EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW SCREENING: IS THE INK WORTH IT?

Paul J. Antonellis, Jr. Ed.D.
*Faculty and Director of Human Resource Management Programs, Business School,
Merrimack College, North Andover, MA*

Gwendolyn Berry, Ed.D (ABD)
Intentional Connections-College Preparatory at San Jacinto College, TX.

Rachel Silsbee
Assistant Director of Student Success: Writing Center, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA.

ABSTRACT: *This article focuses on how employment interview screeners view applicants with tattoos. Tattoos have been in existence for centuries, for they have been traced back to 400 B.C. In some cultures, tattoos have been used to identify criminals; whereas in other cultures, tattoos represent a rites of passage. There once was a time when tattoos were associated with sub cultures, such as gang members or those classified as a menace to society. Today, tattoos are not only worn by the average citizens but also by public servants and individuals in the armed forces. This qualitative study analyzed data from 578 participants while breaking down the data into gender responses concerning the hiring of individuals with tattoos. One major theme emerged from all responses, revealing that 67% of male responses and 33% female are accepting of tattoos during the interview screening process. With today's acceptance of tattoos, employment interview screeners must consider what impact does a candidates' tattoo has on the screening process.*

KEYWORDS: Interview, Tattoos, Selection, Employment Screening

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The debate and views of tattoos is not a new issue or one that has been accepted unilaterally across all employment sectors. Research supports the idea that when it comes to making employment decisions during the interview screening process, the screeners are human and therefore are subject to a level of bias; whether it is based on a person's height, weight, or even physical appearance (Ellis, 2015; Harper, 2000; Watkins & Johnston, 2000). Society has a history of viewing tattoos as a person's connection to gangs, crime, or some other deviant behavior as a means to record and show one's actions or accomplishment. The tattoos may also signify a person's connection to military service (Williams, 2013). Based on the social history around tattoos, some employment screeners may have a level of personal bias towards tattoos or people with exposed tattoos during the interview process (in-person or video). In some cases, this personal bias or stigma held by the employee screening evaluator may result in a negative rating of the candidate due to a visible tattoo (Whorton, 2015). The following article will explore the impact that tattoos have in the employment

interview screening process and the workplace within the United States. The intent of this article is to offer insight to how tattoos may negatively impact the employment interview screening process and provide awareness as to how tattoos are viewed during the employment interview screening process, whether exposed tattoos or tattoos that are concealed with normal business/work clothing.

The significance of this article is based on the projections that estimates the adult U.S. employment application pool has at least one tattoo with estimates ranging from 16% to 21%. Larson, Patterson, and Markham (2014) acknowledged that the tattoo industry grows and the increased percentage of people receiving tattoos provides the pathway for tattoos becoming more socially acceptable today. Given the percentage of people with tattoos today, the best action plan is to provide a discussion on the topic and prepare United States employment interview screeners with the knowledge and education on the topic to ensure that personal biases will not prevent employment candidates with tattoos from being negatively screened for employment.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this research is that tattoos have an impact on the employment interview screening process in the United States. The in-person employment interview screening procedure is the most widely used employment screening procedure next to the resume screening process (Macan, 2009; Pettersen & Durivage, 2008). Given the importance the employment interview screening process plays in the entire screening process of candidates, examining some of the areas that may have positive or negative results on the process, such as tattoos, is recommended.

The goal of this article is to provide United States employment interview screeners with insight on how people view tattoos when it comes to employment interview screening, how personal bias can impact the selection process, provide additional knowledge based on the topic of tattoos that can be built upon in the future, and to encourage an open, honest, respectful discussion on the topic of employment interview screening and tattoos. Employers and human resource practitioners may want to consider including the findings of this research in their employment interviewing screening training that they provide to employment screeners or employment screening committees.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Historical Standpoint

A report in 1955 acknowledged that tattoos have been tracked back to the Egyptian mummies around 400 B.C and further suggested that the medical community noted the link between tattoos and people with mental health disorders (Ferguson-Rayport, Griffith, & Straus, 1995). In ancient Greece, criminals would often be inflicted with scars from cuts or brands in an effort to allow society to identify criminals in an open manner in society; this process has a direct connection to the virtual social identities for people with tattoos and the association to crime (Neuberg, Smith, & Asher, 2000). Biernat and Dovidio (2003) suggested that a person only needs to look at the

inside of a prison and see the high rate of tattoos being displayed on prisoners to see how a person could stigmatize or stereotype people with tattoos, without knowing anything else about the person, other than the physical appearance of the tattoo and that the person is incarcerated.

