

02nd – 05th

SEPTEMBER

International Business Conference

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



International Islands of
Seychelles

L BERGH

UFS Business School, University of the Free State,
P.O. Box 339,
Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa

Tel: 27 51 4013233
Fax: 27 51 401 3195

e-mail BerghL@ufs.ac.za

E LOMBARD

Communication Science, University of the Free State,
P.O. Box 339,
Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa

Tel: 27 51 401 9350
Fax: 27 51 401 3195

e-mail: LombardE@ufs.ac.za

J VAN ZYL

Business Management, University of the Free State,
P.O. Box 339,
Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa

Tel: 27 51 4012286
Fax: 27 51 401 3195,

e-mail vanZylJH@ufs.ac.za

TATTOOING AS PERSONAL BRANDING: COMMERCIALIZATION OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION?

ABSTRACT

This article considers tattooing as personal branding based on a research project that was undertaken to determine both the scope and communicative value of tattoos among students of the University of the Free State (UFS). The project, in turn, followed on international research in this respect to establish the situation in South Africa.

The owner of the tattoo shop on the UFS campus was interviewed, and clients of the tattoo shop as well as undergraduate communication science students, a larger random group and a group of young working adults of the same age completed a questionnaire anonymously in view of a pilot study.

The findings of the analysis are evaluated in terms of both incremental and entity theories, against the background of a brief history of tattoos as a means of expressing identity. This study contributes to understandings of the role tattoos play in expressing identity in the form of personal branding.

Key words: implicit self-theories; nonverbal communication; personal branding; tattoos

INTRODUCTION

"The core of innovation is not creating something new—it's looking at old resources in new ways." — Myles Munroe (quoted in Slabber, 2011)

In what ways do the past inform current practices regarding tattooing among students? In what ways are aspects of the present, past and future intertwined in the application of this language? In what ways do the current uses of this ancient language reflect the rich diversity and complexity of languages in South Africa and the challenges of our changing world, and the effects that these have on the dynamics of organisations and subcultures?

This article is based on a research project that was undertaken to determine both the scope and communicative value of tattoos among students of the University of the Free State. The project followed on international research in this respect to establish the situation in South Africa. For Fisher, in 2002, American tattooing remained on the margins of society and could be perceived as part of a deviant subculture and "not a topic of serious intellectual interest" (2002:91). In 2007, Aguilar, in contrast, predicted that with the increase in tattoos by celebrity and professional sports heroes, the trend in tattoo communication and the whole idea of tattoos will continue to permeate societies throughout the world and "may soon be the dominant ideology" (2007:19).

At present there is a renewal in the popularity of tattoos, also on the campus of the University of the Free State. Celebrities and sport stars show theirs off and reality programmes such as Tattoo Hunter, LA Ink, New York Ink and Miami Ink are popular. In general, young people follow trends, copy celebrities and are influenced by images in the popular media.

This article presents a branding framework of analysis with reference to the findings and an analysis of a preliminary study (Bergh & Lombard 2012; 2013) in light of a brief history of tattoos and the current research as well as social and business contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical overview of tattoos in relation to branding

The history of tattoos began all over the world over 5 000 years ago and is as diverse as the people who wear them. Tattoos are created by inserting coloured materials beneath the skin's surface. The word *tattoo* is said to have two major derivations – from the Polynesian word

'ta' which means striking something, and the Tahitian word 'tatau', which means to mark something (Anon. 2010; DeMello 2000).

Although the word *tattoo* did not emerge until James Cook's voyage to Polynesia in the 18th century, the practice of indelibly inking the body can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and their contemporaries (Fisher 2002:92). Jones (2000 in Fisher 2002:92) posits that the Greek word *stigma(ta)* actually indicated tattooing and that evidence suggest that this word was then transmitted to the Romans. Jones (2000 in Fisher 2002:104) argues that although *stigma(ta)* is often read as the equivalent of 'brand', the practice of branding humans was almost unknown to the Greeks and Romans.

Jones (2000 in Fisher 2002:104) further emphasises that "animal-branding was universal, and is virtually never designated by the word stigma but by a word denoting a burn or a stamp".

Jones (2000 in Fisher 2002:92) suggests that the Greeks were not the first to tattoo, though, for "cultures which were familiar to the ancient Greeks practised what we would call tattooing ... Tattooing in its social aspect, whether as a mark of high status or as pure decoration, the Greeks associated with 'barbarians' of the uncivilised kind, and never adopted it".

The way in which tattooing was adopted by the Greeks was as a punitive of proprietary action. In other words, because the Greeks associated stigmata with their rival neighbours, its social importance was degraded and, subsequently, stigmata were used for marking 'Others' within Greek culture, such as criminals and slaves.

Both Jones and Gustafson (in Fisher 2002:92) have shed light on the visibility and messages of these tattoos. Jones posits that the act of tattooing the foreheads of slaves and criminals must have been common up until the 4th century, when Roman Emperor Constantine explicitly forbade inscribing the face with tattoos. Constantine suggested that the hands or claws be tattooed instead, for "the face, which has been formed in the image of the divine beauty, will be defiled as little as possible" (Jones in Fisher 2002:93).

Gustafson (2000 in Fisher 2002:93) identifies three types of punitive tattoos on criminals' bodies: the name of the crime, the name of the emperor under whom the crime was committed and the name of the punishment the criminals were given. Tattooing continued through the Middle Ages in Europe as a means to mark the bodies of criminals, and thus tattooing as a social practice in Western civilisation became intertwined with criminality and deviance (Fisher 2002: 93).

One of the first explicit references to tattooing that offers insight into 18th-century practice was during the American Civil War when soldiers were systematically tattooed with symbols of the military or their own cause.

By the late 19th century, in France and Italy, tattooing changed substantially in that voluntary tattooing had replaced the non-consensual tattooing of prisoners (Fisher 2002:94). Fisher (2002:94) points out that it is ironic that during this same period, England and the USA were experiencing a tattoo craze in 'fashionable society' in spite of the long-standing association of tattoos with criminality (Bradley 2000 in Fisher 2002:94). Until the 1880s, criminals, sailors and the working class were the major groups that were tattooed. Tattoos remained fashionable for the next two decades (Fisher 2002:94).

