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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE SOCIAL WORLDS OF TATTOOING:
DIVERGENT SOURCES OF EXPERTISE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY
LORRIE K. RILEY
CHICAGO, IL
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For Rosalie

People are only supposed to believe the legends, not understand them.

—Norman “Sailor Jerry” Collins

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ABSTRACT

Since its commercialization and rise to popularity in mainstream culture, tattooing has increasingly become a profession that effectively blends medical regulation and artistic expertise. Although a non-traditional profession sociologically, tattooing is in the process of an occupational shift, moving from the realm of deviant, working-class art to a commercialized industry of consumers' artistic identity expression. While in the process of this shift, tattooing currently borders several social worlds, each of which are vying for control over its practice. Specifically, the social worlds of art, medicine, and legislation are currently colliding in the struggle to define and control of the practice of tattooing. This ethnography focuses on the recent professional changes in tattooing, utilizing the local and daily processes of a tattoo shop located in the Chicago metropolitan area. More specifically, I will demonstrate the ways in which tattoo artists negotiate their artistic identity and expertise with customers' bodies, state health regulation, and increasing commercial competition. Furthermore, as I explore the local process of the tattoo shop, it will become clear that the findings of this research have implications for the sociology of professions, organization-based conceptualizations of art worlds, the gendered nature of artistic expertise and bodywork, as well as for the ways in which public health policy is created and enacted.

CHAPTER ONE

ART AND MEDICAL PROFESSIONS

For those studying the phenomenon of Western tattooing, recent times have been best described as a renaissance for the practice. Characterized as a period in which new artists and clientele have brought renewed vigor, popularity, and commercial viability to tattooing practices, this renaissance has also brought increased attention to and calls for governmental medical regulation in tattoo shops. Although regulation varies by state, tattoo shops have increasingly come under the watch of public health departments and are generally subject to inspections, licensing fees, and artist certification. Thus, since its commercialization and rise to popularity in mainstream culture, tattooing has increasingly become a profession that attempts to focus on artistic practices in the face of relatively new medical and bureaucratic guidelines defining the work.

Despite the well documented renaissance in tattooing, we know very little about the accompanying consequences, particularly in regards to medicine, professional status, and artistic identity in tattooing. Thus, while the tattoo renaissance itself certainly deserves attention, it must be considered in context of medical regulation, professional control, and artistic identity. More specifically, the occupational shift associated with the tattoo renaissance has located tattooing at the border of several social worlds, each of which are competing for control over its practice. In this manner, the social worlds of art,

medicine, and legislation form a complex relationship in which local artists are situated and must navigate in order to maintain professional boundaries.

A Review of the Literature

Body Art and Tattooing

The phenomenon of body art and adornment, specifically tattooing, has been a popular phenomenon throughout the development of anthropological and sociological fields. This popularity is almost solely experienced, however, within an understanding of traditional indigenous cultures or a furthering of Western conceptualizations of deviance. Thus, anthropologic research has focused on tattooing as a marker of indigenous peoples (Camphausen 1987; Pritchard 2001; Ballantyne 2005) while sociological research has concerned itself with Western markers of deviance (Irwin 2003; Adams 2009). More specifically, Western research takes a situated view of tattooing in context of prisoners (Bentley & Corbett 1992), gangs (Shelden, Tracy, & Brown 2004), criminal lifestyle (Lozano et al. 2011), and adolescent risk behavior (Silver, VanEseltine, & Silver 2009). Accordingly, predominant sociological accounts posit tattoos as marks of shame, theorizing them as the embodiment of a person's inability to conform to existing social norms (Atkinson 2003). Thus, within a Western context, tattooing has relatively narrow conceptualization despite its long and storied practice in North America. This limited sociological analysis of tattooing ignores the practice of tattooing as a potent form of human expression (Gallick 1996; Freidman 1996; DeMello 2000; Atkinson & Young 2001).

In an interesting, boundary-crossing work, Williams (2004) explores tattooing as both a deviant and artistic enterprise. Williams' aim was to reclaim the expressive subject and demonstrate the ways in which deviant displays can and should be understood as fundamentally artistic. In this manner, tattooing is conceptualized as having the characteristics of romantic art. Williams' transitional exploration of tattooing, deviance, and art brings important questions of power and human expression into bodily displays of deviance. Furthering the practice of tattooing within sociological developments, more contemporary scholars also focus on the processes through which tattooing has shifted from exclusive association with social outcasts (McKerracher & Watson 1969; Paine 1979; St Clair & Govener 1981; Grumet 1986) to a cultural practice that cuts across categories of gender, socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious membership (Vail 1999; DeMello 2000; Irwin 2003). Essentially, with the incursion of new clients and artists into the tattoo scene, a new generation of tattoo artists and subjects has initiated a shift in cultural understandings of tattoos (Benson 2000; Govener 2000; Irwin 2003; Fenske 2007). As Atkinson (2003) declared, tattooing is at the center of an unplanned transformation in North American perceptions of body art.

Falling outside of the previous sociological scope of deviance, contemporary scholars have largely focused on tattooing in the context of community (Vail 1999; Atkinson 2003), subcultures (Copes & Williams 2007; Gelder 2007; Winge 2012), the body and expression/resistance (Pitts 1998, 2003; Atkins 1998); and industry-culture and mass incorporation (Simmel 1957; Hebdige 1979; Brake 1985; Halnon 2005; Langman 2008). Despite the mounting breadth of current literature on body art practices, there

remains a continuous theme of renaissance and commercialization within contemporary scholars' sociological explorations of the tattoo world (Sanders 1989; Benson 2000; DeMello 2000; Govenar 2000; Fenske 2007). Whether it breeds community, resistance, or domination, tattooing has been re-conceptualized as a prevalent, established cultural practice in North America. DeMello (2000) assertively notes that, with this ongoing renaissance in Western tattooing, a new era of professionalism in tattooing has begun.

A History of American Tattooing

The earliest recorded professional tattoo artists began establishing themselves in New York City in the mid-1800s and by 1890, an American tattoo artist had developed the electric tattoo machine, an innovation that greatly contributed to both the artistic status of tattoo artists and the eventual commercialization of their trade. The machine not only quickened the tattooing process and decreased the pain involved, but also allowed for greater detail in coloring and shading (Sanders 1989; Benson 2000; Govenar 2000). According to Govenar (2000), the increased technical proficiency facilitated by the electric tattoo machine eventually led to an increased quality in artists' tattoos as well as in their drawings.

With the popularity of tattooing and tattoo spaces on the rise, the 1900s were defined by tattoo artists' travels in carnivals and circuses. The tattoo artist's role in carnival and circus was to exhibit themselves as tattooed persons as well as to tattoo their audience members, whom were often transient members located on the outskirts of society (Govenar 2000). The transient nature of the carnival and circus allowed artists to expose their work to audiences who had not yet experienced tattoo art (Benson 2000;

Govenar 2000). Similarly capitalizing on transience, the stationary artists of the time rented spaces in empty storefronts or set up in other places of business in areas where they could attract large, moving populations (Sanders 1989; Govenar 2000). The transient nature of tattoo culture at this time was essential in establishing a far-reaching internal communication network among artists. This network allowed for the sharing of information concerning equipment, places to work, and artistic trends. Moreover, it effectively established a tradition of dependence on local, experience-based knowledge over formal institutional controls (Govenar 2000).

Overall, this era was about bringing tattooing to places where people had never seen such a phenomenon, where new audiences could be reached and artistic reputations formed. The network of artists was self-established and facilitated the spread of tacit and local knowledge essential to maintaining an art world (Becker 1982). According to Govenar (2000), the tattoo designs of this era “constitute a folk art form that is traditional and has been transmitted through generations by word of mouth and imitation. As folklorist John Vlach has pointed out:

Folk artists by definition submit to or are at least very aware of the demands and needs of their audience, and this social coercion promotes not only conformity, but the continuity of tradition and the stability of artistic performance” (p. 218).

Tattoo artists relied heavily on their own traditions and constituted a coherent, unadulterated group of similarly-oriented artists that had great autonomy in defining their profession as well as the larger art world to which they belonged.

By the 1940s, the phenomenon of tattooing had spread across the United States and its growth brought artists’ attention to hygienic standards. Despite eventual medical

and legislative claims to the rightful enforcement of hygienic practices, the earliest efforts to standardize hygienic practices of tattooing were made by tattoo artists themselves (Sanders 1989; Govenar 2000). With the beginning of World War II, however, the regulatory efforts of both artists and legislators got little attention (Govenar 2000). Instead, a dramatic number of military men flooded tattoo shops, changing the base of clientele from transient workers to venerated soldiers. Artist Charlie Wagner recounts, “Funny thing about war, fighting men want to be marked in some way or another. High class fellas too – men from West Point and Annapolis. Sailors used to be my biggest customers, but now its soldiers. And fliers...” (Govenar 2000, p. 226). This shift from working-class sailor to professional soldier constitutes a major shift. Whereas artists were previously defining artistic subject matter in relation to their own transient lifestyles and applying it to transient populations, military men began establishing tattoo subject matter as one of patriotism and national stability.

