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Original Publication Citation

Arndt, A. D., & Glassman, M. (2012). What tattoos tell customers about salespeople: The role of gender norms. *Marketing Management Journal*, 22(1), 50-65.

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WHAT TATTOOS TELL CUSTOMERS ABOUT SALESPEOPLE: THE ROLE OF GENDER NORMS

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This study looks at how the meaning of visible tattoos impacts customer ratings of salespeople. Given the prevalence of tattoos, sales managers can no longer have a “no tattoo” policy. As such, they must understand how customers view different types of tattoos on salespeople. To this end, we examine the meaning and appropriateness of highly masculine and highly feminine tattoos on salespeople in two industries, real estate and automobile sales. Overall, people with tattoos trust and are more willing to work with tattooed salespeople than people who do not have tattoos. Furthermore, salespeople with masculine tattoos are considered more masculine than salespeople with feminine tattoos. People view feminine tattoos more positively than masculine tattoos. As such, customers trust and are more willing to work with saleswomen who have feminine tattoos. These effects are diminished for salesmen because feminine tattoos are gender inconsistent.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, tattoos have traditionally been viewed negatively (Laumann & Derrick, 2006). As evidence shows that people with tattoos tend to be more non-conforming and risk-taking (Laumann & Derick, 2006; Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2005; Koch, Roberts, Armstrong, & Owen, 2010), it is not surprising that many managers do not hire tattooed salespeople. Ligos (2001) reported that an overwhelming majority of executives would not hire a salesperson with body art. A study by Miller, Nicols, and Eure (2009) found that even those with tattoos would rather not have co-workers with body art when working in a face-to-face customer contact job.

Today, however, tattoos are becoming increasingly common, especially among younger generations (Whelan, 2001; Laumann & Derick, 2006), which we argue is making people more discerning about tattoo meaning and appropriateness. For example, Burgess and Clark (2010) found that people categorize tattoos as either “cute” or “tribal” each having a different meaning. Similarly, Goulding,

Follett, Saren, and MacLaren (2004) categorized tattoo wearers as “aesthetics,” “committed,” and “life-style,” and proposed that each engages in different life-style choices. Furthermore, as tattoos become fashion items, they are increasingly subjected to gender norms (Atkinson, 2003); hence, people evaluate tattoos on men and women differently (Totten, Lipscomb, & Jones, 2009).

We contend that the increasing prevalence of tattoos makes it less and less practical to avoid hiring tattooed salespeople. This prevalence also means that customers are more likely to distinguish between tattoo meanings and a tattoo’s gender appropriateness when evaluating a salesperson’s trustworthiness and deciding whether to work with that salesperson. Therefore, to make good hiring decisions, sales managers must understand the impact of these two variables on customer reactions to salespeople. To that end, we examine tattoo meaning and gender norms about tattoos and how they impact the consumer’s trust in and willingness to work with salespeople who have different types of tattoos.

**Literature Review
Prevalence of Tattoos**

Recently, it was estimated that 24% of Americans have a tattoo (Laumann & Derick, 2006), up from 1% in the 1970’s (Org, 2003). As might be expected, tattoo prevalence varies by age. While only approximately 15% born between 1953 and 1963 have tattoos, 36% born between 1975 and 1986 have them (Laumann & Derick, 2006). In a recent study of 496 college students taking introductory marketing classes at 14 U.S. colleges and universities, 40.5% indicated having a tattoo (Totten et al., 2009). Some estimate that 60% of college students have tattoos (Forbes, 2001). Today, tattoos are generally accepted as part of popular, mainstream culture as evidenced by the number of celebrities wearing them (Goulding et al., 2004). With mainstream acceptance has come an increased demand for variety in design, meaning, and quality (Vail, 1999).

Tattoo Wearer Gender and Stereotypes

Men and women view tattoos differently and are viewed differently if displaying a tattoo. Table 1 shows Totten’s et al. (2009) findings from a study of 496 students where 48.2% had tattoos:

These findings suggest that different characteristics are attributed to men versus women with tattoos.

Gender Norms and Stereotyping

A large body of literature examines gender stereotyping (Schneider, 2004). People tend to attribute certain traits to males versus females (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). For example, females are considered to have more communal traits, such as being more affectionate, emotional, and sensitive, while males are considered to have more agentic traits, such as being more adventuresome, independent, and tough (De Lisi & Soundranayagam, 1990). People who act contrary to gender-expected traits are rated differently than those who conform. For example, female attorneys are often seen as more competent than their male counterparts, perhaps because they are viewed as having overcome more obstacles (Abramson, Goldberg, Greenberg, & Abramson, 1978) or alternatively, since female lawyers are less common, they are seen as being highly motivated (Schneider, 2004). Similarly, females are viewed as smiling more so unsmiling females are seen as less happy than unsmiling males (Deutsch, Lebaron, & Fryer, 1987).

As mentioned, tattoos are now common on both males and females in the USA. However, we expect that similar to clothes, cosmetics, and hairstyle, certain tattoo designs are considered more appropriate for one gender than the other. Therefore, people with designs considered cross-gendered will be rated differently than those with gender congruent designs.

