



# Don't judge a book by its cover

The acceptance of tattooing in German and Dutch recruitment processes.

**Master Thesis**

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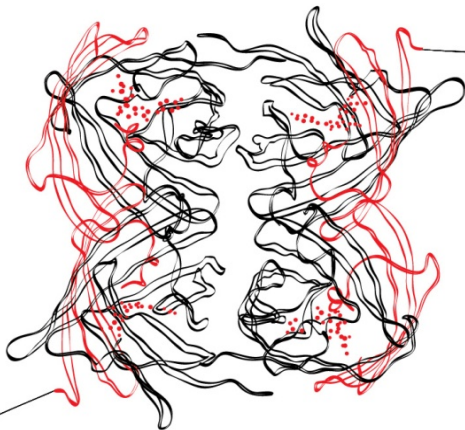
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## Table of contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	<i>Beauty stigma in the modern society .....</i>	<i>7</i>
2.2	<i>The definition of stigmas .....</i>	<i>8</i>
2.3	<i>Different types of stigmata and controllability .....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.4	<i>Type of Job .....</i>	<i>10</i>
2.5	<i>Gender .....</i>	<i>11</i>
2.6	<i>Cultural differences.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<b>3</b>	<b>Research Methodology .....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1	<i>Design .....</i>	<i>15</i>
3.2	<i>Instruments.....</i>	<i>15</i>
3.2.1	<i>Stimuli Applicant Pictures.....</i>	<i>16</i>
3.2.2	<i>Instrument General Questions.....</i>	<i>17</i>
3.2.2	<i>Code Book .....</i>	<i>17</i>
3.3	<i>Participants.....</i>	<i>17</i>
3.4	<i>Procedure.....</i>	<i>18</i>
3.5	<i>Analysis.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<b>4</b>	<b>Results .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion and Discussion.....</b>	<b>29</b>
5.1	<i>Theoretical Findings.....</i>	<i>29</i>
5.2	<i>Recent Cases of Discrimination based on Tattoos .....</i>	<i>31</i>
5.3	<i>Practical Implications.....</i>	<i>32</i>
5.4	<i>Limitations and future research .....</i>	<i>33</i>
5.5	<i>Conclusion .....</i>	<i>35</i>
<b>6</b>	<b>Citations.....</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>Appendix A : Instrument - Code Book .....</b>	<b>42</b>
	<b>Appendix B – General Frequency Table.....</b>	<b>43</b>
	<b>Appendix C – Frequency Table based on German results .....</b>	<b>44</b>
	<b>Appendix D – Frequency Table Based on dutch results .....</b>	<b>45</b>
	<b>Appendix E – Frequency Table based on Male Results .....</b>	<b>46</b>

**Appendix F – Frequency Table based on Female Results .....47**

**Appendix G - Cover letter German .....48**

**Appendix H - Cover letter Dutch.....49**

**Appendix I – Participation Mail German .....50**

**Appendix J – Participation Mail Dutch.....51**

## **Abstract**

**Background** - Getting a tattoo has traditionally been considered as a socially reprehensible consumption choice within the European society. Still, tattoos found their way back into the daily mainstream society. Due to their permanency they remain a risky decision within the working environment. Previous studies have mainly researched different styles and location of tattoos. However, this study is going to investigate whether tattoos are actually a risky choice for the future labour market.

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study was to investigate if the degree of tattooing has an influence on the acceptance of German and Dutch recruitment processes.

**Research Design** – A quantitative exploratory research with a 4 (no tattoo, low tattoo, medium tattoo, high tattoo) x 2 (nationality, gender) experimental design was used. The impact of these factors on the different tattoo conditions was investigated.

**Method** – 496 German and Dutch recruiters received an e-mail, consisting of a short motivation letter, applicant questions and photographs. In total 4 different photos (applicant with no tattoos, low tattoos, medium tattoos & high tattoos) have been randomly presented. The responses of the recruiters have been analyzed based on a codebook.

**Findings** – Results indicated that visible tattoos on job applicants impact the response of recruiters. Overall, recruiters responded more positively to job applicants without visible tattoos. However, while recruiters responded more positively to job applicants without visible tattoos, they made no difference concerning the degree of tattooing.

**Research Implications** – This study contributes to existing literature a closer look on decisions within recruitment processes based on physical appearance in Germany and The Netherlands. The strong point of this study is that the results are based on realistic reactions of actual recruiters.

**Practical Implications** – The findings indicate that visible tattoos do have an influence on recruitment processes in Germany and The Netherlands. Discrimination based on physical appearance still plays an important role within the working environment. Therefore, companies need to reconsider their recruitment.

**Keywords** - Tattoos – Discrimination – Recruitment – Gender Stereotyping – Physical appearance.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Skin is not only the protection of the human organ, but the body's most visible and largest organ itself (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). An individual can decide with this organ whatever he wants to do – some cover it in the beauty of fashion items, others cover their body fully in tattoos.

According to Patterson and Schroeder (2010) “the human skin is important not just because it is the focus of much consumer activity - skin reflects the dynamic relationship between inside and outside, self and society, between personal identity projects and marketplace cultures.” (p.254)

Over the past decade tattoos have progressively acquired the awareness of consumer researchers in the modern society (Shilling, 2005). These studies have been investigating in how far the modification of an individual's body has an impact on the relationship with the contemporary society.

The reason why people decide to change their bodies and differentiate themselves from the society is neither new nor unique, but the significance has changed accurately over time.

In a traditional sense tattoos were only used as a revealing symbol to emblemize an individuals' affiliation such as sailors, bikers, gang-members or punks. They use the art of tattooing to symbolize their outsider status (Fisher, 2002). However, the skin art has found its way back into the mainstream and fashion business nowadays (Fisher, 2012; Swanger, 2006).

Research of Bengtsson, Kjeldgaard and Östberg (2005) has shown that getting a tattoo is an individuals' way to symbolize himself to the outside in an authentic way (Bengtsson et al., 2005). In comparison to the mainstream trend nowadays, tattoos were associated with prisoners and sailors several decades ago (Atkinson, 2004). During the Second World War tattoos have even been used as a brand mark for Jews in concentration camps (Atkinson, 2004). However, since the rise of modern tattoo technologies, tattooing became cheaper and more accessible for all castes, which made it a fashionable aspect in the mainstream business (DeMello, 2000). Tattoos experienced a renaissance in the 1990's when tattoos were not necessarily related to minority groups anymore (Atkinson, 2002).

But still, tattoos remain permanent body decorations which are made in a different range, from small ones which are not visible on a clothed body to those which cover the entire body (Jones & Egan, 2008). Therefore, the personal choice of getting a new tattoo on the skin may not only have an influence on an individual's identity, but also the future possibilities regarding a job career (MacCormack, 2006).

Although it seems that tattoos in modern society are more accepted than several years ago, the professional workplace remains a barrier to tattooed individuals because discrimination still plays an important role within professional communities (McCarty, 2012; Resenhoeft, Villa & Wiseman, 2008). According to McLeod (2014) there has to be a differentiation between acquiring one tattoo and being “heavily tattooed”. Heavily tattooed people are still negatively evaluated, especially in the professional environment. This is due to the fact that heavily tattooed individuals must rectify their identity and settle their professional position compared to their slightly or none tattooed colleagues (McLeod, 2014). According to Atkinson (2002) “Tattooing strongly relates to one’s identity, particularly for those who have heavily altered their body with ink, and social reactions are a prominent aspect in the decision to become tattooed.” (p.211).

MacCormack (2006) argues that individuals with a heavily tattooed body are still alienated from the present society. According to Botz-Bornstein (2013) this is a question of perceived purity of the skin. According to research from Clerk (2009) tattoos have become a part of many individuals in different cultures, regardless of size. In the daily society tattoos are no longer only a brand mark of an outsider status. Where several years ago only criminals and lower middle-class people like sailors and construction workers had tattoos, nowadays also people with a reputable job like doctors, lawyers and managers do get tattoos (Atkinson, 2002; Clerk, 2009; Kjelgaard & Bengtsson, 2005; Kosut, 2008). These previous studies lead to the assumption that, in today’s world the presence of a tattoo might make a major difference when applying for a job, especially if customer contact is required. Although a lot of people do have tattoos these days, there is only limited research about whether the recruitment process is influenced by them (Balci, Sari & Mutlu, 2015). To investigate whether job applicants with visible tattoos are treated differently compared to applicants for the same job with fewer or no visible tattoos the following research question will be used:

***“ To what extent does tattooing have an influence on the acceptance of Dutch and German recruitment processes?”***

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to answer the research question, existing literature has been explored. First of all, in this theoretical framework the background and the mainstream trend of tattoos is discussed.

Furthermore, based on the stigmatization theory, it is explained why tattoos have been a socially marginal consumption choice from the very beginning. Then effects of tattoos on jobs that require customer contact will be discussed. Finally, the differences between the gender (male, female) and the nationality (German, Dutch) will be discussed. Altogether these topics form the theoretical framework of this study.

