

ABSTRACT

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PERFORMANCE OF TATTOOS AMONG
WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN
SOCIETY

Sarah E. Wilson, Master of Arts, 2008

Directed By: Dr. Laurie Frederik Meer, Department of Theatre

This study examines tattooing in the United States among university students, particularly women. A displayed tattoo, I argue, performs a representation of one's identity. This representation can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the audience of the tattoo. This study explores the relationship between the performer and her potential audience, noting that many women within this study frequently conceal their tattoos from the general public. Such regular concealment questions who these individuals' intended audience may be. Based on my research, I propose that the audience for some tattooed women may, in fact, be the performer herself. Research methodology was primarily ethnographic, utilizing observation, interview, and surveys of women and men mainly across a public, eastern coast, college campus. This study contributes to existing literature about tattoos and social identity by focusing on the performance of tattoos chiefly among college student women in contemporary American society.

MARKS OF IDENTITY: THE PERFORMANCE OF TATTOOS AMONG
WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SOCIETY

By

Sarah E. Wilson

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Advisory Committee:
Dr. Laurie Meer, Chair
Dr. Faedra Carpenter
Dr. Catherine Schuler

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	iii
Section 1: Introduction, History, and Methodology	1
Introduction	1
Methodology	9
A Brief History of Tattooing in America Since The Turn of the 20 th Century	12
Section 2: “To Tattoo or Not to Tat You”— Socio-Cultural Influences on the Tattooing Process	20
Unimpressed—Deciding Against Tattooing	23
Impressed—Selecting the Tattoo Design	29
Section 3: Concealer Schtick—Location and Performance of Tattoos	43
Section 4: Conclusion	63
Appendices	66
Appendix I. List of Interviewees	66
Appendix II. IRB Consent Form	67
Appendix III. Tattoo Survey	69
Appendix IV. Survey Results	71
Bibliography	104

List of Tables

Table 1. Occurrence of Prominent Design Elements (Tattooed Respondents).....	30
Table 2. Considered Tattoo Locations (Non-Tattooed Responses).....	46
Table 3. Locations Deemed Inappropriate to Have a Tattoo.....	49
Table 4. Tattoo Displayed To Whom (Tattooed Respondents, 32 W/10 M).....	52
Table 5. Tattoo Concealed When (Tattooed Respondents, 32 W/10 M).....	52

“The body is a traveling scrapbook upon which memories are permanently imprinted.”
(Michael Atkinson 2003:187)

“A tattoo is, even more than a handwritten signature, a marking of individuality and identity. A tattoo makes the subject identifiable, incomparable, and authentic.”
(Sonja Neef 2006: 234)



Section 1: Introduction, History, and Methodology

Introduction

The tattoo is a vehicle, a medium for communicating symbols. Tattoos are active; whenever displayed, they project these symbols to others. For some individuals, tattoos are also symbolic in that they present a mark that represents not merely an idea or affiliation, but also one’s self, one’s identity. Those who perceive these tattoos attempt to interpret the significance of the marks—they attempt to understand what is being communicated. However, within a single symbol one may find endless variety of meaning. Not surprisingly then, to define the tattooing process—a process by which these marks are designed for and inscribed upon the body—is to explore a wide range of aspects and potential significance across a vast array of cultures and time periods. Such an exploration, I have found, easily falls within the realm of Performance Studies. This study utilizes a performance perspective to examine tattooing in the United States among contemporary students

within an institute of higher education, most of whom are women¹. I investigate how these individuals communicate and perform the marks and corresponding meaning(s) they place on their bodies; **in other words, how displaying a tattoo is embodied performance.**

The voices of interviewed women and surveyed students will provide the center of this study, but to emphasize the complexity of the subject, I will start with a basic definition of tattooing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*), to tattoo is: *to form permanent marks or designs upon the skin by puncturing it and inserting a pigment or pigments*. Even this basic definition is rather complex. Within it there are several elements that can be explored, but generally they can be considered in two ways: impression and expression. As a mode of communication, indeed of *performance*, the tattoo is at once both variously impressive and expressive, and this can be seen even in the *OED*'s basic definition.

The first part of this definition is “to form” or “to make.” A tattoo is not a naturally-occurring object; rather, it is formed conceptually and then literally by humans. A tattoo is a conscious form of body modification affected by inherent social and cultural influences. The tattoo begins as an impression, a conception within the mind of its designer. Regardless of the function(s) it may serve or the eventual significance the mark will have, this initial impression of the tattoo cannot be severed from the culture in which it is conceived. One might say the tattoo is the physical forming of one's personal conception of self. As a variety of influences and experiences impact this conception, they logically also impact first the tattooed individual's decision to become tattooed at all, and then her subsequent creation of

¹ I use the term “higher education” to refer to both graduate and undergraduate students.

the design. To use sociologist Michael Atkinson's term, the tattoo at all levels—concept, symbol, and performance—is *interdependent* upon socio-cultural factors; it is affected by whether or not society deems it “appropriate” to have a tattoo, where that society deems it acceptable to place this mark, what symbols are acceptable as designs, etc. Immediate family, friends, coworkers, employees, and even strangers can affect how an individual performs her self through her tattoo (Atkinson 2003). The tattoo has an impressive relationship with its potential audience from the very outset of its conception.

It is very important then to consider to what extent these socio-cultural influences aid and/or deter contemporary American formulations of tattoos. What influences young adult students to get a tattoo? What influences women in particular? What influences where they place it and what its design may be? These questions are an integral part of this study, as they set the backdrop for the decisions that will eventually become a marked performance of one's conception of self.

Secondly, the tattoo is a “design.” The tattooed person selects an image or images that she presents to a tattoo artist to be impressed, literally, into the skin. This image can take the form of various objects: words, numbers and other linguistic figures; iconography based on religion, heritage, popular and other cultural influences; animal, plant, and human representation; or abstract shapes and lines. Commonly the arrangement of these objects into the design is the result of direct interaction between the consumer, the tattoo artist, and occasionally a third party such as a friend who helped create the design. Because it is a “design” the tattoo has an essential aesthetic quality to it; indeed, many now consider tattoos to be works of art

(Rubin 1992, Atkinson 2003, “Zogby Poll” in *PR Newswire* 2005, Kosut 2007). This artistic element naturally coincides with cultural ideologies of beauty. The artwork is not going to be mounted on the wall; rather, it will be inscribed on an individual’s skin. This study will thus consider how individuals determine where it might be appropriate to place such aesthetic work based on their social ideas of beauty and personal attractiveness. Atkinson, DeMello, Mifflin, and Pitts all discuss the potential sexuality of tattoos and how many women actually use their tattoos to conform to standardized notions of femininity within North American culture. Are women more or less likely to place a tattoo on their lower back than on their arms? What, if anything, might this say about the female body and cultural interpretations of it?

Additionally, the design of a tattoo gives an impression of the bearer’s identity. The design can represent the wearer’s particular aesthetic/taste as well as an affiliation with the images that are impressed permanently into his/her skin. In one way, the tattoo can be viewed as securing a particular role affiliation with the bearer of that tattoo, a concept Susan Benson terms “sealed selves” (Benson 2000): 251). In this manner, the tattoo concretizes the bearer’s association with her identity through the tattoo’s indelibility and its clear, outward significance; that is, its *expression*. The abstract, the conceptual is removed from its fragmentary existence and made physical and material. The imag(in)ed design becomes an expressive mark upon the skin. The identity is thus not only secured, but also openly communicated to anyone who perceives the tattoo. This relationship between the aesthetic aspects of a design,

considerations of attractiveness, and associations of identity that the tattoo signifies are further explored within this study.

Finally, the tattoo is a “permanent mark...upon the skin.” Again, the tattoo is created through the impressing of a design into the skin and as such, it is meant to be indelible. Pulling from J. L. Austin, theorist Sonja Neef claims that skin is a “performative articulation,” that “‘does’ the self” in its existence as both part of the inner workings that collectively make the body and external contact and communication with the rest of the world (Neef 2006: 231). As the tattoo becomes a part of the skin, part of the human body, it becomes as much of a defining characteristic of an individual as any other element of the skin—wrinkles, facial hair, scars, etc.—and sometimes even more so. It is a visible signifier of an aspect of that individual, when it *is* visible.

Here I would like to acknowledge a potential argument that could be posed through Peggy Phelan’s concept that “Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (1996: 148). If tattooing is a permanent process, then, how can it be considered a performance? I would argue that while the mark is arguably permanent (and even so, because it is on the body, it will change, fade, stretch, etc. as the body ages), the *performance* of the mark is not. *Each time* the tattoo is displayed, it is performed. The action of the performance is the showing of the mark and the subsequent interactive exchange between the actor and the audience. For example, if the actor is invited to tell her “tattoo narrative” (DeMello 2006) to the audience as a

result of their seeing the tattoo, the performance of the tattoo is extended. Even if the tattooed individual is looking at her own tattoo for the hundredth time, the impulses that led her to look again will be different, her personal gaze will be different, and the exchange between embodied mark and conceptual self will also be different. If performance, as Phelan suggests, is comprised of the following: 1) “implicates the real through the presence of living bodies”; 2) requires consumption; 3) “plunges into visibility - in a maniacally charged present - and disappears into memory” because it cannot be reproduced; 4) offers the “possibility of revaluing that emptiness,” I maintain the tattoo fits into each of these categories (ibid.). 1) It implicates one’s “real” identity through its embodiment upon a living self; 2) I contend that the perception of the tattoo allows for its communication and thus performance (not to mention its commodification in the mainstream marketplace); 3) it exists in the embodied present and disappears with each concealment and/or change of audience; and 4) it revalues the concept that the tattoo as symbol represents, be it an association/affiliation with a larger group or community or simply a personal representation of one’s individual self. In all these ways, the tattoo is simultaneously permanent and impermanent, a lasting performance upon the living body. Many of the subjects in this study, both women *and* men, claimed to conceal their tattoo or said they would if they had one. Atkinson notes the communicative and performance aspects of the tattoo, arguing that in its ability to be “read” by others, the tattoo is part of a person’s “doing identity”—it transmits a definition and permanent identity of a person to those who see it (2003: 141, 229). I add that to display or perform the tattoo is to *show* an audience the “doing” of one’s identity, that is, to *perform* identity

through the tattoo. Richard Schechner claims that any performance must have an audience (Schechner 2005, 2006). I argue that the same holds for the performance of the tattooed identity. Without an audience, an observer, the tattoo transmits nothing—there is no one to receive the performance and thus no one to validate neither the individual's transformation from a non-tattooed to a tattooed individual nor the new identity that this tattoo represents. Victor Turner discusses the importance of this social validation in terms of social drama and ritualistic transformation (Turner 1982). Many of the people surveyed claimed they obtained their tattoo(s) in order to commemorate someone or a special event or accomplishment. Some said they did so as part of their moving past certain, often negative times in their lives. Such reasons for tattooing suggest a sort of rite of passage or marker of change in their lives. In fact, scholars have dedicated entire studies to that aspect of tattooing alone (Rush 2005; Sarnecki 2001; Rosecrans 2000; to a lesser extent: Salecl 2001; Pitts 2003). Even the process by which one acquires a tattoo is rather ritualistic, according to Turner's definition: the individual leaves her established routine, voluntarily separates herself in a special place (tattoo studio) for a special amount of time where she gives herself over to the authority of a specially empowered individual (tattoo artist) who painfully breaks her skin and inscribes a symbol onto her body. At the end of this process, she emerges back into society, newly marked. A change has definitely occurred, and the individual has the ability to perform this change to her society. But if the individual chooses *not* to perform this change, has it actually occurred? Has the individual been transformed? How might we conceive of the performance of tattooed identity among individuals, particularly

women, who conceal their tattoos? Who is their audience and why? Could it be that the individual is her *own* audience and that she finds validation for her personal identity within private performance of her tattoo? The consideration of these questions also forms a large portion of this study in terms of concealment, the performance of the tattoo, and the potential audience.

This study sets out to explore the relationship between the performer and her potential audience, and argues that many women within this study conceal their tattoos from the general public on a regular basis. Thus, the “accidental audience,” to use Schechner’s term, (2003) of the mass populace is not the audience for whom the performance of the tattoo is necessarily intended. Rather, it would seem, those individuals who consciously choose to conceal their tattoos seek an “integral audience” for their performance—an audience who intimately knows the performer and is capable of appreciating and more closely comprehending the significance of her tattoo.² For many of these women, is it possible that in fact that integral and informed audience is none other than the performer herself? Research methodology was primarily ethnographic, utilizing observation, interview, and surveys. This study contributes to existing literature about tattoos and social identity by focusing on tattooing as a performance and situating this performance primarily among college student women in contemporary America.

² For a more detailed description of “integral” vs. “accidental” audiences, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pgs. 218-222. Schechner further notes that an accidental audience will often pay closer attention to a performance than an integral audience because they do not know what to expect from the performance, whereas an integral audience is more informed and less likely to find the performance particularly provocative. Given the still-controversial aspect of tattooing, it is likely that some individuals choose not to perform their tattoos for an accidental audience—here, the general public—because they fear this audience will scrutinize and judge the individual from a less-informed position.

Methodology

The bounds of this study comprised of young college-going people, since this generation is strongly influenced both by popular and counter-cultures and did not grow up with the same social perceptions of tattoo as stigmatized as the older generations. Tattooing is increasing in popularity among this younger age group in particular (Mayers, Judelson, Moriarty, and Rundell 2002; Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, and Koch 2004; Armstrong 2005; Laumann and Derick 2006). Marketing trends for tattoo-oriented products and the general pop-culture interest within this age group also warrants my study. Connected to this increase in popularity among young people is an increase in popularity of tattooing among women in particular. Recent studies and polls have also determined that many more women than ever before are obtaining tattoos. The majority of these women fall into this age range and middle class status (Laumann and Derick 2006). Tattoo theorists such as Margo DeMello, Margaret Mifflin, Victoria Pitts, and Michael Atkinson have recognized this trend and the need for more studies to exist on women and tattooing.³ Though I am specifically interested in women, I purposefully chose to interview both men and women. My main reason for this choice was to investigate if there indeed was a noticeable difference between the genders in terms of design, location, and performance of tattoos.

My primary research methods included in-depth, one-on-one interviews and surveys for more quantitative data. I also conducted many informal interviews. I

³ Atkinson, notably, is from Canada and thus his studies, though quite informative and connected to the American experience, ultimately focus on the Canadian tattoo scene. DeMello, Mifflin, and Pitts focus more on the tattooed artists and/or women of a variety of ages. Their studies additionally are situated more with heavy tattooing and the question of body modification as an instrument of gender resistance and the empowerment and reclamation of the female body.

interviewed 12 collegiate students, all of whom, with the exception of one, were undergraduate or graduate students at the University of Maryland. These interviews were obtained in a variety of ways. I submitted ads to the Department of Theatre weekly newsletter and ARHU announcements and received several responses. I also sent out requests to several of the other colleges across campus for inclusion in their weekly emailed news correspondences. The other major source for my contacts was networking through peers/colleagues, friends, and family.

Most of the interviews were conducted on campus. I also conducted an interview online via the chat service AIM (AOL Instant Messenger) with the student who was not from the University of Maryland campus. Each participant was given an IRB consent form to read, fill in, and sign, providing basic information about the age, sex, ethnic origin, location, and profession of the interviewee.⁴

I interviewed 1 white man, 10 white women, and 1 African American woman. The ages ranged from 18 to 32 years old, with a median of 24 years old. Everyone I interviewed was a student, seven undergraduates and five graduates. Most of them attended the University of Maryland, College Park, but were originally from other parts of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or elsewhere along the East Coast. The interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Each participant met with me once. All but one of the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. The nine one-on-one interviews all involved individuals who had one or more tattoos. The final interview was a round-robin discussion involving three graduate women, one of whom had a tattoo, one of whom did not have a tattoo but

⁴ See Appendix II.

was seriously considering obtaining one, and one of whom did not have a tattoo and was not interested in obtaining a tattoo.

Surveys were disseminated in a number of ways.⁵ Several were sent across the campus via teaching assistants who voluntarily gave the surveys to their students. I also attended a sorority meeting to pass out surveys. One of the sorority members, who was also a local high school teacher passed several surveys out to her students. Additionally, surveys were passed via email to graduate peers within the university. These peers were encouraged to forward the survey to other peers. One such peer further posted the survey on a website surrounding a woman author and focusing on young female writers. All in all, a total of 216 surveys were returned from 147 women and 69 men.

Respondents to the survey were asked to give their sex, age, and racial/ethnic origin. These responses were self-defined by the students and are here reproduced exactly as they were written upon the surveys (Male respondents are identified as “M” and Female respondents are identified as “F.”) Most of my informants were white students at both the undergraduate and graduate level in a semi-urban, east coast, public university. Those individuals who responded to the survey via email or online posting were also all students either at the collegiate level or about to enter it. 182 out of 216 respondents (86%) were between the ages of 18 and 25. Approximately 35 students from the pool of high school respondents were between 15 and 17 years old. Given the general lack of ethnic/racial diversity in the responses I received, I chose not to include a consideration of ethnicity and race in my analysis. However, this would certainly be an issue to address in a larger research project with

⁵ See Appendix III.

a broader study group. Additionally, I used the acronyms “T” to represent tattooed individuals and “NT” to represent non-tattooed individuals.

Another important part of my research has been general observations I have made concerning tattooing in the general public. I kept notes on individuals I have seen with tattoos. I recorded descriptions of the person, the location in which I saw them, and a description of each tattoo. Occasionally, I attempted to speak to the individual about his or her tattoo to obtain more information. In addition to these general observations, I attended one day of the 15th Annual Tattoo Convention in Richmond, VA. The convention was a three-day event, starting Friday at noon and ending Sunday night. This event was crucial for contrasting the young population at a college campus with a more openly performed and consciously constructed community.

Ethnographic research was crucial for this study, since the performance of tattoos in contemporary society is often a personal experience, and data could not have been collected in any other way. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed me to compare the data I collected from the university students in Maryland with other national studies.

A Brief History of Tattooing in America Since The Turn of the Twentieth Century

The importance of understanding a symbol’s history, and indeed, the historical context of tattooing in America is crucial to understanding the significance of these skin symbols today (Turner 1972). Since its arrival in America, tattooing has been viewed negatively. Even the word “tattoo” itself was a metonymical reference, synonymous with vilifying or “blackening” one’s reputation (*OED*). To have a tattoo

implied membership within a deviant, marginalized group such as criminals, sailors, bikers, military servicemen, and gangs (DeMello 2000, Rubin 1992). As tattoo historian Arnold Rubin notes, the practice of tattooing in the early twentieth century remained primarily underground and secretive to avoid the “repressive reaction of the public” (1992). Not surprisingly, tattooing was also primarily associated with masculinity and subcultural assertions of dominance and power.

Nevertheless, certain women also were acquiring tattoos in the early twentieth century. As Margot Mifflin discusses in her work *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo*, there have been major accounts of European and American women obtaining tattoos—primarily for means of public display and performance via circus/freak shows—since the late 1800s. Sexual exhibitionism abounded as women tattooed their bodies and showed them off for profit: “forced to bare a scandalous amount of flesh in order to show their work, women provided a sensational double whammy onstage—a peep show within a freak show” (Mifflin 1997:18). Such performances continued on into the early-mid twentieth century. It was not until the sexual revolution and civil rights movements of the 1960s that women really began to think of the acquisition of tattoos as more than for sexualized freak shows.

Both Rubin (1992) and Victoria Pitts (2003) situate the strong surge in popularity in tattooing as a form of expressive body modification as beginning around the 1970s and ‘80s, which Rubin marks as the beginning of the “Tattoo Renaissance.” Pitts associates this increase with specific subcultural movements, such as S/M and punk—politically charged movements populated primarily, she states, by “white, gay-

friendly, middle-class, new-age, pro-sex, educated, and politically articulate” persons (2003:13). Gradually, tattooing became assimilated more into the mainstream, and Rubin notes, additionally became viewed more as works of art and moved somewhat beyond strictly subcultural associations.

When it was more distinctly marginalized, tattooing was easy to relegate to its own subcultural community. Today, it seems more difficult to allocate all tattooed persons into one general social body. DeMello suggests that a “tattooed community” does still exist, but she defines particular parameters and notes it now has an inherent hierarchical structure. Any person with a tattoo may be a part of the “tattooed community,” DeMello notes, but she must actively participate within it through reading the literature and attending conventions (2000:3). DeMello further recognizes this “tattooed community” as moving both within and outside of subcultural activity (Hebdige 1979). For my part, though I acknowledge tattoo’s historic association with a “subculture of style,” I feel that the popularity and commodification of the tattoo is moving it increasingly beyond subculture and into the mainstream. This is not to say that certain social marginalization of tattooing no longer exists, but that it is not as stigmatized as it once was. None of the respondents of this study who have tattoos considered them to be in direct protest and/or rebellion to the dominant culture. If anything, these individuals were concerned with how they could *still fit in* with the mainstream, rather than moving away from or outside of it. One informant, Monica, (interview 11/27/2007, College Park) further defined the “tattooed community” as those persons who do not attempt to conceal their tattoos, but rather openly display them and perhaps attach political import to their presence.

