

Tattoos as an expression of narrative identity among emerging adults

by

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the use of tattoos as an expression of narrative identity among emerging adults. The practice of tattooing is almost as old as humanity itself, yet we are only now starting to uncover the profound and unique narratives that are expressed by these images. Narrative identity theory served as the framework for this study with the assumption that the self consists of three interconnected layers. The actor self is concerned with the present and the performance of social roles while the agent self focuses on the achievement of future goals by constructing and personalising a worldview. The author self becomes prominent during the emerging adulthood stage and attempts to make meaning of past nuclear events. Emerging adulthood is a distinctive life stage with multiple paths undertaken by individuals in the exploration of their unique identity.

This qualitative study followed an explorative and descriptive research design rooted in a constructivist framework. Through purposive sampling, 10 emerging adults with at least one tattoo were selected. Data were gathered through the use of a reflective writing exercise and semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using thematic narrative analysis. The findings demonstrated that the emerging adults from this study used tattoos to express their affiliation with others. Tattoos also reminded participants of the nuclear events that form part of their life narratives. The resilience shown to overcome challenges was another aspect expressed by the tattoos. Furthermore, it was indicated that there still seems to be a generational gap, with older individuals reacting negatively to the participant's tattoos. Finally, the findings showed that participants used tattoos to express their unique identities.

This study emphasises the importance of all three layers of the self for narrative-identity development by describing how the actor, agent, and author use tattoos to perform their various roles. This study draws a similarity between tattoo narratives and aspects of narrative identity such as agency, communion, and meaning-making. The study also emphasises the importance of the balance between agency and communion. Furthermore, a unique perspective was presented regarding vicarious narratives and their possible role in altering the master narrative. Lastly, the study adds valuable knowledge to emerging adulthood theory by showing the applicability of the proposed developmental pathways within the South African context. This study illustrates the importance and relevance of research on tattoos for the expansion of knowledge in the fields of narrative identity and emerging adulthood.

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Chapter 1 - Context of the Study

“I am a canvas of my experiences, my story is etched in lines and shading, and you can read it on my arms, my legs, my shoulders, and my stomach”

– Kat Von D

“My tattoos remind me of who I am when I start feeling my identity getting blurred in the thick of life. They’re about memorializing something so important it needs to be engraved on my skin”

– Zara Barrie

Imagine getting stuck with a needle that has anything between 1 and 21 razor sharp points. Imagine this doesn't just happen once but 50 to 3 000 times a minute. Now imagine enduring this for anything between 30 minutes and 8 hours. This is the pain that every tattooed person has endured. This leads to the questions that are as old as tattooing itself: Why would anybody get a tattoo? What can be so important that a person will endure the pain, health risks, and stigma that is attached to tattoos? These are the fundamental questions that all research on tattoos tries to answer. What has emerged is that the reasons for getting a tattoo are as diverse as the tattoos themselves. Furthermore, it has become clear that the narratives attached to these tattoos are more than just skin deep. These tattoo narratives tell the story of the person and the events that helped in shaping the individual's unique identity. Research has also found that tattoos are becoming more popular among emerging adults, a phase in which identity exploration is a prominent developmental task. With this golden thread connecting tattoos, narratives, and identity development, the current study aimed to explore and describe how tattoos are used for the expression of narrative identity among emerging adults.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the study. The context and rationale of the study are initially introduced. Next, the theoretical perspectives that guided the study are briefly discussed. Thereafter, an overview of the research design and methods is provided, followed by a delineation of the chapters in order to clarify the composition of the following chapters.

1.1 Context and Rationale of the Research Study

If a picture is worth a thousand words, it is easy to see why for millennia, tattoos have been used to tell the life story of the person wearing them (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). The meaning of tattoos varies across cultures, ranging from a sign of high social status in the South Pacific to a punishment for criminals in Japan or from a reminder for sailors of far-off lands visited to a permanent declaration of gang membership for prison inmates (Hill et al., 2016).

Humans have developed multiple distinct and unique cultures over time. However, tattoos are the one phenomenon that is found in almost every one of these cultures. Thus, investigating the psychological mechanisms driving this age-old practice of marking the skin can provide valuable knowledge and understanding regarding the human condition. Furthermore, this knowledge can help to break the stigma and discrimination endured by some tattooed individuals.

Globally, tattoos are becoming more popular among the emerging adult population (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Dickson et al., 2015; Kosut, 2000), and this is likewise the case for South African emerging adults (Lombard & Bergh 2014; Naudé et al., 2017). Emerging adulthood is a relatively new yet expanding field of research, and there are interesting debates regarding the universality of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2016a; du Bois-Reymond, 2016; Katsiaficas, 2017). It is becoming clear that societal and cultural influences lead emerging adults down different paths, and South Africa's culturally diverse population provides an ideal setting for research on emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is also when crucial life decisions regarding love and vocation are made (Arnett, 2000, 2015) and thus, having a good understanding of this life stage is important.

Naudé et al. (2017) found that for emerging adults, the most prominent motivations for getting a tattoo is for symbolic personal meaning and as an expression of self. As emerging adults journey from being adolescents to becoming adults (Arnett, 2000, 2015), they take progressively more ownership of their knowledge, beliefs, identity, and relationships with others. In conjunction with this, the author self becomes prominent (Baxter Magolda, 2002; Breen et al., 2017). As the author self remembers nuclear events from the past and shares them with others, the narrative identity is constructed, edited, and reconstructed to develop a more integrated sense of self. Emerging adults express this narrative identity in many ways (Breen et al., 2017; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Research on narrative identity increases the understanding of how it develops and how it is expressed,

and this knowledge can in turn be used to assist emerging adults in their journey towards developing their unique identity. Hence, this study also contributes to the limited research on narrative identity in the South African context.

The findings of this study add knowledge to the body of research related to the above-mentioned fields. This was achieved by exploring and describing how tattoos are used to express the narrative identity of emerging adults in the South African context.

1.2 Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning the Study

The theoretical framework for this study incorporated two main theoretical perspectives. The first perspective is that of lifespan development, with specific focus on the stage of emerging adulthood. The second perspective is on identity theory, with specific focus on narrative identity development.

Erik Erikson's seminal work on human lifespan development (Erikson 1950, 1968) was the foundation on which Arnett (2000) developed his theory on emerging adulthood. According to Arnett (2014), the developmental stage of emerging adulthood starts at about the age of 18 years and continues until the age of 29 years. Five distinct features or pillars make up emerging adulthood, namely self-focus, possibilities, instability, feeling in between, and identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). Although all these features are important, identity exploration links closely with the work of Erikson (Pratt & Matsuba, 2018). Initially, the stage of identity versus role confusion was proposed to end at the age of 20 years. However, Erikson made mention of extended adolescence in industrialised societies where identity exploration continues after the age of 20 years (Arnett, 2000). According to Schwartz et al. (2013), exploring their identity is a fundamental task for emerging adults. Emerging adulthood theory states that multiple aspects of the individual's life and identity are explored during this stage, with some of the more prominent aspects being worldviews, interpersonal relationships, and vocational identity. It is also during the emerging adult years that the first attempts are made to develop a narrative identity (McLean & Breen, 2009).

Similar to emerging adulthood theory, the work of Erik Erikson is the foundation for the development of narrative approaches to identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative identity includes the ever-evolving story that the individual constructs by amalgamating experiences from the past, present, and anticipated future into an integrated self (Hasford et al., 2017; McAdams & McLean, 2013). In the narrative approach to identity, it is proposed

that the self consists of three parts. The actor self is present-orientated and focused on social roles. The agent self is orientated towards the future and the development of goals and values. The author self constructs a life story out of nuclear events from the individual's past (Breen et al., 2017). It is this life story that assists in the shaping of a narrative identity.

Another aspect that helps to shape narrative identity is the overarching stories shared by the culture in which the individuals find themselves. These stories are known as master narratives, and they offer the individual a basic structure for the construction of a life story (McLean et al., 2018). Thus, master narratives are vitally important blueprints for the development of a sound and accepted narrative identity. When an individual's story significantly deviates from the master narrative, the individual is said to have created an alternative narrative. With time, alternative narratives can alter and change the master narrative in the culture. Vicarious narratives are the stories told by the people close to the individual such as family members. These vicarious narratives have been shown to influence an individual's narrative identity (Breen et al., 2017). Vicarious narratives help the individual understand their place in the family and society. These vicarious narratives are also incorporated into the narrative of the individual's life. These are important aspects for understanding the tattoo narratives of individuals. How the larger society and close family tell their stories will determine, in part, how the tattoo narrative is told.

1.3 Overview of Research Design and Methods

For this study, a qualitative approach was employed to explore and describe how emerging adults express their narrative identity through the use of tattoos. Qualitative research attempts to make sense of participants' subjective experiences and provides thick and rich data (Neuman, 2014; Smith, 2008).

A constructionist view was adopted for this study. Constructionists believe that individuals construct their own truth by using language and culture (Giles, 2002; Silva et al., 2014). One advantage of the constructivist paradigm is that it allows the researcher and participant to work together whereupon the participant describes their narrative and the researcher can explore how these narratives construct the participant's reality (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Participants for this study were obtained using non-probability, purposive, and snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014; Stangor, 2015). These sampling methods allow the

researcher to select participants based on specific criteria that will produce rich data. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study focused on age and tattoos. Participants had to be between the ages of 18 years and 29 years and have at least one tattoo that held a significant meaning. The aim was to obtain 10 participants from diverse backgrounds.

Data were collected using two collection methods. This was done in an attempt to obtain thick and rich data from the participants. The first data collection method was a reflective writing exercise (Jasper, 2005). For a long time, the use of reflective writing has been viewed as an effective technique for the collection of rich data (Hayman et al., 2012). Furthermore, reflective writing promotes self-awareness and meaning-making because it allows for the construction and reconstruction of events or knowledge (Gelmez & Bagli, 2018; Jasper, 2005). The second data collection method involved the use of semi-structured interviews (Babbie, 2014). According to Fontana and Frey (2005), semi-structured interviews have become one of the most popular methods for collecting data when trying to understand an individual's subjective experience. The semi-structured interview gives the researcher the freedom to follow where the participant leads them while still providing a good framework for the topics that should be covered (Babbie, 2014). Making use of these two data collection methods allowed for in-depth information to be gathered on the participants' tattoo narratives.

One of the most widely used methods for data analysis in qualitative psychology research is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In addition, thematic analysis is one of the recommended methods to analyse narratives (Riessman, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2006) propose six phases to guide the process of thematic analysis; however they emphasise that thematic analysis is not a linear process. By moving between these phases, the researcher in the current study analysed each participant's narrative in order to give voice to each unique story. Thereafter, a cross-case analysis was conducted in which salient themes from the various narratives were identified.

To ensure rigour throughout the process of this study, the criteria of trustworthiness were considered. Trustworthiness has been described as the amount of confidence in the data, methods, and analysis (Connelly, 2016). This was achieved by the promotion and enhancement of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Established research methods were used during the study. Additionally, accepted strategies such as

triangulation, audit trails, and researcher reflectivity were implemented in the pursuit of trustworthiness.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State. This study was informed by the ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, autonomy, non-maleficence, and confidentiality (Allan, 2016; Babbie, 2014; Stangor, 2015).

1.4 Delineation of Chapters

The research report is structured as follows.

Chapter 1: The first chapter serve as an introduction to the study. Within this chapter a short overview of the rational, context, theoretical underpinnings, and design are presented. The structure of this report is also provided in this chapter.

Chapter 2: In this chapter, an in-depth review of existing literature on tattoos, emerging adulthood, and narrative identity is presented. Firstly, a historical overview of tattoos is offered, showing how the practice of tattooing has evolved from rudimentary shapes tapped into the skin by primitive animal-bone tools to the photo-realistic images made by the technologically advanced machines of today. This is followed by the most prominent reasons for getting a tattoo, with the expression of individuality and belonging to a group being just two of the reasons that are discussed. Thereafter, the focus shifts to emerging adulthood and the features of this developmental stage. An argument is made that emerging adulthood is one life stage and multiple different paths can be taken by the individual during this stage. Next, identity theory is summarised with an emphasis on narrative identity development. The conceptualisation of the self from a narrative identity perspective is presented in addition to components of narrative identity such as agency, communion, and meaning-making. The chapter concludes with an examination of the role of the body in identity development and the relationship between tattoos and narratives.

Chapter 3: A comprehensive discussion on the research design and the methods used in this study is presented in the methodology chapter. Firstly, the aim of the research is presented. Secondly, the research design and approach in addition to the sampling procedures that were used are indicated. Thirdly, descriptions of the data collection and the analysis methods are given. Finally, the relevant ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness are discussed.

Chapter 4: The results of this study are presented in the fourth chapter. This chapter consists of two sections. In the first section, a short introduction to each participant is given, followed by their tattoo narrative. The unique themes generated from each participant's data are presented as a single case study. In the second section, the results from the cross-case analysis are reported. Salient themes from the individual narratives are highlighted without comparing the unique experiences of each participant. The themes constructed from the cross-case analysis were named: 1) *Affiliation: Belonging to a family*; 2) *Reminiscence: Remembering events that moulded the narrative*; 3) *Perseverance: Surviving the difficult times*; 4) *Opposing viewpoints: Bridging the generational gap*; and 5) *Identity: Exploring and expressing my unique self*.

Chapter 5: In the fifth chapter, a discussion of the themes identified in Chapter 4 is presented. This is done by integrating the results of this study with existing literature on tattoos, emerging adulthood, and narrative identity. This integration shows how each layer of the self uses tattoos as a tool in performing its function. Chapter 5 also conveys how the emerging adults from this study expressed their agency, communion, and meaning-making through their tattoos.

Chapter 6: In this chapter, the most significant findings and the limitations to this study are presented. Recommendations for future research are also made.

1.5 Chapter Summary

The aim of Chapter 1 was to provide the reader with a brief and general introduction to the research study. Firstly, the research was placed into context, and the rationale and aim were presented. By exploring and describing how tattoos are used in the expression of narrative identity, knowledge is added to the research fields of emerging adulthood, narrative identity development, and tattoos. Secondly, the most important theoretical perspectives for the study were briefly discussed. This was followed by an overview of the research design and methods used in this study. Finally, the chapter concluded with an outline of the different chapters of the study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In the following chapter, the aim is to offer an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this study. The most relevant theories and the research pertaining to the study are discussed in the different sub-sections of Chapter 2. In the first section, tattoos are defined and thereafter, a short history of tattoos and some reasons behind getting tattooed are presented. In the second section, the focus is on emerging adulthood and how the features of this life stage may influence tattoo behaviour. This is done by highlighting the proposed pillars of emerging adulthood and by summarising some of the criticisms against the theory. Next, an attempt is made to define identity and to explain the development of identity by discussing the identity status and narrative identity models. In the final section of this chapter, a closer examination of tattoos and the connection this phenomenon has with identity exploration and expression is carried out. The role that the body plays in identity is presented first, followed by the relationship between tattoos and narratives.

2.1 Tattoo

Tattooing, or making a permanent mark on the skin, is a tradition that is almost as old as humanity itself (Bell, 1999; Bergh et al., 2017; Lombard & Bergh, 2014). Tattoos are produced when black or coloured pigment is inserted under the epidermis with a sharp object (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). These pigment particles are then trapped under the skin permanently. Small tattoos can be done in less than an hour whereas larger tattoos such as a back piece (one design that covers the entire back) may take multiple six- to eight-hour sessions to complete (Armstrong & Kelly, 2001).

