

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND PRACTICE IN ATTITUDES TOWARD INDIVIDUALS WITH BODY PIERCING¹

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Summary.—Some research suggests adorning the body with tattoos or piercing jewelry is normative. Survey data were gathered from 450 undergraduates (72% female; 80% Euro-American; 63% freshmen and sophomores). Correlations between an index of respondents' religious belief and practice and their attitudes toward individuals who had more body piercings were weak if piercings were 7 or more, including piercings of the nipples and genitals. As religiosity is a carrier of normative behavior, individuals who have body piercings may be viewed as behaving within cultural norms.

Individuals with strong religious beliefs and regular religious practices are less likely than others to engage in deviant behavior (Brown, Parks, Zimmerman, & Phillips, 2001; Jaynes, 2001). The evidence is not so clear for correlations of religious belief and practice with interest in body art. In one study religious and nonreligious individuals were equally likely to have one tattoo, be interested in tattoos, or obtained a tattoo (Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2004). While medical practitioners regard body art as a signal for high-risk behavior (Carroll, Riffenburgh, Roberts, & Myhre, 2002), others contend that young adults with piercings and tattoos are psychologically normal and more similar than dissimilar to peers (Frederick & Bradley, 2000).

This paper reports correlations between religious belief and practice and respondents' attitudes toward others who have various numbers of body piercings as well as piercings placed in more prominent and intimate parts of their bodies.

METHOD

Sample

Respondents were 450 students at a large, public state university located in a predominately rural area in the southwest. The sample included 85% who were between 18–22 years ($M = 20.9$ yr., $SD = 4.5$). 55% identified them-

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selves as "Baptist" or "Church of Christ"; 57% attended church at least once a month; and 78% said their religious faith was moderate or very strong. 59% pray at least daily.

They were undergraduate students from various majors enrolled in sociology courses. The survey was administered on examination days and collected immediately. After giving informed consent, all in attendance participated. While this was a convenience sample, the respondents are from a generation likely to have piercings and tattoos and be exposed to positive images of body art in sports, popular culture, and entertainment (Sanders, 1989; DeMello, 2000; Forbes, 2001).

Measures

Attitudes toward individuals with body art were measured by questions describing three piercing scenarios as well as semantic differential word-pairs (Osgood, Tannenbaum, & Suci, 1957). These were derived and adapted from the Armstrong Tattoo Team Attitude Survey (Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998; Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2002). Respondents were given the following instructions: "First, think about the person with Few (1-3) piercings, wearing delicate appearing piercing jewelry, in such locations as an ear cartilage and/or navel." "Next, think about the person with More (4-6) piercings, wearing regular piercing jewelry, and in such locations as the tongue, nose, eyebrow or lip." "Lastly, think about the person with Many (7 or more) piercings wearing heavy gauge jewelry, and piercings in locations such as the nipples and/or genitals."

After each scenario, respondents were asked to "Look at (the following) pair of words, then respond quickly and spontaneously." There were 7 points between paired words arranged as semantic differentials from most negative to most positive. The word pairs were "shy/self-confident," "dull (boring)/interesting," "irrational/rational," "ugly/beautiful," "immature/mature," "ordinary/unique," "old-fashioned/progressive," "unstable/stable," "unenjoyable/enjoyable," and "negative/positive." The items from each scenario formed scales with Cronbach alphas of .87 for Few (1-3 piercings) and More (4-6) piercings) and of .86 for Many (7 or more).

The six items describing religious faith and practice which formed the Religiosity scale were adapted from the General Social Survey.² Cronbach alpha was .84.

These variables and their responses were A. Church attendance growing up: "How often did you attend church while growing up?"; score as (1

Weekly or more often, (2) 2-3 times a month, (3) About once a month, (4) Several times a year, (5) Once or twice a year, (6) Never. B. Church attendance at college: "Since coming to (name of university), do you: (1) Continue attending a church of the same denomination as you attended as a child, (2) Attend a different type of church, (3) Attend several different types of churches, (4) Attend only sporadically, (5) No longer attend worship at all, (6) I have never attended church. C. Church attendance now: "How often do you attend church now?" (1) Weekly or more often, (2) 2-3 times a month, (3) About once a month, (4) Several times a year, (5) Once or twice a year, (6) Never. D. Strength of religious faith: "In general, would you consider your religious faith to be": (1) Very strong, (2) Moderately strong, (3) Moderately weak, (4) Very weak, (5) Nonexistent. E. Frequency of Prayer: "About how often do you pray?" (1) Several times a day, (2) Daily, (3) Several times a week, (4) Once a week, (5) Less than once a week, (6) Never. F. Feeling close to God: "How close do you feel to God most of the time?" (1) Extremely close, (2) Somewhat close, (3) Not Close, (4) Not at all, (5) I don't believe in God. (6) I don't know. Each Religiosity variable was reverse-coded so a high score indicated greater religiosity.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the zero-order correlation coefficients, means, and standard deviations for each variable. There was no correlation between Religiosity and attitudes toward those with "few" or "more" piercings. The weak (-.14), negative correlation (explaining less than 2% of the variance), was between Religiosity and many piercings. This supports the conclusions by

TABLE 1
BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS OF FOUR VARIABLES

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Few (1-3) Piercings				
2. More (4-6) Piercings	.62†			
3. Many (7+) Piercings	.48†	.80†		
4. Religiosity Scale	-.01	-.07	-.14†	
M	46.1	44.1	40.8	26.3
SD	9.6	10.4	11.1	6.4

Frederick and Bradley (2000) and suggests practitioners may need to re-examine the supposition that college students with tattoos or body piercings are at high risk for other deviant behavior (Carroll, *et al.*, 2002).

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²Davis, J. A., Smith, T. W., & Marsden, P. V. (2003) *General Social Surveys, 1972-2002. 2nd ICPSR version*. On line [Cumulative file] [Computer file] Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center.

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