Kris (interview 3/27/2008, College Park) offered that this “tattooed community” emphasizes tattoos as works of art, as “masterpieces” they bear to the public. Neither Monica, who has eight tattoos, nor Kris, who has one but intends to acquire at least two more, believed themselves to be members of the “tattooed community.” Monica preferred to identify as a “tattooed individual” because she chose to conceal her tattoos and she only rarely attended conventions. I argue that while there may be a definable “tattooed community,” it does not seem to apply to the subjects of my study, at least in the sense that DeMello proposes. None of my informants directly or openly associated with this community; only Monica claimed to ever have attended a convention, and no one mentioned reading tattoo literature (magazines, websites, etc.). Still, through their willingness to discuss their tattoos with me, each tattooed individual seemed to acknowledge their distinctiveness in having a tattoo and moving in a society where the majority of people do *not* have tattoos. How, then, might these tattooed individuals be viewed? Do they fit within a community of tattooed persons? Perhaps, in looking again through the performance model, these individuals could be understood as being potential performers within a larger theatrical, tattooed community. I posit that a tattoo is performed when it is displayed. In this manner, the body can be understood as a stage upon which the tattoo is performed. To conceal the tattoo, then, is like keeping the curtain drawn across the stage -- to conceal the performance (though not the performer). Thus, while these tattooed individuals may not perform their tattoos as often as those who identify more publicly with DeMello’s “tattooed community,” there still is a definite connection between these two groups. Anyone who has a tattoo has the potential to perform it. Some are

simply onstage more often than others. Again, this study focuses on those who prefer to perform “behind the curtain,” or “backstage,” as it were, in the more private regions rather than the public spaces, though I must stress that even these performers are conscious of the existence of both the stage and their fellow tattoo performers. They do imagine the community as a whole, even if they choose not to openly identify with it (Anderson 1983) or participate in its activities (magazines, conventions, websites, etc.).

This community is moving more and more into the mainstream community, as can be seen through the influencing of the media, which has generated several marketable products related to tattooing. Movies (*Tattoo*, *American History X*, *XXX*, *Hitman*— initially a video game by Eidos, though the movie was released in theatres on November 21, 2007) have promoted the subject itself or heroes who are adorned with marks to demonstrate their strength of character. Celebrities and sports stars such as Angelina Jolie, Johnny Depp, Sarah Michelle Gellar, and Michael Jordan and musicians such as Axl Rose, Billie Joe Armstrong, Beyonce Knowles, Pink, and Christina Aguilera have openly expressed their tattoos, doubtless furthering the public interest in tattooing as a consumable item as indicative of celebrity status and fashion.

Similarly, prevalent pop culture iconography in tattoos has included cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and friends, SpongeBob Squarepants, and *Family Guy* characters, book and movie references from the *Harry Potter* series as well as *Lord of the Rings*, and gaming references such as *Warhammer*, *Call of Cthulu*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, and *World of Warcraft*, to name just a few.⁶ A simple online

⁶ One tattoo enthusiast, a young, rather heavy set white man in a black shirt and modernized kilt at Richmond’s 15th Annual Tattoo Convention avidly described his next tattoo as from the “third” *Star*

search I conducted revealed a website: www.tattoosandtoys.com, dedicated to creating “the most comprehensive collection of *Star Wars*, GI Joe, Transformers, comic characters, Anime, and toy related tattoos known to mankind.” The site also heavily lauded another website, www.theforceintheflesh.com, a site built around a book of the same name: *The Force in the Flesh: Star Wars Inspired Body Art*, which was released May 24, 2007 at the Celebration IV—a growing, annual tattoo convention also entirely dedicated to *Star Wars* tattoos. Very few, if any, of the characters or icons described above have any direct connection to tattooing in their media representation; they have simply become popular choices for tattoo designs.

Tattooing has indeed become more noticeable in the mainstream marketplace. Physician Myrna Armstrong notes the effectiveness of marketing tattoos towards children in particular: “children today see tattoos almost as toys because of the popularity of temporary rub-on tattoos and dolls children can tattoo with markers” (as qtd. in Lloyd 2003: 18). A quick search in the toys category on walmart.com located the following: i-tattoo, an electronic pen that will paint any of 30 temporary tattoos on the skin, The Cake Fashion Body Art and Tattoos Kit, and Girl Crush Air Brush Glitter Tattoo Kit, that “now has even more glitter than the original, letting you create unlimited body art designs to express yourself!” (walmart.com)

Though once a form of marking associated primarily with subculture, sociologist Mary Kosut notes, now “tattoo is used to sell a product and is simultaneously a product to be consumed” (2006: 1039). Even the alcohol industry

Wars movie: the scene where Darth Vader kneels before the Emperor in deference to his master. He further wanted the Death Star looming in the background to enhance the reference. He went on to describe the tattoos of his fiancée and close friend, referencing the games *Warhammer* and *Call of Cthulu* as primary influences, concluding that “the geekier the better” for him.

has jumped on the tattooing bandwagon, offering Captain Morgan Tattoo, a Black Spiced Rum in a black bottle with tribal designs flowing from “The Capn’s” signature stance. As a result of its fluctuating nature in association with its (arguable) permanency, Kosut has termed tattooing an “ironic fad” (1040). Kosut (2006), Susan Benson (2000), and Paul Sweetman (2000) all consider and discuss the possibility that tattoos are moving out of subculture and becoming a fashion trend or accessory for mainstream consumption. Sweetman asks whether tattoos “should also be seen as all but empty signifiers, once marginal or subcultural devices that have now gone mainstream, thus joining the ranks of the other ephemeral products available in the ‘supermarket of style’” (2000:55). Indeed, this is a considerable question, and prompts several others: Just how often are pop cultural icons selected as tattoo designs? Why are young adults choosing to permanently impress these icons into their skin? How are these designs representative of the individual’s identity?

According to a recent study, researchers estimate that approximately half of all 18 to 29-year-olds have at least one tattoo (Mulrine 2006). Other studies have suggested percentages for this age group ranging from the high teens to low twenties (Mayers, Judelson, Moriarty, and Rundell 2002; Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, and Koch 2004; Armstrong 2005; Laumann and Derick 2006). In recent years tattoos have gained in popularity across the mainstream culture, particularly affecting women, it seems, who now obtain tattoos as regularly as men (Korn, 1996; Laumann and Derick 2006). Still, Margot Mifflin and others have noted, tattooing is not fully accepted by the mainstream but neither is it fully rejected or stigmatized. Mifflin notes that there are increasing numbers of female tattoo artists as well, but this

number is still low in comparison to the number of male artists (1997). My study investigates where American college-age students, mostly women, situate themselves with regards to tattooing, performance and identity. What levels of stigmatization still exist within this young generation? How popular is tattooing? Does it tend to be viewed in a more positive or a more negative light? What are the influences for or against the procedure? How is the tattoo performed?

“Were I to live the same 34 years as my mother, the eyes that looked down at my lifeless ones would probably catalog the colorful scars I have chosen. He would begin with the same physical details as were recorded for my mother—female, Caucasian, green eyes, brown hair, five-feet, three-inches tall. But I have mapped a different story on my skin with ink. He will list them by location: behind left ear, Japanese character; between shoulder blades, woman with bottle and flames; lower back, scrolled roses; outside right thigh, woman with peacock; top right shin, apple and horseshoe; inside right ankle, eagle and American flag; outside left thigh, woman in kimono; outside left ankle, rocket, stars.

The lack of details will be a necessity of his job, but he will take pictures to make the images clear, unique, and identifiable. They will show the negative space stars in the turquoise sky where a pink rocket climbs high, and they will show the vibrant red apple with its carefully placed light source making one side shine. They will even show the wispy medium blue of peacock feathers surrounding tri-colored eyes in yellow, red, and purple opposite Monet’s wife, in black and gray portrait work, swirling in a kimono so detailed the samurai is leaping out of it with his sword. He will dissect my painted body with his camera, fracturing the self I have built and still never knowing who I was.”

~excerpted from “Woman With Bottle and Flames” by Dr. Monica F. Jacobe (Interviewee)

Section 2: “To Tattoo or Not to Tat You”— Socio-Cultural Influences on the Tattooing Process



As Atkinson noted, several socio-cultural factors affect an individual’s decision to undergo the tattooing process. This next section examines first respondents who have claimed no interest in tattooing and their reasons for reaching such a conclusion. The section then follows with an investigation of respondents who are tattooed as well as those who are interested in becoming tattooed. Interestingly,

all respondents take the same social-cultural influences into consideration, but they negotiate these influences in different ways. “Of central concern,” Atkinson claims, “is how and when non-tattooed others will deconstruct tattooed skin as a breach of established body practice” (2003:207). This concern informs the performance of the respondents and their level of interaction with tattooing. My investigation of how and in what ways these students address this concern provides the through-line for this section.

Various studies have examined the influences that encourage young adults towards and away from tattooing. One such study, conducted by Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, and Koch among 908 college students—with and without tattoos and body piercings—concluded that friends, the desire to be “unique,” and a sense of “living for today” were major factors that contributed to a student’s decision to become tattooed (2004:291-293). Koch, Roberts, and Cannon conducted a similar study of 520 undergraduates, 70% of whom were female, and 81.3% of whom did not have a tattoo (2005). Their study examined interest levels in tattooing; the results of which were that students who were surrounded by family and peers who viewed tattoos favorably were more interested in obtaining a tattoo. The reverse was also true: the more students’ family and peers spoke against tattooing, the less likely the students were to view tattooing in a positive light or have much interest in body modification at all.

Finally, a study conducted by Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn that focused on attitudes towards women with tattoos among 268 undergraduate students in a Canadian university discovered that men and women generally perceived women

with tattoos to as “significantly more powerful and active” than women without tattoos (2004:602). One might at first assume this to be a positive reading, but as Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn note, such a reading is dependent upon the surrounding cultural interpretation. In North American culture, it is still questionable to what extent women are allowed access to power, or at least the manner in which it is acceptable for women to display their power.

These studies all concluded that family, peers, and general public perception affected the college student’s perspective of tattoos. Normatives of gender, age, and class held by these social groups and thus ascribed to by the individual further impacted her decisions regarding tattooing. My study results generally confirmed the conclusions formed by the studies above, suggesting the perpetuation of these social norms and influences within American society.

Of the 216 surveyed respondents, 32 women and 10 men claimed to have one or more tattoos, for a total of 42 respondents (19%), a number that generally corresponds with previous studies of the same focus and age range.⁷ 31 of these tattooed individuals intend to acquire another tattoo or several more. 116 respondents claimed to have considered getting a tattoo, roughly 16% of whom intended to do so in the near future. Such results suggest that tattooing has become more common and accepted among college-aged American students than in previous decades. 58

⁷ It should be noted that this data is not meant to suggest any sort of specific conclusion about the prevalence of tattooing other than to note that men and women within an institution of higher education between the ages of 18 and 35 do have tattoos. Any further statements regarding the trend of tattoos based on this data alone would be insufficiently-stated. Furthermore, this data does not claim that more young American women have tattoos than young American men, though more reliable studies do suggest that the percentage of men and women obtaining tattoos in the United States are roughly equal (notably (Laumann and Derick 2006, Mayers et al 2002).

additional respondents professed no interest whatsoever in tattooing, and it is on these respondents that I now focus.

Unimpressed—Deciding Against Tattooing

My survey asked those respondents who did not have a tattoo for the reasons that prevented them from doing so.⁸ The most common factor that respondents listed as a reason not to obtain a tattoo was the fact that it is permanent (23 times). Such a response suggests the performance aspects of tattooing that are present in the minds of individuals even as they consider whether or not to obtain a tattoo in the first place. Erving Goffman discusses one's "personal front" as those elements that a person puts on to perform for others in everyday life. He includes all the visible accoutrements of person's ensemble, from clothing to cosmetics to facial expressions and body language. All of these elements contribute to how one performs for others—to the impressions one makes (1959). However, and equally importantly, most if not all of these elements can be altered quickly and often with little difficulty (one could simply change her clothes to something more professional or smile to hide his underlying anger). Such simple alterations are not true for the tattoo, a permanent mark that could be covered up, but not removed entirely (without a long, painful surgical process). So simply the fact that a tattoo could not be removed—it would always have the chance of being performed—is enough to turn some individuals away from tattooing.

Furthermore, this permanency indicates a sort of assumption or assimilation of the tattoo *into* the self-identity of the person who bears it. The tattoo is not simply a

⁸ For the full listing of these responses, please see Appendix IV.

mark on one's skin; it is an expressive sign about that individual. Thus, for some who are deterred by the tattoo's permanency, part of the reason for this is that they do not believe the potential signifiers of the tattoo will always accurately represent who they consider themselves to be:

I don't like the idea of having something permanent on me. I might be a completely different person in 5 years, 10 years (indeed, at my age, that's more than likely). I also have never had an idea for a tattoo that I don't imagine I'd end up hating (F/18/White/NT).

It is permanent. I wouldn't want to get something that didn't mean anything. (F/18/NT)

I can't think of anything meaningful enough to me that I would want on my body forever. (F/20/White/NT)

I have never felt a need to get one. I am more comfortable expressing myself without tattoos. (M/19/Asian-White/NT)

The next most commonly-reported factor influencing persons not to obtain a tattoo were parents (16 responses). While such data is not definitive, such responses correspond with the idea that there is somewhat of a generational gap between older adults and their young adult children. Though tattooing is becoming more and more mainstream, certain adults above the age of 35 still cling to the stigmatized past of tattoos associated only with bikers, criminals, and the military—members of the lower class (Rubin 1992; DeMello 2005). Indeed, these responses indicate the potential continuation of this stigma with tattoo, particularly in respondents who described the disciplinary action (however tongue-in-cheek) their parents would take against them if the respondents acquired a tattoo:

My parents said they would disown me if I did. (F/19/White/NT)

My parents would shoot me. (F/19/White/NT)

My parents won't let me—won't pay for school if I do.

(M/18/White/NT)

The final threat listed is perhaps especially poignant to this particular study. Though college-aged students often classify as “middle-class,” the students themselves are generally reliant upon their parents’ salaries and willingness to invest in the students’ education. The loss of this education and monetary support would completely alter the role-status of these students. Thus, such a threat suggests not only the import of the tattoo issue to the parents but also the strength of their influence upon their children as a result.⁹

Religious and moral reasons were yet additional factors deterring students from obtaining tattoos, and this reason was listed almost as often as parents (15 responses). Most of these respondents did not go into detail about their religion, but the clear assumption was that their religious institution and/or philosophy did not approve of or allow permanent marking of the body. Indeed, one respondent claimed that her religion did not allow “anything unnatural on your body” (F/18/White), again indicating that tattoos are unnatural marks that negatively affect the body. Four respondents did identify their religion as Judaism, and three further listed a negative effect tattooing has on the human body: “My religion forbids a person to be buried in a Jewish cemetery if there are tattoos on the body” (F/18/Jewish).¹⁰ One of my

⁹ It might be interesting in a future study to consider how these responses might contrast with women and students in the upper bracket of my age range (late 20s-early 30s) who are supporting themselves rather than receiving financial assistance from their families.

¹⁰ (Other respondents who listed the same concern: F/19/White and M/19). An interesting sidenote: An immense controversy has surrounded Jewish persons who choose to obtain tattoos. According to *Boston Globe* journalist Donald Belkin, the claim that Jews bearing tattoos (Holocaust victims excepted) will not be buried in Jewish cemeteries is false (2004). In his article, he claimed that many opponents to tattooing maintained it is an insult to Holocaust victims. Still, others claimed that it is actually empowering as a tribute to these victims in the fact that in a few more years, only those who

interviewees, Lindsey (interview 3/28/2008, College Park) also noted that her Jewish faith was the strongest influence in her decision not to obtain a tattoo. Because it is believed that upon the Messiah's return the body will rise in the same condition as when it was buried, Lindsey explained, the body must be kept in its most natural state. She mentioned that she did have piercings and that this form of body modification was allowed by the Jewish community because it is something that can be undone—the body can “heal” and close the holes left by piercing. Tattooing is not acceptable because the body is permanently altered. Still, Lindsey further mentioned the recent advances in the ink used in tattooing, noting that new inks might be available soon that are easier to remove later in life. If these inks do in fact come out on the market, Lindsey considered, she might very well go out and get a tattoo. But much like the parental threats, the potential for religious disciplinary action suggests a continuing negative view of tattooing as marks associated with uncouth persons and sinners.

Another response strongly related to the performance aspects of tattooing was that many expressed an opinion of tattoos as unattractive, “disgusting,” and “trashy.” As humans are incredibly interactive creatures, the social opinions of peers holds considerable weight in determining one's own identity expression and personal front.

have *chosen* to be tattooed will bear the marks. Similarly, Cara S. Trager reported on Rabbi Alan Lucas's confirmation that tattooed persons are not banned from cemeteries. She noted that his paper on the subject was accepted by the Conservative Judaism's Rabbinic Assembly (2007). Furthermore, one survey respondent who was tattooed also claimed Jewish heritage and religion, and this was evident in her tattoo. As she described, her tattoo was on her lower back and said “*gam zu l'tova*” meaning “‘it's all for the best' in Hebrew” (F/19/White-Jewish). She further stated, “I have overcome a lot and it represents a new balance in my life.” Though she believed no place on the body is inappropriate to have a tattoo—“It's their body”—she did conceal her tattoo from her father. Like many of the tattooed persons in this study, this respondent found herself struggling to negotiate between her personal expression and performance of herself and the social expectations of her surrounding society. That this debate concerning Judaism and tattooing has continued suggests the powerful influences of religious ideology on social behavior.

Humans are constantly monitoring their attraction levels to one another in sexual and social ways. Cosmetic alterations of one's appearance are most often done to achieve an enhancing of attraction; thus, a social view of tattooing as a degenerative alteration results in students moving away from this body modification:

Stays on forever. It's hard to pick what you want. What will people think of you? (F/18/Hispanic/NT)

It makes me realize how dependent on interpretation tattoos are, and that I don't want people interpreting it in a way I didn't mean and drawing incorrect conclusions about me. (F/19/White/NT)

Makes me look trashy and/or an easy target for people to stereotype and pre-judge me. (F/22/White/NT)

It's there forever, it's ugly, it's trashy, my mom wouldn't approve, it attracts the wrong type of girls. (M/19/NT)

Almost all of the above-listed concerns respondents have reported share a common theme: social communication, interpretation, and interaction involving an implied audience. These students chose not to be tattooed because they were worried what their parents, their religious affiliates, and their peers would think about them. Many articulated the notion that whatever these other people would think, it would be *wrong*. For these students, the tattoo represents an ambiguous sign at best and a false signal at worst. One could argue that they did not wish to distinguish between an integral and an accidental audience—that is, one that understood their tattoo and one that did not and thus negatively judged them for it. As a result of their inability to control the performance of the tattoo in terms of the potential meaning it would communicate to the audience, these students ultimately resisted doing their identity through tattooing at all.

Margo DeMello situates the body within a centuries-old struggle over the “representation of cultural identity. This struggle occurs as the upper classes attempt to control the untamed impulses of the lower classes by regulating their activities and behaviors” (2000). Invoking Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival and “grotesque realism,” DeMello links the historic marginalization of tattooing to the struggle between upper class dominant ideology and lower class (biker, sailor, criminal) deviance. The upper class claims to present a body that is “pure” in its unmarked refinement, in stark contrast to the grotesque, vilifying markings of tattooed persons. This mentality was more prevalent in past decades, but DeMello notes, it maintains a presence in today’s society.

Atkinson also remarks on the continuation of tattoo stigmatization, most noticeably among the older generations, that is, the parents and grandparents of the young adults who comprise this study. In an ethnographical study of 92 tattooed individuals of varying ages and experience with tattooing throughout Canada, Atkinson notes, “Sixty-seven (73%) of the enthusiasts interviewed in this study feared negative reaction from their parents at some point in their lives, and suggested that such fear has strained the relationships” (2003:215). Atkinson continues to argue that the opinion of close family members usually is the primary influence in an individual’s decision of whether or not to obtain a tattoo, with peer support following close behind and finally considerations of reaction in the workplace. The reason for this, he contends, is: “Even though tattooing is not a grave violation of established norms, values, or beliefs, the symbolic gesture made by one’s participation in tattooing is considered a social foreshadowing of future involvement in more

deleterious social transgressions” (ibid.:217). Again, this reasoning suggests the ideology of tattooing as social deviance and recalls the responses made by several students within my study as well. Though tattooing is evidently not as stigmatized as it once was, there remains enough of a negative perspective of this form of modification within society to deter certain young adult students from acquiring one or even of professing interest in tattooing at all.

Yet, as Armstrong’s sociological study also found, the same factors that discourage one individual from getting a tattoo can also encourage another individual to get a tattoo (2004). Several students who reported tattoos or who wanted to get one noted the positive role parents and friends played in their decision. Many more noted a conflict of roles that result in influences both positive *and* negative (for example: parents who were against tattoos but friends who were for it). The sections that follow examine how tattooed persons and those interested in acquiring tattoos negotiate the same socio-cultural influences that deterred their colleagues, and how this selection of design, location, and performance allowed these students to have tattoos and continue to perform their diverse social roles successfully.

Impressed—Selecting the Tattoo Design

As aforementioned, the tattoo communicates, indeed *performs* a symbol that is representative of one’s affiliation with someone or something else and/or one’s own identity. Regardless of how carefully one may attempt to conceal her tattoo (the practice of which will be discussed further below), the mark always has the possibility of being performed for an audience, however accidental. Not surprisingly, then, many respondents demonstrated a careful consideration in the selection of their

tattoo design (See Table 1). Several offered distinct reasons and stories for their decisions. DeMello (2000) and Atkinson (2003) both note that the “tattoo narration” is a uniquely middle-class development, further denoting the movement of the tattoo from the realm of the subcultural and rebellious to the realm of the creative, artistic, and personal expression. Such a narrative also offers an explanation of the mark that, while not necessarily an *apology* for it, may still justify for the tattooed person that her tattoo is acceptable for her class, age, and gender.

