

TATTOOS IN THE US

University Studies 7: Course Plan

**Italicized lines will be asked to prompt discussion during lectures*

Week 1

Topic: Preconceptions; Introduction to body modification; History of tattoos

Anonymous quick write (5 min):

1. Write down the first things that come to mind when you think of tattoos.
 2. Write any questions that you hope to have answered this quarter, or any tattoo topics that interest you.
 3. Write why you enrolled in this class.
- Collect—use thoughts for discussion later and answer questions in later weeks.

Introduction:

Important syllabus points

- 1 unit
- Participation
- Disclaimer—propose to have an open-minded approach, ask for their agreement

Summary

- Why tattoos? Why not? Meaning?
- Not good or bad, but why is that a question/controversy in the first place?

“Who am I?” Ice Breaker (10 min):

Write names of celebrities, famous characters, public figures, etc on small slips of paper and tape them to our foreheads. Students have to ask yes-or-no questions to figure out whose name is written on their forehead.

Quick write discussion:

Hand back papers randomly and have students read what is written in section 1 of the quick write.

- Diversity of responses
- Perspective: social group = University students, generation = late adolescents and 20-somethings, region = Orange County

Introduction to body modification:

- Tattoos are a form of body modification = willful alteration on one's body
- *What other kinds of body modification exist?*
 - Piercings, implants (subdermal and transdermal), stretching (gauges), scarification (inkless, scraping), branding (burning), splitting (ear lobe, tongue), binding (corsetry), filing (fangs)
 - Cosmetic surgery
 - Body building
 - Eating disorders (borderline voluntary)
 - Involuntary = enslavement, exile, oppression (foot binding, slave tattoos, female genital mutilation)
- My focus is voluntary tattoos

Presentation:

- History of tattoos (see slides for details)
 - *How old do you think tattoos are? Where do you think they originated?*
 - Ancient Egypt
 - *Do you think mummies were tattooed alive or as part of their funeral rites?*
 - Ancient Eastern Europe
 - Ancient Greece and Rome
 - *Why the difference between punitive tattoos here and decorative or therapeutic tattoos elsewhere?*
 - *What does stigma mean?*
 - Ancient Western Europe
 - *Based on these accounts, would you infer that these groups painted themselves or that they tattooed themselves?*
 - *How does it affect our inquiry that the tattoos/paintings were documented by others, not those who wore them?*

Homework due Week 2:

1. Run an image search for tattoos/body modification.
2. Copy and paste into a word document 5 examples of what you consider to be cliché tattoos/body modification.
3. Copy and paste into the word document 5 examples of what you consider to be unusual tattoos/body modification.

DUE Sunday April 6th by 5pm to EEE Dropbox

Week 2

Topic: How do we derive cultural and temporal meaning? History of tattoos cont'd

Discussion:

Show pictures found for cliché tattoos.

- *What makes them cliché? The subject matter, style, location, type of modification? Were they always cliché?*

Show pictures found for unusual tattoos.

- *What makes them unusual? Will these remain odd in the future?*

What makes the meaning and reception of tattoos change over time?

Presentation:

- History of tattoos cont'd (see slides for details)
 - Recap Egypt, Eastern Europe, Classical World, Europe
 - *Any questions about ancient tattoos in these regions?*
 - Ancient Latin America
 - *Again we see others documenting tattoos of those they are attempting to conquer. Why do they perceive the tattoos as barbaric?*
 - Ancient - Contemporary Africa
 - *Why might scarification be used as a rite of passage?*
 - *How are these modifications different than those in other regions?*
 - Early Modern Middle East
 - *Why is physically marking the body used to bring these talismans—how is it different than other forms of charms?*
 - *Is the “sign upon thy hand” in Exodus a literal mark? If so, what do you make of this Levitican Law?*
 - Ancient – Modern Japan

- *What benefits does tattooing a criminal have for society?*
- *The 19th century tattoo ban enforcement was not due to criminal association; what else could have caused this action?*
- Ancient – Modern Pacific
 - *Why was tattooing so well received by all of the islands to which Tongans and Samoans travelled?*
 - *“Tattoo” from Samoan “tatau,” mimics the sound of the *auta* hitting the *au* against the skin*
 - Moko in Maori culture
- Early Modern Europe
 - *Why did Englishmen accept tattoos in the places they explored while earlier explorers (i.e. Romans, Spanish) did not?*
- Ancient North America
- Summary: purpose of tattoos throughout history and the world

Map Activity:

Students break into groups of 4 and each group is given a world map and markers. Students must color in the location that corresponds with the projected reason for getting a tattoo there (healing=red, talisman=green, tribute=yellow, social role=blue).

