

Inked lives: Tattoos, identity, and power

by

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DEDICATION

In memory of Ioana Elise Hociota.

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ABSTRACT

Tattoos are culturally rich forms of self-expression and fulfillment, and hold power for their owners, both internally and externally. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways, and the reasons, tattoos are important *Body Documents* of identity, as well as their perceived role in making their wearer distinct within specific cultural environments. I examined this dynamic through a summer of participant observation and a series of interviews with participants within the Phoenix, Arizona area during the summer of 2012. This thesis finds that tattoos are powerful identity markers because of their social projections and meanings in the greater social formation. The power of tattoos lays in their oppositional nature to the *status quo*, and the ability of people with tattoos to use them as tools for contesting existing power structures and accepted body ideologies.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tattoos exist within a geographically varied and extensive history, where time and place have resulted in a rich cultural practice extended over many locations across the world.

Unfortunately, this rich history has often been oversimplified. Substantial academic research on the topic of tattoos in developed nations (Lombroso 2006; Nathanson et al. 2006; Romans et al. 1998; Stirn et al. 2011) has considered tattoos a symbol of criminality, mental illness, and aberrant lifestyle (Gilbert 2000; Lombroso 2006). People with tattoos upon their flesh were considered rogues, and their tattoos were a symbol of some external manifestation of an internal deficiency (Fenske 2011)—a perception that resulted in policies and social practices intended to alienate and control tattooed people, while simultaneously relegating body markings to places—both bodily and spatially (such as employment)—outside of the common public eye.

My interest in the topic is based on my own life as a tattooed person who, over the course of several years, has become aware of many of the different modes of control imposed on tattooed individuals and, conversely, the attitudes of tattooed people regarding these types of control mechanisms. Driven by the question, “What kinds of attempts are made to control the spread of tattooing, and what can tattooed people do to counter attempts to control their bodies?”, I examine the strategies of control, and the tactics that people with tattoos used to subvert them. To explore these phenomena in contemporary practices within the United States, I focus on my own hometown area of Phoenix, Arizona.

My thesis centers on the proposition that tattoos act as an important text of one’s life, and are tied to power through mechanisms of display and concealment as a response to acts of surveillance and policies by people and institutions in power. Specifically, tattoos function as a form of biopower where the individuals use their tattoos to counter such surveillance and

policies, by using tattoos as tools of subversion. By displaying tattoos, tattooed people are using their bodies to challenge existing social conventions of body appearance, by using their very own body appearance as the key to this resistance. In my analysis, I will use French sociologist Michel Foucault's (1994) concept of biopower, understood as the power that lays within the biological condition of life held by an individual; it is a power form existing, and rooted deeply, within the social community of that individual. By using biopower, I aim to illustrate the ways that tattooing is both a symptom of power, and also a resistive technique to it.

Much of the previous academic literature on tattooing has approached the issue based on understanding tattoos as innately stigmatizing. This kind of approach has by and large been abandoned; yet, tattooing is still considered a "risk behavior" and a symbol of personality that errs towards psychopathy and aberrant psychological conditions (Favazza 2011; Lombroso 2006; Nathanson et al. 2006; Romans et al. 1998; Stirn et al. 2011). It is therefore no surprise that previous forms of inquiry have not only ignored the use of tattoos as practical expressions of identity construction, and focused on the negative traits associated with tattooed individuals (Atkinson 2003; Kosut 2005; Sanders and Vail 2008), but also incorrectly assumed that tattoo motivations were unchanging throughout history. Tattoos, unintentionally and through their very existence, have brought along with them methods of control on the bodies of tattooed individuals, which has in turn created methods and industries of dealing with and subverting such forms of control. In order to understand the roots of these types power and subversion, we must understand the changes in patterns of social meaning and perception of tattoos through time.

The history of tattooing in the United States cannot be overlooked, as it has evolved and been modified over time to fit (or to resist) the expectations of the times and places where it has

been practiced. From the first known tattoos dating to over five thousand years ago, to the tattoos of the modern age, there have been many different views on the meaning of tattoos, what they represent, and what they show in regard to the wearer. These views, while dependent on location and historical practices, range from complete rejection and marginalization to the more public face and increased popularities experienced today. In order to understand the place of tattoos in contemporary U.S. culture, the focus must shift to the historical implications that the act has carried within Western societies, particularly over the last two hundred and fifty years. This rise in tattooing over the last two and a half centuries is due to the explosion of techniques and visibility of tattooing, specifically as it has been refined and spread by advances in technology and large-scale historical events (for example, the First and Second World Wars).

Some of the oldest, and most well known tattoos date from the Tyrolean Alps of Western Europe around 5,400 BCE (Dorfer et al. 2010), such as the series of hash marks on the back and hips of “Ötzi the Ice Man”. The Tyrolian Iceman had laid sheltered under a rock since his death, which was not peaceful; a stone arrowhead was found still lodged in his left shoulder (Rollo et al. 2002:12594). His tattoos are thought to be for medical purposes, specifically, as target points for the practice of acupuncture (Dorfer et al. 2010). Contrary to popular belief, tattoos *were* practiced in Europe prior to the Age of Discovery that followed the initial contact between European Powers and Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Carr 2005; Gilbert 2000; Renault 2011), though the rise of Christianity *did* reduce the number of people receiving tattoos substantially, owing to the actions of Emperor Constantine and his orders that outlawed tattoos as a form of punishment (Renalt 2011:15). Prior to the rise of Christianity within the Roman Empire, tattooing had been common in areas assimilated, and was not exclusively the realm of those being punished; within the empire, however, slaves were typically tattooed as punishment,

which led to a stigmatization in the heart of the Roman Empire (Carr 2005; Renault 2011). Thus, tattoos were not a realm exclusive to indigenous cultures outside of Europe or the Americas; tattooing was a global act, though the conceptions and traditions surrounding it varied highly from locale to locale (Carr 2005; Gilbert 2000; Jablonski 2006; Krutak 2013; Renault 2011; Turalija 2012; Wooden 2011). The varied meanings of tattoos, from marks of honor to marks of shame, were dependent on the culture that practiced them, as well as the historical era in which they were practiced.

Due to technical advances in the hardware used for tattooing (the creation of electric coil machines, first developed by Thomas Edison, and further refined by Samuel O'Reilley [Gilbert 2000:126], rather than the punch, poke, or tap methods¹), as well as historical events (including the American Civil War, and Westward expansion in the United States, there were various cyclical stages of alternating mass popularity and revulsion between the 1890s and through both world wars (Gilbert 2000). For example, George V of England and Winston Churchill's mother Jennie both sported tattoos; yet, in the early part of the 20th century, tattoos among the rich fell out of style, and once again became an act reserved (in the popular imagination) for military and criminal elements of society (Henley 2010). The reason for this popularity lay in a form of cultural appropriation and gentrification of body practices; tattoos were a fad for the rich and famous, they were *en vogue*, as they would often go to culturally exotic places in order to be tattooed; George V, for example, was tattooed in Japan (Gilbert 2000). Ultimately, the popularity would not last: it was simply one example of the cyclical popularity (Gilbert 2000) of tattoos.

Following the Second World War, tattoos became the realm of outsiders and soldiers. That perception lasted until the last quarter of the 20th century, when accepted ideologies of the

¹ For definitions of these methods, refer to Appendix A, which provides the reader with a glossary of terms from my research.

body began to shift, due to wider social changes (such as the cultural revolution of the 1960s), and tattooing experienced a variety of technical innovations; this period of time could be considered a “Renaissance” of the practice of tattooing (Sanders and Vail 2008; Rubin 1988: 233). Furthermore, as a result of increased technical competency of tattoo artists over time, wider ink varieties, and the popularity of magazines, changes in conventions of appearance, and expansion in other media forms, tattoos became more visible to the public. As a result, between the 1980s and early 1990s, notions of marginality began to be deconstructed (Atkinson 2002; DeMello 2000; Sanders and Vail 2008). Since then, tattoos have become even more public, popular, and less stigmatized in the public sphere (Atkinson 2002, 2003, 2004). “The Artification of Tattoo: Transformations on a Cultural Field” (Kosut 2013) describes two loose categories of tattoo artists, which she uses for easy identification: First- and Second-Generation. The first category, comprised of individuals born between 1900 and 1950, and who primarily (and pragmatically) viewed tattooing as a trade instead of an art, comprised the “First-Generation Tattoo Artists”. The “Second-Generation Tattoo Artists”, typically born after 1965, have some artistic training or higher education, and view tattooing as a professional art—not as a trade or skilled labor (Kosut 2013). The split between these two categories, it should be noted, coincides with the “Tattoo Renaissance” mentioned by Sanders and Vail (2008) as well as by Rubin (1988). As tattooing changed, so did conceptions regarding it as a practice. One important shift resulting from the evolution of the practice is the idea of tattoos as self-expression.

My research is based on the notion of the managed personal identity dependent on social context (Foucault 1995; Goffman 1959, 1986; Hewamanne 2008), and a sense of self-determination tied to the subject’s self-awareness regarding their personal and social situation, precisely where the body is utilized as an object of recording or display of personal status and

experiences (Colopelnic 2011; Fenske 2006; Goffman 1959; Hewamanne 2008). Furthermore, my research relies on Michel Foucault's presentation of biopower, where political power lies in the individual through the act of existing (Foucault 1990), as well as the management strategies of the individual as related to power dynamics they are a part of (Foucault 1995). The point of this research is to recognize that tattoos are fluid and dynamic objects, that they transcend historical stereotypes and, as the participants of this study show, that people with tattoos manage their bodies and their biology to establish power within their social surroundings. Because tattoos are a form of the managed body, where visual communication is established with the person viewing the tattoos, they are not merely worn by the owner, but rather, they *are* the owner, or a specific reflection of the owner viewed by others (though not necessarily understood by viewers).

Increased tattooing possibilities provide the owner with a form of cultural investment that allows for them to increase their standing within the tattoo community as they get more experienced tattoo artists' work, and as their collection grows. My own interest in the matter is beyond academic; as a tattooed person with many close friends who are tattooed, or in the body modification industry, understanding the connection between one's tattoos, the self, and the perception of larger groups is the force of curiosity behind my work. Due to the personal nature and wide degree of meaning that tattoos have, I take this subject as an exploration not only into one of the most historically widespread acts of body adornment, but also as a personal journey into my own understandings of tattoos. I was raised in a family that viewed tattoos as socially different; neither good nor bad, but done due to the misguidance of the person getting the tattoo. As I grew older, I began to meet more people who had tattoos, and I became increasingly aware of the complexity of their meaning.

As the previous literature on the topic points out (Atkinson 2003; Kosut 2006; Sanders and Vail 2008; Vail 1999), tattooing is a negotiated act of identity and impression management. As perception of one's own identity changes over time, so do notions of the self, individual choice, and self-direction. Thus, the narrative surrounding tattooing is one that inherently changes over time as the person, as well as social conventions related to the self, change. Understanding the role of self-determination through a person's tattoos is key to understanding how people use tattoos as visible elements of identity and as specific records of life events. On the topic of identity and self-management, this thesis seeks to explain how people are able to manipulate their body to fit, or to stand out, as the case may be, to their advantage in social situations. By examining the manipulation of the body and the social, I will examine the act of self-control as a consequence of observation, or *discipline* of the self, as it were (Foucault 1995). This self-control, this discipline, is a key concept related to power, as it reveals the true presence of power.

A further idea worth noting is the break from the idea that tattoos are "worn" by the owner. I believe that tattoos, in some measure, *are* the owner, and that they reflect an individual's history through visual codification. The individual tattoos of a person exist in a context specific to that person's life experiences, whether planned or unplanned as a body project. As wild and unpredictable as the circumstances leading to the tattoo may be, they still form a part of the life of the owner of those tattoos; even if the tattoo itself is mediocre for its artistic value, it still retains a narrative element of that individual's life. Often, with unplanned tattoos, the circumstances of the tattoo are the important part of the story, and not the tattoo, which merely acts as a placeholder for that event. To limit the ideation of tattoos to simply a fashion statement or fad (Favazza 2011) that can be "worn" dismisses the deeper meanings that

may be associated with tattoos. Certainly, deeper meanings are ascribed to the certain parts of the material culture of fashion, yet I believe that it is the permanence of the tattoos for the individual that makes them distinct from other forms of display, especially when examining the topics of identity and biopower.

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature around tattoos, specifically detailing previous exploration of the concept and role of insider/outsider dynamics within the community, discourses of mental health relative to tattooed individuals, the bio politics of tattooed bodies, discipline, and the importance of display and self construction in tattooing. As well, it examines global examples from other social contexts, time spans, and locations.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this ethnographic study. In addition, it describes the demographics of the research participants. Chapter 4 presents the results of my original research, as well as the research venue and the particulars on specific research subjects who helped me through my investigations. It also recounts the methodology used and the literature as applied to my research environment. Chapter 5 presents the conclusion to this thesis, and provides the reader with an understanding of possible future directions that tattoo studies might evolve into. The conclusion argues for the need to see possible future avenues of study on tattooing as indicators of broader topics (public perception of changing body ideals, utility as tools of resistance, artistic conventions, among other topics) and advantages of understanding tattoos, in the United States as they are practiced contemporarily.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review addresses the easily overlooked, yet important distinction between tattooed people and those with tattoos, the history of discourses that have been associated with tattoos. Finally, the chapter demonstrates the intersections of biopower, discipline, and the tattooed person. These elements form the central core of this document, and should be read in detail and with care.

