

At the Intersection of Personal Expression and Professionalism in Education: Perceptions of Body Art in K-12 Schools

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Abstract

This qualitative research seeks to determine the perceptions of school stakeholders regarding educators with visible tattoos. A snowball sampling technique using social media to access the sample garnered 246 responses to an open-ended survey linked from an online survey tool. While approximately 71% of the respondents felt that educators should not be required to cover visible tattoos in the workplace or at school-sponsored activities, a majority of the responses indicated that administrators monitor the content and placement of tattoos to avoid the presentation of inappropriate content or placement based on the age and maturity level of the students. Detractors of this position cited religious opposition or a generally negative stereotype of the types of people with tattoos as a reason to restrict the visibility of any body art at school or while at school-sponsored activities. Based on these findings, school districts should evaluate educator dress code standards to reflect the acceptance of tattoos as a method of personal expression similar to that of choice of dress or accessories.

Keywords: Body Art, Tattoos, Snowball Sampling, Social Media, Qualitative Research, Dress Code

Introduction

While student dress code and rights of expression have vastly expanded over the last fifty years, teachers have remained locked into a 1950s paradigm of professional dress. The cultural model of teacher has stagnated over time, with a focus on the teacher as a conservative and formal construct with no personal interests or activities (Mallozzi, 2014). This cultural model does not adequately address the relational and personal aspects of teaching and creates an unrealistic perception of educators as devoid of creativity and unique capabilities. The most significant area in which this is

seen is the professional dress code of K-12 educators. The global, abstract control of educators through dress code reflects a 19th-century system of cultural mores that minimizes autonomy and individual professional practice while promoting a soft reflection of perceived community values (Bourke, Lidstone & Ryan, 2015).

Professional dress codes do not violate the rights of employees, nor does a restrictive dress code discriminate when applied to the entire employment force (Flake, 2015; Jones & Hobbs, 2015; Kramer, 2006), even when dealing with restrictions on visible tattoos. With an estimated one in five Americans having tattoos, there has been an influx of court activities related to the restriction of visible tattoos in a variety of workplace environments, from large retail organizations to governmental agencies (Shultz, Harvey & Bosco, 2015; Jones & Hobbs, 2015). Although tattoos are more widely accepted than ever before, they are slow to gain acceptance in schools or other work environments (Colbert, 2008). Because of this, it is hard to know if courts will continue to be sympathetic to businesses as more and more employees have tattoos (Allred, 2016).

Dress codes that stifle the expression of employees by limiting tattoos can diminish motivation, negatively impact job performance and decrease job satisfaction (Ellis 2015). Teaching is a demanding profession with low job satisfaction, especially when teachers feel a lack of control over decision-making in the field (Akkaya & Akyol, 2016). That lack of satisfaction can also diminish organizational commitment and damage stakeholder relationships (Tentama & Pranungsari, 2016). Requiring a teacher to cover a tattoo has the potential to quash the culture of creativity on a school campus, increase professional turnover, and hinder student performance.

Research has been done to determine what effects if any, visible tattoos have on a professional environment. Generally speaking, large tattoos negatively impact perceived professionalism, where small tattoos did not (Verrisimo, Tolle, McCombe & Arndt, 2016). Likewise, there is no significant difference in the earning and productivity of those with and without tattoos, and there is no relationship between having a tattoo and being employed (French, Maclean, Robins, Sayed & Shiferaw, 2016). While being sensitive to those that do not like tattoos is important college graduates are not willing to sacrifice self-expression just because there may be negative perceptions of tattoos in the workplace, even teacher candidates (Fotz 2014). The question becomes how do we make professional appearance expectations flexible enough to avoid contradicting core values about human diversity, cultural competence, and empowerment while still responding to the greater culture and climate of school communities (Williams, Thomas, Christensen, 2104)?

Research Questions

The first step to answering this question is to determine what perceptions the greater community holds regarding professional educators having tattoos. The guiding research question for this study was two-fold: what is the relationship between perceptions about teachers as professionals and educators having body art and how are dress codes requiring K-12 educators to cover tattoos during the workday and at school events reflective of those perceptions? To understand more fully potential factors that could influence the perceptions of participants, questions addressed

whether or not participants had tattoos and whether or not participants currently had children enrolled in K-12 schools.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework focuses on the viewpoint of community members, parents, and educators concerning body art on professional educators by using qualitative phenomenography. Phenomenography is the study of how people experience, interpret or conceptualize a given phenomenon rather than studying the phenomenon itself (Marton, 1986). Marton said that "a careful account of the different ways that people think about phenomena may help uncover conditions that ease the transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively better view of reality" (p. 33). This representation of various viewpoints allows for people to become aware of the contradictions in their own opinions and ideas as they consider events and perceptions, allowing for alternative thoughts and ideas to shape their world-view. This study focuses on how the participants conceptualize tattoos in a professional environment and probes the reasons why these perceptions hold true for individuals.