### *2.1 BEAUTY STIGMA IN THE MODERN SOCIETY*

One look in the daily society is sufficient to notice how important the power of attraction has become these days. Modern society is steadily confronted with beautiful people through different media channels, which creates a conscious as well as unconscious definition of beauty in the human brain (Särngren & Aberg, 2005). According to research from Särngren and Aberg (2005) this fashion trend has become a popular obsession which also entered the professional world. Nowadays the physical appearance of job applicants has become more important to professional recruiters than professional qualities and personal characteristics (Särngren & Aberg, 2005).

In accordance with these findings, Langlois, Kalakanis and Rubenstein (2000) have shown that the physical appearance has an important role when it comes to the judgment and treatment of employees. For instance, research has shown that attractive people are rated higher on professional expertise, social competences and adaptability compared to people with an unattractive appearance. Further research from Hosoda, Stone-Romero and Coats (2003) also found that people with an attractive appearance get higher rewards and their interactions are rated more positively. Furthermore, an important finding of this research was that physical attractive people are also rated higher by professionals within the working environment such as recruiters or managers (Hosoda et al., 2003). In addition, research from Hosoda et al. (2003) confirms that the physical appearance plays an even more important role when a crucial decision between two or more comparable people must be made. When a recruiter has to make a decision between two applicants with similar background, the physical attraction is an influencing factor (Griffiths, Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2016). The employee that fits more to the expectations of the

company, including dress code and general appearance, is more likely to be hired (Karlsson, 2011).

## *2.2 THE DEFINITION OF STIGMAS*

In the scientific literature there is a general definition of acceptance, defined by Goffman (1963) into different stigmas. The concept of 'stigma' is assigned in form of a prejudice which is put on an individual to stereotype him based on certain characteristics (Goffman, 1963). Stereotyping basically results in excluding or avoiding individuals or groups with the same characteristics (Ellis, 2015).

Individuals with a certain stigma diverge from the standard norm and are therefore often assessed with an inferior position in the society (Ellis, 2015). Stigmata can be linked to several characteristics. For example, the physical appearance where tattoos play a role, behavior (experience) or demographic segmentations (nationality). Essentially, a stigma is related to a context specific background, which means that it is not intrinsic to a certain person but a social context (Ellis, 2015). This social context determines, if a certain characteristic of a group or an individual is perceived as a stigma. Based on the criticism concerning the different views and interpretations, Link and Phelan (2001) describe this process as a struggle that occurs when individuals stereotype other individuals based on certain characteristics or physical appearances.

The stigma concept forms the moment that stereotyping, discrimination and loss of status come together in situations where one individual has the power above another individual (Link & Phelan, 2001), for example a recruiter or manager in the work environment. Goffman (1963) defines this kind of situations as a 'general defacement' of an individual that exhibits divergent character traits (stigma). Kurzban and Leary (2001) add to this definition that stigmatization is a phenomenon of regarding other individuals' traits as a reason to segregate them. Thus, stigmatization is defined as isolation or avoidance of individuals with divergent character traits. Furthermore, stigmatization is based on a social context. Thus, people within a group, who share the same standardization cartels might avoid these individuals as well (Kurzban and Leary, 2001).

However, the stigmatization theory is based on social processes and the interaction with other people. Since these interactions change over time, Goffman's theory about how individuals are treated in the modern society has been renewed in 2010. The renewal of this theory was



necessary since it was not as common to have visible tattoos when the theory was created as it is now. Therefore, it was more common in the past to stigmatize people for having tattoos, since it was, as already mentioned above, a sign for criminals or minority groups (Clerk, 2009).

According to Clerk (2009), tattoos are more common and accepted, especially in the young generation these days. Jetkins (2010) adds to these findings by stating that this type of stigmatization belongs to the identification process of the younger generation.

Based on the definition of stigmatization, this study will investigate in how far stigmatization appears within the job application process of people with a visual stigma (tattoo) compared to people with no (visual) stigma in terms of discrimination.

### *2.3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF STIGMATA AND CONTROLLABILITY*

According to Towler and Schneider (2005) stigmata can be divided into seven overlapping clusters: physical restrictions (disabilities), mental (depression), physical appearance (obesity), sexual preference (sexuality), origin and socially divergent (Nationality). However, due to the classification used during the research of Towler and Schneider (2005) people with a visible tattoo are divided in the same group (socially divergent) as drugaddicts and murderers.

Furthermore, these seven classifications of stigmatizations are again subdivided in three factors. The first factor states how socially undesirable the stigma is, the second one contains the power of self control (voluntary or involuntary) and the third one sympathy for the stigmatized individual (Towler & Schneider, 2005). Therefore, a job applicant with a certain disability might be preferred to other job applicants due to sympathy of the recruiter. In case of tattoos the job applicant has self-control of the decision to get a tattoo, thus the stigma is voluntary. To what extent this decision is symphazised and in how far the decision it is considered as socially desirable depends on the recruiter. The three factors indicate to what extent a job applicant is treated differently based on the given stigma.

Other results of the research from Towler and Schneider (2005) have shown that the reactions to a certain stigma can differ between the participants, but, of all stigmata listed above, people react most positively to individuals with a physical restriction (disability) or a different origin (nationality), thus involuntary stigmata.

According to Weiner, Perry and Magnusson (1988) controllability has a great influence on the judgment of different stigmata. Controllability, according to Hebl and Kleck (2002) refers to the

emergence of a certain stigma, which means that a stigma is judged more negatively depending on the self-control an individual has about the stigma. In case of tattoos the individual has a high controllability since the choice is voluntarily. Research from Kurzban and Leary (2001) shows that stigmata which are not controllable have a more negative influence on other people.

Furthermore, the results of the research from Hebl and Kleck (2010) indicate that these findings are also applicable to job interviews. Job applicants that are responsible for their stigma, like visible tattoos have been judged more negatively by the interviewer. Therefore, the stigmatization theory is applicable within this study, since the prediction that people with visible stigmata will be considered differently within recruitment processes is alienable. In the next section the effects of stigmatization on the recruitment process will be explained.

## *2.4 TYPE OF JOB*

The stigmatization within the working environment is not only limited to the origin or the color of an applicants' skin (McLaughlin, 2006). Research from Barret and Aspen (2009) has shown that the ideal of pure skin is also applicable to jobs within the customer service, which implies a lot of customer contact. Earlier research of McLaughlin (2006) has shown that overweight employees have been disadvantaged in fuctions which required customer contact. These insights might suggest that applicants with other visible stigmata, like tattoos, are also disadvantaged within the recruitment process. Further research has shown that the impact of visible tattoos in the work environment is systematically estimated by recruiters regarding the contact with clients and the type of the job (Aberg, 2005; Barrett & Aspen, 2009). This can be explained with the theory of aesthetic labor by Nickson and Warhurst (2001), which states that applicants that have physical attributes which fit into the visual expectations of customers, have a higher chance to be hired.

A study of Dean (2010) has found that tattoos are seen as inappropriate for jobs with customer contact, since consumers are less confident with the experienced service, therefore they do not fit the expectations of aesthetic labor. Once new employees are hired for an internal job, they become "walking billboards" (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2003, p. 318) and represent the company to the outer world, therefore employees which fit into the image of the company will be recruited first (Pettinger, 2004). The recruiters have the great responsibility to find adequate applicants that can represent the company to the outside world. Legally, recruiters

have the right to govern the physical appearance as long as it fits the interests of the company (Hay & Middlemiss, 2003). This has according to research from Nickson and Warhurst (2007) been widely accepted in terms of the relationship between customer related jobs and visible tattoos. Research from McGlashan and Nicols (2009) shows that most HR-employees rate visible tattoos for jobs where contact with customers is required as less acceptable.

However, an online survey of a career website (Vault.com) about the rating of co-workers has demonstrated that in 2001 81% of the participating employees felt that co-workers are hindered by the fact that they had visible tattoos, whereas only 64% of the participants felt this way in the same survey six years later (2007). Therefore, there is an upcoming trend regarding the acceptance within the customer service.

All in all, the acceptance of tattoos in higher managerial functions has been researched already, therefore the present study is specifically concerned with the job application process of lower customer functions. Recent research about this topic has been conducted insufficiently, while most of them do examine external factors and not the influence of tattoos on the recruitment process. Therefore, this study will investigate the acceptance on the degree of tattooing on functions with customer contact.

In the following two sections it will be explained how the stigmatization theory does not only play a role in the type of job, but also in the gender of the judging party and the nationality of the job applicant.

## *2.5 GENDER*

Gender is defined as a social construct that considers not only the biology of a human being, but also the social rules of a certain culture (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). In broader sense this means, although individuals are either born male or female, they still have to evolve their sense for femininity or masculinity within the culture they grow up (Butler, 1990). According to Butler (1990) this indicates ‘‘one is not born with gender, but becomes gendered through a stylized repetition of acts, which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time’’ (p. 140).

Also in the work environment employers tend to attribute different traits to male or female characteristics (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). For example, males are considered as tougher and more independent, whereas females are considered as more sensitive and emotional (De Lisi & Soundranayagam, 1990). This categorization of attributes to a certain gender is defined by

Schneider (2004) as gender stereotyping. Bordo (1990) adds that activities in the present society are categorized as either 'male' or 'female' and serve as a rule of gender-power relations. Additionally, McGinley (1991) proves that male individuals want to conform to dominant views of masculinity within society. This suggests that male recruiters might refuse job applicants with visible tattoos as a sign of power, rather than female recruiters.