Tattooed or With Tattoos?

To begin, it is important to understand that people within the tattoo community differentiate themselves from each other, and on a macro-level. When I refer to the tattoo community, I am referring to a group of individuals who may be tattoo artists, tattooed people, or tattoo enthusiasts (these categories may overlap) within the contemporaneous United States. This distinction between groups has been a common theme among tattoo researchers (Atkinson 2002; 2003, 2004; DeMello 2000; Nikora et al. 2007; Oksanen and Turtiainen 2005). Vail (Sanders and Vail 2008), however, offers a precise distinction, imperceptible though it may seem to someone unacquainted with tattoos, between tattooed people and people with tattoos. The former group, he argues, can be divided into what he terms *collectors*, as well as casual tattoo seekers, while the second group is more easily identified as those with tattoos but the lack of knowledge; *Collectors* seek out specific artists and visual styles, while committing a significant amount of time (both in the tattoo studio, and in researching artists) and money (Sanders and Vail 2008; Vail 2000). Meanwhile, the second group, or people *with* tattoos, is comprised of individuals who have tattoos, but do not seek out special artists or styles, and whose condition of ownership is less characterized by methodological planning than the first group

This definition of collectors is different than sociologist Michael Atkinson's (2003:1) definition of an *enthusiast*, which he describes as a "person who has a personal/cultural fascination with tattoos, and at some point in their life course decided to become tattooed." Atkinson's definition differs in that it is much more inclusive, and does not account for the large-scale expenditures of effort and capital to obtain work from more seasoned tattoo seekers. Thus, I argue that Atkinson's definition lends itself not only to tattooed people, but also people with tattoos, which makes the category quite broad, and therefore not an ideal term for use in ethnographic inquiry. This kind of community insider/outsider dynamic between individuals that wear tattoos has been observed before (Elias 1965; Nikora et al. 2007; Oksanen and Turtiainen 2005; Sanders and Vail 2008; Vail 2000), and I merely reiterate it through my own observations.

In my research, I follow Vail's logic and divide this study's respondents into these two very large groups to serve as a general guideline for understanding the community. These two groups are roughly based on the difference between tattooed people (individuals who felt that their tattoos were an integral part of who they are, and not afraid to be known via their tattoos) and people with tattoos (individuals who did not primarily conceive of themselves as tattooed people, and who might feel more apprehension on being known via their tattoos). The collectors mentioned in Vail's work would thus be placed within the category of tattooed people, since they not only seek specific artistic tastes and artists, but also due to the fact that they conceive of their existence through their tattoos. Casual tattoo seekers, on the other hand, should be thought of as people with tattoos: they do not have the same sort of cultural capital and investment that the collectors have. They are both similar, however, in that the narrative element of their tattoo still exists, though in different manners. For tattooed people, there may be artistic nuance and subtlety, and use of visual metaphor (creating a complex visual narrative to honor a person or

event), while for tattooed people, it may be quite open (“RIP John”, or something more obvious). The complexity again depends on the narrative; in either case the story could be in the actions leading up to the tattoo, and not the tattoo itself. Meanwhile, the narrative and its value as a clear story, are dependent on several factors independent of the tattoos themselves; primarily, their clarity depends on the observer in relation to the individual tattoos in question. Different people with different first hand knowledge of the person will draw different ideas about what the tattoos “mean”, or what stories might lay behind the actual tattoo. In this way, there is no one single body document, but rather, it is a series of documents in a theme or collection, where the understandings are dependent on the perspectives of the viewers, as they project themselves into their reading of the tattoo. In this way, tattoos are similar to a provocative art installation or piece, as some viewers might not perceive it as art, but rather as a common item, meanwhile other viewers, more familiar with the artist or the background of the piece, would be more understanding of the intentions. The object remains physically the same, and yet the interpretations are dependent on the individuals viewing it.

These two groups are progressive, so it is possible for someone with tattoos to become a tattooed person through the attainment of knowledge on the social and stylistic rules concerning tattoos; researching artists, investing time and money into finding and soliciting the right one, and being disciplined enough to endure the pain and repeat the process over and over are all characteristics of tattooed people which are learned. It would be unusual (and I am not aware of any cases of this occurrence), though not impossible, for a tattooed person to revert back to simply being a person with tattoos, given that many of the tattoos they would already have would accredit them with a form of social capital that would mark them as tattooed individuals, instead of a novice person *with* a tattoo.

Criminality, Illness, and Deviancy—The Changing Discourse

In his major work, *Criminal Man*, originally published in 1876, Italian Criminal Anthropologist Cesare Lombroso (2006) stated in reference to tattooing as an activity, “it only occurs among the lower classes—peasants, sailors, workers, shepherds, soldiers, and even more frequently among criminals” (58). This outlook is not an uncommon perspective on the topic of tattooing in both academic and social circles. In 2005, Mary Kosut examined how prevailing ideas regarding tattooed individuals had been approached and reinforced by previous researchers. These scholars typically framed individuals with tattoos as psychologically unbalanced, or damaged individuals, who get tattoos not out of a personal desire, but instead because they feel compelled by mental instability. These arguments were precisely the kind espoused by Lombroso and his intellectual heirs since the publication of *Criminal Man*. This approach of deterministic psychiatry has in recent years become more inclusive of other potential motivations for getting tattoos (Kappeler et al. 2007; Stirn et al. 2011), although old habits die hard (Favazza 2011; Nathanson et al. 2006; Romans et al. 1998; Stirn et al. 2011). An example of this misdirected focus (it does not allow for the choices of the individual, and correlates tattoo ownership with behavioral or psychic instability) may be seen in the following case. As late as 2006, a published psychological study, carried out Nathanson et al., explained how social deviance might be identified by what he and his associates termed “Cultural Deviance Markers”. These markers were identified through a self-reported questionnaire given to two hundred and seventy-nine of Dr. Nathanson’s students, and included such things as, “radical hairstyles, clothing, cosmetics, and sexually provocative display” (784), and served as aids for categorization.

According to Drs. Nathanson et al. (2006), these so-called “CDMs” were predictors of misconduct, although there was never any clear indication of what misconduct actually *was*, when the authors referenced it. The categories were quite vague, and tied to what they termed, “anti-authority misconduct” (788). This kind of anti-authoritarian activity could range from verbal abuse of an adult to failure to declare items at customs. This broad jump could mean that anybody who has been aggressively rude might be placed into the same category as an international smuggler. Interestingly enough, Dr. Nathanson and his associates pondered the possibility that, “(the) painful and physically invasive procedures involved in body modification... (are) a gateway to a lifestyle of corporal self abuse” (796, quoting Grumet 1983). Such “corporal self-abuse” was even illustrated with the example of *injecting heroin* (796, emphasis added).

After pointing out that tattoos are signs of cultural deviance, without a clear definition of the term, or contextual precedent, and then “controlling for personality” (Nathanson et al. 2006:779), the authors indicated that individuals with tattoos are more likely than unmodified people to have low marks of conscientiousness, which they compared with psychopathy, given that both personality traits “are irresponsible and lacking in impulse control” (782, citing Paulhus and Williams 2002). While Nathanson et al. (2006) made very broad generalizations regarding tattoos and the psychological make up of those that seek them, one aspect of their article—deviance—is worth discussion.

Deviance, as a behavioral category, has been an umbrella term to describe the motivations or acts related to body modification. In the case of tattooing, it continues to be used as a descriptor, albeit in varying modes, and is dependent upon the definition of the specific researchers. Sociologist and tattoo researcher Clinton Sanders (1989) has established a precedent

for much of the work in the field of tattoo research with his 1989 volume *Customizing the Body* (Sanders and Vail 2008). The methodology he used, reliant on ethnographic accounts, as well as his depiction of the tattoo scene through a frame of willful deviance would shape the research of such authors as Michael Atkinson(2003, 2004), Margo DeMello (2000), Angus Vail (1999, 2000), and Mary Kosut(2005), among others. Sanders illustrates this perfectly when he explains, “*Choosing to become a physical deviant symbolically demonstrates one’s disregard for the prevailing social norms*” (Sanders and Vail 2008:2, emphasis added). In this kind of situation, Sanders argues, the individual may not feel stigmatized even while being judged by those around them, as they are the masters of their display. Sanders proceeds to argue that tattoos are “key features of self-definition” (46). As I mentioned earlier, tattooed people conceive of themselves through their tattoos; the individuals are not simply tattooed—they themselves *are* their tattoos. Having said this, it should be noted that the self-definition achieved through tattoos is not necessarily the self-narrative I have described earlier; the narrative is in the tattoo and dependent on the viewer. Meanwhile, the self-definition is in the tattoo and dependent on the individual with the tattoo and how they use it to define their conception of their self.

Sanders does make use of the term *deviant*, though he confines it within three specific contexts that take into account the culturally constructed and evolving nature of the concept: social harm, statistical rarity and, as Sanders makes use of them, behavior, thoughts, or appearances widely regarded as “bad” (Sanders and Vail 2008, Preface). It should be noted that the concept of social harm is up to interpretation, given that what constitutes “social harm” varies across time and place. Sanders, using deviancy as something widely regarded as “bad”, undertakes a study of tattooing in a way that has qualified his use of the term, and allows for a cogent analysis without judgment or moralistic intentions. This is a significant departure from

many of the previous bodies of work, where little context or definition was given to such a problematic concept, and shows the progressive advancement of tattoos in academic enquiry as more complex than had been previously imagined.

To understand the changing nature of a topic, or of a category (in this case, deviancy), attention should be paid to the idea of discourse. In *History of Sexuality: Volume I*, Michel Foucault (1990) describes his take on the constructed nature of discourse: sexuality and frank discussions of sex had been repressed from public areas of dialogue during the Victorian era. Foucault terms this, “the repressive hypothesis” (10). Foucault argues that these things were not repressed but, in fact, that, “There was installed rather an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy” (23). That is to say, the modes of dialogue changed, and that different people were saying different things, from a different perspective, with the goal of obtaining different results than the original dialogues (27). These dialogues were not repressed, destroyed, or removed, but instead became a part of an apparatus of power increasingly concerned with the dynamics of power tied to the body.

A connection therefore exists between Foucault’s changing discourses of sexuality and the medicalized modes of study upon criminality that have been tied to tattoo studies for so long; Foucault explored how sexuality discourse was presented, but the following quote may also be used to describe how tattoos were part of a discourse of deviance and criminality:

It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done—the sexual act—and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images . . . There was

scarcely a malady or physical disturbance to which the nineteenth century did not impute at least some degree of sexual etiology. [Foucault 1990:64–65]

For Foucault's Victorians, sexuality was the infirmity, the illness; its symptoms were visible in every facet of life, and ripe for study and treatment. In the case of tattoos, the infirmity is deviance and criminality; tattoos were a symptom of this. As well, the etiology of tattoos places them as symbols and symptoms of psychic infirmity: "Reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it" (64), the categorization of tattoos as negative acts would subsequently dominate the literature (Favazza 2011; Kappeler et al. 2007; Kosut 2005; Nathanson et al. 2006; Romans et al. 1998; Stirn et al. 2011), especially in explaining tattoos as a facet of personal deficiencies (Fenske 2011). Tattoos were a symptom of deviancy that broke with the conceptions of proper body image, and were medicalized accordingly—both in a restrictive (Health Ordinances from different areas banning or restricting the practice) manner, and in a fashion that made use of the permanent advantages (marking blood type on a patient, or indicating permanent medical conditions to alert emergency staff in case of a non-responsive patient).

Throughout my study, I have noticed that these patterns of prior research that focused on deviancy have failed to explain why tattooed people seek tattoos, and have merely ascribed large scale, ill defined behavioral patterns to a complex action. Lombroso (2006), started this philosophy over a hundred years ago, and since then it has continued to plague studies on those with tattoos, leading up to the last decade, where it is still unfortunately alive and well. My research indicates that tattooing is a complex phenomena, and restricting it to a deviant act, done by deviant people, ignores the reality of the situation.

Power and Discipline—Tattoos and their Concealment

The term, “biopower” in this thesis is based on the merging of the ideas of Power and Bio Politics, as defined by Foucault (1990):

...An explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of a new era of “biopower”. [140, in reference to the Classical Period]

In order to aid the reader in understanding my conceptualization of biopower, I turn to Michel Foucault, and his description of the term, “police”, as “the ensemble of mechanisms serving to ensure order, the properly challenged growth of wealth and conditions of preservation of health *in general*” (Foucault 1994:94, emphasis in original). One may see this form of “police” in its derivative form: policy. The true objects of this form of Police, Foucault claims, are individuals, and all of their social relations (Foucault 1994:414). In the Foucaultian sense, the Police are an extension of the individual(s) with Power.

Power, however, should not be understood simply as being coercive and limiting (through the actions of the military or security apparatuses), since it instead defines itself through its relationship between itself (power) and the subject of the power (in this case, the body). Foucault explains, “the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate effect upon it” (Foucault 1995:25). Power acts upon subjects through their actions: “an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions” (Foucault 1994:340). This idea should be understood as follows: The holder of the Power, in this case the State, acts upon the acts committed by its subjects, being committed presently or the possible acts that *could* be committed.

