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**Visible Body Modifications & Employability in Hospitality Industry: Manager vs.
Customer Perspective**

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Abstract

The present study investigates employability of individuals with visible body modifications, specifically tattoos and piercings, in hospitality industry. The study was twofold. First part of the study was a questionnaire administered to tourists in a paper-pencil format, investigating their attitudes toward tattooed service providers, as well as the level of comfort they feel while served by a person with visible body modifications. The second part of the study was a questionnaire distributed to managers involved in hiring decisions in hospitality industry through which impact of visible body modifications on their assessment of employability and personality traits of potential employees was tested. Controlling for the effect of gender, physical attractiveness, dress, body posture and facial expressions, managers were presented with a set of eight photographs they needed to evaluate in terms of employability and Big Five personality traits. The results of the customer survey suggest that customers do not mind being served by individuals with visible body modifications, feel relaxed and at ease with such a service, and overall report no negative stereotypes. Based on the managers' survey, people with big tattoos were rated as most employable, most extroverted, open to experience, agreeable, and conscientious, with lowest scores in neuroticism. Interestingly, in terms of Big Five traits, no relation was discovered between managers' assessment and the actual scores of the eight individuals presented in the photographs.

Keywords: body modifications, employability, customers, managers, hospitality

Visible Body Modifications & Employability in Hospitality Industry: Manager vs. Customer Perspective

"Everybody does something to their bodies to communicate who they are. Even if just to comb their hair"

Adler, 1999

History of Body Modifications

Piercings and tattoos played an important role in the lives of many civilizations throughout the time (Lineberry, 2007). The first known evidence was found in the distant 3000 BC on a mummified male named Ötzi. According to the evidence, the remains of the man found were covered with 61 tattoo marks (Deter-Wolf et al. 2016, as cited by Rao, 2018) and additionally, the mummified body showed evidence that his ears were pierced on several spots (Hesse, 2007, as cited by Rao, 2018). Research discovered the different uses of these body modifications among different civilizations. For example, Egyptians used belly button piercings to symbolize royalty. Roman military leaders and servicemen pierced nipples in order to present courage. Mayans pierced their tongues during their ceremonies for spiritual reasons (Botchway & Kuc, 1998, as cited by Rao, 2018).

A lot of royalty in the 19th and 20th century decorated their bodies with tattoos; the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, Prince and Princess Waldemar of Denmark, Queen Olga of Greece, King Oscar of Sweden, the Duke of York, the Grand Duke Constantine, Lady Randolph Churchill (Dawson, 2021). King Frederick IX of Denmark was known as “the tattooed king” because instead of getting traditional souvenirs, he collected tattoos during his travels.

The use of piercings and tattoos has changed over the years, serving as amulets, status symbols, declarations of love, signs of religious beliefs, adornments, and even forms of punishment (Lineberry, 2007). What has never changed, however, is that they have always remained personal.

One of the reasons why people perceive tattoos negatively is the decision of Emperor Constantine to ban them (Lineberry, 2007). At that time, it was believed that the human body was a work of God and that any correction would be an insult. When Christianity became the dominant religion, missionaries traveling around the world also spread this opinion. Despite these sermons, sailors, warriors, and explorers could not resist the temptation to adorn their bodies. As simple as that, the trend began to rise and experienced the biggest boom in 1940, which went down in history as the "golden age of tattooing". Organically or through the collision with another culture, this practice only gained popularity. Modern society has developed enough technologies to keep this practice safe and has only contributed positively to its existence. Now the body has become not only a work of art but also a work of culture. People of different ages use their bodies to express themselves and send various messages.

Piercings and Tattoos in 21st century

In 2002, the term "tattoo" was the most often searched item on the internet (Zuckerman , 2020).

In 2009, among the Americans between the age of 18 and 25 (people born between 1981 and 1988), the most popular way of self-expression were body modifications (Pew Research Center, 2009). Adorned with at least one tattoo is 36% of this generation and more than a half, 54%, have done some form of body modification (tattoos, body piercings, untraditional hair dye). Still, people born between 1966 and 1980 or "Gen X-ers" were the ones with the highest

percentage of tattoos, 40% of them had at least one. The research showed that male and female gender are roughly the same in numbers when it comes to tattooing and untraditional hair dying, while body piercings were more popular among females.

The general population has different opinions on the impact of increased number of tattooed people (Pew Research Center, 2009). The results show that 45% of people claim this trend has not made much difference, 40% think that this has been a change for the worse and only 7% stated that this has been change for the better. Furthermore, the elderly in America are the ones who dominate with negative attitudes. When asked about the opinion of how is the trend of more and more people getting tattoos affecting the world, 64% of respondents in the age range of 65+ years and 51% of people in the age range 50-64 years said that this has been a change for the worse. Most neutral were people under the age of 50 (50% of them said that it hasn't had an impact). Moreover, the significant discrepancies in the answers depending on age were found more among female than male public. If comparing women over 50 years and those under, 61% of the first group believe that this was the change for the worse, whereas only the 27% of other group supports this opinion.

Statistics from 2012 show that in America, 42% of adults had at least one tattoo and 61% of them had piercings (Stapaw.com, 2012). While Jackson (2019) reports that there was an increase of 21% in the number of tattooed individuals in those previous 7 years (as cited by Tews, 2020). Further estimations from 2020 show that the increase from 2007 until 2019 was 50%.

Some researches work in favor of presenting the positive sides of this trend i.e. market research firm IBISWorld reported an appraised \$1.6 billion in revenue produced by the tattoo industry (Zuckerman , 2020). Supposedly, this industry is the 6th fastest growing in America. The estimate is that it will grow by 8% each year in the next 10 years. Today, 40% of people between

the age of 18 and 34 have one tattoo or more (Modern gentlemen.net, 2022). The evidence shows that 70% of millennial parents reported that they don't mind tattooed professionals in childcare.

However, other studies suggest that there are still strong negative stereotypes associated with visibly modified people (Modern gentlemen.net, 2022). Namely, the research finds that people are still afraid of the effects tattoos will leave on other people and don't feel comfortable showing them off. Statistics show that the 4th reason for regretting the tattoo is the negative effect on the professional image. More than 50% of the general population sees tattooed individuals as less serious. Still, the level of tolerance is determined by the type of profession. Only 23% of employers reported they would give employment opportunities to a tattooed individual, without taking into consideration the size or the location of it.

Individual Identity and Body Modifications

Some people believe that this kind of art serves only fashionable purposes, while others support the opinion that it has a deeper psychological meaning (Wohlrab et al., 2007). These authors have studied the motivations for acquiring body art. In their work, they highlighted the 10 most important factors that influence the decision. In fact, one of the 10 most important factors in the decision to purchase body art is the combination of beauty, art, and fashion to be different and unique. Interestingly, the other 9 motives are individuality (as an attempt to stand out and show one's true self), personal narrative (as a form of mental healing from physically or mentally painful situations), physical endurance (as a struggle with one's limitations and stamina), group affiliations and commitment (as evidence of belonging to a social group), resistance (as a form of protest against a particular movement or people), spirituality and cultural tradition (to strengthen the connection with one's beliefs), addiction (due to the endorphins released during the procedure, which are responsible for the positive feeling afterward), sexual motives (such as emphasizing

one's sexuality or sexual inclinations), no specific reason (this motive is more related to not having thought about the decision or making the decision under the influence of alcohol or drugs).

