The Communicative Value of a Tattoo: The Role of Public Self-Consciousness on the Visibility of a Tattoo

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my family, friends, strangers, acquaintances, and even strangers with tattoos – for without you this project would not have been possible!
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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore the degree to which participants consider their tattoos communicative and to probe the relationship between public self-consciousness and tattoo visibility. Based on impression management theory, two hypotheses were generated for tattooed people who consider tattoos to be evaluated positively and negatively by others. In the positive evaluation condition, a positive association was expected between public self-consciousness and tattoo visibility. In the negative evaluation condition, a negative association was expected between public self-consciousness and tattoo visibility. A total of 181 participants were surveyed from the University of Hawai‘i and tattoo shops in Hawai‘i. Results showed that participants considered their tattoos as somewhat communicative. Additionally, support was found for the prediction that for tattooed people who consider tattoos to be negatively evaluated by others, as their level of public self-consciousness increased, visibility of their tattoos decreased. No support was found for the other predicted relationship.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Imagine walking behind a young woman and you notice a tattoo on her ankle. A tattoo is defined as a permanent design on the skin, which does not wash off, and alters a person’s physical appearance. The tattooed image on the young woman is a small replication of the island of Hawai’i and you wonder if she was from the island of Hawai’i. The tattoo could be on her ankle because she has a loved one from the island, or she visited once and felt a strong association with the island. She could be expressing her love for the island or her origin. Or, perhaps she did not care what image was permanently drawn on her ankle; she just wanted a tattoo. Another possibility is that the tattoo could be on her ankle because she had a birth mark which she chose to cover. Either way, the tattoo on her ankle was visible, such that others could view the tattoo.

Tattoos are more prevalent in our society in the twenty first century than in the past (Cronin, 2001) and tattoos are spreading across demographics (DeMello, 1995); increasing numbers of people are using tattoos as a part of their physical appearance. Tattoos have been studied extensively by anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, nurses and doctors. Among other things, anthropologists have looked at the people who have tattoos (DeMello, 1993). Psychologists have looked at the mental disorders associated with tattoos (Newman, 1982; Raspa & Cusack, 1990). Sociologists have looked at the deviance associated with tattoos (Irwin, 2001), and nurses and doctors have looked at the motivations for obtaining or removing a tattoo (Varma & Lanigan, 1999).

However, more research regarding the communicative value of tattoos is needed for the following four reasons. First, a tattoo is part of a person’s physical appearance.
People judge each other by the other’s physical appearance (Leary, 1995; Lennon, 1986). Therefore, physical appearance is an important part of managing appearances. Because tattoos are a part of a person’s physical appearance, and people judge each other by physical appearance, there is an importance in looking at how people with tattoos manage their appearance with regard to their tattoos. Second, there has been no research regarding specific communication and tattoos among the general population. Past studies on tattoos and communication have been limited in that the researcher studied only a very specific sample of HIV+ individuals (Brouwer, 1998), rather than the general population. The focus of tattoos and specific communication in Brouwers’ research was narrow; this research looked at only one small segment of the population.

Third, the past research with tattoos which has looked at tattoos and communication was only focused on tattoos as communicating identity. The research on the communication of identity through a tattoo was among prisoners (DeMello, 1993; Newman, 1982), among gang members (Mallon & Russell, 1999) and among HIV positive individuals (Brouwer, 1998). The focus of the research on the communication of identity through a tattoo was only on specific groups of tattooed people, not the general tattooed population. Fourth, tattoos are becoming more widespread in our society. Popularity of tattoos increased in the late twentieth century (Irwin, 2001), and, in the twenty first century, there are an estimated 10% - 20% of North Americans who wear tattoos (Atkinson & Young, 2001; Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004). Thus, communication researchers should investigate the general tattooed population beyond the reflection of identity. Research should examine to what extent the tattooed person attempts to convey
messages to others through his or her tattoos, and how tattooed people manage their appearance, specifically with regard to his or her tattoos.

In this paper I will discuss the background of tattoos; this section includes (a) a brief history and (b) the classification of tattoo procedures and tattooed people. From there I will discuss the function of a tattoo on a body. This section includes discussion regarding how tattoos convey information, whether they are (a) other imposed or (b) self imposed. I will also discuss the role of self-consciousness and evaluation of appearance. This section includes discussion regarding (a) types of self-consciousness, (b) evaluations of those with tattoos and (c) the choice to alter one’s appearance with a tattoo.

Background of Tattoos

History of Tattoos

To begin I will discuss a brief history of tattoos. This history presented here is by no means comprehensive, but will be discussed because of its significance to this study, especially regarding the historical uses of tattoos. Also, the history will be discussed because of its significance to the general understanding of the background of tattoos within various cultures. I will discuss findings of ancient tattoos, a brief background of the historical uses of tattoos, and the introduction and popularity of tattoos in England and North America.

Findings of Ancient Tattoos

Tattoos have been inscribed on humans for many centuries. Records of tattoos date as far back as 6,000 B.C.E. (Birmingham, Mason, & Russell, 1999; Mallon & Russell, 1999). Evidence of tattooing was found in caves in both France and Portugal; the caves contained pictures of humans with tattoos. The oldest known human body to have tattoos
is the “Iceman”, estimated to be almost 5,300 years old, discovered in the mountains of Northern Italy (Cronin, 2001; Gilbert, 2000). Also, tattooed mummies dating from around 2,000 B.C.E. have been recovered in Egypt (Cronin, 2001; Gilbert, 2000; Mallon & Russell, 1999). This evidence shows that tattoos are not a modern invention; humans have been wearing them for thousands of years.

**Historical Uses of Tattoos**

Humans in many different cultures have been wearing tattoos for various reasons. Uses of tattoos in past cultures include tattoos as adornment, as a mark of mystical power, and as a mark of status (Dinter, 2000; Gilbert, 2000). These cultures which applied tattoos are widespread across the globe, and tattoos can be seen in images of the Maori of New Zealand, the Dayak of Borneo, and the Haida of North America (Atkinson & Young, 2001; Dinter, 2000; Gilbert, 2000).

**Tattoos as adornment.** Many cultures have used tattoos as adornment for aesthetic and religious purposes (e.g., people of the Ryuku islands, New Zealand, Japan and Europe). Tattoos were viewed as ornamental for the women of the Ryukyu Islands (Dinter, 2000). Many Maori women tattooed their lips with solid or horizontal blue lines at the time of puberty as red lips were considered undesirable (Simmons, 1986) and lips tattooed blue were considered beautiful (Gilbert, 2000). For many centuries, the Japanese have used tattoos as a full body decoration (Richie, 1980), some of which depicted religious imagery (Stevens, 1992). The European crusaders tattooed themselves to mark their expedition to the holy land (Dinter, 2000; Stevens, 1992), and Muslim pilgrims to Mecca commemorated their visit with a tattoo (Stevens, 1992). Both Buddhists and Hindus have decorated their bodies with various images or names of their
gods (Stevens, 1992). And Hindus and Native Americans both tattooed their bodies to ensure passage into the afterlife (Gilbert, 2000; Stevens, 1992).

Tattoos as a mark of mystical power. Many cultures have used tattoos as a mark of their mystical powers. The tattoos were used as lucky charms, as a magical defense and as granting the wearer the same attributes as the animal depicted in the tattoo (Dinter, 2000), in places such as North Africa, Thailand, Southeast Asia, North America, and Japan. An example of a lucky charm tattoo can be seen in North African tribes who tattooed a design of a cross on their bodies (Dinter, 2000). Examples of tattoos used as a magical defense can be seen on the hunters of Thailand who tattooed a picture of a tiger on themselves for protection (Dinter, 2000). In South East Asia, fisherman used dragons, snakes and water animal tattoos as protection (Dinter, 2000). Tattoos were also used by people to adopt the same characteristics as the animal on the tattoo. For example, a North American tribe considered the bear a strong animal and believed that those who wore a tattoo of a bear would become just as strong (Dinter, 2000). In Japan, the carp is representative of courage and steadfastness. Thus, the belief was that a tattoo of a carp would result in the transfer of the carp's attributes to the wearer (Dinter, 2000).

Tattoos as a mark of status. Tattoos have been used in many cultures as a mark of status. These marks distinguished characteristics such as lineage, power, and nubility for women (Dinter, 2000; Gilbert, 2000). Instances of such tattoos are evident in cultures from New Zealand, Paraguay, and Japan. For example, the Maori used tattoos to distinguish all three characteristics as previously listed. The Maori had elaborate designs placed on their face to depict attributes such as ancestral lineage, rank within society, and women's availability for marriage (Simmons, 1986). Also, in Paraguay, tattoos were
placed on the forehead as a tribal distinction (Dinter, 2000). In seventh century Japan, the lower classes, the hinin and eta, were marked with a basic cross tattooed on their inner forearm, or a basic straight line was made either on the upper forearm or on the upper arm itself near the armpit (Richie, 1980). The marks distinguished them as belonging to the lower class.

*Introduction and Popularity of Tattoos in England and North America*

On the other hand, tattoos in European and European North American society have only been around since the late nineteenth century and have been used mostly for adornment purposes. Tattoos in English and North American society are more recent, and have only been around for a few hundred years. Tattooing was introduced in civilized England in the late eighteenth century. Sailors returning from Tahiti with Captain Cook returned wearing tattoos as souvenirs. As the idea of having a tattoo spread, the need for a European method of tattooing became evident. The first tattoo machine was invented in 1891 by Samuel O’Reilly. With the invention of the tattoo machine, acquiring tattoos then was much easier for the English, and the popularity of tattoos spread across England and across the ocean to the European Americans in North America. Traditional English and North American tattoos were literal images; the tattoos were direct representations of things such as flowers, flags, and faces. During the mid to late twentieth century, there was a rise in popularity of tribal type tattoos in North America (Vale & Juno, 1989). Tribal type tattoos are based on tattoo images used in tribal cultures; they are one solid color, usually a black pigment appearing bluish on the skin and are more geometric shapes and images rather than direct representations. Still,
compared to many other cultures, tattoos were a relatively recent addition to the English and European American societies.

Tattoos have been popular with a diverse crowd and have increased in popularity in the late twentieth century in North America. Wearing a tattoo initially spread in popularity among the lower class, but was later adopted for a brief period by the European aristocracy and American upper class (Irwin, 2001; Vale & Juno, 1989). After World War I, having a tattoo again was associated with the lower classes – bikers, circus sideshow acts, criminals, and sailors (Atkinson & Young, 2001; Bell, 1999), and remained so until the 1960s (Irwin, 2001). In North America, resurgence in the popularity of tattoos occurred in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Irwin, 2001). The popularity of having a tattoo increased and spread across all demographics such as age, gender, and socio-economic status (Armstrong, Stuppy, Gabriel, & Anderson, 1996; Atkinson & Young, 2001; DeMello, 1995).

As evident in many historical accounts of various cultures, tattoos have been around for thousands of years. Many cultures have incorporated tattoos for differing reasons such as adornment, as a mark of mystical power, and as a mark of status. Tattooing in English and European American society is a recent addition, and has increased in popularity in North America. From here, I will discuss the procedure for creating a tattoo.

Classification of Tattooing Procedures and Tattooed Persons

Tattoos are intentionally designed to modify a person's physical appearance and are as varied as those who wear them. Tattoos appear in all shapes, sizes, locations and colors. The procedure for creating a tattoo is straightforward, and tattoos can be categorized
according to the procedure used. Persons with tattoos are categorized according to the amount of tattoos they have on their body.

