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Tension in the Field of Art: The Practical Tattoo Artist and Perceptions of the Fine Art Community

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Abstract This is an ethnographic study utilizing observation and in-depth interviews. The following research analyzes a collaborative circle of tattoo artists and its tension with the fine art community. The tension is a result of perceptions of the fine art community and the nature of tattoo shops as enterprises. This article contributes to the understanding of collaborative circles by incorporating taste distinctions and a formal group element, the enterprise. Taste distinctions and the enterprise allow artists to erect boundaries between themselves and others in the art community.

Keywords Tattoo Artists; Collaborative Circles; Taste; Boundary Making; Goal Orientation

“It’s not just tattooing, it is all artists. We all as artists guard the secret that art is really a sham, it’s not just tattooing, it is all artists.” Thor, a tattoo artist, implies artistic recognition and inherent tension within the art world regarding the practice of art. How artists function on a day-to-day basis and what their goals are produce a tension between these individuals occupying specific social fields.

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Theoretical Context. Choice and Taste

Choices are constrained by location, personalities, norms, and the social context. Agency, the capacity to choose freely, is a difficult concept to pinpoint because, as Collins (2004) suggests, agency “is a conceptual morass” distracting from the study of interactions prior to individual action (Hitlin and Elder 2007:171). Agency is self-reflectiveness, intentionality, and the forethought that allows actors to act with, as Hitlin and Elder (2007) state, a “personal causality.” This creates a better-defined concept of agency which can be contextualized with taste distinctions. The result of choices produces social worlds that are composed of individuals similar to one another (Fisher 1982). These individuals harbor various and differing tastes. Tastes are predispositions towards behaviors, individuals, and objects that can be thought of as a marker of class, more importantly, they indicate a social position. Taste creates boundaries as individ-

uals act on their tastes (Bourdieu 1979). These boundaries contain others with similar tastes and networks are formed. A network composed of likeminded individuals reinforces cultural norms and behaviors, and this is an efficient process because those within the network can develop expectations and boundaries of what is appropriate and acceptable. As these expectations and boundaries are further stratified, the potential to form a collaborative circle heightens. The collaborative circle contains those willing to work together concurrently to propagate their art. Through actions and practice, the artists take their place within the social field.

The Field

Bourdieu (1996) stresses the positioning of an artist within the field. The field is the social space in which skills, relationships, and habits of practice are built. The field contains other like-minded social actors participating in the same types of behaviors and interactions. An artist’s search for autonomy produces maneuvering and positioning within a field, and cultural resources are necessary in the process. Beyond the individual, there are social institutions and social structures, which delineate fields of art. The artists acquire cultural, social, and economic capital inside social institutions and social structures, all defined by particular standards. The social structure is a layer of negotiation and a structure of relationships (Lin 1999:29). The forming of relationships, both outside and inside social institutions, creates boundaries. Bourdieu (1982), in his discussion of Flaubert, states that the French salons distinguished themselves more by whom they kept out as opposed to whom they let in, akin to the

“magnet places” discussed by Farrell (2001). A magnet place is a defined social space, such as a bar, that attracts circle members because of the types of individuals that frequent the place. Each magnet place will define itself in relation to the dominant culture of the field or art. Crucial to self-definition is a relational understanding of other groups in the field and the power these groups hold. Typically, there is a group of reference that gauges the attitudes of all other artists. In this study, this group is fine artists. I define fine artists as those that create art through traditional mediums, such as: painting, sculpting, and drawing. Fine artists generally work independently of a continuous employer and are not heavily directed by a consumer as are tattoo artists, architects, print makers, and digital artists. My definition of fine artists is informed by my understandings of the art community but also my observations at Jobstopper Tattoo and my discussions of art with the artists at Jobstopper Tattoo. Tattoo artists have experiences in institutions and organizations that reify the standards of the field in expectation of the customer as the driving force.

