

## Marking Gender:

### Women and Tattoos, Practice and Representation

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With the act of making oneself a work of art, the artist reclaims the body, an especially powerful act for women.<sup>1</sup>

- Kim Hewitt

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.<sup>2</sup>

- Laura Mulvey

Subculture forms up in the space between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance. It translates the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched. It is hiding in the light.<sup>3</sup>

- Dick Hebdige

The practice of tattooing one's body, and of body modification in general, is one that stimulates reconsiderations of traditional conceptions of mind and body, as well as notions of power with regard to self-expression and control over nature / the body. In recent decades tattooing has become a visible and popular aspect of mainstream Western culture, while at the same time it remains, under certain circumstances, a deviant, subversive, and empowering countercultural practice.<sup>4</sup> As Victoria Pitts notes, "while various forms of body modification have become hugely popular among youth and others, a significant portion of the body modification movement could be characterized as outside the mainstream."<sup>5</sup> For both women and men tattooing may be used as a means of individual expression and differentiation, group identification and membership, ritual boundary marking, and aesthetic 'improvement' or decoration of one's body. While tattoos represent a form of cultural capital for a vast number of people in contemporary Western society who have had themselves tattooed, there are significant differences between this popular Western practice and the practices of those in the West who consider themselves members of communities based primarily around heavy tattooing or extreme body modification practices. For these individuals, tattoos represent not only a form of cultural or symbolic capital but are also markers of lifestyle, and can be construed in terms of what Thornton refers to as subcultural capital.<sup>6</sup> This term draws on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and

refers to the distinction made between that which is disparaged as 'mainstream' and that which is valued as 'alternative' by subcultural groups.

As with many subcultural groups, these communities utilize popular forms of mass media such as magazines and the internet for the communication of group values, ideals and trends. Thornton points out that such groups define and distribute cultural knowledge through various forms of media.<sup>7</sup> According to contemporary academic research these extreme tattooing communities tend to be relatively gender-neutral in terms of tattoo iconography, placement and size.<sup>8</sup> However, an analysis of the media representations employed and consumed by these communities reveals gender differences that may be interpreted as highly traditional in terms of their representation of hegemonic feminine norms.

This paper will demonstrate the conflicts and contradictions of contemporary extreme tattoo practices among women in the West, and the relationship of such practices to the media representations of these women. Relying on the theories of Frederic Jameson, Sarah Thornton, Raymond Williams, Judith Butler and Nikki Sullivan, as well as on academic histories and analyses of Western tattoo practices, I will examine contemporary tattoo magazines aimed at extreme body modification communities in terms of their visual and linguistic representations of women, and their relationship to the actual practices of the women who belong to such communities and modify their bodies as expressions of power, control, identification and aesthetic choice. As Sullivan shows, while communication via tattooing practices is often "assumed to be a straightforward process of expression and reception," there tends to be a great deal of ambiguity, contradiction and conflict in the multitude of approaches taken to such practices.<sup>9</sup> Thus, any fixed or concrete interpretation would seem to be impossible. The gap between women's practices and their representations in magazines such as *International Tattoo Art* and *Skin & Ink*, as well as the multitude of potential ways to interpret these representations, supports this claim.

As indicated in the introduction, not all tattoos or tattoo practices constitute membership in a tattoo or body modification community. The vast majority of tattooed individuals in the West have only one or two small tattoos and these tend to be placed in such a way as to be easily covered for social or business purposes.<sup>10</sup> These individuals are not included in such communities, and those who consider themselves outside the Western mainstream perceive such tattooing as conventional.<sup>11</sup> Extreme body modification communities regard these tattoos as lacking the empowering element of subversion that is attached to more extensive tattooing and other extreme body modification practices. The formation of extreme body modification communities is a relatively new phenomenon that can be roughly traced back to the mid-1960s, and which had increased in popularity by

the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Before this time tattooing (the practice of permanently fixing images onto the skin using ink and a needle or other sharp object) was performed throughout the world, dating back to prehistoric human existence. According to many historians, archeological work has uncovered cave drawings depicting humans decorated with markings of various kinds, and well-preserved human remains have been found which show signs of having been adorned in this way.<sup>13</sup> There are a great number of historical accounts which trace the traditional body modification practices of many cultures, including the Maori people of New Zealand, the Tiv of Nigeria, the Nuer of Sudan and the Japanese. Although Polynesian practices are often credited as having been responsible for introducing tattooing into modern Western culture (through the voyages of Captain James Cook), tattooing was practiced in Europe before this time (the term 'tattoo' was, however, introduced to Western culture as a result of Western contact with Polynesian cultures). Nevertheless, the tattoos of returning sailors and the transportation of tattooed natives for purposes of display helped increase awareness of tattooing in Europe.<sup>14</sup> With some exceptions, tattoos were generally regarded as deviant or debased throughout much of their early European history. This is in stark contrast to non-Western cultures, many of which treated tattooing as a sanctioned cultural practice important for identification and ritual, as well as aesthetic adornment.<sup>15</sup>

In parts of pre-Christian Europe tattooing *was* an accepted form of adornment, but the introduction of Christianity brought with it a prohibition of the practice: tattoos were interpreted as opposing the Judaeo-Christian perspective that sees the body as the sacred creation of God and, more importantly, the Christian teaching of the body as the temple of God. As such, tattoos were regarded as defacing the temple.<sup>16</sup> Following the diffusion of Christianity, tattooing remained a non-sanctioned body modification practice in the West. During this time members of the military (especially sailors), incarcerated criminals, prostitutes and institutionalized mental patients were the primary practitioners or recipients of tattooing.<sup>17</sup> While the naval practice of tattooing was partly a means of identification (in case of drowning), it also carried important value as a means of demonstrating individuality, group identity or membership and aesthetic decoration. For others, especially institutionalized individuals, tattoos were a form of personal aesthetic expression that was a means of individuation and differentiation in an environment which stripped them of all other identity markers.<sup>18</sup> Though carrying positive value for many such individuals, the association of tattoos with marginalized members of Western society combined with factors such as the Christian view of the human body to encourage a view of tattoos as a sign of moral decay.

