

Tattoos in the Workplace

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This study looked at the current stance of the general public on acceptability of visible tattoos in the workplace. Participants included ages 18 to 66, which were recruited from Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. Participants took part in an online Qualtrics survey consisting of 25 questions. These questions involved demographics, opinions on acceptability of tattoos in the workplace, factors taken into thought when deciding if tattoos should be acceptable in the workplace, as well as questions relating to stereotypes of people that have tattoos. My hypotheses were 1) More people will claim tattoos are acceptable than they are unacceptable in the workplace; 2) The participants age, gender, and whether they have tattoos themselves will factor into their perception of acceptability of tattoos in the workplace; 3) Other factors such as type of workplace, as well as placement and size of the tattoo will factor into the perception of acceptability of tattoos in the workplace; 4) People hold negative stereotypes against people with tattoos. The results showed that 86.4% of participants said tattoos are more acceptable in some workplaces than others. In regard to negative stereotypes toward people with tattoos, 82% did not hold any negative stereotypes, and less than 1% held strong negative stereotypes. This study can help current youth as well as anyone going into a new workplace decide if they should get a tattoo, or on placement of their tattoo. It can also help current employers reexamine at their policy on tattoos based on the current norms of society.

Keywords: tattoos, workplace, acceptability

When it comes to the workplace, it is generally required by business owners to have any and all tattoos be covered up so that they are not visible to other employees or customers. For example, from personal experience of working at QuikTrip, their policy includes that all tattoos must be covered. They say this is a requirement, due to the fact that visible tattoos are not considered the current “norm” of society, and that until they become said norm, the policy will

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continue to be that tattoos are completely covered. However, from my current experience of working at Target, their policy does not require employees to cover any tattoos, no matter the placement. Considering that both companies are fairly big and successful, it brought up the question of whether or not the general public minded if employees of different companies had visible tattoos while on the job. A follow-up question then occurred of whether or not the general public attaches stigmas to people with tattoos or not, and if so, if this is the reason why they do not want to see tattoos on an employee. These questions are what brought up the interest in conducting my study.

Previous research shows that even though people are beginning to agree that tattoos are becoming more acceptable in general, these same people still have negative stereotypes against people with tattoos (Martin & Dula, 2010). The increase in popularity to get tattoos was said to be at 40% in 2007, and .5% in 1957 (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004; Martin & Dula, 2010). Due to this increase in popularity and in acceptability, youth are continuing to get tattoos even though there are negative stereotypes against people with tattoos.

Some of these negative stereotypes were specified in a study by Degelman and Price (2002), in which participants rated people with tattoos as less honest, attractive, and motivated than people without tattoos. Resnehoeft, Villa, and Wiseman (2008) also conducted a study dealing with stereotypes against people with tattoos – to which their results show that people with tattoos are found to be less intelligent and attractive than people without tattoos. Even with the awareness that most individuals, including employers, have a negative stigma against people with tattoos, younger people, such as college students, are still continuing to get tattoos (Foltz, 2014). Although these young people are continuing to get tattoos even with the negative stigmas based around them, they are more cognizant of what part of their body they decide to place the tattoo (Foltz, 2014). For example, instead of getting the tattoo on a visible part of their body such as their wrist, they may instead get the tattoo on their side, which is generally always covered.

Some workplaces are considered to be more acceptable to have visible tattoos than others. Dean (2010) conducted a study on this topic, and his results indicate that visible tattoos were seen to be unacceptable on white-collar workers, yet acceptable on blue-collar workers by the general public. His results also claim that people with tattoos themselves were more acceptable of tattoos being visible in the workplace and vice versa (Dean, 2010). Employers in general tend to have a widespread view that tattoos are completely unacceptable to have visible at any workplace (Dale, Bevill, Roach, Glasgow, & Bracy, 2009). Though, places like Target do not seem to mind visible tattoos, which goes against these findings.

There is evidence showing that tattoos have actually helped in the workplace, in that they are big conversation starters for employees and the customers of the establishment (Ellis, 2015). This can help develop a rapport between the two, and therefore make the outing more pleasant for both parties. Ellis (2015) suggested that businesses that do not allow tattoos to be visible need to change their ways because disallowing tattoos to be shown can drive away customers and potential employees. This can be seen to be increasingly true, especially with the findings that the younger generations are shown to have a bigger popularity with getting and having tattoos (Martin & Dula, 2010). With this increase in popularity comes a new wave of what is acceptable to the general public, which means that the norms could be changing to more acceptability of tattoos in general.

