THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES THAT PROVIDE THE IMPETUS TO CREATE

SELF-IDENTITY THROUGH INSCRIBING THE BODY

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DEDICATION

This thesis would be incomplete without the mention of Alexander, Bridget and Julie. Thank you for your support and patience during this process. The three of you kept me balanced and focused on what is truly meaningful to me.

This thesis is dedicated to John. Thank you for giving me wings.

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ABSTRACT

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Tattoos, a permanent body modification that has frequently been associated with deviance and lower class sub-cultures, have become increasingly popular in the United States since the early 1990's. In my thesis I examine the shared worldviews of individuals who obtain tattoos by conducting an analysis of six internet communities that promote this sub-culture in order to understand how cultural influences provide the impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body. I will argue that individuals who commit to a permanent tattoo may be motivated by the need to create self identity.

Catherine A. Dobris, Ph.D., Chair

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Historical Functions of Tattoos

Tattoos have existed and served a variety of purposes for thousands of years. As far back as 3300 B.C.E. the "ice-man of the alpha" was identified as possessing fifty-nine tattoos located on various parts of his body (Green, 2005). While the location of many of the "ice-man's" tattoos coincide with areas that are typical acupuncture points, the "ice-man" actually predates the beginning of acupuncture, which was believed to originate in China two to three thousand years ago. It is speculated that his tattoos could have also served as symbols of ethnicity or good luck charms (Green, 2005). Although the purpose of the "ice-man's" tattoos is uncertain, the function of tattoos among other historical cultures is understood. For example, Ancient Greeks used tattoos to mark criminals and slaves, a practice that was adopted by the Romans (Fisher, 2002). The Maori tribes of Aoeteroa (New Zealand) tattooed their faces to communicated information such as achievement, community status, and the design was also used in placed of a signature when signing documents (Green, 2005; Bell, 1999). Sailors of the 1700's relied on tattoos to express religious faith, political beliefs and professional membership, when wealthier and better educated Americans could utilize badges, pins and clothing to declare beliefs and affiliations (Newman, 1998). European sailors of the 1800's continued to utilize tattoos for affiliation and identification, a practice later implemented by American groups such as bikers and prison inmates (Wohlrab, et al, 2006). The historical functions of tattoos were to serve a purpose whether it was to classify a criminal or serve as a mark of personal identification. Craig Burns, curator of "Skin &

Bones: Tattoos in the life of the American Sailor" indicates that "every culture on earth has developed a method of tattooing itself" (Curley, 2009). Historical tattoo designs were not random, but represented meaningful cultural and personal aspects of the individuals that wore them.

Tattoos in Modern Society

Starting in the late twentieth century, tattooing became a popular form of self expression for many Americans. Since the early 1990's the United States has witnessed an increase in the number of individuals who have chosen to become tattooed. Nearly 40 million Americans possess at least one tattoo (Blickerstaff, 2005). In fact, adult Americans aged 25-29 are most likely to possess a tattoo. Thirty-five percent of Americans in the 25-29 age groups have at least one (Green, 2005) however, tattooing is not limited to this younger population. Thirty to thirty-nine year olds account for 28% followed by 18-24 and 40-49 year olds, both at 14%. Ten percent of 50-64 years and 7% of those 65 years old and older boast at least one tattoo (Green, 2005). Moreover, tattooed individuals are not the only evidence of the tattoo craze. According to Ginn (2009) the presence of tattoo parlors in upscale shopping districts and malls is the "surest sign" (Ginn, 2009) that tattoos have "gone mainstream". In 2006 *Tattoo Nation* was the first mall studio, opening in Wayne, New Jersey (Ginn, 2009). Since then, other tattoo shops have opened their doors in malls such as *Ink* in Cambridge, Massachusetts and *Tattoo City* in Lockport, Illinois (Perry, 2009). Despite the current economic slump, the tattoo business has remained steady, with consumers willing to pay anywhere from $75.00 to $150.00 an hour to obtain a tattoo (Ginn, 2009; Perry, 2009). The economy

may in fact contribute to the business success of tattoo parlors because lease rates for retail space are more negotiable, which allow for studios to afford rent that was too expensive past years (Ginn, 2009). It is also speculated that consumers are more mindful about their purchases and want something that is meaningful, yet fashionable (Perry, 2009). For example, Natalie Kearns, a recent college graduate who lives with her parents is willing to spend $80 for a literary tattoo of a French quotation because it is a passage that she has long admired (Perry, 2009). Perry (2009) notes, "such dedication is paying off for parlors across America. At a time when luxury goods are struggling, tattoos appear to be, in not recession-proof, at least recession-resistant." Perhaps due to the permanence of tattoos, consumers believe they are purchasing an accessory that retains its significance season after season (Perry, 2009).

One area of American culture that has not embraced the fascination for tattoos is the military. The historical tattoo trends of ancient sailors are no longer acceptable by the United States armed services. Strict policies about tattoos may either prohibit or prolong acceptance into the military. The U.S. Coast Guard bars new recruits that have visible tattoos that cannot be hidden with clothing, or individuals that have tattoos that covers more than twenty-five percent of a limb (Zezima, 2005). The Army, Navy and Marines also refuse potential soldiers if he or she has a tattoo on the neck, face, head or scalp (Zezima, 2005). The strict policies do not apply to the men and women already enlisted in the service except for members of the U.S. Air Force. Soldiers are not "grandfathered in" and all tattoos must be able to be hidden with a uniform or they must be removed (Zezima, 2005). The quest to maintain professional appearance (Zezima, 2005) through the exclusion of tattoos is also becoming prevalent in police departments across the

United States. Police officers in Kentucky, California, Texas and Maryland are required to cover visible tattoos with uniforms (Zezima, 2005; Reed, 2007). For some officers this means wearing pants and long sleeved shirts in high temperatures in order to maintain a positive public image (Zezima, 2005).

Tattoos in modern society may also indicate celebrity status, personal triumph or serve as an individual memento. As Perry (2009) suggests, tattoos are employed to "communicate something about the person, something they are passionate about or that expresses their unique sense of selfhood". The academic literature supports the concept that tattoos and identity creation are closely associated.

The Relationship between Tattoos and Identity

One of the earliest studies that focuses on identity creation through tattoos is the work of Edgerton and Dingman (1963), who suggests that individuals seek to develop identity when circumstances exist that prohibit identity to fully develop or when identity is stripped away from an individual, such as in a prison or mental institution. Tattoos are employed to relate something about one's self that the individual either wants others to believe or that he or she wants to believe. The created identity is not necessarily based on factual information, but rather the message the individual desires to portray to others.

Vail (1999) examines tattoos as a catalyst for identity change that alters an individual's behavior. Working from Matza's Theory of Deviance, Vail suggests that collecting tattoos is a transformative process that is guided by three stages: affinity, affiliation and signification. Affinity is a commitment to physically change one's appearance by becoming tattooed. Next, affiliation is a psychological development of

learning to be a tattoo collector, which includes the acceptance of a new self image. The final stage is signification where a new behavior is adopted that is considered appropriate for individuals "like that".

Edgerton and Dingman (1963) and Vail (1999) present two relationships between identity creation and tattoos. Whether or not behavioral changes coincide with obtaining tattoos, the literature suggests that individuals are motivated to become tattooed in order to create identity. The association between identity creation and tattoos is so established that occasionally individuals attempt to avoid any change in the "self" while still becoming tattooed. Atkinson (2002) and Irwin (2001) examine negotiating and legitimizing techniques that individuals utilize to counter social perceptions of identity when becoming tattooed. For example, women select tattoos of flowers or birds because the designs appear more feminine that traditional tattoos associated with bikers or sailors (Atkinson, 2002). Similarly, individuals legitimize tattoos by redefining their purpose in the parameters of accepted societal norms, such as celebrating a college graduation (Irwin, 2001).

The importance to re-conceptualize tattoos in order to adhere to social acceptances suggests that identity creation is strongly associated with tattoos. While some individuals implore negotiating or legitimizing techniques to maintain identity, others obtain tattoos to purposely change identity. The literature denotes that tattoos influence the creation, alteration or reinforcement of identity. The literature does not however, address the rhetorical situation that has influenced the surge of tattooed individuals in the United States over the past two decades. The context in which the tattoo trend has taken place is of interest because it provides insight into the influencing

factors that motivate individuals to obtain permanent body modifications.

Communication scholar Littlejohn (2005) explains the importance of culture,

communication and actions, suggesting:

> Many socio-cultural theories also focus on how identities are established through interaction in social groups and cultures. Identity becomes a fusion of ourselves as individuals within social roles, as members of communities, and as cultural beings. Socio-cultural scholars thus focus on how identity is negotiated from one situation to another. Culture is also seen as a significant part of what gets made in social interaction. In turn, culture forms a context for action and interpretation in communication situations.

The significant increase of individuals acquiring tattoos in the United States suggests that

a shift has taken place that has changed how individuals perceive themselves, others and

their communities. The examination of the motivations to obtain tattoos may reveal a

relationship between people's reactions and the cultural events that have contributed to

the alteration of identity perceptions. The exploration may help to identify how the

American culture forms the "context for action and interpretation" that influences the

actions of a significant proportion of the population. In this thesis I will examine the

shared worldviews of individuals who obtain tattoos in order to understand how cultural

influences provide the impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body.

Methodology

This study uses the theoretical foundation of Ernest Bormann to conduct a fantasy

theme analysis of six internet communities that promote a tattoo sub-culture. Bormann

developed Symbolic Convergence Theory from Robert Bale's research on small group

communication (Bormann, 1972). The theory has two assumptions: symbols create

reality and symbols can be shared and converge to create a shared reality (Foss, 2004).

The shared, or social realities created by group members chain out through fantasy themes, which are dramatic interpretations of events, comprised of characters, actions and settings (Bormann, 1990). Collectively, fantasy themes formulate a group's rhetorical vision, or worldview which is instrumental to understanding the motivations of a movement and its followers (Bormann, 1972).

This study utilizes internet communities to conduct the analysis. Online data collection has become an increasingly rich source for research information. Internet communities are but one of the several approaches available through the internet for academic research. Surveys, focus groups and weblogs are other means of data collection (Rhodes, et al, 2003). There are several advantages of online research. Internet access is relatively inexpensive and it is readily available (Rhodes, et al, 2003; Hookway, 2008). Especially pertinent to this study is the access to populations that are otherwise difficult to locate, such as a tattoo sub-culture (Rhodes, et al, 2003). Several studies have utilized fantasy theme analysis in conjunction with web based data collection. For example, Greer (2008) conducted an analysis from an online discussion board following the death of Peter Jennings. Chen (2007) relied on weblogs in order to understand the rhetorical strategies and visions utilized by expatriate in Taiwan. Duffy (2003) examined hate group websites to explicate persuasive strategies embedded in the worldview of four different groups. The utilization of internet communities provides opportunities to further communication studies by presenting alternative means for data collection. Internet communities offer researchers the possibility to examine groups that might otherwise be difficult to locate, but also presents new sources of study, such as online discussion groups that are specific to the internet. Internet communities provide

insight to communication studies by allowing access to diverse and unique groups for examination.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides a historical glimpse of the functions of tattoos beginning with the 3300 B.C.E. discovery of the tattooed "ice-man of the alpha". Next, statistical information is presented about the tattoo population in the United States. The Chapter concludes with an overview of tattoos in mainstream culture, including costs and modern trends.

