

WHAT EXPLAINS GETTING A TATTOO?
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN BODY ADORNMENT

by

Rachel Johnson

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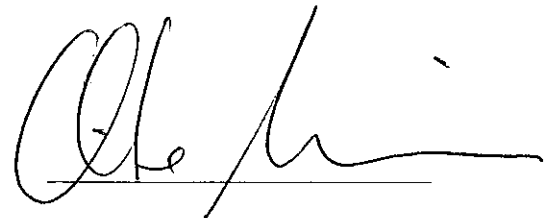
Rachel Johnson

Greenville, NC

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Approved by:

Faculty Mentor (signature required):

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Avenarius', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Christine Avenarius

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

No matter if it is a choice about practicing religion, getting a tattoo, drinking alcohol, or doing well in school, everyone is confronted with important decisions on a daily basis. Cultural anthropology is interested in understanding the perspective of the person making the choice, i.e. the emic perspective, asking “Why have you decided to choose this path?” Previous literature has compared the decisions of youth to get a tattoo to other life influences (Ryan 2002, Farrow 1991) but few have explored the motives of young Americans today that simultaneously choose to participate in Christianity (Scheinfeld 2007).

Research Objectives

Through preliminary research, I observed tattoos in the Christian culture of Victory Campus Ministries (VCM). I plan to determine the reasons why some Christians have chosen to get a tattoo while others have not. My previous research indicated that active-Christians tend to get tattoos representative of their faith. Therefore, I hypothesized that all tattooed informants would have at least one tattoo that they deem religiously symbolic. Additionally, I hypothesized that non-tattooed Christians explain their choice against a tattoo based on their faith.

I plan to share young active Christian’s interpretations of their faith. During my previous research, I learned that Corinthians 6:19-20 and Leviticus 19:28 are verses that other Christians may reference when discussing how they believe tattoos are a sin. I hypothesized that the majority of tattooed informants will interpret bible verses Corinthians 6:19-20 and Leviticus 19:28 in a manner that does not associate their content with tattooing. I hypothesized that the majority of informants without a tattoo would interpret tattoos to be sinful.

I plan to compare the current lifestyle of young active-Christians to the relationship among specific choices. I hypothesized that there would be no significance when comparing stimulant usage, or educational data to the choice of having a tattoo or not.

Overview of the Thesis

This thesis will cover known topics in literature about tattoos that are applicable to this study. To find out what influences young active-Christians in America, a discussion about the relevant views of postmodernism is included. The data collection methods and sampling strategy employed in this study will be mentioned in further detail. Additionally, I will discuss the techniques I used for data analysis and notable improvements that could be made to my research strategy. I then proceed into a detailed description of the findings about young active-Christians interpretation of their faith and tattoo opinions. Responses are typically referenced to be significant with respect to gender, having a tattoo, or faith participation rank. General trends in informants' responses will be noted. Finally, the discussion aims to address how the acceptance of individualism today leads to a multitude of choices. Other anthropologists are then encouraged to complete additional studies about tattoos in religion to discover the relationships of tattoos to postmodernism, age, and other Christian denominations.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Choices for Tattoos

Research on tattoos has covered many topics. Of particular interest for this research project are tattoos in the western culture, previous studies describing the trends and motivations seen among tattooed individuals, and tattoos in the religious context of Christianity. Additionally, the influences that postmodernism has had on the choice to participate in religion and body adornment will be discussed.

The History of Tattoos in the Western Culture: Contributions to Negative Stereotypes Today

Due to a scarce tattoo culture in the 1805's, heavily tattooed people and animals were considered as a "freak show" attractions at the circus (Govenar 1982). Tattooing prevalence increased among the sailors and soldiers in the Civil War (Govenar 1982). However, the invention of "the electric tattoo machine by Samuel F. O'Reilley around 1880" transformed this practice to be quicker and less painful (Govenar 1982: 30). As a result, the upper class in English and European societies, including King George and Czar Nicholas of Russia, took part in a new tattoo trend (Govenar 1982, Blanchard 1991). The majority of O'Reilley's customers in America remained servicemen who obtained patriotic designs (Govenar 1982).

Govenar (1982) cites that in 1908, Sinclair (1908) reported the percent of the U.S. Volunteer Infantry and sailors who had tattoos to be 75 and 90 percent respectively. The author quotes that as the commonality of tattoos in the armed forces shifted from patriotic symbols to, "all sorts of lettering, including lucky numbers, important dates, happy mottoes, and wordy tributes to lost comrades or past glories," the Navy decreased its' leniency towards tattoos, stating that "indecent or obscene tattooing is a cause for rejection, but the applicant should be given an opportunity to alter the design, in which event he may, if otherwise qualified, be

accepted” (Farenholt 1913, Ibid, Govenar 1982: 31). Although statistics are scarce, reports in the media indicate a decline in sailors obtaining tattoos in the 1920’s (Literary Digest, 1919).

In 1930, circuses employed heavily tattooed people and tattoo artists to traveling shows, which introduced tattoos to the general population (Govenar 1982). Due to World War II, men in the armed forces got tattoos “as a means of expressing the devotion to wives, children, family, and country, and to ease the separation from home” (Govenar 1982: 33). During the war, the government showed little interest in the regulation of tattooing practices and after the war was unsuccessful in regulating this “dangerous practice” due to tattoos increased popularity (Govenar 1982: 33).

After the war, servicemen found that their tattoos were associated with negative stereotypes (Govenar 1982). Due to this, some men had their tattoos removed and admitted regret while others prized their tattoo as a symbol of fighting for their country (Govenar 1982). From the 1940’s to the early 1960’s, tattoo shops were usually located in low class neighborhoods (Govenar 1982) which has most likely supplemented the stereotype that associates tattoos with a someone of a ‘low-economic class.’ Shops were being penalized for tattooing children under the age of 16 and for unsterilized needles (Govenar 1982). Blanchard (1991) discusses the ‘paranoia’ that middle class American’s began to feel towards those who have tattoos.

Dr. George Bailey, East Carolina University's chair of philosophy, comments on the attitudes about tattoos in the 1960's:

“Over the last 40 years we have witnessed the acceptance of what used to be socially unacceptable by a large number of people. It would appear that the culture has significantly changed. In the 1950 and into the 1960's, people would react strongly to someone with tattoos. People would immediately negatively characterize someone with tattoos. Parents would get very upset if they discovered their daughter was dating a guy with tattoos, or their son had gotten a tattoo. (It was unheard of for a daughter to get a tattoo back then). The parents wouldn't have asked what the guy does, etc. They would just have said “He has a tattoo; you're not going out with him.” That would be all there was to it. And if someone with visible tattoos tried to get a job other than as a laborer or truck driver, people wouldn't have hired him. That was how it was then. Getting or giving a tattoo was illegal. ”

Sweetman (1999) mentions that tattoos in the 1960 and 70's were commonly obtained for the identification in a subculture, such as servicemen or gang affiliations. Although the tattooing practice is more recently being described as an art form used to obtain individuality (Blanchard 1991, Sweetman 1999), stereotypes about tattoos still relate tattoos to their past low-class and criminal associations (Blanchard 1991). I aim to see if negative views towards tattoos are still prevalent among young active-Christians today.

Christianity and Tattoos

The study of Christianity in association with tattoos in current American culture is a relatively unexplored subject. Scheinfeld (2007) cites that religious tattoos indicate devotion to religion through the pain and altered appearance of its wearer. He also addresses that the bible verses Corinthians 6:19-20 and Leviticus 19:28 are commonly used by Judeo-Christian tattoo refuters to support their stance (Scheinfeld 2007). Through my previous exploratory research, tattooed informants also mentioned these verses were used to 'verify' tattoos are a sin. In order to

discover how young active-Christians today interpret their faith, I asked informants both tattooed and non-tattooed for their interpretation of these verses.

Scheinfeld (2007) further mentions several verses in the bible that are believed to “reference body markings in the old and new testament” including Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Isaiah 44:5, Isaiah 49:16, Ezekiel 9:4, Galatians 6:17, Revelations 7:2-3, and Revelations 19:16 (363). Therefore, to see if informants interpret any of these verses to relate to tattoos, I asked informants if there were any bible verses they could recall that relate to tattoos.

Scheinfeld (2007) also noted there is a “debate whether Christians are allowed to tattoo themselves” (363). The religious beliefs that explain preferences for or against a tattoo can ultimately help describe the stance that young active-Christians in America today have towards this debate.