Notwithstanding this general attitude towards tattoos, there were a number of notable exceptions – cases of well-known or well-respected individuals who broke with social stigma and tattooed their bodies in spite of tattooing's generally negative connotations for Westerners. Following the invention of the first tattoo machine in 1891 (a development which greatly reduced the pain involved in tattooing), tattoos were even a brief fad amongst the British aristocracy.<sup>19</sup> It is also commonly noted that Winston Churchill's mother had tattoos, indicating that the trend – like mainstream and extreme practices of today – appealed to and was practiced by both men and women.<sup>20</sup> The trend, however, was not long-lived, and by the early twentieth century tattoos were seen at best as a curiosity, and often as a sign of mental illness or criminality.<sup>21</sup> Women in particular were put on display for their tattooed bodies, often appearing in circus or carnival freak shows and photographed for 'pin-up' reasons. Their popularity as tattooed subjects was much greater than that of men because "women provided a sensational double whammy onstage – a peep show within a freak show."<sup>22</sup> Clearly this form of display, especially with its focus on women, can be and has been construed as an exotification of the tattooed 'other'. The use of photography at this time was significant. Referring to Susan Sontag, Melissa Forbis points out that the metaphorical power of photography is such that the camera may be seen as a weapon with which one can 'shoot' the exotic individual and bring home a two-dimensional trophy.<sup>23</sup> The connection between tattoos and mental illness is also interesting to point out here since mentally ill individuals were often subjected to treatment that positioned them as curious 'others'. A psychiatrist writing for *The Medical Times* as late as 1958 argued that

The presence of a single meaningless tattoo mark suggests a prepsychotic or psychotic phenomena [sic]...the appearance of multiple tattoo marks which differ greatly in motivation, which have no symmetry, and which have no apparent connection one with the other is always diagnostic of a severe psychoneurosis...A study of the tattooed individual, the designs and the obvious motivation behind each design is as valuable in determining the emotional pattern of an individual as is a multiphasic personality test or a Rorschach test.<sup>24</sup>

The diagnosis of tattoos as symptoms of mental illness should not be surprising, particularly when connected to women's histories, given that physical 'otherness' or misunderstood physical behaviour in women was often attributed to psychological dysfunction (for example, the well-documented history of the Freudian interpretation of female masturbation and orgasm as an 'hysterical response'). Though we now recognize these diagnoses as unfounded and

erroneous, the above quotation remains useful for its implications which connect emotional expression to specific tattoo practices.

Tattoos have since become increasingly accepted by a significant portion (if not the majority) of Westerners, and are now not uncommon among younger members of the white urban middle class in North America.<sup>25</sup> This shift is generally attributed to cultural diffusions from the performance art of the 1960s and 1970s, from changing notions about the relationship between the mind and body influenced by trends in Holistic New Age philosophy, and more commonly from the British punk movement of the late 1970s.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Mark Blanchard suggests that

the growing vogue of tattoo as a basic art form is actually a byproduct of the development of photography: people could look at pictures of tattoos without being confronted by the physicality of the body beneath the tattoo.<sup>27</sup>

Other factors behind the mainstreaming of tattoos include improvements in technology and the increasing interest of practitioners in elevating tattoo practices to the level of fine art. This drive led to an increasing specialization of technique, with many practitioners now formally trained at universities, and an increasing degree of importance placed on custom artwork and tattoo shops.<sup>28</sup> These practitioners are predominantly male, though their client base tends to be fairly evenly split between male and female.<sup>29</sup>

As indicated earlier, studying Western mainstream tattoo practices can be difficult because the majority of people who are tattooed have only one or two small designs and they tend to be located in areas which are easily covered by everyday clothing. However, Demerson's study of contemporary tattooing practices in Montreal does reveal some marked gender differences with regard to tattoo size, placement and iconography amongst this heterogeneous group. Women are inclined to select smaller designs and are more likely to choose a spot which is easily hidden. Arm and leg tattoos are very uncommon amongst women who receive only one or two tattoos. These women are more likely to have their lower back, ankle, shoulder, hip or breast tattooed. Men who fit into the mainstream category of tattooed individuals have a propensity to choose somewhat larger designs and generally select the arms, back, shoulders and chest for placement. These men, like their female counterparts, tend to prefer that their tattoos remain invisible under most circumstances. Iconography also tends to be gendered amongst this group, with women generally selecting 'prettier', more feminine designs such as flowers, butterflies and hearts. In contrast, men tend to be more likely to choose violent imagery such as skulls and daggers, or 'masculine'

animal images such as panthers, wolves and dragons.<sup>30</sup> Such differences tend to be less visible in cases of extreme body modification or heavy tattooing.

According to Demerson's study, gender differences with regard to placement, size and iconography are difficult to discern amongst those who identify with extreme body modification communities:

When a person has become heavily tattooed, their design choices tend to be more varied. Heavily tattooed men sometimes have flowers and heavily tattooed women sometimes have dragons and daggers. This is especially true with people who have tattoos influenced by traditional Japanese imagery [a popular choice within extreme body modification culture]. My own research shows that design, placement, and size were directly affected by gender, but the differences were not present among those who were more heavily tattooed.<sup>31</sup>

As small, easily hidden tattoos are no longer considered particularly deviant by a majority of the population (though, undoubtedly, there remain social arenas in which this is still not the case), membership in body modification communities requires that one's tattoos be visible and that they cover a significant area of the skin. In addition to size and visibility, uniqueness and meaning are further mitigating factors for these communities. Flash designs, the sheets of standardized images found on the walls of many tattoo shops, are often disparaged by these communities, who tend to favour custom shops that do not offer flash and who tend to select or design unique tattoos for their bodies. Flash remains a popular option within the mainstream. This is often attributed to a lack of information on the part of the casual tattoo client who may not know that anything but flash is available. Indeed, in many shops flash is the only option.<sup>32</sup> In addition, other forms of tattoo culture – such as biker tattoo practices and prison tattooing – are not generally accepted by the usually middle-class extreme tattoo communities.<sup>33</sup> Other aspects of tattoo practices valued by these communities include the privileging of tattoos 'done' in the absence of professional help (i.e. self- or home-tattooing), a thematic or stylistic wholeness to large-scale tattooing (the degree to which the tattoos are merged effectively into a single design or an organized network of designs), and significance of meaning (tattoos that have strong personal associations tend to be considered more valuable than those with largely aesthetic value, which are considered shallow and without 'real' meaning). Furthermore, there is an explicit emphasis on process and the experience of pain as an indicator of labour, of 'earning' one's tattoos.<sup>34</sup>

In both mainstream and extreme tattoo practices in the West, the motivation behind tattooing and other body modifications is often expressed in terms which recall the work of Frederic Jameson.<sup>35</sup> Many tattooed individuals and tattoo artists

express the importance of tattoos in terms of a present-day loss of meaning and, as a result, an increasing importance of personal expression.<sup>36</sup> In a particularly telling quote, one of Demerson's participants stated that