To understand a practical view of this context of Power, consider the use of Health and Medicine as tools of Power. Foucault argues, “The state of health of a population is the general objective of policy” (Foucault 1994:90). In order to ensure the health of the population, “Different power apparatuses are called upon to take charge of “bodies”... to help, and if necessary constrain them to ensure their good health” (Foucault 1994:92). An example of the power to constrain for the health of the population, according to Foucault (1995:95), is given with the policies of the French state to be taken in the case of a plague in a metropolitan area, where strict controls were to be followed on pain of death. In more contemporary and topical terms, one may look at the state of Iowa, and its process for granting practitioners the legal ability to tattoo. In Iowa, the act of tattooing without proper certification and permission from the state government is a prosecutable offense (IDPH Tattoo Program 2013). In order to become certified, certain personal conditions (age, education, and training) must be met before a license is granted to an artist.

Foucault also described an effective method of Power, and of control, over populations, through the idea of Surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1995), Foucault explained how the body as a political field may be contested by the individual, and by the elements of power seeking to constrain it. That is, for Foucault, Power does not exist on its own. He emphasized the point that there is no relationship of power without the means of flight or escape. Therefore, it may be used as subversion, as resistance (Foucault 1994:346; Foucault 1995:26–27).

How does the power of being observed modify the behavior of bodies? Normalization, he argues, is an imposition of power, which allows differences to become useful by allowing them to stand out as relative markers (similar to way points or landmarks on a map), to allow for

reading the situation of the group (Foucault 1995:184). The process of surveillance is intended to modify certain behaviors. The individual subjected to power, and who is aware of it, becomes the principle of their own subjugation (Foucault 1995:202).

A simple example of this normalizing power of surveillance would be if someone were to go to a sporting match wearing the colors of one team, but sat in the section reserved for the followers of the rival team. The act of wearing the colors of a different team in itself does not modify the behavior; it is the social relations that come into play that modify it. The ensuing dirty looks (as a literal form of observation and normalizing judgment), jeers, and jokes would act as disciplining forces. Foucault revealed the power of the social in controlling the individual, stating, “Power relations are deeply rooted in the social nexus” (Foucault 1994:344).

The ultimate goal of surveillance is to create within the object of its focus (in this case, the tattooed person or one seeking a tattoo) a form of discipline that would maximize its compliance to the acts of policy (Foucault 1995). These forms of policy may be, as Foucault posits, the effects of governance, but in this case, they also extend to capitalistic policies on body appearance and behavior in the workplace and out. For a practical example, we may look at how certain states have different regulatory mechanisms for controlling the act of tattooing; the capitalistic regulation results from industries and businesses requiring the concealment or altogether lack of tattoos as a condition of employment and advancement. Foucault describes this discipline as inducing a state of conscious and permanent visibility that ensures an automatic functioning of power where, once perfected, the exercise of power is rendered unnecessary (Foucault 1995:201). In this way, *not* getting a tattoo, or concealing or removing those already had, would be exactly such a form of surveillance, with the result that the exercise of power would be rendered unnecessary.

We are within an age that Foucault describes as having “infinite examination and compulsory objectification” (Foucault 1995:189). For those with tattoos, this examination and objectification is a literal, constant state of being. As Kosut (2010) explains, “Whether we are always conscious of it or not, our bodies are expected to look, act, and perform in precise ways in specific places” (2). This sentiment of anticipation and expectation of body appearance is due to the power of normalization described by Foucault, and the conscious awareness of “good” body appearance, and the act of seeking it, is a perfect example of Foucault’s Discipline:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjugation.

[Foucault 1995:203]

Foucault’s ideal example of disciplinary action is based on Jeremy Bentham’s proposed prison unit: The Panopticon. The idea was to have a circular building, where the cells are separated individually, and located along the circumference, with a separate tower in the center where the guards would have full visibility into all of the cells by means of backlighting, but where the inmates would not have visibility into the guard tower (Foucault 1995:200). This design would ensure a permanent state of uncertainty of observation, and a fear of punishment for not following the rules. The unknowable condition of observation, coupled with the punishments of transgressions, would modify behavior in such a way that the individual would discipline themselves to such a point as to make the Panopticon superfluous as a mechanism of power (Foucault 1995).

The key to understanding the process by which tattooed individuals may incorporate Discipline into their daily lives is found in Foucault and his description of Discipline as a “type of power . . . comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, and targets” (Foucault 1995:213). The tactical restraint of display (that is, concealing tattoos by wearing long sleeves or using cosmetic creams such as *Dermablend*TM) is something that should be understood as a mechanic of Discipline. For example, a person with a neck or knuckle tattoos, such as my research respondent, “Phillip²”, may partake in tactical restraint of display when the time calls for it—for example, through the use of *Dermablend*TM, so as to attempt to minimize any negative repercussions or social discrediting (Foucault 1995; Goffman 1986). Such negative repercussions might be things such as getting passed over at a job interview, or creating a bad impression when meeting the parents of one’s significant other. By using the tactical restraint of display, the individual is attempting to modify social perception of those individuals they may encounter that conceive of tattoos as dangerous objects. Such tactical restraint may be physically uncomfortable (having to wear long sleeves in a hot workplace), or expensive (having to purchase concealing creams), and is usually viewed negatively by the person performing it.

To extend this idea, I’d like to discuss the idea of a tattoo narrative, and how the story associated with a tattoo can impact the perception that others may have of the person with the tattoo. For example, if someone is regretful about their tattoo, and has a sense of shame about it, they might modify the original, real version of events that lead to its acquisition, or might simply conceal facts pertinent to the tattoo. This kind of “tactical omission” (Kosut and Moore 2010) is a limiting form of self-presentation. It acts to conceal when the full picture is not desired on the

² Appendix E

part of the individual. Again, however, not every tattoo has an origin story. Sometimes, a tattoo is just a tattoo. In these cases, a false story may sometimes be created in order to minimize potential stigma associated with impulsive decisions, or out of fear of negative judgment or potential consequences, to attempt to control the perception that others may have of the individual (Goffman 1986). To reiterate: the original intention and narrative will likely always be known to the individual with the tattoo, no matter how their feelings regarding the tattoo or its social perception may change.

One thing that must be remembered while examining tattoos through a Foucaultian lens is that tattoos do serve as symbols of a particular person's life history, regardless of their origin. Whether the tattoo was meticulously planned or decided by the flip of a coin, the tattoo holds the story of the wearer; in the first case, the tattoo might literally tell their story, and in the second, the tattoo, or the provenance thereof, *is* the story. The tattoos act as inscriptions that construct and hint at a variety of psychological, cultural, and political elements (Pritchard 2000:3), among other traits. The decision to modify the retelling of the events leading up to or embodied by a tattoo is one based on the perceived or anticipated reaction of the listener. This kind of action is very closely associated to forms of affect management (Atkinson 2003a; Hewamanne 2008; Misztal 2000; Sanders and Vail 2008; Sween 2007), first presented by Irving Goffman in, *The Presentation of the Self* (1959). Goffman's ideas in *The Presentation of the Self* were recently applied by Sandya Hewamanne (2008) to garment factory workers in Sri Lanka; depending on where the workers were (the factory or their home villages), they would coif their hair in different ways, wear different styles of clothing, and even speak and act in different manners (179;212-213). Presenting themselves in this way preserved their social image in their hometowns, where the rules governing behavior and expression were more restrictive than in the

factory towns where they worked; being around others similar to them in the factory towns empowered them to dress in more modern fashions, to use profanity, and to be more open with their behavior than when they were in their villages and had to conform to the expectations of their social audience. Within the hometowns, then, the Foucaultian Discipline has rendered power exercises unnecessary, as the workers willingly modified their affect in such a way that no action from those in relations of power to them would need to act.

So what relation do tattooed people have to power, if it is apparently mostly on the receiving end? Even within tattooing, there are power relations between those establishing conceptions of “good” tattooing versus “bad” tattooing, although in this case, the power struggle is internal, whereas the struggle against outside power structures unifies both those with “good” tattoos and those with “bad” tattoos. The power of tattoos lays in their ability to act as a form of “destructive decoration” (Braunberger 2000) that is antithetical to unmarked, bare skin; by becoming tattooed, individuals use their bodies as an oppositional document. As Jill Fisher asked in her work,

Why is it that a culture that abhors permanent body modification, such as tattooing, infibulations, and cicatrization, can simultaneously encourage incremental, semi-permanent and often expensive body modifications such as clothing, make-up, hair trends, and muscularity? [Fisher 2002:102]

This is an excellent question, since it illustrates part of the reason why people choose to get such permanent marks: tattoos, by virtue of their permanence, are oppositional to the temporary or semi-permanent, materialistic nature of those other forms of body modification and adornment; it is the permanence of the opposition to homogenization that makes them appealing. It is the capacity for antagonism, their oppositionality, that gives them their meaning within cultural

context (Fiske 2010:20); their capacity to put on display anxieties regarding the body (Fenske 2011:3) makes them an ideal oppositional tool to counter conventional conceptions of what the body is and should look like. Because tattooed bodies misbehave, in the sense that they act outside of general patterns of accepted behavior and appearance, they set the person aside from the general population that lacks tattoos. The maxim, long touted, that the unknown creates fear is seen in this case, as tattoos form a different body experience unknown and incomprehensible to many, and which results in an unsettling experience. As Kosut explained, they form the bodies that create discomfort, are unpleasant, and misbehave through their transgression of social limits (2010). It is this ability to create a space of difference and to challenge perceptions that allows the tattooed person to use the existing power structures (through the established and prevailing ideas of what bodies *should* look like) in a way that subverts them.

A possible explanation for this increased popularity is this form of oppositional capability—eschewing normalizing conceptions of what the body should appear as, and using tattoos as the vehicle for this opposition, is sentiment echoed many respondents for this study. So, as a form of oppositionality, tattoos permit the power dynamics to exist fluidly, and refute the idea that tattoos act as monolithic, static objects. They reveal themselves not as issues of personality and mental illness or deviancy, but function rather as elements of power and control through which bodies are governed and through which this governance is contested.

Conclusion

The concept of Power should be understood as the set of force relations whose aim is to subjugate the body of their objects (Foucault 1990). There exists a multiplicity of manners, strategies, and methods of exerting and using Power to achieve this subjugation, but the two most closely tied to my studies of tattooing are Surveillance and Discipline (Foucault 1994,

1995; Kosut and Moore 2010). These are most notably seen through acts of Affect Management (Atkinson 2003; Braunberger 2000; Fisher 2002; Goffman 1959, 1986; Hewamanne 2008; Kosut 2010; Sanders and Vail 2008), which may be directed within a group, or from a group for outsiders, depending on the place of the individual and their relation to such a group (Elias 1965; Fisher 2002; Nikora et al. 2007; Oksanen and Turtiainen 2005; Sanders and Vail 2008; Vail 2000), and which may be managed through tactical restraint of display, to influence the opinion of the visual audience, when desired. The narrative powers of tattooing lay in their reading by the observer, and the observer posits into such reading their own conceptions about art, as well as their knowledge of the individual with the tattoo. More knowledge about the person and their reasons for the tattoo means a greater understanding of the narrative tattoo, while less knowledge about the person might signify a potential misinterpretation of the intended narrative.

The narrative value of tattoos has been long overshadowed by other, outside impositions about their meanings; Tattoos exist within a place of historical discourse based on their pathologization and the attempts to psychiatrically or psychologically deconstruct individuals who hold them, as well as their motivations (DeMello 2000; Gilbert 2000; Lombroso 2006; Kappeller et al. 2007; Kosut 2006, 2010; Nathanson et al. 2006; Romans et al. 1998; Stirn et al. 2011).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS, RESEARCH VENUE, AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Following the methods and setup used by other researchers (Atkinson 2003a, 2003b, 2004; DeMello 2000; Kappeler et al. 2007; Kosut 2006; Sanders and Vail 2008), I chose to create a battery of questions for conducting a personal interview to willing respondents.

Interviews were conducted in public places, such as coffee shops, restaurants, or bars, as well as in respondents' residences. The information provided through the battery of questions, along with information gleaned from non-formulated questions, was noted in my field notes at the time of each interview, in shorthand and in such a way as to diminish any impact on the flow of the interview process. These interviews were conducted from May to August of 2012, and constitute the corpus for the examples of my findings in Chapter 4. My research takes the form of a qualitative autoethnography (Jupp 2006:15), whereby I couple my own experiences with my ethnographic observations. As a tattooed person, I felt, and still feel, that it is important to further an academic dialogue where tattooed people are able to voice their ideas into the research on tattoos, instead of just being observed noted. By creating this project, it was my hope to do just that.

An important note should be made regarding the informed consent of the subjects, and the use of names throughout my work. This project was approved by Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board. To protect the anonymity of my respondents, the project used informed consent forms that participants signed, which were then kept in a locked cabinet in a secure location. Consent forms included respondents' real names, as well as consent for interview and photography; to ensure that any questions were adequately addressed, I distributed business cards with my personal contact information. The consent forms also listed my

information, and the contact e-mail of Dr. Yalem Teshome. Because of the need for participant privacy, I used pseudonyms for each respondent and, in the case of the artists, their places of work and any co-workers. All shop names have been changed to ensure the privacy and safety of the respondents.