Week 3

Topic: American tattoo history & influences

Presentation:

- Highlights of the evolution of tattoos in the United States
 - 1891 – Samuel O’Reilly and the first electric gun
 - The Bowery (New York)
 - Flash
 - 1920’s and 30’s – circus acts, sailors
 - Betty Broadbent, Artoria Gibbons
 - Paul Rogers
 - Cap Coleman
 - Charlie Wagner
 - *Why were they restricted only to the circus and the navy?*
 - Shock factor, toughness
 - 40’s – more sailors
 - Stanley Moskowitz
 - Sailor Jerry
 - Flash + sailors = quick tattoos in high volume when sailors were in port
 - issues of hygiene, regulation, standardization
 - 50’s – decline during suburbanization, bans
 - Beginning of association with criminals/gangs/rebels
 - Psychological research
 - Bans in some cities for sanitation reasons
 - 60’s – Vietnam War and resurgence of military tattoos
 - 70’s and 80’s – divide between traditional and new age artists
 - *What’s the difference? What do you think the new artists were changing about the industry?*

- Regulation appears, bans start to lift
- Ed Hardy
- Beginning of association with art
- Custom tattoos
- Still a struggle to reconcile 50s/60s attitude with modern attitude
- Contemporary – following custom practice, combination of traditional and modern styles = neotraditional, embellishing on traditional/“tribal” styles, artwork on the body, still have talismans/symbols, cartoons and fandoms...
- *Why this fluctuation between socially acceptable and unacceptable over the years? Where does it stand now?*

Activity:

Class is split into 4 teams, and each chooses a designated artist. Teams will discuss what makes the best sailor tattoo in the 20s/30s. Artists will then draw the tattoo on the board. Teams are given a chance to justify why their tattoo best fits the style, and can compare to the other tattoos if desired. Instructor will act as judge.

Homework due Week 4:

Perceptions Interview – transpose or summarize, typed, 1 page

DUE Week 04 April 22nd by 12:00pm to EEE Dropbox:

1. Speak with someone approximately two generations older than yourself (i.e. born in the 1940s or before). This person may be a relative, professor, or any other person who fits the age criteria. Make sure he/she is willing to talk about tattoos with you and understands that you are doing research for a class assignment. Some people might not be open to the topic.
2. Politely ask what decade he/she was born. It is okay if he/she declines to answer. Ask him/her where he/she grew up and spent most of his/her life.
3. Ask him/her what he/she remembers about tattoos in the past. This can be from his/her childhood, teenage years, and/or young adult year. Try to keep the discussion prior to the 1980s.
4. Ask him/her about his/her own idea of tattoos at the time. Ask if that perception has changed since, and how.
5. Type up the interview (transposed or summarized) in standard style, minimum one page. I recommend taking notes or audio recording (ask for permission) so that you remember what to write down afterward.

Sample questions:

- Did anyone specific in your community have tattoos? How would you describe those people?
- Was it a voluntary act to get a tattoo? Why did people get them?
- What kinds of people tended to have tattoos in general?
- What kinds of tattoos were common?
- Did specific groups of people have specific kinds of tattoos? How would you describe those relationships?
- What did majority society think about tattoos?
- What was your personal opinion of tattoos at the time?
- Has your opinion changed since? How?

Feel free to come up with your own questions if this is not enough. If you need more, ask me.