Current Tattoo Trends

Since the 1970’s, tattooing has become increasingly popular in American society (Gagne 2009). In 2003, Sever reported an approximate 15% of Americans have at least one tattoo. Current explanations for this phenomenon include gaining acceptance into a subculture, increasing ones individuality, friendship or love, to remember an important moment, and fashion (Gagne 2009, Antoszewski 2009). Current literature indicates significant findings about those who have obtained a tattoo: people are more likely to abuse alcohol, use drugs, have emotional and physiological problems, and have a lower level of intelligence (Antoszewski 2009). However, many of these findings are only representative of subgroups, such as Farrow’s comparative study of adolescents in a substance abuse program, a detention center, and a private pediatric practice (Farrow 1991). These studies are greatly beneficial to academia; however they contribute to the current stigmas associated with the tattooed population (Antoszewski 2009).

In 2002, Roberts and Ryan (2002) conducted surveys, in two waves, on “a larger, nationally representative sample of adolescents” ages 11 to 21 (1058). Their findings indicate that participants whose parents had a high school education or less were more likely to be tattooed (Ryan 2002). Those who had tattoos also indicated that their friends were more likely engage in substance abuse (Ryan 2002). Additionally, they found that participants with a tattoo have participated ‘high risk behavior’ more often than those without a tattoo (Ryan 2002: 1061). Significant on the $P < 0.001$ level, tattooed informants were more likely to engage in sexual intercourse, binge drinking, smoking cigarettes, marijuana use, and fighting; additionally, it was more likely that tattooed informants had received a D or lower on their report card and they more often had unexcused absences from school (Ryan 2002). Roberts and Ryan (2002) conclude that a tattoo within this age group can be used as a “clinical marker that may identify adolescences who are at a higher risk for engaging in risk behavior” (1061). However, minimal conclusions are made discussing why the choice to obtain a tattoo is associated with participating in these risk behaviors. Other studies have suggested that tattoos obtained by an adolescent without their parents’ knowledge may represent low parental supervision which strongly correlates to engagement in high risk behavior (Armstrong 1997).

From 2005 to 2007, Antoszewski (2009) and team distributed questionnaires in Lodz, Poland to 492 participants with a tattoo to address the motivations behind getting a tattoo. The most commonly reported motivations to get a tattoo were enhancing one’s individuality, aesthetic value, acceptance into a subculture, and peer pressure (Antoszewski 2009). The questions used to assess the motivations behind tattoos that were implemented in this study were adapted to my semi-structured interview template (Appendix). The results indicated that 53% informants believe their tattoo increases their sexual attractiveness, 28% believe it increases their

self esteem, 26% informants think their tattoo helps in self-determination and proves they are courageous, and 25% believe it attracts attention (Antoszewski 2009). Additionally, 51% of informants mentioned they hide their tattoo before a professional meeting; my findings indicate this may be a function of the stereotypes that associate tattoos with unprofessionalism (Antoszewski 2009).

Exploring a Postmodern Perspective: Are Tattoos Considered Fashion or Anti-fashion?

Sweetman (1999) comments that “more and more men and women, of various age-groups and socio-economic backgrounds” are participating in the tattoo culture (51). Dr. George Bailey, philosophy professor at East Carolina University (ECU), seems to agree:

“Sometime between then [the 1960’s] and the tattoo culture grew. It [tattooing] became popular with people who weren’t part of the culture.”

To speculate why these changes may have occurred, he comments why tattoos were less accepted in the past:

“It’s complicated by the fact that some people associate tattoos with criminal behavior, especially people who are 50 and older, who grew up in the time when just about the only people who had tattoos were people who got them in prison or people who got them in the Navy.”

With further prompting, Dr. Bailey explained how the acceptance towards tattoos has changed from the past:

“The move from those days to these days didn’t happen just because people got comfortable with tattoos. It’s because they got comfortable with cultural differences, and differences in everything, every aspect of human life that they wouldn’t accept for a minute in 1960.”

Dr. Bailey further describes how postmodernism has led to a greater acceptance of social diversity:

“Certainly being more open to diverse lifestyles and to being open to people living the way they want and having tattoos, they feel like they're not condemning them for it... That's a convention requiring less social conformity, it's probably good overall.”

Due to the ‘everything goes’ postmodernist attitude, literature states that tattoos have become a fashion trend in the ‘supermarket of style’ (Polhemus 1995). Conversely, Sweetman (1999) presents that due to the pain and permanence of tattoos, they cannot be described simply as a fashion accessory. He argues tattoos are:

“intrusive modification to the body whose production involve pain, blood and the penetration of the skin in a non-medicalized setting, not to mention varying degrees of planning and ‘after-care’... One cannot simply purchase a finished tattoo... in the same way that one might acquire a new sweater...”(Sweetman 1999:64).

In fact, Polhemus and Proctor (1978) describe tattoos be a form of ‘anti-fashion’ which represents the resistance of change. Sweetman (1999) comments that this would describe why people got tattoos to symbolize their beliefs as part of a subculture in the 1960’s and 70’s but does not consider that the meanings of tattoos are not necessarily fixed. I observed this phenomenon during my research: two informants that obtained tattoos without a relation to their faith stated their tattoos acquired a religious meaning once they got closer to God.

Sweetman (1999) found that tattooed informants described they obtained tattoos for individual expression, and less commonly associated their tattoos with group identification in a subculture. Informants also identified their tattoos as a means of self determination (Sweetman 1999). Additionally, majority of the tattooed participants did not get their tattoos spontaneously;

research was done to distinguish the best artists and designs (Sweetman 1999). This shows they took this decision seriously and it was not just a postmodernist fashion trend (Sweetman 1999).

Despite the multitude of accepted choices postmodernism presents, behavior is still patterned. My thesis makes a contribution to understand the patterns of choosing body adornment among 18 to 30 year old Christians.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This section includes background on the previous exploratory research I conducted including improvements I made for the data collection and sample strategy in this study. I will discuss the quota sample method implemented and how I selected Victory Campus Ministries (VCM) as my Christian group of interest. I will provide further information highlighting the methods used for data analysis and any improvements that could be made for similar research in the future.

Preliminary Research: What Improvements Have Been Made?

I was invited to attend a non-denominational Christian club on ECU's campus by a fellow classmate. A preliminary class project involved interviewing 11 tattooed informants who were active Christians. This preliminary study enabled me to see flaws in my sample strategy and improve them for this project. For example, in the preliminary class research I interviewed 10 males and 1 female; I decided for this project I would interview the same number of males and females to assess if gender plays a role in the decisions young active Christians make.

Additionally, I interviewed 4 tattooed informants who did not attend Victory Campus Ministries on a regular basis. By regularly attending VCM throughout the course of this project, I got to know and become friends with many of the members who are regularly involved. Many of my new friends were eager to participate in my research project. Finally, in my preliminary research, I interviewed only informants who had tattoos. In order to analyze the different opinions about tattoos in the Christian community, in this project I decided to interview informants both with and without a tattoo. This has allowed me to analyze the differences present in the choice to obtain or abstain from getting a tattoo.

Site Selection

Victory Campus Ministries is a non-denominational Christian club held on ECU's campus every Thursday evening. In order to reduce variability of informants, all participants that were recruited regularly attended VCM (Bernard 2011). It must be noted that because this is a college club, the members join from various religious backgrounds. However, their desire to be an active member in VCM as opposed to other options on ECU's campus and throughout Greenville suggests informants have found commonalities in their faith.

VCM is partnered with a church in the Greenville community, Greenville Christian Fellowship (GCF). Members of VCM are notified about special events through group text messaging and VCM's Facebook page. VCM holds special holiday events at GCF. VCM employs small bible study groups known as 'connect groups.' The groups are divided by gender. There are many 'connect groups' that one can join depending on their schedule and most convenient locations. Finally, VCM has several campus ministers who are hired through Every Nation Ministries. The campus ministers prepare the 'connect group' material that will be covered, lead several of the connect groups, and are available to meet up with members of VCM for fellowship and any additional needs.

Sampling Strategy

A quota sample based on gender and having a tattoo was implemented (Bernard 2011). Informants had to be between the ages of 18-30 and be an active-Christian, defined as participating in their faith three or more times per month. For recruitment, I relied on referral to meet the requirements of the quota sample. Thirty-two informants were interviewed.