I chose the Valley Metropolitan Area of Phoenix, Arizona to conduct the study, due to the fact that I have pre-existing networks that afforded me an entry into the groups within that locality. I used a purposive sampling methodology (Tongco 2007), where the criterion of inclusion is tattoo ownership, with chain sampling incorporated into my recruitment methods. Using a purposive chain sampling method enabled me to find respondents by establishing connections through people who I had previously interviewed, and who could introduce me to potential respondents (Tongco 2007). By navigating through a first round of interviewees who knew me personally, I would gain access to their friends or acquaintances who were tattooed, and who could serve as appropriate respondents for this study's goals.

Since this research is strictly qualitative, and based on purposive chain sampling, random sampling was neither an imperative nor possible. My methods consisted of interviews and ethnographic observation at a tattoo studio where I was able to observe and interact with clients and artists, and which served as a base for identifying further interview subjects. These methods are well established in the study of tattoo sociology and ethnography (Atkinson 2002–2004; DeMello 2000; Kappeler et al. 2007; Kosut 2005; Sanders and Vail 2008). Once my interviews and observations were completed, I created a table illustrating various aspects of demographic information³. Overall, I found that people readily agreed to being interviewed, recorded, and in

³ Appendix B

many cases, photographed. The interviews followed a loose prompt, and were semi-structured⁴. In all cases, respondents were informed of their rights as research participants, and were furthermore informed that should they desire to bring a person to accompany them to the interview, that they could do so with no fear of repercussions or consequences. If respondents did not oppose it, a digital recording was made of the interview, which served as the basis for my transcriptions.

My first few interviewees were a source of knowledge, not only in the sense that their interviews produced key findings, but that they introduced me to others willing to participate in the study. In one case, one particular respondent “Joan” was able to contact several of her friends, and I was able not only to interview her, but also another six interviewees to whom she referred me. In another case, after interviewing piercing artist “Travis” at a local shop, I was able to interview three other tattoo artists who worked at the same shop, thus providing me with more data than I was able to get from his original interview. The importance of building connections with interview subjects was paramount to the success of my study: they were, and are, the gatekeepers to my access. If I had a negative interaction with one subject, it could have seriously jeopardized my access to their friends and acquaintances. Luckily, there were no such negative instances. In fact, due to the relaxed, conversational tone of my semi-structured prompts, I was able to create a non-threatening and comfortable interaction, which allowed for fruitful and productive ethnographic data gathering. I chose the relaxed and familiar interview settings (e.g., coffee shops, restaurants, bars, residences, and tattoo parlors) to ensure the subjects felt comfortable and at ease.

Some of the challenges that I had to contend with, however, were high levels of

⁴ Appendix C for Tattooed People, and Appendix D for Artists.

background noise (tattoo shops and the places of work of tattoo artists were particularly notorious for poor sound quality, due to the loudness of the machines and background music), as well as damaged data files due to the Arizona heat (in one case, my recording device stopped working and had to be placed in the respondent's refrigerator to cool down before I could continue the interview). These challenges, however, were overcome through detailed field notes collected at the time of the interview and immediately afterwards, where all facts and details from the interview that could be recalled were written down.

Atkinson(2003), DeMello (2000), Sanders (2008), and others have relied on existing networks for their research, as a way to access local groups. Through several weeks of observation in various tattoo studios and shops, I witnessed the interactive process between the artists and the clients. This interaction between tattoo artists and those seeking the tattoos was important primarily because it was the moment of execution; it was the central experience to tattooing that *all* of my respondents had encountered, and was very similar experience that could be related to by my interviewees.

The majority of the time spent in studios was spent in one particular studio in a suburb near Tempe, to which I will refer as, "Crow's Nest Tattoos", and which specialized in American Traditional tattooing. I was able to secure my observation at Crow's Nest Tattoos due to a personal friendship with one of the artists: "Rachel" (aside from being a longtime friend, she is also my tattoo artist). During my time in the field, Rachel acted as my prime informant, yet she declined to be formally interviewed, preferring a natural conversation to be the method of information exchange. This relationship gave me a valuable and candid insight into the industry, especially from the perspective of a young woman (Rachel was, and continues to be, the only female artist at the shop, and the youngest artist there). I had to take care in my notes and in the

elaboration of this document not to compromise her workplace or her identity; certain details have been omitted from this document in order to protect her and the shop.

All steps of the execution of the tattoo, from discussing the preliminary drawings (the first step to a tattoo), all the way to the instructions on aftercare (these instructions form the last action of the act of tattooing in many shops and studios), were observed, and formed the whole process of negotiating the commissioning of the piece. During the observation phase of my research, I took notes in a notebook, while maintaining friendly banter with the staff—or even clients if they felt so inclined. No interviews were conducted on these clients, and no direct or indirect (e.g., via the artists acting as informants) information of any kind, personal or otherwise, was collected of them.

Over the course of my study, I interviewed thirty-four respondents, a number consistent with interviews done by other researchers with more extensive timeframes (Atkinson 2002, 2003, 2004; Sween 2007). These interviews⁵, and photographs of the tattoos of the interviewed subjects who consented to photos and possible publication, are included⁶ for visual reference. The primary focus of the interviews was on the process (or lack thereof) through which tattooing relates to concepts of identity and the self, and how respondents view these categories, especially those related to power relations (i.e., in the workplace) and discrimination (in particular, discriminatory hiring practices). I was not concerned with piercing as a body modification to the extent that I was with tattooing because, by and large, publicly visible piercings are not as uniquely constructed as a body project per individual in the way tattoos are (Rosenblatt 1999)—nor do they contain custom iconography or permanence the way tattoos do. Tattooing, due to the sustained interaction between artist and client, requires an agreement in order to come up with a

⁵ Appendices C and D

⁶ Appendix E

piece that reflects the individuality of the client and the artistic style of the artist (Atkinson 2002, 2004; DeMello 2000; Sanders and Vail 2008).

The data have been analyzed to understand the relationship between insiders and outsiders within the subculture (veteran enthusiasts and those new to the subculture or who do not identify with it), how this relationship affects the motivation and the discourse within tattooing from the perspectives of both artists and clients and, most importantly, how individual decisions regarding tattoos can contribute to the construction of the self. By studying attitudes of individual identity, and attempting to understand the role of agency in its creation among tattooed people, I gained critical insight into the process of identity creation through the act of tattooing, and how tattoos are used as a form of Body Documentation.

Given Angus Vail's (2000) precedent of distinguishing between casual tattoo enthusiasts and serious collectors, I would like to draw a similar distinction between individuals who are *tattooed* versus those who simply *have* tattoos. The difference is in many ways complementary to Vail's division, yet slightly different: the *tattooed* people I interviewed were more educated regarding the art form of tattooing, and were more willing to spend higher amounts of money for quality work, whereas people *with* tattoos were not, or did not have the inclination to be, as knowledgeable or willing to spend large amounts of money on their tattoos. As they become more tattooed, people *with* tattoos become more aware of the guiding principles and artistic cannon of tattoos, and become more knowledgeable and in many cases, spend more money on higher quality tattoos, thus sliding slowly into the category of *tattooed* people.

For the first group, tattoos were an important and cultural-artistic matter, whereas the second group took a less serious and more forgiving attitude towards tattoos. That the work be of high quality was particularly important to *tattooed* people, as they considered aspects of work

such as color saturation, unwavering lines, and proper use of depth and perspective, as well as body placement, to be important aspects of a tattoo; people *with* tattoos were in many cases simply interested in getting a certain design completed, and were either unaware of, or did not find, such issues as being important. “Jessica”, one of my first interviewees, was a young woman who had the phrase “Live Laugh Love” tattooed on her belly⁷; this placement, along with the shaky line work, were indicators that would place her in the “people *with* tattoos” category, as they were symptoms of a less expensive, and less experienced, artist.

While I am not a tattoo artist, my extensive interactions with them, as well as my personal history with tattoos, has afforded me with a certain knowledge of the elements of style beyond that considered normal for the layperson. Such stylistic considerations may be seen with “Janice”, a respondent who had a tattoo of two roses on her shoulders, connected by script that read, “I’m the beauty in this breakdown”⁸. For her, this tattoo signaled a reference to surviving a particularly messy break up with her ex-boyfriend. In this tattoo, the lines were drawn too forcefully, and there was too much contrast, leaving the roses looking like rubber-stamped objects that had been colored in as an afterthought, much like a children’s coloring book. Furthermore, the spacing of the letters and the flourishes of the words were not consistent, lending the lettering a disjointed and awkward air. These kinds of mistakes are not uncommon among individuals who have little to no experience in the cannon of what makes a tattoo a “good” tattoo.

To see the inverse of this presentation, we might look at tattooed individuals such as “Phillip”, a young man with a myriad of tattoos, and who had started as someone with no knowledge of the criteria for a good tattoo. However, through exposure to tattoo artists and

⁷ See Appendix E

⁸⁻⁹ See Appendix E

personal contact with them, he became more educated upon the subject, and his tattoos came to reflect that formation: his original tattoos were simplistic, done in a middle-of-the-road manner, but were later covered up by more intricate and well-performed tattoos, which now cover a substantial portion of his neck, shoulders, left arm, hands, and fingers⁹. A second example of a *tattooed* person may be seen in “James”, who sought out the work of Rachel, also a close personal friend, and apprenticing at Crow’s Nest Tattoos at the time of his first tattoo. James was aware that the first tattoo might not be technically excellent, as Rachel had fully explained her limitations at the time, but he decided to proceed and act as a form of “practice”, so that she could become more acquainted with the machine and techniques of tattooing. Over time, her techniques improved, and James returned time and again, knowing that as her competence increased so, too, did the quality of her work.

I would like to pause here and note that someone who *has* tattoos, or a person *with* tattoos, may become someone who is *tattooed*, through continual additions and exposure to the industry aesthetic ideals of a good tattoo. The reverse of this process (going from someone who is *tattooed* to someone who *has* tattoos), however, is something that I have not witnessed, and therefore discounted for consideration in this study. The categories, and where an individual stands in relation to them, vary depending on the tattooed observer, as well as the tattooed person whose category or investment is being determined. For some people, having one or two high-quality tattoos, and a good deal of knowledge of the cannon, is enough to be *tattooed*, while in some cases, someone may be covered in tattoos, yet their lack of quality (according to the general standards such as bold colors, strong lines, and efficient shading) and preference for cheap artists or flashy styles may solidify their standing as someone *with* tattoos, albeit a high number of them.

Out of the 34 respondents, 17 were male and 17 female; of these, there were a total of seven artists. Of these artists, one was female, and the remaining six male. The respondents self-identified as multi-ethnic [17.6% (6 interviewees)], Caucasian or “white” [73.5% (25)], and less than five percent responded as Hispanic (2) or African American (1). The average age was 24 years old, where the two youngest interviewees were 19, and the oldest 42 years old. Because there was extreme variability in the definition of what constituted a tattoo “piece” (differences among respondents regarding surface area, number of sessions, and subject matter made definitions very subjective, and rendered impossible an overall categorization in terms of numbering), it is difficult to say what the average number was. Several respondents stated that they had no idea how many tattoos they had, or that there was no definite number. Others counted how many “sets” they had (it must be noted that the definition of a “set” is flexible, as well, since each “set” could constitute a construction of various independent tattoos of diverse sizes and images—for example, an arm sleeve or a pantsuit of the legs). Thus, quantifying the exact number fell to a case-by-case basis, where the definition was pliable, and highly dependent on the respondent’s own conception of what constituted a single “piece”. In addition, what makes a “piece” versus a “set” is also dependent on the owner of the tattoo.

Among the respondents, 73.5 percent (25) identified as either “single”, “unmarried”, or “Divorced”; of these, 8.8 percent (3) had at least one child. Of the remaining respondents, nine were married (or engaged to be married), and six, or 17.6 percent, had at least one child. In terms of employment status, 17.6 percent (6) self-identified as “unemployed”, 20.5 percent (7) responded as being employed at least half-time (including several who identified as being either part-time or full-time students); 52.9 percent (18) responded as being employed at least full-time (again, including several who responded as being part-time or full-time students).

Of the 34 respondents, there was only one high school drop out, and there was also one student planning on attending graduate school at the London School of Economics for a degree in International Finance. Six respondents (17.6%) answered as having only a high school diploma, 17 (50%) responded as having at least “Some College” or “Trade School”, and 7 (20.5%) responded as having completed a Bachelor’s degree. These results indicate that the stereotype perpetuated by such academic treatment as Cesare Lombroso’s, *L’Oumo Delinquente* (2013) of tattooed people as uneducated, unemployed masses with no prospects for the future is flawed, and not particularly relevant to these particular respondents.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

During my time at Crow's Nest, I was able to observe and document several encounters between my primary informant, the tattoo artist Rachel, and her clients. Rachel, 21 years old at the time, had been tattooing for just over three years, following a year-long apprenticeship with one of the artists who also worked at Crow's Nest. Apprenticeships are a common way of entering the world of tattooing as an artist, and typically last anywhere from six to eighteen months. During the course of the apprenticeship, apprentices generally do what many artists and apprentices call, "bitch work", which typically involves dealing with biohazard materials, cleaning the shop, shopping for supplies, running errands, and generally doing the tasks that the regular artists wish to avoid, all while drawing and sketching whenever they have free time, and learning how to take apart and use different machines for different techniques (Garcia-Merritt Field Notes; Gilbert 2000). In Rachel's case, the apprenticeship lasted just over a year, and was completed under the supervision of her tattoo "Master", one of the artists at Crow's Nest and part-owner of the establishment. From my notes with Rachel, the kind of relationship they had was both personal and professional; her master was both a mentor and close friend, and she viewed him like "a big brother". Even after the apprenticeship had ended, her Master continued to be a very close friend and personal mentor, giving her feedback and suggestions on tattoos. Rachel and her master had met when they were both working at a different shop (she worked as a counter girl, and he was one of the artists); when he left that shop to open his own, in partnership with other artists, she followed him, and began her apprenticeship.

