



Bodies under Siege: Self-mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry

Armando R. Favazza

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Although instances of deliberate skin-cutting are recorded as far back as the old and New Testaments of the Bible the behavior has generally been regarded as a symptom of various mental disorders. With the publication of *Bodies Under Siege*, a book described in the New York Times Magazine (July 17, 1997) as "the first to comprehensively explore self-mutilation," Dr. Armando Favazza has pioneered the study of the behavior as significant and meaningful unto itself. Drawing from the latest case studies from clinical psychiatry he broadens our understanding of self-mutilation and body modification and explores their surprising connections to the elemental experiences of healing, religions, salvation, and social balance.

Favazza makes sense out of seemingly senseless self-mutilative behaviors by providing both a useful classification and examination of the ways in which the behaviors provide effective but temporary relief from troublesome symptoms such as overwhelming anxiety, racing thoughts, and depersonalization. He offers important new information on the psychology and biology of self-mutilation, the link between self-mutilation and eating disorders, and advances in treatment. An epilogue by Fakir Musafar, the father of the Modern Primitive movement, describes his role in influencing a new generation to "experiment with the previously forbidden 'body side' of life" through piercing, blood rituals, scarification, and body sculpting in order to attain a state of grace.

The second edition of *Bodies Under Siege* is the major source of information about self-mutilation, a much misunderstood behavior that is now coming into public awareness.

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