

# **Tattoo perception in the professional work environment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this research is to examine the effect of tattoos on the perception of a person within a professional work environment, because the image of tattoos has changed in the last decades. Previously, there were many negative stereotypes present for people with tattoos, but these have made way for an image of art and creativity. Thus, this research provides answers on whether tattoos now fit in the role expectations that come in a professional work environment; if tattoos have an influence on the perception of professionalism of a person. Participants from a creative and non-creative work environment, filled in questionnaires with vignette photos included. These give insights on their perception of people depicted in the photos, with and without tattoos. In addition, direct questions are asked on the participants perception of tattoos. Also, the influence of the type of work environment of the participant, of the age of the participant and of the gender of the perceived people are researched, for the perception of tattoos. The analysis gave the following results. The type of work environment has no influence on the perception of tattoos, regarding professionalism. But overall, the participants from the creative work environment are more critical regarding the perception of professionalism. Also, the gender of the perceived person does not have an influence on the perception of tattoos as professional, but it does have an influence on the perception of tattoos as creative. Women with tattoos are perceived as more creative than men with and without tattoos.

Overall, the perception of tattoos in a professional work environment is rather accepting. It seems to be the case that tattoos do not influence the expectations of a person to behave professionally. However, for people with tattoos, there are overall more expectations to be creative, but also to take their job less seriously, which are specific aspects of professionalism. This shows, that the creative image of tattoos is present in the role expectations of people with tattoos, and that the previous, more negative image does not influence the perception of the professionalism of people with tattoos.

**KEYWORDS:** Tattoos, Perception, Professionality, Creativity, Work environment

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	6
1.1 Relevance.....	8
1.2 Structure.....	9
2. Theoretical framework .....	10
2.1 The role theory .....	10
2.2 Professional work environments .....	14
2.3 The history of tattoos .....	17
2.4 research questions & hypotheses .....	21
3. Methodology.....	24
3.1 Research design .....	24
3.2 Sample.....	25
3.3 Operationalisation .....	27
3.3.1 Background information.....	27
3.3.2 Vignette photos.....	27
3.3.3 Direct questions .....	30
3.4 Variables .....	32
3.5 Data Analysis .....	34
3.6 reliability and validity .....	35
4. Results .....	36
4.1 Overall tattoo perception.....	36

4.2 The direct questions on tattoo perception .....	38
4.3 Explaining tattoo perception on the photos.....	40
4.4 Sub-research question 1 .....	42
4.5 Sub-research question 2 .....	45
4.6 Sub-research question 3 .....	47
4.7 Possible other influences on tattoo perception.....	50
5. Conclusion.....	52
6.1 Limitations .....	55
6.2 Recommendations on future research .....	55
References .....	56
Appendix 1: The questionnaire .....	58
Appendix 2: the versions of the vignette photos .....	66
photo 1: Anne.....	66
photo 2: Nienke.....	67
photo 3: Daniël.....	68
photo 4: Sam .....	69

# 1. INTRODUCTION

People have tattoos for a lot of different reasons. These reasons can vary from person to person, but they are also dependent on the place and age. Someone in the Baiga tribe in Central India is most likely to have tattoos because they have very specific cultural meaning (Mohanta & Chadhar, 2002). The tattoos from this tribe are related to social status, religion, wealth and health care practice and tattoos are applied at specific ages and on specific locations on the body, making it a big part of the Baiga culture (Mohanta & Chadhar, 2002).

This study is not about the practice of tattooing in tribal cultures though. In this study I will focus on how tattoos are perceived in today's Western society, where tattoos manifestly carry a completely different meaning. A person will most likely have a tattoo because of very personal reasons or just to decorate their body.

However, in contradiction to the Baiga culture, tattoos have had very negative connotations connected to them in Western society, especially in history (Burgess & Clark, 2010). As primarily sailors and criminals initially adopted the practice of tattooing, the practice of tattooing got connected to a masculine image, but also criminal and delinquent behaviour. However, the image of tattoos changed over time. As they became more popular in the middle class, tattoos took on a more positive image from the 70's onwards (Burgess & Clark, 2010). Also, more women started having tattoos, making the masculine image of tattoos lose its strength (Burgess & Clark, 2010). According to Kosut (2014) these changes happened for one reason in particular: artists started adopting the practice, after the art market got saturated. This resulted in tattoos getting a more creative and artistic image, as they started to be seen more as an art and less as a craft. Irwin (2001) refers to this change as the *tattoo renaissance*. Which is also why people have tattoos for the reasons they do today. Tattoos are understood more as personal expressions of creativity nowadays.

This raises the question, how accepted are tattoos in today's society? Even though, they seem to be more present than in other time, and they are no longer only present within specific sub-cultures or social groups. That makes it interesting to question whether the older, negative image of tattoos is still present, if tattoos still raise these negative associations, influencing the way people are perceived? In particular, this research is on the perception of tattoos in a

professional environment. After all, people are expected to behave professionally in their work environment.

This leads to the main focus of the research, which is the perception of tattoos within a professional work context, in particular. Looking at the definitions of professional behaviour, it is remarkable how little emphasis is put on external characteristics of people, even though it is very clear that in society people do have expectations on what a professional look is. Fidler (1996), for example, identifies four core areas of professionalism: positive self-regard, self-awareness, interpersonal competence, and a commitment to learning. These all focus on behavioural aspects.

According to Dahrendorf's role theory, there are many different roles in society that raise particular expectations (Biddle, 2013). These roles are based on different contexts people are in. For example, in a working environment people are expected to take on the role of professional behaviour (whereas the same people can be expected to dance and drink alcohol in the context of a dance club). These roles have been formed over time. The more people act in a certain way within a particular context, the more expectations that constitute a role are strengthened. And whenever an established role exists this will shape the way people act even further. This makes it understandable why tattoos are difficult to combine with the expectations on professionalism within the service sector, holding in account the negative expectations that were formed for tattoos within history. As Dahrendorf explains, roles are very difficult to change, but according to Kosut (2014) this is exactly what has happened; the role/image of tattoos has changed. And this newer creative image of tattoos might over time have created new role expectations for people with tattoos, in a professional work environment.

This research will be aimed at finding out under which conditions and for which people tattoos are more or less acceptable in a professional work environment. Firstly, certain types of work environment will be differentiated between. Because tattoos have gotten a more creative and artistic image over time, it makes sense that within a creative work environment there is more acceptance towards tattoos. They may fit more into the expectations of professional behaviour at creative workplaces than in more traditional/non-creative work environments. Secondly, the difference between the perception of tattoos on men and women, within a professional work environment, will be sought. As explained, initially tattoos had a very masculine image, which changed after the 1970's. This means that if the role expectations have not changed (enough), tattoos might have a (larger) negative effect on the perception of women than the perception of

men. Finally, age is another factor that cannot be ignored in this context. Because the tattoo renaissance has only happened in the past few decades, the older a person is, the more likely they are to have experienced/learned the older role expectations of people with tattoos. Therefore, age is very likely to have an influence on the tattoo perception within a professional work environment.

The answers to these questions will be collected through a questionnaire, with the inclusion of an experiment. This experiment is in the form of vignette photos, people will perceive certain people in a professional work environment in these photos, for which the participants will answer questions based on their perception. Half of these photos will include a person with tattoos and half will not.

## 1.1 RELEVANCE

Regarding scientific relevance, this research is a new and original addition to existing research on tattoos or the perception of tattoos. In particular, a professional work environment is relevant, because there are many different factors that have been analysed for their perception in this context, although tattoos have not. This research explains the effect of role expectations on how a person is perceived, detached from their work abilities. Because most ideas on professionalism are about the attitude of a person, not about external characteristics. Thus, external characteristics are seen as irrelevant, but with this research it becomes clear that they do play an important role in the perception of professionalism, and therefore play a role in who is seen as professional.

Also, bringing the results for the perception of tattoos forward enables a comparison between other factors and tattoos in the future. Especially, because a differentiation is made between creative and non-creative work environments in the service sector. This shows that the ideas on professionalism can be different and can change. And since the creative industries are on a rise, it is very interesting to see how these work environments have different professional role expectations.

Finally, most published researches about the perception of tattoos are qualitative, as tattoos are very personal choices in recent Western society. But most quantitative research that is published, is from at least a decade ago, most often longer ago. Therefore, these researches are done in a time where tattoos are most likely, still more influenced by the role expectations of



tattooed people from before the tattoo renaissance. The most recent developments have not been analysed yet, especially not within a professional environment.

Practically, this research is of most relevance to people that often find themselves within a professional work environment and have tattoos or think about having tattoos. The outcomes and conclusions of this research will provide them with information they can apply into their professional life; Whether tattoos are expected to be covered up in certain environments or by certain people. What sort of behaviour is expected from people with tattoos, within a professional work environment? Is there a difference in the acceptance of tattoos between a creative and non-creative work environment? Thus, is their kind of work environment accepting towards (visible) tattoos?

## 1.2 STRUCTURE

The structure of this master thesis is rather straightforward. Firstly, the literature is presented in the theoretical framework. The central concepts will be introduced: role theory and stereotyping, professional work environments and the history of tattoos. This framework provides openings in the academic knowledge, which provides an opportunity to form research questions.

The concept of tattoos, the history of tattoos and the perceptions that are present of tattoos are explained in a quite abstract manner in the articles used for preliminary research. Therefore, this part of the theoretical framework is supported by an interview held with a tattoo artist. This interview does not function as data but is merely there to illustrate what is explained in the theory.

Next, the methodology offers the research plan on how to find answers on these research questions. Also, the sample is described, just like the operationalisation and the resulting variables. In addition, the validity and reliability of the research is addressed. After the methodology the results are presented and interpreted. And finally, the conclusion consists of the main findings, the discussion and a reflection.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to find out the effect of tattoos on the perception of a person in a professional work environment, several concepts need to be clarified. First of all, role theory will be introduced to explain how tattoos are related to social expectations. Next, expectations that are present particularly in a professional work environment will be discussed. After that role expectations in relation tattoos that have developed throughout history until their image in contemporary society. On the basis of these insights, the main research question will be derived, which will be further developed into hypotheses. Apart from professional role expectations, some other factors will be considered that may also be relevant for the perception of tattoos. In particular, age and gender will be taken into account. The possible influences will be explained, and according to this, hypotheses can be formed as well.

### 2.1 THE ROLE THEORY

The context people are in affects the expectations that others have of them. This can be explained by Dahrendorf's role theory. But before explaining this theory, it must be explained why these expectations are present and even necessary. Many would argue that social expectations are at the core of sociology, as this is a part of the social cognitive theory (SCT), according to Bandura (as cited in Rosenstock, Strecher & Becker, 1988). SCT entails that behaviour is influenced by expectations and incentives. This means that every choice to do something or not do something, the cognitive process, is influenced by previous experiences. These previous experiences have created expectations, that can be applied to other new situations. Thus, when something bad came from a particular decision, one is less inclined to make a similar decision again. These expectations are divided into three types: expectations about the environmental cues, which refers to how this can lead to other events, expectations about consequences of one's own actions and expectations about one's own competences (Strecher & Becker, 1988). These expectations are applicable not just to environments, but also the people that are involved.

