

BODY MODIFICATIONS: PERCEPTIONS OF TATTOOS  
AND THE EXAMINATION OF GENDER, TATTOO  
LOCATION, AND TATTOO SIZE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Individuals' perceptions of others, including the presence or absence of body modifications, can influence the way they make judgments. Body modifications have become mainstream in American culture. There is a lot of research documenting negative judgment of individuals with body modifications, such as tattoos, due to their association with deviant activity, criminality, and gang affiliation. Although possessing tattoos once had negative connotations, now having tattoos is being seen as an emerging trend. The study explored whether possessing tattoos still elicits negative judgment from others, examining whether an individual's gender, tattoo location and size have an effect on judgments (2x2x2 design). In addition, participants' gender transcendence versus gender role conformity and rigidity were assessed to see if these factors affect judgments. MANCOVA results revealed a main effect for tattoo size [ $F(4,337) = 2.559, p=.039$ , partial  $\eta^2=.034$ ], an interaction effect between gender and tattoo location [ $F(1,340)=5.398, p=.021$ , partial  $\eta^2=.016$ ], and an interaction effect between tattoo size and tattoo location [ $F(1,340)=9.385, p=.002, \eta^2=.027$ ]. Hypothesis II which predicted gender attitudes would be related to tattoo judgements was supported and Hypothesis III which predicted larger tattoos resulting in more negative judgement than smaller tattoos was also supported.

## **I. BODY MODIFICATIONS**

This study has been proposed to investigate the effects of gender, tattoo size, and tattoo location on individual's perception of others who possess body modifications.

Body modifications are defined as any alteration of the body or adornment applied to the body, inclusive of tattoos (Featherstone, 1999). Historically, Sailors branded themselves to display conquests and experiences out at sea while inmates used modification to show affiliation with gangs, mobs, and to express ranking within an organization (Deschesnes, Fines, & Demers, 2006; Roberts & Ryan, 2002; Sanders, 1989). From an underground activity origin, tattoos have developed into a commonplace form of art in alternative lifestyles and among pop culture (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005; Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007). Although tattooing has been previously depicted as a taboo underground activity in relation to criminal and gang-affiliated organizations, tattooing in the 21st century has emerged in popular culture as a new trend related to expressing individuality (DeMello, 1993; Featherstone, 1999; Swami, 2011; Swami & Harris et al., 2012). Regardless of tattoos becoming a commonly occurring trend, possessing a tattoo also can have an effect on the way individuals in society perceive and judge someone.

### **Social Learning Theory & Sociocultural Influences on Tattoos**

Although the application of sub-cultural identity theory to body modifications (Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2010) may be relevant for individuals identifying with deviant social groups, social learning theory may be more applicable for explaining the more mainstream acquisition of and acceptance of tattoos. According to Bandura, learning occurs through modeling and imitation (Bandura, 1971). The media, as one



source of highly acclaimed models, has had a hand in influencing body modifications. Popular and highly liked individuals such as celebrities can be revered as role models, and their behaviors can be imitated by others. In addition, in the entertainment field, body modifications are a common trend, and individuals who hold role models with tattoos in high regard may be more likely to imitate their behavior by obtaining tattoos themselves.

Modeled behaviors which have positive rewards and consequences are likely to be repeated. The act of body modification is reinforced by the positive rewards individuals receive after copying the behavior (e.g. obtaining a tattoo), which then evokes feelings of pride and identity. Media and celebrities endorsing modifications or modeling body modification lifestyles then help to bridge the gap from an alternative lifestyle by popularizing and thus normalizing the obtainment of tattoos. This rise in normalization and frequency of tattoos is predicted to continue to increase in the next decade (Adams, 2012; Anderson, 2006).

Sociocultural influences including the various media forms may also impact additional characteristics associated with a more bodily modified youth culture. Personality traits differentiating those with body modifications from those without have been considered (Swami, Pietschnig, et al., 2012; Tate & Shelton, 2008). Some research indicates that traits such as extroversion and need for uniqueness from the Big Five Personality Index differentiate tattooed vs. non-tattooed individuals (Swami, Pietschnig et al., 2012). In other research, tattooed individuals had significantly higher scores on extraversion, thrill-seeking, and need for uniqueness as compared to non-tattooed cohorts (Swami, 2011; Tate & Shelton, 2008).

### **Reasons for Obtaining tattoos: Subculture Lifestyle**

In most cases alterations to the human anatomy are intentional, and reasons for modifications are variable. The motivation for body modifications in some instances may originate from individuals with more liberal views or subculture lifestyles (Koch et al., 2010; Pitts, 2003). Furthermore, cultural upbringing and rearing can affect the possibility of whether an individual is more likely to possess a tattoo or not. Individuals from a lower socioeconomic status or from abusive situations may be more likely to have tattoos to represent the hardships which they had to overcome due to geographic, demographic, or familial makeup (Hewitt, 1997).

