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The Association of Professional Piercers is a California-based, international non-profit organization dedicated to the dissemination of vital health and safety information about body piercing to piercers, health care professionals, legislators, and the general public.

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As 2013 draws to close, I—like most—have been reflecting on the year as a whole. When I consider 2013 in piercing, I am in awe at what we as a piercing community have accomplished. The Point, our very own industry publication, saw its first year fully online—reaching a wider audience than we could have imagined. Legislation was passed in numerous states that promotes safe piercing (like New York's bill, requiring parental consent for the piercing of underage individuals) and protects the rights of modified individuals (see Arkansas's fierce fight to defend scarification). Other countries made equally impressive strides: South Australia is working to ban piercing guns, and just last month the newly formed LBP (Lationoamericana Body Piercing A.C.) hosted their first annual Conference, the first Congreso Internacional de Perforadores Profesionales, in Mexico. While the Conference consisted of a wide array of events and classes, there was also a fantastic announcement: Mexico is officially banning piercing guns!

While some U.S. states and several European countries have already banned piercing guns for use on cartilage, including ears and nostrils, and other areas of the body, Mexico is the first country to ban its use entirely.

I have my own piercing gun horror story: the first time my ears were pierced, at nine years old—and with a gun—the piercing became infected within two weeks. Whether the infection was the result of contaminated equipment, poor quality jewelry, a terrible aftercare regimen, user error, or “twisting” the posts I will never know. I reluctantly removed the studs and waited another four years before having them repierced, again with a gun. (It was the '90s; my mother and I didn't know any better and actually assumed it was preferable to the “ice cube and sewing needle” method she knew.) My second experience was worse than the first; while the stud did pierce my lobe, one of the guns mechanisms failed and the jewelry was never ejected. This means my ear was pierced but the gun was still attached. Imagine sitting nervously on one of those cold stools—in front of a floor-to-ceiling storefront window—feeling the jewelry pass through your skin and then hearing the phrase “Uh oh.” After a few painful minutes of poking and pulling the piercing “tech”—i.e. counter girl—was able to wiggle the jewelry free and I walked away with a pair of pierced ears that miraculously healed.

The APP has the following stance against piercing guns:

It is the position of the Association of Professional Piercers that only sterile disposable equipment is suitable for body piercing, and that only materials which are certified as safe for internal implant should be placed inside a fresh or unhealed piercing. We consider unsafe any procedure that places vulnerable tissue in contact with either non-sterile equipment or jewelry that is not considered medically safe for long-term internal wear...
reason, APP members may not use reusable ear piercing guns for any type of piercing procedure. While piercing guns may seem to be a quick, easy and convenient way of creating holes, they have major drawbacks in terms of sterility, tissue damage and inappropriate jewelry design.”

However, many states and communities have not. (Keep in mind these decisions and regulations are passed at a local, not national, level in America, hence we cannot push for a nationwide ban.) That said, as we start the new year, I have a challenge for all piercers (and piercing enthusiasts): Join together and work to ban piercing guns in your state, city, or municipality. How? Education, education, education. Continue to educate piercees, public health officials, legislators, and anyone who will listen about the dangers of piercing guns, the jewelry they use, and the untrained individuals who use them. Petition those who have the power to write, present and vote on these regulations. And do what you do best: perform safe and healthy piercings in sterile conditions all day, everyday.

There is power in numbers, so let’s pull our voices together and work to make 2014 an even better year for safe and professional piercing. And, as always, enjoy this issue of The Point. ☺

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR - ELAYNE ANGEL has been a professional piercer for more than 20 years and has performed over 40,000 piercings. She was awarded the President’s Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association of Professional Piercers in 2006 and is a contributing writer for PAIN Magazine. She lives in Mérida, Mexico. Visit www.piercingbible.com for more information.

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Below is a transcript of the President’s Corner video from December 13, 2013.

Hi. My name is Elayne Angel, and I’m President of the Association of Professional Piercers, and this is the President’s Corner for The Point, Issue #65.

When I was considering what to talk about for this issue, I found my subject while at a Board meeting of the Association of Professional Piercers Board of Directors. During this meeting we were in a work group and were working on a new brochure. Be on the lookout for it: the topic is “stretching” (or expanding or enlarging) piercings. And the topic of discussion that came up was whether or not to include the terms “gauges” and “gauging” in the brochure.

