

THE TATTOO RENAISSANCE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF SYMBOLIC CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Anne M. Velliquette, University of Arkansas

Jeff B. Murray, University of Arkansas

Elizabeth H. Creyer, University of Arkansas

ABSTRACT -

This article presents an ethnographic account of product symbolism and fashion imagery within a segment of the consumer culture. This segment has emerged as an effect of the tattoo Renaissance and is referred to as the New Tattoo Subculture. After developing a historical interpretation, four a priori themes are discussed (i.e., Renaissance, extended self, risk, and satisfaction/addiction). Ethnographic support was found for these themes as well as two emerging themes (i.e., design versus act and the simulated self). The article concludes by exploring the implications of tattooing for identity formation.

INTRODUCTION

In all cultures, irreversible forms of body decoration are used as a vehicle for human expression. Piercings, scarification, and tattoos may signify a wide array of meanings. For example, decorations may represent emblems of accomplishment (Gritton 1988), group membership (Drewal 1988), social status (Gathercole 1988), or willingness to endure pain in order to please a lover (Bohannan 1988). Permanent forms of body decoration must ultimately be viewed as part of a larger domain of more temporary adornment (Rubin 1988). At the most basic level, consumers use hairstyles, jewelry, clothing, and cosmetics to display gender, status, values, interests, opinions, lifestyles, roles, and other identity features. People continually make decisions and judgements about others on the basis of what they are wearing, how they style their hair, their body shape, and their use of objects. Clearly, these nonverbal signs and symbols are part of a discursive mix used to communicate individual and group identity.

Understanding the way that consumers manage signs or strive for symbolic capital has recently become an important focus in symbolic consumer behavior (Baudrillard 1981, 1994; Bourdieu 1984). The purpose of this article is to present an ethnographic account of product symbolism as expressed by a segment of the population, the New Tattoo Subculture. The modifier New signifies the recent expansion of popular interest in body art as a form of marking identity (Blouin 1996; Krakow 1994; Lautman 1994; Peterson 1996; Rubin 1988; Sanders 1989a; Stewart 1996; Tezak 1996).

Although assessing the number of people who participate in the New Tattoo Subculture is difficult, it has been estimated that 12 to 20 million Americans have acquired a tattoo (Blouin 1996). This is not surprising given that tattoo parlors were among the top six growth businesses in 1996 (American Business Information, Inc. 1996). During the last decade, observers have also witnessed sharp increases in tattoo ink sales, the expansion of tattoo associations and conventions, the growth of State regulations, and the rise of tattoo

removal clinics (Ball 1996; Blouin 1996; Peterson 1996). Other forms of media culture, including advertising, are beginning to reflect this interest in tattoos. For example, even conventional companies such as Jell-O puddings and gelatins are including temporary tattoos for children featuring star basketball players such as Dennis Rodman (Pollack 1996). This introduction leads to a number of research questions. What motivates particular consumers to participate in this subculture? In what ways is the tattoo used as a form of expression? What is involved in the experience of acquiring a tattoo?

HISTORY AND A PRIORI THEMES

"Tattoo" is a word loaded with rich visual associations. The word summons images ranging from circus sideshows or tribal warriors, to WWII sailors, media stars, athletes, or the Holocaust. With such vivid associations, few people enter a discussion about tattoos without a predisposed emotional outlook. Most academic studies of the tattoo have been done by sociologists and anthropologists. For example, Clinton R. Sanders' *Customizing the Body* (1989) is a sociological investigation of the art and culture of tattooing in America and Arnold Rubin's *Marks of Civilization* (1988) is an anthropological investigation of historical roots and cross-cultural differences.

From an anthropological perspective, the practice of tattooing is one of the oldest art forms discovered by archaeologists (Ball 1996). The word "tattoo" is derived from the Tahitian word *ta-tu* meaning "to strike." A "ta" was a piece of bone that had sharp, jagged edges. Different types of bones or *tas* were used to create different designs. Inks were made from the shell of a particular nut which was burned and left to dry. The tattooist would then tint the ashes with oils, herbs, plants, and juices (Ball 1996). Early evidence for the tattoo is ultimately conjectural since only artifacts remain. The first incontrovertible evidence of tattooing enters the archaeological record during the course of the Middle Kingdom in ancient Egypt around 2000 B.C. (Bianchi 1988). The anthropology of the tattoo from the Middle Kingdom in ancient Egypt to the present is well-documented. The role that tattoos play in society varies a great deal depending on ethnological issues such as geography, economic development, innovation, and cultural diffusion. For example, tattoo art in contemporary America reflects Euro-American influences combining "international folk style" with a "new tribalism" (see Rubin 1988, p. 207).

