

Identity, Community and Embodiment: Chopper's Tattoo Tour

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Heavy Metal fans have a unique style of dress, music and interaction via which a sub-cultural community is formed and maintained. This article explores how this community is embodied through tattoos and the display of cultural symbols associated with the shared identity of Metallers. We employ the concept of metonym as a means of exploring the bodyscape of a particular Metaller and his interactions with others. The concept of the bodyscape is used to theorise links between community and identity as enacted at sub-cultural events.

In a dark and crowded Heavy Metal bar, surrounded by drunken bar patrons and loud music, a mutual friend introduced Dave to Chopper. It is important to note here that this is a self-selected pseudonym that is used in this article. It comes from the infamous Mark 'Chopper' Read from Australia, a murderer and violent criminal, who our participant physically resembles. Our participant has no connection to the actual Mark Read.

Chopper was aware Dave was conducting research into Heavy Metal culture. Chopper stated that when he had first heard of Dave's thesis he knew, sooner or later, he would be approached to take part. When asked how he knew this, Chopper rolled up his sleeve to reveal his heavily tattooed right arm (see Figures 1-3). Chopper is heavily tattooed with a variety of different images of Heavy Metal bands, the New Zealand flag and the Holden car logo. The tattoos depicted in Figures 1 to 3 relate to Darrell 'Dimebag' Abbott who was the guitarist for the Heavy Metal bands Pantera, Damageplan and Rebel meets Rebel. Chopper's upper right arm displays lightning bolts and a portrait of Dimebag (See Figure 1). Below this image is the logo employed by Pantera for Cowboys from Hell (CFH), the band's first commercially successful album (Pantera, 1990). The lower third of the tattoo features the bass line to In this River, a song written by the Heavy Metal band Black Label Society and later dedicated to Dimebag (Black Label Society, 2005, track 5). The arms and hands of Heavy Metal fans are seen saluting

the portrait. The tattoos comprise a tribute to Dimebag who was shot and killed by an obsessed fan on the 8th of December, 2004, while performing with the band Damageplan, Not captured in Figure 1 are the lyrics from In This River (Black Label Society, 2005, track 5) and three headstones depicting the other victims of the shooting, who are also tattooed onto Chopper's arm. Chopper's lower right arm contains tattoos celebrating Zakk Wylde, guitarist and lead singer for the Heavy Metal band Black Label Society, the composer of the song In This River (Black Label Society, 2005, track 5) (see Figure 2). The tattoos feature Zakk Wylde's face and an autograph – having got the musician to sign his arm, Chopper had it tattooed as a permanent sign of fandom. As with Zakk Wylde, Chopper's inside lower right arm displays an autographed portrait of Vinnie Paul. Along with being the brother of Dimebag, Vinnie Paul was the drummer for the three bands of which Dimebag was a member, as well as the Heavy Metal band Hellyeah. In the background of this section of the tattoo is a Confederate flag.

The current article draws upon Dave's interactions with Chopper. A core aim of the article is to develop an understanding of the ways in which tattoos and associated descriptions can render into view community assumptions, practices and relationships. Choppers tattoos are colourful and embodied statements of membership and community. By focusing on the dialectics of tattoos and their



Figure 1. Chopper's upper right arm

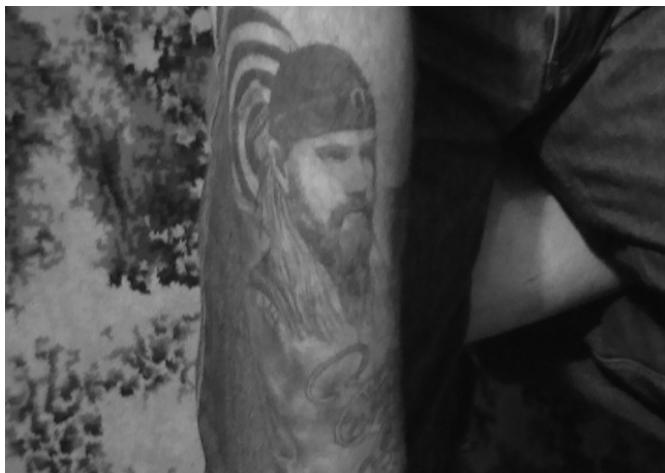


Figure 2. Chopper's lower right arm

metonymic relationship with a Heavy Metal community, we explore how this participant's sense of self as a member has been imprinted upon his flesh. Our analysis moves beyond the description of specific representations to broader observations about the ways in which social relationships and community are rendered meaningful through mediated and interpersonal communication featuring these tattoos.