### **Self-esteem and Self-worth Related to Obtaining Tattoos**

What additional factors make an individual choose to alter his/her body? In some cases increasing self-esteem and appreciation for one's own body may influence the driving need to modify the body to achieve the desired outer image in order to promote feelings of better self-worth (Swami, 2011). However, modifications to the body meant to enhance self-esteem can still be subject to scrutiny by other individuals in the population. Negative judgments of tattoos can reflect prejudice against others who have modifications. Negative evaluations of tattoos also can lead to unfair treatment with regard to social interactions and opportunities such as vocational outlook (Miller, Nicols, & Eure, 2009). Employers may be hesitant to hire a tattooed individual based on discriminatory attitudes or worry related to customer reactions.

For tattoo modified individuals, concealment of their pieces could create inner conflict with the self for not being able to fully express one's self-identity (Ellis, 2015; Kernis & Goldman, 2005). Employers are concerned about the image of a business, what

it represents, and self-image. The self-image of a business conveys to customers the ideologies and principles a company has found itself on, therefore, employers may be hesitant to hire anyone who may not be the best representation of the company or brand. Employees may feel they work in an unfair or unjust work environment. Increased pressure of job performance due to negative stigmatization of tattoos can lead tattooed employees to feeling as if they are held to a higher standard because their tattoos are a source of possible discrimination.

### **Workplace Discrimination**

The United States Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) is an institution which strives to eliminate unjust discrimination against employees or prospective employees by enforcing federal laws that prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on gender, race, age, or mental and genetic disabilities (Miller et al. 2009; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016). Further amendments to the laws allow its extension towards the protection of persons from discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016).

Religious and cultural background attributes of personnel, which could be sources of contention, are also respected such that many workplace institutions are tolerant of religious holidays and cultural customs (i.e. Muslim women wearing hijabs and adorning nose piercings, Catholics given extended lunch breaks to attend Ash Wednesday, and Christians given time off to celebrate Christmas) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016). Currently, the equal employment laws do not extend towards modifications such as tattoos and piercings, leaving modified individuals without

protection of the law against workplace incidences surrounding their tattoos as the subject matter (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016). Tattooed employees may see this as a disadvantage.

In conjunction with equal opportunity laws not being inclusive of body modification, dress code standards in the workplace promote concealment of tattoos. Employees are required to dress and groom themselves in professional attire, which thus acts in accordance to hygiene standards set in the US out of safety precautions (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2016; Miller et al., 2009). Dress codes not only set a precedent for hygiene in the workplace but also serve to cater towards enhancing the public image of a company, conveying a sense of credibility and trust to potential customers (Dean, 2011; Miller, Nicols, & Eure, 2009). Employers are concerned about the image of a business and what it represents. Negative public cognitions surrounding tattooed individuals discourage tattoo visibility in the work environment thus discouraging employers from hiring any person who could be seen as a risk to the company (Dean, 2011; Miller et al. , 2009; Timmings, 2015; Timmings, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2015). Potential employees may feel at a disadvantage and current employees may feel they work in an unfair or unjust work environment. Beliefs that an employer is prejudiced can lead to lack of authenticity of the self, poor work performance and lack of motivation (Kernis & Goldman, 2005).

Self-expression in the form of modification could potentially be recognized as a component of cultural heritage because of its origins being rooted as a physically displayed representation of sociocultural group membership (Miller, Nicols, & Eure, 2009). For instance, symbolic representations of cultural heritage can serve as rites of

passage and depiction of familial kinship. Companies which promote a pro-modification workplace could also be considered an option for individuals seeking a more welcoming environment for them to display their modifications, giving them more permission to express their self-identity.

### **Gender Identification and Gender Linked Conformity**

Gender identity, the sex an individual identifies themselves as, can have an effect on the way an individual perceives the world. In addition, gender roles have stringent rules which individuals in society are likely to abide by, and any deviancy from expectations required of individuals in a gender role can elicit negative or critical judgments of that individual. In relation to tattoos, there is far more acceptance of men possessing tattoos compared to women (Swami & Furnham, 2007). Women who do possess tattoos are often rated as being less attractive and more promiscuous (Hawkes, Seen, & Thorn, 2004; Swami & Furnham, 2007). This study will investigate whether attitudes towards women, compared to men, in relation to having tattoos are consistent with more critical judgments. The female role in a patriarchal society, such as the U.S., portrays females being held to a higher standard to conform to their gender role (Swami & Furnham, 2007). Expectations for females to fulfill their societal role make certain traits more desirable than others. Gender linked behaviors produce greater unfavorable judgment towards females who refuse to conform.

### **Size and Tattoo Location Imparting Negative Attitudes**

Size of tattoos can also impact judgment. Smaller tattoos in comparison to larger tattoos attract far less attention and scrutiny. This study will investigate whether more negative judgments are assigned to individuals who possess larger tattoos. In addition,

this study will assess the levels of scrutiny individuals face as a function of gender; larger tattoos may be more accepted in males than females while a small tattoo may be considered effeminate ( Hawkes et al., 2004). Location of a tattoo could either increase or decrease the amount of visibility a tattoo would have, with more visible tattoos hypothesized to receive more critical judgments than less visible tattoos. The arm and back are included in the most common areas to place tattoos (King & Vidourek, 2013). This study includes various visibility conditions (a tattoo on the back potentially covered and a tattoo highly visible on the arm) in order to assess whether visibility is a factor in the way an individual would judge someone possessing a tattoo.

