

NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF
BODY ART

by

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Abstract

In recent years body modification practices such as the arts of tattooing and body piercing have experienced an increase in popularity. A close examination of previous research conducted on the topic revealed a dichotomous categorization of these practices as either acts of deviance or self-expression. In an effort to add to the research that strives to portray 'body art' as a means of identity formation, the current study took a qualitative approach to the examination of body modification practices and the individuals who participate in them. Throughout 2007, fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with college-age individuals who had at least one visible piece of 'body art,' and were currently living in or around Manhattan, Kansas. An emphasis was placed on what motivated the individuals to participate in the arts of tattooing and/or body piercing and how they felt the physical alteration of their body had affected their subsequent social interactions and identity. A careful review of the interview transcripts revealed that the respondents had chosen to participate in body modification practices for a variety of reasons. Nine analytical categories were then created in an attempt to explain the key motivations for their participation in these practices and ultimately call into question whether these practices should continue to be viewed as "deviant." The findings also demonstrated that there is still a certain amount of stigma associated with the arts of tattooing and body piercing, especially within the workplace. Although some businesses and organizations require their employees to keep their artwork concealed during business hours, others simply refuse to hire any individual who has a visible piece of 'body art.' Thus, the knowledge gained from the respondents and their experiences provided insight into the thought processes involved in the decision to participate in body modification practices as well as shed light on discriminatory, appearance-based hiring practices.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving parents, Clyde and Shawn Teeter. I would like to thank you for allowing me to make my own decisions. You have never judged me, always accepting me for who I am. I appreciate all of the love and support that you have provided me throughout the years. If it were not for the two of you, I would not be who I am today.

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

In recent years body modification practices such as the arts of tattooing and body piercing have experienced an increase in popularity. They have become so prolific notes Katie Zezima (2005) that a survey conducted by Harris Interactive in 2003 found that one in six adults has a tattoo. It was also not too long ago that the media jumped on the 'body art' bandwagon, producing reality based television programs like "Miami Ink," "Inked," and "L.A. Ink." Televisions shows that have provided society with the opportunity to explore the inner workings of tattoo parlors and the customers that frequent them, from the comfort of their own homes. In addition, they have given the art of tattooing a publicity boost while breaking down stereotypes about body modification practices as a whole and about the individuals who participate in them.

According to Victoria Pitts (2003), "because they have pushed the envelope of body aesthetics, body modifiers have been understood as perverse, criminal, and offensive, but also as artistic, expressive, and radical (23)." This dichotomous categorization of body modifiers can also be seen within the research that has been conducted on this phenomenon. Some scholars have argued that body modification is a deviant act. For example, Richard Post (1968) argued, "the presence of a tattoo, or tattoos, can serve to indicate the presence of a personality disorder which could lead to, or is characterized by, behavior which deviates from contemporary social norms" (516). Other scholars, like Michael Atkinson, have suggested that tattooing should be seen as one or a combination of the following: as a way for an individual to differentiate themselves from others or as a way to express one's emotions (Atkinson 2004: 130).

In 1998, I began modifying my body with a combination of tattoos and body piercings. Naturally, people were curious about the thought process behind my decision to do so and the two most common questions people asked me were, "did it hurt?" and "why did you do that?" It was taking the time to answer the latter that caused me to wonder why others choose to physically alter their bodies and whether their experiences were similar or different from my own. Upon examining the thoughts and ideas of other researchers it occurred to me that there was a need to expand the research that examined

body modification as a means of identity formation and/or self-expression. I also realized that in order for these practices to be seen in this light, future research would need to avoid framing them as deviant.

The reason researchers need to avoid framing body modification practices as deviant is because

it is difficult to identify which forms of conduct belong under this heading and which do not [since] the essence of deviance as a sociological category does not lie either in the particular characteristics of behavior itself or in similarities among those who engage in it. Instead, deviance is a category of behavior and of persons who are classified and treated as such by the members of society itself (Hewitt 2003: 231).

In other words, deviance is a social construct, the definition of which is subject to change at any given time and differs from one society to the next. This means that attempting to discern a deviant act from a normative one becomes extremely difficult the more heterogeneous a society is and that the more widely practiced a behavior, once labeled as 'deviant' becomes, the harder it will be for people in society to continue to label and treat it as such. I would argue that the arts of tattooing and body piercing are perfect examples of this. How can we continue to label these practices as deviant when men and women, young and old, of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds, are modifying their bodies?

As a self-proclaimed body modifier, I decided that the best place to start my research was with an exploratory study that would focus on how those who participate in these practices think about the art that adorns their bodies in a society where these practices are often stigmatized. The following study took place in Manhattan, Kansas and is a preliminary investigation of college-age individuals and their art. It places an emphasis on what motivated them to modify their body and how they feel the physical alteration of their body has affected their social interactions and their identity. Although a variety of cultures have "used paint, scars, and tattoos for centuries as marks of achievement, adornment, identification, protection, social status, and group membership," there is currently no "textbook" definition for the term 'body art' (Taylor 1968: 171). For the purpose of this study, 'body art' will be defined as the ink, jewelry, or marking left on

the body as a result of a permanent or semi-permanent body modification practice. In addition, because I wanted to see how people responded to body modifiers, I chose to focus specifically on individuals who had at least one visible tattoo and/or body piercing.

It is important to keep in mind that body modification is not only a cross-cultural phenomenon; it is a phenomenon that continues to withstand the test of time. Although the methods of applying and performing these arts have changed over time, one thing remains the same: the modification of the human body will always be a unique and interesting way for people and cultures to define themselves in relation to one another. I will argue that tattoos, piercings, and scarification help an individual to define their identity and that these practices are undertaken for a variety of new and different reasons, which can best be explained by the individuals themselves. In order to examine this phenomenon at the micro-level, I have taken a qualitative approach to the study of body modification practices and the individuals who participate in them.

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

There is a great deal of literature that examines the histories and origins of body modification. According to Kim Hewitt (1997), “body modification practices are so prolific that an exhaustive account of the practices of body magic and marking around the globe is nearly impossible” (65). An extensive review of these historical documentations reveals that the literature focuses on the reasons why a variety of different cultures practice the arts of tattooing and body piercing. In addition, a close examination of the sociological research conducted on this topic revealed that while sociologists have only recently begun to investigate this phenomenon, they attempted to catch up with psychological and anthropological schools of thought. The following is a brief examination of the historical backgrounds of these body modification practices and a discussion of the research that has been conducted on the topic.

Historical Background

Religious ceremonies and beliefs, cures for sickness or pain, giving good luck and preserving youth are just a few of the reasons different cultures have provided as explanations for the use of body modification practices (Hambly 1974). For the Melanesian tribes of New Guinea, the tattooing process plays an important role as part of a young woman’s coming of age. The women of the Koita tribe have almost every part of their body tattooed over the course of several years. The tattoos are placed on the body

Commencing with hands and forearms at the age of five or thereabouts, the work progresses until the age of ten years, by which time the chin, nose, lower part of the abdomen, and inner region of the thighs have all been decorated. Breasts, back and buttocks are tattooed as signs of approaching puberty appear, while V-shaped markings on the chest and on the back of the neck, together with markings on the lower legs, are given when betrothal has taken place (Hambly 1974: 30).

The final markings adorn the skin between the woman's navel and breasts once a marriage agreement has been reached. These markings signify that the woman is taken and no other man should approach her.

Tattoos have also served as a measure of social status. Among the Nagas of Assam, married women who are unable to afford material objects are tattooed with designs that are usually very simple and consist of several dots and or lines. It is believed that these markings will make it easier for their husbands to identify them once they themselves reach the spirit world. Hambly (1974) writes, "as a rule a woman who can afford a necklace did not receive the tattoo mark" (52). This is because those women who could afford necklaces would be buried with them and the necklace would then serve as a way for the husband to identify his wife.

The men of many of these cultures are tattooed for some of the same reasons that women are (i.e. coming of age and social status) and for very different reasons. In New Guinea, for instance, when a man gets tattooed, it signifies that he is a warrior and has killed at least one of his enemies (Buckland 1888). It has also been noted that men are tattooed as a test of endurance. In other cultures, markings on a man's back and arms were seen as a form of protection.

After reviewing numerous historical accounts of the tattoo, it became apparent that there are differing opinions on when the practice reached the United States. The origin of the word itself was one of few things that the majority of these accounts could agree upon. They explained that although this art was practiced in pre-Christian Europe, the word tattoo did not become part of the English language until the eighteenth century, when Captain Cook brought it back to the states with him after a journey he had made to the Pacific Islands (Hewitt 1997). It was also noted by Steve Gilbert (2000) that "the earliest written records," of Americans actually participating in the practice, "were found in ships' logs, letters, and diaries written by seamen during the early part of the nineteenth century" (125).

The instruments used in the tattooing process by the aforementioned tribes/cultures and as early as 10,000 BC typically consisted of

a disk made of clay and red ochre together with sharp bone needles that are inserted into holes in the top of the disk. The disk served as

reservoir and source of pigment, and the needles were used to pierce the skin” (Gilbert 2000: 11).

But once the art reached the United States, new methods were developed in an attempt to make inserting the ink underneath the skin a little less barbaric. Although Martin Hildebrandt opened a tattoo parlor in New York during the 1890’s, it would not be until 1981 that Samuel O’Reilly would invent the first electric tattoo machine. Sanders (1988) noted that, “tattooing with the electric machine subjected the customer to less pain and necessitated far less skill and experience on the part of the tattooist” (17). Today this machine is known as a tattoo gun and there is no question that this invention drastically increased the rate at which tattooing has spread throughout society.

It is also important to note that there were several other artists practicing the art between the time that Hildebrandt opened his tattoo parlor and the invention of the tattoo gun. One of these artists was Lewis “Lew the Jew” Alberts, who was “of particular importance to the course of western tattooing because he reproduced sheets of his designs and sold them to fellow tattooists” (Sanders 1988: 17). This artwork came to be known as “flash” and many of these designs can still be found in the tattoo parlors of today. Thus, with the invention of the tattoo gun, the opening of tattoo parlors, and the advent of “flash patterns,” Reybold (1996) stated that it was not long before “young lovers began declaring their eternal love through tattoos and devoted sons proudly displayed “MOM” on their arms” (17).

Today, there are an infinite number of “flash” designs and different pieces of “flash” can be mixed and matched to create an even more unique design for individuals who desire something a little more original. Freehand work is another option for individuals in search of originality. It has recently experienced a dramatic increase in popularity, which was apparent with the artwork of the respondents of the current study. In the past, flags, eagles, ships, and words like “liberty” and “freedom” were the most popular choices for sailors and soldiers alike. These “flash” pieces were designs, which for them “represented courage, patriotism, defiance of death, and longing for family and loved ones left behind” (Gilbert 2000: 125).

Men flocked to the tattoo parlors, which Demello (2000) says were “located alongside barber shops, in dirty corners of arcades, under circus tents, or on carnival

midways” (59). These small spaces were like a get-away for sailors, carnies, drunks, and laborers. Even young boys would go to watch the older men get “inked,” hoping that they would one day be able to get a tattoo or learn the trade for themselves. Inside these shops, sailors and soldiers would tell stories of their services overseas, try and out do each others tattoos, and speak lewdly about women (DeMello 2000).

According to the article, “Factors that Influence Attitudes Toward Women With Tattoos,” “historically, although men with tattoos have experienced negative judgments and reactions, they have arguably received greater social acceptance than have women with tattoos” (Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn 2004). It should come as no big surprise then that the only women with tattoos at this point in time were circus sideshow attractions. This would change however, when the feminist movement began to gain ground. It was then that “women realized that their bodies were their own canvasses, and became inspired to ink themselves” (Assenmacher 2001).

Eventually more and more women would begin to participate in the tattooing culture, but they would continue to be looked down upon for a very long time. They would also be treated differently within the tattoo parlors themselves. Samuel Steward, a tattoo artist, would go so far as to set up rules governing which women he would and would not tattoo. He wrote in his accounts of tattooing in the fifties:

When I finally discovered the trouble that always surrounded the tattooing of women, I established a policy of refusing to tattoo a woman unless she were twenty-one, married and accompanied by her husband, with documentary proof to show their marriage. The only exception was the lesbians, and they had to be over twenty-one and prove it (DeMello 2000: 61).

It has been reported that Steward often referred to those women, whose bodies were adorned with tattoos, in a variety of disheartening ways. He is most famous for referring to these women as, “large lank-haired skags, with ruined landscapes of faces and sagging hose and run-over heels” (DeMello 2000; Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn 2004).

Finally, I have found that many of the historical documentations of body modification practices focus solely on the art of tattooing, which makes it the most well known of body modification practices and the research focus of most of the scholars in

this field. The art of body piercing is however, another form of body modification that has recently experienced an increase in popularity. According to Hewitt (1997) though, “although one can construct histories of self-mutilatory beautification practices, such as leg-shaving, hair-tweezing, and body sculpting, body piercing practices in Western cultures remain virtually undocumented” (84). What we do know is that anthropological research shows that many cultures all over the world have practiced and continue to practice the art of body piercing.

It has been used both as part of ceremonies for rites of passage and as a measure of social status. For example, according to Reybold (1996), “in ancient Rome, slaves who were in the service of the emperor could be recognized by their distinguishing piercings” (Reybold 1996: 21). In addition, Africans and Europeans alike once believed that demon spirits caused illness by entering one’s body through the nose and the left ear, respectively. In order to ward off these demon spirits some Africans began wearing a ring in their septum and European men began piercing their left ears (Reybold 1996).

We also know that the process of body piercing, like the tattooing process, has become more modernized. In the past, the art of piercing one’s body parts involved questionable procedures, but today the process is fairly free of risk as long as a professional is the one doing the piercing. It is also important to note that different parts of the body are pierced in different ways. According to the book, *The Dangers of Tattooing and Body Piercing*,

some piercings, including navel piercings, are performed with the use of a surgical clamp. The piercer cleans the area with a disinfectant, and draws two dots on the area to be pierced. One of these dots marks the spot where the needle will enter the body; the other, where the needle will exit. The area to be pierced is then clamped, pulling the skin to be pierced away from the rest of the body. The piercer then pushes the needle through the flesh (1996: 24).

The skin, which will be pierced, is clamped and pulled away from the body to avoid puncturing vital areas and this is why the procedure should be performed by a professional and not by any unlicensed person in the privacy of one’s home.

Research

Clinton Sanders was one of the first sociologists to show an interest in body modification practices. While attending an ASA conference in San Francisco, Sanders received his first tattoo. It was then that he realized the research opportunities this phenomenon offered. Once he returned to his home on the East coast, he visited a local tattoo parlor and explained to the artist that he was interested in learning more about the trade itself and the individuals participating in it. He states,

I soon became a regular participant in the shop, observing the work, talking to the participants, and – despite my original vow never again to undergo the pain of indelible body alteration – eventually receiving considerable tattoo work from a variety of well-known tattoo artists with whom I came into contact during the subsequent seven years (Sanders 1988: 167).