The topic of tattoos on the human body has deep roots from a historical standpoint and in some cases linked to various types of religion rights of passages (i.e. Samoans, Tahitians, and Hawaiians). It has been reported that as early as 1769, sailors returning from long sea journey brought tattoos back to the New World and today people still associate tattoos with sailors (Sanders, 1988). Woodstock (2014) believed that people chose to have a tattoo as a way to express themselves visually, through membership in a tribe, fraternity, trade, or organization; the reason why a person would choose to have tattoos are endless and comes down to an individual choice. This open display in society will allow others to see that they belong to the same fraternity regardless of their travels.

Deviant Behaviors

Historical research to the most current research literature suggested that tattoos have been linked to deviant behaviors. Research studies observed a link between tattoos and deviant behavior in the following areas: binge drinking, multiple sex partners (Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2010; Wohlrab, Fink, Kappeler, & Brewer, 2009) homicides (Blackburn, Cleveland, Griffin, Davis, Lienert, McGwin 2012) suicide, and accidental death (Blackburn et al. 2012; Dhossche, Snell, & Larder, 2000). As a result of these findings, society's negative attitudes towards tattoos may be in fact supported by science; however, society may tend to shift in its opinion of tattoos in more recent times. From a society timeline, people's attitudes of tattoos have shifted with the changing tides of time. During the 1950-1970 period, society saw the shift from the acceptance of tattoos to respected groups (sailors, firefighters, police, occupation affiliation) to the deviant phase. Jump to today, and the tattoo industry is medically regulated, performed in local markets and allows for customized artwork demonstrating a level of acceptance by society (Serup, 2015). The fact that the tattoo industry is being regulated by the government and that tattoo parlors business growth in flushing further lends itself to argue that society is perhaps moving to a greater acceptance level of tattoos.

Stereotypes

Fyock and Stangor (2011) suggested that once people develop stereotypes, they are more likely to remember facts about a person if the information conforms to their prior ideas and belief. The same holds true during an employment screening process; the evaluator is more likely to identify with the candidate that ideas and/or beliefs are aligned with the evaluator. The same can take place with a negative result, if the employment screening evaluator has a set belief about tattoos. The evaluator may tend to resist altering his/her belief on the topic of tattoos (outgroup) and this resistance to alter a prior belief may result in a negative rating for the candidate with a tattoo. The evaluator may remember facts about the exposed tattoo on the hand or below the short sleeve line because of a preconceived bias about tattoos. Research has shown that employment candidates

with tattoos being assessed for employment were negatively impacted by the evaluators than those candidates with no tattoos (Ellis, 2015; Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008; Swanger, 2006).

Entertainment Industry

Cable television shows are now common place pertaining to tattoo-related entertainment with some shows lasting multiple seasons (Woodstock, 2014). The increase in media acceptance by producing television shows based on tattoos and the profession has created a heightened interest in mainstream American's. The television shows focus on the average person receiving a tattoo, such as the mother, business owner, and the college student. These television shows are not showing the long historical negative views that many people hold against tattoos and their association with gangs, crime, or deviant behavior. In the past few years, Henna tattoos have increased in popularity if someone wants a temporary tattoo for 7-14 days. This elaborate temporary tattoo may provide an avenue for a person to try a tattoo before receiving permeant ink. Brides are now having elaborate bridal henna performed on their hand for their wedding day (Wang, Maranda, Cortizo, Lim, & Voracek, 2016). Swami, Tran, Kuhlmann, Stieger, Gaughan, and Voracek, (2016) research argued that "tattooed and non-tattooed adults nowadays are more similar than different" (p.42). Today tattoos are considered mainstream art and are now being used on a temporary basis as a fashion statement.