**TABLE 1:
Findings from Totten, Lipscomb, and Jones (2009)**

| <i>Statement</i> | <i>Female Respondents</i> | <i>Male Respondents</i> |
|--|--|--|
| “Tattoos on men are attractive” | 51.3% strongly agreed or agreed with statement | 24.9% strongly agreed or agreed with statement |
| “Tattoos on women are attractive” | 32.4% strongly agreed or agreed with statement | 49.4% strongly agreed or agreed with statement |
| “A person with a tattoo has a bad image” | 73.7% strongly disagreed or disagreed with statement | 56.9% strongly disagreed or disagreed with statement |
| “Tattoos indicate that the a person abuses alcohol or drugs” | 84.1% strongly disagreed or disagreed with statement | 71.8% strongly disagreed or disagreed with statement |

**Hypothesis Development
Tattoo In-group/Out-group**

Studies show that people with and without tattoos are viewed differently (e. g., Totten et al., 2009). Therefore, we opine that tattoos are salient symbols which consumers may use to stereotype salespeople. Furthermore, we expect that consumers who have tattoos will have different views of salespeople with tattoos than do customers without them based on in-group/out-group theory.

Groups are important sources of identity (Tajfel, 1969). To enhance self-image, people often join groups they feel have positive traits or emphasize the positive traits of groups to which they already belong (Schneider, 2004). Furthermore, people are more likely to ascribe stereotypic (and often negative) traits to members of out-groups (groups to which they do not belong) rather than in-groups (groups to which they belong) (Park, Ryan, & Judd, 1992; Ryan & Bogart, 1997). Accordingly, people with tattoos should accept other people who have a tattoo more than people without tattoos. Therefore, we argue that consumers without tattoos are more like to feel negatively towards tattooed salespeople.

H_{1a}: People with tattoos will trust salespeople who have tattoos more than people who do not have tattoos.

H_{1b}: People with tattoos will have a greater intention to work with salespeople who have tattoos than people who do not have tattoos.

Tattoo Meaning and Gender Traits

To better understand tattoo meanings, Burgess and Clark (2010) asked participants to group 15 different tattoos. The designs included suns, dolphins, bright colored shapes, black Celtic patterns, black artistic designs, tigers, barbed wire, and snakes. Suns, dolphins, and small brightly colored shapes were always grouped together. Participants described them as “modern, friendly, cute, happy, and peaceful” and were labeled “cute.” Black Celtic and black artistic designs were considered “aggressive, tribal, bold, and bad” and were labeled “tribal.” Comparing these traits with Schneider’s (2004) list of stereotypical gender traits (shown below in Table 2), it appears that females stereotypically have many of the traits attributed to “cute” tattoos and men stereotypically have many traits attributed to “tribal” tattoos.

**TABLE 2:
Male and Female Traits**

| Female traits | Male traits |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Affectionate | Adventuresome |
| Dependent | Achievement-oriented |
| Emotional | Active |
| Friendly | Ambitious |
| Kind | Coarse |
| Mild | Independent |
| Pleasant | Loud |
| Prudish | Robust |
| Sensitive | Self-confident |
| Sentimental | Stable |
| Warm | Tough |
| Whiny | Unemotional |

Table from Schneider (2004)

Hence, we argue that tattoos express gender traits. As such, people should select tattoo designs expressing image-consistent characteristics. Schneider (2004) explains that people make inferences about others based on their clothes, hairstyle, cosmetics, and other fashion items. Therefore, the more strongly a tattoo is associated with masculine or feminine traits, the more the wearer will be viewed as having those traits. Thus, a salesperson with a highly masculine or feminine tattoo would appear to customers as being more or less masculine based upon the tattoo design.

H_{2a}: Male salespeople who have masculine tattoos will be considered more masculine than male salespeople who have feminine tattoos.

H_{2b}: Female salespeople who have masculine tattoos will be considered more masculine than female salespeople who have feminine tattoos.

Similar to fashion and cosmetics, we contend that certain tattoo styles are considered more “typical” for one gender than the other. Not unexpectedly, both males and females exhibiting cross-gendered behavior are viewed negatively (Lindsey & Zakahi, 1996; Rojahn & Willemsen, 1994). Rudman and Glick (2001) found that females with agentic (masculine) traits were rated lower on interpersonal skills, and Rudman (1998) discovered that women who use self-promotion, a tactic often encouraged and valued in men, are often rated negatively. Likewise, male homemakers are viewed more negatively than females in the same role (Rosenwasser, Gonzales, & Adams, 1985). Furthermore, people exhibiting cross-gendered traits are likely to be seen as homosexuals (Kite & Deaux, 1987), who are also frequently stereotyped negatively (Schneider, 2004). Hence, males with highly feminine tattoos and females with highly masculine tattoos will likely be viewed more negatively than those with gender-congruent tattoos. Therefore, in a selling context, we propose that people will have lower trust in and intention to work with salespeople who have

gender-incongruent tattoos than salespeople who have gender-congruent tattoos.

H_{3a}: People will trust male salespeople who have masculine tattoos more than they will trust male salespeople who have feminine tattoos.

H_{3b}: People will have a greater intention to work with male salespeople who have masculine tattoos than male salespeople who have feminine tattoos.

H_{3c}: People will trust female salespeople who have feminine tattoos more than they will trust female salespeople who have masculine tattoos.

H_{3d}: People will have a greater intention to work with female salespeople who have feminine tattoos than female salespeople who have masculine tattoos.

