



Visible Tattoos as a Source of Employment Discrimination Among Female Applicants for a Supervisory Position

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Accepted: 5 January 2021 / Published online: 7 March 2021

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Abstract

Although tattoos have increased in popularity, they may put individuals at a disadvantage when seeking employment. Drawing on the justification-suppression model and the stereotype content model, we propose that job applicants with visible tattoos experience prejudice in hiring and starting salary recommendations because they are stereotyped as less competent and warm than those without visible tattoos. In Study 1, we compared equally qualified Caucasian female applicants in their mid to late 20s with no visible tattoos, a mild visible tattoo, and extreme visible tattoos for the position of a sales manager. Tattooed applicants were less likely to be hired, especially if they had extreme visible tattoos, and were offered lower salaries and rated lower on competence (but not warmth) than applicants without visible tattoos. Furthermore, competence mediated the relationship between visible tattoos and hiring and salary recommendations. In Study 2, we examined if young Caucasian female applicants with visible tattoos can overcome prejudice through their job qualifications and found they were able to mitigate salary discrimination, but not hiring discrimination by being highly qualified. In Study 3, we proposed that young Caucasian female applicants with visible tattoos can neutralize discrimination by being highly qualified and having volunteer experience. However, volunteering did not mitigate prejudice related to visible tattoos. Our findings suggest that it is difficult for applicants with visible tattoos to overcome discrimination.

Keywords Body art · Discrimination · Hiring · Stereotypes · Tattoos

Organizational policies and practices based on physical appearance, such as requiring makeup or a certain level of attractiveness and limiting facial or body hair, have been legally challenged over the years (HRFocus, 2008). Although only a handful of US locations outlaw employment discrimination based on appearance (e.g., Michigan, District of Columbia, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, Madison), practices such as Abercrombie & Fitch's "Look Policy" have been legally challenged (King, 2016) and recently laws have been passed

prohibiting discrimination based on hairstyles and facial hair (e.g., Phillis & Brailey, 2020). Given the increased attention by the EEOC, legislators, and the courts (Pating & Cruse, 2019), employers need to reevaluate their appearance-based practices and policies. Even if they are not legally challenged, employers may be missing out on a viable portion of the labor force if they screen applicants or treat employees adversely because of aspects of their appearance that may not be indicative of job performance (Graham, Harvey, & Puri, 2016; Jackson, Hunter, & Hodge, 1995).

A large body of literature has shown that we judge others based on physical appearance. For example, attractive people are seen as more competent (e.g., Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005), intelligent (Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002), trustworthy (e.g., Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991), employable (e.g., Marlowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996), and earn more (e.g., Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006). We argue that visible tattoos represent another aspect of physical appearance that could affect employment outcomes, and that it deserves attention, especially because of the increasing proportion of the population that

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has tattoos. An online survey by Harris Interactive (2016) found that the popularity of tattoos has grown 15% since 2008. Specifically, 29% of Americans have a tattoo, women are more likely to have a tattoo than men, and the prevalence of tattoos is even higher among those between the ages of 18 and 40. Among those with a tattoo, 69% have more than one and the most common locations for tattoos are the upper arm, back, forearm, hand/wrist, and shoulder (Statista, 2017). This is not just a US phenomenon as 38% of the global population has at least one tattoo (Dalia Research, 2018). These statistics suggest that a sizeable portion of the workforce worldwide has a tattoo, and it is often in a visible location.

Traditionally, individuals with tattoos have been perceived as less attractive, caring, intelligent, athletic, motivated, generous, religious, and honest than those without tattoos (Degelman & Price, 2002; Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008). Given that tattoos are becoming more common and negative connotations are typically associated with them in social contexts, it is important to understand if these reactions carry over to the employment context. Job applicants with tattoos often believe they are at a disadvantage for employment because their body art may be viewed as deviant and unprofessional (Atkinson, 2002) or as hurting their credibility (Armstrong, 1991). In this study, we ask whether visible tattoos are likely to lead to adverse employment outcomes and if so, what is driving these effects. To achieve this goal, we examine hiring managers' perceptions of young Caucasian female applicants for a sales manager position with visible tattoos, whether they would hire them, and the starting salary they would offer. We focus on Caucasian female applicants in their mid-late 20s because this is a segment of the workforce most likely to have tattoos (Statista, 2017).

Our study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, past studies have not sufficiently explored the rationale behind body art bias, so we offer an explanation for why job applicants with visible tattoos are less likely to be hired. Based on the justification-suppression model (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), as informed by the stereotype content model (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004), we argue that applicants with visible tattoos are stereotyped as less competent and warm than those without tattoos. These stereotypes may in turn provide a justification for prejudice against job applicants with visible tattoos and hurt their employment opportunities.

Second, across two studies, we explore if job applicants with visible tattoos can overcome discrimination. Providing methods for neutralizing stereotypes related to visible tattoos will help applicants secure employment based on their merit and avoid rejection for potentially spurious reasons. Using the justification-suppression model (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), we investigate if job applicants with visible tattoos can offset justifications for prejudice through their job qualifications and volunteer experience. That is, we propose that hiring

managers will be less likely to discriminate when tattooed applicants refute negative stereotypes by being highly qualified for the job and having volunteering experience.

Third, we study the effects of visible tattoos in a way that more closely replicates the hiring context than most previous studies by having participants evaluate simulated LinkedIn profiles of multiple applicants (within-subjects design). Most companies use social media for talent acquisition (SHRM, 2016), although the soundness of this practice has been questioned (e.g., Zhang et al., 2020), with LinkedIn being the most popular platform (Jobvite, 2018). However, in past research, participants are typically shown only a photo of the job applicant (e.g., Burgess & Clark, 2010; Timming, 2017; Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2017) and are asked to evaluate only a single applicant (between-subjects design; e.g., Brallier, Maguire, Smith, & Palm, 2011). We replicate many of the key features companies use to evaluate applicants by using LinkedIn profiles, which include a photo along with job-related information.

Study 1 Hypotheses

The justification-suppression model (JSM) of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) offers a theoretical framework for determining when prejudice will be expressed. Prejudice refers to the negative evaluation of a particular group or individual members because of their group membership. That is, prejudice is an affective reaction to a devalued group that has a motivational component. This motivational force drives individuals to express their negative attitudes, which may manifest as derogation of group members, interpersonal mistreatment, and/or discrimination.

According to the JSM, the motivational force of prejudice can be mitigated by suppression factors and enhanced by justification factors. Suppression is defined as internally or externally motivated processes that are used to decrease the internal experience and external expression of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Suppression may occur because of social norms regarding the unacceptability of prejudice, public accountability for prejudice, empathy for marginalized groups, or personal, social, political, and religious values eschewing prejudice (e.g., egalitarianism). Suppression helps uphold a desired self-image and an outward appearance of being unprejudiced.

Although suppression factors restrain the expression of prejudice, justification factors can release normally suppressed prejudice. Justification refers to processes that enable the expression of prejudice without any internal or external repercussions. Justifications provide a social or psychological rationale for prejudice that enhances its acceptability and excuses it from accountability, sanctions, and feelings of guilt or

shame (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Justifications can include blaming the victim, beliefs in the status quo, desire to preserve social hierarchy, social roles, ideologies, and stereotyping.

In summary, the JSM argues that individuals are motivated to express their negative views of other groups or individual members of those groups. However, prejudice can be decreased or held in check through factors that encourage the maintenance or projection of a self-image that is free of prejudice. Nevertheless, individuals may release repressed prejudice when they can express prejudice with impunity. Thus, prejudice is most likely to translate into discrimination when suppression factors are minimized or justification factors are maximized.

Applying the JSM to job applicants with visible tattoos, we assert that stereotypes regarding those with body art will justify exhibiting prejudice in the form of employment discrimination. Visible tattoos can be classified as a stigma because they involve modification to and deformation of the body and individuals with stigmas are often marginalized, socially rejected, and viewed with prejudice (Goffman, 1963). In addition, stigmas elicit negative attributions and stereotypes that will further preclude individuals from social interactions (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Jones et al., 1984). Thus, job applicants with visible tattoos should be perceived as unsuitable for employment due to stereotypes linked to their stigmas. Indeed, individuals with tattoos are often perceived as less professional (Ruetzler, Taylor, Reynolds, Baker, & Killen, 2012), less competent and sociable, and lower in character (Seiter & Hatch, 2005) as well as less attractive, caring, intelligent, athletic, motivated, generous, religious, and honest (Degelman & Price, 2002; Resenhoeft et al., 2008) than those without tattoos. Furthermore, body art is often perceived as indicative of character flaws such as arrest records, sexual promiscuity, alcohol and drug abuse, and depression (e.g., Heywood et al., 2012; Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2010). Given that many of these stereotypes will be viewed by hiring managers as predictive of future job performance, they should provide a justification for expressing prejudice in hiring decisions against job applicants with visible tattoos.

