LIVING WITH S(K)IN: AN ANALYSIS OF TATTOO REMOVAL

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This paper investigates the role of tattoo removal in postmodernity. Specifically, I suggest tattoo removal is a technology of self in which the tattooed person can attain absolution from a “sinful” tattoo. This paper explores the construction of the confessional act in two parts: the construction of the confessing subject and the construction of the medical clinic as the confessor’s listener. Using the texts medical offices place on the internet to advertise their services, I investigate the text’s interpellation of subjects desiring tattoo removal. I then examine the construction of the clinic’s status in the confessional act. Websites and brochures on gang tattoo removal provide a dialogue in which the clinic negotiates and attains its powerful position in the confessional act. The paper concludes by investigating the implications of the tattoo remnant, the material effects of the technology of self, and the benefits of studying the body-skin in rhetoric.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INVESTIGATING NOTIONS OF BODY, DESIRE, AND FANTASY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsequent Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY: TATTOO REMOVAL AS A CONFESSION OF SELF</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technologies of Self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoo Removal: A Postmodern Condition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual Analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CONSTRUCTION OF ENUNCIATIVE STATUS: AN ANALYSIS OF GANG TATTOO REMOVAL</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Text: Gang Tattoo Removal for Juveniles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility of the Apparatus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorics of the Body-Skin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curves of Enunciation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CONJOINING DESIRE AND CONFESSION</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption and the Remnant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body-Skin and Rhetorical Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric and Desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDNOTES</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCE LIST</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INVESTIGATING NOTIONS OF BODY, DESIRE, AND FANTASY

Introduction

Distorting the lines between art, fashion, and illustration, tattooing in contemporary America is a way of defining ourselves and expressing our beliefs. Tattoos have a long history, dating back to the Stone Age and recognized as an established art form since 1000 B.C. (Sanders, 1989). Despite this longevity, scholarly works as well as social commentaries consistently discuss tattooing as a unique display of identity. Current mainstream society seems more accepting of tattoos, placing less emphasis on the association of tattoos with deviance and transgression. Perhaps this shift in attitude occurs in part because of the narratives persons in the 1990s used to justify their tattoos (DeMello, 2000, Langellier, 2001), the representation of tattoos in the media (DeMello, 1995), and other informal negotiations of the stigma attached to tattoos (Irwin, 2001). Take, for example, the following testimony.

I am probably the person that anyone would least suspect of having a tattoo: I am a very conventional soccer mom…conservative in outlook and work at a bank. Up until a year ago, I was one of those people who looked down on people with tattoos. But that all changed last year... Barbara, a college sophomore, who babysat our children one night (and who had a very nice tribal tattoo on her lower back) explained to me very intelligently and eloquently the reasoning behind so many young women getting tattoos these days. After that conversation, I began to consider the possibility of getting a tattoo myself. I selected a design that I
loved and would feel comfortable with for the rest of my life. Nowadays, not a day goes by without my taking a few minutes several times a day to look at my beautiful tattoo in the mirror. I love it and so does my husband. He says it is exciting to know that his conventional, traditional wife has this wild side to her. My tattoo does give me a sense of empowerment and control over my life, and it also enhances my body's natural beauty. (Mary, 2003)

In addition to soccer moms, tattoos are commonplace among professional athletes (Wise, 2003), Hollywood actors (Signature Group, 2003), career-oriented moms (Armstrong, 1991), and college students (Degelman & Price, 2002). No longer seen as deviant, the status of this particular cultural assertion of individuality seems to be improving (Vail, 1999). As DeMello appropriately puts it, tattoos are “not just for bikers anymore” (1995, p. 37).

Interestingly, just as society becomes comfortable with tattoos, another phenomenon asserts its presence -- tattoo removal. Despite perceived approval of the fashionable tattoo, technologies for tattoo removal and discourses about tattoo regret are commonplace (Grumet, 1983, Varma & Lannigan, 1999). Stories about the tattooed no longer conclude with the existence of a tattoo, what it represents, and the behavioral characteristics of its owner. Currently, society questions the permanence of tattoos and often provides tattooed persons with innovative and safe options for removal. Until recently, few effective and painless methods for tattoo removal existed. People who urgently desire a tattoo gone often try to remove it themselves (Houghton, et al, 1996). Concoctions containing garlic, sulfur, oil, urine, vinegar, honey, and turpentine, and
crude blister-inducing methods are reported as early as 54 A.D. (Scutt & Gotch, 1986). Dermatological techniques in the 1900s included grafting and salabrasion (rubbing with salt); however, the most common methods used were dermabrasion (sanding the skin with an abrasive surface) and excision (cutting the tattoo from the skin and closing the wound with stitches). Possible infection and heavy scarring characterize all these methods. Scutt & Gotch (1986) present an interesting narrative of a naval officer, who discusses his experience with tattoo removal.

I saw the surgeon and he said that he'd fix me up, but warned me that it would be very painful and the results weren't all that good, although the scars would fade over time. I was in the hospital for 3 ½ weeks. It was extremely painful. Quite frankly, if I'd known about the pain and the discomfort, well, I wouldn't go through it again…however, I am glad I had it done, because my wife is much happier, although you can still see the scars. (Scutt & Gotch, 1986, p. 142)

The narrative reveals one person’s preference for scarred skin over an unwanted tattoo. Intriguing and emotional stories such as the naval officer’s testimony raise many rhetorical questions about tattoo removal. The simultaneity of narratives such as that of the naval officer and the soccer mom deserve further investigation.

Rhetorical analyses of the discourses that constitute and influence the tattooed reveal additional and significant information about contemporary society. For example, rhetoric serves as a valuable tool for questioning how an individual perceives her or his decision to get a tattoo and society’s impact on subsequent decisions by the individual (i.e., decisions to get another tattoo, remove a tattoo, the attitude and conversations that
circulate about each individual tattoo). This paper intends to investigate these issues by examining popular discourses on tattooing and tattoo removal through a rhetorical lens.

Statement of the Problem

Research suggests contemporary tattooed persons continue to struggle against the association of tattooing with socially devalued groups (DeMello, 2000, Sanders, 1989). Many people in society still evaluate the tattooed negatively (Degelman, & Price, 2002; Forbes, 2001), despite tattooed persons’ resistance to long-standing stereotypes (Grumet, 1983; Millner & Eichold, 2001). Additionally, current research on tattoos shows that many of the same deviant behaviors hold true for the contemporary tattooed culture. For example, those with tattoos see themselves as more artistic and risk-taking (Armstrong, 1991; Drews, Allison, & Probst, 2000). Studies show tattooed youth as more likely to use drugs and abuse alcohol (Braithwaite et al, 2001). Statistics that associate tattoos with deviant behaviors partially inspire governmental programs, such as Health One and Clean Slate, which advertise free tattoo removal services for former gang members. The idea that tattoo removal eliminates the desire to transgress seems to permeate these texts. Notions that tattoos hinder one’s chances of getting a job and serve as bad examples to American youth suggest a stigma towards tattoos that continues to perpetuate in the current society. This situation, as the title of this paper suggests, constitutes a problem of sin. Aside from the religious or moral implications of the word, sin refers to the idea that, for some, tattoos represent something inappropriate, offensive, or wrong. If a tattooed individual internalizes this pejorative perspective of tattooing, then how might one interpret the response of tattoo removal?
This thesis speculates that tattoo removal is a form of public confession for the tattooed. I intend to investigate the position of the confessor (i.e. the tattooed individual confessing through tattoo removal) in relation to the listener (i.e. the medical clinic that provides the removal services). An analysis of this confessional relationship is necessary, because at stake in the confession is the agency of the tattooed subject. In other words, it is important to distinguish when people mark his or her own body in the form of a tattoo and when society (re)marks the skin as sinful. Certainly, the notion of physically altering the body to confess a sin deserves additional attention.

Also at stake for this study is the status of the body and skin, not only for the tattooed body, but also for non-tattooed persons. Before considering the skin, I first question what motivates individuals to remove a tattoo. An initial, logical explanation for the rise in tattoo removal suggests that the act literally removes the tattoo, while the confession symbolically purges the feelings or affiliation associated with the tattoo. One may speculate that rhetorical discourse about confession and tattoo removal supports a societal desire to forget past regrets. However, this metaphoric connection ultimately fails; most dermatological surgeons caution that complete tattoo removal remains impossible. Early removal methods resulted in scarred skin. However, as the narrative of the naval officer demonstrates, this scarring was not always unsatisfactory. Contemporary methods, such as the technologically advanced laser, also leave remnants of the original tattoo. If the confession via tattoo removal seems to be gaining popularity, then what are the implications of the contradictory remnant still visible on the body? Indeed, the body (and the skin) seems to hold a lower status than the fantasy of confession.
Initially, it is easy to follow the suggestion that the act of tattoo removal symbolically represents purging past mistakes, by erasing (or confessing) the visual reminder from the body. That is, until one considers the tattoo remnant. The public demand for the procedure suggests that the possible scarring, faded tattoo or splotchy skin does not diminish the appeal of the confession for the unhappily tattooed. Even in the best scenario, in which a laser completely clears an individual’s skin of ink, the only natural protection of human integument -- the hair -- is permanently removed. Indeed, if the symbolic aim of the procedure is to recapture the previous and unmarked condition, the symbolic connection fails as an impossible and a misguided effort. Excogitation of the actual removal process falls short in answering the original question about the rise in tattoo removal, as the remnant on the skin obscures the more obvious explanation for the confession of tattoo removal. Study of the removal process also generates additional questions regarding desire.

Apparently, a desire for a certain image, identity, or recognition spurs one’s decision to get a tattoo removed. Therefore, the introduction of desire leads this paper to psychoanalysts, who typically specialize in the study of desire. Psychoanalysts, such as Joan Copjec (1994), postulate that desire and language often possess a negative relationship. In other words, what one articulates is not necessarily what one desires. In the confession (through tattoo removal), perhaps the desire to remove a tattoo stems not from the desire to erase the tattoo, but a desire to perform a socially acceptable procedure. Tattoo removal possibly operates as a process of confession for the societal sin of tattooing. The juxtaposition of the skin and the corresponding discourses on tattoo removal reveal a space in which one may reevaluate or rearticulate desire. This
preliminary speculation exemplifies the type of reading that Copjec encourages cultural scholars to practice. Copjec entreats researchers “to become literate in desire, to learn how to read what is inarticulable in cultural statements” (1994, p. 14). Copjec criticizes studies that explore only the structures of experiences and events, claiming that “structures do not march in the streets,” and that one must investigate the motivation, or desire, that exists below the surface and outside of the structure (p. 1). In addition to the discourse surrounding the confession, this study includes the study of skin (the most relevant part of the body for the study of tattoo removal) to address and critically interrogate Copjec’s appeal.

Having established the importance of desire in the study of confession and tattoo removal, I now attempt to answer how one uses rhetoric to analyze desire. If rhetoric traditionally relies on language, and desire transcends language, one is challenged to find an isolated area in which the two overlap just enough to reveal one working inside or around the other. This action proves tricky, as Lacanian theory instructs us that desire steps in to negotiate the lacuna between being (i.e., the order of the real, the generative principle) and appearance (i.e., a structure, language). The dimension of being and appearance prevents an imbrication between the two.

At this juncture, I reframe the study of tattoos as a study of confession and desire, in hopes of resolving the distance between the tattooed body-skin and the psyche of the individual. Past research on tattoos reveals rare scholarly discussions of the tattooed skin itself; instead, researchers ignore the skin in favor of examining individuals’ personalities (Degelman & Price, 2002; Forbes, 2001; Houghton, et al, 1996). Mark Taylor (1997) asserts the importance of the study of the skin. Taylor opens
his book, *Hiding*, with a provocative statement: “In the end, it all comes down to a question of skin. And bones. The question of skin and bones in the question of hiding and seeking. And the question of hiding and seeking is the question of detection” (p. 10). Following a long line of social theorists, Taylor refutes the frequent assumption that knowledge is found beneath the surface, arguing it is unnecessary and counterproductive for scholars to search beneath the surface to discover depth. The analysis of tattoo removal leads us directly to a study of skin and, as Taylor explains, all we have is “skin rubbing at skin…hides hiding hides hiding… If depth is but another surface, nothing is profound…*nothing is profound*. This does not mean that everything is simply superficial; to the contrary, in the absence of depth, everything becomes endlessly complex” (p. 18). Removing the skin from one’s study of the body decorporealizes the corporeal. In this study bypassing the skin would miss the point of the tattoo and the story of the remnant.

The intimacies of skin lead us to desire. Skin finesses the conflict between being and appearance in two ways. On one hand, the skin appears as a structure in which an individual or others may employ language for or against, shaping identity and inscribing the body. On the other hand, the skin is arguably the closest one can physically get to a being. It is important to maintain a distinction between skin and the psychoanalytic notion of being, while still utilizing the usefulness of skin in providing closer access to being. I use the skin in this way to maintain a study of the conspicuous and unconcealed, as Taylor (1997) and other scholars make evident the immeasurable possibilities located on the surface.
The skin is vital to the study of tattoos. Skin also plays a metaphorical role in the confession. In other words, without the removal of the tattoo from the skin, the confession of tattooing would remain incomplete. Indeed, rhetoric has recognized the body in recent years, but often eschews or fails to notice the desire bound up in the corporeal self. By incorporating the work of psychoanalysts, I intend to discuss the way the rhetorical body expresses desire and finesses the real. Joshua Gunn (2003) articulates the exigency of psychoanalysis for rhetorical studies. Gunn questions "the general stigma to using psychoanalytic theory for rhetorical criticism" (p. 54), despite calls for its incorporation by respected scholars, such as Barbara Biesecker (1998). He posits, "What is needed is a theoretical reconceptualization that admits and incorporates determining social structures and psychical structures simultaneously, a theoretical perspective that fashions ideology and lesser social forms as having both a mass or political and an individual psychical existence" (p. 55). In the present project, Gunn’s assertion allows the skin to function equally with its psychical counterpart.

Gunn’s primary purpose is to lay the groundwork for an imaginary paradigm, derived from a perceived need for imagination (based on the Lacanian discussion of the unconscious) in increasingly critical and materialistic ideological studies. The current paper utilizes Gunn’s call for action as an opportunity to draw on provocative psychoanalytic insights to expand knowledge and to create new perspectives in the rhetorical study of the tattooed skin, tattoo removal, confession, and desire. Specifically, this thesis addresses three questions. 1) Who is the desiring subject in tattoo removal?
2) How do the texts (both discursive texts and body texts) rhetorically reveal these desires? 3) How has the confessor, the listener, and the confession of tattoo removal been constructed?

Review of Literature

Before detailing the study further, I discuss the literature concerning society, the body, and fantasy. First, I discuss what this paper refers to as the postmodern condition. Postmodernity serves as the context, rather than the focus, for the present discussion of tattoo removal. Second, I search for the skin in current rhetorical research, pointing out the deficiencies of these studies because of the absence of the skin. The new term I prefer and promote throughout this thesis is the body-skin, to ensure that the body is no longer separated from its largest and most bodily part. Third, I discuss the current state of fantasy in the field of rhetoric by outlining the conversation around Ernest Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis and symbolic convergence theory. I intend to reveal the flaws in Bormann’s work that specifically relate to rhetoric and the potential for psychoanalysis to supplement fantasy analysis and the study of ideology.