The shop itself is located in an upper-middle class neighborhood, across the street from a market/restaurant and an American Legion post, in a business plaza where there is a café, a

dance studio, and a venue for events, and several other small. Gilbert, the city in Arizona where the Crow's Nest is located, regulates the proximity of tattoo shops (as well as other "alternative" businesses, such as pawn shops, adult entertainment venues, or standalone smoking lounges) to each other, as well as to schools, daycare centers, and places of worship (City of Gilbert Code Supplemental Use Regulations 2012). The shop itself is co-owned by three of its permanent artists, and decisions regarding its operation are taken on a 2/3 majority vote. There are five artists and one guest artist operating at any time at Crow's Nest. Only two of those five artists have been tattooing fewer than 10 years, and more than one has been tattooing for over 15 years. Both of the less experienced tattoo artists have been tattooing for three years, and completed their apprenticeships at the shop. While the experienced artists each have a work area (or "station"), the two less experienced artists share a work station.

The "front" of the shop was well lit, with large windows that faced the street, and there were a couple of leather couches, a coffee table with photo albums that displayed the work of each of the artists, and even several books and magazines to keep waiting customers entertained. Along the walls of the shop were a variety of objects and trinkets (exotic masks, a kite, a skeleton, among other things) that contributed to a very artistic, eclectic atmosphere, as well as *flash* made by the various artists at Crow's Nest, instead of mail-order flash (which is common in many shops, resulting in a large number of shops with the same, standard designs), adding a sense of artistic quality and finesse to the establishment.

On several occasions while I was present at Crow's Nest, a client would come in either to set up an appointment or to get their tattoo. Appointments are usually handled by the counter employee. Typically, tattoo shop counter employees are female, though the Crow's Nest only hire male employees for this position. Management believes that it reduces the possible problem

of fraternization between artists and counter girls, and aids in the smooth operation of the shop, since artists will be less distracted, and the counter employee will focus more on work. When a client is scheduled for tattooing session, the first hour is paid up front to keep the client accountable. Artists and the shop lose money when clients do not show; up-front payment mitigates the potential cost of a no-show. If the client is a first-time client, or a returning client beginning a completely new tattoo (though not necessarily returning for a follow-up session on an existing tattoo), a release form is signed to shift liability for any injuries away from the shop, and making that decision a conscious choice for the client.

After checking in with the counter employee, clients go to one of the workspaces where the artist would perform the tattoo. The artist then sets up the work area with pre-sanitized (either by using an autoclave to sterilize metal tools or by using disposable, sterile equipment, such as needles) instruments and effects. Apart from the tattoo machine itself, there is generally a bottle of diluted “green soap”, used to sterilize any surfaces coming into contact with the client, and to clean off excess ink and blood plasma during the course of the tattooing, since tattooed areas can become quite messy over the course of time (especially with longer tattoos, where the artist and client may be working on the same tattoo for several hours at a time). Along with the “green soap”, there would typically be some regular paper towels, tape, and pads similar to those used by dentists as patient bibs. At all times, tattoo artists wear sterile surgical gloves (Nitrile or non-latex, so that clients with latex allergies would not be affected), and if any incidence of cross-contamination is suspected, gloves are immediately changed. These elements are used in the cleaning of the tattoo during the process and for protection and wrapping after the process is completed.

Once the client has been brought to a full operational, pre-sanitized work station, the artist shows the client the final sketch, and if the client was happy with the design, then a stencil is printed out on thermal paper, and applied directly to the skin. The artist then “gloves up”, and dons sterile surgical gloves for their own protection, as well as the protection of the client’s open wound once tattooing starts. In certain cases, the area where the tattoo would be applied would have to be shaved, by means of disposable razor blades (the kind of which may be found in any convenience or grocery store). Wiping “green soap” to the area, and thoroughly rubbing away any dead skin, dirt, or other topical impurities sanitizes the shaved area where the tattoo is eventually applied. At this point, the stencil is placed on the area. Once applied to the skin, the client lets the artist know whether that location is good, or whether they want the tattoo to be higher, lower, and so on. In certain cases (such as my own tattoo), the client might wish to have the tattoo moved slightly, but the artist might strongly advise against this preference for pragmatic or stylistic reasons (for example, the lines of the tattoo would fit the natural contours of the body in the first position better than in the second position). Generally, the client agrees to the artist’s advice, and the tattooing proceeds.

After the stencil had been applied, and the artist given permission to begin, the artist fills several plastic thimbles with different pigments that would be used as ink. These caps are then placed on a tongue depressor, similar to those used by doctors, and are secured by means of dabbing petroleum jelly to the bottom of the thimbles and pressing them against the tongue depressor. This process enables the artist to have easy access to all pigments in the same place. Having prepared the inks in the “sterile area”, the artist picks up the machine (already prepared with the specific needles to be used for whatever kind of work was going to be done), and tattoos first an outline, then the coloration, and finally the shading.

Depending on the size, subject, and style of the tattoo, the process of tattooing could take minutes, hours, or even full sessions of several hours to complete. The quickest tattoo that I saw Rachel complete took her roughly forty minutes from the time the client walked into her workspace until the client left the workspace (this particular client was a regular, who would always seek biblical verses as her tattoos, making Rachel's job fairly easy, since script is not as time consuming as more complex types of art). The longest session I observed her complete was my own, which took her two and a half hours. The actual tattooing process is quite simple. The artist dips the needles into the ink while running the machine, and then follows the lines of the stencil, pausing every now and then to wipe away excess ink, blood, and plasma, permitting them to see the area they are working on and continue tattooing. Once the lines are drawn, a new needle (sometimes a different machine altogether) is used to fill in the colors, and finally a different needle (again, sometimes a different machine) is then used to perform shading.

Once the tattoo is completed, non-sterile, or used equipment is disposed of in regular trash containers; meanwhile, the needles are separated from the rest of the trash and disposed of in biohazard containers. These biohazard containers are the same as those found in doctor or dentist offices, and are meant to secure the biohazard separately from the regular trash items. In order to clean the tattoo, a final coat of soapy water is sprayed across the surface of the skin, and wiped one last time with a paper towel, to remove excess blood, ink, or plasma.

The artist, upon completing the tattoo, gives the client a chance to look at their tattoo, sometimes by allowing them to use a mirror on the back of a door, or a handheld mirror. In every case that I witnessed, the client was happy with the results, and would then meet the artist at the front desk, while the artist finished "tearing down" their workstation. In certain situations, where the artist is particularly happy with their work, a photo might be taken and uploaded to social

media websites, such as Facebook or Instagram. The artist then gives aftercare instructions to the client, and the client pays for the work. If the process is a “multi-session” tattooing, the artist and client set up a follow-up appointment. In Rachel’s case, because she was one of the newer artists in the shop, could only take cash.

Many clients, particularly those who seek out tattoos often, have an understanding that tips are a regular part of the payment process. Typically, the tips that artists receive are similar to those that someone in food service might receive (anywhere from ten to fifteen percent, though shop “regulars” may tip more). In the case of those individuals that are leaving bigger tips, it might be because they either plan on returning to that artist in the future, and would like to be cared for in a more personable, relaxed manner than a new customer, or they already return to that specific artist often, and are simply “taking care” of their artist, and of their tattoos. In the second case, some of the people I interviewed were adamant that tips are a necessary part of the exchange, because the artists “live on” the tips, especially because shop fees, equipment maintenance costs, and personal business expenses can bite into their profit. Individuals who follow the criteria of high frequency of tattoos to be considered members of the tattoo community, or *tattooed* (DeMello 2000; Vail 2000; Nikora et al. 2007) are often the most consistent tippers.

These methods are similar to, and support, those described by other researchers (Atkinson 2003; DeMello 2000; Sanders and Vail 2008) regarding the encounter of tattooing between the artist and the client. The tattooing process is a negotiated act (Sanders and Vail 2008), in the sense that the artist and the client must come together and agree on a subject and style that is both feasible and appropriate. It should be noted that when I refer to tattoos as, “appropriate”, I do not necessarily refer to “appropriate” in the sense of cultural conventions (though many tattoo

artists noted that they would not tattoo someone's hands or neck unless that person was already previously heavily tattooed). "Appropriate" in this case refers to a tattoo that meets the content expectations of both the artist *and* the client. This does not mean that tattoo artists had no objection to performing any kind of tattoo; every artist I spoke to claimed that they refused to perform tattoos of extreme offense (i.e., Swastikas, SS emblems, other neo-nazi imagery, or gang affiliated designs). Indeed, when asked about the strangest or most offensive tattoos they had seen, many artists, due to their time in the industry and high exposure to a large variety of tattoos, were able to recount specific examples of images or subject matter that had struck them as odd (at best) or plainly offensive (at worst).

As an act, tattoos require a willing abandonment of certain social conventions regarding the body, and forever place that person into a different category than someone who is not tattooed. As a physical space, the tattoo runs contrary to certain cultural assumptions about what constitutes a normal body. The person with the tattoos thus becomes their "bad body" (Kosut 2010); through their body, they challenge societal conceptions and understandings of what constitutes a normal, clean, or respectable body. Furthermore, as Kosut notes, bodies are "sites of representation and desire . . . situated within a complex matrix of culture, consumption, politics, technology, identity, and power" (1–2). The tattoo artist enables this sort of "misbehavior", by advising the client on what may be done, in practical terms, as well as by performing the act of tattooing itself.

The process of tattooing is thus both a negotiation between the client at the artist, as well as the client and their social audience as a whole, where trust is vitally important: both parties understand that the process is both painful *and* permanent. The idea of trust is a recurring theme among the individuals I interviewed, regardless of whether they were artists or simply

enthusiasts; the idea of responsibility on the part of the artist to ensure a good tattoo, and the idea that the customer, while in control of the ultimate design, should be open to suggestions and modifications regarding the design. An example of the kind of responsibility of the artists could be their counseling and refusal to tattoo underage people (even those with parental permission); as “James” noted:

You know, I can’t tattoo myself . . . And so the person that’s putting it (the tattoo) into you should have . . . a say in what’s going on in your body, because sure it’s going on your body, but that’s their name going onto your body (in the form of their work representing them). That’s kind of why I respect tattoo artists that will literally turn people down and make them walk out the door if their tattoo is *that* stupid, or *that* pointless, or *that* offensive. [Garcia-Merritt, June 11 2012].

James finds the professionalism and willingness of artists to maintain their reputation admirable, which inspires in him confidence in their values and abilities as purveyors of a specialized service. Many artists and clients interviewed also spoke of the trust that must be established between the client and the artist if the working relationship is to be successful. From a Foucaultian standpoint, the artist is an accomplice in the client’s act to subverting prevailing power confines of proper body appearance, so trust, as a concept of the relationship, must exist if the artist and client are to negotiate the body document successfully upon the skin of the receiver. Fisher and Sanders have both referred to this negotiation as a form of “mutual artistry” (Fisher 2002; Sanders and Vail 2008), a process whereby the personality of the client and his or her body are taken into account by the artist to create the best tattoo possible for those parameters (Fisher 2002). Thus, the tattoo is a procedure, a negotiation, and a text that lives upon the skin of the client, and in the name of the artist that executed it. As Fisher points out, “The

contemporary practice of tattooing is one that is simultaneously physical and social, with multiple levels of meaning” (Fisher 2002:91).

The opinions regarding what makes a tattoo a “good” tattoo versus a “bad” tattoo, however, varied substantially from person to person, though after several interviews, a pattern emerged of what made a tattoo good, speaking from a technical perspective. Several artists I interviewed, as well as some respondents, mentioned that good tattoos would have bold lines with no breaks in continuity or wavering of direction, and should follow the natural contours of the body when possible; colors were to be vibrant and filled in well, with proper saturation, so there is no discoloration or spots that appear to be less colorful, and that shading should be properly executed. As mentioned earlier, the adherence to these ideas on proper artistic form was part of what differentiated someone *tattooed* versus someone *with* tattoos. The myriad of attitudes regarding tattoos and what makes one “good” or “bad”, “appropriate”, or “not appropriate” made finding common themes difficult, but not impossible. Suffice to say, for every person with tattoos, there is a different understanding and conceptualization of what makes a tattoo “true”, and the sorts of social implications that go along with having such a tattoo.

To understand the role that tattoos play in the development and construction of personal identity and Body Documentation, I use the analogy of a traveler’s trunk that is covered in stickers. Collecting stickers and souvenirs of places visited, the observer may see the trunk and infer certain characteristics regarding the owner, and where that person has been. For example, if one sees a weather-beaten trunk with stickers from the Grand Canyon Nation Park, Flagstaff, and Monument Valley gift shops, they would infer and hold an opinion that would be quite different than someone who has stickers on their brand-new, Louis Vuitton trunk from St. Tropez, the Seychelles Islands, or Martha’s Vineyard. Simply put, these stickers may be indicative of

different personal interests and different personal histories. In this way, tattoos serve as “stickers” (marks of memories and moments past) upon the “trunk” (the body of the subject).