Despite the temporary status change from working class transient to professional soldier, a post-war return to an increasingly suburban and family-centered life slowly edged out lifestyles expressed through the circus, carnivals, war, and tattooing. Countless scholars note that the post-war 1950s emphasized conformity and materialism through middle-class values while tattooing became primarily identified with rebelliousness and deviance among adolescents, the working class, inmates, and street gangs (Sanders 1989; DeMello 1993; Govenar 2000 Sterwart 2000). With this shift to an association with deviance, civic groups and health departments fought to make the practice of tattooing illegal. Throughout the early 1960s, several states, led by New York, banned tattooing

and restricted the use of tattooing equipment to medical doctors (Govenar 2000). The dramatic increase in tattooing bans not only perpetuated the deviant image of tattooing as immoral and unhygienic, but also placed its practice solely in the world of medicine. With the profession of tattooing legally restricted to medical practitioners in many states, the next resurgence of tattooing in an artistic context would not occur until the Vietnam War. When the crisis began, military men once again infiltrated the tattooing clientele (Govenar 2000). However, as the conflict in Vietnam escalated and public opinion increasingly opposed the war, a reversal occurred. The professions renewed associations with the military were slowly severed by a new generation of clientele. A counter cultural public began adorning their bodies with symbols of resistance, self-expressive pieces, and alternative representations of identity (Sanders 1989; Benson 2000; Govenar 2000). This new client symbiotically attracted a new set of artists, contemporaries who created body art in an exploration of the tattooed as both subject and object of art (Benson 2000; Govenar 2000). Moreover, these younger artists recognized the need to establish universal standards of hygiene within their artistic practice in order to overturn any existing bans on their trade. As Govenar (2000) effectively states, “These efforts, combined with the changing attitudes toward the adornment of the human body in the population at large, did create a context in the 1970s and 80s for tattooing to ultimately establish itself as a legitimate art form” (p. 235). Benson (2000) similarly contends that after the 1960s, “the tattoo community became more visible and more organized, with the development of large scale and well-publicized conventions, an expanding number of

magazines, books, websites devoted to tattoos, publications and museums dedicated to documenting its past” (p. 240).

Thus, with the redefinition of tattoos after the 1960s, the profession of tattooing attempted to reestablished itself within the context of an art world, depending on a new self-expressive clientele to bolster popular support of tattooing practices outside of the medical context. Moreover, the constant transition of tattooing from art to medico-legislative worlds over the span of a century has transformed tattooing from a folk art based solely in localized knowledge, to a more commercialized and widespread phenomenon simultaneously existing within several social worlds.

Sociology of Professions

In understanding the unique position of body artists in the sociological field, it is essential to recognize that, traditionally, tattooing is far from being understood as a professional occupation. This is largely due to the dominant focus on “golden age” professions that initially characterized the subfield (Goreman & Sandefur 2011). During the mid-twentieth century, professions such as medicine, accounting, law, clergy, science, and engineering experienced a golden age during which they benefited from a high level of legitimacy and autonomy as a result of expert, university-based knowledge and subsequent state-sanctioned control (Galanter & Palay 1991; Freidson 2001; Goreman & Sandefur 2011). Within the discipline of sociology, these burgeoning professions became the focus of prominent scholars such as Robert Merton (1958, 1968) and Talcott Parsons (1939, 1951) who largely utilized functionalist theory to situate and categorize professions as an indispensable institution that serve to sustain social order.

Within the context of this golden era, the institutional status of professions led most scholars to attempt the construction and utilization of strict yet abstract conceptual frameworks in exploring the wide-ranging experiences of professional life. Accordingly, scholars dedicated the subfield to defining and exemplifying the concepts of profession and professionalism. This explains why early sociological work on professions includes a heavy focus on defining essential properties, drawing a strict line between what can and cannot be considered a profession, but without ever reaching a definite consensus (Carr-Saunders & Wilson 1933; Cogan 1933; Caplow 1954; Millerson 1964; Wilensky 1964; Goode 1969).

In order to compensate for the lack of agreement on the definite properties of professional occupations, subsequent scholars began to conceptualize occupations as transitionally existing on a continuum of professionalization (Goode 1961, 1969; Wilenski 1964; Denzin & Mettlin, 1968). Despite attempts to move away from abstract conceptual frameworks, attempts at defining ideal professionalization processes problematically mirrored the initial challenge of conceptualizing ideal professions and professionalism (Becker 1962; Freidson 1970). Furthermore, the continued focus on accredited professions that maintained legitimacy and autonomy without any strong analyses of power relations helped to reify their institutional status in a hierarchy of occupations. This drew the attention of several scholars who challenged previous conceptualizations and who successfully used the medical profession to argue their position.

Considering the traditional qualities of professions, medicine is often viewed as the most professionalized of all human services (Freidson 1970). More specifically, within a traditional sociological framework of functionalism, the institution of medicine serves the public in the absence of direct material rewards and becomes essential to sustaining social order (Parsons 1931, 1951; Goode 1957, 1961, 1969; Turner 1987; Goreman & Sandefur 2011). Thus, scholars working from this framework of professions generally emphasize the ethical character of the profession, affective neutrality, dedicated service to the public, and the possession of specialized technical knowledge (Durkheim 1893; Parsons 1951; Goode 1957, 1961, 1969; Turner 1987). For this reason, Hughes (1958) contends that a traditional sociological approach embraces the biased and ideal self-image offered by the medical profession. In contrast, more critical scholars describe control and ethical standards as useful fabrications protecting the autonomous sphere and vested interests of licensed practitioners (Hughes 1958; Freidson 1970). In this view, professions are actually a phenomenon of labor market organization and are fundamentally rooted in power dynamics (Brint 1996). Freidson (1970) argues that the medical profession has an occupational monopoly which results in both material and symbolic benefits for its practitioners. Moreover, this monopolistic power allows the medical profession to subordinate adjacent occupations, keeping them permanently in the status of quasi-professions (Freidson 1970; Turner 1987). Medical institutions under the wing of the state have an increased power over adjacent occupations and often have special functions within a capitalist system (McKinlay 1973; Navarro 1976; Carchedi 1977; Turner 1987).

Although an interesting alternative to the functionalist theories of the golden age of professions, the power-centered perspective of Freidson (1970) and other sociologists (Ritzer 1975, 1977; Ritzer & Walczak 1986) initially garnered little attention from scholars like Hall (1983), who boldly professed that “the decline and near disappearance of papers on the professions and professionalization would make it appear that this category of occupation is no longer meaningful to sociologists” (p. 11). Notably, the years surrounding Hall’s review of professions consisted of major new studies of medicine (Arney 1982; Starr 1982), law (Heinz & Lauman 1982; Abbott 1986), the clergy (Vera 1982; Kleinman 1984), and scientists (Gieryn, Bevins, & Zehr 1985). More importantly, undoubtedly motivated by the dominance of the power paradigm, there was a noticeable interest in the process of deprofessionalization and loss of occupational power (Rothman 1984). This apparent surge in research, although not in the functionalist tradition, makes it rather difficult to support Hall’s declaration of disinterest in the field. Instead, as MacDonald and Ritzer (1988) contend, “the reason for the apparent ‘death’ of the study of the nature of the professions is the fact that a consensus appears to have emerged that the professions are defined by their power” (p. 252).

As Freidson (1983) demonstrates, relative to the initial golden age of professions, more contemporary conceptualizations have largely abandoned the traditional tendency toward professions as ideal types. He succinctly states:

The future of profession lies in embracing the concept as intrinsically ambiguous, multifaceted folk concept, of which no single definition and no attempt at isolating its essence will ever be generally persuasive. Given the nature of the concept, such a theory is developed by recognizing that there is no single, truly explanatory trait or characteristic – including such a recent candidate as “power”

– that can join together all occupations called professions beyond the actual fact of coming to be called professions (Freidson 1983, p. 32-3).

In this view, focusing on the fundamental characteristics of professions, professionalism, and professionalization leaves little room for variations, intersections, or overlap between occupations and other social actors. Accordingly, while Abbott (1988) defines professions as exclusive occupational groups that have the autonomy to apply their abstract knowledge to a particular area, he also recognizes that very few professions actually have exclusive control of their areas. Instead, professions claim jurisdiction within several different arenas, each constituting a different social world in which professionals operate. Following this line of thought, we need to be concerned with the place of the professions within the larger social structure and their relationships with other social actors, not simply the problem of defining the profession. Moreover, while we must recognize that traditional professions rarely have complete control over their areas, it cannot be denied that medicine and law still possess a great deal of power and autonomy in comparison to occupations such as tattooing. Thus interactions between social worlds and the power dynamics within this field become an essential method by which to further explore the nature of professions and society.

Approaches of Symbolic Interactionism

Within sociology, symbolic interactionism is a tradition largely concerned with the negotiation of collective social meanings. Theorists within this tradition emphasize processes and have studied an incredible range of phenomena (Metzler, Petras, & Reynolds 1975; Denzin 1992). Moreover, they have a lengthy history of studying the

organization of work and the professions. Thus, when applied to more recent phenomena of science and medicine, symbolic integrationists approached them as occupations, not as bodies of specialized esoteric knowledge (Gerson 1983; Fujimara 1987, 1988; Star 1990; Pickering 1992).

