

## Sample Sociology Entry

**Passage:** “And although corrections imposed serious penalties on the guys that got tattoos in jail and on the artists that did them (‘Oh, man,’ I hear one of those jailhouse tattoo artists say, ‘the way police see it, when we do our thing, we’re defacing county property’), they couldn’t do anything to stop it. I had no argument with the DOC’s ban on tattoos. But I did disagree with their reasoning. To corrections, all tattoos were, in some way or another gang-related. As far as they were concerned, a tattoo either said to another inmate, ‘I’m one of you’ or, more dangerously, ‘I’m not.’ Or they saw them as a silent but powerful way of telling society what they thought.” (pg 106-107)

**Entry:** This passage demonstrates the 3 theoretical perspectives and the concept of breaking folkways. The **3 theoretical perspectives** are a set of assumptions about the workings of society. They are often used by sociologists and include functionalism, conflict perspective, and symbolic interaction.

**Functionalism** emphasizes contributions of each part of society. In this section, we learn the tattoos are used for self-expression; something that could never be taken away from an inmate. This positive, intended effect is the **manifest function**, a part of functionalism. The negative effect of these tattoos is they often represent gangs and violence, which causes tension within the prison. This would be a **dysfunction**, the negative consequences within functionalism. The **conflict perspective** emphasizes conflict, competition, change, and constraint within a society. Because the tattoos were associated with gang rivalries, they also showed who had power and who were followers. It also portrayed which gang they belonged to and whether the gang itself was one of high-superiority. These tattoos were easily understood by all inmates, depicting the idea of **symbolic interaction**. This perspective is when there are interactions among people based on mutually understood symbols. They were able to learn a lot about someone, just by their tattoo. Many of the symbols within them were shared by many, so it was like their own secret way of communicating who was who. This passage also demonstrates the idea of breaking

folkways. A **folkway** is a rule that covers customary ways of thinking, but lacks moral overtone. The idea of having tattoos is considered a folkway, because it is often associated with negative actions, and is discouraged in society. For example, if a student at Deerfield has many tattoos, they are usually thought of as poor students involved in drug and violent activities. This assumption may not necessarily be true, but because tattoos are a folkway, it gives them a bad name. This passage clearly portrays the concepts of the 3 theoretical perspectives and breaking folkways.