Social Identity and Body Modifications

Attribution theory explains how people tend to interpret behavior of other people by pointing to “internal dispositions” or “external situations” (or in other words, make judgments related to their interpretation of factors responsible for someone’s behavior) (Fritz Heider, 1958; as cited by (Myers, 2009)). For example, if during the talk over coffee break Julie occasionally talks and Jack talks frequently, shy personality is to be attributed to Julie and an outgoing one to Jack (Idson & Mischel, 2001 as cited by Myers, 2009). However, these conclusions aren’t necessarily right. This is called the *fundamental attribution error* and it occurs when the “influence of personality” is given significantly more importance than the “influence of situations”. Maybe Julie at the party behaves differently than Julie at the coffee break. Or perhaps, Jack is as quiet as Julie in class time. Therefore, people are prone to making the mistake of omitting the importance of the situation while explaining others’ behavior; especially after observing only one setting. This mistake is more often made with strangers because we base our attributions solely on their appearance and exclude the various possible situations. This phenomenon is known as *lookism* or in other words “physical attractiveness discrimination” (Newton, 2015, p.1)

Attitudes are “beliefs and feelings that predispose our reactions to objects people and events” (Myers, 2009). They are formed based on our perceptions and aforementioned attributions and have the power to predict our behavior towards someone. Therefore, if a person is perceived by an individual as e.g. mean, one’s feelings towards them will be negative and their behavior will be unfriendly. This is why attitudes guide actions when other stimuli are negligible

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a group, usually a different cultural or ethnic group (Myers, 2009). Like all attitudes, it is often overgeneralized and has various emotions and biases. Prejudices, like other types of prejudgment, are patterns that shape how we observe and understand events. Duncan's study questioned this phenomenon (1976). The results showed that most white participants, when shown an example of a white man shoving a black man, perceived the event as "horsing around". Whereas, when they saw an example of a black man shoving a white man, they observed the event as "violent". "Our preconceived ideas about people bias our impressions of their behavior. Prejudgments tailor perceptions." (Myers, 2009, p. 555)

The way people simplify the world is they categorize it (Myers, 2009). We sort things with similarities in groups. However, when people are categorized, there is a common creation of *stereotypes*. This occurrence biases our perceptions. With the categorization is present, people of one group tend to see people in another group as alike in appearance, personality, and attitudes even more than they in reality are. (Li & others, 1996 as cited by (Myers, 2009)) An example of this is that after 9/11 a lot of people perceive (or stereotype) Muslims as "terror-prone". When in reality, the National Research Council explained how the majority of the terrorists are not Muslim and that the majority of the people from this group have no connection to it. (Smelser & Mitchell, 2002)

Customer's Perceptions on Service

Baker and Cameron (1996, as cited by Dean, 2010) have introduced three factors that shape customers perceptions of overall service. These are: ambient factors (temperature, air, humidity, noise, odor...), design factors (layout, arrangement, visuals like texts, colors, signs...) and social factor (the appearance and behavior of employees and other customers in the environment). The appearance of the employee can be interpreted as an implicit sign of service quality. Dean (2010)

has further researched perceptions of tattoos on service personnel. His findings suggest that tattooed individuals do not have a more favorable view of visibly tattooed service employees than individuals who do not have tattoos. However, his research does suggest that the perceptions of individuals vary by age. More specifically, older generations find people with tattoos less appropriate for certain occupations than younger ones do. Finally, his results showed how consumers generally consider visible tattoos to be more acceptable to blue-collar workers such as mechanics, waiters, barbers / hairdressers, and less suitable for white collar professions such as bankers, accountants, doctors and dentists. This can be explained by image congruence hypothesis which suggests that consumers have stereotypical expectations of how a service provider should look based on their previous experience (Birdwell, 1968; Graeff, 1996; as cited by Dean, 2010). This is why they perceive visible tattoos appropriate for some individuals and inappropriate for the others.

Visible Piercings and Tattoos and Employability

What shapes professional opinion about people with body art is the potential impact these people can have on a company's image (10 Wrong Reasons, 2014). There are many biases associated with this culture that companies simply do not want to risk by employing its participants. Some of the most common are: Tattoos and piercings are considered unprofessional, they scare away customers, they are hazardous to health, they can be offensive, they are distracting, they convey the wrong message, they are too extreme, or they simply do not fit the dress code.

A study conducted by Swanger (2006), in which 30 executives from HR and college recruiters gave their opinion on the employment potential and their attitude towards people with visible body art, found that 86.67% of respondents claim that this type of applicant would be perceived negatively by their company. This high percentage indicates that people who express

themselves in this way are discriminated against and that this situation can lead to further problems in the labor market. Still, the hospitality, tourism and recreation industry was found to be the second on the list of “Share of Americans with a tattoo by occupation” (Statista, 2013). This means that 20% of employees operating in this industry are adorned with body art.

Another study shows how 85.3% of respondents believe tattoos and 80.8% believe piercings make a difference in how a person is judged (Totten, Lipscomb, & Jones, 2009). Furthermore, the same research found that 86.9% agree that society stereotypes people with tattoos. In addition to this, Dr. Ross Avilla shows in his findings that piercings and tattoos cause people to perceive individuals as less attractive, intelligent, honest, and caring (Avilla, 2014). They highlighted the fact that 87% of respondents claim that a visible body art would be a valid reason not to even consider the candidate as a potential employee.

However, as the popularity of the tattoos is increasing, so is the acceptance of body modification among employers in the hospitality industry (Tews, 2020). For example, shortly after Starbucks’s employee Kristie Williams collected more than 25,000 signatures on his petition for the company to alter their tattoo policy, Starbucks announced new dress code (Bradford, 2014). With the statement “Treat your tattoos as you treat your speech” (Bradford, 2014, para 5) this company allowed their employees to be adorned with this type of visible body modification, except for the ones on the face or throat. In addition to this, they allowed for their workers to have up to 2 earrings per ear, ear gauges and a small nose stud. However, they still didn’t allow dying hair in any “unnatural colors”.

When Ritz Carlton wanted to update its branding and asked for the customer feedback, they noticed how constant involvement in the customer service style allowed for them to keep up with customer demands (Solomon, 2015). One of their responses was more relaxed approach to

grooming standards of the brand. Aiming to better reflect the authenticity and community of some locations, Ritz Carlton allowed their employees to have visible tattoos in some cases, with the realization that “We’ve become intentionally less formal over time. We focus now on authentic, unscripted conversation and interactions with the customer” (Solomon, 2015, para 10)

Even though this shift in opinion among the employers is visibly happening, the status of visibly modified people in the workplace is still questionable (Tews, 2020). There are two types of studies currently. One type indicates how people with body modifications are “viewed as less acceptable for the workplace and perceived as lower performers” (in comparison to those without them) and the other type that proves that people with visible body modifications are not discriminated against. As Tews claims, the commonness of body adornments and the struggle of retaining talent in the hospitality industry, invites for further research on the possibilities of these people in this industry.