His subsequent research would consist of a mixed methods approach, which would include participant observations at four tattoo parlors in or around major cities in the Eastern part of the United States, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Sanders' interview respondents consisted of 10 men and 6 women, ranging in age from 17-39 and an additional one hundred and sixty three men and women between the ages 17-71 would fill out a self-administered questionnaire.

In 1988, Sanders' used the data he had collected to publish the book *Customizing The Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, in which he explained how the art of tattooing was making a shift from being a deviant act to being a legitimate art form. He noted that this phenomenon should be seen as a culture, stating that “it is meaningful to the members of the society in which it occurs and it is produced within complex webs of collective action (Sanders 1988: 21).” In other words, the art was meaningful in that it symbolized something for the individual as well as created a bond between those who participated in these practices. In addition, body modification practices have had the ability to shape one's identity and therefore, they were also capable of affecting and being affected by social interactions.

Sanders used the “production of culture perspective” to frame his argument. He stated that this school of thought emphasized “the importance of the sociological

organization of art and media production systems as being the central factor shaping the form and content of cultural items and determining the social process by which they come into being (Sanders 1988: 22).” Thus, the ways in which we define what is “deviant” and what is “art” are shaped by cultural norms and because ‘body art’ has been used by various sub- and countercultures, which have been labeled as deviant, the physical alteration of one’s body has also become labeled as such. Sanders (1988) suggested that once we begin to identify or label these practices as art, they would no longer be associated with deviance.

Victoria Pitts also examined the ways in which culture is capable of shaping our view of the world. In her book *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification*, Pitts (2003) focused on how “radical body art practices reflect, consciously and otherwise, the social and political locations of individual bodies in the larger power relations of society” (14). Her research, like many other scholars’ in this field, was based on a variety of qualitative methods including observation, interviews, and textual analysis. She collected data from 1996 to 2000. Her sample consisted of 20 individuals ages 20-53. All of her respondents were Caucasians and half of her sample was female. She claimed that her sample was “disproportionately gay, lesbian, or transgendered relative to the general population, but possibly not so disproportionate relative to the makeup of the body modification movement” (Pitts 2003: 19). Although her sample may have been disproportionately gay, lesbian, or transgendered, her ideas were deeply rooted in post-essentialist theories of the body and can be applied to the study of body modification within a variety of contexts.

Pitts (2003) stated that from a post-essentialist perspective, “the historic and geographic diversity of bodies and body practices point not only to the body’s shaping by and through cultural practices, but also in the impossibility of a natural model of the body” (29). Therefore, what is defined as beautiful and acceptable is shaped by culture and is ultimately unachievable for most individuals. People have and continue to do numerous things including cutting and dying their hair, buying certain styles of clothing, body building, and going through cosmetic surgery in order to achieve the most beautiful and socially acceptable body that they possibly can. But the line between what is defined

as culturally acceptable and what is defined as deviant is a thin one. More importantly, where the line is drawn is shaped by cultural norms, which are always changing.

Clinton Sanders and Victoria Pitts also noted that body modification practices are becoming more commercialized and can therefore, be seen as a commodity. Pitts (2003) stated that many body modifiers “see themselves as outsiders and innovators, not as followers of “alternative fashion,” which makes the commercialization of this phenomenon “an ambiguous process that forces body modification communities to define and reconsider the meanings of their practices” (12). It is important to note however, that Pitts’ work focused solely on a subset of body modifiers (all of who identified themselves as such) and ignored the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of other individuals who participated in these practices but did not identify themselves as body modifiers. Therefore, in the current study I attempted to interview a wide range of individuals, from the avid body modifier to those who have participated in these practices simply to be “fashionable.”

Michael Atkinson is another scholar who has spent some time observing, interviewing, and interacting with tattoo artists and “tattoo enthusiasts.” In 2002, he published the article “Pretty in Ink: Conformity, Resistance, and Negotiation in Women’s Tattooing.” In this article he criticized that scholars who have argued that “non-normative body projects such as tattooing are increasingly adopted by North American women precisely because radically marked bodies tend to subvert hegemonic ideologies about femininity – especially of the weak, sexually objectified, or otherwise submissive women, are overlooking the fact that some “body projects” actually conform to or are influenced by “hegemonic ideologies of femininity” (220). In order to examine this assumption, Atkinson turned to data he had previously collected during a three-year participant observation based study situated in Canada. He originally conducted interviews with 27 tattoo artists and 65 of their clients. The artists were anywhere from 20 to 55 years old and were predominantly male. The sample of clients had a similar age range (18-50) and the majority of them were female. For this particular project Atkinson focused solely on the tattoo narratives of the 40 Canadian women he had interviewed at that time and he found that although cultural gender norms had in fact affected these women’s decisions on what design to choose, the size of the design, and where to place

the tattoo, “many of the women interviewed preferred to negotiate their involvement in tattooing, neither accepting nor consenting to established constructions of femininity in Canada” (233).

In their discussion of the previous research done on tattoos, John Copes and Craig Forsyth (1993), stated that in the past tattooing has been linked to exhibitionism, masochism, emotional immaturity, neurotic conflicts, personality disorders, expressions of manliness and sexuality as well as narcissism, compensation for physical handicap and gang initiations (84). Copes and Forsyth, on the other hand, took a more social psychological approach to explaining why people get tattoos. They hypothesized that people with extroverted personalities are more likely to have tattoos. Their research consisted of data collected over a six-month time span between 1992 and 1993. The respondents were college students at a university in Louisiana and customers at four tattoo parlors in Texas and Louisiana (Copes and Forsyth 1993). Their sample was one of convenience and consisted of 138 men, ages 16 to 42.

First, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire consisting of questions about whether or not they had tattoos and if so where the tattoos were located. Then they were asked to take a shorter version of the Eysenck Personality Inventory, which evaluates each respondent’s level of extraversion. From the questionnaire and the personality tests, Copes and Forsyth were able to conclude that their results were consistent with Eysenck and Eysenck’s Stimulation Theory. “Therefore, instead of tattoos representing personality disorders, they can merely be a means for extraverts to gain external stimulation” (Copes and Forsyth 1993: 87).

Sometimes people get tattoos that are identical to signify being part of a group. Other times best friends or significant others go together to get tattoos as a tribute of their love or friendship. In the article, “Tattoos and Male Alliances,” Kathryn Coe et al (1993) examined the social aspect of the tattooing culture. Coe et al (1993) stated that, “tattooing frequently is done socially often as part of what is referred to in the vernacular as male bonding” (199). Their pilot study conducted in the spring of 1990, consisted of 12 cadets from an all male military college in the southeastern United States. All of the respondents were Caucasians between the ages of 18 and 23. In addition to the qualitative data that was obtained for the purpose of content analysis, some quantifiable data was also

gathered. As a result of this research Coe et al (1993) discovered that “not only was the process of getting a tattoo social, but the cost and the pain of the tattooing process were a source of pride and a common topic of shower room conversations” (201).

A common theme among many of these scholars was that what motivates an individual to participate in these practices as well as certain aspects of the decision-making process (i.e. choosing a design and location), are influenced by or related to an individual’s gender. Sanders (1988) noted, “the sex-based conventions regarding choice of body site are largely determined by the different symbolic functions of the tattoo for men and women” (48). He suggested that men and women see ‘body art’ differently. For men, ‘body art’ was an identity symbol that should be publicly displayed. Women, on the other hand, saw ‘body art’ as a decoration that was both permanent and personal. In addition, Victoria Pitts (2003) also noted that, some women have described their body art as a way to rebel against male dominance and to “reclaim” power over their own bodies.

The data I collected provides supporting evidence for Pitts’ idea as well as for several of the other aforementioned ideas. The goal of the current study was to focus on how these individuals think about their art, given the fact that there is a stigma attached to it. I chose to draw from the works of Sanders and Pitts, both of whom focused on culture and its ability to shape our bodies and our perceptions of what is seen as normal or deviant and from Atkinson’s work, which examined the role that body modification practices play in identity formation. In addition to a cultural perspective and the concept of identity, I used the concept of stigma to examine a different population in a different time and place.

Much of the preliminary research in this area was lacking in theory, but all of the aforementioned scholars attempted to bridge this gap by applying theories of the body and/or culture to their studies. Erving Goffman was one of many theorists that was briefly mentioned in several of these pieces and because I was intrigued by many of his ideas, I decided to take a closer look at his works, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, to assess their applicability to this topic.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life began: “When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into

play information about him already possessed” (1). Goffman (1959) claimed that we do this because we need to be able to define the situations that we find ourselves in. When we are unable to define a situation we become uncomfortable and possibly even incapable of continuing the interaction. According to Goffman (1959), we gain the necessary information to continue interacting with one another through “sign-vehicles,” which include things like the way an individual talks, dresses, and behaves. I argue that ‘body art’ should also be seen as a “sign-vehicle” because an individual’s ‘body art’ says a lot about them. For example, as I previously mentioned individuals sometimes get matching tattoos in order to signify group membership or loyalty to one another.

Next, Goffman (1959) presented readers with the idea that there are two methods of communication, “expressions given” and “expressions given off.” ‘Body art’ falls into the latter category because Goffman refers to “sign-vehicles” of this type of communication as “the more theatrical and contextual kind, the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind, whether this communication is purposely engineered or not” (4). I think that it is possible for ‘body art’ to “give off” information about the individual unintentionally. In other words, people who encounter a bearer of ‘body art’ may automatically assume things about that person, which may or may not be intended by the bearer. I think that it is also possible that some people choose to modify their body in a certain way, on purpose, in order to communicate something in particular, which may not always be understood in the way that they intended.

As Goffman (1959) points out:

Sometimes we will intentionally and consciously express ourselves in a particular way, but chiefly because the tradition of our group or social status require this kind of expression and not because of any particular response (other than vague acceptance or approval) that is likely to be evoked from those impressed by the expression (Goffman 1959: 6).

Thus, within certain subcultures, ‘body art’ may be seen as a type of status marker. I am very interested in the social aspect of this culture and hypothesized that an individuals acquaintances and surroundings may play a role in an individual’s decision to modify their body. I am also interested in the extent to which ‘body art’ is seen as a status marker among the participants of the culture itself as well as how it becomes a way to

differentiate or “stigmatize” the individual when they are in the company of a different group of people.

In order to take a closer look at stigmatization, I turned to Goffman’s *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Goffman (1963) used the term “stigma” to refer to “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” and he often used the term to discuss the plight of the blind, the deaf, and the crippled as stigmatized individuals (3). I applied the term to those who have chosen to adorn their bodies with ‘body art,’ because I thought that others who do not participate in this culture looked down upon individuals who possessed a tattoo, piercing, or a brand. Goffman (1963) stated that the reason behind this is that we live in a “society that establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories” (Goffman 1963: 2). This means that people may be discredited as being abnormal or deviant simply because society says they are.

Next, Goffman (1963) defined three categories of stigma. The first of the stigma categories was that of “abominations of the body.” These may include scars, blindness, being handicapped or crippled, among various other physical deformities. Next, were “blemishes of individual character,” which he says refers to whether or not one is liar, if one has been in trouble with the law, has strong passions or beliefs or addictions. Finally, there were “tribal stigmas,” which were attributed to race, religion, and things of this nature (4). I think that ‘body art’ falls into all three of these categories. It can be seen as physical alteration of one’s body, a blemish of one’s individual character, and also be a “tribal stigma,” in that an individual may have done it because of their religion or family history.

Finally, Goffman (1963) presented readers with the idea of a “normal” person. A “normal” person, according to Goffman, is simply an individual without a stigma. When discussing these individuals he noted,

the attitudes we normals have toward a person with a stigma, and the actions we take in regard to him, are well known, since these responses are what benevolent social action is designed to soften and ameliorate; by definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. (Goffman 1963: 5).

I argue that those who do not possess 'body art' can be seen as "normals" and I thought that this is how people with visible, more "edgy" forms of 'body art,' such as tattoos, piercings, and brands, are often treated. According to Goffman (1963), "[normals] construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain this inferiority and account for the danger this person [or people] represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class" (5). This is important because I am interested in the reasons "normals" create for stigmatizing 'body art' enthusiasts. However, the current study focused solely on how individuals with 'body art' feel about their art and the stigma that is associated with it. It appeared that Goffman's thoughts on "stigma" would be better for an analysis of how and/or why "normals" create reasons for "stigmatizing" other individuals. Because this study focused on how 'body art' enthusiasts feel about and experience stigmatization, I decided that Goffman's notions of the "presentation of self" were slightly more suitable for the current study than those dealing with "stigma."

Michael Atkinson (2004) suggested that future research "should challenge overly simplistic, ahistorical and stereotypical constructions" of 'body art,' and "pursue empirical explanations of the practice grounded in the lived experience of being a part of this culture" (14). As a participant in these practices, I whole-heartedly agreed with Atkinson and in light of his suggestion decided that the best approach to take with my own research was that of a qualitative analysis. I believed that this type of approach would help me to obtain information on a more personal level, which is something that quantitative analysis fails to do. In addition, by being a part of this subculture, I felt that the participants would be more willing to share their experiences, stories, and personal perspectives with me.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

The goal of this study was to provide insight into what motivates an individual to modify his or her body and to examine how the physical alteration of one's body affects social interaction and identity. The most appropriate way to answer these questions was through the use of qualitative research methods. These types of methods provide a researcher with the opportunity to connect with their respondents on a more intimate level by allowing the researcher to become the instrument with which they will gather data. In some instances, such as participant observation and one-on-one interviewing, the researcher is placed in direct contact with the individuals or phenomenon that they wish to know more about. This direct contact then presents the researcher with the chance to ask in-depth questions as well as to probe for more information when a respondent's feedback is either unclear or insufficient.

In addition, qualitative research gives a researcher the ability to not only grow through their work, but with it as they examine their own ideas and beliefs, which can and often do change as knowledge is gained throughout the research process. According to Clinton Sanders (1988),

one theme consistently stressed in recent methodological discussions by writers dedicated to traditional modes of fieldwork practice has been the importance of an explicit and reflexive account of the complex interactional experience through which the researcher collected the data and grew to understand their meaning (165).

I agree with this statement and would argue that regardless of what type of research design has been used, it is critical for researchers to reflect on and share their experiences with the research process with one another. Doing so will demonstrate how to begin a research project as well as how to arrive at the finished product. It will also provide fellow researchers a road map with which to examine the difficulties that may have been encountered and the steps taken to overcome them.

The following is my attempt at providing a detailed description of my experience as a participant in body modification practices and with the process of conducting my first qualitative research study. To aid in understanding how I arrived at the study's research questions, I begin by discussing my personal experiences as a self-proclaimed "body modifier." Next, I describe the process of creating the research design. This incorporates a brief outline of the questions included in the interview schedule and their importance for answering the study's research questions as well as an examination of how the preliminary interviews and proposal defense shaped the construction of the final interview schedule and research design. Finally, I will conclude with the details of the study itself, the respondents, and the methods used to analyze the data.

The Journey From Personal Experience to Research

In *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, Clinton Sanders noted that it was during the process of receiving his first tattoo that he realized the research potential of body modification practices and the culture surrounding them. I however, can assure you that when I was obtained my first tattoo, I was completely unaware of the fact that this phenomenon would become the subject of my own research. Instead, I was overwhelmed by the feeling of doing something that I was not supposed to do. I was only 17 years old, and not quite old enough to get a professional tattoo without parental permission. I went behind their backs and got my first tattoo without their permission. When I did, I was experienced a combination of adrenaline and anxiety.