Anybody who has been a piercer in the industry for very long knows that it is terminology that did not come from within the industry. That is terminology that somehow got started outside of the field, and it has become so pervasive that broadly what we used to call “stretching” is now being called “gauging.”

Everybody on the Board agreed that we’d like to continue to use the terms we’ve always used, but to acknowledge the fact that other people are using the terms “gauges” and “gauging.” So, we did end up deciding to include it.

But I also wanted to talk to you about it. For those of you who are not in the industry to understand that it is not terminology that we use. And for those of us who are within the industry to understand that, pretty much, the general public is hearing that terminology, and they’re not aware that it grates on our nerves, or that it is something that we think of as inappropriate.

So what I wanted to caution against was losing business but gaining a victory in making sure someone is well schooled that they’re using the wrong terms when they come in to ask for some gauges. So, my suggestion is this: if someone comes in—when someone comes in, because they do, and they say, “Um, I need some new gauges,” or points to something in your display case and says, “Ooh, sweet gauges!” you don’t blow your top. You simply say, “I’ll be happy to show you some jewelry.”

You may want to gently let them know that in your studio, and in the industry, they’re called “plugs” or “eyelets” or whatever the term is that you would ordinarily use, but to be gentle enough so that you don’t win the battle and lose the customer. So that’s my bit of advice.

The truth is that language—the English language—is a living, growing, and changing entity, and whether we like it or not, I believe that we have lost the battle. And it doesn’t mean that we need to give up entirely, but to recognize that the widespread use has changed the way things work in the studio nowadays.

So, thanks for watching. If you have any input on this topic, and I think there may well be some, feel free to send an email to president@safepiercing.org, and I’ll see you next time. Thanks.
Association of Professional Piercers

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What has been your favorite piercing moment? It is a question that has haunted me since the first time I was asked. An echo of this makes the voice in my head always think “maybe this piercing will be the one that defines my piercing career.” Several people have shared their defining moments with me: some of these turning points involved meeting their piercing idol while, for others, it was defined by where they worked, who they worked with (or worked on), and, in some cases, a paycheck. The ways people have been affected by their careers are as unique as the individuals who had the experiences.

Most days there are no moments that change me, or at least affect me in a drastic way. I take a client in, bond with them and then let them go, hoping that we connected enough for them to return to me for their next piercing experience—or, better yet, remember my name to bring me more clients to bond with and release.

However, when asked about my favorite moment there is one I always relive. An older lady, at least seventy years old, came in to get her earlobe pierced. We took a moment chatting but as I started to get set up for the piercing she stopped me. “I need you to know that I have Hep C. I understand if you can’t pierce me.” After asking if she had talked to her physician about getting a piercing I smiled and said “Thank you for telling me but I have no problem piercing you. I take many precautions so that both my safety and yours are taken care of.” She was shocked that I didn’t respond like she had expected. She thought I would react poorly and then proceed to treat her as a leper, sending her on her way. Both she and her wife were overcome with joy. It was something she had wanted to do for a long time but had been afraid to get because she would have to expose a secret that had given her so many other bad experiences. (I later found out how much that experience changed her perception of herself. She, for a moment, felt like she was human rather than a disease and not worth common decency. I had felt like I had changed the world, and for her I had.)

Recently another experience left the same type of lasting impression on me. While at Omega Red Studios a man came in asking questions about his daughter. She had cancer and, as a result, had made a “bucket list.” On that list was a lip piercing. He wanted to help her fulfill her wishes and asked if I would be willing to perform such a task on her. I had replied that I would be willing, after I knew it was okay with her doctor. The next day he came back with a handwritten note. Skeptical that the doctor was in on this idea I Google searched the doctor and found out everything I could about not only her but the entire hospital. I talked to lawyers, her doctors, and parents about what I expected, what they should expect, and the young girl’s expectations. I did not hold back on making demands on what I would need to make a safe and positive environment for her. Many of them were personal things to increase my comfort. After all, my safety is just as important as hers.

It took three days to come to an agreement on piercing her. After speaking with the doctor we decided the nostril would be a more acceptable piercing rather than the lip. I learned that the reason there was so much passion behind her parents getting this one thing done was because she had just received a dire prognosis. The likelihood that she would be alive long enough to even see her piercing heal was slim. She had fifteen things that she wanted to do before she died. Her parents chose this task, as it was most obtainable, and came in search of me. Completing one of her bucket list tasks was important in helping her fight the feeling that all was lost for this fourteen year old whose life was on a countdown. The before and after effect on her life was immediate. She went from a child who looked and acted sickly to a young girl who wanted to walk around with her father as she felt a kind of rejuvenation.