The recent expansion of popular interest in tattooing has led to a revival of both traditional and modern art forms and has attracted a number of new artists, some of them classically trained at prestigious art institutes (e.g., the tattoo artist Jamie Summers, see Rubin 1988, p. 256). This Tattoo Renaissance (Rubin 1988, p. 233) has not only led to a creative medium for some artists, it has also led to a creative form of expression for the consumer. If the construction of subjectivity can be viewed as a "work of art" (Foucault 1983, p. 236), then the tattoo can be understood as a creative extension of self (Belk 1988). Choosing a permanent symbol of self involves a certain amount of risk and leads ultimately to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. If the self is represented accurately and communication is creatively enhanced, the experience of being tattooed may become habitual and even addictive. Thus, a review of literature suggests four expected or a priori themes: Renaissance, extended self, risk, and satisfaction/addiction.

The first theme is referred to as the tattoo Renaissance. A recurring theme when referring to the contemporary tattoo subculture is a revival or Renaissance of what Rubin (1988, p. 235) refers to as "avant-garde tattooing" (also see Webb 1979). Avant-garde tattooing consists of Japanese, fineline, and tribal art. Japanese body art refers to symbols taken from Japanese mythology and decorative art which was originally expressed in the idiom of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints (McCallum 1988). Fineline refers to representational tattoos (i.e., lettering) done with one (rather than the usual three) needles. According to Govenar (1988), fineline is usually done in black and is often associated with Latino subcultures. Tribal tattooing refers to interpretations of designs originally associated with Polynesian, Indonesian, and Southeast Asian traditions (Rubin 1988).

The tattoo Renaissance began in the late 1950s with the influence of artists such as Lyle Tuttle, Cliff Raven, Don Nolan, Zeke Owens, Spider Webb, and Ed Hardy. A second generation of artists, trained by the first, continued these themes into the 1970s. This second generation includes artists such as Bob Roberts, Jamie Summers, and Jack Rudy (Rubin 1988). In many respects, Lyle Tuttle represents the beginning of the tattoo Renaissance. Working in San Francisco during the hippie period of the 1960s, Tuttle lent an "earthy, proletarian focus and contour to a new, liberated conception of the body as expressed in Asian/Pacific religion and philosophy" (Rubin 1988, p. 252). Since that time, Tuttle has been instrumental in helping to preserve and document the historical and ethnographic records of the tattoo medium. Tuttle founded the Tattoo Art Museum and Hall of Fame in San Francisco and publishes the *Tattoo Historian* (personal interview with Tuttle done by the first author 7/12/96). As the commercial art world and academic art historians take notice of tattooing, gallery and museum showings increase. This tends to attract better trained artists, which in turn, leads to a new clientele (Sanders 1989b). This new clientele consists of middle class teens and adults, college students, media celebrities and sports heroes.

The tattoo Renaissance may be an effect of the new social movements (e.g., gay and lesbian, feminist, environmentalist, eco-feminist, etc.) as they argue for full participation in a pluralist consumer culture. As diversity becomes further emphasized, the tattoo becomes one more way of reassuring the ego under pressure. When seeking identity under these circumstances, it is the permanence of the symbol and the unavoidable impassioned face-to-face encounter with an artist that becomes the most attractive. These issues lead to the next theme.

The second theme borrows a phrase from Russell Belk (1988), the extended self. Possessions may embody experiences, memories, and feelings that fortify identity and attach our sense of past (Belk 1988). In this sense, possessions are extensions of self conceptions. If the inner self is known only to the subject, then possessions may symbolize the self to others. Visual art is one of the most frequently mentioned possessions which calls forth memories of other people, occasions, and relationships (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Thus, body art may symbolize group membership, interests, activities, relationships, life transitions, accomplishments, or values (Hoerr 1995, Sanders 1988). For example, Govenar's (1988) research found that, within the Latino subculture, tattoos which appear on the hand often symbolize group identity and ethnic pride. The most common symbols chosen by this group are Christian and religious designs (e.g., angels, clouds, crosses, devils, skeletons, and fairies) (Govenar 1988). Miller (1996) suggests that although tattoos are rich in personal meaning for the wearer, meanings often have a basis in cultural practice and myths. For instance, angels may symbolize divine inspiration and protection, clouds may represent the intermediary between heaven and earth, crosses signify the relationship between the spiritual and earthly worlds, devils may personify earthly desire, skeletons may represent death, and fairies symbolize supernatural forces or magic in nature (Miller 1996). It is expected, therefore, that choice of design, size of the design, colors, and location on the body will all be symbolic of life experiences and identity. Further, since tattoos are perceived as permanent, it is expected that choice of design, size, and location on the body involve anticipated regret and risk.