Week 4

Topic: Personal belief, significance, and professionalism

Discussion:

- *What did your interviewees have to say about the historical perspective of tattoos?*
- *How did that compare with their personal opinions?*
- *How did they compare to the general historical outlook we went over last class?*
- *How do they compare to each other?*
- *What difference does the decade, location, and/or socioeconomic status make?*

Presentation:

- Tattoos with personal significance (ignoring just decorative tattoos for now)
 - Historically (review)
 - Contemporary - *For what reasons do Americans get tattoos?*
 - Religious or spiritual
 - Tribute or family
 - Brotherhood (i.e. military)
 - Personal identity
 - *Why are tattoos used to mark these aspects of a person's life?*
 - Commitment, devotion, worship, expression of the self
 - *What are the implications of such a permanent commitment?*
 - *Does this ever backfire?*
 - Significant others
 - Matching tattoos (that aren't brotherhood tattoos)

Activity:

Students act as detectives and make inferences about me based on my appearance (make an observation, then draw a conclusion from it). Afterward, if students agree, they will get into pairs and do the same with each other. If students don't agree, students get into pairs and share an inference that someone has made about them in the past, or make one about themselves right now. After either activity, students debrief as a class about what was discussed in their pairs.

Presentation:

- While you can use inference making to learn about people before you get to know them better, it can also be used in a negative way, creating a false idea of the person (i.e. stereotyping) or otherwise having some bearing on how you react to that person.
 - Students evaluate my preparedness for an interview based on my appearance (casual clothing)
 - Cultural ideas of what "professional" means
 - Appearance represents ability to understand and meet societal standards and adhere to the rules and expectations of the social environment.
 - Social construct
- Tattoos
 - Social construct
 - Show video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuvGh_n3I_M
 - Social conformity – ingratiation
 - Tattoos rebel against professionalism
 - *What about tattoos is fundamentally unprofessional?*

- Generational differences
- Associations with criminals/gangs/rebels
- Tastefulness

Discussion:

- *What is the future of tattoos in the workplace?*
 - *Why should aspiring professionals have to limit where they get tattoos?*
 - *Does a company have the right to not hire someone because they have tattoos?*
- *Are there certain tattoos that are more tasteful than others?*

Homework due Week 5:

Read the short Wikipedia entry on “Brand Community”
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brand_community)

Week 5

Topic: Group formation: Brand community and identity

Discussion:

- *What is a brand community?*
 - Don't all know each other, joined together by a like admiration of a specific brand
 - *Examples?*
 - Apple consumers, band/team fans, Harley riders, Tumblr
 - Three traditional markers of community (& UCI examples)
 - Shared consciousness
 - Rituals and traditions
 - Sense of moral responsibility
 - What constitutes an active consumer?

Activity (10 min):

Brand Bingo: Students are each given a grid with names of popular brands, products, fandoms, etc in each box. Students must find peers that associate with the items in the grid. First student to get a full row wins.

Presentation/Discussion:

- *Was there a brand on the grid that didn't seem to match up with the others?*
 - Tumblr
- *Can tattoos be a product around which a brand community is centered?*
 - *How are tattoos like a brand?*
 - Advertise the image, join a community, advertise the self
 - Like Tumblr, not a product/commodity exactly, but still a symbol around which a community has formed
 - 3 markers:
 - SC: externalizing the interior (opening the skin; exposing the self), and interiorizing the external (applying ink; applying meaning) - opening and resealing body boundaries
 - R&T: going to the same artist, conventions
 - SoMR: tipping well, defending tattoos
 - Connection to literal branding of the skin
 - *Who is part of this community? Are there communities within this one?*
 - i.e. custom tattoos, visible tattoos, certain styles, certain images, etc

- *Do these people exclude the non-tattooed community, or are they excluded from that community? Both? Neither?*
- *What does brand community have to do with personal identity?*
 - You identify with the brand and make connections “based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of [the] brand” (O’Guinn).
 - The brand is a part of the group with which you associate – to connect with that group, it becomes a part of you
 - For tattoos, in order to participate in and connect with the communities, you usually have to have a tattoo
 - *Do you purposely get the tattoo to become a part of the community, or do you assimilate with the community because you have the tattoo? For what reasons?*
 - i.e. counterculture
 - *Does everyone with a tattoo assimilate with the community?*
- Group formation
 - Military
 - Warrior ethos, brotherhood, memorials
 - Army reform of tattoo policy
 - Show videos
 - for the reform (0:44 – 1:34):
<http://www.krdo.com/news/veterans-have-mixed-emotions-about-tattoos/-/417220/22163684/-/scahiyyz/-/index.html>
 - against the reform (0:26 – 1:35):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5NfWgSXIf4>
 - Fraternities, athletic teams, best friends
 - Getting tattoos together, or of the same thing, to symbolize brotherhood