These moments have stuck with me, as it has been these moments that have pushed me to realize how much I could help the world just with a tiny prick of my needle. Sometimes a navel piercing is more than a belly adornment, it is a story—a celebration—of a woman reclaiming her body. It amazes me how much a person can be changed from something that, for me, is just a way of life: the impact of one life to another. Everyone has different reasons for loving their job. So please take a moment and relish yours. ☺️
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When going up, or stretching, from one size to the next, it’s important to select the correct size jewelry. That means it’s important to know how body jewelry is measured when you buy it.

The first thing to realize is that while the thickness of jewelry is measured in diameter, what your body feels is circumference. An excellent overview of this is included in issue #2 of Piercing Fans International Quarterly (PFIQ). (Thanks to Jim Ward, you can download the article here.)

The second is this: body jewelry is measured in several different systems, depending on its size and country of origin. This means there are slight deviations in size with different jewelry types. While slight variances in smaller sizes shouldn’t affect your ability to wear the jewelry, once you hit larger sizes this can make a big difference.

Here’s an overview of the different systems of measurement:

Brown & Sharpe (American Wire Gauge System, or AWG)

Body jewelry manufactured in North America is typically measured in the American Wire Gauge System, also called the Brown and Sharpe measuring system. This wire gauge system has been used since 1857 (predominantly in the United States and Canada) for measuring the diameters of round, solid, and nonferrous (not iron-based alloys) electrical conducting wire. This system is used for measuring the thickness of precious metals in the U.S. and was first used for making body jewelry by Jim Ward in the early years of The Gauntlet.

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With the Brown and Sharpe system, as the thickness of the wire increases the number, or gauge, decreases. (In other words, 18ga is thinner than 16ga which is thinner than 14ga.) This is because the number, frequently referred to as the jewelry’s gauge, represents the number of operations used to produce a given gauge of wire, or the number of times wire must be pulled through a drawing die to make it smaller. Thinner wire requires more passes than thicker wire, hence the higher number for thinner material.

Imperial Units (or Customary Units)

In the United States we’ve fought hard against the adoption of the metric system. Unlike most of the rest of the world we still use a structure based on the imperial System, defined by the British Weights and Measures Act of 1824. When body jewelry sizes get larger than 00 gauge (or sometimes 000 gauge) it is too large to measure with a Brown and Sharpe measurement, and under the imperial System is typically measured in inches and/or fractions thereof: ½, ⅜, %, etc. Plugs for stretching manufactured in the U.S. are most commonly available in increments of ⅛ or ¼ of an inch.

The Metric System

Based on the system introduced in France in 1799, the metric system (or “SI” or the “International System of Units”; in French the “Système international d’unités”) is the official system of measurement in almost every country in the world—with the United States being the notable exception. Unlike the imperial system, the metric system uses interrelated base units and a standard set of pre-
The short answer is: not always. For example: If you’re buying 2 gauge glass plugs they will most likely be made from 6mm stock. (True 2 gauge is approximately 6.5mm.) Going up to 0g will mean jumping to 8.25mm, while many companies who sell jewelry manufactured in metric sizes will offer 7mm plugs—often sold as 1 gauge plugs—which will be a much more reasonable next size.

And remember: Your jewelry is measured by diameter, while your body feels the circumference. Jewelry measured in the Brown and Sharpe (gauge) system or imperial units (inches) can be especially problematic, as circumference measurements are often not incrementally consistent. This means while one size to the next may feel easy, the next stretch can be incredibly difficult.

Confused? It can be daunting, but the point to take away is this: Educate yourself and pay attention to the size of the jewelry you are buying. When buying retail jewelry, find out where the jewelry is manufactured—or at the very least have them take calipers to the piece and tell you exactly what size you’ll be purchasing. Understand how the different sizing systems measure what you are buying; this can make the difference between buying jewelry that is too close to what you are currently wearing, jewelry too large, or something that is the perfect size. Just like the wrong-sized shoes can turn an easy walk through the city into a crippling ordeal, correctly sized jewelry can be the difference between a happy piercing and an angry one. ☺️
The 141st American Public Health Association (APHA) meeting was held in Boston running November 2–6, 2013. More than 12,000 people attended the meeting, and once again the Association of Professional Piercers was among those present (this year represented by Nicholas Adams, Brian Moeller, Laura Jane Leonard, and myself—Jef Saunders).

