

RICE UNIVERSITY

**The Influence of Employee Inkings on Consumer Behavior:  
Booed, Eschewed, and Tattooed**

by

**Enrica Nicole Ruggs**

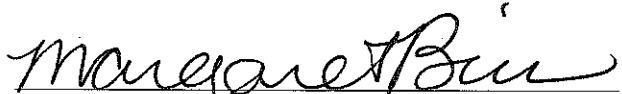
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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:



Michelle R. Hebl, Professor, Chair  
Psychology



Margaret Beyer, Associate Professor,  
Psychology



Fred Oswald, Professor, Psychology



D. Brent Smith, Associate Dean and  
Associate Professor, Management

HOUSTON, TX

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## **ABSTRACT**

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One trend that is becoming overwhelmingly popular in mainstream America, particularly among the youth (prior to and as they enter the workforce) is getting tattoos (Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2002; Chivers, 2002; Laumann & Derick, 2006), yet there is little empirical evidence on the impact of having tattoos in an employment context. The current dissertation sought to understand this impact by examining the influence of employee tattoos on customers' stereotypical perceptions, attitudes toward the employee, organization, and products, and behavior toward the employee and organization across two studies. In the first study, customers viewed a marketing video in which the employee either had a visible tattoo or not. Customers reported more stereotypical perceptions of tattooed (versus nontattooed) employees, such that they perceived the tattooed employee as possessing more artistic traits, having a less favorable appearance, and being riskier. Stereotypical perceptions of artistic traits were the strongest, and these perceptions mediated the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations of the employee, organization, and product. In a second field study, employees (who either had a tattoo or not) sold restaurant cards to customers at a convention to raise money for a charity organization. Results showed that customers engaged in more avoidance behaviors with tattooed (versus) nontattooed employees; however, there were no significant differences in purchasing behavior based on tattoo presence. The results of

both studies provide insight into a mechanism for how tattoo presence impacts customers' reactions to employees, organizations, and products. Implications and future research ideas are discussed.

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## Introduction

An employee's physical appearance is often the first thing that customers see when they walk into an organization. In some cases, that appearance may involve a stigmatizing characteristic, or one that leads to negative assumptions about and actions toward an employee. Thus, it is not surprising that many organizations require employees to maintain a certain appearance. Corporate America embraced a "business" dress code for many years, and prior to the 1990s, there seemed to be little debate about acceptability and appropriate appearance in corporate America (Dale, Bevill, Roach, & Glasgow, 2007). There was an unstated, understood rule that conservatism was essential. Men and women wore business suits and dress shoes, kept their hair tamed and generally natural in color (e.g., black, brown, blonde, red, or gray), and wore minimal accessories. During the 1990s, corporate dress became more relaxed. Some people credit the technology boom in Silicon Valley with the birth of the "business casual" trend (Gutierrez & Freese, 1999). Since the 1990s, many companies have adopted revised standards that include at least one "dress-down" day per week (usually Friday). The incorporation of this more relaxed dress code may create a positive image of the organization to employees because it helps them feel more at ease (Jones, 1996); however, it may have a negative influence on customers if they feel that employees look too relaxed or unprofessional.

One aspect of employee appearance that may impact customer reactions (including behavior) is the presence of visible tattoos. This may pose a potential problem, as there has been a rise in tattooing in American culture, particularly among college-aged individuals and those entering the workforce. Research polls have indicated that between

14-24% of Americans has at least one tattoo (Corso, 2008; Laumann & Derick, 2006). This form of expression, particularly when visible, is pushing the envelope of acceptability and may be considered deviant in the workforce, even in the casual work environment that many enjoy today. Consequently, visible tattoos have received pushback from some organizations because they may send a negative message concerning an organization's image to customers, who are often among the most valuable stakeholders. With the rise of tattooing in mainstream culture however, is it legitimate for organizations to pushback against visible tattoos on employees? That is, do visible tattoos on employees negatively impact organizations via customers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and if so why? By understanding if and why visible tattoos have a negative impact, organizations can make a stronger case for legitimizing pushback against this trend.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how tattoos on employees might influence the bottom line for organizations in three different ways. The current dissertation attempts to address several research questions. First, what types of impressions do people form when they see or interact with employees who have tattoos? Although research has shown that perceivers have some negative stereotypes about people with tattoos (Resenhoft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008; Swami & Furnham, 2007), stereotypes and attitudes toward tattooed employees have yet to be thoroughly examined in previous literature. Second, do employee' tattoos impact customers' attitudes and behavior? Although many organizations ask require employees to cover up visible tattoos, some do not, and some have policies on certain types of tattoos. It appears that there is no consensus on the appropriateness of tattoos across and even within industries,

and this may be due in part to the fact that very little is known about the extent to which customers care about tattooed employees. Third, do employees with tattoos influence customers' reactions toward products and organizations, and if so, how? If customers respond negatively to tattooed employees, it is possible that these negative reactions may extend to the organization and its products. To address these research questions, I will assess whether there is a general stigma against employees who have visible tattoos by examining reactions to tattooed employees. Next, I will assess whether the presence of visible tattoos on employees influence customer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Finally, I will assess whether employees' visible tattoos influence customers' actual behaviors.

This dissertation draws on research from the person perception literature (e.g., Fiske, 1980), stigma literature (e.g., Goffman, 1963), and consumer behavior literature (e.g., Bitner, 1992). According to the person perception literature, this dissertation examines how and why people form impressions of others. The stigma literature shows that individuals with stigmatizing characteristics are often the recipients of negative attitudes and behaviors. Tattoos may be considered stigmatizing characteristics as they are unnatural marks on the body, thus, employees with tattoos may be considered part of the environment that influences customers' perceptions and behaviors. According to the consumer behavior literature, customers draw on several aspects of the environment to assist in decision-making processes concerning things such as purchasing intentions and intentions to return to the organization (Bitner, 1992; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Shao, Baker, & Wagner, 2004). Employees serve as part of the social environment surrounding

consumers, and may therefore influence decision-making processes (Wall & Berry, 2007).

By combining theories from psychology and consumer behavior, the current dissertation makes several contributions to these fields. First, it provides a theoretical examination of the importance of organizational policies concerning tattoos. As previously discussed, many organizations have policies requiring employees to conceal tattoos when working; however, to date there has been no exploration concerning the impact of not concealing tattoos when working. This dissertation will serve to elucidate the relation between employee tattoos and organizational outcomes. Second, this study adds to the literature by combining an examination of stereotypes and attitudes with an examination of behavior. Past research concerning tattoos suggests that negative attitudes about employees with visible tattoos exist (Miller, Nicols, & Eure, 2009; Swanger, 2006). Currently however, the body of literature in this area is rather small, and most of these studies examine stereotypes, perceptions, and attitudes toward employees without examining the extent to which stereotypes and attitudes are related to behavior. This study will capture all three aspects to inform not only the literature on tattoos as stigma, but also the stigma literature in general. Third, this study focuses on the attitudes and behaviors of customers. Much of the literature focuses on the attitudes of supervisors and human resources personnel; however, the customers' perspective and reactions are very important because customers keep many organizations thriving. Thus, it is possible that the findings from this study will both add to the literature and provide information that is relevant and useful in applied settings. Focusing on the customers' perspective may help organizations understand the potential impact of employee individualism in the form of

physical appearance on the bottom-line and hopefully help to inform policy-making concerning dress and physical appearance. In these ways, this dissertation will provide a comprehensive examination of the influence of tattoos in an organizational context.

To begin the current dissertation, I will first examine the potential status of tattoos as stigma. Next, I will examine reactions to stigma, including how tattoos can serve as an indicator in person perception and how this relates to negative attitudes and behaviors toward the tattoo bearer. Then, I will explore factors that may moderate reactions to stigma. Finally, I will derive specific hypotheses and present the ways in which I plan to assess the impact of customer service personnel's tattoos on the evaluations that customers form about personnel, associated products, and the organization as a whole.

### **Tattoos as a Stigma**

The term stigma was derived originally from the Greeks as a term to refer to visible bodily markers (i.e., cuts, brands, tattoos) that were placed on slaves, criminals and traitors (Cole & Haebich, 2007; Fisher, 2002; Goffman, 1963). These markers, also used by the Romans, served as indicators that the bearers of these marks were deviant or lower class. The study of stigma in psychology can be traced back to Erving Goffman's (1963) definition and classification system. Goffman defined stigma as an attribute that causes one to be discounted in society. He further stated that stigmas can be classified into the following general categories: 1) heritability, which include traits passed down through generations (e.g., race), 2) abominations of the body, which include devalued and/or unattractive physical characteristics (e.g., obesity), and 3) blemishes of character, which include personality characteristics or behaviors that are devalued by society (e.g., homosexuality). Based on this classification system, tattoos can be viewed as stigmas



because they can be considered an abomination of the body, and perhaps even a blemish of character.

Despite the original negative connotation, in modern society people consciously choose to get a tattoo and often spend money to have this “mark” placed on their body; thus, tattooing has some value in society. National surveys have shown that between 14-24% of Americans has at least one tattoo (Corso, 2008; Laumann & Derick, 2006). In recent decades, tattooing and other forms of body modification have gained in popularity by their common exposure through various sources of media, such as movies and television, as well as their publicity by celebrities and professional athletes. For instance, tattoos were rarely seen on famous athletes who entered major league sports prior to the 1990s such as Joe Montana and Michael Jordan; however, they are commonplace and almost appear to be a rite of passage on famous athletes today (e.g., LeBron James and David Beckham). Even Barbie is taking part in the new fashion trend with toy maker Mattel celebrating the doll’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009 by coming out with the “totally stylin’ tattoos Barbie.” Clearly, people are influenced by television and media (see Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002); thus, although it is possible that this gain in media publicity may be a case of art imitating life, the effects of tattoos in art (media) no doubt influence life as well.

People who obtain tattoos often cite beauty (art or fashion), individuality, personal narratives (e.g., expression of personal values or experiences), group affiliations, and resistance (to parents or society) among the top motivational reasons for engaging in tattooing behavior (Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, & Koch, 2004a; Armstrong, Roberts, Owen, & Koch, 2004b; Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007). People with tattoos report a

higher need for uniqueness than people without tattoos and perceive themselves as more unique once they have a tattoo (Swami, 2011; Tiggemann & Hopkins, 2011). Through these internal motivations and resulting tattoo marks, people are presenting themselves to others in a way that represents one thing to the self but may represent something different to others. Although some people value tattoos and do not see them as stigmas, others may perceive tattoos as an indication that one lacks judgment and self-presentation skills.

This choice of behavior is often undertaken during youth (during teenage years and early 20s; Armstrong et al., 2008; Laumann & Derick, 2006). Across various studies, approximately 19-25% of undergraduate college students and 14% of graduate students reported having at least one tattoo (Armstrong, Owen, Roberts, & Koch, 2002; Dale et al., 2007; Laumann & Derick, 2006; Lipscomb, Jones, & Totten, 2008; Mayers, Judelson, Moriarty, & Rundell, 2002). These numbers suggest that there are greater increases in the number of working-aged individuals with tattoos, which can impact those seeking employment, employed with tattoos, and the organizations where they are hired. Despite being more popular to obtain in youth, there are sometimes important ramifications to this action such as the pain and expense involved in getting a tattoo, and later regret upon getting it. One study examining the motivation for tattoo removal found that those who sought tattoo removal did so because they experienced more negative comments and stigma problems in public, workplace, and school settings (Armstrong et al., 2008). This suggests that although tattoos may not be considered a stigmatizing characteristic at the time one obtains them, this status may change based on others' reactions.

Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) defined stigma as any “characteristic or social identity that is devalued in a particular social context” (pg. 505). Although visible tattoos

may be considered appropriate and even cool in some contexts, tattoos are perceived negatively in many work environments (for example see Dean, 2010; Swanger, 2006). In their review, Crocker and colleagues discuss two dimensions of stigma, controllability and visibility, which influence the extent to which individuals with a particular stigma are judged. Controllability refers to whether or not one is responsible for his/her stigma. The stigmas of obesity, homosexuality, or being a drug addict are often perceived as more controllable than gender or race because those in the former list are viewed to be things that individuals brought upon themselves whereas the latter are factors that were placed upon them. Crocker and colleagues suggest that the more controllable a stigma is the more one will be denigrated as a result. Indeed, research seems to support this notion (Weiner, Magnusson, & Perry, 1988). For instance, obese individuals are often the targets of discrimination because people believe that heavy individuals can lose and control weight through diet and exercise (Crandall, 1994), even though research shows that weight gain is not always controllable (Sturm, 2002).

In today's society, tattooing is self-imposed and therefore controllable. Individuals make a conscious decision to get a tattoo on their body. This stigma requires one to think about what type of tattoo they want, how large they want it to be, and where they want it displayed on their body. One survey found that over 65% of tattooed participants had thought about getting a tattoo for at least a month before actually doing so (Forbes, 2001), although other data suggests that many get tattoos almost immediately after making the decision to get one (Latreille, Levy, & Guinot, 2011). Regardless of the timing between thinking about and actually getting one, the process of getting tattooed represents a permanent mark on one's body. Individuals must go to a tattoo shop (in most

cases), pay for the service, and experience some degree of discomfort as the tattoo is being inked into their skin. This process involves a high degree of conscious thought and effort on the part of an individual and is thus highly controllable. Hence, such attributions of controllability are likely to influence individuals' perceptions of those with tattoos.

Visibility, which refers to whether or not the stigma can be hidden, also influences the impact of stigmas (Crocker et al., 1998). Visible stigmas (e.g., obesity, facial disfigurement, race) can lead to individuals being discredited or less accepted (Goffman, 1963), whereas stigmas that are not immediately visible (e.g., epilepsy, sexual orientation) allow individuals the opportunity to be judged on other information. For instance, although homosexuality is sometimes considered controllable, it is a stigma that can be hidden unless someone chooses to disclose (or reveal) this characteristic. To the extent that this stigma is concealed, targets have the opportunity to be judged first on other more relevant information. For characteristics that are less concealable such as race or gender, individuals with stigmatizing characteristics are more vulnerable to being judged on that characteristic first as opposed to more relevant information.

Tattoos can be either visible or hidden. Opting to "mark" oneself with a visible tattoo is inconsistent with the stigma literature, as Goffman (1963) suggests that most people try to conceal or manage stigmas. When visible, there is greater opportunity for stigmatization (the act of forming negative attitudes and displaying negative behaviors toward one based on a stigma characteristic) to occur (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004). In a laboratory experiment involving undergraduate participants, Hawkes and colleagues (2004) manipulated the visibility of tattoos on female stimuli through the use of scenarios and found that attitudes toward women with visible tattoos (versus those with hidden

tattoos or none) were less favorable. Additionally, human resources managers and recruiters from the hospitality industry have reported that visible tattoos and body piercing on interviewees are viewed negatively by restaurant and hotel organizations (Swanger, 2006). This study was preliminary ( $N = 30$ ); however, a much larger study consisting of over 500 business people also found that business people report negative attitudes about tattooed job applicants (Dale, Bevill, Roach, Glasgow, & Bracy, 2009). These studies provide support for the notion that visible tattoos may pose a problem in the workplace because the image they portray does not align with the traditional corporate image.

Visible tattoos on employees may be particularly problematic if they negatively influence customers at the organization. Much of the research to date on employee tattoos focuses on management's perspective; however, if customers are negatively averse to employee tattoos they may not only respond negatively toward the employee, but also toward the organization as a whole and the products sold by the organization. Customers' response toward an employee tattoo likely depends on a number of factors including the type of organization and products and/or services it offers, and the signal that the tattoo evokes. To the extent that employee tattoos are seen as stigmas, they may have an effect on the bottom line for organizations. Specifically, visible tattoos may influence customers' perceptions of the employee, attitudes toward the employee and organization, and behavior. In the next section, I discuss reactions to stigma and examine how these reactions are relevant to tattoos as stigma.

### **Reactions to Stigma: Attitudes, Behaviors, and Cognitions**

Stigmas can create cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions for those interacting with a stigmatized individual (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000). Cognitive reactions are associated with stereotypes, perceptions, and preconceived beliefs. People constantly judge others and form impressions about them based on visual cues or attributes that they perceive (Hastorf, Schneider, & Polefka, 1970). Impressions of others are formed even when observations of them is very brief. Furthermore, when making evaluations of others, perceivers place more weight on attributes that have a negative (versus positive) valence and are extreme or unusual (versus common) attributes (Fiske, 1980). This is in line with the stigma literature suggesting that people pay particular attention to stigmatizing characteristics and evaluate others negatively as a result. People develop and use stereotypes based on the impressions they form of others. Stereotypes, which can be either positive or negative, serve as shortcuts to help people navigate the world around them so that they do not have to exert time and cognitive effort evaluating the same things time and time again. Stereotypes are useful in that they help people focus their attention on solving new problems and evaluating new characteristics. According to social cognition theory, people construct mental cognitive representations to simplify perceptions of others (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). These cognitive representations are used when interacting with others or trying to process information about them. From these representations, people make categorizations, which then help form judgments about the stereotyped objects or person.

Visible tattoos can be used as triggers to categorize the bearers based on stereotypes concerning tattoos or types of people who get tattoos (e.g., people who are

deviant such as delinquents and bikers get tattoos). Research supports this notion, as tattooed individuals have been perceived more negatively than non-tattooed individuals on a number of attributes including: health (Wohlrab, Fink, Kappeler, & Brewer, 2009), creditability (Seiter & Hatch, 2005), Big Five personality traits (Forbes, 2001), intelligence, athleticism, caring attitude (Resenhoeft et al., 2008), and attractiveness (Swami & Furnham, 2007; Resenhoeft, et al., 2008). In addition, tattooed women (compared to non-tattooed women) have been perceived as more sexually promiscuous and consumers of more alcoholic beverages (Swami & Furnham, 2007). In line with findings by Swami and Furnham (2007), tattooed individuals have been perceived as more likely to engage in deviant behaviors (Adams, 2009). The stereotype of deviance is linked with the historical functioning of tattoos.

Based on these impressions, people attribute traits such as intelligence, friendliness, or hostility to others (Hastorf et al, 1970). According to attribution theory, people more often attribute dispositional traits (or personality inferences) to others based on their behavior or action, whereas they are more likely to attribute self-behavior to a situational factor (Weiner, 1974). That is, people make evaluations of others' personality based on an attribute or a decision that individual made. One study examining the perception of personality of tattooed individuals found that tattooed people were perceived as higher in neuroticism, and lower in agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness by people without tattoos (Forbes, 2001). From a customer's perspective, perceiving a tattooed employee as not very conscientious may have serious implications on subsequent attitudes about that employee as well as the products that employees are selling and organization for which they work.

In addition to activating stereotypes, stigmas may activate attitudes about how one feels about people with a particular stigma. Attitudinal or affective reactions to stigmas may represent crude responses based on perceptions or stereotypes that are easily diffused, or may represent more deep-seeded prejudicial attitudes. The dimensions of stigma (i.e., controllability and visibility) influence the extent to which negative affective reactions are expressed. For instance, visibility plays a role in immediate crude reactions (Dovidio et al., 2000). Some researchers have speculated that there may be some evolutionary basis behind this reaction and suggest that individuals possess cognitive adaptations that cause them to display negative reactions and avoid those who appear defective or deviant (Kurzman & Leary, 2001). Controllability also plays a role in the expression of negative attitudes, particularly prejudicial attitudes. According to Crandall and Eshleman's (2003) justification-suppression model, people are conflicted between desires to express genuine prejudice and the desire to maintain values and social norms of non-prejudiced attitudes. People therefore attempt to suppress prejudicial attitudes; however, when given justification, such as a perception of controllability, people are more likely to express these attitudes. From customers' perspective, they may feel as though they are justified in forming negative impressions of tattooed employees and subsequently have negative evaluations or attitudes about that employee because they are at the organization to spend money and are therefore in a position of power.

In addition to negative cognitive and affective reactions, stigmas lead to negative behavioral reactions that manifest in discriminatory behavior. A study examining perceptions of tattooed individuals showed that healthcare professionals reported negative perceptions of these individuals (Stuppy, Armstrong, & Casals-Ariet, 1998).



Research focusing on health professionals' perceptions and attitudes toward other stigmas suggests that when health professionals have negative attitudes toward a stigma they express greater amounts discrimination or intentions to discriminate against individuals with that stigma (for example see, Hebl & Xu, 2001).

The stigma literature is abundant and consistently shows that stigmatized individuals are more susceptible than non-stigmatized individuals to discrimination in the workplace (for examples see Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio, 2002; King, Shapiro, Hebl, Singletary, & Turner, 2006). Discrimination can be defined as behaviors people engage in with the intention of excluding or denying individuals or groups equality of treatment (Allport, 1954). Discrimination can manifest as either overt, blatant acts or as subtle behaviors. Hebl et al. (2002) coined these different manifestations formal and interpersonal discrimination. Formal discrimination refers to acts that are typically prevented by federal laws (e.g., not hiring an individual based on a protected class status), such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Americans with Disabilities Act, and interpersonal discrimination refers to behaviors that are more covert in nature and are not considered illegal. These behaviors can be displayed in nonverbal (e.g., avoiding eye contact, grimacing), verbal (e.g., dismissive language) and paraverbal (e.g., tone of voice) ways. Formal discrimination appears to be less common than interpersonal discrimination due to differences in laws and social acceptance; therefore, much of the current literature focuses on subtler forms of discrimination. These subtler behaviors have often been described using other terms such as incivilities, micro-aggressions, and microinequities (Cortina, 2008; Rowe, 1990; Sue et al., 2007).

Very little research examining tattoos in the workplace has been done; however, of the studies that have been conducted, results suggest that people do discriminate against individuals with tattoos. Such stigmatization is particularly evident when examining managers' perspectives of applicants. For instance, when surveyed, a small group of human resources managers in the hospitality industry reported that they view interviewees with visible tattoos and other body modifications (e.g., facial piercings) negatively (Swanger, 2006). Also, faculty and students in the hospitality industry asked to assume the role of hiring managers in an experimental study rated visible tattoos as an undesirable trait for job applicants (Ruetzler, Taylor, Reynolds, Baker, & Killen, 2012). In addition to managers, coworkers find tattoos to be relatively unacceptable in the workplace, particularly in situations where the employee has face-to-face contact with customers or when employee rewards are dependent upon coworkers (Miller et al., 2009). In sum, research on stigma has shown that managers and other perceivers show stereotypes of and prejudice toward applicants and employees. When considering behavioral reactions to stigma, negative behaviors are often discriminatory; however, research has rarely examined the behaviors of customers toward stigmatized employees.

When examining behavioral reactions to stigma from the customer's perspective, the term discrimination is rarely used. This may be because there is some question as to whether or not a customer's behavior toward employees is considered discrimination. Customers may choose not to interact with employees for various reasons; therefore, it may be difficult to pinpoint this behavior as an act of discrimination. Nonetheless, customers can engage in behaviors that are similar to discriminatory behaviors based on their perceptions and attitudes about employees. In the consumer behavior literature,

Bitner (1992) developed a framework to illustrate how environmental factors ultimately influence customers' behavior. In this framework, Bitner discusses two types of behavior: approach behavior (e.g., exploring the establishment, spending money, and returning to the establishment), and avoid behavior (e.g., opposite of approach behavior). Combining this framework with behavioral reactions to stigma, when approached by a stigmatized employee, or one who has a tattoo, customers may display more overt or subtle avoid behaviors that are akin to behaviors that may be considered discriminatory in a different context.

