

# THE POINT

ISSUE 75  
SUMMER 2016

THE QUARTERLY

OF PROFESSIONAL PIERCERS





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## THE POINT

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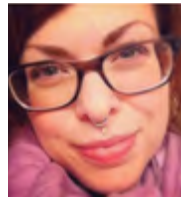
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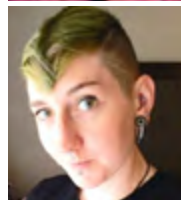
BODY MODIFICATION SURVEY





## FROM THE EDITORS

**KENDRA BERNDT**  
**MARINA PECORINO**  
The Point Editors



### • Kendra Jane B

On May 1, 2016 the province I live in was struck with the largest disaster in my country's history. What I have also seen come out of this tragedy is a special intimacy, and openness to help and to share with those in need. Although I do not live in Fort McMurray, where this tragedy occurred, it is a city that has supported my family for decades and is home to many of my friends. As this tragedy and the recovery efforts unfold, we are all coping in different ways, as is the case when struck with grief, sorrow, or any other very intense emotion. When I am sad or happy or anywhere inbetween I work through my feelings in the kitchen.

I have also been reading a book that has struck a chord in me. It is both about life and cooking and I would like to share a little of it with you, our readers.

*When we cook, we are expressing ourselves completely, for we always cook within the context of our lives. If we are feeling lonely, stressed, generous, too busy, happy—whatever is happening in that moment—when we step up to the stove, we cook with these circumstances as much as any ingredient or recipe. This kind of attention to the particulars of the moment won't be found in the recipe we are using, yet it will have an enormous influence on the final product and how much enjoyment we will receive from both the doing and the consuming of it.*

*I want to encourage and support us to look more deeply and experience more deeply, in our everyday lives. There is a hunger for a more considered life, one where our everyday circumstances are not a series of inconveniences to get through (or around) as quickly as possible, but rather a source of awakening and pleasure. We don't have to go looking for it, we don't have to purchase it, because it's right here.*<sup>1</sup>

I think I have already read the above passage a hundred times and the contents of its message makes me look more forward to our Conference than ever before. This is the one week a year I soak in every minute, every \$6.00 bottle of water, every smoke filled casino, and every tired morning. There are absolutely no inconveniences, and everything is a pure source of genuine happiness and awakening.

As you read our pre-conference issue I urge you to change your mindset as you pack and prepare. In this issue you will find excellent tips from our mentor team to lessen the stress before you even leave home, setting yourself up for a successful week. If your worry is about leaving your shop while at Conference, April Thomas and Julie Taylor have put together some advice on ensuring your studio will be more than prepared for your absence.

As I wrote, edited, and compiled this issue I felt the butterflies start in my stomach, but this year I will be approaching Conference from a different perspective, one that will allow me to see my conference family in a whole new light. I urge you to do the same; open your hearts and minds, let down your guard (as hard as it may seem) and experience the week, really experience it. Amazing things can happen when you do. I look forward very much to hugging my family, my friends, and the best colleagues on the planet. So whether this is your first or your twenty-first Conference, I hope you will allow yourself to find the extraordinary in the mundane, the irreplaceable in what others dismiss as irrelevant; to have a deeper life experience.

<sup>1</sup> Velden, Dana. *Finding Yourself in the Kitchen*. Rodale. New York. 2015.

### • Marina Pecorino

I was born and raised in north Florida, which unfortunately is not known for its diversity. So, having the chance to experience a convention space filled with piercing industry professionals definitely has a unique impact on me each year at Conference. Seeing so many members of a subculture in close proximity is incredible on its own, but experiencing such a high level of colleague support and strong eagerness for professional growth makes all the difference. As we all prepare for this exciting week of classes, camaraderie, and fun, please take a read through our pre-Conference issue. Julie Taylor and April Thomas have provided some tips for preparing from a business perspective. Frankie Pistone has written some very important things to consider if you are covering at a studio during Conference as well.

As I get ready to embark on my second Grand Summer Adventure and a shift in career directions, I find myself thinking about the role that APP has played in the past several years of my life. I can honestly say that volunteering has forever changed me. The support I've received from my fellow volunteers and colleagues has helped provide me with the confidence to take pro-

fessional risks, from which I've had some incredible experiences. It has been quite a journey to learn that there is a place (or several) for the real "me" in the workforce. In this issue, Stephe Von Hütter Thomas describes a similar sensation during her graduate studies. The people I've met and worked with as a result of Conference and the APP have played a significant role in my professional identity and the course of my work life.

As I prepare to embark on a summer's worth of exploration, culminating in our shared week in Vegas, I reflect on all the professionals I've connected with since my first APP Conference in 2012. Since then, I've witnessed and been a part of industry collaborations at all different levels around the world. As a result, I am finally learning that travel and consistent work are not mutually exclusive.

Conference is a family reunion of sorts. Every year piercers save up, plan, and buzz about seeing all of their industry family. The volunteer family is already buzzing with talks of hugs, coffee runs, nerdy late night puzzling, and Legos. It truly is an amazing week, I can't wait to see my industry family and meet new members of our tribe in just a few short weeks!

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## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

# SALUTATIONS!

**BRIAN SKELLIE**  
APP President



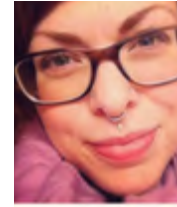
**A**s I eagerly anticipate our next meeting, the gratitude that I feel towards my colleagues in this organization is responsible for a reliable renewal of enthusiasm. The APP mission, presence, and conscientiousness are core to my personal experience, education, and priorities. My purpose remains the same although my responsibilities change after this Conference.

Getting to know the membership better over these years working within the organization and at the helm has been a privilege. By making certain sacrifices and spending a lot of time on the road, I have appreciated real life meetings with quite a few of you. It has been both informative and delightful to visit with you, your studios, and manufacturing facilities.

These days, it is much easier (via the myriad of technological advancements available) to find out more about our colleagues and their work and attitudes. I'm convinced that this friendly professional espionage/stalking following is one of the best things for collegiality in our business. Evermore accessible technology has facilitated a greater sense of familiarization and a willingness to communicate. This development has provided a foundation for friendships and interaction with people who I may have otherwise been more reserved with, and I live with a daily appreciation of how online translation provides access to the world.

Our community seems to be rising, bolstered by social media and a culture of sharing among peers. Access to current information and peer review alongside beautiful examples of our work have created a level of accountability for achieving our goals and is keeping this trade lively. Aptitude and quality are continually improved upon and excellence may be recognized.

Even as I step down from Presidency this summer, we have committed to participate internationally to keep the momentum with fellow trade organizations going. I find it refreshing to see the progress of [LBP](#) and the [UKAPP](#), along with the continuing success of our [Associate Corporate Members](#), [APTPI](#), [ASAP](#), [BMXnet](#) and meetings in Germany, Spain, and France. Let's make this happen!



# CHARLES GATEWOOD REMEMBERED

**KENDRA JANE B.**  
The Point Editor

**C**harles Gatewood, 73, had an indisputable impact on our industry, although he was never a piercer. On Thursday, April 29, 2016 Charles passed away due to complications from a fall on April 8, 2016. According to Betty Gatewood, Charles's sister, the earlier fall from the third floor balcony of his apartment was a "suicide attempt as he had left several notes behind."<sup>1</sup> No matter the cause of his death, the burden of grief is not eased.

In addition to numerous private collections, Charles Gatewood's images have been archived in over a dozen libraries and universities across the United States. The Gatewood Archive is currently curated at the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley, which is now the steward of the lion's share of the Gatewood Archive. Before his death, Charles Gatewood donated his video archive to the Body Piercing Archive. We digitized the first 1/3 of the collection last year, with the remaining 2/3 to be digitally preserved this year.

The Gatewood Archive contains several thousand vintage and modern silver prints, 250,000 slides and negatives, plus contact sheets, proof prints, personal papers, correspondence, over a thousand books, and special collections. The archive also contains three films (including a copy of *Dances Sacred and Profane*) and a selection of prints by other fine art photographers.<sup>2</sup>



In our winter issue, we'll thoroughly explore the incredible impact Charles had on our industry.

---

*"Charles Gatewood, the man known as 'the anthropologist of the forbidden', has been documenting America's sexual underground and alternative subcultures since the 1960s,"*

*"And though his name may not be that familiar to some younger pervs whose knowledge of fetish history is not that broad, the chances are that even these people will instantly recognize some of his best known images... Gatewood's work can be traced back to photographs that appeared in the late '80s ReSearch publication "Modern Primitives," the seminal work on body modification cults and characters, which introduced the original Modern Primitive, San Francisco's Fakir Musafar, to a much wider audience."*

*"Much of the activity that Gatewood documented on the margins of society in the '70s, '80s and early '90s is now part of contemporary youth culture, today, tattooing is commonplace, and pop stars regularly appear in SM-influenced attire. As sexual and body modification practices once seen as radical and taboo become increasingly accepted by the mainstream consciousness, Gatewood's photography can be seen as showing the way."*

—Fetish newsletter, *TheFetishistas*

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<sup>1</sup> New York Times, May 4, 2016 "Charles Gatewood, Photographer of Extremes, Dies at 73," by William Grimes <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B0DEEDF1E31F930A25755C0A961948260>

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia

Gatewood, Charles (1999). *Badlands*. Goliath. ISBN 3980587649.

Gatewood, Charles (1999). *Badlands*. Goliath. p. 17. ISBN 3980587649.

Donohoe, Joe; Lynn Rubenzer (October 2012). "Charles Gatewood: Story of the Eye". *Specious Species (Six)*: 19–30.

Gatewood, Charles (1975). *Sidetriping*. Strawberry Hill Books. ISBN 0891550011





# 4<sup>th</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL

### CONGRESS OF PROFESSIONAL PIERCERS

FROM OCT. 31<sup>st</sup> TO NOV. 4<sup>th</sup> 2016

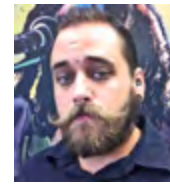
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- Opening party
- Banquet Dinner
- Jewelry Expo pass

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## MEMBER UPDATES

Aaron Pollock  
APP Secretary

**T**he APP has a lot going on this summer, and we want you to join us! Read through for all the latest updates on Conference, Camp APP, raffle updates, and the Members Meeting Notice.

### CONFERENCE 2016 ROOM BLOCK

Attending Conference? Be sure to book in the APP room block at Bally's! Booking within the block allows you to have the option of choosing not to pay the resort fee (which is usually mandatory), and that alone saves you \$30 a day!

