

# ATTITUDES ON TATTOOS AND TATTOOED INDIVIDUALS

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**Abstract:** Tattoos are increasingly common around us. Young and adult wear tattoos in sight and people around me don't turn their heads after tattooed people. The present study is an exploratory attempt to identify the attitude of young people about people with tattoos. With the help of a quantitative methodology and a scale of attitudes we interviewed 113 respondents about different aspects regarding tattoos.

One of the most interesting finding was that less than half of the people who answered the questionnaire do not think that an individual is more attractive if they are tattooed, which means that tattoos are not a way to improve the image or attractiveness of someone.

**Key words:** tattoos, attitudes toward tattoos, young.

## **Introduction**

People who put on different "additions" (tattoos and piercings) are a minority that is judged more by its physical appearance than by its intellectual, emotional or moral attributes. People in these minority groups are almost automatically treated with prejudice and are framed according to certain expectations. Erving Goffman (1963) refers to the Greek word *stigma* as *signs on the body designed to expose something out of the ordinary and bad about the moral status of its bearer*. They had the role of warning other people against the presence of the stigmatized ones with the sole role of being able to avoid them. Tattoos and piercings, as bodily modifications, are perceived as signs that have led to the formation of negative stereotypes and thus their bearers have been considered deviant. Goffman (1963) defines the deviant as an individual who does not obey the norms of society. Hence, a person who chooses to be tattooed is exiting the patterns and norms imposed by society.

The number of tattooed people is increasing steadily, thing which can be easily noticed, but that does not mean that the level of stereotyping or stigmatization will be diminishing any time soon. Individuals who negatively stereotype someone based on their appearance are not aware of the negative

emotional effects that could occur, and which could significantly affect that person (Gavrila-Ardelean, 2014).

Researchers who have studied the way people mark their body have found that by displaying it, they create, communicate and maintain their status and identity, not only in traditional societies but also in modern ones. In short, body modification is the easiest way for people to become a social being through the transition from the *naked body* to the *marked body* (DeMello, 2007).

Tattoos and piercings are two examples of body changing practices that are increasingly common in contemporary society, this fact resulting in many scientific studies.

Researches have been conducted in the medical field (Long & Rickman, 1994; Chowfin, Potti, Paul, & Carson, 1999; McGovern, 2005; Tuffs, 2007; Vanston & Scott, 2016). The authors listed possible risks, but also real medical complications related to the process, but especially the hygiene of tattooing. Another association exploited in specific literature was that of tattoos and religion (Firmin, Luke, Foster, & Angelini, 2008; Rivardo & Keelan, 2010). Increased interest has also been manifested in the field of social sciences. Sociology has conceptualized tattoos and piercings and has often associated them with the search for adrenaline rush (Nathanson, Paulhus, & Williams, 2006; Roberti, Storch, & Bravata, 2004; Wohlrab, Stahl, Rammsayer, & Kappeler, 2007) or psycho-social disorders (Roberti & Storch, 2005).

Being for long associated with the exotic, with the passage of time, tattoos have begun to be adopted by all kinds of subcultures: from motorcyclists, hippies to punks, as a form of protest against mass society. Thus, tattooing is seen as a form of physical and visual protest against the virtual and conservative world (DeMello, 1995; Bell, 1999).

It is interesting that while the popularity and visibility of tattooing is increasing, stereotypes about personal life and the features of tattooed people persist (Howard & Jacobi, 2014; Swami, & Furnham, 2007, Durkin & Houghton 2000).

Today, tattoos are also common among career women, students, athletes, actors (Drews, Allison, & Probst, 2000), practically crossing the boundaries of class, genre, and culture.

Skin is a visible way of defining the identity and cultural differences of an individual or group (Schildkrout, 2004). Tattooed skin marks the relationship between the individual, society, and social groups.

Seiter & Hatch (2005) examined the effects of tattoos on the perception of the credibility and attractiveness of an individual, whether male or female. Analyses have shown that the level of attractiveness has not been influenced in any way by displaying a tattoo, but the affected one was the credibility of the

individual. In another study, the subjects were shown images of tattooed and un-tattooed individuals. They were asked to evaluate aggressiveness, attractiveness, dominance, health, masculinity and perceived femininity (Wohlrab, et al., 2009). It was discovered that tattooed men were perceived to be more dominant, and tattooed women were considered unhealthier than the untattooed ones.