Moreover, there are also differences within the dressing and grooming norms between male and female individuals. Since tattoos have become a fashion item within the daily society and women tend to be more fashionable than men (Schneider, 2004), female recruiters might accept job applicants with visible tattoos more than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, individuals acting contrary to gender expected traits are rated differently than individuals who conform (Schneider, 2004). For example, recruiters and HR-employees tend to have the authority to hire employees, which is a sign of power. Since power is a characteristic that is attributed to men, women in this position might rate differently. According to Abramson, Golberg and Greenberg (1978) 'females are often seen as more competent than their male counterparts, perhaps because they are viewed as having overcome more obstacles' (p. 128), thus female recruiters might base their hire decisions more professionally than their male counterparts. As already mentioned above, gender is related to the culture of an individual, therefore the cultural aspects will be explained in the following section.

## *2.6 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES*

The worth of an individual's body is uniquely subjected to social regulations including culture, religion and education. In addition, Featherstone (2010) broadens this definition by adding significant factors as clothing, aesthetics and taste to a modern consumer culture. The way an individual behaves and presents their body to the outside world is an indicator of having either accepted or rejected the values of a culture. The definition of Maguire and Pitceathly (2002) states that individual bodies have a certain market value in this modern society where physical appearance plays an important role. However, this value differs per country since the judgment of certain stigmata are also differently interpreted within a country's culture. Although Germany and the Netherlands share a border and a similar language, there are quite some differences between those two nationalities when it comes to the work culture (Stantat, Böhme, Schipolowski & Haak, 2016). In general, both countries are known for their directness and punctuality. Furthermore,

Germans are known for firmly following procedures and strict rules, whereas Dutch employees handle a calmer approach (Undutchables, 2018).

In general, Germany ranks higher than the Netherlands when it comes to the degree of formality, professionalism and authority in the workplace. According to research from Undutchables (2018) employees are generally treated as equals in the Netherlands, despite their rank and position within the company. These findings are in line with a study of LegalKnowledge (2014) which shows that Dutch employers take a more personal approach in the working environment, whereas German employers keep it professional. Furthermore, the study confirms that the German perspective is more based on personal care, including physical appearance and clothing, while Dutch employers focus more on the personality (LegalKnowledge, 2014). This view is in line with results from Mack and Rock (1998), which state that some cultures are more personality-based and put the focus more on the individual itself rather than on the work experience. This might imply, that job applicants with visible tattoos are more accepted in The Netherlands than in Germany.

Since stigmata can occur whenever there is a sign of hierarchical differences and the physical appearance, it is expected that German employers with a higher rank accept tattoos less than employers in the Netherlands.

All in all, the perceptions of tattoos seem to have changed over time. Although it was seen as socially reprehensible consumption choice in traditional sense, it found its way back to the mainstream society. However, it still seems to be unclear whether job applicants with visible tattoos are an adequate choice to hire for current positions with customer contact since employees represent the image of the company. Therefore, it seems that the professional workplace remains a barrier to tattooed individuals because discrimination based on physical appearance still plays an important role. According to the stigmatization theory, the social context, including demographics such as gender and culture, determines whether this discrimination takes place. This research is important because of the increased popularity of tattooing, since recent studies have shown that in European society 38% of the generation between 18-29 have visible tattoos (Aslam & Owen, 2013). This study examines the prejudices that recruiters in the Netherlands and Germany might have in relation to tattooing. Since most research has studied only the differences

between the Western and European culture, there is not known yet in how far recruiters of these particular cultures judge tattooed job applicants.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In the following chapter the research design will be explained in detail. In this context, further insight into the the design, selection and demographics of the participants, the measurements and the analysis will be given.<sup>1</sup>

#### *3.1 DESIGN*

This quantitative exploratory research makes use of a 4 (no tattoo, low tattoo, medium tattoo, high tattoo) x2 (Germany, The Netherlands) experimental design. The material used within this study consists of a short motivation letter, applicant questions and applicant photographs. The four applications are utilized and describe 4 male German (Stephan Meyer) and 4 male Dutch (Stephan Mulder) applicants. To prevent name discrimination, the applicants all have the same name within the country. The short motivation letter does not provide any background information about the former experience since this is one of the questions which is provided within the application itself. Furthermore, the questions are based on general information about the job, like working schedules and the expected language knowledge.

#### *3.2 INSTRUMENTS*

This research included different kind of stimuli both visual (4 pictures in 4 conditions) and written (3 general questions in form of a mail). Furthermore, a code book was used as instrument to label the variables for this study in order to analyze them. Those two instruments are presented in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>1</sup> The research method was developed in close cooperation with Giessler (2018) who used the identical procedure and approach to investigate the influence of facial hair within the recruitment process of customer related jobs.

### *3.2.1 STIMULI APPLICANT PHOTOS*

The mail sent out to the recruiters contained one of the four pictures below. An equal number of each picture has been attached to the mails. Since the total number of recruiters was 496, each of the photos was sent to 124 recruiters. The photos are presented below.



*Figure 1: Condition 1 – No tattoo*



*Figure 2: Condition 2 – Low tattoo*



*Figure 3: Condition 3 – Medium Tattoo*



*Figure 4: Condition 4 – High tattoo*



### *3.2.2 INSTRUMENT GENERAL QUESTIONS*

The mail sent out to the recruiters contained general questions about working hours, availability and languages. Below the three final questions are listed.

**Question 1:** Is the advertised vacancy a full-time or part-time job? How flexible are the working hours?

**Question 2:** Is the customer service available 365 days a year, including public holidays and weekends?

**Question 3:** Which preferable languages are spoken in the company?

### *3.2.2 CODE BOOK*

The code book (Appendix A) consisted of thirteen variables based on a previous conducted pretest. The structure of the code book resulted from the order the variables were visible to the researcher by looking at the returned emails. The first two variables described the demographics of the recruiters, including their gender and their nationality. The following three variables referred to the duration of time the recruiters took to respond, the number of words they used and the availability of an automatically generated response that confirms the receipt of the mail. The next four variables were related to the general appearance of the email including the used tone of voice, salutation as well as the language and text extendedness. The variables 'job information' and 'extras' referred to the actual content of the email. These variables contained information about the extra effort recruiters took to answer the mail, whereas the amount of answered questions and additional information about the job applicant.

### *3.3 PARTICIPANTS*

A total amount of 496 recruiters and human resource managers within the customer service branch located in all parts of the Netherlands and Germany have received the applications. Finally, 260 have participated in this research by sending answers to the questions which were provided. Figure 1 shows the overall response rate of the study. 306 of the contacted recruiters and managers replied to the provided questions which results in a response rate of 61.69%.

Besides gender and nationality, no further demographic data about the recruiters and human resource managers were available.

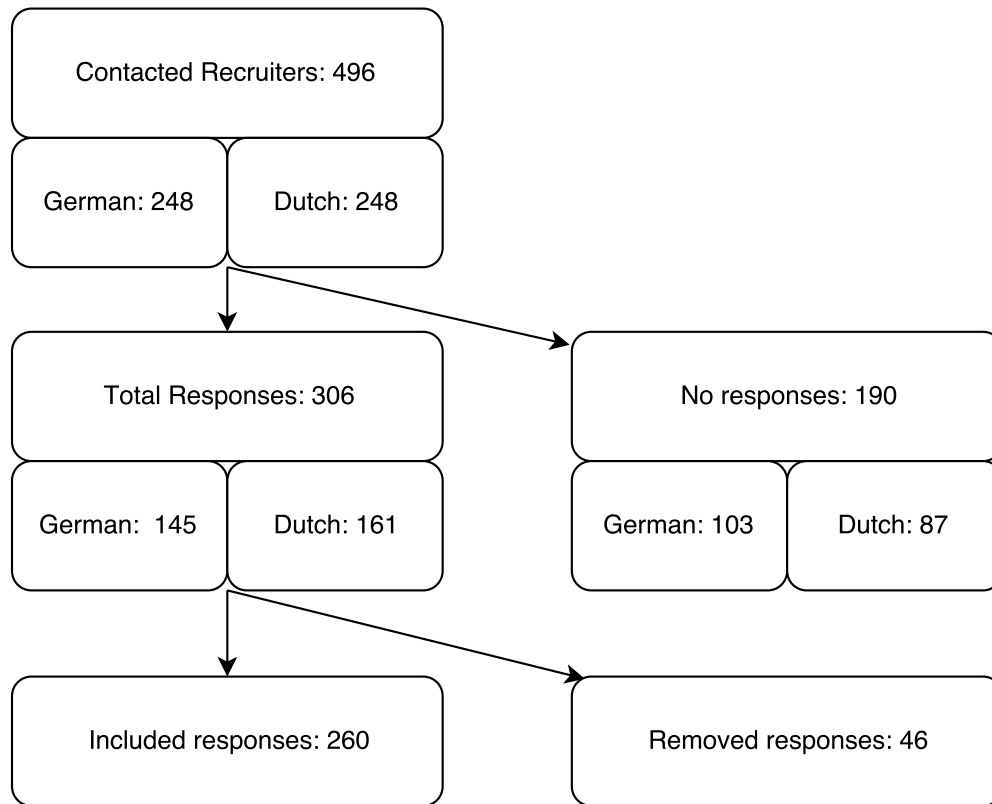


Figure 5: Flow diagram of the overall response rate

### 3.4 PROCEDURE

A Pretest was conducted contacting 10 German and 10 Dutch recruiters to find out which possible reactions there could be expected from the request made. After that, 496 recruiters (248 German, 248 Dutch) received an email asking them for general information about the advertised job. The contact details were obtained through multiple online sites that offer job vacancies in different categories and countries. All the materials that were provided in this email were mentioned in the previous paragraph. After two weeks the time for responses was over and the analysis was proceeded. To ensure ethical correctness, an information mail was sent at the end of this timeframe to all participating recruiters to inform them that they participated in a scientific research. The German version of the mail can be found in Appendix I and de Dutch version in Appendix I. They were ensured that their data where treated anonymously, received information

