

People Perception: The Effects of Facial Piercings

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The research hypothesis of this study is that subjects will have a more negative perception of models with facial piercings than models without. There were 35 subjects surveyed. Each subject looked at 15 pictures of people between the ages of 19 and 21 years. There were 11 filler pictures and four model pictures in each survey. The subject answered questions that helped them to rate these people on different positive and negative scales. The models were shown with no facial piercing, a fake lip piercing, a fake nose piercing or both a fake lip and nose piercing. The same models were used with every subject. The results of some of the tests indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the way the subjects perceived the model with no facial piercing, the model with a lip piercing and the model with a nose piercing.

Body modification is becoming more prevalent in American society today than it has ever been. Because it is becoming more prevalent, some may go so far as to say that it is becoming more widely accepted. However, this is not necessarily the case. The purpose of my study was to determine if society would negatively perceive people who have a facial piercing. I conducted the experiment by having the participants complete an 11 question survey about 15 pictures. Throughout the pictures, there were 11 fillers (people without any facial piercing) and four models (people who were wearing fake facial jewelry). I hoped that by using fake facial piercings, society would learn that “you should not judge a book by its cover.” In other words, you shouldn’t judge a person by

whether or not they have a facial piercing and more broadly by whether or not they have a body modification. Throughout the literature reviewed, there was an overall negative connotation towards people with body modification, including facial piercing.

Myrna L. Armstrong, a professor in the School of Nursing at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center figured that the number of people with piercings or tattoos is hard to know exactly as cited in (Schnirring, 2003). She has come across one study of college students that concluded that 17% of them are pierced and yet another study that shows that 51% are pierced. Both of these numbers still differ from her findings, which indicated that 33% of college students are pierced. A 1999 study by researchers from Emory University and Howard University published in the *Journal of Public Health Policy* indicated that... “a typical establishment would perform about 3,000 piercings per year” as cited in (Schnirring, 2003). This number alone shows that piercings are a very prominent activity in today’s society. However, the difficult question to answer is whether or not the rest of society discriminates against people with body modifications (Schnirring, 2003).

Discrimination of body modification can be seen in many forms. In a study conducted by researchers at the University of Florida (UF), a comparison was made among gender differences in college students who had at least one tattoo or nontraditional piercing, defined as located anywhere other than the earlobe. Two-hundred and eighty undergraduate students from UF were surveyed for this study. Of the 280, 160 of them were women and the remaining 120 were men. Of the women surveyed, more than 80% were pierced. Whereas of the men surveyed, only 50% were pierced. To show an even bigger gender difference, of the men who were pierced, 40% of them waited until they

were 18 or older. Of the women who were pierced, only 20% of them waited until the legal piercing age. One could infer that this difference among genders helps to show that it is more widely accepted for females to have non-traditional piercings than it is for men. In other words, society deems it socially unacceptable or discriminates more toward males who have non-traditional piercings.

Marisa A. Miller, PhD. said, "It is apparent that body art is a fad that is gaining popularity worldwide, and oral jewelry is increasingly being viewed as an acceptable fashion statement in our society" (Miller, 2003). Although this comment may lead one to believe that this article is in favor of such piercings, the rest of the article refers to the dangers and hazards of oral and facial piercings to the athletic community. The article referred to the many dangers a person inflicts upon oneself by subjecting oneself to facial and oral piercings, as well the dangers to others. One such danger noted in this article was injuring oneself or another, with one's piercing, when physical contact is made during a sporting event. There is a debate of whether or not this danger should be eliminated, by forcing all players with a piercing to remove the piercing before being allowed to play, or considered another risk of playing the game. The fact that some people believe that those with facial and oral piercings should not be allowed to play in sports does show discrimination against people with such piercings. The discrimination against the person with a piercing may not be detrimental to the person, because he or she could simply remove the piercing, but the discrimination is still there.