Biddle (2013) explains Dahrendorf's theory by mentioning that these expectations are based on the roles that people have. Biddle (2013) also mentions that these environments are social

systems that serve as context and influence these roles. These different roles raise different expectations that people have. To explain, the same person can be seen working in an office and partying in the club, but different things will be expected from them, because of these different circumstances. This is also why social roles are compelling. Not following them can lead people to have unfit expectations. That is also why social roles are rather stable. They can only change if people start acting different than what is expected from their role, but as said doing this can complicate interaction. Therefore, people will mostly keep acting in accordance to the role.

There is also more that comes to these expectations, because it is not yet clear why these expectations are this important and relevant. This can be explained by Goffman's theory (1959), which explains that finding these external characteristics and analysing them, is the fastest way to obtain information about a person within the first encounter. He explains that when a person enters the presence of others, they will need know more about the other person in order to respond accordingly. They recall the information they know about the individual or try to acquire information. The first way to acquire some information is through the way this person looks, this gives an indication on how to behave, just like is explained by Bandura (as cited in Rosenstock, Strecher & Becker, 1988); how to respond to the presence of this person.

This is in line with what McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears (2002) claim about stereotyping, as this is a way of gaining knowledge, through the expectations that come with certain roles. They explain that it gives an explanation on people, it is a way to gain specific knowledge. But it saves a lot of effort and is fast, as it gives a first impression without having to get to know a person. In that sense, stereotyping can be considered a way of protecting oneself. It enables one to estimate the possible danger that may come with certain situations and people. As some external characteristics are connected to expectations, these help to form a judgement on, for example, possible danger. It is important to point out the difference between social roles and stereotypes, because they seem very similar in the sense that they help in giving expectations on people. However, roles are based on different contexts people are in, what role this puts them in and what expectations come with this role. Roles, in a way, can be seen as social guidelines on what to expect and act like. For stereotypes the focus lies somewhere else. Stereotypes are there with the purpose to estimate how to behave in response to others, which is more about efficiency and simplification.

Biddle (2013) goes further into the perceiving of external characteristics with Dahrendorf's role theory. He explains that the roles and status of a person are associated with another. The status of a person is described as the position they have in the social hierarchy influenced by what is commonly recognised about them. This is slightly different from social position. He describes this as an identity in which a group of people is commonly recognised. This means that the social position can influence one's status and are therefore often connected.

To get back to the main theme: the expectations that come with social roles, Biddle (1986) also mentions that there are five different perspectives, that account for the formation of expectations in a slightly different way. These are functional, symbolic interactionist, structural, organisational, and cognitive (Biddle, 1986). These different perspectives help in seeing the different ways role theory can work, depending on different contexts, different individuals or societal changes.

First, functional role theory focuses on the differentiation between social positions, within a stable social system and explains why these systems are stable. Biddle (1986) states: "This work views social structures as collections of designated social positions, the shared norms of which govern differentiated behaviours (p. 70)." Within this perspective there is a focus on the norms and values, how roles can contain and force people to act in certain ways. On the contrary, the symbolic interactionist role theory emphasises that these roles are only there because people keep on acting in accordance to them. However, there is room for change within these roles, people can evolve these roles through acting slightly differently, as long as the role is still recognisable. Therefore, symbolic interactionism focusses on the differences between 'role making' and 'role taking.' In other words, roles can be formed and adjusted through the way people behave in this role, but it works the other way around as well; roles can determine the way people behave, as people unconsciously 'take on' certain behaviour that fits within their role. Then, there is the structural role theory, where the focus is on the social structures consisting of social positions or statuses and, in particular, how roles help keeping social hierarchies. There also is the organisational role theory which focusses on hierarchical social systems that are pre-planned and task oriented (Biddle, 1986). He adds: "Roles in such organizations are assumed to be associated with identified social positions and to be generated by normative expectations, but norms may vary among individuals and may reflect both the official demands of the organizations and the pressures of informal groups." This describes how pre-planned social systems enforce certain social roles. Finally, there is the cognitive role theory. This theory focusses on the interaction between role expectations and behaviour

(Biddle, 1986). This final perspective is very much in line with the theory on stereotypes. As previously explained, stereotypes are made in order to estimate how to behave towards others. In a way stereotypes are the connection between role expectations and behaviour.

Overall, role theory is based on one principle, which is the fact that people are influenced by their social identities and situations (Biddle, 1986). This entails that people are predictable depending on their contexts, although these different perspectives help keeping in mind that there are more factors, like norms, values, role-taking and role-making, which make the concept of role theory more complicated. These different perspectives are all useful, but may be more or less applicable, depending on the context. The context of this research will be organisations, thus a professional work environment. Even though this is very much in line with the organisational role theory, all different perspectives can be useful. It is important to keep each of the perspectives in mind, since all have a different view on the main presumption that: 'persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of other persons (Biddle, 1986, p. 67).'

## 2.2 PROFESSIONAL WORK ENVIRONMENTS

The roles in this organisational context have been set for a long time, there are clear expectations and there is a set hierarchy. As is explained in the perspective of the organisational role theory, there are identified social positions which come with 'normative' expectations (Biddle, 1986). Even though there are many different positions within the same contexts, that have different expectations, there is also a more general role expectation within working environments.

There is a general the expectation of professional behaviour, within the service sector. This is specific for the service sector, because in the primary and secondary sector workers have different perceptions of professional behaviour. It is a very broad construct though, which needs to be clarified. What does professional behaviour mean in the tertiary/service sector?

There are many different definitions of professionalism, but most divide the concept into different areas. For example, Fidler (1996) mentions that there is a process of developing professional behaviour, with four core areas: positive self-regard, self-awareness, interpersonal competence, and a commitment to learning. Each of these areas is explained by many ways in which this trait can be demonstrated. In addition, Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim (1977) identify five dimensions which together characterise professional behaviour. They mention a desire for professional autonomy, a commitment to the profession, identification with the profession, professional ethics, and a belief in collegial maintenance of standards. Comparing these two definitions brings out some main themes: self-confidence and -awareness, interpersonal skills and ethics, commitment to do well and a liking for the profession. This shows that in most working environments the expectations for professionalism will be quite similar, although professional behaviour cannot clearly be defined, as there are many different areas that are to be considered, which might contradict in some cases and therefore will vary in importance.

These expectations for professional behaviour are not completely the same for every work environment, as there are differences in social rules. This is especially noticeable in social rules regarding external characteristics, as these can be easily seen without having to get embedded in the culture of the environment. Also, it is remarkable neither Fidler (1996) nor Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim (1977) incorporate external characteristics in their explanations of professionalism, especially since this is very applicable to the role and stereotype theory.

Professionalism seems to be more about a person's attitude, but external characteristics is more about expressing this attitude.

For example, there are differences in the rules of organisations, regarding business attire. In most professional environments there are social rules on how to dress, sometimes there are even formal policies on how to dress. These rules include clothing that is regarded as professional attire, like suits and collared shirts. However, this is not the case in all organisations according to McPherson (1997). He explains that nowadays there are many organisations that have adopted casual business wear as the norm. This means that there are differences in role expectations regarding professionalism, specifically regarding professional external characteristics.

Thus, there are different norms regarding what constitutes 'looking professional' and professional attire. This raises the question: Why are there differences in the norms of professionalism? The first option is that organizations have a different approach to self-expression. Some businesses might connect their social rules of working attire to the concept of self-expression and disconnect it more from the professional behaviour of a person. Although, within other organisations, attire might be seen as an important reflection of their professionalism, and self-expression is more common in the way they decorate their desk. In some cases, it might even be so that self-expression is not considered at all on the work floor but is something one should keep at home. This means that, in some organisations, the norms for looking/dressing professional are less strict than for others.

The second option is that the way a person dresses depends on their role expectations. In a more creative environment, it makes sense that one's looks can be considered as an expression of creativity. Which would explain the idea that in more creative environments the role expectation is to express through one's looks; being freer in clothing choices, hairstyles and body decorations like piercings and tattoos, including that one can dress more casually. This would as well explain that the looks in less creative work environments are different, because of the idea that formal work attire is a uniform, which leaves no room for one's creative expression through clothing. Thus, this 'uniform' is not fitting in a creative work environment.

Finally, there is a third option. This last option includes informalisation in working culture, meaning that there is a trend of a more informal culture being adopted in working environments (Benería, 2001). As McPherson (1997) explained more informal attire is becoming more normalised, generally in organisations, so not just in 'creative' organisations. That it is

becoming more accepted to dress more informal, not because it is a way to show one's creativity, but just because there are less strong role expectations; it is less seen as a reflection of professionalism. On the other hand, the informalisation, can also be a case of changing role expectations, where casual business wear is seen as the norm and a full-on suit does not fit the role expectations. Both could explain that some businesses have adopted the acceptance of casual business wear, in contradiction to other businesses that expect their employees to dress formally.

The differences in attire is a fitting representation of the perception of professionalism. But there are more external characteristics that people have, which have more extreme role expectancies and stereotypes connected to them, and they can as well have changes in their perception as a result of informalisation. Just like one of the more interesting external characteristics, in this context, is tattoos. Tattoos can also be seen as a self-expression, but also has particularly negative role expectations connected to them, in Western history. This makes it interesting to find out what the role expectations are for people with tattoos, specifically in a professional working environment.

Before going into tattoo perception in a working environment, the history of role expectations of tattoos will be discussed. More specifically, the history of tattoos since they were introduced in Western society, as there are many other societies, where tattoos have never had a negative role expectation and are more seen as a status symbol (Levi, Sewell & Goldstein, 1979).



## 2.3 THE HISTORY OF TATTOOS

In Western society, tattoos appear to have had a negative image as soon as they were introduced. However, Levi, Sewell & Goldstein (1979) explain that tattooing had a long history before becoming common in Western society. According to them, archaeologists have found proof of tattooing for over eight-thousand years ago. Many different tribal communities found ways to permanently decorate their bodies and it is presumed that these decorations reflected tribal status. Tattoos, thus, had positive annotations. Burgess & Clark (2010) state that sailors were the first to adopt tattoos in western societies. Initially, sailors adopted the practice of tattooing from the Pacific islands, where tattoos were still present after ages of tribal tradition. Although it is unclear why sailors adopted the practice, the fact that they did so in large numbers resulted in a steady association between tattoos and sailor culture.

