

The Role of Religious Values: Young Christians' Opinions towards Tattoos

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Abstract

Since the 1960s tattooing has become increasingly popular in mainstream American society (Rubin, 1988; Schildkrout, 2004). Explanations for this phenomenon include expressing individuality and gaining acceptance into a subculture (Blanchard, 1991; Gagne & Orend, 2009). Although research has demonstrated that spirituality can influence tattooing practices (Caplan, 2000; Swartz, 2006), few studies explore the intersection between Christian beliefs and tattoos (Scheinfeld, 2007). My research focused on the relationship between tattooing practices and the changing values of 18 to 30 year old active Christians in Greenville, NC. For this study, an active Christian was defined as a person who participates in his or her faith community at least three times per month. A class project during a previous semester facilitated the proposal development, including a literature review of tattoos and Christianity and the design of the data collection instrument, asking questions on personal faith, Bible verse interpretations, tattoo stereotypes, tattoo symbolism, and opinions about tattoos. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview instrument which asked open-ended questions, including free-listing tasks (Bernard, 2011; Brewer, 2002). To increase comparability, all informants were recruited from the same non-denominational Christian organization in Greenville, NC (Bernard, 2011). A quota sample was employed to reflect differences by gender and preference for tattoos (Bernard, 2011). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The resulting text was coded using a grounded theory approach, logging discoveries about frequencies and co-occurrences of themes to establish similarities and differences between study participants (Bernard, 2011). A model of young Christian's beliefs and values that suggests possible reasons for the choice for or against a tattoo was discussed.

The term ‘tattoo renaissance’ was used by Rubin (1988) to express the change in the Western tattoo culture that began in the 1960s. Prior to this shift, much of Western culture associated tattoos with the deviant behavior of bikers, criminals, prisoners, circus entertainers, gang members, and sailors (Govenar, 1982; Schildkrout, 2004). The ‘tattoo renaissance’ marked the era of mainstream and customized tattoos that were beginning to be identified as art (Rubin, 1988). In recent studies, the increasing popularity of tattooing in American society has been explained by some humans’ desire through body adornment to express individuality and gain acceptance into a subculture (Blanchard, 1991; Gagne & Orend, 2009). Previous literature has compared the decisions of youth to get a tattoo to other life influences (Roberts & Ryan, 2002; Farrow et al., 1991) but few studies have explored the motivations for body adornment among young Americans that simultaneously choose to participate in Christianity (Scheinfeld, 2007). Research has demonstrated that spirituality can influence tattooing practices (Caplan, 2000; Swartz, 2006). Thus, it is important for researchers studying cultural change to consider the role of Christianity as a spiritual influence on current tattooing practices for young Americans.

The subject of body adornment is of interest to scholars of numerous backgrounds; Schilkrou (2004) provides a detailed overview of studies in anthropology and other social sciences that have given insight to inscription practices, including tattoos. The discipline of cultural anthropology is interested in understanding the perspective of the person making a choice, i.e., the emic perspective which asks “What motivated you to make this choice?” For this reason, I chose anthropological research as a means to reveal the views towards body adornment of both tattooed and non-tattooed young active-Christians who participated in a non-denominational Christian club in Greenville, NC. From exploratory research in this Christian community, I observed the frequent positive perspectives towards religiously symbolic

tattoos in this culture. My limited knowledge about the Bible encouraged me to further question this phenomenon as the practice of obtaining tattoos is a controversial subject. Similarly, Scheinfeld (2007) notes there is a “debate whether Christians are allowed to tattoo themselves” (p. 363). If religious beliefs are predictive of tattoo preferences in a small community of young active-Christians, the data obtained in this study can provide models for future researchers. One research goal of this study is to explore the views that the interviewed young active-Christians in Greenville, NC, have towards this debate.

What motivates individuals to obtain a tattoo?

