



# Experimental Evidence of the Prejudice and Discrimination That Exists Towards Tattooed People in Some Hiring Processes

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## Abstract

A considerable body of research has shown having visible tattoos is linked to greater workplace-related discrimination, with some women reporting feeling dehumanized based on their tattoo status within the context of their careers. However, most of this work is qualitative in nature, and little correlational or experimental evidence has supported these links or examined specific mechanisms of prejudice that might underpin this discrimination. The present study addressed these gaps using an experimental design in which participants were told they would assist with hiring a research assistant by viewing and evaluating online video job applications. In one condition that applicant was tattooed, and in the other she was not. Results showed that participants were less likely to hire the tattooed target, and that this effect was specific to when participants were average or higher in their dehumanization of her. These findings held controlling for participant sex, own tattoo status, age, and hiring capability in their job. Together, these findings suggest that some tattooed job applicants may face implicit discrimination which is driven by dehumanization of the target.

## Keywords

tattoos, dehumanization, workplace discrimination, tattoo-based discrimination, hiring decisions

Alongside a recent increase in the cultural popularity of body art (French et al., 2019), researchers have begun to consider whether visible tattoos detract from (or perhaps enhance) employment and career success (e.g., French et al., 2016, 2019; Timming, 2015; Timming et al., 2017). Although laws exist in many countries that prohibit discrimination against physical features including tattoos (e.g., Taylor & Taylor, 2020), studies never-



theless demonstrate that some individuals report experiencing tattoo-based workplace discrimination (see [Ellis, 2015](#) for review). Moreover, research has found that some individuals in hiring or managerial positions discriminate against tattooed applicants and employees (e.g., [Adisa et al., 2021](#)). This perception is so commonplace that many individuals, such as Americans who had been involved in the justice system, often report seeking tattoo removal procedures because of perceived employment discrimination ([Ojeda et al., 2023](#)). Nevertheless, other research examining large demographic data sets has found little or no evidence of tattoo-based job discrimination (e.g., [French et al., 2016, 2019](#)). Still other research has shown that employee tattoos can be used to benefit a business by conveying an ‘edgier’ and younger image for the brand ([Timming, 2017](#)). This suggests that the relationship between tattoos and employment discrimination is not a monolith, but rather likely relies upon underlying factors associated with how employers view individuals with tattoos.

One factor that may underlie this link is the dehumanization of tattooed applicants. Whereas prejudice often involves a negative attitude toward a particular group (e.g., [MacInnis & Hodson, 2012](#)), dehumanization, involves viewing someone as “less human”; denying individual qualities, such as personality traits, that are deemed uniquely human ([Haslam, 2006; Vaes et al., 2011](#)). Research has drawn links between dehumanization and prejudice, arguing that both are distinct forms of intergroup bias ([Kahn et al., 2015](#)). Some view dehumanization as a form of prejudice, where “Pinpointing the distinct causes and consequences of dehumanization as a distinct category rather than simply an extreme form of prejudice is important for future social psychology research and action.” ([Wilde et al., 2014](#)). Discrimination would then represent the behavioral output of such intergroup biases ([MacInnis & Hodson, 2012](#)).

Dehumanization has been linked independently to both tattooed women ([Heckerl, 2021](#)) as well as workplace/employment discrimination ([Utych & Fowler, 2021; Sarwar, 2020](#)). Accordingly, the goal of this study was to determine whether dehumanization moderates the relationship between a female job applicant’s tattoo status and participants’ hiring recommendation in a bogus crowdsourcing hiring paradigm.

