

# TATTOOS

## IDENTIFICATION



**WEAR YOUR HEART  
ON YOUR SKIN IN THIS LIFE**

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## 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 12<sup>th</sup>-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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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 you design in error, just think back to what attracted you to it in the first place. Was in 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 known 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 tattooist 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 at 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](http://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](http://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 you 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](http://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](http://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](http://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 make 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're 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, you 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 you 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.