**Classification of Tattooing Procedure**

A tattoo is created on the skin through the process of embedding colored pigment particles as a design under the epidermis. The pigment particles are embedded through the epidermis to the dermis with a sharp tool or object. When the colored pigment particles are embedded deep enough, $1/64^{th}$ to $1/16^{th}$ of an inch, the pigment particles remain in the dermis permanently, in the form of the design. The skin heals, but the pigment particles stay in place. Interestingly, the English word tattoo is derived from the Tahitian words "tatau" or "tatu", which mean physical markings or to mark something, respectively (Desai, 2002; Dinter, 2000; Mallon & Russell, 1999).

Depending on the procedure, there are two types of tattoos; amateur and professional. Amateur tattoos are those placed on the person by self, by friends, or by a non-professional, and generally have little artistry or detail. The pigment used for marking the skin includes household items such as ashes, charcoal, mascara, and pen ink. The amateur tattoo can be applied by using objects such as knives, needles, pens, or straight pins (Armstrong, 1995). Professional tattoos are placed on the person by an expert, master, or paid artist. Artistry and detail of professional tattoos are greatly varied. For example, a professional tattoo could replicate a perfect likeness of an image. Or a professional tattoo could be lacking in detail so that the image is barely recognizable. Professional tattoos can then be further divided into cultural or modern tattoos. Cultural tattoos are acquired by using culture specific procedures and tools of the culture. They are acquired by a tattoo master. Most cultural tattoos do not vary in color; rather they are
one solid dark color. Modern tattoos are acquired by using a tattoo machine, known as a
gun, and are obtained from paid professionals. Modern tattoos can have a wide variety of
color. Tattoos discussed in this paper will be strictly modern tattoos, but I will use the
term tattoo and modern tattoo interchangeably. Tribal type tattoo designs, if obtained by
a tattoo gun rather than a culture specific method, will also be considered a modern tattoo
for the purpose of this paper.

Classification of Tattooed Persons

There are different ways to classify persons with tattoos. Persons with tattoos have
been categorized in research as being lightly tattooed or heavily tattooed (Bell, 1999;
Sweetman, 1999; Vail, 1999), although no direct definitions of these terms have been
provided. Exactly who the terms are referring to is not apparent; therefore, using the
terms could be problematic. For instance, one researcher may classify heavily tattooed
individuals one way, and another researcher may use the same term, but classify heavily
tattooed individuals another way. Sweetman (1999) and Vail (1999) have suggested that
the lightly tattooed individuals are those who choose their tattoos as decorations and are
viewed as persons who “have tattoos.” Bell (1999) and Sweetman (1999) have suggested
that heavily tattooed individuals are those who collect numerous tattoos and are seen as
“tattooed persons” rather than “persons with tattoos.” For the purpose of this paper, I
will not make a distinction between tattooed person and person with tattoos. The terms
tattooed individual or tattooed person is synonymous with the terms an individual with a
tattoo or tattoos. I will use the terms tattooed person and person with tattoos
interchangeably.
To summarize, tattooed individuals have been around for centuries, in varying and widespread cultures. These cultures have used tattoos for many reasons, including adornment, as a mark of mystical power, and as a mark of status. In contrast, tattoos in European and European North American societies were introduced in the late nineteenth century and have been used for adornment purposes. Creating a tattoo is a basic procedure and there are different types of tattoos based on the procedure used. As a result of the increased prevalence of tattoos (Cronin, 2001), and the increased demographics of those who are tattooed (DeMello, 1995), there has been increased research regarding both cultural and modern tattoos. Yet research looking at modern tattoos as conveying information about the individual has been limited.

Tattoos Convey Information

In most of European North American society, the cultural beliefs for the uses of a tattoo do not apply. That is, North Americans in general do not use their tattoos as a mark of status or for mystical powers; they use their tattoos as an adornment for personal reasons (Atkinson & Young, 2001; DeMello, 1995; Irwin, 2001) and as an adornment for others to view (Atkinson & Young, 2001; Bell, 1999; Sweetman, 1999). Tattoos can be viewed and "read" to convey information about the individual wearing the tattoo (DeMello, 2000). In fact, the body itself has been compared to a text, suggestive and readable (Atkinson & Young, 2001). Some tattoos were imposed by others and forced on a person for identification, yet present day modern tattoos are self imposed - a matter of personal choice - and have the ability to convey multiple messages, as I shall discuss further.
Many theorists view the body as a text. According to Atkinson and Young (2001), the body is viewed as an “evocative social text” (p. 119). In their article exploring Neo Primitives (alternatively known as Modern Primitives, Urban Aboriginals and Urban Primitives), Atkinson and Young (2001) stated that the socially constructed body is viewed as a “canvas” available for manipulation and show, “a billboard to be displayed socially” (p. 128). Neo Primitives engaged in body modification through tattooing, piercing, scarring, and branding practices. These modification practices permanently altered their physical appearance. In doing so, Atkinson and Young argued that the Neo Primitives were consciously attempting to put forth a cultural expression. In her book, Bodies of Inscription, Margo DeMello (2000) also discussed the literal ability to “write oneself” and subsequently to be “read” by others (p. 12). The body was viewed not only as an area to be adorned, but also functioned as a means of transmitting messages through writing on the body.

One way to transmit messages through writing on a body is through a tattoo. Tattooing on the body can be either imposed by others or imposed by the self. Other imposed tattoos are those in which the individual had no choice in obtaining the tattoo. The tattoo was forcibly placed on the persons’ body. Self imposed tattoos are those in which the individual made the choice to tattoo his or her body. In this case, the individual decided he or she wanted the tattoo and had the tattoo created by either an amateur or a professional. Both other imposed tattoos and self imposed tattoos function to convey information about the individual, such as identification.
Other Imposed Tattoos Function as Identification

Throughout history, other imposed tattoos have been used to mark others as a form of identification. According to Burgoon, Buller and Woodall (1996), others are identified through their nonverbal demeanor, which includes behavior and appearance. A process of identification is used to differentiate individuals within society (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). Tattoos also differentiate individuals within society (Cronin, 2001; Mallon & Russell, 1999). There is a communication theory of identity proposed by Hecht (1993) which might be helpful in discussing identity and tattoos.

Communication Theory of Identity

Hecht (1993) proposed a communication theory of identity. According to Hecht (1993), identity is interactional. Identity is a communicative process and can be understood as an interaction in which messages are exchanged. Hecht (1993) also asserts that the communication theory of identity “extends beyond individual and societal constructions to consider interaction . . .” (p.78). Identity is not only framed by society or the individual, but through interactions as well. Hecht discusses four frames of identity: personal, enacted, relational and communal. These are four perspectives from which we may view identity. These frames are interconnected; they interpenetrate each other and do not just stand on their own (Hecht, 1993).

Personal frame of identity. The personal frame of identity is that which comes from the self. This frame is characteristic of identity stored as self-cognitions, self-feelings or as a spiritual sense of self.
Enacted frame of identity. The enacted frame of identity is that which comes from a social interaction. This frame is characteristic of identity enacted in social interaction through communication.

Relational frame of identity. The relational frame of identity is that which comes from relationships. This frame is characteristic of identity as mutually constructed in social interaction.

Communal frame of identity. The communal frame of identity is that which comes from a group. This frame is characteristic of identity as constructed in a group rather than constructed as an individual or interaction.

These frames of identity are helpful to understand when looking at other imposed tattoos because other imposed tattoos function to convey a message about the identity of an individual. This identity may be personal, enacted, relational or communal. For example, a tattooed person may use his or her tattoo to enhance self-feelings and an individual sense of identity, which is a personal frame of identity. This identity comes from the person, or self.

Another example is an identity from a social interaction which could be created between rival gang members; they may display their gang related tattoos as a sign of danger to a rival gang member. Or an identity could be created by tattooed persons in that they belong to a certain group such as modern primitives. Members of a group could have their identities constructed within the group, or communally, rather than individually. These socially constructed identities could be classified as either an enacted or communal or even relational frame of identity.
Both communally and individually, tattoos have been used for identity. In the past, other imposed tattoos were used to identify individuals in society as a result of negative characteristics (Brouwer, 1998) or perceived negative characteristics (Cronin, 2001; Vale & Juno, 1989). These individuals included criminals, army deserters and those of Jewish descent. For example, criminals in seventeenth century Japan were marked to indicate their criminal status; the tattoos indicated the type of crime committed and the location where the crime was committed (Richie, 1985). In the Tama region, the ideograph for “dog” was tattooed on the criminals’ forehead (Richie, 1985). In Kyoto, a criminal had a double bar tattooed on the upper arm, or, in Nara, a double line circling the bicep of the right arm (Richie, 1985). In Satsuma, the tattoo was a circle near the left shoulder (Richie, 1985). Each of these designs indicated the criminal activity and the region in which it was committed. The ancient Greeks also used tattoos to mark their criminals as well as their slaves (Gilbert, 2000). Another example is the unfortunate individuals assigned to Nazi concentration camps in twentieth century Europe. These individuals were put in the concentration camps because they had negative characteristics as perceived by the Nazi regime (Cronin, 2001; Vale & Juno, 1989). When they were assigned to the concentration camp, they were marked with tattoos on their forearms.

Tattoos have also been used to mark army members. For example, the Roman army tattooed the mercenaries so that deserters could be identified (Gilbert, 2000). Another example is that, in the nineteenth century, the British army tattooed deserters with a “D” and men of bad character with “BC” (Brouwer, 1998). These armies used tattoos to distinguish their members according to their service or characteristics.
In many cases, tattoos have been forced on others as a mark of identification. These forced, other imposed tattoos have functioned in different societies to mark or distinguish individuals, conveying information about the individual to the observer.

**Self Imposed Tattoos Function as Impression Management**

In contrast to the previously discussed other imposed tattoo, modern tattoos are largely a matter of personal choice and can be thought of as self imposed. A self imposed tattoo also conveys information about an individual to the observer, but a self imposed tattoo is acquired at the discretion of the tattooed individual. According to interviews with tattooed persons completed by many researchers, the choice regarding the tattoo is premeditated and deliberated prior to the procedure (Bell, 1999; DeMello, 1995; Irwin, 2001; Sweetman, 1999; Vail, 1999). In choosing to acquire a tattoo, individuals are choosing to alter their appearance relatively permanently. By altering their appearance, these individuals are managing the image others might see. There are varying reasons why a person might choose to wear a modern tattoo. To better comprehend this decision regarding altering one’s appearance relatively permanently, understanding impression management theory is helpful.

*Impression Management Theory*

Impression management is a conscious attempt to control an image in a social interaction (Schlenker, 1980). Impression management theory helps to explain the decisions people make regarding the appearance they put forth to others. Because people evaluate each other based on how they look and act (Schneider, 1981; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985; Leary, 1995), an individual will act and dress in certain ways to foster certain impressions or to influence other’s perceptions of him or her (Schneider,
1981; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985; Leary, 1995). Attempts to control one's image are also known as self-presentation (Jones & Pittman, 1982), and are utilized to influence how others perceive one's personality traits, abilities, attitudes, physical characteristics, and social characteristics (Schlenker, 1980; Jones & Pittman, 1982). The terms impression management and self-presentation have been used interchangeably throughout research and will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. Impression management theory is best understood through its assumptions, key terms, the importance of physical appearance to impression management theory, and impression management theory propositions.

Assumptions of impression management theory. Impression management theory has several assumptions. The basic assumption of impression management theory, according to Schlenker (1980), is that people are concerned with the impression they convey to others. There is an emphasis on the perceptions of the observer, also known as the audience, regarding the person (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). Tedeschi and Norman define this concept regarding the emphasis of the perception of the observer as “desired audience response” (1985, p. 295). The person being observed is concerned with the perceptions and response of the audience. As a result, the person attempts to create an image in the mind of the audience, therefore influencing the audience's perception of him or her.

