

# **Perceptions of visible tattoos and piercings in the service industry**

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**Affidavit**

I, Rahul Rao, hereby ensure that:

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# PERCEPTIONS OF VISIBLE TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY

## ABSTRACT

A walk down the high street nowadays and one is confronted with an ample selection of Millennials and Post-Millennials adorned with some form of body-art. This paper attempts to examine how such people are perceived in today's society and how they would be favoured should they be in any service industry profession. This 3-part research took into consideration the views of twelve organisations to gain an insight into their views, existing regulations and recruitment policy. It also surveyed a group of one hundred and eighty-eight people to gauge their reactions on the subject. Lastly, eight tattooed and pierced professionals were interviewed to find out more about their life experiences with visible body-art. The study exposes latent stereotyping and stigma that exists amongst the respondents, albeit to a small extent. It also shows that barring a few ultra-traditional and conservative organisations, many companies were adopting a judicious approach when employing people with visible body-art with a strong focus on hygiene and aesthetics. The survey reveals a predominantly positive view of body-art and shows that stereotypes are slowly changing to acceptance.

**RAHUL RAO**

Master of Business Administration 2018

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## 1. Introduction

A person's physical appearance as an expression of identity has been modified since time immemorial in ways that are (mostly) conventional like waxing, hair-styling and colouring, tanning, bodybuilding, and plastic surgery to others which border on the extreme and stigmatised such as tattooing, branding, scarification and body piercing and stretching. In today's times, tattooing and body piercing (henceforth referred to as body-modification) is emerging from the fringes of society to transform itself into an alternative art-form which many young people are starting to embrace. With the proliferation of body art into the mainstream more than ever before, there is an increased incidence of people choosing body-art in places which are not easily hidden such as the head, face, hands, knuckles, lower legs and neck. How does this affect their professional life and careers? Are they victims of their own life-choices, relegated to blue collar jobs or is there a place for them in the mainstream service industry? When I use the term service industry I include those industries which provide services through the use of human resources. Specifically, the service sector jobs which will be included as part of this study, would range from banks, restaurants, Hotels, airlines, railways, telecom service providers and the retail industry. With so many people making this choice it is a pertinent question how the service industry will react to such people. Will they reject them purely based on their appearances or will they make an effort to look beyond that to study their professional qualifications and work ethic?

## 2. Literature Review:

To gather more information on the subject of body-modification, we will first study various literature which refers to the subject at hand. There is a rich body of literature written on the subject. To help us try and better understand the associations of body-modification in today's society, this literature review helps understand the existing perceptions on the matter and how these perceptions embed themselves into the psyche of those working in the service industry. We will start by defining key terms followed by some facts and figures on body-modification. This would cover its history and some important figures on the prevalence of them in society would be presented

and analysed. This chapter would include the reasons why people choose body-modification and the existing laws and regulations for the same. We then include a chapter on the study of perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices on the subject. Finally, we will present the existing recruitment and promotional processes and ethical standards which apply to the service industry.

## 2.1 Definitions

Tattoos and piercing have been defined and re-defined over the years but the most used definition is by Myrna Armstrong, Greif and Hewitt who state that the word Tattoo derives from the Tahitian term *tatu*, as an indelible mark or figure fixed upon the body by the insertion of pigment under the skin or by a production of scars” They go further to add that “Today, that is often accompanied in a studio by artists using a rapidly injecting electrical device that delivers a uniform set of punctures into the dermal layer of the skin ’50 to 3000 times per minute up to, or into the dermis at a depth of 1/64 or 1/16 of an inch”. (Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1999)

Body-piercing has similarly been defined by them as follows, “Piercing involves the insertion of a needle into various areas of the body to create an opening through which decorative instruments such as jewellery may be worn. (Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, Tattooing and body piercing: Body art practices among college students., 1999). It also adds, “the procedure only takes a few minutes and is done on body areas such as ears, nose, eyebrows, lips, tongue, nipples, navel and genitals”.

Furthermore, piercings can be ‘stretched’. Williams & Majumdar (2010) state, “At present there is a fashion for ‘tunnel and plug’ ear piercings. The initial piercing is performed as with any normal ear piercing, creating a hole approximately 1 mm in diameter in the lobe of the ear. Clients are advised to allow the ear to heal for a period of 6 weeks with a stud in place. Gradually increasing sizes of ear plugs are then placed into the lobe, increasing by 0.2–0.6mm every 2–3 weeks as tolerated. It is advised that once a 10mm piercing is in place that the dilated hole will remain stretched despite the piercing being removed”. (Williams & Majumdar, 2010)

All piercings have the possibilities to be stretched and many people have stretched their piercings all over their body (including lip, nose, cheeks and nipples) way beyond conventional norms.

## 2.2 Facts and Figures on Body-Modification:

### 2.2.1 History

Tattoos and body-modification almost certainly date back to ancient times with earliest records of tattoos being found as early as 5,200 years ago. 'Ötzi' was a mummified ice-man whose remains were discovered accidentally in 1991 on the mountainous Austrian-Italian border. He was found to have 61 tattoo marks all over his body including some on his wrist torso lower legs and back. (Deter-Wolf, Robitaille, Krutak, & Galliot, 2016) Ötzi also showed signs that his ears had been pierced with earplugs. (Hesse, 2007) One of the Chinchorro Mummies from Northern Chile is another similar specimen dating from the second millennium BC who had dots tattooed along his upper lip (Deter-Wolf, Robitaille, Krutak, & Galliot, 2016). Over the centuries, body-modification has played a significant part in many famous civilisations. Ancient civilisations such as the Egyptians depicted royalty through the use of navel piercings, Roman army officers used to pierce their nipples as a sign of courage and Mayans pierced their tongues for spiritual purposes. (Botchway & Kuc, 1998) Circumcision is also one long-standing form of body modification. Mentioned in the Bible and practised far earlier, it remains, often due to its religious connotations, a socially accepted form of body modification. (Favazza, 1996). One might be surprised to learn that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century tattoos even had a place in European royalty. In the 1898 version of the Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine author R.J. Stephen writes, "What wonder, then, that tattooing is just now the popular pastime of the leisured world? For one of the best-known men in high European circles, the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, is most elaborately tattooed. And Prince and Princess Waldemar of Denmark, Queen Olga of Greece, King Oscar of Sweden, the Duke of York, the Grand Duke Constantine, Lady Randolph Churchill, with many others of royal and distinguished rank, have submitted themselves to the tickling, but painless and albeit pleasant, sensation afforded by the improved tattooing needle" (Stephen, 1898)



Stretching its seems, is also nothing new. Since history, African tribes have been stretching their piercings by inserting discs or hanging heavy metal weights from earlobes and other parts of their body for aesthetic value or in a display of hierarchy. (Williams & Majumdar, 2010)

### 2.2.2 Statistics and Figures

We have seen that various forms of body-modification especially tattoos enjoyed a great deal of popularity in society almost from the dawn of mankind. These days too, a simple walk down the street makes one realise that body-modification is coming up in big way. What is the actual prevalence of tattoos and piercings? Larry and Shannon-Missal from "The Harris Poll" conducted an online survey in 2015 in the U.S. which pointed out that at 29% of the 2225 people polled had at least one tattoo and also noted that in the age group 18-35, 47% of respondents had a tattoo. (Shannon-Missal, 2015) Studying gender specifics in this survey, it also showed that there was a higher percentage of women than men who had 'one or more tattoo'. This was also the case in another study conducted in Australia in 2012, where it showed that in the age group 16-29, more women had tattoos than men. (Heywood, et al., 2012)

Studying similar statistics in Europe, we see that a total of 12% (44 million) of Europeans have a tattoo, while Austria shows 19% or 1.61 million people with one or more tattoos. The age group 16-29 in Austria showed a tattoo prevalence in 29% of the population. (Piccinini, Pakalin, Contor, Bianchi, & Senaldi, 2016)

These 29% is an ever-increasing number with a higher prevalence amongst the younger population and these people would form a significant part of the labour market here in Austria. Whether they choose a service sector job is a matter of preference. However, this study is trying to establish whether these people do stand a chance in the service industry.

### 2.2.3 Reasons for body-modification:

In his paper, *Why Did You Put That There?: Gender, Materialism and Tattoo Consumption*, Joel Watson discovers that "objects become part of the self when we are able to exercise control over or possess the object" and that "humans feel the most control and sense of possessiveness over their bodies and body parts" and therefore "body alteration becomes a powerful symbol of helping to define or

redefine the self". He goes further to add that people with tattoos then "consistently view the tattoo as an expression of self and a way to transmit information about their uniqueness to others". (Watson, 1998)

Watson also discovered through his research that his respondents were more generalised rather than specific in their reasoning behind their motivations to get tattooed and that 4 major reasons become known: "1. The tattoo connects the person getting tattooed to significant others who have similar tattoos 2. Having the tattoo makes this person unique by differentiating himself from the untattooed mainstream 3. The tattoo symbolises self-control in that person's life 4. The tattoo has aesthetic value as art or decoration of the person's body". (Watson, 1998)

In her paper, *The Psychology of Body Art and Academic Success*,

In her study on the other hand, Katherine Janney suggests that "peer pressure, or friends were the biggest influence on acquiring a tattoo". (Janney)

In yet another study, Allison Teeter goes to suggest that the motivations for body-art can be broadly categorised into 9 broad categories.:

- Commemoration: This could be to mark some celebratory event in their life. It could also be to mark a sad event: a passing of someone or thing which had a big impact on their life.
- Emotion Work: Body-art could be a means of expressing emotions within oneself. An event or a period in their life which has had a profound impact (positively or negatively) can be expressed through body-art.
- Bonding: Matching tattoos are an example of Bonding motivation. Also 2 people could get tattooed together as a symbol of their love.
- Rebellion: Sometimes reasons for body-art could be a sign of rebellion against society or family and an attention seeking tactic. Body-art can therefore be used as a provocative means due to already stigmatised place in society.
- Impulse: Many state their reason for getting some form of body-art is based on impulse and not given much thought before getting them.
- Addiction: This is an important motive. The release of endorphins by the body in response to the pain of a body piercing or a tattoo (or in fact any form of body mutilation) can be a factor to get more. There are lots of stories of

people simply cutting themselves to get an endorphin high. Besides that, there are also people who have a 'compulsion' to cover any bare skin with ink. Although, normally when the term addiction is used, it means the "addict will go to any lengths to support his habit"; however, that is not always the case with a tattoo addict.

- Cover up: It could be that a person gets a tattoo when he gets bored or tired of a previous tattoo.
- Identity Formation: Body-art can be used to define a person sense of individuality. They can be used a "graphical representation of a person's passion, culture, background and interests".
- Modish: Trend following can be an important motivation for getting tattooed or pierced. People often state their rationale behind getting an incredibly painful tattoo or a piercing in a sensitive location as "because it's cool" or having some aesthetic value.

(Teeter, 2008)

Obviously, the reasons are not limited to the above. Wohlrab, Stahl and Kappeler claim even more motivations. While there are plenty of overlaps between both paper's reasoning, the latter go further to include group affiliations, sexual motivations, physical endurance, spiritual and religious reasons and finally no apparent reason.

While the reasons can be incredibly personal for a lot of people, they mostly fall into (but are not limited to) the above categories of motivations.

Viren Swami details an exhaustive list in his paper "Marked for life? A prospective study of tattoos on appearance anxiety and dissatisfaction, perceptions of uniqueness, and self-esteem". We could arrange these motivations in the above categories as outlined by Teeter and also by Wohlrab, Stahl & Kappeler:

- Form of Self-expression (Emotion Work)
- As symbols for defining or redefining one's self (Identity Formation)
- Connections to near and dear ones having similar tattoos (Bonding)
- A sign of differentiation from other un-tattooed people (uniqueness) (Identity Formation)

- Aesthetic value, art form or self-decoration (Modish)
- A symbol of self-control (Physical Endurance)
- A sign of masculinity for men (Group Affiliations)
- Attachment towards a subculture (such as a military academy, school or motorcycle club, homosexual connotations, religion) (Group Affiliations/Religious/Spiritual Motivations)
- Indicative as a private vow or special dates in the individual's life (Commemoration)
- Indicative of personal passion or hobby (Identity Formation)
- Indicative of personal sexual tastes or fetishes (Sexual Motivation)
- Form of Rebellion (Rebellion)
- To look tough (Identity Formation)
- To fit in with friends who are also tattooed (Group Affiliations)
- To be a risk taker (Identity Formation)
- To feel independent (Identity Formation)
- To look attractive (Modish)
- To be an individual (Identity Formation)
- To control my body (Physical Endurance)
- To be fashionable (Modish)
- Because they look good (Modish)
- To feel mature (Identity Formation)
- To have a beauty mark (Modish)
- To be creative (Identity Formation)

(Swami V. , 2011)

#### 2.2.4 Existing Laws and Legality regarding Tattoos and Body-Piercing in the world

At the time that this paper is being written, the laws regarding tattooing and body-modification are fairly standard and tattooing is not illegal in most countries. Some countries (or some states in the U.S. and other countries) have made tattoos for minors more restrictive or in some cases completely illegal.

Despite the legal status of tattooing in most countries, there are those which have peculiar laws regarding tattooing. South Korea, for instance, have made tattoo

artistes illegal and one must be a licensed doctor to tattoo a person. This is presumably done to protect the people from the health hazards associated with unsafe tattooing practices. These laws are further supported by the medical industry want to limit competition. (STAPAW, 2012)

In North Korea, tattoos are deemed acceptable only when they are propaganda for the regime. While words like love are illegal, phrases like I love our great leader, Kim Jong Un are allowed. There have been cases where people with non-accepted tattoos have been arrested and interrogated. (Lee, 2015)

Iran made getting tattoos illegal citing them to be health hazard, and also that the Quran forbids it. They also stated that it is the practice of 'thugs'. According to this website, even non-Muslims must keep their tattoos and piercings hidden or risk jail or rejection at the entry points into the country. (STAPAW, 2012)

Turkey has similar laws with the highest religious body in the country dictating that they are banned by Prophet Muhammad and that Muslims with tattoos should either surgically remove them or repent for their sin. Tattoos, piercings and make-up was banned in schools as well. (HurriyatDailyNews, 2015)

In Japan, getting a tattoo is not illegal but their many public and commercial establishments like hotels and public baths and pools which will refuse entry to tattooed people. In fact, it is reported that over 50% Japanese hotels and bars will refuse entry to tattooed patrons. (JapanToday, 2015)

The U.A.E. bans tattooing in the country. The General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowment states that tattoos are a form of self-injury and that makes them un-Islamic. While tattoos for make-up purposes like permanent eyeliner or brows are allowed if performed by a licensed doctor, body-modification as a means of artistic expression are explicitly forbidden. (DeLeon, 2012) There have been cases when some tourists have been refused entry into the country due to their extensive facial piercings. (Hamad, 2014)

STAPAW states on their website:

"Other countries where there are stringent regulations on the content of tattoos are:

- China (Right-wing symbology and most religious tattoos)
- Cuba (Right-wing symbology and most religious tattoos)
- North Korea (All tattoos must be approved by the Communist Party)

- Malaysia (Forbids Quran quotes, Allah, & Prophet Mohammed Tattoos)
- Saudi Arabia (Islamic Sharia Law determines illegal tattoos)
- Yemen (Tattoos are subject to Islamic Sharia Law)
- Afghanistan (Ban tattoos that violate Islamic Sharia Law)
- Pakistan (Bans Quran quotes, Allah, & Prophet Mohammed Tattoos)
- Iran (Bans tattooing)
- UAE (Bans tattooing by tattoo artists)
- Germany (Ban tattoos with Fascist or right-wing themes)
- France (Ban tattoos with Fascist political themes)
- Thailand (Tattoos of Buddha's Head are against the law)
- Sri Lanka (Tattoos of Buddha are against the law)
- South Korea (Tattoo laws ban tattooing by tattoo artists)" (STAPAW, 2012)

In most of Europe, including Austria, body-modifications with right-wing themes and Swastikas are illegal. (Chao-Fong, 2015)

### 2.3 The Perceptual Process and its resulting attitudes and behaviours

We have already seen that the practice of tattoos and piercings has been practiced for thousands of years in many cultures around the world. But does the presence of such body-modification influence how the individual sporting them is perceived by others? This alone has been a study of many a scholar over the years.

#### 2.3.1 Perceptions

According to McShane & Von Glinow, "perception is the process of receiving information about and making sense of the world around us. It entails determining which information to notice, how to categorise this information, and how to interpret it within the framework of our existing knowledge". (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

Perception begins when stimuli from our surroundings and received through our 5 senses.

Most of the stimuli that are received by our senses are filtered out and some important ones are organised and interpreted. "This process of attending to some information received by our senses and ignoring other information is called selective attention. Selective attention is influenced by the characteristics of the person or

object being perceived, particularly their size, intensity, motion, repetition and novelty. The selective attention process can also be triggered by things or people which are out of context in a group". (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999) The perceivers nature and character can also play a part in how the selective attention process works. This usually happens unconsciously. Upon receiving information, the brain quickly interprets to understand whether it is relevant or irrelevant to us and then attaches "emotional markers" to it. These emotional markers could be anything like worry, happiness, boredom, anger, etc. These markers help to record this information in our memory. Once that is done, the same emotions are triggered when the information is brought back up from memory. Although an interesting phenomenon, this process is not without errors. One of the errors or 'biases' is they are known, is how this process is affected by our "assumptions and conscious anticipation of future events. Expectations and assumptions can also cause us to screen out other important information in the process". (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999) More appropriate to this paper, is another issue with this process called confirmation bias. This is a propensity of people to filter out information which does not match their decisions, values, beliefs and assumptions, while "confirming information is more readily accepted through the perception process". (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999) When we have pre-conceived notion about someone or something, that notion causes the us to select information that matches this notion and ignore all the rest of the contrary or seemingly irrelevant information.

Another part of the perceptual process is 'categorical thinking'. "This is a non-conscious process of organising people and objects into pre-conceived categories in our long-term memory" (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999) Categorical thinking relies on several perceptual grouping principles which are all done automatically. These people or objects can be grouped together based on similarity or proximity to others. Another type is based on "the need for cognitive closure" which means filling in missing information about an event in your head. Yet another type is when we see trends or patterns in unrelated or unclear information.

The process of making sense of the world around us also involves interpreting the information being received. This happens very quickly (50ms) because emotional markers are already tagged to incoming information, "which are essentially quick

judgements whether that information is good or bad for us". (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

### 2.3.2 Stereotyping

In their book 'Stereotypes as explanations' authors McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears state, "Without individuals there could be no society, but unless individuals also perceive themselves to belong to groups, that is, to share characteristics, circumstances, values and beliefs with other people, then society would be without structure or order. These perceptions of groups are called stereotypes". (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002) They state that perceptions of groups are important to help other people or groups understand society around them, therefore the understanding of those stereotypes is equally important. How is that so? Stereotyping it may seem is an instant categorisation process. It is not possible to tell the difference between two discrete groups of people without categorisation. This cognitive process is an individual's way of detecting those differences and similarities. (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002) Stereotyping can also be considered energy- saving tactics. By elimination of the understanding of all the diverse details of that group being studied, the human mind focuses on certain visible and non-visible traits of that group. This saves effort and time on the part of the observer but also limits his true understanding of that group. So, it can be said that stereotyping does not assist in understanding a set of individuals but rather assists in misunderstanding it, as much of the details of their characteristics are left out and the ones which are actually fathomed often mean different things when understood in a vacuum. (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002) Stereotypes are also considered a shared belief of a particular set of people. If each individual had distinct and varied stereotypes they would be of little significance. Its only when the stereotypes are shared by a set of people is when it is possible to grasp that set's behaviour patterns to the other. How are stereotypes formed? Research suggests that they could be formed from actual differences between sets of people. Another possibility is that they could be 'self-fulfilling prophecies", which means that the perceptions formed of a group by another could lead to corresponding changes in the behaviour of the former as effect of the treatment of that perceived by the perceivers. (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002)



### 2.3.3 Stigma

“The modern usage of the word ‘stigma’ originated in the ancient Greek practice of branding their slaves who were caught in their escape attempts. The brand or mark was the letter ‘F’ for fugitive. The word for such a mark was called stigma”. (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988) In his pioneering work, Erving Goffman states that the word stigma is used to refer to an attribute of an individual or group which is deeply discrediting. He also states that attribute makes him different from others in that group of people that he is part of, thereby making him one of less desirable kind, and in the extreme understanding of the term, “being a person who is bad, dangerous or weak”. (Goffman, 1963) So, it can be safely inferred that stigma is a form of extreme negative perception of a particular group of people or individual. Prejudice can be defined as “a negative evaluation of a group or individual the basis of a group membership”. (Timming, Nixon, Re, & Perrett, 2017) The authors of this study that stigma and prejudice have lots in common between in them. Both of them “involve normative imputation of negative behaviours onto a set of individuals sharing some objectionable characteristic” and “both are largely predicated on an unequal power relationship based on exploitation”. Thereby the authors have inferred that stigma and prejudices are practically one and the same thing. (Timming, Nixon, Re, & Perrett, 2017)

### 2.3.4 Discrimination

What is discrimination: Discrimination is defined as a denial of equal rights based on prejudices and stereotypes. The difference between the discrimination and prejudice and stereotyping is that “it is not a belief, but rather an application of beliefs”. (Keene, 2011) Both prejudice and stereotyping are a form of social bias. These could be demonstrated non-forcefully or forcefully. An example of a subtle bias leading to discrimination could be an employer not employing a person with body-modifications due to his personal pretences on the matter of body-modification. Examples of blatant biases and the subsequent discrimination are hate crimes. The person committing them believes he or she is right to cause harm to another based on the traits of that marginalised group. (Keene, 2011)

### 2.3.5 The Perceptual Process and its resulting attitudes and behaviours in relation to the topic of body-art

What are the existing perceptions of body art? There are many studies which indicate negative perception of people with body-modification. One such study demonstrates that exposing the participants of the study to images of simple Microsoft Paint line drawings of women some with tattoos drawn onto these figures. The results showed that based simply on these drawings suggested a predominantly negative perception with the drawings with tattoos being considered more less physically attractive, more promiscuous and heavier drinkers compared to the drawings without tattoos (Swami & Furnham, Unattractive, promiscuous and heavy drinkers: Perceptions of women with tattoos, 2007). Another study inferred that visible tattoos on white-collar workers were regarded as inappropriate while similar tattoos on blue-collar workers were regarded appropriate. There was an assumption that people with tattoos were less honest and less intelligent than tattooed people (Dwane, 2010).

In previous chapters, we have already seen how body-modification was popular and even sometimes a sign of royalty, virility, and bravery. So how is it that body-modification developed negative perceptions towards it. In her study "Tattoos: A Marked History", Audrey Porcella has done extensive research on how this process has evolved. Religion undoubtedly has played a big part in the way tattoos were perceived. The Abrahamic religions have largely perceived the human body to be God's creation and defacing it is largely frowned upon. When European settlers all over the world encountered local tribes in all the places they travelled to, they also encountered many traditions of tattooing in these tribes who would have different religious rituals like human sacrifice, idol worship, all of which considered primitive and savage by the newly arrived settlers. Furthermore, different types of tattoos were used by these tribes to denote royalty, warriors and even slaves. Their practices of tattooing of slaves in a specific way made a big negative impression in the minds of the Europeans (Porcella, 2009).

During the Victorian era, when there was a surge in the popularity of tattoos amongst the elite. But when the cheaper more economical electric tattooing machine was invented by a New York tattoo artist called Samuel O'Reilly, the art of tattooing

became quicker and cheaper to do. This allowed the masses to get on with this craze. To differentiate themselves from the lower classes, the elite discarded this fashion which till then was seen as an indication of prestige. Once again, perceptions slid towards the negative end of the spectrum. (Porcella, 2009) While tattoos still enjoyed a positive status with the servicemen community, tattooists would not tattoo women, then seen to be 'pure'. (Victorian women were conservatively dressed and behaved). Tattooed women were essentially labelled as freaks and tramps thus reinforcing the perception of promiscuity associated with body-modification. (Porcella, 2009) Local natives in America were often kept as slaves and sold to circuses to be used as attractions for the masses. This once again drew a connection with body-modification being savage and freakish continuing its slide into the domain of negative perceptions. Soon, economic circumstances made Europeans join the circus by tattooing them fully. This incorporation by the circus of body-modification at a time when there was already a predominantly negative perception of the same resulted in marginalising the body-modification community for many decades to follow. (Porcella, 2009)

After the war, outbreaks of diseases such as hepatitis due to unsafe tattooing practices resulted in further destroying the reputation of body-modification. This way body-modification moved from being simply a socially deviant art form to a health hazard. That was followed by motorbike gangs showing an attraction to inked bodies. Bikers being perceived as criminal led to that association being extended to the already heavily negative perception of tattoos. (Porcella, 2009) This negative perception that tattoos are pre-dominantly the domain of criminal gangs is still evident in countries like Japan where despite that the traditional Japanese style of full bodysuit tattoos using traditional local motifs have gained international renown, the stigma attached to visible tattoos is very strong; tattoos are banned in many public baths, swimming pools and gyms. (Yamada, 2009)

But barring Japan, tattoos today are enjoying far more acceptability than before. Our discussion on the statistics of body-modification prevalence is a true demonstration of that.

How did a marginalised section of society suddenly develop a positive association?

Porcella notes that the media had a significant role to play in this change. Through the 90's through till today, there has been a greater increase of depiction and coverage of tattoos and piercings. TV series like Miami Ink and LA Ink have brought tattooing into people's living rooms. She states that the increase in exposure means greater awareness which in turn assists in normalising the trend. (Porcella, 2009)

The motive behind doing so lies in the fact that the media capitalises on what sells. A lot of this coverage on tattoos has shown people with white collar jobs and high levels of education and by focusing on these aspects of the wearer the media has successfully shifted the focus from body-modification being a domain of people on the fringes of society. Those with an acceptable set of morals and social behaviour. Athletes and celebrities followed suit with rock stars and footballers adorning full arm 'sleeve' tattoos. Toys started selling with optional tattooing accessories and instructions. Barbie is one such example. Models whose tattoos were effectively photo-shopped out or covered with clothes were now being accepted. Not only that, but models without tattoos were being photo-manipulated to include tattoos on the skin. (Porcella, 2009)

It is important to note that Porcella adds that prevalence amongst the highly educated would mean that the decisions to get some body-modification work done on oneself is not considered "irresponsible or rash".

