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## Inking an identity

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# Inking an Identity



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## **Inking an Identity**

### **Introduction**

When you see an individual with a tattoo, what really goes through your mind? Most likely not his or her culture. This research shows the history, culture and meaning behind tattoos. For a long time, stereotypes have been placed on tattoo wearers: sometimes they fit and sometimes they don't. This is the reason tattoos have been misrepresented for such a long time. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tattoo enthusiasts are no longer bound to one meaning by their tattoos, instead each tattoo can represent something different and something important with every new design.

Tattoos have existed for as long as mankind has roamed the earth. Many ancient civilizations incorporated them into their cultures as they have passed from one generation to the next. In today's society, tattoos have taken on a whole new persona. Where before they were marks of culture and linked people to certain associations, they now represent each person's identity.

Even with the freedom of expression that people have today, tattoos are not always completely understood. While more and more people are embracing the new take on this old practice, many of the stereotypes and negative associations that were linked with them from the past are still alive today. Stereotypes are not the only opposition that is held on tattoos though; other people feel that a permanent expression on the body is not appropriate, especially since that person might regret that choice later on in life.

This capstone explores the rich and meaningful history behind the practice of tattooing. It explores the journey of this art and the symbols of culture that they held for many of the world's ancient civilizations. Though the exploration of tattoo history, from

its past into the present, I hope to dispel many of the negative associations by showing the meaning behind this arts origination.

By uncovering the ancient practices behind the origination of tattoos, I hope to not only help myself, but others as well, gain a better understanding of where and why tattoos became a popular form of expression today. The tattoos that we see now are reflections of individuality for each person and the reason for getting a tattoo may have a unique story or meaning behind it.

## **Inking an Identity Literature Review**

What I find most intriguing about tattooing is just how mainstream and acceptable tattoos have become in the past few decades. Once only associated with savagery, sailors, side show freaks and the working class citizens, tattoos have now become a staple in pop culture. Original meanings and associations of tattooing from ancient civilizations and cultures have digressed and expanded into the freedom of expression it is today. And while these days, people get tattooed for any number of reasons, motivations like affiliation, loved ones, social groups, and representation of identity, all originated from the cultures and ancient people that began the practice millions of years ago.

In order to fully understand how tattoos have evolved into what they are today, it is important to first understand their origins, the meanings they held, the cultures that used them, the identities associated with them and how these ideas have change through out the centuries. Current works on this topic seem only to focus on specific periods of time and separate one culture from the next. The purpose of my research is to observe the changing views and associations of tattoos over time and find common links between the different civilizations that practiced this art over millions of years. I also examine how tattoos transitioned from ancient to modern society and its meanings evolved from identifying culture into the identity of an individual.

Before tattooing transformed into we know it to be today, ancient civilizations from around the globe were already practicing this form of art many thousands of years ago. Though very little evidence remains, a small group of tattooed mummies from the fourth millennium BC proves that tattooing indeed existed in Ancient Egypt (Arnold 21).

The few clues left behind help archeologists piece together what we know today about their ancient practice. The interpretation of artifacts that have been discovered support the assumption that tattooing in Ancient Egypt was usually reserved but not exclusively for women. This idea was born after the discovery of numerous tattooed female mummies and handcrafted figurines of females that displayed tattoos and were left behind by this ancient civilization (Arnold 22). A tradition for nearly two thousand years, Egyptian tattoos were adopted from the Nubian culture of Africa during 1500 BC and became a firmly established tradition of the New Kingdom (Arnold 24).

Discoveries of ancient tattooing practices are not just associated with the Egyptian civilization, but can be found across the globe. Asia is home to so many different types of cultures. While the ancient cultures of Asia and its surrounding islands were each unique, some of these civilizations shared at least one thing in common: tattooing.

Located in the rain forests of Indonesia, the ancient Mentawian tribe still thrives on old traditions, and has included tattooing, or *titi*, into their culture for thousands of years. “The purpose of tattooing is to lend the body ‘dignity’, because a person’s soul would not feel at home in a body that was not artistically ‘completed’ with fine drawings” (Groning 195). Throughout their rich history, the tribes cherished tattoo rituals have been both accepted and banned by the Indonesia Government, and their artwork on the body can be seen today.

Similar to the Mentawi’s of Indonesia, tattooing in the Japanese culture was also met with many mixed views during its evolution into today’s society. Evidence of tattooing practices in Japan date back to as far as the third millennium BC, and can be seen on figurines found in ancient tombs. The origins of tattoos in Japanese history

represented barbarism and early tattoos were implemented as a painful form of punishment. In the early seventeenth century, tattoos marked the foreheads of criminals and outcasts so that they were distinguishable from the rest of society (Gilbert 77). But by the next century, most of the negative associations gave way to pictorial tattooing and became popular among the lower end of society, such as gang members, outlaws, peasants, and laborers. Ancient Samari soldiers also partook in this art form as a symbol of courage because they were able to withstand the pain (Gilbert 78).

The Japanese government during this period of time imposed several bans on tattooing, fearing both the people who bore them as a threat to their society and the outside influence of foreigners, “When in 1881 the heir to the English Throne, Prince George, visited Japan with a tattoo of a dragon on his arm, the ban was immediately lifted, and the tattooists enjoyed a new boom,” (Groning 221). As a result of tattoos being legalized and Japan opening its previously closed off culture to the rest of the world, the highly developed skills of Japanese tattoo artists were well known and sought after by many of the century’s most distinguished people. The Duke of Clarence, King George V and Czar Nicholas II were some of the influential leaders intrigued by Japanese tattoo designs (Gilbert 81).

Still popular today, the Japanese tattoo distinguishes itself from the Western tattoo because of its elaborate designs covering the back, arms, legs and chest of the wearer. These full body tattoos are known as *zenshin-bori* (Groning 220).

Just like the Japanese and Mentawi cultures, the inhabitants Polynesian Islands, remained unaffected by outside influence for many thousands of years. Tracing back to at least the second millennium BC, Polynesians mastered the art of tattooing and are



responsible for influencing much of what we know about it today. Because of their geographic location, fertile environment, and their simple lifestyle, Polynesians had more time to devote to the arts. Their culture was considered to be highly developed in the art, “the most intricate and skillful tattooing in the ancient world” (Gilbert 21). Tattooing was a very important part of Polynesia culture; and their elaborate designs were constantly added on to and renewed thought out a person’s life until it covered their whole body.

During a voyage to the Pacific Islands in the 1700’s, the tattoo as we know it today was ‘discovered’ by Captain James Cook and his crew (DeMello 45). Previously known as “pricks” or “marks” though out North America, the Tahitian word, *tatu*, was adopted by the Europeans and North America’s after Captain Cook and his sailors brought the island influence back to their country (DeMello 46).

An expert in the field of modern day tattooing in society, Marge DeMello explores how elite tattooists, magazine editors and leaders of tattoo organizations, downplayed the working-class roots of tattooing in order to make it more palatable for middle class consumption. She analyzes the origins of Western tattooing, its introduction into our culture, and how it was received by the American public, then and now (3).

Though the Pacific Island influence resulted in tattoo’s spread through out West, and can be attributed for its emergence into modern society, the Europeans and North Americans was already familiar with the art prior to the Polynesian encounters. “Christian pilgrims had been receiving tattoos as souvenirs of their faith on pilgrimages to the Holy Land as far back as the early 1600’s, and the Celts had practiced tattooing prior to the Roman conquest” (DeMello 45). Very few details are actually known about

weather or not all or just of few people within each culture associated themselves with tattoos. But even though evidence is scarce, it does exist and there is enough proof to link certain European cultures with the practice prior to Captain Cook's voyage (Caplan 32). Though the indications of earlier European tattooing is enough to suggest that it was put into practice prior to Polynesian influence, it is the Tahitians that can be credited with its later flourish throughout Europe and the United States.