Tattoos, identity and community

Indigenous scholars writing about tattoos have noted that people live their lives through their bodies, and in the process bodies become sites of negotiation over the meanings one has for one's self and the meanings other people have for us (Nikora, Rua & Te Awekotuku, 2007). When



Figure 3. Chopper's lower inside right arm

transported by 'explorers' to Europe, tattoo wearers were characterised as being exotic savages. A well publicised example of this was Omai, a heavily tattooed Tahitian man who became an exotic curiosity in eighteenth century London (Back, 2004). Subsequently, for many Europeans having tattoos became "a mark of daring, masculinity and adventure" (Te Awekotuku, 2004, p. 78). During the 1960s and 1970s there was a 'Tattoo Renaissance', when tattoos were still associated by wider society with 'deviant others', such as bikers and hippies. However, tattoos began to gain more widespread acceptance as an art form (Polhemus, 2004). While there are many other forms of body art, such as piercings or brandings, tattooing has now become the most established form of body art in the West (Pitts, 2003). For example, since the 1990s white suburban females have been the fastest growing tattooed demographic (Donovan, 1997). It has also been estimated that in the United States as many as 15% of all people have tattoos (Sever, 2003).

The popularity of tattoos in Western society has not detracted from their function in indigenous societies, where tattoos remain as icons for community affiliation and identity (Nikora et al., 2007). For many indigenous societies, carving markings into one's skin comprises a powerful way of drawing together

places, people and events and of asserting one's relationship with a community (Te Awekotuku et al., 2007, p. 150). For example, in their work concerning moko, or Maori skin adornment, Te Awekotuku and colleagues (2007) discussed the use of indigenous tattooing practices to link wearers to their culture and heritage.

Furthermore, wearers link themselves to broader group affiliations, with their tattoos coming to represent wider social identities, relationships and communities.

One group that has come to utilise tattoos as markers of community affiliation are Heavy Metal fans – often self-identified as Metallers (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). Having a 'Metaller tattoo' has come to mark the wearer as loyal to the music and community (Weinstein, 2000). Heavy Metal tattoos often include symbols and images that are unsavoury to other societal groups. These 'alternative' markings, such as the Confederate flag or a human skull, represent Heavy Metal's association with expressions of rebellion and the darker side of the human condition (Weinstein, 2000). Heavy Metal tattoos may also represent relevant bands or musicians, as shown by Chopper (see Figures 1 – 3) and link the wearer to specific concerts and festivals.

Despite tattoos being described by Weinstein (2000) as "key trademarks" (p. 129) of Heavy Metal, this art form has largely been ignored by sub-cultural researchers (e.g., Kahn-Harris 2007; Walser 1993). Indeed, even Weinstein (2000) devoted only a single brief paragraph to tattoos. Tattoos and tattooing are also ignored in literature about other forms of music and identity (e.g., DeNora, 2000). Community psychologists have also only paid passing interest to tattooing and issues of embodiment in the context of community (Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). Given the permanent nature of tattoos and their relevance to identity, these absences omit key elements of many peoples' identities and experiences of community.

Contemporary ideas regarding identity, community, materiality and embodiment, which are central to our exploration of Metaller tattoos, can be traced to the eighteenth century work of social psychologist William James. James (1890)

discussed a distinction in the self between the 'I' and the 'Me'. He described the 'I' as the self-as-knower, which represents a sense of personal identity, consisting of experiences of continuity of self over time and across contexts, a sense of individuality in being distinct from others, and personal agency. The 'Me' is the self-as-known and consists of everything that the person can call their own such as their body, possessions and other people with whom they interact. This conceptualisation allows us to recognise our identities as not simply located within our minds, but also as extending into the material and social world (*cf.* Hermans, 2001).

The implication of James' (1980) and Hermans' (2001) conceptualisation of self is that there is an interactional aspect to our very being (Charon, 1979; Hodgetts et al., 2010). As Silverstone (1999) noted, what it means to be a person lies in our communiting with others. Further, sharing social identities with others through common practices and the display of shared symbols can constitute community (*cf.* Charon, 1979; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Wenger, 1998). Material objects, and the interactions surrounding these, can function as signs of community members' ties to a larger system in which the individual is a part (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In other words, identities can be viewed as ongoing cumulative projects, developed through embodied interactions with other people (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Kaufman, 2000; Mead, 1934). People often experience themselves as simultaneously individuals and as members of communities (Arnow, 1994). Such conceptualisations point to not only the individual as part of a community, but the importance of the community in the development of personal identity. In this way, communities are conceptualised as social networks offering support and a sense and means of displaying identities that are derived from social interactions within everyday life (Obst et al., 2002; Pretty et al., 2007). As an important site in the presentation of identity, the body is a site for the expression of community (DeMello,

2000; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). This is particularly pronounced in the case of tattoos. As Diprose (2005) noted, “the modified or marked body is not usually a sign of itself; it only means something through the expression and sharing of meaning and community with other bodies” (p. 384). Embodied representations of identities communicate self to others (*cf.* Edgerton & Dingman, 1963; Nikora et al., 2007).