Research from the consumer behavior literature does show that employee appearance impacts consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Ryu & Jang, 2007; Shao et al., 2004; Yan, Yurchisin, & Watchravesringkan, 2011). For instance, when examining upscale restaurants, Ryu and Jang (2007) found that the facility aesthetics (décor, architectural design), ambiance (music, aroma, temperature) and employees (attractive, well dressed) were positively related to customer pleasure and arousal, which was positively related to customers' intentions to return to the restaurant, recommend it to their friends, stay longer and spend more money than they originally planned. Researchers have noted that there is a lack of research examining the extent to which human variables (e.g., employee appearance and behavior), or the social environment, influences customer behavior (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Turley & Milliman, 2000).

Even less work has examined the effect of employee tattoos on customers' reactions. One study explicitly examining the effect of tattoo presence on customers' reactions asked the customer's perspective asked students to imagine they were customers of a tax preparation service. In some conditions, the service provider had visible tattoos and in other conditions he did not (Dean, 2011). The findings showed that

customers in the tattoo condition perceived the appearance of the tax service provider as less appropriate than customers in the non-tattoo condition and had lower confidence in the ability of the service provider than customers in the non-tattooed condition. This study suggests that customers are influenced by visible tattoos; however, the manipulation may have been somewhat convoluted with overall appearance. That is, this study used text descriptions of an employee who either had “long hair and was wearing a t-shirt revealing a ‘sleeve’ of tattoos on each arm” or “wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and necktie, and has relatively short hair” (Dean, 2011 pg. 258). Thus, it is possible that the combination of visible tattoos along with the overall appearance concerning hair and professional dress (e.g., shirt and tie versus t-shirt) influenced evaluations. The current study aims to disentangle visible tattoos from other appearance measures to provide a clearer picture of the influence of visible tattoos on customers’ reactions to employees.

Customers are in a unique position of power because they have the choice of what organizations they choose to support or not support. Thus, although customer behavior toward tattooed employees may resemble (and in fact be considered) interpersonal discrimination, organizations are likely to try to appease customers as opposed to employees in this situation. That is, organizations want to display a positive image to customers through every aspect of their business, including employee appearance. If visible tattoos on employees elicit negative behavioral reactions from customers, then this may also negatively impact the organization in terms of profit, sales, and reputation.

It is important to note that stigma characteristics, regardless of valence and extremity, do not elicit the same reactions or same level of reactions from every person.

Several factors may moderate customers' reactions to stigma, and some of these factors will be examined in the next section.

### **Factors Moderating Reactions to Stigma**

In a theoretical framework modeling social interactions between perceivers and targets of stigma, Hebl and Dovidio (2005) noted three antecedents to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions to stigmatized individuals. The first antecedent is personal factors, or individual differences that may predispose individuals to stigmatize against others. In the stigma literature, individual differences in views regarding authoritarianism (those higher stigmatize more; Allport, 1954) and protestant work ethic ideologies (again, those higher stigmatize more; Crandall, 1994; 2000) have been shown to influence levels of stigmatization. Personal variables that also have been shown to influence the degree of stigmatization include demographic variables such as gender and age. For instance, women are more positively biased and tend to perceive others more favorably than men (Hebl, Ruggs, Singletary, & Beal, 2008; Winqvist, Mohr, & Kenny, 1998). Additionally, age has been shown to be influential in the perceptions of tattoos, as older individuals appear to be less accepting of tattoos than younger individuals (Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010; Dean, 2010).

In addition to personal variables related to the stigmatizer, personal variables related to the target may interact with stigmatizing characteristics to influence the degree of stigmatization. For instance, the interaction between stigmatizing characteristics has been seen between age and weight such that young obese women are evaluated significantly more negatively than old obese women (Hebl et al., 2008). When examining the influence of tattoos, there appear to be differences in the degree of stigmatization

based on gender such that women with tattoos are evaluated more negatively than men with tattoos. Women with tattoos have been evaluated as less healthy than women without tattoos yet similar findings do not translate for men with tattoos (Wohlrab et al., 2009).

The second antecedent to stigmatization in interactions noted by Hebl and Dovidio (2005) is experiential factors. These factors include past experience that people have had interacting with stigmatized individuals. As suggested by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), greater experience in interacting with stigmatized individuals leads to less discrimination against individuals belonging to that stigmatized group. In terms of stigmatizing tattooed individuals, younger individuals may be more accepting because they have more contact with individuals who have tattoos.

The third antecedent in the mixed social interactions framework is relational-situational factors. These are factors relating to the physical or social setting or situation. For instance, some research has shown that stigmatization is more likely to occur when the situation is ambiguous than when it is clear and straightforward (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000); and when social norms against stigmatization are less clear (Zitek & Hebl, 2007). In terms of tattooed employees, several situational-relational factors may play a role in the degree of stigmatization. One situational factor that influences stigmatization of tattooed employees is tattoo characteristics such as type, size, location, and number of tattoos. A recent study found that job applicants with a “cute” tattoo (e.g., dolphins) were not rated any lower in job suitability than applicants without a tattoo; however, applicants with a “tribal” tattoo were rated significantly lower than those without a tattoo or those with a “cute” tattoo (Burgess & Clark, 2010). Another study found that women with a

dragon tattoo were rated negatively on a greater number of dimensions than women with a dolphin tattoo (Resenhoeft et al., 2008). Other research consisting of a sample of college students enrolled in a business course revealed that although students believe tattoos can be attractive, they do not believe that extensive tattooing is attractive on either a man or a woman (Totten, Lipscomb, & Jones, 2009). Another study found that perceptions of negativity concerning tattooed women increased as the number of tattoos increased (Swami & Furnham, 2007). Taken together, these findings suggest that people's tolerance of tattooed individuals is in some ways dependent on tattoo characteristics.

### **Current Studies**

In the current dissertation, I will examine the impact that employee tattoos have on customers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. The controversy surrounding whether employees should be allowed to have visible tattoos in the workplace is one that is becoming more relevant to organizations due to the dramatic increase in working-aged individuals getting tattoos. Some organizations have policies requiring tattoos to be covered, some do not have such policies, and some have policies that vary depending on the type of tattoos. Differences in policies spans both across and within industries (Hennessey, 2013), and this variation may be the result of organizations struggling to find middle ground between employee satisfaction and the organizational image they wish to portray. To date, the research concerning the implications of this behavior for the workplace is relatively sparse. Although a few studies have examined the stigma of tattoos, much of this research fails to examine these reactions in an employment context. Previous research has not fully examined the potential mechanisms behind why tattoos on employees may lead to negative evaluations, and the impact that negative reactions

toward tattooed employees may have on the bottom line for organizations. That is, a comprehensive examination of the impact of tattoos in the workplace has yet to be conducted. As a result, there is not a clear understanding of how tattoos influence workplace decisions (including but not limited to managerial evaluations). In addition, the extent to which employees' tattoos have the potential to influence not only a) evaluations of the employees themselves but also b) the organizations for which they work and c) the products that they are selling or marketing. To address these concerns, two studies will be used to provide insight on the attitudes, intentions, and behaviors that customers have when interacting with tattooed employees.

The first study uses a scenario-based survey in an attempt to gauge attitudes and behavioral intentions that are formed about tattooed employees, products they are selling, and organizations they represent. This study also examines potential mechanisms for why consumers stigmatize tattooed employees. The second study is a field study that examines actual customer behavior when individuals are interacting with tattooed employees. The use of both survey and field studies allows for triangulation and greater external validity and applicability of results. It also allows for a direct examination of the extent to which attitudes about tattooed employees match behaviors toward these employees. Some stigma research suggests that negative attitudes do not always translate into negative behaviors. For instance, in a seminal study, LaPiere (1934) found that many establishment owners reported that they would not serve Chinese individuals; however, when Chinese individuals went to these establishments, they were served in all but two instances. However, in the present study, attitudes may be potent enough to reflect accurate representations of behavior due to the high controllability aspect of tattooing and



the low degree of social norm clarity related to not being negative toward people with tattoos (Zitek & Hebl, 2007).

From an organizational perspective, opinions of the customer or client are critical because they keep the organization thriving by purchasing products and services. Organizations work hard to create an image and culture, and to the extent that employee tattoos are misaligned with that image, organizations may suffer. It is possible that employee tattoos may help bolster an organization's image, particularly if the organization works to portray an image that aligns with stereotypes about tattoos (e.g., edgy, artistic). In any case, customers are often not provided individuating information (or extensive information that sets one apart from others) about employees when they walk into an organization; therefore, they rely on visual cues (e.g., appearance, mannerisms) to make evaluations about the employees as well as the products and organizations that they represent. Customers may be uncomfortable interacting with tattooed employees in some organizations, particularly if the image of tattoos is incongruent with one's stereotypes about how employees at a particular type of organization should present themselves. Thus, perceptions of incongruity due to stigma may lead to negative reactions to tattooed employees.

### **Stereotypical Perceptions About Employees as a Function of Tattoos**

Customers may perceive employees with visible tattoos negatively and subsequently form negative attitudes about these employees (which may lead to negative evaluations about the organization, intentions, and behaviors) because they associate negative stereotypes with the tattooed employees. Across studies that have examined perceptions of tattoos, there are some recurring themes concerning stereotypes about

tattooed individuals. Specifically, results have shown that tattooed (versus nontattooed) individuals are perceived more negatively on appearance-related characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, fashion sense), intelligence, and honesty; and are perceived as possessing more deviant behaviors such as criminality and rebelliousness (Dean, 2010; Degelman & Price, 2002; Resenhoeft et al., 2008; Swami & Furnham, 2007). When considering employment situations, there may be particular stereotypes that influence customers. In the current dissertation, I examine four negative stereotypes related to 1) *appearance*, 2) *conscientiousness*, 3) *professionalism*, and 4) *risky behavior* that may be triggered when a customer interacts with an employee. Specifically, I propose that the presence of a visible tattoo will trigger certain negative stereotypes, which in turn lead to negative attitudes and behaviors. I also will examine one relatively positive stereotype (*artistic traits*) and explore the extent to which this stereotype may counteract the previous four stereotypes.

Previous research consistently has shown that tattooed (versus nontattooed) individuals are perceived as less attractive (Degelman & Price, 2002; Resenhoeft et al., 2008; Swami & Furnham, 2007), and in some cases less healthy (Wohlrab et al., 2009). Furthermore, research shows employee appearance impacts customers' satisfaction and evaluations (Dean, 2011; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Shao et al., 2004; Yan et al., 2011), although most of this research examines clothing cues (e.g., professional attire). Given that tattoos are related to appearance and that employee appearance is often the first cue that a customer has about that employee unless a previous relationship has been established on the telephone, it is likely that tattoo visibility triggers negative stereotypes about the general appearance of the employee (Dean, 2010). In addition to attractiveness, stereotypes related to overall neatness and health such as general cleanliness and hygiene, may be considered when thinking about an employee's appearance (see Smith, 2007).

Evidence linking actual health risks with tattooing further deepens the negative associations of stereotypes with lack of hygiene (Carney, Dhalia, Aytaman, Tenner & Francois, 2013). Therefore, I predict:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Customers will report more negative (stereotypical) perceptions of employee *appearance* for employees with visible (versus nonvisible) tattoos.

Other negative stereotypes that customers may have about tattooed employees are that they are less capable of performing well and that they have poor judgment, and they are somewhat risky and dangerous individuals. Research shows that in general, people more readily to attribute others' behavior to dispositional traits as opposed to situational circumstances (Weiner, 1974), thus tattooing may be perceived as an indication of a character flaw. Some evidence of this has been seen as Forbes (2001) found that people with tattoos were perceived by those without tattoos as lower in conscientiousness; a personality trait that encompasses attributes such as dutifulness, dependability, responsibility, and deliberation (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Goldberg, 2005). This finding may be magnified when examining tattooed employees because conscientiousness is a trait that people expect from good employees. Thus, customers may align their perceptions of employees with negative stereotypes about the judgment and decision-making of tattooed employees. Therefore, I predict:

*Hypothesis 1b:* Customers will report more negative (stereotypical) perceptions of employee *conscientiousness* for employees with visible (versus nonvisible) tattoos.

Additionally, job applicants with visible tattoos have been perceived as less professional and less attractive for hiring than applicants without tattoos (Ruetzler et al.,

2012; Swanger, 2006), and customers have viewed visible tattoos on employees as inappropriate (Dean, 2011). Thus, customers are likely to form negative perceptions concerning tattooed employees' performance potential and characteristics that are associated with effective employees including professionalism. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 1c:* Customers will report more negative (stereotypical) perceptions of employee *professionalism* for employees with visible (versus nonvisible) tattoos.

Tattooed individuals have been perceived as possessing more deviant traits such as rebelliousness and engaging in more deviant behaviors such as promiscuity and criminal activity (Dean, 2010; Swami & Furnham, 2007). For customers who endorse these stereotypes, tattooed employees may be perceived as dangerous and risky not only in their personal lives but in their professional lives as well. That is, customers may believe that tattooed (versus nontattooed) employees possess risky behavior and engage in negative behaviors. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 1d:* Customers will report more negative (stereotypical) perceptions of employee *riskiness* for employees with visible (versus nonvisible) tattoos.

In line with stigma theory, I have proposed that visible tattoos on employees will trigger negative stereotypes for customers; however, it is possible that tattoos may also trigger some positive stereotypes. One of the top reasons individuals cite for getting tattoos is artistic expression (Wohlrab et al., 2007), and it is possible that in some cases other people view it as such. A visible tattoo may signal that an individual is artistic, creative, and has an appreciation for art. Some support for this was seen in a recent study that found that students rated a college professor with visible tattoos (versus one without tattoos) as more imaginative (Wiseman, 2010) and another sample rated tattooed (versus

nontattooed) individuals as more artistic (Dean, 2010). Given that stereotypes about creativity exists, it is possible that customers may perceive tattooed (versus nontattooed) employees as having more artistic traits although they may perceive these employees more negatively on other dimensions. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 1e:* Customers will report more positive (stereotypical) perceptions of employee *artistic traits* for employees with visible (versus nonvisible) tattoos.

### **Attitudes About Employees as a Function of Tattoos**

Research has shown that people have negative attitudes about individuals with tattoos (Swanger, 2006) and that employee appearance can impact customer satisfaction (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002); however, the effect of tattoos on customers' attitudes has yet to be empirically examined. Given that affective reactions are often automatic and crude responses (Dovidio et al., 2000), it is likely customers will not only have cognitive, perceptual responses, but affective attitudinal responses as well. Customers' attitudes about employees are often manifested through evaluations of the employee's performance and potential to help the customer with his or her needs. Based on the literature examining attitudes toward people with tattoos generally, I predict:

*Hypothesis 2a:* Customers will evaluate tattooed (versus nontattooed) employees with more negative attitudes.

### **Attitudes About Organizations as a Function of Having Tattooed Employees**

Likewise, just as employee dress has been shown to be influential in perceptions of organizations and brands (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Shao et al., 2004; Yan et al., 2011), visible tattoos on employees also may influence perceptions and evaluations of the organization that the employee represents. That is, since customers often view the employee as an extension of what the organization stands for and the organization as a

whole, they may feel that employees with tattoos represent more relaxed standards by the organization and hence perceive the organization in a poorer light. Even if the organization does not represent what may be conveyed through an employee's tattoos, its association with the employee may stigmatize the organization. Stigma by association (Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994) suggests that individuals without a stigmatizing characteristic may be evaluated negatively for simply associating or being in the presence of someone with a stigmatizing characteristic. This theory is based off of Goffman's (1963) description of the "courtesy stigma" or which refers to the negative outcomes that non-stigmatized individuals may receive when associating with stigmatized individuals. Research supporting this theory has shown that heterosexual men are denigrated more when interacting with homosexual man than when interacting with another heterosexual man (Neuberg et al., 1994) and that shoppers felt more stigmatization by cashiers when shopping with someone using low value coupons (Argo & Main, 2008). Research extending this theory has found that simply being in the proximity of someone with a stigmatizing characteristic, regardless of the relationship status (e.g., may be a stranger), can create a stigma by association effect (Hebl & Mannix, 2003; Pryor, Reeder, & Monroe, 2012). Underlying all previous studies on stigma by association is the implicit assumption that person perception effects of stigma relate to other persons. It is possible that these effects may transfer to inanimate objects such as organizations and products. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 2b:* Customers will evaluate an organization with more negative attitudes when an employee with tattoos (versus no tattoos) is working there.

### **Attitudes About Products Sold/Marketed by Tattooed Employees**

In addition to influencing attitudes about tattooed employees and the organizations for which they work, visible tattoos on employees may influence customers' perceptions of the value and quality of products. The influence of employees' stigmatizing factors on customers' evaluations of products or services has received little attention in the literature and none has focused on tattoos. The little research that has been done in this area has focused on factors such as attractiveness, employee demographic characteristics such as race and gender, and employee dress. For instance, Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman (1994) found that employees' adherence to the dress code (i.e., wearing a uniform apron versus not) influenced customers' perceptions of the quality of products; however, later findings from these researchers failed to reproduce these results (Baker et al., 2002). It is possible that the differences in results may be due to differences in customers' attributions of the incorrect dress as a signal of a negative dispositional trait that is difficult or impossible to correct in one instance versus a situational issue in the second study.

Research examining factors that are may be perceived as more inherent (versus situational) shows stronger evidence of an association between stigma characteristics and evaluations of products and services. For instance, research has shown that attractiveness affects customers' behavior toward products such that more attractive employees influence customers' purchasing behavior to a greater extent than less attractive employees (Ahearne, Gruen, & Jarvis, 1999). Additionally, one study found that customers reported better service from White (versus Black) and male (versus female) employees (Hekman et al., 2010).

To the extent that tattoos signal information about inherent, dispositional traits (as hypothesized previously), it is possible that tattooed employees may elicit similar reactions to products and services as those reactions garnered by employees with characteristics that may be perceived as stigmatizing (e.g., racial minorities, unattractiveness, poor dress). This relation may be seen because customers feel that the organization knowingly hired employees who have willingly self-stigmatized themselves. Customers may feel that an organization that has relaxed standards when it comes to employee appearance may perhaps use relaxed standards when it comes to product selection. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 2c:* Customers will evaluate products with more negative attitudes when being sold by employees with tattoos (versus no tattoos).

### **Intentions to Support the Organization**

In addition to harming perceptions and evaluations, it is possible that visible tattoos on employees also harm behavioral intentions toward the organization that employs tattooed individuals. In other stigma research, people have indicated negative intentions toward stigmatized persons, such as being less willing to hire heavy (versus non-heavy) job applicants (Hebl et al., 2008). From a customer perspective, little research has been done on the influence of others' stigma characteristics on intentions to patronize or support an organization, but research has suggested that customers' intentions to patronize an organization in the future are positively related to the service climate, which includes knowledgeable, helpful employees, at that organization (Salanova, Agut, & Peirò, 2005) and their perceptions of the way they were treated at that organization (King et al., 2006). These findings suggest that employees play some role in customer loyalty;



thus it is possible that employee appearance may influence customer loyalty. As such, I predict:

*Hypothesis 3:* Customers will report lower intentions to support the organization when approached by an employee with tattoos (versus no tattoos).

### **Stereotypes as a Mediator Between Tattoo Presence and Attitudes/Behavioral Intentions**

In an attempt to make a more comprehensive assessment of the influence of employee tattoos on customers' stereotypes, attitudes, and behavioral intentions, I posit that customers' stereotypes about tattooed employees serve as the mechanism for customers' subsequent negative attitudes and evaluations. In the stigma literature, the general link between stereotypes and attitudes is not entirely clear. Research has shown a positive correlation between the two constructs; however, an exact the nature of the relationship is not well understood (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). What is known is that stereotyping can happen without the occurrence of negative attitudes (prejudice; see Dovidio et al., 2000), and people are able to suppress negative attitudes when exposed to stereotype content (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003); however, stereotypes can affect attitudes (see Devine, 1989). In customer service settings, the link between stereotypes and attitudes about employees may be present because most people have preconceived stereotypes about tattoos and tattooed individuals, and these stereotypes are triggered when a stigma cue (i.e., a tattoo) is available. It is likely that customers' stereotypical perceptions of employee' tattoos will influence their attitudinal evaluations of those employees. Thus, the extent to which perceiving or interacting with a tattooed employee elicits negative stereotypes about these employees will play a large role in a

customer's attitudes about the employee's performance, the products, and the organization as a whole.

The negative stereotypes associated with tattooed individuals concerning appearance, conscientiousness, professionalism, and riskiness may lead customers to believe the tattooed employee is lacking the ability or skill to effectively help them with the product or service needed. That is, customers may perceive a disagreement between their perception of the ideal employee and the actual employee, which will in turn lead to negative attitudes toward the actual employee. This idea is grounded in Lack of Fit theory, which states that there is an incongruity between stereotypical attributes ascribed to one group versus another (Heilman, 1983). In this case, the incongruity lies between stereotypical attributes ascribed to tattooed employees (versus non-tattooed employees) and the stereotypical attributes of an ideal employee. This incongruity in turn leads to negative attitudes about the employee. In addition, the incongruity between customers' stereotypes about tattooed versus ideal employees may also serve as the link between employee tattoo presence and customers' attitudes about the organization and the products sold at the organization. Customers who perceive tattooed employees negatively are more likely to see these employees as a reflection of the organization that hired them, and are thus more likely to allow this factor to influence their overall reaction toward the organization. These customers also are more likely to believe that the organizations' poor judgment when selecting personnel may extend to their selection of products. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 4:* Customer perceptions of employee traits will mediate the relation between employee tattoo presence and evaluations of the employee (*H4a*), evaluations of the organization (*H4b*), and evaluations of products (*H4c*).

Individuals' reported intentions are often similar to their reported attitudes, and can in some ways be thought of as attitudes toward future events. Thus, if customers' perceptions influence the relationship between employee tattoo and attitudes (i.e., evaluations) of the organization, these perceptions are likely to influence customers' future intentions toward that organization. Therefore, I predict:

*Hypothesis 5:* Customer perceptions of employee traits will mediate the relation between employee tattoo presence and intentions to support the organization.

### **Factors Moderating Link Between Visible Tattoos and Stereotypes**

In today's society, the social construction surrounding the acceptability of tattoos appears to be variable. It is likely that individual customer characteristics as well as tattoo characteristics will influence the extent to which people stereotype tattooed employees. Specifically, tattooing appears to be more acceptable among younger people (Deal et al., 2010; Dean, 2010), with the prevalence of tattoos and the thought of getting a tattoo higher among those who are younger compared to older (Laumann & Derick, 2006). Based on Hebl and Dovidio's (2005) model of mixed social interactions, one's contact or experience with tattoos as well as the nature of the situation (in this case the type of tattoo) should influence the extent to which negative reactions toward tattooed employees are expressed. Thus, I predict:

*Hypothesis 6a:* Customer age will moderate relation between employee tattoo presence and stereotypes of employees such that older customers will have more negative

stereotypes about tattooed employees than younger customers, which will lead to more negative evaluations of tattooed employees.

*Hypothesis 6b:* Customer tattoo presence will moderate relation between employee tattoo presence and stereotypes of employees such that customers without tattoos will have more negative stereotypes about tattooed employees than customers with tattoos, which will lead to more negative evaluations of tattooed employees.