Chapter Two summarizes past scholarship of tattoos. The literature review addresses past studies about tattoos in modern society. The research explores tattoos as a trend or "ironic fad" because it is a fashion accessory that is permanent. Once statistical information about tattoos and their use as a fashion accessory is introduced the research explores the deviant nature of tattoos. Individuals obtain tattoos in order to undergo an identity change by conforming to pre-conceived behaviors associated with tattoos. A discussion focuses on the legitimizing practices of people who desire to change self identity in comparison to the negotiation tactics implored by individuals who desire a tattoo without conforming to stereotypical conduct. Chapter Two concludes with the specific examination of the relationship between tattoos and created self-identity.

Chapter Three describes the theoretical and methodological foundation utilized in the study. The Chapter includes a review of the development of Bormann's (1972) Symbolic Convergence Theory and comprehensive and explanation and application of fantasy theme analysis.

Chapter Four begins with a description of the data collection and procedure utilized for this study. Through the analysis of six online tattoo communities, this research locates and identifies the fantasy types, fantasy theme and rhetorical vision of a tattoo sub-culture. A discussion follows that explores the research question which seeks to understand how cultural influences provide the impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body. The Chapter continues with the examination of the events that contribute to a culture of fear and how an uncertain environment in the U.S. threatens ontological security. The Chapter concludes with a discussion of the relationship between fear, uncertainty, ontological fear and the dependence of tattoos as a protective cocoon.

Chapter Five offers a summary of the research project. I describe the implications and the contribution that this study will provide toward the field of communication. The limitations of the study are also described. Finally I pose further questions or potential areas of study that could develop from the groundwork of this research.

Throughout western history there have been a range of preconceived ideas about tattoos and the people that wear them. Many of the notions are rooted in the association between tattoos and the supposed deviant nature of those who display them. The analysis of tattoos as a form of identity creation may challenge the antiquated thoughts about tattoos and illuminate communication that reveals a more positive supposition of the art.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tattoos in Modern Society

As noted earlier, the tattoo trend has rapidly increased since the mid to late 1980's (Sweetman, 1999). For some individuals, a tattoo is nothing more than the latest fad that has become popularized in part due to the exposure through the entertainment industry (Kosut, 2006). Celebrities such as Johnny Depp, Sean Connery, Cher and Ben Affleck all have acquired tattoos (Kosut, 2006). Tattoos are also popular with professional athletes. Michael Jordan, Marcus Camby and Shaquille O'Neal are among the fifty percent of NBA players that are tattooed (Kosut, 2006). The tattoo designs worn by high profile celebrities inspire new trends in tattoo art, which replace traditional designs such as skulls and anchors with contemporary motifs (Kingston, 2008). One such trend is exemplified by actress Angelina Jolie's tattoo of the latitude and longitude coordinates of her children's birthplaces on her arm which contributed to a "new-mom" (Kingston, 2008) tattoo fad.

Tattoos are prevalent in contemporary American society and became readily visible in the mainstream public by the late 1990's (Kosut, 2006). The public attraction to tattoos has not gone unnoticed by advertises who incorporated tattoos into print advertisements, such as a cigarette ad by R.J. Reynolds which showcased vintage watercolor tattoos or another display by Dodge that depicted a caliber SE receiving a tattoo (Kingston, 2008). Moreover, tattoo artists are utilizing their talents in venues other than tattoo parlors. Famed artists Mister Cartoon, Ed Hardy and Kiki Smith contributed

their names and designs to clothing, cell phones, cars and crystal, including a $60,000

tattooed vase designed by Smith (Kingston, 2008).

While there is nothing particularly remarkable about fashion trends, historically or

contemporaneously, before becoming too comfortable with the notion that tattoos are a

transitory fad, one important concept that separates a tattoo from any other fashion

statement must be addressed: permanence. For example, Kosut (2006) relates one

twenty-nine year old tattooed woman's perspective on the permanence of tattoos,

observing, "(tattoos) the fad you can't toss away. (My) tattoos will be cool again and I

will get cred from my grandkids" (2006). Kosut (2006) deems tattoos as an "ironic fad- a

popular cultural trend that, due to its permanence nature, cannot be as easily discarded as

a pair of jeans." The permanent nature of a tattoo is perhaps the precise reason that the

fascination with and popularity of tattoos has not diminished over the years. In terms of

fashion accessories, most can be purchased with little knowledge of the production

(Sweetman, 1999), nor are they acquired with the intentions of lifelong wear. The

difference is illuminated by Sweetman:

> A pair of jeans, or a new pair of training shoes, can be consumed and
> displayed as a 'pure sign', in ignorance of the conditions under which the
> material product was fabricated. Tattoos in contrast, *demand* one's
> presence as a producer, consumer and living frame for the corporeal
> artifact thus required (1999).

It is evident that one must be committed not only to the permanence of the tattoo design

that is obtained, but agreeable to the process of becoming tattooed. For many, the act of

obtaining a tattoo is part of the allure. There are typically three stages in the process for

obtaining a tattoo (Kosut, 2006). For many individuals the process begins with creating

and deciding upon the design and where it will be placed on the body. Tattoo artists and

parlors may also be researched to determine where quality tattoos can be obtained and for the cleanliness of the studios. Aftercare is also a factor because a tattoo must be treated to promote proper healing. The process provides a sense of achievement for some tattooees. As one interviewee observes (Sweetman, 1999):

> I get a lot of enjoyment out of planning what to do next, and, indeed, out of the whole process of booking it, finding a design, going up there and chatting to the artist, and looking after his new tattoo.

For some consumers, the pain connected with obtaining a tattoo is also associated with the appeal of the permanent quality of tattoos. Since, unlike a pair of jeans or new shoes, a tattoo cannot be passively purchased, the consumer is an active participant in the process (Sweetman, 1999), which is accompanied by pain. If an individual does not believe that he or she cannot tolerate the pain, he or she is not likely to get a tattoo. Pain, therefore, creates a separation of "have and have nots" as one individual describes:

> you can't, well you *can* buy it, but you can't like, go to the shop and try it on and say," I'll have one of them" and just walk out with it. You've gotta sit there for hours and put up with the pain. So even if you're really rich, if you can't stand the pain, you can't get tattooed (Sweetman, 1999).[1]

The discomfort associated with the tattoo process is similar to an act of initiation for the consumer. A tattoo is not just a design, but it is also representative of the uncomfortable experience a consumer endured to obtain it. The tattoo is symbolic of an individual's courage to withstand the necessary pain that accompanies a tattoo application.

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[1] The examples are taken directly from the online communities utilized for this research and contain original spelling and grammar.

The Deviant Side of Tattoos

There is one more characteristic associated with tattoos that fascinate tattooed and non-tattooed individuals alike, and that is the deviant nature of tattoos.

The historical review of tattoos indicate that in the not too distant past tattoos had primarily been obtained by convicts, prisoners, sailors, and bikers; groups that are classified as *deviant*. How have tattoos worked their way into mainstream culture despite ties with a deviant sub-culture? DeMello (1995) suggests that the media groups' coverage of tattoo events and participants portray a "new culture of tattooing" that alienates tattoos from groups historically associated with tattooing: convicts, prisoners, sailors, bikers. The media attention is focused on the new social class of people who obtain tattoos. Educated professionals are the new tattoo generation who get "fine art" rather than "tattoos" that are "designed by professional artists" rather than "tattooists" (DeMello, 1995). The "new tattoo generation" is introduced through three different forums (DeMello, 1995). First, mainstream media focus on "seedy" groups who used to get tattoos. Once the foundation of who "used" to get tattooed is established a comparison is made with the new generation of tattooed comprised of professionals such as doctors, lawyers and bankers (DeMello, 1995). It is implied that the bikers and convicts who used to get tattooed are a thing of the past and the only groups getting tattooed are the professionals associated with the new generation (DeMello, 1995).

The second forum that introduces a "new generation" is the academic coverage of tattoos which is similar to the mainstream media approach (1995). A distinction between middle and lower class tattoo populations are established, but most of the research is focused toward the middle class and the fine art of tattooing, according to DeMello

(1995). Tattoo publications are the third forum that introduces a "new generation" tattooing population. Publications such as *Tattoo Advocate* and *Tattoo Time* represents a "highbrow perspective" (DeMello, 1995) of the tattoo culture. The presentation of tattoos as fine art and the concept of "new tribalism" were established through these types of publications which continue to ignore groups outside of the "new generation".

The media, academic and tattoo publications attempt to portray a "high brow" image of tattooing by comparing historical "low class" tattooed populations with the new generation of middle class professionals. However, the comparison continues to highlight the deviant nature associated with tattoos with the description of the past connections of bikers, convicts, sailors, (i.e. low class) with tattoos. Why then, is the new generation attracted to the medium? It is at this junction that the concept of self-identity can be introduced. As Millner and Elchold (2001) observe, "If you don't have any identity, you try to recreate your life in such a way that you think you have some. How do you do that? Tattoo some weird design on your stomach." Identity is created and purchased rather than developed through experience.

Vail (1999) suggests that obtaining a tattoo is a "transformative process" that ultimately influences a change of behavior because a new identity has been established. Based on Matza's theory of deviance Vail examines the physical, psychological and sub-cultural changes that accompany becoming tattooed. Vail contends that tattooing is a form of deviance because individuals with several tattoos are still considered to be "outside of the social norms" (1999). Individuals learn the deviance by discovering how to wear and interpret tattoos from other tattooed individuals (Vail, 1999). The desire to

obtain tattoos involves not only a physical commitment to change the look of one's skin

but also the way he or she is perceived by others (1999). Vail explains:

> Becoming a collector requires devotion to a lifestyle that is more marginal
> than that associated with fraternities or "tasteful" flowers. In short, one
> must want to become a collector. This desire is what Matza called
> affinity. In essence, affinity refers to a person's desire to become deviant
> (1999).

It is important to note the difference between "having tattoos" and "tattooed people"

(Bell, 1999). "Having tattoos" involves or two tattoos that are easily hidden, but

"tattooed people" (hence collectors) have several tattoos, in obvious places and are

immersed in the sub-cultural world of tattoos (Bell, 1999; Vail, 1999). Vail attributes the

process of affiliation as the separation between "having tattoos" and becoming a

collector. Affiliation is the psychological process of converting to a new self image

(Vail, 1999) which involves "learning how to feel good about becoming a collector as

well as learning where to place his or her tattoos" (Vail, 1999). Once individuals have

undergone the physical and psychological transformations of becoming tattooed, they

"often re-conceptualize one's life in terms of that deviance" (Vail, 1999). Signification is

the sub-cultural transformation of adopting actions that are considered "appropriate for

people who are *like that*" (Vail, 1999). In the sense of a tattoo sub-culture, "actions for

people like that" involve redefining the skin as a canvas and planning how to place

tattoos on the canvas. The re-conceptualization can present tension however, when

individuals attempt to combine a new tattooed identity with social expectations outside of

the tattoo sub-culture. Vail provides the following excerpt that illustrates the conflict:

> [Before] he became a fulltime tattooer and piercer…his crew chief
> wouldn't let him work with any …tattoos showing. So, he had to get
> long-sleeved t-shirts to cover the tattoos that went to his elbow. He [has

subsequently covered his arms] down to the wrists and is now going on to the tops of his hands. He said that he…is thinking about leaving the collar untattooed and, that way, he can take out the facial piercings and put on a hat and go out in public with a long-sleeved shirt and still look somewhat respectable (1999).

