A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of Body Art Patients and their Health Care Experience

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Abstract
This study aimed to update dated research by exploring the relationships between patients with body art (tattoos and body piercings) and their interaction with health care providers. This creates a current description of the body art patient’s health care experience. Previous research indicates that body art has been associated with risk taking and deviant behaviors and these behaviors have been used to justify why people with body art are negatively perceived. If the presence of body art and the associated behavior are viewed as a threat to normalcy, then Stangor and Crandall’s theory (2000) suggests that stigma may surround the body art population and health care providers may have developed attitudes perceived by this population. A descriptive phenomenological methodology was used to explore the perception of the lived experience of the body art patient. participants who had body art and who had interactions with the health care providers were interviewed using open-ended semi-structured questions. To ensure trustworthiness the interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi’s (1978) method. Interviews occurred with 12 participants, with two overarching themes and three essences within each theme discovered. All described their tattoos as a deeply personal artistic representation of who they are and all shared they felt stigma or judgment, the two overarching themes. Even though health care access and quality were not affected, several participants stated having negative experiences with health care providers that they perceived were related to their body art. With the deep meaning associated with someone’s body art it would beneficial for health care providers to take notice to contribute to the holistic experience and view it as an extension of who they are.

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