2.1.1 History of the Tattoo

Ancient cultures worldwide differ greatly, but the custom of tattooing appears in most of them in one form or another (Bell, 1999). Ötzi the Iceman, estimated to be almost 5 300 years old, is the oldest human body known to have tattoos (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). Ötzi was discovered in Northern Italy in 1991 and is believed to have more than 50 tattoos comprising simple patterns with a carbon base (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). Around 2000 B.C., Egyptian females are believed to have used tattoos to be seen as erotic and fertile and from here, tattooing spread to places such as Greece, Persia, southern Asia and the South Sea Islands (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). The Polynesians moved between the South Sea Islands and eventually reached New Zealand where a unique style of tattooing named *moko* evolved.

In Rome, slaves were marked with tattoos while in Greece, not only slaves but also criminals were tattooed, and the Greeks referred to tattoos as 'stigmata' (Bergh et al., 2017; Lombard & Bergh, 2014). The marking of criminals with tattoos spread throughout Europe and through this, the negative view on tattoos started. In Rome, early Christians and monks were tattooed to represent their commitment to the religion, but this practice was stopped when the Pope banned this "barbarous practice" in 787 A.D. (Lombard & Bergh, 2014, p. 195). From here, the practice of tattooing declined throughout Europe with the rise and spread of Christianity.

Around 1760, Captain Cook explored the South Sea Islands, and it is here that he and his sailors observed the *tatau* (tattoo in Tahitian meaning to strike) (Bell, 1999; Lombard & Bergh, 2014; Martin, 2013). Many of the sailors got tattoos during their time in the South Sea Islands and reintroduced the practice to Europe upon their return home. Captain Cook also transported tattooed people from the Islands to Europe in order to display them. At the beginning of the 19th century, tattooing spread to the United States of America, and the practice was anchored in the culture during the Civil War between 1861 and 1865 (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). In 1891, Thomas Edison's electric engraving pen was modified by Samuel O'Reily into the first electric tattoo machine (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). This invention accelerated the process of tattooing since it could puncture the skin between 80 and 150 times per second. This made tattooing more accessible to the broader public, and its popularity increased until an unforeseen consequence arose. The unsanitary use of tattoo equipment started to spread disease and by the 1940s, tattooing was seen as distasteful and abnormal (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). Tattoos were still popular among soldiers at this time, but with the outbreak of the Second World War, it was banned by the US military due to its health risks. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, tattoos were associated with the hippie and rock music subcultures but thereafter, their popularity started to rise, reaching the level seen in today's post-modern society (Lombard & Bergh, 2014).

The rise in popularity of tattoos and the more accepting view on tattoos held by society currently is reported in multiple studies (Bergh et al., 2017; Broussard & Harton, 2018; Foltz, 2014; Strübel & Jones, 2017). However, the stigma surrounding tattoos has not disappeared completely and tattooed individuals can still expect negative reactions from some parts of society (Bergh et al., 2017; Broussard & Harton, 2018; Naudé et al., 2017). According to Bergh et al. (2017), peers are more likely to give positive feedback on a tattoo, while negative comments come from family members. Other studies also report that tattooed

individuals experienced some negative reactions from family members (Alter-Muri, 2020; Armstrong et al., 2001; Ball & Elsner, 2019). It would seem that older generations still hold this negative view on tattoos (Naudé et al., 2017). Broussard and Harton (2018) reported that only 13% of people between the ages of 55 years and 75 years had tattoos while 47% of people between 21 years and 37 years were tattooed. This correlation between age and negative views towards tattoos could be pointing to a ‘generational gap’ regarding tattoos (Foltz, 2014). Some of the negative characteristics ascribed to people with tattoos are sexual promiscuity, impulsive, lower academic abilities, less professionalism, and less godliness, to name a few (Broussard & Harton, 2018; Forbes, 2001; Hill, 2020; Naudé et al., 2017). Religion was also a prominent reason for not getting a tattoo given by non-tattooed participants in these studies. However, Lombard and Bergh (2014) found that religion was expressed and celebrated with the use of symbolic tattoos such as crucifixes.

Nowhere is the stigma against tattoos more visible than in the workplace where non-tattooed individuals are more likely to be employed than tattooed individuals with the same skill level (Bergh et al., 2017; Broussard & Harton, 2018; Foltz, 2014; Naudé et al., 2017). Broussard and Harton (2018) proclaim that tattoos could be the only physical characteristic against which discrimination is still legal. The level of discrimination varies from company to company, with some having extensive policies against visible tattoos (Foulke & Romo, 2021). Others give managers the right to decide whether or not a tattoo is allowed to be visible, while the more accepting employers allow visible tattoos providing they are not offensive (Foltz, 2014). What is most alarming is that companies are allowed to refuse to hire an individual based solely on the fact that they have tattoos (Foulke & Romo, 2021). This stigmatisation by employers, religious communities, and family is one of the major reasons why an individual will decide not to get a tattoo (Burgess & Clark, 2010; Foltz, 2014). With all the negative reactions and stigma that is associated with being a tattooed individual, why would anyone get a tattoo? In the following section, the reasons for getting a tattoo are explored.

2.1.2 Reasons Behind Tattoos

In ancient societies, the body was seen as a canvas for marking social status, tribal affiliation, and family position (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). The functions and reasons for tattoos throughout the ages cannot be summarised into a single list because there are simply too many. However, the most prominent reasons for tattoos throughout history include

decoration, membership marker, mourning the dead, magical protection, and rite of passage (Bell, 1999; Lombard & Bergh, 2014). Tattooing is still a significant part of the culture on the South Sea Islands where it serves as initiation into adulthood (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). However, in modern Western societies, most traditional rituals and rites of passage have been lost and as such, getting tattooed as a ritual has also declined. Hence, the question must be asked: Why are modern-day humans getting tattoos?

Individuality. From an evolutionary point of view, expressing one's uniqueness differentiates the individual from the group, thus increasing the chance of being noticed by a potential partner (Carmen et al., 2012). Studies have reported that some participants get tattoos in the hope of gaining the attention of a potential romantic partner (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Lombard & Bergh, 2014; Naudé et al., 2017). Body art, which is similar to a tattoo, was reported as something unique by people both with and without tattoos. Furthermore, people with tattoos perceived themselves as distinctly different from people without tattoos (Armstrong et al., 2004; Drews et al., 2000). Having these unique markings on the skin is seen as an expression of the wearer's identity (Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002). Furthermore, tattoos give individuals the feeling of autonomy over their own bodies, increasing the feeling of individuality (Alter-Muri, 2020; Buckle & Corbin Dwyer, 2021; Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015). Orend and Gagné (2009) added that tattoos can serve as an anchor for parts of the self while identity exploration continues since tattoos are seen as permanent body modifications. Individuality was a prominent reason for getting a tattoo. Under this overarching concept, terms such as 'to express themselves; to feel unique; to be themselves; to have a sense of independence; to identify themselves; to express their individuality' have been reported (Carmen et al., 2012; Naudé et al., 2017).

Affiliation. Tattoos are also used to express group membership, as reported by multiple studies (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Carmen et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2016; Lombard & Bergh, 2014; Naudé et al., 2017; Orend & Gagné, 2009). As humans evolved, they realised that belonging to a group has certain benefits. There is safety in numbers, but one also derives self-worth from belonging to a group (Carmen et al., 2012). Thus, tattoos are used in a similar way to jewellery and clothing in symbolising affiliation to a subculture, group, religion, sports team, or family (Armstrong et al., 2004; Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015). In groups such as prison gangs, tattoos are not only an essential declaration of belonging but also serve to express the individual's status within the gang (Carmen et al., 2012; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002). In New Zealand, a unique style of tattooing evolved that is still popular today. The

moko is a facial tattoo that directly represents the wearer's family. To this day, every family has a unique design that is personalised for each member of the family (Bell, 1999). According to Kierstein and Kjelskau (2015), this sense of belonging is important for individuals who are still exploring their identity and trying to find their uniqueness. Thus, by affiliating with a certain group, one distinguishes and differentiates oneself from those who are not part of that group (Armstrong et al., 2004).

Reminders. Tattoos can act as a commemoration of important people in the tattooed person's life. This is similar to affiliating with a group but here, the tattoo symbolises the kinship with a specific person such as a family member, significant other, or friend (Alcina, 2009; Alter-Muri, 2020; Dimitropoulos et al., 2016; McNiven, 2016; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002). Through an evolutionary lens, Carmen et al. (2012) propose that expressing this strong bond with other individuals may give social status to the tattooed individual through association. Furthermore, these types of tattoos communicate positive traits such as commitment to potential partners. Memorial tattoos seem to have a dual function, honouring the person and reminding the wearer of the influence that the individual had in shaping the narrative of the wearer (Alcina, 2009).

Important life events, good or bad, can also be remembered by getting a tattoo. To a potential partner, these types of tattoos could signify that the wearer has life experience, thus increasing their status in the eyes of the suiter (Carmen et al., 2012). For some, the tattoo represents a rite of passage such as a significant birthday or graduation from university (Alcina, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2004; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002). Others may wish to mark the difficult chapters in their narratives with a tattoo. Kierstein and Kjelskau (2015) believe this to be a form of controlled self-harm where the pain from getting the tattoo helps to heal the psychological or physical pain associated with the life event. Dann and Callaghan (2019) disagree with this statement and propose that tattoos indicate self-care. They conclude that tattoos become part of the therapeutic process, aiding in the healing of trauma by allowing narratives to be shared with others (Dann & Callaghan, 2019). Remembering difficult life events through tattoos also serves as a reminder of the wearer's resilience and perseverance (Carrere & Peake, 2020).

Other. As a fashion statement is a less frequently reported reason for getting a tattoo. Due to the popularity of television shows such as *Miami Ink* and *Ink Master*, tattoos have been pushed into popular culture. Tattoos have been turned into a fashion statement by

tattooed celebrities and clothing brands using tattoo imagery (Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015). Furthermore, social media has helped to spread this trend globally. Unfortunately, fashions come and go and as a result, a high percentage of people who were tattooed as a fashion statement regretted it later and looked into removing the tattoo (Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015). Some people get a tattoo simply because they are interested in tattoos or desire one (Armstrong et al., 2004; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002), and others view tattoos as art and collect them as an art form (Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015). It has also been reported that some individuals were tattooed when they were very young in an attempt to rebel and appear mature (Firmin et al., 2008; Naudé et al., 2017; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002). Most of these people indicated that they regretted these impulsive tattoos and would consider removing or covering them up (Firmin et al., 2008; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002).

The practice of tattooing, which was not so long ago seen as a symbol of the subcultures existing on the peripheries of society, has now become mainstream and acceptable. This rise and fall in the popularity of tattoos must be taken to indicate that the tattoo is a complex phenomenon with multiple layers of meaning (Lombard & Bergh, 2014). Previous research mainly focused on tattoos as a deviant act (done by gang members and prisoners) or as a marker for mental disorders (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009; Kosut, 2000). Hence, more research is needed to expand the knowledge pertaining to the tattooing practices of the general public and to discover the meanings behind these tattoos. A popular population for current research on tattoos is university students.

2.2 Tattoos Among Emerging Adults

Tattoos are becoming more acceptable and more popular among emerging adults (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Dickson et al., 2015; Kosut, 2000), not only in the United States but also in Africa (Chacha & Kazaura, 2015), including South Africa (Lombard & Bergh 2014; Naudé et al., 2017). Dickson et al. (2015) estimate that between 22% and 30% of people between the ages of 18 years and 29 years are tattooed. Research by Dansby-Giles et al. (2011) reports that one in three Americans aged between 18 years and 25 years have at least one tattoo. Naudé et al. (2017) reported that on a South African university campus, 21.7% of the emerging adult participants had one or more tattoos. In addition, 74.3% of participants in this study had a friend with at least one tattoo. Is there something about this life stage that encourages individuals to get tattoos?

Erik Erikson's theory of human development was a contributing theory that led Arnett (2000) to propose the distinct life stage of emerging adulthood. Although Erikson never mentioned the term 'emerging adult', he did mention two constructs that may be equated with emerging adulthood. Erikson (1968) wrote about the prolonged adolescence and psychological moratorium that is bestowed upon young people living in industrialised societies. During this period, the young person is free to experiment with different roles in order to find one and fit into society (Arnett, 2000). Thus, Arnett (2000) argues that this time in a young person's life during which they are not adolescents but are also not adults since the commitments and responsibilities of the adult stage have been delayed should be known as the emerging adult stage. This stage was first proposed to stretch from the ages of 18 years to 25 years (Arnett, 2000) but was later adjusted to stretch from 18 years to 29 years of age (Arnett et al., 2014).

2.2.1 The Five Pillars of Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2000) proposes five distinct features for emerging adulthood, namely self-focus, possibilities and optimism, instability, feeling in between, and identity exploration. A brief discussion of these five features or pillars that differentiate emerging adulthood from adolescence and young adulthood follows.

Emerging adults are more focused on themselves because during this time in their lives, they have few responsibilities and few daily social roles to perform (Arnett et al., 2014). This self-focus is considered negative by some and is correlated with a loss of values, a rise in narcissism, and less empathy with the needs of others (Pratt & Matsuba, 2018). In contrast, others argue that self-focus aids in the preparation for adult roles and helps resolve the explorations of the self. Self-focus develops the skills that are needed to understand the self better and to become a self-sufficient and unique individual (Arnett, 2014). The need for uniqueness is a significant driving force behind emerging adults getting a tattoo, even though there is no difference in this need for uniqueness between tattooed and non-tattooed people (Hill et al., 2016). This increasing focus on themselves and their own needs could contribute to some emerging adults getting a tattoo. While parents' opinions had to be considered during adolescence, studies found that the majority of the tattooed emerging adult participants did not inform their parents or obtain their permission before getting tattooed (Dansby-Giles et al., 2011; Naudé et al., 2017). Furthermore, the knowledge that their parents would react negatively to the tattoo did not deter the emerging adults from getting the tattoo. So, does this

mean that emerging adults are getting tattoos to rebel against their parents? It would seem that the answer is no. Research suggests that only a small minority of participants reported being tattooed as an act of rebellion (Bergh et al., 2017; Dickson et al., 2015). Instead of rebellion, a better explanation may be the newfound independence and self-focus that comes with emerging adulthood. Tattoos may be a way of individualising the self from parents rather than rebelling against them.

Overall hopefulness and high expectations for the future is another feature of emerging adulthood. During this stage, there are still multiple different futures possible to the emerging adult, and this offers them the potential for radical life changes (Arnett, 2014). Whether the individual is from a good or a troubled family background, emerging adulthood is the time during which individuals can work on themselves, make independent decisions about their lives, and distinguish themselves and their story from their parents. This optimism towards the future is not without stress but even so, most emerging adults feel their lives will be better than the lives of their parents (Pratt & Matsuba, 2018). Could this positive outlook result in emerging adults getting tattoos without truly considering the consequences?