Method

Pilot Study

We began with a pilot study using 114 undergraduate students, 59 males and 55 females, taking a junior-level introductory marketing class at a public university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the USA. The purpose was to select very masculine and very feminine tattoo designs and learn more about respondent feelings toward the wearers of these tattoos. From a popular temporary-tattoo website, we selected tattoos resembling commonly-worn permanent tattoos. After eliminating similar designs, 21 remained. Pilot study participants then completed a two-part questionnaire. In the first section, students rated the 21 tattoo designs based on each tattoo’s masculinity/femininity using a 7-point, bipolar adjective scale (most feminine = 1 to most masculine = 7). In the second section, students chose the most masculine and the most feminine tattoo and then answered several questions about each. Based upon the pilot study, we selected the tattoo participants rated as the most masculine and the tattoo rated as the most feminine (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1:
Tattoo Designs
Most Masculine Tattoo (mean = 6.2)



Most Feminine Tattoo (mean = 1.3)



(1= very feminine and 7 = very masculine)

Participants

To obtain our sample for the main study, we included an invitation to participate in the study in the “University Announcement” daily email sent to all people affiliated with the same university where the pilot study data were collected. Participants could enter a drawing for one of two \$100 cash prizes. The total sample size was 257, consisting of 97 undergraduates, 32 graduate students, 54 faculty, 66 staff, and 11 saying they had multiple roles. The mean age for respondents was 34.49 years (SD of 13.99). The number of respondents with tattoos by gender is shown below in Table 3.

Procedure

We used a 2x2x2 between-group design in which respondents were randomly assigned to one of eight condition groups: salesperson gender (male salesperson or female salesperson), tattoo gender trait (masculine or feminine), and industry (automobile sales or real estate sales). We chose automobile sales and real estate sales because both are major purchases where salesperson trust should be relevant to customers. In addition, the automobile sales industry has traditionally been

male-dominated (Sawyers, 2000), while the real estate sales industry is more gender-balanced (e.g., Cole, 2003). By comparing a gender-imbalanced industry with a gender-balanced industry, we hope to increase the generalizability of our findings.

Participants were asked to imagine a scenario corresponding to one of the eight experimental conditions. For example, subjects in the condition representing a saleswoman at a car dealership with a feminine tattoo were told, “Imagine that you were interested in purchasing a new car or truck. You go to a car dealership and a salesperson, a woman in her mid-twenties with the tattoo shown below on her wrist, approaches you. [Feminine tattoo shown here]. Visualize this saleswoman. Please answer the following questions based on your first

TABLE 3:
Gender Ratio of Study Sample

| | | Tattoo | | Total |
|--------|--------|--------|-----|-------|
| | | No | Yes | |
| Gender | Male | 39 | 25 | 64 |
| | Female | 98 | 95 | 193 |
| Total | | 137 | 120 | 257 |

impression of her.” The salesperson’s age, mid-twenties, was selected because tattoos are more common and varied among younger generations.

Measures

Intention to work with salesperson was measured using a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale adapted from Sharma’s (1999) “behavioral intention” scale and modified based on the gender and industry of the experimental scenario. *Salesperson Trust* was measured using Ramsey and Sohi’s (1997) 5-item, 7-point Likert scale adapted to a retail context with the double-barreled item “This salesperson was friendly and approachable” made into two separate questions. Consistent with DeBruine, Jones, Smith, and Little (2010); Munoz Sastre, Fouquereau, Igier, Salvatore, and Mullet (2000); Koch, Luft, and Kruse (2005), and Gatton, Cathy, Dubois, and Faley (1999), *salesperson masculinity/femininity* was measured using a single item 7-point, bipolar adjective scale with 1 being very feminine and 7 being very masculine. Control variables included in the analyses include respondent gender, whether or not the respondent had a tattoo, and whether the respondent was an undergraduate student.

Results

Purification of Measurement Model on the Estimation Sample Data

To evaluate the strength of our measurement scales, the sample was split into an estimation sample consisting of automobile salespeople (N = 131) and a holdout sample consisting of real estate salespeople (N = 126). Given that 10 items were measured, the sample size allowed for the recommended ratio of five observations per item (Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986). We used a principle components factor analysis and, since the factors were related, an oblique rotation. Based upon the proposed model, eigenvalues over 1, the screeplot, and the maximum-likelihood goodness of fit test, three factors (including the single item for

masculinity/femininity) were extracted, capturing a total of 82.1% of the variance. With one exception, each item had a factor loading over 0.7 on its appropriate factor while not loading on any other factor. The salesperson trust item “I feel there is very little risk involved in dealing with this salesperson,” did not load sufficiently and was dropped.

Test of Scales on the Holdout Sample Data

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the nine remaining items (4 measuring intention, 4 measuring trust, and 1 measuring masculinity/femininity) using the holdout sample to determine the robustness and reliability of the modified scales. The Chi-square value for the sample was 26.56 and was not significant, RMSEA was .049, NFI was 0.983, CFI was .996, RFI was 0.969, and GFI was 0.956. As the model is not significant, RMSEA was below the recommended value of .08, and NFI, CFI, RFI, and GFI were all above the recommended value of 0.9, the model provided an acceptable fit. The discriminant validity was examined and supported using the procedure recommended by Bagozzi, Yi, and Phillips (1991) where discriminant validity is supported if a two-factor model fits significantly better than a one-factor model for each pair of factors. The two-factor model provided a superior fit in all cases, supporting the discriminant validity of the scales.

