

Deviant behaviour research paper example

Government, Army



Abstract

Society is an integral part of a man's life. To be a part of a society, one has to fulfil societal expectations. These expectations require a person to behave in a certain way and to live a certain lifestyle. In other words, these expectations form the norms of the society. To be accepted in a society, it is important to follow these norms. Actions that lead to breaking of these norms are called deviant behaviour or deviance. Deviance leads to outcast from society. Having tattoos is considered one such deviance. This paper talks about prevalence and importance of tattoos in military. The four important reasons for military men having tattoos are as a sign of patriotism, an act of remembrance, rite of passage and a mark of identification. Even if tattoos are considered rebellion in society, it is very much accepted in the military culture.

Introduction

Man is a social being, who cannot live in isolation and prefers to live in a society. A society is a group of people, mostly demarcated by real or virtual territory, having similar behavioural and cultural expectations. These expectations to behave in a certain way, lead a certain way of life and have a certain eating habit are dominant and engrained in a society. Hence, a group of people belonging to a certain society imbibe shared values, beliefs and customs. They conform to the stated and unstated criteria of accepted behaviour in a society. These rules which define accepted behaviour and cultural expectations in a society are societal norms. Adherence to these norms makes one accepted in the society and deviance leads to social

outcast or refused acceptance. This paper attempts to understand the prevalence of deviance behaviour with a case of prevalence of tattoos in military.

This paper is divided into three main sections. The first section briefly describes societal norms and deviant behaviour; the second section explains prevalence of tattoos in military with three sub-sections, history of tattoos in military, profile of tattooed people in military and importance of tattoos in military; the third section concludes the paper.

Societal Norms

Societal norms are set of rules followed by societies which define a societies' way of living. These norms impose uniformity of behaviour with a given social group, but often vary substantially among group (Durlauf and Blume 1). Norms are dynamic and undergo gradual transformation as a society evolves. For example, using spoon and fork for eating was not a norm during the early stages of human evolution. But now, it has become a well-accepted norm and eating by hands leads to refused acceptance. Similarly, wearing a tie for formal occasions is a norm now, but was not important for the early humans.

Norms vary widely with class, geography and generation. For example, smoking has become an accepted behaviour in the younger generation. However, it is still an unaccepted behaviour for older generation people. Similarly, there is notable difference in societal norms of Americans and English.

Norms can be formally written down and promulgated like laws or informally enforced through social sanctions. Societal norms are mostly informally enforced. Breaking of societal norms or deviance can lead to refused acceptance or exclusion from the society.

Deviance

Deviance describes actions or behaviours that deviate social norms, both formal rules and informal sanctions (Wikipedia). Norms are not based on moral grounds or pragmatism. Norms are based on contextual settings and is a complex mix of values, beliefs, biases and interests of the people in the society. At times it can be biased, benefitting a particular segment of society. Deviance is nothing but violation of these norms. It is an action or an expression that contradicts with the ideologies, values and acceptable behaviour in a society. However, there is a possibility that a similar behaviour is totally accepted in some other society.

Deviance is not necessary illegal or criminal. Certain illegal acts like tax evasion and piracy are very much accepted in the society. And certain legal acts like live-in relationships are not accepted in some societies. Hence, deviance is unrelated to legality but relative to time and place (Wikipedia).

Having tattoos is considered as one such act of deviant behaviour or rebellion. According to Harris Poll in 2012, 50 % of the people without tattoo in America say that tattooed people are rebellious (Eturbonews. Com). The study re-establishes the fact that tattoos are viewed as deviance in the society. Society has considered tattoos as out of the normal societal bounds for long. It has been associated with indecency, crime and recklessness. In

spite of this fact, tattoos are becoming increasingly prominent in high schools, colleges and military. In 1936, Life Magazine estimated that around 6% of Americans have at least one tattoo (Vanishingtattoo. Com). The numbers have been increasing since then. A recently conducted online survey, Harris Poll, estimates that 21% of Americans have one or more tattoo today (Eturbonews. Com).