Evidence suggests that negative stereotypes regarding people with visible tattoos may translate into discrimination. For example, employers from a variety of industries report that they would be less inclined to hire job applicants with tattoos (Anderson, Lubig, & Mathys, 2015; Bekhor, Bekhor, & Gandrabur, 1995; Dale, Beville, Roach, Glasgow, & Bracy, 2009; Ruetzler et al., 2012; Swanger, 2006). Similarly, a survey of college students found that 86% expect students will have a more difficult time finding employment if they have a tattoo (Foltz, 2014). Empirical work also suggests that job applicants with tattoos will be stigmatized in hiring decisions.

For example, Brallier et al. (2011) found that restaurant managers were more likely to report that they would hire a non-tattooed applicant versus a tattooed one after viewing a photo and resume. Another study found that individuals rated photos of job applicants with a tattoo as less suitable for employment than those without tattoos in both customer-facing and non-customer-facing jobs (Timming et al., 2017). Taken together, the JSM and past research suggest that job applicants with visible tattoos should experience more discrimination than applicants without tattoos. Thus, we seek to replicate past studies that have found tattooed applicants are less likely to be hired but extend this work by examining if visible tattoos also lead to discrimination in starting salaries.

Hypothesis 1: *Job applicants with visible tattoos will be (a) less likely to be hired and (b) offered a lower starting salary than applicants without tattoos.*

The JSM suggests that the degree of prejudice is a function of justifications. Drawing on this premise, we argue that justifications for hiring discrimination should be greater when job applicants have more extreme visible tattoos because the salience of the body art will trigger even greater negative stereotypes. That is, not all stigmas are equal in magnitude. An attribute is more stigmatizing when it is disruptive, esthetically unpleasant, controllable, and highly visible, and signals danger (Jones et al., 1984). Researchers have long called for studies investigating whether the characteristics of tattoos influence the negative perceptions associated with them (e.g., Baumann, Timming, & Gollan, 2016; Degelman & Price, 2002; Seiter & Hatch, 2005; Swami & Furnham, 2007), and past research suggests that body art severity is important. For example, Totten, Lipscomb, and Jones (2009) reported that undergraduate business students thought tattoos are attractive unless they are overdone or extensive.

The severity of body art can vary in terms of genre, location, size, and number, all of which can be linked back to Jones et al.'s (1984) characteristics of stigmas. First, the genre matters as some tattoos can be visually unpleasant or connote danger. For example, Burgess and Clark (2010) empirically categorized tattoos as tribal or masculine versus cute or feminine and found that individuals with the former were rated more negatively on personal traits such as honesty and reputation and viewed as less suitable for the job. Similarly, Arndt and Glassman (2012) reported that salespeople, regardless of sex, with highly masculine tattoos were rated as less trustworthy than those with feminine tattoos. Thus, applicants with tattoos that are unappealing or aggressive are more likely to be stigmatized than those with more benign designs.

Second, highly visible and large tattoos will be more noticeable and distracting in hiring situations, thus leading to greater stigmatization of the applicant (Jones et al., 1984).

For example, Hawkes, Senn, and Thorn (2004) found that men and women rated females with tattoos more negatively on measures of evaluative attitudes (e.g., cruel, dangerous) and potency (e.g., rash, hard), especially when the tattoo was visible and large. Thus, larger tattoos located in hard-to-cover areas such as the neck, face, or hands will carry with them greater prejudice than smaller tattoos in areas that could be covered with business attire such as the upper arm, thigh, or torso.

Third, as the number of tattoos increases, so will the stigma linked to them because it will be harder to downplay multiple examples of body art. Koch et al. (2010) argued that a single tattoo seems benign in comparison to multiple tattoos, and Totten et al. (2009) found that most participants agreed that the number of tattoos individuals have influences how others view them. Swami and Furnham (2007) found that tattooed women were seen as heavier drinkers, less attractive, and more promiscuous than females without tattoos, especially as the number of tattoos they had increased. Finally, Thomas et al. (2010) showed that nurses were rated as less caring, skilled, and knowledgeable as their number of tattoos rose.

In summary, a single, small, innocuously designed tattoo that could be concealed should have fewer stereotypes associated with it than multiple, larger, more aggressive designs that cannot be readily covered up. Thus, we predict that job applicants with more extreme visible tattoos will be viewed as less suitable for employment than applicants with a mild visible tattoo because they provide a higher level of justification in the form of more negative stereotypes.

Hypothesis 2: *Job applicants with more extreme visible tattoos will be (a) less likely to be hired and (b) offered a lower starting salary than applicants with a mild visible tattoo.*

According to the JSM, stigmatized groups are likely to experience discrimination when prejudice can be justified using negative stereotypes. However, the JSM does not specify which stereotypes are likely to be activated against marginalized groups (King & Ahmad, 2010). Thus, we extend past research by drawing on the stereotype content model (Cuddy et al., 2004) to identify competence and warmth as job-related characteristics that tattooed applicants might be evaluated more negatively on than those without visible tattoos. That is, stereotypes regarding individuals with visible tattoos as less competent and warm may justify prejudice and subsequent hiring discrimination.

The stereotype content model argues that stereotyped groups are evaluated and differentiated based on the dimensions of competence and warmth (Cuddy et al., 2004).

Stereotyped groups can be low on both competence and warmth (e.g., homeless), high on both competence and warmth (e.g., middle class Whites), low on competence but high on warmth (e.g., older individuals), and high on competence but low on warmth (e.g., professional women). Where groups fall on these dimensions determines whether they are favored or discriminated against (Cuddy et al., 2004). Groups viewed as high versus low in competence are likely to have other groups seek to interact with them and thus are less likely to be ostracized or mistreated. Relatedly, groups viewed as high in warmth will be able to request and acquire help from others, which can shield them from harm. However, when stigmatized groups are low in both competence and warmth, they are more likely to be a target for social exclusion and active discrimination. Thus, perceptions of competence and warmth determine whether members of certain groups are vulnerable to prejudice and are at risk for discrimination. We argue that job applicants with visible tattoos will be perceived as lacking competence and warmth and thus experience prejudice. Indeed, past research suggests that individuals with tattoos are often perceived as less intelligent, competent, and professional as well as less caring, sociable, and generous (Degelman & Price, 2002; Resenhoeft et al., 2008; Ruetzler et al., 2012; Seiter & Hatch, 2005), which implies that tattooed job applicants should be stereotyped as both incompetent and lacking in warmth.

Hypothesis 3: *Job applicants with visible tattoos will be rated lower on (a) competence and (b) warmth than applicants without tattoos.*

Applicants with visible tattoos may be less employable because they are stereotyped as low in competence and warmth. Most studies examining tattooed job applicants fail to explore possible reasons for discrimination; thus, we extend prior research by using the stereotype content model to select job-relevant traits that might explain why hiring managers find applicants with visible tattoos unsuitable for employment. While competence is unequivocally job-relevant, we argue that warmth is also job-related for the position examined in this study, sales manager. According to O*NET OnLine (2020), sales managers must possess a variety of traits related to warmth including cooperation (being pleasant with others on the job and displaying a good-natured, cooperative attitude), a social orientation (prefer to work with others rather than alone and being personally connected with others on the job), and concern for others (sensitivity to others' needs and feelings and being understanding and helpful on the job). Additionally, they must carry out tasks related to warmth such as being able to resolve customer complaints, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, coaching and mentoring others, and developing and building teams. As a stereotyped group, applicants with visible tattoos should be

evaluated unfavorably on competence and warmth, which should lead to more negative hiring decisions.

Hypothesis 4: *Competence will mediate the relationship between visible tattoos and (a) likelihood of hiring and (b) starting salary.*

Hypothesis 5: *Warmth will mediate the relationship between visible tattoos and (a) likelihood of hiring and (b) starting salary.*

Study 1 Method

Stimulus Materials

We conducted a pilot study to ensure that the photos used in the LinkedIn profiles were equivalent in terms of attractiveness and personality before we added the tattoo manipulations. We downloaded photos of 16 women in business or business casual attire from Shutterstock to serve as applicants and six men to be used as fillers. We only used female applicants because women are more likely to have tattoos than men and most research has not found sex differences among job applicants with body art on ratings of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience, social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, task attractiveness, character, competence, interpersonal trust, pleasantness, honesty, kindness, dangerousness, reputation, or likelihood of being hired (e.g., Brallier et al., 2011; Burgess & Clark, 2010; McElroy, Summers, & Moore, 2014). To minimize the number of conditions in our study, we only downloaded photos of Caucasians in their mid to late 20s. Photos were presented in a randomized order and participants rated the individuals on nine descriptors (“The person in this photo is...agreeable, aggressive, attractive, competent, conscientious, creative, friendly, a risk taker, trustworthy”) and suitability for employment (“If I were a manager, I would hire this person”) using a 7-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Participants were 18 undergraduate business students enrolled in a staffing course who received extra credit for participation (78% were women, average age was 22 years ($SD = 2.08$), and they had an average tenure with their current employer of 10 months ($SD = 4.45$)). We dropped photos if the repeated measures ANOVAs¹ indicated higher or lower scores on attractiveness, creativity, risk-taking, trustworthiness, friendliness, or likelihood of being hired than the others.