This meeting is a decidedly different form of outreach than many of us are used to. Instead of working with clients or piercers, we deal directly with public health workers. From doctors, regulators, and students we were blown away by our reception. So many people stopped and said, “Thank you for being here. This is definitely a great public health topic!”

One of the questions we got again and again was “Do you have information on the dangers of piercing and tattoo parties?” And after fielding the question several times I got to thinking that an informational pamphlet (written by our members) would be an excellent addition to our existing literature. (In it we can outline everything from the dangers of piercing outside a well-equipped facility to what one should look for in a piercing studio.)

One of the joys of this expo was meeting with folks from state and local health departments and discussing things that they hadn’t considered health and safety issues. Many of these health department officials were completely in the dark about things like jewelry standards, and it turns out these were things that the officials were very interested in!

The difference between APHA and other types of outreach, like the Philadelphia Tattoo Convention, was tremendous. A tattoo convention is similar to the same type of “outreach” that we do in our own shops every day. Educating the public one at a time is important, but is it a good investment of our resources? (I’m not saying it is or isn’t, just posing an important question.) What I can say is that the APHA meeting convinced me that efforts can, and should, be spent working with public health officials.

Think about it: Consider how influential our organization might be on public policy! Getting jewelry standards, health and safety standards, and even our procedure manual directly into the hands of policy makers and legislators has been of tremendous value to our members and to the public at large. It is for that reason I would strongly encourage the APP to continue attending APHA meetings; I can’t imagine a better investment of our time and resources than reaching out to influential public health leaders.
Let’s face it: Conference can be expensive and time-consuming. But if money is tight, planning ahead can save you hundreds of dollars, from registration to hotel booking and flights.

**Get Time Off**

Talk with your employer about time off now. Depending on how integral you are to your operation, your boss—and the others who work with you—will want to know as soon as possible that you plan to be gone for a week. This will also give you time to explain the benefits of the idea if they don’t initially like it. If your boss is leery of letting you go, ask if you can cover your shift with a guest piercer and/or do a promotion when you get back.

If you are a studio owner, this may finally be time to train someone to at least work your front desk. This person doesn’t need to be a piercer, but a smiling friend who will hand out a coupon and explain that you attending a conference with some of the world’s top piercers in order to provide the best possible piercing experience.

In fact, some studios even use this time for a complete shutdown, and all of their piercers head to Conference, while their tattoo artists either hold down the fort, or take vacation. Either way, work with your boss to create a solution that works best for you and your studio.

**Save, Save, Save**

**Things to do before you go:**

- Save all of your tips. If your studio has a tip jar you might put a sign about Conference near it, to let people know their tips are going to a great cause.
- Save all of your change.
- Save a certain amount per week/per paycheck.
- Ask your employer to hold a portion of your paycheck for you.
- Ask anyone who might give you a birthday or other gift to instead contribute to your Conference fund.
Your Accommodations:

- Bally’s—the hotel where the Conference is located—offers early bird discounts on rooms. Early bird rates start at $64/night and can be booked [here](#). And keep in mind: You do not need to pay for your room when you reserve it, though you do need a credit card.

- Find a roommate, or two or three; that will really get the cost down!

- If you choose to stay in another hotel be sure to factor in the cost of transportation, as well as the time you will spend traveling back and forth. (Whatever mode of transportation you choose, you’ll be spending precious Vegas time away from Conference if you don’t stay at Bally’s.)

On Travel:

- Watch discount sites, like [fly.com](#) and [Kayak](#), to search a number of travel sites at once; watch for sales, promotions, and discounts.

- Roadtrip! If you live close enough, join up with other attendees and split the costs of a road trip.

While In Vegas

Eating:

[Vons.com](#) delivers groceries to Bally’s, which saves a lot on meals, snacks, and drinks. It’s also handy to have food in your room when you don’t have time to go to a restaurant between the classes you’ve chosen to take. (And last year Vons was offering free delivery on your first order!)

