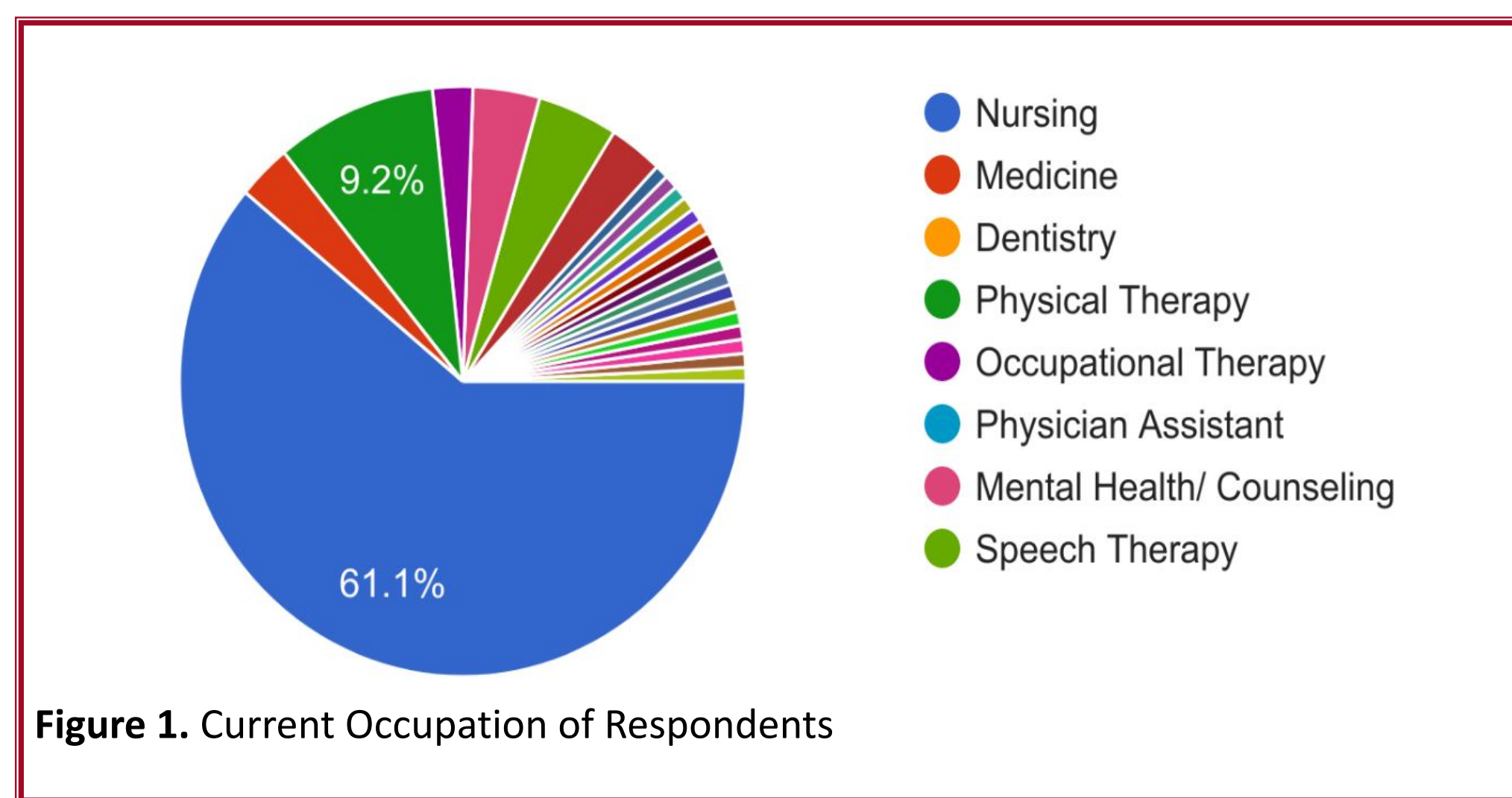


# Perception of Visible Body Art in Healthcare: Perceptions on a College Campus

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## Introduction

This project aims to determine if there is a relationship between visible body art on a healthcare provider and perceptions of that person's ability to render care. During the literature review, it was clear there was a lack of research on this topic. A survey was designed by the researchers. The data was collected during social justice week on Sacred Heart University's campus. The data was then compared to regional healthcare facilities and nursing program policies and procedures to see if they are synonymous with the survey findings.