Risk-taking and impulsive behaviour does increase during the emerging adult's time at university (Naudé et al., 2017). However, Dansby-Giles et al. (2011) reported no difference in the risk-taking behaviour between tattooed and non-tattooed emerging adults. Thus, tattoos should not be viewed as a marker of the riskier individuals in the emerging adult population. Even with the more optimistic view that everything will work out for the best, emerging adults still consider the consequences of their actions. Research has shown that an overwhelming majority of tattooed emerging adults delay getting a tattoo by a few months after the initial decision is made. Some even take as long as a year to re-evaluate their decision to get a tattoo (Dickson et al., 2015; Dundes & Francis, 2016). Moreover, most emerging adults report being tattooed in reputable tattoo shops where the risk of health-related complications is minimised. This points to emerging adults being aware of the health risks associated with unhygienic tattoo practices and actively avoiding these risks (Dickson et al., 2015).

Instability is another feature of emerging adulthood. During this life stage, there are frequent changes in educational direction, romantic partners, and jobs as alternative options are explored (Arnett, 2015). These changes lead to a revision of the 'plan' for the future, and in time, each revision helps the emerging adult in clarifying the future that they want (Arnett,

2014). As reported by Naudé et al. (2017), this instability may cause some emerging adults to regret their tattoos. In their study, having a tattoo of the name of an ex-romantic partner was one of the few reasons given by participants for regretting their tattoo (Naudé et al., 2017). Another distinction between emerging adulthood and other life stages is that there are no demographic norms that define emerging adulthood. Predicting the demographic status of an individual between the ages of 18 years and 29 years is almost an impossible task. While some go to university and live in some form of student accommodation, others start working full time and live on their own or with a romantic partner (Arnett, 2000). This instability may lead to the emerging adult feeling that they are in between stages, another feature of this distinctive life stage.

Between the boundaries of being an adolescent and the responsibilities that accompany adulthood lie emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014). Subjectively, emerging adults feel 'in between' since they do not see themselves as adults yet but feel they are not adolescents anymore (Arnett, 2000). This ambiguity may in part be caused by the demographic instability they experience. Research found that emerging adults reported that individuals can be seen as adults when they take responsibility and agency for themselves, when they can make independent decisions, and when they become financially independent (Arnett, 2000). These above-mentioned criteria for adulthood echo the importance of striving to become a self-sufficient individual during the emerging adulthood period, which in turn, drives the development of the character qualities needed to attain agency. Tattoos provide emerging adults with some sense of agency (Alter-Muri, 2020) since they take responsibility and control for every aspect surrounding the process of getting a tattoo (Martin, 2013). This sense of agency helps the emerging adult adjust to this unstable and in-between stage and assists with the development of identity (Nunes et al., 2021; Schwartz et al., 2005).

The final feature of emerging adulthood as proposed by Arnett (2000) is identity exploration. This feature is linked the closest to Erikson's traditional stage of identity versus role confusion (Arnett, 2000; Pratt & Matsuba, 2018). Although identity versus role confusion was allocated to the stage of adolescence by Erikson, he proposed that industrial societies extended the identity exploration phase because of prolonged adolescence. Arnett (2000) argues that most identity exploration takes place between the ages of 18 years and 25 years since identity achievement is rarely reached by 18 years of age. Love, work, and worldviews are the main identity issues on which emerging adults focus, but during this stage, emerging adults explore multiple aspects of their lives (Arnett, 2000, 2015). In

addition, emerging adults progressively take more agency for their knowledge, beliefs, relationships, and unique identity (Arnett, 2016b; Baxter Magolda, 2002; Breen et al., 2017). These aspects of the self are expressed in some of the tattoos of emerging adults. Multiple studies report that the main reason for tattoos are the expression of uniqueness, the connection to family, and the celebration of religious beliefs (Bergh et al., 2017; Carmen et al., 2012; Dickson et al., 2015; Forbes, 2001; Lombard & Bergh, 2014).

2.2.2 The Variability of Emerging Adulthood

Since the proposal of emerging adulthood theory in 2000 (Arnett, 2000), there has been a significant amount of research done on the topic around the world (Arnett, 2016a). As with most theories, emerging adulthood theory has critics that do not agree with some of the claims made by the theory (Arnett, 2016a; du Bois-Reymond, 2016; Katsiaficas, 2017). Some scholars are concerned with the age bracket of 18 to 29 years put forth by Arnett et al. (2014), asking what factors led to this decision (du Bois-Reymond, 2016). The second and greater problem that scholars have with emerging adulthood theory is that of social class and whether the theory applies across all social classes (Arnett, 2016a; du Bois-Reymond, 2016). Critics claim that emerging adulthood only applies to upper- and middle-class young people who can afford to go to university (Arnett, 2016a; Katsiaficas, 2017). At university, these young people are free to explore different roles with the financial backing of their parents while working-class youth are forced to enter the job market, more often with little prospect of climbing the corporate ladder. Whereas young people at a tertiary institution look at the future and see multiple possibilities, the young people who do not attend such an institution look at the future as a series of closed doors (Arnett, 2016a).

These criticisms could in part be caused by a misunderstanding in the use of the term 'stage'. The traditional model used in developmental psychology differs from Arnett's view. He proposes stages to be useful frameworks in assisting in the understanding of development (Arnett, 2016a). However, these stages should not be seen as universal or uniform frameworks (Pratt & Matsuba, 2018). The current standing within emerging adulthood theory is that of one stage, many paths. Emerging adulthood is a life stage, and people within this stage share certain common experiences (Arnett, 2016a). However, similar to other life stages, emerging adulthood is influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors, which leads to emerging adults from different backgrounds taking different paths through this life stage (Arnett, 2016a).

In summary, it can be said that emerging adulthood is a distinctive life stage and that tattoos seem to be a popular practice among this population. Although emerging adults are prone to take more risks, it was shown that getting a tattoo was mainly a well-thought-out process. Emerging adulthood is also characterised by instability and feelings of being between stages. Lastly, tattoos were used by emerging adults to aid in the expression and exploration of different aspects of their identity.

2.3 Identity

Who am I? This question is not only present in the lives of emerging adults but is also present in some form throughout the human lifespan (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015). Answering this question may lead to exciting self-discovery, but it also entails difficult realisations and decisions. Furthermore, the question of ‘Who am I?’ consists of multiple sub-questions that need to be answered and integrated into a coherent sense of self. This inherent complexity regarding identity creates challenges in terms of studying it (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015). Sigelman and Rider (2015) define an individual’s identity as “an overall sense of who they are, where they are heading and where they fit into society” (p. 332). Erikson (1968) was not sure that identity could be defined as easily since it is such a profound term that has been used in many different contexts. He continues by explaining that the scientific use of the term ‘identity’ complicates the issue even more (Erikson, 1968). Sometimes identity is described as such a colossal concept that defining it seems futile, if not impossible. In an attempt to avoid this problem and to ease measurement, other studies reduce identity to the extent that all meaning is lost.

2.3.1 Identity as a Concept

Individuals perceive themselves as being the same within numerous contexts because identity is an idiosyncratic perception of oneself that has stability over time (Rosdahl, 2017). Furthermore, identity appears to be moulded by biological, psychological, and cultural mechanisms, and ideal identity formation occurs when biological and psychological needs are met with beneficial cultural and societal conditions (Rosdahl, 2017).

Erikson provided an explanation of how identity forms when he wrote:

[I]n psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way

in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him.

(Erikson, 1968, pp. 22–23)

Thus, identity is not only at the foundation of the individual but also at the centre of their culture. This interaction between different spheres of identities is what makes the concept so hard to grasp (Erikson, 1968). While the conceptualisation of identity in research has not helped in its clear definition, the data gathered have proved to be useful for the field of psychology.

2.3.2 The Various Perspectives on Identity Development

The work of Erikson inspired the development of different perspectives on identity development. James Marcia's identity status model was an early theory that was developed from Erikson's work (Schwartz, 2001). This was followed by the integrative identity model and the three-factor identity model. Another neo-Eriksonian identity model that is becoming popular is the narrative identity model (Rosdahl, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2013).

The Identity Status Model. The identity status model operationalised Erikson's work, and its main proponent, James Marcia, proposed two defining dimensions of identity, namely Exploration and Commitment (Schwartz, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2013). Exploration can be defined as gathering and sorting through information gained from experimenting with multiple identities, whereas commitment refers to the selection and adherence to specific values and beliefs. By adding high and low levels to each dimension, Marcia proposed four identity statuses that signify a combination of the level (high or low) and a dimension (exploration or commitment) (Marcia, 1966; Schwartz, 2001). Identity Achievement is a status that is high in exploration and commitment, whereas the status of Identity Diffusion is low on both these dimensions. Identity Foreclosure is high on commitment but low on exploration and lastly, Identity Moratorium is high on exploration but low on commitment (Marcia, 1980; Schwartz, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2013). While Marcia focused on the commitment and exploration components, Meeus (1996) reported on the in-depth exploration of commitment and how this maintained the commitment.

The Integrative Identity Model. This model was developed in an attempt by Luyckx and colleagues (Luyckx et al., 2006; Luyckx et al., 2008) to integrate the work of Marcia and Meeus. The result was a four-dimensional model. The first dimension is called exploration in

breadth in which information is gathered about a wide variety of alternative identities to assist with commitment. In the second dimension, a choice is made regarding a domain-specific identity, and this is referred to as commitment-making by the model. In the third dimension, in-depth exploration occurs when more information is gathered about the current chosen identity. The last dimension is called identification with commitment and refers to the level of internalisation and acceptance of the current commitment (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015; Luyckx et al., 2006). A fifth dimension was later added by Luyckx et al. (2008), namely ruminative exploration and deals with dysfunctional exploration where no commitment is made.

Three-Factor Model. Crocetti and Meeus (2015) used the earlier work of Meeus as the foundation for their Three-Factor Identity model that proposes three fundamental identity processes. In the first factor, commitment refers to the choices made regarding specific identity domains and the degree of certainty about these choices. The second process following commitment is the reflection and gathering of more information on the choices made. This is called in-depth exploration and includes obtaining feedback from others about the chosen identity. Lastly, reconsideration of commitments occurs in which alternative choices are compared with the current commitment, and changes are made when deemed necessary (Crocetti et al., 2008). This model proposes that even after a commitment is made, exploration continues, and changes to commitments are almost guaranteed. The model also differs from that of Marcia and proposes that adolescents do not start out with a lack of commitment but rather with the commitments from parents and other authority figures that have been internalised. These inherited commitments are then evaluated and altered when they no longer fit with the adolescent's sense of self (Crocetti & Meeus, 2015).

The Narrative Identity Model. Storytelling is an activity that is performed in every human culture in one form or another from traditional folk tales to reality television shows (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In the past, life stories were equated with fairy tales by psychologists, and these stories did not carry any scientific value for studying human behaviour (McAdams, 2001). During the 1980s, this mentality slowly started to change (McAdams, 2001), and the idea that narratives help individuals in developing identity became increasingly popular (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Contemporary narrative approaches to identity formation have developed from Erikson's work on identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Narrative identity includes the ever-evolving story that the individual constructs by amalgamating experiences from the past, present, and anticipated future into an integrated self (Hasford et al., 2017; McAdams & McLean, 2013). As mentioned above, an individual is looking for continuity of the self over time, and one way to achieve this is through narrative continuity (McAdams, 2013a). The self is seen as a character in an integrative story that is told to demonstrate where the self has stayed the same and where and how the self has changed over time. These stories or narratives are not only reflective but also build our worldviews and thus, we shape the world and ourselves through narratives (Knoetze & Stroud, 2012). However, this process is reciprocal, and the individual's narrative identity is also shaped by the narratives of the world in which they live.

2.3.3 Development of a Narrative Identity

According to McLean et al. (2007), the first opportunity for children to develop an understanding of narratives is through their interaction with parents. As children become older, they create narratives known as personal fables. These autobiographical stories often have little relation to reality, but it is nevertheless a good exercise in coherent storytelling as the child proclaims their uniqueness and potential for greatness (McAdams, 2001). Furthermore, these personal fables are seen as preliminary drafts of later life narratives and will fade as the child ages. During adolescence, a cognitive skill that is crucial for narrative identity is developed, namely formal operational thinking (McAdams, 2001; McLean, 2005; McLean & Breen, 2009). Narrative identity requires the individual to be able to apply multiple hypothetical scenarios to their life, and this ability is granted by hypothetico-deductive reasoning. The onset of puberty is another developmental milestone that is said to drive the development of narrative identity since it guides the realisation of the individual that they are not as they used to be (McAdams, 2001). This realisation causes childhood to become the remembered past and adulthood the anticipated future and drives a need for meaning-making during emerging adulthood.

Influences on the Development of a Narrative Identity. The first important influence on narrative identity development is the cultural context in which individuals find themselves and the stories told by the members of the culture (McAdams, 2001; McLean & Pasupathi, 2011; Singer, 2004). These culturally shared stories are known as master narratives, and they offer individuals a basic structure when constructing their own narrative (McLean et al., 2018; McLean & Syed, 2016). McLean and Syed (2016) propose that master

narratives share five interrelated principles. The first of these principles is utility as the master narrative provides information on successful living and belonging. The second principle specifies that master narratives should be ubiquitously shared by the culture. The third principle asserts that because master narratives are everywhere, they are almost invisible, making it easy for individuals to adopt them unconsciously and automatically. The fourth principle is that master narratives have a compulsory nature, and those who deviate from them are marginalised to some extent. The final principle maintains that master narratives are rigid and difficult to change (McLean & Syed, 2016).

There is an expectation that the individual's narrative should conform to the master narrative (Breen et al., 2017). However, some of the underlying details of the narrative will be unique to each individual (Knoetze & Stroud, 2012). Some individuals significantly deviate from the master narrative, and these stories are referred to as alternative narratives (McLean et al., 2018). McLean and Syed (2016) propose that constructing an alternative narrative requires the recognition of the master narrative. Thus, while constructing an alternative narrative, the individual may unintentionally be strengthening the master narrative. However, with time and great effort, it is also possible for the alternative narrative to influence and change the master narrative.

Another important influence on the individual's narrative identity is the stories told by the family (Breen et al., 2017). These family narratives may be the individual's first encounter with the master narrative of the larger culture. Furthermore, the narratives of family members are used to understand the self and how the individual fits into the family context. These unique stories that are told by others are referred to as vicarious narratives (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). Vicarious narratives are not only used to understand the self and others but are also incorporated into the personal narrative. It has been found that there is an association between personal and vicarious narratives (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018). Additionally, it has been found that vicarious narratives help the individual with life decisions and problem solving. Individuals can have vivid recollections of nuclear events from their parent's life narratives even though the individual was not part of this event (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). It is important to note that it is not only the event that is recalled but also the meaning that is attached to the event by the parents. This awareness of how others assign meaning guides meaning-making in the personal narrative (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017).

Aspects of Narrative Identity. It is during the emerging adulthood years that individuals compose the first drafts of their life narratives and the first efforts at meaning-making are attempted. Meaning-making implies that the storyteller does not only recall the details of a specific event but also interprets how this event relates to who they are. McLean and Breen (2009) define meaning-making as the “degree to which one learns something about oneself from reflecting on past events” (p. 702). According to Knoetze and Stroud (2012), the first step in meaning-making is to place events into a chronological order in order to make sense of the progression of events. Next, the event is identified as meaningful when it is seen to promote the overall rationale of the narrative. McAdams (2013a) refers to these interpretive operations in which an individual draws on memories to deduct who they are and to give meaning to their lives as autobiographical reasoning. Hence, narrative identity theorists propose that the most important aspect of identity development is not what happens to individuals but how they make meaning of the events through the use of autobiographical reasoning (Baxter Magolda, 2009, 2014).

