

LET'S NOT JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

Society is evolving, and so should ophthalmology.

We all know what it's like to be judged based on appearance, and we also know what it's like to be judged based on merit and talent. Of course, the latter is preferable—and is the best indicator of on-the-job performance. The most important facet of the culture in our cataract and refractive surgery practices is cohesive teamwork. We strive to provide the best care and visual results to our patients, and that means having talented staff members working together.

It is wrong to judge people based on the way they were born, whether it be color of their skin, facial features, or even gender. Should we hold the same standards regarding personal choices such as getting tattoos or piercings in an effort to express individuality? I would say that we should not judge people in either situation.

THE NEW NORM

Society is evolving, and the taboo associated with tattoos is fading, particularly among millennials. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that 47% of millennials have at least one tattoo, compared with 36% of generation Xers and 13% of baby boomers.¹ Piercings are also more common now, and body modifications such as branding, scarification, and implants are gaining popularity.

Certainly you do not want to exclude up to 47% of the population when you are looking to hire talented staff members.

In my experience, health care professionals tend to get tattoos that are easily covered with clothing or that can be camouflaged in the work setting. Others have more obvious ink, such as on their arms or hands, but even these tattoos do not interfere with their ability to do their jobs—and that is the key.

WE WERE ALL YOUNG ONCE

Often, in youth, we do things that seemed good at the time but years later regret. Take the rising rate of laser tattoo removal. As a fellow ophthalmologist with a prominent arm tattoo explained to me, "This tattoo is what my 18-year-old-self thought looked really cool at the time."

I have even noticed closed ear piercings on ophthalmologists who are nearing retirement age. Yes, we were all young once. We should not impose a lifetime of penalty for decisions that were made as teenagers.

WHAT WOULD I WANT?

When it comes to medical care and my body, I want the most talented team to deliver care, and I will make no judgments regarding their appearances. I am happy to have a technician, nurse, or surgeon with tattoos, piercings, or any other unusual appearance—as long as the person has a great attitude and a high degree of talent.

One of the surgical techs with whom I've worked has prominent neck

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tattoos. Anyone who excludes him based solely on his tattoos is missing out on one of the best and brightest health care professionals.

Perhaps my live-and-let-live approach is a reflection of living in the progressive and tolerant city of Los Angeles, with its wide range of cultures, backgrounds, and styles. Or maybe it is because of my personal experience being judged solely on appearances—and I've never even had a tattoo or a piercing! Whatever the reason, I think mine is the right attitude for successful practices in the modern world. ■

1. McGinty JC. Tattoo industry wins over millennials. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/tattoo-industry-wins-over-millennials-1535713200>. Accessed April 28, 2019.



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