Inquire & Investigate

LOOKING AT TATTOOS USING CULTURAL RELATIVISM

In many Western societies today, tattoos are often seen as a form of self-expression, fashion, or art. However, opinions about tattoos vary widely. Some people view them positively, while others associate them with rebellion or unprofessional behavior. In some cultures, tattoos have historical and cultural meanings. For example, in Polynesian cultures, traditional tattooing carries spiritual and social significance. Tattoos represent ancestry, identity, and status within the community. In this activity, consider how tattoos can be viewed through an ethnocentric or cultural relativism lens.

What do tattoos represent in your community? Do people view tattoos positively, negatively, or both? Do opinions on tattoos differ within your community? If so, how?

Apply the lens of cultural relativism to the practice of tattooing. How might someone from a culture with sacred tattoo traditions view tattoos differently from someone who sees them as fashion? Why is it important to understand cultural meaning before judging a practice? How does cultural relativism help prevent stereotypes?

Imagine you are an anthropologist studying tattoo practices across cultures. Explain how you would describe tattooing without judging it. Write a short reflection.

VOCAB LAB

Write down what you think each word means. What root words can you find to help you? What does the context of the word tell you?

- cultural evolution
- diffusionism
- ethnocentrism
- evolutionism
- functionalism
- structuralism

Compare your definitions with those of your friends or classmates. Did you all come up with the same meanings? Turn to the text and glossary for help.

Sometimes, people choose to adopt traditional tattoo designs without understanding or respecting their meanings. Why can this be problematic?

INVESTIGATE MORE

Check out more titles and other great activities at nomadpress.net.