



Your Guide to Tattoos

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Aging Tattoos

Although there have been many technological advances in tattooing, tattoos will always age as the skin ages. Genetics, environment and lifestyle combine to determine both the skin's long term health and the appearance of a tattoo. Even with fastidious care, aging skin tissue loses moisture and elasticity. A tattoo on dry skin with diminished elasticity will fade and its contours will soften.

The more fine detail work in the tattoo's design, the more it will change when the skin ages. Faded and softened tattoos do not show detail or shading as well, and the smaller the tattoo the more pronounced the effect. For that reason, large tattoos tend to age more gracefully than smaller, intricate designs. Bolder and larger pieces hold up to changes over the years. Trendy, bold tribal tattoos will change very little over time, whereas small, elaborate designs with fine line shading are likely to change dramatically.

Just as prolonged exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause dramatic, irreversible and sometimes deadly skin damage, they also accelerate damage to body art. Sun exposure speeds up line or color decay. Black ink is particularly sensitive to sun exposure. Some black inks fade to gray with extended sun exposure, while others take on a bluish tinge. Occasionally, whites and light yellows disappear if the skin is badly sunburned.

One of the key threats to an aging tattoo design does not alter the tattoo itself but is a very real consequence of a simple fact of life - weight fluctuations. The speed of weight gain or weight loss, skin moisture and tattoo placement all influence how

well a tattoo withstands weight gain. The more slowly the weight fluctuates, the more skin retains its elasticity. Moisture also helps skin to retain its elasticity.

The way a tattoo reacts to weight gain varies widely from person to person, because it depends on where the person carries his or her weight. Areas where the skin remains more taut or areas that have more muscle will hold the design better than sagging or fatty areas. Although most tattoos will change shape when the skin is stretched or contracted, torso tattoos are arguably the most susceptible to irreparable damage after weight gain.

A tattoo artist's skill and equipment can change a tattoo's long term durability. A well trained tattoo artist can bring considerable craftsmanship to the boldest and simplest tattoos. There is a wide variety in the resilience of tattoo inks as well. Tattoo inks consist of simple carbon particles. The carbon base usually comes from burnt wood, cotton, vegetables, India or pen ink and plastic. Professional artists have access to more than 100 different colors.

Ink manufacturers are not required to list the composition of their products, so tattoo artists may not know the base of their chosen ink. Nevertheless, plastic based inks are heavily marketed for their relative colorfastness and permanence. Unfortunately, plastic based inks are also more likely to cause allergic reactions.

Though there was no documented study available at the writing of this article, it makes sense that the technological advances in skin care could be beneficial to prolonging the life of your tattoo. The age-fighting trend is enormously popular in the cosmetic industry these days. Virtually every major brand is getting in on it. There are all kinds of products claiming to lift, firm and unwrinkled the skin. Some

of them even claim to slow down, stop or even reverse the aging process. Most of them really do work to some degree. If it makes the skin on your face look better, why wouldn't it make your tattoo look better as well?

Frequently Asked Questions

For centuries, perhaps for longer than we know, tattoos have belonged to those on the fringes of society. They adorned pirates who sail the mysterious waters of the uncharted seas, gypsies who forsook the normalcy of steady work and calling the same spot home every night, people who did not conform to the way everyone else lived.

Tattoos are often associated with bikers, gang members, carnival freaks, prisoners and rock stars. Individuals perceived to fall into categories for which there is no place in the status quo. Are they the ones being rejected, or are they rejecting the restrictive, binding mold that many think everyone should fit in?

The 1960s brought about a series of social revolutions. The civil rights movement was coming to a boil, and women were carving out their place in the world. People not only became more aware of the flaws in their government and social structure, but were moved in mass numbers to do something to make them better. Tattooing became a little more mainstream because it moved people away from the norm in a time when the social structure was increasingly unpopular.

In recent year, people are getting tattoos to fit in rather than to opt out, but some of the stigma remains. Information is the key to abolishing prejudices of all kinds.

Take some time to review a few of the most frequently asked questions regarding tattooing.

Q: Does it hurt?

A: Well, it doesn't tickle. A needle is being repeatedly stuck in your skin, sometimes for hours. Most people aren't bothered by the discomfort enough not to get the tattoo. Of course, pain tolerance varies greatly from one person to the next, and placement of the design also makes a difference. Boney spots usually hurt more than fleshy spots.

Q: How long does it take?

A: That depends on many things: the size and amount of detail involved in the design, how long you're able to sit at a time and the tattooist's schedule. If your design is large or very detailed, you may have to break it up into several visits.

Q: Will I be more comfortable if I have a couple of drinks first?

A: Absolutely not. Blaming a goofy tat on inebriation is probably just an excuse. Most tattoo shops won't even work with you if you've been drinking. Unless you're passed out cold, (and maybe even if you are) drunks tend not to hold still very well. Alcohol makes you bleed more than you would otherwise. The excessive bleeding is unhealthy and may keep the ink from depositing into your skin correctly, and sometimes not at all. Besides, getting a tattoo is an experience; don't you want to remember it?

Q: What's the least expensive tattoo I can get?

A: Don't be silly; would you trust a doctor who would take out your tonsils for a \$5 bill? Of course you wouldn't. That tat will be with you for the rest of your life.

Treat it like an investment. Choose your tattooist and design base on quality, cleanliness and professionalism, not how much cash you happen to be carrying at the time. It will save you from making an impulsive decision.

Q: How long does it take to heal?

A: Usually a couple of weeks if everything goes well and you take care of it properly. You have to leave the bandage on for at least a few hours, and wash the area with mild soap and water immediately after removing the covering. If you can't wash right away, leave the gauze on until you can. Always pat the tat dry, never rub. DO NOT pick at your scabs. Do you WANT to get an infection? Always keep a fresh tattoo moisturized. Your tattooist should be able to recommend a great product for that.

Now you have a little more information, but these questions are just a jumping off place. There are many books on the subject if you need to know more, or make an appointment with the artist you're considering to ask questions before you actually make up your mind.

Disappearing Tattoos

Perhaps the most identifying characteristic of a tattoo is its permanence. Think about it; every time you mention finally getting that tattoo you've been on the fence about for years, someone always chimes up and reminds you that you won't

be able to take it off if you ever change your mind. So, for fear of regret and not wanting to hear any “I told you so” declarations from family and friends, you have thus far carried on with your life as an inkless individual. But that perfect tattoo design is always in the back of your mind isn’t it?

Well stay tuned, because what you’re about to read will shatter everything you know about body art and might be just the thing you need to hear to finally get that tattoo out of your mind and onto your skin. Researchers at the Harvard Medical School have developed a special tattoo ink that can be totally and painlessly removed with no scarring.

First, understand that the coloring currently used in tattooing is not really ink, but various pigmenting agents ground up and mixed with a carrier solution. The solution serves a couple of functions: to sterilize the pigments and make them smoother and easier to work with. Though these inks fall into the category of things that could be regulated by the FDA, they are not. Ink vendors don’t even necessarily have to disclose the contents of their products. There have been reports of carcinogens and other contaminants that can poison the body and even be fatal.

The new ink is the first ever such substance approved especially for tattooing. The color is enclosed in tiny particles that are designed to contain it forever. So a tattoo done in this manner can be permanent if you want it to. However, if you should decide that everyone else was right and you wish you hadn’t got the tattoo, it can be easily removed. The pigments carrying particles can be broken down through a simple, painless process and the color harmlessly absorbed and flushed out of the body.

There are a few choices of procedures for removing conventional tattoos, but they are pricey and painful. For example, one method uses a saline scrub to literally scrub away the layers of your skin until all the ink is washed away. There is another similar option that uses a material that works very much like sand paper. Even laser surgery is not risk free. It's expensive and you may have to do it more than once. It even leaves a scar that's basically shaped like the very design you're so desperately trying to get rid of, so instead of having an unwanted tattoo that people are always asking about, now they can ask how you got such an unusual scar.

None of these methods are fool proof. All of them carry some risk and will not completely remove every trace of the offending body art. You will have traces of pigment left, if not a noticeable outline. If your tattoo is comprised of several different hues, it may require a separate treatment for each one. Unlike the new ink which dissolves completely with no scarring or residual pigmentation.

Those involved in the tattoo industry like the idea of a clean ink, but are skeptical about it being temporary. They believe body art is a sacred tradition, made so by in part by the fact that it lasts forever. They also feel that taking away the consequences will crowd their ranks with people who aren't serious about their art. The new ink is not expected to be on the market for another couple of years.

The Cultural Significance of Tattoos

For many people, tattoos are marks of machismo – a form of expression for sailors, bikers and convicts with little significance outside of those subcultures. On the contrary, tattoos are often symbolic of rich cultural histories.

In many cases, tattoos are a way to place protective or therapeutic symbols permanently on the body. Polynesian cultures have developed elaborate geometric tattoos over thousands of years. After British explorer James Cook's expedition to Tahiti in 1769, the marks became fashionable in Europe. As a result, European men in dangerous professions, in particular sailors and coal miners, have tattooed anchors or miner's lamps on their forearms for protection since the late 18th Century. The tradition of tattooing a loved one's name also developed during this time.

In other cultures, tattoos mark people as part of specific social, political or religious groups. In the Maori culture of New Zealand, the head is considered the most important part of the body. The face is embellished with elaborate tattoos, which serve as marks of high status. Each tattoo design is unique to the individual, as it conveys specific information about that person's social status, ancestry and skills. Men are given tattoos at various stages in their lives, and the decorations are designed to enhance their features and make them more attractive to potential wives. Although Maori women are also tattooed on their faces, the markings are concentrated around the mouth. The Maori believe tattoos around the mouth and chin prevent the skin becoming wrinkled and keep them young.

Similarly, there are countless meanings behind traditional Native American tattoos, but most tattoos were a symbol of a warrior's status within a tribe. It was also common for a tribe to give tattoos to those who had proficiency in using the

symbol that was tattooed upon their body. For example, warriors often had tattoos of weaponry, while women were given tattoos of various labor tools. Although Europeans have had the names of loved ones tattooed onto their skin for centuries, Native Americans generally wore their own names.

Various groups throughout Africa employ tattoos as cultural symbols. Berber tribes in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya tattoo fine dots on the faces of women after they give birth to a male heir. Women also tattoo their faces, hands, and ankles with symbols marking their ethnic identity. In Egypt, members of the Christian Copts sect bear small crosses on their inner forearms. The elaborate facial tattoos of Wodaabe, nomadic herders and traders in western Africa, carry various meanings. Wodaabe women dot their temples, cheeks and lips with geometric tattoos to ward off evil spirits. Men and women use black henna as a temporary tattoo covering entire hands, forearm, feet and shin during weddings, baptism, and special holidays.

At times, tattoos are a form of artistic expression. Modern Japanese tattoos are considered fully realized works of art. The highly skilled tattooists of Samoa consider tattooing both a craft and a spiritual awakening. They create their art with the same tools as were used prior to the invention of modern tattooing equipment. This process is seen as a spiritual journey, a strongly psychological experience that will change their lives forever.

In North America, the cultural status of tattooing has steadily evolved over the past thirty years, from a rebellious, anti-social activity in the 1960s to a mainstream means of asserting one's identity in the 1990s. Although tattooing is simply a trendy fashion statement for many, others choose tattooing as a way of honoring

their cultural, ethnic or religious heritage. Often tattoos represent both fashion and cultural significance, as in the increasing popularity of Americanized geometric tribal tattoos.

Cover-up Work

The thing about tattooing that makes people nervous about getting their first tattoo is its permanence. When they seek support or advice from friends and family, the first thing they hear is “Are you sure you want to do that? You can’t just take it off if you don’t like it.” But despite all the warnings and despite all they know about tattoos, they will still get their girlfriend’s name prominently inked into some painfully obvious place on their body. It happens all the time.

Getting someone’s name tattooed on your body is just an example, but it’s one of the most common regrets people have about their tattoos. Fortunately, there are some options. The tattoo can be removed via one of a number of drastic, expensive and painful procedures after which, instead of having an unwanted tattoo people ask you about all the time, you will have a scar people ask you about all the time. In fact, with some methods the scar looks eerily similar to the tattoo. Maybe you have a tattoo you are still in love with, it’s just old, and faded into a mere shadow of its former glory.

Often it’s not having a tattoo people change their minds about, it’s the design or a particular aspect of it. Your best bet is to sheepishly trot yourself back into the tattoo parlor and talk to someone about doing a cover-up job. Chances are great

that you'll come away from the experience with a design that your happier with and probably wouldn't have come up with under normal circumstances.

The best candidate for this kind of work is a well healed, but fairly new tattoo that's small and lightly colored. Of course, that's just the ideal, and if you had an ideal tat, you wouldn't be seeking a cover-up job in the first place. Don't worry if you don't fall into that category. There are some extremely talented artists out there. The Internet is full of before and after transformations on former darkly colored armbands that are truly amazing.

In every trade, some are decent at what that do, some are great and some are just terrible. Tattooing is no exception. You need to do some pretty intense shopping around before climbing into anyone's chair. It's also important to remember not every great tattooist is good at cover-up work. Ask a lot of questions and look at a lot of before and after shots before you make up your mind.

The laziest way of covering up a name for example, is blacking in out with a black box. No kidding, people actually do that. You're other (and far more tasteful) choices are incorporating the current design into a different one or covering it up completely with a bigger new one.

If your tat is faded and it's a touch up you seek, modern technology is most definitely on your side. Ink is ever evolving, and now they are bolder, brighter and better than ever. Chances are you can leave the shop with a tattoo that is sharper, clearer, better looking than it was to begin with.

Complete cover up work can produce some pretty amazing results, but you have to be prepared to have a larger tattoo than you had to begin with. Once you're confident you've found a really awesome artist, the project is likely to turn out best if you allow him as much artistic freedom as you can stand. Cover-ups can be quite difficult, and he knows better than you how to deal with the situation. After all, he is cleaning up your mess.

Cosmetic Tattooing

If the tattoo industry had an alter-ego, it would be the permanent cosmetic industry. Some people call it the more sophisticated and refined side of tattooing. Other people seem to be in a state of deep denial of the fact that it is a tattoo. Ladies who roll their eyes and shriek at the idea of artistic tattoos, the very same ones who perpetuated the stigma attached to them, are the jumping at the chance to finally define their faint eyebrows and pale lip lines. Dermapigmentation technicians used the same ink and the same equipment as artistic tattooists, but in a far more socially acceptable way.

Though there are documented cases of cosmetic tattooing taking place at the turn of last century, it's only recently become more or less mainstream. Some ladies go

for the full face, eye shadow and all, but eyeliner, cheek color and lip liner are the most popular procedures.

The process starts with a consultation with a makeup artist who will help you decide the color palette that's going to be permanently applied to your face. Obviously, this is perhaps the most important step. You wouldn't want to wake up every day for the rest of your life with an unflattering shade of lipstick.

Once your colors are chosen, the technician will apply a topical anesthetic to the area. This will numb the skin, but you will still feel a stinging sensation. Most people feel the end result is worth the discomfort, or there would be women walking around with half finished faces.

After the tattoo is applied, you should treat the site just like a wound. An antibiotic ointment should be applied and the area should be covered as well as possible. Your technician should be able to recommend an ointment or cream that's best for delicate facial skin. Even if your technician is well trained and runs a reputable and sterile operation, side effects and complications can occur. If you start running a fever, contact your doctor to rule out infection. A patch test should be done ahead of time to make certain you are not allergic to the ink.

Your new cosmetic tattoo is just as permanent as any artistic tattoo, but it will eventually fade to some extent. Eyeliner usually needs to be touched up every four to six years. Lip liner usually doesn't last quite as long and may need to be reapplied ever two to four years. There are a couple of factors that cause the need for reapplication: pigments and your body's natural skin cell renewing process.

Different color pigments fade at different rates, which may account for the fact that dark eyeliner lasts longer than lip color which tends to be rosier.

Cosmetic tattooing has a more practical side as well. It can be used to cover up scars after reconstructive surgery and make skin discolorations virtually disappear. Tattooing has successfully covered up facial scars and created facial features for people who lost theirs due to being burned or some other type of accident. It can also be used to create new aureolas and improve the appearance of a nipple after breast reconstruction. It's a simple procedure that can make all the difference in the world to someone's self esteem.

The best way to choose a reconstructive tattooist is with the help of your plastic surgeon. Your doctor may be able to give you a mild anesthetic before your appointment. Unfortunately, the procedure is not covered by most insurance companies and the cost can be quite high, but you can't put a price on feeling like yourself again, especially after an accident or a life altering surgery that requires reconstruction.

Choosing a Tattooist

So you're thinking about getting a tattoo? There is practically an infamous number of choices involved. Whatever you do, don't allow yourself to be pressured and don't get into a hurry. After all, we're talking about a permanent mark on your body. It will be there forever, and one of the most important decisions you're going to have to make is who you want to apply it.