It is not uncommon for tattooed individuals to employ negotiating strategies between societal norms and a tattoo sub-culture. Similar approaches employed to balance societal norms and the desire to obtain a tattoo was discovered by Atkinson (2002) during a three year participant observation of tattoo enthusiasm conducted in Canada. Interviews with 40 women revealed repetitive struggles between the desires to become tattooed with the conventional norms of femininity. Several of the participants use negotiation techniques which aid them to conform to established constructions of femininity (Atkinson, 2002) while also becoming tattooed. One technique was to select "feminine" designs, such as flowers, cartoon characters or small animals rather than more traditional emblems such as skulls (Atkinson, 2002). Selecting areas of the body that could be easily hidden and applying smaller tattoos instead of larger designs also help the women to conform to stereotypical forms of femininity (Atkinson, 2002). Several of the participants use tattoos to aesthetically enhance the body, using the design to reinforce the societal norms of femininity. Atkinson relates one participant's experience:

> I couldn't decide whether or not I was going get tattooed. One of the main reasons was that, I dunno, I guess I never thought it looked lady-like. And all the guys I knew were like "you want to do *what*?" They looked at me like I was crazy…But then I started talking about getting a string of roses tattooed across my lower back, right at the top of my butt. I think it looks sexy, and so do all my male friends. Like, when you go out with a high cut t-shirt on, and low rise jeans, you can see it really well, and it looks great. I've got a pretty flat stomach too, and when I'm dressed up in the right clothes it makes my body look killer (2002).

Vail (1999) and Atkinson (2002) expose negotiating techniques that are employed to balance the societal norms associated with deviance or femininity with the desire to become tattooed. Irwin (2001) found similar negotiating techniques that individuals used when they contemplated getting their first tattoo. Instead of selecting tattoos that would adhere to social norms, Irwin (2001) discovered legitimizing techniques in which individuals re-conceptualized tattoos with mainstream values. Tattoos are redefined as a means to communicate life passages, such as a college graduation. Individuals also use conventional norms to prove they can maintain their responsibility and get a tattoo. Commitment to continued conventional behavior, thoughtful planning of the tattoo and selecting smaller, traditional designs all contribute to "proving" one's dedication to societal expectations while at the same time allow individuals to become tattooed (Irwin, 2001). Irwin (2001) and Vail (1999) examine how tattooing is employed to establish self identity. Several studies consider the concept of identity formation in relationship to tattooing. For example, Edgerton and Dingman (1963) specifically examines identity as a motivating factor to become tattooed and suggests that individuals have either been stripped of their identity or have failed to develop acceptable identity and use a tattoo to create self identification. Edgerton and Dingman (1963) forms their idea according to Straus:

> Identity is connected with the fateful appraisals made of oneself—by oneself and by others. Everyone presents himself to the others and to himself, and sees himself, in the mirrors of their judgment. Tattoos may function to indicate membership, class, wealth or experiences in order to communicate something about oneself, a relationship or a possession, which the individual believes he or she possesses, whishes to possess and wants others to believe that he or she possesses.

Therefore, the creation of identity does not necessarily correlate with factual events or

characteristics, but relates to what the individual desires to communicate. For example,

Kosut (2006) relates the store of a twenty-five year old man who received a tattoo as a

teen:

> I: Tell me about when you first started thinking about getting a tattoo.
>
> M: Well, I mean, the people that I wanted to be like all had tattoos when I was a kid.
>
> I: Kid meaning a teenager?...Who were the people that you wanted to be like?
>
> M: Yeah 12 and up. Well I have always wanted to be a musician…You know I liked to rock at an early age. You know, I loved it when Guns n' Roses came out and they had cool tattoos, you know?

In this example, the teenager obtained a tattoo to emulate the rock star he admired and to

convey the image of being a musician to others. Kosut notes that even if Matt did not

become a musician, his tattoos would indicate his commitment to "rock" (2006).

Kjeldgaard (2005) further supports the idea of a tattoo as a vehicle for identity creation,

whether real or imagined: "In the late modern age it has been claimed that individual

identities have become reflexive articulations of imagined biographies (Giddens, 1991 as

cited in Kjeldgaard, 2005). Martin (1997) explores the concept of imagined biographies

in his research on tattoos and teenage motivations. Once 13year old participant explained

he had an image of dice marked by day and month of his birth tattooed to his arm to

commemorate his father who was killed in a motorcycle accident. The tattoo was

evidence of their connection, and in fact, became the relationship itself since the child

had little recollection of his father (Martin, 1997).

The literature indicates that the motivations for obtaining a tattoo are grounded in past stereotypes of deviance. Individuals implement negotiating strategies to balance societal expectations with the desire to be tattooed. Some individuals commit to a change of behavior in relationship with being tattooed, while others choose to reinforce conventional manners, proving that tattoos do not affect their values and beliefs. Although the literature presents several perspectives about the motives for becoming tattooed, they are primarily focused on the individual. The rise of popularity of tattoos since the early 1990's suggests there are cultural influences that contribute to the incentive to obtain tattoos. An examination of a tattoo community provides an opportunity to explicate the cultural incentives that motivate a significant number of the population to acquire a tattoo.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis

In the early 1970's Ernest Bormann began a research project that focused on the impact of religion on the culture of the United States. The research led him to discover a connection between religious and secular speaking and allowed Bormann to document a rhetorical style that he labeled "the rhetoric of romantic pragmatism" (Bormann, 2001). During his research, Bormann came across the work of Harvard University Professor, Robert Bales. Bales published observations of small group communication in *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior* in 1970 (Bormann, 1972). Bales and his associates found twelve categories for a content analysis of small groups. Bales described one category "shows tension release" that was later changed to "dramatizes" that led to "group fantasy events" characterized through physical changes of group members such as "becoming excited, interrupting one another, blushing, laughing and forgetting their self-consciousness" (Bormann, 1972). Bales discovered a "sharing of fantasies" among small group members when dramatizing communication occurred (Bormann, 2001). The members became caught up in a drama consisting of characters and events in a setting removed from the here and now (Bormann, 1972). Bormann broadened Bales' research to include mass communication through his research on romantic pragmatism (Bormann, 2001). Bormann expanded upon this category and developed symbolic convergence theory.

Bormann describes symbolic convergence theory as a general theory that explains "the causes of common consciousness on the part of group members" (Bormann, 1990). The theory has two assumptions: symbols create reality and symbols can be shared and converge to create a shared reality (Foss, 2004). When members participate in dramatizing communication, group fantasy chains result (Bormann, 1990). The term fantasy should not be confused with make believe stories, but is defined as "the creative and imaginative shared interpretations of events that fulfills a group's psychological or rhetorical need to make sense of its experiences and to anticipate its future" (Bormann, 1990). A group fantasy is often mirrored of real life events, situations and people (Bormann, 1990). Social realities are created and chained out through fantasy themes. A fantasy theme is "the pun, figure or analogy that characterizes an event" (Bormann, 1990). Because fantasy themes explain or interpret events, the plotline and characters of a fantasy theme will differ between varying groups. Three factors explain why group members enthusiastically share, passively respond or reject fantasies: "(1) the members' past hang-ups and their current baggage of personal and previously shared fantasies; (2) the common concerns that group members have because of their experiences in the group; and (3) the rhetorical skill with which participants dramatize during the group meeting" (Bormann, 1990).

When fantasy themes share similar plotlines, characters and settings, fantasy types are developed. A repetition of the same scenario is used by the members to conform new events and situations to the belief system of their group culture (Bormann, 1990). A rhetorical vision is developed through the "swirling together of fantasy themes to provide a particular interpretation of reality" (Foss, 2004). The examination of the social reality

contained in a rhetorical vision is a means to explicate and understand the motivations of a movement and its followers (Bormann, 1972).

Bormann and Cragan (1996) expanded the analysis procedure through the characterization of the life cycle of a rhetorical vision. Three phases outline the advancement of a rhetorical vision: consciousness creating, consciousness raising and consciousness sustaining. Consciousness creating communication provides insight into the "sharing of fantasies that generate new symbolic ground for a community of people" (Bormann, et al, 1996). The consciousness raising communication reflects how fantasies are shared that attracts newcomers to become members of the newly created community (Bormann, et al, 1996). The consciousness sustaining phase is focused on keeping the members that share the vision committed to the vision (Bormann, et al, 1996). The three phases provide an in depth analysis into the rhetorical vision because it specifically focuses on the communication that contributes to the symbolic convergence and the real world situations from which it is created.

Fantasy theme criticism is an appropriate method for this research because the dramas present in fantasy themes are specifically related to the groups "here and now situation" and "relationship to the external environment" (Bormann, 1972). Bormann explains:

> Individuals in rhetorical transactions create subjective worlds of common expectations and meanings. Against the panorama of large events and seemingly unchangeable forces of society at large or nature the individual often feels lost and hopeless. One coping mechanism is to dream an individual fantasy which provides a sense of meaning and significance for the individual and helps protect him from the pressures of natural calamity and social disaster (1972).

Symbolic convergence theory was employed to analyze eating disorders (McCabe, 2009, *Resisting Alienation: The Social Construction of Internet Communities Supporting Eating Disorders*), prison incarceration (Novek, 2005, *Heaven, Hell and Here: Understanding the Impact of Incarceration through a Prison Newspaper*) and online postings (Greer, 2008, *Media Literacy and Internet Discussion Lists: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Online Postings Following the Death of Peter Jennings*).

The first step of a fantasy theme criticism is to establish if a symbolic convergence has taken place. A symbolic cue is an indication that symbolic convergence has occurred because a rhetorical community has been formed. It is "a code word, phrase, slogan or nonverbal sign or gesture" (Bormann, 1990) that triggers the expectant emotion associated with a shared fantasy. It indicates the establishment of at least the beginning of a group culture because only those who share in the fantasy will respond accordingly (Bormann, 1990). Examples of symbolic convergence, according to Bormann (2001) include Reaganomics, McCarthyism, New Measures, and The New Birth. New Tribalism is a symbolic cue that encompasses the current tattoo culture. The ideology of new tribalism considers the act of tattooing as a ritual that provides meaning in individual's lives (DeMello, 1995). The "new generation" tattoo populations encompass a diverse group that is composed of individuals from a variety of professions, and ages and includes both male and female.

Data Collection

The communicative devices offered through the internet are a way to gather data to analyze the rhetorical strategies that develop the fantasy themes and rhetorical vision

of a tattoo sub-culture. Weblogs, online communities and postings, and websites provide

instantaneous and rich data to conduct research. Bormann (2001) offers further support

for the advantages of utilizing the internet as a research tool:

> The most impressive change for fantasy theme analysis since the first
> printing of this book has been the development of new technologies. The
> symbolic convergence theory seems to have been serendipitously designed
> for the World Wide Web, the Internet, satellites, cyberspace, the digital
> world, virtual reality, and whatever new purveyors of fantasy theme on the
> horizon (Bormann, 2001).

The worldwide estimate of internet users exceeds one billion people

(www.internetworldstats.com, 2009). This figure indicates that nearly 25.6 percent of the

world population access the internet (www.internetworldstats.com, 2009). The

abundance of information is changing the scope of academic research that presents

advantages, challenges and ethical issues for the researcher.

Online data collecting maybe approached in several ways: surveys, focus groups

or observation. Rhode, et al, (2003) presents several advantages of online research that

apply to all methods of data collection. Electronic dexterity is one advantage that allows

the researcher to post a questionnaire quickly by translating it into HTML language. An

added benefit is that questions can be easily added, deleted as information is gathered.

Web based surveys are user friendly and are often in the format as traditional self

administered surveys. The data from electronic surveys often has a reduction of error

because there is greater opportunity to include explanatory materials and menus which

provide a clearer understanding of directions. The exclusion of interviewer interpretation

and data entry also decreases errors.