- Find a friend (or make a new friend) and carpool/split a cab to one of many local grocery stores.

- Bally’s also has on-site dining in a wide price range, from pizza and hotdogs to sushi and high-end restaurants. The hotel keeps an updated list of restaurants on their [website](#).

Entertainment:

- Many sites, like [Vegas.com](#), offer deals on shows you may want to take in while you are in Sin City, but keep in mind cabs are pricey, running $15-30 from the airport. (Note: The airport shuttle will take you right to Bally’s and runs 24/7 for a cost of $7.)

Conference and Classes:

- Most classes range from $40-60, but if you are planning to take in a lot of classes (and the Expo) you can save by purchasing a full Conference package, which allows you to take unlimited classes and workshops. A full conference package costs $400 until May 17, 2014 and then the price goes up by $100. Register early and save! You can also save $50 on your full-conference fee if you’re an APP member, and another $50 if you are coming from a country other than the US.

Scholarships

The Al D. scholarship applications are due by March 1, and the application period will open on January 1, 2014. These scholarships provide full conference fee and shared accommodations for their recipients. The Al D. scholarships are available to apprentices and piercers. Among other requirements, applicants must provide an essay and be responsible for their own transportation to and from conference. Application forms for the Al D. scholarship may be obtained by emailing [info@safepiercing.org](mailto:info@safepiercing.org) after November 28, 2013.

Last year an informal group of generous piercers pooled their resources and provided additional scholarships to a number of piercers in need. A great way to find out more about this type of scholarship is to join the APP 2014 Conference Facebook page.

Even if you are not interested in applying for a scholarship we encourage you to join the APP 2014 Conference Facebook page. While it’s not an official APP page, it is a great place to meet people pre-Conference (and possibly find a roommate), and it will be full of suggestions for making the most of your week. We hope to meet you there! ☺️
Few people are aware of what a shibboleth is, but they are familiar with one very famous one: Lollapalooza. Lollapalooza, made famous by the Perry Farrell’s traveling music fest, is familiar to us. It is relevant on several levels to the piercing industry, as Lollapalooza was, for many people across the United States, their first exposure to body piercing. Whether it be through traveling piercers like Eve Zamora, Gadhi, Cricket Keene, Allen Falkner, and Ken Coyote, or the modified Jim Rose Circus Sideshow: the Lollapalooza tour was essential to early 1990’s body piercing culture.

But the Lollapalooza I am referring to is the shibboleth “lollapalooza.” A shibboleth is a word that one culture can pronounce easily, but another cannot. U.S. Forces in the Pacific theater of World War II would hear other soldiers walking in the woods, or in the dark. If they were unsure as to whether they were American or not, they would yell, “Say Lollapalooza!” An American can say this word easily. Japanese soldiers could not. This shibboleth protected American soldiers from ambush, and the mispronunciation potentially cost Japanese soldiers their lives.

The word shibboleth, and the first recorded concept of this kind of password, is from the bible. Specifically Judges 12:5-6 (King James version quoted) “And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now shibboleth: and he said sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.”

The two previous mentions of a shibboleth are primarily a racial/cultural mispronunciation, but if we get to the heart of the matter, a shibboleth is a password into a culture. Arguably, body piercing has several of these: “plugs” versus “gauges,” “philtrum” versus some sort of “bite.” Some piercers still mispronounce “labret!” (For the record, it’s a hard “t” sound.) But none is as nonsensical as the pronunciation of the daith piercing (doth, like “goth” with a “d”). The uninformed cannot wrap their heads around that pronunciation, and this makes it a shibboleth.

I had heard several versions of how the daith received its name, but I decided to go straight to the source. I called Erik Dakota, the first person to do the daith, and asked him how his client came up with the name. Erik explained to me that he had a wonderful, intelligent and creative client named Theresa, who was “a good Catholic girl” (which hopefully dispels some of the inaccurate versions of the story). She asked Erik if he could perform a unique piercing, what we now call the daith. Erik assessed her anatomy. Yes indeed; her tissue could support the piercing, but the cartilage was too rigid to put a straight needle through. Erik had lots of experience...
curving needles to perform another piercing he originated, the rook, so he curved the needle, performed the piercing, and asked Theresa to name it. Theresa had been teaching herself Hebrew, and decided it took quite a bit of intelligence to perform this piercing. She elected to name her new piercing the “daith,” which she said was the Hebrew word for intelligence. The name, pronunciation, and spelling stuck.

