

# Fashion replaces rebellion as motive for body piercing

More and more students are adopting the practice which originally came from ancient spiritual beliefs

By **Natasha Chilingerian**  
Pulse Reporter

After Dahvi Fischer got her labret pierced in her new college town, she decided to get creative in hiding the new piece of jewelry for her first visit home. She snapped on a "plug" — a flesh-colored plastic cover-up — over the stud emerging from the skin just below her lower lip. Unfortunately, the plug failed to convince her parents.

"When I stepped off the plane and my dad asked what it was, I said, 'Oh, it's just a zit,' she said. 'I ended up taking the jewelry out because I knew I couldn't pull it off.'"

At the time, Fischer — who is now a junior at the University — was one of many 18-year-olds who experimented with their skin while out of their parents' sight. Some professional piercers in Eugene say that every fall they get a new batch of students asking to get pierced.

"We definitely get new freshmen coming in every year," said piercer Dale McDonald, who works at Primal Body Piercing at 509 E. 13th Ave.. "It's part of being 18."

Piercing remains a popular form of rebellion for more traditional folks, but other piercing trends are transforming. The difference is that now people are doing it to please themselves, not just to follow the latest fad. A more conservative crowd is turning once-obscure piercings mainstream. Now, piercings are simply casual ornaments worn by people from all walks of life.

Body piercing traces back thousands of years to tribal times, when it was practiced for spiritual reasons. Some ancient tribes believed that demons could enter the body through the ear, so the metal was attached in order to repel them. Tribes located in the Americas — such as the Aztecs and Mayans from Central America, for example — would pierce their tongues in order to altar consciousness and thus communicate with gods. Today, motives behind piercings often lack a deeper meaning.

"(Piercings) beautify the body, and they increase sexuality and physical sensation," High Priestess Piercing employee Joshua Bryant said. "People get pierced nowadays mostly for the look. It isn't as shocking as it was seven or eight years ago. When someone sticks out their pierced tongue, nobody cares. They just think it's cool."

Since Britney Spears first pranced around onstage baring her belly ring, the navel has become the hot spot for women to get pierced. However, it's not anymore. Now, a piercing style on the nostril — once



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Jodie White, 19, is an art student who joined the throngs by getting her right nostril pierced.

considered "punk-rock" — has been popping up on clean-cut women everywhere.

"The nostril is the piercing that has changed the most over time," Fischer said. "It used to be grunge

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**Joshua Bryant**  
High Priestess Piercing employee

during the Nirvana phase, but now it's classy and cute."

The nostril piercing originated in India during the 16th century, when women pierced their left nostrils because they believed it would lead to an easier childbirth and diminished menstrual pain. In the 1960s, hippies who traveled to India brought the piercing back to the United States. Later, it became a symbol of rebellion during the punk movement of the 1970s. Both McDonald and Bryant agreed that nostril piercings on non-punk girls are the latest piercing trend.

Now, with a greater number of clean-cut individuals getting pierced, the line between "punk" and "cute" styles has blurred. Fischer said the presentation of the jewelry is what draws the line today.

"When I'm wearing sweats and a bandanna, my piercings look really punk," she said. "It depends on what you're wearing. I think almost any piercing can be made to look cute. Except maybe the lip — that always looks punk."

Bryant said he has experienced more than his share of customers from different genres, including conservative ones.

"I've had the mom, the dad, the kids and the grandma all come in to get pierced," he said. "Then I have to pierce these 97-year-old earlobes. I've pierced one of Oregon's state legislators, people from the Eugene Police Department, and Oregon's sheriff office, doctors, nurses and lawyers. I've pierced everyone from crusty punks to the people who work at Taco Bell to the porn store people."

Body piercing has made its mark on contemporary lifestyles, but the more daring body modification techniques are still left to the die-hard fans. For example, McDonald has experimented with driving metal hooks into his back and hanging from ropes attached to a ceiling. He said it hurts less than one might think.

"Getting the hooks in hurts, but once you're hanging from the rope, it feels like someone is just pulling the skin on your back," he said. "It's not a sharp pain that makes you cringe."

Extreme body modification goes beyond hanging from the ceiling. On the wall inside Primal Body Piercing's studio is a photo of staff members, each with a knitting-needle size bar pierced through their cheeks — in through the cheek and into the mouth, and out through the other cheek. Other practices of body modification come close to self-mutilation, including tongue splitting, branding (burning away the skin to result in a permanent scar) and even amputation.

People may have nothing left to experiment with on their bodies, but that doesn't mean body piercing will fade away. Although Bryant said the height of body piercing popularity has passed, he expects the trend to continue for years to come.

"I think it will stick around and remain at a level popularity," he said. "People do it because it has that cutting edge, but it's still beautiful."

Contact the Pulse reporter at [natashachilingerian@dailyemerald.com](mailto:natashachilingerian@dailyemerald.com).

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