Autobiographical reasoning is a set of cognitive interpretive operations that an individual will use to analyse and interpret autobiographical memories as they make sense of who they are (McAdams, 2013a). One of these interpretive operations is known as contamination sequences. With contamination sequences, the narrative starts out with a positive event or memory that is spoilt in some way, leading to a negative outcome (Dunlop et al., 2020; McAdams, 2015). Thus, the negative meaning attached to the event erases the preceding positive experience during the event. Another important autobiographical tool is redemption sequences (Perlin & Fivush, 2021). Narratives that contain redemption sequences include negative nuclear events or memories that progress into a positive outcome (Dunlop et al., 2020; McAdams, 2015). Furthermore, the initial negative feelings caused by the nuclear event are negated by the positive meaning that is attached to the event. Dunlop et al. (2020) reported higher levels of life satisfaction in individuals who tell more redemptive narratives. Thus, redemption helps the individual to make sense of difficult times or the suffering in their life (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Some individuals choose to express this redemptive meaning with tattoos, with Carrere and Peake (2020) reporting on participants with tattoos that symbolise their perseverance.

Furthermore, contamination and redemption are two of the themes used to analyse and measure narrative identity together with agency and communion (McAdams, 2018; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Schwartz et al. (2005) define agency as taking responsibility

for one's life and believing that decisions and outcomes are within one's control. Furthermore, the individual believes that obstacles in life can be overcome. It was reported by Schwartz et al. (2005) that agency was positively linked to aspects of identity such as exploration and commitment. In research on narrative identity, agency is expressed in stories of empowerment and self-mastery and is demonstrated as having some influence over others in the narrative (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Agency, self-focus, and taking responsibility for one's life are important aspects in emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2015; Nunes et al., 2021). Multiple studies (Alter-Muri, 2020; Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015; Martin, 2013) have indicated tattoos to be a signal of agency, or at the very least, as something that provides the feeling of being in control. Agency and control comprised one of the salient themes identified by Buckle and Corbin Dwyer (2021) in their study on memorial tattoos.

Inasmuch as master and vicarious narratives are important for the development of a narrative identity so is the perception that the individual belongs to a larger group. Humans have evolved to be social and belonging to a group benefits both the individual and the group (Carmen et al., 2012). Communion is defined as the experience of interpersonal connection to a group or other individuals (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Through communion, individuals will become aware of the master and vicarious narratives that will guide them in the construction of their personal narratives (McLean et al., 2018; McLean & Syed, 2016). Communion is especially important during the emerging adulthood years when individuals are exploring their identity (Arnett, 2015). McAdams (2015) proposes two sub-themes within communion. The first is affiliation or the belonging to a group, and the second is intimacy wherein the connection is with a specific individual. Multiple studies have found that tattoos are used to express and represent communion in the form of affiliation (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Carmen et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2016; Lombard & Bergh, 2014; Naudé et al., 2017; Orend & Gagné, 2009) and intimacy (Alcina, 2009; Alter-Muri, 2020; Dimitropoulos et al., 2016; McNiven, 2016). Thus, tattoo narratives that contain themes of agency and communion can contribute to the narrative identity development of the emerging adult who is relating them.

The Actor, the Agent, and the Author. McAdams' model on narrative identity proposes that the self is made up of three parts, namely the social actor, the motivated agent, and the autobiographical author (McAdams, 2013b). Furthermore, these three parts of the self develop during different developmental stages of the individual's life. The actor self incorporates representations of traits and social roles while the agent self is concerned with

goals, values, motives, hopes, and decisions that influence the future. The author self attempts to use episodic information and nuclear events from the individual's life to create an integrated and coherent life narrative (McAdams, 2013b). It is important to note that these three parts of the self are not mutually exclusive or separate components but rather interactive layers of the self (Breen et al., 2017; McAdams, 2015).

The actor self is the first to emerge and is present from birth (McAdams, 2015, 2020). Being born with a specific temperament style means the infant is performing certain traits to the audience even before becoming aware of the self. At approximately the end of the second year of life, the infant starts to recognise the self. Thus, the first self-concept that an individual forms is of the self as a social actor (McAdams, 2020). This is, however, an inconsistent and unstable sense of self until about the age of four years when a clearer and continual sense of self forms (McAdams, 2015). Children gradually start recognising themselves through physical and performance traits such as boy or girl, shy or outgoing, friendly or aggressive. These traits are assigned from a third person perspective with recognition of how the audience views the individual (McAdams, 2020). In order to manage the audience's expectations, the actor self plays different social roles that follow social scripts. However, the actor is not blindly following directions when performing. Instead, the performance is personalised not only to fit within the expectations of the audience but also to express the actor's unique personality and lived experiences (McAdams 2013b).

It is important to find a balance between fulfilling the expectations of the audience and personalising any given role. When the actor self blindly follows the script, the individual may feel they are being controlled by others (Gilboa-Shechtman et al., 2020). However, if the actor self deviates too much from the script, they risk the audience rejecting them. To maintain this balance, the actor self controls the image that is conveyed to the audience; this is referred to as impression management (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). An important aspect of impression management is physical appearance because the audience uses physical appearance to form rapid opinions. Thus, the actor self will alter the physical appearance in different social situations to avoid rejection by the audience and other undesired outcomes (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). The actor self is the first layer of the self to develop and is concerned with finding a balance between pleasing the audience and being a unique person.

To be an agent is to make things happen in a way that conforms to the needs of the agent (McAdams, 2015, 2020). An agent has some level of control in life, intentionally

moving towards the future in a goal-directed manner. The agent self only becomes fully operational once the individual is able to define themselves in terms of personal values and goals. Furthermore, the individual needs to be able to organise behaviour and plan their daily lives in relation to these values and goals (McAdams, 2013b). According to McAdams (2015), this organisation occurs around eight or nine years of age. During adolescence, individuals broaden their awareness of personal, social, and cultural goals and ideologies and by the time they reach emerging adulthood, they start narrowing their focus on the more realistic goals and ideologies (McAdams, 2013b).

During these broadening and narrowing periods, various questions arise, and it is during the emerging adulthood years that the agent self attempts to find the answers. During this life phase, the individual dedicates considerable amounts of time and energy into exploring, reforming, and personalising moral and religious values (McAdams, 2015). Ultimately, the agent self needs to commit to goals and beliefs that feel true to the self. Although the agent self is predominantly focused on the wants and needs of the individual, it has to consider the social and cultural context in order to commit to realistic goals and beliefs (McAdams, 2013b). These commitments are not permanent, and the agent self undergoes multiple changes during the lifetime. Whereas the emerging adult will set goals relating to interpersonal relationships and occupation, individuals in middle adulthood may focus their goals on raising children and maintaining a career. In late adulthood, goals shift to health and retirement (McAdams, 2013b). Regardless of the life stage, the agent self looks into the future and anticipates the outcomes of their goals, imagining specific episodes that might occur. This is referred to as episodic future thought by McAdams (2013b). In order for the agent self to use episodic future thought, it must be able to recall specific episodes from the past. Thus, the agent self is concerned with goals, values, and beliefs and attempts to imagine the future by remembering specific past events.

Reflecting on past events is one of the functions of the third layer of the self as proposed by McAdams (2013b). The author self reconstructs past events into a life story, which in turn develops into narrative identity (McAdams, 2015). According to McAdams (2013b), the author self waits in the background during the childhood and adolescent years. During this dormant period, the author self collects information to assist in the telling of the life story during emerging adulthood. Although the author self is only operating in the background during the period preceding emerging adulthood, other important factors such as

early attachment experiences, temperament, and peer relations play out. These factors will have an influence on the way the author self will construct the narrative (McAdams, 2013a).

According to McLean et al. (2007), the first opportunity for children to develop an understanding of narratives is through interaction with their parents. As children become older, they create narratives known as personal fables. These autobiographical stories often have little relation to reality, but their creation is nevertheless a good exercise in coherent storytelling as the child proclaims their uniqueness and potential for greatness (McAdams, 2001). Furthermore, these personal fables are seen as preliminary drafts of later life narratives and will fade as the child ages. During the second and third years of life, the child develops autobiographical memory (McAdams, 2013a). Theory of mind, or the ability to make inferences about beliefs and desires in their own minds and in others, is consolidated at the age of four years. This theory of mind plays a huge role in the quest of becoming an author because it allows the child to realise that the story takes place during a specific time and at a specific place and that the characters act upon their own beliefs and intentions (McAdams, 2013a). During adolescence, a cognitive skill that is crucial for narrative identity is developed, namely formal operational thinking (McAdams, 2001; McLean, 2005; McLean & Breen, 2009). Narrative identity requires individuals to be able to apply multiple hypothetical scenarios to their lives, and this ability is granted by hypothetico-deductive reasoning. Constructing and telling coherent stories about one's life are not the only tasks of the author self. More importantly, the author self must express the meaning behind the memories that make up the narrative. The construction of a narrative identity is seen as one of the major challenges confronting emerging adults (McAdams, 2013a). Tattoos may be one of the ways emerging adults express their narrative identity.

2.4 Tattoos as an Expression of Identity

The historical view of the identities of tattooed individuals was simple; they were seen as mad, bad, or perverted, and in some cases, all three (Nichols & Foster, 2005). According to psychological literature, the willingness to mutilate one's skin permanently was connected with anti-social tendencies and psychopathology. In contrast, sociological literature viewed tattoos as markers of social categories and identity constructs (Nichols & Foster, 2005). As tattoos became more accepted, it became clear that in some cases, they may be a symbol of deviance but they are more often used to symbolise the self as an individual.

2.4.1 The Body and the Self

In recent times, the body has become more visible than ever before (Weiss & Fern Haber, 2003). Furthermore, the body has become the focus of multiple social science disciplines, and it is proposed that the body plays an important part in the sense of self and agency that manifests in the individualisation of the body (Heavey, 2015; Nichols & Foster, 2005; Weiss & Fern Haber, 2003). According to Heavey (2015), Western medicine views the self and consciousness as separate and distinct from the body. In other words, the body is merely a vessel containing the self. This dualistic view is opposed by the phenomenological view that the human consists of a unified body and self, which argues that people experience the body as the self (Heavey, 2015). Kosut (2000) argues that the body is the main physical representation of the individual and provides a way for that individual to distinguish themselves from others. 'Body projects' such as body modification are an important way in which individuals reflect on the self. With modern technology, the body has become much more malleable with activities such as bodybuilding and plastic surgery. Thus, the body should not be seen as natural and extrinsic but as the battlefield for the war for self-definition and individualisation (Nichols & Foster, 2005).

Nichols and Foster (2005) explain that this need for individualisation is caused by the globalisation of culture that is resulting in the disconnection of the self from a physical place and nationality. In the digital age of social media where people increasingly live online through profile pictures, selfies, avatars, and emojis, the self is progressively removed from the physical body (Leader, 2016). Thus, it should be seen as significant that the embodiment of the self through tattoos is rapidly growing during this time in which the body is being left behind. Leader (2016) proposes that the active narratives associated with tattoos serve as a way to connect the mind and body for a more authentic self and that this embodiment has an empowering effect for the individual in this modern world.

The permanent alteration of the body is seen as impression management (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). Although all bodies tell a narrative, the tattooed body's unique articulation communicates a more distinctly personal narrative (Kosut, 2000). Similar to the signs on buildings or slogans on clothes, the body also carries 'signs' such as race, gender, and size that is read by others when interacting. Kosut (2000) explains that these 'signs' are assigned at birth but that other 'signs' such as make-up and clothing may be added to the body. Tattoos are added as permanent 'signs' on the skin, and according to Borgerson and

Schroeder (2018), the skin plays an important part in the development and expression of identity since it provides the canvas on which these ‘signs’ are displayed.

2.4.2 The Skin, the Tattoo and the Narrative

Nichols and Foster (2005) argue that the ‘ritual’ of getting a tattoo connects the tattooed individual to humanity. Therefore, tattoos are a form of visual communication that transcends national boundaries and culture and are used in the production of a desired self-image by controlling the gaze of others. It can be said that life is a stage, and the individual is the actor using the tattoos as a tool to aid in the telling of the narrative (Heavey, 2015; Nichols & Foster, 2005). As part of a self-presentation strategy, the tattoo is ‘performed’ as it is hidden or revealed depending on the audience (Leader, 2016).

According to Leader (2016), the complicated connection that exists between tattoos and narratives should be viewed as a form of art that attempts to move audiences from narrow presumptions to more in-depth appreciation. The difference between other art forms and tattooing is that the canvas, the skin, is not framed and hung on a wall, and the stories are not written down or read in books. Thus, tattoos are living and breathing embodiments of the individual’s autobiography. Tattoo narratives never tell the story of something that happened to the wearer but instead, something that is the wearer (Leader, 2016). If you ask a person about their tattoo, you are almost guaranteed to get a narrative of some sort as a reply, and if the inquiry is made with a genuine sense of interest, it will produce stories with rich, deep interpretations and experiences (Leader, 2016). Telling and listening to stories is a human need that is as great as the need for happiness because stories demonstrate to the individual that they fit in, that there is a place for them (Bauman, 2008). Tattoos not only have a visual aspect but also a characteristic narrative value, and every tattoo has a story behind it (Kosut, 2000). Furthermore, a constant reflection of the body, the author self, and society exists within these tattoo narratives. Leader (2016) points out that tattooed bodies can be equated with walking books that should be read, analysed, and interpreted to reveal the intricate narratives contained within. Tattoos often represent the collaboration between body and mind because tattoos are a literal embodiment of a narrative (Leader, 2016). Research on tattoos could aid in exposing the complicated relationship that exists between the body, identity, and society. Thus, tattoos are not something to be investigated in isolation but should be seen as a tool to aid in the exploration and understanding of humanity in general (Leader, 2016).

Outwardly, tattoos can be seen as a form of creative expression, but tattoos are also memory keepers, commemorations of hard times and celebrations of good times (Leader, 2016). Multiple studies found that people view tattoos as a way of expressing their identity and memorialising special events (Alter-Muri, 2020; Dickson et al., 2015; Martin, 2013; Naudé et al., 2017; Orend & Gagné, 2009; Swann-Thomas et al., 2021; Yamada, 2008). Thus, the tattoo becomes an identity marker that honours life events by recording a special incident or person. In conclusion, tattoo narratives should be seen as an existential understanding and integration of life events via the body (Leader, 2016).

From all of the above, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of tattooing is a complex issue that is definitely not simply skin deep. With multiple reasons behind the decision to get tattooed, it would be ignorant to assume that every emerging adult with a tattoo is trying to express their narrative identity. But from the literature, it appears safe to assume that most emerging adults will have a story connected to their tattoo and that they would not mind sharing these tattoo narratives. Since sharing stories from one's life is part of narrative identity development, it can be deduced that the tattoos of these emerging adults express their narrative identity in some form.