Quota Sampling Method

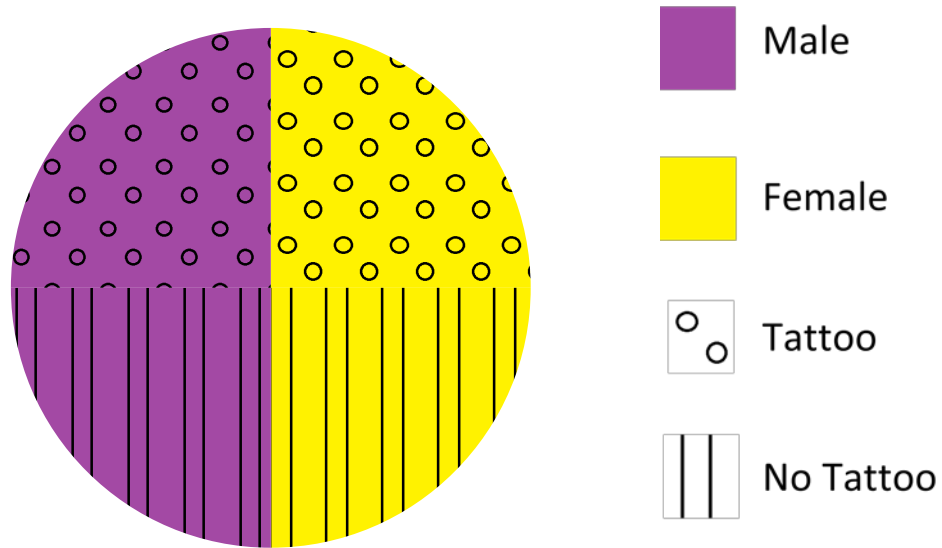


Figure 3.1 A Depiction of the Sampling Method Used to Gather Informants

The term 'informant types' will be used to describe the following four categories: females with tattoos, females without tattoos, males with tattoos, and males without tattoos.

Data Collection Methods

I created two semi-structured interview instruments: one for informants with tattoos and one for informants without tattoos. Both instruments contained open ended questions, two free listing exercises, and two rank order tasks (Bernard 2011, Brewer 2002). The instruments used can be found in the Appendix. Informants were given ID numbers so that their identity would remain anonymous. To maintain this, I have not included images of my informant's tattoos within this thesis to assure their identities are not revealed. Interviews were held in a public location, usually in a Joyner Library study room, for the informant and I's safety. The interviews were voice recorded with the participants' permission. I used probing questions to increase my understanding of responses and produce in depth responses from participants (Bernard 2011). Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to two hours. After the interview was finished,

informants were compensated with a \$10 target gift card. IRB approval for this study was obtained on November 13th, 2013 (Appendix).

Data Analysis Methods

Interviews were transcribed by an online transcription site CastingWords. Transcribed texts were coded and analyzed for co-occurring themes in ATLAS.ti7 using a grounded theory approach (Bernard 2011, ATLAS.ti). Free list data was entered into Anthropac to obtain salience and frequency rankings of informants' responses (Brewer 2002, Borgatti 1992). Using SPSS statistics, data was entered using dummy variables; themes based on the variables of gender, having a tattoo, and faith participation ranks were analyzed using cross-tabs (Bernard 2011). All significant findings, $P < 0.050$, were reported (Bernard 2011).

Reflection

In hopes of finding an anthropological topic for my Senior Honors Project, I was appointed by Dr. Heidi Luchsinger to take an Ethnographic Field Methods anthropology course, taught by my mentor, Dr. Christine Avenarius. In this course, we were assigned several small projects involving observations and interviews leading up to a final project which had to involve 10 to 12 interviews on a topic of our choice. When brainstorming topics, I initially was interested in children and bullying but Dr. Avenarius expressed that it is important we choose a topic about something we truly enjoyed. This swayed my decision; I wanted to talk to people who wanted to talk to me and tell me their story. Through my experience, I have observed that tattoos typically have a story people want to share. Then I thought about tying this into another topic; I brainstormed several ideas, including how tattoos are thought to be accepted or rejected in varying religions. I wanted to find out more about this phenomenon since I am not from a religious background.

I believe that actively participating in the VCM community was highly beneficial to my research. Attending large group on Thursday and small group on Monday each week enabled me to make close friendships with my informants. Through these relationships, I was regularly introduced to new people and welcomed to attend special events. Engaging in VCM's culture caused me to gain a deep understanding of the love my informants have for God. Several members of VCM mentioned that they were happy I engaged in this topic because they wanted to reflect on these topics within their personal faith as well. I feel as though my research is highly supported throughout the VCM community.

There are some improvements I would apply to my interview template prior to using it in a future study. I believe that when I asked informants to describe how they actively participate in their faith, some of the activities they participate in may have been left out. Now that I know many of the religious events in this community, I would specifically ask informants if they participate in the following activities: service, worship, prayer, fellowship, church, bible study, and evangelism. Through further questioning, I would gather how often and for how long a week they engage in the activity. I would then probe for any additional religious activities they participate in that were not mentioned.

Humans often report their actions to be different from their actual actions (Bernard 2011).

Dr. Bailey explained this phenomenon:

“I think in general, human beings are amazing creatures in that they're capable of amazing acts of self-deception. When they explain the causes of their behavior and why they did things to themselves, that they're capable of embracing the most wildly inventive stories and seeing things differently than an objective observer might describe them.”

Therefore, it may have been interesting to have informants fill out a schedule, outlining the amount of time spent engaging in religious activities for a month. A more accurate representation of participation may have been evident with this method.

Additionally, I would change the “current lifestyle” rank task to specifically ask how often one ‘binge drinks’ opposed to how often on drinks. The significance that tattooed informants drink more often than non-tattooed ($P= 0.012$) may incorrectly infer a ‘wild’ or ‘party’ lifestyle when in reality an informant drinks one alcoholic beverage once a week.

Finally, instead of simply asking for the locations that an informant “likes” or “dislikes” tattoos, I would ask them to mark the locations on a body image similar to Figure 4.1. I think that a visual image would have allowed informants to recall additional locations that they did not mention.

Chapter 4: Attitudes Towards Tattoos in the VCM Culture

This section provides a detailed description of the findings in my research. I will discuss the environment of VCM that I encountered through participant observation. I will explain how informants were categorized as a 'high' or 'low faith participant'; this distinction is further used as a variable for comparison, similar to the informants' gender and presence of a tattoo. I will present the opinions tattooed and non-tattooed informants shared. Additionally, young active-Christians interpretation of their faith will be analyzed through their bible verse interpretations and data from the free listing exercise about sinful actions. The common stereotypes about tattoos mentioned by each informant type will be compared and contrasted. The preferred locations of tattoos as a function of gender will be presented. Finally, current lifestyle choices, such as engaging in sexual activity, drinking, and school preparedness will be analyzed as a function of gender, presence of a tattoo, and faith participation.

The Atmosphere of VCM

VCM prides itself in being a community; through my observations it truly is. Getting set up for 'large group' on Thursday's requires help from many of the members to set up the stage, lights, sound system, and various booths. Several students volunteer as greeters where they welcome new faces by introducing them everyone and informing them about the upcoming event.

Additionally, newcomers are welcome to the VIP table where you can fill out a 'connection card' and enjoy complimentary candy. Getting connected involves joining a 'connect group' which is a smaller more intimate bible study group who meet once a week. The connect groups are divided by gender and numerous groups meet throughout the week at various times and locations.

In addition to the VIP table, there is usually an events booth, where you can sign up to volunteer or learn about upcoming events, and a merchandise table, where you can purchase

items such as the Purple Book, an interactive workbook to help you go deeper into God’s word. Members will mingle and chat around the booths, but when the worship team begins to play, everyone rushes in to sing praise and worship the Lord. The worship team plays live music on the stage, usually three to five songs, and the words to the songs are up on the screen for everyone to sing along. After the worship team is done, a campus minister typically comes up and opens the night with a prayer thanking God. The night then opens up with the announcement of upcoming events through VCM or the partnering church, Greenville Christian Fellowship (GCF). Then the sermon begins, which may be in a lecture series such as “You Only Live Once” or “It’s Controversial.” On occasion, the lecture may be a by guest speaker or have a panel open for questions.

I was able to attend special holiday events such as the ‘Hoe-Down’ held on Halloween and the ‘Tackiest Christmas Sweat Party.’ Additionally, I joined a ‘connect group’ that met every Monday evening for about an hour. The small bible study is pre-made by the campus ministers and includes verses to refer to and follow up questions to the verses where we could all discuss. The bible study I attended allowed everyone to open up and share the things that we or close friends were struggling with. We had a prayer circle prior to leaving where we prayed for one another’s concerns.