The third theme is risk. Previous research has considered the ways in which anticipated regret affects risky decision making (e.g., Zeelenberg, et al. 1996). Regret is defined as "a more or less painful cognitive and emotional state of feeling sorry for mistakes" (Landman 1993, p. 36). It is expected that anticipated regret for acquiring a permanent tattoo will lead to risk-averse decisions. When considering whether or not to acquire a tattoo, there are at least three types of risk the consumer may consider: social psychological, physiological, and financial (Sanders 1985).

Social psychological risk involves changes in how the consumer conceives of themselves as well as imagined reactions from others. Although tattoos are gaining in popularity, they may still be viewed by many as a mark of insolence. If the consumer anticipates regret regarding social psychological issues, they may choose not to acquire a tattoo, choose a small design, choose a non-threatening design, or choose an easily concealable

location on the body.

The practice of tattooing is highly regulated and even prohibited in many states due to the physiological risks. Although most professional artists take precautions, risk of blood-borne infectious disease is inherent in tattooing (Tope 1995). According to the American Academy of Dermatology, exposure to blood in combination with non-sterile tattooing practices has led to the transmission of syphilis, hepatitis B, and other infectious organisms (Tope 1995). In addition, the potential for transmission of HIV during tattooing is real, although no proved cases have been reported (Tope 1995). In addition to the health issues, the process of being tattooed can be quite painful. It is expected that the more the consumer knows about the health related issues, or the more sensitive they are to pain, the more carefully they will seek out an artist that they trust and studio environment that feels comfortable.

The third type of risk is financial. According to a 1990 unpublished market survey of 10,000 randomly selected American households, 3% of all respondents had a tattoo (Tope 1995). Given that even a small, basic one-color tattoo costs \$80-\$100, this group spent at least \$30,000 on their tattoos. More elaborate, larger, or multi-color tattoos are much more expensive. A tattoo done by a reputable artist that covers most of the back may cost \$5,000. If the consumer travels to a well known artist the price could easily be double or triple what a local studio may charge. Thus, depending upon the socio-economic status of the consumer, it is expected that financial risk may influence the decision to acquire a tattoo, size of the tattoo, number of colors, and choice of artist. If the consumer does not regret the acquisition of the tattoo, they may experience a certain amount of elation. This experience may lead to repeat purchase, and in some cases, maybe even an addiction to the act of becoming tattooed. This leads to the last a priori theme.

The fourth theme is satisfaction and addiction. Given the commitment, possible regret, and risk associated with the acquisition of a tattoo, it is not surprising that the tattoo literature discusses satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Vail 1996, 1997). Although tattoo consumption is usually discussed in the context of a high involvement product leading to significant levels of search and evaluation, many consumers acquire tattoos impulsively (Hoerr 1995, Sanders 1989a). It is expected that impulsive decisions to acquire a tattoo will more often lead to regret and dissatisfaction. Tattoo cover-ups have become an important part of the tattoo industry and tattoo removal has become large enough to justify specialty clinics (i.e., dermatology and laser clinics). Since cover-ups require a larger and more expensive tattoo and having a tattoo removed is nearly always more expensive than the original tattoo, regret and dissatisfaction are clear themes.

Very positive post-purchase evaluation and satisfaction is also a clear theme. Much of the literature discusses very satisfying, almost celestial transformations that potentially can be experienced by permanently altering the body with a work of art. Some researchers even suggest that many individuals become addicted to tattoos (Hoerr 1995, Sanders 1989a). In this case, the consumer becomes a collector, using their body as a vehicle for exhibition and expression.

These four themes together define the expectations of the researchers as they enter the field. Since it is difficult to bracket (in a phenomenological sense) expectations, they inevitably influence observations and findings. By reflecting on expectations prior to fieldwork, the researcher is able to separate expected and emergent themes. This is useful since the purpose of ethnography is more in the context of discovery rather than justification. The next section provides a brief overview of the ethnographic method used by the researchers.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD

Tattooing is one topic that demands a plunge into the waters (Steward 1990). According to Hebdige (1979), immersion in the field continues to produce some of the most compelling and evocative accounts of subculture. Given the symbolic complexity associated with both the choice of design and the act of becoming

tattooed, ethnographic interviews and participant observation in the field are appropriate.

