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Tattoos and Body Piercings: Towards a Differentiated Understanding

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Abstract

Drawing on 35 in-depth interviews, this article explores the perceptions of managers and employees concerning tattoos and body piercings in Nigeria. This study examines the underlying factors inherent in the comments of the participants. The study reveals a general negative perceptions on tattoos and body piercings, which are basically driven by ethical, religious, and cultural beliefs. Interestingly, the findings also reveal that tattoos and body piercings influence recruitment and selection decisions and could lead to summary dismissal of an employee. Contrary to popular opinion as well as other research findings that social acceptance of tattoos and body piercings is increasing, this study found that Nigerian employers and society generally stigmatise and prejudice against people with tattoos and unconventional body piercings.

Introduction

A tattoo is a pictorial design that is marked on the skin with needles and is a relatively permanent form of body modification (Sperry, 1991). Tattooing, which was originally popular mainly among sailors, gangsters, and prisoners (Schildkrout, 2004), has now experienced a dramatic rise in popularity and acceptance among adolescents and young adults (French et al., 2016). This phenomenon has exacerbated the challenges of hiring, managing, and retaining talented employees in the context of international human resource management (IHRM). It is particularly challenging in the face of cultural differences and social perceptions that are typical of the contemporary workplace.

Tattoos and body piercings have become more prevalent in modern society among adolescents and young adults, particularly in the West, such as Europe and the US (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Laumann and Derick, 2006). For example, in 2004, one-quarter of the US adult population was reported to have tattoos (Laumann and Derick, 2006), and 38% of Americans between 18 and 19 years old have tattoos (Pew Research Center, 2010). Similarly, Aslam and Owen (2013) reported that about 25% of the adult population in Europe are tattooed. The increasing number of people with tattoos makes the phenomenon important for human resource management (HRM) (Timming, 2015). According to French et al. (2016), having a tattoo is not associated or significantly related to employment and earnings discrimination in the western context. Can we argue the same point for non-western countries such as Nigeria?

This study argues that it is inappropriate to make a global statement regarding such significant HRM and labour market issues. This is because Africa is ethnically diverse and constitutes a unique context in terms of its values, dress, beliefs, norms, religious syncretism, institutional frameworks, *inter alia*, as constructed by people and culture, which are different to what is obtainable in the global north. To this end, this article examines managers' and employees' perceptions of tattoos and body piercings, using the contemporary workplace in Nigeria as a research focus. The study also examines the reasons underlying their attitudes and perceptions.

Furthermore, the trend of tattooing is growing in Nigeria among the youth (Ayanlowo et al., 2017), and there is a shortage of research on the perceptions of managers concerning those who have tattoos and body piercing. The focus of this study is managers' and employees' perceptions of tattoos and body piercings. In particular, the study investigates (a) whether tattoos and body piercings influence recruitment and selection decisions; (b) whether having

tattoos and/or body piercings could lead to the summary dismissal of an employee; and (c) the perceptions of the participants concerning tattoos and body piercings.

To effectively address these questions, 15 managers and 20 employees were interviewed in the city of Lagos, Nigeria. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study to examine managers and employees' perceptions of tattoos and body piercings in Nigeria.

Tattoos and Body Piercings in Context

Tattooing is a procedure that involves using a device to imprint a permanent marking or design on the skin's surface (Durkin, 2012). The term 'tattau', which means 'to strike' or the 'result of tapping', metamorphosed into what is now known as 'tattoo'. This term 'tattau' was used by a British Captain, John Cook, in his 1700s expedition to Tahiti and the South Pacific Islands (Braverman, 2006; Lineberry, 2007). However, the art of using needle to imprint markings and designs on the surface of the skin has been around for thousands of years (Lineberry, 2007).

Body piercing, on the other hand, is the practice of perforating or cutting a part of the skin to create an opening for devices, jewellery, or apparatus to be worn (Durkin, 2012). Like tattooing, the act of body piercing has also gained more prevalence and acceptance among adolescents and young adults in the western society (Beers et al., 2007). For instance, a study by Schorzman et al. (2007) found that approximately 56% of young adults aged 17- 25 years old have body piercings. The study also found that those with body piercings are more likely to have tattoos than those who do not have body piercings.

Tattoos and body piercings are prevalent in western culture, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Greif and Hewitt, 1998; Schildkrout, 2004). Throughout the ages, tattoos have been used for different purposes, ranging from symbolising ownership to denoting nobility (Durkin, 2012). Nowadays, tattoos are often associated with 'uniqueness' and artistic individuals. Creativity and innovation have pushed some to use tattoos for permanent medical alerts instead of using bracelets displaying the wearer's medical conditions, such as diabetes or epilepsy (Clinical Rounds, 2009).

