

College Students Perceptions of Tattoos and Body Piercings.

Nicole Landry
Soc. 601
May 12, 2008
Professor Moran

Abstract

This study examines the perceptions of college aged students in regards to tattoos and body piercings. I was able to determine that college aged student have relatively open minds in regard to others personal behaviors as well as men's reluctance to answer questions regarding other males attractiveness.

Introduction

As society changes around us, our perceptions of others must as well, but how quickly? When do we become set in our ways, or are we always able to alter our thoughts and perceptions of others? This study focuses on the attitudes of college students toward tattoos and body piercings, by examining the way college student perceive others of the same and opposite sex with tattoos or body piercings. The study of this demographics' perceptions is important in all aspects of society, thus it is of sociological relevance to be concerned with and following the attitudes of this demographic to learn what this demographic finds acceptable and unacceptable in society, especially between the sexes.

Lit Review

The research in this study was primarily modeled after the study done by Grief et al.; *Tattoos and Body Piercing: Body Art Practices Among College Students*. In this study, college students across the country were surveyed regarding their body art practices. Demographics such as age, race, sex, year in school, achievement in school and sexual orientation were all asked. I was less concerned in my study about all of the demographics however, I did want to include some as to gauge acceptance of tattoos and body piercings as this was my main research question. I was led to a possibility of tattoos and body piercings as a deviant behavior. I was drawn to this conclusion due to several

of my results. I was able to find a quote by Ceasar Rebellon, in *Justice Quarterly*, in which he states; “Of particular importance, results suggest that delinquency does not appear to increase dating by increasing the delinquent's desire for dates. Instead, they suggest that delinquency increases dating outcomes by making the delinquent more attractive to prospective mates. This finding supports evolutionary psychology's implicit prediction that adolescents may, knowingly or *unknowingly* (see Berry & Broadbent, 1984; Claxton, 1999; Lewicki et al., 1992; Massey, 2002), perceive delinquency as one type of risk-taking behavior that reflects such qualities as nerve, daring, and bravado. From an evolutionary perspective, such qualities may be highly beneficial to a prospective mate's social status, physical well-being, and/or genetic Lineage. (Rebellon and Manasse. 2004) In this passage, the author implies that risk taking behaviors have been shown to attract prospective mates. For all intents and purposes, tattoos and body piercings can and should be considered risk-taking behaviors.

Methods

I hypothesized sex and perceptions of tattoos and body piercings would be positively correlated, and that college students would be liberal in their beliefs and perceptions of tattoos and body piercings. My null hypothesis was that there would not be any correlation in the sex of the participant and his or her perception of tattoos or body piercings. My alternative hypotheses are that men will be less accepting of tattoos and body piercings in general, and that college students will be more conservative than I had anticipated.

To gain as broad of a sample as possible, I used random sampling. I randomly sampled 222 students in three general education classes on the University of New

Hampshire; Durham campus. To do so, I made a list of all the general education classes, cut them apart and put them in a hat. I selected nine of them at random. I then contacted each professor whose name I drew by e-mail. Of the nine classes, I was able to survey three of them. I used the survey to gain the most possible information with a limited amount of time and resources. The students in these classes were given a survey at the beginning of the class to complete and anonymously place in a box in the front of the classroom. Each survey consisted of 31 questions regarding their beliefs about tattoos, body piercings and their demographics using the Likert scale, yes or no questions and “circle the best answer” questions in regard to the demographic questions such as sex and class. After I received all of the surveys from the three classes, each survey was numbered and entered in STATA for quantitative analysis. T-tests and Chi Square tests were run for data analysis.

My sample consisted of a split between males (n=106) and females (n=112), with a majority of freshman (n=104) followed by sophomores (n=63), juniors (n=29), and seniors as the minority (n=22). The prior result was surprisingly consistent with the University of New Hampshire; Durham campus’s overall undergraduate population, which has a 56.35% female population, and a 43.65% male population. The population in my study consisted of 51.38% female and 48.62% male. I was not surprised however, at the larger amount of freshmen in these classes, as this is consistent with many general education classes.

The dependent variables in the study were multiple, however consisted mainly of students’ general acceptance of tattoos or body piercings on both sexes, exposure of tattoos and body piercings on both sexes by both sexes, and tolerance of tattoos and body

piercings at the workplace or in public on both sexes, by both sexes. My independent variables were sex and class. I felt that classifying my variables in this way would allow for greater ease of analysis.

Although I had spent quite some time on the design of my survey, and the questions that I felt were important to my research question, it wasn't until I received all of my completed surveys and began to enter them into STATA, that I realized how many more in depth questions I should have asked, hindsight is always 20/20 I suppose. I would have liked to gather more data on the size and location of the tattoo or body piercing. I would also have liked to gather data on what the tattoo or body piercing was, and also why the respondent had that particular form of body art done.