Rhodes, et al, (2003) also points out the advantage to the available number of respondents and the access to populations that otherwise are not easily accessible, which is especially pertinent to the study of a tattoo sub-culture. The participants for a research project are available from unlimited geographical and cultural boundaries with an array of interests or affiliations. Duffy (2003) benefited from the availability of "hidden populations" in the study *Web of Hate: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Rhetorical Vision of Hate Groups Online*. The author used the internet to understand the persuasive messages of hate groups through an analysis of the websites of white Nationalists, Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, and black separatists.

Low cost is yet another advantage of web based research (Rhodes, et al, 2003). It is relatively inexpensive to conduct web based research requiring at a minimum an internet connection (Hookway, 2008). Web based research also lowers costs since the need to train interviewers of provide questionnaire administration is eliminated (Rhodes, et al, 2003).

Despite the advantages of web based research, there are challenges associated with this type of data collection. There is a potential for sampling issues when administering an online survey. Researchers are able to document the number of visits a website receives but it is not possible to count the active or passively recruited respondents that declined to participate in the research (Rhodes, et al, 2003).

Educational, economic, racial and gender biases are a potential concern for web based research. Rhodes, et al, (2003) calls attention to the "digital divide" in the United States, which indicates that a greater proportion of individuals that have access to the web are younger, better educated, has a higher income and are male Caucasian.

Ethical considerations must also be addressed when conducting web based data collection. At the forefront is the provision of anonymity and privacy to research participants. Free servers such as http://anonymizer.com guarantee anonymous internet access (Rhodes, et al, 2003). A link through the website connects participants with the URL addresses of research surveys, though participants must visit the data collection website first (Rhodes, et al, 2003).

There are two schools of thought toward the subject of privacy associated with weblogs and postings: first, the archived data is publically available, therefore no participant consent is necessary. The second consideration is the postings are written with the expectation of privacy and therefore consent is necessary (Hookway, 2008). The "fair-game domain" position however leans in favor of the first argument:

> Blogs are firmly located in the public domain and for this reason it can be
> argued that the necessity of consent should be waived. Further, blogs are
> public not only in the sense of being publicly accessible and heeding
> Waskul and Douglas's (1996) warning- but also in how they are defined
> by users. Blogging is a public act of writing for an implicit audience. The
> exception proves the rule: blogs that are interpreted by bloggers as
> "private" are made "friends only". Thus, accessible blogs may be
> personal but they are not private (Hookway, 2008).

Greer (2008) relied on postings for a fantasy theme analysis following the death of Peter Jennings. The author indicates that privacy of the individuals was ensured because most who posted comments did not include their names. The only identifier was the individual's log in name. The author did not reference names in the research furthering the guarantee of individual privacy.

Rhodes, et al, (2003) indicates that a standard for informed consent for web based data collection has not been adequately established. Potential respondents can be

presented with an electronic consent form but it is not possible to know if the research

project is truly understood.

There are also methodological challenges associated with web related research.

Schneider and Foot (2004) highlight some of the questions that have been presented

about web based research:

- What forms of communicative actions are being inscribed on the web, and how do they change over time?
- How do the actions of web producers enable and/or constrain the potential actions of web users?

The authors suggest that traditional approaches to social research may not be

adequately suited for web based research and advise three approaches for analysis.

"Structural" or "feature" analysis (Schneider and Foot, 2004) use individual websites as

the unit of analysis, focusing on the elements of the website, such as the number of pages,

order, or the features on the website. "Studies of this type enable an understanding of

network structures on the web, but inferring the meaning or "substance" of those network

structures can be difficult to infer from large-scale mapping studies" (Schneider and Foot,

2004).

Another approach is a "socio-cultural" analysis of the web (Schneider and Foot,

2004). A socio-cultural approach "seeks to highlight the attention paid in this genre of

web studies to the hyperlinked contest(s) and situatedness of websites-and to the aims,

strategies and identity-construction processes of website producers- as sites are

produced, maintained and/or mediated through links" (Schneider and Foot, 2004).

The last approach is relevant to the proposed study of a tattoo sub-culture. A

"discursive" or "rhetorical" (Schneider and Foot, 2004) analysis focuses on the content of

a website. "Studies using a discursive/rhetorical approach, especially those that take

broad views of what constitutes text, contribute significantly to our understanding of the

communicative phenomena on the web" (Schneider and Foot, 2004). There is an

abundance of research projects that have implored a variety of web based resources to

collect data for rhetorical analysis. Greer (2008) utilized postings from an online

discussion board after the death of news anchor Peter Jennings. The postings were

analyzed in order to "understand the impact of news media at an interpersonal level by

examining the perceived characteristics of news media at an interpersonal level by

examining the perceived characteristics of news workers, the role of television news in

the daily lives of the public, and the audience itself" (Greer, 2008). Chen (2007)

depended on weblogs to explicate the rhetorical strategies and rhetorical visions utilized

by expatriates in Taiwan. Duffy (2003) gathered information from hate group websites to

examine the persuasive strategies embedded in the worldviews expressed by four

different hate groups. Meyers (2006) relied on the virtual community Secondlife.com to

examine "the communicative practices of minorities in cyberspace (Meyers, 2006).

McCabe (2009) also relied on a message board of an online group to examine how

"members of pro-eating disorder groups construct their social reality". Each of the

studies presented conducted web based data collection coupled with fantasy theme

analysis, which successfully yielded insight to the communicative strategies that were

utilized.

     Online communities were utilized to gather data in order to understand how

cultural influences provide the impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body.

The communities were located at www.Livejournal.com. Communities that were

devoted to tattoos with other sub-cultural concepts such as piercings, alternate life-styles, and sexual behaviors were excluded. Eighteen online communities dedicated to a tattoo sub-culture were located. Thirty percent of the communities were selected with a random start. During the week of June 16-20, 2009, the postings for each of the six communities were counted, which resulted in 1,297 postings. A systematic sampling method with a random start was used to select 30% of the postings. The sampling technique yielded 389 postings. The main subject postings were considered for analysis but threads within the postings were not.

After the postings were selected each was analyzed in order to isolate the character, action and setting themes. Two fantasy types were developed from the fantasy themes and developed the rhetorical vision. Analysis of the rhetorical vision reveals a shared reality that is situated in real world events which offers an explanation of the impetus to obtain a tattoo.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF ONLINE COMMUNITY POSTINGS

At the core of symbolic convergence theory are two premises: symbols create reality and symbols can be shared and converge to create a shared reality (Foss, 2004). The analysis of internet communities reveals insight into the shared reality of the tattoo sub-culture. The exploration suggests a common worldview that reflects an American culture of fear which is influential to the motivations to obtain tattoos,

Development of Fantasy Themes

Two fantasy types emerged from the tattoo community postings. The fantasy type "experience needs to be materialized" is developed from fantasy themes centered on emotions being transformed from conceptual feelings to visible keepsakes. The second, "make the most out of life" focuses on elements that contribute to a happy life. The convergence of the fantasy types constructs the rhetorical vision "remember the past to make tomorrow meaningful".

Fantasy Type: Experience Needs to be Materialized

Four fantasy themes contribute to the fantasy type "experiences needs to be materialized". The sanctioning agent of each theme is permanence because it is not sufficient to remember an experience with only a picture or other artifact. It is necessary for the experience to become eternalized through a tattoo. There is a wide array of experiences and emotions depicted in the plotlines of the fantasies, but the motivation is

to preserve the event in the form of a tattoo as a permanent reminder of the emotional experience.

Fantasy Theme: Be Prepared

A reoccurring plotline is present among individuals who experience and overcome personal difficulties. The situations differ among the writers, but typically they reference how past intrapersonal conflicts prepare them to cope with future problems. One blogger explains that a tattoo of a cherry blossom branch is symbolic of feminine beauty and strength which aid her to overcome self confidence issues. Writers are often the dramatic personae in the plotline, creating a man versus himself or woman versus herself scenario, but the obstacles in the scenario may also become characters. The individuals battle depression, suicide and worry and frequently describe emotions or states of mind with human characteristics. One individual refers to her battle with the depression monster, while another writes about her fight with bi-polar disorder:

> Because J. K. created the dementors when she was depressed, and I have many depression crises on my bi-polar disorder, so, it's like the dementor of my life, whenever it shows up I think about the worst moments of my life, so I have to fight it with good memories. So, it would be a reminder, to think about the good things instead of the bad whenever I feel depressed, send in a patronum against it.

The tattoo is also a character in the plotline that connects the past to the future. Regardless of the past conflict, individuals want a permanent reminder of the event. The reasons for a permanent reminder vary. For some individuals it is a means to equip themselves to fight the same hardship should it reappear in the future, such as the individual who writes:

> This tattoo is also for remembrance of my mind. When I lose it. When
> the depression monster gets me.

For others, the tattoo serves as a daily reminder of how to live, such as the individual who

had recently lost 50 pounds and tattooed the word "choice" on the wrist of the hand with

which she holds her folk, as a reminder that she has the option to live healthy, every day.

Others choose to have a tattoo to remind themselves of broader issues such as the

individual who opted to have her tattoo applied off center as a reminder that nothing is

perfect.

Fantasy Theme: Tribute

Writers describe how a tattoo commemorates an individual, experience or

concept. A tribute to a deceased loved one reoccurs most frequently. Typically there are

two main characters in this fantasy: the individual with the tattoo and the deceased friend

of relative. As in the "be prepared" fantasy theme, there is little, if any personal

information provided about the individual with the tattoo. The emphasis is on the

deceased and provides a glimpse of the personal information about that individual: a

favorite object or poem, the year of their birth or death or their initials. The personal

information provided is almost always transformed into the tattoo design.

Once again, the tattoo, the permanent reminder, connects the past to the future.

The past is situated in a setting of grief during the time of the death. Quite frequently it is

also situated in a place where the deceased lived, a specific time of happiness, or where a

particular activity was performed. The future is vaguer and simply implied as an ongoing

tribute to the deceased. One individual writes:

This was a pencil sketch done by my kindergarten teacher who is amazingly talented. Her and my dad were really good friends and he always admired her artwork and she was an amazing singer. In fact, she used to give me private voice lessons when I was a little kid. Anyways, my dad died 3 ½ years ago from prostate cancer. My dad was everything to me, and I really want my first tattoo to be in memory of him. I used to call him Papa Bear because when I was little he used to tell me his hunting stories and I always loved the ones where he would run into bears out in the woods. He also used to go hunting for bears and I thought he must've been the strongest person in the world if he could down a bear. My dad bought this from Mrs. Smith (my kindergarten teacher) at a school auction when I was in 2nd grade and it was his favorite piece of artwork that we had in our house. Recently I got it back from my mom and I would love to get this on my right shoulder, like more towards my back on my shoulder blade.

In this description, the setting is in the past, first when the writer was in elementary school. Then it progresses to the future, when the father died. The description of the future is omitted; however, the implication of an eternal memory of the father is implied because of the permanence of the potential tattoo.

Tributes are not limited to the deceased, however. There are a variety of experiences and objects chosen by individuals to memorialize. In this type of tribute fantasy, the individual has selected to obtain a tattoo in order to pay tribute to something meaningful in their lives. Honoring friendships, horses, and receiving a Master's degree are some of the objects or concepts that individuals pay tribute. For example, one individual choosing a bus tattoo to memorialize her relationship with her best friend notes:

So I went home for thanksgiving this week and my best friend came with me. We are both pretty big transit nerds. We both live in Chicago and ride the EL everywhere. We just take it to random places sometimes. So when we came home for thanksgiving we figured we would honor our love for each other and transit we decided to get tattooed. I don't have a picture of hers just mine. But hers is exactly like mine just red. She lives off the red line and I live off the blue lines.

