



## Coloring the Community through Tattooed Identities

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**Rationale:** An individual's body modification (e.g., tattoo, body piercing) plays a significant role in developing and enhancing his or her identity, claiming it as the extended self (Belk, 1988). While Belk's (1988) extended self has been explored through a variety of topics such as apparel consumption (Ki et al., 2017), animal companions (Hill et al., 2008), and digital consumption (Belk, 2013), it has not been applied to one of the most visible subcultures, the tattooed subculture. This is surprising given that nearly 96 million Americans have self-selected into this subculture, which is more than 30% of the population (Shannon-Missal, 2016). While several researchers have employed a qualitative approach to identify motivations for becoming tattooed (Tiggemann & Golder, 2006), empirical research on their relations to identities is nascent. Furthermore, emerging evidence suggests that tattooed individuals contribute to their communities through consumption practices (e.g., shopping for local foods/vendors) (OECD, 2014). As more consumers support and engage with their local community and their wellbeing is dependent upon community connectedness (Whitlock, 2007), exploring why and how tattooed individuals feel connected to their community will provide insightful results. To this end, the purpose of this study is to determine the effects of tattoo motivations on personal and social identities, and further determine the effects of these two identities on community connectedness.

**Hypotheses:** As individuals get tattooed to maintain or enhance a positive self-image (Belk, 1988), tattooing motivations, which can be personal (e.g., to reclaim myself) or social (e.g., to fit in), can be associated with enhancing the individuals' identity. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) argues that a person's self-concept encompasses two aspects: personal identity and social identity. It can be posited that personal motivations lead to personal identity (e.g., my tattoos are an extension of my inner self) and that social motivations lead to social identity (e.g., my tattooed peers accept me). Therefore, we hypothesize that personal motivations of tattooed individuals such as achieving distinctiveness (H1a) and reclamation (H1b) enhance their personal identity. Similarly, we posit that tattooed individuals' social motivations such as belongingness (H2a) and counter-culture (H2b) enhance their social identity. Furthermore, identity has been linked to community connectedness, which refers to a psychological state in which individuals perceive that they and other members are "cared for, trusted, and respected, individually and collectively" (Whitlock, 2007, p. 501). When individuals have a clear sense of personal identity (H3a) as well as feeling a sense of social identity (H3b), it will intrinsically orient them towards the community in which they reside (Puddifoot, 1995), leading to community connectedness.

**Methods:** An online consumer panel survey was used to distribute to tattooed individuals residing in the United States via Mturk. The sample consisted of 418 tattooed individuals. The scales were modified from the previous studies. Tattoo motivations consist of distinctiveness (e.g., to make me unique), reclamation (e.g., to feel alive), belongingness (e.g., because I want to belong to the

group), and counter-culture (e.g., to be a non-conformist). All these motivations were modified from Myers (1992). Personal identity (e.g., My tattoos symbolize the kind of person I am inside) items were modified from Feningstein et al. (1975); social identity (e.g., The tattoo group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am), from Luhtanen and Crocker (1992); community connectedness (e.g., As a tattooed person I feel connected to my community), from Puddifoot (1995) and Whitlock (2007). All measures were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree).

**Results:** Data analyses included structural equation modeling (SEM) with LISREL 8.80; parameters were estimated using maximum likelihood method. Confirmatory factor analysis validated the measurement model that showed a good model fit:  $\chi^2(278)=1118.335$ ,  $p<.001$ ; CFI=.984; NNFI=.981; RMSEA=.048. Construct reliabilities were all above .70. The convergent validity was confirmed for all constructs as the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the threshold value of .50. Discriminant validity was also confirmed as AVEs for all variables were larger than the shared variances (i.e., squared correlation coefficients) between all possible pairs of constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

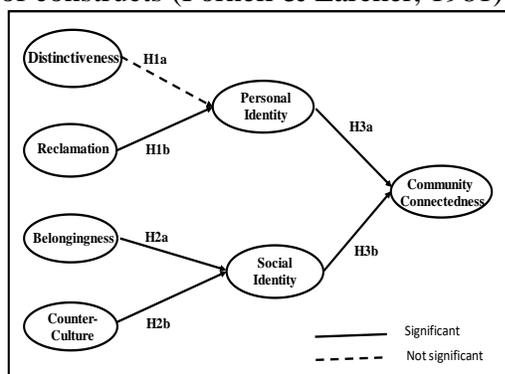


Figure 1. Research Model

The structural model (Figure 1) showed a good model fit:  $\chi^2(287)=1404.827$ ,  $p<.001$ ; CFI=.975; NNFI=.972; RMSEA=.059. Distinctiveness did not influence personal identity ( $\gamma_{11}=.129$ ,  $p>.05$ ), while reclamation positively influenced it ( $\gamma_{12}=.233$ ,  $p<.05$ ), not supporting H1a but supporting H1b. Both belongingness ( $\gamma_{23}=.332$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and counter-culture ( $\gamma_{24}=.264$ ,  $p<.01$ ) positively influenced social identity, supporting H2. Finally, both personal identity ( $\beta_{31}=.248$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and social identity ( $\beta_{32}=.244$ ,  $p<.001$ ) influenced community connectedness, supporting H3.

**Discussion and Implications:** The results reveal that a proactive shift is vital from the negative connotation of the tattooed subculture to its positive and inclusive nature. Because small businesses and retailers are a cornerstone within a community, marketing based on motives that entice the tattooed community towards their businesses will be beneficial to the community. Small businesses can attempt to attract the subculture based on their strong personal identities derived from their need to reclaim their bodies or social identities fostered by the desire to be in-group and out-group (counter-culture) as well. These motives can be utilized to bring the tattooed individuals even closer to their community through inclusive marketing and products. While distinctiveness maybe an attractive visual cue, it does not lead to personal identity and therefore should not be a theme or focus for marketing. Practically, communities committed to cultivating connections must view engagement with tattooed individuals as an opportunity for growth. Inviting them to participate in the community along with respect and encouragement will promote a positive perception toward this subculture and help the public embrace it as a healthy component of the community. Future research can further develop tattoo motivations to be used in empirical studies.

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