

ABSTRACT

TATTOOING AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIOR: THEIR RELATIONSHIP AND CORRELATIONS TO SELF-ESTEEM, ANXIETY, BODY INVESTMENT, AND DEPRESSION

Why are tattoos becoming more prevalent in our society? One suggestion has been that tattooing is one form of self-injurious behavior—including “cutting”—which is also becoming more prevalent in general. But there have been few empirical studies that address this issue. For this reason, a study was conducted in which participants filled out surveys relating to tattoos, self-injury, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and body investment. The surveys were conducted at two different tattoo conventions. Correlations among the variables were examined to see whether (a) tattoos and self-injury are correlated and (b) whether tattoos and self-injury are related to the other variables in similar ways.

Although tattoos and self-injury were positively correlated, tattoos and self-injury were related in different ways to the other variables. Across all participants, tattoos were not correlated with any of the other variables, but self-injury was correlated with all of them. There were also important sex differences. Tattoos and self-injury were correlated only for men, tattoos and anxiety were correlated only for women, and the strong pattern of correlations between self-injury and the other variables was apparent only for women. This is inconsistent with the idea that tattoos are a form of self-injurious behavior. They also raise questions about sex differences in the tattoos and the psychological functions they serve.

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