The text for this study was collected over a six month period in 1996. The first author returned to the field briefly in 1997 to follow-up on questions regarding emerging themes. The text consists of over 500 pages of hand-written fieldnotes composed immediately after each participant observation in the everyday activities of two tattoo studios. The first author would generally spend 2-4 hours at a time in one of the studios helping maintain files of tattoo designs, working behind the front desk, sitting with customers as they were tattooed, interviewing customers, and interviewing artists when they were not tattooing. The researcher used "jottings" (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, pp. 19-35) as a mnemonic device in the field. After being removed from the field, jottings were converted into detailed descriptions of the day's activities. In addition to participation in the studios, fieldnotes and photographs were taken at a national tattoo convention and two tattoo art work museum gallery exhibitions. In order to gain a historical appreciation, the first author traveled to the Tattoo Archive in Berkeley, California. The Tattoo Archive is a national museum of tattoo history and collectibles. The researcher spent four days collecting relevant information and interviewing the curator.

Although the primary goal of ethnography is immersion in the life-worlds and everyday experiences of a group of people, the researcher inevitably remains an outsider. Since both "outsider" and "insider" perspectives are important (Rubin 1988, p. 11, endnote 2), the first author decided to reinforce an insider's perspective by becoming tattooed. A cat (ankle) was chosen for the first tattoo and a butterfly (lower front hip) was chosen for the second. Two different artists were chosen, the first was a woman in her forties who had been tattooing for a number of years and the second was a younger male apprentice. By selecting these two artists, the researcher was able to discuss the orientations of both the experienced artist and the apprentice (note: the art of tattooing is passed-on through apprenticeship). The researcher was careful to record in a private journal details of this experience. These notes also became part of the text.

The text was analyzed using a thematic approach to content analysis (Schneider, Wheeler, and Cox 1992). Prominent themes were identified using a dialogal research approach (Rowe, et al. 1989). The purpose of this approach is to make the fieldnotes the subject of dialogue among the researchers. Researchers would generally read the notes aloud stopping frequently to discuss and reflect. Dialogue encourages the untangling of key patterns and relationships (i.e., interpretive tacking [see Geertz 1979]). As new data were collected, they were discussed in the context of previously gathered data and points of similarity and contrast were examined. As themes emerged, they were used to guide the researchers toward relevant literature, further interviews and observations (i.e., grounded reading in data or theoretical sampling [see Strauss and Corbin 1990 and Glaser and Strauss 1967]). Although this ethnography is a work in progress, the researchers collected enough information to discern thematic redundancy. The next section discusses findings in the way of support for a priori and emergent themes.

SUPPORT FOR A PRIORI AND EMERGENT THEMES

Analysis of the text resulted in support for the four a priori themes. In the next section, some passages from the text were included to illustrate the nature of this support. In addition, two themes emerged which have not received attention in the tattoo literature.

A Priori Themes

The first theme was referred to as the tattoo Renaissance. Customers receiving a tattoo interviewed for this study included doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, nurses, police officers, farmers, hair dressers, manicurists, executives, and athletes. The most frequently interviewed client of the two local tattoo studios was a white female in her 20s. One of the recurring themes was that a new clientele is symbolic of a new subculture. The following passage is representative of this theme:

I asked C.W. if he would describe for me the tattoo subculture or if he even thought of it as a subculture. His answer: 'It is definitely a subculture and to describe it...if I had to do it in one word it would be diverse.' He discussed that at one time only rough bikers or degenerats got tattoos, but that today this was just not the case. C.W. still considers tattooing outside the mainstream culture but that those getting tattoos are now coming from every walk of life. All social classes, all types are getting tattoos (fieldnotes 7/12/96).

Although the clientele is changing, many traditional stereotypes remain. These stereotypes are sometimes used by clients to distinguish themselves from what they perceive as the norm. For example, one customer stated: "The reactions are great, no one expects someone like me to have tattoos!" (fieldnotes 6/8/96). This quote helps to illustrate the transition from old to new. On the one hand, the informant is representative of the new tattoo subculture, on the other hand, the informant perceives the norm to still be that only bikers, rebels, and sailors get a tattoo.

