

Effects of Tattoo Presence and Race on Approach Behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Stereotyping, or a generalized belief that we hold about members of a social group, is something that most people experience (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2005). Due to the fact that the stereotype motivations for discriminating behavior are usually unconscious and unidentifiable at first, they are considered demonstrations of implicit discrimination. One particular area of stereotyping that is growing in interest applies to body modification, such as tattoos.

Few studies such as Houghton and Durkin (1995) have been conducted on actual discrimination towards individuals with tattoos. Houghton and Durkin also reported that previous research demonstrated unfavorable attitudes in non-tattooed people toward visible tattoos on others, and that delinquent youths interpreted the presence of tattoos as association with their subculture. Houghton and Durkin found that general attitudes toward tattoos were negative and there was an overwhelming agreement on the stereotype of individuals with tattoos being "bikies," which is an undesirable social category. They also found that people with tattoos were associated with lower social status and illegal activities. The high school aged participants in the study even stated that they would cross the road if they encountered an individual with a tattoo.

Burger and Finkel (2002) found that tattoos significantly predict high risk behaviors, such as cigarette smoking and drug abuse, in college students, even though tattoos are highly favored by many college students.

On the other hand, Durkin and Houghton (2000) stated that tattoos have been associated with criminality and that participants were more likely to pair the tattooed male with the negative description, and less likely to pair the tattooed male with the neutral or prosocial definition.

A survey conducted in a previous class (Survey of Psychology: Social) hinted at the idea that college females may find it difficult to approach an individual with a tattoo.

The purpose of the current study is to examine the effects of tattoo presence and race of a target on participants' intention to approach the individual. It was hypothesized that the participants would be less likely to approach a target with a tattoo, regardless of the ethnicity of the target. It was also hypothesized that the participants would be less likely to approach the African American target than the Caucasian target.

METHODS

Participants

41 participants were recruited from a medium sized university in East Texas. All participants were female, and were assigned to conditions through the use of systematic randomization.

Design

The study was a 2 (ethnicity of participant: Caucasian, African American) by 2 (tattoo: yes, no) factorial design experiment. The dependent variable was intention to approach the target.

Measures

After giving consent, the participants received an intention to approach questionnaire, that was a modified version of the Intention to Behave Scale created by Madden, Ellen, and Ajzen (1992). It included questions such as:

• Approaching the individual in the picture would be:

Good – Bad, Pleasant – Unpleasant

• When it comes to approaching individuals, such as the one in the picture, I want to do what most people who are important to me would want me to do:

Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree

• For me to approach the individual in the picture would be:

Very Easy – Very Difficult

• I intend to approach the individual in the picture:

Definitely Do – Definitely Do Not

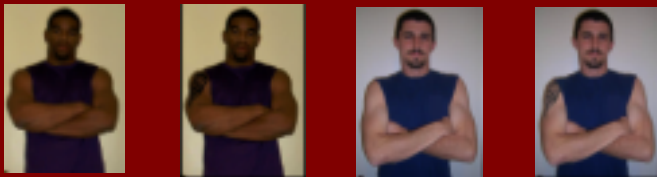
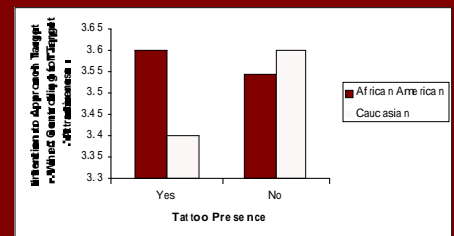
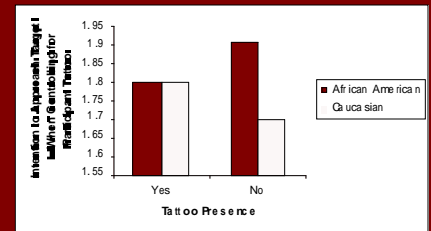
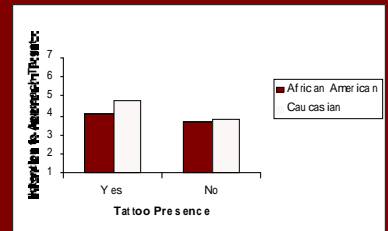
The figures below demonstrate the combinations of all levels of the independent variables.

RESULTS

The current study utilized a 2 (target ethnicity) x 2 (tattoo presence) between ANOVA with 2 covariates: participant tattoo and perceived attractiveness of target. A Cronbach's alpha was conducted and it was determined that seven items were highly related, Cronbach's alpha = 0.856. A mean score for the remaining questions was used in all subsequent analyses.

Each measured extraneous variable was correlated with the dependent variable scores. Two of the three measured extraneous variables demonstrated a significant correlation. The first was the attractiveness of the target demonstrating that as the attractiveness of the target increased, the likelihood to approach increased, $r(40) = 0.398, p < .01$. The second was the presence of a participant tattoo demonstrating that the likelihood to approach the target increased with the participant having a tattoo, $r(40) = 0.363, p < .05$.

An ANOVA with two covariates was performed and there were no significant main effects or interactions. One trend was demonstrated and it was consistent with what was hypothesized in that the target without a tattoo ($M = 3.745$) was more likely to be approached than the target with a tattoo ($M = 4.386$), $F(1, 35) = 1.892, p = 0.178$.



DISCUSSION

Although there were no significant main effects or interactions, the trend that was found did not support the hypotheses. The results demonstrated that the participant having a tattoo increased the likelihood that they would approach the pictured target. If the participant had a tattoo, then the ethnicity of the target with a tattoo did not affect the participant's rating of their intent to approach the target. However, the ethnicity of the target did matter when participating in the no tattoo present condition, in which participants reported a higher likelihood to not approach the African American target in comparison with the Caucasian target.

It is possible that for participants who have a tattoo, the stigma and stereotype of body modification is not as salient as it would be for participants who do not have tattoos. The trend could also be attributed to the fact that as individuals we tend to be surrounded by those that are similar to ourselves (Lesko, 2003). In the current study this could have created a subconscious feeling of familiarity with the target because of similar physical appearance in the tattoo present condition.

Retrospection indicates that by incorporating a more equivalent proportion of participants with tattoos, the trend that was demonstrated may become more prominent and reach significance. Nonetheless, this study has given insight into how college students react to their peers with tattoos. It brings to light how females might react to a male that is unknown to them based solely on their race and whether or not the male has a tattoo, and has shown us that there is not much of an effect, at least for college students.

The current study has limited external validity due to the fact that the sample size consisted of a small age range of college females. The trends that were demonstrated may not be true for older females, or those without a college education. Future generations could benefit from research delving deeper into the issue of race and tattoos in regards to approaching behavior because these are both physical attributes that people in a society are faced with more and more everyday. I believe that both of the issues addressed by the current study are strong influences on our judgment of others and that the only way we can begin to change society is to find out what the fixation on race and tattoos are in the first place.

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