2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the relevant literature regarding tattoos, emerging adulthood, and identity and how these constructs interact with each other was presented. The aim was to offer an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this research project. In the first section of the chapter, an attempt was made to define tattoos and to give a brief overview of their history. From this, it could be seen that tattoos are almost as old as humanity itself and that the act of tattooing was performed in most ancient cultures in one form or another. From here, the discussion moved to the reasons for getting a tattoo, and it was made clear that there are as many reasons as there are tattoos. The next subsection focused on emerging adulthood theory as proposed by Arnett (2000) and introduced some of the main criticisms against the theory. The five pillars of emerging adulthood were presented to support the claim that this is a distinct life period. The third section of this chapter attempted to define and explain the concept of identity. Thereafter, a closer look was taken at the status and narrative identity models that developed from Erikson's work on identity. Lastly, the connection between tattoos and identity was explored. From the literature, it can be deduced that not all but most emerging adults get tattooed partly as an expression of their narrative identity.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology that was employed for this study and discusses why certain methods were chosen above others. Starting with the rationale and aim of the study, an argument is made for the importance of the research. Thereafter, the research design and approach is described, followed by a description of the research participants and the sampling procedures that were used. A description of the data collection and analysis methods are subsequently given and finally, an overview of the relevant ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness is provided. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

3.1 Research Aim

In the preceding chapter, it was shown that the practice of tattooing is almost as old as humanity itself. This practice is becoming more popular among emerging adults. During the stage of emerging adulthood, progressively, more responsibility and ownership of worldviews, identity, and relationships are taken (Arnett, 2016a; Baxter Magolda, 2002; Breen et al., 2017). Furthermore, it was shown that this is the stage in which the author self becomes more prominent. Multiple approaches on identity development have developed from Erikson's work, one of which is the narrative identity approach (McAdams & McLean, 2013). As the author self emerges during emerging adulthood, an attempt is made to write a life story. However, this life story is not merely a retelling of the events but more importantly, the meaning attached to the events (Baxter Magolda, 2009, 2014). There are multiple ways in which emerging adults express their narrative identity (Breen et al., 2017; McAdams & McLean, 2013), one of which is through tattoos and their narratives.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe how emerging adults express their narrative identity through tattoos.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

The research design is the roadmap that guides the researcher along the research path to ensure that the best methods are used to explore and answer the particular research question (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a; Stangor, 2015). Furthermore, a research design is not necessarily a linear process but rather a holistic model in which all components of the research process interact. Lastly, a research design should not be seen as a concrete guide since it is almost

certain to require some changes as the research progresses (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). For this study, a qualitative approach was followed, embedded in an explorative and descriptive research design.

Qualitative researchers determine how people make sense of their surroundings and interactions with others (Neuman, 2014) by providing thick and rich data that describe the concept under investigation (Smith, 2008). Qualitative research methods have been used increasingly since the 1960s in the social sciences but have only become popular in psychology as recently as 1990 (Giles, 2002; Richardson, 2002). Despite its rise in popularity, qualitative research is still a contentious issue even among the researchers that use it, so much so that the qualitative approach to research has become a research topic on its own (Giles, 2002).

In contrast to the positivistic view in which it is believed that there is only one truth and that this truth can only be discovered with observable, testable evidence (Ashworth, 2008), qualitative research is befitting of the constructionist views (Silva et al., 2014). Constructionists believe that people construct their own truth by using language and their cultural background (Giles, 2002; Silva et al., 2014). This does not mean that constructivists reject the idea of objectivity outright, but instead, they acknowledge the dynamic tension between subjectivity and objectivity (Baxter & Jack, 2008). One advantage of the constructivist paradigm is that it allows the researcher and participant to work together; in this context, the participants describe their narratives, and the researcher can explore how these narratives construct the participants' realities (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is this reality of the participant that qualitative research attempts to explore and describe (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Silverman, 2011).

Because the aim of the study was to explore and describe how emerging adults express their narrative identity through tattoos, all of the above led the researcher to choose the qualitative approach.

3.3 Research Participants and Sampling Procedures

The participants of interest for this study were emerging adults with at least one tattoo. Therefore, to take part in the study, participants had to meet the following criteria. Firstly, they had to be between the ages of 18 years and 29 years. Secondly, they had to have at least one tattoo that had personal meaning for them and their life narrative. Ten participants were recruited by the researcher making use of non-probability sampling methods. More

specifically, purposive and snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014) were used. These techniques are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Non-probability sampling is used when it is not possible for the researcher to obtain some sort of sampling frame listing the entire population of interest (Stangor, 2015). With a qualitative approach, non-probability sampling is the preferred method since it is normally almost impossible to obtain information on the entire population (Neuman, 2014). This leads to one of the greatest disadvantages of non-probability sampling, the fact that results cannot be generalised to the larger population (Stangor, 2015). Furthermore, non-probability sampling enables the qualitative researcher to select participants based on how well they fit the criteria for the study. This can be achieved with purposive sampling (Neuman, 2014) where the researcher selects participants they regard as information-rich cases for the study. Purposive sampling is frequently used in qualitative research when the aim is to explore and describe a specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). When using this sampling method, there should be clear criteria set out in order to eliminate the impact of researcher bias (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014) is another method that flows naturally from purposive sampling. Once a few participants have been identified, these participants are asked to refer other possible participants from their social networks to the researcher. Another possibility is for the researcher to ask for referrals from people in the researcher's own social networks (Neuman, 2014).

The aim of this study was to explore and describe how emerging adults express their narrative identities through the use of tattoos, but it would have been impossible to develop a sampling frame of all emerging adults with tattoos. In addition, emerging adults with tattoos are also a special population (Neuman, 2014) since most emerging adults do not have tattoos. For these reasons, non-probability purposive and snowball sampling were regarded as the best fit for the research design. For the purposive sampling, the researcher approached emerging adults with visible tattoos. The prospective participants were informed about the study and given the contact details of the researcher. Those individuals who were interested in taking part in the study contacted the researcher and further arrangements were made. The prospective participants were also asked to refer any friends who fit the selection criteria for the study. The researcher also asked fellow students in the Honours and Master's programmes to refer individuals from their networks who fit the selection criteria.

In total, 10 participants were selected to form part of the study. Of the 10 participants, 7 were female and 3 were male, with the youngest participant being 20 years of age and the oldest being 27 years old. Half of the participants identified themselves as Afrikaans, with English, Xhosa, and Italian making up the other participants' ethnic groups. Nine was the highest number of tattoos for one participant, with four participants only having one tattoo. The 10 participants' demographic information is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnic Group	Number of Tattoos
1	Peaches	23	Female	Xhosa	1
2	Kahlo	22	Female	English	1
3	Audrey	24	Female	English	2
4	Ally	26	Female	Afrikaans	9
5	Blair	26	Female	Afrikaans	2
6	Zama	27	Female	Xhosa	3
7	Frank	23	Male	Italian	5
8	Reese	22	Male	Afrikaans	1
9	Lennon	20	Female	Afrikaans	5
10	Kai	21	Male	Afrikaans	1

3.4 Procedures of Data Collection

Data were collected using reflective writing exercises and semi-structured interviews. Each participant was asked to complete the reflective writing exercise at home and to return it to the researcher. The reflective writing exercise focused on the meaning of a single tattoo, as chosen by the participant. Thereafter, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews began with general questions about the participants' tattoos before probing them for more personal information about the meaning of their tattoos. These data collection procedures were chosen because the study required rich, in-depth data in order to make sense of the participant's point of view.

3.4.1 Reflective Writing

Personal document research is an umbrella term for multiple data collection methods including diaries, journals, autobiographies, and many other reflective writings authored by a single person. Furthermore, this form of data collection has long been viewed as an effective technique to collect rich data (Hayman et al., 2012). According to Gelmez and Bagli (2018), writing is an external symbolic depiction of one or many thoughts and is seen as very different from other language processes such as talking or listening because writing is graphically recorded. Nevertheless, writing is not simply recording the thinking process (Gelmez & Bagli, 2018). Writing reflectively can be seen as a technique that promotes self-awareness, meaning-making, and internal dialogue by allowing the writer to construct and reconstruct knowledge on the specific topic being written about (Gelmez & Bagli, 2018; Jasper, 2005). Hayman et al. (2012) point to one challenge that a researcher may face when using reflective writing as a data gathering technique, namely poor participation. Participants may feel anxious about permanently recording their feelings; they may feel that they are not good at writing; or they simply do not want to spend time on writing.

Once the participants had returned the signed informed consent forms (see Appendix A), the reflective writing exercise (see Appendix B) was emailed to the participants. They were instructed to write a reflective piece on the narrative connected to their tattoo. Those with multiple tattoos were instructed to choose the tattoo that they felt had the most personal meaning attached to the narrative. Only three participants returned the reflective writing exercise to the researcher. Participants were reminded of this task after their respective individual interviews; however no additional reflective writing exercises were received. Because comparison between participants was never the aim of the reflective writing exercise, the researcher decided to use the data collected from the three reflective writing exercises that were received.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Babbie (2014), the qualitative interview must be seen as an interaction between the interviewer and the participant. When using semi-structured interviews, the interviewer does not enter into this interaction with a set of questions that must be asked verbatim and in order but with a general strategy of the topics that need to be covered. This does not imply that the interviewer simply improvises the interview; the interviewer must be completely

aware of all the questions and topics that are to be covered (Babbie, 2014). Babbie (2014) equates an interview with a normal conversation in which the interviewer directs the dialogue to ensure that specific topics are discussed. The only major difference is that the participant should do 95% of the talking. Drawing this comparison between interviewing and normal conversation may lead to the belief that interviewing is an easy task, which is far from the truth. Fontana and Frey (2005) point this out by explaining that no matter how cautiously the researcher transcribes, codes, and reports the interview, the spoken word will always possess some level of vagueness. Babbie (2014) also warns against the researcher becoming complacent because wording and asking questions are complicated matters. Unconscious predispositions in the way a question is phrased or asked can influence the response given by the participant. Asking a question in a specific context may lead to the elimination of the most related answer or may put pressure on the participants to conform and give the answer that they think the researcher wants to hear (Babbie, 2014). Despite these potential pitfalls, semi-structured interviews have become one of the most common data collection techniques when the researcher is trying to make sense of other human's subjective experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used to allow for flexibility during the process. An interview guide was used to ensure that all of the important areas were covered (see Appendix C). Each interview was scheduled for a time that was convenient for both the participant and the researcher. The interviews were all conducted in the Psychology Department, in either a conference room or the researcher's office depending on availability. Before the interview commenced, the researcher welcomed the participant and tried to put them at ease about the process. Next, the aim of the study and the participant's rights were explained in addition to what the researcher expected from the participant. Any questions were answered and only then, was informed consent obtained. Each interview lasted between 15 minutes and 25 minutes and was recorded. The interview was transcribed verbatim at a later stage. Initially, questions regarding identity and emerging adulthood were asked. These were followed by questions relating to the participant's tattoos. Follow-up questions were asked based on the answers given by the participant. At the conclusion of the interview, any questions that the participant had were answered, and the participant was thanked for their time and was given a gratitude bag containing a cold drink and packet of potato chips.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the non-numerical investigation and interpretation of data for the purpose of uncovering underlying patterns and meanings (Babbie, 2014). According to Silva et al. (2014), two principles govern qualitative data analysis. The first is that data analysis is an ongoing process that begins with the gathering of the data and only ends with the completion of the research project and requires the repeated examination of the data. Secondly, qualitative data analysis makes use of tried-and-tested procedures in a systematic manner (Silva et al., 2014).

3.5.1 Narrative Inquiry

The overarching analytical framework for this study was narrative inquiry (James, 2017; Riessman, 2008). Narratives are seen to provide important psychological insights into human existence (Head, 2020; McAdams, 2001). In the early 20th century, narrative inquiry was frowned upon by those promoting the positivistic approach to research. However, by the final decades of the century, researchers returned to narrative inquiry because they were starting to reject the reductive and generalised assumptions made by the positivist paradigm (Head, 2020). This new interest in narratives coincided with the expansion of qualitative methodologies. Furthermore, the inquiry into narratives also aided in the expansion of the phenomenological and constructionist frameworks (Head, 2020). Hence, it can be said that the positivistic master narrative was changed, in part, by the increased use of narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry, according to James (2017), is not steered by guiding or fixed research principles but is rather a fluid form of research. Some may argue that this fluid process is at the expense of theory, but James (2017) argues that narrative inquiry merely acknowledges that not all people and the stories they tell will fit perfectly into some theory. Narrative inquiry is said to be the act of finding meaning within a narrative in order to understand the experiences of humans better (Riessman, 2008). According to Head (2020), this understanding comes in many forms. Narrative inquiry has been used to investigate memory over time and to understand how individuals navigate dilemmatic situations. Some research investigates how individuals make meaning of historic events, while others focus on how meaning is created between narrators with opposing points of view. Most relevant to the

current study is the view that narratives are ideal for research on identity (Head, 2020; McAdams, 2008).

Similar to the diverse range of phenomena investigated by narrative inquiry, there are multiple approaches to analysing narratives. Riessman (2008) discusses four of the more popular analytical approaches used within narrative inquiry. Firstly, structural analysis focuses on the structure and organisation of the content of the narrative. Secondly, dialogic analysis explores the dialogic nature of the narrative and the influence of culture and society. The third approach, visual narrative analysis, combines images with the words of the narrative to make meaning. The final approach is thematic narrative analysis in which focus is placed on the content of the narrative with little attention to the written or spoken form (Riessman, 2008).

3.5.2 Analysis Process

For the current study, thematic narrative analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the participants. According to Riessman (2008), thematic analysis is the most popular method for analysing narratives. Thematic analysis is flexible and has been used in a variety of different studies (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This popularity stems from the fact that thematic analysis provides systematic methods for data analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) proposed phases of thematic analysis comprise one of the most popular methods for identifying, analysing, and interpreting qualitative data, including narratives. These phases are (i) knowing your data, (ii) initial coding, (iii) joining codes into themes, (iv) reviewing the themes, (v) naming and defining the themes, and (vi) reporting on the themes. It is important to note that these are not linear steps that are followed consecutively. On the contrary, they are phases that can, and should, be revisited multiple times during the analysis process.

For this study, there were two distinct yet interconnected processes relating to data analysis. Initially, each participant's narrative was analysed, allowing for a holistic presentation of their experiences. According to Riessman (2008), it is customary to keep the narrative intact by analysing each interview as a case study rather than simply looking for similarities across narratives. However, this does not mean that cross-case analysis is not possible. For this study, the second analytical process was employed to construct themes that were salient across the different individual stories. A short description of how the thematic

analysis phases were applied for this study follows. It is important to note that the individual analysis process was completed before the cross-case analysis process started.

Knowing Your Data. The starting point for thematic analysis is to become thoroughly familiar with all the data by reading and re-reading them in an active way (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher who personally collects and transcribes the data will start this phase with some prior knowledge, which is always an advantage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase (phase one) should be viewed as the foundation upon which the data analysis process is built; however, this is the phase that is most frequently overlooked by researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, this is not a passive reading of the transcription but an active and analytical reading of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

For this study, the researcher gathered the data personally. The researcher transcribed half of the interviews, and a research assistant transcribed the remaining half. The transcriptions were then read while listening to the recordings to ensure that no mistakes had been introduced during the transcribing process. Multiple re-readings of the transcriptions were performed, and possible patterns were noted. The notes served as the foundation for the construction of codes in the following phase. Therefore, coding was not a once-off phase but rather a process that evolved throughout the analysis.