Researchers have found that having tattoos and body piercings impact a person's health and general wellbeing. For example, Stirn et al. (2006) argued that tattoos and body piercings were related to lower perceived mental health and low social integration. In another study of 550 military recruits in the US, 27% were found to have tattoos, and those with tattoos were more likely to display health-risk behaviours than those without tattoos (Stephens, 2003). Similarly,

in Australia, people aged 14 years old and above with tattoos and body piercings were found to behave in a manner that could seriously damage their health (high-risk behaviour) such as using drugs (Makkai and McAllister, 2001).

Furthermore, some studies have reported a link between having tattoos and/or body piercings and risk-taking behaviours, such as imposing harm to one's health through the use of psychotropic substances, unhealthy diet habits, and self-harm (Carroll et al., 2002; Robert and Ryan, 2002) and other externalised risk behaviours (Deschesnes et al., 2006; Heywood et al., 2012).

Additionally, researchers have found that individuals with tattoos spend more time in jail, consume more alcohol, are more likely to have tried recreational drugs, have greater problems in school, suffer from a higher rate of mental illness, and display more violent tendencies than people without tattoos (Heywood et al., 2012; Manuel and Retzlaff, 2002; Roberts and Ryan, 2002).

Aside from health and wellbeing issues, socially, people with tattoos are perceived as a disadvantaged and loosely social group (French et al., 2018). This finding reinforces the historical view that tattoos are associated with counter-cultural delinquents of the lower classes (Burgess and Clark, 2010; DeMello, 1995). A sight of tattooed individuals usually signal social stigmatisation to non-tattooed others (Durkin and Houghton, 2000; Goffman, 1963).

Research has also found that human resources (HR) managers and recruiters are averse to employing people with visible tattoos and prefer to employ people without visible tattoos (Bekhor et al., 1995; Brallier et al., 2011; Swanger, 2006). In other words, the location of the tattoos on the body plays a significant role in explaining employer prejudice against tattoos and/or body piercings (Timming, 2015).

Similarly, the extant literature has also found that customers have mixed feelings about transacting business with people tattoos. While some are antagonistic towards women with masculine tattoos (Arndt and Glassman, 2012), some are reluctant to buy from a tattooed seller (Doleac and Stein, 2013), and others have a stereotypically negative attitude towards sellers with body art (Arndt et al., 2016; Larsen et al., 2014). Given that the extant literature on tattoos and body piercings is based on the western context and does not offer insight into the implications of tattoos and body piercings on HRM in Africa, specifically Nigeria, further

research is needed to clarify managers' and employees' perceptions of the phenomenon. Hence, the present study is timely and essential.

Theoretical Background
Social Stigma and Prejudice

The concept of stigma has long been useful in understanding certain social phenomena, including unemployment and discrimination against certain social groups. Stigma is a powerful phenomenon, which is strongly linked to the value placed on various social identities (Heatherton et al., 2000). The social psychology of stigma was largely developed by Erving Goffman with the aim of explaining situations in which individuals are disqualified from social acceptance. The concept is further expounded by Heatherton et al. (2000), among others.

Using social stigma and prejudice (Goffman, 1959, 1963; Heatherton et al., 2000) as a theoretical lens, this article examines the perceptions of managers and employees towards tattoos and body piercings in the non-western context of, Nigeria. DuBrin (2011) distinguishes between what he refers to as substantive (i.e. things that we say) and surface-level (i.e. how we appear) approaches to self-presentation. Stigma often falls under the latter heading (Hinshaw, 2007; Letkemann, 2002). Tattoos and body piercings are clearly a surface-level characteristic. Therefore, this section will focus on visible stigma and its relationship to prejudice.

Stigmatisation is a challenge for both the stigmatised and the stigmatiser (Dovidio et al., 2000). According to Crocker et al. (1998, p. 504), 'A person who is stigmatised is a person whose social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity – the person is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others' (also see Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). Stigma has a negative effect on the stigmatised person's life chances (Link and Phelan, 2001) including employment chances (Timming, 2015). For example, dressing in full traditional Muslim attire in a job interview may affect the interviewee's chances of getting the job (King and Ahmad, 2010).
Similarly, researchers have found that being overweight could put a job applicant at disadvantage in job interviews (Finkelstein et al., 2007; Pingitore et al., 1994). In other words, stigmatised job applicants have a reduced chance of securing jobs at the interview compared to their ono-stigmatised counterparts (Madera and Hebl, 2012; Stone and Wright, 2013). Research has also suggested that stigma is related to prejudice in the sense that a stigmatised person is often a target of prejudice (Dovidio et al., 2000).