In another study that showed discrimination of those with body modifications, Jessica Brown, a 10-½ year old girl, asked, "Doesn't that hurt...That's got to be painful," to a graduate student who had an ivory spike through his nose and needles going through

his skin on both sides of his chest (Lord, 1997). Her parents had taken her to a daylong body-art convention in hopes that she would no longer want to be a “body modifier.” By the end of her day at the convention, Jessica was quoted saying that she doesn’t want a tattoo because they make people uglier, but she still wants a navel ring (Lord, 1997).

Armando Favazza, a psychiatrist for the University of Missouri and the author of *Bodies Under Siege* said, “While it may alarm parents, the body-art fad is “nothing pathological” as cited in (Lord, 1997). Although, this may comfort Jessica Brown’s parents, this belief is not widely held by all in the field of psychology. There was a correlation found between higher self-reported antisocial attitudes and the younger the age of the person when he or she began to pierce their body (Anderson & Carroll, 2002). This evidence was concluded from a comparative study of body modifiers versus non-body modifiers, conducted by Frederick and Bradley in 2000 (Anderson & Carroll, 2002).

Method

Participants

Thirty-five participants were recruited for my research project. However, one of the subject’s data had to be omitted because he confused the order of the pictures viewed from the picture booklet. All of the participants were students at Lindenwood University. They were all enrolled in at least one of the following courses; Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Anthropology and Interactive Psychology, which enabled them to be considered a part of the Lindenwood University Human Subject Pool. I used the Lindenwood University Human Subject Pool to recruit all of the participants. By recruiting the subjects through the Human Subject Pool, I was

able to give them a bonus slip, which enabled the subjects to receive bonus points from their professors.

Materials

The materials used were as follows; a lab room, a long desk with a divider in the middle (so if the researcher was running two participants at once, the participants could not see what the other one was looking at or writing down), a separate desk for the researcher and three chairs (one for each participant and one for the researcher). Each participant was given a pen to write with, a booklet of 15 head shots, see Appendix A for examples, and 15 copies of the 11 question survey in packet form (see Appendix B). The headshots were of 15 young adults who voluntarily signed a model informed consent, allowing the researcher to use his or her picture(s) for this study. Of the 15 head shots the subjects were going to view, four of them were target or model pictures. The other 11 were filler pictures. One of the four models viewed by the subject had no facial piercing, one had a fake nose piercing, one had a fake lip piercing and one had both fake nose and lip piercings. Every model was seen with all of the above four conditions in position three, six, 10 and 13 of the picture booklet. However, the subjects only saw each model with one condition. Therefore, by counterbalancing experiment was left with a total of 16 conditions and 27 headshots. The 11 questions on the survey dealt with the subjects rating the people in the photos on different life aspects. For instance, question #2 asked, "how far has this person gone academically?" The choices that the subject could chose from were: high school dropout, high school graduate, attending college, or college graduate. The answers that the subjects provided about the models were later analyzed to see if there was a significant difference in the way the subjects rated the model with a

facial piercing and the model without a facial piercing. The subjects were also given one informed consent to keep and one to fill out and give back to the researcher, a participant receipt to turn in for extra credit, an Experimenter's List of Participants form to fill out one line and give back to the researcher and finally a feedback letter. A debriefing script was used to ensure that the same thing was said to each participant at the conclusion of his or her participation.

Procedure

Before recruiting subjects, 15 of the researchers' friends were asked if they would be a model in a picture in the study. One head shot was taken of 11 of them. These were used as the "filler pictures" to help deceive the subjects. Had the subjects known that the study was looking at their judgments of only the people with the facial piercings; their answers may have been skewed. The other four people's pictures were used as the stimuli. One picture, of each of the four models, was taken with no fake facial piercing, one with a fake nose piercing, one with a fake lip piercing and one with both fake nose and lip piercings. A sample of all of these stimuli is on Appendix A. The order in which the filler pictures were presented was randomly decided, by turning all of the pictures upside down, mixing them up and then numbering them one through 11. The odd pictures were presented first, followed by the even pictures. The model pictures were presented in positions three, six, 10 and 13 in order to ensure that there was almost an even amount of filler pictures between each model picture. After the original order was determined, the researcher counterbalanced the order in which the subjects saw the models. Therefore, the study ended up having 16 conditions. Each model was seen in position three, position six, position ten and position 13. In each of the positions, the

model was also seen having no facial piercing, a lip piercing, a nose piercing or both a lip and a nose piercing.

