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THE RELATIONSHIP OF TATTOOS TO PERSONALITY DISORDERS

RICHARD S. POST

The author is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Institute of Police Science and Administration, Wisconsin State University at Platteville. He was formerly an Instructor at the School of Police Administration and Public Safety, Michigan State University, serving as an Assistant Project Director on a Training Grant and management consultant on a Planning and Research Grant both from the U. S. Department of Justice, OLEA. He has served with the military police and as a civilian investigator and research assistant for the Department of Army. The author has both a bachelor and master's degree in police administration from Michigan State University and is currently working towards a Ph.D.

This article represents a graduate paper prepared for a seminar in deviant behavior in the School of Police Administration and Public Safety, Michigan State University (1965). It contains the hypothesis that the presence of ornamental body tattoos could serve to indicate the presence of personality disorders which could manifest themselves in criminal behavior. The need for more research in this area is stressed.

The tattoo, or some form of bodily marking, has always held a certain fascination for people in many cultures. The fact that certain people in a culture find it necessary or desirable to obtain such markings while others do not seems to lead to the conclusion that there must be some factor, or factors, which makes this embellishment desirable. Taken in general perspective, tattooing appears to be a subcultural practice found in any population category (class, occupation, sex, age, etc.) rather than as an established trait uniformly characteristic of a whole society.¹

THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this paper is to show that the presence of a tattoo, or tattoos, can serve to indicate the presence of a personality disorder which could lead to, or is characterized by, behavior which deviates from contemporary social norms. The value of the establishment of a correlation between the presence of a tattoo and social deviancy would be most beneficial in that it could be a readily discernible mark of predisposition toward such conduct. This is not to imply that Lombroso's feeling that the presence of a tattoo regardless of how simple is a sign of atavism,² but rather that the presence of the tattoo indicates that there was, or is, a personality disorder which manifested itself in the tattoo, and which could again appear in socially deviant behavior. The type of tattooing referred to is strictly limited to ornamental varieties.

¹ J. H. Burma, *Self-Tattooing Among Delinquents: A Research Note*, 43 SOCIOLOGICAL & SOC. RESEARCH 341 (1959).

² C. LOMBROSO & W. FERRERO, *THE FEMALE OFFENDER* 124 (1915).

The medical profession, particularly in the field of plastic surgery, has used tattooing to an extent not generally appreciated. Quite often, livid facial scars can be 'toned down' by tattooing the area with flesh colored pigment being blended into the scars. Burn areas on men frequently fail to produce a beard growth after healing. These areas can have false beard stubble tattooed into them. In one case of record, a gentleman whose hair was thinning had lines of 'hair' tattooed onto his scalp. In numerous cases, false eyebrows have been tattooed, and lip coloring has been permanently applied in the same manner.³ A tropical disease quite common in Mexico leaves its victims outstandingly marked by chalk white blotches on their skin. A major part of the post cure therapy for this disease is the blending of the blotched areas to the balance of the skin by tattooing. It has been found that the tattooing process is invaluable in rehabilitating the recovered victims of the disease. Medical uses of tattooing for psychological or cosmetic reasons are excluded from consideration in this paper. However it should be noted that while cosmetic tattooing has a psychological benefit to the person, the same reasoning might be applied to a person with a personality disorder giving him a certain psychological benefit from his tattoo.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Personality Disorder

"It is characterized by developmental defects or pathological trends in the personality structure with minimal subjective anxiety, and

³ J. B. Kenmerer, *Tattoo*, 88 AM. MERCURY 92 (1959).

little or no sense of distress. In most instances, the disorder is manifested by a lifelong pattern of action or behavior, rather than by mental or emotional symptoms."⁴

Tattoo

The word "Tattoo" seems to have had its origin in the writings of Captain Cook, recording his travels in the south seas, and particularly in his book "The Voyage in H. M. Bark Endeavor" published in 1771. In this book Captain Cook referred to a process of scarification common to Tahitian men. He wrote that the process was known as "Tattaw," and described it as follows:

"They stain their bodies by indentings, or pricking the skin with small instruments made of bone, cut into short teeth; which indentings they fill up with dark blue or blacking mixture prepared from the smoke of an oily nut This operation, which is called by the natives 'tattaw', leaves an indelible mark on the skin. It is usually performed when they are about ten or twelve years of age, and on different parts of the body."⁵

It is interesting to note that the word was adopted and has survived in all major European languages, being *Tatowirung* in German; *Tatouage* in French; and *Tatuaggio* in Italian.