If you're serious about your ink, picking out a tattooist is a big deal. You would be wise to shop around. The criteria you use should be very similar to the way you would judge a family doctor, and for many of the same reasons. It's a choice that ought to involve considerable thought. Here are some ideas to inspire your search:

- Cleanliness – This is by no stretch the most important factor; it can't be emphasized enough. Drop in unannounced and observe how the artists work. Are they wearing gloves? How do they dispose of used equipment? Surely they don't reuse needles? What are their sterilization practices? Don't hesitate to ask questions. A good tattooist will be glad to talk with you. If he won't take the time to talk, then you walk.
- Personality – A person's personality is always reflected in their art. When you have your search narrowed down to just a few artists, make an appointment with each one and just have a conversation. Observe them with other clients. Get a feel of the kind of person they are. If something about them turns you off, if you ever feel even a little bit uncomfortable, find someone else.
- Reputation – The best place to start your search is word of mouth. Ask people about their ink. They won't mind. After all, they wouldn't have the tat if they didn't want people to notice it. Find a tattoo you love (not just like, but LOVE) and find out who's responsible for it. Then go find them.
- Relationship – When you find the artist you want, stop by for a visit a couple of times before you actually get to work on the tattoo. Don't stay for ever,

and don't get in the way. Form a relationship with the person who will be applying artwork permanently onto the only body you are ever going to have. It will be reflected in his work.

- Conventions – Tattoo conventions are a great way to see several artists work in one spot. However, don't plan on getting inked at the actual convention. The tattooists are away from their usual space and may not work as comfortably as they would if they were. Also, conventions are usually already booked well in advance.
- Style – After cleanliness, this may be the most important element. There are several different genres of tattooing, kind of like music. For example, if you like the look of jailhouse tattoos, find somebody who is really good at that. If it's a portrait you want, find someone who excels at that (prison records are a matter of public record). It just makes good sense. After all, you wouldn't ask Dolly Parton to rap, would you?

This is by no means a complete list of things to consider, but it's a good place to start. This is not a decision to take lightly. Most people don't have the cash for a good tattoo readily available at any given time. It may be a good idea to more or less decide on a design, shop for an artist, and then use the time it takes you to save up for the project to really do some soul searching about the step you are getting ready to take.

Celebrity Tattoos

Celebrity tattoos have been a frequent topic in mainstream pop culture and the media since the early 1990s. Actors, musicians and sports figures have gone under the needle, and their designs have inspired millions to do the same.

Oscar winning actor and budding humanitarian Angelina Jolie is also closely associated with her myriad of tattoos. Jolie is a dedicated tattoo enthusiast, collecting at least a dozen tattoos to symbolize various beliefs and life events. Jolie has made the dragon one of the most popular tattoos for women and sparked interest in traditional tattoo styles of Southeast Asia.

Rapper, Record Producer and actor 50 Cent is as noted for his body art as for his music. Fifty's tattoos cover his back; the giant "Southside 50" rising from smoke and flames has become his signature. The back tattoo was designed by celebrity inkster Mr. Cartoon, who also designs Nike sneakers.

Eminem, another Mr. Cartoon client, has dog tags tattooed around his neck, a large mushroom on his left shoulder, his daughter's name on his left wrist, "Slit Here" on his right wrist, a D on his right arm, the number 12 on his left arm, tattoos for Eminem and Slim Shady on his chest and several others.

The actor and reality television star Nicole Richie has at least nine tattoos, including wings on her back, a rosary around her ankle and a spider on her lower back. A pair of ballerina slippers commemorates both her childhood passion and her father Lionel Richie's song "Ballerina Girl."

Similarly, Britney Spears has several tattoos: a fairy on her lower back, a small daisy circling her second toe on right foot, a butterfly leaving a vine on left foot, a flower with Chinese symbol for mystery in middle on lower stomach, three Hebrew characters on back of her neck, and reportedly several others. Critics allege Britney's rather varied assortment of body art is indicative of her impulsive vices, but others celebrate her love of tattooing.

Drew Barrymore has sported inked crosses and butterflies for more than a decade. Barrymore has posed for countless photographs displaying her tattoos, so she has perhaps the most extensively photographed body art of anyone in the public eye.

In abandoning her late 1990s teen pop image, Christina Aguilera adopted a variety of tattoos. She had the name of her controversial alter ego, Xtina, inked on her neck. She also obtained a flower on her wrist, a design on her forearm and reportedly several unseen designs. Later, she celebrated her marriage to record producer Jordan Bratman with the words "Te Amo Siempre" on her arm.

International sports star David Beckham is as famed for his jet-setting lifestyle, celebrity wife Victoria "Posh" Beckham, and famous friends as he is for his skills. Beckham has his sons' names on his back, his wife's name and his jersey number on his arm, and other tattoos. Beckham detailed his tattoos' symbolic value in his autobiography, and his wife is also a body art fan.

Another celebrity couple who are tattoo fans are pop star Pink and her husband motocross racer Carey Hart. The singer's tattoos may well number in the dozens. She has a shooting star and angel on her shoulder, "what goes around comes around" on her wrist, "tru luv" on her arm, "Mr. Pink" on her thigh, a cartoon cat

on her stomach, the barcode from the album Missundaztood just below her hairline on back of her neck, and many more. Hart owns the Huntington-Hart Tattoo Shop in the Palms Casino in Las Vegas. The shop is featured in the reality television show "Inked."

Branded for Life: Tattooing and Social Status

Twelve thousand years has not altered the cross-cultural implications of tattoos. From the jungles of Borneo to dorm rooms at Harvard, their implications remain the same. Tattoos have always signified status.

In Indochina, a woman's forearm tattoos made them desirable for marriage. Various designs demarked the wearer's station in life. Rich women wore delicate arm tattoos that looked like expensive gloves women buy today at Bloomingdale's. Warriors' tattoos on showed how many lives they had taken in battle. Tattoos commanded respect and assured their wearers status for life.

Today, tattoos signify some personal trait or membership in either clan or society. The Hells Angels jealously guard their tattoo. Secret societies do the same. The aura of mystery and secrecy pervades the tattoo wearer whether they repel or attract us. Whatever our reasons for asking, the question remains: "What ARE they wearing? And WHY?"

Some believe a tattoo wearer possesses the spirit of his “dragon, eagle or flower.” William Blake might have said the ferocity of the Tyger belongs to others. Today, tigers, snakes, and bird of prey stalk unchecked in our midst. We might want to be careful whom we antagonize.

Mediterranean civilizations used tattoos for espionage, slavery and the demarcation of crime, a filthy practice that continues to this day. Japanese girls were tattooed as rite of passage to womanhood and the Japanese tattoo assumed a religious significance.

Western cultures have tattooed family crests for centuries. Pope Hadrian banned tattooing in 787 AD but thrived in the British Isles until the Battle of Hastings, 1066 AD. William the Conqueror forced its disappearance from Western culture till the 16th century.

Yet tattoos thrived in Japan, notably for marking criminals. First offenses carried a line across the forehead. The second, an arch and the third, another line – the Japanese character for "dog" – The start of the: “Three strikes and you’re out law.” The Japanese tattoo became an aesthetic art form with the “body suit”, a social reaction to strict laws. While royalty alone were allowed to wear ornate clothing, nothing stopped the middle class from wearing elaborate full body tattoos that left the naked considered “well dressed”.

American tattoos were born in Chatham Square, New York City; a seaport and entertainment center attracting the affluent and the working class. Tattoo artists grew in respectability and so too did the tattoo, flourishing as artist husbands tattooed their wives with their work and became their billboards. Cosmetic

tattooing meshed with cheek blush, lipstick and eyeliner. Cardinals' fans might want to investigate Jim Edmonds.

After World War I, tattoos began to symbolize bravery and wartime solidarity. With the Prohibition and Depression, tattoos became travelers' markers telling the story of where the wearer had been.

Post World War II America became disenchanted with the tattoo by its association with delinquency. Tattooing had little respect in American culture. The 1961 hepatitis outbreak all but destroyed any positive status the tattoo had earned.

Lyle Tuttle changed the American attitude toward tattoos in the late '60s with media savvy and tattooing celebrity women. Scores of magazines rushed to him for information about this ancient art form.

Toady, tattoos are more popular than they ever were. All classes of people seek them and the tattooist is considered a "fine artist". Political consultants, actors and baseball players wear them – proudly or sheepishly – but wear them nonetheless. While the status tattoo wearers enjoy is certainly less clear than it was a thousand years ago, the status the tattoo itself enjoys is a popular, if confused one.

Before You Get Your First Tattoo

So, you've finally decided to jump off into the tattooed community and get some ink done. A new tattoo is fun and exciting, but it's a massive commitment. You need to do some serious soul searching and educate yourself. Getting a tattoo is a experience, and obviously one that's going to follow you everywhere you go for

the rest of your life. Make sure you know everything you need to know to make it something you are proud of and not something you regret. Here's a partial check list of things for you to think about in no particular order, because they're all important.

- The Design – This is a huge deal. You don't want to pick something you're going to feel stupid about later. Think along the lines of something class, something that will always be cool to you. For example, if you run out and get a cartoon character tattooed on your ankle the first possible second you're legally old enough, are you still going to love Tweety Bird as much when you're 48 as you need when you were 18? The same goes for the name of a significant other and anything else you might grow out of. Sometimes you can get a temporary tattoo of the design you are considering so you can wear it around a while before you commit. Consider every possible circumstance in which you may be embarrassed about that design and make sure you're ok with it.
- The Placement – There is absolutely nothing wrong with having an obvious tattoo if that's the way you want it, but you have to be aware that there is still a significant amount of stigma associated with them and there will probably be consequences at some point down the road. Depending on your line of work, your employer may require you to cover up your tattoo while you are on the clock. If that's the case or could ever be a possibility, you should think about putting it someplace that you can easily cover if you need to but could still show off when you want to, like the chest, stomach or back. If your tattoo contains nudity or some other social taboo, be prepared to be

asked to leave some public places. When you get mad about it, remember you knew what you were getting into.

- The Price – Be prepared to shell out some cash. The cost of a tattoo can vary quite a lot, depending on the size, how many sessions it takes, if you choose some flash straight off the wall, or decided to go custom. It's a good idea to pick out your design when you don't have the money, that way you have time to think about it while you save up. Don't settle for something cheap just because you don't have the money. You will always wish you would have just waited.
- The Artist – Perhaps the best way to pick an artist is by spotting some work you like and finding out who did it. It's almost always ok to ask someone about their tattoo. If they didn't want you to notice it, they wouldn't be showing it off. Once you know, visit their shop. Don't make a nuisance of yourself, but it wouldn't hurt to drop in a few times. Observe how the tattooists interact with their clients, and make sure to watch for telltale signs of sterilization. Is everybody wearing gloves? Do you see the autoclave? If not, then ask about it. If they're hesitant to answer any of your questions, walk out and keep looking.

This is not even close to all the things to consider before getting inked, but they are a few of the biggest ones. Remember, the tattoo is the end result, but you'll bear the experience forever too, and much of the outcome depends on you. Do what you can to make it a happy memory.

Gang Tattoos

Much study has been done over the gang phenomenon, why people are drawn into gangs and why they can be so destructive. The typical gang member is young, disadvantaged and lives in an urban environment. While there are exceptions, they tend to be male, black, Asian or Hispanic and come from a broken home with often absent parents or none to speak of. Another distinguishing characteristic of a gang member is his tattoo.

Being a member of a gang is like being a member of a large family, that you are initiated, rather than born, into. Getting a tattoo of something that symbolizes your gang shows loyalty and dedication. Perhaps in this case, ink runs as thick as blood, maybe thicker.

Despite their growing social acceptance, tattoos have long been away to label those who rebel, or don't fit into mainstream society, like prisoners, carnival workers, bikers, pirates and gypsies. The Japanese often used tattoos as part of a criminal's punishment, branding him so everyone he encounters will know not only that he broke the law, but the nature of the crimes he committed.

Besides getting inked in the usually places, like the arms, chest, back and legs, gang members often get tattoos in more conspicuous and less popular areas such as the hands, face, neck and skull. Tats like these not only show their allegiance to the gang, but also demonstrate that they've turned their back on society at large. The larger and more prominent the design, the more clout its owner has within the gang world, and the less credibility they have with mainstream society.

Unfortunately, street gangs are synonymous with criminal activity, especially illegal drugs, weapons and the sex trade. Because of their illicit lifestyle, jail time is something they should probably plan for. If a gang member hasn't been tattooed yet, he'd better hurry and get one before he's shipped off to the pen.

Tattoos are invaluable to the prisoner. While they run the risk of being identified by a rival gang member, they will also get the notice of members of their own gang within the prison population. This means there will be people around that have their back. Being associated with the gang goes a long way to ensuring their safety behind bars.

The tattoo will also let other prisoners know what his status in the gang was on the outside. Respect is paramount to prison survival. If you don't have a tattoo, you have no credibility. Either you aren't dedicated enough to your gang, or you aren't in a gang and are just trying to pose as a gangbanger to for protection. Either way, you better watch your back, because no one is going to trust you. If you go in the big house with no ink, you'd better come out with some.

Most gang related tats with simply say the gangs name and territory, but there are some more generic symbols common to gang members that aren't necessarily restricted to a particular gang. One is the pachuco cross, a simple crucifix with three small dots above it usually placed on the hand between the thumb and index finger. This design is used by Hispanic gangs and stands for "mi vida loco," or "my crazy life." Southeast Asian gangs have adopted a similar symbol: three dots on the hand standing for the phrase "To O Can Gica," or "I care for nothing." The very same symbol identifies a Cuban gangster as a competent thief.

The stigma associated with tattoos may have lessened, but they still remain a powerful aspect of a person's character. In no situation is this more true than in a street gang.

Generational Trends in Tattooing

Time passes, and with it the fads and trends that accompany each decade revolve in and out of the background. However, they say that everything old becomes new again, and that often becomes obvious as our kids start showing up in our old, thrift store cast offs thinking they are the next big thing. The same is true of body art. Just like blue jeans, tattoo styles have changed through the years, but they are still a classic staple. Let's explore the generational trends in tattooing.

There's nothing good about war, though it's a necessary evil. World War II was fairly popular, as wars go and there was no shortage of men lining up to enlist. The Lady Luck tattoo was widespread among the military men. She was beautiful, and appeared in all stages of dress, surrounded by lucky talismans like four leaf clovers, eight balls and rabbit's feet. She was believed to bring luck to the wearer, and who needs luck if not a soldier on his way to war? The Lady Luck was not particular to any one branch of the military.

Generally speaking, service tattoos mark an entire generation, whether it's bluebirds on the chest of a sailor, an anchor on his forearm, or Simper Fi on the shoulder of a marine, they're a proud symbol of his service. Today's armed forces still participate in the rich tradition of military tattooing, but due to the

chronological gaps between wars that the current generation has been blessed with, the military no longer makes up as significant a part of the population as it has in times past.

Previous generations held tattoos at a distance and perpetuated the stigma associated with them. Body art (it probably wasn't widely considered art back then) was somewhat taboo for mainstream society. Tattoos were only for certain groups of people, like bikers, tramps and convicts. So, it's probable that more risqué designs, like nude or topless women were done more often, because the people getting them were already outcast, and didn't have to conform to social politeness because no one really expected it of them anyhow.

While nude tattoos definitely still happen, more and more people are opting for more modest and less visible body art. This trend is probably supported by the fact that tattooing isn't confined to such specific segments of the population. Today, there's a host of doctors, lawyers, accountants and other professionals who want to get their ink done, but don't want to risk hindering their employment options, or need to comply with a dress code or a particular image.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, tribal tattoos reached the height of their popularity. Contrary to popular belief, there's really nothing ethnically significant about such designs, other than they are loosely inspired by the elaborate tattooing practiced by the people of the Polynesian islands. Tribal tattoos are characterized by heavy, bold black lines in patterns that often feature prominent jagged points.

There was a time when women didn't ever get tattooed, especially nice, respectable ones. My, how times have changed. Not only do ladies get inked, but

all kinds of ladies get inked. The lower-back tattoo has been an overly popular choice for ladies in the last few years. Girls chose designs ranging from the ultra feminine butterfly, or a dainty little flower, all the way to heavy Celtic knots and more. Every tattoo makes a statement; the lower-back tat says “I’m still following the crowd, just the alternative one.”

There are a lot of things that cause a rift between the younger generation and the older one. Often the one doesn’t understand where the other is coming from. The clothes are different, the music has changed, but tattoos are a cultural phenomenon that bridges the gap.

Health Risks in Tattooing

Of course it’s exciting, but getting a new tattoo is something to take very seriously. People get caught up in choosing the placement and design, which shouldn’t be underestimated, because it’s going to be on your body full time, everywhere you go, for the rest of your life. However, your first consideration should be the fact that you’re about to undergo a invasive procedure that is going to break your skin and insert a foreign substance. No matter how careful you are and how clean the shop is, things can still go wrong.

In the tattooing process, a needle connected to tubes of dye pierces the skin repeatedly, inserting tiny ink droplets. The process causes a small amount of bleeding, and there may be redness and swelling of the area that should disappear in two or three weeks. This is an expected side effect of the tattooing process. However, several complications can result from tattooing: infection, removal problems, allergic reactions, granulomas, keloids and MRI complications.

Tattooing equipment and needles can transmit infectious diseases if not sterilized properly. It is extremely important that all tattooing equipment is clean and sterilized before use. Even if the needles have not been used, the most conscientious tattoo artist cannot thoroughly sterilize older tattoo guns. The design of older equipment makes full sterilization impossible, which can contaminate the needle. If the equipment used to create your tattoo is contaminated with infected blood, you can contract a number of diseases, including hepatitis C, hepatitis B, tetanus, tuberculosis and HIV.

In addition, you must care for the tattooed area properly during the first week to avoid bacterial infections. Redness, warmth, swelling and drainage are all common signs of an infection. Some skin infections resist antibiotics and can lead to pneumonia, bloodstream infections and necrotizing fasciitis.