To recruit subjects the researcher put a description of my study, along with a sign-up sheet on the Human Subject Pool Sign up Board, located on the fourth floor of Young Hall at Lindenwood University. The subjects signed up for a predetermined time and then came to the corresponding location at the correct time. When the subject arrived, the researcher asked for his or her name to make sure he or she was at the right place. The researcher then had him or her sit down at their desk and fill out the participant receipt, two informed consents and the Experimenter's List of Participants. Once they were finished doing this, the researcher explained to him or her that the first page of the survey corresponded with the first picture in the booklet, the second page with the second picture, and so on. The subject would answer the 11-questions on each page of the survey that pertained to the person in the corresponding picture. When the subject had completed the survey, the researcher would debrief them by reciting the debriefing script and then give them a feedback letter.

Results

All data that corresponded with the models that had both a nose and a lip piercing were omitted because subjects continuously stated after their participation, that he or she could tell that the piercings were fake. The researcher felt that if the subjects could tell that some of the models were wearing fake piercings they might have rated him or her differently than they would have if they believed the piercings to be real. The researcher analyzed the amounts of undesirable behaviors attributed to each model, the amount of negative characteristics attributed to each model, the perceived education level of each

model, the perceived amount of income made per hour by each model, the likelihood of the test taker befriending each model, the perceived category/categories each model fit into best and if the models were perceived to be an asset, menace or something else to society. These factors were chosen to be analyzed because the researcher felt that they are helpful in determining the subjects' perception of the models.

Data about the model's perceived race and positive characters was left out of all analyses because the researcher felt they would be of no help in determining the perception of the models.

The first test that was run on this data was descriptive. The variable of interest in this test was the perceived amount of income made per hour by a model with no facial piercing, a model with a lip piercing and a model with a nose piercing. In all cases, over 60% of the subjects chose either \$6.00 - \$7.99 or \$8.00 - \$9.99.

The second type of test used was a chi-square analysis. Here, the variables of interest were the perceived education level of a model with no facial piercing, a model with a lip piercing and a model with a nose piercing. Statistical significance was found in all three cases. For the model with no facial piercing, $\chi^2_3 = 26.000$, $p < .001$. For the model with a lip piercing, $\chi^2_3 = 8.118$, $p = .044$. For the model with a nose piercing, $\chi^2_3 = 18.000$, $p < .001$. However, the significance could be attributed to the fact that most of the subjects chose one of the two middle choices (i.e. high school graduate, attending college).

A one-way ANOVA was used when analyzing the difference in the amounts of undesirable behaviors attributed to each model. The dependent variable was the mean of the undesirable behavior and the independent variable was piercing. The levels of the

independent variable were a model with no facial piercing, a model with a lip piercing and a model with a nose piercing. Statistical significance was found, $F_{(2,64)} = 5.524$, $p = .006$, indicating that the models piercing status had an effect on the mean undesirable behavior rating.

Post-hoc tests were run to determine where the differences occurred. When the model with no facial piercing was paired with the model with the lip piercing, statistical significance was found, $t_{(33)} = -2.874$, $p = .007$. When the model with no facial piercing was paired with the model with a nose piercing, statistical significance was also found, $t_{(32)} = -2.852$, $p = .008$. However, when the model with a lip piercing and the model with a nose piercing were paired together, no statistical significance was found, $t_{(32)} = -.607$, $p > .05$. The statistical significance of the first two analyses hold even with the Bonferroni correction factored in in order to account for the inflation of Type I error.

