Most People Love Their Tattoos

Body Piercing and Tattoos, 2008


Kristopher Kaiyala is a writer based in Washington State.

Body art is no longer reserved for social outcasts such as bikers, criminals, and sailors. Tattoos are becoming increasingly common on Americans of all ages and are considered by many to be "art," not skin graffiti. Perceptions about tattoos are changing, and body art is becoming more acceptable, even by senior citizens.

It was a typical family vacation in Honolulu. Kathryn visited many of the usual attractions: Waikiki Beach, Pearl Harbor, Diamond Head ... and a tattoo shop. On a lark while sightseeing, she and her two female companions walked in.

They each walked out with small designs—in Kathryn's case, a rose, to symbolize her hometown of Portland, Ore.—permanently imprinted on their right ankles, discreetly placed to not draw attention, but to easily show off to friends without making them blush.

Many would argue there are better ways to immortalize a vacation than getting a tattoo, but stories like Kathryn's are becoming more and more common. Today, it seems people of every persuasion are doing it. Case in point: At the time of her vacation, Kathryn was 75.

"When I got back home," she says with a laugh, "everybody at my retirement complex thought it was absolutely fantastic! Except for one person; she thought it was just horrible."

So the next time you talk to grandma on the phone, ask her if she's been to the parlor lately—the tattoo parlor.

Going Mainstream?

Body art is no longer the domain of bikers, sailors and inmates. A 2003 online survey by Harris Interactive found that 16 percent of all U.S. adults have at least one tattoo. The age group with the highest number of tattooed adults is 25-29 year-olds (36 percent), followed by 30-39 year olds (28 percent). Seven percent of tattoo owners are 65 and older. The poll also found that equal numbers of males and females have received tattoos.

If you think tattoos are a recent phenomenon, needle this: Many unearthed Egyptian mummies have shown evidence of body art, and it's likely that the practice originated much earlier. The word "tattoo" entered the English vernacular some time around 1785, when Captain Cook observed in his journal that Tahitians engaged in the art of "tattau" ("to mark").

For various reasons over the years, tattoos became taboo in Western cultures—but this is rapidly changing.
From Dennis Rodman to David Beckham, from the Dixie Chicks to Cher, from 50 Cent to Eminem, athletes, celebrities and others in the media have brought tattoos into the limelight. Today tattoos are considered by aficionados as "art," not skin graffiti.

**Coming of Age**

If tattoos are becoming more mainstream, the tattoo industry is growing up as well. There now exists a National Tattoo Association (with annual conventions), as well as an Alliance of Professional Tattooists (APT), whose primary mission is to educate shop owners on critical health and safety issues.

No one knows for certain how many adults had tattoos 10 or even 20 years ago, but Dennis Dwyer, a director at the Tucson, Ariz.-based APT, says the industry has grown sharply in the last decade. Today his organization has around 3,000 members. Five years ago, it was around 1,800.

"We're still seeing more and more people getting tattoos," notes Dwyer, "but interestingly, the industry is reaching a saturation point; there are so many shops out there now that it may not be as lucrative for the average tattooist as it once was." Dwyer also notes that a lot of business is being lost to so-called underground tattooists—amateur "artists" who tattoo friends and family members for free or for cash on the side with little regard for industry standards.

"People come in for a tattoo, they like what they get and how they're treated, and come back for more."

But not all shops are in a rut. According to the Harris poll, the Western United States has more tattooed adults than any other region in the country. And that makes sense to shop owner Karen Roze of Sacred Rose Tattoo in San Francisco's Mission District. These days, she says, business is booming.

**Parlor Gone Boutique?**

Ask anyone to describe a typical tattoo shop and you may hear words like "seedy," "dirty," "macho." Roze, 37, is out to change that perception by mixing her art with friendliness and customer service. In San Francisco, a hotbed of tattoo artists and tattoo seekers, competition can be fierce.

"We train our artists to treat each customer as if their tattoo was the most important thing to them," says Roze, who opened her shop in 1998 after apprenticing for about six years elsewhere. Roze shies away from any salon-type comparisons, but she insists her shop's open layout (no booths) and clean, old-fashioned atmosphere create a very professional and creative environment.

You'd expect nothing less from a fine-arts graduate. In fact, each artist in Roze's shop is schooled in the arts. Roze says the high-quality designs they come up with draw clients in the door more than once. "People come in for a tattoo, they like what they get and how they're treated, and come back for more. I'm even tattooing children of parents that I tattooed years earlier."

What surprises Roze most in recent years is how many of her clients are senior citizens. "I have a theory," she says, "that the older you get, the less you care about what others think. Plus you have more disposable income. A good tattoo isn't cheap."
The Harris poll revealed another telling statistic: 34 percent of tattooed adults feel sexier than before getting their body art. Roze concurs. "The fake tattoos were always the coolest prize in the Cracker Jack box. Now people don't have to worry about getting the real thing. The sexy appeal of body art never goes away."

Further Readings

Books

Periodicals
- C. Mark Brinkley "Think Before You Ink: Consider the 4 'Cs,'" Army Times, March 22, 2007.

• Tom McGhee "Workers, Companies Spar Over Tattoos, Piercings," Denver Post, August 14, 2005.


• Men's Health "Body of Evidence," April 2003.