Prejudice is a negative attitude that 'based on faulty and inflexible generalisation' (Allport, 1979, p. 9). It is a state of mind, feeling, or behaviour that involves some disparagement of others on account of the group to which they belong (Brown, 2010; Crandall et al., 2002). Both stigma and prejudice share so much in common that they are essentially the same 'animal' (Phelan et al., 2008). This is because the two terms involve unjustified and usually negative attitudes toward others because of their social category or group membership (Samson, 1999). In short, stigma and prejudice almost always walk hand-in-hand (Timming et al., 2015).

Literature on stigma and prejudice is closely related to studies on and the impact of tattoos and body piercings on employment opportunities (see Brown, 2010; French et al., 2018; Timming et al., 2015). This is because tattoos are a signifier of stigma and a subject of prejudice (Miller et al., 2009) and because they are also associated with many antisocial behaviours and what Deschesnes et al. (2006, p. 389) refer to as 'eternalised risk behaviours'. These include, inter alia, carrying a weapon (Thurnherr et al., 2009); increased sexual behavior (Skegg et al., 2007); anger management problems (Carroll and Anderson, 2002); and drug abuse (Brooks et al., 2003).

Basically, there is a plethora of overwhelming evidence in the literature that there are negative perceptions of body modification in general (Jeffreys, 2000; Durkin and Houghton, 2000; Hawkes et al., 2004; Resenhoeft et al., 2008). This study examines managers' and employees' perceptions of tattoos and body piercings, using the contemporary workplace in Nigeria as a research focus. The study also examines the reasons underlying their attitudes and perceptions.

Methodology

The empirical evidence for this study was gathered by applying a qualitative approach. This is because qualitative research is a meaningful way of collecting images of reality and naturally occurring data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), thereby permitting the researcher to study the phenomenon in depth and detail using a small sample size (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002). This approach enables the participants, including the four who have tattoos, to explain their experiences and perceptions.

This research focuses on managers and employees in the traditional white-collar job. This group was chosen because its members represent a distinct and highly respected section of the workforce. Nevertheless, the researcher understands that perceptions of people with tattoos and body piercings may differ among different work environments. This study was conducted in

Lagos, Nigeria. The importance of Nigeria as a research focus of this study resides in the fact that Nigeria's economy is the biggest in Africa (IT News Africa, 2018) and that one out of every seven black people on the planet is a Nigerian (Urban, 2014), making Nigeria an important hub in Africa and the black race.

Purposive sampling, whereby the researcher is guided by one participant to the next (Lavrakas, 2008), and snowball sampling, whereby the researcher selects 'information-rich cases' (Patton, 1990, p. 169), were used to select the participants. The aim was to select specific participants (managers and employees) who would be best equipped to enable the researcher to understand the phenomenon and answer the research question. The research sample consisted of 35 participants who work in banks and insurance companies. The participants' backgrounds varied in terms of their gender, their age, and job titles, and the number(s) of their tattoos and body piercings (see Table 1).

Data was collected during October and December 2018 using a snowball method from the researcher's network. On informed consent the final sample included 15 managers and 20 employees who agreed to participate in the research after having been contacted by email and given a thorough explanation of the purpose of and procedures involved in the study.

Table 1 A Biographical Sketch of the Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Positions	No of tattoo(s)	No of body piercing(s)
Participant 1	27	Female	Employee	2	1(nose)
Participant 2	38	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 3	25	Female	Employee	1	1(nose)
Participant 4	47	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 5	39	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 6	49	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 7	29	Male	Employee	2	0
Participant 8	42	Female	Manager	0	0
Participant 9	47	Female	Employee	0	0
Participant 10	51	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 11	29	Female	Employee	1	0
Participant 12	32	Female	Employee	0	0
Participant 13	26	Male	Employee	0	1(earlobe)
Participant 14	42	Female	Manager	0	0
Participant 15	46	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 16	34	Female	Employee	0	0
Participant 17	39	Female	Employee	0	0
Participant 18	43	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 19	49	Female	Manager	0	0
Participant 20	37	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 21	44	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 22	43	Female	Manager	0	0
Participant 23	44	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 24	50	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 25	34	Female	Employee	0	1(nose)