about the goals of the research and based on this knowledge, the participants had the chance to withdraw their participation from the research by responding to the mail. A total of 46 recruiters withdrew their participation and were removed from the research.

The codebook can be found in Appendix A.

### *3.5 ANALYSIS*

Based on the conducted Pretest a codebook was developed to analyze the responses of the recruiters that participated in this study. The codebook can be found in Appendix A. The literature review has shown, that the two independent variables nationality and gender can act as predictors of acceptance. All remaining variables were tested against those two to determine if nationality or gender of the recruiters had a significant effect on all other dependent variables. To prevent bias in the response of the recruiters the stimulus material consisted of two variants of faces with diverging colors of facial hair. However, that results showed no significant difference in the response to the different faces so this variable was not considered into further analysis. Because the sample size of this research was limited the decision was made to include marginal significant results with an  $\alpha$  of .1.

The variables considered as most relevant for this research were duration of response, tone of voice, salutation, language and text extendedness, job information and extra information. Most of the variables were defined through two values except from tone of voice and extra information. In order to measure those two concepts correctly all containing six values were added up to form a total score for each variable which had a range from 0 to 6. Those total scores were used in the analysis to find out the coherence towards the independent variables nationality and gender of the recruiters. The measures used in this analysis were chi-square tests for independence, univariate Anovas, independent-sample T-tests and Pearson correlation coefficient. The results of the tests are presented in the following section.

## 4 RESULTS

In this section, the results of the statistical analyses are described. The frequencies per variables and underlying values based on the 4 manipulated conditions used in this research namely no tattoo condition, low tattoo condition, medium tattoo condition and high tattoo condition can be found in Appendix B. The frequencies for the German respondents can be found in Appendix C and the Dutch frequencies are displayed Appendix D. The frequencies of the male recruiters can be found in Appendix E and the frequencies for the female recruiters are displayed in Appendix F.

### 4.1 Duration of response

To determine, if there was an effect from degree of tattooing on the duration of response, a crosstab analyses was conducted. The results show, that there is no statistical significant link between conditions and duration of response,  $\chi^2 (3) = 4.48, p = .22$ . That indicates, that the degree of tattooing had no influence on the duration of response the recruiters used to respond to the received emails.

#### 4.1.1 Interaction with Nationality

To test an interaction effect of degree of tattooing and nationality of the recruiters on the duration of response, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the German subpopulation showed no statistical significant effect of conditions on duration of response,  $\chi^2 (3) = .27, p = .97$ . For the Dutch subpopulation, a significant link between condition and duration of response was found,  $\chi^2 (3) = 11.10, p = .07$ . That indicates, that the nationality of the recruiters had an influence on the duration of response used to respond to the received emails for the Dutch, but not for the German subpopulation.

#### 4.1.2 Interaction with Gender

Additionally, an interaction effect of condition and gender of the recruiters on the duration of response was tested. The results of the Female subpopulation showed no statistical significant effect of condition on duration of response,  $\chi^2 (3) = 2.70, p = .44$ . For the Male subpopulation,

there was also no statistical significant link of condition and duration of response found,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.87, p = .60$ . That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no influence on the duration of response used to respond to the received emails.

## 4.2 Number of words

To determine, if there was an effect from degree of tattooing on the number of words, an univariate Anova was conducted. No significant effect of condition on number of words was found,  $F(18, 244) = 27.68, p = .67$ . That indicates, that the degree of tattooing did not influence the number of words the recruiters used to respond to the received emails.

### 4.2.1 Interaction with Nationality

An interaction effect of degree of tattooing and nationality of the recruiters on the number of words was tested and this variable was added to the analysis. The results show, that there is no statistical significant link between conditions and nationality related to the number of words,  $F(1) = .86, p = 0.77$ . The nationality of the recruiters had no main effect on the number of words the recruiters used to respond to the received emails, neither was there an interaction effect with condition (see table 1).

*Table 1: Univariate Anova for interaction with nationality*

	Total		
	<i>F</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Condition	27.67	18, 244	.67
Nationality	33.02	18, 244	.17
Interaction	.86	1, 244	.77

### 4.2.2 Interaction with Gender

To find out, if the nationality of the recruiters had yielded an interaction effect with degree of tattooing on the number of words, this variable was added to the analysis. The results show, that there is no statistical significant interaction effect of conditions and nationality on the number of words,  $F(18, 256) = 24.31, p = .21$ . Nationality of the recruiters had no main effect on the number of words the recruiters used to respond to the received emails, neither was there an interaction effect with the degree of tattooing (see table 2).

Table 2: Univariate Anova for interaction with gender

	Total		
	<i>F</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Condition	18.51	18, 256	.58
Gender	24.31	18, 256	.21
Interaction	1.66	1, 256	.62

### 4.3 Tone of voice

To determine, if there was an effect from the degree of tattooing on tone of voice, an univariate Anova was conducted. Tone of voice was computed out of the six variables (*kind, open, inviting, rude, touchy, denying*). The new scale ranged from -3 until +3. The results show, that there is a statistical significant effect of degree of tattooing on tone of voice,  $F(3, 256) = 5.20, p < .01$ . That indicates, that the degree of tattoos did influence the tone of voice the recruiters used to respond to the received emails. A post hoc test revealed, that in the no tattoos condition, an overall more positive tone of voice ( $M = 1.77$ ) was received than in the medium tattoos condition ( $M = 0.91$ ) and the high tattoo condition ( $M = 0.85$ ). All other group comparisons are not statistically significant. Overall, the degree of tattoos had an influence on the tone of voice the recruiters used to respond to the received emails (see Table 3).

Table 3: Post hoc test

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1 No tattoo	1.77	1.33				
2 Low tattoo	1.50	1.18	.13			
3 Medium tattoo	0.91	1.90	.09	.04		
4 High tattoo	0.85	1.85	.10	.03	.01	

#### 4.3.1 Interaction with Nationality

An interaction effect of degree of tattooing and nationality of the recruiters on the tone of voice was tested. The results show, that there is no statistical significant interaction effect of the conditions and nationality related to the tone of voice,  $F(3, 252) = 0.89, p = .45$ . The results also

reveal that the nationality of the recruiter has no main effect on tone of voice (see table 4).

*Table 4: Univariate Anova for interaction with nationality*

	Total		
	<i>F</i>	dfs	<i>p</i>
Condition	5.26	3, 252	.00
Nationality	0.97	1, 252	.33
Interaction	0.89	3, 252	.45

#### 4.3.2 Interaction with Gender

To test, if there is an interaction effect of condition and gender of the recruiters on the tone of voice, this variable was added to the analysis. The univariate ANOVA conducted reveals that there is not significant interaction effect of condition and gender of the recruiter on tone of voice,  $F(3, 162) = 0.16$   $p = .92$ . Gender has also no significant main effect on tone of voice (see Table 5).

*Table 5: Univariate Anova for interaction with gender*

	Total		
	<i>F</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Condition	3.79	3, 162	.01
Gender	2.46	1, 162	.12
Interaction	0.16	3, 162	.92

#### 4.4 Salutation

To determine, if there was an effect from degree of tattooing on salutation, a crosstab analyses was conducted. The results show, that there is a statistical significant link between conditions and salutation,  $\chi^2(3) = 28.05$ ,  $p < .01$ . That indicates, that the degree of tattoos has an influence on the salutation the recruiters used to respond to the received emails. A closer look at the results with a post hoc test revealed, that in the no tattoo condition, an overall more formal salutation ( $M = 1.40$ ) was received than in the low tattoo ( $M = 1.61$ ), medium tattoo ( $M = 1.77$ ) and high tattoo condition ( $M = 1.78$ ). All other group comparisons are not statistically significant. That indicates, that the degree of tattoos had an influence on the salutation the recruiters used to respond to the

received emails (see Table 6).