Although actor-network theory has been hugely successful in analyses of science construction (Latour & Woolgar 1979; Callon & Law 1982; Latour 1987; Latour & Johnson 1988; Callon 1995), scholars working from symbolic interactionism have commonly used social worlds theory to analyze how scientists and their associates create knowledge (Fujimura 1987, 1988; Star & Griesemer 1989; Clarke 1991). More generally, these scholars conceptualize social worlds as loosely organized entities in which people share resources and information, commitments and assumptions, and plans of action. People typically participate at various level of activity in multiple social worlds. Moreover, several worlds can form an arena of common interest around a particular issue. Notably, scholars demonstrate through their research that social worlds are not fixed and homogeneous, but fluid and heterogeneous with divergences, integrations and intersections. Thus, as Garrety (1997) posits, social worlds theory as offers rich and more complex analysis by incorporating varying social actors involved in boundary construction, particularly through exemplifying the intersection of social worlds at sites of controversy. In this context, according to Clarke (1991), social worlds theory “focuses on how individuals organize themselves and addresses how they do this in the face of others trying to organize them and/or broader structural situation in which they find

themselves” (p. 135). It is here, in this conceptualization, that both cooperation and conflict become more visible between various social worlds.

In utilizing social worlds theory to examine disputes over boundary claims, we are better able to see the processes by some actors maintain their construction of truth while others fail to ever gain legitimacy (Strauss 1978, 1982). Science and its varying social worlds serve as an ideal example of the ways in which legitimacy becomes a major goal of social worlds. Although not a social worlds scholar, Gieryn further (1995) observes:

Pragmatic demarcations of science from non-science are driven by a social interest in claiming, expanding, protecting, monopolizing, usurping, denying, or restricting the cognitive authority of science (p. 405).

Thus, the investigation of social worlds often involves mapping the ways in which those worlds attempt to draw, re-appropriate, and accentuate their boundaries. Most importantly, this often occurs in the context of multiple, ostensibly unrelated social worlds. Although often seen as far removed from science worlds, art also exists as a series of competing and cooperating social worlds. Thus, along a similar line of analysis as the symbolic integrationists of science and technology studies, Becker (1982) aggressively maps the existence of art worlds. These worlds consist of loosely defined networks of people whose shared knowledge and everyday ways of doing things produce works that are characterized as art (Becker 1982).

Becker’s (1982) analysis is an incredibly important translation of art into sociological understandings of networks, divisions of labor, and cooperative action. For Becker, a sociological approach to the arts “produces an understanding of the complexity

of the cooperative networks through which art happens...” (p. 1). Using Clarke’s (1991) conceptualization in the context of tattooing, social worlds theory focuses on how tattoo artists organize themselves and their practice while medico-legislative forces conversely attempt to organize artists and their contexts. Maroro (2011) takes a direct interest in this dispute between the worlds of tattoo art and public health policy in an exploration of professional status and boundary maintenance. Maroto addresses DeMello’s (2000) initial claim that a new era of professionalism has begun for tattoo artists by indicating that growing popularity has brought previously marginalized occupational groups into a struggle to maintain control over professional standards. Maroto (2011) ultimately finds that tattoo artists select from both formal and informal methods of control in their dispute with the medical and legal worlds of public health policy.

Maroto’s (2011) contemporary perspective excellently demonstrates increased tattoo acceptance, the changing occupational status of tattoo artists, disputes over social worlds’ boundaries, and the nontraditional development of tattooing as an occupation. Her work addresses all of the main themes in the presented literature, demonstrating a need for improvements within research on tattoo practices and the sociology of professions. In this view, expanding the sociological scope of professions allows for the wider understanding of the informal strategies tattoo artists use to maintain professional dominance in the face of medical regulation.

Maroto’s (2011) work may be exemplary for my own, but there is one large area upon which to expand and improve. Namely, Maroto’s classic understanding and interpretation of Becker’s (1982) art world concept overlooks an alternative,

interpretative approach to the social world of art. Largely relegated to the humanities in previous utilizations, an interpretive approach focuses on the form and content of tattoo displays as a cultural object. Because this approach ignores the social constructions and eternal contexts of art, social sciences react using an institutional approach that is based in collective action and organization, generally overlooking cultural meanings and identities in order to remain scientific and generalizable (Griswold 1987). In order to both further the arguments set forth in previous literature as well as expand upon them, the goal of this ethnography is to explore the social world of tattooing in relation to increasing medical regulation. This means expanding upon the sociology of professions in an examination of informal methods of control and also contributing to social worlds arguments by introducing cultural meanings of tattoo displays into methods of boundary maintenance. Thus, in an exploration of tattooing, preferred artistic traditions, masculine identity-displays, and other cultural inscriptions become essential considerations.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CURRENT STUDY

Methods

As discussed, in the theoretical framework of sociology, there are often inherent implications of autonomous control as a main feature of professional occupations (Caplow 1954; Millerson 1964; Wilensky 1964). Thus, within this research tradition, developing professions may be easily overlooked or their complex relation with other social worlds may be portrayed as simplistic and oppositional. It is essential to note, however, that the relation between tattoo artists and medico-legislative forces is both complex and dynamic, characteristics that are essential to understanding how artists negotiate their informal artistic identity with formal regulations in a commercial field. This complexity is further deepened by the fact that tattoo artists work without a hierarchal internal labor market and that regulations vary by state, essentially allowing for each tattoo shop to mold and adapt daily practices according to their local circumstances (Osnowitz 2006). Thus, due to the unique, localized position of tattoo artists, I have effectively utilized qualitative observation methods to more closely examine the processes by which artists combine formal medical regulations with local artistic techniques in their daily routines. In order to bolster my findings, artist interviews assisted in identifying local ways of knowing and experiencing the practice of tattooing.

Thus, the methods of this research allowed artists' own terms and actions to define their context, identities, and professions (Shweder 1996).

Research Site and Participants

In an ideal world, while selecting a site for ethnographic research, I would have chosen tattoo shops that were representative in terms of race, sexuality, and social class. In reality, however, the U.S. profession of tattooing is increasingly male, heterosexual, and middle-class (Sanders 1989). Therefore, in recruiting tattoo shop employees and customers for observation and interviews, I simply used a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling. After speaking with the shop owner, I selected "Chicagoland Tattoo" (a pseudonym to protect confidentiality) based on its accessible location via public transportation and welcoming of both appointment and walk-in customers. This metropolitan Chicago-based shop offers tattooing and piercing services and also sells body jewelry and promotional shop paraphernalia.

Chicagoland Tattoo currently has a single owner, six tattoo artists, two body piercers, and three shop assistants. In considering the representativeness of my research participants, I find it important to note that the shop owner and tattoo artists are all white men with the exception of a single Latino artist. The piercers consist of a white woman and a Latino man and, finally, the receptionists are two white women and one white man. For the purpose of confidentiality, all participants (employees and customers) have been given pseudonyms. While the employees of Chicagoland Tattoo are largely white and male, the customer base is much more diverse and harder to capture using standard categories of race and gender.

Research Questions

This thesis supplements previous literature by expanding conceptualizations of professions, occupations, and control. The current study also adds to the understanding of the use of art and self-presentation in boundary construction. Broad research inquiries include: 1) How do artists experience medical regulation in the daily processes of the tattoo shop? 2) How do artists maintain legitimacy in their daily work? 3) What methods do artists use to maintain boundaries between artistic and medico-legislative worlds? And 4) How are artists' identities enacted in the daily processes of the tattoo shop?

Observations and Interviews

For this research, I have conducted approximately 80 hours of ethnographic observations and 6 one-hour interviews with artists at Chicagoland Tattoo. The shop's store hours are from 12:00 p.m. until 12:00 a.m., seven days of the week and, because the shop owner and employees had no preference as to my observation schedule, I attempted to arrange my field observations during varying times and days every week. In this manner, I was able to observe any shop processes, clients, or employees that varied depending on temporal contexts. While I asked a relatively uniform and comprehensive set of questions for each interview, this thesis focuses on the complex roles of medical regulation and masculine artistic identity in the tattoo world. As such, the interview questions that proved most essential to this study centered around specific customer interactions, daily sanitation requirements, tattoo tools and techniques, and personal aesthetic preferences. The interview questions were open-ended and conversational in

nature with the purpose of gaining personal perspective and insight into artists' experience of tattooing in a medically regulated, commercial setting.

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

The Commercialization of Tattooing

In considering the clientele of Chicagoland Tattoo, it becomes clear that there is a diverse population of individuals who have and who seek tattoos. Excerpts from ethnographic observations elaborate upon the diversity of customers but also indicate the common display of class status symbols within the shop:

The customer's pants are pulled slightly down and, on the side of the tattoo, Luis has tucked a paper towel into her waist band. On the other side, I can see the strap of her black thong pulled up above the pant line. The customer is wearing black jeans, a dark gray v-neck t-shirt, black leather combat boots, dramatic 50s style make-up (thick black eyeliner on the top lid, bright red lip stain, pink blush), red nail polish, large red and black earrings, and has a short pixie hair cut bleached blonde (her dark roots show). Her facial features are fine, she's pale, and her body is fairly petite. Her right arm has a full tattoo sleeve – a collage of flowers (mostly poppies), some blades of grass, and a wasp. While the artist works on his customer's Russian doll tattoo, the accompanying friend smiles while she looks at her cell phone.

The friend is waiting for Chris to draw her geometric tattoo. She is wearing skin-tight black leggings, a blue oxford button-up, pointy black boots with a kitten heel, some eye make-up, and coral colored nail polish. She has a tan, honey-colored complexion and shoulder-length golden brown hair [I wonder if she is Latina or maybe Middle Eastern but cannot tell from appearance alone]. On the floor next to her chair, she keeps her brown and tan Coach purse. Although she is currently using her phone to text, she also has an iPad in a protective case sitting on her lap.