Hospitality Industry Labor Market

Hospitality industry has always struggled with high turnover rates (Peralta, 2021). Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2016 that an annual employee turnover rate was 73.8% in the hotel industry (Hausman, 2016). Still, 2021 was a critical year for the industry (Adams, 2021). Many companies faced enormous obstacles caused by COVID -19 and are struggling to keep their operations alive. Unfortunately, this is not the only problem they face. One of the major harms caused by the pandemic is the shortage of labor. A recent survey found that of the 13,000 unemployed workers in the hospitality industry, more than half would not return to work, and more than a third would not even consider returning to the industry. Adams explains this with the belief that, affected by the causes of virus, the employers have neglected the workers. They have stopped investing in trainings, are treating their employees as numbers and not humans with feelings and

kept low wages, which only drives potential candidates further away from the industry. This resulted in hospitality companies being desperate for workforce. According to Joblist's quarterly U.S. Job Market Report from October 2021, 58% of hospitality workers say they plan to quit their jobs (Peralta, 2021). In addition to this, those who plan to keep their jobs reported lower job satisfaction following the pandemic outbreak. Some of the stated reasons are: difficult customers for 38%, 34% blame inflexible schedules, COVID -19 risks were cited by 23%, and physical demands by 23%.

Impacts on Hiring Decisions in Hospitality Industry

Most commonly, the desired characteristic aimed for when searching for employees in the service industry is appropriate behavior when establishing communication with the customers, and the positive effect of it on customer perception (Timming et al., 2015). Hochschild (1983) defined this as "emotional labor". This term explains the ability of the employees to use their social skills in order to establish the effective interaction with the customer. However, more recent studies introduced another key term – "aesthetic labor" (Nickson et al., 2001; as cited by Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). Whyte (1948) initiated the researches related to the importance of the physical looks in "interactive" service industries (Timming et al., 2015). He concluded that there is a differentiation between the people more appropriate for "front-of-house" jobs and "back-of-house" jobs. McDowell, Batnitsky & Dyer (2007) further explained how it is the matter of nationality, gender, race and class; based on their research on a big international hotel in London. They highlighted that for front-line employees, it is of the high importance that the employee is aesthetically suitable. Chung and Liao (2010) noted that "front-of-house employees play a pivotal role in enhancing the performance of the workplace in industries such as retail and hospitality". (Timming et al., 2015). Williams and Connell (2010) claim that there are a lot of proofs that an

employees' fit with the organizational image is a huge factor in making the hiring decisions. Moreover, the interviews in the service industry are in fact designed to evaluate social skills but also physical attributes (Nickson et al., 2001; as cited by Warhurst and Nickson, 2007).

Methods

This research's primary goal was to determine if the discrimination against people adorned with body modifications while employing in the service industry is still present and to see if managers' hiring decisions are supported by the preferences of the customers. In order to obtain a deeper insight into the current trends, this research was divided into two studies. One study was designed to test the employability potential of people with body modifications and assessment by the managers who have a say in hiring decisions. The second study, on the other hand, was conducted on customers and examined their perceptions of people with visible body modifications in order to determine if the decisions brought by managers are, in fact, justified.

Study 1

Instrument. The purpose of this study was to measure the impact of visual cues on managers' perceptions of personality traits and employability potential. It aimed to find out if discrimination based on negative stereotypes associated with visible body modifications is still present. In addition to this, the study tested if employment possibilities in the service industry are equal for people adorned with visible body modifications and people without them.

As there were two main focuses in this study, namely the perceptions and employability potential, the questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire, concerning perceptions, used a set of items from the study which investigated "Personality judgments from everyday images of faces" (Sutherland, 2015). This set required participants to rate the extent to which the person in the photograph exhibited The Big Five personality traits

(extraversion, agreeableness, openness to new experiences, neuroticism, and conscientiousness) on a 10-point Likert scale. The supplementary material was used for explanations of the traits and was retrieved from the same research (Sutherland, 2015). In the second part of the questionnaire, regarding the employability potential, the participants were asked to evaluate, on a 10-point Likert scale, the likelihood of them hiring the person on the photograph and were asked an open-ended question to explain their decision.

To test the impact of visible body modifications on hiring decisions, the participants were presented with eight photos of individuals with or without adornments. Aiming to control for the potential impact of physical attractiveness, the individuals were selected based on the previously conducted research including 32 raters. The participant group included college students who were asked to rate the attractiveness of 16 individuals. To avoid biases and control for the impact of other socio-demographic factors on the assessment of personality traits and employability of individuals, the portrayal was made uniform by controlling the dress factor (all individuals wore the similar attire - clean white or black t-shirt). Additionally, the impact of nonverbal behavior was avoided by the same positioning of the body of each participant, and by similar facial expressions. To control for the impact of gender, same number of male and female individuals was chosen for the questionnaire. The impact of all aforementioned variables was further controlled for through data analysis (see *Results* section of the present study).

The responses of participants in this preliminary research were recorded on a 10-point scale, in which 0 was associated with extreme unattractiveness and 10 was associated with extreme attractiveness. Participants were advised that an average-looking individual would be associated with a rating of 5 whereas any additional attractiveness/unattractiveness would be rated higher/lower. As there were no significant discrepancies between the standard deviations,

photographs rated with the mean ranging between 5, 00 and 6, 99 were selected for the original research. The original output of selected means contained 13 photographs, however, to control for the impact of gender, an equal number of photographs of male and female individuals were used in the research (four of each) and the study included 8 individuals in total. From this sample, one male and one female had a small tattoo; one male and one female had a bigger tattoo; one male and one female had a piercing; and one female and one male had no body modifications.

To further test evaluations of managers, each person from the photographs was asked to complete the Big Five personality test. This allowed for the subsequent comparison between manager ratings and actual personality traits of individuals in the photographs (see *Results* section of the present study).

Participants. The questionnaire was distributed electronically, via email, or via LinkedIn, to managers in the service industry who have a say in hiring decisions. The strategy used for finding participants was snowball sampling meaning that participants were asked for help in finding other research subjects. Full anonymity was granted to all the participants and their participation was voluntary.

The response rate was 80 and all of the 80 questionnaires were used in the analysis. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are to be found in Table1.

Study 2

Instrument. This study focused on the perceptions and impressions of customers. Aiming to research the attitudes of tourists from different countries as customers in the service industry, the study was based on a similar study conducted on workers and patients in the medical industry, specifically in the Clinic of Surgery and the Department of Orthopedics and Traumatology of the Clinical Hospital Center Osijek (Čordaš, 2018).