Another assumption of impression management theory is that people have the ability to convey impressions and images to an audience (Schlenker, 1980). According to Tseelon (1992), people can control the impression others will form of them by acting appropriately according to the situation. At a social gathering, for example, these
appropriate behaviors or images are designed to establish particular desired images of a person in the mind of the audience.

Impression management is an intentional act, which means that people manage their images on purpose. In fact, Burgoon (1994) states that most of the verbal and nonverbal cues which are responsible for managing impressions are sent intentionally. Leary (1995) also affirms that people act in a specific way to cultivate a certain impression. Whether by what they say, do, or how they look, people are intending to send a message via these verbal and nonverbal cues. People are aware that others judge them, and they intentionally manage the image they portray.

Another assumption of impression management theory is that people expect gains from creating and perpetuating the desired images (Schlenker, 1980). A gain is defined as a benefit or reward. People concerned with the impressions others form of them, they expect to receive certain rewards or benefits from managing these impressions. People are managing their image in order to gain rewards.

Not only are people trying to increase gains from utilizing impression management, they are also trying to avoid costs (Schlenker, 1980). Avoiding costs is another assumption of impression management theory. A cost is defined as an unwanted outcome or result. People are concerned with the images they are putting forth because they are trying to avoid an unwanted outcome. An individual would manage an impression in order to circumvent a cost.

To review, the assumptions of impression management theory are that people are concerned with the impression they convey to others and have the capability to convey an impression. Impression management is an intentional act, and managing impressions is a
matter of expecting gains and avoiding costs. Tattooed persons alter their physical appearance permanently when acquiring a tattoo. Having a tattoo could either create or change an impression. The assumptions of impression management theory are applicable to persons with tattoos in that a tattooed person could control the impression others might have by having a tattoo as part of his or her physical appearance.

*Key terms of impression management theory.* There are many key terms of impression management theory which are utilized throughout the literature. The terms used in impression management can be compared to the terms used in the theatre. Goffman (1959) and Schlenker (1980) adopt a dramaturgical approach to impression management, comparing message senders to actors and message receivers to audience members. The terms used are an analogy between social situations and the stage. Both impression management theory and self-presentation theory apply the terms actors, performance, and audience (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980). Impression management theory also incorporates the terms stage, props, and backstage (Schlenker, 1980).

Actors or performers are those who are controlling the image of themselves. The image is a conscious choice. Actors determine which characteristics they want to portray and develop a character based on these attributes.

The act is referred to as the performance or role held by the actor. A performance is the act or behavior of an actor. This behavior is intentional and controlled (Schlenker, 1980), and is designed by the actor to establish certain images in the eyes of others (Baumeister, 1982; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi, 1981; Tseelon, 1992). A performance is situationally appropriate; it will vary from one situation to the next, depending on the image the actor is trying to portray.
Actors and their performance need an audience. The audience consists of the persons for whom the performance is based. The audience is an important factor for the performer to consider when determining what characteristics or qualities are to be portrayed. Actors perform these roles to convince audiences of certain qualities or characteristics as possessed by the actor.

An actor performing needs both an audience and a stage. Schlenker (1980) refers to the stage as the front created by the actor. The front consists of the actors’ appearance, the actor’s manner, and the setting in which the performance is given (Schlenker, 1980). An actor’s appearance consists of natural physical characteristics, such as hair and body type, as well as added features such as clothing and accessories. The manner with which the actor performs his or her role will define the characteristics of the situation. For example, the manner could be friendly versus unfriendly, or professional versus casual. The setting is the physical environment or scenery in which the actor performs his or her role. The setting could be a tattoo convention, a classroom, or an office for an employment interview.

Actors are concerned with the front they display, but their performance backstage is not the same. The backstage is the area where the actor is not performing. A living room could be the backstage when one is alone and not managing an impression of professionalism, stylishness or rebelliousness. In this area, the actor could act silly or incompetent without reducing the credibility of his or her professional attributes. Also, an actor who is concerned with portraying the impression of stylishness in their front stage area can easily lounge in unstylish, oversized sweat pants backstage and not be concerned about the performance of appearing stylish in their backstage area.
Props are important to the performance. Props consist of objects chosen to enhance a performance. The props used during the performance are movable and can be readily displayed and could include items such as a briefcase, an overhead projector or a computer. In addition, the way the actor interacts with the props is important. The individual should interact with the prop in a competent manner; otherwise the performance is not believable and thus, unsuccessful (Schlenker, 1980).

In summary, the dramaturgical approach to impression management theory uses such key terms as actor, performance, audience, props, stage and backstage, and these terms could be applied to tattooed persons. A person with tattoos would be the actor, and the audience would be anyone observing him or her. The performance would be the behaviors with which the tattooed person is trying to convey the message of possessing certain characteristics. Physical appearance is considered a part of the front with which the actor interacts, and a tattoo is part of a person's physical appearance, which enhances the front. Displaying a tattoo could also be a part of the performance. But, depending on where the tattoo is placed on the body, the tattoo could be easily visible as a part of physical appearance or not visible at all.

*Importance of physical appearance in impression management theory.* Physical appearance is an important aspect of impression management theory. Physical features, also known as appearance cues, are part of every person, which are easily and immediately seen. Actors have the ability to manipulate these features, depending on the desired impression they want to make. Actors will manage their appearance according to what they think looks good or is appropriate according to the audience involved. Audiences rapidly form impressions based on physical appearance (Leary, 1995), and, as
a result, physical appearance is a fundamental part of impression management. Lennon (1986) reported that controlled appearance cues of a person significantly predicted people's impressions of that person. As with the performance of the actor, appearance cues are conscious and controlled (Schneider, 1979), and physical appearance is the most salient aspect of an actor. Naturally, other people know and recognize each other by their physical appearance and there is an assumption on the part of the actor that the audience will analyze him or her based on physical appearance. Therefore, the actor uses physical appearance as a part of the front, as a natural extension of self. What the actor wears, accessorizes with, and chooses to display is a conscious choice. A tattoo is an added, chosen feature such as clothes and accessories and the tattooed individual can be flexible when choosing to display the tattoo. Yet, unlike clothing, a tattoo is a permanent feature, an actual part of the tattooed person.

Physical appearance is significant when considering impression management theory. In fact, there are many clothing and impression formation studies which ask participants to evaluate someone based on their appearance. Lennon (1986) found that clothing and physical appearance cues such as hairstyle and glasses could be manipulated to predict participants' evaluations of the stimulus person. Lennon and Davis (2001) looked at impressions made by a stimulus person due to their physical appearance with regard to character traits, behaviors, attitudes, demographic traits, and biological traits. Newman (1980) also used the physical appearance of a stimulus person to be an indication of characteristics of that person. In these studies, only a photograph of the stimulus person was used. Each participant was required to indicate the impression formed based on only the physical appearance of the stimulus person. The physical appearance and clothing
worn by the stimulus person was all that was necessary for the stimulus person to manage an impression. Thus, physical appearance is a vital part of managing an impression.

*Propositions of impression management theory.* In addition to the assumptions and key terms, impression management theory also has several propositions. These propositions include an association between image portrayed and image received; consistency of an image; success of a performance; failure of a performance; and the reliance on perceptions.

A proposition of impression management theory is that there is a strong association between the image an actor portrays and the image received by the audience (Goffman, 1959; Jones & Pittman, 1980; Lennon, 1986; Schlenker, 1980). If actors properly manage their image, then the desired audience response will occur. In other words, the actor's managed impression has a causal effect on the audience's response. For example, the impressions of the individuals who attempt to appear threatening will cause the audience to perceive them as threatening. Or, the impressions of the individuals who attempt to appear competent will cause the audience to perceive them as competent. The image received by the audience is associated with the image put forth by the actor.

The next proposition of impression management theory is that the image portrayed must be consistent (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 1995). To be believable, the actor and performance must be consistent. If an image portrayed is inconsistent, then the audience will doubt the performance (Leary, 1995). Actors must be aware of the image they want to portray and remain in character as long as they are managing those images. If the actor who wants to appear confident and professional instead acts in a nervous manner, or dresses unprofessionally, then the audience will doubt the performance.
Another proposition of impression management theory has to do with the success of the performance. If the images are being viewed correctly then impression management is considered a success. Images viewed and judged as the actor wants them to be are considered successful impression management (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). An actor may want to use self-enhancement to increase his or her likeability at a social gathering, if his or her self-enhancing words or actions are not viewed as likeable, then the impression management is not successful.

On the same note, if images are judged incorrectly, then impression management is considered a failure (Leary, 1995; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985), which is another proposition of impression management theory. The individual using self-enhancement to increase likeability may instead be viewed as conceited, which is not what was intended. If the outcome of the impression management behavior is not what was intended by the actor, then the impression management is considered a failure.

Finally, impression management relies on perceptions. Perceptions can be either positive or negative. Tedeschi and Norman (1985) posited that, in social situations, people attempt to put forth a positive image and avoid putting forth a negative image in the mind of the audience. Goffman (1959) and Schlenker (1980) also emphasized the idea that individuals are concerned with exhibiting positive attributes, as assessed by the audience, rather than negative attributes. Arkin (1981) argued that individuals strive to put forth the most positive presentation of self in order to result in the most social approval. In other words, the actor must consider the perception and perspective of the audience when determining what impression to put forth in order to ensure a positive evaluation and avoid a negative evaluation by the audience.
To recap, the propositions of impression management theory are many; there is a strong association between the image one portrays and the image which is received by the audience, also, an inconsistent image is doubted by the audience. If the image received is perceived by the audience as was intended by the actor, then the impression management is considered a success. But if the image received is not perceived as was intended by the actor, then the impression management is considered a failure. Finally, perceptions can be either positive or negative.

These propositions can be applied to tattooed persons. A tattooed person could inadvertently portray an inconsistent impression. For example, the person who uses his or her tattoos to manage the impression of rebelliousness, but then conforms to societal sanctions, conveys an inconsistent image of rebelliousness. Impressions can be considered a success or a failure. If an individual decides to display a tattoo at an informal social gathering to put forth an image of sexiness, and the person is perceived as sexy, then the performance was a success. If, instead, the person was perceived as sloppy rather than sexy because of the possession of a tattoo, then the performance was a failure.

A positive audience perception is important to impression management. Tedeschi and Norman (1985) and Schlenker (1980) stated that individuals are concerned with portraying a positive image and use impression management to do so. For example, a heavily tattooed individual may not consider displaying his or her tattoo in a business meeting with non-tattooed persons because he or she would not want to elicit a negative image. The tattooed individual may choose to cover the tattoos as impression management to avoid negative perceptions of him or herself and to increase a positive impression. There could be negative or positive impressions perceived because of a tattoo.
and the tattooed individual could manage his or her impression accordingly, depending on his or her motive for impression management.

*Motives for Having a Modern Tattoo*

There are many motives for managing impressions, and there are many motives for having a modern tattoo. A tattooed individual may want to acquire his or her tattoos for a particular reason or reasons, some of which are communicative. Researchers have found that individuals obtain tattoos for reasons of identity and expression. Identity articulation can be separated into group identity and self identity. Expression can also be separated into self-expression and social expression. Tattoos obtained for reasons of identity and expression can be considered communicative if the tattooed person desires to use his or her tattoos to convey messages about him or herself.