European and American fascination with the tattooed natives of the Polynesian developed in the late 1600's and early 1700's, when sailors would return home from their island voyages. "Not only did eighteenth-century sailors return to England with Polynesian tattoos, they also returned with tattooed Polynesians to exhibit," (DeMello 47). In the 1800's, the growing popularity of displaying primitive people as exhibits became huge attractions at world's fairs and carnival midways. To the Western world, these tattooed natives with their lack of technology, represented progress in the United States (DeMello 48).

Resulting from the fascination live exhibits held over American audiences, most of their society began to view tattooing as barbaric and savage like the cultures they were displayed on. These associations were a far different opinion than that of Europe's high society in the mid 1800's. Started by the Prince of Wales, later known as King Edward VII, tattoos became a fad among European Aristocrats during this period. The reason for their popularity among the wealthy was because at that time, tattoos were applied by hand and was very time-consuming and costly. This trend lasted only until World War I, which was around the time the tattoo gun was invented, making tattoos cheaper and more accessible to people of the lower class (DeMello 50).

In the contemporary American societies of the late 1800's and early 1900's, public amusement over primitive culture tattoos faded as the practice began to branch out into other parts of society. Sideshow freaks, sailors, soldiers, and lower-class citizens adopted tattoos into their cultures, and further separated them from the sophisticates of American society. "With the invention of the electric tattooing machine, many individuals were attracted by the possibility of making an easy living in the circus," (Gilbert 137).

It wasn't until the 1980s, that the art of tattooing reemerged into modern society and found a more accepting audience. Since the increased professionalism of the art in the 1980's, tattoos reemerged into mainstream society and was now regarded as a sophisticated, artistic, and meaningful practice. "The predominate middle class Tattoo Community became much more diverse as it celebrates the spiritual, poetic and self-empowerment of tattooing," (DeMello 3). Author of Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art, Karl Groning's extensive research has lead him to suggest that modern tattooing, and the extremity of the art, is a reflection of the psychology of its wearer, "Self-affirmation, vanity or wishful thinking might be as important as the simple desire for decoration, the direct confirmation or rejection of moral concepts or an indication of social kinship and status" (237).

On the verge of a yet another millennium, and for the first time in tattoos extensive history, this art was finally considered fashionable in mainstream culture. What I hope to accomplish through my exploration of tattoo culture, is how the art of tattooing has survived over thousands of years, and how the art has transitioned from a practice of culture to the choice of the individual. Ultimately, tattoos have always

connected an individual with their view and place in a culture or society. By combining ancient with modern and linking culture with culture, I would like to see how ancient traditions are a reflection of the images and meanings that we associate with them today.

## **Inking an Identity Methodology**

My Capstone focuses on the connection between tattoos and culture from the past and present. My project will examine the cultural and mainstream practice of body art as well as the meanings and reasons that have been and still are associated with them today. This is a practice that has been going for millions of years, and I am interested in learning about the origins of tattooing and the significances they held within each culture through every new millennium. In order to understand how they slowly transitioned from primitive origins into the freedom of expression they are today, I explore their journey through various cultural, their meanings and their ever evolving nature passed from generation to generation. I chose the art of tattooing because of its rise in popularity as they emerged into pop culture, and the universal appeal that created a culture all of its own.

I believe my topic is an important tool for helping others, especially those who misinterpret the meanings. By understanding the strong religious, cultural and community ties of their beginnings, I hope to teach others, as well as myself, how art on the body can symbolize deep connections with the past. This topic can become an important tool in changing the misconceptions and anti-society labels that have clouded the practice since its beginnings. Therefore it is important for me to incorporate a variety of perspectives in order to gain a well-rounded and complete understanding of this topic.

The most important tool, and what I feel to be the key goal of this research, is shown through the use of Critical Communication Skills. Since I grew up in Indonesia, I was raised in a culture much different than mine. Adventure was a huge part of my

experience and it led me on journeys throughout the world, including a visit to the Headhunter tribe living in the jungles of Borneo I got to observe the deep traditions of Japanese culture, explore the Australian outback, home to the ancient Aborigines and witness first hand a diversity of cultures much different from mine. I attribute this opportunity to my understanding and acceptance of all cultures. It is these experiences that will be reflected in my research. Through the way I approach and research this topic of tattoo culture, to the formation and basis of my argument, my goal is to show tattoos as an expression of art and as a positive and symbolic practice through the development of human race.

Whenever I notice someone with an interesting tattoo, I have always inquired about why that person chose that particular design. It caught my attention that many of these people, no matter what age, sex and race they were, would reveal a deep and symbolic meaning behind their choice of body art. My curiosity grew further as I began to compare all the anti-society stereotypes I linked with them as a child, to the diverse expressions they symbolized for individuals, I learned as I got older. The contrast in views I received on this topic became the formulation for my research, and my ultimate goal to dissect these associations by connecting them to their rich and colorful history.

In order to support my Critical Communication Skills, I feel that using other angles of inquiry such as Media, Narrative and Ethnographic Skills, Philosophical Analysis, Cultural Analysis and Historical Analysis are needed. The use of these skills will be evident in the final product, and is shown through the variety of accumulated materials and way information is arranged, so that it is used in the most effective manner. Also, I will uncover the stereotypes and myths by understanding the associations and

meanings held by each culture during its evolution through history. This topic also relates to my concentration, Journalism and Media Studies, for two very specific reasons. The way I gather my evidence will reflect on reporting skills I have acquired from my experience as a staff reporter on the Otter Realm, and understanding the transition of tattoos into pop culture through my knowledge of media studies.

In order to put these skills to use, I have gathered information from a variety of primary, secondary, electronic and media sources. In order to get a basic understanding of my arguments, I first began with hard copy sources, which I found at the CSUMB library. I chose the secondary sources that best complemented my research based on whether or not they could provide answers to my main research questions. From there, I continued on to explore numerous other electronic resources, such as the scholarly journals I found using Ebsco host, as well as websites and online articles that will contribute to my research.

I have also found many primary materials on this topic, from movies, music, photographs and documentaries. These resources, which emphasize the use of visual analysis, are important in helping me to understand how their relationship with society has evolved over time to their current placement in pop culture. These images portray the origination of this practice, and its diverse cultural connections, up to the current way tattoos are viewed and their placement in mainstream society. This type of analysis is beneficial to my topic, and I will use it as a way to connect written sources together with my visual sources in a way that will help me differentiate and identify ancient forms of this art as it transitions into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Inking an Identity Findings**

The art of tattooing has been around for many thousands of years and its techniques and eye-catching designs have been passed down through a number of different cultures. Because of its rich and colorful history, it is only natural for this art to have evolved from one generation to the next. While ancient people designated specific tattoo designs for certain age groups and sexes within each culture, these original ideas and cultural beliefs are far different from the way we view tattooing today. The freedom of choices available today is based on individual expression and one's personal preference. In our modern society, people can not only decide whether or not they want to get one, but they also have a plethora of tattoo designs to choose from, ranging in colors, shapes and sizes.

Both the cultures that can only be studied in history books, and the ancient civilizations that still flourish today, have passed down their skill and designs from generation to generation. And though man, with thousands of years of practice, has mastered art of tattooing, some of the ancient cultural traditions associated with this practice have been lost or altered over the years. Despite these changes, I argue certain tattoos still hold the same representations and meanings for some cultures. Sometimes, within individual cultures, different tattoo designs were used to represent certain groups, clubs, genders or the social status of its people. By researching and observing numerous archeological findings, surviving documents, photographs and drawings on the subject of ancient tattooing, I have found that the distinguishable characteristics of specific designs depicted on a person will reveal the cultural and associative purpose of that individual.



