

TATTOO TABOO

By ARIEL E.M. SERVADIO

When, after years of thought and deliberation, I made the decision to get my first forearm tattoos, I was scared.

It wasn't because of the pain. I had several other tattoos by then, and a whole slew of body piercings.

It was the commitment. It was a big step to take. Getting tattooed in an easily visible place is in some ways like saying, "I'm ready for people to judge me for no justifiable reason. I'm ready to have to hide who I really am for the purposes of getting hired for a job I'd like to do. I'm even ready for the possibility of having my family be disappointed in me."

With so much at stake, with so many things to be "ready" for, why do it? Why put yourself through unnecessary anguish all for the sake of body art?

"It's human nature to interpret and create beauty in an otherwise cold and neutral world," says Roy Nalven, who graduated from Hofstra last year with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. "One man's Rembrandt is another man's flaming skull tattoo."

Roy has a tattoo of a roaring lion covering a large part of his upper right arm. He also has a spiraling tribal design on the right hand side of his chest, and large Kanji lettering on his upper left arm spelling "Daimajin."

"[Because] this is me, this is who I am. I'm not afraid to show it," says Jimmy Lazaro, an Asian Studies major at Hofstra.

Jimmy, who is more heavily tattooed than your typical college student, is working on covering his entire body in tattoos, also known as a full body suit. He currently has his entire right forearm and hand tattooed in a biomechanical style, which combines organic forms and machinery, that flows with his natural arm shape. His other tattoos, which cover his upper left arm, left thigh, right calf, chest and neck, range anywhere from nude pin-ups, to Egyptian hieroglyphs, to a "brass knuckle tattoo machine" that he did himself.

"I'm an intelligent and mature adult," says Roy. "What I do for myself and to myself is solely my responsibility."

There is no denying that's a true statement. But if that's the case, then why do so many other people care about whether or not we're tattooed?

Clearly they shouldn't. But the reality that I, and many other tattooed students must face, is that people do care. And this includes strangers who walk by you on the street, your parents, and possibly most importantly, your future employers.

I realize that on a large scale, being

tattooed in a professional setting is not exactly socially acceptable. Therefore, every tattoo that I have in a visible place, I've gotten knowing that it can be covered up if necessary for employment purposes or otherwise. Other tattooed people are getting inked with this idea in mind as well.

"I want to work for ESPN and Sports Center, that would be amazing," says Erik Delosh, a Video/Television major. "My tattoos are up to my wrists, so the worst thing that could happen [when I start working] is that I wear a long sleeve shirt, which doesn't bother me at all."

Erik has tattoos on both of his wrists, a heart on the left, and three stars on the right. He also has the word "hope" tattooed on his waist, and his left arm holds a large piece composed of a lighthouse, two children, and a microphone.

"The [tattoos] that I have right now can't really be seen unless I take my shirt off, which is something that's not going to happen in front of prospective employers," says Roy. "Unless of course the starting salary is remarkably high," he jokingly adds.

But not everyone feels the same way.

"I will never hide my tattoos because I'm not ashamed of them, and because it's me," says Jimmy.

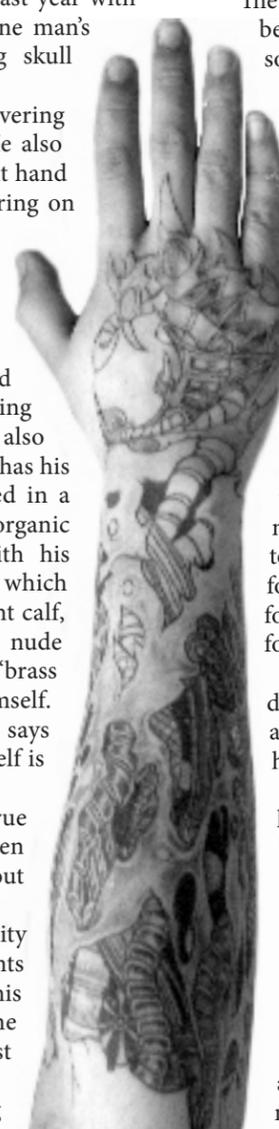
"I get tattooed often. I get tattooed basically every other week or so. I will never stop getting tattooed. I will be 60 going on 70 going on my death bed getting tattooed."