In his study 'Personality differences between tattooed and non-tattooed individuals', Viren Swami and Jakob Pietschnig reveal that "compared with non-tattooed (n = 420) individuals, tattooed participants had significantly higher scores on extraversion, experience-seeking, need for uniqueness, and held more positive attitudes toward tattoos". (Swami & Pietschnig, Personality differences between tattooed and nontattooed individuals, 2012)

Furthermore, in his study, Josh Mcleod has also noted that while tattoos are marks worn by social misfits and others living on the fringes of legality or blue-collar workers, much progress has been made since the 1990's and that the "antiquated silos for tattoo wearers have mostly faded". And that "For many, the aesthetic that accompanies being heavily tattooed is derived from the working class, and to be heavily tattooed in a professional setting is a misrepresentation". Given the history

of body-modification this could very well be a reason for such a stereotype. (McLeod, 2014)

There is also notion of “perceived purity”. Within many societies, the ideal symbol of visual perfection is a light unblemished fair skin. It is a known fact that light skin is deeply linked to having a “psychological, occupational, educational and economic advantage”. (McLeod, 2014) There is also a stereotyping of the heavily tattooed person as though it is an “external expression of the inner self” and that the person character can be judged by studying his body-modification. These assumptions have led to various presumptions being made about tattooed people like being regressive, masochistic, lacking stability, sexually-promiscuous and thrill seeking. (Buckman, 2015) There is another perception that the objective of people with visible body-modification is to draw attention to themselves. (McLeod, 2014)

Let us see how stereotyping influences people with visible tattoos and piercings in a professional setting i.e. their chances in the labour market, their acceptance within the workplace. Mcleod points out that “stereotypes of ability and intelligence run deep”. when faced with members of the body-modification. Mcleod also states that during the course of his study “the most prevalent manifestation of stigma was the perception that heavily tattooed individuals may not have the ability or intelligence to perform their professional roles”. Once again, the class connotation rears its head due to the negative perceptions of people with tattoos through history; people from the lower classes. Mcleod suggests that “the class implications that come along with those historical stigmas influence perceptions of intelligence and ability – upper/middle-class hierarchical interpretations of lower-class value”. He also notes that socioeconomic degrees are tied in with perceptions of tattoos, and that goes in with education and intelligence”. Once again, it is stereotyped as a practice mainly for the blue-collar worker community. (McLeod, 2014)

Some of the heavily tattooed interviewees in his study complained about how some people they encountered would be shocked when they learnt about his (high) education level. He also notes that some of these professionals chose to combat the stigma that they carried through positive action on their part, “creating a higher work standard as part of their identity management”. So, by challenging the stigma and thereby also the existing stereotypes they successfully change perceptions. (McLeod,

2014) on the other hand, another from McLeod's focus group also explains that "it's a professional thing" and that "the thought of showing your tattoos isn't professional". This could be due to the fear of a "loss of achieved status" amongst his work peers. They need at every step weigh their body-modification aspirations with the potential repercussions they may have on their career aspirations. They have to work hard to differentiate themselves between some members of their own community, namely criminals, gang members "through markers of quality, artistic excellence and cost" thereby creating a niche "elite tattooed group" He points out that all in all the professional with visible body-modifications exist in a sort of state of limbo between the professional and tattooed communities.

There have been plenty of documented cases when it comes to discrimination of people with body-modification in the workplace. Studies have also pointed that prospective employers when faced with digitally altered photos of people to show body-modification are less likely to be hired. There is also the issue on what type of tattoo it is. A flower or a star would portray a completely different impression as compared to a swastika or guns. The same way a small nose piercing also conveys a different meaning compared to large septum piercing through the nose. (Timming, Nixon, Re, & Perrett, 2017)

The authors of this study also state that, body-art are not a "legally protected category" so companies are well within their rights to discriminate against job applicants with visible body-modification. Cases of teachers working with children have been made to cover up by their schools fearing 'impressionable' children and a backlash from their parents. The Equal Employment Opportunity commission in the U.S. states that employers have a constitutional right to impose dress code policies which include body-modification as long as they don't discriminate based on colour, race, religion or gender.

#### 2.4 Body-modification in recruitment and selection processes

As previously mentioned, with the emergence of visible body-art in various strata of society and younger generations and it is important to consider the approach of various service sector organisations in this matter

#### 2.4.1 The recruitment process

Different organisations have different recruitment processes. Moreover, a particular organisation may have a different process depending on what the job position is about. Recruitment is a time when the prospective employer gets a chance to source important information from the applicant about himself. There is no study which discusses the different application processes and criteria for service industry jobs when it comes to body-modification. But studying various career websites we can get a better idea of what the current scenario when it comes to acceptance of body-modification in the workplace. We study 20 service industry organisations and check the various eligibility criteria on their career websites. It is important to note that this is only part of the pre-eligibility criteria for the jobs in question:

We start with airlines and their respective customer-facing roles. The 6 airlines chosen are across the board from different cultures (Western, Middle eastern and Far-Eastern) and Full-Service vs Low-Cost carriers.

- Emirates Airlines is a well-known Dubai based full-service carrier. Their Cabin Crew Careers website specifically states the non-visibility of tattoos as one of the prerequisites for eligibility on their careers website, thereby eliminating the applicant even before an application. (Emirates Group Careers Cabin Crew Requirements, 2017)
- Their close competitors Qatar Airways based in Qatar, is another Full-service airline. They do not state it as part of their pre-requisites, so in theory, an applicant can apply for the position and appear for the interview regardless of whether he/she has visible tattoos or piercings. (Qatar Airways Cabin Crew Recruitment Event , 2017)
- Another top player in the industry, Singapore Airlines which is a full-service carrier based in Singapore specifically asks the applicant about their visible tattoos in the application form. Again, they do not specifically state that it is an automatic disqualification from the selection process. (Singapore Airlines Walk In Interview Application Form, 2017)
- British Airways is a well-established full-service carrier with various bases across the world. A quick search on their careers website allows a prospective applicant to download and view a file listing the job criteria and description of the specific

position. The file specifically states that the applicant must wear “the British Airways uniform to the required standard with no visible tattoos or body piercings. Tattoos or body piercings must never be visible on the body or through uniform clothing and MUST be able to be covered. Only tattoos that can be reasonably covered up are permitted. Plasters and bandages must not be used”. (British Airways Careers, 2017)

- EasyJet is a British low-cost airline based at London Luton Airport. Although it has many bases for its cabin crew around Europe, they have a global careers page advertising job vacancies for their various bases. Applying for their positions requires filling out a questionnaire which explicitly asks whether the job applicant possesses “any visible tattoos or piercings which cannot be covered up discreetly” (Easyjet Careers Jobsearch, 2014)
- Austrian Airlines is the national air carrier of Austria. It does not state specifically in the details of the job criteria and description anything about tattoos and piercings but in the initial application form there is a question asking whether the applicant has “tattoos in visible places (Head including tongue, neck, arms and legs)” (Aktuelle Jobs: Flugbegleiter Austrian Airlines, 2017)

We will also study the application process for 6 hotels in the city of Vienna, Europe and the Middle East. Once again these are chosen based on their positioning, location and their customer demographic.

- Hotel Bristol Vienna is a prestigious and exclusive property in Vienna. Their Job application page outlines the job responsibilities and expected profile of the applicants for different positions but does not have any mention about tattoos and piercings. (Hotel Bristol Education and Careers, 2017)
- Do&Co is a catering company based in Vienna. It manages and runs catering in trains, airlines and international events. It also owns and runs restaurants, lounges and hotels. They have offices all over the world. Every position has a separate application form and they detail out the criteria and responsibilities for that position. Again, there is no mention of any specific point about tattoos and piercings. (Henry am Zug Karrieretag für Stewardess on Train, 2017)



- The Marriott group careers website is a common website for all the Marriott group hotel chains. An application for a position for a barkeeper for one of their chain hotels in Vienna, the Imperial Riding School Renaissance Vienna is a detailed application process which includes a psychometric test and detailed questionnaire but does not include any questions or job criteria which state that tattoos and piercings are not allowed. (Marriott International Careers, 2017)
- Melia Hotels International is a Spanish hotel chain which has a job application process which does not require any detailed online application form but rather only a C.V. sending form on their careers page. (Employment Opportunities Melia Hotels International, 2017)
- Hotel Palais Hansen Kempinski Wien which is a 5-star hotel located in Vienna has no pre-eligibility criteria on tattoos and piercings on their website. (Hotelcareer.at Guest Relations Agent, 2017).
- Burj Al Arab is a 7-star hotel in Dubai U.A.E. It belongs to the Jumeirah Group of hotels. The group careers website has a similar application procedure to the Marriott Careers website but does not have a pre-eligibility criteria regarding tattoos and piercings. (Careers at Jumeirah, 2017)

We also look at 3 banks in Europe, in the U.K, Austria and Italy:

- The UniCredit group is a Milan based Bank group owning various investment firms and banks across Europe. The organisation has no clause in their application procedure asking whether the applicant has any tattoos or piercings. (Unicredit Karriere Bewerbungsassistent, 2017)
- Lloyds Bank is a U.K. focused bank and investment firm based in London but with many bases in the U.K. All their customer facing roles require an in-depth job application process. The F.A.Q.'s mention dress code but states that the specifics would be brought up as and when the applicant moves through the employment process. The application form online does not mention any pre-eligibility criteria about tattoos and piercings. (Lloyds Bank Careers, 2017)
- The Erste Group is a leading Austrian Bank Group which is based in Vienna. Their careers page outlines the job opportunities available in their organisation but

does not explicitly state any information or criteria on visible body-art. (Erste Group Positions Offered, 2017)

We also look at 3 retail chains across the board. We select these based on the type of brand (high-end, medium or budget) and the customer demographic it serves.

- Gebrüder Heinemann Duty-Free Flughafen Wien: Gebrüder Heinemann is a Hamburg-based business which runs various duty-free shops at airports in Europe as well as a logistics division. Their application process does not include a clause about tattoos and piercings as a pre-eligibility criteria.
- The Inditex group, a Spain based retail group, which owns and manages various retail chains like Zara, Pull&Bear, Massimo Dutti and Bershka does not check for tattoos and piercings as a pre-eligibility for their job applications for any positions. (Inditex Group - Employment openings search, 2017)
- Tag Heuer, an exclusive watch company with many showrooms across the world does not have any pre-eligibility criteria about tattoos and piercings for their Customer Service or Sales personnel. (Job Alertes - TAG Heuer - Offres d'emploi dans l'horlogerie de luxe, 2017)

Lastly, we look at 2 service organisations run by the government:

- The Austrian Federal Police (Bundespolizei) is one of the organisations which specifically state that for the purpose of eligibility, the applicant should not have visible tattoos whilst in summer uniform (which is a short-sleeved shirt) and goes further to say that any tattoos on the body will be scrutinised for their meaning and significance. In case of body piercing, a medical clearance for Hepatitis C should also be presented. ( Bundespolizei Das Aufnahmeverfahren)
- While the U.K. Home office allows tattoos and piercings for its recruitment of police officers, it details out a process through which each and every case of tattoos is considered on a case-by-case basis. (NATIONAL RECRUITMENT STANDARDS-ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR POLICE RECRUITMENT AND CONSISTENT RECRUITMENT PRACTICES, 2003) Despite the same, the London Metropolitan police does not allow tattoos on their officers.

While these above organisations have different pre-requisites, it can always happen that once an applicant has moved to the next round of a personal interview he or she could be eliminated for having visible tattoos.

For all the airlines like Emirates Airlines, Qatar Airways, Singapore, Austrian Airlines and British Airways, it can be stated with a degree of certainty that all visible body-art should be either covered or removed. Some companies like Heinemann Duty Free allow visible body piercing and stretched ears, but tattoos need to be covered.

It is important to recognise that despite ethical and moral concerns on the enforcing of appearance standards for visible tattoos and piercings, employers do have the legal right to monitor and oversee their employee's appearance, "as long as it is in the company's business interests and non-discriminatory with regard to legally protected characteristics such as gender and ethnicity". (Timming, Nixon, Re, & Perrett, 2017)

#### 2.4.2 The promotion process:

A job promotion means the advancement of an employee to a higher rank within an organisation. The process constructed for the same is called the promotion process. The reasons for employee promotion are two-fold: "to assign people to jobs where they can best contribute to organisations performance and to serve as rewards and incentives". (Fairburn & Malcolmson, 2000) These same reasons can also boost employee performance and motivation in organisations. "Motivation impacts productivity and turnover, waxes and wanes over the employee's tenure and fluctuates in response to organisational events (such as being passed over for a promotion)" (Phelan & Lin, 2001)

There are 4 types of promotion systems which are used in organisations:

Merit-Based Systems (MBS) are further divided into 2 sub-systems Absolute and Relative. "In the absolute MBS, the employee must perform over an arbitrary cut-off level in the past, current or projected future performance to become eligible for promotion. In a relative MBS, candidates are ranked according to performance and the highest-ranking candidates are promoted regardless of their absolute performance level". (Phelan & Lin, 2001)

Up and Out systems (UOS) evaluate the candidates after a certain set period of time against certain set performance criteria. Those who meet the criteria are promoted and those who do not are dismissed from the organisation. (Phelan & Lin, 2001)

Seniority Based systems promote the candidates based on 3 criteria: 1. Most experience in the job 2. Most experience in the organisation 3. Most experience in the industry.

Random Promotion Systems do not follow any of the above mechanisms but rather randomly chooses a candidate based on pure chance. (Phelan & Lin, 2001)

Visible tattoos and Piercings could fall within the scope of Merit-based promotional systems as the employees with the same are measured against a set of performance criteria. These criteria could include the adherence to an HR policy of not having tattoos or piercings in an Absolute system or without any criteria where the employee obtains a lower performance score due to his body-art.

## 2.5 Ethical Standards in various organisations

According to McShane & Von Glinow, ethics refers to “the study of moral principles or values that determine whether actions are right or wrong and whether outcomes are good or bad”. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999) Ethics and honesty in the workplace is stated to be one of the most important characteristics of a leader in a workplace. But despite these findings, there are frequent reports of violations in this regard in the workplace. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999).

To be able to delve deeper into the understanding of the prevalent ethical standards in the workplace we need to study ethical principles in the context of philosophical study.

The 3 types of ethical principles as highlighted by McShane & Von Glinow are:

- Utilitarianism
- Individual Rights
- Distributive Justice.

### 2.5.1 Utilitarianism

They state that despite one’s personal values playing a part in which one of these above three principles we are partial towards, these are the one that should be considered while making ethical decisions in the workplace. The author says”, This

principle advises us to seek the greatest good for the greatest number of people". This means a decision maker should decide upon the choice which brings the most satisfaction to those who are being considered in this decision. While this principle may be a good one to follow, one must bear in mind that with a large number of people at stake it may be hard to bear in mind each and every one's varying needs and values. Also, another problem may be that though the consequences of such decisions may be ethical, sometimes, the behaviours needed to make such decisions may be unethical. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

#### 2.5.2 Individual Rights

This principle allows for people to enjoy privileges that let them behave in certain ways. Some of these privileges or rights are basic rights like freedom of speech, expression, etc. More than basic legal rights, it also encompasses basic human rights granted to people. The downside to these can be that certain rights may clash with others. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

#### 2.5.3 Distributive Justice

This third principle could invoke a lot of controversy and it allows for the possibility of being unfairly used since it focuses upon a concept of inequality between people. It states that stakeholders who are similar to one another should be receiving similar benefits or handicaps while those dissimilar should receive different ones "in proportion to their dissimilarity". A shortfall of this principle lies in the fact that it is difficult if not impossible to agree on who is similar and who is not. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

Are there any other factors which play their part in ethical conduct in the workplace? McShane & Von Glinow state that there are a further four factors which do: The moral sensitivity of the problem, the stakeholders ethical sensitivity, situational factors and habitual/mindless behaviour.

#### 2.5.4 Moral sensitivity

As stated by McShane & Von Glinow, Moral Intensity is the degree that people view an issue as an ethical one. It consists of a further six components that together make up the total moral intensity of the issue at hand. The moral intensity of an issue is always larger when the harm or benefit to others is larger (magnitude of consequences) Moral intensity is higher when more people agree on (ethical) good

or bad of the action. (Social consensus) The moral intensity is higher when there is a greater probability of the consequences being good or bad. (Probability of effect) The moral intensity is higher when the consequences of the actions are quicker to show. (Temporal immediacy) Moral intensity is higher when the people affected are closer culturally, psychologically, physically or socially to the person conducting these actions. (Proximity) And finally moral intensity is directly proportional to the number of people being affected or when they can be distinguished as a group. (Concentration of effect)

#### 2.5.5 Ethical sensitivity

If Moral Intensity is the degree that people see an issue as an ethical one, Ethical Sensitivity is an attribute which allows people to recognise whether an ethical issue is present and understand its importance in that context. It doesn't make them more ethical, rather it only makes them more likely to sense if the matter at hand needs ethical thought. These people are likely to be more empathetic.

#### 2.5.6 Situational factors

Situational factors can also affect the occurrence of unethical conduct in the workplace. Unrealistic timelines, pressure from management to perform, unrealistic objectives can contribute towards unethical conduct or decision-making in the workplace.

#### 2.5.7 Mindless behaviours

Mindless behaviour on the part of decision makers or employees is a final factor why unethical conduct occurs. This happens when the people indulging in such unethical conduct do not think their actions through fully. They fail to realise the consequences of their actions in a way whether they disregard ethical principles or personal values. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

To reduce the occurrence of unethical conduct in the workplace many companies have developed a code of ethics which is usually unique to that organisation. That is usually compiled based on its organisational philosophy, business model and customer philosophy. While this sets out guidelines for employees to manage their behaviour it cannot and does not assure that unethical conduct will not take place. Only when an organisation has an intrinsic culture of ethics and ethical decision-

making can the occurrence of unethical behaviour be minimised. (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999)

What makes the study of ethics relevant to this paper? To begin with we could see how the presence of visible body-modification can be compared with the three ethical principles. Does its presence on an employee (or on a prospective employee) obey or violate these principles? There is a strong ethical aspect in regard to how much can an employer legitimately pressurise its employees to fit the corporate image. Timmings, Nixon, Re et al note that “employees who feel pressurised by the organisation to present themselves in a way that is at odds with their self-definition may react negatively. This is often the case when employees must suppress their own identity to comply with the organisations standards. They also state that “the imposition of appearance standards can lead to a process of de-individualisation”. In the same way, restrictions and regulations surrounding body-modification can lead to a sense of resentment and feeling of ‘invasiveness’ into the employees chosen self-identity. This can lead to considerable hostility and anxiety on the part of the employee and create “an unbalanced state between the organisation and the employees”. (Timming, Nixon, Re, & Perrett, 2017)

Let’s make this comparison with the first principle that we reviewed, the one of utilitarianism. As we discussed this principle speaks about doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. When this principle is applied to the issue of visible body-modification it can be said that the issue is neutral to this principle. While when viewed from the angle of the second principle of individual rights, this issue is clearly not in harmony with it. Measured against the third principle of distributive justice, the issue also stands neutral.

### 3. Research Methods:

The study was conducted as a 3-point study to be able to gather various perceptions. managers, everyday customers who patronise establishments such as hotels, airlines and retailers and lastly, visibly tattooed or pierced professionals were approached. The methods employed for these were a mix of qualitative and quantitative analyses. Data collection with H.R. managers was done through qualitative interviews.

The same method was employed to interview professionals who had some form of visible body-art.

An online survey was used to understand attitudes of the people who could be patronising such establishments such as hotels, airlines and retail outlets. This part of the study was conducted as a quantitative analysis.

### 3.1 Interviews with managers

In total, 12 personal interviews with managers were conducted. The managers were mainly from the H.R. or Training departments with one from Sales & Marketing. The companies were all service industry organisations. They were between the ages of 26 and 55. (Mean: 36.1666666666667, Median:35.5)

These interviews lasted approximately an hour and their aim was to gather information on past experiences and also personal views on body-art. The interviews also shed light on the existing H.R. policies for any form of body-art (if any) of such organisations. For ease of understanding and protection of their identities the following table describes the personnel interviewed with a short description of company:

Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
MH1	41	Male	H1	Hotel	A famous high-end luxury Viennese property which is family-owned. It has a lot of establishment and long history behind it. The interview was conducted with the person in charge of the Training and Quality Assurance division of the hotel.



Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
MH2	36	Male	H2	Hotel	A self-professed design hotel in Central Vienna. The Training manager was interviewed for the purpose of this study.
FH3	36	Female	H3	Hotel	A relatively new luxury property with mix of guest patronage with a modern décor in a historic 19 <sup>th</sup> century building. The Director of H.R. agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of this study.
MH4	35	Male	H4	Hotel	A hotel group which includes hotels of various genres all over Europe and is based in Vienna. The genres include budget hotels, luxury properties and resorts, thus including a variety of clientele. The H.R. Operations Manager was interviewed for the study.

Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
FH5	28	Female	H5	Hotel	A modern contemporary hotel with a modern forward-minded outlook near the famed Museumsquartier in Vienna. The interview was conducted with the H.R. Manager.
MH6	46	Male	H6	Hotel	Another luxury property from the historic 1 <sup>st</sup> district of Vienna with a mix of the traditional and the contemporary under one roof. The interview was conducted with the Director of H.R.
MH7	32	Male	H7	Hotel/Catering Company	A catering company based in Austria which runs its own hotels as well as provides catering services for events, airlines, railways. A recruiting

Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
					specialist for the events section of the company was interviewed for this study.
FA1	26	Female	A1	Airline	A well-known Austrian carrier was chosen for this study. The company is based at Vienna International Airport. Data for this study was collected through an H.R. assistant for the airline.
MT1	55	Male	T1	Tourism Company	A multinational travel and tourism company owning travel agencies, airlines, cruise ships and retail stores. The interview was conducted with a manager from the travel agency section of the group who is based in Vienna and is responsible for Training &

Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
					Development for their booking system.
MR1	38	Male	R1	Retail	A family-owned business from Germany whose interests include travel retail, purchasing and logistics. They supply a range of duty-free goods to international airports, airlines and cruise ships with a retail operation serving over 40 million customers annually. The H.R. and Administration Manager of the Viennese operation was interviewed for this study.
FR2	28	Female	R2	Retail	A well-known Swiss luxury watchmaker whose core business includes luxury watches and fashion accessories. The interview was

Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
					conducted together with both the Sales & Marketing and H.R. heads of Austria.
MR3	33	Male	R3	Retail	A Spanish multinational clothing company which is the parent company of various global clothing and accessories brands. It is the world's largest fashion group with over 7200 stores worldwide. For the purpose of this study, a Skype interview was conducted with an H.R. Director of the group currently in charge of the Indian market. He also spoke about his past experiences in the European market as the Assistant Director H.R. for a package holiday and resort

Manager	Age	Gender	Organisation	Industry	Description
					operator based in France.

Interviews were conducted in 2 different ways. With the 6 organisations, the purpose and the subject of the study was clearly and openly communicated during the initial email correspondence, the interview held with the respective manager and an outlined set of questions and data was collected and recorded based on their responses. The companies that were interviewed in this manner were:

- Hotels (H2, H4, H5)
- Airline (A1)
- Retail organisations (R1, R3)

To be able to obtain an unbiased honest opinion on the subject, it was also decided to prepare 8 fictitious Curriculum Vitae (C.V.'s) of prospective job applicants with fictitious names, details and photographs. 4 of these applicants had some form of body-art (tattoos or piercings) and 4 without any body-art. All of these applicants had varying levels of experience in the service industry. Care was also taken to ensure that some applicants with body-art were better qualified than others without body-art.

Two sets of C.V.s were prepared. Set 1 consisted of C.V.s with random internet-sourced fictitious applicants, photographs and qualifications and were labelled C.V. 1 through C.V. 8. Set 2 contained the same C.V.s but the photographs, names and qualifications were switched around between them. These were labelled C.V. 9 through C.V. 16.

During initial contact with these organisations over email, the subject of the thesis communicated to them as “an analysis of various résumés (C.V.s) of applicants with the goal is to see what first impressions they provide to the recruiting teams in service industry-based jobs”.

The methodology was explained as “to send them a set of C.V.s, allow them to briefly peruse through them and then meet with them (the managers) to gather

their initial perceptions on the C.V.s; more specifically, to see who they would invite for an interview and who they would reject while explaining the reasons behind their decisions". Set 1 (C.V.s 1-8) was sent to hotels (H1, H6, H7) and tour operator (T1). Set 2 (C.V.s 9-16) was sent to hotels (H3) and retail organisation (R2)

During the interview process with the above companies, the first part was spent gather the manager's insights into the C.V.s and to see whether there lay a bias for or against body-art, based on the photographs attached to the C.V.s. Once the reactions were captured, the real subject of the thesis was revealed, and the same set of questions used for all the companies was then applied to gather data.

All interviews lasted approximately an hour and were recorded using a laptop running QuickTime in an mp4 format. In all interviews an outlined set of questions/leading statements were used as a guideline. After an initial introduction, basic information of the company and the interviewer was recorded. The information recorded was:

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Position in the company
- Background Info of the Company
- Industry
- Target Demographic of the company
- Number of staff
- Employee demographic in the organisation
- The current HR policy of the company with visible tattoos and body piercing and the basis for such a policy to be adopted.

The question set itself was sub-divided into 3 categories:

- Core Questions: These questions were considered a basic minimum for data collection and were necessary to collect the correct viewpoints needed for the study. These were also a must for every interview in the event of a time constraint.

- Follow-up Questions: A set of further questions were formulated for each core question. Some of these questions were dependent on the responses to the core questions and added to the initial responses.
- Additional Optional Questions/Statements: A further set of optional questions or leading statements were formulated for the interview. This was done in case the core and follow-up questions did not gather sufficient pertinent information or when there was extra time available.

In many cases, interviews ended up being conversations, which allowed the interviewer to gather more important and pertinent information than a structured interview could gather. See the question set used in the Appendix 1.

### 3.2 Interviews with professionals who have some form of visible body-art

The second group of respondents consisted of professionals with visible tattoos or visible body piercings who either currently work or have worked previously in a service industry job (as described above).

Like all the previous interviews, these also lasted approximately an hour and were also recorded using a laptop running QuickTime in an mp4 format. The respondents were between the ages of 23 and 44. (Mean: 31.375, Median:29)

As previously done with the managers, we code the respondent's details in the same manner as we did with the managers. This is done for ease of understanding and protection of their identities. It describes the professionals interviewed with a short description of their current and past employment status:

Name	Age	Gender	Job Position	Industry	Description
M27	27	M	Unemployed /Former Copywriter	Advertising	Currently unemployed. Past employment includes: copywriter in an advertising agency; sales staff at a well- known European consumer electronics retailer MM and service staff at an



Name	Age	Gender	Job Position	Industry	Description
					amusement park in Carinthia, Austria.
M44	44	M	Personal Trainer/Massage Therapist/ Life coach	Fitness/Wellness	Currently self-employed as massage therapist and life coach. Past employment includes: Senior Sales Manager at a luxury department store in London HOK; General Manager for 3 countries at an international cosmetics firm LOL based in London; at a real estate firm FOK in the U.K.; international clothing brand ARM; proprietor at his own recruitment company in London.
F27	27	F	Stewardess in Hotel	Hospitality	Currently employed as a stewardess at a 5-star hotel H3 in Vienna. Past employment as a stewardess at a hotel in Switzerland.
F23	23	F	Stewardess in Hotel	Hospitality	Currently employed as a stewardess at a 5-star hotel H3 in Vienna. Past employment as a waitress at local Viennese pub.
M43	43	M	Freelance Art Director	Fashion and Beauty	Current employment Freelance Art Director based

Name	Age	Gender	Job Position	Industry	Description
					in Berlin. Clients include international fashion brand RL and photographers in Tokyo.
M31	31	M	Barber /Barbershop owner	Fashion and Beauty	Currently owner of his own barbershop in Vienna. Past employment in a restaurant SP in a Viennese museum and a shop manager of a streetwear store SNP in Vienna. His first job was as a cook and apprentice in a small Viennese restaurant.
M24	24	M	Tutor/Student of architecture	Education	Currently a tutor with TU in Vienna. Has worked in an architecture studio in Vienna in the past.
M32	32	M	Marketing Executive	Charity Organisation	Currently a marketing executive for RC, a charity organisation. Has previously worked for BW, an international online betting brand.

The interviews styles and question sets were similar to the ones used for H.R. managers with questions being subdivided into core questions, follow-up questions and additional optional questions.