*The Motive of Identity*

*Group Identity.* Many individuals tattoo themselves to portray an image of group identity (Atkinson & Young, 2001; Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2002; Bell, 1999; Carroll & Anderson, 2001; Cronin, 2001; Langman, 2003). Portraying an image of group identity communicates to others that the tattooed person is a member of a particular group. Many individuals tattoo themselves to display association with a gang (Bell, 1999; Cronin, 2001; Mallon & Russell, 1999) and thus communicate their membership within the gang to the general public or opposing gang members. Convicts also obtain tattoos (Bell, 1999; Bronnikov, 1993; Crockett, 1998; Cronin, 2001; DeMello, 1993; Mallon & Russell, 1999; Newman, 1982). Crockett (1998) stated that a tattooed convict conveys a message to others through the tattoo, and Bronnikov reiterated that point by stating, “Tattoos [in Russian prison] are another kind of secret language, understandable
only to the initiated” and later, “one simply needs to know how to read this open book” (p. 52). Convict tattoos can tell the story of the convict and the crime committed, thus conveying the convicts experience to others.

*Self-identity.* Many tattooed persons choose their tattoos to articulate their identity, either to themselves, or to others (Bell, 1999; DeMello, 1995; Irwin, 2001; Langman, 2003; Millner & Eichold, 2001). Irwin (2001) stated that tattooed persons choose their tattoos as a symbol of who they are. The tattoos convey characteristics about the person, such as sense of humor, artistic nature, gentleness, or personal power (Irwin, 2001). When discussing her choice of tattoo, one of the participants interviewed by Irwin stated, “I liked it right off the bat. I started thinking about it and why I liked it. The design is kind of round, kind of strong, it flowed from one half into the other without stopping and separating. . . . It reinforces and says ‘me’” (Irwin, 2001, p. 60). Many tattooed people state self-identity as a motive for having a tattoo.

*The Motive of Expression*

*Self-expression.* Individuals use their tattoos as a form of self-expression (Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2002; Carroll & Anderson, 2001; Grief, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1999; Sweetman, 1999). One form of self-expression with a tattoo has to do with expressing oneself to those in the medical profession. Tattoos have been used to transmit messages regarding medical attitudes and information. Some individuals have “DNR” and “no code” tattoos (Mallon & Russell, 1999). The “DNR” and “no code” tattoos are directed at health care providers and are becoming more common (Mallon & Russell, 1999). Another form of self-expression with a tattoo has to do with expressing oneself to the general public. According to those HIV+ individuals interviewed by Brouwer (1998),
they chose to tattoo themselves to express their HIV status. "HIV+" tattoos convey information about the presence of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus in the tattooed person's body.

**Social expression.** Individuals use their tattoos as a form of social expression. Buddhist, Christians, Hindus and Muslims who wear a tattoo of a cross or crucifixion design are using their tattoos as a symbol of their devotion to their religion (Stevens, 1992). DeMello (1995) and Irwin (2001) argued that middle class tattooed persons choose their tattoos as a symbol of personal growth or spirituality. Irwin (2001) also argued for the convict tattoo as a symbol of a passage through a deviant career. Tattooed individuals interviewed by Irwin (2001) stated they are using their tattoos as a form of social expression of their personal or spiritual accomplishments. Some of the participants described their tattoos as a mark of a passage in life, this passage included achievements such as a graduation or an end to a relationship (Irwin, 2001).

Tattoos have also been used to celebrate a relationship. Some of those tattooed described their tattoos as a symbol of commitment to a romantic relationship (Millner & Eichold, 2001); they chose their tattoos to communicate their love to loved ones. According to Bell (1999) some participants described their tattoos as a symbol for an intimate relationship, and many chose to honor their lovers by having a tattoo of their lovers' name (Bell, 1999). To communicate their love for someone to the general public, many Korean men had a heart or a heart and arrow tattoo (Kim, 1991). The tattooed men called it "the mark of love" (Kim, 1991). Crockett (1998) provides an excellent example of a tattoo used to communicate love and commitment – the tattoo was a picture of a man, woman, and a heart, with the words, "we will never part." Whether a mark of love,
or an expression of identity, those tattooed have reported various motives for obtaining their tattoos.

Overall, there are many ways a tattoo can be used to convey information about an individual. The motives for having a modern tattoo have been discussed in research, and may well be thought of as a form of communication. Tattoos have been used in the past as adornment, as a mark of mystical power and as a mark of status and identification to others. Other imposed tattoos have been used specifically for communicative purposes regarding identification. As a result, those other imposed tattoos were highly visible. In the present, tattoos are becoming more common and are a part of one’s physical appearance, and could be used for communicative purposes from the perspective of impression management. These tattooed persons are using their tattoos to convey information to others. Messages which can be sent through a tattoo can be one of self-expression, identity articulation, and group identity or association. These messages can be to the self or about the self to others.

Even though tattoos are more prevalent, the research regarding modern tattoos as a form of communication is narrow and does not include the general tattooed public. In fact, only those sampled (tattooed HIV+ participants) in the Brouwer (1998) article, actually state they are using their tattoos as a direct form of communication. Visible modern tattoos as a form of communication have not been specifically examined. If tattoos in the present are used as a form of identity and expression, then visible modern tattoos are actually a form of communication to others regarding identity or expression. Thus, in order to discover the degree that tattooed individuals use their tattoos as a form of communication to others the following research question is asked:
RQ 1: To what extent are individuals who choose to tattoo their bodies using their tattoos as a form of communication to others?

The Role of Self-Consciousness in Impression Management

Communication may be a factor for obtaining a tattoo, and communication to others is also a factor for managing impressions. Choosing what to communicate through physical appearance is essential to impression management. Thus, there is a need to determine when a tattoo is displayed versus when a tattoo is not displayed. To understand how tattooed people manage impressions, the tattooed persons’ level of awareness of their public image as perceived by others should be explored. If tattoos are communicative, visibility of a tattoo is important in impression management, and the perception of the audience is also important when managing impressions successfully. Thus, the actor’s realization or awareness of audience perception is important for successful impression management. The actor’s awareness of self and others is also important.

Self-consciousness is an awareness of self and others. Self-consciousness is the disposition to be self-attentive, and aware of oneself as an individual (Monfries & Kafer, 1994), and includes being aware of one’s actions, appearance, manner, and thoughts. Not only does the concept of self-consciousness include self awareness, the concept also includes the realization that others are similarly aware of you. People who are attentive to the public image of the self are likely to become aware of the possibility that others are also attentive to the image. Self-consciousness has been categorized into two types; private self-consciousness and public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975).
Private Self-Consciousness

Private self-consciousness refers to the constant attentiveness to inner aspects of the self that only the individual can observe (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). These aspects include thoughts, feelings, goals and other personal experiences. Individuals who are privately self-consciousness are self-reflective and introspective (Turner, Carver, Scheier, & Ickes, 1978). Their main concern is their subjective experiences. Private self-consciousness is the process of attending to one's inner thoughts and feelings on a habitual basis. Since private self-consciousness concerns aspects of the self that only the individual can observe, a more relevant trait to look at would be public self-consciousness.

Public Self-Consciousness

On the other hand, public self-consciousness refers to the constant attentiveness toward aspects of the public self (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). These aspects include actions, appearance and manner. Public self-consciousness refers to the attentiveness to the self as a social object that others can observe and evaluate and is considered a personality trait (Fenigstein, 1987). Individuals who are publicly self-conscious are concerned about how they are seen by others (Fenigstein, 1987). Their main concern is the public appearance. According to Tunnell (1984), participants with a high degree of public self-consciousness reported that they varied their self-presentations within different social situations. Those participants were more aware of their public image and more concerned with displaying the socially appropriate behavior (Tunnell, 1984). Fenigstein (1987) reports that persons high in public self-consciousness tend to have a high regard for how others look upon them and, Turner, Scheier, Carver, and Ickes
(1978) found public self-consciousness to be moderately correlated with self-monitoring yet interestingly unrelated to social desirability. Public self-consciousness denotes the process of attending to one's outward appearance and actions as viewed by others.

**Public Self-Consciousness and Impression Management**

Public self-consciousness has been discussed as having a connection with impression management. According to Tedeschi and Norman (1985), strategic impression management is behaviors employed when the focused outcome of the behavior is a long-term goal or a long-term consequence. For example, individuals may use strategic impression management behaviors to establish likeability by portraying conformity, or individuality or stylishness throughout a career, a long-term goal. Buss and Briggs (1984) argued for the link between public self-consciousness and strategic impression management. Buss and Briggs (1984) stated that an individual will engage in more impression management behaviors if their awareness of self as a social object is high. On the other hand, if an individual’s awareness of self as a social object is low, then the individual will engage in fewer impression management behaviors (Buss & Briggs, 1984). Bruch, Hamer, and Heimberg (1995) found public self-consciousness to be associated with strategic impression management in the form of protective self-presentation. In their study, individuals high in public self-consciousness were more likely to engage in interactions designed to be socially safe, and strategically managed. Doherty and Schlenker (1991) found individuals who were “pure publics” (high in public self-consciousness and low in private self-consciousness) to be the most likely to use strategic impression management with regard to maximizing approval and minimizing disapproval in social interactions. Doherty and Schlenker (1991) found that the pure
public individuals in their study were concerned with putting forth a positive image. The participants were required to complete a bogus trait test, which they either passed or failed. After failing the test, pure publics described themselves self-effacingly. And, after passing the test, pure publics described themselves self-enhancingly. Those individuals high in public self-consciousness were concerned with managing their impressions consistently to maximize approval and minimize disapproval.

*Successful impression management characteristics.* In managing an impression, success and failure of the impression should be taken into consideration. Impression management can be considered a success and there are certain characteristics of impression management which render the impression successful. First, images must be viewed by the audience correctly for success (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). Second, believability by the audience is an important consideration (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Third, according to Schneider (1981), individuals present a certain impression to achieve a certain goal. The impression could be presented to achieve the goal of a positive evaluation. If the individual is trying to portray a positive image and the image is evaluated positively, then the impression management is again considered a success.

*Failed impression management characteristics.* Impression management can also be considered a failure and there are certain characteristics of impression management which render the impression failed. First, if the impression presented is not perceived as desired, then impression management is considered a failure (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). Second, an effort to create a particular calculated impression could result in an undesired secondary impression (Leary, 1995; Schneider, 1981). If the individual is trying to portray a negative image and the image is evaluated positively, then the impression
management is considered a failure. If the individual is trying to portray a positive image and the image is evaluated negatively, then the impression management is considered a failure.

On the whole, impression management can be considered either a success or a failure, depending on the desired audience response versus the actual audience response. Strategic impression management has been associated with public self-consciousness (Bruch, Hamer & Heimberg, 1995; Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). Those high in public self-consciousness are concerned with how they appear to others (Fenigstein, 1987), and thus, evaluations of appearance are significant.