### **Behavior Toward Tattooed Employees**

In addition to harming attitudes and behavioral intentions, visible tattoos may impact customer behavior. Customers may be more prone to engage in more avoidance (versus approach) behaviors, such as cutting the interaction short and physically distancing oneself from a stigmatized employee. Indeed, some research has shown that people are more likely to display approach behaviors (e.g., moving closer) toward positive stimuli and avoidance behaviors (e.g., physical distance) toward negative stimuli (Chen & Bargh, 1999). In the literature, these behaviors often represent subtle or interpersonal discrimination, and have negative consequences for both the receiver and organizations (see Hebl et al., 2002; Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007; King et al., 2006). For instance, employees approached by shoppers who have a stigmatizing characteristic (e.g., obese, Black, Muslim) have been shown to behave more negatively toward these customers than customers without this stigma by interacting with the stigmatized customer less, being less friendly and less helpful (King & Ahmad, 2010; King et al., 2006; Ruggs, Williams, & Hebl, 2011), making stigmatized customers wait longer for service (Ainscough & Motely, 2000), and displaying more suspicious behaviors such as staring and following them through the store (Schreer, Smith, &

Thomas, 2009). Customers willingly decide to patronize organizations, but they may feel leery of interacting with tattooed employees and therefore display more avoidance versus approach behaviors. These behaviors can be displayed not only in subtle actions, but also in spending behavior, where purchasing represents an approach behavior to the organization and not purchasing represents an avoidance behavior.

Although there have been mixed results in the literature concerning the link between attitudes and behaviors, I believe that the self-imposition of the visible tattoo and the lack of social norms suggesting that negative behavior toward individuals with visible tattoos is inappropriate will lead customers to act in accordance with their attitudes and stereotypes about tattooed employees. Thus, I predict:

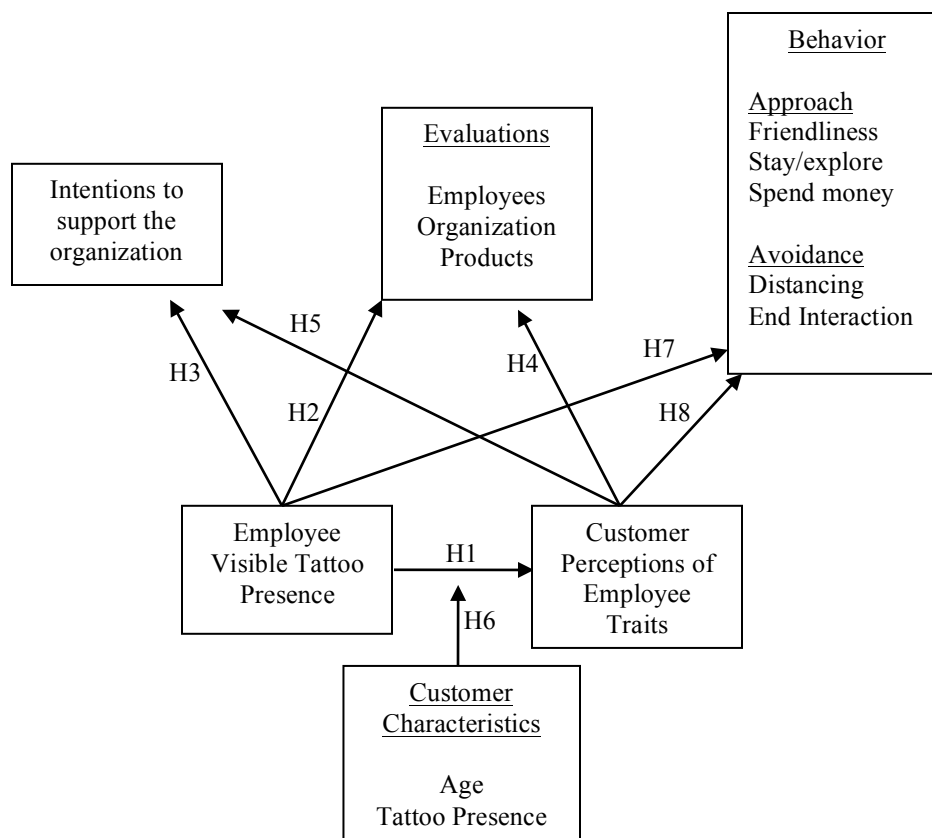
*Hypothesis 7:* Customers will engage in fewer purchasing behaviors (*H7a*), fewer approach behaviors (*H7b*), and more avoidance behaviors (*H7c*) when interacting with employees with tattoos (versus no tattoos).

To the extent that employee tattoos lead to an activation of stereotypes about tattooed employees, this can in turn influence behavior by perceivers. When people endorse stereotypes, they are more likely to act or treat others in accordance with these beliefs; thus, those endorsing negative stereotypes about tattooed employees will engage in fewer positive approach behaviors with these employees. Also, since employees are seen as a representative for the organization, endorsing negative stereotypes about employees may lead customers to decide to engage in avoidance behaviors toward the organization as well. Therefore, I predict:

*Hypothesis 8:* Customer perceptions of employee traits will mediate the relation between tattoo presence and customer behavior.

The differentially affects of tattoo stigma for men and women is not clear in the literature. Much of the small body of literature that examines tattoos as stigma focuses on the effect of tattoos for women (Resenhoft et al., 2008; Swami & Furnham, 2007), and research that does examine the stigma for both men and women tend to find more negative effects of tattoos for women than men (Wohlrab et al., 2009). For instance, in a study examining attitudes toward hiring food servers, hiring managers reported being less likely to hire an applicant with a visible tattoo regardless of gender (Brallier, Maguire, Smith, & Palm, 2011). Another study found that women with tattoos are viewed as less healthy than women without tattoos, although no differences health-related perceptions were seen for men (Wohlrab et al., 2009). Other studies have examined the effect of tattoos using only female stimuli (e.g., Resenhoft et al., 2008) or only male stimuli (e.g., Dean, 2010). Given the mixed findings for gender, the effect of gender will be examined; however, no formal hypotheses are given.

Figure 1 provides a summary of all hypothesized relationships.



*Figure 1.* Hypothesized relations between employee's visible tattoo presence and customers' reactions, evaluations, intentions, and behaviors.

## **Pretesting**

Tattoos come in many different sizes, shapes, and colors, and can be placed on almost any location on the body. The goal across two pretesting studies that are described below was to identify a set of neutral tattoos and neutral tattoo placements. Identifying such neutrality allows me to then hone in on reactions to those with tattoos, without such reactions being driven by the reactions to the type and placement of the tattoo itself. Although features of the tattoo (e.g., size, location, type, aesthetic appeal) likely influence reactions, I first wanted to examine relatively neutral tattoos in neutral positions. Hence, the use of two pilot studies allows me to standardize reactions to tattooed individuals in a very conservative way.

## **Pilot Study 1**

As research suggests that type of tattoo can influence perceptions of individuals with tattoos (Burgess & Clark, 2010; Resenhoef et al., 2008). The first pilot study examined different types of tattoos. In particular, participants were presented with and asked to respond with perceptions of Valence (versus negativity) and Content to 19 different tattoos.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Seventy people participated in this pilot study. Participants were recruited from a university in South Texas. Sixty-six percent ( $N = 46$ ) were female and 33% ( $N = 23$ ) were male and one person did not indicate gender. The average age of participants was 29 years old ( $M = 29.36$ ,  $SD = 9.10$ ). Twenty-seven percent ( $N = 19$ ) of the sample indicated having at least one tattoo, 71% ( $N = 50$ ) indicated not having any tattoos, and one person



did not respond to this question. Of those who indicated having tattoos, 53% ( $N = 10$ ) only had one tattoo, and 37% ( $N = 7$ ) had two or more (two people did not respond).

### **Measures and Procedure**

The tattoos examined were 1) a rose, 2) a Chinese symbol, 3) a rose encased with metal wire, 4) a tiger, 5) a scorpion, 6) the phrase “carpe diem” written in old English style lettering, 7) a tribal sun, 8) a she-devil, 9) a burning heart, 10) a butterfly, 11) a cross (black ink), 12) a yin yang symbol, 13) an eagle draped with an American flag, 14) an angel, 15) a clover, 16) a cross (black and blue ink), 17) a shooting star, 18) the Harley Davidson logo, and 19) a skull with wings.

Participants viewed each tattoo in an online survey and rated the extent to which they believed each tattoo was positive and offensive. Valence was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “1” = very negative to “5” very positive. Content was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “1” = very offensive to “5” = not offensive.

### **Results and Discussion**

An examination of means showed that participants rated 16 of the 19 tattoos as neutral in valence (neither positive nor negative) and 16 of the 19 tattoos as not neutral in content (i.e., not offensive). From the 19 tattoos, the she-devil ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) and skull ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) were rated as negative and the butterfly ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) was rated as positive. In terms of content, the she-devil ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ), burning heart ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), and skull ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) all were rated as offensive. The four tattoos that were not perceived as neutral in terms of valence and/or content were removed from further analyses.

Next, I examined gender differences in perceptions of valence and content. Independent-samples t-test indicated that no differences between male and female participants emerged in ratings made for the eight neutral tattoos. As seen in Table 1, gender differences emerged in perceptions of valence of seven tattoos and the perceptions of content of the one tattoo.

Based on this study, eight tattoos were identified as neutral. In addition to identifying neutral tattoos, I also wanted to identify places on the body where tattoo placement was viewed similarly for both male and female bearers. Thus, a second pilot study was conducted.

Table 1

*Gender Differences in Ratings of Tattoo Valence and Content*

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Rose Valence	1.895	67	.062	-.023	.893
Rose Content	.844	67	.401	-.296	.731
Chinese Valence	.756	67	.453	-.214	.475
Chinese Content	.000	67	1.000	-.455	.455
Thorn Rose Valence	**2.550	67	.013	.109	.891
Thorn Rose Content	1.605	67	.113	-.101	.927
Tiger Valence	***3.316	67	.001	.277	1.114
Tiger Content	*2.148	67	.035	.038	1.048
Scorpion Valence	*2.005	67	.049	.002	.781
Scorpion Content	1.881	67	.064	-.028	.941
Carpe Diem Valence	.783	66	.437	-.356	.814
Carpe Diem Content	.676	66	.502	-.421	.852
Sun Valence	1.475	67	.145	-.115	.767
Sun Content	.492	66	.624	-.404	.669
Cross Valence	*2.002	67	.049	.001	.912
Cross Content	.717	67	.476	-.311	.658
Yin Yang Valence	1.313	66	.194	-.159	.770
Yin Yang Content	.723	66	.473	-.312	.665
Eagle Valence	*2.095	64	.040	.026	1.110
Eagle Content	1.561	65	.123	-.111	.906
Angel Valence	.303	67	.763	-.365	.495
Angel Content	.037	66	.971	-.424	.439
Clover Valence	1.191	67	.238	-.162	.640
Clover Content	1.195	67	.236	-.175	.697
Blue Cross Valence	*1.969	65	.053	-.006	.912
Blue Cross Content	.508	64	.613	-.429	.721
Stars Valence	.445	65	.658	-.341	.537
Stars Content	-.313	65	.755	-.518	.378
Harley Valence	*2.321	66	.023	.058	.775
Harley Content	1.092	65	.279	-.202	.690

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## **Pilot Study 2**

This pilot study was designed to examine the favorability of the same tattoos on the same location on a man versus a woman. The goal of this study was to find body locations where there are no differences in favorability ratings for tattoos on women versus men. The body location had to be a place that was visible but not one that is particularly common more so for one gender versus the other. Previous research shows that women (versus) are more likely to get tattoos on their ankle, upper back, or shoulder, and men (versus women) are more likely to get tattoos on their arms, upper back, or shoulders (Laumann & Derick, 2006). Additionally, women (versus men) tend to get tattoos in concealable places, whereas men (versus women) are more likely to have at least one tattoo in a visible location (Laumann & Derick, 2006). Thus, the body locations examined in this study were the neck, forearm, and upper chest. It is highly likely that gender, the type of tattoo, and tattoo placement all play a role in stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors toward tattooed individuals. However, at this initial stage, I wanted to control for any variance due to gender, tattoo type, and tattoo placement in order to isolate more comprehensively the reactions to (or the mere presence of a tattoo on) tattooed employees regardless of the variance in tattoos.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Fifty-three people were recruited online to participate in this pilot study. Seventy-five percent ( $N = 40$ ) were female and 25% ( $N = 13$ ) were male. The average age of participants was 33 years old ( $M = 32.68$ ,  $SD = 8.78$ ). Forty percent ( $N = 21$ ) of the

sample indicated having at least one tattoo, whereas 60% ( $N = 32$ ) indicated not having any tattoos.

### **Measures and Procedure**

I examined the following seven tattoos: 1) a Chinese symbol, 2) a tiger, 3) a yin yang symbol, 4) a clover, 5) a tribal sun, 6) the phrase “carpe diem” written in old English style lettering, and 7) a shooting star. Participants rated the valence of each tattoo, all of which they viewed online, on a 5-point scale ranging from “1” = very negative to “5” very positive. Participants rated how favorable they believed each tattoo would be on three visible body locations: 1) the forearm, 2) the neck, and 3) the upper chest if it were on a woman. Participants then rated their perceptions of favorability for each tattoo on the same body locations on a man. Evaluations of body location favorability were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “1” = very negative to “5” very positive.

### **Results and Discussion**

To examine whether or not differences were seen in tattoo body location when on a man versus a woman, I conducted paired samples t-tests. Results showed significant differences in favorability ratings for four of the seven tattoos. The three tattoos where no significant differences were seen between men and women involved the yin yang, the sun, and the clover (see all t-test results depicted in Table 2). Additionally, the three tattoos were seen similarly (regardless of gender) when placed on the a) forearm, b) neck, and c) upper chest. The sum of these findings are important because they allow for an initially high degree of standardization and the removal of gender confounds in the tattoo type and placement used in the current dissertation.

Table 2

*Gender Differences in Tattoo Body Location*

		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Chinese Symbol on Forearm	***-3.767	52	.000	-.723	-.220
Pair 2	Chinese Symbol on Neck	-1.902	52	.063	-.504	.013
Pair 3	Chinese Symbol on Chest	***-4.152	51	.000	-.970	-.338
Pair 4	Tiger on Forearm	***-4.223	51	.000	-.908	-.323
Pair 5	Tiger on Neck	***-2.867	50	.006	-.400	-.070
Pair 6	Tiger on Chest	***-4.269	50	.000	-1.096	-.395
Pair 7	Yin Yang on Forearm	-1.095	51	.279	-.381	.112
Pair 8	Yin Yang on Neck	-0.444	52	.659	-.313	.199
Pair 9	Yin Yang on Chest	-1.542	51	.129	-.576	.076
Pair 10	Carpe Diem on Forearm	***-4.276	52	.000	-.804	-.290
Pair 11	Carpe Diem on Neck	***-2.976	52	.004	-.569	-.111
Pair 12	Carpe Diem on Chest	***-4.624	51	.000	-1.048	-.414
Pair 13	Sun on Forearm	-0.83	51	.411	-.395	.164
Pair 14	Sun on Neck	0.151	51	.881	-.236	.275
Pair 15	Sun on Chest	-1.07	50	.290	-.508	.155
Pair 16	Clover on Forearm	-0.98	52	.332	-.403	.138
Pair 17	Clover on Neck	0	52	1.000	-.242	.242
Pair 18	Clover on Chest	-0.697	51	.489	-.373	.181
Pair 19	Stars on Forearm	***2.950	51	.005	.147	.776
Pair 20	Stars on Neck	***3.764	49	.000	.252	.828
Pair 21	Stars on Chest	***2.104	51	.040	.016	.676

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Study 1: Stereotypes, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intentions

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 419 individuals participated in this study. Twenty-eight participants were missing fifteen percent or more of their data and were dropped from the analysis. Thus, I retained a final sample of 391 participants. The sample was relatively diverse, with participants ranging in age from 18-83 years old ( $M = 31$  years old,  $SD = 14.5$ ). Sixty percent of the sample was female ( $N = 223$ ) and 40% ( $N = 149$ ) was male (one person did not respond to this item). Thirty-eight percent ( $N = 141$ ) of the sample was White, 31% ( $N = 115$ ) Asian, 13% ( $N = 49$ ) Black, 13% ( $N = 50$ ) Hispanic, and 4% indicated Native American ( $N = 2$ ) or “Other” ( $N = 13$ ) for race (3 people did not respond to this item). The majority of the participants were employed at the time of this survey (66%;  $N = 246$ ).

Finally, 14% of participants had at least one tattoo ( $N = 53$ ), and 58% ( $N = 215$ ) indicated that they had relatives or close friends with visible tattoos. The number of tattoos the participants themselves had ranged from 1 to 9, with the majority of participants having either 1 ( $N = 25$ ) or 2 ( $N = 15$ ) tattoos. Most of tattooed participants got their first tattoo by the time they were 21 years old ( $N = 42$ ) with only three individuals indicating that they got their first tattoo when they were at least 30 years old. Of participants who did not have a tattoo, 53% indicated that they had considered getting one.

## Materials

**Confederate Employees.** Two male and two female research assistants were recruited to serve as confederate employees for this study. All employees were young, college-aged White individuals to control for any age and race effects that might result. Two employees (versus one) from each gender were used to control for effects that might be due to a given idiosyncratic feature of any one individual. Both female employees wore a short sleeve solid dark shirt and pants, and both male employees wore a short sleeve solid dark shirt and khaki pants.

**Tattoos.** Tattoo presence and absence was manipulated using temporary tattoos, which enabled the type and placement of the visible tattoo to be manipulated and standardized. Based on pilot testing, two tattoos (a sun and a yin yang) were rated as neutral (i.e., neither positive nor offensive) and thus, selected for this study. As mentioned previously, neutral tattoos were used to examine participants' attitudes thereby creating a conservative test but one selected because I did not want reactions to the tattoos to be about the image, size, or placement (which most likely do influence reactions), but rather about the tattoo itself. Tattoos were printed on inkjet tattoo paper and sealed with liquid adhesive. Based on pre-testing, tattoos were placed on the right forearm of each employee<sup>1</sup>.

**Marketing videos.** I created 12 different videos depicting an employee marketing a series of products to promote the launch of a fictitious company's website. Four confederates (two women and two men) were recruited to serve as employees for this

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<sup>1</sup> Although tattoos on the neck and upper chest were rated as neutral, I selected only one placement to keep the design and overall standardization of the study at a manageable size.



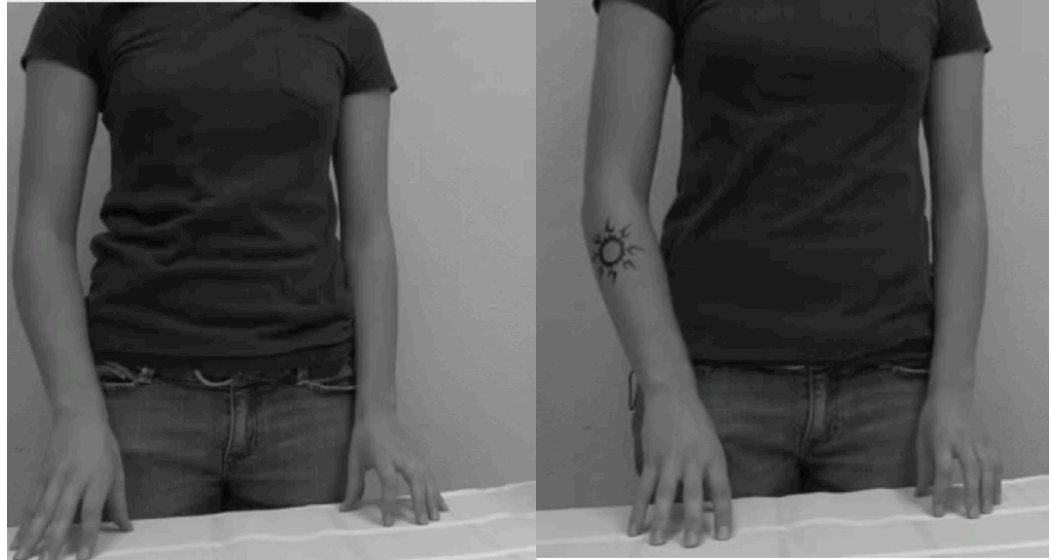
study. Each employee read a script (see Appendix A) and made a total of three videos: one without the presence of a tattoo, one with a visible sun tattoo, and one with a visible yin yang tattoo. Employees received the script prior to recording the videos and received a demonstration on how to present the products. A research assistant held a copy of the script off camera to provide cue cards for the employees during filming. All employees re-shot each manipulated condition until they were able to get through the entire script without flaws.

In each video, the employee stood behind a table with a computer sitting on the left side. First, the employee introduced himself/herself and provided some background information about the organization. Next, the employee introduced a new website that the company is launching. As this website is introduced, the employee points to the computer screen using his or her right arm (the arm with the tattoo manipulation). After discussing the website, the employee showed viewers five products the company carries. The products were presented in the same order in every video (alarm clock, coffee cup, planner, picture frame set, and carry-on bag). All products were placed to the right of the employee and out of the sight of the camera. Employees discussed the products one at a time and pointed to specific features of each product using their right arm.

The videos were shot over a series of two sessions using a Sony HVR-Z1U digital HD video camera at session 1 and a Canon EOS 7D digital SLR 18 mega pixel camera at session 2. The camera was positioned on a tripod and angled to capture only the table and the employee. Only the employee's torso was visible from the camera angle (see Figure 2 for an example of both tattooed and nontattooed exemplars that participants viewed). Two photography students (one per session) with experience filming documentaries shot

the videos. The second photographer viewed the first set of videos prior to filming to ensure that the lighting, camera angles, and setting were all the same.

After the videos were recorded, they were uploaded to a computer and edited using Final Cut Pro™. During the editing process, unnecessary pauses or dead space were cut from the videos and a short fade was added in between the introduction of each product to aid the transition between setting one product down and picking up the next product. Additionally, a still photograph of the fictitious bricks and mortar storefront company was added into the video when the employee provided background information about the company. This was done to add believability that the company actually existed in Philadelphia. After the editing process, all of the videos were checked to ensure that no differences due to taping session emerged. Then, the videos were uploaded to YouTube.com™, and embedded directly into the SurveyMonkey.com™ surveys. In YouTube.com™, the privacy setting for each video was set to “unlisted,” to ensure that only people with access to the link (via the embedded survey) could view that particular video and to ensure that each video did not appear in any related searches thereby revealing there was more than one condition.



*Figure 2.* Example Stimuli from Study 1.

**Products.** To maximize the possibility that differences in product evaluation were due to the tattoo manipulation and not to other factors such as the product type (e.g., specific to a particular audience) or interaction between products and tattoo (e.g., products that may elicit reactions to tattoos due to stereotypes specifically connected to the product), the employee marketed products rated as appealing to a wide audience, beneficial, and inoffensive. To ensure these products were viewed as such, I pre-tested: a) an alarm clock, b) a black cell phone case, c) a carry-on suitcase, d) a coffee cup, e) a day planner, f) a digital camera, g) a flashlight keychain, h) a plain t-shirt, i) a picture frame set, and j) a shoe rack. A sample of 21 college students evaluated each product by rating the extent to which the product is: a) beneficial, b) appealing to a wide variety of people regardless of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and/or race, c) positive, and d) negative. All ten products were generally considered positive, beneficial, and appealing (or neutral). Therefore, five items from this group were selected to use in the main study, which included: a) an alarm clock, b) a carry-on suitcase, d) a coffee cup, e) a day planner, and e) a picture frame set.