Archeological history has recorded that tattooing, or some form of bodily marking dates back to 12,000 B.C., proof being found in excavations dated to this period.⁶ Tattooing by the introduction of dyes or pigments into the skin by puncture was known in ancient Egypt between 4,000 and 2,000 B.C. Later variations on bodily marking included a process known as scarification, which was practiced by African tribal warriors. This method involved keeping open the wounds received in tribal warfare and introducing colored pigments or wood ash into these wounds. The result would be a scar which would be horrifying to most cultures today, but which was a mark of bravery to the warrior; identifying him as a survivor of warfare, and testifying to his stamina and ability to withstand pain. In fact, even today in some lower socioeconomic groups, the obtaining of a

tattoo with the limited amount of pain involved, is considered a sign of masculinity.

Strong religious and superstitious significance is found in certain body markings in different parts of the world today. Mohammedan women of Yugoslavia, for example, mark their foreheads with a cross, as a protection against evil. In certain seafaring circles it is believed that a rooster tattooed on one foot and a pig on the other will protect the person so marked against death by drowning. In long past years the influence of the Roman Catholic Church was directed against the practice of tattooing. Pope Hadrian I, at the Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 787, banned the practice of tattooing among Catholics, calling the practice savage and barbaric.⁷ Exactly how long the ban held effective is not clearly recorded, but it is indicated that the soldiers in the crusades were rarely if ever tattooed.

Tattooing

We know for certain that the "art" of tattooing as practiced today, no longer involves the pain which accompanied the primitive methods. Today the tattoo artist works with an electric needle which injects the dyes into the skin to a depth of approximately $\frac{1}{164}$ of an inch, at the rate of 2,000 to 4,000 injections per minute. A pointed needle is used for outlining the design, and a broader tip called a shader is used to fill in the large areas of the design. Although present day tattooing does not present the danger of infection which most certainly accompanied the scarification process, certain diseases have been traced directly to unsanitary tattooing practices. The Health Department of the City of New York was obliged to close every tattoo parlor in that city in 1961 when a number of cases of viral-hepatitis were traced directly to the parlors. In addition to viral-hepatitis, it has been recorded that in Philadelphia an epidemic of syphilis was attributed to one particular tattooer.⁸ Leprosy has also been transmitted through tattooing.⁹

The professional tattooer in the United States today rarely works freehand in the applying of the design. It has been estimated that less than one design in 300 is done freehand; this of course excludes initials, block lettering, and an occasional word, name, or phrase done in script. Tattoo supply houses sell plastic or celluloid stencils in more than

⁴ S. M. Ferguson-Rayport, R. M. Griffith & E. W. Straus, *The Psychiatric Significance of Tattoos*, 29 *PSYCHIATRIC Q* 116 (1955).

⁵ G. BURCHETT & P. LEIGHTON, *MEMOIRS OF A TATTOOIST* 19, (1958).

⁶ *Id.* at 15.

⁷ *Id.* at 17.

⁸ J. F. Briggs, *Tattooing*, 87 *MED. TIMES* 1030 (1958).

⁹ *Id.* at 1038.

two thousand popular designs. In the application of a tattoo the area to be tattooed is shaved, and sometimes scrubbed. The stencil is then placed against the skin and the design is outlined with the electric needle, using the liner attachment. After allowing the outline to dry, the design colors are filled in using the shader attachment. The age of tattoos can be estimated with an appreciable degree of accuracy, but much time and practice is required to learn this skill.

Much of the tattooing done upon orientals, by orientals, particularly in Japan, shows true artistic quality. The practice of tattooing in Japan carries considerable status, and it is not uncommon to find heavily tattooed persons who bequeath their entire skin to be mounted and displayed after their death. A number of these human skins, preserved and mounted on plaster manikins are to be found on exhibit at the Imperial University in Tokyo. Again this type of definite cultural practice is not to be considered in the paper, but is merely mentioned to provide necessary background information on tattooing.

"Self" and Institutional Tattoos

These are tattoos which are inflicted upon persons by themselves, or by another amateur. This is very common in American penal institutions. The designs are quite easily spotted. They consist of outline designs only, with no colors or shading used. The methods employed in applying these tattoos are crude, usually a sewing needle, a straight pin, or the corner of a safety razor blade is used to introduce the coloring into the skin. The coloring consists of writing or laundry inks available in the institutions, or mixtures of ground pencil lead, cigarette ashes, the ashes of burned paper or similar substances. This powder is mixed with water or spittle to make an ink. The process quite frequently produces low grade infections, which the prisoner is reluctant to report because of regulations forbidding such practices at most institutions.