Tributes to fictional characters were also memorialized through a tattoo, which serves to connect the real world to the fantasy world of fictional characters. One individual gives this reason for wanting the tattoo "Half of what I was" a quote from the *Harry Potter* series:

> …in honor of George and the death of Fred. Together they were whole,
> and I always felt that George would feel like he was missing his other half.

Despite the difference in settings and characters, the writers obtained tattoos in order to materialize an experience of emotion that is personally meaningful.

Fantasy Theme: Because I love…

The plotline of this fantasy is very simple. There are typically two characters: the person with the tattoo and the object that he or she loves. The postings for this fantasy are typically very short, with no more information besides "because I love….". Although the fantasy is simplistic in terms of characters, setting and action themes, it is the most specific in terms of the storyline. The individuals literally write the same thing "because I love" with the only difference being what they love. The setting is not an actual place. It is often depicted through a date or era. For example, one individual selected a 1930's version of the character Peter Pan. The sanctioning agent is permanence, fulfilled through the use of a tattoo to materialize an emotion or experience. The tattoo designs are unique because they are often a representation of the actual object the person loves. For example, one writer posted a picture of her tattoo, of two strips of bacon. Other examples of this fantasy theme are listed to illustrate the variety of objects individual choose to recognize.

"I Love Snape and I always knew he was good!!!"

"I really do love bacon and wanted to share my latest ink"

"so I really want to get something Disney inspired. Disney means so
much to me.

"That's my EYE of HORUS…(My obsession with ancient Egypt)."

The tattoos in this story line epitomize the fantasy type "experience needs to be
materialized". The writers have elected to preserve and proclaim emotions that appear to
be unattached to a specific experience. Despite a reference to a specific situation the
individuals display a need to materialize their feelings in some tangible medium.

Fantasy Theme: I Love It

Writers often attribute human characteristics to their tattoos. Individuals describe
loving the tattoo, which implies a relationship between the individual and the tattoo. The
setting has been limited to the body of the individual, although occasionally the tattoo can
represent another environment associated with the design. Ultimately, however, the
individual writes of the love of the tattoo as an intrapersonal experience, limited only to
the one who possesses it. This fantasy supports the fantasy type of "experience needs to
be materialized" because the individual expresses love for an object in a way that
suggests it has taken human characteristics, thus becoming more than ink in the skin, but
a possession. For example, these tattoo descriptions from several writers:

" I seriously love it so much, I want to make out with it every time I see it.

"The heart is so freaking beautiful and awesome! I go back in a couple of
weeks for color."

"After two sittings my first tattoo is more or less finished, needs a couple
of minor touch ups still. I am in love with it."

"I just got tattooed on Wednesday. I kind of really love her. I go back for colour…sometime."

"This is rather large tat- and it's a veritable paragraph of prose. But…this bit of passage means a lot to me, quite obviously…and well…something just are what they are. I Love it deeply."

The writers describe their feelings about their tattoos in the same manner an individual would describe their feelings about a person. The storyline is similar to the "I love it" fantasy in that the plot is void of an actual experience or memory. The fondness is explicitly directed toward the tattoo which perhaps is related to the experience of obtaining the design. In which case the writer has created and eternalized the experience of becoming tattooed within the tattoo itself.

Fantasy Type: Make the Most out of Life

A micro analysis was conducted on the tattoos that were phrases and words and categorized according to themes, which developed the fantasy type "make the most out of life". The sanctioning agent for this fantasy type is universalism. Whereas the motivations for obtaining tattoos in the fantasy type "experience needs to be materialized" were based more frequently on individual experiences for individual satisfaction, the messages of the textual tattoos are designed to motivate everyone, everywhere to appreciate life. The literary statements that were tattoos also serve as a guide and reminder for the wearer.

Fantasy Theme: Strive to do Better

Writers exhibited the desire for self improvement. The literary selections for

these tattoos suggested the writers wanted to change for the better, but had not yet

achieved their goals, as exemplified by the following tattoos:

> "If you wanna be somebody and go somewhere, wake up and pay
> attention."
> "All of us are in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars."
> "Choices show who we truly are, more than our abilities."
> "No power in the universe can stop me."
> "Thru difficulties to the stars."

The character theme present in the text suggests the main character is everyone. The

frequent use of the word "we" connects the reader of the tattoo with the owner of the

tattoo. The tattoo becomes a slogan of wisdom rather than a personal statement or

experience. The action theme is directed toward reaching goals and striving for

betterment. The drama takes place in life, the world of the living.

Fantasy Theme: Death is Inevitable, but it is not the Ultimate Power

This fantasy theme also takes place in life, or the world, and death is recognized

as part of that environment. Death is a character that is feared but also accepted as a part

of life. There are more important things than death: things worth dying for and loved

ones. The statements once again are directed at everyone, indicated by the repetitive use

of the word "we" and the lack of personal reference. The textual tattoos that formed this

fantasy theme are:

"What's comin' will come and we'll meet when it does."

"There are things worth dying for."

"There ones we love never really leave us."

" 'til death."

"Remember you will die."

Fantasy Theme: Live with Love and Dreams

The textual tattoos that construct this theme are once again universal: statements about living life, directed at no one specifically and toward everyone that reads them. The setting of life is also repeated. The action is directed at the importance of love within the life setting. The textual tattoos that construct this fantasy theme are:

"Give into love or live in fear."

"Forget regret or life is yours to miss."

"Where your treasure is there will your heart also be."

"It does not do well to dwell on dreams and forget to live."

"Age is foolish and forgetful when it underestimates youth."

"My soul be still, and wait without hope; for hope would be hope of the wrong thing; wait without love, for love would love of the wrong thing."

Whereas the fantasy theme "death is inevitable" is centered around textual tattoos that serve to remind people to remember the concepts that are more important than either life or death, the story line in this fantasy theme reminds everyone and the wearer to live life to the fullest. The context of the textual tattoos may be used to reinforce the belief that life is temporary and advocate that a minute of living should not be squandered.

Fantasy Theme: Life Slogans

Not all textual tattoos are in the form of a phrase or quotations. There were seventeen single word tattoos collected in the analysis. Of the seventeen words, *truth* and *dream* each appeared three times and *always* (*forever*) appeared four times. The "universal" sanctioning agent is the apparent because the tattoos hold meanings that can be understood by everyone. This fantasy theme connects the fantasy type "experience needs to be materialized" with the fantasy type "make the most out of life" because the words suggest the importance of truth and dreams and permanence. Whether truth and dreams are actually present in life, they are at least what appear to be desired. In communication studies it is understood that the most frequently used words in a culture may reveal what is important in that society (Littlejohn, 2005). The need for permanence is represented by the words "always" and "forever", once again stressing the importance of eternalizing life's experience.

The Rhetorical Vision: Survival in a World of Fear and Pain

The rhetorical vision constructs a social reality that sees the world filled with obstacles that interferes with the important emotional, non-materialistic attitudes that contribute to a meaningful life. The participants see themselves as victims who continually work to triumph over the tribulations presented by the world, emerging as heroes who are committed to living a meaningful life by memorializing the values that are important to them.

In the vision the world is a place that is defined by constant grief, pain, depression and uncertainty. Life is a temporary activity that individuals attempt to enjoy and give

meaning. The difference between the "world" and "life" shape the rhetorical vision of

the members of a tattoo sub-culture. The world, which is filled with obstacles, is the

villain that is represented by the loss of loved ones, mental disease, depression or

emotional hurt. The members of the vision see themselves as the victims who suffer pain

and sadness due to the hardships presented by the world. Death is also a villain that is

also a permanent, inescapable force that no one can overcome. The important elements

of life are conceptualized by the textual tattoos. Individuals should value *truth*, *dreams*,

and *permanence* (*always*). It is implied that life is temporary and individuals should take

advantage to love, life without regrets or forget to live. The villains of the world prevent

the victims from successfully performing the act of "life", robbing them of the people and

emotions which they valued. The commitment to a meaningful life transforms the

victims to the heroes in the vision, which portrays them as a group that is persevering

against the obstacles of the world.

The worldly villains are persistent in the vision, a permanent placement in the

lives of individuals. The motivations of the members are to live a meaningful life. This

is accomplished by employing a permanent reminder of what they value, in the form of a

tattoo. A tattoo eternalizes the events, people and triumphs that individuals have (or had)

in their lives so they are emotionally equipped to face future difficulties. A similarity is

the function of a scrapbook. Abbott (2007) explains the purpose of a photograph in a

scrapbook:

> On the page of a scrapbook we find a story behind the subject of pictures.
> This additional hermeneutic component of scrapbooking expresses the
> drive to remember events and people in certain ways.

A comparison is exemplified in the fantasy theme of "be prepared". Individuals experience a difficult or emotionally painful event, but successfully reconciled their emotions to overcome the situation. The individuals choose to remember the event as one where he or she demonstrated strength and perseverance, thus influencing their self perception. If the individuals had, instead, remembered the events as situations where they were victims that were unable to overcome the difficulties presented by the world, their self perceptions, and interactions with others would have undoubtedly been different. The depiction of how events, experiences and people are remembered either in a tattoo or a scrapbook is associated with the relationship between memory and identity formation. There are four different types of memory, each with a different function (Abbot, 2007): Semantic memory stores words and meanings; propositional memories recall specific types of information such as facts or dates and; procedural memory stores information that is related to the performance of tasks (Abbott, 2007). The memory that is influential to identity creation is episodic memory, which stores and recalls events that have been experienced. The manner in which an individual remembers an event, person or place shapes how he or she relates to him or herself and other people in their environment (Abbott, 2007). The application of episodic memory function in connection with tattoos suggests that the victims in the rhetorical vision implore a method to construct memories of events into a permanent reminder that will equip them to face the challenges presented by the continual presence of the world villains.

As a new relationship emerges between tattoos, identity and the worldview of individuals with tattoos, the function of the tattoos is also redefined. The meaning of a tattoo is not held within the design, but rather by the event or person the design

represents. It was previously mentioned that the fantasy themes collectively shared similar plotlines that position group members as forging through the obstacles presented by the villains of the world in order to live meaningful lives. The tattoo is symbolic of this worldview, thus indicating that a rhetorical community of a tattoo sub-culture has been formed.

Addressing the Research Question

The tattoo serves as a daily reassurance of the important concepts in an unpredictable world of harm and violence. The environment that has been created by the villains is one that is dominated by fear which has become prevalent in the American society and is in part advanced through the mass media (Altheide, 1997). Simply by looking at the daily newspaper or tuning into the evening news, American's are warned of an extensive list of concerns: "bioengineered, corn, spinach, identity theft, the poor, the rich, racism, sexism, the ozone hole, drug companies, cellular phones, vaccines, water, video games and predators who could kidnap our children" (Brown, 2008). These examples of what Americans should fear illustrate the rise of the "problem frame" a discourse that conveys "danger and risk" as central features of the environment (Altheide, 1997). The frequency of the use of fear in the text of news reports escalated sixty-four percent in the *Los Angeles Times* rising from 4,519 in 1985 to 7,415 in 1994 (Altheide, 1997). *ABC World News Tonight* used fear 173% more from 1990 to 1994, although there were approximately 3,000 references to fear between August 1989 and January 1, 1995 in all ABC news shows (Altheide, 1997). The impact of the media's use of the

problem frame is influential on people's perception of the dangers in their environment.

