

More Women Than Men Seek Tattoo Removal

BY MARY ANN MOON
Contributing Writer

More women than men have sought tattoo removal in recent years, a reversal of the pattern that prevailed 10 years earlier, according to a report in the Archives of Dermatology.

Today, women report receiving significantly more negative comments and having more problems with "stigma" regarding their tattoos than do men. Women

with tattoos are more likely to report embarrassment and "more societal fallout" than men with tattoos, according to Myrna L. Armstrong, Ed.D., of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Marble Falls, and her associates.

The researchers studied the issue because "dermatologists are increasingly hearing stories of regrets and requests for tattoo removal. Estimated prevalence rates of dissatisfied tattoo wearers hover around 20%, with a smaller number who actual-

ly seek removal (6%)," they noted.

Dr. Armstrong and her colleagues assessed present-day tattoo removal using an anonymous survey of 196 clients aged 14-73 years who were attending four dermatology clinics in Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Texas. They compared the results with those from a similar survey conducted in 1996.

Although most of these subjects had been pleased with their tattoos when they first got them, they reported feeling dis-

satisfied with the tattoos for an average of 10 years before finally seeking removal. Most people who wanted to remove tattoos in 1996 were men, whereas most of those seeking removal in the present day were women, especially "career-minded" women.

Women reported receiving significantly more negative comments and suffering significantly more embarrassment regarding their tattoos than did men. In particular, women reported their tattoos interfered with their job or career and that they elicited negative comments in the workplace, in public, and in school settings, as well as from significant others.

Currently, women also reported having to hide their tattoos with cosmetics or bandages and being unable to wear certain

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clothing because of their tattoos more often than men did. These findings correspond with reports in the literature that tattoo wearers are perceived as having lower credibility, competence, and sociability, particularly in the workplace,

Dr. Armstrong and her associates said (Arch. Dermatol. 2008;144:879-84).

"For women, their tattoo procurement may be a way to break out of the gender norms and take some social risk by visually displaying their assertive identity. Yet, there still may be many members of society who consider tattoos on women to be a 'transgression of gender boundaries,'" the researchers wrote.

The major reason cited for getting a tattoo among both men and women who later sought removal was that it "helped me feel unique." Most of these subjects grew "disillusioned because their unique product had lost its luster and excitement." Some also said they were actively dissociating from their past or shifting their identity focus in order to "move on."

Dr. Armstrong is an education consultant for Freedom2 Inc., described on its Web site as "part of a \$250 billion worldwide skin care industry" that manufactures cosmetics and body art products including inks that produce permanent but removable tattoos. ■

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