Filling the room block benefits the APP's ability to negotiate the spaces and rates we are given in the future for conference spaces and hotel rooms. The APP is able to retain its meeting spaces only when the room block is filled. Please, help us achieve our goal of filling the room block this year!

After a long day and night of socializing, being able to take one elevator back to your room is way better than taking a bus, taxi, or walking numerous blocks back to another hotel. Staying in the host hotel fosters a bigger sense of community at the event and keeps you close to your home base for the week!

Check out the links below to learn more about how to book in the APP room block at Bally's, our host hotel for 2016. The room block closes June 21, so be sure to book today! [APP ROOM BLOCK REGISTRATION](#)

### CONFERENCE 2016 RAFFLE

Do you like raffles that include awesome prizes? Attendees have multiple opportunities to win prizes, with separate raffles being held on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Our Vendors in the past have generously donated prizes with wholesale values from \$50-\$15,000!

Don't wait to buy your tickets at Conference! Purchase in advance through your registration and have the tickets waiting for you when you arrive!

The best gamble in Vegas is waiting for you at Conference 2016! [Register for Conference now!](#)

### MEMBERS MEETING NOTICE

Members Meeting Wednesday July 27th 7-8:30pm

This meeting will cover all current APP business for the membership. Voting members will sign in to deter-

mine if the meeting has met the required quorum. Non-voting members are welcome to attend, as well as one representative from each APP Corporate Sponsor. If you wish to address the board and membership, you may reserve a time slot by emailing [secretary@safepiercing.org](mailto:secretary@safepiercing.org).

There will be a Members Mingle before the meeting, 6:30-7:00pm. Refreshments will be served.

### BODY PIERCING ARCHIVE RAFFLE

The APP and Body Piercing Archive are very excited to announce a charity fundraising auction for which all proceeds will go towards the BPA and their efforts in preserving our industry's history!

Over the past year, beautiful handmade items were meticulously constructed from donated iconic piercing industry t-shirts. Sharon McLaughlin Gowen has generously donated her time in fabricating quilts, backpacks, bags, and Ipad cases for this cause.

The items will be on display and the silent auction will happen at the 2016 APP Conference!

Thank you Sharon and Gene Gowen for making this happen!

### CONFERENCE SITE SURVEY

Every year hundreds of piercers, counter staff, shop owners, and jewelry manufacturers look forward to the Association of Professional Piercers Conference. For the past several years we have met in the desert oasis known as Las Vegas. As we look forward to planning our Conferences for 2019 and beyond we want to hear from you! Please take a few minutes to complete our survey from which we will be able to gather information pertinent to creating and putting on the best Conference possible. Thank you in advance for your time, the APP appreciates your ideas and opinions. [TAKE THE SURVEY HERE.](#)

### CAMP APP 2016

Join us for CAMP APP 2016!

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual CAMP APP will be held OCT 11-15 at Hard Labor Creek State Park in beautiful Rutledge, GA

We hope you will join us for a week of fun, learning, and excitement at our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Members Retreat.





# THE MENTOR PROGRAM & CONFERENCE SURVIVAL TIPS

**CALE BELFORD**  
*The Mentor Team*

**W**hat is the mentor program? It is a fantastic outreach system started by Ryan Ouellette in 2009. His dream was to essentially build small conference families that could work together as a group and lean on each other for support. We have seen incredible progress and have had wonderful feedback when it comes to the program. We look forward to continuing this process for years to come.

Our mentors are well-rounded, experienced conference goers who want to ensure that the new attendees at Conference have an outstanding time. The mentor team acts to pair mentors and mentees based on similar interests, areas of knowledge, and class schedule needs. We use information built from a survey sent out during registration. These small groups consisting of a mentor and three to four mentees will help to assist and encourage each other and provide a positive and enriching Conference experience. Mentors are available to support mentees; providing reassurance if they feel overwhelmed, giving assistance with class and event schedules, or to simply give advice on where to find the tastiest tacos or a delicious vegan donut. Don't be afraid to take full advantage of this opportunity!

Do you plan on attending Conference for the first time? Do you have questions that you would like to have answered, need help selecting your classes, or would you simply like to have a friend before arriving in Vegas? The APP Mentor Program is here to help!

If you are a first or second year attendee and would like assistance from a mentor chosen specifically for you, please email [mentor@safepiercing.org](mailto:mentor@safepiercing.org) with MENTEE in the subject line. Be sure to include your name, telephone number, and other contact information in the email. There is technically no deadline for signup, but the earlier you enroll the more you will get out of the program! We are thrilled that you have decided to come to Conference this year and we are all waiting to meet you.

We genuinely want each and every one of our new attendees to get the most out of their conference experience and hope that the mentor program helps to make this possible. If you have any questions about the mentor program, becoming a mentor, or being a mentee at

Conference, please do not hesitate to contact anyone on the Mentor Team. This year's Mentor Team includes Ash Misako, Billy Wood, Chris Theis, and Cale Belford. They as well as all of our mentors can be easily identified at Conference by their Mentor Ribbons.

Part of being a mentor means that we want to ensure you are prepared and set up for success before arriving in Vegas. It's natural to get caught up in the excitement of going to Vegas making it easy to forget even the most basic necessities. Las Vegas is a lot like the Bermuda Triangle, with all the activity and controlled chaos, it can be easy to lose track of things. So basically, if it will break your heart to lose it, leave it at home!

However, if there are a few small creature comforts from home you need to make your day a little easier or brighter, especially things you don't feel comfortable borrowing or may be difficult to find, then bring it. The hotel will provide you with towels, soap, shampoo and conditioner, even an ironing board and hair dryer. Most of the time you can find other items in shops around the hotel, but they will be limited and expensive. If you are particular, don't forget them.

You shouldn't bring every credit card you have, but unexpected things may happen and it's best to be prepared. Always keep your emergency funds separate from your spending funds.

When it comes to clothing, be sure to bring enough outfits to last you a little longer than your stay. You will be experiencing long days with many different activities and some people find it comfortable to change throughout the day. You may also want to wear different clothing to your activities, classes, meet-ups, special events, etc. And don't forget, accidents happen, so it's never a bad idea to have a spare shirt or pair of pants just in case. The classrooms and the hotel can get a little chilly, so you will want a sweater to make sure you are comfortable! If you enjoy dressing up for the Banquet dinner, special events, or just in general, make sure to bring your accessories. You will likely also want to look your best while enjoying the pool and hot tubs! Don't forget about the opening party, which takes place this year at the Bally's pool.

There may be times when you want relief from your

nice shoes. We suggest bringing multiple pairs. You will track a lot of miles in Vegas!

Even if you don't normally use lotions and moisturizers you will very likely need them in Vegas. It's dry in the desert and even drier in the hotel. Battling dry lips in a dry climate can be even more challenging. Bring as much chap stick as you can. If you will be laying by the pool or leaving the hotel, sunscreen will save you from a nasty sunburn. Even if you only go in the sun for a few minutes, apply sunscreen! Las Vegas is no joke during the month of July!

Pain relievers, allergy pills, and the like can make a world of difference when you need it most. Make sure to bring enough to last you through your stay and a few extra days just in case. Taking vitamins in advance of arriving will improve your chances of staying healthy so don't delay.

Things in Las Vegas can be expensive and eating between classes, events, and socializing isn't always easy to fit in your schedule. Having a supply of on-the-go snacks that don't require a fridge or preparation can make your week less stressed. There are some grocery stores around to help you stock up for your stay if needed.

Especially during this week of networking, it is important to stay connected. Having a copy of your portfolio

ready to go on your phone or laptop can make a lasting impression while networking. With all this networking don't be surprised if your battery needs more charging than normal. So ensuring you have chargers for all of your electronic devices is mandatory. It's also a good idea to have a stack of business cards at the ready. We all know technology isn't always there when we need it, so in case of an emergency or if you misplace your phone, keeping some contacts in your wallet can be a lifesaver.

By downloading the 2016 Conference app you will be able to check out your schedule, find where you are going, and to get any last minute updates.

Always have water with you! Remember that Las Vegas is a desert. Staying hydrated is not only important, but is a key to having a good experience. Awesome APP water bottles are available for purchase at the merchandise booth. There are also water dispensers provided throughout the conference area so feel free to use them!

The APP Board of Directors and Administrator, along with the Conference Staff, Volunteers and Mentors all want you to have an exceptional experience. If there are any questions we can answer or concerns that should be addressed, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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# AN INTERVIEW WITH GUS DIAMOND

**MATTE ERICKSON**  
*The Body Piercing Archive*



The Body Piercing Archive presents a new series of informal interviews with some of the most interesting people in the body piercing community. Often the importance of the spoken word and the stories handed down from one generation to another is forgotten. We hope you enjoy this lighthearted (sometimes [pierced] tongue-in-cheek) insight into our industry's history.

Our first interview is with Gus Diamond, a piercer, cigar smoker, long-time supporter of the APP, Super Volunteer, and most importantly a pirate. Gus is also a member of a very exclusive club that many people don't even know exists; he has attended all 20 Conferences (this year will be 21) that the APP has held. A larger than life personality, yet, humble beyond measure. Some just know him as Gus. Others know him as Funky Gus. Some, only know him as Smee. A few of us still remember he was the one that pierced Britney Spears's navel back in 2000. So without further ado....

**BPA:** How long have you been around piercing? What is your history?

**Gus:** The first non-ear piercing [was] in '89; I got my nipple pierced while in Navy Deep Sea Dive school (because divers pierced their nipples and "dicks"). When I started piercing

I was a hack piercer (from '90-'93) and opened my first shop in '94. I opened Paragon in '95 and sold it in '01 before leaving Hawaii.

**BPA:** Who has most influenced you over your body piercing career?

**Gus:** Allen Falkner, him and I were friends before piercing.

**BPA:** You are part of an elite group of people that has attended all 20 Conferences. What were the first conferences like?

**Gus:** It was amazing being in the same room with so many people that wanted to make our industry better.

**BPA:** What are a few of your favorite Conference memories?

**Gus:** There are too many to list, but if I had to narrow it down, it would be the first few Conferences in '96-'98, the chance to meet so many like-minded people for the first time, it is unforgettable.