## Objectives

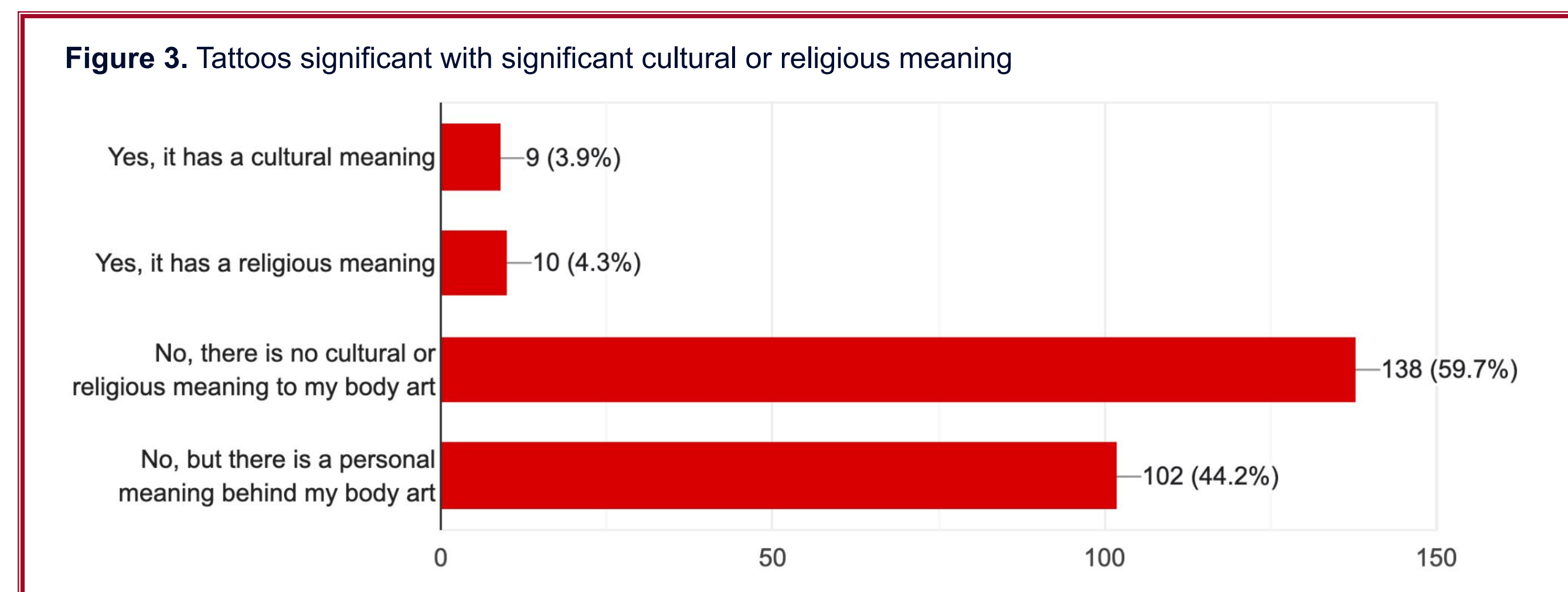
- Describe the perceptions of college students, staff, and faculty regarding visual body art on healthcare providers.
- Compare the findings of a campus survey to regional hospital and nursing program policies and procedures.

## Methods

- The convenience sampling method was used to survey students, staff, and faculty walking past table times during social justice week.
- The survey was submitted to the SHU's IRB office for review and approval before data collection began.
- Internet searches were used to access regional hospital uniform guidelines and student nursing handbook policies.

## College and Hospital Findings

- Only one regional hospital had public regulations available online. At that agency, earrings are permissible, and offensive, sexually explicit, racist, or threatening tattoos must be covered. The other hospitals or healthcare networks examined had no published policies accessible to the public.
- Most regional nursing programs have prescriptive guidelines on piercings and tattoos. All schools allowed for one pair of earrings, a wedding band, and a watch. No other visible body piercing or jewelry is permitted. All schools required visible tattoos to be covered regardless of their meaning, size, or location.