Table 1. Occurrence of Prominent Design Elements (Tattooed Respondents)¹¹

Design Element	Female	Male
Family-Oriented	1	4
Name/Initials	2	1
National/Cultural	4	1
Nature-Oriented	12	2
Peace/love/equality Symbols	6	0
Religious	2	2
Stars	3	0
Zodiac/Astrological	2	0
Word/Phrase/Number	7	2
Original/Non-specific	1	2

As an example of this idea, Mifflin (1997) and Atkinson (2002, 2003) note that the women each sociologist studied often chose tattoos that were “feminine” or at least non-masculine. In doing so, these women remained non-threatening to their

¹¹ This table lists prominent *elements* of tattoo designs rather than attempting to claim the entire design itself. Though the non-tattooed responses generally coincide with this categorical breakdown (See Appendix IV for a detailed listing of designs), these categories are not in any way absolute. There were often too many attributes to respondents’ designs to categorize it as entirely one thing or another, or even very specifically. For example, one female respondent described a flower design she had that has a *skull* in the center of it (F/16/White/T). This design at once challenges such binaries as “feminine”/“masculine” and “life”/“death.” It suggests a “nature-oriented” element, but it could also be indicative of “peace” or even “religion.” Thus, this table is useful for its listing of design elements, or features, but should not be taken as representative of full designs and further emphasizes the importance of respondents’ “tattoo narratives” in establishing the deeper meanings these designs may have. Also, because this list reflects *design* elements, it does not reflect the number of respondents (32 Women, 10 Men), but rather the number of designs and design *elements*.

male partners and peers. A similar trend, to some extent, was apparent in my study. As can be seen in the table above, 12 women's tattoo designs contained a nature-oriented element. Nature-oriented designs were also popular among non-tattooed women who offered potential design choices as well. Several listed butterflies, flowers, sun/moon, and other such imagery as design choices.¹² Though I hesitate to label these designs as "feminine," I do allow that they were non-political and non-specific—in other words, the designs seemed "safe" in that they did not challenge any social norm for the individual outside of the permanent mark itself. However, as mentioned above, other women did have nature-oriented designs that seemed to challenge this "safe" aspect: again, one woman had a flower tattoo with a skull in the center, and another woman chose a tiger for her design—a more powerful symbol (F/17/White). All of these choices also suggested that aesthetics was a primary factor in the students' decision-making. DeMello notes that the "Tattoo Renaissance" brought an insurgence of "fine art" into the tattooing world (2005). Part of her argument concerning the "middle class appropriation" of tattooing is the attempt of the middle class to make tattooing an acceptable practice by removing it from the subcultural world of the working class (think stereotypical biker tattoos, lovers' names, pin-up girls on sailors, etc.) and reforming it along "higher" ideals of taste and aesthetics (ibid.:134-135). For DeMello, then, the prevalence of flora and fauna tattoo designs represents merely the cultural representation of the middle-class aesthetic. This aesthetic is one deemed culturally *acceptable* and thereby appropriate for designs that are representative of that class mentality.

¹² Again, for the full listing of tattoo design selections and concepts of both tattooed and non-tattooed persons, please see Appendix IV.

Notably, several more individuals also mentioned designs like these, but included descriptions that complicated the tattoos beyond an aesthetic impulse alone. These designs allow one to perceive in the tattoo itself the potentially deep meanings these individuals have for their tattoos, regardless of how culturally “safe” they may be. Also, particularly because these students are giving *conceptual* responses—they do not actually have these tattoos—their responses suggest the level of thought many individuals put into their tattoo selections in terms of the meaning it will have both for them and those for whom it is performed:

I want a memorial butterfly tattoo between my shoulder blades and mehndi Indian symbols on my wrists. I want some stars and a hand drawn one as well (hand drawn by me). (F/17/White/NT)

I don't know yet. I am thinking about a ring of fire with a butterfly coming out to symbolize new beginnings. (F/19/African/NT)

These two designs both invoke the image of a butterfly—an image that is somewhat cliché in the tattooed community. However, both girls note that the butterfly for them is not simply a flash design they would pull off the wall or from a tattoo artist's portfolio. Rather, one is a “memorial”—designed to incur remembrance of something important. The other is of a butterfly flying out of fire “to symbolize new beginnings,” and the moving out of and beyond something that was likely painful, dangerous, and potentially consuming. Again, these designs suggest a depth of consideration that moves beyond the purely aesthetic or the fashionably trendy even as it uses design elements that could fall into both categories. Accordingly, DeMello also mentions *spirituality* and *personal growth* as two other large, contributing factors

that have influenced middle class acquisition of tattoos.¹³ Both of these elements seemed evident in these girls' explanations of their design choices.

For several respondents, both male and female, tattoos seemed strongly and consciously associated with the individual's personal identity or with a strong affiliation with another person, institution, or cultural concept. Such associations reinforce the need for a tattoo narrative in that the individual must be able to explain, at least for him or herself, what the tattoo means to that individual. Inversely, for some, rather than needing a narration to explain the tattoo, perhaps they need the tattoo to generate the opportunity to perform their tattoo narratives. The tattoo performance need not end with the audience's perception of the tattoo alone, but rather can continue if the tattooed individual is given a chance to share his or her story and narrate the associations that the tattoo represents. I found that these associations, while often conforming to some sense of cultural norm, did begin to challenge the theory that college-aged young adults choose only those tattoos that are "safe." Even if this happened to be the case, I think the acceptability of the tattoo was generated not so much from a concern of negative public reception, but rather a genuine desire for positive group association.

Some sought to retain their individual identities through tattoos that had positive personal meaning for them alone:

Zodiac sign inside of a crab with birthday date underneath.
(F/18/Black/T)

¹³ It should also be noted that some members of the tattoo community take the spiritual aspect of tattooing along with non-Western cultural celebration to a whole new dimension with the concept of "modern primitivism." One could make the argument that some of the student respondents, while not associating directly with this community, have recognized similar influences that informed their tattoo design selection. Valuable resources for "modern primitives" include: Vale and Juno 1989; Rosenblatt 1997; Pitts 2003; Rush 2005.

A Leo astrological sign. (F/18/Hispanic-Latina/T)

Flower with [the letter] 'B' or something that I think is extremely different that no one else has. (F/19/Jamaican/NT)

Roman numeral '3' because it's my lucky number and my initials inside: *[Draws image: IDIBI]* (M/19/White/NT)

Dark green or black name in Korean. (M/20/Korean/NT)

"Tina" (pseud., interview 10/28/2007, College Park), chose her most recent tattoo to cover up her previous tattoo and to regain her personal sense of self. After Tina separated from her ex-partner, she realized she should remove his and her names from the left side of her back. She went to a tattoo artist to generate some ideas, and the artist encouraged her to think about how she saw herself. Tina said she thought of herself as a strong, powerful, Black woman, and made an association with Foxy Brown movies as an example of the sort of vision she was imagining. She had a strong appreciation for the Black Power Movement, and she realized that a tattoo of a modernized strong Black woman might be exactly what she needed to move on from her past relationship. When she explained her idea to the artist, he drew an image of a Black woman's head onto Tina's back, creating an Afro to cover the former tattoo. For Tina, this tattoo marks her strength; it gives her "personality and attitude," and also represents all the "different hats" that women wear.

Other respondents chose to move away from personal representation of themselves and more towards representation of those people or objects to whom they felt strongly attached. Some in particular sought to honor and/or memorialize their ties to family and loved ones through their design selection:

The other one is the colon cancer ribbon with my grandmother's initials under it on my left wrist. (F/19/White/T)

It's my late grandmother's name with a sun underneath her name (the sun was her 'thing'). (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)

Cross with "Rest in peace Mom" and city going down my arm (old English). (M/16/Mixed/T)

All family-oriented, all above the elbows. Angelic descriptions, picture of mother holding baby. (M/19/Black/T)

One is a tribute to a very close friend of mine who passed away...
[Includes a drawing of RIP, 27, and JER surrounding a cross.]
(M/18/White/NT)

It would be a cross with a whistle hanging from it for my grandfather.
(M/19/White/NT)

Others described designs that were specifically related to their faiths:

'*Gam zu l'tova*'—it means 'It's all for the best' in Hebrew.
(F/19/White-Jewish/T)

I have religious tattoos. One with a cross and words. One with praying hands with a biblical saying. And one going down the back left side of my arm saying 'truly' and the right says 'blessed.'
(M/18/Black/T)

St. Michael or a cross. (F/18/White/NT)

Prayer hands, angel wings (on back with children's name under).
(M/16/Black/NT)

Probably a cross related to my Catholic religion or something about my family. (M/19/White/NT)

"Lisa" (pseud., interview 10/23/2007, College Park) was also influenced by her faith when she created her tattoo design. Lisa described her tattoo as a design she drew herself involving a cross and hearts. She created this design, she said, because she believes "Love comes from love which comes from God." Thus, the design was emblematic of her Christian faith and her belief in the providence and power of love.

Though she held these religious beliefs and they influenced her to obtain her tattoo, she was also discouraged from tattooing by her parents. Indeed, she says, when she was 13 and got her ears pierced with an additional hole on each side, she agreed with her family that also getting a tattoo was not a good idea. However, the desire to get one never left her, and after she left for college, she found the opportunity to obtain one while in Florida for Spring Break. Still, the influence of her parents was evident in the fact that she created a design that, she described, was only approximately 1-2” large and located on her right hip so that it would not even show when she was wearing a swim suit. In fact, she added, neither of her parents knew about the tattoo, though she had it for nearly a year at the time of the interview. Thus, though Lisa was positively influenced both by her religion and by her friends, the negative influence of her parents also impacted the design of her tattoo.

“Susan” (pseud., interview 10/23/2007, College Park) provides an interesting contrast to Lisa. Susan also was influenced by her family concerning her tattoo, but in a much different way. Susan has one tattoo, which she acquired in September 2004. Her tattoo is the Ukrainian symbol “tryzub.” This symbol is reflective of Susan’s heritage, which, though she was born in the United States, is 100% Ukrainian on both sides of her family. According to Susan, her tattoo is specific and personal; it is a reminder of her heritage and of her family. As such, and unlike Lisa’s example, Susan’s parents were informed and approved of her getting the tattoo. Thus, in Susan’s case, the influences for her tattoo were positive from her family. The only minor caution that her mother gave her was to not show the tattoo to certain family members, as they might be offended by the tattoo. For these family members, putting

a national symbol on the body was profane and disrespectful. Thus, for these individuals, Susan carefully negotiated the performance of her tattoo. On the whole, though, her family has been supportive, deeming the tattoo “tasteful,” and appreciating its representation of their familial connection. In this way, Susan was able to inform her family about the meaning of her tattoo and gain their support and understanding. In so doing, her example suggests how one’s family can also positively influence one’s decision to obtain and to share a tattoo.

Like Susan, some survey respondents described tattoo designs related to unique cultural elements of either their own culture or one with which they felt ardent affiliation:

- 1) Egyptian hieroglyphs: Eye of Horus followed by sign for “goodness, happiness, beauty,” and sign for “eternity”
- 2) Figure from cave painting
- 3) African sign *hwe hwe*, meaning “that which does not burn (indicating strength), followed by the three moon goddess symbol
- 4) “SPQR”—*Senatus Populusque Romanus* (“Property of the Senate and People of Rome”, in Latin), a tattoo commonly worn by Roman soldiers and gladiators. (F/23/White/T)

The word ‘love’ in my language, Farsi. (F/19/Persian/NT)

Sanskrit writing. (F/19/South Asian/NT) and (F/21/South Asian/NT)

Another interviewee, “Ashley” (pseud., interview 11/26/2007, College Park) also designed a tattoo that represented her heritage and also her lifelong religion. She intended to acquire a Celtic cross as a symbol of her Irish-Catholic heritage, of what is “in [her] blood.” Like Susan, Ashley argued that her blood and thus her heritage was permanent, unchanging, and the best way to represent this aspect of her identity was with a permanent mark on her skin, what she calls “an outward symbol of an

inner devotion.” Ashley has already worn a Celtic cross as a necklace; for some time this piece of jewelry was her form for expressing her devotion. However, she admitted, the necklace she wore at her interview was not the first such necklace she has worn. Rather, Ashley has had several Celtic cross necklaces that have either worn out or been lost over the years. For her, the permanence of the tattoo became even more important because it would be a symbol that she could not lose and one that would not wear out so quickly as a necklace (and even then, it could be touched up and restored). Ashley intended to go with the permanent symbol over the temporary accessory because it signified her level of commitment to her Catholic faith and Irish heritage.

Unlike Susan, however, Ashley’s family did not approve of her decision. Rather, her main outside influence came from a very close friend of hers whom she affectionately referred to as “Older Brother.” A couple of years ago, Older Brother got married and he and his wife got tattoos together. From that point on, he obtained a new tattoo approximately every six months, for a grand total of six tattoos that he happily shared with Ashley. Her relationship with Older Brother has greatly encouraged Ashley to obtain a tattoo in spite of her parents’ resistance. But even more importantly, she stressed, her commitment to her faith and her heritage is as unchanging as the ancestry that runs through her veins. Thus it was appropriate, she felt, that it should be inscribed upon her skin, regardless of what others might think. Ashley chose to perform her tattoo in spite of potential miscommunication and judgment, as a demonstration of her personal faith in its representation.

Other respondents also demonstrated strong commitments that informed their tattoo designs. Some were not as obvious as religious, cultural, or familial ties; still, these individuals, mostly female, identified with conceptual ideals and universal connections:¹⁴

- 1) The symbol for woman with a crescent moon in it
- 2) The words 'acceptance are the answer'
- 3) The sign language for 'I love you'
- 4) The Braille for 'peace' (F/20/White/T)

A bracelet with a heart charm that says 'love.' (F/20/Black/NT)

A heart or flower or peace sign. (F/21/White/NT)

World peace sign with tree on top and white dove. (F/21/NT)

Much like the respondents above, "Alicia's" (pseud., interview 10/25/2007, College Park) tattoo represents an adherence to large-scale ideas that have been personalized through their inscription in the form of a marker on her body. She said that her tattoo is a form of art, a self-expression that is a "very personal, constant reminder." Her primary reason for the design of this tattoo—a red peace sign—was to identify herself as an activist for peace and AIDS awareness. Not surprisingly, the other major influence for Alicia's decision was her family. Her mother has been tattooed, and she wholeheartedly supported her daughter's decision, going with Alicia to the same artist who had previously tattooed her. Alicia's mother endorsed her daughter's exploration into the tattoo community. As Alicia shared, her mother

¹⁴ I found it interesting that there were more women who had tattoos of these conceptual ideas than men, though men did have religious and familial tattoos as often as women did. There could be a correlation between these designs and gender issues. Symbols of love and peace were the most commonly described designs that fit into this category. Perhaps such symbols are still seen as more "feminine" and thus more appropriate or acceptable for women to have than for men. Indeed, they go against the traditional notion of the "masculine." I did not receive enough responses to make a strong judgment on this issue, but it would be an excellent topic for further studies on tattoo design.

actually encouraged her to put *more* details into the tattoo design. However, Alicia maintained that she wanted it to be plain because it was her first tattoo and she really wanted it to “represent who *I* am,” not someone else’s idea of her.

Still other respondents, again relatively equally male and female, described tattoo designs as informed by organizations they had joined or the field(s) of study they were working towards as students at their schools:¹⁵

Floral; some combination of themes from both majors (Cell bio/Genetics and Theater). (F/18/White/NT)

My sorority letters or a cross. (F/20/Korean/NT)

Animal-related or Agriculture-related—dog, cow, etc. (F/21/White/NT)

Basketball with wings coming out of sides, ‘flight’ written on the bottom. (M/18/NT)

Something from my university or fraternity. (M/19/White/NT)

“Amanda” (pseud., interview 10/26/2007, College Park) chose an anchor for on her hip both because it is the International Symbol of Hope and also because it is the symbol of her sorority on campus. Like Alicia, she requested that her design remain rather small because she felt it was most “tasteful” that way. Amanda noted that several of her sorority friends have the same symbol, and that other friends within other sororities and chapters create specific designs for representation within the sisterhood.

These responses as well as those related to culture, family, and friends recall DeMello’s concept of the hierarchical “tattooed community.” The results of my

¹⁵ Further inquiry might determine whether the social and school-related organizations to which the individuals’ tattoos relate correspond to gender normativity. For example, how might fraternity designs differ from sorority designs?

study suggested that, in addition to viewing the community of tattooed persons collectively through the performance model, another relevant reading is through Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (1983). Through imprinting marks of affiliation on their bodies, I argue, many of the tattooed individuals within the scope of my study have represented membership with a larger group, organization, institution, or community. Thus, the emphasis was not placed on the tattoo itself, but rather the symbol or icon of the associated community that it performed. In other words, Ashley's desire to mark her wrist with a Celtic cross was not derived from an association with a "tattooed community," but with her affiliation with her Irish-Catholic community. Similarly, Amanda's anchor tattoo symbolized her affiliation with her sorority community. This analysis held true for the majority of my informants, both men and women. Thus, for example, Amanda may choose not to perform in front of her family and strangers, because they are not members of her integral audience. On the other hand, she may perform her tattoo for her sorority sisters because they would understand and appreciate the context and meaning it represents.

I was surprised to discover in my surveys and interviews very few descriptions of tattoos related to the commercialism and commodification of tattoos in the mainstream culture, since much of my literature on tattoos suggested that the marketplace had been using the tattoo to boost sales and that mainstream media were becoming increasingly popular as tattoo designs. The only tattooed individual whose tattoo suggested commodification was a woman who got an arm piece based around 2 Pac when she was 15 years old. Ironically, this is also the only individual who claims

to regret getting a tattoo (though she does not regret the tattoo she later acquired on her lower back) (F/24/White/T). Likewise, of all 82 responses describing potential tattoo designs, only three suggested popular cultural influences clearly associated with the modern media and the marketplace.¹⁶

All of the various responses depicted above collectively imply that the tattoo has not only moved beyond its stigmatic association with criminals, bikers, and sailors, but also refrained from becoming only a commercialized, aesthetic symbol for the skin. Many of these students still used the tattoo to express their identities with a particular group or groups; it simply was not to what the tattoo has historically been attached. For these American students of higher education, the tattoo was not an association directly with other tattooed persons (DeMello's "tattooed community")—such an association would be indirect at best. Rather, their tattoos seemed to be associations with specific groups and organizations that were central to the individual's identity. Those who wished to retain a personal identity tattooed their own name, lucky number, astrological sign, favorite animal, or other "unique" design onto their skin. Those who wished to identify with a group selected iconic designs that performed their membership within that imagined community.

¹⁶ My name and Tinkerbell; and a set of lips with a skull and crossbones in the lips. (F/17/NT)

Joker from *Batman* altered in some way. (M/19/Hispanic/NT)

A barcode on my wrist. (M/20/Multiracial/NT)

I find it also worth mentioning that the first two responses, both of which contain specific character references, also include a personalization of those designs. Tinkerbell will be positioned next to the individual's name, and perhaps could even be overshadowed by it. The Joker will be "altered in some way," implying that the design will not be a direct representation of whichever comic, cartoon, or movie the individual may most relate for the character. Rather, the character will be the individual's representation, a design that is altered to have meaning for him.

[Calvin] pulled up his left pant leg. There was a small tattoo just above his ankle. Everyone crowded around to look at it. "A potato!" exclaimed Leslie. "How stupid!" "That's the worst tattoo in the world!" said Mac. They all thought it was a dumb tattoo. "Anything is better than a potato!" said Jason. "It's a pretty potato," said Bebe, trying to be nice. "I wish I could draw a potato that good. But even Bebe thought it was a dumb tattoo." "I like potatoes," said Calvin. "I would hope so," said Mrs. Jewls. Calvin could tell Mrs. Jewls didn't like his tattoo either. "I would have gotten an eagle," said Deedee, "soaring across the sky!" "Not me," said Terrence. "I would have gotten a lion!" "I would have gotten a kangaroo," said Leslie. All day long everyone told Calvin what they would have gotten: a fire-breathing dragon, a lightning bolt, a creature from outer space. None of them said they would have gotten a potato. But Calvin knew better. He knew it was easy for his friends to say what they would have gotten, because they really hadn't had to choose. He was the only one who really knew what it was like to pick a tattoo. Even Mrs. Jewls didn't know that. He looked at his potato. He smiled. It made him happy. He was sure he had made the right choice. At least he was pretty sure.



Section 3: Concealer Schtick—Location and Performance of Tattoos

In the above excerpt from Louis Sachar's book *Wayside School is Falling Down*, the young student Calvin chooses to get a tattoo of a potato. His peers are all curious as to where the tattoo is located and of what the tattoo design might be.

Calvin possesses a sort of mesmerizing power over the students as they crowd around to see him reveal his tattoo. Finally, the performance happens, the mark is revealed, and the audience has their interpretation and reaction. In the case of Calvin, his audience reacts negatively and with some disgust. Clearly, for them, a potato is a poor choice for a tattoo. But Calvin maintains that he likes it; for him, it holds personal meaning and significance despite what his peers might think. Furthermore, he distances himself from his peers, noting that they are incapable of understanding this meaning because they have not experienced what it is like to select and obtain a tattoo. Perhaps from now on, Calvin will more carefully determine to whom he performs his tattoo.