Boundaries

Forming a collaborative circle is a process of boundary making, it is a social mapping process that includes a particular few and excludes others. Inclusion and exclusion are stratification processes that allow for sub-stratification along various lines of categorization. In the context of art, fields are formed based on distinctions of taste and modes of practice, whether learned inside or outside formal art institutions. How one thinks about art and how they practice art set up boundaries that can be sub-stratified

based on economic functions, such as degrees of entrepreneurship and profit motive. Art for the sake of art or art for the sake of profit and the degree to which artistic vision is limited by profit motives create boundaries between artists in the fine art community and the tattoo community. The boundaries are reinforced through practice and routinization of behavior informed by habits and, in the case of tattoo artists, framed by the enterprise. Tattoo artists intentionally make decisions or behave in a manner that consciously reinforces their habits, but are limited by the rules of the enterprise. An artist governs themselves according to their tastes, which reproduce the environment and actions appropriate for the given social context. Depending on the social space, success is more likely achieved if one is a specific type of artist, and what is defined as success can bring about tension between artistic communities. If success is defined through profit or capital gain, it conflicts with definitions of success based on artistic merit and reputation as the primary motivations of each are markedly different. Fine artists may suppose that the motivation of tattoo artists is maligned with assumptions of ideal art. The tattoo artists, on the other hand, may suppose the motivations of fine artists are maligned with the realities of making a living. An enterprise provides the tattoo artists with consistent standards, employment, and limits on a daily basis, aspects not typically experienced by fine artists.

Artists and Collaborative Circles

The tattoo artists in this study discussed their frustrations with the rules of the fine art community, as well as feeling a sense they are on the fringes of the

art world. The feelings they expressed are similar to artists Howard Becker (1982) labels as mavericks. Becker (1982) details mavericks as artists that were a part of the conventional art world, but found it too constraining because of rules, the orthodoxy of the medium, or a combination of the two. Mavericks pursue innovations without the support of the art world they distanced themselves from, yet they continue to utilize all the conventions of the art world they have left (Becker 1982). They may keep up to date on various works or artists in the medium, though perhaps not the day-to-day workings of the specific field of art. Being a maverick is to take a divergent path from the conventions of the medium, but it is not total abandonment of all conventions. With an increasing number of tattoo artists with formal art backgrounds, the techniques used by tattoo artists are becoming similar to those of fine art forms. These techniques include: lighting, shading, 3d effects, and distancing within the tattoo. Using these techniques in tattooing is divergent and innovative, but these techniques are becoming more popular, as are tattoos, and thus, more acceptable. Over time, if the innovations and styling of the maverick become more acceptable to the conventional art world, they may be fully re-assimilated into the conventional art world. Acceptance and assimilation extinguish the maverick quality of the work and the artist. For tattoo artists, what is conventional is difficult to pin down. Tattoo artists may come from traditional art backgrounds and feel the fine art community is too protective and stuffy, but by breaking from these rules and constraints, they create another set of rules and constraints governed by the enterprise. The difference is a spacial difference between the maverick and those in the conventional art world, artists at

the margins, but yet not outside the margins. How one defines and understands convention in the field of art is dictated by their habits of practice. In the context of tattoo artists, they may see their medium as non-traditional and non-conventional, yet what is more conventional than establishing an enterprise or working for a private enterprise on a daily basis? Within these enterprises artists that work together may form a collaborative circle.

According to Farrell (2001), a collaborative circle is “a primary group consisting of peers who share similar occupational goals and who, through long periods of dialogue and collaboration, negotiate a common vision that guides their work” (p. 11). A shop of tattoo artists typically occupies a shared space and they often discuss designs and ideas with one another (Johnson 2008). The ability to discuss and criticize in concert within a shared spaces allows for tattoo artists to be considered a collaborative circle. According to Farrell (2001), a collaborative circle also engages a group of individuals in a shared vision, each playing a different role. The collaboration of the circle leads to the production of highly creative work that reinforces and routinizes their shared vision. Producing artistic work entails practiced behaviors from conceptualizing ideas to applying these ideas in the medium. How an individual practices relies on their disposition towards acting and reacting (Bourdieu 1996:12)? Dispositions towards acting and reacting which generate practices are part of what Bourdieu labels as habitus. Habitus is the result of experiences that can be thought of as cultural baggage; a set of skills and characteristics that allow an individual to move throughout the social world. The set of skills and characteristics that an individual

possesses may be consciously drawn “on demand” in response to something, or they may be reproduced at the non-conscious level through how one acts. How an individual practices indicate a style, it is a replication and reproduction of past behaviors and experiences. Predispositions are practiced and reproduced through interactions with others in the social environment and acting or choosing not to act on predispositions replicates one’s cultural understandings and experiences. This is further modified by roles individuals adopt within the circle.