Conditioning

This paper embraces the current condition of postmodernity that allows the impossible to be possible, the unlikely probable, and the binary undecidable. Highly developed societies, characterized by capitalism and consumerism, have slowly and persistently evolved into a new human condition. Michael McGee (1990) suggests a new focus for rhetoricians in postmodernity. Accusing scholars of often complaining about the new human condition and encouraging a shift in focus to exploring strategies that reveal the condition’s intricacies, McGee claims postmodernity redefines what it
means to be a rhetorical critic. Postmodernity necessitates a role reversal between the critic and speaker. McGee posits that critics should primarily study texts and construction of texts, while speakers should primarily focus on interpretation. New texts are deemed possible under McGee’s suggestion that the traditional texts have disappeared along with the idea of a whole text. He emphasizes the process of texts over their content, asserting that a homogenous body of knowledge no longer influences the entire populace. Instead, multiple texts combine to effect different people in different ways. McGee summarizes his argument with a prediction about fragmentation and the new human condition. He states, “The unity and structural integrity we used to put in our texts as they faithfully represented nature is now presumed in us ourselves” (p. 76). Following McGee’s logic, the body-skin becomes a revealing postmodern text.

Since the 1960s, scholars have described and debated the details of the new postmodern condition. Perhaps the most recognized of these works comes from Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) in The Postmodern Condition. Lyotard defines the postmodern condition as the “incredulity towards metanarratives” (p. xxiv), emphasizing its fragmented nature and intolerance towards totalizing narratives that pre-modern and modern societies had traditionally used to legitimate knowledge and to define Truth. In modernity, master narratives, such as progress and truth, legitimized and served as a sort of touchstone with which to compare experiences and beliefs. Lyotard states, “. . .the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (p. 37). However, the contemporary period no longer sees grand narratives as credible, making
room for smaller narrative and a new legitimating power, which Lyotard identifies as “efficiency” (p. 51).

Renata Salecl (1998) makes a pivotal connection between postmodernity and the body-skin, positing that the lack of grand narratives that Lyotard first discussed, has caused an increase in individualization and a disappearing symbolic structure and authoritative “law” (p. 141). Salecl claims individualization occurs when others do not recognize one as a contributing member of a community. She suggests this individuation leaves people feeling unstable and deadlocked, leaving the postmodern subject with two options: 1) return to tradition or create a new group identity, which also feels erratic because of an unclear group identity, and 2) a focus on the individual, which results in narcissistic body-obsessed society (p. 145). Salecl posits that the turn to the body-skin by many groups is an answer to the lack of symbolic structure. In the absence of symbolic law, we establish our own laws by cutting the skin through acts such as tattooing, masochism, and clitorectomy. Accompanying the newfound freedom from oppressive symbolic structures is a liberated, but disillusioned subject, bitter about the lack of authority. The subject realizes that the symbolic structure masked a different truth. Salecl claims that the result is “a mistrust in mere words (i.e., in the symbolic fiction)” (p. 151), leaving the body-skin as the only logical place to turn. Salecl asserts that cutting the body-skin is not playing with identity, but a protest against the postmodern ideology of changeability (p. 160). Salecl’s conclusion on the postmodern practice of tattooing leaves one to wonder about the practice of tattoo removal. Salecl concludes before interrogating the question that this paper poses, “If tattooing attempts
to mark the body into the absence of grand narratives, what is at stake in attempts to remove this gesture of marking?"

**Body (T)issues**

Taking up Salecl’s (1998) assertion leads to an already necessary discussion of research on the body-skin. Frances Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe (1990) note a surge of theories about the body in the late 1980s, partially inspired by the work of Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault (1979) focuses on the body as a site for cultural power struggles. He argues that the body is imprinted and inscribed by cultural powers and reading the body helps us understand the power of culture. Mascia-Lees and Sharpe confront current theories about the body, and question the location of the body when it is theorized to an abstraction. In other words, theories of the body whittle away at its physical and material representation. Additionally, the authors warn against the term, body, as all-inclusive. The authors discuss how society traditionally views the female body as natural and sexual and read the male body as cultural. When theorists discuss how culture is inscribed on the body, they involuntarily refer to the male body, which erases the female body. Mascia-Lees and Sharpe’s caveat states that even though “the sign is arbitrary in linguistic theory, it is not always so in practice” (p. 155) and postmodern theorists are ignoring gender, race, and economics. In addition to Mascia-Lees and Sharpe’s argument, this paper calls for the reinstatement of the skin, which also seems to be missing from the body.

Judith Butler (1993) provides provocative insight on the relationship between discourse and the body in her research on gender performance. In an attempt to elaborate one of her prior arguments, Butler posits that the interaction of the discursive
and the nondiscursive constitutes the body. Butler argues gendered bodies perform their own materiality. Clarifying her definition of materiality, Butler explains that materiality occurs when things “materialize.” For Butler, matter materializes and the body gives meaning through the process of performance. A claim against a binary inner and outer characterizes Butler's theory. For her, the body is no more and no less material than surrounding discourse. Rather than expressing a condition or effect, materiality is a condition created by the interaction between discourse and the body. Butler asserts a similar argument to the one given by Taylor (1997) of the revealing nature of the body. However, Butler’s theory of materiality stops a step away from the most material portion of the body, because in examining the surface of the body, one inevitably runs into the skin. This thesis advances Butler’s theory of the body, because Butler does not address skin explicitly.

Carole Spitzack (1993) provides an excellent example of a uniquely contemporary performing body in her analysis of the spectacle of anorexia nervosa. In the post-industrial age, women fight a particularly difficult battle with appearance expectations. Performing female identity has become increasingly anxious for women, as beauty standards increase with incredible specificity. Spitzack explains how the anorexic woman embodies contradictory expectations: “Anorexic bodies in post-industrial society perform a spectacular fear of womanhood” (p. 18). Anorexic women perform the societal expectation for beautiful women, and then, feeling out of control, turn inward to seek their own identity. The anorexic spectacle enacts a greater societal text of anxiety. Like Salecl (1999), Spitzack’s study finds the body as a source of comfort for the postmodern subject. The spectacle of the anorexic performance shows
how the body resists and contains, supports and refuses the gender constructions of the postmodern society. Spitzack also posits anorexic bodies as the suicidal parasite that society is slowly becoming. In other words, the anorexic body that does not receive food turns in on itself to feed just as the suicidal parasite turns on its back and eats itself. Anorexia is a public spectacle of a society where consumerism eats away at its buyers until a consumed body is all that is left. Spitzack’s article offers an interesting perspective, but suffers heavily by ignoring the body-skin. Most importantly Spitzack’s failure to identify phenotypes excludes the experiences of many women, especially since skin is always significant in beauty -- the way it is toned, tanned, tweezed, groomed, shaved, painted, moistened, and so on. These methods also fail to permanently alter the skin, and perhaps the fleeting and unsatisfactory performance of beauty causes women to seek more permanent alterations (i.e., tattooing the body-skin).

The social movements of the 1960s sparked significant interest in the body as an effective site for protest. This interest in the body and its rhetorical capabilities continued to capture the attention of scholars, expanding and elaborating theories of body rhetoric and the ability of marked bodies (marked by discourse) to substitute for language. Kevin DeLuca (1999) establishes the body’s place in visual and constitutive rhetoric by discussing how certain social groups use their body to argue political issues. DeLuca provides an example of Earth First! protestors who located their bodies at the top of 100-foot tall redwoods and buried themselves neck-deep in a road to enact the substance of their argument. DeLuca also discusses the body rhetoric of Queer Nation activists whose well-marked homosexual bodies (via stereotypes, meanings, and
restrictions) are vital and essential to the arguments, for it is their sexual body that is shunned, mocked, and ignored. Displays of homosexual identity in typical heterosexual spaces, such as kiss-ins at the mall, make visible their oppressed body. The rhetorical presence and performance of the homosexual body helps re-write and transform these spaces into new sites for all sexual orientations. DeLuca observes that people using body rhetoric often display their bodies as vulnerable, although typically (and paradoxically) the audience interprets the vulnerable body as aggressive. DeLuca’s examples challenge the relationship of the body to nature and the heterosexual body. The bodies in DeLuca’s study serve as rhetorical strategies, chosen by protestors for their potential effectiveness, not as autonomous messages. He identifies strategies but pays scant attention to the statements to which they are related. Additionally, the body-skin is overlooked in the presence of the body. When the marked body asserts itself, the body-skin remains unexamined.

Gerald Hauser (1998) investigates the body’s rhetorical power in certain circumstances and the body’s failure to elicit significant responses in other cases. He examines the ways in which European political prisoners exerted control over their bodies through self-starvation. Much like DeLuca (1999) observed, the visual vulnerability of their bodies incited social action and proved the body a powerful argumentative tool. Their passive performance subverted the hierarchy because it appealed to outside groups, who questioned the morals and values of the people that the body protested. Hauser speculates that events such as the self-starvation of the prisoners of conscience has lent to a paradigmatic view of the body. He argues that the paradigmatic view of the body is not a viable perspective, because some bodies, such
as those of abused women, cannot control their own stories. In this instance, the body serves as anecdotal evidence for the discourse that surrounds it. The discourse, coupled with the private nature of abuse, shields the body from direct view of its audience. Therefore, the abused body is rarely seen in a direct causal relationship with its abuser and often remains unnoticed. Hauser establishes the autonomous power of the body and the ways in which discourse may hinder an accurate reading of the body. Hauser’s insights reveal a pejorative relationship between the body and language that remains unarticulated by the author. Negative associations of language and body typically revolve around power, economic, and social issues, but for Hauser’s example of abused women, discourse interferes with the bruised and swollen body-skin. Language may hinder the corporeal and physical message that this thesis deems essential. The present study demonstrates that the body-skin and the discursive body may at times operate on separate, but intersecting, planes.

Carolyn Marvin (1994) investigates the body-text link and accuses scholars of ignoring the body too frequently and its contribution to textual works. Concerned about the invisibility of body in academics, Marvin proposes the term “embodied literacy” to describe the contribution of the body to the making of a text and its role in the formation of social structure (p. 130). History suggests literacy elevates the social status of the body. Subsequently, lower status holders’ possess the most visible bodies and a lack of literacy. Marvin states, “Literate acts aim at dissociating mind from body. To practice literacy is, at the very least, to disguise and repudiate the body. At most, it is to damage or destroy it physically, morally, and emotionally” (p. 132). Marvin further investigates the conjoining of text and flesh through discussion of Charles Manson, who sometimes
carved words into his victim’s skin. Marvin suggests Manson’s acts are a disturbing reminder of the power of the body in the delivery of text (p. 133). The author also reflects on the popularity of books bound in human skin (known as anthropodermic bibliopegy). The skins of the lower classes constructed the human bound books sold to the upper classes. Consequently, the position of both groups (the rich and the poor) advanced with this exchange. In other words, the skin of the illiterate increased in value simply by containing a written work. The books were highly esteemed until after WWII, when stories of Nazi doctors executing tattooed Jewish prisoners for their decorated skins repulsed and horrified the world (p. 144). At the end of the essay, Marvin explores the body as a text for physicians. This relationship challenges assumptions about body and text separation, since the body is a text for the physician. Marvin’s essay leads this thesis in its desired direction, but while Marvin emphasizes the significance of the human bound books, she fails to discuss the importance of tattooed skin and what makes these skins more valuable than non-tattooed skins.

**Fantasy**

An understanding of fantasy is important because it is also a crucial element in this project. Rhetoricians have made many attempts to understand fantasy. Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory (SCT) and consequent method, fantasy theme analysis, are well recognized in the field of rhetoric. Building on the observations of Robert Bales in 1970, Bormann investigates “the dynamic process of group fantasizing” (1972, p. 396), asserting the analysis of rhetorical visions, and group fantasies, reveal human motivation through the identification of fantasy themes (fantasies that chain to form a shared group fantasy), fantasy types (stock scenarios that are often repeated or are
alluded to), and symbolic cues (analogous to inside jokes) (1985). Bormann speculates that if individual dreams (or fantasies) reflect issues and unsolved problems, then analyzing collective group fantasies will uncover underlying issues, attitudes, and values of the group. Bormann asserts that group fantasies generate the "psychological process of being caught up in a drama" (1985, p.130), through the collective sharing of storylines, characters, and scenes.

Much of Bormann’s writing (1972, 1973, 1985, 1994) defends symbolic convergence as an effective social theory approach to viewing communication in terms of *homo narrans* (1985, p. 128). The theory posits humans as social storytellers who share fantasies, which build group communication and create social realities (1972, 1973). Bormann’s theory stands in opposition to the rational world paradigm, which views fantasies as untrue and recounted falsehoods. Bormann, John Cragan, and Donald Shields (1994) argue that the theoretical problems proposed by scholars critical of the theory (such as G. P. Morhmann) have been solved since symbolic convergence theory’s initial introduction. The authors present four basic presuppositions to SCT that they believe clarify and justify the benefits of the theory: 1) it is a grounded epistemological approach to communication studies, 2) it shows the connection between imaginative data and external data that yields a rhetorical product to show the origin and practice of rational elements, 3) it reinstates the audience in the rhetorical paradigm, and 4) it is a rhetorical method designed for exposing generalizability and unity. The authors conclude by identifying lacunae in the philosophical foundation of symbolic convergence theory (1994).
Gunn (2003) examines the major inadequacies of Bormann's work, identifying Bormann’s failure to address the Freudian components of symbolic convergence theory as the theory’s demise. He states,

Because the method is ultimately based on Freudian psychoanalysis, knowing and being able to describe a fantasy does not mean that one can predict behavior or define motive. For Freud, individual dreams were misleading distortions of wishes and unconscious desires; hence, the motive or source of group fantasy, likewise, could not be discerned on the basis of surface texts and apparent fantasies. (p. 50)

Gunn extends Morhmann’s assertion that fantasy theme analysis falls short in its attempt to accurately reveal motives. Gunn argues that Freud theorizes that fantasies conceal Real motives through the "language of myth and symbol," and since fantasies obscure the true motives and desires, then a fantasy theme analysis based on content will result in deceptive discoveries (p. 48). Gunn suggests that the major downfall of Bormann's theory is his refusal to consider fantasies as derived from the individual unconscious. Gunn disagrees with Bormann’s privileging of the collective consciousness over the individual as the “primary locus of the fantasy” (Gunn, 2003, p. 49). Gunn suggests incorporating psychoanalysis and ideological concepts to enlighten the work of Bormann’s humanistic (a rational, thinking, original, knowing subject) view of the individual.

Revisiting Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis and subsequent criticisms reveal an impasse in the study of fantasy, and a need for psychoanalytic research assistance. The insights presented earlier in this essay by Salecl (1998) illustrated the value of new
perspectives in rhetorical theory, specifically for studies on the body. In subsequent chapters, I plan to expand on works by other psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek and James McDaniel, whose contributions assist in fantasy analysis.

