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A Third of Americans With Tattoos Say They Make Them Feel More Sexy

National survey of adults shows that Democrats more likely to have tattoos, but regret for getting them is highest among Republicans.

by Joy Marie Sever

A recent Harris Poll finds that 16% of all adults have at least one tattoo. The highest incidence of tattoos was found among the gay, lesbian and bisexual population (31%) and among Americans ages 25 to 29 years (36%) and 30 to 39 years (28%). Regionally, people living in the West (20%) are more likely to have tattoos.

Democrats are more likely to have tattoos (18%) than Republicans (14%) and Independents (12%) while equal percentages of males (16%) and females (15%) have tattoos.

This survey was conducted online between July 14 and 20, 2003 by Harris Interactive[®] among a nationwide sample of 2,215 adults.

How do tattoos make people feel?

Among Americans with tattoos, 34% said having a tattoo has made them feel sexier. Interestingly, more tattooed females (42%) feel this way than males (25%).

Additionally, those with tattoos said that having a tattoo has made them feel more rebellious (29%) while others said a tattoo makes them feel more attractive (26%). But tattoos apparently won't do much for your intelligence or your physique, as few Americans reported that tattoos make them feel more intelligent (5%), more healthy (4%), or more athletic (3%).

How do people without tattoos feel about those with them?

Many Americans who do not have tattoos said they think that people with tattoos are less attractive (42%), less sexy (36%) and less intelligent (31%). They also think that those with tattoos are more rebellious (57%). In contrast, only 29% of those with tattoos think they are more rebellious.

Do people regret getting tattoos?

A majority of Americans with tattoos (83%) do not regret getting them, while 17% do feel regret. The survey found that regret for getting a tattoo was highest among tattooed Republicans (24%) and among those living in the South (21%). And, the reason cited most often for feeling regret about getting tattoos was “because of the person’s name in the tattoo” (16%).

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**TABLE 1
WHO HAS TATTOOS?**

“How many tattoos do you currently have on your body?”
(People saying “one or more”)

Base: All Adults

All Adults	16%
Region	
East	14%
Midwest	14%
South	15%
West	20%
Age	
18 – 24	13%
25 – 29	36%
30 – 39	28%
40 – 49	14%
50 – 64	10%
65 +	7%
Sex	
Male	16%
Female	15%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	16%
Black	14%
Hispanic	18%
Party I.D.	
Republican	14%
Democratic	18%
Independent	12%
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	31%

**TABLE 2
REGRET HAVING A TATTOO?**

“Do you ever regret getting a tattoo?”

Base: Currently Have a Tattoo

	%
Yes	17
No	83

TABLE 3
WHY REGRET HAVING A TATTOO?
 “Why do you regret getting a tattoo?”

Base: Yes, Regret Getting a Tattoo

	%
Because of the person’s name in the tattoo	16
Don’t like the way it looks	12
Faded/unclear over time	11
It was stupid	11
It is visible even when I don’t want it to be	8
It was a rash decision	3
Got an infection/disease	2
I’m a different person now	2
Effects my job/getting a job	2

TABLE 4
HOW HAVE A TATTOO MAKES ME FEEL

“Please complete the following sentence: “Compared to not having a tattoo . . . having a tattoo has made me feel . . . ?”

Base: Currently Have a Tattoo

	%	More	Less	No Difference
Intelligent	%	5	3	93
Sexy	%	34	1	65
Spiritual	%	20	1	79
Rebellious	%	29	1	70
Attractive	%	26	4	70
Athletic	%	3	1	97
Healthy	%	4	*	95
Strong	%	16	*	84

TABLE 5
ATTITUDES OF THOSE WITHOUT A TATTOO

“Please complete the following sentence: “Compared to people without tattoos, I think people with tattoos are . . . ?”

Base: All Without Tattoos

	%	More	Less	No Difference
Intelligent	%	*	31	69
Sexy	%	8	36	56
Spiritual	%	3	29	68
Rebellious	%	57	2	41
Attractive	%	4	42	54
Athletic	%	4	14	82
Healthy	%	1	21	78
Strong	%	8	8	84

Methodology

The survey was conducted online within the United States between July 14 and 20, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 2,215 adults. Figures for age, sex, race, education and number of adults in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. "Propensity score" weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus two percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online survey is not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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