The goal was to find out if customers have negative attitudes towards service providers with visible body modifications and to test if discrimination is present among this group. Since the original research was done in the medical industry, the questions were modified to fit the service industry. Statements like “tattoos reflect the personality of a medical employee” were replaced with “body modifications reflect the personality of a service provider”. Additionally, the study needed to be translated to English, as it was originally in Croatian, and one question was excluded as it was not relevant for this research.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part was four multiple-choice questions regarding people’s views and opinions regarding body modifications. The questions at hand were aimed to examine if participants have body modifications and want them, if they notice when a service provider has them, their feelings when they are served by a person like this, and their approval/disapproval of body modifications based on genders. The second part included six statements testing the opinions of participants regarding traits of service employees with visible body modifications, using a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 stood for strongly disagree and 7 stood for strongly agree. Statements were insinuating certain traits that these people might have or were comparing people with visible body adornments to people who have no visible body adornments i.e. “In my opinion, an employee with body modification/s is more impulsive than the one without it”.

The final part consisted of six socio-demographic questions concerning the last finished level of education, employment status, place of residence, gender, and age of participants.

Participants. The questionnaire was distributed in person to tourists visiting Dubrovnik from anywhere in the world. To ensure inclusiveness, people from different age ranges and races were invited to participate. There were 80 responses in total. More than half of the participants

were male (56.3 %) and came from urban communities (60% of all participants). The average age of respondents was 36.41, with the oldest participant being 79 and the youngest being 14 years old, while the most common age category was from 22 to 35 years (47.5%). The majority of the sample were employed (66.3%) with an undergraduate degree as their last finished level of education (37.5%). The most dominant country of residence was the United Kingdom (32.6%). 71.3% of the participants did not have a tattoo, of which 47.5% did not want one and 23.8% were considering getting one. Respondents' participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. Further socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are provided in Table 2.

Results

Study 1

Out of the 80 respondents who participated in the research 100% of the answers were included in the results as they all met the criteria and successfully completed the survey.

As Figure 1 shows participants' attitudes towards people with tattoos were mostly positive. Only a small percentage stated that they would feel uncomfortable if served by a person with a tattoo (2.5%) or that they wouldn't even like to be approached by this person (1.3%). The noted opinion of the respondents related to genders and tattoos was, once again, positive, as 82.5% of the participants stated that they approve of tattoos on both male and female service providers. (See Figure 2)

From the data in Figure 3 it can be seen that customers mostly do not have different feelings towards people with visible body modifications than they have towards those without them. The majority of the respondents agreed that they are able to establish equal communication ($M=5.71$, $SD=1.69$) with people adorned with visible body modifications as they are able to do

with those without any. Moreover, the results show the agreement of customers when it comes to having equal respect towards both of the groups ($M=5.76$, $SD=1.55$).

Statement that the service received from visibly adorned and not adorned employees was no exception and customers stated that they feel like they are given equally pleasant treatment from both parties ($M=5.45$, $SD=1.68$). The statement “Body modifications reflect the personality of the service provider” was the only one with the neutral result ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.87$). Likewise, the only statement where participants showed disagreement is the one asking if the respondents feel like employees with body modifications are more impulsive than the ones without them ($M=2.93$, $SD=1.92$).

The effect of (not) having a tattoo on the responses

When splitting the sample into people who have and who do not have tattoos, only two situations resulted in a disparity of opinion. Namely, tattooed people were more inclined to feel the same amount of respect towards a visibly adorned service provider as towards the employee without any adornments ($M=6.39$, $SD=1.20$) in comparison to the not tattooed persons from the sample who showed a slightly lower agreement ($M=5.68$, $SD=1.55$), $t(78)=-1.96$, $p=0.05$. Another significant difference was related to people’s perception of the impulsiveness of employees with visible body modifications in comparison to employees without any. Both groups stated the disagreement that individuals with body modifications are more impulsive than those without them. However, the tattooed group showed a slightly greater amount of disagreement with the previously mentioned statement ($M=2.04$, $SD=1.55$) than the non-tattooed group ($M=3.25$, $SD=1.85$), $t(78) = 2.74$, $p=0.026$.

The effect of gender on the responses

The significant difference based on gender was found in two statements in the second section of the questionnaire. Women expressed more agreement when it comes to their ability to equally communicate with employees with visible body modifications as with those without them ($M=6.15$, $SD=1.25$) in comparison with the male population who still showed slight agreement, but were lower than the other group ($M=5.64$, $SD=1.77$). When asked about the opinion on increased impulsiveness found in employees adorned with visible body modifications in comparison with employees without them, the female group showed greater disagreement ($M=2.64$, $SD=1.69$) than the male group did ($M=3.11$, $SD=1.98$).

The effect of the age on the responses

There was no significant effect of different age groups on the opinions of participants regarding visible body modification.

Study 2

When asked which person from the exhibited photographs has the greatest employability potential, people with the big tattoos emerged as the most desirable ones ($M=13.63$, $SD=2.43$). When asked which person from the exhibited photographs has the greatest employability potential, as seen in Figure 4, people with the big tattoos emerged as the most desirable ones ($M=13.63$, $SD=2.43$). On the opposite side of the spectrum were people with small tattoos ($M=11.9$, $SD=2.68$). Neither the respondents' gender nor their country of origin had a significant effect on the evaluation of the employability potential of the subjects. The following questions examined managers' opinions on The Big Five personality traits of each individual. Out of the five traits, four with a positive connotation (extraversion ($M=12.87$, $SD=3.42$), agreeableness ($M=13.40$, $SD=2.87$), openness to experience ($M=14.47$, $SD=2.85$), and conscientiousness ($M=13.33$, $SD=2.20$)) were all primarily associated with the "big tattoo" group. Moreover, the previously

mentioned group had the lowest association with neuroticism ($M=8.67$, $SD=4.12$), while the “small tattoo” group was most likely to be associated with this trait ($M=9.83$, $SD=3.90$). (See Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8 & Figure 9)

From the manager pool ($n=30$), on average 12.75 respondents gave an answer to the open-ended question regarding their choice on the previous question concerning their willingness to employ the person from the photograph over a hypothetical candidate with the same/similar qualifications. Most of the comments for the people with visible body modifications did not revolve around the modification itself. The managers were more focused on the body language and their own gut feeling about the personality of the individuals.

Managers’ evaluations of personal traits vs. personal assessments

As the matter of this topic, the managers completely missed the mark. Their evaluations of candidates’ personal traits were nowhere near the actual results.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the impact visual cues, namely visible body modifications, have on perceptions of managers and customers and to check if they impact individuals’ employability potential. Given the results collected from customers, it is safe to conclude that the majority of this group does not have negative feelings towards service employees with visible body modifications. Even more surprisingly, 22% of people love to be served by them. The results strongly imply that visible body modifications are approved of on both female and male workers. The fact that the majority of respondents do not have a tattoo and that the results are still in favor of visibly adorned individuals, confirms Dean’s (2010) findings that the opinions of the respondents have no correlation with the fact that participants do or do not have one. Furthermore, based on Dean’s (2010) image congruence hypothesis, which he proved to be

true, these results could suggest that people got more used to seeing service workers adorned with body modifications. This, in addition to the Zuckerman's (2020) prediction that the number of the tattooed people will increase 8% each year in the following 10 years, might mean that the negative impact of visible body modifications will become a myth soon.