### **Procedure**

A total of 12 versions of a questionnaire were developed for this study. Each version had a different video manipulation embedded following the informed consent. The questionnaire consisted of five measures measuring participants' stereotypes about the employee, attitudes about the employee, the organization, and the products, and their behavioral intentions toward the organization. Additionally, participants were asked demographic information. These measures were consistent across all 12 versions. A

computerized randomizer was set up to connect all 12 versions to one common survey link and randomly generate a version once participants clicked on the common link.

Participants were recruited via email using a snowball technique. Each participant received a link to the study, which once selected, sent him or her to one of twelve randomly selected surveys. Participants first reviewed the informed consent page. Once they agreed to participate, participants watched a short two-minute marketing video online and then completed a questionnaire via SurveyMonkey™. Each participant viewed one employee marketing five products and then responded to the questionnaire.

### **Measures**

**Conscientiousness.** Ten items from McCrae and Costa's (1987) adjective rating scale instrument were used to assess stereotypes about employee conscientiousness. This scale, which has been previously validated, includes five adjective pairs with each pair having one positive item and one negative item. Participants rated the extent to which the employee seemed: a) careless, b) careful, c) reliable, d) undependable, e) lazy, f) hardworking, g) conscientious, h) negligent, i) self-disciplined, and k) weak willed. This scale has been used previously to evaluate others' perceptions of one's personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Forbes, 2001). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = "not at all" to 7 = "extremely"). An EFA revealed two factors for this measure, one with the positively worded traits and one with the negatively worded traits (even after reverse scoring). Given that it has been well established in the literature that these items all load on a single conscientiousness factor (Forbes, 2001; Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to further assess the factor structure of this measure. Specifically, three

models were examined: 1) a one factor model with all items loading on to a single Conscientiousness Scale, 2) a two-factor model identified by the initial EFA, and 3) a one factor model with correlated error variances for the positively and negatively worded traits to control method effects due to wording. Model 3 was developed based on previous research showing that a single factor solution may be optimal when method effects are accounted for by examining the correlation between residual covariances for similarly worded items (Marsh, 1996).

The CFAs were conducted using the Lavaan package in the R 2.15.2 program. The fit statistics used to analyze the data were root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and its 90% confidence interval (90% CI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), comparative fit index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). Multiple indices were examined because they provide different information (i.e., absolute fit, correction for parsimony), which allows for a more accurate evaluation of model fit. The criteria set by Hu and Bentler (1999) were used to indicate acceptable fit: RMSEA close to or below .06, SRMR close to or below .08, CFI and TLI close to .95 or greater.

The results for all three models can be seen in Table 3. Consistent with results from the EFA, the two-factor model fit the data better than the simple one-factor model. Model 3 also fit the data well, with similar fit to Model 2. Given that there was virtually similar fit between Model 2 and Model 3 and that previous research has used these items to represent a single factor, a composite score using all ten items was created with the negative items reversed scored ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

Table 3

*Fit Statistics for Examined Conscientiousness Models*

	<i>df</i>	$X^2$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Model 1	35	545.80***	.22 (.201-.234)	.16	.66	.57
Model 2	34	83.96***	.07 (.051-.088)	.04	.97	.96
Model 3	15	30.78**	.06 (.028-.088)	.02	.99	.97

*Note.* Values in parentheses in RMSEA column represent the 90% confidence interval.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Additional stereotype measures.** Whereas the measure of conscientiousness came from previously validated research (McCrae & Costa, 1987), measures concerning the next four stereotypical perceptions were developed directly for this study from a small body of research on the stigma of tattoos. That is, well-established validated measures concerning the additional four stereotypes that we wanted to assess have not yet been developed and validated. Hence, I adapted four sets of items from previous studies on the stereotypes associated with tattoos and tattooed individuals (Adams, 2009; Dean, 2010), more general stigmatized individuals in workplace settings (Hebl et al., 2008), and employee appearance factors (Baker et al., 2002).

To assess professionalism, participants rated the extent to which the employee seemed: a) professional, b) able to make good judgment, c) honest, d) competent, e) personable, f) persuasive, g) able to perform well and h) intelligent. Additionally, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the employee seemed: a) neat and clean, b) hygienic, and c) attractive, to assess appearance, the extent to which the employee seemed: a) risky b) irresponsible, c) dangerous, d) untrustworthy, and e) rebellious to assess riskiness, and the extent to which the employee seemed: a) artistic and b) creative to assess artistic traits. Participants rated the extent to which they felt the employee possessed each trait or ability on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = “not at all” to 7 = “extremely”).

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA; principal components) was conducted on all 18 items to determine the dimensionality of this scale. This EFA used Varimax rotation and specified that four factors were extracted. As seen in Table 4, the analysis revealed that all items loaded onto the factors that were predetermined, therefore, the



Table 4

*Factor Loadings for Stereotypical Perceptions Items*

	Factors			
	1	2	3	4
Factor 1 (alpha = .93) Professionalism				
The employee seems able to perform well.	<b>.87</b>	-.12	.17	.05
The employee seems able to make good judgments.	<b>.87</b>	-.02	.18	.00
The employee seems intelligent.	<b>.73</b>	-.06	.27	.27
The employee seems honest.	<b>.72</b>	-.21	.25	.27
The employee seems competent.	<b>.71</b>	-.18	.32	.19
The employee seems persuasive.	<b>.69</b>	-.09	.24	.31
The employee seems professional.	<b>.67</b>	-.20	.44	-.23
The employee seems personable/likeable.	<b>.63</b>	-.14	.43	.34
Factor 2 (alpha = .83) Risky Behavior				
The employee seems risky.	.01	<b>.86</b>	-.20	.02
The employee seems untrustworthy.	-.13	<b>.81</b>	-.04	-.18
The employee seems irresponsible.	-.07	<b>.77</b>	-.14	.02
The employee seems dangerous.	-.18	<b>.73</b>	.05	.21
The employee seems rebellious.	-.16	<b>.59</b>	-.10	.52
Factor 3 (alpha = .73) Appearance				
The employee seems attractive.	.33	-.02	<b>.75</b>	.23
The employee seems neat and clean.	.35	-.20	<b>.73</b>	-.08
The employee seems hygienic.	.38	-.14	<b>.63</b>	.19
Factor 4 (alpha = .79) Artistic Traits				
The employee seems artistic.	.38	.09	.16	<b>.74</b>
The employee seems creative.	.52	.03	.20	<b>.61</b>

*Note.* Principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation.

following composites were created: 1) Professionalism (Cronbach's alpha,  $\alpha = .93$ ), 2) Appearance ( $\alpha = .73$ ), Risky Behavior ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and Artistic Traits ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Attitudes about employees.** Participants' attitudes about employees were evaluated using six items adapted from previous research on evaluations of service providing employees (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002; Burke, Rupinski, Dunlap, & Davison, 1996; Liao & Chuang, 2004). Participants rated the extent to which the employee seemed: a) friendly, b) able to render assistance to customers when needed, c) able to explain the features of the product, d) able to explain benefits of the products, e) helpful, and f) attentive to customers. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = "do not agree", 4 = "somewhat agree", and 7 = "very strongly agree"). An EFA revealed a single factor with all items loading between .84 - .94; thus, a composite variable was created. Reliability analysis revealed good reliability,  $\alpha = .95$ .

**Customer evaluation of the organization.** Eight items from research on customers' evaluations of organizations' performance, credibility, and overall ability to succeed were adapted to measure evaluations about the organization (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Marin & Ruiz, 2007; Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987) Participants rated their level of agreement with the following items—this organization seems: a) trustworthy, b) risky (R), c) to offer high quality product, d) to offer good customer service, e) to have a good reputation, f) to have the potential to be profitable, g) attractive to customers, and h) likely to be in business five years from now. These items were scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = "do not agree" to 7 = "very strongly agree"). An EFA revealed one factor;

however, one item (“this organization seems risky (reverse scored) loaded poorly (.34). There a composite variable was created with seven items minus the low item,  $\alpha = .94$ .

**Customer evaluation of products.** Seven items from research on customer satisfaction with products (Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994) were used to measure product evaluation. Participants assessed the extent to which each of the products seemed: a) valuable, b) desirable, c) satisfying, d) worthwhile, e) helpful, f) popular, and g) high in quality. Participants rated a single product on all seven items before proceeding to rating the next item. For each questionnaire, participants rated the products in the order in which they were viewed. Items were scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = “not at all likely” to 7 = “extremely likely”). An EFA examining the factor structure for revealed six factors. The first five factors contained the seven items for each product (e.g., evaluations of alarm clock, evaluations of the picture frame set). The sixth factor contained items that loaded on both the factor corresponding to the correct product as well as an additional, uninterpretable factor. Reliability analyses for the first five factors revealed good reliability,  $\alpha = .95 - .97$ . Given that these products were pretested to all be evaluated similarly, the reliability of all product evaluations was examined. Reliability analysis showed good reliability,  $\alpha = .98$ , therefore a single composite variable of product evaluations was created.

**Customer intentions to support the organization.** Seven items adapted from previous research (Baker et al., 2002; King et al., 2006; Salanova et al., 2005) were used to measure customer intentions. Participants believed that the products they saw in the video would all be available on the company website soon. They rated their likelihood that they would a) visit the website to shop, b) spend a lot of money on products from the

website, c) spend a lot of time on the website, d) become a repeat shopper at the organization, e) purchase similar products to the ones marketed from another organization (R), f) recommend the organization to a friend, and g) direct people away from the organization (R). An EFA showed two factors, one containing six items, and the other containing 1 item that was reversed scored (“How likely is it that you would direct people away from this company?”). Additionally, one item in the first factor loaded poorly (I would purchase this item elsewhere, .50). Because a composite variable cannot be created with one item, the single item from factor two was dropped, as was the low loading item. A Behavioral Intentions Composite Measure was created with the five items that loaded highly on the first factor of the EFA. This measure had good reliability,  $\alpha = .94$ .

In addition, participants completed demographic information, which included specifying their gender, age, race, employment status, tattoo presence, visibility status of tattoo (if applicable), extent to which they had considered getting a tattoo, and number of their relatives or close friends who have tattoos.

## **Results**

This results section will be presented in four parts. First, I discuss the results of the manipulation checks for the tattoo stigma and employee gender. Second, I check for differences between the two female employees, two male employees, and two tattoo types. Third, I present the descriptive statistics for the independent variables, dependent variables, mediators, and participant characteristics used in data analysis. Fourth and finally, I present the results of hypotheses testing for hypotheses 1-6.

## Manipulation Checks

To begin, I examined the stigma manipulation. At the end of the questionnaire participants were asked whether the employee had a tattoo (yes, no, or I do not remember). A chi-square analysis showed that the stigma manipulation successfully created a distinction between participants who affirmed seeing a visible tattoo versus those who did not,  $\chi^2(2) = 323.72, p < .001$ . An examination of frequencies showed that 91% (186 out of 204) of participants in the tattoo condition correctly identified that the employee had a visible tattoo and 79% (147 out of 187) of participants in the control condition correctly identified that the employee did not have a visible tattoo. Ten participants failed the tattoo manipulation check with nine people saying the employee did not have a tattoo when there was a tattoo present, and one saying the employee did have a tattoo when they actually did not have one. Finally, 46 people (eight in the stigma condition and 38 in the control condition) did not remember whether or not the employee had a visible tattoo. All 56 of these individuals were removed<sup>2</sup>.

Next, I examined the employee gender manipulation. At the end of the questionnaire, participants identified the gender of the employee in the video they viewed (i.e., male, female, or I do not remember). A chi-square analysis showed that participants successfully distinguished between the male and female employees,  $\chi^2(2) = 349.35, p <$

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<sup>2</sup> I decided to remove participants who did not remember whether the employee had a tattoo because I believed it would result in the cleanest dataset. However, it is possible that the large number of individuals (N=38) in the control condition did not actually “fail” the manipulation check but were just confused by the question about a tattoo because they did not see one. Hence, I did conduct an analysis including these participants and no significant difference emerged with respect to any of the main study variables and findings. I choose to exclude them in the analyses that I report because I believe that the cleanest dataset involves those that passed all manipulations.

.001. An examination of frequencies showed that 97% (193 out of 199) of participants who viewed a female employee correctly identified the employee as female and 96% (185 out of 192) of participants who saw a male employee correctly identified the employee as male. Ten participants misidentified the employee's gender, with five identifying the employee as male after viewing a female employee and five identifying the employee as female after viewing a male employee. Three participants (two in the male condition and one in the female condition) did not remember the gender of the person in the video. Two participants failed both the tattoo manipulation and gender manipulation, with both failing to identify the tattoo when it was present and misidentifying the female employee as male. Therefore, the eight participants failed the gender manipulation checks. All individuals who failed the manipulation checks or did not remember the manipulation were dropped from analyses ( $N = 64$ ), leaving a total of  $N = 327$  participants.

### **Design and Employee Differences Check**

The design was a 2(tattoo present: yes or no) X 2(target gender: male or female). Within the tattoo present yes cell, participants viewed either a sun or a yin yang tattoo. Participants were distributed evenly across the four conditions. Additionally, as seen in Table 5, the number of participants who saw each employee and each type of tattoo was relatively even.

Table 5

*Distribution of Participants by Condition*

	No Tattoo	Sun Tattoo	Yin Yang Tattoo	Total <i>N</i>
Female Employee 1	37	23	25	85
Female Employee 2	36	28	19	83
Male Employee 1	42	27	15	84
Male Employee 2	29	27	19	75
Total <i>N</i>	144	105	78	327

Next, I examined the effect of tattoo type (i.e., the sun and yin yang) on the measures of stereotypical perceptions, attitudes and behavioral intentions using two MANOVAs (one for the five perception variables and one for the three attitude variables and behavioral intentions variable). As expected, no significant differences were seen for stereotypical perceptions,  $\lambda = .99$ ;  $F(5, 176) = .22$ ,  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ , or attitudes and intentions,  $\lambda = .99$ ;  $F(4, 177) = .68$ ,  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ , based on the type of visible tattoo presented. Therefore, data for the sun present and yin yang present was collapsed, and analyses were based on tattoo absence versus tattoo present.

Then, I checked for idiosyncratic differences between the two female employees and between the two male employees for the variables of interest in the current study. To do this, I conducted MANOVAs examining differences between the two female employees only and two male employees only. In addition to looking for employee effects, I also examined whether there were interaction effects with tattoo presence between the same-gender employees. Thus, I conducted 2(employees) X 2(tattoo: present, absent) MANOVAs on the stereotypical perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions measures (two for just the female employees and then two separate MANOVAs for just the male employees).

I examined differences between the female employees first. This analysis did not reveal significant differences between the two female employees on stereotypical perceptions,  $\lambda = .96$ ;  $F(5, 159) = 1.22$ ,  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .04$ , and there was no interaction between female employees and tattoo presence on stereotypical perceptions,  $\lambda = .98$ ;  $F(5, 159) = .61$ ,  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ . As predicted, the significant main effect for tattoo presence on stereotypical perceptions was seen,  $\lambda = .78$ ;  $F(5, 159) = 9.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .22$ ; female



employees with (versus without) tattoos were evaluated with more stereotypical perceptions. Next I checked for differences between the female employees in ratings on attitudes and intentions to support the organization measures. Again, there was no main effect between the two female employees,  $\lambda = .99$ ;  $F(4, 159) = .45, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .04$ , or interaction of female employees by tattoo presence,  $\lambda = .97$ ;  $F(4, 159) = .27, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .03$  for attitudes and intentions. A main effect of tattoo presence also was not seen,  $\lambda = .99$ ;  $F(4, 159) = .14, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .04$ .

Next, I examined differences between the two male employees. When testing for differences in stereotypical perceptions, the results showed no main effect of employees,  $\lambda = .95$ ;  $F(5, 151) = 1.67, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .05$ , tattoo presence,  $\lambda = .94$ ;  $F(5, 151) = 1.79, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .06$ , or interaction between employee and tattoo presence on stereotypical perceptions,  $\lambda = .94$ ;  $F(5, 151) = 2.06, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .06$ . Additionally, no significant main effect of employee,  $\lambda = .97$ ;  $F(4, 151) = 1.12, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .03$ , tattoo presence,  $\lambda = .98$ ;  $F(4, 151) = .69, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ , or the interaction between male employees and tattoo presence,  $\lambda = .98$ ;  $F(4, 151) = .61, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ , on attitudes and behavioral intentions. Based on these findings, I can conclude that there were no idiosyncrasies observed with one particular employee. Therefore, I collapse across data for the two female employees and across data for the two male employees to create a gender variable. I do not analyze further differences between the two female employees as well as differences between the two male employees.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Table 6 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the independent variables (i.e., tattoo presence and employee gender), the dependent

Table 6

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, Mediators, and Customer Characteristics*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Tattoo Presence	0.56	0.50	327	1						
2. Employee Gender	1.51	0.50	327	0.01	1					
3. Conscientiousness Perceptions	3.16	0.64	327	-0.05	0.03	1				
4. Professionalism Perceptions	4.10	1.23	327	-0.06	0.09	.50**	1			
5. Risky Behavior Perceptions	1.83	0.99	327	.13*	-.13*	.32**	-.28**	1		
6. Appearance Perceptions	3.71	1.32	327	-0.11*	.18**	.38**	.72**	-.27**	1	
7. Artistic Trait Perceptions	3.21	1.52	326	.21**	-0.00	.37**	.61**	0.08	.49**	1
8. Evaluations of Employee	4.07	1.41	327	0.01	0.05	.41**	.78**	-.20**	.63**	.54**
9. Evaluations of Organization	2.95	1.29	325	-0.02	0.09	.37**	.67**	-.19**	.51**	.44**
10. Intentions to Support	2.29	1.17	326	-0.04	0.05	.24**	.40**	-0.08	.30**	.30**
11. Evaluations of Products	3.32	1.18	327	-0.02	0.01	.39**	.58**	-.12*	.46**	.44**
12. Customer Gender	1.59	0.49	327	0.01	0.03	0.01	-0.04	0.03	-0.06	-0.05
13. Customer Age	30.76	13.95	326	0.08	0.06	-0.11	-0.09	-.11*	-0.10	-0.07
14. Customer Tattoo	1.86	0.35	326	0.05	.26**	0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.10	-0.04

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 6 Continued

*Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the independent variables, dependent variables, mediators, and participant characteristics*

	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Tattoo Presence							
2. Employee Gender							
3. Conscientiousness Perceptions							
4. Professionalism Perceptions							
5. Risky Behavior Perceptions							
6. Appearance Perceptions							
7. Artistic Trait Perceptions							
8. Evaluations of Employee	1						
9. Evaluations of Organization	.68**	1					
10. Intentions to Support	.42**	.65**	1				
11. Evaluations of Products	.60**	.68**	.55**	1			
12. Customer Gender	-0.04	0.06	0.10	0.04	1		
13. Customer Age	-.19**	-.20**	-0.03	-.26**	-0.00	1	
14. Customer Tattoo	-0.02	-0.01	-0.10	-0.05	0.02	0.09	1

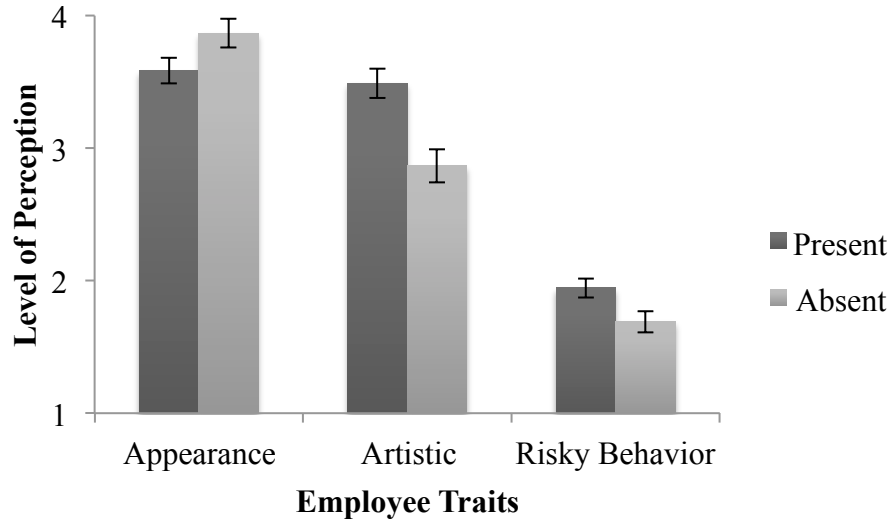
*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

variables (i.e., stereotypical perceptions, evaluations about the employee, organization, and products, and behavioral intentions), and customer characteristics (i.e., gender, age, tattoo presence, whether ever consider getting a tattoo, and number of friends who have tattoos). Tattoo presence did not relate to attitudes about the employee, organization, or products; however, the presence of a tattoo was positively related to perceptions that the employee possesses risky behavior, ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ), and artistic traits, ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ). Additionally, the presence of tattoo was negatively related to stereotypical perceptions about the employees' appearance, ( $r = -.11, p = .05$ ). Customers' perceptions about employee conscientiousness, artistic traits, professionalism, and appearance were positively related to attitudes about the employee, organization, products, and intentions to support the organization. Conversely, perceptions about risky behavior were negatively related to attitudes about the employee, ( $r = -.20, p < .001$ ), the organization, ( $r = -.19, p = .001$ ), and products ( $r = -.12, p < .05$ ). Employee gender was positively related to perceptions about appearance, ( $r = .18, p = .001$ ) and negatively related to risky behavior perceptions ( $r = -.13, p < .05$ ), suggesting that stereotypes about some of the employee traits and personality characteristics were more positive when the employee was female versus male. Finally, participant characteristics (such as gender, tattoo presence) did not impact stereotypical perceptions and attitudes with the exception of age. Participant age was negatively related to evaluations about the employee, organization, and products suggesting that older participants tended to give harsher evaluations.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis 1 stated that customers would have more negative perceptions of employee appearance (H1a), conscientiousness (H1b), professionalism (H1c), risky

behavior (H1d), and artistic traits (H1e) for employees with visible tattoos than employees without visible tattoos. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the effect of tattoo and employee gender on stereotypical perceptions of all of the perception variables. Using Wilks' multivariate criterion, results showed an overall main effect for tattoo presence,  $\lambda = .88$ ;  $F(5, 318) = 8.52, p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .12$ , and employee gender,  $\lambda = .94$ ;  $F(5, 318) = 4.15, p = .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .06$ . An overall interaction between tattoo presence and employee gender did not emerge,  $\lambda = .98$ ;  $F(5, 318) = 1.45, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ . As seen in Figure 3, an examination of the dependent variables showed a significant effect of tattoo presence for perceptions about Appearance,  $F(1, 322) = 3.82, p = .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ , such that tattooed employees ( $M = 3.59, SD = 1.74$ ) were perceived as having a less favorable appearance ( $M = 3.87, SD = 1.95$ ) than nontattooed employees. An effect of tattoo presence was also seen for Risky Behavior perceptions,  $F(1, 322) = 5.60, p < .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .02$ , such that tattooed employees were perceived as being riskier ( $M = 1.95, SD = 1.30$ ) than nontattooed employees ( $M = 1.69, SD = 1.46$ ). Finally, an effect of tattoo presence was also seen for perceptions about Artistic Traits,  $F(1, 322) = 14.11, p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .04$ , where tattooed employees ( $M = 3.49, SD = 2.00$ ) were perceived as more artistic than nontattooed employees ( $M = 2.87, SD = 2.17$ ). An effect of tattoo presence was not seen for stereotypical perceptions about Professionalism,  $F(1, 326) = 2.08, p > .05$ , or employee Conscientiousness,  $F(1, 326) = .75, p > .05$ . Overall, H1 was partially supported, with support seen for H1a, H1d, and H1e were supported but not for H1b and H1c.