I’ve had a bit of trouble confirming this spelling and/or the meaning for the word “daith.” Internet searches and talks with friends who speak Hebrew have pointed me toward the word daath, or da’at, or da’as, meaning knowledge.³ (For example, someone who is knowledgeable in Jewish law is “da’as torah.”) I have also found reference to “daath” on the Tree of Life on Kabbalistic websites.⁴ The spelling “daith” remains elusive to me.

I think it is important to note that neither Erik Dakota nor his client Theresa had any intention of this piercing having spiritual overtones; it was simply a good name that fit a piercing that had to be performed by a knowledgeable, intelligent piercer.

I have heard several piercers suggest we change the spelling to “daath” or just make it as easy as possible for our clients, and spell it “doth.” Our industry seems to get particularly bothered by clients and piercers mispronouncing terms. I am of a slightly different opinion.

We have been given a gift, in this unique spelling and counterintuitive pronunciation. I say: Let’s keep this our password. One of the joys of my job is meeting other informed, active piercers, and the rarer, but much appreciated, educated client. To hear “daith” pronounced correctly is music to my ears. Only someone knowledgeable about our culture (at least a little) will pronounce “daith” correctly, and this uniquely confirms Theresa’s initial intention. It is a nod of respect to Erik and his client. Daith is our shibboleth; it is our pass into our culture, and we are well served to preserve it.

References:
¹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shibboleth
²http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Judges+12%3A5-6&version=KJV
³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da’at
⁴http://www.mirach.org.uk/basic/daath.html
Editor's note: The history and growth of the APP’s outreach work in Mexico has been included in The Point many times before. Alicia Cardenas’ initial outreach in December of 2003, when she was the APP’s International Liaison, was reported in The Point #28. The APP seminars in Mexico were reported on in 2006 (#35), 2007 (#42), 2008 (#45), 2009 (#50), and 2010 (#54), and Danny Yerna organized the last seminars sponsored by the APP in 2012. This year marks the first year that the seminars were put on independently of the APP, by the newly-formed Latin American Body Piercing Association (LBP).

The History & Mission of the LBP

The Latin-American Body Piercing Association (LBP) is a recently-formed non-profit association based in Mexico.

The decision to create the LBP was made by the attendees of the APP’s 2012 educational seminars in Mexico, when a meeting was held where the majority voted in favor of creating this association, and also voted on who should be on the first board of directors.

The board of the LBP is comprised of seven body piercers from Mexico. Many have been piercing for ten or fifteen years; most are shop owners in Mexico and all are well known by the piercing community.

The LBP’s board of directors and founding members are:

• Danny Yerna, President (Wakantanka)
• Ana Paula Escalante, Secretary (Tonatiuh and Quetzalli)
• Axayacatl Nochipa, Treasurer (Studio 184)
• Charly Pastrana (Tercer Ojo Krew)
• Karlin Murillo (Nomadas)
• Memo Reyes (Tercer Ojo Krew)
• Mario Oliva (Busterzone)

Later, Mauricio Torres (Extigma and BioMetal) was added as head of South American Outreach.

The mission (and vision) of the LBP is to educate and inform piercers and the public about the techniques, materials, safety, and health practices related to body piercing, to raise the standards, while respecting our differences. At the same time to help the Latin American community build stronger bonds in a respectful and relaxed environment, and to be a link between Spanish-speaking piercers with what is happening in the world.

What Has Been Accomplished Thus Far in Mexico

In 2001, there was a meeting with legislators in Mexico City. Two of our current LBP board members (Danny and Ana Paula) attended and spoke about what we were doing and what laws were needed. Four tattoo artists, two doctors and two legislators also attended. This was a historic event for the body piercing industry in the country. After this meeting, the first draft was made of a law covering tattoos, cosmetic tattoos, and body piercings.

In 2005, the first body art law in Mexico became official: no tattooing or piercing of minors!

In 2006, the APP’s first educational seminars were held in Mexico City, attended by many piercers from all through Mexico, APP Members from the U.S., and several Mexican public health officials.
Since this time, we have been collaborating with health officials and giving suggestions on the laws, which were being drafted based on APP guidelines. Our suggestions were approved (but unfortunately not all were applied appropriately), but by 2012 we finally had a law on piercing and tattooing (and cosmetic tattooing).