Because I was not old enough to get a tattoo from a professional tattoo artist in a tattoo parlor, I got my first two tattoos in the living room of a friend's apartment. A couple of friends, who stopped by, had recently acquired a homemade tattoo gun. They wanted to test it out and asked whether anyone would be willing to let them experiment with their "new toy." I was aware but unconcerned about the health risks involved. My best friend, myself, and several other individuals decided to be their guinea pigs. For years, my best friend and I had been what she liked to call "partners in crime," so she had the acronym "P.I.C." tattooed on her left wrist. Flattered by her devotion to our

friendship, I chose the same design and location and also decided to get a small tattoo of a butterfly on my right ankle.

Shortly after I turned 18, my best friend and I got our tongues pierced and my interest in body modification increased. During the next few years, I acquired several more body piercings and tattoos. By the time I reached graduate school, I had obtained a total of twelve body piercings and two additional tattoos. When I started graduate school, my cohort and I were informed that in order to complete our degrees we would have to write a thesis on a topic of our choice. I knew immediately that ‘body art’ would be the topic of my research, but I had no idea that the task of narrowing down this topic and creating a research design would not be nearly as easy as choosing the topic itself.

During the first few semesters, I was consumed with course work. I conducted ‘body art’ research for all of my graduate term papers, with the goal of saving time in the long run in mind. Unfortunately, this only made choosing which direction to take with my own research much more complicated, because there were many different aspects of the phenomenon that I could explore. As I examined my own experiences as a “body modifier,” I began to think about all of the times that people had looked at me funny and asked questions about my art. I thought about the uncle who had often chastised me for being a “freak.” Although I could think of several instances in which I thought I had been treated differently or poorly because of my body art, there was one experience in particular that stuck out in my mind.

My whole life I had struggled to find something that I was good at and as I started my college career I had high hopes that I would finally find that something. My goal was to receive a degree as quickly as possible so that I could start a career. Unfortunately, during freshman orientation I chose Psychology as my major, not realizing that I would need to get a Ph.D. in order to become a Psychologist and at that time in my life a Ph.D. was simply not in my game plan. Two years later I would begin to contemplate switching majors from Psychology to Elementary Education with a minor in Spanish.

Upon meeting with an advisor in the Education department I learned that in order to fulfill the degree requirements, I would have to spend some time in the classroom. I naively told the advisor that this would not be a problem and that I looked forward to doing so. Then I realized that she was saying that it would be a problem because I would

be seen as a role model. She told me that I would have to conform to certain societal and cultural norms. In other words, she tried to tell me politely that if I was unwilling to remove my facial piercings, cover up the tattoo on my wrist, and dress professionally (when I met her I was wearing jeans and a t-shirt), I would not be accepted by the department or allowed into the classroom.

Later, when taking all of my personal experiences into consideration, I realized that the majority of my experiences left me feeling as though I had been judged, stigmatized, or discriminated against. Believing wholeheartedly that there was a stigma attached to these practices, I wondered why I had voluntarily become social outcast. It then occurred to me that my research should ask why people participate in body modification practices. Therefore, the primary focus of the study became what motivates an individual to get a particular tattoo or body piercing and whether they felt as though the physical alteration of their bodies had affected their social interactions and/or identity in a negative way.

I began the study in the spring of 2007 as part of a course entitled Qualitative Research Methods. The course was designed to give students the opportunity to learn about qualitative research by taking a hands-on approach that required each student to conduct, transcribe, analyze, and interpret three interviews. Completing an IRB application was the first assignment and in doing so I filled out the forms in anticipation of using the course project as part of this study. Students were also required to create a consent form and an interview schedule. At this point in time this study's original interview schedule would consist of three sections: The Artwork; Experiences/Reactions; and Self Reflection.

The first section addressed the quantity of artwork adorning the individual's body, the location of each piece of artwork and the motivation for getting that particular tattoo, piercing, or scar as well as its symbolism for them. These questions were important because they allowed me to get to know a little bit more about the individual and their artwork. After conducting those preliminary interviews I found that this section gave the respondent a chance to construct a timeline of when they received each piece of artwork. In addition, hearing the stories behind their artwork gave me the opportunity to learn

more about what was going on in their lives and what influenced their decision-making processes.

The second section provided a series of questions regarding the reactions of family members, friends, and strangers to the respondent's body modification(s). There were also questions about whether they had, or would, cover a tattoo or remove a piercing for any reason, or if they had ever felt as though they had been treated differently or poorly because of their art. This section looked at the affect a practitioners 'body art' had on the individual's social interactions. The final section of the interview schedule contained questions that forced the respondent to think about what the art meant to them, what they wanted the art to say about them as a person, and what advice, if any, they had for others who might be thinking about participating in body modification practices. I wanted to get the respondents to reflect on their decision to alter their body.

I created the final section of the interview schedule because many people have asked me why I decided to get tattoos and piercings. At first, I found it difficult to answer them. Although I had a reason to do it at the time, I had not written it down or even thought about it since then. I thought that the individuals who participated in these practices, myself included, should spend more time thinking about why we modified our bodies, what the art meant to us, what we wanted others to think or feel about it, as well as how we felt about the stigma attached to it. Unless we can get the rest of the world to understand where we are "coming from," it will be difficult to communicate to them what these practices mean to us.

With a green light from the IRB, I began conducting interviews. My first interview was with a 23-year-old, white female. She chose Lucy as her pseudonym. I must admit that I was quite nervous as I began asking Lucy for some background information. It would not be until we got well into the first section of the interview schedule that I began to loosen up a little bit. As Lucy started telling me the stories behind her art, I found them absorbing and found it difficult to maintain that dual consciousness of interviewer and researcher, to remain the interviewer and not become a fellow body modifier. The interview lasted a little over 30 minutes. When it was finished, I felt good about it. But after transcribing the interview, I noticed that I had missed picking up on some important things. For example, I asked her where each of her tattoos

was located, but I hardly ever asked why she put it in that location. This type of information was important because I was interested in whether the individual's choice of location was affected by social norms.

Next, I interviewed a 24-year-old white male named Rico. I have known Rico for at least ten years and I knew that he would provide me with a lot of information. In fact, Rico had so much to say about his art and his experiences his interview lasted twice as long as those of the two female respondents that I interviewed for the course project. I found myself picking up on subtle nuances, much better than I had in the first interview. If I did not understand or was confused by something Rico said, I would ask him to elaborate on it and I would do the same even when I did understand. For instance, in the first interview if Lucy said, "you know what I mean," I would say "yeah." I am sure that I did this because I identified myself as a body modifier and believed that knew what she meant. But after transcribing the interview, I realized that I needed to know what they said or how they felt, not what I thought they meant based on my own experiences. During the interview with Rico, I responded much differently when he said, "do you know what I mean?" I would say something along the lines of, "I think I understand, but can you tell me a little bit more about that." I truly felt as though I had grown as an interviewer.

The final interview respondent for the course project was Lola, a 31-year-old white female. Lola had quite a bit of art, so I hoped that her interview would last as long as Rico's, if not longer. Unfortunately, Lola's interview only lasted a little over 30 minutes. Each of the previous interviews had taken place at my parent's house, a quiet location with very few chances for interruption. Lola and I had originally discussed holding the interview there so that my mother could take care of her daughter while we did the interview. But my mother had a change of plans at the last minute. So Lola and I decided the next best place to do the interview would be at her home.

When I arrived at Lola's home I felt prepared for the interview. But I was concerned that Lola might be unable to give me her full attention because she would also need to attend to her child. However, I should have been worried about myself. When the interview was over I felt differently than I had upon finishing the first two interviews. I am unable to explain exactly how I felt, but the interview had only lasted 30 minutes and

I left Lola's home feeling as though I had forgotten something. As I transcribed this interview I noticed that I had missed picking up on some of the same types of things that I had missed in Lucy's interview. Overall I was pleased with the information Lola provided me, but disappointed in myself for not having asked for clarification in certain instances.

Those preliminary interviews gave me a chance to test out my interview schedule. As I transcribed these interviews, it became apparent that the interview schedule helped get the conversation rolling, but in the end the questions that elicited the most interesting and helpful information evolved out of the interviews themselves. This would also become evident in my subsequent interviews. More importantly, these interviews allowed me to rehearse my role as an interviewer before diving deeper into the study and I would suggest that all researchers, who are new to the interviewing process, conduct preliminary interviews in order perfect their interviewing skills and questions.

I conducted interviews after the semester was over and by the time I defended my research proposal for this study, I had conducted a total of 10 interviews. My committee members all agreed that I had chosen an interesting research topic and they were pleased with my enthusiasm. They also offered some important insight and direction. First, they felt that the project was lacking in originality. They suggested that in order to overcome this I should find a niche for the project by focusing on a particular group at a particular time. They also suggested that in order to deal with the numerous motivations my respondents would more than likely provide as explanations for participating in these practices, I create analytic categories for their meanings and motives, based on the similarities or differences among their responses. Finally, a committee member suggested bringing a calendar to the interviews to use as a visual aid that might help to stimulate the respondent's memories of what was occurring in their lives around the time that they received each piece of art. This could also give me the opportunity to examine whether their participation in these practices was related to other world or life events.

After taking their suggestions into consideration and examining the interviews that I had conducted thus far, I decided to focus on individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 living in Manhattan, Kansas. The city of Manhattan has a population of approximately 44,831 (Census 2000). It is also the home of Kansas State University,

which according to the college's website, has more than 23,000 students. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the majority of Manhattan's population lies between the ages of 15 and 44, making the "Little Apple" an ideal location for this study. New questions about what had brought the respondents to Manhattan, how the area had changed and whether those changes had affected their lives in any way, were added to the interview schedule. Because the study essentially became a case study of Manhattan, the importance of these questions was to be able to provide a little bit of information about this location from the respondent's point of view.

Although the interview schedule already contained questions about the individual's decision to get a tattoo or body piercing, a few more questions were added to ensure that I had a firm understanding of the thought processes involved in getting each piece of artwork. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of how the respondent sees him or herself in relation to others, questions about how these individuals perceive themselves and how they think others perceive them were also added to the interview schedule. Finally, intrigued by my committee member's calendar idea and desiring to make my study methodologically unique, I opted to have my respondents create timelines of their artwork and life events such as moving out of their parents house, starting college, and the deaths of family members, friends, or pets. In order for them to do this, I took a piece of construction paper and some markers with me to the interviews.

The Study

This study is based on data collected from 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with college-age individuals, living in Manhattan, Kansas. The only requirement for participation in the study was that the individual possessed at least one visible piece of 'body art.' Artwork was classified as visible even if it could be causally covered or could only be seen by others and not the individual them self due to its location. Though I wanted individuals with some visible artwork so that I could gauge the effect of their art on other people, the aim of the interviews was to investigate the meaning of the art and not to put the art on display. Therefore, the respondents were not asked to undress or reveal any artwork that was not already visible upon arriving at the interview.

With the exception of a few outliers, the sample consisted of eight women and seven men between the ages of 18 and 30. Looking at Table 1, we see that twelve of the fifteen respondents (80%), five males and seven females, identified themselves as White. We can also see that while two of the respondents were born and raised in Manhattan, others had been in the area for as little as one year or as many as seventeen years. In addition, all but two of the male respondents had some form of higher education.

Table 3.1 - Table of Respondents

PSEUDONYM	GENDER	AGE	RACE	EDUCATION	OCCUPATION	YEARS LIVED IN MANHATTAN
RICO	MALE	24	CAUCASION	GRADUATE UTI	MOTORCYCLE TECHNICIAN	9
GOAT	MALE	24	CAUCASION	HIGH SCHOOL	MACHINIST	24 (born & raised)
CARL	MALE	24	CHINESE AMERICAN	BACHELOR'S	REPORT COORDINATOR	6
ENRIQUE	MALE	36	AFRICAN AMERICAN	PH. D. (A.B.D.)	ACADEMIC	4
PIE	MALE	28	CAUCASION	UNDERGRAD	VIDEO STORE EMPLOYEE	1-1/2
JOE	MALE	26	CAUCASION IRISH	TECH SCHOOL	WELDER	UNKNOWN
J	MALE	23	CAUCASION	HIGH SCHOOL	SCREEN PRINTER	2
ADDISON	FEMALE	22	CAUCASION	UNDERGRAD	VIDEO STORE MANAGER	4
ANNE	FEMALE	26	CAUCASION	UNDERGRAD	DELI EMPLOYEE	26 (born & raised)
LUCY	FEMALE	23	CAUCASION	BACHELOR'S	LAB TECHNICIAN	5
SUCCUBUS	FEMALE	36	CAUCASION	TECH SCHOOL	INVENTORY CONTROL	17 (off & on)
LOLA	FEMALE	31	CAUCASION	BACHELOR'S	RETAIL MANAGER	13
SAHANEY	FEMALE	23	INDIAN	BACHELOR'S	PHARMACY EMPLOYEE	UNKNOWN
CLAUDETTE	FEMALE	21	CAUCASION	UNDERGRAD	GROCERY STORE EMPLOYEE	UNKNOWN
GABRIELLE	FEMALE	24	CAUCASION	UNDERGRAD	CASHIER	15

Table 2 provides information about the quantity of art each respondent possessed. It is important to note the difficulty involved in attempting to count a respondents tattoos or body piercings, because some of them had either covered up a tattoo(s) or removed body piercings. The act of counting as well as describing an individual's artwork is also fairly subjective since the respondents might view their art differently than I do. For example, a "sleeve," which is viewed or defined as artwork that covers an individual's entire arm, is always done in multiple sessions. Sometimes an outline of everything is done first and the details are filled in later, but other times they are done piece-by-piece. The question became should a "sleeve" be counted as one tattoo? An individual with a "sleeve" could quite possibly see each piece of the sleeve as a separate tattoo. As a result, I used my best judgment when tallying up each respondent's artwork and used Table 2 to note whether an individual had a "sleeve," covered up a tattoo, or removed a piercing.

Table 3.2 - Respondent's Artwork

PSEUDONYM	NUMBER OF TATOOS	TATOO DETAILS	NUMBER OF PIERCINGS	PIERCING DETAILS
RICO	4	COVERED 2 OTHERS	2	REMOVED TONGUE RING EARS PIERCED ONCE
GOAT	2	SLEEVE IN PROGRESS	0	
CARL	6		0	
ENRIQUE	1		2	EARS PIERCED ONCE
PIE	5		1	REMOVED NIPPLE PIERCINGS
JOE	2	2 SLEEVES IN PROGRESS	2	SEPTUM & TONGUE
J	1		1	EAR PIERCED
ADDISON	6	5 FORM 1 BACK PIECE	4	EARS TWICE AND REMOVED A FEW
ANNE	13		6	REMOVED 5 OTHERS
LUCY	5		10	EARS TWICE PLUS SIX OTHERS
SUCCUBUS	6	COVERED 2 OTHERS SLEEVE IN PROGRESS	2	EARS PIERCED ONCE REMOVED 10 OTHERS
LOLA	10	COVERED 1 OTHER	10	ALL IN THE EARS REMOVED 4 OTHERS
SAHANEY	3		5	EARS TWICE & NOSE
CLAUDETTE	1	DONE IN 2 PARTS	4	EARS AND 2 OTHERS
GABRIELLE	8	COVERED 1 OTHER	1	EYEBROW RING

In order to reach this unique population, I employed a combination of convenience and snowball sampling procedures. Three-quarters of the sample was derived through snowball sampling. As a participant in these practices I chose to begin this process by interviewing a few of my friends and acquaintances. At the end of each of these interviews these respondents directed me to at least one other individual that might be willing to participate in the study. I came into contact with the rest of my respondents through convenience sampling. On occasion my friends, family, and colleagues would encounter an individual that met the study's criteria for participation and would ask these individuals to contact me.