Method

I intend to employ a close textual analysis as the method of this thesis. This method permits a study of the inner dynamics of the texts and their relationship with their external contexts.¹ I dedicate this section of chapter one to justifying a close textual analysis method based on Foucault’s method of archaeology (rather than genealogy), and also finagle the contention between Foucault and the “new” psychoanalysts. Foucault serves as the primary inspiration for the close textual analysis, which may seem unusual at first, due to the dissent between Foucauldian and psychoanalytic notions of desire.

Initially, it is necessary to discuss Foucault’s methods for studying discursive formations. Foucault titled his first attempt at a method as archeology, which stood in contrast to traditional methods of historical analysis, or the history of ideas. He called for the birth of specific intellectuals, or scholars who concentrated on specific discourses and possessed privileged knowledge of discourses rather than privileged consciousness. Foucault’s critique aimed at making things more complex, rather than discovering simple answers or universal truths. Genealogy, Foucault’s subsequent method, ascribed to many of the same tactics used in archaeology, but underscored different discursive facets. Randolph Harland (1987) articulated these differences well; “The most obvious aspect of the difference between archaeology and genealogy is that
the latter puts the emphasis upon power rather than upon knowledge, upon practices rather than upon language” (p. 154).

I choose to utilize archaeology to examine tattooing and the emergence of tattoo removal through discourses about tattooed skin. In particular, I pay attention to truncated messages that often appear as a series of statements.² In the *Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault asks, “How is it that one particular statement was made rather than another” (1972, p. 27)? In studying tattoo discourses and texts, I found two reoccurring collections of statements to be the most provocative and pertinent to this study: tattoo and tattoo removal. These statements remain relatively overlooked, taken for granted, or amalgamated into additional statements. This study examines how tattooed skin has reached its current height of popularity and acceptance, and why, at this time, tattoo removal also is rising in popularity. What does the simultaneity or confluence of the two statements mean? How does the discursive formation on tattooed skin permit the emergence of tattoo removal? How has the confession of tattoo removal been constructed? How does tattooed skin contradict or concede discourse on tattoo removal? This thesis addresses these questions by mapping out the discourses and field of regularity that allows tattoo removal to be enunciated.³ Foucault adamantly warns scholars against using depth hermeneutics or interpretation. Instead, Foucault argues that one acquires knowledge and understanding by mapping out the formation of each enunciated statement and embracing its contradictions. The contradictory popularity of both tattooing and tattoo removal necessitate a method that encourages the study of their confounding co-existence. Also, Foucault’s adherence to surface benefits this study of tattoo removal, which relies on the juxtaposition of surface texts to
the surface of the body (i.e., the skin) to reveal information about the individual confession. I believe that the surface of the skin assists in a better understanding of human communication through confession and individual desire, because it provides a new text for examination.

The discord between Foucault and Copjec over the relationship between power and desire spur the choice of Foucault’s archeological method over genealogical. Copjec admits the value in Foucault’s tendency toward specificity and his constitution of method. Copjec suggests, “The problem, then, is not with the way Foucault formulates his project but with the way he carries it out” (1994, p. 7). I abandon the genealogy method since Foucault incorporates the method to argue sexual repression during the Victorian age in the History of Sexuality. Back-tracking to a previous publication, The Archeology of Knowledge, which provides a lucid account of method without departure, I hope to employ Foucault’s method as I believe it was originally intended. The disregard of genealogy does not mean the disregard of language and power, only a heeding of the prevalence of power in all aspects of life. This caution is due in part to Copjec’s criticism of Foucault’s method as lacking a transcending substance, which Copjec identifies as desire.

Foucault frequently references desire and pleasure in the History of Sexuality, but his definitions do not coincide with those of psychoanalysts. For example, he claims, “Where there is desire, the power relation is already present” (1978, p. 81). For Foucault, one does not possess unique individual desires, but desire is always already determined by force relations. Copjec (1994) challenges Foucault’s conception and contends desire cannot possess a social existence, for it operates apart from power.
Foucault ties pleasure with power and psychoanalysis see desire as separate or transcendental from power.

A major point of contention for Copjec is Foucault’s forgoing of the individual and his reduction of power to relations. For example, Foucault (1978) claims in *History of Sexuality* that confession turns desire into discourse, and subverting discourses were attempts to change the power relations that construct desire. Copjec argues discourse fails to reflect desire, and hence, one of the dangers of abiding by Foucault’s stratified and flattened out discourse analysis. Contrary to Foucault, psychoanalysts assert discourse as frequently disclosing the opposite of what one desires.

How can one read desire without abandoning Foucault’s attention to detail, discourse, and denial of sovereignty? Earlier in this paper, I discussed the psychoanalytic perspective that desire and language often possess a negative relationship. I propose that skin is a readable text that can negate language, but also satisfies the expectations of both Foucault and Copjec in three ways: 1) Messages of the skin do not necessarily rely on the rules of language and hence may stand in opposition of it. Copjec argues that the negation of power is outside of language — I argue that does not mean it is outside of the visible text. Therefore, 2) the contrast of skin and discourse eschews Copjec’s non-dimensional criticism without straying from the revealing nature of the surface and Foucault’s notion of the grid of intelligibility. Finally, 3) if the skin negates language, then the comparison of the two will help clarify the desire at play in each.
Therefore, the method proceeds as a close textual analysis, based on Foucauldian notions of knowledge and Copjec’s ideas on text. Each analysis ensues in the following fashion:

1) In each chapter I isolate a section of the discursive formation on tattoos for analysis. In chapter two, I review the internet advertising texts provided by tattoo removal clinics to promote their services. The repetitiveness of these texts leads me to construct a single narrative on tattoo removal. I analyze how the narrative rhetorically unfolds to persuade the audience (specifically, tattooed persons) to regret their tattoos. In chapter three, I examine the brochures and Websites on government and privately organized removal clinics that provide free tattoo removal to former gang members. I study the inner workings of these texts to reveal how the medical clinic gains its enunciative status in the discourse on tattoo removal.

2) I approach the analysis through a subjective lens of confession. This approach is perhaps the most important element of my analysis, as I consistently stop to investigate the relationship between the unfurled strategies of the text (articulated through the close textual analysis) and the idea that tattoo removal serves as a postmodern confession for the tattooed.

3) Throughout the analysis, I view desire from two perspectives. First, I look at desire through a Foucauldian lens. In other words, I examine the construction of power relations and the influence of power on an individual’s desires. Second, I incorporate a psychoanalytic reading of desire, and specifically, the desires associated with identity and self-knowledge.
Subsequent Chapters

The subsequent chapters of this thesis rhetorically examine tattoos and tattoo removal to speculate about their societal significance. Towards that effort, this rhetorical analysis studies a number of texts to better understand the intricacies and complexities of the discursive formations about tattooing. Chapter two, “The Search for Identity: Tattoo Removal as a Confession of Self,” focuses on the internet advertisements that encourage tattoo removal. These texts raise interesting rhetorical questions about the broader implications of tattoo removal as a confessional technology in a contemporary American culture. Analyzing these advertisements help one to understand how the tattooed person feels about her or his tattoo and, consequently, why he or she desires tattoo removal. In the postmodern society, media venues frequently deliver popular narratives and texts, which shape our understanding of the world and our place in it. The internet has become a favorite arena in which to surf or browse for products, people, and information. Consumers are bombarded daily by a plethora of advertisements, items, and services. It is becoming increasingly important to understand the effect these texts have on American society, as they occupy and demand public attention more often than not. Catering to short attention spans and a time-efficient public, the Web primarily displays snip its of text in each venue. Individually the texts are informative, but collectively they create a significant rhetorical effect. In short, I argue that these tattoo removal advertisements construct and represent a larger narrative about desire and confession (manifested in tattoo removal) in today’s society.
Chapter three, “Construction of Enunciative Status: An Analysis of Gang Tattoo Removal,” turns to the status of the enunciative modality. Specifically, I investigate how the enunciative modality gains and retains their powerful position in the discourse on tattoo removal. The texts for this analysis are the brochures and Websites provided by gang tattoo removal clinics across the country. The programs provide relatively free removal services to former gang members wishing to cut ties with their gangs. I plan to analyze the texts to uncover the strategies used by each medical clinic to achieve its enunciative position. The thresholds from which the clinics enunciate and the rhetorics the clinics employ serve as the main point of focus for this chapter.

Finally, chapter four, “Conclusions: Conjoining Desire and Confession,” discusses the conclusions of this project. Both discourse areas in the preceding chapters address the confession of tattoo removal. In the concluding chapter, I try to reach more general conclusions about American society and tattooing. Here, I attempt to connect the results of the previous textual analysis to current research on tattoos, and specifically Salecl’s theories on tattooing in an age that lacks grand narratives. Also, in this chapter I revisit the methodology of the project and explore the effectiveness of studying desire to better explain the process of redemption. The chapter explores and elaborates on the material effects of tattoo removal and how this study of the body-skin assists in other rhetorical studies.
CHAPTER 2
THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY: TATTOO REMOVAL AS A
CONFESSION OF SELF

Introduction

This thesis speculates that tattoo removal is a postmodern technology of self that allows individuals to confess the sin of tattoos. In today’s society, tattoos retain unprecedented popularity in the media, cinema, sports, and fine arts. However, tattoo removal also seems to be gaining status, as more and more Americans choose to submit their body and tattoo designs to the procedure. The postmodern mistake appears to have shifted from not getting a tattoo, to not having the tattoo removed. Tattoo removal services have spread to the masses as a means of confessing the sin of tattooing. The tattooed confessors seek out removal clinics, which serve as the listeners in the confessional act.

The confessional perspective of postmodern tattoos and tattoo removal raises a number of interesting questions. This chapter addresses the questions associated with the confessing subject. First, where does the desire for tattoo removal originate? I investigate the rhetoric of the tattoo removal Websites and advertisements to reveal the desiring subjects whom the dermatologists and laser clinics target. This chapter examines how the listener (the clinic) of the confessional act uses their enunciative status to articulate desires and construct new confessors from mainstream society. I incorporate psychoanalytic theory throughout the paper to provide a better reading of the desires of the subject. This approach proves useful, since psychoanalysis primarily is concerned with the relationship between individual desire and its function in the social
world. Second, what are the implications for the larger public? I look at the rhetorical effect of the text beyond the tattooed person. I speculate that the significance of tattoo removal extends to postmodern individuals, consumers, genders, and sinners. In particular, the condition of the body-skin for these subjects remains crucial to the analysis. The chapter begins with a more detailed description of how this paper integrates Foucault’s technology of self. Then I argue that advertising texts construct a number of subject positions from which the tattooed desire absolution from sin. These positions include subjects desiring individuality, freedom from regret, freedom from gender restraints, and consumer-related desires

Technologies of Self

Foucault (1988) introduced the technologies of self to better understand the connection between language and the construction of self. Foucault speculates that “knowing oneself” prevails in contemporary society and overshadows the notion of “taking care of the self,” which circulated in previous centuries. Foucault unfolds the history of thought that allowed this shift to occur and asserts a contemporary technology of self in which a person scrutinizes and regulates her or his self (a soul that exists separate from the body) through verbal disclosures (e.g. confessions) and activities that train the self. Self-renunciation is central to Foucault’s notion of technologies of self. He claims, “You can’t disclose without renouncing” (p. 48), meaning that confessions and disclosures operate under a guise of purification of the soul, but in actuality, the self-renunciation inherent in the act results in the rejection of self and identity and makes one vulnerable to domination and repression. This self-rejection has considerable
implications for identity studies, for when one confesses (or self-renounces) he or she looses power and perpetuates existing power structures.

Tattoo Removal: A Postmodern Confession

Building on Foucault’s work, I propose laser tattoo removal as a postmodern technology of self based on two assumptions. First, the self-renunciation of tattoo removal differs from Foucault’s examples of confession, which Foucault limited to verbal expressions of confession. I speculate that tattoo removal functions similarly to Foucault’s self-renunciation and confession, but does not require verbalization. The move from verbalization to action is important for rhetorical scholarship that seeks a better definition of the ambiguous term, “postmodernity” and its characteristics. Salecl (1998) begins to explain the proposed move to action, when she advances the claim that individualization and a mistrust in language characterize postmodernity. Her suggestion leads her to a theory on the cutting the skin, but I speculate it has broader implications and associate it with a postmodern emphasis of action rather than verbalization.

My second point pertains to the location of the postmodern confessional act. Traditionally, confession has been linked to psychiatric wards and religious institutions. For example, Catholicism advocates penance as a sacrament in which forgiveness of sins committed after baptism is granted through a priest's absolution. In a proper confession, the priest has the power to pronounce absolution for the sinner. In postmodernity, religious institutions no longer retain the visible or obvious power they once had and, therefore, the confession has trickled into the secular society under a different guise. I believe that scientific discoveries and advanced technology permit a
new medium for the confessional act. The technologies of self first articulated and
examined by Foucault hold true in the postmodern society, but take a different, more
secular form. This paper identifies a modern configuration and situation in which self-
renunciation takes place. I speculate that laser technology serves a confessional
function, by providing a means for the tattooed to confess the societal sin of tattooing
through consumer action.

The Text

Margo DeMello (1995) asserts media influence in the changing views of
tattooing, claiming the contemporary acceptance of tattoos are due in part to media
representation of current tattoo trends. The author suggests the new attitude towards
tattooing is the result of the separation of the tattoo from its old reputation of deviance
and transgression. With the help of the media, the tattooed redefined tattoos as artistic
expressions of individuality. Critical media studies have become a commodity of ever
increasing value and importance, as millions of Americans form opinions on religion,
politics, and cultural mores based on what we see and hear from the media. For
example, the internet provides quick access to information and bombards many
Americans with messages and advertisements. These messages demand attention, as
they help mold the perception of who we are and how we view the world. In a later
publication, DeMello (2000) identifies the internet as the new medium for
communication between those with tattoos or those interested in tattoos.

In contrast to the surging pro-tattoo virtual community, the internet also provides
a plethora of information on tattoo removal. In this chapter, I investigate the texts
dermatologists and medical institutions provide on their Website about tattoo removal.
In the following pages, I refer to these often as advertising texts, for their rhetoric is certainly geared towards promoting their services, although the institutions present them as informative and brochure-like. I analyze the strategies employed in these texts that constitute a confessor and articulate a desire for tattoo removal.