What was surprising is that no respondent claimed that they approve of tattoos on male and not female workers and two participants claimed that they approve of them on female and not male workers. Moreover, whereas Dean's (2010) research has found out that age plays an important role in individual's approval of tattoos, this research has shown that the age had no significant impact on the responses. Again, image congruence hypothesis and 12 years of difference in researches could be a potential explanation of the disparity. It was interesting to find that country hasn't had the impact on the participants' choices since not a lot of research was done on comparing Balkan and other regions. In addition to this, even though the past researches have shown that people adorned with visible body modifications are perceived less serious (Modern gentlemen.net, 2022) and that the general public thinks that the increase in tattoos was change for the worse (Pew Research Center, 2009), the present study found that the majority of the customers perceive tattooed and not tattooed employees equally. Therefore, the results of this part of the research show the supporting evidence that if, as according to the previous researches, the primary concern of managers' hiring decisions is leaving good impression on customers (Timming et al., 2015), then people with visible body modifications should not have any difficulties in the hiring process based on this aspect of their appearance.

The most surprising results are the ones from the research done on managers. Not only that they do not discriminate based on the body adornments, but the most favorable traits and the highest employability potential were attributed to people within the "bigger tattoos" group. These

results represent the contradiction of the data from the previous research data which claims that only 23% of employers would give employment opportunities to a tattooed individual, without taking into consideration the size or the location of it (Modern gentlemen.net, 2022).

Open-ended questions did not provide significantly useful data, besides one conclusion – the managers' evaluations are in fact affected by the visual cues.

Managers' choices contradict previous older findings such as the one that people perceive individuals as less attractive, intelligent, honest, and caring if they have visible body modifications (Avilla, 2014) or that 86.67% of recruiters claim that this type of applicant would be perceived negatively by their company (Swanger, 2006). Subsequently, they support more recent researches which show the increase in the acceptance of body modification among employers in the hospitality industry (Tews, 2020).

As noted in the results, the managers mismatched the traits (openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism) assigned to the candidates. This explains the fact that their evaluation was not based on their intuition, but rather on visual cues. However, this impact of visuals was not in the way it was expected to be, but was rather positive. Even though their open-ended question answers explaining their choices were sometimes linked to body position, facial expression, and attire, these biases were avoided for with preliminary research. Their answers can be explained with the halo effect, meaning that managers added bias details to explain their preferences (even if the reasoning behind it doesn't exist). Therefore, this leads to the conclusion that tattoos in fact increase the score, as the gender was controlled for, attractiveness was controlled for, all participants had the same body posture (nonverbal behavior), and they all had the same attire.

Limitations

Although the present results work in favor of expectations of this paper, it is appropriate to recognize several potential limitations. There are at least two potential limitations related to this research. The first one is that the research done on customers didn't investigate the size and the locations of tattoos on service provider in detail. Since this part of the research was distributed in pen and paper form, the feedback was available at the spot. The questions related to this topic were common and therefore this could be one of the bigger limitations. The second limitation that could be addressed is that the explanations for given employability scores were not sufficient. Further research should include in-depth interviews through which managers would be required to elaborate their scores in more detail.

Study Implications

The data gathered during this research has shown that intuition does not work in favor of hiring managers. Therefore, it would be logical to conclude that interviewers should not rely on the sole power of it. The results in this research imply that additional supporting means should be used in the future hiring processes. These means shall allow for managers to better test and evaluate candidates' traits or employability potential.

Final Remarks

Despite the limitations, this research contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that tattoos and piercings are pushing away from being discriminated in the workplace. It seems that Starbucks, Ritz Carlton and many other similar companies have realized that trends are shifting and they are not wrong for this. Not only that the customers do not mind being served by service providers with visible tattoos and piercings, but the managers have also started gaining positive feelings towards this people. We hope that this research will inspire others to research this

topic even more and our sincere wish is that prejudices and stereotypes towards people with visibly adorned bodies will be eliminated.

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Table 1. Customers' socio-demographic characteristics		
	N	%
GENDER		
Male	45	56.3
Female	33	41.3
Non-binary	2	2.5
AGE		

Minimum	14	/
Maximum	79	/
Mean	36.41	/
COMPLETED EDUCATION LEVEL		
Elementary school	1	1.25
High school	20	25
Undergraduate program	30	37.5
Graduate program	21	26.3
Post-graduate program	8	10
EMPLOYMENT STATUS		
Employed	44	55
Unemployed	15	18.8
Self-employed	9	11.3
Retired	12	15
COMMUNITY		
Rural	16	20
Urban	48	60
Suburban	16	20
COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE		
Albania	2	2.5
Austria	2	2.5
Belgium	2	2.5
BiH	2	2.5
China	4	5.0
Columbia	1	1.3
Croatia	2	2.5
France	4	5.0
Germany	2	2.5
India	1	1.3
Ireland	5	6.3
Italy	4	5.0
Kosovo	1	1.3
Macedonia	1	1.3
Montenegro	4	5.0
Netherlands	2	2.5
North Macedon	1	1.3
Philippines	9	11.3
Poland	1	1.3
Spain	3	3.8
Sweden	2	2.5
Turkey	1	1.3
Uganda	1	1.3
UK	21	26.3
United States	1	1.3
USA	1	1.3

Table 2. Managers socio-demographic and professional characteristics		
	N	%
GENDER		
Male	23	76.7
Female	7	23.3
Non-binary	/	/
AGE		
22-32	13	43.3
33-44	11	36.7
45-55	4	13.3
56+	2	6.67
WORKING EXPERIENCE (in years)		
1-10	11	36.7
11-21	12	40
22+	7	23.3
COUNTRY		
BIH	1	3.3
Croatia	19	63.3
Montenegro	7	23.3
Serbia	1	3.3
USA	2	6.7

