



# Tattoos & Taboos

## Tattoos needle hot debates

**Ink trend increases  
among young people,  
conflicts with religion**

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for the Index

Tattoos have evolved from deviant deeds to teasingly scandalous acts.

Tattoos are an art form no longer considered a rebellious act in back-alley parlors. In fact, tattoos are common and becoming more widely accepted at a rapid pace. Many individuals get tattoos as a coming-of-age, a rebellious move or for personal validation.

"I wanted one for a long time, and finally at 18 years old, I did it because I could," freshman Colleen Cooper said.

Some people display their body art openly while others choose to hide their tattoos under clothing or in discrete places on the body.

By 2002, one in every eight Americans was tattooed, according to Esquire Magazine's March 2002 issue.

### Meanings go beyond skin-deep

The recorded history of tattoos extends to 12th Dynasty Egypt, about 4,000 years ago, but evidence suggests that tattooing was practiced in Pre-dynastic Egypt of 4,500 B.C., according to designboom.com. The word tattoo is derived both from the Polynesian word "ta," meaning "to strike something," and the Tahitian word "tatau," meaning "to mark something," according to pwerverbs.com.

Markings on the body have many meanings for cultures around the world. People have gotten tattoos to commemorate, celebrate, for religion, hobbies, for loved ones, culture or for anything and everything.

"When you get a tattoo that has no meaning, you're only defacing your body," freshman Cory Teller said. "When you get a tattoo with a meaning, it becomes a part of you."

Teller's tattoo is an eagle he drew himself. He is an Eagle Scout, and the tattoo is a marker for him to remember what it means to be a Scout.

Senior Corey Owens has four tattoos, all of which are related and have their own significances. His first tattoo is Kokopelli, an ancient Native American deity of fertility. The second, a western bear, symbolizes strength and courage, and a heart through the middle of the bear means self-reliance. A lizard chasing its tail is Owens' third tattoo, meaning perseverance and adaptation. His final tattoo is a Honu, a Polynesian symbol for sea turtles that live to be 100 years old. The four images tie together because they all stand for strength, and all are from the mythology of various cultures, he said.

### Affirmation and Regret

Most people contemplate a tattoo for a long time before actually committing to a drawing.

"I waited nine months before getting my first tattoo," freshman Jordan Richards said. "If you want it for six months or more, then you really want it, and it's not just a phase."

Sophomore Shahr Rezaiekhaliq said it is important not only to be sure of getting a tattoo, but also of the specifics of what it will look like.

"For eighteen years, I knew I was going to get a tattoo, and for a year I shopped around for a design," she said.

However, half of Americans who have tattoos want them removed, according to a 2002 estimate by the American Society of Dermatological Surgery.

The physical experience also is something many people consider beforehand.

"The pain is unlike a pain felt before," freshman Kim Lowery said. "It's different. It hurts, [but] you get used to it. It's annoying and irritating, but then again, it is a tiny needle ripping new pores into your skin to fill with ink."

### Reconciling tattoos with religion

Although Colleen Cooper has two tattoos that have religious meaning to her, tattooing is not highly accepted in her religion.

"I'm Catholic," she said. "One tattoo is a picture of a dove in a starburst, which represents my church and the Seedbearers Project Retreat I did for 13 years. The second is a fish with my friend's initials who died in a car accident. My tattoos promote my religion because you can see they are religious and not just a random design."

However, some people take the exact opposite stance on tattoos because of religious literature like Leviticus 19:28, which reads: "Ye shall not make any cuttings on your flesh for the dead nor print any marks upon you."

Most religions view the body as a temple that should not be modified or changed because people are made in the image and likeness of their maker.

"It's not a major commandment, but it's tradition," said Sherri Palmer, professor of psychology and also a Jew. "Therefore, you won't find many Jewish people with tattoos."

Palmer said she considered getting a tattoo for a few months as a coming-of-age. However, after much discussion with her family and friends of her faith, she ultimately decided not to get a tattoo.

"In the Jewish faith, there are 613 laws, this is where tattoos and marking fall under," Palmer said. "For example, I don't eat pork, except for bacon. But if I got a tattoo, that would be permanent, and I would not be able to get rid of it. It's a broken commandment forever."

Others who were opposed to the thought of decoration on the body associate a stigma with it for reasons unrelated to religion.

"Getting a tattoo is defacing your body, and it's permanent," sophomore Ryan Kroeger said. "To cover 'you' up is tribal and primitive to put markings on your body. Some people hide it for their personal appreciation, but what's the point?"

Individuals who choose to hide tattoos after all the time and effort to get it done often do so because of professions and careers. Many still consider corporate America a straight-laced and conservative mass with a critical opinion.

But the fact remains that tattoos are a growing trend, with 36 percent of Americans 25 to 29 years old having at least one, according to a 2003 Harris Poll.

The taboo might fade, but for now, this personal choice will continue to draw debate.



Photo Illustration by Roger Meissen

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