However, Measey (1972) explains that tattoos did have a purpose of fashion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a portion of the European nobility and royals did enjoy this type of body decoration. Nonetheless, tattoos soon took on a negative association with deviance, especially after World War II (Irwin, 2001). Roberts (2012) adds that the negative associations only started after the introduction of the electrical tattooing machine was introduced, as this made tattoos available for the middle class. Because of this, tattoos were no longer a status symbol for the upper class, who therefore stopped having them. Bourdieu (1984) explains this as the copy-cat phenomenon; the middle class has a desire to be like the upper class and start mimicking them. The upper class has the advantage of their wealth which enables them to consume accordingly, to show off their wealth. This is pecuniary emulation, according to Veblen (1899, as cited in Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996). This was the case with tattoos as well, they were time consuming and expensive, thus serving distinction from the middle class. But when the lower class started to copy having tattoos, it could no longer be a case of pecuniary emulation. The upper class stopped having and showing tattoos, meaning that in the eyes of society it was only the sailors and criminals, etcetera that still had tattoos. Roberts (2012, p. 154) states: 'Once removed from the upper class repertoire, tattoos became affiliated with social undesirables and deviants. Not only were tattoos linked with deviance, it was argued that the physical act of getting a tattoo would cause future deviance.'

Measey (1972) found that there is a positive correlation between the number of tattoos a person has and whether they have a personality disorder, the more tattoos the higher the significance. He also mentions that tattoos are very common with prison inmates. Hence, the association with criminal and deviant behaviour. Jacques (2017) explains that there is no one, clear reason for the popularity of tattoos in the criminal community, but he found that most tattoos are symbols for a belief, passion or identity. This can be connected to a representation of status and/or anti-association from the rest of society (Jacques, 2017). Whatever the exact reason for the association with criminal behaviour and deviance, it is undeniable that tattoos have carried negative connotations for a long time.

However, tattoos developed to have a slightly better reputation and became more normalised in the 1970's and 80's, when tattoos became more popular (Burgess & Clark, 2010). During this time the masculine image of tattoos lost strength as well and in the 70's more women started getting tattoos (Burgess & Clark, 2010). This overall increase in popularity, and specifically for women, can be explained by an increasing number of fine artists starting in the profession of tattooing, as explained by Robin (as cited in Irwin, 2001). Irwin refers to this changing image and sudden popularity as the renaissance of tattooing, which lead to tattoos entering popular culture in the 80's and 90's (2001).

As mentioned in the introduction, some theory can be illustrated by experiences of a tattoo artist. And indeed, an experience of E. van den Hoek is applicable to this change in image of tattoos. To give some context to the experiences, some background information will follow. The tattoo artist a female and has been in the business for about ten years and has had a tattoo shop for almost five years. Before she started tattooing, she worked in a creative organisation. She has had many different customers in her tattoo shop, ranging from ages 16 to 80 years old, men and women and people in many different work environments, both creative and non-creative. This provided her with much experience and knowledge on this topic. In a sense, she has had first-hand experience of the theory presented in this thesis.

*I even have ladies come to get tattoos that are 70 or 80 years old. When older people come here, they usually have wanted a tattoo their whole life, but they never got one, because it just was not done. And now it is way easier, plus, often their children or grandchildren also have a tattoo, which makes the threshold lower for them to do it after all. That is really fun, because they have wanted it for a long time. But in their time, it was for the lowest classes, but now it has become normal (E. van den Hoek, personal communication, May 14, 2019).*

Kosut (2014) explains that this increase in acceptance and appreciation lead to a whole new image of tattoos. She illustrates that tattooing came to be seen less as a craft, and more as a fine art. After the tattoo ‘renaissance,’ tattoos became more valued by cultural specialists, as tattoo changed to be more authentic as the process underwent changes on the literal and symbolic level (Kosut, 2014). These changes were introduced by art students. In the 80’s more and more art students graduated, making the market saturated, which caused artists to migrate into the field of tattooing (Kosut, 2014). Their artistic upbringing brought a new dimension to tattoo, they incorporated their skill and creativity to this craft, transforming it to an art. This new point of view would be adopted by society, as a new tattooing culture emerged, where there are different styles, more diverse pieces, and a whole new discourse was created around tattoos, in which tattoos are more seen as work of art on top of a ‘human canvas.’ These new ideas gave tattoos an increasingly artistic and fashionable image, as they are seen as decorations of one’s body (Dhossche, Snell & Larder, 2000). These changes in use of tattoos, can be illustrated by the tattoo artist.

*Tattoos are still used with gangs and in prisons as a tool to show hierarchy or what crimes are committed. But what a mostly come across, is that people use tattoos as decorations for their bodies or that it has symbolic meaning about something that has happened in their life or about someone (E. van den Hoek, personal communication May 14, 2019).*

Although Dhossche, Snell & Larder (2000) also mention that tattoos are still seen as unconventional in large segments of society, Burgess & Clark (2010) claim that the new artistic discourse gives tattoos a meaning of self-expressions, making them more accepted.

Pitt (as cited in Burgess & Clark, 2010; Degelman & Price, 2002) even explains that tattoos became generally perceived as an expression of personal identity. They became a way of individualising oneself. Because of this the people that had tattoos became more diversified, just like the tattoo designs. They started diverting from the tribal styles or the typical sailor style in design. Whereas the original designs had negative associations connected to them, the new, more individualized designs played a role in the development towards a greater acceptance of tattoos (Mayers et al., as cited in Burgess & Clark, 2010).

However, notwithstanding these changes, tattoos still had a long way to go towards more general acceptance. Lin (2002) found that people without tattoos, that are older in age or regard religion as a positive phenomenon will most likely view tattoos as something negative. Lin's research was conducted in the early 2000's, therefore it does not record the developments since then. However, Burgess & Clark (2010) did record these newer developments in their research. They found that the type of tattoo still makes a difference, after newer styles were introduced in the 1980's, as Mayers et al. (as cited in Burgess & Clark, 2010) predicted. They concluded that people with more traditional tattoo designs are still being prejudiced because of them, while people with more contemporary tattoo designs do not experience any disadvantages compared to non-tattooed people. This new approach towards tattoos opened up new role expectations, that are more in line with the tattoo culture of today's society.

To conclude, having tattoos is a physical characteristic that fed a lot of negative role expectations throughout history and might still do. This makes it particularly interesting to investigate the role expectations and stereotypes towards tattooed people that are present in today's society. As explained, the change in the image of tattoos from a craft of marking to an art of expression might have resulted in tattoos being more accepted overall. On the other hand, taking into account the claim of Dhossche, Snell and Larder (2000) that tattoos are still largely seen as unconventional, the possibility remains that they are still surrounded with negative associations, for example with deviant behaviour and criminals.

## 2.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESES

These changes in the perception of tattoos have made the perception of tattoos in professional working environments, within the service sector, rather interesting. Whereas before the tattoo renaissance the expectations for the role of tattooed people and the expectations for roles in a professional work environment were vastly different, it now seems that these roles can have some overlap with another. Traditionally tattoos do not fit into the role expectations of a professional environment. However, according to the symbolic interactionist approach, it can also be expected that these roles have changed. This can be seen as a result of the broader acceptance of tattoos, which made them fit into more professional roles.

What also could have added to the increase in acceptance towards tattoos, is the growing importance of the service sector. When more people got access to professions in the service sector, because of social mobility, they brought characteristics with them that were traditionally associated with the lower social classes. This includes informal clothing, but also tattoos.

Thus, now people with tattoos can have expectations to be professional in a working environment, suggesting that the tattoos do not interfere with their professional role. This is also explained by Kosut (2014), who argues that tattoos are more accepted as a result from the changes that made tattoos to be an art rather than a craft. Thus, this suggests that role expectations have changed and tattoos have fewer negative connotations. This raises the main research question:

*To what extent do tattoos influence how one is perceived in a professional work environment?*

With the hypothesis: tattoos do not influence the perception of a person, in a professional work environment. The initial drive for this hypothesis is the informalisation that is happening throughout society, causing more acceptance towards different external characteristics in the professional work environment, like casual attire and tattoos as well.

It has already been mentioned that role expectations are different for different work environments. This together with the artistic, and therefore creative, connotation of the tattoo renaissance, raises the idea that this more positive perception of tattoos only goes for creative environments. Tattoos are very similar to attire, but tattoos fit within a creative role, because of the artistic discourse that has come to surround tattooing. This can imply that more creative

work environments have a more positive perception towards tattoos, compared to work environments with no such focus on creativity. Raising the sub-research question:

*To what extent, does a work environment influence the perception one has of tattoos, depending on whether it is creative or non-creative?*

To be able to research this, some elaboration is needed of what constitutes a creative work environment. In line with the organizational approach to role theory, we might assume that role expectations about professionalism are primarily negotiated and upheld by the organization as a whole. Therefore, rather than focusing on the specific roles that people take in such an organization, we consider whether the organization as a whole can be considered creative. By this, we mean an organisation where the main mission has a creative focus or is about creativity (one might think of architecture or graphic design companies, cultural organization or art education institutes). Such an environment does not necessarily imply that every employee defines her-/himself as creative or fulfils strictly creative tasks, but it might still be expected that the role expectations that apply to them are associated with creativity. For work environments that are not a part of the creative industries and therefore farther removed from the discourse of self-expression and artistry or creativity, we might expect less acceptance of tattoos. Thus, the hypothesis is that creative environments are more positive towards tattoos than non-creative environments. This hypothesis can also be illustrated by an experience from the tattoo artist.

*I come from a creative background, where tattoos are completely accepted. People do not find it weird. But in the shop I notice, for example with people in healthcare, that it is still not accepted there, as the people explain. They will want their tattoos in places where their work attire will cover it. The same for people who work in a 'grey suit culture,' it is still not accepted there either. (E. van den Hoek, personal communication, May 14, 2019).*

Apart from working environment and the expectations of professionalism associated with that, the perception of tattoos depends on other factors as well. Characteristics of both the people that have tattoos and the people who see them, may affect how tattoos are perceived in professional roles. The first factor is gender, raising the following sub-question.

*To what extent, are tattoos differently perceived on men and on women, in a professional work environment?*

As explained by Burgess & Clark (2010) before the 70's/80's tattoos had a masculine image, but as they got more popular, more women started having them as well. This makes the topic of gender especially interesting to reflect how tattoos are differently perceived depending on the person that has them.

Given the traditional masculine connotation of tattoos, one might hypothesize that tattoos have primarily become more acceptable for men. However, one might also hypothesize that the general rise in popularity and acceptance of tattoos has actually decreased the gendered associations of tattoos. Based on the theory of Kosut, tattoos are merely seen as an artform. As they no longer carry the expectations that fit with the historical role of tattoos, we might in fact hypothesize that tattoos are not perceived differently for men and women.