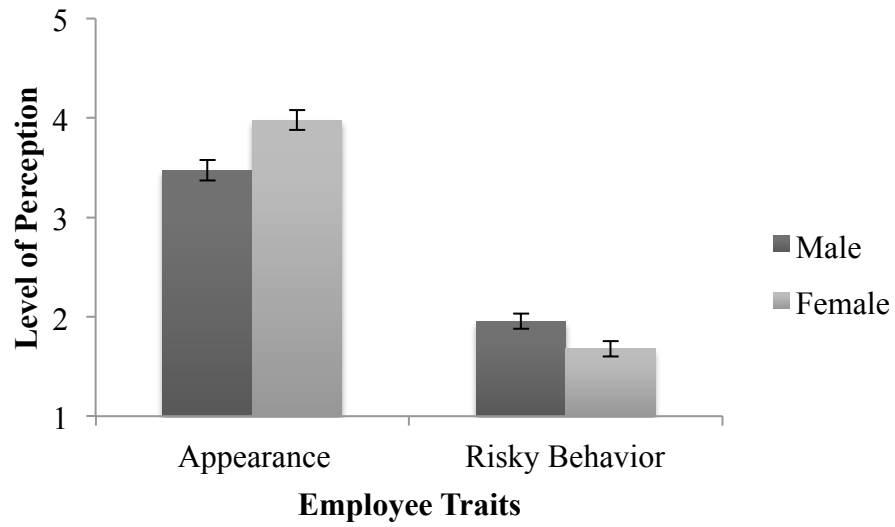


*Figure 3.* Stereotypical perceptions of employee traits as a function of tattoo presence.

An examination of employee gender showed significant main effects for stereotypical perceptions about Appearance,  $F(1, 322) = 12.14, p < .001; \eta^2 = .04$ , and Risky Behavior,  $F(1, 322) = 6.71, p = .01; \eta^2 = .02$ , but not for perceptions of Conscientiousness,  $F(1, 322) = .34, p > .05; \eta^2 < .001$ , Professionalism,  $F(1, 322) = 2.72, p > .05; \eta^2 < .01$ , or Artistic Traits,  $F(1, 322) = .05, p > .05; \eta^2 < .001$ . As seen in Figure 4, female employees were perceived as having a better appearance ( $M = 3.98, SD = 1.83$ ) and as being less risky ( $M = 1.68, SD = 1.37$ ) than male employees ( $M = 3.48, SD = 1.86$  and  $M = 1.96, SD = 1.39$  respectively).

Hypothesis 2 examined customers' attitudes toward the employee, organization, and products based on tattooed employees. Specifically, H2 proposed that customers who viewed a marketing video with a tattooed employee would evaluate employees (H2a), the organization (H2b), and products (H2c), more negatively than customers who viewed a video with a nontattooed employee. Results from a MANOVA examining evaluations of the employee, organization, and products (using the single composite), did not yield a significant effect of tattoo presence,  $\lambda = 1.00; F(3, 319) = .20, p > .05$ , employee gender,  $\lambda = .99; F(3, 319) = 1.56, p > .05$ , or the interaction of tattoo presence by employee gender,  $\lambda = 1.00; F(3, 319) = .17, p > .05$ . Thus, support was not seen for H2.

Hypothesis 3 stated that lower intentions to support the organization would be reported by customers who viewed a tattooed employee versus customers who viewed a nontattooed employee marketing for the organization. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) did not reveal a significant effect of tattoo presence,  $F(1, 322) = .50, p > .05$ , employee gender,  $F(1, 322) = .76, p > .05$ , or the interaction of tattoo presence by employee gender,  $F(1, 322) = .48, p > .05$ . Thus, H3 was not supported.



*Figure 4.* Stereotypical perceptions of employee traits as a function of employee gender.



Hypothesis 4 predicted that customers' stereotypical perceptions about employee traits would mediate the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations of the employee (*H4a*), organization (*H4b*), and organizational products (*H4c*). Bootstrapping was used to test for mediation. As indicated by the correlations and hypothesis testing for H1, the presence of a tattoo was related to perceptions about Artistic Traits, Appearance, and Risky Behavior; therefore, these three measures were used to examine mediation between the tattoo presence and customers' evaluations. Given that there are three potential mediators that are related to each other (with the exception of perceptions of Artistic Traits and Risky Behavior), a multiple mediator model was tested using the INDIRECT macro for SPSS developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Preacher and Hayes (2008) suggested multiple mediation analysis over several tests of simple mediation to not only account for collinearity, but also to reduce the likelihood of bias and allow for an examination of mediator strength in the presence of other mediators and relative to other mediators. The results produce path coefficients between the independent variable, mediators, and dependent variables, the total and direct effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable, and bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effects. For each bootstrap analysis, 1,000 resamples were used.

**Influence on employee evaluations.** Results for H4a indicated that, when examined as a set, perceptions about Artistic Traits, Appearance, and Risky Behavior did not mediate the effect of tattoo presence on evaluations of the employee. That is, the total and direct effects of tattoo presence on employee evaluations were not significant ( $B = .04, p > .05$  and  $B = .02, p > .05$ , respectively), and the total indirect effect (i.e., difference between the total and direct effects) was not significant,  $B = .02, p > .05$ . A

total indirect effect is not a prerequisite to examining specific indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008); therefore, the effect of each stereotype on the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations of the employee was examined.

The results showed that the presence of a tattoo led to higher endorsements of stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits ( $B = .63, p < .001$ ) and Risky Behavior ( $B = .26, p < .05$ ) and a lower endorsement of positive stereotypical perceptions about Appearance ( $B = -.28, p = .06$ ). Additionally, results showed that perceptions about Artistic Traits and Appearance led to higher employee evaluations ( $B = .31, p < .001$  and  $B = .47, p < .001$  respectively), and perceptions about Risky Behavior stereotypes led to lower employee evaluations ( $B = -.15, p = .01$ ). A significant indirect effect of tattoo presence through perceptions about Artistic Traits on employee evaluations was seen ( $B = .19, p < .001, CI: .09$  to  $.32$ ) such that the presence of a visible tattoo led to a higher endorsement of Artistic Traits stereotypes, which led to higher employee evaluations. Additionally, negative marginal effects of mediation were seen for perceptions about Appearance ( $B = -.13, p = .06, CI: -.27$  to  $-.00$ ) and Risky Behavior ( $B = -.04, p = .09, CI: -.12$  to  $-.01$ ). The presence of the tattoo led to a higher endorsement of negative Appearance stereotypes and Risky behavior, both of which led to lower employee evaluations. Examination of the pairwise contrasts of the indirect effects (C1, C2, and C3) shows that the specific indirect effect through Artistic Traits is larger than the specific indirect effect through Appearance and through Risky Behavior. The effect sizes and confidence intervals for the relations examined in H4a and the mediator contrasts can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

*Indirect Effects for Tattoo Presence through Stereotypical Perceptions on Evaluations of the Employees, the Organization, and the Products*

	N	Effect	SE	Z	BC 95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
<b>Evaluation of Employee</b>	326					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1948	.0588	3.3140	.0913	.3193
Appearance		-.1316	.0701	-1.8771	-.2853	-.0071
Risky Behavior		-.0395	.0229	-1.7215	-.1222	-.0047
TOTAL		.0237	.1147	.2067	-.2194	.2337
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.3264	.0650	5.0192	.1930	.4576
Artistic vs. Risky Behavior		.2343	.0655	3.5775	.1192	.3918
Appearance vs. Risky Behavior		-.0921	.0708	-1.3002	-.2480	.0380
<b>Evaluation of Organization</b>	324					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1582	.0517	3.0587	.0659	.1980
Appearance		-.0896	.0498	-1.8009	-.2039	-.0067
Risky Behavior		-.0388	.0234	-1.6594	-.1077	-.0048
TOTAL		.0298	.0908	-1.6594	-.1616	.1980
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.2478	.0505	4.9066	.1402	.3600
Artistic vs. Risky Behavior		.1970	.0594	3.3192	.0931	.3687
Appearance vs. Risky Behavior		-.0508	.0527	-.9637	-.1696	.0421
<b>Evaluation of Products</b>	326					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1519	.0491	3.0961	.0761	.2704
Appearance		-.0738	.0412	-1.7928	-.1796	-.0061
Risky Behavior		-.0175	.0172	-1.0171	-.0628	.0068
TOTAL		.0606	.0789	.7678	-.1007	.2131
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.2257	.0451	5.0096	.1390	.3289
Artistic vs. Risky Behavior		.1694	.0542	3.1234	.0823	.3044
Appearance vs. Risky Behavior		-.0564	.0447	-1.2596	-.1652	.0160

*Note.* Differences in sample size are due to dropped cases because of missing data.

**Influence on evaluations of organizations.** Next, the effect of stereotypes on the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations about the organization (H4b) were examined. The total and direct effects of tattoo presence on evaluations of the organization were  $B = -.03, p > .05$  and  $B = -.06, p > .05$ , respectively, and the total indirect effect was not significant,  $B = .03, p > .05$ . Thus, when considered together, stereotypes about Artistic Traits, Appearance, and Risky Behavior do not mediate the effect of tattoo presence on evaluations of the organization. The effect of tattoo presence on stereotypes remains the same as noted in the H4a results. Results showed that a higher endorsement of stereotypes about Artistic Traits and Appearance led to higher evaluations about the organization ( $B = .25, p < .001$  and  $B = .32, p < .001$  respectively) and higher endorsement of Risky Behavior stereotypes led to lower organization evaluations ( $B = -.16, p < .05$ ). The indirect effects are presented in Table 7. A significant indirect effect of tattoo presence on evaluations of the organization through Artistic Traits was seen ( $B = .16, p < .01$ , CI: .07 to .30) such that an employee's visible tattoo led to a greater endorsement of Artistic Traits, which led to higher organization evaluations. Additionally, a marginal effect of mediation was seen for stereotypical perceptions about Appearance ( $B = -.09, p = .07$ , CI: -.20 to .00) and Risky Behavior ( $B = -.04, p = .10$ , CI: -.10 to -.01), whereby the presence of the tattoo led to more negative stereotypical perceptions about Appearance and higher perceptions of Risky Behavior, both of which led to lower employee evaluations. Examination of the pairwise contrasts of the indirect effects (C1, C2, and C3) shows that the specific indirect effect through artistic traits is larger than the specific indirect effect through Appearance and through Risky Behavior.

**Influence on product evaluations.** Next, I tested for mediation between the

presence of a tattoo and product evaluations (H4c). This was tested both by using the composite of all products combined and also by more closely testing for mediation for each of the five product evaluations separately. The mediation patterns for the separate product evaluations were similar; therefore, the results for the combined product evaluations are presented here (the indirect effects for each individual analysis are presented in Appendix B). Again, the effect of tattoo presence on stereotypical perceptions remains the same as noted in H4a results. Results showed that a higher endorsement of stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits and Appearance led to higher evaluations of the products ( $B = .24, p < .001$  and  $B = .26, p < .001$  respectively), although here, a significant effect of stereotypical perceptions about Risky Behavior stereotypes on product evaluations ( $B = -.07, p > .05$ ) was not seen. The total and direct effects of tattoo presence on evaluations of the products were  $B = -.04, p > .05$  and  $B = -.10, p > .05$ , respectively, and the total indirect effect was not significant,  $B = .06, p > .05$ . These results suggest that the joint examination of stereotypes about Artistic Traits, Appearance, and Risky Behavior did not mediate the effect of tattoo presence on the evaluation of products; therefore, the specific indirect effects were examined for each mediator. The indirect effects and contrasts are presented in Table 7. A significant indirect effect of tattoo presence on product evaluations through artistic traits stereotypes was seen ( $B = .15, p < .01$ , CI: .07 to .27) such that an employee's visible tattoo led to higher endorsement of stereotypes about Artistic Traits, which in turn led to more positive product evaluations. Additionally, a marginal effect of mediation was observed for stereotypical perceptions of Appearance ( $B = -.07, p = .07$ , CI: -.18 to -.01), whereby the presence of the tattoo led to more negative stereotypical perceptions about

Appearance, which in turn led to lower employee evaluations. Examination of the pairwise contrasts of the indirect effects (C1, C2, and C3) shows that the specific indirect effect through Artistic Traits is larger than the specific indirect effect through Appearance and through Risky Behavior. Taken together, the findings from the multiple mediator analyses provide partial support for H4.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that customer stereotypes would mediate the relation between tattoo presence and intentions to support the organization. The same analysis procedure used to analyze H4 was used to analyze H5. Results showed that the total effect ( $B = -.09, p > .05$ ) and direct effect ( $B = -.14, p > .05$ ) of tattoo presence on intentions to support the organization were not significant. Results showed that stereotypes about Artistic Traits ( $B = .18, p < .001$ ) and Appearance ( $B = .15, p < .01$ ) led to greater intentions to support the organization. A significant effect of stereotypical perceptions of Risky Behavior on intentions to support the organization was not seen ( $B = -.05, p > .05$ ). The total indirect effect was not significant,  $B = .05, p > .05$ ; thus, the combination of stereotypes about Artistic Traits, Appearance, and Risky Behavior did not mediate the effect of tattoo presence on intentions to support the organization. Next, the indirect effects were examined (see Table 8). A significant indirect effect of tattoo presence on intentions to support the organization through Artistic Traits was seen ( $B = .11, p < .01, CI: .03$  to  $.23$ ) such that an employee's visible tattoo led to higher endorsement of stereotypical perceptions of Artistic Traits, which in turn led to greater intentions to support the organization. A marginal effect of mediation was seen for stereotypical perceptions about Appearance ( $B = -.04, p = .11, CI: -.12$  to  $-.00$ ), whereby the effect of having a tattoo led to more negative perceptions about employee

Table 8

*Indirect Effects for Tattoo Presence through Stereotypical Perceptions on Intentions to Support the Organization*

	<i>N</i>	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
<b>Intentions to Support</b>	325					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1095	.0424	2.5849	.0457	.1813
Appearance		-.0445	.0280	-1.5873	-.1241	-.0034
Risky Behavior		-.0128	.0181	-.7061	-.0714	.0114
TOTAL		.0522	.0613	.8506	-.0637	.1813
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.1540	.0364	4.2311	.0827	.2454
Artistic vs. Risky Behavior		.1223	.0489	2.5005	.0425	.2510
Appearance vs. Risky Behavior		-.0317	.0353	-.8972	-.1235	.0313

appearance, which in turn led to lower intentions to support the organization.

Stereotypical perceptions about Risky Behavior did not mediate the relation between tattoo presence and intentions to support the organization ( $B = -.01, p > .05, CI: -.06$  to  $.02$ ). The pairwise contrasts of the indirect effects (C1, C2, and C3) show that the indirect effect through stereotypical perceptions of Artistic Traits is larger than the specific indirect effects through stereotypical perceptions of Appearance and Risky Behavior. Overall, partial support was seen for H5.

Hypotheses 6 examined the influence of customer demographic characteristics on the mediated relations between tattoo presence and customers' evaluations. As with H4 and H5, stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits, Appearance, and Risky Behavior were examined; therefore, moderated mediation with multiple mediators was used to analyze the data. Although moderated mediation can be tested in several ways (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), I was particularly interested in the effects of first stage moderation, or the influence of moderator on the relation between the independent variable and mediators (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Thus, I examined the effects of customers' age and customers' tattoo presence on the relation between employee tattoo presence and stereotypes about the employee. Hypothesis 6 proposed that the relations between tattoo presence and stereotypes about the employee will be moderated by customer age (H6a) and customers' tattoo presence (H6b), which will in turn impact evaluations of the employee, the organization, and organizational products. The PROCESS macro for SPSS developed by Hayes (2012) was used to test the hypothesis. A total of 1,000 bootstrap samples were used for each test.

The influence of customer age on the mediated relations between employee tattoo



presence and evaluations of the employee was examined first. Results showed no evidence of moderation of the indirect effect of customer age on the relation between tattoo presence and stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits ( $B = .00, p > .05, CI: -.02 \text{ to } .02$ ), Appearance ( $B = .01, p > .05, CI: -.01 \text{ to } .03$ ), or Risky Behavior ( $B = -.00, p > .05, CI: -.02 \text{ to } .01$ ). Conditional indirect effects were examined at the 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the moderator (i.e., at ages 19, 20, 24, 39, and 55). The results, seen in Table 9, showed that the indirect effect of stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits on the relation between tattoo presence and employee evaluations was relatively similar across. However, differences were seen across age for the indirect effect of stereotypical perceptions about Appearance and Risky Behavior such that these perceptions appeared to particularly impact the relation between tattoo presence and employee evaluations for younger adults in the 50<sup>th</sup> age percentile and below. The direction of the effects of the relation between age and stereotypes and between stereotypes and evaluations suggests that younger (versus older) adults were more likely to use stereotypes about Appearance and Risky Behavior to evaluate tattooed employees, and these stereotypes resulted in lower evaluations.

Table 9

*Conditional Indirect Effects of Tattoo Presence on Evaluations of the Employee  
based on Customer Age*

	Age	Effect	SE	BC 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
<b>Mediator</b>					
Artistic Traits	19	.2024	.0764	.0785	.3913
Artistic Traits	20	.2028	.0742	.0797	.3931
Artistic Traits	24	.2044	.0672	.0983	.3812
Artistic Traits	39	.2104	.0715	.0959	.3851
Artistic Traits	55	.2168	.1149	.0166	.4756
Appearance	19	-.1779	.0902	-.3917	-.0290
Appearance	20	-.1731	.0871	-.3766	-.0271
Appearance	24	-.1541	.0767	-.3266	-.0198
Appearance	39	-.0829	.0799	-.2573	.0622
Appearance	55	-.0069	.1375	-.2952	.2339
Risky behavior	19	-.0586	.0321	-.1394	-.0071
Risky behavior	20	-.0573	.0312	-.1371	-.0071
Risky behavior	24	-.0520	.0282	-.1260	-.0086
Risky behavior	39	-.0321	.0256	-.1039	.0042
Risky behavior	55	-.0109	.0379	-.1027	.0610

*Note.* Ages represent the 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the data.

Next, the influence of customer age on the mediated relations between employee tattoo presence and evaluations of the organization was examined. Results for the effect of moderation on the relation between tattoo presence and stereotypical perceptions was the same as presented above as the path coefficients were identical. Results for the conditional indirect effects, seen in Table 10, followed the same pattern as those for employee evaluations. That is, the indirect effect of stereotypical perceptions of Artistic Traits on the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations of the organization was relatively similar across age. However, differences were seen across age for the indirect effect of stereotypical perceptions about Appearance and Risky Behavior. These perceptions appeared to particularly impact the relation between tattoo presence and employee evaluations for younger adults in the 50<sup>th</sup> age percentile and below. The direction of the effects for the relation between age and stereotypes and between stereotypes and evaluations suggest that younger (versus older) adults were more likely to use stereotypical perceptions about Appearance and Risky Behavior to evaluate tattooed employees, and these perceptions resulted in lower evaluations.

Table 10

*Conditional Indirect Effects of Tattoo Presence on Evaluations of the Organization based on Customer Age*

	Age	Effect	SE	BC 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
<b>Mediator</b>					
Artistic Traits	19	.1631	.0652	.0600	.3334
Artistic Traits	20	.1631	.0638	.0622	.3273
Artistic Traits	24	.1631	.0592	.0682	.3087
Artistic Traits	39	.1631	.0640	.0578	.3207
Artistic Traits	55	.1631	.0947	.0053	.3869
Appearance	19	-.1240	.0660	-.2641	-.0073
Appearance	20	-.1206	.0639	-.2540	-.0075
Appearance	24	-.1071	.0569	-.2311	-.0093
Appearance	39	-.0563	.0594	-.1885	.0490
Appearance	55	-.0056	.0962	-.1956	.1904
Risky behavior	19	-.0558	.0305	-.1475	-.0142
Risky behavior	20	-.0544	.0296	-.1460	-.0148
Risky behavior	24	-.0490	.0264	-.1279	-.0128
Risky behavior	39	-.0286	.0236	-.0917	.0054
Risky behavior	55	-.0083	.0353	-.0885	.0674

*Note.* Ages represent the 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the data.

Finally, I examined the impact of age on the relation between tattoo presence and product evaluations. The results of these analyses were similar across each product; therefore, I examined the effect using the combined product evaluation variable. As seen with evaluations of the employee and organization, the conditional indirect effects, seen in Table 11, showed relatively similar effects of stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits on the relation of tattoo presence and product evaluation across age. The effect of stereotypical perceptions of Appearance on the relation between tattoo presence on product evaluations was only evident for customers in the 50<sup>th</sup> age percentile and below across all products. Finally, there was no evidence of differences in the effect of stereotypical perceptions of Risky Behavior on evaluations of any products.

Table 11

*Conditional Indirect Effects of Tattoo Presence on Evaluations of Products based on Customer Age*

	Age	Effect	SE	BC 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
<b>Mediator</b>					
Artistic Traits	19	.1589	.0597	.0610	.3051
Artistic Traits	20	.1593	.0582	.0634	.3007
Artistic Traits	24	.1605	.0531	.0741	.2923
Artistic Traits	39	.1652	.0581	.0670	.3063
Artistic Traits	55	.1702	.0927	.0070	.3774
Appearance	19	-.0986	.0538	-.2384	-.0166
Appearance	20	-.0959	.0520	-.2301	-.0163
Appearance	24	-.0854	.0460	-.2017	-.0116
Appearance	39	-.0459	.0459	-.1521	.0339
Appearance	55	-.0038	.0772	-.1655	.1413
Risky behavior	19	-.0274	.0237	-.0941	.0068
Risky behavior	20	-.0268	.0232	-.0912	.0067
Risky behavior	24	-.0243	.0211	-.0827	.0066
Risky behavior	39	-.0150	.0175	-.0755	.0060
Risky behavior	55	-.0051	.0224	-.0806	.0245

*Note.* Ages represent the 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the data.

Overall, the age of the customer did not appear to play much of a role in influencing stereotypes about an employee with a visible tattoo. When age effects were seen, the findings showed that, contrary to the hypothesis, it was younger customers' stereotypical perceptions about Appearance and Risky Behavior that influenced the negative relation between tattoo presence and evaluations. Thus, H6a was not supported.

The same analysis procedure was used to examine H6b. First, the presence of moderated mediation effects were examined for the relation between tattoo presence and employee evaluations. Results showed no significant interaction effects between customers' tattoo presence and employee tattoo presence on stereotypical perceptions about Artistic Traits ( $B = -.14, p > .05, CI: -1.07 \text{ to } .79$ ), Appearance ( $B = .43, p > .05, CI: -.39 \text{ to } 1.26$ ), or Risky Behavior ( $B = -.38, p > .05, CI: -1.00, .23$ ). Results for the conditional indirect effects for evaluations of the employee, organization, and product are shown in Table 12. Conditional indirect effects showed that the effect of stereotypical perceptions (all three) only impacted the relation between employee tattoo presence and evaluations of the employee for customers who did not have tattoos.