Allergic reactions to tattoos are relatively rare, but the concentrated tattoo pigments can cause a reaction. These can be very dangerous, because the damaging pigments are often hard to remove. Cadmium sulfide in some yellow tattoos can cause reactions when they are exposed to sunlight. Phototoxic reactions normally appear as swelling and redness around the tattoo site. This can also occur in red tattoos, because cadmium sulfide is added to brighten red tattoo pigment.

Occasionally, people develop an allergic reaction to tattoos they have had for many years. Red pigment is the main cause, but green and blue pigments can also cause late reactions.

Granulomas are nodules that may form around material that the body perceives as foreign, such as particles of tattoo pigment. Some pigment colors are more likely to cause granulomas than others; red, green, blue and purple pigment tattoos are most often associated with granulomatous reactions.

Keloids may form any time you injure or traumatize your skin, and tattooing is a form of trauma. However, keloids occur more frequently after tattoo removal for all but those most prone to keloid formation.

Occasionally, tattoos can react poorly during other medical procedures. Some people have experienced swelling or burning around tattooed areas during magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Tattoos may also interfere with the quality of the image. This is most common when a person with permanent eyeliner undergoes an MRI on their eyes. Although mascara produces a similar effect, it can be removed easily.

Similarly, items related to tattooing often cause complications even when the tattoos themselves do not. Many tattoo artists use latex gloves, which can cause a reaction for those allergic to latex. Similarly, tattoos carry a risk of anaphylactic shock in those who are susceptible, but this reaction is very rare otherwise.

Henna Tattooing

Are you thinking of getting inked, but not sure you're ready for the commitment? Consider a henna tattoo. It's the best way to avoid permanent ink without looking like you whimped out.

The tall shrub like henna plant grows in dry, arid climates. Much of the world's henna supply comes from Egypt, Sudan and India, but it's cultivated in some African and Middle Eastern countries as well. In Pakistan, the plant tends to be known as "Mendhi." The plant is ground into powder and made into a paste that will temporarily stain the skin.

Leaves are harvested from the plant just as the pink and cream-colored buds start to bloom. The flowers can be used for perfume, and the leaves are hung to dry. It's important to keep them out of direct light. Allowing them to air dry in semidarkness will preserve their skin-staining qualities.

The paste consists of the powder and a substance usually referred to as a "developer." Hot water is by far the most common developer. Some henna artists swear by additives such as lemon juice, various kinds of tea and certain essential oils

Henna will start staining the skin upon the initial contact, as well as any soft surface it comes in contact with, so it's important to protect the work area and make sure the paste goes exactly where you mean for it to.

The paste should set on the skin for about two hours after design is fully applied. Carefully brush the dried paste off of the skin without rubbing. The design should be an orange color. Don't panic. The color is not finished developing. It should keep evolving for the next 12 to 48 hours depending on skin type.

It's of utmost importance that the new tattoo doesn't get wet in the first 12 hours. The water will automatically stop the color development. Aftercare of the fresh

henna tattoo is very similar to that of a regular under skin ink tattoo. Avoid soaking in the bath, and use only mild soap. Be careful to keep it clean and make sure to pat the area dry rather than rubbing.

The art of henna application is typically practiced by females, or at least there is very little documentation that proves otherwise. Henna tattoos are traditionally applied to the hands, including the fingernails, and the feet for ceremonies and celebrations such as weddings and festivals, especially religious ceremonies.

The earliest documented use of henna as body art dates back to the ancient Egyptians. Mummies uncovered in archeological digs have revealed signs of henna use, not only on the hands and feet, but as a hair dye and possibly even a conditioner. There is evidence that pharaohs were often hennaed and that specifically hennaed hands may have been perceived as a status symbol among the ancients, signifying prosperity. In other parts of the world where henna application is popular, it's used without respect to social or economic boundaries. Peasants are just as likely to be tattooed as royals.

Henna crosses many diverse cultural boundaries, but application techniques have stayed pretty much the same. The artwork may vary depending on the formality of the event. Tattoos worn for every-day decoration won't be as ordinate as those for special occasions. The popularity of various designs changes from one geographical region to the next.

For example, the dominant style in Arabia is large, flowery design covering the palm, in addition to the back of the hand. This design tends to leave more unadorned skin showing than some alternative styles. Fine-lined, intricate paisley

patterns are popular in northern India. These designs usually only cover the palm and leave very little skin uncovered.

Henna is a permanent dye. It only fades because of the natural regeneration of the skin. The typically tattoo lasts about 10 to 15 days. The fading process is affected by the tattoos placement on the skin and the lifestyle of its wearer.

The History of Tattooing

The population of those with inked or colored skin is growing by leaps and bounds. In recent years, tattooing has become much more mainstream. But what is a tattoo? Where did they begin?

Tattooing is the process by which colored dyes or inks are inserted beneath the surface of the skin with some type of sharp tool. In today's western world, tattoos are most often done with a motorized needle. In other countries, however, tattoos are inflicted on a person with a homemade instrument, by hand, over a period of several days, sometimes months. In such cultures, the art of tattooing has not changed for thousands of years.

Archaeologists have reported finding tools they think were most likely used for tattooing in many digs all across the continent of Europe. The objects are round and flat. They are made of clay and have openings at the top where needles made from bone are inserted. They were probably used as a source of pigment and a reservoir, and the bone needles were used to apply ink to the skin. Engraved figures of clay and stone from the same era have been discovered with these instruments. It is thought that these engravings represented tattoos.

In 1991, the oldest known tattooed man was discovered. He was a mummy from the Bronze Age, which was more than 5,000 years ago. It is hypothesized that the man was caught in a snow storm while hunting. There were a bow and arrows, a bronze ax, and flint found with the body, frozen inside a glacier. Among the Bronze man's tattoos are "a cross on the inside of the left knee, and six straight lines 15 centimeters long above the kidneys." These tattoos are thought by experts to be either ornamental or, perhaps, to represent social status or magical meaning.

The History Channel online encyclopedia states that tattoos were being inked into Egyptians' skin as early as 2000 B.C. According to Dr. W.D. Hambly, author of *The History of Tattooing And Its Significance*, published in 1925, there is archaeological evidence which indicates that tattooing could have begun several hundred years earlier than 2000 B.C. Made in Egypt between 4000 and 2000 B.C., Egyptian female clay figurines which have markings by puncture tattoo have been discovered. Two of these tattooed dolls are on display in the museum at Oxford University.

From Egypt, the art of tattooing spread around the world. The 3rd and 4th Dynasties were the golden age of Egyptian pyramid-building. The massive tombs still

standing at Giza were constructed during this time. During this time, between 2800 and 2000 B.C., the art of tattooing began to spread across the globe, to Arabia, Greece, Persia, and Asia.

The types of tattoos and instruments used in their application vary from culture to culture, as does the meaning. In the early days of tattooing, most of the time tattooing or scarification was applied to indicate a person's social status within a tribe. A tattoo could indicate a person's high ranking social status in one culture, or one's a low societal ranking in another culture. Tattoos have been used throughout history to show religious affiliation and loyalty, and since the time of the first tattoo there have been those who were inked for merely decorative purposes.

Tattooing is an invasive, painful procedure that can result in serious health problems if not done correctly. If done by an inexperienced and ill-prepared artist, a tattoo could spell death for someone in the form of AIDS or hepatitis. If done correctly, however, a tattoo is priceless, a personalized piece of art that lasts a lifetime.

How a Tattoo Gun Works

Every profession has tools of the trade, and the tattoo industry is no exception. All the ink, flash, stencils and needles in the world would be worthless without the tattoo gun. Your tattooist will definitely know what you're talking about when you used the word "gun," but it's a generally thought of as an amateur term. Professionals usually just say "machine" or use the term "iron."

The first tattoo machines were based on something Thomas Edison (that's right, *that* Thomas Edison) invented in the year 1876 called the Autograph Engraver. The device was originally meant to be an engraving machine. The design was improved upon some years later by a man named Samuel O'Rielly who came up with a needle and rod system and ink reservoir.

The modern day machine has evolved quite a lot since O'Rielly's version. The first apparatus resembling the current model was so heavy; it was often mounted to the ceiling with a spring so that the majority of the weight was taken off the tattooist's hand.

The version used today allows for much more precision in depth, saturation, everything. In fact, the art of tattoo application has become so precise that dermapigmentation, or applying permanent cosmetics to the delicate skin of the face and eyelids is possible and popular.

The gun works on an alternating current system, similar to a sewing machine. The needle moves between 80 and 150 times per second, speeding up the process, cutting down on skin irritation and allowing the artist to work without moving very much so that his hand remains as steady as possible.

The needles are soldered into tubes in all different numbers and arrangements. The purpose in having a variety of configurations is the same as a more conventional artist having more than one paint brush. Each one produces a different effect. Some are for outlining, some are for shading to varying degrees and some create a solid fill.

The general mechanics of a tattoo gun are fairly simply. In fact, some inventive person could put one together at home with parts of things you probably have lying around the house. There are several very good reasons you should never, ever do this, injury and disease to name just two, but since when has that stopped everybody? For the sake of discussion, here's a list of supplies you might use if you were going to build one as noted at <http://www.medindex.am/shop/articles/tattoo-suplies.html>:

- An ink pen
- Guitar string
- A tooth brush, or something similar (you'll see in a minute)
- The eraser from the top of a #2 pencil
- A small, battery operated motor, like what would be in a hand held cassette player
- Tape, or some sort of adhesive to hold it all together
- Some sewing needles

First you take four or five inches of guitar string and bend a little bit toward the end. Next, you remove the tube of ink from the pen. Cut it down to three or four inches long, then remove the brass ball at the end, making sure the opening created is large enough for a needle to pass through. Insert the needle into the tube. Then decapitate the toothbrush. Use a lighter, or some other flame to heat the plastic just until it's soft enough to bend, and then do so in an L shape. Use your adhesive of choice to join the tube/needle combo to the long end of the L. Gently push the eraser onto the motor's shaft, getting it as centered as possible, then attach the

motor to the short end of the L. Stick the bent end of the guitar string should be pushed (off center) into the eraser, and the other end should go through the tube and attached to the needle. The thinner the tube, the more control you will have over the gun. Now that you know how to manufacture a tattoo machine, DON'T!

How to Care for Your New Tattoo

You've talked about it for ages. All your friends had decided you were just chicken, but you finally got that tattoo you've always wanted. Now it's going to be there for the rest of your life. With the proper care, it will look brand new for years to come. If you understand how tattoos work and what happens if they don't get all the tender loving care they need, it will be easier to get into the habit. Treat your new tattoo like an investment.

The tattooist uses a gun that's about the same size as the drill a dentist would use. The number of needles it holds at one time depends on how much ink needs to be deposited to achieve the desired affect. Your skin has two layers: the dermis and the epidermis. The epidermis is the surface layer, and the dermis is underneath. The ink is deposited about a millimeter under the skin in the dermis.

Your tattooist will bandage his newest work of art before you leave his shop. Leave it wrapped up for at least 10 to 12 hours. This protects it while the skin is its most vulnerable, and gives it time to properly scab over. Once the bandage is off, don't cover your tattoo up again. Rebandaging can trap foreign particles such as dirt and lint under the gauze, irritating your skin increasing your chances for infection.

There are as many recommendations for tattoo lubrication as there are tattoo shops, but a few facts hold true. Petroleum-based products used to be the aftercare of choice, since it was inexpensive and could be found just about anywhere. It has since been discovered that they can take color out of your tattoo, and does nothing whatsoever to promote healing and stave off infection.

For a while, Neosporin was the favored alternative. It has antibiotic properties and preserved the color beautifully. However, some people developed small, red bumps on their new tattoos. The bumps generally healed without much problem, but they took some color with them when they went. Hoards of Neosporin users are walking around with spotted tats.

Bacitracin is the big thing in tattoo aftercare right now. It's good for fighting infection and keeps the tattoo moist to keep the healing skin healthy. It's not perfect; some people still have allergic reactions. There's no one thing that will work perfectly for everyone. A&D Ointment or Micotracin are good alternatives.

A&D is a great choice for people who don't do well with antibiotic ointments. While it doesn't have infection-fighting proprieties, it does have vitamins that promote healing. Unless you're prone to infection, keeping your tat clean should be enough. If your immune system is compromised for any reason, you don't need to get a tattoo anyway. Wait until your back up to speed.

Whatever your choice of ointment, use it frequently. Don't ever let your fresh tattoo dry out. Keeping the tat moist will keep your scabs from falling off too early. Eventually, the tattoo will develop a layer of dry skin over the top. Resist the urge

to peel or scrub it off. That's just another way to get it infected. Let it fall off naturally.

Don't scrub or scratch your new tattoo. Don't pick at the scabs. They are nature's way of protecting newly traumatized skin. Picking them off is not only gross, it's painful, will bleed and you're just asking for infection. It will make your tat look ugly, and who wants to show that off?

The color in your new tat is especially susceptible to fading in the first two weeks. During that time, avoid direct sunlight. Soaking in the bathtub is a bad idea too. In fact, spending time in any water, specifically water than has chemicals in it, such as swimming pools or hot tubs should be avoided as well.

Japanese Tattooing

Though there's not a lot of information about it on the books, there is some evidence that ancient Japanese regularly anticipated in tattoo. Artifacts resembling statuettes of people bearing tattoo like marks have been found in tombs. It is believed that the figures replicas of real, living (at that time) people and are there to represent them following a loved one to the grave or beyond.

The earliest mention of Japanese tattooing is actually in Chinese accounts around 297 A.D. The Chinese spoke of it in derogatory terms because they thought the practice was for the uncultured savages. Eventually Chinese culture started infiltrating Japanese society to a significant extent so that the art of tattooing was

degraded into a form of punishment. In one area, the symbol for the word “dog” was commonly tattooed on the offender’s forehead. Other symbols used were double lines, crosses and circles. The designs were usually placed on the face, or noticeably on the arms so that the person was obviously and irreversibly branded a criminal for the rest of his life.

The tattooed often lived as lepers on the outskirts of society. No one would hire them do business with them. They were rejected by their friends and even their partners in crime. Their families tried to pretend as though they never existed. In a culture where family devotion and social status are everything, getting tattooed was more devastating than getting executed.

Eventually there was a shift in Japanese society’s perception of tattooing and there became two distinct styles of tattoos. One was still definitely used to disgrace criminal, and the other was to signify a man of the highest status. The practice became a ritual of the samurai warriors. Soldiers were sometimes tattooed so that their bodies could be easily identified if they were killed and stripped of their armor in battle.

In modern times, Japanese tattoos have gone from punishment to prize. The unique style is studied by tattooists of all nationalities. The word for it is “irezumi,” which literally translates “insertion of ink.” Though some Japanese tattooists have adopted the faster, American style of tattooing with an electric machine, it’s traditionally done by hand. The design is drawn or painted on by the artist, and then the ink is meticulously tapped into the skin by striking a small, sharp instrument into the flesh with a hammer.

Though Japanese tattooing is now a highly celebrated art form all over the world, it still has strong ties with the criminal element in their culture. One of the most widely recognized characteristics of the “Yakuza,” the Japanese mafia, is their tattoos. The more elaborate the designs, the more powerful the mobster.

Full fledged members are encouraged to have full body suits. Much like American street gangs, the Yakuza view extensive tattooing as a test of a man’s strength, loyalty and masculinity. Being of common ink lends a sense of solidarity and unity to the group. However, the practice is fading, as the newest generation of Yakuza have come to realize that getting away with organized crime is much more lucrative than looking cool while you do it. The distinctive tattoos tend to draw attention in a business where it’s better to blend in. They also make it easier for victims to identify someone as a mobster, and maybe even as an individual. Today, most Yakuza have shed the idea of traditional pictorial tattoos in favor of more simple line drawings or phrases, but tattooing is still going strong in organized crime groups of all nationalities and cultures. It runs as deep as ink into skin.

Kinds of Tattoo Ink

The tattoo culture often refers to the process as “getting work done” or “getting inked.” The truth is, the solutions used to color the skin is not ink at all, but pigments suspended in a carrier solution, in most cases, water. The function of the carrier solution is to clean the pigments, and keep them well mixed and smooth so that the application is easier and more comfortable. Sometimes the carrier is a

mixture of a couple of things. Other commonly used, and probably the safest carriers are Listerine, witch hazel, ethyl alcohol, propylene glycol and glycerin.

It pays to ask what kind of carrier the tattooist is using. You wouldn't believe the things some unscrupulous scratchers would put into your skin. Here are some you should be aware of:

- Denatured alcohols – These can burn the skin, and are toxic, even if you don't show any initial reaction.
- Rubbing alcohol – toxic, toxic, toxic!
- Ethylene glycol – antifreeze falls into this category
- Various detergents

There is a common belief that the pigments used are vegetable dye. While that's probable true some of the time. Metal salts are more commonly used, and sometimes even plastics. The earliest known pigments were pure, ground up pigments. As stated above, the ones used today come from several different substances, namely plastics and metals. Plastic-based colors produce the most vivid colors, but more people report reactions to them than the other "inks."

Black light tattoos are a recent fad. The tattoo appears to be very faint or totally invisible in regular light, but shows up under a black light. The craze has really caught on, with black lit clubs and bars. However, the ink that makes it all possible is new and unproven, and may be something to be wary of. Some it could be toxic or even radioactive.