¹ The results of the ANOVAs from all the pilot studies are available upon request from the authors.

This resulted in a final set of eight female (five of which are used in the main study) and three male photos (used as fillers).

We also had participants rate eight randomized photos with different tattoos to determine their severity using nine descriptors (“This tattoo is...aggressive, dangerous, distracting, harmless, mild, offensive, overdone, pleasant, subtle”) and a 7-point rating scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”). We used Photoshop to create unique photos of the same female model with (1) a dolphin tattoo on the upper arm and (2) a sun on the upper arm. These tattoos were possibilities for the mild condition because they are small and cute and could be concealed with longer sleeves. For the extreme condition, we created unique photos of the model with (1) a dragon on the neck, (2) a scorpion on the neck, (3) a spiky tribal band on the wrist, (4) a tribal band with an eye on the wrist, (5) a curvy tribal band on the wrist, and (6) a tribal band with flames on the wrist. These tattoos were larger, more aggressive, and harder to conceal than those in the mild condition. Repeated measures ANOVAs showed that the dolphin and sun were equivalent on the traits and were rated as the least aggressive, dangerous, and offensive. Given their similar ratings, we randomly selected the dolphin for the mild condition. The dragon, scorpion, tribal band with flames, and curvy tribal band were rated as the most aggressive, distracting, and overdone, and least mild, harmless, pleasant, and subtle. Given their equivalence, we randomly selected the dragon and the tribal band with flames for the extreme condition.

We conducted a second pilot study to determine if the LinkedIn profiles were equivalent in terms of job qualifications before adding the photos. Another sample of 13 undergraduate business students enrolled in a staffing course (88% were women, average age was 22 years ($SD = 2.11$), and they had an average tenure with their current employer of 9 months ($SD = 4.96$)) assumed the role of a recruiter hiring for the position of sales manager (this job is rated as sex-neutral; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). They read the job description, reviewed 18 randomized profiles containing information about applicants’ education and work experience, and rated them on competence, warmth, and likelihood of being hired using the same measures and rating scales used in the main study. At the end of the survey, participants commented on whether they felt any of the applicants were more or less qualified than the others. After reviewing the ANOVAs and open-ended comments, we eliminated eight profiles because they were perceived as more or less qualified than the other applicants.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). To be eligible for participation, individuals were

required to be at least 18 years old, live in the USA, be employed outside of MTurk, have at least 1 year of supervisory experience, and have helped hire a new employee within the last 2 years (e.g., screened resumes, conducted interviews, provided input into or made the final hiring decision). Those passing the screening survey were given access to the Time 1 survey, which asked about participants' demographics and work experience. The survey took 13 min to complete and participants were compensated \$1. To pay participants and preserve their anonymity, they created an alphanumeric code to match their Time 1 and Time 2 surveys. Three attention checks were included (e.g., "Mark "Agree" for this answer."), and participants were dropped if they failed two or more. One participant was dropped for failing the attention checks, and 16 participants were dropped because they did not complete the survey or enter a code to match their surveys. The final sample size for the Time 1 survey was 203.

One week later, the Time 2 survey was available to participants who completed the Time 1 survey. Participants assumed the role of a recruiter hiring for the position of sales manager and read the job description. They viewed the LinkedIn profiles of eight different applicants and rated them on their perceived characteristics, how likely they were to hire the applicants, and what starting salary they would offer (see Appendix for the job description and sample profiles). Severity of body art was manipulated through the profile photos and included as follows: (1) a female applicant with no tattoo, (2) a female applicant with a dolphin tattoo on her upper arm (mild tattoo condition), and (3) a female applicant with a dragon tattoo on her neck and a tribal tattoo with flames on her wrist (extreme tattoo condition). Profiles of two female and three male applicants without body art were included as fillers to prevent participants from realizing the study is about tattoos. Profiles were presented in a randomized order (including the five filler profiles).

Of the 203 participants eligible for the Time 2 survey, 164 started the survey. Participants were eliminated because they did not complete the survey or enter a code ($N=9$), failed two or more attention checks ($N=8$), or had a code that could not be matched to a Time 1 code ($N=4$). The final sample size was 143. The Time 2 survey took 30 min to complete and was anonymous. Participants were paid \$2.50.

Sample

Participants ranged between 21 and 63 years old with an average age of 36.19 years ($SD=9.96$), and more participants were male ($N=78$) than female ($N=65$). The sample was mostly Caucasian (72.7%) followed by Asian (11.9%), African American (8.4%), Hispanic or Latino (3.5%), multi-racial (2.1%), and other (1.4%). Most of the sample had a Bachelor's degree or higher (67.8%) and worked in retail (16.8%), finance (15.4%), educational services (9.1%), or

professional, scientific, and technical services (8.4%). Participants had 6.93 years of supervisory experience ($SD=7.44$) and were involved in hiring decisions for a variety of different positions including white-collar, blue-collar, and service jobs within the past 4 months.

Measures

The below measures used a 7-point scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely."

Perceived Competence Participants were asked the extent to which they believe each applicant had the following eight competency traits (competent, productive, effective, capable, efficient, skilled, intelligent, organized). The items were from measures used by Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) and Heilman and Okimoto (2008), and we averaged individual trait ratings to form an overall score. Coefficient alphas for the applicant without tattoos, with a mild visible tattoo, and with extreme visible tattoos were .94, .93, and .93, respectively.

Perceived Warmth Participants also rated each applicant on ten traits (good-natured, sincere, warm, trustworthy, helpful, kind, understanding, aware of others' feelings, likeable, friendly) representing warmth (Benard & Correll, 2010; Cuddy et al., 2004; Güngör & Biernat, 2009), and individual ratings were averaged to form an overall score. Coefficient alphas for the applicant without tattoos, with a mild visible tattoo, and with extreme visible tattoos were .95, .93, and .94, respectively.

Likelihood of Hiring We asked participants to indicate their likelihood of hiring each applicant for the sales manager position with the following item from Timming et al. (2017), "How likely would you be to hire this applicant?"

Recommended Starting Salary We asked participants what salary applicants should receive with an item from Correll et al. (2007), "Keeping in mind that the salary range for the Sales Manager position is \$80,000-\$95,000, what salary would you recommend for this applicant if he/she were hired?" Responses were open-ended but were limited to the job's salary range.

Control Variables Body art is more common among younger than older individuals, and thus, the age of the participant could influence their ratings of job applicants with visible tattoos. Also, participants who have body art might be more favorably disposed toward applicants with visible tattoos. In the Time 1 survey, we asked participants for their age and to report if they have tattoos or piercings. To prevent demand effects, we asked a variety of personal questions along with

the body art ones and waited a week before having participants complete the hiring task.²

Analytic Strategy We used the multivariate analysis of variance with follow-up ANOVAs and planned contrasts to test Hypotheses 1–3, presenting information about both statistical significance and effect size (e.g., eta squared) for all analyses. Hypotheses 4 and 5 proposed competence and warmth as mediators. We used the multivariate analysis of covariance to test mediation hypotheses. There are a number of ways of evaluating mediation (e.g., path analyses, SEM), but they all focus on the hypothesis that the relationship between some independent variable or set of independent variables and the dependent variables can be explained if the relationship between the dependent variable and the mediator is taken into account. In this case, the independent variables represent manipulations in a factorial ANOVA design. The advantage of maintaining a consistent analytic approach across the different analyses we carry out (i.e., MANOVA/MANCOVA) is that it makes comparisons of results across studies and hypotheses simpler by preserving effect size information in a way that many other methods of examining mediation do not, allowing us to show concretely how much of the variance in particular dependent variables is explained by tattoos alone versus tattoos controlling for the mediators. Thus, we first establish that there is a relationship between visible tattoos and the dependent variables and then show the extent to which this relationship disappears or approaches zero if we statistically control for the mediator.

Study 1 Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for ratings on likelihood of hiring, starting salary recommendations, competence, and warmth by condition. This table suggests that visible tattoos (mild or extreme) lead to a reduction in hiring and salary recommendations. Additionally, ratings of competence are higher for the applicant without tattoos than for the applicants with visible tattoos. For warmth, ratings were higher for the applicants without visible tattoos and with a mild visible tattoo than for the applicant with extreme visible tattoos.

