

Does My Tattoo Matter? Impact of tattoos in Employee Selection

Simone Woodford

Graduate student

University of Canterbury Business School

Russell Wordsworth (Corresponding author)

Senior Lecturer

Human Resource Management

University of Canterbury Business School

Private Bag 4800

Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Tel: +64 3 3693710

Russell.wordsworth@canterbury.ac.nz

Sanna K. Malinen

Associate Professor

Organisational Behaviour & Human Resource Management

University of Canterbury Business School

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Introduction

Effective employee selection decision-making should discriminate between job applicants based on reliable and valid predictors of job-related criteria (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008). In practice, however, much of the decision-making that occurs during a typical selection process is based on subjective judgement, intuition, and gut feeling (Highhouse, 2008; Rynes et al., 2002). Subjective decision-making can result in intentional and unintentional discrimination in selection (Lindsey et al., 2013). While most developed countries have legislation in place to prevent unfair discrimination (for example, New Zealand's Human Rights Act, 1993), this often only covers legally protected and clearly defined characteristics such as age, race, disability, gender and ethnicity (French et al., 2019). Physical appearance is generally not covered by discrimination legislation (Elzweig & Peeples, 2011). Despite having little to no influence on actual job performance (Timming et al., 2015), aspects of physical appearance such as physical attractiveness, body weight, apparel, and intentional body modification (e.g. tattoos and piercings) have been shown to bias selection decision-making (Frederiksen et al., 2017; Koch et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2014).

Most studies examining the impact of visible body art (i.e. tattoos) on selection decision-making find that it has a negative impact on applicant evaluations (Bekhor et al 1995; Dipboye & Colella, 2005; McElroy et al., 2014; Swanger, 2006; Timming, 2015). Two studies by Timming (2011, 2017) are notable exceptions, demonstrating that in some contexts having a visible tattoo may work in favour of the job applicant. Both studies, however, focused on contexts where tattoos are likely to be socially acceptable, i.e. the recruitment of tattoo artists (Timming, 2011) and in a nightclub setting (Timming, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of job type on the influence that body art has on selection decisions.

Background

A substantial body of research has examined how physical appearance affects employee selection decisions (Braun et al., 2012; Desrumaux et al. 2009; Featherstone, 2010; Hosoda et al., 2003; Madera, 2016). These studies tend to demonstrate that job applicants displaying desirable physical traits, such as physical attractiveness, are viewed more

positively in the selection process. This attractiveness bias can be explained by the “what is beautiful is good” heuristic, whereby physical attractiveness creates a halo effect leading to positively biased evaluations of attractive job applicants (Johnson et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2015). In contrast, applicants displaying physical attributes deemed undesirable, such as obesity, facial disfigurement, physical disability, or intentional body modification are generally viewed less favourably, and are more likely to experience direct discrimination during the selection process (Adamitis, 2000; Carter, 2016; Koch et al., 2015). This form of discrimination is often referred to as ‘lookism’ (Warhurst et al., 2009) and tends to be more prevalent in high customer contact positions, where attractiveness is valued more than general mental ability and conscientiousness (Tews et al., 2009).

Despite increasing prevalence and acceptance in mainstream society (Kluger, 2015), visible tattoos are generally still regarded as an undesirable physical attribute in most workplace settings (Bekhor et al., 1995; Dale et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2016; Dean, 2010, 2011; Henle et al., 2018; Jibuti, 2018; Swanger, 2006; Timming, 2015). This is partly due to the societal perception of tattoos as a source of stigma, arising from their historical use to signal group affiliation amongst sailors, gang members, prisoners, bikers and those typically associated with criminal and socially deviant acts (Zestcott et al., 2018). This has led to the treatment of the ‘tattooed’ as a marginalised group of society, stereotypically associated with negative and socially undesirable traits, including sexual promiscuity, drug use, aggression, violence, delinquency, lower intelligence and dishonesty (Zestcott et al., 2018). Stigmatisation theory suggests that negative stereotypes, and associated reactions, can be automatically activated in response to stigma observation (Major & O’Brien, 2005), and can lead to the formation of both conscious and implicit negative attitudes.

