

INKED AND IN PUBLIC: TATTOOS AND DISCLOSURE

by

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This thesis is dedicated to...

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...all those who I have met who have talked about tattoos and shared their stories to form the image outline.

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...my wife, who inspired and motivated me from the initial idea to put ink into the design of an illustrating final product.

Tattoo Haiku
Michael D. Wessely

A key made of ink
Locks emotion into place
Cutaneously

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Abstract of Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study will examine the phenomenon that tattooing has become. More individuals of all ages and groups are obtaining tattoos (Kosut, 2006). The current study will explore the motivations that individuals have for obtaining tattoo modification, as well as how they manage their tattoos online and in face to face situations. Popular culture in the United States has also fed into increased interest for tattoos. Media exposure of famous tattooed individuals in a variety of venues has increased, as has media programming dedicated to tattoos.

Fifteen participants in three focus groups held in the Midwest provided insight into the complexities of tattoo motivations and communication management of their tattoos both online and in person. Qualitative responses from a questionnaire were also utilized as a supportive component. The current study used the theoretical frameworks of Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory, as well as Petronio's (2002) Communication Privacy Management. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory was utilized to examine tattooing in the scope of group interaction. Petronio's (2002) Communication Privacy Management was utilized to examine publicness and privacy, information sharing, and communication strategies with regard to tattoo-related information.

Results of this study found that individuals had emotional motivations for obtaining tattoos in conjunction with practical considerations. In addition, participants detailed how they managed disclosure of their tattoos with various people in different situations, both online and face to face.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Tattooing is a complex social phenomenon individuals undertake for a number of reasons. Tattoos are created by introducing pigment into the skin to create a long-lasting design (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). The word “tattoo” is originally from “tattow”, “tatau”, or “tattaw” which is from “ta”, a Polynesian word referring to striking (Scutt & Gotch, 2003, p. 37). Tattoos have been inked into the United States’ cultural skin. Tattooed media personalities are readily visible in any number of televised genres; additionally, entire television shows and series have been dedicated to the practice and its artists and clients. The Internet provides a burgeoning opportunity for proliferation and dissemination of tattooing-related information.

Tattooing and communication have been connected and analyzed (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009; Atkinson, 2004). Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) noted that tattoos may communicate regardless of the tattooed individual’s desired intention about communication. Van Berkum, van den Brink, Tesink, Kos, and Hagoort (2008) used a tattoo communication as part of a larger study to examine perceptions about a speaker. Thus, in order to examine tattoos in the scope of communication, it remains necessary to examine why individuals are motivated to obtain tattoos as well as how they may choose to reveal or conceal them from others, in person and online.

Tattoo motivations can be emotional, practical, complex, or very simple. One tattoo may be the result of many disparate motivations. Atkinson (2004) examined individual and social motivational elements and explanations for tattoos through qualitative inquiry. Antoszewski, Sitek, Fijalkowska, Kasielska, and Kruk-Jeromin

(2010) noted several motivations for obtaining tattoos in their survey: individuality (43.3%), liking tattoos (22%), on a whim (17.5%), social group pressure (5.6%), love for someone else (4.8%), subculture membership (2.9%), as a souvenir (1.9%), to hide a scar (1%), or as a result of fighting with parents (1%). Tattoo motivations have been the focus of some recent television programs highlighting tattoo shops and the artists.

Social Identity Theory provides an intriguing basis for analysis of tattooing motivations. Tajfel and Turner (1986) posited that society is defined by groups, and the differences can cause conflict for a number of reasons. The interplay of groups factors into perceptions others have of tattoos and how tattooed individuals fit into society. Many individuals today detail personalized motivations for tattoos.

The role of the Internet and social media with tattooing remains ill-defined and under-researched, at best. Social media calls to the forefront a need for study of public/private dialectical tensions. Petronio (2002) articulated these forces in Communication Privacy Management (CPM). What individuals reveal and hide in online arenas from others' eyes is critical to consider in a time of increasing online visibility.

Petronio's (2002) CPM can also be utilized to analyze face to face interactions regarding disclosure of tattoo-related information with various people. The tension arising between public and private, for example, may be managed with location of the tattoo and use of clothing (Atkinson, 2002). Individuals may wish to control who sees their tattoos, how others perceive them, and where that information is shared. How individuals manage this personal image for others provides fertile ground for research and holds implications for society and daily life. Given that individuals may have

specific motivations for obtaining tattoos and may enact strategies to communicatively manage their tattoos online and face to face, further study is needed.

The current study examines tattoos and communication through the motivations individuals may cite for obtaining tattoos and Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. In addition, how individuals reveal or conceal tattoos, examined through the lens of Petronio's (2002) CPM provides important insight into how and why this communication may or may not occur online and in person.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Popular Culture

It is undeniable that tattooing has ingrained itself into American culture. Kosut (2006) outlined the extent of the practice's reach. Media personalities have obtained tattoo modification and have become de facto marketers of tattoo to the larger populace. Musicians, actors, actresses, and professional sports stars, among others, have led the way in making tattoos fashionable for public consumption (Kosut, 2006; Martí, 2010).

An increasing number and broadening demographic of individuals get tattoos (Kosut, 2006). Statistics vary by the group examined and metrics utilized, but research has suggested 10% of the population has body modification (Wohlrab, Stahl, Rammsayer, & Kappeler, 2007). Demographic is important, as a 2007 poll reported 40% of Americans ages 25-40 had at least one tattoo (Martin & Dula, 2010). Even younger individuals are not ignoring the practice, as 13% of surveyed adolescents reported having at least one tattoo (Carroll, Riffenburgh, Roberts, & Myhre, 2002). Rivardo and Keelan

(2010) studied tattooing at a Catholic liberal arts college and found 16% of their sample had tattoos. Some statistics about the prevalence of tattooed individuals may appear high due to populations sampled, such as college students. Roberti and Storch (2005), for example, found 65% of their undergraduate sample had one or more tattoos or body piercings. This underscores the importance of frequently obtaining data to measure the practice and its prevalence, as well as the critical need to examine the changing demographic of those seeking tattoos and the perceptions surrounding tattooing. However, this exposure is not simply limited to adults or the United States. A study of Italian secondary school students found 47% of those without a tattoo considered getting at least one (Cegolon, Miatto, Bortolotto, Benetton, Mazzoleni, & Mastrangelo, 2010).

The historical stigma attached to tattoos has simultaneously constrained and guided how tattoos are perceived (Stirn & Hinz, 2008; Martí, 2010). Interestingly enough, *stigma* (or “to prick”, from Latin/Greek origins) refers to tattoos (Jones, 2000). The dichotomy between the old and new inherent in the world of tattooing can be found in several avenues. Portrayals of the typical tattoo client are changing, and this conflict is visible even in the research literature several years ago (DeMello, 1995). Changing perceptions related to tattoos and those who obtain them can impact how tattoos are communicatively managed with others.

Products such as temporary tattoos and tattoo-able dolls make the practice accessible and seemingly understandable even for the youngest children (Kosut, 2006). Media’s reach into the lives of individuals can be found through television, movies, books, magazines, and the Internet, regardless of whether the tattoos are real or merely a

temporary adornment (Kosut, 2006). It is important to note that not all media send the same homogenous message regarding tattoos (John Roberts, 2012). Globalization through the media has spread awareness of tattooing practices (Martí, 2010). Tattooing has been the focus of special events. The Guggenheim Museum has sponsored exhibitions highlighting tattoos (Kosut, 2006). The National Tattoo Association has held conventions for several years (DeMello, 1995); the next one is scheduled for 2014. It perhaps should not be a surprise, then, that tattoos are more socially saturated and more common than ever before.

Tattoos and Communication

While tattoos are images applied into the skin, there is nonetheless a communicative connection. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) noted “tattoos are informative and have significance for individuals” (p. 64). Potential communication regarding a tattoo leads naturally into an examination of its visibility. In order to communicate, there should be information/data/knowledge to share. Firmin, Tse, Foster, and Angelini (2008) deemed tattoos as communicative art. Leavy (2009) stated that art should be able to independently communicate information. Wohlrab et al. (2007) supported that the visual component of body modification is communicative. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) created a four item communicative value of tattoos scale, which had acceptable reliability (0.86). Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) found on a seven point scale that tattoos were somewhat communicative: M= 3.86 for one tattoo, M=4.27 for multiple tattoos, M= 4.06 overall (p.68). Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) found that

tattoo visibility and communicative value were significantly positively correlated: $p < .03$ (p.68). Orend and Gagné (2009) found that their participants with non-logo tattoos intended the tattoos to communicate to others (and themselves). Atkinson (2004) argued similarly that tattoos are a form of communication. Some individuals get tattoos that are text, which can be in a variety of different languages. Lei (2009) noted how Chinese text has elements of language and image, which connects with tattooing. Lei (2009) also articulated the potential issue of having potential tattoo text misinterpreted or prepared incorrectly (due to language/translation), leading to an error and misunderstanding. Additionally, whether a tattoo is an image or text, there is a potential gap between if/what the tattooed individual wants to communicate and what potential viewers may feel is being communicated.

Leavy (2009) noted this creator/viewer dilemma in the scope of art, and specified that the context in which art is viewed can shape meaning. Atkinson and Young (2001) noted the role of the audience with regard to body modification. The message might be interpreted correctly, but the potential for misinterpretation remains. Individuals rely on previous experiences to make conclusions about the information in the present. Even if an individual does not connote that personal tattoos are communicative, they may be perceived that way, and a message is created where none is intended (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009).

Video Games and Avatars

Previously, research could not accurately compare tattooed and non-tattooed individuals against the perceptions of others. Wohlrab, Fink, Kappeler, and Brewer

(2009) created male and female digital avatars (human representations), otherwise identical, with and without tattoos. Thus, they were able to obtain a true comparison based solely on the tattoo, a lofty goal that had previously been unreachable. They found significance in that females rated the tattooed male figure as more healthy, while males rated the tattooed male figure as less healthy (Wohlrab et al., 2009). The combined use of tattoos and avatars is not limited to research, however.

Computer games have integrated tattoos into the characters found in the game worlds. This extends beyond just non-player characters (NPCs- characters included to enhance the storyline and are not controllable by the player). For example, in *Neverwinter Nights*, a player can select tattoos for the digital avatar self before the game progression ever begins (“Legacy games,” 2012; “Character creation,” 2012). Another example is *Kingdom of Loathing*, an Internet-browser based game (“Kingdom of Loathing,” 2012). Tattoos for a character are unlocked through various in-game accomplishments (“Coldfront,” 2012). Thus, individuals can experience tattoos in a way, even if they do not have any in real life.

Tattoos as Product

Tattoos are somewhat unique in that while they are a product to purchase, they can also be utilized to sell other products (Kosut, 2006). For example, a 2002 Versace advertising campaign featured tattooed models wearing swimsuits (Kosut, 2006). These commingling aspects of tattoo can be found in clear intersection. Kosut (2006) expertly noted the ritual, commercial, and individual components of the tattooing process. Where tattoos have become commodified, so has the concept of beauty (Harlow, 2008). Taking

this commercialization of tattoos further are tattoos which are also corporate logos, though such tattoos can have multiple meanings. Consumer adherence to specific products (including procurement of logo tattoos) can develop identity, both for individuals and groups (Orend & Gagné, 2009). In another twist to this conceptualization, some individuals have taken to selling tattoo space on their bodies to get whatever tattoo the buyer might want (often in the form of advertising) in exchange for money. An higher profile example of this phenomenon occurred in the 2012 presidential election, with someone auctioning tattoo space on his face for what would eventually be a Romney logo (“Eric Hartsburg tattoos,” 2012).

Tattoos and Health

Tattoos might have potential effects on health, but further study is needed. Despite this uncertainty, individuals’ motivations are strong enough to offset potential risks (some of which are mitigated by good sanitary procedures) to obtain tattoos. Research has shown that some persons may be motivated to get tattoos *because* of the risk (Cegolon et al., 2010). Tattoos are not regulated on a national level, leaving individual states to develop their own policies (Miller, 2010). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) oversees tattoo inks as cosmetics, which means they must prove safe, but they are not approved for injection into the skin (“Tattoos and permanent makeup,” 2012). Despite the potential unknown effects of some tattoo ink ingredients, no studies have connected tattoos with skin cancer (Doremus, 2009). Potential complications may include discomfort when undergoing a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exam, scarring, allergic reaction, lumps or bumps forming, and possible infection

(“Tattoos and permanent makeup,” 2012). Doremus (2009) also noted that tattoos can make it more difficult to detect skin cancer or can cause incorrect identifications of cancer in lymph nodes. Blood-borne pathogens like Hepatitis B and C can be transmitted through tattooing (Selekman, 2003; Miller 2010). This fact once led to a historic deferral of recently tattooed potential blood donors (Menitove, 2009). Cegolon et al. (2010) offered that health care professionals, secondary school staff, and higher education staff could disseminate information about body modification risks and implications, as young people continue to procure it. Some tattooing cultures may not be able to utilize historical application methods, as sterilization techniques may not work well on traditional implements (Martí, 2010).

Health risks involved with obtaining tattoos could be considered within an embedded health behaviors context. Booth-Butterfield (2003, p. 171) detailed how embedded health behaviors involve: “(a) the complexity of the behavior itself; (b) factors, both biological and psychological, within the individual communicator; (c) and external situational or sociocultural factors”. Body modification can be viewed as a complex behavior for all the elements included in the entire process. Certainly, there can be both physical and emotional elements for an individual’s internalized choice to get a tattoo or piercing. Stirn and Hinz (2008) noted how individuals utilized body modification for specific body sensations, as well as how they experienced and felt about their bodies before and after modification. The societal influence or effects of others in tattooing can be applied, as well. Whether someone obtains one or more tattoos or

piercings, these components can be considered for reasons why someone obtained one or more tattoos.

Old versus New Tattoo Demographic

Kosut (2006) made the astute point that media portrayal of tattooed individuals has focused on this new demographic and has limited focus on the traditional purchasers of tattoo modification: bikers, sailors, gang members, and prisoners, among others. The new group's profession, educational level, and gender have differed from that of the classically tattooed person (DeMello, 1995; Kosut, 2006). DeMello (1995) documented the throes of this battle as waged in the pages of a 1992 magazine that emphasized both fine art and biker tattoos. As the demographic of those getting tattoos diversified, so did the readership. The conflict occurred in letters published in the magazine when a writer commented that fewer biker tattoos should be included, and the responses lashing out were frequent and vocal (DeMello, 1995). While some of the writers may have felt it was a personal attack, some of the response may have been to prevent perceived marginalization. DeMello (1995) previously posited that the new demographic of the tattooed is eclipsing that of the old, and traditional tattoos are equated as low-class. Hebdige (1979) noted this general battle between the old and the new in a subcultural sense.

Religion

Tattooing has historically been perceived negatively in Western society. Equating tattooing with savagery and stigma has been a long-held notion (Wohlrab et al., 2007). Some slaves in ancient Greek and Roman times were tattooed to identify them as slaves

(Jones, 2000). Some physicians in the 19th and 20th centuries deemed tattooing as for the low classes (Martí, 2010). Some tattooing prohibitions have been religiously based. The Bible provides a few references to tattoos. There are Jewish restrictions against marking skin, in the book of Leviticus; there are also Islamic prohibitions against tattooing (Talvi, 1998; Harlow, 2008; Scheinfeld, 2007). Paul, in the book of Galatians, refers to marks of Jesus, and the book of Revelation mentions the tattoos of vices on the face of the Scarlet Woman (Jones, 2000). In 787, the pope set forth an edict against tattoos because of their pagan connection (Martí, 2010). There is the additional idea of the sanctity of the body (Atkinson, 2004).

Not all religions or religious ideas are against tattooing, however. Buddhist and Hindu adherents have utilized tattoos (Scheinfeld, 2007). Some Christians have used tattoos to promote their beliefs, and some believe that the Leviticus verse is meant to be considered only within the scope of the Old Testament (Firmin et al., 2008). Firmin et al. (2008) also had participants in their study state that designs with positive or neutral messages or motivations could be religiously acceptable (as opposed to a tattoo image of a demon, for example).

Culture

Tattooing has a long history. Tattooing was perceived negatively in Han China, and tattooing was used historically as punishment (Lei, 2009). Symbol and animal tattoos made with soot, some of which were speculated were for therapeutic use, were found on a 1000-year-old Peruvian mummy (Pabst, Letofsky-Papst, Moser, Spindler, Bock, Wilhelm, Dorfer, Geigl, Auer, Speicher, & Hofer, 2010).

Traditional Tattooing Cultures

Several cultures have aligned tattooing with integral, socially significant events or imparted the practice with meaning. For example, the Eskimo [*sic*] have used tattoos (and piercings) as a feminine beauty enhancement, applied on young girls by older women (Huss-Ashmore, 2000). The Lakota utilized tattoos to assist in the afterlife (Scheinfeld, 2007). Huss-Ashmore (2000) focused on the Marquesan Islands (Polynesia), where the prevalence and development of male facial and whole body tattooing and female arm and leg tattooing has ascribed tattooing as art. Tattooing was used in a ritual for males after puberty for spiritual and physical defense (Huss-Ashmore, 2000). Body modification was also utilized in Mesoamerican cultures (Huss-Ashmore, 2000). Additionally, the Maori people of New Zealand have utilized facial tattoos (Martí, 2010). A reinvigorated interest in pan-cultural styles and some of the more extreme styles of body modification (e.g. branding or scarring) has been termed Neo Primitivism (Atkinson & Young, 2001).

Globalization Effects

Martí (2010) attributed some of the increased Western focus on tattooing to globalization (e.g. tribal style inspired designs). Globalization has had an opposite effect in some cultures with a cultural tattoo heritage; the strong and meaningful cultural tattoo traditions are disappearing (Martí, 2010). The mass media permeate these societies with both an unblemished image of beauty and the new style of tattooing, which replace existing tattoo traditions and styles (Martí, 2010). Martí (2010) argued that this alters the

cultural kaleidoscope, adding an increased number of options to choose from, thereby diluting and replacing existing forms. Martí (2010) articulated five reasons for this switch: loss of use/meaning (tattoos were associated with specific rituals or ideals), the trends of fashion, state authoritarian influence, religious/moral influence, and globalization through the mass media.

Martí (2010) presented the cultural group case studies of the Li people of Hainan, China, and the Bubi and Fang peoples of Equatorial Guinea. The former group's women applied thin black-lined tattoos to young and adolescent girls, who then gained adulthood (Martí, 2010). Now, the practice is nearly no longer performed and existing examples are deemed ugly (Martí, 2010). The historical significance was profound. Traditional beliefs held that a woman without tattoos would not be recognized by her ancestors in the afterlife; the tattoos were applied to the body even shortly after death, if necessary (Martí, 2010). The Bubi people utilized scarification, which Europeans reviled (Martí, 2010). As an example of this cultural shift, in one Fang family, the grandmother had traditional tattoos, the mother had no tattoos, and the granddaughter had modern-style tattoos (Martí, 2010). Even existing meanings change. Polynesian tattoos could refer to social standing, but now are more about identifying with ethnicity (Martí, 2010). An additional change is a shift away from tattoos' cultural group identity connection to a more individualized identity focus (Martí, 2010). Though identity can be a very internalized concept, tattoos remain external.

Tattoos as Art

The tattoos-as-art debate is just one component of the old versus the new (Kosut, 2006). A tattoo may not be accepted universally as art. Those without tattoos or even members of the traditional tattoo establishment may make this judgment (DeMello, 1995). However, the notion that tattoos have at least some aesthetic value has been documented, as well as skin serving as a medium, as a canvas, a text, or a journey (Liotard, 2001; Kosut, 2006; Selekman, 2003; Martí, 2010; Harlow, 2008; Atkinson & Young, 2001). An example website (“Rate my ink,” 2012) of the many websites highlighting tattoos allows users to rate others’ (photographs of) tattoos on a low-high scale of 1-10, with 1 meaning “Tat” and 10 referencing “Ink!”. This elucidates that some tattoos can transcend the most basic meaning of body art.

Tattoo Artists

While level of training certainly varies from artist to artist, some have obtained formal training to aid in their craft (Kosut, 2006). Contrarily, some persons seeking tattoo modification select amateurs to create the tattoo (Carroll et al., 2002; Choudhary, Elsaie, Leiva, & Nouri, 2010). The reasons for this might include lack of parental approval if underage, cheaper rates than professional artists, more readily available access to amateur artists, or illegality of the practice, such as it was in Massachusetts from 1962-2000 for any non-physicians (Cegolon et al., 2010; Martí, 2010; Doderio, 2003; Ferdinand, 2000). Along with the questionable skill level or training of amateur purveyors, potential tattoo seekers may subject themselves to questionable sanitary conditions and non-standard tattooing implements or colorants (Selekman, 2003; Doderio,

2003; Miller, 2010; Smith, Acuña, Feldman, Vallejos, Fleischer Jr., Quandt, & Arcury, 2009). Additionally, the end result may be flawed (Selekman, 2003).

Tattoo Motivations

Researchers have recognized the value and importance that individual motivations have in tattooing practices (Kosut, 2006; Frederick & Bradley, 2000). Stirn and Hinz (2008) observed, however, that there are comparatively few studies that focus upon individuals' social background and motivations for modifications. Atkinson (2004) called tattooing "a contextual and negotiated signifier of identity" (p. 127). Individuals are enacting agency in electing to use time, spend money, and endure pain to obtain tattoos (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). In a sense, pain is a way of earning a body modification (Atkinson & Young, 2001). Motivations may be generally classified into religious, cultural, or emotional categories, or they may be more individualistic (DeMello, 1995; Williams, 2009). Leavy (2009) mentioned that art can evoke emotion. Thus, it seems that tattoos can be framed in a unique relationship: evoking emotion and possibly being created as a result of emotion. Young adults may utilize tattooing to build upon existing desires to be unique and stand out (Roberti & Storch, 2005). Alternately, they may be affected by peer pressure or wanting to fit in (Frederick & Bradley, 2000; Stirn & Hinz, 2008). Persons who obtain tattoo modification may have no deep, underlying meaning, or there could be several motivations for one tattoo.