In my research, an online survey was conducted asking the general public who were at least 18 years of age their opinions of people with tattoos, as well as different situations regarding visible tattoos in the workplace. These situations involved things such as location of the tattoo, acceptable establishments/positions for visible tattoos, as well as type of tattoos that were considered with acceptable or unacceptable in a workplace setting. I hypothesized that 1) More people will claim tattoos are acceptable than they are unacceptable in the workplace; 2) The participants age, gender, and whether they have tattoos themselves will factor into their perception of acceptability of tattoos in the workplace; 3) Other factors such as type of workplace, as well as placement and size of the tattoo will factor into the

perception of acceptability of tattoos in the workplace; 4) People hold negative stereotypes against people with tattoos.

Method

Participants

In my online Qualtrics study, I had 774 participants, whom I recruited through Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. Of these participants, 409 identified as female, 268 identified as male, and 97 identified as other. Other consisted of transgender, nonbinary, or cisgender without defining whether they were cis-male or cis-female. The age range of participants was from 18 to 66 – of this age range, 748 were under age 50 and 18 were over age 50. There was no compensation offered to the participants that participated in my study.

Materials and Procedure

I created an online survey through Qualtrics consisting of 25 questions (see Appendix A for survey). The first question of the survey included the informed consent which stated the purpose of my study, how long it would take to complete the survey, the fact that participation was completely voluntary, and contact information if they had any questions. The rest of the survey included questions regarding age and gender, as well as questions regarding the acceptability of tattoos in the workplace and stereotypes towards people with tattoos. The questions on stereotypes towards people with tattoos stemmed from the questions produced in Martin and Dula's (2010) study.

After all data collection was complete, I exported my data from Qualtrics into Excel. From there, I coded my data with the help of my assistants. Following this, I analyzed my data using descriptive statistics on Excel and Qualtrics.

Results

I hypothesized that 1) More people will claim tattoos are acceptable than they are unacceptable in the workplace; 2) The participants age, gender, and whether they have tattoos themselves will factor into their perception of acceptability of tattoos in the workplace; 3) Other factors such as type of workplace, as well as placement and size of the tattoo will factor into the perception of acceptability of tattoos in the workplace; 4) People hold negative stereotypes against people with tattoos. I used COUNTIF equations in Excel to analyze my data, as well as Qualtrics to see how many people responded with different answers most frequently.

Unfortunately, I was unable to fully answer my first three hypotheses. This being due to my mistake of not asking a general question about tattoos being acceptable in the workplace; rather I asked if having tattoos was more acceptable in some workplace settings than others. This being so, in order to somewhat give results towards my first three hypotheses, I used the responses to the question “Having tattoos is more acceptable in some workplace settings than others” to compare to the different demographics and factors included in my hypotheses. The results showed that 86.4% of participants said that tattoos are more acceptable in some workplaces than others – 2% did not respond to the question. With age, 88% of participants aged 18-29, 86% of participants aged 30-49, and 100% of participants aged 50 and up said that tattoos are more acceptable in some workplaces than others. Of 672 participants who identified as male or female, 86% of women and 92% of men found tattoos to be more acceptable in some workplaces than others. 85% of people that have tattoos and 91% of people that do not have tattoos said that tattoos were more acceptable in some workplaces than others.

In order to analyze whether people still held negative stereotypes, I looked at how many times a participant answered negatively or positively towards the multiple questions regarding negative stereotypes towards people with tattoos. With these results, 82% of participants did not hold any negative stereotypes about people with tattoos, and less than 1% held strong negative stereotypes.

Participants found the most acceptable places to have visible tattoos in construction, restaurants/catering/food industry, and in self-employed positions. Education, business, and religion/clergy were the least chosen workplace for acceptable workplaces to have visible tattoos (see Figure 1). With size, 15% of participants said 1-3 in. in diameter was acceptable, 20% said 4-6 in. in diameter was acceptable, 4% said 7-9 in. in diameter was acceptable, less than 1% said 10-12 in. in diameter was acceptable, 46% said that a full sleeve/leg was acceptable, and 14% chose other. Other responses included things such as case specific, back, depends on location, and depends on work setting. With placement, I used a heat map to analyze the results (see Figure 2). This heat map shows that the face, back of the head, and back of the hands were the most frequently chosen spot of unacceptable places. The least chosen places were anywhere from the hips down.

