

BODY ART

Tattoos and piercings show individuality, creativity



Clockwise from left: Michael C. of Tattoo Consortium tattoos a customer's back — the process will take a number of sessions to complete; Navel rings are a popular choice for females; tongue studs are a recent fad for college students.

At first sight, tattoos and body piercing generate one of two responses — instant attraction or rapid repulsion.

Richard Friedman, a tattoo artist at Poking You Tattoo in College Station, said there are still common misconceptions.

"Overall, people look at tattoos as a dark art," he said. "They see people with tattoos as a rowdy, rebellious crowd. That's not how it is."

Although the allure of a piercing or a tattoo may be great, there is always the pain factor to consider.

Michael C., owner and artist at Tattoo Consortium, said he is frequently asked if tattooing and piercing hurt.

"Everything we do hurts a little bit," he said. "It hurts the least on someone else. Bony parts hurt the most."

Michael C. said the most common piercings are the belly button, tongue and eyebrow.

"I do a little bit of everything," he said. "I've been tattooing for 18 years and piercing for about eight."

"J," a piercer at Tattoo Consortium, said he has performed several piercings in his five years of experience and said it is a relatively quick procedure.

"I've pierced everything," he said. "There's nothing I haven't [pierced] and nothing I won't. The entire thing takes five to eight minutes, including the consultation, actual piercing and after-

care instructions."

"J" said the most unusual piercing he has seen was a chest piercing.

"We pierced the center of this dude's chest, right under his collar bone," he said. "It was a ring that hung through his skin."

Jolene Heck, a Bryan-College Station resident who recently got a tattoo, is not exactly the type of person you would expect to see in a tattoo shop located in a college town.

"I'm 42, about to be a grandmother," she said.

Heck said her tattooing experience was much better than she anticipated.

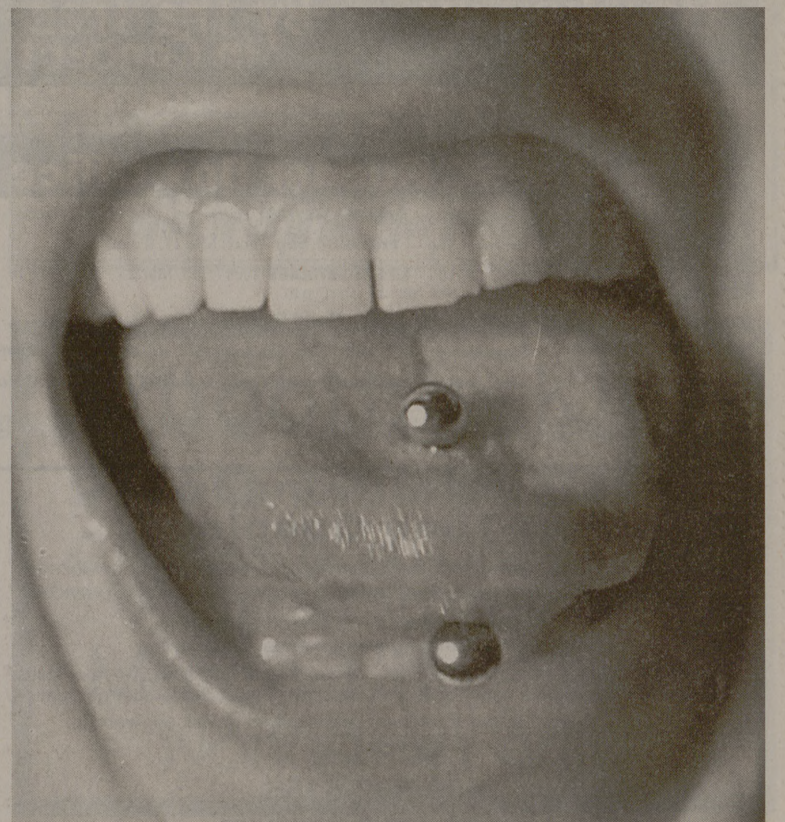
"I was petrified, but it wasn't bad at all," she said. "Right after I had it done, I was thinking about getting another one. I wanted [the tattoo] for 10 years and finally talked myself into it."

Ian Perez, a freshman civil engineering major, said his tattoo of a phoenix was a graduation gift from his parents.

"It represents a new beginning, of a new life," he said, referring to the mythical Phoenix, a bird who lived for 500 years and then built a nest of aromatic wood and consumed itself in it.

Michael C. said tattooing has not always been so highly regulated.

"Up until 1994 there were no regulations on tattooing," he said. "Now there's about 17 pages of health codes by the Texas Health Code Department. They all deal with some form of sanitation,



sterilization and prevention of cross-contamination."

Michael C. said the art of tattooing is continually improving.

"In the last 10 years, the pigment industry has been revolutionized with polymers and non-organic pigments," he said. "Most pigments before were salts and oxides."

Dee said Tattoo Consortium maintains the highest standards of safety and cleanliness.

"All counters are aseptic and all sterilization is done by autoclave," she said. "All needles are single-use."

Jennifer Schill, a senior community health major, said she recently had her tongue pierced and currently has a 12 gauge, 5/8 inch barbell in her tongue.

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