It may be a simple story, but Calvin's example raises a few important questions that I explore in the following section. What does it mean to have a potato on your ankle? For whom is this potato intended to be performed? What, if anything, does the potato tattoo perform? What is most interesting, I contend, is that though Calvin does perform his tattoo for his peers, he remains mostly unaffected by their negative reaction. If he as a performer felt a certain responsibility to this audience, he would likely have responded differently to their disapproval, rather than shrugging it off. Instead, he maintains a personal ownership of the potato tattoo. What matters to him is that *he* understands why the potato is important; the audience of his peers, and indeed the audience of the readers of the story do not know why he chose a potato. I propose, then, that perhaps we are not Calvin's integral audience, the primary audience for whom the performance of his tattoo was intended. We certainly are an accidental audience; we "saw" or "read" the tattoo through happenstance, as it were.

But I argue that Calvin's tattoo is for Calvin before it is for anyone else; thus, *Calvin* is the integral audience of the potato tattoo.

Calvin's story suggests the importance of recognizing the audience for the tattoo when considering how it may be performed. Many of my informants viewed tattoos as an expression of themselves, a way to mark some important element of themselves or their lives onto their bodies, to have it with them forever. Yet many feel that they cannot or should not share this mark with the general public, particularly in the professional world. As a result, many women listed concealment as the most important and often the only factor that affected the location of their tattoos (25 of 28 tattooed women). Several also mentioned attractiveness of the body and/or how appropriately the tattoo fit with that part of the body, thereby suggesting that since the tattoo *could* be performed, the individual sought to meet an aesthetic standard with her tattoo that would appeal to her potential audience. Still, none of these other influences were listed as often as concealment. Even among those women who did not list concealment as an important factor in considering a location, the most popular locations for tattoos for women were locations that were already concealed by everyday clothing. As can be seen in Table 2, the most popular location for women considering a tattoo was their back.¹⁷ Though a few women pointed out that the lower back was easily visible in today's shorter shirts and low-cut jeans, for the most part, this area remained covered by everyday wear. Likewise, the second most popular area, the hip/pelvic area, was always covered by normal clothing. The same was true of the ankle, the third most popular location. The ankle was more

¹⁷ Interestingly, Atkinson also reports the lower back in particular as the most common location for the women in his study (2003).

easily revealed, should one wear a skirt or bottoms cut above the ankle (shorts, capris, etc.). However, this location and others like it (back of the neck, wrist, feet) necessitated smallness of size and thus ease of concealment. One woman even noted that she would choose to place a tattoo on her hip or foot because such locations would “Prevent me from getting a huge tattoo” (F/20/White/NT). Indeed, many women placed emphasis on having small, cute, sexy tattoos versus large, gaudy, and trashy tattoos. One woman stated that a floral tattoo extending from her wrist to her thumb was acceptable even though it was visible because it was “delicate-looking” (F/18/White/NT). Such results suggested that though these American, college-aged women were concerned with public reactions to their tattoo, the public perhaps did not comprise their integral audience so much as it did an accidental audience. The concerns these respondents have with performing “socially acceptable” tattoos seemed to reinforce an appropriateness based on sex—that women should avoid looking “trashy” and unfeminine; the best way to do so, according to these respondents, was to choose small tattoos that were easily concealed.

Table 2. Considered Tattoo Location (Non-Tattooed Responses)

LOCATION	WOMEN	MEN
Face	0	0
Neck	0	1
Back of neck	13	0
Arm	5	21
Wrist	12	1
Back	27	10
Chest	1	3
Side/Ribcage	4	1
Hip/Pelvic area	19	0
Backside	2	0
Leg	1	3
Ankle	14	2
Feet	12	0
Non-specified Concealable	3	0

However, what can be concealed can also be revealed. Not all of the women who responded focused only on the concealment of their tattoos. Many of these women noted that they liked not only being able to conceal their tattoo, but also having the power to reveal it to whomever they chose. As one woman explained:

I would want it in a place that could be covered or shown as I prefer. I plan on working in professional fields and having a conspicuous tattoo is often frowned upon. I would also like it to be somewhat private since it would be for me and not for someone else. But I would like to have the option of showing it off on occasion so the ankle or shoulder-blade would provide the most diversity. (F/25/White/NT)

Several other women echoed the sentiments of covering up their tattoos for professional and certain social situations (two women mentioned their wedding day in particular) but the excitement of “showing it off” to certain, privileged people. The ability to control their performance was no doubt empowering for these women. From one perspective, they were controlled by their potential audience—an audience that they fear would disapprove of their tattoos and could exact a punitive response. Yet from another perspective, it was the women who controlled when and to whom they chose to share these elements of their identity. As one of the tattooed women explained an influence that pushed her towards acquiring her tattoo:

I have a personal tradition of wearing sexy lingerie underneath normal clothes on Valentine’s Day; I was thinking about how much I love that feeling of having a sexy little “secret” under my clothes, and it occurred to me that a tattoo would be just like that, only permanent. So that was another reason that I decided I wanted to get the tattoo. (F/23/White/T)

Although there is an obvious element of sexuality to these performances, it starts to move beyond the social norms for the feminine ideal. In seeking to control their performances, even in a sexualized manner, these respondents suggest an agency and a resistance to the potentially negative judgments of their accidental audiences.

Not unlike the women's responses, several men also listed concealment as an important consideration in their tattooing process. 14 male respondents included concealment as one of the reasons or the only reason for their location choice. Unlike the women who responded, the male respondents seemed to tend towards two primary locations for their tattoos: the arms and the back. One must take into account that there were considerably less male respondents than female respondents; thus a more extensive study would be more revealing. Still, these are also locations that are easily concealed, but only the back and the upper arms are concealed by everyday clothing. A few men listed the forearm as a possible location for their tattoo (no women listed this location).

Additionally, more men than women seemed concerned with the attractiveness of the location for their tattoo (11 responses). Several responses focused on the "coolness" of the location and how good it would look with a tattoo. One respondent mentioned that he would put tattoos on his biceps to "motivate myself to get better and bigger" (M/18/Indian/NT). Again, these results are too inconclusive to say with any sort of definitiveness, but perhaps men chose these locations because the arms and the back are relatively easy to maintain on the male body in terms of attractiveness and the performance of "masculine" upper body strength.

Further studies should be done that focus on the importance of attractiveness, concealment, and visibility among young men and women who have considered obtaining tattoos. While both sexes stressed the importance of concealment for occupational purposes, their reasons surrounding the attractiveness of the body are intriguing. It would be very interesting indeed to see what further research into this area might reveal about men and women’s conceptions of the body and the enhancement/reduction of attraction based on body modifications such as tattooing.

Table 3. Locations Deemed Inappropriate to Have a Tattoo

Location	Tattooed Women	Tattooed Men	Tattooed Total	Non-tattooed Women	Non-tattooed Men	Non-tattooed Total	Overall Total
Face	11	6	17	16	18	34	51
Neck	3	2	5	10	2	12	17
Back of Neck	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Hand	0	1	1	2	0	2	3
Wrist	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Lower arm	1	3	4	5	0	5	9
Arm/Shoulder	3	0	3	2	0	2	5
Back	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Lower Back	1	0	1	5	0	5	6
Chest	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Breasts	0	0	0	3	0	3	3
Hip	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Genital Area	1	0	1	7	3	10	11
Butt	0	0	0	2	1	3	3
Leg	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Any “sensitive part”	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Anywhere	0	0	0	2	0	2	2
Any place visible	1	1	2	9	3	12	14
All over the body	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Any place <i>not</i> visible	0	0	0	2	0	2	2
Depends on profession	2	0	2	1	1	2	4
Nowhere is inappropriate	10	2	12	21	6	27	39

Not surprisingly, the most common locations on the body that were deemed *inappropriate* by the students of this study were those locations that it is difficult to conceal. Table 3 categorizes these locations based on the responses of tattooed and non-tattooed women and men. The most frequent response to this question by both tattooed and non-tattooed individuals was the face, with the neck being a common extension of this response. The reasons for the inappropriateness of this location were varied, although most revolved around either the difficulty in holding or maintaining a job with facial tattoos or simply the lack of apparent aesthetic taste:

It attracts too much attention. (M/18/Indian/NT)

It's just ridiculous and a little extreme. It would also be really hard to get a good job. (F/18/White/NT)

It's not respectable and people discriminate against them.
(M/16/Mixed/T)

The face is the center of our bodily gestures and expressions. To place a permanent mark on one's face is to forever pull the attention of those to whom one is speaking to that mark on the face. For the students who were against this, their reasons included the distraction and grotesqueness one might experience from gazing at this mark. Notably, one respondent called a facial tattoo a "disguise" (M/White/16/NT). As Goffman has written, every interaction calls for a role of some kind, and as individual actors, we constantly adjust our "personal fronts" to take on those roles (1959). A tattoo is a permanent marker upon our "sheaths"—the outer layer of our selves that other people see. A facial tattoo is an indelible expression of a limited aspect of one's identity. It cannot change unless the tattoo itself is altered or removed. Thus, when one bears a facial tattoo, one bears the aspect of one's identity that is signified by that

tattoo *constantly*. If one is asked then to play a role that would conflict with the identity expressed by that tattoo, one cannot remove the tattoo to properly assume the role. Unlike the rest of the body, the stage on which the tattoo plays cannot be covered by a curtain of clothing. Rather, immediate and unavoidable attention is drawn to the tattoo; the interaction occurs, the performance is begun, but what is transmitted is not a perfect roleplay, but rather the signifiers of the tattoo. For many, it would seem, to bear the socially-visible tattoo is, quite literally, to wear a single identity upon one's sleeve.

Many responses suggested that in 2007/2008, the greater American audience was still against open exposure of tattoos, at least among those of the middle/upper classes and authority. Responsible performers, then, would know to cover up their tattoos when they were in the presence of such persons, and to be unable to conceal these tattoos would be to imply an association with the lower classes, the disempowered, and the stigmatized. One respondent offers this summation:

I think everywhere is appropriate, as long as the person getting it is comfortable with it, and has thought through the repercussions of the location and accepts them. IE if someone is going into the business world and gets a facial tattoo, well, I think that's poor decision making on their part, but it's not inappropriate per se, just stupid (F/23/White/T).

Thus, though many allowed the individual the choice of where to place his or her tattoo, this choice was still mightily influenced by the knowledge that some choices were more or less "responsible," and the individual should understand the inherent connotations and consequences the location of his or her tattoo would bear within the greater society.

Considerations of the (in)appropriateness of tattoo display heavily affected how the tattooed persons of this study chose to perform their tattoos. The remainder of this section examines the performance negotiations of tattooed individuals in terms of audience selection and moments of display and concealment. Table 4 depicts to whom tattooed survey respondents chose to display their tattoos. Similarly, Table 5 depicts when and why these same tattooed individuals chose to conceal their tattoos.

Table 4. Tattoo Displayed To Whom (Tattooed Respondents, 32 W/10 M)

Displayed To	Tattooed women	Tattooed Men	Total
Everyone	7	4	11
Everyone w/few exceptions	3	0	3
Anyone who asks	6		6
Friends, Family	11	5	16
Occasional	8	1	9

Table 5. Tattoo Concealed When (Tattooed Respondents, 32 W/10 M)

Concealed When	Tattooed Women	Tattooed Men	Total
Located under “normal” clothing; concealed for everyday activities	10	2	12
Concealed for occupation	10	5	15
Concealed in cold weather	2	2	4
Concealed to hide from family	4	0	4
Concealed for (new) social encounters	4	2	6
Concealed to keep it private	1	0	1
Never concealed	3	1	4

Again, most respondents stated they concealed their tattoos for their professional occupation. For example, Tina noted that she was an actor, and her career was very important to her. The tattoo on her back was rather large; it extended from just below her underarm down almost to her hip. Tina said that it was important for her that her tattoo remains concealable for her occupation. However, she also explained that she got the tattoo because she wanted something to hold on to, to claim for herself. She did not want to become merely a “director’s canvas,” and to lose

herself in all of the various roles she plays. Rather, she wanted a unique part of herself that she determined and that would always obviously stay with her.

In a society where, Goffman notes, we play roles every day, and in an occupation where even more roleplaying was required of her, Tina chose to mark her body with something permanent, something that would not change on a daily basis (1956). Her negotiation of her roles and her performances was to choose something that was not alterable (though it was, ironically, used to cover up another permanent mark). Her case suggested the importance of permanence for some of these tattooed individuals, and that possessing such a permanent mark lends clarity to one's understanding of one's self amidst a society that is constantly attempting to influence and adjust the individual. Such a response additionally implied a conscious movement away from outside interpretation of her tattoo, just as Calvin moved away from his peers regarding his potato tattoo. Here again, we must question for whom Tina's tattoo may be primarily intended to perform.

Though only a few students responded that they would conceal their tattoos in certain social situations, especially noting new encounters with strangers as one such situation, their reasons for doing so lend further insight into the concealment issue. One respondent said she covered her tattoo in social situations because she did not "want to look in negative way" (F/19/Korean/T). It is difficult to ascertain whether she meant others would look *at* her in a negative way, or if it is her tattoo that would look negative *to* those around her. This question of gaze is fascinating and poignant. It immediately suggested that the public had a significant power to influence her to cover her tattoo. But it also suggested that the performance of her tattoo had potency

as well; it provoked the feelings of potential repugnance and negative feelings in others that the respondent wished to avoid. This latter view places more power with the individual who possesses the tattoo. The tattoo is in some ways a source of power—of resistance, one might say—against those members of society who disapprove of its visible presence (or likely of its presence at all). The tattooed individual has made the choice to obtain a tattoo *in spite* of her knowledge that such disapproving persons are quite prevalent in society. It is thus out of deference to these individuals and responsibility to her audience that she again *chooses* to conceal her tattoo when she is around them. As another respondent expounded:

Occasionally I do [conceal my tattoo], in professional situations or when I'm meeting new people, if I'm not sure of their views on tattoos. My grandfather doesn't approve of the tattoo, so sometimes I'll cover it up when I'm visiting him (though occasionally, I admit, I'll wear something that shows it off on purpose, just to antagonize him!). I've also tended to keep the tattoo covered when around my boyfriend's extended family, cause I want to make as good an impression on them as I possibly can. And I don't think I would ever show the tattoo during a job interview—again just to be on the safe side. First impressions mean a lot, and even though I love tattoos, I know that they can give some people a bad first impression. I do think it's becoming a lot more acceptable in our generation, though (F/23/White/T).

In his work “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor,” Erving Goffman discusses the concepts of “deference” and “demeanor” as important elements of an individual’s performance with others (1956). Sometimes an individual will show deference to another who she perceives to be of some import; she perceives this individual as worthy of a certain respect. Thus, as a responsible performer, she will demonstrate an appropriate demeanor through her actions, gestures, and other forms of display. However, should this individual encounter a peer or someone she considers to be

beneath her, she likely will not show them the same deference that she showed the individual of authority.

Such concepts were certainly present in several of these students' responses concerning the concealment of their tattoos. In the response above, the respondent described in detail four situations in which she chose to conceal her tattoo out of deference to those in authority: new people, her grandfather, her boyfriend's family, and potential employers. In each of these situations, she was attempting to win the approval of these people to meet certain aims. There is an uncertainty in meeting new individuals; one cannot tell if they will reveal themselves to be of a high position of authority, a peer, or an inferior. In any circumstance, they have the potential to be of great benefit or detriment to the individual should she impress or offend them. Similarly, as an elder and kin, her grandfather was an individual of personal importance within her close circle of peers. She likely saw him more often than most other people she encountered. Thus, maintaining his approval would be of great benefit to her livelihood. However, as the respondent noted, there were occasions when she chose *not* to show deference to him, but rather displayed her tattoo in an open act of resistance and adult independence. Such moments of selected *non-*deference are equally insightful and lend credence to her own belief that perhaps tattoos are becoming more acceptable in society. Perhaps, too, it was the fact that her grandfather was familial, that is to say, *familiar* enough to her that she felt somewhat secure in pushing the boundaries of proper performance with him. On the other hand, she continued to show deference to the individuals who may eventually become her family—her boyfriend's family. Apparently she did not yet feel familiar enough with

these members to openly display her tattoo to them. Rather, she maintained a show of deference; her performance was carefully plotted to produce the greatest amount of gains for her—his family’s approval could help ensure a future with her current partner. Finally, as with many of the other respondents, she performed deference to her potential employers; she played the role of the kind of employee they would want to hire. All in all, this one respondent portrays an intricate web of negotiated performance that required the concealment of a permanent marker.

Similarly, another respondent described her negotiated performances:

If I want to make a more conservative first impression, I would probably not be wearing clothing that revealed my tattoos anyway (they’re all covered by any t-shirt). I wouldn’t want them visible at a job interview, and when I met my fiancé’s family I made sure they were covered. On subsequent meetings, however, I didn’t try to conceal them. My wedding dress is strapless and shows them all off! The woman at the shop told me ‘oh honey, I barely even notice your tattoos!’ Which I thought was hilarious, because I didn’t get them just to cover them up. I’m proud of them! (F/23/White/T)

This respondent made some of the same choices as the respondent above; she chose to conceal her tattoos for potential employers, and as the above respondent did with her boyfriend’s family, so too did this respondent initially conceal her tattoos from her fiancé’s family. However, perhaps due to the fact that she was making a lifetime commitment to him and his family, she eventually chose to reveal her tattoos to her family-to-be. Her choice to display all of her tattoos on her wedding day was also indicative of her comfort level with the performance of her tattoos. Certain other respondents listed their wedding day as a crucial time that they would *want* their tattoos covered. However, for this individual, her pride in her tattoos was most evident, and it was this personal attachment that overrode societal influence. Again, that she can make such a decision regarding a conscious, public performance of her

tattoos suggested the continuing acceptance of tattooing that may be expanding within the mainstream society. This respondent still carefully negotiated her performances, but perhaps with a little less care than many of her peers and those that came before her.

Such negotiation of performance was also evident in Ashley's choice of location for her tattoo. Because of her commitment to the expression of her tattoo, Ashley wanted to get her Celtic cross tattoo on her left wrist/forearm. She acknowledged that there is some public distaste for this location, but she felt it "wouldn't be too trashy" because the location was not "glaringly obvious." She argued that the hip and the lower back are more sexualized locations that do not appeal to her or the meaning of her tattoo. Thus, while they may be popular choices for many women, they did not work for her purposes. Instead, the more visible wrist tattoo fit her rationale and symbolism the best. She stated, "If I'm going to have a tattoo, it will be in a visible place because it's important and I'm proud of it." She added that this location would also demonstrate, for her at least, that she made an *adult* decision rather than one based on impulse.

Ashley recognized that some people do see tattoos as negative, and she understood this view in terms of those who have made "misinformed decisions" about the design and location of their tattoos. For example, she found tattoos as acts of rebellion to be "tasteless and immature." Similarly, she has heard girls talk who only wanted to get lower back tattoos because they associated the "tramp stamp" with something desirable and trendy. In this manner, she claimed, the media has been very effective in promoting the "sexiness" of tattoos. This realization strongly affected her

decision to avoid lower back and hip tattoos as sexualized locations. With such associations with tattoos among her peers and family, Ashley acknowledged that a tattoo can become a “stain” rather than a “symbol.” Nevertheless, she felt the key to preventing this occurrence, at least from one’s own perspective, would be to ensure that the tattoo has significant personal meaning for the one obtaining the tattoo. Even though she wanted her tattoo to be a public display, Ashley still focused on the tattoo as performing a meaning that is ultimately personal and unique to her own understanding.

Kris’s explanation of her tattoo’s importance offered the most noticeable removal of the public audience from her tattooed performance (interview 3/27/2008, College Park). Kris had a tattoo of the mockingbird from the book *To Kill A Mockingbird*, as it was drawn on an old cover of the book. This book was one of Kris’s favorites, and she found she related strongly to the main character of the book as well as to several of the ideas that the book puts forth. As she described:

My parents were divorced, and my dad made me read the book and it was an important experience for me, so [the tattoo]’s really tied to that. And I think getting a tattoo was both recognizing that the things I believed in, in terms of freedom and equality of thought and treatment, were very important to me, and that they were tied to that specific book and moment in my life.

Thus, her first tattoo represented specific ideas, but also Kris’s childhood. At the time of the interview, as an adult with more carefully-developed conceptualization of those same ideas, Kris shared her plans to obtain another bird tattoo—a simple, calligraphy-outline of a Japanese bird. For Kris, this bird recalled the first bird tattoo, but also demonstrated her evolution of thought concerning the ideals that both birds represented. She explained:

I like to think of [the second bird] as a reclaiming of that in a different way, in a more personal way. I think when I first got [the first bird], it was more like “Social Justice!” and things that I certainly still believe in, but now I think of them as more focused inward, and more about what I want to do as a person as opposed to representing something to the world or changing the world...I guess what I like about it is that it can appear simple, but that simple line makes a complex change. So again it goes back to the idea of it being sort of internal, that something you do as a person renders everything else complex.

Kris’s tattoos were reminders to her of the ideas to which she adhered. Like Tina, she acknowledged that she has performed different roles for different people, but even more so, she acknowledged that people interpreted these performances in different ways. This realization has strongly affected her view of tattoos and her process in obtaining them.

Kris acquired her first tattoo on her lower back, and she intended to place two more tattoos further up her back: an elephant in the center of her back, and the simple, Japanese bird tattoo on her upper back. When asked why she chose that location, she responded:

I like the idea of the back. I like that I can turn around and look at it if I want to, and I kinda know it’s there but—I like to think of it as a reminder of certain things, so I like the idea of actually being reminded of it now and then. Sometimes I forget about it because it’s not [constantly visible], so I just forget that it’s there. I think that’s part of it as well. Because again I like to think of it as a marker or reminder for certain ideas, that it’s there all the time, but when I *see* it, it reminds me of them.

