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TOWARD BUILDING A COMPOSITE OF COLLEGE STUDENT INFLUENCES WITH BODY ART

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Body piercing and tattooing flourish on American campuses. The theoretical framework of symbolic interaction and subculture identity were used to examine two similar studies (methods, sample, and tools) for building a composite of influences associated with body art and further understand the psychosocial dimensions. In data from Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, and Koch (2002a, 2002b), and the described study within, four groups of college students ($N = 908$) were formed; those without tattooing ($n = 419$, 81%), and with tattooing ($n = 97$, 19%), and those without body piercing ($n = 247$, 55%) and with body piercing ($N = 145$, 32%). Influences (purpose, image, identity, cues, barriers, family, friends) were examined. All four student groups reported a positive image for the body art. Friends provided major support, whereas

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family were not as influential. Uniqueness was important, with the major purposes "I just wanted one, express myself, feel unique, be myself, I don't need to impress anyone anymore, and it helps me feel independent."

Over the last two decades, the general body art (tattoos, body piercing) phenomenon has experienced a middle and upper class artistic renaissance, further popularized by the media, movies, and sports celebrities. Many people of different ages, social classes, and occupations, including career women, adolescents, military recruits, and college students have obtained body art (Armstrong, 1991; Armstrong & McConnell, 1994; Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2000a, 2000b; Armstrong & Pace-Murphy, 1997; Armstrong, Pace Murphy, Sallee, & Watson, 2000; Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1999). While visible body art sites can be seen during a cursory review of the individual, often the semivisible and concealed body sites that also are pierced and or tattooed are not revealed, exposed only when the person feels comfortable or wants to display their body art.

PROBLEM

While tattooing and body piercing are becoming a widespread and accepted tradition among youth and young adults across many social classes, the practices are not without controversy. For example, two recent studies (Carroll, Riffenburgh, Roberts, & Myhre, 2002, p. 1021; Roberts, Auinger, & Ryan, 2004; Roberts & Ryan, 2002) concluded tattoos and body piercings "are markers of risk-taking behaviors in adolescents," and should serve as a "warning signal or screening device leading to medical monitoring and/or counseling." These stereotypical concerns, as well as the psychosocial influences of body art, are of importance to the nurse caring for this population. Frequently, single studies examine either tattooing or body piercing concentrate mainly on prevalence, have few common variables, and provide no opportunity to compare data. With the current popularity of body art, similar studies of both tattooing and body piercing can provide strength for a composite picture of those with and without body art, leading a better understanding of the decision making and influences for obtaining body art. Examining what influences the procurement of body art provides not only information about individual choices, but also provides an important view into the body art subculture.

Few studies have attempted to examine this phenomenon from a theoretical perspective. Findings from the studies of college students (Armstrong et al., 2000a, 2000b; Greif et al., 1999) have led the authors to examine the way individuals use body art to project who they are as they interact

with others. Goffman (1959) has conducted seminal studies examining the stigma associated with being different from the majority members of a group. He argues that the "self" emerges as individuals interact, metaphorically, as though they were actors on a stage. Individuals develop a self-image and project this identity to others in an intentional manner, using clothing, accessories, and body art in the same way actors use costumes and props. As they seek approval or acceptance, individuals take special care to manage what they reveal to others. This "presentation of self" emerges as individuals define the situation where interaction occurs in advance of the event. For example, when someone with a tattoo allows it to be seen by others they reveal it as part of their identity and permit it to be part of the context for interaction. A man whose tattoo is visible while wearing a shirt and tie in his office at an accounting firm tells us something not only about his value system, but also about the culture of the firm itself. These insights are a part of Goffman's (1959) larger premise that "impression management" is a key feature in understanding how individuals create and negotiate the nature of their interactions with others. For better or worse, a visible body piercing or tattoo makes an impression.

These same ideas are useful when trying to understand group behavior, what draws a person to others, or impels them to behavior that situates them in social groups. A recent body of research on the cohesive nature of conservative religiosity is useful here, at least by way of analogy. Smith (1998) believes that a major reason for the persistent growth of American Evangelicalism (in an ever-more pluralistic religious and secular social content) is that conservative Christian groups have been quite successful in creating and maintaining a "sub-cultural identity" of those who stand firm in opposition to the mainstream viewpoint.