I speculate that the texts construct and represent a larger narrative about tattoos and tattoo removal in today’s society. History has proven narratives as a powerful rhetorical tool.¹ In the case of tattooing, researchers suggest narratives play a major role in the current attitude towards tattooing (DeMello, 1995; Langellier, 2001). The subsequent analysis examines the multifarious and intertextual advertising texts on tattoo removal as one narrative to better understand their collective effectiveness.² After reviewing the advertising or informational texts provided by medical clinics, I compiled a truncated narrative that represents the general message about tattoo removal in each of the texts. The narrative is my own compilation, but each sentence is taken verbatim from each respective Website. The narrative progresses as such:

If you have a tattoo, you’re not alone. If you want it removed, you’re also not alone. So you didn’t believe your mom when she said you’d regret getting that tattoo? Tattoos no longer need to be a part of your life forever. Time changes, your taste changes, your life changes. Traditionally, in this country, tattoo parlors haven’t exactly made the “A” list of places nice people frequent – at least that is what generations of children have been told. Everyone has done something in their life they wish they could change…only some mistakes brand you for life. Today, a little beam of light can make all the difference.
Method

This study employs a close textual analysis method to study the inner dynamics of the texts and their relationship with their external contexts. Inspired by the debate between Foucault and the “new” psychoanalysts, the texts in this analysis is not limited to the aforementioned advertising texts, but also includes corresponding body-skin texts. Leff (1986) suggests the rhetorical effect of a text is not always inherent in the text, but is produced as the text unfolds and builds on itself. Dilip Gaonkar (1989), whose works are often influenced by Foucauldian theory, argues with Leff’s approach, claiming the critic should read the text in order to understand the social, political, and economic context. He asserts, “The pressing task, for which ‘textual studies’ are ideally suited, is to offer an understanding of ‘contexts’ (non-discursive formations) through a reading of texts (discursive formations) while allowing the text to retains its integrity as a field of action” (p. 275). Gaonkar’s method proves useful for this paper, since it allows one to address the societal contexts that permit the confession of the tattoo sin. Using this method, the texts on tattoo removal reveal the most valuable information.

Establishing the method for this chapter, I now proceed to the analysis of the text, which launches in the following section. I divide the narrative into smaller excerpts and examine each excerpt individually. The analysis starts at the beginning of the tattoo removal narrative.

Textual Analysis

*If you have a tattoo, you’re not alone.*

*Hey you there!*³

*Skin and Cosmetic Solutions; Althusser, 1972*
The tattoo removal narrative begins by identifying an audience of desiring individuals. Drawing from Kenneth Burke and Louis Althusser, Maurice Charland’s (1987) seminal theory of constitutive rhetoric serves as a guide for studying interpellation of an audience, or the group acceptance of an identity rhetorically presented to them. Althusser posits interpellation as a key process in the production of ideology. Charland claims, “The theory of constitutive rhetoric leads us to call into question the concept usually implicit to rhetoric's humanist tradition, of an audience composed of unified and transcendent subjects” (1987, p. 147). Charland claims rhetoric and, specifically, narratives are effective means of achieving audience interpellation. If the audience identifies with the narrative logic of the speaker, then the audience will follow the logic of the narrative, for “they must be true to the motives through which the narrative constitutes them” (Charland, 1987, p. 141). The narrative ontologically functions to define and create subjects posed for action.

Interpellation seems like a good starting point for analyzing tattoo removal until we consider Judith Butler’s (1997) arguments against Althusser’s original theory. Inspired by Foucault’s definition of power, Butler reexamines the agency of the interpellated subject, arguing that Althusser’s endeavor implies a passive subject and, hence, also suggests a sovereign voice that hails the subject into being. Butler claims that the sovereign power represses and disregards power relations. This observation has considerable implications for Charland’s constitutive method, which relies on the repressive critique of sovereign power.

Butler supplements her arguments with psychoanalytic theory. She speculates that if the addressee chooses to answer a hail, then a pre-linguistic subject must exist...
prior to the interpellation. The pre-linguistic subjugation implies selfness and otherness, a fundamental component of Lacan’s mirror stage. Butler identifies the Ideal-I as a vital part of human motivation and a desiring subject (that is, one desiring the Ideal-I) as the pre-linguistic subject. Following Butler’s suggestion that the desiring subject exists prior to the interpellation of the text, I speculate that the first sentence of the narrative attempts to articulate an always already desire of the subject. For thousands of years, researchers have studied tattoos, the meanings ascribed to them, and why people desire certain tattoos. Obviously, desire and tattoos are inextricably linked. The narrative aims to articulate or “interpellate” the always already desire of the tattooed person. The texts reference, but do not alienate the audience by naming a specific desire. The second part of the sentence, “you’re not alone,” strengthens the message of the text, as the statement implies a collective audience sharing a collective desire. The articulation of a shared desire strengthens the persuasiveness of the texts, especially for those who belong to groups where tattooing is accepted. In short, the use of the statement assists in the interpellation of tattooed individuals into tattooed subjects.

On a more conspicuous level, the opening sentence of the narrative refers to the general acceptance of tattoos in today’s society. The text rhetorically addresses the subject’s need for belongingness. Scholarly research shows that the contemporary tattoo typically reflects group affiliation and conformity rather than isolation and seclusion. Tattoos and tattooing have undergone many changes in the past 100 years. For, example, between World War I and World War II (dubbed the ‘Golden Age of Tattooing’), with international conflict being foremost in the minds of the public, people requested more evocative tattoos with military and patriotic themes (DeMello, 2000).
During the ‘Renaissance’ in the 1960s, the tattoo population broadened. The new tattoo subgroups included traditionally deviant and rebellious characters such as bikers, military persons, street gangs, and prisoners. However, sanitary and professional tattoo parlors soon emerged, helping alleviate some of the anxieties people had about diseases and poor artwork. Creative and artistic tattoos became popular among feminists and anti-war leaders, and complemented many of the social movements of that time. Musicians, such as Janis Joplin and the Rolling Stones, popularized tattoos among their fans and followers. Artists trained in traditional fine art disciplines emerged on the tattooing scene in the 1970s and brought with them sophisticated imagery and techniques. Advances in electric needle guns and pigments provide artists with new ranges of color, delicacy of detail, and aesthetic possibilities. Traditional stereotypes of people with tattoos are no longer as prominent (Armstrong, 1991), as professional women (Armstrong, 1991) and teenage girls (Carroll & Anderson, 2002) comprise many of the newer tattoo subgroups. Present day, there exists a fully functioning and cohesive tattoo community has emerged, evidenced by the existence of 9 tattoo magazines, virtual tattoo communities, tattoo museums, and a tattoo lexicon.

One is inclined to wonder, “If the tattooed view their tattoos as more socially accepted, then why might a verbal reminder of their commonality be rhetorically effective for tattoo removal?” As both Foucault and psychoanalysts point out, persons desire what Foucault refers to as self-knowledge, and Lacan calls the Ideal-I. Perhaps this is best illustrated by research showing that an expression of individuality prevails as the most frequently reported reason for getting a tattoo (Grumet, 1983; Millner & Eichold, 2001). In other words, the text rhetorically attacks the idea that tattoos reflect a
unique and personal identity – and that they actually reveal group affiliation. This contradiction between the social function of tattoos and the personal desire for a tattoo exists even for people in groups where tattoos are deemed necessary. For example, gang members use their tattoos to express loyalty and to strengthen ties to the group; however, many will claim their tattoos express their individuality (Spencer, 2002). If the motivation for getting a tattoo lies in its singularity, then the desire for the tattoo’s presence may lessen once a person perceives this individuality threatened. This decrease in the tattoos appeal may be a psychological reaction to the language of the text, which suggests tattoos as a quotidian and unexceptional societal fad.

In a similar fashion, the text also challenges the confidentiality of some tattoos. Consider the private location of many first tattoos on the skin - the lower back, the shoulder, the bicep, an ankle, the chest. In everyday clothes, these are not highly visible locations. The most observable part of the body – the head, is rarely tattooed. Even tattoo artists discourage patrons from tattooing the head, due to the intense social stigma of such a tattoo (St. Clair & Govenar, 1981). Other highly visible locations, such as the hands and neck, often are associated unfavorably with deviant groups, such as gangs and prison inmates. For many tattooed persons, the tattoo serves a representative power of individuality and strength as long as it remains hidden from the critical eye. The tattoo loses its power when recognized, stereotyped, and marked as a symbol of deviancy and rebellion. The tattooing process proves more complicated when one considers that a person may loose the intended meaning or value of their tattoo. The individual retains power over the choice and location of the tattoo, but revealing the tattoo to others also means relinquishing control over the tattoo’s message. Regret
occurs when the tattoo stops delivering personal enjoyment to its owner due to a societal (re)marking or (mis)interpretation. The advertisement texts attempt to redefine the meaning of tattoos and squelch the desire of perceived tattoo singularity. Identifying and quantifying the prevalence of tattoos causes the tattoo to shift from a mark requested by an individual to a mark society imposes on the individual. This shift puts the agency of the individual in the tattooing process at stake. Regardless of the nuances and intricacies of the rhetorical message for the subject, the opening line of the narrative effectively interpellates tattooed persons as full of desire and sets them up for the rest of the narrative.

*If you want it removed, you’re also not alone. So you didn’t believe your mom when she said you’d regret getting that tattoo…*

*How Tattoo Removal Works*

While the first portion of the narrative interpellates a general audience that desires identity, the next part of the narrative works to articulate more specific desires of the newly formed subject. In this section, I investigate how the text draws from certain social relations to construct remorse in the tattooed and the desire for freedom from that remorse. I pay specific attention to the language aimed at the tattooed that suggests they possess a subordinate or inferior status. I demonstrate how the language of the clinic helps establish its strong enunciative status in the discourse on tattoo removal.

Cumulatively, the advertising texts send a clear message of consensual regret among the tattooed. “Many people choose to have decorative tattoos in youth but live to regret this decision.” “About half”/”over 50 percent”/”at least 80 percent”/”over 10 million” Americans regret their tattoos. The texts continuously discount the significance of the tattoo and strategically reiterate its triviality and commonality. By presenting deceptively
factual statistics, the text unfolds to construct another collective audience – persons who regret their tattoos. The text ties the regret of the individual to her or his rejection of authority ("mom"). This strategy immediately positions the reader in a subordinate position to the speaker. The clinic’s rhetorical move establishes the minimal power of the tattooed person, and subsequently also establishes the power norm for the future relationship between the confessor and the listener.

The text introduces power relations by cultivating a distinct enunciative function as a rhetorical tactic when speaking of tattooing. Establishing the authority of the enunciative modality on tattooing also positions them as the authority on tattoo removal (the confession). First, the texts utilize the enunciative function to create a number of speaker and subject positions - that of a doctor to a patient, a knowledgeable person to an ignorant one, a parent to a child, or a mature person to someone immature. The advertising texts present tattoo removal as a second chance at making the right decision, describing the tattooing experience as a “valuable teacher” (Aesthetic Surgery Center). References to tattoos as “the things you did as a kid” (Tat2begone Medical Group) or a “game we all play” (Center for Laser Surgery) personifies the authors at a more experienced and authoritative level, performing as pseudo-parental figures for the less informed, tattooed children of society. The removal of the tattoo signifies the correction of a mistake, a mistake that society (and these advertisements) have articulated.

Not only does the site correlate itself with positions of authority, it also uses the traditional position of the clinic in our society to enhance its enunciative status. Specifically, the institutional site of the advertisement as a medical or dermatological
Website, amalgamates the power of the enunciative function and further impacts the effectiveness of their message. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) discusses the impact of the medical institutions in contemporary society’s view of sexuality. In accordance with Foucault’s observations, I contend that medical institutions pass morals and truths to the public under the guise of factual information. In the case of tattoo removal, the clinic possesses additional authority because it articulates the desires of the tattooed. The status and position of the speaking subject permits a more effective argument for tattoo removal. The clinic’s discourse is often interpreted as scientific fact and logic for tattoo removal. A strategy that appears logical is difficult to challenge and thereby strengthens the clinic’s authority position in the confessional act.

Identifying the tattooed as inexperienced and naïve, the texts aggressively instruct the tattooed audience to regret their tattoo. Despite the absence of credible or disseminated scholarly research on the topic, the elevated status of the texts allows them to present deceptively factual statistics about the number of persons who regret their tattoos. However, research does support that surveyed persons report existing feelings of ambivalence because their tattoos serve as a reminder of an intoxicated mistake or youthful audaciousness (Grumet, 1983). The advertising texts simultaneously draw from and feed into these statistics. Varma and Lannigan (1999) report regret lasts a median length of 14 years before a person seeks removal, which coincides with an earlier study that shows the majority (69%) of tattooing and piercing occurs between the ages of 18 and 22 (Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1999). Additional statistics reveal 70 percent of removed tattoos were acquired before the age of 18, and often reflect the work of an amateur artist (Varma & Lanigan, 1999). The texts question
the validity of tattoos received during the young adult years. However, the error is not getting the tattoo in the first place (after all, we all make mistakes when we’re young) – the error is not having the tattoo removed. Rather than condemning the individual to a life literally marked by shame, they provide a service – a cathartic technology for the tattooed to confess the mistake. Because they have used the text to establish their enunciative status, the medical clinic appears as the authority on the subject and the logical site for confession.

_Tattoos no longer need to be a part of your life forever. Time changes, your taste changes, your life changes._

Smooth Skin Online

The previous section discusses how the medical clinic establishes and uses its enunciative status when speaking on the subject of tattoo removal. In this section, I investigate the relationship between tattoo removal and consumerism. Specifically, I look at how the text interpellates the desiring consumer as another subject in need of tattoo removal.

“Whether it’s love gone wrong, Rolling Stones forever, flower power, or some other out of date tattoo – you now have tattoo buyers remorse” (Epione Medical Center). “What you once saw as a good idea, does not fit your new image, and you wish it would just go away” (Topdocs). Quotes from the media describe contemporary tattoos as trendy and fashionable (Irwin, 2001). Accordingly, research shows that 45 percent of removed tattoos were originally applied for the sake of fashion (Varma & Lanigan, 1999). But in popular culture today, we have learned that what is hot one day could be what is not the next. Our society embraces diversity and ephemeral trends in music, (bubble gum bands and one hit wonders), toys (Elmo, Slinky), clothes (leg warmers,
parachute pants), and many more. American culture is obsessed with being in style. Logically, the permanent features of tattoos should prevent their acceptance into chic society, since their immovability contradicts a postmodern public that encourages temporary fads and the ability to change.

Here the text attempts to articulate the desire of consumers. Accordingly, research shows that tattoo customers frequently request mainstream-style tattoos (Irwin, 2001). An analysis based solely on tattoo designs would likely reveal the influence by societal and cultural trends even when the individual denies such a connection. The advertising texts for tattoo removal reiterate the expectation and necessity of change in a society characterized by multifarious identity options. The dialectical and constituted nature of humans is reflected by the fact that a person’s original motivation for a tattoo does not always reflect long-lasting interests or values in her or his life. Despite attempts to categorize emotions and experiences into false dichotomies, humans evolve and move continuously along dialogical spectrums. Previously, a person unable to find satisfaction in the stagnant symbol had two alternatives – searching out an additional tattoo to better articulate her or his identity or have the offensive tattoo painfully removed. Accordingly, research shows that cover-ups account for 40-60% of tattooing business (Sanders, 1989). These individuals seek comfort in a new identity or symbolic law, but do not forgo the practice of tattooing. Tattooing retains its pleasure function even when the design of the tattoo does not.