The law states that body art practitioners must:

- Have proof of first aid training
- Have a procedure manual
- Be vaccinated for tetanus and hepatitis B
- Use approved release forms
- Distribute basic aftercare sheets to clients
- Use new, sterile, and disposable needles and not a piercing gun
- Use quality jewelry and/or ink
- Refrain from using anesthetics
- Use gloves
- Use mouth covers
- Use an autoclave or other sterilizers
- Use equipment that ensures aseptic techniques and a safe level of hygiene
- Have access to running water
- Have a separate room for procedures
- Use a separate room for disinfection and sterilization of tools
- Have a restroom
- Have a license for the shop
- Have a practitioner license

The law also prohibits the use of piercing guns in Mexico! And, for the first time, we will also start to get inspections from health officials.

While we were working towards this legislation, we were also making efforts in education. The APP’s Mexican Educational Seminars were held in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2012, with attendees from over 25 States in Mexico in addition to piercers from Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru and Spain.

We have also continued to speak to health officials, to give feedback about the new laws, and to keep them informed about forming the association. Some of our suggestions were approved almost immediately, and they let us know that once we were legally consolidated we could work towards fine-tuning the law. On May 21, 2013, we officially became a legal association, the Asociación Latinoamericana de Body Piercing, A.C.

The LBP Now

The LBP is currently working on:

- Outreach to the piercing community
- Getting the word out about the LBP
- Working on press kits and promotional items
- The 2014 Seminars (which were held on November 4 to 7 in Mexico City)
- Working to get the LBP accepted as an Associate Corporate Member of the APP
- Working closely with health officials to fine-tune the current laws in Mexico into comprehensive and effective legislation
- Raising the standards of body piercing in Latin America

As you can see, we have been working on this for awhile. Much has happened, and it’s just the start! We wish to keep sharing many achievements and growth. On behalf of the LBP Board Members, to the APP for their support and inspiration, and to our international body piercing brothers and sisters: Thank you. ☺️
Top to bottom: Free vaccination services were offered to LBP conference attendees by government health services; jewelry from the 2013 exposition; Eduardo Chavarria teaching; belly dancers pose with several attendees at the banquet.
In the summer of 2012 Allen Falkner contacted me, requesting help from the APP for a member of the suspension community. A woman was having a legal custody battle over her children. The other party’s attorney was using her participation in hook suspension as evidence that she was an unfit mother. I recommended that he take the issue to the APP Board, as I was sure they would help in some way. But I wasn’t sure exactly what help would look like and what the implications, would be.

The APP’s primary purpose is laid out in the mission statement: The Association of Professional Piercers (APP) is an international health and safety organization. It is a nonprofit voluntary alliance dedicated to the dissemination of information about body piercing.

As a modern adaptation, (hook) suspension utilizes body piercing needles to pierce the tissue rather than the actual hook. However, after this commonality, the differences start to outweigh the similarities: Suspension is temporary without the complication of trying to heal the body with a foreign object present. Suspension requires knowledge of, and experience with, placements and configurations with considerations for differences in weight and torque bearing tissues. This must all be done in tandem with an expertise of the support rigging that rivals that of a mountaineer. Body piercing is almost always performed by a single practitioner while suspension is usually done with well-practiced and coordinated teams.

The mission statement goes on to say: the APP is a united group of piercing professionals...

Anyone that looks around the APP’s annual conference, online forums, or The Point publications will see faces of people that suspend and those of people that pierce. However, not everyone that professionally pierces suspends, and vice versa. Many people that are active in the suspension community participate within teams without needing to learn or to perform piercing. These are two distinct-yet-overlapping communities that have independent jargon, histories, skill sets, social norms, and motivations.

Body piercing has become a professional industry. While there are some who perform suspensions professionally, I’m unaware of a single person that financially sustains themselves on suspension. For most in the suspension community the words “paid professional” have no place. Although some appreciate donations to cover costs, most practitioners perform the services out of love of the experience, the benefits of gathering together, and the privilege of being entrusted to guide another through this powerful process.

The APP has political clout, but does it have the legitimacy and the authority to represent the suspension community before judicial, legislative, and public health officials?