The composite reliabilities and coefficient alpha’s were at or over the recommended 0.7 for each construct and the average variance explained was over 50% (see Appendix A). The Cronbach’s Alpha for *Intention to work with salesperson* was 0.921 for real estate sales and 0.937 for automobile sales and for *Trust* the figures were 0.930 for real estate sales and 0.904 for automobile sales. The evidence (i.e., the split sample analysis, Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability scores, and average variance explained) indicates scale reliability. A correlation matrix is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4:
Correlation Matrix

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Trust ^a | .930/.904 | 0.565 ^{***} | -0.167 | -0.005 | 0.232 ^{***} | 0.062 | -0.175 [*] | -0.015 | 0.051 |
| 2 Intention ^a | 0.671 ^{***} | .921/.937 | -0.048 | -0.064 | 0.316 ^{***} | 0.266 ^{***} | -0.076 | 0.031 | 0.021 |
| 3 Sales Masc ^a | -0.288 ^{***} | -0.127 | | 0.136 | 0.100 | 0.103 | 0.764 ^{***} | 0.257 ^{**} | 0.200 [*] |
| 4 Resp Age ^a | -0.185 [*] | -0.180 [*] | 0.245 ^{***} | | -0.116 | 0.000 | 0.078 | 0.100 | 0.682 ^{***} |
| 5 Resp Tattoo ^b | 0.234 ^{***} | 0.326 ^{***} | 0.085 | -0.201 [*] | | 0.066 | 0.103 | 0.020 | 0.007 |
| 6 Resp Gender ^b | 0.118 | 0.196 [*] | 0.191 [*] | -0.007 | 0.100 | | -0.004 | 0.023 | 0.058 |
| 7 Tattoo Masc ^b | -0.301 ^{***} | -0.160 | 0.772 ^{***} | 0.169 | 0.096 | 0.052 | | -0.039 | 0.180 [*] |
| 8 Sales Gender ^b | 0.036 | -0.081 | 0.188 [*] | 0.033 | 0.080 | 0.012 | -0.106 | | 0.087 |
| 9 Resp Status ^b | 0.063 | 0.007 | 0.173 | 0.533 ^{***} | 0.017 | 0.054 | 0.218 [*] | -0.043 | |

Top half of table represents automobile sample and bottom half represents real estate sales

Diagonal values represent Cronbach's alpha, the order is: real estate/automobile sales

^a Pearson's Correlation; ^b Spearman's Rho;

Masc = Masculinity, intention = intention to work with, Resp = respondent

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses were tested using a MANOVA followed by a series of step-down tests using GLM. The step-down test for each hypothesis was tested separately for automobile salespeople and real estate salespeople.

H_{1a} states that tattooed participants will trust tattooed salespeople more than will non-tattooed participants, and H_{1b} states that tattooed participants will have a greater intention to work with tattooed salespeople than will non-tattooed participants. The omnibus model for testing the effect of the participant's tattoo status on salesperson trust and intention to work with the salesperson (H_{1a} and H_{1b}) was significant (Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root were all significant at p < .001, see Table 5). Participant tattoo status significantly impacted both trust (F = 18.95, p < .001) and intention to work with the salesperson (F = 7.402, p < .001).

As shown in Table 6, tattooed participants trusted both automobile and real estate salespeople significantly more than participants

without tattoos. For tattooed participants, the mean trust score for automobile sales people was 5.03 versus 4.34 (p < .01) for non-tattooed participants. For real estate sales people, the mean trust score was 5.05 for tattooed participants versus 4.47 (p < .05) for non-tattooed participants. Therefore, H_{1a} was supported. People with tattoos also had a significantly greater intention to work with tattooed auto and real estate sales people. For people with tattoos, the average intention-to-work-with score was 5.29 versus 4.33 (p < .001) for non-tattooed participants and for real estate salespeople the scores were 5.17 for tattooed participants and 4.27 (p < .01) for non-tattooed participants, supporting H_{1b}.

The omnibus model examining masculinity, trust, and intention by tattoo type (H₂ and H₃) was also significant (Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root were all significant at p < .001, see Table 7). The nature of the salesperson's tattoo significantly impacted ascribed masculinity (F = 488.75, p < .001), trust (F = 25.96, p < .001), and intention to work with the salesperson (F = 13.478, p < .001).

TABLE 5:
Multivariate Test for Respondent Tattoo

| Respondent Tattoo | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----|-----------|----------------|-----|
| <i>Multivariate test</i> | <i>Value</i> | | <i>DV</i> | <i>F-value</i> | |
| Pillai's Trace | 0.096 | *** | Intention | 25.960 | *** |
| Wilks' Lambda | 0.904 | *** | Trust | 13.478 | *** |
| Hotelling's Trace | 0.106 | *** | | | |
| Roy's Largest Root | 0.106 | *** | | | |

Controls include respondent gender and university status
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

TABLE 6:
General Linear Model Test for H1 by Industry

| Automobile sales | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------------|----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----|
| | <i>Tat</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Diff</i> | <i>F-value</i> | |
| Trust | No | 7 | 4.34 | 1.16 | -0.69 | 7.01 | ** |
| | Yes | 5 | 5.03 | 1.17 | | | |
| Intent | No | 7 | 4.33 | 1.48 | -0.96 | 13.11 | *** |
| | Yes | 5 | 5.29 | 1.41 | | | |

| Real estate | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|----|
| | <i>Tat</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Diff</i> | <i>F-value</i> | |
| Trust | No | 6 | 4.47 | 1.13 | -0.58 | 6.27 | * |
| | Yes | 6 | 5.05 | 1.33 | | | |
| Intent | No | 6 | 4.27 | 1.28 | -0.9 | 12.76 | ** |
| | Yes | 6 | 5.17 | 1.43 | | | |

Controls include respondent gender and university status
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

H_{2a} states that salesmen with masculine tattoos will be considered more masculine than salesmen with feminine tattoos, and H_{2b} states that saleswomen with masculine tattoos will be considered more masculine than saleswomen with feminine tattoos. As shown in Table 8, salesmen with masculine tattoos were considered to be significantly more masculine than salesmen with feminine tattoos for both

automobile sales (masculine tattoo mean = 6.28, feminine tattoo mean = 2.25, p < .001) and real estate sales (masculine tattoo mean = 6.06, feminine tattoo mean = 2.78, p < .001). Similarly, saleswomen with masculine tattoos were also considered significantly more masculine than saleswomen with feminine tattoos for both automobile sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.80, feminine tattoo mean =