Wellman (1999) uses this same theoretical language to frame the tension between religious conservatives and religious gays and lesbians. Each group struggles to maintain a distinctive subcultural identity, and both derive in-group solidarity in their distinctiveness from one another. Thumma (1991) studied a formalized group of gay Evangelicals and reached the same conclusion; in-group cohesiveness (subcultural identity) even makes it possible for individuals to reconcile their own conservative theology and homosexuality.

The logic of "sub-cultural identity" applies to those considering body art, whether body piercing or tattooing. Irwin (2001) authored a fascinating ethnography of mostly middle-class individuals obtaining their first tattoo. Informal interaction with those already tattooed, over an often extended period of time, enabled the interested to obtain a tattoo and maintain a relatively mainstream and middle-class identity. This is an often complicated process of understanding and negotiating aversions and

attractions to being tattooed in a way that resembles a cost-benefit analysis. Their motivations for getting a tattoo are characterized by mainstream logic. Irwin writes (2001 p.61):

> Throughout the process of becoming tattooed, individuals attempted to frame their desires or tattoos within mainstream definitions of success and achievement. . . . Many tattooees explained that they wanted tattoos to commemorate special times in their lives. Their celebrations usually centered on a set of conventional achievements such as graduation from college or graduate school, finishing major exams, or the birth of children.

This description of tattooing aids in conceptualizing about individuals with body art as a subculture. Further examination of what sets of social and social–psychological motivations promote segments of the culture to seek and procure body art will be helpful to understanding the subcultural identity associated with body art. Considering to what extent and in what ways these practices illustrate emotional needs such as desiring to belong to a group, shocking peers, and superiors, or keeping some people at a distance while attracting others into their social networks are important components to deriving a composite picture of the body art subculture in the college population.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this article was to compare information from college students with and without tattoos (Armstrong et al., 2002a, 2002b) with a similar study examining those with and without body piercing. Similar methods, samples, and tools were present in both studies, as well as the same themes of influence regarding image, identity, cues, purpose, barriers, friends, and family. Examining these same influences of body art in college students within the context of symbolic interaction and subculture identity offers a new and informative approach to addressing the social and psychological motivation for obtaining body art and gaining a better composite of those with body art. In order to present this information, the tattoo study (Armstrong et al., 2002a, 2002b) is summarized in the Background section. The body piercing study is fully described in the Methodology and Findings sections. Then, both studies are compared in the Discussion section. Research questions, including prevalency of body art, are:

What is the image of those with body art?
Do those with and without tattoos or body piercing identify with those with body art (affiliation)?
What is the purpose(s) of body art?

Do family and friends influence those with body piercing and tattoos? What barriers stop them and cues prompt them for body art decisions?

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of adolescents and young adults with body art (tattoos, body piercing) has consistently come from estimates or small studies, as no national polls have been conducted. In 1991, Sperry estimated a 25% tattooing rate in adolescents and young adults, but at that time no studies substantiated that figure. Later, rates of 8.6 and 10% were reported in two studies from Armstrong and McConnell (1994) and Armstrong and Pace-Murphy (1997) querying almost 3,000 adolescents living in nine states. Anderson (2001) also agrees that the incidence of body art is higher in young adults, especially in the South. Recently, several studies (Drews, Allison, & Probst, 2000; Forbes, 2001; Mayers, Judelson, Moriarty, & Rundell, 2002) have examined tattooing and body piercing on the college campuses, although aside from prevalency there have been few common variables in their studies. Regarding prevalency, these studies have documented progressive increases and consistent numbers of between 19 and 23% for tattooing and 33% for piercing in college student body art studies.

In order to establish common influential themes when examining body art in college studies, Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) queried 520 college students enrolled in Introductory Sociology classes. A 134-item attitudinal-type tool called the *Armstrong Tattoo Team Attitude Survey* (ATTAS) was created from Armstrong's previous studies of tattooed groups (Armstrong, 1991; Armstrong & McConnell, 1994; Armstrong & Pace-Murphy, 1997; Armstrong et al., 2000; Greif et al., 1999). The influences of image, identity, cues, barriers, and purpose, as well as family and friends with tattooing, were examined by ATTAS subscales. The ATTAS had been reviewed by expert panels for face and content validity.