Figures

Figure 1. Customers' opinions on being served by employees with tattoos

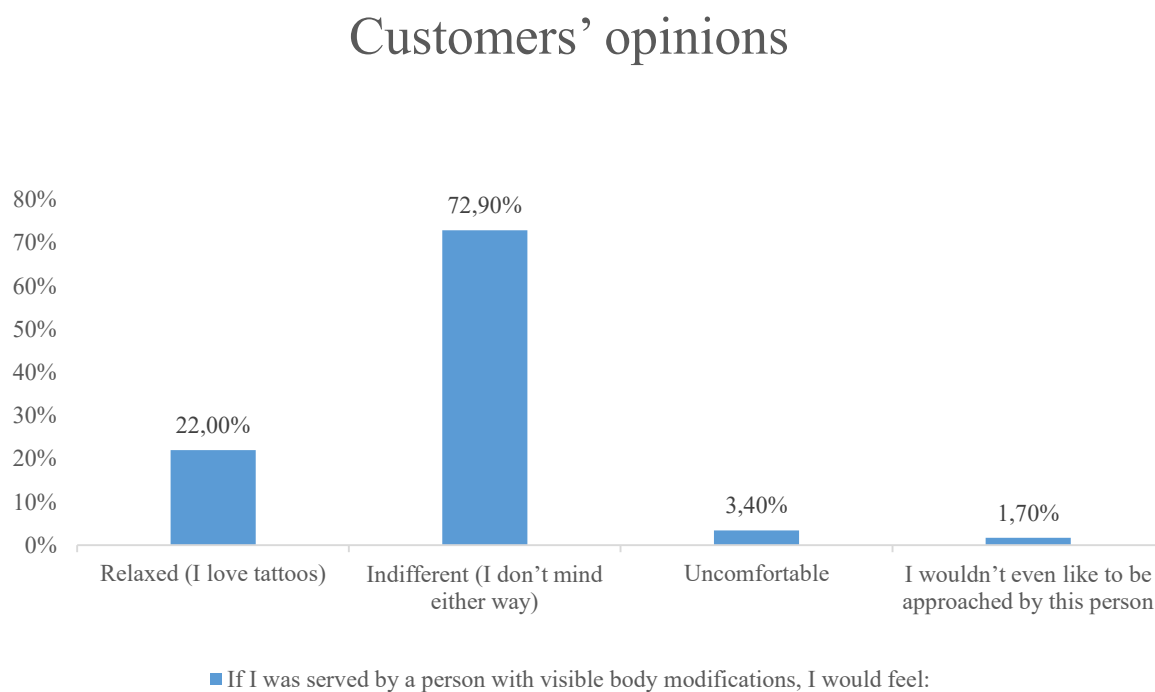


Figure 2. Customers' opinion on tattoos and genders of service workers

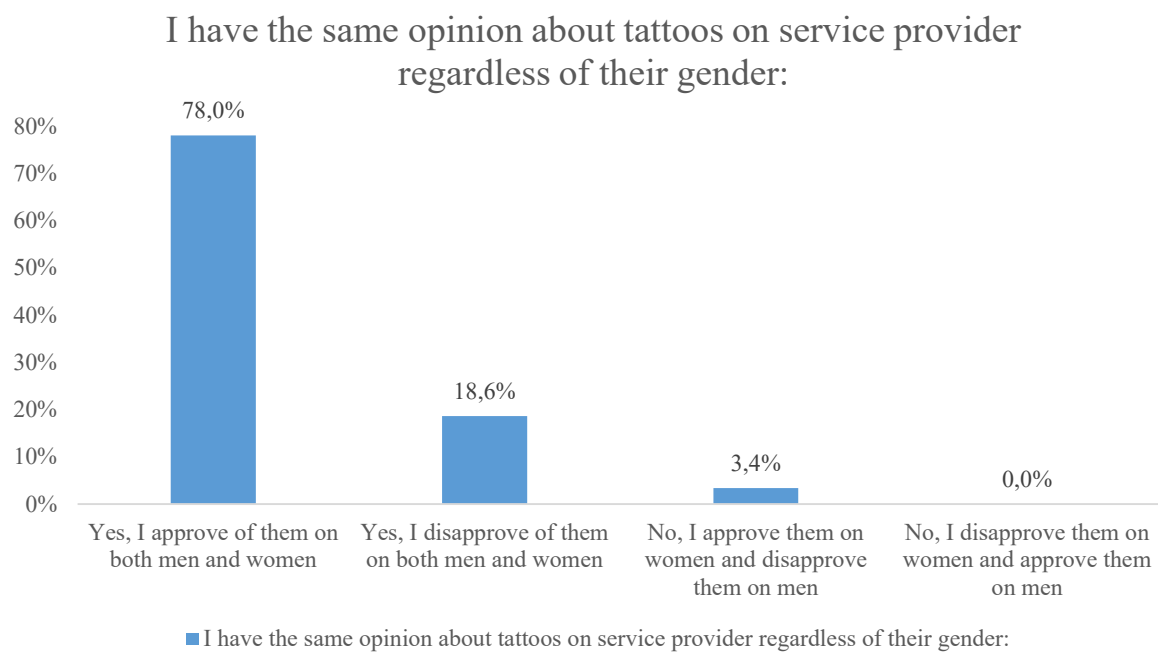


Figure 3. Customers' feelings towards employees with VBM in comparison to those without them

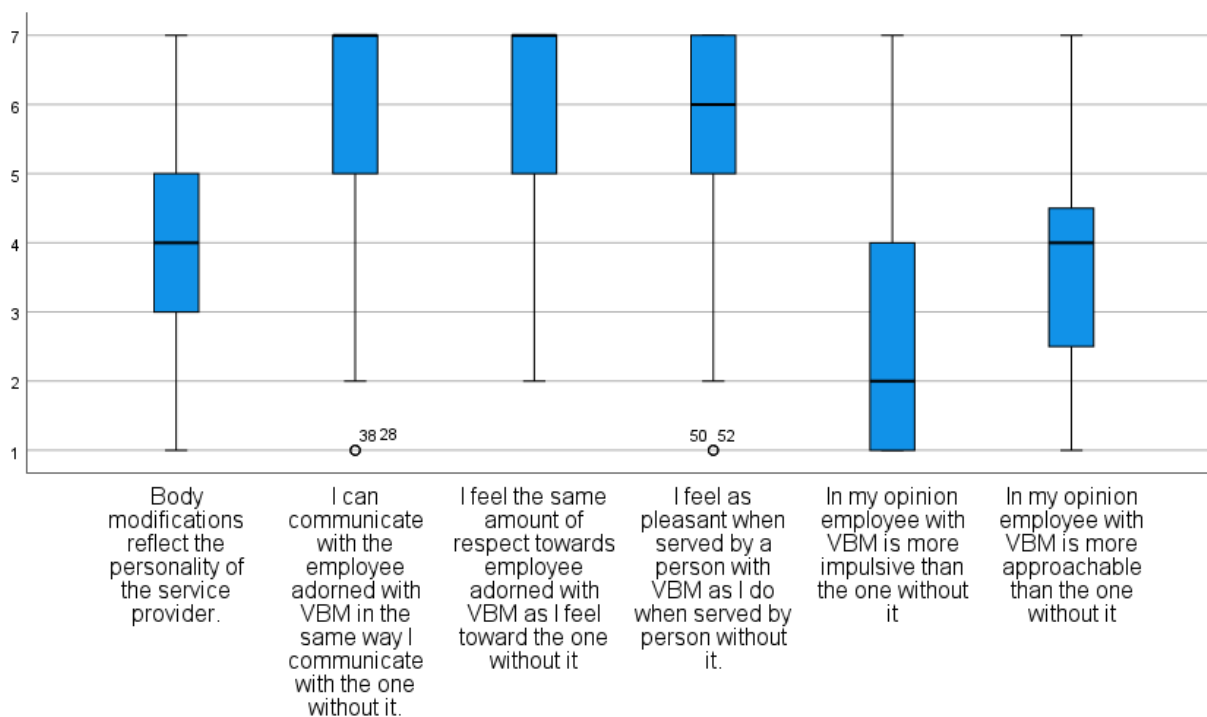


Figure 4. Managers' scores on employability potential of 4 groups (no tattoos, bigger tattoos, piercings and smaller tattoos)