Through the observation of drawings, pictures and other images depicted in a number of sources, I discovered that visual connections can be made between cultures and the meanings behind their designs.

Cultures through the ages each had their own unique styles of tattooing. Arnold's "Marks of Civilization" explores the tattoo styles used by the Ancient Egyptians. First appearing during the course of the Middle Kingdom, these Egyptian tattoos consisted of series of dots and dashes that formed abstract patterns and appeared to be regarded as procreative powers for the deceased in order to assure resurrection (27). Patterns and shapes were not the only designs used by this culture; Gilbert's "Tattoo History," suggests another type of tattoo design that used in Egypt reserved specifically for certain people and occupations. While many of the earliest Egyptian tattoos depict abstract art rather than pictures, the discovery of a female mummy dating back to 400 BC bore evidence of the first known portrait tattoo. The tattoo was an image of Bes, the god of revelry. Many Egyptian paintings show Bes tattooed on the thighs of dancers and musicians and as described by Gilbert portrays an "ugly ape-like dwarf wearing animal's skin," (13). The art of tattooing, as practiced by the Ancient Egyptians, seem to have both tribal ties, seen in the abstract patterns, and social ties depicted through the pictorial images reserved for specific members of the public, like the dancers, musicians and sometimes even the female members depending on the type of design.

Strikingly similar to most of the abstract designs created by ancient Egyptians, the inhabitants of Polynesia also used geometrical designs in their art. Traced back to the second millennium BC, these tattoos covered all areas of the body, including the face, hands and feet and were a natural part of life for the Polynesians (21). These geometrical

configurations consisted of lines and stars, but were not the only kind of designs used in Polynesia at that time. In “Bodies of Inscription,” DeMello incorporates drawings and paintings showing how Polynesians also incorporated animal and human figures in their art, seen on both men and women, and were noted by Captain Cook during his voyage to Tahiti in 1778 (45). It was thought that the linear tattoos, which dominated the Polynesian culture, served both a genealogical protective function and their use of figures symbolize their deep ties with nature and the peaceful way they lived. Since the Polynesians led a simple lifestyle, away from the booming industries and high paced lifestyle of Europe and the United States, their tattoos were influenced by their surroundings. This tribe of hunters and gatherers lived and survived off nature and it is only natural that their knowledge of the world around them became the theme of this art.

It was this culture, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century that helped re-define this form of art in Europe. The Polynesian attention to detail and dedication to this tradition is responsible for the transition of tattoos from ancient civilization into mainstream. The European sailors who ‘discovered’ this tribe during the last 1700’s, were intrigued by these tribal tattoo designs and had the Polynesians tattoo their own skin as souvenirs to bring back to their homes.

Through out the early millennium, tattoos were a popular form of art around Asia and its surrounding islands. The ancient inhabitants of Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia are a few examples of the Asian cultures that took part in this form of expression. Archeological findings, old documents and artwork, shows how each civilization chose to express their selves using a variety of shapes and designs which served purposes unique to their culture.

Today the Japanese culture is best known for its cuisine and ever-growing economic status, but it is well known that this culture still thrives on many ancient traditions within their modern societies (Groning 210). One of these traditions, tattooing, has been deeply rooted within the Japanese culture since before 5000 BC (77). The pictures depicted in Gilbert's book, show the origination of tattoos as a painful punishment. Different Japanese characters were branded on the forehead of criminals and were a way to let others know who these people were and the crime they were guilty of. Tattooing eventually made its transition from these hostile roots into the elaborate and beautiful works of art that can still be seen on the Japanese today. Best known for their discipline, fearlessness and abilities to withstand the excruciating pain associated with this practice, full body tattooing was once only reserved for Samaris and gangs of gamblers called Yakuza, depicted in pictures. It was these groups who were responsible for the flourish of extravagant pictorial tattooing that gave way in the 18th century (78).

Stories and legends from Japan's history are retold time and time again through tattoo designs. Traditionally meant to completely cover the upper arms and the back all the way down to the thighs, the old style of tattooing not only told a story deeply rooted in tradition, but also took much discipline and was quite time consuming. Some of the more elaborate designs can take more than a year to complete. These elaborate designs depict not just an image stories, and many use the mystical dragon, which is known for its mystery and power and is highly respected among the Japanese (84).

Though the ancient use of color was limited, Groning's "Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art," contains pictures of the traditional blue, red and brown

tattoos of the past, and are just as beautiful and symbolic as the multi-colored tattoos of today (223). Because a great deal of tradition and Japanese legend are still incorporate into their tattoos, these intricate designs are distinguishable all over the globe. What sets them apart from the rest of the worlds tattooing style, is that they cover the body, not just with geometric shapes and designs like in Tahiti, but with elaborate pictures that resemble works of art (224).

Made from a mixture of tree resin and sugar cane juice, both male and female members in the Mentawai religion of Indonesia exhibit traditional tattoo designs. Known throughout their culture as *titi*, Groning pictures these designs as spiral drawings running up their arms and down their legs, which were applied to the individual once they hit adulthood to avoid stretching and manipulation of their tattoos. Men are decorated with half-moon-shaped curves around the face, and horizontal lines on their thighs (196). The tattoos drawn on Headhunters are distinguishable from the other members of their tribe by the image of a toad on the stomach, which is their symbol for man, and spirals on the forehead and shoulders. On the island of Siberut, these ancient tattoos are still practiced and can be seen today.

Many inland tribes living on the Malaysian island of Borneo have not been affected by the contemporary world and remain today as they have been for over 50,000 years. The inhabitant's seclusion from modern society is due to the islands massive size and as a result, has allowed them to continue to embrace their ancient traditions and culture (39). Because of this, the style and designs used by these ancient cultures are the same ones they have. Images of their tattoos are a reflection of Balian and Javan art (40). The placements of these ancient tattoos hold meaning for these tribes of Borneo even

today. A tattoo on the hand symbolizes status in life and even after death, and on the shoulders and arms of men; bold abstract tattoos of their ancestors are represented.

Though their designs were far less elaborate and noticeable, Europeans practiced the art of tattooing long before Polynesian influence and its reemergence into mainstream culture the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1600's, Christian pilgrims received tattoos as a souvenir of their faith during their pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Images of the Virgin Mary, St. Francis, the crucifix, angels, the sacred heart and the rosary were some of the symbols Christians bore on their skin when they returned home from the Pilgrimages and these drawings are depicted in Caplan's "Written on the Body," (xvii). She also uses images of Celtic tattoos from medieval Ireland, which suggest a variety of reasons tattoos were used within their culture. These Celtic tattoos held many positive and negative associations. The significance of these medieval tattoos held a broad range of meanings and could be used to identify who were soldiers, slaves, criminals, pagans and also were symbols of holy men and women, known as the soldiers of Christ. Tattoo meanings according to the Celts also depended on its origin. Tattoos with religion and Christian origination are shown as acceptable because they depicted religious iconography, but the people who wore tattoos associated with exotic cultures, which held no religious meaning to Christians, are portrayed as savage and uncivilized, they were not acceptable (33). While it is still a question of just how many and which kinds of Celts practiced tattooing in Medieval times, it is known that Celtic tattoos and their visual representations held contrasting meanings which symbolized either Christianity or paganism (44).

Over the summer, the History Channel ran a special on the history of tattoos called, In Search of History-The Art of Tattooing. The documentary featured tattooed art

from around the globe and through out history. Distinguished designs have become a representation of culture. The array of shapes, symbols and pictures vary from one culture to the next and has evolved over many generations. Despite diverse cultural traditions and the assortment of styles created by each civilization, the collaboration of pictures and drawings presented in this documentary portrayed the art of tattooing as a celebration of expression and identity.