² We found virtually no relationship between participant age and the hiring and salary ratings given to applicants; participant age explained less than 1% of the variance in the ratings. Similarly, there was very little relationship between having body art and applicant ratings. One key recommendation of recent reviews of the use of control variables in the organizational sciences is that control variables that are essentially uncorrelated with the dependent variables should normally be avoided (e.g., Becker, 2005; Bernerth, Cole, Taylor, & Walker, 2018). On that basis, we decided not to control for participants' age or body art.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 Hypothesis 1 stated that job applicants with visible tattoos would be (a) less likely to be hired and (b) offered a lower starting salary than applicants without tattoos. Hypothesis 2 stated that job applicants with extreme visible tattoos would be (a) less likely to be hired and (b) offered a lower starting salary than applicants with a mild visible tattoo. We used repeated measures MANOVA to evaluate the effects of tattoos, comparing applicants with no tattoo, a mild visible tattoo, and extreme visible tattoos on hiring and salary recommendations. We found that visible tattoos had a significant and moderately large effect ($F(4,139) = 8.87, p < .001$, multivariate $R^2 = .20$).³ Univariate follow-up ANOVAs showed that the effects of visible tattoos on hiring and salary recommendations were both statistically significant ($F(2,284) = 12.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$; and $F(2,284) = 16.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$, respectively).

We created contrasts to test the specific predictions in Hypotheses 1 and 2. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, the means for hiring ($F(1,284) = 16.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$) and salary ($F(1,284) = 26.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$) recommendations for tattooed applicants were significantly lower than the means for the applicant with no tattoos. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. For Hypothesis 2, we found that the applicant with a mild visible tattoo received significantly lower hiring and salary ratings than the applicant with no tattoo ($F(1,284) = 7.77, p = .005, \eta^2 = .06$; and $F(1,284) = 23.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$, respectively). The applicant with extreme visible tattoos received significantly lower hiring ratings than the applicant with a mild visible tattoo, but there was no difference in their salary offers ($F(1,284) = 5.39, p = .02, \eta^2 = .02$; and $F(1,284) = .05, p = .83, \eta^2 = .00$, respectively). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported for hiring decisions, but not salary offers. Taken together, visible tattoos led to lower hiring and salary ratings than no tattoos, and the applicant with extreme visible tattoos was less likely to be hired than the one with a mild visible tattoo. We should note, however, that even applicants with extreme visible tattoos received hiring ratings that were above the scale midpoint. Thus, visible tattoos hurt applicants' hiring prospects, but they do not necessarily preclude hiring.

Hypothesis 3 Hypothesis 3 stated that job applicants with visible tattoos would be rated lower on (a) competence and (b) warmth than applicants without tattoos. We conducted a one-way repeated measures MANOVA to evaluate the effects of tattoos on ratings of the job-related attributes. Visible tattoos had a significant multivariate effect ($F(4,852) = 3.95, p < .003$, multivariate $R^2 = .03$). The effects of visible tattoos

³ Cohen (1988) notes that the multivariate R^2 between a set of dependent variables and a set of independent variables in one-way MANOVA is given by $1 - \text{value of Wilks' lambda}$. In more complex designs, the value of Wilks' lambda is adjusted slightly for shrinkage (See Steyn & Ellis, 2009, p. 114).

Table 1 Means and standard deviations for Study 1 dependent variables by condition

Condition	Likelihood of hiring, <i>M</i> (SD)	Starting salary, <i>M</i> (SD)	Competence, <i>M</i> (SD)	Warmth, <i>M</i> (SD)
No tattoo	5.30 (1.45)	\$86,538 (4907)	5.43 (1.05)	5.23 (1.12)
Mild tattoo	4.88 (1.41)	\$84,379 (4184)	5.16 (1.06)	5.21 (.99)
Extreme tattoos	4.53 (1.74)	\$84,271 (4580)	5.01 (1.13)	4.96 (1.08)

N = 143. Standard deviations are in parentheses

on ratings of competence were statistically significant ($F(2,427) = 4.56, p = .010, \eta^2 = .02$), but there were no significant differences in ratings of warmth ($F(2,427) = 2.59, p = .076, \eta^2 = .01$).

We created contrasts comparing the applicant with no tattoo to the applicants with visible tattoos (either mild or extreme) to test the specific predictions in Hypothesis 3. The mean ratings for applicants with visible tattoos were significantly lower for competence ($F(1,429) = 8.00, p = .005, \eta^2 = .01$), but not for warmth ($F(1,429) = 1.30, p = .04, \eta^2 < .001$) than the means for the applicant with no tattoos. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 Hypotheses 4 and 5 stated that competence and warmth would mediate the relationship between visible tattoos and the outcome variables. We have demonstrated moderately strong to strong multivariate effects for visible tattoos on hiring and salary decisions (multivariate $R^2 = .20$). If competence and warmth serve as mediators of this relationship, including them as covariates should substantially reduce these effects. We conducted a repeated measures MANCOVA on hiring and salary recommendations, with tattoos as the within-subjects factor and ratings of competence and warmth for each applicant as covariates. Adding these covariates led to a substantial decrease in the multivariate effect of visible tattoos on hiring and salary recommendations ($F(4,846) = 4.93, p = .001, \text{multivariate } R^2 = .05$). Adjusting for ratings of competence and warmth, there were significant, but very small univariate effects of visible tattoos for hiring and salary recommendations ($F(2,430) = 4.81, p = .009, \eta^2 = .02$; and $F(2,430) = 7.69, p = .001, \eta^2 = .003$). This pattern of results provides general support for a mediation hypothesis, but still allows for a small direct effect.

Study 1 Discussion

This study examined the effects of visible tattoos on applicants' likelihood of being hired and starting salary. Caucasian female applicants in their mid to late 20s with tattoos, especially extreme visible tattoos, were significantly less likely to be viewed as employable compared to applicants

without tattoos. Furthermore, applicants with extreme visible tattoos or a mild visible tattoo received lower initial salary offers than the applicant without a tattoo (\$2267 and \$2159, respectively). These results suggest that tattooed applicants experience more discrimination than those without visible tattoos, especially if the visible tattoos are more extreme. This study also provides insight into why applicants with visible tattoos are more likely to experience hiring discrimination. Specifically, we found that applicants with visible tattoos, especially more extreme ones, experienced unfavorable hiring and salary recommendations compared to the applicant without tattoos because they were perceived as less competent. Thus, in support of the JSM, negative stereotypes justify prejudice against tattooed job applicants and result in discrimination in the hiring process.

In summary, Study 1 demonstrated that job applicants with visible tattoos are more likely to be discriminated against than applicants without tattoos even when they are equally qualified. However, our findings indicate that applicants may be able to reduce prejudice by selecting more mild tattoos. In Study 2, we seek to identify factors that can reduce the justifications for prejudice against applicants with visible tattoos. Toward this end, we examine whether applicants' job qualifications can neutralize negative stereotypes associated with visible tattoos and thus reduce hiring discrimination.

Study 2 Hypotheses

The JSM argues that prejudice is likely to be expressed when justification factors are high (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Thus, to reduce expressed prejudice and the resulting discrimination, steps must be taken to neutralize the perceived justifications for prejudice. Given that stereotypes of incompetence are used to justify discrimination against job applicants with visible tattoos, evidence refuting this justification should reduce discrimination. We propose that tattooed applicants may be able to overcome prejudice and employment discrimination by providing evidence of their competence through their job qualifications. That is, having outstanding job qualifications should signal to hiring managers the applicant's competence, a key component of the stereotype content model

(Cuddy et al., 2004). In summary, providing information that is inconsistent with the negative stereotypes of job applicants with visible tattoos can negate justifications for prejudice and reduce hiring discrimination.

Dean (2010) suggested that information regarding performance may overcome stereotypes associated with body art, but no empirical research exists on the effects of applicant qualifications on reactions to visible tattoos. However, research on other stigmatized groups suggests that providing information that contradicts negative stereotypes can reduce discrimination. For example, Morgan, Walker, Hebl, and King (2013) found that hiring managers were less likely to display interpersonal discrimination against pregnant applicants when they received counterstereotypic information about pregnancy-related stereotypes (e.g., lack of commitment, inflexibility). Thus, specific information about job-related qualifications should override stereotypes related to visible tattoos because compelling evidence that an applicant is highly qualified for a particular job will remove the justification for prejudice (Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993). Thus, highly qualified applicants with mild or extreme visible tattoos should experience similar hiring rates as highly qualified applicants without tattoos. Conversely, minimally qualified applicants with visible tattoos, especially extreme ones, should be least able to negate justifications for prejudice by recruiters (negative stereotypes attributed to tattooed individuals) and thus unlikely to overcome hiring discrimination.