Kris’s opinion regarding the location of her tattoo presented a fascinating perspective on both concealment and performance of tattoos. Kris claimed that she did not take the concealment of her tattoo into much consideration when she chose the location, the staging for its performance. Rather, it was more for the reason she mentioned above, that she wanted the reminder to always be present with her, but not always

visible for her. She could look at it when she needed to be reminded of who she was and what she believed in. Furthermore, she did not really think about how other people would receive the tattoo because she did not get it for other people; she got it for herself. She stated:

I figured anywhere would eventually be seen at some point, by someone, so I didn't really think too much... It was less that I wanted to conceal it and more that I didn't want it to be, "This is ME! This is what I think!"...*Because* of ideas of interpretation and all these different things that go around it, I don't think it's an accurate expression of myself in an artistic sense to other people. I think people can look at it and they can see a thousand different things, so I don't see that as being a clear expression of me. I think obviously it influences people's impression of me, but I think I see it more as an expression *for me*.

Kris hit on a very important aspect of today's society and its influence on behavior. As we do live in a postmodern world, we are surrounded by variety, hybridity, and multiplicity. Intertextuality has become a catch-phrase in literature, interculturalism in Cultural Studies, and interdisciplinary studies in general has gained acceptance in universities across the country. In a world where deconstruction is pushed to its limits, uncertainty and ambiguity abounds, and people find themselves struggling to assign any sort of definiteness to any statement they make about themselves or anything else. The possibility for interpretation, as Kris noted, is infinite. Each individual is the product of a vast array of experiences, biological imperatives, cultural signs and social influences. Every individual has a unique *schema* through which he or she views, experiences, and interprets the world (Kertzer 1999). Thus, Kris was exactly right to question the validity and relativity of others' responses to her tattoo. Unless she would sit down with them and attempt to explain what her tattoo means in no uncertain terms, they would very likely interpret something quite

different from what she had intended, much as Calvin's audience failed to understand the meaning behind his potato tattoo. Kris has already experienced people who interpreted her bird as a raven or some patriotic sign rather than as a mockingbird. Thus, she realized, the tattoo cannot be centered about the public, even though there may be *an* audience for whom it is performed.

Rather, in Kris's case, *Kris* is the audience for her tattoo's performance, as I argue Calvin is the audience for his potato tattoo performance. Every time she turns around to look at it, or looks at it in the mirror, the tattoo is performing for her (or she performs for herself). It is reminding her of the ideals it represents and in which she believes. Again, she clearly stated, it was for this very reason and function that she obtained the tattoo. For Kris, the tattoo was a permanent marker in an ever-changing world. It was a sign that bore a definite meaning for her amidst a world of multiple signs and endless signifiers. The tattoo may perform for her, but it does so to remind her of a concrete aspect of her personality. And though she may herself also perform a variety of roles every day, she bears a permanent mark of a permanent element of her self. Furthermore, when she does obtain her new bird, it will be to symbolize how she has changed in her identity. I find it poignant to point out that she chose not to change her first tattoo, but rather to *add* to it, to alter the performance by extending it beyond the original. Yet again one may see in this performance a process that unites permanence and temporality, a performance that changes in its repertoire but not in its archive, to use Diana Taylor's term (2003). The tattoo as an established communicative symbol upon the body (the archive) remains essentially the same, but

the performance of the tattoo, that is, its repertoire, is altered constantly in response to the self who expresses it and its audience.

Though the subject matter and global symbolism of Alicia's peace sign tattoo suggested that it would be designed for public performance, this has not been the case. Indeed, one might assume that Alicia would *want* to openly display her tattoo as a clear sign of her affiliation and activism. However, much like Kris, Tina, and other the women students I interviewed as well as several students who responded to the survey, Alicia wanted the tattoo as a reminder to *herself* of this affiliation. Alicia chose the location of her hip foremost because it was again for her to see and not for others unless she chooses to show them. She also mentioned that the concealment of the tattoo was important for her job. Again, she was not ashamed of her tattoo, and did not attempt to hide it when she wore more revealing clothing, such as a swim suit. However, her tattoo—as with Kris's tattoo, Tina's tattoo, and many other college-aged, American women's tattoos—represented an affiliation of her identity to herself, suggesting that for these young adults, at least, the primary audience for their tattoo is the owner of the tattoo him or herself.

“The social body overlaps with the political in a symbolic sense, since society always has coercive and therefore politicological aspects, and the practical effects of influence are always felt ultimately by the experiencing body of the individual. Skin tattoos, for example, are felt or experienced in a certain way; they may represent social values, and they may be restricted to, or enjoined on, a certain social class or category. Moreover, the body is ‘mindful’ at all three of these levels, and there can be support, as well as interference, between them.”

(Andrew J. Strathern 1996:2-3)

“Performance also functions as an epistemology. Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing.”

(Diana Taylor 2003:3)



Section 4: Conclusion

DeMello (2000) and Atkinson (2003) as well as others confirm that the tattoo as an artistic expression of identity is the primary reason many people obtain a tattoo, and my research confirmed this assessment. Not surprisingly, when given a list of multiple-choice answers for which they could select as many or as few as they deemed accurate, the most common response for how surveyed students viewed tattooing was “an artistic expression of who I am” (136 responses). As one respondent noted, “As it should be, a tattoo should not be something done on a whim or a dare, it should be thoughtfully chosen since it will be silently representing you for the rest of your life” (F/25/White/NT). The “silent representation” of the tattoo noted by this respondent is essential to my overall argument that the tattoo constantly holds the potential to be performed and that the tattooed person must be aware of how

and when these performances could occur. Whether the tattoo is performed for a public audience or for its bearer alone, it cannot help but be expressive.

The art aspect of the tattoo, I would argue at least for the subjects of my study, seemed to result more from the desire for the tattoo to have some sort of personal *meaning* or affiliation with an imagined community (sorority, ethnicity, etc.) than it did from a conscious desire for aesthetics—that is, a desire by the bearer to have a permanent work of art inscribed into her body. The idea of the tattoo as art more seemed to be the *result* rather than the *impetus*. Many of these students found themselves determining the meaning *before* they determined the design, and then it was this meaning that informed the design. As a symbol of powerful meaning realized through inky creation, then, the product almost could not help but be artistic for these students. As Lindsey remarked, the tattoos became “personal talismans,” touchstones that the wearers could turn to day in and day out as reminders of an important aspect that they defined for themselves not entirely individually, but as members within the larger American culture. Carried on a whirlwind of injunctions, ideology, and role-playing, these students were often moved to act and think in ways that they could not fully control. Obtaining and designing a tattoo was, on the other hand, a definitive and permanent choice. There is certainly a seductiveness to such a choice, particularly one that might, as Benson suggests, act as a “seal” for an aspect of one’s self (2000).

The inherent individuality suggested by this statement also seemed to be a through-line for these potential tattooed performers. Though I at first expected to find significant differences between the tattoo performance of men and women, I was

surprised to find little distinction between the two. The clearest differences were in terms of staging: men generally seemed fine with tattoos that were more *likely* to be seen than women, but overall, both men and women within the parameters of my study chose tattoo locations that could be easily concealed. Another potential difference is the sexual aspect of the location—that both seemed to choose locations that were sexually “attractive.” There did seem to be some difference in the design choices—that some women did consciously choose more “feminine” designs (butterflies and stars) and some men more “masculine” designs (dragons and pitbulls). More often, though, there seemed to be a gender ambiguity to many of the designs (butterfly emerging from a ring of fire from a female respondent, a mother’s portrait on a male respondent). Most respondents focused more on the personal meaning attached to their tattoo than with adherence to social norms of gender, class, etc. The individuals that were interested in tattooing and/or that chose to become tattooed seemed not to worry about the reception of the general public. While some individuals were admittedly still impacted by them because of their daily interaction with the general public, many more seemed to be turning inward to more private performances allowing for self-exploration, self-representation, and self-actualization.

As Diana Taylor notes, embodied performance “offers a way of knowing” for both the audience and the performer(s) (2007:3). When the tattoo is performed upon the body—indeed, when it is *embodied*—it represents and it reminds the wearer of that ideal or “identity bit” that has been physicalized and sealed on that individual’s body (Munoz 1999). It allows the performer to also become the audience and in so doing, to learn and reinforce notions of self.

Appendices

Appendix I.

List of Interviewees

- “Alicia.” (pseud.). Interview by author, 25 October 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- “Amanda” (pseud.). Interview by author, 27 November 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- “Ashley” (pseud.). Interview by author, 26 November, 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- Kris. Interview by author, 27 March 2008, College Park. Audio recording. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- Lindsey. Interview by author, 27 March 2008, College Park. Audio recording. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- “Lisa” (pseud.) Interview by author, 23 October 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- “Matt” (pseud.) Interview by author, 26 October 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- Megan. Interview by author, 14 December, 2008 via online chatting service. Transcript. Online from College Park, MD.
- Monica. Interview by author, 27 November 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- Natalie. Interview by author, 27 March 2008, College Park. Audio recording. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- “Tina” (pseud.). Interview by author, 24 October 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
- “Susan” (pseud.). Interview by author, 23 October 2007, College Park. Transcript. University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Appendix II.

IRB Application for the Research Study: *Marks of Identity?: The Significance of Tattoos Among the UMD Student Population*

1. Abstract: This project is designed to explore why and to what extent students at the University of Maryland, College Park get tattoos. Students will be surveyed and/or interviewed and asked such questions as whether or not they have tattoos, how many tattoos they have, when and how they obtained these tattoos, what the tattoo designs are, and the reasons for choosing to undergo the tattooing process. My guiding research questions are: what do tattoos say about social trends, identity, and perceptions of beauty in our society? How is the expression and perception of tattooing affected by factors such as design, size, and concealment versus public display?

Subject interviewees will be asked to fill out a consent form to ensure they understand and agree to the terms of the interview. Students may choose whether or not they wish to answer certain questions and may provide as little or as much detail as they feel comfortable. Subjects' names will be omitted or changed for inclusion in the final thesis paper. I will ensure full confidentiality of all subjects. If a student does not feel comfortable with an interview, he or she may opt to fill out an anonymous survey instead.

2. Subject Selection:

- a. Subjects will primarily consist of the undergraduate and graduate student body of the University of Maryland, as well as local tattoo artists. Potential subjects will be recruited via university email lists (with permission), and flyers placed in public places and residence halls across campus.
- b. The main determining factors for subject selection will be adults between the ages of 18 and 35, with a focus on UMD students.
- c. I seek to explore the growing trend of tattoo acquisition among this generation.
- d. We will accept as many students as respond to our calls for volunteers, or between 20 and 200 students, depending on the response to our calls.

3. Techniques:

- a. Informal interviews—consists of conversations with the subject(s) on the topic of tattooing in an informal environment. Conversation will be spontaneous and free; no specific, pre-written questions will be asked, and no recording will take place.
- b. Formal interviews—consists of one-on-one directed conversations. Subject will sign a consent form agreeing to the terms of the interview.

The subject will be asked prepared questions and will be tape-recorded if s/he gives his or her permission.

- c. Surveys/Questionnaires—Subjects who wish to participate in this study but who do not wish to be interviewed may fill out an anonymous survey or questionnaire consisting of basic questions on tattooing. Questions will ask about the subject's decision to obtain a tattoo and the process of acquiring it. Questions may also ask those who do NOT have tattoos for their opinions on tattooing.
- d. Observations—Includes attendance at conferences on tattooing, as well as observation of tattoo artists in tattoo parlors in the College Park area (with permission from the artist(s) and any clients present).

4. **Risks and Benefits:** There are no risks to the subjects.

5. **Confidentiality:** Recordings will only take place with the written permission of the subject. All names will be altered (per the subjects' wishes) for inclusion in the final thesis paper. A digital recorder will be used to record the interviews and then transferred to the student investigator's computer for review. Only the student investigator, Sarah Wilson, and her adviser, Dr. Laurie Meer, will have access to these records.

6. **Information and Consent Form:** Subjects will be told exactly what the study is about, as it is a straightforward collection of student opinion and experience. The subjects will not be deceived in any way; rather, it is more beneficial that the subjects understand the questions that they are being asked and why so that they might give genuine answers. Subjects will be given a written consent form prior to a formal interview that they must sign in order for the interview to take place. Interviews will only be conducted in English.

7. **Conflict of Interest:** Not Applicable

8. **HIPAA Compliance:** Not Applicable

9. **Research Outside of the United States:** Not Applicable

10. **Research Involving Prisoners:** Not Applicable

Appendix III.

Tattoo Survey:

Please fill out the following information in a manner you feel best describes you:

- | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| 1. Age : | 5. Student: Y N | |
| 2. Sex: | 6. Current major: | |
| 3. Zip code: | 7. Graduate/Undergraduate: | Year: |
| 4. Ethnic origin: | 8. Profession: | |
-

1. Do you have a tattoo(s)? _____ (If yes, please skip to #4).
2. Have you ever thought about getting a tattoo? _____ (If yes, please skip to #5).
3. What, if anything, prevented your decision to get a tattoo? (After finishing #3, please skip to #12.)
4. How many tattoos do you have?
5. Briefly describe the design(s) of your tattoo(s).
6. Where is/are your tattoo(s) located? If you do not have a tattoo, where would you consider placing one?
7. Why did/would you decide to get your tattoo on that part (or those parts) of your body?

8. Where on the body do you think it is *not* appropriate to have a tattoo? Why?

9. When and with whom do you openly display your tattoo(s)?

10. Do you ever cover up your tattoo(s)? _____ If yes, why?

11. Who or what influenced your decision to get a tattoo?

12. Do you think you will ever get a/another tattoo?

13. I consider a tattoo to be (Circle all that apply):

- A. A waste of time and money.
- B. A fashion statement.
- C. An artistic expression of who I am.
- D. A choice I regret making.
- E. A commemoration of an important event.
- F. Something I went to get with my friend(s) because _____
- G. Something I went to get alone because _____
- H. My method for moving past something.
- I. Something I did on a whim/dare.
- J. A rite of passage.
- K. A symbol of a club or exclusive group.
- L. A way to remember someone/something special.
- M. A badge of honor or symbol of status.
- N. A symbol of my allegiance or faith in something.
- O. A way to decorate my body.
- P. A protest statement of _____
- Q. Other: _____
- R. Other: _____
- S. Other: _____

Thank you so much for your participation in this study! To retain your confidentiality, there is no need to put your name on this survey. Questions? Please contact Sarah Wilson at 2823 CSPAC, sewilson@umd.edu.

Appendix IV.

Survey Responses

Total: 216

F: 147

M: 69

1. Do you have a tattoo(s)?

Y 42

N 174

2. Have you ever thought about getting a tattoo? _____

Y 116

N 58

3. What, if anything, prevented your decision to get a tattoo?

- ❖ My mom (F/16/White)
- ❖ Pain (F/16/White)
- ❖ Stays on forever. It's hard to pick what you want. What will people think about you? (F/18/Hispanic)
- ❖ Always be there—will regret it. (F/18/White)
- ❖ Fear of needles (F/18)
- ❖ Fear of needles; my parents (F/18/White)
- ❖ Mother's approval (F/18/Black)
- ❖ It hurts to get one! (F/18/White)
- ❖ I don't like the idea of having something permanent on me. I might be a completely different person in 5 years, 10 years (indeed, at my age, that's more than likely). I also have never had an idea for a tattoo that I don't imagine I'd end up hating. It would need to be something small, discreet, and elegant in its simplicity. But I really doubt I'll ever get a tattoo. (F/18/White)
- ❖ I don't like the idea of having something permanent on my skin, something that I can't take off. (F/18/Hispanic)
- ❖ My religious beliefs against putting anything unnatural on your body. (F/18/White)
- ❖ Gross, unattractive, religion, parents, own opinion. (F/18/White)
- ❖ I heard that it hurts a lot (F/18/Asian)
- ❖ My religion forbids a person to be buried in a Jewish cemetery if there are tattoos on the body (F/18/Jewish)
- ❖ Scared of needles. My religion does not allow it (Judaism) (F/18/White)
- ❖ I just haven't had the money to get the tattoo I want. (F/18/White)
- ❖ Thought I would regret it and I don't like anything on my skin. (F/18/White)
- ❖ It is permanent. I wouldn't want to get something that didn't mean anything. (F/18)
- ❖ I dislike tattoos. Religious reasons, also it is unhealthy. (F/18/Hispanic)
- ❖ My parents and morals (F/19/Nigerian-American)

- ❖ I think it is disgusting, painful. Religion. (F/19/White)
- ❖ Religion (in Jewish religion you cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery with a tattoo), and I don't like things that are permanent (F/19/White)
- ❖ The pain and the fact that it's on you for life. (F/19/Black)
- ❖ A lot of people in the Seattle area have tattoos of Chinese characters that mean really weird things in Japanese, and what freaks me out about that is *they can't fix it*. A character that means "peaceful" or "harmonious" in Chinese means "cheap" in Japanese. Yes, I could avoid that particular tattoo, but it makes me realize how dependent on interpretation tattoos are, and that I don't want people interpreting it in a way I didn't mean and drawing incorrect conclusions about me. Really, I don't think those people wanted me to look at their shoulder and read "cheap," and I would be nervous that something similar would happen to me.
Tattoos are very permanent, and that is kind of a daunting thought. Ultimately, though, I just don't find them very appealing, and while some people can pull them off and look awesome, most people can't/ I believe I fall into the category of "most people" with regards to tattoos. (F/19/White)
- ❖ Nothing in particular; I've just never been interested. (F/19/White)
- ❖ The fact that it hurts (F/19/Black)
- ❖ That it's permanent—it can't go away without surgery (F/19/Puerto Rican)
- ❖ I don't want something permanent on my body. (F/19)
- ❖ Not appealing to me (F/19/White)
- ❖ My parents said they would disown me if I did. Also, I think it would be dumb because I'd probably regret it when I got older. My father has a giant scar from getting a tattoo removed. (F/19/White)
- ❖ My parents would shoot me. (F/19/White)
- ❖ Fear of needles/parents wouldn't approve (F/19/White)
- ❖ I have no desire for one at all. They last forever and I think they are gross. (F/19/White)
- ❖ It hurts and I don't like how they look. (F/19/White)
- ❖ The fact that it is permanent (F/19)
- ❖ I hate needles and I don't want to regret it years later. (F/19/White)
- ❖ Permanent marking on body, it will never go away. Don't have anything that is meaningful to tattoo on myself, and don't want to litter my body. (F/19/White)
- ❖ Supreme dislike of needles (F/19)
- ❖ Child of God (Christian) (F/19/Black)
- ❖ Because I don't want to be a grandmother and have a tattoo of a drunken mistake I got one night in college. No one classy can be taken seriously with a tattoo that doesn't have legitimate meaning. (F/20)
- ❖ The idea of permanently having something on my body. I can't think of anything meaningful enough to me that I would want on my body forever (F/20/White)
- ❖ Money, and father is very religious and against it. (F/20/Black)
- ❖ Just not interested, looks cheap, it is so permanent (F/20/Indian)
- ❖ Parents (F/20/White)
- ❖ Didn't know what I wanted, and I thought it should be good. (F/20/White)
- ❖ I don't think I would want it forever, even if I do think I would want it now. (F/20/White/NT)

- ❖ I wouldn't want it to show, so what is the point? (F/21/White)
- ❖ Cost. Can't think of a design that I would need to have on my body permanently for the rest of my life. (F/21/White)
- ❖ Parents (F/22/Indian American)
- ❖ Staying with me forever, unprofessional. (F/22/Asian)
- ❖ Don't want anything on my skin permanently. Makes me look trashy and/or an easy target for people to stereotype and pre-judge me. (F/22/White)
- ❖ It'll be my reward for one year out of graduate school/paying back loans, etc. (F/24/White/NT)
- ❖ Health issues—skin condition (F/30/Asian Pacific American)

- ❖ Didn't want one (M/16/Black)
- ❖ My parents (M/16/White)
- ❖ Underage (M/16/Black)
- ❖ I am underage (M/16)
- ❖ My parents wouldn't like me having one (M/17)
- ❖ My parents won't let me—won't pay for school if I do (M/18/White)
- ❖ Permanent/not-professional (M/18/Asian)
- ❖ Dislike needles (M/18/White)
- ❖ Permanency (M/18/White)
- ❖ Just not for me (M/18/White)
- ❖ Not strong enough desire (M/18/White)
- ❖ Not interested (M/18/White)
- ❖ I don't like the idea of ink on my body (M/18/Black-Asian)
- ❖ Can't stand needles (M/19/White)
- ❖ It's there forever, it's ugly, it's trashy, my mom wouldn't approve, it attracts the wrong type of girls (M/19)
- ❖ I have never felt a need to get one. I am more comfortable expressing myself without tattoos. (M/19/Asian-White)
- ❖ I don't think they look good, and it's against my religion to get one. I think it's a waste of money, and as you age it just doesn't look the same and it's something you have to live with the rest of your life. (M/19/White)
- ❖ Career aspirations in theatre & religious purposes (M/19/Hispanic-White)
- ❖ The permanent nature of a tattoo and, more importantly, the effect on my ability to donate blood. (M/19/White)
- ❖ Against my religion (M/19/White)
- ❖ Does not appeal to have things on me (M/19/Indian)
- ❖ Religious reasons (M/19/White)
- ❖ My religion. In the Jewish religion you cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery with a tattoo. (M/19)
- ❖ I would probably regret it later. (M/20/White)
- ❖ I just don't want something that may look bad as I age. (M/20/Korean)
- ❖ Parents (M/20/Korean)
- ❖ I don't like it. (M/20)
- ❖ I decided not to get the tattoo because it may affect me in future jobs and also I may regret it. (M/21/White)