The interviews took place in a variety of locations including my home, the respondent's homes, classrooms on campus, and local cafés. The interviews that took place in my home were with respondents that I knew personally or people who felt comfortable coming to my home for interviews. This was a fairly ideal location for interviewing because it was quiet and had very few opportunities for distractions. Interviews conducted in respondent's homes meant that they would be more susceptible

to distractions. Sometimes children or other family members present at the time of the interview interrupted the interview or attempted to participate in it.

The remainder of the interviews took place in classrooms on campus or in local cafés. I found that these were ideal places for conducting interviews, because there were few if any interruptions. However, during a couple of the interviews in the cafés, respondents expressed concern that they may be speaking too quietly for the recorder to pick them up, especially when it came to discussing drug use and artwork that was not visible to the public (specifically nipple piercings). Then upon transcribing a few of these interviews it became apparent that the digital recorder had picked up an echo in the classrooms and lot of background noise in the cafés, which made it difficult to hear the respondents when transcribing.

Before beginning each interview I informed the respondents of the purpose of the study, the research procedures, and their right to refuse participation or to terminate the interview at any time via the consent form. Almost all of them attempted to sign the consent form without reading it. I was unsure whether they were unconcerned with the form or simply unaware of its importance. So I took it upon myself to spend a few minutes highlighting the key points. I could not help but wonder if this was a common occurrence or a unique characteristic of the population itself. In addition, I thought that it might be fun to let the respondents choose their own pseudonyms, so before beginning each interview I asked the respondents to pick the name that they wanted to go by.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. Once all of the interviews were transcribed, I began the process of analyzing and interpreting the information I had received. I originally intended to use NUD*IST to code the interviews, because I had been trained to use the program in my course on qualitative methods. However, as I continued to interview and transcribe I found it extremely overwhelming to also code the interviews all at the same time. Upon returning to the coding tree that I had begun to create almost six months prior to completing the interviewing process, I found it difficult to integrate the old material with the new. Therefore, I decided to take the “old-fashioned” approach, combing for themes with highlighters and multi-colored post-it notes in hand.

But before I get too far ahead of myself, I would like to give credit where credit is due. In 1990, Samuel Steward wrote *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors and Street Corner Punks 1960-1965*. This work was a personal account of Steward’s experience as a tattoo artist and in it he wrote that, “gradually it began to be clear that there were indeed many motivations for getting tattooed” (Steward 1990: 46). In an attempt to explain to the rest of society why men were participating in tattooing practices, Steward dedicated an entire chapter of his book to outlining the motivations he encountered. He broke the motivations down into 28 analytical categories (Table 3.3), providing readers with brief descriptions and examples of each one. He noted however that, “the observations together with illustrative examples are tentatively presented – not as final and definitive conclusions but more in the nature of provocative departure points for further investigation” (Steward 1990: 46).

Table 3.3 - Samuel Steward's Analytical Categories

DECORATION	HOMOSEXUALITY	COMPULSION	GUILT AND PUNISHMENT
HERD INSTINCT	CRYPTO-HOMOSEXUALITY	CELEBRATION	ADVERTISEMENT
NARCISSISM	MANHOOD INITIATION RITE	NON-CONFORMITY AND REBELLION	SENTIMENTALITY
EXHIBITIONISM	MASCULINE STATUS	GANG MEMEBERSHIP	BRAVADO, BRAGGADOCIO, AND "WICKEDNESS"
POSSESSION	AN EXISTENTIAL ACT	FETISHISM	MAGIC AND TOTEMISM
SADOMASOCHISM	COMPENSATION	PASTIMES	RELIGION, CONSECRATIONS, STIGMATA, AND THE MESSIAH COMPLEX
RIVALRY	IMITATION	UTILITARIAN	NATIONAL AND/OR ETHNIC ORIGINS

After examining my interview transcripts it became apparent that in order for me to adequately address the motivations that I had been presented with, I would need to follow in Steward’s footsteps and create analytical categories of my own. I began by placing post-it notes on the transcripts next to each piece of artwork, using different colors for tattoos and piercings. On the post-it notes I would write a brief word or phrase about why the individual chose to get that particular piece of art. Once I had been through all of the transcripts, I made a list of the words or phrases on the post-it notes and created nine analytic categories describing what appeared to be the key motivations.

It is important to note that the categories presented in the following chapter are based solely on the motives presented to me by my respondents. When creating them, I

chose to set Steward's work aside so that his work could not influence their creation. Therefore, there are a few noticeable differences between Steward's categories and those that are presented here. First and foremost, these categories are not related to or defined by sex. Steward (1990) noted that,

most of the motives were sexual; several were "pure" – that is, not noticeably overlapping or even connected with sexuality. Some were "mixed" – pure in certain cases, and sexual in others; and a final grouping was questionably pure (46).

Although Steward believed that many of the motives he had encountered throughout the years were either sexual in nature or directly related to an individual's sexuality, I did not find this to be the case. Second, Steward's work focused primarily on men and the motives behind their tattoos. The categories I introduce to you are based on data collected from both men and women and they are representative of the motivations behind tattooing as well as body piercing.

Finally, the categories that Steward presented to his readers were defined by a different era than those of the current study. While his are based on what motivated individuals between the years of 1950 – 1965, the current categories are based on data collected from individuals in 2007. The oldest respondents in the study were 36 and one of them received a tattoo at the age of 16. This means that with the exception of getting one's ears pierced, 1987 is presumably the earliest date at which a respondent physically modified their body. So the motivations for participation in these practices that I present to you are roughly based between the years of 1987 and 2007.

CHAPTER 4 - Motivations

Samuel Steward (1990) wrote that, when creating analytical categories for the motivations he had encountered throughout his years as a tattoo artist, he realized that “some motives were more common than others, and perhaps in a majority of cases there was an overlapping or merging between categories” (46). This was also apparent within my own research and because the process of creating the categories was extremely subjective, it is possible that a piece of artwork was inspired by a category other than the one it is currently paired with. It is also important to keep in mind that the goal of this study was to examine what motivated individuals to get tattoos and/or body piercings. However, although a respondent occasionally mentioned one of the other motives for getting a body piercing, this type of artwork often fell into the “impulse” category. Body piercing also appeared to have less symbolism or significance than tattoos did for these respondents. This might be due to the fact that body piercings, unlike tattoos, are a temporary form of body modification, in that they can be removed when an individual no longer wants to wear them.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to outlining the motivations I encountered during the course of this study. They have been divided into nine analytical categories: commemoration, emotion work, bonding, rebellion, impulse, addiction, cover up, identity formation, and modish. The categories are presented, as were Steward’s (1990), “not as final and definitive conclusions but more in the nature of provocative departure points for further investigations” (46). They offer a chance to examine how the motives for participation in body modification practices have changed since Steward’s study. In addition, they will provide future researchers with a set of possible explanations as to why people participate in body modification practices which could be used for comparison purposes should they choose to examine this aspect of ‘body art.’

Commemoration

There are two types of commemorative motives. First, an individual can be motivated by an urge to celebrate a birthday or an achievement. In the current study, a couple of respondents reported that they had either purchased 'body art' for themselves as a birthday present or graduation gift (among other things) or they had received 'body art' as a gift. Lucy, one of the first individuals that I conducted an interview with, was a twenty-three year old lab technician. At the time of the interview she had five tattoos and 8 body piercings (including ear piercings). She explained to me that she purchased her largest and most expensive tattoo(s) as a graduation present for herself. Lucy refers to the feathers that adorn either side of her abdomen as "side pieces." I questioned her about the purpose of the artwork. I wondered if the tattoo(s) were a reminder of the achievement itself or simply a reward for all of her hard work. She said,

Right, more of a present. That was a big accomplishment for me because I didn't want to go to college in the first place, but I went and I finished and I decided that I needed a really expensive present and 700 dollars sounded good I guess.

She wholeheartedly believed that the tattoo(s) were only a gift and not a commemorative mark of her success. Judging by her response, however, it would appear as though the feathers subconsciously served both purposes.

Rico, on the other hand, received his first piece of 'body art' as a gift from his mother for his 17th birthday. He stated,

She said (referring to his mother) do you want a piercing or a tattoo?
And I said, a tattoo.

Rico proceeded to tell me that he and his mother traveled to a local tattoo parlor together and when they arrived his mother signed the paperwork that allowed Rico to permanently alter the original state of his body. He chose a piece of flash art that day, a design of an animal that he defined as a "very powerful creature." At the time it was something that he felt symbolized his strength to overcome adversity. Although Rico would not necessarily regret this decision later in life, he would decide that he did not like the particular design that he had chosen and would later have it covered with much larger tattoo, a figure of death that was not quite finished at the time of the interview.

A second type of commemorative motive, reported by approximately one third of my respondents, involved a desire to mark the passing of a pet or of an individual that had had an impact on their life. Michael Atkinson (2004) argued that the reason why some individuals do this is as an attempt to “manage feelings of grief or sorrow” (137). I agree with this statement, but have found that more importantly, ‘body art’ obtained for this purpose helped an individual to preserve their memories and show their devotion to that particular person or pet. Although the majority of the respondents who participated in body modification practices for this reason received tattoos, J., a 23-year old screen printer, informed me that he got his ear pierced shortly after a close friend of his passed away in a car accident. He said,

I had had it pierced before and I had taken it out. Well, my buddy had both ears pierced and I was like I need to do something for him, so I got my ear pierced for him.

J. explained that he had originally wanted to get a tattoo but could not afford one. Whereas the cost of a body piercing is dependent upon where it will be located on the body and the type of jewelry the individual desires, the cost of a tattoo is based on things such as the size of the design, where it will be located on the body, and the amount of time that it will take the artist to complete the artwork. So while a body piercing using the standard jewelry costs an average of thirty to forty dollars, tattoos can cost anywhere from thirty dollars to hundreds, possibly even thousands of dollars.

Gabrielle is a 24-year old undergraduate student in Animal Science. Her father was in the military and their family traveled quite a bit before settling down in Manhattan, where they have lived for the past 15 years. She had a total of eight tattoos at the time of our interview, two of which served as memorials. She explained that the third tattoo she purchased was in loving memory of her mother. After her mother passed away, Gabrielle spent a few months contemplating the design of the tattoo she would get. She eventually decided to get a flower accompanied by her mother’s birth and death dates and she proceeded to tell me that the design itself came from,

a picture of one of the [flowers] that we had at her funeral and I got the outline of that done, so the actual picture was used, I had them use that particular [flower].

In addition to this tattoo, Gabrielle has a tattoo that is a tribute to the family dog. According to Gabrielle, her family purchased the dog when it was eight weeks old and it was a part of the family for approximately 12 years before it passed away unexpectedly. She would eventually like to have a tattooed portrait of her furry friend placed on her arm, but at the moment a tattoo of the dog's actual paw print suffices as a reminder of her four-legged family member. The outline for the tattoo came from a plaster of paris mold her family purchased at the animal's time of death, a service that many veterinarians have recently begun to offer.

Addison, a 22-year old manager of a local video rental store, is another respondent that had a tattoo commemorating the death of a pet. The tattoo of her reptilian friend is part of a much larger set of tattoos that Addison referred to as a "back piece," or artwork that covered her entire back. The basis of the piece is her favorite flower, taken from a picture of a bouquet she received from a boyfriend. According to Addison, the portrait of her pet was also taken from an actual picture of the reptile itself. She said the portrait is,

full size so it's about 6 inches long tattooed on one of the petals, and it's taken from a photo of her. I have a different [reptile] now, but like I'll always have that you know? I'll always have her with me. She was my baby.

She explained that upon the untimely death of her pet, she knew immediately that she wanted to incorporate a picture of the animal into the artwork that was going to be done on her back. She wanted the portrait to be life-size and discussed this idea with the tattoo artist. He informed her that in order to achieve the look she wanted with the amount of detail she desired, the flower would have to be larger, leading to the construction of a full "back piece."

Finally, Lola, a 31-year old retail manager and mother of one, had multiple memorial tattoos. She purchased her first memorial tattoo, a paw print accompanied by a small drawing when her dog passed away and obtained another, her husband's dog's initial, upon its passing. Lola also had a commemorative tattoo for her grandfather, representing his interests and occupation. In my opinion, Lola's description of her

commemorative tattoos, illustrated the overall importance of this type of artwork. She said,

my art is like chapters in a book. Some people write in diaries, I have tattoos.

In other words, for these respondents ‘body art’ served the same purpose as writing in a journal, creating a scrapbook, or making a home movie; it helped them to remember the good and bad times in their lives as well as the life and times of those family members, friends, and pets that they do not ever want to forget.

Emotion Work

An individual can express their emotions in any number of ways, but in 2004 Michael Atkinson noted that body modification had become an increasingly popular method of doing so. He argued that tattooing was a way of “etching controlled representations of emotional experience onto the body, or managing problematic emotions stirred through social interaction” (136). I too, have found that people use body modification as a means of expressing their emotions. I have chosen to refer to this motive as “emotion work,” and provide the following stories of Addison and Rico’s artwork as examples of this.

Addison, the respondent with the “back piece,” obtained a tattoo a few hours after a devastating break-up with her first “serious boyfriend.” Upon returning from Fort Riley, where she had gathered her belongings from the living quarters of her ex-boyfriend, Addison contacted a local tattoo parlor to see if they had time to fit her in. She said,

I was like I need to feel something other than what I am feeling right now. I needed something other than this horrible oh my god somebody kill me feeling.

She went on to say that she has been telling people for years that,

it (tattooing) is a physical outlet for emotional pain. Some people are weird and they cut themselves or they burn themselves and they do things that truly mutilate their body and they do it for the pain. With me its like I get beautiful artwork out of the adrenaline rush.

A statement of this nature demonstrates that when compared with self-mutilation, body modification can be viewed as a more appropriate way of coping with one's emotions.

Rico also explained to me how his artwork helped him to express his emotions. As a child, he was slightly overweight and suffered from an illness that caused him to grow excess breast tissue. Consequently, Rico spent his childhood being ridiculed by his peers. He said that his tattoos have allowed him to express the sadness and frustration that filled his heart at that time in his life and said the following about his artwork:

I really think it is a barrier between how I feel about things. I can't say it, so I put it on my body.