Tattoos have become an ‘in-thing’ in recently. However, tattoos have existed for a long time in some societies. In certain societies in the world, tattooing has existed since long and has been used as an identification mark for a person. The name of the person or a mark is tattooed on a person’s wrist in the childhood. This functions as an identification mark. Similarly, tattoos have an inseparable history with army, navy and marine services.

History of Tattoos in Military

Etymologically, the word tattoo has two derivations. The first is the Polynesian word ‘ta’ meaning striking something and second is the Tahitian word ‘tatau’ meaning to mark something (Designboom. Com). The marking of skin can be for various purposes, including religious, demonstration of association or mark of remembrance. Tattoos have a long history which dates back to 12, 000 BC (Lori). According to Lineberry, the history of tattoos dates back to the icemen, around 5200 years ago. Historically, it was used by different cultures for varied purposes. The ancient Greeks tattooed spies, Romans tattooed criminals, Polynesians tattooed tribe rankings and in Japan tattoos signified religion (Lori).

Tattoos were reintroduced by a British explorer, William Dampier, in 1691 (Lori). After one of his voyages, Dampier brought home along with him an extensively tattooed person. This person aroused public interest in the art of tattooing. A similar story was repeated by Capt. James Cook, a century later (Lori).

A revolution in tattooing came in 1891, when the first electric tattoo machine was invented by Samuel O'Riley (Lori). It became prevalent during World War I. Tattoo studios appeared near military bases in early 1900 (Lori). By World War II, its popularity faded and it was seen as a rebellion and outcast. In recent years, popularity of tattoos is again increasing across the world.

In America, tattoos have been an integral part of all branches of military since its foundation in 1775 (Tattoojohnny. Com). Perception of tattoos in the society did not have much impact on the prevalence of tattoos in military.

Profile of Tattooed People in Military

According to Staff Sergeant James Campbell, across combat arms, a good 90% of everyone has a tattoo (Van). This means it is very difficult to profile people in military on the basis of their being tattooed. However, overall age profiling can be done for tattooed people in America and extended to military.

Till recently, tattoos have been considered as a younger generation act. The Harris Poll done in 2003 estimated that 36% of people aged between 25 and 29 had one or more tattoos (Vanishingtattoo. Com). This finding was also supported by a study done by the Journal of American Academy of

Dermatology in 2006. The study found that 24 % of Americans aged between 18 and 50 have a tattoo; whereas 36 % of Americans aged 18 – 29 have at least one tattoo (Vanishingtattoo. Com). However, recent studies show a different picture. The Harris Poll in 2012 finds that adults aged between 30 and 39 are most likely to get a tattoo, about 36% (Eturbonews. Com). This indicates that there is a slight shift in preference of tattoos with age. Now, instead of youngsters, adults are more likely to have a tattoo in America. The same pattern is likely to exist in military services as well.

Importance of Tattoos in Military

Tattoos in military are prevalent for various reasons. Firstly, it is a mark of status, a way of expressing pride in serving the military, an act of patriotism. A tattoo of an eagle or an American flag is mostly related to military service. Tattoos serve as a means to display the emotion of pride or honour of serving the nation, of risking one's life for the country. It is a way of displaying their motto of 'service before self'.

Secondly, it also services as a way of commemorating comrades who sacrificed their lives for the country. This is to show one's respect and love for the people who died serving their nation. It provides an impetus, a force that never lets one give up. Staff Sergeant Campbell has a tattoo in memory of a friend, Sergeant Mike O'Neal, who died while fighting in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2004 (Van). The tattoo does not go anywhere and helps remember comrades forever. An infantryman, Baker, has three soldier's crosses on his back naming his three soldiers who lost their lives (Van). Apart from this, soldiers also have tattoos the terrain of war. Fry, an

infantryman, wishes to have a tattoo with phrase “ OEF 07-08” to signify the terrain of Afghanistan (Van). Here, the abbreviation “ OEF” stands for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Thirdly, tattoos serve as the means for military men to display their achievements and acts of bravery. These tattoos can be in the form of a medal or an award. Display of achievements and acts of bravery provides inner satisfaction and motivation to the soldier, and lets other people know of one’s achievements and earn their respect. This acts as the necessary fuel to hold on in life threatening situations and choose ‘ death to dishonour’. In professions like military services, non-materialistic incentives like these, matter much more than monetary compensation.

