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## Women With 4 or More Tattoos Have a Higher Self-Esteem, Study Finds

By [Rachel Lubitz](#) November 30, 2015

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We know that tattoos can [connect people](#) with shared interests. We know that tattoos can be [empowering](#). We know that tattoos can help someone [reclaim their body](#). Now a new study suggests that tattoos may lead to [higher self-esteem](#).

According a recent [study](#) by Texas Tech University sociology professor [Jerome Koch](#) titled "Tattoos, Gender and Well-Being Among American College Students," there's a strong correlation between college-aged women with multiple tattoos and a higher self-esteem.

The study from Koch, who has studied tattoos and piercings for years, found that among the 2,395 college students from six American public universities surveyed, women with four or more tattoos reported higher levels of self-esteem than anyone else in the study.



**"Women with four or more tattoos had a statistically significant elevation in self-esteem over others in the study."**

Source: [Mic/Getty Images](#)

**Using ink to reclaim a sense of self:** The study itself tested the correlations between escalating numbers of tattoos and depression, suicide ideation, number of suicide attempts and self-esteem.

"The only significant correlations we found," Koch told *Mic*, "[were] that women with four or more tattoos had a statistically significant elevation in self-esteem over others in the study."

However, there is one caveat. "They also had a statistically significant elevation in their reports of one or more previous suicide attempts," Koch said.

With this paradox at work, the researchers explain that tattoos appear to be a credible [healing mechanism](#), with women moving on from a dark period by reclaiming their bodies as their own with art, which then sends their self-esteem through the roof. As *Mic* has previously reported, this logic — tattoos as a path to self-recovery — is on display with women who get tattoos to cover scars from [mastectomies](#), [domestic abuse](#) and [self-harm](#) as a way of taking positive ownership of their bodies.



Source: [Getty Images](#)

"I think women, especially, are more aware of their bodies through, among other things, fat shaming, the cosmetics and plastic surgery industry and hyper-sexualized imagery in media," Koch told [Science Daily](#). "What we may be seeing is women translating that awareness into empowerment. We know women sometimes replace a surgically removed breast, for example, with elegant body art. We wonder if more tattoos might be a way of reclaiming a sense of self in the wake of an emotional loss — evidenced by a suicide attempt."

In 2010, Koch published a [study](#) called "Body Art, Deviance and American College Students," which found that people with four or more tattoos have a higher levels of deviance, from admitted drug abuse to arrests. His more recent study, however, looks to study the positive effects of getting several tattoos.

"This study is, we believe, the first of its kind in reporting elevated levels of positive emotion as connected to higher levels of body art acquisition," Koch told *Mic*.

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"We reported in 2010 that the threshold of four tattoos or more was connected to higher levels of deviance," he added. "This latest study examines that same dynamic from the inside out — looking for any impact of four or more tattoos on well-being instead. The limited connections we found — and the paradox they reveal — we think point toward the need for more research that zeros in on the positives more directly."

In other words, this finding is a win for tattoo fans who want to do away with the many [negative stereotypes](#) of heavily tattooed people. Tattoos are deeply personal; for some women in particular, they're a defiant act against beauty standards and an embrace of their flawed but triumphant bodies.

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