Swami and colleagues have shown that people with piercings have been rated less physically attractive and intelligent than those without piercings. In addition, pierced men were evaluated in a more negative way than women with piercings (in most cultures women have the "normative" earrings in their ear lobes, and men do not fit these rules). The tattooed individuals were identified as less conscious, more extrovert, and more often involved in casual sexual relations in the absence of a long-term relationship (Swami et al., 2012).

We live in a culture where body changes have become a rule rather than an exception. Tattooing as a practice of defining eyebrows or lips is no longer considered as something out of the ordinary. However, "body drawing" has not yet become a normative practice. Whether individuals use the tattoo to express rebellion, social protest or compliance, the practice of tattooing has been preserved in the peripheral cultural area, forming rather a subculture than a generalized practice (Atkinson, 2003).

### **Methodology**

Through this study, we investigated young people's attitudes towards tattoos and tattooed people. Answers to a set of 15 statements were digitally recorded. Respondents completed the survey in about 5 minutes. The used tool and the way the data was collected ensured the anonymity of the participants. The above mentioned were also asked to provide general information on their age, gender, occupation and level of education.

To capture the participants' attitudes as nuanced as possible, we used a five-point Likert scale between total disagreement and total agreement. The study was carried out with the help of 113 individuals aged between 18 to 35 years old.

Most studies, in other countries, that have dealt with tattoo issues and body art in general, have shown that they are still viewed with some skepticism by the unknowing or those who do not have a passion for these practices. Thus, we have started with the same presumption that there is also the same problem in Romania: tattooed individuals receive negative feedback from others.

The 15 items in the questionnaire indicated the dependent variables representing the attitudes and perceptions of tattoos and tattooed individuals. The statements were as follows: tattoos are an art form; people who get tattoos should not be taken seriously; tattooed people are more attractive / interesting;

people with tattoos are mentally ill; tattooed individuals are former inmates / offenders. Using the Likert scale, these assertions were evaluated in the following response categories: 1 = total disagreement, 2 = disagreement, 3 = no agreement, no disagreement, 4 = agreement, 5 = total agreement.

## Results

More than a quarter of respondents (35.4%) reported one or more tattoos, of which 62.5% were women and 37.5% were men. Thus, we can say that tattoos have gone beyond the boundaries of gender, so they have ceased to be a mark of masculinity.

Most tattooed respondents made their first tattoo at the age of 22 (20%). At the age of 18, when one can tattoo with the consent of the parents, only 5% reported getting the first body art. 85.8% of respondents believe that tattoos are a form of art, with 68.1% choosing "totally agree" and 17.7% "agree". But 2.7% do not include tattoos and art in the same category. Also, a percentage of 11.5% remains neutral to the statement "Tattoos are a form of art." This data may signify that the practice of tattoos is regarded as a form of art.

Tattoos are considered a means of expressing uniqueness by 69% of respondents, 10.7% disagree, and 20.4% adopt a neutral position against this statement.

The highest degree of agreement on tattoo identification with uniqueness was expressed by the tattooed category: 85%, compared to 57% non-tattooed respondents.

The statistical differences between the two groups are confirmed by the t test on independent samples. Among the respondents with tattoos ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 0.749$ ) and those without tattoos ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.131$ ) statistical differences were identified;  $t(111) = 4.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . This data suggests that the individual perceives tattooing differently as a means of expressing uniqueness, depending on the presence of the tattoo or not.

Of all respondents, 57.6% disagree with the statement "Tattoos are just a fashion," 23.9% are indifferent, and 18.5% agree with it. Those in the tattooed category who think that tattoos are not just a fashion are 77.5% compared to 46.5% from the non-tattooed category. However, there are also tattooed respondents who agree that tattoos are a fashion (7.5%), but a smaller number than the others that account for 24.6% of respondents without tattoos. The choice of "not agree nor disagree" was also made by 15% of the people possessing a tattoo, but a smaller number than those without a tattoo (28.8%).

From the analysis of the t test it is confirmed that there are statistical differences between tattooed individuals ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) and those without tattoos ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) with  $t(111) = 2.95$  and  $p = 0.004$ . This means that the presence of a tattoo influences the bearer's attitude to the claim

that tattoos are just a fashion. This can be explained by the fact that tattooing remains permanently on the wearer's skin, and fashion is fleeting, so he does not perceive his tattoo as passing.

42.5% of respondents without tattoos say they like tattoos, but not on their bodies, compared to 38.4% who they do not like and do not want to experience the tattoo experience on their skin, and the remaining 19.2% remain neutral regarding this fact.

