

The Role of Tattoos in Body Image

Magali Escobedo^{1,2}, Xin Du³, Joelle Soulard³, Toni Liechty³

¹Department of Health and Kinesiology, ²Student Aging Researchers in Training, ³Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism

Introduction

- Poor body image is a prevalent public health concern with 80% of Americans having grappled with negative body attitudes (Within Health, 2022).
- Limited research exists about the role of tattoo collecting in body image, with only some research correlating body image and tattoos.

Aim

- The purpose of this study was to explore the role of tattoos in body image among tattoo collectors.

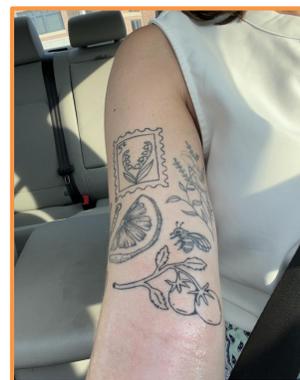
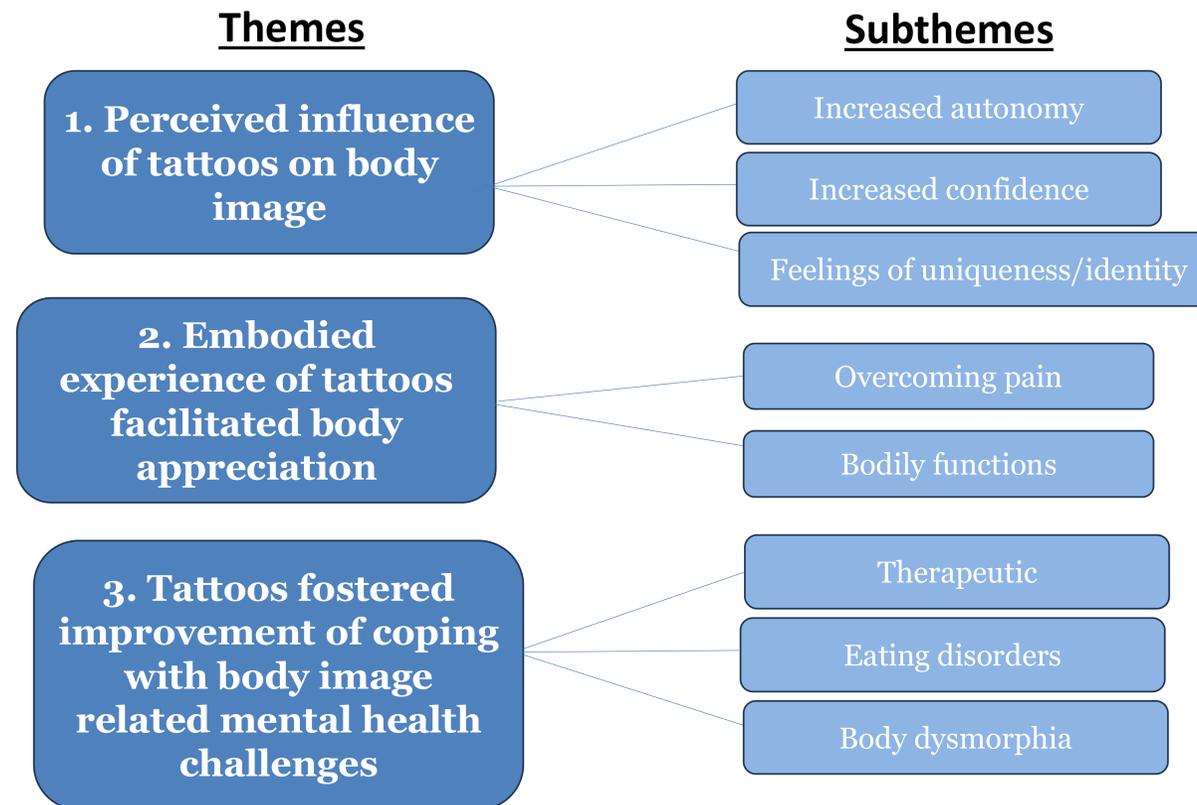
Methods

- 40 participants with tattoos from around the U.S. of varying occupations ranging from 21-68 years old recruited using User Interviews platform.
- Qualitative data collection involving photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews.
- Interviews were digitally-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

Participant Demographic Data

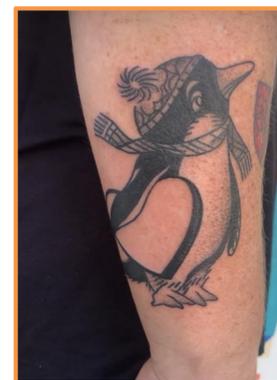
Category	Information M (SD) or N (%)
Age	39.7 (11.1)
Gender	
Woman	26 (65%)
Man	14 (35%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	27 (67.5%)
Black or African American	5 (12.5%)
Hispanic or Latino	4 (10%)
White/Black	1 (2.5%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1 (2.5%)
White/American Indian	1 (2.5%)
Mixed Race Asian	1 (2.5%)
Level of Education	
High school diploma	3 (7.5%)
Some college	11 (27.5%)
Undergraduate degree	17 (42.5%)
Postgraduate degree	9 (22.5%)
Number of Tattoos	
<10	22 (55%)
10-20	8 (20%)
21-40	3 (7.5%)
>40	7 (17.5%)

Findings



Theme 1

Participant Quote: “I think I feel more like myself with them. You know, I feel like I’m kind of being able to like take ownership of my body by choosing like the things I’m putting on it ... I would say I have better body image now.”



Theme 2

Participant Quote: “You know like just knowing like that’s something that I can do. That’s something that I can endure like it makes me really appreciate my body.”



Theme 3

Participant Quote: “I literally was still kind of getting over from the car accident and everything ... I still have the scars on my arms. I was in a really depressed state when I started getting all these tattoos, because this was like therapy for me.”

Discussion

- Supports existing literature about the potential for tattoos to improve body attitudes.
- Expands on existing literature by connecting promotion of body autonomy involved in tattoo collecting to positive body image.
- Guiding theory of this study is Objectification Theory, which suggests that individuals are socialized to self-objectify by viewing their bodies from the perspective of an outsider and to assess their body’s worth based on its aesthetic/sexual value to others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).
- Objectification theory has not been studied in relation to tattoos in existing literature. Findings highlight tattoo collecting as a way for individuals to move away from self-objectification and toward viewing the body as serving the self.

Conclusion

- Practical implications include moving toward the destigmatization of tattoos in society, reduced researcher bias, and opportunities for public health intervention.
- 32% of American have tattoos (Schaeffer & Dinesh, 2023), while traditionally stigmatized, findings suggest a positive role in improving body image, appreciation, and general confidence.
- Potential for study to inform future social media public health campaigns in promoting positive body image through tattoo collecting.

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