Findings from the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) study included demographics from the 423 nontattooed students (81%) and 97 tattooed students (19%) (Table 1). The average respondent without a tattoo was a lower-division student, white, female, between the ages of 18–20, from a hometown of a size of 50,000 or less, and living with their biological parents, who had at least an undergraduate degree. Typically, the student attended church two or more times monthly while at home. While in college, this church attendance was reduced at least by 40%, yet a moderate-to-strong strength of faith and at least daily prayer was reported. While the percentages were not as high, the tattooed students reported similar demographic characteristics regarding ethnicity, hometown size, parent's education and church attendance while in college.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of college students with and without tattoos and body piercing

Variable	Tattooing (Armstrong et al., 2002a, 2002b) (N = 520)		Body piercing (N = 450**)	
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
	Without tattoos 423 (81%)	With tattoos 97 (19%)	Never Pierced 247 (55%)	Pierced 145 (32%)
Gender				
Male	121 (29%)	32 (34%)	95 (38%)	20 (13%)
Female	298 (71%)	63 (66%)	152 (62%)	126 (87%)
Age				
18–20	288 (69%)	53 (56%)	150 (60%)	110 (75%)
21–23	128 (31%)	42 (44%)	67 (27%)	27 (19%)
Ethnicity				
Whites	341 (80%)	74 (78%)	159 (52%)	126 (87%)
Blacks	16 (4%)	5 (5%)	14 (5%)	3 (>1%)
Hispanics	48 (12%)	10 (11%)	28 (9%)	12 (8%)
Undergraduate Classification				
Freshman/sophomore	280 (66%)	51 (53%)	150 (60%)	104 (72%)
Junior/senior	139 (33%)	44 (45%)	97 (39%)	41 (28%)
Hometown size, population				
50,000 or less	171 (41%)	37 (39%)	91 (37%)	61 (42%)
51,000 to 200,000	122 (29%)	29 (31%)	76 (31%)	32 (22%)
201,000+	124 (30%)	29 (30%)	80 (32%)	52 (36%)
Education, at least college degree				
Father	228 (54%)	51 (53%)	124 (50%)	74 (51%)
Mother	198 (47%)	43 (44%)	115 (47%)	76 (52%)
Church attendance				
2, + per month, at home	251 (60%)	60 (64%)	204 (83%)	109 (75%)
2, + per month, at college	94 (23%)	14 (15%)	116 (47%)	54 (37%)
Strength of faith, moderate	339 (81%)	65 (68%)	197 (80%)	109 (75%)
Prayer, at least daily	239 (57%)	46 (48%)	126 (51%)	84 (58%)

*Significance at the 0.05 level.
**Another 13% removed jewelry within the past year.

In the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) study, influences such as purpose, image, identity, barriers, and cues subscales, as well as family and friends, were examined (Table 2). Major *purposes* for the tattoos evolved around expressing themselves, feeling unique, being themselves, and helping them feel independent (α = .90) A positive *image* toward tattooed people was reported (62%), even from those that were not tattooed (α = .90). As

Table 2. Comparison of influences associated with body art

Type of influence	Tattooing study ($N = 520$)	Body piercing study ($N = 450$)
Family	Very limited influence Sister, only family member $\chi^2(1) = 3.87$, $p = 0.05$	Very limited influence Only item "negative family comments" $\chi^2(20) = 34.84$, $p = 0.02$
Friends	Strong influence, one significant difference Need for friends with them $\chi^2(4) = 13.1$, $p = 0.01$	Strong influence, few significant differences Amount of closest friends $\chi^2(25), = 82.0$, $p = 0.00$ People their age with body art $\chi^2(35, n = 447) = 88.0$, $p = 0.00$
Purposes	• to express myself • to feel unique • be myself, I don't need to impress anyone anymore • help me feel independent • festival occasion	• to express myself • to feel unique • be myself, I don't need to impress anyone anymore • help me feel independent
Barriers	*Without tattoos* Permanent marks (88%) $\chi^2(4, n = 519), = 127.7$, $p = 0.00$ *Tattooed* Cost (63%) Permanent marks (43%) Hepatitis (40% Significant other concerns (41%)	*Nonpierced* Infections concerns (84%) ns *Pierced* Cost (65%) Permanent marks (59%) Hepatitis (54%) Significant other concerns (41%)
Identity	$\chi^2(2, n = 519) = 9.07$, $p = 0.01$	*Few piercings*: $\chi^2(30, n = 437) = 57.75$, $p = 0.00$ *More piercings* $\chi^2(30, n = 447) = 57.39$, $p = 0.00$ *Heavy piercings* $\chi^2(25, n = 445) = 44.83$, $p = 0.01$
Cues for body art	*Interest in body art, very likely* Nontattooed (13%) Tattooed (63%) $\chi^2(4) = 150.8$, $p = 0.00$ *Get a (or another) very likely* Nontattooed (8%) Tattooed (32%) $\chi^2(4) = 49.2$, $p = 0.00$	*Interest in body art* Nonpierced (09%) Pierced (57%) $\chi^2(5) = 116.6$, $p = 0.00$ *Get a (or another) very likely* Nonpierced (5%) Pierced (36%) $\chi^2(5) = 63.07$, $p = 0.00$