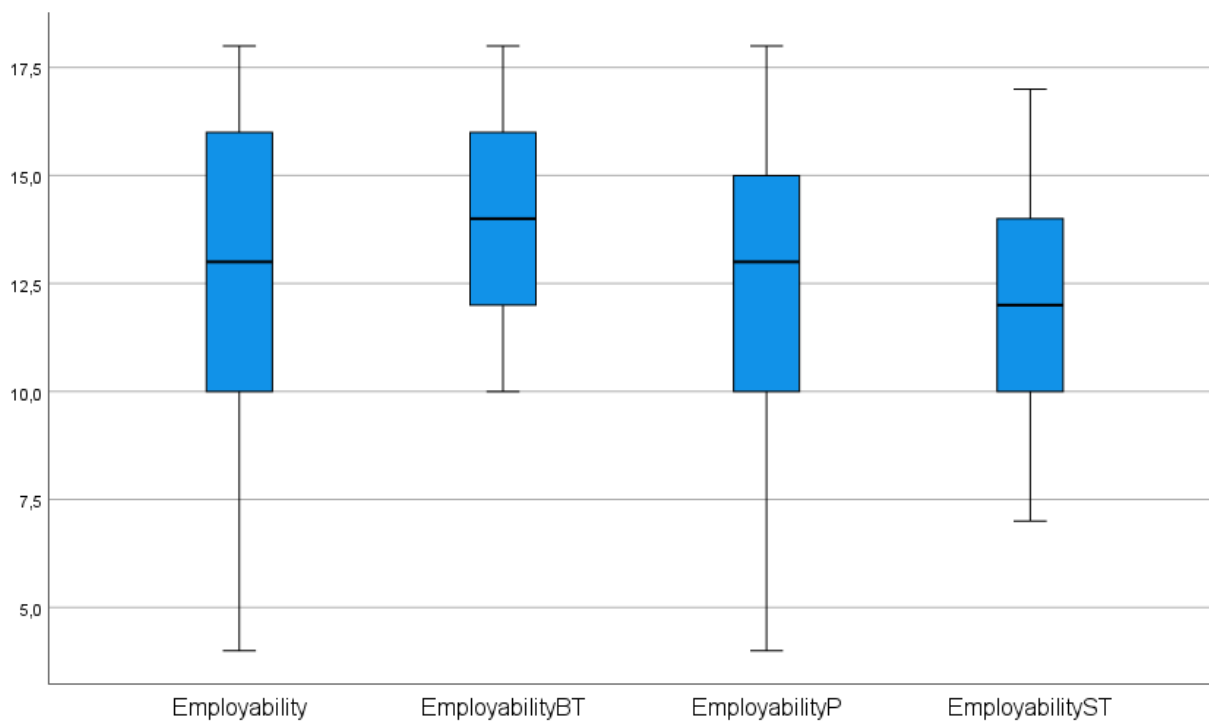


Figure 5. Managers' perceptions of traits of 4 groups – extraversion

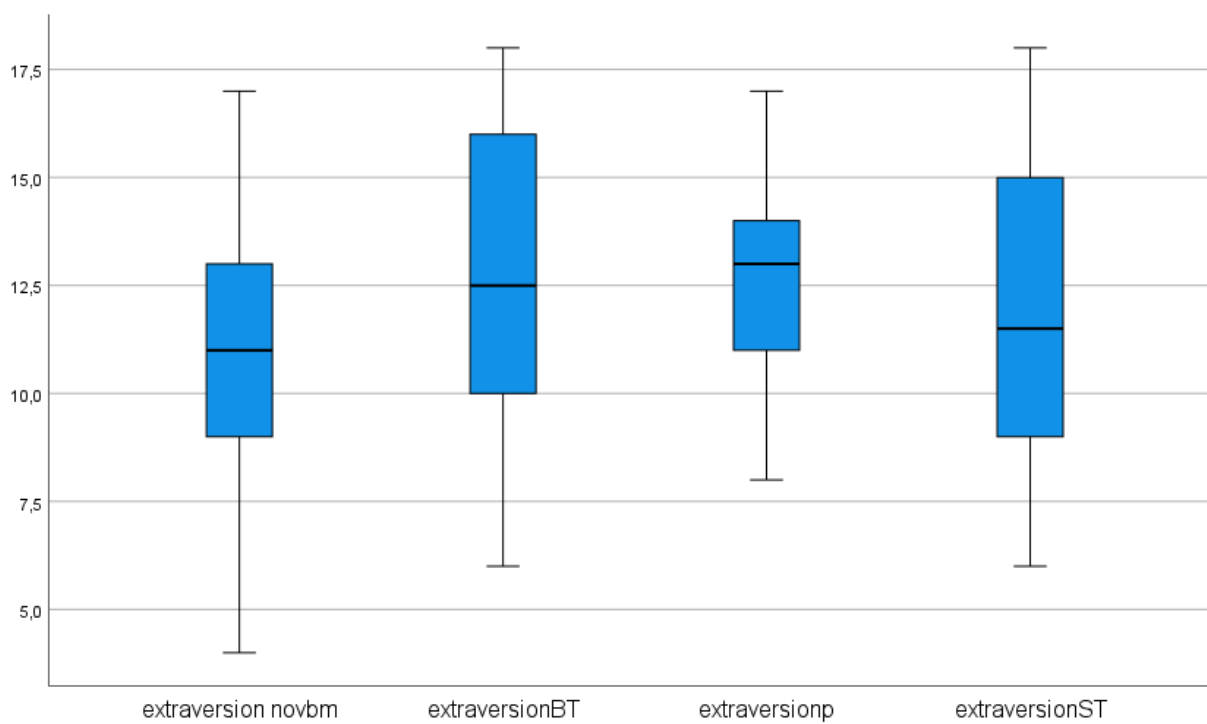


Figure 6. Managers' perceptions of traits of 4 groups – agreeableness

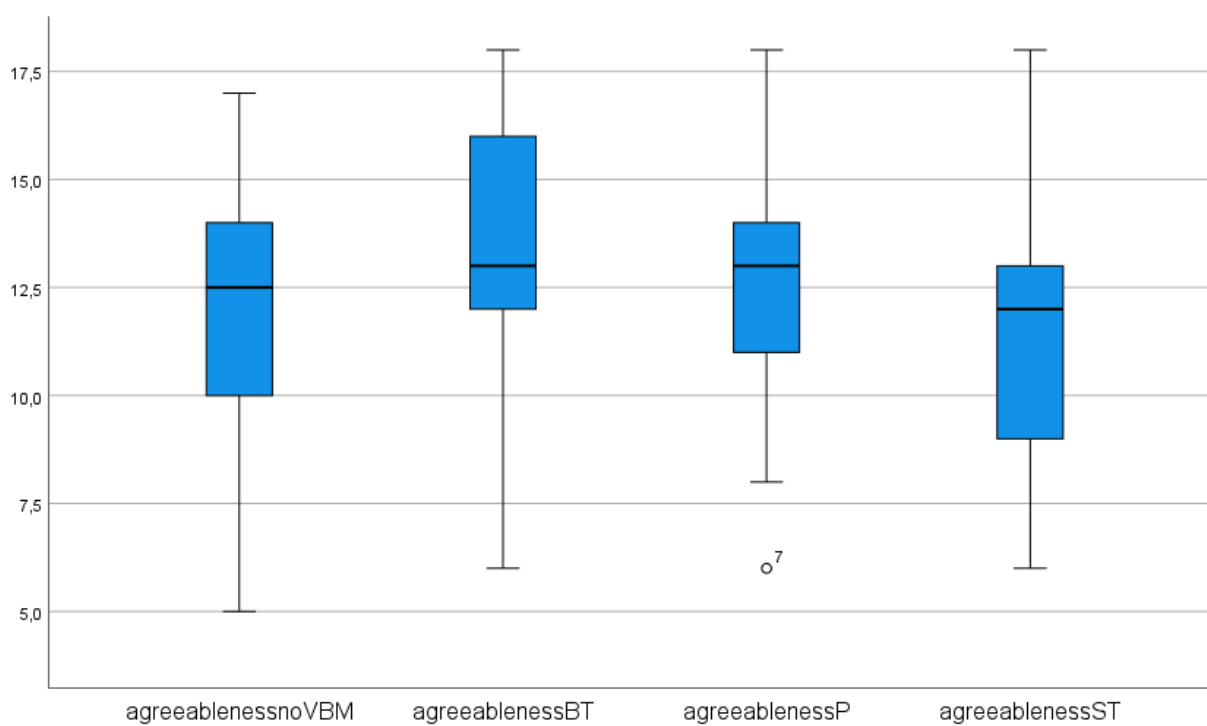