Interview styles were significantly more casual and more conversational as compared to the interviews with managers. This was because interviewees tended to be either cohort members, personally known to the interviewer and shared a common passion for the subject matter at hand. This helped the interviewer to establish a friendly rapport and led to a more free-flowing exchange of information and consequently more forthright answers from the interviewee. See the question set used in the Appendix 2.

### 3.3 Survey of general public opinion on the subject

General public opinion on the subject was collected through an online survey. The general public often use the services of such organisations in the capacity of a customer. The rationale behind such a survey is to understand prevailing attitudes of these 'customers' in such case they interact with service providers with visible body-art.

After careful comparison of various online survey sites, the survey was conducted using an online survey website called Surveyplanet. This particular survey platform was chosen keeping in mind the features it offered for the use of its free version, although a licence was temporarily purchased to be able to download the results in an organised Excel format.

A set of 21 survey questions was prepared. 20 questions were prepared with a multiple-choice response while one required a scoring response. The scoring response question consisted of 7 statements with responses set on a 5-point Ordinal scale from 1(strongly agree), 2(agree), 3(neither agree nor disagree), 4(disagree) and 5(strongly disagree).

Before being made live online, the survey was de-bugged 2 times. The first time was done with a M.B.A. cohort member and the second de-bug through a friend who completed it while in my presence.

The survey was advertised through the M.B.A. cohort members and also on three different Facebook groups:

- Foreigners in Vienna: This is a closed Facebook group for foreigners who live in Vienna. The group is formed as a peer support group for foreigners who live in Vienna to help each other with information about government

procedures, language courses, etc. It also includes a significant number of Austrian nationals who assist the rest in such matters.

- Ex-Emirates Airlines Crew: This is a closed Facebook group of ex and current flying crew of Emirates Airlines (pilots and cabin crew). The ex-crew either currently work in other airlines or are full-time homemakers or work in other fields or are entrepreneurs.
- Modul University Vienna community: This group consists of students, ex-students and staff of Modul University in Vienna.
- Modul University M.B.A. group is another Facebook group for ex and current members of the Modul University M.B.A. programme.

A total of 188 responses were received. The results were downloaded from the website in an Excel format. The same was then modified accordingly to be read/analysed using SPSS Statistics. IBM SPSS Statistics (originally called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a licenced software used for statistical analyses in business and research applications.

SPSS Statistics (SPSS) was then used to analyse and compute a variety of results to explain the results. This was the only part of study to use a quantitative analysis. The survey can be viewed in the following link: <https://s.surveypplanet.com/H1nz-twbb>

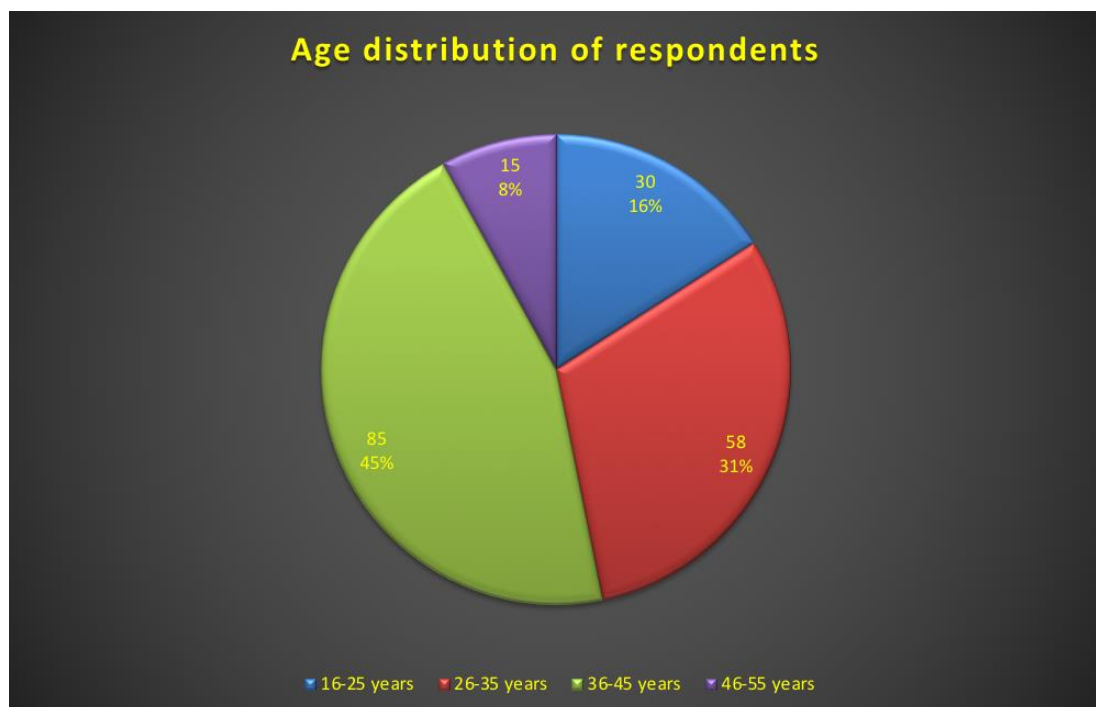


Fig. 1 Age distribution of the respondents

Fig. 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents. 45.2% of respondents (85 respondents) fell into the 36-45 age bracket becoming the largest age group in the survey. 30.9% (58 respondents) were in the 26-35 age category. 16% (30 respondents) were in the 16-25 age group and lastly 8%(15 respondents) were in the 46-55-year age group.

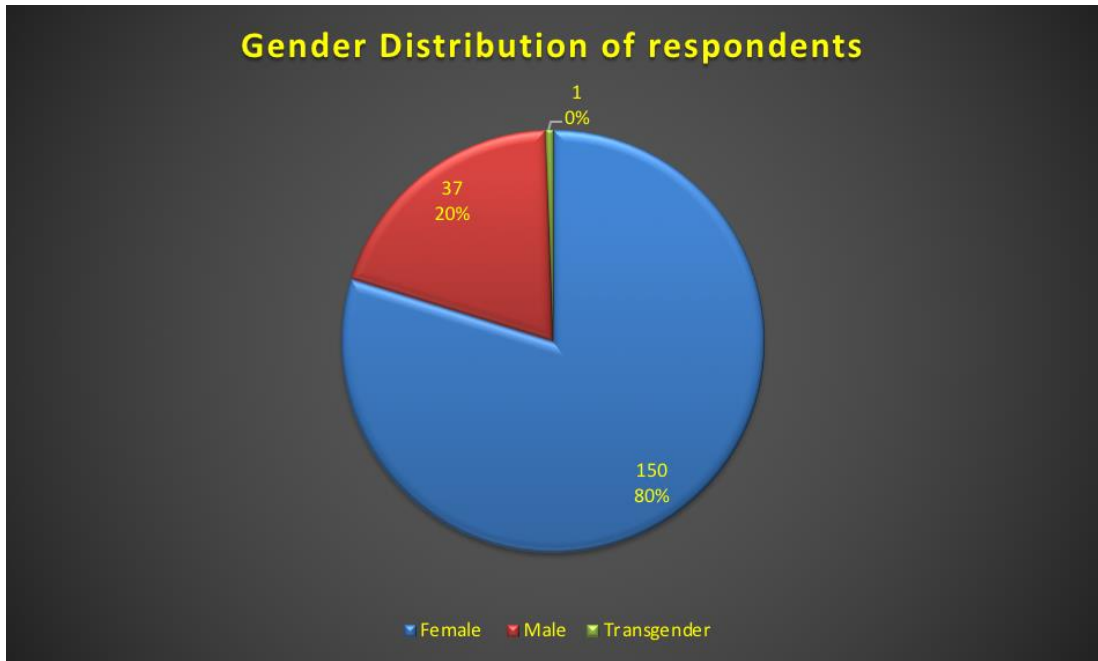
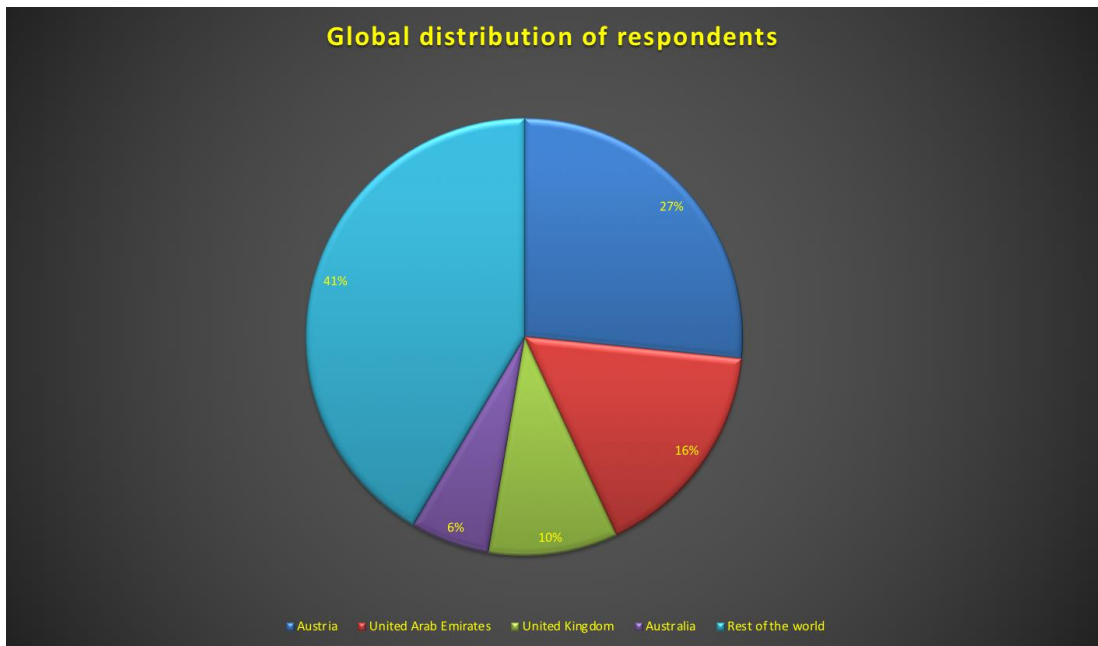


Fig. 2 Gender distribution of the respondents

Fig. 2 shows the gender distribution of the respondents. There were overwhelmingly larger number of female respondents as compared to male. 79.8% (150 respondents) were female, 19.7%(37 respondents) were male, while 0.5% (1 respondent) identified as transgender.



*Fig. 3 Global distribution of the respondents*

Fig. 3 shows the distribution of the respondents across the globe. The distribution of the respondents across the globe showed that the largest percentage of respondents (26.6% or 50 respondents) came from Austria, 16.5%(31 respondents) from the U.A.E., 9.6%(18 respondents) from the U.K. and 5.9%(11 respondents) from Australia. The rest of the countries each had too small a number of respondents to be statistically significant and are consolidated together as 'Rest of the world' to form 41%(78) of the respondents.

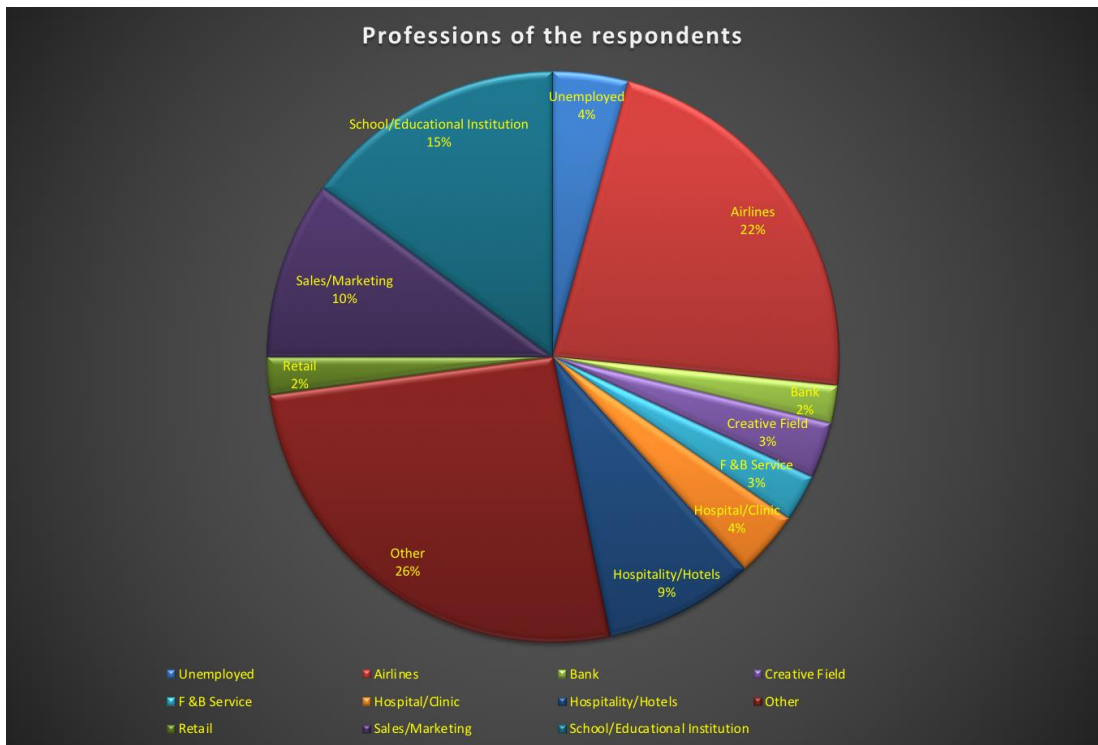


Fig. 4 Professions of the respondents

Fig. 4 shows what professions do the respondents come from. On sorting the data to display the work industry of the respondents, we see that the single largest group of respondents work in the airline sector (22%) followed by schools/educational institutions (15%). Hospitality/Hotels (9%) and F&B service (3%) could be consolidated to form 12% of the respondents. Sales & Marketing follow at 10%, Hospital/Clinic (4%), 3% in some sort of creative field (artist/hairstylist/advertising/photographer). Retail and Banks both stand at 2%. A large chunk of respondents did not fit into any of the category and are combined to form 'Others' at 26% of the total respondents. 4% stated they were currently unemployed.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Findings

Tattoos and piercings usually fall under grooming standards or grooming regulations of organisations. Grooming regulations are in place either for civil clothes or in a such a case that an employee is required to wear a uniform whilst on duty. Usually in case of the latter, the regulations are more detailed and stringent than with civil clothes, ostensibly to allow for a more consistent look among employees. The uniform

regulations are also designed in line with the brand image the organisation would like their patrons to see. Conforming to this mind-set, the overall perception from the managers in the service industry community is that, in general, the presence of visible body-art is accepted on employees and/or on applicants depending on the brand of the product or company in question. The brands which would like to position themselves as a more traditional sort tend to be stricter in their requirements than others.

An exception to this is airlines where, regardless of the type of airline (low-cost, full-service, budget or charter) there is generally a more traditional and conservative view taken in this matter. Grooming standards with regards to visible body-art range from a strict zero tolerance policy to one that is more lenient allowing a provision that body-art be covered (and therefore not visible) while in uniform.

#### 4.1 Interviews with managers

In presenting the findings of the interviews with managers of various organisations we discuss the following points which had been covered by the question sets. Many of the questions are inter-related and therefore consolidated together for ease of presentation.

##### 4.1.1 Reactions to the fictitious C.V.s

As described in the section which details the research methods, interviews were conducted in 2 different ways. While the first set of interviews were fairly straightforward with the question set being used directly, the second set of interviews with the same question set done after noting reactions of the respondents to the visible tattoos and piercings in applicant's photos on their C.V.s.

From the six managers who were presented with the fictitious C.V.s, some noticed the tattoos, and some didn't.

Manager MH1 did not discuss the tattoos and piercings. He was one of the few managers who focused only on the qualifications of the applicants and did not look much at the photographs. His only statement while looking at the C.V.s was, "We do have grooming standards being a 5-star hotel and then again lot of people are willing to adhere and adjust their look based on the grooming standards". And "Going back



to the picture, it's very serious; his résumé says he is a friendly and bubbly personality, but his picture doesn't show that". He did notice that the tattoo and the ear piercings were not fitting the photo and the business attire look but said that it did not matter until he saw the applicant in person.

MH7 response to an applicant's visible tattoo was, "Maybe he would have to cover this. Personally, I think it (the visible tattoo) shouldn't be an issue. I think legally also it must not be an issue" The ear piercings were not acknowledged. In another case, he stated that maybe the ear piercings would need to be removed for hygiene reasons. He also added that that would not be a reason to reject someone. He did follow up later confirming me in writing that tattoos are not a problem.

FR2 noticed the tattoos and piercings in the applicant's pictures and suspected that there is a link between their presence on 4 photographs and the interview. She brought up the conversation, "To be honest with you, if you are in customer contact, the tattoos and the earrings, it IS an issue. It is not an issue, but if we are being very conservative, then I think for many people, I mean it's a given, tattoos and earrings and piercings are usually something which makes you take a step backwards. For me it *would* make a difference". "We work with jewellers in the 1st District in Graben. It really depends a lot on your appearance. In our industry, we could never go to a watch retailer or jeweller like this (with visible body-art and piercing" However, later on in the interview she stated, "I would never exclude somebody with tattoos and piercings. Tattoos for me personally are not a reason to not hire somebody, except if he has a 'Mike Tyson' style tattoo all over his face".

While studying a résumé of an applicant with a visible tattoo FH3 stated", I would invite him for a position in Finance. As you know, we are a 5- star hotel and in the picture, you see he has a tattoo; so, for us it would be really difficult to put him at the front desk because of the grooming standards that we have; which I don't support, but we have them. If he has them (plugs) like you have it might be ok but like this (tunnels) it would not be possible. If he works in back-of-house, the tattoos don't make a difference".

MH6 seemed a bit displeased with the C.V.s not having specific positions or cover letters explaining their motivation for the application. He stated, "I need to know what I'm looking for". "Every second point I'm making is, "For what position"?"

However, he also did not discuss the tattoos or piercings in the C.V.s. Only when the actual topic was revealed to him did he give me information regarding the hotel's tattoo and piercing policy.

MT1 was also quite suspicious about résumés being photo-shopped. He had provided me a detailed written analysis of all the applicants. Some of his comments on the body-art were: "Though she appears open-minded and friendly, I would suggest a more serious 'business' picture. I would definitely hide the tattoo" Another one said, "The picture leaves a good impression. It is a business style picture; serious attitude and the tattoo is visible but not disturbing". And yet another, "a combination of business style with a private fetish for piercing and tattoo". Later on, he was quite straightforward in his opinion, "To be honest, from the C.V.s it (the visible body-art) doesn't impress upon me at all. I see that there are tattoos, that's okay with me. I put myself in the place of the customer and say, "Okay, I want to see the full person. I want to see the things you cannot write down in a C.V., like are you charming?... are you open-minded...what is the skill? ...what is the personality you can bring over"? I think problem we would have in customer service is not regarding tattoos, it would be piercings and ... I don't know, there are plenty of things that can do for the customers to scare them, even make-up"!

In some cases, the résumés were not screened beforehand by the managers being interviewed. This led to the screening being done before the questions were put forth to the respondent and using up some of the interview time.

#### 4.1.2 General view on body-art.

The interviews yielded a mixed result when it came to the views the respondents had on body-art. On analysing the total number of comments made by the respondents which numbered to 51, 25 of those were perceived to be positive views in relation to visible body-art, while 26 were perceived to be negative. By the same, it means that the people who responded positively had experiences and outlooks on tattoos and piercings by way of family, friends or general opinion on the matter. Some respondents said they like tattoos and piercings, but it wasn't for them. Said MR3, "It's totally okay, but it's not for me. Globally people are changing their minds about body-art and our customers will also change their mind". MH2 says, "I really like

piercings and tattoos, but it doesn't go with my style". FA1 says", I love them. They are a way to express yourself". However, there were some respondents who were not positive in their views. Says MH1, "Personally, I have never been a big fan of tattoos. I don't find them attractive. The idea of putting ink under the skin without knowing the health risks is not appealing to me. Piercings? Not something I would choose to do". MH6 says when referring to tattoos as art, "I like nature. There is a picture of it on the wall. I don't need to make it on the whole body to make a picture". Some like MH4 say, "It depends on the people. On some it can look good, on some not good at all" "Although, I don't have any, my partner is full of tattoos". MT1. says, "I have been wanting a tattoo since I was twenty. The only thing which has stopped me is the thought of the pain".

#### 4.1.3 Positive Stereotypes, Negative Stereotypes and Limits for visible body-art.

Stereotyping of people with tattoos and piercings has been occurring for a long period of time. However, the stereotyping is not necessarily only negative. From our interviews we gather that many of our managers have positive associations with wearers of body-art. FH3 had some good things to say, "They can be more creative; more outgoing". MH4 was also quite positive, "Yes. It can reveal a bit about the person, and not necessarily negative: open-minded, trendy". FR2 noticed the change over the years", Before it was more like "Oh my God, Tattoos?? And now it is hey, cool tattoos!" MT1 remarked, "There are still plenty of stereotypes where they consider that tattoos are drug addicts or criminals or something like that. These stereotypes depend on how people were educated, how they grew up in their childhood, and how it was to make them open-minded on how to judge not based on looks but based on personality. This something you have to learn as a child. Once you are 15 or 16 then you get your own ideas, but some ideas will remain fixed in your head". He also commented on the stringent grooming regulations in all airlines, "It could be because the passengers may get a perception that if you have tattoos you may take drugs or too much alcohol and probably in emergency you wouldn't handle the situation the same way as somebody without a tattoo. For example, if a person with a full body tattoo is a captain of an airplane then people could get scared. The same happened 20 years ago when the first women started to fly as pilots. I

don't know but maybe 25-30 years ago if I saw someone with extreme tattoos it would come in my mind that maybe this man is a criminal". MH7 though disagrees with that stereotype, "I have a lot of personal friends with forearms that they tattoo themselves that look like prison tattoos and for people who don't know them they would think they went to prison or something. But I know them, and they are highly educated people who have a personal reason for doing that. The tattoo doesn't determine whether the person is professional or not. That's an attitude thing". FA1, herself quite well tattooed also agrees with the negative stereotyping, "Visible body-art can look freaky or too rough".

Limits for visible tattoos and piercings on an individual varied from manager to manager. While MH2 felt "There is no limit for me. As long as the person can carry it off", most others like MH4, MH6, MT1 felt the face was the limit for them. Said MT1, "what we see many times are people with their fingers tattooed, they always have these stupid sentences like 'Fuck' or something. I think when you have this 'F-U-C-K' tattooed on your fingers and if you have a customer, the only thing that remains with him (as a memory) is that. Because in this 15 min of interaction it could scare him, especially given the history of Austria and Germany given our history it also has a kind of political meaning. It may not mean that for you but mostly it conveys the impression that you are very right wing and a political statement is never good if you work in customer service. This is when I say : "Think about what you do". But everyone agreed that any right-wing symbols like the swastika, Nazi signs were an absolute no-go apart from being illegal in Austria and Europe. MR2 put things into perspective, "Any tattoo or piercing for me which could impact the brand would be a no-go. It could be political one or a religious one. MH1 also stated, "Some tattoos you look at and think "what was the person thinking?". But there is no limit for me. I don't care if someone else covers their body, It's just not for me". FH3 said, " A tattoo fits a lot of people. But sometimes you look at people and think no that does not fit the person. Yes, (in agreement) a bit of the person is carried out".

#### 4.1.4. Official policy on visible tattoos and piercings for the organisations included in the study

Regarding official policy regarding visible body-art in our study, two hotels (H1, H3) and one airline(A1), had an official 'Not Allowed' policy for visible tattoos for all customer-facing positions. A manager (FH3), states that "Although visible tattoos are not allowed on service and front-office staff, kitchen staff who have tattoos in visible areas of the body who sometimes need to work in public areas like open kitchens of the hotel are an exception to this rule". The above organisations also stated that visible tattoos were all allowed only if they had the possibility to be covered either by clothes or a plaster.

Eight companies, 3 hotels (H4, H5, H6 and H7) one tour operator (T1) and 3 retail companies (R1, R2, R3) stated that there was no official policy in place and all visible tattoos on staff were dealt with on a case-by-case basis depending on factors like size, location and genre. A manager (FH5) for hotel (H5), says the no policy rule is in place only because they explicitly allow tattoos everywhere on the body except when they are political or religious. She also added, "We always tell our applicants during the interview process, if you have tattoos and piercings we would like that show them to us, tell us more about them".

Only one hotel H6 has a written policy where it there is a specified maximum size and they should be not on the face.

Policy with regards to visible piercings was slightly different. Most establishments where food was handled had a policy disallowing visible piercings whilst on duty. Health & safety concerns were cited as the primary reason behind such a policy being adopted (E.g. the possibility of piercings falling into food). Four hotels H1, H2, H3, H7 stated that all piercings would need to be removed while on duty. Hotel H5 said that this rule applied only to kitchen staff. Hotel H6 stated that they stretched ear plugs could be worn provided they were skin coloured and maximum 10mm in diameter. Nose piercings and septum piercings were not allowed.

The rest of the six stated that they had no policy on piercings (or stretched) piercings in place although decisions were always taken on a case-by-case basis.

It is clear that policy-wise, very few of the companies interviewed had a rigid policy. Most rigid policies were restricted to really classic traditional hotels and airlines.

Every other organisation has a policy which looks at body-art on a case-by-case basis. This can be an advantage for prospective applicants with small or medium tattoos or discreet piercings or even large, stretched ear piercings. The focus (as we go on to discuss below) is on a neatly groomed, well dressed, polished look rather than individual items on a person's body. So, to conclude 4 hotels did not allow visible tattoos (H1, H3, A1, R1) as compared to 6 where they were allowed albeit with some conditions:(H2, H4, H5, H6, H7, T1, R2, R3) Piercings were evenly spread between them with 6 not allowing( H1, H2, H3, H4, H7, A1) 6 allowing(H5, H6, T1, R1, R2, R3)

#### 4.1.5 Views on restrictive policies of employers

What do our managers feel about these stringent policies that some employers adopt towards visible body-art? Said MR2 who works for a very big retail organisation, "It's a bad thing; it's a kind of discrimination, but as employees they have a responsibility to follow what the company is setting as policy". Also said FH5, "It's okay when other employers don't allow it: it's their philosophy. The employer decides. We are at this point where it (the hospitality industry) is just developing this new trend. We aren't supercool. We are better than 10 years ago and maybe in 10 years maybe we develop. it is changing a lot". Many of the managers were clearly in tune with this change: MH6 working for a conservative chain had this to say, " Yes, we would lose talent with those regulations previously, and that's the reason so now these days we have to open up as the guest doesn't expect it, then why do we insist on it? So, we talked about it and we changed it and that's what we did in our company in July 2015". FH3 also felt quite strongly about these policies and had a lot to say about them, "It makes me angry that we have such strict regulations, but these are the rules set by the head office and I must follow them. We are pushing our head office to relax the regulations. It's not like 20 years ago anymore where they (applicants) wanted to work for a big brand. Nowadays they want work-life balance, they want a good salary, they are not looking for career; they just want a good life. People who invented these strict regulations on tattoos and piercings are not the ones doing this interview process every day. They are not seeing the applications, they have no feeling of how many applications we get and how many people we need to reject; and also, that there would be no people working in the hotel if we decide

to reject everyone like these. I also feel that we sometimes are forced to reject someone who is perfect for the position just because he has a tattoo somewhere. The (H3) group sometimes cannot decide what they want to be: very traditional or trendy and being open and innovative, and if it's the latter they want to be, then they are going to have to open their doors to people having tattoos. MH4 felt similarly, "The 'pool' of applicants in the hospitality business is not that big. There are lesser applicants and therefore lesser invitations. Here especially in Austria and Vienna it is not so easy to get hospitality staff and when there is a policy of rejecting people with tattoos, it makes your life more complicated. Therefore, 'Being yourself' is part of the brand philosophy of (H4)".

