

# The College Student's Religious Tattoo: Respect, Reverence, Remembrance

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**Thank you!**

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# Demographics of the Twelve University Samples

|                | Three<br>Christian | Six<br>Public | Three<br>Secular<br>Private |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| • n =          | 770                | 2394          | 446                         |
| • % Aged 18-20 | 87                 | 83            | 70                          |
| • % Anglo      | 69                 | 67            | 64                          |
| • % Female     | 68                 | 67            | 58                          |

Total N = 3610

Overall Response Rate: 77%

# Tattoo Research in General

## Behavioral correlates

- 4+ for “Deviance.”
- Tattoos and Religion = null

## Ideology & Identity

- Need for Uniqueness
- Well-being and Healing

## Meaning

- Stories and Emotion
- Gender and Power

# Religious Tattoo Research

- Kluger, Nicolas. (2012). Le Tatouage Religieux. (The Religious Tattoo). *Annales de Dermatologie et de Vénérologie* 139(11): 776-782.
- Koch, Jerome R., and Alden E. Roberts. (2012). The Protestant Ethic and the Religious Tattoo. *The Social Science Journal* 49(2): 210-213.

## General Tattoo Demographics

- Baby Boomers – 13%
- Gen-X – 36%
- Millennials – Slightly < 50%

## Sample Tattoo Demographics (2010-2013)

- 534 of 3337 respondents had at least one tattoo (16%)
  - 85 of those were religious tattoos (15% of tattoos)
- Respondents for this research
  - 85 essayists; 11 interviewees
- Respondent pool:
  - Aged 18-24; 57% Female; 60% Anglo

## Distribution of Religious Tattoos

- Public schools: 17% had 1+ tattoo.
- 63% of religious tattoos came from Public schools
- Average of 9 religious tattoos/school (n=6)
  
- Secular Private schools: 15% had 1+ tattoo
- 8% of religious tattoos came from Secular Private schools.
- Average of 3 religious tattoos/school (n=3)
  
- Religious Universities: 14% had 1+ tattoo
- 29% of religious tattoos came from Religious schools
- Average of 8 religious tattoos/school (n=3)

# Data

The survey data came in response to the following written prompt:

- To be answered only if at least one of your tattoos depicts what you consider to be a religious symbol...please tell us the story of your religious tattoo(s). Include, but do not feel limited in your discussion to issues such as: what does the tattoo depict? Draw or describe it in detail if you'd like. What led you to consider getting this symbol tattooed on your body? Where is it located? What does the symbol mean to you? How has having this tattoo changed your life or your faith? What else would you like us to know about your religious tattoo(s)?
- The interviews: 30-90 minutes in length. One-on-one. Stories.



- *Respect*
- *Reverence*
- *Remembrance*

**Respect** – religious tattoo that the respondents stated that they got out of admiration for a religious belief or culture not shared by the respondent. Interestingly, some respondents identified tattoos that would not be considered religious in that other culture as religious for the respondent. These tended to be deeply spiritual and aesthetic.

- *Of Another Religion/Culture*: symbol from a religion or culture not shared or believed in by respondent, but identified as religious by that respondent  
“It’s a pictograph of the Mayan calendar. I think it looks really detailed and decorative.”
- *Of Loved One Without Shared Faith*: Respondent felt religious symbol was so indicative of loved one that s/he tattooed it without ascribing religious meaning to the symbol him- or herself; usually found on intimate area of body.  
“I’m not Christian myself, but my cousin who died had a tattoo of Philippians 4:13, so I put the words ‘I can do’ on my hip to remind myself of him. It’s a religious text, but it’s more about him and to be persistent.”

**Question 104A** – To be answered only if at least one of your tattoos depicts what you consider to be a religious symbol. Use additional pages if necessary. Please detach this page and return it (along with other pages if applicable) with your scantron answer sheet.

Are you: Male  Female  Your age 19 Race/ethnicity White

How long have you had your religious tattoo(s)? 1 yr

Please tell us the story of your religious tattoo(s). Include, but do not feel limited in your discussion to issues such as: What does the tattoo depict? Draw or describe it in detail if you'd like. What led you to consider getting this symbol tattooed on your body? Where is it located on your body? What does the symbol mean to you? How has having this tattoo changed your life, or your faith? What else would you like us to know about your religious tattoo(s)? Add additional pages if necessary.

