Examining Perceptions of Tattoos on Hiring Decisions
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Background:
- Recent surveys suggest that over 29% of the United States population has at least one tattoo (Shannon-Missal, 2016).
- Despite the increasing prevalence of tattoos, research suggests that individuals with tattoos are stigmatized (Martin & Dula, 2010; Zestcott & Stone, in press).
- Research finds that tattooed individuals are often stereotyped as deviant, unprofessional and uncooperative (Broussard & Harton, 2018; Pfeifer, 2012; Resenhoefst & Wiseman, 2008). In addition, perceivers hold both negative explicit and implicit attitudes toward tattoos (Zestcott et al., 2018).
- Negative attitudes toward tattooed individuals can lead to poor co-worker or supervisor interactions and potential discrimination (Ellis, 2015). Employees also perceive co-workers with tattoos as more acceptable when face-to-face interaction with customers and reward sharing is diminished (Miller, Kay, & Eure, 2009).
- Research finds that the presence of body art is detrimental to the likelihood a candidate is hired, although this effect was reduced when the job does not involve customer interaction (Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perret, 2017). However, minimal research has investigated how attitudes toward tattooed individuals can impact the job hiring process.
- How do perceivers’ explicit and implicit attitudes toward tattoos impact hireability ratings of a tattooed, compared to non-tattooed, job applicant?

Method:
Participants: 96 undergraduate students from SUNY Geneseo (Mage = 19.31; SD = 1.80, 69 females (72%), 27 males (28%), and 18 (19%) with tattoos, 78 (81%) without tattoos.

Procedure: Participants completed explicit (thermometer) and implicit (IAT) attitude measures toward tattoos and read a job description for a position at an advertising agency. Participants then assessed two applicants for the position, one with tattoos and one without tattoos.

Hireability of applicant was assessed by averaging 9 questions (tattooed applicant rating = 8.32; non-tattooed applicant rating = .95). Example question: "The candidate possesses the skills necessary to perform the duties of this specific job" using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 11 (strongly agree).

Results:
- No effect for explicit attitude on hiring preference.
- Those with negative explicit attitudes about tattooed individuals were more likely to prefer the non-tattooed applicant for a position at an advertising agency, whereas those with more positive explicit attitudes were more likely to prefer the tattooed applicant.

Discussion:
- Beliefs about a tattooed candidate’s hireability was dependent on explicit attitudes toward tattoos.
- These findings suggest that negative explicit attitudes can result in hiring disparities for those with tattoos.
- Limitations: The participant pool for this study was not representative of the United States population (only 19% of participants had a tattoo) and used an undergraduate sample.
- Future directions: examine potential interaction between tattoo presence of applicant and stereotypical vs. non-stereotypical job type.

References:
Shannon-Missal, L. (2016). Tattoo takeover: Three in ten Americans have tattoos, and don’t stop at just one. Harris Insight and Analysis LLC.

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