**Negative Evaluations of Tattooed Persons**

Many researchers have discussed the negative evaluations of persons with tattoos. People evaluate others based on physical appearance (Leary, 1995), and, as part of a person's appearance, the tattoo is taken into consideration when evaluations are made. Interestingly, the Latin word for tattoo is "stigma" (Gilbert, 2000) and the English definition of the word stigma still describes a stigma as a mark of disgrace (Gilbert, 2000). Tattoos are still considered anti-mainstream adornment (Bell, 1999), and Irwin (2001) discussed the legitimation techniques employed by middle class persons with tattoos as a justification of their tattoos. Justification was necessary because of the pervasive negative evaluations of persons with tattoos. There are associations of persons with tattoos with psychiatric disorders (Ciniceros, Brown, & Swartz, 1998; Raspa & Cusack, 1990; Romans, Martin, Morris, & Harrison, 1998). There are also negative evaluations of women with tattoos (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorne, 2004; Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998) and there have been negative evaluations of adolescents with

**Negative Evaluations due to Associations with Psychiatric Disorders**

There are negative evaluations of persons with tattoos due to the associations made of persons with tattoos and disorders. Researchers have shown associations of persons with tattoos with psychiatric disorders and there have been reported negative evaluations of persons with tattoos from those in the medical profession. For example, Raspa and Cusack (1990) reported that a tattoo on a patient is an indication of criminal activity of psychiatric disturbance. Raspa and Cusack (1990) discussed tattoos in reference to psychiatric disorders; that the presence of a tattoo correlates with psychiatric disorders. Also, Ciniceros, Brown, and Swartz (1998) reported a significant correlation between tattoos and self mutilation and dysfunctional social behavior within psychiatric patients. They found that the number of tattoos a patient had, the more likely they were to practice self mutilation and behave dysfunctionally within society. In a study of New Zealand women by Romans, Martin, Morris, and Harrison (1998), tattoos were statistically linked to childhood sexual abuse, alcohol use, borderline personality disorders and later psychopathology. These tattooed women were more likely to have more psychiatric symptoms than the non-tattooed women. Psychiatric disorders are just one of the negative evaluations of persons with tattoos.

**Negative Evaluations of Women with Tattoos**

There are also reports of negative evaluations of women with tattoos. For example, female nurses, doctors, and medical students rated professional women with tattoos significantly more negatively than non-professional women with tattoos (Stuppy,
Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998). In a sample of undergraduate students, women with tattoos were seen as violating gender norms by those participants with conservative gender attitudes (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorne, 2004). In the same study, women with visible tattoos were rated more negatively than those with tattoos which could be easily hidden (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorne, 2004). In general, women with visible tattoos have been evaluated negatively.

Negative Evaluations of Adolescents with Tattoos

Adolescents with tattoos have also been negatively evaluated. For example, tattooed adolescents were viewed less positively by nurses and doctors (Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998). Also, tattoos have been significantly associated with high risk behaviors in adolescents (Roberts & Ryan, 2002; Carroll, Riffenburgh, Roberts, & Myhre, 2002). Also, significant associations were found between trait and state anger and number of tattoos on adolescent girls (Carroll & Anderson, 2002). Finally, there was a significant negative association found between the number of tattoos and positive feelings towards their bodies by adolescent girls (Carroll & Anderson, 2002).

Overall, tattoos are still evaluated negatively. In the past, tattoos were associated with the underclass. In the present, tattoos are associated with psychiatric disorders. Research has shown that women and adolescents with tattoos are also evaluated negatively because of their tattoos. These negative evaluations are prominent, and yet, people are still choosing to tattoo their bodies.

From the standpoint of impression management theory, having a negatively evaluated tattoo is contradictory to portraying a positive image. The performance would be considered a failure if the actor is attempting to solicit a positive evaluation, but his or her
tattoo elicits a negative evaluation. In order to achieve the desired positive audience evaluation, and have a successful performance, the actor would either have to choose not to obtain a tattoo or choose to cover the tattoo. Despite the negative evaluation, if the actor still chooses to obtain a tattoo, the ability to cover the tattoo is imperative to consider in order to ensure a successful performance.

*Personal Choice to Obtain a Tattoo*

Modern tattoos are acquired by the personal choice of the tattooed person. When making this choice the person must consider the visibility of the tattoo, especially given the negative evaluations associated with tattoos. Visibility of a tattoo can be determined by the location of the tattoo, as well as by the size of the tattoo. The person’s degree of public self-consciousness can influence choices regarding visibility of the tattoo.

*Choice Regarding Location of Tattoo*

Individuals acquiring a modern tattoo have the choice of where to place the tattoo on their body. Realistically, a tattoo can be placed anywhere on the body, so the decision is not based on possibility, but rather on preference. An individual can choose to tattoo his or her face, neck, shoulders, arms, abdomen, back, legs and or feet. In making this decision, people may take into account whether or not they want the tattoo to be visible to a public audience or a private audience.

*Choice Regarding Size of Tattoo*

Individuals acquiring a modern tattoo also have the choice of what size of a tattoo they want placed on their body. Tattoos come in all shapes and sizes and can be altered to fit on a body part. That is, a small butterfly can be drawn larger to cover an entire back, or a large rainbow can be drawn smaller to fit on an ankle. In deciding the size of the tattoo,
an individual may also take into account whether or not the tattoo will be visible to a public audience.

*Influence of Public Self-Consciousness on Visibility*

Individuals deciding on location and size of their tattoo may be influenced by their level of public self-consciousness. Those who are aware of themselves as a social object and higher in public self-consciousness will be more aware of the placement of a tattoo with regard to visibility. Consequently, when making the decision on location and size of a tattoo, the individual may take into account whether or not the tattoo could be viewed by an audience.

The tattooed individual can make the choice to display a tattoo or to not display a tattoo. According to Bell (1999), many heavily tattooed individuals choose to display his or her tattoos depending on the audience. Bell (1999) stated that many heavily tattooed people are uncomfortable displaying their tattoos to a non-tattooed audience because of the perception of that audience. But when in the company of other tattooed individuals, the heavily tattooed individual feels more at ease displaying his or her tattoos (Bell, 1999). Either way, the tattooed actor has the choice to display or not display his or her tattoo, depending on the audience and the desired audience response, resulting in either a successful or failed performance.

As previously discussed, individuals high in public self-consciousness are aware of themselves and are concerned about how they appear to others (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Also, research has shown that tattoos are still associated with negative characteristics (Ciniceros, Brown, & Swartz, 1998; Raspa & Cusack, 1990; Romans, Martin, Morris, & Harrison, 1998) and are still evaluated negatively (Carroll &

Accordingly, there is a prominent negative evaluation associated with having a tattoo. As a result, those individuals who are higher in public self-consciousness will be more likely to choose a smaller, less visible tattoo because they are aware of other’s evaluations of a tattoo as negative and they want to avoid a negative evaluation.

According to impression management theory, people want to convey a positive impression and avoid a negative impression. According to Fenigstein (1987), individuals who are publicly self-conscious are aware of and concerned with how they are evaluated by others. Thus, a tattooed individual is interested in receiving a positive evaluation from others, and if he or she considers the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive, and he or she is higher in public self-consciousness, then the individual will have more visible tattoos, thus conveying a positive impression. For example, a tattooed person who is publicly self-conscious and concerned about portraying a positive image in order to receive a positive evaluation, he or she will be more likely to have a tattoo in an area of the body which can be easily viewed with the public eye, increasing the chance of a successful performance. On the other hand, if a tattooed individual is concerned with avoiding a negative evaluation, and he or she assumes the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be negative, and he or she is higher in public self-consciousness, then the individual will have less visible tattoos. In other words, a tattooed person who is publicly self-conscious and concerned with avoiding negative evaluations will be more likely to have a tattoo in an area of the body which is easily covered from the public eye, again increasing the chance of a successful performance. In other words, when a positive
audience response is assumed, as a tattooed individuals’ public self-consciousness increases, then the visibility of his or her tattoos will also increase. When a negative audience response is assumed, as a tattooed individuals’ public self-consciousness increases, then the visibility of his or her tattoos will decrease. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypotheses 1: When the assumed audience response is a positive evaluation, then there will be a positive linear relationship between the degree of public self-consciousness and visibility of tattoos.

Hypotheses 2: When the assumed audience response is a negative evaluation, then there will be a negative linear relationship between the degree of public self-consciousness and visibility of tattoos.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Recruitment of Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited from tattoo shops in the Waikiki area of Honolulu, Hawai‘i, and from classes at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Four tattoo shops were sampled: Aloha Tattoo, South Pacific Tattoo Company, Tatoolicious, and Paragon Tattoo and Body Piercing. The tattoo shops around Waikiki attract both tourists and locals, providing for a more varied sample. The classes at the University were upper division Speech classes which accommodate students with many different majors, also providing for a more varied sample.

The tattoo shop sample (to be known as the “shop sample”) and the University sample (to be known as the “school sample”) were chosen for their convenience. The shop sample consisted of employees as well as patrons of the shops. The school sample consisted of students enrolled in the Speech classes and their friends or family members.

Shop sample. Among the many tattoo shops in the Waikiki area, these four were chosen because the researcher knew the owners and was given permission to survey the patrons and employees. To obtain participants from the shop sample, patrons were approached after they had completed their interactions with the shop staff. The researcher first asked the patron if he or she had any tattoos, if there were none readily visible on the patrons’ body. If the patron did have at least one tattoo, then oral consent was requested (See Appendix A for oral consent script). Once oral consent was given, participants were asked to fill out a survey, which took from five to fifteen minutes to
complete. Once the survey was completed, the participants were debriefed and provided with a copy of a form describing the study (See Appendix B).

School sample. The school sample was obtained through the University of Hawai‘i. Among the many classes at the University, these were chosen because the classes were accessible to the researcher. To obtain the participants from the school sample, Speech classes were visited either at the beginning or end of the class period. The study was briefly described to the students and the requirements were explained. In order to be eligible to fill out the survey, students were required to have at least one modern tattoo; cosmetic tattoos such as eyeliner and lip liner did not count as a modern tattoo (See Appendix A for oral consent script). Surveys were then distributed in class, and those students who did not have a tattoo were asked to have a friend or family member with a tattoo fill out the survey. Students received class points or extra credit for their participation in this study.

Description of Participants

A total of 181 tattooed participants, 100 (55%) males and 81 (45%) females completed the survey. The average age of the participants was 25.45 years ($SD = 6.70$ years). The ethnic background of the sample was diverse with 69 (38%) Caucasian, 47 (26%) Asian American, 17 (9%) Pacific Islander, 9 (5%) Mexican/Hispanic, 3 (1%) African American, 1 (1%) Native American, and 32 (18%) who classified themselves as “other.”

Among the participants, 81 (45%) had one tattoo, 39 (21%) had two tattoos, 20 (11%) had three tattoos, and 34 (23%) had four or more tattoos. Participants reported having tattoos on their upper back ($f = 63, 35\%$); upper arm ($f = 58, 32\%$); lower back ($f = 51,$
28\%); shoulder (f = 47, 26\%); ankle (f = 37, 20\%); abdomen (f = 32, 18\%); calf (f = 30, 17\%); chest (f = 21, 12\%); thigh (f = 21, 12\%); lower arm (f = 18, 10\%); neck (f = 14, 8\%); hand (f = 12, 7\%); foot (f = 10, 6\%); buttocks (f = 6, 4\%); and head (f = 3, 2\%).

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument included questions regarding the participants' tattoos. These questions assessed the communicative value of tattoos, visibility of tattoos, and evaluation of tattoos by others. Also included were questions regarding the participants' level of public self-consciousness (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics for each variable). Participants were also asked to report their age, gender, and ethnicity. A language level test was performed on the survey using Microsoft Word. The language level test results showed that the survey was written with ninth grade level language.

Pilot Test

A pilot test was conducted using seven acquaintances of the researcher. Those who completed the pilot survey were tattooed students and tattooed non-students, and the time they took to finish the survey ranged from five to fifteen minutes. Several who completed the pilot test commented on the ambiguity of the first item of the public self-consciousness scale, "I'm concerned about my style of doing things." They were not sure of the context which the statement referred, and, as a result, that item was moved toward the end of the scale. By moving the item toward the end of the scale, the context of the scale was more obvious and then reported as easier to comprehend by those who completed the pilot test. The remainder of the survey was reported as clear and understandable by those who completed the pilot test, and thus, not revised.
Communicative Value

To determine whether participants think that their tattoos are communicative, communicative value was measured by several statements. This scale was developed by the researcher and several experts in the field of communication by brainstorming many potential statements. Those statements which were deemed inadequate were eliminated. After careful consideration of many possible statements regarding tattoos as being communicative, four were chosen (e.g., “my tattoos help me to communicate a particular image to others” and “my tattoos help to express myself to others”). Each of these statements were followed by a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The mean for the sample was 4.17 ($SD = 1.6$). Reliability analyses of the communicative value scale resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .86. Higher scores on this variable indicate that participants consider their tattoos to be more communicative (See Appendix C).