## Survey Demographics

### Gender

- 91.4% Female
- 7.9% Male
- 0.7% Gender-Fluid

### Hoping to Work in Healthcare

- 86.2% Yes
- 13.8% No

### Age

- 92.1% - 18-22 years old
- 6.9% - 22-29 years old

### Currently Working in Healthcare

- 73.3% No
- 26.2% Yes

### Who has body art (tattoos or piercings)

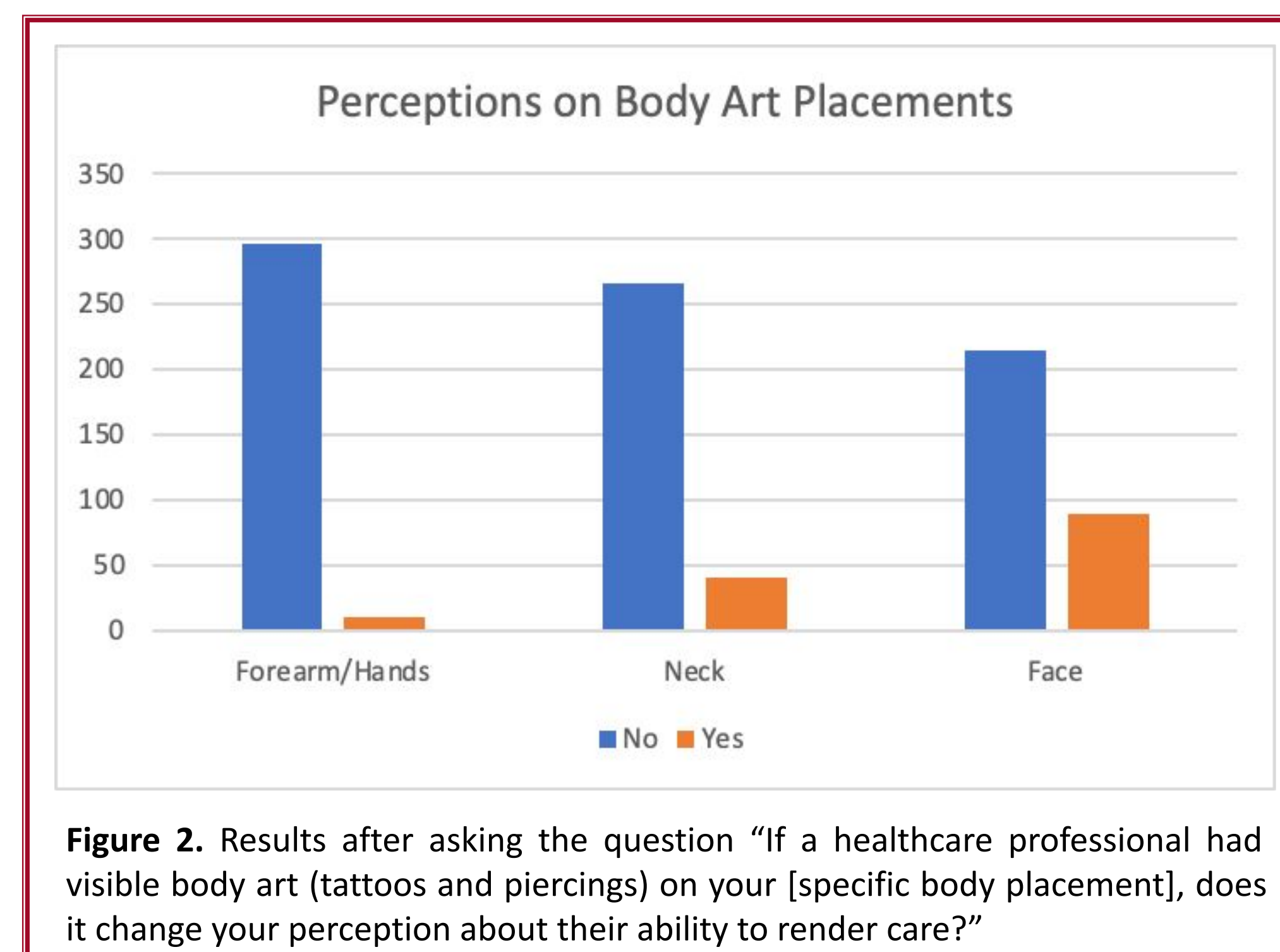
- 73.5% Yes
- 26.7% No

## Significance to Practice

Hospitals and nursing programs have historically restricted the visibility of body art due to the perception that it is unprofessional or inappropriate. Hospitals worry their patients might have negative opinions or perceptions of healthcare workers since piercings and tattoos can have negative connotations (American Institute of Medical Sciences & Education, 2022).