With respect to implicit responses, dual-process theory has been used to explain how stigma exposure triggers Type 1 heuristic decision-making in the pre- and early interview stages of employee selection, where visual cues feature more heavily in initial impression formation (Derous et al., 2016). Importantly, Derous et al. (2016) note that these Type 1 negative reactions and attitudes towards stigma tend to be stronger in cases of controllable stigma such as religious affiliation and tattoos, as these individuals are perceived to be responsible for their condition.

Implicit or automatic stereotypes are not the only explanation for the prejudicial treatment of tattooed job applicants. In many industries, but particularly the service and hospitality sectors, discrimination against tattooed individuals can be more explicit or overt. For example, strict dress codes or appearance standards may explicitly exclude the hiring of people with visible tattoos that cannot be covered up (Antonellis et al., 2017; Bible, 2010; Totten et al., 2009). In addition, theories of aesthetic labour and image congruence suggest that bias toward tattooed job applicants may in part be attributable to a hiring manager’s perception of customer expectations (Dean, 2010, 2011; Ellis, 2015). In this sense, a hiring manager might impute not only applicant characteristics, but also customer expectations of what ‘normal’ employees should look like into their decision-making. They may therefore consider how employing an applicant with visible tattoos could damage the company brand or influence customer engagement with the organisation (Antonellis et al., 2017; Arndt & Glassman, 2012; McElroy et al., 2014). In fact, Timming (2015) found that hiring managers’ perceptions of customer expectations outweighed their personal attitudes towards visible tattoos, even when managers’ attitudes were positive.

To briefly summarise, research generally suggests that tattoos are considered an undesirable characteristic in the workplace, that hiring managers hold more negative attitudes towards visibly tattooed job applicants, and that tattooed job applicants are likely to face higher levels of direct and indirect discrimination during the selection process. However, the literature also suggests that contextual factors may moderate the extent to which visible tattoos impede employability. In an exemplary qualitative study, Timming (2015) found that the attitudes of hiring managers towards visibly tattooed job applicants

varied according to industry type and proximity of the role to customers, with tattoos being less acceptable in the service sector and in customer-facing roles. Similarly, Bekhor et al. (1995) found that, within the hospitality, beauty, retail and office sectors, less than one-third of managers were willing to employ someone with a visible tattoo. Notable exceptions to this were the construction and public service sectors, where tattoos were viewed slightly more favourably than in other industries. However, Behkor et al.'s study was conducted in 1995. More recently, Baumann et al., (2016) demonstrated that customers have predominantly negative attitudes towards service sector employees with tattoos, but that this was not the case in more masculine or traditional blue-collar roles such as vehicle mechanics. Also examining customer preferences, Dean (2010) found that visible tattoos on white-collar employees were deemed to be unacceptable while similar tattoos on blue-collar workers were acceptable. In both the Baumann et al. (2016) and Dean (2010) studies, the nature of the role or industry affected customer perceptions of visible tattoos, such that tattoos were viewed less favourably in traditional white-collar roles when compared to traditional blue-collar roles.

However, no study has specifically considered how visible body art might influence job applicant suitability in blue- and white-collar roles within the same industry, thus warranting further research (Beard, 2018).

Theory and hypothesis development

Classifying jobs as either blue- or white-collar is a commonly accepted means to distinguish between roles in terms of job context, content, and the physical and psychological demands associated with the role (Herr et al., 2015; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016; Perez-Ahumada, 2017). Blue-collar roles are labour intensive and involve physical, rather than intellectual, job demands (Herr et al., 2015; Schreurs et al., 2011). They are characterised as having low levels of autonomy, discretion, task variance and decision-making (Ravensteijn et al., 2017), and thus generally require lower levels of education and training (Herr et al., 2015). In contrast, white-collar jobs, which include supervisors, managers, semi-professional and professional occupations, tend to be intellectually demanding and are associated with higher levels of autonomy, discretion and decision making, thus requiring greater educational, training and experience (Schreurs et al., 2011).