Participant 26	37	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 27	39	Female	Employee	0	0
Participant 28	40	Female	Manager	0	0
Participant 29	29	Female	Employee	1	0
Participant 30	40	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 31	34	Male	Employee	0	0
Participant 32	47	Female	Manager	0	0
Participant 33	49	Male	Manager	0	0
Participant 34	32	Female	Manager	1	0
Participant 35	43	Male	Employee	0	0

A total number of 35 participants (15 managers, 20 employees) aged between 25 and 51 years old participated in the semi-structured interviews. Although the study was conducted in Lagos, however, the participants come from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. The number of body piercings recorded does not include the normal piercings of a female's two earlobes. All but one of the participants who have tattoos are in their 20s. This confirms Ayanlowo et al.'s (2017) findings that the trend of tattooing is growing in Nigeria among the youth.

Data Collection

Thirty-five personal, semi-structured interviews were conducted at a convenient setting chosen by the participants. For the managers, the interviews took place in their offices at their preferred times, while employees elected venues other than their places of work. A topic list served as guidelines for the semi-structured interviews regarding the broader research problem.

The topic list was structured upon a review of the literature and focused on tattoos and body piercings: whether tattoos and body piercings influence recruitment and selection decisions; whether managers allow tattoos and/or body piercings at work; could having them lead to dismissal; and what are the perceptions of managers and employees about the phenomenon. The topic list was not exhaustive and certain perspectives and ideas that were raised by the participants that had not previously been anticipated were investigated and used to refine the topic list for the remaining interviews.

The interviews were conducted in English and lasted around 90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded, and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Extensive handwritten notes were taken in the cases of the five participants (two managers and three employees) who declined permission to audio record their voices.

Data Analysis and Procedure

The researcher employed the data-driven thematic analytical method, based on the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006); Boeije (2005); and Corbin and Strauss (2008) to the interview data analysis. All the audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim immediately after the interviews had taken place, and these transcriptions were analysed interpretatively. A narrative summary of each interview was drafted and open coding (the identification of first key points, meaning objects in the data that seem to be significant) was applied (Boeije, 2005). At this stage, the researcher was able to question the meanings of certain words and phrases and to think critically about their meanings and interpretations (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

The first set of codes were then grouped into categories according to their common codes. This stage was then followed by colour-coding the categories in order to enable the data set to be analysed. A thematic map was then drawn. At this point, the analytical process shifted completely from the initial descriptive analysis to a more analytical one. Furthermore, the main categories were refined by constant comparison, until a representative overview was achieved. Finally, the themes and interrelationships between them were defined. Investigator triangulation (Polit and Beck, 2004) was applied throughout the analysis.

Findings

The findings of this study were divided into two sections. This was done for the purpose of clarity: managers' perceptions and employees' perceptions of tattoos and body piercings.

Managers' Perceptions

The managers' perceptions of tattoos and body piercing are biased and are deeply rooted in four factors: religious, cultural, moral, and corporate factors. The managers' biased perceptions are informed by one or all of these factors. One participant said:

> How could any of my staff have tattoos or pierce any outer part of their body, except of course the earlobes for women? I cannot condone it because it is against my religion and even the corporate etiquettes of this organisation…for these reasons, I dislike tattoos and I would not like any of my staff to have one. Would I employ anyone with tattoos visibly displayed on the outer part of the body? No (Participant Z).

This participant personalised having tattoos and body piercings by mentioning religious issues before corporate etiquette. The narrative evidence of another participant suggests the level of stigmatisation and prejudice of managers in Nigerian organisations towards employees with tattoos and body piercings:

> For me, it's not moral and definitely not in line with our culture here in Nigeria. It's a western thing. I don't like it, and I will never employ anyone with tattoos and body piercings except for ladies piercing their earlobes. There was a case of this nature about two years ago. A member of staff just turned up at work with a big tattoo on her neck, towards the left side of her neck. We went through the necessary process, and her employment was terminated (Participant A).

Another participant who has tattoos shared her experiences and perceptions about tattoos and body piercings. The participant expressed a feeling of guilt due to the perceptions, stigmatisation, and prejudice associated with having visible tattoos. Surprisingly, she is unsure if she would employ someone with visible tattoos.