From 2005 to 2007, Antoszewski, et al. (2009) distributed questionnaires in to 492 participants Lodz, Poland, to address the motivations behind their decisions to get a tattoo. The most commonly reported motivations were enhancement of one’s individuality, aesthetic value, acceptance into a subculture, and peer pressure (Antoszewski et al., 2009). The study’s results indicated that 28% of those surveyed believed having a tattoo increased their self-esteem, and 26% of the informants thought their tattoo helped in self-determination (Antoszewski et al., 2009). I adapted questions from Antoszewski, et al. (2009) study to my semi-structured interview template because the questions asked were unique in terms of the ordinal scale and informative about personal adornment motivations.

Are Tattoos Referenced in the Bible?

Both Scheinfeld (2007) and several informants in my exploratory research noted that the Bible verses Corinthians 6:19-20 and Leviticus 19:28 are commonly used by Judeo-Christian tattoo refuters to support their stance. In order to discover how the young active-Christians in my study interpret their faith, I asked both tattooed and non-tattooed informants for their interpretation of these verses. Scheinfeld (2007) further mentions several verses in the Bible that are

believed to “reference body markings in the Old and New testaments” including Exodus 13:9, Exodus 13:16, Isaiah 44:5, Isaiah 49:16, Ezekiel 9:4, Galatians 6:17, Revelations 7:2-3, and Revelations 19:16 (p. 363). Therefore, I designed my study to find out which Bible verses, if any, informants related to tattoos.

Methodology

I conducted ethnographic research with a quota sample to understand the values that can influence both tattooed and non-tattooed young active-Christians today in deciding about body adornment. Quota sampling is “stratified sampling without random selection” to compare variables within a population or “culture of interest” (Bernard, 2011, p. 144). In other words, informants in this study were selected based on a quota sample differentiated by gender and having a tattoo. In order to reduce variability of informants, all participants regularly attended Victory Campus Ministries (Bernard, 2011). Victory Campus Ministries (VCM) is a non-denominational Christian club held on the East Carolina University campus every Thursday evening. Because VCM is a college club, membership includes those from various religious backgrounds. However, their desire to be an active member in VCM, as opposed to other Christian organizations on ECU’s campus and throughout Greenville, suggests informants have found commonalities in their faith.

Members of the VCM community were able to participate in this study if they were between the ages of 18 and 30. It was required that informants participated in their faith community three or more times per month, the criterion I used to define study participants as being an active-Christian. For recruitment, I relied on referral to meet the requirements of the quota sample. Thirty-two informants were interviewed. The term ‘informant types’ will be used subsequently to describe the following four categories: females with tattoos, females without tattoos, males with tattoos, and males without tattoos. I interviewed eight VCM members for each

‘informant type.’

I created two semi-structured interview instruments: one for informants with tattoos and one for informants without tattoos. Both instruments contained open ended questions, two free listing exercises, and two rank order tasks (Bernard, 2011; Brewer, 2002). Informants were given ID numbers so that their identities would remain anonymous. To maintain their privacy, I have not included images of my informant’s tattoos to assure their identities are not revealed. The interviews were voice recorded with the participants’ permission. After the informants’ initial responses to questions regarding their faith activity, tattoo description, and tattoo likes and dislikes, I followed up with ‘probing questions’ that initiated in depth responses and increased accuracy of recall (Johnson & Weller, 2002). Additionally, following free listing exercises exploring attitudes about sin and stereotypes, I discussed each listed item with the participants to ensure my understanding of certain words or phrases (Johnson & Weller, 2002; Brewer, 2002). Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to one-hundred twenty minutes. After the interview concluded, informants were compensated with a \$10 Target gift card. The Institutional Review Board of East Carolina University approved the procedures used.

Interviews were transcribed by the online transcription site CastingWords. Transcribed texts were coded and analyzed for reoccurring and co-occurring themes using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory research is an inductive research method used to analyze qualitative data (Bernard, 2011). To elaborate, I read each interview closely and marked passages of texts with an appropriate label, such as, ‘religious tattoo.’ Using the software ATLAS.ti7, I identified frequent and coexisting themes (ATLAS.ti, 2013). Data were entered into SPSS statistics using dummy variables; themes based on the variables of gender, having a tattoo, and faith participation ranks were analyzed using cross tabulation procedures as suggested by Bernard (2011), setting an alpha level of .05

for statistical significance. Table 1 shows the demographic information of informants and faith participation which I discuss in the following section. To explain and validate the models I am presenting, I include exemplar re-quotes by informants, as suggested by Bernard (2011).