A useful framework for conceptualising differences in tattoo acceptability across white- and blue-collar roles is stereotype fit theory (Dipboye, 1985), which proposes that decision makers perceive members of different social groups to be a better or lesser fit for the task or organisation based on the stereotypes held about that particular group (for a comprehensive discussion see Lee et al., 2015). As discussed in earlier sections, tattooed individuals are stereotyped as less intelligent, less qualified, less motivated, and less honest than non-tattooed individuals (Kosut, 2006; Tranter & Grant, 2018). Stereotype fit theory suggests that a hiring manager might draw on these stereotypes, as one source of information, to infer that a tattooed job applicant is a poor fit for a white-collar role given the intellectually demanding nature of the job tasks. By the same token, a hiring manager may infer the opposite, that a tattooed job applicant is a good fit for a job requiring less intellectual input or decision making, but more physical stamina and toughness, which are attributes often associated with blue-collar work. Timming (2015) also identifies proximity to the customer as a key factor influencing the hireability of tattooed individuals. Given that many white-collar roles are customer- interfacing, a hiring manager may be influenced by stereotypes associating tattoos with fear, anger, and aggression to conclude that a tattooed job applicant is a poor fit for a white-collar customer-facing role. In contrast, most blue-collar work does not involve direct interaction with customers, thus potentially decreasing tattoo salience in the selection decision. We therefore hypothesised the following:

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Hypothesis 1: Visibly tattooed applications for a white-collar role will be evaluated less favourably than those without a visible tattoo.

In line with stereotype fit theory, it is likely that hiring managers have more positive reactions to candidates who fit the stereotype associated with the role. That is, decision makers demonstrate a preference towards job applicants who belong to the same social group and class as the majority of current job holders. This is particularly important given the differences in tattoo prevalence across blue- and white-collar jobs. Visible tattoos are not readily associated with managers and professionals in white-collar occupations, and have historically been seen to belong to the working class (DeMello, 2000). It is therefore plausible that decision makers may see a candidate with a tattoo fitting the stereotype of a blue-collar worker.

To support this assertion, empirical evidence attests that tattoo prevalence is significantly higher among blue-collar employees, compared to those in traditional white-collar or professional roles (French et al., 2019). It follows, therefore, that tattooed individuals may be seen as a minority and perceived as a poor fit in white-collar environments as compared with blue-collar environments, and would thus be more likely to experience bias based on ascribed negative stereotypes when applying for white-collar roles. In contrast, we argue that having a tattoo may work in the job applicant's favour in a blue-collar setting, as they would be seen as fitting the stereotype and therefore reducing the impact of negative stereotypes. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: Visibly tattooed applicants for a blue-collar role will be evaluated more favourably than those without a visible tattoo.

In this study, we investigated the effect of visible tattoos on evaluations of applicants in the construction industry due to fact that this industry is associated with both blue-collar (labourers, unskilled and semi-skilled trades) and white-collar (engineers, quantity surveyors, managers) roles. We used an experimental, within-subjects design, with the role (blue- vs. white- collar) and visibility of tattoo (visible vs. not) manipulated.

Method

Participants

Eighty-seven participants took part in the experiment with 80.5% being female, and the majority (75.9%) being between the ages of 18-24. Participants were university students, with 88.5% of the sample having work experience and 6.9% without experience (4.6% with no response to this question). The mean tenure of work experience was 5.93 years (SD= 5.43).

Materials

The materials for the study included application packs containing detailed job descriptions, applicant curriculum vitae (CV) and applicant evaluation forms, as well as a brief demographic survey.

Application Packs:

Each participant received two application packs: one for a blue-collar role and another for a white-collar role. Each application pack contained the following materials: a detailed job description, three CVs, and three applicant evaluation forms (one for each applicant). There were two variations of the application packs for both roles: Pack A and Pack B. In half of the packs, Applicant A had the visible tattoo and in half the packs, Applicant B had the visible tattoo, counterbalancing the presence of the visible tattoo between the applicants applying for each role.