Moreover, location and visibility of the tattoo may also be related to gender. Placement of tattoos on the arm are more common for males while placement on the lower back is more common for females (Hawkes et al., 2004; King & Vidourek, 2013). A prediction of the study would be an interaction occurring between gender and visibility; males would be evaluated more positively related to higher levels of visibility (on the arm) and females would be evaluated more positively related to lower levels of visibility (on the back).

The proposed study would expand the current literature on body modifications, analyzing whether the current positive trends in acquiring tattoos and more liberal culture have affected interpersonal judgments towards individuals who have tattoos. Furthermore, this research will provide insight into how location and size of the tattoo related to gender would be useful in understanding attitudes towards tattooed individuals. Negative attitudes towards tattooed people could cause discrimination in relation to job opportunities and advancement in the workforce. Therefore, it is relevant to explore

conditions in which interpersonal judgments will hinder an individual most.

## **Purpose**

As just described, body modifications have been shown to elicit negative judgement by others in society. In addition, factors such as gender, tattoo size and tattoo location can have an effect on an individual's chances for employment or other forms of bias related to first impressions. The proposed study will attempt to expand on the presented research examining whether negative biases towards body modification still exist and, if so, the conditions which elicit more negative judgment. The study also aims to help fill the gap in literature with regard to how current gender role attitudes impact judgments towards those with tattoos.

The research question being explored by this study is: "In what ways do negative perceptions of body adornments influence an individual's attitude and evaluation of another person?" Four main hypotheses are proposed in this study. The hypotheses presented are as follows:

1. Judgments will be more negative in conditions in which the stimulus person named Taylor is described as female, compared to Taylor being described as male.
2. Participants' gendered attitudes will be related to tattoo judgments.
3. Larger tattoos will result in more negative judgments than smaller tattoos.
4. Tattoos on the arm (in a more visible location) will lead to more negative judgments than tattoos on the back (a more concealed location).

## **Method**

This study assessed attitudes towards body modification based on gender, tattoo size, and location. A 2x2x2 design was utilized in a paragraph manipulation of a hypothesized student named Taylor who is portrayed as graduating from college and about to interview at different jobsites for an entry level position. Follow-up questions in relation to the paragraphs assessed attitudes of participants' towards the hypothetical student in regards to potential occupational success, likability/similarity, sexual promiscuity/risk-taking, and perceived liberal/conservative/religiousness. Participants also provided information on whether they themselves had tattoos and are assessed in relation to their gender role attitudes.

Qualifications for participation included participants to be healthy adults with normal or corrected-to-normal vision. Participants were selected from the psychology department due to the department's diversity in terms of age and ethnicity. Participants were recruited from Texas State University through email and in-class announcements, directing students to a link to the survey which was attached to the email. Each participant was provided with documentation on participation consent along with an explanation of the study's objectives on Qualtrics. The Institutional Review Board approved this study.

## **Participants**

The study included 70 males (18%) and 319 females (82%) 18 years of age or older from the Psychology Department at Texas State University, PSY 2101 Introductory Statistics lab sections, and PSY 3300 Lifespan Development. Students who completed the study were compensated with one point of extra credit. A majority of participants were between the ages of 18-19 years old (120, 30.8%), 167 participants between the



ages of 20-21 (42.9%), 46 participants between ages 22-23 (11.8%), 27 participants between ages 24-25 (6.9%), and 29 participants, ages 26 and above (7.5%). The sample included a majority of Caucasians (46.3%) and Hispanics (33.9%), 8.7% identified as Black, 7.5% participants identifying as Biracial/Multi-racial, and 3.6% identifying as Asian. In regards to family socioeconomic status, a majority of participants identified as middle class (52.2%), 21.9% identified as being in the upper middle class, 20.1 % identified as being lower middle class, 5.4% identified as lower class, and 0.5% identified as upper class.

When participants were asked whether they had tattoos, 64.4% identified as having tattoos and 35.6% participants identified as not having tattoos. Participants who identified as having tattoos also reported tattoo frequencies such that a majority identified as having one tattoo ( 18.0%), 7.4% identified as having four or more tattoos, 6.6% identified as having 3 tattoos, and 5.3% identified as having two tattoos. Tattoo visibility was assessed such that a majority of participants with tattoos identified their tattoos as never being visible (56.0%), 18.5% identified their tattoos as sometimes being visible , 16.8% identified their tattoos as rarely being visible, 6.4% identified their tattoos as appearing most of the time, and 2.3% identified their tattoos as always being visible.

## **Procedure**

Participants completed a three part online survey via Qualtrics assessing the following: part I: demographics, part II: 1 of 8 passages with 14 follow-up questions in relation to 4 measures: 1. Occupational Success, 2. Likability/Similarity, 3. Sexual Promiscuity/Risk Taking, 4. Liberal/Conservative/Religious; part III: Social Roles Questionnaire (Baber & Tucker, 2006). Part I of the study included questions about basic

demographic information, whether the participants had tattoos and, if so, how many. Part II of the study consisted of a passage describing an individual followed by questions related to perceptions of the individual portrayed in the passage. Part III of the study included questions in relation to gender roles. Average survey length/duration to completion was 15 minutes.