Alcohol is good for sterilization, but there are a lot of other risks involved. It makes the skin more permeable so more chemicals are allowed into the bloodstream than would be normally. It also causes more bleeding and the ink may not stay in the skin as well as it should, leading to a spotty tattoo. It's also a "promoter," binding with pollutants and carcinogens to make them even more harm than they would alone. That means, if the pigments aren't absolutely pure the alcohol could bind with an impurity that may pass through your system on its own and wreak havoc on your body.

Tattoo artists have a choice to either mix their own inks or to buy them premixed. Purchasing them from a well established and reputable supplier is usually pretty safe. They aren't going to intentionally risk their business and their future profits by selling something that could bring legal action against them. However, the Food and Drug Administration doesn't regulate such things, so they aren't obligated to supply a list of ingredients. You're more likely to find out exactly what's in the ink if it's mixed on the spot by your artist, but it is up to him if he fills you in or not. That's right; they don't have to tell you anything. Such things are protected as trade secrets.

If you have had allergic reactions to certain metals before, say to the nickel in a pair of earrings or faux gold jewelry; mention it to the artist before you actually go in for the ink. He should know if you might have a reaction to the ink. He might even be able to mix the ink in a different way that is less likely to aggravate your allergies.

Learning to Tattoo

So you think you want to be a tattoo artist? You had better be good at it; there is a whole lot of pressure involved. People are going to be paying you quite a bit of money to apply a design to their skin that not only has deep sentimental value to them, but is going to be there for the rest of their lives whether you do a good job or not. There's no one way to become a tattooist, but there are probably some ways that are better than others. Let's take a look at what's available out there and weigh the options.

- Apprenticing – involves working along side a experienced, professional tattoo artist in a functioning shop. It's a good way to not only learn the art, but learn the business as well. It would be hands on experience. You would have the chance to learn by actually doing instead of just reading about it. They probably aren't going to train you for free, but if you don't have the money, there's a couple of different ways to work it out. You could do some work around the shop, like clean up and empty the trash, a to cover the costs. If you have some other kind of skill to offer, you can do that in trade, like keeping the books or doing in their taxes. You might even be able to work out a combination of these ideas.
- Academic Schooling – When you're talking about putting something permanent into people's skin they will carry everywhere they go for the rest of their lives, it's not enough to know how, you have to be able to produce the results. Most people don't just pick up a tat gun one day and decide to be a tattooist. Most of them started off with natural talent that they worked to

develop over the course of their lives. Many have a degree in some art-related field. So, at least taking some art classes would give you a foundation to start from.

- Books, Tapes, etc – Think about it. You could cosmetically mutilate for life if you don't have the proper training. It may be entirely possible come out of such a course they best tattooist who ever lived, but would you go to a doctor who learned how to perform surgery over the Internet? These materials may be a great place to get some extra information, but if it's the only experience you have, you should come with a warning sign.
- Tattoo Courses – Most people feel more comfortable with the courses that require them to actually show up somewhere on a regular basis and actually interact with an instructor, and actually touch the equipment. Your future clients will probably feel better about that too. However, despite the previous warning about correspondence courses, not every single one of them is a sham. If you chose to go this route, be sure to check them out with the Better Business Bureau in your area. The only ones worth checking into will still have an apprenticeship program and put you straight on track to receive a legitimate tattoo license in your state upon graduation from the course. That goes for any method of training you choose. You also need to know things about sterilization, pathogens and blood-borne diseases, so a course in microbiology wouldn't hurt either.

Learning to tattoo is a huge commitment, and you need to have some realistic expectations. Just reading a book, watching a video and picking up a tattoo gun isn't going to make you a tattooist. It takes practice and dedication. Even if you are

the most artistically talented tattoo artist this is that's no guarantee you are going to be a success. There's more to it than that. You have to have some business sense, and know how to manage finances, staff and marketing.

Marriage Tattoos

Tattoos have long been a medium people use to pledge their undying love for each other. In the United States, we tend to associate hearts with love, thus a heart design is a popular choice to show affection. Some people have even chosen to get tattoos to commemorate their marriage. Other cultures dictate that a woman be tattooed before she is even eligible to marry. Others use tattooing as a method to attract mates.

Perhaps the origin of marriage related tattooing in North America stems from the devotion tattoo. Devotion tattoos usually involve a heart or some other symbol of love and usually someone's name. Names don't necessarily have to be involved though, something else could be used to symbolize the devotee, like a favorite flower or something to do with her interests.

Tattooed wedding rings have been around for centuries, but their modern celebrity status has given them a new lease on being hip and trendy. Back in the mid 1990's rocker Tommy Lee wed Pamela Anderson of "Baywatch" fame. Unfortunately, the union didn't last as long as the matching tattooed bands on their ring fingers. Fashion model, Mia Tyler (daughter of Aerosmith's Steven Tyler) and her musician husband, David Buckner also have tattooed bands.

Although tattoos in place of actually rings sounds extreme and absurd, it may actually have some practical advantages. Some people, like doctors and nurses have professions that require them to wash their hands all the time. A tattooed ring would mean they can do so without having to bother with taking their wedding band on and off repeatedly and risk losing or forgetting it.

Others have jobs that have certain risk factors associated with wearing jewelry, like oil field worker, mechanics and others who deal with heavy machinery on a regular basis. Conventional rings can get caught on the machine's moving parts and cause damage, and maybe even the loss of a finger. The ring finger has a tendency not to heal as well as other parts of the body, so the design may turn out a little blurry.

Not all marriage tattoos have to be permanent to be important. The Hindu religion mandates the couple, especially the bride to be, be decorated with henna tattoos for the ceremony, or their union will not be considered official. The word "mehendi" is often used in place of "henna" and is synonymous with the word "marriage." Its reddish color is symbolic of good luck and prosperity a new bride is going to bring to the family she is becoming a part of. The designs are usually placed on the hands and feet by the bride's female relatives during a ritual performed the day before the wedding. At least one the groom's hands is usually decorated for the ceremony as well.

In other cultures, a woman is not considered worthy to marry unless she is tattooed because it's believed if she can't take the pain of getting extensively tattooed, then she might never be able to stand the even more intense pain of child birth. By the

same token, and untattooed man isn't worth marrying because if he can't endure the discomfort of getting inked, he is not going to be a good worker so he can't provide well for his family. He will probably be considered a incompetent warrior.

In many ways, picking out a tattoo design is much like looking for a spouse. Your tattoo will be your ever present companion in good times and bad, in sickness and health, for richer and for poor. Pretty much the same rules apply. Some times a tattoo outlasts the relationship it was meant to celebrate and the two or three more. Much like a marriage gone wrong, divorcing a tattoo will also leave you hurting, broke and scarred.

Memorial and Devotion Tattoos

One of the most classic tattoo images is a heart with the word "mom" inscribed in it, because it's often with our maternal caregiver that our initial sense of devotion forms. Mom is supposed to love you no matter what. This kind of design is an example of what's referred to in the business as a "devotion tattoo."

Of course, a person's permanent body art tells you a lot about what's in their heart and on their mind. Often, our affections are where our money is, a really great tattoo can cost a pretty penny. So, if you see a guy with a big, beautiful design artistically tattooed on his body with someone's name emblazoned on it, you almost have to know he's in love.

The first thing we think of concerning devotion type tattoos is a boyfriend or girlfriend and all the reasons why it may not be a good idea. Obviously, if you

break up, you sure are going to look silly stuck with that name everywhere you go for the rest of your life. There are other ways to ink your love for a specific person without using their name. Your tattoo artist can help you come up with a design that incorporates some of your beloved's favorite things, like a favorite flower, or a quote from a book she really likes. That way, if your ink last longer than your love does, you may not regret the tattoo as much.

If you are just dying to have someone's name tattooed on your body forever and ever, your brother, sister, parents, favorite teacher, or even your dog are better choices than your significant other. Those are things that will never change, unless the dog bites you. A lover's affections can and will be fickle. Not even married couples are exempt from this fact; divorces happen all the time.

Just like the Men's Ruin tattoo is Lady Luck's evil twin, the devotion tattoo has a sad sister, and that's the memorial tattoo. At first glance, there doesn't seem to be a lot of distinction between the two. However, they differ at two main points: a) memorial tats tend to be about the deceased, and devotion tats about the living, and b) you're probably going to be less likely to change your mind about a memorial.

An example of a memorial tattoo might be a shrine like design with the person's name on it, surrounded by flowers or depictions of items that the wearer associates with the deceased. There are often the dates of birth and death included, as well as angels or other heavenly beings, as well as doves and symbols of peace. Some people simply get the their loved one's name with an asterisk beside it to denote the death, others opt only for a single tattooed tear drop to show their permanent sorrow.

Another option may be a portrait tattoo, a picture of the honoree inked onto the skin. This is a very specialized genre of tattooing and it's best to seek out someone who has mastered it. If you don't, the results could be disastrous. In general, people are less likely to regret memorial tattoos because their earthly relationship with the other person has already ended. They know how it's going to end. There are so surprise infidelities or disappointments that will change their feelings for that person.

Memorial tattoos don't necessarily have to be about people. They can be about pets, or the ending of an era in your life, like a reluctant retirement or a divorce. After September 11th, many people got tattoos honoring the fallen and supporting their country.

Prison Tattoos

While certainly not every person with a tattoo has done time, you can bet most every person who has done time has a tattoo. Tattoos are synonymous with prison culture. However, their origin in the prison system is far from the status symbol they are today. For centuries, tattoos were used as a means of identification, and to mark the accused so that everyone who saw their ink would know they were and, many times, the nature of their crimes. In Nazi Germany, tattoos were used to permanently mark the Jews in concentration camps.

In modern times, prisoners tattoo each other to show gang affiliation, to symbolize their standing in the prison community, to make themselves look more intimidating to their enemies or just to pass the time. Tattoo artists may use their services to barter for privileges, favors or contraband.

Traditional tattoo equipment is not allowed inside the prison, but such rules are only a small bump in the road for those who are serious about their ink. Almost anything with some kind of motor can be used to make a tattoo gun. Electric shavers, sewing needle, guitar strings and syringes are commonly used materials.

As you can imagine, there's not an over abundance of tattoo ink flowing through the prison system, thus prison tattoos are characterized by long, thin, black or blue lines. Carbon produced from liquefying any number of substances is a common substitute for ink. Melting rubber soles off of shoes produces a good that can be thinned out with water, and the soot collected from burning candles can be mixed with water for the same purpose. Perhaps the simplest supplies used are a sewing needle and ink from an ordinary writing pen. The absence of a motor will make the process much slower, but quieter and more discrete.

If inmates weren't affiliated with a gang before going to jail, chances are good they will be before they get out, if they ever do. Gangs serve many functions in a prisoner's life. They're a source of protection, status and offer a sense of belonging in a world that's very much about being out for oneself. Law enforcement officials pay special attention to tattoos because they're ideal for forensic and identification purposes. They are also indisputable proof of a person's gang involvement.

As tattoos in general become more popular in general society, prison-style tattoos are turning up on a sect of tattoo subculture that has never spent time behind bars. A prison-like tattoo in anything but black or blue is more than likely a fake, as is a tattoo that consists of more than a single color. Prison tattoos are heavy with symbolism. Some are pretty obvious and well known, such as the swastika, but

some appear to be innocent. For example, a bluebird is commonly associated with the Aryan Brotherhood, a notorious white supremacy gang. A spider web, particularly on the neck or skull labels its owner as an IV drug user. If you're considering getting a tattoo inspired by this style, make sure to do your research carefully to avoid sending a message you don't really mean.

A significant percentage of the prison population carry with them a reminder of the rough lifestyle that landed them there in the first place: disease. Reckless sexual practices and drug use take their toll on the body, and are often associated with diseases, such as AIDS and Hepatitis C, which can be spread through contact with infected blood. Because the process of tattooing breaks the skin to deposit ink, it may be a factor in spreading disease.

Popularity of Tattoos

How long the practice of tattooing has been going on and the exact origin of its use remains a matter of much speculation. There's evidence to suggest that kings and pharaohs have been tattooed since way back, debunking the myth that ink was originally used only for marking criminals and other undesirables.

For years a stigma has been imbedded in body art as ink is in the skin. Perhaps that attitude was perpetuated by the fact that traditionally, tattooed people tended to be somewhat on the fringes of society, and have occupations that were not exactly mainstream and a little mysterious, like pirates, merchant sailors, gypsies and non-Christian clergy, giving body art a rather romantic, outlaw reputation.

Over time, rebels of all kinds, and some falsely accused of rebellion, have adopted tattoos as a symbol of their beliefs. For example, a particular sort of rainbow is associated with homosexuality. The rainbow in question has six specific colors: red, for life; orange, for healing; yellow, for sun; green, for nature; blue, for harmony and purple, for spirit. This rainbow was first introduced as such in 1978 at the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Pride Day parade. The movement desired a banner that could represent them through the ages, and some feel strongly enough to have it permanently inked into their skin so they can always be identified with their cause. For similar reasons, modern Christians, despite traditional religious objection to the practice of tattooing, opt for crosses or fish symbols to illustrate their faith.

Of course, for every action there is an opposite reaction. Various hate groups also have their own tattoo. Members of the Aryan Brotherhood, a notorious white supremacy group, often brand themselves with ink that supports their raciest views. Designs popular with this group may not come right out and say Aryan Brotherhood. Instead they just contain the letters AB or the name Alice Baker to symbolize their hatred. Similarly, other branches of racist extremism, such as skinheads and neo-Nazis, utilize the swastika and the confederate flag.

In the 1960s and 70s, society was in a mess. The black civil rights movement was coming to a head, and women were finally starting to exercise the independence they had been trying to gain for centuries. There were activists for or against so many things. Nixon was on his way out of the White House and people were discouraged with their government. This era was a turning point in widening the

social acceptance of tattooing. Suddenly the status quo wasn't really worth preserving any more.

It seems like movie stars are prone to jumping on band wagons and getting tattoos. The general public's fascination with celebrity gives them the power to give a voice to their cause, and influence our culture. More and more stars are making appearances with their tattoos hanging out and showing them off in photo shoots, giving their adoring fans one more reason to run out and get inked.

For better or worse, it's the idea of symbolism that draws people to tattooing. People commonly seek designs that celebrate or commemorate significant events in their lives, such as the birth of a new baby or the death of a loved one. Some people chose a symbol of a monumental accomplishment, like graduating from college, surviving cancer or serving in the armed forces.

Though we obviously have a long, long way to go before every person is free to be themselves in this world, self expression has become more and more acceptable. Getting a tattoo is a way to display art that is deeply meaningful to the owner. It's ok to ask someone what their tattoo stands for. They wouldn't have it so prominently displayed if they didn't want you to notice it.

Popular Tattoo Styles

The most popular tattoo styles are tribal, flowers, stars, crosses, butterflies, fairies, eternity symbols and dragons.

True tribal tattooing has a long history. These tattoos traditionally consisted of black ink and intricate lines heavy with symbolic meaning. Often, young men were tattooed to mark the passage from boyhood into adulthood, while women were tattooed to signify that they were ready to be married. Today, the techniques and significance of tribal tattoos are very different today. Most favor tribal tattoos because of their striking appearance.

Flower tattoos can be far more than just pretty, benign pictures. Flowers can also embody of nature, maturity, birth, life and rebirth. Specific flowers have come to represent varied cultures and beliefs. In Asia, the lotus flower has tremendous spiritual significance. The lotus figures prominently in the Creation Myths of Indian and China, and Buddha is said to have risen at the center of a Lotus Blossom.

In the West, the rose is a symbol of pure love popular with both men and women. A tattoo of a rose with prominent thorns is a reminder that love is not without risk. The rounded, cup-like shape of the flower has been long been seen as a symbol of the feminine. Flowers are also ideal for those hoping for a large variety of color choices.

The star is often considered a symbol of hope, but their nocturnal connotation can also represent the dark or the unknown. Stars can signify countless things depending on the number, color and orientation of the points. The most well known star designs are the Pentagram (five-pointed star), the Nautical Star (five-pointed star), the Hexagram or Star of David (six-pointed star) and the nonagram (nine-pointed star).

Crosses are also a very popular tattoo design. They can range of styles from angular, tribal inspired designs to curving Celtic crosses. Crosses frequently combine other popular tattoo subjects such as flowers and tribal elements. Cross tattoos are worn all over the body, from armbands to lower back pieces to ankles. A symbol with religious implications, crosses can represent faith, belief or the death of a loved one.

Many people are attracted to the colorful symmetry of butterfly tattoos, but they can have deep significance to the wearer as well. Often, butterflies signify metamorphosis, freedom, rebirth or dreams. The latter symbolism derives from the Native American belief that butterflies bring dreams while we sleep.

Angels and fairies are similarly anthropomorphic winged creatures, but they usually convey very different ideas. Angels personify divine will and are symbols of devotion, guidance and protection. Angels and crosses are often used together in memorial tattoos, as angels commonly refer to the souls of the departed.

The Fairy as a tattoo design can be a pop culture reference or a nod to ancient mythology. Fairies are inspirational, because a fairy must earn its wings. They are also transformational, because their wings allow freedom. As a tattoo design, they suggest of freedom, innocence or magic.