A second important theme supporting the tattoo Renaissance is tattooing as an artform. Some informants chose to be tattooed for aesthetic rather than symbolic reasons. These informants explained that tattoos are a way of decorating or adorning the body. Designs were chosen not because they symbolized past experience or personal traits but because they were aesthetically pleasing. Here the focus is on fine art, beauty, taste, and appreciation. Don Ed Hardy states in an introduction to a tattoo art exhibition:

This first comprehensive museum exhibition of images for tattoos surveys the works of over seventy artists in North America, Europe and Asia. Primarily practiced by sailors in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tattooing has evolved from an elaborately codified folk practice to today's sophisticated artform...At best it personifies all art: a celebratory, irrational and eccentric exploration of our physical existence (fieldnotes 7/14/96).

The second theme was the extended self. Using the tattoo to express the inner self was probably the most commonly stated motivation for acquiring a tattoo. As one artist described: "with most clients, it is to bring a little bit or a lot of their inner self out for others to see" (fieldnotes 3/31/96). Another artist comments: "the tattoo is already there inside those who really want it...it is already a part of them, the tattoo artist just brings it out" (fieldnotes 7/12/96). One of the informants that had acquired tattoos from 35 different artists described his tattoos as a "scrapbook" symbolizing his life story:

I asked him if there was one he favored or if any particular one had great meaning. He said, 'they all do.' He told me that he considers his tattoo art work 'his personal scrapbook.' Each and every tattoo remind the informant of a person, place, time or period in his life. A personal scrapbook of one's life or self (fieldnotes 7/12/96).

In this context, the tattoo is part of a system of signs forming a public persona. This persona symbolizes the subject's narrative story. Examples from other interviews include: a Mickey Mouse tattooed to the informant's arm because his grandfather called him "Mickey;" a Road Runner tattooed to the subject's shoulder because his favorite activity was marathoning; a butterfly tattooed to the client's hip symbolizing her birth given name; a rattlesnake design chosen in memory of being bitten and almost dying; a rose tattooed on the wrist for every child and a butterfly tattooed on the ankle for every family member that had died. The first author chose a cat due to her long history of living with and loving cats and a butterfly as a symbol of rebirth or transformation. There were some interesting unexpected findings regarding choice of design which will be discussed later as an emergent theme.

The third a priori theme was risk. The social psychological risk of changing self perceptions, or reactions from

others, was a recurring theme. Many potential clients left the studio without acquiring a tattoo because they feared regret: "they are permanent, how do you know you won't change your mind?" (fieldnotes 6/15/96). Other informants who had acquired a tattoo at some point in the past regretted the decision. One female client with two tattoos on her arm was so ashamed of the design and location, she tried to keep them covered:

'I was only 13 years old when I got them. I wish I would have waited to get them when I was more mature. I don't like what I got and I hate where I got them.' She showed me one on her lower arm and said the other one was on her upper arm. She refused to show me this one. 'I won't even wear a tank top. I don't like how people look at me' (fieldnotes 6/8/96).

The only physiological risk mentioned by informants was the pain involved in acquiring a tattoo. Feeling anxious about the pain, clients would frequently interview artists about the process. Their first question was usually: "how much will it hurt?" The artist would explain that tattoos over the bone (e.g., ankle) will be more painful and if the client had recently consumed alcohol this will also add to the pain.

I have learned that when you have alcohol in your system, the ink does not take very well...the artist tells the customer that his blood is thin and is pushing the ink out as fast as the needle is pushing it in. The artist tells him that the ink will take but that it will take more effort. 'I will have to go over the raw skin with color several times to make sure it takes well. This means more pain for you' (fieldnotes 3/1/97).

Clients often appeared uncomfortable while acquiring a tattoo, turning bright red, appearing sweaty and nervous, or clenching the arms of the chair so tight their veins would swell. Upon seeing others being tattooed, some clients would choose very small designs and a soft fatty part of the body.

Many informants stated that price was an important issue. Some clients chose not to get a tattoo, or preferred smaller designs, due to the price. Other informants selected the apprentice for the work since this is nearly always less expensive (fieldnotes 6/1/96). A few customers negotiated with the artist hoping to lower the price, and if unsuccessful, they would usually leave.

She flipped through the file quickly and asked the artist how much the design would cost. The artist quoted her \$200. After repeating the price '\$200! that's high!' the customer left (fieldnotes 6/8/96).

The apprentice takes the picture back to the artist and comes back with a quote of \$180. The customer complains that it is way too high and leaves (fieldnotes 3/1/97).

The last theme was satisfaction and addiction. The informants who were dissatisfied were usually discussing old tattoos. These were tattoos that had faded from the sun, were of poor quality, or were symbolic of previous chapters in the informants' lives. Other dissatisfied informants claimed that they were too impulsive when choosing the design. These clients were in the studio to acquire "cover-ups," a new tattoo which will cover the old.