Regarding back office positions, most of the organisations interviewed said they had no restrictions on body-art. Even MH1 of the very traditional hotel H1 said MH1 said, "Body-art will not matter if the position is not customer facing even if they wear the uniform".

Management positions were a different story. Although a few like MH4 said it is not a problem and that many of their corporate office staff have beards and tattoos, some like FA1 said, "Getting a visible tattoo for a management position, e.g., head of a department a visible tattoo would work against you". MH6 felt similar, "A person who applies for a senior position will not have reached that stage in life to be able to apply for a senior position if he hasn't abided by the norms of the industry he works in. If someone did not have these accessories in his previous job and now does, it's a question what happened in life that had such a big change. What caused the motivation to change"? FH5 who despite working for an alternative 'pro-body-art' hotel also says, "Recruitment for management: I would say you should have the chance to look professional i.e. to cover it (tattoos) up but it wouldn't make a difference to me because it's about what you know, your experience and not how you look. Besides, you (E.g. you, with your large plugs) you do look professional even if you wear them. If someone would come with the whole head and face covered then I would think maybe this is a bit too much for this position, where you are sitting in front of people and telling them how to behave. But as long as you have the chance to look professional and be professional in the way you speak and behave, be a mentor, lead your employees and your team and meet the grooming standards. I'm

just saying that as a manager you should find a way even for those people with typical expectations of a manager, however you do this". MT1 was also the same, "In leadership roles, we generally have an assessment centre and a panel of recruiters or interviewers. In such scenarios the applicants body-art could work against them as we do have colleagues even younger than me who are more traditional and conservative than me".

MH6 summed it up", What I would say to young people? The young apprentices who start to work: You don't know what the future will bring. You don't know what employer you want to work with. Make it in such a way that it is flexible, that it would not be a hindrance, that you get every job that you need, that you like to have.

#### 4.1.6 Visible body-art in relation to looking professional

Since most places of work require people to look 'professional' it is important to understand what that term actually refers to. Here we ask service industry professionals what their perception of looking 'professional' is and how that relates to our subject matter, i.e. how do visible tattoos and piercings compare when it comes to someone looking 'professional'.

Most of the responses state looking professional depends less on tattoos and piercings but rather than the whole persona. Some of the phrases used to explain the same were: How the person is dressed; Neatly groomed; Neat hairstyle. To be 'polished'; how one makes the first impression with his body language and communication skills. Says MH1, "It depends on the profession, it doesn't depend on looking conservative, it depends on where one works. Depending on the industry it could look weird. Tattoos and piercings are a bit out of place/incongruent with the look (of a suit and tie). If you see a woman in a business suit and tattoos and piercings you would think something is not ok". MT1 also has a conservative view, "We are still in Customer Service. It still is a kind of 'traditional' thing. It doesn't mean that there no extremes allowed. E.g. It would be problem if you plenty of piercings all over the face because customers would get afraid. You always have to think it's not only my personal opinion about somebody. You always have to think, "how will my customers react?" If they have somebody like him or her sitting in front of them. He or she could have a bright smile, he can be 300% qualified for the job but people are scared. This



is something like you say please put a business photo in your CV; it gives a much better attitude for me (the recruiter) to decide that ok Its his private life and it's his choice to have a tattoo or whatever but he is aware what he is applying for".

In contrast to their views, FH3 feels "So many people like football players are tattooed and sometimes are required to wear a suit and its looks kind of sexy. I like to see people in suits who are tattooed. (For me) looking professional is about having your hair done, wearing a suit, looking neat. For me is about the overall picture". MR1 adds to that, "It doesn't depend on anything specific like on tattoos or whatever but on the whole person. When we recruit people, we try and keep in mind one thought: "would I buy something from this person" If someone has really short trousers and socks with sandals he or she wouldn't be recruited because he doesn't know how to represent himself. As a salesperson the first thing you have to do is sell yourself".

MH7 opines, "It has a lot to do with how you carry yourself. And that not only in the sense of how you dress yourself but for me it's more in the sense of ... Does the person carry a smile does she say hello to new customers? On one hand if you are very well dressed but you don't open your mouth when a customer comes in then you are not professional. On the other hand, if you are fully tattooed and you run around in a t-shirt, but you are very outgoing, you greet the customer and you have this very strong service attitude then that's professional".

FR2 put things into context by saying, "For instance the way you look today, I even like the (stretched) earrings and I like the beard with it. it looks cool and it has something. Its sophisticated. Its clean cut, I like the grey hair and doesn't look untidy. You look properly dressed. So, there's always a difference, right?"

#### 4.1.7 Experience with tattooed applicants or tattooed staff.

All managers interviewed had cases where they encountered applicants with tattoos or piercings. Depending on the policy, the applicants are informed accordingly. MH1 from the prestigious and traditional hotel H1 says, "we have staff with body-art but are instructed to cover them up while working. We have an option for arm tattoos to work in a long sleeve uniform. Grooming standards explained during the interview process and you are automatically disqualified if you have irremovable piercings.

The same is the case with the airline. FA1 stated, "Applicants are explained the policy in the interview. A female applicant who had a tongue piercing was explicitly told that she would need to remove it during her duty hours". Talking about promotions for non-customer facing positions, "Provided the work ethic is good, an applicant with big visible tattoos are dealt with on a case-by-case basis".

FH3 admitted that now and then they have had to relax the rules, "An exception was made for a staff member who had a covered tattoo on her arm which became visible when the uniform was changed to short sleeves. We just hired a sous chef with tattoos; it was really hard to find someone for the banquet area. Nowadays if you really strictly follow the rules you will not be able to find any staff members. The hotel would be empty there would be hardly any staff". She added, "Back office is not problem. We have people in the Purchasing department who have tattoos. But if they have visible tattoos and applying for positions such as Hotel Sales or Reservations, it would need to be discussed and would be management decision. As Hotel Sales Executives, they have to deal with very high-profile clients and they have to represent the brand and I'm not quite sure they could get away with having a visible tattoo as they have to have a clean, mainstream look which does not cause any offence or shock to such customers". She also spoke of her interview experiences, "I don't ask them people about tattoos but in case a visible tattoo is spotted then it would negatively affect the outcome of the interview. One also has to be careful about giving the reason of failing the interview as due to the tattoo as it possibly could be a reason for discrimination based on appearance".

MH6 gives his opinion on the matter, "When an applicant comes for the interview, you ask him about his tattoo, we discuss it. We just want to check that we don't have political symbols. It's the symbols we have to take care of. Because the guests can feel uncomfortable. Applicants will be told of our regulations, If they refuse to keep their plugs in the natural colour then they are not senior enough to understand what we are doing here in (Hotel H6) and they would not be professional. Therefore, they anyway will not understand other things in our job, responsibility, values. I had a student once, with an application for summer internship and his ears had plugs inside which were new or half a year but then it was still not allowed in the company. I asked why he had it, he said, "It's cool". My response was "Did you think about that?"

What do you think: is it good or bad"? "Yes, maybe I don't get some jobs". Would you like to get a job in such a property? "then maybe you need to take it out and wear a plug with which you don't recognise anymore that it is a big hole". But he also said", We do have some colleagues in the bar that have them (visible tattoos). Yes, visible, He demonstrates it. With my team in HR, all of us have something of that mentioned, inclusive of me, if you talk about visible 2 of us have something visible as well. Only the rule is not on the face. And also, from the size, not too big".

FR1 who works at the airport offers his view on recruiting staff, "When we recruit people we try and keep in mind one thought: "would I buy something from this person". If someone has really short trousers and socks with sandals he or she wouldn't be recruited because he doesn't know how to represent himself. As a salesperson the first thing you have to do is sell yourself".

FH5 who works in an alternative, open-minded hotel chain talks about her experience there, "Recruiting from here has been a lot different because it's a totally different philosophy and company. I had to change a lot of my thinking because I was in the traditional Austrian hospitality style of thinking. We don't even expect people to suit up in interviews. We always tell our applicants during the interview process, "If you have tattoos and piercings and show them as long as they meet our hygiene standards"". She speaks of the staff at the hotel, "We have plenty staff who are extensively visibly tattooed. There is an employee who is putting her shirt (sleeve) up so that everyone can see her tattoo. Our hotel manager is also full of body art and doesn't wear a uniform and in the summer now he is wearing polo shirts and all the tattoos on his arms are seen. Another pizza chef with all-over tattoos and dreadlocks is part of our recruitment campaign".

#### 4.1.8 Brand Image Congruency

There is an overwhelming agreement amongst all the managers: Tattoos and piercings and the decision to accept them is completely dependent on the brand image the organisations are trying to portray to their customers.

7 out of 12 companies pointed out that visible tattoos and piercings could very well be accepted if they were part of the 'brand promise' of the organisation in question.

Says MH2, "Professions are bound by stereotypes of how an employee should look. Therefore an employee must represent the brand in terms of appearance" MH4 added to that statement, "Old fashioned brands have a different brand promise and the look must be in accordance to it". MH1 says "The staff should fit into the environment they work in and here the environment is very traditional, very classic". "Since people who come to the (H1) hotel have certain expectations of where they are staying and since it is a very traditional brand everything needs to be classic. If I have a tattooed server at a third wave café I don't care but if I'm going to the Park Hyatt, then I would find it a bit weird because it's really not the place for it". MR3 from retail organisation R3 added, "Professionally, I believe I should be protecting the interests of the company, so in the service industry the people who are serving the customers need to represent the brand. There is a place for everyone, but in a brand which matches their style". FA1 from the airline at Vienna International Airport stated, "Visible body-art is not congruent with image of airline staff being friendly". MR1, also at the airport, on the other hand has a contrasting view, "The person should not only look professional but also cool. Especially at the airport it's a different environment, they don't expect professional people they expect dynamic young people and people from other cultural backgrounds. The salesperson should represent liberal thinking".

To conclude we could say that some of service industry organisations do allow visible tattoos depending on what brand image they are trying to illustrate. Some of the brands like hotels H2, H4 and H5 want to depict themselves as modern liberal thinking and 'cool'. They also try to attract a clientele which is cool, young, trendy and alternative in their lifestyle. Says FH5 from Hotel H5, "For us this (policy) is important because we think that people are happy if they could be themselves. Even if it looks cool and we are super-cool to each other, we do have standards and we do have guidelines, but they are more like behaviour guidelines, hygiene guidelines and service guidelines; instead of what people look like: grooming standards. If a guest is not pleased with our concept and is doing not-so-good things to our employee, then he should please leave. But If the brand is strict and conservative then body-art would not be okay; it also wouldn't be okay for me, because the guests are not okay with it. It depends on the product. People have to fit into the product".

## 4.2 Interviews with professionals who have some form of visible body-art

To obtain an insight into the experiences of professionals who are tattooed and pierced, interviews were also conducted with 8 such professionals. Like the managers, their experiences, opinions and comments were recorded over a period of about an hour each and the entered into an Excel sheet matrix.

### 4.2.1 Location and reason for body-art

Through the years, our respondents chose to get tattooed and pierced all over their bodies. Many of them were concealable, but many were not. The reasons they have given for vary from self-expression to reminders about life experiences. Says M44, “I have my full body tattooed. My knuckle tattoos don’t ever go unnoticed. My ears are also stretched. I have many reasons to tattoo myself: Mark occasions in my life, Closure to events and episodes, opening of parts in my life and also because I fancy tattooed men. My knuckle tattoos are a quote from a book called ‘The Outsiders’, a book which made a significant impact on me”. M31 felt a bit different about them, “I am tattooed all over my body. I never counted how many I have. I started with piercings. I then started thinking them (tattoos) when I was 14 and I always knew I want to get all tattooed up. I couldn’t ever imagine myself without any tattoos. Because I’m also a pretty small guy, it’s also about self-confidence. It made me look a bit tougher at the beginning. It’s also that my body looks more beautiful to me when its covered with colourful tattoos”. Remarkd M24, who besides one of his legs, ribs and his neck, has his entire body tattooed, “I’m an artist. I like art. I always wanted to have art on my body. The Indian mythology tattoos are personal steps, things I achieved and things I reflect upon. My reasons go quite deep: the whole world is not real, it is an illusion and therefore, so is my body. So, in the end, it doesn’t really matter what I do to it”. F27, who works in a hotel explains, “I’m tattooed on the leg, torso and lower arm. I got mine after I had my son and had his name tattooed on me”. Yet another respondent from the hotel industry, F23 said, “I’m tattooed all over my body, but I have one visible tattoo: a small rabbit behind my ear. I like tattoos and like how they look. They mean different things to me: reminders of people close

to me, some about my beliefs in life. Similarly, explained M44, “Pretty much my entire upper body is tattooed. I felt I must get these tattoos as they are a story about various times in my life. Even though I sometimes have doubts about them affecting my career as a life coach, I do believe I can only succeed if I am completely myself”. This demonstrates clearly that people do get tattooed for a gamut of personal reasons ranging from art to reminders of events and people in their lives and to attraction to other tattooed people. But the only real similarity between all the reasons given could be an underlying passion for self-expression despite it not being such a socially accepted way of doing so.

#### 4.2.2 Interview Experiences

Most of our respondents have had interesting and rather positive experiences during their job interviews. Some like M44 felt that as long one was confident and self-assured even with visible body-art, it would lead to success. He spoke of his experience of an interview with LOL for a senior position (General manager for 3 countries), “I went through 6 rounds. In the 3rd round it was very important to me, that they see more of me, and so I rolled up my sleeves. And it showed these people that I am secure of who I am; and that matters more than anything else. If at that stage, if someone felt that I don’t fit the bill because of the tattoos or the piercings, then it would be their loss. There were a few looks but they weren’t any comments”. M32 was a bit less confident in the first few interviews of his career, “When I applied for my job at BW, no one asked me about the tattoo on my neck, but later I found out that they indeed did notice that I had done a bad job of trying to cover up my tattoo: I’d worn a jacket which I could button up all the way up to the chin, which I did. I did this because I was really in need of a job and I thought the first impression they should get should be based upon my words and not on what I look like. So, for the first round I wanted to give them a very neutral perception of me. So yes, at that point in my career I did worry about how the tattoo might seem to them. The following job interviews, I didn’t bother because by then I was more secure about my career and believed people need to take me the way I am.

M43 echoes similar sentiments as M32, “I once had an agent. She told me once that there were certain jobs that she would never put me forward for, because she knew

that the clients would be a bit freaked out with somebody with tattoos. I have been to job interviews where I thought if the tattoos would be an issue. But no, never did I feel I needed to work harder (in trying to get the job). I was once in a meeting once with RL about this event we were doing together; with the director of marketing and she spent the entire meeting speaking to my (tattooed) knuckles. But I've reached this point in my career where she had to respect me no matter what; whether she liked me or not”.

M31 offered his views, “I never had any issues with not finding jobs because of my tattoos. I also never searched for jobs where I knew I could have problems with my body-art. So, yes, you could say I avoided looking for such jobs”.

M24 stated, “I never really applied for jobs. I was head-hunted, and I got them. I always dress up well. My (dressing) style is more elegant and not so summery-casual. That also probably made a difference in the way they perceived me with all my body-art”.

M27 admitted that he once conformed to people’s perceptions of how applicants should look, “Sometimes I would hide my septum piercing if I was to go for an interview. But not anymore”. “I once applied for job as security for a museum in Vienna and they said during the interview if I want to work there, I would need to cover everything up. I said no problem. But then I got a rejection letter saying I would not fit into the role/company”. “Now I don’t even apply for jobs where I think that they give importance to this matter. If I was sure they wouldn’t take me because of my tattoos, then I wouldn’t apply in the first place”.

It clearly goes to show that while most interview experiences for our respondents were positive, many of our respondents were not part of the service industry. For the few who were in such jobs, they either met the challenge by being honest and totally self-confident or had left themselves the option of covering up the tattoos for the interview.

#### 4.2.3 Perceptions of others

The respondents we have come from a variety of professions and from varied age groups. This has given them abundant experiences when it comes to how they have been perceived by their colleagues and higher-ups. M44 speaks of an experience

early in his sales career, “The Senior Manager came down one day and said that these (large thick hoop earrings) are not fitting HOK. Even though I was in the Men’s Casuals section, HOK is a traditional British establishment with high-end clients. She said that I must take them out. But I told her that would not happen. You see, back then, I had a little bit of power because my sales were up tremendously. A few days later, the owner happened to be passing by and I approached him; and armed with my sales figures, explained my point (about allowing trendy earrings), and said that even HOK needed to move forward on this issue. Apparently, he understood, because the rules were changed within 24 hours to allow them”. “If you are in a sales job and your sales are down and you come along with all your body-art and piercings no one will take you seriously”.

M24 who works as a tutor in an educational institution, regularly works with professors and students of architecture. He also worked previously in an architecture studio in Vienna where he has never been perceived any different, “I think Vienna is tolerant of such things and it’s pretty normal here. I got most of my visible tattoos while I worked in an architecture studio and nothing changed in the dynamics between me and my colleagues or seniors. I mostly cover my tattoos up even though I have visible ones because they are more a very personal thing for me and don’t like to show people I have them. I generally always wear long sleeve shirts and long trousers, because I really don’t like the attention of the people so much. People ask about the tattoos all the time, which really annoys me after some time”.

M32 works with mainly middle-aged and senior people in his job, “At RC, my colleagues are very old school. The average age is 40-ish. They make jokes sometimes: I remember once something got stolen and they were joking that perhaps it was the guy with tattoos (me) but there was nobody taking it seriously. They mainly are always curious: “How long do I have them; what do they mean, etc.?””. He speaks of his experiences in his past jobs, “Now after many years of working and quitting from BW, I heard some of them mention to me how, at first they thought that with my tattoos, I seemed like this strange guy and perhaps I could be trouble, but then they started to get to know me and that I was the complete opposite of what they had expected. So at least this is an assurance to me that even they thought of me as weird at first, in the long run that had changed for the better”.



But he adds, “I do think people are more judging about these things when it comes to girls”.

But F23, who works in hospitality says, “I never had any judging glances anywhere. At least, not that I know of. Maybe I’m ignoring them or not noticing them. People are really cool here at the hotel. I’ve had no reactions other than positive: “Oh, cool tattoo etc”. Maybe I'm really lucky or just still very young”. F27, who works in the same hotel as F23 also agrees that her colleagues or seniors never had any problems”, It’s totally okay with my managers”. From customers, “Some when people see the hidden septum in my nose, they go "what is in your nose?" and when I say it’s a piercing, I get, “Wow, awesome!”, but sometimes also "Why ever did you do this?". Most of the guests are very open but there are also guests who are not so open. They don’t say anything, but you can see it from their eyes and their face. Its only in private (as opposed to professional) life when people go: “Okay, what’s wrong with you?”. Its only on the street that I get stared at when I go out with my son, my tattoos in full view. They say I'm not a normal mother because I look different”.

M31 who also worked in a variety of customer facing jobs before he turned barber agreed that sometimes his body-art worked against him, “My colleagues, they were totally accepting of my body-art. But when I first started in my first job as a cook and apprentice and first started out getting tattoos, I had some problems with my boss who was quite a bit older who refused to allow me to work in the service section of the restaurant. I had earlier asked my seniors whether pierced ears would be a problem and they responded with a no. But when I stretched them to 8mm diameter, they were not so comfortable with it. Then later, when I was working as a shop manager (in a streetwear store SNP), I was told by the regional manager that if I get more tattoos (on my hands and neck), I would lose my job”. “Once, also while in retail, A woman came in with a problem but refused to talk to me and asked for the shop manager (which was me). It was clear that, although I gave her correct information, she didn’t take me seriously.

With rather a mixed bag of experiences in this regard, our respondents have dealt with a varied range of perceptions for their body-art in their lives. It’s clear that people still harbour a negative perception of tattoos and piercings; in our study these ranged from distrust to disdain and an apprehension of being offensive to clients and

customers. On a positive note, many colleagues are accepting of their body-art despite them being aware of the negative connotations that tattoos and piercings have.

#### 4.2.4 Stigma and its effects

In our interviews with managers, it is evident that a few did believe that there is still some stigma attached to body-art in today's modern society. We see that many of our tattooed respondents also agree that despite some progress being made, that stigma is very much alive. M44 has an opinion about how this may have come about, "I have had people change sidewalks because I had a shaved head , tattoos, muscles and a tank top". "Sometimes there are people with tattoos who use their body-art as excuse not to work. They don't want to work". "Yes, but we must also respect people who don't like tattoos and don't want to be around people with tattoos". F27 has a similar take on this, "Most of the people think you are not normal and that you do not work hard". M31, who is completely tattooed all over his body besides his face talks about his family, "My dad still hates them until today. He always has a stigma against tattoos that they equal jail-time". "I also had a neighbour who once commented on how ugly all my tattoos looked". M43 tells us his theory, "Having tattoos is still the symbol of the outlaw. Tattoos used to be (but not anymore) this break with society. Where you made a conscious decision where you were past this point where you were polite with society. When I got my knuckles tattooed I debated it for a really long time (around 5 years), because I knew it would change the way people perceive me". "I think there is thing in people's heads that if you have a tattoo which you can cover up with a shirt, people forgive that, but once you start going above the collar or over the hands, then it becomes something like people can't pretend anymore that they can ignore that. M44 also agrees, "Yes, there is a stigma attached to tattoos today. But do you care about it? And do you allow them (the people who stigmatize) to bother you? I didn't let myself be affected by the stigma. Or rather those who stigmatized me for my body-art".. "Nowadays its really about being authentic. No one has ever talked to me in my entire life about my look or style except once that day in HOK (which I conquered) because I come across totally authentic. Once you start showing people that there is absolutely nothing different

between you and them despite your body-art it then they can have their own perceptions”.

The respondents are completely aware that there is a stigma attached to visible body-art and they have from the word go, accepted this reality and learnt to deal with it. All of them also very aware that there are still other tattooed and pierced people who being anti-social elements, do feed these negative stereotypes. Our respondents have gone through life by showing through their positive work ethic and self confidence that they do not belong in that stereotype. For the rest whose reactions they have no control over, they ignore.

#### 4.2.5 Regrets

The data from the respondents shows that some form of regret or hindsight about their own body-art is consistently evident amongst the respondents. Most of this regret can be related to style of the body-art, its quality or its location on the body. M32 had a lot to contribute to this: “If I had to, I wouldn’t do a tattoo again on the neck to be honest, because your life changes (evolves) somehow and now I’m not going to a music concert every week like I used to in the past. I’m still living the life I want to, but that in itself has changed”. “There is a tattoo I have which says ‘pacifist’ in Latin which was true for me before, but not what I believe in anymore today. And It annoys me that people ask me about it all the time”. “People should choose carefully where they get their tattoos, not for professional reasons but mainly for personal reasons; just so that they have no regrets of what they have. If someone asks me today the only advice I would have is: Wait a bit, because you grow, you evolve, and you change; wait until maybe your 30’s and then perhaps you won’t change so much anymore, which then would be better to get the designs/locations you want”. M44 echoes his sentiment, “There was some body-art which I regret but I covered them up with other designs. The stars on my chest, I did have some regrets once I got them, but I have integrated them into my other tattoos on my body to make them stand out less. Similarly said M43, “I only thought of removing one so that I could get another over it”! A few like M31 had another story to tell, “I have a friendship tattoo which I kind of regret now because we (my friend and me) are not talking to each other anymore”. “I don’t regret my

back tattoo, but It would have been a bit better if I had waited and gone to a better artist”. M24 whose tattoos have a deep-rooted personal significance says, “No regrets at all. Never. Not for my tattoos anyway. My piercings/my ear tunnels, for those, yes. I just didn’t like them anymore”.

It’s clear that there is some form of regret over their past body-art at some point in our respondents lives. This is because people grow out of their life phases and what bound them to that particular style or piece of body-art does not hold true anymore. As mentioned, this could be avoided by either waiting for a more mature age to get them or keep them as a reminder of the folly of their youth or cover tattoos up by other ones. Piercings can also be removed.

#### 4.2.6 Views on restrictive policies of employers

There were a range of opinions within the tattooed community when it came to the policies of employers when it came to visible body-art. M44 acknowledges the same, “It’s totally okay. If someone comes along and he doesn’t fit the bill of your business, then you don’t hire them. You are hiring for the business which you are and what type of business it is. I completely understand if someone looks at me and says, “M44, I like you, but I don’t like the way you look (for my business)”. There are businesses I wouldn’t go for an interview because I would think for myself I’m not suited for them”. He also adds, “A person who hides his body-art is limiting himself. Why would one want such a person to work for them? He presumably could then limit himself in the job, with the customers, with the sales, etc”..

M24 also agrees, “Of course it is okay. The owners created a company and they present themselves in a way *they* think is right. If they sell certain things, they have a business model for a certain market segment. So, it should kind of match e.g. a rock and roll shop would be fine for someone with tattoos. But in a fancy place, then probably not, because it doesn’t conform with the image. And if it’s a general place where everybody goes, then they have to find a balance”. “I think there are some places where people are more conservative, where they have an image of people in their minds about how somebody who works with them should look like. I’m sure such places exist. But I wouldn’t apply to such places. I wouldn’t want to work there”.

F27, however feels differently, "It's not fair. If I'm ever asked in an interview about my tattoos, I say it doesn't affect how I work. And it does not make another person out of me".

M43 states matter-of-factly, "I have tattoos and they are not going away, so if someone doesn't want to hire me because of my tattoos then its fine. In probably ten years no one will make a big deal about tattoos anyway.

M31 has a different take on this, "It doesn't matter if the person is tattooed. He has to prove himself if he is worth the job. How would an employer even know whether a non-tattooed person is a good employee or not?". "The fact that a person is tattooed; that already tells me a good bit about their life choices. Good tattoos are expensive, and most people have to save money for them, which means they are most of time working hard for their money". "I, for one, was never really concerned with tattoos affecting my career. I was never really the person who aimed for the big money and management, etc. I chose a life where I could be myself and perhaps make the same kind of money in my own way".

While some of them acknowledge that such policies are not totally fair, some older respondents understand that the employer is king when it comes to setting requirements for how their employees should look for their business needs. As with the previous discussions, they take it in their stride by avoiding such businesses altogether.