[The body is a] surface to be mapped, a surface for inscription, as a boundary between the individual subject and that which is Other to it, as the container of individual identity, but also as a permeable boundary which leaks and bleeds and is penetrable (McDowell & Sharp 1997, p. 3).

Symbols and icons on the body such as tattoos can represent identities and relationships that tie a person to a particular community. Tattoos can also display personal and communal histories. Tattoos relating to specific events can place their wearer at a particular place or places, or can be used to evoke strong memories in others through feelings of nostalgia. As souvenirs, tattoos link self, memory and community (*cf.*, Morgan & Pritchard, 2005).

The concept of bodyscape is particularly relevant to our argument. Within art history and cultural studies the term bodyscape has been used to describe portrait paintings (Mirzoeff, 1995). Paintings of people, particularly those who are well known or famous, are described as a way of representing not only a particular person. These images also constitute signs or symbols representing affiliations to particular places, times, events and groups. A bodyscape is at once personal and communal and is an expression of individual interests, tastes and affiliations as well as being the expression of individual and collective practices, values and ways of being. The bodyscape is a mediating space between the inner world of a person, their participation in community events and the social negotiation of their identity as a member of a particular group. As a repository for social life, the bodyscape is

held within a broader life world and a communal field and has a metonymic relationship with other places and bodies.

The interactional nature of the bodyscape is a common theme throughout this article. By exploring Choppers bodyscape as a site for identity and community, we will illustrate how people such as Chopper work to refine their core sense of ‘I’ through the use of tattoos and their interactions with others.

The case of Chopper

For readers from a quantitative research background our research methodology may be a little unsettling. How can you ‘generalise’ from a single case? Do we not have to engage with groups when conducting community research? Such questions are often posed to qualitative researchers who use case study methods. The short answer to such questions is that we are not seeking generalisations in a statistical sense, and if personal identities are communally based then we can research community by focusing on an individual. “A case is, in an important sense, an exemplar, which ‘goes to show’ something about the class to which it and other members belong” (Radley & Chamberlain, 2001, p. 326). A case is fundamentally metonymic. We are using a case study of Chopper to investigate a particular situation in relation to the wider social forces at play and as a way of extending conceptual understandings (*cf.* Small, 2009) of the function of tattoos in the Heavy Metal community. Through the accumulation of multiple sources of empirical material in the creation of our case study, we seek to demonstrate how a myriad of events and relationships may be interconnected and embedded in the life of our participant. Findings from the fieldwork are then compared through an abductive process to existing theory and research findings and used to add depth and context to scholarly discussions regarding tattoos, identity, community and embodiment.

Our research strategy is informed by Simmel’s (1903/1971) approach of looking locally in order to understand systemic elements of the socio-cultural world within which people

reside. This case study allows us to engage in more depth with Chopper over time, to witness and contextualise changes and developments in his life, and to conduct research with rather than on him (Hodgetts et al., 2010). We move with Chopper beyond rich descriptions offered by him to consider the broader societal significance of his experiences.

At the time of this study Chopper was 39-years-old and worked as a fitter/welder. He also played bass guitar for a local band. His introduction to Heavy Metal occurred when he was in his early thirties, a time when he began watching friends play Heavy Metal covers and he developed an appreciation for the technical guitar playing involved. Two weeks after our initial interaction in the bar, an interview was conducted with Chopper in his home. During the interview Dave took photographs of items Chopper thought were relevant to the study, predominantly his tattoos. Chopper also provided a photograph of him meeting Zakk Wylde. A month following the first interview, Dave twice visited a local Heavy Metal bar with Chopper (see Figure 4) and took extensive field notes. On the second visit to the bar Chopper made friends with one of the performing bands, Harvest, as three of their members also have the CFH tattoo. A week after their meeting at the bar, members of Harvest visited Dave at his house where photographs were taken. The significance of this interaction will become apparent in the second section of our analysis.