Body Modification

Over the years, certain attitudes have developed associated with body tattoos. The tattoo provides an opportunity for the individual receiving a tattoo to alter his/her natural condition, giving way to the eye of the beholder as a means to enhance one's beauty. The choice to have a tattoo can be linked to self-identity; for example, the individual may choose to have a tattoo that identifies a personal challenge they have overcome or a tattoos of art or a special verbiage that they feel personally inspired (Kosut, 2000; Stirn, 2003). People who have tattoos will often have a story to tell about each tattoo and the significance of the tattoo (Goulding, Follett, Saren, & MacLaren, 2004). The individual with the tattoo, each tattoo holds personal value to the induvial.

Tattoo Location

The two main factors that surround the issue of tattoos is the location on the body for the tattoos and the number of tattoos on the body when it comes to how the person is perceived by others. If a person has a smaller tattoo and in a discrete location people tend to be willing to accept the tattoo compared to a larger tattoo, such as a sleeve when the arm is totally covered in ink, that is considered unattractive (Tiggeman & Hopkins 2011; Totten, Lipscomb, & Jones 2009). Dickson, Dukes, Smith, and Strapko (2015) reported that most people consider tattoos on the face, neck and hands to be unattractive and unacceptable in a majority of employment situations. College age students have reported that receiving a tattoo is an important phase of identity or self-expression for students, resulting in a symbolic transition to adulthood. Foltz (2014) claimed that college age students contended that most students understand the negative consequences of having a tattoo and the employment screening process but still plan on receiving a tattoo with the ability of concealing

it. Visible tattoos and non-visible tattoos appear to hold significant value in the employment screening process; if the tattoo(s) can be covered up by work clothing or other methods, people tend to be more acceptable of individuals with tattoos.

Professional Appearance Policy

Organizations have a professional appearance to uphold in order to maintain their customer base. Some organizations have had long standing policies against exposed tattoos for employees. The standards may be in the form of a written uniform policy or employee handbook policy explicitly stating that employees cannot have any exposed tattoos. Dean (2010) found that people think exposed tattoos on white-collar employees is considered unsuitable and the same exposed tattoo on blue-collar employees as suitable.

A policy that allows for employees to "cover up" normally exposed tattoos may have a negative result on those employees being asked to cover up their tattoos. The United States military has been making significant iterations to its tattoo policy since early 2003, with additional iterations being considered going forward (Michael, Munn, & Michael, 2016). The military has been forced to alter their tattoo policy based on the fact that so many people now have tattoos and the mainstream acceptance of tattoos. Tattooing of the body has become a fashion statement and a means to decorate the body as a person might decorate the body by wearing a business suit or dress, called fashion (Walzer & Sanjurjo, 2016).

When an organization requires an employee to "cover up" a tattoo during work hours, that employee may feel that they are not a true fit to the organization. Ellis (2014) argued that, "For some individuals who must cover up their body art, the resulting feelings of inauthenticity could lead to anger, lower levels of motivation, and poor performance" (p.108). Employers with a cover up policy may want to consider the end results of the policy and weigh the risk of lower levels of performance, increased anger, feelings of not being accepted by the organization and weigh it against the benefits of having such a policy; customer contact, business culture, and professional appearance.

Screening Discrimination

Current literature suggests that employees who are participating in the employment screening process are subject to a level of bias based on visible tattoos (Drazewski, 2013; Roberts, 2012; Timming, 2015; Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2015). Mendez (2016) claimed that men and women did not perceive tattoos any different in the workplace. What Mendez (2016) did find is that when subjects were provided with a photo of an individual with a tattoo and the same individual with no visible tattoos, the subject with the tattoos were negatively impacted, supporting the above research that people with visible tattoos are negatively impacted by the employment screening process. Although people may say they do not have a problem with tattooed coworkers in the workplace, there still remains a level of bias when it comes to the employment screening process for new employees.