As cultures began to integrate, the separate images that used to tie each society with its art began to collide as well. What started in the 1800's, when Polynesian influence hit Europe and North American, the art of tattooing took on a whole new meaning. For the first time, individual communities began to share their ideas and this art transformed into what we know of it today. The designs brought by the sailors from Polynesia into Europe and the United States began to branch out into other parts of society as well.

Tattoos acceptance into mainstream society and their transition into pop culture and did not happen right away. Over the next few centuries, tattoos became associated with many different communities and groups of people. From sailors, to convicts, to carnival side show freaks, and the biker gangs onto the 'punk rock' generation of the late seventies (Groning 234). None of these groups were ever really accepted by mainstream society, and instead these identities were considered to be more of social outcasts. It would take many years for the art of tattoos and the people who wore them to become accepted into the general public. Nowadays, people have the creative choice about whether to tattoo themselves, in any way and design they feel fit.

Tattoos in the mid to late 1800's, were associated with convicts around Europe. Gilberts "Tattoo History" displays many pictures of tattooed French criminals from around this time. Their choice of designs was anything but ordinary. One man is shown wearing over a dozen portraits of different women, while another man is shown with the names of different women over his shoulders and chest and a daisy looking flower around each of his nipples. Portraits and the names of different women aren't the only themes shown on convicts though, one man has a number of different people tattooed across his body, some seem to portray army generals, and another man is wearing tattoos of flowers, butterflies, shooting stars, and in the center of his chest, a winged heart with a dagger through it, while the words "Down but not out" and "No luck" drape down around his neck (112).

Around the time of their popularity with sailors, criminals and the lower class, Gilberts highlights the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a time when tattooing made its circus debut (135). The full-bodied tribesman tattoos from Polynesia were a great spectacle for the Americans who never before had seen such art and can be seen in Gilberts book. A man standing, as if on display, is depicted wearing the traditional Polynesia geometric tattoos all over his arms, legs and face (134). These designs were an inspiration for many Americans in the side show industry, and they, too, began tattooing themselves head to toe. The tribal tattoos used on the Polynesians were put aside as the art of tattooing began to take on a new persona. Sideshow freaks are shown tattooed head to toe, but not with the geometric designs seen on the Tahitians, instead the choice of design explodes into much more. Flowers, words, women, hearts, animals, religious symbols and symmetrical patterns are only a few of the thousands of choices in tattoo design during

this time (135). Both men and women took part in this practice, sometimes picking a constant design, but most often displaying random pictures, but no matter what, these carnival sideshow freaks were always covered head to toe (135-141).

Groning's "Decorated Skin" depicts tattoos in the 'punk rock' generation as colorful and loud. One woman, with numerous facial piercings and a shaved head, has numerous woven tattoo designs that start from her forehead and go all the way back and alternate between yellow, red and blue designs (234). The punk rock culture, along with the music that influences it, is believed to be the start of tattooing transition into pop culture (DeMello viii).

Nowadays, tattoos are considered to be works of art and the artists who create them are also respected in society. They seem to be a collaboration of the many tattoo designs that have survived over the millions of years they have existed. Caplan's, "Written on the Body" shows images of two tattoo designs, one from the year 1997 and the other from 1998, that resembles many of the tattoo designs historically depicted on the Samari's of ancient Japan. One man has a colorful and elaborate dragon wrapped around his upper body and winding all the way down to his feet (247). The other, from 1998, has a colorful serpent in wrapped in the same manor around a different man (248).

While many people are shown with just one or two designs, others choose to use their entire body as a canvas. One man shown in Groning's book has a portrait of Marilyn Monroe, covering the whole lower portion of his leg (236). Another man displays a plethora of designs covering his back and arms. Some appear to be similar to the Polynesian tribal designs of the earlier centuries, others are checkered bracelets



around the wrist, a spider web that extends up from the elbow, and the use of elaborate colors and shapes complete this mosaic.

Famous rap musician, Tupac Shukur, is shown in Caplan's book, to have tattoos of great symbolism and meaning to the rapper. His tattoos depicted images that ranged from religious iconography to street violence, as well as phrases such as, 'Only God can judge me,' 'Trust nobody,' and 'Notorious Outlaw,' (qtd. in Caplan 253). Another place where the tattoos of celebrities can be viewed in today's society is on the television show "Inked," airing weeknights on the A&E channel, is a show that is devoted to tattooing. Taking place in a tattoo parlor in Las Vegas, the first ever to be stationed inside a casino, the shop is run by such pop culture icons as famous dirt bike racer, Carey Hart. Tattooed himself, Hart's shop is also frequented by celebrities and musicians. An episode that aired in late August featured a woman who brought in a tattoo design of her own. The design, she later described to the tattooist as he was hard at work, was a memorial to her father, and meant a lot to her to have it done. The special meanings that many people associate with their tattoos, together with the new generation of high profile celebrities and musicians is one of the main reasons why tattooing has become so popular in American society. Television shows and magazines who glamorize the practice, make it more accessible and acceptable for this generation and the next, to continue this art and make it their own.

The August cover of The New Yorker seems to be making a social comment about tattooing on the front of this issue. The cover is a drawing of a completely tattooed man at a nude beach, surrounded by many other people, who are not tattooed. The only portion of this mans body that is not tattooed is his rear, which is usually covered up with

shorts. It seems to speak of a time when tattoos were unacceptable in society and the wearers of this art were picked apart from the average population and this man is stepping out for the first time, unfazed by his noticeable painted skin among the non-inked members of society.

As cultures began to integrate, the separate images that used to tie each society with its art began to collide as well. What started in the 1800's, when Polynesian influence hit Europe and North American, the art of tattooing took on a whole new meaning. For the first time, individual communities began to share their ideas and this art transformed into what we know of it today. The designs brought by the sailors from Polynesia into Europe and the United States began to branch out into other parts of society as well.

Tattoos acceptance into mainstream society and their transition into pop culture and did not happen right away. Over the next few centuries, tattoos became associated with many different communities and groups of people. From sailors, to convicts, to carnival side show freaks, and the biker gangs onto the 'punk rock' generation of the late seventies (Groning 234). None of these groups were ever really accepted by mainstream society, and instead these identities were considered to be more of social outcasts. It would take many years for the art of tattoos and the people who wore them to become accepted into the general public. Nowadays, people have the creative choice about whether to tattoo themselves, in any way and design they feel fit.

Tattoos in the mid to late 1800's, were associated with convicts around Europe. Gilberts "Tattoo History" displays many pictures of tattooed French criminals from around this time. Their choice of designs was anything but ordinary. One man is shown

wearing over a dozen portraits of different women, while another man is shown with the names of different women over his shoulders and chest and a daisy looking flower around each of his nipples. Portraits and the names of different women aren't the only themes shown on convicts though, one man has a number of different people tattooed across his body, some seem to portray army generals, and another man is wearing tattoos of flowers, butterflies, shooting stars, and in the center of his chest, a winged heart with a dagger through it, while the words "Down but not out" and "No luck" drape down around his neck (112).

Around the time of their popularity with sailors, criminals and the lower class, Gilberts highlights the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a time when tattooing made its circus debut (135). The full-bodied tribesman tattoos from Polynesia were a great spectacle for the Americans who never before had seen such art and can be seen in Gilberts book. A man standing, as if on display, is depicted wearing the traditional Polynesia geometric tattoos all over his arms, legs and face (134). These designs were an inspiration for many Americans in the side show industry, and they, too, began tattooing themselves head to toe. The tribal tattoos used on the Polynesians were put aside as the art of tattooing began to take on a new persona. Sideshow freaks are shown tattooed head to toe, but not with the geometric designs seen on the Tahitians, instead the choice of design explodes into much more. Flowers, words, women, hearts, animals, religious symbols and symmetrical patterns are only a few of the thousands of choices in tattoo design during this time (135). Both men and women took part in this practice, sometimes picking a constant design, but most often displaying random pictures, but no matter what, these carnival sideshow freaks were always covered head to toe (135-141).