Initial Coding. Once the researcher had achieved familiarity with the data, phase two began during which the initial codes were formed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A code can be described as a word or phrase that describes why a piece of data may be useful (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Silva et al. (2014) point out that coding data is at the centre of data analysis, and it entails organisation of data snippets into groups for deeper analysis at a later stage. Coding can be conducted with the help of a computer program or manually. Regardless of the method of coding, the researcher should generate the greatest number of codes possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For this study, coding was done by creating a table on Microsoft Word with two columns. The transcription was placed in the left column. In the right column, codes were typed that represented the content of the adjacent sentence. All the codes that could be generated to represent a section of data were written down with no consideration for similarities or overlap. This process was followed for all received reflective writing exercises

and for all 10 interviews. These codes later served as the initial codes for the cross-case analysis.

Joining Codes into Themes. Once all the data had been initially coded, phase three commenced. This phase consisted of grouping similar codes together and analysing how they fitted into an overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme is a collection of codes that captures something important regarding the data. Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasise that these themes are generated by the researcher. Throughout this phase, the researcher should keep in mind the connection that exists between the codes and themes and between the main themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher can end this phase as soon as there is a set of main and sub-themes.

The initial codes from each participant's data were sorted into groups based on their similarity. Thereafter, rudimentary themes were assigned to each group. This was a process of continually returning to the initial coding document to make sure that each code was assigned to the correct theme. For the cross-case analysis, the codes from all 10 participants were sorted into groups. Again, themes were ascribed to each group of codes.

Reviewing the Themes. During phase four, the themes that were generated were reviewed, amended, and clarified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is seen as one of the quality controls inherent within thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Themes were evaluated against the entire data set to ensure accurate representation, and all the codes that fell under the theme were assessed again to confirm their fit. At the end of this stage, the researcher should have a good comprehension of all the diverse themes and the story that is being told by the overall data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The themes for each participant were reviewed by checking if they represented all the codes that were placed under them. The themes were also compared with the narrative of each individual to make sure that they fit with the story being told. This process was also followed for the cross-case analysis by using the salient themes generated during the previous phase. For the cross-case analysis, it was important that the themes were representative of the entire data set. However, salient themes also needed to represent the individual narratives as accurately as possible.

Naming and Defining the Themes. Phase five involved the clarification and the final naming of the themes that were generated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The aim was to make the

specific and unique characteristics of the themes clear. It is important to find a balance between the theme being not too broad and complex and not too simplistic and narrow. Each theme, together with the data extracts under it, should tell a narrative that is internally consistent and fits into the larger narrative of the complete data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, sub-themes may be generated to give structure to larger or more complex themes. By the end of this phase, the researcher should be able to have a clear understanding of each theme. Themes are also named during this phase, and it is important for the name to be concise and to give the reader a sense of the content of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase ends when each theme has a clear definition of what it is and what it is not (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For the current study, a theme was defined by understanding the story told by it. This was again checked against each participant's unique narrative. Themes that seemed to tell more than one story were split in order to make them less complex. This was common where the same tattoo had different narratives connected to it. For the individual narratives, themes were named using quotations from the participant's data. For the cross-case analysis, the identified themes were again defined by the story they told. When all five themes were examined, the researcher felt that these themes told the story of the participants' combined experiences well. No clear sub-themes were apparent and thus, there were no sub-themes generated for any of the themes.

Reporting on the Themes. Phase six involved the researcher assembling the report that was generated from the first five phases of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The writing of the report should happen in such a manner that the story of the data is told in a way that the reader is convinced that the analysis that took place is valid. Therefore, the report must be rational and compelling. The report must also produce adequate substantiation for the themes created by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The themes identified in this study are reported in Chapter 4. This is done in two sections. In the first section of the chapter, the individual themes are reported, followed by the salient themes in the second section. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the themes, they are substantiated by excerpts from the data.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

According to Damianakis and Woodford (2012), the role of social scientists is twofold. Firstly, knowledge must be generated with trustworthy and rigorous research and secondly, this research should uphold ethical standards. Ethics relate to topics of right and wrong and are usually connected to morality (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). However, what is right or wrong is not set but is rather an agreement between the involved parties. Babbie (2014) refers to ethics as obeying the codes of conduct of a given group. Thus, everyone entering the ‘group’ of social science research needs to be familiar with the agreed-upon ethics. The ethical issues pertaining to this study are discussed in more detail below.

This study forms part of a larger research project for which ethical clearance (see Appendix D) has been obtained [UFS-HSD 2017/0230]. The title of this larger project is *Emerging Adults in a Transitional Society*, and it explores the experiences of emerging adults in South Africa. The aim of this larger project is to investigate identity development in emerging adults within the South African context. The research includes different domains of identity development such as gender identity and spiritual identity. Factors influencing identity development such as social media are also investigated. Although the current study is aligned with the other studies in the larger project, it is unique for its focus on tattoos and narrative identity. In addition to the ethical clearance, the Student Affairs’ Research Desk gave permission for the study to be conducted on the University of the Free State campus.

The first ethical agreement entailed voluntary participation and the autonomy of participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). Kiliñç and Firat (2017) describe voluntary participation as taking part without being forced by external forces to do so. Research requires participants not only to give up their time but also, in some cases, to provide personal or sensitive information (Babbie, 2014). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance not to force any participant to take part in research. Voluntary participation is associated with another principle, autonomy. The principle of autonomy requires that participants are given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves in matters that affect them (Johnsson & Eriksson, 2016). According to Babbie (2014), informed consent is a way to formalise the above-mentioned ethical principles. Informed consent gives participants the opportunity to base their voluntary participation on the complete comprehension of the risks that are involved (Babbie, 2014). Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before the data gathering started, and any questions from the participants were answered.

Non-maleficence, or the principle of do no harm, is possibly the most direct ethical concern for the researcher (Allan, 2016; Stangor, 2015). Although the risk of physical harm is very low in most social science research, psychological or emotional harm is a real possibility (Stangor, 2015). No deception of any kind was used, and no physical harm was foreseen. However, for this study, it was important to consider the psychological impact that the process might have. In telling their tattoo narratives, it was possible that some emotional distress could occur. To minimise the risk of psychological distress, participants were assured that they were not obliged to share any information that they were not comfortable sharing. However, should the participants have felt the need for psychological assistance, they would have been referred to Student Counselling and Development on the University of the Free State campus.

The last ethical principal centred on anonymity and confidentiality (Babbie, 2014). The anonymity of a participant is only certain when not only the readers of the research but also the researcher cannot connect any specific piece of data to a specific participant. However, because this study made use of face-to-face interviews, anonymity could not be promised. When researchers can match data to a participant, they should ensure that they do not divulge this information to anyone else and they should omit or censor any identifying information from the research report (Babbie, 2014). Confidentiality was maintained to the best of the researcher's ability. No personal information was required from the participants on the forms they completed, and they were asked to provide a pseudonym to be used instead of their real name. Because tattoos can be an identifying feature, no images of the participants' tattoos were included in the research. Lastly, data were stored securely on a laptop and protected with a password.

3.7 Issues of Trustworthiness

Despite the ever-growing use of qualitative research methods, there are still concerns about their scientific grounding, with some even saying that qualitative research merely provides an assortment of narratives (Nutt Williams & Morrow, 2009). To counter this view, Nutt Williams and Morrow (2009) point to the concept of trustworthiness and argue that this sets qualitative research apart from mere journalism or the retelling of anecdotes. Connelly (2016) describes trustworthiness as the extent to which there is confidence in the data, methods, and analysis of a study. It should be noted that trustworthiness in a qualitative study does not aim to meet the same goal as reliability and validity in a quantitative study since the two different

approaches lead to different types of knowledge (Morrow, 2005). Hence, Guba (1981) was one of the first authors to use separate terminology when referring to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study in order to differentiate it from the positivistic paradigm (Shenton, 2004).

3.7.1 The Concepts of Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) proposes four concepts that are widely accepted (Shenton, 2004) as the guidelines to achieve trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). These guidelines are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility. Credibility can be seen as the confidence that the findings of a study are ‘true’ (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). Shenton (2004) identifies credibility as one of the most important factors for the establishment of trustworthiness. Triangulation is a technique that is used to achieve credibility, and it does so by making use of different sources, methods, and even different researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Using two data collection methods and the research supervisor as a ‘second researcher’ helped promote the credibility of this study. Furthermore, member checks and researcher reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) were used. Participants were asked to read the transcription of their own interview and to confirm that it was transcribed correctly. The results and findings were also shared with participants, and they were asked to comment on the accuracy of the interpretations made by the researcher. Lastly, co-analysis (Morrow, 2005) was employed in which the research supervisor analysed some of the data and compared the results with the researcher’s analysis. Any discrepancies were discussed and reanalysed.

Transferability. Transferability of a study points to the degree to which the research can be applied to another context (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Morrow, 2005). Although transferability might be seen as the counterpart of the generalisation of quantitative research, it is not since qualitative studies never claim to be reporting on the story of every member of a population but rather, are reporting only on the narratives of the participants (Connelly, 2016). Furthermore, transferability differs from the other guidelines that are discussed in this section since it is the readers who determine the extent to which they can apply the findings to their own situation. The researcher can, however, strengthen a study’s transferability and assist the readers in making this decision by providing rich and detailed

descriptions of all aspects of the research (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Morrow, 2005).

The researcher should provide information on themselves as an instrument (Morrow, 2005). This was done by placing the researcher in context by providing relevant information and using a reflective writing journal (see Appendix E) throughout the research process. In addition, the participants and their contexts were described in detail. Furthermore, a full description of the methodology was provided, and samples of primary data were added to assist in making the analysis more transparent. With all this rich information, the researcher attempted to give a vivid narrative of the study.

Dependability. The next guideline is dependability, which is closely related to transferability (Guba, 1981). Dependability is obtained when the method that is used to arrive at the findings is repeatable (Morrow, 2005). In quantitative research, the issue of reliability guides researchers to use techniques to prove that if the study were repeated in the same context using the same methods and respondents, the results would be similar (Shenton, 2004). However, White et al. (2012) point out the difference in the reliability of a method in quantitative research that promises identical results versus the dependability of a method that only proposes that similar results are possible. Shenton (2004) agrees and adds that the phenomena that qualitative researchers study are ever changing in nature and thus, identical results are almost impossible. There are, however, steps that a researcher can take to improve the dependability of a study (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004; White et al., 2012).

Dependability requires detailed descriptions of all the processes within the study to enable other researchers to repeat the study (Shenton, 2004). In the current study, this was done by a detailed description of all methodological issues. Any changes made to the research design were recorded, and the thought process behind the changes was explained.

Confirmability. Confirmability is the researchers' acknowledgement that they are part of the research process and thus, their bias or motivation could steer the findings instead of the participants (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The researcher must show that the findings represent the experiences of the participants by creating an acceptable link between the data, the analysis, and the findings (Morrow, 2005). Establishing confirmability involves the same steps as indicated for dependability, including audit trails. Another useful aspect is triangulation (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004;

White et al., 2012). During this study, the researcher made use of method triangulation and analyst triangulation to strengthen confirmability.

3.7.2 Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is crucial to qualitative research because subjective data gathering and analysing techniques are used (Berger, 2015; Jootun & McGhee, 2009). For the scientific legitimacy of a study, it is necessary for the researcher to acknowledge this inherent subjectivity because failing to do so might lead the researcher to project their own feelings onto the participants (Lietz et al., 2006; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Reflexivity can be defined as a continuous deconstruction of the researcher's biases, experiences, beliefs, values, and identity. This is done in order to expose how these aspects may influence the research (Berger, 2015; Jootun & McGhee, 2009; Lietz et al., 2006). Reflexivity should be a process that begins and ends with the research instead of being a last-minute activity at the end of a study (Lietz et al., 2006; Smith, 2006).

Most researchers find it difficult to write about the self in a research report for fear of revealing personal information or flaws that may lead to embarrassment (Smith, 2006). Berger (2015) points to positions that a researcher should make clear, including age, gender, race, sexual orientation, beliefs, biases, and political and ideological viewpoints since these can affect the research in major ways. Access to the field or to the participants could be affected since participants generally share more openly with someone whom they perceive as sympathetic. The relationship between the researcher and the participant is also shaped by these positions and may influence the type, amount, and richness of the narratives that the participant will share (Berger, 2015). Lastly, the worldview of the researcher forms the lens that is used to make meaning of the data and in this way, will directly affect the findings of the study.

The researcher is a white male and was 36 years old at the time that the data was gathered. He can speak Afrikaans and English fluently, but his home language is Afrikaans. The researcher has 12 tattoos that were acquired between 2005 and 2018, and he is positive that he will get more. The most recent tattoo was at the beginning of 2018, which was also the beginning of this research study. It is a red Japanese Daruma doll on his right lower leg. The Daruma doll is seen as a symbol of perseverance and is used in the setting of goals. When the doll is purchased, both eyes are blank. Once the owners set a goal for themselves,

they will paint a black pupil into one of the blank eyes. The ‘one-eyed’ doll then acts as a reminder of the goal, and once it is reached, the other eye is painted. The researcher’s goal in this case is to finish this research journey and obtain his master’s degree. Once this goal is reached, he will have the remaining blank eye on his tattoo filled in.

During the entire process, the researcher kept a journal in which personal reflections on perceptions and experiences arising from the research process were written. After each interview, an entry was made and feelings about the interview were recorded. Regular discussions with the research supervisor helped with the uncertainty that is associated with being a novice researcher. These interactions also served as triangulation and helped in the reflexivity process by pointing out biases.

As with any art form, one person cannot love every tattoo style and design that exists. Therefore, one of the greatest biases that the researcher had to overcome was his own taste in tattoos. This was done by actively focusing on the narrative behind the tattoo instead of just the design. This process led to some personal growth for the researcher as looking back after all the interviews, he could not think of one participant’s tattoo that he did not like. After some reflection, it became clear that knowing the narrative behind the tattoo makes the tattoo itself more appealing. Now, before judging someone’s tattoo as ugly, the researcher reminds himself that there is an amazing and personal story behind the tattoo.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology that was applied in this study. The aim of the study was stated, and the approach and design were discussed. The sampling and data collection methods and the technique that was used for data analysis were explained. Thereafter, the ethical considerations were reviewed and the importance of establishing trustworthiness was pointed out. The chapter concluded with a discussion on researcher reflexivity. The following chapter reports on the findings and the results of the study.

Chapter 4 - Research Results

The aim of this chapter is to present the results that were obtained from the data analysis. The chapter is presented in two sections. In the first section, the results of the individual narrative analysis process are presented. The results of the cross-case analysis are presented in the second section of the chapter. Verbatim quotations from the original transcripts (see Appendix F) are included in italics in an attempt to report the true voice of the participant. Quotations from the reflective writing exercises are marked with [RW]. Quotations taken from the interviews are indicated by [INT]. Numbering indicates the specific participant and the number of the paragraph where the quote can be found in the transcript, for example, [INT 1.23]. Some quotations have been altered slightly to improve readability and understanding. Three periods are used to indicate where information has been removed. Square brackets [] indicate information that has been added to provide clarity. Words that could possibly be offensive were censored with the use of ****.