These two customers are both young women with very different physical appearances.

The first customer exhibits a 50s pin-up style of make-up that is common within tattoo culture. Her dress is militaristic and greatly contrasts with her make-up, feminine

features, and bleach blonde hair. While her body is covered in visible tattoos, the subject matter of these tattoos is largely considered feminine (Sanders 1989) – flower depictions of nature, and a traditional doll. The second customer is dressed more femininely and displays several class status symbols such as a cell phone, an iPad, and a designer purse. In comparison, a much more masculine customer displays a different style of tattoo, but still exhibits several class status symbols:

A skinny white man in his late 40s or early 50s enters the shop. He is wearing thick framed glasses, a stiff-billed baseball cap (holographic sticker still under the bill), jeans, spotless Timberland boots, and an oversized black and red plaid coat with a hood. He has removed his oversized coat and I notice that he is wearing a red thermal shirt and black metal jewelry. On his left wrist is a large black metal watch encrusted with jewels. His right wrist has a matching bracelet, black metal with jewels. His hat is black with a red and white gothic typeface letter “D” embossed on the front. He has tattoos on his hands in addition to a microphone on his neck. One tattoo on his left hand reads, “Never again.” ...Once this customer moves through the swinging door and into the tattooing area, he takes off his red thermal and I can see that his hands, arms, neck, and chest are completely covered in tattoos.

Although this customer is displaying a traditional, masculine style of tattoo often associated with low-class status or deviance (Sanders 1989), he simultaneously showcases jewelry, spotless boots, and a stiff billed cap as symbols of his socio-economic status. Surprisingly, customers of Chicagoland Tattoo display these class status symbols across race, gender, and age. An ethnographic observation of two browsing customers elaborates:

A white woman enters the shop. She is wearing all black – a black jacket, black stretch pants, and black UGG boots – plus a multi-colored sparkly scarf loosely draped around her neck. She is about 50 or 60 years old with short dark blonde hair with golden blonde highlights. She looks unseasonably tan and has deep wrinkles around her eyes. Her nails are done in a French manicure and she is wearing a large gold wedding ring with a large solitary diamond. She is holding

oversized sunglasses, a Blackberry phone, and car keys. I notice that the key is the type that folds inside a rectangular case with remote buttons on the exterior. When you push one of the three buttons, the key flips out [This type of key usually belongs to a luxury car].

Seconds later, a young African American man enters the shop. He is tall and muscular but has a very young, smooth face. His hair is short and clean-cut. He has on a black Ralph Lauren Polo coat, a gray striped shirt, jeans, and black Ralph Lauren Polo snow boots with the tongue of the boots sticking out to showcase a Polo label (jeans tucked into the boots). Over his shirt, he is wearing two silver dog tags and a shiny black rosary around his neck. He also has a single diamond earring in one ear.

Here are two customers of different ages, races, and genders displaying similar class-based status symbols of jewelry, designer brands, well-manicured bodies, and clean-cut dress. This particular tattoo shop often draws a diverse clientele on a daily basis, but it is essential to note that despite racial, ethnic, and gender diversity, the customer base is largely displaying middle to upper class socio-economic status and often relies on a variety of material signifiers to demonstrate this privileged class position. Furthermore, as these examples demonstrate, there have been recent trends toward the commercialization and mainstreaming of tattoos (Govenar 2000). Specifically, tattoo shops have become a place for capitalist exchange between artists and their increasingly diverse clientele. In these exchanges, customers select self-expressive images and pay artists for the translation of this image into their bodies. An artist at Chicagoland Tattoo elaborates on this translation process, explaining that he determines the price of a tattoo by parceling it according to the “length of time” required as well as the “size, color, and complexity” of the design (Luis, Chicagoland Artist).

While the idea of selling tattoos and other forms of body art is certainly not a new concept, higher prices and increasingly systematic processes of quantifying the value of a

tattoo is a more recent development that I have observed at Chicagoland Tattoo. One of many ethnographic observations illustrates this systematic process:

Frank gets up from organizing his space and approaches the customer who is occupying herself by looking around the room at the art on the walls. He is holding the stencil for her tattoo and says, “Alright, it’s gonna be \$200 for the rose with leaves and \$180 without.” The customer says, “Without leaves. And how big will it be?” Frank tells her, “It will be the same size at it is on the flashboard” [which is no more than a square inch]. He continues, “You want it in color, right?” The customer replies, “Yeah, color.” Frank then moves to the counter, erases the leaves on his sketch and gives it to the receptionist to make into a stencil.

In this particular transaction, the customer paid \$180 dollars for a piece no larger than one square inch and that took the artist approximately ten minutes to complete.

Interestingly, in presenting the price to his customer, the artist dissected the rose into individual pieces for sale, saying that adding leaves to the rose would add another \$20 to the cost. This increased cost and dissection of tattoo art is indicative of a professional shift within the practice of tattooing. More specifically, the locally visible increase in this line of capitalist thinking indicates that there must be larger social, economic, or political forces driving the increased mainstreaming and commercialization of tattoos.

In exploring the historical origins of professional tattooing, it becomes clear that, since its introduction to the United States through early traveling tattoo artists, the practice of tattooing has experienced a shift from deviant folk art to mainstream artistic self-expression (Sanders 1989; Benson 2000; DeMello 2000; Govenar 2000).

Considering the socio-historical developments in tattooing after the 1960s and 70s, it is clear that the status symbols being displayed by the customers of Chicagoland Tattoo can be described as a local manifestation of relatively recent, large-scale shifts in cultural

attitudes. Due to attitudinal shifts, an increase in middle and upper class clients has expanded the practice of tattooing beyond deviant subcultures and allowed for the mainstreaming and commercialization of tattoo art. In line with this commercialization, tattoo artists now practice a precise and consistent dissection of tattoo art in order to effectively determine and then commodify the amount of time, skill, and effort a tattoo will require.

Aesthetic and Financial Negotiations

As repeatedly observed at Chicagoland Tattoo, getting a tattoo in a mainstream, commercial tattoo shop can be expensive. At this particular shop, tattoo pricing begins at a minimum of \$50 but this will cover only the smallest and simplest of black and gray designs. Therefore, customers are often very weary of quoted costs and must go through a process of negotiation before finding a balance between what they want and what they can afford. Through observing this process, it becomes easier to detect any real class differences as well as dedication to subject matter of tattoos. The example of one young man exemplifies this sometimes arduous and frustrating negotiation process:

The young black man who entered several minutes ago with three other friends finally chooses a tattoo off of one of the pages of flash. It is a large skull surrounded by blue flowers. He points to the skull and turns to his friends, asking “Should I get it on my arm or my chest?” The couple looks up without pulling their head phones out of their ears and the friend on the adjacent couch looks up from her phone. They all say “arm” in unison, each of them agreeing that it would be better on his upper bicep. The customer looks very hesitant – eyes down, lips pursed, and silent for several seconds. He says, “I think my chest.”

In his initial selection, this customer is negotiating exactly what design to get as well as where to place it. As with most customers who bring friends, his first decision involves

weighing where he wants a tattoo and where his friends think it will look best. In this instance, the customer disagrees with his accompanying friends, ignores their advice, and then consults the shop assistant on price.

The shop assistant, Jane, then says, “Okay, let me get a price on this,” and walks back to her desk. She talks with Frank, who is currently cleaning up after his latest customer. I cannot hear what they are saying over all the noise in the shop but Jane quickly returns to the customer and says, “It will be \$290.” The customer’s face is one of disbelief – mouth slightly open, eyes wide, brows up... He asks, “Ugh, \$290!?” Jane looks unsympathetic – blankly staring at the customer. She replies, “That’s what I said.” The customer says, “Uh. Okay, I’m gonna look a little bit more.”

Although taking a second step in this process, the customer is only negotiating with himself. Instead of naming a counter to the artists’ quote, he assumes that the price is standard and inflexible. This assumption indicates that, although there is a discrepancy between customer and artist’s valuing of the art and labor, the artist is perceived to be in an expert position with the ultimate authority to enumerate the value of tattooing. This perception is bolstered by the gate-keeping function provided by the shop assistants, who regularly act as ambassadors between the customer in the waiting area and the artist behind the partially enclosed tattooing area. In the end, this particular customer went through many additional tattoo selections and rejections before settling on a scripture verse quoted at \$200. While this price is more than several of the other selections, it is an acceptable balance between the customer’s preference of subject matter and the artist’s seemingly inflexible quote.

This pattern of accepting artists’ initial pricing is a common occurrence within the tattoo shop, and in doing so, customers repeatedly demonstrate their trust in the expertise

of the tattoo artist. A waiting customer explains to his guest, “To me it’s like any other kind of service industry where you get what you pay for.” Here, the customer is making the inherent assumption that getting a tattoo in a commercial, regulated tattoo shop is better than the inexpensive tattooing conducted at a lesser shop or somebody’s home. Furthermore, he conceptualizes pricier shop-based artists as legitimate because of presumed artistic training and the ostensible enforcement of health standards. It is this perception of shop artists as trained and standardized experts that effectively allows them to quote fundamentally subjective prices without direct challenges from customers.