Historically and culturally, the infinity symbol is similar to mythological creatures such as Ouroboros, the snake that consumes its tail to form an endless circle. Circles and loops are reminiscent of the idea of life being conceived as an eternal, seasonal cycle that repeats continuously. Eternity symbols can also signify a

myriad of religious beliefs, from those that embrace eternal heavenly existence to the idea of endless reincarnation.

Dragon tattoos come in two main forms: the Eastern dragon and the Western dragon. The Eastern dragon is a protective ally. It brings water, signals fertility and ensures prosperity. The Western dragon is an evil creature, a winged, fire-breathing lizard that thwarts brave warriors and threatens distressed damsels.

Polynesian Tattooing

When you say the word Polynesian to people, they immediately start talking about beautiful islands, ritualistic dancing and food, but not too much time will pass without vivid descriptions of large, intimidating looking men sporting extensive, if not full body tattoos. The art of Polynesian tattooing is a product of a culture that has no written language. Information and stories were passed down through oral tradition from generation to generation. The tattoos were used as a kind of record book to keep track of a person's personal history. There were specific markings to denote one's social status, occupation, lineage, and sexual development.

In the late 1700s, Christian missionaries came to the Pacific Islands and made quite a mark. Quite a bit of the native population converted to Christianity, and felt they had to give up their culture to do so. The things that made the people who they were gradually started to fade, and the practice of tattooing was probably one of the first things to go since it is expressly forbidden in the Old Testament.

Eventually the Polynesians resurrected their way of life, and reverted to some of their old customs and practices. The ink once again began to flow and the

traditional methods and designs of tattooing became popular again. However, using the traditional tools of the trade was banned in French Polynesia in the late '80s because the Ministry of health didn't feel the wooded and bone instruments could be sufficiently sterilized.

The tools are made from needles carved sharply out of bone or tortoise shell and fastened to a wooden piece so that the finished tool looks somewhat like a hair comb. Like the tattoo ink used in the modern day United States, what the Polynesians used wasn't really ink at all, but soot from burning candlenut, and like modern ink, it was combined with a carrier solution to keep it mixed well and make it easier to apply. They usually used water or oil. The needle end of the comb is then dipped into the ink and tapped into the skin with a hammer-like instrument.

A person usually started participating in the tattooing rituals to around the age of 12 to mark their transition from childhood into adulthood. The design and placement of a person's tattoos was largely determined by their bloodline. Your social status was directly proportionate to how many tattoos you had. A man with no tattoos was an outcast, and those with extensive tattoos were revered and held high stations in the community.

Polynesian women are also tattooed, though not as heavily as men. Like boys, girls typically began their tattooing around the age of 12. Until a girl was tattooed, she was not allowed to prepare food or participate fully in society. Women were only allowed to get tattooed in certain places on their bodies, mostly the hands, feet and lips. We now know these to be the most painful areas.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the tattooed community in the United States was in the throws of the “tribal” trend. These tattoos are characterized by their solid blackness and distinctive shapes. However, many people don’t realize they have none of the significance of the Polynesian art they’re inspired by. That doesn’t make them fake Polynesian tattoo, it makes them a perfectly legitimate, but separate category of tattoo possibility. Just because it doesn’t mean the same thing as its more rootsy counterparts, doesn’t make it void. The real symbolism is the sentimental value the wearer attaches to it, and that’s the same with any body art.

Nazi Imposed Forearm Tattoos

Numbered forearm tattoos are closely associated with Holocaust survivors. This practice originated at Auschwitz, the largest and most notorious of the Nazi concentration camps.

Incoming prisoners went through the infamous selection process where a Nazi security officer, or Schutzstaffel (SS), would determine who would be killed in the gas chambers and who would work in the forced labor camps. The prisoners who would live and work were registered with a tattoo. Each prisoner was assigned a specific five digit Hollerith number, which was part of a custom punch card system designed to track prisoners within the Nazi concentration camps, similar to our social security system in the United States in that each person was reduced to a number for purposes of identification. The punch card number would follow each prisoner from labor assignment to labor assignment as Hollerith systems tracked the prisoner’s availability for work and reported it to a central inmate file.

These tattoos were only one of the ways the Nazis dehumanized their prisoners, and Jews were not the only prisoners who bore SS tattoos. Homosexuals, the mentally ill, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, Communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, blacks and the Roma were also tattooed in forced labor concentration camps. Only ethnic Germans and police prisoners escaped the degrading registration tattoos.

Tattoos evolved quickly at Auschwitz. When the Nazis initiated the tattooing program in mid-1941, the tattoos were placed on the left breast of the prisoner. Later that year, the tattoo location was moved to the inner forearm. Before long, the number system bore no further relation to the Hollerith number. The Hollerith number was designed to trace a working inmate, so when the number of exterminated inmates surpassed the number of living inmates, the Hollerith numbering system was unnecessary.

Instead, the Nazis introduced ad hoc numbering systems tailored to each division of the extermination camp. For example, Dr. Josef Mengele, who performed inhumane scientific experiments on prisoners, tattooed his own distinct number series on those assigned to his division.

Nevertheless, Nazi officials in Berlin continued to use the numbers to track prisoners. In late 1943, the extermination of more than six thousand working prisoners was delayed for two days. The SS was under orders to spare the lives of any Jews with traces of Aryan parentage, and the prisoners' execution was postponed until each of their tattoos could be checked against the records in Berlin.

However, tattoos took on an even more gruesome significance in the concentration camps than just simple identification. The inmate who entered a Nazi concentration camp with tattoos was targeted from the moment he or she arrived. Tattooed inmates were immediately catalogued, and their skin was marked for the collection after death. The skin of dead prisoners was used to make lamp shades, saddles, riding britches, gloves, house slippers and ladies' hand bags. Elaborately tattooed specimens were kept in a Nazi museum in Berlin. SS officers also frequently seized tattooed skin from these macabre stockpiles and prized them as morbid souvenirs of their time at the camps.

The significance of tattoos in Nazi Germany continues more than sixty years after the concentration camps were closed. Nazi Germany glorified an idealized Aryan heritage, and in recent years extremists have appropriated many Aryan symbols from pre-Christian Europe for their own uses. They give such symbols a racist significance, even though the symbols did not originally have such meaning. In addition, these symbols are often used by nonracists as well, in particular practitioners of modern pagan religions, though they still have their place in confinement. Today's prisons are packed with people prominently displaying such ink, because it identifies them with a group. Like Nazi Germany, they are bound together by hate.

Military Tattoos

One of the most well known, and probably the most widely socially acceptable tattoos are on servicemen, and more recently servicewomen. These tattoos, sometimes called travel marks are more than just art. They tell stories about where

the wearer has been, what they've seen and many times, how they feel about it. The story of freedom, hardship, war and liberty can be traced back for decades or longer on the bodies of generations of those who have served in all branches of the military.

Some got inked as very young boys on their way to war. Excited, scared and away from home for the very first time, their ink made them a man, and at the same time gave them the comfort of belonging to a family, a brotherhood bonded by ink and a common experience.

Others came home with tattoos done in strange and exotic foreign cities, maybe by someone who didn't even speak the same language. They carry that design through life as a souvenir of the experience. Women are a bigger part of today's military, and make up a bigger part of the tattooed community as well. They get their tattoos just like the boys do, and for the same reasons.

So pervasive are tattoos in military culture, that tattoo studios almost always situate themselves near bases. Some are satellite locations of bigger shops on the other side of town. Their hours of operation may even revolve around the service people's pay schedule.

The popularity of "Lady Luck" tattoos escalated right along with World War II. She may be completely clothed or in various stages of undress, but she's always smiling, beautiful and usually accompanied by other lucky symbols like rabbits' feet, four leaf clovers, horseshoes, etc. This tat was a stylish choice for men about to ship out because it was thought to bring them luck.

We can't mention Lady Luck without giving some time to her evil twin, the "Men's Ruin" tattoo. It also features a woman in various stages of dress, but this time she's portrayed as the root of all his troubles instead of the object of his affection. She's surrounded by representations of vices, such as dice, playing cards, booze and drugs, but she's still pretty, because who wants to wear an ugly woman around for the rest of their life.

There were other variations on the same theme. A lady dress as a hula girl probably means the wearer served in the Pacific Theater. Similar images were often painted on bombs, cannons, guns and other instruments of war.

United States Marines often sport tattoos with slogans like: "Semper Paratus," or Death before Dishonor." The bulldog mascot is also popular, but perhaps no other branch is known for their body art like the navy. Sailors are famous for their tattoos, which are rich with symbolism. After he's gone his first 5,000 miles at sea, he has a blue bird inked on to one side of his chest, the next 5,000 earns him one on the other side. A seagull may represent a fellow serviceman lost at sea. A dragon means he's crossed over an international dateline. The ever popular anchor was thought to save him if he fell overboard, and sailors back in the days of actual sails had "hold fast" tattooed on to their knuckles to help them remember to be careful while up in the crow's nest.

Sailors in the British fleet sometimes had crosses tattooed on their backs to spare them a flogging if they got into trouble, because it would be sacrilegious to strike the image. Other popular designs among the seafaring are Neptune, the god of the sea, nude women and various kinds of ships.

There's been resurgence in patriotic tattoos in recent years, with the Gulf Wars drawing in a new generation of soldiers, and memorial tattoos honoring the fallen of September 11th. What ever the branch, during peace or times of war, servicemen and women wear their ink like a badge of honor.

Methods of Tattooing

From primitive tools to the modern machines; tattoos have been applied for thousands of years. The practice is believed to have originated in ancient Egypt, where evidence supports that the highest pharaohs were inked. With the evolution of society and modern technology all kinds of gadgets found there way in to the lives of men. The development of tools and machinery changed the way we work play and even decorate out bodies. Different cultures have used various instruments and methods.

The people of the Polynesian islands are traditionally heavily tattooed, using the designs to signify things like sexual maturity, genealogy and social status. Generally, the more tattoos a person had, the more respect they had from their peers, thus the higher their position in the community. A man with no tattoos was virtually ignored.

They did, and still often do use a handmade tool that involves carving and sharpening many needles out of tortoise shell, or some kind of animal bone. The blunt end of the needles was inserted and bound into a stick. The end result looks similar to a very sharp hair comb. The needles were then dipped into the ink, pressed against the flesh and the comb was tapped into the skin with a mallet-like tool. The ink was a concoction of soot diluted with water or oil so that it's easier to work with.

For years the Japanese only used tattoos as a way to mark criminals so that society would know what crimes the wearer had committed. The Yakuza, the Japanese mafia, traditionally encouraged the use of tattooing to promote unity in their ranks and test the strength and endurance of a man. As with other cultures, the more tattoos a mobster has, the more respect he is given. In recent years, the current generation of Yakuza has opted for simpler, less conspicuous tattoos so they would be harder to identify.

Today in Japan, tattooing is accepted to much the same extent it is in the United States. It has developed into quite an exquisite art form, revered and studied by tattoo artists all over the world. To this day, the process is performed in very much the same method the Polynesians used, only they use a single sharp object rather than many fastened together.

Some tribal cultures required that people be tattooed by a certain age or before they are allowed to participate in certain rites, like marriage. A marriage tattoo often signifies the wearer's commitment to their intended spouse. In some of these cultures, the entire design of the tattoo is painted on all at one time. The ink is then tapped into the skin, by hand, with a sharpened thorn.

Some cultures created tattoos by cutting designs into the flesh of a person and then rubbing the wounds with a pigment of some kind. The pigmenting agents would get into the skin and remain there long after the cuts had healed. Inks made from plants and flowers or ashes mixed with water were commonly used. Because the cuts tended to be larger and deeper than the needle pokes associated with most body art, they were very easily infected. This practice may have evolved into what we now call scarification.

Today, in modern civilizations, tattooing is performed with an electric tattoo machine, or gun, which uses groups of needles inside metal tubes to place ink

under the skin. The machine repeatedly drives the needles in and out of the skin, between 80 and 150 times a second. Thanks to this modern technology, this process is faster and much less painful than what our inked forefathers had to endure.

Samoaan Tattooing

More than 2,000 years ago, according to PBS online, the first Polynesian tattoo was inked into skin. Early tattoos were done with crude instruments and caused tremendous pain. In some societies, the art of tattooing is much the same today as when it began. In particular, Samoaan *tatau*, which is the art of tattooing by hand, has remained unchanged.

Two of sisters named Taema and Tilafaiga are credited with first bringing the art *tatau* from Fiji to Samoa. In Fiji, the sisters were taught that only the women were to receive tattoos. This information “got reversed on their journey home,” and from this confusion emerged what became the Samoaan tradition--men were tattooed while women bore children.

The Samoaan master artist, or *tufuga*, are usually a male and apprentice for many years before his first tattoo. He spends years honing his skill, which is often passed down from father to son. The *tufuga* will spend hours, even days, practicing with his *au* in barkcloth or sand. The *au* is a comb-like tool, made of wood and a part of

a turtle shell which has sharpened boar's teeth attached to it. The artist uses a mallet to hammer the comb's teeth in, marking his design.

Rank and title are of utmost importance in Samoan society, and a person's tattoos reflect their standing in the social hierarchy. Because the *tatau* process is extremely painful, a finished tattoo represents not only a person's societal rank, but is a reminder of that person's strength and ability to endure. Both the pain and the risk of infection are great, but if a person refuses *tatau*, he is seen as a coward. A person who can't sit through an entire tattoo has to live with a mark of shame for the rest of his life.

In a Samoan's life, the first *tatau* session occurs at the onset of puberty. The traditional tattoo for men, the *pe'a*, is an intricate design which extends from the knees to the middle of the man's torso. Originally, this design represented a man's dedication and pledge of loyalty to his extended family, or *aiga*. The process of tattooing lasts all day, for weeks, even months, at a time. The usual *pe'a* is supposed to be able to be completed in ten days, five actual days of tattooing and five days of rest in between. Because the process takes such a long time, the *tufuga* is often housed and fed by the family of the person being tattooed for the duration of the tattooing.

The healing process, unlike the tattooing, is sure to last for months. To heal completely takes a year or more. Women's tattoos are done on the thighs, legs, or hands, and are usually of a smaller design. While men's tattoos are typically comprised of larger, solid sections of ink, the women's patterns are of a much more delicate, intricate design. The most honored tattoo that a female can receive is the *lima*. *Lima* is a special tattoo inked into the hands which is required to serve

kava, a narcotic drink served at ceremonies. The *malu*, a lacy web design, is done on the inside of women's thighs and is flashed during the dancing of the *siva*.

Geometric patterns, utilizing lines, triangles, circles, and other polygons, are commonly used in Samoan tattoo design, as are simple pictographs depicting mankind, animals and birds, or other, man-made, objects. The geometric designs had multiple meanings, depending on these three factors: where the tattoo is placed on the body, what other designs are tied into it, and who the person is who is being tattooed. Typically, the master determines what designs would be suitable for each subject individually, and then explains the story of the design to that person.

This tradition, strongly rooted in Samoan society, has lasted thousands of years and may likely last a thousand more. For a Samoan, a tattoo is not just a pretty design but a badge of honor.

Safety and Sanitation in the Tattoo Parlor

You wouldn't eat in a dirty restaurant, or have surgery in a filthy operating room, so why in the world would you settle for a less than sanitary tattoo studio? You wouldn't. When a tattoo parlor sets up shop in a city in which the practice is legal, (believe it or not, there are still places in the United States where it's not) it is licensed by the city in the same way any other business would be and is subject to the same rules.

However, there are, as of yet, no governmental bodies or laws geared specifically toward regulating the sanity of the body art industry. Over the years, there have

been times when the government, at various levels, has threatened to stick its nose into the tattoo business. So far professional tattooists have prevented that by self regulation. Here are some things you should look for to make sure you have a happy, healthy tattoo experience.

- Needles – They should be sterile to start off with and disposed of every single time. Above all else, needles should never be used more than once. It's a good idea for tattooists to break and properly dispose of the used needle where the customer can see them. This gives the tattooist a little accountability and incentive to finish the job right while instilling confidence in the facility in the customer. At the very least it's good for business.
- Gloves – If the tattooist acts like he's about to touch your skin without gloves on, scream. It's a popularly know fact that we carry a lot of germs on our hands. Before your tattooist begins working on you, he should was his hands with antibacterial soap and put on a fresh pair of gloves. After the gloves go on, he should not touch anything but your skin and his already sterile equipment. If he steps away from the sterile environment for any reason: to talk to another customer, answer the phone, operate the cash register, anything, the process should be repeated with a new pair of gloves.
- Autoclave – We you are in the process of auditioning shops for your new tattoo, be sure to look around for an autoclave. This is a machine roughly the size of a microwave that is used to serialize tattoo equipment. Dentists and doctors also use them. Smart tattooists keep their autoclaves in sight of the customers for all the same reasons they let them see the broken needles.

- Ink – The tattooist should always throw out left over ink after every project. All kinds of airborne contaminants can fly into open ink pots and stick there.

Reusing

In a good shop, you should be able to observe most of these practices just while you are waiting in line. If not, don't hesitate to ask some questions. A tattooist with nothing to hide won't mind talking with you. If he acts nervous, or like you're bothering him, just turn around and walk out. There are enough good, clean shops out there that there's no need for you to compromise your health or the quality of your experience.

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists, Inc. was founded in the summer of 1992 to educate and protect the interests of both the tattooer and the tattooee. Membership hopefuls must be able to prove at least three years of documented tattooing experience, use an autoclave and attend a nine hour seminar on microbiology and how diseases are contracted. The APT sets guidelines for sanitation practices and, with the help of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) enforce hefty fines of up to \$7,500 a day to encourage members to operate safe, clean shops.

