Tattoos and race/ethnicity have been thoroughly researched through the lens of social perceptions, and each can act as a characteristic Erving Goffman termed a stigma. Goffman wrote that “…an attribute that makes [a person] different from others…and of a less desirable kind…is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive” (1963/1986, pp. 2-3). In his categories of stigma, Goffman included race or nationality and what he called “abominations of the body” (p. 4). The following examples illustrate a few negative perceptions and outcomes based on race and tattoos:

**Race**
- Black and Latino men are perceived as more threatening than white men (Johnson & King, 2017).
- Black men are more likely than white men to be convicted of a felony (Camacho & Brown, 2018).
- Compared to white individuals, Latino individuals are perceived as more likely to commit assault, and black individuals are perceived as more likely to commit crimes like robbery or burglary (Funk & Todorov, 2013).

Despite the scope of research focused on these topics, a literature review found no study examining the interconnection of race and tattoos. The present research sought to address this gap.

**Hypotheses**
- All men with a digitally-added facial tattoo will be rated less likable, less competent, less trustworthy, and will receive lower social distance scores than those without.
- The black and Latino men with an added facial tattoo will be rated more negatively in all categories than the white man with a facial tattoo.

**Results**
- Data for each study were analyzed using a 3 x 2 factorial MANOVA.
- Across dependent variables, participants in both studies rated tattooed faces more negatively than non-tattooed faces at $p < 0.001$, supporting H1.
- Race also influenced participants’ perceptions, but the influence varied across DVs and studies.

**Conclusion**
- As predicted, results from both studies indicated that the presence of a facial tattoo influenced participants’ ratings across all four dependent variables.
- Participants in both studies indicated desire for greater distance from tattooed individuals and rated them as less likable, less competent, and less trustworthy than those without a facial tattoo. These findings support the first hypothesis.

No interaction effects were found in either study—the results did not indicate that participants’ ratings of the men varied as the result of the combination of race and presence of a tattoo, which failed to support the second hypothesis.

This suggests that people of color with visible tattoos should not face harsher stigma than white counterparts.

Interestingly, there was a significant difference in the way race influenced participants’ ratings between the two studies. Participants in Study 1 rated the black man more favorably on three of the four dependent variables, indicating desire for less social distance from the black man than the Latino or white men and rating the former as more competent and trustworthy than the latter two. In Study 2, race did not significantly influence ratings on the DVs of competence or trustworthiness. For the DVs of social distance and likability, however, MTTurk participants rated the Latino man more harshly, desiring more social distance from than the black man and rating the Latino man as less likable than both other groups.

The disparity in ratings between samples may have resulted from a number of factors. Social desirability bias seems a likely candidate—research participants often feel pressure to respond to sensitive questions in a socially desirable manner, an effect mitigated by increased privacy (Krumpl, 2013; Krysan, 1998).

Despite steps to maintain anonymity of answers in both samples, the MTTurk sample was recruited online and so had greater overall privacy.

In terms of limitations, both samples were predominantly white; future research would utilize quota samples to ensure racial/ethnic representation. Further, future iterations could include photos of women, different methods of applying the false tattoo, and other locations of the tattoos on the body, and perhaps the use of real people instead of photos.

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**References**