Table 6: Post hoc test

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1 No tattoo	1.40	0.49				
2 Low tattoo	1.61	0.49	.21			
3 Medium tattoo	1.77	0.42	.37	.16		
4 High tattoo	1.78	0.42	.38	.16	.01	

#### 4.4.1 Interaction with Nationality

To find out, if there is an interaction effect of the degree of tattooing and the nationality of the recruiters on salutation, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the German subpopulation showed a statistical significant link between conditions and salutation,  $\chi^2(3) = 20.26, p = .00$ . The results of the Dutch subpopulation,  $\chi^2(3) = 6.12, p = .11$  showed no statistical significant link. That indicates, that the salutation used to respond to the received emails had an influence in Germany, but no influence in the Netherlands.

#### 4.4.2 Interaction with Gender

To test, if there is an interaction effect of the degree of tattooing and gender of the recruiters on the salutation, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the Male subpopulation showed no statistical significant link between conditions and salutation,  $\chi^2(3) = 4.60, p = .20$  nor did the results of the Female subpopulation,  $\chi^2(3) = 12.70, p = .10$ . That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no influence on the salutation used to respond to the received emails.

### 4.5 Language and text extendedness

To determine, if there is an effect of the degree of tattooing on language and text extendedness, a crosstab analyses was conducted. The results show, that there is no statistical significant link between conditions and language,  $\chi^2(6) = 5.59, p = .47$ . In contrast, there is a statistical significant link between conditions and text extendedness,  $\chi^2(9) = 4.36, p = .00$ . That indicates, that the degree of tattoos had no influence on the language, but on the text extendedness the recruiters used to respond to the received emails.



#### 4.5.1 Interaction with Nationality

To find out, if there is an interaction effect of the conditions and nationality of the recruiters on the language and text extendedness, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the German subpopulation showed no statistical significant link between conditions and language,  $\chi^2 (3) = 4.27, p = .23$  nor did the results of the Dutch subpopulation,  $\chi^2 (6) = 2.40, p = .89$ . That indicates, that the effect of the degree of tattooing on the language the recruiters used to respond to the received emails is not moderated by nationality. The results of the German subpopulation also showed no significant statistical significant link between conditions and text extendedness,  $\chi^2 (6) = 25.48, p = .57$ . For the Dutch subpopulation, a marginially significant result is found  $\chi^2 (9) = 14.90, p = .09$ . That indicates, that the degree of tattooing had no influence on the text extendedness within the German subpopulation. For the Dutch subpopulation the degree of tattooing influenced the language and text extendedness, which means that Dutch recruiters replied overall more extensive to the mails (see Table 7).

Table 7: Chi Square Test for the variable language & test extendedness and nationality

Variable	Total			German			Dutch		
	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2$	df	p
Language	5.59	6	.47	4.27	3	.23	2.40	6	.89
Text extendedness	4.36	9	.00	25.48	6	.57	14.90	9	.09

#### 4.5.2 Interaction with Gender

To find out, if there is a moderation effect of gender of the recruiters on the language and text extendedness, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the Male subpopulation showed no statistical significant link between conditions and language,  $\chi^2 (6) = 6.08, p = .41$  nor did the results of the Female subpopulation,  $\chi^2 (9) = 18.25, p = .13$ . That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no moderating effect on the language the recruiters used to respond to the received emails.

The results of the Male subpopulation also showed no significant statistical significant link between conditions and text extendedness,  $\chi^2 (3) = 4.86, p = .91$  nor did the results of the Female subpopulation,  $\chi^2 (3) = 8.64, p = .62$ . That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no moderating effect on the text extendedness the recruiters used to respond to the received emails

(see table 8).

*Table 8: Chi Square Test for the variable language & test extendedness and gender*

Variable	Total			Male			Female		
	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i>	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i>	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i>
Language	5.59	6	.47	18.25	6	.13	6.08	3	.41
Text extendedness	4.36	9	.00	4.86	3	.91	8.64	3	.62

#### 4.6 Job information

To determine, if there was an effect from degree of tattooing on job information, a crosstab analyses was conducted. There is no statistical significant link between conditions and job information,  $\chi^2 (3) = 1.92, p = .59$ . That indicates, that the amount of tatoos had no influence on the job information the recruiters used to respond to the received emails.

##### 4.6.1 Interaction with Nationality

To find out, if the nationality of the recruiters had a moderating effect on the job information, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the German subpopulation showed no statistical significant link between conditions and job information,  $\chi^2 (3) = 1.09, p = .78$  nor did the results of the Dutch subpopulation,  $\chi^2 (3) = 1.02, p = .79$ . That indicates, that the effect of condition on job information is not moderated by the nationality of the recruiters.

##### 4.6.2 Interaction with Gender

To find out, if there is an interaction effect of condition and gender of the recruiters on the job information, this variable was added to the analysis. The results of the Male subpopulation showed no statistical significant link between conditions and job information,  $\chi^2 (3) = 4.10, p = .26$  nor did the results of the Female subpopulation,  $\chi^2 (3) = 6.30, p = .10$ . That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no moderating effect on the job information used to respond to the received emails.

#### 4.6 Extra information

To determine, if there was an effect of degree of tattooing on extra information, an univariate Anova was conducted. The results show, that there is a statistical significant effect of degree of tattooing on extra information,  $F(3, 256) = 7.95, p < .01$ . A closer look on the results with a post hoc test revealed, that in the no tattoo condition, significantly more extra information ( $M = 1.09$ ) was received than in the medium tattoo condition ( $M = 0.61$ ). Also, the mean difference between the no tattoo condition and the high tattoo condition ( $M = 0.79$ ) is marginally significant. All other group comparisons are not statistically significant. That indicates, that applicants without tattoos received more extra information about available vacancies (see Table 8).

Table 8: Post hoc test

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1 No tattoo	1.09	0.79				
2 Low tattoo	0.86	0.61	0.11			
3 Medium tattoo	0.61	0.57	0.10	0.24		
4 High tattoo	0.79	0.57	0.11	0.16	0.16	

##### 4.6.1 Interaction with Nationality

To find out, if the effect on extra information is moderated by nationality of the recruiters, this variable was added to the analysis. The results show, that there is a statistical significant interaction effect of conditions and nationality on the extra information,  $F(3, 252) = 2.29, p = .01$ . Also, there is a main effect of nationality on extra information. That indicates, that the nationality of the recruiters had an influence on the extra information the recruiters used to respond to the received emails (see Table 9).

Table 9: Univariate Anova for interaction with nationality

	Total		
	<i>F</i>	dfs	<i>p</i>
Condition	10.47	3, 252	.01
Nationality	2.29	1, 252	.02
Interaction	3.28	3, 252	.05

#### 4.6.2 Interaction with Gender

To find out, if the gender of the recruiters had a moderating effect on the extra information, this variable was included. The results show, that there is no statistical significant link between conditions and gender related to the extra information,  $F(3, 162) = 7.70, p = .20$ . That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no influence on the extra information the recruiters used to respond to the received emails, nor is there an interaction with the degree of tattooing (see table 10).

*Table 10: Univariate Anova for interaction with gender*

	Total		
	<i>F</i>	dfs	<i>p</i>
Condition	7.70	3, 162	.20
Gender	.27	1, 162	.46
Interaction	.45	3, 162	.81

#### 4.6.3 Interaction with Gender

To find out, if the gender of the recruiters had a moderating effect on the number of words, this variable was included to the analysis. The results show, that there is no statistical significant link between conditions and gender related to the number of words,  $F(18) = 24.96, p = .13$ . Also, no main effect of gender of the recruiter as found. That indicates, that the gender of the recruiters had no influence on the number of words the recruiters used to respond to the received emails.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted in order to answer the overall research question:

‘‘To what extent does tattooing have an influence on the acceptance of Dutch and German recruitment processes?’’

Therefore, the study tested several variables in reference to acceptance within recruitment processes (Duration of response, Number of Words, Tone of Voice, Salutation, Language & Text Extendedness, Job Information and Extra Information).

The study focused mainly on recruitment processes within the customer service sector whereby direct client contact is required as a main task of the applicant. Furthermore, the study focused on the differences between the German and Dutch nationality.

The following paragraphs will discuss the findings of all analyses done in detail and link the findings to existing studies. Then, limitations of this present study and future implications will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will finish with an overall conclusion of the whole study.

### 5.1 THEORETICAL FINDINGS

First of all, the main finding in several analyses was that there is a difference between job applicants with no visible tattoos and job applicants with visible tattoos. However, this study has shown that there is no difference within the degree of tattooing. Thus, job applicants without visible tattoos have in several regards been treated more positively.

For example, the overall tone of voice of job applicants was more positive, which means that the recruiters answered the mails in a more positive way and took more effort to answer them. This is confirmed by the degree of extra information, since job applicants without visible tattoos also receive the highest degree of additional information about vacancies.

Futhermore, recruiters used a more formal way to answer the mails of job applicants with no visible tattoos. The mails of job applicants with visible tattoos were answered in a more informal way overall. This might suggest that the personality of job applicants with visible tattoos is considered as more relaxed.