Descriptive statistics were analyzed for the likelihood of the test taker befriending the model with no facial piercing, a model with a lip piercing and a model with a nose piercing. Of the subjects who viewed the model with no facial piercing, 12% said it was very unlikely they would befriend the model, 43% said it was unlikely they would befriend the model, 33% said it was likely they would befriend the model and 12% said it was very likely they would befriend the model. Of the subjects who viewed the model with a lip piercing, 15% said it was very unlikely they would befriend the model, 44% said it was unlikely they would befriend the model, 39% said it was likely they would befriend the model and 2% said it was very likely they would befriend the model. Of the subjects who viewed the model with a nose piercing, 18% said it was very unlikely they would befriend the model, 32% said it was unlikely they would befriend the model, 47%

said it was likely they would befriend the model and 3% said it was very likely they would befriend the model. A possible reason that a difference was detected could be the fact that subjects tend to choose the choices that are in the middle, as a majority of these subjects did. When the two unlikely choices were paired together and the two likely choices were paired together, no difference was detected. Of the subjects who viewed the model with no facial piercing, 54% said they would not befriend the model and 46% said they would. Of the subjects who viewed the model with a lip piercing, 60% said they would not befriend the model and 40% said they would. Of the subjects who viewed the model with a nose piercing, 50% said they would not befriend the model and 50% said they would.

Another set of Chi-Square tests that were run, looked at which category the model with no facial piercing, the model with a lip piercing and the model with a nose piercing fit into best. No statistical significance was found based on what type of categories the models were perceived to fit into best.

Another analysis conducted of this data was descriptive. 81% of the subjects perceived the model with no facial piercing to be an asset to society. The remaining 19% perceived the model to be a menace to society. 58% of the subjects perceived the model with a lip piercing to be an asset to society. The remaining 42% perceived the model to be a menace to society. 67% of the subjects perceived the model with a nose piercing to be an asset to society. 30% of the subjects perceived the model to be a menace to society. The remaining 3% made no distinction. Because the percentages of the model with a lip piercing were so close, a Chi-Square analysis was conducted to determine if there was

statistical significance. However, no statistical significance was found when looking at the model with a lip piercing, $\chi^2_1 = .758, p > .05$.

The final test that was run was another one way ANOVA. The variables of interest were the amount of negative characteristics attributed to a model with no facial piercing, a model with a lip piercing and a model with a nose piercing. No statistical significance was found and the Null Hypotheses was accepted.

Discussion

In today's society, it is important to know how people with facial piercings are perceived. Therefore, it is interesting to find out from this study that people with a facial piercing are generally looked upon more negatively than people without facial piercings. Facial piercing is a major topic of discussion in many workplaces and families. Because, it is mainly adolescents and young adults who are engaging in this piercing behavior, only models that were between the ages of 19 years and 21 years were used in this study. This factor could have been the first limitation to the study. If models that appeared younger or older than 19-21 years had been used in this experiment, the results may have been completely different.

Not only were the models used within that 3-year age range, but also all of the subjects that were tested in this experiment were very near to this age range. Although significance was found based on whether or not the model had no facial piercing, a lip piercing or a nose piercing in some instances, the actual amount of significance would have probably been greater if the age of the subjects had a wider range. It is sensible to believe that the amount of significance, when significance was found, was not all that great because of the fact that the subjects were in close age proximity to the models and

could therefore relate to them better than somebody of a different generation. Furthermore, college students, because of the era that they are currently living in, are more habituated to seeing people with facial piercings than people of older generations. Because in such situations as job interviews, the interviewees are usually of an older generation, it seems important to learn how young adults with facial piercings are perceived by members of earlier generations.

Another factor that could have caused the results of this study to be skewed either way could have been the mere boredom effect. Because of the time length and repetitiveness of the survey, the subjects could have easily become bored and just possibly marked down the same answers for the entire survey to just “get through it.” Each subject was required to answer an 11-question survey about 15 different pictures. While observing some of the subjects answering the questions, it seemed as if they were fidgety. For instance, they would constantly be looking to the back of the survey to see how many they had left to answer instead of focusing on the picture and questions they were working on at the current time.

Another factor that should be considered in this study is the fact that a fourth type of model was used in the survey. There was a model that had both a lip and nose piercing. However, that data was thrown out because many subjects, after being debriefed, had told me that they believed one of the male models with both piercings really did have fake piercings. The mere thought that one particular model in the survey had a fictitious piercing could have led the subject to believe that all of the people with piercings indeed had fake piercings. It is possible that because the subjects believed that they had figured out the purpose behind the study, they wanted to do their best to give

false answers to make it seem as though they really would rate a person with a facial piercing lower than a person without one, when in all actuality they would not.