Despite more socioeconomic groups seeking tattoos during this time, there was no sense of class unification through tattooing. Those in the lower classes receiving tattoos were still interpreted by the tattooed wealthy as deviant. This attitude was, to some extent, based on tattoo imagery and designs - which changed rapidly during this period. Bradley (2000 in Fisher 2002: 94) clarifies this point as follows:

On the most basic level, tattoos acted as a badge of social and cultural differentiation that separated the tattooed from the non-tattooed. On a deeper level, however, social and cultural homogeneity did not unite the tattooed, for the subject matter and aesthetic style of the tattoos created a fault line that divided the classes.

Fisher (2002:94) explains that one of the characteristics of the new design was the addition of the 'ethnic' tattoo, especially Japanese tattoos. For the wealthy, this

symbolized a (usually false) message of worldliness in that these tattoos indicated that its bearer had travelled and consumed other cultures. Among the working class, however, tattoo designs were generally chosen based on personal experiences or characteristics. Fisher (2002:94) captures this class difference as follows: "in the wealthy class, the purpose of the tattoos was to impress, and in the working class, tattoos were to express".

Although the middle class did not have a similar involvement in tattooing at the end of the 19th century as did the wealthy, there was a concurrent movement among the working class and among entertainers then as the circus spectacle or 'freak show' added to the upsurge in tattooists' business until the 1940s (Fisher 2002:96). The military also became publicly opposed to tattoos, due in part to the erotic images soldiers chose as tattoos, but also due to fears that tattooing was a public health hazard.

Govenar (2000 in Fisher 2002:97) associates this rejection of the military man's tattoo as part of the American Return to Normalcy movement of the 1950s in which conformity and rejection of the war played a large part. The tattoo was a symbol of the breach the Second World War had caused on society. During these years after the war, tattooing was primarily associated with the working class, gangs and drunks. At the same time, however, tattooing became one of the most common forms of teenage rebellion, and tattoos were widely depicted in film and advertisement with nationally recognised figures like Popeye and the Marlboro man having tattoos.

Tattooing as a fashion or as a craze re-emerged during the late 1960s and 1970s with the hippie and rock star subcultures. This trend has had its peaks and lulls during the past 40 years, but it has sustained itself as a movement. Cutting across diverse social and class groups, there are more people today who get tattoos (Fisher 2002:97).

Aguilar (2007:10) refers to a 1996 Alliance of Professional Tattooist report that indicated that one in 10 Americans had a tattoo, compared to one in 100 three decades ago. In the same year, it was reported (Aguilar 2007:10) that "in the US, tattooing was the sixth fastest growing retail business after the Internet, paging services, bagel stores, computer retail outlets, and cellular phone stores. In 2011,

according to Cesare (2011:3), one in five Americans had a tattoo.

Functions of the current tattoo

Both Blanchard and Sanders (in Fisher 2002:100-101) identify four primary overlapping functions of the current tattoo. A tattoo functions, firstly, as a ritual. In a culture in which there are few rituals or rites of passage outside religion, the tattoo can serve (as it did for indigenous people who practiced tattooing) as a physical mark of a life event. These life events are interpreted as significant by the bearer, if not by society, and can vary from the winning of a sporting event or competition to the completion of a divorce or the remission of cancer. The tattoo also functions as identification. By inscribing established symbols on the body, the tattooee is identifying him-/herself as part of given group – which can be as broad as 'American' to the very specific, such as a family or partner's name.

A third function of tattooing is protective. The tattoo can be a symbol or talisman to protect its bearer from general or specific harm. Finally, the fourth function of tattoos is decorative. Regardless of their particular psychosocial function for the individual, tattoos are images (even words become images as /within tattoos). By modifying the body with tattoos, the individual has chosen to add permanent decoration to his/her body.

Having this decorative function, tattoos are often associated with exhibitionism. Although there is an element of desire to reveal tattoos, there is often an equally profound desire to conceal tattoos. Revealing the tattoo has several functions, including showing the individual's stylishness, identifying a group to which they belong, and demonstrating their rebelliousness. The desire to conceal can stem from the deeply personal meaning of the tattoo for the individual or from the deeply embedded social stigma. While the tattooed person enjoys the positive attention from his/her peers generated by the tattoo, most of these same people feel embarrassed about the negative reactions they get from others, especially when this reaction is from friends or family.

In the research study discussed in this article, related and additional functions of tattoos among SA students were

identified and will be discussed in sections 6 and 7 below.

Challenges and ambiguities regarding tattoos

Tattoos represent a form of body language - in a very specific way, though. It also gives new meaning to the expression "reading a person". On the cover of the 2007 edition, Vergine's 1974 *The body as language* is described as "immediately a huge publishing hit ... a direct testimony of the birth and development of one of the most controversial art trends".

- **Branding as part of marketing: terminology**

From the historical overview above and the present emphasis on the identification function of tattoos, it also follows that tattoos demand rethinking of the notion of branding. The following terminology relate to the analysis in this article:

- **Marketing**

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual (customer) and organisational objectives" (Burnett & Moriarty 1998:31). The marketing concept is a business philosophy that defines marketing as a process intended to find, satisfy, and retain customers while the business makes a profit (Burnett & Moriarty 1998:31).

The different marketing mix elements are comprised of programmes pertaining to the following: product, price, promotion (marketing communication), place (distribution), physical evidence, processes and people (Jooste et al. 2009 355-357). Marketing communication involves marketer-initiated techniques directed to target audiences in an attempt to influence attitudes and behaviours (Du Plessis, Bothma, Jordaan & Van Heerden 2003:3) and/or provide product information (Burnett & Moriarty 1998:24).

Marketing management uses eight marketing communication elements, namely advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, publicity, public relations,

sponsorships, direct marketing, and new media marketing (Du Plessis et al. 2003: 3). Two main types of messages communicate with the target market and stakeholder audiences: planned and unplanned. Planned messages are those that marketing communicators intend to send to target audiences via such activities (or tools) as advertising, direct mail, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations. Unplanned messages are those that audiences infer.

Unplanned marketing communication message sources include all elements associated with the company or brand that are capable of delivering implicit messages to consumers, ranging from the courtesy and knowledge of the salesperson to the company parking lot. In a traditional marketing program, the marketing mix typically sends unplanned messages. In an Integrated marketing Communication (IMC) programme, the marketing mix is part of the communication plan, so it is a planned message strategy (Burnett & Moriarty 1998:24).