Ellis (2014) argued that some people view tattooed people as "irresponsible, unprofessional and less qualified" (p. 111) compared to those with no tattoos. The level of bias that remains in the workforce today against people with tattoos is still prevalent and those with tattoos should consider the consequences and alternatives when displacing tattoos for all to see or deciding to strategically place tattoos in a location that can be covered. As indicated, there is a mix of research on the topic of tattoos and how they are perceived in the workplace.

At the time of this report, there are no federal laws in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia that provide direct protection to those who display body art in the form of a tattoo as it pertains to employment law. The literature reveals that employment screening individuals often hold negative views of people with tattoos. Organizations tend to hold a wide range of options when it comes to determining company policy on the display of tattoos, body piercings, dress codes, and grooming polices for employees; providing that the policies will not have an adverse effect on a protected class under federal law (Ellis, 2015; Mendez, 2016). Those with tattoos who may feel that they are being discriminated based on the display of art on their body; however, there are no laws for this feeling of discrimination unless a person falls under a protected class. For example, a religious tattoo, one could argue that that they are being discriminated based on the expression of the religious tattoo. A religious tattoo may fall under the protection of the law, the employer would need to have any action taken by attorney to protect the candidates' rights and the employers' rights under the law.

Tattoo vs Tattooed

As a point of clarification, *people with a tattoo* are considered to have one or two small tattoos that may be strategically placed on the body that can be easily covered up or may not be visible in public, while *tattooed people* are considered to have multiple tattoos and that the tattoos are mostly exposed and are not easily covered up with business attire. Tattooed people are those who chose to have a bold tattoo on the face, neck, and hands in an effort to show themselves as an individual (self-identity). Tattooed people want to display their body art for all to see and are offended if asked to cover it up for employment, viewing the cover up of the tattoo as a means of them covering up their self-identity. Laumann and Derick (2006) believed that only about ten percent of the people with tattoos would fall into the category of tattooed people; therefore, only a small percentage of people who are being interviewed for employment may have a facial, neck, or hand tattoo. Hence, a candidate who has a covered up tattoo and not exposed during the employment screening process stands a better chance of not having the tattoo negatively impact their rating for the position.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology selected for this research was thematic analysis of the qualitative data. We explored the textual data collected and analyzed from a professional social media human resource management discussion board in an effort to account for what people think of tattoos and the employment interviewing screening process. The study included a total of 669 participants. After removing the simple "yes" or "no" responses, the qualitative data analyzed was based on

578 participants.   Based on the participants posting, the textual responses appear to be predominantly from the United States and some international responses, providing firsthand knowledge written responses on the acceptance and rejection of a candidate when it comes to the employment Interview screening process.

Elicited online data collection was the main method of data collection for this research. The discussion post included a color photo of a woman in a short sleeve dress shirt with her arms exposed and her skin covered with full color tattoos sitting in a chair. The photo did not show her face or her lower half. The photo was posted with the caption "My candidate missed out on a job because of their tattoos. Right or wrong? Would you employ someone with tats?" The original discussion post was made on March 18, 2016 and for the following three days, the posted textual comments were recorded verbatim with no personal identification being recorded, other than if the poster was male or female based on the posters name and photo used. The data was saved in an Excel sheet and only the researchers had access to the raw data. Each time a participant posted a comment on the discussion board, the people within that participants "network" would see the posting and could also add a comment. We did not have any influence once the original post was made along with the photo to the social media site, pertaining to promotion, distribution or any further comments/edits postings to the group. The goal was to collect the statements provided by people based on the question asked and the photo used to allow the qualitative data to be analyzed for emerging themes to determine a deeper understanding of the beliefs of tattoos and the employment screening process held by people today. During the thematic analysis, we tried to maintain the participant's voice as close to what they wrote. Many of the emerging themes in this research can be linked to participants' words or phrases from the textual comments provided.

Our research study aim was to identify how people responsible for the employment interviewing process feel about a candidates' tattoos so others can learn from this new knowledge. The following two questions guided the study:

1. How do people who are responsible for employee interviewing feel about tattoos?
2. What influence do candidates' tattoos have on the screening process?