Job Descriptions

Two job descriptions were developed for different roles within the construction industry: Construction Manager (white-collar) and Construction Labourer (blue-collar). These were developed with input from a Human Resource Advisor at a local construction firm. Both position descriptions were for the same fictitious organisation ('Construction Group Ltd'). Each job description outlined the job's overall purpose, key duties and tasks required to be performed, as well as essential and desirable knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) required to perform the role. KSAs were categorised as (1) education and formal qualifications, (2) professional or technical experience, (3) professional or technical knowledge and skills, and (4) personal attributes and competencies.

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Curriculum Vitae

We developed three standardised CVs for each role: two of equal merit (experimental CVs: one with and one without tattoo), and one CV depicting an application clearly unsuitable for the role (distractor CV). Pilot testing was conducted to ensure the equal merit of the two experimental CVs in each condition. CVs contained information on the applicant's education, employment history and personal attributes. Each CV also included a photo of the applicant.

Experimental manipulation – tattoos.

Images labelled for non-commercial reuse with modification were sourced online (Flickr.com). Male photos with similar stance and semi-casual attire were selected for pilot testing. Potential applicant photos were piloted to assess perceived levels of physical attractiveness. Attractiveness evaluations were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, from low (1) to high attractiveness (7). Equal attractiveness was found for each of the three applicant photos within each job type. Tattoos were superimposed using Adobe Photoshop onto respective applicants (Figures 1 and 2). Tattoo placement for the construction manager was on the applicant's neck towards the collarbone (see Figure 1), and for the construction labourer, on the forearm (see Figure 2). Tattoo location was driven by our ability to make the tattoo appear as natural as possible.

Figure 1: Example of Construction Manager (white-collar role) tattoo (right) versus no tattoo (left).



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Figure 2: Example of Construction Labourer (blue-collar role) tattoo (right) versus no tattoo (left).



Applicant Evaluation Forms

The applicant evaluation form included six criteria against which to assess each applicant's CV. These criteria were designed to align with essential and desirable KSAs. Participants were asked to evaluate each job applicant based on their education and formal qualifications, person-job fit, professional or technical experience, person-organisation fit, professional or technical knowledge and skills, and personal attributes and competencies. These six criteria were measured on a scale from poor (1) to excellent (7).

Demographic Survey

The demographic survey contained questions on the educational qualifications towards which the participants were currently studying as well as their age and gender. Participants were also asked to indicate if they had any prior work experience and the duration of this experience.

Due to the experimental nature of this research, a manipulation check was added into this survey so that it could be determined whether participants were aware of the actual purpose of the research. This question simply asked participants to describe in their own words the intent of the research. Finally, if participants felt comfortable in doing so, they were asked to indicate if they personally had any tattoo(s). All participants answered this question.

Procedure

Students from a New Zealand university were recruited for this study through in-class advertisements (26.4%), advertisements posted online (Student Association Facebook page and noticeboard; 29.9%), and via the Psychology Department's participant pool (43.7%).

Upon arrival to the laboratory, participants were individually seated, and given a verbal explanation of the study's ostensible purpose (to complete an employment selection task) and procedure. Participants were told that prior experience and/or knowledge of employee selection processes were not necessary to complete the task. Participants were then provided with the first application pack. Application packs were counterbalanced: half of the participants received the Construction Labourer (blue-collar role) first, and the rest were given the Construction Manager (white-collar role) first. Once participants had completed individual applicant evaluations for one role (i.e., evaluation forms), they received their second application pack for the other role. After evaluating and ranking applicants for both roles, participants were asked to fill out the demographic survey. Once all experimental materials were collected from participants, they were debriefed and told the actual purpose of the research.

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Results

We ran a factor analysis with principal axis factoring and oblimin rotation to investigate the dimensionality of the application evaluation survey questions. A clear one-factor solution was found with all factor loadings above 0.4 (DeVellis, 2012). The items were therefore combined, and resulted in an internal reliability estimate of .90. Means and standard deviations for evaluations for each applicant can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for experimental conditions.