- **Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)**

Harris (1998:3 in Du Plessis 2003:9) claims that IMC "will be the marketing practice necessary for survival in the 21st century". Du Plessis et al (2003:10) captures the essence of IMC as "the ability to select the best means of delivering the marketing communication that has a consistent, unified message to the marketplace, and communicates a common theme and positioning".

The perspective presented here includes public relations and publicity in the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) concept (cf. Du Plessis et al. 2003:v).

- **Personal Public Relations**

Public relations entails building good relations with an organisation's publics and stakeholders by creating favourable attitudes, building a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories or events (Du Plessis et al. 2003: 6). Marketing public relations (MPR) overlap with publicity and is the management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends.

MPR directly supports corporate and product image and promotion (Du Plessis et al. 2003:6).

Personal public relations is conceptualised as “the constitution, positioning, and promotion of individuals to form a public identity” (Motion 1999:466).

• Branding

In marketing, branding can be defined as naming a product or service in order to gain an identity, develop a meaning and project an image conducive to building brand equity for an organisation. Branding can be used to differentiate the organisation's product or service and to position it in the mind of customers (El-Arsary 2006:269 in Jooste, Strydom, Berndt & Du Plessis 2009:217). For Sampson (in North 2010) branding is even more; it is about owning the hearts and minds of customers.

“Brand distinguishes competitive products from one another, but also gives them specific symbolic value, creating an image or personality for the product” (Jooste et al. 2009:217). For Jooste et al. (2009:355) branding is unique in that it is both an element and an outcome of marketing activities.

“Positioning is concerned with registering the brand's functional capabilities on a number of attributes that differentiate the brand (Clifton & Simmons 2003:144 in Jooste et al. 2009: 345). Harley Davidson, for example, has succeeded in positioning itself as the authentic motorcycle experience.

“Two key issues in arriving at the optimal competitive brand positioning are, firstly, to define the competitive frame of reference and, secondly, to choose and establish points of parity and points of difference” (Jooste et al. 2009:346).

• Personal Branding/Self-branding

Personal branding has become a buzzword in business circles over the past few years and is the term that needs special consideration in the context of this article. In a professional context, personal branding refers to the process whereby people and their careers are marked as brands (North 2010). According to Wikipedia (2010),

“personal branding, self-branding, self-positioning and all individual branding by whatever name” were first introduced by Ries and Trout's (1980) *Positioning; The battle for your mind*; the term 'personal branding' was first used and discussed by Peters (1999). Lair, Sullivan and Cheney (2005:307 in Wikipedia 2010) point out that whereas certain “previous self-help management techniques were about self-improvement, the personal branding concept suggests instead that success comes from self-packaging”. This emphasises a link with terms such as 'impression management' as well as with 'identity management'.

Also related to the preceding point, reLiance (in North (2010) emphasises that successful personal branding is authentic; it uses personal strengths, values and passion to differentiate oneself from others. Rachelson (2010:76) summarises the term as follows: “Essentially, personal branding focuses on your uniqueness, how you position yourself relative to colleagues and competitors, and how you 'package' yourself in an authentic way that makes you stand out”.

Sherman (2009 in Wikipedia: 2010) goes on to define personal branding as “the creation of an asset that pertains to a particular person or individual; this includes but is not limited to the body, clothing, appearance and knowledge contained within, leading to an indelible impressions that is uniquely indistinguishable”. In contrast to this, reLiance (in North 2010) argues that personal brands are not created; they are uncovered, strengthened, and nurtured.

Some of the characteristics by which people are branded include their profession, but also their possessions, appearance, friends, interests and creativity, as well as their writing and body language (North 2010). By means of a personal brand it can be communicated that a person is creative and innovative (North 2010).

North (2010) points out that although personal branding is embedded in marketing, personal branding cannot be equated with personal marketing. North (2010) concludes that someone's personal brand is a combination of that actual person and other people's perception and beliefs about that person. This presents a challenge in the face of the issue regarding the visibility or not of tattoos.

Trends in tattoo research

In international tattoo research so far, especially four trends in analysing data can be identified, namely Standpoints, the body as commodity, impression management and postmodern identity expression.

According to Aguilar (2007:4), Standpoint Theory lends authority to a person's own voice and was therefore an effective tool to use in his study of the action and reaction associated with tattoos. Aguilar (2007:20) concludes that people with tattoos "have taken a stand and made their mark on their bodies".

Fisher (2002:103) points out that in the American culture of body fixation, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn based on the body and as society focuses increasingly on the material body, individuals feel alienated from their own commodified bodies. She goes on to reason that if the American body is a commodity, tattooing and other forms of permanent body modification can be construed as a way in which the individual reclaims some power over his or her own body. She (2002:103) quotes Benson's point in this regard:

What is distinctive in contemporary tattoo practices is the linking of such assertions of permanence to ideas of the body as property and possession – 'a statement of ownership over the flesh', as one individual put it – indeed as the only possession of the self in a world characterised by accelerating commodification and unpredictability, 'the one thing you get in a culture where you are what you do'.

For Fisher (2002) then, the struggle between the physical and social body can be analysed in terms of the individual in opposition to the state or culture. In this sense tattooing can be seen as a means of reappropriating the physical body from the socially "dis-eased" body, as a means to resist the cultural forces that have commodified the body, and continue to do so.

Impression management is not a new topic to those interested in studying human behaviour, for even prehistoric and primitive peoples were concerned about self-presentation. Cosmetics, clothing, jewellery, and other

aids to physical attractiveness are universally used to present positive identities to others. Artists have provided insightful commentary on the masks and personae that people everywhere adopt in their interactions with others (Tedeschi 1981:xv).

"The idea that people project identities to one another and form identities out of the reactions of others to them has been around for a long time; however, only in this century have social philosophers incorporated this interactive process into their thinking" (Tedeschi 1981:xv).

Physical appearance cues are an important aspect of impression management because audiences rapidly form impressions based on physical appearance (Leary 1995 in Doss & Hubbard 2009:63). Tattoos are an interesting case because they alter the appearance of an individual relatively permanently (Doss & Hubbard 2009:63). The visibility or not of tattoos come to mind in this regard, but also the words of Oscar Wilde: "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible" (1973:32 quoted in Finkelstein 2007:96).

Over the past fifteen years, public relations scholarship on identity has added image management and organizational identity to impression management approaches (Motion 1999: 466-467).