Visibility

To determine whether participants think their tattoos are visible, visibility was assessed by asking the participants two series of questions. The first series comprised a visibility scale and the second series were additional questions regarding visibility.

Visibility scale. The visibility scale was also developed by the researcher and several experts in the field of communication. After careful consideration of many prospective statements regarding the visibility of a tattoo, four were chosen. Two statements reflected visibility as perceived by participants (e.g., “my tattoos are visible to the general public”) and two statements reflected visibility by others, as perceived by participants (e.g., “others can see my tattoos when I am in public”). Each of these statements were
followed by a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The mean for the sample was 4.49 ($SD = 1.69$). Reliability analyses of the visibility scale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Higher scores on this variable indicate that participants consider their tattoos more visible to the general public (See Appendix D).

*Additional questions regarding visibility.* For the purpose of clarification, additional questions were included regarding the number of tattoos a participant had and the location of the participants' tattoos. Also included was an outline of a body (front and back) where participants were asked to circle the approximate size and location of their tattoos on the outline. To ensure anonymity, designations of the participants' tattoos were marked with a circle rather than an image of the tattoo (See Appendix D).

*Evaluation of People with Tattoos*

Semantic differential scales were used to measure the participants' perceived evaluation of people with tattoos. Participants were asked to specifically recall the time before they received their first tattoo, and answer how they thought others evaluated people with tattoos.

This scale was developed by the researcher and several experts in the field of communication by brainstorming many potential statements. Those statements which were deemed inadequate were eliminated. After careful consideration of many possible statements regarding the evaluation of people with tattoos, four were chosen. Each statement had the stem, "before I had a tattoo, I believed others would think that people with tattoos are . . . ." Then the participant was asked to rate the evaluation as positive or negative using adjectives provided such as "good/bad" or "respectable/not respectable." These adjectives comprised the anchors of the semantic differential scales, ranging from
1 (positive adjective) to 7 (negative adjective). The mean for the sample was 4.15 (SD = 1.31). Reliability analyses for the evaluation of people with a tattoo scale resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .89. Higher scores on this variable indicate that before they had a tattoo, participants considered that others evaluate people with a tattoo as more negative (See Appendix E).

Public Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness scale. Public self-consciousness was measured using a subscale from the self-consciousness scale. The self-consciousness scale was developed by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975), and has been shown to be reliable and have a clear factor structure (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). The predictive validity of the self-consciousness scale has been supported in a number of studies (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975; Nystedt & Ljungberg, 2002; Vleeming & Engelese, 1981). The scale consists of three subscales which measure public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness and social anxiety. Scheier and Carver (1985) revised the self-consciousness scale in order to ensure understanding of the items by the general population. The original and revised self-consciousness scales have been used globally and translated into many different languages, including Arabic (Alanazi, 2001), Chinese (Hamid, Lai, & Cheng, 2001), Dutch (Vleeming & Engelese, 1981), Estonian (Realo & Allik, 1998), Japanese (Gudykunst, 1987), Korean (Gudykunst, 1987), and Swedish (Nystedt & Smari, 1989). The three subscales of the self-consciousness scale measure different propensities and have been found to be weakly correlated with each other (Alanazi, 2001; Mittal & Balasubramanian, 1987; Vleeming & Engelese, 1981).
There has been some debate regarding the number of dimensions in the self-consciousness scale. For example, Mittal and Balasubramanian (1987) have argued for a five dimensional self-consciousness scale rather than the initial three dimensional scale. These researchers proposed that both private self-consciousness and public self-consciousness should each be split into two different factors, thus making the scale five dimensions rather than three dimensions. They proposed that private self-consciousness should be broken into self-reflectiveness and internal state awareness. Mittal and Balasubramanian (1987) and also Nystedt and Ljungberg (2002) proposed that public self-consciousness should be separated into style consciousness and appearance consciousness. Despite these speculations, the added dimensions have not been tested and therefore the entire public self-consciousness subscale will be used for this paper.

*Modified self-consciousness scale.* A modified version of Fenigstein’s self-consciousness scale (1987) was used for this study to measure degree of public self-consciousness. The items which measure private self-consciousness and the items which measure social anxiety were not used due to their lack of relevance in this paper; only the items which measured public self-consciousness were used (e.g., “I’m usually aware of my appearance” and “I care a lot about how I present myself to others”). Each of these statements were followed by a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The mean for the sample was 4.86 ($SD = 1.14$). Reliability analyses for the public self-consciousness scale resulted in a Cronbach’s Alpha of .82. Higher scores on this variable indicate that participants are higher in public self-consciousness, meaning they are more aware of themselves as a social object (See Appendix F).
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

Initial analyses were conducted to determine whether the shop sample and school sample differed on the key variables investigated in this study (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics of the variables). Because the size of the shop sample and school sample were unequal, harmonic means were used to compare the difference in the means.

There was no significant difference in the means between the shop sample and the school sample for the communicative value of a tattoo ($t(178) = .90, \eta^2 = .12$), the visibility of a tattoo ($t(178) = 1.15, \eta^2 = .15$), the evaluation of people with a tattoo ($t(180) = 1.38, \eta^2 = .16$), and the level of public self-consciousness($t(177) = 1.27, \eta^2 = .21$). However, there was a difference between the shop sample and the school sample in the number of tattoos a participant reported ($t(173) = 3.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$), the shop sample reported more tattoos than the school sample.

The Communicative Value of a Tattoo

Communicative Value

In the research question proposed, the researcher asked to what degree tattooed people consider their tattoos as a form of communication. In order to answer the research question regarding the communicative value of a tattoo, means were examined from the communicative value scale. The overall sample ($N=179$) considered their tattoos somewhat communicative ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.61$). The shop sample ($n = 63, M = 4.24, SD = 1.55$) and the school sample ($n = 116, M = 4.10, SD = 1.66$) also considered their tattoos to be slightly communicative. In general, participants considered their tattoos to be somewhat communicative.
Communicative Value and Visibility

An additional analysis was completed to further assess the communicative value of a tattoo. In order for a tattoo to be communicative to others, the tattoo would also need to be visible. Thus, a correlational analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between the communicative value and the visibility of a tattoo. The correlation for the overall sample was statistically significant, $r(177) = .31, p < .01$. As the communicative value of a tattoo increased, the visibility of a tattoo also increased.

Public Self-Consciousness and Visibility of a Tattoo

There were two hypotheses proposed regarding the participants' level of public self-consciousness and visibility of a tattoo. The main difference between the two hypotheses pertained to the perceived evaluation of people with tattoos. The key components used to test the two hypotheses were the perceived evaluation of people with a tattoo, the degree of public self-consciousness and the degree of visibility of a tattoo. Hypothesis one stated that when a participants' perceived evaluation of people with a tattoo was positive, as public self-consciousness increased, visibility of a tattoo would increase. Hypothesis two stated that when participants' perceived evaluation of people with a tattoo was negative, as public self-consciousness increased, visibility of a tattoo would decrease.

In order to test the hypotheses proposed, the sample was divided into two groups based on the mean evaluation of people with a tattoo. The evaluation scale ranged from 1 (positive evaluation) to 7 (negative evaluation). Those participants who thought others evaluated people with tattoos positively had mean evaluation scores below four and were considered to be the positive evaluation group. Those participants who thought others evaluated people with tattoos negatively had mean evaluation scores above four and were
considered the negative evaluation group. Participants whose mean evaluation score was equal to four were excluded in that they did not fit into either the positive or negative evaluation group. Participants in the positive evaluation group were utilized in order to test hypothesis one and participants in the negative evaluation group were utilized to test hypothesis two.

**Hypothesis One**

A correlation coefficient was computed between public self-consciousness and visibility for those participants who thought tattoos were positively evaluated by others \( n = 50 \). The correlation was not significant, \( r(48) = .12, p = .40 \). That is, when the participant considered others' evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive, level of public self-consciousness did not have a significant relationship with visibility of a tattoo.

**Hypothesis Two**

A correlation coefficient was computed between the public self-consciousness scale and the visibility scale for those participants who thought that tattoos were negatively evaluated by others \( n = 84 \). The correlation was near significant, \( r(82) = -.21, p = .06 \), and in the appropriate direction. That is, when the participant considered others' evaluation of people with a tattoo to be negative, as level of public self-consciousness increased, visibility decreased.

**Number of Tattoos**

Because the participants were asked to report their perceived evaluation of people with a tattoo *before* obtaining their first tattoo, those participants who had only one tattoo would provide a more clear answer of the perceived evaluation *before* obtaining their first tattoo. After obtaining more than one tattoo, the perceived evaluation of people with a
tattoo before obtaining a tattoo becomes less clear with each tattoo due to the recall time since obtaining the tattoo. Also, the visibility of a tattoo is easier to assess if the participant has only one tattoo. With more than one tattoo, the participant may have one which is highly visible and one which is not, making the visibility difficult to measure.

Because there were not enough participants with three tattoos to comprise a group, those with two or three tattoos were combined into one group. The sample was thus divided into those participants with only one tattoo, and those with more than one tattoo (e.g., two to three tattoos, and those participants with four or more tattoos). Each of the three groups was further separated; those who thought others’ evaluation of people with a tattoo was positive and those who thought others’ evaluation of people with a tattoo was negative. Correlation coefficients were again computed between the public self-consciousness and the visibility scale.

Participants with only one tattoo. A correlation coefficient was computed between public self-consciousness and visibility for those participants who considered the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive and who reported having only one tattoo \((n = 19)\). The correlation was not significant, \(r(17) = .32, p = .19\). A correlation coefficient was computed between public self-consciousness scale and the visibility scale for those participants who considered the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be negative and reported having only one tattoo and \((n = 42)\). The correlation was significant, \(r(40) = -.34, p < .05\), for those participants who considered the evaluation of people with tattoos to be negative, and had one tattoo, as public self-consciousness increased, visibility of the tattoo decreased (See Table 2).
Participants with more than one tattoo. Correlation coefficients were computed between public self-consciousness and visibility for those participants who considered the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive and reported having either two or three tattoos ($r(14) = .47, p = .07$), or four or more tattoos ($r(10) = -.09, p = .78$). The correlations were not significant. A correlation coefficient was computed between public self-consciousness and visibility for those participants who considered the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be negative and reported having either two or three tattoos ($r(21) = -.13, p = .56$) or four or more tattoos ($r(14) = -.10, p = .70$). The correlations were not significant (See Table 2).

Separation of shop and school sample

Bivariate correlations between public self-consciousness and visibility of a tattoo were conducted on the shop sample and the school sample separately. Both the shop sample and the school sample were divided into groups based on either a positive or negative evaluation of people with a tattoo, and then further divided into groups regarding number of tattoos.