The findings of this study are in line with research from McCarty (2012) and Resenhoeft, Villa

and Wiseman (2008) who found out that discrimination based on visible tattoos still plays a role within professional communities. Since German companies put the focus more on professionalism, the theory of aesthetic labour (Nickson et al., 2001) is applicable. The theory states that the physical appearance of an individual fits to the aesthetic perspectives of the organization, for example a recruiter of a corporate company expects the job applicant to be of smart and professional appearance.

Once new employees are hired, they become ‘‘walking billboards’’ (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2003, p. 318) representing the company to the outer world. Job applicants with visible tattoos fit less into the picture of German recruiters and therefore receive less positive mails (Pettinger, 2004). Also, there was a statistical significant link within the salutation of the German subpopulation, which shows that German recruiters overall answered the mails in a more formal way. However, there was no significant link within the Dutch subpopulation. These findings are in line with research of the recruitment company Undutchables (2018) which states that German companies score higher in the level of formality and professionalism. This can be explained with the theory of aesthetic labor by Nickson et al. (2001), which states that applicants that have physical attributes which fit into the visual expectations of customers, have a higher chance to be hired. Furthermore, studies of Undutchables (2018) and LegalKnowledge (2014) have shown that German companies are more hierarchic. Since both of these studies have shown that Dutch employees are more treated as equals, this could also be a sign for less discrimination within Dutch recruitment processes.

All in all, the responses in all degrees of tattooing have been positive. Therefore, the findings of this research are in line with previous research of Atkinson (2002), Clark (2009) and Kosut (2006), all stating that tattoos find their way into the modern professional society. Still, physical attraction and appearance remain an influencing factor when it comes to work-related decisions within companies (Hurley-Hanson & Giannantonio, 2016).

In contrast to several results which show that male recruiters react more positively to job applicants with visible tattoos, this study shows that the gender has no statistically significant influence. Since tattooing has become part of the young self-identification process (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007), it seems that tattoos have also been more accepted by females. In general, tattoos have become more accepted by men and women.

However, this study confirms that visible tattoos still are an important factor within service related industries, which implies a lot of customer contact (McLaughlin, 2006). All in all, it plays an important role whether the job applicant does fit to the desired physical appearance of the recruiter or not (Hay & Middlemiss, 2003). It seems that applicants with a pure skin still have a better chance to receive an invitation to a job interview. However, as soon as a company is interested in a job applicant with visible tattoos, the degree of tattooing does not matter.

## *5.2 RECENT CASES OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON TATTOOS*

The following section presents recent cases of discrimination based on visible tattoos to underline that it is an actual problem. At the end of the section an example is presented how companies might protect their employees against discrimination.

The findings of this study that discrimination based on physical appearance in the workplace still plays a role, is in line with several other studies. Homans (2017) describes the discrimination based on physical appearance as ‘‘overshadowing of the external aspects of a person over the intellectuality and skill that one encompasses’’ (p. 18). At the moment there is no law that forbids the discrimination based on physical appearance in the work environment. Since work-related decisions are to the employer’s discretion, there is no possibility to investigate if the hiring decision is based on physical appearance (James, 2008).

A recent case has shown that a consultant had her contract terminated because she had a butterfly on her foot and contravened the no-visible-tattoo policy of the firm by failing to cover it up (Clark, 2016). The same research describes the case of a waitress who has been fired due to a word she got tattooed on a forearm. In 2014 a male employer was forced to resign his job because his new manager disliked that his whole body was covered in tattoos.

It is important that companies have clear statements about the expectations of physical appearance. For example, McDonald’s recently came up with a new policy stating that ‘‘visible tattoos, whether they are Henna-type ones or the real deal, are allowed if they are unobtrusive and inoffensive’’.

The actual situation concerning tattoos in the workplace gives a lot of space for further research. As described above, the first woman had an image of a butterfly on her foot, the second one a

word on her forearm and the third one was fully covered in tattoos. Therefore, the kind of tattoos and the place on the skin are also interesting topics for further research. Also, the companies the three persons worked for were highly different. The opportunities for future research will be explained in section 5.3. The following section will give advice how companies could prevent discrimination based on physical appearance.

### *5.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS*

Although there is the saying ‘‘don’t judge a book by its cover’’, which also applies to the professional world, in the European society it is unusual to see a lawyer or a doctor with blue hair. Even though it is more important how capable an individual is at doing his function, recent research has shown some statistics about the discrimination and prejudices within the work environment.

There is no statistic evidence that verifies a direct correlation between work culture and physical appearance (Manglona, 2015). However, an individual’s appearance, either attractive or unattractive influences several factors within the workplace. According to the stigmatization theory, tattoos are placed in the same category as obesity, namely ‘discrimination based on physical appearance’. A study has shown that the wage of white employees who gained extra weight dropped by 9% (Van Dusen, 2008). Since tattoos and obesity are placed in the same category, similar cases might happen for employees with visible tattoos. Morsch (2007) argues that although physical appearance is the first thing you notice about an individual, factors such as skills and competencies are more important.

Even though tattoos are more accepted in the daily society and discrimination in the work place based on physical appearance should not be allowed anymore, this study proves that it still plays an important role.

Based on the theoretical findings, companies could ask job applicants for Curriculum vitae’s without pictures. The first check within the recruitment process would hence take place without discrimination and purely be based on the skills and competencies of an individual. As soon as the recruiters invite the applicants for an interview they know at least that they have the required level of experience for the job. Furthermore, job applicants will not only be judged based on their overall looks, including gesture and facial expressions. Instead, the job applicants



have the possibility to convince with personality.

Another implication for companies to prevent discrimination based on physical appearance is following the trend of job fairs for young professionals. According to Cascio (2018) more and more companies participate in those fairs to attract young people. On these fairs, the recruiters and HR-employees can have direct contact with potential job applicants and match the right candidates for their company. Therefore, job applicants with visible tattoos have the chance to convince the recruiters on the person.

#### *5.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH*

The results of this study must be viewed in the light of its limitations. First of all, there has only been one male applicant, presented in four different tattoo conditions (no tattoos/light tattoos/medium tattoos/high tattoos), this research has no significance for female applicants. Future research might expand the stimulus materials to include more subjects varying in certain characteristics as attractiveness, age and race would help to identify the boundary conditions of the tattoo stigma.

The second limitation is the source of the contacted recruiters. Especially in the Netherlands it seems to be more usual to hire external recruitment companies to find adequate companies. Since recruiters out of the company might not know the organizational culture perfectly, it is possible that they can not match the candidates purely based on their physical appearance. Furthermore, it is unknown to what extent the recruiters were involved within the process. External recruitment companies often have to gain their targets. Therefore, it is possible, that they just link random candidates to open vacancies. Since internal recruiters know the culture of the organization better they might take a closer look at the profile of the candidates. Also, the structure and the size of the company is an important factor. No difference has been made between corporate companies and start-ups. Start-up companies might put the focus more on the personality of the job applicants, whereas corporate companies are more focused on competencies and skills.

For future research it might be useful to capture effect contextual issues as size and organizational culture beforehand and differentiate them.

Furthermore, besides the gender of the recruiters there are no further demographics like age or educational level known. Since tattoos were less accepted several decades ago, it might be that recruiters from an older generation have a different view on job applicants with visible tattoos. Future research should investigate not only demographics of the company, but also demographics of the recruiters.

Moreover, it seemed that the larger number of recruiters have been female ( $M = 51$ ) compared with their male counterparts ( $M = 18$ ). Therefore, the control sample is too small to come to general conclusions.

However, a strong point of this study has been the number of recruiters that participated. Since they took the time to reply to the mails of the applicants carefully, they took the effort to go through the application. Also, the recruiters were not aware of the fact that they participated in a research, therefore it can be suggested that they responded to the mails authentically.

Furthermore, there is likely some range restriction in the type of job since only the field of customer services has been considered, and these functions involve direct client contact. However, the expectations might differ within different job dimensions. Therefore, future research should focus more on other job dimensions to analyse to what extent other factors, such as degree of creativity or independence have an influence on the hiring choice. Broadening the study to other types of job dimensions and job settings for example more artistic and creative functions, may reveal different perceptions associated with tattoos. While this study reveals a slightly negative stigma associated with job applicants in the pre-hiring phase of the recruitment process, an interesting territory for future research remains. What if employees get tattoos later in the recruitment process or once they are hired: would it affect the performance appraisal or opportunities for promotion?

The occupational career is also a remarkable field for future research. In this study, no proper CV has been attached to the stimulus material, but the reactions associated with the tattoo conditions might change on the side of the recruiter as soon as the applicant has relevant job experience or a required college degree. Therefore, a suggestion for future research is to include different work experiences and graduation degrees to insure the fact that rejections are based on the physical appearance and not on insufficient experience.

Results of Totten et al. (2009) show that there is little evidence of a negative stigma associated with tattoos. This suggests that characteristics of those judging individuals are an interesting field for future research. In this case, there were no photographs of the judging recruiters included. Future research might investigate face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, other forms of visible body modification such as piercings and eargauges should be investigated. However, in this study photographs of job applicants have been used on purpose rather than actual face-to-face interviews in order to control all possible verbal and nonverbal variations that can occur in face-to-face conversations.

