Inking the Line: Tattoo Artists, Cultural Appropriation, and Stolen Histories

Allison Hawn
The Hugh Downs School of Human Communication

Introduction

Cultural Appropriation In Tattoos

A cultural appropriation occurs when a person from a culture of lower social status appropriates a sacred importance to a culture, a tattoo that holds historical or sacred importance to a culture, with no knowledge or understanding of the culture or the significance of the art being tattooed (Baldwin, 2014). Research has shown that tattoos that hold historical or sacred importance to a culture, if tattooed by someone who does not have an understanding of that culture, can cause us to feel dissonance. We will either rationalize the new tattoo, or make the tattoo nonsensical by our actions (Atkinson, 2004).

Methods

Inking the Line: Tattoo Artists, Cultural Appropriation, and Stolen Histories

Allison Hawn
The Hugh Downs School of Human Communication

Research Questions

- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation?

Cultural Appropriation In Tattoos

A cultural appropriation occurs when a person from a culture of lower social status appropriates a sacred importance to a culture, a tattoo that holds historical or sacred importance to a culture, with no knowledge or understanding of the culture or the significance of the art being tattooed (Baldwin, 2014). Research has shown that tattoos that hold historical or sacred importance to a culture, if tattooed by someone who does not have an understanding of that culture, can cause us to feel dissonance. We will either rationalize the new tattoo, or make the tattoo nonsensical by our actions (Atkinson, 2004).

Results

Reaction Categories

- Flat Refusal
  - Don't want to get tattoo
  - Objectively Dislikes the Art
  - Objectively Dislikes the Art
  - Objectively Dislikes the Art
  - Objectively Dislikes the Art

- Acceptance
  - Accepts the tattoo
  - Accepts the tattoo
  - Accepts the tattoo
  - Accepts the tattoo
  - Accepts the tattoo

- Apathetic Acquiescence
  - Acquiesces to tattoo
  - Acquiesces to tattoo
  - Acquiesces to tattoo
  - Acquiesces to tattoo
  - Acquiesces to tattoo

- Flat Acceptance
  - Flatly accepts the tattoo
  - Flatly accepts the tattoo
  - Flatly accepts the tattoo
  - Flatly accepts the tattoo
  - Flatly accepts the tattoo

- Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work

- Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance

- Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair

- Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction

- Flat Refusal
  - Flat Refusal
  - Flat Refusal
  - Flat Refusal
  - Flat Refusal
  - Flat Refusal

- Acceptance
  - Acceptance
  - Acceptance
  - Acceptance
  - Acceptance
  - Acceptance

- Apathetic Acquiescence
  - Apathetic Acquiescence
  - Apathetic Acquiescence
  - Apathetic Acquiescence
  - Apathetic Acquiescence
  - Apathetic Acquiescence

- Flat Acceptance
  - Flat Acceptance
  - Flat Acceptance
  - Flat Acceptance
  - Flat Acceptance
  - Flat Acceptance

- Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work
  - Reparative Work

- Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance
  - Apathetic Acceptance

- Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair
  - Repair

- Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction
  - Retraction

Reaction Examples

- Flat Refusal
  - “I don’t like that tattoo.”
  - “I don’t want to get it.”
  - “I’d never want to get that tattoo.”
  - “I’d never want to get that tattoo.”
  - “I’d never want to get that tattoo.”

- Acceptance
  - “I love that tattoo.”
  - “I’d love to have that tattoo.”
  - “I’d love to have that tattoo.”
  - “I’d love to have that tattoo.”
  - “I’d love to have that tattoo.”

- Apathetic Acquiescence
  - “I’m pretty okay with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m pretty okay with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m pretty okay with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m pretty okay with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m pretty okay with that tattoo.”

- Flat Acceptance
  - “I’m fine with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m fine with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m fine with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m fine with that tattoo.”
  - “I’m fine with that tattoo.”