Additionally, data from the free listing exercises were entered into Anthropac to obtain salience and frequency rankings of informants' responses (Brewer, 2002; Borgatti, 1992). The measure of saliency captures both the rank of items in an individual's list as well as the frequency of the item mentioned by all informants (Bernard, 2011).

Faith Analysis: Informant Participation

During the interviews, I noticed that informants differed in the number of times they participated on a weekly basis in religious activities. These activities included service to others, attending church, fellowship with other VCM members, spreading the gospel to others, and individual or group worship, prayer, and Bible study. Based on an informants' regularity of participation, I categorized informants as high or low frequency participants. The number of religious activities per week informants participated in ranged from 2 to 26. Compilation of the data revealed that informants mentioned they participated in either 10 or fewer or 16 or more activities per week. This determined the definition of high frequency participants as those who participated 16 or more times and low frequency participants as those who participated in 10 or less religious activities per week. High frequency participants actively worshiped God an average of 19 times per week while low frequency participants actively worshiped God an average of seven times per week. I found no significant correlation between frequency of participation and being tattooed ($\chi^2=0.582$, $p=0.446$). It is important to note that classifying informants as a "high" or "low" frequency participant is based solely on self-reported activities related to a choice to actively attend a religious service or activity. The faith

<i>Demographic Information (total N=32).</i>				
	Females (n=16)		Males (n=16)	
	Faith Participation		Faith Participation	
	High	Low	High	Low
Tattoos	5	3	5	3
No Tattoos	7	1	5	3

Table 1

participation of informants as a function of gender and being tattooed is located in Table 1.

Faith Analysis: Defining a Sin

As previously stated, the subject of tattoos in the Christianity community is controversial (Scheinfeld, 2007). The question of whether tattoos are a sin is also a point of debate. To gain a better perspective of the actions informants associated with sinning, I asked informants to define a sin. A compilation of definitions offered by study participants suggests a sin is anything that is put above God or anything that displeases him. Whether it is a physical object or an emotion, the thing that is put above God is termed an 'idol.' Idolatry is a sin that may lead to other sinful acts; it is referred to as a 'root sin.' As described by informants, even though someone may think certain idols are positive, such as family and friends, the number one focus in his or her life should be God. Informants described that when God is the center of their lives, other life concerns, such as their grades or financial situation, will fall into place.

Participants were asked to complete a free listing exercise of any activities, actions, or anything else they considered to be a sin. Only one female informant without a tattoo stated that she believed tattoos were sinful. However, no informants specifically listed tattoos to be a sin in the free listing exercise. Figure 1 represents the relations between the top ten sins mentioned in the free listing exercise by overall salience score. To reiterate, saliency encompasses both the rank of a term in an informant's list as well as the frequency of the term mentioned by all informants (Bernard, 2011). Therefore, a high salience score signifies a term that was mentioned

early and frequently in the free listing exercise by informants.

When comparing the salience score of terms for tattooed informants to non-tattooed informants, the top seven terms were identical: lying, stealing, sexual immorality, murder, lust, idolatry, and cheating. It is interesting that all of these terms relate largely to the

Denying God was in the top ten frequencies of all informant types, suggesting that the young active-Christians in the current study aimed to serve and glorify God through their actions. Although informants strove to glorify God, the informants also stressed that Christians are not perfect because only God is perfect. However, as long as they repent

