The Mainstream Body Modification Phenomenon: Visible Tattoo and Facial Piercing Acceptance in the Workplace

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Question
What experiences have body modified individuals encountered in the workplace regarding employer reactions to and/or allowances of mainstream visible tattoos and facial piercings?

Methods
- Qualitative research method via phenomenological research strategy
- Textual analysis of online data gathered from the Facebook group pages:
  - Tattoo Acceptance [sic] in the Workplace - 824,000+ group members
  - Piercing Acceptance in the Workplace - 35,000+ group members

Bracketing Out Preconceptions: I acknowledged that I held preconceptions that keeping body modifications discrete for an employment interview is imperative, body modifications are not allowed in the professional workplace, that professional employees must hide body modifications when in the workplace setting, and that only certain professions will allow individuals to wear visible body modifications.

Sample: 275 participants - Statements from March 2010 - March 2011
- Statements from administrator status updates posed as questions, voluntary member comments, and discussion boards.
- Hand coding and classification into the core set of essential themes
- Sorted through MALpedia 10 computer software program and imported to MS Excel spreadsheets

Results
Contract Typology Themes: Ready-to-sign contract (assimilation), quasi-contract, contract adaptation, or co-created contract (mutual valuation).

Workforce Factors:
- Body modifications have not been an issue in the workplace
- Body modifications have been an issue in the workplace
- Have fully visible body modifications - display them
- Have body modifications - choose to limit their visibility
- Have body modifications - mandated by management to cover-up/remove

Emergent Sub-themes:
- Turned Down or Quit job - Due to company policy
- Won't do business with anti-body modification companies
- Non-standard - Body modifications outside the mainstream definition
- Creative Cover - Concealed in unusual ways
- Placement - Purposely placed to be concealed
- Bandages - Cover-up method
- Arm or Wristband/Wrap - Cover-up method
- Policy Consistency (cross-contractual)
- Organizational Alignment - Corporate rule not consistent with local practices
- Gender Standards - Policy variation for men vs. women
- Hierarchy Standards - Policy variation for management vs. subordinates
- Policy Changes - Occurring after employment
- Perceived Stigma (cross-contractual)
- Derogatory Statements/Negative Connotations - Towards body modified individuals
- First Impression - Participants cancel until after first impression
- Quality of Work/Performance - Organization & participant acknowledgment (co-created)

Discussion
The research revealed that body modification participants faced a variety of experiences in the workplace that led to the contracts’ signature or refusal.

Ready-to-sign Cultural Contracts: Assimilation
Participants have had an issue in the workplace with their body modifications and were met by management to cover up or remove their body modifications.

Cross-contractual Situations: Multiple situations where a lack of policy consistency was demonstrated or participants felt body modification associated stigma in the workplace emerged from all three of the cultural contracts.

Policy Consistency
- Policy change not consistent with local practices
- Gender Standards - Policy variation for men vs. women
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- Policy Changes - Occurring after employment
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- First Impression - Participants cancel until after first impression

Cross-contractual: Participants had been mandated by management to cover up or remove their body modifications.

Consequences of Cultural Contracts: Mutual Validation
Participants who had body modifications may not have been an issue in the workplace and who display their visible modifications.

Cross-contractual: Participants felt body modification associated stigma in the workplace emerged from all three of the cultural contracts.

Cultural Contracts Theory:
- Jackson (2002) defined cultural contracts as “manifested products of identity negotiation or communication with others.”

Social Contracts:
- Jackson (2002) explained cultural contracts theory as a rubric for negotiating cultural identities through the exchange of cultural values and commitments.

Organizational Context:
- Organizational context seems to influence the interactions of management with employees.

Literature Cited


Purpose
The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences for individual employees with visible body modifications in the workplace. The individuals’ experiences are generally defined as the employer reactions to and/or allowances of mainstream visible tattoos and facial piercings on employees in the workplace setting.

Policy
- Mainstream of Tattoo: A picture of the entire body
- Mainstream Facial Piercings: Acne (zits), ear/cut, cheek, chin, fork, tragus, up to .05/0.10mm gauge, nostril, eyebrow, or Oral (Monroe lip, labret lower lip, tongue).

What do we mean by the term “Mainstream”? The term Mainstream was defined as any body modification that was deemed similar to any other product in a consumer environment.

Organizational Context:
- Mainstream Facial Piercings: Ear (auricle), ear/cartilage, cheek, chin, fork, tragus, up to .05/0.10mm gauge, nostril, eyebrow, or Oral (Monroe lip, labret lower lip, tongue).

Organizational Context:
- Mainstream Facial Piercings: Ear (auricle), ear/cartilage, cheek, chin, fork, tragus, up to .05/0.10mm gauge, nostril, eyebrow, or Oral (Monroe lip, labret lower lip, tongue).

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