Another method that might be useful for future research is ‘mystery shopping’ to get a better insight in the reasons why companies are less interested in job applicants with visible tattoos. While talking face-to-face with the recruiters, job applicants also experience gesture, facial expressions and the organizational culture. Furthermore, by making use of mystery shopping, job applicants can also present themselves and talk more about their personality and former job experience.

## *5.5 CONCLUSION*

The physical appearance of individuals plays an important role in the daily society, wherein individuals constantly strive to conform to the rules. This study has proven that the physical appearance is one of the focus points when it comes to hiring decisions within companies. By putting the focus too much on the physical appearance, recruiters might fail to select adequate candidates based on competencies and skills.

Some unwritten rules based on discrimination of physical appearance still apply in different cultures and individuals are used to certain images. Therefore the saying ‘‘don’t judge a book by its cover’’, does not really apply in this context since it is quite unusual to see a full tattooed doctor or lawyer.

Due to the fact that not only time but also perception changes, it seems that tattoos in the work environment are more accepted than several decades ago, especially since the youth of today grows up with a totally different perception of tattoos. Therefore, this perception might change entirely within the following years and needs to be elaborated more.

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## APPENDIX A : INSTRUMENT - CODE BOOK

Variable	Definition	Values
1 Nationality	Nationality of the recruiter.	German Dutch
2 Gender	Gender of the recruiter.	Male Female
3 Face	The stimulus material the recruiters where exposed to.	Dark hair Ginger hair
4 Automatic response	An automatic generated response from the recruiter or company that confirmed that they received the email.	Yes No
5 Duration of response	The time it took for the recruiters to respond to the send email.	Up to 2 days > than 2 days
6 Number of words	Total amount of words	Amount of words
7 Tone of voice	How the written language used by the recruiter comes through in their mails. It's rather about the way the recruiters used the communication within the replies, not about the content.	Kind (eg. is happy about your mail) Open Inviting (eg. gives you a warm feeling about the company) Rude (seems uninterested to hear more from you) Touchy (Short sentences, gives you the feeling of a force response) Denying (eg. tell you right away that they are not interested)
8 Salutation	The way the recruiter addresses the applicant throughout the mail.	Formal: - Geachte - Sehr geehrte(r) - U / uw , Sie, Ihnen Informal: - Beste - Hoi - Hallo - Goedemiddag - du / dich , je / jouw
9 Language	The amount of effort the recruiters took to respond to the specific mail.	Personalized answers Standardized answer
10 Text extendedness	The extensiveness of the mail concerning structure.	Static answer Fluent answer
11 Job information	To what extend the recruiter answers the questions provided in the mail.	0 questions answered All questions answered
12 Extras	The amount of extra information additionally provided by the recruiters.	Send CV Job already taken Provide more information via telephone Provides additional information about job Questions about vacancy reference Information Positive Negative
13 Subjective impression	The overall subjective impression of the mail based on the variables mentioned before.	

## APPENDIX B – GENERAL FREQUENCY TABLE

Variable	Values	Condition 1 (no tattoos)		Condition 2 (low tattoos)		Condition 3 (medium tattoos)		Condition 4 (high tattoos)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nationality	German	41	58.6	30	52.6	24	34.4	26	41.3
	Dutch	29	41.4	27	47.4	46	65.7	37	58.7
Gender	Male	15	31.3	16	47.1	15	33.3	20	46.5
Salutation	Female	33	68.7	18	52.9	30	66.7	23	53.5
Tone of voice	Formal	42	60.0	22	38.6	16	22.9	14	22.2
	Informal	28	40.0	35	61.4	54	77.1	49	77.8
Extras	Kind	57	81.4	39	68.4	51	72.9	45	71.4
	Open	58	82.9	42	73.7	47	67.1	38	60.3
Extras	Inviting	21	30.0	17	29.8	9	12.9	6	9.5
	Rude	4	5.7	2	3.5	15	21.4	13	20.6
Extras	Touchy	7	10	6	10.5	20	28.6	17	27
	Denying	1	1.4	4	7.0	8	11.4	5	7.9
Extras	Send CV	22	31.4	23	40.4	18	25.7	20	31.7
	Job already taken	23	32.9	7	12.3	9	12.9	12	19.0
3. Automatic response	Information via phone	14	20.0	8	14.0	9	12.9	10	15.9
	Additional Inf. about job	7	10	7	12.3	4	5.7	4	6.3
Language	Vacature reference	5	7.1	3	5.3	2	2.9	4	6.3
	Information	5	7.1	1	1.8	1	1.4	0	0.0
Text extendedness	No	63	90.0	47	82.5	50	71.4	45	71.4
	Yes	7	10.0	10	17.5	20	28.6	18	28.6
Job information	Personalized	45	64.3	33	57.9	35	50.0	34	47.1
	Standardized	25	35.7	24	42.1	34	48.6	29	54.0
Duration of response	Static	24	34.3	23	40.4	37	52.9	38	60.3
	Fluent	30	42.9	17	29.8	29	41.4	19	30.2
Duration of response	0 questions answered	29	43.9	17	32.1	25	41.7	23	38.8
	all questions answered	37	56.1	36	67.9	35	58.3	37	61.7
Duration of response	up to 2 days	28	40	30	52.6	24	48.5	26	41.3
	> than 2 days	42	60	27	47.4	46	51.5	37	58.7

Note. Chi Square analysis identified the frequencies in all 4 conditions. The values from tone of voice and extras were added up to form a total score ranging from 0-6, because more than one value was possible in each mail.

## APPENDIX C – FREQUENCY TABLE BASED ON GERMAN RESULTS

Variable	<i>p</i>	Values	No tattoo condition		Low tattoo condition		Medium tattoo condition		High tattoo condition	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	.824	Male	6	22.2	6	42.9	1	10.0	5	27.8
Automatic response	.256	Female	21	77.8	8	57.1	9	90.0	13	72.2
Duration of response	.093	No	39	95.1	3	10.0	14	58.3	18	69.2
		Yes	2	4.9	27	90.0	10	41.7	8	30.8
		up to 2 days	31	75.6	13	43.3	9	37.5	6	23.1
Salutation		> than 2 days	10	24.4	17	56.7	15	62.5	20	66.9
Tone of voice	.000	Formal	33	80.5	22	73.3	17	70.8	20	76.9
		Informal	32	78.0	17	56.7	15	62.5	13	50.0
	.129	Kind	9	22.0	7	23.3	2	8.3	6	23.1
		Open	1	2.4	1	3.3	2	8.3	2	7.7
		Inviting	4	9.8	5	16.7	7	29.2	6	23.1
Language		Rude	0	0.0	4	13.3	7	29.2	4	15.4
Text		Touchy	28	68.3	19	63.3	11	45.8	13	50
Extendedness		Denying	13	31.7	11	36.7	13	54.2	13	50
Job		Personalized	8	19.5	6	20.0	11	45.8	12	46.2
Information		Standardized	18	43.9	8	26.7	11	45.8	13	50.0
		Static	38	92.7	29	96.7	24	100.0	26	100.0
Extras		Fluent								
		0 questions answered	3	7.3	1	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
		All questions answered								
		Send CV	11	26.8	12	40.0	2	8.3	12	46.2
		Job already taken	11	26.8	4	13.3	4	16.7	6	23.1
		Information via phone								
		Additional	6	14.6	3	10.0	2	8.3	4	15.4
		Infoamtion	3	7.3	4	13.3	1	4.2	0	0.0
		Vacature	2	4.9	1	3.3	1	4.2	0	0.0
		reference								

Note. Chi Square analysis identified the frequencies in all 4 conditions. The values from tone of voice and extras were added up to form a total score ranging from 0-6, because more than one value was possible in each mail.

## APPENDIX D – FREQUENCY TABLE BASED ON DUTCH RESULTS

Variable	Values	No tattoo condition		low tattoo condition		Medium tattoo condition		High tattoo condition	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	Male	6	22.2	6	42.9	1	10.0	5	27.8
Automatic response	Female	21	77.8	8	57.1	9	90.0	13	72.2
	No	24	82.8	20	74.1	10	21.7	10	27.0
	Yes	5	17.2	7	25.9	36	78.3	27	73.0
Duration of response	up to 2 days	16	55.2	20	74.1	16	34.8	17	45.9
	> than 2 days	13	44.8	7	25.9	30	65.2	20	54.1
Salutation	Formal	31	75.6	13	43.3	9	37.5	6	23.1
	Informal	10	24.4	17	56.7	15	62.5	20	66.9
Tone of voice	Kind	24	82.8	17	63.0	34	72.9	25	67.6
	Open	26	89.7	25	92.6	32	69.9	25	67.6
	Inviting	12	41.4	10	37.0	7	15.2	0	0.0
	Rude	3	10.3	1	3.7	13	28.3	11	29.7
Language	Touchy	3	10.3	1	3.7	13	28.3	11	2.7
Text	Denying	1	3.4	0	0.0	1	2.2	1	2.9
Extendedness	Personalized	12	41.4	13	48.1	22	47.8	16	43.2
Job	Standardized	17	58.6	14	51.9	24	52.2	21	46.8
Information	Static	13	44.8	16	55.2	17	37.0	26	56.5
	Fluent	16	55.2	11	44.8	29	63.0	11	43.5
Extras	Send CV	11	37.9	11	40.7	16	34.8	8	21.6
	Job already taken	12	41.4	3	11.1	5	10.9	6	16.2
	Information via phone	8	27.6	5	18.5	7	15.2	6	16.2
	Additional Infoamtion	4	13.8	3	11.1	3	6.5	4	10.8
	Vacature reference	3	10.3	2	7.4	1	2.2	4	10.8

Note. Chi Square analysis identified the frequencies in all 4 conditions. The values from tone of voice and extras were added up to form a total score ranging from 0-6, because more than one value was possible in each mail.