The ethnographic case study approach used in this paper is informed by recent calls in community and social psychology for context sensitive research that includes a focus on situations, places and material objects important to research participants (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005; Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008). More specifically, the research employs an auto-ethnographic orientation where at least one member of the research team is a member of the community under study (*cf.* Hodkinson, 2002). As well as being an academic researcher, Dave is also a Metaller. His community links and intimate knowledge of the Metaller community



Figure 4. Chopper and Dave

provided a further layer of context to this research. Rather than an outsider looking into a community, Dave's positioning shifted the research to an insider looking around (*cf.* Davis & Ellis, 2008). In this article, Dave is not another source of empirical material as this would overshadow Chopper's experiences. Instead, Dave's active community involvement and positioning provided a further layer of context and analysis when exploring Chopper's accounts, as Dave was able to place the material obtained within wider community practices and his own knowledge and experience of the community (*cf.* Berger, 2001; Ellis, 2004; *cf.* Hodkinson, 2002).

Outsider supervision and insights were provided by Darrin and Colin, who are not Metallers. These authors provided theoretical and methodological expertise from the broader social sciences and literatures on popular music, which were drawn upon in designing and conducting the study. Darrin and Colin also provided a fresh perspective for working with the empirical materials generated during the study. As such, this research represents our attempt to work with empirical materials that Dave produced through his interactions with Chopper (*cf.* Davis & Ellis, 2008). The resulting interpretation encompasses both etic and emic insights.

Our analytic task was to encourage Chopper to communicate how he conducts his life by showing and telling us about relationships, places and daily practices of importance to him. The concept of metonym was used as a core analytical device to explore how, as visual images imprinted onto bodies; tattoos carry resonances of experience and events central to a broader community to which the wearer belongs. Brown (2006) stated that “the word metonym translates from Greek to mean beyond (or after) the name” (p. 317). This concept of metonym describes a situation where one particular object or name is used to represent something to which it is closely associated culturally and/or spatially (Brown, 2006). As such, metonym defines a situation where a tattoo comes to represent a wider community. Through talk about tattoos, the practices and events associated with this group are articulated into view and rendered intelligible. Tattoos can stand for what lies beyond them (Selden & Widdowson, 1993) and our analysis traces events, relationships and practices embodied in and beyond the tattoos.

Touring the bodyscape

Tattoos are at once personal and communal icons of identity and group membership (DeMello, 2000). As such, tattoos can trace a complex history of participation and claims to belonging. Chopper takes us on a tour of his bodyscape and in doing so takes us with him through time and space. His tour is not only of his body, but also of his cultural place in the world and the events and experiences central to his social and felt identity as a Metaller. Chopper talks metonymically about, and presents himself as, a Metaller by talking about his tattoos. Thus, Chopper's tattoos render forth contiguity between himself, his body, communal events and other people. Chopper starts the tour with the portrait of Darrell Abbott, the guitarist who was performing on-stage with Damageplan on 8 December 2004 when he was murdered (see Figure 1).

Starts at the top [Figure 1], with the portrait of Darrell Abbott the guitarist from Pantera murdered on the 8th of

December 2004 on stage ... performing to a packed house. The lightning bolts around him are a reference to his most famous guitar design, the Dimebolt. Around the front there's three more crosses... that represent the other three people who were shot on that night, round the back is the CFH that is the Cowboys from Hell logo that was their first commercially successful album ... The music underneath is the bass line from a song from the Black Label Society called In this River and it's also the lyrics as well underneath from that song. It's also the song that the Black Label Society dedicated to Darrell after the event and the crowd underneath is just your standard concert mosh pit paying homage to their hero as he floats away. Down the back [Figure 2] is a portrait of Zakk Wylde who is both the author and composer of the lyrics and music up the top, which has been signed and autographed and tattooed when I met him a couple of years ago. Come round this side [Figure 3], the next portrait of Vinnie Paul who is not only Darrell's brother but is also the drummer for both Pantera and Damageplan and was obviously there on the night that he got shot... that has also been signed by him and tattooed...it's basically one big ongoing tribute to the memory of Darrell Abbott... I love it. Any opportunity to educate someone about the musician that Darrell was, the tragedy of his death, and I mean, a lot of people come up to me and go “Who is that?” and the story begins. I've got no problem at all giving twenty minutes of my time to explain who Darrell was and exactly why I have him tattooed on my arm cos the more people that are

educated about it the better.