Lastly, the other factor: people that do the perceiving, is expected to have an influence. The main thing that has come forward in the theory is that the image of tattoos has changed in the past decades. In previous times, tattoos were more connected to criminal and deviant behaviour, feeding negative associations. Gradually, though, connotations developed of creativity and art. Therefore, it is likely that there is a difference between the perception of tattoos from older people compared to younger, as older people are possibly more inclined to perceive tattoos with the expectations that were more present in the past. This raises the sub-research question:

*To what extent, does age influence the perception one has of tattoos, in a professional work environment?*

Because of the theory on the evolution of the perception of tattoos, the hypothesis is that older people have a more negative perception of tattoos than younger people, within a professional working environment.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

As explained, the goal of this study is to find out if there are negative perceptions of tattoos, especially in a professional environment. Therefore, this research has focuses on the interaction between certain specific aspects and the perception of tattoos within the work environment. In particular it will be tested how the age of the participant, the gender of the perceived person and overall different work environments influence the perception of tattoos in this context. This research will give insight in the perception people have of those with tattoos, based Dahrendorf's theory, which explains that one's external characteristics and social role expectations are connected (Biddle, 2013).

#### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to gain insight on how the gender of the perceived person, the age of the participant and the workplace of the participant affect people's perception of tattoos on the work floor, a quantitative method is applied. Data are collected in the form of survey questionnaires on Qualtrics, which are analysed statistically using SPSS, because the goal is to test the hypotheses that came forth from the theory and not to explore. The study is conceived as a survey questionnaire containing an experimental vignette study. This enables participants to give their thoughts on tattoos without the implications that come with the taboo that still might linger around. This is because vignettes allow for participants to respond to depicted situations as a whole, where topics like tattoos can be hidden in. Hence, this experimental set-up enables a view on the effect of tattoos on people's opinions about others, within situations that closely resemble reality.

Also, because of these carefully created situations, the respondents are not specifically focussed on the tattoos, which otherwise could impact their responses. Especially because the topic can be thought of as a taboo, they might be likely to give answers more in line with the opinion of their bosses or their surrounding community in general. Their unawareness of the specific topic gives more security on them answering truthfully to their own thoughts and feelings.

finally, it might be argued that a qualitative research delivers more in-depth information on the topic. For example, information on when a tattoo might be acceptable and when it is not, why



people would find them unacceptable, etc. This is interesting as well but looking at the history of tattoos it is already apparent where the negative perceptions of tattoos come from. Therefore, it is warranted to apply a deductive research strategy to assess the effect of tattoos in relation to professionalism, as it connects very fitting concepts like tattoos, self-expression and acceptance.

### 3.2 SAMPLE

The questionnaires are sent out to two different businesses, from the service sector. These are gathered through quota sampling, which is a non-probability technique. This means that the sample is divided into subgroups, and the first available participants were included. In this case there are two sub groups: people in creative businesses, where the roles are expectedly more fitting with tattoos and traditional business attire is not required, and the other sub group contains people working in a more traditional business environment, where there is less room for outspoken creativity within the role expectations and business attire can be considered the norm. Within each of these types of businesses at least 30 respondents are sought, thus 60 in total.

To do this, two businesses are selected which represent the two subgroups. For a more creative organisation, where clothing norms fit within the creative role expectancy, this will be Sint Lucas, a creative MBO school of vocational secondary education. This school qualifies as a creative organisation, because their mission is focused on creativity: *Sint Lucas guides creative talents to a beautiful future in the creative industries*. It is important to point out that only employees will be used as participants and not students, as the focus is on a professional working environment, not a learning environment.

The second business represents a more traditional organisation, where there are different norms on how to dress, which are more traditional business-wear. For this study, employees from the organisation Thuisvester are approached to fill in the questionnaires. Thuisvester is a housing construction organisation, where the clothing norms are expectedly more traditional. Since their mission is about creating homes as purposeful and affordable as possible (with the core values: *courage, together* and *sustainable*), this is expected to be a traditional environment, because this is a business with no particular creative focus, but a more functional focus.

To ensure access to sufficient numbers of participants, I selected these organisations, because I have direct contacts working there. These contacts were used for the recruitment of other participants within the same organisation. When making the questionnaires, the option was selected to make sure each participant only fills in the questionnaire once, ensuring there are no double answers from the same participant.

After distributing, there are 74 respondents that filled in a questionnaire in total, 30 from Sint Lucas and 44 from Thuisvester. This exceeds the goal number of participants by a little bit, though ideally even more participants would be part of the research. In the process of data cleaning, it turned out unexpectedly that a considerable number of respondents had not completely filled in the questionnaire. Therefore, the total number of participants decreased to 57; 34 from Thuisvester and 23 from Sint Lucas (29 male and 28 female). Unfortunately, as it turned out to be very important to have a contact person in the organizations who could assure access to its employees, with the time at hand it was not possible to approach additional organisations to increase response. Given the fact that highly comparable organisations needed to be approached, it was not possible to sample from other suitable organizations. A summary of the general characteristics of the sample are provided in the table below.

**Table 3.1: General statistics**

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Thuisvester</i>	Mean: 49.1 (St. Dev.: 9.6) Min.: 29 Max.: 66	21 males 13 females	34 respondents
<i>Sint Lucas</i>	Mean: 46.1 (St. Dev.: 1.7) Min.: 27 Max.: 65	8 males 15 females	23 respondents

### 3.3 OPERATIONALISATION

#### 3.3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As already stated, the data is collected with questionnaires, in which vignettes are included. The complete questionnaire can be found in the appendix, as it was made in Dutch. The questionnaire consists of three sets of questions. Firstly, a set of questions are asked for background information of the participant. These are direct questions, asking what the participant's age and gender is, both using closed-ended questions. The answers for age are continuous, people can freely fill in a number and the answers for gender range from 0 = male to 1 = female. The organisation the participant works for, is not directly asked, as there are 2 sets of questionnaires distributed (one for each organisation). Thus, the questionnaires inform directly what organisation the participant works for, without having to ask. This results in two separate datasets, with the same content, for the two organisations. These were combined into a single dataset with a variable (*workplace*) indicating which of the two was taken by a respondent. As the resulting variable for workplace was a dummy, it was coded as 0 for respondents working at Thuisvester and 1 for those from Sint-Lucas.

#### 3.3.2 VIGNETTE PHOTOS

Secondly, a vignette study is incorporated, to find out about the perception the participant has of tattoos. Finch (1987) describes vignette studies as: “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond (p. 105).” Within this research the vignette approach is applied slightly differently. Those are not short stories that describe the situations, but photos with a short description. These descriptions include a name, age and occupation, that are fixed and kept as neutral as possible, meaning that these descriptions were chosen to be as free from stereotypes as possible. The photos shown together with the descriptions contain a person. The photos are manipulated experimentally to display tattoos or not. Per photo, a participant gets to see only one version.

To do this, four different vignettes are created containing a photo. Thus, there were four photo observations per respondent. These photos were experimentally manipulated, by editing tattoos in them with Adobe Photoshop. As a result, of each there are two versions; one version with a tattoo and a version without a tattoo. Each participant sees 4 vignette situations in total; two of

people with tattoos (one male and one female) and two of people without tattoos (also one male and one female). To make sure all versions are used equal amounts of times, there are four questionnaires made per business. Each of these shows a selection of the photos. Below is a schematic overview of the versions:

**Table 3.2: The different versions of the vignette photos**

<u><i>Vignettes</i></u>	<u><i>Questionnaire 1</i></u>	<u><i>Questionnaire 2</i></u>	<u><i>Questionnaire 3</i></u>	<u><i>Questionnaire 4</i></u>
<i>1, female</i>	Tattoo	Tattoo	No tattoo	No tattoo
<i>2, female</i>	No tattoo	No tattoo	Tattoo	Tattoo
<i>3, male</i>	Tattoo	No tattoo	Tattoo	No tattoo
<i>4, male</i>	No tattoo	Tattoo	No tattoo	Tattoo

As mentioned, the photos are supported with some describing texts in the questionnaire. This was done to make sure that the people depicted were explicitly ascribed a similar professional position. Information that could influence the judgement of the participant on the photo, was deliberately avoided. Thus, only a name, age and profession were added, with a description of what is happening in the photo. Even this information had to be carefully considered, as even names can raise some judgements. For example, some are connected to certain contexts, some names are seen as trashy or fitting with certain cultures or origins. The same happens for certain professions, as there are differences in income and there are connections made with status, etcetera. Therefore, it was made sure that the names and professions are selected to be as neutral as possible. In the appendices all photos and descriptions can be seen, but by way of illustration below two versions of the first photo are shown.

**Figure 3.1: Example vignette photos**



*This is Anne. She works as a consultant and is 30 years old. She is making some last adjustment for a large assignment. [originally in Dutch]*

It is also important to point out that the tattoos shown in the vignette photos reflect more modern, stylistic and individualistic tattoo designs which developed in recent years, and not a more general style connected to prejudices such as tribal styles or the typical sailor tattoo designs. In this way the type of tattoos most commonly seen are included in the research, as these can be expected to be most generally accepted, because these have no heavy stereotypes connected to them. Overall, the tattoos are edited to be seen, but they are not overly conspicuous. For example, the placement of the tattoos is considered to make that they are not in places that are very much ‘out there.’ Thus, no tattoos were edited on the face, neck or chest. This is likely to lead to less extreme results, but will make the research topic less obvious as well. The results will reflect the perception of more generally ‘accepted’ tattoos, which are a better reflection of real-life situations (although less subtle tattoos are likely to lead to more marked effects on perception, results might in that case only be applicable to rather extreme situations).

The questions the participants answer about these vignettes are statements they can agree or disagree with in a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree.’ There are ten statements on topics regarding one’s professional behaviour. These were based on the literature regarding professional behaviour and the meaning of professionalism (Fidler, 1996; Kerr, Von Glinow & Schriesheim, 1977). These questions give the variables *perception photo*. Below the 10 statements are listed (literally translated from Dutch).

**Table 3.3: Questions about the perception of the photos**

<i>Statements</i>	
<i>Statement 1</i>	This person is ambitious
<i>Statement 2</i>	Colleagues can count on this person
<i>Statement 3</i>	This person is motivated at work
<i>Statement 4</i>	This person is professional
<i>Statement 5</i>	This person is open to critique
<i>Statement 6</i>	This person is creative
<i>Statement 7</i>	This person is successful
<i>Statement 8</i>	This person is intelligent
<i>Statement 9</i>	This person is good at dealing with customers
<i>Statement 10</i>	This person takes their job seriously

### 3.3.3 DIRECT QUESTIONS

Thirdly, the participant's perception of tattoos is directly asked. I will also look at the participants' overall opinion on tattoos, within a professional work environment. In the case there is a difference with the perceptions of the photos, this serves as an interesting result as well, since this means that people pretend to be more openminded or closeminded towards tattoos or that they are not aware of their prejudices. Though, to avoid priming and make sure the participants don't know the full research is about tattoos, these questions are part of a list of ten questions about the professional image of other external characteristics seen on one of the vignette pictures. Question 4 provides the variable *tattoos less professional* and question 8 provides *tattoos not covered*. All questions are listed below (literally translated from Dutch).