Condition		Min	Max	Mean	Stand. Dev.
White Collar	Tattoo	4.38	7	6.15	.58
	No tattoo	3.75	7	6.21	.61
	Distractor CV	1.13	6	3.12	.97
Blue Collar	Tattoo	3.38	7	6.06	.68
	No tattoo	3.50	7	5.93	.73
	Distractor CV	1.00	5	2.44	.85

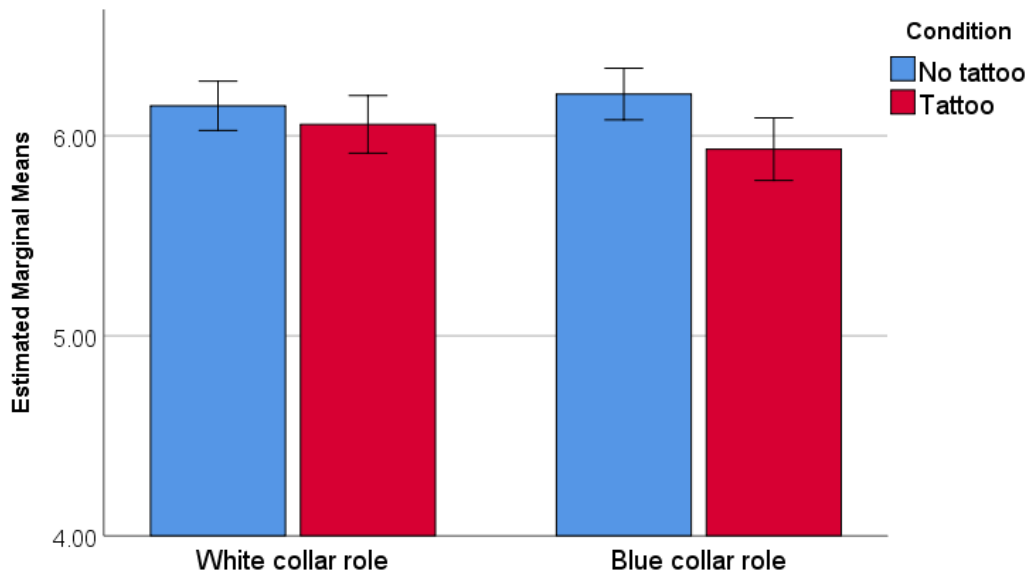
To assess whether applicants with tattoos were evaluated more or less favourably as compared with those without visible tattoos, we ran a 2 (Role: Blue vs. White collar) x 2 (Tattoo: Visible vs. not) repeated measures ANOVA with applicant evaluations (composite) as the dependent variable. A significant main effect of Tattoo was found, qualified by a significant Role x Tattoo interaction, $F(1, 86) = 4.88, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .54$.

Hypothesis 1, which suggested that applicants for a white-collar role with visible body art will be evaluated less favourably than those without visible body art, was not supported. Applicants were evaluated similarly regardless of tattoo visibility ($M_{\text{tattoo}}=6.15$ ($SD=.58$) vs. $M_{\text{No Tattoo}}=6.21$ ($SD= 0.61$)).

In contrast, Hypothesis 2, which suggested that applicants for a blue-collar role with visible body art will be evaluated more favourably than those without visible body art, was supported. Applicants with a visible tattoo were rated significantly more favourably ($M_{\text{tattoo}}=6.06$, $SD=.68$) than applicants without a tattoo ($M_{\text{No Tattoo}}=5.93$; $SD= 0.73$; $t(86)=2.08$, $p=.041$) – see Figure 3.

Figure 3: Role x tattoo interaction on applicant evaluations.

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Further analysis of variance was run to investigate whether differences would be found as a function of which applicant photo had the tattoo (photo added as a factor). No differences were found ($p>.05$). Seventeen participants reported that they had a tattoo themselves. We ran an ANOVA with participant tattoo as an added between-subjects factor and found no changes to our findings, with participant tattoo as a non-significant factor. Finally, three participants guessed the research intent. We re-analysed the data with and without these participants and found no differences to the results.