Groning's "Decorated Skin" depicts tattoos in the 'punk rock' generation as colorful and loud. One woman, with numerous facial piercings and a shaved head, has numerous woven tattoo designs that start from her forehead and go all the way back and alternate between yellow, red and blue designs (234). The punk rock culture, along with the music that influences it, is believed to be the start of tattooing transition into pop culture (DeMello viii).

Nowadays, tattoos are considered to be works of art and the artists who create them are also respected in society. They seem to be a collaboration of the many tattoo designs that have survived over the millions of years they have existed. Caplan's, "Written on the Body" shows images of two tattoo designs, one from the year 1997 and the other from 1998, that resembles many of the tattoo designs historically depicted on the Samari's of ancient Japan. One man has a colorful and elaborate dragon wrapped around his upper body and winding all the way down to his feet (247). The other, from 1998, has a colorful serpent in wrapped in the same manor around a different man (248).

While many people are shown with just one or two designs, others choose to use their entire body as a canvas. One man shown in Groning's book has a portrait of Marilyn Monroe, covering the whole lower portion of his leg (236). Another man displays a plethora of designs covering his back and arms. Some appear to be similar to the Polynesian tribal designs of the earlier centuries, others are checkered bracelets around the wrist, a spider web that extends up from the elbow, and the use of elaborate colors and shapes complete this mosaic.

Famous rap musician, Tupac Shukur, is shown in Caplan's book, to have tattoos of great symbolism and meaning to the rapper. His tattoos depicted images that ranged

from religious iconography to street violence, as well as phrases such as, 'Only God can judge me,' 'Trust nobody,' and 'Notorious Outlaw,' (qtd. in Caplan 253). Another place where the tattoos of celebrities can be viewed in today's society is on the television show "Inked," airing weeknights on the A&E channel, is a show that is devoted to tattooing. Taking place in a tattoo parlor in Las Vegas, the first ever to be stationed inside a casino, the shop is run by such pop culture icons as famous dirt bike racer, Carey Hart. Tattooed himself, Hart's shop is also frequented by celebrities and musicians. An episode that aired in late August featured a woman who brought in a tattoo design of her own. The design, she later described to the tattooist as he was hard at work, was a memorial to her father, and meant a lot to her to have it done. The special meanings that many people associate with their tattoos, together with the new generation of high profile celebrities and musicians is one of the main reasons why tattooing has become so popular in American society. Television shows and magazines who glamorize the practice, make it more accessible and acceptable for this generation and the next, to continue this art and make it their own.

The August cover of The New Yorker seems to be making a social comment about tattooing on the front of this issue. The cover is a drawing of a completely tattooed man at a nude beach, surrounded by many other people, who are not tattooed. The only portion of this mans body that is not tattooed is his rear, which is usually covered up with shorts. It seems to speak of a time when tattoos were unacceptable in society and the wearers of this art were picked apart from the average population and this man is stepping out for the first time, unfazed by his noticeable painted skin among the non-inked members of society.

## **Inking an Identity**

### **Conclusion**

The art of tattooing has experienced a long and colorful journey since its birth into society many millions of years ago. It has spent time amongst the elite members of society and has been shunned for its connection to the morally corrupt and working class. They were used to depict legends of ancient Japanese methodology on the backs of Samari soldiers, and its fascination amongst American audiences helped tattooed individuals earn their living as side-show spectacles. For early Christians, it embodied the commitment they had to their faith and at a time were viewed as the epitome of a barbaric lifestyle when the primitive nature of Polynesian culture was introduced to the progressive societies of the west.

Before the concept of travel contributed to the integration of culture, the art of tattooing was a common practice among many isolated civilizations. Despite their seclusion from the rest of the world, this practice was integrated into the traditions of many ancient societies. Though the discovery itself was not unique, the variations of meaning it held within each culture were as diverse as the worlds they lived in. As this practice continued weaving itself into the customs of world civilizations, tattoos became a representation of cultural identity and held distinguished meanings within each society.

Throughout the tropical islands of the Pacific, and the jungles of Asia, all over Europe and the deserts of Egypt, each culture's unique connection with their environment and the perceptions they formed about the structure of their society are reflected through this art. The associations that linked each culture to this practice reflected different aspects each society. Designs corresponded to gender, as seen in the Mentawi tribe of

Indonesia, and could also mark the passage into adulthood. Other cultures, like in ancient Japan, utilized this practice as a way to punish wrongdoers. Distinguished designs were used to signify the roles each person played within society, similar to the discovery of tattooed dancers in Ancient Egypt, and its brief adaptation among the European elite exemplify how it could also indicate a person's social status. The ideas and views civilizations formed about the world around them reflected the way each society was structured and were commonly represented through body art. And though the variety of tattoo designs used to symbolizing certain social roles were unique to each society, this practice ultimately defined culture as a whole.

As exploration flourished and civilizations began to collide, a different kind of culture emerged and the tattooing practice began to personify a whole new generation of meaning. With the integration of cultures, new identities were created through common interest rather than cultural roots. Linked by brotherhood and not through origin, the purpose of tattooing remained as a way to associate individuals with similar interests. Sailors received tattoos as souvenirs of their travels, and it became popular among soldiers during World War I. Carnival workers made their living as tattooed freaks, and this art symbolize social rebellion and anarchy when the punk rock generation emerged in the late 70's. Though the use of this art had shifted from culture roles into social roles, tattoos still defined an individual's placement within society.

Associative identities represented by tattoos eventually transitioned into the identities of personal expression it represents today. Tattooing is an art that has existed almost as long as mankind has roamed the earth. It is a practice that has taken place on every continent and incorporated into traditions for many ancient civilizations throughout

the world. Its recent emergence into pop culture at the turn of the century has help to eliminate many of the stereotypes and misconceptions associated with tattoos in the past. As this art continues to incorporate itself into each new generation, the restrictions and reservations previously connected with this practice no longer apply. Today, tattoos have come to be known as an accepted voice of individual being.



### **Inking an Identity Reflection**

I entered Pre-Cap with no clue about what Capstone was at all. I have been at CSUMB since I was a freshman and though I was familiar with the word Capstone and it's importance to this school, no one had ever really told me what a Capstone was. I had kicked around the idea of tattoos for a while, but with no clue as to what exactly were the requirements for Capstone, had no idea if that was a topic I could choose. When I finally grasped the concept of Capstone, things began looking up and I am very proud to be where I am today.

I knew that CSUMB was the school from the moment I saw it on the college list. My advisors knew nothing about it, and I remember the tour I took of it my Senior year in High School, probably only took about 15 minutes. Obviously my dad was very skeptical, but for me there was no other choice but here. I think that entering this school with a positive attitude has helped me succeed. Through out the past four years, I've seen many students, and many friends, come and go for whatever reason, and though I understood why, I think that if those people were here to see where the school is now, they might change their mind.

From day one I embraced the learning style. I had never before been a good student, and had always struggled, but at CSUMB, I finally felt that I was smart. Semesters flew by and before I knew it, it was time start my major. I had juggled a few around during the first two years and how I feel upon HCOM, I still don't know, but I've never looked back.

I still remember sitting on Planner Web, trying to find classes for my first upper-division semester. I literally just read through all the majors, and when I came to the Journalism and Media Studies concentration I was taken back by how much that fit me and I couldn't get over the fact that my future career could actually be something that I enjoyed.