**Table 3.4: Direct questions about external characteristics**

<i>Variables</i>	
<i>4 tattoos less professional</i>	1 Someone with eyeglasses comes across as more professional
	2 The laptop brand someone has, says something about their professionalism
	3 Work attire influences how professional someone comes across
	Someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional
<i>8 tattoos not covered</i>	5 The brand of someone's smartphone says something about their professionalism
	6 Someone with a well-kept appearance comes across as more professional
	7 A woman with notable make-up comes across as less professional
	Tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment
	9 A man with a clean shaved face comes across as more professional
	10 An expensive watch comes across as professional

After this, the question is asked what the participant thinks to be the topic of the research. As this allows me to assess how aware respondents were of the study's topic, which gives the variable *aware tattoo questionnaire*. Finally, the participants will be asked if there are any additional comments or questions.

### 3.4 VARIABLES

**Table 3.5: The variables**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Operationalisation</i>	<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>
<i>Workplace</i>	What business the respondent works for	0 = Thuisvester 1 = Sint Lucas	59.6% = Thuisvester 40.4% = Sint Lucas	34 = Thuisvester 23 = Sint Lucas
<i>Gender of the respondent</i>	What gender the respondent is	0 = Male 1 = Female	50.9% = Male 49.1% = Female	29 = Male 28 = Female
<i>Age of the respondent</i>	How old the respondent is	None	M = 47.93 (St. Dev. = 11.05), Min. = 27, Max. = 66	-
<i>Photo</i>	Which photo is depicted	1 = Vignette 1 (Anne) 2 = Vignette 2 (Nienke) 3 = Vignette 3 (Daniël) 4 = Vignette 4 (Sam)	25% = Vignette 1 25% = Vignette 2 25% = Vignette 4 25% = Vignette 5	-
<i>Gender of the person in the photo</i>	What gender is the person in the photo	0 = Male 1 = Female	50% = Male 50% = Female	-
<i>Tattoo photo</i>	Does the person in the photo have a tattoo	0 = No tattoo 1 = Tattoo	50% = No tattoo 50% = Tattoo	-
<i>Perception photo (10 different statements)</i>	What perception the respondent has of the person depicted in the photo.	-2 = Completely disagree -1 = Disagree 0 = Neutral 1 = Agree 2 = Completely agree	(different for all 10 statements)	-



<i>Tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment</i>	What perception the respondent has of tattoos	-2 = Completely disagree -1 = Disagree 0 = Neutral 1 = Agree 2 = Completely agree	5.3% = Completely disagree 24.6% = Disagree 33.3% = Neutral 24.6% = Agree 8.8% = Completely Agree	12 = Completely disagree 56 = Disagree 76 = Neutral 56 = Agree 20 = Completely agree
<i>Someone with tattoos comes across as less professional</i>	What perception the respondent has of tattoos:	-2 = Completely disagree -1 = Disagree 0 = Neutral 1 = Agree 2 = Completely agree	14% = Completely disagree 19.3% = Disagree 38.6% = Neutral 19.3% = Agree 5.3% = Completely Agree	32 = Completely disagree 44 = Disagree 88 = Neutral 44 = Agree 12 = Completely agree
<i>Direct questions on other external characteristics</i>	What perception the respondent has of other external characteristics	-2 = Completely disagree -1 = Disagree 0 = Neutral 1 = Agree 2 = Completely agree	(different for all 8 statements)	-
<i>Realise tattoo questionnaire</i>	Does the participant realise the questionnaire is about tattoos	0 = No 1 = Yes	92,7% = No 7.3% = Yes	204 = No 16 = Yes

### 3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

To answer the main and sub-research questions, several different analyses are executed with the variables that are operationalised from the questionnaires. Firstly, an overall impression is sought by testing the global effect of tattoos on the perceptions of the vignette photos (*perception photo*). In addition, the direct opinion questions on the opinion of tattoos (*Tattoos do not have to be covered within a professional environment* and *Someone with tattoos comes across as less professional*) are included into the analyses, their means will give a reflection about the participant's opinion he or she is aware of. After this, the direct questions about their opinion on tattoos are analysed. The influence of the age of the participant, the gender of the participant and the workplace of the participant on these direct questions is investigated. To see if this helps explain the effect of the direct opinion on tattoos on the perception questions about the photos.

Next, these direct opinion questions are put in an interaction with the whether a tattoo is seen in the photos. This is done in order to look if there is any influence present of this interaction on the perception questions about the photos.

Then, the variables: the *workplace of the participant*, the *gender of the person in the photo* and the *age of the participant* are separately put in regressions to see if there is an interaction effect with tattoos that influences the *perception photo* answers. This gives answers to the sub-research questions on, whether there is an influence of different workplaces (creative versus non-creative) on the perception of tattoos, whether tattoo perception is different on men and women and whether a difference in age of the participant influences tattoo perception. In addition, the means of the different photos are compared. This can give an indication if there are other influences, of factors present in the photos, on the perception of tattoos.

### 3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Regarding validity, there are some variables that very directly measure what is intended to be measured, but there are also some variables with more dimensions, making the designing of questions difficult to be variable. *The gender of the person in the photo, the age of the participant* and the *workplace of the participant* are, for example, very direct, without multiple dimensions. They measure whether the person in the photo is male or female (which is easily observed), the age of the respondent and the organisation the respondent works at.

The inclusion of professionalism in the questions about the perceptions of the people in the photos was a bit more difficult, as they had to be transferred to statements, but also translate several core areas and dimensions. Also, the photos themselves were more difficult to make as valid as possible. The focus within the four different photos was put on the tattoos, but a balance needed to be found, for the tattoos to stand out but not be too obvious. In addition, there are more differences between the four photos, which could influence the perception of the participants as well. This means that the photos and measuring of professionalism of the people in the photos can have an effect on the results, which this is inevitable. However, the variables are made with validity in mind, thus for the sake of the subtleness and intricacy of the research, they are as valid as possible.

Regarding reliability, there is a reliability analysis performed for the questions that measure perception of professionalism for the photos (*perception photo 1 -10*) and for the direct questions about tattoo perception (*Tattoos do not have to be covered within a professional environment* and *Someone with tattoos comes across as less professional*). The Cronbach's alpha is very high for the perception of professionalism, this is 0.933. For the direct tattoo perception, this is 0.546, which is also acceptable because the scale only consists of two items (questions).

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 OVERALL TATTOO PERCEPTION

The main research question is: To what extent do tattoos influence how one is perceived in a professional work environment? To answer this question, the 10 questions about the vignettes are investigated. To find out the global effect of the tattoos in the photos, a simple regression analysis is performed, per question. Thus, the independent variable is whether a tattoo was shown in the photo and the dependent are the 10 different perception scales. This enables us to find out the influence of whether one has a tattoo on the perception of this person.

The number of respondents for whom this regression is performed is 227 (one respondent did not fill in the scales for photo 4). For the ten vignette questions, only some had a variance that was significantly explained by a model that includes whether a tattoo was seen in the photo or not. This is the case for the questions about whether the person seems creative and whether they seem to take their job seriously. For the other 8 questions there was no significant effect found, as  $p > 0.10$ . This means that for these questions the effects are not reliable.

**Table 4.1: F-ratios for predicting the perception of tattoos**

<i>Question</i>	<i>F-ratio</i>
<i>1 This person is ambitious</i>	0,50
<i>2 Colleagues can count on this person</i>	<0,01
<i>3 This person is motivated at work</i>	0,53
<i>4 This person is professional</i>	2,21
<i>5 This person is open to critique</i>	0,45
<i>6 This person is creative</i>	6,33*
<i>7 This person is successful</i>	0,06
<i>8 This person is intelligent</i>	1,03
<i>9 This person is good at dealing with customers</i>	<0,01
<i>10 This person takes their job seriously</i>	5,19*

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

This gives a first indication that tattoos have no major influence on the perceiving of a person in a professional work environment, except regarding their perceived creativity and seriousness. The people of the sample that saw the photos with tattoos agreed more with the statement about creativity, as there is a positive effect ( $b^* = 0,255$ ,  $t = 2,551$  with  $p = 0,011$ ). This suggests that people with tattoos are found to be more creative. This is a positive perception of tattoos, but the negative relationship with the statement about seriousness, suggest a negative perception. It suggests that the sample finds the people in the photos with a tattoo to take their job less seriously, which is generally a bad thing ( $b^* = -0,209$ ,  $t = -2,248$ ,  $p = 0,026$ ).

## 4.2 THE DIRECT QUESTIONS ON TATTOO PERCEPTION

However, these indications do not tell the entire story, as there are many other factors that might have an influence on the perception of tattoos. These variables are personal characteristics of both participant (gender) and of the person depicted in the photo (age). There also are collective characteristics that say something about professional norms (workplace). These are discussed in the theory, as they lead to the sub-research questions.

Before finding out the specifics of the influences of *participants' age*, *the gender of the person depicted in the photo* and the participants' *workplace*, there are two question specifically focussed on the direct opinion on tattoos. These can give further indication on the perception of tattoos in a work environment. These questions are both also Likert-scales. The statements are: *Someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional* and *Tattoos do not have to be covered up in a professional environment*. The first statement: *'tattoos do not have to be covered up in a professional environment'* has a Mean of 3.07 ( $n = 220$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) suggesting that the sample is slightly more tolerant towards tattoos. This also applies to the second statement: *'someone with visible tattoo's comes across as less professional.'* The Mean of this Likert-scale is 2.82 ( $N = 220$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and as it is a negative statement towards tattoos, the Mean of lower than three indicates a slightly more tolerant feeling about tattoos, as well. It is important to stress that this is just an indication, for both questions the Median is 3, meaning that most participant feel neutral about the statements.

This gives an indication that tattoos alone do not have an influence on the perception of a person, but there are many different factors that can have an influence on this connection as well. As explained in the theoretical framework, *whether the participant works at a creative organisation* or not can influence this connection just like *gender of the person depicted in the photo* and *age of the participant*. To find out about the effect of these variables, this connection will be explored. This will be done through a multiple regression analysis with *workplace of the participant*, *gender of the participant* and *age of the participant* as the independent variables and both, separately, *tattoos do not have to be covered* and *someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional* as dependent variables ( $N = 220$ ). To clarify, it is not gender of the person in the photo that is used in the regression, but gender of the participant. Because the participants gender can possibly have an effect on the overall direct perception of tattoos, but

the gender in the photos cannot, as the photos are in no way involved in the direct perception questions.

