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Tattoos and Their Influences on College Students

By

ZACHARY TRAVIS

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__________________________________________
Dr. Bruce Austin
Professor Directly Thesis

__________________________________________
Dr. Tracy Worrell
Thesis Advisor

__________________________________________
Dr. Patrick Scanlon
Department Chairman
Abstract

TATTOOS AND THEIR INFLUENCES ON COLLEGE STUDENTS

Name: Madeleine Varno
Department: Department of Communication
Professor: Dr. Bruce Austin
Degree: Advertising and Public Relations
Term Degree Awarded: Spring, 2013

At some point in a college student’s life between all of the events that they engulf themselves in, they think about future goals and desires. As a college student, an ultimate goal would include landing a career related job upon your graduation. Before reaching that point, however, there may be some underlying considerations and perceptions that may be floating around in the back of their heads. Specifically, if a college student has a tattoo there may be some extra precautions with the way they dress in a work environment or for an interview. If a college student does not have a tattoo, considering the placement of the tattoo, or have a tattoo at all may be of concern. As the popularity of tattoos rise, their popularity within the workplace may not be so popular.

This research study involves discovering the mental perceptions of tattoos between students who have tattoos as well as those who don’t have tattoos. Furthermore, it hopes to answer the differences in concerns with the placement of tattoos between those who have tattoos and those who do not. Some other differences in concern could also be related to whether or not students are currently employed. Lastly, a difference in major could have an effect on the mental perceptions of tattoos within the workplace. All of these questions are the sought for purpose of the study, and are directed at answering some of those underlying questions that we are unable to currently answer.
Introduction

The presence of tattoos in our society is becoming more accepted as time passes on. Depending on the person, one may want to get a tattoo for a specific reason. Giving your own tribute to a loved one lost, a word that you feel represents meaning, or your favorite Justin Bieber lyrics from the hit song “baby” are just a few reasons you may want to get a tattoo.

In 2005, McLaughlin claimed that nearly 20% of Americans have a tattoo. In 2010, PRNewswire claimed that approximately 40% of 18-40 year-olds have one or more tattoos. The rise of the popularity in tattoos is the result of tattoo-inspired television shows and magazines, as well as celebrities and sports icons that now have tattoos.

The popularity of tattoos within our culture is increasing rapidly, as well as becoming more accepted. However, within the workplace, there are often certain guidelines that employees must keep in mind when dressing for work. Wearing long sleeves, or other articles of clothing may be required in order to cover tattoos in order to abide by certain rules that the company has set in place.

As a college student, there may be a time at which you consider getting a tattoo. With tattoos becoming nothing but more popular as years pass, you can most likely think of at least one person you know that has a tattoo. This alone may make you more inclined into having one yourself, or at least consider it.
The purpose of this study is to see if there is a correlation between the consideration of potential employment and the decision of whether or not a college student will go through getting a tattoo. If the student already has a tattoo, measurements would be observed to see if there was any precautions that were taken, such as the placement of the tattoo.

**Literature Review**

Although tattooing is growing within our society, there is still a wide-range of psychographic and demographic influence surrounding tattoos. A broad range of age groups have both negative and positive outlooks on tattooing when relating to it on a personal level as well as a professional level. There has been several studies that have measured the perceptions of co-workers, consumers, and friends that have given a range of responses of feelings regarding tattoos.

A study by Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, and Koch (2002) used a convenience sample consisting of 520 college students whom reported their tattoo experiences using an objective and subjective questionnaire. The questions were mainly likert-type questions that would essentially help build a perceived image of a typical person that has a tattoo. The study also contained questions that would build basic demographic ideas of the sample population.

Although 22% of the sample stated they were interested in tattoos, only 13% said they were likely to actually get one. Of the sample size, 98% of the tattooed students reported that they had never been prevented from achieving further promotion due to having a tattoo. The
data collected was also able to determine two forms of perspectives that were measured by the
students.

One perspective from the sample had negative views towards those who had tattoos, and the other had positive views towards those who had tattoos. Those who had negative perceptions viewed tattooed individuals as immoral, crude, unstable, undesirable, and foolish. Those who viewed tattooed individuals in a positive perspective were seen as enjoyable, interesting, unique, self-confident, desirable, and progressive (Armstrong, et al., 2002). With a considerably small sample size to calculate the 98% figure, this percentage is expected to be much lower after the data is collected and interpreted.