## Dehumanization and Workplace Discrimination

Previous qualitative work has identified dehumanization as a component of workplace discrimination ([Asey, 2022](#)), with further theoretical work detailing the dehumanization of marginalized jobseekers by hiring managers ([Matthijs et al., 2022](#)). Nevertheless, little empirical work on the concept of dehumanization within the context of the workplace exists. Of the extant research, the focus has been on organizational rather than individual dehumanization, or the extent to which workers perceive their organization to dehumanize the workforce, in relation with perceived job discrimination. Specifically, [Sarwar \(2020\)](#) found that perceived organizational dehumanization (e.g., “My organization considers me as a tool devoted to its own success”) predicted workers’ perceived existence of

discrimination within the workplace (“Elderly workers do not have equal opportunities for training during work time”). Other research has shown that even positive dehumanization, such as ascribing mechanistic or animalistic words to describe an employee’s positive job performance (e.g., “Brad is a machine”; “Brad is a workhorse”) can reduce raters’ perceived trustworthiness of the employee, even while simultaneously conferring a small increase in perceived competence (Utych & Fowler, 2021). Interestingly, experimental evidence has shown that individuals with specific tattoo content (such as those depicting violence or nudity) are also rated as being less trustworthy (Hauke-Forman et al., 2021; Timming & Perrett, 2017).

## Tattoos and Dehumanization

Tattooed individuals are often viewed negatively on a range of traits, including as being less competent, trustworthy, and likeable (but more threatening; Hauke-Forman et al., 2021), less attractive, caring, intelligent, fashionable, and athletic, (but more creative; Resenhoeft et al., 2008), as well as being less artistic, motivated, generous, mysterious, religious, and honest (Degelman & Price, 2002). Although, some research suggests the opposite pattern (see Zidenberg et al., 2022). Dehumanization of others is often related to negative attributions made about those individuals, including negative moral judgements (Bastian et al., 2011), as well as with aggression toward those dehumanized individuals (Arnocky et al., 2019). However, it is important to note that dehumanization is both empirically and conceptually distinct from the concept of negative evaluation, the latter of which involve traits that can apply to humans and non-humans alike (Vaes et al., 2021). As Vaes and Colleagues noted: “dehumanization cannot be reduced to negativity... Theorists and researchers have taken care to differentiate humanness from valence and dehumanization from prejudice precisely because they wanted to determine whether dehumanization as a concept goes beyond mere negativity” (p. 31).

Tattoos have a long history of being linked to dehumanization. At times, tattoos could be used to facilitate or reflect existing dehumanization of a population. For example, tattoos would often be used to mark slaves in ancient Greece and Rome (Fusillo, 2022). The tattooing of Jewish people in concentration camps was meant to dehumanize the bearer (Milanović, 2017). In contemporary Western society, some researchers have argued that individuals might also be dehumanized because of their tattoos. Qualitative research has drawn links between tattoo status and dehumanizing behavior toward members of marginalized groups. Some qualitative research suggests that women experience feeling dehumanized as a result of their tattoos, “primarily through objectification, fetishization, stereotyping, and not being respected in their professional lives” (Heckerl, 2021, p. 14). The author further noted that eight of eleven women interviewed felt specifically dehumanized by men within the context of their careers. However, the participants were largely either tattoo artists or worked in fields with a specific body focus (e.g., modelling or sex work). The most direct empirical evidence of a link between

tattoos and dehumanization comes from [Forbes \(2001\)](#) who found that individuals rated others with tattoos as being lower in openness to experience and conscientiousness; two Big-Five personality factors that are rated as being the most uniquely human and which together comprise measures of dehumanization with lower scores indicating greater dehumanization ([Gosling & John, 1999](#); [Hodson & Costello, 2007](#)). However, in the study, participants also rated tattooed individuals lower on other personality traits that are unrelated to dehumanization. Moreover, it remains unclear if dehumanization of tattooed women would more broadly impact their professional lives, such as in hiring decisions for jobs that are not either tattoo or body related.

