

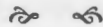
Tattoos in the Workplace

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not individuals with tattoos were looked down upon in their chosen profession simply based on tattoo presence. Specifically, it was hypothesized that there is a stigma attached to individuals with tattoos in the workplace in comparison to non-tattooed employees. Previous research has looked at the attitudes toward tattooed individuals based on style, gender, and size, yet little research has been done to understand the attitudes toward people with tattoos in the workplace. This study sought to determine if stigmas are placed on individuals with tattoos. To do so, the appropriateness of tattoos in various white and blue collar professions was measured. In addition, the size and visibility of the tattoos were factors in determining attitudes. Although tattoos are becoming more socially acceptable, different traits are still being associated with tattoos. Various personality and physical characteristics of individuals with tattoos were addressed to understand if character is being judged based on body ink. Overall, the results of this study found no differences in attitudes toward individuals with tattoos in the workplace compared to non-tattooed employees. However, the perceived personal traits of tattooed and non-tattooed individuals varied.



As the art of tattooing has become more popular and accepted within various societies, stigmas and stereotypes of those with such body modifications remain. For over three hundred years, tattoos have been viewed as a deviant act, one that causes individuals to associate those with tattoos with risky and foolish behavior. Despite the characteristics of tattoos being large or small, tribal or fashionable, people did not express any difference in opinion toward individuals who endured the pain of tattooing. The stigmas and attitudes placed upon these individuals continue in an array of areas, as those with tattoos are judged based on personality, character flaws, behavioral patterns, intelligence, and approachability. Such judgments of the tattooed population may have an effect on whether a person chooses to get a tattoo. The

decision to be tattooed can influence social status and in turn diminish role expectations by permanently altering the body. Multiple studies have attempted to assess such stigmas in an effort to understand why body ink has such a dramatic effect on the way a person is perceived and identified.

The research literature on tattoos and stigmas is limited, but several studies have attempted to understand the attitudes toward tattoos, as well as their origin (Burgess & Clark, 2010). Burgess and Clark investigated the origins of tattoos in addition to how the various designs had an effect on the attitudes of others. As tattoos were introduced in the 1700's, specific notions about those who received them were subsequently placed into the developing subculture. Thus, the tattooed were viewed as straying from everyday social norms and assimilating into a deviant and aggressive social group. Burgess and Clark designed two experiments, one in which participants were to group different tattoo designs. The participants proceeded to explain the appearance of the individuals who had those tattoos, as well as to describe the meanings of the tattoos. A portion of the tattoos depicted were of "cute" nature, such as dolphins and bright colored work, whereas others were dark in color and featured tribal designs. Following this study, the tattoo groupings from study one were then rated by a group of students on a scale of friendly to aggressive. Results showed that participants viewed the "cute" design tattoos as more friendly and the tribal tattoos aggressively (Burgess & Clark, 2010).

The style of tattoo an individual acquired was indicative of negative attitudes in the above study, despite the lack of interaction with the tattooed individual. Judgment is easily passed with the initial sight of a tattooed person, regardless of what that individual may have to say. For example, a person may be heavily tattooed but extremely intelligent and socially approachable. Resenhoeft, Villa, and Wiseman (2008) formulated a study in which pictures were used to identify characteristics of the individuals. This created a visual representation rather than relying on imagination by the interpreter. Participants were shown

photos of models with and without tattoos, then rated the women on multiple levels of personality and fashion. This study found that the participants tended to view the model without tattoos as more fashionable, honest, and caring; yet less creative (Resenhoef et al., 2008).

The characteristic of creativity is an element that appeared again and again within studies of tattoos, as people with body art are often seen as appreciators of artistic ability and self-expression (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005). Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson studied the intrinsic value of tattoos in order to understand the booming consumerism of tattooing in modern society. Interviews were done with 14 individuals who had tattoos as well as two tattoo artists. Results found that there was an artistic aspect to the process of tattooing, in which the chosen tattoo delineated that individual from the stereotypical "tattoo subculture." Individuals personalize tattoo designs as a form of art as well as an innovative form of self-expression and identity. Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson also looked at tattoo consumption, or viewing the purchase of tattoos as a means of fashion rather than placing tattooed individuals within a category of nonconformance. Therefore, tattoos were considered to be another means of consumerism; a form of self-expression through the purchase of permanent body art. Results also showed that some individuals got tattoos for the simple aesthetic beauty regardless of the stigma that may be attached to their decision. Participants did not see themselves as deviant or reckless, but members of society trying to express personal history and experience through the acquisition of tattoos (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005).