College students looking for jobs may consider the risks that might be at stake when having a tattoo. An employer or fellow co-worker may perceive your tattoo as a negative aspect of you, which could be detrimental to your perceived credibility as a worker, or even a person. These negative implications may have potential tattoo wearers turn away from having a tattoo.

In a study conducted by Armstrong et al. (2008), the motivation for tattoo removal in the young adult population was compared between two studies conducted in 1996 and 2006. The comparison measured the reasons of why the young adult population would be motivated to have a tattoo removed. Then study found a trend in the removal of tattoos that progressed from those years.

Trending reasons for removal of tattoos were responses including receiving negative comments in a public, workplace, or school setting. Other observations were noted including
perceptions of lower credibility, competence, and sociability which effected people who had exposed tattoos within the workplace.

These negative aspects of having a tattoo may wear on a college student that is looking into getting a tattoo. Worrying about acceptance by potential employers and co-workers could have an influence on their decision, however, it may not even be a consideration for a student when the idea of having a tattoo presents itself if they potential person wanting a tattoo is already set on it.

While college students may be seeking jobs within different fields, it is important to understand that different work environments may propose different perceptions of tattoos on workers. In a study conducted by Dwane (2010), service personnel from nine different occupations were used to analyze consumer perceptions of tattooed service employees. The study deemed that visible tattoos on white-collar workers were not acceptable while similar tattoos on blue-collar workers were considered acceptable. The study also concluded that older people were generally more unfavorable to workers having tattoos at all.

As a college student seeking a job, you may base your decision on getting a tattoo or not in relation to what profession you may be a part of. A student pursuing a medical degree may hesitate much more to get a tattoo than someone who is seeking a degree in a profession that is not seen as high in perceived value.

In a study conducted by Miller, Nicols, and Eure (2009), a measurement of the impact of body art and the corresponding ratings by co-workers was observed. The study was based around the group norms theory (GNT), and the justification-suppression model (JSM) of the
expression of prejudice. In general, the study observed that people are less likely to find people that have tattoos in the workplace as “acceptable work partners.”

An interesting finding is that even though tattoos and other forms of body art are more prevalent in our society today, there is still an association within the workplace with such forms of expression as being a negative aspect. As college students decide on whether or not to have a tattoo, the response may vary for their justification for doing so, or preventing them from doing so.

Taking a perspective outside of the workplace, the study by Resenhoeft, Villa, and Wiseman (2008) demonstrates the perceptions of tattoos among 158 community college students. The study hosted two separate but similar experiments. One experiment had a picture of a female model with and without a tattoo, and measured the responses of the students in two independent samples on 13 perceived characteristics.

The second experiment had a picture of a model with and without a tattoo again, except this tattoo was much smaller and was an image of a pair of dolphins, while the first experiment was a dragon. Comparing the first experiment to the second, there was a decrease in the characteristics that were negatively resembled, but they were still present.

Another experiment conducted at Loyola University of New Orleans also explored the perceptions of characteristics of people that have tattoos and other body modifications such as piercings and unnatural hair color. The study used a similar method, although this study used both a male and female as their pictures, while the previous study used only a female.
Even though a male was included within this study, similar conclusions were drawn within the experiment. The subjects rated the pictures on a lower scale that contained body modifications including tattoos. Both males and females with tattoos were seen as more masculine due to the body modifications (Kahl, 2009).

One of the most demanding jobs that can have an influence on appearance is the food industry, particularly restaurants. A study by Brallier, Maguire, Smith, and Palm (n.d.) measured who managers at food restaurants would employ based on their resumes which included a photograph. There were two people total, one male and one female. Their photos were taken twice, once while wearing a tattoo sleeve and another while not wearing a sleeve. The resumes and photos were then distributed to 192 managers in South Carolina restaurants.

The study demonstrated that there was a preference evident to select the candidates without tattoos. Further analysis showed that there was no difference between employment when comparing gender between both males and females, tattooed and not (Brallier et al., n.d.).