The campus ministers of VCM are also always there to help you with struggles or to meet up and have a leisurely lunch. From holiday events to volunteer opportunities on and off campus, VCM has many ways to get involved in a community dedicated to glorifying God.

Participation Rank

Informants differed in their frequency of participation in the following religious activities per week: service, worship, prayer, fellowship, church, bible study, and evangelism. High frequency

participants actively worship God an average of 19 times per week while low frequency participants actively worship God 7 times per week. I found that there is no significant correlation between frequency of participation and being tattooed. It is important to note that I am not putting a value a person's relationship with God. Rather I am distinguishing how often informants choose to actively worship God.

Opinions about Tattoos by Non-Tattooed Informants

Informants who have decided not to get a tattoo most frequently say they haven't gotten one because tattoos are too permanent or their opinions are dynamic (50.0 and 43.8% respectively).

"I think because it's permanent as well... in the way my personality is, I don't like that. I like control. I don't like that idea. I've noticed even in the last five years, my face, my preferences, [and] the way I think has changed so much." (Female without tattoos, 23 years old, high frequency participant)

More males stated that they have not gotten a tattoo because they are permanent (P=0.003). Although it was not considered significant, only females mentioned that they did not get a tattoo because of the expense.

"Honestly, I'd rather go shopping or pay my bills... I feel there are better ways to spend my money on things I am more decisive on." (Female without tattoos, 23 years old, high frequency participant)

Non tattooed informants stated that negative aspects about tattoos include: judgment, unprofessionalism, and change in appearance at an older age (50.0, 31.3, and 31.3% respectively).

"There will always be people who have negative connotations about tattoos and place you in a stereotype." (Female without tattoos, 20 years old, low frequency participant)

The positive aspects of tattoos included the religious based ideas that religious tattoos can spread the gospel and be a way to worship God (18.8 and 18.8%) however more common responses identified tattoos as expressive, symbolic, and creative (50.0, 37.5, and 31.3%).

“I do think they're good conversation starters. It [religious tattoos] can open doors for the world that we live in, where there is a lot of anti-God... and for believers, I think it can be a good witnessing tool.” (Female without tattoos, 23 years old, high frequency participant)

Opinions about Tattoos by Tattooed Informants

All tattooed informants identify their tattoos to be symbolic. Only one male informant described one of his novelty tattoos to have no symbolism. Tattooed informants collectively defined a symbol to be a representation with a deeper meaning. Additionally, all but two tattooed informants have a religious tattoo. An important factor is that in both cases, the choice to obtain a tattoo was made prior to coming into their faith.

“The real change is just that I've just completely given my life to serving God. My goal is to do whatever he wants me to do. Of course, I don't always measure up to those standards but that's what Jesus died for in his grace”(Male with tattoos, 21 years old, high frequency participant).

When discussing their tattoos, 6 informants used the word faith while 13 informants referred to God. More females used the term “faith” when discussing their tattoos (P=0.039).

Influences that were discouraging to the informant in getting a tattoo most commonly included having a family member who disliked tattoos. Despite family members dislike, usually parents or grandparents, the informant still chose to get a tattoo which shows tattooed informants choice to express themselves, sometimes without approval.

Encouraging influences included that the informant knew the artist or the artist were recommend by a friend and that the informants' friends or family had a tattoo (43.8 and 37.5%). Therefore, it is interesting to note that tattoos, which were once thought to be indicative of those who were rebellious and trying to stand out (Gange 2009) is now popular because other have done it. However, tattoos today still promote ones individualism rather than obtaining a tattoo to gain acceptance into a subculture (Sweetman 1999).

Common Stereotypes about Tattoos

Informants were asked to complete a free listing task about the social stigmas they have heard in association with tattoos. They were given three minutes to write all of the positive and negative stereotypes they have heard about tattoos. We then discussed which of these opinions they personally had and which ones they have heard from others. Stereotypes mentioned by all informants and the four informant types were compared by salience scores (Table 4.1).

The stereotype with the overall highest salience score was that tattoos are 'artistic.' Along with this idea, the belief that tattoos are a form of 'personal expression' and are 'creative' were other positive ideas that informants shared about their evaluation of tattoos. When I discussed with informants if 'artistic', 'personal expression', and 'creative' are stereotypes that represent what they personally believe about tattoos, all informants confirmed my suggestion. This shows that the current generation of people between 18 and 30 years of age are accepting tattoos as an individual art form. This is different from the view of the 1960's and 70's, where tattoos were used to distinguish someone as a member of a subculture (Sweetman 1999).

Table 4.1 Tabulated Salience Score Rankings of Stereotypes Listed by Informant Type

Stereotype of interest	Type of stereotype	Rank in overall Salience	Rank in Salience for Females		Rank in Salience for Males	
			No Tattoos	Tattoos	No Tattoos	Tattoos
Artistic	Positive	1	14	2	1	4
Rebellious	Negative	2	9	3	6	2
Gangster	Negative	3	2	NA	3	1
Criminal	Negative	4	3	4	NA	6
Personal Expression	Positive	6	6	15	4	8
Creative	Positive	7	5	13	8	5
Low economic class	Negative	8	15	1	NA	13
Unprofessional	Negative	9	10	8	NA	3
Bad/dangerous person	Negative	11	NA	5	7	NA
Christian	Positive	12	NA	16	5	14
Sinful	Negative	13	1	17	19	NA
Anti-Christian	Negative	16	NA	10	NA	18

NA: not ranked in top 20 salience scores

Informants’ responses are evidence that the negative stereotypes about tattoos from the previous century are still influential in shaping opinions. The stereotype with the second highest salience score for all informants independent of gender and tattoos, is referring to the notion that people with tattoos are ‘rebellious’. According to the scholarship on postmodernism, the term ‘rebellious’ correlates with the rejection of authority (Bailey 2014). Other negative labels include people with tattoos are ‘gangsters’, ‘criminals’, and ‘bad/dangerous people.’ Two of these three negative labels were within the top ten salience scores of stereotypes by all informant types. These labels express an “anti-establishment” sentiment, questioning the authority of the state and law enforcement.

However, rebellion isn’t strictly limited to rejection of the law; it can also be rejecting the authority of God. Data from the salience scores of the informant type “Females without tattoos”

indicates the number one stereotype to be that tattoos are sinful. Sin is defined by informants as anything that goes against God and therefore sinning is the rejection of Gods' word. Although the stereotypes listed were not personal stereotypes, the fact that these women frequently heard from others that tattoos were sinful may have been a subconscious reason for not obtaining a tattoo. The stereotype that tattoos are sinful was hardly mentioned by male informants with tattoos and didn't register among the top 20 salience scores for this group of informants. Instead the idea that tattoos are 'anti-Christian' was mentioned frequently. I coined the term 'anti-Christian' to capture the notion that tattoos are representative of those who are atheists, meaning they believe in no Gods, or those who worship other Gods. I labeled this as a negative stereotype, not because other religions are negative, but because many of the participants of this study expressed hope that those who practice other religions or none at all would find their faith in God and glorify him.

Important to the VCM culture, and possibly other Christian groups, is the stereotype that tattoos can be 'Christian.' All informant types, with the exception of the group of women without tattoos, listed this stereotype at frequency levels that registered within the top 20 salience scores. Surprisingly, data from the free listing exercise indicates that males without tattoos ranked 'Christianity' higher than the females and males with tattoos. This might be explained by the fact that the majority of the male members of VCM who do have tattoos have gotten religious tattoos. To elaborate, five of the eight tattooed males I interviewed had four or more tattoos and most of these tattoos featured a religious motif. Since VCM offers gender based 'connect groups', the male church members without tattoos would most commonly observe multiple religious tattoos on other men, while the women without tattoos are more often socializing with other women than with men; the tattooed women they interact with usually wear

tattoos at less visible locations on their body. In other words, six of the eight tattooed females I interviewed have two or one tattoo, usually small in size and often in a location that is covered by clothing.

In fact, when I asked informants about their opinion on the visibility on tattoos, 22 out of 32 stated that they believe tattoos should be covered up in a professional setting, 9 said the tattoo should be covered up if it is vulgar or inappropriate, and 7 said that tattoos might lead to judgment by others so you should get them in a location where they can be covered up. No significance was found when comparing reasons to cover up tattoos with gender, having a tattoo, or faith rank.