4.1 Individual Narratives

In this, the first section of the chapter, each participant's unique thematic narrative is provided. Each case begins with a short introduction of the participant. This introduction provides brief but relevant information regarding the participant's current life and important past experiences. In addition, a short description of the participant's tattoos is provided. Each participant's story starts by exploring the present and how life is experienced at this point in the narrative. Thereafter, the past is explored with the aim of linking the participant's tattoos to their life stories.

4.1.1 Peaches

Peaches is a 23-year-old Xhosa-speaking female. She is studying towards an honours degree in psychology. While life may feel a little overwhelming at times, Peaches understands that the difficult times prepare her for adulthood. One of the darkest chapters in her story is the period of her family break up. Peaches was 16 years old when her parents were divorced and at that time, she felt as if her life was over. In reflecting on this part of her narrative, Peaches understands that these events shaped her into the person she is today.

Peaches believes that the three words, faith, hope and love, that are tattooed on her foot are a representation of her identity. This is her only tattoo, and the shoes that she wears

on any given day determine the visibility of her tattoo. She got her tattoo a year ago when she was 22 years old. The idea for the tattoo came from a passage in the Bible. The tattoo serves as a reminder of the difficult chapters in her narrative.

Taking Life by the Horns. For Peaches, life at the moment is all about learning how to be an adult while moving away from being a child: “... *coming into terms of being an adult ... you shifting from the adolescence*” [INT 1.10]. Peaches is experiencing a transition, moving from having little responsibility to taking on more responsibility: “... *in where you don't have pretty much a lot of responsibility and you going into a phase where you are starting to accept responsibility*” [INT 1.10]. This new responsibility and independence makes the transition difficult for Peaches:

... a difficult transition because you were so used to being someone that was spoon-fed or other people had to take responsibility for you. And now when you an emerging adult, you have to take that, you know, by the horns, and you have to be that one that takes responsibility and accountability for yourself. [INT 1.12]

Sometimes, this transition even gets “... *overwhelming*” [INT 1.12]. However, she accepts this feeling as an integral part of this period of transition and change: “[*I*’s important for ... *me to remind myself that it is okay coz I'm only transitioning, so it's okay ... to feel overwhelmed*” [INT 1.12]. Peaches also feels that she accepts who she is at this time: “*I accept my identity*” [INT 1.30]. She describes identity as a combination of her self-perception, the people with whom she associates and what she presents to the outside world:

Identity to me is, is how I see myself and, and what I identify with. With which group do I identify with? Am I female? ... Do I feel more female? Do I express myself as female? That to me is identity. [INT. 1.2]

She mentions how she uses make-up for impression management when she wants to portray herself as being more feminine: “*How [do] I express my, my feminine side? Do I wear make-up? Am I just ... am I a girly girl? Am I just a normal girl? Yes. That's identity to me*” [INT 1.2]. Peaches agrees that a tattoo can express one's identity; however, she feels that her tattoo expresses a part of her identity that she had to let go: “*'Cause mine specifically, uhm, reminds me of a part of me that I, uhm, outgrew but which was very important to me*” [INT 1.4].

Faith, Hope and Love. At the age of 16 years, Peaches' parents got divorced, and this had a significant impact on her emotions and how she saw the world around her: "*[W]hen I was 16, my parents got a divorce and I went into an immediate negative state. I was very negative*" [INT 1.48]. During this time, Peaches lost her faith, but not so much in a religious sense since she was not particularly religious at that time: "*I would not consider myself religious then because I did not understand what it is to be religious*" [INT 1.48]. Instead, she lost faith in who she was and where she would fit in now that her family was ripped apart: "*You know, I lost faith in everything. I lost faith in the definition of what marriage is and what a family structure is and what it meant to me*" [INT 1.48]. For about three years, Peaches not only doubted herself but also everyone around her: "*I had a lot of self-doubt; I doubted myself a lot and, uhm, I questioned everyone that was around me*" [INT 1.20]. As time passed and with some effort, she was able to regain her faith in herself and in those around her: "*I had to work on regaining that faith back and just letting go and just getting that faith back*" [INT 1.48].

After the divorce, Peaches lost all hope: "*I think that when you are at those years and something happens to you, that changes your life. You think you are doomed*" [INT 1.48]. She felt that her identity would now revolve around the fact that her parents were not together anymore: "*You think because my parents are separated, this is how people are gonna look at me; I'm going to be the girl that has divorced parents and that is going to be my label*" [INT 1.48]. Reflecting on this part of her narrative, Peaches realised that viewing a situation from only one perspective would reinforce the hopelessness: "*I just looked at me and, and you never find hope when you look at yourself alone and when you consider yourself alone*" [INT 1.48]. To find hope, Peaches realised that she also had to consider the perspectives of her parents: "*But I never really looked at my parents and said they did this because they were unhappy and they were not satisfied*" [INT 1.48]. After this realisation, she regained hope for the future again, not only for her parents, "*... there's hope for them just to co parent and be my parents but not be together*" [INT 1.48] but also for herself: "*And there's hope for me to get married and look at marriage in a different light*" [INT 1.48].

Peaches also struggled with her perception of love: "*... not say, 'You guys didn't love me because you divorced.' That's not love*" [INT 1.48]. Her healing process started when Peaches realised that she must love and accept herself before she could expect others to love her: "*I have to love myself. It has to start here before I can actually love my parents and*

expect them to love me” [INT 1.48]. In her meaning-making of the situation, she realised that maybe her parents’ separation could be due to love: “Love is them making a decision that what we have is not working and if, if, if we really love each other, we have to let go” [INT 1.48]. She also concluded that her love for her parents could be expressed in her acceptance of the situation: “And if I really loved them, I would have accepted that they had a difficult marriage” [INT 1.48].

This time was very significant to Peaches, and she feels that she is not the same person anymore: “[I]t’s something that I overcame, but I felt it was a very important time in my life. Because I did not have those, uhm, three, uhm, aspects, faith, hope, and love ...” [INT 1.20]. While this was a challenging time for Peaches, “It was difficult. I don’t wanna lie; it was a difficult experience” [INT 1.50], she felt that it helped to shape her into a different person: “It was a very life-changing experience for me just to work on me ... at that time, I had to work on me” [INT 1.50]. Although she did not consider herself religious, she did turn to religious text to help give meaning to what was happening:

I did not have those, uhm, three, uhm, aspects, faith, hope, and love and ... obviously we lean towards the Bible when we try to find meaning in why we don’t have certain things and why we feel a certain way [INT 1.20]

This is where she first saw the three words, faith, hope, and love: “I have faith, hope, and love, and it’s from a Bible scripture, uh, the Corinthians” [INT 1.20]. Peaches felt this passage helped her in dealing with and understanding her life. She knew she wanted those words to represent this narrative in the form of a tattoo:

And it, it gave me so much that I felt it was very important for me ... when I saw the words ... I knew that’s what I wanted. I knew I wanted that process to be reflected on me [INT 1.20]

For Peaches, the tattoo was not part of the meaning-making process but rather a reminder of that process: “I think I understood the meanings of faith, hope, and love before I had the tattoos ... So, I first had to understand why faith, why hope, why love and then put it on me.” The three words that Peaches had tattooed on her are a reminder of newfound faith, hope for the future, and love for herself and the people close to her. It is a reminder of hard times; it tells a story in three words: “I feel like my tattoo in some way expresses what I’ve been through, expresses my life ... I can see how these words define me” [INT 1.54].

Different Points of View. Peaches mentioned that she is the only member of her immediate family that has a tattoo, and she reflected on how the people close to her reacted when they first saw the tattoo. Her mother appeared to be more open and understanding with regard to what the tattoo meant to her daughter: “[M]y mother was not, uhm, she’s not a very judgemental person and she tends to ask why. She listens to your reasons behind it” [INT 1.32]. In contrast, Peaches’ father had a difficult time accepting the tattoo and to this day, still has not done so: “To him [her father], it was difficult; it’s difficult” [INT 1.32]. In reflecting on her father’s negativity towards her tattoo, Peaches concluded that her father’s reality is different from her own: “[I]t irritates him, and I understand that because of his reality” [INT 1.36]. She believes that her father’s reality is shaped by his culture, a culture in which old ideas and ways of thinking are preserved: “I feel like for my father, he is deeply rooted in culture and he has the culture where nothing is modified” [INT 1.38]. According to Peaches, her father views tattoos as a symbol of the delinquent elements in life: “I think in their times, a tattoo was not something to look forward to. It was something that associates you to something bad and demonic and, and to him, it was like a no ...” [INT 1.38]. Another contributing factor to her father’s negative view on tattoos stems from his occupation. He is employed by the Department of Correctional Services where tattoos are often linked to gang membership:

[H]e works at the Department of Correctional services so he has had this association with tattoos with, uhm, people that are imprisoned. So he says, ‘Why would you want to be someone like that? Why would you, you know? You are in a gang now?’ [INT 1.32]

It is clear that Peaches has her own reality, and she feels that her narrative does not have to follow the same line as that of her father’s: “And I grew up in a society where culture’s been questioned and it’s been modified. So with him, it [tattoos and culture] will clash but with me, it’s like we have modified this” [INT 1.38].

Although this tattoo carries some religious meaning for Peaches, she experienced some negative reactions from members of her church: “Well, I have had incidents at church where people would be like ... the body is the temple of the Lord, and, uhm, they criticise it a lot” [INT 1.28]. Again Peaches ascribes these negative reactions to the individual’s reality and how they decide to perceive the world: “They reflect negatively on tattoos, and I understand that it’s their perspectives. It’s, it’s, it’s what they choose to concentrate on ...”

[INT 1.28]. Peaches makes it clear that she will not compromise her own sense of self or her unique view of the world in order to fit the reality of others. In her opinion, self-acceptance is more important than what others expect of her:

I accept my identity and in, in, in religion specifically, I feel like my religion matters more than the religion I have to have—the identity I have to have in church. So I am this person throughout. In church, in, in my spiritual life, I am me. I accept me. [INT 1.30]

In conclusion, Peaches' tattoo tells a much greater story than the three words that comprise it. It represents a defining chapter in her life. But more importantly, it expresses her meaning-making and healing process and her growth into the person that she is today. The tattoo also helped shape her worldview that reality is subjective and that it is acceptable for one's own reality to diverge from others. These three words, faith, hope, and love, define the story of Peaches this far.

4.1.2 Kahlo

Kahlo is a 22-year-old female with English and Spanish as her home languages. She was born in Cuba but moved to South Africa at a young age. She is a law student who dreams of becoming a lawyer in the near future. Kahlo is part of a tight family unit, and this was the predominant theme of her narrative. She is enjoying her life and feels that she is working towards important goals.

Kahlo was 16 years old when she and her sister went to visit a friend who was a tattoo artist. Both Kahlo and her sister left their friend's house with a bandage covering their new tattoos. The phrase, 'everything for the family', was now permanently visible for the world to see. Despite initial negative reactions from her father, the meaning that this tattoo represented was so significant that a week later, the tattoo artist was asked to recreate the same tattoo on both Kahlo parents. Thus, a family tradition began with the hope that it continues within the family.

I Like Growing Up. Kahlo seems to be enjoying her current stage in life: "*For me, for some reason, lately, it's been very easy ... I like growing up*" [INT 2.28]. She feels that she is moving away from the past and looking towards what is to come: "*[Y]ou leave behind all your childlike things and ways ... you have to now look into the future*" [INT 2.26]. While Kahlo is enjoying life at the moment, she also understands that now is the time to start

shifting her attention away from trivial issues and focus on the more important things in life: “[Y]ou have to focus more on the more important things ... you make, really like, uhm, like informed decisions ... you have to think about it” [INT 2.26]. According to Kahlo, these daily decisions also speak to a person’s identity: “Uhm, it’s definitely who you are obviously and how you ... how people see you ... and how ... you conduct yourself and ... I don’t know, the way you live basically” [INT 2.16]. She believes that a tattoo is one way of expressing a part of her identity to the outside world: “[I]t shows, okay look, I wanna show everyone something about me that I believe” [INT 2.18]. In summary, Kahlo is currently laying the foundation for her future: “[W]hat I am doing now, I have to do this in order for ... later on, for everything to go how I want it to” [INT 2.28].

Todo Para la Familia. At a young age, Kahlo’s small family consisting of her parents, her sister, and herself moved to South Africa from Cuba in search of a better life: “I was born in Havana, Cuba, and my parents made us move to South Africa when I was about three years old in order for them to give us a better life here with more opportunities” [RW 2.3]. Leaving extended family behind, the four of them came to South Africa and only had each other to rely on: “This all meant leaving behind our whole family and just us four coming to South Africa. It has always been just us four and that is what makes me so family oriented [sic]” [RW 2.3]. This experience led to the family being extremely closely knit. Every decision in their lives is based on what is best for the family: “I do everything for them, and it will never change, we are very close ... almost any situation I remember that it’s everything for the family” [RW 2.3]. Hence, the motto of ‘everything for the family’ shaped Kahlo’s life story, and she knew from early on that she wanted a tattoo that would express this bond: “I’ve always wanted to get one ’cause of being very family oriented [sic], and I’ve always, from being young, I always knew I wanted to get one” [INT 2.44]. While she was not sure exactly what the tattoo would say, she knew she wanted the meaning to be as permanent as the tattoo itself: “I just didn’t know where exactly what. Uhm, I always knew it had to be something that went with me till I die, basically something that I really believe in” [INT 2.44]. Thus, Kahlo wanted her tattoo to express something that she lives for: “I always told myself it had to be something that would stay true to me till the day I die, something that will never change and actually something that I live for” [RW 2.2]. The idea for the tattoo came to Kahlo when she remembered a show that she used to watch when she was a child: “[T]he only thing that came to mind was this one show that I watched when I was young” [INT 2.44]. The closing line used in the show stuck with Kahlo: “[I]t was about a Mexican-

American family and at the end of every episode they would say ‘todo para la familia’ ... somehow those words stuck with me for over 10 years and I never let go of those words” [RW 2.2].