The ideal way to understand tattoos as Body Documents is to understand precisely *how* tattoos can act as forms of identity documents, much in the same way as a driver’s license or passport, albeit within social settings, and not official documentation of the State. They are inscriptions that construct and hint at a variety of psychical, cultural, and political elements (Pritchard 2000:3). Tattoos, regardless of their origin, serve as symbols of that individual’s life history. Whether it was an impulsive decision, or whether the person meticulously planned the tattoo for months, or possibly years in advance, the tattoo still holds a story of which the wearer is aware, and will hold as an aspect of their identity for the rest of their lives. In the first case, the tattoo may have been a spur of the moment decision, yet it still tells the story of that moment itself, and of the place in life where the person who wears the tattoo found her- or himself.

An example of this kind of sudden decision making would be “Bart”, a 22-year old Caucasian man who, in addition to more visible tattoos along his arms and back, had a series of tattoos performed on his buttocks, most of which were done while drinking at parties or in friends’ private residences. These tattoos, while done in various states of intoxication from drugs and alcohol, still retained the element of a story to him, even though they were not planned. As Bart explained it, the tattoos on his buttocks started as a way for his best friend “Ben”, who is a tattoo artist who works from home (and referred to as a scratcher by my prime informant, Rachel) to practice his “script” (lettering done by tattoo machine). These tattoos acted for Bart as a sort of icebreaker when at new parties, where people unfamiliar with his particular brand of extroversion would quickly become aware of the past events that lead to the tattoos themselves. In this case, it was not the tattoos themselves that contained the story, but rather that they served

as props in the retelling of the circumstances leading up to their placement upon Bart's body, allowing Bart to expand his social environment through the retelling of the narrative.

Due to the widespread nature of tattooing throughout the world, many people who sought tattoos, or who were artists themselves, had strong opinions regarding the topic of cultural appropriation that has been tied to various types of tattoos from other nations or groups. "Tribal" tattoos, for example, are based on the *Ta Moko* of New Zealand, and other forms of Polynesian tattooing (Gilbert 2000; Nikora et al. 2007; Pritchard 2000). While some tattoo artists were neither for nor against tattooing Tribal style or other tattoos incorporating elements of other distinct cultures, and would do such a tattoo if asked, I found that most people were quite hostile to the idea. James explains:

Gabriel Garcia-Merritt: If I got a traditional tattoo versus a tribal tattoo, (would) that say something about my personality?

James: Are you part of a tribe? Are you part of a Native American Tribe? Are you a member of one?

GGM: But . . . I'm not a sailor either.

James: That's a very sacred . . . What makes a sailor a sailor?

GGM: Well in your case, they're nautical themed. I mean, I could say that-

James: A sailor tattoo does not mean, there was never a sailor civilization. There was never a sailor nation . . . A sailor tattoo shouldn't be called a sailor tattoo. Just because you want a lighthouse doesn't make you a sailor. It means you're trying to advocate sea life, that you're showing your love for the ocean and what lies beyond, what's undiscovered. When someone gets a tribal tattoo, like an Apache design, and

he's a white dude from Philadelphia, that's a disgrace. [Garcia-Merritt, June 11 2012].

This idea of disgrace and shame stem from the actions of another; the tattoos are so embarrassing that the observer might feel embarrassment or as a consequence of simply observing the act or the final result. Many respondents felt this sort of embarrassment, and had quite negative views of people who choose these tattoos. Rachel, for example, was tattooing a man of around 18 or 19 who was already planning of his next tattoo, which he wanted to be in a "Tribal", pseudo-Maori, pseudo-Polynesian style. While she tattooed him, Rachel kept her professional attitude, but once he had finished his session for the tattoo currently in progress and had left the shop, she expressed her disdain for having to do tattoos in that style. She said that it had made her feel uncomfortable, yet she expressed feeling bound, because she did not have the luxury of turning down work that was that technically straightforward, and which would bring money to the shop.

"Tribal" tattoos and other similarly culturally appropriative styles are simultaneously popular among individuals that I have qualified as people *with* tattoos, yet are discredited by those I've identified as *tattooed* people. "Tribal" is a misnomer, as it is not from any one specific tribe, but rather, it is an idea of what the artist perceives as tribal art (typically, Polynesian art); it is the co-opting of traditional designs, and modifying them to resemble something different, by incorporating different elements not found in the traditional design. James' disdain for this form of cultural appropriation stands as a voice of someone who is actively tattooed, and who is "in the know". Thus, to the serious tattoo enthusiast or collector, appropriating the art of another people without having earned the right to wear it is a social boundary not to be crossed. This hasn't always been the case, as the canon has changed, but from what I have heard from interview respondents and read in the literature, these attitudes, or very similar ones, have been

in place for decades. This relates back to Goffman's notions of the presentation of the self; being a *tattooed* person and seeking a "tribal" tattoo is something that would most likely be done in an ironic twist, as a joke.

For a case antithetical to Bart's understanding of the role of personal history and the stories that accompany tattoos, there is "Jennifer", a 22-year-old expectant mother and wife, with a dual Bachelor's degree in Zoology and Biology. In Jennifer's case, the tattoos were a form of remembrance, a memorial to a brother she lost to cancer. Jennifer points out that she used her tattoos as a vehicle for expressing a metaphor about the duality of life and death, and how life is made all the more beautiful because it is finite, and must one day come to a close:

I decided to go with sunflowers because they're my favorite flowers and I think that they're pretty, and I decided one dead one and one live one as symbolism for life and death and that it's natural and it happens, and it doesn't always have to be so horrible. You know everybody dies, and it can be peaceful, kind of a way to look at it with more of a positive aspect, when people do have to think about death. [Garcia-Merritt, June 21 2012].

In the case given above, the tattoos should be thought of as an encrypted text, where the cipher, the key to understanding, lays in the knowledge of the subject that the observer holds.

The meaning of the tattoo may not be established or codified beyond an immediate group of friends and family, yet it holds the text of that person's life in a visual manner. If the observer is someone with no connection to Jennifer, who had no idea about her brother's passing, its meaning might not even have been guessed. Someone who knows Jennifer, on the other hand, might be able to infer from the symbolism that it is related to life and death, and to her family's struggle with the cancer that resulted in her brother's death; in this manner, to the learned

observer, the tattoo tells a portion of Jennifer's life story. To a close friend, or to a significant other, the text may be plainly understood, as Jennifer would likely have told that person, making the visual aspect of the tattoo much more plainly visible.

Jennifer's tattoos regarding death and remembrance of life are not uncommon; they figure into part of a category of tattoo known as *memorial tattoos*, where specific people, pets, or other important figures are remembered through the process of tattooing. These tattoos are meant to serve as a memory of a loved one who has passed away and to aid in the mourning process; this class of tattooing is one of the most common types, and also one most respected by the client. In the words of "Helen", a 23-year-old economic development consultant, whose father passed away several years ago, her tattoo serves as a constant memory of her father, and the kind of outlooks that he influenced her with. It should be noted that Helen's father was himself heavily tattooed, as is her brother, who has full sleeve tattoos and neck tattoos:

So when something happened to me, which was my dad passing away, I decided to get a tattoo to memorialize him, because that's something that I'd never regret. I'd never, ever, feel bad, or regret, because that's something that I did for my dad, because it's my dad and he raised me, and I owed it to him, and so I've never regretted it. [Garcia-Merritt, June 15 2012].

Another interview subject with a memorial had taken it a step further than is customary; "Gordon", a self-described "wandering traveler" and former enlisted member of the Navy, who acted as an itinerant tattoo artist while on the road, had effected upon himself and other friends tattoos to commemorate the passing of his friend "Bumblebee". The tattoos were matching bee designs, and the ashes of "Bumblebee" were mixed in along the normal ink for use in the outline and dark parts. As Gordon explained:

We took a, like an ink that we used specifically for it, and we mixed his ashes right into it. There's pretty little preparation, but more the experience . . . how close it drew us together with a shared, moment of remembrance. Um, remembering. [Garcia-Merritt, July 5 2012].

This level of dedication to memorializing the subject of the tattoo is uncommon, to say the least, though it is not incompatible with the technology of tattooing, as many early tattoo pigments were made from lamp soot and the ashes of organic matter (Carr 2005; Krutak 2008; Rudenko 1970). In Gordon's case, his knowledge of the tattooing process and access to the tools used in its execution enabled him to perform this tattoo that other artists might not have done for a regular client.

In several interviews, tattooed subjects expressed their belief that their tattoos were a reminder of an ideal to strive for, or a goal to aim for. For James, tattoos were a form of reminding him that he should always try to live near the ocean, a goal he had always kept:

I've always fantasized about the ocean, sea life. My ultimate, end-all retirement goal is to buy land by the sea by a lighthouse where I can just spend my days just . . . with whoever I end up with, whoever I choose to live the rest of my days with, it just seems like the most peaceful end. And uh, it could also be, since I live in a land locked state, something that I don't get to experience and because of that I think about it that much more, because I'm not able to, you know, to experience it on the daily . . . Every time I go to California, I go to the beach, and I never, ever want to turn back around again. Ever. That's for sure. [Garcia-Merritt, June 11 2012].

"Kyle", a personal trainer and former apprentice piercer at a tattoo studio had this to say about tattoos as reminders:

You know, me putting this big concept of honor and being honorable, and to make a statement like, “Death Before Dishonor”, and putting it on my back, I mean it shows placement can mean a lot because I’ve never seen this tattoo! I’ve seen pictures, I’ve seen it in a mirror, but it’s kind of like carrying around a meaning I always have to think now, like, “Am I being honorable”? “Am I being a good person”? “Am I being how I want to be”? Because if I’m not, I have this tattoo (to remind me). [Garcia-Merritt, July 7 2012].

Kyle’s tattoos consist of a dagger through his right leg, with a Roman numeral for the number 12, meant to represent Christ’s 12th station of the cross, where he died for the sins of others. As Kyle explains, this tattoo is disavowing Christ’s sacrifice, and reaffirming Kyle’s belief that only *he* is responsible ultimately for his transgressions, and that nobody else should suffer for them. Kyle’s second tattoo, a full back piece, depicts a samurai committing *hara-kiri*, or ritual suicide; Kyle explained that this tattoo serves as the ultimate reminder to act honorable, as according to him, samurai warriors would commit suicide if they were captured as a way of retaining honor in death. For Kyle, this symbolism of accepting death before dishonor is something he holds very dear, and which reflects his rather peculiar personal ideology.

For others, tattoos are a therapeutic process; memorial tattoos serve as a form of closure (“Gordon” Garcia-Merritt, July 5 2012), while others might permit the wearer to encourage self-control in the face of adversity; “Lea”, a 23-year-old woman of mixed Latino and Caucasian heritage described her tattoo of the phrase, “This Too Shall Pass”, as a reminder to be equanimous in the face of adversity, and to hold her composure when faced with problems. Another subject, “Margaret”, who struggled with issues of bipolarism and borderline personality disorder, used her tattoos as a method of grounding herself in the ideals embodied by her tattoos.

For example, located on Margaret's right side was a tattoo of a Japanese Cherry Blossom, which she pointed out as a symbol of Truth and Beauty (Garcia-Merritt, May 23 2012). For her, truth and beauty are two elements that she wished to remain constant in her life, no matter what situations she may find herself in. Gordon affirms this perception:

Tattoos are important to me for the therapeutic value, not to mention the keeping of the record. To hold my story, um, put it out there, uh, to let it not be forgotten. Not to live the past, but to not forget it, you know? . . . It keeps you in the present. [Garcia-Merritt, July 5 2012].

Many respondents believed that tattoos should be meaningful, and that those tattoos performed without any meaning previously ascribed were signs of an impulsive person who would eventually regret their tattoos. As Helen explained, "I get tattoos for meaning, and if I can't think of a meaning, I'm not going to get a tattoo" (Garcia-Merritt, June 15 2012). On the other hand, some respondents believed that tattoos' meanings were what you made of them, and that no previous meanings or understandings needed to be had, as the event of getting that tattoo would form enough of a reason. As Bart stated, "I just wanted a tattoo, there's no story" (Garcia-Merritt, May 30 2012). The meanings and motivations varied greatly, of course, yet all agreed that a tattoo is a permanent decision, and a certain level of willingness to accept risk or regret was required, regardless of the amount of preparation or "story" behind each tattoo.

These respondents perceptions show that tattoos form a variety of meanings upon the bodies of their wearers. Depending on the owner, different understandings may be had for what constitutes a true tattoo, what meanings are legitimate, and which meanings are just "hot air". Tattoos are not simply worn by the wearer, but they may actually *be* the wearer, insofar as the original purpose for selecting or getting that tattoo is tied to intimate life events. The tattoo is an

extension of the self; it reveals the wearer to the observer through visual communication: the more the observer knows the individual, the more information is possible to read from the tattoo. While it does not encompass the absolute entirety of that individual's embodied life, it may hold the person's conception of the self in a way that displays his or her inner conception and identity. In the way that someone might ascribe meaning and identity to a piece of music ("This song represents who I am", or "This song is like me because X"), the tattoo may act as a large identifier and therefore hold the representation of "This is who I am", or "This is me".