Cesare (2011) provides a postmodern identity expression view on tattoos that will be kept in mind in section 7 below, where a personal branding framework for analysis in view of the research findings among SA students is presented.

Paradoxes surrounding tattoos

Fisher (2002:101) claims that even as tattooing becomes more prevalent in the USA, there is still a persistent taboo on tattoos. In general, it seems that people with tattoos often feel that they should cover their body markings in public (especially job situations) to avoid social or professional rejection. Caplan (2000 in Aguilar 2007:2) perhaps most aptly, calls modern-day tattoos "metaphors for ambiguity". Sanders (1988 in Cesare 2011:39) views tattooing as a form of 'voluntary stigma' and 'mutual accessibility'

that allow the user to simultaneously exhibit personal expression and find group acceptance. Getting tattooed is often not a deliberated decision (Fisher 2002:100).

Several authors (cf. Fisher 2002:100) compare the decision to be tattooed with impulse shopping (in a group). The vast majority of clients do not research the process of tattooing nor the reputation or skill of the tattooist (Fisher 2002:100). Fisher (2002) points out that linking impulsiveness with tattooing creates a fascinating tension, for tattoos are, by definition, permanent. The choice of tattooist and design should, therefore, be a process rather than a capricious act. This impulsiveness can mean that the individual does not receive a well-designed tattoo, but in spite of the spontaneity of the act, the tattoo generally conveys multiple meanings for its bearer.

Tattoos have recently been described as relevant forms of nonverbal communication (Aguilar 2007:2), "scars that speak and yet demand no reply: assertions of what is, frozen in the flesh" (Benson 2000 in Aguilar 2007:2). To Lloyd (2003 in Aguilar 2007:2) tattoos are "a way of committing to something permanent and stable, of recording who and what you are right now".

PROBLEM INVESTIGATED

An investigation as to whether tattoos, as a form of creativity, can be considered as characteristics of personal branding, given the findings regarding tattoos among students on the campus of the University of the Free State, South Africa.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this article was to establish whether tattooing can be considered as a form of commercialised personal branding based on a research project was undertaken to determine both the scope and communicative value of tattoos among students of the University of the Free State. The project, in turn, followed on international research in this respect to establish the situation in South Africa. A secondary objective was to develop an extended conceptual framework as an explanatory tool

that would also facilitate further research in this regard.

RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN AND EXPECTATIONS

In order to study the frequencies of occurrence in a linguistic corpus (cf. Stefanowitsch i.p.:1; Biber, Conrad & Reppen 2000), the owner of the tattoo shop on the UFS campus (Real Art Studios) was interviewed, and clients of the tattoo shop as well as undergraduate communication science students, a larger random group and young working adults of the same age completed a questionnaire anonymously in view of a pilot study. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was adapted for the local setting from one used in international research and was available in Afrikaans and English. The expectations were that (i) tattoos among these four groups would not be predominantly culturally determined, that (ii) tattoos among these four groups would not be visible all the time; and that (iii) tattoos among these four groups would not be chosen specifically to communicate a rebellious message.

Although it is anticipated that the research project will ultimately include students on several campuses throughout South Africa, this pilot study focused on students in Bloemfontein. Their ages ranged from 19 to 26 years - in other words - generation Y (1982-1999). Characteristics of the generation vary by region, but this group is generally marked by an increased use and familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies, and being brought up with a neoliberal approach to politics and economics.

FINDINGS

The exposition below represents the results that pertain to this article, obtained by means of questionnaires (see Appendix A) completed by the two student groups as well as the young, working adults.

Students registered in the Department of Communication Science

In the next few tables, the findings of the questionnaires

distributed amongst a group of students registered as students in the Department of Communication Science will be revealed.

Number of tattoos

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF TATTOOS

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
N	3	13	17	9	2	1	1	0

The majority of respondents had two tattoos each. Three respondents did not have tattoos, of which two are planning to have some tattoos done in future. Thirty respondents who had tattoos already were planning some more for the future, while fourteen indicated that they are not planning to have any more tattoos done.

Age

The majority of respondents had their tattoos done when they were 20 years old (17). One respondent indicated that he was 11 years old when he had his first tattoo done. The majority of the respondents are now 21 years old (23).

Visibility and parents

The researchers asked the respondents by way of the questionnaire to indicate whether or not their tattoos are visible to onlookers or not and also wanted to know whether the respondents' parents had any tattoos.

TABLE 2: VISIBILITY OF TATTOOS AND PARENTS WITH/WITHOUT TATTOOS

	Yes	No
Tattoos visible	29	17
Parents	4	42

Gender and religious affiliation

TABLE 3: GENDER AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Gender	Male	Female
N	12	34

Religious affiliation	Christian	Other	None
N	41	-	5

It was insightful to note that 41 respondents proclaimed themselves to be Christian, while five respondents indicated that they believed in "nothing".

The members of this group of students were all from the Department of Communication Science, but the majority of students with tattoos study Corporate and Marketing Communication, as captured below.

TABLE 4: FIELDS OF STUDY RELATED TO NUMBER OF TATTOOS

Corporate and Marketing Communication	Communication Science	Media Studies and Journalism
23	7	16

The group of students' reasons for having a tattoo are summarised in Table 5 below. The categories were not specified as choices, but followed and were systemised from the respondents' answers.

TABLE 5: PRIMARY REASON FOR THE TATTOO

Enjoyed the pain	2
No reason	3
Fun, cute, just wanted to do it	8
To feel young again	2
Meaningful, symbolic, stories, special events	14
Uniqueness, self-expression	3
For attention	1

Peer pressure, influenced by others	6
Like the designs, body art, decorations	5
Personal	1
Seems interesting	1

The following comments by some of the participants were noteworthy:

"I enjoy the pain, which is weird."

"I wanted to feel young and alive again."
(Respondent is 22 years old)

"Dit vertel 'n storie van verlede en van alles wat al met my gebeur het."

(English translation: *It tells a story of past and of everything that has happened to me.*)

"A tattoo is a way of expressing yourself and your way of thinking. It (the tattoo) has to be something meaningful to you."

"Nonverbal communication –
I love to express myself through art."

"My first reason for getting a tattoo is because I love attention, one more thing is because I enjoy decorating my body, I think tattoos make an attractive body."