Table 2. Comparison of influences associated with body art (*Continued*)

Type of influence	Tattooing study(*N* = 520)	Body piercing study(*N* = 450)
Image	Possible score up to 119 *M* = 74.5 (*SD* = 15.4) (62%) *t*(507) = −5.03, *p* = .00 Highest rated item boring–interesting	Possible score up to 70 *Few piercings* *M* = 46.1 (*SD* = 9.6) (66%) *t*(507) = −5.03, *p* = .00 Highest rated item old-fashioned–progressive *More piercings* *M* = 44.0 (*SD* = 10.4) (63%) *t*(444) = −3.5, *p* = 0.00 Highest rated item old-fashioned–progressive *Heavy piercings* *M* = 40.8 (*SD* = 11.1) (58%) *t*(445) = −3.2, *p* = 0.002 Highest rated item old-fashioned–progressive

part of this *identity* with tattooed people, being labeled as a risk taker was of low concern for all of these college student respondents, with or without body art (α = .65).

Questions in the barrier subscale of the ATTAS focused on possible factors that would inhibit them from getting or obtaining another tattoo; these factors included such items as pain, disease, or parents (α = .83; Armstrong et al., 2002b). There were different barriers among those with and without tattoos. While both groups were concerned about tattoos because they were permanent marks, those with tattoos were also concerned about cost, hepatitis, and comments from significant others. As to *cues* for the body art, only a small portion of this nontattooed group (13%) stated they were very likely or definitely interested in tattooing and definitely intended to get a tattoo (8%; α = .83). Most said if they were interested, they would "just get one," that seeing famous people or their friends with body art did not seem to play a major part in their decision-making (Armstrong et al., 2002b). Other questions inquired about the influence of family and friends. With tattooing, the sister was the only family member that significantly influenced the respondents, whereas friends seemed to have a strong influence.

DESIGN, SAMPLE, AND PROCESS

An opportunity was present the next year to replicate Armstrong et al.'s (2002a, 2002b) tattoo study, this time specifically targeting those with

body piercings. To investigate the components of the "sub-cultural identity" which existed among and between college students who are pierced, with those who are not, a similar descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative design was used to collect data from two new groups of respondents. While it is known that self-reporting is subject to bias, inaccurate recall, or inflation (Burns & Grove, 1999), it was concluded that the use of an anonymous survey was perhaps the only way to obtain information on their views of body piercing and note the incidence of body piercing in this population. Exempt study status was obtained from the university institutional review board, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all research participants were protected throughout the study.

Instrument for the Piercing Study

The Armstrong Tattooing Team Attitude Survey was revised by the authors of the current study to accommodate the procedural differences and types of piercings. Overall, the tool contained 182 items with 5 subscales (purpose, image, identity, cues, and barriers) and 48 demographic questions. Fourteen questions inquired about the influence of family and friends for the student's decisions regarding body piercing. Other topics regarding religion and risks were asked (27 questions). All of the students approached, whether pieced or not, were asked to complete these sections. For those who were pierced, thirty additional questions using a variety of question formats examined their decision making and experience with their body art. The reading level of the tool was at the 10th grade.