- ❖ I never felt like getting one. And if I did I would have to be careful where I place it. Not worth it for me (M/21/White)
- ❖ Just don't like them (M/21/White)

4. How many tattoos do you have?

One tattoo: 27

Two tattoos: 10

Three tattoos: 2

Four tattoos: 3

Approximately 15 tattoos: 1

5. Briefly describe the design(s) of your tattoo(s).

Tattooed:

- ❖ Initial (F/16/White)
- ❖ A flower with a skull in the middle (F/16/White)
- ❖ Butterfly, and tiger design (F/17/White)
- ❖ A heart (F/17/White)
- ❖ An art nouveau design taken from a stained glass window. A slightly abstract green plant with blue bell-shaped flowers. It's upside-down L shaped and follows the top of my shoulder blade. (F/18/White)
- ❖ It is the number "13" with a ribbon tied in a bow (F/18/White)
- ❖ 3 stars connected by spiral lines; 2 butterflies with "forever 1" at the top of the design with lines and shading around it (F/18/German-Japanese-Black-Native American)
- ❖ Red peace sign on my lower right hip (F/18/White)
- ❖ Zodiac sign inside of a crab with birthday date underneath (F/18/Black)
- ❖ A Leo astrological sign (F/18/Hispanic-Latina)
- ❖ "Hardcore" tattooed in very cool font (F/19/Korean)
- ❖ "*Gam zu l'tova*"—it means "It's all for the best" in Hebrew (F/19/White-Jewish)
- ❖ Outline of a dove (F/19/White)
- ❖ My name (F/19)
- ❖ One is a trail of stars across the top of my foot and the other one is the colon cancer ribbon with my grandmother's initials under it on my left wrist (F/19/White)
- ❖ Small heart (F/19/Asian-White)
- ❖ Italian prayer (F/20/White)
- ❖ I have a pawprint and I'm getting the word "hope" next week (F/20/White)
- ❖ It's my late grandmother's name with a sun underneath her name (the sun was her "thing") (F/20/Japanese-Black-British)
- ❖ Cultural design (F/20/Ethiopian)
- ❖ A butterfly with swirly designs and a hummingbird and 3 roses (hummingbird drinking from one rose) (F/20/Black)

- ❖ 1)one upper back piece—Japanese Artwork by Dana Helmuth—snake (cobra) and chrysanthemums in color
- 2)one outline of a star on my wrist (F/20/White)
- ❖ 1)The symbol for woman with a crescent moon in it
- 2)The words “acceptance are the answer”
- 3)The sign language for “I love you”
- 4)The Braille for “peace” (F/20/White)
- ❖ It is a Phoenix in an arched flight pose. It is full color with blue, green, yellow, and purple. (F/21/White)
- ❖ 1)Equilibrium symbol on right side of R leg
- 2)shooting stars (4) on left hip (F/21/Black)
- ❖ 1) flowers, Gerber daisies
- 2)cross (F/21/White)
- ❖ 3 small sunflowers (F/22/White)
- ❖ The infinity symbol with red interior shading, otherwise black (F/23/White)
- ❖ 1)Egyptian hieroglyphs: Eye of Horus followed by sign for “goodness, happiness, beauty,” and sign for “eternity”
- 2)Figure from cave painting
- 3)African sign hye won hye, meaning “that which does not burn (indicating strength), followed by the three moon goddess symbol
- 4)”SPQR”—Senatus Populusque Romanus (“Property of the Senate and People of Rome”, in Latin), a tattoo commonly worn by Roman soldiers and gladiators. All four are pretty small and in black only. (F/23/White)
- ❖ 2-Pac tattoo and _____ (F/24/White)
- ❖ A bird in flight surrounded by blue (F/30/White)
- ❖ Black cat (F/23/White)

- ❖ Cross with “rest in peace mom” and city going down my arm (old English) (M/16/Mixed)
- ❖ 1) a pitbull standing in flames, and 2) Old English lettering over a cross with a ribbon (M/18/White)
- ❖ I have religious tattoos. One with a cross and words. One with praying hands with a biblical saying. And one going down the back left side of my arm saying “truly” and the right says “blessed.” (M/18/Black)
- ❖ A medium-sized black dragon with colored red/yellow/orange flames (M/19/White)
- ❖ All family-oriented, all above the elbows. Angelic depictions, picture of mother holding baby... (M/19/Black)
- ❖ My mother’s portrait (M/19/Jamaican)
- ❖ Detailed, black ink (M/19/Black)
- ❖ Last name in olde English; Japanese letters; skin ripped open with saying inside (M/19/White)
- ❖ Three intertwining circles (M/20/Romanian-Irish)
- ❖ 1)family crest, and 2) Tall ship with the banner “Homeward Bound” underneath. (M/24/White)

Non-tattooed:

- ❖ I would want a flower with 5 petals and 4 leaves. (F/15/White)
- ❖ Cherry blossom (F/16/White)
- ❖ I want a butterfly (side view), my name, Chinese symbol for love, and stars in a pattern, and a kiss mark (F/16/White)
- ❖ I want a butterfly with vines. (F/16/White)
- ❖ A vine with lilies, and the initials of my family (F/16/White)
- ❖ Moon, heart with stars (F/16/White)
- ❖ I want a memorial butterfly tattoo between my shoulder blades and mehendi Indian symbols on my wrists. I want some stars and a hand drawn one as well (one drawn by me). (F/17/White)
- ❖ My name and Tinkerbell; and a set of lips with a skull and crossbones in the lips (F/17)
- ❖ My name and stars (F/17/White)
- ❖ Get my full name on my lower back and a heart on my arm. (F/17)
- ❖ Something that had a meaning to me (F/17/White)
- ❖ Tribal butterfly (F/17/White)
- ❖ When I get one, it will be a large (9x12") decorative black-and-gray paisley bokeh. Probably others as well, but that will be the first one. (F/17/White)
- ❖ Something to do with night stars, moon. Not really sure of design; that's why I don't have one (F/18/White)
- ❖ I thought about getting an Aries tattoo that had a print of the ram and "Aries" written on it. (F/18/White)
- ❖ I never really thought about it that in detail, but if I got one it would be symbolic for something serious that I grew up dealing with, specifically a drug addiction of a family member of mine. (F/18/White)
- ❖ Some vinery on my foot, my dead family members, a humming bird flapping its wings (F/18/Black)
- ❖ Either "peace," "rest," or "love" written in Russian really small (F/18/White)
- ❖ A simple word or symbol that has great meaning to me (F/18/White)
- ❖ Small heart (F/18/Asian)
- ❖ A snake or words (F/18/Asian)
- ❖ A cross (F/18/White)
- ❖ A flower going around my wrist to my thumb (F/18/White)
- ❖ Floral; some combination of themes from both majors (Cell bio/Genetics and Theater) (F/18/White)
- ❖ St. Michael or a cross (F/18/White)
- ❖ Cherry blossom (F/18/Hispanic)
- ❖ The word "love" in my language, Farsi (F/19/Persian)
- ❖ Sanskrit writing (F/19/South Asian)
- ❖ I don't know yet. I am thinking about a ring of fire with a butterfly coming out to symbolize new beginnings. (F/19/African)
- ❖ Some kind of heart with a ring of stars around it (F/19/Black)
- ❖ I haven't put a lot of thought into it, but maybe a small star, fairy (F/18/Persian)

- ❖ Small, maybe size of postage stamp; Celtic symbol maybe, or something earthy (F/19/White)
 - ❖ Small dove, no color (F/19/Czech/Hugarian)
 - ❖ Flower Hawaii-type that is pink and yellow (F/19/White)
 - ❖ Flower with [the letter] “B” or something that I think is extremely different that no one else has (F/19/Jamaican)
 - ❖ Hot pink cherries (F/19/White)
 - ❖ An anchor (F/19/White)
 - ❖ A sun—kind of like the Las Vegas sun (cartoon-y but fun) (F/19/White)
 - ❖ Something grandiose and cryptic (F/19/French-Japanese)
 - ❖ My sorority letters or a cross (F/20/Korean)
 - ❖ Religion-based (F/20/White)
 - ❖ A bracelet with a heart charm that says “love” (F/20/Black)
 - ❖ Palm tree (F/20/White)
 - ❖ Unsure, nothing generic, but I can’t think of something meaningful enough (F/20/Middle Eastern)
 - ❖ A music note with a heart as the notehead. (F/20/White)
 - ❖ Celtic/horse (F/20/White)
 - ❖ A small white tattoo on the back of my neck or upper back. Hibiscus flower pattern on side of torso down to side of stomach or stars in pink, teal, and purple outlined in black (F/20/White)
 - ❖ A heart or flower or peace sign (F/21/White)
 - ❖ A sun (F/21/White)
 - ❖ World peace sign with tree on top and white dove (F/21)
 - ❖ Sanskrit writing (F/21/South Asian)
 - ❖ Animal-related or Agriculture-related—dog, cow, etc. (F/21/White)
 - ❖ I want something simple and elegant that will look good as it ages. Something that means something to me, such as a favored animal. I like Celtic and stylized art forms so I would want the tattoo to reflect those styles. Probably be in simple black ink so that it won’t fade and even when it turns green it will still look good. (F/25/White)
 - ❖ Butterfly with vines (F/27/White)
-
- ❖ Flags and emblems of another country (M/15/White)
 - ❖ An ancient Aztec god (M/15/White)
 - ❖ Armband on left arm (M/15/White)
 - ❖ Prayer hands, angel wings (on back with children’s name under) (M/16/Black)
 - ❖ [*Drew image of a swastika.*] (M/16/White)
 - ❖ A deer with “born to kill” over it. (M/16)
 - ❖ I want to get 1 or 2. One is a tribute to a very close friend of mine who passed away. [*Includes a drawing of RIP, 27, and JER surrounding a cross*]. Another would be the word “Artorius” for King Arthur in script. (M/18/White)
 - ❖ Something religious, a symbol (M/18/Indian)
 - ❖ Probably a cross or Jesus sign (M/18/Black)
 - ❖ Bible verse; something of importance (M/18/Black)
 - ❖ Basketball with wings coming out of sides, “flight” written on the bottom (M/18)

- ❖ Joker from *Batman* altered in some way (M/19/Hispanic)
- ❖ Something with my university or fraternity (M/19/White)
- ❖ I want a cool Chinese letter (M/19/Japanese)
- ❖ Not 100% sure; probably something to do with the beach (M/19/White)
- ❖ It would be a cross with a whistle hanging from it for my grandfather (M/19/White)
- ❖ Probably a cross related to my Catholic religion or something about my family (M/19/White)
- ❖ Quote by Dostoyevsky in Russian (M/19/White)
- ❖ Name in script (M/19/White)
- ❖ Roman numeral “3” because it’s my lucky number and my initials inside: IDIBI (M/19/White)
- ❖ Dark green or black name in Korean (M/20/Korean)
- ❖ A barcode on my wrist (M/20/Multiracial)
- ❖ National Bohemian logo (M/20/White)
- ❖ Dragon on my waist that wraps all around my body. (M/20/Filippino-Black)
- ❖ I thought about getting my family crest intertwined on my leg. (M/21/White)
- ❖ Branding in the center w/a tribal tattoo surrounding; phoenix (M/23/Hispanic)
- ❖ Simple criss-cross, blue, on shoulder around bicep (M/25/White)
- ❖ Lighthouse, Ella Fitzgerald (M/31/Latin)

6-7. Where is/are your tattoo(s) located? If you do not have a tattoo, where would you consider placing one? Why?

Tattooed:

- ❖ Arm (M/16/Mixed)
- ❖ Arms
 - Because I’m a religious person and because that is where I wanted them (M/18/Black)
 - Revealing in the summertime (M/19/Black)
- ❖ Inside of left forearm
 - Different—no one else had one there (F/19)
- ❖ Inside of right lower arm
 - To hide it (F/16)
- ❖ Left upper arm
 - Because it is still visible and easy to share with others, yet easy to cover with any shirt in a professional environment (M/19/White)
- ❖ Right upper arm and left forearm
 - I wanted it there (M/18/White)
- ❖ Right upper arm and Left upper arm
 - Three reasons: Tradition, Good “beginner spot,” and Positive Body image regarding that portion of body (M/24/White)
- ❖ Left shoulder
 - I wanted a place I could show off easily, and at the same time cover up if necessary. Also, I wanted the design to match a feature of my body, not just look like I stamped it on anywhere. (F/18/White)
- ❖ Back of both arms, ribs

- The ribs because it's one of the most painful spots (M/19/White)
- ❖ Left arm, lower back
 - Lower back because it can be shown when you want and covered when you want. Arm because I was 15 years old (F/24/White)
- ❖ Wrist and upper back
 - I thought a backpiece could be easily concealed and showed off but I didn't think about my wedding day! I think a small wrist tattoo is cute and not degrading—it doesn't matter if people see it. (F/20/White)
- ❖ 1) On the upper left side of my chest, next to where a bra strap would be (I actually made very certain that it would not be covered by a bra or tanktop strap)
 - 2) upper back, right below the nape of my neck
 - 3) upper right arm
 - 4) upper left arm

I thought a lot about each one. I wanted a location that I could easily conceal or reveal, as I chose. I wanted areas of my body that I thought were attractive, and that wouldn't get completely weird looking if/when I a) got really fat or b) got really old. (F/23/White)
- ❖ Chest
 - Visible when desired (F/19/Asian-White)
 - Only visible if my shirt is off (M/19/Jamaican)
- ❖ Left side of my chest
 - That is where my heart is. (M/19/Black)
- ❖ Inside of my left breast, left hip, sternum, and shoulder
 - So I can cover them easily, but show them off if I like (F/20/White)
- ❖ On my back, below my neck
 - So it wasn't very visible and gaudy (F/17/White)
- ❖ Left upper back
 - So it wouldn't be visible to potential employers (F/20/Japanese-Black-British)
- ❖ Right upper back
 - Because it can't be seen in a professional environment (F/18/Black)
 - So that I wouldn't have to always look at it if I didn't want to (M/20/Romanian/Irish)
- ❖ Center of my upper back
 - It's relatively easy to cover up, but also easy to display in dresses, tank tops, etc. Also, that's one of the last areas of the body to sag when you get older (so I hear). (F/23/White)
- ❖ Lower back
 - I have overcome a lot and it represents a new balance in my life (F/19/White-Jewish)
 - Because it's right above my jeans (more fashionable) (F/20/Ethiopian)
 - I was drunk (F/20/White)
 - I like that part of my body, and I thought it fit with the size of the tattoo (F/30/White)
- ❖ Lower back and left ribs

- It's hidden so in a professional setting it would not be seen. (F/18/German-Japanese-Black-Native American)
- ❖ Lower back on right side
 - I wanted it to be in a place that I could cover it easily. I don't like it when people have tattoos hanging out all over the place. I think it looks trashy. I got my tattoo for me, not for other people. (F/21/White)
- ❖ Lower back (Hummingbird) and Foot (Butterfly)
 - They are easy to hide (F/20/Black)
- ❖ Left side ribcage
 - It was a hidden area, easy to hide if necessary for a job or certain social situations. (F/18/Hispanic-Latina)
- ❖ Hip
 - To hide it (F/17/White)
 - Because it is flattering and can be easily hidden if I want. (F/18/White)
- ❖ Right hip
 - I wanted to get it in a discreet place. (F/22/White)
 - I wanted to choose somewhere that I would not have to expose as a matter of course in my daily life unless I chose to do so, and somewhere that could even be covered by bathing suits, if again I desired to do so. Also, my reasons for my tattoo are relatively personal and I didn't want to be explaining it to every person I met. (F/23/White)
- ❖ Lower right hip
 - Because it's more private (F/18/White)
- ❖ Hip and side
 - After achieving a goal I got my last tattoo; I got it there because it appropriately fit the design (F/21/White)
- ❖ Right side of right leg and left hip
 - 1) Wanted something that means balance
 - 2) Astronomy minor and wanted something to represent that—picked them so they aren't visible (F/21/Black)
- ❖ Outside of my left thigh near my butt
 - I thought it will be hard to see the tattoo if I tattooed there. I didn't want many people seeing it. (F/19/Korean)
- ❖ Right leg by my ankle
 - It's the part that people see the most but can also be covered. (F/16/White)
- ❖ Foot
 - It doesn't show and I like the way it looks (F/19/White)
 - I like how it looks, and it's easy to cover up when you need to (F/19/White)
 - The pawprint is on my foot. I thought a foot on my foot was cute—and I like my feet. (F/20/White)
- ❖ Left wrist; top of right foot
 - I got the one on my left wrist because it's closer to my heart and on my foot because I always wear flip flops (F/19/White)

Not Tattooed:

- ❖ Neck
 - It shows the most, not covered by your shirt, etc. (M/19/Japanese/NT)
- ❖ Back of neck, middle of back, or behind my ear
 - Because I can cover it up in case I get a job where I can't have it show. (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Back of neck and upper arm
 - Common place for people to put their tattoos (F/18/Asian/NT)
- ❖ Back of neck, right side of torso
 - So they could not be seen in professional settings. (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Back of neck, side of torso, middle of my back
 - To be hideable but so I can show it off too (F/21/White/NT)
- ❖ Back of my neck, my hip, back, maybe foot
 - I think it's the only cute spot. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Hand, perhaps (Somewhere hidden between fingers or near the palm). Also would consider foot, behind ear (neck area, hidden by hair), and perhaps hip.
 - Discretion. I would want the tattoo to be in a place where few people would see it. A hand isn't a particularly private body part, true, so I might rule that out simply on the grounds that I wouldn't want people asking me questions about my tattoo all the time. Having inconspicuous tattoos is also obviously good for professional situations. (F/18/Asian-Caucasian/NT)
- ❖ Wrist, neck, ankle
 - Can hide them for professional reasons (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Wrist
 - Because you can easily feel the heart beat there (F/18/Asian/NT)
 - My mother has one similar to it (F/20/Black/NT)
 - It's kind of hidden and adds to my purpose and reason for that tattoo (M/20/Multiracial/NT)
 - Because it would be clearly visible (F/21/South Asian/NT)
- ❖ Left wrist
 - I want "hope" on my wrist, because I think it's the most important thing, and I want it where I can always see it so I always remember to have it. (F/20/White)
- ❖ Wrist and the back of my neck
 - It looks good there (F/17/NT)
- ❖ Wrist or hip
 - Can hide it or not (F/21/White/NT)
- ❖ On my wrist, or around my pelvic bone
 - I wouldn't want to draw too much attention to it. (F/18/Persian/NT)
- ❖ One on each wrist, one on each hip, one between shoulder blades, and one on ankle. I might get a larger one on my middle back.
 - These places are just where I think they would be most attractive on my body. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Wrist to thumb
 - It's delicate-looking (F/18/White/NT)

- ❖ On my wrist to my forearm.
 - So I could see it. (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Forearm
 - It looks the best there (M/15/White/NT)
 - Looks cool (M/18/Asian/NT)
- ❖ Arm
 - I like it (M/15/Black)
 - It would look good there. (M/16/NT)
 - I could see it and it won't be on my chest. (M/18/Persian/NT)
 - Fashionable/visible (M/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Arms, biceps
 - Because being a teacher, they need to be hidden (M/18/White/NT)
 - To motivate myself to get better and bigger (M/18/Indian/NT)
 - The tattoos I have seen and liked are there AND they are hidden under professional attire (M/25/White/NT)
- ❖ Left arm
 - Just because I like how it looks (M/15/White/NT)
 - It's generally visible but I can choose to conceal it with clothing. I can see it. I don't know how people can spend \$100 on something they'll never see directly. I used to be a port-side rower and I'm dominant on my left side. Identical twins are supposed to be mirror images—my sister is right; I'm left. (F/30/Asian Pacific American/NT)
- ❖ Right arm
 - It looks nice and when I'm wearing shirts it could be shown. (F/17/NT)
- ❖ Right arm, probably shoulder
 - So it's not too noticeable and only I can reveal it if I want. (M/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Inner bicep, wrist, lower back, back of neck, foot, shoulder
 - Concealable for shows (theater) (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Bicep, shoulder blade
 - Out of sight (M/18/White)
- ❖ Upper arm or on my back shoulder/shoulder blade (M/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Arm/bicep, side of calf, or shoulder
 - That's where it would look best (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Arms and back
 - Cause it would look better (M/16/NT)
- ❖ Shoulder/arm
 - Covered when wearing a suit (M/31/Latin/NT)
- ❖ Shoulder
 - So others can see it (F/18/Hispanic/NT)
 - Can't see it all the time (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Either my shoulder, oblique, or shoulder blade
 - You can hide it. (M/19/Hispanic)
- ❖ Shoulder blade/back
 - If I had gone through with it, it would've been there so I could hide it in a professional setting, but show it off for fun times. (F/18/White/NT)