Students registered for other courses

In the next few tables, the findings of questionnaires distributed amongst students registered for different degree courses, excluding students from the Department of Communication Science, will be represented.

Number of tattoos

TABLE 6: NUMBER OF TATTOOS

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	>7
								11 (2),
25	57	19	14	3	1	1	1	12 (1)
								15 (1)
								35+ (1)

The majority of respondents had one tattoo each. The majority of respondents planned to have more tattoos in future.

Age

The majority of respondents had their tattoos done when they were 18-19 years old. The majority of the respondents are now 20-21 years old.

TABLE 7: AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

Age	<18	18-19	20-21	22-23	24-25	>25
Currently						26 (3)
	4	15	42	40	17	27 (1)
						28 (4)
						31 (1)
First tattoo	23	39	22	5	-	27 (3)

Visibility and parents

TABLE 8: VISIBILITY OF TATTOOS AND PARENTS WITH/WITHOUT TATTOOS

	Yes	No
Tattoos visible	71	29
Parents	1 (4)	106
	2 (2)	
	3 (2)	
	4 (1)	

Gender and religious affiliation

It is noteworthy that 92 respondents proclaimed themselves to be Christian, while 20 respondents indicated that they believed in "nothing".

TABLE 9: GENDER AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Gender		Female	
N	Male	65	
	57		
Religious affiliation		None	
N	Christian	20	
	92	Anglican (4)	
		Roman Catholic (4)	
		Rastafarian	
		Spiritual	
		Jeki	

TABLE 10: PRIMARY REASON FOR THE TATTOO

Enjoyed the pain	1
No reason	-
Fun, cute, just wanted to do it	18
To feel young again	2
Meaningful, symbolic, stories, special events	45
Uniqueness, self-expression	10
For attention	5
Peer pressure, influenced by others	23
Like the designs, body art, decorations	20
Personal	3
Seems interesting	3
Fashion	2
Addictive	1
Relieves stress	3
For improved self-esteem	2
Rebelled	5

Students' main reasons for having tattoos were organised in the same way as for the previous group.

The following comments by students stood out:

"Getting tattoos is generally the prerequisite for being cool. However, my first tattoo was a gang tattoo."

"I just wanted to know what it felt like to have a tattoo drawn on my body, it was just a cool thing for me."

"Expression of independence, and having the one thing I love the most, closest to me."

"n Tattoo is iets waarmee ek myself kan assosieer, 'n klein weerkaatsing van myself."

(English translation: *A tattoo is something that I can associate myself with, a small reflection of myself.*)

"I got a tattoo to boost my image. When I was growing up

I wasn't a very popular person at school and so I had very low self-esteem so this tattoo helped me in many more ways than one."

"I enjoy expressing myself through my body."

One student gave reasons for not getting a tattoo:

"It makes people to fear and disrespect you. I think for some jobs tattoos are not allowed. I also think that the

body is the temple of God and that it should be respected and honoured."

Other young people on campus

In the next few tables, the findings of questionnaires from young people who are not currently studying and who are mostly employed will be reflected. These participants were on campus on a specific day in 2012. This group is included in our preliminary study by way of comparison.

Number of tattoos

Table 11: Number of tattoos

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	>7
3	4	5	3	3	1	-	-	8 (1) 10 (1) +24 (1)

The majority of respondents had two tattoos each. The majority of respondents planned to have more tattoos in future, as revealed in the following table:

Table 12: Planning more tattoos

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	>7
-	3	3	2	3	1	-	-	-

Age

The majority of respondents had their tattoos done before or when they were 18-19 years old. The majority of the respondents are now 22-23 years old.

Visibility and parents

None of the parents of the young people in this group had tattoos:

TABLE 13: VISIBILITY OF TATTOOS AND PARENTS WITH/ WITHOUT TATTOOS

	Yes	No
Tattoos visible	13	5
Parents	0	20

Gender and religion

Table 14: Gender and religion of participants

Gender	Male	Female
N	9	13

Religious affiliation	Christian	Other	None
N	14	Rastafarian	7

The main reasons for tattoos were categorised in the same way as for the previous two groups:

TABLE 15: PRIMARY REASON FOR TATTOO

Enjoyed the pain	0
No reason	2
Fun, cute, cool, just wanted to do it	4
To feel young again	0
Meaningful, symbolic, stories, special events	7
Uniqueness, self-expression	1
For attention	0
Peer pressure, influenced by others	2
Like the designs, body art, decorations	5
Personal	1
Seems interesting	0
Fashion	1
Addictive	0
Relieves stress	0
For improved self-esteem	0
Rebelled	0

The following comments by participants in this group were telling:

"My body is a canvass and I like to show through my outer body art who I am inside as an artist."

"I love art, when I discovered body art I thought it was the most exotic thing. The designs are based on things I love most, which are fairies."

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings are in line with our expectations in that the tattoos counted were not predominantly culturally determined (and also not by tradition, given the few parents with tattoos); the majority were visible all the time, but many not; and very few tattoos were chosen to communicate a rebellious message. The latter result is in line with Cesare's (2011) finding regarding tattooees at the University of Ohio. Some researchers (Cullerton 2005 and Orend & Gangé 2009 in Cesare 2011) claim that the increase in tattoos as such indicates that the practice no longer constitutes a form of rebellion.

Across all three groups, the category *Meaningful, symbolic, stories, special events* represented the strongest reason for having a tattoo. The three other categories that came out strongly were *Like the designs, body art, decorations; Fun, cute, cool, just wanted to do it; and Peer pressure, influenced by others*.

In the initial stages of the project in 2010, the owner of the tattoo shop pointed out that remarkably many clients have tattoos for the sake of the pain. According to our findings that strong trend has now subsided, although there is a return to an original ritual of capturing personal meaning. This ties in with international findings among students (Cesare 2011) that it is no longer so much about the act of getting a tattoo, but about how it is used in an individual way. This individual, personal use of tattoos contrasts with the words of Simmel (quoted in Kosut 2006) that might have applied to tattoos a few years ago: "Whenever we imitate, we transfer not only the demand for creative activity, but also the responsibility for the action from ourselves to another. Thus the individual is freed from the

worry of choosing and appears simply as a creature of the group, as a vessel of the social contents ...".

The respondents in our study were creative in, for instance, choosing tattoos as body art decoration, and 'innovative' in using Christian symbols as tattoos.