• Jan Norman "A Piercing Question in the Workplace," Orange County Register, June 20, 2005.


• Teen Vogue "Hole Truth," April 2006.


Internet Sources


• Karen Hudson "Piercing Gun vs the Needle." tattoo.about.com/cs/psafety/a/piercing_guns.htm.


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Many People Regret Getting a Tattoo


Deanna Anderson is a freelance writer.

Approximately one-third of people with a tattoo regret getting it. The most common reasons for regretting a tattoo is the tattoo is the name of a significant other who is no longer significant; it is a gang or prison tattoo; the tattoo is of poor quality; or the wearer regrets the location of the tattoo. Tattoos should never be done on a whim or a dare.

In a national survey in which 163 tattooed men and women were asked about their tattoos one-third of those men and women said they regretted their tattoo.

People Change As They Grow Older

The reasons for why someone regrets getting their tattoo vary as much as the reasons why they want to get them. People's likes, dislikes and affiliations change as they grow older and what someone likes or thinks is cool at age 20 will not be the same at age 50. For this reason, tattoos should never be done on a whim or to please someone else. It is permanent and the tattoo wearer has to live with it. Tattoos should also never be done while the wearer is drunk or intoxicated in any way; in fact, it is illegal to do so.

Choosing a tattoo should be a very personal and meaningful experience. There are two basic types of tattoos: flash and custom. A flash tattoo is the designs you see in stock at the tattoo parlor while a custom tattoo is one a customer brings in themselves. Either way, the decision should not be taken lightly. An aspiring tattoo wearer should choose a design that represents them.

Because of the permanency of your tattoo a person should look at themselves in 5, 10, or even 20 years. As a free-spirited college student a web of vines on the wrist would look really lovely. However, if that same student is planning on working in a very conservative field after graduation will others look at the tattoo negatively? If so, the tattoo wearer needs to decide if they can or are willing to cover up the tattoo either by cosmetics or clothing.

It is very expensive to remove a tattoo. Expect to pay $1,000 to remove even a fairly small-sized tattoo if you're looking at laser surgery. Also expect to have a noticeable ugly scar with a non-laser technique. Health insurance companies will not pay for tattoo removal because it is considered an aesthetic and elective surgery and not required for their physical health.

Common Reasons to Regret A Tattoo

Here are some common reasons why a tattoo might be regretted:
Lover’s name. When in the throes of passion an aspiring tattoo wearer may decide to get the name of their significant other tattooed somewhere on their body. The only problem with this endearing symbolism is that when the significant other is not so significant anymore, the tattoo wearer is stuck with the name. Either a tattoo artist will have to be creative and cover up the tattoo or it will have to be removed.

Gang symbols. Often gang members will have special tattoos that will show status or involvement in a gang. While this may give a tattoo wearer special privileges within the gang it may subject them to the scrutiny of outsiders or make them a victim of other gangs simply because of the affiliation. A person who wants to leave a gang or put that past behind them will have a constant reminder of that time.

Prison tats. Like gang tattoos, prison tattoos have a symbolism and culture that is unique. Often prisoners tell their story by the tattoos placed on their body. These tattoos can identify what the prisoner is in for, what they are willing to do, if they can be trusted or not and many other things. And, like the gang tattoos these representations can be reminders to the wearer or cause them to be under the scrutiny of others.

Location. The location of a tattoo should not be taken lightly. Depending on a person’s career choice a visible tattoo might just hinder their gaining a position in that field or career. Many places from fast food chains on up to administrative positions will not hire a person with a visible tattoo. If it can be covered up, for example on the ankle or shoulder, it is allowed. Facial tattoos are not highly recommended because they cannot be covered up and to be removed by laser surgery is risky and may leave scarring. Also, an ill-placed tattoo may leave a customer feeling less than satisfied. A tattoo that is crooked or askew on a part of the body, or not centered on the body part will not likely be valued much.

Other Reasons

Cartoons, musicians, actors. Tattooing a favorite cartoon character, actor or band is often done as a symbolic gesture to honor that thing. However, as a person grows older their likes may change. A person might suddenly be 50 years old and will be stuck with a cartoon tattooed on their arm. Or the musicians and actors they liked at one time might not be so important anymore. There is also the added concern over copyright and trademark infringement as well. Some companies have tried to sue people and tattoo artists for duplicating their images.

Poor quality. Any tattoo that comes out in a poor quality is also one that will be regretted. Lines might be blurred, text might be misspelled, lines might be shaky, borders or details might not be uniform, colors might be faded or dull. Homemade or prison-made tattoos are more likely to have these problems but they can also be encountered in a tattoo parlor. Make sure you view a portfolio of the artist's work before and talk with the tattoo artist so you can get a feel for their work.

Whims or dares. As stated earlier, a tattoo should be a very personal decision and not one that is done on the spur of the moment or done as a dare or a favor to someone else. Getting a tattoo for someone else takes away the personal aspect of it and will likely be regretted later by the one who has to wear it.

Further Readings

Books


**Periodicals**


• C. Mark Brinkley "Think Before You Ink: Consider the 4 'Cs,'" *Army Times*, March 22, 2007.


• *Men's Health* "Body of Evidence," April 2003.


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Karen Hudson "Piercing Gun vs the Needle." tattoo.about.com/cs/psafety/a/piercing_guns.htm.


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