For example, Atkinson (2004) noted that one participant's tattoo had significance as a marker for an accomplishment, but was simultaneously intended as a religious symbol, as well as a display of masculinity. Additionally, body modification practices

can be undertaken as a form of leisure and a means of connection to life events (Williams, 2009). Others obtain tattoos as connection to personal relationships (Albin, 2006). In some cultures, tattoos are believed to provide protection (Martí, 2010; Scheinfeld, 2007). Some research has attempted to connect personality traits with body modification (Wohlrab et al., 2007). Albin (2006) acknowledged that the unconscious might even be responsible for corporeal expression. Jongeward (2009) noted the power of visual images to reveal experiences and elements below the rational mind. Some tattoos may have a functional purpose, such as tattooing a wedding band, “do not resuscitate”, or “no CPR”, which some individuals use in place of a ring or bracelet and that cannot be lost (Nelson, 2009; Gupta, 2010; Collier, 2012). Tattoos have even been utilized in conjunction with breast reconstruction (Choudhary et al., 2010). Firmin et al. (2008) noted in their study that individuals devoted a great deal of thought, time, and care in their tattoo decision process.

Maslow’s (1943) theory of motivation is worthy of mention for tattooing motivations. Bodily needs, consideration of safety, feelings of love, esteem for the self and others, as well as the development of the self can all be applied (Maslow, 1943). As a tattoo is placed on the body, it could be considered a physical desire. While feeling safe may not directly tie into tattoos, the pain in the tattooing process and potential health risks can be connected with those concerns. Tattoos can be obtained for feelings of love or motivations internalized to the self or external influence of other people. Tattooing can certainly be posited as addressing and remaking the internal and external self. Additionally, Maslow (1943) details how behavior often has multiple motivations and

may address multiple needs simultaneously but not necessarily entirely. Each of these elements fits with having multiple motivations for tattoos, as well as potential reasoning for obtaining multiple tattoos.

Personal Identity

A tattoo's level of integration into personal identity varies with the individual, but worth considering is the role tattoos play in this deliberation. Albin's (2006) first case study suggested that tattoos were part of the physical identity constructed, but also referred to unfulfilled or unreachable desires. Harlow (2008) posited that these desires, which correspond to tattoos, could also be repressed. Stirn and Hinz (2008) used the apt options between "I am tattooed/body pierced" and "I have a tattoo/body piercing" to examine the distinction that individuals made with personality and body modification (p. 329). More respondents selected the former supposition (83%) than the latter (17%) statement, suggesting a strong connection to personal identity (Stirn & Hinz, 2008).

The Body

The physical body is the vehicle for tattoo modification, but there is also the (individually and socially) constructed body (Suchet, 2009; Atkinson & Young, 2001). Individuals can show off their unique bodies to a range of emotions and perceptions of others (Liotard, 2001). In a sense, the body becomes what we make it. Suchet (2009) examined this dichotomy through identity shaping the body and the possibility of the reverse. Orend and Gagné (2009) noted that corporate logo tattoos can aid in the creation of a commercialized body. Bogdanoski (2009) noted that the development of the body is subject to change and always in progress. Atkinson (2004) detailed this development and

noted tattooing is a component of creating a social identity, as well. The mark that body modification creates is only a representation of part of the process (Atkinson & Young, 2001). Huss-Ashmore (2000) suggested that changing bodily image is the aligning of the internal and the external selves. Stirn and Hinz (2008) similarly identified that self-cutters wanted to connect their physical body with their bodily emotional state.

Recovery

Research has documented tattoo's value in creating a new, inspiring meaning to replace a negative meaning associated with a bodily trauma, such as abuse, disease, or scarring (Suchet, 2009; Selekman, 2003; Atkinson & Young, 2001; Fenske, 2007). Self-cutters reported a significantly better relationship with their bodies after getting body modification (Stirn & Hinz, 2008). Tattooing can help an individual with non-corporeal matters, such as change or loss (Suchet, 2009). Tattooing can bring about a transformation in the self and give control of the body back to the individual who had lost it (Suchet, 2009). An individual can use body modification to find the self again (Atkinson & Young, 2001).

Image Management

Body modification techniques have diversified with advances in so-styled "health" technology; many of which deal with image management. These procedures and activities vary by level of invasiveness and include exercise, dieting, makeup application, plastic and weight loss surgery, breast enhancement or reduction, buttock

implants, hair removal, tattooing, piercing, and branding (Williams, 2009; Strenger, 2009; Atkinson, 2004; Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005; Inckle, 2007). Choudhary et al. (2010) detailed that tattoos can be used as permanent makeup. Albin (2006) noted how the individual's motivations interact and connect with the expectations of society.

Societal Image

Societal pressures attempt to dictate how a normal, acceptable body should appear (Atkinson, 2004; Bogdanoski, 2009). Tattoos can deviate from this expectation. Society tends to prefer a standardized body and eschews bodily diversity (Bogdanosky, 2009). The mass media exacerbates and proliferates this ideal (Martí, 2010). Bogdanoski (2009) mentioned how body modification procedures can be met with derision. The general public may not understand elective amputation or double mastectomy with no medical necessity, but breast enlargement would likely cause no concern (Bogdanoski, 2009). Utilizing certain body modification techniques (or non-use of others) can assist in creating or managing personal identity (Inckle, 2007). Strenger (2009) posited that motivation for body modification might be a human attempt to deny death. A similar argument could be made about the less invasive image modification techniques, as they attempt to make us look younger or healthier.

Masculinity

Tattoos have been historical masculine signifiers. Trunev (2010) examined traditional masculinity as expounded in the sex and war avenues; in today's society, they can be examined in the literal sense or in the sense of competition and sports. Kissack

(2000) noted from an interview conducted with Samuel Morris Steward, a university professor and tattoo artist, that he had detailed 32 motivations for tattoos, and 25 of them were connected to sex (though this finding refers to earlier decades and the traditional tattoo demographic— primarily males). Trunev (2010) argued that tattoos express bodily experience, and similarly, from the traditional masculine approach, scars (and tattoos) are perceived as enhancing masculinity but detracting from femininity. Santos (2009) has posited that there can be a double standard as tattoos for males can be perceived as more acceptable than tattoos for females. Santos (2009) had some of the study's participants second this notion, as they witnessed it within their own families.

Femininity

Tattooing has typically been men's domain, but females have increasingly sought tattoo modification (Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson & Young, 2001; Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). Additionally, the visibility of female tattoo artists and media personalities such as Kat Von D underscore an increasing shift. Feminine beautification procedures can be uncomfortable, not unlike tattooing (Atkinson, 2002). Tattoos can be a means of empowerment for women and a symbol of feminism (Atkinson, 2004; Harlow, 2008). This is despite traditional notions of the beauty of unblemished skin (Martí, 2010; Talvi, 1998). Some women use their not publicly revealed body locations to obtain tattoos and yet maintain a publicly un-tattooed appearance (Atkinson, 2002). Kluger (2010) mentioned that tattoos located in areas of the body that change with pregnancy can be distorted or stretched. Thus, this consideration may affect potential tattoo location. Santos (2009) acknowledged that this natural beauty ideal can be reinforced by culture

(in the scope of Chicanas in East Los Angeles). The typical feminine image that is created is one of passivity and powerlessness (Atkinson, 2002). As a result, tattoos can threaten a feminine association (Atkinson, 2002). Certain tattoo styles/images are typically associated as more masculine or more feminine. Similarly, feminine tattoos could imperil a masculine association. These gender differences can prevail even across cultures (Martí, 2010).

Atkinson (2002) has argued that portrayals of female tattooing should be and realistically are more than just resistance against masculinity and patriarchy (as they typically are presented). Some women need to struggle against (sometimes even tattooed) male partners' wishes that they remain not tattooed (Talvi, 1998). Some research has found more prevalent body modifications for females than males in their studies' samples (Carroll et al., 2002; Atkinson, 2004). Tattoos can be an important signifier of one's gender identity, but they can also reinforce stereotypes, as well (Inckle, 2007). Santos (2009) detailed how tattooed Chicanas felt subject to perceptions that they were more sexually promiscuous or criminal due to their tattoos. The gay and lesbian community has adopted tattooing (Suchet, 2009; Klesse, 2007). Some individuals use body modification as a means of addressing the revelation of coming out (Atkinson & Young, 2001).

Beauty and Sexuality

The concept of beauty plays an important role in image and tattooing. Individuals may desire to obtain tattoos as a permanent part of a beautification regimen. A person's physical attractiveness could be considered a result of adaptation through genetics

(Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005). However, the societal/cultural construction of beauty and personal preference in perception is impossible to discount (Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005). Selekman (2003) suggested that body modification might be a conversation starter (as might be used in dating situations). Additionally, characteristics of attractiveness change over time (Albin, 2006). A tattoo seems to be a form of manual adaptation (bypassing genetics) and image modification like the aforementioned beautification procedures. While beauty is part of sexual attraction and identification, it may be posited that tattoos, as a component of beauty, may serve a similar function (based on an individual's motivations). Wohlrab et al. (2007) supported that men and women utilize body modification in this manner. Body modification and sexuality/sexual activity have been connected (Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2005; Stirn & Hinz, 2008; Rivardo & Keelan, 2010). Atkinson (2004) also found this connection to eroticism.

The case study of the Suicide Girl Jaylin takes sexuality and tattoos even audaciously further (Harlow, 2008). SuicideGirls is a website that showcases erotic images of tattooed and pierced women in an alternative to standardized notions of beauty (Harlow, 2008). Jaylin has three main tattoos: a beauty queen with a bloody mouth, "Abigail" written in Hebrew, and a half-skeletal black angel (Harlow, 2008). Tattoos have carved out a new type of beauty (Atkinson & Young, 2001). Though Jaylin's tattoos are a form of empowerment, she loses some of this through the commodification espoused by the nature of the website (Harlow, 2008).

Online environments can be perceived as containing inherent risk, specifically sexual risk (Couch & Liamputtong, 2007). The concept of the body and how individuals

interact takes on new meaning, as well (Wysocki & Childers, 2011). Technology has expanded how sexuality is expressed (Parker, Blackburn, Perry, & Hawks, 2013). While this consideration may be influenced by an individual's intentions in communicating with others, information control questions for the individual remain. Online environments may allow greater freedom than real life, or they may recreate divisions found there (Atkinson & DePalma, 2008). This possible stratification into groups fits within Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. The potential sensual component of tattoos intersecting with privacy concerns creates implications for individuals' lives, including their online interactions.

Tattoos and Negative States

Tattooing has been typically predicated as a reaction to and result of an underlying negative psychological issue or otherwise deviant behavior (Williams, 2009; Atkinson, 2004; Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2010). Stirn and Hinz (2008) examined the connection between body modification and self-injury (cutting). Cutting could be considered body modification, though its perception has been negative (Stirn & Hinz, 2008). The pain associated with performing body modifications may also have been one of the linkages in this line of inquiry. Research has found that tattooed persons have a greater likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, such as drug use, sexual activity, or increased alcohol use (Carroll et al., 2002; Guéguen, 2012). Other research has analyzed the prevalence of risky behavior of tattooed persons among a college student population (Burger & Finkel, 2002). Tattoos and other body modifications were also examined for connections to suicidal behavior and depression (Hicinbothem, Gonsalves, & Lester,

2006). Roberti and Storch (2005) found that persons with body modification experienced more depressive feelings and greater anxiety than those without, but made the observation that people with those states may use modification as catharsis. Contrary to Roberti and Storch (2005), Frederick and Bradley (2000) found that tattooed individuals reported significantly less depression than those without tattoos. Frederick and Bradley (2000) found no support in their study to connect body modification to greater prevalence of negative psychological issues. Tattoos can be visible and public representations of deeply private emotions.

Tattoos and Rebellion

The continued role of tattoos for shock value or rebellion can also be called into question with the increased marketing of tattoos as “cool” (Kosut, 2006). DeMello (1995) had even posited several years before that tattoos would possibly lose their subversive meaning. Tattoos’ use as an element of fashion is unique due to their semi-permanence; they are the contradictory long-term fad (Kosut, 2006). Tattoos cannot be discarded as easily as out-of-date and unstylish clothing as trends change. DeMello (1995) noted the point that tattooing (like some other fashions) has been elevated from low class and is now trendy. Hebdige (1979) argued that the media’s stance on subculture operates with conflicting dismay/appeal (in a dialectic-type approach). Some practices are absorbed and legitimized, while others remain unacceptable to society as a whole (Albin, 2006). Lloyd (2004) detailed that body modification has become a matter of fashion, and extreme iterations are merely progression of the fashion ideal. Atkinson and Young (2001) noted that even some extreme or culturally-based modifications have been

co-opted by fashion, potentially reducing their perceived significance. Orend and Gagné's (2009) participants confirmed this trend, suggesting that tattoos were losing the ability to demonstrate rebellion and evoke a subculture standing. They did note that this type of message was still possible with a great number of tattoos or being tattooed in a prominent place like the neck (Orend & Gagné, 2009).

Tattoo Regret and Removal

Tattoos are difficult and painful to remove. Tattoos that are no longer wanted may prove impossible to remove completely, and the removal process may be longer and more painful than the tattoo's initial application (Selekman, 2003). Lasers are now often used in tattoo removal, although more invasive methods have previously been utilized (Miller, 2010; Choudhary et al., 2010; Varma & Lanigan, 1999). Alternately, an individual may obtain another tattoo to cover the undesired tattoo.

Removing a tattoo is not a decision that is made lightly. To go forward with the decision and intensive steps of removing a tattoo, individuals may be motivated by a certain amount of regret. Tattoo regret may be for a variety of reasons, including social pressure and the perceived effect upon employment possibilities (Varma & Lanigan, 1999). Varma and Lanigan (1999) found that participants in their study had waited an average of 14 years before opting for laser removal and that participants perceived cost as a factor in delaying the final decision.

Tattoo regret may also be connected to regrettable messages. Regrettable messages can affect an individual's perception of positive image (Knapp, Stafford, & Daly, 1986). Regrettable communication interactions may be influenced by the

interpersonal relationship between persons, as well as the magnitude of possible effects from regrettable messages (Knapp et al., 1986). How individuals react to tattoos may vary in different situations or with certain groups. For example, family members, friends, or strangers may all have different reactions to someone's tattoo. Tattoos revealed in a professional or religious situation may have specific consequences for an individual. Any negative evaluations expressed by others may amplify any individual doubts or potential regrets about a tattoo in the short or long term.

Group Identification

Tattoos may be openly disclosed, as they can be a form of group identification. Tattoos and the respective sharing of experiences may also help create closer interpersonal ties or create group associations (Atkinson & Young, 2001; Atkinson, 2004). Contrarily, Harlow (2008) noted how the Suicide Girls “commit social suicide and assert their own version of non-conventionally aggressive beauty” (p. 188). This supposition is one example of how tattoos can be used to create a distinct out-group. Santos (2009) revealed his own tattoos to associate as a member of the tattooed in-group, which allowed him to do his research. Stirn and Hinz (2008) found that nearly 75% of their body-modified sample had partners also with modifications. Group usage has been identified among gang members, as well as sailors in World War II, among others (Selekman, 2003). The Nazis imposed group identification with tattooed numbers on prisoners in the concentration camps (Selekman, 2003; Talvi, 1998; Hoenig, 2011).

Managing Tattoos Online

The Internet and social media play a critical role in today's conceptions of public (tending towards disclosure) and private (retaining information). Social media networks have a potential far reach, as well as oft-changing security settings. Ledbetter, Heiss, Sibal, Lev, Battle-Fisher, and Shubert (2010) noted the possible issues that could arise as a result of parents attempting to monitor college students' activities via social media sites. Greysen, Kind, and Chretien (2010) cited the potential increased damage social media can do due to the range of the network (when compared with regular interpersonal interaction). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted that the concepts of private and public are still in flux in the online world. In this scope, DeVoe (2009) detailed that "the lines between public and private and personal and professional are blurred (even blended) due to their 'share and share alike' nature" (p. 419).

There is very limited research available connecting tattoos and social media. Atkinson (2004) noted that the online world encourages a type of voyeurism. As an example, the SuicideGirls website allows a more intense focus of this type (Harlow, 2008). Tattoos are just one way of displaying to the public what it wants to see (Atkinson, 2004). Atkinson and Young (2001) posited that computers and the technological shift have served to somewhat dehumanize us, and body modification attempts to rebuild some individuality.

Social media sites allow creation of a personal profile, and they facilitate connection, content-sharing, and communication across the site's users (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). Social media actively aid and advocate individuals' sharing of personal

information (Taraszow, Aristodemou, Shitta, Laouris, & Arsoy, 2010). The framework of the sites encourages sharing photographs, personal details (such as birthday or contact information), and updates about daily life. Social media options weaken long-developed privacy rights (Taraszow et al., 2010). Russo, Squelch, and Varnham (2010) noted that Internet access location could play a role in privacy expectation (e.g. on a mobile phone in a public area, on a work computer, or at a public library). If an individual discloses information via social media site, it could be disseminated and distributed for any number of reasons, with potentially unintended, but damaging effects nonetheless (Taraszow et al., 2010). The potential audience for any social media content must be considered (DeVoe, 2009).

Growth of Online Communication and Social Media

Social media is constantly growing and changing. What constitutes social media is instantaneously being refined as time passes. Social media serve a variety of purposes, and social media options can push to the forefront or fall away. Facebook recently passed the one billion user threshold (Zuckerberg, 2012). Twitter has registered rapid growth, as well, burgeoning to hundreds of millions of users (Dugan, 2012). Once-popular MySpace still exists, but has seen better financial times and more users in previous years (Gaylord, 2012). The interconnectedness of the multitudes of social media users spreads social networking ever further.

Online Communication and Social Media Implications

Digital social media can have real life effects and implications. Russo et al. (2010) detailed how social media had particularly damaging effects in the case of

teachers. One individual's use of MySpace showed a comingling of her personal and professional lives, thus causing the issue (Russo et al., 2010). Russo et al. (2010) noted that the impacted individuals claimed, unsuccessfully, that freedom of speech had been violated. In this scope, the researchers concluded that "social networking sites are thus indeed borderless and very public" (Russo et al., 2010, p.12). Potential job applicants may be wary of content that a potential employer might find on social media sites (Russo et al., 2010). This could sensibly be extended to include tattoo information or photographs.

Social Groups

Social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter, innately necessitate a consideration of privacy (and thereby also publicness). West, Lewis, and Currie (2009) reiterated Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) articulation of privacy as multifaceted. Additionally, the construction of the social group acquires new meaning when considered in a social media context. West et al. (2009) noted that being connected with one's social circle or being a Facebook 'friend' does not equal true real-world friendship. Taylor (2008) detailed the "quality versus quantity" dilemma with regard to individual relationships via social media (p. 21). In other words, there is a clear difference between having 100 'friends' that are truly acquaintances or having 10 true friends. Social media connections between family member further blur the lines (West et al., 2009). Social connections with employers or observation of personal information in a professional scope can also cause potential issues (West et al., 2009). West et al. (2009) astutely posed the question of privacy with consideration of specific audiences.

Privacy Management

Social media naturally bring consideration of disclosure to the forefront. One of the difficulties in managing privacy with groups of individuals on social media is the sites themselves. Houghton and Joinson (2010) noted that privacy controls and settings may change frequently, thus increasing users' confusion. Facebook has previously had trouble with advertisers' use of personal information and information management (Gozzi Jr., 2010).

While some of privacy management is the content posted (or not posted), individuals may not utilize privacy management settings to the full extent available (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). While social media sites do have a role to play in privacy, much of the burden remains on the individual. This can refer to both one's own information, as well as that of others (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). Palandri and Green (2000) found that individuals may even use different identities online if the context is potentially damaging in real life. Digital boundaries, while blurred, are still critical for users to consider in order to prevent possible privacy violations (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). Taraszow et al. (2010) noted that when an individual actively posts information to a social media site, "it is very likely to be of high quality, i.e. complete and accurate" (p.87). West et al. (2009) noted the sacrifice of making information available through Facebook meant trading privacy in exchange. Houghton & Joinson (2010) stated how privacy can be viewed through the lens of control.

Interface: Online and Face to Face

Tattoo Location

One of the specific questions an individual obtaining a tattoo must consider is the intended location. Research has noted an individual's consideration of the public/private dialectic (Kosut, 2006). This issue is important in that the public/private consideration extends into various spheres in a person's life and relates specifically to identity and what one chooses to communicate about self to others. One iteration of this is the individual's pre-selection of body area for tattoo modification, whether buying a readily-available, pre-set "flash" image or an individually specified design (Kosut, 2006). How/if body modifications are perceived a certain way and management strategies are worthy of examination. Wohlrab et al. (2007) noted that individuals reveal or conceal tattoos through use of clothing. Stirn and Hinz (2008) found that a majority of individuals with body modification utilized specific placement and concealment in this manner. Orend and Gagné (2009) noted that some of their participants choose readily visible locations for tattoos specifically to evoke rebellion and a break from the rest of society. Tattoo publicness or privateness can be selected for specific reasons.

The interplay of public and private spheres has its roots in dialectical tensions, with further extension and refinement to include group effects. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) mentioned self-disclosure (with clear implications for the individual with associated costs and benefits) in dialectical metatheory. Some people have emphasized this publicness to the extreme, utilizing body modification as performance, transformation, and/or spectacle (Lloyd, 2004; Knafo, 2009). Fenske (2007) and

Braunberger (2000) noted the publicness of the tattoo contest at tattoo conventions. Carnivals and circuses historically emphasized the spectacle of tattooed women to draw crowds (Atkinson, 2002; Braunberger 2000). A small number of people highlighted by the media have used body modification to alter their appearances to become more animal-like (Bogdanoski, 2009; Schramme, 2008; Ressler & Barnes, 1999). What one person terms body modification, another deems mutilation (Schramme, 2008). Whether deemed public or private, tattoo consideration can be considered part of an individual's public image.

Image Management

Image management, whether handled interpersonally face to face or online, can be viewed several ways. Leary and Allen (2011b) found that individuals utilized different personas depending on the person/group being interacted with. Stanyer and Wring (2004) noted how emphasis of certain elements of private life (in conjunction with ignoring or overshadowing other elements) can affect public image. Leary and Allen (2011a) similarly emphasized these efforts to create a positive image while balancing disclosure and privacy. Watts (2010) noted that individuals may manage their identities using social media "to create a new identity or to improve upon their current one" (p. 48). Oržekauskas and Šmaižienė (2007) posited the possibility of a gap between public image and reality.