¹There is at least one other documented custody battle in which suspension participation was used as evidence that a parent was unfit for custody. In the second case this tactic was applied towards the father. In both of these instances, the individuals requested to remain publicly anonymous.
I don't think so, and some veterans of the suspension community agree. On March 28, 2013, leaders from all the teams present during the Dallas Suscon met for dinner to discuss openly if they felt there was a need for greater community-wide coordination and cooperation, and what that might look like. Some of the needs that emerged were safety standardization, legislative representation, international cooperation, and contact consolidation. Simply put, there is a need for a common, stable, and readily accessible location that anyone, anywhere, can go to for reliable information and help.

A small work group formed from the initial Dallas meeting. This group's primary tasks are to solicit feedback and ideas from teams and individuals within the suspension community at various Suscons around the world, investigate these community-proposed options, organize and delegate viable plans, work their butts off, and continue to hold meetings to report on progress. At present, the group includes seven workers: Allen Falkner, team member of Traumatic Stress Discipline (TSD), USA; Bruno Valsecchi, member of APTPI, Italy; Eden Thomson, team member of Skindependent, New Zealand; Håvve Fjell, team member of Wings of Desire (WoD), Norway; Mike Coons, team member of Hooked, USA; Misty Forsberg, team member of Hanging City, USA; and Steve Joyner, team member of Constructs of Ritual Evolution (CoRE), USA.

On June 12, 2013, while at the APP conference, suspension teams and individuals came together for the second forum. During this meeting, the group submitted a working mission statement for a proposed new organization, to be known as the International Suspension Alliance (ISA): The International Suspension Alliance (ISA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the unification of the body suspension community through education, outreach, and the dissemination of information pertaining to the safe practice of human suspension to practitioners, the general public, and health care professionals.

86 people attended the open meeting. The entire meeting, including presentation and Q&A, was videotaped and is available for everyone to see here.

The third open meeting occurred in Oslo, Norway, July 24, 2013. Transparency and solid communication with the greater suspension community remain paramount for the work group. Allen Falkner et al. compiled a list of concerns and addressed them frankly. A complete video of this meeting is also available.

Over the next several months, more open meeting times and locations are scheduled:

- **September 2013 - Livorno Italy during Italian Suscon**
- **September 2013 - Omaha, Nebraska during Mecca**
- **April 2014 - Dallas, Texas during Dallas Suscon**

The need for community organization is not theoretical; it is very real. In some U.S. cities, counties, and states legislation is circulating that—if passed—will dictate, restrict, and in
some cases, prohibit hook suspension. On December 6, 2002, the Florida Board of Medicine determined and then ratified that hook suspension was a medical procedure and therefore requires an M.D. to be present for and approve of all suspensions performed in the state. In 2010, the city of Minneapolis prohibited all suspension practices. December 5, 2012, Coconino County, AZ Public Health Department implemented the revised Body Art Code, which banned suspension. The Coconino regulation acknowledges that suspension could be motivated by the desire for a “spiritualistic ritual.” It seems easy to imagine that any law blatantly banning what in some circumstances is an expression of religious belief and in other circumstances is performance art could be defeated in a U.S. court under First Amendment protections, but this of course assumes that the community has the resources and organization to challenge such discrimination.

Time and time again, body modification (tattooing, piercing, scarification, suspension, and extreme/heavy) communities are at the mercy of legislators, medical and mental health professionals, local law enforcement, and health inspectors. The people in power have their perspectives, informed by their own biases and agendas. We can let them establish whether or not these practices are legal or illegal, ethical or unethical, healthy and cathartic, or emotionally unstable and dangerous—or we can establish our own. Operating only from a position of defense and reaction to what they do is inefficient and garners as many defeats as victories. It’s exhausting and we’re always fighting these battles on their terms and their turf. Like it or not, much of this comes down to good old fashion PR. How we talk about our practices and how we portray and organize ourselves in person, in the media, and on the internet does matter in shaping the minds of policymakers and the greater public opinion.

I talked to Allen about the group’s progress. His words sum this article up best: The future is really up to the suspension community. The work group’s only function is to set up and establish the organization. Once we have membership, the real work begins. At this point I cannot speak for the organization. I am simply one person, but it is my hope that we will soon have one unified voice that will work to help those within our community.

Steve Joyner, Allen Falkner, and www.suspension.org are credible resources.
http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/community/body-piercing/newinfo.htm
http://www.coconino.az.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1044
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