Hypothesis 6: *Job qualifications will moderate the effect of visible tattoos on (a) likelihood of hiring and (b) starting salary, such that minimally qualified applicants with extreme visible tattoos will experience the most discrimination.*

Study 2 Method

Stimulus Materials

We modified some of the LinkedIn profiles from Study 1 to incorporate the job qualifications manipulation. For the minimally qualified condition, we removed any awards received from the profiles. For the highly qualified condition, we added an “Awards and Professional Recognition” section that listed multiple awards for performance (e.g., Sales Leader of the Year Award, Best Sales Manager) and advanced education (e.g., Masters of Business Administration, Certified Manager certification) to the profiles. To verify the effectiveness of the job qualifications manipulation in the modified profiles, we conducted a pilot study using MTurk to ensure the profiles represented minimal or high job qualifications as intended. To be eligible for the study, individuals were required to be at

least 18 years old, live in the USA, be employed outside of MTurk, have at least 1 year of supervisory experience, have helped hire a new employee within the last 2 years, and did not participate in Study 1. Those who passed the screening survey ($N = 67$) were given access to the pilot study. Fifteen participants did not complete the survey and four failed two or more attention checks, so the final sample size was 48. Participants were paid \$2.

Participants assumed the role of a recruiter hiring for a sales manager position, read the job description, and rated eight job applicants presented in a randomized order on their competence, how likely they would be to hire each applicant, and what salary they would offer using the same measures and rating scales used in Study 1. At the end of each LinkedIn profile, participants were asked if there was anything specific about the profile that led them to make the rating they did. Repeated measures ANOVAs indicated that one of the highly qualified profiles was rated lower than some of the minimally qualified ones on competence and likelihood of hiring. Participant comments revealed that the applicant oversaw a small team in comparison to other applicants. We modified the profile so the applicant managed a large team and conducted another pilot study.

In the second pilot study using MTurk, 57 participants passed the screening survey, but nine were dropped because they did not complete the survey and five failed two or more attention checks. The final sample size was 43 and participants were paid \$2. Repeated measures ANOVAs indicated that the highly qualified profiles were rated higher on competence than the minimally qualified profiles. Participants were also more likely to hire and offer higher salaries to the highly qualified applicants versus the minimally qualified.

Procedure

Working adults were recruited from an MBA course and offered extra credit in exchange for participation ($N = 141$). We also recruited 59 participants through undergraduate business students who were offered extra credit for providing up to four email addresses of working adults willing to complete the survey. Participants had to be at least 18 years old and have supervisory or hiring experience. Seventeen participants were dropped because they did not complete the survey, and 13 were eliminated because they did not have supervisory or hiring experience. We included three attention checks (e.g., “Click Extremely for this item”) and a manipulation check at the end of the survey to determine if participants noticed the tattoos (“Did any of the applicants display a tattoo?”). Fourteen participants failed two or more attention checks, and eight failed the manipulation check and were dropped from the study. The final sample size was 148.

Participants assumed the role of a recruiter for a sales manager position, read a job description, and viewed ten LinkedIn

profiles. Participants rated the job applicants on their likelihood of being hired and starting salary. We used a 3×2 within-subjects design in which we manipulated body art (no tattoo versus a mild visible tattoo versus extreme visible tattoos) and competence (minimal versus high job qualifications) for Caucasian female job applicants in their mid to late 20s. For the additional tattoo condition, we used the unused, equivalently rated tattoos from the Study 1 pilot study (scorpion on the neck and a tribal band on the wrist). We included profiles of three males and one female as fillers to prevent participants from inferring the true purpose of the study. All applicant profiles, including the fillers, were presented in a randomized order. After rating the applicants, participants answered questions about their demographics and work experience. The anonymous survey took 50 min to complete.

Sample

Participants were mostly male (85 males; 63 females) and had an average age of 34.39 years ($SD = 7.84$), and 66% had a Bachelor's degree and 24% had a Master's degree. The sample was mostly Caucasian (68%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (14%), Asian (9%), multi-racial (5%), African American (3%), and other (1%). Participants had an average tenure of 5.12 years ($SD = 5.25$) and 6.80 years of supervisory experience ($SD = 5.97$) and helped make a hiring decision for a wide variety of different jobs within the past 7 months. Most worked in finance and insurance (13%), other services (12%), professional, scientific, and technical services (12%), educational services (10%), and health care and social assistance (10%).

Measures

We used the same items from Study 1 to measure likelihood of hiring and recommended starting salary, but we broadened the salary range to \$75,000 to \$95,000 to reflect the increased range of applicant qualifications (minimally versus highly qualified) used in Study 2.

Study 2 Results

Means and standard deviations for hiring and salary recommendations by condition are shown in Table 2. Applicants with a mild visible tattoo or extreme visible tattoos received lower hiring recommendations than similarly qualified applicants without tattoos, although as we noted in Study 1, even applicants with extreme visible tattoos received hiring ratings above the scale midpoint. This suggests that visible tattoos represent a disadvantage, not a fatal flaw. Also, highly qualified applicants received similar salary recommendations regardless of their tattoo status. Minimally qualified applicants

with either a mild visible tattoo or extreme visible tattoos received a lower starting salary than the minimally qualified applicant without a tattoo.

Hypothesis 6 stated that the influence of visible tattoos on hiring and salary recommendations would be moderated by job qualifications, with minimally qualified applicants with extreme visible tattoos experiencing the most discrimination. We conducted a 3×2 repeated measures MANOVA to assess the main effects of and interaction between qualifications (high versus minimal) and tattoos (no tattoo versus a mild visible tattoo versus extreme visible tattoos) on hiring and salary recommendations. We found a strong main effect for qualifications ($F(2,146) = 97.24, p < .001$, multivariate $R^2 = .57$), a smaller but significant main effect for visible tattoos ($F(4,144) = 5.20, p = .001$, multivariate $R^2 = .13$), and a moderately small but significant interaction ($F(4,144) = 3.26, p = .014$, multivariate $R^2 = .08$). The patterns of results for the two dependent variables are illustrated in Fig. 1.

Univariate tests for hiring recommendations showed a strong and significant main effect for qualifications ($F(1,147) = 112.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .43$), a smaller but significant main effect for visible tattoos ($F(2,294) = 11.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$), and a non-significant interaction ($F(2,294) = 1.78, p = .168, \eta^2 = .02$). Thus, Hypothesis 6a was not supported for hiring as there were only main effects for visible tattoos and qualifications.

Univariate tests for salary recommendations showed a strong and significant main effect for qualifications ($F(1,147) = 179.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .55$), a smaller but significant main effect for visible tattoos ($F(2,294) = 3.96, p = .025, \eta^2 = .03$), and a small but significant interaction ($F(2,294) = 6.74, p = .001, \eta^2 = .04$). We used the method of simple main effects to analyze this interaction and found that the simple main effect of visible tattoos for highly qualified applicants on salary recommendations was small ($F(2,294) = 3.83, p = .023, \eta^2 = .05$), while the simple main effect of visible tattoos for minimally qualified applicants was stronger ($F(2,294) = 10.83, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$). These findings indicate that visible tattoos are more strongly related to starting salary when applicants were minimally qualified. Thus, Hypothesis 6b is supported for salary decisions.

Study 2 Discussion

Competence, as signaled through job qualifications, was able to counteract bias in starting salary decisions against Caucasian female applicants in their mid to late 20s with visible tattoos. There were no statistically significant differences in initial salary among the highly qualified tattooed and non-tattooed applicants. However, preference was given in salary decisions to the minimally qualified applicant without tattoos versus the minimally qualified applicants with extreme or

Table 2 Means and standard deviations for Study 2 dependent variables by condition

Condition	Job qualifications	Likelihood of hiring, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Starting salary, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Tattoo	Minimal	5.07 (1.31)	\$81,186 (5797)
	High	5.82 (1.02)	\$85,236 (5956)
Mild tattoo	Minimal	4.70 (1.36)	\$79,301 (4574)
	High	5.60 (1.20)	\$85,084 (6404)
Extreme tattoos	Minimal	4.49 (1.42)	\$78,997 (4421)
	High	5.52 (1.34)	\$85,545 (6725)

N = 148. Standard deviations are in parentheses

mild visible tattoos. Specifically, the minimally qualified applicant without tattoos was offered \$2189 and \$1885 more annually than the minimally qualified applicants with extreme or mild visible tattoos, respectively. Thus, prejudice based on body art is prevalent in terms of salary when applicants do not have strong qualifications to override prejudice. Contrary to our expectations, job qualifications did not neutralize hiring discrimination for tattooed applicants. Instead, applicants without tattoos received better hiring recommendations than similarly qualified applicants with extreme or mild visible tattoos.

