

Tattoos can be a 'positive' addition to the workforce

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Credit: University of St Andrews

Having a visible tattoo can help job seekers find some kinds of employment, new research by the University of St Andrews has found.

In the study, Dr Andrew Timming found that [managers](#) were more likely to select applicants with a tattoo on their face for a hypothetical job as bartender in a nightclub.

Dr Timming's latest research on the subject suggested that some managers think tattoos on staff can "positively convey an organisation's image".

Dr Timming, of the School of Management at St Andrews, presented his findings at the British Sociological Association's conference on Work, Employment and Society in Leeds (Wednesday 7 September).

In the recent study, he showed 192 people with managerial experience in various organisations two versions of people's faces, one with a tattoo added to the neck using image software, one without. The managers were asked to imagine they

were recruiting a bartender and to rate the faces on a scale of 1 to 7.

They gave the same face a higher score, 5.07 on average, when it was tattooed than when it was not, 4.38. The approval rating was higher for women with a tattoo: 5.14, compared to 4.51 for women without a tattoo.

When considering the person for a hypothetical role as a waiter in an upmarket restaurant, where the customers would be older, managers rated the tattooed version of the face lower: 3.38 on average, compared with 4.67 without a tattoo.

Dr Timming says that the managers believed that having a bartender with a tattoo would attract younger customers who thought body art was trendy.

He said: "Visibly tattooed job applicants can present as attractive candidates in the [labour market](#) because they can help to positively convey an organization's image or brand, particularly in firms that seek to target a younger, edgier demographic of customer. Tattoos, especially in pop culture industries such as fashion retail, are an effective marketing and branding tool.

"Body art can be seen as an asset in the labour market, as long as an applicant's tattoos are compatible with the organisation's wider brand personality. This argument is compatible with anecdotal evidence that there has been, in recent decades, what might be called a 'tattoo renaissance' in which body art has figured more positively in mainstream society and popular culture.

"Previous research has focused on the negative effects of tattoos on one's employment chances, but the idea that [body art](#) can improve job prospects has, until now, been largely neglected. This research is both timely and important because

of the dramatic increase in the number of tattoos in recent years."

In another part of his research, Dr Timming interviewed two managers of a skateboard firm and a chain of trendy pubs, who said tattooed staff would be seen positively by their younger customers.

One manager at the pub chain said that the company paid for some staff to have tattoos as a performance-related incentive. "We're a little bit out there on the edge of what some employers would feel is acceptable, but we do incentivise our staff with things that they're interested in," she told him. "You hit targets A, B and C this year and we'll give you X amount towards your next tattoo project."

A manager at the skateboarding company said: "We have the kind of culture that's associated with tattoos. We've got a skate vibe – it's a lifestyle for us; it's just be yourself, you know?"

However, the managers and their customers told Dr Timming that certain types of [tattoos](#) would be unacceptable, including sexual images, those supporting fascism or Satanism, and ones that were sectarian, misogynistic or related to drink or drugs.

The research was carried out in the UK and the US. In one part of the study, photos of four men and four women in their 30s were taken from a publicly available image database (www.3d.sk). A second version of each shot was created with a single star shaped tattoo added to the neck. Both versions, and another eight 'diversionary' faces, were shown to 192 people with management experience to evaluate for hypothetical jobs as bartender and again as a waiter in an upscale restaurant. In the second part of the research Dr Timming spoke to customers and managers at an unnamed skateboarding company and pub chain.

Provided by University of St Andrews

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