## APPENDIX E – FREQUENCY TABLE BASED ON MALE RESULTS

Variable	Values	No tattoo condition		low tattoo condition		Medium tattoo condition		High tattoo condition	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nationality	German	6	40.0	6	37.5	1	6.7	5	25.0
Automatic response	Dutch	9	60.0	10	62.5	14	93.3	15	75.0
	No	12	80.0	13	81.3	12	80.0	18	90.0
	Yes	3	20.0	3	18.8	3	20.0	2	10.0
<b>Duration of response</b>		16	55.2	20	74.1	16	34.8	17	45.9
	up to 2 days	13	44.8	7	25.9	30	65.2	20	54.1
Salutation	> than 2 days	7	46.7	6	37.5	2	13.3	5	25.0
		8	53.3	10	62.5	13	86.7	15	75.0
Tone of voice	Formal	12	80.0	9	56.3	10	66.7	14	70.0
	Informal	13	86.7	13	81.3	9	60.0	12	60.0
	Kind	2	13.3	5	31.3	2	13.3	1	5.0
	Open	2	13.3	0	0.0	5	33.3	6	30.0
Language Text	Inviting	3	10.3	1	3.7	13	28.3	11	2.7
	Rude	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	6.7	1	5.0
Extendedness	Touchy	22	66.7	11	61.1	16	53.3	11	33.3
Job Information	Denying	11	33.3	7	38.9	13	56.5	7	38.9
	Personalized	7	46.7	9	56.3	8	53.3	12	43.3
	Standardized	10	53.3	13	81.3	8	53.3	15	75.0
Extras	Static	10	66.7	5	31.3	6	40.0	7	35.0
	Fluent								
	Send CV	5	33.3	11	68.8	9	60.0	12	65.0
	Job already taken	5	33.3	6	37.5	6	40.0	3	15.0
	Information	4	26.7	2	12.5	0	0.0	6	16.2
	via phone	8	27.6	5	18.5	7	15.2	6	16.2
	Additional	5	33.3		18.8	1	6.7	3	15.0
	Infoamtion			3					
	Vacature reference	3	20.0	4	25.1	1	6.7	2	10.0

Note. Chi Square analysis identified the frequencies in all 4 conditions. The values from tone of voice and extras where added up to form a total score ranging from 0-6, because more than one value was possible in each mail.

## APPENDIX F – FREQUENCY TABLE BASED ON FEMALE RESULTS

Variable	Values	No tattoo condition		low tattoo condition		Medium tattoo condition		High tattoo condition	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nationality	German	21	63.3	8	44.4	9	30.0	13	56.6
Automatic response	Dutch	12	36.4	10	55.6	21	70.0	10	43.5
	No	32	97.0	14	74.1	19	63.3	15	62.2
	Yes	1	3.0	4	25.9	11	36.7	8	34.8
Duration of response		12	18.2	9	24.8	8	15.2	8	17.4
	up to 2 days	29	81.8	21	74.2	22	84.8	23	82.6
Salutation	> than 2 days								
		19	57.6	6	33.3	5	16.7	6	26.1
Tone of voice		14	42.4	12	66.7	25	83.3	17	73.9
	Formal		87.9	13	72.7	23	76.7	18	78.3
	Informal	29	87.9	15	83.3	19	63.3	15	65.2
	Kind	29	60.6	11	61.1	24	80.0	19	82.6
	Open	20	3.0	0	0.0	6	20.0	3	13.0
Language Text	Inviting	1	3.0	2	11.1	8	26.7	4	17.4
	Rude	1	0.0	2	11.1	2	6.7	2	8.7
Extendedness	Touchy	0	53.3	7	43.8	9	60.0	10	50.0
Job Information	Denying	8	46.7	9	56.3	6	40.0	10	50.0
	Personalized	7	27.3	7	38.9	14	46.7	14	60.9
	Standardized	9	54.5	14	77.8	16	53.3	15	65.2
Extras	Static	18	27.3	6	33.3	17	56.7	10	43.5
	Fluent	9	72.7	12	66.7	12	40.0	13	56.5
	Send CV	24	37.9	11	40.7	16	34.8	8	21.6
	Job already taken	11	41.4	3	11.1	5	10.9	6	16.2
	Information	12	69.7	10	55.6	22	73.3	15	65.2
	via phone	23	33.3	2	11.1	4	13.3	3	13.0
	Additional Infoamtion	11							
		8	24.2	1	5.6	4	13.3	6	26.1
	Vacature reference	4	12.1	3	16.7	2	6.7	1	4.3

Note. Chi Square analysis identified the frequencies in all 4 conditions. The values from tone of voice and extras were added up to form a total score ranging from 0-6, because more than one value was possible in each mail.

## **APPENDIX G - COVER LETTER GERMAN**

Sehr geehrtes .... Team,

aufgrund persönlicher Veränderungen bin ich momentan auf der Suche nach einer neuen Herausforderung. Die von Ihnen ausgeschriebene Stelle als Customer Service Mitarbeiter auf einem Jobportal hat mich aufgrund des abwechslungsreichen Aufgabenbereiches sehr angesprochen.

In der Anlage erhalten Sie ein Dokument mit allgemeinen Daten und kurzen Fragen, die noch offengeblieben sind. Könnten Sie mir diese Fragen bitte noch beantworten?

Über eine Antwort Ihrerseits würde ich mich sehr freuen.

Vielen Dank im Voraus und einen schönen Tag!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,  
Stephan Meyer



## **APPENDIX H - COVER LETTER DUTCH**

Geachte .... Team,

Door persoonlijke omstandigheden ben ik op zoek naar een nieuwe uitdaging. Op een vacaturewebsite heb ik gezien dat jullie momenteel op zoek zijn naar een Customer service medewerker. De veelzijdigheid van deze functie spreekt mij erg aan.

In de bijlage kunt u een documentje met persoonlijke gegevens en openstaande vragen vinden. Zou u deze vragen voor mij kunnen beantwoorden?

Ik hoor graag van jullie.

Alvast bedankt en een hele fijne dag toegewenst!

Met vriendelijke groet,  
Stephan Mulder

## **APPENDIX I – PARTICIPATION MAIL GERMAN**

Sehr geehrtes XX-Team,

am (DATUM) haben Sie von mir eine Anfrage bezüglich einer offenstehenden Vakanz im Kundenservice erhalten. Hiermit möchte ich Sie informieren, dass diese Anfrage Teil der Untersuchung meiner Masterarbeit ist.

Das Ziel meiner Arbeit ist es zu untersuchen, ob Bartlänge/Sichtbarkeit von Tattoos Einfluss auf die soziale Akzeptanz in Bewerbungsprozessen in Unternehmen hat.

Selbstverständlich werden weder der Name des Betriebs noch des bearbeitenden Mitarbeiters innerhalb der Studie veröffentlicht. Alle Daten werden anonym behandelt. Hiermit möchten wir Ihnen die Möglichkeit geben, die Teilnahme an der Untersuchung zu verweigern. Des Weiteren besteht die Möglichkeit, Einsicht in die Resultate zu bekommen, sobald diese ausgewertet sind.

Ich möchte mich rechtherzlich für die investierte Zeit und Ihre Bemühungen bedanken.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,  
Felix / Bruno (Stefan M.)

## **APPENDIX J – PARTICIPATION MAIL DUTCH**

Geachte XY-Team,

Op (datum) heeft u een verzoek van mij mogen ontvangen met betrekking tot een openstaande vacature binnen de customer service afdeling van uw bedrijf. Bij deze wil ik u informeren dat dit verzoek een onderdeel vormt van een onderzoek in het kader van mijn masterscriptie.

Het doel van mijn onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in de sociale acceptatie van baardlengtes / zichtbaarheid van tatoeages binnen sollicitatieprocessen bij bedrijven.

Uiteraard zullen alle gegevens anoniem verwerkt worden, dit betreft zowel de naam van uw bedrijf als de naam van de verantwoordelijke medewerker die de sollicitatie afneemt.

Hierbij willen wij u de mogelijkheid geven om uw deelname aan dit onderzoek te weigeren.

Bovendien kunt u, indien gewenst, inzicht krijgen in de resultaten van dit onderzoek, zodra deze geanalyseerd zijn en de informatie is verwerkt.

Ik wil u hartelijk danken voor uw geïnvesteerde tijd en moeite.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Bruno/Felix (Stephan)