Rico believes that his tattoos, many of which are mythical monsters or figures of death, represent the strength and courage that it took to overcome the depression that set in as a result of being cast out by his peers.

Body modification would also prove to be an outlet for dealing with emotion for 28-year old Pie. At the time of our interview he had five tattoos and no body piercings, though he said that he did have his nipples pierced at one time. One of his tattoos was a symbol of love that appeared to be made out of a material that was broken or crumbling and was held together by a set of restraints. He said,

about four months ago my uncle unexpectedly passed away and I had a hell of a time dealing with that. I've always had a hard time dealing with death, but my uncle was very influential in my life and so losing him was really tough. And that was kind of the inspiration for my other one, along with some other things that had happened. So I wanted to represent what I was feeling at that point.

With a little bit of probing I learned that the "other things" to which Pie was referring included a recent break up with his girlfriend. This was a reoccurring topic throughout his interview, because Pie said that he had many relationships that ended after he discovered his partner had cheated on him. Thus, this particular tattoo symbolized both the feelings associated with losing a loved one and his failed attempts at love.

Whether it was from a love lost or from a childhood memory of being teased, individuals who were driven by emotion to modify their bodies did so as an outlet to ease the pain. Because they did not want to continue harboring the pain of the past or present,

they used their artwork to express their feelings of anger or sadness. Body modification became a means of expression and healing, which they felt helped them to move on.

Bonding

My best friend and I got matching tattoos when we were 17, as a symbol of our loyalty to one another and of the bond that we had created and maintained throughout high school. After analyzing the interview transcripts, it became apparent that some of my respondents had also obtained tattoos or body piercings for the same or similar reasons. The following respondents spoke of experiences involving a sibling. Lucy, the lab technician with the feather “side pieces,” said,

my next one was a tattoo on my left ankle. My sister came down and she wanted a tattoo, so we went to get one together.

And Carl, a 24-year old Chinese American, said his first tattoo was inscribed on his body he attended a tattoo convention with his brother. He said,

we both got the same symbol at the same time. It cost sixty dollars and only took about forty-five minutes.

The symbol to which he was referring is called Kanji and is a Chinese character used in Japanese writing. Each symbol represents a word or phrase and in some instances a symbol may have more than one meaning. Many tattoos parlors have at least one book of Kanji symbols however, whether the symbols actually mean what the book says they do is questionable. In other words, individuals who choose to get one of these symbols do not always get what they think they are getting.

On a similar note, people who are in love sometimes get tattooed together. For example, shortly after her first marriage, Lola and her husband decided to get matching Kanji tattoos. Then during the course of my interview with Anne, a 26-year old female, born and raised in Manhattan, Kansas I learned that several of her tattoos were inspired by her love for another individual. In relation to a question about one of her tattoos she said,

I got that with the guy I married.

The tattoo was a love symbol and when I asked her why she got that particular design she said,

because I was in love, like I was really in love with him and it was one of those symbolic reference kinds of things I guess.

So it seems that tattoos obtained for this reason represent the bond that has already been created between these individuals, and possibly strengthens that bond at the same time.

Next, other respondent's stories demonstrated that in some instances simply knowing someone that was going to get a tattoo or piercing was motivation enough to do the same. For example, when Lola's best friend was getting ready to go to the local tattoo parlor to get her second tattoo, she asked Lola if she would like to tag along. Upon arriving at the tattoo parlor, Lola saw a design in one of the books and decided to get it tattooed on her wrist. Goat, a 24-year old machinist, also said that he obtained his second tattoo when a couple of his friends decided it would be fun to go down to the tattoo parlor together. He said,

basically I had a couple of buddies that were just wanting to get a tattoo that day and it sounded like a good idea.

He talked to me about not being able to find a design that he absolutely had to have. His friends were all getting kanji symbols so Goat spent some time looking at them and ended up picking one that he was "remotely interested in." Then he told me,

it (the tattoo) was 40 dollars for about 10 minutes and I put it in a horrible location because I just kind of pointed to a spot on my leg and said to put it there and he put it exactly where I pointed. So it is a little off-centered.

What is interesting about this statement is that Goat expressed discontent with some aspect of the decision making process when other individuals were involved. Others also confided to me that they were disappointed with either the decision to get 'body art' or their choice of location. However, in most cases the respondents said that they did not regret their decision because the artwork was a reminder of the bond that they had with the other individual(s) and with a particular time in their lives.

For example, when Addison's best friend of 15 years came to visit her, she mentioned to Addison that she would like to get her first tattoo, but she did not want to do it by herself. Addison said,

I said to her you pick the design, pick whatever you want and I'll even go, but you have to go first.

When they arrived at the tattoo parlor Addison's friend picked a piece of flash art that Addison referred to as

The doofiest looking butterfly I have ever seen in my life.

Although Addison did not really like the design, because she was not a fan of flash art, she went ahead and got the tattoo anyway. When I asked why she got a tattoo that she did not like, she replied,

we are always going to be best friends any way, that's just the way it is.

She is the sister that I never had and that is something that just ties us together.

Finally, Enrique's story provides another example of how a tattoo can bring individuals together. He is a 36-year old African American male, who received his one and only tattoo when he joined a fraternity. He began his interview by explaining to me that brands, not tattoos, were the preferred method of fraternal body modification beginning as early as the 1960's and there are still members of the fraternity being branded today. According to Enrique it is

a big ritual process where they come and hit you in the arm, beat you in the arm, you're drunk they get the coat hanger, they put it in the fire and we call it getting hit, so you get hit.

Before I began this study, it was my understanding that branding had become a recent addition to the list of body modifications that one could obtain at a tattoo parlor.

Convinced that I would be able to find an individual that had participated in this practice, I decided that I would include branding in the study. Later, a respondent would inform me that this practice is not legal in the state of Kansas. Although I asked Enrique if it would be possible to get contact information for a fraternity brother with a brand, he would ultimately be unable to find an individual with a brand that was willing to participate in this study. It is possible that their non-participation was due to the fact that the legality of "getting hit" is questionable in terms of Kansas' hazing laws.

Enrique would go on to tell me that because branding was often associated with slavery, African Americans within as well as outside of the fraternity began to ask why

anyone would want to participate in or even affiliate him or herself with the practice, and tattooing became the alternative. Enrique explained to me that he decided to get a tattoo instead of a brand because,

when you get branded it depends on your skin and some people can actually heal nicely and some people can heal not so nicely. The first guy that showed me his brand it didn't heal so nicely so I was turned off immediately. I just did not want a nasty looking brand that came out terrible so I thought if I was going to scar my body or modify my body it needed to be something that I could see how the end result is going to be.

He also said that,

one of the things that a lot of people don't understand in the public is it's just a love you have for your fraternity and internally it's like a status symbol so to speak.

Because Enrique noted that having a tattoo or a brand was sort of like a status symbol, I wondered whether everyone participated in the practice and, if not, how nonparticipating members of the group were treated by the rest of the fraternity. Enrique told me that getting tattoo or a brand was not something that every member chose to do. He also assured me that those who do not modify their bodies were not treated differently. In fact, he said that the individuals who did get a tattoo or brand were *more* likely to be treated differently by people in and outside of the fraternity.

For Enrique this was important because his tattoo was a conversation starter, which provided him with the opportunity to advertise his fraternity. He also used it as a chance to explain to his nephew and other young African American males the importance of a college education. For Enrique, the tattoo helped him bond not only with his immediate fraternity brothers, but also with his family and his culture.

Overall, there were several individuals who said that the act of physically altering their bodies tied them to other individuals or a group. From these observations and examples it was apparent that it was not just men who bonded over the tattooing experience, but women as well. These findings are contradictory to those of previous researchers, who suggested that there were gendered-based differences associated with

certain aspects of the decision-making process, such as choosing a tattoo's design and location. In addition, past research also found gendered differences among the motivations for an individual's participation in body modification practices. Based on this information and my own personal experiences, I thought that my research would support these findings, but instead I found just the opposite. To my surprise, I discovered that regardless of an individual's gender, tattoos were of all shapes, sizes, and designs, located in various locations of the body. Moreover, the men and women of this study chose to participate in these practices for very similar reasons. In order to illustrate these findings, I have provided quotes from *both* male and female respondents in each of the nine motivational categories that I created.

Rebellion

Upon reviewing the transcripts I encountered several instances in which the respondents had cited "rebellion" as a motive for getting a tattoo or piercing. In the majority of these cases the respondent explained to me how they had used their artwork to rebel against their parent's authority. First, there was Succubus. In a story similar to my own, Succubus obtained her first tattoo at the age of 16, without parental permission, from an unlicensed individual. While she was hanging out with some friends, a tattoo gun that one of the boys had ordered arrived in the mail. Succubus offered herself up as a guinea pig and obtained a small tattoo on her hand. Although she did not pick the design, she chose the location. When I asked her why she picked that particular location she replied:

Outlandish. At that age, I think I was just trying to piss my mom off. She went on to tell me that she felt that she'd had a "pretty sheltered childhood." With an absent father and a mother who was in the Air Force and stationed overseas, Succubus was forced to live with the family of a friend. Living conditions were not ideal because her guardian worked at night and slept all day. Therefore, Succubus received little, if any, attention during the day. This means that her rebellious decision to get the tattoo was more than likely an attempt at gaining some attention, even if it would come in the form of punishment.

Next, at the beginning of Goat's interview I asked if he could explain to me why he decided to start getting tattoos. Goat responded by saying,

my guess is mostly rebellious to start. My parents never really wanted me to get tattoos, so it kind of drew me in a little bit.

I was intrigued by this and wanted to know if Goat's parents had been strict. I questioned him about their rules, to see if that would have made him feel as though he needed to "rebel." He told me that his parents were not necessarily strict and that they did not have a bunch of rules to follow. He also said that his parents were always very supportive and they had a very open relationship. So "why rebellion?" I asked and he replied,

basically just the fact that I was 18 at the time and I worked for the money so I should be able to do whatever I want with it. And the fact that they didn't want me to get a tattoo kind of made me want to get a tattoo more, just to show them that it doesn't matter necessarily what they want.

This statement illustrates how the coming of age and financial independence from his parents allowed him to go through with his decision to participate in body modification practices. The fact that he no longer needed parental permission to participate in these practices indicates that this was not necessarily a rebellious act in the sense that he was resisting parental authority. Instead it can be labeled as such because he knew that his parents would not approve of the artwork.

Lola's situation was very similar to that of Goat's. She explained to me that at the age of 10 her mother had taken her to a local beauty shop to get her ears pierced for the first time. But she said that she had been "bugging" her mom to take her since she was 5 years old. When I asked her to tell me about when she got her ears pierced for the second time she said,

that would be when I came up here (to Manhattan), because my mom was like that would be ridiculous to have more than one set of earrings.

In high school I really lobbied for it and then I got up here and I was like my mom is not here to tell me no so I am going to go do it.

Like Goat, Lola was no longer under her parent's control. She was free to make her own decisions about her body, but did so knowing that it was something that her mother would not approve of.

It was apparent that these "acts of rebellion" had occurred at a particular point in time, the respondent's coming of age. This caused me to wonder if these instances might actually constitute as a rite of passage. As I previously noted, the art of tattooing has been a rite of passage for a variety of cultures, including the Melanesian Tribes of New Guinea and the Nagas of Assam. I contemplated labeling this category as such, but because the respondents had specifically identified them as "rebellion," I decided against it. I think that the difference between an "act of rebellion" and a "rite of passage," lies in the individual's ability to make a choice about whether or not to participate. Whereas, Goat and Lola made the decision to get a tattoo or body piercing, the boys and girls of the aforementioned tribes are forced to participate because it is part of their culture.

Finally, in the article "Women and Their Reasons for Being Tattooed," Sarah Assenmacher (2001) addressed the motives behind the decision of women, in general, to begin participating in the 'body art' movement. She wrote:

Beginning with the feminist movement women realized that their bodies were their own canvasses and became inspired to ink themselves. Tattooing was a way of expressing that they were no longer "owned" by their husbands or society, and that they had the freedom to do with their bodies as they wished (Assenmacher 2001).

It seemed to me that Assenmacher was referring to what might be considered as a woman's attempt to reclaim the body. After examining my respondent's transcripts, I found that Claudette and Pie had modified their bodies for this reason. Both of these respondents noted that at one point in time in their lives a significant other had requested that they not get a tattoo or piercing. Although Claudette went ahead and modified her body, Pie respected the wishes of his significant other and waited until he was free of those controls to reclaim what he saw as rightfully his.

Pie obtained his first tattoo at the age of 21, but he told me that he had wanted a tattoo when he was 16. When I asked him why he did not get a tattoo as soon as he turned 18 he informed me that shortly after he turned 17 he began dating a girl who told him

that as long as she was dating me I wasn't to get a tattoo.

He went on to say that as soon as their four-year relationship ended, he got his first tattoo, a pair of wings. He explained to me that they are fairly large, approximately 6 inches tall and four inches wide and he said

I always thought of them representing angel's wings. I have always been a bit of an adrenaline junky and some of the things that I've pulled in my past; I've always kind of felt like there's been someone looking after my ass.

Although Pie had a lot to say about the tattoo's symbolism, when I asked him why he let his girlfriend place limits on what he could and could not do with his own body his response was very brief. He simply said,

I was young and naïve.

Claudette also provided an example of being motivated by the need to reclaim her body. Like Pie, Claudette said that she obtained an eyebrow piercing because her boyfriend told her that he did not want her to do so. His excuse was that "it would detract from her natural beauty." Claudette said,

some of my girlfriends in high school, they had boyfriends and they just like totally ditched me and you know spent all their time with their boyfriends so I was kind of like rebelling against that whole idea that like he (a man) could control me and the moment he (her boyfriend) said that he didn't want me to get it (her eyebrow pierced), I was like oh I'm getting it now.

What we see from Pie and Claudette's experiences is that because they both found themselves in relationships with someone who attempted to control their actions, they felt a need to reclaim their bodies by participating in a body modification practice. It appears that by making the decision to physically alter their bodies and following through with this decision, demonstrated to themselves as well as others that they were the ones who were in control of their bodies. More importantly, Claudette specifically refers to the decision to get her eyebrow pierced as an act of rebellion. Therefore, although I had originally placed these examples in a separate category entitled "reclaiming the body," I have decided that body reclamation should be a subcategory of rebellion because Pie and

Claudette ultimately decided to modify their bodies in order to resist the control of a significant other.

Impulse

When I asked my respondents about the thought process behind picking a design or location for a tattoo, I learned that some times individuals impulsively participate in body modification practices. For example, Lucy said,

I was at work one day and decided that I wanted a tattoo. And we just, we just made one, me and my friend that I worked with and then we called them to see if they were booked that afternoon and they said no, so we left work and went and got it.

I went on to ask Lucy what sparked her sudden desire to get a tattoo. I wondered whether she had seen someone else with a tattoo, if her and said co-worker had been talking about tattoos, or if her co-worker had any tattoos. Her response to all of these questions was “no;” the decision was completely spontaneous.