This may create unsupportive work environments as healthcare workers might need to conceal body art that is personal and meaningful to them. This may make the healthcare worker feel their freedom of expression is limited. Restricting the visibility of body art due to concerns of unprofessionalism is a form of beauty bias (Menon, 2020). In an era of increasing emphasis on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, it is necessary for healthcare and higher education institutions to reexamine policies and practices to determine their relevance and implication to avoid introducing bias in the workplace.

While the results of this study are important, they are limited in scope. Future survey research on this topic could be expanded to include stakeholder perceptions beyond a college campus. Results from administration, patients, healthcare workers, and others could help change current practices to be more inclusive and less restrictive. Nursing programs can then change their student guide language to align with hospital policy changes.



## Results

### Multiple Choice Survey Question Results

- 305 participants completed the survey during two campus table times.
- 92.1% of the respondents don't deem healthcare workers with visible body art unprofessional.
- 98.4% of the respondents do not question the capability of healthcare workers with visible body art.

### Open Ended Question Results

An analysis of the free-text responses yielded four recurrent themes.

Body art demonstrates a humanistic side of nursing.	Details matter (location, content, purpose/meaning).
"I believe that body art makes them more of a person and shows that they are human too."	"Face full of tattoos, not going to lie, I would be a little scared."
"If they already had them, I don't think employers should discriminate someone's past history."	"Face tattoos or neck tattoos have no significant cultural or personal meaning; they are simply unnecessary."
"It is also a reminder that they are people too."	"Inappropriate or excessive tattoos could cause discomfort."
"Healthcare workers with tattoos and piercings would make me feel more comfortable."	"Empty visible holes instead of jewelry looks way more unprofessional."
"More personable and creates conversation."	"I wouldn't mind someone with a date on their hand, but I would mind a gang tattoo."
Generation impacts perception.	Body art is an accepted form of self-expression.
"To younger people, this (body art) isn't a good judgment of character."	"No problem with sensible tattoos or self-expression."
"I do not care, but I know the older generations would definitely be more judgy about it."	"My ability to love and express myself does not associate with my ability to be a healthcare provider/medical worker."
"I think it's an old-school idea that body art represents a lack of professionalism."	"I love seeing people's personality and beliefs in them."

Figure 4. Public Thoughts On Body Art Among Healthcare

## Conclusion

Most survey participants were 18-22 years old. Many comments conveyed a generational gap between current policy and 2023 social norms.

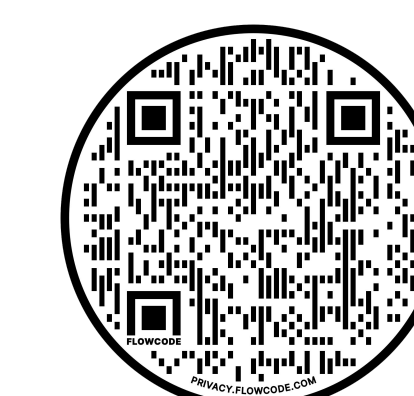
Although more than 90% of survey participants agree that tattoos and other forms of body art did not change their perception of a healthcare provider, the body art's location, the tattoo's content, and its meaning did alter perceptions. Facial body art could persuade participants to contemplate feelings of unprofessionalism in their healthcare provider, but piercings were viewed more favorably than tattoos.

Some participants felt body art could make a nurse more relatable and enhance patient rapport.

Most participants viewed body art favorably and described it as a means of self-expression. Almost 3/4 of the participants disclosed having body art. Sixty percent of participants with body art deny their piercings or tattoos having any cultural or religious meaning.

Nursing programs construct their nursing student guide language based on clinical site policies. Limited data is available on this topic. More research is needed regarding the perceptions of body art within the healthcare field. Future studies could impact nursing student guides and hospital policies.

## Contact Information



## References