Negotiating and Managing Body Work

Although negotiations on price are often manifested as an internal debate between what the customer wants and what the customer is willing to pay, there are other forms of negotiation that fall outside of the realm of private financial debate. Specifically, these negotiations occur between artist and customer and stem from the literal use of the body as a canvas:

Daniel stands up, says, “Hey, Mike” and moves from the tattooing area to the waiting area. Mike says hello and Daniel asks, “How’s the neck?” Mike pulls his coat collar to the side and Daniel places his hands on Mike’s jaw, slightly lifting his head to look at a tattoo of a 1950s style microphone. Daniel says, “Looks good, healing well” and Mike replies, “Yeah, I’m looking for something to fill this space” while pointing to the other side of his neck. Daniel looks to the other side of Mike’s neck and asks, “What kind of theme do you want to fit the space?” Mike replies, “I was thinking a skull with some roses.” Daniel brings Mike over to the flashboards on the wall and flips to a page with a skull and rose and asks, “How about something like this? Maybe just change a few details.” Mike says, “Yeah. Looks good.” Daniel then moves close and looks at Mike’s neck, gently tilts his head and holds tracing paper to the space. He draws an outline on the tracing paper to delineate the approximate shape of the available space. He then goes back to his work space and begins drawing a similar image that will best fit the space on Mike’s neck.

In this excerpt, it becomes clear that within the tattoo shop, the body is conceptualized as a living canvas. Each piece is connected by this canvas and represents a cohesive piece of work. Furthermore, the customer offers his body to the artist as a blank slate, entrusting that expert artistic knowledge of style, theme, composition, and aesthetics will take a general idea and transform it into a piece of art.

In addition to aesthetic negotiation such as those described in previous scenarios, there are also more technical and compositional negotiations made at the shop. When a customer is selecting a tattoo for a particular area of the body, the tattoo artist must often remind them that there are limitations on size, detail, and orientation because of the unique contours of the human canvas. A successful interaction between customer, receptionist, and artist demonstrates this style of aesthetic negotiation:

Kelsey, a shop assistant, swiftly enters the tattoo area and asks Daniel, "How much for this," as she points to a page in a book. Kelsey continues, "He wants it on his upper arm as a sleeve." Daniel asks, "The flag? Well, it would work best if he did it with one blue star or made it bigger... otherwise it won't fit right... \$120." Kelsey returns to the customer, talks with him briefly and returns to ask Daniel, "Can you do the flag tattoo 30% bigger? Then maybe you could fit more than one star?" Daniel begins a quick sketch of the image before saying, "Yeah." Kelsey asks, "What would the bigger size cost?" Daniel replies, "Ummm, \$150." Kelsey then moves back to the front, speaks with the customer, reprints the stencil 30% bigger, and quickly brings it back to Daniel for him to use as a tattoo stencil.

In this instance, the customer was able to find a balance between what he originally wanted, what the artist thought would look best aesthetically, and what could reasonably fit on his arm. While the artists' initial recommendation of only a single star was not acceptable to the customer, the alternative of increasing the tattoo size within the limits of the physical space proved to be an acceptable compromise. This style of compromise,

between the physical space of the body and the composition of the art, occurs for almost every tattoo completed within the shop and, although some customers are disappointed by the limits of tattooing and their bodily canvases, other, more heavily tattooed customers seem to greatly trust their artists and willingly take a more passive role in the creative process.

Clearly, aesthetic and technical negotiations are indicative of the relevance of the physical body in this profession. In each of these instances, the body has been transformed into a unique and sometimes challenging canvas. Although challenges presented by the physical space of the canvas can drastically change the composition of a tattoo, negotiation between artist and customer results in a collaboration that values both customer preference and experience-based, expert artistic knowledge.

Moving beyond negotiation processes to the actual marking of bodily canvases, the challenges presented by the physical canvas of the tattoo world are often attributed to problematic bodies. Often, if these challenges cannot be overcome, failure can be accredited to the flawed technique or skill of the artist. In one instance, a tattoo artist of Chicagoland Tattoo is able to overcome the challenges presented by a problematic body:

The customer Daniel is tattooing has a very shapely body with especially large hips which are exposed as Daniel colors and shades a large tattoo of a Japanese mask... Just as I begin to settle into my surroundings, Daniel wipes that tattoo clean and tells his customer, "Alright, we're finished." Before the customer can even get up from the tattoo bed, Chris is leaning over her assessing Daniel's work. He says in a teasing tone, "Just about average, Daniel." At this point, John and Tim also approach the customer, looking at her tattoo while she attempts to get up and look in the mirror. Tim says, "That looks great," to which John agrees, "Looks pretty awesome, Daniel." Daniel simply nods while disassembling his tattoo machine and putting the needle in the sharps collector and the machine in the red biohazard bucket... After the customer has left, Chris suddenly asks

Daniel, “Hey, Dan. Was her skin rough?” Daniel replies, “Well, she was like all stretch marks.” Chris commends Daniel, “Man, it’s tough to do stretch marks.”

This brief, but poignant interaction between tattoo artists demonstrates the ways in which artists problematize bodies with scarring, stretch marks, discolorations, or other imperfections. Artists see the difficulty of tattooing scarred skin as a major challenge to overcome in order to demonstrate technical skill to others in the professional network. Another instance at Chicagoland Tattoo illustrates the ways in which a failure to transform problematic bodies into technically-skilled artwork can indicate an individual failure for an artist:

After resuming the outline, Luis asks his customer, “How ya doing?” She lifts her head slightly off her folded arms to glance back at Luis, saying, “Good. How are you?” Luis says, “Not too bad.” She then asks him, “Is it hard to stretch love handles?” Luis repeats, “Is stretching them hard?” [Here she is referring to the way tattoo artists pull the skin taught before applying the needle and tattooing]. The customer clarifies, “Yeah. Do you think I have elephant skin? Another artist told me that my skin was like an elephant’s.” Luis thinks for several seconds and says, “I don’t think so...” Chris jokingly interrupts, saying to Luis, “You’re bein’ a real charmer there.” Luis defends himself, “Well, that’s maybe a problem with the artist’s skill.” Chris thinks for a second and agrees, “Yeah, you’re right.”

This rare and frank discussion about bodies and tattooing techniques between customer and artist is an incredible opportunity to see the ways in which tattoo artists view the failure to manage problematic bodies. Within professional tattooing, an artist’s inability to transform a problematic body is seen as an individual’s technical failure by others in the professional network. Considering the ways in which tattoo artists often share and assess each other’s work, this technical failure easily undermines a tattoo artists’ status as artistic expert and could threaten their reputation within the professional network.

In one incredibly candid moment at Chicagoland Tattoo, we see the consequences of unsuccessfully tattooing a challenging space on the human canvas:

Tim enters the shop and swiftly enters through the swinging half-door. Before he gets more than a foot into the tattooing area, Chris turns from his desk and says in a loud and stern voice, “Hey, Tim. I do not do ear tattoos. Someone told Kelsey that I did them!” Tim looks surprised and says defensively, “Kelsey asked if anyone would do an ear tattoo. And I just said, ‘If anybody will, its Chris.’” Chris replies angrily, “Well, get your shit straight. I do not do ear tattoos – now I’ve got a shitty ear tattoo out there and the lady is telling all her friends that I did it... Some crazy Evanston lady came in at noon and asked for this ear tattoo. I’ve never done an ear tattoo! I don’t do ear tattoos – that’s all. And she came in specifically asking for me!” Kelsey looks over the ledge into the tattooing area and meekly says, “I told her you would. Sorry, I didn’t know.” Chris seems to ignore Kelsey’s apologetic comments and says, “I’m not doing them anymore! You guys figure your shit out!” With that he pulls out a cigarette and leaves the shop to smoke. During this episode, the shop owner emerges from his back office but does not intervene. Tim looks shocked, surveys the room (everyone is looking at him) and says, “I just said that if anybody would do it, maybe Chris.” Tim continues through the room, puts his coat away, and sits at his station.

In this tense moment between artists, we can clearly see that the poor execution of a tattoo, whether the result of a flawed canvas or unskilled practitioner, can severely damage the reputation of artists. The artist elaborates in an interview:

Well what sucked about it is I’ve never tattooed an ear before... cause it sucks to tattoo. So then, I know that tattoo isn’t gonna look good. Ear lobe tattoos look like shit. So now I gotta do a crappy tattoo on a really nice lady. I got these ear tattoos out there which are gonna look like garbage eventually and it drives me nuts. It’s like, well fuck... okay, now that’s my ear tattoo (Chris, Chicagoland artist).

Although not usually made so explicit, reputation is incredibly important to tattoo artists in this shop. They display examples of their executed artistic work in shop reference books, on their websites, and on their customers. In this manner, the customer, their actual canvas, becomes a centralized, embodied display of their skill that can potentially

elevate their status in the art world through referencing and establishing new network pathways.

Although problematic experiences with bodies have the potential to damage the artistic reputation of tattoo artists, there are other common, daily processes that show the customer naturally assuming tattoo artists' authority in handling bodies.