Methods

This qualitative phenomenography is designed on the premise that the individual participants experience qualitative variations of the same phenomenon: teachers having visible tattoos. The instrument used to collect data was an open-ended survey consisting of nine questions:

- Are you employed in a K-12 school?
- Are you the parent of a child currently attending a K-12 school?
- If so, what type of school does your child attend? (Public, charter, secular private, religious private, or home)
- Do you have tattoos?
- What is your local area or child's school policy regarding staff and faculty having tattoos visible to the students?
- What is your opinion of your school's policy?
- Do you think an educator with tattoos visible to the student should be required to cover the tattoos during the school day? Why or why not?
- Do you feel a visible tattoo impacts the professionalism of an educator? Why or why not?
- Do you feel a visible tattoo impacts the ability of an individual to work with students and/or parents? Why or why not?

The first four questions were provided on the first page of the survey to develop demographic information that was used when analyzing the research questions. The final five questions were developed to answer the overarching research question: should K-12 educators be required to cover tattoos during the work day and at school events? This survey was built in an electronic survey tool and sent electronically to participants.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected using a snowball method. Due to the concern of low response rates (Baruch & Holtom, 2008) the use of social media to

collect data has become an alternative to traditional data collection with a higher response rate than traditional sampling (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Browne, 2005; Dusek, Yurova & Ruppel, 2015). This research used Facebook as the social media tool for a snowball sampling technique. The electronic survey was posted on the researchers Facebook page, where friends were asked to share the survey on their Facebook pages and then to complete the survey themselves. Eight friends shared the survey on their Facebook newsfeeds with the same request to repost the survey and to complete the survey. The group that reposted the survey represented different political, religious and social backgrounds as self-identified by participants in public profile information on the social media site. The researcher reviewed public information on the "About" pages of the participants to determine if the use of the social media site increased the likelihood of inherent bias; however, the differences as identified in the public information indicated varied political and religious affiliations, as well as difference social group affiliations.

Participants of this study were not restricted to any specific population. The research was designed to gather parent and community perceptions; therefore, all social media users were invited to participate in the survey. This lack of restriction aligned well with the use of a social media snowball sampling technique. A total of 246 people completed the survey from across the United States.

Limitation of the Study

One limitation of this study is that the research assumes that the information provided by participants regarding district policy is accurate and the information posted by participants is based on recent district policy. As the purpose of the study is to focus on the perceptions of professionalism and if the policy is reflective of those perceptions, inaccuracy of reporting district policy would not invalidate the responses of participants. Rather, the understanding of the participants is important in understanding the perception of current practice and expectations of professionalism.

Analysis of the Data

Data analysis for a phenomenography requires the researcher to sort perceptions of the participants into categories of description (Marton, 1986). These categories are considered the phenomenographic essence of the phenomenon (Uljens, 1996). In this research, the phenomenon is tattooing on professional educators. The phenomenographic essence is whether or not the participants of the study perceive a visible tattoo diminishes the effectiveness and professionalism of a professional educator. For each research question responses were divided into categories of description, with most categories being yes, no, or it depends. The responses were coded into those categories, with specific comments being listed in the category column. A phenomenographic analysis is comparative, involving continual sorting and resorting of data and an ongoing comparison between the data and the categories themselves (Åkerlind, 2005). By using the first set of demographic questions to understand the ways of seeing something as experienced and described, the researcher was able to complete a collective analysis of the participants' individual experiences.