### **Measurements**

The survey assessed the demographics of each participant including their gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and college classification. Two additional questions pertaining to whether an individual had a tattoo, and if so, how many were also included in the demographics section. For example, one question asked, “Do you have tattoos?” Participants that answer “yes” to this question were prompted by a follow up question asking, “If you have tattoos, how many do you have?”

Part II of the survey included a short paragraph of a hypothetical person named Taylor who is depicted as a successful college senior who is about to graduate. The Qualtrics survey program used randomly assigned each participant to one of eight paragraphs which had a manipulation of gender (male or female), tattoo size (small or large), and tattoo placement (arm or back). For greater internal consistency, all paragraphs contained the same descriptive information and similar word count. The manipulated paragraphs used in the eight conditions are as follows:

1. Female, small tattoo, back: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean’s List for several semesters. In her spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor’s father, who shared her passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate her father’s life, Taylor recently acquired a small tattoo on her back. This spring Taylor will earn her undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor’s degree with a

major in Mass Communications. Concerned about her future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure she will be able to begin her career as soon as she graduates and take an entry level job in her field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

2. Female, large tattoo, back: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In her spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared her passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate her father's life, Taylor recently acquired a large tattoo on her back. This spring Taylor will earn her undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about her future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure she will be able to begin her career as soon as she graduates and take an entry level job in her field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

3. Female, small tattoo, arm: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In her spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared her passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate her father's life, Taylor recently acquired a small tattoo on her arm. This spring Taylor will earn her undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about her future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure she will be able to begin her career as soon as she graduates and take an entry level job in her field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

4. Female, large tattoo, arm: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In her spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared her passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate her father's life, Taylor recently acquired a large tattoo on her arm. This spring Taylor will earn her undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about her future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure she will be able to begin her career as soon as she graduates and take an entry level job in her field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

5. Male, small tattoo, back: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In his spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared his passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate his father's life, Taylor recently acquired a small tattoo on his back. This spring Taylor will earn his undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about his future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure he will be able to begin his career as soon as he graduates and take an entry level job in his field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

6. Male, large tattoo, back: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In his spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared his passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate his father's life, Taylor recently acquired a large tattoo on his back. This spring Taylor will earn his undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about his future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure he will be able to begin his career as soon as he graduates and take an entry level job in his field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

7. Male, small tattoo, arm: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically, Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In his spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared his passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate his father's life, Taylor recently acquired a small tattoo on his arm. This spring Taylor will earn his undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about his future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure he will be able to begin his career as soon as he graduates and take an entry level job in his field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

8. Male, large tattoo, arm: Taylor is a student who attends a central Texas University and is currently majoring in Mass Communications. Academically,

Taylor is in good standing and has been on the Dean's List for several semesters. In his spare time, Taylor enjoys exploring the outdoors, hiking, and canoeing. Taylor's father, who shared his passion for adventure and the outdoors, has recently passed, so in order to commemorate his father's life, Taylor recently acquired a large tattoo on his arm. This spring Taylor will earn his undergraduate degree and graduate with a bachelor's degree with a major in Mass Communications. Concerned about his future, Taylor has begun the process of job searching in order to ensure he will be able to begin his career as soon as he graduates and take an entry level job in his field. Taylor already has several interviews lined up within the next month.

(145 words)

Fourteen follow up questions were asked in relation to the content from the paragraph, asking the participant to assess the hypothesized student on four measures: 1.

Occupational Success, 2. Likability/Similarity, 3. Sexual Promiscuity/Risk Taking, 4.

Liberal/Conservative/Religiousness. Occupational success, the belief Taylor will be able to maintain a job and perform the tasks required of an entry level position, was measured by four items on a 5-point Likert scale, with "1-Not at all likely to 5-Very likely." The item questions are as follows, "What is the likelihood Taylor will find a good job?"

(Question 1), "What is the likelihood Taylor will be successful?" (Question 4), "How likely do you think it is Taylor will receive promotions in the future?" (Question 9), and "What is the likelihood Taylor will relate well to coworkers and customers?" (Question 10).

Likability and Similarity to the hypothesized student Taylor was assessed using three items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1- Very unlikely to 5 -Very likely" and one item rated on a 5-point similarity scale ranging from "1-Not at all similar to 5-Very similar". The four items used are as follows: "How likely would you be to get a drink with Taylor?" (Question 2), "How similar is Taylor to you?" (Question 3), "What is the likelihood you would be interested in spending time with Taylor?"(Question 8), and

“If you knew Taylor personally, how likely is it that you would be friends (Question 11)? Higher scores were indicative of the participants thinking well of Taylor’s character and low scores indicative of a more negative evaluation of Taylor or perceived dissimilarity to Taylor.

Sexual Promiscuity/Risk Taking behaviors of Taylor were assessed by three items on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from “1-Very unlikely to 5-Very likely.” Higher scores would be a positive indication that the participant believes Taylor is highly promiscuous and lower scores indicative of Taylor not engaging in sexually promiscuous/risky behaviors. The three items used are as follows: “How likely is Taylor to be sexually promiscuous?” (Question 6), “How likely is Taylor to use condoms related to any sexual activity?” (Question 13) and “How likely is Taylor to have multiple partners?” (Question 14).