The five subscales used Likert-type statements with a choice range of 1–5 or 1–7 (1 = strongly disagreed or unlikely to 5 or 7 = strongly agreed or very likely) to examine the pierced and nonpierced student's opinions regarding piercing. Topics of the subscales were:

1. *Purpose*. Students were queried about what the purpose was (or would be) if they would get a (or obtain another) piercing. A variety of choices (12 questions) were provided that ranged from improving their social position and self-helpfulness, to furthering their identity.
2. *Image*. The student's perceptions of a typical person with body art were sought. A previous pilot study conducted with students cited difficulties describing just one image of pierced students, so they suggested using various scenarios describing students with piercings that differed in location and number of piercings. Thus, three body-piercing image scenarios were designed so the participant could consider the pierced student with:

(a) few (1–3) piercings in locations such as ear cartilage or navel;

(b) more (4–6) piercings in locations such as the tongue, nose, eyebrow, or lip; or

(c) many (7 or more) piercings and in such locations as the nipples and/or genitals.

Each of these three body-piercing image scenarios had the same 10 bipolar adjectives such as dull—interesting, impulsive—deliberate, and traditional—progressive. Terms for these bipolar adjectives were from the literature and various field experiences in body art studios (Drews et al., 2000; Gibbons & Gerrard, 1995; Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casal-Ariet, 1998). No definitions for these adjectives were given, so a response was based on the respondent's conception of the adjective. For the body piercing image scenarios, the total range for the Likert subscales were from 1 (negative opinion) to 7 (positive opinion), so possible scores could range from 10 to 70 when responses to all items were summed. Therefore, if the mean of the responses ranged from 0 to 34, the perspective of the respondent would be negative, whereas if the Mean ranged from 35 to 70, the viewpoint would be considered increasingly positive.

3. *Identity*. This subscale contained three questions which were placed right after each of the three body-piercing image scenarios to examine how much subjects related or had affilation (feeling) with the specific type of individuals described in the three scenarios. For example, the question would be "how often have you compared yourself with this type of person," whether those with 1–3 piercings, 4–6, or 7 or more piercings. Another question asked the total respondents their opinion about the amount of rebellion associated with getting a tattoo in regard to each of the three body-piercing image scenarios.

4. *Cues*. Seven questions were asked about what might stimulate college students toward consideration or procurement of a piercing. These included famous people, friends, or family members.

5. *Barriers*. Ten questions inquired about what might stop the college students from obtaining a body piercing. These questions focused on possible factors such as pain, disease, or parents that would inhibit them from getting, or obtaining another, body piercing.

The questionnaires were distributed to the college students in the same manner as in the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) study. The sociology researchers on this study approached the students, giving them information regarding the study purpose, benefits, and risks; the students were told their participation was one way they could earn extra credit within

the class. Questionnaires were distributed in classroom sessions and returned in an envelope. No personal identifying information was on the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS, Version 11.

FINDINGS

To obtain information on the influences of those with body piercings, college students with and without body piercing ($N = 450$) were surveyed. The sample was comprised of those enrolled in one of several introductory sociology classes and contained different students than in the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) study. These sociology courses were a requirement of the core curriculum of the university, which was located in a rural part of Southwestern United States in a predominately conservative political and religious community (Roberts, Koch, & Johnson, 2001).

Sample Characteristics

Demographic data from those who participated in the study with piercings ($n = 145$) or without ($n = 247$) body piercings can be found in Table 1. Students who had removed their piercings within the past year ($n = 58$) were excluded in this review. Of interest was that the average nonpierced respondent in this study had similar demographic characteristics to the pierced student as to ethnicity, undergraduate classification, hometown size, parent's education, and church attendance while in college. Those with piercings had obtained them in college (68%), still liked their piercings (85%), and would have the piercing done again (63%). The pierced students ($n = 145$) reported a total of 229 piercings; they also reported a 22% rate of tattoos. Very few (5%) cited drinking alcohol or using drugs at the time of the piercing.

Next, several factors in the subscales (purpose image, identity, cues, and barriers), as well as family and friends thought to influence their body piercing decision making, were examined (see Table 2).

Purposes Cited for Considering or Getting Pierced

Four consistent self-identity responses were chosen with the greatest frequency, whether they had body piercings or not. These statements included: (1) "to express myself, (2) to feel unique, (3) be myself, I don't need to impress anyone anymore, and (4) help me feel independent." For this scale, the internal consistency was $\alpha = .90$. While another purpose of obtaining body piercing "to honor a festive occasion such as a birthday, marriage, or divorce" also was asked, this was not a high priority for those with piercings.

Student's Image of Pierced Individuals

The Cronbach alpha for the three body piercing image scenarios ranged from .85 to .87.