Results

I input my raw data into STATA, so that I could use quantitative analysis to obtain my results. After running two-sampled t-tests and ANOVAs I was able to determine that there was no significance in either sexes perceptions of women with tattoos or body modifications, however there was a significant difference in the perceptions of men with tattoos and body piercings between the sexes (Tables 1 & 2). The two-sampled t-test was constructed using a simple formula.

Table 1

t-test by sex (mtatscale)						
Two-sample t test with equal variances						
Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Male	88	5.215909	.1394579	1.308231	4.938721	5.493097
Female	111	5.900901	.1486797	1.566438	5.606253	6.195549
combined	199	5.59799	.1058944	1.493824	5.389164	5.806816

diff	-.6849918	.2081124	-1.095406	-.2745778

diff = mean(Male) - mean(Female)			t =	-3.2915
Ho: diff = 0			degrees of freedom =	197
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.0006		Pr(T > t) = 0.0012		Pr(T > t) = 0.9994

Table 2

t-test by sex (mbpscale)						
Two-sample t test with equal variances						
Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Male	86	4.639535	.1710295	1.586063	4.299482	4.979587
Female	109	5.293578	.1521746	1.58875	4.991942	5.595214
combined	195	5.005128	.1157667	1.616594	4.776805	5.233451

diff		-.6540431	.2289744		-1.105656	-.2024297

diff = mean(Male) - mean(Female)					t =	-2.8564
Ho: diff = 0					degrees of freedom =	193
Ha: diff < 0			Ha: diff != 0			Ha: diff > 0
Pr(T < t) = 0.0024			Pr(T > t) = 0.0048			Pr(T > t) = 0.9976

The “mtatscale” was made by adding “mycontat” (representing that men should conceal tattoos in public), “mntatattrac” (representing that men with tattoos are not attractive) with the reverse scoring of “mytatattrac” (representing that men with tattoos are attractive). The “mbpscale” was made by adding “myconbp” (representing that men should conceal body piercings in public), “mnbpatattrac” (representing that men with body piercings are not attractive; and the reverse scoring of “mybpatattrac” (representing that men with body piercings are attractive). These formulas and tests show that women are significantly more likely to be accepting of men with tattoos and of men with body piercings than men are in either case. This may be due to several causes, one such case

may be due to the fact that for whatever reason, men were significantly more likely to leave the questions about the attractiveness of men with tattoos and the questions about the attractiveness of men with body piercings blank, while the majority of women responded to all questions regardless of the sex referred to in the question. The question referring to men with tattoos being attractive was missing 11 responses; of those 11, 10 or 9.4% were male respondents. The question referring to men with tattoos being not attractive was missing 17 responses, all of which were male respondents which is 6.6%. The response rate was nearly equal to the questions referring to men with body piercings. The question asking if men with body piercings are attractive was missing 10 responses or 9.4% were all males, while the question that asked if men with body piercings were unattractive was missing 17 responses, 16 or 15.1% of which were males. There were a total of 106 male respondents and 10-15 percent of them did not answer the previous questions. The other possible cause of this significant outcome may be due in part to the old adage “good girls like bad boys.” Regardless, of which cause is responsible, there still shows a significant difference in the responses of the sexes in their perceptions of males with tattoos and with body piercings.

I was unable to determine with statistical results whether college students were in fact liberal or conservative when it came to their acceptance of tattoos or body piercings, however, I was able to determine that of 219 respondents, 218 either strongly agreed or agreed that a person has the right to do whatever he or she wanted to their own bodies, which I believe is a positive outcome.

Discussion

The major findings of my study were that women were significantly more accepting of tattoos as well as body piercings on men than other men were. I was able to infer that college students were accepting in general of other student's choices. The findings of my study suggest that either men are just unwilling to answer questions about other men's attractiveness, or the old adage truly is correct. I have learned that my research question, although I thought it was thorough enough, was in fact not. I should have made it much more in depth. I could have also improved my findings by adding more questions in my survey as well as changing the wording of several of them. I feel as though I had many shortcomings to my study. The lack of time would be the biggest one. I also feel that the lack of variety of classes surveyed is also a large factor for the weakness of my study. I suggest for further research that the researchers expand their research to multiple areas, as to broaden their variety of participants and thus broadening the amount of responses.

References

- Greif, Judith, Walter Hewitt and Myrna L. Armstrong. (1998) Tattooing and Body Piercing: Body Art Practices among College Students. *Clinical Nursing Research*. 8:368-385
- Rebllon, Ceasar and Michelle Manasse. (2004) Do "Bad Boys" Really Get the Girls? Delinquency as a Cause and Consequence of Dating Behavior Among Adolescents. *Justice Quarterly*. 21:355-389