TABLE 7:
Multivariate Test for Tattoo Masculinity

| Multivariate test | Tattoo Masculinity | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Value | DV | F-value |
| Pillai's Trace | 0.66*** 7 | Intention | 7.402*** |
| Wilks' Lambda | 0.33*** 3 | Trust | 18.946*** |
| Hotelling's Trace | 2.00*** 2 | Masculinity | 488.749*** |
| Roy's Largest Root | 2.00*** 2 | | |

Controls include respondent tattoo, respondent gender, and university status
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

TABLE 8:
General Linear Model Tests for Hypotheses 2 & 3 by Industry

| Sales-person | | Automobile sales | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------|------|-------|-------|------------|-----|-----------------|---------------------|------|-------|-------|-----------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | | Masculinity | | | | Trust | | | | Intent to work with | | | | | | | | |
| gender | Tattoo | N | Mean | SD | Diff. | F | Mean | SD | Diff. | F | Mean | SD | Diff. | F | | | | |
| Male | Masculine | 36 | H _{2a} | 6.28 | 1.00 | 4.03 | 257.9 6 | *** | H _{3a} | 4.47 | 1.50 | -0.18 | 0.28 | H _{3b} | 4.79 | 1.81 | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| | Feminine | 20 | | 2.25 | 0.97 | | | | | 4.65 | 0.75 | | | | 4.78 | 1.60 | | |
| Female | Masculine | 51 | H _{2b} | 4.80 | 1.33 | 2.89 | 72.56 | *** | H _{3c} | 4.44 | 1.28 | -0.61 | 5.06* | H _{3d} | 4.57 | 1.38 | -0.47 | 4.22* |
| | Feminine | 24 | | 1.92 | 0.97 | | | | | 5.04 | 0.90 | | | | 5.04 | 1.33 | | |

| Sales-person | | Real estate | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----------------|---------------------|------|-------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|------|------|-------|------|
| | | Masculinity | | | | Trust | | | | Intent to work with | | | | | | | | | |
| gender | Tattoo | N | Mean | SD | Diff. | F | Mean | SD | Diff. | F | Mean | SD | Diff. | F | | | | | |
| Male | Masculine | 35 | H _{2a} | 6.06 | 1.03 | 3.28 | 133.4 | *** | H _{3a} | 4.57 | 1.33 | -0.52 | 4.57* | H _{3b} | 4.58 | 1.49 | 0.02 | 0.23 | |
| | Feminine | 32 | | 2.78 | 1.21 | | | | | 5.09 | 1.07 | | | | 4.62 | 1.47 | | | |
| Female | Masculine | 37 | H _{2c} | 4.95 | 1.33 | 3.18 | 98.68 | *** | H _{3c} | 4.32 | 1.35 | -0.99 | 16.49 | *** | H _{3d} | 4.49 | 1.44 | -0.99 | 14.6 |
| | Feminine | 22 | | 1.77 | 0.87 | | | | | 5.31 | 0.96 | | | | 5.48 | 0.99 | | 2 | |

Controls include respondent tattoo, respondent gender, and university status
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

1.92, p < .001) and real estate sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.95, feminine tattoo mean = 1.77, p < .001). Therefore, H_{2a} and H_{2b} were supported.

H_{3a} states that people will trust salesmen with masculine tattoos more than they will trust salesmen with feminine tattoos, and H_{3b} states

that people will have a greater intention to work with salesmen with masculine tattoos than salesmen with feminine tattoos. The trust in auto salesmen with masculine tattoos was not significantly higher than the trust in auto salesmen with feminine tattoos (masculine tattoo mean = 4.47, feminine tattoo mean = 4.65). Surprisingly, for real estate sales, trust

was significantly higher for salesmen with feminine tattoos (masculine tattoo mean = 4.57, feminine tattoo mean = 5.09, $p < .05$). Intention to work with salesmen with masculine tattoos was not significantly higher than intention to work with salesmen with feminine tattoos for either automobile sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.79, feminine tattoo mean = 4.78) or for real estate sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.58, feminine tattoo mean = 4.62). Therefore, H_{3a} and H_{3b} were not supported; indeed, for real estate sales, people trust salesmen who have feminine tattoos more than salesmen with masculine tattoos, despite the gender-incongruence.

H_{3c} states that people will trust saleswomen with feminine tattoos more than saleswomen with masculine tattoos, and H_{3d} states that people will have a greater intention to work with saleswomen with feminine tattoos than saleswomen with masculine tattoos. Saleswomen with feminine tattoos were seen as significantly more trustworthy than saleswomen with masculine tattoos for both automotive sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.44, feminine tattoo mean = 5.04, $p < .05$) and real estate sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.32, feminine

tattoo mean = 5.31, $p < .001$). Therefore, H_{3c} was supported for both industries. The mean intention to work with saleswomen with feminine tattoos was significantly higher than that of saleswomen with masculine tattoos for automobile sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.57, feminine tattoo mean = 5.04, $p < .05$) and for real estate sales (masculine tattoo mean = 4.49, feminine tattoo mean = 5.48, $p < .001$), supporting H_{3d} .

A summary of the results for each hypothesis is presented in Table 9. As expected, people were more inclined to work with and trust saleswomen with feminine tattoos than saleswomen with masculine tattoos. However, despite rating salesmen with feminine tattoos as significantly less masculine, people did not trust or have higher intention to work with salesmen with masculine tattoos. Contrary to our expectations, real estate salesmen with feminine tattoos were actually trusted more than salesmen with masculine tattoos.