As said before, due to not asking a general question on if tattoos were found to be acceptable in the workplace, I was not able to see if my first three hypotheses were supported or not. When comparing to the question if tattoos were more acceptably in some workplaces than others, gender and age did not seem to have an influence on responses. This seems to be the same case with personally having or not having tattoos as well. Although my results went against my hypothesis that there are negative stereotypes of people with tattoos, this is a good thing as it shows negative stereotypes towards people with tattoos are decreasing.

Though some questions did not relate directly to my hypotheses, results from the following questions were taken as well. One question regarding what type of tattoos participants considered unacceptable came with multiple results, as expected. These responses included different locations on the body (such as the face, head, etc.), tattoos regarding racism or sexism, misogyny, homophobia, drugs, gang affiliations, profanity, violence, pornography, anything gory, political, religious, controversial, or “NSFW” (not suited for work). With these varying responses it could be said that the type of tattoo being shown in a work setting may need to be discussed on a case by case basis – for example, someone may

think that their religious tattoo is completely harmless, though it may not be appropriate for the workplace at hand.

When asked if a specific gender was unacceptable to have a tattoo showing, only eight participants answered. Of these participants, 25% said both male and female, 25% said solely male, 37.5% said solely female, and 12.5% said neither – being that neither gender is considered unacceptable. When asked which age(s) are considered unacceptable to have visible tattoos, only 15 participants responded. Of these 15 participants, 27% said all ages were unacceptable, 13% said no ages are unacceptable, 27% said under age 18 is unacceptable, 7% said under 16, 7% said under 35, 13% said 40 and up, and 7% said that it depends on the age and location of the individual. When relating culture to acceptability of tattoos, I grouped participants into cultures of American/US, Canadian, mixed (being that they claimed having two or more culture experiences), and other (being any other culture than previously mentioned if only one culture mentioned). 91% of participants with American/US culture, 84% of participants with Canadian culture, 88% of participants with mixed culture, and 79% of participants with other cultures claimed that tattoos are more acceptable in some workplaces than others.

Near the end of the survey, participants that claimed they have tattoos answered questions dealing with having to cover their tattoos in the workplace, as well as how upset this made them. When asked if they have ever been treated negatively because of their tattoos, 81% said that they have not, and 19% said that they had. Of these 19%, the most frequent explanations were family related negativity towards them, as well as rude comments or questions about them from others. The workplaces brought up that required these individuals to cover up their tattoos included food service at 20%, retail/customer service at 21%, healthcare field at 11%, and areas working with children at 11% (teaching, camp counselor, day care, assistant principle). Other workplaces mentioned included theme parks, legal professions, nursing homes, government jobs, office work, construction, religious institutions, custodial work, and movie theaters. The level of “upset” that each participant ranged from 1 to 10, with 1 being not upset at all and 10 being extremely upset. The most frequently chosen number was 2, although this was not a very dramatic

difference from other chosen numbers (see Figure 3). This shows that the level of “upset” is quite individual to the person and situation at hand.

Discussion

As mentioned previously, I was unable to clarify if my first three hypotheses were supported or not. My hypothesis that tattoos are becoming more acceptable in the workplace was supported by my data. Gender and age did not seem to have an influence on acceptability in the workplace when comparing each to tattoos being more acceptable in some workplaces than others – this being due to their responses all being fairly similar. My results contradicted my hypothesis that there are still negative stereotypes against people with tattoos.

Some things to take into consideration are that some responses to questions did not line up with others. For example, some participants would answer that tattoos are only acceptable in some workplace settings, but in open response would claim that all workplaces are considered acceptable to have tattoos showing. In future research, I would clarify these questions more so that answers could correlate better. I also would change my questions to have only “unacceptable” or only “acceptable” throughout the entire survey, so as participants did not become confused in some situations. On Reddit, one of my participants brought up the confusion between having unacceptable and acceptable continuously interchange throughout the survey, so only having one or the other could get rid of this confusion.