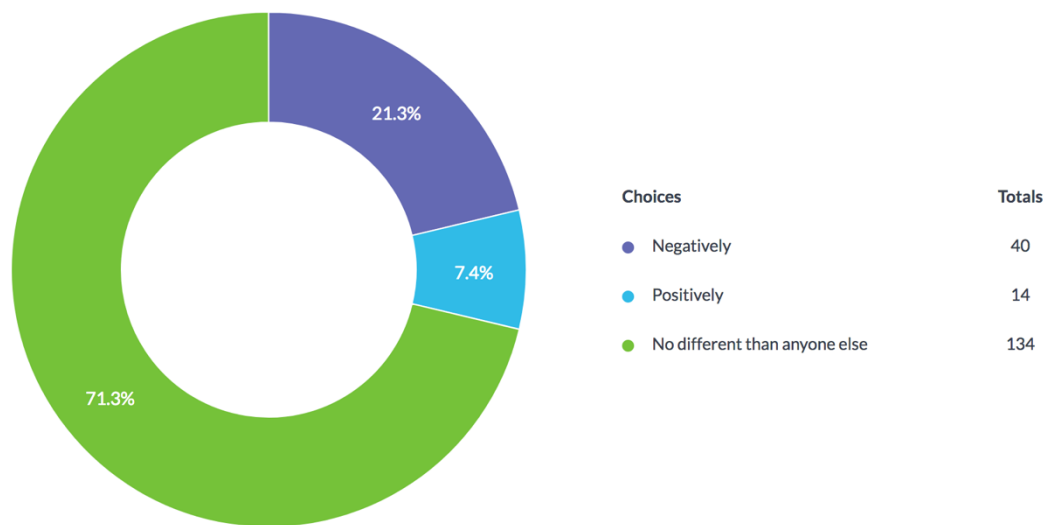
#### 4.2.7 Other comments

There were some comments that our respondents made which stood out and could make a positive contribution to this research. M24, who started out with his tattoos when he was 18, says, "I have a good level of education. I'm an engineer already and then I studied and worked at the same time. I'm not like some others with tattoos, the types that didn't finish school and more like the rebel people. I do see a connection between good education and tattoos. People that have a proper education and tattoos, then it doesn't matter. I believe also that the more educated the people around you (colleagues, seniors) are the less they care about your tattoos. Also, if you have tattoos and know how to present yourself, and when you are sure of what you know, nobody cares".

### 4.3 Survey on general public

The online survey was the only quantitative part of the research study. This was necessary to ascertain the general public opinion on visible tattoos and piercings. This information could substantiate or invalidate existing organisational policy on the matter, while also providing an insight into the current opinion of the public. This information could be helpful to set new policies or update the existing policies. It could also provide important tips to future applicants with visible body-art on how they could be perceived by the public in a work setting.

As explained in section 3, the survey was conducted online from May till August 2017. The findings of the 188 respondents are analysed using SPSS Statistics and MS Excel to provide the following charts and details. Here we go through some of the important questions in survey:



*Fig. 5 How do you view people with piercings and tattoos?*

Fig. 5 shows how the respondents general view on tattoos and piercings. Majority of the respondents stated that they did not view people with tattoos and piercings different from anyone else (71.3%) while 21.3% viewed them negatively. Only 7.4% viewed them positively.

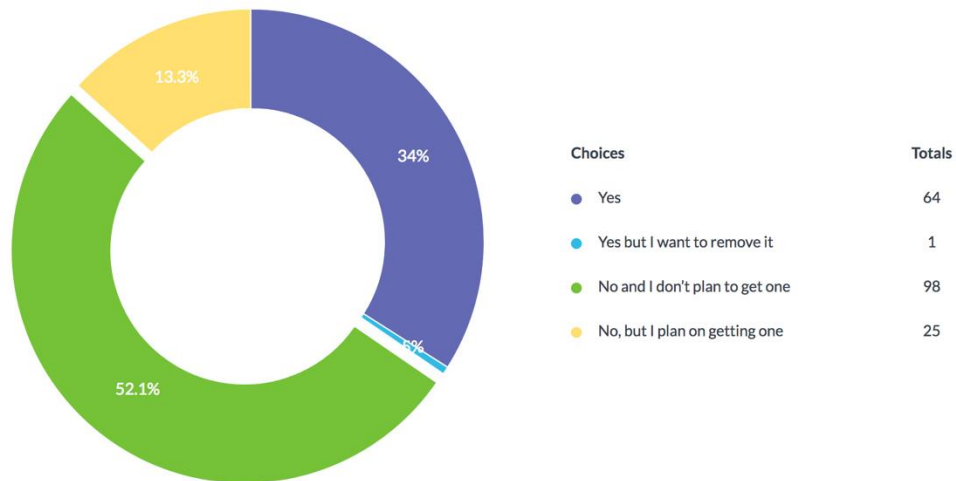


Fig. 6 Do you have a tattoo?

Fig. 6 shows how many respondents themselves had a tattoo. A total of 39% were themselves tattooed. One respondent (5%) stated he/she wanted to remove his tattoo. 52.1% said they did have one and didn't plan on getting one, while 13.3% stated that although they didn't have one they planned to get one in the future.

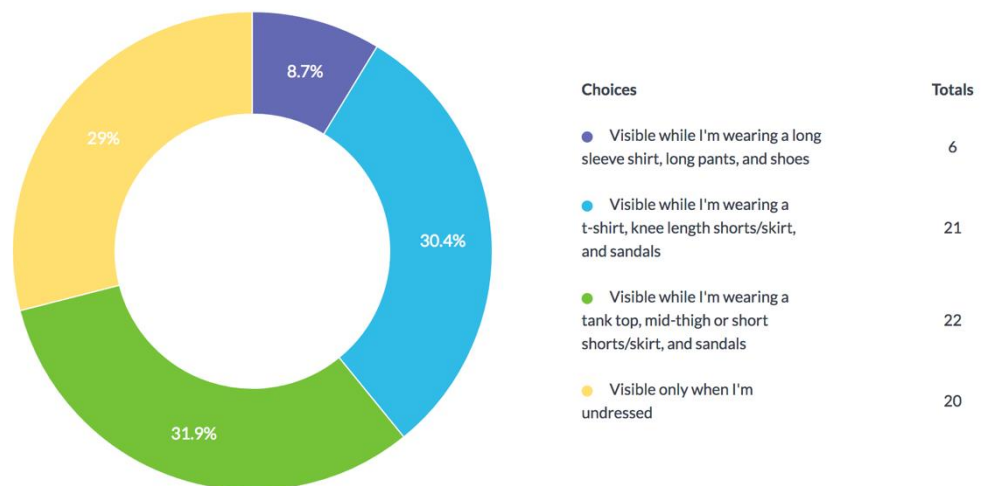


Fig. 7 How visible are your tattoos?

Fig. 7 shows how visible those tattoos are on the respondents. From those who stated there are tattooed, 8.7% were tattooed heavily enough that theirs could be seen while wearing long sleeved shirts, full length trousers and shoes. 30.4% said

they could be seen while wearing a t-shirt, knee length shorts or skirt and sandals. The largest group of respondents (31.9%) was the one whose tattoos were visible only when they wore a tank top, short shorts/skirt and sandals and lastly the group of 29% of the total number of tattooed respondents said theirs were visible only when undressed.

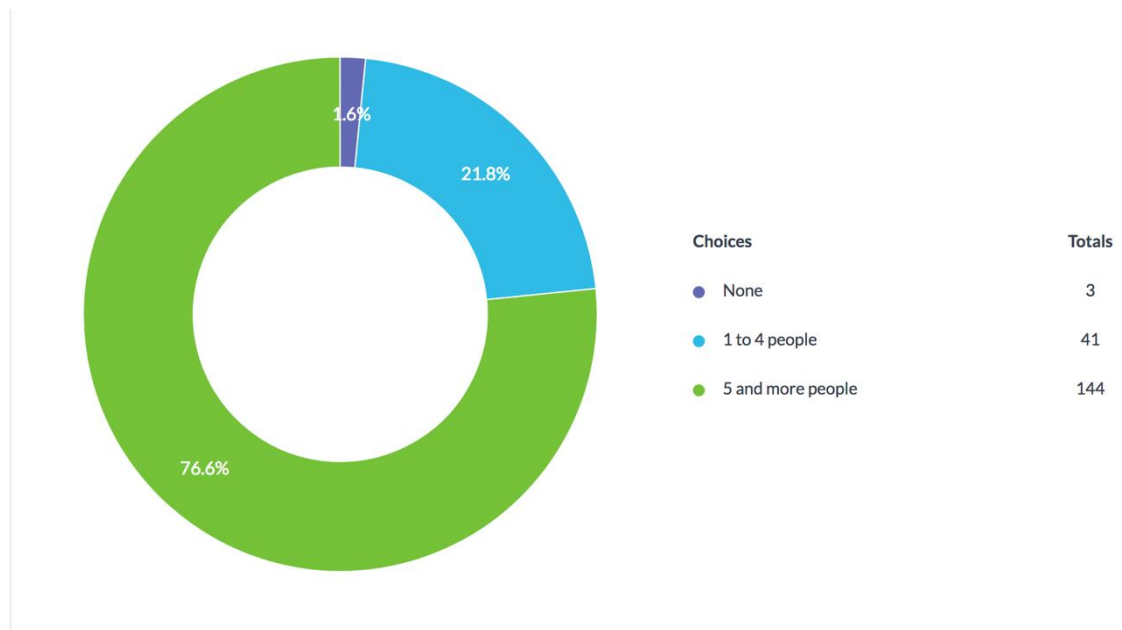


Fig. 8 How many people do you know personally with tattoos?

Fig. 8 shows how many people the respondents personally know with tattoos. This question was included to understand the levels of exposure of the general public to tattoos. 3 options were given to the respondents: None, 1-4 people, 5 and more people. 1.6% stated they did not know people with tattoos. 21.8% stated they knew of only 1-4 people in with tattoos and finally 76.6% said they knew of at least 5 people with tattoos.



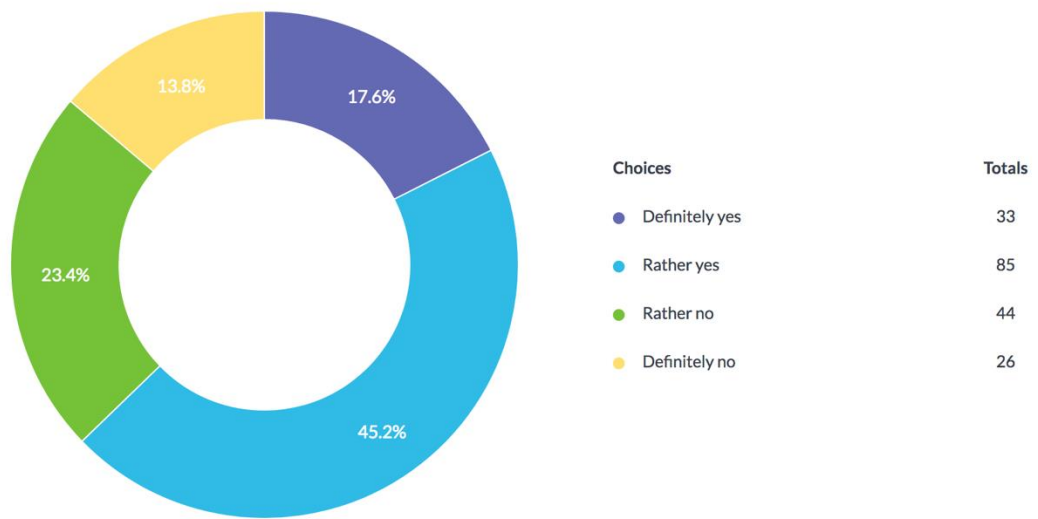


Fig. 9 Do you feel piercings and tattoos reflect what kind of a person someone is?

Fig. 9 shows if the respondents feel if tattoos and piercings reflect the kind of person he or she is. It breaks the information down into 4 degrees of consent where there are 2 affirmative options (rather yes and definitely yes) and 2 negative options (rather no and definitely no). Once again, these can be consolidated as total affirmations and total negations as follows: 62.8% of respondents affirmed that body-art was indeed a reflection of a person's character and 37.2% of the respondents stated that they do not reflect the persons character.

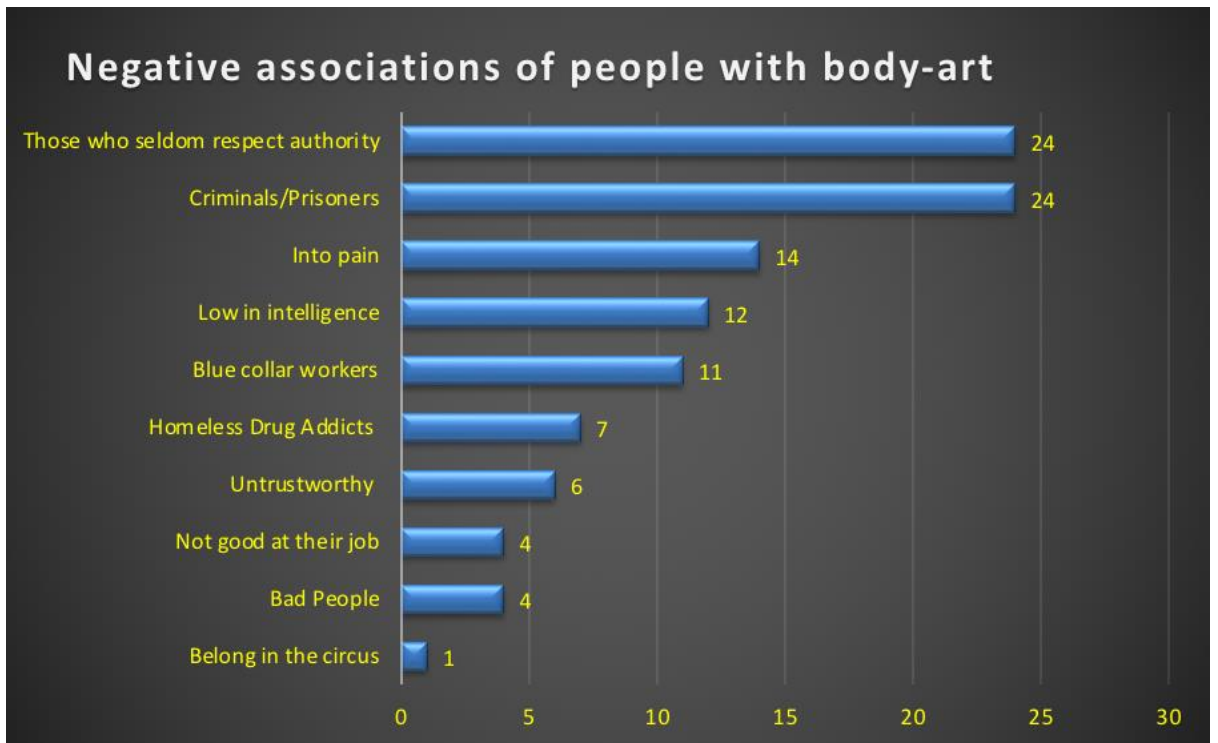


Fig. 10 Negative associations of people with body-art

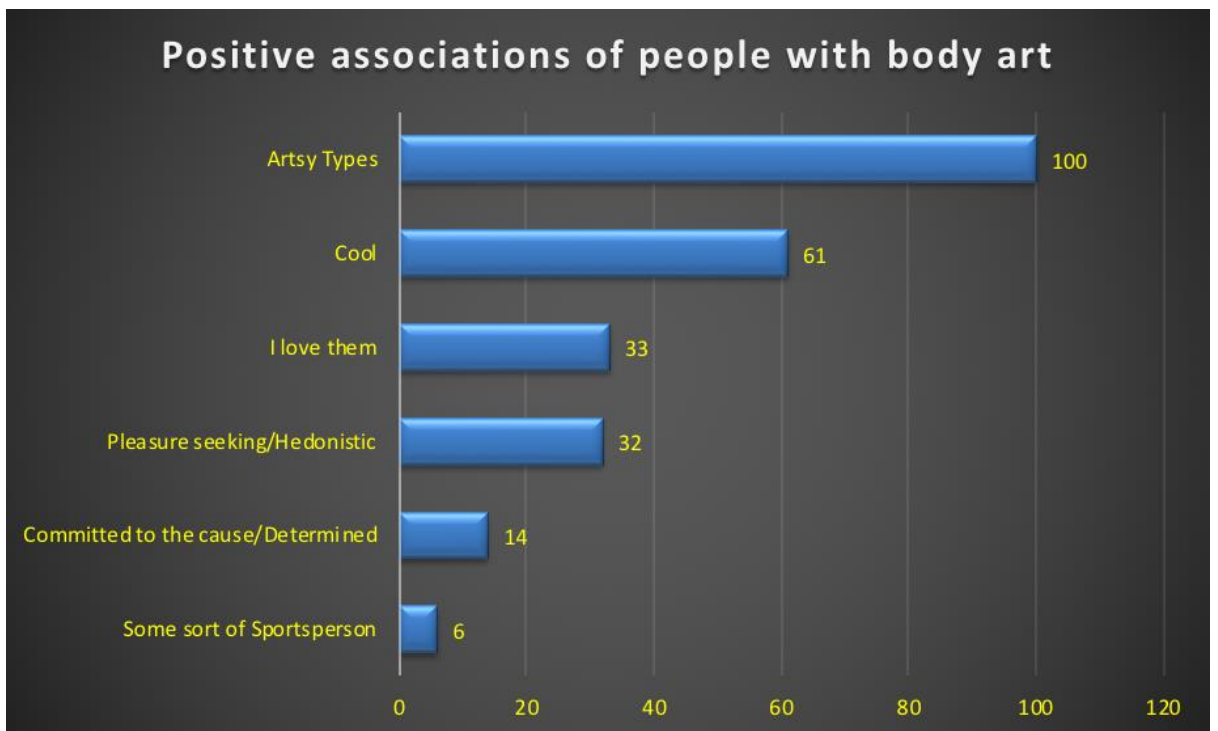


Fig. 11 Positive associations of people with body-art

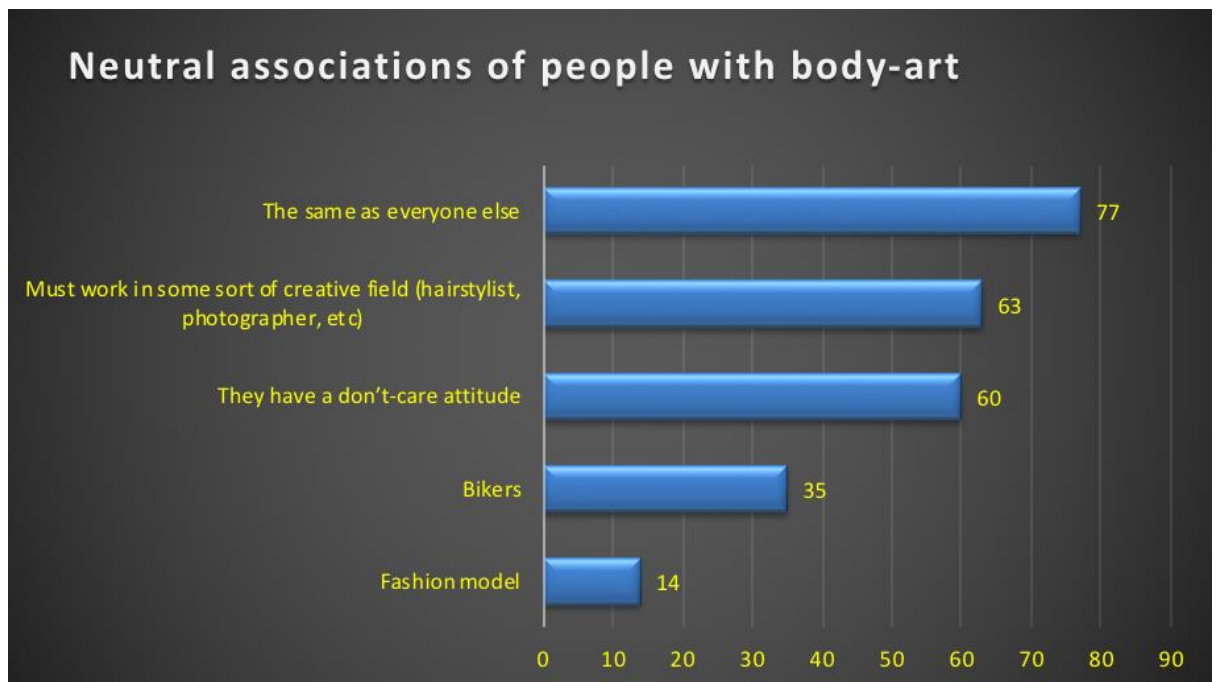


Fig. 12 Neutral associations of people with body-art

Associations which struck the respondents can be divided into 3 categories: Negative associations, positive associations and neutral associations. The associations which were consolidated into negative (as shown in Fig 10) were:

- Untrustworthy
- Bad people
- Not good at their work
- Criminals/prisoners
- Homeless drug addicts
- Belonging in the circus
- Seldom respecting authority
- Low in intelligence
- Blue-collar workers
- Into pain

The relative count of negative associations as compared to positive or neutral associations is quite low. However, within all negative associations one sees the largest 2 groups of negative associations are that people with tattoos and piercings can be associated as people who seldom respect authority and criminals/prisoners

both tying at 24 counts. Pain usually being associated negatively is the third largest group at 14 votes. People low in intelligence (12) and blue-collar workers at 11(also usually associated with low intelligence) are next. Homeless drug addicts (7), untrustworthy (6), not good at their job (4), bad people (4) and finally belonging in the circus (1) follow.

Positive associations form our largest count of associations. As shown in Fig. 11, they were consolidated as:

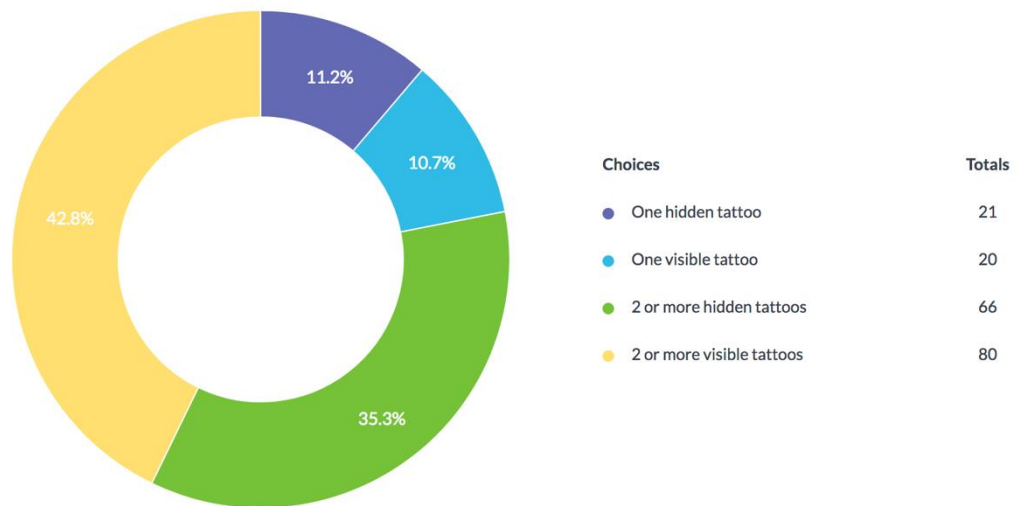
- Artsy Types
- Cool
- I love them!
- Pleasure-seeking
- Committed to the cause/determined
- Sportsperson

The largest number of counts received for this question was the association of people with body-art being artsy types with 100 votes. 61 people felt they were cool, 33 loved them, 32 felt they were pleasure-seekers, 14 votes were given to determined and 6 felt they could be sort of sportsperson (a sportsperson usually being a positive role model for most people)

The last group of neutral associations (shown in Fig.12) is made up of:

- Same as everyone else
- Must work in some sort of creative field (e.g. Photographer, adverting, hairstylist, etc)
- They have a don't-care attitude
- Bikers
- Fashion model

The second largest count for this question is for 77 counts for respondents who felt that people with body-art are the same as everyone else, 63 people felt they must work in some sort of creative field, 60 votes were given to the statement 'They have a don't-care attitude, 35 counts for Bikers and lastly 14 for Fashion model.



*Fig. 13 In your opinion, how many tattoos would be an acceptable limit on an individual?*

Fig. 13 checks how many tattoos would be an acceptable limit on an individual. The respondents were of the following opinion when it came to their personal views on how many maximum tattoos an individual should have:

Acceptable limits for tattoos were 2 or more visible tattoos for 42.8% of respondents, 2 or more hidden tattoos for 35.3% while 10.7% felt only one visible tattoo was enough and 11.2% stated only one hidden tattoo was enough.

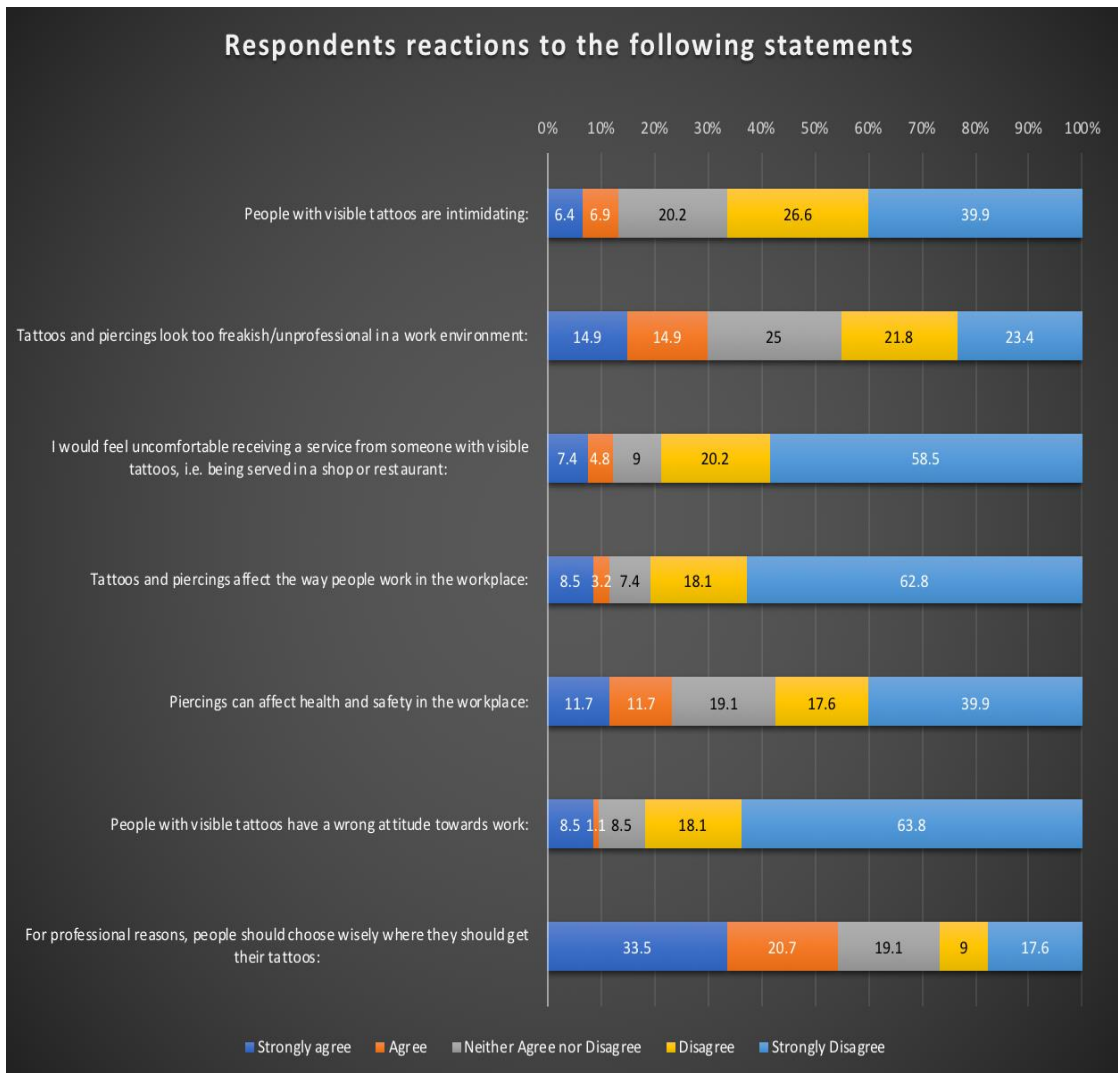


Fig. 14 Respondents reactions to above statements.