Most of the informants interviewed directly after acquiring a tattoo appeared satisfied. The satisfied customer often returned for another tattoo. One client entered the studio stating that they wanted to: "add to their collection" (fieldnotes 6/15/96). Some clients would spend hundreds of dollars every week and sit for hours as their favorite artist would add to their collection. One of the artists suggested: "humans are very addictive creatures and tattoo art seems to be addictive for many people" (fieldnotes 3/31/96). The following passage from the fieldnotes was written at a recent skin art convention:

There was an old man, 60-70 years old who had tattoos all over his body, many had

faded and were sagging with his skin. He entered the contest and won a prize for having the most tattoos. He had over 200. The announcer asked him when he got his first tattoo and his last one. He answered, 'my first one was in 1944 and my last one was yesterday' the audience applauded (fieldnotes 4/20/96).

Some of the informants would anthropomorphize objects that they collected at home by having them tattooed to their bodies. For example, one female informant collects stuffed teddy bears and now has a growing collection of tattooed teddy bears on her body (fieldnotes 6/23/96). Other informants discussed satisfaction with their tattoos in the context of something "spiritual," a real "buzz," or a "natural high" (fieldnotes 6/1/96). This is consistent with both the tattoo and the consumer collecting literatures. For example, Belk, et al. (1991, p. 192) states: "Besides delivering them from evil, collectors also hope that the extraordinary power of collected objects will deliver them from the ordinary world of everyday life into a magical world."

Emergent Themes

The first emergent theme is design versus act. The tattoo literature emphasizes the significance of the design. However, it became evident during the ethnography that both artists and clients find meaning in two separate realms. The first is the design itself. Choice of design may be meaningful for many of the reasons discussed above in the extended self sections. The second realm is the act of getting a tattoo regardless of the design. The literature discusses the meaning of the act through the design. However, there were repeated instances when the design was not useful in order to explain the meaning of the act. For the consumer, there may be symbolic meaning in the design only, the act only, or in both. If meaning is found in both, these meanings may be complementary or contradictory. Thus, the choice of a design and the act of acquiring a tattoo appear to be separate events, marking distinct domains.

'Tattoos should mean something. Even if the design itself doesn't mean anything to you, your reason for getting one should be meaningful.' I asked the artist to explain. He then discussed how the butterfly I had meant more to me than just the design itself (fieldnotes 8/8/96).

The act may symbolize a variety of meanings such as conformity to a reference group (e.g., gang membership), resistance or rebellion (e.g., teenagers rebelling against their family of orientation), or control over one's body.

The artist felt that I [first author] was doing it to make the statement that I was in control, that I wasn't someone to sit around and wait for things to happen. That I could and would go out and grab things by the horn. I discussed with him how I enjoyed the experience of actually getting one and that it did give me some sense of control (fieldnotes 8/8/96).

The second emergent theme is the simulated self. Nearly all of the tattoo literature conveys ideas consistent with the extended self theme. As discussed in previous sections, this theme suggests that the public persona uses a system of signs which reflects the inner self. Thus, the inner self is the real self and the public persona is a simulated self which extends from within. The ethnography discovered a number of instances which did not fit this model. With these cases, the tattoo design was chosen because it reflected media culture imagery. Here, the public persona is symbolizing an image or an idealized fictional self as portrayed in the media. In other words, the informant is reconstructing their public identity by changing their image. The tattoo reflects, not their inner self, but an image which has positive symbolism.

By way of illustration, a number of informants chose to have the Ralph Lauren Polo Horse tattooed somewhere on their body. Most of the informants discussed this design as symbolic of a sophisticated image,

one that was sure to be recognized by the rest of society. In the following passage an artist comments on this choice:

The artist said that he was amazed at how young people come in and pick out designs. He used the Polo Horse as an example: 'the media is partially responsible for giving these kids the idea that by purchasing or using certain products they can change who they are, it is so superficial' (fieldnotes 7/31/96).