Next, I examined the moderated mediation effects for evaluations of the organization and products. The lack of effect of customers' tattoo presence on the relation between tattoo presence and stereotypes has been established. When examining organization evaluations, results for the conditional indirect effects showed that the effect of perceptions (all three) only impacted the relation between employee tattoo presence and evaluations of the organization for customers who did not have tattoos. Similarly, when examining product evaluations, the conditional indirect effects showed that the effect of customers' tattoo presence impacted the influence of stereotypical perceptions

Table 12

*Conditional Indirect Effects of Tattoo Presence on Evaluations of the Employee, Organization, and Products based on Customers' Tattoo Presence*

	Customer Tattoo	Effect	SE	BC 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
<b>Employee Evaluation</b>					
Artistic Traits	No	.2073	.0677	.1005	.3839
Artistic Traits	Yes	.1633	.1481	-.1159	.4575
Appearance	No	-.1672	.0746	-.3272	-.0340
Appearance	Yes	.0337	.2152	-.3641	.4726
Risky behavior	No	-.0488	.0275	-.1228	-.0087
Risky behavior	Yes	.0108	.0558	-.0937	.1516
<b>Organization Evaluation</b>					
Artistic Traits	No	.1681	.0569	.0689	.3263
Artistic Traits	Yes	.1335	.1249	-.0879	.4065
Appearance	No	-.1145	.0562	-.2399	-.0164
Appearance	Yes	.0231	.1539	-.2670	.3591
Risky behavior	No	-.0481	.0258	-.1254	-.0120
Risky behavior	Yes	.0110	.0563	-.0944	.1445
<b>Product Evaluation</b>					
Artistic Traits	No	.1623	.0533	.0770	.2999
Artistic Traits	Yes	.1279	.1190	-.0897	.3935
Appearance	No	-.0934	.0452	-.1974	-.0219
Appearance	Yes	.0188	.1222	-.2022	.2732
Risky behavior	No	-.0217	.0208	-.0791	.0084
Risky behavior	Yes	.0048	.0299	-.0399	.0907



of Artistic Traits and Appearance on the relation between tattoo presence and product evaluations for customers who did not have a tattoo. Customers' tattoo presence did not effect of the influence of their stereotypical perceptions about Risky Behavior on the relation between employee tattoo presence and product evaluations.

Although the presence of a customers' tattoo did not appear to moderate the relation between tattoo presence and customers' stereotypes, it does appear that when faced with an employee with a visible tattoo, customers without tattoos (versus customers with tattoos) were more likely to use their stereotypes of employee traits to influence their evaluations about that employee, the organization, and the products that were marketed. Thus, partial support for H6b was seen.

### **Discussion**

Study 1 sought to investigate the impact of visible tattoos on consumer reactions. Based on stigma and person perception theories, it was hypothesized that the presence of a visible tattoo on an employee would lead to negative stereotypes (i.e., perceptions) about, attitudes (i.e., evaluations) toward, and behavioral intentions toward the employee. I also hypothesized that the presence of a visible tattoo would lead to more negative attitudes about the organization and products. In addition to direct effects, I examined the particular structure of the stereotype-attitude relationship and hypothesized that the effect of tattoo presence on evaluations would be mediated through customers' stereotypical perceptions. Finally, I examined the influence of customer age and tattoo presence on the effect that tattoo presence had on their perceptions of the employee.

## **Stereotype Activation**

The results of the current study show that the presence of a visible tattoo led to stereotype activation, or thoughts about and accessibility of stereotypical information. The findings from the current study show that when an employee tattoo is visible, customers perceive that the employee was more artistic as well as more risky and dangerous, and less neat and attractive. These findings suggest that the presence of tattoos activates stereotypes regarding appearance-related judgments as well as deeper-level judgments about employee traits (e.g., risky behavior, artistic traits), which in turn impact evaluations of customer service skills (e.g., friendliness, listening skills) and abilities (e.g., ability to help customers).

Tattoo presence helped to elicit both positive and negative stereotypes about the employee. These stereotypes were in line with stereotypes about tattooed individuals from previous research (e.g., Dean, 2010; Resenhoeft et al., 2008), and are consistent with research showing that stereotype content is often mixed (Fiske, Cuddy, Xu, & Glick, 2002). Fiske and colleagues (2002) developed a stereotype content model to study mixed stereotypes along the dimensions of warmth and competence and findings consistently show that many stigmatized groups are often viewed as high on one dimension and low on the other (e.g., elderly individuals are seen as high on warmth and low on competence). The findings in the current study do not map on to the warmth-competence domains; however, they do support the notion that negative stereotypes in one dimension can work in tandem with positive stereotypes in another dimension and may impact individuals with the stigmatized characteristic differently across different contexts. In

fact, in the current study, the findings show, somewhat surprisingly, that positive stereotypes have a stronger situational influence than negative stereotypes.

It is important to note that although the presence of a tattoo led to an increase in activation of some negative stereotypes, it did not lead to a denigration of the perception of (or greater negative stereotyping about) Conscientiousness or Professionalism. This finding may be the result of the situational context such that a marketing video for relatively common household products was not strong enough to impact perceptions related to overall employee professionalism or conscientiousness. Previous literature has shown that visible tattoos are perceived as an inappropriate, unprofessional and undesirable attribute in employment (Dean, 2011; Ruetzler et al., 2012); however, this research has been from the perspective of the hiring manager and customers in an industry that may be seen as more conservative (i.e., accounting). This result also may be due to the fact that customers were given some information about the employee's tenure with the organization. In the marketing video, the employee always stated that he or she had been working for the organization for one year. Customers may have used this information to surmount that the employee must be somewhat professional and conscientious in order to maintain a job with the organization.

### **Stereotype Application**

One of my central hypotheses, that tattoos would directly influence ratings of tattooed employees, was not borne out. That is, the predicted main effect of tattoo presence on employee evaluations did not emerge in the current study. This is somewhat surprising given that the literature would suggest that the presence of stigma should evoke an affective (often even automatic) reaction toward bearers (Crocker et al., 1998;

Dovidio et al., 2000). There are a few potential explanations for this lack of significance. First, tattoos simply may not be as stigmatizing as they once were. Due to the presence of tattoos in mainstream society and the positive valence that is associated with many of the bearers (e.g., professional athletes, celebrities; see Levy, 2008), the sight of a visible tattoo alone may not be enough to evoke a direct, negative attitudinal reaction. Second, the types of tattoos used in this study were ones that were perceived as neutral (i.e., neither positive, negative, nor offensive). The selection of neutral tattoos was intentional to test the nature of having a tattoo void of any additional information that the tattoo may convey. However, the lack of valence may have greatly reduced or even removed the association with stigma, making the test so conservative that direct effects simply did not manifest. Third, the current study assuredly was a conservative test using neutral products that have large appeal. In the context of deciding whether to purchase products that are commonplace and widely used, people may not have cared so much about whether the employees had a visible tattoo. The items are basic and needed – that an employee with a tattoo is selling them may not influence such common, neutral purchases (i.e., a coffee cup is just a coffee cup, and not likely to be influenced greatly by those selling it). Fourth, the relatively low means for evaluations of the organization and intentions to support the organization (see Table 6) suggest that customers may have been generally apprehensive about the employees and organizations altogether. Start-ups and new websites may be met with customer apprehension and because of this, the presence or absence of a tattoo may not have had as much of an impact as it would if the store were more established.

Although direct relations between tattoo presence and evaluations of the employee were not seen, the results did show that the presence of the tattoo impacted

customers' activation of stereotypes about traits the employee possessed, which in turn impacted their evaluations of that employee. Thus, it appears that stereotype activation led to stereotype application, or the use of stereotypes to make judgments in line with the predictions of Gilbert and Hixon (1991). The current findings provide support for a stereotype-attitude link when examining the impact of tattoos in workplace settings, and the findings suggest that customers may use activated stereotypes to help determine how to interact with employees about whom they have no previous knowledge.

The impact of the relation between tattoo presence and employee evaluations is particularly interesting from a marketing perspective. It has long been established in the literature that the speaker in advertisements can be used to persuade consumers to buy products (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The current findings suggest that customers may form opinions and make deep-level attributions about employees who work at an organization simply from viewing of them within the context of advertisements. This study shows that when negative stereotypes are activated, the tattooed individual is viewed somewhat negatively. But when positive stereotypes are activated, the tattooed individual is viewed favorably. Hence, marketing researchers would do well to consider that there may be ambivalent stereotypes about tattooed people and the way that they can best capitalize on these, from a marketing perspective, might be to focus or activate the positive stereotypes. Furthermore, there are some organizations where tattooed employees might activate more negative stereotypes (e.g., financial, corporate, health sectors) than others (e.g., art, technology sectors). Thus, organizations should consider the influence that marketing has not only on the products but also on perceptions about the employees.

The impact of stereotypes about employee appearance and traits also extended to the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations of the organization and the products. In both instances, having (versus not having) tattoos led to a higher activation of stereotypes about Artistic Traits, which in turn led to more positive evaluations. However, having (versus not having) tattoos led to less favorable perceptions of Appearance and increased perceptions of Risky Behavior, both of which in turn led to less favorable organization and product evaluations. Although customers were having both positive and negative reactions to the tattoos, the effect of perceptions about Artistic traits on evaluations was stronger than the effects of Appearance and Risky Behavior on evaluations, suggesting that tattoos at least in the present study can have some very positive, and not just negative, effects that directly impact views of the organization and its products.

Not surprisingly, the effect of tattoo presence on perceptions influenced customers' intentions to support the organization in the same fashion that it influenced evaluations about the employee, organization, and products. This finding suggests that customers' cognitive and attitudinal reactions extend not only to their attitudes but also to their behavioral intentions. Such findings are critically important because behavioral intentions have been so closely linked to behavioral patterns (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and suggest behavioral congruence. These findings are in line with research showing how employees' interaction with customers can influence customers' intentions to patronize the organization in the future (King et al., 2006). Although customers did not actually interact with employees in the marketing video, the current study illustrates the role that employees can have on influencing bottom line results for organizations. To the extent

that an individual has positive attitudes about the employee, they are more likely to express willingness to support the organization. Hence, it is important for organizations to understand the full impact of front line employees.

### **Individual Differences**

The results reveal that characteristics about customers are influential on the relation between tattoo presence and the activation of stereotypes. Specifically, the effect of stereotypes on the relation between employee tattoo presence and evaluations about the employees, organizations, and products were stronger for customers who did (versus did not) have a tattoo/s. These findings suggest that customers who did not have tattoos relied more on stereotype activation to make decisions than did customers belonging in the stereotyped group. This is in line with research on person perception and intergroup relations (for example see Park & Rothbart, 1982), showing that out-group members are more likely to stereotype and use stereotypical information than in-group members. One of the implications of such research is that one may be able to garner a lot about reactions to employee characteristics by examining whether customers also possess such characteristics. Recent research has shown that such matched characteristics in the employee/customer relation led to more optimal organizational outcomes. In the current research, those who had (versus did not have) a tattoo were less likely to use activated stereotypes to make their evaluations (Avery, McKay, Tondidandel, Volpone, & Morris, 2012). Organizations might be able to use as a proxy, then, the characteristics of their customer base when making decisions about whether or not to allow tattoos or to make employees cover their tattoos. Although this proxy may not provide direct measure of how acceptable a certain employee type of characteristic is, it does provide a measure of

how influential that characteristic may be in customers' decision making. It would be helpful for future researchers to continue clarifying how the presence of tattoos on oneself influences the evaluations of others with tattoos and related judgments.

Contrary to hypotheses, older customers did not have higher stereotype activation than did younger customers, nor were they more likely to use negative stereotypical information to make evaluations. In fact, in cases where age differences were seen, it was younger customers who used stereotypical information about Appearance and Risky Behavior to make harsher evaluations about the employee and organization. Although unanticipated, this result may be due to the fact that younger adults place more emphasis on appearance related cues than older adults. For instance, younger adults report that physical appearance is more important than older adults (Mellor, Fuller-Tyskiewicz, McCabe, & Ricciardelli, 2010), and ratings of importance of physical appearance decreases as individuals become older (Tiggemann, 2004). Another possibility is that younger customers are more likely than older customers to be on the job market, about to go on the job market, or have recently been on the job market and thus, they may have a heightened sense of what they perceive as appropriate for the workforce. Additionally, the employees in the video were young and may potentially be seen as competition for future jobs for younger customers versus older customers. This unconscious introduction of threat may have served as a trigger for younger customers to view the tattoo as stigmatizing. Thus, younger customers may have used negative stereotypes to evaluate the young tattooed marketer as a way to distinguish the stigmatized employee from their ingroup. Self-enhancement has been shown to increase the use of negative stereotyping (Fein & Spencer, 1997), and in this case younger customers may see the denigration of



the young tattooed employee as a way to increase positive feelings about their own selves. Older (versus younger) customers may be more established in their place of employment and less likely to consider working in a marketing job such as the one presented in the study. Thus, they may have been less likely to view the employee as a threat.

Alternatively, the age differences in the use of negative stereotypes may be the result of age-related differences in experiences with people who have tattoos and differences in negativity bias, or attention to negative versus positive information. Previous experience or contact with stigmatized individuals can serve as an antecedent to stigma (Hebl & Dovidio, 2005), and older (versus younger) customers may have more experiences with working individuals from a wide variety of industries who have tattoos (e.g., have more friends or coworkers with tattoos). These experiences may have influenced the extent to which older customers applied negative stereotypes. Additionally, research has shown that response to negative images decreases with age (Kisley, Wood, & Burrows, 2007). This may be due in part to a positivity effect in attention for older adults, whereby they (versus younger adults) attend more to positive versus negative stimuli and have a greater ability to regulate emotions toward negative images (Charles, Mather, & Carstensen, 2003; Mather & Carstensen, 2003). Thus, older (versus younger) customers may have just been less prone and less motivated to respond to the tattoo. In sum, the removal of threat combined with the attenuation of the negativity bias may have helped older customers place more emphasis on applying the positive stereotypes that came to mind as opposed to the negative stereotypes. I

encourage future research that clarifies and evaluates the specific cognitive processes by which age influences differences in reactions to tattooed employees.

The results from the current study suggest that the display of visible tattoos on employees significantly impacts customers' reactions; however, the impact is more complex than initially expected. Whereas it was hypothesized that a visible tattoo would act as a stigmatizing characteristic and therefore lead to negative customer reactions, customer reactions were mixed and additional evidence revealed that visible tattoos led to positive (and not just negative) customer reactions. Thus, organizations should not consider employee expression of individuality through visible tattoos as an automatic strike, but instead examine their targeted audience more carefully to understand how employee individuality might affect the audience. For some organizations, such as the one presented in the current study, the type of products offered may not have elicited strong negative associations between negative stereotypes about tattooed individuals and evaluative judgments about the organization, its products, and its employees.

Despite more predictions concerning the influence of negative stereotypes, the current results showed that positive (versus negative) stereotypes had a stronger influence on evaluations. The findings regarding the effect of stereotypes about artistic traits on the relations between tattoo presence and evaluations were often in the opposite direction of the direct effect. This is known as inconsistent mediation, and it can be the result of suppressor variables that mask the total and direct effects (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Thus, it is possible that stereotypes about Artistic Traits were suppression effects to the true relation between tattoo presence and evaluations. However, MacKinnon et al. (2000) also pointed out that

a mediator helps to explain causal relationships and a suppressor focuses on the adjustment of the relation between the independent and dependent variable. Given the nature of the relationships between tattoo presence and the stereotype variables, the relations among the three stereotype variables, and the relations between the stereotype variables and evaluations as illustrated by the correlations in Table 6 the impact of stereotypes about Artistic Traits appears to be functioning in as a mediator that serves to buffer the relation between tattoo presence and evaluations.

### **What about the influence of tattoos on actual behaviors?**

Although support for the direct link between tattoo presence and evaluations was not seen in Study 1, it is posited that the link may be more apparent in other scenarios, or perhaps in actual face-to-face behavioral interactions. Customers did not physically interact with the employees who had a visible tattoo. The lack of physical interaction may have diffused the affective, dynamic, and interdependent reactions that often emerge in mixed interactions, or when nontattooed customers interact with tattooed employees (see Hebl & Dovidio, 2005). Other such research finds similar incongruence between expressed attitudes and behavioral displays but in some cases, this pattern shows more incongruence than a strengthening of an effect (see LaPiere, 1934). In the current research, I investigate how the main questions of Study 1 play out in an actual behavioral setting. That is, do tattooed employees influence the purchasing behavior and interpersonal behaviors of customers?

### **Study 2: Behaviors**

Study 2 examines customers' behavior when interacting with an employee who either has or does not have a visible tattoo. In this study, I focus on a real-world setting

and the measurement of behaviors in addition to attitudes. I anticipate that tattoos on employees will lead to more negative perceptions of the employee, which in turn will lead to more avoidance (versus approach) behaviors by customers.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Study 2 was held within a booth at a local convention center. All individuals ( $N = 349$ ) who approached the booth and interacted with employees were considered participants. Each participant was invited to complete a survey after interacting with employees regardless of whether or not he or she made a purchase. Although there were 349 employee-customer observations, only 90 customers elected to a survey. Observers recorded participant gender and race for all customers. Fifty-four percent ( $N = 189$ ) of the sample was female, 40% ( $N = 199$ ) was male, and gender was not recorded for 6% ( $N = 21$ ). The racial makeup of the sample was similar to that of the U.S., with 64% ( $N = 222$ ) recorded as White, 12% ( $N = 42$ ) Black, 14% ( $N = 50$ ) Hispanic, 5% ( $N = 19$ ) Asian, and 1% ( $N = 3$ ) Other. Race was not recorded for 4% ( $N = 13$ ) of participants.

When examining only participants who completed the survey, 61% ( $N = 55$ ) were female, 37% ( $N = 33$ ) were male, and 2% ( $N = 2$ ) did not respond to this question. Participants ranged in age from 22 – 69 years old ( $M = 45$ ,  $SD = 11.53$ ; 15 participants did not provide their age). Most of the participants were employed (82%,  $N = 74$ ) and had some level of higher education (23% had a professional degree, 29% a Bachelor's degree, 12% an Associate's degree, and 31% some college). Additionally, 19% reported having a tattoo, 80% reported not having a tattoo, and one percent did not respond to this question.

Based on the demographic information collected in the study, the participant makeup of the sample appears to be fairly consistent with the average participant demographic makeup at the Home Show. According to the Home Show statistics, 55% of customers who generally attend are female and 45% are male, and 74% of customers are between 27-65 years old. Additionally, 87% of customers who attend are homeowners (versus renters), and 70% earn over \$75,000 a year.

### **Materials**

**Tattoos.** Tattoo presence and absence was manipulated using the same temporary tattoos from Study 1. Pre-testing revealed multiple body locations that were perceived as neutral sites for a visible tattoo across gender: the forearm, upper chest, and neck. For Study 2, tattoos were placed on either the right forearm or right side of the neck of each employee. Although I used the same procedure of tattooing employees in Study 1, one difference in Study 2 is that here there were two (not just one) tattooed employees. I made this decision to ensure that the manipulation of tattoo presence was clearly discernible given all the other distractions present in a real-world setting (e.g., other people, lighting, merchandise). When one wore the sun, the other wore the yin yang, and when one wore it on the forearm the other wore it on the side of the neck. These tattoos and positions were counterbalanced across dyads.

**Employees.** Five male and five female research assistants were recruited to serve as confederate employees for this study. To control for any age and race, I employed individuals who were young, college-aged White individuals. All employees wore pants and a plain colored short-sleeve t-shirt. Employees worked the fundraising table in pairs, one male and one female, for a three-hour shift. During the first one and one half hours,

neither employee had a visible tattoo. During the second one and one half hours of the shift, employees went offsite and applied the temporary tattoo. Although no differences in tattoo type (sun or yin yang) or location (forearm or neck) were anticipated, the type and location was counterbalanced between male and female employees.

All employees arrived thirty minutes prior to his or her shift and were given a brief training about the fundraiser, the restaurant card procedures, and standardization of customer interactions. They were instructed to be similar in how they interacted with all customers; that is, if they were generally happy in disposition, they were asked to remain that way for all interactions. If they were generally introverted, they were asked to remain that way for all interactions. Thus, I wanted the employee behavior standardized so that any difference emerging in interactions could be attributed to the customers and not the employees. Employees also learned that they would be observed and rated by observers who would be located behind them in the booths. This was important because employees had to position themselves in a way such that the observers could see both the employee and the customer. To avoid recording the same interaction twice, employees were instructed to not work as a team and to not impede the interaction between the other employee and customer(s). Each employee was paired with a single observer, the latter of whom recorded the employee-customer interaction. During training, both employee and observer were provided basic knowledge about the organization (Habitat for Humanity). A representative from local chapter of Habitat for Humanity came by the booth prior to the beginning of the first day and provided information about the location of the Habitat for Humanity parent company booth so that employees were able to direct customers to this booth if they had specific questions about the organization. Finally, employees

learned about the procedures involved with using the restaurant cards, including the price of purchase, the value of the card, where to find information about participating restaurants, and the instructions on how to redeem the card.

Confederate observers were recruited to serve as observers of the employee-customer interactions. Observers worked 3-hour shifts and were paired with a single employee to rate interactions solely between employee and customers. They arrived thirty minutes prior to the beginning of their shift and were trained to observe employee and customer behavior unobtrusively and record information accordingly. Part of the recording included timing employee/customer interactions using a stopwatch. Observers were instructed to start the time once a verbal interaction began and stop the time once a purchase was made if the interaction did not end before then. The time it took customers to write checks, gather money, and complete surveys was not included in this measure of interaction time. Observers were instructed to complete a questionnaire concerning the employee-customer interaction any time a customer stopped and engaged with an employee, regardless of whether or not the customer decided to purchase a restaurant card or the length of the interaction.

**Organization and Products.** Employees sold restaurant cards to raise money for Habitat for Humanity. I selected restaurant cards because I believed this product to be gender neutral and have wide appeal to a diverse audience. Customers were able to purchase restaurant cards for ten dollars each and redeem them for twenty-five dollars at participating restaurants. Once a restaurant card was purchased, customers could find, on the back of the card, a website link to a list of over 15,000 participating restaurants nationwide.

Habitat for Humanity was selected because this organization addresses an issue that is widespread in America (i.e., building homes for families) that is relatively neutral in terms of potential biases related to gender, politics, or particular affinity groups. The organization was contacted prior to the study and provided consent for the use of the local charter of Habitat for Humanity name and logo in the study. The organization provided assistance and materials to use such as brochures, safety equipment (for decoration), and posters.

**Fundraiser Location.** A fundraising booth was set up at the 2012 Home Show at the city convention center to raise money to support Habitat for Humanity. The booth was 100 square feet (10 X 10) and had two tables configured with one in front of the other and six chairs. The table at the very front of the booth contained literature about Habitat for Humanity a cash box, tax receipts, a flyer about a raffle, and decorations (a paint canister containing candy, paint brushes, a hard hat, a pair of safety goggles, and a hammer). The second table was located at the back of the booth and had four chairs located behind it and two chairs located in front on the far right hand side. This table contained customer questionnaires, candy bars, and raffle entry instructions.

### **Procedure**

Two employees stood at the front table and interacted with customers passing by attempted to sell restaurant cards to these individuals. When customers approached the table, employees provided them with information about the cause and showed them a flyer containing information about Habitat for Humanity as well as a brochure containing a list of restaurants where they would be able to use restaurant cards. After interacting with employees, customers went to the second table and complete a short survey



concerning their shopping experiences. Customers who completed the survey were offered a free candy bar and a chance to have their name entered into a raffle to win one of eight fifty dollar gift certificate to their choice of Amazon™, iTunes™, or Starbucks™.