This relates to the frequently mentioned stereotype that tattoos are ‘unprofessional’ and typically represent a ‘low-economic class.’ However, men without tattoos are less likely than women to make this connection. I conclude that men might have observed other men with tattoos in professional setting and have not noticed any negative treatment for individuals who sport visible tattoos.

Overall the personal views of tattoos by informants are positive. This is evident by the common thought that tattoos represent art or an artistic individual. The group of women without a tattoo have mentioned hearing more traditional views than all other informants. This may imply that these women are influenced by the idea that tattoos are sinful, causing them to practice self-censorship to avoid judgment.

Commonly, the negative stereotypes that were mentioned were not the personal views of the informant. Instead, it was mentioned that they have heard this from their parents or grandparents. This implies that the older generation is less accepting towards tattoos. Several informants mentioned that we are currently in a popular era of tattoos and that they are becoming

more accepted in society. Further research involving active Christians in an older generation may verify these claims.

Did Informants Agree or Disagree? A Structured Exploration of Tattoo Opinions

Informants were asked to rank their agreement with statements about tattoos that were inspired by those in Antoszewski (2010) study. Since I interviewed both tattooed and non-tattooed informants, I had to modify the statements to be directed towards the informants' general opinion about tattoos and not the informants' specific tattoo as in Antoszewski study (2010).

All but three informants agreed that tattoos attract attention. It was not noted whether this attention is positive or negative though the previously mentioned stereotype data suggests both. The agreement that tattoos attract attention supports the idea of individuality, as tattoos can be distracting because of their unique appearance or meaning.

16 of the 32 informants agreed that tattoos increase one's self esteem and 15 said tattoos help in self determination. This suggests that tattoos are viewed by young active-Christians as a means to find and feel good about one's inner self. Specifically, those who are 21 or 22 years of age agreed that tattoos help with self determination ($P= 0.027$). Through further exploration of the phenomenon it was discovered tattooed informants more commonly fell within this age range ($P= 0.029$). This indicates that active-Christians, ages 21 and 22, may be more inclined to view tattoos as a means for expression and individuality.

Preferred Location of Tattoos: Another Tale of Gender Differences

I asked both males and females to comment on the body locations that they like and dislike tattoos on men and women specifically. Table 4.2 presents my findings on the preferred tattoo locations on each gender's body.

Table 4.2 Tattoo Location Preferences by Gender

Locations ^a	On Females (%)		On Males (%)	
	Liked *n=81	Disliked *n=70	Liked *n=67	Disliked *n=65
Head/Face/Neck	10	19	6	34
Chest	10	14	22	3
Back	19	9	25	0
Arm	9	14	34	2
Wrist/hand	16	4	6	14
Stomach/oblique	14	3	5	3
Lower Back	3	16	0	3
Pelvic Area	0	3	0	3
Buttocks	0	3	0	3
Leg	5	1	2	28
Foot/ankle	16	4	0	8

^acorresponds to the aggregated locations shown in Figure 4.1

*informants gave more than one response or no response; percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

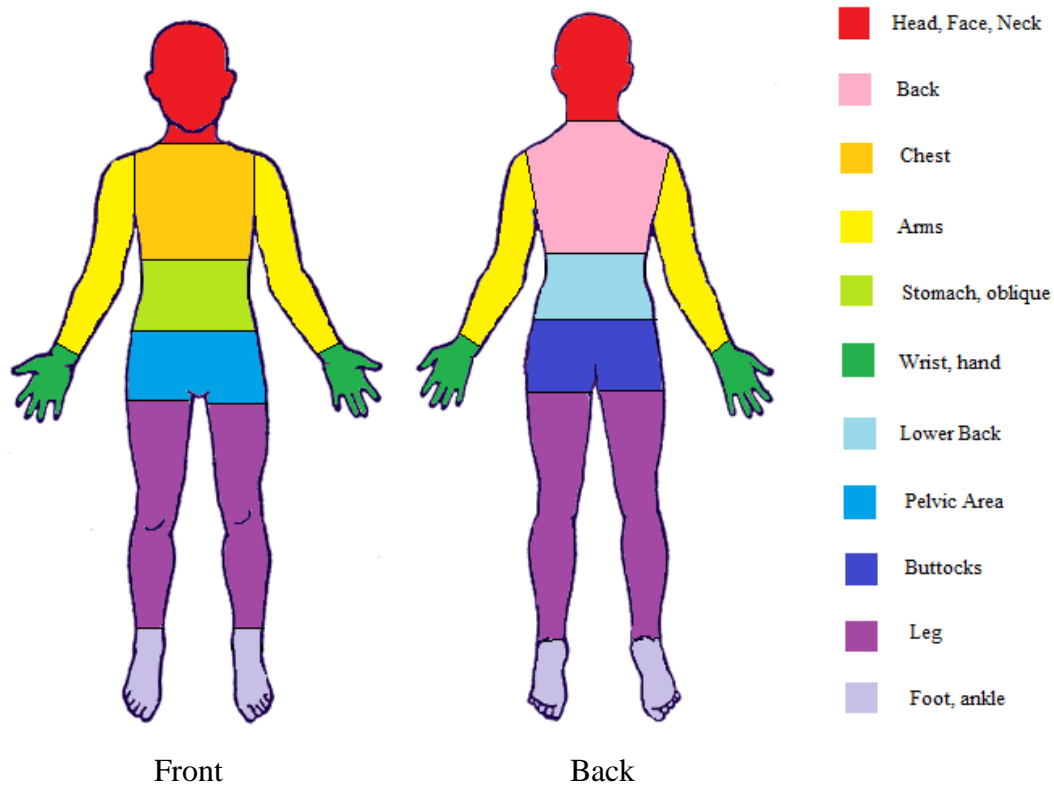


Figure 4.1 Aggregated Body Locations for Liked or Disliked Tattoo Locations

The top three locations liked on females by all informants were the back, wrist/hand, and foot/ankle. I have personally observed the trend of females getting wrist tattoos and ankle or foot tattoos. Aggregated data from all informants reveals the locations of arms, chest, lower back, and legs were frequently disliked tattoo locations on females. Tattoos on the lower back area, most frequently termed a ‘tramp stamp’, and on the chest of females are thought to be provocative locations. Because 16% of informants mentioned they specifically dislike provocative tattoos, it makes sense that those who want to glorify God through their body would dislike these tattoo locations on a female.

Females provided over half of the responses about tattoo locations liked on men’s bodies (61%). The most liked locations on males by all informants were the chest, arm, and back. All but one female mentioned she likes tattoos on male’s arm while less than half of the males stated this. Over 2/3 of the females said they liked tattoos on males back and slightly under 2/3 said they like tattoos on male’s chest. Females more often agreed with the statement that tattoos increase the wearers sexual attractiveness ($P= 0.041$), which may explain their likelihood to respond to tattoo locations they prefer on male bodies.

Men were more inclined to list the locations of tattoos on other males that they disliked; half of the responses are from males. Three fourths of the males and slightly under two thirds of the females said they disliked tattoos on the head/face/neck area of a male. A disliked location on males by 14% of informants was the wrist/hand area. I conclude that these locations are disliked for tattoos because they are usually exposed and difficult to cover up. Recall that over two thirds of informants stated tattoos should be covered up for professional reasons. Similar to the locations disliked on females, the leg was a common disliked location on men’s bodies. No

significance was found when comparing location preferences to the gender of informant and to having a tattoo or not.

Tattoo Likes and Dislikes: What is the Tattoo About?

When asking informants about the specific tattoo symbols they like, 63% stated they like tattoo with a religious motif and over 1/3 described that they like tattoos with meaning that relate to that persons' life. This study has shown on multiple occasions that religious tattoos in the VCM community are accepted and described as a great way to express ones faith and share the gospel.

Disliked symbols include tattoos that are: satanic (44%), meaningless (19%), against God (16%), and provocative (14%). Tattoos that are satanic, against God, and provocative are most likely disliked because they relate to the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality. Women with tattoos were most likely to comment that they dislike tattoos that convey an association that spoke against God (P= 0.017). This data allows me to deduce that the VCM community finds high importance in tattoos that glorify God and have personal meaning to the wearer.

“I want to make sure that it [a potential tattoo] is really meaningful... I want it to relate to Jesus for sure” (Female without tattoos, 19 years old, high faith participant).

An Analysis of Religious Beliefs: Bible Verse Interpretations

When interpreting Corinthians 6: 19-20, those who had a higher faith rank are more likely to mention its correlation with sexual immorality (P=0.030). While I was attending the organization, the minister brought up this scripture in its context and discussed how it is specifically in reference to sexual immorality. Therefore it is evident that those who spend more time actively worshipping God were more likely to know the meaning of the scripture in context.