Findings

A total of 246 people completed the survey, answering all demographic and research questions. Participants that did not complete the entire survey were excluded from the data analysis. The following chart represents the demographic data from the participants:

Demographic Responses-Yes/No

	Yes	No
Work in K-12 Schools	60%	40%
Parent of Child in School	61%	39%
Have Tattoos	42%	58%

Demographic Responses-Multiple Answer

	Attending
Public Schools	87%
Charter Schools	3%
Secular Private	2%
Religious Private	7%
Home School	<1%

District Policy and Opinions

According to the respondents, approximately 48% of districts make teachers cover tattoos while 18% percent of districts do not require teachers to cover tattoos. A total of 34% of the participants in this study did not know the school districts policy. These questions received the fewest number of comments. Most participants stated the policy, or that they did not know the policy, but few of them addressed whether or not they had opinions regarding the policy. Some of the comments of participants include:

- I support the policy (that requires teachers to cover tattoos).
- Rules are rules so teachers should follow the policy.
- It is antiquated and should be changed (regarding a district that required tattoos to be covered).
- I do not worry about tattoos; I worry about how the teacher teaches.
- If tattoos are allowed, I am against the school policy.
- It's okay. I personally don't think tattoos are professional, but I feel like kids are used to them and they probably don't distract them.
- I think it is a good opinion to have. I am personally not a fan of tattoos, but as long as they are not a distraction to the students learning, I don't see a problem with them.
- Honestly. I've thought [keeping tattoos covered] was absurd for the past 10 years. I would have a tattoo if it were allowed without me going through the hassle of having to cover it. I also believe it limits potentially excellent people from entering the profession who may already have tattoos. I have two adult children with tattoos. One is an educator who has to keep it covered.
- I think that it is probably a little outdated [to cover tattoos], but I like that it values professionalism.

- If they are allowed to show, I am against it. I do not believe professionals should have tattoos. It is very hard to take someone seriously if they have tattoos, especially if they are absurd ones.
- The schools should allow tattoos on teachers. The society we live in should not condemn a person because of their self-expression, and I think it is an important lesson for children to learn.
- That's fine. Our school atmosphere is very accepting of tattoos, and the staff does their best to keep them covered. If it is uncovered, it is not a big deal as long as it's work appropriate
- It's within the district's authority to have such a policy [restricting visible tattoos].
- Stupid. Exclusive. Judgmental [not to allow tattoos]

The majority of the participants felt policies requiring teachers to cover tattoos were not enforced consistently. Principals were able to choose whether to enforce the rules or ignore them. Of the participants going to religious schools or homeschool, all but one felt tattoos should not be allowed in the school.

Visible Tattoos at School

This question was the primary research question in this study. Approximately 71% of participants feel that school policy should not restrict teachers from having visible tattoos. Of these participants, approximately 59% feel visible tattoos are ok and believe there should be a policy in place with guidelines for appropriate placement and content of visible tattoos. Suggested policies include having no neck/face tattoos, no sleeves, and no inappropriate content, such as satanic, porn/nudity, cuss words, gang-related, racist, and drug-related or violent. Of these respondents, approximately 55% have tattoos. Common comments include that tattoos:

- Are the equivalent of jewelry, clothes or accessories.
- Have no bearing on a person's ability to teach.
- Can build connections with families and students
- Are a part of personal expression
- Can be discrimination to ask to cover
- Are accepted depending on the community culture and climate

One cogent quote; "Depends on what they are. Unless it's a fire-eating she-demon with her legs spread, I don't see the problem." This majority supports permissibility of visible tattoos, with some consideration of the content and location of the body art.

Of the 28% of respondents that feel that visible tattoos should be covered at school approximately 87% do not have tattoos. The majority of these respondents feel that visible tattoos are unprofessional and the majority had a religious opposition to tattoos in general. The overall perception was that everyone has to have the same rules. You can't have some people allowed to show tattoos and some not. The common question is, "Who would decide what is appropriate?" Those that have a religious opposition had these comments:

- Yes - I prefer my they not be visible for my kids to view
- Yes! Some are inappropriate. Most just look tacky.

- Yes. It communicates, as normal/good something with which I don't agree is a good decision.
- Yes, I think they should be covered because you get into the appropriateness or inappropriateness of tattoos if they are allowed, and one is fine with one person may not be with another.
- Yes, I have told my children that if they get a tattoo, their boss may not take them seriously. Some may accept them but what is your boss doesn't.
- Yes, because there are families that view them as offensive, they can be distracting, and they can be controversial. It's best just not to go there.
- Yes - tattoos should be hidden in my opinion - teachers are role models, and some parents do not agree with tattoos so to me it solves any potential issues to cover them. Especially if they are not appropriate in a school setting
- Yes. Some parents do not approve of body markings such as tattoos. Students look up to teachers. Given the possible dissenting opinions between parents and teachers, it is best to leave the subject matter out of the school arena.
- Yes, because they are in a position of authority and showing the tattoos may encourage a student to get one
- Yes! It shows disrespect not only to the person with the tattoo, but a total disrespect to the creator, God, and a blatant disrespect for His law which states, New American Standard Bible "You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD." King James Bible "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD." Leviticus 19:28
- Yes. They are a distraction. They could also influence students to want a tattoo or think that is acceptable to have one.
- Yes. They are unsightly & indicate a lack of self-respect
- Yes. Because children look up to their teachers & having a tattoo would directly affect how that kid feels about tattoos. If parents are against tattoos that would make their point much more difficult to deal with their children.