The aim of the research questions is to identify how employment screeners feel about tattoos and to what, if any, influence that a tattoo may have on the employment screening process. The knowledge gained from the research may provide new or supporting literature for those who conduct employment interviews or for those individuals with tattoos to consider the influence the tattoo may have in the employment screening process. The first step was to collect the textual data from the interview photo social media posting. The next step was to review the current literature on the issues surrounding tattoos. The third step was to analyse the data collected and identify the emerging themes. The fourth step involved determining how our research findings support the current literature or determine if our findings were not consistent with the current literature.

FINDINGS

Mainstream Acceptance

Depending on what studies you read, the percentage of Americans with tattoos range from 16 to 21 percent with some estimates peaking at around 40 percent (Brallier, Maguire, Smith, & Palm, 2011; French, Maclean, Robins, Sayed, Shiferaw, 2016; Roberts, 2012). Henley (2010) suggested that 40% of Americans between the ages of 26 to 40 have tattoos. This would suggest that many organizations hiring employees in the age range could be significantly impacting the employment screening process depending on screener's views, beliefs, and biases on tattoos for almost 40% of possible candidates.

In our research, we found one emerging theme indicating that tattoos are "Appropriate/Acceptable" in the workforce with a total of 418 words or phrases appearing in the textual data (72%). In providing additional depth to the textual data, 140 words or phrases (33%) were from females and 278 words or phrases were from males (67%). Our research findings are aligned with the current research indicating that people generally feel that employees with tattoos are acceptable leading to a mainstream acceptance. The following are some of the textual data provided by participants and broken down by gender:

> "I would hire any talented qualified candidate that dressed and had a professional demeanor regardless of any tattoos, come on its 2016". Female. (26)

> "Tattoos probably don't affect people's ability to do their jobs but they do affect what our customers think of us. I'd only hire if they could comply with our HR policy of "no visible tattoos or piercings" - while dressing in "normal, corporate appropriate clothing". Male. (68)

> "Depends on type, location, meaning behind the tat. I admire the creativity and art work but professionalism in business does and can offer a -/+ view upon how a client may see your business through your employees". Male. (90)

> "Tattoos are a form self-expression, in no way, shape or form does this hamper an individual's ability to perform a task that they might have spent years studying for. It is a mere facade, and does not reflect capabilities or skill sets." Male. (157)

> "Nothing wrong with tattoos, but they should not be visible when dressed in workplace attire" Male. (220)

> "It goes to professional image, it depends on the role, the exposure to customers, the amount of tats, and the image you want your organization to portray". Male. (342)

"depends on the position and the job requirements, I have tattoo's but I took into account having to work for others and they can't be seen when I am wearing professional attire". Male. (614)

Gender Gap

Swami et al. (2016) reported that the gender gap for tattoos is narrowing to the point that there is no longer a gender gap for males and females showing off their body art for everyone to see. Our research further supports this idea with 53% of females and 50% of males reported "Yes to hire" and 43% of females and 46% of males reported "Depends on position" as reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants wiliness to hire the individual with exposed tattoos.

Participants Responses	n	%	Female n	Female %	Male n	Male %
Yes to hire	294	51	86	53	208	50
Depends on position	260	45	69	43	191	46
No to hire	24	4	6	4	18	4
Total	578	100	161	100	417	100

Art/Expression

One emerging theme in our research revealed that a total of 134 (23%) words or phrases indicated that tattoos are a form of "art/expression." To provide additional depth to the data, we broke the textual data down by gender; 43 words or phrases appear from females (32%) and 91 words or phrases appear by males (68%) consider tattoos as "art/expression." The findings support the prior research of Kosut (2000) and Stirn (2003). The following are some of the textual data provided by participants and broken down by gender:

"Tattoos done by the right artist are works of art". Female. (13)

"Clothing options are a choice and so is what you do with your body. Nothing wrong with body art, but it is one of those choices that comes with a consequence. I always recommend at least having the art in places that can be covered." Male. (159)