Choosing and having control and carrying images, it's powerful. Not much is certain in our consumer society, nothing lasts and tattoos make it solid, it grounds you and makes you real.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, a tattoo artist quoted in Sanders asserts that

I do see many people get tattooed to find out again...to say, "Who was I before I got into this lost position?" It's almost like a tattoo pulls you back to a certain kind of reality about who you are as an individual.<sup>38</sup>

Here, depth is replaced by surface and a "compensatory decorative exhilaration" takes over due to the large-scale waning of affect characteristic of the postmodern.<sup>39</sup> Jameson describes the emergence of what he terms "depthlessness", and goes on to describe the death of the subject that accompanies these phenomena. This death indicates the end of style, uniqueness and the personal as a result of the absence of a *feeling self*.<sup>40</sup> By tattooing one's body, one may be rejecting the postmodern absence of feeling; one is forced to *physically* feel her own expression as it is etched into her skin. However, the tattoo as etching on the skin, while potentially rejecting postmodern fragmentation, may also reinforce it. Although the tattoo may hold many overlapping and shifting personal or cultural meanings for the bearer, the observer sees only a surface of ink on skin, and can only guess as to deeper intended meanings. The gap between encoding and decoding here may be great, although many tattooed individuals go to some length to reduce this distance. Ultimately however, as Sweetman makes clear, the fixing of images by no means results in fixed readings of those images (or of the individuals who bear them).<sup>41</sup> In addition to this fissure, the tattoos of others carry more meaning for individuals who also bear tattoos because the sight of another's tattoo reminds the tattooed individual of the process of her tattooing and the pain and personal memory with which it is associated. This recognition and recollection go a long way towards explaining the formation of communities around practices of body modification.

With regard to this sharing of meanings and interpretations between the bearer of the tattoo and the individual who observes it, it is commonly noted that tattooed individuals tend to be characteristically eager to discuss and display their tattoos to both tattooed and non-tattooed individuals. As Hewitt notes, the punk movement's challenge to hegemony was decidedly exhibitionist in nature. As an

extension of this subculture, tattooing is “performed in a social sphere that is deliberately...meant to be witnessed.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Demerson notes the social intent of tattoos (that is, the fact that most people want others to see their tattoos – even if only in certain contexts), and the overwhelming willingness of virtually all individuals involved in tattoo practices (mainstream and extreme) to show off and talk about their tattoos and their tattoo experiences.<sup>43</sup> These examples correspond to Dick Hebdige’s explanation of subcultural spectacularity as a form of “hiding in the light”: that is, as a way of coping with the gaze that seeks to control the body by turning that very surveillance – the experience of being looked at – into an aggressive act by virtue of drawing attention to oneself through practices of adornment and dress.<sup>44</sup> As a mechanism of social communication, then, tattoos are particularly effective when visible because they draw the attention of others and encourage questions, allowing the tattooed person to guide others’ interpretations of their own body art. Furthermore, this narcissistic penchant for display and discussion emphasizes the tattoo’s status as Bourdieu’s cultural or symbolic capital.

Pierre Bourdieu describes the processes by which “social spaces are written into bodies.”<sup>45</sup> He notes that differences function as distinctive signs and that acts of representation – the act of having oneself tattooed, for example – constitute one form of struggle with the perception of the social world. He notes that symbolic power, partly characterized as the power to create groups, is one of the “profits of recognition.”<sup>46</sup> Symbolic power is achieved in part through the possession of symbolic capital. In other words, the recognition of same-ness between those who are tattooed and the desirable recognition of difference of the tattooed by the non-tattooed individual (that is, the perception of *intentional* deviance or transgressiveness associated with tattooing, especially in its extreme usage<sup>47</sup>) affords social power to the tattooed person whose tattoos function as symbolic capital written, quite literally, “into the body.”<sup>48</sup> This notion is supported by Sullivan’s suggestion that tattoos, in fact, constitute a form of “reiterative performance” whereby one enacts particular *shared* codes and practices (rather than, as many critics and supporters suggest, constituting an intuitive process of the recognition of innate truths about the individual).<sup>49</sup>

Drawing explicitly on Bourdieu’s work, Sarah Thornton develops a notion of *subcultural capital* which is perhaps more conducive to my argument. Like Bourdieu’s model, Thornton’s concept places individuals within complex and multi-dimensional spaces instead of constructing a vertical model of social structure which places groups and individuals in strict hierarchies. However, unlike Bourdieu’s concept, subcultural capital is largely unrestrained by class.

Members of particular subcultural groups tend not to be associated in “any one-to-one way” with a particular economic class (but this is not to imply that class is irrelevant for such individuals).<sup>50</sup> This model corresponds more closely with contemporary extreme body modification communities, in which individuals are not intelligibly marked in accordance with class-specific tastes or values as individuals in Bourdieu’s social groups tend to be. However, where class distinctions tend to be obfuscated in these communities, gender differences are not. This further corresponds with Thornton’s theory, which suggests that gender tends to be a significant social difference along which subcultural capital is typically and systematically aligned.<sup>51</sup> However, what is most significant for this essay’s purposes is Thornton’s observation that while subcultural capital tends to be based upon an assertion of difference and deviance by those who possess it and work to maintain it (a positioning that is often construed as subversive and therefore progressive or anti-hegemonic), the inscription of such practices and viewpoints as *necessarily* progressive is difficult to sustain.<sup>52</sup> So while many may see women’s extreme tattoo practices as overwhelmingly or intuitively progressive (in the sense that they defy dominant standards of beauty and femininity), it may be equally the case that these alternative representations uphold many of the dualisms and assumptions that underpin more traditional Western perspectives of beauty, though they may do so in ways that are less easily read as such.