**BPA:** When did you start volunteering at Conference and how did that affect your viewpoint on the experience?

**Gus:** 2003 was my first year volunteering. I feel everyone should do it at least one year.

**BPA:** Where do you see Conference in another 20 years?

**Gus:** In Las Vegas

**BPA:** Many of us know that in your spare time you are a pirate. Why a pirate, say instead of a buccaneer?

**Gus:** I'll be a Pirate, Buccaneer, or Privateer whatever pays the most... :)

**BPA:** What keeps you busy now that you no longer pierce?

**Gus:** I am a video editor, but am still looking for a quality shop to help and work with in my area.

**BPA:** Who have been your role models over your involvement in the piercing industry?

**Gus:** Allen Falkner, Pat Pruitt, and Steve Joyner just to name a few.

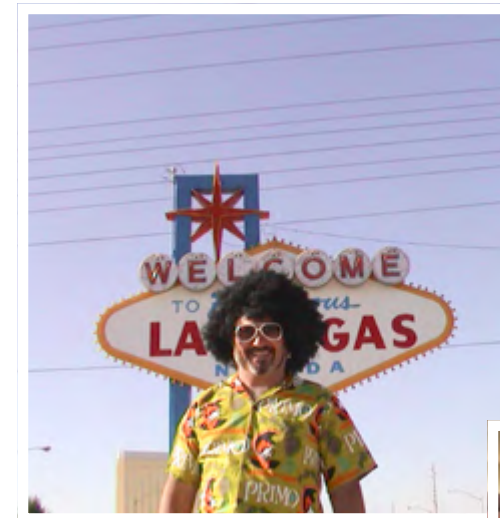
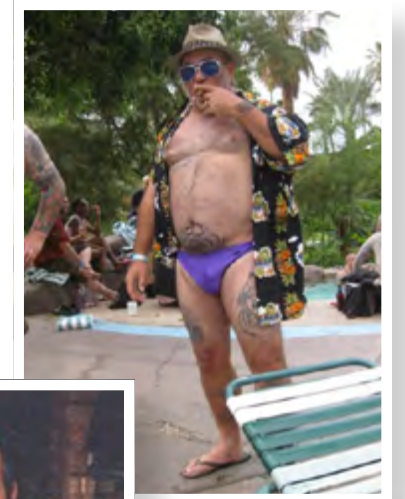
**BPA:** If you could pass on one piece of advice, what would it be?

**Gus:** Save it while you can; some day you may not be making it like you did.

**BPA:** Puppies or kittens?

**Gus:** Kittens.

We hope you enjoyed this quick insight into one of the friendliest faces at Conference, Gus Diamond. Ask him to share a great story from Conferences past when you see him in July; he has lots. We hope you look forward to our future interviews in *The Point*. If there is someone specific you would like to see us interview please email us at [archive@safepiercing.org](mailto:archive@safepiercing.org).







# PREPARING YOUR STUDIO FOR CONFERENCE

**JULIE TAYLOR & APRIL THOMAS**  
*Outreach Committee*



**If most of your staff is going to Conference it could be a time to close the studio and give your tattoo artists a week off.**

Conference for a week, it is best to take stock of how this will affect your studio as soon as possible. The sooner you do this the sooner you put into place a plan for while you are away.

There are a variety of approaches to determining what will work best in each studio. Communicating with your entire team and making a plan in advance can reduce your anxiety about what is happening in your studio while you're enjoying your time at Conference.

If most of your staff is going to Conference it could be a time to close the studio and give your tattoo artists a week off. If your entire staff is away, you might consider hiring someone who can answer basic questions and book appointments for you.

It could also be a time to have a guest piercer come into assist your clients while you're away. If you are not the studio owner, offering to fill the spot with another piercer could be greatly appreciated. APP Member Woodstock Bader, owner/piercer of Crow's Nest Tattoo, says, "quite simply, we find a piercer we trust to live in our house and [work] at the shop." Woodstock offers this piercer a guaranteed minimum to ensure they will make money while they cover for him.

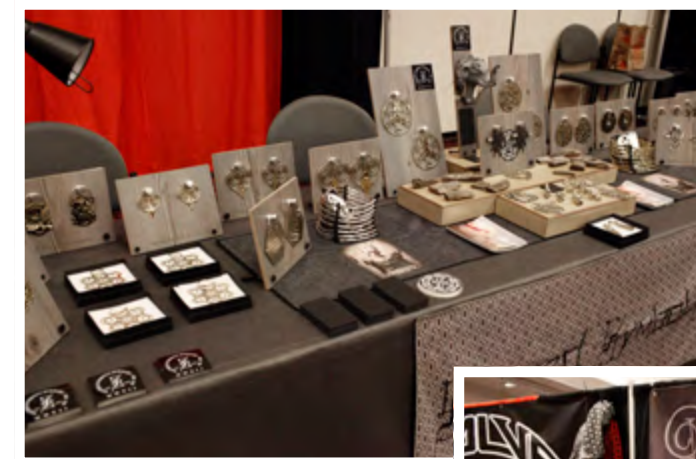
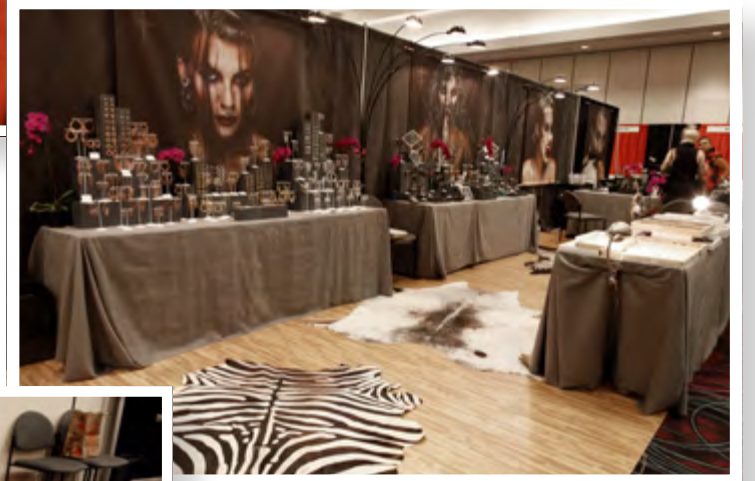
Use your social media and email contacts to let your clients know about Conference. Get them excited about your trip, so although they

**I**f you or other piercers in your studio are going to be at

will miss you when you're gone, they know you will return full of inspiration and knowledge, and in turn they will even support you being gone. APP Member Brian Fowler, owner/piercer of Brand X Piercing, says he lets people know that he will be away for months in advance online as well as when they come in to get pierced. He says that those who stop by when he is away "receive a fancy coupon to entice them to come back."

If you regularly answer your studio's emails or other messages, have someone else take this task over, even if they have to refer some questions and troubleshooting to you. Vegas is not the best environment for replying to clients in a timely fashion. Pat Pierce, owner/piercer at Mauve, says he creates an email out-of-office message which "responds to anybody that emails me, stating that I am away with the dates that I am gone, what I am away for, when I will return, and that the reception staff are available." Pat will also try to look through his messages as time permits so that he is able to respond to any urgent client concerns.

An invaluable way to ensure that your clientele appreciate your absence, is to promote the jewelry you will be returning with. Take special orders for any vendors you only shop with while at Conference. Once you return with your goodies, plan to do things like organize a trunk show and/or update displays to show off the year's new releases and designs. This is a great way to showcase the designs that may be unique or new to your studio. There's nothing like sharing your post-Conference glow with your favourite clients!



**Vegas is not the best environment for replying to clients in a timely fashion.**



OUR 2016 APP CONFERENCE EXHIBITION!

# THE SAILOR SID ARCHIVE

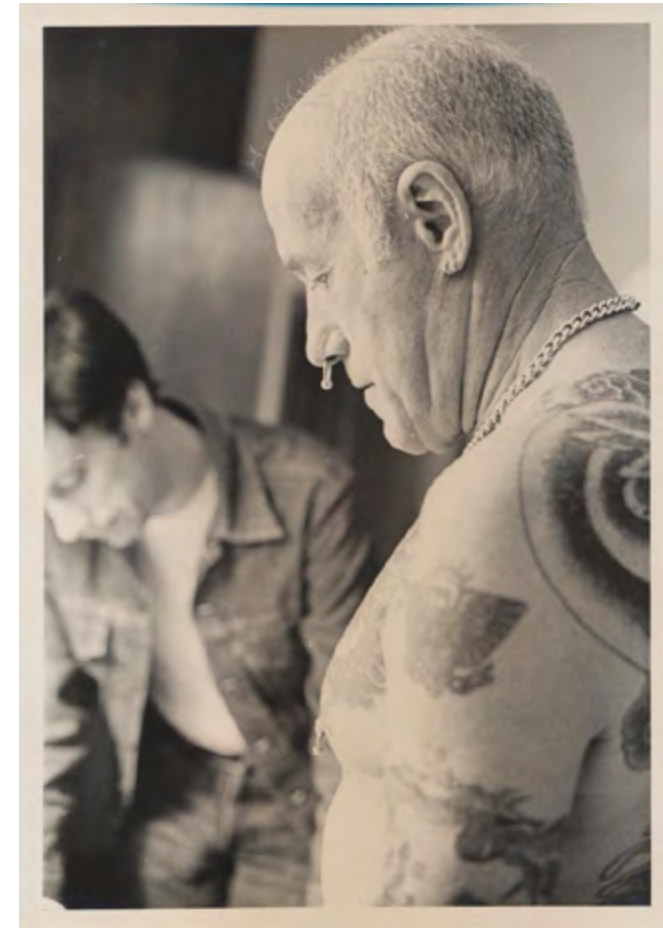
PRESENTED BY THE APP BODY PIERCING ARCHIVE  
& THE LEATHER ARCHIVE & MUSEUM



The Leather Archives and Museum will curate the Sailor Sid Archive. LA&M's archivists/collections librarian, Jakob VanLammeren, will host and give tours of this exhibition. Come check out the fragile history that YOUR contributions helped to save!

Besides Sid, the collection includes images of some of our greatest piercing pioneers such as Fakir Musafar, Mr. Sebastian, Jim Ward, Doug Malloy, Ethel Granger, and more! You'll be amazed to see the sometimes innovative and sometime ghastly, well-documented piercing procedures! Please visit the Body Piercing Archive in Bronze 4.

Tuesday 10:00-6:30 pm  
Wednesday 10:00-6:00 pm  
Thursday 9:00-5:00 pm



## LEATHER ARCHIVES & MUSEUM LAUNCHES SAILOR SID DILLER DIGITAL COLLECTION ONLINE



[View the Digital Collection](#)



When Sailor Sid passed away in 1990, his piercing collection—personal papers and effects related to his piercing career—was entrusted to Jim Ward, founder of the original piercing studio Gauntlet. Ward donated the collection to LA&M in 1997, where it has remained in climate-controlled storage ever since, largely inaccessible due to lack of processing resources.

Thanks to a large community response to a 2015 [crowdfunding campaign](#) and a generous contribution from the [Association of Professional Piercers](#) this amazing collection is now easily accessible to adults around the world.