Body Piercing Image Scenario I: Few (1–3) Piercings, i.e., Ear Cartilage and Navel

Respondents (both those pierced and nonpierced) for this scale reported positive opinions of the pierced individuals with the total mean at 46 (66%). No significance differences of opinion were noted between the nonpierced ($M = 44.8$, $SD = 9.4$) and pierced ($M = 47.8$, $SD = 9.6$) as they rated the bipolar adjective pair of "old-fashion—progressive" their highest positive item. There were only two instances in this body-piercing scenario between the pierced and nonpierced students that reflected a significant difference of opinion. These included the terms, "ugly–beautiful" ($\chi^2(30, 450) = 45.18$; $p = .04$) and "negative–positive" ($\chi^2(30, 450) = 44.36$; $p = .04$). Thus, those without piercings thought of those with 1–3 piercings as "ugly" and "negative" whereas those with piercings thought of them as "beautiful" and "positive."

Body Piercing Image Scenario II: More (4–6) Piercings, i.e., Tongue, Nose, Eyebrow, and Lip

The total mean of the scale was 44.0 (63%), so again a positive perspective was present toward those that were pierced. Additionally there was no significant difference between the nonpierced ($M = 42.5$, $SD = 9.73$) and the pierced ($M = 45.9$, $SD = 10.8$) in the highest rated bipolar adjective pair of "old-fashion–progressive." In this scenario, there was only one descriptor pair (negative–positive) ($\chi^2(30, 450) = 47.07$; $p = .024$) that demonstrated a significant difference of opinion.

The descriptive adjectives of "ordinary–unique" were further reviewed to examine the concept of "uniqueness," or what Sweet (2001) refers to in the college generation as an "image-driven culture" (p. 82), seeking to be or do anything but maintain ordinary responses to life. This scale was selected to examine this concept because it related as a "middle of the road" perspective with location and amount of body piercings when all the student scenarios were reviewed. Of the total respondents ($n = 389$) who selected the number on the Likert scale toward the unique perspective (4–7), there were significance differences from those pierced (92%) and nonpierced (86%) ($\chi^2(1,388) = 3.90$; $p = .048$). When all the responses to "uniqueness" were totaled, three other descriptive bipolar adjective pairs were rated over five. These descriptors were *progressive* ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.4$), *interesting* ($M = 5.4$, $SD = 1.3$), and *self-confident*

(M = 5.4, SD = 1.3). Students who rated pierced people as *ordinary* (n = 55) perceived them as immature, ugly, and negative.

Body Piercing Image Scenario III: Numerous (7+) Piercings, i.e., Nipples or Genitals

Although positive perspectives were still present, the ratings were less positive than the other two scenarios. For this scenario, the total mean of the group of adjectives was 40.8 (58%), as compared to Scenario #1 (66%) and Scenario #2 (63%). Also, as in the other two body-piercing scenarios, there was no significant difference in the two groups for the bipolar adjective pair "old-fashioned–progressive" by the nonpierced (M = 39.3, SD = 10.06) and the pierced (M = 42.7, SD = 12.0). The two paired adjectives, "ordinary–unique" (χ^2(30, 450) = 46.38; p = .03) and "immature–mature" (χ^2(30, 450) = 45.02; p =.04) reflected significant differences of opinion between those pierced and nonpierced students; those with piercings had more positive opinions on these bipolar adjective pairs.

Identity with Those with Body Piercing

The range of reliability (Cronbach alpha) was 0.65–0.78 for these three subscales. While there was significant differences between the pierced and nonpierced students regarding their similar feelings or comparisons with any of the body piercing image scenarios, there were no significant differences between those with and without body piercings regarding rebellion. Of those having 1–3 piercings, it was considered less rebellious (61% nonpierced; with piercings, 71%); 4–6 piercings were as rebellious as tattooing (54% nonpierced; with piercings, 59%); and 7 or more piercings were more rebellious (55% nonpierced; with piercings, 46%).

Cues that Might Prompt or Barriers Stop Students from Getting Body Art

For cues (α = .83), the element of interest seemed to be the deciding factor. If not interested, they did not obtain a piercing, while those interested (34%) obtained one and might be interested in more. Both groups (pierced and nonpierced) respondents in this study totally agreed that they "lived for today rather than design long term plans."