In demonstrating symbolic power by talking about their tattoos, most people tend to emphasize the meanings behind their tattoos, their reasons for acquiring them, and the experience of having them done. Hewitt notes that an important aspect of tattooing is the use of pain as a form of self-expression. Similarly, Pitts cites Sweetman in her discussion of tattoo practices as “body projects”, and states that the tattooed subject “gain[s]...a sense of accomplishment by enduring pain and healing the body” which allows her to “experience subjectivity ‘to the full’”.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Hewitt also points out that it is through the crossing and blurring of boundaries of the body of what constitutes inside versus outside and through the interaction with blood and sweat that tattoo practice achieves its primary transgressive force.<sup>54</sup> Connected to this is the notion of labour. This is a question of some importance when examining tattoos as a cultural phenomenon. While many may see the bearer of the tattoo as a passive recipient and the artist as a skilled labourer, most members of tattoo communities tend to see tattoos as “earned”.<sup>55</sup> Demerson states that the tattoo process is essential for social perception because “meaning in body modification is associated with the experience.”<sup>56</sup> The voluntary experience of pain is seen here as a form of work that connects the tattooed person to the work of art in the same way that the pre-industrial labourer is connected to

the product through their physical relationship to it. Thus it is partly through this conception of the tattooed individual as an active labourer rather than a passive recipient that we can understand Hewitt's quotation cited at the beginning of this essay, where the process of being tattooed is a "powerful" act of "reclaim[ing] the body".<sup>57</sup> The analogy of the pre-industrial labourer is also useful when considering the implications of flash versus original, self-designed images. All of these factors contribute to a sense of authenticity with regards to an individual's tattoos.

Interestingly, though the tattoo process tends to be a major focus of the personal discourses surrounding body modification, tattooing subculture magazines tend to efface this element most of all. The obfuscation of blood, sweat, pain and labour is the first of many discrepancies between the practices of tattooing amongst the heavily tattooed and the representational tendencies of the media aimed at these same individuals.

Representations of tattoos in Western mainstream media grow ever more pervasive, and it is not uncommon to see tattoos in ads for Guess jeans modeled by celebrities (Pamela Anderson's barbed wire armband tattoo, for example) or represented in television programs (such as *The Simpsons*).<sup>58</sup> In addition to these pop culture representations, tattooing is represented by extreme body modification communities and caters to these communities through specialty websites and magazines. Unlike more popular media such as fashion magazines, which may depict models with single small tattoos (an emergent trend that many extreme 'bod mod' community members greet with concern<sup>59</sup>), these media depict images of heavily tattooed individuals, male and female, and discursively emphasize many of the values of tattoo practice outlined in earlier sections of this essay. Other notable features of this media include the importance placed on custom work and the denigration of flash, the visibility of tattoos as markers of an 'extreme' practice which goes beyond or subverts the mainstream, the labour of both tattoo practitioner and tattooed individual, the celebration of practitioners who are formally trained artists skilled in other 'legitimate' arts, and the legitimation carried out by cross-cultural interaction.

Despite the many commonalities between actual extreme tattoo communities (as represented through ethnographic research) and the values represented by their media, there are also many differences, particularly with regard to the perception, representation and treatment of women. Raymond Williams' model of hegemony, specifically his discussion of the selective process of incorporation, helps explain the presence of tattoo practices within social arenas that bear no connection to the communities of individuals who identify as extreme body modifiers. As Jameson notes, the "scandalous and intolerable external irritant is drawn into the aesthetic process itself and thereby systematically worked over,

‘acted out’ and symbolically neutralized.”<sup>60</sup> This can be understood as paraphrasing a process that Williams sets out as an essential feature of the hegemonic, whereby the dominant incorporates the residual and the emergent through “reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Henri Lefebvre declares: “That which yesterday was reviled today becomes cultural consumer-goods, consumption thus engulfs what was intended to give meaning and direction.”<sup>62</sup> Clearly, this process has been and continues to be a factor in the popular adoption of tattoo practices as well as the appropriation and adaptation of non-Western tattoo motifs and practices by extreme body modifiers. In representing members of these communities, even in contexts where they themselves are the only intended consumers of a media product, many aspects of the tattoo practices on which these communities are based are reinterpreted, diluted and excluded. An example of this dilution or exclusion is the representation (or lack thereof) of the tattoo *process*.

Although academic writers and researchers have found that the process and pain of tattooing constitute a central component of its expressive and identificatory impulse, tattoo magazines such as *Skin & Ink* and *International Tattoo Art* rarely depict images of this process, except for the odd case in which men are depicted having their bodies tattooed. In the magazines I examined there were no images of women in the process of being tattooed, and there were no written accounts of this process by either women or men.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, it is rare for the popular media to represent the tattoo process and even less common that this process is represented in connection with tattooed women.<sup>64</sup> Examples of celebrities *being* tattooed do occasionally enter the mainstream media, usually as promotional tools. New Kid on the Block Donnie Wahlberg, for example, was photographed having his shoulder tattooed in 1991, an attempt to demonstrate his “badness” in order to maintain the loyalty of his aging fan base. Similarly, Steve-O from MTV’s *Jackass* agreed to have his arm tattooed while riding in a jeep on bumpy terrain. His arm is revealed to the camera once the tattoo is ‘complete’ and the sight of his blood and irritated skin remind us of how ‘rebellious’ and ‘crazy’ those *Jackass* guys really are. These kinds of demonstrations are extremely uncommon for women. Women’s tattoos are almost never shown as anything but completed works of art.<sup>65</sup> As noted above, the pain of tattooing constitutes one element of its expressiveness. It may be an empowering process, but a process that is perhaps denied female representation because it draws attention to body boundaries that play an important role in gender formation. It also reminds us (through the intentional transformation of the body) of cultural constructions of the body, sexual desire and gender roles, and thus points to hegemonic processes of gender

formation. By denying this representation, these media exclude elements which are uncomfortable (or, in Jameson's words, "intolerable") for us because they question the dominant norms of femininity.

In considering this effacement of process it is interesting to note that Sanders refers to the process of having oneself tattooed as implicitly sexual.<sup>66</sup> Sullivan also cites early twentieth century perspectives on the tattoo process which saw it as inherently sexual.<sup>67</sup> Sanders notes that popular (mis)conceptions understand tattooing as a process that involves an active person and a passive person, mirroring traditional formulations of heterosexuality where women are perceived as passive and men as active. Thus, in accordance with Thornton's formulation of subcultural capital, tattooing's potential progressiveness cannot be said to be a fixed association or reading. Furthermore, despite its subcultural capital, it may remain culpable in the reinscription of traditional binaries (active / passive, male / female).

The absence of women's tattoos in-process within the magazines analyzed could be interpreted in a number of ways. Discourses of female empowerment are overtly expressed as important to the community of body modifiers who constitute the readership of these magazines. The perceived eroticism of the process itself, particularly when a male tattoo artist performs it on a female subject, can be read as suggesting passivity. This could be seen as reinscribing traditional conceptions of sexuality in terms of a male / active, female / passive dichotomy. In this way, it may be considered offensive to the 'feminist' sensibilities of some readers and / or contributors. Conversely, others may read images of women undergoing the tattooing process (where such an eroticism is perceived) as excessively expressive of women's sexuality. That is, rather than being interpreted as something being 'done to' women, such images might suggest to some an overwhelming expression of female sexual desire that is deviant or subversive.

