THE TATTOO

It’s Social Prevalence and Psychological Significance
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Why Review Tattooing?

• fascination
• people collecting
• useful in evaluation
• HIV (AIDS)
• Hepatitis *
definition of: Tattoo

English word "tattoo", is an Anglicized version of the Tahitian word "tatu" or ( "to mark" ).
History of Tattooing

• different cultures
• arose spontaneously
• inherent in all humans
• Stone Age, 12,000 BC
• 2988 to 4888 BC, on Egyptian mummies. *
History - Biblical Ref.

- Genesis - Cain and Abel.
- Leviticius 19:28, Moses *prohibiting tattooing*
- Mohammed, the Koran
- Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 787 A.D.
- Decalogue: *no graven image*
Attitudes on Tattooing

- non-Christian cultures, protection, bravery, and love
- enhancement of beauty
- Hebrews: undereducated, criminals, sailors, soldiers, and [prostitutes] *

Japan-females chins, upper lips: power
Attitudes On Tattooing

• Greece: nobility or bravery
• to identify criminals or slaves
• Early Romans: barbaric

• Japan, criminal syndicate: head to foot
Early Tattoo Themes

• Burma & Japan
• animals, birds, butterflies
• dragons, snakes
• religious, sensuous, or patriotic themes
Tattooing In the Western World

- mainland Asia to the South Sea islands.
- Capt. Cook
- sailors from South Pacific 18th Century
- badge of adventure. challenges of the sea.
Who Gets Tattooed?

- Associated with venereal disease
- Study in Sweden: 69 jobs
- Chimney sweeps: highest – writers: least
Who Gets Tattooed?

- risk takers
- a delinquent
- divorced, divorced parents
- jail record
- drug addiction
- Federal felony charges.
Who Gets Tattooed?

heroin addicts: most had more than one tattoo

• antecubital fossae - needle tracks
• personalities - anti-social characteristics.
RESEARCH
MODERN PRIMITIVES

TATTOO
PIERCING
SCARIFICATION

An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment & Ritual
Modern Primitives

- rediscovery of an OLD STORY
- one leads to another
- WHAT’S WITH MY KIDS?
- You pierced your WHAT?
Psychiatric Aspects
Psychiatric Aspects

- Canvas of the Soul
- tribal identification
- totems
Gang
or
Tribal affiliation
Communication

• conscious
• as an emblem, “I belong!”
• a clear unspoken message
Communication (2)

- passive message
- passive but... aggressive
- cryptic
- unconscious message
Dynamics of Skin

- infancy
- childhood
- adolescence
Rebellion

- against external control
- defense mechanisms
- usually an unconscious motives
Sexuality and Exhibitionism

- dynamics of the skin
- The First Tattoo
- Homosexual theory
- sexuality
Tattoo Analysis

• Patient’s emotional reaction to the tattoos
• Number and sequences of tattoos
• Circumstance of tattoo acquisitions
• Age
• Alone or with peer group
• Incarcerated
• Intoxicated
Tattoo Analysis

- Location of tattoos
- Visible in normal clothing
- Visible when partially clothed
- Visible only on unexposed areas
Tattoo Analysis

• Quality, symmetry and size
• “Jailhouse” or amateur
• Professional
Tattoo Analysis

Tattoo Content

Objective meaning for viewer

Private meaning for patient

The “love/hate” ratio
What do they mean?

• simple self mutilation
• expression of violence
• Expression of LOVE
• as a totem for protection
• location, location, location !!
Subconscious Aspects

- emotional pain and joy
- IDENTITY
- WARNING
Ambivalence

• then and NOW !!
• undercover...hide it !!
• swords into plow shares
• removal
• what to do with the fantasy??
Modern Primitives

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General Facts About Tattoos

- upper/lower socioeconomic background
- the poor man's coat of arms.
- An **excellent** source of psychodynamic info
- patterns, the number, and locations have profound psychological meaning
- **BUT, not** every tattoo has a **deep psychological significance**
Summary

- Identity
- It hurts sooooo good
- Hey, read my pics !!
- It’s deeper than you think!!
References:
6. BUNRICH, N. 1983 Significance of tattoos in narcotic abusers. Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 11, 391-394
11. FRIED R. 1983 The psychodynamics of tattooing: a review. Cleveland Clinic Quarterly Vol. 51, 239-241