Though expression and creativity are perceived as positive qualities that exist amongst tattooed individuals, the stigmas still remain in every aspect of life. As Martin and Dula (2010) discuss, although the presence of tattoos may ignite fear and hesitation toward individuals, among the general population, tattooed individuals are less likely to be harshly disapproving toward their tattooed counterparts. The participants within this study were college students at a Southeastern University. The Martin Stigma Against Tattoos Survey and the Big 5 Personality Measure were then used to measure attitudes toward tattoos. Results supported the hypothesis that those with tattoos were less likely to place a stigma upon fellow tattooees. Nevertheless, individuals in this study were aware of the implications of tattoos and the negative feedback that is often associated with them. This may explain why people conscientiously place tattoos in a concealable area. Participants may have already been aware of potential harassment through the lives of others because of their visible tattoos. Though inconclusive, the stigma survey portrayed a multitude of perceptions of the tattooed (Martin & Dula, 2010).

Thus with tattooing comes stigmas. However, stigmas may affect certain populations more than others. Perceptions of women with tattoos have also been a topic for many studies (Swami & Furnham, 2007). Swami and Furnham examined perceptions of women with tattoos, including blonde and brunette haired women as variables. Line drawings were used as visual models for interpreting the tattoos. Participants then rated the drawings based on physical attractiveness, as well as promiscuity and anticipated alcohol consumption. The simulated tattoos were deliberately placed in what are thought to be popular spots on the body, such

as the hip or arm. Overall, this study found that women with tattoos were perceived negatively. Also, attitudes reflecting negativity were expressed toward women with more tattoos. Women were also seen as less attractive and more promiscuous if they had a tattoo. This finding is reflective of the notion that tattooed individuals are sensation-seekers and may engage in risky behavior. Though tattoos may not be a direct cause for promiscuity or alcohol consumption, the stigmas attached to women creates an association between the behaviors and the presence of tattoos (Swami & Furnham, 2007).

Women tend to encounter harsher social sanctions than others in response to their tattoos. Other qualities of interest in present research are factors such as size and visibility, which may contribute to negative attitudes. Hidden tattoos would not seem to evoke the vast amount of negativity that visible tattoos would, but the mere knowledge of the artistic inscription may be cause for concern. Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn (2004), examined the factors that influence attitudes toward women with tattoos. The researchers intentionally manipulated the size and visibility of tattoos on women. Regardless of the growing popularity of tattooing, many people feel women are not fulfilling their defined gender roles that were established centuries earlier. Therefore, women who made such a mark upon their bodies were seen as social outcasts (Hawkes et al., 2004). Such gender bias stems from the stereotypical idea that tattoos are for men, bikers, and sailors. This conception was reflected by the results of the study, as men expressed stronger negative attitudes toward women with visible tattoos despite other positive characteristics. Findings also showed that women with tattoos were more negatively perceived despite the size and visibility of their tattoos, supporting the notion that many judgments passed were a result of sexism (Hawkes et al., 2004).

Surprisingly, little research has been done to examine such stigmas in the workplace. Many previous studies have emphasized personality and behavioral qualities of tattooed individuals but there is a need for in-depth research on how tattoos affect a person's chance for career advancement. In particular, Dwayne Dean (2010) looked at issues related to consumer perceptions of personnel with visible tattoos. The researchers hypothesized that customers with tattoos would be less judgmental toward service providers compared to non-tattooed customers. Also, older customers were expected to hold more negative attitudes toward the tattooed service personnel than their younger correspondents (Dean, 2010). Questionnaires were used to examine which profession held more stigmas against tattoos, from mechanics and barbers to nurses and bankers.

Results from Dean's (2010) study indicated a strong difference in negative attitudes toward tattooed individuals in white and blue collar professions, as stigmas were much more prevalent in white collar jobs. Blue collar jobs are often seen as less professional and rigid, therefore accepting employees as they are, even those who may be heavily tattooed. In comparison, a white collar job such as an accountant would restrict the presence of tattoos. Older adults also held more negative opinions of tattoos in the workplace than younger consumers as hypothesized (Dean, 2010).

Although tattoos have become more prevalent in society, the stigmas and negative responses have not been eradicated.