DISCUSSION

There are three very broad categories into which all tattoos may be placed.

1. Mnemonic devices
2. Erotic or decorative
3. Those with philosophical significance.¹⁰

¹⁰ W. H. Haines & Arthur V. Huffman, *Tattooing Found in a Prison Environment*, 4 J. SOC. THERAPY 107 (1958).

However, for a more accurate description of tattoos a more precise system of classification was established in 1953.¹¹

Classification of Tattoos

1. Identification tattoos
 - a. Emblems
Various branches of service, anchors
 - b. Personal data
Initials or name, social security number
 - c. Diary
Specific events in life, with or without dates
2. Love tattoos
 - a. Idealized love
Head of a woman in flower or halfmoon, a woman draped in a flag
 - b. "Mother"
Heart, flower, etc., inscribed with "Mother"
 - c. Sentimental
Girl's name, hearts, flowers, hands clasped
 - d. Pornographic
Nudes: without or without snakes, daggers, peacocks, scarves, bathing suits, and those which present an obscene view to the patient and a more acceptable pose when inverted for the viewer
3. Bombastic and pseudoheroic tattoos
Skull and crossbones; dagger with "Death before Dishonor"; dagger through the skin; "Man's Ruin" as a caption for a woman in a wine glass; dragon, panther, tiger
4. Inveighing fate
Card with "13"; horse shoe with "Good Luck"; "Good Luck, Hard Luck"; "Friday the 13th"; a spade (playing card figure)
5. Religious and commemorative
Cross: "In Memory of . . ." Inscription about Jesus, etc.
6. Private symbols
Of significance limited to wearer
7. Miscellaneous
Animals and birds: horse's head, pig, rooster, squirrel, bat, bluebird, butterfly. Flowers: roses.
Many unscientific type lay reports on tattooing suggest the following six points:

¹¹ Ferguson-Rayport, *supra* note 4, at 118.

1. One person in ten has a tattoo.
2. Three to five times as many men as women have tattoos.
3. The basic motivation is exhibitionism.
4. Their frequency rises in periods of crises, large-scale movements, the "Holiday Spirit".
5. When drinking.
6. One third of tattooist's work involves requests to erase, cover, or clean-up existing tattoos.¹²

Motivating Factors

While reports of this type are of value for establishing general trends they do not bring out the more important aspects of the subject. What is the significance of a tattoo—any tattoo—to the person obtaining one? Why did he get the tattoo and what does it mean to him? There appear to be two or three schools of thought on this subject, depending upon your prejudices, which attempt to classify the motivation of the act of being tattooed:

1. The symbolism of the act.
2. The exhibitionist element.
3. The masochistic element.¹³

Investigations conducted in a Massachusetts State Hospital into sex-symbolism, revealed that all persons evaluated indicated that tattooing represented the sexual act to them. The piercing of the skin, insertion of the needle, and the depositing of a fluid in the skin represented the coital act. This theory was further by the assumption that like the sexual act tattooing requires both an active and passive participant and further that the act has a combination of both pleasure and pain.¹⁴ It is known that prostitutes frequently become tattooed, having found that designs sexually stimulate certain clients. Tattoos on the breasts and genitals are not uncommon. The element of masochism would appear to be present in cases of tattooed genitalia since the process is extremely painful.

Pseudo-masculinity or exhibitionism has also been noted as an underlying drive in certain types of tattoos, particularly in tattooed genitalia. A subject arrested by the Cincinnati, Ohio Police Department is an interesting example. This subject had the words 'Fluid Drive' and a snake tattooed on his penis. Although he overtly described himself

as a ladies' man, subsequent questioning by a psychiatrist revealed that he allowed himself no reasonable degree of intimacy with women; and in fact had serious doubts about his masculinity. The tattoos noted were painful expressions meant to convince himself and others that he possessed an exceptionally high degree of masculinity and virility.