Cronbach alpha for the barrier scale was .83. The most frequently listed barrier of those nonpierced was infections (84%) (ns). Other barriers in descending order were hepatitis (73%) and parents (69%). In contrast for those with body piercing, cost was the first barrier (64%), followed by permanent marks or infections (51%), hepatitis (47%), and concerns by

significant others (41%) (ns). Being labeled as a risk taker did not seem to be a barrier (18%) by either respondent group of those pierced or not.

Family Influence on Body Piercing

Several questions inquired about the presence of any family members with body piercing, the amount of parental education, and any negative comments from the family regarding their body piercing. The influence of the family seemed limited, as significant differences between those with body piercing and without were not evident, including the amount of parental education (Table 2). Only the item "negative comments from the family" seemed to be more concerning for the pierced students. The average parent response to the body piercing ranged from mixed (57%) to negative (23%), but this data did not reach significance.

Friends' Influence on Body Piercing

A major support system for the body piercing was supplied by friends, whether they had no piercings, were pierced, or even had piercings with tattoos. No significant differences were present between the pierced and nonpierced when asked about the need to have body piercing to feel a part of the group or because their friends suggested it. The support of friends was even more influential if their friends already had body piercings (Table 2). With those that were pierced, significant differences were present from the nonpierced groups regarding the amount of closest friends and people their age with body piercings, as well as the need for friends with them when they obtained the body piercing.

DISCUSSION

Commonalties in methods, tools, student samples, and subscales of the instrument between the current study and that of the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) studies provide an opportunity to compare and contrast the findings. Thus, four student groups were formed to examine the influences of body art (tattooing and body piercing) to begin to describe a composite picture of those college students who chose to obtain body art. Two of the groups were without either tattoos or body piercings, and two were with tattoos or body piercing.

Demographics

When the demographics of the two samples of college students were examined, there were virtually no differences in demographics found in

the groups of nonbody art respondents, and the two groups of students with body art (Table 1). This lack of demographic difference between those with body art and those without also has been noted by Drews (2000), Forbes (2001), and Mayers et al. (2002). While more body art was obtained as a lower-division student, there still was consistent procurement throughout college enrollment (Table 1), as also noted by Mayers et al. (2002).

When the data were averaged in the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) tattoo studies, and the current piercing study, (1) over one-half of the body art was obtained in college (62%), (2) most still liked their body art (80%), (3) would have done it again (64%), and (4) few drank alcohol or used drugs before the procedure (11%). Also, almost 20% were tattooed and 33% pierced.

Examining the psychosocial dimension of college students with and without body art from a theoretical perspective provides further meaning to the symbolic interaction through which self-image and identity influences decision making and individual interaction. These findings provide initial information regarding the influences of identity, image, cues, purpose, and barriers as well as family and friends for body art in this population.

Influences for Body Art

Friends rather than family provided more influential impact for those with tattoos or piercings. While those without either tattoos or piercings were giving their opinion of what they might do, their responses did produce significant differences regarding the amount of close friends and people their age with body art, as well as the need for friends with them when they obtained the body art.

The *image* of those with either tattoos or body piercings tended to be rated toward the positive end of the continuum by all four student groups, including those without body art (for example, 62% for tattoos and 58–66% for piercings). As in the Drews (2000) study, those with body art did view themselves differently from those who did not have tattoos or piercings, yet sometimes these perceptions were similar to views of students who did not have body art. All of the groups, whether with or without body art, viewed body art as something unique. Their biggest cue for procurement of body art was their interest; if interested, they would "just get one." As expected, strong identity (affiliation) of those with body art (tattoos, body piercing) was present with those having body art.

Their *purpose* for procurement, whether with body art or not, seemed to cluster around a central theme of self-identity, as illustrated by their consistent statements of "to express myself, to feel unique, to be myself,

and help me feel independent" by all four student groups. Additionally, as also noted by both Forbes (2001) and Irwin (2001), commemorating special times and achievements also became a significant purpose for those with tattooing. While significantly more males (29%) in the tattoo study (Armstrong, 2002b) chose a tattoo for such occasions than females (18%), this difference was not present in those with piercings. *Barriers* for obtaining more body piercings or tattoos were consistent among those with body art, and even some of those also were concerned about permanent marks. "Genuine interest" seemed to be the major *cue* that would prompt them to obtain either a body piercing or tattooing. Additionally, living for today rather than projecting long-term plans was reported by all four groups almost unanimously.