To tie this idea in with Goffman's (1959) and Hewammane's (2008) work on affect management, the example of someone who has a tattoo on a visible portion of their body, such as the top of their hand, or their neck, is relevant. Such a tattoo could be discrediting, according to Goffman (1986), yet, using careful selection of clothing, and constructing a narrative suitable for the occasion (such as a job interview versus a backyard barbecue), the individual may be able to manage their visual identity in such a way that negative repercussions might be minimized, if not avoided completely—in the same way that Hewammane's (2008) garment workers changed their style of dress and speech while at home. By using tattoos in this managed form, the individuals act on the surveillance by which they are affected. Negative repercussions are the effects of power, while the modification of presentation of the tattoo, and the controlled manner in which it is displayed, are examples of modified behavior to fit expected surveillance and comments resulting from surveillance.

Many tattooed people may encounter difficulty at times where more conventional body appearances would be favored, such as when interviewing for a new job, trying to get a bank loan, or attending a court hearing. In the case of many that I interviewed, the presentation of their self was dictated by the environment to their advantage, depending on if concealment or display

was preferable. The oppositional nature of tattoos means that their display in an otherwise conservative setting might make the wearer stand out; in the workplace, this could be tantamount to insubordination, and would be carefully done, keeping in mind the possible consequences of such an act. Likewise, going to a bar or social where unorthodox behavior (both of the body and of the mind) is the common element, not having tattoos might make one stand out, whereas having them might make one just another face in the crowd.

In the case of the work place, the example of “Casey” comes to mind. Casey, a 36-year-old personal trainer who had formerly worked in the private sector (specifically, a debt management company) as a department head, recounted a meeting with the CEO of the firm, as well as with several of the Vice Presidents and other important figures. In this meeting, the CEO exposed his bias against those with tattoos, and that the company would be better off not hiring anyone with them. According to Casey, he interjected at this point, stating that he knew five people in the same room at this meeting aside from himself who had tattoos, and that it was against the company’s best interests to reject qualified applicants based on their appearance alone (Garcia-Merritt, August 2, 2012).

Contesting conventional notions of body roles occurs within situations where the subject is vulnerable (social vulnerability as a consequence of images associated with tattooed persons), which ironically allows them to use their social vulnerability as a form of empowerment. This kind of dynamic is an example of Foucaultian power relations, where power exists in a flowing and mutual way: “The production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the realm of power; the latter are not simply an aspect of the former” (Foucault 1994:337). This circular power relation allows tattooed individuals to use their bodies as the tool of choice for exerting their biopower upon those in

positions of authority who would use moralistic grounds—an offshoot of what Foucault terms “Pastoral Power” (332) to curb the position of those with tattoos. By using the power structure against itself, their position is granted greater strength, as it acknowledges the power structure, but undermines it by using elements of it that may be contestable. A perfect example of this would be the case of Helen (mentioned earlier for her memorial tattoos). Helen’s older brother has a multitude of very visible tattoos (including throat tattoos and full sleeve designs). During our conversation, it became clear that she becomes very upset when strangers judge him in her presence:

Helen: Yeah I’ve told people off for treating him like crap!

GGM: What did you say?

Helen: Well I’d bring up the fact that just because he has tattoos doesn’t mean that he’s a bad person, it does not mean that he’s in a gang. What makes a person is their character, it’s their brain and their personality, not their physical appearance. And so I’ve told people off before, like, “You need to be so judgmental”...

GGM: Do you think that it had any impact on the person that you were saying it to?

Helen: A few people were speechless. (Garcia-Merritt, June 15, 2012.)

By using the moment of discrimination as an opportunity to educate (and in a sense, to shame), Helen was using her brother’s body, as well as her own tattooed body, as form of leverage to attempt to gain a form of biopower from the audience. So in this way, Petryna’s biological citizenship, and Foucault’s biopower are both put into play in an active, participatory manner. Using tattooed bodies as a tool of education and emotional manipulation (in this case,

creating a sense of shame) echoes Petryna's biological citizenship, because it shows a practical, first-hand knowledge of the social environment and biological categorization of the individual. Furthermore, it is a Foucaultian exercise of biopower because it relies on the existing power structure, and it contests that structure while simultaneously using the same parameters set forth by it. In this way, it changes the rules of the game from within, and allows the subject to contest the rationale behind their present situation by using the *status quo* as the starting point for their contesting of the prevailing views.

My ethnographic data confirm many such instances of bio political contestation among the respondents, but these examples highlight many of the similar attitudes that they vocalized. By using their bodies as tools, the respondents shaped a discourse that empowered them and allowed them to contest the bio political reality they face on a daily basis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It may seem like an obvious reminder, but it is necessary to emphasize that the history of tattooing is global, and that while meanings attached to tattooing are analogous in many societies, there are different understandings and a high degree of variance when it comes to the social acceptance of tattooing, and body modification in general, based on geographic and cultural context. In many places, tattooing may be a rite of passage, a form of group hierarchy reinforcement, or a form of personal identifier with specific traits or qualities associated with it (Gilbert 2000; Krutak 2006, 2008), or some mix of the three (Gilbert 2000; Krutak 2008). In this manner, it is helpful to think that a tattoo earned through a rite of passage is a sort of identifier specific to that wearer, which might grant them access to certain privileges or social standing they might not have had before (Nikora et al. 2007); when considering this point, one must consider the relevance of the idea of Body Documents, specifically as it details an aspect of that individual to a public who views that individual's body, and which allows the individual to display their self to their cultural context in general.

Throughout this thesis, I describe the forms of tattooing that exist and are commonly practiced in the greater Phoenix metro area. These practices are not significantly distinct from those of other places across the United States or the Western Hemisphere. In fact, the practices of the artists, and the beliefs commonly held by their clients, are not radically different than those beliefs and practices mentioned in previous literature (Atkinson 2003, DeMello 2005, Gilbert 2000, Sanders and Vail 2008). My ethnographic research supports the existing literature in its description of methods used, as well as the styles that are common within the current fashions of tattooing.

It has been my goal throughout this work to provide the reader with a sense of history regarding not only tattoos, but also the greater concept of deviance, and to use this opportunity as a platform to contest the idea of tattoos as deviant acts, and instead to illustrate the complex mechanisms by which they empower their owners and give them a means to contest existing problems within their cultural environment.

Understanding the power of tattoos is predicated on the fact that they are different and meaningful to each individual. The process of creating tattoos and ascribing meaning to them varies from person to person: for some, it is a deeply personal process where meticulous care is taken to constructing an image that describes that person or their feelings as accurately; for others, tattoos are a spur-of-the-moment affair, and meanings are added only after the tattoo has been inked, if it is attached with meaning at all. Indeed, the meanings are often known only by the wearer, and the visual code of the tattoo is unbroken, even by those who know the wearer best. As well, in some cases, no original intention or meaning is attached to the tattoo; the act of getting that tattoo might be the first sign of meaning attached (the company kept at the moment of the tattoo, the mindset, the visual subject chosen to be represented in the tattoo itself). Tattoos are defined by the spaces they inhabit, and yet, because social conventions and norms change over time, they may also influence the environment, thus allowing them to be used not just as effective tools of challenging cultural attitudes regarding the body, but also to display characteristics not biologically natural. Because notions of the body, and the methods of controlling it, are constantly in flux, definitions will change, as will cultural understandings. Foucault's structures of power relied on the body as a source and target; my research has shown that tattoos, while being the target of such power, may also grant the owner the power to contest the structures that constrain them, and thereby create accepted ideologies of body behavior and

appearance.

Due to the cyclical nature of tattoos (Gilbert 2000), I believe that within a generation, the concept of a tattoo, and why one would choose to get one, will be completely different than it is today. The purpose of this thesis is not to serve as the final word regarding tattooing, but to provide a textual picture of the present state of tattooing within this metropolitan area, how they have changed over time, and how I understand them in their present situation. Perhaps in several years, or even a generation, the general public's understandings regarding tattoos will be more open to some of the more complex reasons behind tattoos. Tattoos are as varied and complex as the people that get them; with this idea in mind, I believe that academics should continue to pay attention to tattoos. As they do so, however, they should be careful to avoid oversimplifying their meaning, as well as the people who get them. Tattoos will continue to be used by their owners as forms of biopower to challenge the bio political *status quo* and, perhaps one day, they may be so prevalent as to not even need their power as tools of contestation.

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS FROM RESEARCH

Aftercare: The process by which the tattoo is cared for after being executed. Typically involves using hot water and unscented soap as soon as client reaches home, to clean the tattoo of excess plasma and clots, as well as any bleeding or ink seepage. Following this wash, a light layer of some form of healing ointment is applied for the first few days to week, after which regular unscented, uncolored lotion may be used to keep the skin hydrated while the tattoo heals. Scabbing is natural, but should not be scratched, as it may affect the healing process and final outcome of the tattoo.

Anatomical: *Anatomical* tattoos seek to emulate aspects of human anatomy, such as bone or muscle, in a realistic style. Results vary based on the skill of the artist performing the tattoo.

Apprenticeship: A very common form of training whereby a wannabe artist will work under the supervision of an established artist. Typically, an *apprenticeship* will involve various kinds of “bitch work” (such as cleaning work stations, equipment, sweeping the shop, preparing stations for an artist, and other menial tasks around the shop), and long, unpaid hours where drawing, sketching, and conventional forms of art are practiced. Typically last anywhere from a few months to a year or year and a half, depending on the shop.

Back Piece: A *Back Piece* is the most valued tattoo to perform by an artist, as the back offers the largest continuous surface area for the artist to work on, giving them the most creative freedom in incorporating different stylistic elements they wish to use.

Badass: May be used as a compliment by an observer, or as a statement attaching value to a specific *piece* (i.e. That sleeve looks *badass*).

Biomechanical/Biomech: A style that combines organic and synthetic elements to create a “cyborg” look.

Black And White/Greyscale: Tattoos performed in the style of Chicano/Latino artists that originated in LA. Stylistically replicates pencil drawings, using only black and grey color schemes and careful shading to produce realistic, detailed results.

Blowout: A common term used to describe a tattoo where the pigment has gone too deep into the skin, and spread into the lower layers of the Dermis. *Blowouts* are visible as the edges of the line appear to be fuzzy or hazy instead of crisp or sharp.

Body Suit: A tattoo that covers the majority of the body. Refer to *Irezumi*

Chest Cap: Chest Caps are tattoos that are placed on the area of the chest, typically going from the area roughly below the neck to just below the breast, covering the breasts, as well as the area of the Sternum.

Counter Guy/Girl: Typically female, these employees are in charge of greeting and entertaining clients until a tattoo artist is available, setting up appointments, and running errands (such as getting lunch, coffee, or supplies) for the shop owners. Some tattoo artists avoid counter girls and believe that they are simply trying to

Cover-up: *Cover-ups* are tattoos that are meant to improve on, replace, or otherwise conceal by being performed on the same spot as another tattoo that already exists. Typically performed if the person has regrets about the artistic quality or the personal meaning of the first tattoo (i.e. covering up the name of an ex with another tattoo).

Dermablend™: A topical cream that conceals tattoos, famous for an ad in which a heavily tattooed man removes the cream, revealing his “true” self to the viewer.

Fade: May refer to either the judicious use of shading to create the impression of fading of light and shadow, *or* to the natural effect over the course of time and exposure to sun where the tattoo becomes less clear and “sharp”.

Green Soap: *Green Soap* is the colloquial term for a sterilizing soap substance, generally diluted with water, which is used to clear up the tattooed area as the tattoo is being performed, as well as the soap used in sterilizing the work station both before and after the tattoo has been completed.

Flash/Flash Sheet: *Flash* are mass produced designs, often printed on poster-sized sheets, which may be bought online or through magazines or supply retailers. Because the designs are common, many artists consider flash to be tacky and cheap (many others will keep flash sheets on the walls as it allows them a stable form of income from customers who just want a tattoo and aren’t particularly picky about the subject matter). Some tattoo artists will refuse to display flash, or create their own.

Half Sleeve: A piece that extends from the neck or shoulder to roughly the elbow area. May later on form a part of a “Full” Sleeve.

Handling Fee: A “fee” that is assessed to customers who request tattoos around the genitals, often dramatically increasing the price of the tattoo.

Hours: A common unit of measurement for how much effort has been put into a tattoo. As rates may vary from one shop to another for a similar piece, many will use *hours* as a form of measuring how much they have invested into a particular tattoo project.

Ink- May refer to the pigments used in the tattoo process, or as a slang term for the tattoos themselves.

Irezumi: A form of Japanese tattooing style where multiple elements work together to form a complete tattoo; *Irezumi* tend to be quite large, often covering whole limbs, and the body itself ultimately.

Japanese Style: Refers to the popularized style of Japanese themed tattoos, where traditional Japanese imagery is often transplanted into an American style; should not be confused with traditional forms of tattooing practiced in Japan.

Kitchen Magician- Refer to *Scratcher*

Machine: Also referred to colloquially as a *gun*. The machine is comprised of a capacitor, frame, tube, needle(s), and electrical supply (separate from the machine itself, but connected via a cable). Many artists have multiple machines, where each machine serves a specific technical purpose. Typically quite expensive (200+ dollars general starting price, varying by make), are sometimes made by the artists themselves.

Needle: Refers to the needle (in fine line tattooing or Black and White tattooing, single needles are sometimes used) used in the tattoo machine. There are many varieties of needles, used for different purposes (lines, shading, different width and boldness of lines, etc...).

Old School/Traditional American: Styles that became popular due to their prevalence among servicemen, particularly Sailors (See also “Sailor Tattoo”). May also refer to the practices that a tattoo artist performs (making their own ink, machines, etc...).