- ❖ Right shoulder blade, ankle
 - Place where it can be seen but can also be covered up if need be. (F/16/NT)
- ❖ Shoulder/back, ankle
 - Can be hidden or shown (F/19/White/NT)
 - Able to conceal (M/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Back
 - No one can see it. (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Back and forearm
 - It would look better. (M/16/Black/NT)
- ❖ Back/shoulder
 - Primarily because it's a large, flat space and is easier and less painful to work on than other parts of the body. (F/17/White/NT)
 - Nice look (M/20/Korean/NT)
- ❖ My back or my leg
 - Easily covered up, but also easily visible. (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ On my side under my arm or on my ankle
 - Small tattoo, so inconspicuous spot (F/19/Czech/Hungarian)
- ❖ Arm or chest (M/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Chest
 - To show I support that country (M/15/White/NT)
- ❖ On the right side of my chest where a tanktop strap would be
 - It can be hidden or it can be seen when I have on tank tops or strapless shirts (F/19/Black/NT)
- ❖ Side (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Ribcage
 - Place where I won't be able to see it unless I put in effort. And no one else would be able to see it. (M/19/White)
- ❖ Back, arm, chest, shoulder
 - Stands out more (M/18/NT)
- ❖ Upper back
 - Not visible, can be hidden; only those who I want can see it (F/18/Hispanic/NT)
 - Discreet/personal (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Lower back
 - You can hide it if you need to. (F/16/White/NT)
 - Everyone can see it (F/17/White/NT)
 - It can be covered during work. (F/19/White/NT)
 - Seems cool; can be hidden when you want to (F/19/South Asian/NT)
 - I can hide it when I want to but show it when I want to (F/23/European)
 - Can hide if want (wedding dress), show if you want (F/27/White/NT)
- ❖ Lower back, shoulder, navel
 - Doesn't interfere with profession—can't see it (M/23/Hispanic/NT)
- ❖ Lower back, stomach
 - It can be hidden (F/18/Black/NT)
 - I could hide them if I was in a professional setting (F/18/Black/NT)

- I think it would be sexy. (M/20/Filippino-Black)
- ❖ Lower left back or lower left stomach
 - So that it can be seen and it's easy to show someone (F/15/White/NT)
- ❖ Lower back or below belly button
 - It's cute. It will be out of sight for professional reasons (F/19/African/NT)
- ❖ Underneath the stomach
 - It makes you look pretty with a swimming suit on (F/18/Asian/NT)
- ❖ Front of hip/possibly lower back
 - Concealable, hopefully won't stretch too much (F/20/Middle Eastern)
- ❖ Hip
 - Because it would be easy to hide if I needed to. I just like the placement. (F/18/White)
 - It is easy to hide for work purposes. (F/19/White/NT)
 - Because it can be hidden (F/19/NT)
 - People can't see it (F/20/Korean/NT)
 - I think it would be pretty. (F/20/White/NT)
 - It can be hidden. (F/21/White/NT)
- ❖ I want one on my right hip bone, my lower back, the back of my neck, and on my foot, and on my butt
 - I like the locations because it is cute places to get them. (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Either lower hip, or by ankle, back of neck
 - I think it's not too open, but still somewhere I'd like (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Hip, ankle (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Hip, foot
 - Sexy or cute. Prevent me from getting a huge tattoo (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Backside
 - Keep hidden if needed (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Thigh
 - So my parents don't know. (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Upper calf (M/21/White/NT)
- ❖ Ankle
 - So I could easily conceal it (F/18/White/NT)
 - To cover up a scar (F/18/White/NT)
 - It's not very noticeable (F/19/White/NT)
 - Unobstrusive; no stretching with age (eww) (F/20/White/NT)
 - Can cover it up if you need to; not obnoxious (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Ankle, base of neck
 - Hideable under work clothes (F/24/White/NT)
- ❖ Ankle or wrist
 - That's just where I would want one (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Outside of ankle or shoulder-blade.
 - I would want it in a place that could be covered or shown as I prefer. I plan on working in professional fields and having a conspicuous tattoo is often frowned upon. I would also like it to be somewhat private since it would be for me and not for someone else. But I would like to have the option of

showing it off on occasion so the ankle or shoulder-blade would provide the most diversity. (F/25/White)

- ❖ Ankle, back (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Foot
 - It's different (F/16/White/NT)
 - I love expressing my uniqueness; I love beautiful things. Forever having art on your body. A way to remember my aunt (F/19/Jamaican/NT)
 - For fun...it wouldn't be too big. (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ On top of my foot more to the inside of it
 - Because they are really cute. And if I get it on my foot I can cover it up if I don't want it to be seen. (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Foot, upper back, pelvis
 - They are easy to hide; you don't have to show them all the time (F/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Foot, back of neck
 - Back of neck is cute; foot is visible. (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Foot, wrist, or back of neck
 - It can be hidden (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Name on my foot and stars on the inner part of my hips.
 - Because they can be hidden if needed to be, and it's not gaudy (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Somewhere not noticeable
 - Do not think it is professional (F/19/Persian/NT)
- ❖ Somewhere I could hide it
 - To be hidden but remember something as well (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ A concealable part of my body. (F/22/White/NT)

8. Where on the body do you think it is *not* appropriate to have a tattoo? Why?

- ❖ Face
 - It don't look appropriate. (F/16/T)
 - Unprofessional and painful (F/18/German-Japanese-Black-Native American/T)
 - It is distracting. (F/18/White/T)
 - Anywhere else is fine and decorative. (F/18/Hispanic-Latina/T)
 - That is just plain stupid (M/18/White/T)
 - (F/19/White/T)
 - (F/19/T)
 - (F/19/White/T)
 - Can never be hidden (F/19/Asian-White/T)
 - It looks ridiculous (M/20/Romanian-Irish/T)
 - They don't look right and you can't cover it up. (F/16/NT)
 - No one wants to see that on your face. (M/16/NT)
 - Looks ugly; disguise (M/18/White/NT)

- (F/18/Persian/NT)
- Too crucial (F/18/Asian/NT)
- (M/18/White/NT)
- It attracts too much attention (M/18/Indian/NT)
- (M/18/Asian/NT)
- For professional reasons (F/19/African/NT)
- It's weird. (F/19/White/NT)
- (F/19/White/NT)
- Just not appealing (M/19/Hispanic/NT)
- Because it's your face. (M/19/White/NT)
- Looks ridiculous (M/19/White/NT)
- Prevents you from having a regular job (M/19/White/NT)
- It makes you ugly and you will probably regret it. (M/19/Japanese/NT)
- Not professional (F/20/White/NT)
- It's not professional. (M/20/Filippino-Black/NT)
- (M/20/White/NT)
- (M/21/White/NT)
- (M/31/Latin/NT)
- ❖ Face/neck
 - You can't cover it. (F/16/White/T)
 - Anywhere to be seen while in professional attire because some jobs don't allow it (F/18/White/T)
 - Noticeable—if you try to get a job they may not like the fact you can see it (F/18/White/NT)
 - It's just a little too much for me. (F/19/Jamaican/NT)
 - It's just ridiculous and a little extreme. It would also be really hard to get a good job. (F/19/White/NT)
 - They are always exposed and get annoying to look at after awhile (M/20/Multiracial/NT)
 - (F/21/White/NT)
- ❖ Face, neck, hands
 - (M/18/Black/T)
 - They are hard to hide. Some jobs don't allow tattoos. (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Face, neck, or lower arms.
 - It is too obvious and you cannot hide them easily. It may prevent you from getting a job one day (M/19/White/T)
 - Cannot hide them easily (F/20/Black/T)
 - They are hard to hide and look unprofessional (F/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Face, hands
 - Unless you are in the entertainment profession (M/18/Jamaican/T)
- ❖ Face, lower arms
 - It's not respectable and people discriminate against them (M/16/Mixed/T)
- ❖ Face, lower arms and lower back.
 - Former—people can see it; latter—it's trashy (F/20/Korean/NT)

- ❖ Face, calves, lower back
 - Face—it's gross; calves—looks like a biker; lower back—tramp stamp
- ❖ Face, Genitals
 - (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Face, chest, back, inappropriate areas
 - Because it looks weird (M/15/White/NT)
- ❖ Neck
 - (M/15/Black/NT)
 - (F/16/White/NT)
 - (F/18/White/NT)
 - Looks trashy (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Back of neck
 - It looks trashy. (F/22/White/T)
- ❖ Neck, hands, wrists.
 - Any place where it's not dainty and can look trashy (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Neck, legs
 - Anything that is shown when wearing shorts with a t-shirt (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Hand
 - It's stupid (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Wrist, forearm especially for females (F/17/White/T)
- ❖ Arms
 - You can see it. (F/17/White/T)
 - It can be harder to get a job (F/18/Black/T)
- ❖ Arms/hands
 - I think that tattoos should be able to be hidden (F/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Lower arms/Below the elbows
 - Because of jobs (M/19/Black/T)
 - Not professional (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Arms and private areas
 - Arms—too much; private areas—stupid (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ If you're a girl, on your arm because it looks trashy. If you're a guy, not on your leg because it makes you look gay. (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Shoulder, arm
 - Just normal (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Below waist and above thighs
 - I'm sure it will hurt and it's just pointless to have one [there] to me (M/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Genitals, head, neck (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Breasts
 - It's not appropriate to always show them and so the tattoo would stay hidden. (F/15/White/NT)
 - For females, because then people would be looking (F/17/NT)
- ❖ The genitals and breasts (for females).
 - I think it is disgusting and unnecessary to pierce or tattoo the sexual organs on either gender and the breasts on women. I know some females who have put

tattoos on their breasts and I just don't see the point. I suppose it's just a personal opinion, I would assume that there are in fact people who tattoo these parts of their bodies, but I would think that they would come to regret that action in the future. (F/25/White/NT)

- ❖ Genital area
 - Painful and pointless (F/21/Black/T)
 - That's weird. (M/15/White/NT)
 - (F/19/South Asian/NT)
 - Doesn't seem safe (F/21/South Asian/NT)
 - (F/21/White/NT)
 - Privates, excluding rear (F/21/NT)
- ❖ Butt
 - (F/17/NT)
- ❖ Ass, face
 - Ass—it's tacky (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Lower back, lower hip (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)
- ❖ Lower back
 - "Tramp stamp" (F/18/Hispanic/NT)
 - No one will see, not even yourself (F/18/Asian/NT)
 - The "tramp stamp" because of the stigma attached (F/19/White/NT)
 - Because mainly for females it symbolizes a degrading meaning, plus it forces them to want to show off their lower back and buttocks area (F/20/Black/NT)
- ❖ Butt, thighs, face, feet (M/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ Leg
 - No one will see it. (M/16/Black/NT)
- ❖ The soles of your feet.
 - I just don't like the image of walking on an artistic design. (F/19/French-Japanese/NT)
- ❖ On any sensitive part
 - It will hurt more (F/18/Hispanic/NT)
- ❖ Any place visible
 - It may not be professional/appropriate in all public places (F/18/White/NT)
 - "Tramp stamp" or a place so open for the public to see (F/18/White/NT)
 - Anywhere that is blatantly obvious (M/18/NT)
 - Anywhere normal clothes can't conceal. (M/18/White/NT)
 - For girls. Arms on guys is OK (F/19/NT)
 - Anywhere that clothes can't hide. Looks unprofessional (F/19/White/NT)
 - If you want a professional job (F/19/Black/NT)
 - Anywhere seen while wearing a t-shirt for business purposes (M/19/White/T)
 - (F/20/White/NT)
 - Areas that cannot be covered because they shouldn't be so obvious that it affects job interviews. (F/21/White/NT)
 - Anywhere very visible in everyday tasteful clothes (F/22/White/NT)
 - Hinder job opportunities/profession (M/23/Hispanic/NT)
 - Anywhere that can be covered when need is OK (F/24/White/T)

- ❖ I don't care. I think most tattoos are stupid anyways. (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ I hate seeing tattoos EVERYWHERE (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Anywhere
 - (F/18/White/NT)
 - (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Any place *not* visible.
 - You can't see it. (F/16/White/NT)
 - No one sees it. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ It depends on your profession/situation.
 - If they want to work/live in a professional setting I think that any tattoo showing is inappropriate. However, if that were not the case and it didn't matter if they had tattoos I think that nowhere is inappropriate; it is their choice after all.
The exception being if it is an obscene/offensive tattoo, I think that it should be covered in public, and if it is not an obscene tattoo the person should take into mind the people around them and cover up when they should. (F/21/White/T)
 - It totally depends on your personality/occupation. I don't think there's anywhere that's automatically inappropriate, though having a tattoo somewhere (like your head/face/neck) that's almost impossible to cover up could be problematic. I personally would never get a tattoo somewhere that couldn't be covered by basic professional clothes. And I also don't think I would ever get one in a private/sexual location either-just a personal preference. (F/23/White/T)
 - If it's a CEO of WalMart: anywhere not visible is appropriate; if it's a Mixed Martial artist: anywhere is appropriate (M/25/White/NT)
 - I'd say of you were in a position of public authority or in a professional, corporate atmosphere, a tattoo on your face or neck is inappropriate. I suppose it's because I have a traditional notion of work-place etiquette. I also think it exhibits a certain level of unawareness to those around you. (F/30/Asian Pacific American/ NT)
- ❖ Nowhere
 - Personally, I don't think anywhere is inappropriate, but I understand that other people disagree, and that it could affect your career or other things. I might also have an issue with something exceedingly profane or offensive tattooed somewhere obvious. (F/18/White/T)
 - [A tattoo can be] anywhere the individual wants. It's their body. (F/19/White-Jewish/T)
 - (M/19/Black/T)
 - I think everything's fair game. I personally wouldn't get one in any suggestive place because that's cute when you're young but ridiculous when you're old. (F/20/White/T)
 - (F/20/Ethiopian/T)
 - Tattoos can be appropriate anywhere on your body depending on the person who's getting it and the reason/symbolism for getting it. (F/20/White/T)

- As long as everyone is comfortable with where it is, I have no reason to say anything. However, I think it's dumb to put them on your face. (F/20/White/T)
- I am fine with wherever someone feels comfortable. (F/21/White/T)
- I think everywhere is appropriate, as long as the person getting it is comfortable with it, and has thought through the repercussions of the location and accepts them. IE if someone is going into the business world and gets a facial tattoo, well, I think that's poor decision making on their part, but it's not inappropriate per se, just stupid. (F/23/White/T)
- I don't think it's inappropriate to have a tattoo anywhere. However, in terms of aesthetics I don't generally like tattoos on the neck. Certain areas of the body have definite connotations—hard to get a job with tattoos all over your head, labeled as a slut if you have a “tramp stamp” on the lower back. (F/23/White/T)
- It's all fair game. (M/24/White/T)
- I think it is up to the person who has the tattoo to decide that, not me. (F/30/White/T)
- (M/16/White/NT)
- You can have it anywhere, as long as you can stand it. (F/16/White/NT)
- I don't think there is anywhere that is inappropriate. People like different things and express themselves in different ways. (F/17/White/NT)
- Anywhere is appropriate. I prefer something you can hide. (F/17/White/NT)
- Although it is questionable taste to have sort of offensive tattoo (particularly violence or sexually themed tattoos) in a place that can't be covered. I'm relatively desensitized to more extreme modifications, so things like facial tattooing and whatnot don't really elicit a reaction from me. (F/17/White/NT)
- People can do what they want. (F/18/White/NT)
- I don't think it is inappropriate anywhere; it's your decision. (F/18/Black/NT)
- It's completely an individual's decision. (F/18/White/NT)
- Anywhere is appropriate as long as you can pass it off as professional. (F/18/Asian/NT)
- I think wherever people want them is fine and it's the own person's choice. (F/18/White/NT)
- I think anywhere is appropriate to get a tattoo. It's a personal choice. Some places might be stupid, particularly depending on profession (i.e., a forehead tattoo on Senator), but nothing is inappropriate, exactly. (F/18/Asian-Caucasian/NT)
- You can get a tattoo anywhere you want to. It's your body (once you're 18). (F/19/Czech/Hungarian/NT)
- I think if you are comfortable with the placement, I don't really care where other people have it. (F/19/White/NT)
- People can have a tattoo wherever they want one—it's their body to present to the world, they can express themselves however they want (F/19/White/NT)
- It's up to the people. (M/19/Persian/NT)
- (M/19/White/NT)

- (M/19/White/NT)
- It's your decision. (F/20/White/NT)
- Anything goes really, as long as you're comfortable with it. (F/20/Middle Eastern/NT)
- Everywhere is appropriate. They're not all for me but I feel like they're appropriate. (F/20/White/NT)
- People can have them wherever they want; I just personally wouldn't get one in certain places! (F/20/White/NT)
- I don't think anywhere is inappropriate but I think it would be awkward on a face, front of neck, hands, knees (F/20/White/NT)
- I guess it's up to you/where you feel comfy (F/20/White/NT)
- (M/20/Korean/NT)
- I think tattoos are appropriate anywhere on the body because it's a personal preference. (M/21/White/NT)
- I believe it is a personal preference. I will not say whether a person should or should not have a tattoo somewhere. (F/23/European/NT)
- Free body (F/24/White/NT)

9. When and with whom do you openly display your tattoo(s)?

- ❖ I would tell anyone who asks. (F/16/White/T)
- ❖ Everyday, everyone (F/16/T)
- ❖ My dad, friends awhile ago (F/17/White/T)
- ❖ My family. Nobody else really unless they ask to see it, because it's not in the open for just anyone to look at. (F/17/White/T)
- ❖ Anyone who wants to see it; somewhere less public because of location [of tattoo]. (F/18/Hispanic-Latina/T)
- ❖ I show it to people who ask me, I warn them that I would have to pull my shirt over my head (I don't take it entirely off), or if I anticipate lots of people wanting to see it I wear a tank top or something that doesn't need to be removed. I suppose in a job/scholarship interview I would not show it, frankly because any clothes I would wear that would show it would be unprofessional. (F/18/White/T)
- ❖ Everyone except academic/professional people (F/18/German-Japanese-Black-Native American/T)
- ❖ Boyfriend, friends, sisters, soon parents. (F/18/White/T)
- ❖ My friends, when I first got it (F/18/White/T)
- ❖ Summer time, at the beach (F/18/Black/T)
- ❖ Boyfriend (F/19/Korean/T)
- ❖ People who see me in a bathing suit. (F/19//White-Jewish/T)
- ❖ Anyone anytime I'm barefoot or wearing sandals (F/19/White/T)
- ❖ I never intentionally hide it (F/19/T)
- ❖ All the time to everyone because they're meaningful (F/19/White/T)
- ❖ Friends, warm weather (F/19/Asian-White/T)
- ❖ Everyone (F/20/Ethiopian/T)
- ❖ Mostly summertime (F/20/Black/T)
- ❖ Bathing suit (F/20/White/T)
- ❖ Anyone who sees it. (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)
- ❖ My shoes cover my feet usually, but anyone can see it. Everyone will see my wrist [tattoo]. (F/20/White/T)
- ❖ If somebody asks, I'll show them. (F/20/White/T)
- ❖ Friends and family, especially in hot weather. (F/20/White/T)
- ❖ All the time if asked; my boyfriend/when clothes are off (F/21/White/T)
- ❖ My friends and during the summer (shorts show it) (F/21/Black/T)
- ❖ When asked about it I sometimes show people, yet only once we are in a private setting. Other than that, only when I wear a swimming suit. (F/21/White/T)
- ❖ Friends (F/22/White/T)
- ❖ I show it to people if asked to, generally. Obviously, not to students at CTY or anything where baring my right hip (below my waistline) would be inappropriate, but around other adults, I am generally comfortable showing it to people. I would also probably be uncomfortable show it off in a workplace situation. (F/23/White/T)
- ❖ I openly display my tattoo pretty much anywhere: home, school, work, out...with just a few exceptions. (F/23/White/T)

- ❖ I don't think twice about displaying my tattoos in public. None are obscene (well, the cave painting figure actually has a penis, but it's quite stylized and no one has ever mentioned it to me—I think you have to have a pretty dirty mind to figure out that's what it is), and none are on a publically unacceptable part of my body. Even with my elderly relatives, I don't try to cover them up. (F/23/White/T)
- ❖ When I'm in the club or with close friends (F/24/White/T)
- ❖ Husband most openly, but I generally don't try to hide it. (F/30/White/T)

- ❖ I do with everybody. (M/18/Black/T)
- ❖ Family, friends (M/16/Mixed/T)
- ❖ All the time when I wear a tee-shirt and with everyone (M/18/White/T)
- ❖ I display my tattoo to friends and most of my family. I am lucky to be in an educational department where I can also openly display it in front of faculty. Regardless, it is often covered just by way of normal clothing (M/19/White/T)
- ❖ Whenever in a social environment, home, exercising (M/19/Black/T)
- ❖ Whenever with whoever (M/19/White/T)
- ❖ Friends and family (M/19/Jamaican/T)
- ❖ Everyone (M/19/Black/T)
- ❖ My close friends. (M/20/Romanian-Irish/T)
- ❖ Friends/Coworker/Parents...anyone really. (M/24/White/T)

- ❖ I would show them to friends and family, wherever. (F/15/White/NT)
- ❖ Whoever wants to see it (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Whoever (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Friends, family (F/17/NT)
- ❖ Everyone (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ The clothing I wear might show it. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Logically I would say during my off-time and with people who are comfortable with tattooing (so most friends and some family). That is a bit hindered by the potential placement, however, so it wouldn't show in normal casual clothing. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Your friends (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ I would with my friends and family, not grandma though, heck NO! (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Anyone but family (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Anyone in a casual situation, social (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Anyone who asks or friends (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Beach, friends, who I want (F/18/Hispanic/NT)
- ❖ Friends, depends where at (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Friends in casual settings (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Friends, family (F/19/Black/NT)
- ❖ Friends/boyfriend (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Friends only (F/19/Persian/NT)
- ❖ I would show it to friends and family. (F/19/Jamaican/NT)
- ❖ Almost all the time with anyone! (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Partner/family (F/20/White/NT)