Succubus would also state that she had spontaneously inscribed tattoos on her body on multiple occasions. She had a great deal of difficulty remembering when she got each of her tattoos and body piercings. We had to relate them to other things that may have been occurring in her life, such as the births of her children. When I said to her that I didn't realize how hard it was going to be for some people to remember when they got their artwork. She responded by saying,

there are some people who really they (tattoos and piercings) mean something to them so they remember the dates and stuff. I don't give a fuck.

She went on to explain to me that this did not mean that all of her tattoos were completely meaningless. In fact, she has two tattoos that are more meaningful than the others: her children helped to design one of them and she drew the other one.

These examples demonstrate that artwork obtained on impulse often has very little, if any, thought put into it. When an individual spontaneously gets a piece of artwork, they typically make the decision about what they want, where to put it, and to get it all at once. It appeared as though the spontaneity of the decision to participate in

these practices also had an impact on the amount of “meaning” or “symbolism” attached to the artwork. In other words, although some pieces of ‘body art’ had symbolism, the truth was that not all of the respondent’s artwork had “meaning.”

Addiction

It was clear that some of the respondents felt an irresistible urge to participate in the art of tattooing. The respondents who expressed this type of sentiment chose to refer to their repetitive participation in body modification as an addiction. For example, in response to a question about how long he would spend thinking about getting a tattoo before actually going to the tattoo parlor to get it, Pie said,

it’s like I have this addiction, that every tattoo I get gives me my fix for about four months and then its like oh, I could use another one right about now.

On a similar note, Joe said,

I can’t get enough ink. Like I always want to get a tattoo, every chance I get I’ll be down at the tattoo shop if I can afford it.

Judging from Joe’s response, I would speculate that an “addiction” to body modification is different from an addiction to things such as drugs or gambling. Whereas an individual who is addicted to the latter will go to any length to support their habit, Joe will not go to the tattoo parlor if he cannot afford it.

Addison would also imply that there is a difference between being a “body modification addict” and being a drug addict. In response to the question how do you see yourself she stated,

I am an addict. I just happen to be addicted to something that is legal. You just get to where you are addicted to it (tattooing) and I think that it’s better than cocaine.

I think that what Addison meant by this was that because body modification is legal and is not necessarily harmful to others, the rest of society should not look down upon her for compulsively participating in the practice. Upon analyzing these quotes it seemed to me that there is clearly a difference between being addicted to drugs and being “addicted” body modification. Based on the information provided by these respondents I questioned

whether repetitively participating in the art of tattooing constituted an addiction or a compulsion. Because the respondents chose to refer to it as an addiction, I have labeled it as such.

Cover up

Unlike a body piercing, which can be removed when the individual becomes tired of it and decides that just do not want to wear it anymore, tattoos are permanent. So, what can an individual do if they no longer like the design they chose or regret getting the tattoo for whatever reason? The options are fairly limited. One option is having the tattoo removed. Today, there are a couple of different medical procedures available (laser removal and intense pulsed light therapy) and there are “do-it-yourself removal creams.” The problem is that these possibilities can be expensive, time consuming, painful, or in some cases, just plain unreliable.

The alternative to having a tattoo removed is to have it covered up with another one. In many cases this can be complicated, if not impossible, depending on the size, design, and location of the original tattoo. Most artists however, are becoming more efficient at the “cover up” and will attempt to come up with a design that the client will like and that will effectively disguise the old tattoo. People expressed different reasons for wanting to cover up a tattoo including regret, dissatisfaction, and no longer wanting a particular design to represent their current interests.

Because she had not spent a lot of time researching the tattoo parlor or the artist, Gabrielle decided to cover up a tattoo that she was less than happy with. She said,

I got one covered up that I didn't like, because it was done really poorly. It was so crappily done. The lines were uneven, they didn't even connect all the way, and the color just looked horrible.

Succubus, on the other hand, decided to cover up more than one of her tattoos. She said, of a small tattoo on the back of her neck,

I was just sick of it. I had enough of [it], I didn't want [it] representing me anymore, I didn't want it on me any more.

Then there are situations like that of Lola and Ann. Shortly after getting married Lola and her first husband, went to a tattoo parlor to get tattoos as a symbol of their love and

affection for one another. Three or four months after their divorce, Lola had the piece covered with another tattoo. She said,

I didn't really like it (the tattoo), I didn't really like the marriage, I didn't really like anything about it so I was ready to get it covered up.

So while the majority of Lola's artwork has attempted to preserve her memories, she ultimately regretted the decision to get this particular tattoo and decided to camouflage her mistake.

In a similar situation to Lola's, Anne and her ex-husband took a trip together and got matching tattoos in an attempt to rekindle their relationship. Although Anne regretted getting a certain part of the tattoo, she felt differently than the other respondents did about the possibility of having a tattoo covered up. She said,

I don't really believe in covering up your tattoos, I think that if you got it at that time it was important to you or at that time it meant something to you, so if you cover it up, you can't escape that time anyway, so you might as well leave it there so you can remember something.

This sentiment illustrates the importance of the tattoo as a way to remember what was going on in the individual's life at the time it was obtained. Anne saw her tattoo as a constant reminder of that time in her life and believed that the tattoo helped her learn from her mistake. Although Lola knew that covering up her tattoo would not erase the past, she hoped that by doing so would not be constantly reminded of a time in her life that she would like to forget.

Identity Formation

There are numerous ways in which we can define ourselves as individuals. The clothing we wear, the way we style our hair, the music we listen to, and the books we read are all representations of who we are as a person. During the course of this study, I have learned that body modification, the art of tattooing in particular, should be seen as yet another way for an individual to shape his or her identity. Atkinson (2004) expressed a similar sentiment when he wrote that, "tattooing projects are considered ideal for literally illustrating individuality" (135). The following examples demonstrate how an

individual's identity can be formed through the use of tattoos as graphic representations of one's passions, culture, background, and interests.

Artwork that served this purpose included tattoos that depict the respondent's area of focus in school. Gabrielle, the respondent studying Animal Science, has always had a love of animals and had several tattoos that illustrated her love of one animal in particular. She said,

I just like the power and beauty of [them]. I've loved them as long as I know and I've had little figures [of them] since I was born, I think.

She also had a tattoo of a small rodent, which symbolized the nickname given to her by her parents as a small child. Sahaney also had a tattoo of an image that she felt represented her education in women's studies. She explained that during a women's studies course she noticed the image tattooed on another individual and decided that she too would like to have the image as an illustration of her love for the subject.

Other respondent's had tattoos that demonstrated their allegiance to their family and their pride in their cultural heritage. For example, Rico wore a tattoo of a cross with a snake wrapped around it, accompanied by his parent's names on his left arm. He said,

it was one I had picked out a couple of times. I had went in a couple of times and looked around and I kept coming back to it. It just caught my eye, it was a really cool tattoo at the time and I wanted to put my parents names on my arm because they are my parents and I wanted to represent them on my body.

Sahaney had a tattoo of an image created as a symbol of her family's culture and last name. She said,

my last name in Indian means "cobra king" and its always kind of meant something to me, so I always wanted to get a snake, but I couldn't find a design that I liked. And then I noticed on the pictures, they have this really distinct design on their hood, when cobras open their hood, on their neck so I decided to put that on my back.

In addition, Carl also had a tattoo of his family's last name, written in Chinese. Like Rico, Carl simply said,

I chose it because it represented my parents.

I felt that these examples belonged in this category because the designs the individuals inscribed on their body demonstrate to others that they are proud of who they are and where they come from. In addition, upon asking the respondents about these particular pieces of artwork, I got the impression that they were not only family-oriented but also loyal to those they care about the most. I thought that others would also get this impression should they ask these individuals about their artwork.

Finally, a song, movie, or other forms of media that the respondent liked were inspiration for some of their artwork. Carl, for instance, had a tattoo that was inspired by a movie and another inspired by Manga. He said,

I got the design out of a Manga, which is a Japanese comic book that I'd been reading. It is supposed to symbolize "noble reasoning" amongst other things.

Joe, the welder, said that the majority of his tattoos represented characters from various horror movies. When I asked him why, he said

because I am totally into horror movies. I mean I love horror movies.

Later, I would ask him what his artwork meant to him and he said that his tattoos really did not have any significance they simply represent his interests.

Anne, the woman who did not believe in covering up a tattoo that she no longer liked, wore a tattoo inspired by one of the Harry Potter movies and another inspired by a song. The tattoo inspired by the song was of the lyrics found in the songs chorus. She said,

I really like the lyrics and I really like the song. I'm just really into words and lyrics and stuff. I was just really big into it and had this uncontrolled feeling that I had to tattoo that on myself.

Lola, the 31-year old retail manager and mother of one, said that one of her many tattoos was of a group of female cartoon characters. Of this tattoo she said,

When I was little they didn't have female role models in cartoons.

[These girls] are strong little girls and it was a show appropriate for little girls to watch and they you know they did everything right, they kicked butt and they set a good example, so I mean I just think that its

awesome that little girls at that point in time had someone to look up to that wasn't He-man or G.I. Joe.

Based on this information we can see that Anne is a Harry Potter fan and Lola is an individual who understands the role that an increase of female role models in cartoons will play in the socialization of her own child.

Every tattoo has a story, regardless of its design or the motivation for its inscription on the body. I learned a lot about these individuals simply by asking them to tell me the stories behind their artwork. As I previously noted, Erving Goffman (1959) argued that there were two types of expressions: "expressions given" and "expressions given off" (4). An example of the latter form of expression are "sign-vehicles" or cues that people can pick up on when they attempt to gather information about another individual. Based on the aforementioned observations and examples, I think that tattoos clearly constitute "sign-vehicles," which can be used as a form of self-expression and/or identity formation.

Modish

During the course of this study I learned that on occasion these respondents chose to participate in body modification practices because it was trendy. While talking to Anne about why she decided to pierce her belly button she said,

everybody had one and it was the cool thing to do.

This was a sentiment that Anne would utter repeatedly and she would not be the only respondent to do so. Other respondents also confided that they had gotten a tattoo or piercing because it was either popular or fashionable. For example, Sahaney stated the following when I asked her what wanted her are to say about her as a person:

I guess like when I think about why I got them, it wasn't for like, I wasn't necessarily trying to make a statement to other people, you know I don't want to like pigeon hole myself and be like this is what it means about me. I mean really it's just, I don't know, art to me. Even like, it kind of sounds bad, but really it's almost like accessorizing to me. I really enjoy jewelry and make-up, and colors and designs and I am just a visually stimulated person so that's a big reason I got it.

What is interesting about this statement is that Sahaney said that her explanation for getting tattooed “kind of sounds bad.” I felt as though she was embarrassed by the fact that she saw her tattoos more or less as fashion accessories. It is possible that this is because as Pitts (2003) noted, some body modifiers “see themselves as outsiders and innovators, not as followers of “alternative fashion” (12). I believe that Sahaney understood that there is a difference between how she views her ‘body art’ and the way in which others view their body art. It is possible that she thought individuals who do not view their artwork as fashion, would look down upon her for doing so.

It is important to remember that the nine analytical categories presented here, are by no means an exhaustive account of the reasons why people choose to participate in these practices. They are simple categorization of some of the reasons why these respondents chose to modify their bodies. I would now like to turn to an examination of the stigma associated with the arts of tattooing and body piercing. When I began this study, I turned to my own experiences for inspiration. I had recalled that an uncle had chastised me for being a “freak,” remembered people who had given me funny looks and found that I had difficulty finding a job that did not require removing my facial piercings. I realized that many of my experiences had left me feeling as though I had been judged, stigmatized, or discriminated against. Based on this experience I wanted to know whether my respondents had similar experiences. This inspired the secondary focus of this study: to study the effect that body modification had on people’s social interactions.

CHAPTER 5 - Stigma

In order to gauge the effect that body modification practices have had on respondent's social interactions, I asked each person to describe how their family members, friends, employers, and strangers have reacted to their artwork. Many of them said their social relations were adversely affected by their decision to physically alter their body. Although I examined the effect that the artwork had on these individuals in a variety of situations, I focused on the impact the practices had on their workplace experiences. I conclude with a discussion of how the respondents felt about having to cover up their tattoos and/or remove their body piercings to gain employment.

The respondents were asked to tell me how others reacted to their artwork. In addition to describing the general reactions of others, I asked respondents to talk about the most recent or most memorable encounter about body modification that they have had with another individual. I also asked them whether they had been treated differently or poorly because of their appearance. If they said they had, I asked them to describe the experience that stuck out in their mind the most. I found that almost every respondent could think of at least one time in which they had felt as though they had been stigmatized.

For example, Succubus said a number of different times that she thought someone was offended by the way she looked. When I asked her to describe one of these encounters, she told me about the reaction of her best friend's mother:

My best friend, her mom hates me now. I thought or she (her friend) thought it was because of the divorce, because their family has some sort of, well they are just really uppity about things and when I got the divorce she didn't really talk to me a whole lot when I saw her after that. Later on I found out that it was the tattoos. She went from liking me- I was good for her kid to be around, I was a good person to be around, I had a good head on my shoulders and took care of things - to

oh god she got tattoos, she's dirt now. She (her friend's mother) won't have anything to do with me.

How did that make you feel?

Sometimes it bothers me. Sometimes I would like to be able to sit down and talk to her and get her to understand that I am still the person I was before the divorce and before the tattoos. Nothing in that regard has changed, but it's not worth it. Not to me. I don't want to waste my time.

Succubus appeared to be genuinely disheartened by the fact that her relationship with her best friend was no longer as close as it once had been, largely because her friend's mother could not accept her decision to participate in body modification practices.

Succubus also told me that children were more likely to have a positive response towards her artwork. She is a "volunteer parent" at her children's school and helps out with a variety of things, including fieldtrips. Succubus explained that when she goes on the fieldtrips, all of the children want to be in her group. Because she often finds herself in a school setting, a place where I was informed I would not be welcomed, I asked about the reactions of her children's teachers to her artwork. She said,

Most of them have accepted it, I think that there are so many parents out there now a days. Like when I went to the elementary school stuff, there were tattoos. When I would go to, when they all get on stage and sing, the little concerts, and things, I can see the tattoos out there. But most of them (the other parents) don't really show them a whole lot.

But I always wear tighter shirts and I always have my shirts rolled up, because I like them.

Here she referred to the fact that other parents attempted to conceal their artwork when they attended school functions, whereas Succubus chose to display her artwork no matter where she was. She would go on to say however, that all though most teachers seem to have accepted that parents might have 'body art,'

I've had some teachers just automatically be bitches to me and they think that I, I must be some drug dealing trailer trash because I have

tattoos. It doesn't matter what my kids are wearing or what kind of grades they get they treat me like trash.

Next, Anne explained to me that her extended family had not responded well to her decision to participate in body modification practices. But she said she was unsure whether her 'body art' was solely to blame for their poor treatment. She believed that they might also be displeased with other decisions she had made in her life, including marrying an older man and being employed as a "dancer" at a gentlemen's club. Of the situation with her family members Anne said,

my uncles and aunts are super religious and super, super conservative so I know that they don't like [tattoos]. They kind of treat me as an outcast.