Managing Tattoos Face to Face

Tattoos and Dialectical Tensions – Public and Private

An individual must make many disclosure related decisions regarding a tattoo. Stirn and Hinz (2008) supposed that body modifications can be private; thus, individuals may be reluctant to discuss them. Albin's (2006) second case study involved a tattooed woman whose conservative husband was not tattooed. She admitted that opposites may have attracted in their case, and he was drawn to her body modifications. Despite this initial acceptance, her husband tried to control her appearance in public situations, as he worried about others' perceptions (Albin, 2006). One participant in Atkinson's (2002) study detailed how a boyfriend resisted her desire to get a tattoo. This lasted until he assisted in her decision that she get tattooed below her bikini line; it was private so it would only be shared with each other (Atkinson, 2002). Another participant stated how her tattoo was on her lower back, where only she would see it (Atkinson, 2002). One respondent made the assertion that sexual areas of the body that are private and concealed seem to have that sexuality enhanced by tattoos (Atkinson, 2002). Atkinson (2002) noted that readily visible tattoos are equated with more trivial aspects of fashion, such as wearing jewelry. Visible tattoos lose the mystique connected with being hidden and subsequently revealed. Santos (2009) suggested that females have more social pressure against getting visible tattoos than men do. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) noted that the potential audience for tattoos could vary by group, such as the general public, close friends, family, or peers. Tattoos only revealed to certain groups may not be revealed for

the same reasons. For example, an intimate partner or doctor may see a private tattoo as a result of differing circumstances.

An interesting case study in the public scope of tattoos is that of Straightedge, which developed from specific Punk attitudes (Atkinson, 2003). Adherents emphasize a philosophy of purity from illegal drugs, alcohol, and non-monogamous sex, while some avoid even prescription medicine and caffeine, or have an additional emphasis on animal rights (Atkinson, 2003). A small subset of the group advocates violence to promote the cause and make the ideals public (Atkinson, 2003).

One might argue that injecting ink into the skin would conflict with this lifestyle, but it does not alter the mind like other substances can (Atkinson, 2003). Additionally, Straightedge members view tattooing, like the lifestyle, as a lifelong commitment (Atkinson, 2003). Atkinson (2003) documented three disparate uses for Straightedge tattoos: identification (meant to display group lifestyle affiliation), restraint (showing control and bodily equilibrium), and critique (criticizing others not in the group for living lives of excess). These tattoos are often located in public/easily visible places on the body as a means to attract attention and invite questions (Atkinson, 2003). Similarly, those with Neo Primitive modification generally opt for increased public exposure (Atkinson & Young, 2001).

A participant in Atkinson's (2002) study argued the necessity of the public in tattooing, stipulating that a tattoo is almost pointless if it is not visible to others. This was not a majority viewpoint, as other participants valued the privacy and personal aspects more (Atkinson, 2002). Another participant commented this conflict was not an easy

decision, as the tattoos were obtained to be public, but nonetheless emphasized her need to be private (Atkinson, 2002). The interplay between public and private was noted for Neo Primitives: body modifications are very personal, but the body is intended to be a billboard (Atkinson & Young, 2001). While a rite of passage or a life accomplishment may be a public event, a corresponding tattoo might or might not be similarly public (Atkinson & Young, 2001). Private tattoos may still communicate, but the potential audience is reduced (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009).

Employment

Potentially visible tattoos play into the image one presents in employment. Public image is critical to consider as tattoos may affect the image presented to others. Employers may be less than accepting of visible or disclosed body modification, to the point of discriminating against potential hires simply because of their image. This reaction may even extend into supposedly creative career paths where innovation and uniqueness is valued (Williams, 2009). Kissack (2000) mentioned that Samuel Steward, a professor and tattoo artist (occupations simultaneously undertaken for two years), attempted to manage his appearance with clothing in the hopes that his students would not recognize him (though the experience Steward related in the article occurred decades ago). Tattoos and professionalism may appear to be mutually exclusive (Atkinson, 2002). Concern regarding how one's tattoos are perceived is not new.

Methods used in Tattooing Research

Quantitative Study

Tattooing research has been approached with a variety of heuristic methods. Quantitative study via questionnaire and survey has been the longtime standard, and tattooing research is no exception. Several studies have utilized quantitative research in various contexts for tattooing (Wohlrab et al., 2007; Roberti & Storch, 2005; Carroll et al., 2002; Frederick & Bradley, 2000; Stirn & Hinz, 2008; Cegolon et al., 2010). Quantitative studies have been useful in obtaining larger-scale numbers, statistics about specific demographics, and are more easily generalizable to other populations.

Qualitative Study

Alternatively, some researchers have noted the value of the newer voice of qualitative research. Tattooing research has utilized qualitative methodology's benefits, as well (Atkinson, 2003; Atkinson, 2004; Huss-Ashmore, 2000; Albin, 2006, Harlow, 2008; John Roberts, 2012). Many tattoos are images only. A direct translation into words from a non-lexical source may eliminate additional available meaning; rather, a connection should be constructed between the two (Leavy, 2009). Even in cases where tattoos are words, additional components may exist beyond that which is directly visible. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) called for additional qualitative data on the communicative value of tattoos, as well as how tattoos are managed in various settings or with groups of people.

Narrative is a critical part of qualitative research methodology. As interviews (and focus groups) are a form of narrative, a natural extension may be made to include creative narratives (Leavy, 2009). Some individuals have utilized this method to discuss tattooing beyond an academic focus (Talvi, 1998; Nelson, 2009). Narrative has the critical distinction between the experiences of life and life as documented (Leavy, 2009). Narrative allows even more of the writer's voice to be revealed.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research is a dynamic extension of the qualitative approach. While not all would agree that tattoos are art, it is a possible interpretation. The arts (narrative included) have been noted for their healing and empowering abilities (Leavy, 2009). Tattoos have already been documented as a method in recovering from trauma (Suchet, 2009; Selekman, 2003; Atkinson & Young, 2001). In addition, disclosure can prove to be therapeutic (Petronio, 2002). The arts are noted for studies dealing with identity, as well as conveying emotion and the intricacies of social life (Leavy, 2009). Tattooing research has examined personal identity and motivations for tattooing, including emotion (Atkinson, 2004; Albin, 2006; DeMello, 1995; Williams, 2009). Arts-based research also can elucidate multiple meanings (Leavy, 2009). It has been documented that tattoos can individually have several meanings (Atkinson, 2004). Thus, a logical connection can then be made between the value of arts-based research and tattooing on a number of points.

Visual Art

Visual art research methodology provides a unique perspective on a visual component such as a tattoo. Tattoos are made to stand out on the skin by means of pigment. Leavy (2009) notes an art approach of examining blank space, which points to space with imagery. Similarly, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) have compared what is said and left unsaid. This line of thought may prove useful for tattooing research in that heavily tattooed persons may have “blank” skin amidst their tattoos, which provides a means for framing the tattoos, as well. Harlow (2008) compared un-tattooed skin to silence. Visual art has been used as a means of resistance to hegemonic beliefs (Leavy, 2009). This is not altogether unlike the message for some tattoos (Atkinson, 2003). Visual art has been considered interpretive (Leavy, 2009). Images are subject to the perception of the viewer to some degree. Tattoos, then, could be examined for the images themselves.

Theoretical Foundations

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) Social Identity Theory also provides a solid basis for analysis. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals belong to groups, and the differences among those groups can result in conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel and Turner (1986) denoted two poles on a continuum of this conceptualization: one where group dynamics are “fully determined by their interpersonal relationship and individual characteristics” and the other that is “fully determined by [...] respective memberships in various social groups or categories” (p. 8). Some mixture of these extremes would likely

seem to occur most often. Additionally, Tajfel and Turner (1986) noted the aspect of social mobility- that individuals will seek to change group affiliation if their existing group does not meet their needs. Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, and Gallois (1998) noted that individuals may redefine their boundaries to accomplish this. The concept of social change reflects that groups in society are strictly divided, “making it impossible or very difficult for individuals, as individuals, to divest themselves of an unsatisfactory, underprivileged, or stigmatized group membership” (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 9). Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) use of the term stigma is of note in this instance due to tattoo’s connection to stigma and lower-class origins of tattoo (Jones, 2000; DeMello, 1995). This element is in need of consideration due to the changing dynamic regarding positive and negative perceptions of tattoos.

Tattooed and Non-tattooed Groups

There are clear implications for this theory in connection to tattooing motivations. Certainly, individuals with tattoos and individuals without tattoos could be divided into separate groups. Group conflict may result in the form of negative perceptions on the part of non-tattooed individuals, evoked through disparaging comments or real world results (such as not being hired for a job on the basis of visible tattoos). The ways that an individual could attempt to change group membership would be to have the tattoo removed (thus reverting to a supposedly non-tattooed appearance) or covering the tattoo (thus creating the appearance of being non-tattooed). Tattoo removal is difficult, painful, and not guaranteed to produce a pre-tattoo appearance. Covering a tattoo may be easier by comparison, but depends on tattoo location. Additionally, covering a tattoo may not

produce the desired effect of appearing non-tattooed if others previously knew about the tattoo.

Groups Among Tattooed Individuals

Additional group distinctions could be made within groups of tattooed individuals, as those with tattoos are not necessarily one homogenous group. One division may be between those who obtain tattoos for certain reasons and others who have no specific motivations for them. The traditional tattooing demographic could also be separated from the new tattooing demographic. Another distinction may occur between those who have few tattoos and those who are heavily tattooed. Others may note a distinction between those with tattoos that are in readily visible areas of the body and those with tattoos that can be easily covered. Individuals might even be united as a group by a specific tattoo motivation, such as getting a memorial tattoo for a deceased loved one, even if the tattoos and the persons they are for remain different.

Dialectical Tensions

One of the theoretical foundations for the current study finds its origins in the metatheory of dialectical tensions. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) detailed dialectics succinctly as the dynamic interaction of opposing ideas (such as public and private). They additionally emphasized nuances at work instead of mere direct opposition (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Contradictions occur naturally in society and have several layers (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, public/privacy could also be iterated in various shades, such as autonomy/privacy, social/private, public/separation, or public/confidential. Each comparison takes on slightly different meaning. Ben-Ari

(1995) noted that the amount of self-disclosure affects the dialectic of intimacy and privacy. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) underscore the importance of interplay of tensions (versus “either/or”), as the reaction between the forces is ongoing (p. 10). Baxter (2004) also referred to this as flux. The notion of totality is how terms are relative in regard to other terms; the meaning cannot exist in a vacuum (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Some meaning is derived for similar, but separate, concepts. Where the theoretical path begins to diverge is that dialectics has typically focused on the shared tensions of the dyadic relationship (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996).

Communication Privacy Management

Petronio (1991) analyzed privacy in communication boundary management, which would prove to be a progenitor for Communication Privacy Management (CPM). Petronio (1991) detailed the element of risk and the strategy in disclosure, specifically in the case of married couples. The ways that married couples coordinated their message strategies as disclosing spouse and receiving spouse led to varying effectiveness of coordinating boundaries (Petronio, 1991). Petronio et al. (1998) examined privacy in a group context. Individuals seek a specific amount of privacy, but actual privacy resulting from set boundaries and in certain situations may vary (Petronio et al., 1998). Individuals have a sense of ownership about personal information and develop rules to determine how to control and manage it (Petronio et al., 1998).

With the development of CPM, Petronio (2002) evolved a dialectical approach similar to Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996). There is certainly some agreement between the two theoretical perspectives, though Petronio examined privacy specifically, as well

as looked beyond the dyadic interaction to groups and mass dissemination (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2002) noted that revealing information is a “balancing act” and revealing/concealing are not independent concepts (p. 1). Information is “owned or co-owned with others”, as anyone who has knowledge of it has some control over how it is handled (Petronio, 2002, p. 3). Thus, the boundaries around that information may be similarly decided by one person or several (Petronio, 2002). Boundaries may allow varying levels of access to different groups, may work in conjunction with each other, and change over time (Petronio, 2002). Though they referred to primarily a parent/child relationship, Ledbetter et al. (2010) made the astute distinction regarding the role of physical distance between persons in development of specific privacy boundaries (college students at home versus at college, for example).

Both revealing and concealing can have risks and benefits, so the decision to do either is never simple and always a trade-off (Petronio, 2002). Beldad, de Jong, and Steehouder (2011) noted this type of exchange occurs with use of social media. Individuals can discover information in numerous ways, and do not need to be willing recipients to discover it (Petronio, 2002). Once information is revealed, it can be distributed without the authority of its originator, if its co-controller(s) share it communally (Petronio, 2002). As notions of public and private interact, boundaries can correspondingly flux, as well (Petronio, 2002). Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) examined the variety of potential social groups who might witness tattoos, and CPM’s privacy boundaries varying by group type is a particularly good fit for this connection.

Individuals have different boundaries for social groups such as friends, family, and peers (Petronio, 2002).

Tattooing

In the scope of tattooing, the study of privacy is critical. For example, if an individual has a semi-private tattoo on the ribs, the tattoo will remain hidden under clothing most of the time. If the individual goes swimming, the tattoo may be revealed. A number of strangers may see the tattoo, but not care. If someone in the individual's social circle discovers the previously unknown tattoo, both the individual and the peer become co-owners. The individual may or may not know that the peer has learned this information. The peer then has a choice to keep the information similarly private or share it with others, thus creating a similar decision for any others who become privy to the information.

Technology

In this increasingly technological age, this situation takes on greater significance. Perhaps the peer does not just share information of the tattoo with others; perhaps the peer nondescriptly takes a digital photograph with a cellular phone camera and posts the picture online so that others in the peer's social network can see it. This can also occur without the individual's knowledge. The dissemination of the information or the photograph can have costs for the individual, as perhaps her parents or religious authority did not know about the tattoo. The individual may be able to confront the peer as a

result, or the individual might not be able to discover where/with whom the breach of privacy originally took place. However, the information is now out of the individual's control and is unlikely to be contained.

Alternately, the individual may have told the peer about the tattoo, but asked her to keep the information among friends. Perhaps the peer disclosed the information to someone to whom she was a friend, but not a friend of the original individual. This mistake could have similarly critical consequences. The misunderstanding is termed boundary turbulence, as each person thought she understood the appropriate boundaries for the sharing of the information (Petronio, 2002). The concept of praxis suggests that in the above situation that there are actions and reactions to the events as they occur on the part of the individual, the peer, and the extended network (Petronio, 2002). Rules are developed along cultural, gendered, motivational, and contextual criteria- social and physical environment (Petronio, 2002). Potential disclosure of tattoos could very sensibly be managed along these conceptual lines. Petronio (2002) detailed stigma risks, which deal with others' potential negative perceptions- an element that fits very naturally with tattooing perceptions and historic tattooing stigma.

Research Questions

Many people in current American society have tattoos, which not only serve a communicative function, but often directly relate to the "owner's" identity and values. The motivations people identify for getting tattoos and how they manage issues of privacy and disclosure can further illustrate how individuals communicate, specifically

with regard to their tattoos. Thus the following research questions for this study have been posed:

RQ 1: What motivations for tattoo modification will participants detail?

RQ 2: How do tattooed persons manage disclosure/privacy of their tattoos online?

RQ 3: How do tattooed persons manage disclosure/privacy of their tattoos in face to face situations?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Study Design

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study in hopes that issues related to tattooing are best explained using thick description in participants' own words and experiences to explain complex phenomena. Miller (2010) posited that people with tattoos usually enjoy talking about them and encouraged the use of open-ended questions (Appendix B) to foster discussion. This is more of an exploratory study, which is appropriate for a qualitative approach. Individuals could have multiple and nuanced reasons for obtaining one or more tattoos. Additionally, online and in person tattoo management is best explored through explanation. All of these components could be as unique as the individuals themselves, so a qualitative methodology is fitting. Research (and specifically qualitative research) is denoted as making meaning (Leavy, 2009). It proves particularly illustrative for complex phenomena (such as tattooing practices and motivations). It allows researchers to reveal the true voice of the participants, as well as highlight unique aspects of the research that would be obscured behind the aggregation of data.

Focus groups were selected to capture group dynamics and responses that might not be otherwise found in individual interviews. Qualitative responses via survey were also utilized as a supportive component. Both components allowed elaboration in areas where simple responses would not suffice.

Procedures for Data Collection

Instrument – Focus Groups

In the current study, data collection was accomplished utilizing qualitative focus groups for the primary approach. A quantitative survey was attempted as a supportive triangulation complement, but insufficient responses were obtained for analysis. By utilizing a separate survey (Appendix G) link in the invitation to find participants interested in interviewing, the researcher hoped to find rich information through purposive selection (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The contact information was separate from the survey responses, so the researcher was not able to connect specific responses with any one person. Additionally, the researcher utilized snowball sampling through respondents' interpersonal social networks (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Responses for focus group volunteers via the online link were low, so the researcher utilized his interpersonal network via Facebook and interpersonal relationships to locate tattooed individuals who would be interested in focus group participation, as well. All the focus groups were with people who had at least one tattoo, which hopefully encouraged the fullest possible discussion of tattoos, since participants were with tattooed peers. The researcher did not mention beforehand that he had tattoos or wear clothing that revealed tattoos, though after the focus groups some participants did inquire about

the reason for the topic selection, and the researcher related the information at that time. Some participants knew the researcher previously and may or may not have known about his tattoos. This lack of disclosure of the researcher's tattoos was purposive to avoid swaying any focus group discussion. Wohlrab et al. (2007) conjectured that having a tattoo would affect perception of tattoos.

The first focus group (group of males and females) was held in a dining area of a house. The parents of the husband of one of the focus group participants allowed the use of their home for the focus group. This location was selected because it was the most convenient and comfortable for participants. This same focus group participant connected with her interpersonal network to find individuals to participate. The group dynamic was perhaps more relaxed since the participants all knew at least one person in the group, even if they had not met each other previously (though some participants knew more than one person in the focus group). Other individuals were present in the home, since it was a personal residence, but they did not impose on the focus group. There was soft television noise in the background of the recording throughout, from another room.

The second focus group (all females) was held in a meeting room on a university campus. This location was selected as it was central for participants and the researcher. Three of the participants knew the researcher previously, one was a volunteer via the separate focus group web link, and one was a friend of one of the participants. This focus group had the greatest range in age of participants. The group dynamic worked well; though participants may or may not have perceived the others as peers, tattoos certainly served as a unifier.

The third and final focus group was intended to be all males. After initial efforts to get a group together, enough volunteers were found to run the last group with both males and females. This group was also held in a meeting room on a college campus. This focus group was nearly subject to some additional unexpected difficulties. One of the expected volunteers had a work emergency and could not attend. Another expected volunteer did not show up. A replacement volunteer was found, and participants utilized their interpersonal networks to find someone additional who would participate in the focus group. Eventually, enough individuals attended and the focus group began.

Instrument- Questionnaire

The questionnaire link was distributed via e-mail to instructors of a mandatory university course. Instructors were to share the link with their students. The specific class was chosen as it draws students from all colleges across the university and has a minimum requirement of junior standing, providing a subset of the university's student population. It was conjectured that students at this level might be more likely to have tattoos than those in a mandatory class more likely to draw students of freshman status. Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, and Koch's (2002a) findings provided support for this stipulation. The survey link and separate link to volunteer for focus groups were promoted using a standardized prompt. The researcher also offered to speak to the instructors and classes in question to discuss the purpose of the research. Both the survey and volunteer links for focus groups were prepared utilizing secure online survey software. The links were separate so that no survey responses could be connected to

anyone who may have volunteered for the focus group. Survey respondents did not receive any compensation for their responses to the survey. An informed consent page (Appendix E) indicating a required agreement to volunteer to participate needed to be completed before anyone was able to progress on to the remainder of the survey. The survey was not directed only at those who had tattoos; it was also meant to obtain a measure of the prevalence of social media use and notions of publicness and privacy in social media among college students.

While the survey as a whole did not receive enough responses to be quantitatively usable [i.e. a population of 1000 should have a sample size of 278 (Keyton, 2011)] for analysis, the qualitative responses from individuals still remained valid and were compared with data evaluated from the focus groups.

Participants

The three focus groups consisted of five participants each. The original plan was to have one group of all female participants, one group of all male participants, and one group of mixed males and females. This structure was selected to elicit any unique viewpoints from participants as a result of being in the presence of only male, only female, or other male and female peers. Petronio and Martin (1986), for example, had examined information disclosure with regard to gender differences. Due to scheduling conflicts and the available volunteers, the focus group intended to be all male participants needed to be run as another with mixed males and females. The researcher offered pizza and soda as compensation for participation in the focus groups. In addition to the initial

conversation starter, group members were able to ease any initial uncertainty by eating pizza together and talking a little beforehand.

Demographics (of Sample)

The tables below list the demographics of focus group participants. ‘Number of Piercings’ listed excludes earlobes, and ‘Tattoos Covered’ refers to tattoos covered with another tattoo.

Table 1 – Focus Group 1						
Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Number of Tattoos	Tattoos Covered	Tattoos Removed	Number of Piercings
Ramona	Female	25	21	1	0	5
Nicole	Female	19	1	0	0	1
Becky	Female	23	2	0	0	0
Ashley	Female	26	5	0	0	1
Chris	Male	23	1	0	0	1

All participants in the first focus group responded to an open-ended question of race/ethnicity, identifying as white/Caucasian.

Table 2 – Focus Group 2						
Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Number of Tattoos	Tattoos Covered	Tattoos Removed	Number of Piercings
Ann	Female	53	1	0	0	5
Aria	Female	45	1	0	0	0
Ivy Jones	Female	25	2	0	0	1
Samantha Topaz	Female	39	5	0	0	3
Jennie	Female	20	2	0	0	5

All participants in the second focus group identified as white/Caucasian.

Table 3 – Focus Group 3						
Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Number of Tattoos	Tattoos Covered	Tattoos Removed	Number of Piercings
Allie	Female	30	2	0	0	0
Iambic	Female	29	4	0	0	0
Eric	Male	22	2	0	0	0
Jake	Male	22	1	0	0	0
Marie	Female	27	1	0	0	0

All participants in the third focus group identified as white/Caucasian.

Overall, the average focus group participant was 28.53 years old, had 3.4 tattoos (though this was skewed higher by the one participant with 21 tattoos), and had 1.5 non-earlobe piercings.