Tattooing Rituals

The explorer William Dampier brought the tattoo to the contemporary west when he brought the heavily tattooed Polynesian Prince Giolo to London in 1691 and put him on exhibition. He became the rage of London. The British public welcomed the novelty. Europe had not seen tattoos in 600 years. It would be another 100 years before tattoos would make their mark on the West.

The slow spread of tattoos in the West was due to their slow, painstaking procedure of application. Puncture of the skin by hand and subcutaneous injection of ink was unappealing. Tattooing was viewed so poorly that it went underground; becoming a secret society few were accepted into. This ritualistic approach to tattooing is prevalent throughout its history.

It is believed that the tattoo originated in Ancient Egypt. Archaeologists at Ashmolean Museum in Oxford claim tattoos were first applied to female clay figurines and their human counterparts as early as 4000 BC. Such neo-pagan practices so eerily reminiscent of voodoo that pre-date Christ by nearly four millennia clarify why so many find tattoos mysterious and disturbing.

The migrant Ainu people of Japan adopted tattooing early and considered the tattoo divine. Modern Japanese dismissed such notions of the tattoo and viewed it ornament. Japanese tattooists called the Horis refined tattooing to an art form. Their use of color, sheer intricacy of designs, and use of contrast made their tattoo marks appear almost three-dimensional. Even as art-historians appreciated tattoos as an aesthetic, the human suffering required to endure tattooing mystified many.

Sir Joseph Banks was the first European on record who speculated why. During his 1769 visit to Tahiti, Banks wrote: "What can be a sufficient inducement to suffer so much pain is difficult to say; not one Indian (though I have asked hundreds) would ever give me the least reason for it; possibly superstition may have something to do with it. Nothing else in my opinion could be a sufficient cause for so apparently absurd a custom."

Superstition may well be the reason so many early tattoo wearers endured the pain of tattooing but such notions are scorned or chided by their wearers today. Tattoos seem to be a fundamental area of common ground across cultures. From Africa to Europe, to North America and its thousands of native tribes, the acceptance of tattoo pain and permanence appear integral to very societal structure.

The pantheistic and animistic connotations of tattoos cannot be overlooked. The belief the tattoo wearer calls upon the spirit of his marked image – the dragon, eagle or flower – implies a return to a nature of the human form. Regardless of the reasoning behind them, tattoos are a practice in symbolism as much as art and their ritualistic nature cannot be understated or ignored.

Some civilizations use tattoos for demarcation of degree of crime, others tattoo young girls as rite of passage to womanhood. Tribal Samoan women are married based on the tattoos they wear. Dayak warriors' tattoos symbolize how many lives they have taken in battle. Such tattoos assure their wearers status for life.

The rewards of such tattoos in tribal life seem to justify the physical pain required to endure their application. Today's global village makes tattoos and the rites of passage their represent seem out of date.

Teenagers war with each other to fit in with the right crowd, and have the right clothes. Twenty-somethings fight each other harder for the entry-level job that's

going to take them to the top, or to get into graduate school. Established businessmen will stop at nothing to preserve their balances. Humans seem to love status and will submit to whatever rituals assure them of it.

Removal

You should have listened to your friends when they said you'd regret getting your significant other's name tattooed on your arm, and you really should have known how your mother would react upon seeing “Momma” scrawled across your back. Tattoos are created by injecting colored pigment under the skin with a needle, and are relatively permanent.

Lucky for you, and your poor mother, there are several methods for tattoo removal. The success of the removal depends on several factors including; the location, size, the individual's ability to heal, how the tattoo was applied, and how old the tattoo is. A physician will review these factors while choosing the best method for you.

Dermabrasion is the method in which a small area of the tattoo is sprayed with a solution that freezes the skin. The physician then uses an instrument to “sand” the skin, peeling layers away. Some bleeding is likely to occur, and a dressing is immediately applied to the area.

The Salabrasion method has been performed for centuries, and is still occasionally used today. The tattoo and surrounding area are numbed by a local anesthetic and then rubbed vigorously with salt or a salt block until the layers of skin trapping the ink are literally rubbed off and the ink able to escape the skin.

Excision is a method used to remove small areas of the tattoo. The patient is given local anesthesia to the affected area and the tattoo is surgically cut from the skin. The edges of the remaining skin are sutured together. It is a simple procedure with a mild recovery time as long as there are no complications, such as infection. If that tattoo is too large it may be necessary to excise the areas in stages, removing the center of the tattoo first, then the perimeter at a later date. A skin graft may be taken from another part of the body to replace the portion of skin that was removed..

In recent years physicians have considered laser surgery one of the best methods of tattoo removal. Anesthesia is not required for laser removal, but depending on the patient's pain threshold a physician may decide to use a numbing cream or local painkillers. The patient is given protective eyewear and pulses of light are directed onto the tattoo, breaking up the pigments. Over the next few weeks the pigments are absorbed into the body. Black and blue pigments respond well to laser treatments, whereas greens can be resistant, and red pigments do not respond at all to Ruby laser light. Thanks to new laser technology scarring is not a significant risk for laser tattoo removal.

Your skin is the largest organ on your body and your first line of defense against infection. Anything you do to damage or break the skin weakens your natural immune responses. Just as your tattooist did when you got your new tattoo, your doctor should give you precise instructions on how to care for your skin as it heals. Keeping the area clean is of the utmost importance. There is no complete method of tattoo removal. While the procedures and patient responses vary, you're essentially trading a tattoo for residual pigmentation and some degree of scarring. Before choosing to get a tattoo, make sure your motives are lasting and you

tattooist is reputable. Stay away from fads and choose a design that is deeply meaningful to you.

Removal of your little mistake isn't going to be cheap. Depending on the size, type, and amount of treatments needed; the average cost can be from \$150 for the excision of a small tattoo, up to \$5,000 for larger pieces that may take several treatments.

Religious Objections to Tattooing

Tattoos offend the religious of a variety of familiar denominations. The most dramatic example is found among Jewish believers, who deny a traditional Jewish burial to persons with tattoos, or even bodily piercing. Some Christian churches impose restrictions on bodily “modifications”. While 21st century enlightened individuals might take surprise or offence at religious objection to tattooing or body piercing, basis may be found in an Old Testament passage.

“Do not lacerate your bodies for the dead, and do not tattoo yourselves. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:28). By this passage, lacerations and tattoos so described were part of non-Jewish mourning rituals, intended to disguise the living from the spirits of the dead. This curious mixture of neo-paganism with orthodox faith is as fascinating to some as disturbing to others. While cultural anthropologists and the religious may wage holy war over the subtext for a tattoo, religious motives seem to weigh very little on choices by those who adorn themselves with ink beneath the skin or piercing it with rings. Some might argue that they should.

Vatican II Council's declaration that human beings are called upon to view their bodies "As good and honorable since God created it and will raise it up on the last day" (*Gaudium et Spes*, #14) lends credence to opinions that some tattoo motifs seek to offend the more religious minded. At least, both secular and religious will agree that most tattoo designs seem less than "good and honorable" and so might seem "inappropriate" decoration for a body created by the divine.

The very consideration of religious objection tattoos raises powerful questions of us as a society, and equally interestingly, the degree to which tattoo wearers and objectors view what precisely makes them "human".

If we judge body modification to be appropriate, do we need to acknowledge the reasons why others may not share our views?

Whether we like it or not our decisions affect our futures. Potential employers look at people differently because of holes in their noses and tattoos on their calves. Forget life-careers for a moment. How we look affects our ability to get a part-time job nowadays. And, if we have a job, it might be wise to check to our employer's unspoken policy on tattoos and body piercing. While "prejudice" is unfair – it is often inevitable. Is it consistent with the values espoused by any civilized religion? Moral arguments won't pay your bills. Staring at our navels won't pay for dinner any more than piercing it will. Choosing between right to self-expression and self-sustenance might seem unfair but it may well be a reality.

My friend Lucian got his ear pierced for his 21st birthday. Friends gently ribbed him and his parents accepted it. Yet the law firm he interned at did not. His employer informed him he'd have to remove it during working hours. Since he'd just had the piercing he couldn't take the earring out immediately or the hole

would close. He was faced with walking around with a band-aid on his ear for a month and a chip on his shoulder for a lot longer.

Some argue tattoos have religious significance and artistic merit. Do they deserve standalone appreciation rather than criticism?

No reasonable person openly says that tattoos or body piercing are “bad” or that people who have them avoided. Our love of art or religious significance is valid reason for self-expression.

It remains up to the individual to weigh the risks and issues they enjoin. Some gangs choose tattoos with a religious theme and such a tattoo may be misinterpreted. As with all forms of expression, tattoos are no different – they are open to interpretation.

Perhaps the tried but true forms remain most valid. After all, you could always demonstrate your faith by wearing a medal or a cross.

Tattoo and Copyright Laws

Creativity is an extremely personal thing. All true artists are protective of their work. It's a part of them, an extension of their soul. Tattooists are no exception. Copyright laws are intended to protect artists and inventors from having their ideas stolen, their profits suffer and their art abused. However, the idea of copyrighting tattoo designs is not something tattooists are ready to jump on board for. No one is ever anxious to bring lawyers into the mix, and it's very questionable whether or not copyrighting would even effectively protect custom work.

Even flash, the sheets of tattoo designs that paper the walls of just about every tattoo shop on the planet started its existence as someone's original work. Tattooists buy the sheets from a dealer, probably the same supplier they get the rest of their stuff from. When that deal goes down, it's not art in the sense of wall décor they are paying for; they could go to any discount store for that. It's the right to reproduce the design to a stencil and tattoo it on to a customer. The legal principal behind flash is the same as selling a book that you brought at a bookstore. You paid for the right to own that copy of the book and you have the right to sell it.

Theoretically, custom work is an original design intended for only for one person. The vast majority of the time, all custom designs start out as drawings on actual paper before being applied to someone's skin. So for the purposes of copyright law, the tattoo itself is actually a reproduction. Since it's typically the same artist who both draws and applies the tattoo it's not that big of a deal.

The law is not super clear on what constitutes an infringement of copyright when it comes to tattoo reproduction. It's impossible to make any body art the exact same way twice. Bodies are shaped differently, ink takes to differently to various skin types, the colored pigments with mix up a little bit differently each time, etc. So in that sense, tattoos can't be replicated. Even if another tattooist copies your original work, it's still just that, a copy. That's like a professional band covering another's song. It's just their version of it.

On the other hand, the law used the following phrase: "substantially similar." That means the reproduction in question doesn't have to be exactly perfect, it just has to be similar. Under that logic, the design can be colored entirely differently, and embellished upon, but still be considered "substantially" the same enough to

support a law suit. To the layman, it sounds like the viability of such a suit depends on who is interpreting what constitutes as substantial.

Under copyright law, a work can technically be very much the same as another and still be considered original. For example, innumerable musicians have recorded Beatles songs over the years, and even though it's been done so many times, one version of "All You Need is Love" is legally just as good as another (no accounting for taste, of course).

So, to the average person it seems that copyright laws would be much more user friendly for tattooists, and the rest of the creative community for that matter, if it were the spirit of the law and not the letter of the law that mattered. For the most part, the tattoo industry regulates itself and seems to try and keep it that way by not raising much of a fuss. Law suits involving tattoos are not terribly common and professions who make up the industry don't seem to be bothered enough by others appreciating their work to start filling up the court system. It may be in part because they think doing so would be just like inviting the government in to regulate them.

Tattooed Women

"Well behaved women rarely make history."

- *Laurel Thatchel Ulrich*

It used to be that the only place you would find a lady with even a single tattoo was in a carnival freak show. Even after such displays were, for the most part, things of the past, the realm of permanent body art remained somewhat of a boys' club.

Today, tattoos are far more popular and socially accepted by the general public than they used to be, and though men still tend to be more heavily tattooed than women, the gap is quickly filling in.

So pervasive is the trend that tattooed women have developed their own subculture, hosting Web sites, clubs and even entire conventions tailored especially to ladies with body art. There are also books and magazines devoted to the subject. If you belong in those ranks, wish you did, or think you might someday; here are some media you may want to check out.

- ◆ A Tattooed Women's Collective – This site has links to resources of interest to ladies with ink, and allows them to have their own personal Webpage to show off their art and blog about anything they want to. - <http://www.angelfire.com/grrl/destroymachine/paintedladies.html>
- ◆ The Illustrated Woman - This book by photographer William Demichele showcases pictures of all kinds of ladies and their permanent body art. They range in age from 20s to 60s and have various degrees of ink, from small, discrete tats to full bodysuits.
- ◆ Bodies of Subversion 2 Ed: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo – by Margot Mifflin, is written by a woman, about women and even published by a woman-owned and operated press, Juno Books. It features information about tattooed women of influence and female tattoo artists.

- ♦ Stewed, Screwed and Tattooed – by Madame Chinchilla and photographed by Jan Hinson chronicles the author's 12 years of life as a tattooed woman and comments on the social stigma surrounding the subject.

Of course, tattoos know no gender or social class, but a little celebrity endorsement never fails to boost a trend. Several famous women have gotten inked, probably more than we know. One of the most documented in the last century was Betty Broadbent. She was born in 1909 and got her first tattoo in 1927 at the age of 18. Her tattooist was Charlie Wagner of New York. He was one of the few at the time using the new electric machine. Her body was almost solidly covered with more than 300 tattoos. Broadbent became a tattoo artist herself to supplement the income she had from touring. She retired to Florida in 1967 and passed away in 1983.

Are any woman's tattoos more famous than Janis Joplin's? Her ink was an outward manifestation of the free spirit she was. A pioneer in the realm of female rock stars, she inspired many people before she died in 1970 at the age of only 28. The coroner's report itemizes her body art: a bracelet on her left wrist, a flower on her right heel and a heart just above her left breast. Janice's tattooist, Lyle Tuttle, told the New York Times in 1971 that he tattooed more than 100 copies of that heart on mourning fans since her death.

Thanks to women like these, ladies everywhere are making a place for themselves in the tattooed community. Women are no longer just the canvas. Now they're the artist too. Female owned and operated tattoo studios are popping up everywhere, and may be a contributing factor in the rise of tattooed women. Modesty may have prevented some from getting the design and placement they really wanted in the past, but they may feel more at ease in an all girl shop.

Tattoo Placement

The type of tattoo you want may dictate its placement. For example, the back, chest and upper leg are great canvases for large designs, such as portraits and scenery. The arms, especially the bicep, is a traditionally popular location, and gives you the option of an ever trendy arm band design, a small, easily hidden tat, or a huge, domineering statement that goes great with a tank top.

The hands and feet are painful spots for permanent tattooing; as a result, most people opt for smaller designs in these places. However, the hands especially are highly popular in traditional henna tattooing, so if you have next to no pain tolerance but still want your digits extensively decorated, henna is a pain free option that's strong cultural tradition will keep you respectable in the tattoo world. Just don't tell people you got henna because you're afraid of a little pain.

The genitals and butt, it not the most common and is extremely painful, but people do it. You know what they say: different strokes for different folks. There really is a tattoo out there for everybody.

If you've already got ink, you know that the first thing everyone wants to know is "Did that hurt?" If you've been considering whether or not to get a tattoo, the mystery surrounding the pain factor is most likely what's holding you back. Some have described the sensation as more of a burning or feeling. Some say it feels more like a bee sting or a burn. Many wouldn't call it pain at all, but more of an

irritation. How much discomfort you experience depends on where you choose to put your new tattoo.

Bone and nerve endings should be main considerations in tattoo placement. Areas with a lot of nerve endings close to the surface of the skin, like the spine, nipples, hands, feet and genitals are going to be more uncomfortable than others. Places with shallow bones like the sternum, ribs, shin, knees, elbows, the head and behind the ears will also be more sensitive.

The size of the design you chose also plays a part in the amount of pain involved. Of course larger tattoos take longer to complete, prolonging the irritation of the skin and making it more raw and sensitive. That's why most tattooists will suggest you break big projects up into several sittings.

There's a common misconception that having a few drinks before going under the gun will keep you relaxed and help make you more comfortable. This is not the case. In fact, tattooists won't work on you and don't even really want you in their shops because, unless you are so drunk that you passed out cold, you will have a harder time following directions and sitting still.

While there is always some blood during the process, drunks tend to bleed more, making the process slow and messy. The excess blood makes it harder for the skin to absorb the ink and your tattoo may not take at all, which means you've wasted the artist's time, bled all over his shop and got poked repeatedly with nothing to show for it.

The same is true for any drugs, legal or otherwise, you may be thinking of taking. That goes double for amphetamines, or anything that makes you jittery, even caffeine. The best thing you can ingest to help with the pain is a good meal. A good night's sleep wouldn't hurt either. Fatigue is known to have a negative effect on pain tolerance.

Another very important thing to consider when choosing where to put your tattoo is how it will affect your employment options. Even in the twenty-first century, there is still a lot of stigma attached to tattoos. If you are a white collar professional or work in a very public, customer-service type atmosphere, you may want to think about putting your tattoo someplace where you can show it off if you want to, but can easily cover it up for work without looking silly.