Feminist accounts of representations of women's bodies have tended to occupy one of two polarized positions. Many theorists, particularly those associated with Second Wave feminism, viewed dominant Western representations of women as objectifying, exotifying and fetishizing. For example, Laura Mulvey discusses the representation of women in film according to a "straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference" that is pervasive and "which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle."<sup>68</sup> The scopophilic impulse (outlined by Freud as a component instinct of sexuality whereby individuals are subjected to a controlling and curious gaze) was clearly at work in the carnival displays of tattooed women in the early twentieth century, and is viewed as the impetus behind popular representations. Mulvey states that in fragmenting the female body and physically positioning female models in

passive, submissive or sexualized ways, media images are coded to convey a sense of “*to-be-looked-at-ness*”.<sup>69</sup>

Many critics of Mulvey’s work have noted the denial of female spectatorial agency and object to the notion that women are inherently restricted by media representations of themselves to a few, very narrow subject positionings. This argument implies that women are able to interpret media representations of femininity in a multitude of creative and subjective ways. Judith Butler notes that “the subject of feminism is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, by negating the possibility of women having positive interpretations or identifications, we may be restraining alternate or variable conceptions of femininity and empowering ways in which women may use these media. While Mulvey’s formulation remains useful in terms of understanding the overt coding of patriarchal images of women within tattoo magazines, it is also important to consider the women who act within the target communities and the ways in which they might negotiate these same images in connection with their own ideals, values and beliefs associated with femininity, tattoo practices and the communities which surround these overlapping identities and practices. Women readers might, for example, be reminded of the empowering process of their own tattooing through the images of other women with tattoos, particularly if the imagery or placement is similar to their own. Though the process is effaced in these representations, it cannot be effaced from the memories of those who have experienced it. Furthermore, women may identify with the few men depicted ‘in-process’ on the basis of the experience itself, rather than failing to identify simply because of a difference of sex or gender.

In contrast to Mulvey’s theory and other theories which view(ed) representations of women as necessarily objectifying and subordinating, feminists associated with more recent movements often view sexually connotative representations of women as appealing to the freedom of sexual expression which was denied women previously. By baring their bodies, women may be seen as taking control over their physical selves and controlling the direction of the gaze. This corresponds to Hebdige’s suggestion that girls participating in subcultures related to sexuality and sexual expression use their bodies through posing and decoration to “turn being looked at into an aggressive act.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, when women who do not perfectly fit within Western heteronormative standards of beauty are depicted (thin, white, large breasts, long blond hair, flawless skin, etc.), such representations are frequently seen from this viewpoint as automatically progressive because restrictive conventions of femininity are being denied or subverted. This perspective is very common in contemporary discourse on women and tattoos that celebrate the practice of tattooing and the representation of

tattooed women as inherently progressive. Ruth Barnes and Joanne Eicher assert that the alteration of visually gendered cues is an essential feminist project.<sup>72</sup> Citing Barnes and Eicher, Forbis observes that it is “important ... [to] creat[e] alternative visual images that don’t subscribe to the standard.”<sup>73</sup> Tattooing the body disrupts the ideal of flawless skin and is thus seen as one such alternative. Similarly, Christine Braunberger argues that by “making one’s body into the seductive and scary and strange combination that is monster beauty... [t]attooed women [can] revel in their freakiness, enjoy the act of display, and delight in the tease of their tales.”<sup>74</sup> Pitts explains more explicitly:

Proponents stress how body modification has subversive potential, particularly for women, whose bodies are so often pressured by cultural norms of beauty or are the victims of sexual or physical abuse. In these cases, they argue, women can reclaim their bodies from physical or symbolic victimization by creatively and ritually modifying them. Piercing, branding, scarification, heavy tattooing, and the like challenge conventional beauty ideals...<sup>75</sup>

In relation to tattooing and other forms of ‘bod mod’, this type of interpretation is often espoused by proponents of the movement known as “Modern Primitivism”, a subset of the larger extreme body modification subculture.<sup>76</sup> This movement tends to be the most extreme in terms of its conception of body modification as inherently progressive and linked to ‘natural’ expressions of personal identity.

The representations of women found in *Skin & Ink* and *International Tattoo Art* can quite easily be interpreted according to either (or both) of these perspectives, depending on the desires, intentions and cultural positioning of the reader. Sullivan’s work relies on ethical theory to situate her claims of contingency as integral to ‘reading’ tattoos. She notes that “whilst the concern of ethics is most often thought to be moral principles and judgments, it is nevertheless also to do with location, position, and place.”<sup>77</sup> She quotes Rosalyn Diprose, who suggests that ethics “is about being positioned by and taking a position in relation to others.”<sup>78</sup> This discussion and an exploration of Foucault’s conception of power / knowledge lead to an understanding of the tattooed self (as well as those who look upon the tattooed individual) as unable to extricate herself from within the matrices of power and discourse that surround us all. Essentially, we can only ever ‘read’ tattoos, or representations of tattoos, through the discourses available to us. This does not mean that we cannot see tattoos and / or representations of women’s tattooed bodies as empowering or subversive, nor does it mean that we can see them as necessarily or unproblematically so.

*Skin & Ink* and *International Tattoo Art* are intended for both men and women in Western tattooing communities and do not make any overt claims as to an erotic

or pornographic function. In the case of *Skin & Ink*, however, such a function is implied at the level of political economy. Until recently the magazine was published by Larry Flint Publications, a company best known for its pornographic publications (*Hustler* and *Barely Legal*, for example), and was bought by another pornography publisher, Magna Publishing Group (known for their magazines *Swank* and *Ripe*). Although these companies publish other magazines not specifically deemed pornographic, they *do* restrict themselves to publications discursively aimed at Western heterosexual males in particular (extreme skate magazine *Big Brother*, for example, is published by LFP and *Sports Preview* is published by Magna).

