

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Examining the Experiences of College Women About Body Modification:

Searching for the “I” in Tattoo

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The tattooing culture has been associated with negativity and danger for much of the Western culture’s history (Atkinson, 2003; Caplan, 2000; DeMello, 2000). Recently, a shift has occurred in which the practice of tattooing has become a method of expression and a tool in illustrating one’s identity. Despite this transition, there continues to be hesitation against the tattooing culture regarding acceptance in the collegiate and professional setting (Manuel & Sheehan, 2007). The strongest hesitation seems to be toward females with tattoos based on our society’s beauty ideals and expectations of feminine expression and behavior (Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson, 2003).

Through means of qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven tattooed, female, undergraduate students. Their experiences were transcribed and the data were analyzed using coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to identify prominent themes among the participants.

The women shared their experiences of why they chose tattooing to express their ideas and shared the meaningful stories that inspired the art they have or will be getting. They also shared many stories of disapproval or mistreatment as a result of being a

tattooed female. There was particular connection between disapproval and generational beliefs as well as religious beliefs. The college environment was an overall positive environment for the women to be, however stories were shared of mistreatment or judgment from the classroom or particular areas of study. Suggestions were presented for those who work in the college setting with students who might be of this sub-population.