Fig. 14 shows the one scoring question in the survey which established reactions to given statements. The statements were scored with a 5-point Ordinal scale from 1(strongly agree) 2(agree), 3(neither agree nor disagree), 4(disagree) and 5(strongly disagree). The above figure displays the distribution percentage of respondents for each of the 7 statements:

1. People with visible tattoos are intimidating: Here we see that 13.3% of the respondents do find them intimidating, 20.2% are undecided and 66.5% disagree that they are indeed intimidating.
2. Tattoos and piercings look freakish or unprofessional in a work environment: 29.8% feel that it is true. 25% feel undecided on the matter while 45.2% feel they aren't unprofessional in a work environment. This statement has possibly the most uniform distribution of respondents.

3. I would feel uncomfortable receiving a service from someone with visible tattoos, i.e. being served in a shop or restaurant: Here we see an overwhelmingly large percentage of respondents disagreeing with this statement at 78.7%, 9% are undecided while 12.2% feel uncomfortable being served in a restaurant with visible tattoos.
4. Tattoos and piercings affect the way people work in the workplace: Here too there a very large percentage (80.9%) who feel that the statement is simply not true for them. 7.4% are undecided and 11.7% feel that visible body-art affects the way people work in the workplace.
5. Piercings can affect health and safety in the workplace: 57.5% of the respondents felt that piercings affect health and safety at work, 19.1% felt they couldn't agree or disagree with this statement while 23.4% felt they do affect health and safety at work.
6. People with visible tattoos have a wrong attitude towards work: Once again, for this statement there a very large percentage of respondents who feel that this is simply untrue for them at 81.9%, 8.5% are undecided and 9.6% agree that people with visible tattoos have a wrong attitude towards work.
7. For professional reasons, people should choose wisely where they should get their tattoos: This was a very important statement in the study; 54.2% felt people should indeed choose wisely where they get their tattoos, 19.1% felt undecided and 26.6% disagreed with the statement.

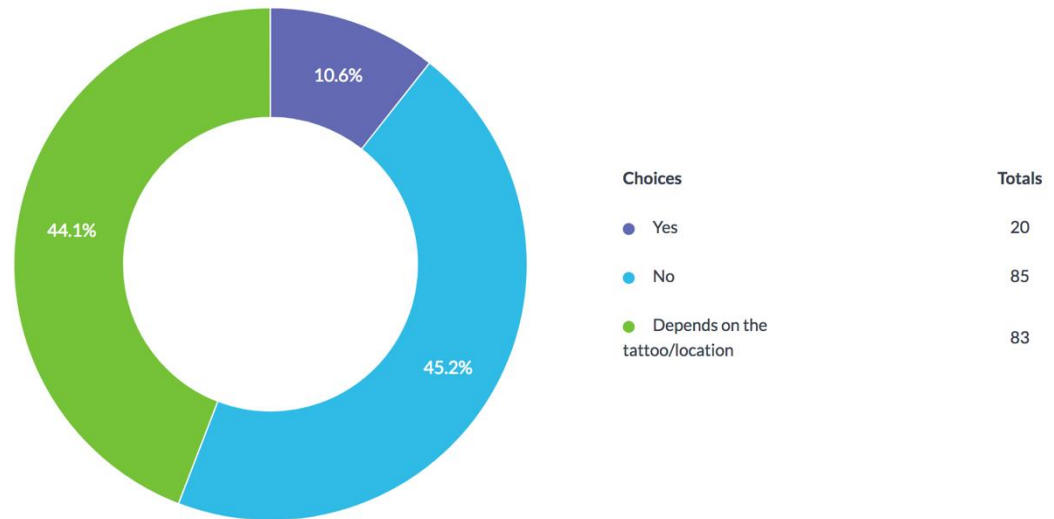


Fig. 15 Would a tattooed doctor make you uncomfortable?

Fig 15 shows reactions to a question which was included to understand whether, in a profession where the focus lies on providing important medical treatment, is also affected by the stigma and stereotypes of visible body-art. The responses showed that tattooed doctors would make 10.6% of respondents uncomfortable, while 45.2% said they wouldn't feel uncomfortable. 44.1% stated that it would depend on what tattoo it is and what location it is placed.

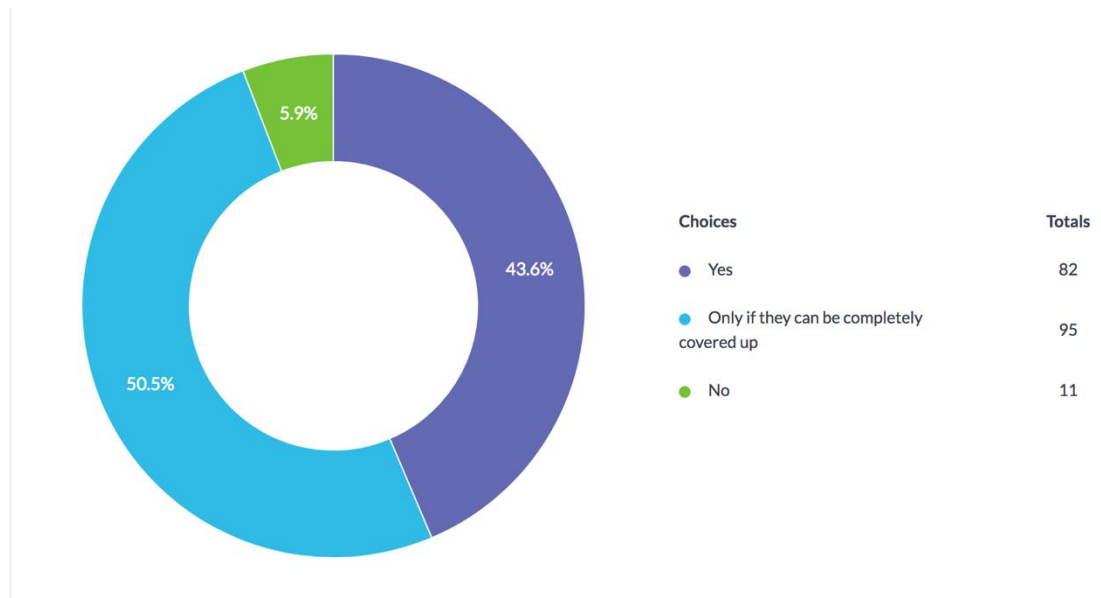
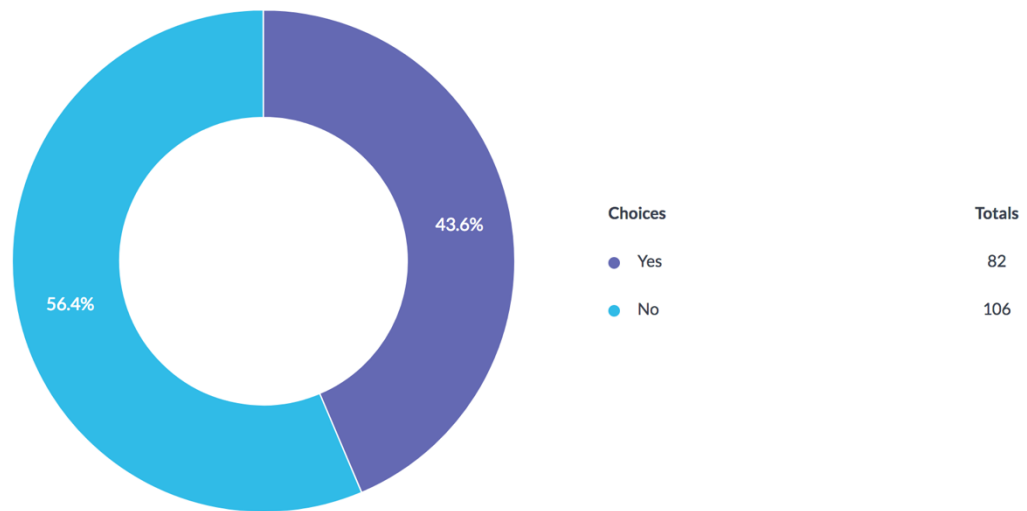


Fig. 16 Do you believe tattoos should be accepted in the frontline service jobs?



Fig. 16 shows the reactions of the respondents when asked whether tattoos and piercings should be accepted in frontline service jobs. Despite general acceptability, respondents still felt that specifically in frontline service jobs tattoos should be accepted only if they could be completely covered up (50.5%), while 43.6% said they should be allowed regardless. 5.9% said they should not be allowed at all.



*Fig. 17 Do you think it's fair that employers don't want to hire people with visible piercings or visible tattoos?*

Fig. 17 asks if the respondents feel it's fair that employers do not want to hire tattooed and pierced people. 56.4% responded that it was not fair, while 43.6% said yes it was fair for employers not to hire people with visible body-art.

We now look at some important correlations in the data, to be able to study how the respondents have voted, how specific age-groups have voted and how have respondents from various countries voted for some questions. This shows us trends in different parts of the world.

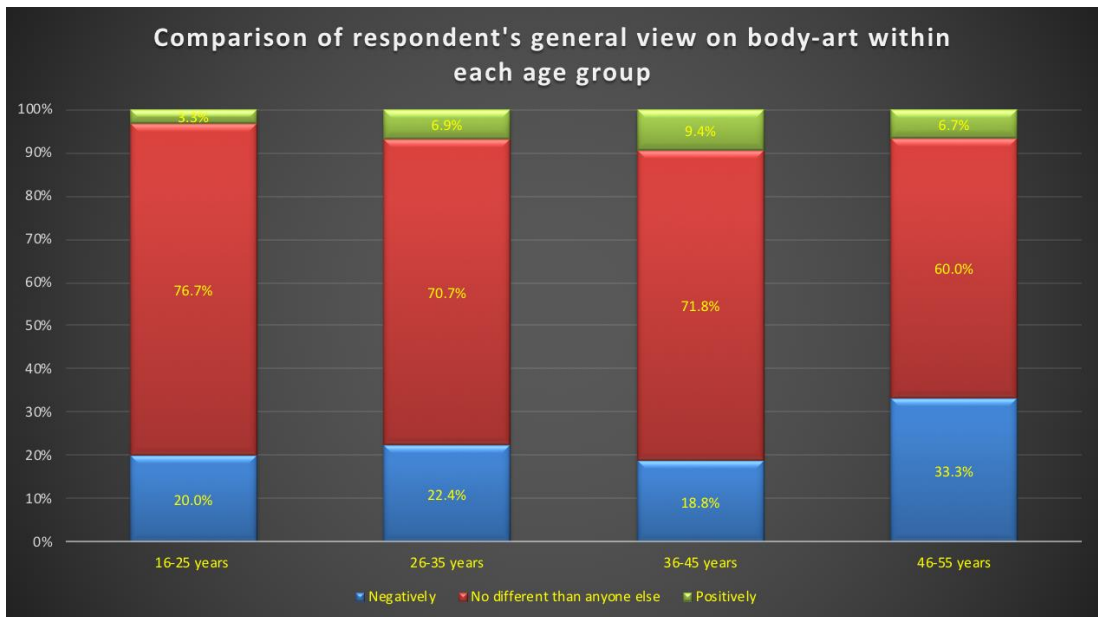


Fig. 18 Age vs General view on body-art

Fig. 18 shows results of cross-tabulation between the age of the respondents with their general view on body-art. It shows that 20% of the respondents between the ages of 16-25 years (Total of 15) viewed people with tattoos negatively, 3.3% viewed them positively and 76.7% felt they were no different from the rest.

Similarly, respondents between ages 26-35 years (total of 58), 22.4% viewed them negatively, 6.9% had a positive view of them and 70.7% viewed them no differently. Within our largest age group of 36-45-year old (total of 85), 18.8% felt negatively about people with tattoos, 9.4% felt positively about them while 71.8% viewed them as no different.

In the oldest group of individuals of 15 people between the ages of 46-55 years, 33.3% felt negatively about people with tattoos, 6.7% viewed them positively, while 60% viewed them as same.

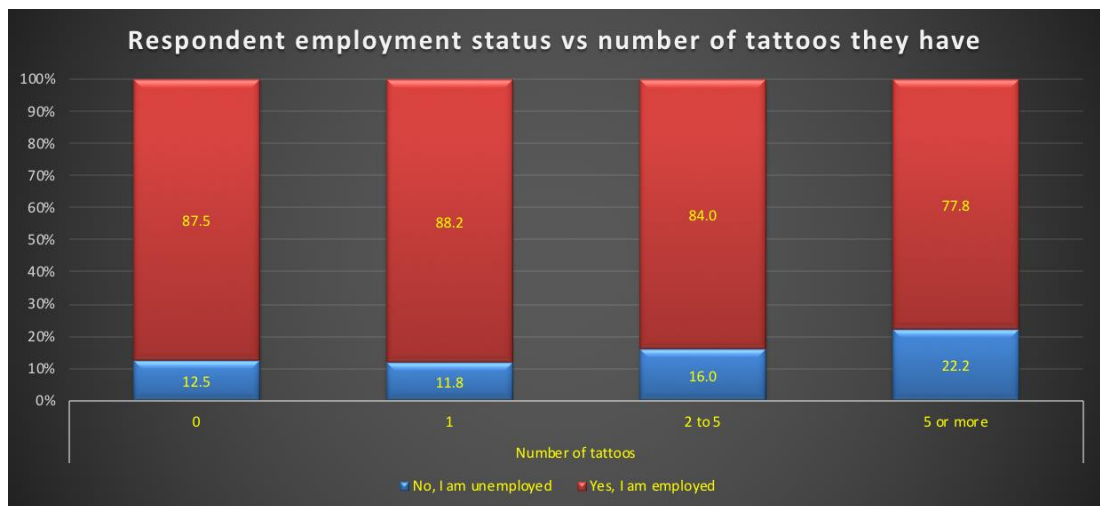


Fig. 19 Respondents: Number of tattoos and employment situation

Fig. 19 shows results of cross-tabulation comparing employment statuses of the respondents with the number of tattoos they have. We found that 12.5% people with no tattoos were unemployed vs 87.5% who did have some form of employment. 11.8% of respondents with one single tattoo were unemployed vs 88.2% who had employment. 16.5% of respondents with 2-5 tattoos said that they were unemployed and 84% were employed and lastly 22.2% of people with 5 or more tattoos were unemployed and 77.8% were employed.

### Country-wise comparisons

The largest group of respondents came from 4 countries: Austria followed by the United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and Australia. As the rest of the countries had each a very small number of respondents, they have been consolidated into one group: 'Rest of the world'. Below we make some comparisons between these 5 groups of respondents to compare their views on some of the question topics.

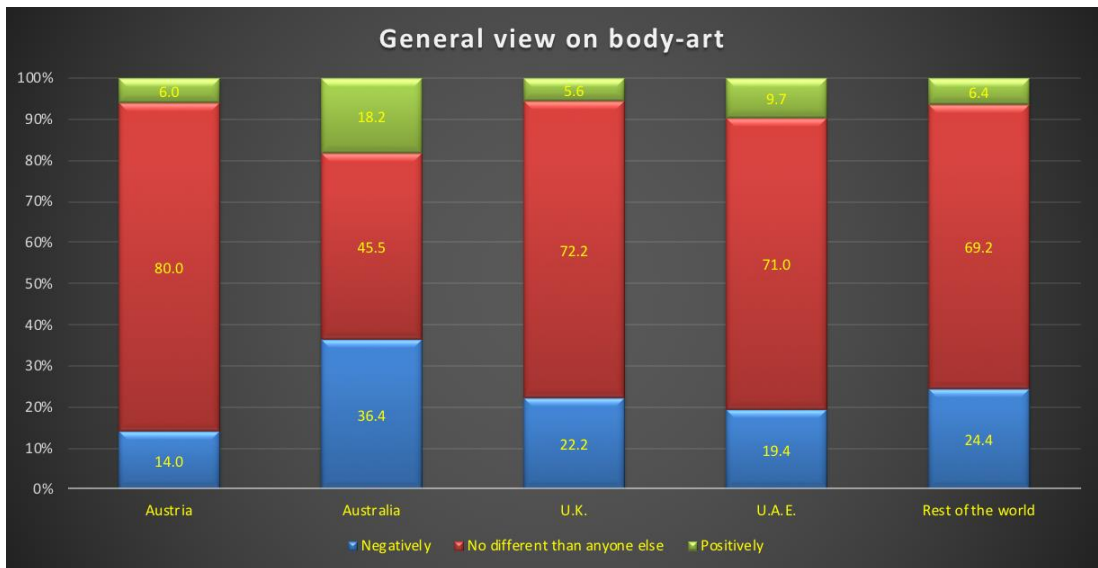


Fig. 20 Country-wise comparison: General view on body-art.

Fig 20 shows country-wise comparisons for the general view on body-art. The distribution for general view on body-art shows that Australia has the highest percentage of respondents who viewed tattoos and piercings negatively at 36.4%, followed by 24.4% in the rest of the world, 22.2% in the U.K. and 19.4% in the U.A.E. Austria has the lowest ratio of respondents who view body-art negatively (14%). Austria has also the largest percentage of respondents who view people with tattoos and piercings as no different from anyone else at 80%, followed by 72.2% in the U.K., 71% in the U.A.E., 69.2% in the Rest of the world and 45.5% in Australia.

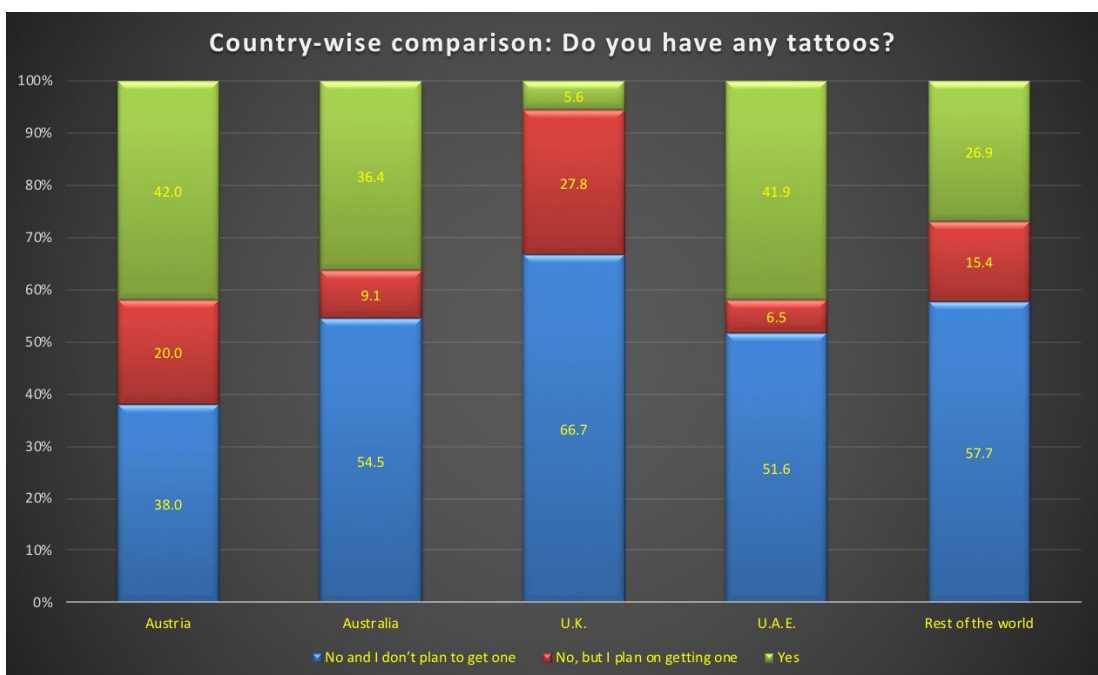


Fig. 21 Country-wise comparison: Respondents with tattoos.

Fig 21 shows country-wise comparisons for how many tattoos the respondents have. In the country comparisons, Austrians respondents had the highest number of tattoos at 42% followed the U.A.E. at 41.9%, Australia at 36.4% and the rest of the world at 26.9%. only 5.6% of the respondents in the U.K. had tattoos. Although in the U.K. 27.8% of respondents with no tattoos were planning on getting one, Austria came second with 20% planning to get one, followed by the rest of the countries at 15.4%, Australia at 9.1% and U.A.E. at 6.5%.

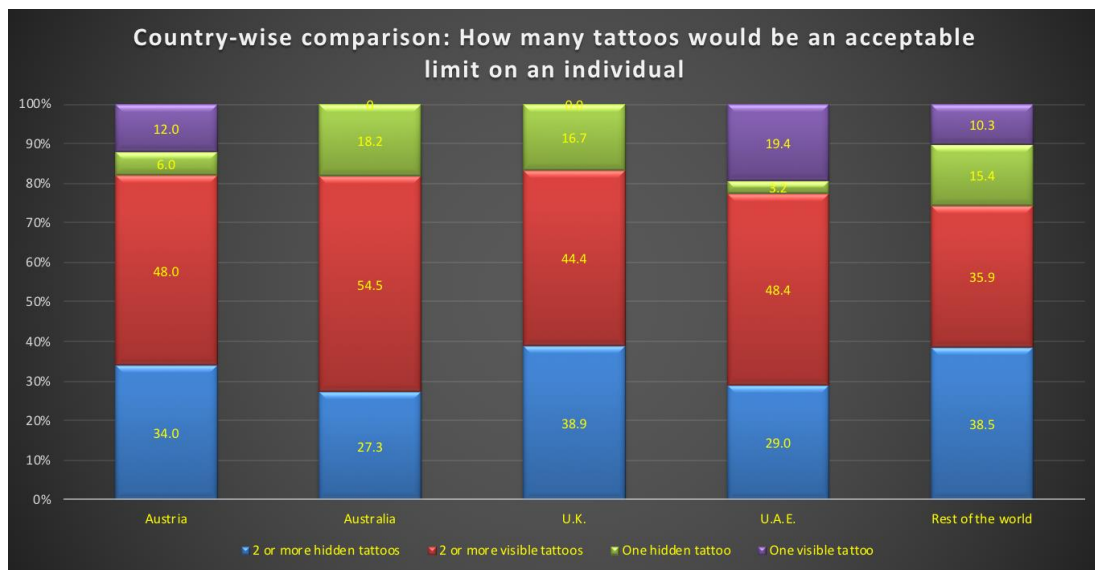


Fig. 22 Country-wise comparison: Acceptable limits for tattoos on an individual.

Fig 22 shows country-wise comparisons what the respondents think is an acceptable limit for tattoos on an individual. Australia was most open to people having visible tattoos with 54.5% respondents saying that 2 or more visible tattoos were acceptable; 27.3% said 2 or more hidden tattoos were the limit; 18.2% said one hidden tattoo was enough. The U.A.E. came next with acceptance with 48.4% voting for 2 or more visible tattoos, 29.4% for 2 or more hidden tattoos; a limit of 1 visible tattoo received 19.4% of votes while 3.2% for one hidden tattoo. 48% Austrian respondents voted for 2 or more visible tattoos as the limit; 34% 2 or more hidden tattoos; 12% said one visible one was enough while 6% said one hidden one was enough. The U.K. was next with 44.4% voting for 2 or more visible tattoos; 38.9% for 2 or more hidden and 16.7% for one hidden tattoo with no votes for 1 visible tattoo. The rest of the world voted with 35.9% of the votes for 2 or more visible tattoos; 38.5% for 2 or more hidden; 15.4% for one hidden and 10.3% for one visible tattoo.

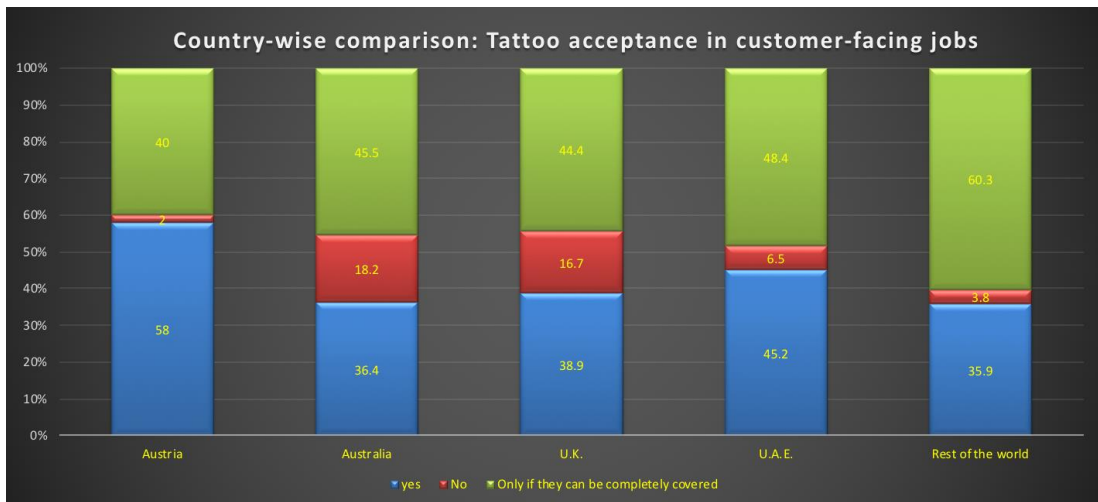


Fig. 23 Country-wise comparison of respondents: Do you believe that tattoos should be accepted in frontline customer service jobs?

Fig 23 shows country-wise comparisons for whether the respondents felt tattoos should be accepted in frontline service jobs. The responses were as follows: 2% of Austrian respondents say that they should not be allowed in such jobs. 58% says yes and 40% say only if they can be covered up. Australia has the largest number of responders who say no at 18.2%; 36.4% say yes, while 45.5% say only if they can be covered up. The 16.7% of the U.K. group say no, 38.9% say yes and 44.4% say only if they can be covered up. The U.A.E. respondents voted accordingly: 6.5% were against acceptance in front-line customer facing jobs, 45.2% were for acceptance, while 48.4% said only if covered up. The rest of the countries voted as 3.8% being against, 35.9% being for and 60.3% only if they could be covered up.

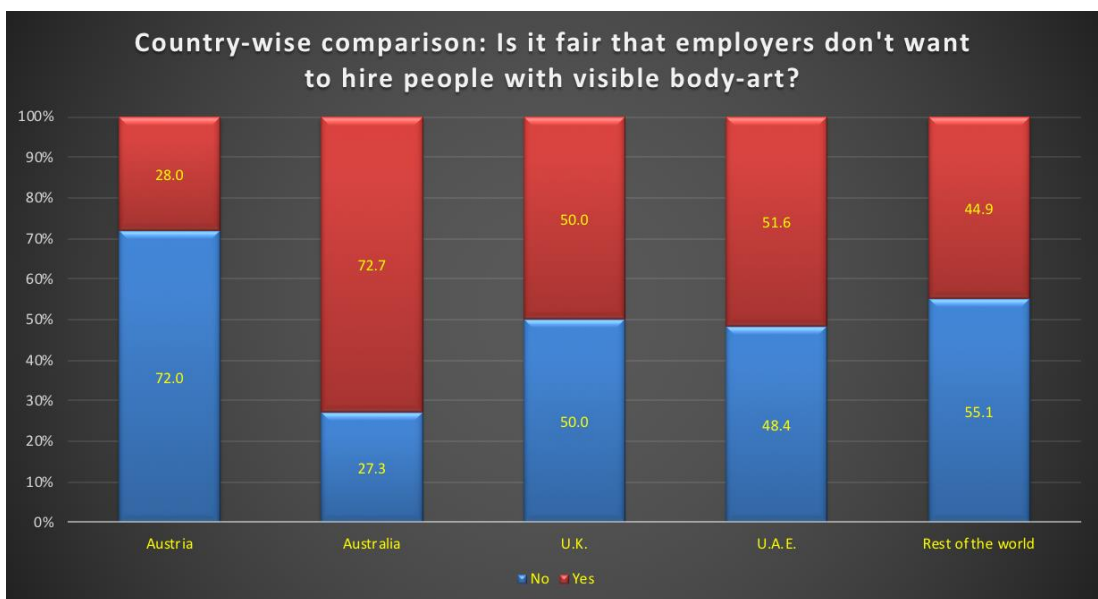


Fig. 24 Country-wise comparison: Is it fair that employers don't want to hire people with body-art?