In Chicago a subject under arrest for burglary and grand larceny was found to have the words LOVE and HATE tattooed across the fingers of both hands between the first and second joints. Between the second joints and the knuckles he was tattooed with the phrase LETS F---. This second phrase is arranged so that it can be read only when the fingers are interlocked. The subject was asked why he chose this particular phrase, but he could give no reason stating that he didn't know. This white male subject was 27 years old and had spent five years in various prisons. It was while he was in an Army Disciplinary Barracks awaiting a court martial that he acquired the above described tattoos.

Dr. John Briggs, a person who has done considerable work with tattoos has stated that the tattoo "TRUE LOVE," spread across the fingers of both hands almost certainly indicates that the bearer is a homosexual. Similarly there is much evidence to support the theory that the presence of pornographic tattoos and nudes are meant to curtain homosexual interests or doubts of masculinity. In fact a striking number of the research results in the area of tattoos indicate that there is a high percentage of sexual abnormality connected with the practice of being tattooed. Further, the theory has been forwarded that many tattoo artists are homosexuals, latent or overt, who have chosen this occupation because it puts them in almost constant close proximity to the male body, which they can feel, stroke, and fondle without arousing suspicion.

Navy Research Findings

The United States Navy indicated that tattoos might have definite psychological implications as the result of extensive research conducted by the Naval Research Laboratory at New London, Connecticut in 1959. The Navy was doubtlessly motivated by a desire to exclude psychological misfits from the highly selective submarine service and therefore subjected submarine school volunteers to attitude and psychological testing. The

¹² Burma, *supra* note 1, 341.

¹³ A. Parry, *Tattooing Among Prostitutes and Pervers*, 3 PSYCHOANALYTIC Q. 475 (1934).

¹⁴ Haines, *supra* note 10, at 109.

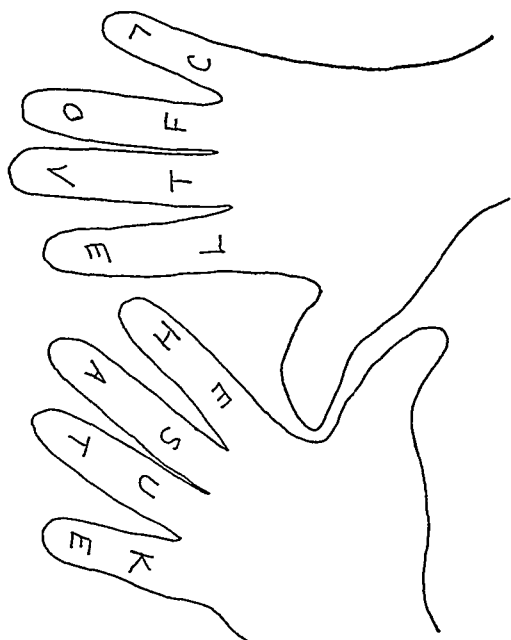


FIGURE 1

One of many bizzare tattoo patterns which indicate the presence of a disordered personality. The letters between the second joint and knuckles are meant to be read with the fingers interlocked.

nature of the duties in this particular branch of the Navy are such that only exceptionally well adjusted men can be trained. Lieutenant Youniss conducted his study on 648 men and made some significant findings:

"It was found that subjects with multiple tattoos give test indications of greater personal maladjustment than do subjects without tattoos or with only one tattoo. Again, it was found that the mean PIB score (General Intelligence) of the one tattoo group did not differ significantly from that of the non-tattooed group. . . . The admission of a desire for future tattoos was found to be a significant variable in comparing the level of personal adjustment within both the tattooed and non-tattooed groups. Within both groups it was found that subjects desiring future tattoos obtain scores higher in the direction of personal maladjustment and conflict than subjects who disclaim a desire to obtain tattoos."¹⁵

¹⁵ R. P. Youniss, *The relationship of tattoos to personal adjustment among enlisted submarine school volunteers*, U.S.N. Medical Research Laboratory Report, New London, September, 1959, (Whole No. 319), p. 9.

In addition, the findings of this research indicated that men possessing two or more tattoos have unresolved sexual and aggressive conflicts. The Navy Department of Medical Research in footnoting this report noted that further research is indicated in this relatively unexplored area.

