

Tattoos gaining popularity

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 Comments (No comments posted.)

Next time you're at the grocery store or the gas station or the library, take a look around.

The chances are good that at least one of the strangers around you sports a tattoo.

Is it the woman studying the Granny Smith apples for bruises? Maybe.

How about the middle-aged man pumping premium gas into his Acura? Could be.

The sweet librarian? Probably not, but you never know.

The popularity of tattoos continues to increase, with a recent study showing that they are featured on one in four adults born after 1953.

And although tattoos remain most popular for those younger than 30, tattoo artists say they are getting more business than ever from the 9-to-5 crowd who are just as likely to own a BlackBerry as a biker jacket.

Tattoo artist Pete Walker said reality shows that featured the tattoo industry had helped to change some people's perceptions.

The cable network TLC launched "Miami Ink" in 2005, the same year that A&E first broadcast "Inked," a reality show about a Las Vegas tattoo parlor.

"The fact that there are mainstream TV programs about it, I think that's a big deal," said Walker, who has worked at Blue Magic Tattoo in Crystal Lake for about a year and a half. "A lot of people come in because they saw something on 'Miami Ink' or something like that. I think a lot of those people never would have considered it before."

A national study published earlier this year found that 24 percent of adults surveyed had at least one tattoo. That included 36 percent of those ages 18 to 29, 24 percent of people in their 30s, and 15 percent of those in their 40s.

Barrington dermatologist Amy Derick co-researched the study along with Anne Laumann, an associate professor of dermatology at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine. Laumann said her findings varied from those who were covered in tattoos to others who might have had a small rose tattoo or a similar fashion statement.

"I don't think that all people that get tattoos are the same by any means," Laumann said.

Their research did find that those who drank alcohol, used recreational drugs or served time in jail were more likely to have tattoos.

"Despite becoming mainstream, tattooing was still significantly associated with risk-taking behaviors," Derick said.

Those details likely explain why many area municipalities continue to tiptoe around the issue of tattoo parlors. In August, Huntley's Village Board decided not to change zoning regulations to allow tattoo parlors in the village's office districts. Several trustees said at the time that they did not believe that a tattoo parlor fit in with the quaint atmosphere of downtown Huntley.

On the other hand, other recent measures could help those who want to get a tattoo.

Last year, Illinois lawmakers overrode Gov. Rod Blagojevich's veto and lowered the minimum age to receive a tattoo from 21 to 18. Thirty-seven other states already had set 18 as the legal age to receive a tattoo.

Blagojevich did sign into law new regulations that increased health and safety requirements for the approximately 425 tattoo and body-piercing establishments in the state. The law took effect July 1.

"The fact that it has become more popular has probably increased the safety," Laumann said.

Juan Silva has owned Blue Magic Tattoo for more than seven years. In that time, he said, he has seen fathers and sons or mothers and daughters receive tattoos together, and on another occasion he tattooed a woman in her mid-60s.

"She was like, 'I'm getting too old, and I always wanted one, so I'm just going to get it,' " Silva said. "I think more people are being open toward that. Times are changing."

Mark it down

Tattoos have become more popular, according to a national study published this year by a team of Chicago-area researchers. They found that:

- 36 percent of those ages 18 to 29 have a tattoo.
- 24 percent of those in their 30s have a tattoo.
- 15 percent of those in their 40s have a tattoo.
- 16 percent received their first tattoo before age 18.

- 13 percent reported problems with healing in the first two weeks; most of those had the procedure outside of a professional tattoo parlor.

- 17 percent said they were considering tattoo removal; most of those received their tattoos when they were younger than 18.

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