Essentially, the studies give evidence that there is a trend of negative influence regarding tattoos when relating them to not only the workplace, but within the perceptions that people have on others, even though tattoos are becoming more popular within our culture in general. Whether or not there are trends within college students that prevent them from getting a tattoo, however, has yet to be established.
Hypothesis

It’s believed that there will not be a significant difference in mental perception of tattoos between students who have tattoos, and those who don’t have tattoos. For those students that do have tattoos, it’s believed that there is going to be a difference in concern regarding the placement of tattoos from those who don’t have tattoos. Finally, it is expected that there will be different mental perceptions of tattoos within the workplace when it comes to a student’s major, as an art student may not be as concerned with the placement of tattoos compared to a business student.

Research Questions

This study will test the hypothesis through these main research questions:

1.) What are the differences in mental perceptions of tattoos between students who have tattoos, and students who don’t have tattoos?

2.) What are the differences in concerns with the placement of tattoos between those who have tattoos and those who don’t?
   
   a. Is there a difference in concern with the placement of tattoos between those who are currently employed and those who are not currently employed?

3.) What are the differences between college students’ current majors, and their mental perceptions of tattoos within the workplace?
Methods

Sample Size

The sample will be considered a convenience sample, as it will be distributed to college students through the campus at RIT, nearby colleges, as well as Facebook. The target sample size is 200 college students, both males and females. In terms of the split between those who said “no” to having a tattoo and those who said “yes,” the study would be more valid if those responses were equal. In order to ensure this, participants will be randomly selected to be trimmed in order to achieve close to a 50/50 split in those answers. If the sample size does not suffice the targeted amount of 200 respondents, no trimming of participants will occur.

Methodology

College students will take part in an online survey consisting of mostly nominal, ordinal, and ratio-scaled responses. The survey will be distributed via an online survey website such as Survey Monkey. Participants will be contacted through the myCourses email system at RIT as well as Facebook. The demographics of the students may vary pending on location, the school they are attending, and their major. There will be no restrictions based on demographic characteristics.
The college student’s part of the sample will be both males and females, ages 18-26 years-of-age. The range of the samples education will range from a high-school diploma to a bachelor’s degree, with a variety in ethnic and/or racial groups. It is expected that most of the students will be attending The Rochester Institute of Technology, because they will be contacted the most through the convenience sample.

Survey structure will consist of mostly “Yes” or “No” questions, as well as questions that allow respondents to rate their responses on a scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” These types of questions will allow tests to see if there are any differences to answer the research questions mentioned. Also, the survey will consist of demographic questions at the end of the survey for further analysis of the responses.

Results

Of 87 respondents in the survey, 37 responded “yes” to having a tattoo, making up 42.5% of participants. Of those who answered “yes” to having a tattoo, 25 respondents claimed that their tattoo is located in a place where others can see it, making up 67.6% of the total respondents who have tattoos. The survey participants consisted of 27 males (31%) and 60 females (69%), averaging an age of 22.19 years old.

An independent-samples t test comparing the mean scores of college students who have and do not have tattoos found a significant difference between the mean results of the mental perceptions of tattoos \((t(84) = -2.348, p < .05)\). The mean of college students that don’t have tattoos was significantly lower \((m = 2.615, sd = 0.425)\) than the mean of college students that have tattoos \((m = 2.801, sd = .296)\). Contrary to what was hypothesized, it seems that there
is a significant difference in the responses relating to mental perceptions between those who have and don’t have tattoos.

Concerns relating to placement of tattoos were also tested using an independent-samples t test comparing the mean scores of college students that do not have tattoos and those that do have tattoos. Again, there was a significant difference between the means of the two groups \((t(79) = 5.492, p < .05)\). The mean of college students that have tattoos was significantly lower \((m = 2.26, sd = .529)\) than the mean of college students that does not have tattoos \((m = 3.0, sd = .667)\). This result confirms there is a difference in the responses regarding the concern with the placement of tattoos between those who have tattoos and those who don’t.

The mental perceptions of tattoos from the survey were compared to a student’s college using a one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found \((F, (6,79) = 1.66, p > .05)\). The mental perceptions of the students did not significantly differ based on the college they attend. Students who attend college relating to imaging arts and sciences had a mean score of 2.93 \((sd = .866)\). Students who attend college relating to liberal arts had a mean score of 2.56 \((sd = .685)\). Students who attend college relating to engineering had a mean score of 2.542 \((sd = .354)\). Students who attend college relating to business had a mean score of 2.62 \((sd = .772)\). Students who attend college relating to science had a mean score of 2.71 \((sd = .722)\). Students who attend college relating to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) had a mean score of 1.92 \((sd = .57)\).
Discussion

With a lower than expected number of respondents, no deletion of responses was necessary in order to have a more even number of respondents that have and don’t have tattoos. The total number of respondents for the survey was 95. However, responses were trimmed down to 87 due to 8 of the respondents answering “no” to the question of being a current college student.

