

# THE INFLUENCE OF TATTOOS ON SELF-ESTEEM AND THE PERCEPTION OF ROMANIAN SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to inform and to raise awareness of the existence of people with at least one tattoo in Romanian society. It is also hoped to increase the chances of integrating these people into Romanian society and at the workplace. In the same time, the present paper wishes to investigate whether the possession of a tattoo affects positively the self-esteem of these individuals and at the same time their tolerance level.

**Keywords** Tattoos, self-esteem, perception.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Introduction to the appearance of tattoos*

Tattoos are very popular. Approximately 25% of those aged 18 to 30 have at least one tattoo and it seems that in the next few years the proportion will reach 40%. If you thought tattoos were a specific thing for men, think about it.

Approximately 65% of the tattooed persons are women. After all, why do people make tattoos?

There are different reasons people do tattoos. There are people who make tattoos for pleasure, for beauty or even for medical reasons.

The symbolism of tattoos varies according to each culture.

About 12,000 years BC the first forms of "artistic" representations on the skin were all by chance: those who had wounds on the body were trying to heal them by rubbing them with ashes. After scratching the affected areas, there were black drawings, like drawings.

It seems that the term tattoo comes from the word Tahitian *tatu*, which means "to mark/mark". According to other sources, according to the Polynesian

term "tatao" (tapa), the current name would be designed. This form of art (one of the oldest) has not appeared somewhere, but has been practiced simultaneously in several areas, in various forms.

The first representations were discovered in Egypt during the construction of the great pyramids. The empire has gradually expanded, and tattoos have found a way to follow the same process: around 2000 BC. arrived in China and continued to evolve.

After the Second World War, the custom became more and more controversial, especially since it was associated with juvenile delinquency and the "biker" style. In American culture, in general, skin tattooing was not very appreciated. In 1961, the outbreak of hepatitis epidemics and various blood poisonings led to banning this practice in several areas.

However, during the 1960s, prospects changed radically, with the advent of Lyle Tuttle, the one who managed to use media influence to make positive the pejorative note underlying the art of "skin decoration." He tattooed the bodies of some celebrities of the day, mainly women, which he then brought to the spotlights. The initiative was a success, as large magazines and TV stations frequently approached it to provide the public with various information about tattoos.

Although current tattoo practitioners do not have the same motivations as in the past, the choice of a particular drawing certainly takes into account the ancient symbolism.

#### ***For aesthetic purpose***

At first, the tattoo was only ornamental and, to make it beautiful, the primitive man tattooed. Then, gradually, it became a characteristic, a sign of nobility, a hint of servitude, finally establishing a distinction between members of the same family, the same tribe, etc.

In some peoples, the tattoo is spread as ornamentation and is practiced by stinging, in this case a blue or black coloring. This is how we find it in the women of Polynesia, the Islands of Society and Tahiti, where they present true elegance, is also found in Arab women, namely Moorish and Kabil.

#### ***For therapeutic purposes***

In this case, they are represented more by burns. Thus, in Asia, the populations of Kazemir and Baltisan make their babies, from the age of 5-6 years, a burning that either occupies the center of the head (glabela) or the vertex, over the ear, the dorsal region of the leg outside the first metatarsian, the fist, etc. Burns are made with a bamboo tube applied to the chosen region, leaving a sign like a true seal. This practice, very widespread in the populations

cited, is intended, after Ujfalvy, to keep children from epidemic diseases. It's kind of mystical vaccination.

Also in Asia there are populations in which these burns on the calves are meant to guard against neuralgia (Armand), the same kind of tattoo is found in botocudos, which, although they have a large number of mutilations on the body, adds a scar white burn in the middle of the forehead.

This scar, after Rey, made with a piece of quartz or bamboo, is designed to heal headaches. After Spencer, the Arab tribes of Guyana are scaling their limbs in order to avoid the rheumatism they are very prone to.

### ***For religious purposes***

The ancient Egyptians tattooed on their skin some emblems belonging to the rites of Isis and Osiris. In this way the priests were tattooed.

In the Jews, the tattoos were totally opposed to the precepts in the Bible (Leviticus) which forbade any kind of tattoo, the same is noticed in Turks forbidden by the Qur'an. In New Guinea, priests of the serpent cult bear on their arms, chest and cheek scars representing flowers, animals and, above all, snakes. This operation makes them sacrifices. Also, according to Alibe, any Arab who will have three parallel incisions on each cheek will be considered a slave to the house of God.

In some populations, priests being replaced by priestesses, they are also tattooed in a special way.