Consumerism and the desire for a tattoo coincide easily when viewed through a psychoanalytic lens. As discussed earlier in this paper, Lacan argues that one’s fundamental desire is the desire for subjectivity, or the Ideal-I, that begins in the mirror...
stage of human development. One buys things, goes places, talks to different people, and uses different experiences in hopes of eventually reaching, or becoming, her or his Ideal-I. Indeed, throughout life one never stops trying to achieve the Ideal-I, despite its impossibility. Lacanian theory also suggests that once one acquires what one thought he or she desired, the desire for that object or experience dissipates. This dissipation occurs because one actually desires the function of the object (as a means of reaching the Ideal-I) and not the object itself. One may interpret the purchasing of tattoos as a perceived step towards the Ideal-I. The consumer believes he or she desires a tattoo, but he or she really desires self-knowledge. The text steps in at this juncture to articulate any residual feelings of dissatisfaction or ambivalence that exist over the tattoo. The medical clinic offers tattoo removal as another option to the person seeking self-knowledge. The confession (tattoo removal) is presented to the tattooed person as a purging mechanism that brings one closer to her or his Ideal-I.

Traditionally, in this country, tattoo parlors haven’t exactly made the “A” list of places nice people frequent – at least that is what generations of children have been told.

Aesthetic Surgery Center

The previous section examined the clinic’s construction of a desiring consumer. This section discusses how the text constructs a subject that desires gender normalization, and specifically deals with the case of tattooed women. I investigate the implications of inserting tattoo removal into the existing research on women and tattoos.

Investigating the body without considering gender differences is imprudent. I speculate that the text targets the gendered desiring subject in this section of the narrative. This portion of the text on tattoo removal appeals to “traditional” values and
norms, which, as many feminist scholars argue, is actually a guise for long-standing patriarchal social and cultural power structures. Feminist literature often explores the power and influence of male-dominated economic, political, and cultural practices on the female body. Since recent estimates suggest that more women than men request tattoos in current American society, the need to explore the relationship between women and tattoos maintains vital importance.

Many scholars have speculated on the meaning of tattoos for women and girls (Atkinson, 2002; Armstrong, 1991; DeMello, 2000; Drews, Allison, & Probst, 2000), revealing a variety of specific reasons for tattoos, but ultimately finding consensus that tattoos communicate messages about gender and feminine construction in contemporary American society. A provocative article by Michael Atkinson (2002) discusses the close connection between gender identity, status, and tattoos. The author interviewed 92 women with tattoos and from their stories concluded, “Almost without exception, the women’s underlying reasons for being tattooed; the shapes, sizes, and placements of their tattoos; the social presentation of their tattoos; and the active construction of their tattoos reflected a desire to communicate specific messages about gender to particular audiences” (p. 233). Certainly, the tattooed body subverts and reifies traditional notions of femininity and the passive female body.

Early and “traditional” research by criminologists and psychologists suggests tattoos function as an exoskeletal defense, or symbolic enhancement of the body (Hawkins & Popplestone, 1964). They speculate that the presence of the tattoo stirs psychological reactions for both its owner and its observers regarding the strength and toughness of the tattooed person. The tattoo provides a very masculine appearance of
strength, which women (whose bodies are traditionally seen as passive and docile) have struggled against. However, women also engage in tattooing to enhance their femininity, requesting feminine designs (butterflies, rose vines, hearts, celestial figures), or sexualized locations (lower back, buttocks, atop the breast, below the navel) that perpetuate gender constructions. Despite the counter hegemonic or hegemonic action, Atkinson (2001) considers tattooing and other body modification as “a flesh journey” and a postmodern method of “exploring femininity.”

Negotiation and contestation are the key terms that Atkinson articulates in the study of women and tattoos (2001; 2002) and that I wish to highlight in this study on body-skin (including the female body-skin) and tattoo removal. The permanence of tattoos makes it difficult to negotiate gender identity with them. When the advertising text questions the validity of the tattoo, it also questions the validity of the display of femininity. The rhetoric of the text, "tattoo parlors haven't exactly made the "A" list," promotes traditional power structures, implying that tattoos are outside the cultural norm. While this rhetorical strategy may not be effective for an individual who request tattoos to establish her or his independence from society, the strategy might work on women as a whole, who wish to assert their individuality within the bounds of conventional femininity. For some women, the tattoo contests cultural notions of femininity and established gendered practices. If unsatisfied with the reception of their display of femininity, the woman may request tattoo removal as another means of searching and defining her gender identity.

Tattoo removal (and perhaps other confessional technology) also provides a means of contradictorily controlling and supporting the gendered body-skin through
consumption. Akin to the statement, "Tattoo parlors haven't exactly made the "A" list," there exists a disciplining function for femininity relying on a call to tradition. Like Spitzack’s (1999) discussion of the spectacle of anorexia nervosa, tattoos resist and contain, support and refuse the gender constructions of the postmodern society.

Coinciding with the perspective of this paper, Spitzack purports the postmodern subject finds the body a source of comfort. Spitzack suggests anorexia is a public spectacle of a society where consumerism eats away at its buyers until a consumed body is all that is left. Tattoo removal, which the individual also purchases, serves a similar function for the body-skin. Consequently, the confession itself must also be bought. A person wishing to renounce their construction of gender must pay for their redemption. Indeed, confessions are only available to those with the economic means to purchase them.

Everyone has done something in their life they wish they could change…only some [deeds] brand you for life” Today, “A little beam of light can make all the difference…”

Skin and Cosmetic Solutions

The texts constitute a pejorative perspective of tattooing through the rhetorically articulated enunciative modalities, thematic strategies, and interpellation of desiring subjects. The narrative establishes the tattoo as first wrong, then regrettable, baiting the audience for the much anticipated and divine intervention of the laser. In this section of the narrative I examine how the clinic introduces its removal services as capable of providing absolution for tattooed persons.

In addition to the frequent metaphorical and often religious connotation of the laser light, the texts describe the laser as capable of “cleansing the soul” and “erasing” the past (Skin and Cosmetic Solutions). The text presents the laser as the (ab)solution
for the regretful audience. “A little beam of light can make all the difference…” should constitute the end of the narrative. However, the solution comes with a catch.

Tattoo removal is an elective procedure and there are no guarantees that the ‘art’ will completely disappear. 

Zimmet Vein and Dermatology Clinic

In this section, the narrative reveals the paradoxical ending to the clinic’s tattoo removal story. Up to this point, I have investigated how the narrative constructs, or interpellates a desiring audience in hopes of leading them to come to the same conclusion as the clinic – to remove their tattoo. In the following two sections, I intend to discuss the implications of the final portion of the narrative, including the relationship between the subjects’ desires and the tattoo remnant left on the skin, and the implications the remnant has on my ongoing discussion of tattoo removal as a technology of self.

As most Websites and advertisements point out, many dermatologic surgeons caution that complete tattoo removal is not possible. Pictures showing the before and after shots of laser treated skin are displayed on most tattoo removal sites as a means of persuading the audience to request removal services. These pictures typically depict the final state of the removed tattoo as still partially visible on the skin. Herein lies a confounding end to the tattoo removal story and the limit of the confession. The text advocates laser treatment as a way of removing an unwanted tattoo and purging the guilt associated with its presence. However, the technology fails to deliver these results. A juxtaposition of the advertising text to a (re)reading of the skin reveals an alternative message of self-renunciation. By attacking the tattoo, the text covertly attacks the
identity of the tattooed person. The text constructs the tattoo, not as a moral sin, but as a sin against one’s true self - a fallacy of identity.

Conclusion

The text suggest that the laser is an invention with illimitable capabilities, including, most importantly, the ability to renounce an identity deemed unacceptable by members of a certain social status. At this juncture the text articulate the need for tattoo removal from a combination of religious, familial, and scientific enunciative positions. Encountering the text is an experience of power in which the reader is interpellated as powerless and ignorant vis-à-vis the clinic. The variety of relationships established by the text ensures the adherence of the audience to the message of the text. In each instance the text constructs a number of desiring subjects: those desiring individuality, regretful persons desiring freedom from their regret, those desiring less gendered constraints, and those with consumer-related desires. The advertising text concludes the narrative by presenting tattoo removal as the (ab)solution for the desiring tattooed subject. The redemption powers of the laser provide an opportunity for the subject to create a new identity.

I now return to the suggestion I made earlier in this chapter. Specifically, I wish to elaborate on how these advertising texts reveal tattoo removal as a postmodern technology of self and the implications of this action for the non-tattooed. Foucault's initial studies of confession and the technologies of self were limited to verbal discourse and linguistic technologies, as that was the emphasis in Greek and Early Christian cultures. In a highly developed postmodern society, the forms in which technologies of self materialize are varied. This paper adopts Salecl's (1998) assertion that the
individuality of postmodernity causes mistrust of words. Certainly many rhetoricians (and many Foucauldians, as well) have embraced the visual, non-linguistic elements of postmodernity as an opportunity for analysis of new texts. In a similar vein, I purport tattoo removal as a non-linguistic technology of self. In contrast to Foucault’s linguistic examples of confession, laser removal provides a new mode of thinking about confessional technologies. While certain Christian cultures and psychoanalytic offices perceive verbalization as the only way to reach absolution, words are no longer necessary for the redemption of all postmodern subjects.

Laser technology provides a confession of self that requires action, consumerism, and change of the body-skin. This perspective of confession effects both tattooed and non-tattooed persons. The logic behind tattoo removal seems evident – if you wish to redeem yourself, you must first buy a change in your appearance. If the non-tattooed who witness the confession of the tattoo (by seeing the remnant of the removed tattoo on the person) and find logic in this style of confession, then the utility of laser removal as a technology of self is demonstrated. I further investigate this issue in the conclusion of this thesis.
CHAPTER 3
CONSTRUCTION OF ENUNCIATIVE STATUS: AN ANALYSIS OF GANG TATTOO REMOVAL

Introduction

Throughout his lifetime, Foucault investigated the idea of sovereign power, claiming that micro-relations of power on multiple levels operated from the bottom-up to produce non-static power structures. One of Foucault's most compelling arguments concerns enunciative modalities. An enunciation always involves a position from which something is said -- a position that requires certain discursive possibilities in order to exist. The second chapter of this thesis identified the medical clinic as the enunciating subject for tattoo removal. The clinic’s position permits a discourse on the “sin” of tattoos and the absolution of tattoo removal. This discourse constructs a regretful subject (the tattooed). Not only the admonisher of tattoos, the clinic also presents itself as the solution… and the listener in the confession of tattoo removal.

This thesis investigates how tattoo removal acts as confessional technology and the construction of the subject position involved in the confession. Chapter two discussed the construction of the desiring subject, or confessor. This chapter delves into the creation of the listener in the confessional act. Specifically, I intend to address how the listeners' enunciative modality is created.

This chapter analyzes the brochures and Websites provided by various gang tattoo removal programs to better understand the creation of the clinic's enunciative modality. To accomplish this feat, this paper analyzes the clinic as an apparatus, or dispositif (Deleuze, 1992). After explaining the set of texts on gang tattoo removal
programs, the first argument of the chapter involves the visibility of the apparatus. In his discussion of sexuality, Foucault (1978) demonstrates how medical offices retain their power by remaining relatively invisible in the discourse on sexuality. I argue that a similar instance occurs in the discourse of tattoo removal, in which the focus is directed away from the clinic and remains riveted on the tattooed individual. Next, I investigate the rhetorics of the enunciative modality. Foucault states that in order to understand the enunciative modality one must, "describe each time the rules for the formation of objects, modalities of statement, concept, and theoretical choices" (1972, p. 64-5). Specifically, in this section I examine the rhetorics of transformation and redemption that the enunciative modality employs to retain its status. Finally, I look at what Deleuze (1992) calls, the curves of enunciation, present in the text. Since the listener in the tattoo removal process is not a traditional entity (i.e., a priest or a psychoanalyst), it is necessary to investigate how the listener retains its powerful position. I describe the transformation of the discursive formation of tattoos by studying the changing role of the speaking institution (the clinic) in the discourse on tattoos. I further demonstrate how the institution changes its role in discourse by speaking from a variety of scientific, aesthetic, and political thresholds. Deleuze’s (1992) clarification of the visibility, enunciative dimensions, and thresholds of the social apparatus help explain how the clinic acquired it enunciative position.

The Text: Gang Tattoo Removal for Juveniles

The proposed texts for analysis are the brochures and Website information available on tattoo removal programs for gang juveniles in the United States. Preoccupied with marginalized and deviant persons, Foucault introduced the
technologies of self to better understand how one elucidates her or his own identity in relation to societal restrictions and prohibitions. The perceived transgressive behavior of gang members seems appropriate to Foucault’s prior work. The informational brochures and Websites discuss the free removal services available across the country to gang members wishing to cut ties their with gangs. Frequently, state governments initiate these programs, providing funding for laser equipment and office space for volunteers and local organizations to run their services. Christian churches and other religious organizations also are active in establishing removal centers. The removal clinics that this chapter considers include B.E.S.T. Anti-Gang Grant, Agape Light Removal Program, D-Tag Tattoo Removal Program, Chuck Muncie Removal Program, Fairfax Skin Deep, Dallas County Tattoo Removal Program, Tattoos are Taboo, Gang Outreach, Tat2BeGone Medical Group, T.R.A.P., and X-Tattoo Gang Tattoo Removal Program.

Whether organized in California, Texas, Georgia, or Wisconsin, the tattoo removal programs espouse many of the same criteria for their future patients. The majority of tattoo removal programs in the United States target juvenile gang members up to 25 years of age who wish to leave their gangs. Programs that extend their services to adult former gang members typically charge a minimal fee, but rarely turn away clients unable to contribute financially. Prospective patients apply for tattoo removal and must meet a number of requirements before being granted the free services. These requirements are clearly stated in the brochures and Websites on tattoo removal. They include having no recent arrests and acquiring parental consent (for those under 18). After an interview and a few counseling sessions the former gang
member schedules anywhere from four to ten, 30-minute sessions to remove her or his gang-related tattoos. According to all the brochures and Websites, tattoo removal is granted if the patient completes a number of community service hours prior to the removal, remains drug and alcohol free, continues to disassociate with her or his former gang, and gains employment or enrolls in school. The texts explicitly state that if the patient violates any of these requisites, the program terminates the remaining removal sessions. Since the brochures and Websites provided by the programs discuss their requirements and provide information about the program and their patients, I further investigate these texts to better understand the creation of the clinic as the enunciative modality in the discourse on tattoo removal.

Visibility of the Apparatus

In an effort to construct a better understanding Foucault’s complex notion of the apparatus (dipositifs), Deleuze (1992) identifies certain dimensions, or lines, that allow the apparatus to obtain a particular enunciative status. These trajectories outline the apparatus to give it its shape and appearance without materializing themselves. This paper incorporates two of these lines to better understand how the clinic has retained its enunciative position as the listener in the confessional act. The first of these lines is the apparatus’ visibility, or rather, its lack thereof. In the History of Sexuality, Foucault (1978) proposes that the power behind the discourse on sexuality originated with the church and in the office of psychoanalysts. These positions retained their power by remaining invisible and seemingly disconnected from the discourse on sexuality. Deleuze discusses the power of the invisible in another of Foucault’s (1977) works, Discipline and Punish.
Each apparatus has its way of structuring light, the way in which it falls, blurs and disperses, distributing the visible and the invisible, giving birth to objects which are dependent on it for their existence, and causing them to disappear. This is the case not only for painting but also for architecture: like the ‘prison apparatus’ as an optical machine used for seeing without being seen (Deleuze, 1992, p. 160).