## Tattoos and Workplace Discrimination

Qualitative research has highlighted detailed personal examples of individuals dealing with tattoo-based job discrimination ([Ellis, 2015](#)). These reports align with meta-analytic work broadly demonstrating that professional appearance confers higher ratings for applicants in job interviews ([Barrick et al. 2009](#)). Specific to tattoos, [Drazewski \(2013\)](#) found that participants rated photos of bogus job applicants with tattoos as being less effective in the desired role than the same photos without tattoos. [Timming et al. \(2017\)](#) found that photos of tattooed job applicants were rated as less hireable relative to controls; and this effect was greatest for customer-facing roles. One recent study found that participants who were asked to imagine taking on the hypothetical role of a hiring manager were less likely to hire, and recommended lower salaries for, women depicted in photos wearing business attire altered to exhibit 'mild' to 'extreme' amounts of tattoos, relative to the baseline stock photos of women without tattoos. Tattooed photos of women were also rated as less warm (e.g., cooperative, socially oriented, and concerned for others) and less competent relative to the no tattoo conditions ([Henle et al., 2022](#)). Follow-up research showed that modifying the bogus female applicant's qualification for the position did not moderate the relationship between tattoo status and hypothetical hiring decisions, but that low qualification interacted with tattoo status to predict a lower recommended starting salary. Similarly, modifying the applicant's warmth by highlighting their volunteer experience did not moderate the effect of tattoo status on hypothetical hiring ([Henle et al., 2022](#)). This work corresponds with qualitative investigation of real-world hiring managers who, overall, report tattoos as having a negative impact on employee selection, albeit one that is augmented by some specific employment factors including tattoo location and content, and job type ([Timming, 2015](#)).

Conversely, some research has shown no evidence of employment or monetary discrimination against tattooed versus non-tattooed people, and in some circumstances, tattooed individuals were even more likely to gain jobs relative to non-tattooed individuals ([French et al., 2019](#)). Rather, some bivariate data suggesting employment discrimination of tattooed individuals may be due to other associated variables such as occupation type, as behavior and lifestyle factors, which, once controlled for in large US

and Australian data sets, reduce or eliminate the effects of tattoo status (French et al., 2016). Indeed, some experimental evidence suggests that job status may play a role in the level of tattoo-based discrimination individuals face, where more ‘white collar’ jobs may be more prone to such discrimination. For example, females described as surgeons were less preferred as a doctor than the same face pictured without a tattoo, but this effect was not found when the job was changed to auto mechanic (where both female faces were rated low; Baumann et al., 2016). Surveys of workers demonstrate equally complex and inconsistent findings. For example, service workers with more tattoos have higher perceived workplace discrimination, but also report earning more money (Tews & Stafford, 2020). Furthermore, participants rated a fictional female clinical psychologist profile with a “provocative tattoo” (a black and grey skull with flowers on the bicep) as more competent, but less professional, in comparison to the no tattoo condition (Zidenberg et al., 2022). Together, these results suggest that research must go deeper into understanding individual differences in tattoo-based hiring discrimination to determine potential psychological factors that might drive this link among those making hiring decisions.

## The Present Study

We are unaware of any research exploring dehumanization as a potential driver of tattoo-based employment discrimination. The conflicting evidence around the effects of tattoo-based job discrimination suggests that the relationship is more complex than some findings might indicate, and that the mixed effects of tattoos on employers’ decision-making might be due, in part, to individual differences in how the employer perceives the tattooed individual. Here, we propose that those who are more prone to dehumanizing a tattooed job applicant will be more likely to discriminate against them. We tested this hypothesis using an experimental design, whereby participants were told they would be participating in a crowdsourced hiring decision for a research laboratory, whereby their recommendations would contribute to who is hired for the job. Participants viewed a video job application where an experimental confederate (tattooed or not tattooed) described their interest and qualification for a research assistant position. Participants rated the applicant on personality traits (used to calculate a dehumanization score), the applicant’s perceived qualification for the job, and their interest in hiring the applicant. We hypothesized that the applicant would be rated as less qualified and would score lower in hiring recommendation when tattooed versus not, and that this link would be moderated by dehumanization, such that this association would be strongest when the participants dehumanized the tattooed target. In other words, we expected that the independent variable (i.e., seeing the applicant as tattooed or not) would predict the dependent variables (i.e., hiring decision/perception of qualification), most strongly at higher levels of the moderator (i.e., dehumanization). Those less inclined to dehumanize

a tattooed person were expected not to behave in a prejudiced or discriminatory way toward them.