In the above excerpt Chopper presents a life map in the form of tattoos that are landmarks on his bodyscape. The tattoos, in one sense, comprise monuments (Favro, 2006) of the Heavy Metal community. These monuments commemorate events such as Dimebag's death, as well as concerts where Chopper met with high profile band members. Such tattoos, and in particular the portrait tattoos, serve as exemplars for a larger community with its own affiliations to people, material objects, events and places (*cf.* Mirzoeff, 1995). Through sharing his experiences and insider knowledge Chopper's tour also provides an opportunity for personalising the images as icons for his own biography and links to Metaller culture. In his commentary, Chopper attempts to create a focus on the tragedy of Dimebag's death, positioning his tattoos as an ongoing tribute to a 'fallen comrade'. Through the tattoo tour, Chopper is able to communicate the perceived tragedy of the circumstances surrounding the musician's death. He sees this as a way of educating others and through doing so he experiences positive feelings of community. In participating in the tour community knowledge is passed on to the observer, with Chopper deciphering meanings and identifying the tattoos' significance as exemplars or landmarks. Given the number of Metallers who wear tribute shirts or hold tribute nights on the anniversary of his death, it is evident that Dimebag is viewed as a tragic figure. Chopper's tattoos are a way of metonymically drawing these elements together as they can be traced back to people, places, events and objects.

This tour also takes us across the boundary between public and private, from Chopper's inner thoughts and memories to public displays of identity and community (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005). A given tattoo of an event takes on meaning in the context of other tattoos; when combined, these tattoos create a history of participation in concerns and efforts to meet community leaders (band members). This is the bodyscape in action. Tattoos become central props to Chopper's identity and the



Figure 5. Zakk Wylde signing Chopper's arm

communication of his community biography.

Figure 5 shows Zakk Wylde signing Chopper's arm at a local music store. Wylde is one of Chopper's musical idols. Such is Chopper's identification with this Heavy Metal icon that the autograph is tattooed on his arm as a permanent reminder of the event.

[I thought I'd] get a portrait of Zakk done on there as well and then hopefully if I get a chance to meet him he can sign it and that's how it happened, pretty much exactly how it happened. The tattoo was finished two weeks before the concert which gave it just enough time to heal and then got up there, the band did a signing at the Real Groovy store up in Auckland and that was when he signed it and the next day I got it tattooed and basically the same thing happened with Vinnie . I thought I should really do something for Vinnie so I put Vinnie on the other side and up at the Hellyeah gig I got him to sign that and got it tattooed as well.

The tattooed autographs on his arm represent significant monuments on Chopper's bodyscape. They locate him at a particular moment in time in relation to a famous musician. Not only does it identify him as being present at the event, but the tattooed autograph

also identifies him as having met an influential community member. Chopper found the experience important and meaningful enough to permanently tattoo their autographs on his bodyscape. Anyone who is willing can have tattoos of famous musicians; however the wearer gains further status when the tattoo is signed by the person depicted, given such autographs are difficult to obtain. This signifies connection. While autographs can be forged, the ability to discuss the circumstances surrounding their procurement in detail as Chopper does, as well as supporting evidence such as photographs of the event, authenticate the autograph tattoos and confirm Chopper's status as an influential community member.

Chopper's tour locates him in relation to key landmark events depicted as visual monuments (with their own histories) on his skin. His tattoos speak metonymically to past events and add depth and meaning to his body and associated account. His tour takes us on a pilgrimage or organised journey to sites associated with ritual, faith, myth and past action (*cf.* Coleman & Elsner, 1995). In one sense, tattoos constitute a celebration of community events traced onto skin, which allows for resonances of moments in time to be carried forward. His tattoos bring past moments of time into the present as a way of remembering historical community moments while at the same time reminding others of these events. Subsequent references to the tattoo are also references to the events that then transport the speaker and listener back in time and space. The tour is co-constructed between speaker and listener when a listener draws on their own knowledge. This is even more relevant in relation to a celebrity's death as people share where they were when they heard the news, who they shared it with, and related emotions and feelings. In this way, tattoos manifest in dialogue as communicative aids and landmarks for shared history and affiliation. The tattoos constitute key embodied monuments on a metonymic Metaller landscape or bodyscape.