Post Hoc Analysis

It is important to understand the preference for feminine tattoos. One explanation is that

TABLE 9:
Summary of Hypotheses

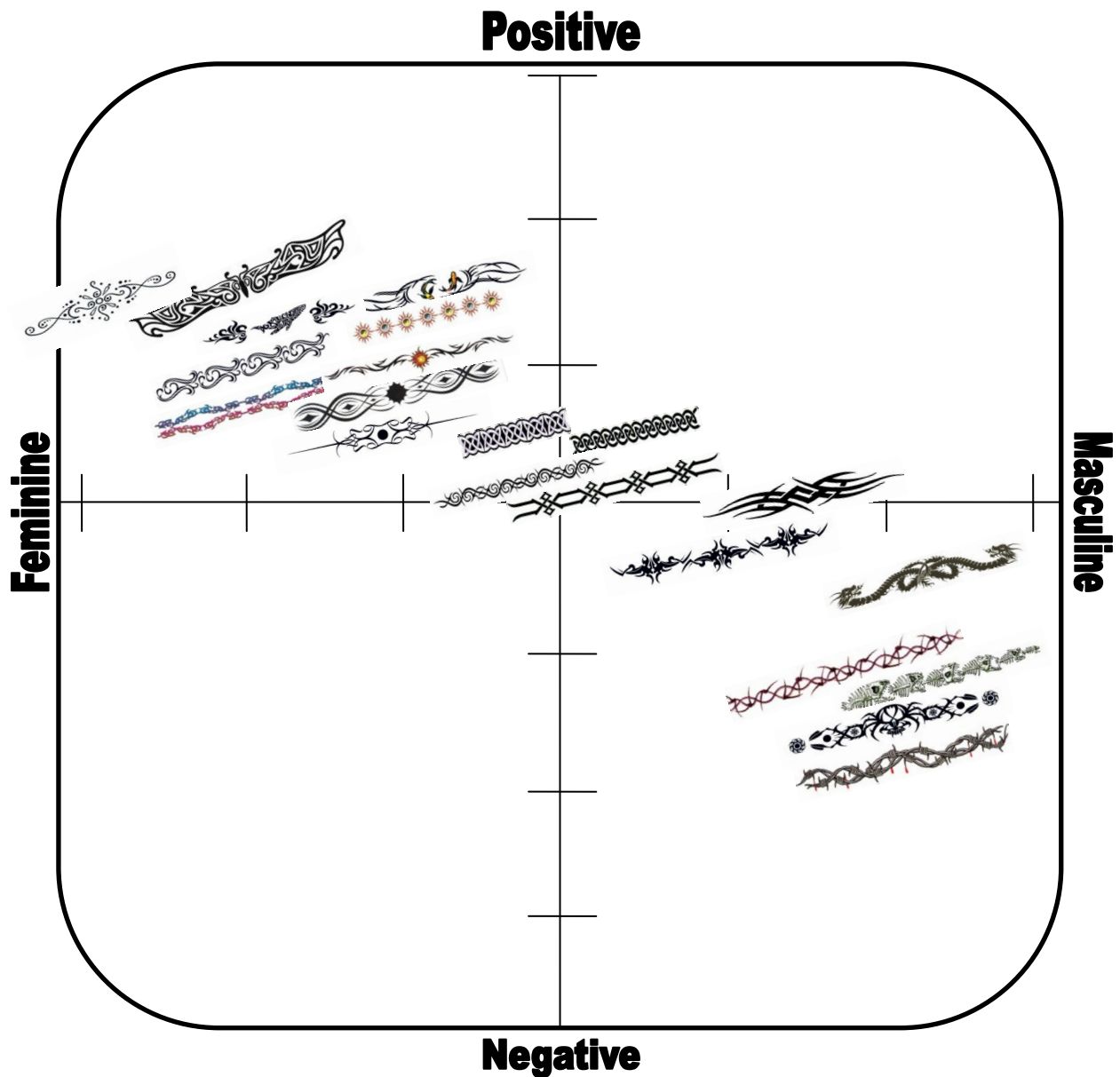
| <i>Hypotheses</i> | <i>RE</i> | <i>Car</i> |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| H_{1a} People with tattoos will trust salespeople who have tattoos more than people who do not have tattoos. | Supported | Supported |
| H_{1b} People with tattoos will have a greater intention to work with salespeople who have tattoos than people who do not have tattoos. | Supported | Supported |
| H_{2a} Male salespeople who have masculine tattoos will be considered more masculine than male salespeople who have feminine tattoos. | Supported | Supported |
| H_{2b} Female salespeople who have masculine tattoos will be considered more masculine than female salespeople who have feminine tattoos. | Supported | Supported |
| H_{3a} People will trust male salespeople who have masculine tattoos more than they will trust male salespeople who have feminine tattoos. | Opposite | Not significant |
| H_{3b} People will have a greater intention to work with male salespeople who have masculine tattoos than male salespeople who have feminine tattoos. | Not significant | Not significant |
| H_{3c} People will trust female salespeople who have feminine tattoos more than they will trust female salespeople who have masculine tattoos. | Supported | Supported |
| H_{3d} People will have a greater intention to work with female salespeople who have feminine tattoos than female salespeople who have masculine tattoos. | Supported | Supported |

masculine tattoos have a negative meaning. To investigate this, we examined the correlation between tattoo masculinity/femininity and attitude (positive/negative) toward the tattoo.