# GUEST SPOT ETIQUETTE

**FRANKIE PISTONE**  
*Self-Employed Piercer*

The opportunity to guest spot is a great way to learn and grow as an industry professional. Spending time behind the scenes in studios away from your own home studio allows you to get a first-hand view of how other reputable shops operate day-to-day, as well as how other artists apply their knowledge and skills. It's also a great way to be exposed to a broader range of personalities while learning about piercing in varying geographical areas with a differing client base.

Of course, one of the main goals while guest spotting is to always be respectful and accommodating to your hosts, the clients, and other employees at the studio. It is important to keep in mind that the routines in the studio you are visiting may be different from what you're used to; do your best to follow existing policies and procedures. You should make sure that your tools are consistently and correctly processed and your room is kept stocked. It is important to show up early, focused, fed, and ready for the day. The way you carry yourself and the work



Also, if you have any stipulations regarding pay rates, or commissions, guarantees, lodging, tips, special accommodations, travel, transportation, etc., it's best to discuss everything pertaining to your guest spot before you decide to accept the position. Do what you can to make sure there is no confusion surrounding any of the details for your guest spot. Outlining everything in advance is a good idea. However, shared written documentation between you and the studio you are visiting will help clarify expectations and avoid miscommunications.

For those artists covering for a conference attendee during the week of *APP Conference and Exposition*, don't be sad that you're missing out; think of guest spotting as an equally valuable learning experience. This exercise in versatility can be a very helpful trait to have, it is a great chance to test your ability to adapt to new environments, techniques, and people.

**... it's best to discuss everything pertaining to your guest spot before you decide to accept the position.**

spot your best and appreciate the opportunity you have been given.

Being open and flexible with different piercing techniques can be an essential attribute when guest piercing. Every studio will have different techniques and some of the tools you normally use may not be readily available for you, so it is important that if there's an item or tool you can't live without, you are prepared by bringing it with you.

Of course, one of the main goals while guest spotting is to always be respectful and accommodating to your hosts, the clients, and other employees at the studio.







# NOSTRIL PIERCING TECHNIQUES PART 1: Clamped Nostril Piercings

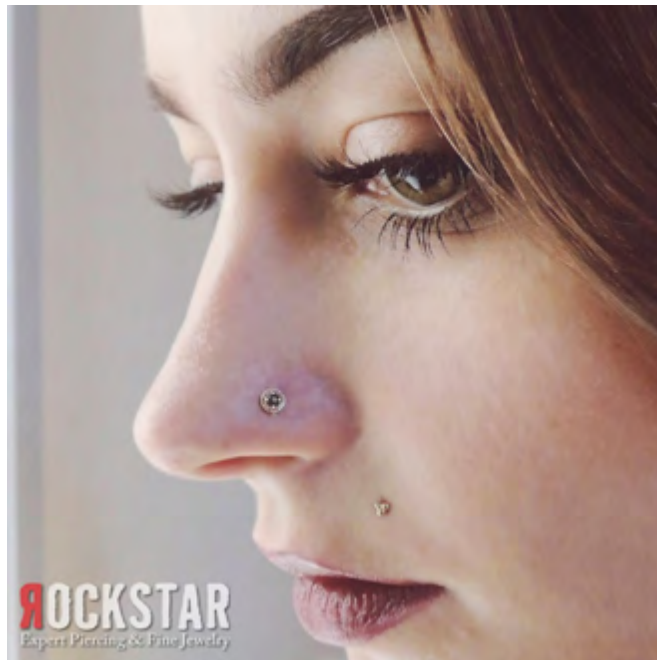
**JEF SAUNDERS**

*Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from an October 29, 2014 [blog post](#) on [Confessions of a Piercing Nerd](#).*

**A**fter the Nostril Piercing: Advanced Fundamentals class (which I had the pleasure of teaching with the incomparable Alicia Cardenas) at the 2014 Association of Professional Piercers Conference my friend "Tall" Gary Vargas came up to me and said, "10 years in the industry. This is my first conference. I come to see your class ...and you tell me to clamp a nostril".

Frankly, I understand where Gary is coming from and I imagine this sentiment was not rare within the ranks of our more than 200(!) attendees. Clamping nostrils isn't just abnormal, it's downright passé.

The piercing industry has a love/hate relationship with tools in general. I actually run a piercing studio that disposes of every tool we use, which means I am always looking for opportunities to safely eliminate tool usage. Still, I really like tools. I like things that make my job easier. Piercers sometimes forget that tools are not the devil. At the end of the day our clients are much happier

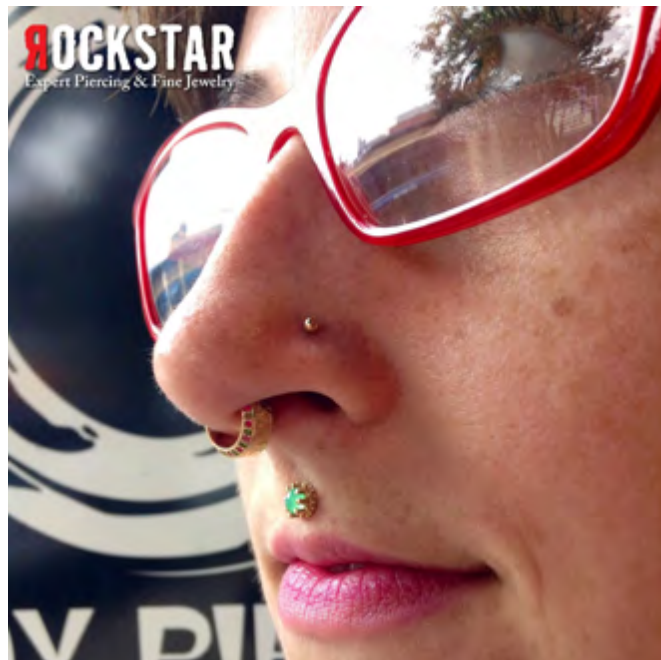


with well placed piercings that heal well than they are with innovative piercing techniques that impress other piercers.

I have established from my previous entries that (by and large) we as piercers are attempting to make piercings that enter and exit perpendicular to the the nostril. The most simple and effective way to make this happen is by clamping the nostril. This isn't just because clamps are exceptionally good at delivering perpendicular piercings, but also because needle receiver tubes and freehand techniques can make it much harder than necessary. To put it another way: clamping can make nostril piercings (nearly) idiot proof.

The rigid stiffness of the outside of the nostril means that when you place a clamp on, it is unlikely to distort the tissue (on the visible part of the nose). Since the clamp applies pressure on the inside and outside of the nostril equally, we have a very strong indication of how to pierce perpendicular to the tissue. Try placing a clamp on your own nostril crooked. Not only will you find it nearly impossible to do so, you'll also see that if you manage to get a clamp on your nose crooked, it hurts. A lot. Your client will let you know if you've got the clamp on wrong, I promise.

Clamping also eliminates a problem that receiver tubes create. Receiver tubes only support the inside of the nose. What many piercers do is push too hard on the receiver tube, pushing the nostril out of it's natural position. This distorts our view of of what perpendicular



truly is, and makes it significantly more challenging to get our x and y axes right.

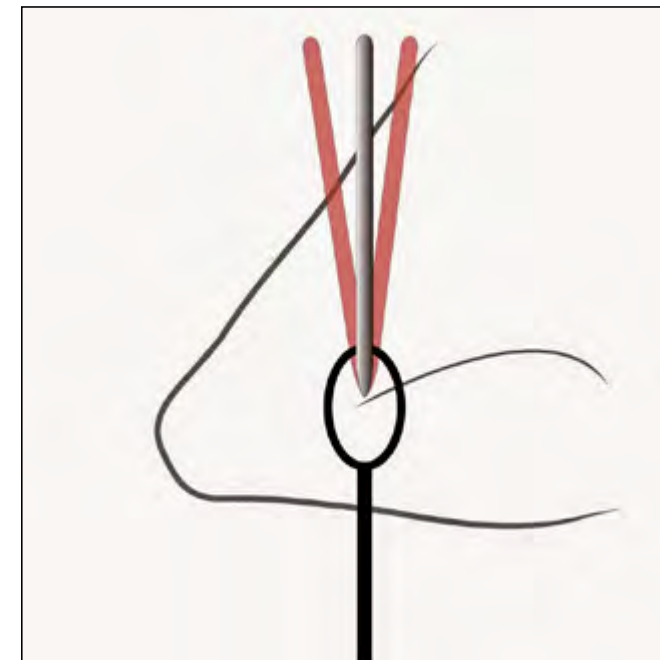
I mentioned before that the outside of a nostril is rigid, and unlikely to be distorted. That isn't true of the inside of the nostril. The inside of the nostril is soft, delicate tissue. Having anything up the nose can cause your client discomfort. That's why, when placing a clamp on the nostril, I gently place the clamp on the inside first. After I have established a comfortable place for the clamp to sit on the inside of the nostril, I gently apply pressure with the other side of the clamp.

### VISUAL CUES

One of the best aspects of using clamps for nostrils is they give us visual cues as to 90 degrees. When we line up a needle in a clamp, we can see it line up with the handle of the clamp. This lets us know if we are wildly off of perpendicular (needle drift because of needle bevel should still to be accommodated for).

We can also visualize our X axis by looking for 90 degrees from the side of the clamp. Yes, you should be able to do that without the clamp... but the clamp takes the guess work out.

Finally, the clamp provides a visual cue for itself. What I mean by that, is when you see the visible jaw of the clamp on the outside of the nose, you can visualize (in yer noggin) what the jaw on the inside of the nose looks like. On all but the widest nostrils, you are piercing where you are not able to see, so having all of these visual cues really adds up.



The clamp provides a line to measure against.

### A BRIEF DISCUSSION ABOUT CLAMPS

Body piercing clamps evolved from sponge forceps and many piercers (myself included) have trouble not referring to them by their "original" names. For the purpose of separating our modified versions of these sponge forceps, I will not call our clamps by their sponge forceps names; Donnington or Pennington or Foerster. (But I'll be thinking it!)

As for choosing a clamp style, I prefer the smallest I can get my hands on. Mini-oval jawed clamps are great. Mini-triangular jawed can work as well, although you will want to make sure not to poke your client with the edge. Unfortunately disposable clamp technology hasn't yet achieved very small jawed disposable models, but I am confident those are on the way. Disposable models tend to be built on the "tweezer" model instead of the hinged models we know by using metal clamps. I don't mind either, so long as I feel like I have control over the pressure I am placing on the nostril.

### SLOTTED CLAMPS?

When I saw slotted piercing clamps introduced, I was skeptical of their effectiveness. If we are using a clamp to provide support, cutting a big chunk of that support out didn't make a ton of sense to me. I also didn't like the edges on slotted clamps. Over time, my stance against them has mellowed. Most disposable options are only available slotted, which meant I had to learn to use them. Now that I have experience with them, I'd say my initial concerns were overblown, to an extent. I still prefer non-slotted options, but I feel comfortable with either option being effective.