The final factor that has been considered to affect the results of the data in this study was the fact that some of the subjects accidentally skipped a few of the pages of picture book. Therefore, when they got to the end of the picture booklet, they still have a few pages in the actual survey to answer. The subject would then have to go back and look at each page carefully until they found which picture it was that they had not previously seen. If the pictures were viewed in the correct order, the results may have been different. For instance, if the previous picture viewed put the subject into a negative thinking mode, then the subject's response to the model picture could have been affected.

In replication of this study, the first thing one should think about is the use of a broader age range of subjects. Collegiate students should not be the only age range tested. For instance, more thorough results may be found if one would survey people in high school and business settings. Another suggestion would be for the researcher to use a computer to display the pictures and to have the subjects answer electronically. This way all subjects would for sure see all of the pictures in the same order. Another thing the researcher could do is to shorten the survey. This could take away from the boredom effect. Finally, the researcher should make sure that the models' fake piercings look as real as a real piercing does.

References

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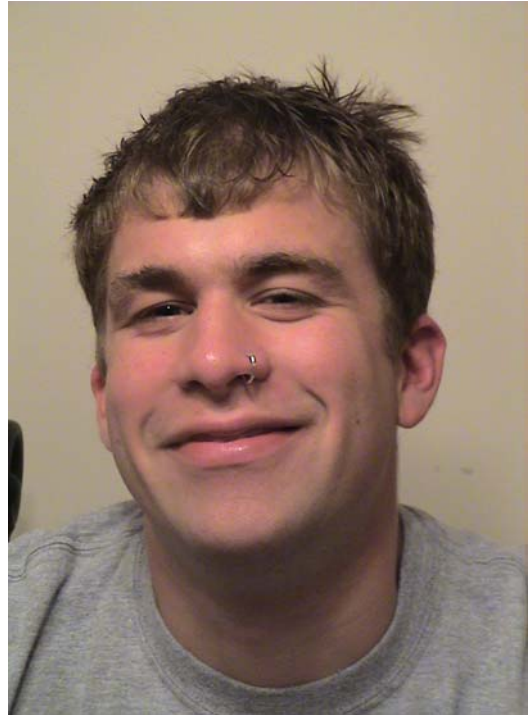
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Appendix A
Sample Pictures



Appendix B

People Perception Survey

Please circle the answer that **best describes** the person in Picture #1.

1. What race does this person belong to?

Caucasian Black Hispanic Croatian Other:

2. How far has this person gone academically?

High School Dropout High School Graduate Attending College College Graduate

3. How much money does this person make per hour?

Unemployed \$0.01 to \$5.99 \$6.00 to \$7.99
\$8.00 to \$9.99 \$10.00 to \$11.99 \$12.00 or more

4. How likely do you think this person is to have been arrested?

Very unlikely unlikely likely very likely

5. How likely do you think this person is to smoke cigarettes?

Very unlikely unlikely likely very likely

6. How likely do you think this person is to use recreational drugs?

Very unlikely unlikely likely very likely

7. How likely do you think this person is to drink alcoholic beverages?

Very unlikely unlikely likely very likely

8. How likely are you to be friends with this person?

Very unlikely unlikely likely very likely

9. Which category/categories does this person appear to fit into best?

“Jock” “Druggie” “Preppy” “Trouble Maker” “All-American”
“Nerd” “Alcoholic” “Other”: _____

10. Overall, is this person an asset to society or a menace to society?

Asset Menace Other (please explain on back)

11. On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is the lowest and 4 is the highest; please rate this person on how much of the following characteristics you believe that they have.

Honesty	_____	Trustworthiness	_____
Messiness	_____	Organization	_____
Kindness	_____	Selfishness	_____
Pessimism	_____	Optimism	_____
Hardworking	_____	Laziness	_____