The comments above show that many of these participants have a strong opposition to tattoos. Others show a broader consideration of how others may feel. The data reveal from the collected opinions indicate this to be a very polarizing issue.

Professionalism, Ethics and Efficacy

The responses to the question of whether or not the professional ethics of educators were impacted by having a visible tattoo aligned with the responses in the previous section. The majority of respondents, approximately 57%, believe visible tattoos do not impact the professionalism of an educator. These respondents made comments supporting the right of the educator to express personality through body art, similar to how personality is shown with clothing and make-up. Comments included the following:

- An educator needs to focus on the quality of his/her teaching. Times are changing. Professional dress doesn't make a teacher a better teacher.
- I see tattoos as an expression of personality, like hair color or makeup. I see no correlation between tattoos/no tattoos and professionalism

The participants that felt professionalism was not impacted by visible tattoos were the least likely to leave an explanation or further comment.

While the majority of respondents did not feel that professionalism was impacted by visible tattoos, approximately 26% said it does impact the professionalism. These respondents were more likely to include comments. Some of the comments were very personal, such as "looks trashy" and "shows a lack of respect for their own bodies." However, some of the comments addressed the distraction that a tattoo can cause and other concerns, such as:

- Yes. They are distracting and devalue the profession. If you can't have a tattoo and work at Disney world then how can it be ok in the classroom?
- Yes. An educator having a visible tattoo communicates it is professional, while many believe it is not. A student emulating the teacher's behavior may put himself in a position of disadvantage when compared to others (i.e., In a job hunting situation)
- Yes. I see tattoos as an indication that a person is rebellious as well as immodest and attention-seeking not to mention imprudent with the use of his/her time and money. None of those are characteristics of a professional.
- I think big glaring tattoos can impact the professionalism of teachers. So many schools are requiring teachers to dress professionally in their clothing, and so I believe a tattoo is along the same lines as professional clothing. A casual look may cause a casual learning environment where the students may not take the learning very seriously.
- I think they can. Right or wrong there is a certain stigma attached to a person with a lot of tattoos. There is little issue with a small tattoo here and there, but larger ones tend to bring a certain mindset. I think it is another hurdle to get over in the workplace. I am not saying that people shouldn't get them. Simply that they should be prepared for possible judgment that they will have to work to get past.

Some participants acknowledge that they have a personal bias, while others provide swift judgment:

- Yes - I'm old school I suppose, but I do not think tattoos are professional.
- Yes because educators are to be the examples/role models.
- Yes, kids look up to teachers and just like you wouldn't sit at a bar with a student you shouldn't share your tattoos.
- Yes, I do. One must respect yourself before one can respect others. Marring one's body with tattoos
- Shows the ultimate self-loathing, and makes it difficult to take a person seriously as a professional in any occupation.
- Yes, it is distracting, and it brings up the question of the morals this person has.
- Yes, unfortunately. Though we would all love to claim that we don't judge a person by their appearance, we know this is patently false. Tattoos can be off-putting to people and even frightening. Body art is heavily used by those in prisons and gangs, so the associations some people make with tattoos definitely have a detrimental effect on perceptions of professionalism and

intelligence. Young people have difficulty in accepting the truth, but the better dressed, more professionally attired person will almost always draw better first impressions than the sloppy person or the tattooed person.

- Yes. I see tattoos as an indication that a person is rebellious as well as immodest and attention-seeking not to mention imprudent with the use of his/her time and money. None of those are characteristics of a professional.

Many of the comments left are similar to those above. Participants that believe tattoos impact the perception of professionalism leave comments that are judgment-based or that denigrate the person that has the tattoo.