Looking back on the past four years, and the four years before that when I was in high school, I have to just laugh at where I ended up today. English, never my best subject, and the grammar I never learned is finally making sense. My time at CSUMB is almost up and it's bittersweet. While I have been waiting for years to finally be done with school, now that I am almost finished, I'm afraid that I am not ready for what's next.

Up until collage, I feel that the purpose of all of my learning experiences was to prepare for collage. It took me 12 years to prepare for collage, and only four years to prepare for life, kind of scary I think. And while sometimes I am afraid of the uncertainty that lies ahead, other times I am confident that the skills I have acquired at CSUMB, and more so in HCOM, have prepared me for my future. I feel lucky to have had an integrated education, and while sometimes I feel that it might put me at a disadvantage when trying to land a job in Public Relations, I know that I've learned more than just the tricks of the trade, and the communication skills I have gained is my advantage.

It is now November, I graduate in a month, and as I sit here putting the final touches on my Capstone Portfolio, I feel at peace. I look back on where I came from, the awkwardness of my younger days, and I am proud of all that I have accomplished. This December, I know I will be ready to face the world and I know that I will succeed.

## **Inking an Identity Annotated Bibliography**

Arnold, Rubin. Marks of Civilization. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988.

While this source has many primary attributes, I have chosen this source as a secondary source because along with the many pictures and illustrations, the written texts describe a lot about tattooing and civilization in a secondary source fashion.

I chose to use this source because even though it is not as up to date as the rest, I still think that it will contribute valuable insight into my research. I also enjoy the more modern approach that it takes in one of the later chapters, which focus on “commercial” tattoos, and many of today’s ideas and views that follow.

Atkinson, Michael. “Tattooing and Civilizing Process: Body Modification and Self Control.” Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology 00084948. 41.2 (2004).

This is one of the sources I found using Ebsco host and it relates to my subject because it discusses the reasons behind tattooing or “body modification” This approach is taken from a very scientific angle unlike the rest of my sources who seem to be written by people who are actively involved or interested in the tattoo community.

I plan on using this source primarily to view my topic from a scientific point of view. Even though I don’t really grasp many of the concepts the author is trying to point out, I still think that it will be a useful source when trying to get a rounded perspective on my topic.

Blackburn, Mark Tattoos From Paradise Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Publishers, 2000.

This source contains traditional tattooing designs depicted from Pacific Polynesian cultures of Easter Island, Hawaii, the Marquesas, New Zealand, Samoa, Tahiti and Tonga. The actual process and ceremonies involved in tattooing are described and illustrated with numerous drawings and color illustrations of native people. Included are actual 19th century photographs as well as early exploration art, paintings, drawings, engravings, and artifacts all relating to tattooing.

This source will be used to contribute some of the earlier history of tattooing. These are some of the first known cultures that practiced the art and this book will be a great place for me to reference when I begin writing my capstone.

Caplan, Jane ed. Written on the Body. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

This source explores the history of tattooing in European and American history through a historical, sociological and cultural perspective. This source relies primarily on textual analysis instead of visual analysis like most sources on this topic tend to do.

I chose this source as a secondary source because I like how it focuses exclusively on European and American tattoo history. Most of the sources I have found so far focus on the many Asian and Eastern cultures who practice this art, but since I would like to get a world wide cultural perspective, I feel that this book will be a strong point when talking about the Western culture’s role in body art.

De Seve, Peter. "Beach Bum" The New Yorker 29 Aug. 2005

This source is an image that makes a political statement on the cover of a well read and prestigious magazine. It's a picture of a man at a nude beach and his body from the waist up and thighs down are covered in tattoos while his behind and private areas are bare.

From the knowledge I've acquired on this subject so far, I've learned how taboo tattoos become around the 1800's and early 1900's and their association with "carnies" and outcasts. The fact that tattoos were supposed to be hidden and this man has tattoos everywhere they wouldn't be hidden, I think that it makes a powerful statement about where body art stands in today's more modern society.

DeMello, Marge. Bodies of Inscription. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000.

This source explores how elite tattooists, magazine editors and leaders of tattoo organizations downplayed the working-class roots of tattooing in order to make it more palatable for middle class consumption. It also explores how a completely new set of meanings derived primarily for non-Western cultures have been created to give tattoos and exotic and primitive flavor.

I think this is an excellent secondary source because it is completely dedicated to the pop cultural aspect of tattoo designs. This source even pinpoints a time period, the 1980s, when tattoos became 'mainstream' accepted. I think this will be a great source in helping me understand the modern meanings and reasons for tattoos beyond what I find out from my peers.

Gell, Alfred. Wrapping Images. New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1993.

This source explores the complete history of tattooing practices in Polynesia, from the beginnings to today. It also goes in-depth on the spiritual and tribal leaders of different Polynesian groups and how they viewed the practice.

I think the source will be a useful secondary source because I am trying to explore the topic of tattooing from many cultural perspectives and Polynesia has many cultures within. This source will only be one of many that I plan on using when researching cultural views and practices of tattooing.

Gilbert, Steve Tattoo History: A Source Book. New York: Juno Books Publishers Group West, 2000.

This source contains an illustrated collection of historical records of tattooing throughout the world from ancient times to the present. It contains the first written records of tattooing by Greek and Roman civilizations, the types of designs and techniques used throughout Polynesia, Japanese tattooing, the first nineteenth century European and American tattoo artist, tattooed British royalty as well as essays by prominent contemporary tattoo artists.

I choose this as a primary source because it provides a great first hand look at both the history and cultural aspects of tattoos. I think it will greatly help me understand and uncover many of the meanings behind them.

Groning, Karl ed. Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art. New York: Thomas & Hudson, 2000.

This source contains numerous illustrations and photographs of various world cultures that practice body art. This source not only covers some of the historical issues behind tattoos but also examines the cultural practice, as it still exists today among many tribal and modernized civilizations. It even includes the “punk rock” culture which is the one that is most thought of when talking about mainstream tattoos.

I chose this as a primary source because it not only explores the ancient practice of tattooing but also goes beyond that and contains the many modern practices of tattooing and how it reflects our modernized American culture.

Handwerk, Brian “Tattoos- From Taboo to Mainstream” National Geographic News, 11 Oct. 2002

This source explores the journey of tattooing through ancient tribes and cultures and the meanings each group associated with wearing them. From ancient Easter societies who used them when marking the status to adulthood, as a means of identifying oneself, and regarded as added beauty to the wearer to the Western associations like individuality, expression and creativity. This source examines the various communities who chose and choose to celebrate body art.

I think this source is a great contribution to my research in that it really sums up and touches all of the individual’s areas I’m choosing to focus on. It provides a great base in which to expand on my project by listing individual cultures and periods in time, which are of interest to me as I further investigate this subject.

In Search of History-The Art of Tattooing Dir. Steve Gilbert. Video Cassette. The History Channel Video, 2005.

This source is a video based on a feature program from the History Channel. It explores the complete history of tattooing from most every culture on earth from it’s beginnings to now. This video goes in-depth on the subject to answer the questions of why and how this all started.

This is another great source for me to use, and it is similar to many of the book sources I have found because it explores the entire history of this phenomenon. What sets this apart though is the fact that it is a media reference and I will get visually what lacks in print.

Inked Dir. Gregg Backer, Jeff Bowler. Perf. Lance Bass, Tommy Davidson, Joey Fatone, Carey Hart, Tony Hawk. A&E. 2005

This source is a reality program that spotlights the personal stories and confessions of patrons at the first tattoo parlor to ever open inside a Las Vegas Casino. This show also features celebrities who enter this establishment as well as their opinions and reactions while they themselves receive tattoos.