The online survey had 9 tattooed respondents who had an average of 2.11 tattoos. One person had covered up two tattoos with other tattoos. Tattooed persons had an average of 1.22 non-earlobe piercings. The average age of a survey respondent was

21.44, and the age range was 20-30. All respondents responded to an open-ended question about race/ethnicity and identified as white/Caucasian. The survey respondents were additionally asked about specific social media options they used. All of them responded that they used Facebook. Two said they had blogs (photo/writing), and one used Twitter.

Informed Consent

The researcher distributed informed consent forms to all participants (Appendix A). Participants signed and dated the form and returned it to the researcher. The researcher also provided participants with a blank copy of the form for them to keep for reference to the study. In addition, the researcher provided a demographic data form (Appendix C) for participants to complete. This form also gave a brief statement mentioning the study's general topics for discussion. Firmin et al. (2008) suggested one item on the demographic form: a drawing or description of one of the participant's tattoos. Firmin et al. (2008) also suggested that due to the possible sensitive nature of the location of a tattoo that the location of the tattoo not be requested (though it should be noted that individuals could discuss the location of their tattoos in the focus groups, if they so chose). The form also allowed participants to choose their own pseudonym for the focus groups to allow additional input, as suggested by Lindlof and Taylor (2002). In the few cases where participants chose a similar name or initials (i.e. Mike in place of Michael, M.W.) or wrote the same name, the researcher re-assigned a different pseudonym so that responses could not be connected to any of the focus group participants, so anonymity could be assured as much as possible.

Data Analysis of Focus Group Transcripts

Qualitative research provides its own unique rewards and challenges, starting with questions to drive the inquiry. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stressed the importance of quality questions in qualitative research. The aims of the stated questions are built from previous research and the gaps therein (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Meloy (1994) offered that qualitative inquiry entails several steps all occurring at once, with the researcher at the eye of a hurricane of preparation. Leavy (2009) noted that qualitative study can reach a saturation point, in terms of amount of data for analysis.

The researcher informed all focus group participants at the start that the focus group sessions would be audio recorded. The researcher transcribed all audio recordings personally, while listening repeatedly and carefully to ensure all words were correctly understood. This included making efforts to include emphasis of and emotion in specific words and phrases used by participants, including any verbal fillers and pauses in between words. This was done to retain the participants' narratives in the form they were presented. There were also several situations where dialogue was overlapping and some situations where participants interrupted. These were documented in the way they occurred. While the specific dialogue sections seemed somewhat fragmented in places, they capture a close approximation of the narratives as they happened in real time. Any clarifications in the transcripts were noted by researcher notes in [brackets]. For example, on occasion, participants used sarcastic humor that would not match with the literal meaning of the words. The researcher also noted room noises (e.g. birds outside, pen clicking, a train going through the area, etc.) Survey respondents' qualitative

responses were copied verbatim from the electronic documents obtained from the survey site, without any editing for spelling, grammar, or capitalization.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) emphasized the importance of categorization and data reduction in qualitative research. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) agreed that such categories are a result of data reduction from a large amount of potentially broad written material. As individuals may have numerous reasons for obtaining tattoos, this point is particularly salient.

Saldaña (2013) noted that coding can not only reduce data, but also refine data and develop a summary. Additionally, coding and category analysis can connect data to larger concepts (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher listened to the audio recordings several times, making notes on the transcripts to gain a holistic view of and immersion into the data— becoming sensitized to the salient themes. As the researcher more carefully reviewed the transcripts, the codes themselves were created and documented. They were made to appear distinct from the rest of the transcript text through text formatting and brackets, as coding guidelines suggest (Saldaña, 2013). The coding process of the current study led to a number of themes (which ideally should be a small overall number). Individual codes were combined or modified into a smaller number of themes with which to answer the research questions posed. The thesis advisor served as an additional coding reviewer, contributing to the validity (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Any coding discrepancies were reconsidered and resolved through discussion.

Reliability and Validity

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted the importance of reliability, or repetition of results, in qualitative research and articulated the unique challenge of reliability with qualitative research: that though individuals may be asked the same questions, the responses can vary by individual, and yet be valid. Validity is defined as research measuring what it is designed to measure (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This is particularly salient in tattooing research, as motivations for obtaining tattoo modification may vary widely. Focus group participants responded to others' narratives by providing affirmation, disagreeing through clarification of their alternate viewpoints, or elaborating further. Certain responses resonated across focus groups and survey responses. The researcher saved multiple drafts and made process notes throughout the research to better document the development of analysis. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) detailed how saving notes and data regarding the process are part of a beneficial audit trail that can help others understand the research.

Triangulation

Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods to obtain data and enhance validity, is beneficial in qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) also noted that validity benefits as a result of triangulation, or use of multiple methods to achieve research aims. The current study planned to use three focus groups as the primary instrument, as well as qualitative and quantitative data through a questionnaire as the secondary instrument.

Researcher's Role

The current study's topic was chosen since it is pertinent to today's increasingly tattoo-saturated society and of personal interest to the researcher. Leavy (2009) noted the importance of acknowledging the researcher's role and personal connection to the topic of study. The researcher had obtained tattoo modification for specific reasons and wanted to examine others' motivations, as well. In addition, the researcher had considered location before obtaining tattoos and desired to find out the extent that others did the same or were otherwise concerned with who knew about the tattoos, both in person and online.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1 attempted to examine the potentially complex motivations that drove participants to obtain tattoo modification. Using Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory, tattooing motivations were examined in the scope of groups. Research Question 2 attempted to examine potential tattoo management online, with a specific focus on social media. The 'mass' focus makes Petronio's (2002) CPM a sound theoretical backing for the mass aspect of social media, as well as for analysis of tattoo information sharing among individuals and groups. Research Question 3 attempted to examine tattooed individuals' potential tattoo and tattoo information management with various people and groups in their lives. The results and discussion sections have been combined to promote a deeper understanding of the issues explored.

Data from the focus groups is included with participant pseudonym and focus group number (FG1, FG2, or FG3). Qualitative survey data is listed also (QS). Italics denote words emphasized by participants. Names of places and individuals mentioned by participants were also changed [indicated by brackets] to ensure identities remained obscured.

RQ1 – What motivations for tattoo modification will participants detail?

Figure 1 - Motivational Framework

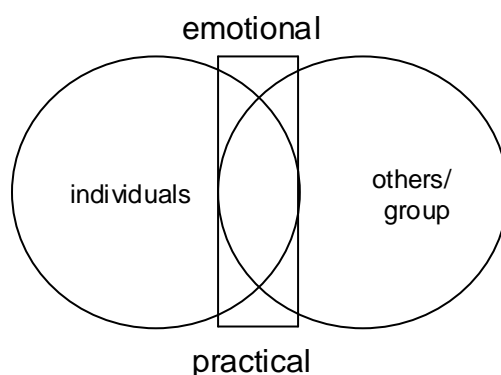


Figure 1 illustrates the framework for tattoo motivation utilized in the current study. From analysis of all focus groups and the qualitative portion of the survey, 32 possible initial motivational codes emerged (Appendix D). Table 4 shows the refined themes for discussion within this framework. For the purpose of this thesis, only the dominant themes will be discussed in detail to keep the overall length of discussion manageable. Some tattoos were examined as emotionally individualistic or group-influenced, in addition to practical considerations. The overlap of the two circles represents that neither emotional category is mutually exclusive. For example, a memorial tattoo has a strong individualized feeling of loss component, but certainly that loss relates to another person. Alternately, a tattoo obtained for rebellion has a group connection to one or more authority figures, but definitely has ties to personalized expressions. It is this interaction helps define several motivational dynamics. There will

naturally be some semantic overlap. Several individuals listed their tattoo(s) as having more than one motivation.

Table 4 – Motivational Themes		
Emotional		Practical
Primarily Individualistic	Primarily Group-Influenced	
Individuality	Family and Friends	Addictiveness
Personal Interests	Rebellion	Cost
Significant Others (Love)	Social Situations	The Artist Influence
Memorials (Loss)		Regret

Background – Overview of Motivations

The current study operates within the popularly-held, media-enhanced paradigm that many people today obtain tattoos for certain motivations. While tattooed individuals could be considered as a singular group in comparison with non-tattooed individuals, it is important to make the distinction of differences among those with tattoos. Orend and Gagné (2009) had participants who felt that tattoos should be thoughtful, customized, and meaningful. Participants in the current study echoed this sentiment for many of their tattoos. This point remains in comparison to the previous tattooing paradigm that certain types of people got tattoos and no meaning was attached, or as Ann (FG2) put the tattoo split: “either they got meaning, or they don’t”. Samantha Topaz (FG2) advised regarding getting tattoos: “you want it to *mean* something”.

An important tattoo distinction should also be made. In conjunction with the current paradigm, there is also the split between pre-made ‘flash’ images and personalized, custom tattoo images. These ‘flash’ images are often associated with the

prior tattooing paradigm or certain groups and often aligned with having no specific motivations for the tattoo. Ashley (FG1) mentioned her mother's perceptions about the old tattooing paradigm:

My mom realized there was a lot more *meaning* to them [to Ashley's tattoos]. I mean, she likes to say- 'the only people who had tattoos when I was a kid were carnies and sailors [...] and...and it was *scary*.'

Iambic (FG3) also recalled the history: "It's [...] working class." Jake (FG3) made the observation: "I think it's worth...*noting* that... a lot of these biases and assumptions aren't... *baseless*. [...] "It's a *fact* [...] that a lot of... *biker* gangs and stuff [...] *have* tattoos." Ann (FG2) said: "Sailors and... the *bad* cats were the only ones who had 'em. And now it's just opened up to anybody."

While participants in the current study often detailed their unique tattoo modifications with similarly unique motivations behind them, having a tattoo 'flash' image did not necessarily mean that the tattoo itself was without meaning, as it might have at one time. Ashley (FG1) commented on how one of her tattoos may have been a stock image, but still had meaning for her.

It depends on how you consider, what you consider like 'flash tattoos' [...] 'cuz the hamsa hand I have on the back of my neck, it's just... a regular image of one that [...] I found, and that I really liked... but...it had a lot more *meaning* for me, but again, like I said, I didn't totally have anyone *design* it specially. [...] It seems like pieces are usually custom... in *some way* because there's some element of it that has... some special purpose...

Ann (FG2) also noted "it could *be* the exact same tattoo and have... totally different... meanings" (which could happen in the case of two individuals choosing the same 'flash' tattoo design).

Emotional Motivation

Some motivations mentioned were participants' impressions of others' tattoo motivations (i.e. they may have talked with someone about the reason for obtaining a tattoo or made an inference about a tattoo's meaning.) Some of these observations were more substantial than others (e.g. a description of a sister's tattoo versus a perception of a famous person's tattoo). Thus, these are not motivations detailed by the tattooed individuals themselves, but rather perceptions of others. Despite this, they do enrich the study, but where they are cited and discussed in this thesis, they are identified as perceptions instead of true motivations.

Individuals in the current study detailed several motivations for obtaining tattoos. Atkinson (2004) noted sexuality, a death, emotions, and peer group identity as some of the possible reasons for getting a tattoo. Stirn and Hinz (2008) noted positive or negative life events, loss, positive or negative feelings, health, and other reasons as categories for body modification. Some of these motivations were found in the current study. Tattoo motivations were complex and individual tattoos often had more than one motivation detailed. Some motivations and tattoos were mentioned repeatedly by the same participants throughout the focus group. This may have been due to the strength of the stated motivations and/or participants having one or a few tattoos (necessitating some repetition, where others with comparatively more tattoos had more tattoo-specific motivations to discuss). Alternately, this may have been due to the way that the discussion of certain topics occurred in the groups.

Individualized Motivations

Individualized motivations were a common reason to obtain tattoos. Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, and Koch (2004) found a high incidence of self-identity; this was in line with the current study. Participants also spoke in general about the individualized reasons why they get tattoos. Ramona (FG1) succinctly described tattoos: “It’s a good way to carry things with you.” Ashley (FG1) noted that tattoos: “*stand for* things that are important to me”. Wessely (2011) examined personalized emotional motivations found in the television show *LA Ink*. Ann (FG2) commented regarding these types of television shows that highlight individuals’ motivations for tattoos: [it] “gives you an idea of what’s inside their souls, so to speak” and “what makes and moves them”. Jennie (FG2) agreed. Aria (FG2) said that “the *elements* of what I, how I view my personality” were in the tattoo. Ivy Jones (FG2) said: “Getting it was more... expression. [...] This is *me*... And I know I want this on *me*. And I know this... makes me feel good when I think about... what this *means* to me.” A (QS) respondent obtained tattoos “to express my individuality”. Knafo (2009) articulated that body art can be used as a means to align the current self with the desired self. Aria (FG2) mentioned:

I was goofing around with a friend, an artist friend of mine. And we were just *joking* or whatever... and she came up with this *drawing* that, at the end of it, I thought... so completely... utterly represented *me*, at least the way I *wanted* the world to see me. [...] *That’s* the way... I want to remember or think of myself, is...is that.

Personal Interest Tattoos

Focus group participants also detailed a wide variety of personal interests that led them to get tattoos. In this way, some focus group participants were unified as a group

because they obtained tattoos for specific interests, though the interests may have been disparate. While focus group participants may not have had similar tattoos for these individualized interests, they could find commonalities nonetheless.

Samantha Topaz (FG2): And one... is *also* because I just love Lord of the Rings... and... I... found a website that tells you the meaning of your *name*... like what it would be in *Elvish*. [...] My name means ‘hope’. [...] The Elvish word is ‘estel’. So I figured out [...] how it would probably be *spelled*... and then got a tattoo of it... I don’t know, it could say ‘*get bent*’, but... Nobody reads Elvish...

Jennie (FG2): [...] Going back to Lord of the Rings... my... hip tattoo, the quote... I actually... had it [...] written in [...] the script that was on the *ring*. Just because I *also* love Lord of the Rings. I mean it’s kind of like a *combination* of that tattoo for me. [...] The script was just so unique that it... you can still *read* it, but it’s [...] Elven... or whatever kind of script is encrolled on the ring. And I... I just adore it. (laughs)

Interestingly and coincidentally, Iambic (FG3) and Ann (FG2) both had turtle tattoos.

Iambic said: “the *turtle* is because I really like turtles. Uh... that’s, that’s about *it*.

(Laughs)” Ann related:

Well, my first one was a turtle, because I’ve collected turtles since... I don’t even know who gave me my first turtle. I...It was before I could even remember. And I always knew... I would get a tattoo of a *turtle* someday.

While one person may get a tattoo about a specific interest, another may only hold it as an interest but not get a tattoo, or the individuals may use different aspects of the same interest. In the above example, the content of Jennie’s (FG2) tattoo was not related to Lord of the Rings, though the style was connected. This connected Jennie and Samantha Topaz during the focus group because they shared a common interest.

Tattoos for Significant Others

Spouses and significant others were considered in a separate motivational category from family due to the potential romantic distinction. Participants noted these meaningful individuals in their motivations for tattoos. Having a relationship with a significant other can involve creating a strong emotional bond with another person.

Ramona (FG1) detailed having multiple tattoos for her husband:

I have my husband's name on me. Um, I got it actually, like three months after we started dating. It's kind of big too. [...] *Things* can happen, and [...] I'm in love for a reason. I trust him. [...] Then I specifically got two, one a little bit bigger than the other, to represent lovebirds... me and my husband..."

Ashley (FG1) also detailed with the other participants how she took a design she developed and turned it into a tattoo for her and her husband:

The symbol I have on my back is one I created in high school. And... it's a... a Taurus and a Capricorn symbol [...] overlaid into one symbol and [Seth's] a Capricorn and I'm a Taurus, and it really is a way to [...] *honor* our love and show unity. But at the same time, it's not putting his name, like, in a heart on my... boob or something. (group laughter) Really tacky. [...] It's a nice way to be, like, tact...*ful*. [...] For me, it had a lot of meaning to it.

An important counterpoint is the implication of getting a name of a significant other tattooed. Nicole (FG1) shared her perceptions of a friend who had this issue:

One of my really good friends in Colorado, [...] she had been married for, like, four years, and [...] shit went down, [...] her husband cheated on... her with [...] her sister, an aunt, it was just, like, insane. [...] She got his name, right *on* her wrist, and... I'm just like, *ohmigosh* [...] there's no fixing that!"

Ashley: Did she cover it up, or get it removed?

Nicole: No!

Ashley: It's just there?

Nicole: Yeah! [...] *Every* day, you know... what if you get married again?

This example illustrates the added difficulty of attempting to change affiliation (finding and connecting with another significant other) with a substantial link to another person still present, in addition to the emotional and legal difficulties of divorce. Varma and Lanigan (1999) found that this change in affiliation was one of the reasons that individuals sought laser removal for tattoos. A tattoo in such a visible location could be difficult to cover with clothing at all times, though it could be covered with another tattoo or removed. Both options are not necessarily simple. The fellow (FG1) group members suggested creating an alternate meaning for the tattoo (somewhat in jest). Ramona: “Get a dog and name the dog that.” (group laughter) Somewhat more seriously, Ashley (FG1) eloquently offered an alternative way to think about the gravity of having a tattoo for a significant other:

I thought about that one long and hard. [...] No matter what happens *between* my husband and I, he’s still gonna be a huge part of who I am as a person. We’ve been together since I was 15 years old. It doesn’t matter what happens necessarily in the future because... a huge part of who I am as a person is *because* of him.

Memorials

A common motivational tie with family-related tattoos were those done in memoriam in connection with personal loss. Many of the FG1 participants had memorial tattoos. Ramona (FG1) said “it’s a good first tattoo... to get.” Losing someone so strongly and emotionally connected to the family group was a powerful reason Becky (FG1) cited to obtaining a personalized tattoo:

Part of mine... was like I (clears throat) had this fear... [...] It's for my brother, who passed away... and I was like, oh I'm gonna *forget him* or... *something*... so, for me, it was part of like... he's *always a part of me*.

Chris (FG1) echoed this point and mentioned how his tattoo: "Helps me remember. [...] I have family members [...] who have passed that [...] I don't have *tattoos* of [...], and I think of [Annie] *way more* [...] because I have something there." Ashley (FG1) said how her tattoo helped her cope with the pain:

The artist who was doing my one for my sister was like 'is it *hurting*? How's it *feeling*?' I'm like 'it hurts *nothing* compared to what I'm feeling right now.' [...] The *emotional* pain was there, [...] so... I don't *care* how much the tattoo *hurts*; I *want* it.

Group Motivations

Tattoos for Family and Friends

Family and friends were both mentioned as extremely important groups in participants' lives. Thus it is no surprise that each group was also cited as a main motivator for obtaining tattoos. Firmin et al. (2008) found that different family members and friends of tattooed participants both encouraged and discouraged them regarding tattoos. Roberts, Koch, Armstrong, and Owen (2006) found that 75% of their college student sample had at least one close friend and 29% had at least one family member with tattoos. This connection with tattooed friends and family was supported in the current study.

Family occurred most often as a motivational theme out of all themes. This is not altogether surprising, as the family unit is one of the most meaningful groups for many

people. John Roberts (2012) had a participant state that she obtained tattoos for loved ones; this was very much in line with what participants mentioned. The strength of emotional ties among people in a family group sensibly connects with the strong emotions individuals can have regarding getting a tattoo for familial reasons. Iambic (FG3) noted: “You’re starting to see more guys [...] who are getting more *family-oriented* tattoos”. Frequently, tattoos obtained for family members had multiple motivations involved. Jennie (FG2) detailed her reasoning for a planned tattoo for family members, in conjunction with health concerns:

The breast cancer tattoo that I’m going to get... that’s definitely going to tie down to [...] the past *year*, but... I also feel like that’s also gonna remind me that... [...] my mom went through that, and then that year was *hell* for my whole family, but, you know, we made it through.

Nicole (FG1) noted the reasons she got a tattoo for her grandfather, as well as how she referred to her tattoo as a motivating force and connection to her employment.

(Brightly) It makes me kinda like... tear up a little bit ‘cuz it’s like, it’s my grandpa... and ya, he was very sick. He had Alzheimer’s for, like, seven years and he lived with us for a year... [...] but... that’s what made me want to go into the healthcare field, [...] so every time I look at it, it’s like, you know, ‘I can do this’.

One of the (QS) respondents noted how tattoos were utilized as a unifying force in the family: “It was a connection that my only sister and I made together. We got the same tattoo on the same day. My younger cousins also got the same tattoo some years later.” This tattooing bond created an additional in-group connection among those who shared the experience. The tattooing experience as well as the tattoo itself were used as unifying forces within an already connected family group.

Ashley (FG1) discussed how one of her tattoos connected with her family's ethnicity and culture:

The... newer one I have... the star part is for my grandmother because she calls me her star and then the feather hanging from it is because... I'm Native American on, through that side of the family, so it's really... combining a... just an overall family theme.

Eric (FG3) felt his tattoos connected with his friends: "It brings back different... *memories*, or [...] reminds me of different *friends*. [...] When I'm old and gray... I'll have it [...] kind of remind me of [...] what... I used to love, and what I will love still."

Becky (FG1) planned to get a tattoo with her sister and also a shared friend:

My next tattoo [...] is hopefully going to be with my sister and [...] our best friend. [...] As the outline of the heart [...] someone would have [...] 'best friends' and then... the next person would [...] start it with [...] 'sisters' [...] so... when you line them all on top of each other, they'd say all three words... around to the heart."

Tattoos as Rebellion

Rebellion as a motivation for tattoos was mentioned on occasion in the current study. Swami (2012) did not find significant differences between those with and without tattoos regarding attitude towards authority. Eric (FG3) noted regarding tattoos and rebellion: "I think it's kinda like the smoking and drinking thing. When you can't do it, [...] it's a lot more appealing." Jennie (FG2) said: "So... mine [tattoos] were kind of more like a... a *rebellion*... plus [...] I really *wanted* them [...] to *express* myself." A (QS) respondent wrote regarding tattooing: "I don't drink, smoke, or do drugs, so I needed something reckless to ease my teenage brain." Ivy Jones (FG2) said: "Rebellion's probably a little part of it; you know, I'm eight-*teen*, I can *do* what I *want*!

And... I went with one of my friends and we [...] both got our first one together.” In the same focus group, Aria stated that her tattoo “wasn’t an act of *rebellion*. (pause) Though I was a little disappointed when I showed my mother, and she just *laughed*.”

