

## **Tattooing: Personal Markings with Meaning: Themes Uncovered While Making a Video Documentary**

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**Abstract :** No longer the secret mark of outlaw bikers, criminals, and sailors, tattooing has become mainstream in much of the world. The current study showcases data gathered for a video documentary on the triangulated relationship connecting tattoos as a form of body modification, cultural norms, and personal meanings. This research has revealed that some religious belief systems, Buddhism in Thailand, is one example, connect tattooing with spirituality in an intimate manner. Buddhist monks provide tattoos using traditional bamboo implements and processes, and they pray over the tattoo, infusing magic into the tattoo and consequently, into the body of the receiver. In contrast, although there is no direct mention of tattooing in the Qur'an, many Islamic scholars argue that permanent tattooing is considered haram—forbidden for Muslims. Only the temporary henna is acceptable. In fact, tattooing is illegal in Qatar. Some Indigenous belief systems in Canada adopt a similar stance on the basis that we were all created by the Creator and as such, we do not have the right to alter what the Creator has made. Still other belief systems such as Spiritism in Brazil and mainstream Christianity in the West are more inclined to regard tattooing as a matter of personal choice. It is practically impossible for any culture to resist the dual impacts of time and globalization. Long term cultural change has resulted in mainstream acceptance of tattooing in the west and increased acceptance in Japan. Short-term cultural change is seen in Qatar where tattoos are on on public display amongst expats and migrant laborers. This tolerance of tattooed individuals was clearly evident with the choice of David Beckham as ambassador for the FIFA World Cup and during the corresponding tourist celebrations. Themes uncovered in this multicultural research also include individual meanings attributed to tattoo imagery and processes, experiences of personal empowerment, devotion to family, personal philosophy, gender identity, and aesthetics.

**Keywords :** culture, norms, tattooing, spirituality, personal motivations and personal meanings

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