Farrell (2001) notes that roles within collaborative circles emerge, such as charismatic leader and executive manager. The charismatic leader produces energy that the other members draw upon, and the executive manager oversees the practical duties of the group. In Farrell’s (2001) context, the executive manager and charismatic leader apply in the informal group setting. It is essential to apply these roles to a formal group setting as artists that work for an employer on a day-to-day basis have the capacity to form a collaborative circle within the structure of the environment. Roles, such as executive manager and charismatic leader, still emerge, yet take on additional meanings within the structure of an enterprise.

The Tattoo Industry

An important overarching characteristic of tattoo shops is that they exist to make a profit in order to pay the working artists and continue to operate. Recently, the number of tattoo shops in the United States has increased as the tattoo industry experienced an economic expansion as a result of legitimization of the art by celebrities and, in certain

instances, the fine art community. The number of tattooed individuals in the contemporary United States has grown with the tattoo industry. Penn and Zalesne's (2007) analysis of data from the *Journal of American Academy of Dermatology* states that nearly 1 in 4 adults have a tattoo, and their analysis of a Harris poll conducted in 2003 shows the best represented income group among tattooed Americans were those making over \$75,000 a year, reflecting 22% of the sample. The crux of their analysis is the indication that tattooing may be a growing economic middle class phenomenon. Therefore, artists and shop owners may want to move upscale, increase pricing, properly license themselves, modernize their designs, establish national chains, and hire celebrity spokespersons to maximize the middle class clientele (Penn and Zalesne 2007:237).

The trends in clientele will determine the trends in the tattoo economy. Adapting to an upscaling market may result in heightened tensions with the fine art community through growing commercialization of tattoo art heavily dictated by profit motives. Commercialization runs contrary to what is instilled in fine art academies, and DeMello (2000) describes a growing segment of tattoo artists find it difficult to marry their ideas of artistic conventions, specifically in the context of being "mainstream" or too commercial, with the reality of the tattoo industry. It is a consumer's game, the tattoo industry may be more of a service industry than an art industry.

As with most enterprises in the United States, service is paramount. The customer base of your service depends on how you serve. Of course, this may result in an implicit closed-door policy to certain groups

of consumers whose interests do not align with the artists'. How tattoo shop owners operationalize "service" determines their place in the field of art and their relationship to other artists and the consumer. Is the shop owner seeking to provide good service to all those that come in the door or are they directing good service to a specific group of customers that share their artistic taste distinctions? This question points to a process of commercial branding. Grossi (2007) discusses what tattoos on an individual express and indicate to others in the social world. Tattoos point to something of an individual's identity and this is translatable to the tattoo shops themselves. Habits informing style and marketing in the shop can result in the formation of a brand. How the tattoos are designed, applied, sold, and marketed speak to a specific brand and further specific shops. "It's a consumer driven market and I'll say it a million times, we are a service industry" [Thor]. The shops must market their service to potential customers who, in turn, market themselves to employers.

Marketing and the expanding tattoo industry must be addressed according to Jones, Lipscomb, and Totten (2009). Private and public employers will encounter more tattooed individuals if the industry and its consumers continue to expand. Tattoos are still not allowed in some police departments, branches of the military, and private corporations. While some gains have been made in the acceptance of tattoos in the workplace, highly visible tattoos severely limit job prospects and may directly violate workplace policies. Images and specific placement areas on the body are off limits for some customers, and this is limiting to the tattoo artists. This is something that is not necessarily seen in the fine art

world. It is not always up to the tattoo artists to design the tattoo, customers can have highly specific ideas and designs to be strictly adhered to or very closely adhered to. This comes with the territory in service-based enterprises which rely on expectations of the customer to be satisfied. Satisfying expectations creates social disruption in tattoo artists that have fine art backgrounds or that compare themselves to fine artists. Their finances may be in more control, but their creativity is not.