Selective Service Board Findings

During World War II, Dr. Joseph Lander and Harold M. Kohn did a study while working at a selective service induction board for the armed service. They noted that on the basis of their year long study on thousands of draftees that:

"The rejection rate for tattooed men was almost 50% greater than for non-tattooed men . . . 58% of all rejections among tattooed men were on the basis of neuro-psychiatric disability, in contrast to 38% among the non-tattooed. . . . The tattooed men rejected for neuro-psychiatric reasons comprised 20% of the total of tattooed men, but they had exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ of all the tattoos which could be classified as erotic. There is thus a correlation between the character of the tattoo and the presence of significant psychopathology."¹⁶

¹⁶ J. Lander & H. M. Kohn, *A Note on Tattooing Among Selectees*, 100 AM. J. PSYCH, 326 (1943).

Penal Institutional Findings

Dr. William Haines and Arthur V. Huffman did a study on inmates at an Illinois prison and published some interesting results. Dr. Haines said, "What the man places on his skin reflects his habits of thought, his prejudices, his affections, his ambivalences, fears and hostilities."¹⁷ An equally important statement of Dr. Haines was to the effect that if the tattooed person is verbally circumspect or non-committal, keeping silent about his inner self, perhaps his unintended self disclosures can be made to speak for him. Dr. Haines, whose writing frequently indicates that he finds little evidence to correlate tattoos with specific criminal tendencies, does clearly indicate that certain tattoos can be deciphered as having latent motivations.

The adult offender, so conditioned that he does not follow socially approved means of expressing his ideas of self, attempts to materialize them in the form of behavior pattern and bodily markings for all to see. In this sense, the tattoo can become a form of non-verbal communication.¹⁸

Such intended or unintended self-disclosures are seen in the tattooed prisoner. The man for example, who marks himself on his chest in inch high letters "F---- YOU COPS" habitually indicates his attitude toward authority. Not only attitudes and emotions, but also social status, may be indicated equally well by more subtle markings.¹⁹

Their study included evaluations of 482 men: In this group were 227 white males, and 255 negro males. A number of important statistics were compiled as a result of their study. It was found that men bearing the tattoo "DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR," if prior servicemen, had been, without exception, discharged under conditions other than honorable.²⁰ In attempting to verify this statement several other studies were found in which a high percentage of men serving time for crimes similar to the ones used in the study had been honorably discharged from various branches of the service. It is therefore reasonably safe to assume that there is some correlation between this particular tattoo pattern and the ability to

adjust to the armed services, expressed by some form of deviancy which caused their discharge under other than honorable circumstances.

In the study by Haines and Huffman, types of crime were classified into primitive (which include sex, murder, and robbery) and non-primitive (larceny, burglary, embezzlement, etc.). Of the total of 482 incarcerants, 297 had been imprisoned for primitive type crimes, and 203 for non-primitive type crimes. In sub-classification, 86 of the primitives were tattooed and 93 of the non-primitives. Percentage-wise, this indicated that just less than one third of the primitives and just less than one half of the non-primitives were tattooed.²¹ Reducing his figure to percentages by racial group it was found that well over fifty percent of the whites imprisoned for primitive type crimes were tattooed and that twenty percent of the negroes in the primitive group were tattooed.²² In addition it was found that thirty-eight percent of the whites arrested for robbery were tattooed and forty-seven percent of the negroes arrested for the same crime were tattooed.

Correlation of Tattoos to Criminal Behavior

Probably one question which interests researchers in this area more than any other is one that can be stated as follows: "What is the percentage of frequency with which we find tattooed criminals?" A partial answer comes from the state of New York where in July of 1962, 845 subjects were released from their penal institutions. Of this number 224 were tattooed in one or more places which would be visible while normally clothed. The total number of tattooed subjects released in that month was 377. These figures when compared to the known average rate of recidivism should indicate that a high percentage of recidivists will be tattooed subjects. This however does not imply that there is a direct linkage between the presence of a tattoo and the tendency toward criminality. There are many people who have tattoos who are not criminals. What the statistics do show however is that a greater percentage of recidivists do have tattoos than would normally be expected in a normal distribution of the population. If the presence of a tattoo does indicate a personality disorder, perhaps that disorder could be, but is not necessarily, manifested in the form of criminal behavior. In the New York figures it would seem that there is more than a

¹⁷ Haines, *supra* note 10, at 112.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 110.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 112.

²⁰ *Id.* at 108.

²¹ *Id.* at 105.

²² *Id.* at 105.

causative factor, but that there is almost a casual link between tattoos and criminal behavior.