Liberal/Conservative/Religious perceived attitudes of Taylor were assessed by three items on a 5 point Likert scale, with one of the items ranging from “1-Very unlikely to 5-Very likely”, another item assessed on an importance scale ranging from “1-Not very important to 5-Very important”, and the final item on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from “1-Very conservative to 5-Very liberal”. Examples of questions used in this section are as follows: “How liberal/conservative do you think Taylor is?” (Question 5), “How likely is Taylor to attend church? (Question 7), and “How important is religion to Taylor?” (Question 12). Liberal evaluation would be indicated by high scores in the liberal item, low scores in church attendance, and low scores in importance of religion. A conservative evaluation would be indicative in high scores in conservativeness, high scores in church attendance, and high scores in importance of religion.

Finally, the revised Social Roles Questionnaire (SRQ) developed by Baber & Tucker (2006) was utilized to measure participant's gender role conformity which would be indicative of traditional gender role attitudes (gender-linked subscale) or nontraditional gender role attitudes (gender transcendence subscale). The revised SRQ includes 13 items scored on a five-point Likert Scale, five items reverse coded comprising the Gender Transcendence subscale ( $\alpha=0.65$ ) and eight items forming the Gender Linked subscale ( $\alpha= 0.77$ ). For consistency with the other items, a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," rather than the original 0-100% scale, was used." All listed questions from the Gender Transcendence scale are as follows: "People can be both aggressive and nurturing regardless of sex" (Question 1), "People should be treated the same regardless of their sex." (Question 2), "The freedom that children are given should be determined by their age and maturity level and not by their sex" (Question 3), "Tasks around the house should not be assigned by sex" (Question 4), and "We should stop thinking about whether people are male and female and focus on other characteristics" (Question 5).

The Gender Linked subscale includes questions to determine participant's beliefs on whether certain roles are dictated by gender. Questions on the Gender Linked subscale are as follows: "A father's major responsibility is to provide financially for his children." (Question 6), "Men are more sexual than women"(Question 7), "Some types of work are just not appropriate for women" (Question 8), "Mothers should make most decisions about how children are brought up" (Question 9), "Mothers should work only if necessary" (Question 10), "Girls should be protected and watched over more than boys" (Question 11), "Only some types of work are appropriate for both men and women"

(Question 12), and “For many important jobs, it is better to choose men instead of women” (Question 13). Higher scores on this subscale indicate more stereotypical gender linked beliefs.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data collected in the study were uploaded to SPSS v. 22, a statistical analysis program for further analysis. The data was screened for any outliers or missing values. The alpha level was set at 0.05.

A three-way multivariate analysis of the covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to determine participant attitude differences on the four dependent variables of occupational success, likability/similarity, sexual promiscuity/risk-taking, and liberal/conservative/religious based on the paragraph stimuli’s character gender, tattoo size, and tattoo location; the gender transcendence subscale and gender linked subscale were controlled by being factored in as covariates.

### **Results**

MANCOVA results revealed an overall main effect for tattoo size [Pillai’s  $V=.029$ ,  $F(4,337) = 2.559$ ,  $p=.039$ , partial  $\eta^2=.029$ ], indicating that smaller tattoos had a significantly lower mean score in relation to the dependent variables than larger tattoos. Furthermore, there was an interaction effect between tattoo size and tattoo location [Pillai’s  $V=.034$ ,  $F(4,337) = 2.982$ ,  $p=.019$ , partial  $\eta^2=.034$ ].

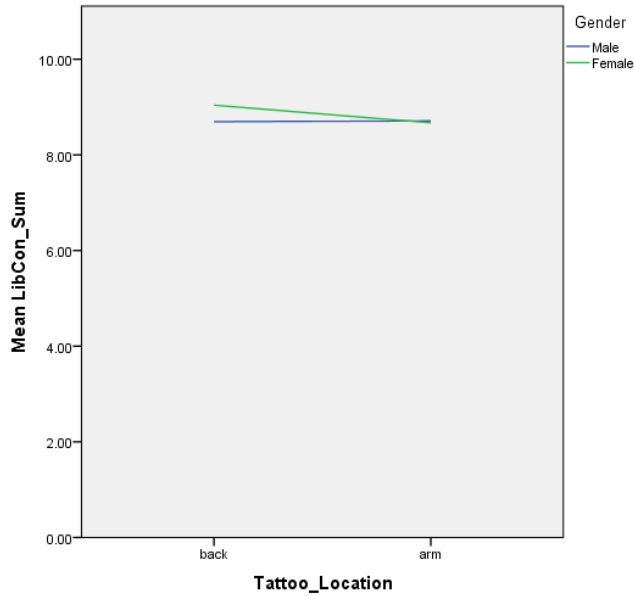
Taylor’s gender, whether or not Taylor was described as female or male in the paragraph conditions, had no significant main effect in relation to the four dependent measures, [Pillai’s  $V=.005$ ,  $F(4,337)=.434$ ,  $p=.784$ ]. In addition, there was no significant main effect of tattoo location, [Pillai’s  $V=.021$ ,  $F(4,337) = 1.784$ ,  $p=.132$ ]. No significant



interaction effect was found between stimulus gender and tattoo size [Pillai's  $V=.001$ ,  $F(4,337) = .067$ ,  $p=.992$ ] nor was there any significant interaction between character sex and tattoo location, [Pillai's  $V=.022$ ,  $F(4,337) = 1.879$ ,  $p=.114$ ]. The three-way interaction among character sex, tattoo size, and tattoo location was not significant [Pillai's  $V=.025$ ,  $F(4,337) = 2.156$ ,  $p=.074$ ].