Working or owning a shop puts the tattoo artists themselves in contact with a human resource component that fine artists may never come in contact with (Timming 2011). Whether hiring processes for potential employees and apprentices are formal or informal, they entail some form of recruitment and/or applicant selection component. Habits may inform these components as small shops may have less formal human resource management procedures than larger shops. As they are hired, tattoo artists interact with standardized institutional processes, such as employment paperwork, workplace policies, terms of pricing, and terms of payment. The standardized procedures must be managed by a member or the owner of the enterprise. At best, this can be considered managing art compared to fine artists. A freelance artist or independent fine artist is not in contact with these processes or management of these processes on a day-to-day basis. This may have rather large implications when discussing whether one is an artist or an employee. This may also reach beyond the world of art in considerations of those in other fields being identified or self-identifying as employees of institutions and organizations.

Setting

Tattoo artists seldom work individually, most work at a tattoo shop with other artists (Johnson 2008). Some shops have rooms for each artist and others have open, shared space. The artists at Jobstopper Tattoo share one space cordoned off by small waist high walls. The shop is located in a small plaza on a high traffic street in the suburbs of a medium sized city. Inside, each artist has their own cube full of personal affects, art, and tattoo equipment. Physically, it is a very ordered, structured, and clean environment. The shop is home to four working tattoo artists, and three of the artists agreed to participate in the research. Each artist chose a pseudonym, El Zombero, Thor, and Stanley Snodgrass, and together they created the pseudonym for the shop, Jobstopper Tattoo.

Methods, Data, and Findings

I have multiple tattoos and my casual dress fits in with that of the artists', so I did not look out of place in the shop and this may have made the artists more comfortable with my presence. The collection of my data spanned from September 1st, 2011 to December 15th, 2011. During the data collection, I maintained my casual appearance to make the artists more comfortable and to build rapport. I used direct observation on a weekly basis and I conducted in-depth interviews with each artist that agreed to participate in the study. The direct observations lasted three to four hours once a week, and the interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 90 minutes. Reactivity became a concern during the initial visit, and I became aware that taking notes in person may hamper the

artistic environment, verbal freedom of the artists, and possibly make customers uncomfortable. I did not want to drive customers away, and this allowed me to recognize I was in more than an artistic environment, I was in a business environment. After the initial visit, I recorded my notes and observations on a digital recorder after my observations and interviews took place. The interviews were recorded real time on a digital recorder.

The observation notes were transcribed and structured in three parts, the initial physical setting, observations of the artists' interactions and work, and analysis. The observation and interview transcriptions were analyzed for keywords to connect to themes within the context of collaborative circles and fields of art. I searched the transcriptions for the following keywords: difference, connection, mainstream, expectation, and satisfaction. I used these words as they pertain to the artists themselves and the works they produce, compared to the others in the shop, tattoo artists outside the shop, or artists using other mediums. Analysis of the transcriptions pointed to tensions between the artists and the fine art world stemming from the nature of their employment and perceptions of the fine art community.

Irwin (2003) described tattoo artists as "a group occupying an important social location as elites on the boundaries between conventional and outcast social groups" (p. 54). The three tattoo artists composing my primary group occupy a space between the fine art world and the marginal art world, the artists all have a fine art background at local colleges; two four-year institutions and one two-year institution. The initial instruction each received and their ex-

periences created value distinctions regarding the practicality of having a career in the art world.

"Yeah, I got a two-year. Stupid little two-year degree. Completely worthless when slapping a tattoo, and it doesn't mean anything when it comes to tattooing either." Understanding that the value of his diploma is low according to his defined taste builds boundaries around El Zombero. He conveys a difference between credentialed fine art and practical tattoo art. El Zombero chose to describe providing someone with a tattoo as "slapping a tattoo," which implicates the work as not very complex and repetitive. Thor also expressed tension regarding his fine art background and the day-to-day of tattooing. "Everybody told me I was an illustrator and not an artist. I liked to render instead of draw to abstraction and I am like, 'Well draw a chair.' They couldn't, if you can't draw a chair, how can you draw some lofty concept you are working with?" As with El Zombero, Thor conveys a sense of practicality regarding the technical aspects of art and implies that the fine art world is too high-minded. Prior to becoming a tattoo artist, Thor worked as a print screener. He worked five days a week creating and producing art based on customer direction, similar to his experience at Jobstopper Tattoo. Practicality, it may have been a large factor in the pursuit of becoming tattoo artists for Thor and El Zombero. I asked Stanley whether a member of the fine art world would consider him an artist. "I don't think he can deny it. He might have more talent or classical training, but I am working artist. How many painters can claim that?" As with the others, his focus is on more practical issues, such as being employed and having a steady income. El Zombero, Thor, and Stanley differentiate themselves as being more pragmat-

ic, they are working artists creating art and making money. Being an employee is part of their identity as an artist and, at times, this is more conscious than subconscious, specifically in considerations of scheduling and pricing.