Consider this statement from the *Los Angeles Times:*

> Despite clear evident showing that Americans today have a comparative
> advantage in terms of diseases, accidents, nutrition, medical care, and life
> expectancy, they perceive themselves to be at great risk and express
> specific fears about this. According to numerous public opinion polls,
> American society is a very fearful society—some believe "the most
> anxious, frightened society in history." Indeed, 78 percent of Americans
> think they are subjected to more risk today than their parent were twenty
> years ago, and a large source of this perception is crime news coverage
> (1994).

The media's presentation of the news through a problem frame influences the public

perception of fear; however, there are other sources that contribute to the feelings of fear

which so many Americans experience.

American surroundings are filled with customs, rules and displays that insinuate

individuals are consistently threatened by danger. Not only are people constantly being

reinforced that there is a chance that a dangerous event could occur, they are often left

frustrated by the warning since they are not offered any real actions for security

(Lampman, 2003). Take for instance, warning the general public to be on high alert

without issuing specific actions to be taken for protection (Lampman, 2003). Americans

are frequently confronted with similar circumstances that support a culture of fear.

Kathryn Shields highlights two situations that were established in the response of a

fearful country:

> Consider this: After Columbine and other school shootings, metal
> detectors sprang up in *urban* public schools across the nation. Of course,
> Columbine was not only a wealthy *suburb*, but involved suicidal boys who
> outgunned the security guards. Other school shootings occurred outside
> the schools, making metal detectors useless except to scare the tar out of
> everyone and create the impression of a school as a fortress and of
> schooling as unsafe.

> Before Oklahoma City, large amounts of money were spent on courthouse security. After that event and now 9/11 it is virtually impossible to either enter a public building without passing through a metal detector nor can you legally park near one. Of course, none of those actions deal with the actual threat: an *illegally* parked truck bomb, as was used in Oklahoma City. We act as if a mad bomber bent on mass murder will be deterred by the threat of a parking ticket (2006).

It is presumable that the threat of receiving a parking violation is not intended to deter would be terrorists, but to call attention to vehicles parked in a prohibited area. However, these safety measures and others like them may instill more feelings of fear than security for Americans. It seems unlikely that the dangerous events that have brought about these security measures can be separated from the safety they are meant to guarantee. But, despite the media problem frame, regardless of the seemingly senseless security precautions, Americans have witnessed an abundance of events, both dangerous and deadly that give reason for their fears.

Terrorism

Many established safety measures were developed because of the terrorist related events that have occurred in the United States over the past two decades. Terrorism is not a new phenomenon for the United States but it was relatively rare to occur in the United States. In 1979 the American Embassy in Tehran was overthrown by young militants, capturing and holding hostage the staff for 444 days (Schorr, 2000). The kidnapping of 17 Americans by Iranian back guerillas followed in the 1980's (Schorr, 2000). Obviously, America was not immune to terrorist's acts, but the country had not yet experienced any recent attacks on U.S. soil. The 1993 bombing of the World Trade

Centre, which left six dead and over one thousand people injured (*Terrorism in the United States*) "ushered in a new understanding of the international terrorist threat confronting the United States" (*Terrorism in the United States*). Just a mere two years later on April 19, 1995, Americans were faced with another act of terrorism, this time however, the assault came from one of the country's own. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Lynn Nichols bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 169 men, women and children and leaving nearly 800 injured (*Terrorism in the United States*). The event replaced the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing as the worst terrorism event to take place in U.S. history (Burke, 1995). Before Americans could recover from the Oklahoma City devastation they were shocked by the explosion of a pipe bomb that sent nails and screws through a crowd at the 1996 Summer Olympics at Atlanta, Georgia (Sack, 1996). The bombing killed one and injured 111 people. On September 11, 2001 a series of terrorist attacks replaced the Oklahoma City bombing as the worst terrorism event to take place in U.S. history (Barnard and Kowalczk, 2001). Within eighteen minutes two hijacked passenger jets crashed into the World Trade Centre Towers. Less than an hour later the Pentagon was hit by an aircraft and another passenger jet crashed in western Pennsylvania (Barnard and Kowalczk, 2001). The death toll from the Trade Centre attacks exceeded 2,500 individuals. The acts of terrorism against the United States since 1993 help to explain the results of the 2003 Gallup Poll which indicated that "fear of war and feelings of fear in this country" tied for the number one concern for Americans and fear of terrorism followed third (Lampman, 2003). The following year it was revealed that half of the respondents in a poll conducted by the Council for Excellence in Government were concerned that a terrorist act would strike their home or place of work

(Lee, 2004) and seventy-three percent were anxious and concerned about terrorism in general (Lee, 2004). Two years later 46 percent of Americans still felt "uneasy or in danger" and 48% indicated that life had only "somewhat returned" to what it was like before the 9/11 attacks (Roberts, 2006). The uncertainty of when, where and how terrorists will strike have left Americans vulnerable and afraid.

School Shootings

School shootings have also produced uncertainty for our society. Schools are not immune from violent acts that have taken the lives of students and teachers. It was previously mentioned that the use of metal detectors in primary and secondary schools is once source that initiates fear among the American public (Shields, 2006). Shields (2006) suggests that these types of security precautions advance feelings of fear rather than promotes a sense of safety. Shields' (2006) argument is based on the Columbine High School shooting as the typical scenario for which a school shooting could occur: a suburban school, suicidal boys and shootings that take place outside of the school, rendering a metal detector as useless. Although Shields' line of reasoning may maintain some logic, it is difficult to argue against the desire to protect school students and staff given the overwhelming number of middle and high school and college shootings over the past decade. Perhaps most notable is the April 20, 1999 Columbine School shooting in Littleton, Colorado. Two male students entered into the 1,900 student school and opened fire, killing 12 students, 1 teacher and inuring 23 (Cloud, et al, 1999). The two teens committed suicide before authorities could reach them. In 2005 nine people were killed at the Red Lake Indian Reservation, Minnesota (Fox News, 2007) prompting a re-

examination of staffing schools with armed guards to protect students from would-be

gunmen (Trotter, 2005). Approximately 6,500 police officers are already assigned to

select schools across the nation due to the "Community Oriented Policing in Schools

(COPS)" grant program (Trotter, 2005). The program, which was established in 1999,

provided $35 million in three year grants to pay for armed officers in schools (Trotter,

2005). However, similar to Shields' debate against metal detectors, there is doubt as to

the effectiveness of police officers with firearms in schools. There was an armed guard at

Columbine School and though shots were exchanged with the gunman, he was not able to

detain the boys (Trotter, 2005). There were two unarmed security guards at Red Lake

High School. While one assisted students the other was shot twice and died at the scene

(Trotter, 2005). Determining how to secure a school building against potential threats is

challenging. The need to protect college campuses from similar situations is a

comparable concern. There were 42 major school shootings from 1997-2007 while there

were only 8 campus attacks over the last fifteen years. Although the frequency of

university shootings is far less, the casualties are not. On April 16, 2007, a gunman

opened fire in a dormitory and classroom at Virginia Tech, killing 33 people and injuring

26 more before taking his own life (Smith, 2007). Once people have been directly and

indirectly exposed to an unpredictable massacre on an innocent community, ensuring a

sense of security is problematic.

Child Abductions

It is estimated that in the United States only115 children are abducted each year

by a non-family captor (Duenwald, 2002). For those children abducted by a family or

non-family kidnapper, an alert system is in place that notifies the public to watch for the missing child. America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response, or Amber Alert was established in 1996 after 9 year old Amber Hagerman was abducted and murdered near her grandparent's home in Arlington, Texas (Bennett, 2008). It may appear curious as to why child abductions create concern for Americans since relatively few children are taken each year and a national security system is established to help locate them. First, the statistics are chilling:

> About 40 percent of the time, abductors who take children for sexual purposes kill the victims, said Dr. Finkelhor, who compiles child abduction statistics for the Justice Department. In 32 percent of the cases, the children are seriously injured. A fourth of abductor-molesters are sadistic, deriving pleasure from their victims' suffering, according to a study by Dr. Robert A. Prentky, of F & P associates, a forensic psychology practice in Boston. Eight percent of child molesters over all are considered sadistic (Duenwald, 2002).

Also, when an abducted child is murdered, the act typically occurs within the first three hours of being taken (Bennett, 2008). By the time it is noticed that a child is missing and an Amber Alert is issued, the window of opportunity to locate and save the victim maybe closed (Bennett, 2008).

The specter of child abductions may also create fear for Americans resulting from the nature of the disturbing cases that have occurred over the past ten years. For example, a Wrentham, Massachusetts teen disappeared from her hometown August 3, 2001 in what police referred to "as one of the worst sex crimes they had ever seen" (Baker, 2001). The girl met her abductor through a chat line on the internet and later agreed to meet in person. The 15 year old was taken by a Long Island couple and help captive for a week before she was able to telephone for help. The couple and one other

man, whom the couple "loaned" the victim to for two days was charged with the

following:

> According to the authorities, Mr. Warren was charged with kidnapping, 10
> counts of sodomy, 6 counts of rape and 1 count of sexual abuse; Ms.
> Loschin was charged with 8 counts of sodomy and 1 count of sexual
> abuse; and Mr. Montez, who was arrested Saturday, was charged with 3
> counts of kidnapping, 5 counts of rape, 5 counts of sodomy and
> endangering the welfare of a child (Baker, 2001).

In yet another high profile kidnapping, 14 year old Elizabeth Smart was abducted from

her bedroom when an intruder cut through a screen window. The kidnapper took the girl

at gunpoint from her bed, warning her 9 year old sister that he would harm Elizabeth if

she warned her parents (Murr and Peraino, 2002). Nine months later, Elizabeth was

reunited with her family. Her captor, Brian D. Mitchell had been employed as a

handyman for the family and became fixated on Elizabeth, taking her to fulfill religious

convictions of polygamy (Allen, 2009). Although these two girls were reunited with

their families, there are instances when the children are never found or are murdered,

such as Samantha Runnion and Danielle van Dam, two Californian youth who were

seized and found murdered (Robertson, 2002). The statistics indicate that the probability

of a child being taken is relatively low, but an unsuspecting midnight break-in or a

daylight abduction coupled with horrifying treatment and potential murder rationalizes

fear because just one hurt or murdered child, especially when that child is yours, is one

too many.

Disease

The potential of a disease epidemic is cause for alarm. When the disease is

unknown, rendering a cure impossible, fear becomes rampant. AIDS is one such disease

that baffled physicians who struggled to name the ailment when it first surfaced and have

yet to develop a cure twenty years later (McGinn, 2001). In 1981 the unidentified

ailment was confined to the homosexual community, but by 1982 children and

transfusion recipients began to show similar symptoms (McGinn, 2001). Physicians did

not know how to treat the mystery illness; they could not even identity its origin

(McGinn, 2001). It would take three years before that discovery was made, (Kalb, et al,

2003) nor would effective treatment become available until 1997 (Gerlach, 2006).

The fear of disease in America is perhaps warranted. When AIDS first appeared

in the United States, physicians, the public and victims faced an unidentified killer. By

2001 nearly 450,000 individuals in the U.S. died from the disease (Gerlach, 2006). Since

the onset of AIDS new diseases emerge every few years and the uncertainty of their

severity and source cause Americans to panic. From February to April of 2003 SARS

infected more than 2000 people and killed over 100 people worldwide (Redfearn, 2003).

In comparison to the worldwide population that figure is relatively small, so why the

concern? The prominent reason the public focused on SARS was because it was an

unknown disease. There was little information about the symptoms or the method of

contraction, so people that developed a cough became fearful that it was SARS

(Redfearn, 2003). Tracking the cause of SARS was reasonably swift, as it took only

seven weeks to identify the agent that causes it (Kalb, et al, 2003). In contrast it took

seven years to determine the source from which Lyme disease derived (Kalb, et al, 2003).