All of the bivariate correlations were similar to the results above, except for the groups with four or more tattoos. In the shop sample, the participants who perceived the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive, and had four or more tattoos ($n = 8, r(6) = -.54, p = .17$), and the school sample who perceived the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive, and had four or more tattoos, ($n = 4, r(2) = .82, p = .18$), differed in the direction of the relationship between public self-consciousness and visibility of a tattoo. The contrast should be noted, but, due to the small sample size, assessment cannot be made (See Table 2).
Summary of Results

There was no support for hypothesis one, but the relationships were in the right
direction. That is, there was not a significant relationship for those participants who had
considered the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive and had one to three
tattoos, between degree of public self-consciousness and visibility of a tattoo, although
the relationship was in the right direction. For those participants who considered the
evaluation to be positive and had four or more tattoos, the relationship was not significant
and the relationship was in the opposite direction expected.

There was partial support for hypothesis two. There was a significant relationship for
those participants who considered the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be negative
and had one tattoo, between degree of public self-consciousness and visibility of a tattoo.
For those participants who considered the evaluation to be negative and had two to three
tattoos, or four or more tattoos, the relationship between public self-consciousness and
visibility of a tattoo was not significant, but the relationship was in the right direction.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to understand the role that communication plays with regard to people with tattoos. This research focused on the general tattooed population and their view on the communicative value of a tattoo. Also examined was the perceived evaluation of people with tattoos; as either positive or negative. Depending on whether the evaluation was positive or negative, the role that public self-consciousness plays on the visibility of a tattoo was also investigated. This study found that the sample surveyed did consider their tattoos to some extent communicative. This study also found that, for those participants who perceived the evaluation of a tattoo to be negative, as their level of public self-consciousness increased, the visibility of their tattoos decreased.

Discussion of the Results

Tattoos as Communication

With the increase in tattoos there has also been an increase in research regarding people with tattoos. Tattoos are more prevalent in the twenty first century than in the past, and are increasing in popularity. Though there has also been an increase in research regarding people with tattoos, the research has focused on psychological characteristics of the tattooed person, and on the motives for obtaining a tattoo. These motives are for identity or expression, which may be communicative in nature. Prior studies were from fields such as psychology and sociology, examining the characteristics of a tattooed person and the deviant groups who obtain tattoos. Among other groups, previous research has focused on convicts, gangs, and subcultures; which are subsets of the general population. The focus of this study was to investigate how the general tattooed
population views tattoos as a form of communication. Yet, to date, there has not been much research regarding the specific communicative value of a tattoo.

In this study the question was addressed to what degree a tattooed person considered his or her tattoos as a form of communication. For this research, participants answered questions regarding the communicative value of their tattoos. Addressed in these questions was the issue of a tattoo conveying a message about the tattooed person to others. Participants responded that they do think of their tattoos as slightly communicative. If these results are representative of the general tattooed population, then, tattooed people, in general, can consider their tattoos as a form of communication to others.

Given the information that tattooed people can consider their tattoos as a form of communication, there is much that a person can say with a tattoo. The wearer is able to communicate many ideas through his or her tattoo, all of which are descriptive of the person. The tattooed person can communicate aspects of his or her personality through a tattoo, like the girl in the introduction with the island of Hawai’i tattooed on her ankle. Or, for example, an American flag tattoo is a symbol of patriotism, a surfboard tattoo would indicate a hobby, or a portrait tattoo could convey the significance of that person in the portrait to the tattooed person. There are also many examples of a tattoo as a symbol of love, such as the notorious “Mom” tattoo, or the name of a lover or spouse to indicate commitment on the part of the tattooed person.

The tattooed person can only use his or her tattoos to communicate to others if the tattoos are visible. In view of the fact that the entire body can be tattooed, the placement of a tattoo is essential and the person has the choice of where to place the tattoo. The
tattooed person who does not want others to see the tattoo can place the tattoo in a
discreet location. On the other hand, the tattooed person who does want others to see the
tattoo can place the tattoo in a visible location. Having a tattoo in a visible location can
increase the communicative value of the tattoo.

Not surprisingly, the communicative value of a tattoo had a strong relationship with
the visibility of a tattoo. As the visibility of the participants' tattoo increased, the
communicative value of the tattoo also increased. The tattooed person may have placed
the tattoo in a more visible location because he or she thought of the tattoo as
communicative. Or, he or she may have thought of the tattoo as communicative and
placed the tattoo in a visible location. The results of this study show that communicative
value and visibility of a tattoo are positively correlated.

The existence of this association between the communicative value and visibility of a
tattoo is important to consider because of impression management theory. According to
impression management theory, nonverbal cues are used to form impressions of others.
Physical appearance is one of the first characteristics used to assess an individual, and
people use their physical appearance to portray an image. Impression management
theory covers the notion that people attempt to portray a positive image to others and
avoid portraying a negative image. If people use their appearance to manage impressions,
and tattooed people with visible tattoos consider their tattoos to be communicative, then
the tattooed person could be using his or her tattoos specifically as a form of impression
management. Therefore, the tattooed person with a visible tattoo is using the tattoo to
manage an impression of him or herself.
This sample considered their tattoos to be somewhat communicative. Tattoos are not only viewed as communicative for the tattooed person, but also as communicative for the tattoo artist as well. A note should be made that elsewhere in the United States tattoos have been argued to be communication; specifically, a visual form of communication. In a legal brief submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court, Schildkrout argued that a tattoo artist from South Carolina (where tattooing was then banned) should be allowed to work on the basis of the protection of the first amendment of the U.S. constitution (Schildkrout, 2002). This case against tattoo artist Ron White centered on the issue of free speech and the fact that tattooing by a tattoo artist could be considered a visual form of communication.

Perceived Negative Evaluation of People with a Tattoo

The next matter addressed in this study was the perceived evaluation of a tattoo. Participants reported what they thought were others’ evaluations of people with tattoos. The overall results suggest that participants perceived others’ evaluations of people with tattoos as slightly negative. This finding is consistent with past research, but to a lesser extent. Past research has shown that the evaluation of people with tattoos is more than slightly negative (Carroll & Anderson, 2002; Carroll, Riffenburgh, Roberts, & Myhre, 2002; Ciniceros, Brown, & Swartz, 1998; Hawkes, Senn, & Thorne, 2004; Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998; Raspa & Cusack, 1990; Romans, Martin, Morris, & Harrison, 1998; Roberts & Ryan, 2002).

Given the premise of impression management theory that people are attempting to obtain a positive evaluation and avoid a negative evaluation, understanding why someone would wear a visible tattoo if they thought the audience evaluation is negative is
intriguing. This issue was addressed in the second hypothesis, bringing the level of public self-consciousness into consideration as well. As previously discussed, if a person is high in public self-consciousness, then that person is more aware of him or herself socially and is more concerned with the evaluations of others than someone who is low in public self-consciousness. Perhaps a visibly tattooed person who considers’ others evaluations of a tattoo to be negative is just low in public self-consciousness. But the results for this sample suggest otherwise in that the mean of public self-consciousness is slightly high.

Participants in this sample were somewhat high in public self-consciousness and also considered the evaluations of a tattoo to be somewhat negative. Yet, if they were concerned with the positive evaluations of others, and they considered the evaluations of people with tattoos to be negative, then having a tattoo may be in direct violation of impression management theory. On the other hand, a tattoo cannot induce a negative evaluation if the tattoo is not visible to others.

As expected, the results indicate that, for those participants with only one tattoo, when the perceived evaluation of a tattoo is negative, as the level of public self-consciousness increased, the visibility decreased significantly. Those participants with only one tattoo provided a more pure answer to the survey. Reporting the visibility of their tattoo is clearer for those with only one tattoo because they do not have subsequent tattoos to consider. Reporting the perceived evaluations of others regarding people with tattoos before obtaining a tattoo is also clearer for those with only one tattoo because they have only the one tattoo to consider.
The theory of impression management is supported by those participants having tattoos which are not visible. The tattooed person is still attempting to elicit a positive audience response, based on a positive evaluation. But he or she still wants a tattoo. In that case, when making the choice to obtain a tattoo, he or she chose a tattoo or tattoos which are not visible to the audience, thereby maintaining a positive evaluation, and successful impression management.

Also in the sample were those participants who perceived the evaluation of people with tattoos to be negative, and had more than one tattoo. These participants also had a decrease in the visibility of their tattoos as their level of public self-consciousness increased, but, due to the small sample size, the relationship was not as strong as the relationship for those with only one tattoo.

Given the results, one could speculate the fact that tattooed people are taking into consideration the evaluations of others when obtaining their tattoos. People obtaining tattoos decide where to place the tattoo. They may want a tattoo but still want to be viewed positively; consequently they choose tattoos which can be easily hidden from view. Tattoos can be placed on body parts which are less visible, such as the hips, lower back, upper arm, or on the neck behind a collar or hair. These body parts can be easily covered from the public eye in order to avoid a negative evaluation. Those with tattoos which can be hidden could be considered as concerned with the desired audience response and therefore are considering the audience evaluation when choosing where to place their tattoo.
Perceived Positive Evaluation of People with a Tattoo

Contrary to past research regarding the evaluation of people with a tattoo, there were participants who perceived the evaluation of people with a tattoo to be positive. This finding calls into question the previous research regarding the evaluation of people with a tattoo. Prior studies have focused on the negative psychological characteristics of those tattooed (Raspa & Cusack, 1990) as well as the negative perceptions of those who wear tattoos, especially women (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorne, 2004) and adolescents (Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998). On the contrary, evidence of this study shows that not everyone considers evaluations of people with tattoos as negative, in that evaluations of people with tattoos were also reported as positive.

Perhaps this finding is due to the location of the study. In the Hawaiian Islands, tattooing has been an integral part of Hawaiian culture for many centuries (Gell, 1993). The Hawaiian tattoo was an expression of genealogy, gender and aesthetics (Gell, 1993), and was considered “a visual manifestation of social relationships among the people, the gods, and the universe that changed over time” (Blackburn, 1999, p. 89). There was a brief period when European missionaries discouraged and even banned tattooing in Hawai‘i (Pritchard, 1999), but, overall, tattoos in the islands have been viewed as an affirmative part of the culture. This positive evaluation of tattoos may have something to do with the findings in this study. Living in an area where, historically, tattoos have been viewed positively may affect the responses of the participants, as opposed to living in an area where, historically, tattoos have been viewed negatively. The location of the present study may have made a difference in the perceived evaluations of a tattoo, as compared with the previous studies completed on the continental United States.
Regardless, there were participants who considered the evaluation of people with tattoos as positive. To recap, an awareness and concern for the evaluation of others is encompassed in ones’ level of public self-consciousness, and a positive evaluation is the goal for consciously managing an image, according to impression management theory. Based on these two concepts, if a tattooed person considers the audience evaluation as positive, then he or she will choose more visible tattoos.

The first hypothesis proposed addressed the issue of the tattooed person who considers the evaluation of people with tattoos to be positive with regard to the relationship between the level of public self-consciousness and the visibility of a tattoo. The relationship found was in the expected direction. That is, as public self-consciousness increased, the visibility of a tattoo also increased. These results indicate that the participants considered evaluations of a tattoo to be positive and, in support of impression management theory, wanted to put forth a positive image, and therefore, chose more visible tattoos. The visible tattoos can be used to help the tattooed person achieve the desired positive image successfully.

Based on the results of this study one can speculate that tattooed people are considering the evaluations of others when making the choice of where to place their tattoo. They are making a choice with regard to size and location of the tattoo, both of which directly affect the visibility of the tattoo. The size and the location both can determine if the tattoo is easily displayed or easily hidden. Those participants who considered others’ evaluations of people with tattoos as positive, chose more visible tattoos, thus supporting impression management theory.
Limitations

The limitations to this study include sample size, the generality of the scales; recall issues for those participants with more than one tattoo; and the explanations in the recruitment of participants. The first limitation to this study is the sample size; a larger sample would provide more power. In the case of hypothesis one, the relationship was in the right direction, and strong, yet not significant. The effect sizes were large enough to suggest a strong relationship, but, due to the small size the sample was underpowered. A larger sample would provide the power necessary for significance.