"Tattoo art is very common today and I tend to like it especially if it's artistic in nature. Most people I know would embrace it and accept it". Male. (218)

"Good body art is no different to good graffiti in a safe place. It can be beautiful. As long as it doesn't display prejudice it's completely acceptable. We need to recognize that people express themselves in different ways and what we should always do is recruit for capability not appearance." Female. (402)

Concealed/Covered Up

A second emerging theme for our research findings reveal that a total of 144 words or phrases indicated "concealed/covered up" as a factor when considering screening a candidate for employment. The gender breakdown reveals that 43% words or phrases indicated by females and 57% words or phrases indicated males consider "concealed/covered up" as a factor during the employment interviewing procedure (See Table 2). This emerging theme supports the findings of Foltz (2014) as it pertains to college students receiving tattoos. The following are some of the textual data provided by participants and gender identification.

> "I understand they are an artistic way of expressing yourself and what is important to you. So if you must, get them in a place where they can be personal to you. Why would you want to limit yourself from any career opportunities because of personal expression? Having said that, there are definitely certain industries that accept and welcome exposed ink but they are not in the majority." Female. (35)

> "People should only get tattoos they can cover with clothing or else they run the risk of damaging their professional career." Male. (142)

> "I fully agree that in a general corporate role, especially client facing, tattoos should generally be hidden; and especially so on an interview just so it isn't unnecessarily distracting." Female. (186)

> "If you can't hide the tattoos when the time comes, it's a valid reason for rejection for many roles". Male. (522)

> "My tattoos are hidden under my clothes no one would even know I have them so clearly they make no difference to my work performance". Female. (554)

Corporate Culture

The increase in people with tattoos and the growth of the mainstream acceptance is forcing many organizations to reconsider long held policies preventing tattoos. A third emerging theme for our research findings reveal that a total of 199 (34%) words or phrases indicated that "corporate culture, policy, image" is a factor when considering screening a candidate for employment. To provide additional depth to the data, the gender breakdown for "corporate culture, policy, image" revealed 48 (24%) female words or phrases compared to 151 (76%) male words or phrases, revealing that males tend to feel that the culture/image of the organization is important to consider when determining if a candidates' tattoos will have a negative impact on the "corporate culture, policy, image". The emerging theme from the male participants are consistent with the research of Ellis (2014). The following are some of the textual data provided by participants and identified by gender:

"Don't be shocked by people's inability to accept what they can't avoid seeing. You put it out there, it's important to you- it's important to employers too. Kind of like someone bringing up their political beliefs during an interview when it's completely irrelevant. Don't be shocked when the interviewer has an opposing view, and doesn't hire you because of it." Male. (215)

"That would depend on the nature of the tattoo, the nature of the job and the potential impact it would have on our customers/clients. I don't think there is a single Yes/No answer for this." Female. (285)

"I wouldn't hire someone with visible tattoos to work in banking or a "professional" type position. If the tattoos can be covered while at work, then of course. However, people need to consider their appearance when deciding to get tattoos, piercings, etc., just as they would consider what clothing to wear to work. While I am all for personal expression, when you are at work you represent your employer and their company." Female. (312)

"Depends on the culture of the company, this is almost the norm in our modern society. If the tattoos are not offensive, then there really shouldn't be a problem. I'm grateful my company has an open mind and we hire based on the experience and personality." Female. (445)

This research project consisted of a qualitative analysis of 578 written comments provided by participants to a social media discussion post over a three-day period. A total of 2,000 words or phrases were identified from the 578 written responses, representing 584 female words or phrases and 1416 male words or phrases identified. The postings were captured in an effort to determine the participants' feelings on the topic of tattoos and employment hiring. Table 2 shows an analysis of the emerging themes after an extensive qualitative analysis and the gender difference for each of the nine emerging themes.

Table 2. Themes for social media responses to tattoos and employment interview screening.