## Method

### Transparency and Openness Statement

This research received approval from the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board in accordance with the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement on research ethics (TCPS-2).

### Participants

A-priori sample size calculation using G-Power (Faul et al., 2009) for an interaction effect with a total of seven variables in the model showed that with a small-medium effect size (.05), an alpha of .05 and 80% power, we required a sample of 159 participants. We oversampled by nearly 50% to ensure that we could accommodate the anticipated need to exclude inattentive responders using the online data collection method. Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) was used to recruit 306 respondents (between Oct 29, 2021, and Mar 17, 2022), who had to pass two attention checks for their data to be included in the final sample. The first attention check asked: "What is the name of the applicant?" and a second item embedded later in the survey stated: "If you are paying attention to the survey, please select 4 - Very applicable". Approximately 15% ( $n = 47$ ) failed at least one attention check and were not retained. Therefore, participants were 259 American and Canadian men and women ( $M_{age} = 33.42$ ,  $SD = 5.69$ ). Remuneration was \$.75 USD. Sample ethnicity/cultural heritage was 79% Caucasian, 16% Black, 5% Latin-American, 3% Asian, 2% Indigenous, 2% South Asian, and 1% Arab or West Asian.<sup>1</sup>

### Procedure

#### Video Stimuli

Participants first read the following instructions: "Recently, research has shown that in-person interviews are poor predictors of job performance. With COVID-19 further limiting in-person interviews, we are studying whether hiring based upon short video resumés is an effective way to find a good employee using crowdsourcing as a way of making hiring decisions. We will show you one random applicant video for a research coordinator job in our lab. The job involves clerical work such as participant recruitment, scheduling, coordinating research projects delegating tasks to others, and data entry. Please evaluate the candidate using the provided form. Your responses will help deter-

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1) Total percentage is greater than 100% because to allow participants to select multiple ethnicities that apply to them.

mine who is hired for the job in our lab. Nipissing University is a public institution that does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, appearance or grooming, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any hiring practices. We do require support staff to wear business-casual attire in the workplace. Please click continue when you are ready to watch the applicant's video". Participants were then randomly assigned to watch one of three videos that used an identical applicant saying the same script and wearing the same attire.

The conditions varied only by the degree to which she was tattooed (no tattoos, full sleeve tattoo, or arm sleeve plus chest tattoo, see [Figure 1](#)). To increase the ecological validity of the tattoo stimuli, thirty tattoo parlors in North Bay, Toronto, and Ottawa were contacted to determine the most common tattoo designs among females for "full sleeve" (i.e., a tattoo that extends from the wrist to the shoulder), and chest tattoos. Of those contacted, 11 tattoo shops responded. Floral designs were most common for a full sleeve (47%) and for a chest tattoo (50%). This information was used to determine the appropriate tattoo designs for the female applicant to wear.

**Figure 1**

*Stimuli Depicting the Three Tattoo Conditions (no Tattoo, Arm Sleeve, and Chest Plus Arm Sleeve)*



Independent samples *t*-tests indicated that there were no significant differences between the sleeve tattoo and sleeve + chest tattoo conditions on either dehumanization,



$t(178) = -0.12, p = .90$ , or hiring decision,  $t(178) = 0.82, p = .41$ . Therefore, we aggregated these conditions to increase statistical power. Because it is possible that those whose jobs involve hiring could behave differently in the experiment, we asked participants: “Are you currently in a position to hire employees?” The ‘no tattoo’ group did not differ from the ‘tattoo’ group in their hiring ability,  $t(257) = -.26, p = .79$ .