### ***For warlike purposes***

Through their tattoos, through physiognomy and a terrible appearance, these people had to inspire the fear of the enemy. Thus, they were Attila's hordes, which had their faces covered with deep scars. Sometimes they were meant to try the courage (Breaz, 2011). To this end, the Central American populations, caribbeans, for example, after Spencer, were making young tattoos at the age of puberty.

### **Tattoos in Romania**

The fashion of tattoos in Romanian society can be considered present from the Middle Ages at the level of the upper blankets or probably a series of more extravagant characters such as Petru Cercel, Aloisio Gritti or Stefaniță.

Along with modernity, tattoo fashion has spread to all social structures, especially urban ones.

Tattoos with their various symbols meet from delinquents to high society. From a sociological and psychological perspective (both of which have a strong imaginary and mental consistency), tattooed symbols also highlight some particularities of individual personality.

From the perspective of the history of the modern urban daily, the impact of the rapid and rapid modernization in which individuals are beset by problems, many of the tattooed symbols were either protest against a difficult world or repression. There are other facets of the problem: tattooing is an urban art or not; is a product of subcultures or an extension of persuasive refinement, sexual attraction, etc.

The first and last attempt to treat such a problem was not a historian, but a lecturer, Nicolae Minovici, in 1898. The Tattoo work in Romania was his bachelor thesis and is still a reference for Romanian medicine and he it should be the same for historiography.

Tattoos to delinquents gave precious notions "to the nature of the tattoo's moral ideas, images that are expensive, their intimate souvenirs, and even their cynical revenge projects."

To the criminals – it is the case of France, with which Dr. Nicolae Minovici makes a comparison - were found inscriptions such as " Freedom martyr", "Death of the Gendarmes", "Death of the French officers", "I swear avenge", and various insignia, between which a gendarme head threatened by a closed fist.

Prostitutes bring true news in tattoo symbolism, even if "after sex, tattoos are more widespread in men." As far as prostitutes are concerned, they were generally tattooed "when they were young and their first lover" and are often "bad and unwashed souvenirs of their first mistakes, which are meant to mistreat them the exercise of their profession ". From the story of a young woman tattooed, "I love you, Leon," we find out that "many people who are very gentle at first, seeing this tattoo, cool fast, and many go without doing anything and without paying." Another interesting fact is documented by Dr. Minovici: "Generally, old prostitutes have a tattoo represented by a woman's name, while the young ones have men's names, their sense is not yet perverted." In the clandestine prostitution, very numerous, the habit of having more tattoos on the body was not shared; most were tattooed by either an "artist", others by their girlfriends, in prison, or by their mistresses.

The doctor Nicolae Minovici integrates obscenity and pediatric tattoos, "this kind of people who, more than anyone else, likes others." It again refers to a few cases from France that might have been encountered in our country; on such an individual was found the tattoo of a naked woman on the forearm joint, a woman "who seemed to masturbate when her forearm flexed." There were also several portraits: Joana d' Arc, a hangman, Bismarck's portrait, a soldier, "one eye on each buttock, one snake headed to the anus.

Another category of individuals was mad, jinks. Some observations have been made on a few selectively reproduced cases: Radu Ionescu, also called Dumitru Ignat Călărețu, touched by chronic alcoholism, has a tattoo that

represents his mistress and is dated (1879). The tattoo was made with spirits and rifle grass. Dumitru Mihai, touched by alcoholism, had a tattoo executed with six needles and incense smoke; a certain Costache Ionescu, touched by general paralysis, had a tattoo "consisting of several crosses made in the Golgotha Monastery, by a monk when he was locked there for the theft of horses" and made of "rifle grass, yeast and three needles".

### *Defining the self-esteem concept*

There have been numerous studies on self-esteem and its correlations with other dimensions of personality or with various behaviors. For example, Rosenberg and Harter in 1990 took into account three dimensions: self-esteem, personal responsibility and social responsibility. Initially, however, there was no link between the three dimensions. Only after a few years re-analyzing the data in another study revealed a negative correlation between self-esteem and personal and social responsibility. The same study highlighted a correlation between high self-esteem and violent behavior.

Baumeister (1996) shows that individuals, groups and even violent nations that already have a high self-esteem appeal to violence when they do not receive the respect they think they owe. On the other hand, he argues that, in the case of accumulation of knowledge, high self-esteem may lead to a decrease in school performance. Similarly, S. M. Pottebaum, T. Z. Keith and S.W.Ehly (1986) also claim, following an empirical research, that an increase in self-esteem does not bring a benefit in the accumulation of knowledge by students.