Discussion

This research sought to understand the impact of visible tattoos on job applicant evaluations in blue- and white-collar roles. Our findings run counter to the prevailing view that the presence of visible tattoos prejudices one’s employment chances. In fact, they demonstrate that in blue-collar settings a visible tattoo may work in the job applicant’s favour, supporting our Hypothesis 2 and affirming previous research by Timming (2011; 2017). Unexpectedly, Hypothesis 1 was not supported, as we found no statistical difference in applicant evaluations for tattooed and non-tattooed applicants for the white-collar role. Our findings offer mixed support for stereotype fit theory. In the case of blue-collar roles, our results support stereotype fit theory and suggest that in industries such as construction, where tattoo prevalence amongst the workforce is high and associated with positive

qualities like masculinity, toughness and physical strength, hireability ratings may be positively influenced by tattoo presence. However, our results do not support the opposite argument for white-collar roles, suggesting that role-specific and other contextual factors may moderate the extent to which stereotyping influences selection decision making. We elaborate on this below.

The increasing prevalence of tattoos and other forms of body modification in modern society may offer one explanation for our mixed findings. While our effect size for the difference in evaluations for the blue-collar role was small, the finding that having a tattoo in either role did not disadvantage the applicant is one that strongly supports changing societal norms and attitudes, at least in our relatively young sample. It is estimated that 10 – 20% of the population in developed countries has a tattoo (Serup et al., 2015), with rates of up to 40% reported in recent studies (Tennent, 2018). This growth is partly attributable to an increased prevalence of tattoos within popular and celebrity culture and amongst younger generations (Carroll & Anderson, 2002). In New Zealand it is estimated that around a third of people under the age of 30 have a tattoo (Radio NZ, 2009). Tattoos are arguably even more acceptable in New Zealand due to prevalence and the cultural significance they hold for the indigenous Māori people and other Pasifika sub-groups (Nikora et al., 2007).

Beyond broader societal acceptance, our findings also offer evidence for changing attitudes to tattoos in the workplace. However, this finding should be interpreted cautiously, as previous research suggests that selection decisions involving tattooed job applicants are industry- and role- dependent; that is, visible tattoos are considered more acceptable in some industries than others (Bekhor et al., 1995; Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2009; Timming, 2015). Thus, while tattoos may be viewed favourably within a construction industry setting, other industries may be less accepting. Support for Hypothesis 1 (tattooed candidates rated lower in a white-collar role) may have been found if the white-collar role had been situated in a different professional setting, such as an accounting or law firm or a medical practice. As noted earlier, extant theory suggests that proximity to the customer has a significant impact on hireability ratings for tattooed individuals (Timming, 2015), and it is possible that our white-collar role selected for the present study were not viewed as customer facing, or at least not sufficiently to elicit negative perceptions. Thus, further research is warranted in order to understand the impact of tattoos in different industries, although we would anticipate that less favourable attitudes towards tattoos would be present in professional settings with high customer proximity and interaction. Researchers could consider replicating this study in a professional setting such as a hospital, using a surgeon for the white-collar role and an orderly for the blue-collar role, where both may be expected to have similar levels of patient/customer interaction.

It is noteworthy that we chose two relatively neutral tattoo designs for this study. The white-collar role applicant had a star and the blue-collar role applicant a modern abstract blackwork design. These tattoos were simply chosen due to past research using similar designs (e.g., Timming, 2017) and for the ease of adding them to the applicant photos to appear natural. The star design could be viewed as a more feminine tattoo, whereas the blackwork design can be viewed as masculine. The more masculine design used for the blue-collar role may have prompted participants to attribute other masculine characteristics, such as physical strength, to the job applicant, and could partly explain why the tattooed applicant was evaluated more favourably for the physically demanding blue-collar role. It would be useful to investigate the impact of different tattoo designs on applicant evaluations, as it can be expected that more confronting designs and/or placement may not work to the applicants' favour.