> My experience is not a good one, because I have lost two jobs in the past because of my tattoos. I have two tattoos on my arms, and my employment was terminated when my superiors at work saw them. Since then, I don't wear short dresses to work…I always cover the tattoos. Even outside work, I often cover them except when I'm at home. The problem here in Nigeria is that you are stigmatised as a bad or wayward person if you have tattoos and you pierce anywhere other your earlobe, and that is for a lady…if a man does it then he is considered as a wayward person. I think I shouldn't have done it…I don't think I would employ someone with visible tattoos. I think I made a mistake not to have considered all of these issues before having my tattoos…sometimes, I feel bad and ashamed, especially when I don't cover the tattoos (Participant Y).

Similarly, another participant explained in detail the managers' and society's perceptions of tattoos and body piercings:

> It doesn't have a place in our systems. I mean the religious, cultural, moral, and even corporate systems. It is a western idea. Any corporate manager or I, as a manager myself, will not employ anyone with visible tattoos. You may have it hidden underneath your clothes, that's fine. People with tattoos and unusual body piercings are stigmatised as bad people in society, and they often find it difficult to get a job. I know people who have lost their job because of having tattoos on visible parts of their bodies. For example, a guy was summarily dismissed about six month ago because he suddenly turned up at work with a big tattoo on the right side of his neck. Another one got a written warning last week, because he had an earring on one of his ears. In

short, it is a western idea that has so many factors to contend with in Nigeria (Participant G).

Note the underlying factors (cultural, religion, moral, and corporate) beneath the prejudice, stigmatisation, and discrimination against people with visible tattoos and body piercings. The findings resonate with Miller et al.'s (2009) argument that tattoos are a signifier of stigma and a subject of prejudice.

Employees' Perceptions

The data analysis highlights that the majority of the employees interviewed also shared the same perceptions as the managers. Sixteen out of the twenty-one employees that participated in this study shared the same perceptions as the managers. The following quotations typify their shared views:

> I think it is not decent to have tattoos at all, and if one must have one, then it should be etched on a hidden part of the body. Having it on a visible part of the body speaks volumes to the beholder that the person who has tattoos is someone who lacks moral values. Would I do it? No, because it against my religious beliefs (Participant J).

Another participant shared her experience with a tattooed friend, who the participant's parents drove away because of her tattoos and body piercings:

> Having tattoos or body piercings, especially for males, doesn't have a place in our society. People will perceive you as wayward or a hooligan. For example, a friend visited me about a year ago…he had a big tattoo on his left arm and also had one earring. My parents were really upset, and they questioned him about his parents and personal life. They could not imagine a man wearing a tattoo being their daughter's friend. They told him not to come to our house again and ordered me to stop being friends with him…yes, that is the perception (Participant U).

Religion and cultural reasons for such views were also reported by employees. One participant commented:

> I can't do it, for two obvious reasons. It against my religion and it is not even accepted in our culture. Having tattoos displayed openly on one's body and a man wearing earrings are western concepts. If someone does it here, all eyes will be on that person. Their parents, neighbours, and even their pastor or imam [imam is the spiritual head of a mosque] will call you, possibly with your parents, for a meeting…People and society at large will not welcome you as a decent and cultured person (Participant T).

Another participant said:

> I don't have one and no one has one in my workplace. How could anyone do such a thing? It's not decent, not corporate. Even the society at large. My wife sacked our former housemaid because she etched two tattoos on her neck and arm (Participant O).

While many participants (16) have no tattoos or body piercings (except for normal earlobe piercings for women), other participants (5) have tattoos and body piercings and recounted their experience about their body art:

> I have a tattoo on my back, but I dare not expose it at work. I once wore a dress that revealed it, but my manager was really angry and warned me never to do that again. She said it is morally and religiously wrong and that it is not good for our company image if customers see it. I like it, but it doesn't have a place in our society (Participant N).

Another participant recounted her experience in the labour market and previous workplace:

> Let's just say I should not have done because it [got tattooed] causes me so much trouble. I once attended an interview where the interviewer expressed great displeasure in my tattoos. She was really displeased and did not offer me the job because of my tattoos. She said 'We need decent people here and not tattooed hooligans….I'm sorry'. Again, I nearly lost my current job a few months ago because my tattoos were revealed. My parents, too, are not happy with it. That is why I said I should not have done it. I like it, but it is not well received in our society (Participant X).

Another participant recounted how he lost his job because he wore an earring:

> I pierced my left earlobe, but I hardly put a ring in it because of all the insinuations, abuse, and bad perceptions I received from people each time I wore an earring…even from my family and friends. One day, I mistakenly wore my earring to work, and my manger was really angry at me. I was suspended and eventually lost the job. Tattoos and body piercings are not part of Nigerian culture. People frown upon it based on cultural and religious reasons (Participant G).