The clamp allows us to visualize perpendicular easier.



## PERFORMING THE PIERCING

At this point, I am ready to execute the piercing. There are two schools of thought when it comes to preparing to pierce. Some piercers “hover” their needle above the dot they are about to pierce through, while others place the needle on the mark and let their client get used to the sensation of the needle against their skin. I am in the latter category, and you will notice in my tutorial videos I am not shy about setting the needle against the skin for some time before I proceed with the piercing. I don’t think there is a right or wrong approach, honestly. It comes down to the comfort level of the practitioner. I do think the hover method is better for more experienced piercers.

Before performing the piercing, you need to make sure the needle will not go through the nostril and right into the septum. If you did that, it would not be the end of the world; although it probably won’t feel good and will result in some unnecessary bleeding. We are in the business of keeping clients, after all, so let’s take steps to prevent doing that. I suggest holding the needle with a thumb and middle finger about ¼ to ⅝<sup>ths</sup> of an inch from the end of the bevel of the needle, while supporting the back of the needle with the index finger. This way, when your thumb and index finger hit the clamp, the needle has traveled the average length of your jewelry plus the length of the bevel, which is enough for the needle to exit the skin but not so much that the needle pokes the septum. Obviously, your client’s nose will determine exactly how far you can push without hitting their septum. Hold your needle accordingly.

Once the needle bevel has completely come out the exit side, then and only then can you change angles and get the needle out of the nasal cavity. After this, you can safely insert the jewelry of your client’s choice.

### THE AUTO-CORRECTING MECHANISM

I really can’t go a blog entry without mentioning Fakir Musafar, mostly because these principles I am writing about originated with my training at the Fakir Intensives. I’d love to say I came up with most of this, but I didn’t. Fakir Musafar and Course Administrator Ken Coyote are to thank for most of my understanding of body piercing.

In the Fakir Basic class, Fakir introduces the concept of the “Auto-Correcting Mechanism”. This is a trick your brain plays on your hand-eye coordination to make you hit what you want to hit. Fakir learned this by doing trick shooting. You don’t look at your gun, you look at your target. Your brain will auto-correct and help you hit the target (with practice, of course).

What this means is, when I pierce I first set my needle on the tissue that I am piercing. Then make sure my bevel orientation is correct (and that I am using the cutting surface of the needle). Once I have that side of the clamp set, I can divert all of my attention to the exit side of the piercing. My auto-correcting mechanism will make sure I do not pierce at a strange angle. I will focus on the exit and I will hit it, over and over and over again. I suggest practicing this technique a lot on a piece of foam board or silicone. Once you have established confidence with the auto-correcting mechanism, then you can use it to assist you in piercing your client.

If I cannot see inside the nostril (even while wearing my trusty headlamp), I make sure I am visualizing the clamp on the inside of the nose. I know where I want the needle to exit, in reference to the perfect exit position in the clamp. I concentrate on that spot and pierce smoothly right at the spot. I will always hit it, and you will too.

At that point, it is easy to insert jewelry, clean your client, and proceed with the rest of your day. One more perfect piercing leaves your studio and the world is a better place for it. Have you wowed piercers on the internet? No. Have you wowed your client? Yes. And that’s what’s important here.

*This video* is an example of a clamped nostril piercing using a *Snaptile* disposable clamp. The insertion is performed using sterile needle blanks (19 gauge and 26 gauge) from *Industrial Strength, LLC*. The jewelry is an 18 gauge ⅝” Neometal flatback with a 2.5mm moonstone end.

Clamped nostrils are not a step backward as a piercer. Often times, stepping outside of your comfort zone (safely) will only improve your usual piercing routine. Good piercers routinely challenge themselves with new techniques or revisiting old ones. Ken Coyote suggests you try a new technique 25 times. After applying “the rule of 25”, you should have enough experience to really form an opinion on the technique. When clamping nostrils, the first few tries will seem foreign. The few after that, you’ll start to see how clamping tissue like this provides tremendous tissue support and visual cues. After that, well, you will be able to decide if clamped nostril technique is really for you... Or if I am totally crazy.

I hope you enjoy this first technique installment. In subsequent blog entries I will discuss receiver tube and freehand techniques.

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## RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

*An Intimate History of the Modern Body Piercing Movement by Jim Ward*

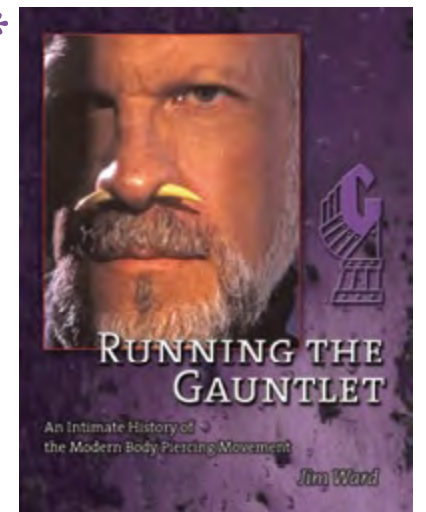
In this revealing autobiography, Jim Ward, considered by many to be the father of the modern piercing industry, tells the engaging and candid story of discovering his own fascination with body piercing, his founding of Gauntlet, the world’s first body piercing studio, and how he transformed a personal fetish and backroom, amateur pursuit into a respected profession and spearheaded a world-wide social phenomenon.

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“Essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how modern body piercing arrived at the place it currently occupies.”

JAMES WEBER, Former President  
Association of Professional Piercers



# AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE STRETCHED EARLOBE PIERCING AS SITE

by Paul King



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express appreciation for the guidance from Matthew Kennedy, Joshua Craze, Laurence Cohen, Arpita Roy, and Justin Underhill. He offers his deepest gratitude to the research participants for their generosity of time and trust.

## ABSTRACT

“Sweet Gauges!” is an ethnography of the stretched earlobe piercing as a site of investigation. Often, social scientists attempt to assign “fixed identities.” These are inscribed onto individuals within designated social groups in a way that seeks to support the scientists’ theoretical claims. Research of body modification practices often inductively simplifies an entire range of corporeal processes into an over-generalized in-group signifier. I wish to elucidate a more comprehensive perspective of the individual from a more focused site of the body. What are the ideas that stretched earlobes communicate about one’s identity? How successful are these transmissions within and outside one’s social groups? Most importantly, how do intended communications and their corresponding interpretations change over time? This paper explores the subtleties and the complexities of the changing significations of stretched earlobe piercing for individuals, especially when positioned with self-identified social groups, authority figures, and random strangers. It finds that over time individuals with stretched ears transition through various and sometimes overlapping social roles and social groups. In-depth interviews revealed varied and complex experiences with unique insights into understandings of selfhood, agency, sexuality, ethnicity, and age, many of which are divergent from categorical tropes of “self-mutilation.”

**Keywords:** body piercing, stretched earlobes, enlarged earlobes, gauged earlobes, gauges, body modification, modern primitives, earlobe piercing, ear piercing, body art.

## THE STRETCHED EARLOBE PIERCING AS SITE

Since the early 1990s, the phrase ‘body piercing’ has become widely known in Western popular culture. This term encompasses all forms of the mechanical process of perforating the skin’s surface to install jewelry. However, among people living in the United States, the earlobe is a unique piercing site. An examination of the history of pierced earlobes in the U.S. reveals it as a corporeal site embodied with changing ideas about naturalness, privilege, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

Since the 1990s, there has been a significant increase in the stretching of earlobe piercings. The physiology of an enlarged earlobe piercing resists seasonal fashion trends and behavioral normative shifts. Unlike the immediacy of piercing, sustained stretching cannot be impulsive. Stretching requires an enduring commitment of time, care, and often finances. Usually this process takes years to reach the exceptionally large sizes, those that allow for gazing through the earlobe.<sup>1</sup> With the larger stretched earlobes, to change one’s mind and reverse the process requires expensive surgery.

Often, social scientists attempt to assign “fixed identities.” These are inscribed onto individuals within designated social groups in a way that seeks to support the scientists’ theoretical claims. With few exceptions, social science research inductively simplifies an entire range of corporeal processes into an over-generalized, in-group signifier. However, from a diachronic perspective, individuals with stretched ears transition through various and sometimes overlapping social roles and social groups.

I interviewed 16 people for this paper. In total, I collected approximately 60 pages of transcript, which spanned 30 hours of conversation. I talked to friends, colleagues, and strangers. This sample includes diverse ethnicities from a spectrum of young and old, males, females, and one self-identified sexually indeterminate individual.

From a more focused site of the body, I wish to elucidate a more comprehensive perspective of the individual by asking several questions: What are the ideas that stretched earlobes communicate about one’s identity? How successful are these transmissions within and outside one’s social groups? Most importantly, how do intended communications and their corresponding interpretations change over time? This paper explores the

subtleties and complexities of the changing significations of the stretched earlobe piercing for individuals when positioned with self-identified social groups, authority figures, and random strangers.

## THE AMERICAN PIERCED EARLOBE

*This research emphasizes the variable of time.* Symbolic meanings shift with time. To gain an understanding of the significance of the stretched earlobe piercing as a symbol for an individual, for an intended audience, and for an unintended audience, the symbol and the individual must be considered together within the historical context of relevant social norms of ear piercing, status, gender, and sexuality.

Today, for a vast majority of Americans, females with pierced ears are acceptable. Data vary widely; however, somewhere up to 80% of adult American females have had their ears pierced (Laumann et al., 2006). Since 1974, Inverness’ piercing stud guns have pierced 400 million earlobes (“Customer Service FAQs,” 2012). Inverness is just one of several major piercing gun manufacturers. Their statistics provide a sense of the prevalence of earlobe piercing today.

However, the “normal” pierced earlobe has been subject to cycles of fluctuating acceptance. The most significant shift of social norms for pierced ears in the last 100 years began a few days prior to

**“I started stretching in 2003–2004. It mirrors like when I got my ears pierced when I was 15; it was something I saw happening, something I thought was attractive, and something I wanted to be a part of.”**

June 2, 1953. Queen Elizabeth II had her ears pierced to wear the heirloom regalia during her coronation. This highly publicized affair was seminal in changing public opinion (Wruck, 1980, p. 193). In 1957, *Life* magazine ran an article on the new fad of ear piercing that had spread to America from the United Kingdom. Prior to this, females with earlobe piercings were negatively viewed through the prevailing dominant social norms as low class, sexually promiscuous, non-white, and foreign (Wruck, p. 84–90). However, by the 1960s, mainstream magazines such as *Time*, *ABCs of Beauty*, *Ladies’ Circle*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Glamour* enthusiastically encouraged women and girls to pierce their earlobes (Wruck, p. 192).