Some limitations to mention occurred through the responses to how the participants identified their gender. This question was an open response, allowing participants to type in their answers. This brought upon multiple different responses that did not have relation to gender, such as not wanting to respond because they did not support gender theory, attack helicopter, secret agent, old lady, bi, straight, etc. Another limitation is that I had so many open response questions – though this allowed participants to clearly speak their minds regarding each question, it also had responses that did not go along with the question at all, as well as a very wide range of responses. In future research, I would have less open

response questions in order to reduce these affects. Although I had a good amount of participants, if I continued this research, I would hope to gain even more participants so that I can get even more information regarding acceptability of tattoos in the workplace.

In regard to not fully being able to answer all of my hypotheses, in future research I would also like to amend this. To do so, instead of asking if having visible tattoos is more acceptable in some workplaces than others, I would have a blanket statement of “tattoos are acceptable to have visible in the workplace” and have it as a true or false question. This would allow me to be able to compare my different demographics and other factors more accurately.

The implications with this study are quite relevant to the current workplace. Many people of younger generations are beginning to go into the workforce, and with the popularity of tattoos increasing, the question of getting or having visible tattoos in regard to future employment can be in mind. With research regarding how the general public feels about tattoos, this can help employers see what the current norm of society is and adjust their policies accordingly. This information can also be beneficial to the general public that is already in, and for those going into the workforce soon, so that they can decide if or when they want to get a tattoo, as well as where they should place their tattoo if they do decide to get one.

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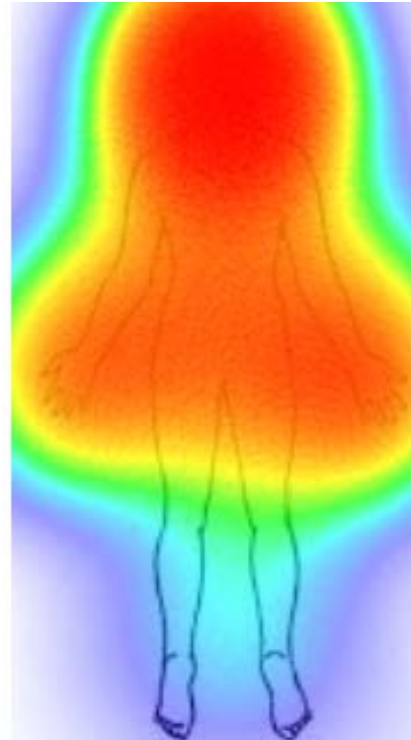
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Type of Workplace	% Acceptable	Count
Other, please specify*	1.39%	82
Religion/Clergy	5.67%	335
Corporate Level	7.20%	425
Business	7.65%	452
Education	8.01%	473
Health Care	8.86%	523
Retail	11.80%	697
Music, Theater, and the Arts	12.04%	711
Restaurant/Catering/Food Industry	12.21%	721
Self-Employed	12.50%	738
Construction	12.68%	749

Figure 1. This is a table showing the results from the question “Which workplaces do you consider to be acceptable to have visible tattoos? Select all that apply.” *Other included things such as adult entertainment, tattoo artists, technology, and science related jobs.



Front of the body



Back of the body

Figure 2. These images are a heat map attached to the question(s) “What location of tattoos are considered Unacceptable to have showing in a workplace setting? (FRONT OF BODY) or (BACK OF BODY)” Areas where the colors are “hottest” are where participants chose most frequently. The red areas are where was chosen most, being the face, back of the head, and back of the hands. Arms and torso were shown as orange areas on the back of the body, which shows that they were frequently chosen as well. Whereas the legs and the feet were rarely chosen at all.