Disparities in personality characteristics have been found between tattooed and non-tattooed people, with tattoos accounting for high sensation-seeking behavior and a lack of agreeability (Wohlrab et al., 2007). Women are often seen in a more negative light, as tattooing has been a male-dominated practice. Tattooed people were seen as belonging to a masculine, working-class subculture. Thus, women who even thought of tattooing their bodies were in direct opposition of their expected gender roles (Burgess & Clark, 2010). As time continues, tattooing is becoming more androgynous, as both men and women are obtaining permanent body ink. The raw nature of tribal and dark tattoo designs have revolutionized into elaborate works of art. Nevertheless, stigmas remain depending on the social parameters tattoos cross, especially in the workplace setting. As such stigmas remain, it is necessary to understand such differences in attitudes toward tattooed and non-tattooed employees. To do so, a survey designed to determine the appropriateness of different sizes and placements of tattoos in the workplace was used in my study. In addition, questions regarding personal and physical characteristics were used to understand if there were perceived differences between the traits of tattooed and non-tattooed employees.

This study aims to understand if and why tattooed employees are looked down upon. Tattoos may not be a conventional practice to everyone, but that alone is not a reason to deny job opportunities to a qualified individual. Therefore, it is hypothesized that there is a stigma attached to individuals with tattoos in the workplace in comparison to those who do not have tattoos. Appearance is a vital first impression, especially in a person's chosen line of work. As more and more people are getting visible tattoos, their decisions to do so may harm their chances for career advancement, even if their personality and moral compass do not reflect their external appearance. In addition, a perceiver's age may have been a factor in negative attitudes against tattoos. Younger adults were thought to be more accepting of the widespread cultural phenomenon, while older adults viewed tattoos as inappropriate and abnormal.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of students enrolled in introductory psychology courses. The participants are enrolled at Indiana University South Bend, a regional, Midwestern University. A total of 50 students participated, 40 females and ten males. Recruitment of participants was done via an online research management system to participate in the research. Through this system, students were able to access all available studies and follow a link to an online survey. Upon participation in this study, participants were granted course credit for their designated psychology class.

Design

A quasi-experimental, between subjects design was used for this study to measure attitudes toward individuals with tattoos in the workplace. People with vs. without tattoos (tattoo status) as well as age were the independent variables. The age range was broken

down into three groups; 18-25, 26-35, and 36 and above. The dependent variable was attitudes toward tattoos.

Questionnaires

A single survey modified from Dwayne Dean (2010), *Attitudes Toward Tattoos*, was given to the participants. This survey was designed to measure the attitudes toward tattoos in various professions as well as different personality characteristics of individuals with tattoos. The modified survey consisted of five demographic questions and 25 attitudinal questions. The first part of the survey listed a total of 15 white and blue collar professions, using a rating scale as the response format. Responses were rated on a scale of 0 to 4, 0 (no opinion) to 1 (Strongly Inappropriate) to 4 (Strongly Appropriate) to indicate whether or not different sizes and visible tattoos were appropriate in the given profession.

The second part of the survey consisted of ten attitudinal questions in regards to personality characteristics and physical traits. The purpose of this part of the survey was to determine if those with tattoos in the workplace were viewed differently than those without tattoos on the aspects of intelligence, rebelliousness, creativity, etc. The response format consisted of three options; more, less, or no difference. For example, on the characteristic of intelligence, participants were asked to determine if an individual with a tattoo was more, less, or no different regarding intelligence levels than an individual without tattoos.

Procedures

Participants signed on to the research management system and clicked on the link to a survey for my particular study. An Informed Consent document was provided for participants to review. Upon review, participants chose to either proceed with or exit the survey. If the participant consented to the survey, it took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Results

The total attitudes toward tattoos in the workplace were calculated by adding all responses given in the scale measuring appropriateness in different professions. The ratings were summed for each profession (range = 0-16). A 2 (Status: Tattoo or No Tattoo) x 3 (Age: 18-25, 26-35, 36 and above) factorial ANOVA was used to determine attitudes. The main interaction, Age x Tattoo Status provided no significant results, $F(2, 39) = .358, p = .701, \eta^2 = .018$ (see Table 1 for means). A Cronbach's Alpha of .978 was the scale's score of reliability. In addition, the main effects for age, $F(2, 39) = .563, p = .574, \eta^2 = .028$, and tattoo status, $F(1, 39) = 1.186, p = .283, \eta^2 = .030$ were reported. Regardless of age or tattoo status, negative attitudes toward individuals with tattoos in the workplace were not significantly displayed ($p > .05$).