Figure 7. Managers' perceptions of traits of 4 groups – openness to experience

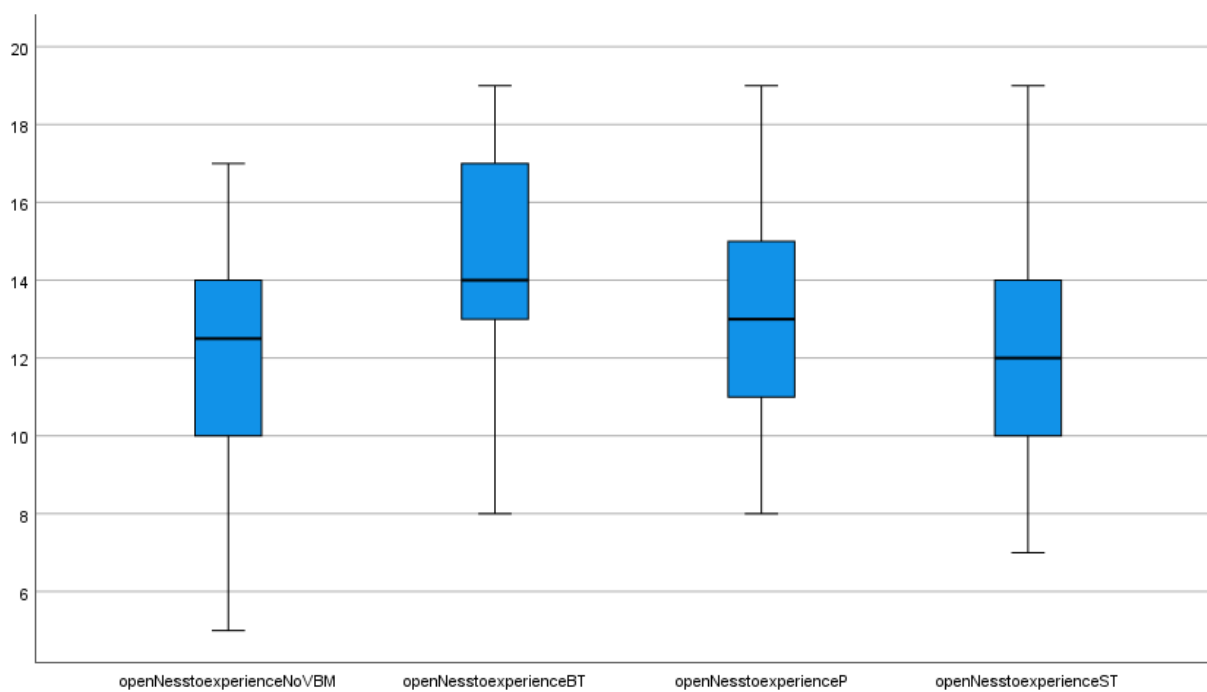


Figure 8. Managers' perceptions of traits of 4 groups – neuroticism

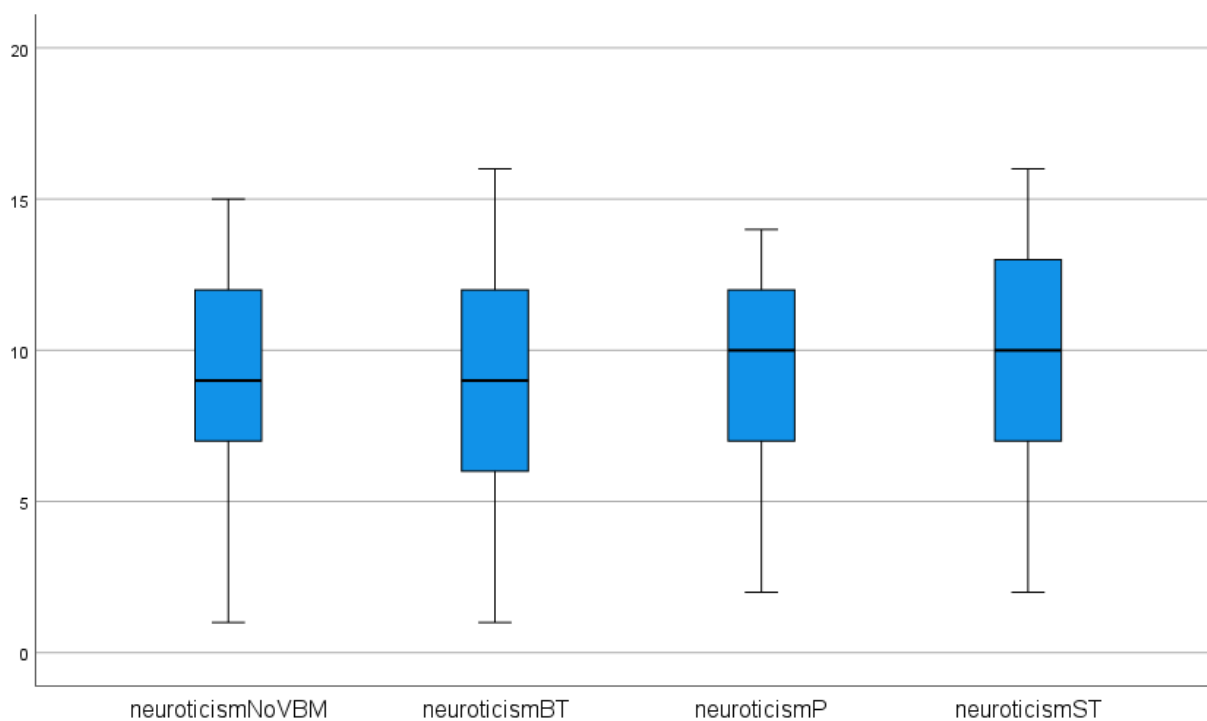


Figure 9. Managers' perceptions of traits of 4 groups – conscientiousness