Without instruction, the customer lies down and lifts her shirt much higher than necessary. She pulls her shirt to the underside of her breasts, exposing her entire stomach. Her stomach protrudes and she has stretch marks on her sides. She also unbuttons her jeans to expose the faded and distorted scorpion on her lower hip. She then rests her hands on her stomach just below her breasts, holing her sweater up in place. Frank gives verbal warning, "I'm gonna turn these in a little bit" while he flips the edge of her jeans inward, tucking them away from the area he will be tattooing... Frank warns the customer, "I'm gonna lean into you a little bit here," and leans his arm into her stomach and applies the needle to the skin on her hip... as he shades the tattoo, the customer's entire body moves with his circular hand motions. The fat of her belly is exposed and jiggles with each stroke of Frank's needle.

Here the customer assumes a relatively compromising position, casually laying back and exposing her body to a room of perfect strangers. Surprisingly, she does so without any instruction from the tattoo artist. Despite the customer's visible comfort with exposing her body in the context of the professional tattoo shop, the artist remains cautious, constantly warning her before touching her body or adjusting her clothing. In moving on to a second tattoo for this particular customer, the artist's caution verges on unease:

He changes the needle and his gloves then turns to the customer and quietly asks, "Do you have a sports bra on?" She begins to pull up her shirt and Frank interjects, "Don't show me, just tell me!" She casually replies, "I have a bra and tank top on." Frank says, "Okay, then take your blouse off and we'll put the stencil on... But leave your undershirt on and keep your jeans down."

The artist remains vigilant in his instructions, ensuring that he treats his customer's body with a prudish respect. The customer's response, on the other hand, indicates that she understands a professional tattoo artists' gaze as comparable to that of a medical practitioner. This conflation of tattoo artists with a detached and methodical practitioner is further fueled by the display of formal medical credentials such as hanging Blooborne Pathogen Certificates and other state required fliers promoting the scientific standards achieved by tattoo artists.

Social Worlds and Methods of Professional Control

From the analysis of ethnographic evidence thus far, it is clear that the local world of commercial tattooing is defined by artistic practices and conceptualizations of the body as a canvas. In stark contrast to this artistic world, the analysis has also shown several signs of another major influence within tattooing: the state's establishment of formal medical health standards. Historically, artists were the first group to push for standards (Govenar 2000) and, in my own ethnographic work at Chicagoland Tattoo, a tattoo artist describes the importance of his informal knowledge. His first response to my question about what in the shop is regulated was a simple and direct, "Nothing." After I echo his response, he elaborates:

We regulated ourselves. Every practice you see out there – me putting on gloves, and opening equipment, and laying out individual inks, and using disposable tubes and disposable needles, and all that other stuff – are all controls that this shop has put into place. These were all in place before the health department said, 'We want \$800 per tattoo shop and we'll come and inspect you.' We had all this stuff set up before that... We already do everything above and beyond what they ask for (Chris, Chicagoland Artist).

Here, the artist is describing the ways in which traditionally informal methods of control become co-opted by state regulatory practices, formalizing and standardizing tattooing in order to more strictly organize the occupation and simultaneously profit from its mainstream success as consumer-based artistic expression. Moreover, artists consistently demonstrate a viewpoint indicating that the state's intervention devalues their local, experience-based knowledge. Tim demonstrates:

In Chicago, there is a bullshit health code. The inspector comes around, looks for certain things that she's supposed to – like you're autoclave, how do you use your autoclave, how do you sterilize your equipment, how do you set up for a tattoo... But she was never trained by people who are industry-specific. And that's something that we've always pushed for (Tim, Chicagoland Artist).

Similarly, other scholars have found that many tattoo and body artists are knowledgeable about hygienic practices but that they also stress the need for on-site learning and local knowledge that can only come from experience (Maroto 2011; Raymond, Pirie, & Halcon 2003; Sanders 1989).

In considering this perspective, it becomes clear that with the mainstreaming and commercialization of tattooing, artists have lost control over some aspects of their occupation. While artists recognize this loss and seek to regain control through the inclusion of artist-defined standards in formal regulation, they also recognize the importance of state regulation and credentialing. Chris further elaborates:

I've always wanted to be regulated because then it legitimizes you and it keeps the people who don't do it out of it. I first started tattooing in 1994 at this shop and there were like six tattoo shops – wait, seven really – in Chicago. Now there's over 180... and it sucks – Not only for business, but I cover up a ton of garbage

tattoos. You could have a shop that's super clean and that's super up to date – bloodborne pathogens, infection control, and all this other shit but there's no one who's gonna regulate any kind of artwork. Because, really, the regular person who comes in, you have to teach them what a good tattoo is (Chris, Chicagoland Artist).

While this artists' perception confirms that regulation does have some gate-keeping benefits in an increasingly competitive commercial profession, it also demonstrates that regulation can still be a method by which non-expert artists enter the business. Here the artist is referring to the creation of technically good tattoos as opposed to aesthetically pleasing subject matter. More specifically, the level technical skill determines the level of artistic expertise. According to this particular artist and others interviewed by Sanders (1989), tattoos executed by expert artists have clean and steady lines, smooth shading, and solid coloring. Clearly, this definition of tattoo work largely depends on the technical skills that tattoo artists achieve through lived experience, not on some innate artistic quality (see Doing 2004). One artist emphasizes this in a description of his developed drawing abilities:

I liked to draw a lot and stuff like that. But I learned how to really – like I can't just draw whatever. I draw mostly for tattooing. I learned how to draw through tattooing. I learned composition through tattooing, I learned color through tattooing. So I would draw a bunch as a kid, but not anywhere near what I would do now... (Jonh, Chicagoland Artist).

An interaction between a shop assistant and a restaurant delivery man further demonstrates the ways in which technical ability to draw and utilize tattooing tools allows the artist to practice any aesthetic style of art:

Brent stands up and pulls a wad of cash out of his back pocket to pay the delivery man. After paying, Brent thanks the man but before he turns away, the man

quickly asks, “I was wondering about a tattoo.” Brent looks slightly confused and says, “What?” The man replies, “I got a question about a tattoo.” He pulls one sleeve of his coat off and lifts the arm of his shirt to expose a tattoo covering half of his upper arm. It is designed to look as if his skin has been cut open and peeled back to reveal bio-mechanical cords and structures. He continues, “I was wanting to continue this tattoo... is there anyone here that does bio? Like does anyone specify in it?” Brent looks at the tattoo and says, “Well, anyone here can do it. Tell you what, here’s a card for the shop. Come by when you have some free time and you can talk to an artist about it.”

In this brief encounter, the customer is clearly looking for aesthetic specialization from a member of the tattoo shop and, while artists certainly have aesthetic preferences, the shop assistant indicates that their technical ability to draw and expertly wield tattoo machines allows for them to work across aesthetic tattoo categories. As the John indicates in the previous excerpt, this ability to work within different aesthetic traditions comes with repetitive, everyday tattooing processes that teach various technical aspects of tattoo art. One repetitive process I have constantly observed at Chicagoland Tattoo is the diligent preparation and sanitation of the work station:

Daniel has finished his sketch and has propped his reference book up against the back wall of his desk. He is pulling several sheets off the roll of paper towels in order to line his tattoo bed. He chooses a tattoo machine from one of the several hanging from his cabinet and sets it on his towel-lined tray. He reaches into his drawer and pulls out two plastic packages. He puts on blue medical gloves and opens the packages. Removing a long, textured metal tube from the first package, he then takes a single-point needle from the second and inserts it into the tube. He tightens a knob on the tube to grip the needle in place. Daniel then picks up the tattoo machine and using a paper towel to get a grip, he loosens a bolt, inserts the tube, and retightens the bolt.

This demonstrates the initial preparation of the tattoo machine and the ways in which the artist has a clear understanding of each machine component. This, however, is only the beginning of local tattoo processes:

John puts on medical gloves, and uses a paper towel and solution to clean the skin. He then vigorously shaves the area with a disposable razor from a jar on his desk... John connects his tattoo machine to the hanging cord which runs to a machine bolted to his tool box. The machine has several digital number readings and is connected to a pedal on the floor. John moves the pedal toward him and uses his foot to start the tattoo machine, using the pedal to increase the speed of the needle vibrations. After selecting the desired speed, John pushes the pedal aside with his foot, pulls his swiveling lamp over the customer's torso, dips his needle into yellow ink, and leans over to begin reshading the tattoo. John tightens the customer's skin by spreading it between his thumb and index finger while using his right hand to move the tattoo machine in small but loose circular motions. While reloading the needle with ink, John uses his pinky finger swipe some salve off the metal tray. Before he begins again, he uses his pinky to apply the salve to the area.

Here the artist is further demonstrating an experience-based ability to utilize the tools of tattooing. Similarly, his controlled movements indicate an understanding of how to effectively color the skin without damage, infection, or cross-contamination. The final step in this process is cleaning up after a tattoo:

Frank puts on a new set of gloves to begin clean up. He starts by getting a SaniCloth wipe and cleans the surface of the bed and of his desktop. The cloth wipes smell strongly of alcohol. He throws his used gloves, swabs, razor, ink caps and paper towels into a trashcan built into the countertop. Frank then sits down and dismantles his tattoo machine, putting the used needles into the sharp collector and the machine itself into a red biohazard box... He hangs the mirror on the cabinet after washing it with a SaniCloth. After the area has been sanitized and organized, Frank begins to pull new supplies for the next session. He re-covers his solution bottles with fresh plastic bags and then re-lines the metal tray with fresh paper towels, setting out a new razor and new tattoo machine.

