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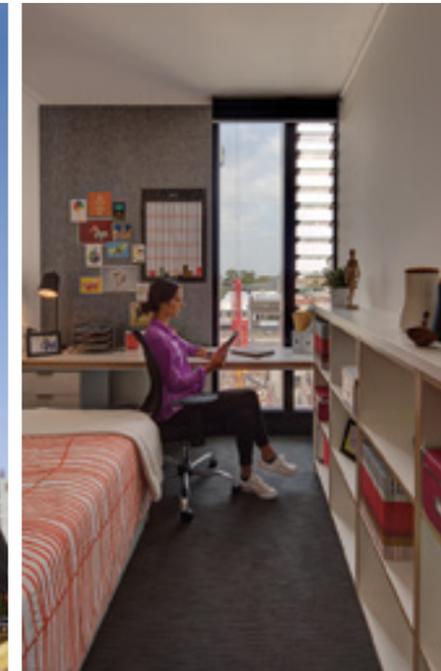
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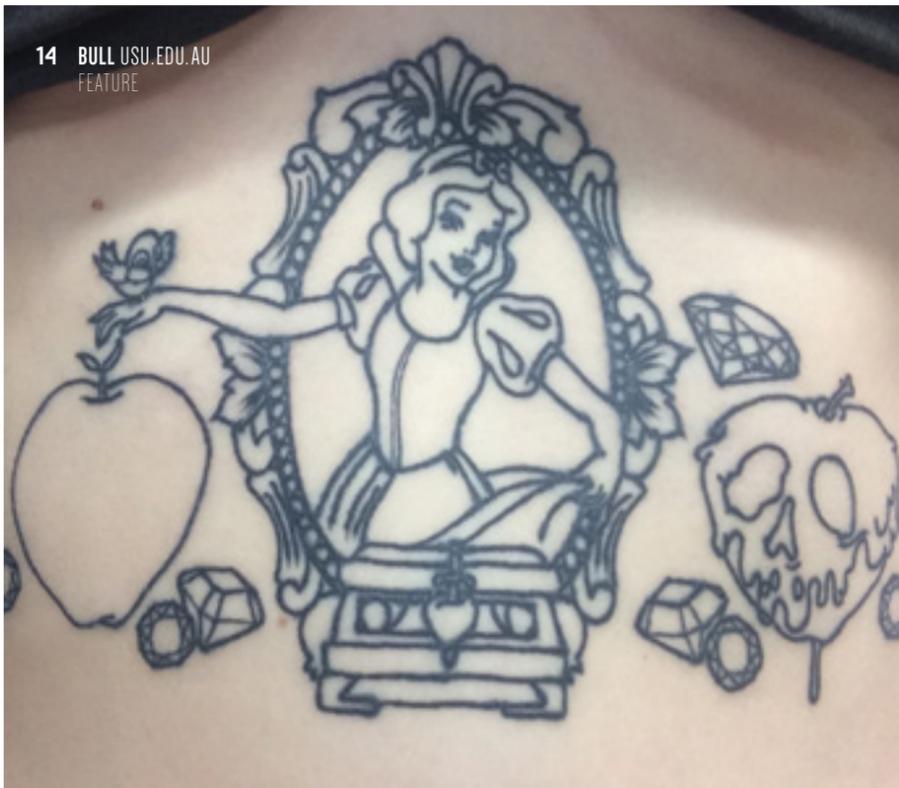


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INK



**HANNAH EDENSOR EXPLORES
THE NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS
SURROUNDING TATTOOS.**



“FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST AND WHEN I GO IN WEARING A SHIRT, PEOPLE ARE LISTENING TO WHAT I AM SAYING, NOT LOOKING AT THE PICTURES ON MY ARMS”

‘WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO RUIN YOUR SKIN LIKE THAT?’

It’s a question my grandma has been asking me ever since I got my first tattoo two months ago. I get the same response from my uncles, my stepmother, and sometimes, even my employers. Despite increasing acceptance of tattoos in modern society, I couldn’t help but wonder why something so personal can still be so openly judged by others.

I recently got a butterfly inked on my forearm, and while the majority of my family disapprove and my grandma dismisses it as ‘dirt’, I remain happy with my decision. A lot of meaning lies behind this tattoo, and the fact that I got it in memory of my recently deceased mother makes it feel particularly special.

Family is a value that inspires many concepts for ink, such as the tattoos of Tenille Furness. As Office Manager for a search marketing company, Tenille never thought her decision to get a tattoo would be an issue in the workplace. She has her family crest on her wrist, and her sister’s birth date on her neck, and both are of strong significance to her. Whilst her existing tattoos didn’t impact on her ability to get a job, they were a frequent topic of office discussion.

“I have been asked constantly, ‘Why did you get a tattoo?’ or ‘What’s the point?’ by work colleagues who are against the idea of tattoos,” Tenille explains, expressing her

bewilderment at their open criticism of her personal presentation choices.

“I’m also constantly asked, ‘What if you and your sister have a falling out and you’re stuck with her birthday on your neck?’ as a way of making me question my tattoos.”