For these regressions, the variables of these two statements are mean centred. Thus, their Likert-scales with a score of 3 as the middle, is changed to a score of 0 in the middle. This means that the answer scores do not range from 1 -5, but from -2 to 2. The regression with *someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional* is found to be significant,  $F_{(219)} = 8.52, p < 0.001$ . Thus, this regression model is useful for predicting whether visible tattoos are perceived as less professional, even though only 11% of the difference in judgement on the Likert-scale can be predicted based on *workplace*, *gender participant* and *age participant* ( $R^2 = 0,11$ ). Only, the variable *workplace* ( $b^* = -0.28, t = -4.29, p < 0.001$ ) has a significant effect on *someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional*. This means that participants from Sint Lucas disagree on the statement: someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional, with an average of 0.63 points lower than participants from Thuisvester answered on the Likert-scale. In other words, for employees of the creative organisation tattoos indicate a lack of professionalism to a lesser extent. The *Age of the participant* ( $b^* = 0.01, t = -0.08, p = 0.603$ ) and *gender of the participant* ( $b^* = -0.12, t = -1.40, p = 0.164$ ) have insignificant effects. Overall, there is no significant difference between ages, when it comes to their opinion on someone coming across as less professional with tattoos. Also, men and women give no significantly different answers. This means that most of the variance in the dependent can be attributed to the respondent's *workplace*.

For the regression with *tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment* there is also significance found.  $F_{(219)} = 9.71, p < 0.01$ . In this case both the participant's *workplace* ( $b^* = 0.26, t = 3.95, p < 0.001$ ) and participant's *age* ( $b^* = -0.25, t = -3.41, p = 0.001$ ) explain a significant part of the variance. And the *gender of the participant* ( $b^* = -0.08, t = -1.11, p = 0.270$ ) does not. The overall variance that is explained is 12% ( $R^2 = 0.12$ ). The participants from Sint Lucas agree more with the statement: tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment, than participants from Thuisvester, as they voted on average 0.55 points higher. As for the variable *age participant* this means that for every year of life the score is 0.02 points lower. This means that the older a person is, the more likely they are to think that that tattoos have to be covered in professional environments.

### 4.3 EXPLAINING TATTOO PERCEPTION ON THE PHOTOS

Now that it is clear how direct opinion on tattoos differ, this direct opinion can help explain the perceptions of the photos with and without tattoos. In order to explain this, two multiple regression analyses are performed per statement about the *perceptions of the photos*. These regressions are only performed for the two statements that were significantly affected by whether a *tattoo was shown* in the first place. These are *perception photo 6* with the statement: *This person is creative*, and *perception photo 10* with the statement: *This person takes their job seriously*. Each of these is put in two separate regressions as the dependent variable, with ‘*Someone with tattoos comes across as less professional*’ as the independent variable and with ‘*Tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment*’ as the independent variable. In both is also the variable on whether a tattoo was displayed included to see this direct effect, plus an interaction between these direct perception statements, on the one hand, and whether a *tattoo was displayed* in the photo, on the other hand. The purpose of this interaction is to see whether the respondents’ direct attitudes about tattoos affect the perception of photos differently, depending on whether a tattoo was shown or not. For the dependent variable one of the perception photo variables is used.

The regression with ‘*Someone with tattoos comes across as less professional*’ is found to be significant to *perception photo 6 (This person is creative)*:  $F_{(219)} = 2.70, p = 0.046$ . The model explains 3.6% of the variance. This significance comes from the influence of whether a tattoo is shown. The photos with tattoos are averagely rated 0.24 higher on the statement if this person is creative ( $b^* = 0.16, p = 0.018$ ). Although, whether a person finds tattoos to come across as less professional, does not influence whether the people in the photos are found to be creative, depending on if they have a tattoo or not. Because the interaction effect is insignificant.

The regression with *perception photo 10 (This person takes their job seriously)* on the other hand, gives a significant influence,  $F_{(219)} = 4.50, p = 0.004$ , because of the interaction effect as well. In the table below, it can be seen that, overall, people give 0.25 points less on the scale, for the idea that a person takes their job seriously, when there is a tattoo visible. But when looking at the interaction effect it shows that people who find tattoos to come across as less professional, also find the people with a tattoo (in the photos) to take their job less seriously, because there is a negative influence of 0.25 points on the scale.



**Table 4.2: predicting *This person takes their job seriously***

	<i>b</i> *
<i>Tattoos come across as less professional</i>	0.25**
<i>Tattoo visible in photo</i>	-0.18**
<i>Tattoos come across as less professional x Tattoo visible in photo</i>	-0.25**

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Looking at the regression of '*tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment,*' *whether a tattoo is seen in the photo* and their interaction, with *perception photo 6 (This person is creative)*, there is no significance found ( $F_{(219)} = 2.53, p = 0.058$ ). This means that people's opinion on whether tattoos need to be covered in a professional environment are not an indicator for whether they find the person in the photo creative or not, depending on whether they have a tattoo or not. The same applies for the regression with *perception photo 10 (This person takes their job seriously)*; a participant's opinion on whether tattoos need to be covered in a professional environment does not influence whether people with tattoo is thought to take their job seriously or not. This regression is also not significant,  $F_{(219)} = 1.84, p = 0.141$ .

As is explained earlier, the direct opinion questions can partially be explained by some personal characteristics of the participants. *Workplace of the participant* can explain partially if *someone with tattoos comes across as less professional* for the participant. Also, the *workplace of the participant* and *age of the participant* can explain partially whether the participant thinks if *tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment*. Even though these opinions on these statements do not influence *perception photo 6 (This person is creative)* and *10 (This person takes their job seriously)* enough, it can still be the case that the personal characteristics by themselves do have a significant influence. This makes it possible that it is actually these characteristics that influence the outcomes of the questions about the perception of the people in the photos, based on the difference between if a tattoo is seen or not. To test this, three separate regressions are performed per question about the perception of the photos. Hence, separate regressions are conducted with the participant's *workplace* and the *age* of the participant, for each question about the person in the photo. Also, a regression is conducted for *gender of the person in the photo* (instead of the participant's gender).

#### 4.4 SUB-RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first regressions performed are with the participant's *workplace*, whether there is a *tattoo in the photo* and the interaction between the participant's *workplace* and whether there is a *tattoo in the photo* as the independent variables, and *the questions about the perception of the people in photo 1 - 10* as the dependent variable, in order to see if different workplaces have an effect on the perception of the tattoos in the photos. As can be seen in the table below, these regressions mostly count a significant amount of variance. Only for question 2, 5 and 9 (*Colleagues can count on this person, this person is open to critique and this person is good at dealing with customers*) the influence of *workplace* in interaction with whether there is a *tattoo in the photo* is insignificant. This means that regarding colleagues counting on the person, openness to critique and dealing with customers, there is no influence of workplace on the perception of tattoos. For the dealing with customers this is especially strange, as it would make sense that external characteristics matter more.

**Table 4.3: Predicting tattoo perception**

<i>Question</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>
1 This person is ambitious	2.34	0.075~	0.03
2 Colleagues can count on this person	0.70	0.551	0.01
3 This person is motivated at work	3.90	0.010**	0.05
4 This person is professional	3.08	0.028*	0.04
5 This person is open to critique	1.47	0.223	0.02
6 This person is creative	5.75	0.001***	0.07
7 This person is successful	3.00	0.031*	0.04
8 This person is intelligent	4.19	0.007**	0.05
9 This person is good at dealing with customers	0.13	0.943	<0.01
10 This person takes their job seriously	4.41	0.005**	0.06

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Going back to the theory, this is difficult to explain, because being open for critique, being there for colleagues and dealing with customers, is not connected to one specific part of professional behaviour. Being open for critique is connected with a commitment to learning, but dealing with customers and colleagues being able to count on you is connected to interpersonal competence (Fiddle, 1996). Therefore, one could argue that it is these two core areas of professional behaviour that are not differently perceived in the different workplaces. This implies that for the core areas: interpersonal competence and a commitment to learning, there is no difference between people with tattoos and without tattoos in the perception of participants from different workplaces. Also, *perception photo 1* (regarding being ambitious) also partially falls under a commitment to learning, which can explain why it is not significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$  (Fiddle, 1996). Therefore, should *perception photo 1* be interpreted more cautiously as a trend.

The other six regressions give a significant influence, when looking at the  $b^*$  values this is because of the significant direct effect of the *workplace* of the participant. These values are negative, which means that participants of Sint Lucas overall were more negative about the professionalism of the people in the photos, than the people of Thuisvester. The insignificance of the  $b^*$  values of the direct effect of tattoos and of the interaction effect shows that the difference if there are tattoos shown or not mostly does not matter. In both cases are the participants that work at Sint Lucas more critical.

This was not expected, looking at the theory. Participants from Sint Lucas were expected to be more positive towards the professionalism of the people depicted in the photos, especially when tattoos are shown. However, it is the participants from Thuisvester that respond more positive overall. As a result of speculation, can this outcome be explained. Because the people within the creative environment are more oriented towards arts and aesthetics it can make sense that they are more critical when it comes to the way something or someone looks. They might be more influenced by external characteristics in general. And the insignificance of the interaction effect could be because they are used to creative expressions like tattoos in their work environment, therefore realising that this does not affect the professionalism of a person.

**Table 4.4: Predicting tattoo perception (on the next page)**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>b*</i>
<i>1 This person is ambitious</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.12
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.23*
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.14
<i>2 Colleagues can count on this person</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.03
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.04
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.07
<i>3 This person is motivated at work</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.12
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.29**
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.14
<i>4 this person is professional</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.13
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.21*
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.06
<i>5 This person is open to critique</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.03
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.15
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.025
<i>6 This person is creative</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.11
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.27**
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.11
<i>7 This person is successful</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.11
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.27**
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.18~
<i>8 This person is intelligent</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.07
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.23*
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.07
<i>9 This person is good at dealing with customers</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.03
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.05
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.06
<i>10 This person takes their job seriously</i>	<i>(Constant)</i>	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.16~
	<i>Workplace participant</i>	-0.19*
	<i>Workplace participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.02

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## 4.5 SUB-RESEARCH QUESTION 2

For the second sub-research question, the focus lies on the influence of *gender* of the person in the photo, on the perception of the photos depending on whether there is a tattoo shown or not. To find out whether this influence is significant, several regression analyses are performed. In this regression, the *gender* of the person in the photo, whether a tattoo is shown or not, and an interaction between these two: *gender photo* and *tattoo photo* are the independent variables. *Perception photo 1 – 10* are the dependent variables.