This source will be used only for the modern portion of my project. I want to end my capstone with where tattoos stand today and how they are influenced by pop culture and I think that the celebrities who make appearances in this program will greatly contribute to that aspect of my project.

Kitamura, Takahiro, Kitamura, Katie M. Bushido: Legacies of the Japanese Tattoo Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Publishers, 2001.

This source explores the elusive world of traditional Japanese tattooing. The Samurai spirit known as Bushido, is an integral component of Japanese tattooing that is traced through the imagery and interpersonal dynamics of this veiled subculture. The eloquent text is based largely on the authors experiences as client and student of the famed Japanese tattoo master.

The Japanese is a great example of a culture who has for many years reguarded tattooing as a secret tradition that is still honored today. This is why I chose this source because it is an in-depth look at a culture who has used this form of art and expression for many years.

Leigh, J & Craig R. 2004 Woodstock Tattoo & Body Art Festival. 2004. Tattooz Net & Needle Inc. 22 Feb. 2005. [www.woodstocktattoo.com](http://www.woodstocktattoo.com)

This source contains many pictures from the current and past Woodstock Tattoo and Body Art Festival. It also upcoming tattoo events and where they are located and how to get tickets to attend. This site also features all sorts of news related to tattooing and body art which is important for understand it's pop cultural importance.

I choose this for my primary source because it is a first hand source and the events that it lists are occurring now. It displays actual modern day body art enthusiasts, their latest designs and what is the current trend in body art.

McCabe, Michael. New York City Tattoo: The Oral History of an Urban Art Honolulu: Hardy Marks Publications, 1997.

This source is unique because it is very specialized on a certain period of time in a very specific place. Like the title suggests, this book focuses on mainly on postwar, pre-hippie New York history and its association's with body art.

I enjoy finding books that are specialized to a certain time and group. By incorporating this source with my others, it will help me to refine my research and go more in-depth on issues that are only minor in books that cover much more area.

Mifflin, Margot. Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo New York: Juno Books Publisher Group West, 1997.

This source contains a piece of cultural history that is rarely examined and distinguished apart from bigger groups. This books focuses solely on the role women played in the evolution of body art rather than focusing on the bigger scale of cultural groups in general. It shares the perspective of self-expression more so than as a cultural identity like in many other sources.

This source is an excellent find. It's a very unique book compared to the rest of the sources I have already found. Because of the dedication that this book has to a single group, women, I will be able to focus on the aspect of my subject, where before I wasn't even aware that they would be considered an individual group.

Ritz, David Tattoo Nation: Portraits of Celebrity Body Art New York: Bulfinch Publishing, 2002.

This source depicts tattoos in modern society by focusing on some of the biggest

pop icons of our time, like Drew Barrymore, Eminem, Melissa Etheridge, Ozzy Osbourne, Busta Rhymes, Mary J. Blige. It chronicles the gradual emergence of this evocative art form into mainstream society via pop-culture icons.

This is the perfect source for the end and conclusion of my capstone project. What attracted me to this subject was the fascination my peers and friends have with tattoos and I was interested in learning more about why and where this phenomenon came about.

Sanders, Clinton R. Customizing the Body. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.

This source explores the art and cultures of tattooing from a wide variety of cultural standpoints. Like the numerous other sources I have found, it focuses on the history and modern day practices of tattooing and the reasons and meanings behind them.

I think that this source will be useful, even though it repeats much of what my previous sources already say, is that this is from a different perspective, and I hope that perhaps this source will take a different angle and/or approach to this topic and provide me with an alternative insight than some of my others sources.

“Tattoo!: Beauty, Art and Pain” Tattoo!: Beauty, Art & Pain Discovery Channel. DSI, Silver Springs. 2005.

This source is a weekly TV series that runs on the Discovery Channel. Like many other sources, it in-depthly explores the ancient forms of tattooing from the indigenous tribes, Japanese bathhouses and also looks into gangsters, criminals and other associated people from the later centuries to see how it’s evolved.

This source is another visual source for me to use that contains identical information as others I’ve looked into. But no matter how similar different sources appear to be, there are also differences in what kind of information contained so I feel that any source is a valid source.

**GUIDELINES FOR HCOM SENIOR CAPSTONE PROSPECTUS**  
**HCOM 474 – RESEARCH METHODS (PRE-CAPSTONE)**

**SECTION ONE: COVER SHEET**

**Name:** Heather Johnson

**Date:** March 30, 2005

**Concentration:** Journalism & Media Studies

**HCOM 474 Professor:** David A. Reichard

**Working Title of the Capstone Project:** The Many Colors of Ink

**Human Subjects:** Do you intend to interview or work with any special or vulnerable subjects, such as: pregnant women, prisoners, elderly persons, children, juvenile offenders, persons with acute and/or severe mental or physical disabilities, non-English speaking persons, or any others who may suffer psychological, economic, legal or social harm as a result of participating in your research?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, have you consulted with your HCOM 474 professor?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

If, in consultation with your HCOM 474 professor, you have determined that you will need to obtain permission from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects before commencing your research, please indicate the status of your application.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I have not yet obtained the needed human subjects application and/or forms.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have obtained the needed human subjects application and/or forms and have begun completing them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have submitted my human subjects application and am waiting to hear from the Committee.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have received approval from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and may begin interviews and/or my work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My application was not approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and I am in the process of revising the application.

**Archive:** Do you intend to archive your project in the CSUMB Library Capstone Archive?

\_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No



## SECTION TWO: BACKGROUND AND POSITIONALITY

My Capstone project will explore the culture and associations of tattoos, both past and present. My project will examine the cultural and mainstream practice of body art as well as the meanings and reasons that are associated with them.

I choose this topic because of their popularity in mainstream society. I am interested in learning about their origins and the real significances behind many of them. I would like to understand more about the variety of views (global and generational), that certain individuals and groups have about them.

I believe that my topic is an important tool for anyone who misunderstands the associations of tattoos. I would like to educate myself and others about the strong cultural, religious and associative ties that they hold for some, and clear up any misconceptions about the type of people who enjoy tattoos.

In order to gain a full understanding of my topic, I will incorporate the use of Critical Communication Skills when communicating with many types of people, Media Narrative and Ethnographic Skills in order to gather and put together my information, Relational Communication Skills by using non-judgmental views when learning about my subjects. I will be using Philosophical Analysis when uncovering stereotypes and myths behind issues, as well as, Cultural Analysis and Historical Analysis when understanding the associations with culture and learning about the history behind it.

## SECTION THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the origins of tattoos?
- Which world cultures (past and present) practice the art of tattooing?
  - ◇ What do/did they represent within each culture?
  - ◇ How long have each of these cultures been practicing this?
- What clubs or groups (both old and new) are associated with this practice?
  - ◇ What do/did they represent?
- How do people, unassociated with culture and organized groups view tattoos?
  - ◇ How have these views changed over time?
- When did tattooing cross over into mainstream culture?
  - ◇ How?
  - ◇ What are the more modern associations of tattoos
  - ◇ Do they appeal to a certain age, gender, race, or class?

## SECTION FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to gain a wide and well-rounded perspective on my research of tattoos, I plan on using a variety of primary, secondary, visual and electronic sources. I first want to begin with hard copy sources found at the CSUMB library in order to get a basic understanding of the questions I'm trying to answer. Next, I plan on continuing to explore electronic resources, which include articles, websites and anything else I can find. I also would really like to include visuals within my project, because I think I have a very visual topic. If I talk about a certain tattoo that is popularly associated with a culture, I would like to show that, and I would also like to incorporate any interesting and meaningful designs to show my audience the real beauty of the art behind it.

## SECTION FIVE: WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Arnold, Rubin. Marks of Civilization. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988.