For Becky and Morgan, pierced ears signaled to the world that they were females. Neither of these two women knows each other, although both share a strikingly similar childhood story. At the age of nine (for Becky in 1994, and for Morgan in 1983), they experienced responses of gender confusion from strangers. They had

<sup>1</sup> [Download](#) Chart 1 for a categorization of stretched earlobe sizes.

**SWEET GAUGES!**





received short haircuts, preferred to wear pants, and had not yet developed the secondary sexual characteristics of puberty. Morgan's gender-ambiguous first name added to strangers' confusion. Both of their mothers decided having the young girls' ears pierced would clarify for all that their children were not little boys. For Morgan, the piercing was a sweet victory. Morgan had wanted to get her ears pierced previously, but her mom had forbidden it until she was in high school. For Morgan's family, the social pressure to have their child accurately and clearly signal gender normalcy took priority over their values and ideas of age appropriateness for this feminine, sensuous display. For Becky, the experience was somewhat traumatic: "I screamed and cried; the experience was awful... I didn't want to do it and was pushed into it."

For males, historical trends of acceptability and meaning have been markedly different. Dr. Samuel Steward (1990), author and professor-turned-tattooist, reports of only thugs and sailors with pierced ears, as well the subsection of homosexual men who fetishized and emulated these hyper-masculine males. Following the 1953 release of *The Wild One*, starring Marlon Brando, Steward marks a noticeable increase in homosexual men requesting tattoos

while wearing biker leather and a single earring (p. 92). During the 1960s, the incidence of males with pierced earlobes increased in marginalized groups such as homosexuals and bikers. However, in actual numbers, male earlobe piercing remained rare.

The initial challenges to the popular culture and the dominant social structures which defined the 1960s, strengthened and spread in the 1970s. The mainstream media started to take notice of males with pierced earlobes in the Gay liberation and Punk Rock movements. During the 1960s, East Coast Gays and West Coast Gays had opposite in-group signifiers for dominant and passive roles within sexual relations. Accessories such as bandanas, keys, and earrings worn on the left or right could mean a "top" or a "bottom" sexual role preference depending on locality. By the mid-1970s, most American Gay males agreed that a right ear piercing signified you were publicly "out." Some in the straight world started to say: "Left is right, right is wrong." By the early 1980s, males started to pierce both earlobes. This remained risky. A single lobe piercing on the "wrong" side, might be interpreted as "Gay," but having both ears pierced violated widely entrenched gendered visual cues. With the growing occurrence among high profile music and sport celebrities in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, a more general acceptance gradually built for both or either male lobes being pierced. Jody tells of his experience:

It was my 15th birthday; I had my left ear pierced, in the mall at Spenser's gifts, with a gun. It was a gold stud in my left ear. This was the mid to late 80s [1988]. At that time, it was very important that I got my ear pierced because it was

what my peers were doing, but it wasn't peer pressure. It was a popular mythology that if you got your left ear pierced you'd not be seen as a homosexual. My dad had his left ear pierced. My desire to have it done was more a reflection of the male kids I was hanging with and male celebrities like George Michaels and Prince. I had both ears pierced by like 3 years later; it was the early 90s. The right ear was definitely after I moved out of the house, after turning 18. It was a statement for me, part of my coming out process, and certainly from that it was how I expressed my sexuality, because I knew I'd be identified as gay.

Jody's story implies a more personal definition of peer pressure, which probably is similar to coercion. However, social norms and role models clearly influence his choices.

When the earlobe piercing is contextualized with personal experiences and historical writings, broader understandings begin to take shape. The sociologist Victoria Pitts (2003) has recognized that "instead of one truth of the body or of ontology, there are competing truths that are productions of time, place, space, geography, and culture" (p. 28).

#### EXPANDING HOLES

Stretching is the most common method for the enlargement of the healed channel of scar tissue or fistula known as a "piercing." Stretching is a gradual process. Depending on the method, the tissue's condition, and the individual's preference, stretching up one size in the established category can take seconds or days.<sup>2</sup> Allowing for the ear piercing to heal and produce more skin cells generally takes several months. It can take many months, or even years, to get to a size that registers with an on-

looker's gaze as outside of the ordinary.<sup>3</sup> Drawing from Roy Baumeister's and P.L. Callero's earlier works, the sociologist Lisiunia Romanienko (2011) distinguishes piercings that are exposed and readily available to the public gaze, such as the enlarged earlobe, as a "public self-symbolizer." The individual with a public self-symbolizing piercing asserts self-autonomy of his or her body while simultaneously opening oneself to unpredictable visual, verbal, and sometimes physical responses of approval or disapproval from others. In contrast, piercings as "private symbols" are covered by clothing, which allows the pierced individual some control in selecting who may know of and when another may gaze at the piercing (Romanienko, 2011, p. 5). My interview with Brian illustrates the dichotomy of private versus public self-symbolizers:

I pierced my lobes when I was 17 [1991], but they were not my first piercings...I'd seen magazines of tribal/traditional peoples. I was pushing my limits and piercing my genitals and nipples just to have the intense experience. In an area like Atlanta, [with] the moral majority, the Southern Bible belt, there is going to be people rebelling against that. I didn't do my lobes first because I lived in a town where I got shit for long hair already. I ended up getting more shit for having my hair long than pierced ears. I pierced my ears after I felt I had already undergone some rites of passage. Before I pierced my ears, I wasn't ready to talk about it publicly. Piercing was attractive in a sensual, not necessarily sexual way, and [in] a self-reliance [way], in terms of

what you need in your character to be able to step off that bridge, to stand in front of people and say this is who I am...

Even as a teenager, Brian's experience reveals a complex series of "who I am" explorations. Both private and public self-symbolizers work as part of a continuous process for testing ideas of the self and the self's place in society.

Brian studied magazines for alternatives to non-Western styles and significations of body adornment. Prior to the 1970s, public self-symbolizing piercings that were unconventional in size, in gender, or in quantity, were extremely rare. The "self-made freak" Rasmus Neilson, a circus sideshow performer, is one of the only known examples in American history. From the 1930s through the 1950s, Rasmus toured extensively with Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey circuses, and Ripley's Believe It or Not. His act included swinging 10-pound hammers from the rings through his distended earlobes. His act was seen by tens of thousands of people and influenced some of the earliest pioneers of the modern body piercing movement. In 1977, the periodical *Piercing Fans International Quarterly (PFIQ)* disseminated images of stretched earlobes to a broader, receptive audience. In one of the earliest issues, Fakir Musafar coined the phrase "Modern Primitive." Vale's and Juno's book *RE/Search Modern Primitives* (1989) coalesced a loose network of individuals exploring identity, spirituality, art, and sexuality through their bodies, into a bona fide movement. Musafar and other Modern Primitives describe their practices as reverent of other cultures and as an integrative narrative for

a self-determined aesthetic beauty and spirituality through engagement with and manipulation of the body. For many, Modern Primitivism is seen as an alternative to dominant norms of sacred naturalness and/or the intrinsic sinfulness of the body. Pitt (2003) notes some academics criticize Modern Primitives as privileged white Westerners, exoticizing and even symbolically colonizing the third world. Pitt and others contend: "Rather than establishing believable 'tribal' identities and communities, the gestures of modern primitivism call into question the fixity of identity as such" (p. 133).

Late 1993 marks the rise of the significantly enlarged earlobe piercing among non-indigenous peoples of the United States. It transitioned from an individual's action, as practiced by less than a dozen people, to a collective behavior, as practiced by thousands.<sup>4</sup> Blake Perlingieri (2003) and Kristian White teamed together to open Nomad's in San Francisco. Nomad's was the first shop to specialize in enlarging earlobe pierc-



<sup>3</sup> The objective is to apply pressure to the cells of the walls of the scar tissue. Under the proper amount of such stress, the tissue does not tear, but rather generates more cells. An analogous process occurs with weight gain or pregnancy.

<sup>4</sup> In this case, significantly enlarged earlobe piercing means greater than ¾".

<sup>2</sup> Download Chart 1 for an example of the established size categories.





ings. They fostered relationships with local artisans to produce large earrings for a fledgling market. They displayed beautiful antique 'tribal' earrings and decorated the shop in traditional designs of Borneo. The idyllic ambiance was completed with exotic birds, plants, and reptiles. The Modern Primitive aesthetic wasn't a contrived marketing ploy but rather a genuine pursuit of passionate ideals. Kristian and Blake pioneered the practice of scalpel piercing the earlobe.<sup>5</sup> Innovations in the enlargement process and the jewelry selection resulted in dramatic increases in the population of enlarged earlobe piercings in San Francisco (pp. 59-76).

The high visibility of stretched earlobes attracted the media and subsequently the local phenomenon went global. Back in the early 1980s, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, performance artist, musician, and self-described "cultural engineer," was the first celebrity to have stretched his earlobe piercing. Most Americans

have been exposed to enlarged earlobe piercings by celebrities such as Travie McCoy, Davey Havoc, Lil Wayne, Brandon Boyd, Adam Lambert, and Chester Bennington, films such as *Apocalypto*, and chain stores such as Hot Topic, which sells stretched earlobe jewelry and supplies to the youth masses. In March of 2013, a YouTube search yielded over 1200 instructional videos of "How to Stretch Your Ear Piercing." As in the beginning, the professional body piercer displaying the latest developments in jewelry styles and demonstrating the anatomical possibilities of sizes is still the best advertisement for stretched ears. Jody from San Francisco shares: "I started stretching in 2003-2004. It mirrors like when I got my ears pierced when I was 15; it was something I saw happening, something I thought was attractive, and something I wanted to be a part of."

#### LOCATING SYMBOL

Some ideas of self can be expressed quite clearly in non-verbal symbolism. Abigail exemplifies such a readily apparent communication, "The bicycles engraved on my earplugs represent [that] I agree with the green movement, sustainability, and it's my main mode of transport." In 2012, most of her San Franciscan co-habitants could probably deduce this message. In contrast, Becky's expressions and reflections of identity are more complex to decipher:

There was a lot of soul searching on the journey of stretching my ears, "Who am I? Do I want to go past the point of no return?" I didn't want to cut myself off from other options; but stretching my ears, the commitment helped to solidify and support my resolve.

Over the years I was stretching, I would ask myself, "Who am I, What am I? What do I want to do with my life?" Looking in the mirror, after 5/8 inch, I saw myself as a person with stretched ears and I'm continuing as a person with stretched ears... my overall journey will end at the person I really am.