### Dehumanization

Research suggests that respondents rate the personality traits of Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness as being the most uniquely human factors, and researchers consider low target ratings on these traits to indicate dehumanization of that individual (Gosling & John, 1999; Hodson & Costello, 2007). Following previous research (e.g., Arnocky et al., 2019; Hodson & Costello, 2007), participants rated the applicant openness to experience and conscientiousness using four items modified for rating others from the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). Items were scored along a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *trait does not apply to her*, 7 = *trait strongly applies to her*, with scores averaged to create a dehumanization score. Data were recoded such that higher scores indicated a lower rating of the target on these traits. The measure showed acceptable internal consistency,  $\alpha = .70$ .

### Hiring Decision

Participants responded to two hiring decision items. The first, tapped their assessment of the applicant’s qualification for the position (“How qualified is the applicant for this job?”), and the second tapped their hiring recommendation (“How likely would you be to personally hire the applicant?”), each rated on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using PROCESS macro (Model 1 with 5000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2013) for SPSS (28.0.1.1; IBM Corp., 2021), including examination of Johnson-Neyman floodlight data to determine the ranges within which the moderation was significant, in addition to the traditional spotlight approach. The moderator variable (dehumanization) was examined at ‘high’ (+ 1 standard deviation from the mean), ‘mean’, and ‘low’ (- 1 standard deviation from the mean) levels.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. Of note, and contrary to some previous research (Forbes, 2001; Heckerl, 2021) tattoo status did not correlate with dehumanization, suggesting that overall, participants



did not dehumanize tattooed individuals more than non-tattooed individuals. In other words, participants overall did not have an overarching tendency to broadly dehumanize the tattooed applicant. Age, sex (*male* = -0.5, *female* = 0.5), real life hiring ability, and own tattoo status were entered as covariates, tattoo condition (*no tattoo* = -0.5, *tattoo* = 0.5) as the predictor, and dehumanization as the moderator. Continuous variables were mean-centered. The model was run twice: once with perceived applicant qualification, and once with willingness to hire the applicant as the dependent variables.

**Table 1**  
*Zero Order Correlations Among Study Variables*

Variable	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Tattoo Condition	259	—	—	-0.50	0.50	—						
2. Age	259	33.42	5.69	21.00	45.00	-.03	—					
3. Tattoo Status	259	—	—	-0.50	0.50	-.03	.01	—				
4. Sex	259	—	—	-0.50	0.50	.02	.15*	.23***	—			
5. Real Life Hire Ability	259	—	—	-0.50	0.50	.02	-.02	.07	.17**	—		
6. Dehumanization	259	2.55	1.09	1.00	5.50	.06	-.09	-.04	-.24***	-.37***	—	
7. Willingness to Hire	259	3.93	0.85	1.00	5.00	-.19**	-.04	.14*	.10	.16**	-.38***	—
8. Qualification for Job	250	3.99	0.70	1.00	5.00	-.10	-.02	.05	.09	.04	-.33***	.55***

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

First, results showed that hiring decision was unrelated to participant age, hiring ability in the participants’ workplaces, and sex. Participants’ own tattoo status predicted hiring likelihood, showing that tattooed participants were more likely to hire the applicant. Results showed statistically significant main effects of both tattoo condition and dehumanization, as well as for their interaction (Table 2, left). Results supported hypothesis one, that tattoo-based discrimination relied upon dehumanization of the applicant, such that those who were exposed to a tattooed applicant and who were prone to dehumanizing her, were least likely to hire her. Specifically, tattoo condition predicted lower interest in hiring the applicant when participants scored at the mean (*B* = -.32, *SE* = .10, *t* = -3.04, *p* = .002) or high (+1 *SD*) in dehumanization of the applicant (*B* = -.57, *SE* = .15, *t* = -3.78 *p* = .0002), but not for participants scoring low (-1 *SD*) on dehumanization (*B* = -.06, *SE* = .14, *t* = -0.44 *p* = .66; Figure 2, left panel).