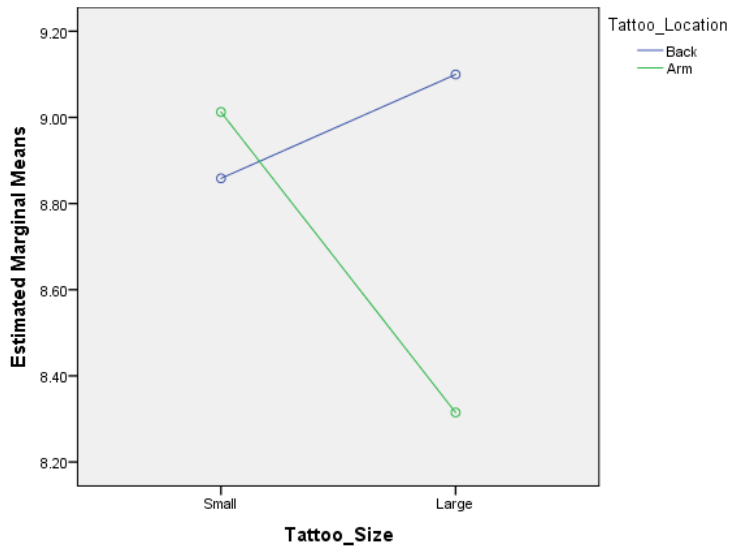
In addition, the two covariates were significant in the MANCOVA. Both gender transcendence (Pillai's  $V=.066$ ,  $F(4,337) = 5.98$ ) and gender linked attitudes (Pillai's  $V=.044$ ,  $F(4,337) = 3.91$ ) were significant at the .001 level.

Analyses of the covariance were conducted on each dependent variable as follow-up tests to the MANCOVA. A two-way interaction between stimulus gender and tattoo location was significant in relation to the dependent measure of liberal/conservative/religiousness, [ $F(1,340) = 5.398$ ,  $p=.021$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .016$ ]; see Figure 1. When the stimuli's sex was female and tattoo size was small regardless of location (back or arm), the female stimuli received significantly higher mean scores in conservativeness than compared to males. However, when the tattoo size was large and placement was on the back, the female stimuli had significantly higher conservativeness scores in comparison to the male stimuli. However, since the MANOVA interaction was not significant, this finding should be regarded with caution.



**Figure 1: Effects of gender and tattoo location on the dependent variable of liberal/conservative/religiousness. Two-way interaction of gender (male, female) and tattoo location (back, arm) on the dependent measure of liberal/conservative/religiousness.**

A two-way interaction between stimuli's tattoo size and tattoo location was significant for the dependent measure of liberal/conservative/religious, [ $F(1,340)=9.385, p=.002, \eta^2=.027$ ]; Figure 2. Small tattoos had higher mean scores on conservativeness when tattoo location was on the arm compared to large tattoos, while large tattoo placement on the back had significantly higher conservativeness scores in comparison to small tattoo placement on the back. However, since the MANOVA interaction was not significant, this finding should be regarded with caution.



**Figure 2: Effects of tattoo size and location on the dependent variable of liberal/conservative/religiousness. Two-way interaction of tattoo size (small, big) and tattoo location (back, arm) on the dependent measure of liberal/conservative/religiousness.**

The covariate gender transcendence subscale was significant for the dependent variables of occupational success [ $F(1,340) = 20.621, p < .0001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .057$ ] and likability/similarity measures [ $F(1,340) = 6.886, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .020$ ]. The covariate gender linked attitudes subscale was a significant covariate for the dependent variable measures of sexual promiscuity/risk-taking [ $F(1,340) = 4.642, p < .032, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .013$ ], and likability/similarity [ $F(1,340) = 4.430, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .013$ ]. In the ANCOVA's gender transcendence was a significant covariate for occupational success,  $F(1, 340) = 20.621, p = .001, \eta^2 = .057$ ; and for likability/similarity,  $F(1, 340) = 6.886, p = .009, \eta^2 = .020$ .

For further analysis, a five-way MANOVA was conducted utilizing median splits of the gender transcendence subscale and gender linked subscale variables to test for an interaction effect among gendered attitudes, character sex, tattoo size, and tattoo location in relation to the four dependent variables (occupational success, likability/similarity, sexual promiscuity/risk-taking, and liberal/conservative/religiousness) The four-way

interaction between the character gender, tattoo location, tattoo size, and the median split on the gender linked variable was not significant, [Pillai's  $V=.012$ ,  $F(4,315) = .993$ ,  $p=.411$ ]. Neither was the comparable four-way interaction on the median split on gender transcendence, [Pillai's  $V=.001$ ,  $F(4,315) = .088$ ,  $p=.986$ ].