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Gell, Alfred. Wrapping Images. New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1993.

This source explores the complete history of tattooing practices in Polynesia, from the beginnings to today. It also goes in-depth on the spiritual and tribal leaders of different Polynesian groups and how they viewed the practice.

I think the source will be a useful secondary source because I am trying to explore the topic of tattooing from many cultural perspectives and Polynesia has many cultures within. This source will only be one of many that I plan on using when researching cultural views and practices of tattooing.

Gilbert, Steve Tattoo History: A Source Book. New York: Juno Books Publishers Group West, 2000.

This source contains an illustrated collection of historical records of tattooing throughout the world from ancient times to the present. It contains the first written records of tattooing by Greek and Roman civilizations, the types of designs and techniques used throughout Polynesia, Japanese tattooing, the first nineteenth century European and American tattoo artist, tattooed British royalty as well as essays by prominent contemporary tattoo artists.

I choose this as a primary source because it provides a great first hand look at both the history and cultural aspects of tattoos. I think it will greatly help me understand and uncover many of the meanings behind them.

Groning, Karl ed. Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art. New York: Thomas & Hudson, 2000.

This source contains numerous illustrations and photographs of various world cultures that practice body art. This source not only covers some of the historical issues behind tattoos but also examines the cultural practice, as it still exists today among many tribal and modernized civilizations. It even includes the “punk rock” culture which is the one that is most thought of when talking about mainstream tattoos.

I chose this as a primary source because it not only explores the ancient practice of tattooing but also goes beyond that and contains the many modern practices of tattooing and how it reflects our modernized American culture.

Leigh, J & Craig R. 2004 Woodstock Tattoo & Body Art Festival. 2004. Tattooz Net & Needle Inc. 22 Feb. 2005. [www.woodstocktattoo.com](http://www.woodstocktattoo.com)

This source contains many pictures from the current and past Woodstock Tattoo and Body Art Festival. It also upcoming tattoo events and where they are located and how to get tickets to attend. This site also features all sorts of news related to tattooing and body art which is important for understand it's pop cultural importance.

I choose this for my third primary source because it is a first hand source and the events that it lists are occurring now. It displays actual modern day body art enthusiasts, their latest designs and what is the current trend in body art.

Sanders, Clinton R. Customizing the Body. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.

This source explores the art and cultures of tattooing from a wide variety of cultural standpoints. Like the numerous other sources I have found, it focuses on the history and modern day practices of tattooing and the reasons and meanings behind them.

I think that this source will be useful, even though it repeats much of what my previous sources already say, is that this is from a different perspective, and I hope that perhaps this source

will take a different angle and/or approach to this topic and provide me with an alternative insight then some of my others sources.

**SECTION SIX: FORM OF CAPSTONE PROJECT**

My Capstone Project will be in the form of a 10-15 page research paper and a 10-15 page journalistic essay which is required for my concentration. I would also like to include some visual findings that will support my research.

**SECTION SEVEN: CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS REMAINING**

I think my biggest challenge in my research will be allowing any views that don't agree with my own, to be voiced in a non-judgmental way. I am completely for the pro side of my topic and I have always believed that tattooing is a great form of self expression. But I also believe that the only way to fully educate others and myself on this topic will be to present the best, least judgmental and well rounded perspective on my topic that I can.

**SECTION EIGHT: ACTION PLAN AND NEXT STEPS**

<b>Goal One:</b> Gain a full understanding of the history behind cultural and organization associations, along with their origins.		<b>Goal Two:</b> Identify main debates and arguments both for and against tattooing		<b>Goal Three:</b> Begin to piece together findings in a thoughtful and educational format & gather visuals	
<b>Tasks</b>		<b>Tasks</b>		<b>Tasks</b>	
Find a wide variety of books, articles and other materials which contain historical and cultural information to be used in my research.	4/30	Find sources relating to a wide variety of views, both positive and negative on the topic of tattooing.	5/15	Combine Findings and begin to organize them, along with appropriate visuals.	5/30

# HCOM Senior Capstone

## Digital Poster

### Fall 2005

xi Johnson

**Name: Heather Johnson**  
**Project Title: Inking an Identity**  
**Concentration: Journalism & Media Studies**

### Project Abstract

The art of tattooing has been around for thousands of years and practiced by many of the world's ancient civilizations. Through each millennium this art evolves as new techniques and ideas are incorporated into this practice. This project includes an analysis of the ancient cultures that actively used this form of art. It also incorporates how the art of tattooing made a transitioned into pop culture and how it has evolved into what it is today and has become the identity for so many people.



### Project Context & Contributions

The goal of this research is help uncover the many misconceptions and negative associations of tattoos by helping myself and others understand the strong tie body art has in world history and to ancient civilizations. This project explores the deep-rooted connections tattooing has within certain cultures. It also explores how this practice came to be adopted by almost ever culture around the globe.

### Relevant Links

<http://www.woodstocktattoo.com>

### Research Questions

What are the origins of tattoos & which world cultures, past and present, practice the art of tattooing? How long has each culture been practicing this art, & what do they represent for each? What clubs, groups & organizations have/are associated with this practice & what do tattoos represent for each? How have the views of people both associated and unassociated with this practice viewed this art & how have these views changed over time? When and how did tattoos cross over into mainstream and become a part of pop culture? What are the more modern associations with tattoos & how are they viewed?

### Key Findings

**4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC**- Ancient Egyptians created tattoos by grouping dots and dashes into geometric patterns (Arnold 24).

**3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC**- Tattooing was an important part of Polynesia culture; elaborate geometric designs were added on to through out a persons life & eventually covered the body (Gilbert 21).

**2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC**- Tattooing in Japan was first used as a punishment, the crime was tattooed on the foreheads of criminals (Gilbert 77).

**1600's**- Christian pilgrims received tattoos as symbols of faith during pilgrimages to the Holy Lands, and the Celts practiced this art prior to the Roman Conquest (DeMello 45).

**1700's**- On a voyage to the Pacific Islands, Capt. James Cook 'discovered' the tattoo as we know it today (DeMello 45).

**1800's**- Japanese tattoo artists became sought after by man distinguishable people like King George V & Czar Nicholas II (Gilbert 81).

**1900's**- Tattooed people became popular sideshow attractions at carnivals and world fairs (Gilbert 135).

**1980's**-The professionalism of this art reemerged into mainstream society (DeMello 3).

### Evidence

To complete this research I used a combination of Major Learning Outcomes: Critical Communication Skills, Media, Narrative and Ethnographic Skills, Philosophical Analysis, Cultural Analysis and Historical Analysis. My research included both textual analyses. I gathered evidence through the use of numerous books, electronic resources, scholarly journals, film documentaries and TV program sources.

### Project Format

The final project is in the form of a research paper. My own collection of images is included.

### Selected Bibliography

Arnold, Rubin. Marks of Civilization. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988.

Caplan, Jane ed. Written on the Body. New Jersey: Princeton U. Press, 2000

De Steve. "Beach Bum" The New Yorker 29 Aug. 2005.

DeMello, Marge. Bodies of Inscription. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000.

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Gilbert, Steve. Tattoo History. New York: Juno Books Publishers Group West, 2000.

Groning, Karl ed. Decorated Skin. New York: Juno Book Publishers Group West, 2000.

In Search of History- The Art of Tattooing. Dir. Steve Gilbert. Video Cassette. The History Channel Video, 2005.

Inked. Dir. Gregg Backer, Jeff Bowler. Perf. Carey Hart, Tony Hawk, and Tommy Davidson. A&E. 2005.

Sanders, Clinton R. Customizing the Body. Philadelphia: Temple U. Press, 1989.

This capstone is dedicated to my many friends who shared their own tattoos and meanings with me