Currently, Americans are keeping a close eye on H1N1 as the new strain of influenza

spreads to pandemic proportions (Grady, 2009). President Obama declared the disease as

a national emergency, preparing for the expectation that the second wave of the ailment

would return "with a vengeance" (Calmes and McNeil, 2009). Worldwide 5000 people

have died from H1N1 (Calmes and McNeil, 2009) which further public fears and

perceptions of a situation that is surrounded by uncertainty (Grady, 2009). The spread of

unidentified disease in global proportions and the ambiguity that surrounds the

emergence of unrecognized conditions contribute to the formation of a fearful culture.

Food Safety

      Another phenomenon that promotes fear in the American culture is food safety.

Officials began to fear that a threat to the food supply could be utilized as another form of

terrorism after Anthrax caused the deaths of five people in 2001 (Weise, 2004). The

bacterium was sent through the mail, which caused officials to speculate on the possible

methods that terrorism could be executed. The U.S. had already witnessed one known

terrorist attack on food in the late 1980's when members of an Oregon cult tainted salad

bars with the salmonella bacteria (Birmingham Post, 2001). There were no

acknowledged attempts on the American food source but people were still confronted

with issues of food safety. In 2003 a cow was discovered with bovine spongiform

encephalopathy, also known as mad cow disease, in Canada (Krantz, 2003). Canada

supplies the U.S. with only 7% of beef and cattle yet there was still panic (Krantz, 2003)

which was evident in the plummeting shares of fast food hamburger chains McDonalds,

Wendy's and Jack in the Box (Krantz, 2003). Fears one again escalated later in 2003

when the disease was discovered in a Washington state dairy cow (Weise, 2004). The

Food and Drug Administration called for the removal of cattle blood and litter from

poultry cages from cattle feed, which are the carriers of mad cow infection (Weise, 2004)

but it was difficult to curb the public fear of the disease because it is incurable and always

fatal. As the concern of contracting mad cow disease subsided, Americans still remained

wary about food-borne illnesses. A survey of 2,500 Americans revealed that 93 percent

were concerned about food safety (Progressive Grocer, 2007). A similar survey

conducted in 2009 concluded that at least 47 percent of Americans were still concerned

about food contamination (Progressive Grocer, 2009). Occurrences of salmonella have

contributed to the fear of food-borne illness.   As recent as 2009 America experienced

one of the largest food recalls ever due to a salmonella outbreak in peanut products which

was linked to 520 reported cases of sickness and eight deaths (Schmit and Weise, 2009).

Prior to the 2009 peanut industry contamination, American attention was directed at

China where 53,000 infants were affected by melamine-contaminated dairy products

(Yardley, 2008). Melamine is used illegally to artificially raise protein levels in milk

and is the same additive that was found in pet food that causes the sickness of thousands

of pets in the United States in 2007 (Yardley, 2008). Currently the USDA's Food Safety

and Inspection Service is working to develop new standards to reduce instances of

salmonella and E.coli contamination, but fears may be difficult to curb due to what Bill

Marler, a food safety litigator, cites as one of the major problems of addressing food

safety:

> Part of the problem with how we currently deal with food-borne illness
> cases is we wait until people get sick and die, and then we announce an
> outbreak. It seems that the focus here is a bit on preventing it before we
> have sick and dead people, as opposed to counting the bodies after
> salmonella or E.coli is out of the barn (Black and O'Keefe, 2009).

Food safety, like the other fear inducing phenomena presented, is surrounded by uncertainty. It is difficult to feel confident in the safety of food when the trustworthiness is evident only after consumption.

The Loss of Ontological Security

The inability to predict, and therefore, to protect oneself or others against violent acts such as terrorism, school shootings, child abductions, fear of food safety and fear of disease is frightening, even if the probability of an individual actually confronting one of these phenomena is relatively low. For example, Ruby points out that auto accidents pose a greater risk of threat that results in approximately 40,000 deaths a year, yet more people are fearful of terrorism than riding in cars (2004). The notion of normalcy is explored in order to understand why people are more fearful of seldom occurring violent events. When a situation or environment is perceived as normal, it is considered as a "peaceful and safe environment" (Misztal, 2001) where there is no cause for alarm. Giddens (1991) explains that normal appearances mean the social world is "safe and sound to continue on with the activity at hand with only peripheral attention given to checking up on the stability of the environment". For example, Ruby (2004) points out that in order to drive to work, an individual must trust that other drivers share similar beliefs about life so they will also follow the rules of driving. Each day people conduct similar routines that are governed by the expectation f normalcy. Borrowing from McSweeny (1999) Ruby suggests "The routines and predictability of life provide the essential order without which social action would be literally impossible" (2004). The importance of routine and predictability are vital to reducing anxiety, as Ruby explains:

Everyday life is so full of potential dangers that individuals cannot possibly process them all. Threats are both physical and social. Novel or infrequent events are simply impossible to know in advance. Situations where assigning probabilities is impossible are called hard uncertainties (Mitzen). Hard uncertainty reduces objectively the confidence actors can have in probability assignments. Pulling these together Giddens argues that all social actors intrinsically know that behind the routines of daily life, chaos lurks. Constant awareness of such chaos would generate tremendous anxiety making it extremely difficult to reconcile competing threats and take any action at all.

Ruby (2004) utilizes the September 11, 2001 attacks to illustrate how the breach of routine and predictability cause individuals to fear terrorism more than auto accidents. Thus, as previously indicated, an estimated 40,000 deaths occur from auto accidents each year (Ruby, 2004) yet people continue to ride in cars. Auto accidents are within the normal expectations of social order. While not specifically predictable, auto accidents are to a degree an expected part of daily life, a part of normalcy. The terrorists' attack of 9/11 violated the expectations of normalcy, "using violence in contexts where it is unexpected and generates surprise" (Ruby, 2004). The expectations of normalcy were manipulated first by the security measures at airports, which are a safety response to previous experiences with terrorism. Passenger concerns of hijacking were minimized by the expectation that safety measures would either "discover or deter" any potential threats (Ruby, 2004). The expectation of a hijacking is typically about extortion (Ruby, 2004), so using the aircraft as "quasi-guided missiles" violated the perceptions of the situation. The violation of normalcy during the 9/11 attacks amplifies public fear. Ruby explains:

Thus the condition of possibility for the 9/11 attacks included the normal appearances and routines constitutive of basic trust. This is what gives terrorism its extra normal character. It invalidates the mechanism and routines by which the threat of danger is mediated, threatening death and chaos simultaneously. The routines upon which normality depended and could no longer be trusted, the environment no longer safely ignored—

even though terrorism remains a rare event with extremely low probably
of any individual falling victim (Ruby, 2004).

The inability to trust in reality of "persons, social institutions, science and the state"

(Ruby, 2004) challenges individual ontological security. Developed by Giddens, Ruby

(2004) defines ontological security as "the degree to which basic trust is successful in

keeping out the existential anxiety and the dread that would otherwise be an

overwhelming aspect of an individual's existence". Ontological security is strengthened

when the routines of day-to-day life are predictable and dependable enabling individuals

to know what to expect, which in turn prepares them for proper interaction and responses

to given situations (Ruby, 2004). Ontological security is a basic need and is principally

guided by the attachment of routines (Mitzen, 2006). It is threatened when the cognitive

perception of the environment is challenged, such as in cases of trauma (Mitzen, 2006) or

"during times where there is no clearly designated threat but rather a multiplicity of

threats that exhibit unknown and ambiguous properties nonetheless experiences as

threatening" (Ruby, 2004). The culture of fear that America is experiencing could be

explained by "threats that exhibit unknown and ambiguous properties" stemming from

the rare, but far from isolated, random and injurious acts that have transpired (Ruby,

2004). The arbitrariness of the tragic events undermines the basic premise of ontological

security, which is that "actors fear deep uncertainty as an identity threat" (Mitzen, 2006).

When faced with uncertainty, individuals struggle with ontological *in*security, leaving

them confused as to which dangers to confront and which to ignore (Mitzen, 2006). That

is to say, they do not "know how to get by in the world" (Mitzen, 2006). The importance

of predictability and "taken-for-granted-safety" is paramount for ontological security as it

reinforces an individual's placement in the social world which in turn guides their actions

in a manner that makes sense to them (Ruby, 2004). The security that individuals need is

that of the self, rather than of the body (Mitzen, 2006). When individuals have a

subjective sense of "self" the ability to "enable and motivate action and choice" is

developed, thus developing identity (Mitzen, 2006). Mitzen explains:

> Individuals need to feel secure in who they are, as identities or selves.
> Some, deep forms of uncertainty threaten this identity security. The
> reason is that agency requires a stable cognitive environment. Where an
> actor has no idea what to expect, she cannot systematically relate ends to
> means, and it becomes unclear how to pursue her ends. Since ends are
> constitutive of identity, in turn, deep uncertainty renders the actor's
> identity insecure. Individuals are therefore motivated to create cognitive
> and behavioral certainty, which they do be establishing routines (2006).

Social order is created by developing a "cognitive cocoon" (Giddens, 1991). Giddens

(1991) developed the notion of a "protective cocoon" from Goffman's concept of

Umwelt, which is "a core of (accomplished) normalcy with which individuals and groups

surround themselves" (Giddens, 1991). The cocoon is the foundation of trust that makes

a "viable Umwelt" possible (Giddens, 1991). Individuals manage existential threats by

developing a cocoon that deflects the need for "action and choice" (Mitzen, 2006). This

is accomplished by rationalizing the risk of probability, such as determining there is a

minimal chance of being killed in a plane crash (Giddens, 1991) or by deferring time and

space, which situates the individual in another dimension where safety is not threatened

(Giddens, 1991). Mitzen (2006) expands on the protective cocoon in relationship to

developing basic trust in their cognitive world, which she refers to as a "basic trust

system":

> The mechanism generating basic trust is routinization which regularizes
> social life, making it, and the self, knowable. Routines are internally

programmed cognitive and behavioral responses to information or stimuli. Some are strictly personal but social relationships are an important source of routinization. Whether person or social by definition routinized responses are unthinking or habitual-options are not weighed. Information is not updated. In fact, this suppression is the source of their security generating power. By giving actors automatic responses to stimuli, routines pacify the cognitive environment, bound the arena of deliberative choice. Routines thus sere the cognitive function of providing individuals with ways of knowing the world and how to act, giving them a felt certainty that enables purposive choice. They also serve the important emotional function of inoculating the individual's choice against the paralytic, deep fear of chaos.

The protective cocoon is important for the development of a stable self, especially when environmental predictability is undependable, as in times of crisis, such as wars or plagues because the experiences disrupt the normal assumption of order and safety (Ruby, 2004). The chaotic nature of such events challenges one's actions because actions either reinforce or contradict identity (Mitzen, 2006). Since identity influences action, and in turn action sustains identity, action must be sustainable over time (Mitzen, 2006). Predictability, established through a protective cocoon, is therefore an important component to the dynamic process of identity and action (Mitzen, 2006).

The Cultural Influences of Inscribing the Body

The assumptions that underlie the concepts of ontological security, protective cocoon, predictability and identity can be utilized to understand the research question of how do cultural influences provide the impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body.