## **Discussion**

Hypothesis I, which predicted judgments would be more negative in conditions in which the stimulus Taylor's gender is described as female, compared to Taylor being described as male was not supported. Retaining of the null was also contrary to the literature (Delegman & Price 2002; Swami & Furnham, 2007), which indicated more negative judgment would be imparted towards female tattoo wearers than males. Findings from this study's dependent variables of particular interest relating to gender prejudice (sexual promiscuity/ risk-taking and likability/similarity) also were contrary to the literature.

A possible explanation for this outcome could be the product of a more accepting modern culture, more tolerant of androgyny (Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007). The twenty first century has brought about a current of tolerance, including the legalization of gay marriage and gay rights. Furthermore, the current millennial generation, unlike previous generations, has emerged as a socially progressive generation, making strides towards the tolerance of gender equality and sexual orientation (Arter, 2016; Ellis 2015).

Presently, the media supports the platform of social equality. Social concern is a prevalent issue raised by millennials; a present example would include the fight to end the wage gap between females and males (AAUW, 2016). Media portrayed currently also aligns with politically correct tolerance and there is a wealth of information and

services attempting to ameliorate social concern. For example, companies such as Secret Deodorant for females spread messages about equality by running the Fearless ad campaigns about women daring to break gender social norms and traditions (Garfield & Levy, 2012). Caitlyn Jenner, a prominent celebrity has been praised in the public eye after transitioning from a male to a female, helping to raise concern over gender identity disorders. The viral internet project “It gets better” allows homosexual men to reach out to struggling teens questioning their sexuality in the efforts to reduce suicide attempts (Follet, 2016). Perhaps with the influx in social concern, there has been normalization away from gender bias. Endorsement of less stringent gender classification would provide the permission for aesthetic modification without the fear of negative social consequences or repercussions.

Beyond social consciousness of equality, the justice system may also play a part in reduction of gender differences biases. Implementation of laws such as Title IX , instituting gender equality in education, and the Workplace Gender Equality Act of 2012, legally require school and workplace institutions to put aside personal gender biases, opinions, and judgments (U.S Department of Education, 2015). The legality behind implementing gender tolerant institutions requires bias free environments. Perhaps the threat of punishment, such as a company sued for sexism, may be enough of a deterrent to prevent new cases of gender bias from arising.

Although gender differences were not significant factors, gendered attitudes, related to Hypothesis II, may still play a role in attitudes towards men/women with tattoos. In the MANCOVA, both gender transcendence and gender linked attitudes were significant covariates. Individuals with gender transcendent attitudes were less likely to

assume the stimulus Taylor was promiscuous, and more likely to view Taylor as similar or likable to them. Additionally, participants who identified themselves as less traditional were more likely to have higher expectations for Taylor's occupational success than gender conforming individuals. A potential reason behind these findings is that androgynous persons adhere less to adopting strictly just cisgender traits and instead exemplify both aspects of male and female qualities (Bem, 2015; Cheng, 2005). Having the flexibility to take on feminine and male aspects of personality can perceptively allow those individuals to be more forgiving or accepting of non-traditional practices (ie. body modification). Moreover, it is due to the androgynous nature of plasticity with gender roles which could have allowed participants to imagine the stimulus Taylor being successful in the workplace, regardless of Taylor's tattoo.

Conversely, participants who were more aligned as gender conformative, were more likely to assume Taylor was sexually promiscuous and were less likely to identify or relate to Taylor. These findings are consistent with the literature such that individuals who endorse gender linked attitudes are more likely to conform to traditional gender role expectations, perceiving deviation from the norm as socially undesirable (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2002; Coultas & van Leeuwen, 2015; Hays & Goldstein, 2015; Hodges, 2014). Current literature regarding gender linked behaviors indicates greater unfavorable judgment towards males and females who refuse to conform, and praise awarded towards socially desirable traits (Hays & Goldstein, 2015; Hodges, 2014). Furthermore, the current literature states that greater undesirability is elicited towards female non-conformists, yet this was unsupported by this study (Swami & Furnham, 2007).

The stereotypical female gender role endorses feminine qualities and traits in

women such as being sensitive, demure, and a caregiver (Brehm et al., 2002). Similarly, the stereotypical male gender role promotes masculine qualities of strength, power, and the financial provider (Brehm et al., 2002). Traditionally aligned participants viewed the stimuli Taylor as deviant from current expectations of gender, and therefore made assumptions about Taylor's character, such as being more sexually promiscuous, even though the paragraph manipulation presented portrayed Taylor solely as a successful undergraduate student.