A contributing factor to this tension is the continued muddling of definitions of fine art and the backgrounds of the artists themselves. Kosut (2006:87) discusses the increasing amount of university-trained artists since the 1970s. She states that these university artists may choose tattooing to support their struggling art careers or as an alternative to entering the impenetrable contemporary art world. Legitimate academy training provides education on what constitutes fine art and how to produce fine art outside the university, but there may be a lack of opportunity to enter the field. A career in fine art may not at all be practical for many of these artists. The understanding of the particulars of the fine art world becomes more socially distant to artists that remain outside of the field. The distance grows the longer they are not a part of the community or its institutions. Gallery exhibitions of tattoo art, as discussed by Kosut, have legitimized the art form in the "high art" environment, but it has yet to be seen if tattoo art will heavily influence other art forms or be totally accepted by other art forms as opposed to carving out a small space in the field of art by being "recognized." These exhibitions have provided a bridge to the fine art community, but have not necessarily compacted the social distance to a great degree.

During their interviews, El Zombero, Thor, and Stanley said that they seek to provide fair prices, a good experience, and customer satisfaction. Honing their

skills is seen as part of satisfying the customer, the better the artist, the more accurately they can apply the customer's desired tattoo. What the participants described sounds much more like hallmarks of the service industry rather than the art industry. Sharpening skills for the customer speaks more to being an employee or business owner than an artist. My observations and interviews pointed to the artists as being in a constant state of application guided by pricing, customer experience, and customer satisfaction. The artists apply ideas to a sketchpad, the sketchpad to the stencil, and the stencil to the body. The driving force of the shop is application and not conceptualization of art. The day-to-day life of the tattoo artists is guided by creating quality tattoos limited by price and customer expectations. The tattoo artists are employers, and employees first and artists second. Working on their own art is something that is typically done at home for these artists.

"Most of the stuff I do is pretty meat and potatoes." Stanley's description of his work encapsulates that which produces the tension with the fine art world. If you can apply a technically sound tattoo efficiently and often, then you are a successful artist. He is not pushing the limits of artistic technique and thought. The definition of being a successful artist is, in Stanley's context, a matter of a practiced routinization rather than freedom of creation or expression. Each artist has an understanding of art history and techniques, but their shared vision boils down to a sense of practicality juxtaposed to that of the conceptual in the fine art world.

El Zombero is an artist with nearly twenty years' experience, is the shop owner and approaches

his work with a straightforward attitude. He explained that he learned when there were a lot more rules and being told one cannot do something was common. El Zombero expresses an implication of structural dominance, which is a function of a legitimated power structure. In this case, the legitimacy creates restraints on the individual, which is a part of the business environment. El Zombero internalized the structured environment and reproduced it by owning a shop. Owning a shop or working for a shop may provide the artists with fewer restrictions than employees of other work institutions, but compared to fine artists, the restrictions are fairly significant. The restrictions must be managed by someone in a structured environment.

El Zombero has adopted Farrell's (2001) role of executive manager focusing on the day-to-day functions of the shop. He later commented that when he was not an owner, he had more time to focus on tattooing and did not have to worry about paper towels or toner in the printer. When it comes to practice, El Zombero's distinctions have allowed him to conserve his space as executive manager within the collaborative circle. He must worry about the business first, and tattoos second. Making sure the artists have enough business to work a forty-hour week and enough supplies to work with places the enterprise above the art. The artists working under the executive manager contribute by booking enough appointments or "filling out their week" completely so they may bring in enough capital to sustain the business and their livelihood. The resources are funneled to the business, whereas in fine art the resources are funneled to the artist.

When asked what could be done to improve or change the tattoo industry, El Zombero focused his answer on licensing not artistic quality. "It's illegal to tattoo out of your house or basement, yet there are tons of people that do it. I wish, I wish there was some way to buckle down on that." The problem for El Zombero is not health or art, it is business. People participating in underground tattooing are taking away potential customers. It is not that their tattoo art is low quality and they are hurting the reputation of the medium, they are not legitimately practicing business. Shop ownership and its duties are more important than the art for El Zombero, which is partly a function of necessity, as he is the executive manager.

