



# Self-Authorship and Meaning Making Through Tattoos

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## Research Questions

- How do students make meaning of the external and internal messages they receive about tattoos?
- To what extent do students describe getting a tattoo as connected to their identity development?

## Methods

- A chain-sampling method was used to attract tattooed participants who then took part in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were then coded for common themes amongst the participants.

## Participant Information

- 6 tattooed students from the University of Dayton participated in this study.

Gender	Gender	Tattoos
Eve	Female	4
Katie	Female	11
Brenna	Female	3
Jordan	Non-Binary	5
Angelo	Male	2
Clark	Male	2

## Themes

- **Negative messages from family/faith traditions**
  - Generational differences
  - Differences in interpretation
- **Rebellion to claim individuality**
- **A “coming out” process for tattoos which presses against societal norms**
  - Family disapproval/shunning
- **Linked to a major life event(s)**
  - Stories/chapters in their lives
- **Nonverbal form of self-expression**
  - Fear of a loss of self
- **Deliberate choice to go through process**
- **Sense of belonging to tattoo subculture**

## Limitations

- The questions in the study were focused more on intrapersonal identity development rather than interpersonal identity development.
- Being at a religious institution may have skewed results about receiving messages from faith traditions.
- Attending a PWI gives limited access to different races and cultures, which could give different results.
- Number of students who participated.

## Conclusions

- There is a pattern of receiving external messages that leads to an internal conflict.
  - This forces the student to respond and identify behavioral changes.
- Tattoos are very much so related to most students intrapersonal identity. There is also a link between interpersonal identity and tattoos as well.
  - Acts of healing vs. acts of aggression.

## Future Implications

- A better understanding of tattooed students and their identity formation.
- Student Affairs professionals can help deconstruct negative social stigmas attached to tattoos through education.
- This sort of identity formation could be relevant to other forms of body modifications as well.