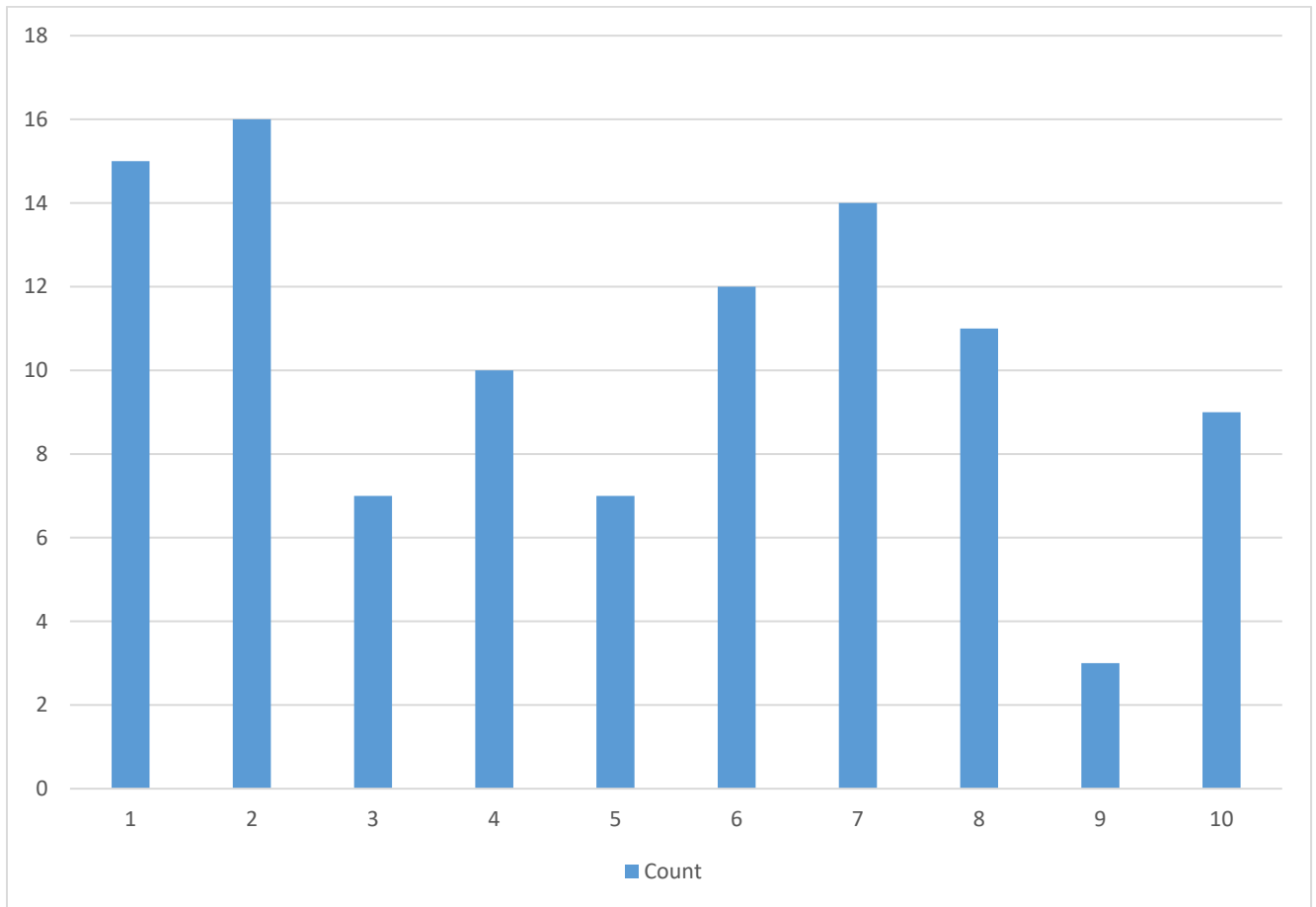


Figure 3. This bar graph shows the results attached to the question “How upset were you that you had to cover up your tattoo? (1 being not upset at all and 10 being extremely upset)”

Appendix A

Tattoos in the Workplace (Survey)

Tattoos in the Workplace

Q1 You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Megan Hamilton at Lindenwood University. I am doing this study to look at different demographic factors associated with acceptance of tattoos in the workplace. You will be asked a range of demographic questions, as well as your opinions on tattoos and tattoos in the workplace. It will take about 10 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.

There are no risks from participating in this project. I will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Megan Hamilton email: mth728@lindenwood.edu

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair email: mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director – Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

By my response below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window. Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

Q2 Please choose one of the following options

- I agree to participate in this study (1)
- I do not agree to participate in this study (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Please choose one of the following options = I do not agree to participate in this study

Q3 How old are you? Please specify.

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 0

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 1

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 2

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 3

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 4

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 5

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 6

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 7

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 8

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 9

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 10

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 11

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 12

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 13

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 14

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 15

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 16

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? Please specify. = 17

Q4 For each of the following statements, identify whether you believe the situation is true or false.