In this final vignette, the artist is following steps that have become a constant routine of the shop. Every piece of equipment is sanitized or hygienically disposed of before setting up for the next customer. Within each of these depictions, the artists combine a mixture of technical knowledge pertaining to their tools and movements with long-standing ideas of hygienic practice. As both the interviewed artists and historical accounts have

indicated, these processes began as locally-enforced principles but have become co-opted and standardized practices required by law (Sanders 1989; Govenar 2000). This replacement of artist expertise with medico-legislative expertise suggests that state health polity debases the local knowledge acquired through experience tattooing. Furthermore, it is clear that tattoo artists recognize that their experience in the field is ignored during the creation of state health policies by outside institutions such as the Red Cross and OSHA (Maroto 2011).

In understanding the dual role of state regulation as undermining artist experience while also bolstering legitimacy in a competitive market, it is clear that while the art world is central to tattooing, the encroaching medical and legislative worlds are forcing tattoo artists to better conceptualize and control their industry using informal methods. In some instances, the best method of informal professional control is also the oldest:

...for the most part, people are doing just like we all did. I was like, 'Hey, I'm gonna start tattooing.' And I had some friends of some friends, and one guy's uncle was a tattooer, and I got equipment and, um, and I think that's how most people started. Once you get into a shop, a legitimate place – with people who care about what they do and stuff like that – you're gonna learn from everybody you're around (Luis, Chicagoland Artist).

Here, a Chicagoland Tattoo artist describes the informal process through which he was introduced to tattooing, emphasizing his lack of official training in favor of learning by observing and experiencing. The artists at Chicagoland Tattoo all elaborate on this point, indicating that their entrance into the profession was through initially networking with a shop owner or tattoo artist via shared interests in art and tattooing:

So I bought this tattoo equipment and was just hacking people up. I bought it from this biker dude. It was a kit he bought out of a magazine. So I was just reading

books on tattooing and just going at it... and people would give up their skin for free tattoos – it's amazing. But then I met the guys here and started hanging around the shop... long enough that I started to learn and was fillin' in when they needed extra artists (Frank, Chicagoland artist).

At that time, Illinois law was 21 to get tattooed so at night, 18 year olds would come in and I had little cards made up and I'd give 'em a card to my pager and... yeah, they would come to my house, and eventually I started to get to know all the guys here... I sat around and just watched these guys tattoo for months and months and months before I actually tattooed – a long time just watching. That was like my training. And I still do that – like if I go to other shops where I got friends, I just sit and watch them tattoo... cause you just pick stuff up (Tim, Chicagoland artist).

The artists then began sitting in to watch and learn daily routines of the shop, practicing technical skills, and finally beginning to substitute for the shop's established tattoo artists who traveled for conferences, vacations, or guest-spots at other shops. Clearly, in an effort to maintain local control over those entering the craft of tattooing, the majority of artists recognize informal apprenticeships as the most effective method of occupational training (Maroto 2011). While artists' expectations of their mentees differ, an apprenticeship remains a valued experience-based way of knowing that excludes the direct institutional influence of medical and legislative regulation. Furthermore, this system of apprenticeship simultaneously allows for the continuance of informal knowledge as well as the exclusion of potential artists who disregard local practices of hygiene or simply demonstrate poor technical skill (Sanders 1989; Maroto 2011). Overall, the establishment of these informal networks not only provides gate-keeping mentorships and fosters an unregulated flow of information, but it also allows for the establishment of trust among members (Sanders 1989; Moroto 2011). Thus, the network ultimately creates a familial relationship that fosters technical, hygienic, and artistic

accountability while also providing an informal method for restricting those deemed unsuitable from entering the profession (Sanders 1989; Govenar 2000).

The Role of Rebellious Artistic Identity

From my ethnographic interviews, as well as the supportive ethnographic findings of other scholars, it is clear that a strong artist focus on the importance of technical skill is essential in defining tattooing as inherently artistic and, therefore, not fully comprehensible in the context of medical and legislative worlds alone. In this view, tattoo artists rely on their technical knowledge as an experience-based understanding that medical and legislative worlds cannot fully define using institutional methods of control. A Chicagoland tattoo artist again demonstrates that artists largely see their work on customers' bodies as the exercise of technical skill instead of an appreciation of customers' chosen subject matter:

I'm a tattooer so it's like, tattooing is my thing. I don't really care what people get – that's not my thing... Everyone wants their tattoo to have meaning and tattoos do not necessarily have to have meaning. Like the girl I just tattooed with that little 'f' on her wrist – she's like, 'I'm a photographer and this means so much to me...' and I'm like, I don't give a shit if you're a photographer. If you want an 'f' on you, if you want a hot-stuff devil on you – I don't care what you want. It's not my job to care! (Chris, Chicagoland artist).

Clearly, without autonomous control over or any particular interest in the subject matter of an increasingly diverse customer base's tattoo selection, tattoo artists see technical skill as the true art behind tattooing customers. While other ethnographic observations of artists' technical skills similarly demonstrate this point, this particular excerpt showcases the gendered nature of the work conducted in the tattoo shop.

Scholars who have previously studied women and commercial work find that within such an industry, the women's emotions often become commercialized and subsequently alienated (Hochschild 2003; Kang 2010). In stark contrast, this masculine space and its artists do not allow for an emotional connection through tattooing. In addition to a general indifference toward customer's tattoo choices, a local artist frankly comments on his customers' conversational skills: "I get so tired of hearing people talk about inane bullshit" (Daniel, Chicagoland artist). Admittedly disgruntled with customer interactions, one artist still manages to exemplify the amount of work and dedication it takes to be a successful artist in a masculine, commercial industry:

I told my wife that when we got engaged, I thought I was cheating on tattooing because I married a tattoo shop when I was 19 – and that's the honest to god truth. I would rather – until I had my kids – I would rather be here than anywhere... which takes up a ton of time and... since it's commission-based, there's no good time to take a vacation, there's no good time to chill out. If you're not at the shop, you're wondering what's going on at the shop – so it's a very all-consuming craft and it's a very all-consuming life that is very unforgiving in that way. I mean, it's allotted me everything I have – like my house, and I can travel, and I can put clothes on my kids. Everything I have, I've gotten through tattooing. I'm the luckiest person in the world as far as that goes – it's amazing but the dedication that you have to put into it is rough sometimes. That's the biggest – it's not like you can't let it go, you don't wanna let it go (Tim, Chicagoland artist).

For this artist, comparing his work at the tattoo shop to marriage situates him as wholly committed to his work and as a provider to himself and his actual family. This "all-consuming" commercial craft has clearly allowed for artists' alienation but the work between artist and customer remains incredibly detached and masculine. In this manner, artists masculine emotional displays become a vital part of the tattooing process.

Overall, the routinely emphasized importance of technical skill in combination with a detached, masculine approach to customer-defined aesthetics helps artists to build a rebellious artistic self-presentation that often starkly contrasts to their increasingly mainstream customer base. This contrast posits tattoo artists as rebellious, deviant, or folksy artistic experts within a commercial phenomenon. Thus, this artistic, expert identity of tattoo artists and the popular perception of tattoo artists as such becomes a method of informal control over the profession.

As noted, the artists of Chicagoland Tattoo take a very masculine, technical, and detached approach to the style and subject matter of most customer's tattoos. However, one look around the physical space of the tattoo shop indicates that tattoo artists are grossly concerned with aesthetics in their own identities as both professionals and tattooed persons.

Watching John, I see that he is hunched over a thick paper board, painting on it with a paintbrush. He has a medical lamp directly over his work and, at his station, a small cup of dirty water, a jar of paintbrushes, and a shiny metal case opened to reveal a large selection of colored inks. The inks are lined inside of the case by color and are housed in uniform glass jars topped with droppers... On paper, the ink looks very different from water color, oil, or even acrylic. Its texture thin yet the color is very saturated. On the paper it looks very matte and rich. I also does not show any texture or individual strokes on the page... John is using black ink to apply short, jerky brush strokes to the paper board. He holds the board down daintily with his left middle finger (other fingers turned upward) while he applies the short stokes with his right hand... He rinses his paintbrush in the cup of dirty water but is looking at his work, leaning his neck back to assess his progress... He sits in silence for several minutes, looking at the work and fidgeting with his hands.

This ethnographic description is just one of many exemplifying the ways in which tattoo artists use their free time to work on artistic portrayals within their own favored style. Their completed works cover every possible surface within the tattooing area. Other works in this area are not their own, but signed gifts from others within the professional network. While the waiting area is similarly filled with art, a large amount of this work is flash art, a type of tattoo style made for individuals easily select and get in a quick, simple transaction. In comparison to the more generic waiting area, Chicagoland Tattoo's artists' spaces are highly personalized:

Closely examining Luis' station, I realize that he has personalized his space much like the other tattoo artists – with stickers, drawings, paintings, photos, and figurines. Luis' space, however, also houses a large collection of Day of the Dead skulls and skeletons. There are approximately 10 skulls and skeleton figurines on top of the cabinets and many others on the countertop of Luis' area, each decorated in bright colors and geometric designs. There are jars of disposable razors, scissors, gauze, gauze tape, rubber bands, and ink caps. On the counter next to the jars are Sani-Cloth sanitizing wipes, plastic wrap, bottled salves, red biohazard containers, metal trays, mirrors, and boxes of surgical gloves. Mounted on the walls are Purelle hand sanitizer pumps and a sharps collector for used needles. However, mixed in with these tattoo tools and medical supplies are other personal items ranging from sketches and drawing paper, paint brushes, figurines, stickers, paintings, photos, and books... below the countertop is a space for large metal toolboxes. The outside of each toolbox is completely covered in the stickers. There are stickers from other tattoo shops, bands, commercial brands, and artistic images.