Web of Top 10 Sins by Salience Rank

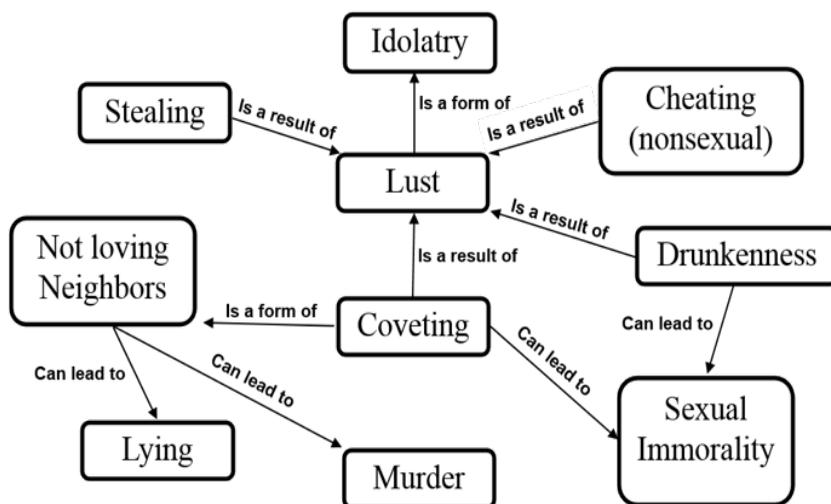


Figure 1. Web of top ten sins noted by study participants.

Ten Commandments of the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1-17 King James Version). The Ten Commandments of the Old Testament directly state that one should not lie, cheat, or steal. Additionally, it says ‘thou shalt have no other gods’ which refers to the root sin of idolatry. The Ten Commandments also specify that a believer should not kill or commit murder. To continue, sexual immorality encompasses adultery, which is an action the Ten Commandments forbid. Similarly, lust is the root sin that may lead to an adulterous act; it, too, is specified in the Ten Commandments.

Denying God was the eighth most frequently listed sin by all informants. One may deny God by not being obedient to prompting by him, not giving him all life, not worshipping him, or worshipping other gods.

their sins, they are forgiven by God. One tattooed female with a high frequency faith participation noted, “*God is so holy, perfect, and righteous. He is so good. We are so sinful. There is a huge gap between us... He’s more than enough to forgive anything, no matter what you’ve done. [God will] set you free from your past and bring you into this whole new identity.*”

The most frequently listed sin by all subgroups of informants was sexual immorality. Informants described this term to encompass acts that include prostitution, incest, masturbation, fornication, pre-marital sex, pornography, adultery, and homosexuality. However, an informant’s choice of obtaining a tattoo or not showed no statistically significant correlation with sexual activity, even among those who admitted engaging in pre-marital sex within six months of the interview (chi

square=6.476, $p=0.166$). Not all informants abstained from sex their whole lives, but the majority of them practiced abstinence once they found God. For example, one female tattooed, high frequency faith participant noted, *"I would drink and be sexually active in high school before I started living for the Lord."*

Faith Analysis: Bible Verse Interpretations

I discovered during my exploratory and literature research that both Corinthians 6: 19-20 and Leviticus 19:28 are verses some Christians believe indicate that tattoos are sinful (Scheinfeld, 2007). Therefore, I asked informants for their personal interpretation of each verse to discover if they believed it was associated with the practice of tattooing. Corinthians 6:19-20 states, *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"* (King James Version).

In response to Corinthians 6: 19-20, I found that informants with a higher faith ranking were more likely to mention its correlation with sexual immorality (Pearson's chi square=4.693, $p=0.030$). In addition, those interviewees who did not have a tattoo were more likely to state that they should glorify God with their bodies (chi square=4.50, $p=0.034$). An example comment from a non-tattooed female, high frequency faith participant highlights this belief, *"He [God] saved our souls and he made our spirit come alive, but it's not like we can honor God with our spirits and our souls and not our bodies as well. I think that our bodies go hand in hand with honoring God."* One interpretation of this relation is that informants without a tattoo aim to glorify God by keeping their bodies healthy and away from drugs, sexual immorality, and even body adornment. Again, a quote from an informant describes this interpretation: *"The way you use your body, the way you portray your body, in whatever manner you do that...glorify him [God] with your body, the best you can. You can do that*

through your actions, the way you dress, the way you reflect in your mirror, the way people see you" (Male without tattoos, low frequency faith participation).