Fig 24 shows country-wise comparisons for the question: 'Is it fair employers don't want to hire people with body-art?' 72% of Austrian respondents felt that it wasn't fair that employers don't want to hire people with visible body-art with 28% saying it was indeed okay. 55.1% of the rest of world felt it was it unfair, 44.9% saying it was fair. The 48.4% of the U.A.E. said unfair to 51.6% for fair. The U.K. weighed in at exactly 50/50 and Australia was at only 27.3% of the respondents saying it was unfair and 72.7% saying it was fair for employers to reject applicants with visible body-art. All these analyses are done to be able to show different attitudes and perspectives of the general public so as to make appropriate recommendations to businesses in terms of making progress with existing organisational policy.

## 5. Discussion

The service industry arguably attracts an archetypical type of professional. One who fits into a specific type of 'look'. That look is usually clean-cut and well groomed: a woman with neat subtle make-up or a clean-shaven man, neatly combed hair held in place with plenty of hair product, a clean neatly pressed uniform and polished shoes. A homogeneous look, where one is expected to look nothing out of the 'ordinary'; the objective is to fit into pre-set mould, one that has little room for disparity in terms of looks and individual style. Individuality can of course, be expressed in other ways, the way the person interacts with others, mainly the customers; but other than that, very rarely does one find deviation in the appearance of the quintessential service professional. Body-art in the form of visible tattoos and piercings is one of those areas where self-expression is frowned upon.

While hygiene and cleanliness, undeniably are important requirements within the service industry (or any industry, for that matter), the uniform look not only plays an important part in how the industry wants their staff to look (and respectively how they want to project their brand image), but also how perceptions and stereotypes are constructed in the minds of their patrons. Due to this stereotype constantly being projected in the minds on the customers, they too start to believe that this is how a service professional *should* look and that any deviations in those terms are, more often than not, met with shock and wonder.

Visible expression of body-art is one those elements which is very often viewed as unfit for this mould of uniformity. The reasons are of course, a combination of historical views of body-art, a bit of classism and some of today's anti-social elements who continue to feed the stigma against it.

### 5.1. Answers to research questions

Let us return to our research questions to see whether we have been able shed some light on the matter:

- Are there prejudices which exist in the service industry towards visible body-art? If so, what are they like?
- Does this affect the recruitment processes or promotional opportunities in any way?
- Is there strong, good talent out there that is lost due to such policies of elimination?

To obtain some clarity on the matter, this research was conducted as a 3-part study with opinions and experiences collected from all stakeholders involved: 1. recruiters/managers in service industry organisations, 2. tattooed professionals some of who have worked in the service industry and 3. the general public. It was conducted in this manner so as to reveal how far the acceptance of people with visible body-art has come since the time that such lifestyle choices were considered too risqué or even completely unacceptable in such professions.

Each group of respondents provided their own interesting viewpoints on the subject while corroborating or invalidating well accepted clichés about people with tattoos and piercings. The first group of managers and recruiters provide us with insight into recruiting policies in this regard, how C.V.s are screened and how visible body-art is perceived when encountered by them. The managers came from seven hotels, one airline, one tour operator and three retail firms. The second group of tattooed and pierced professionals speak of their experiences with jobs in the service industry, how they are perceived by their colleagues, their interview experiences and how they cope with the stigma on a day to day basis. Finally, the general public provides their views on how they perceive people with body-art in general, and in such case, they encounter them in service industry professions. Although by no means is the survey of the general public a true representation of public opinion on the matter, it



provides a comparative view on the perceptions/opinions of visible body-art in 2018. The respondents ranged from a heterogeneous selection of expatriates living in Austria, a few industry professionals also from Austria and a large group of ex and current fliers from an international airline who are based all over the globe. Most of these have had opportunities to fly on a regular basis as passengers on airlines and also are regular patrons in 4 and 5-star hotels. The retail industry is, of course, an industry which is frequented by people from all walks of life. Therefore, the opinions/perceptions of this focus group can provide an adequate picture on the attitudes of the general populace on this matter and reveal whether age-old stereotypes continue to play a part in their minds.

This in turn helps in ascertaining whether the industry and the patrons have indeed made any progress since the time that tattoos were considered a symbol of the outlaw and also can show us a way forward towards greater acceptance.

**Are there prejudices which exist in the Service Industry towards visible body-art? If so, what are they like?**

Although prejudice may be a strong word in this context, it can be confirmed that a certain stigma does still exist within the service industry. The stigma is not so large as previously assumed to be, but is distinctly higher in some industry professions than others.

From a management perspective, it can be affirmed that the industry is slowly moving forward and changing their regulations to be more inclusive. In this regard, retail organisations are leading the way with more acceptance and leeway given to this kind of self-expression. Some hotels and tour operators are also changing long standing grooming and recruitment policies to allow them. Here, a lot has to do with the brand positioning of particular chains: More classical, traditional properties still wish to retain their strict regulations in this regard to preserve their long successful brand image. Newer chains or properties (like boutique hotels) or even traditional chains with new dining concepts are modifying regulations to include some forms of body-art with certain provisions. Airlines seem to be the only industry profession where almost no progress has been made in this regard. The only allowance some airlines have made so far in this matter is allowing studs in the ears of men.

The stigma endures from historical associations of body-art and is noticeable in some statements made by management professionals. The associations of people with visible body-art were indicative of being criminals, prisoners, drug addicts and of tattoos and piercings being too 'rough', 'freakish' or 'of shock value'. The management professionals themselves were quite liberal and open minded, however some did believe that they are unable to control the reactions of their patrons who could be more conservative in their outlook.

While there were no prejudices by the managers displayed during our interviews towards the people with body-art, there could be a possibility that these negative associations could play their part in the development of such grooming regulations in the first place. It could be that, due to such historical associations playing their part, the presence of tattoos and piercings is deemed incompatible with an elegant uniform and consequently the brand of that organisation; that they appear to be too 'low class', 'unpolished' or 'rough' to fit into that brand's environment.

And since, most 5-star hotels and high-end retail outlets maintain a brand image which is 'polished', 'elegant' and 'upper-class', there is always a danger that an employee who doesn't fit that exact image could end up causing offence to their elite patrons. MH1 possibly confirms such attitudes when he says, "If I have a tattooed server at a third-wave café I don't care but if I'm going to the Park Hyatt then I would find him a bit weird because it's really not the place for it".

While some organisations do allow them, their brand is then automatically assumed to not be as 'high-class' and 'exclusive' compared to the previous ones described; they are thereby classified 'contemporary', 'modern' or 'new-age'. The same can be said of retail brands and retail outlets. This was evident when M44 describes his incident (in section 4.2.3) with his manager in the retail outlet (HOK). This certainly reveals a hint of classism.

Tattooed professionals can also confirm that the occasional occurrence of prejudice exists. This is true for some of these professionals in job situations and also in personal life situations.

The general public also harbour certain stereotypes about people with body-art. These are not specifically related to the service industry (we discuss service industry acceptance in the next question). As seen in the results of the survey, the general

attitude of the public is in favour of visible body-art on others. But plenty of negative associations were revealed as well in the survey. The negative associations included seldom respecting authority, criminals/prisoners, into pain, low in intelligence, blue-collar workers, homeless drug addicts, untrustworthy, not good at their work, bad people, belonging in the circus. These are consistent with those found by Porcella (Porcella, 2009) and McLeod (McLeod, 2014) in chapter 2.3.5 of the literature review. There were, of course, also many positive associations which we will discuss later in this chapter. These negative associations result in stigma being formed in minds of the people against anyone who possess such characteristics, in our case those are tattooed professionals.

When asked for reactions to the following statement

“People with visible tattoos are intimidating”, we see that 13.3% of the respondents do find them intimidating, 20.2% are undecided and 66.5% disagree that they are indeed intimidating. This 13.3% could possibly be the reason behind such stringent grooming policies adopted by organisations. MH6 corroborates this, “Not everyone is ready to accept a plug a tattoo or a piercing. So, we have to take care”. MT1 echoes similar sentiments, “We are still in customer service. It’s still is a kind of 'traditional' field. E.g. It would be problem if you plenty of piercings all over the face because customers would get afraid”.

Moreover, it is interesting to see an age group breakdown on responses. At 33.3% the oldest age group of 46-55-year olds have the largest percentage of a negative view towards body-art. This is not surprising, given the historical associations of body-art with criminals, older generations are more likely to view them negatively. The second largest group is surprisingly the 26-35-year age group at 22.4%. This is the Millennial generation, most of these have not only liberal views on body-art, they are the generation who possess the maximum body-art today compared to other generations (Shannon-Missal, 2015). Even more surprising is our next age group which was 16-25-year olds (the Post-Millennials or Generation Z) who voted negatively at 20%. The age group with the least number of negative votes on body-art was 36-45-year-old at 18.8%. This tells us that there will be significant percentage of the population who view body-art negatively. This prejudice could be a result of various factors: religious beliefs, upbringing, pre-conceived notions of how men and

women should look and an inability to accept different ideas and attitudes. This has been confirmed to an extent by Audrey Porcella and discussed in section 2.3.5 (Porcella, 2009). Prejudices like these will sadly continue to endure, and no amount of exposure, visibility and acceptance by others can change that. People who do not fit a mould of uniformity with the rest of the world tend to always be discriminated against.

**Does this affect the recruitment processes or promotional opportunities in any way?**

When analysing what the managers had to say, the answer could be “yes and no”. To understand this accurately, first, we take a look at official policies of organisations regarding visible body-art. Then we examine some of the comments made by some of the managers regarding how they run their recruitment and promotional processes. In most places, it would be dealt on a case-by-case basis except certain hotels where no form of visible body-art is allowed. Out of 12 organisations interviewed, the ratio which allowed visible tattoos and piercings was 40:60. So to conclude, 4 organisations did not allow visible tattoos (H1, H3, A1, R1) as compared to 8 where they were allowed albeit with some conditions:(H2, H4, H5, H6, H7, T1, R2, R3) Piercings were evenly spread between them with 6 not allowing( H1, H2, H3, H4, H7, A1) 6 allowing(H5, H6, T1, R1, R2, R3). In most hotels and food businesses piercings are not allowed by food handlers. In most cases, this would mean kitchen staff. These regulations are clearly communicated to prospective applicants.

Confirms FH3, the H.R. manager for her hotel H3 (which describes itself as ‘distinguished’ and ‘luxurious’), “I don’t ask them people about tattoos but in case a visible tattoo is spotted then it would negatively affect the outcome of the interview”. MH1 says the same is true for his hotel H1, “The applicant is automatically disqualified if he or she has irremovable visible piercings”. The same situation was in case of stretched ears or plugs which could not be removed.

Even for the 4 organisations that did not allow visible tattoos and piercings, the suggestion to cover them with plaster was given to them depending on how big the tattoo was. Long sleeved shirts were also an option in such case that the tattoos or piercings were on forearms.

Regarding promotional opportunities, if the person was applying for a promotion within his department and his future role would still be customer-facing, then the same regulations would apply. If the role is not customer-facing, then the regulations would not apply. MH1 confirms the same, "Body-art will not matter if the position is not customer facing even if they wear the uniform". FA1 from the airline A1 also offers, "Office jobs they don't care". FH3 from H3 also "Back office is not problem. We have people in the purchasing department who have tattoos".

But when asked about management positions, most of the managers were not so sure of the implications of visible body-art on managers. FH3 offers, "As a Hotel Sales Executives, they have to deal with very high-profile clients and they have to represent the brand and I'm not quite sure they could get away with having a visible tattoo as they have to have clean, mainstream look which does not cause any offence or shock to such customers". FH5 who works in a hotel chain known for its alternative and forward-minded outlook has this to say, "Our hotel manager is also full of body art and doesn't wear a uniform and in the summer now he is wearing polo shirts and all his tattoos on his arms are seen". But she also added, "Recruiting for management: I would say you should have the chance to look 'professional' i.e. to cover it (tattoos) up but it wouldn't make a difference to me because it's about what you know and your experience and not how you look. If someone would come with whole head and the face would be covered then I would think maybe this is a bit too much for this position, where you are sitting in front of people and telling them how to behave. As a Head of Department, you should not cover it up, but you should be *able* to; you never know: you could be in negotiations with suppliers or with other customers because these are sadly still the standards of *other* people and that you have a chance to look professional for them, so that it does not affect your negotiations with them".

Another place T1, the tour operating company had this to say, "In leadership roles, we generally have an assessment centre and a panel of recruiters or interviewers. In such scenarios the applicants body-art could possibly work against them as we do have colleagues even younger than me who are more traditional and conservative than me". Another manager from retail, MR3, spoke of his experience in a previous job in a leisure resort in France, "Depending on the recruitment manager the

situation could be different. If there were very traditional people in the recruitment process, things could not go further for a tattooed applicant”.

Retail companies also would deal with such situations on a case-by-case basis. FR2 explained her point of view, “I understand that while recruiting I must concentrate only on the qualifications but also depends on the person presents himself. If you are in customer contact, tattoos, piercings, earrings and things like that is usually something that makes you take step backwards. It is an issue. For me it would make a difference”. “We work with a lot of jewellers in the 1st district of Vienna. It really depends a lot on your appearance”. But she also later added, “Tattoos for me, personally, are not a reason to hire somebody, except if he has a Mike Tyson (style) tattoo all over his face”.

Retail H.R. manager from R1 also talks about his recruiting experiences, “To make the process of recruitment unbiased, we have 2 persons on the panel, sometimes 3 or 4. If I see something during the interview process which I believe should be hidden then I would bring it up. We have people in our company with tattoos on the back of their hands but if it’s too much we wouldn’t recruit”.

Summarising the above, one can confirm that other than the places which have very strict regulations, all recruitment processes screen applicants and their respective body-art on a case-by-case basis. The overall look is what is of utmost importance and if the person presents himself well he is will be successful in the interviews, his visible body-art notwithstanding. When it comes to promotional opportunities in management, it would be prudent to cover up the tattoos if possible because it could be offensive to some high-profile clients who are more traditional and conservative than the regulations of the organisation where the employee works.

Tattooed professionals tell us about their experiences: M31, who is now a self-employed barber, speaks of his experiences at a fine dining restaurant in the one of Vienna’s museums, “The restaurant where I worked hired me because of the way I looked. They were looking for tattooed people. Nearly everyone in the restaurant was tattooed”. M43 went into detail about his interview with cosmetic company LOL, “In my interview with Loreal I went through 6 interviews. In the 3rd interview it was very important that they see more of me and so I rolled up my sleeves. And it showed these people that I am secure of who I am, that matters more than anything else. If

at that stage if someone feels that I don't fit the bill because of the tattoos or the piercings, then it's their loss. There were a few looks but they weren't any comments". While M43 had this too offer, "I once had an agent. She told me once that there were certain jobs that she would never put me forward for, because she knew that the clients would be a bit freaked out with somebody with tattoos".

The survey of the general public had several questions which were related to recruitment.

- Do you think it's fair that employers don't want to hire people with visible piercings or visible tattoos?

Here the we see once again that respondents from Austria had the lowest percentage who disagreed with the statement at 28%, then the U.A.E. at 51.6%, the U.K. was 50:50 on this question and Australia had the highest number of disagreements at 72.7%. This would mean that despite the stigma, 7 out of 10 people believe that the recruitment processes and regulations in this regard are unfair and that there is room for change.

- Do you believe tattoos should be accepted in the frontline service jobs? (e.g. Hotel Reception, Customer Service, Bank Executive)?

Here, we see a slightly different story: Although, once again Austria leads in the acceptance of tattoos in frontline jobs at 58%, there is a significant chunk (40%) who also feel they should be able to completely cover them up. Only 2% said no way. The ratios are significantly different in the other countries Australia being the most conservative: 18.2% said absolutely not while it was 16.7% and 6.5% in the U.K. and U.A.E. respectively. 44.4% in U.K. said only if able to be completely covered up, 48.4% and 45.5% in U.A.E. and Australia respectively.

In addition to these questions, reactions of the respondents to given statements related to workplace dynamics tell us:

- Tattoos and piercings look freakish or unprofessional in a work environment: 29.8% feel that it is true. 25% feel undecided on the matter while 45.2% feel they aren't unprofessional in a work environment.
- I would feel uncomfortable receiving a service from someone with visible tattoos, i.e. being served in a shop or restaurant: Here we see an overwhelmingly large

percentage of respondents disagreeing with this statement at 78.7%, 9% are undecided while 12.2% feel uncomfortable being served in a restaurant with visible tattoos.

- Tattoos and piercings affect the way people work in the workplace: Here too there a very large percentage (80.9%) who feel that the statement is simply not true for them. 7.4% are undecided and 11.7% feel that visible body-art affects the way people work in the workplace.
- Piercings can affect health and safety in the workplace: 57.5% of the respondents felt that piercings affect health and safety at work, 19.1% felt they couldn't agree or disagree with this statement while 23.4% felt they do affect health and safety at work.
- People with visible tattoos have a wrong attitude towards work: Once again, for this statement there a very large percentage of respondents who feel that this is simply untrue for them at 81.9%, 8.5% are undecided and 9.6% agree that people with visible tattoos have a wrong attitude towards work.

In all cases the majority of responses are for allowing visible body-art in the workplace. But the 1<sup>st</sup> statement shows that the percentages are quite uniformly distributed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> statement is well skewed towards acceptance, with only 12.2% saying they would be uncomfortable with a tattooed or pierced server in a restaurant or bar. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is similar to the second with only 11.7% feeling that visible body-art affect who people work together. The 4<sup>th</sup> statement has surprisingly a large percentage, nearly a quarter, at 23.4% who felt that piercings can affect health and safety at the workplace. This could be true when it comes to piercings and service jobs where there is a danger of them falling into food or drinks. The hygiene issue is addressed by Health and Safety regulations of various countries. As explained by our managers from hotels, most of them do not allow piercings to worn by food handlers while on duty. The last statement has the smallest percentage of responses who say that people with tattoos and piercings have a wrong attitude towards work. It can be said although a considerably large percentage of the general public is unaffected by the stigma, some amount of prejudice does exist within the public.

Hence the last statement in that table shows:



- For professional reasons, people should choose wisely where they should get their tattoos: This was a very important statement in the study; more than 50% of the people advised prospective applicants to choose wisely the location where they would get inked or pierced.

To sum up, we can confirm that some organisations are stricter than others but for the majority the overall look and presentation of the applicant is more important than simply the presence of tattoos and piercings. The general public is mostly accepting of their presence but are still wary of how they could be perceived.

Coming back to our third and final research question.

**Is there strong, good talent out there that is lost due to such policies of elimination? With so many stringent regulations and are prospective applicants turning to other professions?**

This question is more pertinent to the fields of hospitality rather than retail with managers saying this:

Says MH4, “The 'pool' of applicants in the hospitality business is not that big. There are lesser applicants and therefore lesser invitations. Here especially in Austria and Vienna it is not so easy to get hospitality staff and when there is a policy of rejecting people with tattoos, it makes your life more complicated”. That is why our (the H4 group) brand philosophy explicitly called ‘Being yourself’.

FH3 confirmed this phenomenon, “It makes me angry that we have such strict regulations, but these are the rules set by the head office and I must follow them. We are pushing our head office to relax the regulations. People who invented these strict regulations on tattoos and piercings are not the ones doing this interview process every day. They are not seeing the applications, they have no feeling or understanding of how many applications we get and how many people we are forced to reject; and also, that there would be no people working in the hotel if we decide to reject everyone like these. I also feel that we sometimes are forced to reject someone who is perfect for the position just because he has a tattoo somewhere. The (H3) group sometimes cannot decide what they want to be: very traditional or trendy and being open and innovative, and if it’s the latter they want to be, then they are going to have to open their doors to people having tattoos”. She says due this shortage of skilled staff they are forced to bend the rules every once in a while, “An

exception was made for a staff member who had a covered tattoo on her arm which became visible when the uniform was changed to short sleeves. We just hired a sous chef with tattoos; it was really hard to find someone for the banquet area. Nowadays if you really strictly follow the rules you will not be able to find any staff members. The hotel would be empty there would be hardly any staff”.

The H6 group of hotels states that its new brand philosophy of ‘We care for people’ covers both the guest and the employees. MH6, their H.R. director at their central Vienna property spoke about why this came about, “Yes, we would lose talent with those regulations previously, and that’s the reason so now these days we have to open up as the guest doesn’t expect it, then why do we insist on it? Hence, we talked about changing it and that’s what we did in our company in July 2015”.

From the above, we see that the managers confirm that there definitely exists a situation of ‘brain-drain’ or more correctly ‘skill-drain’ from the field of hospitality.

Airlines, however, continue to attract applicants for flight attendant positions as is evident in this news report about an [Emirates Airline cabin crew recruitment open day](https://www.msn.com/en-ae/news/uae/watch-thousands-of-people-queue-up-to-apply-for-emirates-cabin-crew-positions/ar-AAvTKIN). (https://www.msn.com/en-ae/news/uae/watch-thousands-of-people-queue-up-to-apply-for-emirates-cabin-crew-positions/ar-AAvTKIN, 2018)

It can be assumed that the glamour of travelling the globe and seeing new destinations combined with the extensive range of benefits that an airline employee enjoys remains the biggest motivator for many prospective job seekers.

As a result, airlines probably do not bother changing their grooming regulations and their recruitment guidelines for visible body-art, because they know that the pool of applicants for these jobs will never reduce to a point where they are struggling to find skilled people to work for them. Another reason also could be that it helps eliminate a lot of applications which otherwise could be a much larger set of applicants to sift through and eliminate.

To understand whether prospective applicants are turning to other jobs, we checked with them to see what say about this: although there were no references by tattooed professionals to specific service industry professions, they did have a few generalised statements about such grooming regulations which are worth a mention:

- M27 who was unemployed and in a job-search phase when interviewed said, “I don’t even apply for jobs where they think that they give importance to this

matter. If I was sure they wouldn't take me because of my tattoos, then I wouldn't apply there in the first place".

- F23 who already works in a 5-star hotel property (H3) says, "I also say if I'm ever asked in an interview about my tattoos I say it doesn't affect how I work. And it doesn't make another person out of me".
- M31, the barber, told us of his aspirations, "I was never really concerned with tattoos affecting my career. I was never really the person who aimed for the big money and management etc. I chose a life where I could be myself and perhaps make the same kind of money in my own way"

Such viewpoints are indicative of a possible trend amongst the Millennial and post-Millennials.

A few other interesting themes emerged during the course of the interviews:

## 5.2. Motivations, characteristics and counteractions to the stigma.

Our group of tattooed professionals/professionals were 8 in total with 2 who were in the forties and the rest were Millennials between the ages of 23 and 32. This group has mainly grown up in a world where the stigma attached to body-art is considerably lesser than what the previous generation experienced. This normalisation is due to media influences and sports influences as detailed by Porcella in chapter 2.3.5 of the literature review. (Porcella, 2009) Their motivations in life are different. As FH3 acknowledges, "It's not like 20 years ago anymore, where they wanted to work for a big brand like (H3). They want work-life balance, they want a good salary; they are not looking for career; they just want a good life".

They don't care what the world thinks of them! They will try and fit themselves into jobs which accept them the way they are. Although, this could project an image of rebellion (which could be unsuitable for many professions) it would be an unfair generalisation to presume so. As mentioned by many managers themselves, they are more creative, outgoing and extroverted and that in most cases their body-art does not project a negative view of character. This has also been analysed in a study conducted by Swami and Pietschnig, 'Personality differences between tattooed and non-tattooed professionals', the responses from our tattooed professionals indicate they have a high need for uniqueness (or authenticity, as termed by M44) and extraversion. On comparing our research with a previous study conducted by Viren

Swami, 'Marked for life? A prospective study of tattoos on appearance anxiety and dissatisfaction, perceptions of uniqueness, and self-esteem' (Swami V. , 2011), we notice that our respondents have many similar motivations in getting themselves tattooed and pierced, the biggest motivators being self-expression (M27 & M44), indicative as a private vow or special dates in the individual's life (F27, M43 & M44), attachment towards a subculture, such as a music or biker subculture(M31 & M32), aesthetic value (M24), and to look tough(M31). Due to this strong need for uniqueness, people who choose to get body-art value their need for self-expression much more than a need to 'fit' into a mould. Therefore, they either try and search out jobs where they are accepted with their ink and piercings or they avoid such jobs altogether. It's almost like a rejection of anyone who judges them on their appearance. This characteristic of theirs also resonates with the general public survey which scores people with body-art significantly high on the association, 'They have a don't-care attitude'.

M43, who works as a freelance art director elaborates, "When they (clients, etc) call me in, they do so because I have this kind of view on society and culture that they are just not able to see and I always think my tattoos and body-art is a visual symbol of the fact that I am different. It's almost as if it gives my viewpoints a bit more credibility". It also so happens that extraversion is a desirable quality in service professions like airlines, sales and hospitality where a lot of the work focus is on teamwork and interacting with other people.

The people who choose to get such tattoos are not unaware of the stigma they carry. M43 confirms this when he says, "Yes, there is still a stigma attached to tattoos today. But do you care about it? and do you allow them (the people who stigmatize) to bother you"? But then he also adds, "We must respect people who don't like tattoos and don't want to be around people with tattoos. It's their choice".

For those from a previous generation, these negative associations have undoubtedly been in their minds since before they made their decision to get their body-art. Therefore, most of them take that occasional instance of prejudice against them in their stride. However, these aforementioned motivators are strong enough to prevent them from being affected or fazed by the (restrictive) recruitment policies sometimes present in the service industry.

But amongst them are also the types who that they would like to sometimes leave the option open to cover up their tattoos or remove their piercings on certain occasions when it so demands. McLeod quotes Paddy from his research, who is quite on point when he says, “There are just certain careers where you can’t be openly heavily tattooed, due to the lingering stigma... I think it’s a professional thing – the thought that showing your tattoos isn’t professional. If you always keep your tattoos covered it’s never something that people can look negatively upon. You eliminate that, and now it’s just about your work”. (McLeod, 2014) This is substantiated by M27 who worked in an amusement park, “I initially covered my tattoos in my customer facing role but soon realised no one had a problem with them”.

Individuals who seek careers in the service industry understand the importance of self-presentation. Hence despite their body-art, they have the good judgement to either dress neatly and/or cover up their body-art up under their clothes depending on the culture of the place they work in. This is amply proven in the fact that there is a plentiful number of tattooed professionals already employed in retail jobs, not to mention new-age design hotels and third-wave coffee shops.

With the marked increase in the amount of people choosing body-art nowadays at a relatively young age, many organisations seem to take these individual qualities of extraversion, uniqueness and need for self-expression into account in their recruitment strategies; but only when 1. their brand image allows them to 2. when they fulfil health and hygiene guidelines and 3. When the overall impression that such professionals render is one of sociability, professional and polite in their interaction with others.

