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## Body art and deviant behavior: Study finds link between multiple tattoos, piercings and trouble

Steve Johnson Tribune reporter January 13, 2010

Here's a new aphorism: "The more body art you have, the more likely you are to be involved in deviance."

So says Jerome Koch, a sociologist with Texas Tech University's "Body Art Team" -- true moniker -- which surveyed 1,753 students at four colleges and found a correlation between multiple tattoos or piercings and "deviant behavior."

The severally inked or poked at the unnamed Midwestern and Southern colleges said they engaged in, roughly speaking, more promiscuity, more drug use, more binge drinking, more arrests and more cheating on academics than their peers.

The research team has been studying tattoos and piercing since 1999; its latest study will be printed in The Social Science Journal in March and was first reported in Miller-McCune magazine, which tracks academic research.

But the new data also suggest parents needn't freak about a lone dolphin (14 percent of surveyed students had a tattoo) or a belly-button ring (37 percent had a body piercing). "For low-level body art, these kids are not any different from anybody else."

The correlation with deviant behavior came among the 4 percent of students who had four or more tattoos, seven or more piercings, or one "intimate piercing," said Koch. Over at Taylor Street Tattoo, close to the University of Illinois at Chicago's Near West Side campus, owner Timothy Gooding stood up for his clients.

"The people I see on a regular basis that get tattooed are some of the nicest, most well-mannered people," Gooding said. "I see college kids, screaming, yelling, fighting on a regular basis. Those are not my kids."

Koch doesn't necessarily disagree. He says what the study really demonstrates is how body art going mainstream has upped the ante for those who would treat it as more of a subculture.

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