Goffman's (1959) work suggests that obtaining a tattoo, or presenting oneself with an obvious body piercing, sets the stage for a symbolic interaction through which individuals use body art to project an identity that shapes how others see them. Presenting one's body art raises the odds that others will interpret a personal encounter based on their attitudes toward tattoos, piercings, and the people who have them. These impressions may be positive or negative and could include affirmation and pride or derision and shock. Regardless, the impressions created are not wholly accidental or haphazard. This seems especially the case when individuals present tattoos and piercings as symbols of who they are and gravitate toward others of like mind or similar behavior. Data we report here support this assertion that having pierced or tattooed friends significantly influenced respondents' attitudes toward body art as well as the likelihood of being pierced or tattooed themselves.

Borrowing again from the language of subcultural identity theory, it is surmised that individuals who are tattooed or pierced see themselves as distinct from others who are not. Uniqueness was found to be an important characteristic for those in the second (4–6 piercings) Body Piercing Image Scenario, which supports the notion of subculture identity. This suggests that to be in the body art subculture one needs to want to be "progressive and unique." Moreover, the data showed that the third body-piercing image scenario (with 7 or more piercings) evoked the most concerns or negative ratings, even among those with body art themselves. Piercing one's body to this degree and beyond enables individuals to shock and awe others by identifying themselves as dramatically as possible with a piercing or tattooed subculture. Depending on the choices one makes with whom to interact, these differences may or may not rise to the level of deviant distinctiveness. In either instance, an obviously visible tattoo or even extreme body piercing marks identity in a manner similar to using clothing or jewelry to mark affiliation with a religious group, fraternity/sorority, or athletic team, all of which use symbols and

rituals to enhance group solidarity. Paradoxically, as individuals use tattoos and piercings to gain entrée into a subculture, they also are able to express individuality and uniqueness to those outside the subculture as their body art makes its intended impression. As individuals gain the attention of those who do not have body art, and at the same time more strongly affiliate with those who do, it appears that tattooing and body piercing are not likely to disappear soon

APPLICATION

College students with body art, both in the Armstrong et al. (2002a, 2002b) study and in this study described here, were expressing their uniqueness by obtaining tattoos and body piercing. This body art symbolized their individuality and self-identity (Armstrong, 1991; Armstrong et al., 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Armstrong & Pace–Murphy, 1997; Drews et al., 2000; Forbes, 2001; Greif et al., 1999; Irwin, 2001; Sweet, 2001). Overall their demographics were not much different than those without body art. The nurse should expect body art clients from all walks of life. Additionally, nurses in clinical practice who are caring for young adults, as well as adolescents, either in illness or health activities, are continually confronted with issues related to self-concept, body image, and self-esteem. Thus, it is important that nurses have a clear understanding of the psychosocial dimensions, as well as the developmental issues confronting these clients at a transition time when they are aspiring to assume control of their lives and make important decisions regarding their independence, self-confidence, and establishment of personal identity. These issues produce an ongoing process of striving to develop self-concept, which in turn influences behavior; then, this behavior affects one's self-concept. Emotional support and role modeling become very important at this time.

Increasing numbers of people have tattoos and body piercing. In previous research, nurses and other health care providers expressed negative attitudes toward those with tattoos; attitudes that may adversely affect care (Stuppy et al., 1998). Less-than-favorable attitudes, especially to groups of people trying to "find themselves," can negatively impact the development of caring relationships. Gaining insight into the body art subculture, the choices, and decision making that leads to body art fosters gathering both emotional and informational data, whether the nurse is in the role of teacher, advocate, caregiver, or problem solver. While it is well documented that this developmental group are risk-takers and that historically those with tattoos and body piercing have been associated with rebelliousness and deviancy, recent findings (Armstrong et al., 2002a, 2002b), including this study, are beginning to question that notion of deviancy and rebelliousness, and instead suggest that body art is a "valued

means of self-expression" (Forbes, 2001, p. 784). Acceptance of the body art as a recognition of the individual's uniqueness can build trust and ultimately develop more individualized, effective nursing care. Thus, the tattoos and body piercing could provide a useful set of discussion cues when developing rapport and understanding of clients who are in the process of forming and reforming self-identity.

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