Themes	n	Female n	Percent	Male n	Percent
Appropriate/Acceptance	418	140	33	278	67
Visible Ink	273	78	29	195	71
Qualified/Skills/Talent/Ability	257	77	30	180	70
First Impression	231	54	23	177	77
Depends on Position	215	45	21	170	79
Corporate Culture/Policy/Image	199	48	24	151	76
Concealed/Covered Up	144	62	43	82	57
Art/Expression	134	43	32	91	68
Offensive/Polarizing/Hate	129	37	29	92	71
TOTAL	**2000**	**584**		**1416**	

DISCUSSION

The emerging themes reveal that 72% words or phrases indicated that participants in this research generally are accepting of tattoos if they are "appropriate/acceptance" for the position. However, the gender difference reveals that 67% of males and only 33% of females consider tattoos appropriate/acceptance. Of the 47% words or phrases indicated of all responses revealed that "visible ink" is acceptable, most did follow up with if the tattoos are smaller in nature and not on the face, neck or hands. The limitation of no tattoos on the face, neck, or hands supports the findings offered by Dickson, Dukes, Smith, & Strapko, (2015). The gender difference when it comes to "visible ink" reveals that 71% of male words or phrases consider visible ink as being appropriate during the employment interview process where as only 29% of the words or phrases from female responses consider visible ink acceptable. Female words or phrases for "concealed/covered up" reveals that 43% words or phrases think it is best to cover up or conceal tattoos during the employment interview process. The top two emerging themes for male participants involve 79% for "depends of position" and 77% for "first impression" of responses, where as the top two emerging themes for female participants revealed that 43% of words or phrases apply to "Appropriate/Acceptance" and 43% of words or phrases apply to "Concealed/Covered Up".

The research findings reveal that people who approve of visible tattoos still have limits and that they are not an all-inclusive acceptance of any type of tattoos. The visible tattoos with limits are consistent with the current literature identified in this article (Tiggeman, & Hopkins, 2011; Totten,

Lipscomb, & Jones, 2009). The participants indicated 44% of the responses that they felt that hiring should be based on qualifications, skills, talent, and ability and that tattoos should not be a deciding factor. This may support the research that candidates with tattoos are negatively evaluated during employment screening and this is why the participants may have felt that the employment decision should be based on qualifications, skills, talent, and ability (Antonellis, 2012; Ellis, 2015; Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008). It may further support the current literature that during the employment interview screening process screeners are subjected to a level of bias when involving tattoos (Drazewski, 2013; Timming, 2015; Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2015; Larson, Patterson, & Markham, 2014).

It is our recommendation that employers take the necessary steps to properly train those in the organization conducting employment screening on the impact that candidate's tattoos may have during the interview screening process, and to ensure that the screening is consistent with current employment practices while minimizing the negative influence that tattoos may have on the interview screener. Providing training and awareness to the employment screening members can be productive in minimizing personal bias and prior views/beliefs of people with tattoos (Antonellis & Flam, 2016).

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Our research provides insight into how people feel about tattoos and the employment screening process. It is our hope that this research will provide additional knowledge in the area of employment interview screening, tattoos, and interview training. The theoretical and practical application of this research may provide academic and human resource management practitioners with new knowledge in the area of employment interviewing screening and how tattoos can impact the process.

CONCLUSION

It is our hope that the research conducted will provide further evidence as to the influence a tattoo can have on the employee interview screening process. Like all research, our research has limitations and we can only assume that the participants who provide the textual data were being honest in their responses and that they have responsibilities for hiring employees. We would encourage additional research in the area of tattoos and employment screening. Our goal was to provide employers, human resource management practitioners, and researchers with new literature on the impact that tattoos play during the employee interview process.

FUTURE RESEARCH

It is our recommendation that future research in the area of employment interviewing be conducted to further understand the significance that tattoos may play in the process. The focus of this type

of research may want to limit participants who have direct responsibility for employment interview screening.

One of our research limitations was the size of sample and asking one open ended question of the participants. Therefore, our recommendation for future research studies would be to explore in-depth why participants would or would not hire an individual with an exposed tattoo. The use of an individual with exposed tattoos compared to the same individual with no exposed tattoos.

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