Week 6

Topic: Negative brand communities; Self-branding; Characterization

Presentation:

- Tattoos as a way to associate with a group - tattoos as a brand (review)
- *What kind of negative groups are brought together by tattoos?*
 - Gangs, criminals
 - Certain symbols/images link you to certain communities
 - Examples
 - Neo-Nazis, other racist tattoos
- What happens when the brand community is not voluntary? When the members are physically branded and forced together into the group?
 - Holocaust
 - Star of David as first brand – exclusion from the dominant group forced them into a marginal group defined by their “brand”
 - ID number tattoos made permanent this forced branding
 - Survivors had/have that connection back to the war and their forced brand – some had them removed, others kept is as a reminder
- Self-branding
 - Choosing brands that enhance self-concept

- Not just to fit into a group
- How you identify personally with the brand
 - i.e. buy a MacBook because you believe it will help you be a better student; drive a Prius because you identify with the energy-saving aspect
 - After self-branding, we connect with others who identify with the same brands, thus building a brand community
 - *How do tattoos enhance one's self-concept?*
- Sense of self (confidence, identity)
 - Tattoos for the internal self vs. tattoos for the projected self
- Tattoos as a way to create and display your own brand (projected self)
 - *How can you use tattoos to create your own brand?*
 - Custom tattoos
 - Externalizing the internal self - advertising your ethos on your body
 - Be your own brand
 - *Are these advertisements of the tattoo brand community or of the self? What's the difference?*
- *What examples do you see of projecting the self other than in tattoos?*
 - Graffiti (images)
 - Tags especially - projecting the self upon the environment (externalizing the internal self on a larger scale)
 - Certain more famous artists are known by style (i.e. Banksy)
 - Claim to social or environmental territory
 - ⌚ Relation to gangs
 - Creates an ethos to publicly display
 - T-shirt designs born from graffiti (i.e. Marc Ecko)
 - Car stickers, choice of attire, the image you choose for your Facebook?
- *What stereotypes do we have about tattoos?*
 - Sailors, rebels, bikers, gangs, criminals, counterculture, punk scene, hipsters?
- *What characters in stories, movies, etc. do you see with tattoos?*
 - They have been created with the tattoo for a purpose, often to display a certain characteristic or trait
 - The other side of self-branding – they have been constructed to project a self-image to the audience for the purpose of the narrative
 - ⌚ Often an antagonist or a tortured soul
 - (Popeye, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, El Diablo of DC Comics, Memento, The Phantom Menace, The Boondock Saints, Elektra, Tattooed Man of DC Comics, Red Dragon, Atlantis, The Hangover 2, Inked, Pirates of the Caribbean, etc)

Activity:

Look up photos of the characters students have suggested above. As a class, determine what the tattoo says about the character, their role in the narrative, their relationships with other characters, etc. Look for stereotypes.

Week 7

Topic: Tattoos as art: Styles, technique, and artistic license

Presentation:

- Supplies (see slides)
 - Machine

- Tubes
- Needles
- Ink
- Etc.
- Technique
 - Lining
 - Coloring and shading
 - Lettering
- Styles
 - Flash/traditional
 - Neotraditional
 - Color vs black and grey vs white vs UV
 - Literary, script, kanji
 - Tribal (Celtic, Polynesian...)
 - Biomechanical
 - Portraiture and photorealism
 - Irezumi/Japanese
 - Cartoon, caricature

Discussion:

- Custom tattoos
 - *How much artistic license do you give the artist? Is your body their canvas, or do you dictate exactly what is inked? What's the difference?*
 - *What are some common symbols/images in modern tattoos?*
 - Clocks (passing of time), animals (totems), roses (beauty), ships and anchors (neotraditional, importance of family), maps (wanderlust), weapons (power, strength), portraits (memorial)
- Art
 - *What is art? Does tattooing fall into that category?*
 - OED: "The expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, drawing, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power"
 - *What restricts the categorization of tattoos as art?*
 - Taboo, nontraditional media, etc
 - Compare to other abstract or questionable forms of art (modern, digital, graffiti, etc)
- Nature of tattoo art
 - *How are tattoos different from more traditional media?*
 - Sheer skill it takes to tattoo on a 3D surface, on a *living, breathing, bleeding* surface
 - ⌚ Imperfections, curves, bones, hair, blood, prone to infection, fidgeting, movement from breathing, flinching from pain, etc
 - Daunting knowledge that if you mess up it's forever
 - ⌚ Artist's work impacts your life physically - much more powerful than a painting
 - *Do people ever get tattoos because they specifically want the artist's work? Or is it always the image itself that drives the tattoo?*

Guest Speaker:

- Give his perspective as an artist on the art and trade of tattooing
- Open forum for students to ask questions

Homework due Week 8

Read articles: "Whose tattoo is it anyway?"

(<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/commentary/la-oe-raustiala-tattoo-copyright-20131006,0,3026228.story>) and "Tattooing makes transition from cult to fine art" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/arts/artsspecial/Tracing-the-transformation-of-tattoos-.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>)

Week 8

Topic: Tattoos as a business trade: Ownership and copyright, value vs. cost

Discussion/Presentation:

- *What did you make of the articles?*
 - *To whom does a tattoo belong?*
 - *If tattoos are art, doesn't the artist own it?*
 - *How do human rights come into play? An artist cannot own the body on which he tattoos*
 - *What about intellectual property?*
 - *When someone pays to get a tattoo, does the cost include the right to show it wherever they go without citing the artist?*
 - *What about social media? Blogs like FYeahTattoos, etc post images submitted by artists and bearers, usually giving credit to the artist. What happens when no credit is given? When you use Youtube, you can't include popular music without citing it. What about tattoos?*
 - *What about when the tattooed image is a brand? Does the company have any rights to the tattoo?*
 - *Who gets to create its meaning?*
 - It means something different for everyone - the bearer, the artist, and each new viewer
- *How do you determine the value of a tattoo?*
 - Supplies used, cost of service, tip
 - *Why is there so much variety in prices?*
 - Just like other goods and services, ones that are more well-known, preferred, or better quality can afford to charge more
 - ⌚ I.e. the difference between Kat von D and that guy at the tattoo shop down the street
 - ⌚ Those who want the *brand* of the famous artist, higher quality, etc pay more
 - Artists make a living off of this – tattooing other people allows them to feed their families
 - Also often sell paintings, prints, etc.

Activity:

Debate: Who has the rights to a tattoo? Split class in half. One side will argue that the bearer has full rights to the tattoo, while the other will argue that the artist has some rights to the tattoo. Sides will have time to collaborate, designate speakers, make their case, ask

questions of the opposing side, and respond to those questions. Instructor may step in to ask questions if necessary.

Homework due Week 9:

Story interview – 2x space, 1 page

DUE week 09 Tuesday May 27 by 12:00PM to EEE Dropbox

1. Speak with someone who has a tattoo. If he/she has more than one, choose one to focus on for the interview. It can be anything--any size, location, image, style, age, etc. This person may be a relative, instructor, friend, coworker, etc. Make sure he/she is willing to talk about his/her tattoo with you and understands that you are doing research for a class assignment. Some people might not want to participate in an academic investigation.
2. Find out his/her age, where he/she grew up, when he/she got the tattoo, and if he/she has any other tattoos.
3. Ask him/her about the tattoo. Your ultimate goal is to learn the story behind it.
4. Type up the interview (transposed or summarized) in standard style, minimum one page. I recommend taking notes or audio recording (ask for permission) so that you remember what to write down afterward.

Sample questions:

- Why did you decide to get a tattoo at all?
- Why did you get it that particular image? What was the process of choosing the image like?
- What did it mean to you at the time?
- Why did you choose that body location?
- How much of the reference image was the artist's idea, and how much was yours? What about the design itself?
- What was the physical space of the shop/environment like? What about the artist(s) and any other employees?
- Did you go alone or with friends? Why?
- What was the healing process like?
- Has the tattoo's meaning changed for you since you first got it? What does it mean to you now?
- Do you still like the tattoo?