In this physical space, tattoo artists are effectively blending artistic interest, tattooing tools, and medical supplies into their artistic worlds. In particular, this artist has customized his space in order to showcase his own artistic interests in Mexican culture and traditional Mexican-style tattoos. Moreover, this colorful and attention-grabbing

demonstration of artistic and cultural interests allows the manifested medical world to fade into that of the artistic. This last point is exemplified by the disguise of medical tools within the physical space of the shop but can be further delineated by considering the role of the tattoo machine within this industry.

Looking at the walls, I notice a framed drawing of a banner which says “Electric tattooing expert.” The banner is being carried by an eagle, with an adjacent rose and clouds. Below the banner is an electric tattoo machine surrounded by small lightning bolts. I also notice that there are 5 tattoo machines hanging from a row of hooks at the bottom of the wall cabinet. I look around at the other stations and see that all of them have a row of hooks with tattoo machines hanging. No machine looks the same. They are different shapes, sizes, and colors. They are a variety of different metals, most of them oxidized, painted, or stained dark. Not a single machine has any metal that looks shiny, new, or standard. Some motors have exposed copper coils, other have colorful decorative cases. Each has a coin or circular piece of metal on the end. There are quarters, washers, gold tokens, and other circular metal pieces with holes punched through the middle and a screw attaching them to the body of the machine.

The observations made about the physical characteristics of the tattoo machines used in this shop are indicative of larger trends within the profession of tattooing. As indicated by the artwork glorifying the electric tattooing expert, the tattoo machine is one of the most essential and revered tools of this trade. Although the tattoo machine wields highly regulated and standardized medical-grade needles, the tool itself has managed to resist physical standardization and regulation. Several Chicagoland Tattoo artists collect tattoo machines and explain the folksy nature of the tattoo gun. One artist describes the inclusion of quarters, dimes, and nickels as part of the customary local saying that, “Money makes money” (John, Chicagoland Artist). This is an incredibly centralized combination of medicine and art and, amazingly, the tattoo machine has been able to

remain an unregulated artistic icon. It is this iconic tool that has been especially helpful in the establishment of tattoo artists' expert status within an art world.

Undoubtedly, personalized artistic displays of work space and tattoo machine subtly and effectively blend medical aspects into the artistic world of tattooing.

Moreover, these displays also serve as a statement of artistic expertise. On artist's work space pushes the perception of expertise to a surprising and amusing level:

At Chris' station, the piece that stands out most to me is a narrow but long piece of paperboard painted with his full name in a cursive font. Below his name it reads in a more casual script "Brightest colors Best work" and below that reads, "Chicago's Favorite Tattooer" in cursive font.... Another adjacent strip of paperboard reads "Lowest prices Superior work" and is surrounded by a star on each end. Sitting on top of the cabinet is a painted image of a tiger. The tiger is leaping over the word "Reliable" in a cursive script.

Another artist largely defines his space with photography. He explains his space's theme as one of his major interests – the history of the Chicago tattooing scene:

I collect old tattoo stuff... very much related to Chicago. So, there's pictures of tattooers who used to work in Chicago, there's flash that was from the 40s on South State Street in Chicago, there's tattooed ladies who used to be at Riverview – which is like this amusement park at Belmont and Western, there's tattooed ladies who tattooers used to tattoo in Chicago. It's all, mostly Chicago-related stuff. Um, and if I had enough disposable income, there would be more... (Frank, Chicagoland artist).

These are simply naming a few of the countless self-advertisements and classic images featured in the artists' workspaces. In an interview, Chris artist elaborates on the origins and importance of his prized pieces:

All the stuff you see out there is how old tattoo shops used to look. They all used to have these little signs and just like stuff for people to look at while they're gettin' tattooed. And when we're not tattooing – if we're not bullshitting or busting somebody's balls – then we're painting or doing whatever... So when someone comes in, they're gonna remember sitting at my station because, 'Oh,

he's got that reliable tattoos, he's got that tiger, and he's got that best tattoos in town and Chicago's favorite tattooer...' and all this other crap (says "crap" loudly and overemphasized) around for people to look at. That's what the old carnie tattooers used to have. They used to have little pitch lines and little things for people to remember – like my card says, 'Chicago's favorite tattooer.' Somebody asked me the other day, 'Did you win a contest?' I was like, 'No! What the fuck you talking about...' (Chris, Chicagoland artist).

Here, the artist is indicating that this method of establishing expertise is an important informal and local tradition by which to maintain control in an increasingly commercial, competitive, and regulated business. Instead of simply relying on and embracing the formal professional controls imposed by state health regulation, tattoo artist alternatively choose to embrace their artistic expertise to make a dominant claim on the world of tattooing.

Overall, it may be true that state regulations assist in limiting commercial competition within the profession of tattooing. However, these regulations also threaten local knowledge and experience-based artistic expertise. Instead of fully embracing formal methods of control, tattoo artists fight for the incorporation of their specialized technical knowledge in the formation of public health policies. In addition to seeking to formalize their technical knowledge, artists continually rely on local and informal methods to establish themselves as artists. These methods include effectively blending medicine into the background of their artistic practices while proudly displaying their preferred aesthetic traditions within their daily practices at the shop.

Discussion and Conclusion

From my ethnographic study of the daily processes of Chicagoland Tattoo, it is clear that several thematic lines run through the practice of commercial tattooing. An

account of customers and their class-status symbols indicates that the client base has expanded to include a wide variety of middle to upper-class populations. The growing pop-culture status of tattooing has helped re-conceptualize tattooing as apolitical and thus less deviant than when practiced by marginalized groups such as prisoners, gang members, and the working-class. With the mainstreaming and commercialization of tattooing, a new customer-artist relationship has emerged. Customers continue to value artists' expertise in matters of aesthetics, pricing, and hygiene. Moreover, artists view the customer body as a canvas on which to exercise and demonstrate technical skill. However, access to artists is highly guarded by gate-keeping staff and artists' own emotionally detached approach to body work.

In stark contrast with previous examinations of gendered emotion work (Hochschild 2003; Kang 2010), the masculine style of emotion work seen at Chicagoland Tattoo is largely engendered in tattoo artists' maintenance of legitimacy and independence in an industry easily defined by their customers' identity-expression and medical claims of hygienic knowledge. Moreover, this detached approach is part of artistic identity in the tattoo shop, highly related to a masculine obsession with working-class and rebellious displays. Thus, through their labor, artists' identity as rebellious, masculine, and ostensibly working-class becomes a commodity inherent in customers' tattoo experience.

While detached, masculine displays characterize artists' behavior toward those outside of their art world, more aesthetically, culturally, and emotionally-driven conceptualizations of tattoo style do shape artists' identity displays. This is where more

humanist approaches to tattooing allow us to see how displays of artistic identity draw customers to this unique artistic space while also managing to overshadow medical influences within the profession. The tattoo shop is dominated by embodied masculine displays that take the form of an obsession with the World War II era, carnival and circus freaks, working class culture, and crude humor. Even more subtly, they take the form of a focus on the technical aspects of art, the subsequent detached and technical manipulation of the body (artist's and customer's), physical and verbal historic and cultural references, and the most mundane lingual and physical displays toward those they interact with. In this manner, artists' aesthetic and behavioral displays become part of tattooing practices and are central to generating and maintaining boundaries between artists and medical and legal bureaucrats.

As previously noted, artists' displays, actions, and ways of knowing build a rebellious artistic self-presentation that often starkly contrasts to their increasingly mainstream customer base as well as intervening medical practitioners. This contrast posits tattoo artists as rebellious, deviant, or folksy artistic experts within a commercial phenomenon and allows them to reinforce the boundaries of their social world. Thus, these artistic, expert displays of tattoo artists and the popular perception of tattoo artists as such becomes a method of informal control over the profession in the face of increasing government regulation. In this manner, artistic displays become a cultural tool of resistance against the worlds of law and medicine.

Overall, despite attempts of medico-legislative control, I find that the expert, artistic identity of tattoo artists locates their practice primarily within what Becker (1982)

deems an art world. The introduction of medical regulation into tattooing still indicates, however, that the profession currently borders several other social worlds, each of which are vying for control over its practice. The social worlds of art, medicine, and legislation are currently colliding in a struggle to define and control of the practice of tattooing. As a result, tattoo shops have become centers for artistic knowledge but are simultaneously legitimated and controlled by federal medical regulations. Moreover, tattoo artists have adapted both formal methods of professional control provided by state medical regulations as well as informal methods provided by their own traditions and identities as artists. While it is imperative that tattoo shops adhere to state regulations in order to establish and maintain their own capitalist presence within the newly commercialized field, my research suggests that in order to maintain professional dominance, tattoo artists must be included in the formation and execution of state regulation. Furthermore, the summation of my ethnographic research suggests that, until artists are included in the establishment of formal controls, they will continue to counter institutionalized knowledge with informal knowledge, showcasing displays of unique artistic style, technique, and identity.

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