Table 2

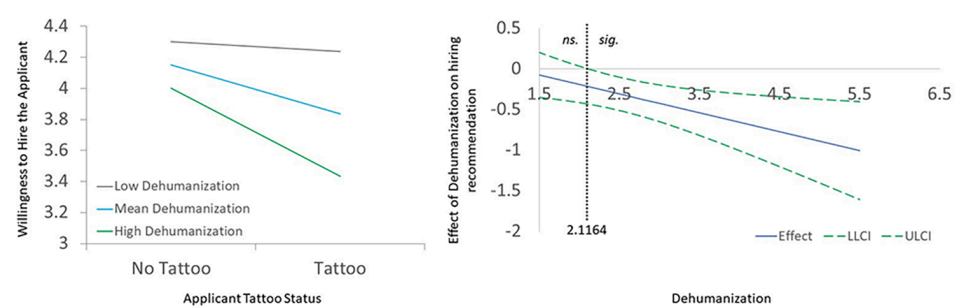
PROCESS Model 1 Results Examining the Effects of Tattoo Condition and Dehumanization on Hiring (Left) and the Applicant's Perceived Qualification (Right)

Variable	Hiring Decision				Qualification for Position			
	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p
Tattoo Condition	-.32	.10	-3.04	.003**	-.12	.09	-1.37	.17
Age	-.01	.01	-1.70	.08	-.01	.01	-1.00	.32
Tattoo Status	.27	.10	2.63	.009**	.07	.09	0.77	.44
Sex	-.01	.01	-0.79	.43	-.01	.09	-0.15	.88
Real Life Hire Ability	.01	.10	0.03	.97	-.15	.09	-1.70	.09
Dehumanization	-.25	.05	-5.31	< .001***	-.19	.04	-4.70	< .001***
Condition x Dehumanization	-.23	.10	-2.43	.01*	-.09	.08	-1.15	.25

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Figure 2

Standardized Conditional Moderation Effect (Left Panel) of Dehumanization Scores on the Relationship Between Tattoo Status and Hiring Decision and Johnson-Neyman Confidence Limits (Right Panel)



Note. The two tattoo conditions did not differ on target variables and were collapsed into one tattoo condition variable.

Deconstruction of the interaction using the Johnson-Neyman floodlight technique showed that the moderation effect was significant for dehumanization above the mean-centered value of 2.11 (Figure 2, right panel), which suggests a significant effect of tattoo condition upon willingness to hire the applicant when dehumanization is in the mid-normal range, becoming more significant as dehumanization increases.

Next, we considered whether the tattooed female was also viewed as being less qualified for the position. Age, sex, and participants' own tattoo status, and hiring ability in participants' own workplaces were unrelated to perception of the applicant's qualification for the position. Results showed that tattoo condition did not predict perceived qualification, nor did tattoo condition interact with dehumanization of the target.

There was a main effect of dehumanization (Table 2, right). This suggests that men and women's reduced willingness to hire a tattooed female when high in dehumanization is not a function of perceiving the applicant as being less qualified for the job.

## Discussion

Experimental evidence from laboratory studies of employment discrimination suggest that tattooed individuals are less likely to be viewed as acceptable employees (Miller et al., 2009), less desirable for jobs (Drazewski, 2013) and to be less hireable (Timming et al., 2017). However, demographic studies of actual hiring decisions are more equivocal, with research showing little to no hiring bias after controlling for other variables (e.g., French et al., 2016; 2019). This study addressed two potential issues with extant experimental research: 1) the novel use of a deception whereby participants were told they were participating in an actual crowdsourced hiring decision, and 2) the consideration of dehumanization as a potentially important moderator which might help to explain why some individuals discriminate against tattooed individuals whereas others do not.

In alignment with previous findings, results showed that participants were less willing to hire the applicant when she was adorned with tattoos. There was also a main effect of dehumanization, indicating that the extent to which participants dehumanized the female applicant predicted a lower willingness to hire her. More importantly, there was a statistically significant condition x dehumanization interaction, whereby condition (tattoo versus no tattoo) predicted less willingness to hire the applicant at average-to-high levels of dehumanization, but not at low levels. This finding suggests that whether a person in a hiring position will discriminate against a tattooed applicant depends on the extent to which they dehumanize tattooed individuals.