Examination of Becky's statements reveals an alignment with Wicklund and Gollwitzer's (1982) symbolic self-completion theory. Romanienko's (2011) asserts that in symbolic self-completion theory, "individuals strive emphatically toward their identity goals, which often requires the use of symbols to most comprehensively construct the intended self one aspires to present" (pg. 3). The importance and complexity of how Becky situates herself in society and of how she is situated by society shapes her symbolic image production. Currently, Becky's earlobe sizes are holding at 1 1/16".

Weston situates his stretched earlobes within his identity as an indigenous ethnic minority even though the relative size of his lobe piercings puts him outside the current practices of his group:

I was born into Caddo, so it's just how it is. It's not a chosen community. I'm just tattooed and pierced; I didn't stretch my ears to be part of a group. I'm not "Mod Prim" [Modern Primitive] or "Bod Mod" [Body Modification community]. I don't want to be associated with that. Stretching was the impetus for my aunts to tell me the stories of the Caddo's body art history. The Osage people had a sign language and for the Caddo they would have the bent index finger horizontally move back

and forth in front of the septum, symbolizing the Caddo's pierced septum and thus a sign for the entire tribe. At the annual powwow, the elders would say, "Hey, you look like an old timer." I started stretching because I liked the look of the jewelry. And today it's the same. The bigger jewelry is more decorative and detailed with better designs. The meaning of my stretched ears hasn't evolved into anything, just like any other ear piercings, maybe that's because I've had my ears pierced my whole life.

Weston adeptly reconciles his identification with the past traditions of his people while enjoying the current aesthetics of non-traditional sizes and jewelry designs. Weston goes on to share a proud memory of his father's protection of the family's traditional practices against an institutional authority:

When I was in school, they tried to make me take them out. My dad went to school, wearing his turquoise studs and won! He told them it was our peoples' way. Then we, me and my brother, were cool."

From a very young age, a female named "Danny," realized that earlobe piercing was an act of asserting herself and demonstrating agency:

I remember the first pierced earlobes I saw on one of my mom's biker friends. I was about 6 years old. I probably saw them earlier, but this was the age when I realized they did that to themselves. They WANTED it, and I like it and I want it too. I've been a fatty since birth, and had issues early on, "you mean you can control what you look like? You can have a say in it?"

Danny's awareness of her weight difference at such a young age reveals the social mechanisms at work by which the individual internalizes social pressures to conform to norms of beauty and self-worth. For

Danny, earlobe piercing and the subsequent stretching may demonstrate adaptive behaviors of psychological healing and self-esteem building.

By 15 years old, Christian's earlobe piercings were stretched to 1/2". He discusses his exuberant process of exploring meditative traditions and the interconnectivity of the mind-body relationship:

I developed an interest in the Tibetan culture, emotionally and religiously. I honestly think then is when everything became more sentimental and serious. I was a freakin' hippie. I was practicing and learning about different religions; spirituality became a huge influence. At 17, it became an obsession overall to see what the human body could willingly withstand, you know, how the Tibetan monks would go out into the snow and embracing physical challenges during meditation. To make a long story short, I just stretched the hell out of them.

#### ENGAGING OTHERS

Whether self-reported or academically studied, interpretations of what is being communicated can be highly subjective. For this paper, I am most concerned with self-reported evaluations of the individual's public self-symbolizing when considered with intended as well as unintended observers. According to the ideas of Pitts (2003) what is at stake for those who stretch their ears resides in Alberto Melucci's concept of the "power of naming" (1996). In her book *Mutilating the Body*, the academic Kim Hewitt defends her choice of naming all forms of body piercing as "self-mutilation" in order to situate, compare, and contrast this practice with eating disorders and Non-Suicidal Self Injuries (NSSI), such as cutting and head-banging. (She does not name acts such as weightlifting, dieting, or teeth straightening as "self-mutilation.") In contrast,

the psychiatrist Armando Favazza (2011) reserves the label of "self-mutilation" for "self-injury involving a major, significant body part such as enucleation of an eye or limb amputation" (p. 71). Naming matters; the opinions of the general public and of the policy makers are influenced through taxonomic associations particularly when asserted by persons in positions of authority and expertise. When we resist the urge to reduce complex behaviors and associations into discreet categories, we avoid the construction of artificially fixed identities and, in this case, pathologized behaviors.

Thaoe's family history shares the ongoing tensions between in-group beliefs and the normative social policies set by dominant institutions:

My grandfather had approximately 00ga earlobes. Traditionally, stretched ears are a sign of age, status, and wisdom. His father [Thaoe's paternal great grandfather] took out his own earrings when he worked for the US government, and then put them back in. My uncle took them out when he was the tribal sheriff, then put them back in afterwards. Two other uncles had stretched lobes.



<sup>5</sup> "Scalpel piercing" enlarges the earlobe piercing instantaneously up many gauge sizes by incision with a knife. Although implementation of the scalpel method spread among body modification practitioners as a way to reduce stretching time and jewelry cost, it remains legally, medically, and socially controversial even within modified communities.





My great uncle went to a US government boarding school and couldn't speak the native language and didn't have stretched earlobes. My other great uncle, the other one's brother, went to boarding school too, but had an illness, and went deaf. My deaf uncle got pierced after boarding school and engaged in other rituals. The family believes this was because since he was deaf he couldn't hear the school's teachings.

Thaoe receives positive and negative responses from unintended observers. He shares a memorable interaction that asserts his ideas of class, ethnicity, sovereignty, and authenticity:

"I was with a friend on the subway and a yuppie lady said, 'Oh I've been to Africa where people actually do that.' I told her, 'You're standing on my ancestors' land and WE did this too.'"

As a single young adult living in San Francisco, Thaoe's intersecting communities are complex. He has a Spanish last name and self-identities as a tattooist, artist, and musician. Those who don't know his story may never consider the richness and uniqueness of his belief associations with his stretched earlobes. Thaoe recognizes that living and working in the city affords him greater access to jewelry choice. The old people still living on the reservation will react in

awe, "...because they don't have shit."

Becky's story discusses the complexity of family members', intended observers', and unintended observers' reactions that correlate to the continuum of size:

I remember ALWAYS getting compliments until I hit 5/8", comments like, "I really like your size, it's not too big." My mom was SO funny, "Oh that's perfect! That's the perfect size, you don't need to go ANY bigger!" [Laughter] Now today, "Are your ears BIGGER?" or "Why are you going bigger?" Dad never was a fan, but they're supportive of me, of course they wish I'd been a doctor. [Laughter] Up until 5/8", I'd get compliments from the general public, from everyone, but past that, only from people in the industry, or compliments just about the jewelry or the dedication [to stretching], but not as often and not about how beautiful my ears were.

Becky's experience reflects a distinct size at which she noticed a change in observers' reactions. However, descriptions such as "large," "small," "noticeable," or "too big," are all relative to an observer's exposure and knowledge of stretched ears, aesthetic preference, and relationship to the individual with stretched earlobes.

After stretching too fast, Christian offers a cautionary tale of physical and emotional harm:

I had some complications... People were doing lobe repairs, but it just wasn't an option. I went to two different surgeons; a Fort Collins' doctor said, "No" to fixing them, so I flew back home to LA, and that surgeon also said, "No." My career goal at the time was to become a medical doctor and at the time I felt a little bit pressured, by my career goal,

the doctors, and my family to remove them [his 2" stretched earlobes]. I know medical doctors that are fully sleeved [tattooed] and could be in the O.R., but I, with my ears stretched, couldn't be? It's almost like social conformity has a dress code. I was told by numerous surgeons that I couldn't have stretched earlobes in the O.R. I distinctly remember a plastic surgeon had a half hour consultation with me about it; he was even from Africa! I think Kenya? He was calm and even-toned but very offensive. At 23, I had my ears reconstructed by a plastic surgeon in Pasadena. I cried in the car after the operation. A piece of me was gone, that's how it felt. It's weird how you mourn over that [*he pulls his reconstructed ear*] but I paid someone to cut off a piece of that [*he points to his adominoplasty*].... Everyone was very shocked after the operation, some even mentioned they liked the old me, even to this day. Most of my interactions are with people without stretched ears.

There is little doubt that the surgeons were doing what they thought was best for Christian. Christian's medical condition may be incomprehensible to these surgeons who exclusively construct normative ideals of Western beauty. Therefore his desires to keep his stretched earlobes were dismissed with encumbered medical categorizations such as "self-inflicted, cosmetic, and elective."

Christian's case appears indicative of a more general problem, in which doctors confuse their morality for beneficence and override a patient's autonomy. As more people stretch their earlobes, more people will seek earlobe reconstructions resulting from physical problems such as structural tears, infections, and scars or personal choices such as social

pressures, career decisions, and aesthetic preferences. The topic of earlobe reconstruction entails difficult questions of economics, access, and ethics. Professional body modifiers offer an affordable option for people who don't have health care or money, or have health care but want a procedure that's not covered because it is medically defined as "elective surgery." Body modifiers charge approximately \$400 while surgeons can charge \$4000 and up. The procedure supplements the income for body modifiers who are generally at the lower end of middle-class earnings.

So far my research suggests that procedural outcomes are usually better when performed by the body modifiers than by plastic surgeons. These better outcomes correlate with elite body modifiers that are highly networked, specialized, and experienced with this particular procedure.

But what about the ethics of performing what could be considered "plastic surgery" outside the legally sanctioned medical field? What of the ethical consequences of my investigating this activity? Bringing an apparently adaptive system of underground services under scrutiny could have far-reaching repercussions for practitioners trying to make a living, for clients trying to access affordable alternatives, and for my professional and personal relationships.

