

Tattoos and piercings essay sample

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When you look at someone and see a tattoo or piercing, what do you think? Do you instantly see this person in a negative light or do you simply see it as a way in which the individual is expressing themselves? Tattoos and piercings are a form of nonverbal communication that can communicate many things to us. Nonverbal communication is defined as “all modes of communication except language, including nonword vocals, gestures, use of space, time, artifacts, and smell” (Warren and Fassett 201). These different forms of nonverbal communication, such as tattoos and piercings, help to portray one’s unique image and style to society.

Tattoos and piercings are both forms of body modification that have been used to help identify individuals for many years. Dating all the way back to 700 A. D., the ancient Mayans practiced ear, lip, cheek, and nasal piercings. Women from the Maori culture used chin tattoos to signify womanhood and the ability to bear children and marry. In addition, Romans used tattooing to mark criminals and Eskimos used lip piercings to symbolize womanhood (Rush, 30-36). One other example of ancient forms of body modification dates back to 1700 Japan. In this ancient Japanese culture, tattooing was considered as an aesthetic art form. In their culture, the royalty wore ornate clothing and as a result the middle class adorned themselves with elaborate full body tattoos (Lineberry). For many years, tattoos and piercings have been used to help identify people in society.

Although body modification has been used for many years as an identifier, the uses of tattoos and piercings has become much more complex in today’s culture. Tattoos and piercings were once believed to be relegated to the margins of society. The only people you would see with tattoos and piercings

were bikers, military, and sailors. In today's culture, they are much more commonplace (Atkinson, 36). As this form of body modification has become more prevalent, the reasoning and meaning behind these tattoos and piercings have become more complicated. It no longer serves as a simple identifier but serves as a way to look into someone's life at their values and certain aspects of one's life.

In order to examine the value and aspects of one's life that they are communicating with these body modifications, you must look at the reasoning behind these tattoos and piercings. Some say it's simply exciting and pleasurable or they may just be one of those people who are jumping on the bandwagon. There are others who see it in the context of art, ritual or self-expression. They may get a tattoo or piercing as a memorial of a family member or friend, tribute to someone or something, feeling of belonging to a group, fashion statement, individuality, or as something spiritual. Those who disagree with tattoos and piercings see it as a symbol of risk-taking behavior, self harm and personality disorders (Atkinson, 56). Whatever the reason behind an individuals' tattoo or piercing, it is sending out a message to people giving them a first impression of who you are.

When examining what a tattoo or piercing is communicating, you must also look at the actual process itself. Not only is the actual tattoo or piercing communicating something to us, but the actual process of getting a tattoo or piercing is also communicating something to us. It may be something as simple as an individual that enjoys the pain that comes along with getting a tattoo or piercing. Getting a tattoo or piercing may also be signifying an

important stage in someone's life. Do you remember a time when you were a young adolescent and made a decision simply for that fact that you were old enough to make your own decision? There are some people who believe that getting a tattoo or piercing may be an example of this. There are those who turn eighteen and want to get a tattoo or piercing just because their parents have told them they can't their whole lives. Although this may be seen as a rash decision, it is still communicating something to us (Rubin). It is communicating to us that this person has come to a life changing moment in their lives' when they are able to make decisions on their own.

We live in a world today where we can no longer fit our identities into simple boxes. It is not as simple as black or white, male or female, or gay or straights. What we once thought were simple boxes now overlap (Warren and Fassett 207). It is important to understand that these boxes are overlapping so that we do not make prejudged stereotypes about individuals. We must pay close attention to all forms of communication in order to help identify an individual. By examining forms of communication like tattoos and piercings, it can give us clues to an individuals social status, personality, religious affiliation, associations with organizations and sexual orientation.

Works Cited

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