Observers completed a survey documenting the customers' behaviors. Data collection took place across three days (the entire span of the Home Show) on a Friday from 2 pm – 7 pm, Saturday from 10 am – 7 pm, and Sunday 11 am – 5 pm. All proceeds were donated to Habitat for Humanity, which in the end amounted to slightly more than \$1,200.

## **Measures**

**Behavior.** I assessed behavior in two ways. First, I assessed overt behavior through customer purchasing behavior; specifically, observers indicated whether or not the customer made a purchase (yes or no). Second, I assessed more subtle behavior using a nine-item measure adapted from previous research (Hebl et al., 2007; King et al., 2006). Observers were asked to rate the extent to which the customer displayed the following behaviors toward the employee: a) friendliness; b) eye contact; c) affirmative gestures (e.g., nodding); d) smiling; e) interest in the product the employee was selling; f) rudeness; g) physically distancing (i.e., how far away did customer stand); h) ending the conversation prematurely; and i) nervousness. These items were scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (0 = “not at all”, 4 = “moderately”, and 7 = “very much”). The first five items (i.e., a-e) represented approach behavior and the last four items (i.e., f-i) represented avoidance behavior.

An EFA revealed two factors. Factor 1 contained four approach items, and Factor 2 contained two avoidance items and one approach item (interest in the product the employee was selling). Two items (rudeness and nervousness) did not load cleanly onto either factor and were therefore dropped from the measure. The reliability was acceptable for Factor 1,  $\alpha = .83$  and for Factor 2 (with the interest measure recoded),  $\alpha = .77$ ; thus two composite variables, Approach Behavior and Avoidance Behavior, were created (see Table 13 for factor loadings).

Table 13

*Factor Loadings for Approach and Avoidance Behavior Items*

	Factors	
	1	2
Factor 1 (alpha = .83) Approach Behavior		
The customer smiled at the employee.	<b>.83</b>	-.14
The customer was friendly.	<b>.81</b>	-.26
The customer made affirmative gestures.	<b>.73</b>	-.39
The customer made eye contact.	<b>.73</b>	-.02
Factor 2 (alpha = .77) Avoidance Behavior		
The customer ended the conversation prematurely.	-.23	<b>.86</b>
The customer distanced his- or herself physically.	-.08	<b>.81</b>
The customer seemed interested in the product.	.32	<b>-.76</b>

*Note.* Principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation.

**Customer questionnaire.** Customers completed a 10-item questionnaire. The questionnaire contained four items used in Study 1 regarding employee traits. Specifically, customers evaluated the extent to which the person selling the restaurant card seemed: a) professional, b) conscientious, c) hardworking, and d) self-disciplined<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, customers responded to two items measuring attitudes toward the employee, two items measuring toward Habitat for Humanity, and two items measuring attitudes toward the restaurant card. For these items, customers rated how they felt about the employee, organization, and product, and the extent to which they thought the employee, the organization, and the product were valuable. All responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = “do not agree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).

An EFA was conducted on the four stereotype items and revealed one factor, which had good reliability,  $\alpha = .97$ . A single stereotype composite factor was created due to the high reliability of this factor. An EFA was conducted on the remaining six items and revealed two factors. Factor 1 included the two items regarding attitudes about Habitat for Humanity. Factor 2 included both items about the restaurant card. The two items about the employee loaded highly on both factors. Given that I anticipated that these items would fall into three factors, I ran a second EFA and specified that three factors should be extracted versus extraction based on eigenvalues. This EFA yielded the anticipated factors, with Factor 1 containing the two items about the employee, Factor 2 containing the two items about the restaurant card, and Factor 3 containing the two items

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<sup>3</sup> Study 1 and Study 2 were run in tandem, not sequentially. Only a subset of items that examined two of the five stereotype characteristics were selected in order to address real-world time constraints. The items were selected based on what I believed would be most heavily impacted during the initial development stages.

about Habitat for Humanity. All scales had acceptable reliability and composite variables were created (Employee  $\alpha = .79$ , Organization  $\alpha = .74$ , Product  $\alpha = .81$ ).

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

As with Study 1, a tattoo stigma manipulation check was conducted. At the end of the questionnaire, participants indicated whether the employee had a tattoo (yes, no, or I do not remember). Eighty customers responded to this item, and out of those 80, 40 were in the tattoo-present condition and 40 were in the tattoo-absent condition. A chi-square analysis showed that the tattoo stigma manipulation was successful; the majority of customers correctly identified their condition (i.e., having a tattooed employee versus not),  $\chi^2(2) = 30.35, p < .001$ . The frequencies reveal that customers in the tattoo absent condition were very accurate at identifying when the employee did not have a tattoo (0 out of 40 participants in the control condition failed the tattoo manipulation). Customers in the tattoo present condition were not as accurate as only 53% customers in the tattoo present condition (21 out of 40) were able to correctly identify the presence of a tattoo and 45% of customers in this condition (18 out of 40) incorrectly stated that the employee did not have a tattoo when they did have one. One participant could not remember whether or not the employee had a tattoo when he or she did have one present, and seven people did not respond to this question.

Next, I examined whether customers were able to successfully recall the gender of the employee with whom they interacted. A total of 48 male and 39 female customers completed this item. A chi-square analysis showed that participants were successful in making this distinction,  $\chi^2(2) = 71.83, p < .001$ . Frequencies showed that 95% (37 out of

39) of participants who interacted with a female employee correctly identified the employee as female and 94% (45 out of 48) of participants who interacted with a male employee correctly identified the employee as male. Four customers misidentified the employee's gender, with one stating that he or she interacted with a female when the employee was male and three indicating the employee was male when he or she was female. One person did not remember the gender of employee. All of the customers who failed the tattoo or gender manipulation checks or did not remember the manipulations were removed from analyses involving customer (but not observer only) data<sup>4</sup>.

Next, I examined whether there were differences in customer behavior toward employees of the same gender. There was a total of five male and five female employees who worked throughout the course of the study. MANOVA analyses examining both whether 1) there were employee differences as a whole, and 2) there were employee differences within each gender across the three behavior measures (purchasing, approach, and avoidance) revealed that some employees were idiosyncratically responded to by customers differently (for all ten employees, the employee main effect was  $F(27, 804) = 2.87, p < .001$ ; for only the five female employees, the employee main effect was  $F(12, 328) = 1.98, p < .05$ ; and for only the five male employees, the employee main effect was  $F(12, 395) = 1.66, p = .07$ ). What this means is some employees were more successful than others in selling restaurant cards, and in being reacted to with more favorable

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<sup>4</sup> Consistent with Study 1, I removed participants who did not remember whether the employee had a tattoo because I believed it would result in the cleanest dataset. I did conduct an analysis including these participants and no significant difference emerged with respect to any of the main study variables and findings. I choose to exclude them in the analyses that I report because I believe that the cleanest dataset involves those that passed all manipulations and because this is most consistent with the procedures used in Study 1.

interpersonal behaviors. Given that there were a total of 10 employees, such results may not be surprising. Importantly, there were no interactions between employee and tattoo presence, thus, the results were not driven by differential reactions to the tattoos placed on certain male and certain female employees. To control for differences in employee effects, I use the only variable that the observer rated the employee on – friendliness of the employee – as a control variable in the analyses. Additionally, to control for differences that might have been due to the shift (and potential crowdedness) that employees worked, I also controlled for collection period (i.e., Friday, Saturday, Sunday). Beyond this, I treated the differences between some employees as error and collapsed across all female employees' data and all male employees' data to create an employee gender variable. All data were used in further analyses.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables used to examine the observer data are presented in Table 14, and the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables used to examine the customer data are presented in Table 15. Somewhat surprisingly, the correlations for the observer show that approach and avoidance behaviors are positively correlated, suggesting the potential of ambivalent reactions being depicted toward employees. Contrary to my expectations, the presence of a visible tattoo was not related to customers' perceptions, attitudes, or behavior. In both sets of observations, all of the behavior measures were positively related to each other, suggesting that the more customers interacted with the employee (regardless of the customers' interpersonal behavior), the more likely they were to make a purchase. Purchasing behavior was positively related to evaluations of the product ( $r = .31, p <$

.05), but not evaluations of the employee or the organization, suggesting that attitudes about the restaurant card were the strongest affective driver of the decision to make a purchase.



Table 14

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Independent Variables and Dependent Variables for Observer Data*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1. Employee Tattoo	0.53	0.50	332	1				
2. Employee Gender	0.50	0.50	349	0.10	1			
3. Purchase	0.30	0.46	314	-0.02	-0.14*	1		
4. Approach Behavior	3.96	1.25	345	0.03	-0.03	.28**	1	
5. Avoid Behavior	3.98	1.05	345	0.07	-.26**	.62**	.42**	1

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 15

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, Mediators, and Customer Characteristics for Customers who Completed the Survey*

	Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Employee Tattoo	0.36	0.49	66	1										
2. Employee Gender	0.44	0.50	68	0.12	1									
3. Purchase	0.69	0.47	62	-0.09	-0.12	1								
4. Approach Behavior	4.21	1.24	67	-0.07	-0.12	.36**	1							
5. Avoid Behavior	4.72	0.78	67	-0.01	-.37**	.46**	0.28*	1						
6. Stereotypes of Employee	4.51	0.54	68	0.06	-0.18	0.02	0.04	0.03	1					
7. Employee Evaluations	4.55	0.50	68	0.13	-0.12	-0.01	-0.06	-0.01	.88**	1				
8. Organization Evaluations	4.68	0.47	68	0.16	-0.21	-0.05	0.27*	0.14	.41**	.48**	1			
9. Product Evaluations	3.98	0.72	67	-0.02	-0.14	0.31*	0.12	0.22	.47**	.50**	0.31*	1		
10. Customer Age	46.21	11.29	56	-0.06	-0.13	0.10	0.21	0.18	0.01	-0.00	0.15	0.06	1	
11. Customer Tattoos	1.24	0.58	67	-0.31*	-0.06	0.20	-0.08	0.04	0.16	0.09	-0.15	0.01	-0.24	1

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

## Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 7 stated that customers would engage in fewer overt purchasing behaviors (H7a), in fewer approach behaviors (H7b) and in greater avoidance behaviors (H7c) when interacting with employees with visible (versus no) tattoos. First, a Chi-square analysis did not reveal a significant difference between purchasing behavior when employees had a visible tattoo versus when they did not,  $\chi^2(1) = .07, p > .05$ . A total of 209 (93 interacted with a employee without a tattoo and 116 interacted with an employee with a tattoo) customers did not make a purchase compared to 91 (42 interacted with a employee without a tattoo and 49 interacted with an employee with a tattoo) customers who did make a purchase. Although not significant, I examined the odds-ratio of making a purchase, and the trend showed that customers who interacted with an employee without a tattoo were 1.07 times more likely than customers who interacted with an employee with a tattoo to make a purchase. This suggests that customers who interacted with a tattooed employee were slightly more likely to make a purchase (versus not make a purchase) when interacting with a nontattooed employee. Chi-square analysis did show a significant effect of employee gender on purchasing behavior,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.33, p = .01$ , such that customers were more likely to purchase from a male than a female employee (OR = 1.88). In sum, H7a was not supported.

Second, I examined the effect of tattoo presence and employee gender on interpersonal approach and avoidance behaviors (controlling for employee friendliness and survey collection period) using a MANOVA. Contrary to predictions, there was no significant effect of tattoo presence,  $\lambda = .99; F(2, 310) = 2.17, p > .05; \eta^2 = .01$ , and there was no significant interaction between tattoo and employee gender,  $\lambda = 0.99; F(2, 310) =$

1.00,  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$  was not seen. Although the omnibus MANOVA was not significant, I did examine the predicted univariate patterns for approach and avoidance in an exploratory manner. This examination was conducted because 1) there were a priori hypotheses concerning approach and avoidance behaviors, and 2) Study 1 provided initial evidence that customers simultaneously illicit both positive and stereotypes about tattooed employees, thus they may have similar dueling behavioral reactions toward tattooed employees. No significant tattoo effect emerged for the univariate tattoo main effect for approach behaviors,  $F(1, 311) = 0.46, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .00$ . As predicted, however, a significant tattoo effect emerged for the univariate tattoo main effect for avoidance behaviors,  $F(1, 311) = 4.23, p = .04$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ , with means showing that customers displayed more avoidance behaviors when interacting with employees with visible tattoos ( $M = 4.08, SD = 1.38$ ) than employees without visible tattoos ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.46$ ). In sum, no support was found for H7b and modest support for H7c emerged.

Although not predicted, the MANOVA did reveal an employee gender main effect,  $\lambda = .90$ ;  $F(2, 310) = 16.69, p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .10$ . Follow-up univariate analyses were significant for both approach and avoidance behaviors and the means show that customers displayed more approach behaviors when interacting with female ( $M = 4.19, SD = 1.83$ ) than male employees ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.97$ ),  $F(1, 311) = 4.27, p < .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ , and customers displayed more avoidance behaviors when interacting with male employees ( $M = 4.23, SD = 1.53$ ) versus female employees ( $M = 3.71, SD = 1.65$ ),  $F(1, 311) = 14.03, p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .04$ . The omnibus MANOVA did not reveal a significant interaction between tattoo presence and employee gender,  $\lambda = .99$ ;  $F(2, 310) = 1.00, p > .05$ ;  $\eta^2 = .01$ .

To continue analyzing the results of Study 2, I next included data collected from the customers' perspective. These analyses allow for a test of H1, H2, H4, H6 and H8. Unfortunately, only a portion of all customers completed the survey ( $N = 90$ ) and then, after removing people who failed or did not remember the manipulations, a sample size of  $N = 68$  was left for the remaining analyses.

I began by testing the effect of employee tattoo presence and gender on customers' stereotypes about the employee (H1). An ANOVA showed no significant main effect for tattoo presence,  $F(1, 59) = .63, p > .05; \eta^2 = .01$ , revealing that tattooed ( $M = 4.59, SD = .95$ ) and nontattooed ( $M = 4.47, SD = .74$ ) employees were stereotyped similarly. The ANOVA also showed no significant employee gender main effect,  $F(1, 59) = .81, p > .05; \eta^2 = .01$ , revealing that female ( $M = 4.46, SD = .95$ ) and male employees ( $M = 4.60, SD = .86$ ) were both rated similarly. Finally, the ANOVA yielded no significant interaction,  $F(1, 59) = 1.00, p > .05; \eta^2 = .00$ .

Next, I examined the effect of employee tattoo presence and gender on attitudes toward the employee (H2a), the organization (H2b), and the product (H2c). Results from the MANOVA did not show significant effects for tattoo presence  $\lambda = .96; F(3, 56) = .86, p > .05; \eta^2 = .04$ , employee gender,  $\lambda = .98; F(3, 56) = .39, p > .05; \eta^2 = .02$ , or the interaction,  $\lambda = .89; F(3, 56) = 2.37, p > .05; \eta^2 = .11$ . The means and standard deviations for the main effects are presented in Table 16. Overall, consistent with Study 1, support was not seen for H1 or H2.

Table 16

*Means and Standard Deviations for Tattoo Presence and Employee Gender across Evaluations of the Employee, Organization, and Product*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Employee Evaluations</b>		
Tattoo Present	4.65	.69
Tattoo Absent	4.49	.91
Female Employee	4.52	.89
Male Employee	4.62	.82
<b>Organization Evaluations</b>		
Tattoo Present	4.79	.78
Tattoo Absent	4.61	.60
Female Employee	4.63	.77
Male Employee	4.77	.72
<b>Product Evaluations</b>		
Tattoo Present	3.97	1.31
Tattoo Absent	3.95	1.01
Female Employee	3.91	1.29
Male Employee	4.02	1.20

Next, I examined whether customers' stereotypes about employees traits mediated the relation between employee tattoo presence and attitudes about the employee (H4a), the organization (H4b), and the product (H4c) using PROCESS macro for SPSS. For these analyses I controlled for employee friendliness and data collection period. First, I examined the mediated effect on employee evaluations. Results showed no effect of tattoo presence on stereotypes ( $B = .11, p > .05, CI: -.18 \text{ to } .40$ ). When examining attitudes about the employee, there was no evidence of a significant total effect of tattoo presence on attitudes ( $B = .17, p > .05, CI: -.10 \text{ to } .44$ ) or direct effect ( $B = .08, p > .05, CI: -.05 \text{ to } .21$ ). There also was no evidence of an indirect effect of tattoo presence on attitudes about the employee through stereotypes ( $B = .09, p > .05, CI: -.13 \text{ to } .32$ ).

A similar pattern emerged when examining the mediated relation between tattoo presence and evaluations of the organization. There was no evidence of a significant total effect ( $B = .14, p > .05, CI: -.10 \text{ to } .39$ ), or direct effect ( $B = .10, p > .05, CI: -.12 \text{ to } .33$ ) of tattoo presence on organization evaluations. Additionally, an indirect effect of tattoo presence on organization evaluations through stereotypes ( $B = .04, p > .05, CI: -.03 \text{ to } .21$ ) did not emerge. Finally, when examining the product evaluations, there was no evidence of a total effect ( $B = -.00, p > .05, CI: -.40 \text{ to } .39$ ), or a direct effect ( $B = -.06, p > .05, CI: -.41 \text{ to } .29$ ), of tattoo presence on product evaluations. Additionally, results did not show a significant indirect effect of tattoo presence on product evaluation through stereotypes ( $B = .06, p > .05, CI: -.10 \text{ to } .29$ ). Although customers' stereotypes about the employee did not mediate the relation between employee tattoo presence and evaluations, stereotypes were positively related to attitudes about the employee, ( $B = .82, p < .001, CI:$

.70 to .93), the organization, ( $B = .35, p < .01, CI: .15 \text{ to } .55$ ), and the product, ( $B = .63, p < .001, CI: .32 \text{ to } .94$ ). Overall, support for H4 was not seen.

Hypothesis 8 predicted that customers' stereotypes of employee traits would mediate the relation between employee tattoo presence and customer behavior. Results showed no significant effect of tattoo presence on purchase behaviors (total effect:  $B = -.30, p > .05, CI: -1.46 \text{ to } .86$ ; direct effect:  $B = -.30, p > .05, CI: -1.46 \text{ to } .87$ ), approach behaviors (total effect:  $B = -.15, p > .05, CI: -.76 \text{ to } .46$ ; direct effect:  $B = -.14, p > .05, CI: -.75 \text{ to } .48$ ), or avoidance behaviors, (total effect:  $B = .04, p > .05, CI: -.37 \text{ to } .46$ ; direct effect:  $B = .06, p > .05, CI: -.38 \text{ to } .47$ ). Additionally, there was not evidence of indirect effects of tattoo presence through stereotypes on purchase behaviors ( $B = -.00, p > .05, CI: -.23 \text{ to } .23$ ), approach behaviors ( $B = -.01, p > .05, CI: -.19 \text{ to } .06$ ), or avoidance behaviors ( $B = -.00, p > .05, CI: -.14 \text{ to } .06$ ). Finally, stereotypes about employees were not significantly related to purchasing behavior ( $B = -.01, p > .05, CI: -1.11 \text{ to } 1.10$ ), approach behaviors ( $B = -.09, p > .05, CI: -.62 \text{ to } .45$ ), or avoidance behaviors ( $B = -.03, p > .05, CI: -.40 \text{ to } .34$ ). Overall, support was not seen for H8.

Finally, I examined the influence of customer age (H6a) on the impact of stereotypes on the relation between employee tattoo presence and evaluations and behavior. Customer tattoo presence (H6b) could not be used as a moderator because only 11 customers had tattoos. Results from moderated mediation analyses showed no age moderation effects on the relation between employee tattoo presence and customers' stereotypes about the employee ( $B = -.00, p > .05, CI: -.03 \text{ to } .03$ ) when examining evaluations of the employee, organization, product, or approach and avoidance behaviors. Additionally, when examining the conditional indirect effects at the 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 75<sup>th</sup>,



and 90<sup>th</sup> (ages 30, 34, 47, 53, and 61 respectively), no significant conditional indirect effects were seen for any of the dependent variables. Overall, support for H6a was not seen.

### **Discussion**

This study extended Study 1 by examining the influence of an employee's visible tattoo on customers' perceptions, attitudes, and actual behaviors including overt (i.e., purchasing) and subtler measures (i.e., interpersonal interactions). The results did not show any significant influence of visible tattoos on levels of purchasing behavior (H7a), although the trends suggest that customers who interacted with an employee without a tattoo were slightly more likely to make a purchase than customers who interacted with a tattooed employee. Although no differences emerged in approach behaviors (H7b) on the basis of tattoo presence, an exploratory analysis revealed that significant differences did emerge in avoidance interpersonal behaviors (H7c). Specifically, customers displayed more avoidance behaviors with a tattooed (versus non tattooed) employee. Such a finding is suggestive of direct effects of tattoo presence on customer reactions to employees. If similarly significant findings emerged on the two behavioral measures, a clear case could be made for the impact of employee tattoos on customers but as with Study 1, there seems to be a lack of absolute clarity when it comes to direct reactions to tattooed employees.

Although most anticipated effects did not emerge, one interesting relation that was seen in the correlation table (Table 15) was that between purchasing behavior and attitudes. Specifically, out of the customers who made a purchase and completed a survey, purchasing behavior was related to attitudes about the product but not the

organization. This suggests that customers who made purchases did so primarily because they really liked the restaurant card the product that was being offered. Thus, it may be that to the extent that customers see the value and want the product, they are not as concerned with the presence or absence of a visible tattoo on the employee who is selling the product. This interpretation should be taken with caution however, as there are other reasons why purchasing behavior was related to attitudes about the product but not the organization. One reason is that there were many customers who made a purchase or a donation but did not complete the survey. There is no empirical way to examine their attitudes about the product and organization; however, a strong inference can be made that the customers who donated did so because they had positive attitudes about the organization. There are individual differences related to who is more likely to give to charity versus who is not (e.g., level of empathetic concern; Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010), and these differences may have played a role in who, in fact, did make a purchase and who did not. In addition to being unable to account for the attitudes of purchasing customers who did not complete the survey and individual differences between charitable and uncharitable individuals, there are other explanations as to why the presence of the tattoo did not effect purchasing.

Another interesting positive relation seen in Table 15 is between approach behavior and attitudes toward the organization. Attitude toward the organization was the only attitudinal variable related to approach behavior, which suggests that customers with more positive attitudes about Habitat for Humanity were also more likely to display more positive behaviors. Thus, it is likely the case that customers approached the booth because they wanted to support the organization, not necessarily because they wanted to

purchase a product. The design is somewhat different than a traditional selling task where customers' interest in a particular product(s) may spur their motivation to patronize an organization. Although the selling task used in this study was for a fundraiser for a non-profit organization, the introduction of selling a product (as opposed to simply taking donations) served as a proxy for a traditional selling task. Although this served as a proxy for a traditional, for-profit selling task, it is possible that the favorability of the organization may account for the lack of effects seen in Study 2.

Another alternative explanation for the lack of effect of the visible tattoo on behavior, attitudes, and stereotypes is that customers did not see it or pay significant attention to processing it as relevant information. As seen by the high failure rate of correctly identifying the tattoo presence in that condition for the manipulation check, many customers simply failed to recognize the tattoo altogether. Even though they interacted with an employee who had a visible tattoo present and who was standing next to another employee who also had a visible tattoo present, almost half of the customers (45%) who interacted with tattooed employees stated that the employee did not have a tattoo. Another complexity that may have added to the manipulation failures was that this study was conducted at a Home Show where there were a lot of new products, crowds of people, and other such stimuli. If people were simultaneously processing this wealth of information, it may have served as a further cognitive load and distracted them from fully observing and processing the tattoos. One additional alternative is that the manipulation failures occurred because tattoos have become so mainstream that they in fact are not stigmatizing (at least not when they are small and neutral). Assuming this rationale,

people may simply be used to seeing individuals with visible tattoos; therefore, it does not register to them as something unusual, devalued, or even different.