Thor is second in the shop – as far as seniority – and has been at Jobstopper Tattoo for nearly five years. He is not willing to sacrifice the marginality of the art form giving way to mainstream acceptance of tattoos. "I love how tattoos still kind of have an outsider rebellious nature to them, and if it ever lost that, I would become kind of bummed. I like how people don't like them, I guess it seems counter intuitive to my career, but I want people to be aghast at tattoos." Thor wants to stand out and wants his art to stand opposite of what is accepted as conventional, but he is not able to sustain a living without a continuous flow of customers. The more customers he sees, the more money he and the shop make, and the more mainstream and common tattoos become. How he perceives his medium and how his practices stand at odds?

Thor is often the most jovial and audible person in the shop. He is self admittedly egocentric and has

taken on the role of charismatic leader. Farrell (2001) describes a charismatic leader as narcissistic, energetic, engaging towards novices, and more apt to be exploratory, and this perfectly describes Thor. In 2010, Thor developed the "tattoo generator project." Customers blindly choose three pieces of paper out of a jar, each having the name of a person or object on it. Thor then develops a design incorporating the three elements and applies it on the customer for free. This is a function of his taste distinction reflecting a break from the conventional approaches to art that the fine art world maintains, and a reflection of his role as charismatic leader. The tattoo generator is also a way for Thor and the shop to market their work and their service. The story behind the tattoo generator tattoos signifies certain characteristics of the shop to potential customers.

Stanley has been at Jobstopper Tattoo for nearly a year and his role is that of novice. He began in the shop as an apprentice. Stanley discusses tattoo methodology and openly expresses his opinions regarding tattooing and art in general to Thor. At times, Thor degrades Stanley's opinions and, in response, Stanley does the same. The open exchange of opinions, insults, and ideas liberates the artists from actively being criticized. As Stanley's methodology and technique develop, it is apparent that he draws heavily on what he has learned from Thor. This is seen in how he describes the tattoo that he had applied on me. "I knew you wanted a cartoony zombie, so I drew a cartoony zombie, and Thor's stuff is kind of cartoony and comic bookie. I don't know, that is just the way it turned out I guess." The tattoo he is discussing is very similar to Thor's work and stands in sharp contrast to the earlier tattoo

work in his portfolio. The similarity is a function of the instrumental intimacy Thor and Stanley share. The instrumental intimacy is possible because each artist has taken on a role within the circle. Role adoption helps perpetuate the circle and stems from the distinction of taste the artists possess. The unification of the artists has produced a shared style and a shared vision. As Farrell (2001) points out, a shared vision pulls the artists together and pushes them towards a common goal. In this case, the goal is to provide quality artwork and satisfied customers, thus setting them apart from other shops in the area. It is a business model, not an artistic model.

The tension between the primary group of artists and the fine art world has trickled down to the artists' opinions of boutique tattoo shops. Boutique shops are typically in urban trendy areas of town and much business is drawn from word of mouth and reputation. The artists in this group discuss boutique shops and their artists in much the same way they do with fine artists. Their taste of art production and consumption is different than other tattoo artists. "The thing is, anybody can do this shit. Anybody can draw and anybody can paint, you just have to put the effort in to do it. Artists get snooty when they feel exposed." Thor went on to say that many boutique shops become snobby and will choose which customers and designs they will accept and the others are sent out the door. For Thor, these shops are too like-minded to fine artists, they are trying to be too much like fine artists. Stanley stated that the artists in the shop apply a number of tattoos in which they are not partial to the client's design, but as long as the client is happy, that is what is important. It is not about holding up or onto fine art ideals, it is a matter

of practicality. He has a job as an artist and he is dependent on customer satisfaction, turning away customers is not practical. El Zombero, similar to Stanley, said that many people come in with awful ideas and designs, but it is their satisfaction that is important. The artists in the collaborative circle are working for their customers, and not their peers. According to the artists at Jobstopper Tattoo, creating work for peers is a defining trait of the fine art world and the boutique shops. Their shared vision reflects their nature as members of an enterprise and as employees. Their art exists for the consumer and for profit, whereas fine art may exist only to exist.