- Reparative Work
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”

- Apathetic Acceptance
  - “I don’t care.”
  - “I don’t care.”
  - “I don’t care.”
  - “I don’t care.”
  - “I don’t care.”

- Repair
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”
  - “Can you fix it?”

- Retraction
  - “No, I don’t want that tattoo.”
  - “No, I don’t want that tattoo.”
  - “No, I don’t want that tattoo.”
  - “No, I don’t want that tattoo.”
  - “No, I don’t want that tattoo.”

Discussion

- Aware of the permanence of their work, all of the tattoo artists spoke to the degree at which they felt that their art contributed to the perpetuation of cultural appropriation.
- Of the tattoo artists who said that culturally appropriate tattoos were, at some level, problematic or wrong.
- Artists who fell into the Flat Refusal and Reparative Work Category responded the least amount of cognitive dissonance and had to engage in frame denial, marginalizing customers to maintain their self-image and public identity (RQ2).
- Artists who fell into the Authentic Acquiescence category had the highest level of Cognitive Dissonance, and as such, felt that they had exploited their behaviors in greater length and provide more excuses to reduce dissonance.
- Tattoo artists who had been in the business longer had more freedom to turn away tattoos they did not want to perform as they had a more viable clientele and reputation.
- Those who had been in the business a shorter time expressed more resistance to turn away a piece, even if they didn’t feel perfectly comfortable with it, both due to the loss of money and the fear of getting a “hard to work with” reputation.
- This research has wider implications for cultural appropriation in other artists and consummate markets and can help speak to how artists and image creators can turn these ethically murky areas.
- The work also begins to address the lack of research on tattoo artists.

Research Questions

- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation in Western society?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation in Western society?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation in Western society?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation in Western society?
- How do tattoo artists and body modification artists contribute to the perpetuation of problematic cultural appropriation in Western society?

Cultural Appropriation In Tattoos

A cultural appropriation occurs when a person from a culture of lower social status appropriates a sacred importance to a culture, a tattoo that holds historical or sacred importance to a culture, with no knowledge or understanding of the culture or the significance of the art being tattooed (Baldwin, 2014). Research has shown that tattoos that hold historical or sacred importance to a culture, if tattooed by someone who does not have an understanding of that culture, can cause us to feel dissonance. We will either rationalize the new tattoo, or make the tattoo nonsensical by our actions (Atkinson, 2004).

Cultural Appropriation In Tattoos

A cultural appropriation occurs when a person from a culture of lower social status appropriates a sacred importance to a culture, a tattoo that holds historical or sacred importance to a culture, with no knowledge or understanding of the culture or the significance of the art being tattooed (Baldwin, 2014). Research has shown that tattoos that hold historical or sacred importance to a culture, if tattooed by someone who does not have an understanding of that culture, can cause us to feel dissonance. We will either rationalize the new tattoo, or make the tattoo nonsensical by our actions (Atkinson, 2004).

Cultural Appropriation In Tattoos

A cultural appropriation occurs when a person from a culture of lower social status appropriates a sacred importance to a culture, a tattoo that holds historical or sacred importance to a culture, with no knowledge or understanding of the culture or the significance of the art being tattooed (Baldwin, 2014). Research has shown that tattoos that hold historical or sacred importance to a culture, if tattooed by someone who does not have an understanding of that culture, can cause us to feel dissonance. We will either rationalize the new tattoo, or make the tattoo nonsensical by our actions (Atkinson, 2004).

Cultural Appropriation In Tattoos

A cultural appropriation occurs when a person from a culture of lower social status appropriates a sacred importance to a culture, a tattoo that holds historical or sacred importance to a culture, with no knowledge or understanding of the culture or the significance of the art being tattooed (Baldwin, 2014). Research has shown that tattoos that hold historical or sacred importance to a culture, if tattooed by someone who does not have an understanding of that culture, can cause us to feel dissonance. We will either rationalize the new tattoo, or make the tattoo nonsensical by our actions (Atkinson, 2004).