Photorealistic: A form of tattoo where emphasis is placed on making the image as lifelike as possible. See also, *Portrait*.

Piece: Refers to a specific tattoo. A *piece* may be formed by a multitude of smaller tattoos. See also: *Back Piece*, *Chest Cap*, *Sleeve*, *Half Sleeve*, *Set*, *Tramp Stamp*, *Thigh Piece*, *Pantsuit*, and *Bodysuit*.

Poke Tattoo: A widely extended method among traditional indigenous artists and those that do not use electric machines, where a rod with needles fixed to one end is poked against the skin, in a manner similar to how a pool cue pokes a ball on a billiards table.

Portrait: A type of tattoo that is based around making a visual representation of a human being, typically in a *photorealistic* style. Due to the high level of detail, some artists are wary of portraits or *photorealistic* tattoos because of how they might change with the body over time.

Punch Tattoo: A manner of tattooing where a punch, similar to a stamp, is struck against the skin, typically used in common prison tattoos.

Sailor Tattoo: Refer to *Old School/Traditional American*

Scratcher-Tattoo provider who works either from home or performing house calls; viewed negatively by both established “Shop” artists and “independent” artists who work from home, due to their lack of technical skills, training, and perceived lack of talent. Also known as “Kitchen Magicians”.

Session: A *session* is the time spent in the chair at a tattoo studio. Depending on the time that the artist and client have available, this could be minutes or hours, though it is generally understood to be multiple hours. For example, “The tattoo which I have on my arm took 2 sessions of two hours each to get to where it is now”.

Shading: The use of light and dark to create an impression of shadows within a tattoo.

Sharp: Refers to lines that are crisp, clear, and bold. Antonyms: shaky, *sketchy*.

Sketchy: Refers to a tattoo that is done with poor quality workmanship, to a shop that appears to be disreputable, or to a tattoo that appears as a warning signal that the wearer is not to be trifled with (i.e. gang tattoos are considered “sketchy” in that the owners themselves may be “sketch”)

Sleeve: A tattoo that extends from the area of the neck or shoulder to the wrist, roughly.

Generally contains one stylistic theme (i.e. Greek mythology).

Stencil: A stencil in tattooing permits the artist to paste the design directly onto the skin of the client. In operation, stencils are much like water-applied tattoos that a child might use.

Thermofax: A machine used to print stencils that permit the artist to display the stencil to the client prior to actually tattooing.

Tribal: A style that is influenced by Polynesian and Maori artistic styles, using geometric designs. Regarded quite poorly by many artists and non-artists alike; *Tribal* is an example of a fad style, and those with tribal tattoos are typically looked down upon, as not being aware of tattooing, and just using their tattoos to make a fashion statement. Also looked down upon by some due to the cultural appropriation that is implicit with the style.

Tube: A hollow part of the tattoo machine which is connected to the frame, and which protects the needle and allows the artist to grip the machine, much like the tube of a ball point pen.

Walk-in: A customer who literally walks in to the shop, without a prior appointment, desiring to get tattooed at that moment. Walk-ins are a good source of revenue for shops, as they don't require scheduling, and provide a steady flow of income. Walk-ins are typically appointed based availability of artists, followed by level of seniority in the shop.

Work: The concept of *Work* is simply an addition/expansion to an existing *piece*, or the creation of a new one

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender	Sexual (Self ID)	Race (Self ID)	Age	Tattoos (Self Report)	Marital Status	Occupational Status	Highest/Current Level of Education	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	Multiracial	28	+	Divorced 2 Children	Employed Full Time	Bachelor's Degree	
Female	Heterosexual	White	21	1	Single	Employed Full Time	High School	
Female	Heterosexual	White	19	2	Single	Employed Half Time	High School	
Female	Heterosexual	White	19	3	Single	Unemployed	High School	
Female	Bisexual	White	21	3	Married	Unemployed	Some College	
Female	Heterosexual	White	24	5	Single 1 Child	Employed Full Time	Bachelor's Degree	
Male	Heterosexual	White	22	5+	Single	Unemployed	Some College	
Male	Heterosexual	White	22	*	Married 1 Child	Employed Full Time	Some College	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	White	21	1	Single	Employed Full time plus Half Time	High School	
Male	Heterosexual	White	22	4	Single	Employed Half Time and Full Time Student	Trade school	
Female	Heterosexual	Hispanic	23	2	Engaged	Employed Half Time and Full Time Student	Entering Grad School	
Female	Lesbian	Multiracial	23	*	Single	Employed Full Time	Bachelor's Degree	
Female	Heterosexual	Multiracial	22	1	Married 1 Child	Other	Bachelor's Degree	
Female	Heterosexual	Multiracial	22	7	Single	Employed Half Time and Full Time Student	College	
Female	Heterosexual	Multiracial	20	3	Single	Unemployed	High School Dropout	
Female	Heterosexual	Multiracial	22	*	Married 1 Child	Unemployed	Some College	
Female	Heterosexual	White	22	6	Single	Unemployed	Some College	
Male	Heterosexual	White	30	*	Divorced 2 Child	Full time Employed and Full Time Student	Associate's Degree	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	White	22	3 sets	Single	Half Time employed and Full Time Student	Student	
Male	Heterosexual	White	25	5 sets	Single	Full Time Employed	Some College	
Male	Heterosexual	White	24	1	Single	Half Time Employed	High School	
Male	Heterosexual	White	22	8	Single	Full Time Employed	High School	
Female	Heterosexual	White	22	4-7	Single	Employed Half Time	Trade School + Some College	
Female	Heterosexual	White	27	*	Single	Employed Full Time	Bachelor of fine Arts	Artist
Female	Lesbian	White	24	*	Single	Employed Full Time and Full Time Student	Student	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	White	No Data	No Data	Married 1 Child	No Data	No Data	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	Hispanic	38	*	Married 3 Children	Employed Full Time	Some College	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	White	29	*	Married 1 Child	Full Time Employed	Some College	
Male	Heterosexual	White	26	*	Single	Full Time Employed	Some College	Artist
Male	Heterosexual	African American	36	2	Single	Full Time Employed	Bachelor's Degree	
Female	Heterosexual	White	20	1	Single	Half Time Employed and Full Time Student	Student	
Female	Heterosexual	White	42	1	Married	Full Time Employed	Some College	
Female	Heterosexual	White	4	1 set	Single	Full Time Employed and 3/4 Time Student	Student	
Female	Heterosexual	White	22	*	Single	Employed Full Time	High School	

Table 1.1- Asterisk indicates inconsistent definition by subject of what constitutes a tattoo "piece"

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROMPT FOR TATTOOED PEOPLE

INTRODUCTIONS>Basic icebreakers

1. What are your initials?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you originally from?
4. How did you end up in Phoenix?

INTRODUCE>Tattoo related questions-

5. How many tattoos do you have?
6. What are your tattoos images of?
7. How old were you when you got your first tattoo?
8. Do you have more tattoos planned?
9. What kind of tattoo styles would you say best describe your personality?
 - a. Why do these styles represent you?
10. Do you believe that certain styles represent certain types of people?
11. What makes a tattoo a “good tattoo” to you?
12. What was your first tattoo experience like?
13. Why did you choose the symbol or image that you chose for your first tattoo?
14. Was your image designed by an artist, friend, yourself, or by whom?
15. Do you believe that tattoos are forms of art?
 - a. What makes art to you?

INTRODUCE>Artist related questions

16. Do you have a preferred artist or shop?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. How did you find out about this artist or shop?
17. How does the artist influence the choice of tattoo?

- a. What about the location of the tattoo?
- 18. What has the interaction with artists been like for you?
- 19. Which tattoo is your favorite? (if interviewee has more than one)
 - a. Why do you consider this tattoo your favorite?

INTRODUCE>Reactions and perceptions

- 20. How did you think of tattoos before you got one?
 - a. What was your perception of tattooed people?
 - b. What was your perception of artists or tattoo shops?
- 21. Do you have any friends or family with tattoos?
- 22. How did your friends and family react when you told them you wanted to get a tattoo?
- 23. Do they still have the same attitude about tattoos now as they did then?
- 24. What kinds of problems do you face with your tattoo?
 - a. How do you face these problems?
- 25. How do you think tattoos can cause trouble for the people that wear them?
- 26. Do you think that your tattoos will limit your
- 27. Have you felt judged based on the kind of tattoos that you have?
 - a. If so, why do you keep that (those) tattoo(s)?
- 28. Have you ever seen a tattoo that “crossed the line” in terms of what you consider socially acceptable?
 - a. Why did you consider it too extreme?
- 29. Do you show or hide your tattoos?
 - a. Under what circumstances do you show /hide (based on previous response) them?

INTRODUCE>General

- 30. Do you have any interesting stories relating to your tattoo, or how someone has reacted to your tattoo?
- 31. What is your primary concern regarding your tattoo (social stigma, fading of the design, poor quality, etc...)?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROMPT FOR TATTOO ARTISTS

All questions from client are included, although they may be slightly modified in content to fit the circumstance of the artist (i.e. #12 “preferred artist or shop” would be within the context of artistic ability, not as a consumer).

Basic Demographics and background questions

1. How old are you?
2. What ethnicity or race do you consider yourself?
3. What kind of personal background do you have?
4. What did you do before you got into tattooing?
5. Do you have any kind of artistic formation besides your experience as a tattoo artist (MFA, art school, etc...)?
6. Are there any long terms that you have in regards to your occupation or career?
7. Are you planning on committing your career to tattooing, or do you have any other interests?
8. Are tattoos art? Do you consider yourself to be an artist?

Introducing me to their tattooing experiences; tattooing as an art form

9. How long have you been tattooing?
10. How did you come into the world of tattooing?
11. Did you pursue an apprenticeship or did you teach yourself, or did you learn by some other method?
 - a. What is your opinion of the apprenticeship method?
 - b. What methods of training were used in your apprenticeship (if applicable)?
 - c. How long was it between the start of your apprenticeship and the first tattoo that you worked on?
12. What was your first tattoo as a client?
 - a. “As an artist?
13. What kind of tattoo motif would you say that you specialize in (in terms of “type” or “theme”)?
14. Would you classify tattooing as an art?

- a. Why?
 - b. Under what circumstances is it art, or is it an absolute answer?
15. Outside of the tattooing field, do you enjoy art? What kinds or forms?
16. Do you think that tattooing is a socially accepted practice?
- a. Why or why not?
17. In your experience as an artist, what has been your greatest pleasure?
18. In your experience as an artist, what has been your burden?
19. “ “ what has been your biggest annoyance?

Creation and execution process

20. What makes a client a “good” client or a “bad” client?
- a. How do you deal with the “bad” clients?
21. What is an average interaction between you and a client like?
22. Do you have any “go to” conversation topics or phrases that you use to calm a nervous client, make small talk, etc?
23. Have you ever felt judged because of your line of work?
24. What kind of careers did you consider besides tattooing prior to becoming an artist?
25. What is the difference between a tattooist, a tattooer, and a tattoo artist?
26. What are some artists that you draw inspiration from, from around the world (general artists, not just from within tattooing; question is meant to understand the artistic influences of the interviewee, the question is not meant to indicate local artists)?
27. What are the different styles of tattooing that exist, and how are they different from one another?
28. Why are tattoos important to you?(obvious question, looking for an answer deeper than just economic incentive, use probing to move conversation in this direction).
29. How are suppliers and magazines tied to your work as an individual?
30. Are there different groups/cliques/factions within the industry?
31. What is the biggest problem facing the industry, in your personal and professional opinions?
32. What should a client look for in a shop, in terms of hygiene and safety?

33. What should a client look for in a shop or artist in terms of artistic quality?
34. What do you do if you have to work on a design or a client that you don't like (either by content or behavior), and how do you manage this?

Public perception and personal perception

35. What kind of public perceptions exist in regards to tattooing, based on your personal experience?
36. Have you ever felt judged because of the line of work that you perform?
 - a. In what ways?
37. Do you believe that tattooing will remain as popular as it has become over the past 40 years?
 - a. Is the resurgence of tattooing an anomaly, or is it a long-term change?
 - i. What is that answer based on?
38. How do you think being tattooed has changed who you are?
39. How do you think that being a tattoo artist has changed who you are?
40. What was the reaction of your friends and family upon finding out that you were a tattoo artist?
41. How has their reaction changed, if it has at all?(negative to positive, positive to neutral or negative, negative to neutral)
42. What kind of attitudes do you see from people when they find out that you're a tattoo artist?
43. Do you think that tattooing is a financially secure form of work, as compared to other arts (sculpting, painting, etc...)?
44. Is there discrimination against tattooed people? How have you personally dealt with it if you have faced it? How have others that you know of (family and friends) dealt with it?
45. What can people do to avoid being discriminated against because of their tattoos?
46. If people face discrimination as a consequence of their tattoos, what would you recommend they do about it? How would you recommend handling it? (How does what they recommend differ from what they actually do?)

APPENDIX E
PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1-Jessica's Belly Tattoo



Photograph 2-Janice's Contrasting Tattoo: Note the flourishing of the letters and coloration of the Roses



Photograph 3-Phillip's Tattoos



Photograph 4- One of James' Tattoos, performed by Rachel



Photograph 5- Bart's Faux Native American Back Piece, performed by Ben



Photograph 6- Ben's Faux Native American Tattoo