Correlation of Certain Designs to Criminal Behavior

Attempts to correlate certain designs with particular criminal activities have been made but findings in this area are inconclusive. In fact some researchers go so far as to say that "no attempt should be made to construct the personality type by the fact that they are tattooed or by their choice of design."²³ It has been found that French criminals have adopted a code of identification with their criminal speciality. The pimp has an eagle carrying aloft the figure of a girl. The burglar is identified by a butterfly. However, no association between type of crime and type of tattoo has been established in the United States. The well known "Pachuko" tattoo must be excluded as identifying with a particular type of criminal activity. This tattoo, in its original form is comprised of a cross tattooed between the thumb and index finger. The cross is surrounded by a varying number of dots, each of which represents a crime of some import or an arrest for a crime. The design had its origin among West Coast gangs of Mexican descent and has been widely imitated by youthful offenders the country over.

Tattoos and Superstition

The most common design found among the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans is a form of the crucifix, but invariably some design of a pornographic nature is normally found on the same subject. It was found that persons bearing tattoos of a religious design are usually extremely superstitious about symbols other than those with which they choose to mark their bodies. The reason for having any superstitious symbol tattooed upon themselves would seem to be a basic latent shame of superstition and the desire to overtly declare superstition below them through the medium of the tattoo; while actually being fearful of one or more other symbols. In the group studied the ages ran from fifteen years to twenty eight years, with age nineteen being the average. Seventy six of the subjects examined had only one tattoo; one subject had thirty two. The most recurrent motif found was "LOVE & MOM," the second most frequent was the name of a girl friend. In cases where the subject had only one tattoo, his own

²³ O. J. Pollak & E. C. McKenna, *Tattooed Psychotic Patients*, 101 *AM. J. PSYCH.* 673, 674 (1945).

name, initials, or nick-name was most frequently encountered.²⁴

Some tattoos have specific meanings, such as marks of identification to others in a particular subculture. In some penal institutions for females, the passive partners in a lesbian "love affair" are tattooed on the middle finger of the right hand with the initials of the "lover" and protector. Other lesbians respect this symbol and will not attempt to steal the affections of a person marked with such a tattoo.

Psychological Significance of Tattoos

Such messages as "BORN TO RAISE HELL" or "I'M A REBEL" surely indicate an anti-social attitude or philosophy. Likewise the person who has "I HATE COPS" tattooed on his body is screaming his defiance of authority and has permanently marked himself with the attitude that he will probably assume throughout his lifetime. It will likewise be found that religious motifs rarely appear on devout persons. Usually the person bearing such a design has used the religious theme to cover a basic exhibitionist tendency. The religious theme will frequently be found on the same body bearing an erotic design; obviously then there is a duplicity of motivation involved in such situations. Dr. John Briggs, another researcher in the area of tattoos has stated:

"It suggests to the observer the emotional pattern of the tattooed individual. The presence of a single meaningless tattoo mark suggests a prepsychotic or a psychotic phenomena . . . 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. . . . The type of tattoo may be such that the type of psychoneurosis may be apparent. . . . 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."²⁵

In certain areas of personnel selection a person with a tattoo is considered as unacceptable for employment merely on the basis of having a tattoo

²⁴ Haines, *supra* note 10, at 113.

²⁵ Briggs, *supra* note 8, at 1039.

on his body. The Cincinnati Police Department attaches such psychological importance to the appearance of tattoos that in its recruitment programs the department insists that candidates who are tattooed must be rejected.

Veterans Administration Hospital

Tattooed patients, diagnosed as "Personality Disorder" or "Schizophrenic Reaction" admitted to the neuropsychiatric section of a 1,200 bed veterans hospital at Lexington, Ky. over a period of seven months in 1953 were studied, along with tattooed schizophrenics on the chronic wards of the hospital. A number of interesting results came out of the study conducted by Dr. Ferguson-Rayport:

"By investigating the tattoos as to number, quality, location, arrangement, and content, and the persons tattooed as to their backgrounds, circumstances of obtaining tattoos, and clinical history, it has been shown that, despite the many chance factors involved, choice and selection are not haphazard throughout. Striking differences, well correlated with present-day psychopathological concepts distinguish the tattoos of the personality disorder patient from those of the schizophrenic.

"The tattoo has been interpreted as an expression of personality structure. Man, capable of reflecting himself, can accept his body as it is, or, rejecting the natural state, modify and embellish it.