Leviticus 19:28 states, *"Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD"* (King James Version). When interpreting Leviticus, those participants who had a tattoo were more likely to mention that the context of this specific verse was very important for the correct interpretation (chi square=4.571, $p= 0.033$). This is likely because those who had tattoos were more often confronted by tattoo refuters with this verse. A female non-tattooed, high frequency faith participant illustrates this point, *"You can't really take a verse out and interpret it without first interpreting who said that. Was it God? Was it someone speaking? Was it God speaking through someone? Who were they speaking to? Was it cultural context? Who are the people?"* In addition, more than one-third of informants claimed that in Leviticus, God was trying to distinguish his followers from those who were engaging in pagan rituals to worship the dead. Additionally, slightly less than half mentioned that today they are not *"under the laws of the Old Testament."* The following quote by a non-tattooed male low frequency faith participant describes this belief: *"Well, I think you have to have a historical sense of the Old Testament, a little bit. You read anything out of Leviticus or anything Old Testament that's under Moses' Law; that was written for a specific time in the Israelite history. A lot of pagan worship was going on in that time; nothing had been redeemed in that time. God gave some very strict rules: this is how I want you to live, if you're going to be my people, I got to set you on the right path. Down that road, I can redeem the entire world out of this little nation. I definitely see that in Leviticus as well as a number of other laws in the Old Testament... You can't really single out a single thing and say that it was meant for eternity, along the course of human history."*

The Bible verse Revelations 19:16, which

states, “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords,” was quoted by seven informants who considered it as a reference to tattoos. Interestingly, there was no statistically significant relation between tattooed informants and referencing this Bible verse (Pearson’s chi square= 0.183, p=0.669). The verse was mentioned by both tattooed and non-tattooed informants.

Tattoo Stereotypes: A Religious Perspective

Informants were asked to complete a free listing task about the social stigmas they had heard in association with tattoos. They were given three minutes to write all of the positive and negative stereotypes they could recall. We then discussed which of these opinions they personally had and which stereotypes they heard from others. The tattoo stereotypes that are associated with religious principles are provided in Table 2 reflecting salience scores ranks that indicate the importance of a particular term by informant type. Importance, or salience score ranking, is captured by computing the order in which terms were mentioned and the frequency of terms across informants.

Data from the salience scores in Table 2 indicate the belief that tattoos are sinful was the number one stereotype from the informant type “Females without tattoos.” Although the stereotypes listed were not necessarily personal stereotypes, the fact that these women

the top 20 salience scores for this group of informants. The fact that this group less commonly heard the stereotype that tattoos are sinful did not inhibit their choice to obtain a tattoo.

The idea that tattoos are ‘Christian’ was recalled quickly and frequently by the males without tattoos, even more so than the males and females with tattoos. All informant types except “Females without Tattoos” noted that tattoos can be viewed as Christian. The fact that VCM offers gender based ‘connect groups’ may be an explanation. Male church members without tattoos could have observed multiple religious tattoos on other men because the majority of the male members in VCM who do have tattoos have been “inked” with religiously symbolic images or phrases. To elaborate, five of the eight tattooed males I interviewed had four or more tattoos, and most of those tattoos featured a religious motif. The fact that men without tattoos commonly see the tattooed males with apparent religious symbolism may explain why Christian was a more ‘important’ tattoo stereotype based on salience scores. In contrast, women without tattoos more often socialize with other VCM women. The tattooed women they interact with tend to wear tattoos at less visible locations on their bodies. In other words, six of the eight tattooed females in the sample have one or two tattoos, usually small in size and often in a location that is covered by clothing. Therefore, women

Table 2.
Salience Score Rankings, i.e. Evaluation of Importance of Religious Stereotypes Listed by Informant Type

Stereotype of interest	Females without Tattoos (n=8)	Males without Tattoos (n=8)	Females with Tattoos (n=8)	Males with Tattoos (n=8)	All informants (N=32)
Sinful	1	19	17	NA	13
Non-Christian	NA	NA	10	18	16
Christian	NA	5	16	14	12

Note. NA: not ranked in top 20 salience scores

frequently heard from others that tattoos are sinful may have been a reason for not obtaining a tattoo. The stereotype that tattoos are sinful was seldom mentioned by male informants with tattoos and didn’t register among

without tattoos have fewer opportunities to observe religious tattoos on other women. This may explain why the idea that tattoos are ‘Christian’ was not frequently recalled by women without tattoos during the free listing

exercise.

