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"Your necklace may break, the fau tree may burst, but my tattooing is indestructible. It is an everlasting gem that you will take into your grave."

-Verse from a traditional tattoo artist's song

Standing behind the counter at a local bead shop, surrounded by African tribal masks, trays of beads, and various artsy/traditional objects, she is hooking wires into little loops to hold strings of beads. Her tiny, dark hands move smoothly, yet quickly as she bends the wire. She is short, no question about it. Her skin tanned by her Mexican heritage. Her dark, curly hair is curled up tightly in a bun; if it were to fall down it would reach all the way down her back. She speaks Spanish but an accent is not audible: she prefers to speak Spanish with a "white girl" accent. Her features are delicate yet strong. Her back is covered with three butterflies, ivy and the word Karma. Her tongue is pierced. Her ears have several holes and stretched earlobes. Her hipbone brands a tiny black butterfly surrounded by three 3's. The colors of her tattoos stand out beautifully on her dark skin. She is a soldier for the Air Force National Guard. She is Venesa Bombard. Her body is her canvas, her journal.

My introduction into the body modification community started while I was young. Both my parents are tattooed and I never viewed it as something that was taboo. The reasons behind it seemed simple to me until Venesa became my best friend. I began to question why people chose to pierce their flesh, inject ink into their skin and all the

various other things you can do. I began watching shows on body modifications, learning about its history and its societal meaning. My passion for the subject began forming itself on my own body once I turned 18. This paper is not about me, it's about all the other people who have taken the journey to turn their bodies into their journals.

The art of tattooing began over 2,000 years ago in the Polynesian islands. Their tattoos are unique and have a deep societal meaning. The masters of tattooing were called tufuga in Samoa, tohunga in Aotearoa/ Te Waipounamu, and kahuna in Hawai'i. Even the sacred chiefs held them in high esteem. It was the master who decided what design was right and who was to be marked and when. Often the tattooee would be instructed to fast or stick to a special diet before receiving the tattoo, lest they taint their spirit. Many tattoo ceremonies were a rite of passage into adulthood. Samoan boys, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, were marked in a group ritual as their passage into manhood. Tattoos, in battle, were viewed as exerting magical protection.

Maori men of New Zealand had their faces, buttocks, and thighs tattooed. Their tattoos were signs of prestige and power. They were designed to impress and intimidate enemies in battle. The process was started in early adulthood and was completed in stages. Each tattoo was unique and helped with individual identity. Women were limited to lip and chin tattoos. The process in which it was done also varied from sexes. Many of these ideals have been lost as the art of tattooing has been carried over into western society. The age limit for getting a tattoo in the United States is eighteen, I know many people who, shortly after their eighteenth birthday, have raced to a tattoo artist to get marked. A westernized version of a passage into adulthood. "The butterfly actually represents when I lost my virginity so that was a big important date for me and so I got a

tattoo of it, and the three kind of represent the date and the butterfly itself is just like, it's an innocent insect so that's kind of why I got it and plus my name means butterfly in Greek so that's what inspired that," Venesa Bombard (1) states about her butterfly tattoo. Her goal is to show her life experiences on her body. Her excitement for her journey is obvious when asking her about her tattoos. " I can't wait to show my whole life on my body [...] It's like a painting that you just get to keep forever and ever, and ever, and ever," She (1) states with a big smile on her face.

Piercing has a rich history, just like tattooing. Among the Tlingit of southeast Alaska ear piercing showed a person's rank in society. One could be born into a certain rank, however, if their parents decided to throw a "potlatching", which is a community feast, they could pay to have their child's ears pierced. A great amount of wealth was required to host this feast and pay the person to pierce the child's ear. As a result the many holes marked the child as a member of nobility. Ear plugs were found in Mayan culture, many plugs range from one centimeter to an inch in diameter. Throughout Asia, stretched earlobes can be found on statues such as one from A.D. 550-577.

Stretching your ear lobes has caught on in western civilization. "I'm definitely gonna gauge my ears again," Bombard (1) states. Her earlobes can fit pencils. "My motivation for getting body modifications is that it is a strong kind of self representation and it shows other people more of who you are than, I feel, anything else," Joe Nilmeyer (3) discusses his stretched earlobes and his motivation for future body modifications. Showing off your stretched earlobes to your friends can almost become a competition, who can stretch their earlobes the farthest.

Lip piercing has been catching on in the west as well. What many don't realize is that until the late nineteenth century, the Eskimo of Alaska defined social status by lip piercing. A man in an Eskimo tribe either wore one lip plug in the middle (labret) or two on either side of the mouth. A man wearing the double labret looked like a walrus. Young men received this piercing, symbolizing their entrance into manhood. Women in this culture usually wore only one, middle, lip plug as decoration. Tlingit girls wore labrets to show their noble social status.

A more radical approach to body modification would be scarification. The act or process of scarifying one's skin. In Papua New Guinea's Sepik region, scarification is an initiation rite for young men. In this culture it is believed that crocodiles created humans. The young men's chest, back, and buttocks are cut with a sliver of bamboo. The men must remain emotionless and show no pain. The scars created by this ritual represent the teeth marks of the crocodile that swallowed the young man during the ceremony. In Australian Aboriginal peoples scarification was widely practiced but is now restricted to parts of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Members of the tribe without marks are not considered adults and are not allowed to partake in many tribe activities. In Ethiopia's Karo tribe men scar their chests to show killing men from enemy tribes. Women with scarifications are considered sensual and attractive.

Scarification is a painful process that can take minutes to hours. The scars resulting from them are popped out and create a truly permanent mark. One can risk infections with this type of body modification. Scarification is starting to emerge more in western society. "Yes I have considered scarification," Joe Nilmeyer (3) states after

learning about scarification. Many people are not willing to risk having someone cut their skin with a scalpel.

Body modifications have a rich history in many societies, the United States has been building its own history of modifications. People see their bodies as a blank canvas that has to be filled. Experiences and people can influence each tattoo, piercing, or scar. "My sister's a huge role model for me. She had three kids between the ages of 18 and 22[...] She shows me that like no matter what happens like you just gotta keep going. And like she has some crazy artwork on her. She has like her kids footprints on her back that's frickin' awesome. So she's probably a big influence on what got me into getting more tattoos than just the my first original one. And then you know her fiancé is covered in tattoos and so is my boyfriend so all three of them together kind of they showed me more and more artwork and I was like aww man yea so they're all kind of influencing me and being inspirations to me," Venesa Bombard (1) boasts.

Some people write poetry, some write music. Then there are those who mark their bodies with designs, made with ink and/or scalpels. The intent is the same. It helps to show life's experiences and people. It's not about being a freak. Bombard states it plainly: "There's deeper meaning to it." (1) Perhaps one day it will be seen as completely acceptable, and not something that's on the fringes of society.

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