Among our control variables, participants' own tattoo status positively predicted their willingness to hire the applicant but did not predict their assessment of the applicant's quality. This contrasts slightly with some previous research showing a null relationship between participant tattoo status (number of tattoos) and their ratings of acceptability of working with a tattooed individual (Miller et al., 2009). Perhaps this reflects a difference in measurement of tattoo status across studies, and future research might consider a more thorough investigation of whether tattooed individuals are indeed less likely to discriminate against other tattooed individuals in the employment sector. Miller et al. (2009) also examined bivariate links between tattoo status and agreeableness (but not conscientiousness) and found a null correlation which corresponds with our findings, suggesting that tattooed individuals are not less likely to dehumanize other tattooed individuals.

It was also interesting that dehumanization did not correlate with tattoo condition, suggesting that, overall, participants did not dehumanize the tattooed applicant more than the non-tattooed applicant. Considering extant qualitative work arguing that peo-

ple with tattoos generally feel dehumanized (e.g., Heckerl, 2021) and some empirical evidence linking images of a tattooed person to lower human-specific personality ratings (albeit not specifically calculated together as a measure of dehumanization; Forbes, 2001), future work should examine the different factors that might influence whether a tattooed person feels dehumanized or is dehumanized by others.

Our second hypothesis that tattoo condition would also interact with dehumanization to predict the applicant's lower qualification for the job, was not supported. Rather, there was only a main effect of dehumanization, such that those who dehumanized the applicant (regardless of tattoo status) viewed her as less qualified. This null interaction suggests that the unwillingness to hire the tattooed applicant among those higher in dehumanization was unlikely to be due to viewing her as less qualified. This null interaction could serve as additional evidence of more direct discriminatory hiring tendencies among those who dehumanize tattooed individuals, rather than tattoos affecting a person's perceived qualification for a job that would then feed more indirectly into a hiring decision. Indeed, a post-hoc reanalysis of our hiring decision model with perceived qualification for the job entered as an additional covariate did not meaningfully change the model, suggesting that hirers who dehumanized the tattooed applicant were less likely to hire her regardless of their perception of her qualification for the job.

The current study had several strengths, such as novelty and the use of ecologically valid stimuli. However, as with any study, there were limitations. OLS regression was used to test for moderation, and there were unequal groups for the categorical independent variable. This can result in a decrease of statistical power and unequal error variance across the groups (discussed in Frazier et al., 2004). We also examined hireability for a research lab coordinator position, and our findings may not apply to other occupations, such as "blue-collar" (e.g., manual labor) work, whereby being tattooed may not garner the same kind of work-based negative prejudice and discrimination (Baumann et al., 2016). Therefore, in future work, researchers should seek to recruit relatively equal groups of participants across conditioning and vary the type of job that the tattooed individual is being considered for.

## Conclusion

The inconsistency of previous findings surrounding applicant tattoo status and hiring decisions suggests that how those responsible for hiring perceive tattooed individuals may play a role in potential discrimination. The present study considered whether the extent to which hirers dehumanize tattooed applicants decreases their willingness to hire them. Using a novel crowdsourced hiring paradigm where participants were led to believe they were contributing to a real hiring decision, results showed that tattooed applicants were discriminated against at average and high (+1 *SD*) levels of dehumanization, but not at low levels (-1 *SD*). These findings suggest that whether or not an individual in the position to hire will discriminate against a tattooed applicant depends upon the extent

to which they dehumanize them. As tattoos become increasingly popular among adults in Western cultural contexts (French et al., 2019), it is critical to ascertain the extent to which tattoo status might impact perceived hireability and qualification for kinds of work. Previous empirical work has been somewhat equivocal regarding whether having tattoos elicits negative (e.g., Hauke-Forman et al., 2021) or positive work-related attributions (e.g., Zidenberg et al., 2022). Our findings help to clarify some of this ambiguity by pointing to the importance of individual differences in dehumanization.

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