Those who did not have a tattoo were more likely to state during their interpretation of Corinthians that they should glorify God with their bodies (P=0.034).

“He [God] saved our souls and he made our spirit come alive, but it's not like we can honor God with our spirits and our souls and not our bodies as well. I think that our bodies go hand in hand with honoring God” (Female without tattoos, 26 years old, high faith participation).

This may indicate that informants without a tattoo aim to glorify God by keeping their bodies healthy and away from drugs, sexual immorality, and even body adornment.

“The way you use your body, the way you portray your body, in whatever manner you do that... glorify him [God] with your body, the best you can. You can do that through your actions, the way you dress, the way you reflect in your mirror, the way people see you” (Male without tattoos, 22 years old, low faith participation).

When interpreting Leviticus, those who have a tattoo are most likely to mention that the context of the verse is very important for the correct interpretation (P= 0.033). This is most likely because those who have tattoos are most often confronted with this verse.

“You can't really take a verse out and interpret it without first interpreting who said that. Was it God, was it someone speaking, was it God speaking through someone? Who were they speaking to? Was it cultural context? Who are the people?” (Female with tattoos, 21 years old, high faith participant).

More than one third of informants claim that God was trying to distinguish his followers from those who were engaging in pagan rituals to worship the dead. Additionally, they mention that today we are no under the laws of the Old Testament (46.9%).

“Well, I think you have to have a historical sense of the Old Testament, a little bit. You read anything out of Leviticus or anything Old Testament that's under Moses' Law; that was written for a specific time in the Israelite history. A lot of pagan worship was going on in that time; nothing had been redeemed in that time. God gave some very strict rules: this is how I want you to live, if you're going to be my people, I got to set you on the right path. Down that road, I can redeem the entire world out of this little nation. I definitely see that in Leviticus as well as a number of other laws in the Old Testament... You can't really single out a single thing and say that it was meant for eternity, along the course of human history” (Male without tattoos, 22 years old, low faith participant).

The bible verse Revelations 19:16 which states, “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords” was referred to by 7 informants who discussed it may be in association towards tattoos. There was no significance to someone having a tattoo and mentioning this verse as an example of tattoos in the Bible. This suggests that the acceptance of tattoos in Christianity is not a function of having a tattoo. Overall, younger Christians may be more open minded to this possibility than previous generations of Christians.

An Analysis of Religious Beliefs: Defining a Sin

In order to gain a better perspective of the actions associated with being a sin, I asked informants to define a sin. A compilation of definitions lead me to conclude that a sin is anything that you put above god or anything that displeases him. Whether it is a physical object or an emotion, the thing that is put above god is termed an ‘idol.’ Idolatry is a sin that may lead to other sinful acts; it is referred to as a ‘root sin’. Even though one may think certain idols are positive, such as family and friends, the number one focus in your life should be God. Informants describe that when God is the center of your life, other things will fall into place.

Participants were asked to complete a free listing exercise of any activities, actions, or anything else they consider to be a sin. Only one female informant without a tattoo stated that she believed tattoos to be sinful. No informants specifically listed tattoos to be a sin in the free listing exercise.

Web of Top 10 Sins by Salience Rank

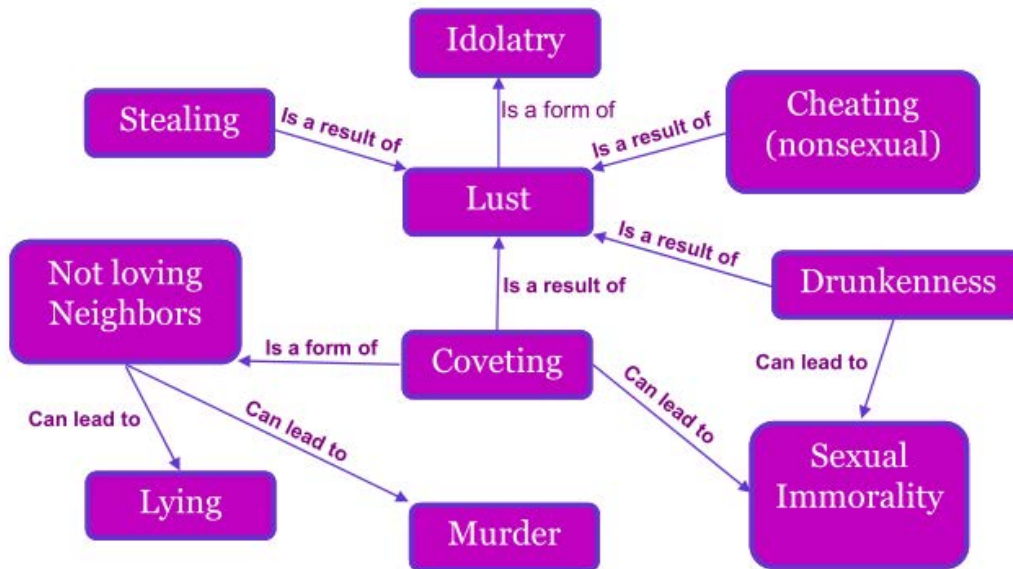


Figure 4.2 Web of Top 10 Sins as Explained by Informants

When comparing the salience of terms for tattooed informants to non-tattooed informants, the top 7 terms are identical: lying, stealing, sexual immorality, murder, lust, idolatriy, and cheating. It is interesting that all of these terms relate back to the 10 commandments.

The 10 commandments directly states that one should not lie, cheat, or steal. Additionally, it says ‘though shalt have no other gods’ which refers to the root sin, idolatriy. The 10 commandments states that you should not commit murder, or kill. To continue, sexual immorality encompasses adultery, which is an action the 10 commandments forbid. Similarly, lust, is the root sin that may lead to an adulterous act; it too relates to the 10 commandments.

Denying god was the 8th most frequently listed sin by all informants. One may deny god by not being obedient to prompting by him, not giving him all of your life, not worshipping him, or worshipping other gods. Denying god was in the top ten frequencies of all informant types.

This verifies that the young active-Christians in VCM aim to serve and glorify God through their actions. Informants would like it to be known that Christians are not perfect because only God is perfect. However, as long as they are repenting of their sins, they are forgiven by God.

“God is so holy, perfect, and righteous. He is so good. We are so sinful. There is a huge gap between us... He's more than enough to forgive anything, no matter what you've done. [God will] set you free from your past and bring you into this whole new identity”
(Female with tattoos, 21 years old, high faith participant).

Current lifestyle: Sexual Activity

The most frequently listed sin by all subgroups of informants is sexual immorality. This term encompasses acts that include prostitution, incest, masturbation, fornication, pre-marital sex, pornography, adultery, and homosexuality. The cross tabulation of current sexual activity to tattoos shows no significance, but it is interesting to note that the 3 people who are sexually active all have a tattoo. Not all informants have abstained from sex their whole life, but the majority of them have done so once they found God.

“I would drink and be sexually active in high school before I started living for the Lord”(Female with tattoos, 20 years old, high frequency participant).

Current lifestyle: Drinking

Drunkenness is the 8th ranked sin ranked by salience scores. Christians I spoke with believe that you can indulge in a glass of wine but you should not drink to get drunk. Drinking blurs your judgment, most likely making you more susceptible to commit other sins. However, in some cases, a glass of wine may be a sin if that person feels convicted. In all of your actions, you must think, “What are my intentions? Where is my heart at?”

“I may not have the same convictions as an alcoholic, because I haven't struggled with alcoholism. He [an alcoholic] might not be able to go into a bar and he might not be able to have some glass of wine, where maybe I could have a glass of wine and I'd be fine” (Female without tattoos, 23 years old, high frequency participant).

Having a tattoo shows a significant relationship to drinking (P= 0.012). However, some informants explained that when they drink alcohol it is not binge drinking, defined as consuming five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more in a row for women (Marczinski 2009).

“If I do have a drink, it's a purely casual thing. I'm not one to go and binge drink...” (Male with tattoos 21 years old, low frequency participant).

Current Lifestyle: Focus on Education

Similar to findings by Roberts and Ryan (2002), the data showed that the average GPA of non tattooed informants is higher than tattooed informants (P=0.037). It is important to note that having a tattoo does not cause a lower GPA and that GPA is not a measure of intelligence. GPA reflects a person's attitude toward preparedness and fulfilling requirements. This may embody a particular outlook on life. Those who have tattoos might be less willing to conform to specific expectations of academic preparation. The statements that I collected reveal that self expression is a very important need for this group.