The theme of rebellion also fits in well with Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) Social Identity Theory and group conflict. Rebellion implies conflict (or at least struggle). In the scope that participants discussed rebellion with regard to tattoos, the struggle referenced mostly regarded parental authority, though the conflict can be on a societal basis, as well (Atkinson, 2003).

Social Situations

Social situations, often with friends or family, were imparted as motivations for obtaining tattoos. Orend and Gagné (2009) argued that group identity can be constructed with corporate logo tattoos, among other elements. Firmin et al. (2008) noted that unplanned tattooing often occurred with groups of individuals. Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, and Koch (2002b) found group membership and friend recommendations as two of the reasons for getting tattoos. This social component was found in the current study. Some participants detailed getting tattoos at the same time as others, as a group bond or a shared experience, with varying amounts of personal motivation. Ivy Jones (FG2) noted:

I know my second tattoo I got... with a group of friends of mine. And we’ve been friends since [...] elementary school, and we’re still really good friends. [...] And we all got ...similar tattoos. [...] It was kind of like... a little party. (slight group laughter) We all got our tat-*toos* and we hung *out* and... we made a whole *event* of it... So, it’s *within ourselves*.

Marie (FG3) shared: “My husband was going in at the same time, so I wanted to, you know, kinda do something special with him, too.” Becky (FG1) talked about her perceptions of peer influence on her sister’s tattoo:

My sister got a tattoo when she was 18... pretty much just... because she went with other friends that were doing it... And it’s the smallest little [...] probably size of a dime, star on her back that no one ever sees. [...] She kind of regrets getting it now, just ‘cuz she’s like ‘it had no meaning’.

Ramona (FG1) spoke about her tattoo obtained along with someone else: “When I was 18, got two stars on each foot... Slightly meaningless. Well, I went with my best friend who also got stars on *her* feet...”

Though tattoos might have been obtained when with others, it did not necessarily mean they were without or had little meaning, as in Becky’s sister’s or Ramona’s situations. Ashley and Jake shared:

Ashley (FG1): I got my first one a few weeks into college. And that was the design that I had made... for my husband and I. And I knew I that I had wanted it as a tattoo. So when everybody else was like ‘hey, we’re going’, I’m like ‘All right, I know what *I’m* getting.’

Jake (FG3): I got mine [...] a couple weeks after I graduated high school. [...] Me and the... guy who’d been my best friend through elementary, middle school, and high school... and...then we were... super close and stuff. So we both went in and got... tattoos the same time. [...] Like a *stamp* on the end of that whole... and we’re still both really good friends and stuff...but it’s [...] kind of a time stamp, I guess.

This illustrates that strong emotions can still be involved in tattooing situations with others. Tattoos do not need to be the same or even similar to have an important group component.

Practical Considerations

Addictiveness

At times, there may be more of an addictiveness component for obtaining tattoos. There is the common tattooing adage that ‘tattoos are addictive; you can’t get just one’. Ramona (FG1) articulated that “it’s very true, once you get one, it’s... you just want more”, with which the other (FG1) group members assented. Jennie (FG2) added: “They say once you get *one* tattoo, you want *more*” and “you have like, the needle bug”. Samantha Topaz (FG2) agreed: “It’s a little addictive.” A (QS) respondent noted (sic): “there were times i had tattooing done when i felt a physical need to have work done. or skin that felt blank.” Chris (FG1) posited that the ‘addiction’ “stems from the *attention* that you kinda get”. Addictiveness may also be a component of overall image management and consideration of body image. Many of the focus group participants stated a desire to get another tattoo and had plans for the future designs and motivations behind them, but not all participants agreed they wanted additional tattoos. Allie (FG3) obtained tattoos for major life lessons and quipped regarding getting more tattoos: “I’m *hoping* I’m done. [...] I don’t *want* any more major life lessons!”

Cost Effects

Cost of tattoos could also be a potential factor in the decision to get more. Cost could possibly affect the choice of design, as well. Allie (FG3) recalled: “The only reason why I’m considering of adding a little bit more on to the butterfly is... [...] when I

originally got it... I was *broke*, and all I had was the shop minimum.” Allie (FG3) also related: “I’ve known... several people... that [...] had money to *burn* and they were just covered head to toe, kind of thing, because, (almost laughing) [...] ‘*hey*, tattoos are *expensive*; may as *well!*’” Jennie (FG2) added: “You gotta... definitely take that [cost] into *account* with other things.” (pause) Ivy Jones (FG2) responded: “It’s kinda... conversely [...] I wouldn’t want to go... too *cheap* on it” (in a mention of cost’s effect on quality). Ramona’s (FG1) husband is a tattoo artist, so she acknowledged: “They’re *free*, so...” (group laughter); Chris (FG1) replied: “That helps.”

The Artist Influence

An individual may plan and/or design a tattoo to varying degrees, but the tattoo artist also plays a role. Someone may have desired motives for obtaining a tattoo, but the choice of artist and the artist’s approach will certainly affect the finished product. The intersection of these two elements is found in the finalized tattoo. Artists have their own motivations for developing designs a certain way and their own specialties or styles they enjoy/utilize best. Samantha Topaz (FG2) noted: “finding the right match that *way* is important”. Sometimes an artist may have a drastic influence on a tattoo, such as image or location. Santos (2009) noted how some artists in East Los Angeles would refuse to tattoo Chicanas in visible areas of the body, would not tattoo desired designs or colors, or would encourage them to get tattoos that the Chicanas’ male significant others would supposedly enjoy. In the current study, Ramona (FG1) noted an instance where an artist changed her initial idea for the tattoo, while she still retained its original motivation.

Ashley: What is your peacock one, [Ramona]? I always thought that one was so beautiful.

Ramona: (*laughs lightly*) Funny story...actually. I went in to get cherry blossoms on my collar... and it was my first time meeting [Juan]... who's my current artist... I don't go to anybody else now, and uh... he's like 'can I do a peacock on you' – I said 'sure'. (pause) That's how *that* went.

(Group laughter) Ashley: Beautiful.

Ramona: Um...It *was* a little bit different; [...] Phenomenal artist... my husband's grandpa, [...] he had like, a *year and a half to live*-ish, and I *really* wanted to impress him. [...] that's the only custom part about it; I just really wanted it *bursting with color* to impress him.

Ivy Jones (FG2) mentioned how a miscommunication with her tattoo artist amid a group of friends led to a different design than expected:

I got my second one with a group of friends, and we were all going to get the same one. [...] And I think there was just *miscommunication* [...] we had this design we wanted... and... one of my friends, it's a Celtic knot, and she wanted it, like, shaded in [...] And... (softer) I did *not*. But, apparently... the guy thought we all wanted it, and... one of my friends didn't want to go first... I'm like '*ohhhh*, I'll go first' And then after, he's like... half done [...] '*wwwwhat* are you doing?' [...] It was still a *design* I liked, and I still *like* it. But now [...] it doesn't look *exactly*... like I would like it to look. [...] I've got it... touched up a couple of, like, different times to make it look a little more like what... *I* had envisioned, but... (soft) *I don't know*... it's not perfect [...] but it wasn't *meant* to be. [...] Our *friendships* aren't perfect. [...] There's always things that you're not going to like but... they're there anyways...

Ivy Jones' story details a minor conflict as a result of a misunderstanding as a member of a group. Despite this, there was little she could do to resolve the issue to her full satisfaction, even though she attempted resolution.

Regret

Also worth considering is regret with regard to the motivation of tattoos. It is a salient narrative in the media. An element of possible “regret” could be viewed as motivations that are no longer valid. The current study’s focus group participants did not mention major regrets with regard to their tattoos, though there were some minor elements of regret expressed. Becky (FG1) said regarding the size of her tattoo: “My only regret was not getting it bigger.” Ashley (FG1) noted that (though she didn’t regret the tattoo itself) despite planning and researching: “I regretted that I didn’t just... *wait*... until I went to somebody who I knew [...] was going to do it *well*.” Jennie (FG2) also stated “*timing* as to when I got my wrist tattoo” as a regret with regard to her continued efforts to hide it from her parents. Ramona (FG1) said location regrets could be an issue: “‘Cuz now I want to *finish* my sleeve [tattoo], but now I have to worry about *this* (refers to tattoo in the way).” Ivy Jones (FG2) also offered location as a possible consideration: “if I was to re-do it over again, maybe I would wait ‘til... I was a little older, or [...] ‘well, is this *exactly* where I want it?’” Jennie (FG2) pondered a way of framing potential future regrets: “A quote [...] I came across... it’s like, ‘don’t regret anything, ‘cuz at one time, that’s exactly what you wanted.’”

Research Question 1 attempted to examine the complex motivations that individuals have for obtaining tattoo modification. Someone may have several powerful motivations for obtaining one or more tattoos. Tattoo motivations can be placed in emotional or practical categories, with emotional motivations being further subdivided into non-mutually exclusive individualistic and group-influenced motivations. While

emotional and practical motivations are not the same, they are similarly powerful. The motivations participants detailed fit with the current motivationally-driven tattooing paradigm that has received a great deal of media attention in today's society.

RQ2– How do tattooed persons manage disclosure/privacy of their tattoos online?

In addition to why individuals get the tattoos they do, the current study also attempted to examine how individuals managed their online social profiles and online communication with regard to their tattoos. In this study, results were introductory and somewhat mixed, but illustrative. Though tattoos had the potential to be perceived negatively by some individuals viewing online content, it did not appear that individuals operated in vastly different ways online than they did in real life when managing their tattoos. Goldsborough (2009) detailed some of the many specific components to consider in social media profile development: profile picture, description, other profiles an individual connects to, and status updates. Participants made reference to some of these elements with regard to their online management in the current study. These themes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 – Online Tattoo Management
Self-Sharing
Newness
Social Media Reach
Levels of Involvement
Connections
Online Management as in Real Life
Others' Sharing
Shared with no Management Reaction
Shared in Artists' Portfolios

Sharing

Self-Sharing

Newness

The newness of a tattoo may facilitate an urge to share the information online. Communication with others could include photographs or written text. Chris (FG1) noted: “Mine are...[online] like, you know, when you first get it... yeah, want to *show it off*. So, *profile picture*. Here’s my *new tattoo*.” Allie (FG3) added: “If I’m getting a tattoo, that’ll probably be the ma-jor topic of Facebook for like, the next two weeks.” Ann (FG2) said: “I posted mine on Facebook and Myspace; I was *proud*.” [...] “Everyone’s like... when are you going to *get it*, already?” (laughs) ... ‘Okaay, I *did!*’ ‘Well, we have to *see it!*’ so...” Iambic (FG3) had the same sentiment: “It’s kind of like getting a new *car*, you wanna show everyone. [...] You’re *proud* of it; you’re *excited*.” Aria (FG2) was not as certain: “*Part* of me is like, ‘*yeah*, look at what I did, you know’ which is what Facebook’s all about.” Ivy Jones (FG2) noted how she perceived some people took this behavior to the extreme:

I can think of people I know that sometimes it’s like ‘*Look what I got!! I’m so excited!!*’ Where other people will, you know, take the picture with the camera in the mirror, like ‘*hey, yeah*’ (deeper voice) ‘*Look how awesome I am.*’”

Individuals acquiring a first tattoo might be perceived as changing group affiliations from being non-tattooed to joining a larger tattooed group. The sharing of this information may be an attempt to connect with others who already have tattoos.

Social Media Reach

Participants mentioned how they used the reach of social media to their benefit regarding tattoos. The network effect facilitated communication despite distance and included multiple individuals. Jake (FG3) mentioned: “When I first... *got* mine, I took *one* picture of it, just ‘cuz all my friends wanted to see it. [...] It was right after graduation, so I wasn’t actually seeing my friends in person a *lot*...” A (QS) respondent mentioned: “I posted a photo so that my friends who live farther away and wanted to see it could.” Iambic (FG3) noted: “It’s like any... exciting... thing going on in your life, you kinda wanna *tell* people... and sometimes... it’s *easier* just to post on there, as opposed ta... texting or e-mailing or calling everyone... [...] to share your... excitement.” Ivy Jones (FG2) stated:

Yeah, I know I *like* seeing ‘em. One of my friends just got one yesterday. She put up a picture of it, and it’s not a friend I *see* often. And so... it was really *nice* to be able to be like... ‘oh, coooool. [...]That looks *great!*’

Not all participants preferred the visibility of social media. A (QS) participant noted the personal nature of the tattoo: “I do not feel the need to advertise my tattoo. I got it for me, not to impress anyone else.” Another (QS) respondent stated (*sic*): “there are some people i dont want knowing i have tattoos.”

Levels of Involvement

Individuals’ involvement, interaction options with information, and sharing online can vary. Individuals can elect to share a great deal of textual information or only a little, and they can shape narratives in specific ways. Additionally, they may post pictures with

or without self-commentary, or reply briefly or in depth to others' content. Approving or 'liking' content provides a simple one-click option as a reaction to content. These elements reflect individuals' rules working within the boundaries they have set online, like Petronio (2002) details in CPM. Involvement options with information can operate on a publicness/privacy dialectic. Individuals may choose to not post or react to any tattoo related information online, tending towards privacy, or they may opt to share or interact, having limited distinction between online and real life. Individuals may only take certain actions, but not others, or they may vary their actions by group. Ashley (FG1) noted the possibilities online (in comparison to in person):

Ashley: "On Facebook, I'm just going to go and be like, 'oh, that looks cool'- not really a big... deal. I think there's probably *more* of a *reaction* in person, 'cuz you end up talking about it longer. On Facebook, it's just... usually... 'somebody *likes* this'." [...] "Or 'that looks *great*'. Like, it's a couple of words... it's not a whole conversation about it."

Chris (FG1) and Nicole (FG1) also agreed with Ashley's assertion. Similarly, there are several ways to share information online. Samantha Topaz (FG2) clarified: "Yeah, I mean, I have it *listed*, um, in my profile, versus [...] 'interests' or 'about yourself'. I just have [...] mentioned that I have some tattoos and what they are... I... don't... have any pictures posted of them." Iambic (FG3) noted the photograph option: "I've... taken pictures of 'em and posted 'em online." Allie (FG3) mentioned writing in detail:

I've run... my own *blog* [...] just kind of like an online *diary*. [...] I think I've told the *story* of each of my tattoos [...] and] my *reason* for getting them [...] I've] detailed out on the *blog* before, too.

Connections

Some participants referred to online management with regard to the connections they had (or didn't have) in their social media usage. This would open avenues of communication with some individuals and potentially close them to others. Ramona (FG1) said: "I'm just lucky... my mom doesn't have Facebook." (group laughter) Ann (FG2) added: "I don't have a lot of outsiders on my page. It was mostly... very close friends and family before it just went... and really... became bigger than life out there." Marie (FG3) mentioned: "I would say... because I monitor who I *have* on my *profile*, I've already decided how I'm monitoring [...] because I don't have [...] my *boss* or something. [...] Anybody that's on there... pretty much probably already knows."

Online Management as in Real Life

Some focus group participants noted they did not treat online management of their tattoos any different than their management of them in real life. By establishing no specific differences, online communication and interpersonal communication remain similar. Regarding considering tattoos specifically/separately online, Ashley (FG1) said: "Honestly, I don't spend a whole lot of time... thinking about *them*... in that way." Ann (FG2) said, regarding posting her tattoo online: "I put my grandchildren up too, 'cuz I was proud of *them*. [...] I guess ta... reach out the same way I would with my grandchildren." A (QS) respondent added: "they [tattoos] are no different than any other changing piece of me." Another (QS) participant stated: "I am not embarrassed at all about my tattoos and I love them. It would be like anything else I show through my social

media (pictures, updates, etc).” Still another (QS) respondent wrote (*sic*): “it's apart of my life that I'm willing to share with others.” Eric (FG3) detailed how tattoo photos were of limited concern: “Yeah, I think I'm *more* worried about the pictures from a night *out*, of last night...than getting... my tattoos in.” Contrarily, a (QS) participant preferred interpersonal communication face to face over that expressed online with regard to tattoos: “Seeing my tattoo is a privilege reserved for those I meet in person.” Jake (FG3) stated “I don't really put much... specific focus on 'em in either place, it's not [...] like I go around showing 'em off in person or online.”

Sharing by Others

Shared with no Reaction

Information relating to an individual may be shared online by another person. Typically, this may occur in the form of general photographs by friends or acquaintances and may include visible tattoos. Photographs can be additionally associated with the people in them via social media, which connects them to the individual's profile. Once pictures are posted online, individuals could potentially take action to restrict access to the photo. Interestingly, some focus group members noted how once others had posted photographs (even if they themselves had not posted any) they would not take action to adjust access to the images of their tattoos. This choice potentially allows communication with implications for the individual to be shared by others. Chris (FG1) mentioned:

Chris: If it's ever in a picture I don't like, 'oh, don't post that, it's on there' [...]; if it's *on there*, it's *on there*. [...] I don't like... *intentionally* stick the leg out, and be like... 'Hey! [...] Make sure you get that in there!' [...]

Ramona: Lookit! Lookit!

Ashley: Pointing to it!

Chris: Like...if it's *in there*, it's *in there*.

Ivy Jones (FG2) agreed:

I personally have *not*... put any pictures, like 'Look what I gottttt!' on there. [...] When I was 18, they didn't have Facebook yet. I feel old saying that. [...] Like, I don't feel the *need*... to do that. But [...] if my friend puts one up with my tattoo, I don't, like, ask him to take it *down* or anything...

Jennie (FG2) agreed, but noted a specific management option to disassociate her name with the photograph:

I personally haven't put anything up about my tattoos, but [...] I don't hide 'em here [at college]. So if I'm... *here* hanging with some friends, and they manage to take some pictures of my tattoos in there, I'm not going to be like, 'Dude, take down the *picture!*', [...] I'll just like... *untag* [disassociating the person's name with the photo] myself."

Jennie's assertion fits with Petronio's (2002) CPM element that distance can affect rules.

Jennie utilized a different set of rules at college than at home for managing the information regarding her tattoos. Her rules for managing communication of her tattoo at home tended to be more private, while her rules for communicating at college were more public. The potential connection of her contacts from home and at college necessitated online communicative management to prevent public information at college from becoming public at home. Iambic (FG3) agreed with Jennie's (FG2) proposed management option: I think they [tattoo shops/artists] usually... don't... tag you, and if they do, you can always *untag* yourself, really... *plus* I think it's kinda cool... 'cuz that

means they're *proud* of what they did." Iambic's comment ties into another means of potential sharing by others: by those involved in the tattoo process.

Shared in Artist Portfolios

Focus group participants noted the online aspects of tattoo artist portfolios. Tattoos are added to artist portfolios (which may be online or offline), which showcase their work for other potential clients. Many tattoo shops have an online presence, including a website as well as social media connections. These are used to communicate to returning and potential new clientele. Ramona (FG1) mentioned that her tattoos are online: "It's... respect... to the artist. [...] Add it to your portfolio... *please*." The other (FG1) members confirmed that their tattoos were online. Ann (FG2) noted another sharing possibility used by the tattoo shop she visited:

They have a Facebook and Myspace page and [...] they asked if they could have permission to put it up, just because they put everybody's *up*. And so mine was placed on there, and I don't know if it's 'cuz they thought it was... cute 'cuz grandma was comin' in for a tattoo [...] or *what* it was. [...] They tag you when they do it.

Some (FG2) participants expressed concern regarding that aspect of the information sharing.

Jennie: If they have Facebook or something... and they... *choose* to put the tattoos up [...] I'd be all down for [that]. [...] You can put my tattoo up there... just, kinda leave my *name* off of it.

[...]

Aria: Yeah. So, I would probably... steer away from that... Just me personally... [...] it's for *me* to decide... even though you did the artwork. But [...] it's... just a little slightly different *spin* on it, for somebody *else* to be putting it up [...] on a

Facebook page... or [...] social site. [...] It's kinda like it's *yours*. And it's *yours* to release when and if... whenever you want.

Jennie: Right. I don't care if you want to take a picture and show it to the world. Just leave *me* out of it.

This observation falls in line with Petronio's (2002) CPM articulation about information ownership and co-ownership. Information owned by one person becomes co-owned when it is shared by multiple people. The information-sharing rules that an individual sets are then subjected to the influence and discretion of others and may or may not be upheld. Aria and Jennie (FG2) noted the loss of control and shared ownership that would occur with the information in the specified situation. While Aria and Jennie could control boundaries to control the information, it becomes more difficult and risky once the tattoo shop is a co-owner of the personally-connected information. Individuals must rely on information-sharing rules of a tattoo shop, which may not be the same as theirs.

Research Question 2 attempted to examine if and how individuals managed sharing of their tattoos online, with a specific focus on social media. Information could be shared online by the individual or be posted by someone else. Participants detailed a variety of behaviors for themselves, including how newness of a tattoo facilitated sharing, the reach of social media was utilized to spread information, the ways individuals interacted with information, how individuals managed information using their connections, and how they managed tattoo information compared to real life. Others shared individuals' tattoo information in artist portfolios or other online photos, sometimes without prior agreement. Participants detailed some concerns over these occurrences, but interestingly how they would not always take any additional action to

manage the information. Participants discussed positive and negative aspects of social media and potential effects upon sharing of tattoo-related information.

RQ3– How do tattooed persons manage disclosure/privacy of their tattoos in face to face situations?

All participants detailed behaviors with regard to concealing and revealing their tattoos in a variety of face to face situations. Several face to face situations with various groups of people were detailed by participants, and individuals utilized specific responses to manage their tattoos as they deemed appropriate. Armstrong et al. (2004) noted how tattoos that are not always visible are subject to purposive decisions to reveal. Petronio's (2002) CPM applies in face to face situations, as well. Individuals can choose to share tattoos or keep them private. If a tattoo is shared, the other(s) then become co-owners of the information.

Table 6 – Tattoo Management Face to Face			
Management Strategies	Group Management	Situational Management	Perceptions
Location	Family	Specific Situations	Conversation Starter
Visibility	Friends	Revealed Tattoo Reactions	Motivations Misunderstood
Advance Notice	Public	Moving Clothing	Type of Person
Varying Explanation	Employment		Appropriateness
			Females

Management Strategies

Location

John Roberts (2012) found that management of tattoos began with selecting a body location to place the tattoo and considering whether it is publicly visible. This behavior was found in the current study. Chris (FG1) noted:

Mine's in a spot... where it's... like you really don't ever see it unless I'm in shorts. [...] I got it that way on purpose, just *so* that way I didn't have to go through that hassle of 'should I hide it'/ 'should I not'. [...] It's always... there. [...] But it's not like... I intentionally did it there because I *don't* want anybody to see it. I just thought it'd be... the most appropriate place for... me.