As Deleuze suggests, the enunciative position is most effective when one is unable to identify it. Consequently, the enunciative modality retains its status because of the difficulty in challenging an indiscernible power.

The initial purpose for analyzing texts on gang tattoo removal programs is to understand how the institutions (the clinic) rhetorically utilize the voice of the former gang members (the patients) to speak for them about tattoo removal. Using the voice of the desiring subject helps the apparatus maintain its invisibility in the discourse on tattoo removal. The apparatus exploits the desires of the former gang members as a political tool to maintain its status and construct new confessors from the general public.

Perhaps, the former gang member desires tattoo removal to protect her or himself from other gangs and to attain an acceptable role in society. Patient testimonies such as, “The reason I’m getting my tattoo removed is for job purposes. It’s really hard to get a job with visible tattoos. People in general are quick to judge people with tattoos…” demonstrate the social hazards of having a tattoo (Agape Light). These desires assist in the creation of the gang tattoo removal clinic and, consequently, also construct the clinic as the listener in the gang members’ confession. This paper breaks down the lines of
the apparatus to illustrate how tattoo removal has become a postmodern technology of self, in which tattooed persons confess the error of their tattoos.

In the brochures and Websites on tattoo removal, the institutions remain invisible behind the stories and so-called desires of their patients. Although typically these desires are paraphrased or implied, occasionally the clinic provides pseudo-testimonials of former patients. For example, one program co-opts the story of a former gang member unhappy with his tattoos. The clinic frames the boy’s experience in order to narrate a story that coincides with the objectives of the institution. The program writes, “When people begin to regret their tattoos, many resort to drastic measures. A Fillmore High School student used a knife to gouge a gang insignia from his hand. He was afraid the tattoo might provoke gang members to attack him” (Chuck Muncie Removal Program). The narration, that implies the voice of the boy stating his desire to disaffiliate with his gang, serves as an impetus for the existence of the apparatus (the clinic). The clinic presents the boy’s efforts at self-confessing (by gouging the tattoo out of his hand) as unsuccessful, leaving a space for the clinic to step in where the boy fails. The story establishes the logic of the apparatus – to help out those who are unable to help themselves. Also, the clinic serves as the narrator of the story. This narrating position disembodies the clinic from the actions of the boy, but does not eliminate its visibility completely.

Themes of assistance or service of the apparatus are prevalent in many of the texts on gang tattoo removal. The enunciative modality retains its invisibility by directing the focus (and hence, visibility) to the desires of the patient. An article about a Napa Valley removal clinic demonstrates the role of the former gang member in constructing
the position of the removal clinic (Garcia). A volunteer from the clinic, Mayra Garcia, relays her plight as a teenage gang member who had wanted to disaffiliate from her gang. Seeking out a new life, Mayra pleaded with an employee of a nearby hospital to help her remove her gang tattoos, which she perceived as a major obstacle in her reformed identity. She disclosed her desire for a more socially accepted life and her struggles with her personal identity. Her testimony moved the hospital employee, who sought the help of other hospital administrators and, along with a nearby Catholic church, started a Napa Valley removal clinic called Tattoos are Taboo. Garcia’s desire for removal (among other things) directly influenced the creation of this particular clinic. The published story highlights Mayra’s plight, while discreetly strengthening the position of the clinic as a site of refuge and liberation.

The key point that each of these examples demonstrates is how the desires of the patients are exploited in order to logically prove the position of the apparatus. In an interview, Foucault discusses the function of discourse in an apparatus. He states, “As you may know, discursivity refers to the care with which a certain language has been constructed, so that it enables dialog based in logic, as opposed to more-or-less-disconnected discussion” (1972, p. 42). The discourse extracted from the student and the volunteer’s experiences relay an urgent, life-altering desire for removal. Their voices and stories lead the reader/audience/observer to an obvious, and most importantly, logical conclusion about the need for the removal clinics. The stories provide reasonable and logistical support for the apparatus. The apparatus retains its invisibility and effectiveness because the logic is presented by the voice of the desiring subject,
rather than the voice of the apparatus itself. This section investigated the effectiveness of this strategy in the discourse on gang tattoo removal.

Rhetorics of the Body-Skin

Rhetorics of Transformation

This next section of the chapter examines additional rhetorical strategies used by the clinic in order to gain its enunciative status. The first rhetoric from the brochures and Websites discussing tattoo removal programs often center on the transformation of the body-skin. The most prevalent body-skin rhetoric in the text suggests that gang tattoo removal is an external procedure that transforms internal identity. The texts dichotomize pre-removal and post-removal, and describe tattoo removal as the impetus for subverting one’s direction in life. The purported idea being that the change in appearance effects the psyche of the individual. Certainly, this notion is prevalent in today’s society, in which individuals are often instructed to change their outside façade to illuminate their inner potential. One clinic demonstrates this line of reasoning in its mission statement, “It is the mission of CleanSlate to assist in the healing of gang members both externally and internally” (Clean Slate). This program provides counseling sessions in addition to the removal services to address the interior and exterior condition of its patients. However, the removal of the tattoo serves as the stimulus for change and the primary focus of the clinic texts. Another program describes tattoo removal as a service geared towards “inspir[ing] and instill[ing] within the youth a desire to fulfill their potential in life with a sense of dignity, honor, respect, and destiny” (Gang Outreach). The text rhetorically addresses the limit created by gang tattoos and the many positive outcomes of removing the tattoos. The text suggests that removal is
necessary for transforming the individual to a more capable, credible, and respected society member.

Tropes and subtle messages of the transformative properties of removal proliferate in the titles of many tattoo removal programs. In particular, the titles of many the religious-based and locally run programs reference the power of the body-skin in the transformation of identity. Fairfax Skindeep program and the CleanSlate program illustrate this preoccupation with skin as a surface capable of converting one’s core identity. Fairfax Skindeep is a rather misguided title, as the old adage states, “beauty is only skin deep,” meaning that appearance matters little and it is what is inside that counts. However, the context of the program title seems to imply the opposite. The title, CleanSlate, alludes to the power of wiping away an identity from the skin in order to start a new, and better, life. Indeed, the mission of the program is to accomplish just that – a clean slate.

The titles focus on the gang tattoos themselves as a dangerous and restricting phenomenon. The program titles, Tattoo Taboo and Tattoo Removal Assistance Program (T.R.A.P.), reinforce the societal stigma and social status of the tattooed body. Describing tattoos as “taboo” implies that one must quickly remove the offensive object in order to become acceptable and “not taboo.” The acronym T.R.A.P. refers to tattooed person’s inability to function as a productive member of society. “Trapped” by gang affiliation, the program encourages tattoo removal to “help the youth regain a level of self-identity and independence” (Tattoo Removal Assistance Program). The Websites and brochures suggest that gang tattoos hinder the individual from entering the
mainstream society, a message that, not only these titles, but also the body of each text reiterates again and again.

The message is clear – removing gang tattoos (and the coinciding confessional/counseling sessions) constitute the terminal step in the reformation of the former gang member. For example, the citizens of the Santa Barbara-San Luis District of California debated and questioned tattoo removal programs funded by the federal government. They argue that local residents and businesses should fund local problems, such as gang-related crime, rather than nationwide taxpayers contributing to the programs. Clinic supporters reiterate the effect of gang affiliation on the economy and employment, correlating the removal of gang tattoos with the potential for employment and community work. A volunteer doctor states another justification for the programs. “If we keep one of these kids out of prison for a year, we have saved the taxpayers between 30 and 50 thousand dollars. That’s one. We’re keeping 30, 40, 100 kids out of prison” (Getting rid of gang tattoos, 2002). The doctor clearly identifies the low status of the tattooed body-skin, rather than the actions, affiliation, or internal qualities of the individual. Indeed, in this case, the apparatus maintains its enunciative position by focusing on and holding the tattooed body-skin responsible for the past actions of the individual. However, as discussed earlier, the Websites and brochures reveal the accountability of the individual for the condition of her or his skin. Politically, the former gang member finds her or himself in a catch 22, and held at fault in both scenarios. In either case, the clinic directs their attention on the individual as ultimately responsible for their past, present, and future. This strategy ensures that the apparatus remains relatively invisible and unnoticed in the discourse on tattoo removal.
Since the apparatus speaks with the voice of the fully accountable gang member, the desire for change and the guilt about past actions remain relatively unquestioned. Therefore, the rhetoric presented throughout the text is one of much needed redemption from the "sins" of the gang tattoo. Gangs are referenced as "children killing children" (Clean Slate) and as a "self-destructive way of life" (Agape Light) without any mention of outside circumstances, influences, or complexity. The apparatus presents tattoo removal as having redemptive powers for individuals wishing to leave the past life that they have chosen for themselves. The Websites and brochures describe their programs as capable of "healing gang members" (Clean Slate) and "help[ing] people turn their lives around" (Dallas County). As discussed earlier in this paper, the clinic constructs the tattooed individual as solely responsible for her or his past and present situation. Themes of the redemptive, healing powers of the clinic contradict these earlier statements about individual responsibility and action, but serve a definite purpose. When the individual fails, the apparatus graciously steps in to assist. However, the rhetorical strategy of redemption places the tattooed subject as subordinate to the clinic. The clinic gains its powerful position by suggesting that the individual, who up to this point has made all of her or his decisions, does not possess the capacity to complete the final step of disaffiliation. The text implies that the individual is incapable of completely cutting ties without the clinic's assistance. The clinic achieves its enunciative status because of the rhetoric presented about the capabilities of the tattooed individual, rather than the capabilities of the apparatus itself.
Redemption is often associated with sin and wrongdoing, as is much of the discourse on gang tattoo removal. One program titles itself Agape Light, which serves as a metaphor for both the perspective of the program and the services used for removal. In Christian contexts, Agape love is the unconditional and charitable love that one receives from God. The light (perhaps also representing the laser light) redeems the sinner from her or his sins without expectations. The title certainly implies that the tattoo is a sin from which one needs to be absolved. Additionally, the text often emphasizes a connection between removing the visible tattoo and simultaneously finding “inner peace” (Clean Slate) or creating “internal change” (Fairfax Skin Deep). Like the rhetoric of transformation, the apparatus’ rhetoric of redemption presents tattoo removal as able to alter one’s internal qualities and provide “a fresh start in life” (D-Tag), a “clean start in life” (Agape Light), or a “positive way of life” (Agape Light). Indeed, references to life and, in particular, an emancipated life, appear in almost every Website or brochure on gang tattoo removal.

Curves of Enunciation

Up to this point, I have investigated the strategies employed by the clinic in order to secure its enunciative status in the discourse of tattoo removal. This next section of this chapter investigates the curves of enunciation of the tattoo removal clinic and how the apparatus maintains its high status by enunciating from a number of different positions. The ability to enunciate from a variety of positions and with a variety of voices effects not only the visibility of the apparatus, but also its status and power. Deleuze (1992) describes the curves of enunciation as affirmations that morph, modify, and penetrate a number of different thresholds (p. 160). Deleuze specifically identifies...
scientific, aesthetic, and political thresholds that apparatuses break through using lines of enunciation. Each time an affirmation is made, it emerges from a different subject position and from a different threshold. I intend to discuss the discourse of the apparatus in relation to the three thresholds (scientific, aesthetic, and political) and the flexibility that allows some discourse to rank in more than one threshold.

**Scientific threshold**

Clinics typically are viewed as credible sources for discourse on science and technology. Therefore, one of the enunciative positions of the clinic (in the case of tattoo removal) is from a scientific threshold. The vaulted scientific status of the clinic occurs because of the technological advancements in laser treatment. In chapter one of this thesis, I discussed the tattoo removal methods of excision, salabrasion, and dermabrasion, which often are characterized by heaving scarring. Laser technology removes a tattoo with less pain, less scarring, and with greater results. Many of the brochures on gang tattoo removal mention this fact. For example, the T.R.A.P. brochure clearly states, “In recent times, many physicians consider laser surgery one of the best methods of tattoo removal.” The clinic uses the laser to justify its voice in the scientific threshold as one of privileged knowledge and technological achievement.

To attain credibility and to secure their status, the clinic also includes scientific jargon to describe the nuances of the laser. The T.R.A.P. brochure explains, “Today, the Q-switched Nd: Yag, Q-switched Alexandrite and the Q-switched Ruby are among the most frequently used lasers for the removal of unwanted tattoos.” The scientific terminology strengthens the message of advancement in the field of laser technology.

The function of jargon in the scientific threshold is not new to Foucault’s investigation of
the apparatus. Foucault deems jargon as necessary in the scientific threshold, as it reflects continual change in the field. Additionally, the language positions the speaker as an authority figure needed to translate for the general public – a process that puts the audience in a subordinate position. The doctor typically fills this role in the scientific threshold.

Because doctors serve as the mediators between the scientific (and medical) threshold and lay people, the role of the doctors that volunteer at the gang tattoo removal clinics is important. First, one needs to understand how doctors use jargon to retain their authority positions. For example, when an individual visits a doctor to diagnose an illness, the doctor first identifies the disease in scientific terminology (i.e., “You have acute lymphocytic leukemia”), and then describes the disease in simpler terms (i.e., “Your body can not fight infections, etc...”). In this case, the patient needs the doctor in order to gather information and to proceed with the treatment of the illness. This reliance may seem logical, and perhaps necessary, but when a doctor performs a similar mediatory role at the clinic, he or she does so with different consequences. For example, the majority of the programs covered by this analysis require a medical screening to determine whether the patient is a good candidate for tattoo removal. The doctor is in charge of inspecting the patient and determining the best method for removing the tattoo. The patient accepts the doctor’s role in the removal process because American society is accustomed to receiving advice from medical professionals. Additionally, the perceived necessity of tattoo removal is heightened because it is spoken from a doctor’s position. I speculate that the already established doctor-patient relationship works to construct a new population of tattoo removal
patients. Indeed, the doctor’s role in this decision-making process suggests the medical necessity of tattoo removal. If patients deem the removal as crucial, then they also make themselves more vulnerable to the supporting discourse for removal. The presence of the doctor alone strengthens the enunciations about tattoo removal in this threshold. However, the effect of the doctor’s scientific status often reaches beyond the scientific threshold. In this case, the status holds weight in both the aesthetic and political thresholds.

Aesthetic Threshold

The aesthetic constitutes the second threshold from which the apparatus enunciates. The idea that postmodernity is marked by aesthetics is not a new one. In short, postmodernism values the impact of an object over its meaning -- its sensation over the interpretation of it. As images reinterpret narratives and the figurative substitutes for the discursive, postmodern society experiences a surge in tattooing. The aesthetic implications of tattooing are most evident when one considers the fads of tattoo designs and which tattoos are considered appropriate in certain social contexts (see chapter 2). A tattoo can elicit an emotional response based solely on its visual appearance. Certainly, tattooing is a phenomenon that corresponds with the emphasis towards aesthetics. Accordingly, gang members (as well as other tattooed individuals) value their tattoos for the impression they make and the feelings they arouse.