**Table 4.5: Predicting tattoo perception**

<i>Question</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
1 This person is ambitious	0.43	0.733	<0.01
2 Colleagues can count on this person	0.75	0.525	<0.01
3 This person is motivated at work	0.27	0.844	<0.01
4 This person is professional	1.07	0.363	0.01
5 This person is open to critique	0.16	0.925	<0.01
6 This person is creative	4.47	0.005**	0.06
7 This person is successful	0.41	0.746	<0.01
8 This person is intelligent	0.48	0.697	<0.01
9 This person is good at dealing with customers	0.13	0.942	<0.01
10 This person takes their job seriously	2.97	0.033*	0.04

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

The outcomes of these regression analyses are mostly insignificant, indicating that including the gender of the people in the photos does not improve the models in explaining the variance of the perception scores. However, there is one regression analysis that is remarkably significant. This is the regression analysis explaining whether the person is thought to be creative (*perception photo 6*).

Within this regression there is one significant effect of  $p < 0.05$ , this is the main effect of the *gender* of the person in the photo. This is a negative effect, which means that women are overall perceived as less creative. This means that women without tattoos are perceived as less creative than men without tattoos. Women are given 0.36 points lower on the scale on average ( $b^* = -0.24, p = 0.009$ ). In other words, tattoos increase the perceived creativity of women as they are considered to be less creative than men when they have no tattoos. However, looking at the interaction effect, it shows that women with tattoos are perceived as more creative than men in general ( $b^* = 0.19, p = 0.095$ ). Women with tattoos are given 0.32 points higher on the scale on average.

As explained in the theory tattoos have had a male image before the tattoo renaissance (Burgess & Clark, 2010). This might explain why tattoos have a stronger influence on the perception of women, as it might still be more outstanding. However, this does not explain why this is only the case for perceiving a person as creative. Although, that can be the influence of the tattoo renaissance, where they were more seen as an art, as something creative, rather than a symbol of deviance and criminal behaviour (Kosut, 2014). Thus, although women are perceived as less creative as compared to men, because of the tattoos originally having a male image, they have a larger effect on women. However, this is only the case with the perception of creativity, as this is the main image tattoos give since the tattoo renaissance.

## 4.6 SUB-RESEARCH QUESTION 3

To research the influence of the *age* of the participant on the perception of tattoos, the variables *age participant* and *perception photo 1 – 10* are entered into regression analyses. These analyses will incorporate *age participant*, whether a *tattoo* was seen in the photo and an interaction between *age participant* and *tattoo photo* as the independent variables and one of the *perception photo* variables as the dependent variable. Overall, these regressions are significant, with the exception of the regressions for *perception photo 1* and *3* (which are insignificant at  $p = 0.250$  and  $p = 0.169$ ). *Perception photo 2, 7 and 10* are significant for  $p < 0.1$  and *perception photo 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9*. Thus, it makes sense to assume that these models explain a significant amount of variance for the other eight regressions.

**Table 4.6: Predicting tattoo perception**

<i>Question</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
<i>1 This person is ambitious</i>	1.38	0.250	0.02
<i>2 Colleagues can count on this person</i>	2.61	0.052~	0.03
<i>3 This person is motivated at work</i>	1.69	0.169	0.02
<i>4 This person is professional</i>	2.80	0.041*	0.04
<i>5 This person is open to critique</i>	2.71	0.046*	0.04
<i>6 This person is creative</i>	5.25	0.002**	0.07
<i>7 This person is successful</i>	2.26	0.082~	0.03
<i>8 This person is intelligent</i>	3.15	0.026*	0.04
<i>9 This person is good at dealing with customers</i>	9.54	<0.001***	0.11
<i>10 This person takes their job seriously</i>	2.24	0.084~	0.03

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To see what causes this significance can be seen in the  $b^*$  values of these model, in the table below. This seems to give an indication that the older a person is the more negative they perceive the professionalism of the people in the photos, without tattoos. The significance of these effects are not very high, except for: *this person is intelligent* (8) and *this person is good at dealing with customers* (9). Their  $b^*$  values are significant for  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$ .

There is one other regression that stands out from the others, when looking at the  $b^*$  values. This is the regression for *perception photo 6 (This person is creative)*. Within this regression there is no main effect of *age participant*, which means that there is no significant effect of the age of a person on whether they find a person without tattoos creative. But the main effect of *whether a tattoo is seen or not* does have significance. It is also positive, which means that people with tattoos are overall seen as more creative, without influence of the *age* of the participant. And finally, the interaction effect is also significant, for the perception of creativity; the older a person is the less they agree that a person with tattoos is creative.

This shows that most people are not influenced by the older and more negative connotations that are connected with tattoos. However, it can be seen that the older a person is, the more likely that they (still) agree with the older connotations rather than those with creativity and art, because the interaction effect proves to be negative and significant.

**Table 4.7: predicting tattoo perception**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>b*</i>
<i>1 This person is ambitious</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.01
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.12
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.04
<i>2 Colleagues can count on this person</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.01
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.18~
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.02
<i>3 This person is motivated at work</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.21
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.07
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.27
<i>4 this person is professional</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.09
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.16~
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.01
<i>5 This person is open to critique</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.04
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.18~
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.01
<i>6 This person is creative</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.74*



	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.14
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.60*
7 <i>This person is successful</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.18
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.12
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.21
8 <i>This person is intelligent</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.09
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.20*
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.02
9 <i>This person is good at dealing with customers</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	-0.34
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.41***
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	0.35
10 <i>This person takes their job seriously</i>	(Constant)	
	<i>Tattoo photo</i>	0.02
	<i>Age participant</i>	-0.04
	<i>Age participant x tattoo photo</i>	-0.17~

Significance levels: ~  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

#### 4.7 POSSIBLE OTHER INFLUENCES ON TATTOO PERCEPTION

So far, *age of the participant*, *gender of the person in the photo* and *workplace of the participant* were investigated as influences on tattoo perception, but there might also be some other influences by characteristics of the specific people in the pictures. To find out about these, the means of the four different photos are checked for the statements *This person is creative* (6) and *This person takes their job seriously* (10). Only the means of these statements are compared, as these are the only statements that are directly influenced by *whether a tattoo is seen or not*. This comparison gives an idea if there are other differences between the photos that could have been of influence. This provides no statistic results, as this only gives a tentative idea about possible other influences.

Firstly, the means are compared for the statement: *This person is creative*. As can be seen below.

**Table 4.8: Means of different photos for *This person is creative***

<i>Photo</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1 'Anne'	3.21 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.70)
2 'Nienke'	3.19 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.74)
3 'Daniël'	3.23 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.73)
4 'Sam'	3.57 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.74)

This shows that there are some differences in the means between the different photos. This gives the idea that the males are perceived as more creative. This has already been tested under '4.5 Sub-research question 2,' which indeed proved that gender has a significant influence on the perceived creativity. But between the two different males there is also a moderate difference between the means. Sam has a higher mean than Daniël. One can speculate, looking at the vignette photos (which can be found in the appendix), that this difference is there because Daniël is wearing more formal (traditional) work attire, which is more in accordance with role expectations of a non-creative work environment. Sam on the other hand is wearing more informal work attire, which is more in accordance with the expectations of a creative work environment.

The means for *statement 10 'This person takes their job seriously'* are compared in the next table below. This shows that Anne in this case is most expected to take her job seriously,

followed by Sam, Nienke and finally Daniël. To speculate what causes this difference, I first look at what makes Anne and Sam, different from Nienke and Daniël, but there is nothing that stands out. But it is also possible that there are two differences causing, one within each gender. The main thing that stands as a difference for the females, is the fact that Anne wears glasses, and Nienke does not. This can imply that possible people with glasses are perceived to take their job more seriously.

**Table 4.9: Means of different photos for *This person takes their job seriously***

<i>Photo</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1 'Anne'	3.74 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.72)
2 'Nienke'	3.58 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.68)
3 'Daniël'	3.42 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.65)
4 'Sam'	3.64 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.70)

The difference between the men that causes Sam to have a higher mean, might also be that Sam wears informal attire and Daniël wears formal attire, although this is unlikely as one would think that formal attire shows a person to be serious, rather than the other way around. On the other hand, when looking more closely at the way the attire is worn, it can still make sense that Sam is perceived as more serious. He wears a polo that fits nicely, it is put in his trousers and he wears a belt, even though it is rather informal attire, one can see that he took care in it. Daniël wears more formal attire, a white shirt, but one can see that he took less care in his outfit, the shirt is loose, not fully buttoned, the sleeves are rolled up. This can suggest that a well-kept appearance can influence the perception of a person to take their job seriously, positively.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The objective of this master thesis was to see how tattoos are perceived in a professional work environment. To get insights on this topic several theories were framed. Firstly, the role theory was addressed in order to understand the perception and expectations of people within certain environments. This was supported by the theory on stereotyping to understand how external characteristics can influence role expectations. Secondly, the context of professional work environments was explained. Moreover, the specific role expectations that are present within this context were addressed. In addition, a differentiation was made between creative and non-creative work environments, within the service or tertiary sector. Finally, the concept of tattoos was applied to the role theory and to the context of a professional work environment, though reviewing the relevant history of tattoos and their perception.

This brought up the three sub-research questions. The first one is based on the idea that the perception of tattoos is different within a creative work environment, compared to a non-creative work environment, both within the service sector. This is theorised because of the most current changes in the image of tattoos, which is that they have artistic and creative connotations, which would make tattoos a better fit in the role expectations within a creative environment. The second sub-research question has a focus on gender, more specifically the gender of the person (with or without tattoos) that is perceived by others. This idea is based on the masculine image of tattoos that was present before the tattoo renaissance, as it still might have an influence on the perception today, making it possible that women are perceived more negatively with tattoos. The third sub-research question is based globally on the fact that the image of tattoos has changed over the past decades. This makes it likely that the older people are the more they perceive tattoos in accordance with older/ negative expectations, rather than the newer, positive ones. With the focus on these three concepts, the main research question is:

*To what extent do tattoos influence how one is perceived in a professional work environment?*

To answer this question, the analysis went as follows. Firstly, a regression was performed with the variable indicating whether there was a tattoo in the photo or not, to predict the answers on the questions about the perception of the vignette photos. This showed that only the perception on the creativity of the person in the photo and the perception on whether the person takes their

job seriously were significantly influenced, by the addition of tattoos to the photos. With tattoos they were seen as more creative and less serious about their job.

These outcomes were compared to the direct questions on the perception of tattoos. Of these two direct questions the means suggested that on average tattoos are accepted within a professional context. After this the influence of three concepts: the age of the participant, the workplace of the participant and the gender of the participant were included to see if they affect the answers on the direct questions about tattoo perception. In the case of direct question on the statement '*Someone with visible tattoos comes across as less professional,*' this explained that for employees of the creative organisation tattoos indicate a lack of professionalism to a lesser extent than for employees of the non-creative organisation. In the case of the direct question on the statement '*Tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment*' this explained that The participants from the creative organisation agreed more with the statement: tattoos do not have to be covered in a professional environment, than participants from the non-creative organisation. Also, the older a person is, the more likely they are to think that that tattoos have to be covered in professional environments.