When I asked if she could tell me more about being treated as an "outcast," she replied, we (her immediate family) don't talk to them much anyway, but they wouldn't come to my wedding. They didn't like my lifestyle. Like they didn't like that I was marrying somebody a lot older than me. And then all the tattoos, they are just so conservative. It's almost like they didn't want me to be around their kids and one of my cousins is even the same age as me.

Judging from Anne's tone of voice and body language, I sensed that she was less concerned about the reaction of her aunts and uncles than about the fact that she did not have a chance to bond with her cousins.

Other respondents described how strangers reacted to their artwork. Goat and Joe specifically mentioned incidents involving other customers during shopping trips to Wal-mart. Goat said,

It's kind of funny. I love kids. I like to hang out with them and play with them and stuff and really I am just a big kid myself, but when I like walk through Wal-mart and stuff, if there is a lady with a little kid walking in the aisle and she happens to see my arm, 8 or 9 times out of 10 she'll grab her kid and pull them over to the side.

On a similar note, Joe stated the following:

I get mixed reactions. Like when we (Joe and his wife) go to Wal-mart per se or the grocery store or something, especially with the kids a lot of the older people will kind of look at you like (makes a face), but when I am by myself people will come up and talk to me more than anything else.

Lola and Addison, on the other hand, told me about confrontations that had occurred between themselves and customers at their places of employment. Lola stated, When I had my facial piercings, I had one customer get really angry and leave the store, but he was kind of angry to begin with. So, he told me that I looked horrible and that I wasn't a good representative of the company.

How did that make you feel?

I just didn't really care. You could tell that he was very conservative and religious. And he had his two kids with him and he just; nothing was going to change his mind. I just. I didn't really care.

When I asked Addison to describe how people reacted to her tattoos, she described an encounter she had with a customer at the local video store where she works. She said, I've been told I was going to hell. One of my regulars at work, she's a really nice lady but she's like a holy rolling bible beating Jesus freak, which is fine for her. Like I am a Christian. I believe in God, but I don't believe that I am going to hell just because I have tattoos. And she was just like people with tattoos are condemned to eternal damnation.

I asked Addison about how she had felt when the customer confronted her. She said that while people often ask her about her decision to participate in these practices, she did not feel obligated to explain herself to them. She said,

I know why I did this to myself, and it's not anyone else's business to know why I did this to myself.

Other respondents also talked about how being a 'body art' practitioner affected them in the workplace. The difference between these experiences and the previous ones was that it was not the customers who had a problem with the artwork, but the employers. Lola, for example, said that she used to have several facial piercings, including two nose

rings and a labret (a body piercing located in an individual's lip). When I interviewed her, she was not wearing any body jewelry. I asked why she no longer wore the piercings. She said,

the company I went to work for four years ago had a no facial piercing policy and it was just too much work. I took the labret out one day and it just wouldn't go back in, it had healed over while I was at work. And my nose rings, it just got to a point where I would forget to put them in when I was off. I am pretty sure the holes are still open, I just don't put them in anymore.

Claudette also told me that a restaurant she worked for had a similar policy. According to the restaurant's employee handbook, employees with tattoos and/or body piercings would have to keep them covered at all times. The manager explained to Claudette that this meant she would have to either remove her eyebrow ring or wear a band-aid over it while she was at work. This is what Claudette had to say about the whole ordeal:

It was ridiculous. Customers would ask me "why do you have a band-aid on your face?" and I'd tell them. So it just seemed silly that I had to wear a band-aid on it.

Based on the information that Claudette provided, the patrons of this particular restaurant would inquire about the band-aid, learn that it was hiding a facial piercing, and agree with Claudette that it was absurd to conceal it.

Goat told me about the time when his partial "sleeve" had interfered with a job he had at a "factory style warehouse." The topic came up while we were discussing the visibility of this particular piece of artwork. Goat said,

It has only caused problems once at a job and that was because my immediate supervisor didn't like tattoos that showed.

Did you have the tattoo before you started the job or did you get it while you were working there?

I'd had the one on my shoulder, just the one [death figure] and while I was working there I continued to move down the arm and it broke onto the forearm and that was when it seemed to become a problem. Nobody gave a shit right up until it started to show every day.

After asking Goat about the factory's employee handbook, I learned that there was a clause within it addressing facial piercings, but not tattoos. The reasoning behind this may be related to the safety issues associated with wearing jewelry that could possibly get caught in the machinery.

Finally, Lucy described the difficulty she had finding a job. I asked Lucy whether she could recall any instances in which she had felt as though she had been treated poorly. The following is an excerpt from Lucy's interview transcript, which depicts an experience that she will never forget.

I was looking for a job and I had a job interview at a liquor store in a college town. So, I didn't think that it would be that big of a deal. I mean I told the lady that I'd be willing to adhere to her dress code and I told her that I am a jeans and t-shirt kind of person, but if you have a dress code, I need a job, so I'll wear khakis if you want me to, but I didn't mention that I had tattoos and piercings. I just figured that she'd find out. So, it was [a] Saturday morning when she wanted me to come in for an interview. And I walked in the door and the lady looked at me and she just goes, "you can go ahead and go home I am not even going to waste your time with an interview." And I was like, "excuse me I just got up and made it here at eight on a Saturday morning for an interview." She's like yeah, "I've got a really strict dress code policy and I am sorry but it will just be a waste of my time and your time." I told her I'd be willing to wear a long sleeve shirt and take out (at this point I only had the one lip ring), I told her that I would take that out and wear a retainer, which is a little clear plastic thing. And she was like "what about the holes in your ears?" and I said, "my earrings?" Then she said, "those are not earrings I can see straight through them" and I said "I can get different earrings" and she was like "no, the way you look would offend my customers" and she totally just walked off and I was like are you kidding me, it's a liquor store. People going in to buy booze are going to be offended by the way that I look. I was so mad

I told all of my friends, I was like don't buy liquor at this liquor store any more these people are Nazis. They are awful, judgmental people.

Lucy was so upset by the way that she had been treated she proceeded to tell all of her friends not to buy their alcohol at that liquor store because they were "awful, judgmental people." She also told me that she was most upset because,

I offered to cover them (her tattoos) all up and take them (her piercings) all out and I thought that I was being reasonable and she was just not having it at all. I mean if I had taken them all out I would have looked like any other kid that worked at a liquor store. It was just, it was unbelievable I had never been treated like that before in my life. It was depressing. I was like how could somebody treat somebody else like that just because of the way they look and you know I sat at home and I was like man this is what racism feels like, being judge by the way that I look except like you know, its not because of the color of my skin. Because of the choice in jewelry that I make. I think of my lips rings and stuff as just like, as some lady putting on a fancy pearl necklace or what ever, it's the jewelry she chose to wear that day and these are the ones I choose to wear. I felt like, it was the worst day ever.

Like Lucy, who seemed to be disheartened by the way she had been treated, when I found myself in similar situations, I got angry. I could not understand what an individual's appearance had to do with their ability to perform well at a job. When I looked for work, I refused to change my appearance and only accepted positions with businesses that could accept me as I was. I wondered whether my respondent's felt as passionate as I did about removing and/or covering up their artwork in order to be employed. But after hearing that many respondents removed a piercing or covered up a tattoo for work, I asked them how they felt about the impact that body modification practices had on their experiences within the workplace. What I found is that the respondent's feelings on this issue varied widely and could be ranked on a continuum ranging from a strong resistance to change to indifference.

Rico and Succubus were at one end of the spectrum. They felt very strongly about not covering up their artwork, explaining that they simply would not apply for a job

where they could not be themselves. For example, when asked if he'd ever had to cover up his tattoos for a job Rico replied:

No, because I don't go for those kinds of jobs. Yeah, I make sure to wear jeans and to clean up, shave, but the tattoos are who I am and if they won't hire me because of my tattoos, then fine you don't deserve what I have to offer.

And when I asked Succubus how she felt knowing that some places required employees to cover up their tattoos and/or remove their body piercings, she replied,

I just wouldn't even apply there. Most of those places I wouldn't want to work because they are usually a 9-5 office jobs. Some of those jobs you have to wear suits and things for anyway and they would cover up people's tattoos and it wouldn't matter. It's just what somebody decides to do.

Succubus went on to say that there was no other reason why she would cover up her art, because, she said,

I don't care what anybody thinks or says about it. If they don't like my tattoos they can either, if they are in my home they can leave or I won't go to their homes or their places.

From these statements we can see that both Rico and Succubus choose not to apply for positions that might cause them to sacrifice their individuality. They understood that while others choose to cover up their tattoos or remove their body piercings in order to be employed, it is simply not something that they are willing to do.

Next on the continuum, I would place respondents like Gabrielle, who when asked if she would be willing to cover up her artwork for a job in the future, replied,

I don't know it just depends on if the job is worth enough for me. I mean if you pay a lot I'll cover them up that's fine, but if it's just something like [name of where she is currently working] where its just an in between job, I am not going to bother with it. It's not worth it if they can't accept me for who I am that's their problem.

Goat said it may or may not be necessary to cover up one's 'body art,' depending on the type of job. Although he said he had some problems when he was employed at a "factory style warehouse," Goat said,

Like I can understand that if I was working directly with a customer, you know like working the sales floor of like Wal-mart or something you know where I am consistently representing a company. But I worked in a factory you know the only people that I saw were either co-workers or my supervisor and especially in that setting what the hell does it matter what I look like.

In an attempt to clarify his views even further, he would go on to say,

It would be like the difference between being a greeter at a restaurant and dish guy at a restaurant. Who cares if the dish guy has tattoos on his fucking fingers you know, but the person at the front door greeting you should probably look a little more clean cut, you know.

These statements illustrate that although Gabrielle and Goat are unhappy with the fact that they might have to cover up their tattoos, doing so would be understandable in certain situations. They would also be more likely to abide by these rules if the occupation's benefits and pay were worth it.

Finally, at the far end of the spectrum, respondents said that they were completely okay with changing their appearance regardless of the type of job. For example, when I asked Carl about concealing his tattoos at work, he said,

it's not so much that I don't want anybody to judge me, but if I am going to work for a company or business they are not paying me to be there to be me they are paying me to be a representative of their company.

When I asked Addison how she felt about possibly having to keep her artwork covered in order to find her "dream job," she said,

I am okay with [covering up]. Like it really doesn't faze me.

Then there was Lola, who said:

Well, I think you have to consider that you see hundreds of different kinds of people in a week and you don't want to isolate people. I

understand the logic behind it, I don't like it, but in order to be employed and be good at my job I'll do it. I mean I can wear a short sleeved shirt not at work and I can put my piercings back in. It's just not limiting me, other than the 8 hours a day that I am at work.

This group of individuals was more or less indifferent towards the fact that some businesses require their employees to conceal their 'body art.' Although one or more of them said that policies against 'body art' in the workplace "sucked," unlike those who refused to change and those who would do so if the price was right, they were willing to do whatever was necessary in order to make a living. I wondered however, whether this rationalization was simply a coping mechanism for a situation in which these individuals felt they had little control.

Previous research failed to examine the affect that body modification has on an individual's ability to find a job. This study's findings demonstrate however, that this is an area in which there is a need for more research. Based on the information provided by the respondents, we can see that people whose bodies are adorned with tattoos and/or body piercings are subjected to discriminatory, appearance-based hiring policies when searching for employment. I believe that this is due to the fact that there is still a certain amount of stigma attached to body modification practices, which has led to the negative stereotyping of the individuals who participate in them. I wondered whether refusing to hire these individuals based solely on the fact that they have 'body art' or hiring them on the condition that they conceal their art while at work, constituted discrimination. I argue that this is indeed, a type of discrimination. The poor treatment of these individuals comes from the belief that their appearance is inappropriate for the workplace. Because of their noncompliance with societal norms, they are seen as outsiders and are subsequently being treated as such.

In the past, researchers used a variety of methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and textual analysis, to examine body modification practices at the micro-level. Although the current study was also based on a qualitative methods approach, I tried to set it apart from its predecessors by asking respondents to construct a timeline of their artwork and other life events. The decision to implement this activity into the research design occurred after ten interviews had already

been conducted. I contacted these individuals again, informed of the purpose of the timeline activity, and asked them to participate in a brief follow-up interview. Five of the ten respondents agreed to participate in a follow-up interview and two others developed timelines via email. I then incorporated their responses into the data.

CHAPTER 6 - Timelines

Once I finished examining the interview transcripts, I turned to an analysis of the timelines. Each respondent was given a piece of construction paper and various writing utensils and asked to create a timeline. As starting points, I asked them to put the year they were born and the year they moved to Manhattan, Kansas on the timeline. I then asked them why they had come to the Manhattan area. After reviewing the transcripts, I found that eight of the fifteen respondents came to the city in order to attend college. Other reasons that these individuals currently resided in Manhattan included, but were not limited to, having lived in or around the area for most of their lives, a parent in the military was relocated to Manhattan because of its close proximity to Fort Riley, or knowing a family member or friend who lived here.

The interview schedule also contained questions that prompted the respondents to compare Manhattan to their hometowns and to discuss any changes that have occurred in Manhattan since they arrived. Several respondents said that they had moved to Manhattan from much smaller cities and they noted that Manhattan had many more “modern conveniences” than their hometowns. I also discovered that a little over half of the sample (67%) had obtained at least one tattoo from the same local tattoo artist.

Next, I asked respondents to say when they obtained each tattoo and/or body piercing and place it on the timeline. I thought that the process of mapping out the things on the timeline would help them remember when they had gotten their artwork and why. Although I was not looking for the respondents to provide me with the exact date and time that they had obtained each tattoo and/or body piercing, many had trouble even remembering what year they had received the artwork. Some respondents simply took a wild guess, while others tried to use the timeline to estimate the year based on things such as the birth of their children, where they working at the time, or who they were dating at that time. Once the interviews were over, the timelines provided me with an opportunity to examine whether the respondent’s participation in these practices might be linked to other life or world events.

When I compared the interview transcripts with the timelines, I realized that tattooing and body piercing was a very personal experience for these individuals. I say this because many respondents were able to recall the intimate details of their own lives, but were only able to remember little, if anything, about what had been going on in Manhattan and the rest of the world when they decided to get a tattoo or body piercing. More often than not, those who were able to tell me about worldly events or things that had happened in Manhattan were only able to do so because the events that they remembered were directly related to some aspect of their own lives. In addition, respondents were quick to tell me that the things they *could* remember had *not* influenced their decisions to participate in body modification practices.

For example, when I asked Goat if he could recall what was going on in the world when he obtained his first tattoo he replied,

that was right around the time that or shortly after the trade center shit,
but that had no impact on my tattoo or decision-making.

In response to a similar question Lola stated,

I know that was the year that K-state beat Nebraska for the first time
because I lived near Aggieville and they brought the goal posts down
and that was about, that's really about all I remember at the time. And
most of the soldiers were here because there wasn't anything going on.

Lola only remembered these things because she had previously lived in Nebraska, had watched the game, and she lived near Aggieville at the time, so she heard K-state fans celebrating. She recalled that the war in Iraq had not yet begun because she is the manager of a local clothing store, a business that does quite well when Fort Riley soldiers are not at war.