### CONSIDERING CHANGE

To form more durable understandings of human behaviors, this research must consider the effects of time. Humans change. The impulse and the act of piercing the earlobe can transpire in moments. In fact, most people can leave the jewelry out for months or even years at a time and the hole will remain open, without consideration or action. But the physiology of the stretched earlobe is different. The moment jewelry is removed, the process

of shrinking starts. For many, this appears glacially slow, taking days or weeks to "lose a stretch" and to have to go down in size. But for others this process starts to happen in hours or even in minutes. Over time, innumerable variables shift: finances, style preferences, jobs, relationships, responsibilities, hobbies, and social groups, so what choices factor in keeping stretched earlobes? Melody's long relationship with her stretched earlobes traces such life changes and her corresponding choices to stretch or not:

[In 1990] When I got to 4 gauge, I stopped because I didn't think I could go any bigger and have it look right.... At that time, people were JUST starting to do crazy body modifications; some looked awesome while others seemed ugly and deforming. As a piercer, I was really aware that some people were modifying their bodies for aesthetics and others were modifying without that regard. I was 4 gauge for years and years. I stopped being a piercer and got another career entirely. Going into a more professional, straight job, I wanted to maintain my individuality in a way. It's funny, at work, I see myself edgy as compared with my colleagues and clients. And they see me as edgy, because of my ears... even though I tone it down. Even though at the same time from 1990 to 2012, body modification has become commonplace, and now I'm TOTALLY tame compared to some people. I get questions like... "Didn't that hurt?" It hasn't gone away, it's such a funny question. I understand the question isn't really "does that hurt," but rather, "even though it does hurt, why did you subject yourself to that pain? Help me to understand." In addition to maintaining my individual style

and it being an aesthetic decision, as I've gotten older, I feel I've been pigeonholed and disregarded. As a woman who is almost 50, I've disappeared in some ways. So the stretched ears, in some way, counter balance that, if not for anybody else, then for me. I've had a LOT of body modification over the years, and then undone a lot over the next years, and this bout or period of changing things on my body has been very much about grounding and solidifying my own identity... my ears seem to be a way, to make a statement about who I am while at the same time balancing the confines of how I need to look as a professional, to be taken seriously and treated respectfully.

My lifestyle has been punk rock, radical lesbian, SM, Mod Prim, radically political and Queer; it's been a LOT of different things that [were] far, FAR outside the norm and to a great extent I don't practice that anymore but it's still a part of me an integral part of that.

It's almost as if age trumps everything else.

For Thaoe, the custom of stretched earlobes sustains his connection to his grandfather, to his identity as Native American and to his reservation. His traditions teach him the importance of an evolving relationship one should have with enlarged earlobe piercings:





Stretching is a time thing; when plugs fall out you go up. I'm guessing I was 8 gauge by junior high. The stretching is not forced; it happens with time. It's natural. There is no stopping stretching until you die, unless they stay at a certain size. You should never push it; they're the size they're supposed to be. If there is a problem, then maybe you need to go down in size, think about what's going on in your life, and reflect on your mental state. It's time to slow down, time to think and reflect.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This ethnography of people's self-reported stories unfolds diverse experiences, ethnicities, communities, and motivations, all of which inform and evolve the choices to stretch and to have enlarged earlobe piercings. As a research tool, ethnography allows for depth, dimension, variation, and personalization within a research cohort that shares commonalities, such as persons with stretched earlobe piercings.

From the stretched earlobe as a locus of study, interviewees revealed varied and complex experiences. These unique insights diverge from categorical generalizations that attempt to aggregate all body modification outside the current social norm as "self-mutilation". For example, Weston and Thae shared their evolving indigenous understandings of stretched earlobe traditions. For Abigail and Jody, the stretched earlobe signified a classic sociological understanding of ingroup affiliation. Jody, Becky, and Morgan each presented the pierced and stretched earlobe as a demonstration of selfhood; however, each original ear piercing was initiated by external pressures of gender inscription. Brian reflected back on a younger self with sophisticated understandings of his personal explorations of earlobe modification within his particular social landscape of place and time. Danny's earlobe piercing and the subsequent stretching appeared to be a successful ongoing reinforcement of psychological healing and self-esteem building. Christian revealed his emotional pain from being pressured into an unwanted surgical removal of stretched earlobe tissue presented as imperative to conform to a prevalent moral bias within the medical field. Melody eloquently examined her shifting relationship to her stretched earlobes, transformed by her growing age and increasing socioeconomic status.

Seeking out alternative narratives to a chosen hypothesis may be a more holistic approach to studying difficult social systems and psychological behaviors. Including the richness of diversity may give balance to otherwise reductive and essentialized research conclusions.

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## BODY MODIFICATION SURVEY

**Stephanie Hutter-Thomas, PhD**



It is no secret that the subject of psychology has been my passion for a very long time, particularly the field of behavioral research. It is this passion for understanding human nature that ultimately drove me to embark on what has become a six-year journey in higher education.

The journey began in 2010, when I enrolled as a graduate student through Capella University, almost a decade after completing my undergraduate degree in Accounting. In 2013, I completed my masters degree in Industrial Organizational Psychology while running our studio, piercing full-time, and volunteering to work in state legislation. These were crazy times to say the least, however in the end, I could not have asked for a better experience.

Immediately after graduation I enrolled in the doctoral program for General Psychology. My thoughts at the time were that I had already incorporated study habits into my daily lifestyle so there was no point in stopping. After all, Capella was a great school and I had enough student loan debt to desensitize me from the financial fears, so what was stopping me? This move was something I viewed as a “no-brainer” because it promised to afford me the opportunity to offer a valuable contribution to the body modification community while also nurturing my own personal growth and future security.

I must admit that I was utterly terrified to enter the world of doctoral education as a modified person; rejection isn't something that any-

one enjoys. I was certain that I would be gawked at, scoffed at, judged, and possibly even shunned by my academic peers, but to my surprise, none of these things happened. In fact, I will be bold and go as far as saying that I receive more acceptance from the academic community at this level than in any other peer group I have been a part of. It was as if for the first time in my life I was being taken at face value, judged only by my merits with my physical appearance having nothing to do with any of it beyond the topic of my study. How refreshing!

After years of completing course work, residency requirements, and taking on a part-time job as a teaching assistant in Research Statistics, I am finally in the dissertation phase of my terminal degree. The dissertation process requires a study that is inferential by design as opposed to descriptive, meaning that the study must compare variables in order to demonstrate research skill at the doctoral level.

My study topic is one that I selected very early, but spent a great deal of time revising in order to meet academic requirements while also attempting to create a study worthwhile for the body modification community. The purpose of the study is to compare a series of variables using a multiple regression statistical analysis in order to report any noted patterns or relationships between age, gender, personality type, impact of life experiences, perceived spirituality, and how extremely modified an individual chooses to be. In other words, I am exploring what drives one

person to be extremely modified while others within the community approach their body art more conservatively.

For those who aren't aware, there is a great deal of misinformation in the world of Psychology regarding body art practices. Much of this misinformation is due to the use of research sampling methods that do not accurately represent the overall community. For example, how can anyone determine motivations to pursue radical forms of body art by interviewing 10 white American females, ages 20-25, on a mid-western college campus? The simple answer is that you can't; yet, many psychologists have done exactly that, largely due to a lack of understanding. This issue has led to generalizations about our community that may or may not be true, many of which are damaging within certain social constructs. This in combination with the ongoing fascination the psychology profession has with pathological diagnosis has led to negative categorizations of anyone wishing to alter their appearance outside of social norms.

Since all respectable research is born out of need, I was essentially tasked with finding the gaps in the literature, choosing one such gap to pursue and determining a way to fill this gap scientifically. Aside from the obvious issues relating to sampling in prior studies, peer reviewed articles repeatedly indicate the need for a means to measure quantity of body modifications. This measurement tool must be simplistic while also measuring body art in a way that is meaningful with corresponding language to describe it consistently. This gap in research resulted in my development of the first instrument for quantifying body modification known as the Unorthodox Elective Body Modification (UEBM) Dimensional Assessment. The approach used in this instrument is definitely simplistic by design, using formulas already seen in science and medicine, yet promises to change the way psychologist study the body modification community. This instrument will be used for the first time in my data collection process to be conducted at this year's annual APP Conference in Vegas. The results for each individual will be compared to their determined personality type along with the other psychosocial constructs previously mentioned to determine if there are any relationships or visible patterns. While this

study will not remedy all our struggles, it is my hope that this research will serve as a foundation for future research relating to the modified community. I hope that many of those attending Conference will consider participating in this study, if not for me, but for the betterment of the community and it's future.

The moral of this story is that you can be anything you want, regardless of your appearance. In my case, it was the love and support of my family and close friends that got me through the rough spots and believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself. There are always opportunities to make a difference; it is simply a matter of deciding where you fit into the mix. Find your gifts, then find ways to incorporate those gifts into your pursuits and never let your body art be a problem or an excuse. We often allow others to stifle our dreams based on choices we made when we were young without ever actually putting ourselves out there to see what actually happens. If you had asked me 10 years ago, I would have told you that the idea of enrolling in graduate school was insane because I truly thought those days were over. At the very least, I would have said “not for me,” laughed and walked away shaking my head. I decided to become more moderately modified during my late 20's and early 30's so at that time I saw my commitment to body art as closing the door to more mainstream pursuits. Later it became clear to me that the only person stopping me from pursuing everything I wanted in life was ME, not my body art. Today, I can't imagine being anything other than a scholar, a scientist, a professor, a writer, and a psychological researcher. My dissertation mentor once said to me, “you are not a modified person who happens to be getting a PhD; you are a research scientist who happens to be modified.” I can live with that.

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# DONATE TO SCIENCE AND HELP A FELLOW PIERCER, STUDIO OWNER, & DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

You are invited to be part of a research study being conducted by Capella University PhD candidate, Stephanie Hutter-Thomas (Stephie Von Hütter Thomas). In order to fulfill her PhD requirements, Stephanie must complete a doctoral dissertation that presents new information for the scientific knowledge base. As a result, Stephanie has chosen to invest her time in research that will serve to promote a deeper understanding of the modified community. Some of the details regarding the study are listed here in order to help you determine if participation is right for you.

## STUDY TITLE:

Sociocultural Evolution: An examination of personality type, life events, age, gender and perceived spirituality and the influence these variables have on self-reported levels of body modification.

## WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between personality and impact of life experiences, spirituality/religiosity, age, gender, and how modified one chooses to become. The study will include only APP 2016 conference attendees in the interest of limiting participants to only those over age 18 and those who view body modification as their lifestyle choice. You do not need to be an APP member to participate, however, you must be attending conference this year.

The goal is to secure 150 participants to take part in this study in order to use the desired statistical analysis. If you decide to be in this study, your participation will last about two hours. The questionnaires you will be completing will be administered in a meeting room at the APP 2016 conference in Las Vegas. Information regarding rooms and time slots will be announced.

## WHAT WILL I HAVE TO DO AND DOES IT COST ANYTHING?

If you decide to be a part of this study, all you need to do is watch for this year's conference course schedule, choose a timeslot that works best for your schedule, and make it to the indicated room number. Participants will not be paid, however all participants in this study will receive a gift for giving their time freely to this endeavor. It is important to note that Stephanie is NOT receiving any funding from the University, the Association of Professional Piercers, or any other third party for conducting this study. All costs relating to the purchase of copywrited instruments/questionnaires, promo materials and gifts to participants are paid solely by Stephanie.

This study will help to expand the information currently published by offering data compiled from those who see body modification as a part of their lifestyle, not a trend. By donating your time to this project you will not only help another piercer complete a major academic goal, you will also be helping to improve the overall understanding of the modified community.

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