Enunciations from the aesthetic threshold are important because of their major role in the perception of tattoos and, consequently, the perception of tattoo removal.

In today’s society, discerning the scientific from the aesthetic is difficult, especially since scientific and medical advancements often are used to alter one’s
appearance rather than improve one’s health (i.e., cosmetic surgery). The BEST anti-gang program informs the public that its services are, “provided by plastic surgeon Josh Korman, who is donating his time.” The statement demonstrates the fine line between the aesthetic and scientific role of the doctor. The doctor administering tattoo removal seems to serve a role similar to a fashion designer, except the doctor is fashioning an acceptable skin condition (by removing a tattoo). While we have seen this comparison before when discussing tattoo artists -- this metaphor often is not extended to those who alter the tattoo (and also the body-skin) through removal. The fact that plastic surgeons administer removals also reveals the complexity of the enunciations. In other words, the threshold from which the doctor speaks is difficult to discern, as doctors are typically given status in the scientific threshold. However, the role of plastic surgeons remains unclear. In this case, the ambiguity works in the favor of the doctor (often a plastic surgeon), who retains her or his status in both thresholds.

Another way the Websites and brochures address the aesthetic, and consequently social, aspect of gang tattoos is by frequently limiting removal treatments to visible tattoos on the neck, face, and hands (California Youth Authority). The Websites and brochures address the aesthetic nature of the tattoo. For example, the X-Tattoo Website states, “Gangs ‘brand’ their members with tattoos, to remind them of their ties to the gang. These tattoos are often on very visible locations, often the hands and arms, and even the face. When they want to get out of the gang, the tattoos make it harder to get their past behind them [sil].” Another Website explains, “The gang related tattoos are a danger to the … former gang member in recovery because it still signifies affiliation” (Clean Slate). While in some cases visible tattoos present physical danger to
the reformed gang members, the apparent concern is that the visible tattoo is not aesthetically pleasing for the person’s new social group – mainstream society.

The aesthetic purpose of tattoos coincides with research that shows that those who belong to a group, such as a gang, where tattoos are accepted feel more satisfied with their tattoo than people in groups where tattoos are not accepted (Armstrong, Murphy, Sallee, & Watson, 2000). Indeed, tattooing in contemporary society is a highly social act (Sanders, 1989). Gang members desiring acceptance use their tattoos as a permanent expression of loyalty and as a status symbol among their peers. Aesthetically, gang tattoos certainly convey a strong social message of hyper-masculinized strength and power. In fact, gang members typically request tattoos in the first place because of the powerful aesthetic symbolism. In short, the visible gang tattoo symbolizes a desire for a certain group affiliation, appearance, or behavior.

The apparatus (the clinic) acknowledges the aesthetic consequences of tattoos in the former gang member’s new social group. The Websites and brochures sustain a focus on the tattooed person, rather than mainstream society. For example, the Chuck Muncie organization suggests tattoos are unacceptable in mainstream society and provide testimonial support for their opinion. The Website states, “Tattoos turn off employers. ‘People just look at me and know I was a gang member,’ said a 19-year-old from Ojai when he went for an unsuccessful job interview.” Using the voice and perspective of the gang member to describe the aesthetic affects of the tattoo allow the apparatus to maintain its invisible, yet powerful, position. The text implies that potential employers do not find the gang tattoo aesthetically pleasing. The individual is discounted because of the condition of his skin. Interesting questions arise when
addressing the status of the tattooed body, however, the effects of a tattoo are often a direct result of the appearance (and aesthetics) of the body-skin.

*Political Threshold*

Enunciations from the scientific and aesthetic thresholds frequently curve through the political threshold. The political threshold is certainly the most dangerous of the three for the apparatus. In other words, enunciations seen as political are more susceptible to opposition and attack. Therefore, simultaneous enunciations often appear, in which the scientific or aesthetic obscure the political statement of the apparatus. The primary political messages sent by the apparatus pertain to the individual’s accountability and the necessity of the individual laboring in mainstream society.

The brochures and Websites often suggest that the successes of their services (tattoo removal) are dependent on the actions of the individual. Whether questioning the genuineness of the patient’s motives or the method in which the patient first applied her or his tattoo, the apparatus holds the individual accountable for her or his future. This political message often coincides with the scientific boundaries of laser technology. For example, the Salt Lake Area Gang Project describes the arduous process of removal and provides the caveat that, “Tattoo removal is a slow process, but for those who are committed to breaking free from their former, destructive lifestyle, it is worth it.” In the same sentence, the limits of the laser are transferred to the responsibility of the patient. Even with advancements in laser technology, the removal process can still take anywhere from five to ten treatments. The clinics warn future patients of this delayed time, suggesting that this time delay is negative only if the patient’s motives for removal
are not sincere. The X-Tattoo program also uses the individual as an excuse for technological limits and poor removal results. The text states, “Scarring is unusual, and if a scar remains after treatment, it is often from the original tattoo placement.” Again, the focus is immediately shifted from the scientific technology to the individual – all within the same sentence. The success of the technology relies on humans; however, the only humans under scrutiny in the Websites and brochures are those with gang tattoos. Spotlighting the individual makes it seem as though the individual is fully responsible if the removal (and absolution) fails. Consequently, the individual receives the blame for the events pre and post removal, and the clinic remains relatively invisible in the discourse on gang tattoo removal.

The theme of individual accountability presented by the clinic texts coincide with Foucault’s compelling notion of biopolitics, which he introduced to the academic world in 1978. Biopolitics function at the level of the body as a micro practice in which individuals regulate themselves. Biopolitics causes one to self-monitor one’s body and keeps her or him focused on them as a site of truth. Foucault discusses this phenomenon in regards to illness-preventing practices. Individuals are expected to work hard to ensure the safety of their food and water, their environment and their physical appearance. Individuals believe they are solely responsible for their well-being, which permits the government to eschew many of its social responsibilities. For gang tattoo removal, the apparatus transfers responsibility from itself to the individual. This movement reduces the visibility of the apparatus and its role in tattoo removal at the expense of the tattooed person.
The second message of the clinic from the political threshold is that tattoos prevent a person from becoming a fully functioning member of society, and that the tattooed need confessional technology to enter the social sphere successfully. Available testimonies frequently address the challenges of gaining employment when one is tattooed. One woman explains the benefits of gang tattoo removal. “I feel more self-assured in a number of ways including seeking employment, interacting with people, meeting new people, and feeling more accepted in society in general” (Agape Light). Indeed, the push towards being a productive laborer permeates the Websites and brochures. Often those who initiate the programs testify on behalf of their patients. For example, in an interview about the removal programs a California government official stated, “People with tattoos often find themselves being unfairly stereotyped in a way that makes it difficult to find employment or be promoted to higher, better-paying positions” (Vlahos, 2002). The official expresses her acceptance of the stereotypes against the tattooed body-skin -- rather than challenging them. She suggests a change of the body-skin to a more acceptable condition to resolve the prejudices. Again, the clinic maintains its focus on the tattooed individual as deviant in need of alteration in order to better fit the status quo.

Aside from the political discourse surrounding tattoo removal programs, many programs institute a system that requires patients to work in society prior to receiving removal services. Once an individual passes initial background checks and counseling sessions (a form of mini-confession in which counselors determine whether the patient expresses a sincere desire for a change in her or his life), they are expected to perform a number of community service hours and gain employment. All the brochures and
Websites on gang tattoo removal specify their criteria for community service. Some require the individual to complete a certain number of service hours before each treatment (around 15 hours each time); others require all hours to be completed before beginning the procedure (anywhere from 20 to 40 hours). The exchange of societal labor for tattoo removal is enunciated from a political threshold for a society that stipulates that members should never get something for nothing. By (re)entering the status quo, the former gang member gains the apparatus’ trust and respect and, consequently, its services. Meanwhile, the apparatus enunciates through the voice of the former gang member a desire for social acceptance and identity. The clinic uses the gang member’s voice to enunciate from the political threshold and ensure their status and position in the threshold.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter investigates how the apparatus, the medical clinic, gains its enunciative status in the discourse on tattoo removal. The chapter opens with a primary question, “How is the enunciative modality (i.e., the listener in the confessional act) created and maintained?” The Websites and brochures provided by gang tattoo removal programs serves as the text for analysis. The text reveals enunciations that emerge from scientific, aesthetic, and political thresholds. These enunciations often curve through more than one threshold, allowing the apparatus more flexible and effective enunciations. The apparatus also employs a number of rhetorics to strengthen its status, including rhetorics of transformation and redemption. The analysis uncovers a focus on the individual, her or his body-skin, her or his tattoos, her or his
actions, and her or his motives. This strategy permits the apparatus to remain an invisible, yet powerful enunciative modality.

Identifying these rhetorics and enunciative strategies proves useful for rhetorical studies of the postmodern condition. Since power no longer emerges in a top-down fashion, or from a sovereign power (i.e., the church or state), understanding the way enunciative modalities create and maintain their powerful positions in a number of thresholds is important. This chapter presents an analysis aimed at creating a better method for understanding the process of building enunciative power.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS: CONJOINING DESIRE AND CONFESSION

Preview

This thesis investigated the implications of tattoo removal in postmodern society. In this concluding chapter, I summarize the previous chapters, discuss whether tattoo removal permits the tattooed the desired redemption, the material effects of the removal services, and the contributions this study makes to the field of rhetoric.

Summary of Chapters

In chapter one, I explored notions of desire, fantasy, and body-skin to better position the analysis of tattoo removal. A review of literature discussed the effectiveness of the body rhetoric, the characteristics of the current human condition, and how tattooing has developed into a postmodern expression of self. Indeed, if tattooing and the body are so closely tied to identity, one is left to wonder what of the practice of tattoo removal? I speculated that tattoo removal has become a technology of self in which people may confess the social sin of tattooing. To further investigate tattoo removal as a confessional act, I examined each role of the confession separately – first looking at the confessor, then the listener.

Chapter two explored the Websites and Web pages used by removal clinics to advertise their removal services and construct the confessor of the confessional act. The chapter analyzed the fragmented texts as one narrative to better understand the dynamic of the text and the rhetorical strategies employed to interpellate desiring subjects. The chapter identified a number of subjects constructed by the text, including those desiring individuality, freedom from regret, gendered normality, and those with
consumer-related desires. The text speaks from a certain enunciative status to recruit confessors from the public and to encourage tattooed persons to confess through the practice of tattoo removal.

Chapter three investigated how the clinic creates its enunciative modality as the listener in the confessional act. The analysis revealed a number of thresholds from which the apparatus enunciates. The paper posited that the curve of enunciation through many thresholds at the same time allows the apparatus to remain relatively invisible in the discourse on tattoo removal. I also examined the rhetorics the apparatus utilizes to strengthen its enunciative status. I purport that the clinic establishes its necessity (as the listener) by speaking with the voice of former gang members and maintaining its focus on the tattooed body-skin.

Redemption and the Remnant

This paper investigated the discourse on tattoo removal to better understand who desires tattoo removal. Believing that the tattooed individual is the traditional focal point of researchers, this paper turned to the clinic to better understand the construction of the desiring subject. At this juncture, I return to the individual to evaluate the success of the removal. The reasons for removal vary from person to person. Some wish to avoid gang warfare, others desire gender normality, and yet others satisfactory consumerism. Whatever the reason for removal, apparently the ultimate goal of removal is to be released from the constraints the tattoo imposes on the individual. In other words, the various texts under analysis present tattoo removal as a means of absolution from the sin of tattooing. Therefore, the question posed in this section is, “does tattoo removal yield satisfactory results for the subject desiring redemption from her or his tattoo?”
The brochures, Websites, and advertisements for tattoo removal seem to suggest that laser removal is effective because it literally erases the visual reminder of the tattoo from one’s body. This claim seems reasonable until one considers the final result of the tattooing process – the remnant of the original tattoo. Recall, no removal process yet developed completely removes the ink and returns the skin to its original condition. Lasers "fade" or "break up" the ink at best. What are the implications of the remnant? Does the persistent ink of the tattoo mean the confession fails to absolve the confessor from her or his sinful tattoo? If the confession fails to fully remove the tattoo, then why is tattoo removal growing so rapidly in contemporary society? Given the rapid growth of the tattoo removal patients, I believe that tattoo removal must yield unexpected, but satisfactory results for the individual. Clearly, investigating the role of the remnant is important.

I posit that the remnant, rather than confounding or ruining the confession, actually proves the subject’s engagement in the confession. Take, for example, tattoos removed from former gang members. For many removal patients, pleasure rises with each treatment. For example, one of the testimonials on the Agape Light Website states, "...once I started to get treatment and started to see that my tattoos were clearing out, oh my God... I felt like a new person..." (Agape Light). The patient feels better about the fading tattoo than she feels about the tattoo in its fully-inked original form. I believe this story shows how the remnant reflects the woman’s acknowledgement of her unacceptable past behaviors and her commitment to change into a “new person.” I posit that the remnant is viewed positively because it represents the woman’s rejection (or confession) of her tattoo.
In addition, I posit that the remnant left after laser removal serves as a battle wound of the removal process. At the beginning of this thesis, I presented a naval officer’s narrative that discussed his wife's and his preference for his scars (that result from tattoo removal) to his tattoo. Looking at the officer’s puzzling story through a confessional lens, the purpose of the scars makes more sense. The officer saw the scars are more acceptable because they showed repentance and absolution. Despite weeks in the hospital and the disfiguring scars, the naval officer still perceived the tattoo removal as “worth it.”

The existence of the remnant also proves useful for understanding the desires and purpose of tattoo removal for the unhappily tattooed. Early in this project, I identified the importance of the body-skin in the study of desire. Following Copjec’s advice, I juxtaposed the body-skin and the discursive text in hopes of revealing a space where desire revealed itself. I found that the desires of the confessing subject seemed to contradict the message of the body-skin-text. The contradiction appeared with the existence of the remnant. The remnant left on the skin after tattoo removal serves as the limit of the confessional act and perhaps the secret door to understanding the desires of the tattooed subjects.

This section builds on the previous analyses to draw conclusions about the function of the body-skin in tattoo removal. With numerous identity options available to the postmodern subject, the subject chooses to turn to her or his skin to articulate her or his desires. Not only does the skin reflect desire, it also reveals less obvious desires. Corey & Nakayama (1997) posit that desire exists beyond the text. Their essay suggests that, “desire is visceral…it transcends the text” (1997, p. 65). After an attempt
to write desire, the authors argue that language understates the fervor of our passions so the subject relies on the body to articulate desire. Corey and Nakayama (1997) demonstrate how the body steps in to articulate desire that language cannot express, but do not describe how the body-skin expresses desire. Instead the authors speculate that even the body expresses a desire for something cultivated by cultural power. They reiterate their point by suggesting the homosexual man lusts for the prototypical heterosexual male image (p. 333). In contrast, this paper searches for an accurate read of desire apart from ideological constraints.