Discussion and Implications

Individuals harboring similar taste distinctions place themselves in a position in the field where recognition of those who may share their vision is highly accessible. Taste can be defined as attitudes and predispositions relative to membership in a field, and refining taste by stratifying individuals in the field is at the core of a collaborative circle. Refining taste often includes practical concerns, as seen in this group of tattoo artists. Setting up an enterprise or working for an enterprise sheds light on how practiced habits are informed by taste distinctions. One cannot simply arrive in a defined social space and obtain capital, it is a boundary making processes. How and why one acts leads to barricading or embracing others.

The tattoo artists in this study have fine art backgrounds. Whether the artists were not able to penetrate the fine art world or they did not wish to be part of that world, each ended up at Jobstopper Tattoo. This is where the artists share and practice

a similar vision. The nature of the artists' work on a day-to-day basis separates them from those in the fine art community. The tattoo artists are limited by their customers' expectations and satisfactions. The tattoo artists also come in contact with human resource components, as they are either being hired or hiring someone. Being an employee or an employer breeds an inherent tension between these artists and the fine art community. Being regarded as employees does not take on the pejorative form for the artists at Jobstopper Tattoo. Being considered as fine artists or comparable to fine artists is not something the group of tattoo artists desire.

The tattoo artists in this study acknowledge that they are working artists. They receive a relatively steady paycheck, generally work set hours, and are managed or manage other employees. It is critical to understand that the participants in this study consider themselves artists. They do not call themselves tattooists or tattooers, colloquially this implies a lack of a high artistic skill level common in shops that do not tattoo custom pieces. The participants in this study call themselves tattoo artists, and asked to be referred as such. The point of emphasis in my discussions is the ability of the tattoo artists to make money creating and applying art as opposed to fine artists that do not get paid consistently. The tattoo artists in this study understand there is something one must make money doing it once one's training is complete. This runs contrary to the ideal of art for art's sake or the starving artist. Not all fine artists lack consistent paychecks or regular work, but these artists are not as limited by the customer or by a manager as many tattoo artists are. While they are limited in some regard, the

tattoo artists have artistic skill and are able to make a living using these skills. The participants in this study consider themselves as artists and employees, and this may have extended implications.

Outside or self-perceptions of professional and employment identities may shed light on performance and decision making within organizations and institutions. The degree to which an individual or group of individuals identify as an employee or a specific job title may deeply impact their work environment. For example, the degree to which an individual identifies as professor, researcher, or employee of a university can highlight mode and quality of production. How much one identifies as an employee may impact creativity and social network formation. Class and race may also shape how much or to what degree an individual identifies as an employee. We must keep in mind that identities are not self-referential, studying, participating, or observing groups and the perceptions of their fields can unearth the group or groups they use as a reference. Reference groups anchor perceptions of experiences in a particular field and understanding which groups are viewed as the guideposts or anchors can shed light on pathway mobility in employment networks.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze a group of three tattoo artists utilizing Farrell's (2001) theory of collaborative circles and Bourdieu's (1979) theory of taste distinction. I focused on the circle's vision, role adoption, and tension with the fine art world produced by taste distinctions and the nature of the artists' place of work. The circle's ability to function

is a result of the roles each member has adopted within the business enterprise. This allows the artists to strive towards a common goal that sets them apart from others in the art field.

The works of art produced and how they are produced spark tension between the tattoo artists and the fine art world. The tension is built by the day-to-day workings and not solely reliant on ideological differences. Incorporating the formal group setting into the collaborative circle framework allows for a better understanding of how the circles are formed, how they negotiate their identities, how they work towards their vision, and how this process may be a function of a business enterprise. Tattoo artists are paid to create and apply art, but are severely limited by the nature of the business and the customer. While they do identify as artists, they are uncertain if they are understood and appreciated as much as those in the fine art community. Gallery exhibitions of tattoo art and celebrity endorsement of tattoo art have raised the profile for the medium, but this does not ensure that boundaries within the art community will be torn down rather than erected. The nature of modern tattoo art is rooted in the business enterprise and the label of employee may overshadow and undercut the talents of the tattoo artists and the perceptions of their art. Being an employee places them at odds with the fine art community.

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