The t test for independent samples was applied in order to compare the answers to the statement "I like tattoos, but not *on* me" depending on the presence of a tattoo. The results of the test confirm that there are statistical differences between tattooed respondents ( $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ) and those without a tattoo ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $t(111) = 10.358$  and  $p < 0.001$ . This means that respondents without tattoos like them, but only insofar as to look at them or admire them on other people's bodies.

In terms of attracting attention through tattoos, 67.2% of respondents do not believe that someone tattoos themselves just to attract attention. But there were still 12.4% of those who had a different opinion. Of all respondents, 20.4% retained a neutral opinion.

However, it seems that 10% of those who have tattoos have done it to attract attention because 2.5% agreed that "People are doing their tattoos just to attract attention", respectively 7.5% totally agreed. Interestingly, the number of non-tattooed respondents who disagreed with this statement (60.3%) is higher than the number of respondents (13.7%).

Analysis of the t test was performed to compare self-confidence based on the presence of a tattoo. The results indicate that there are no statistical differences between the tattooed ones ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) and the untattooed ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ),  $t(111) = 0.23$  and  $p = 0.81$ .

This may mean that tattooing does not affect the level of self-confidence of an individual.

96.5% of participants do not choose their friends because they own a tattoo or not, and the other 3.5% gave the "not agree or disagree" answer to the statement "I accept people with tattoos as my friends. " This proves that most of the study participants do not make a difference between individuals who have and those who do not have a tattoo, as far as their friends are concerned.

Less than half of respondents consider tattooed people as more attractive or interesting (40.7%). The other half is represented by those who totally disagree (10.6%), disagree (14.2%), and those who are neutral (34.5%). It can be observed that of those who totally agree with the statement "Tattooed people are more attractive / interesting", the respondents with tattoos are more numerous than those without tattoos.

The t test identified statistical differences in the degree of agreement with the statement, of tattooed people ( $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ) and the un-tattooed ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ),  $t$  being 2.49 and  $p = 0.014$ . These results suggest that the presence of a tattoo influences the opinion of an individual, so tattoo respondents are more likely to disagree with the statement, "People with tattoos are irresponsible."

Over time, tattooing has been and still is associated with drug and alcohol use. Nonetheless, the results of this research show that 86.7% of respondents do not do this. This may also be due to the fact that drug use has recently dispersed beyond any social, age, class and gender limits, so anyone can be a drug user, and not necessarily just tattooed individuals. 95.6% of respondents do not consider tattooed people to be violent, and 4.4% of un-tattooed people take an indifferent position, leaving room for doubt.

These results indicate that negative stereotypes among young people are not so much attached to people who choose to decorate their body with permanent ink, and society is beginning to open up to tattoos, accepting them as a component of society, and tattooed individuals are being marginalized less and less.

## **Conclusions**

This research introduces what attitude young people have about tattoos.

It has been observed that the number of tattooed people is still small, that is less than half of the respondents. The fact that most of them chose not to tattoo does not mean they did not take this into consideration. Tattooing is an important step, given the serious and permanent implications of a tattoo.

Of those reporting one or more tattoos, female respondents were the majority (62%), which means that tattoos are no longer characteristic of the male gender.

The results of the research revealed that respondents did not tattoo themselves in order to attract attention but for their own pleasure, which means that, by tattooing themselves, they do not want to make any kind of statement.

A small number of people reported doing their first tattoo at the age of 18, given that this decision implies a certain amount of time and taking into account the permanence of a tattoo, they preferred not to rush into it, lest they later regret this decision. The predominant age at which most respondents did their first tattoo was 22.

It could be seen that the prevalence of multiple tattoos was higher among males than females, which means that although the number of women who are tattooed increased, they still consider the negative feedback that society still conveys based on the number of tattoos present on one body.

It has been found that tattoos are a means of expressing uniqueness and not just a fashion among respondents who follow this practice. Interestingly, less than half of the people who answered the questionnaire do not think that an individual is more attractive if they are tattooed, which means that tattoos are not a way to improve the image or attractiveness of someone. Moreover, the results indicated that the presence of a tattoo is not a reason why someone is not treated seriously, and the tattoo is not considered to be a marker of irresponsibility.

Limitations of this study include a relatively homogeneous group of participants in terms of age and level of education. Future developments should include several variables of socio-economic status, as well as replication on a larger sample, more representative of the general population.

The results of this study are quantitative, although qualitative interviews should be applied in the future to provide broader insights; they could include interviews with people affected by negative tattooing stigma.

Finally, this study is an exploratory analysis that should be continued in order to develop a more complete and accurate understanding of tattoo perception and its dynamics in Romania.

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