Our results suggest that applicants with mild or extreme visible tattoos still experience discrimination in hiring, even when they are highly qualified compared to other applicants.

If job qualifications alone are not sufficient to mitigate the negative effects of visible tattoos, the question becomes whether there are additional steps tattooed applicants might take to reduce the likelihood that they will be discriminated against in hiring decisions. We believe that volunteer work experience could strengthen perceptions of these applicants as being even more competent and help to reduce the employment penalty tattooed applicants pay. Therefore, in Study 3, we focus on highly qualified young Caucasian female applicants with extreme visible tattoos to determine if bias against these applicants can be reduced by engaging in volunteer work with vulnerable populations. Working with these groups signals characteristics related to competence like intelligence, motivation, leadership, and work ethic that individuals with extreme visible tattoos are often stereotyped as lacking. Thus, volunteer experience represents one additional way in which job applicants can potentially convey their competence beyond their standard job qualifications and thereby neutralize bias related to visible tattoos.

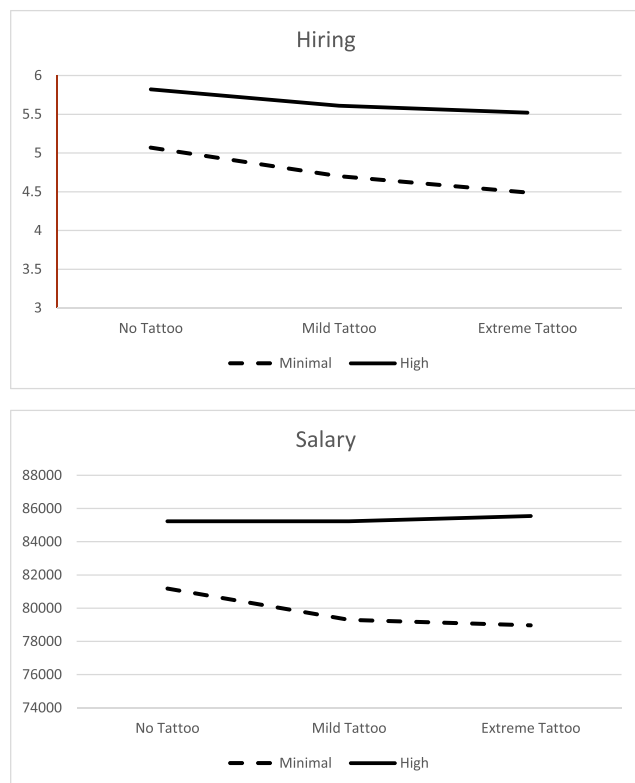


Fig. 1 Interaction between tattoo condition and job qualifications in Study 2

Study 3 Hypotheses

In Study 2, we found that job applicants with mild and extreme visible tattoos received more unfavorable hiring recommendations than those without tattoos, even when they were highly qualified. Thus, being highly qualified does not remove all the prejudice against tattooed applicants. Drawing on the JSM, we argue that volunteer experience with vulnerable populations (e.g., disabled, terminally ill, homeless) will contradict negative stereotypes associated with extreme visible tattoos and thus reduce hiring discrimination. Indeed, research suggests that unemployed persons with volunteer experience find employment significantly faster than those without volunteer experience and that long-term unemployment is virtually non-existent among volunteers (Goić & Jeroncic, 2012). Furthermore, there is evidence that extracurricular activities, which include volunteering, have a stronger effect on recruiters’ employability ratings than academic qualifications or work experience (Cole, Rubin, Feild, & Giles, 2007).

Although volunteer experience might signal warmth because it can convey to recruiters that applicants have interpersonal skills and are willing to cooperate (Cole et al., 2007; Maurath, Wright, Wittorp, & Hardtke, 2015), a review of the literature suggests that volunteer experience more strongly communicates competence. Economists have long argued that volunteer experience can build human capital (Day & Devlin, 1998; Smith, 2010), and other researchers have found that volunteers often have desirable attributes sought by employers that signal competence such as high levels of intelligence, leadership ability, and motivation (Brown & Campion, 1994; Wilkin & Connelly, 2012) as well as extraversion, emotional stability, broad-mindedness, and a strong work ethic (Cole, Feild, & Giles, 2003; Hustinx et al., 2010).

In an extension of Study 2, we argue that augmenting job qualifications with volunteer experience will benefit applicants with extreme⁴ visible tattoos in hiring situations. For example, resumes with a combination of paid work and volunteer experience were judged as more suitable for employment than resumes with only paid work or only volunteer experience (Wilkin & Connelly, 2012). Likewise, Shore and Tashchian (2013) reported that both career and non-career-related volunteer experience listed on a resume reduced bias toward unemployed job applicants. Thus, volunteering represents a concrete way of demonstrating competence and other valued attributes, which suggests that volunteering might mitigate negative stereotypes associated with extreme visible tattoos.

In summary, we expect that prejudice against tattooed applicants will be reduced when they have outstanding qualifications *and* volunteer experience because they convey a high level of competence. These applicants should experience similar hiring rates and starting salaries compared to highly qualified non-tattooed applicants with volunteer experience. By contrast, applicants with extreme visible tattoos who lack volunteer experience should experience the least favorable employment outcomes (highest rejection rate and lowest starting salary) since they are least able to negate justifications for prejudice and therefore less likely to overcome discrimination in the hiring process.

Hypothesis 7: *Volunteer experience will moderate the effect of visible tattoos on (a) likelihood of hiring and (b) starting salary, such that applicants with extreme visible tattoos who lack volunteer experience will experience the most discrimination.*

⁴ In Study 3, we chose to include only extreme visible tattoos because there were no differences between mild and extreme tattoos in Study 2.

Study 3 Method

Stimulus Materials

To modify the LinkedIn profiles to include the volunteer experience manipulation, we conducted a pilot study. Participants read descriptions of 10 types of volunteer experience that involve working with vulnerable populations (e.g., terminally ill, elders, homeless, disabled, substance abusers, children) and rated the extent that they believe a job applicant with each type of volunteer experience is competent as well as how likely they would be to hire them using the same measures and rating scales from Study 1. The sample consisted of participants recruited from MTurk who lived in the USA, were employed outside of MTurk, had at least a year of supervisory experience, helped with a hiring decision within the last 2 years, and did not participate in Study 1 or the pilot studies in Study 2. Of those passing the screening survey ($N = 76$), eight were eliminated due to missing data and 22 were dropped for failing more than one attention check. The final sample size was 46 and participants were paid \$1.

Repeated measures ANOVAs showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the types of volunteer experiences and any of the dependent variables. Given that the volunteer experiences were equivalent, we randomly selected homeless shelter and hospice volunteer for the applicant profiles. We included a “Volunteer Experience” section with volunteer title, organization, participation dates, and a sentence describing the experience.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via MTurk and were required to be at least 18 years, live in the USA, be employed outside of MTurk, have at least 1 year of supervisory experience, have helped hire a new employee within the last 2 years, and did not participate in the previous pilot or main studies. Of those passing the screening survey ($N = 220$), 19 were eliminated due to missing data, 37 were dropped because they failed more than one attention check, and 25 were dropped because they failed either the tattoo (i.e., “Did any of the applicants display a tattoo?”) or volunteer experience (i.e., “Did any of the job applicants have volunteer experience?”) manipulation check. The final sample size was 139.

Participants assumed the role of a recruiter for a sales manager position, read the job description, viewed six LinkedIn profiles presented in a randomized order, and rated applicants on the likelihood of hiring and the starting salary they would offer. We used a 2 (no tattoo versus extreme visible tattoos) \times 2 (no volunteer experience versus volunteer experience) within-subjects design with highly qualified Caucasian women in their mid to late 20s. For the extreme visible tattoos

conditions, we used (1) a scorpion on the neck and tribal band on the wrist (from Study 2) and (2) a snake on the forearm and tribal band on the hand (these tattoos were rated equivalently to the previously used extreme tattoos). We included two male applicants as fillers. After completing the rating task, participants answered questions about their demographics and work experience. The survey took 40 min to complete and participants were paid \$3.

Sample

Participants ranged between 20 and 70 years old with an average age of 34.96 years ($SD = 11.08$) and more were male ($N = 79$) than female ($N = 60$). The sample was mostly Caucasian (75.5%) followed by African American (10.1%), Hispanic or Latino (5.0%), Asian (4.3%), and multi-racial (5.0%). The majority had a Bachelor's degree or higher (69%) and worked in information (12.9%), professional, scientific, and technical services (12.2%), finance and insurance (10.8%), retail (8.6%), or health care and social assistance (7.9%). Participants had tenure with their current employer of 6.53 years ($SD = 6.04$) and 6.12 years of supervisory experience ($SD = 6.82$) and were involved in hiring decisions for many different types of jobs within the past 5 months.