In another case the informant came into the studio wanting a tattoo of the Oakley Sunglasses logo. When asked why, he explained that he saw another individual with this tattoo: "this person looked really cool" (fieldnotes 8/8/96). This informant believed that the brand image represented positive symbolism, by acquiring the design in the form of a tattoo, their own identity takes on this sign value. In a third example, a young woman entered the studio and began scanning the walls of flash for a scorpion design. She chose a red scorpion and had it tattooed on her left shoulder. She chose a scorpion because she saw it in the movie "Natural Born Killers" on the actress Juliette Lewis. This informant liked Lewis' image and wanted to emulate and become the character. In the following section, the sociology of Jean Baudrillard is used to help explain the differences between the extended and simulated selves.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The above review of literature and ethnographic account suggests some feasible answers to the research questions stated in the introduction: What motivates particular consumers to participate in this subculture? In what ways is the tattoo used as a form of expression? What is involved in the experience of acquiring a tattoo? Two of the most important themes used to discover answers to these questions are the "extended" and "simulated" selves. The tensions between these two themes parallels contemporary discussions regarding modern and postmodern theories of identity. In order to understand the use of fashion imagery through the premodern, modern, and postmodern eras, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994, original 1981, pp. 121-127) is useful.

"Simulacra" is plural for "simulacrum" which means superficial likeness. Baudrillard's (1994) first order is called "imitation" and corresponds to the premodern era. In the middle ages, the use of consumer goods reflected a rigid class order. One could observe an individual's use of objects and know exactly their social position. This means that choice was severely limited and product ensembles were fixed according to codified rules (i.e., sumptuary laws).

The second order, called "production" (Baudrillard 1994), describes the modern era. During this era, the industrial revolution democratized signs, created the city, increased mobility, and multiplied social roles. As individuals were absorbed into the masses, a distinction between private and public zones became a way of retaining a sense of self (Ewen 1988). Here the inner, private self was protected by a public persona which was constructed through the use of signs. During this stage, the public persona reflects or represents the inner self. Thus, the "extended self" theme is a historical artifact of modernity. Values such as authenticity, veritable, real, deep-meaning, and truth, are all the result of 17th century enlightenment reasoning. The private self represents the truth about the subject and the public persona is a corresponding interpretation which is needed for survival in a large complex social system.

Baudrillard (1994) calls the third order "simulation." This order corresponds to the postmodern era. In this stage, information, electronic, and cybernetic sign systems have blurred the lines between reality and a virtual or simulated reality. Thus, the public persona appears to the individual to be just as real as the private self. In addition, surface meaning is marketable, it can be exchanged for other forms of symbolic capital. In the postmodern era, the public persona therefore becomes privileged while the private self becomes suspect. During this stage, signs no longer represent the person, signs become the person. The simulated self theme

fits well with this stage. Some informants believed that by adopting a symbol, they were changing their image and becoming someone different.

From Baudrillard's perspective, the extended and simulated selves can be understood temporally as representing the transition from a modern to a postmodern culture. Baudrillard believes that industrialized consumer cultures are postmodern and therefore proclaims the death of deep-meaning, the 'real', and truth. Postmodern culture marks the death of the self and therefore the end of history. However, the observations made in this study indicate that society is still predominately modern, with some hint of the postmodern on the horizon. In conclusion, the art, symbolism, and culture of the tattoo Renaissance provides a fertile and creative context to study issues related to symbolic consumer behavior, identity, and the historical functions of fashion imagery.

REFERENCES

- American Business Information, Inc. (1996), "1996 Business Changes Report," Omaha, NE: Marketing Research Division, contact Jeff Ferris, Project Manager.
- Ball, Keith, ed. (1996), "Skin and Bones: Tools of the Trade," *Tattoo*, 82 (June), 76-79.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1981), *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis, MI: Telos Press Ltd.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1994), *Simulacra and Simulations*, Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Belk, Russell W. (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (September), 139-168.
- Belk, Russell W., Melanie Wallendorf, John F. Sherry, Jr. and Morris B. Holbrook (1991), "Collecting in a Consumer Culture," in *Highways and Buyways: Naturalistic Research From The Consumer Behavior Odyssey*, ed. Russell W. Belk, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Bianchi, Robert S. (1988), "Tattoo in Ancient Egypt," in *Marks of Civilization*, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 21-28.
- Blouin, Melissa, ed. (1996), "Tattoo You: Health Experts Worried About Artful Trend," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, Sunday 14 (July), C4.
- Bohannon, Paul (1988), "Beauty and Scarification Amongst the Tiv," in *Marks of Civilization*, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 77-82.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochbeg-Halton (1981), *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Drewal, Henry John (1988), "Beauty and Being: Aesthetics and Ontology in Yoruba Body Art," in *Marks of Civilization*, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 83- 96.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw (1995), *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, The University of Chicago Press.
- Ewen, Stuart (1988), *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, Basic Books,

Inc.