Insider knowledge is needed in order to

fully appreciate this significance and to ascertain meanings not visually obvious in such tattoos. The tour functions as a way of 'filling in the gaps' in the same way a guided tour of Paris may uncover the Eiffel Tower's history and deeper significance to the people who live there (Favro, 2006). In the same way that people in Paris are more likely to know the history of the Eiffel Tower, so are Metallers more likely to recognise the values and places Dimebag represents. While some tattoos may have immediate visual meaning to other Metallers, such as Dimebag's portrait or Zakk Wylde's autograph, other tattoos on Chopper's arm may not. These tattoos demand more explanation due to their specialised nature. For example, the CFH logo (see Figure 1), as mentioned by Chopper in his tour, is a reference to Pantera's first commercially successful album Cowboys from Hell (Pantera, 1990). To Metallers it is visually self-explanatory and does not necessarily require a verbal narrative, although such a narrative explains how the tattoo came to be imprinted. Other symbols contained within the tattoo may require further explanation to fully understand their relevance even for highly knowledgeable members of the community. For example, Dave did not at first realise that the lightning bolts were a reference to a guitar design. Despite being very familiar with Metaller culture and even with the Dimebolt guitar, Dave did not at first recognise the symbolic reference until Chopper included it as part of his tour. In this way talk in the interviews often refers to the hidden relationships, objects and places central to Metaller culture. While there are metonymic processes and relationships at play here, such representations still need to be explained in order for the viewer to fully ascertain their interconnected meanings and relationships beyond the image itself.

Tattoos provide a shared ground for the establishment of the status of interlocutors as members of the Metaller community with a shared history. The function of language and embodied displays may be witnessed in the co-

construction of meaning, identities, affinities, places and events (*cf.* Tilley, 2006).

[L]andscape becomes a locus of identity formation by virtue of how it was read about, toured through, experienced, viewed physically or in print, spoken about and painted.

Here it is not the biography of the monument that provides the lure, but the historical constructs of significance of 'place' that are cultivated by people, and emotional and affective experiences that are encountered at these 'places' (Nesbitt & Tolia-Kelly, 2009, p. 382).

Such ideas have been voiced in relation to landscapes for some time (Urry, 2005). Here we have applied them to the more intimate bodyscape communicated by this participant through the display of, and talk about, tattoos.

The interactional character of the bodyscape

As stated previously, peoples' bodies are what they use to interact with the world. As such, how bodies are shaped and what they look like greatly influence the nature of these interactions. McNay (1999) stated that "As the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological, the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier. The body is the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject" (p. 98). Chopper's bodyscape is central to his everyday interactions with other people.

Tattoos are not simply pictorial displays of identity imprinted on to bodies. If a shared social identity bonding people in a community consists of similarities in symbolism and art (*cf.* McMillan & Chavis, 1986), then feelings of community and belonging can be experienced through sharing of such art with others. In other words, it is not just about seeing someone else with a Heavy Metal tattoo and feeling like you belong. Although this can happen, feelings of belonging and social networks can be extended

through discussing and comparing tattoos directly. Social identities and associated communities manifest in these interpersonal interactions. In this way, like identity, community can be approached as a fluid process experienced through participating in shared practices (*cf.* Jovchelovitch, 2007; Snell & Hodgetts, 2007). Chopper's tattoos and associated tours are ways of performing identity and community that is acted out and felt through the body. His tattoos comprise physical objects to be interacted with, directly or indirectly, and so are not limited to the symbolic. They can not only be seen but they can also be physically touched or felt by the wearer or observers. In this way, tattoos are a way of creating and articulating attachments between the body, the self and community (Bradley, 2000).

Figure 6 depicts three members of the Rotorua band called Harvest displaying their tattoos. Of particular note is the CFH logo prominent on all three band members. This is also a tattoo Chopper has as part of his right arm (see Figure 1). While at the Heavy Metal bar with Harvest, Chopper and Dave initiated a conversation about Pantera. During this conversation Chopper turned to Dave and asked "Should I?". Chopper then handed Dave his jacket and rolled up his sleeves to show the band members his tattoos. Harvest already had knowledge of the band and associated symbols and so a detailed tour was not necessary. Each member of Harvest then rolled up their sleeves to show their own tattoos. Chopper then mentioned that a door man at the bar also had a Dimebag portrait tattoo. The door man was brought over and a large Pantera discussion and 'tattoo exhibit' ensued. Each tattooed Metaller told their own story regarding their relationship to the band and its music. Chopper held a higher status amongst this group as his tattoos contained autographs. These key landmarks held even more meaning for community members and so Chopper instead focussed on the circumstances surrounding him meeting these influential community members. This



Figure 6. Harvest members' CFH tattoos

social situation represents a performance of identity that differs from Chopper's originally stated function of the tour. Chopper is no longer educating others, but is instead sharing community affiliations and the shared admiration of community leaders, while at the same time establishing himself as a more influential and distinctive member of the group.