And just like the range of Jimmy's work varies, the meanings do as well. While most are for "personal" reasons, according to Jimmy, he says his pin-up girls (he has four of them) are a tribute to the female form, which he believes is the "greatest art form."

Erik's tattoos on his wrists and waist are dedicated to his grandparents, and his left arm symbolizes the effect music has had on his life.

Roy's tattoos are less visible, but not lacking meaning. He says the meaning behind his tribal tattoo changes with his mood, but boils down to the fact that he feels it's just "a really attractive design." His Kanji lettering, "Daimajin," is the title of a 1960s Japanese film that he really likes and identifies with. There's also his first tattoo, the lion.

"At a young age I always liked lions, and as I grew older I began to enjoy the notion of identifying with an animal that



PHOTOS BY ARIEL E.M. SERVADIO

Will tattooed students today have trouble getting jobs tomorrow?

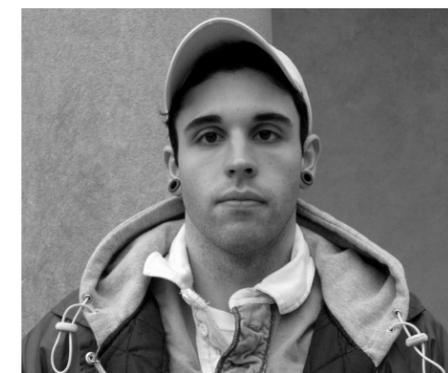
corresponds to your personality," he says. "Since the concept was fused in my mind, it might as well be fused into my skin."

As far as being a tattooed professional, he believes that it requires a lot of thought on both ends.

"If I were to get a tattoo that was highly visible, even when fully clothed, it would require a lot of forethought," he says. "If there are employers or companies out there though, that would turn away a skilled employee because of a visible tattoo that's relatively benign, those are employers or companies that I wouldn't want to work for. It's all very silly."

And I have to say, despite my "respectful" viewpoint, in which I acknowledge how having tattooed skin is a detriment to my value in the professional world, I agree with him. Even with the realization that I might have to always have my tattoos and other body

adornments covered when I go to work, I have always told myself that after I'm hired, my talent in whatever field I'm in will outweigh whatever negative effects my skin could have on my performance in the eyes of my employer.



For a lucky few, being tattooed is a positive thing at work.

"I'm in a professional field. I'm a licensed tattooist/body piercer. Being tattooed affects my career positively," says Jimmy. "I would like to frame my diploma and hang it up and look at it every day before I go to work at my tattoo shop."

"Your doctor... may have... full sleeves" is the introduction of the online portfolio for INKED Inc., a photography project conceived by David Kimelberg (which can be located at inkedink.com). The project, which was published in the form of a book in April 2007, profiles 15 people in a variety of different professional fields. INKED Inc. features photographs of these professionally successful people in both their everyday wear for work, and with their large-scale tattoos exposed.

The INKED Inc. website claims this collection of photos "has a provocative goal: to show how the once-

derided tattoo is quickly gaining popularity within corporate and professional America, a stronghold of conventionality." The professionals within the pages of INKED Inc. range from doctors, to lawyers, to Ivy League graduates.

INKED Inc., in some ways, still proves what most young tattoo enthusiasts find to be sad, but true: there are tattooed professionals out there, and you can be one, as long as you're willing to cover up. However, I believe the project also carries with it a message of hope.

As more and more people come forward (the project is constantly being added to) they are proving that it's time to come out of hiding. And maybe the less tattooed people treat being tattooed as something to hide, the more employers will come to accept them as they are. I think INKED Inc. is making this point.

With an ever-changing social consciousness in which people's minds are being opened more and more every day, one can only hope that reluctance to modify your body in a way that is very important to you, for fear of being shunned by others, will be a thing of the past.

"Throughout life we constantly modify ourselves. Usually it's something as simple as a haircut, but sometimes it's having an ink design injected into your skin. Sometimes it's losing 10 pounds, and sometimes it's piercing your septum," says Roy.

I think the tattooed people of today are helping to bring that change around.

"Regardless of what kind of modification it is, they're all done with the same underlying spirit, the idea that we're capable of and should be crafting a unique self image so we may live as the person we would like to be."

As our numbers increase and as we prove ourselves to be just as valuable assets in the working world as anyone else, we will show people that it simply doesn't matter.

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Jimmy Lazaro is more heavily tattooed than your typical college student, as his forearm, right, clearly portrays.