



LEFT: Jimmy Parkhill's ear is adorned with a couple of jewelry pieces.

BELOW: Nozomi Endo had her belly button pierced because she "was bored and thought it was cool 'cause everybody has it in their ears and stuff."

Another form of body adornment

By **David Jacobson**
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The hollow steel needle is 2½ inches long. It has been sterilized in boiling water and bathed in surgical disinfectant, and now it is going to pass through the skin of Susan Hyde's ice-numbered left nostril.

But first a carrot, organically grown as if to match the intense purity of this moment, has to be whittled down to fit up her nose.

"This will catch the needle when it comes out the other side . . . so we don't also pierce the septum," explains expert body piercer Annie Bogdan, handing Hyde the root and donning a fresh pair of surgical gloves.

"I don't want to know," says Hyde, 32, of Hartford, Conn., sitting at Bogdan's kitchen table. The night before she meditated on the ideal of painlessness.

Still, she didn't get much sleep.

Bogdan lets her clients choose their music. Hyde picks a group called "World of Skin." As a woman's voice sings over cicadalike guitars, Bogdan makes a quick, deft motion with her thumb and forefinger and harpoons the ink-marked spot on the side of Hyde's slightly upturned proboscis.

Hyde digs a thumbnail into her palm. A thick tear, nervous condensation, rolls down her cheek. Seconds later, it's over. Hyde has a gold stud and her birthstone, a sapphire, firmly rooted in her nose.

She checks the mirror: "It's exactly what I wanted, and it looks as nice as I thought it would!"

These days, lots of folks are starting to like piercings and adornments far beyond the traditionally accepted lanced ear lobes.

Pierced and decorated noses and navels, once the sole province of those from the Indian subcontinent or Muslims, are going mainstream hip. Even piercings of the nipples and genitalia, while still primarily a phenomenon among gay or sexually libertine subcultures, are on the rise.

■ At Pelican of Hartford, a boutique, manager Keith Busiere calls nose piercing a full-blown fad. He's doing about 120 a month.

■ The Gauntlet, a Los Angeles-based chain of body-pierc-

ing salons, does nearly 15,000 piercings annually. These include 839 installations of below-the-waist jewelry at the San Francisco store alone, piercings with such names as Prince Albert, Ampallang and Apadravya that can reportedly enhance sexuality or enforce chastity.

The Gauntlet, which also sells body jewelry by mail, has seen sales double in the past few years, according to founder and owner Jim Ward.

Different perforations for different persuasions, right?

Not exactly. Like the punctured punk fashion of the early 1980s, this new wave of piercing probably draws more wincers than devotees.

"It's a cultural thing," says Ward. "These same people that are so negative about piercing ... think nothing of tummy tucks or face lifts or liposuction, then they go, 'Ewww, a piercing!'"

Besides numerous self-drawn tattoos, Bogdan, 27, sports eight ear-piercings, two silver hoops through her nose and a steel ring through her left nipple. She says that "in getting a body piercing ... you're owning and celebrating your body."

"A lot of people are afraid to even look at their bodies. They're always doing some-

thing to change them, to make them perfect or cover them up. People who get piercings accept what they're given ... and then decorate them."

Beyond questions of beauty and taste, there's the issue of pain, pain that runs counter to our popular culture of analgesia.

Piercing devotees insist that professional expertise makes a big difference.

Bogdan knows firsthand. "Young and foolish," she performed her first nose piercing on herself with a mirror, two cans of beer and a safety pin. She held one can to her face and quickly drank the other.

(Piercings can take weeks or even months to fully heal and must be kept clean to avoid infection.)

But enthusiasts don't necessarily deny the brief pain of piercings. Anesthetic injections would hurt more than piercings themselves, says Ward. He paraphrases the late philosopher Joseph Campbell on the need for courage-invoking "rites of passage" to mark personal growth.

"(Such rites) are something that people desperately need, and since there are none prescribed by our culture, we seek ways to construct them," he says.