Tattoo Jargon

It may not seem like it at the time, but getting a tattoo is a huge decision. That ink really is permanent and will be there for the rest of your life. Even if you opt to have it removed, you will still have a scar or traces of ink at the very least. It's very important that you put a lot of thought into the design you want and the placement of your new tattoo. You should do a lot of research into the process of tattooing and choosing your tattoo artist. As with any specialized trade, there's a certain amount of jargon, or terms specific to the practice, used. Study up on this; you can't make informed decisions if you have no idea what the experts are talking about. Here's a short, and by no means complete glossary to help you get started.

- Autoclave – a machine that uses pressure and hot water to sterilize tattoo equipment. The autoclave is also used for medical and dental tools. A lot of shops keep the autoclave in plain sight so potential clients know they are using clean supplies. If you don't see one ask. If you aren't satisfied with the answer, look for another shop.
- Body Suit – a full body tattoo. It typically starts at the neck and covers the rest of the body down to the ankles. Hands and feet are usually excluded. Japanese tattooists are known for their artful applied body suits.
- Cockamamie – one of those cheap temporary tattoos applied by wetting the paper backing and pressing against the skin. Cockamamies were popular in the 1940s and 50s and were often found as prizes in Cracker Jack and cereal boxes.
- Devotion tattoo – a tat that symbolizes its owner's love for a significant other, parent, pet, favorite band, favorite food, etc. The possibilities are endless.
- Cover-up Work – What happens when you change your mind about that devotion tattoo. Cover-up work involves either incorporating an old tat into an new design or covering it up totally. Good cover-up work is hard to spot and is a prized talent among tattoo artists.
- Flash – The sheets of designs that hang on the walls of tattoo parlors. These designs aren't necessarily original to that particular artist and are probably

fairly common. A shop purchases the flash from the vendor and the rights to legally reproduce it into a stencil so that no copy write laws are broken.

- Jailhouse Tattoo – a homemade tattoo usually characterized by fine, black or blue lines.
- Scratcher - a bad tattooist
- Stencil – a template of the tattoo you’re about to get, usually drawn or traced on your skin so that you have a good idea of what the tat will look like on you and the tattooist has something to go by.
- Lady Luck – this tattoo is traditionally popular at war time. The central figure in the design is always a beautiful woman surrounded by other signs of good fortune like a four leaf clover, a rabbit’s foot, etc. The tattoo was thought to bring luck to the owner.
- Men’s Ruin Tattoo – pretty much the opposite of Lady Luck, this design also features a woman, but depicted as the source of men’s troubles. She’s often accompanied by representations of vices that can bring a man down such as liquor, drugs and gambling.

Now that you have a decent foundation to at least ask intelligent questions, you’re one step closer to a tattoo experience that will produce a design you will love for a lifetime and preventing the regret that often comes with a tattoo that wasn’t particularly thought out.

Tattoos: To Color or Not to Color?

More than 50 different pigments, shades and diluents are currently used in tattooing and while some are approved for use as cosmetics, none are approved for subcutaneous injection. Many tattoo inks are not approved for skin contact at all. Some unconscionable tattooist have been known to used automobile paint or printers' ink.

Nevertheless, many tattoo wearers choose color as a time saver or due to physical difficulty applying temporary makeup. Others find color tattooing an alternative to reconstructive surgery, to simulate natural pigmentation, and combat alopecia by having "eyebrows" tattooed on. Whatever their reason, color-tattoo wearers should be aware of risks.

The primary complications that can result from color tattooing are infection leading to hepatitis. Some tattooing equipment cannot be sterilized because of design and dimensions. The American Association of Blood Banks requires a one-year wait between a tattoo and donating blood. All color tattoos require some sort of medical post-care. Removing color tattoos is a painstaking and expensive process. Complete removal without scarring may be impossible. Allergic reaction to color tattooing is rare but problematic if it occurs because pigments used are hard to remove. Sometimes allergic reactions are observed to tattoos worn for years with impunity.

Granulomas or nodules may form around color pigments your immune system detects as foreign. If you are prone to keloids –excessive scarring – color tattoos will traumatize your skin. Office of Cosmetics and Colors dermatologist Ella Toombs, MD defines color tattooing as skin trauma while Charles Zwerling, M.D.,

Annette Walker, R.N., and Norman Goldstein, M.D., warn scarring occurs as a consequence of tattoo removal. Color tattoos have been known to cause complications in patients undergoing magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Mascara produces similar effects but mascara is removable. Why it happens is unclear but some suggest tattoo-color and MRI pigment interaction as likely. Color tattoo wearers should inform the MRI technician to take appropriate precautions and avoid complications.

A common problem with color tattoos is desire and difficulty to remove them. The main complication with eyelid tattooing is pigment-placement. You should consider the consequences of permanently wearing an artist's mistake.

Remember that all tattoos fade in sun and if tattoo-artists inject pigments too deeply possibility of migration from original sites may occur. Changes in the human body and seasonal styles may cause flattering color tattoos too later clash with changing tones and contours. Any permanent facial makeup may become distorted with time. A once stylish tattoo may become dated and embarrassing. Changing color tattoos is not as easy as changing your mind.

Knowing what pigments are in your tattoo is difficult due to tattoo inks variety. Because inks are sold by brand and not by chemical composition directly to tattoo parlors rather than retail basis to consumers, manufacturers are not legally bound to list their ingredients. If a manufacturer considers identity and grade of their pigments "proprietary," neither tattooist nor wearer may be able to know exactly "what" is in the tattoo.

Any kind of abrasion to remove a color tattoo invariably leaves a scar in its place. Discomfort is inevitable. Camouflaging your color tattoo with another pigment may not look natural as pigments lack skin's translucence.

Temporary tattoos are a viable option for the cautious tattoo-wearer but even these have a caveat. Color tattoos use foreign pigments not allowed into the United States due to FDA reports of allergic reactions. As such, even Henna treatments carry alert. In the US, Henna is approved only for use as hair dye – not for direct application to the skin. What specifically causes the typical reddish brown Henna tint is a mystery making what exactly is in “black” and “blue” henna even more curious. "Black henna" may contain the "coal tar" color p-phenylenediamine, which stimulates allergic response in some individuals. The only legal use of PPD in cosmetics is as a hair dye.

Ultimately your choice of a colored tattoo rests on your shoulders. Product availability renders legality of ingredients a moot point – If you want a colored tattoo you can easily find a tattooist who will sell you one. The questions to ask yourself are: Do you trust the ingredients in them sufficiently to risk later allergic response, or other medical complications or social second thoughts? The permanence of color tattoos has far-reaching life-long implications.

Social Acceptance of Tattoos

Would you sit for hours and let someone stab you repeatedly? There are those who crave such treatment. Since its beginnings, civilization has possessed habits that were seen as barbaric and low-rent. Being tattooed has, in the history of the U.S.,

been seen as something that only the dregs and roughnecks of society would do. Yet in this, the technological, age tattoos have become a more accepted and mainstream part of society.

Some of those who are being tattooed today do so to be trendy. The most popular or--as many would put it--the most cliché, tattoos are tribal or Celtic designs, barbed wire, and skulls for males, and, for females, flowers, fairies, hearts, and butterflies. Still others are tattooed because they see their art as an extension of themselves and wish to be a canvas for their artist.

According to Tattoo Facts and Statistics online (<http://www.vanishingtattoo.com>), in 1936 Life magazine estimated about 6 percent of the U.S. population had at least one tattoo. The same article states that in April 2000, the National Geographic News reported that approximately 40 million U.S. citizens had been inked.

If you break it down by age groups, a 2003 Harris poll tells us that young adults aged 25-29 possess the highest percentage of tattooed individuals—a stunning 36 percent! Over the past few years, both the age range and the number of those being tattooed have steadily increased.

Tattoos are gotten for many reasons. In biker culture, one might get a tattoo to symbolize their affiliation with their biker crew, just as a gang member would have his gang's symbols etched into his skin to show his loyalty.

For many, a tattoo is a passing fad, a craze, and is something they will later regret. These are most often the people who go with a group of friends to get tattooed

because it's "cool," or perhaps some are those who would, in the thralls of a passionate affair, get a lover's name inked into their flesh. These people are most commonly the ones who will seek out means of tattoo removal later on in life, ashamed of what they consider a momentary lapse of judgment.

And yet for others, a tattoo is a distinct and desired part of life—an expression of their personal beliefs and a work of art. Not long ago, tattoos were unacceptable in high society and were seen as the rude and brutal etchings of roughnecks and those who were of a lower standard. Throughout the 1960s, the rebellious, anti-social mind-set of the day helped to mainstream tattooing as more and more flower children were inked in defiance of what was "proper." By the 1970s, rock and rollers began to proudly display their tats, and by the 1980s, many celebrities, from rock star to model to sports star to actress, boasted of their ink.

A History Channel program reveals that the earliest sample of tattooed skin which has been discovered dates back to 12th-Dynasty Egypt (1938 B.C.), but that there is evidence to show that, in Pre-Dynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt, tattooing might have been practiced as early as 4500 B.C.

Today's age has been described as the age of the Renaissance for tattoos. An article by U.S. News and World Report states that ten years ago, tattoo parlors were opening at a rate of one per day in the U.S. Tattoo artists now advertise page after page of "Flash" art on their walls, ready-made tattoos for the customers who want ink, but don't know what design they want.

In the past decade, newer, stricter regulations have been put into place to protect both the client and the artist. Cleanliness and equipment guidelines have allowed

tattooing to become a safer form of rebellion for teens looking to shock their parents or to find a way to express themselves.

But for some, tattoos will always be taboo. In this day and age, there is still discrimination against those people who choose to be inked. Often, one will cover his art for a job interview, fearful that any potential employer will judge the person not by his resume, but by the ink in his skin. It is the same for the females who allow their skin to become a canvas. While those with the understanding see tattoos as unique and beautiful expressions of one's personality and another's skill, others see them merely as blemishes or stains on an otherwise unmarred surface. Ultimately, it is an individual's choice whether or not a tattoo is a beautiful addition to one's person or a beastly mistake to be erased.

Tattooing and Forensics

The most defining aspect of tattooing is its permanence. The design and placement of your body art says a lot about you. For better or worse, your tattoo will follow you through the rest of your life, but you probably never considered the fact that it will keep talking about you after you're dead. Tattoos are one of the first tools a forensic pathologist uses to identify the deceased and sometimes even solve a crime.

Your ink will tell the cops who you run with. Street gangs, bikers and other clubs associated with illegal activity wear use tattoos to show their allegiance to their gang, and often to cement their exit out of mainstream society. Most of the time

gang tats are pretty straight forward, spelling out the gang's name and territory. Even if that's not the case, the authorities are familiar with common symbolism and can use it to pick you out of a line up or identify your body.

Your tattoos are also a telltale sign of your socio-economic status. If you have simple, homemade tats instead of detailed, professional ones, it's probably because you couldn't afford any better. A sorority or fraternity tat says that you're educated, and involved enough in your university to be permanently devoted to the Greek life.

Crucifixes or fish symbols denote that the wearer was from a Christian background. A rosary says they were probably Catholic. A hexagon tattoo may mark you involved in the occult. Satanist often sport "666", the "mark of the beast." Some members of the Aryan Brotherhood also use this symbol.

Your tattoos tell what your interests are, what's close to your heart. What do you think when you seen a Harley Davidson emblem tattooed on somebody? You look around for their bike, don't you? Depictions of dice or playing cards could label you a gambler.

Tattoos done inside prison, jailhouse tattoos, have a very particular look to them. There are either black or blue, always one solid color and made up of very thin lines. The jailhouse style has become popular in some circles, but you can tell a fake by its smooth, fine lines. Your tattoo can also associate you with a crime. For example, a falling star is usually particular to kidnappers. Three dots on the web of the hand definitely denote gang activity, but translate differently in different cultures. For Hispanics, it means "mi vida loco," or "my crazy life." For Asians it

means “I care for nothing.” For Cubans it signifies the wearer has a talent for petty theft.

If you adhere to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy you’d better keep your ink silent. There are certain tats that tell a person’s sexual orientation. A pink triangle sometimes accompanies lesbianism as does a prominent bulldog on a woman’s bicep. A rainbow is one of the most popular homosexuality-related tattoos. Another sign may be a name tattoo that’s obviously of the same sex.

A tattoo can also tell about a person’s history of drug use. A spider web design, usually on the neck or skull is a favorite with IV drug users. Antisocial phrases also point in that direction, such as “Born to Die” or “loser.” It sounds drastic, but it happens. Tattoos of things most people consider disgusting or disturbing usually say quite a bit about the wearer’s mental state. Designs of spiders and cockroaches have been associated with the insane or mentally ill, issues that often go hand in hand with drug abuse.

Tattoos are obviously an invaluable tool that forensic pathologist can use to identify your body in the event of your death, but think about your life. Be careful what you label yourself with. It’s absolutely necessary to educate yourself before permanently inking something onto your body. The wrong design can associate you with things you may want no part of and drastically hinder your opportunities in life.

Where to Find Flash

Those giant posters of possible body art options covering the walls of your local tattoo parlor are collectively referred to as “flash.” The term started out as carnival jargon, where tattooists used to peddle their trade. It originally referred to fancy, expensive looking prizes at the game booths, which were often rigged and impossible to actually win. The word evolved to refer to the flashy show signs. The classic tattoo font descended from the lettering on carnival signs.

The flash you see on the wall of most tattoo shops tends to be pretty generic, and if your tattooist can get it, so can every other shop in town, and probably beyond. It’s a good place to generate some ideas, but don’t think you’re going to get anything truly original right off the wall.

The way flash usually works is: Your tattooist buys it from a dealer, probably the same place he gets the rest of his supplies. The purchase also gives the shop the rights to reproduce the design on a stencil, so you won’t be wearing around a permanent copyright infringement. There are flash vendors all over the place.

Thanks to the internet, you have access to pretty much all of them. The copyright issue works pretty much the same way. You find a design you want, pay for it, and that gives you the right to have a stencil made and a tattoo applied. Different vendors have different rules about reusing a design. The laws are really hard to enforce, but if you and a few friends want to get matching tats, you better read the fine print first just in case. Here are some sites to check out before you head to the chair:

- Tattoojohnny.com – This is one of the most user friendly sites out there. You can search their collection by keyword, color (or lack of), size, artist.

They have tons of choices. Just to give you an idea, there are more than 1,500 responses to the keyword search for “butterfly,” and more than 700 for “cross.” That’s barely getting started. Flash sets are sold in sheets, and grouped generally by artist or subject matter. Prices for sets range from about \$100 to more than \$300 bucks. Not all sets are exactly the same size though. Prices for individual stencils stay pretty close to the \$10 range.

- Tattooflash.info- has tons of cool tattoo related links. Featuring work by a handful of artists, they sell flash by the sheet or by the set at greatly varying prices. There’s probably something in every price range. They don’t offer individual designs, but they have links to plenty of sites that offer free ones.
- Flash2xs.com – This one offers a catalog, but you have to register for it. They don’t have individual designs. There’s not a huge collection to view on the site, but what they show has a decent variety, and the display is pretty neat. The sets of five or six pages range from \$50 to around \$180.
- Tattoodles.com – The name is kind of cheesy. They have more than 1,000 thumbnails for you to view, but you look at full sized pictures or even prices without a paid subscription.
- Tattoonow.com – is a little tricky to navigate at first, but once you get off the main page, it gets a lot better. They cater to the individual and print and ship your design usually within 24 hours. The variety is worth checking out, and prices hover around \$15.

Getting permanent body art is a huge decision. It pays to look at as many ideas as possible, though the design you actually go with may not end up being inspired by a picture at all. Don't go cheap just because you're low in cash. If you can't afford exactly what you want, just don't get inked. You'll feel stupid later if you do. Remember, the only way to get something no one else has is to go custom.

Tribal Tattoos

Tribal tattoos were all the rage in the 1990s and remained so into the early 2000s, as with any trend, it led to overuse of the term and a blur in the origin of the artwork. People flocked to tattoo shops all over the country wanting tribal body art without so much as a thought to the symbolism of the piece they were about to have permanently applied to their bodies.

The word "tribal" has a different connotation for different people, largely based on their geographic location. For example, in the Southwest United States, it may bring to mind stereotypical notions of Native Americans living in teepees and hunting buffalo. In other parts of the world, it may make someone think of mysterious peoples living in the jungles of the Congo or the African Bush. The art of tattooing has been practiced for centuries in cultures all over the world, so it's impossible to narrow it to a single group of people.

The very same word, for the purpose of the tattoo industry, is a bit misleading. In the context of tribal tattoos, it simply means a tattoo in a style inspired by Polynesian body art. I guess if you happen to be a Pacific Islander, then your mental image of tribal tattoos is probably the closest to correct.

The word may give some the impression that the art is somehow more meaningful or closer to the roots of tattooing, when the truth is no one is 100 percent sure what the origin is. The fact that tribal tattoos are always solid black makes some people think it is a more pure and undiluted form of the art.

Many people have already had this revelation and have accepted the tribal tattoo for what it really is: still a really sweet looking tat. Tribals.com is a comprehensive Web site that's completely embraced the idea. It has all kinds of links, and tons of ideas to inspire your new tribal body art. The thumbnails are divided up into easy to use categories like "tribal butterflies," "tribal religious symbols," "tribal lettering," "tribal dragon," "tribal celestial designs" and of course, tribal renditions of the ever popular upper and lower back tattoos.

It's seriously doubtful that the body art industry is deliberately trying to trick anybody with this misguided term, but maybe they should consider renaming the trend as a service to the public. Maybe something like "Polynesianesq," would be better, or "shadow," in reference to its typically solid black coloring. "Faux tribal" would certainly be more accurate.