“It sounds funny now that I'm thinking about it, but in a sense that was a way of expressing my independence -- expressing me being different and not caring what people think. People would look at me like, “You got a tattoo on your leg. That's feminine.” Or, “You might be gay.” I was like, “I don't care. It's not for you in the first place.” It was daring, a stepping-out-of-character type of thing. That was encouraging to me...” (Male with tattoos, 21 years old, high frequency participant).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The ultimate goal of this research was to explore what explains lifestyle choices about body adornment and spirituality among young active-Christians in Greenville, North Carolina.

Throughout this discussion, I will summarize the analysis of data I collected to answers this question and relate the findings to the literature review.

What Influences Young Americans' Choices?

Young Americans today are confronted with the choice to participate in religious activities. From a postmodernist perspective, the rejection of authority in the church has caused many people to forgo fully accepting the word of their ministers. Instead young church members interpret the bible and answer questions about their faith individually. Many informants informed me that prayer to God is important when making certain decisions, including the decision to get a tattoo. This individual perspective of faith has lead to numerous interpretations of scripture and what is considered to be a sin. The informants in this study from the nondenominational Christian club Victory Campus Ministries (VCM) collectively defined sin as an idol or anything that displeases God. A free listing exercise revealed that the top 10 sins by salience score closely mimic the laws provided by the 10 commandments (Figure 4.2). None of the informants listed tattoos as a sin during this exercise.

A higher frequency of participation in one's faith has lead to a greater understanding of scriptures in context ($P=0.03$). Through my previous exploratory research, I learned that those who refute tattoos in Christianity defend their stance with the verse of Leviticus 19:28 stating "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD." However, informants mentioned that this verse is actually a reference to pagan rituals that were occurring at the time. As well, they mentioned that this law is part of the Old

Testament and therefore not as binding as the rules of the New Testament. Informants who have chosen to obtain a tattoo frequently mention that one must look at the context of the verse in order to understand its correct interpretation. Additionally, several informants mentioned that the verse Revelations 19:16 may indicate the presence of tattoo practices in scripture. This verse, and several others, we mentioned by Scheinfeld (2007) as evidence of “body markings in the old and new testaments” (363). This implies this group of young-Christians tend to look deeper into scripture to discover its’ meaning for themselves rather than accept the authority of Christians from previous generations.

Only one young active-Christian that I interviewed interprets tattoos to be sinful. Hence I had to reject the hypothesis that those who have chosen to not obtain a tattoo for reasons related to their faith. Instead, the most frequently mentioned reasons non-tattooed informants list for not obtaining a tattoo is that they are uncomfortable with the permanence of a tattoo. Non-tattooed informants further stated that the negative aspects in having a tattoo include judgment, unprofessionalism, and an altered appearance at an older age.

It is evident that negative judgments of tattoos still exist. Stereotypes associated with tattoos include the assumption that tattooed individuals are rebellious, gangsters, criminals, bad or dangerous people, unprofessional, belong to a low-economic class, are sinful, and anti-Christian. These descriptors emerged when I asked informants to complete a free listing exercise about all stereotypes, positive and negative, they have heard in association with tattoos. I was sure to ask informants if each stereotype reflects their personal view, and if not, where they had heard it from. It is likely that negative stereotypes are expressed by an older generation whom I hypothesize are less accepting towards tattoos because informants mentioned they heard these social stigmas from their parents and grandparents. The stereotype that tattoos might be

considered sinful by others emerged as the descriptor with the highest salience score among women without tattoos. This might indicate that they personally decided against obtaining a tattoo to avoid judgment of their faith.

I conclude that the stereotype of unprofessionalism still strongly influences the opinions of young active Christians based on the frequently expressed opinion that tattoos should be covered up in a professional setting. Antoszewski (2009) mentions similar results and writes that over 50% of informants in his study said that they attempted to cover up their tattoo in a professional setting. The current research confirms that as a likely influence on the preference of tattoo locations on male bodies. To elaborate, the most commonly disliked locations on the male body are the hands/wrist and the head/face/neck which are difficult to cover up in a professional setting. The head/face/neck area was a frequently disliked location for a tattoo on a woman's body as well as the chest and lower back which are considered to be provocative locations. Therefore, it is not surprising that informants mentioned provocative tattoos most often as being disliked.

The positive aspects about tattoos expressed by non tattooed informants include that they are symbolic, expressive, and creative. In addition, if a tattoo carries a religious message, it is considered to have the ability to spread the gospel and glorify God. Members of the VCM community most frequently like tattoos that are religious and meaningful while simultaneously disliking tattoos that are satanic. It is apparent that it is important to young active-Christians that tattoos have a significant symbolism that glorifies God.

Approximately half of all informants agreed that tattoos help to improve one's self-esteem and help in 'self-determination.' Informants with tattoos were most likely to be 21 or 22 ($P=0.029$) which elaborates why this age group more commonly agreed that tattoos are a form of

self determination ($P= 0.027$). Therefore, it is evident that tattoos are identified as a marking to specifically relate to the beliefs and values of the wearer. This phenomenon was observed as all but two tattooed informants obtained tattoos with a religious motif, which corresponds to their life values. Similar to the conclusion by Sweetman (1999) that tattoo meanings are not constant, these two informants later gave their tattoos a religious meaning when they became more involved in their faith. The choice to obtain a tattoo has not proven to be indicative of faith participation in this sample ($P > 0.050$). The informants with religious tattoos are not necessarily more frequent participants in their faith than non-tattooed VCM members. However, informants with religiously themed tattoos explain that they chose particular motifs to serve as a permanent reminder and expression of their faith.

It seems that obtaining a religious tattoo is more indicative of individualism rather than an association to the subculture of Christianity. The fact that informants get unique and creative tattoos to symbolize their faith implies it is a form of individual expression, similar to tattooed informants in Sweetman's study (1999). Furthermore, religious tattoos in American culture have become a sort of fad despite the lack of one's participation in church or similar events. This suggests that it is difficult to identify someone as an active-Christian based on their tattoo. Several informants commented that this phenomenon can be considered disrespectful toward Jesus and that a person who wears a religious tattoo but does not have strong faith in that religion may misrepresent Christians.

“Lot of people don't follow Christ at all, but will get a tattoo of a cross. It's almost like crosses are a trendy thing now. They really are. If you look in fashion...it's always cross earrings, cross shirts, dresses with crosses on them. It's crazy. It's the people who don't know Jesus at all, don't identify with Christianity like to wear crosses. It's a fashion statement. It's pretty crazy to me, because... the cross was the most morbid way to die, back in the Roman empire. It was horrifying. That's why Jesus died on a cross, because they want him to die the most painful death that you could imagine...”

it's almost offensive when people are downtown, partying it up and not thinking about Jesus at all, but wearing crosses” (Female with tattoos, 21 years old, high frequency participant).

My hypothesis that having a tattoo would show no significant relationship in comparison to stimulant usage had to be rejected. Those who choose to get a tattoo may embody a particular outlook on life where correlations to drinking and not conforming to academic expectations are significant ($P= 0.012, 0.037$). This may relate to a postmodern view and confirm the likelihood that tattooed informants are more inclined to reject authority than non-tattooed individuals. To elaborate, the act of getting drunk is considered a sin by the VCM community; if those who have tattoos engage in drinking behavior that leads to intoxication then they are going against the rules of the church. However, these findings may imply an incorrect assumption due to the fact that I only asked informants how often they drank as opposed to how often they binge drink. The fact that tattooed informants have a lower GPA does not indicate a lower level of intelligence, but possibly a rejection of a professor's request for class preparedness.

Finally, a rejection of the authority of one's parents or grandparents was found to be common among the tattooed informants. A frequent discouraging influence in one's tattoo decision making process was the dislike of tattoos by authoritative family member. Listed as the 11th sin by overall salience score was dishonoring or disrespecting one's parents. Therefore, in some of the informants' circumstances, when obtaining a tattoo they reject their parents' authority and ultimately the authority of the church. Although further data is needed to confirm that this is mainly applicable to tattooed informants. I did not ask the non-tattooed informants any questions regarding their conformity to their parents' authority. However, non-tattooed informants mention they haven't obtained a tattoo due to their parents dislike. With further prompting, I might have found similar responses from other non-tattooed informants.