Appleman (2007) in a research entitled *Self-Esteem Can Affect Your Health* concludes that self-esteem is in close association with anger and depression and the two negatively affect the state of health.

Research has been carried out and it has been discovered that there is no such relationship, but only a pattern of consistency in the favorable way of presenting the individual (those who have a high self-esteem have a good opinion about them, but those around you do not have a good opinion about them) (Breaz, 2018).

Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs (2003) summarize the results of various studies on self-esteem. The only significant significant links identified by them are those between self-esteem and happiness (positive correlations), self-esteem and the degree of depression or aggression (negative correlations).

Links to school performance, workplace performance, interpersonal relationships, and health have proven to be not significant. In addition, the mentioned authors concluded that high self-esteem improves perseverance in the face of failure.

Self-esteem is one of the fundamental dimensions of personality. It is a judgment of ourselves, vital to our own psychic balance. When it is positive, relatively high, it allows us to act effectively, to cope with the difficulties of existence.

According to G. Albu (2002), self-esteem refers to self-confidence in thinking, in the ability to cope with the fundamental challenges of life and trust in our right and ability to succeed, to be happy, to the feeling that we are entitled to affirm our needs and desires, to fulfill our values and to enjoy the results of our efforts.

Self-esteem correlates significantly with rationality, creativity and the ability to manage change, with the readiness to recognize and correct possible errors. The overall level of self-esteem of a particular person greatly influences the choices it makes in life and its existential style. In this context, high self-esteem is associated with strategies of seeking personal development and accepting risks, errors, while self-esteem, constantly, involves strategies of defense and avoidance risks and failures (Albu, 2002).

In any activity, we seek to satisfy two needs indispensable to self-esteem: the need to be loved (appreciated, desirable, sympathetic) and the need to be competent (performing, skillful, endowed). A high level of self-esteem can be achieved through love and education, initially from parents, then from friends, colleagues, to all significant people, for an individual, throughout his life.

The question arises as to how old we can talk about the existence of self-esteem. Thus the concept of self-esteem is closely related to the idea of social acceptance (the extent to which an individual is pleased with the group to which he belongs) that occurs in the children of 3-4 years, but also to the desire to valorize one's own person in children aged 5-8 years. The experiences accumulated during childhood are the foundation of self-esteem in the way the child is taught to cope with success and failure, the way it is supported by its parents, the type of relationships it establishes and cultivates with others. Thus, good resistance to failure, school performance, good relationships with children of the same age, awareness of competency areas are factors that lead to the creation of a high level of self-esteem.

Coopersmith (1984) considers that the more an individual is freed from doubts and ambivalence, the better he resists threats, he is disposed of by minor personality disorders; so the one who has a high self-esteem can achieve his goals.

### **Research objectives**

A first objective of this research is to inform and raise public awareness of the existence of negative perceptions of society regarding individuals with at least one tattoo and how this perception affects them psychologically.

Another goal is to increase the chances of adopting ways to approach and integrate people with at least one tattoo.

*Specific objectives*

This research project aims to:

- Find out if the possession of at least one tattoo influences the growth of self-esteem;
- Investigate if the possession of at least one tattoo influences the perception of Romanian society.

*Research hypotheses*

**Hypothesis 1** - research on the influence of tattoos on self-esteem

Possession of at least one tattoo influences the increased level of scalar scores from the Rosenberg scale - the self-esteem evaluation scale.

More accurately, scores from the Rosenberg Scale Self-Esteem Scale tend to be higher in subjects who have at least a tattoo compared to scores of subjects who have no tattoo and tend to be lower.

**Hypothesis 2** - Research on the influence of tattoos on the perception of Romanian society

Possession of at least one tattoo influences the low level of the scores from the Questionnaire about the perception of the Romanian society regarding tattoo.

Specifically, the scores from the Questionnaire on the perception of the Romanian society on tattoos tend to be higher in subjects who do not have any tattoos compared to the scores of the subjects who have at least one tattoo and tend to be lower, ie the subjects that do not possess at least one tattoo tends to be less tolerant of the possession of a tattoo than those who hold at least one tattoo.

**Methodology**

*Sample description*

This study was attended by 60 subjects, 30 of whom have at least one tattoo, and 30 have no tattoos. Subjects have socio-economic statuses and different ages and are of both sexes.

Of the total subjects, 28 of the subjects are aged 18-45, and 32 are ages 46-65, 23 of them are men, and 37 are women. These characteristics are not variable in this research.

Also, the 60 subjects can be ranked according to their level of education, so that in this research 26 of the subjects have higher education and 34 of them have medium studies.