Q5 People with tattoos are more likely to be irresponsible.

True (1)

False (2)

Q6 People with visible tattoos are seeking attention.

True (1)

False (2)

Q7 Having tattoos is more acceptable in some workplace settings than others.

True (1)

False (2)

Display This Question:

If Having tattoos is more acceptable in some workplace settings than others. = True

Q8 Which workplaces do you consider to be acceptable to have visible tattoos? Select all that apply.

Education (1)

Health Care (2)

Restaurant/Catering/Food Industry (3)

Retail (4)

Construction (10)

Business (11)

Music, Theater, and the Arts (12)

Religion/Clergy (13)

Corporate Level (5)

Self-Employed (6)

Other, please specify: (7) _____

None of the above (8)

Q9 Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable in a workplace setting? Select all that apply.

Location of tattoo (1)

Size of tattoo (2)

What the tattoo is of (3)

Gender of the person with the tattoo (4)

Age of the person with the tattoo (6)

Other (5)

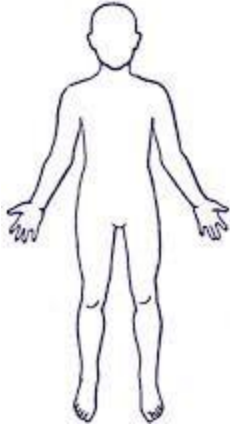
Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

Location of tattoo

Q10 What location of tattoos are considered **UNacceptable** to have showing in a workplace setting?

(FRONT OF BODY)



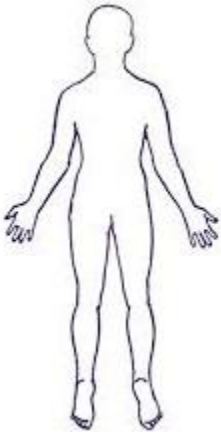
Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

Location of tattoo

Q11 What location of tattoos are considered **UNacceptable** to have showing in a workplace setting?

(BACK OF BODY)



Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

Size of tattoo

Q12 What do you consider the largest acceptable size of visible tattoo in the workplace?

- 1-3 inches in diameter (4)
- 4-6 inches in diameter (7)
- 7-9 inches in diameter (8)
- 10-12 inches in diameter (9)

Full sleeve/leg (10)

Other, please specify (11) _____

Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

What the tattoo is of

Q13 What type of visible tattoo do you consider to be unacceptable in the workplace? Please specify.

Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

Gender of the person with the tattoo

Q14 What gender is considered unacceptable to have a tattoo showing in a workplace setting? Please specify.

Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

Age of the person with the tattoo

Q15 What age(s) do you consider unacceptable to have visible tattoos in the workplace? Please specify.

Display This Question:

If Which of the following factors are considered when deciding if visible tattoos are unacceptable i... =

Other

Q16 What other factors do you consider when deciding if visible tattoos are acceptable in the workplace or not? Please specify.

Q17 True or False: The quality of work of an employee with a tattoo is lesser than an employee that has no tattoos.

True (1)

False (2)

Q18 Do you have any tattoos?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Display This Question:

If Do you have any tattoos? = Yes

Q19 Have you ever been treated negatively because of your tattoos? Please specify if yes.

Display This Question:

If Do you have any tattoos? = Yes

Q20 Have you ever had to cover a tattoo in a workplace setting?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Display This Question:

If Have you ever had to cover a tattoo in a workplace setting? = Yes

Q21 In which job were you required to cover your tattoo? Please specify.

Display This Question:

If Have you ever had to cover a tattoo in a workplace setting? = Yes

Q22 How upset were you that you had to cover your tattoo? (1 being not upset at all and 10 being extremely upset)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How upset were you? ()



Q23 How do you currently describe your gender identity?

Q24 What culture(s) did you grow up experiencing? (Ex: American culture, Japanese culture, Latina/Latino culture, etc.) Please specify.

Q25 Thank you for taking the time to complete my study! This study was conducted in order to see how acceptable tattoos are in the workplace, as well as what demographic characteristics are associated with acceptability of tattoos in the workplace.

If you have any questions or are interested in the results of this study, you are welcome to contact me through the contact information provided below. Thank you again for participating!

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator: Megan Hamilton mth728@lindenwood.edu

Supervisor: Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair 636-949-4371 (mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)