After this, an analysis was performed to see whether the respondents' direct attitudes about tattoos affect the perception of photos differently, depending on whether a tattoo was shown or not. This showed that whether a person finds tattoos to come across as less professional, does not influence whether the people in the photos are found to be creative, depending on if they have a tattoo or not. However, it was also found that people who find tattoos to come across as less professional, also find the people with a tattoo (in the photos) to take their job less seriously.

People's opinion on whether tattoos need to be covered in a professional environment are not an indicator for whether they find the person in the photo creative or not, depending on if a tattoo is shown. The same applies for whether they find the person in the photo to take their job seriously or not.

Overall, the perception of tattoos in a professional work environment is rather accepting. It seems to be the case that tattoos do not influence the expectations of a person to behave professionally. However, for people with tattoos, there are overall more expectations to be creative, but also to take their job less seriously. This shows, that the creative image of tattoos is present in the role expectations of people with tattoos, and that the previous, more negative image does not influence the perception of the professionalism of people with tattoos. Next the sub-research questions were answered.

*To what extent, does a work environment influence the perception one has of tattoos, depending on whether it is creative or non-creative?*

Participants of Sint Lucas (the creative organisation) overall were more negative about the professionalism of the people in the photos, than the people of Thuisvester (the non-creative organisation), there was no significant difference based on the tattoos. This means that the work environment has no influence on the perception of tattoos specifically.

*To what extent, are tattoos differently perceived on men and on women, in a professional work environment?*

Overall, gender does not seem to have an effect on the perception of tattoos in a professional environment. However, specifically on perceived creativity, there is an influence of gender. Tattoos increase the perceived creativity of women as they are considered to be less creative than men when they have no tattoos. However, looking at the interaction effect, it shows that women with tattoos are perceived as more creative than men in general. This means that the gender of the perceived person does not have an influence on the perception of tattoos as professional, but it does have an influence on the perception of tattoos as creative.

*To what extent, does age influence the perception one has of tattoos, in a professional work environment?*

Overall, there is no influence found of age on the perception of tattoos, regarding professionalism. This shows that most people are not influenced by the older and more negative connotations that are connected with tattoos. However, it is found that the older a person is the less they agree that a person with tattoos is creative. Proving that the older a person is, the more likely they are to (still) agree with the older connotations of tattoos rather than the newer connotations of creativity and art. This means that age does not influence the perception of tattoos as professional, but it does influence the perception of tattoos as creative.

## 6.1 LIMITATIONS

To reflect on the method of this research. There is one thing I am aware of. I used age to measure whether the image of tattoos has changed over time, this makes it possible that I measure an age-effect instead, where people are more negative about the creativity of tattoos whenever they get older. But this is not supported by any theory and the change of the perception of tattoos over time is.

Also, the use of the vignette photos, allowed for other factors to influence the perception of professionalism as well as tattoos. This is not ideal, but this method did allow for participants to be unaware of their perceptions of tattoos specifically, which means that their answers are not influenced by what they think I want to hear or for example, what they think others in their work environment will answer.

Finally, regarding the results of this research, they reflect the perception of more generally ‘accepted’ tattoos, which are a better reflection of real-life situations. But this can explain why some effects are less distinct. This means that I made it more difficult to see effects, but this is for a good reason. The more generally accepted tattoos allow for more generalisability; thus, they are more relevant.

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON FUTURE RESEARCH

This research gave new insights on the influence of tattoos within a professional environment. Thus, it makes way for a whole new context to research, as there are many more factors within a professional work environment that can influence the perception of tattoos. But also, as explained in the results, there are possibly other external characteristics that have influenced the perception of the photos, which can be relevant to research as well, especially with the growing informalisation, the influence of attire on the perception of professionalism is very relevant.

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## APPENDIX 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In het kader van mijn afstudeerproject voor mijn master studie aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam doe ik onderzoek naar ideeën over professionalisme op het werk. Ik zou u dus willen vragen om hierover deze vragenlijst in te vullen. Het invullen van de vragenlijst duurt slechts een vijftal minuten en u zou mij hiermee geweldig helpen.

Deze vragenlijst bevat een aantal algemene vragen. Daarnaast worden enkele situaties geschetst in het kader van een professionele werkomgeving. U kan hierover uw persoonlijke mening geven.

Ik wil benadrukken dat er geen goede of foute antwoorden zijn in deze vragenlijst. Enkel uw persoonlijke mening telt. Bovendien is deze vragenlijst volstrekt anoniem. Uw antwoorden kunnen op geen enkele manier gekoppeld worden aan uw identiteit. Het is dus van belang dat u eerlijk bent in uw antwoorden.

Uw antwoorden zullen uitsluitend voor strikt wetenschappelijke onderzoeksdoeleinden worden gebruikt. Zij zullen niet worden gedeeld met commerciële bedrijven of andere onderzoeksinstellingen.

Er zijn geen risico's verbonden aan het deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Hoewel ik hoop dat u bereid bent de volledige vragenlijst in te vullen, kan u stoppen door het browservenster te sluiten. Omdat alleen een volledig ingevulde vragenlijst nuttige informatie oplevert voor dit onderzoek, zullen in dat geval uw antwoorden worden verwijderd. U kan de vragenlijst slechts eenmaal invullen.

Ik wil u vooraf alvast oprecht bedanken voor het invullen van deze vragenlijst,

Kim Scholten

### **Gaat u akkoord om deel te nemen aan deze vragenlijst?**

- Ja, ik ga akkoord om deel te nemen aan deze vragenlijst
- Nee, ik ga niet akkoord, en ik beëindig mijn deelname

**Wat is uw geslacht?**

- Man
- Vrouw
- Anders

**Wat is uw geboortjaar?**

-

**Wat is uw functie?**

-

Op de volgende pagina's worden een stel personen beschreven in een professionele context. Per persoon krijgt u enkele stellingen te zien over hem of haar. In welke mate bent u het daarmee eens of oneens?

Het gaat hierbij over uw inschatting. Er zijn geen juiste of onjuiste antwoorden, dus u mag gewoon op uw gevoel afgaan.

Vignette photo 1

Dit is Anne, ze werkt als consultant en is 30 jaar oud. Ze is bezig met de laatste aanpassingen voor een grote opdracht.

	<b>Zeer oneens</b>	<b>Eerder oneens</b>	<b>Neutraal</b>	<b>Eerder eens</b>	<b>Zeer eens</b>
Deze persoon is ambitieus	O	O	O	O	O
Collega's kunnen op deze persoon rekenen	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is gemotiveerd op het werk	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is professioneel	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon staat open voor kritiek	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is creatief	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is succesvol	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is intelligent	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is goed in de omgang met klanten	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon neemt het werk serieus	O	O	O	O	O

Vignette photo 2

Dit is Nienke, ze werkt als HR functionaris en is 27 jaar oud. Ze zit in een vergadering waar het verloop van het vorige jaar wordt besproken.

	<b>Ze er</b>	<b>E er</b>	<b>N e u t r a a l</b>	<b>E er</b>	<b>Z e r</b>
	<b>o n e e n s</b>	<b>o n e e n s</b>		<b>e e n s</b>	<b>e e n s</b>
Deze persoon is ambitieus	O	O	O	O	O
Collega's kunnen op deze persoon rekenen	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is gemotiveerd op het werk	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is professioneel	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon staat open voor kritiek	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is creatief	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is succesvol	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is intelligent	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is goed in de omgang met klanten	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon neemt het werk serieus	O	O	O	O	O

Vignette photo 3

Dit is Daniël, hij werkt als accountant en is 35 jaar oud. Hij zit aan de telefoon met zijn collega die een vergadering voor volgende week wil inplannen.

	<b>Ze er oneens</b>	<b>E er der oneens</b>	<b>N e u t r a a l</b>	<b>E er der eens</b>	<b>Z e er e e n s</b>
Deze persoon is ambitieus	O	O	O	O	O
Collega's kunnen op deze persoon rekenen	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is gemotiveerd op het werk	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is professioneel	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon staat open voor kritiek	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is creatief	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is succesvol	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is intelligent	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is goed in de omgang met klanten	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon neemt het werk serieus	O	O	O	O	O

Vignette photo 4

Dit is Sam, hij is ICT specialist en is 32 jaar oud. Hij maakt de eerste plannen voor een nieuwe website met een collega.

	<b>Ze er oneens</b>	<b>E er der oneens</b>	<b>N e u t r a a l</b>	<b>E er der eens</b>	<b>Z e er e e n s</b>
Deze persoon is ambitieus	O	O	O	O	O
Collega's kunnen op deze persoon rekenen	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is gemotiveerd op het werk	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is professioneel	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon staat open voor kritiek	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is creatief	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is succesvol	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is intelligent	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon is goed in de omgang met klanten	O	O	O	O	O
Deze persoon neemt het werk serieus	O	O	O	O	O

De volgende stellingen horen niet bij een foto, maar gaan over uw algemene mening.

**Hoe eens of oneens bent u het met de volgende stellingen?**

	<b>Ze er oneens</b>	<b>E er der oneens</b>	<b>N e u t r a a l</b>	<b>E er der eens</b>	<b>Z e er eens</b>
Iemand met een bril komt professioneler over	O	O	O	O	O
Het merk laptop dat iemand heeft, zegt wat over professionaliteit	O	O	O	O	O
Werkkleding heeft invloed op hoe professioneel iemand overkomt	O	O	O	O	O
Iemand met zichtbare tattoos komt minder professioneel over	O	O	O	O	O
Het merk van iemands smartphone zegt wat over professionaliteit	O	O	O	O	O
Iemand met een verzorgd uiterlijk komt professioneler over	O	O	O	O	O
Een vrouw met opvallende make-up komt minder professioneel over	O	O	O	O	O
Tattoos hoeven niet verhuld te worden in een professionele context	O	O	O	O	O
Een man met een glad geschoren gezicht komt professioneel over	O	O	O	O	O
Een duur horloge ziet er professioneel uit	O	O	O	O	O



**Heeft u een idee wat we te weten willen komen op basis van deze studie?**

(Geen enkel probleem als u geen idee heeft. In dat geval mag u het veld hieronder gewoon leeg laten.)

-

Dit is het einde van de vragenlijst. Nogmaals heel erg bedankt voor uw deelname.

Als u nog opmerkingen of tips heeft, mag u deze in het veld hieronder invullen.

-

## APPENDIX 2: THE VERSIONS OF THE VIGNETTE PHOTOS

### PHOTO 1: ANNE

Without tattoo



With tattoo



## PHOTO 2: NIENKE

Without tattoo



With tattoo



PHOTO 3: DANIËL

Without tattoo



With tattoo



PHOTO 4: SAM

Without tattoo



With tattoo