The third group of respondents, approximately 17%, said that the impact on professionalism depends on the tattoo content and placement. Placement around the head and neck would be considered unprofessional, as would vulgar or immodest tattoo content. Some additional comments include:

- Again, I think the content of the tattoo and its location plays a big factor in my opinion on that. Some tattoos I would consider unprofessional if visible, others I would not.
- Again. Depends on the subject matter. In a sense it would be hard to legislate what tattoos are appropriate and what you're not, I'm fine with supposedly banning them, but then being lenient on a case-by-case basis
- Depends on the type and size. It does have a strong negative stereotype.
- I guess it could, but it also humanizes them
- It's not a matter of it being visible that impacts professionalism as much as the placement and design.

Overall, the perception is that professionalism is not negatively impacted by visible tattoos unless they are inappropriate or on the face or head area.

Impact on Ability to Teach

While 26% of participants felt that professionalism is impacted by visible tattoos, only 13% felt that an educator's ability to teach is hindered by having visible tattoos. The vast majority, approximately 70%, of participants felt that an educator's ability to teach is not impacted in any way by having a visible tattoo. Approximately 17% of participants felt like the placement and content of the tattoo, as well as community perception could impact an educator's ability to do the job. The responses to this question are slightly different, as the majority of respondents included a comment. The following comments are a representative sample of comment by the participants that did not feel ability was impacted:

- Again, I feel like it makes me relatable. It's something to connect with kids and parents both. It also helps them not think I'm "better than" them.
- I think it would be good for students to see their school recognize diversity. A lot of newer parents have tattoos, so why would they expect the educator of their children to be shut off to the culture of tattoos?
- It may not impact the educator's ability, but it might impact the ability of the student or family to work with the educator.

- No, people who judge others based on appearance will find something to complain about regardless of a visible tattoo. Children learn from the lessons taught by an educator, not from the appearance of one.
- No. Tattoos are just a part of a person's outfit. A permanent one, but if the initial questions are asked and answered regarding the tattoos, then they just become that person's outfit, and fade into the background.
- No - unless the students are distracted by the tattoos. So I suppose it's possible it's a distraction, but I certainly don't think having a tattoo affects the teacher's ability
- No. Ink on the skin isn't any different than me wearing makeup or dying my hair. None of this has anything to do with what the student is learning. Different isn't wrong. It's just different.
- No. In some cases, it gives you common ground. Shows that you are human too.

The following statements were given by participants that feel that an educator's ability to do the job is hindered by visible tattoos. Many of these statements are judgment-based, as in other questions. These are representative of the comments left:

- I believe the content and meaning of tattoos define a person's personality and they should be carefully taken into consideration when hiring an educator!
- Their performance and willingness to grow and make wise decisions for kids and families are the true test. The issue is less "ink or no ink" and more "who gets to decide what's classy/acceptable/professional or not"...
- I immediately have a negative reaction to a person covered with tattoos.
- Yes, because the parents/students make assumptions based on the tattoo.
- Yes, because there are people, like me, who have and hold reservations towards people who want to have and show a permanent mark on their bodies. Many decades ago, only low lives did this sort of thing. It still reverberates in my mind, my biblical knowledge and church upbringing. I'm not the only one. It is still a type of rebellion like long hair or painted hair (not of natural color) nose rings, massive holes in the lobes of the ears, and loud music to name a few. GROW UP!
- Yes. A visible tattoo is a message. Many people perceive a tattoo as a sign of rebellion. It certainly conveys what a person values. Parents may not want a person with a visible tattoo in a position as a role model for their student. Also, students may find it difficult to respect a person who has defaced himself or herself with a tattoo.
- Yes. It sets a tone of disrespect for self & others
- Yes. Some parents will be less receptive to a teacher with tattoos. I think tattoos can be distracting to children when you're wanting them to learn in a classroom.

While these participants say the educator's ability is hindered, many of the comments left focus on how working with parents and families would be impacted, rather than student learning. Some of them are value judgments. These comments are primarily representative of those participants that have students in alternative school placements instead of public schools.