Another participant said:

> I pierced my nose, but I don't wear a ring in it to work, it is not allowed. I did wore a ring in it to work some time ago, and the manager was really angry at me…so I stopped wearing ring in it to work (Participant L).

It is crystal clear from the above quotations that managers and employees in Nigeria have negative perceptions about tattoos and body piercings. This findings resonates with Vanston and Scot's (2008) argument that public perceptions of people with body art may not be positive.

Discussion and Conclusions

The general thrust of the argument advanced in this article is that managers' and employees' perceptions about tattoos and body piercings in Nigeria are negative and evidence a strong social stigma. The underpinnings of these negative perceptions are religious beliefs; cultural and moral values; and corporate ethics. Although there is increased prevalence of tattoos and body piercings in the western societies (French et al., 2016; Roberts, 2012; Timming, 2015), the findings presented in this article reveal that the perceptions of managers and employees, which reflect societal perceptions, do not follow the western patterns of acceptance of tattoos and body piercings. Rather, people with tattoos and body piercings (aside from normal earlobe piercings for women) suffer social stigmatisation and employment prejudice.

With a very weak level of social acceptability, people with visible tattoos are classified as wayward, morally flawed, indecent hooligans. This is a stereotypical condemnation of people with tattoos and body piercings, which may not reflect their actual attitudes and attributes. Goffman (1963) argued that stigma is a sign or mark that designates its bearer as 'spoiled' and therefore values the bearer as less than 'normal'. Additionally, this may well be the reason why French et al. (2018, p. 3) described people with tattoos as a 'disadvantaged community of individuals'. In particular, men who have their earlobe(s) pierced and decorated with earrings are stigmatised as uncultured and wayward individuals. These individuals suffer societal condemnation such that people would not want their children to be associated with them. This finding evidences that they are socially stigmatised, considered 'tainted' (Goffman, 1963).

Participants recounted how their tattoos and body piercings have damaged their employment opportunities at interviews and have threatened their jobs. Prospective employees dare not display tattoos or unconventional body piercing at interviews, otherwise their employment chances are jeopardised. Undoubtedly, tattoos and body piercings have a negative impact (prejudice and discrimination) on the participants' employment chances. In fact, a male participant with a pierced earlobe lost his previous job because he wore an earring to work, something that is against religious beliefs and unbefitting of the Nigerian culture.

Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of the participants (both managers and employees) believe that tattoos and body piercing contribute to an inappropriate workplace appearance. A

view that has 'discredited, tainted, and flawed' people with tattoos and body piercings (Goffman, 1963, p. 12). This finding resonates with a study undertaken by Career Builder (2011) that 31% of employers across various industries reported that they are less likely to offer promotions to employees with visible tattoos than those without.

Contributing to the literature on body art, particularly tattoos and body piercings, this study reveals that the negative perceptions of managers and employees concerning tattooed people are deeply rooted in religious and cultural beliefs. More importantly, it extends the understanding of the reasons underlying the stigmatisation, prejudice, and stereotypical classification of people with tattoos and body piercings.

As the first study to empirically explore managers' and employees' perceptions of people with tattoos and body piercings in Nigeria, the most populous black nation on earth, the research shows that Nigerian society has not caught up with western societies in terms of collectively legitimatising and accepting people with tattoos and body piercings, a social choice that requires impartiality. Given the all-inclusiveness of this study in that the participants come from the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, the researcher can extrapolate the findings of this study as the perceptions of broader Nigerian society about people with tattoos and body piercings.

The findings have practical implications for practice in that it reveals that talented employees might suffer employment prejudice at interviews, preventing from gaining employment. According to the signalling model (Spence, 1973), having a tattoo would lead to negative labour market outcomes if employers prefer tattoo-free candidates.

Furthermore, the stigmatisation of having tattoos and body piercings may lead to the termination of employment of talented employees. This could consequently hamper organisational productivity and growth. Additionally, although tattoos and body piercings are accepted as cultural norms in many western societies (Laumann and Derick, 2006; Vanston and Scott, 2008), in Nigeria, the societal perceptions of people with tattoos and body piercings are negative and could have a psychological impact on the bearers of tattoos and body piercings. Future research could examine the psychological and sociological impacts of these societal perceptions of people with tattoos and body piercings. The researcher hopes that this study will stimulate further research on this topic in Africa, especially in Nigeria.

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