Within the magazines themselves many strategies are utilized to downplay any overt hetero-male focus and the potentially pornographic function of much of their content. For example, women are employed as writers for these magazines and are foregrounded in features that depict or discuss the working environment behind the scenes.<sup>79</sup> Also, pieces about female tattoo artists are occasionally featured in an attempt to represent the women who labour within these communities as artists and community figureheads.<sup>80</sup> While these strategies may be read as empowering for female readers, these magazines depict women in ways which are ambiguous and cannot be solely understood as coming from feminist perspectives (such as the view that tattoos on women's bodies inherently contradict or subvert traditional beauty standards).

Both *Skin & Ink* and *International Tattoo Art* almost always feature women on their covers. Of the eighty-two magazine covers I examined, only ten featured men alone on the cover (these men had notably 'cross-cultural' tattoos; three others featured a man and a woman together in a romantic pose). All of the women photographed for these covers are young, thin and generally have large breasts (often the models are bare-chested, and use their hands to cover their nipples). Their faces are never tattooed. Many of the poses are reminiscent of pornography cover art (particularly 'high class' or 'gentlemen's' porn such as *Playboy*), and are only significantly differentiated by the presence of large areas of tattooed skin. These approaches to posing are followed through in the inner pages of the magazines.

Clearly, magazines about tattoos must reveal bodies and skin. This is true for both the men and women whose photos are featured. In these magazines, the male tattoo models never smile. Their pecs are flexed, their arms are folded across their chests or behind their backs, or else their hands are planted firmly on their hips, and they look directly at the camera.<sup>81</sup> Female models, on the other hand, point their chins down so that their eyes look up at the camera (that is, at the reader), they hold their hands together at the wrists, coyly leaning forward to show off

their cleavage (often justified by the presence of tattoos on the breasts), or press their hands against their bare breasts. The women smile or look wide-eyed as they pull down their pants to reveal tattoos on the pelvic bone. Visual representations of normatively attractive women are also incorporated into the tattoos themselves as many of the male models sport artwork which features sexualized 'pin-up' girl imagery.

While many of the female models depicted on the inside pages are not necessarily *idealized* in terms of popular conceptions of beauty (i.e. they may be slightly heavier than models in traditional magazines or have small breasts in comparison to porn stars), they continue to fit general categories of standardized Western beauty conventions in terms of size, facial features and age. In addition, focus remains on fetishized parts of the body such as the breasts, hips or lower abdomen / pelvic bone. The men, however, tend to be outside popular conceptions of the ideal male form to a much greater extent (i.e. they are often extremely over- or underweight and many of them are middle-aged or older). This, too, is reminiscent of heterosexual pornographic conventions where women are exaggerated, hyper-real versions of femininity in opposition to 'real-looking' guys (the best known and most extreme example of this is Ron Jeremy, possibly the world's most famous heterosexual male porn star, also known as The Hedgehog for his short, fat, hairy stature).

The strategic focus of photographic representations of tattoos located on parts of the body traditionally fetishized in Western representations of feminine beauty may encourage a sexualized connotative effect within a reader's interpretations. One could read these images in terms of Braunberger's statement: "Even here at this permeable limit of body aesthetics, women are expected to maintain their bodies within larger social codes of size and shape."<sup>82</sup> In addition, as Forbis notes, the conventions of portrait photography in Western media possibly influence choices made by both the photographers and the models themselves during the shooting process, even if only subconsciously.<sup>83</sup> However, while it may be easy to interpret the women depicted (as well as the tattoos themselves) as fetishized in Mulvey's terms, an understanding of Sullivan's approach prevents this claim from being made too simplistically.

The women represented in these ways are active members of the tattooing community by virtue of their heavily tattooed bodies, their participation in community events (such as the Texas Tattoo Jam) and their familiarity with the 'codes' of the social group. In spite of this, they are often visually depicted in sexualized and fetishized ways that relegate them to the status of passive objects. This form of representation (i.e. the traditional, heteronormative qualities of their photographs), coupled with the effacement of female labour (i.e. the lack of images

of women experiencing the pain and pleasure of the tattoo process), could encourage a reading of these magazines as simple attempts to interpolate male members as active participants, ignoring the identificatory needs of female members of these communities. Furthermore, in this sort of formulation the tattoos themselves are often read as fetish objects. An extreme example of this type of interpretation is figured in Braunberger's work, which demonstrates that those who denounce tattooing on feminist grounds do so because they perceive tattoos as "symbol(s) of bodily excess."

When a woman's body is a sex object, a tattooed woman's body is a lascivious sex object; when a woman's body is nature, a tattooed woman's body is primitive; when a woman's body is spectacle, a tattooed woman's body is a show. It would seem that whatever manifold meanings women attach to their tattoos are culturally written over to simply and only punctuate meanings already attached to their bodies within a larger cultural domain.<sup>84</sup>

However, it is unlikely that this reading would be so uniform and unequivocal for all individuals, male and female, who read (and are represented in) these magazines. Textual features of these magazines do indicate a female readership that is active and that regards these publications in a positive, non-oppressive light. Letters to the editor, for example, tend to be submitted by both men and women. In the two magazines discussed here, women had submitted approximately one third of the letters. These letters indicate their authors' loyalty to the magazine as an extension of their community and emphasize the "first-class information" within, as well as the "enthusiasm" and "good attitude" of the writers. The talents of specific tattoo artists are celebrated (particularly in response to female tattoo artists and their work) and submissions of personal artwork are included. One letter is actually a poem entitled "Ode to a Tattoo" which witnesses the author's dedication to protecting her new tattoos, her excitement about the beginning of her "life with inked beauty", and her pride and confidence in response to critiques of tattooing that focus on the ageing body.<sup>85</sup> Several women also send in questions: one inquires about industry standards and tattooing pregnant women. Most of the letters from male readers focus on similar issues, but a significant number of these also mention the sexual appeal of cover models, and some request more images that focus on tattoos on certain body parts considered exceptionally 'beautiful'. These two types of letters are equally dominant, suggesting that male readers interpret the magazines in differing ways – there is no one 'masculine' or 'male' reading.