The use of tattoos by the respondents in this personal regard in our study also corresponds with some principles of effective professional personal branding (Rachelson 2010:76) in that it makes the person memorable; has a unique touch; develops a story about the person and how s/he got to where s/he is at present; is compelling and evokes emotional reactions – but then in a very personal way, focused on intrapersonal communication and mostly self-image (how they see themselves) and self-worth rather than image (how others see them). Tattoos are added as a personal story or artistic picture unfolds, and not for the sake of competition or as prescribed by culture. Several respondents indicated that they were motivated by peer pressure, especially among the two student groups. Tattoos do function as items that provide group membership among the respondents, but in the sense of belonging – yet no longer being one of a group that can tolerate the pain, or a category for the sake of competition. Tattoos do function as artful body decorations and accessories.

At present then, young people on the campus of the University of the Free State choose tattoos for different reasons than a few decades ago when rebellious messages and motivations were typical.

Given the results presented above, the first three analytic approaches referred to in section 2.3.2 did not appear to be relevant theoretical perspectives for analysing the data in this study. Very few respondents indicated that they chose a tattoo to attract attention, or to make a political stand – for instance. No commercial intentions were mentioned. In line with Motion's (1999) argument, if these students regarded their bodies as commodities, one would need branding to differentiate them. This was not the attitude observed.

The notion that identity may be used as a commodity for promotional purposes has gained credence in the

literature (Motion 1999). For instance, Paul du Gay claim that the objective of a distinctive identity is commodifying and adding value to the self, while Cheney and Thøger Christensen acknowledge that positioning strategies are often necessary to gain visibility in a crowded marketplace (cf. Motion 1999). From these perspectives, identity is conceptualised as a commodity for promotion and differentiating the self in organisations or in the marketplace. The notion of identity as a commodity, of integrating communications and marketing skills to promote individuals, is an emerging public relations practice which does not seem to be apt as an analytic tool for this study in light of our findings.

Theorizing on the concept of identity within public relations has so far privileged the organisation as scholars have either examined the corporate identity of the organisation or the identity of individuals within the organisation (Motion 1999). Creating a public persona or identity for an individual initially developed from the currently discredited fields of image and impression management (Motion 1999:466-467). The tactics for achieving public acceptance within the image and impression approaches focused on aesthetics and the correct media performance. Distinctions between the two approaches blurred, and the terms have been used interchangeably, but Grunig (in Motion 1999:466-467) discerned the following distinction; image management is productive, whereas impression management is performative. Image management is concerned with the production and transformation of certain images, which are perceived to be predominantly aesthetic and, therefore, superficial.

Impression management was originally derived from Goffman's (1959) work on presentation of the self, a dramaturgical approach in which actors try to create certain impressions, yet Goffman himself also conceded how difficult it is to have any control over the way one is perceived by others (Finkelstein 2007: 142). Grunig (in Motion 1999:466-467), in particular, has critiqued both image and impression management approaches from a public relations perspective because of what he perceived as the potential for deception and manipulation.

Identity is a more acceptable approach within public relations because identity work is not perceived to be a

superficial exercise, but rather is seen as dealing with authentic concepts and concerns.

The aim of Motion's (1999) research is to examine the public relations practices for communicating personal identity, which may have an organisational, an independent, or a pluralistic focus, depending on the promotional purpose. Given that no promotional purpose was discerned in our findings, our analysis will not be based primarily on a public relations perspective; and given the reasons above, neither on impression management or image management perspectives.

Both the student groups and the young working adults resorted to the use of tattoos by the working class in the late 19th century – as mentioned in 2.1 - for the sake of *expression*. The expression of identity among these respondents, does however not focus on identity domains that are highly profiled in a materialistic sense in consumer culture, namely 'the good life' against the background of a search for happiness and a perfect body (Dittmar 2008). The majority of life events tattooed in this study relate to sad or traumatic events.

At first it appeared that sensory intelligence may offer a useful framework for analysis. Theorists working in the field of sensory intelligence agree that sensory profiles differ from person to person. There is general agreement that persons with a high tolerance for touch will enjoy the touch of other persons or objects, while persons with a high tolerance for visual images will enjoy colours and decorations. From this it can be deduced that persons who enjoy 'having a tattoo' may have a high threshold for touch as well as visuals. *Like the designs, body art, decorations* emerged as a strong category in our study, but since pain was no longer such a strong factor, this approach was not followed for this study.

The complexity of the study under discussion lies in an attempt to analyse the current results coherently, yet it is especially a branding perspective on implicit self-theories (incremental theory and entity theory) that provides a clear analysis of the results so far.

Maya, Oliver, Srivasta and Gross (2007) refer to the claim that beliefs imply certain expectancies, which, in turn,

guide behaviour. In particular, beliefs about controllability guide the way people construe their reality and influence their motivation to engage in self-regulation. On the basis of these assumptions, beliefs about the malleability of personal attributes have been studied (cf. Dweck 1999). Because these beliefs tend to be implied rather than explicitly held, they have been referred to as *implicit theories*. Maya et al. (2007) point out that implicit theories are domain-specific in that theories regarding one personal attribute (e.g. intelligence) may be largely independent of theories regarding another personal attribute (e.g. moral character). Building on this research, we sought to establish whether implicit theories of emotion are linked to emotion regulation, tattooing, personal branding and

social experience.

Our overall analytical approach is that of branding, more specifically personal branding - in the current sense of the term (cf. Clifton & Simmons 2003 and the exposition above in 2.3.1). Following Park and John (2010), a schematic analytical approach was proposed in Bergh and Lombard (2013) that would be able to represent a perspective on the use of tattoos in professional personal branding. Following the line of argumentation above, we would like to postulate the use of the term *Personal Personal Branding* for the way in which tattoos are used among the respondents in this study. The schema in Bergh and Lombard (2013) can accordingly be adapted as follows:

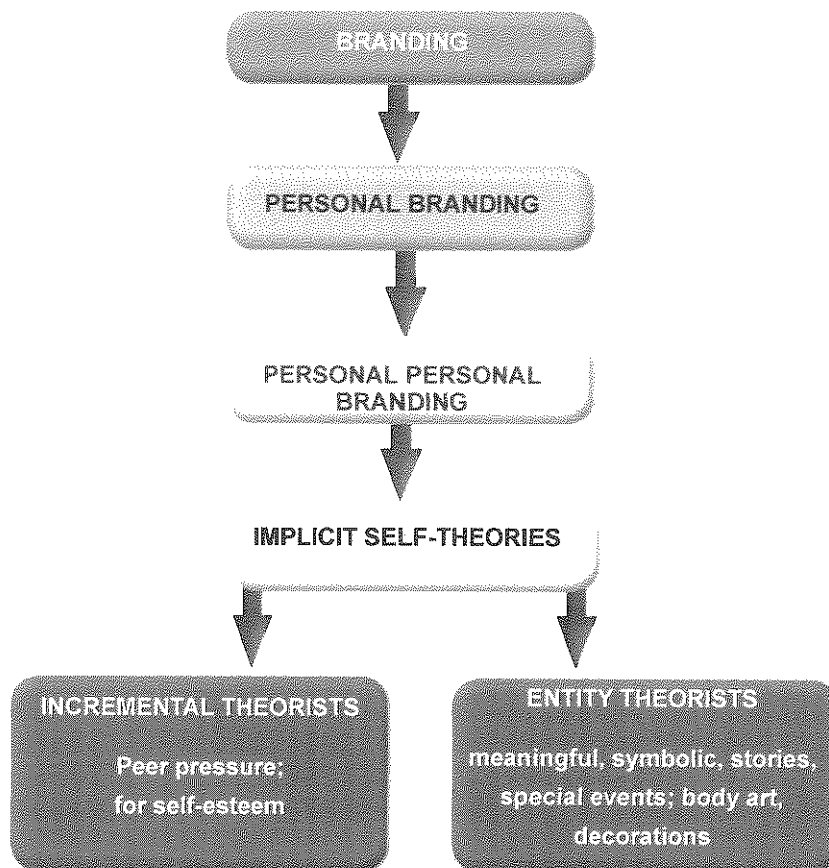


FIGURE 1: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The advantage of such an analysis is that it distinguishes two overall guiding approaches among respondents. Park and John (2010) explain that people who endorse incremental theory (incremental theorists) view their personal qualities as malleable, which they can improve through their own efforts. In contrast to this, those who endorse entity theory (entity theorists) believe that their personal qualities are fixed, and that they cannot improve them through their own direct efforts. In order to enhance

the self, they seek out opportunities to signal their positive qualities to the self and others.

The latter category would represent the two strongest groups in terms of reasons for having a tattoo in this study.

For the purpose of dealing with diversity and individuality in the use of tattoos in this group and in view of generalisation, the following continuum is posited:



FIGURE 2: PERSONAL BRANDING CONTINUUM

The words of one respondent regarding *self-esteem* make this category difficult to classify in terms of Figure 1 above. As quoted in section 6:

"I got a tattoo to boost my image. When I was growing up I wasn't a very popular person at school and so I had very low self-esteem so this tattoo helped me in many more ways than one."

Nussbaum and Dweck (2008) explain that entity and incremental theories can be seen as reflecting two fundamentally different perspectives on the self: a static self with fixed traits versus a dynamic self capable of constant development. In both systems, self-esteem reflects the judgement that one is competent.

However, in an entity self-system, self-esteem comes from validating one's fixed competence; in an incremental self-system, self-esteem comes from assessing one's acquired competence. Negative feedback is a threat to both kinds

of self-esteem because it signals that the desired level of competence is lacking. However, as Nussbaum and Dweck (2008) illustrate, when self-esteem is threatened, different responses are required. In the entity self-system, with no clear way to change one's level of underlying ability, the most direct and effective thing people can do is to readjust their thinking about their ability and resort defensive processes (such as a symbolic self-completion act (of acquiring a tattoo in this case -without attempting to improve social skills) in order to restore 'completeness' of the threatened identity) .

This view of self-esteem links up with Cesare's (2011) postmodern perspective on the searching self in a constantly changing milieu. For us, the postmodern spirit requires us to remember the fluidity of things and therefore aim for continuum-views of categories. In order to capture the variety of ways in which tattoos serve self-esteem, we find it best to see the distinction between incremental and entity theories on a continuum:



FIGURE 3: CONTINUUM OF IMPLICIT SELF-THEORIES

Some of the young people among the respondents were employed already, but it should be kept in mind that students are en route to a profession. The respondent with the most tattoos in this study indicated that he is a tattoo artist himself, while the respondent with the second most tattoos indicated that his major is financial management. Nussbaum and Dweck (2008) point out that whether in a classroom, a hospital, or a boardroom, the implicit theory of, for instance, intelligence, conveyed in a setting may function to reduce or exacerbate defensive behaviours.

"If, when facing the critical gaze of a board of directors, CEO's are unwilling to admit to past mistakes and distort their company's true profits, the results could be costly. If, fearing the disapproval of their mentors, surgical interns defensively dismiss criticism of their techniques or diagnoses, the results could be even worse" (Nussbaum & Dweck 2011:611). Nussbaum and Dweck (2011:611) contend that the evaluative context can play an important role in determining the way in which negative feedback is interpreted and whether one tries to learn from it or responds to it defensively instead.

They add that while an evaluative context focused on nurturing development may not be ideal for every setting, it may be effective in reducing defensiveness in settings where learning is valued and the goal is to minimize lost opportunities to improve. They (2011:611) conclude that defensiveness can stand in the way of learning and thus have serious consequences in classrooms and workplaces. They argue, then, that incremental theory has a role to play in leading people away from defensiveness and toward confronting and addressing their shortcomings. We would like to conclude by pointing out that our continuum may also lead people in distinguishing between what can be changed and improved on and what not, and furthermore, that 'reading a person' in respect of the manifestation of implicit theories via tattoos may present clues in terms of tendencies and potential reactions.

CONCLUSIONS

As was pointed out above, young people on the campus of the University of the Free State choose tattoos for different reasons than a few decades ago. From the finding that

the category *Meaningful, symbolic, stories, special events* represented the strongest reason for having a tattoo, tattoos are by no means skin-deep communicative signs. Given that the majority of respondents in all three groups discussed have tattoos, they are also not the signs of a minority group.

Finkelstein (2007:206) describes Modernity as "an era of neophilia; the pursuit of novelty in technical, political, social and aesthetic arenas are taken for granted"; and goes on to quote Kellner (1994:161) who describes fashion as 'a constituent feature of modernity' which is itself

marked by perpetual innovation, the destruction of the old and the creation of the new ... Fashion perpetuates a restless, modern personality, always seeking what is new and admired, while avoiding what is old and passé. Fashion and modernity go hand in hand to produce modern personalities.