Size of the tattoo can also play a role, as Jennie (FG2) noted: "I'm... more into the *smaller* stuff that I can easily cover... or [...] I can show *off* if I *want to*." This placement then affects how tattoos are managed later on, often with clothing. Several (QS) participants noted the use of clothes (one mentioned jewelry) in managing their tattoos, and some noted wearing swimsuits as when tattoos would be revealed. Jennie (FG2) detailed her tattoo planning:

Before I got my first one, [...] I wrote it on... my hip, with a [marker] and then I looked at it, [...] saw [...] how it would fit with the clothing, and whether or not my clothing would *cover* it, if I was [...] running or jumping jacks.

Public perceptions of tattoos may affect decisions to share information/reveal tattoos.

Antoszewski et al. (2010) found that 61.4% of their survey participants felt their tattoos were received positively by the public, 6.7% felt their tattoos were received negatively, and 31.9% did not have an opinion or felt they were occasionally received positively.

Visibility

Having a tattoo that was visible to others was an important aspect in obtaining tattoos. Atkinson (2002) had a participant who asked the question of why someone would get a tattoo if it wouldn't be seen. Iambic (FG3) stated: "A *friend* mentioned this. [...] First three tattoos are... *easily* covered up. Fourth one [...] you can see it, it's there. [...] 'Well, people can see *that*.' (pause) That's the *point*." Iambic (FG3) also elaborated: "If I'm getting a tattoo, if I'm going to spend [...] money... if I'm going to have someone put *artwork* on me... I don't want to *hide* it." Ivy Jones (FG2) noted: "Having something... [that] *visually* represents something that you, you *feel* is really *gratifying* that way." Aria (FG2) said her tattoo is connected with her personality: "[it's] how *I* see myself, how I want the *world* to see me." Eric (FG3) noted how much tattoos could integrate with the self: "I even forget that I have tattoos" which Iambic (FG3) agreed with: "there are times I forget that I *have* tattoos", as did Jake (FG3) "I forget that I have it all the time." Allie (FG3) discussed the difficulty in revealing tattoos placed for concealability: "I find that I have to go out of my way to...*try* to show it *off*, sometimes... Like the way, that I [...] *chose* to [...] have them placed..." When talking about memorial tattoos, Ashley (FG1) and other FG1 members noted how tattoos can create visibility for emotions, motivations, and memories:

Ramona: It's [getting a tattoo] a good way to carry things with you.

Ashley: Yeah, it makes it more visible. [...] To carry things with you no matter what anyway. [...]

Nicole: Like a visual thing, or?

Ashley: Yeah, I mean, it gives it more credence. [...] It's a way of showing what you survived, but it's another way you carry an outlet... external... mark to it.

Advance notice

Some participants noted how they gave advance notice to others about impending tattoos. This may have been an attempt to manage how the information was perceived or ask permission in a roundabout way. A comparison could also be made to Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) autonomy-connectedness dialectic. Jake (FG3) recalled:

I was pretty *straightforward*. [...] I know a lot of people, like, come home and say, 'hey-o, surprise, Mom, I have a tattoo', which is fine. I was only... eighteen. I was still living at home, and... I told her, for like, a *year* before that. [...] 'Just so you *know*... I'm gettin' a tattoo after I graduate, with my friend'. [...] She... didn't believe me at first, I don't think... But every *week*, I'm like, 'Just a *reminder*...' (group laughter) [...] And then, up to the day, I'm like, '*Mom*, just so you *know still* gettin' that tattoo today...' And then she's like, 'oh, you're *serious*.' (slight group laughter)

Allie (FG3) also did the same:

I told my mom, for a good week, like, every day [...] I'm going to go... down to the tattoo shop with [Sarah] and we're going ta [...] get me a *tattoo*... I think she's getting one *too*. 'Yeah, naw, no, you're not.' 'Yes, yes, we *are!*' 'Na-uh, okay. Okay... whatever you say.' '*Really* doing this.' 'All right.' 'Okay, *bye, Mom*. Be back in a few hours.' (slight group laughter) 'You're not going to *do* it.' I come home... 'So, did you *do* it?' (laughs) (group laughter) Like *eight* hours later, I'm like, '*Yes*.' 'No, you *didn't*.' 'Yeah.' 'Let me see.' (pause, sigh) 'Well, I guess that one's not *that* bad.' (group laughter)

Samantha Topaz (FG2) gave even more notice: "Ever since I was little, I always threatened my mom. You know, 'When I get old enough, I'm going to get tattoos!' 'You better not!'" In Petronio's (2002) CPM terms, this communicative behavior may have been an attempt to avoid or mitigate boundary turbulence within the larger family unit. Additionally, the timing of this information-sharing resulted in making family members

co-owners sooner than they would have been otherwise. Though the information-sharing occurs prior to the tattoo actually being obtained, individuals may be hoping for a better response than an unexpected notice afterwards. Here there are clear risks and benefits. The risk is that the person will not approve, but the potential benefit may be a stronger bond due to the trust in sharing the personal information.

Some parents responded with disbelief (feigned or real) about obtained tattoos.

Eric (FG3) showed his tattoo to his mother: “So I showed her; she didn’t believe it was *real* at first.” Nicole (FG1) noted the reaction of her mother:

I go into her office, and my brother’s cracking up, ‘cuz he already knows. [...] And she’s just like ‘So, why didn’t you answer my phone call?’ And I’m like, ‘I was kind of busy.’ And she’s like, ‘what are you talking about?’ And I show her, and she’s like ‘[Nicole], that is *not real*.’ And I’m like, ‘You can see! My skin! Like, *yes it is!* (group laughter) [...] and she’s like... ‘well, what I am I gonna say? You’re 18, you paid for it on your own’ and I’m like, I was looking for this *big huge reaction*. [...] You said, you were gonna, you know, take me, but you never did. So... I was kinda bummed out.” (laughs loudly, group laughter)

Varying Explanations

Management of a tattoo can also be achieved by explaining tattoo motivations or meanings in different ways. Ashley (FG1) stated regarding one of her tattoos: “I can say whatever I want, wants to mean to anybody in the future. Make it up... Like, and nobody would *know*.” This observation illustrates an important point. Tattoos may have a visible image component, but the meaning may remain unseen, or as Ashley (FG1) articulated it, “hidden layers”. Tattoo management does not appear to be limited to covering with clothing. Eric (FG3) said: “Depending on... how long I want to talk about ‘em, I’ll give... two different answers on what they mean to me.” This is a clear connection to

Petronio's (2002) CPM theory. Using the specifics of the situation to follow communication rules, Eric would use adjust his response as he desired.

Management with Specific Groups

Family

Participants noted a variety of specific tattoo management behaviors and disclosure decisions to reveal or hide tattoos with their family members. The decisions to share or hide this information are inherently full of risks and benefits. Iambic (FG3) noted how revealing a tattoo to parents can be: "I know a lot of people [...] friends and stuff whose parents... would tell them 'if you get one, I don't wanna *see* it'". Ashley (FG1) stated how her parents did not know about her initial two tattoos, since she covered them:

I'd had the first of them for four years. [...] It's on the... middle of my back. I just didn't wear tank tops when I went home. [...] I just wore, you know, regular shirts. And the one on the back of my neck, I don't wear my hair up all that often. And so I made sure it was down when I was over there. But my mom found out on my wedding day, that I had tattoos: 'what's that?' 'Oh, yeah, those are my tattoos!'"

Samantha Topaz (FG2) noted how she told her father, but not her mother:

So I ended up telling my *dad* when I got my first one... But I didn't tell my *mom* for like a full *year*. And I think my dad finally told her. And then when they came for a visit, she was like 'okay, let's see 'em'.

Samantha Topaz shared an intriguing facet connected to Petronio's (2002) CPM theory. Samantha Topaz had certain communication rules which guided her to tell her father, but not her mother. It is uncertain whether she expected her father to share the information at the time with her mother. However, one might conjecture that the

connection between her father and mother makes the sharing of information between them not truly surprising. Petronio (2002) would term this as potential boundary turbulence, where a communication rule may have been violated or it may have been a misunderstanding. Because Samantha Topaz did not tell her mother right away, she and her father became co-owners of the information. She lost some of the control associated with that information in the telling. She did not say whether she gave her father rules governing the information, such as not to tell her mother. Even though there was a risk, it was slight, and Samantha Topaz did not seem worried by this information-sharing misunderstanding. Jennie (FG2) said regarding her tattoos: “Yeah, I haven’t told my parents yet. (laughs) I’m hoping that... they’ll just... let it go.” Ivy Jones (FG2) also noted: ““I did *not* tell my parents right away. Like, I kept mine... a secret. ‘Cuz I knew they would *not* really *approve*.” Some individuals alternately chose to reveal their tattoos with their families. Ramona (FG1) noted her mother’s response regarding revealing her tattoos: “She just... ignores them.” A (QS) participant noted how tattoos are similarly tacitly ignored: “My family does not actually approve of my tattoos but they understand and do not give me much grief.”

Eric (FG3) found some quick acceptance of his obtained for his mother: “I showed her the one for *her*; she was like ‘oh, you should get a *lot more* for *me*.” Jennie (FG2) also hoped that incorporating a parent into the motivation would help with a planned tattoo: “With my next one on my foot [...] I’m *hoping* my mother will be more... acceptable to that one, just because it involves *her*.” Contrarily, Ann (FG2), who is a parent, had her daughter go with her:

Two months before my fiftieth birthday, my daughter and my granddaughter, who is two months old, went with *mom* to get her tattoo. And my daughter just took pictures and we made it a little *family* event.

Iambic (FG3) said the same, from a daughter's point of view: "My mom and I have gone together. It's if she gets one... I feel like I should get one *too*." Iambic (FG3) also noted that this seemed atypical: "They [artists] usually go... Yeah, it's usually the *daughters* coming in, saying 'Well, gotta make it so I can't *show* my mom'..."

Some participants detailed their management with siblings. Ivy Jones (FG2) noted: "I know one of my other sisters is thinkin' about getting one, and I'm like 'you better have me go with you' (laughs)." Jennie (FG2): "My sister knows about mine. Um...I told her that she had to swear not to tell the parents until I was ready or until they eventually saw it." Petronio's (2002) CPM theory can be applied here. Jennie gave her sister clear disclosure rules for the tattoo information, while allowing her to become a co-owner of the information. Jennie will need to rely on her sister's correct understanding of the rule to keep the information private and mitigate possible boundary turbulence.

Focus group members discussed extended family members, as well. Becky (FG1) noted she had revealed her tattoo, and it helped to shape perceptions: "I've had my little cousin, who is now... six, almost seven... but when she was even younger... she'd would... say (higher voice) 'I want to draw something on me. I want a tattoo like *you*.'"

Ivy Jones (FG2) noted her tattoo management with her grandparents:

I know my aunt is like '*whatever*', so it's like of course, she knows. But my grandparents... I'll have to make sure I'm wearing *socks* and *shoes*, or whatever...so it's like, *I'm* not *not* telling them, but I'm not... *telling* them either...

Ivy Jones mentioned using an extremely nuanced approach to management that is not quite revealing the information, but not quite hiding it either. While she admits using clothing to hide the tattoo, she also states that she is essentially not taking a full privacy approach, either— though the management appears to fall closer to the privacy side of the line. Marie also (FG3) detailed her revealing her tattoo: “My other grandparents were not too happy. They saw it for the first time at my brother’s wedding; they were... a little bit *upset*.” Iambic (FG3) said her family was more accepting than some: “definitely... have had... more friends or... acquaintances who... question, ‘well, you have a tat; are you sure you *want* one?’ than my family.” This illustrates that while Iambic reveals her tattoos with each group, individuals with varying interpersonal connections with her have very different responses.

Ashley (FG1) said her parents didn’t know about her tattoos initially, but her significant other’s family did:

Plenty of my in-laws knew right away.... My mother-in-law worked at, uh, my college, so as soon as I, we got back to the college after I got mine, it was like, ‘Look at what I got done!’”

This illustration shows the distance effect of information sharing in the scope of convenience. Ashley did not relate anything suggesting she was specifically keeping the tattoo information a secret back home at this time with regard to this revelation (like Jennie in FG2), though she noted earlier she had not told her parents right away. Alternately, the proximity for her may have made it difficult or impossible to keep the information private. Regardless of the reason, she utilized a different set of rules with her in-laws than with her parents.

Significant Others

Participants did not speak in a lot of depth about revealing or hiding their tattoos from significant others, though they did talk about significant others as motivation for tattoos. Allie (FG3) detailed an ex-significant other's response to revealing a new tattoo:

I'm not sure why. [...] *He* said that *he* wasn't sure why *he* was upset. Because... it's not like he's ever known me, you know... to *not* have ink. [...] I had one *already* before we got married. [...] And it was more the fact that I made a *choice*... for *myself* that was a very *permanent* choice... without consulting him.

Allie made an observation that aligns with Petronio's (2002) CPM articulation. She and her ex may have previously had a communicative rule that allowed sharing of this type. While the boundary had changed for her, he did not perceive that the boundary had changed for him. He had thought the boundary was the same. This clash resulted in boundary turbulence due to his misunderstanding, though it was not an unexpected release of information. The unexpected initial privacy of the information led to more of the shock. Allie strategically revealed the tattoo, thinking her ex would understand, and she was surprised by his reaction. Sometimes enacted management strategies may not have expected results.

Friends

Participants noted tattoo information management with friends. Management tended towards openness or being public rather than closedness or privacy. Some individuals went with friends (as mentioned earlier) to get tattoos. Samantha Topaz (FG2) noted that her friends' understanding was in line with their perceptions of her: "People who know me, like my friends, they're not surprised at all." Ivy Jones (FG2)

added: “I love seeing my friends’ new tattoos. [...] And I’m a very *tactile* person. [...] ‘Can I touch it?’” Jennie (FG2), however, talked about how information travels and this was a concern with how open to be with friends back home:

Other than my sister... no one else knows other than like, my friends, and here. [...] Even my friends back home... their parents know my parents. I kinda hide it from them, as well. Just because... word gets around; [...] I’m from a small town. It’s... more... better for me to be cautious back home than I am here.”

Jennie’s example illustrates a few points of Petronio’s (2002) CPM theory. First, Jennie details the co-owners who share the information with her. The co-owners are not all in the same location. The distance between the college location and home location has an effect on the selection of varying rules and boundaries Jennie uses for managing the information. While she tends to reveal at college, she retains privacy at home. Jennie also appears aware of how a network of people can quickly become co-owners of information and rapidly spread information as a result of boundary turbulence if the co-owners (intended or not) choose to share. The potential effects could reverberate across Jennie’s interpersonal network back home if she suffers a loss of control, potentially through no fault of her own.

The Public

Participants mentioned a variety of reactions when revealing/managing tattoos in the larger public. Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, and Koch (2002a) found that college students (both tattooed and not tattooed) generally provided positive feedback regarding those with tattoos. Expected reaction may play a role in a decision to reveal or hide a tattoo. A (QS) participant noted a management strategy of moderation related to privacy when sharing:

If I don't really know the people well and think they may be conservative, I won't just jump out and say "Hey I have a tattoo!" but I am not covering it up from them either. If they see it, they see it.

Samantha Topaz's (FG2) answer resonated similarly: So usually [my tattoos are] covered. Unless I'm wearing a... swimsuit or something. [...] I don't go out of my way to *advertise* 'em, but if people see them, I don't care. Wearing swimsuits was one way that participants detailed revealing tattoos that aren't typically seen. Chris (FG1) noted how deciding to reveal his tattoo to the public can have the risk of underwhelming, with all the expectations and media saturation of big, colorful tattoos: "Very small, black tattoo. And they're like, 'oh, ok.' (nonchalant) Like, they're kinda, like, *almost disappointed*. Like, oh *that's it?* I'm *sorry*- like, I didn't *real-ize*." Iambic (FG3) had the alternate issue when revealing to the public and challenging their expectations: "My first tattoo is... it's... a fairly (laughs) sizable tattoo. It's not... small and feminine. It's very... large, so I think people were kinda shocked when they... *saw* it." Ramona (FG1) detailed the public's reaction to her tattoos as almost a sort of spectacle, and how she would use clothing to manage this situation:

It takes me about a half-hour longer to go grocery shopping at [Andrews']. I literally get stopped in *every single aisle*" (emphasizes each word) by *somebody* who just wants to just... 'oh! Let me see!' And then..." (group laughter) "I'm standing there, like, and people are *staring* at me. And then more people crowd around... Like, it's... (group laughter) Almost embarrassing. Like, yeah, winter. I put my... my sleeves on. This should be a nice, quick trip. (group laughter)

Similarly to Eric's (FG3) greater concern over party photos than tattoos, Iambic (FG3) said: "I'm more concerned if I'm wearing shorts, less about the tattoo, than if my *legs* are shaved..." A (QS) participant noted: "If those close to me are really close to me, [tattoos] won't matter terribly to them."

Employment

Tattoos in the sphere of employment are not fully embraced by the public and the media. Concern about tattoos' potential effects on employment were found to varying degrees in the current study. Antoszewski et al. (2010) noted that 51% of their survey participants hid their tattoos for formal meetings, suggesting an occupational influence. John Roberts (2012) noted increased litigation due to tattoos in the workplace; courts have generally found that businesses can issue dress codes with consideration to their goals and require that employees follow them. The requirements of specific jobs may lead into decisions on tattoo management. Chris (FG1) is a teacher during most of the year, but is a lifeguard during the summer and doesn't worry about his tattoo: "In my summer job, I'm a *lifeguard*. [...] Where it's not, like... *high class*, like this *country club*. [...] Everybody comes into the pool has... a tattoo." Ramona (FG1) said: "It completely *depends*... on what *profession* you're looking to go into- who you *do* need to impress to get where you want to go." Two (QS) participants described this using 'impress' as well (*sic*): "If there's a situation in which I'm uncomfortable, or if I'm trying to make an impression, I don't make any mention of my tattoo, but I won't necessarily hide it."

I don't feel a need to hide my tattoos with anyone other than potential employers and my boyfriend's family. I need to be able to impress both, and we all know how a impressions of others are often times visual, especially when it comes to a career.

Another (QS) participant echoed this sentiment to a degree: "No one right now affects my disclosure, I'd let everyone see. My manager now is okay with it, but maybe in the future I may not want it to be seen [...] in a more professional job setting." One of the

survey participants may have isolated the key element. Tattoos in the scope of a career may be a distinction for some. Simply being employed is not necessarily the same as working towards a goal or trying to advance in a certain field. Thus, management of a tattoo and tattoo information may be more critical for career-type employment.

Allie (FG3) noted the difficulty of visible tattoos in her vocation: “I do a lot of *acting*... soooo....” Iambic (FG3) added: “A Victorian *era*, people didn’t really have tattoos back then.” Becky (FG1) noted a potential shift in tattoo perception with regard to employment: “You have to think that *not too long*, our generation’s going to be... the CEOs.” Regarding her tattoo, Nicole (FG1) said: “I can cover it up with scrubs [...] ‘cuz I’m a nurse.” Iambic (FG3) noted a seemingly unhygienic result of a dress code- covering a tattoo with a bandage: “Iambic: “I’ve gone to fast food places [...] where they have a Band-Aid. I’m like, that looks even *worse*.” Ashley (FG1) added how her mother’s concerns with regard to Ashley’s visible tattoos and employment were resolved:

‘Cuz I’m working, and it’s never been a big deal. And I think that that made her feel reassured as well, that it’s never been an *issue* for me at work. She knows that it’s not gonna *stop* me from getting a good job or being successful.

Ivy Jones (FG2) still remained concerned regarding her teaching colleagues and supervisors witnessing her tattoos, despite that she sometimes did not hide them:

Are they... *judging* me? Or are they... thinking... less of a professional... of me, because of this?

Ann: So... you’re more critical of yourself?

Ivy Jones: Yeah, a little bit, I guess. [...] I’ve never got any *negative* feedback or negative comments. [...] It’s more and more common, but it’s more just... worried about it.

Chris (FG1) noted how placement played a role, also: “just for my parents, I made sure I got it on my calf, [...] not like, gonna wear shorts at school, [...] just some place that it’s visible...visible only when appropriate.”

Job Interviews

It became clear that tattoo consideration was different and a distinction was necessary between job interviews and employment. Ashley (FG1) noted that she was not worried about potential tattoo risks regarding job interviews:

For job interviews, I’ll tend to wear *longer* sleeves. But [...] if I’m, I put my hands up by my face a lot, I won’t... try and... *not* show my tattoos, either. If you’re not okay with ‘em, then don’t *hire me*, because... I’m not going to hide them.

Jennie (FG2) noted how she was planning to use location to hide her tattoos for this reason: “All of the tattoos that I’m eventually going to be getting... I’m gonna put them in places that I can easily cover just because of job interviews, and like... special occasions.” Ivy Jones (FG2) suggested a difference between tattoos showing in job interviews and during regular, established employment:

I just went through job... a bunch of job interviews this spring. [...] That was also *something* I thought of. [...] I’ve got... long pants and shoes that cover it or dark socks on. [...] I mean now that... I’m *working* at my job, [...] I’ll wear pants sometimes, but I mean I’ll wear dresses some days.

Eric (FG3) concurred and posited:

Right when I go into a job interview, I’ll... cover it up more... Maybe the first few days in the job [...] ‘cuz again, people don’t really know you, so again, they’ll just see that and [...] make quick *judgments*.

This might suggest that some individuals' approach to tattoo management and sharing tattoo information was more relaxed once employment was perceived to be secure.