To me, the most desirable aspect of getting a tattoo is the immense personalisation of the process. You select

“I DIDN’T GET MY TATTOOS TO PISS OFF OR PLEASE OTHER PEOPLE, I GOT THEM FOR MYSELF, SO WHAT EVERYONE ELSE THINKS IS THEIR PROBLEM.”

something that resonates with you, and then you choose to have it inked onto your body, where it remains, for better or worse (or until laser becomes less painful). It certainly shouldn’t be up to others to judge or comment on what we elect to do with our skin.

Ida Thommessen is a student at the University of Sydney, and with three tattoos

under her belt, she doesn’t have time for people who disapprove of her ink.

“When it comes to acceptance in public, I honestly don’t care,” Ida admits. “I didn’t get my tattoos to piss off or please other people, I got them for myself, so what everyone else thinks is their problem.”

The tattoo on her ankle holds the most meaning for Ida. A unique coded image, it is replicated on the shoulder of her dad, and represents the powerful bond they share. “It makes no sense to everyone else, but for the two of us, each letter and number represents something special,” she tells me. And it’s these stories underlying the artwork that make tattoos so interesting.

But not everyone gets tattoos for their meaning, instead collecting various symbols on their body as a form of expression. Whether you get something you have a personal connection with, or you choose an illustration because you liked it at the time, getting a tattoo is an individual choice, and not one that warrants the approval of others.

Unfortunately, it’s here where I sometimes think I’m wrong. The very conspicuous nature of tattoos invites public opinion and commentary, and whether we like it or not, when people see a tattoo on someone else, they form a personal view.

Older generations tend to be the most critical of tattoos, a theory shared by Nicola Evans, the Human Resources Coordinator at Ogilvy Public Relations, who says this comes down to a difference in generational trends.

“There has been a change in mindset around tattoos,” Evans says. “Now it’s almost a mode of expressing yourself.” And in terms of workplace discrimination, this issue is becoming more and more relevant. Employers are beginning to come to terms with the fact that tattoos are more popular than ever and as a result they’re fast moving into offices in a variety of different industries.

A level of professionalism, however, is something that remains essential to boasting tattoos in the workplace.

Nicola tells me that it’s all about being tasteful and respectful of clients’ needs and ideals. “When you get to know your client and grow with your client – if your client is a consumer brand that is edgy, that is chic, that has more panache – then I think it’s ok to basically reflect that in your personal branding of what you wear,” she explains.

Sarah Jane Owen is a Senior Account Manager for Percolate New York, and spoke to *B&T Magazine* last month about her various tattoos. She insisted that when it came to her clients, personal presentation is integral to making the right impact.

“First impressions last and when I go in wearing a shirt, people are listening to what I am saying, not looking at the pictures on my arms,” Sarah said, adding that after making her initial impression, she loves seeing the reaction when clients catch a glimpse of her ink.

Throughout my research, I can see a trend emerging with regards to appropriate times to reveal tattoos. The creative realm of the workforce – that is, writers, advertisers, musicians, and designers – are more flexible when it comes to self-expression displayed across the body. And no doubt there are a number of anchor and rose tattoos hidden underneath the corporate suits of other offices, unbeknownst to other employees and employers, as that tends to be where they stay.

Web developer at VML Josh Russell told *B&T* that he’s never experienced any form of discrimination due to his extensive ink. “The vibe in the advertising industry is that we’re all creative people and everyone is different so there’s a lot of acceptance,” he said.

But he sings the same tune as Sarah, and covers up when he feels it’s necessary. “We have clients like Rip Curl and with them I wouldn’t even think about putting a long sleeve shirt on,” Josh explains. “But if I had to go to a meeting with a bank tomorrow, I probably would.”

Regret often accompanies tattoo artworks, and is something my grandma is fond of mentioning. ‘What happens when you’re old and wrinkly and it looks awful?’ she’ll ask me – and sometimes I think she has a point. The practice of getting tattoos becomes so addictive that we often end up with more ink than we ever envisioned getting. In fact, this weekend my little sister is booked in for her second tattoo in two

months, and I myself am in the process of deciding what I want next.

It’s only logical then that sometimes, when we have more tattoos than we initially intended, regret might creep in. But is employment ever a contributor to ink remorse?

“Personally, I don’t regret any of my tattoos,” Tenille tells me. “But when I recently got my sternum tattooed, my workplace colleagues, after seeing it, struck up the conversation of how I had made a huge mistake.”

Once upon a time, tattoos were deemed taboo, and getting one was seen as rebellious and irresponsible. This is something we can see remaining in the opinions of older generations. But with tattoos becoming more prevalent and therefore familiar in society, perhaps it’s time to realise that while one person’s art might be another person’s dirt; personal presentation is a personal preference.

In the working environment, there’s never been a better time to sport some ink and get away with it. As Ida suggests, many people think tattoos are just another trend, and once the craze passes, regret will change the way we see them. But when I ask Ida if she thinks she’ll ever regret her tattoos, she just smirks.

“I say we’ll look badass till we’re 80,” she states matter-of-factly. Because as it turns out, when you get a tattoo, it’s no one else’s damn business anyway. ●