### 5.3. The importance of brand image

The brand image was perhaps the single most important theme that emerged from all manager interviews. Brand Image congruency means that the employee represents the brand in some way and must look the part of being ‘in-sync’ with the brand philosophy of that organisation. If the organisation promotes itself as a casual brand it wouldn’t make sense for the staff to wear a 3-piece suit. In a similar way, if, as in the case of hotel H1, the brand philosophy is history and tradition, it would be incongruous to have a summery casual uniform with tattooed and pierced staff

when everything from the décor to the tapestries and furniture is chosen to give it a 19<sup>th</sup> century feel.

Amongst the organisations interviewed many shared a progressive brand philosophy: from 7 hotel chains interviewed we see that only 2 of them, H1 and H3 position themselves as classical 5-star exclusive brand therefore retaining a conservative and traditional philosophy in many aspects which is demonstrated in their grooming standard, for instance, besides body-art, both do not allow any facial hair on men.

In the more 21<sup>st</sup> Century design hotel kind of brand positioning we have chains H2, H4, H5 and H7. H2 boasts of a sponsor for a well-known charity event for the fight against AIDS. They therefore attract an alternative lifestyle and a trendier, clientele which is in sync with their brand philosophy. Their regulations are also relaxed with all body-art related issues being dealt with on a case-by-case basis. They also employ staff with tattoos and do not insist that they should be covered.

The H4 hotel group has 3 different lines of hotels, a budget line, a business line and also an upscale resort style which cater to all market segments. Despite serving all market segments, they do have a pre-specified regulation for visible body-art. Says MH4, "Here we have no strict policy. Everything is related to hygienic standards. And again, the people need to represent the brand. But there is a grey zone. In other hotel chains it is more regulated: what is prohibited and what is allowed. Here its more open". "In the hotels, the final decision is taken by the general manager. It's not from the corporate office. We send a little guideline only. And this is dependent on the region also. Different regions can mean different opinions". When asked how they deal with different managers having differing mindsets, values and perceptions resulting in inconsistencies, he pointed out, "We (the corporate office) do support them in every way possible and sometimes are actively involved in the recruitment process and keep an eye on what's going on in terms of staffing". He also stated that there are some pictures to help the managers with the grooming guidelines.

H5 is an 'über-cool' chain of hotels where the focus is on being as different as possible. In any case, their brand image is one that is ultra-casual and very forward-minded and body-art is even encouraged. FH5, the H.R. manager there also was clear

in the fact that it must hygiene standards, although, interestingly, the guidelines for piercings was limited only to kitchen staff and not F&B service staff.

H7 is a catering and event management firm which also has a few hotels of their own. This also brings guests from all across the board. According to the manager who manages recruitment for the F1 Grand Prix and other sports catering, he wasn't really sure how it worked in the hotels and other F&B outlets, he assumed tattoos and piercing needed to be covered but would not be reason to exclude anyone in recruitment, but then wrote back to me a week later saying that they wouldn't be any issue. It was only piercings which need to be removed for hygiene purposes.

The H6 group of hotels is a luxury hotel group. Their H.R. director MH6 states that their new brand philosophy is 'We care for people'. In trying to uphold that, they wanted to care for their own people' as well, and therefore they changed the regulations last year to allow facial hair and visible tattoos and piercings for the employees. This is despite being an exclusive luxury hotel group.

Of course, all these exceptions and allowances come with certain caveats: in case of H5, its simple: Be clean and hygienic! In case of others, there are a few more: be hygienic, represent the brand, and it should not be 'too much'!

This brings us to an important question: when is it too much? While some address it by saying, "tattoos not on face", others (H6) are more specific by saying, "Tattoos not on face, not too big and ear plugs not too stretched (10mm max).

Retail presents us with a different story. MR3, who works a well-known global retail group, owning 8 different brands, tells us that there are no strict set policies

It's true, times are changing. While some managers are half apologetic about it being unfair, they still stand by their policies, saying everyone has a responsibility to the brand of the organisation. If the brand requires them to cover the tattoos up they must do so. Some acknowledge that recruiting has become harder trying to find good talent as the pool of skilled talented people in the hotel industry is quite small anyway.

#### 5.4. "Wait until you're older"

There is another theme which seemed to stand out: People who want a tattoo should wait until they are a bit older. Tattooed professionals did indeed display some form of regret with their body-art later in life. That could in the form of boredom, a need

for change, or simply because their life has taken a different direction than which they had early in their life. Managers spoke about their experiences about people they knew and how those people had got their partner's name tattooed on themselves and then proceeded to break up with them. MR1 adds to that, "A good friend of mine has a tattoo on her whole back and did it as a response to a breakup with her conservative partner. But I don't think she is happy anymore about it". MT1 was also of a similar opinion, "You put your last girlfriend or boyfriend on yourself and you never know what it would be in 3 years". M31 spoke of a friendship tattoo where he is not friends with that person anymore. Yet another that he mentioned was, "I have a tattoo where I have 'N.Y.H.C.' tattooed (a genre of music) but only the HC is visible when I wear sleeveless t-shirts and people assume that I'm a fan of Heinz-Christian Strache (who is popularly known as H.C.) of the FPÖ, an Austrian far-right political party, which is not a good thing for me. I and many others dislike the man". There was another instance where M44 spoke about his 'mistakes of youth', a time when he tattooed his first boyfriend's name on his body. M32, a heavily tattooed professional sums it up quite articulately, "If I had to, I wouldn't do a tattoo again on the neck to be honest, because your life changes (evolves) somehow and now I'm not going to a music concert every week like I used to in the past. I'm still living the life I want to, but that in itself has changed".

So, what *is* the right age to get a tattoo? Clearly, there is no correct age to figure out when you will be totally and completely satisfied with your choice of tattoo. It could vary from person to person. It also depends on what design is chosen: whether it has a deep significance in one's life. One thing is certain here, tattoo genres like names of partners, verses of poetry can be extremely significant and meaningful at the time they are first chosen, but their significance can shift or diminish as one matures. It's important to reach an age where one feels 'settled' in life before going in for something permanent. There is another option which many of the tattooed professionals have gone for: to cover it up with another larger tattoo or choose another design which surrounds it and transforms it into something else.

#### 5.5. How design choices, workmanship and location are construed by others.

As we discussed in section 2.3.1, "perception entails determining what information to notice, how to categorise it, and how to interpret it within the framework of our



existing knowledge” (McShane & VonGlinow, 1999). A tattoo or piercing when viewed by someone is always subject to the same perceptual process: some sort of interpretation based on the past experiences or knowledge of that individual. Tattooed professionals obviously have a lot of experience with body-art in general, so theirs is an almost involuntary reaction to such stimuli. Most of our tattooed professionals talked of how when they observe others tattoos, they look at workmanship, aesthetics and meanings. Based on that there is some profiling of the person carried out. Fading colours, incorrect placement of body jewellery, rough drawing styles, swear words and sometimes even bad location choices can cause them to interpret them in a way which makes them unconsciously analyse a person’s psychological and behavioural characteristics.

Depending on what their previously experiences are, these can either make a positive or negative impact on the observer. There were plenty of such instances during our interviews.

“One of the things that I noticed when I got my knuckle tattoos and I paid for anything they would always check to see whether the note was real even when it was as little as a ten-pound note. So, I’m probably being profiled when that is happening”, M43 admits. But he himself admits to profiling another person with what he deems bad design, “If people have lousy tattoos, like a barbed wire around the arm, then I would question their sense of aesthetics”. Similarly, admits M31, “Sometimes I myself am pretty judgy about tattoos. You can see whether people thought through what they wanted, or did they get some lousy design they chose from a book” M24 is pretty strong-worded in his opinion, “Sometimes you see these Russian kids in the ghettos and they are 16 and have their whole face done. They are totally crazy in my opinion”. Needless to say, this phenomenon presented itself also often in the interviews with managers. Most managers didn’t notice the workmanship quality of the body-art. However, aesthetics, design choices, piercing locations and tattoo locations were issues that made themselves apparent during such chats. Most interviewees believed that tattoos signify creativity, trendiness, expressiveness, mostly positive stereotypes. But then contradictorily, body-art also evoked negative stereotypes, when the subject of locations, designs and aesthetics was brought up.

When asked whether tattoos reflect a person's character, FH3 declares, "Yes, I do definitely see body-art as a reflection of person's character in a positive way. A tattoo fits a lot of people. But sometimes you look at people and think, "No, that does not fit the person". So yes, (in agreement) so a bit of profiling of the person is indeed carried out". FR2 has mixed feelings, "No. Not at all. The maximum is that I won't like the taste. But yes, if it's a middle finger tattooed then, yes, then for me, it would be reflection of the persons character". FH1: "Some tattoos you look at and think "what was the person thinking". MT1: MT1: "I think when you have this 'F-U-C-K' tattooed on your fingers and if you have a customer, the only thing that remains with him (as a memory) is those words".

It's as if, a bad tattoo can be taken as a visible indication of poor taste and therefore be an indication of poor judgement and social skills.

There is a general consensus amongst managers that any facial tattoos would reflect poorly on a job seeker. Ultra-right or left-wing symbology is also a sign that the person would not be an amicable employee.

Even FH5, whose hotel (H5) is relatively laid-back on such regulations admits, "Swastika signs, SS signs and Nazi signs are a no-go. Not only is it illegal in Europe and says a lot of the persons character".

We can infer that what type of tattoo or piercing the wearer chooses is a huge factor in how they are accepted and perceived by today's society. This can be considered a positive step from the days when all tattoos were considered bad news.

#### 5.6. "To hire or not to hire?"

All three groups of respondents agreed that it is totally fair when employers do not want to hire people with tattoos or piercings. Says MR3, "It's unfair, it is a kind discrimination, but at the end of the day as employees, they have a responsibility to follow what the company is setting as policy". FH5 also concurs, "It's okay when other employers don't allow it: it's their philosophy. The employer decides. We are this point where it (the hospitality industry) is just developing this new trend. We aren't supercool. We are better than 10 years ago and maybe in 10 years maybe we develop even more. If the brand is strict and conservative, then body-art would not be okay. And I would agree with the rule because the guests are not okay with it. It depends on the product. People have to fit into the product". Tattooed professionals like M43,

said the same, "If someone comes and doesn't fit the bill of your business then you won't hire them. You are hiring for the business which you are and what type of business it is. So did M24, "Of course it is fair that they don't hire people with tattoos or piercings. They created a company and they present themselves in a way they think is right. If they sell certain things, they have a business model for a certain market segment. So it should kind of match e.g. a rock and roll shop would be fine for someone with tattoos. But a fancy place then probably not, because it doesn't conform with the image. And if it's a general place where everybody goes then they have to find a balance".

The survey of the general public also shows that 43.6% of respondents felt it was fair that employers do not want to hire people with tattoos.

To summarise, all 3 groups of respondents felt the organisations were well within their rights to reject people based on such criteria so that they 'fit the bill of the business'. As confirmed by Timmings et al. body-art is also not a legally protected category hence this also cannot be classified as discrimination by law. (Timming, Nixon, Re, & Perrett, 2017)

### 5.7. Ethical considerations

Viewing this discussion from the ethical viewpoints we discussed in the Literature review, we see that by changing the regulations concerning body-art in their organisations, they fulfil the principle of 'individual rights' of the employee. The allowance of visible body-art helps employees retain a bit of their individuality, promotes their self-expression and their need for uniqueness. This freedom can contribute to higher job satisfaction, a happier work environment and thereby lead to lower staff turnover and higher customer satisfaction levels. This decision therefore goes on to also fulfil the principle of 'utilitarianism'. Making a group of employees happy also results in customers being happy, therefore a decision towards seeking 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people'.

FH5 says this of her hotel, "For us this (policy) is important because we think that people are happy if they could be themselves". "Most other hotels don't want it because it's harder to control. They just want to make things free of this (problem). They just want to generalise it that it is forbidden, so that they don't have to deal with it. With us if something happens its ok but then we have to deal with it".

The same is the case when hotel chains like H4 and H6 adopt philosophies like 'Being yourself' and 'We care for people'. Such philosophies award a greater degree of individual freedom at work which gives returns in form of an enhanced work ethic and satisfied clientele.

### 5.8. The way forward

It would be very useful that this research study be perused by managers and potential applicants and people who wish to get themselves tattooed or pierced.

The service industry is a constantly growing sector in Europe today. (Velthuisen; Kramer; Yildirim, 2018) This indicates a steady need for skilled workers to be able to provide the necessary services. The industry typically aims at employing younger skilled workers, between the ages of 25-35 for entry level jobs, which would consist of those from the Millennial generation. In a few years, those from the Post-millennial generation will be ready to hit the workforce.

These generations possess a different generational mindset from the earlier generations. As discussed earlier, their workplace expectations differ significantly from earlier generations like Baby-boomers and Generation X. They don't expect the workplace to regulate all aspects of the lives. They value flexibility at work rather than too rigid a structure and regulation, this is also true for grooming regulations at the workplace. (Brack & Kelly, 2012) Moreover, impulse behaviours, a need to 'fit-in with the crowd' and be influenced by the world around them tend to be higher at younger ages.

The implications of this are clear. Despite warnings to wait until a later age or choose wisely where they get their tattoos, the likelihood of these generations to make impulse rash decisions is possibly quite high.

Furthermore, from the perspective of recruitment, a distinction must be made from body-art prevalent amongst millennial job seekers and those on anti-social elements. As most organisations already do, the overall look of neatness, presentability, hygiene is also of importance. As more of such individuals are accepted into the service industry, the more the normalisation of body-art occurs.

It is understood that the brand image of a particular organisation is important and that one must fit into the image of the organisation. 'New-age' hotels, restaurants and more casual retail outlets tend to be more inclusive. But as demonstrated by

some of the luxury organisations, who have managed the change quite effectively, a review of the grooming regulations is recommended.

There remains a perception that an exclusive 'hi-class' traditional image is contradictory to an image of body-art. To normalise this the recommendations would be for employers to combine the two; to show the world that they don't have be disconnected.

There is definitely progress being made. In section 2.4.1 of the literature review we discussed how one organisation, the Austrian Federal Police, (Bundespolizei) did not allow any visible tattoos while in summer uniform. This regulation has now been scrapped. While inaugurating a new police academy in Wels, the new Interior Minister for Austria, Herbert Kickl made a formal announcement, stating that visible tattoos will now be allowed on policemen and policewomen. He stated the reason for this was to attract younger, sporty, motivated talent to the force. (Oe24, 2018)

Although the industry is making significant progress as a whole, there is still a long way to go before tattoos and piercings of all styles and means are accepted everywhere. In the meantime, the following advice and recommendations could be offered to prospective applicants:

- It would be a good judgement call to wait until one is a bit older to get tattooed or pierced. In most cases, at an older, more mature age, one is more likely to be satisfied and sure that they want to live with a permanent unalterable fixture/design on their body.
- Try and select spots which are able to be covered by clothes. That only means not on the neck, face and the back of hands and palms. Most organisations have an option of long sleeves if there is a uniform. This leaves almost about 85-90% of the body to be able to tattoo. This is only until one reaches a point in their career where they gain the freedom to do as they wish.
- If one is already tattooed in places which are not possible to hide under the clothes, then the tattoo designs or genres should be as discreet as possible.
- The design choices for such people should be as neutral as possible. It would be a good idea to stay away from designs which carry negative connotations, demonstrate rebellion or possess shock value. Examples are skulls, knives, guns,

reptiles, sexual caricatures and offensive words. As has repeatedly been brought up in interviews with managers stay away from extreme left or right-wing symbols, swastikas, etc. These are not only offensive; some can be against the law. Religious symbology is best avoided to ensure they don't trigger any righteous debates.

- Piercings should have healed completely before commencing any new jobs. This allows the wearer to remove the jewellery safely during work hours without any danger of them closing up. Stretched ears can be left open and the hole will shrink to a smaller size, if the wearer does not wear the plugs for a few months. Flesh-coloured 'hider' plugs can also be purchased to keep the hole at the stretched diameter if one is allowed to do so.
- The overall look should be aesthetically pleasing rather than jarring. It is a possibility that acceptance in the future will be more widespread than what it is today. But the path to acceptance can only be achieved if organisations and the general public are slowly convinced that visible body-art can be artistic and creative; that they can complement the look of the contemporary service professional rather than demonstrating rebellion and trouble. It is also important to 'dress to impress' when it comes to job interviews and work life in general. As voiced by all the managers in the study, the way the person dresses and presents himself is paramount to acceptance of the individual with all his body-art and also helps in changing perceptions.
- As section 2.3.5 of our literature review suggests (McLeod, 2014) and our respondents confirm, education levels play a big part in changing perceptions of body-art. A well-educated person is far less likely to be judged as a brash and impulsive person who decided to get his body tattooed and pierced as they are presumed to have a better judgement and decision-making skills. There is a strong possibility that a person with body-art is required to work a harder in such professions to counter the negative effects of the stigma as is proved in previous research conducted by Josh McLeod where his respondents point out, "If a positive were to come out of this ability/intelligence dilemma, it would be that heavily tattooed professionals have reacted to these stereotypes by working to prove their inaccuracy. In numerous cases, interviewees mentioned their

inclination to combat existing stigma through positive action. The result creates the opposite effect – a core of heavily tattooed professionals who have created a higher work standard as part of their identity management. Serena, a teacher from California, notes: “I like to think I’m functional in promoting the acceptance of those with tattoos – living by example, I would think. Showing that I am good at my job, and I do care. The fact that I have tattoos has nothing to do with my abilities to do my job”“.

As for the general public, It is usually quite hard to change public perception unless there is a greater visibility and widespread awareness about a subject.

I would continue to urge all people to not judge a book by its cover and be accepting of people who may not conform to the mainstream perceptions of how a person should look. Their lifestyle choices should not be (and are not) an indicator of their values, work ethic, just as they cannot be an indicator on people without tattoos or piercings.

## 5.9. Conclusion

In conclusion of this research study, we confirm all the historical associations of body-art with anti-social elements, and how they play a big part in stereotype-forming in the mind of people, although the percentage of people that agree with the stereotypes is small. We look at possible reasons why such stereotypes may play a part in these grooming policies being adopted.

In conducting this study, the opinions of all the stakeholders involved were necessary and in providing a more complete picture. Hopefully, this study has shed some light on what the industry and the views of public were a few years ago, how they are now and how they are moving forward to deal with the future.

We recognise many professions within the service industry are moving forward at a faster pace than others; the latter presumably to cater for those who aren’t still comfortable with a show of body-art.

I am of the opinion that moving away from written policies and stringent regulations and instead weighing individual cases of applicants with body-art on their own can lead to a greater possibility of attracting new skilled talent who previously would consider other professions. This results in happier employees who give their 100% being comfortable working in their own skin.

The greater visibility of tattooed and pierced people in the service industry can be a catalyst in normalising the look and getting the wider public accustomed to it which in turn could play an important part in changing perceptions and reducing the stigma involved.

“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking”. — Albert Einstein

## 6. Research limitations and learning outcomes

The interviews were conducted with a variety of cohorts. After a few initial interviews it was realised that a more rigid interview process with drafted questions and responses was not yielding enough data. It was therefore decided to hold interviews with a rough draft of questions and also framed other questions based on the responses received. This led to many of the interviews being more akin to conversations with both interviewer and respondents talking about their experiences with body-art, opinions on the matter. Conversations also moved about to other topics related to grooming, holiday experiences, customer service observations. This led to a lot of contaminated data, i.e. parts of the conversation which wasn't specifically related to the subject matter at hand. Despite the same, it was found that this method was more conducive to gathering more information for the research.

In interviews with tattooed respondents, the respondents also ranged from different cohorts: some were personal friends while some were employees of the properties where interviews with the HR Managers were conducted. In the interviews with personal friends, a significant amount of contamination in the data exists. All the usable data was gathered and noted down and accordingly distributed on an Excel sheet.

There were 2 cases where there was a refusal for an interview. The first was from the Austrian Airlines Talent Management and Recruiting department stating they did not have the resources to assist with the same.

The second case was from the Hofburg Conference Centre citing inability due to a busy time schedule.



UniCredit Bank, Erste Bank, Weincor, Hotel Bristol, Arcotel Hotels did not respond to requests for an interview.

The Mind Institute, an organisational consultancy for occupational psychology responded stating they could only be able to assist with the research with a charge of €240/hour. The university, however, stated it would not be possible to request a grant for such charges to be reimbursed.

- The fictitious C.V.'s created were created for mainly frontline positions in the hospitality industry sector. However, they lacked a specific role or position they would be applying for other than being for a general' front-line customer-facing role. This created confusions and delays during perusal by the relevant managers.
- Survey shortcomings: The failure to add last essay type question earlier resulting in no written statements being added by respondents. Written statements could help clarify some of the responses which could not have been possible while answering the multiple-choice survey.
- Limitations of Surveyplanet:
  - The question 7 which required the respondents to give their opinion to the statements quoted required a 5-point Ordinal scale. The same was not available as an option in the software.
  - The pie chart views provided by Surveyplanet have a bug where, if the segment of the pie is a really thin narrow one (i.e. 1%), the data labels for that segment get covered and lost in the overlap of the next segment making them impossible to make out. Customer Support staff confirmed there was no fix for this bug as yet. New graphs had to be created.
  - The inability to prevent respondents from automatically skipping questions where they were not supposed to answer (based on their previous responses) resulted in a few discrepancies in the answers. E.g. Question 12 asks the respondent whether they have a tattoo; 65 responded saying yes. However, Q13, 14, 15 and 16 show 68, 71, 69 and 69 responses respectively stating they have tattoos. The same occurs with body piercings in Q10 and Q11 where first 78 respondents and 82 respondents respectively state they have piercings.

- Learning outcomes from conducting interviews:
  - Interviewing techniques need to be polishing up and practice. Too many speech fillers (umm/errs) were unintentionally used during the interviews.
  - There were too many interruptions during the interviews. It would have been more appropriate to let the respondents talk and complete their sentences.
  - Appropriate line of questioning based on responses not always followed.
  - The sample which was surveyed was by no means a true representation of the general public in Austria or in the world.

## 7. Appendix

### Appendix 1

#### **Set of questions / 'leading' statements for Recruiters/Managers/Psychologists**

##### Necessary Information:

1. Name:
  2. Age:
  3. Gender
  4. Designation:
  5. Background Info of the Company:
  6. Industry:
  7. Target Demographic of the company:
  8. Number of staff:
  9. Employee demographic in your organisation:
  10. What is the current HR policy of the company with visible tattoos and body piercing? What is the basis for such a policy to be adopted?
-

Core questions	Follow Up questions	Additional Optional questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have a tattoo?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does any of your children or anyone in your family have tattoos?</li> <li>What would your reaction be if your son/daughter came home with a tattoo?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is your opinion of tattoos and body-modification in general?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why do you love them?</li> <li>What do believe as a limit for anyone to be tattooed or pierced? Meaning: at what point should he/she stop? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you see it as a reflection of the persons character?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People with visible body-art can look freakish or unprofessional ? How true is this statement to you?</li> <li>How would you react if you have a disagreement with someone with plenty of body-art?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have any body piercings?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would you get a tattoo or piercings?</li> <li>Or have you ever thought of getting one?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If yes, why?</li> <li>If no why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is your understanding the term 'to look professional?'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it a contradiction to each other?</li> <li>What personality attributes do you think an employee/potential employee with visible tattoos and piercings could have?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What would your reaction be if you were to be served in a restaurant by a person with visible tattoos and plenty visible piercings?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you feel constitutes an <u>offensive</u> tattoo? Or body piercing? Or even something which has a negative effect on you?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you experienced applicants with visible body-art applying for job positions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What positions were they for?</li> <li>• What reaction did you have?</li> <li>• would the position of the tattoo on the body make a difference?</li> <li>• Did u discuss it? did u ask them about it?</li> <li>• Did you ignore it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think about employers who do not want to hire people with visible tattoos and piercings?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If given a hypothetical situation as such, how would your reaction be?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What positions would you hire them for?</li> <li>• Would there be a concerned discussion amongst the panel members during a recruitment for a NON-customer facing position and the applicant has a visible tattoo?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you see any difference in recruitment processes/criteria for senior/managerial/executive in this as compared to frontline employees in this matter?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would it bother you more when if a manager had many tattoos?</li> <li>• What is your perception of a person in a leadership role as compared to frontline employee?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do u have any internal rules and procedures regarding tattoos?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People experience judging glances at their tattoos at work. Why do you think that is?</li> <li>• What are the norms with regards to dress sense and body-art? How are they perceived?</li> <li>• Do you have colleagues who already have body-art?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think your customers opinion/views about your employee's tattoos?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has anyone (customer/employee ) given you feedback concerning this subject or shared opinions during informal conversations?</li> <li>• Does it apply to all customers or maybe does it apply more to some groups in your opinion?</li> <li>• What is your target group then? Are they really those that you believe would have a problem with tattoos?</li> <li>• Is it really important as an organisation to focus on their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

	potentially negative views?	
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Appendix 2:

**Set of questions / 'leading' statements for Tattooed Respondents**

Necessary Information:

11. Name:
  12. Age:
  13. Gender:
  14. Employment Situation/Last Employed by:
  15. How many years have/did you work in your current/last job:
  16. Background Info of the Company:
  17. Industry:
  18. Target Demographic of the company:
  19. Number of staff:
  20. Employee demographic in your organisation:
  21. What is the current HR policy of the company with visible tattoos and body piercing?
-

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Core questions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Follow Up questions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Additional Optional questions</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a tattoo?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you have them?</li> <li>• How many do you have?</li> <li>• When did you get your first tattoo?</li> <li>• What kind of tattoos do you have?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any body piercings?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you have them?</li> <li>• How many do you have?</li> <li>• Have any of your piercings been stretched after being pierced?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with visible body-art can look freakish or unprofessional? How true is this statement to you?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you get your body-art?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do they mean for you?</li> <li>• What made you go about making the decision to get tattooed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a connection between you and your body-art? If so what is it?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are any of your tattoos visible?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes, why did you choose that spot?</li> <li>• If no, why not?</li> <li>• Is there a reason why you stopped getting a tattoo that would be visible at all times?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are/Were you ever concerned that tattoos that cannot be covered up and they might affect you in your professional life?</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you ever have a customer-facing job?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did they allow tattoos?</li> <li>• If not, how did you go about the interview with your visible body-art?</li> <li>• Did you ask them the regulations?</li> <li>• Did they ask you about your tattoos?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did your colleagues ever notice your body-art?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was their reaction?</li> <li>• Did they express negative views?</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think about employers who do not want to hire people with visible tattoos and piercings?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the reaction from your seniors?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were you ever in a situation where you received judging glances at work due to your body-art?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think that your body-art has affected your professional growth in any way?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you find that you needed to work harder or differently in any way to make up for the presence of visible body-art on you as compared to the rest?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For professional reasons, people should choose wisely where they should get their tattoos.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you believe there is a stigma attached with being tattooed or pierced today?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this stigma affect or concern you? Has it ever affected or concerned you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People experience judging glances at their tattoos at</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever thought of removing them?</li> <li>• Have you ever had thoughts which make you think that you would be better of professionally without your body-mods?</li> </ul>	<p>work. Why do you think that is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have colleagues who already have body-art?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you believe tattoos reflect on your personality or character?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever been in position where your ability or intelligence has been questioned based on your appearance?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your opinion on the stigmas attached to body-art?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had any negative experiences because of your body-art?</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you elaborate on what happened?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think that it is fair that employers do not want to hire people with visible body-art?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you believe tattoos should be accepted in the frontline service jobs? (e.g. Hotel Reception, Customer Service, Bank Executive)</li> </ul>	

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