Attitudes regarding personality and physical characteristics of people with tattoos were calculated by doing a Pearson Chi Square test. The ten attitudinal questions were analyzed by response categories; less, more, or no difference, using tattoo status as a measure to compare frequencies. Significance was

Table 1: Variable Descriptive Data

Age Group	Tattoo Status	n	M	SD
18-25	Yes	14	164.93	37.896
	No	19	147.58	39.964
	Total	33	154.94	39.467
26-35	Yes	6	179.67	19.866
	No	1	179.00	
	Total	7	179.57	18.137
36+	Yes	3	175.33	16.623
	No	2	130.00	110.309
	Total	5	157.20	61.617
Total	Yes	23	170.13	31.767
	No	22	147.41	44.998
	Total	45	159.02	40.036

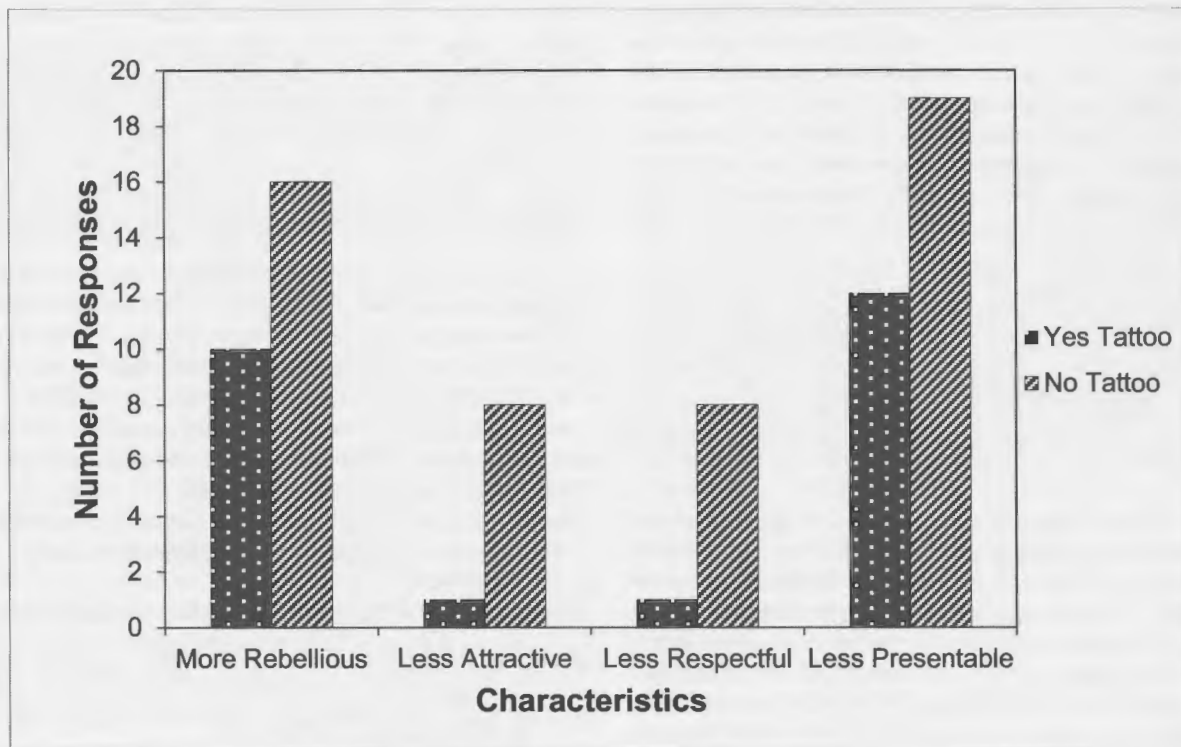


Figure 1: Those without tattoos found individuals with tattoos to be more rebellious, as well as less attractive, respectful, and presentable.

found between the Rebellious x Tattoo Status relationship, $X^2(1, N = 50) = 3.978, p = .046$, finding that those without tattoos found people with tattoos to be more rebellious. The Attractive x Tattoo Status relationship was also significant, $X^2(2, N = 50) = 8.759, p = .013$, expressing that those without tattoos saw people with tattoos as less attractive. In addition, significance was found between the Respectful x Tattoo Status relationship, $X^2(1, N = 49) = 7.027, p = .008$, as those without tattoos were more inclined to view tattooed people as less respectful. The Presentable x Tattoo Status relationship was significant as well, $X^2(2, N = 50) = 8.069, p = .018$, as those with tattoos were thought to be less presentable than

people without tattoos (refer to Figure 1 for a summary).