Measures

We used the same items and response scales from Study 2 to measure likelihood of hiring and recommended starting salary.

Study 3 Results

Means and standard deviations for hiring and salary recommendations by condition are shown in Table 3. Applicants without tattoos received higher hiring and salary recommendations than applicants with extreme visible tattoos. Among applicants with volunteer experience, the applicant without tattoos received higher hiring and salary ratings than the

applicant with extreme visible tattoos. A similar pattern emerged among applicants without volunteer experience.

Hypothesis 7 stated that the effect of visible tattoos on likelihood of hiring and starting salary would be moderated by volunteer experience, with applicants with extreme visible tattoos who lack volunteer experience experiencing the most discrimination. We conducted a 2×2 repeated measures MANOVA to assess the main effects of and interaction between visible tattoos and volunteer experience on hiring and salary recommendations. We found a moderately strong main effect for visible tattoos ($F(2,137) = 10.21, p < .001$, multivariate $R^2 = .13$), a non-significant main effect for volunteer experience ($F(2,137) = .73, p = .484$, multivariate $R^2 = .01$), and a weak and non-significant interaction ($F(2,137) = .90, p = .448$, multivariate $R^2 = .01$). Although there were moderately strong univariate effects of visible tattoos for both hiring ($F(1,138) = 12.72, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .09$) and salary recommendations ($F(1,138) = 19.21, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .12$), volunteer experience did not moderate these relationships. Thus, Hypothesis 7 was not supported.

Study 3 Discussion

In an extension of Study 2, we tested whether Caucasian female job applicants in their mid to late 20s with extreme visible tattoos could overcome discrimination by being highly qualified and having volunteering experience. Past research suggests that volunteers are perceived as higher on traits related to competence, so this combination should help to negate stereotypes that tattooed applicants are less competent than applicants without tattoos. Contrary to our expectations, volunteer experience did not mitigate the prejudice associated with extreme visible tattoos. Instead, highly qualified tattooed applicants with volunteer experience were less likely to be hired and received lower starting salaries than those without tattoos (with or without volunteer experience). Our failure to show an interaction between visible tattoos and volunteering suggest that it might be difficult for job applicants with visible tattoos to mitigate the biases their tattoos can create in hiring decisions.

Table 3 Means and standard deviations for Study 3 dependent variables by condition

Condition	Volunteer experience	Likelihood of hiring, M (SD)	Starting salary, M (SD)
Tattoo	Yes	5.76 (1.35)	\$85,289 (6370)
	No	5.71 (1.28)	\$84,773 (6174)
Extreme tattoos	Yes	5.44 (1.48)	\$83,033 (6319)
	No	5.27 (1.52)	\$82,962 (6324)

$N = 139$. Standard deviations are in parentheses

General Discussion

Examining the results across all three studies, we identify some key findings. First, applicants in their mid to late 20s with visible tattoos, especially extreme ones, were significantly less likely to be viewed as employable as a sales manager compared to comparable applicants without visible tattoos. Second, applicants with extreme visible tattoos or a mild visible tattoo were offered about 2–3% less in annual starting salary than the applicant without visible tattoos. Third, hiring managers used stereotypes of job applicants with visible tattoos as less competent than applicants without visible tattoos to justify their hiring and starting salary discrimination. Fourth, the impact of visible tattoos on one's employability is difficult to overcome even with exceptional job qualifications and a history of doing volunteer work. Thus, Caucasian female applicants in their mid to late 20s with visible tattoos are stigmatized regardless of their job qualifications or volunteering experiences.

We extend past work on prejudice against tattooed job applicants by exploring the mediating mechanism between visible tattoos and hiring outcomes. One explanation for discrimination, based on the stereotype content model, is that visible tattoos elicit negative stereotypes about applicants' competence and warmth. As expected, we found that hiring managers stereotyped young Caucasian female job applicants with visible tattoos as having less competence, but contrary to expectations, they were not perceived as less warm than the applicant without visible tattoos. One possible reason for this is that warmth may not have been viewed as important as competence to the sales manager job, where the primary focus may be viewed as producing concrete business outcomes (e.g., increase sales performance). Perhaps for other types of jobs (e.g., nurse, teacher, counselor), having warmth would be viewed as more relevant and the effect of visible tattoos on perceived warmth for those types of jobs would be greater. Despite the increasing popularity and generally more relaxed attitude toward body art in our society, these results suggest that prejudice still exists toward visible tattoos in the workplace. Future research should continue this line of inquiry by determining if there are other traits that might serve as mediators such as impulsivity, honesty, or moral identity.

Drawing on the JSM (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), in Studies 2 and 3, we proposed that job applicants with visible tattoos can neutralize justifications for prejudice through their job qualifications and volunteer work. We found that highly qualified young Caucasian female applicants for a prototypical white-collar job counteracted bias in initial salary offers but failed to negate the justification for discrimination in hiring decisions. Furthermore,

volunteer experience did not influence hiring managers' perceptions of the employment suitability of applicants with visible tattoos. That is, applicants with visible tattoos face prejudice in the hiring context even when they are highly qualified and perform volunteer work. Future research should explore whether volunteer work more directly related to a particular job provides a stronger signal of competence (e.g., job applicants for a sales manager position serving on the board of directors for a charity organization) than the type of volunteering we included on applicants' resumes (Wilkin & Connelly, 2012).

Finally, we provide a more realistic hiring situation to test our hypotheses than past studies. We did this by using participants with recent hiring experience, which gives us insight into how hiring managers react to applicants with visible tattoos. Furthermore, we provided hiring managers with job-related information about applicants in the form of a LinkedIn profile (versus just a photo) and a context where applicant photos are acceptable to include (versus a resume). Additionally, we used a within-subjects design rather than a between-subjects design because hiring managers typically evaluate more than one applicant for a position.

Study Implications

Given its increasing prevalence in society, organizations should incorporate body art into their training initiatives to ensure that managers and recruiters avoid the use of non-job-related factors in making employment-related decisions. Discrimination based on aspects of appearance, such as visible tattoos, can unfairly limit job applicants' hiring chances and terms of employment (e.g., starting salary). Furthermore, appearance-based discrimination has received increased legal scrutiny and protections in recent years, especially when linked to protected characteristics such as race or religion (HRFocus, 2008; Pating & Cruse, 2019). However, there has long been a movement to include appearance in existing equal employment opportunity laws (e.g., James, 2008), which would result in greater legal recourse for job applicants. Finally, discrimination against applicants with visible tattoos also has the potential to result in a loss of valuable talent to an organization especially when employees are in high demand.

This study also has practical implications for prospective employees. Our findings show that job applicants need to carefully consider the effects that visible tattoos may have on their employment opportunities and earning potential. If applicants choose to display tattoos, our study indicates that they can reduce hiring discrimination by avoiding extreme tattoos. However, our results suggest that even a mild visible tattoo could have costly long-term effects. Suppose, for example, that two individuals are hired as sales managers, one with

a mild visible tattoo and the other with no visible tattoo. Even if the visible tattoo does nothing more than depress that person's salary slightly, the costs will continue to mount over time. Our results (see Table 1) suggest that a mild visible tattoo could lead to a dip in initial salary of \$2159. Even if the tattoo has no further effects on subsequent performance evaluations, promotions, or pay raises, this difference will add up over time. In a company that gives 2% annual raises, this visible tattoo could cost its owner over \$23,000 over 10 years. Extreme visible tattoos are likely to have even larger costs. Therefore, job applicants may want to carefully consider the potential negative impact of wearing visible tattoos when seeking employment and should avoid posting photos that show their tattoos on employment-oriented websites like LinkedIn.

Our results also suggest that young Caucasian female applicants can partially counteract prejudice against visible tattoos by enhancing their job qualifications through greater job experience and education. We found that despite having outstanding qualifications, applicants with mild or extreme visible tattoos face an uphill battle to gain employment. However, once the decision is made to hire a highly qualified applicant with visible tattoos, the motivation to discriminate when it comes to their starting salary is negated by their job qualifications. Furthermore, despite research showing that volunteer experience enhances applicants' perceived suitability for employment (Wilkin & Connelly, 2012), in our study, volunteer experience failed to overcome the stigma of extreme visible tattoos. Taken as a whole, our results suggest that the prejudice associated with visible tattoos is difficult for applicants to overcome.