Unlike Study 1, indirect effects (i.e., H4a – H4c) were not seen in Study 2. This may suggest that there was not enough power to detect the effects. Although the sample size was small, simulation analyses by Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) has shown that for bias-corrected bootstrapping method, a sample size of only  $N = 53$  would be needed to detect an effect when the path from the independent variable to the mediator (path a) is medium and the path from the mediator to the dependent variable (path b) is large (or vice versa), or a sample of  $N = 34$  could detect mediation when both path a and b are large (a sample of  $N = 71$  would be needed if both effects were medium). Thus, it is still possible that there was not enough power to detect small effects; however, if medium or large effects were present, the sample size was sufficient to detect effects.

### **Overall Discussion**

Overall, these studies provide insight on the influence of visible tattoos on customers' reactions. The findings suggest that to some extent, tattoos do still carry some stigmatizing properties in that exposure to them elicited negative stereotypes and a greater amount of avoidance behavior. However, the findings also suggest a shift in the tide for the tattoo as stigma hypothesis, as exposure to tattoos elicited positive (in addition to negative) stereotypes. It seems that customers may have been both slightly intrigued and slightly put off by the visible tattoo. In the current set of studies, the negativity did not severely impact the tattooed employee or the organization as the influence of positive stereotypes was stronger than that of negative stereotypes in Study

1, and the increase in avoidance behavior did not lead to a significant decrease in purchasing behavior in Study 2.

At the most basic level, stigma theory would suggest that if tattoos were viewed as stigma then employees with visible tattoos would have lower evaluations than employees without visible tattoos (i.e., H2a). The lack of support for this finding may be the result of several factors. First, it is very possible that the direct effects dissipated with the very large amount of standardization that I did through the pretesting. It is hard to imagine that customers would not have a strong reaction to certain offensive tattoos (i.e., perhaps a naked lady, a derogatory word), tattoos positioned in particular places on the body (e.g., the face), or tattoos that are very large in size or number (i.e., covering the entire chest and neck). Furthermore, the type of organization and products that were marketed/sold did not evoke strong information about the organizational culture in Study 1 and may have overrode the presence of tattoos in Study 2. It is likely that the organizational image that is portrayed influences attitudes toward tattooed employees. Organizations that have an image that may be contrary to positive stereotypes about tattoos would likely see higher levels of negativity, whereas organizations whose image is more artistic and edgy may actually see greater positivity. I wanted to control for these variables and examine a very tightly controlled scenario in which I measured customers' reactions to a neutral tattoo in a neutral spot on the body. In doing so, it may simply make sense that there were not significant direct effects. I may have removed much of the stigmatizing phenomenon through my pretesting. If future research shows that tattoos are stigmatizing for employees when some of these factors are accounted for, then this would suggest that it is not so much tattoos that are stigmatizing, but the properties of tattoos or

situations. The fact, however, that indirect effects emerge despite the strongly neutral stimuli, indicate that tattoos do hold power in determining customers' reactions to employees, organizations, and products – but they just do so through stereotypical perceptions.

Second, the lack of evidence linking the presence of tattoos to evaluations about the tattoo bearer may be due to the fact that the tattoo does not pose a great threat. Stigma theory posits that one of the factors that leads to the devaluation and stigmatization of a characteristic is the introduction of threat at the individual or societal level (Miller, Maner, & Becker, 2010; Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Stigmas threats can be realistic in that they threaten materials such as resources and health or they can be symbolic in that they threaten beliefs, values, and ideologies (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). It has been suggested that threat is one reason why negative stereotypes lead to negative attitudes (Stephan et al., 2002). Some support for the stigma-threat hypothesis has been seen where individuals interacting with a stigmatized person exhibit greater anxiety (measured via increased cardiovascular activity) and poorer performance than individuals interacting with a non-stigmatized person (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001).

In the current study, the presence of the tattoo, although stigmatizing, may not have introduced a threat that was strong enough to elicit an attitudinal or behavioral reaction. It is possible that tattoos can be seen as tangible threats to health; however, the situational context of the current study did not allow for the expression of this threat. Perhaps in a different context, such as if the employee were marketing medical or health-related products, the threat of stigma would have been heightened to the point of producing a negative change in attitudes and behavioral intentions. This effect may be

seen particularly for customers who hold stereotypes about the relation between tattoos and contagious diseases such as hepatitis, as recent consumer behavior research has shown that activating a negative stereotype can lead to stereotype-conducive behavior (Campbell & Mohr, 2011). However, for organizations that offer products and services that are not aligned with negative stereotypes associated with tattoos, visible tattoos on employees may not be a large problem.

Third, the absence of a direct relation between tattoo presence and evaluations may suggest that the social construction of tattoos as a stigma is changing and tattoos are not devalued in society to the extent that they may have been in the past. Indeed, the perception of what is considered a stigma appears to be fluid or variable and changes both across cultures and time (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Within the U.S. across the last decade or two, there has been an increase in media images highlighting visible tattoos on individuals. These images are seen in both the purposeful portrayal by individuals (e.g., professional athletes donning body art at work, reality television shows such as *Best in Ink*, *Miami Ink*, and *Ink Masters*, dedicated to the profession of the tattoo artist) and the unintended portrayal by individuals (e.g., celebrities and public figures photographed by the paparazzi; see Levy, 2008). One of the primary tenants of stigma, the devaluation of a characteristic by society, appears to be shifting to the point of being valuable in some contexts. Indeed, the media portrayal of individuals with visible tattoos doing everything from playing sports to holding impressive jobs such as scientists (e.g., Abby Sciuto on Naval Criminal Investigative Service [NCIS]) illustrates a change in social acceptance of visible tattoos. This increase of accessibility and exposure to such images may have worked to help reduce the

perception of tattoos as stigma, or at least desensitize individuals to seeing people with visible tattoos. Some support for this idea can be seen in recent research showing the effect of the portrayal of positive images of obese individuals on reducing negative attitudes about obese persons (Pearl, Puhl, & Brownell, 2012).

Fourth and relatedly, the absence of a direct relation between tattoo presence and evaluations may be due to the changing nature of the tattooing industry (and related stereotypes) as a whole. The tattooing industry has changed from one that was once seen as a dirty occupation to one that has gained some legitimacy as an industry (Adams, 2012). This may be due, in part, to the increase in public and media popularity, but it is also may be due to a shift in industry practices that have made the practice of tattooing more controlled, standardized, and safe. In an analysis of the trajectory of the history and development of the tattoo industry, Adams (2012) highlights the transition of people within the tattoo industry changing their image from “tattooists” to “artists,” as well as changing the conditions in which they work from “backroom tattoo parlors” to more professional and sanitary “tattoo studios”. One of the pervasive stereotypes about tattoos is connected to uncleanliness and a lack of hygiene associated with getting a tattoo. The increase in enforcement of industry standards may have helped to reduce some associations related to sanitation of the process of tattooing thereby reducing some of the stigma of having tattoos.

Despite the lack of strong direct links between tattoo presence and attitudes and behaviors, the current research successfully shows how tattoo presence significantly influences attitudes via stereotypes. That is, the current research illustrates a mechanism by which employees’ tattoo presence influences evaluations of employees, organizations,



and products. This is not a direct effect; rather, the tattoo leads to activation of stereotypes about artistic traits, which then leads to more positive evaluations across the board. Tattoo presence also leads to an activation of negative stereotypes about appearance and risky behavior, which hurts evaluations; however, these effects were not as strong as the effect of stereotypical perceptions about artistic traits. Additionally, this research highlights particular groups that are more likely to activate stereotypes and use these stereotypes to influence evaluations.

Taken together, the indirect and conditional indirect effect findings illustrate the complexity of the relation between employee variables and customers' subsequent reactions to employee variables. In some instances, such as the one seen in the current findings, displays of employee individuality (e.g., tattoo presence) may positively influence customers. Instead of attempting to minimize employee individuality, organizations might consider ways to capitalize on such expressions of uniqueness and creativity. To the extent that organizations can use employee individuality to activate positive stereotypes for customers, organizations may see benefits via customer evaluations of employees, the organization, and products.

Although there were no formal hypotheses about employee gender, some interesting differences in perceptions about and behavior toward male and female employees emerged. Specifically, results from Study 1 showed that female (versus male) employees were perceived (whether they had a tattoo or not) as overall having more favorable appearance and being less risky. Additionally, results from Study 2 revealed that customers displayed more approach and less avoidance behavior toward female (versus male) employees. However, findings from Study 2 also revealed that customers

purchased fewer products from female (versus male) employees. Taken together these findings suggest that customers perceived and responded more positively to female employees than they did to male employees; however, customers were more willing to actually purchase something from a male employee. Gender research has shown differences in the levels of tangible versus intangible benefits that men and women receive in various employment and social arenas, with men often being the recipients of more tangible benefits whereas women receive a greater amount of intangible benefits (for example see Biernat & Vescio, 2002). These findings, particularly those seen in Study 2, may also be the result of gender differences in the types of behaviors displayed by the employees. For instance, some research has shown that male service employees tend to focus more on the service outcome whereas female service employees focus more on the emotional value of the service interaction (Mathies & Burford, 2011). If the male and female employees in the current study projected different focus points (outcome versus interaction), this may have influenced differences in customers' behavior toward them such that male employees were able to complete more sales although they were not perceived as likeable as female employees.

Other research has shown that customers report lower satisfaction when serviced by a female (versus male) employee (Hekman et al., 2010), and still other research has shown that matching customer-employee characteristics influences customers' reactions to employees (Avery et al., 2012). Thus, gender is a complex factor that seems to impact customers differently depending on the situational context. Future research should more closely examine customers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward male and female employees.

## **Implications**

The results of the current dissertation have both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the current dissertation adds to the stigma literature by providing a comprehensive examination of the impact of visible tattoos on people's stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors. Despite the increase in tattooing behavior, scarce empirical research exists on the workplace implications of obtaining a visible tattoo. The current study focused on how visible tattoos influenced customers' reactions, which is relevant to the tattoo bearers and the organizations that employ these individuals. The findings show that visible tattoos may both harm and help initial reactions to tattooed employees; therefore, organizations should carefully consider other factors such as their brand and the products they are marketing, when considering whether or not to allow visible tattoos on employees. In some cases, allowing visible tattoos may be helpful to organizations, particularly if customers perceive the tattooed employees as artistic and perhaps feel the employee can help them with their own creative endeavors.

The current study also adds to the stigma literature by examining a self-imposed, controllable characteristic that can be considered a stigma. The psychological research examining the workplace consequences of stigma-imposing behavior is rare, and the research in this area has tended to focus primarily on the perspective of hiring managers. Furthermore, although the literature has established that stereotypes generally lead to attitudes and behavior (for example see, Stephan et al., 2002), this study explicitly explored that link with respect to tattoos in the workplace and showed that the link can consist of both positive and negative stereotypes contributing to attitudinal and

behavioral reactions. This examination illustrated the effect of mixed stereotype content on consumer processing and behavior.

This research also contributes to the consumer behavior literature by empirically examining and shedding light on the additional ways that employees can impact customers' decision-making processes. Previous research has shown that environmental factors, including employee appearance and behavior, influence customers' reactions (Ryu & Jang, 2007; Shao et al., 2004; Yan et al., 2011); however, the majority of this work examines employee attractiveness, dress, and/or service behavior and the influence that these factors have on customer satisfaction and future intentions to support the organization. The current set of studies extends this research by: 1) going beyond dress to examine a characteristic that has received very little attention in the research, 2) identifying a mechanism that explains how employee characteristics impact attitudes and future intentions to support the organization, and 3) attempting to link the influence of employee appearance to actual customer behavior. In this way, these studies provide a more comprehensive examination of the effect of tattoos on customers' reactions.

As tattoos are becoming more accepted in society, organizations must grapple with the extent to which they regulate employees' displays of tattoos. Understanding how and why employee tattoos influence customers provides additional factors that should be addressed within the consumer behavior literature. Although the findings in the current studies were not direct, these studies did show evidence of significant customer reactions to tattoos. Such findings provide insight for consumer behavior researchers who are examining factors that influence decision-making processes. Future research should build on the framework developed in the current dissertation to explore not only how and why

employee tattoos influence customers' reactions, but also when tattoos are most likely to influence customers.

In addition, there are practical implications for these findings. Perhaps the most important practical contribution is that this study provides an empirical basis for organizations to have in supporting appearance policies related to visible tattoos or other body modification. This study goes beyond looking at the impact of tattoos from the organizations perspective and shows that these markers can influence customers' reactions and ultimate decision-making. Although the current findings did not show strong evidence of stigmatization, they do show how the presence of a tattoo can adjust customers' thought processes and influence attitudes about the employee, the organization they represent, and the products they are marketing or selling. Organizations that are marketing products that are incongruent with some of the negative stereotypes that tattoos illicit likely will be influenced more by the negative reactions to tattoos seen in this study than the positive reactions. For example, banking and financial products and services are incongruent with risky behavior such as dangerous and irresponsible (i.e., customers do not want an irresponsible or risky employee handling their money); thus, in this type of organization customers would likely have stronger stereotypes about risky behavior and appearance than artistic traits about tattooed employees and these negative perceptions would have greater influence on evaluations.

The effect of tattoos on customers' attitudes and behaviors is important because it can impact the bottom line for organizations. For instance, customers who felt stigmatized by organization employees reported being less likely to patronize the organization in the future (King et al., 2006). Furthermore, customer satisfaction, which

includes perceptions of employee appearance, is positively related to organizational profits and sales across time (Bernhardt, Donthu, & Kennett, 2000). Customers are the heart of many organizations and research shows that their interactions with and impressions about employees can influence not only their current visit at the establishment, but also future visits and ultimately the success of the organization.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

As with any study, this set of studies was not without limitations. First, the neutrality of the tattoos and products, as well as the types of organizations used across these studies may have reduced the observed effects of tattoo as stigma on attitudes and behavior. Indeed, previous research has shown that people's perceptions and attitudes about tattooed employees vary by industry, with tattoos being more acceptable in some industries versus others (see Bekhor, Bekhor, & Gandrabur, 1995; Dean, 2010). In the first study, an unknown organization, selected to remove any familiarity effects, may have led to less overall trust in the organization regardless of the employee, and in the second study the positive nature of the organization likely influenced behavior and attitudes regardless of the employee. These organizations (and products) were intentionally selected to remove biases related to a well-known brand or organization, yet it is possible that this choice reduced the effect of tattoos as stigma. However, despite these potential effects, indirect effects of the tattoo were still seen. These findings suggest that *even with a very conservative test*, visible tattoos do influence individuals' attitudes. Future research should examine the effect of tattoo as stigma using less conservative tests. For instance, varying the type of organization and types of products sold at the organization to be more aligned with or less aligned with stereotypes related to tattoos

will provide a more in-depth examination of how mixed stereotypes about tattoos function to influence customers' attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, examining differences in where customers are in the decision-making process to purchase a product may also influence the extent to which employee tattoos influence attitudes and behaviors. In both Study 1 and Study 2, the products were relatively inexpensive and may not have been products that customers necessarily felt they needed at that moment. Customers may be more influenced if they are purchasing a product that is more expensive or if it is something they need immediately. Finally, it is possible that people are not concerned with some types of tattoos but see other types as stigmatizing. The number of people who failed the tattoo manipulation check in Study 2 provides some evidence of this. Varying the valence, size, type, body location, and number of the visible tattoo(s) will help to determine a more exact nature of how and when visible tattoos on employees are considered stigmatizing.

A second limitation was the lack of control contained in Study 2. Although employees were trained to act a certain way, they were not given a set script to adhere to because it was difficult to anticipate exactly how the interactions they would have would take place. Also, the crowd rush impacted the employees as well as the observers. In instances where the booth was not very crowded, employees were able to not interact with each other's customers easier and observers were able to make more accurate ratings. However, when the booth was extremely crowded, this affected the interaction between employees and customers (occasionally they cross communicated) as well as the ability of observers to accurately record every interaction that took place. As a result, observers missed some information, which accounts for why there is some missing data.

This may account for some of the same gender differences in employees, as some worked during busier times and had more interactions than others. Although the lack of control allowed for greater variations in behavior and to some extent accuracy, it also allowed for a much more realistic view of how customers interact with tattooed individuals who are selling products. Future research should examine behavior with employees who are selling products for profit as opposed to fundraising to gain an even better idea of how customers react to tattooed employees.

Finally, although the current study examined the causal link with stereotypes mediating the relation between tattoos as stigma and attitudes, it is possible that causality is bidirectional. It is possible that customers' attitudes about tattooed employees influence their stereotypes about tattoos on service employees. This alternative causal link is possible given that affective, attitudinal responses are often crude and happen quickly (sometimes automatically), whereas cognitive responses can be slower as they require more deliberation and thought (Dovidio et al., 2000). The former link was proposed and tested in the current dissertation because it is likely that, due to the prevalence of tattoos, many people have already established some stereotypes about these markers. Thus, as seen in the results, preconceived stereotypes influenced attitudinal responses. However, future research should examine other causal relations between stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors based on tattoo presence. Specifically, future research should examine the extent to which attitudes in addition to stereotypes influence customers' behavioral responses, and explore how the three processes of stigma work together in this framework. It is possible that there is a serial connection between the three such that the presence of a visible tattoo leads customers to think about stereotypes they have, which in



turn lead to attitudes about the tattooed employee, the organization, and products, which ultimately impacts the customers' behavior toward the tattooed employee, the organization, and the products.

### **Conclusion**

Tattooing is on the rise in mainstream society and is a characteristic that varies in acceptability and status. In some instances, tattoos are seen as stigmatizing; however, in other instances they are seen as fashionable. Consistent with this view, the current set of studies showed that the presence of a small, neutral visible tattoo on employees can elicit mixed stereotypes, which can in turn affect customers' attitudes and behaviors to varying degrees. In situations where the organization and products are not necessarily strongly associated with positive or negative stereotypes that are related to tattoos, the presence of a visible tattoo can lead to stronger positive perceptions that in turn can buffer some of the negative attitudes associated with tattoos as stigma. The effect of tattoo presence on perceptions and the activation of stereotypes varies based on the type of customer who perceived or interacted with the employee. Understanding the differential effects of visible tattoo presence on employees will help organizations make more informed decisions about appearance policies.

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## Appendix A

### Study 1 Employee Script

Hi. Thank you for tuning in. My name is Amber (Adam) and I am excited to tell you about E&RShop, a local company based in Philadelphia. I have been a sales representative for the company for one and a half years.

E&RShop was started in 2005 as a small local company that focused on selling universal products that have been locally manufactured at affordable prices. In the past year, our loyal and growing customer base has increased so much that we decided to launch a website so that we are able to offer our products to a wider audience. Because the website will target a nation wide audience, I'm going to tell you about an assortment of our products that we will be featuring. We believe that these exemplar products are useful for people of all ages whether you are headed to school or to the office.

Let's get started with the E&RShop alarm clock. This alarm clock features six different nature sounds, including waterfall, summer night, and rainforest to provide a calm relaxing environment to wake up to.

Before you head out the door, brew yourself a cup of coffee and pour it into the E&RShop travel mug. This to go coffee cup looks like a disposable cup, but it's reusable so it reduces waste. This mug has enhanced insulation so it keeps coffee hot longer.

We also offer a wonderful planner that will help you organize your day. This planner includes monthly and day-to-day calendar options as well as a notes section to jot down important messages.

Next, we have the E&RShop picture frame set. This wooden frame creates a dramatic look for your favorite photos. The bold lines give any area in your home or office added appeal. These frames can be displayed vertically or horizontally.

The last product I will be showing you today is this carry-on bag. This 20-inch carry on bag features four wheel spinners for easy rolling and is expandable for adding up to two and a half inches of extra packing capacity. The locking, telescopic handle and in-line skate wheels make traveling more convenient.

On behalf of E&RShop, thank you for allowing me to show you a sample of our merchandise. I hope you will visit our website once it becomes available.

## Appendix B

### Indirect effects for mediation analyses for individual product evaluations

Table 17

#### *Indirect Effects of Tattoo Presence through Stereotypes for Individual Products*

	N	Effect	SE	Z	BC 95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
<b>Evaluation of Alarm Clock</b>	325					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1645	.0555	2.9620	.0757	.3053
Appearance		-.0563	.0349	-1.6119	-.1542	-.0029
Negative		-.0196	.0208	-.9433	-.0764	.0089
TOTAL		.0886	.0794	1.1157	-.0677	.2541
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.2207	.0476	4.6415	.1320	.3392
Artistic vs. Negative		.1841	.0622	2.9569	.0912	.3416
Appearance vs. Negative		-.0367	.0418	-.8766	-.1504	.0300
<b>Evaluation of Carry-on Bag</b>	326					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1616	.0554	2.9184	.0758	.2881
Appearance		-.0773	.0443	-1.7458	-.1961	-.0056
Negative		-.0240	.0219	-1.0962	-.0914	.0053
TOTAL		.0603	.0873	.6915	-.1130	.2189
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.2388	.0501	4.7694	.1462	.3457
Artistic vs. Negative		.1855	.0625	2.9668	.0824	.3235
Appearance vs. Negative		-.0533	.0497	-1.0724	-.1777	.0309
<b>Evaluation of Coffee Cup</b>	325					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1975	.0625	3.1607	.0960	.3473
Appearance		-.0636	.0384	-1.6578	-.1628	-.0003
Negative		-.0104	.0213	-.4870	-.0625	.0331
TOTAL		.1235	.0884	1.3975	-.0576	.3038
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.2612	.0534	4.8893	.1610	.3812
Artistic vs. Negative		.2079	.0687	3.0262	.0900	.3693
Appearance vs. Negative		-.0532	.0460	-1.1587	-.1608	.0290

*Note.* Differences in sample size are due to dropped cases because of missing data.

Table 17 Continued

*Indirect Effects of Tattoo Presence through Stereotypes for Individual Products*

	<i>N</i>	Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
<b>Evaluation of Planner</b>	326					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1244	.0493	2.5228	.0506	.2399
Appearance		-.0707	.0416	-1.7026	-.1685	-.0062
Negative		-.0175	.0215	-.8147	-.0746	.0154
TOTAL		.0362	.0786	.4606	-.1075	.1962
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.1952	.0459	4.2525	.1137	.3100
Artistic vs. Negative		.1420	.0572	2.4831	.0489	.2666
Appearance vs. Negative		-.0532	.0481	-1.1077	-.1645	.0198
<b>Evaluation of Picture Frame Set</b>	326					
			<u>Indirect Effects</u>			
Artistic		.1149	.0447	2.5697	.0403	.2285
Appearance		-.1002	.0549	-1.8246	-.2322	.0030
Negative		-.0133	.0189	-.7068	-.0651	.0192
TOTAL		.0014	.0854	.0169	-.1776	.1741
			<u>Contrasts</u>			
Artistic vs. Appearance		.2151	.0523	4.1130	.0962	.3214
Artistic vs. Negative		.1283	.0515	2.4911	.0428	.2495
Appearance vs. Negative		-.0868	.0586	-1.4828	-.2204	.0205

*Note.* Differences in sample size are due to dropped cases because of missing data.