In addition to rating the tattoos on femininity/masculinity, pilot study participants also rated the 21 tattoos on a seven-point, bipolar

adjective scale where -3 was very negative and +3 was very positive. For each of the 21 tattoos, we created an average femininity/masculinity score and an average positive/negative score and looked at the correlation between these variables. The correlation was significant and negative ($r = -0.893, P < .001$); masculine tattoos have a negative meaning. Each tattoo is plotted on these attributes in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2:
Post Hoc Plot



DISCUSSION

Tattoo Meaning

Customers actively pursue buying goals (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). As such, one explanation for the negative rating of masculine tattoos is that the traits attributed to highly masculine tattoos, such as ambition, toughness, and competitiveness (Schneider, 2004) were seen as being inconsistent with customer buying goals. This explanation reflects comments made by participants during the pilot study about each salesperson. Participants were randomly selected to provide their opinions about either two male or two female car salespeople, one having the respondent's choice for the most masculine tattoo and the other for the most feminine tattoo. Participants were told the tattoos were located on the salesperson's wrist. Participants were then asked the following: "If you were going to buy a new car and saw a *salesman* [*saleswoman*] in his [her] early 20's with this tattoo on his [her] wrist, what would go through your mind?" Comments about salesmen with highly masculine tattoos include, "I would think he is competitive and that he has a dominant personality," "He listens to rock, does not like women and is scary," and "He is trying to be tough." Comments about saleswomen with highly masculine tattoos include, "Unprofessional, harsh, and unwilling to listen to my needs," "Whoa—be careful," "Who is she trying to intimidate," "She is ambitious and egocentric," and "That's an ugly tattoo." There were no overtly positive comments about these salespeople, though a number of respondents commented they would not use the tattoo to judge the salesperson. These comments suggest that participants feel salespeople who have visible highly masculine tattoos do not have the desirable characteristics necessary for goal attainment.

Conversely, positive characteristics such as friendliness and sensitivity were attributed to salespeople with highly feminine tattoos. Therefore, participants may believe that salespeople with visible highly feminine tattoos

will help with goal attainment. Sample comments include, "It's cute!" "This girl is sweet and loves her life," "She is approachable and nice," "That she enjoys a deep meaningful relationship," "That's a pretty tattoo," and "She is sensitive, imperfect and relatable, trustworthy, not someone who would push me into a sale, someone who would take a softer sales approach." Comments about salesmen with feminine tattoos focused on the tattoo's gender inconsistency, though it is interesting that respondents were not less inclined to work with or trust salesmen with feminine tattoos versus saleswomen with feminine tattoos.

Not all comments about feminine tattoos were positive. For example, about automobile saleswomen with highly feminine tattoos, some respondents wrote, "Maybe this girl is more prone to peer pressures so she would not go against her company to get me a deal on a car," "I would think she probably is a bit too girly and wonder if she would know much about cars," and "Someone who unabashedly displays their preferred identity probably harbors some deep prejudices. She is not a well-balanced character."

Gender Appropriateness

Our original hypotheses regarding gender appropriateness were that people would be less inclined to work with and trust salespeople with cross-gendered tattoos than salespeople with gender-congruent tattoos. Although these hypotheses were not supported for salesmen, there is evidence that gender appropriateness is important. The post hoc analysis showed that masculine tattoos had a negative connotation, while female tattoos had a positive connotation. Yet, while people clearly prefer to work with saleswomen with feminine tattoos over saleswomen with masculine tattoos, they did not clearly prefer salesmen with feminine tattoos. We contend that the positive meaning of feminine tattoos is masked for salesmen by negative cross-gendered effects.

Comments from participants in the pilot study help explain how people feel about cross-

gendered tattoos. Twelve respondents commented about the gender inconsistency when a saleswoman had a highly masculine tattoo, for example, saying, "This woman wishes she were male," "She is a tomboy," and "I would think she is a lesbian." Thirty-one respondents commented about gender inconsistency when a salesman had a highly feminine tattoo, commenting, "He is weird, possibly gay." "Well, considering it's a very bright colorful tattoo on a 'him' I would believe he was a homosexual," "If the salesperson was a woman, it wouldn't be as weird, but if it were a man I would be scared and confused," and "I would think he was very feminine and possibly gay. However, it would not make me think any negative thoughts towards him." However, several respondents also noted that salesmen with a feminine tattoo have an advantage, saying, "He may be gay. But that's okay because some of the gayest men have the best taste in clothing and picking the right color and style car. I would probably feel good about buying a car from him," "He has a softer side," and "He must be very self-confident and in touch with this feminine side." Hence, respondents were aware of gender norms regarding a tattoo's style, but having a visible cross-gendered tattoo was not a clear disadvantage and, in some cases such as real estate sales, may even be an advantage.

General Implications

Our study found that: 1) people with tattoos are more likely to trust and intend to work with tattooed salespeople, 2) people make nuanced evaluations about tattoo meaning and gender appropriateness, and 3) tattoo meaning and gender appropriateness are sometimes at odds with one another.

First, people with tattoos trust and intend to work with tattooed salespeople more than people without tattoos. In the absence of other cues, customers likely make an initial stereotypical in-group/out-group judgment about the salesperson based on the presence or absence of a tattoo. This has important implications for whether salespeople should

cover their tattoos. When selling to a market segment where tattoos are prevalent (or, at least, not indicative of out-group status), an appropriate visible tattoo is not a liability.