Teachers

A notable point of the current study was the high incidence of participants who were teachers. This may be attributed to the interpersonal networks of the researcher and the participants, or that most of the research occurred on a college campus. Additionally, it may speak to the changing demographics of who gets tattoos. Ashley (FG1) noted this along with the perceptions of students about what is normalized:

“The urban population I work in... it's so normal for adults to have tattoos. [...] One of the [...] social workers has a tattoo, and the other one doesn't. And we were all sitting in there... And we had a bunch of kids in... in my office. And we were hanging out... with them...and they said... ‘Mr. [L] has a tattoo, Mrs. [Anderson] has tattoos, Mrs. [P], don't... don't you have tattoos?’ And she said ‘no’, and they're like, ‘Why *not*??’ (group laughter)”

Wiseman (2010) studied college student perceptions of someone tattooed who was described as a college instructor (using photographs and a description of a positive teaching evaluation). Participants rated the hypothetical instructor as significantly more able to motivate students, as significantly more imaginative, and were significantly more likely to recommend the hypothetical instructor (Wiseman, 2010). The study did not utilize an actual college instructor or classroom, however. In the current study, while not all participants who were teachers instructed at the college level, the current study does provide some insight into tattoos' impact upon the student-teacher relationship, teachers' relationships with their peers and supervisors, and teachers' influence in the community. Using Petronio's (2002) CPM framework about boundary turbulence and rapidly

disseminating information over a large network, it is simple to see how public figures and individuals with public jobs could be concerned over the potential wide reach and damaging effects of undesired information sharing.

Marie (FG3) mentioned she would not always show off her tattoo, but it would sometimes cause a reaction when others saw it:

I had a freshman come up to me one time, and I was out in the hallway... putting up posters... and she came up to me, and she whispered in my ear. 'I have to tell you something.'... And I said 'okay.' And she goes, 'You have a *tattoo!*' And I said, 'Yes?' ... And she goes 'Well, *I could see it!*' And I said, 'Uh-huh.' And she goes '*Other people could see it!*', I mean. 'Uh-huh'. And she's like... 'Oh, *okay.*' And then she went and sat down. (laughs)"

Marie (FG3) did also note situations where she would manage visibility of her tattoo: "I would say I would always say for me, a job interview, [...] anytime I have to do *anything* with parents, I would *ab-solutely, positively* make sure that they *can-not* see it." Iambic (FG3) suggested that perceptions might be influenced by the school district size/location, as with one of her teachers: "she was 'well, yeah, I have tattoos' but she wouldn't *show* them... Basically because she goes 'well, you guys are such a *small* district, [...] I don't know how people will *react.*'" Also implied in this statement is the supposition that a small-sized district is more conservative. It remains to be seen what issues may arise, if any, regarding teachers' tattoos and social media. Russo et al. (2010) documented two cases of teachers using social media to detrimental effect, though tattoos were not mentioned in these instances.

Situational Management

Specific Situations

Participants noted a variety of specific situations for tattoo management.

Atkinson (2002) had a participant state that she did not want to have her tattoo show while in her wedding dress. Becky (FG1) said:

My mom was just kind of the person like, ‘[...] When you get married, and you have on a wedding dress, it’s going to be visible.’ [...] ‘Mom, don’t worry, they can airbrush it out in pictures if it’s that big of a deal’” (laughs).

Marie (FG3) added: I waited to get my tattoo until after I was married, because I just didn’t want my tattoo to *show* in my wedding dress. In this sense, timing of obtaining a tattoo could be a management technique, similar to Petronio’s (2002) CPM element of distance. Contrarily, Aria mentioned: “Yeah, I’ve not even covered it going to *weddings*. It’s like, ‘well, if this is what I’m gonna *wear*’, and it happens to be *sleeveless*, there you go.”

Ann (FG2) mentioned a situation where two potential tattoo taboos intersected, in a religious situation that was also employment-related:

I had an interview at a *church*, [...] wore long pants, [of] course it was the *hottest* part of summer, [...] the heat was *so bad*. So, did my interview, the pastor and I got along *great*. The next day, she called me [...] ‘the president of the council’s here. She would *love* to meet you.’ She said, ‘*please* dress comfortably...’ She said, ‘we’re in shorts... flip-flops...’ So I still wore *jeans*, ‘cuz...(laughs) I have a tattoo on my ankle. And the pastor got up... and walked around, and I went ‘you have a *tattoo*’ (group laughter) “And she goes, ‘*yeah*, I got one here too!’ (laughter continues) And she pulls her *shirt* down, and she shows me the one on her chest [...] All right, now, where’s *yours*? (laughing) I *know* you have *one*! And I showed her, and she goes, ‘oh, I really *like* that’ and then everybody was amazed with tattoos, and now I can wear capris to work, so... (group laughter) I *did* get the job.

Revealed Tattoo Reactions

Participants did not detail any attempts to compensate with image repair when a revealed tattoo elicited certain responses from others. Individuals may not have preferred to reveal their tattoos in specific situations or with certain people; this may have been connected with expected negative reactions. Individuals attempted to ignore the issue, as mentioned by Marie (FG3):

My husband's grandfather at [...] one of his brothers' weddings [...] said to me, 'Ohhh... what's that on your back??' And grandpa was... *significantly* older, so I just smiled and leaned down and kissed him and said, 'I love you!' and walked away, 'cuz... (group laughter) Didn't want to explain it. (group laughter)

Individuals were not truly serious in denials, as mentioned by Ashley (FG1):

I used to mess with my first graders when I was first year teaching. 'Cuz I have the one on the back of my neck. And every once in a while, I'd wear my hair up. [...] I'd turn, and the kids would see it, and [...] '(gasp) We saw the tattoo on the back of your neck!' I'd be like 'I *don't* have one!'

Participants simply accepted that another person knew about the tattoo (Samantha Topaz's FG2 tattoo information that was shared from her father to her mother). No participants detailed a negative employment response as a result of a tattoo being shown; in fact, some detailed positive or neutral responses (Ann's FG2 job interview at a church). Ramona (FG1) also talked about an employment experience and employer perceptions:

Searching for jobs, um, I came across this one, I, for nannying and housekeeping, basically. Very old-fashioned family. Um, wife was a doctor. The dad was a pastor. Um, just very... high-class...you know. Not tattoo people, *at all*. Um... luckily for me, I applied in the winter. I wore long sleeves the whole time. And for the first, like, three weeks... they had absolutely no idea I had any tattoos whatsoever, but I *impressed the crap* out of them. They would have never guessed I had tattoos. One day, I was doing the dishes. I rolled my sleeves up... and she looked at... I could *tell* what she was thinking. She looked at my, my tattoos...

then she looked at me. And I... I think... that I *completely changed her mind*, you know. I feel like she would have judged... I probably would have gotten *fired*... if she had seen that. But I just wanted to *see* what would happen if I did an amazing job, cleaned the crap out of their house, took care of their daughter, perfection. And then, you know... ‘oh, look, what do you think now?’ (group laughter) “I could just tell... she was, like, almost in shock, but she didn’t say anything... And obviously, I didn’t get fired or anything... I ended up quitting, ‘cuz she... was a ... weirdo who didn’t pay me as much as she should have. [...] That’s kinda fun to do... those little experiments...”

Moving Clothing

An intriguing component of tattoo management is the partially visible or not visible tattoo that an individual unexpectedly moves clothing to see, sometimes without asking. Through a pilot study conducted by the researcher, one participant noted a violation of personal space directly related to his tattoos (i.e. that people would touch them and move clothing to see them, sometimes without asking). This phenomenon could also be compared similarly to individuals touching a pregnant woman’s stomach, without asking to do so first. Reich (2003) noted the publicness of pregnant bodies, as well as the phenomena of unwanted touches and comments due to pregnancy. Braunberger (2000, p.16) noted part of this moving clothing to reveal tattoos behavior in the scope of the tattoo convention: “strangers touch each other as they admire tattoos, they tug clothing away; most wear little to begin with”. Atkinson (2002) detailed one woman’s mention to a group that she had gotten tattooed and they “clamoured around her, poking and prodding to see if [they] could guess where it was placed” (p. 228). Petronio (2002) noted that individuals can feel as though privacy has been violated if information is forcibly revealed. Though Petronio may not have been referring to such a tangible example, the emotion espoused can be the same. Harlow (2008) noted “in this

image dominated culture everything is for display, but nothing can be touched” (p. 190).

Participants noted this little-researched behavior to some degree in the current study regarding tattoos. Ashley (FG1) detailed:

I’ve had people push up my sleeves, or move my hair, which always kind of *weirds me out!* [...] They touch the glyphs on the back of my neck. [...] A woman who I kinda knew, [...] we were talking about tattoos, and she’s like ‘what other ones do you have?’ ‘One on the middle of my back.’ And I don’t show... that one off, and I mean, not because I don’t want to, just because I don’t wear clothes that it’s, you know, easily accessible. And she like, ‘Well, here!’ and she just lifted my shirt up [...] *in the bar*, and I had a *tank-top* on. And like, ‘*Heey, there!!*’ (shocked, a little angry)

Ashley (FG1) also recalled an experience of one of her friends:

“My best friend has a... a family crest on her side... And she’s this tiny little thing and... um... is real *quiet*, and [it’s]... a very large piece, so she leans over, and you get a glimpse of it. And she *had*... an older man once [...] *lift up* her shirt to look at it, and it *totally* freaked her out. And hers goes really *low*... on her hip, too, and goes up to, like, past her ribs. And she was just like... ‘*What... are you doing?!*’ and was really upset about it. And she’s like... You can’t just, like... *lift up somebody’s clothes* (shocked and upset) to look at...! And then he was just like... ‘I just want to know what that *is!*’

Ramona (FG1) added: “I like it when people... My peacock goes up here (arm/back, covered by shirt); it’s my favorite... part of it. And... people... they’ll *do* it, and then they’ll go ‘Can I move this?’” Marie (FG3) detailed how this happened to her:

It was...um, my grandma’s 70th birthday when I got my first one. [...] My grandma was playing bocce ball. [...] It was a little Italian-American ladies’ club; [...] all the ladies are like, ‘let me *see!*’ And some of them are, like... pulling my shirt down.”

Ramona (FG1) also mentioned another possibility regarding individuals getting and showing inappropriate tattoos or tattoos in inappropriate areas for public viewing: “And then the opposite way around... ‘I just *got* this!’ ‘Oh, I don’t want to *see that!*!’” Ivy Jones (FG2) noted she had not seen this behavior before: “I haven’t ever had someone

either come up to *me*... or I haven't done that; I'll *ask* people." Jennie and Aria (FG2) brought up personal space– Jennie: "Yeah. I generally have like this... my bubble; stay out of it; I'll stay out of *yours* [...] It's *mine*..." (laugh) Aria: "You. Must. Ask." Shortly after this assertion, Jennie (FG2) mentioned when this happened to her: "I mean... my sister did it, when she first... first *saw* mine, because I didn't tell her I was getting it done..." Iambic (FG3) added: "Yeah...I've... never had anybody, any strangers come up... to me and do that. I've had friends... do it... for the one on the back, which is fine, 'cuz I *know* them." Allie (FG3) confirmed: "It'd be people that I've *known*... too...and it usually... it comes up in conversation where somebody says something, you know, tattoo-related". Samantha Topaz (FG2) noted how she felt proud of her partner's tattoos:

I'm happy to [...] talk about mine. [...] I'm like 'oh, you should see [Andy's]! The colors are just... really *awesome!*' And it's like, 'Come on, show 'em your *tattoos!* [...] "So he's very reluctant about that. So I really... I kind of force *him* when we're in company...."

Jake (FG3) had this happen to him at concerts and sporting events:

And I don't know why, what it is about *concerts*, but whenever I'm at a concert... [...] I get people all over comin' up, [...] and they'll see a little bit of [my tattoo], [...] pull my shirt up... like, 'oh, *hey!*'

Iambic (FG3) noted the influence of gender: "Iambic: "Less... acceptable to go... pull out a... female's shirt [...] but a male they're like, 'I can *grab* him; he's a *guy!*'" Eric (FG3) noted: "Anytime there's a girl trying to lift up your shirt, I think most guys would be fine with it. (group laughter)" Jake (FG3) clarified: "I don't think I've ever [...] had a guy come and try to lift my shirt." Marie (FG3) noted a mitigating factor: "Especially if you're *with*... somebody, I feel like it doesn't happen [...] quite as frequently, but [...] I *have* had it happen a couple of times." It appears that perhaps the specific group that this

behavior occurs with may vary. While some participants have had friends or family do this, others have been subject to complete strangers' actions. Ownership of the information regarding the partially visible tattoo is co-owned, but it is a forceable co-ownership, as the details about what the tattoo is are revealed, but not always by choice. This information could potentially then be spread to others without the permission of the tattooed person, though this risk may not be very common, particularly in the case of strangers. The more pertinent issue is the forcible revelation of information, limited interpersonal communication prior to the behavior, and potential ignorance of social rules.

Others' Perceptions

As a Conversation Starter

It was noted that choosing to reveal tattoos could be used to start conversations with others. Atkinson (2003) had a participant state that visible tattoos were used to invite comments or make the public ask questions. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard's (2009) four item communicative value of tattoos scale had an acceptable reliability of 0.86. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) found on a seven point scale that tattoos were somewhat communicative: $M= 4.06$ overall (p. 68). The current study's ($n = 8$) same scale questions had a reliability that was similarly high (0.964) and similarly somewhat communicative: $M= 3.75$. This result provides some initial support for the finding (which might be strengthened with additional responses). Focus group participants noted how their tattoos fostered communication.

Ashley (FG1) said: “There’s that interest factor. That kind of, like, ‘Oh, what do you have?’ and ‘I want to see it.’” Additionally, Ashley (FG1) noted: “I *have*... met and talked with several people... because of that alone.” Other members of FG1 discussed this phenomenon:

Chris: It is kind of like this *bond* that you kind of create. ‘Cuz you can have *nothing* (very strong) in common with somebody at *all*.

Nicole: But then... Yeah!

Chris: But the moment you realize you have a tattoo together...

Nicole: You’ll be talking for, like, *half an hour*!

Ashley (FG1) also noted the social aspect of tattoos:

Ashley: You... make connections with people, but it really is, like a... partly... social relationship phenomenon. [...] You get them for *yourself*, but at the same time, it does have its own social implications of... meeting people, or talking to people about them.”

Gómez, Morales, Huici, Gaviria, and Jiménez (2007) noted that individuals desire to verify their group status. Talking about tattoos with others may be a means of accomplishing this. It is a readily simple means of information sharing, as well as a way to build a bond for a social group (even if the bond is temporary, but the group is not).

Motivations Misunderstood

Individuals’ motivations for getting tattoos could be misunderstood or misinterpreted, either by simply witnessing the tattoo without the context provided by the person or someone not understanding an individual’s explanation. How observers perceive tattoos may be framed in certain ways, such as by an individual’s mindset about

tattoos. Burgess and Clark (2010) found that tattoo design type affected perception of the tattoo (e.g. tribal versus dolphins). Becky (FG1) detailed the frustrations of assumptions:

I've had people say things that... *bug me* just because mine *do* have meaning, a *lot* of meaning to me. So...like, I've had people... see the one on my back... and... they really don't get a good...look, so then they're like 'oh, you have a butterfly... you're a social butterfly?' And I'm like, ohhh, actually *no*. [...]

Nicole: Right.

Becky: The one on my foot says 'only the good die young' and they're like 'oh, you're such a *badass*.' (semi-sarcastic, snobby sounding) And I'm like... *no* [...] that's not *what* it is."

While the image of a tattoo may be visible, any potential meaning behind it may not be, and the image may obscure meaning or misdirect observers' perceptions. A person's desire to reveal a tattoo may not include revealing the meaning. Ivy Jones (FG2) noted a point about explaining the meaning of tattoos:

I don't always *like* when people... like, *ask* me about 'em? [...] Like, I love *having* them, I love people seeing '*em*... But I don't always like [...] *Explaining* 'em...? [...]

Jennie: It's tedious.

Ivy Jones: I don't care if you know. [...] Even if I explain it, I feel like you're not going to necessarily...*get* it. [...] The same way that *I* feel like I get it.

This provides an intriguing connection with Petronio's (2002) CPM articulation.

Individuals may develop rules to control management of revealing meanings of their tattoos similarly as they would to control the visible aspects of the tattoo, and they may not be one and the same.

Jennie (FG2) expressed a similar frustration as Ivy Jones:

Yeah... With my [...] quote tattoo, I actually... tried to explain it to one of my friends [...] and how [...] I love that quote, and everything. And then she just

looked at me, like... 'I don't get it.' [...] And I was just like, 'I'm *done*.' I'm not... even going to try again. If you don't get it, *whatever*..."

A (QS) respondent added (*sic*): "some people just don't understand the reason of getting a tattoo and i sometimes dont want to explain why i got mine." Jake (FG3) noted others' reactions to his tattoo, with it being in another language: "'Ohhh, how's everyone else supposed to *read* it if it's in *Latin*?' ... And it's different for everyone; like, I didn't get it to *show* everyone else. Like, I don't *care* if no one else knows what it means..."

Type of Person

Groups discussed if there is a certain type of person who gets tattoos (and reveals them to others). Some of this notion may be connected with stereotypes, as well as the historical groups that obtained tattoos. Specifically, Martin and Dula (2010) highlighted the negative perceptions and stereotypes that can be associated with tattooing and how this may affect relationships with different groups and individuals (employers, doctors, etc.) Burgess and Clark (2010) noted the traditional masculinity of tattoos associated with gangs, military personnel, and prisoners. Nicole (FG1) recalled:

If I wear a tank top or whatever... 'You have a tattoo?!' Like, you don't look like the kind of person that would have a *tattoo*! Or even, like, I have my tongue pierced... 'You have your tongue pierced?!' [...] 'Yes!' (sarcastically) [...] sorry I don't fit in your criteria."

Ashley (FG1) added:

A guy who I did *not* know very well [...] and I was like, in a larger group. [...] My sleeve went up, or I rolled my sleeves up. And he said, 'Oh, I didn't think *you'd* have tattoos. [...] You're just so *quiet*.' And I'm like, 'Oh, *no* sweetie; you just don't know!'"

Samantha Topaz (FG2) mentioned that her partner has this issue: “So... people... are pretty *surprised* that he has ‘em. You wouldn’t think he’s exactly the type to get tattoos...” Becky (FG1) added:

For me, like, it takes a certain person to pull off a full sleeve [tattoo] or a half sleeve [tattoo], like you have to have that *personality*. [...] You (to Ramona) look *cute* ... having tattoos all over.

Chris (FG1) felt the same:

I’d have to agree with that. Like, I don’t feel like I judge people... like, who I don’t know. [...] For me, it’s... well, I *know* this person... They don’t *seem* like the type of *personality*... that would have a tattoo. I would *never* say you don’t *look* like somebody [who would have a tattoo].”

Ramona (FG1) may have discerned the crux of the issue: “I think if you don’t see it right away, it’s almost hard to imagine them having one.” Ashley (FG1) also added: “I think it takes some confidence to have them, in general where... visible where other people can see them.” Iambic (FG3) noted that tattoos should be perceived as universal: “I think *humans* have tattoos” though even she admitted, “*I think* sometimes I get surprised when I find out [...] ‘you have a *tattoo*?’ [...] You... work at a *church*, and you have a *tattoo*. That’s awesome!” Marie (FG3) elaborated:

“Yeah. I think on one hand, you, you, wanna in your mind, say... ‘*Nooo*... I don’t have limitations for who *can have* tattoos.’ [...] But there’s still every now and then you find yourself being *surprised* [...] I think sometimes it’s more of a *context* thing, too.”

Allie (FG3) posited: “I would *like* to think that [...] Obama has one, rocked on the back of his shoulder, something...(slight group laughter)”.

Appropriateness

Appropriateness was an intriguing concept that occurred regarding discussion of perceptions of tattoos. Some participants referred to what is ‘appropriate’. While this notion is somewhat relative, it could be perceived through the scope of Petronio’s (2002) CPM theory. Individuals could develop rules for communicating appropriate tattoo information and not communicating inappropriate tattoo information, based on situation. Nicole (FG1) noted about appropriateness of tattoos: “Well, it’s not like you have ‘*F you*’ written on your *arm* or *something* [...]” Becky: “It’s *appropriate*.” Ashley (FG1) mentioned an inappropriate tattoo of a friend’s that would be seen when the friend was wearing a swimsuit in summer:

I don’t worry about... mine. Mine are all appropriate. There’s a friend of mine who got a... very... *large* tattoo... on her lower back, that has a... significant *swear* word on it. And I think she was real *excited* to get it, and then she realized... like, ‘*oh*... this isn’t so much fun’”.

Becky (FG1) noted: “Like, yeah... Mine aren’t bad tattoos, so...” Inappropriate tattoo information carries a larger potential for risk of offending someone beyond just the tattoo itself; the content may also be upsetting.

Females

Focus group participants noted how some individuals were concerned with females being tattooed, which could affect how women manage their tattoos or even prevent them from obtaining tattoos in the first place. Despite more females obtaining tattoos and female tattooing gaining greater acceptance, some negative perceptions still remain. Braunberger (2000) noted a situation where others asked a woman who had been tattooed what her husband would think. Ashley (FG1) stated: “I *have* had some people

say ‘what does your *husband* say about those?’ Like, what does that have *anything* to do with it...?’ Marie (FG3) added:

Both my... sister-in-laws... on my side, and my... um... husband’s side have said [...] ‘oh, our husbands would not be okay with that’. And I’m like... ‘My husband’s not telling me what to do like that.’ (laughs)

Iambic (FG3) shared a statement:

A friend... told me... she was... She’s not big on the tattoos. Her husband has one, but that...that’s *okay*, because he’s *male*. But females with tattoos, she’s kinda against. [...] She goes, ‘[...] You’re getting *old*, are you gonna find, you know, someone to *marry* you, if you have *tattoos*?’”

Ramona (FG1) noted: “I actually have two friends who aren’t *allowed* to get tattoos because of their husbands.”

I would say, though, working at [Jacobson’s] (local family grocery store) taught me that... ‘cuz I always had to wear... short sleeves, so everyone could always see... pretty much everything [...] it was really... *unpredictable*... the people that would say certain things. [...] Thirty year old *men* would be less, um... accepting of it than sixty year old *women*... I would have women pull me around the corner and, like, lift up... ‘I wanna see that!’ [...] ‘You’re, like, a great-grandma!’ (group laughter)

While both FG1 and FG3 had male participants included in them, it is important to note what was *not* discussed in this context. None of the participants detailed the opposite: males’ tattoo considerations being influenced or considered in a similar manner by females. Also worth noting is that while the tattoo artist profession is not as homogenously male as it once was, many tattoo artists are males. Ramona’s (FG1) husband is a tattoo artist, and the significance of a male tattooing images onto a female body could be interpreted to still be firmly entrenched in the patriarchal paradigmatic component considering women as objects. Even considering personal consent, agency, and the changing tattooing paradigm, on a basic level, this element remains.