Other subjects offered brief responses when asked about what had been occurring in Manhattan or the world. Lucy said the only thing that she could remember was that K-state students were coming and going from the university. The only things that J. could recall were that it was his birthday and that he could afford the tattoo because he had recently received his tax return. Carl, on the other hand, said

I really don't remember what was going on when I got them. I mean, I
was aware of the world around me, but I don't really have any

associative memories between the tattoo and anything else going on in the world.

I found it difficult to believe that they were not aware of current events, politics, and local gatherings when they were making the decision to physically alter their body. But Carl and other subjects did not have any “associative memories” that linked world events to their artwork.

Addison however, had an interesting response to my question:

What, if anything, can you recall about what was happening in the world or in Manhattan at any of the times you obtained artwork?

She said,

Only me getting kicked out of school, nothing major around here. I am kind of oblivious, live in my own little world. Like I don't pay too much attention to what goes on around me unless it directly affects me. Like I don't read the paper, I don't watch the news. I have no idea what is going on in Iraq. I just don't care to know. I had a teacher in middle school that would make us watch the news, like he would leave it on CNN in his class and it was during the first, like the big weapons of mass destruction issue with Saddam Hussein over in Iraq, and I remember just being terrified twenty four seven. Scared to death that the world was going to end the next day. And so now I don't ever watch I don't pay attention on purpose because I know it would just make me totally paranoid.

Because Addison was one of the final respondents that I interviewed, I did not get the chance to ask the other respondents if their views about the news and world events were similar to Addison's. Therefore, I was unable to draw any conclusions about whether this is a common sentiment among this particular age group. What I was able to conclude however is that people decide to modify their bodies for personal reasons and not in response to wider events. I thought that the timelines would show that the decision to participate in body modification practices was related not only to things that were going on in their immediate lives, but also with things that were taking place outside of their lives. Instead, I found just the opposite. The inability of the respondents to recall what

was going on in the world around them, illustrates the intimacy of their choice to physically alter their bodies.

CHAPTER 7 - Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years body modification practices such as the arts of tattooing and body piercing have experienced an increase in popularity. A close examination of previous research conducted on the topic revealed a dichotomous categorization of these practices as either acts of deviance or self-expression. In an effort to add to the research that strives to portray 'body art' as a means of identity formation, the current study took a qualitative approach to the examination of body modification practices and the individuals who participate in them.

Throughout 2007, fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with college-age individuals who had at least one visible piece of 'body art,' and were currently living in or around Manhattan, Kansas. An emphasis was placed on what motivated the individuals to participate in the arts of tattooing and/or body piercing and how they felt the physical alteration of their body had affected their subsequent social interactions and identity. A careful review of the interview transcripts revealed that the respondents had chosen to participate in body modification practices for a variety of reasons. Nine analytical categories were then created in an attempt to explain the key motivations for their participation in these practices and ultimately call into question whether these practices should continue to be viewed as "deviant."

It is important to note that there are notable differences between the motivational categories presented here and those presented by Samuel Steward in 1990. First, although there are similarities among the motivations we both encountered, for the sake of simplicity I combined motivations that were similar in nature so as to avoid having an overabundance of classifications. Whereas Steward (1990) presented his readers with approximately twenty-eight analytical categories, I have organized the motives of my respondents into nine categories. Second, while Steward (1990) focused on what motivated gangs, sailors, and street-corner punks (the majority of which were men) to participate in the art of tattooing, I attempted to examine why college-age men and women chose to participate in both the arts of tattooing and body piercing. Furthermore,

Samuel Steward's categories were based between the years of 1950 and 1965. With the exception of getting one's ears pierced, 1987 is presumably the earliest date at which a respondent who participated in this study chose to physically modify their body. So the analytical categories that were presented here were roughly based between the years of 1987 and 2007.

Before I began this study, I wanted to demonstrate that the individuals who participate in body modification practices are not deviants, but simply people like everyone else. Upon examining the motivational categories, it is my hope that you will see that there is nothing deviant about these practices or the individuals who are participating in them. Because deviance is a social construct, the definition of what is "deviant" is constantly changing. In addition, ideas about what is and is not culturally acceptable in relation to the human body are often based on cultural and societal norms, which are also subject to change at any given moment. Therefore, as more and more people begin to participate in the arts of tattooing and body piercing, it will be difficult, if not futile, to continue to label them as deviant. In 1988, Clinton Sanders suggested that in order to combat the negative stereotypes associated with these practices we would need to re-label them as something other than deviant. I agreed with this statement and suggested that they be labeled as a means of self-expression and identity formation. In other words, the arts of tattooing and body piercing should be viewed as methods of communicating information about who we are to others, much like the "sign vehicles" discussed in Goffman's work on the presentation of self.

In 1988, after conducting a study consisting of participant observation, interviews, and self-administered questionnaires, Clinton Sanders concluded that what motivates an individual to participate in body modification practices, differed according to the individual's gender. He also suggested that there were gender differences within certain aspects of the decision-making process, specifically when it came to choosing a tattoo's design and location. Based on this information and my own personal experiences, I thought that my findings would support Sanders', but instead found just the opposite. The men and women of this study had chosen to participate in these practices for very similar reasons. Moreover, I thought that there would be gender differences based on tattoo designs and their locations, but discovered that contrary to previous research, tattoos were

of all shapes, sizes, and designs, and were located in various locations of the body, regardless of the individual's gender. In order to illustrate this, I provided quotes from both male and female respondents in each of the nine motivational categories that I created.

Findings also demonstrated that there is still a certain amount of stigma associated with the arts of tattooing and body piercing, especially within the workplace. Although some businesses and organizations require their employees to keep their artwork concealed during business hours, others simply refuse to hire any individual who has a visible piece of 'body art.' I suggested that the underlying reason behind the unwillingness to hire 'body art' practitioners is directly related to the stigma that is attached to these practices as well as the negative stereotyping of the individuals who participate in them. Unfortunately, because the purpose of this study was to uncover why people choose to participate in body modification practices, I was unable to draw concrete conclusions about how or why body modification practices came to be viewed in such a negative light. The knowledge gained from the respondents and their experiences however, not only provided insight into the thought processes involved in the decision to participate in body modification practices, but shed light on discriminatory, appearance-based hiring practices.

Lastly, I thought that my respondents would have felt as if they had been treated differently or poorly by other members of society because of their decision to physically modify their bodies. To my surprise, while many respondents could recall at least one instance in which they had experienced a negative reaction towards their artwork, the majority of them did not feel as if they were treated differently or poorly in general. In fact, Succubus made it a point to say that the positive experiences she has had as a "body modifier" completely outweighed the negative ones. Learning that not everyone who has a tattoo and/or body piercing felt the same way I did was an eye-opening experience for me. It forced me to realize the power of perception. Maybe, just maybe, I had not been judged, stigmatized, or discriminated against as often as I had thought. It is possible that I had only chosen to perceive those experiences in that way. My respondents, on the other hand, chose to perceive their experiences in a different way. They often contributed the adverse reactions they had received towards their 'body art' to curiosity. The respondents

reminded me of two very important things: people have a tendency to react negatively towards things they do not understand and although body modification is an innovative method of self-expression, it is not for everyone.

My biggest concern going into this project was with how others might view my personal relationship with body modification practices. As a participant in this culture, I must admit that at times, especially during the interview process, it was difficult for me to maintain my role as interviewer and researcher and not become a fellow body modifier. In an effort to ensure that my research and its findings would be taken seriously, I have attempted to be upfront and honest about my own experiences and the role they played in the interpretation of the data. I think that this is evident in the discussion of the findings and the extent to which they contradicted what I believed I would find.

This study's exploratory nature limited my ability to draw definitive conclusions from my findings. Furthermore, because it was a case study of college-age individuals living in Manhattan, Kansas, I am unable to generalize my findings to the larger population of 'body art' practitioners. What I did discover however is that there is a need for future research.

For example, researchers should continue examining the effect that an individual's gender has on various aspects of body modification. Although my findings were contradictory to previous research in regards to the role that gender plays in the decision-making process, I suspect that these results might have differed had I have interviewed individuals of a different age group. When the art of tattooing reached the United States, it was a body modification practice that was primarily participated in by men. Therefore, I would suggest that one might find more support and/or evidence of the ways in which women used body modification as a means of "reclaiming their bodies," should the motivations of an older generation of "body modifiers" be examined.

Upon returning to the transcripts, I have also realized that the respondents who were most likely to state that they *would* be willing to cover up their tattoos or remove their body piercings, were currently employed in service-based jobs. It should come as no surprise that many of these respondents were female, considering that women have traditionally filled service-based jobs. So whereas Rico, the motorcycle bike technician stated that he would *not* even apply for a job that required him to cover up his tattoos,

Lola, the retail manager, said that she would be willing do what ever it took to keep from “isolating” her customers. Based on this information it would appear as though there is a need for research, which explores how an individual’s gender is related to the type of job they have and the affect that this has on the way an individual feels about having to cover up or remove their artwork in order to be employed.

I also think that there is a need for research that addresses the intersection of race, class, and gender. It is important to note that the purpose of this study was simply to ascertain base-level information about these individuals participation in body modification practices and their experiences as “body modifiers.” As a result, an extensive emphasis has not been placed on how the responses to the interview questions differed based on the demographics of the sample. Although I obtained information from an equal amount of men and women, the vast majority of the sample was White. I believe that the sampling procedure I used prevented me from obtaining a more diverse sample and has caused me to be hesitant in my attempts at speculating why individuals of various backgrounds choose to participate in body modification practices as well as how their experiences might be different from one another.

In addition, researchers should continue to examine the stigma that is associated with the arts of tattooing and body piercing. First and foremost, research in this area should focus on why those individuals that do not participate in these practices think and feel the way they do about the people who do participate in them. Until we can gain a better understanding of how and why body modification came to be viewed in a negative light, the individuals who participate in these practices will continue to be subjected to unjust treatment within the job market. Moreover, there is a need to examine discriminatory, appearance-based hiring practices and the differences between those businesses that institute policies against ‘body art’ and those who do not.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that individuals choose to participate in the arts of tattooing and body piercing for a variety of reasons. Nine analytical categories were provided in an attempt to summarize the key motivations behind the respondents’ participation in these practices and the observations, along with the examples provided within each category, depict the thought process behind obtaining a piece of artwork. However, this study also illustrates that body modification might be referred to as what

Goffman would call a voluntary stigma. What this means is that individuals who have chosen to participate in these practices are fully aware of what society has defined as natural and/or ordinary attributes of the body, but ultimately transform their bodies in a way that does not correspond to the expected model of the body.

From this we can see that in a causal model the physical alteration of one's body would cause the individual to experience various forms of stigmatization, especially within the workplace. The question then becomes what effect, if any, does the stigma that is associated with these practices have on these individuals identities. Unfortunately, I am unable to answer this question because there was no evidence within the data collected in this study that indicated that the stigma these individuals experienced had affected them in any way. Although I would suspect that as labeling theories suggest, if we continue to label and treat these individuals as deviants, they will act as deviants. It is my belief that by asking "body modifiers" to share their stories and elaborate on the thought processes involved in their decisions to participate in body modification practices, we will reveal that these individuals are in fact not deviants. Instead, practitioners of 'body art' are an interesting and diverse group of people, each with a story to tell. We should never judge a book by its cover; we should open it and read it, because we just might learn something from it that we will be able to share with others.

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Appendix A - Interview Schedule

A. Background Information

I'd like to start by gathering some background information (i.e. age, sex, race, etc.).

1. Could you begin by telling me a little bit about yourself?
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. Where are you from?
 - i. What brings you to Manhattan, Ks.?
 - ii. How long have you lived here in Manhattan?
 - iii. How has Manhattan changed since you have been here?
 - iv. Could you spend a few minutes comparing and contrasting Manhattan to your hometown?
 - v. What else can you tell me about Manhattan?
 - c. Are you currently employed? If so, what is your job title?

B. The Art

1. How do you think about yourself?/How do you see yourself? (I.e. Do you see yourself as a trendsetter, a pin cushion, an art collector, etc.?)
 - a. Do you see yourself as an Artist? Or is the piercer/person placing the tattoo on your body the artist? Why?
 - b. What were you trying to portray?
 - c. How do you think you are perceived by others?

I have brought along this piece of construction paper and some markers. I am hoping that you can help me to construct a timeline of your life and artwork. I have already marked the current year (2007) on the far right-hand side of the timeline and I would like you to place the year that you were born on the far left-hand side. Next, I would like you to mark the year that you moved to Manhattan and I would also like you mark the date that you received your first piece of artwork. (*Note: The following questions will be used for each piece of artwork.)

2. How old were you when you got your first (second, third, etc. for subsequent pieces) piece of artwork?

a. What type of art is it? What does it look like? Where is it located?

i. Why did you pick that design? Or what does it symbolize?

ii. Why did you pick that particular location?

b. Could you describe to me the process through which you went in deciding what to get and where to put it?/What were you thinking?/What was your thought process?

i. How long had you been thinking about getting said piece of art?

ii. What kinds of things did you think about before you decided to go through with your decision?

iii. Why did you decide to go ahead and get the art? / What made you decide to go ahead and get the art?

c. Can you describe to me what was happening at that time in your life?

i. Where were you living at the time? What was that like?

1. If they were living away from home/their parents at this time: How long had they been away from home? Did being away from home have an impact on your decision to get said piece of art?

2. If they were still living at home/with their parents at this time: How did that impact their decision to get said piece of art? Impact on design? Impact on location?

ii. Do you remember what may have been going on in the world at that time?

1. If they lived here in Manhattan at that time: How long had you lived in Manhattan? What was going on in Manhattan?

2. Did any of this have an impact on your decision to modify your body? On the design you chose? On the location that you chose?

d. When you were getting the art what were you thinking/ what was going through your mind?

3. Would you consider getting more art in the future? What kind of art? Where would it be located? Why would you pick that particular design and/or location?

C. Experiences and Reactions

1. Describe to me how people react to your 'body art'.
 - a. How did your immediate family react? Your extended family?
 - b. How did your boss react?
 - c. What about strangers, how do they react?
 - d. Who would you says reacts more positively? Negatively? Why do you think that people make that assumption?
 - e. Can you tell me about the most recent reaction? The most memorable?
2. Is there any reason why you would cover up your art or remove your piercings?
 - a. Have you ever had to cover up your art/remove your piercings? Could you describe the most recent or the most memorable time that you had to cover up your art/remove your piercings?
 - b. What do you think about having to do this? (I.e. How do you feel about having to do this?)
3. Have you ever felt as though you were being treated differently/poorly because of the 'art'?
 - a. Tell me about the most recent time you were treated differently./Tell me about your most memorable experience.

D. Self-reflection

1. What does your 'body art' mean to you? (I.e. What do you think about your 'body art'?)
2. What do you think it says about you as a person/What do you want it to say about you? Do you think that others "get" that about you from just looking at your art?
3. Do you have any advice for others (Family, friends, your children, strangers) who are thinking about body modification? So, it would be okay if your child wanted to get a tattoo or a piercing?

E. Closing Questions

1. Do you think I have missed anything? Is there anything else you would like to add?
2. Is there anything else that you would like to know or are unclear about in relation to the study itself?