- ❖ Friends, family (F/24/White/NT)
- ❖ At a soccer game or at home chillin with homies (M/15/White/NT)
- ❖ Anyone (M/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Anyone who sees or asks to see. (M/16/Black/NT)
- ❖ My family and friends. (M/16/NT)
- ❖ Friends, companions (M/18/NT)
- ❖ Friends/family/social situations, etc. (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Covered by the shirt (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Girlfriend (M/20/Filippino-Black/NT)
- ❖ Friends (M/20/Korean/NT)

10. Do you ever cover up your tattoo(s)? _____ If yes, why?

- ❖ Yes

Tattooed:

- But not on purpose. If I wear pants I can't help it. (F/16/White/T)
- Because it's no one's business. (F/17/White/T)
- All the time because I don't have a choice because it's on my back and because I don't try to show it off. (F/17/White/T)
- Not deliberately, but I've only had it since January, and it's been a bit cold for any clothes that would even show it. (F/18/White/T)
- It is covered naturally when I get dressed. (F/18/White/T)
- When I'm in a professional environment. (F/18/Black/T)
- It is always covered under a shirt unless I'm in a bathing suit. (F/18/German-Japanese-Black-Native American/T)
- I just got it right before I came to school, and it wasn't the right time to show my parents. (F/18/White/T)
- Professional reasons, parental disapproval. (F/18/Hispanic-Latina/T)
- When I wear shoes (F/19/White/T)
- So my dad can't see it (F/19/White-Jewish/T)
- I've never had to but I would for a job. (F/19/T)
- Don't want to look in negative way. (F/19/Korean/T)
- When it's cold (F/19/Asian-White/T)
- My mom doesn't approve of tattoos (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)
- Job/class (F/20/White/T)
- I'm an actor, and they have to be covered up onstage. (F/20/White/T)
- I cover them up when I go to a professional place like a job interview. (F/20/White/T)
- Mine are automatically covered by my clothing. (F/20/White/T)
- For school, work, etc. (F/21/White/T)
- Cannot see when I have clothing on. (F/21/Black/T)
- Mine is always covered when I am wearing clothes. (F/21/White/T)

- When I wear clothing it covers it. (F/22/White/T)
- Mine is covered by default, as it lies below the waistline of nearly ever pair of bottoms I own (pants, skirts, whatever). (F/23/White/T)
- If I want to make a more conservative first impression, I would probably not be wearing clothing that revealed my tattoos anyway (they're all covered by any t-shirt). I wouldn't want them visible at a job interview, and when I met my fiance's family I made sure they were covered. On subsequent meetings, however, I didn't try to conceal them. My wedding dress is strapless and shows them all off! The woman at the shop told me "oh honey, I barely even notice your tattoos!" Which I thought was hilarious, because I didn't get them just to cover them up. I'm proud of them! (F/23/White/T)
- Occasionally I do, in professional situations or when I'm meeting new people, if I'm not sure of their views on tattoos. My grandfather doesn't approve of the tattoo, so sometimes I'll cover it up when I'm visiting him (though occasionally, I admit, I'll wear something that shows it off on purpose, just to antagonize him!). I've also tended to keep the tattoo covered when around my boyfriend's extended family, cause I want to make as good an impression on them as I possibly can. And I don't think I would ever show the tattoo during a job interview—again just to be on the safe side. First impressions mean a lot, and even though I love tattoos, I know that they can give some people a bad first impression. I do think it's becoming a lot more acceptable in our generation, though. (F/23/White/T)
- Because it's not appropriate in the workplace (F/24/White/T)
- Only at my wedding because I did not want people staring at my tattoo while I got married, didn't work anyway. (F/30/White/T)
- When going to an interview or a very respectable/civilized place (M/16/Mixed/T)
- Only when going for a job interview. (M/18/Black/T)
- At work (M/18/White/T)
- Only when I wear longsleeves because it's cold (M/18/White/T)
- If I am to be around prospective employers, high authority, or someone I have not met/earned trust with yet...especially when meeting people's parents for the first time, as some have very differing views on what is right and wrong. (M/19/White/T)
- It's on my chest (M/19/Jamaican/T)
- Only when at work and job requires me to do so. (M/19/Black/T)
- It is on my back, so when I wear a shirt (M/20/Romanian-Irish/T)
- Winter gets damn cold in a sleeveless shirt. (M/24/White/T)

Non-tattooed:

- I would for modeling, because it's not always appropriate for that. (F/15/White/NT)
- I would in certain situations. (F/17/NT)

- Hypothetically speaking, it would be covered by my normal clothing anyway; I wouldn't be particularly keen to show it to some members of my extended family, just because I don't want to have a fuss made over it. (F/17/White/NT)
- Business, formal, professional situations (F/18/White/NT)
- [Theater] shows (F/18/White/NT)
- Would for work (F/18/White/NT)
- If I did [have tattoos], I would cover them at work (F/18/White/NT)
- I would for my job. (F/18/White/NT)
- If I had tattoos, I would cover them when in a professional setting or when at work (I work in a preschool/kindergarten) (F/19/White/NT)
- Some people might not need to know if or where I have a tattoo. (F/19/Black/NT)
- To hide from family and not professional (F/19/Persian/NT)
- I'm in a setting with professionals. I probably would wear shoes that would not show it. (F/19/Jamaican/NT)
- Work (F/20/White/NT)
- To cover up from other people who don't want to see. (M/15/White/NT)
- I would—Business (M/18/White/NT)
- I would because it could jeopardize employment (M/18/NT)
- I would if I had one—cover it up in the business and corporate community. (M/19/White/NT)
- With a shirt (M/19/White/NT)
- Professionalism (M/19/White/NT)

❖ No

- (F/16/T)
- (F/19/White/T)
- (F/20/Ethiopian/T)
- (M/19/Black/T)
- I wouldn't unless at a job or somewhere important. (F/17/White/NT)
- (F/18/White/NT)

11. Who or what influenced your decision to get a tattoo?

Tattooed:

- ❖ I like body art. (F/16/White/T)
- ❖ I just wanted one. (F/17/White/T)
- ❖ Myself, I thought it was pretty. (F/17/White/T)
- ❖ Myself and constant obsession with horoscope and relationship of my character and characteristics of Leos. (F/18/Hispanic-Latina/T)
- ❖ Both of my parents loved getting tattoos and have some beautiful ones. Since I started getting henna tattoos when I was 14 or so, I knew I wanted one. I also

- knew that I wanted an art nouveau design, though the specific design has changed. (F/18/White/T)
- ❖ My tattoo on my rib is influenced by my mother who has the same tattoo; My star tattoo was a birthday present (F/18/German-Japanese-Black-Native American/T)
 - ❖ I've always wanted one! (F/18/Black/T)
 - ❖ 13 is my lucky number and it has been. My sisters and I plan to all get it. (F/18/White/T)
 - ❖ Myself (F/19/Korean/T)
 - ❖ No one (F/19/White-Jewish/T)
 - ❖ Myself...curiosity (F/19/Asian-White/T)
 - ❖ Just another way to express myself and my love for my family (F/19/White/T)
 - ❖ My late grandmother (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)
 - ❖ My sis (F/20/Ethiopian/T)
 - ❖ I always thought they were cool (F/20/Black/T)
 - ❖ Older friends (especially males). Also I fell in love with Japanese Artwork that the tattoo artist does. (F/20/White/T)
 - ❖ I just love tattoos, and I like the idea of putting an important part of me on my body. (F/20/White/T)
 - ❖ Alcohol/friends (F/20/White/T)
 - ❖ I'd wanted my first since I was 16 and waited until I was 18 to get it. I just thought it was a great design. (F/20/White/T)
 - ❖ I have always liked tattoos as long as they are tasteful and not overly flaunted. No one influenced my getting a tattoo. (F/21/White/T)
 - ❖ Myself (F/21/White/T)
 - ❖ My boyfriend went to get one so I got one. (F/22/White/T)
 - ❖ I've been wanting it for awhile, as a symbol of my moving past some self destructive behaviors from my past, but couldn't figure out an appropriate design. Finally the infinity idea hit me, and then I decided to wait until I graduated from undergrad to make it sort of a two for one commemoration. The timing also linked up with when my partner wanted to get his 4th tattoo, so we got them at the same time. (F/23/White/T)
 - ❖ (in order of acquisition)
 - 1) just wanted one Influenced by my friends who were getting them (and incidentally, this one's still my favorite)
 - 2) Got one together with my closest friend at archaeological field school. We influenced each other (it was her 1st one). We wanted to commemorate our first experience working the field we are both obsessed with.
 - 3) This one is very personal. I got it during a hard time, when I was extremely depressed. It's still very meaningful to me, and I would never want to remove it. However, it's my least favorite tattoo. It reminds me of unhappiness, and how desperately I was trying to be strong.
 - 4) My fiancé (then boyfriend) and I realized we wanted the exact same tattoo, and he really talked me into getting it (he also paid for it). This one I got because I thought it was badass, and although I'm sometimes a little embarrassed when I tell people what it means, I still love it. Even though I share this tattoo with

someone else, it reflects me perfectly. My nerdiness and my awesomeness!
(F/23/White/T)

- ❖ I've wanted a tattoo since I was a very young teenager, though I was never quite sure what I wanted to get (not sure why I was always so intent on getting one—I think I just thought they were cool). My mom told me I could get one when I turned 16, but at that point I still hadn't found the right design, and I didn't want to get a tattoo just to be tattooed. When I was in college, studying abroad for a year in Glasgow, I felt even more strongly that I wanted to get a tattoo, sort of to commemorate the experience. I found the black cat in a book that a friend gave me for Christmas, with images of cats from the British Museum. It's from an illustration for a Rudyard Kipling story entitled "The Cat Who Walked By Himself." That really resonated with me, because it symbolized the independent existence I had while studying abroad, walking everywhere alone and taking care of myself. I finally made the decision to go for it after Valentine's Day that year. I have a personal tradition of wearing sexy lingerie underneath normal clothes on Valentine's Day; I was thinking about how much I love that feeling of having a sexy little "secret" under my clothes, and it occurred to me that a tattoo would be just like that, only permanent. So that was another reason that I decided I wanted to get a tattoo. (F/23/White/T)

I was young and thought it was cool. 2 Pac was my hero at that point.
(F/24/White/T)

- ❖ My mom dying influenced me and my cousin told me I should get my name
(M/16/Mixed/T)
- ❖ Me, myself, I (M/18/White/T)
- ❖ Turning 18 (M/18/White/T)
- ❖ My dad influenced me. (M/18/Black/T)
- ❖ I really wanted a tattoo as a form of self-expression and once my parents were cool with it, I went ahead with the idea. (M/19/White/T)
- ❖ To remember my mother everyday (M/19/Jamaican/T)
- ❖ The importance of my family (M/19/Black/T)
- ❖ My older brother (M/20/Romanian-Irish/T)

Non-tattooed:

- ❖ My sister because she got two. (F/15/White/NT)
- ❖ I think they're cute. (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Myself (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ A lot of things, to represent my family. (F/16/White/NT)
- ❖ Just want one (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ I decided to get my full name on my lower back soon because I want my name on me because that's who I am. (F/17/NT)
- ❖ My father passed away and I wanted a tattoo to remember him, especially since he had a lot. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Myself (F/17/NT)
- ❖ The designs and color. Just like piercings, sometimes you just want one.
(F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Seeing them on others and thinking they're cute. (F/17/White/NT)

- ❖ On a deeper level, I've always been inclined towards body modification, almost as an instinct. On a shallower level, I just like how a good tattoo looks; I like the permanence, the style, the way it (should) compliment the owner's body, I like how they can make people so ecstatically happy about their bodies instead of the depressed hatred that's become a social norm. (F/17/White/NT)
- ❖ Life experiences; designs I like (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ My talents (F/18/Black/NT)
- ❖ I want to get it for myself (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Myself and friends/coworkers (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ Sister married a tattoo artist; she has them (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ My dad (F/18/White/NT)
- ❖ It's just what I want. (F/18/Asian/NT)
- ❖ I figured if I still want one when I'm 20 I'll get it then (F/18/Hispanic/NT)
- ❖ Always wanted it (F/19/Persian/NT)
- ❖ Friends who have beautiful, respectful tattoos (F/19/Czech/Hungarian/NT)
- ❖ I can't get one—even though I want to—because of religious reasons (F/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Me, friends, and the idea of something new. (F/19/Black/NT)
- ❖ Personal interest (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ Family member (F/20/White/NT)
- ❖ I've loved them for years and my best friend will get a matching one. (F/24/White/NT)
- ❖ Me (F/27/White/NT)

- ❖ Friends (M/15/White/NT)
- ❖ Myself (M/15/White/NT)
- ❖ If I got one it would be because one of my favorite lead singers in a band has one like it. (M/15/White/NT)
- ❖ Tattoo show *Inked*. (M/16/Black/NT)
- ❖ Myself, love for basketball, friends (M/18/NT)
- ❖ If I would like it in the future (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Myself (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Myself and books I've read (M/19/White/NT)
- ❖ Asian movies (M/20/Filippino-Black/NT)
- ❖ Friends (M/20/Korean/NT)

12. Do you think you will ever get a/another tattoo?

Tattooed:

- ❖ Yes—31
 - I'm getting another VERY soon. (F/16/White/T)
 - A few more. (F/17/White/T)
 - I know I will. (F/18/White/T)
 - I'm planning on having six or seven. (F/20/White/T)
 - I'm planning on getting another one, but only one more. (F/21/White/T)

- Probably, when I get my PhD. More than likely, that one will be something related to my thesis research. (F/23/White/T)
- I do think that I will. (M/18/Black/T)
- I hope to get another tattoo as soon as I have the time and money (M/19/White)
- Without a doubt. (M/24/White/T)
- ❖ Maybe—6
 - If I do, I want it to represent something I won't regret later. (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)
 - Sometimes I want to, but I think it would be like opening the floodgates—once I had more than one, I'd be inclined to keep going (finances permitting). And though I don't anticipate regretting my black cat when I'm older, I think I could really regret it if I was covered in tattoos. (F/23/White/T)
- ❖ No—6
 - Never. I don't want the one I got when I was 15 (F/24/White/T)

Not Tattooed:

- ❖ Yes—30
 - It is highly likely that I will get more than one. (F/17/White/NT)
 - When I'm in my 20s. But I may change my mind because my father got a disease from a tattoo. (F/17/White/NT)
 - I want to get multiple. (F/18/White/NT)
 - But only 1 or 2 (F/19/Czech/Hungarian/NT)
- ❖ No—69
 - I prefer ink on paper. (F/19/French-Japanese/NT)
 - No, I don't. On top of all the issues regarding permanency and interpretation, they also look really, really painful, and I don't voluntarily cause myself pain without very good reason. (F/19/White/NT)
 - Because of medical reasons, I can't get one. (F/21/White/NT)
- ❖ Maybe—19
 - It's in the air (F/18/White/NT)
Maybe when my pop-pop dies (he's the one who prevents me from getting it), but probably not out of respect for him (F/19/White/NT)
 - I think that I would like to get a tattoo in the future, but a wise person once said to me that unless I knew exactly what I wanted and exactly where I wanted it, I should not get one and that is probably the best advice I have ever received on the issue. It is a project that will require much thought and not a little cash to see through. (F/25/White)

13. I consider a tattoo to be (Circle all that apply):

- A. A waste of time and money.—38
 - Sometimes people spend far too much time and money on getting tattoos. I would not want to spend a lot on a tattoo I got and I would not want it to take up too much time (F/25/White/NT)

- B. A fashion statement.—82
 - For me, although I don't care what other people think about it (M/19/White/T)
 - Naturally anything worn or displayed on the body to be seen by others can be considered a form of fashion statement. (F/25/White/NT)
- C. An artistic expression of who I am.—136
 - As it should be, a tattoo should not be something done on a whim or a dare, it should be thoughtfully chosen since it will be silently representing you for the rest of your life. (F/25/White/NT)
- D. A choice I regret making.—8
 - (F/24/White/T)
 - (F/18/Asian/NT)
 - I would [regret it]. (F/19/White/NT)
 - (F/19/White/NT)
 - (F/19/White/NT)
 - (would) (F/22/White/NT)
 - (M/18/White/NT)
 - (M/19/NT)
 - (M/20/Multiracial/NT)
- E. A commemoration of an important event.—62
 - My birthday (F/18/Black/T)
 - I have known people who commemorate events or people in tattoo form and I can imagine circumstances in which I myself might memorialize someone/thing in tattoo form. (F/25/White/NT)
- F. Something I went to get with my friend(s) because:--19
 - It was my birthday (F/18/Black/T)
 - We've been friends forever (F/19/White/T)
 - I needed support (F/19/Asian-White/T)
 - I wanted moral support (F/20/White/T)
 - I also went to get one, and it was a good bonding experience (M/19/White/T)
 - It brings us together (F/18/White/NT)
 - It's meaningful (F/18/White/NT)
 - It would be more fun (F/18/White/NT)
 - To show the connection (F/18/White/NT)
 - It's a bonding experience (F/19/Czech/Hungarian/NT)
 - I will be deathly afraid of the needle. (F/19/White/NT)
 - It would bond us better (F/19/White/NT)
 - I was drunk (F/20/White/NT)
 - I didn't care about my beautiful body anymore. (F/22/White/NT)
 - Joint heritage and hobby (F/24/White/NT)
 - It's awesome (M/15/White/NT)
 - Bonding (M/18/White/NT)
- G. Something I went to get alone because: --13
 - I wanted to (F/20/Black/T)

- I'm not going to get a tattoo just because everyone else is; I want it to mean something. (F/20/Japanese-Black-British/T)
 - There's nobody like me (F/17/NT)
 - It's for my experiences (F/17/White/NT)
 - It is individual (F/18/White/NT)
 - It's special to me only. (F/18/White/NT)
 - It's personal (F/18/White/NT)
 - Not went, but would like to do alone or maybe with a close friend. I feel it would be a personal expression of a part of myself. (F/25/White/NT)
 - My friend's influence shouldn't matter. (M/19/Japanese/NT)
 - It is eternal (M/19/White/NT)
 - It's personal (M/20/Multiracial/NT)
- H. My method for moving past something.—14
- I. Something I did on a whim/dare.—10
- (F/19/Korean/T)
 - (F/20/White/T)
 - (F/24/White/T)
 - (M/19/White/T)
 - (F/19/Black/NT)
 - I would have to get enough courage, then go. (F/19/White/NT)
 - (F/20/White/NT)
 - (F/23/European/NT)
 - (M/18/Indian/NT)
 - (M/19/White/NT)
- J. A rite of passage.—17
- K. A symbol of a club or exclusive group.—27
- L. A way to remember someone/something special.—92
- Not now, but I hope my next one will be. (M/19/White/T)
 - As mentioned above, this is something I could see myself or another doing for a loved one. (F/25/White/NT)
- M. A badge of honor or symbol of status.—36
- Most of my military buddies have at least a unit tattoo if not also a personal tattoo that designates some status or nickname given during service. I could see myself taking on a tattoo of an exclusive organization I belonged to if it was a group I was highly devoted to. (F/25/White/NT)
- N. A symbol of my allegiance or faith in something.—53
- O. A way to decorate my body.—67
- Ultimately, this is what a tattoo is for me personally, a way to decorate my body in a meaningful way. (F/25/White/NT)
- P. A protest statement of _____ --4
- (F/19/White/T)
 - (F/20/White/NT)
 - (F/23/European/NT)
 - (M/18/Indian/NT)

Q. Other:

- All of the above, save A and perhaps B. Each of the modifications I've made to my body (piercings as well) have meant something unique to me. I got my first tattoo at the same time as someone I love dearly, but the actual symbol meant something that was very separate from that set of circumstances. My second tattoo I got to commemorate a period in my life that I felt meant something profound—a time that I felt meant a lot for me. I've planned other body modifications, as well—but when I've actually got them done has been something of a spur of the moment decision—being in the right place in the right frame of mind with the cash on hand. (M/24/White/T)
- They're pretty (F/17/White/NT)
- Potentially a form of beautiful art that you get to carry around with you all the time, if you get one that is particularly artistic. (F/17/White/NT)
- Showing enthusiasm (F/18/NT)
- A personal experience (F/18/White/NT)
- Symbol that I made it through and keep going (F/18/White/NT)
- Too permanent (F/18/Black/NT)
- Health risk (F/18/White/NT)
- Unattractive, trashy, and disgusting (F/18/White/NT)
- Expression of beauty, freedom, and independence (F/19/Czech/Hungarian/NT)
- Something other people want (F/19/NT)
- Something unique (F/19/Black/NT)
- An interesting tradition (F/19/French-Japanese/NT)
- Symbolize something of meaning (F/19/White/NT)
- A way of disrespecting the body (F/19/Nigerian-American/NT)
- Destroys the beauty of the natural human body; you can express art other places. (F/19/White/NT)
- Painful, risky to one's health, and a personal choice (F/19/White/NT)
- Unique to each individual (F/20/Black/NT)
- Painful permanence (F/20/NT)
- Painful! (F/21/White/NT)
- A way to trash my body (F/22/White/NT)
- Cool (M/19/White/NT)
- Family (M/16/Black/NT)
- A way in which I can proclaim to be “a tough guy” (M/19/NT)
- Something that will get wrinkly (M/19/Asian-White/NT)

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