In this instance a community discussion, initiated by Chopper, was conducted in the middle of the bar with tattoos providing focus for engagement. Having an affinity for a particular band and its associated image, and then sharing this affinity with others and discovering they think similarly, elicits feelings of belonging and relationships between their bodies and community (*cf.* Bradley, 2000). In this way tattoos function as visual, material and embodied substitutes for the larger whole (*cf.* Favro, 2006). Such tattoos comprise claims to stature and are used to constitute the self as a dedicated fan who has a high level of community capital. They identify the wearer as not only possessing a very distinctive form of such capital, but also as being sufficiently knowledgeable in community and Heavy Metal music history and thus being 'deserving' of not only his tattoos but also community membership (*cf.* Thornton, 1995). Tattoos are a highly visual and distinctive way of presenting the wearer as an influential and dedicated community member,



Figure 7. Chopper and his Pantera inspired licence plate

as not only do they prove communal affiliations and identifies the wearer as 'worthy' of having them but they are also permanently carved into the body. They identify the wearer as loyal to the group, a loyalty they intend to maintain for life. Other community members possessing and displaying similar tattoos constitute a display of affinity, with the tattoos functioning as items for recognition and focal points for connections. In such instances, metonymic representations are used to present and position a particular social identity to others.

Figure 7 depicts Chopper with the D1ME licence plate for his jeep. Chopper describes how he has connected a specific event of the anniversary of a celebrity's death with the material possession of a car license plate:

When I ordered the plates the guy said you should get them on or around the 6th of December which is two days before the anniversary of [Dimebag's] death so to have the 1 there is sorta a subliminal reference to the first anniversary when I actually got the plates so in that respect it worked out brilliantly. I mean the...response I get to those plates...there isn't a day goes by that someone doesn't drive past and point at the plates and gives me the thumbs up...Got talking to these

young fellas in a bar and [a friend] noticed a couple of them were wearing Pantera shirts... [He] comes up and he goes "Show them your arm, show em your arm" and by this stage they were all like "What's he got on his arm? What's he got on his arm?" The sleeves come up and they were all "Ohhhh my god!". We had people queuing to have photos taken of us with our tattoos and it's like I didn't spend another dollar on whiskey that night, an instant celebrity status, but again that's not what it's about but again that shows the level of feeling people have about it.

While Chopper is unclear as to which came first, his tattoos or the plate, his affiliation and identification with the deceased musician has leaked across two different objects. Having these tattoos and this licence plate has earned Chopper admiration (and free drinks!) from other community members. In considering such interactions we enter into the domain of the social life of things (Appadurai, 1988; Hodgetts et al., under review) and recognition of how tattoos and other objects render shared affinities, events and practices visible (*cf.* Garner, 2004). We also see how the consumption of Heavy Metal music and associated symbols is an active process of social engagement, which involves the negotiation of shared identities and meanings. In sharing a community event across a range of different mediums, a sense of community is established. These interactions around a shared icon provide an opportunity for the expression of affinity.

In interviews, Chopper is very careful to explain the rationale behind obtaining his tattoos as not simply attention seeking. Tattoos represent his identity whilst commemorating one of his heroes and offering a basis for engaging with others. He describes this shared affinity as relating to the depth of emotion and admiration other Metallers have for Dimebag Darrell. Morgan and Pritchard (2005) noted particular

objects can "encode a variety of functions and certain objects which acquire a secular sacred character (such as photographs that encode memories or mark personal histories) are retained and cherished because of their extraordinary status and their implications for self-definition. In short, it is well established that objects mediate human relationships" (p. 32). Through sharing tattoos and an affinity for a certain band or style of music, connections and a sense of belonging to something bigger than the individual are constructed through display and discussion (*cf.* Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Hurdley, 2006). In sharing tattoos and experiences Metallers articulate a sense of community and belonging on their skin that is carried with them as they perform identity through a variety of different places and situations (*cf.* Back, 2004; Paechter, 2003).

For Chopper his tattoos are not simply depictions of various people, places and events, as his bodyscape has been shaped as a source of community engagement and belonging. It has come to metonymically represent Heavy Metal not only through the tattoos themselves but also through the reaction to the bodyscape from others. These reactions reify and confirm his community membership and in doing so are a source of social identity and belonging. Tattooing and interactions surrounding the display and interpretation of these objects also exemplifies how the identities of others can become part of us, literally being imprinted onto one's skin through portrait tattoos. In this way the personal life world is reshaped and expanded to encompass the images and public identities of admired band members and community leaders.

