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Taboo or Trivial: Women Adult Educators with Visible Tattoos

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Abstract: The purpose of this session is to present and frame a future research project examining the effect on adult learning conducted by a female educator with visible tattoos.

Keywords: Training and development, Body modification, Workplace learning, Adult education, Tattoos in the workplace

Introduction

Though there is extensive research on tattoos, adult learning, and women there is a dearth of research on the topic of women adult educators and the effect their visible tattoos have on learning outcomes. These educators may practice in settings such as higher educational institutions, community centers, corporate environments, and several other facilities where adult learners are engaged.

Problem Statement

Tattoos are historically linked to be perceived as deviant or leading to deviant behaviors (Adams, 2009; Burgess & Clark, 2010; King & Vidourek, 2011; Johnson, Lennon & Rudd, 2014). Women, specifically, with visible tattoos are perceived more negatively by both men and women (Hawkes, Senn & Thorn, 2004; Ponte & Gillan, 2007; Gue'guen, 2013). They are traditionally encouraged to engage in gender specific socio-cultural norms to portray the ideal educator. The introduction of a "traditionally" masculine image distorts this ideal construct and may affect learning outcomes.

The new millennium has brought with it new norms that are distinctly different from previous generations. In the latest poll by The Harris Poll (Braverman, 2016), three in ten (approximately 29 %) adults in the US have tattoos and this number is expected to increase. The potential that a new educator will have a visible tattoo is ineluctable. As more young adults enter the educator role a proper and efficient evaluation should be conducted to determine what effect visible body modification on women, such as tattoos, have on learning.

Purpose Statement

The few studies that have been conducted to address this issue were on college campuses, with undergraduate students, and not within an actual corporate setting with a more accurate population sample (McKee, 2015; Hill, 2016). The purpose of this study is to explore the effect that visible body modification on women have in a corporate learning environment. This study is important to illuminate the change in norms regarding body image as it relates to women in these roles.

The posited study will use a mixed methods design to evaluate and compare the learning effects. A course relevant to the needs of the company, that will be used will be developed with the researcher and the training manager, will be utilized to explore the learning outcomes. Participants will be randomly selected to participate in one of two groups: one with the female educator with no visible tattoos and the other group taught by a woman with visible tattoos. Test scores from the two groups will be used to compare the effect of the visible tattoos on learning. The research question that will drive the study is:

What is the effect on learning conducted by a woman adult educator with visible tattoos in a corporate setting?

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