These women's letters demonstrate that tattoo magazines can be (and are) interpreted in multiple and complex ways by their female readership. The influence of women in the magazines through active participation as writers,

administrators and art staff also attests to the variety of subjective ways in which such publications are perceived. While men hold the highest-ranking positions and the majority of the writers are male, a female presence is visible since women do work as art directors, copy editors, writers and sales managers for these magazines. While many of the female writers are assigned stories that focus on male talent (the majority of stories overall, due largely to the high ratio of men to women working as tattoo artists), they often acknowledge their own gender and / or sexuality within their writing (by commenting, for example, on the physical / sexual appeal of the men with whom they interact).<sup>86</sup> This could be understood as a reversal of the gender hierarchy which, Butler declares, stems from the Western philosophical tradition and is produced, maintained and rationalized by a masculine / mind, feminine / body binary framework.<sup>87</sup> It also potentially demonstrates an openness to the expression of female sexuality that many female readers may find extremely empowering. Other female writers deliberately employ what might be typically considered masculine discourse, often leading to a sense of surprise for the reader upon realizing that the author is in fact female.<sup>88</sup> In pointing out the reader's own assumptions about gender, it is possible for these discursive approaches to effect a denaturalization which can, according to Butler, have a subversive function. However, Butler also notes that in cases where this denaturalization occurs without being problematized, an augmentation, rather than subversion, of the heterosexual hegemony may in fact be the result in that it reassures readers of their own political righteousness and creates an illusion of equality and / or subversion.<sup>89</sup> Clearly, none of these issues are strictly delineated, supporting Sullivan's perspective that there is no straightforward relationship between expression and reception<sup>90</sup> (if, in fact, there can even be said to be a straightforward expressive *intention* in the mind of those who write, pose and shoot for these magazines).

Finally, while the photographs of women within these magazines may fit stereotypical ideas of heteronormative Western conceptions and representations of femininity to a significant extent (as denounced by Second Wave feminist theorists, like Mulvey), this does not mean that they are not pleasurable for the women whose bodies are featured in them, or for the women who consume them. The implication that only men gain pleasure from images of female bodies is very narrow in terms of an understanding of human sexuality in general. Although the lack of diversity of body types inevitably means that some women are excluded from representation as well as pleasurable consumption (which is undoubtedly problematic), to denounce the representations available through these magazines also excludes some women. The women who do gain pleasure from such images –

whether by posing for them, or looking at them – should not be denied such pleasure simply because it does not fit yet another standard of what ‘should’ be pleasurable or acceptable for women. Such rigid parameters represent yet another means of relegating certain types of femininity or feminine expression to the domain of the ‘bad woman’.

In the mainstreaming of tattoo practices formerly considered deviant or immoral we can identify the hegemonic process at work as it selectively incorporates certain elements of cultural practice while continuing to exclude others. That is, by the popular acceptance of certain kinds of tattooing – practices which involve one or two small, relatively hidden pieces – the general public experiences increased tolerance as a feature of contemporary life in the West. This popularization means that those who wish to remain marginal have to go further, tattooing larger areas of their bodies in order to be considered exceptional or subversive by virtue of their tattoos. The presence of individuals and communities of individuals who are heavily tattooed undermines the perceived openness of popular culture by pointing out our continuing anxiety about the practice of tattooing in certain non-sanctioned forms. Of course, these communities also operate within the larger culture, and the values and beliefs that are privileged by them are negotiated through the same processes. They are no more able to extricate themselves from the matrices of power and knowledge than are individuals who identify with what might be referred to as the mainstream. Certain traditions or aspects of traditions may be revered here while others, such as biker tattoos and jailhouse tattoos, are discredited. Individuals operating within these communities demonstrate a certain degree of gender neutrality from the perspective of process and lived experience (that is, the process remains the same for both women and men, and the experience of being tattooed and living with tattoos is expressed in non-gendered terms). The media representations of and for these communities complicate the ideals of gender equality expressed in literal terms elsewhere (i.e. in conversation and practice). In this light, Western extreme tattoo communities may support Jameson’s contention that countercultural forms “are somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part since they can achieve no distance from it.”<sup>91</sup> However, this is not to suggest that they can have no subversive effects. It is of the utmost importance, I hope this paper has shown, to consider representations of tattoos – and women’s tattoos specifically – in terms of a multiplicity of contingent and fluid readings that are enacted by individuals in individual contexts, interconnected and mutually informed as many of these may be.

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- <sup>1</sup> Kim Hewitt, *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1997), 103.
- <sup>2</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 750.
- <sup>3</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Hiding In The Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988), 35.
- <sup>4</sup> Melissa M. Forbis, "'This is My Body': Gender, Tattooing, and Resistance in the United States," MA thesis (Temple University, May 1994 [accessed 29 November 2004]), 13. Available from <http://astro.temple.edu/~ruby/wava/forbis/forbis-title>.
- <sup>5</sup> Victoria Pitts, *In The Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Sarah Thornton, "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital," in *The Subcultures Reader*, Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds. (London: Routledge, 1997), 202.
- <sup>7</sup> Thornton, 203.
- <sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Demerson, "After the Pain, Beauty Remains: Identity and Aesthetics of Body Modification in Montreal," MA thesis (Montreal: Concordia University, 2001), 64.
- <sup>9</sup> Nikki Sullivan, *Tattooed Bodies: Subjectivity, Textuality, Ethics, and Pleasure* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Demerson, 67.
- <sup>11</sup> Paul Sweetman, "Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self? Body Modification, Fashion and Identity," in *Body Modification*, Mike Featherstone, ed. (London: Sage, 2000), 55.
- <sup>12</sup> Pitts, 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Michael Thevoz, *The Painted Body* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 20; Demerson, 7; Pitts, 5; Sullivan, 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Demerson, 7-8.
- <sup>15</sup> Clinton R. Sanders, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Demerson, 7.
- <sup>17</sup> It is also worth noting that certain types of tattooing have been associated with the idea of branding rather than adornment. The Nazi tattooing of Jews, for instance, is an example of tattoos as symbols of punishment, ownership and incarceration.
- <sup>18</sup> Sanders, 40.
- <sup>19</sup> Pitts, 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Margot Mifflin, *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo* (New York: Juno, 1997), 33; Demerson, 8.
- <sup>21</sup> Pitts, 17; Sullivan, 13.
- <sup>22</sup> Mifflin, 18.
- <sup>23</sup> Forbis, 13. For a discussion of the sexual exotification of tattooed 'others' in early ethnographic photography, see also Christian Klesse, "'Modern Primitivism': Non-Mainstream Body Modification and Racialized Representation," in *Body Modification*, Mike Featherstone, ed. (London: Sage, 2000), 26.
- <sup>24</sup> J. Briggs, "Tattooing," in *The Medical Times* 87 (1958): 1030-1039; quoted in Sanders, 37.
- <sup>25</sup> Pitts, 3.
- <sup>26</sup> Demerson, 9; Hewitt, 97, 100 and 5; Sanders, 19.
- <sup>27</sup> Mark Blanchard, "Post-bourgeois Tattoo: Reflections on Skin Writing in Late Capitalist Societies," *Visual Anthropology Review* 7.2 (1991): 16. See also Marcia Tucker, "Tattoo: The State of the Art," *Artforum* (May 1981): 42-47.
- <sup>28</sup> Demerson, 62; Sanders, 19.
- <sup>29</sup> Demerson, 68.
- <sup>30</sup> Demerson, 64-65; Sanders, 47-48.
- <sup>31</sup> Demerson, 64.
- <sup>32</sup> Demerson, 59.
- <sup>33</sup> Demerson, 61; Sullivan, 79.
- <sup>34</sup> Demerson, 3. See also Samuel M. Steward, *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors and Street-Corner Punks, 1950-1965* (New York: Haworth, 1990) and Albert Parry, *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art as Practiced Among the Natives of the United States* (1933; repr., New York: Collier, 1971).
- <sup>35</sup> See Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 53-92.
- <sup>36</sup> Demerson, 172.
- <sup>37</sup> Demerson, 70.
- <sup>38</sup> Sanders, 43.