Discussion

Tattoos illustrate peoples' connections within the social world (Te Awekotuku et al., 2007). As pictures imprinted on bodies, tattoos draw together both the symbolic and the physical into the creation of a bodyscape. Tattooing represents a way of making the internal visible and legible. Tattoos can also

provide a way of imprinting and picturing the external world onto the self (Back, 2004). This external environment includes the communities to which we belong and the people with whom we share affinities (*cf.* DeMello, 2000). This supports the assertion that our identities are not located purely within our heads. Our identities are also evident in display and social interactions (Jovchelovitch, 2007); we shape and alter our bodies to reflect not only inner cognition but also our external environments and interactions. While the body is a boundary between the internal and the external, this boundary is permeable (McDowell & Sharp, 1997). Our body (and the 'I' and 'Me' contained by it) not only bleeds literally, but also leaks symbolically out through our interactions with other people to be represented through the objects we possess or the way we look in order to co-construct the self (*cf.* Tilley, 2006).

The bodyscape is both a physical entity and a social practice. It is a process to be built upon, much like a geographical landscape can be conceptualised as a process with meanings constructed through our engagements with it (*cf.* Wylie, 2005). The bodyscape is dialectical, being constructed through the response of others (*cf.* Gleeson & Frith, 2006). The bodyscape is a reflection of our individual thoughts and feelings while simultaneously representing the groups to which we belong. It comprises a physical and symbolic space for community. One of the ways in which this bodyscape is altered and used in the presentation of identity and community affiliations is through tattoos. Tattoos are a way of not only picturing our identities, but provide a focal point for discussions and interactions which further shapes and are shaped by our identities. Tattoos used in this way have a metonymic relationship with other people, communities, places and objects and can be an effective way of drawing these elements together.

Tattoos represent and connect people to things larger than themselves (*cf.* Back, 2004). They have meanings requiring a shared vocabulary between wearer and observer, and as

such these meanings are constructed through interactions with other bodies (Diprose, 2005). In geographical terms, landmarks and other icons become visual substitutes for the much larger city or town they come to represent. Favro (2006) described icons as "visual substitutes for the multi-faceted whole. They must have a broad identity, readily recognized by the majority of people who share a common visual vocabulary and similar viewing skills" (p. 20). Such meanings can, however, require an explanation and for socially disruptive tattoos they can even demand explanation as they are challenged by non-tattooed people in everyday interactions. Metonym then involves the constructions and descriptions of wider meanings and associations through symbolic interactions between people in order for them to represent wider communal affiliations and memberships.

Picturing then not only involves the symbols themselves, but also the physical and symbolic interactions that construct meaning, such as the explanations we give others (Radley et al., 2010). Tattoos can represent relationships and interactions beyond what is contained within the image carved into the skin, further illustrating the need for explanation. For example, as materially and embodied objects, tattoos can act as metonyms which transport people to other times and places. When communicating such narratives the photographer, or in this case the tattooed person, is reliving moments and relationships with others (*cf.* Bourdieu, 1990). Hodgetts and colleagues (2007) discussed how images and their associated discussions are inseparable and when combined are a way for people to attempt to communicate their own histories and identities to others. Academic literature concerning the practice of walking through physical locations, such as Favro's (2006) discussion of landmarks in ancient Rome, has described it as a way in which places are made as we move through various spaces (de Certeau, 1984). Radley and colleagues (2010) discussed how walks can be verbally recalled and

communicated in order to allow people to “weave together past, present and future” (p. 43). Such verbal tours or narratives can re-create a past event in the present, linking together places and times. They also illustrate how histories, relationships and events can be linked to a landmark, or to the image of it, but may not be contained within the image itself (*cf.* Hodgetts et al, 2007). Through our discussions and co-constructions we draw together the relationships behind the tattoos. While the bodyscape can include the inscribing of histories onto the skin, through our talk and interactions with others we tie together the important places, people and events much like a tourist guide giving a walking tour of a city.

Through being the focus of the tour, tattoos provide a focal point and a practical context for discussions in order to create shared meanings (Hodgetts et al., 2007). As Hodgetts and colleagues (2007) stated: “photographs and discussions are inseparable; they are points of progression in participants’ attempts to show and tell their experiences and situations” (p. 278). Similarly, tattoos and related discussions are inseparable. Tattoos are also points of progression in a person’s life and are a way for people to share their experiences and life worlds with others. While tattoos do need a “common visual vocabulary and similar viewing skills” (Favro 2006, p. 20), the meanings of tattoos often need to be explained in order to establish a shared vocabulary. In other words, such codes need to be taught or passed on in order for them to be shared. While a picture may tell a thousand words, images often carry multiple meanings that can vary from person to person. In this instance, an image can say too much, and so viewers may need to be steered in order to garner the particular meanings that are trying to be represented.

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