The importance of the tattoo stereotype 'non-Christian' was highest for the "Females with tattoos." This could illuminate why their tattoos are commonly small or hidden; they do not want their elders to think they have less faith in God for obtaining a tattoo. In the majority of cases, the negative stereotypes that were listed, including 'non-Christian' and 'sinful,' were not the personal views of the informant. Instead, it was mentioned that they heard this from their parents or grandparents. Correspondingly, several informants commented that in contemporary US culture, tattoos are often considered trendy and are becoming more accepted. Further research with a larger sample of varying ages would be useful.

Views of Tattoos in VCM

Tattooed informants collectively defined a symbol to be a representation with a deeper meaning. All tattooed informants identified their tattoos to be symbolic. Only one male informant stated one of his tattoos, which he described as a 'novelty tattoo,' had no symbolism. Moreover, all but two tattooed informants had a religious tattoo. In both cases, the choice to obtain a tattoo was made prior to coming into their faith.

When non-tattooed informants were asked about the positive aspects of tattoos, less than one-fifth mentioned the religious based ideas that religious tattoos can spread the gospel or can be a way to worship God. More commonly, non-tattooed informants identified tattoos as expressive, symbolic, and creative (8, 6, and 5 non-tattooed informants, respectively). A non-tattooed female with a high frequency faith participant describes this sentiment, "*I do think they're good conversation starters. It [religious tattoos] can open doors for the world that we live in, where there is a lot of anti God... and for believers, I think it can be a good witnessing tool.*"

Half of the informants who did not have a tattoo said they hadn't gotten one because tattoos were too permanent. Likewise, seven non-tattooed informants discussed that their

opinions are constantly changing. A non-tattooed female expressed this opinion: "*I think because it's permanent as well... in the way my personality is, I don't like that. I like control. I don't like that idea. I've noticed even in the last five years, my face, my preferences, [and] the way I think has changed so much.*"

When I asked the questions that were adapted from Antoszewski, et al.'s (2009) study to assess motivations for getting a tattoo, half of all VCM informants agreed that tattoos increase self-esteem and 15 said tattoos help in self-determination. This suggests that tattoos were viewed by these young active-Christians as a means to find and feel good about themselves. Specifically, those who were 21 or 22 years of age agreed that tattoos can help with self-determination (chi square=10.945, $p=0.027$). Tattooed informants more commonly fell within this age range (chi square=7.111, $p=0.029$). This indicates that the active-Christians in the study, ages 21 and 22, were more inclined than the younger and older participants to view tattoos as a means for expression and individuality and therefore actually obtained a tattoo.

When informants were asked about the specific tattoo symbols they liked, two thirds stated they liked tattoos with a religious motif, and more than one-third described that they liked tattoos with meanings that relate to that person's life. Participants disliked tattoos that featured images described as satanic (44%), meaningless (19%), against God (16%), and provocative (14%). Examples provided by informants of these tattoo descriptions were the devil, cartoon characters, upside down pentagrams, and naked women, or curse words respectively. Tattoos that were satanic, against God, and provocative were most probably disliked because they can be related to the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality. Women with tattoos were more likely than other informant types to comment that they disliked tattoos that convey an association that spoke against God (chi square= 10.193, $p=0.017$). One quote from a non-tattooed female high frequency faith participant shows that VCM informants found high importance

in tattoos that glorify God and have personal meaning to the wearer: *"I want to make sure that it [a potential tattoo] is really meaningful... I want it to relate to Jesus for sure."*

Discussion

The majority of the young active-Christians interviewed, regardless of personal body adornment practices, voiced their opinion that tattoos are not sinful and are commonly used as a way to express one's faith. As expressed by several non-tattooed and tattooed informants, if a tattoo carries a religious message, it has the ability to spread the gospel and glorify God. Interviewed members of the VCM community most frequently liked tattoos that were religious and meaningful while simultaneously disliked tattoos that were satanic. It is apparent that the young active-Christians in this sample found it important for tattoos to have significant symbolism that did not displease God.