*Selection procedure*

Subjects' participation in this research was based on free consent, expressed in terms of confidentiality of the data provided, and on the fact that the results will be used exclusively for research purposes. At the same time, the 60 subjects were tested in non-disturbing environments such as strong noise, other people's interventions, etc.

The subjects were read the training of the tests intended to be applied, ensuring all the conditions necessary for the correct application of the tests.

#### *Methods description*

The samples that were used in this paper are:

- Rosenberg Scale;
- Questionnaire about the Romanian society's perception of the tattoo.

The Rosenberg scale indicates the level of self-esteem. The sample contains 10 items, each item being evaluated by the subject on a scale from 0 to 3 (3 - absolutely agreeable; 0 - definitely not). The scale is made up of 5 quoted items and 5 reversed items (3, 5, 8, 9, 10).

The score to be awarded for each item varies between 0 and 3 points. The final score is obtained by summing the points obtained in the 10 items.

Between 0-10 points - low self-esteem

Between 10-20 points - average self-worth

Between 20-30 points - Increased self-esteem

Questionnaire about the perception of the Romanian society on the tattoo

The purpose of the questionnaire on the Romanian society's tattoo design is to analyze the extent to which Romanian society accepts or rejects this form of expression, depending on age.

#### *Item description*

The questionnaire on the Romanian society's tattoo design contains items with given answers. These answer items are: 2 items of *yes* or *no* type, these being most often used in personality tests and opinion polls, and have ease and speed in their administration. At the same time, this questionnaire contains 8 items with answers of choice, having the advantage of reducing the percentage of guessing and 5 items with answers on scale types: *yes-no-do not know*.

*37 points - 45 points - high tolerance for people who have tattoos*

You are a very tolerant person. For you, tattoo signifies a form of expression, an art you admire, and you do not dare to say that. You are a person who is not limited to the physical aspect, being able to understand the person who has the body covered by the tattoos.

*18 points - 36 points - average tolerance for people who have tattoos*

The tolerance you show towards the people you come into contact with is not so pronounced because you tend to perceive others by mirroring. For you, the physical aspect has a high weight, but this does not prevent you from trying to get to know the guy tattooed in the tram.

*Under 17 points - low tolerance for people who possess tattoos*

The tattoo for you is a taboo subject. Your first reaction when you see a tattooed maid is to scream for her how vulgar she is. You do not understand why they're making some tattoos, but you know you would not do it forever.

*Procedure*

In December 2010, the instruments were applied to a total of 60 subjects, 30 of which possessed at least one tattoo and 30 subjects had no tattoo.

Subjects have been notified that they will be confidential and that there are no good or wrong answers.

### **Results and discussions**

The first hypothesis interpretation of the results, it can be seen how the holding of a self-esteem tattoo influence by showing the results of frequency values (13) lies within the range 20 to 30 points - in the case of high self-esteem which has at least one group as compared to the frequency tattoo of the results values (14) for the group that does not have any tattoos that fall between 0-10 points of low self-esteem. This means that the values of subjects without a tattoo tend to be lower than those of tattoo subjects, the presence of a tattoo influences positively the level of self-esteem.

Interpreting the results of the second hypothesis, we can see how the holding of a tattoo influences the high level of tolerance by highlighting the frequency of the results values (12) which fall between 37-45 points - high tolerance for the group holding at least one tattoo compared to the frequency of the results (23) in the case of a group lacking any tattoo falling below 17 points - low tolerance. This means that the values of subjects without a tattoo tend to be lower than those of tattoo subjects, ie the presence of a tattoo positively affects the level of tolerance with respect to tattooed persons.

### **Conclusions**

Regarding the hypothesis supporting the influence of having at least one tattoo on the high level of self-esteem, significant differences can be noticed between the two groups of the study.

Thus, the group of subjects possessing at least one tattoo tends to have higher scores from Scala Rosenberg compared to the second group of non-tattoo/ subjects who tends to have lower value at the Rosenberg Scala, that is, subjects possessing at least one tattoo denote high self-esteem while subjects without a tattoo have a lower self-esteem.

As for the hypothesis that supports the tattoo influence on the perception of society, significant differences can be noticed between the two groups of the study.

Thus, the group of subjects possessing at least one tattoo tends to have higher scores from the *Questionnaire on the Concept of the Romanian Society on Tattoos*, compared to the second group of non-tattooed subjects, which tends to have lower values in the questionnaire about the Romanian tattooed society, subjects with at least one tattoo denote a high tolerance on the person being tattooed whereas subjects who do not have any tattoos have a lower tolerance on the tattooed persons.

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