Relating to the first hypothesis, it was believed that there will not be a significant difference in mental perception of tattoos between students who have tattoos, and those who don’t have tattoos. Upon analyzing the results, it was determined that there was a significant difference in the responses relating to mental perceptions between those who have and don’t have tattoos. After analyzing each individual question, it was noticed that those who answered “yes” to having a tattoo consistently rated the acceptance of exposed tattoos socially and within the workplace higher on a scale that rated from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” with strongly agree being the higher rating. From this, it could be said that those who have tattoos perceive overall acceptance of tattoos more than those who do not have tattoos. This study relates back to the research titled College Students and Tattoos: Influence of Image, Identity, Family, and Friends.

The research consisted of college students, and ultimately helped build a perceived image of a typical person that has a tattoo. The research showed that there were both negative
and positive views towards people with tattoos. The research completed in this document further proves that there is both a split between negative and positive views towards people with tattoos. Depending on the concern, some of the data leans towards more concern for placement of the tattoos while some data shows the opposite. As mentioned, these differences are mainly seen differently by those who have tattoos, and those who don’t.

Within the survey, there was a series of questions regarding the concerns of the placement of the tattoos due to several reasons. These questions were all answered using a likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The focus of these questions was to answer the second research question, which questioned the differences in concerns with the placement of tattoos between those who have tattoos, and those who don’t. It was assumed there would be a significant difference measured between the two groups, which the results later confirmed. Looking more in-depth with the responses, it’s very apparent the respondents who answered “yes” to having a tattoo, were more consistent in disagreeing with the concerns regarding tattoos. Those who answered “no” to having a tattoo were on the opposite end of the scale overall, as they were more concerned with the reasons stated in the survey. The most noticeable data demonstrating this pattern can be seen in Figure 1 as well as Figure 2, located below.
Figure 1 (above)
Figure 2 (below)
As the chart shows, those who do not have tattoos certainly have a higher concern with potential employment than those who have tattoos. In the research titled “College Students and Tattoos: Influence of Image, Identity, Family, and Friends,” data showed that 98% of tattooed students reported they had never been prevented from achieving further promotion due to having a tattoo. Using the data from the current survey and past research, we can determine that students who have tattoos are less concerned regarding employment or promotions in the work field.

The differences between college students’ current majors and their mental perceptions of tattoos within the workplace was surely expected to have correlated with the hypothesis, however, the data analysis shows that there was not a significant difference in the responses relating to a student’s major with the data set acquired. It was assumed that students that had majors falling into the arts would have a noticeable difference in the responses compared to a business student, for example.

Measuring the differences in concern regarding the placement of tattoos relating to whether or not participants were employed was originally part of the research questions. Due to a large majority of the respondents seeking employment versus currently being employed, it was deemed that the data for the question would not be able to be answered, at least in a significant manner. It seems as if the convenience sample was surely a limitation to obtaining a variety of responses to help answer this research question. A future suggestion would include a broader audience, or simply more respondents for the survey.
Regarding the students' majors, it was determined to group students by college due to too much variety in specific majors. By doing so, this resulted in a large amount of students coming from only two colleges: The College of Liberal Arts, and The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences. Following these colleges were a few respondents from engineering fields, as well as business-related fields. Over half of the respondents, however, came from liberal arts and imaging arts and sciences. This poses as another limitation, as there may not have been enough variety for an acceptable level of significance.

Other limitations of the study include self-reported data from participants. With this, there is always a chance that respondents aren't always telling the truth through their responses. As previously mentioned, the respondents consisted of a non-random sample. Instead, students from previous classes at the Rochester Institute of Technology as well as people from social media were the only participants that were invited to take the survey. The lower number of responses to the survey was also a limiting factor of accurate results to all of the proposed research questions. For a future study, it would be appropriate for a random sample of students consisting of multiple universities.