The participants that felt that tattoos could impact an educator's ability to do the job felt that the perceptions of other parents and community members would impact the educator's ability to work but would not necessarily have a negative impact on learning. These comments are representative of the comments left in the survey:

- Some parents may have stereotypical views.
- I believe there is often a negative perception of those with tattoos. However, in my experience, the perceptions are due to ignorance and fear. Saying all people with ink are bad/unprofessional, etc. is no more correct than saying all people without it are heroes and saints. Teaching is about the hardest job there is. For someone to come forward, tell their story, and apply to stand in the gap, speaks volumes.
- I feel that a teacher having a visible tattoo is something that those who support tattoos may enjoy but those who do not will most certainly not and it may affect the way a parent and teacher interact.
- All I can say is that it would have bothered me as a student or a parent. I was raised in a time when tattoos were only seen on carnival workers and sailors. I don't think excessive tattoos are professional.
- I think it would only in cases where the parents are sensitive about the tattoo or the actual tattoo is a trigger as in the design or its words.
- I think there is a greater risk of judgment about them from parents than the kids. The kids see them every day in the internet world, on TV, etc. Their generation doesn't perceive them in a negative way. Some of their parents might be from a generation that views them as a reflection of rebellion, disregard for the law, something uneducated people have. Those views, in my opinion, are relics from several decades ago.
- It could, based on the viewpoints of the parent: religious, social groups, ethnicities, etc.
- It might with some parents who still hold a negative view of tattoos due to religious beliefs, but not overall.

These participants did not have a specific opposition to educator's having tattoos, but they did see where others might have concerns.

Discussion

The educator dress code provides a standard for minimum professional dress that reflects the values of the community. In this study, the large majority of participant responses indicate that respondents do not believe that visible tattoos have a negative impact on the professionalism of an educator. While there are participants that believe that tattoos represent negative personality traits, the overwhelming majority do not believe that educators need to cover visible tattoos in the workplace or during school-sponsored activities. Professional dress codes do not violate the rights of employees (Flake, 2015; Jones & Hobbs, 2015; Kramer, 2006); however, restricting the visibility of tattoos can diminish motivation, negatively impact job performance and decrease job satisfaction (Ellis 2015).

Verrisimo, Tolle, McCombe, and Arndt (2016) found that large tattoos negatively impact perceived professionalism, where small tattoos did not, and respondents

confirm those findings by analysis of their responses in this study. According to participants, large tattoos and tattoos on the face and neck were distracting and inappropriate in the school environment where smaller tattoos, and those not in the facial area, were appropriate. Even participants without tattoos largely felt that tattoos are common enough that students and parents were not surprised or shocked by their appearance in the classroom. Some participants even felt that tattoos made educators more approachable. Tattoos do not influence the professionalism or ability of an educator.

Implications for School Boards/Administrators

The professional dress code for educators should be evaluated through a lens of tolerance and acceptance with deference to the prevailing social and cultural environment. The burgeoning numbers of professionals in all areas of business and government service with body art suggest that the tattoo is no longer taboo. Because of this, school boards and communities need to be accepting of the personal expression of educators in the field. The existence of a tattoo is not in itself distracting. Rather than forcing educators to hide body art, as if ashamed of their personal choices; dress codes should regulate the appearance of vulgar, gang-related, or otherwise inappropriate content of a tattoo. Additionally, tattoos placed on the face, neck or head should be restricted as those are the most distracting in the classroom.

While there are some participants in the study that felt deeply offended by tattoos, the majority of these participants sent their children to private schools or homeschooled. In cases where parents are deeply offended by the appearance of a tattoo, the educator can find common ground by having open dialogue with the parents regarding their concerns. Restricting all teachers from having visible tattoos because there might be a concern would be equal to requiring educators to only wear pants if someone is offended by seeing legs, or to only wear close-toed shoes because someone is offended by seeing the feet of a teacher. That response is punitive and minimizes the professionalism of the educator.

As indicated in the research, parents, and students may find an educator more approachable and more "human" if they are allowed to show tattoos. Parents may find the requirement to hide body art offensive if they have them as well. In essence, the school is telling parents that the choices they make, i.e., having tattoos, is inappropriate and unprofessional, which creates a hostile, unwelcoming school environment. Allowing educators to show their tattoos may build positive parent relationships with parents that may have felt uncomfortable in the school in the past.

Conclusion

The 19th-century system of cultural mores that demonized individuality (specifically body art) minimizes autonomy and individual professional practice while promoting a soft reflection of perceived community values (Bourke, Lidstone & Ryan, 2015). The findings of this study show that dress codes that restrict visible tattoos on educators no longer provide even a soft reflection of perceived community values. Tattoos are no longer for the lesser members of society. Professionals from all fields now have tattoos. With four in ten millennials getting tattoos (Taylor & Keeter, 2010) and over 50% of students considering a tattoo in the future (Foltz, 2014), the

education workforce will soon face a significantly reduced professional workforce or the necessity of changing outdated dress codes.

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