"In the hospital population, two attitudes became evident: that of the schizophrenics who, in their feelings about the tattoo, reiterate primitive attitudes as to its magical significance and potency and at the same time express their estrangement from the normal world: and that of the personality disorder patients, whose tattoos express inner conflicts and satisfy inner needs and, evaluated as a social phenomenon, signify another deviation from the mores of our culture.²⁶

"It is possible to say that the tattoos of the Pd (Personality Disorder Patient) are more frequently multiple than otherwise and are carelessly executed (both self and professionally obtained). The subject matter of

preference is pornographic and sentimental or bombastic and pseudo-heroic. They bear inscriptions in flourishing strokes, and are placed on arm, leg and chest in haphazard fashion. The schizophrenic more often than not, has but one tattoo of the identification type, is given to the more serious subjects—especially to commemorative and personally symbolic tattoos—chooses lettering which is small and inconspicuous, and often places his tattoos in unusual locations and arrangements."²⁷

Youthful Offender Research Findings

In another study conducted with several thousand youthful offenders on the West Coast, Dr. Burma concluded that: "There is a relationship that delinquents do bear a significant amount of tattooing."²⁸ He further concluded that:

1. Significantly more delinquents than non-delinquents tattoo themselves.
2. The idea of tattooing oneself occurs to some people early, and is carried out at an early age, probably without much thought for the future.
3. Tattoos in some peer groups are status symbols.
4. For some, tattooing is the result of certain self-concepts, and hence is a partial index of such concepts.²⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The implications of the conclusions reached by the various studies which have been conducted is that in our culture, persons with certain types of self-concepts will be more likely to tattoo themselves than persons with other self-concepts. In fact, the researchers in two of the studies have stated that: "The conclusion seems warranted that psychopathy or social or emotional maladjustment is significantly higher among tattooed than among non-tattooed men."³⁰ Another stated, "The high incidence of alcoholism and law breaking among these men (tattooed) seems to indicate that they are socially unbalanced."³¹

The individual's self-concept is going to determine the actions he will undertake in relation to his environment. "Behavior is not directly in-

²⁷ *Id.* at 123.

²⁸ Burma, *supra* note 1, at 341.

²⁹ *Id.* at 345.

³⁰ Lander, *supra* note 16, at 327.

³¹ Pollak, *supra* note 23, at 674.

²⁶ Ferguson-Rayport, *supra* note 4, at 129.

fluenced or determined by organic or cultural factors, but primarily (and perhaps only), by the perception of these elements."²² In other words it is the person's internal frame of reference, or how he perceives or views society that determines how he will act. If a person's internal perception of society is such that he feels he must embellish his body with signs, symbols, or figures to reflect his internalized self-perceptions, these markings should be taken as indicators of some type of personality disorder. Regardless of whether they are attempts to disguise homosexuality, inferiority feelings, defiance of authority, or any of the numerous forms of personality disorders, the mark was put there for a very definite reason by the person having such a mark. Whether or not the type of mark which is present can be attributed to a specific personality disorder or criminal activity is immaterial; rather it is the appearance of the mark which is more important. It is not possible to say that a specific type of design is definitely related to a specific type of disorder since there is not enough evidence to back this assertion. Nevertheless, the preponderance of information does seem to bear out the assumption that persons with tattoos have, or did have, some type of personality disorder which was reflected in the embellishment of their bodies with a tattoo or a series of tattoos.

There has actually been very little research work done in the area of the relationship of tattoos to personality disorders. The preponderance of work which has been done, however, does seem to indicate that there is some degree of validity in the general hypothesis that the presence of a tattoo, or tattoos, serves to indicate that the person did, or does, suffer from a personality disorder which could manifest itself, and does in many cases, in the form of criminal behavior. The value of a study which validates this hypothesis with statistical data would be great, in that a useful indicator of future deviancy would be established. However it must be remembered that there is no guarantee that because a person has a tattoo he is at the time of observance afflicted with a personality disorder of sufficient magnitude to cause him social adjustment problems. He

²² C. C. Rogers, *Some Observations on the Organization of Personality*, 2 AM. PSYCHOLOGIST 359, 362 (1947).

might have obtained the tattoo while he did have a personality disorder but has corrected the disorder. Nevertheless, even in such a situation the original hypothesis would be further validated since it was originally a personality disorder which manifested itself in the desire for the tattoo.

Based on the information which is currently available it would seem that there is some degree of correlation between the presence of a tattoo and the presence of a personality disorder. It is felt that more extensive and specific research work is indicated in this area so that a clearer picture of this relationship and its value might be more accurately established.

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