- Foucault, Michel (1983), "The Subject and Power," in Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 208-252.
- Gathercole, Peter (1988), "Contexts of Maori Moko," in Marks of Civilization, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 171-178.
- Geertz, Clifford (1979), "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," in Interpretive Social Science, eds. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 225-241.
- Glaser, B., and A. Strauss (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago: Aldine.
- Govenar, Allan (1988), "The Variable Context of Chicano Tattooing," in Marks of Civilization, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 209-218.
- Gritton, Joy (1988), "Labrets and Tattooing in Native Alaska," in Marks of Civilization, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 181-190.
- Hebdige, Dick (1979), *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, NY: Routledge.
- Hoerr, Lisa, Kathi Conklin, Becky Marusich, and Mitch Griffen (1995), "An Exploratory Investigation into the Acquisition and Consumption of Tattoos," *Southern Regional Proceedings*.
- Krakow, Amy (1994), *Total Tattoo Book*, NY: Warner Books.
- Landman, J. (1993), *Regret: The Persistence of the Possible*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lautman, Victoria (1994), *The New Tattoo*, NY: London: Paris: Abbeville Press.
- McCallum, Donald (1988), "Historical and Cultural Dimensions of the Tattoo in Japan," in Marks of Civilization, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 109-134.
- Miller, Jean-Chris (1996), "But What Does It Mean? Symbolism in Tattoos," *Tattoo Review*, 8(50), 44-49.
- Peterson, Andrea (1996), "Parents Spur Laws Against Tattoos for Kids," *Wall Street Journal*, Monday 16 (September), B1-B2.
- Pollack, Judann (1996), "Kraft Teams Up Brands for Olympic Sponsorship," *Advertising Age*, 20 (May), 30.
- Rowe, Jan O., Steen Halling, Emily Davies, Michael Leifer, Dianne Powers, and Jeanne van Bronkhorst (1989), "The Psychology of Forgiving Another: A Dialogal Research Approach," *Existential Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology*, eds. Ronald S. Valle and Steen Halling, New York: Plenum Press, 233-244.
- Rubin, Arnold (1988), "The Tattoo Renaissance," in Marks of Civilization, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 233-262.
- Rubin, Arnold, ed. (1988), *Marks of Civilization*, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History.
- Sanders, Clinton R. (1985), "Tattoo Consumption: Risk and Regret in the Purchase of a Socially Marginal Service," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 12, 17-22.

Sanders, Clinton R. (1988), "Drill and Frill: Client Choice, Client Typologies, and Interactional Control in Commercial Tattoo Settings," in *Marks of Civilization*, ed. Arnold Rubin, Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Cultural History, 219-233.

Sanders, Clinton R. (1989 a), *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

Sanders, Clinton R. (1989 b), "Organizational Constraints on Tattoo Images: A Sociological Analysis of Artistic Style," in *The Meaning of Things*, ed. Ian Hodder, London: Unwin Hyman, 232- 241.

Schneider, Benjamin, Jill K. Wheeler, and Jonathan F. Cox (1992), "A Passion for Service: Using Content Analysis to Explicate Service Climate Themes," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77 (5), 705-716.

Steward, Samuel M. (1990), *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors, and Street Corner Punks, 1950-1965*, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Stewart, Julie (1996), "Permanent Personal Pointillism: Traveling Tattooist Leaves His Marks on Customers All Over the State," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, Friday, (July), 3B, 6B.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin (1990), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, CA: Sage Publications.

Tezak, Jennie (1996), "Body Art is Making its Mark," *The Arkansas Traveler*, Friday 27 (September), 3-4.

Tope, Whitney D. (1995) "State and Territorial Regulation of Tattooing in the United States," *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 32, 791-799.

Tuttle, Lyle (1996), Personal Interview, Friday 12 (July).

Vail, D. Angus (1996), "Live and Let Die: Affective Maximization for Tattoo Collectors at Conventions," Presented at Qualitative Analysis Conference: Studying Social Life Ethnographically, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (May), 1-29.

Vail, D. Angus (1997), "Angels and Dragons: The Social Meanings of Tattoos," Presented at the Annual Meetings of the Popular Culture Association, San Antonio, Texas (March), 1-27.

Webb, S. (1979), *Pushing Ink: The Fine Art of Tattooing*, New York.

Zeelenberg, Marcel, Jane Beattie, Joop Van Der Plight, and Nanne K. DeVries (1996), "Consequences of Regret Aversion: Effects of Expected Feedback on Risky Decision Making," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, (February, 65 (2), 148- 158.