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- <sup>39</sup> Jameson, 61.
- <sup>40</sup> Jameson, 60.
- <sup>41</sup> Sweetman, 63.
- <sup>42</sup> Hewitt, 100-101.
- <sup>43</sup> Demerson, 158, 50.
- <sup>44</sup> Hebdige, 29.
- <sup>45</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *In Other Words* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 128.
- <sup>46</sup> Bourdieu, 128.
- <sup>47</sup> Sweetman, 56.
- <sup>48</sup> Bourdieu, 128.
- <sup>49</sup> Sullivan, 25.
- <sup>50</sup> Thornton, 202-203.
- <sup>51</sup> Thornton, 204.
- <sup>52</sup> Thornton, 209.
- <sup>53</sup> Pitts, 32.
- <sup>54</sup> Hewitt, 104. See also Parry, 2 and Steward, 41-42.
- <sup>55</sup> Demerson, 69.
- <sup>56</sup> Demerson, 168.
- <sup>57</sup> Hewitt, 103.
- <sup>58</sup> Sweetman, 52.
- <sup>59</sup> A number of Forbis' respondents "expressed dismay that tattooed women in fashion magazines are viewed only as 'sexy' and said they hope this doesn't cause people to treat them more sexually." Forbis, 86.
- <sup>60</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Signatures of the Visible* (1979; repr., New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.
- <sup>61</sup> Raymond Williams, "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent," *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 123.
- <sup>62</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Sacha Rabinovitch, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); quoted in Dick Hebdige, "Subculture: the Meaning of Style," in *The Subcultural Reader*, Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds. (London: Routledge, 1997), 131.
- <sup>63</sup> The magazines examined were inclusive runs of the monthly publication *International Tattoo Art* (New York: Mavety Media Group, January 1999-December 2004) and *Skin & Ink: The Tattoo Magazine* (New York: Fox Run Publications, March 2002-November 2004).
- <sup>64</sup> Historically this was not necessarily the case. Nineteenth century tattooed women who performed in carnival 'freak shows' often told tales of their tattoo process, usually in terms of having been subjected to it by force. These verbal and textual accounts of 'tattoo rape' allowed for a gap between the (titillating) notion of tattooed women as 'bad girls' and the conception of such women as victims or 'good girls'. See Mifflin, 18-20, and Christine Braunberger, "Revolting Bodies: The Monster Beauty of Tattooed Women," *NWSA Journal* 12.2 (Summer 2000 [accessed 29 November 2004]). Available from <http://iupjournals.org/nwsa/nws12-2.html>.
- <sup>65</sup> On the other hand, some academic texts *do* depict other forms of body modification – such as breast implants – if not in process, at least shortly after the completion of the process when sutures and bruising remain visible. See Pitts, chapter 3 (photo inserts). However, I have not seen any media representations of the modification of women's bodies in process (or of women's bodies that bear the evidence of process, such as bruising, bleeding or sutures) outside of academic texts, and none where tattoos specifically are shown in process on women's bodies, even in academic texts.
- <sup>66</sup> Sanders, 38. See also Steward, 41-42.
- <sup>67</sup> Sullivan, 15.
- <sup>68</sup> Mulvey, 746.
- <sup>69</sup> Mulvey, 750.
- <sup>70</sup> Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Simon During ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), 342.
- <sup>71</sup> Hebdige, 29.
- <sup>72</sup> See Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher, eds., *Dress & Gender: Making and Meaning* (Providence, Rhode Island: Berg, 1992).
- <sup>73</sup> Forbis, 21.
- <sup>74</sup> Braunberger, n.p.
- <sup>75</sup> Pitts, 15.
- <sup>76</sup> For a lengthy discussion and criticism of Modern Primitivism see Klesse, 15-38.
- <sup>77</sup> Sullivan, 50.
- <sup>78</sup> Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 1994); quoted in Sullivan, 50.

<sup>79</sup> See Holly Tuesday, "Backstage at *Skin & Ink*," *Skin & Ink: The Tattoo Magazine* 22 (January 2004): 50-57.

<sup>80</sup> See Tim Coleman, "Kari Barbra Celebrates 20 Years," *Skin & Ink* 22 (January 2004) and Miz Jo-d, "Luang Por Bun, Chaang, Falang, Mahouts and Sak Yan: Tattoos from Phuket to Chiang Mai," *International Tattoo Art* 23 (February 2004): 70-77.

<sup>81</sup> At this point it seems prudent to note that an analysis of the potentially homoerotic nature of these depictions of men – as well as the magazines' representations of the fetishized, eroticized (and sometimes non-Western) male body – would certainly be feasible and informative. However, this lies beyond the scope and concern of this essay.

<sup>82</sup> Braunberger, n.p.

<sup>83</sup> Forbis, 91.

<sup>84</sup> Braunberger, n.p.

<sup>85</sup> "Letters," *Skin & Ink* 22 (January 2004): 8-9.

<sup>86</sup> See Saralynne Lowrey Precht, "That Rock Poster Guy: L.A.'s Brian Ewing," *Skin & Ink* 22 (January 2004): 14.

<sup>87</sup> Butler, 350.

<sup>88</sup> See Sherri Cullison, "Hell City," *International Tattoo Art* (February 2004): 14.

<sup>89</sup> Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Identity: A Reader*, Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman, eds. (London: Sage, 2000), 110.

<sup>90</sup> See Sullivan, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Jameson, "Postmodernism," 87.