The second limitation of the study is the generality of the scales. The researcher was attempting to measure the participants' perceived evaluation of people with tattoos, and communicative of a tattoo with regard to the general public. Some of the participants in the shop sample had a difficult time determining how to answer the questions. They stated that the answers to the perceived evaluation of people with tattoos and communicative value would vary, depending on the actual tattoo, context, and the others involved. For example, both the context and the evaluation could differ depending on the interpretation. The context could be interpreted as in a job interview versus spending time with friends versus just walking down the street. Or the evaluation of people with a tattoo by others could be interpreted as an evaluation by employers versus friends versus strangers.

Unfortunately these issues did not arise during the pilot test; otherwise the instructions could have been made clearer. The instructions could have been made clearer by asking the participant to think of only one specific context or only one reference group and answer accordingly. Possible contexts which could be looked at are a job interview,
social gathering, or school. Possible reference groups which could be looked at are employers, family, friends, or strangers.

The third limitation of this study is the issue for those participants with more than one tattoo. When asked about the visibility of their tattoos, or the perceived evaluation of people with tattoos, participants with more than one tattoo would have more than one answer. As a result, the results may not be as clear as for those with only one tattoo. To alleviate this issue in the future, instructions could include “answer regarding your first tattoo,” or only those people with one tattoo could be surveyed.

The fourth limitation is the explanation in the recruitment of participants. This study was designed to survey participants with self-imposed tattoos, not other-imposed tattoos. However, this fact was not listed in the requirements for participation and there was no direct control maintained for the school sample. One potential participant in the school sample was declined when she asked if her relative with a tattoo from a concentration camp could fill out the survey. Data from participants with other-imposed tattoos would distort the results. The probability of this limitation as a serious issue is low, but should be addressed. In future studies, the requirements for the tattoo to be obtained by choice, not force, should be included in the recruitment of participants.

Future Directions

Despite the limitations, there are suggested future directions for this study. There are several possible areas to examine with regard to the general tattooed population which are intriguing to consider.

The first direction for this study is the addition of qualitative data. Interviews and observations would provide additional information in order to more clearly interpret the
results. Findings could be more explicit with the addition of qualitative data. In depth interviewing and observation of the tattooed participants would provide a better understanding of their responses, especially with regard to the evaluation of people with a tattoo and the communicative value of a tattoo. That is, the reasoning behind the responses could be explored. For example, the reasoning regarding the evaluation of people with tattoos could be explored. The interview could show that the perception of people with tattoos as evaluated positively or negatively is because of a personal incident or encounter versus just the participants’ own thought processes. Also the reasoning behind the communicative value of a tattoo could be explored. For example, a person with a visible Hawaiian or Tahitian symbol tattooed on his or her thigh may indicate cultural identity or heritage and this person may be attempting to communicate his or her heritage to others. Another example is the ever popular female lower back tattoos which may indicate a fashion statement or a form of self expression, what the participant wants to communicate will be clearer with more in depth investigation.

Second, utilizing the fear of negative evaluation scale (Watson & Friend, 1969) would be another possible direction. The fear of negative evaluation scale could also provide additional information regarding the respondents. Public self-consciousness has been positively correlated with a fear of negative evaluation (Monfries & Kafer, 1994). Perhaps those tattooed individuals with less visible tattoos have a higher fear of negative evaluation than those tattooed individuals with more visible tattoos. The addition of the fear of negative evaluation scale could clarify the relationship.

Third, the addition of a culture variable into the analysis would provide additional information regarding the respondents. Both the historical contexts of tattoos in a
specific culture as well as attributes of that culture could be looked at. Whether or not ethnic identity has a relationship with communicative value of a tattoo or visibility of a tattoo could be investigated. Whether or not an independent or interdependent self-construal has a relationship with the perceived evaluation of people with a tattoo or the visibility of a tattoo also could be examined. Looking at culture and tattoos could provide additional insight about the participants and their tattoos.

Fourth, in order to further understand the perceived evaluation of people with tattoos as well as the communicative value of a tattoo, those without tattoos could also be surveyed. The difference in means between the tattooed sample and non-tattooed sample could be compared. This study investigated the perceived evaluation of people with tattoos and the communicative value of a tattoo from the perspective of a tattooed person. The perspective of a non-tattooed person could be examined as well, and compared with that of a tattooed person.

Fifth, the function of a modern, visible tattoo could be further explored. Participants in this sample considered their tattoos to be somewhat communicative. If participants considered their tattoo as only somewhat communicative, then further exploration of other functions of their visible tattoos is necessary. Past research has explored the motives for obtaining a modern tattoo, and some of these motives could be considered as a function of communication, yet, participants in this sample considered their tattoos as only somewhat communicative. Thus, if not communicative, the function of a modern tattoo could be investigated. Further, researchers could look at whether participants consider their tattoos as communicative from a senders’ or a receivers’ perspective, and
investigate whether or not the tattooed person actually intends to use his or her tattoo as a form of communication.

Finally, an empirical investigation of self-presentational strategies with regard to tattooed people could be performed. Jones and Pittman (1982) developed five self-presentational strategies which define ways to manage images, like impression management. These strategies include both positive and negative images as the desired outcome of self-presentation. The five self-presentational strategies are the exemplifier, ingratiator, intimidator, self-promoter, and supplicator. Each of these strategies has a different focus and, like impression management, is used for a specific gain. But self-presentation differs from impression management theory in that both the supplicator and the intimidator strategies focus on portraying what could be considered a negative image rather than a positive image. This study focused on tattooed people with regard to impression management, yet, future studies can also include self-presentational strategies and explore their application to tattooed people.

Conclusion

This study revealed that tattooed people do consider their tattoos to be somewhat communicative and that the communicative value of a tattoo has a positive relationship with the visibility of a tattoo. Participants who reported more communicative value in their tattoos also reported more visibility in their tattoos. Speculation of this finding is that tattooed people do use their tattoos as a form of communication to others.

This study also revealed that, contrary to previous research regarding people with tattoos, evaluations of people with tattoos can be positive. While the overall perceived evaluation of people with tattoos was slightly negative, there were participants who
reported the perceived evaluation as positive. This finding indicates that some people with tattoos do consider others' evaluations of people with tattoos as positive.

The basic premise of impression management theory was supported by this study. Those participants who perceived the evaluation of people with tattoos to be negative, as their level of public self-consciousness increased, the visibility of their tattoos decreased. Those participants who perceived the evaluation of people with tattoos to be positive as their level of public self-consciousness increased, the visibility of their tattoos increased. Speculations of these findings are that tattooed people are considering the audience evaluation prior to obtaining a tattoo, which reflects in their choice of size and location of the tattoo.

Despite the limitations of this study, the findings are compelling and encourage future research on people with tattoos. Future research can delve deeper into the relationships between visibility of a tattoo and personality or cultural traits.
Table 1.

*Range, Means, and Standard Deviations for Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication (N = 179)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Sample (n = 63)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sample (n = 116)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility (N = 179)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Sample (n = 63)</td>
<td>1.75-7</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sample (n = 116)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation (N = 181)</td>
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<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Sample (n = 64)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sample (n = 117)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Self-consciousness (N = 178)</td>
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<td>4.90</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Sample (n = 63)</td>
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<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sample (n = 115)</td>
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<td>1.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Tattoos (N = 174)</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shop Sample (n = 58)</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sample (n = 116)</td>
<td>1-13</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.

**Bivariate Correlations Between Public Self-Consciousness and Visibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Tattoo Number</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Shop</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (17)</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2 - 3 (14)</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 or more (10)</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (40)</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>-.73*</td>
<td>(32)</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2 - 3 (21)</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 or more (14)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<sup>p < .05</sup>
APPENDIX A

ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT

Shop Sample

Hello, my name is Kathleen Doss and I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I am currently working on my thesis and would like to survey you, with your permission of course. The questionnaire should only take about fifteen minutes. I am looking to survey about one hundred sixty tattooed people to research different ways of thinking about tattoos. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Do you agree to answer a few questions and fill out a survey for me?

[If participants asked about my field of study, I responded with, “I have a bachelor’s degree in psychology and am currently working on my master’s degree.”]

School Sample

Hi, my name is Kathleen Doss and I am a graduate student here at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, currently working on my thesis. The research I am conducting consists of looking at persons with tattoos. I would like to request your participation in my research through filling out a survey. The survey takes approximately fifteen minutes to complete. There is one requirement in that you must have at least one tattoo in order to complete the survey. Cosmetic tattoos such as lip liner and eyeliner do not count. If you do not have a tattoo and would like class credit, you can give the survey to a friend or family who does have a tattoo. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, my contact information is on the last sheet of the survey, which is yours to keep.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Agreement to Participate in

Tattoo Survey

Kathleen Doss, Investigator
314 George Hall, 2560 Campus Road
Honolulu, HI 96822
Speech Department Office (808)956-8202

I am a graduate student working on my thesis. This is a research project looking at individuals with tattoos. Your participation in this project is through filling out a survey. I intend to survey approximately 160 participants. Although there are no direct benefits to you, I hope that this project will shed more light regarding individuals and their tattoos. There is no risk involved in filling out this survey and completion will take approximately 15 minutes. Participation is completely voluntary. Responses will be kept anonymous and it is not possible to identify participants. You may withdraw at any time.

I appreciate your participation and thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions or comments concerning this project, feel free to contact me at the number or address above.

If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this study, contact: Committee on Human Studies, University of Hawai‘i, 2540 Maile Way, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822. Phone: (808) 956-5007.
APPENDIX C

COMMUNICATIVE VALUE

Instructions: The following items concern your thoughts about your tattoos. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number to the right of each statement.

1. My tattoos help me to communicate a particular image to others.
2. My tattoos help to express myself to others.
3. My tattoos are another form of expression for me.
4. I use my tattoos as a form of communication.
APPENDIX D

VISIBILITY

Visibility Scale

Instructions: The following items concern your thoughts about your tattoos. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number to the right of each statement.

1. My tattoos are visible to the general public.
2. My tattoos are NOT noticeable. ** (reverse coded)
3. Others consider my tattoos to be visible to the general public.
4. Others can see my tattoos when I am in public.

Items one and two measured participants' perception of visibility of their tattoos. Items three and four measured participants' perception of visibility of their tattoos by others.

Descriptive Visibility

Additional descriptive questions were: How many tattoos do you have? __________


Please indicate on the outline the approximate size and location of your tattoos by drawing a circle on the bodies depicted below:

YOUR BODY

FRONT

BACK
APPENDIX E

EVALUATION

Evaluation of People with Tattoos

Instructions: Below is a series of evaluations. Indicate how others evaluate tattoos using the descriptions below.

BEFORE I had my first tattoo, I believed OTHERS would think that people with tattoos were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Respectable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admirable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Admirable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


APPENDIX F

PUBLIC SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Instructions: The following items concern your thoughts about yourself. Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number to the right of each statement.

1. I'm usually aware of my appearance.
2. I care a lot about how I present myself to others.
3. I'm self-consciousness about the way I look.
4. I usually worry about making a good impression.
5. I'm concerned about what other people think of me.
6. I'm concerned about my style of doing things.
References


Stevens, J. (1992). Tattooed Buddha: Though often associated with criminals and sailors, tattoos have been proudly worn over the centuries by Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians to symbolize their allegiance to the divine. *Yoga Journal, 103*, 66-69.