Feel free to come up with your own questions if this is not enough. If you need more, ask me.

Week 9

Topic: The stories tattoos tell: experience and result

Discussion:

- *What did you learn from your interviewees?*
 - *What are the stories behind their tattoos? What is their rationale?*
 - *Have the meanings of their tattoos changed?*
 - *What was their experience like?*
 - *How are the different stories similar? What are some common purposes of their tattoos?*

Presentation/Discussion:

- Tattoos always tell a story
 - It doesn't have to be in the meaning or symbolism of the tattoo, but there is a story behind how it got there, even if it was a drunken bet
 - They are markers of a moment in one's life, whether the bearer was trying to remember that moment or not
 - When tattoos have multiple sessions, each session becomes a story
 - Creating new scars to cover old ones
- Show video: Breast cancer survivor - p-ink.org video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzO2U0fj0jM>
- *What did you gather about the process of getting a tattoo?*
 - Planning, consulting, designing, cleaning, tracing, inking, healing
- *What's the difference between the story told by the experience and the story told by the tattoo itself? Does the image reflect the experience, or do they become separate stories?*
 - *What stories do tattoos without express meaning tell?*
 - *What's better: a tattoo with meaning or without?*
 - *What stereotypes are associated with both?*
 - ⊙ Snobs who over think things; reckless, immature kids
- *Does the lack of a tattoo tell any story?*

Activity:

Close reading: Show class a tattoo image, construct a story about the tattoo using the questions below. After the class has done one together, break students into groups of 4 to close read a couple of other tattoos given to them on handouts.

- What stories do the images tell? (use the knowledge gained about stories, tattoo rationale, brand communities, stereotypes, history, art, styles, apparent age, etc)
- What do you get from them as a viewer?
- What do you think the bearer and artist intended?
- Do they tell a story at all?

Week 10

The Decision: Process, permanence, prospect of removal

Discussion/Presentation:

- *Why have humans been permanently marking our skin for arguably as long as we have been around?*
 - What implications does that permanence have?
 - Bravery, loyalty, worship, devotion, memory, etc
- Ideas of regret
 - Why do some people jump into getting tattoos without saving up to pay for quality, thinking enough about the image, choosing an appropriate location, etc?
 - It's a lifetime commitment, just like marriage and parenthood. Shouldn't the same amount of time, thought, and effort be put into a tattoo?
 - *Why is this not always the case?*
- Temporary versions
 - Henna - instead of injecting ink beneath the skin, it stains it for a couple of weeks
 - Less commitment
 - Why is henna on the hands in the workplace acceptable while real tattoos on the hands are not?

- Peel and stick - can rub off in days or hours
 - *What are the implications of children having peel and stick tattoos? Does this act as an influence, under the right circumstances, toward real tattoos later in life?*
- Body paint
 - Carnival style (face, arm, etc)
 - Multimedia art (full body)
- Tattoo sleeves/shirts/etc
 - I.e. for halloween to be a stereotypically tattooed person
- Movie makeup/prosthetics
- Tattoo Removal
 - Laser
 - Show video (1:12 – end): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1z3yS4dD6E0>
 - Does this damage the skin? Does it endanger the body?
 - Some risk of infection, skin pigment removal or alteration, scarring
 - Laser is the safest method
 - Excision (cutting out the tattooed layers of skin), dermabrasion (physically wounding the skin to force it to heal with new skin), salabrasion (salt solution saturates gauze pad to abrade the tattooed area)
 - *Will the relative ease of getting a tattoo removed change the process of getting tattoos?*
 - Despite this procedure's availability, tattoos are still considered permanent

Activity:

EITHER - Students are given a small bottle with henna ink. Instructor gives tutorial (how to use the ink, pressure on the bottle, etc) and puts design examples on the projector. Students can ink themselves or a friend (if the friend agrees!).

OR – Students are given a piece of transfer paper and gel pens. Instructor gives tutorial (how to use the supplies to make a successful transfer) and puts flash ideas on the projector. Students draw an image on the paper and can then transfer it to their skin as a temporary tattoo.