A loss of ontological security has occurred for many Americans because of the culture of fear that is promoted through the media frame due to the severity and

unpredictability of events that have occurred over the past two decades. Terrorism, school shootings, child abductions, fear of disease and, lack of food safety, induce fear in members of our society because each of the phenomena violates the expectations of a normal social order. The routines and expectations associated with each of the occurrences were disturbed. For example, schools are not normally perceived as a place of danger in the majority of middle class, American neighborhoods. Children are protected by instituting fire drills, tornado drills, and playground supervisors. Most schools have a nurse of a procedure to follow if a child is ill. As with schools, individuals normally perceive their homes as a place of safety and do not expect to have the security breached by intruders abducting their children in the middle of the night. Americans count on purchasing food that is safe for consumption and for diseases to be identified and contained. Each day Americans perform the daily acts of sending their children to school, grocery shopping, putting their children to bed or allowing them to walk home from school. Americans readily interact with others throughout the day without wearing masks to protect themselves from disease. The death, harm and exposure that has resulted from the terrorist acts, school shootings, child abductions, tainted food and emergence of unidentified disease has challenged the routines that Americans normally trust. These events have called attention that not everyone is willing to engage in the same belief system about life that ensures that the same rules will be obeyed, which renders the environment as a place that can no longer be trusted.

A comparison of the rhetorical vision and ontological security suggests the cultural influence of uncertainty and fear, which is clearly present in our society, is reflected in the worldview of the tattoo sub-culture. There is a relationship between the

impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body and the uncertainty and fear that is dominant in both the American and tattoo cultures. The tattoo is a means to re-establish a sense of normalcy and predictability in an environment where previous social expectations are threatened through the repetitive exposure of danger.

The rhetorical vision constructed through a fantasy theme analysis revealed a social reality described as a world filled with obstacles that interfere with the important emotional, non-materialistic attitudes that contribute to a meaningful life. The participants see themselves as victims who continually work to triumph over the tribulations presented by the world, emerging as heroes who are committed to living a meaningful life by memorializing the values that are important to them.

The normal appearances of a "peaceful and safe environment" (Mitsztal, 2001) are missing from this worldview. The obstacles, or "hard uncertainties" (Mitzen, 2006) that individuals repeatedly confront threaten the fundamental sense of safety, thus hindering the basic trust of other people (Giddens, 1991). The feelings of safety are absent from the rhetorical vision, but the important elements of life are not. The analysis of the textual tattoos revealed that individuals should value *truth*, *dreams*, and *permanence*. They know that life is temporary so it is important to love, life without regret and to cherish the moments of life, which the villains or uncertain dangers consistently threaten. The characters of the vision implore the memories of meaningful events and people into permanent reminders that will equip them to face the challenges presented by the continual presence of the world villains. This utilization of the tattoo serves as a protective cocoon. As a cocoon, the tattoo reproduces the cognitive world by permanently memorializing the important events or people that provide a certain

trustworthy and safe environment for the wearer. In other words, the tattoo provides

routine, which creates a cognitive and behavioral certainty (Mitzen, 2006) that gives the

individuals automatic responses to the stimuli of the social environment (Mitzen, 2006).

The permanence of tattoos makes them an inherent part of the individual rendering it as a

source of routinization. It is this routinization "which regularizes social life, making it

and the self knowable" (Mitzen, 2006) that motivates action, which in turn creates

identity.

Tattoos help to satisfy ontological security by minimizing the hard uncertainties

of the world by "imposing cognitive order on the environment" (Mitzen, 2006). The

cognitive cocoon, materialized through a tattoo, provides individuals with a sense of

predictability and trust in their cognitive world. Knowing what to expect in their world

helps individuals to know the "self" because they know how to respond to their

environment. Out of 149 postings that described the purpose for obtaining a tattoo, 85

postings made reference that could be interpreted as forms of "Umwelt, the moving world

of normalcy which the individual takes around from situation to situation, which orders

contingent events in relations to risk and potential alarms"(Giddens, 1991). For example,

one writer obtained textual tattoo "Dream to Destine". She explains that the word destiny

is misspelled because as a child she spelled it incorrectly. The tattoo is one inch by one

inch, a concept from "V for Vendetta". The writer states: "Our integrity sells for so little,

but is really all we have. It is the very last inch of us, but within that inch, we are free".

Another writer explains her textual tattoo of "Providence" which means divine

intervention. She obtained the tattoo because she needs to remember that she cannot

control everything. These examples illustrate cognitive cocoons where the individuals

define normalcy in terms of values. They can be seen as a way to "get by in the world" by focusing on important internal beliefs that guide their actions. Writers also created Umwelt by obtaining tattoos of representations of family members. One writer accomplished this with a tattoo of a penguin that represented a toy penguin that her father gave to her. She explains this design because "Dad has my back now". The tattoo provides a sense of security and protection which helps the woman face obstacles because the connection with her father is part of her every day routine.

The community that was devoted to Harry Potter tattoos yielded the most postings that could be scrutinized as formulating a cognitive cocoon. Common tattoos were "dark marks" which refer to eternal life, or of a "snitch" which stands for enlightenment of life (Harrypotterforseekers.com). Other writers created a cocoon through textual tattoos such as "It does not do well to dwell on dreams and forget to life", "All is well", "Always" and "Where your treasure is so also will be your heart be". These tattoos provide a general outlook that guides individuals in their response to existential threats. They help to "deflect the hazardous consequences that thinking in terms of risk presumes" (Giddens, 1991) replacing it with philosophical thoughts that guide their actions.

The application of ontological security in relationship to the examination of the shared worldview of individuals who obtain tattoos suggests that individuals seek tattoos to create and reaffirm the "self". The tattoos serve as a cognitive cocoon that allows the individual to trust and predict their social reality, which creates routine. Routine helps to sustain a stable self because cognitive and behavioral responses to information are reinforced through a "way of knowing the world and how to act, giving them a certainty that enables purposive choice". Although the research has established a possible

relationship between self-identity and the impetus to obtain a tattoo, the outcome has

suggested an association that is more positive than originally speculated.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In the present study, a fantasy theme analysis of six internet communities was examined in order to understand the possible cultural influences that provide the impetus to create self-identity through inscribing the body. The research exposed differing motivations for becoming tattooed for the purpose of identity creation other than the explanations highlighted in the literature review. The new perspective of tattooing suggests a cultural transformation has occurred that affected the belief system and communication practices of a large population, specifically the adolescent populace of the 1990's.

The previous literature focuses on motivations for becoming tattooed that fulfill external purposes. To become tattooed is to model the latest fashion trend. Kosut (2006) and DeMello (1995) both indicate the "commodification of tattoos", either portrayed as "fine art" or as the "ironic fad". The tattoos are mainly obtained for attention, or as a newly acquired accessory. The motivating influences rely more on celebrity status than cultural situations. Identity creation is limited to the transformative process introduced by Vail (1999) of a purposive change of behavior for individuals that belong to an alternate sub-culture. Identity creation is an outward display of attitude or actions in which individuals utilize tattoos to purposely define themselves to others (Edgerton and Dingman, 1963). The results of this study suggest that tattoos provide an internal approach to self-identity. The tattoos are employed to reaffirm emotional relationships and triumphs in order to strengthen ontological security. The previous literature focuses

on the tattoo design where as the research of this study reveals the importance of the

social order that the tattoo helps to create.

The recognition that a tattoo is employed to create a cognitive cocoon to sustain

identity calls forth the need to specifically examine the adolescent population during the

1990's. Thirty-five percent of Americans in the 25-29 age group have at least one tattoo,

and following close behind is the 30-39 age group with 28% having a tattoo. The next

age groups 18-24 year olds and 40-49 year olds fall to 14% of the population. The

highest percentage of Americans with tattoos would have been on average 8-14 years old

during the dramatic events that were ushered in during the 1990's and when the

popularity of tattoos began to surge. These statistics suggest a possible correlation

between the traumatic events that took place and threatened ontological security. The

connection between self-identity, the cultural influences to become tattooed and the

demographic statics provide a basis for the exploration of the concepts in relation to the

communication strategies developed by adolescents during the cultural upheaval that

became prevalent in the 1990's.

Limitations

Online communities were a readily available and rich source of information for

data collection. The search features available on Livejournal.com provided a convenient

means to locate communities that were devoted specifically to a tattoo sub-culture.

Despite the benefits of utilizing online communities for data collection, they also

presented several limitations. The lack of demographic information inhibits the ability to

guarantee a true representative sample. Occasionally a city or country was mentioned in

a posting that indicated if the participant was located in the United States (if they were not, the posting was not included in the research). There is also the possibility of a participant bias since the individuals who belong to online communities, especially those dedicated to a specific subject matter such as tattoos, more than likely share similar characteristics.

Another limitation is the absence of interviews with the writers of the postings. The inclusion of interviews in the study would add insight to the motivations for obtaining a tattoo. First, demographical information may reveal a relationship between socio-economic status, age or education with the means that individuals manage internal threats and ontological security. Second, interviews would provide information about the incentives to obtain a tattoo that was frequently absent from the weblogs. Often writers only posted a picture of their tattoo without commentary or asked specific information about where to get a tattoo. These weblogs failed to provide information that would have enriched the data collection. Personal interviews would offer information where it was not offered and distinguish between individual's motives, separating incentives that were based on fashion trends from those with relationships to identity.

It is also necessary to include the potential for researcher bias. I attempted to objectively formulate the information posted in the communities into character, action and setting themes which contributed to the interpretation of the rhetorical vision. I began the study with the assumption of a relationship between identity and the motive to obtain a tattoo and this supposition may have influenced the analysis of the postings. A possible remedy for research bias is to include more than one person conducting the analysis in a future study.

Summary and Conclusion

   The origin of the idea to examine the cultural influences that provide the impetus

to create self-identity through inscribing the body was seeded in my pre-conceived

opinion that individuals obtain tattoos to create identity. I was curious to discover why

there are an increased number of people willing to permanently alter their skin for

identity purposes. My interest in the subject was based on the socio-cultural

communication tradition that suggests "reality is not an objective set of arrangements

outside us but is constructed through a process of interaction in groups, communities and

cultures" (Littlejohn, 2005). The immense popularity and explosion of the number of

individuals with tattoos suggested that a cultural shift had taken placed that changed the

constructed reality of approximately 16% of the American population (Blickerstaff,

2005).

   There was not an abundant source of information that focused on the cultural

motivations to obtain tattoos. Initially, the information that was available did reinforce

my preconceived belief that tattoos were obtained to create a fictitious self identity.

Atkinson (2002), Edgerton and Dingman (1963), Vail (1999) presented studies that

indicated tattoos were employed to construct a contrived image that individuals desired to

communicate to others. This study suggests two implications that can further advance the

field of communication. First, societal events impact people in different ways. When a

significant population of people engages in a new or different behavior, it should not be

discounted, but rather, examined in the context of the rhetorical situation. The practices

in which people engage are not behaviors that occur independent of the environment but

a potential source of examination to better understand a message that is being

communicated in relation to the environment. Second, transitory trends are a worthy source to explicate communication practices. The adaptation of a movement into a fad is also a potential source of examination. For example, punk rock originated as a source of protest against the English government and it was later adopted as a fashion statement in the United States. The examination of punk rock as a movement holds the potential to expose beliefs and values of the group members, just as the assessment of punk as a fade also reveals beliefs and values of the participants. The research about the impetus to obtain tattoos in analogous to the punk rock example and suggests that other trends may provide the same prospective for the study. Communication is present in a variety of forms, such as a tattoo, and has the potential to reveal important messages from an individual and group level is worthy of exploration.

Tattoos have been associated with identity throughout history, whether it was to mark a slave, proclaim religious affiliation, or as an indication of membership. Tattoos have also been shrouded in the veil of deviance, a trait that also accompanies the historic tattooed people that were considered as outsiders of societal norms. Today, it appears that tattoos are employed to establish societal norms by securitizing routines that make life predictable. Indeed, tattoos are an "ironic fad".

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