Fourthly, these tattoos serve as an identification mark for soldiers. These identification marks help distinguishing soldiers when they are lost. Medals are a popular tattoo in army. In marine, deadlier and tougher tattoos (like bull dog) are famous. Marines also get group tattoos. Navy tattoos are more diverse and varied. As sailors, navy personnel mostly have tattoos of anchors and sailor caps. Navy personnel also have tattoos in memory of their completed voyages. Air force men commonly have tattoos of eagle, airplane and pilot wings. However, norms for having a tattoo and its placement are stricter for air force members. Tattoos of specific units, with which a soldier is associated, are also prevalent in military. These tattoos depict the pride that a soldier takes in being associated with a particular unit. 10th Mountain division is the longest Staff Sergeant Bowers has stayed with any unit; hence he has a tattoo of 10th Mountain on his right shoulder (Van).

Fifthly, tattoos are also used to conceal scars of wounds received during wars. The intention behind having such tattoos is purely aesthetic or cosmetic. Intermixing the scars with the tattoo gives it a new look and makes it look beautiful.

Sixthly, tattoos are also used to display camaraderie to military speciality services. It takes perseverance and hard work to get assigned into a military speciality service, which is celebrated in the form of a tattoo. A combat engineer Soza, who has an engineer castle tattooed on his chest, explains that it signifies his being a combat engineer and the camaraderie they have as engineers (Van). The way they work is a source of pride for him which he displays as a tattoo on his chest.

Last but not least, tattoos are also prevalent as a rite of passage. Rite of passage is transition from one phase of life to other. Studies done by Armstrong, Pace-Murphy, Sallee and Watson found that 37 % of military in basic training have tattoos in 2000 and 64% of these recruits have had the tattoos done between the ages of 15 and 21 (Johnson 46). The age of 15-21 is a changing phase in person's life. It is when a person decides his career plan and achieves his goal. This rite of passage, the journey from being a college student to a military recruit and a soldier, is marked by a tattoo in most of the cases. When a soldier gets assigned to his/her first unit after rigorous training, he/she tends to get the unit's tattoo. It is a mark of pride and association. Other transitions in a military man's life when he goes for tattoos are: after wars, after important voyages and after bravery rewards

post wars. These events mark an improved status or class for the military men.

According to Staff Sergeant James Campbell, across combat arms, a good 90% of everyone has a tattoo (Van). This number might appear inflated, but it surely re-establishes the prevalence of tattoos in military. A soldier's love for tattoo can also be contributed to their heavily regulated daily schedule. First sergeant Aki Paylor believes that tattoos are a way of expressing individuality for soldiers, especially because their day-to-day life revolves around following rules and regulations of the Army (Van). Soldiers wear similar clothes and having similar haircut. They generally have a healthy and strong physique. There is nothing much that differentiates them. Tattoos help in showcasing distinctiveness of soldiers and to unmask their identity. It helps them in getting identified as an individual in a group.

Conclusion

The four important reasons for military men having tattoos are as a sign of patriotism, an act of remembrance, rite of passage and a mark of identification. Remembrance is the most common theme. A soldier's life is full of adventurous experiences. The different kinds of experiences are happiness of winning a battle, grief of losing a comrade and excitement of exploring a new territory. Tattoos help in remembering these events, which may otherwise fade with passage of time. Pride of serving the country, pride of being associated with a unit and pride of being part of special military services is another key reason for military men to have tattoos. The rite of passage, transition to an improved status or class, is also marked by a

tattoo. Tattoos also serve as mark of identification in case one gets lost somewhere. There is an overall shift in the age group of people having tattoos. People between age group of 30 and 38 are more likely to have a tattoo.

Tattoos are used for varied reasons in military. It is common in all branches of military in US i. e. army, navy and air force. Though tattoos are considered deviance in general society, they are very much accepted in military. Hence, having tattoos in military is not perceived as a deviant behaviour by military members. Norms are dynamic and contextual. Something relevant in one context might be irrelevant in other. In the context of military services, tattoos form an integral part. Thus, they do not lead to denied acceptance or outcast.

Popularity and acceptance of tattoos is increasing in the society, at large, as well.

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