Discussion

This study found little evidence of difference in attitudes between tattooed and non-tattooed employees. Regardless of the perceiver's tattoo status, negative attitudes were not definitive. This finding is in direct opposition to the original hypothesis. Though there are various differences in personality and physical characteristics, the overall attitudes found in this study toward tattoos are not as negative as they are generally perceived to be. However, individuals with tattoos were found to be more

rebellious than those without tattoos, a finding that supports previous research.

Traditionally, tattoos have been associated with sensation-seeking, creativity, rebelliousness, and other Type-A personality characteristics. Therefore, it is not surprising that tattooed individuals are still viewed as more rebellious. In addition to rebelliousness, results also show that people who do not have tattoos view the tattooed population to be less attractive, presentable, and respectful. As previous research has shown, tattoos often cause others to judge personality based on surface appearance rather than intrinsic values. In the study done by Swami & Furnham (2007), women who have tattoos are often viewed as less attractive and even more promiscuous. These judgments are superficial. The intelligence, honesty, and creativity of an individual are not dependent on tattoo presence. However, societal influence and cultural norms are factors in determining negative attitudes.

Within the wider society, tattoos now play a larger role in everyday life. Tattoo parlors and shops are often present in every city and town, radio announcements advertise the practice, and television shows are dedicated to the art of tattooing. The reality television show *L. A. Ink* is an example of the booming tattoo industry, as men and women of all varieties are obtaining tattoos. Such a public display of the tattoo world may be a factor in the unexpected results from this study, as tattoos are now expressed in the media as fun and adventurous. As more and more individuals are obtaining tattoos, it is no longer seen as a universally deviant behavior. Dentists, psychologists, chefs, celebrities, and other members who hold prominent positions within society now have tattoos. This growing popularity may be a reason for the lack of negative attitudes toward individuals found in this study. Though there were negative stigmas attached to tattoos hundreds of years ago and still may be present today, tattoos are now a form of self-expression and identity. They are often seen as not mere ink or color, but a form of art and beauty; with the human body acting as its canvas.

Although the current study found no overall negative attitudes toward people with tattoos in the workplace, methodological factors may have affected the outcome. In addition to an individual's tattoo status, age was an independent variable in determining attitudes toward tattoos. However, a threat to internal validity was the average age of participants. Older adults may have less accepting attitudes than younger people. It was difficult to judge whether this was true or not based on the fact that there were only seven participants over the age of 35. Most of the participants were 18-25, therefore increasing the probability of skewed data.

As the age of participants was a threat to internal validity, an external threat to validity was my overall sample and size. The sample consisted of only 50 people, limited to students. If a bigger sample size could have been utilized it may have altered the results, representing a larger cross-section of the community. When trying to determine negative attitudes toward a given population a large sample is beneficial. This makes the results more generalizable to the wider society. Though there were threats to the validity of the study, the results may imply something about the growing tattooed population and how they

are viewed by those around them.

An important finding from this research is that negative stigmas are not always attached to individuals with tattoos in the workplace. If this result is generalizable to the overall population, it may aid in eradicating pre-existing stigmas. There are other factors to consider when deciding who would be an acceptable candidate for a position. Members of society must learn that character is not predetermined by external appearance. Tattoos only go skin deep. Based on the findings, overall negative attitudes toward individuals with tattoos in the workplace were not present, but personality traits were found to differ. This finding may support that though times have changed and traditional stereotypes have seemed to lose their power, personality and character may still be judged based on tattoos. To further understand the origin of such differences and opinions, further in-depth analysis of tattoos is necessary.

Further research is necessary to delve into the attitudes toward individuals with tattoos in the workplace. In the future it would be beneficial to use a large sample of participants to better represent the population. In addition, longitudinal and qualitative studies may serve as a foundation to understand why traditional stigmas against those with tattoos exist. There will always be varying opinions about what is deemed socially acceptable in different situations, but tattoos should not be the deciding factor when choosing a competent applicant for a job. Such stigmas may be more prominent in white collar positions than blue collar ones. For this reason, further efforts are needed to determine if there are differences in opinions between the levels of professionalism.

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