“I felt like growing up I knew if this is something she's [my mother's] so serious about it's because she's really concerned and it's just something that I never wanted to go against her and do. Even though I've had thoughts and I've had in mind something that I wanted to get honestly but I just can't make myself get one” (Female without tattoos, 20 years old, high faith participant).

A differing perspective from literature that may provide a reason for this phenomenon is that tattooed informants typically have less supervision from their parents (Armstrong 1997). Therefore, these instances may infer a lack of authority rather than the rejection of authority. Further data about the relationship tattooed informants have with their parents would be needed to confirm this suggestion.

In conclusion, the VCM community shares positive opinions about tattoos, specifically tattoos that glorify God. The acceptance towards tattoos embodies young active-Christians shift to worldview that accepts social diversity and the quest for individual expression. Tattooed informants are more likely to embody the characteristic trait of rejecting authority. This provides reason to believe tattooed individuals may be more postmodern in their values, meaning there are multiple realities and multiple truths for this generation. Due to this, young active-Christians have the option to participate in an additional method of expressing their faith that previous generations of Christians did not have available and may reject. Young active-Christians who have tattoos have expressed their tattoos are utilized as a form of individuality and a presentation of personal beliefs based on their religion. The welcoming atmosphere that VCM provides to members who refrain and or participate in tattooing practices provides reason to believe that a multitude of choices are accepted by this young group of active-Christians.

Outlook: A Proposal of Further Research

It has been hypothesized that young tattooed Christians are more idiosyncratic than Christians from an older generation. During the discussion of my research conclusions with Dr. Bailey, he commented that people over the age of 50 have different views towards tattoos due to the culture values that were instilled in them while growing up. Additionally, he discussed how a shift to postmodernism has led to greater acceptance of social diversity and individual choices. A study that compares the views of these young active Christians, ages 18 to 30, to the views of an older generation of nondenominational Christians may verify these claims.

Additionally, Dr. George Bailey suggested I would have different findings if I were to work with a different denomination of Christians. I agree with this statement. However, the study may need to be modified and include churches from several different denominations. Some might have members with many tattoos while others might have a very small proportion of tattooed members. I am interested to know if negative views towards tattoos are more likely a function of age or denomination of the church. I could explore this by conducting a study within a different denomination of Christians, while collecting data from both a young age group and older age group.

Additionally, findings indicated that tattooed informants were more likely to drink, have a lower GPA, and obtain tattoos without parents or grandparents approval which seems to imply the rejection of authority. To test the hypothesis that young active-Christians with tattoos have a belief system involving stronger postmodern views, involving acceptance to diversity and a rejection to authority, it would be interesting to distribute a semi-structured survey involving scenarios that correspond to modern and postmodern views. From the responses, informants could be ranked on a scale to determine their 'degree of postmodernism' beliefs. The objective of

this study would be to conclude if there is a relationship between having a tattoo and postmodernism.

Another observable trend is religious tattoos among those who do not frequently interact in the Christian community.

“I think a lot of times, it's not even out of Christianity that they get them [religious tattoos]. I know a lot of my friends, I wouldn't necessarily call them Christians, but they get a tattoo of praying hands or a cross...They don't really exhibit any of the characteristics of a Christian”(Male with tattoos, 21 years old, high frequency participant).

It would be insightful to conduct a study that focuses on people with tattoos that are labeled ‘religiously symbolic’ such as crosses, rosemary beads, Jesus and son on to discover the motivation behind these tattoos. I would like to encourage those who are interested in religion, tattoos, and the beliefs of postmodernism to continue research in any of the above topics.

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Appendix

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
☎ Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Rachel Johnson](#)
CC: [Christine Avenarius](#)
Date: 11/13/2013
Re: [UMCIRB 13-001907](#)
What explains getting a tattoo?

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 11/13/2013 to 11/12/2014. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Consent Template: No More Than Minimal Risk Research	Consent Forms
Data Collection Sheet	Data Collection Sheet
Honors Thesis.docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Non-Tattooed Semi-Structured Interviews	Surveys and Questionnaires
Semi-Structure Interview Template Tattoos	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Semi-Structured Interview Template No Tattoo	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Tattooed Semi-Structured Interviews	Surveys and Questionnaires

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

Free Listing Exercise: Please list the first 25 activities, actions, and anything else that you consider to be a sin. You will be given 3 minutes to complete the task.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
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9. _____
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18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____

(While going through free listing exercise) For what reasons do you associate these activities, actions, or things to be sinful?

What is your interpretation of Corinthians 6:19-20 which states: "**19** What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? **20** For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

What is your interpretation of Leviticus 19:28 which says "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD."

Are there any bible verses you can recall that relate to tattoos?

Can you elaborate on your interpretation of this verse?

Free Listing Exercise: Please list the social stigmas (stereotypes) you have heard in association with tattoos. You will be given 3 minutes to complete this exercise.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
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- 20. _____
- 21. _____
- 22. _____
- 23. _____
- 24. _____
- 25. _____

(While going through free listing exercise) Do any of the social stigmas you listed about tattoos match the stigmas you have personally?

If so, which ones?

If not, why do you think others have this stigma?

Are there any additional stigmas you can think of that were not listed?

How do you define a symbol?

Describe all of the tattoo(s) you have seen that you would consider symbolic of your religion.

Tell me about your tattoo(s).

What does your tattoo represent?

Is it symbolic?

Is it religiously symbolic?

If not, why do you think it is not a symbol?

Describe the reasons you wanted a tattoo.

“I define a tattoo decision making process to involve any research done, such as, decisions associated with getting a tattoo such as where to go, what artist, what to get.”

Describe the influences that were encouraged during your tattoo decision making process.

Describe the influences that were discouraging during your tattoo decision making process.

Describe the reactions you’ve received from others about your tattoo(s).

Siblings?

Parents?

Friends?

Teachers?

Ministers?

Strangers?

What is your opinion on the visibility of a tattoo on others?

(If they don’t prefer visible) Why do you prefer it to be not visible?

Please circle the corresponding number that describes your agreement with the following statements:

Ranking Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree	No, not really	No opinion, I'm not sure	Yes, sort of	Agree

Having a tattoo...

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Increases sexual attractiveness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Helps in self determination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Attracts other people's attention | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Proves you are courageous | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Increases self-esteem | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

What are your plans about getting more tattoo(s)?

Could you describe your future tattoo(s)?

What additional comments you would like to include about tattoos?

Which tattoo locations on females do you really like?

Which tattoo locations on males do you really like?

Which specific symbols of tattoos do you like on a person?

Who has it?

Why do you like it?

Which tattoo locations on females do you dislike?

Which tattoo locations on males do you dislike?

Which specific symbols or tattoos do you dislike on a person?

Who has it?

Why do you dislike it?

What other comments on religious tattoos would you like to make?

Please circle the answer to the statement that best corresponds to your current lifestyle:

I smoke cigarettes:	Never	On occasion	Sometimes (1-3 times a month)	Often (one or more times a week)	No response
I drink:	Never	On special occasions	One to three times a month	At least once a week (including weekends)	No response
I use illegal drugs:	Never	On occasion	Sometimes (1-3 times a month)	Often (one or more times a week)	No response
I have been arrested:	Never	Once	Twice	Three or more times	No response
I am sexually active:	No	No and in a relationship	Yes and not in a relationship	Yes and in a relationship	No response

If you would like to explain any of the above responses please do so below:

Participant ID:
Date:
Time:
Gender:
Age:
Neighborhood type (city, urban, suburban, small town):
Ethnicity:
Highest Education Completed (less than high school, high school, college or higher):
Approximate GPA:
Number of tattoos:
Major/ Occupation:
Parents Education (less than high school, high school, college or higher):

Free Listing Exercise: Please list the first 25 activities, actions, and anything else that you consider to be a sin. You will be given 3 minutes to complete the task.

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If not, why do you think others have this stigma?

Are there any additional stigmas you can think of that were not listed?

How do you define a symbol?

Describe all of the tattoo(s) you have seen that you would consider symbolic of your religion.

Please describe why you have not gotten a tattoo.

What do you believe is negative about having a tattoo?

What do you believe is positive about having a tattoo?

Who do you know that has a tattoo?

What is their tattoo?

What was your reaction of their tattoo?

What is your opinion on the visibility of a tattoo on others?

(If they don't prefer visible) Why do you prefer it to be not visible?

Please circle the corresponding number that describes your agreement with the following statements:

Ranking Scale:

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Approximate GPA:
Number of tattoos: N/A
Major/ Occupation:
Parents Education (less than high school, high school, college or higher):