In a postmodern context, young people in our study seek permanent, meaningful signs and resort to the ancient language of tattoos.

In a changing environment, innovation and creativity are often keys to survival. In our study, innovation and creativity as manifested in tattoos are not used in this sense, nor for commercial purposes - but rather as the preservation of self and the celebration of memories, art and youth. We consider tattooing among our respondents as a form of personal branding that we prefer to call personal, personal branding.

REFERENCES

- **Aguilar, A.** 2007. "Tattoos as Worldviews: A journey into tattoo communications using Standpoint Theory" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 93rd Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, Nov 16, 2007. [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p192402_index.html accessed 30 August 2010].
- **Anon.** 2010. A brief history of tattoos. [http://www.designboom.com/history/tattoo_history.html accessed 31 August 2010].

- **Bergh, L & Lombard, E.** 2012. Tattooing among SA students: Skin-deep communicative signs of a minority group? Paper presented at the 2012 LSSA conference, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
- **Bergh, L & Lombard, E.** 2013. Tattooing among SA students: Skin-deep communicative signs of a minority group? SALALS: under review.
- **Biber D, Conrad S & Reppen R.** 2000. *Corpus Linguistics. Investigating language structure and use.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- **Burnett, J & Moriarty, S.** 1998. Introduction to marketing communication - an integrated approach. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- **Cesare, N.** 2011. Wearing your life as a sleeve: examining tattooing as a form of postmodern identity expression. Unpublished Thesis. Ohio University, USA.
- **Clifton, R. & Simmons, J.** 2003. Brand and branding. London: Profile Books Ltd.
- **DeMello, M.** 2000. *Bodies of inscription. A cultural history of the modern tattoo community.* Durham: Duke University Press.
- **Dittmar, H.** 2008. Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-Being. The search for the "Good Life" and the "Body Perfect". Hove: Psychology Press.
- **Doss, K & Hubbard, ASE.** 2009. The communicative value of tattoos: The role of public self-consciousness on tattoo visibility. *Communication Research Reports*, (1), 62-74.
- **Du Plessis, F, Bothma N, Jordaan, Y & Van Heerden, N.** 2003. Integrated marketing Communication. Claremont: New Africa Books.
- **Dweck, CS.** 1999. *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development.* New York: Psychology Press.
- **Finkelstein, J.** 2007. The Art of Self Invention. Image and Identity in Popular Visual Culture. London: I.B. Taurus.
- **Fisher, JA.** 2002. Tattooing the body, marking culture. *Body & Society*, 8 (4): 91-107.
- **Goffman, E.** 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life.* New York: Anchor.
- **Jooste, CJ, Strydom, JW, Berndt, A & Du Plessis, PJ.** (eds.) 2009. *Applied strategic marketing.* 3rd ed. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- **Kosut, M.** 2006. An ironic fad: The commodification and consumption of tattoos. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39 (6): 1035-1048.
- **Maya, T, Oliver, J, Srivasta, S & Gross, JJ.** 2007. Implicit theories of emotion: Affective and social outcomes across a major life transition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (4): 731-744.
- **Motion, J.** 1999. Personal public relations: Identity as a public relations commodity. *Public Relations Review*, 25(4), 465-479.
- **North, E.** 2010. Personal Branding Workshop, presented at the UFS. Bloemfontien, South Africa on 5 August 2010.
- **Nussbaum, AD & Dweck, CS.** 2008. Defensiveness versus remediation; Self-theories and modes of self-esteem maintenance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34:599. Available online at <http://psp.sagepub.com/content/34/5/599> [accessed 29 April 2013].
- **Park, JK & John, DR.** 2010. Got to get you into my life: Do brand personalities rub off on consumers? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (4), 655-669.
- **Peters, T.** 1999. *The brand you 50: Fifty ways to transforms yourself from an "employee" into a brand that shouts distinction, commitment and passion.* Knopf.

- Rachelson, D. 2010. Brand You. *Destiny*, July 2010, p.76.
- Ries, A & Trout, S. 1981. *Positioning; The battle for your mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- Slabber, C. 2011. *Ekerk Leiermuusbrief* [Mei 2011].
- Stefanowitsch, A. (i.p.) Cognitive Linguistics meets the Corpus. In M. Brdar, M.Z. Fuchs en S.T. Gries (reds.), *Converging and Diverging Tendencies in Cognitive Linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. [http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/stefanowitsch/ accessed 10 October 2010].
- Tedeschi, JT. 1981 (ed.) *Impression management theory and social psychological research*. New York: Academic.
- Vergine, L. 2007. *Body art and performance: the body as language*. 2nd ed. Milan: SkiraEditore.

APPENDIX A

Tattoo Survey

1. How many tattoos do you have? _____
2. Are you planning on getting any more tattoos in future? _____
3. Are your tattoos visible to other people? _____
4. How old were you when you got your first tattoo? _____
5. Do your parents have tattoos? _____
If so, approximately how many? _____
6. What is the primary reason you would give for getting a tattoo?

Demographic information

7. Age _____
8. Gender _____
9. Field of study, if you are a student _____
10. Religious affiliation, if any _____

Are you interested in participating in a 15 minute confidential interview about nonverbal communication and tattoos? If so, please provide your cell phone number so that the researcher can contact you: _____

Thank you for your participation!

TATOE OPNAME

1. Hoeveel tatoes het jy? _____
2. Beplan jy om nog tatoes te kry? _____
3. Kan ander mense jou tatoes sien? _____
4. Hoe oud was jy toe jy jou eerste tattoo gekry het? _____
5. Het jou ouers tatoes? _____
Indien wel, ongeveer hoeveel? _____
6. Wat sou jy sê is die hoofrede waarom jy 'n tattoo gekry het?

Demografiese inligting

7. Ouderdom _____
8. Geslag _____
9. Studierigting, indien jy 'n student is _____
10. Godsdienstgroep, indien enige _____

*Stel jy belang dat daar 'n 15-minuut vertroulike onderhoud met jou oor nieverbale kommunikasie en tatoes gevoer word?
Indien wel, verskaf asseblief jou selfoonnommer sodat die navorser jou kan kontak: _____*

Baie dankie vir jou deelname!