The tattoo is a hebrew phrase from my rabbi which states "if I am not myself who will be me"; It is a very famous quote in Judaism. It is located on my left side of my body (horizontal) and located near the middle of my rib cage. I got this tattoo because it is a very meaningful saying and I wanted something to connect me visibly and permanently to my Jewish faith and culture. This tattoo has brought me closer to Jewish ideals, but not god. It has helped me to better cope with the differences I face as a Jew and to become more self assured.

**Reverence** – religious tattoos that respondents stated they got because of their own religious beliefs and because of the importance of those beliefs. Subdivided into two categories: those tattoos meaningful to both the respondent AND a member of the respondent’s culture and those tattoos meaningful only to the respondent.

These tended to be visibly placed

- *Identity Formation and Group Affiliation Advertisement:* Most obviously religious, observer from same culture would clearly identify as religious, focused on personal beliefs and connection with supernatural, tend to be found on parts of the body likely to be seen by non-intimates (arms, stomach, legs)
  - “A cross with a crown of thorns and INRI so others can see I’m a Christian.”
- *Personal Meaning:* Not obviously religious or faith-based to anyone but respondent, found either on intimate or non-intimate areas of the body.
  - “These three dots represent the Trinity, but it’s not obvious. I know it, though.”

**Question 104A** – To be answered only if at least one of your tattoos depicts what you consider to be a religious symbol. Use additional pages if necessary. Please detach this page and return it (along with other pages if applicable) with your scantron answer sheet.

Are you: Male  Female  Your age 18 Race/ethnicity White

How long have you had your religious tattoo(s)? 1 1/2 Months

Please tell us the story of your religious tattoo(s). Include, but do not feel limited in your discussion to issues such as: What does the tattoo depict? Draw or describe it in detail if you'd like. What led you to consider getting this symbol tattooed on your body? Where is it located on your body? What does the symbol mean to you? How has having this tattoo changed your life, or your faith? What else would you like us to know about your religious tattoo(s)? Add additional pages if necessary.

On my inner bicep it is Hebrew that says "Crucified with Christ". I got this so I could use it as a ministry tool. I got it when I dedicated my life to Christ and wanted to share the good news through my tattoos. It has changed my life because I have been able to my testimony & the gospel to people through my tattoo. It has opened up conversation to a religious topic with people that usually would not talk about Christian faith.

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**Remembrance** – religious tattoos that the respondents stated that they got primarily to remind themselves of something: either of a loved one with a shared faith or of their own religious faith.

Tended to express inward emotions.

- *Of Loved One With Shared Faith*

“My grandma played a huge role in my life and she always said the rosary and encouraged me to. She passed and I got the rosary to remind me of her and to be strong in my faith.”

- *Of Own Religious Faith, Without Loved One*

It “says never alone with a dove because God’s always with me and the dove is a religious symbol.”

**Question 104A** – To be answered only if at least one of your tattoos depicts what you consider to be a religious symbol. Use additional pages if necessary. Please detach this page and return it (along with other pages if applicable) with your scantron answer sheet.

Are you: Male  Female  Your age 21 Race/ethnicity Caucasian

How long have you had your religious tattoo(s)? 3 years

Please tell us the story of your religious tattoo(s). Include, but do not feel limited in your discussion to issues such as: What does the tattoo depict? Draw or describe it in detail if you'd like. What led you to consider getting this symbol tattooed on your body? Where is it located on your body? What does the symbol mean to you? How has having this tattoo changed your life, or your faith? What else would you like us to know about your religious tattoo(s)? Add additional pages if necessary.

While in junior high youth group, a mentor of mine got an ictus (sp?) tattooed on his inner right ankle. The next day he went to the doctor because he had been chronically ill. He was diagnosed with Leukemia. Since his diagnosis i've done 12 triathlons to raise money for his treatment. I got a smaller version of his tattoo - along with 3 other friends - when I was 19. I love my tattoo. It's a constant reminder of Mark's battle as well as God's un-failing ability to provide.

Exact size and design:



PS- Mark went into remission 4 months ago!

# The Take-Away

- Tattoos express personal beliefs, manage identity, and signify group affiliation.
- Religious tattoos link motivation and meaning.
- Religious tattoos express:
  - permanence of beliefs
  - enduring emotions
  - relationships with Deity and loved ones.

We expect to see more religious tattoos as the prevalence of body modification increases.