

Café Scientifique: Studying Subculture: A Qualitative Investigation of American Tattooing Post-Reality TV

Presenter:

David Paul Strohecker, PhD Candidate & Instructor, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland

Time of Event:

Thursday, February 25, 2016 - 18:30

Location:

[49 West Coffeehouse, Wine Bar and Gallery](#) [1]

49 West Street

Annapolis, Maryland

The National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC) organizes the Annapolis Café Scientifique—a place where, for the price of a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, anyone can come to explore the latest ideas in science and technology.

There is never a cover charge for Café Scientifique!

Please note: seating is limited.

Reservations are strongly suggested and sometimes required depending on attendance. Please call (410) 626-9796 to guarantee your seat or, just as importantly, to cancel your reservation so someone on the waitlist may attend.

About this Café

American tattooing has seen a persistent growth in popularity since its early inception with working class delinquents, vagabonds, and servicemen around the turn of the twentieth century. Along with its symbolic redefinition as a form of art, tattooing has become increasingly popular with a variety of social groups, especially middle-class persons and Millennials ([Pew 2010](#) [2]). However, with popularization has come a new challenge to the symbolic status of the tattoo as deviant tradition. As more social groups have adopted the practice, the world of tattooing has fragmented and contests of symbolic redefinition have intensified.

Tattooing's once sordid past has been refashioned as it is now recognized as both an artform and a personalized expression of self. This cultural change has created challenges for those who have built selves and communities at the fringes of conventional society. Widespread incorporation has served to "de-deviantize" the tattoo, erasing the distinctions that once made tattooers and tattoo collectors unique. (This deviant mystique remains the principle allure of the practice for many middle class youth—see Irwin 2001.) Simply put: popular incorporation and redefinition of the tattoo as personal art has challenged the symbolic distinctions upon which many traditional tattooers and their patrons have grounded their identities.

At this juncture one must investigate how committed subculturalists maintain distinctions from popular culture: What is the role of tradition in making subcultural distinctions? What role do subcultural purists play in reconstituting subcultural forms and practices in the face of popular incorporation? Most specifically how do self-proclaimed “traditional” tattooers and their patrons maintain the social boundaries and moral integrity of their community?

This talk investigates the cultural conflicts surrounding American tattooing post-reality TV. The first two American tattoo reality TV shows emerged in the summer of 2005. There are now 23 tattoo reality TV shows on American and international cable networks. Alongside its increasing visibility we have experienced an explosion of corporate and commercial interest in the practice of tattooing, with popular culture serving as a contested site for many of these new developments. Failed tattoo schools, tattoo fashion micro-trends and the adoption of tattoo iconography by mainstream worlds of art and design bespeak the rapidly changing status of this subcultural practice. As such, this talk will situate these tensions within the larger sociological tradition, highlighting the important role of ethnographic work in investigating the changing relationship between subcultures and popular culture.

About this Speaker

[David Paul Strohecker](#) [3] is a sixth year PhD student who studies cultural change, conflict, and social theory, with an emphasis on the relationship between the media, consumer culture, and deviant subcultures. Methodologically he follows qualitative methods, approaching social phenomena from an emic perspective that blends anthropology and social psychology. He has been a regular contributor for [Cyborgology](#), [4] a sister blog to [The Society Pages](#), [5] as well as [Sociological Images](#) [6] and [The Sociological Cinema](#). [7] He is currently doing an extended ethnography of the American tattoo community and tattoo culture, which served as the basis of his master’s thesis and which he continues to develop for his dissertation. He has also written on deviance, subcultures and style, social media, body politics, zombie culture, white racism, and public sociology, among other topics.

He was recently awarded the 2015 Excellence in Teaching Award from the University of Maryland, College Park for his outstanding teaching, mentorship, and active contribution to student life and campus events.

[Click here for more information about the Annapolis Café Scientifique.](#) [8]

Event type:

Café Scientifique

Event Attendance:

Open to the Public

Source URL: <https://www.sesync.org/events-announcements/cafe-scientifique-dave-paul-strohecker>

Links

[1] <http://www.49westcoffeehouse.com/>

[2] <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/02/24/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change/>

[3] <https://davidpaulstrohecker.wordpress.com/>

[4] <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/>

[5] <http://thesocietypages.org/>

[6] <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/>

[7] <http://www.thesociologicalcinema.com/>

[8] <https://www.sesync.org/cafe>