Study Limitations and Future Research

We did not specify a particular industry context for the sales manager job. It is possible that the effects of visible tattoos would differ based on industry. For example, visible tattoos within a conservative industry (e.g., finance, insurance) may be viewed more negatively than in a creative industry (e.g., fashion, music). Visible tattoos may even be viewed as an asset rather than a liability in certain jobs or companies. Timming et al. (2017) showed photos of job applicants with or without tattoos to participants and found they were more likely to hire tattooed individuals for a bartender at a popular nightclub than for a server at a fine dining restaurant. Thus, there may be situations in which having visible tattoos may be advantageous to applicants. The country the organization is based in may also influence the likelihood of discrimination. For example, the Japanese typically have an aversion toward tattoos because traditionally they have been associated with gangs and crime whereas tattoos are an integral part of the culture for the Maori people of New Zealand (Dye, 2013). Future studies should provide organizational, industry, or

cultural context to determine if tattoos are more accepted in certain venues.

Relatedly, we selected a white-collar job (Sales Manager) because prior research suggests that applicants with visible tattoos are more prone to discrimination in white-collar versus blue-collar jobs. For example, tattooed job applicants were more likely to be hired for a non-customer-facing job (e.g., factory worker, janitor) than for a customer-facing job (e.g., teacher; Timming et al., 2017). Similarly, studies have reported that consumers were less likely to want to interact with a tattooed surgeon than a tattooed mechanic (Baumann et al., 2016) and viewed tattoos on white-collar employees (e.g., bank loan officer, stockbroker, nurse, dentist) more unfavorably than on blue-collar employees (e.g., auto mechanic, bartender, barber/hair stylist; Dean, 2010). Nevertheless, future research should investigate the impact of visible tattoos across a variety of jobs.

We intentionally examined only Caucasian female applicants in their mid to late 20s because of the challenges of designing a study that includes multiple levels of sex, race, and age and because this segment of the workforce is more likely to have tattoos. Thus, we chose to focus on one group to determine whether visible tattoos influence the likelihood of being hired and starting salary. Although most past research has not found sex differences among job applicants with tattoos (e.g., Brallier et al., 2011; Burgess & Clark, 2010), older applicants or those of certain religions, races, or nationalities may experience more intense negative stereotypes because of their visible tattoos. Thus, future studies should extend our work by examining whether discrimination varies based on the age, race, religion, or national origin of tattooed job applicants, which may be protected under existing federal laws.

Although past research suggests that tattooed individuals are stereotyped as less competent and warm, we did not find a relationship between visible tattoos and warmth. Future research should explore tattoo genres that may more strongly signal warmth. For example, tattoos depicting beloved cartoon characters (e.g., Winnie the Pooh) or more sentimental tattoos such as those commemorating the birth of a child, death of a loved one, or a specific cause that evokes sympathy (e.g., fight against cancer) may increase perceptions of warmth whereas more controversial tattoos (e.g., prison or gang tattoos) may decrease perceptions of warmth.

Another potentially fruitful area for future research concerns individual differences associated with recruiters and hiring managers. Although we did not find a relationship between participant age or their personal body art and how they evaluated job applicants with or without visible tattoos, future research should examine the personality traits and attitudes of hiring agents that may influence decisions regarding tattooed applicants. For example, hiring managers with traditional or conservative social views may be less accepting of individuals with visible tattoos.

Although we used a sample of working adults recruited from graduate and undergraduate courses in Study 2, a potential limitation may be the use of MTurk workers as a sample for Studies 1 and 3. Some authors have suggested that the use of MTurk as a sampling technique may compromise the validity of a study's findings, due to issues around sample representativeness and subject attentiveness (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Cheung, Burns, Sinclair, & Sliter, 2017). However, empirical research has largely concluded that MTurk workers are more demographically similar to the US population than other convenience samples, including organizational and student samples (Berinsky et al., 2012; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Research also shows that there are no differences in subject attentiveness (Paolacci et al., 2010), and research findings are roughly equivalent between MTurk and other samples (Casler et al., 2013; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013).

We believe our study relied on a more realistic hiring context than prior studies by using simulated LinkedIn applicant profiles, which include applicant photos and are commonly used for talent acquisition. Furthermore, we used participants with recent hiring experience and had them evaluate multiple applicants as they would in a real hiring situation. Nonetheless, our approach is somewhat limited by participants making judgments about fictitious applicants. It would be valuable for future studies to examine real job applicants, with and without visible tattoos, being evaluated for actual jobs.

Finally, our results suggest that the prejudice associated with visible tattoos is robust and might not be limited to job applicants. For example, although research is scarce on post-hiring decisions among tattooed employees, Miller, Nicols, and Eure (2009) found employees preferred not to work with coworkers who have a facial tattoo and piercing. Thus, tattooed managers may be evaluated negatively by higher level managers, subordinates, and even consumers, which may in turn impact their career progression. Future research should explore the possible impact of stigma from visible tattoos on existing employees in terms of developmental opportunities, performance reviews, organizational advancement, recommendations for incremental pay increases, and other forms of employee treatment.

Conclusion

Studying discrimination against job applicants with visible tattoos is important given the increasing legal protections against appearance-based discrimination and the popularity and rising societal acceptance of tattoos, especially among younger individuals getting ready to enter the workforce. Stereotypes and biases against visible

tattoos may result in hiring managers automatically excluding this growing segment of the population even when they are as or more qualified than applicants without visible tattoos. Even though there is a tendency for hiring managers to discount applicants with visible tattoos, our results suggest that individuals may be able to increase their odds of employment by choosing less extreme tattoos that are not as likely to be stigmatized, and placing body art in locations that can be easily concealed. In addition, applicants with tattoos should explicitly emphasize their job qualifications and competence to overcome stereotypes typically attributed to visible tattoos.

Acknowledgments The authors acknowledge the assistance of Katie Dondale in the creation of the photos used in the study and Daniel C. Ganster for his helpful feedback.

Appendix. Study materials

Sales manager job description

Job summary: Plans, directs, or coordinates the distribution or movement of a product or service to the customer. Coordinates sales distribution by establishing sales territories, quotas, and goals and establishes training programs for sales representatives. Analyzes sales statistics gathered by staff to determine sales potential and inventory requirements and monitors the preferences of customers.

Job tasks

- Directs and coordinates activities involving sales of manufactured products and services
- Resolves customer complaints regarding sales and service
- Reviews operational records and reports to project sales and determine profitability
- Plans and directs staffing, training, and performance evaluations of sales agents
- Determines price schedules and discount rates
- Prepares budgets and approves budget expenditures
- Monitors customer preferences to determine focus of sales efforts

Job requirements

- Bachelor's degree in a related field (e.g., marketing, management, finance, supply chain management)
- Minimum of 3 years of sales and/or management experience

The salary range for this position is \$80,000–\$95,000, depending on qualifications.

Applicant profile for mild tattoo condition from Study 1



Amelia Greene

Regional Sales Manager at Archive Alliance

Greater Omaha Area | Information Technology and Services

Current	Archive Alliance
Previous	Media One
Education	University of Nebraska

Experience

Regional Sales Manager

Archive Alliance

April 2012 – Present | Omaha, Nebraska

- Handle all accounts within Nebraska.
- Develop key, longstanding business relationships with clients.
- Manage the hiring, training and development of all new sales team hires in the Midwestern region.
- Monitor customer preferences to determine focus of sales efforts.

Account Executive

Media One

May 2010 – April 2012 | Bellevue, Nebraska

- Prospected via cold-calling and research
- Conducted effective client needs analysis meetings
- Closed contracts and maintained effective client relationships
- Sales Achievement Award for surpassing sales goals in 2011

Education

University of Nebraska

Bachelor of Science in Finance, 2010.

Activities and Societies: Big Red Investment Club

Applicant profile for extreme tattoo condition from Study 1



Janet Snyder

Sales Manager at HomeGuru

Greater Detroit Area | Consumer Services

Current	HomeGuru
Previous	Frye's Electronics
Education	Michigan State University

Experience

Sales Manager

HomeGuru

August 2011 – Present | Detroit, Michigan

- Manage, motivate, and lead a team of account managers.
- Monitor the teams' activities to maintain a high level of results and grow sales.
- Coordinate marketing information with the team to ensure synergy and results.
- Provide entry level training to new hires and on-going training and development for team members.

Account Development Specialist

Frye's Electronics

June 2009 – August 2011 | Ann Arbor, Michigan

- Responsible for making out bound calls to new and existing customers and transitioning under-penetrated accounts.
- Managed all supplier-specific lead programs by providing closed loop feedback to suppliers.
- Grew an active portfolio by identifying new opportunities, revisiting lost business accounts, servicing web leads.
- Top sales person in the company for the year of 2010.

Education

Michigan State University

Bachelor of Science in Marketing, 2009

Activities and Societies: MSU Marketing Association

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