Iambic (FG3) noted what types of tattoos females tended to get: “On the *back*, on the *ankle*, or something very, you know... something very easily concealed, something very, you know... *small*...” Allie (FG3) agreed: “My... placement was on the back and on the ankle because... I *can*... cover them up.” Marie (FG3) noted:

It’s more acceptable for a woman to feel like... this is a piece of *art*; I put it on my body, and I’m comfortable with it. [...] A lot of the men who do have tattoos... It *is* more of that thing *about*... I have to make a statement about being *masculine*.

Contradictory Management Strategies

Participants detailed situations where they managed their tattoos in face to face situations. Negative cases would be where individuals used no specific management for their tattoos; choosing to cover, not cover, or otherwise reveal tattoos would be considered management. Sometimes participants detailed strategies that contradicted strategies enacted in other situations. No participant detailed always hiding or always revealing their tattoos. Location of the tattoo certainly has a role to play in terms of visibility. Some individuals stated they would not hide or cover tattoos for a specific situation, like Ramona (FG1): “I would *never* do it” or Iambic (FG3) who stated regarding her first tattoo: “At that point, I was just... I don’t care (voice higher) if it’s going to be showing, I guess.” She also added: “I think... that I’ve never really... *covered* them up .” In the earlier mentioned example, Ramona (FG3) had mentioned covering up tattoos to go to the grocery store so there would be fewer comments from the public. Iambic (FG3) did mention a time when her tattoos were covered, but it was more due to the situation: “with my job as a reporter, [...] worn some *longer* pants and stuff, just... because that’s more of a formal occasion”. A (QS) participant noted (*sic*): “at

work i cover many of them with my uniform. the others i don't bring up and neither have they.” Aria (FG2) said: “I wear, you know, sleeveless shirts in the summer. [...] I don’t *not* show it” [...] “But I also very rarely, unless we’re having a *discussion* of tattoos, [...] very rarely show it off.”

Research Question 3 attempted to examine how individuals managed their tattoos with others in their lives. Participants detailed how they managed perceptions of their tattoos to varying degrees using several different strategies beyond just covering tattoos with clothes. Management strategies varied with the person(s) someone was interacting with. Specific situations also could influence management strategies, and occasionally, management was ignored while others revealed an individual’s tattoo without asking. Participants detailed perceptions of others regarding their tattoos, as well. Tattoo management and experiences were different for each person, though some similarities were found.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Individuals detailed a wide variety and high number of initial tattoo motivations. These were further refined into emotional individual and group-based themes, as well as practical themes. Individuals may obtain tattoos for specific personalized reasons as well as to foster connection with a larger group. Individuality and group connections do not need to be perceived as mutually exclusive. Additionally, group connections from tattoos may be used to create new affiliations or enhance or change existing ones. Group connections may also facilitate communication among individuals as members of an in-

group. When individuals obtain tattoos and cite strong motivations for them, communicative connections with others may be similarly powerful. By examining the motivations individuals identify for getting tattoos, the current tattooing culture can be better understood.

Communicative management of tattoo information acquires critical implications in the rapidly-developing and changing online realm. The Internet and social media have added additional considerations to an already-complex interpersonal network. The reach, potential digital permanence, and exponential audience affect disclosure and information sharing. Personal concerns about general privacy and tattoo related information are certainly not unfounded. Interpersonal face to face interaction should not be discounted. While online management has added a new component to tattoo management, tattoo management still retains implications among individuals and groups. A person's relationship with others, intentions, connections, and group affiliation can all impact tattoo perception and information sharing in face to face situations. How well individuals manage the balancing act of disclosure and impart their rules for information sharing for co-owners of information help to determine how public or private tattoo information remains. Managing tattoo-related information in person and online can hold critical implications. Information that is inappropriately revealed can have an impact on individuals' lives. The groups of people that individuals tell and the venue they use to share tattoo-related information illustrate the complexities of interpersonal communication.

Limitations

The motivations participants detailed in this study pertained to their own tattoos and their perceptions about others' tattoos. Participants may have chosen to leave some motivations unsaid or framed their response of a tattoo motivation a certain way which may not lead to the complete picture. Magnitude of specific tattoo motivations remains somewhat unknown, with the exception of individuals' own statements of certain events or feelings that affected them most deeply. It remains nebulous to qualitatively compare the strength of individuals' motivations, even when similar powerful reasons are given for a tattoo (e.g. 'memorials') as there is an internal component that proves difficult to quantify, but we can reach a better understanding of an individual's motivation when research uses qualitative methodology.

The sample utilized for the qualitative research is primarily a snowball sample of the researcher's interpersonal network- different individuals might state different motivations for their tattoos or document different nuances to their tattoo management, but that does not make the participants' insights less valid. Since social media was utilized to help find interested focus group volunteers, individuals may have been more social media savvy/in favor of social media. Though it was desired to run a focus group of all males, the researcher ran groups with available volunteers, resulting in a group of females and two mixed groups of males and females. Additional male input on the current state of tattooing would prove useful. Greater racial and ethnic diversity would be helpful, especially since as the literature review points out, culture impacts both meaning and appropriateness associated with tattoos. As a result of all of these elements,

care is needed regarding generalizing results to the larger population. Tattoo motivations, in general, are as unique as the individual's self. The exact same tattoo could have entirely different meanings for different people.

The researcher's non-mention of his own tattoos initially could be viewed as a strength and a weakness in the study. While not mentioning the researcher's tattoos is valuable in the sense that it then does not affect the subsequent discussion, it simultaneously could be critiqued as a limitation as participants may not have viewed the researcher as a tattooed insider along with the members of each focus group.

The decision to hide/reveal tattoos with various groups could change over time, and tattoos could acquire additional new meanings or replace original motivations, as well.

Notions of public and private with implications for tattoos should be considered in different cultures. What is found in United States popular culture may not be the same elsewhere. Why individuals choose to obtain tattoos in other cultures or how people choose to disclose information should be examined, as expectations for information-sharing may vary.

More comprehensive quantitative survey results would likely have added to our knowledge and even understanding of tattooing behavior and its link to communication. The quantitative survey planned for this study was meant to assist in triangulation efforts with the qualitative focus groups, but due to a lack of the necessary response, quantitative results could not be fully utilized. Details on the number of tattooed individuals currently at the university in the proposed sample were left unfulfilled. The survey distribution

method likely exacerbated the lack of response. Many instructors did not respond to the inquiry, thus making it more likely that the survey was not passed along to their students. There was no incentive for instructors to share the survey or students to take the survey, other than furthering research in general.

Suggestions for Future Research

Updated statistics on the prevalence of tattoos will frequently be needed. With a growing number of individuals obtaining tattoos, future measures will be needed to determine if rates continue to rise and in which demographics. How individuals perceive tattoos in U.S. culture also will need regular measurement.

This study examined what motivations individuals stated for obtaining tattoos. More research is needed to determine what specifically drives tattoo motivations from idea stage to action. Additionally, discussion of tattoos before and after procurement and the groups this information is shared with could be further examined. Doss and Ebesu Hubbard (2009) explored the communicative aspects of tattoos, and further development in this line of inquiry would prove illustrative. Some research has focused on motivations for tattoo removal (Latreille, Levy, & Guinot, 2011) or tattoo disappointment (Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2002a). While the participants in the current study did not detail many regrets with regard to their tattoos, longitudinal study of tattoo motivations as well as further study of tattoos and regrets may be beneficial in documenting how/if tattooing motivations change over time, if they are no longer valid, and/or new meanings for tattoos are acquired. In addition, further distinctions can be made between unhappiness with the tattoo image itself, the motivations behind it, or both.

More research is needed on individuals' use of social media in the scope of their tattoos; there remains little available research connecting tattoos and social media. With social media use increasing, a greater number of individuals are placing information in a variety of formats online, where it is more difficult to be controlled. Who sees what and to which effects is a pertinent question with clear implications.

Tattoo visibility management is certainly driven in some part by tattoo location on the body. Further research can examine the specifics of tattoo location and reasons for selection. A measure of self monitoring with tattoo management would prove illuminating. Within the scope of CPM, privacy of information (spoken/written communication) regarding a tattoo and the tattoo image itself are worthy of study. The degree to which these two concepts align and with which specific groups of people can provide further insight into information sharing processes regarding tattoos.

The phenomenon of moving clothing to view a tattoo without the permission of another is relatively untouched in the research literature. Additional studies on this topic would help enhance understanding. Specifically, what causes some individuals upon seeing a tattooed person (or pregnant woman) to ignore typical societal expectations about personal space and go so far as to touch someone unasked? Also, further study is warranted on how the degree to which a tattoo is partially revealed may be related to moving clothing to reveal the remainder of the obscured tattoo, as well as culture's influence on this intriguing social occurrence with regard to social space and personal boundaries.

Practical Application and Implications

Some research has emphasized that doctors should use body modifications to identify those with a greater likelihood for risky behavior (Guéguen, 2012). In the current study ($n = 33$), current number of tattoos and number of (non-earlobe) piercings had a significant moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.531, p \leq 0.01$). While this finding was preliminary due to the number of responses, this means someone who has one type of body modification was found to be moderately likely to have the other type (tattoo/piercing or vice versa). This might be posited as one way individuals might be identified, even if only one body modification is visible to others. While the meaning of this body modification and risk stipulation has not yet been fully explicated, tattoos do have implications for health in the future. Since more individuals have obtained tattoos, any potential risks that tattoos may pose affect a larger number of individuals. Potential health effects for individuals may not occur until many years in the future from the initial tattoo application. Additionally, legislation always has the potential to change how tattoo shops' business practices and health standards are regulated.

As Dula and Martin (2010) mentioned and the current study examined, how others in power or with authority (employers, teachers, etc.) perceive those with tattoos is important because it may impact decision-making. Perceptions of peers and the public in general are also necessary to note. John Roberts (2012) noted the current dialectical situation where tattoos are increasingly ingrained in American society, but not entirely accepted. Social pressures and influences from different groups affect whether tattoos are revealed and how they are received.

Individuals looking to get a tattoo may benefit from examining research that discusses tattooed individuals' perceptions. Shared experiences may help with the decision-making process. Tattooing motivations are as unique as the individual. Also, the perceptions of those in different contexts, such as parents of children, grandparents, and employers, for example, would be useful. The pervasiveness of negative stereotypes associated with individuals having tattoos can be examined.

In a society increasingly challenged with questions about privacy rights, publicness, and surveillance it becomes critical that research analyzes how information, regardless of topic, is shared and retained. Detailing how individuals reveal or hide their tattoos through interpersonal communication or with a mass audience can foster increased understanding of the communicative process. Privacy in a high-tech society will likely be a major issue for years ahead.

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Appendix A – Informed Consent Form for Research¹ Focus Group

Research Topic: Inked and in Public: Tattoos and Disclosure
Investigator: Michael Wessely

What should you know about research studies?

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, to not answer one or more questions, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. Research studies are conducted to gain a better understanding of a topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any benefits from being in a study, and research studies may pose risks to participants. Please ask the researcher for more information or clarification if you have questions.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this is to discover more about motivations about obtaining tattoos, as well as how privacy/disclosure of tattoos is managed online and with various groups. It is hoped this research will help generate knowledge in these areas.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you and up to four other persons will be asked a few open-ended questions to stimulate responses for a group discussion about motivations for obtaining tattoos, communication about tattoos, and privacy management. Each focus group member is encouraged to enhance the discussion with his/her personal experience/insight, or to respond to commentary from other group members. The researcher may ask follow-up questions to elicit further response. This focus group should take about an hour and a half to complete. Food will be provided. Approximately fifteen persons will be participating in a total of three focus groups overall.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks, costs, or discomforts associated with this study. Your responses will be audio-recorded, but accessible only by the researcher. Please contact UW-W's University Health and Counseling Services in the event of research-related injury/distress (students): 262-472-1305 (Karen Brueggeman) or (262) 473-6119 Wisconsin Community Mental Health Counseling Centers, Inc (non-students).

Confidentiality

The information in the records of this study will be kept confidential; you will be asked for a pseudonym of your choice to disguise your identity. Data will be stored securely on

¹ This informed consent form is based upon p. 84 of:

Keyton, Joann. (2011). *Communication Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

the researcher's computers. Personally-identifying information will be kept separate from other research data. No reference will be made in any written or oral reports that will link your real name specifically to the study. Responses to open-ended questions could potentially identify you, based on your responses. Respond with information you are comfortable giving. All information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. Every effort will be made to safeguard your identity and any information you provide from unauthorized access.

What if you have questions about this study or your rights as a research participant?

If you have questions about the study or its procedures, if you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you feel your rights as a participant may have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, (262)-472-5212 or 2243 Andersen Library, 800 W. Main St., Whitewater, WI 53190.

The researcher can be contacted at wesselym@uww.edu, (920)-860-0856 (cell) or (262)-472-1126 (on campus), or MC 321, 800 W. Main St., Whitewater, WI 53190. Dr. Barbara Penington is overseeing the research and may be contacted at: HE 464, (262) 472-1034, peningt@uww.edu

Consent to Participate

I have read and understand the above information. The researcher has given me a copy of this form; I have the opportunity to keep a copy of this information. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. By signing below, I give my consent to participate in this study. Completing this indicates that I am at least eighteen years of age and give my informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature

Date

Appendix B – Focus Group Questions

All questions may not end up being used.

I. Rapport building and connecting participants to topic:

- 1. Conversation starter:** The researcher will hand out small slips of paper and ask participants to draw/describe and share with others what they would get for their next tattoo or what their favorite tattoo is.
2. What representations of tattoos do you recall seeing in the media (characters on shows, news programs, etc)? What celebrities/media personalities (movie, sports, etc...) do you recall who have tattoos?

II. Motivation and meaning

- 3a. Why have you gotten tattoos?
- 3b. (potential follow up) What significant meanings do you have for your tattoos?
- 3c. Do your tattoos have one meaning or several?
- 3d. Why/when did you get your first tattoo?
4. Do you plan to get another tattoo? Why or why not?
11. (for later in discussion) Which statement do you agree with more and why: “I am tattooed” or “I have tattoos”?²

III. Public/private management- face to face

- 5a. Talk about a time when your tattoos were perceived negatively. Why were they perceived that way? How did you react (right away and the next time you saw that person)? (You can relate several instances, if you like.)
- 5b. Talk about a time when your tattoos were perceived positively. Why were they perceived that way? How did you react (right away and the next time you saw that person)? (You can relate several instances, if you like.)

² Stirn, A., & Hinz, A. (2008). Tattoos, body piercings, and self-injury: Is there a connection? Investigations on a core group of participants practicing body modification. *Psychotherapy Research, 18*(3), 326-333. doi:10.1080/10503300701506938

5c. (potential follow up) Have you experienced a privacy violation regarding your tattoo (where someone touched a tattoo, moved clothing to see a tattoo- similar to individuals touching a pregnant woman's stomach area?)

6. Have you needed to cover/hide tattoos? Describe the situation.

IV. Public/private management- online

7. What part do your tattoos play with regard to your use of social media? Do you post pictures/videos of your tattoos or write about them on social media sites? Why or why not?

8. How does face to face interaction compare to how your tattoos are handled "online"?

V. Miscellaneous

9. Have you ever regretted getting a tattoo and how did you deal with it?

10. What would you tell someone who is planning to get a tattoo?

12. Is there anything I've missed that you'd like to add about tattoos?

Appendix C – Focus Group Demographic Data Form

This focus group is to explore tattooed individuals' attitudes and perceptions about body modification (tattoos). Additionally, notions of public and private with regard to social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and tattoos will be considered. How privacy or publicness of tattoos is managed with various groups will be explored.

Demographic data

- 1) Sex: male female
- 2) Age: _____
- 3) Race/Ethnicity

- 4) Current number of tattoos: _____
- 5) Number of tattoos you've had removed: _____
- 6) Number of tattoos you've intentionally covered up with another tattoo: _____
- 7) Number of piercings (exclude earlobes): _____
- 8) Do you plan to get at least one more tattoo? _____
- 8) Pseudonym you would like the researcher to use: _____
- 9) Brief description or sketch of (one of) your tattoo(s):³

³ This item was suggested by
 Firmin, M.W., Tse, L.M., Foster, J., & Angelini, T. (2008). Christian student perceptions of body tattoos: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Psychology & Christianity, 27*(3), 195-204.

Appendix D – Initial Motivations (Codes)

Table D1 – Initial Motivations (Codes)			
Art	General- fill empty space	Love	Pets
Beauty	General- to mean something	Media Product	Rebellion
Culture	General- wanted them	Memorial	Region
Endurance	Health	Memory	Rite
Ethnicity	Individuality	Military	Social
Family	Interests	No Meaning	Spirituality
Friends	Job	Old Versus New	Sports
Gender	Life	Other	Unspecified

Appendix E – Informed Consent Form for Research⁴ Online Questionnaire Cover Page

Research Topic: Inked and in Public: Tattoos and Disclosure
Investigator: Michael Wessely

What should you know about research studies?

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, to not answer one or more questions, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. Research studies are conducted to gain a better understanding of a topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any benefits from being in a study, and research studies may pose risks to participants. Please ask the researcher for more information or clarification if you have questions.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this is to discover more about motivations about obtaining tattoos, as well as how privacy/disclosure of tattoos is managed online and with various groups. It is hoped this research will help generate knowledge in these areas.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked a few questions about tattoos and public/private with regard to social media. This survey should take less than twenty minutes to complete. No compensation will be given. All students at least 18 years of age enrolled in the Spring 2012 World of Ideas class at UW-Whitewater are eligible to take the survey.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks, costs, or discomforts associated with this study. Please contact UW-W's University Health and Counseling Services in the event of research-related injury/distress (students): 262-472-1305 (Karen Brueggeman).

Confidentiality

The information in the records of this study will be kept confidential; you will be asked for a pseudonym of your choice to disguise your identity. Data will be stored securely on the researcher's computers. Personally-identifying information will be kept separate from other research data. No reference will be made in any written or oral reports that will link your real name specifically to the study. Responses to open-ended questions could potentially identify you, based on your responses. Respond with information you

⁴ This informed consent form is based upon p. 84 of:

Keyton, Joann. (2011). *Communication Research: Asking Questions, Finding Answers*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

are comfortable giving. Online communications, in general, are considered *public* in nature. Electronic records of such communications may therefore be subject to open records requests. All information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. As an online participant in this research, there is always the risk of intrusion by outside agents, i.e., hacking, and therefore the possibility of being identified. Every effort will be made to safeguard your identity and any information you provide from unauthorized access.

What if you have questions about this study or your rights as a research participant?

If you have questions about the study or its procedures, if you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you feel your rights as a participant may have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, UW-Whitewater, Denise Ehlen, IRB Administrator, 2243 Andersen Library, 800 W. Main St., Whitewater, WI 53190, Phone: (262)-472-5212, Fax: 262-472-5214, E-Mail: ehlend@uww.edu.

The researcher can be contacted at wesselym@uww.edu, (262)-472-1126 (on campus), or MC 321, 800 W. Main St., Whitewater, WI 53190. Dr. Barbara Penington is overseeing the research and may be contacted at: HE 464, (262) 472-1034, peningt@uww.edu

Consent to Participate

I have read and understand the above information. The researcher has given me a copy of this form; I have the opportunity to keep a copy of this information. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate, skip questions, or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. By completing the questions, I give my consent to participate in this study. Completing this (survey, etc.) indicates that I am at least eighteen years of age and give my informed consent to participate in this study.

You may print this page for your records.

I agree to participate in this study. Yes No **Date:** _____

Appendix F – Questionnaire

(Questions listed were utilized for thesis analysis; additional scale items are omitted since they were not used due to low response.)

Demographic Data

1) Sex: male female

2) Age: _____

3) Race/Ethnicity

4) Current number of tattoos: _____

5) Number of tattoos you've had removed: _____

6) Number of tattoos you've intentionally covered up with another tattoo: _____

7) Number of piercings (exclude earlobes): _____

8) Do you plan to get a(nother) tattoo? _____

9) Why do you want or not want a(nother) tattoo?

10) Generally, social media allows you to share information with others online. For the purpose of this survey, think about the social media you use.

Check any social media you use:

Facebook _____

MySpace _____

Twitter _____

Writing a blog _____

Other (list other social media you use) _____

I do not use social media _____

11) Are you currently a UW-Whitewater student enrolled in the World of Ideas class for spring session 2012? Yes _____ No _____

If you have 0 tattoos, please select the “Exit this Survey” button at the upper right. The rest of the questions will not apply. If you have tattoos, the survey continues below. (This message is to fit Survey Monkey’s design.)

Tattoos and Social Media

20) If you have at least one tattoo, do you post information (words) about your tattoo(s) using social media?

Yes _____ No _____

21) If you have at least one tattoo, do you post images of your tattoo(s) using social media?

Yes _____ No _____

22) If you have at least one tattoo, do you post videos of your tattoo(s) using social media?

Yes _____ No _____

23) Why do you choose to post or not post information about your tattoo using social media?

24) My tattoos help me to communicate a particular image to others.⁵

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

25) My tattoos help to express myself to others.⁵

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

⁵ Items 24-27 are from:

Doss, K., & Ebesu Hubbard, A. S., (2009). The communicative value of tattoos: The role of public self-consciousness on tattoo visibility. *Communication Research Reports*, 26(1), 62-74.
doi:10.1080/08824090802637072

26) My tattoos are another form of expression for me.⁵

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

27) I use my tattoos as a form of communication.⁵

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

38) Why did you choose to get your tattoo(s)?

39) How/what methods do you use to manage who sees your tattoo(s)?

40) Describe how groups and individuals within certain groups (friends, family, religious authorities, or employers, for example) affect your disclosure of your tattoo.

41) Describe how different social situations affect disclosure of your tattoo.

Survey End Page

Thank you for your responses!

Appendix G – Separate Volunteer Survey Question

Separate Volunteer Survey Question

1) Enter your name and contact information (phone number or e-mail) **if you have at least one tattoo** and are interested in volunteering for a focus group. Food will be provided for focus group participants.

Survey End Page

Thank you for your responses!