Second, this study examined the degree to which there are gender norms regarding tattoos and how these gender norms toward tattoos impacted salesperson evaluations. We found that salespeople, regardless of gender, who have highly feminine tattoos are rated as more feminine, and salespeople who have highly masculine tattoos are rated as more masculine. This suggests that customers, whether tattooed or not, seem to make nuanced evaluations of tattoo appropriateness based on gender norms. Thus, while tattoos, in general, have in-group/out-group implications, customers also consider whether a tattoo is suitable for a salesperson based on his/her gender. Furthermore, people were less likely to trust or intend to work with salespeople who have a highly masculine tattoo than salespeople who have a highly feminine tattoo, particularly for saleswomen. In the post hoc analysis, we found a relationship between a tattoo's masculinity and negativity. People commented that both male and female salespeople with highly masculine tattoos were likely to be more aggressive, ambitious, and dominant. Perhaps, people felt threatened by these traits and did not want to work with salespeople displaying them. Therefore, we contend that consumers believe the traits conveyed by a visible highly masculine tattoo are undesirable. This is important because salespeople who wear or display other symbols of hyper-masculinity, for example a poster of a heavy metal band hung at a salesperson's desk, might also be viewed negatively.

Finally, tattoo meaning and appropriateness may be at odds with one another and, accordingly, can mask one another's effects. In this case, while feminine tattoos were rated more positively than masculine tattoos, feminine tattoos were also not considered appropriate for salesmen. Customers must then weigh the tattoo's meaning versus its appropriateness. In some contexts, tattoo meaning is more relevant than tattoo

appropriateness. In our study, real estate salesmen with feminine tattoos were evaluated as more trustworthy than salesmen with masculine tattoos. Yet, in other contexts, tattoo appropriateness counterbalances or outweighs the effects of tattoo meaning. To illustrate, we found that automobile salesmen with feminine tattoos were not rated differently than salesmen with masculine tattoos.

Managerial Implications

This study has a number of implications for managers hiring salespeople. Our results suggest that salespeople with tattoos are not automatically viewed negatively by customers. First, customers with tattoos do not judge tattooed salespeople as harshly as non-tattooed customers. This suggests that when selling to customer segments where tattoos do not indicate out-group membership, the presence of a tattoo should not affect the hiring decision. Furthermore, we speculate that as older people become more accustomed to seeing tattoos on their children and grandchildren, coworkers, and neighbors they will temper their automatic negative reactions, so the mere presence of a tattoo will become less-and-less an indicator of out-group status.

As stated above, female tattoos are rated more positively. However, the appropriateness of having a visible feminine tattoo depends on industry context. Contrary to our expectations (and most likely those of many sales managers), in real estate, people trust salesmen with feminine tattoos more than salesmen with masculine tattoos. Yet in automobile sales, salesmen with feminine tattoos were not trusted more than salesmen with masculine tattoos. One possible explanation for the industry difference is that, unlike real estate sales, automobile sales is traditionally male-dominated (Sawyers, 2000); as such, customers accustomed to the traditional dealership culture may be wary of salesmen displaying female traits. Conversely, in the real estate industry, women are more common and so female traits are better accepted. Accordingly, we recommend that visible feminine tattoos are

better suited in gender-balanced or female-oriented industries than in male-oriented industries. Thus, a feminine tattoo will almost certainly be a disadvantage for salespeople selling “muscle cars.” So, rather than focusing solely on the presence or absence of a tattoo, the sales manager can enlarge the pool of qualified applicants by including those with a tattoo that conveys the appropriate meaning to the target audience.

Furthermore, it should be noted that some pilot study comments indicate that some customers are biased against salespeople showing cross-gendered traits. Despite rating real estate salesmen as more trustworthy, people did not indicate a greater intention to work with salesmen who had a feminine tattoo than salesmen with a masculine tattoo. We argue that this indicates that many people do not feel comfortable working with salespeople who have cross-gendered attributes, even when the salesperson is ascribed positive characteristics. Thus, having a visible highly feminine tattoo may be a high risk strategy for a man because of cross gender issues.

Limitations

We were not able to compare salespeople without a tattoo to salespeople with a tattoo. Hence, while we know that people prefer feminine to masculine tattoos in general, it is impossible to tell whether salespeople with tattoos are rated more or less positively than salespeople without tattoos. However, we do not see this as a significant limitation because it will be increasingly difficult to shun tattooed applicants as tattoos become more common. According to Laumann and Derick (2006), 24% of Americans currently have tattoos. Among undergraduate students, the rates are even higher. Totten et al. (2009) found 40.5% of undergraduate respondents were tattooed, and we found 45.4% of our undergraduate respondents were tattooed. Indeed, further research should examine whether there are selling contexts in which certain tattoos are an advantage for salespeople.

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APPENDIX A
Factor Loadings and Scale Items

| Measurement scales and items | | Std. loadings | CR | AVE | SQ root AVE |
|---|--|---------------|-------|-------|-------------|
| <i>Intention (strongly agree/strongly disagree)</i> | | | | | |
| 1 | If this salesperson offered to assist me, I would definitely be willing to work with (him/her) to help me find [an automobile/a home]. | 0.837 | 0.912 | 0.578 | 0.760 |
| 2 | I would definitely consider using this salesperson to find [an automobile/a home]. | 0.851 | | | |
| 3 | The likelihood of finding [an automobile/a home] using this salesperson is very high. | 0.772 | | | |
| 4 | If I was purchasing this [car/home] jointly (with my significant other or another person), I would recommend we use this salesperson. | 0.933 | | | |
| <i>Trust (strongly agree/strongly disagree)</i> | | | | | |
| 1 | This salesperson is likely to be friendly. | 0.836 | 0.910 | 0.574 | 0.757 |
| 2 | This salesperson is likely to be approachable. | 0.834 | | | |
| 3 | This salesperson is likely to be sincere. | 0.881 | | | |
| 4 | This salesperson is likely to be honest. | 0.835 | | | |