A theory behind why traditionally gender-linked participants were likely to place greater negative judgment on the stimulus Taylor involves the idea of social currency, where social desirability can be described as a manifested form of power (Brehm et al., 2002; Coultas & van Leeuwen, 2015; Hays & Goldstein, 2015; Hodges, 2014). Being considered deviant from normative expectations, individuals who refuse to endorse gender normative traits and behaviors would have a reduction in their social currency, and are seen as less important or powerful (Hays & Goldstein, 2015; Hodges, 2014). In the social hierarchy where following expectations are praised, those who are non-normative could be seen as being oppressed (Ellis, 2015). As an outsider from group expectation, this leaves individuals to the susceptibility of being marginalized or for individuals to ascribe unfounded traits and elicit unfounded negative judgment towards the outsider (Brehm et al., 2002; Kim, Lee, Rao, Singer & Compton, 2012).

Tattoo size was also a factor used to predict negative judgment. Larger tattoos were predicted to result in greater negative judgment than smaller tattoos; this was supported (hypothesis III). Due to sheer surface size, a tattoo of a more substantial size would potentially create greater challenges for concealment. Larger tattoos could elicit

negative interpersonal judgments, leaving others to regard the individual with the modification as unprofessional, disregarding workplace appearance norms (Miller et al., 2009). Smaller tattoos in this sense could be viewed as more conservative and impart traits towards small tattoo adorned individuals as consciously aware of workplace modesty, having concern for social norms or workplace appropriateness (Miller et al., 2009). The inconspicuous nature of a modification taking up less space could be potentially beneficial in relation to interpersonal judgments, allowing individuals to not stereotype based on appearance.

Similarly, others have found tattoo size to be a factor in body modification judgment, resulting in greater judgment towards stimuli with larger tattoos than smaller tattoos. In some cases in the literature, small tattoos were often treated as non-tattoo conditions by participants (Swami, & Furnham, 2007). Individuals with larger tattoos or a greater frequency of tattoos were more likely to have greater judgment elicited towards them because the scale of the items on a canvas' body is interpreted as more deliberate, and therefore participants assumed or were more likely to infer modification as being an enduring part of their personality/character (Degelman & Price, 2002; Ellis, 2015).

Although tattoo size was supported in the study to illicit negative judgment, tattoo location was not supported as a predictor of negative judgment. The prediction that tattoos on the arm (in a more visible location) would lead to greater negative judgment than tattoos on the back (a more concealed location), was not supported (hypothesis IV). Tattoo placement was not considered as important without size being considered in the same context. Tattoo placement alone did not elicit any difference between the eight different paragraph conditions.



Potential reasons for no significant differences could be that discrimination of differences is more perceivable between tattooed and non-tattooed conditions, not between tattooed in-group comparisons. Visibility conditions of tattoos on the arm or back also may not have been viewed as strong manipulations because both of those body part conditions could potentially be concealed with a long-sleeve shirt. Work attire etiquette often involves long sleeved blouses and cover-ups such as cardigans. Therefore, the participants may have regarded the visibility manipulation as a condition which would not interfere as a variable in the workplace (Miller, Nicols, & Eure, 2009).

### **Limitations**

A majority of the participants in the study were female (82%), leaving a limited number of participants' responses to be given by males. Although gender of the stimulus Taylor was accounted for, gender differences of the participants were not assessed in this study. Future research should include analysis of gender difference to use in comparison with gender-linked attitudes and androgyny. Perhaps the unequal representation of gender in the study may have not produced as strong of a significant effect by the independent variable manipulation as equal representations of gender might have produced.

Another factor that could contribute to the insignificant gender differences involve the sample used. Participants were collected from a university, a tertiary institution of higher education with liberal attitudes. Rather than being a reflection of past ideals on modification, the university's population could also be a reflection of a liberal population's perspective, where progressive attitudes already reside. Therefore, the Texas State students and their opinions in relation to body modifications may not be representative of the attitudes from the San Marcos population.

Perhaps the eight conditions/levels of the independent variable presented may have interfered with the results, such that maybe a bigger number of participants could have been used in each of the conditions in order to increase the statistical power of the study. Future studies using fewer conditions with a greater number of individuals could explore the tattoo size manipulation to see if judgment differences would exist if a third size category was added (ie. medium size). Additionally, future studies should analyze gender-linked attitudes in comparison with the dependent variables of sexual promiscuity/risk-taking and liberal/conservative /religiousness.

Finally, this study also is only inclusive of U.S. participants and it is possible that attitudes towards tattoos differ in other countries. Perhaps the U.S. population captures a different sociocultural demographic group than other countries, more permissive in body modification.

## **Conclusions**

Although judgments may still be impacted by tattoo size and location as well as participants' gendered attitudes, societal views may be changing. Especially in a younger sample overall, perceptions of modification are not as negative as previously presented in the past. As an emergent generation, millennials have embraced modifications in a positive light, allowing for tattooing to become more mainstream within the U.S.

Results from this study will be beneficial in the understanding of perceptions associated with body modifications. In addition, the study will broaden the knowledge on attitudes and interpersonal judgement towards body modification. Lastly, this study may be beneficial to future employees when coming to the decision on whether or not to cover

up their tattoos when going to an interview since tattoos may or may not elicit negative judgements by employers.

Companies which promote a pro-modification workplace could be considered an option for individuals seeking a more welcoming environment for them to display their modifications, giving them more permission to express their self-identity. Perhaps the present trend of tattoo modification can eventually ameliorate past prejudices.

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