Zizek’s (1997) discussion of fantasy space sheds light on the connection between the body-skin, the fantasy of tattoo removal, and desire. In Plague of Fantasies, Zizek (1997) advocates psychoanalysis as a “meta-theory of the impasse of modernity” (p. 86). Important to Zizek’s argument is the materialization of ideology. Zizek asserts that the unconscious is not concealed in the depths of the unknown, but is visible from the outside. Ideology and fantasy serve a similar function, that of a protective shield, or symbolic structure to protect a person from the real. Popular fantasy analyses, such as symbolic convergence theory, analyze events for the purpose of revealing ideological structures concealed by a false and distorting fantasy. Zizek purports that the attempt to step outside ideology and critique it simply shows how tightly we are bound to ideological powers.

Zizek proposes a simple definition of fantasy as the “scenario that realizes the subject’s desire” (1998, p. 6). This definition works as long as it is taken veritably – that is, desire is not satisfied through fantasy, but desire is acted out in a fantasy scene.
Zizek emphasizes the role of fantasy in constructing desire. Zizek explains the role structure plays in constituting desire,

> The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject’s desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: *through fantasy, we learn how to desire.*" (p. 6, emphasis in original)

I contend that the body-skin serves as a structure, or fantasy space, for acting our fantasy of self-knowledge. Zizek (1997) posits that reality is an empty surface, or fantasy space, upon which we project our desires. Zizek describes the fantasy space as a black hole in reality, an empty space, in which one may articulate her or his desire. For many humans, and specifically the tattooed, the skin operates as a fantasy space in which one projects her or his desire. Zizek also advances the idea that subjects are motivated by the unattainable goal, or fantasy, of their desires, and in this case, self-knowledge. The movement towards that goal, rather than the goal itself, that drives the subject. Tattoo removal provides the opportunity for movement towards the object-desire, via the skin. The contrast between the discourse on tattoo removal and the pictures of the procedure exemplify the skin’s ability to simultaneously structure the fantasy and articulate individual desire. The juxtaposition of the body-skin and the surrounding discourse reveals the ideological effects of the advertising texts, foregrounded by the transcendental and non-ideological desire. The remnant left on the body-skin after tattoo removal serves as a point of resistance to the self-renunciation.
Therefore, the function of the skin becomes two-fold: a point of resistance in the fantasy (as evidenced by the remnant), and the fantasy itself.

Material Effects

The material implications of tattoo removal abound. The initial materiality of tattoo removal is reflected in the cost of the procedure. Tattoo removal is expensive, costing around four hundred dollars per session. Generally, “complete” removal takes between 4 and 8 laser sessions, although tattoos with color can take as many as ten sessions. The high cost of the procedure limits access to it and, consequently, also limits access to the confession. Whether through monetary means or through community service (in the case of former gang members), persons desiring absolution are required to purchase their confession. One wonders how the materiality of removal effects those who are unable to afford it. If a clinical confession is unattainable, disadvantaged persons are left to confess on their own. One must ask, “Is clinic-assisted tattoo removal the only acceptable form of confession?” Based on the narratives present in certain gang tattoo removal program texts, I speculate that a clinic “confession” is the only acceptable confession. As chapter three illustrates, the clinic presents itself as the most capable and only effective site for confession. Consequently, from the discourse on gang tattoo removal the clinic emerges as a new site of power that can utilize its attained power in other contexts.

Viewing tattoo removal as a confessional technology also effects the materiality of the body-skin. Specifically, one’s image of the body-skin changes when one recognizes its malleability. The skin is not a stagnant organ attached to our body, but a separate entity that both reifies and resists its outside influences. This study discusses
how the tattoo signifies one’s reluctance to repent and one’s desire for individuality. In contrast, the faded tattoo remnant signifies redemption and adherence to certain social expectations. Laser technology permits one to literally change the condition of one’s skin. This process has considerable implications for discussions of the body. Viewing tattoo removal as a technology of self means that persons are developing a new mode of thinking about their body-skin.

This new perception of the body-skin also is demonstrated in its function in postmodern biopolitics. If the tattoo supposedly escapes biopower, as Salecl (1998) suggests, then the confession through removal reterritorializes the terrain as a duty and obligation, which signifies new lines of power. To better explain this concept, I must return to the literature discussed earlier in this thesis. Salecl (1998) suggests the individualization of postmodernity and a mistrust in language forces people to cut their body in an attempt to inscribe their own Law. Salecl asserts that cutting the body-skin is not playing with identity, but a protest against the postmodern ideology of changeability (p. 160). This paper pondered the implications of an individual imposing or inscribing a Law on the body-skin, then attempting later to remove, or confess, the error of that Law. How did the individualized person become susceptible to outside power? This paper demonstrates the importance of studying how powerful entities influence people in their current condition. Since traditional power structures (i.e., the church and the state apparatuses) hold a different weight in postmodernity than they used to, investigating the fragmented power of institutions, which are capable of speaking from a variety of positions and thresholds, becomes necessary.
Body-Skin and Rhetorical Studies

Although the discipline certainly can benefit from incorporating some of the notions already reviewed in this thesis, this portion of chapter four discusses specific ways the examination of the body-skin may assist other rhetorical studies. In chapter one I discussed Hauser (1994) and DeLuca’s (1999) observation of the power of the body to deliver rhetorical messages and elicit audience responses. This project builds on these studies by demonstrating how the body-skin serves as a battleground of signification. Hauser begins to address this subject when he discusses how the vulnerable-looking bodies of starving political prisoners were perceived as threatening. Did the malnourished bodies signify weakness and helplessness? Or, did they signify anger and aggression? Many factors must be taken into consideration when articulating the signification of the emaciated bodies. For example, the dynamic of the body-skin partially relies on the relationship between a person and her or his body-skin. One should observe the link between the two rather than separate them or analyze them in isolation. In addition, things that signify also hold rhetorical value. Therefore, the field of rhetoric would benefit greatly from incorporating into studies the visible, pervasive, and complex message board of the body-skin.

Similarly, the struggle of signification leads us to adopt a more dynamic view of the body-skin. Tattoo removal, as a new technology of self, encourages thinking of the skin as an ever-changing surface. Also, the confessional technology cultivates not only a means, but also a subtle expectation of continuous action on the skin. Future rhetorical studies would profit from studying the fluctuations of the skin and the implications of these fluctuations for society.
Rhetoric and Desire

Language, it seems, is no longer necessary in the creation or the confession of sins. I speculate that desire fills the void between language and action in the confessional act. Based on the role desire plays in tattoo removal, I reiterate Copjec’s appeal for scholars, “to become literate in desire” (1994, p.14). Rhetoric does not appear out of thin air, but arises out of a desire for something. Scholars determining a speaker’s intentionality, which is a basic tenet of rhetorical analysis, should not eschew issues of desire. Desire spurs rhetorical discourse and actions. In order to understand one’s words and actions, one must investigate the desires that motivate and inspire them. Importantly, this project also demonstrates how desire is much more than a psychological condition. Instead, tattoo removal shows how desire takes on a corporeal form. I speculate that the corporeal desires imply a need to understand the body-skin in its postmodern condition. This study serves as a starting point for future rhetorical studies of the desires bound up in the body-skin.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a summary of the chapters of this thesis and discussed the implications of the findings of this project. Specifically, I suggested that the remnant left on the skin after tattoo removal serves as proof of the confessional act for the confessor. The remnant also clues one into the fantasy function of the skin that provides movement towards new identities. The study also provides a new perspective on the malleability of the skin and its potential signification. Additionally, I discussed the high cost of removal and its effect on the public. The cost makes confession accessible only to those who have the economic means to purchase it. The cost also inscribes a
new locus of power – the clinic – that must be included in investigations of gang rivalry, gender empowerment, and body modification, among other things. Finally, I talked about the benefits of incorporating the body-skin into rhetorical studies because of its dynamic nature and its ability to reveal intentionality.

The findings of this project suggest a number of directions for future research. Future analyses need to investigate the role of the body-skin in studies that have focused only on the body. Including the body-skin in such investigations will add a new dimension to traditional studies of the body rhetoric. Additionally, analyses need to incorporate desire when examining speaker/institutional intentionality and audience reactions. Finally, scholars should investigate other postmodern technologies of self that function similarly to tattoo removal.
Chapter 1

The efforts of Leff and Mohrmann (1974) rejuvenated close textual criticism by shifting the focus from a Neo-Aristotelian style and compositional critique, to critiques of a text situated in a historical context. Their assertions inspired much debate about the role of the textual critic. After the passing of Mohrmann, Leff (1986) set out to further define the workings of close textual analysis that he felt Mohrmann had implied but not fully articulated in previous writings. He reasserts Mohrmann’s call for textual critics, “to divert attention away from theoretical constructions and to focus on the rhetorical action embodied in particular discourses” (p. 378). Leff clarifies that rhetorical effect is not inherent in the text; rather, as the text unfolds, it produces an effect. Leff emphasizes critiques of how a text “works,” such as examining the chronological arrangement of the text and how each section builds on the previous in order to achieve or to create a particular effect. He urges critics to explore the internal dynamics of the text while also looking at its place in and among external elements. Gaonkar (1989) argues with Leff’s approach, claiming the critic should read the text in order to understand the social, political, and economic context. He asserts, “The pressing task, for which ‘textual studies’ are ideally suited, is to offer an understanding of ‘contexts’ (non-discursive formations) through a reading of texts (discursive formations) while allowing the text to retain its integrity as a field of action” (p. 275). Leff (1992) later sought to bridge the distance between schools of thought by identifying the primary source of conflict: critical rhetoric studied the text to better understand its context, while textual criticism examined the external context to better understand the text. Leff suggested a modified approach for each, in which intertextuality serves as an additional focus so that the text exists, not in a vacuum, but situated among multiple texts. Despite opposition over the role of the critic, textual critics emphasize examining how a text unfolds or builds on itself in order to create a specific effect. Using this method, the texts on tattoo removal yield the most valuable information.

Foucault (1972) suggests the statement is the foundational unit of historical research, regulated by rules and conditions (rarity, exteriority, and accumulation) of a discursive formation. History can no longer be viewed linearly, but is comprised of multiple perspectives, multi-leveled relations, with a past, present, and future, and a material existence in the form of a monument, or document.

Foucault’s (1972) notion of a discursive formation is equivalent to a cultural code or system of thought that reflects society’s language, perception, and values. This paper explores the discursive formation of tattoos to better understand the communicative practices surrounding the subject and the certain forms of discourse excluded from the formation. The discursive formation may be examined at the formation of objects, made possible by the relationship between the surface of emergence (where things are given status), the authorities of delimitation, and the grids of specification (where things are divided, contrasted, and related). The discursive formation also may be studied from the
level of the enunciative modality, which emphasizes the speaker, institutional sites, status and position of the subject that makes the statements. The enunciative function of the statement allows a number of possible subject positions.

Chapter 2

1 History has proven the power of narrative. Perhaps nothing demonstrates narrative’s influence more clearly than Hitler’s use of ‘vermin’ metaphors and stories to dehumanize the Jewish population during the 1930s and 40s (Perry, 1983). In the rhetorical studies of political speeches, narratives again prove their effectiveness. John Lucaites and Celeste Condit (1990) explained the narrative use in spurning social movements for leaders such as civil rights advocates Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. President Reagan’s unique speaking style that liberally utilized narrative discourse, earned him the title of “Great Communicator” (Lewis, 1987). Feminist scholars demonstrate the effectiveness of narratives in the female public speakers such as Ann Richards (Dow & Tonn, 1993). Furthermore, Bonnie Dow and Mari Tonn assert the narrative style as a “feminine style” of speaking, in which women utilize personal narratives as a tool for identifying with an audience and establishing ethos.

2 Mary Helen Brown and Jill McMillan (1991) constructed a larger text from multiple smaller narratives in an organization. The narrative ‘subtexts’ revealed how individual perceptions and stories cumulated to create an office culture. The authors postulate, “To view an organization as a text is to focus on the language and argument that constitute the organization and, in turn, reveal the premise upon which decisions and activities are based” (Brown & McMillan, 1991, p. 50). Brown and McMillan combined individual narratives from employees into one ‘fictional’ narrative, which encompassed the views of the entire company. Despite being ‘fictionally’ constructed by the authors, the text revealed ‘factual’ information about the organizational culture. To better understand the effectiveness of the texts, the current paper follows the insight of Brown and McMillan and presents a manufactured narrative derived from actual advertisement narratives.

3 Althusser (1972) used this phrase to demonstrate how a police officer hails, or interpellates, an individual.

4 Charland uses the people of Quebecois to demonstrate the theory; by asserting the Quebecois did not exist prior to the discourse of the White Paper. Charland argues the White Paper rhetorically constructed and articulated the existence and the boundaries of ‘the people.’ Charland’s theory has received support through the twenty first century. Cynthia Smith (2000) provides an interesting example of the power of contemporary constitutive rhetoric in her study of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia (MSLO). The essay analyzes the postfeminist style used by MSLO to constitute a domesticated and consumer driven female audience. Sarah Stein’s (2002) study of the ‘1984’ Macintosh ad utilizes Charland’s theory of constitutive rhetoric to examine the use of ideological codes embedded in the ad’s performed narrative. Situated at a time when society was
engrossed by and becoming more dependent on technology, the ideological appeals constituted another audience who believed ‘better’ technology would ‘save the day.’ Audience identification with the presented narrative bound them to follow out the demands of that narrative, while still giving the rhetorical allusion of choice.

5 Lacan’s mirror stage introduced the concept of Other (i.e. language) as a necessary structure for self-consciousness and the human world. Dany Nobus (1998) discusses each component of the mirror stage in detail. Initially, the mirror stage recognition (an infant seeing her or himself in the mirror for the first time) served as a solution to the weaning stage, despite Lacan’s resistance to maintaining it as such. Humans experience a longer infantile stage than most animals, because of “foetalization,” or premature birth. Lacan suggests foetalization is the reason infants are attracted to the mirror, as it identifies a “me” to base its further object relations. As a former student of Alexandre Kojève, Lacan’s mirror stage is heavily influenced by his interpretations of Hegel. For instance, Lacan suggests speech allows a person to be a subject (“a revealing being”) and object (“the revealed being”) simultaneously (Nobus, 1998, p.110). Lacan posits that the symbolic Other maintains the distance between these two things and keeps them from being one in the same. Lacan believed only speech, or the expression of desire, allowed one to attain self-consciousness. When an infant looks in the mirror, the static “imago” or “Gestault” constitutes the infant as “me.” The mirror image alienates because it functions as an Ideal-I, or an exterior image that can not be realized. The image seems complete, but has no depth, rendering it inaccessible and conferring a person with an estranged identity. Lacan contends that objects are nothing, not even a representation, and exist only as a grand illusion.


7 Enunciative modalities include speakers, institutional sites, as well as the status and position of the subject that makes the statements (Foucault, 1972).
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