Approximately half of all informants agreed that tattoos help to improve one's self-esteem and in 'self-determination.' It may be that, for the informants, tattoos are identified as a marking to specifically symbolize the beliefs and values of the wearer. All but two tattooed informants obtained tattoos with a religious motif, which corresponded to their life values. Similar to the conclusion by Sweetman (1999) that tattoo meanings are not constant, these two informants later gave their tattoos a religious meaning when they became more involved in their faith.

The choice to obtain a tattoo was not indicative of faith participation in this sample. The informants with religious tattoos were not necessarily more frequent participants in their faith than non-tattooed VCM members. However, informants with religiously themed tattoos explained that they chose particular motifs to serve as a permanent reminder and expression of their faith.

It seems that for the informants, obtaining a religious tattoo was more indicative of individualism rather than an association to the subculture of Christianity. The fact that informants chose unique and creative tattoos

to symbolize their faith implies tattooing was a form of individual expression, similar to the tattooed informants in Sweetman's study (1999). Furthermore, for some, religious tattoos in American culture have become a sort of fad despite a lack of participation in church or similar religious events. This suggests that it is difficult to identify someone's religious beliefs or behavior based on a tattoo. Several informants commented that this phenomenon could be considered disrespectful toward Jesus, and that a person who wears a religious tattoo but does not have strong faith in that religion may misrepresent Christians. One tattooed female noted: *"Lot of people don't follow Christ at all, but will get a tattoo of a cross. It's almost like crosses are a trendy thing now. They really are. If you look in fashion...it's always cross earrings, cross shirts, dresses with crosses on them. It's crazy. It's the people who don't know Jesus at all, don't identify with Christianity like to wear crosses. It's a fashion statement. It's pretty crazy to me, because... the cross was the most morbid way to die, back in the Roman Empire. It was horrifying. That's why Jesus died on a cross, because they want[ed] him to die the most painful death that you could imagine... it's almost offensive when people are downtown, partying it up and not thinking about Jesus at all, but wearing crosses."*

Data based on informants' interpretations of Corinthians 6:19-20 suggest that higher frequency of participation in their faith has led to a greater understanding of scriptures in context. Through exploratory research, I learned that those who refute tattoos often defend their stance with the verse of Leviticus 19:28 stating "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD." However, study informants mentioned a belief that this verse is actually a reference to pagan rituals that were occurring at the time and are not binding for Christians today. Informants who chose to obtain a tattoo frequently mentioned that Christians must look at the context of the verse in order to understand its correct

interpretation. Furthermore, several informants mentioned that Revelations 19:16 may indicate the presence of tattoo practices in scripture. The verse in Revelations, and several others, were mentioned by Scheinfeld (2007) as evidence of “body markings in the Old and New Testaments” (363). This implies this group of young-Christians tended to look deeper into scripture to discover its meaning for themselves rather than accepting the authority of Christians from previous generations.

Only one young active-Christian that I interviewed interpreted tattoos as sinful. Hence, for the individuals in this study, I rejected the hypothesis that those who have chosen to not obtain a tattoo have refrained for reasons related to their faith. Instead, the most frequently mentioned reason non-tattooed

informants listed for not obtaining one was that they were uncomfortable with the permanence of a tattoo.

Within a societal context, it is likely that some negative stereotypes towards tattoos are expressed by older generations; some of the informants in this study mentioned they heard these negative social stigmas from their parents and grandparents. The belief that tattoos are considered sinful by others emerged as the descriptor with the highest salience score among women without tattoos. This might indicate that these young women decided not to obtain tattoos to avoid judgment about their level of faith. Similar studies researching views towards tattoos by age and Christian denomination could be conducted to study this further.

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