Most think the design has some sort of mysterious, deep meaning, when the truth is the popular form of tribal tattooing usually has no symbolic meaning other than the sentimental value placed on it by the wearer. Hopefully you've done your research well before you get into the artists chair. He may offer some guidance, but it's not his responsibility to tell you what kind of tattoo you want.

Don't be disappointed in your tribal art. If you feel you've chosen your design in error, just think back to what attracted you to it in the first place. Was it the unique flow of the shape or the intensity of the solid blackness? All those things are still there and permanently on your body for better or worse. Don't waste time regretting your decision on a mere technicality. The point is, if you like it and it means something to you, then wear it with pride. When people ask you what your tribal tat stands for, just tell them how it's symbolic to you. Maybe you got it to memorialize a loved one, or mark a major event in your life. That's usually what they want to know anyway. Just love your tattoo for what it is.

The Tattooed Community

No one knows exactly how long the institution of tattooing has been in place, but you can be certain it's here to stay. While there's always going to be some sort of stigma attached to permanent body art, its social acceptance has been revolving for decades. Some people have gotten inked to be in and some have done so to settle the fact that they are out. Whether it be out of the closet, out of cash, out of love, out of luck or out of time, one thing is for certain, they are definitely out of mainstream society. Over time, inked outcasts have formed a community of their own, and they're everywhere. There are numerous chat rooms, forums, discussion groups, books, magazines and Web sites devoted to body art. They've even carved a niche into reality TV. If you want to join the club, or just want to voyeur into that world for a bit, here's a list of places to start:

- Everytattoo.com – has all things tattoo, including: online forums, links to magazines, flash and other resources. You can read about other people's

tattooing experiences and tell your own. You can even upload pictures of your own ink and share your story with people who get you.

- TATTOO magazine – is currently the world's best selling tattoo-related magazine (amazon.com). It features profiles on tattooists and shops all over the world, showcases the work they've done and fills you in on the latest trends and what's new in the industry.
- Miami Ink – A reality TV show, obviously based in a Miami tattoo parlor, that does a good job of showing the everyday goings on of a tattoo artist's work. You get to watch them work, see the finished piece and hear the clients' stories of how they chose their design and what it means to them.
- Rankmytattoos.com – This site is absolutely addictive. Anyone and everyone can upload a picture of their body art and post it on this site to be graded on a scale of one to 10 by total stranger. It's a fun way to see the highs and lows of tattooing and the beautiful and sometimes bizarre designs people come up with.
- Vanishingtattoo.com – Possibly the most comprehensive tattoo site on the Web. It has tons of links, a glossary of related terms, tattoo trivia, a fun quiz to test your tattoo knowledge and a lot more. Definitely set aside some time to check out this site. It's a great place to start your research if you are thinking about getting inked for the first time.
- Howstuffworks.com – This is a great site for all kinds of research. Just type "tattoo" into the search box and up comes an article explaining how the

process of tattooing works from start to finish. It's another great resource for those who are considering their first tattoo.

- [Tattoo.com](#) - has a lot of links to equipment suppliers, flash dealers and tattoo aftercare products as well as a very user friendly calendar of tattoo related events.
- [Tattoojohnny.com](#) – This is another one of those sites you're going to need to set aside some extra time for . You can browse flash by size, color, blackwork, and picture category. They cater to both professionals and individuals with fair prices. They will show you how to print their designs on transfer paper so you can wear it around a while before you decide.

This is just a drop of all the ink-related resources on the Internet. Any one of them is a great place to start if you are thinking about a new tattoo, especially if you're thinking about getting inked for the very first time. You'll want to check out all of them, and carve out your own niche in the tattooed community.

Temporary Tattoos

So you're just not sure, huh? Well there's no shame in that. Getting a tattoo is a huge decision. You only get one chance to pick just the right design and just the right place to put it before you're stuck with it for the rest of your life. You'd be stupid to rush into something like that. It would almost be like marrying someone on your first blind date; only divorcing a tattoo usually requires surgery and leaves

a scar. Fortunately, you have the option to test drive a tattoo before you commit to it for life. Think of it as speed dating for your skin.

Temporary tattoos have been around for decades. You baby boomers probably have fond, childhood memories about Cockamamies, those fun little tattoos that used to come in Cracker Jacks and boxes of breakfast cereal. You just wet (usually by licking, right?) the back of the transfer paper to loosen the design and stick it to your skin and you'd have a tattoo for the day. You probably felt it made you look tough, like your dad and his service tattoo.

You say you'd be embarrassed to wear a fake tattoo? You're friends will give you a hard time about not going for the real thing? Well consider that word, "real" for a minute. If your tattoo exists, then it's real, right? It's certainly not a figment of your imagination. Just think of it as a similar, but separate option.

Just like permanent body art, temporary tattoos have continued to evolve over the years, into a much more sophisticated product with many more options to choose from. The film industry helped push along the development of the product, because shooting movies that involved heavily tattooed characters, such as bikers, gangsters, or Ray Bradbury's Illustrated Man, took so long to shoot. The makeup crew would invest a lot of time and effort into meticulously painting each and every detailed tattoo on the actor by hand, only to have their work quickly melt off under the intense heat of the stage lights.

Chemist, Dr. Samuel Zuckerman has an impressive list of accomplishments to his credit. He's responsible for the Estee Lauder's Origins line, the stripe in Aquafresh toothpaste and he's the father of temporary body art. He invented the first skin

friendly, authentic looking tattoo for the 1981 film by the same name. The film drew overnight attention to his invention and the amazement of the tattoo and makeup industries.

A few years later, Zuckerman and his son set about mass marketing the product. Today the Temptu company caters to the rich and famous as well as the average individual. They've added products like body glitter and stick on jewels, stencil-only stick-ons that let you fill in the color yourself, and even airbrush tattoos, which are applied by applying a stencil to the skin and painting over it with a special spray paint. Tempu products have been used on some of the most famous fashion runways, as well as on the big screen in films like Xmen 2, Rent and The Mummy Returns. It's also decorated the stars of HBO's mega hit The Sopranos.

Prices are fairly reasonable, even for the most elaborate designs. There are varying levels of application graces required, depending on your choice of products. Surely just about anyone can easily apply the stick on tattoos, but if you choose the paint on kind, you may want to enlist the help of one of your more artistic friends.

You don't have to feel like a fake for opting to go temporary with your body art. Just think of it as an extension of the rest of your cosmetic lineup. On your average night on the town, no one will know if your hair is colored, if your bra is padded, or if your tattoo is permanent unless you tell them.

Tattoos in Biker Culture

There's historical evidence that suggest that tattoos have served to both brand criminals and decorate kings. No matter what the social status of the tattoo's owner, its function is still very much the same: to unmistakably signify a very specific aspect of who the wearer really is. Nowhere is that more crystal clear than in American biker culture.

Despite its recent mainstream acceptance, tattooing had long been associated with groups that just don't fit in or have a very distinct culture of their own, like pirates, merchant sailors, carnival workers, servicemen, gypsies and bikers. Like other gang type societies, Bikers not only *not* fit in to general society, they make it a point to make sure they don't. What better way to brand your self an outsider than with a tattoo. Here are some of the tattoo designs bikers have traditionally claimed for their own.

- ◆ FTW – An abbreviation for the phrase F*ck The World. This design is traditionally popular with the outlaw biker and symbolizes their attitude toward a society that has branded them outcasts, which they are proud to be. The expression really is FTW, so you'll never see the words spelled out in a tattoo. If you do, the wearer is obviously just a wannabe.
- ◆ 1% Tattoo – The outlaw biker craze was raging in the 1960s. The general population was terrified of any man on a motorcycle whether they had any legitimate reason to be or not. If you saw a man sporting a lot of hair and a lot of leather, you crossed to the other side of the street just in case. In an effort to set the masses at ease, the American Motorcycle Association made a bold PR move by stating that only one percent of bikers were outlaws. As it turned out, failing to specify what the other 99 percent were made the

AMA's intentions futile. Bikers, both fringe outlaw gangs and more major clubs alike, responded by having 1% tattooed on themselves. With this gesture, they beat mainstream society to the punch by labeling themselves with what people already thought of them anyway. The 1% tat isn't as pervasive as it used to be, because many of the new generation of bikers unmistakably fall into that other 99 percent.

- ◆ Colors – the insignia of a biker gang. The colors and logo of a specific group. You'll often see such things embroidered on leather jackets and other accessories, but that doesn't take the place of having it permanently tattooed on your body. A tat of your colors is usually a requirement of full membership into the club. Colors are to be worn with pride.
- ◆ “Property of” Tattoos – Property of tats had their heyday about the same time as 1% tattoos. They were used to label the women in the group as the “property” of that specific club, and you'd better not be messing with another gang's women. At the time, a property of tattoo proudly signified you were a full fledged part of the biker family. It's not like they held the girls down and branded them against their will. Today however, the women's lib. movement has matured since then, making property of tattoos a thing of the past. As a matter of fact, many female tattooists won't give you one, but they might help you out with some cover-up work.

While most motorcycle enthusiasts are no longer what we think of as bikers, the biker spirit is still very much alive and well. Next time you see someone proudly sporting one of these tattoos, you'll be able to appreciate the rich history behind them and their contribution to American pop culture.

Tattoos and Animal Identification

Body art has nothing if not purpose. Just ask the person wearing it. People get tattoos to commemorate special events in their lives, like new babies or new college degrees. They get them to show their love for another person, location, or even pet. Some get inked to express their grief over the passing of someone they love. Tattoos tell stories about the people wearing them. They scream out hopes, dreams and sometimes even nightmares, but they have a much more mundane, yet practical purpose as well: animal identification.

There's always been a need for farmers and ranchers to be able to identify their livestock. Starting in the 1800s, they used a hot iron to burn an identifying mark into the animal's hide. That practice has since been called into question by animal rights activists who are concerned about it being painful and therefore inhumane. While branding is by no means completely extinct, new practices have been successfully in place for several years; one of them is tattooing. Tattooing is fairly quick and surely less painful than branding. Yet it's still just as permanent

The importance of being able to positively identify an animal goes way beyond ownership. It can go a long way toward the eradication of diseases if the sick animals can be picked out and kept away from the rest of the herd. If it's easy to tell which animals are sick then they can be studied with confidence, knowing they've got the right creature and can more correctly diagnose and treat the illness. Dealing quick and efficiently with the problem means saving money and livestock.

Organ and tissue samples can also be identified for study and lead to better treatment and prevention of sickness.

Being able to easily tell one animal from the other makes it easy to keep accurate records of their vaccinations, checkups and other health information so that the health of the herd can be certified, which is of utmost importance when it comes to selling of the animals at auction. If there is an outbreak, like the Mad Cow epidemic of a few years back, for example, know not only which creatures are sick, but being able to track where they've been and chart their movement could allow veterinarians to find out the source of the disease and maybe stop it.

In recent years, some vets have begun imprinting small, blue tattoos on female pets after the animal has been spayed. The mark is usually placed on the abdomen, in a spot where the animal's hair is the thinnest, so it can be seen through the fur. The idea behind the practice is to protect the animal from having to endure an invasive procedure should it become separated from its owners and someone else take it in to get fixed.

Tattoos are also an effective way to permanently identify mice and rats used in lab research. The tattoos are generally applied to the tails of the animals of course, since it is a hairless area and easy for the tattooer to access. The permanence of the marking means the animal will only have to be labeled once, which means less work on the researcher, and less stress on the rat. Tattooing animals involved in research is actually a pretty big business, with several manufacturers producing the products and training people how to use them.

Tattooing animals is for their own protection as well as that of people. It saves money and often the lives of the creatures. Tattoos can help track sickness and disease and aid in their eradication. The practice that many have deemed barbaric has actually proven to be more human to the animals, improving their health and quality of life in the long run.

Tattooing Pain Management

Those of you with conspicuous ink know there're two questions everyone wants to know. The first one is "Is that real?" and the next one is always "Did it hurt?" If you're a big, tough, burly guy you probably just shrug and grin a little bit, because you wouldn't want anyone to know you really wanted to cry like a little baby.

Of course it hurts. A probably fairly intimidating looking guy is leaning over you and repetitively jabbing your tender flesh with a needle. Of course there's no sympathy for self infliction, and the end result is worth any discomfort. Pain is one of the first things that comes to people's minds when they hear the word "tattoo." But some are saying it doesn't have to be that way.

The growing popularity and social acceptance of tattooing has inspired many to search for a way to make it painless. Some are trying alternative medicines like hypnosis, acupuncture and herbal therapies with varying degrees of success.

The first step in hypnosis is to make sure the client is a willing participant. If so, they are put into a trance. If the client is of a high-strung, hyper personality type, it may be a little more difficult and take a little more time to get them into the trance.

The extra nervousness or anticipation they probably have about their impending tattoo could also slow things down a bit.

Once the client is successfully entranced, they are open to a higher degree of suggestion than they would be capable of otherwise. It's simply suggested to them that they feel no pain, and they don't. Before they come out of the trance, it should be suggested to them that they won't feel any pain once they're brought back to their normal state of consciousness. Artists who have worked with an hypnotists and found clients willing to give it a try have reported great success, with the client reporting only some tightness and warmth around the tattoo sight.

Acupuncture is basically the practice of inserting needles into specific points of the body to create and energy and relieve pain. The process causes the body to produce more endorphins, a chemical known to help make you feel better and alleviate discomfort. The same chemical is produced in different amounts by eating chocolate and exercising. It's possible some tattoo seekers might be turned off by the idea of being stuck with yet more needles.

Reiki is a hands on technique that uses pressure put on different parts of the body to bring about an internal balance, similar to massage. It's perhaps the most physically comforting technique because it relaxes the muscles, which is known to reduce tattoo pain. The tenser the person is, the more they're going to hurt. Also, the nerves can only feel on sensation at a time. That's why scratching an itch makes it go away. The sensation of the scratch replaces the sensation of the itch so you can't feel it any more. The sensation of someone practicing Reiki on you somewhat replaces the pain of the tattooing process.

Drugs and alcohol are absolutely forbidden in upstanding tattoo establishments, but there are herbal options that can be taken internally or applied topically. To either numb the skin or work from the inside out to provide some level of pain relief. If you're not into the holistic stuff, and prefer some good ol' straight forward chemical assistance topical skin numbing creams do exist. They're often used on patients during laser procedures. Your doctor or pharmacist may be able to tell you how to get them.

The Process of Tattooing

So, you're finally going to do it? You're going to get that tattoo you've been talking about for years. You have the perfect design all picked out and know exactly where you want it. You've visited the shop a few times and are confident you've chosen the right one. It's clean and well lit, the artists are all wearing gloves and the autoclave is in plain sight so you see that it's being used. The guy who's going to do your ink seems nice and you feel like he's really listening to you and understands what you want. You're just a little hesitant because you don't know precisely what to expect. Well, here's a little enlightenment on the process.

Just like most other major life decisions, getting a new tattoo begins with some paperwork. You'll be asked for the usual stuff, then a photo ID to prove your age. Rules vary from state to state, but you have to be at least 18 everywhere. Tattooing a minor with a parent present and/or written parental consent used to be ok in some

places. The rules were stretched and abused, and it's really not the norm now, but some shops will still do it.

After all your forms are filled out, you'll have a seat in the artist's chair. Some used chairs kind of like a dentist would have, other's used tables or benches like a massage therapist does. If the shop is small, it may just be a plain kitchen chair. You may be seated in an open work area or a closed room, depending on the placement of your tattoo. Either way, your artist will try to make you comfortable.

Next is the preparation phase. The skin that's about to be inked will be cleaned, usually with rubbing alcohol, then shaved, then cleaned again. Nothing but a brand new disposable razor should be used, and even then, it should only be used once. You can ask to check the razor out first if you want to. The artist won't think you're rude. He'll probably think you're dumb if you don't.

Now you need a stencil. These use to be traces or drawn by hand. It was a time consuming and tedious process. Thanks to the invention of the thermal-fax, it now takes just a few minutes. You can bring in a design you like, and your artist can scan it into the thermal-fax which prints it on a piece of transfer paper (assuming there's not copyright infringement involved). He will then moisten your skin with water, soap, or sometimes a stick deodorant. This will help the transfer stick better and come off darker on your skin.

At this point, your artist will take a few minutes to prepare his workstation. He can't do this ahead of time or everything wouldn't be sterile. He will gather the ink into little bowls called "ink caps." Then he will take the tubes and needles out of their

sterile wrappers and put them in his machine. There should be a cup of distilled water on the table to rinse the needles between colors.

Now it's time to get down to business. Before the needle touches your skin, the tattooist will dab a bit of ointment over the transfer. This is to make the transfer stay on longer, and to help the needle slide more smoothly over your skin so you'll be more comfortable. First comes the outline. It's basically getting what's on the stencil permanently inked onto your skin. It's going to hurt, but it shouldn't be unbearable, otherwise there would be people walking around everywhere with half-finished tattoos. If you're not getting color, you'd be finished at this point. If you are, the tattooist will switch to magnums, needles specifically made for coloring and shading.

You're now the proud owner of a new tattoo. The artist will clean it and usually take a picture for his portfolio so prospective clients can see what he's done. Next, he will put a protective ointment over the area, and cover it with gauze. On your way out, you'll be given a sheet of instructions on how to care for your tattoo while it's healing.