From the results that we have concluded from this research, the next appropriate step would include a larger sample size consisting of respondents from multiple universities. Although this research touched based on several different concerns and mental perceptions, it would be appropriate to focus on one topic, particularly employment. Such research could involve focus groups or interviews in order to get more in-depth ideas relating to employment. This will help develop more detailed, specific questions relating to the topic.
Conclusion

The importance of these findings can help determine future research relating to college students perceptions of tattoos. These perceptions relate to employment, general feelings, placement of tattoos, and feelings of others with tattoos. The data consists of respondents that either have or do not have tattoos, which provides further insight from two different perspectives. Future suggestions certainly include a more precise focus for the study, as well as a more refined survey setup to help interpret results further. Essentially, the responses from this research certainly differ in some questions relating to whether or not students currently have tattoos. Future findings in related topics will certainly be interested to read and compare to the research from this study.
Sample Survey

By filling out this survey, you are helping express information about college student’s perceptions relating to tattoos. The survey contains no anticipated information that may discomfort, or pose as an inconvenience to you. All information you enter into the survey will be kept confidential under appropriate supervision. Taking part in the survey is voluntary, and there will be no penalty loss for choosing not to participate, or if it’s chosen to not complete the survey. The survey will take an estimated 4-7 minutes to complete. Your participation is appreciated.

Please respond by selecting the appropriate response.

1.)  Do you currently have any tattoos?
    a.  Yes
    b.  no

2.)  If so, how many?

3.)  Do you plan on getting a tattoo if you currently don’t have one?
    a.  Yes
    b.  No

4.)  Is your tattoo located in a place where others can see it?
    a.  Yes
    b.  No

5.)  Do you oppose other people having a tattoo?
    a.  Yes: Please explain why
    b.  No

6.)  Relating to employment, please select all that apply. I am:
    a.  Employed Full-time
    b.  Employed Part-time
    c.  Currently looking for employment
    d.  Not currently looking for employment, but will be soon
    e.  Will be looking for employment prior to graduation
    f.  Will be looking for employment after graduation

7.)  Do you know any co-workers that have tattoos exposed within the workplace?
    a.  Yes
    b.  No

8.)  Do you know any employees outside of your workplace that have exposed tattoos?
    a.  Yes
    b.  No

9.)  What percentage of college students do you believe has at least one tattoo?
    a.  0-19%
    b.  20-39%
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- c. 40-59%
- d. 60-79%
- e. 80-100%

Read each statement and choose the answer that best fits your response from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

10.) I’m concerned with the placement of my current or future tattoos due to current employment.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
11.) I’m concerned with the placement of my current or future tattoos due to potential employment.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
12.) I’m concerned with the placement of my current or future tattoos due to social acceptance.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
13.) I’m concerned with the placement of my current or future tattoos due to privacy.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
14.) I’m concerned with the placement of my current or future tattoos due to what it will look like when I have aged.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
15.) I’m not concerned with the placement of my tattoos.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
16.) I feel that tattoos are socially accepted among college students.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
17.) I feel that tattoos are socially accepted within the workplace.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
18.) I feel that exposed tattoos are socially accepted among college students.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
19.) I feel that exposed tattoos are socially accepted within the workplace.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
20.) It is okay for employees to have tattoos exposed within the workplace.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
21.) Employers form negative judgments about job candidates with tattoos.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
22.) Having a tattoo makes the person more attractive.
   a. Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
Please respond by selecting the appropriate response. These questions are asked for statistical purposes.

24.) What is your age?
25.) What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
26.) Are you a college student? Yes/no
27.) What is your current year level in college?
   a. 1\textsuperscript{st} year
   b. 2\textsuperscript{nd} year
   c. 3\textsuperscript{rd} year
   d. 4\textsuperscript{th} year
   e. 5\textsuperscript{th} year
   f. 6\textsuperscript{th} year
   g. 7\textsuperscript{th} year and up
28.) What university do you currently attend?
   a. ____________________
29.) Please list your major, along with college (Example: Major: Graphic Design, College: College of Imaging Arts and Sciences)
   a. Major:
   b. College:
30.) What is your ethnicity
   a. White/Caucasian
   b. Black/African American
   c. Hispanic
   d. Native American
   e. Other _________

Please electronically sign your name and date on the lines below:

Name: ______________________________

Date (MM/DD/YYYY): __________________
References