Gender differences in tattoo acceptability is another area warranting further research. Indeed, the literature suggests that discrimination against visibly tattooed job applicants appears to be higher in industries which employ mainly women (Bekhor et al., 1995). It would be interesting to replicate our study with female job applicants or within a female-

dominant industry (for example nursing). Finally, our participant sample was relatively young and as such our results may reflect changing societal attitudes on a generational scale. Future research is needed to ascertain whether biases found in this study vary as a function of the hiring manager's age.

Practical implications

From the outset, it may appear that our findings bode well for employee selection. However, it is noteworthy that we still found bias in the blue-collar role, albeit in the direction of the tattooed candidate being preferred. Any bias as a function of non-job-relevant criteria can lead to flawed selection decision-making. The emergence of implicit bias research demonstrates its effect on personnel decisions and shows the challenge in 'objective' decision-making even when the decision-maker is attempting to be objective (e.g., Ziegert & Hanges, 2005). While human decision-making will never be completely bias-free, it is essential that those making selection decisions are aware of their biases and their potential harmful consequences. These biases include those that lie beyond our conscious awareness (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005; Malinen & Johnston, 2013). However, while bias training has had some impact, the effectiveness of implicit bias training is still inconclusive (Atewologun et al., 2018).

From a practical perspective it is important to note that our study focused on the pre-interview stage of employee selection. During the pre-interview stage, only a limited amount of information is passed between the job applicant and the hiring manager or recruiter. As a result, hiring managers tend to rely more heavily on visual cues often processed using heuristics or automatic decision making (Derous et al., 2016). There is a real opportunity in this phase to limit the information gathered from a candidate, where, for example, candidate photographs could be excluded, and standard application forms used to aid comparability based on job-relevant criteria (Rinne, 2018). Other research suggests discrimination occurs based on candidate names (Edo et al., 2019), and again, this information could be eliminated before the applications are passed on to the people responsible for shortlisting decisions. Past research shows some success of such methods (Foley & Williamson, 2018). Given that bias may arise from perceptions of person-organisation fit, it may also be advisable for organisations to consider the use of external recruiters during the initial screening of candidates. Finally, developments in using artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms may enhance fairness in selection processes, although evidence of AI's effectiveness in reducing human bias in selection processes is still accumulating (see e.g., Blickman, 2018; Acikgoz et al., 2020).

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that warrant discussion. First, we focused on one industry only, the construction industry. As alluded to above, prior studies evidence the fact that tattoos are considered to be more acceptable within certain industries (Bekhor et al., 1995; Timming, 2015). The construction industry was selected for this study due to the high presence of blue-collar jobs, and because the industry is typically associated with high tattoo prevalence and acceptance (Bekhor et al., 1995). As the focus of our study was on job type and not industry type, both the white and blue-collar roles were situated in the same industry context. Future researchers could consider investigating whether similar white-collar – blue-collar effects are present across different industries.

Second, our study involved just one visible tattoo on the applicant photograph, and the designs were deemed non-offensive. Future research should consider whether the number of tattoos might interact with job type to affect employability ratings. For example, it is quite conceivable that multiple tattoos could be acceptable for a blue-collar role, but unacceptable in white-collar positions. Research exploring this aspect further might find that there are industry and job type 'thresholds' for tattoo acceptability. Our study was also limited in terms of the placement and design of body art used. Evidence suggests that design

of the tattoo and its placement can significantly influence bias (French et al., 2016; Pentina & Spears, 2011; Totten et al., 2009). In our study, tattoo placement differed between the job types. This was on the neck for the white-collar role, and the forearm for the blue-collar role. As such, it is possible that placement of the visible tattoo may have influenced evaluations of the job applicants. Furthermore, the tattoo design also differed between job types. Future research should consider having the same tattoo placement for both job types, or consider using the same tattoo design for both roles.

Conclusion

Overall, our research points to a change in societal attitudes towards tattoos, while acknowledging the rise of a potentially new bias of tattooed candidates being preferred in certain contexts. Given that human decision-making has its limits, the elimination of job-irrelevant data, including photographs, may be the simplest, most practical way to improve decision-making early in the pre-interview selection process.

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