

## *Copying Norms in the Tattoo Industry*

**Aaron Perzanowski**

Assistant Professor, Wayne State University Law School  
Visiting Associate Professor, University of Notre Dame Law School  
perzanowski@wayne.edu | [Bio](#) | [SSRN](#)

This paper reports the results of the first qualitative study of the norms surrounding creative production, collaboration, ownership, and copying in the multi-billion dollar U.S. tattoo industry. Despite prevalent copying within their industry, tattoo practitioners have largely ignored formal legal structures for resolving disputes with clients, other artists within the industry, or creators outside of it. Instead, they rely primarily on a set of complex, nuanced, and occasionally conflicting norms, attitudes, and expectations enforced through informal mechanisms. Relying on data gathered through a series of qualitative interviews, this paper develops a descriptive account of creative practices within the tattoo industry and contrasts that account with existing legal frameworks and norm-based approaches in other creative communities.