As with most other experiences in Kahlo’s life, she shared the act of getting a tattoo with her sister: *“I went with my sister to one of her friends who was a tattoo artist” [RW 2.2]; “I went to go get it done with my sister” [INT 2.52].* Her sister loved the tattoo so much that she also had the words tattooed on her: *“[W]hen she saw that I got it, she thought, ‘Oh, it actually looks nice’ and she got one same time as well” [INT 2.52].* When Kahlo got home and her father saw that she had got a tattoo, he was not happy: *“I said, ‘No, it’s a tattoo’ and then he was all ... he was pretty upset ... ” [INT 2.52].* However, her father’s negative feelings towards the tattoo changed once the meaning behind it became apparent: *“[H]e was pretty upset for literally two seconds and ... when he read it, he was like, ‘Oh, it’s really nice’ and then my mom loved it as well. They all loved it actually pretty quickly” [INT 2.52].* Kahlo’s parents loved the meaning behind the tattoo so much that both her father and her mother got the same tattoo a week later: *“[W]hen they read it they loved it, and a week thereafter my mom and dad got it too” [RW 2.3].* This action, initially taken by her sister and then by her parents, reinforced the meaning behind the tattoo for Kahlo:

It makes it much more. It shows that I actually really have, like the reason for it ... it’s the reason like it ... pushes the reason more ... when she got it and then the rest of them also got it, uhm, ... it ... made me realise even more why I got it. [INT 2.78]

Kahlo is also hopeful that this tattoo and the meaning thereof will continue with the next generation of their family: *“And I hope maybe one day if I had children, they’ll just want to do that as well” [INT 2.88]. “I also strongly believe that this tattoo will also move along to when I have a family some day and carry the same meaning to me” [RW 2.4].*

Kahlo’s father was not the only person who reacted negatively to her tattoo. She remembers receiving negative comments from some older people with whom she had contact, while younger people came across as more accepting of her tattoo: *“I have actually. Yes, with a lot of older people obviously ... not really young people. Old people like to say something” [INT 2.68].* Kahlo feels there is an incongruence between her personal worldview and the religion in which she was raised. Where she views tattoos in a positive light, religion portrays tattoos as something inherently wicked: *“Definitely. I know that it’s definitely wrong*

... it shouldn't be. I am religious; I am just not ... an extreme. I am not at that extreme; I just believe nicely and everything the way I do" [INT 2.66]. This negative reaction was not unexpected, and Kahlo had considered how being tattooed might influence her future:

"[W]hen I got the tattoo, I thought, 'Okay, one day I am gonna ... hopefully be a lawyer and everything, and it is probably gonna be a problem'" [INT 2.64]. However, she is seeing a change in the way that society views tattoos and is hopeful that tattoos will be more accepted in the future: *"[A]t the rate that I see things going and how the world's changing ... by that time when I am a lawyer, one day, hopefully, then everyone is gonna have a tattoo"* [INT 2.64]. According to Kahlo, one reason for this change is the meaning that tattoos carry. Once a critic becomes aware of the deeper meaning behind the tattoo, they may become more accepting:

[W]hen they get the message, they say, 'Okay well, it's not that bad I guess', and people see it in a different way. But I feel like always when they know the reason ... then they think, 'Okay, it's not the end of the world, it's okay' [INT 2.68]

When reflecting on Kahlo's narrative, it becomes clear that her sense of self is intertwined with her belonging to a family group. The phrase *"todo para la familia"* gives recognition to her Spanish heritage and symbolises her connection to the other members of her immediate family. The actions of the other members of the family in getting the same tattoo serve as confirmation of this bond and give this tattoo a more profound meaning. It is for this reason that Kahlo is optimistic that this symbol of family will continue in the narratives of the following generation.

4.1.3 Audrey

Audrey is a 24-year-old, English-speaking female. She is a student in the Faculty of the Humanities, working towards her research master's degree. Audrey is finding her current life stage difficult since her family recently emigrated to the United Kingdom (UK), leaving her without sufficient social and emotional support. Looking back on her story, she feels that her grandfather played a significant role in her journey so far.

Audrey believes that tattoos are part of her identity and her life story. Audrey's first tattoo was of a crucifix that she got at age 19 years. It is visible most of the time as it is on her wrist. Her second tattoo, an anchor, is located on her ankle and is less visible. Both these tattoos were inspired by her grandfather's own tattoos.

Being an Adult is Not Fun or Easy. Currently, Audrey is experiencing the transition to adulthood as very demanding: *“Very difficult. Uhm, it’s an adjustment; uhm, being an adult is not at all fun or easy.”* This period comes with some challenges, and it takes time to adjust: *“It comes with a lot of responsibility and time management and compromise”* [INT 3.19]. For Audrey, it is not the responsibilities per se that are challenging: *“[R]esponsibility was relatively easy to adjust to and to take on”* [INT 3.21]. Instead, it seems that being independent of her family who have moved to another country is the aspect that is the most difficult: *“[M]y parents are no longer here ... in South Africa. They have recently moved to the UK, so that in itself was a massive adjustment for me. Uhm, I feel like I’ve lost that connection with my parents”* [INT 3.21]. Audrey is convinced that her tattoos reveal something about who she is: *“Most definitely”* [INT 3.13]. Furthermore, Audrey feels that characteristics such as race and gender contribute to a person’s identity: *“[I]dentity basically has to do with everything about a person, uhm, age, gender, race, all biographical information”* [INT 3.11]. Despite the expressive nature of tattoos, Audrey states that her tattoos convey a personal message: *“It’s not a message I am trying to convey to them; it’s something personal”* [INT 3.15]. It would seem that this personal message comprises two distinct parts: *“So, it actually had double meaning”* [INT 3.31].

Dual Meaning: In Memory of my Grandfather. From the start, it was clear that Audrey got her tattoos to remember her grandfather: *“I got it in commemoration of my grandfather”* [INT 3.31]. Audrey chose the crucifix design partly because her grandfather also had a crucifix tattoo: *“[H]e [her grandfather] had a tattoo as well that also had a crucifix, so that’s almost my motivation as to why I got this kind of tattoo specifically”* [INT 3.31]. Not only is her grandfather the inspiration behind her tattoos, but he is also her guide to becoming the person she wants to become: *“In memoriam of my grandfather. The person I hope to one day be. In mind and soul”* [RW 3.5]. During her younger years, Audrey spent some time living with her grandparents. When her parents relocated, they decided that Audrey should complete the academic year at her school: *“[W]hen I was younger, my folks moved to Bloemfontein before I did, uhm, because I was still going to school so they couldn’t take me out of school ... [D]uring that time, I was staying with my grandparents.”* [INT 3.53]. For Audrey, her grandfather was a second father: *“[S]o he was basically my father figure when my dad was like somewhere else”* [INT 3.53]. While Audrey’s grandmother was very strict, her grandfather was more understanding and supportive towards her: *“[H]e supported me a lot. He was the more chilled grandparent, so less of the smacking and the*

shouting and more of the joking[and] buying me treats” [INT 3.53]. Despite suffering from health problems, Audrey felt that her grandfather always had time for her: “Despite his sickness, my grandfather strove to ... entertain his young granddaughter while down and under the weather. To have the patience for her when no-one else did” [RW 3.3].

Dual Meaning: Exploring my Beliefs. Audrey got a crucifix tattoo, mainly because it reminded her of her grandfather. However, it also had a religious meaning for her at the time: “... and at that point in time when I got it, the religious significance for it was greater than it is now. So, it actually had double meaning” [INT 3.31]. Thus, the crucifix represented two important aspects of her life at that time: “[A]ccording to me, it’s what symbolised my religious identity as well as the place my grandfather had for me in my life” [INT 3.35]. During her adolescent years, Audrey’s religious identity was shaped by others. It was initially shaped by the school she attended: “I was in a Catholic or Anglican school so religion played quite a significant role in my life” [INT 3.39]. The second influence on her religious identity was her grandmother: “My grandmother’s a Roman Catholic so she’s very religious” [INT 3.35]. When Audrey had finished school and started university, she felt that getting a religious tattoo would serve as a reminder of the role that religion has in her life: “... when I got to university, uhm, the double meaning made sense to me at that time ’cause, uhm, ... I was still in the phase in my life where religion had to have a very big role” [INT 3.39]. Audrey admits that she did not know who she was when she started university. However, with exploration, her worldview started to change, including how she viewed religion and the role it played in her life: “In first year, I was obviously still trying to find myself ... And now a couple of years later, I find that it’s [religion] not as big a role as it used to be” [INT 3.39]. Although Audrey is still religious, her expression of that religion has shifted from attending church every day: “[W]e had chapel every morning at school” [INT 3.39] to practising her religion more privately:

I don’t associate religion necessarily with actively going to church, being part of, uhm, prayer groups and stuff like that. Uhm, I am still reading scripture. I find that I’ve gotten to a comfortable place where if I just pray by myself in my own time, then that’s how I view my religion. [INT 3.39]

Anchored in Mind and Courage. Audrey’s second tattoo is an anchor, which was also inspired by her grandfather’s tattoos. His occupation of chef on board various ships during his life was the influence: “[M]y second tattoo is an anchor tattoo, also related to my

grandfather. *He was actually a chef on, uhm, ships in Cape Town*” [INT 3.45]. “[H]e also had that anchor tattoo as part of his design” [INT 3.47]. The anchor helps to ground Audrey in difficult times when she feels defeated: “... help[s] me become more grounded ... remind myself that I have more strength and courage than I sometimes think I have” [INT 3.47]. She takes this meaning from her grandfather’s life story of being a young immigrant with nothing who worked hard to get to where he wanted to be in life:

... immigrated to South Africa ... at the age of 10 ... he managed to secure work as a kitchen boy ... he thence became skilled as a chef and moved on to work as head cook on various sailboats in the Cape Town Harbour. [RW 3.1]

When Audrey sees the tattoo, it reminds her to stay calm and that she is not alone: “[W]hen I see it, I am reminded instantly that okay, but like, ‘[Y]ou’re going through a rough time, just calm down, think about it. You’re not alone; you have people that support you’” [INT 3.49].

Audrey’s own writing best describes the meaning that these tattoos have in her narrative and how she incorporated the narrative of her grandfather into her own. Her grandfather’s final words stay with her, reminding her that with time, comes understanding: “His final utterance of ‘one day you will understand, one day you will know and remember this instance’” [RW 3.4]. These words echo the most when Audrey experiences self-doubt in the face of an obstacle: “His message comes to mind when I am in doubt, when I have encountered a challenge I believe I cannot overcome” [RW 3.4]. Her tattoos signify the pride she has for her grandfather and of what he overcame in his life: “Thus, I bare my tattoo proudly. A reminder come to be on my nineteenth birthday of the strength and courage of a foreigner, come to this land with nothing but mind and pride” [RW 3.4]. Audrey is inspired by her grandfather’s narrative to be brave while writing her own: “Thus, if nothing, I too have my mind and the courage I have moulded and come to wield in my daily life” [RW 3.4]. By remembering her grandfather through her tattoos, Audrey hopes to evolve into the intelligent and kind person that her grandfather was: “In memoriam of my grandfather. The person I hope to one day be. In mind and soul” [RW 3.5].

Audrey’s grandmother did not approve of her getting a tattoo and felt it was contrary to their religion: “So for her [Audrey’s grandmother], me getting a tattoo, especially a crucifix, was ... from her perspective not ... part of religion; it was actually against religion”

[INT 3.35]. Although her grandmother's view on tattoos has not changed, Audrey feels that her grandmother has accepted her tattoos: *"I don't think that original, emotional connotation to it [referring to her tattoos] is as great as it was originally, as when I told her"* [INT 3.37]. Audrey did consider the effect of her tattoos on those around her and decided that they should be positioned in places that makes hiding them easy: *"[W]hen I get my tattoo, I make sure that I have it in a place that I know and I can see but, uhm, if I do need it to be covered up, it's easy to do that"* [INT 3.63].

Audrey's grandfather is a significant influence on who she wants to be and how she wants her story to develop. Her crucifix tattoo signifies her religious identity and how it changed and grew as she explored who she really is. The anchor tattoo keeps her grounded but also instils pride and courage. These two small tattoos speak of who Audrey was, who she is currently and who she hopes to be.

4.1.4 Ally

Ally is a 26-year-old, Afrikaans-speaking female. She is studying towards her honours degree in psychology and hopes to be selected for the clinical master's programme. Her move from Cape Town, where she grew up, to Bloemfontein for her studies forced Ally to become an independent person. In the past, she has struggled with mental health issues such as depression but currently, she is enjoying life to the fullest.

Ally has nine tattoos and most of these are positioned so that they are always covered by her clothes. Her latest tattoo, a semicolon, is her only visible tattoo and is placed on her wrist. She cannot remember at what age she got her first tattoo, a playboy bunny, but she admitted that she was probably too young to get tattooed. Other designs included in her tattoo collection are the word 'blessed' and a crucifix. Ally feels that her tattoos tell the story of the different phases of her life until now and that these tattoos are definitely an expression of her identity.

Just Having a Great Time ... Exploring. Ally is enjoying this stage of her life and is exploring different options: *"I am just having a great time ... exploring"* [INT 4.18]. She feels that she is in a transition phase in her life, moving away from her childhood and working towards her future: *"... the period between adolescence and becoming an adult"* [INT 4.16]. Ally feels that this is the time for exploration: *"... where you have time to explore and ... see different options and alternatives"* [INT 3.16]. She also believes that this stage of

life affords an individual the opportunity for self-discovery: “... *just to find yourself*” [INT 3.16]. This chapter in Ally’s story is about preparing herself for the adult world: “... *to almost prepare for your adult grown up life*” [INT 3.16]. Just because life is currently good does not mean that Ally did not face challenges in the past. The challenges she mentions seem to involve the recurrent theme of responsibility and independence: “... *into this more responsibility type phase where you now have to stand on your own two feet*” [INT 4.18]. Ally believes that as one acquires more skills and knowledge relating to the adult world, the easier it becomes to be a part of it:

... have to learn what life is really all about ... now that I’ve been doing it for a few years ... I think I am more efficient now, and I’ve sorted out the challenges and I know how everything works [INT 4.18]

Although Ally does not consider herself an adult yet, she does feel that she has most of the responsibilities that an adult would have:

[I]t’s my responsibility to make sure that I come out with [a] set amount of money and that my rent is still paid on the 1st and my water and electricity is paid. No one is going to clean my house for me; no one is going to do my shopping for me [INT 4.22]

For Ally, the only issue preventing her from fulfilling her role as an adult is her financial dependence on her parents: “*I am not completely in the adult phase ’cause I don’t make my own money to pay for my bills*” [INT 4.22]. According to Ally, the role that an individual plays within society is a determining factor in one’s identity: “*To me, identity means who you are ... and where you fit into society, what your role is, what you like other people to identify you as, ja*” [INT 4.10]. Ally agrees that tattoos can form part of a person’s identity: “*Most definitely*” [INT 4.12]. Because her tattoos carry personal meaning for her, she feels others will not understand the messages that her tattoos express without first understanding her narrative:

[I]t’s definitely my own meaning, personal. That’s why I said when someone who doesn’t know me at all looks at all my tattoos, it would be like, ‘Okay, that doesn’t make sense at all’ [chuckles], but it’s because it has personal meaning to me. [INT 4.38]

Different Phases of Life: The Young Rebel. As mentioned above, one may not understand the rationale behind Ally’s tattoos at first glance: “*[S]omeone who doesn’t really know me isn’t gonna understand, uhm, my tattoos*” [INT 4.14]. The meaning of Ally’s tattoos is only shared with the people who are close to her: “... *but people who know me either*

intimately or just very close friends, they, they will understand what my tattoos mean” [INT 4.14]. Ally explained that her tattoos represent the chapters in her life, some of the worst times and some of the best times: “[M]y tattoos, to me, resemble different phases or ... things that I have been through in my life. Uhm, I think for every difficult stage or every breakthrough that I’ve had, I’ve gotten a tattoo” [INT 4.14]. Her first tattoo seems to represent both a fun and a rebellious time in her life: “I have a playboy bunny because when I was younger, or I got it at the point in my life when I was quite the little party girl” [INT 4.42]. Ally did not attach much meaning to the design of a playboy bunny. Instead, the design was derived from the rebellious image that she presented to others by having a tattoo at a young age: “... was very impulsive and just like[d] a girly design but do remember I wanted to get a tattoo to sort of be rebellious” [INT 4.32]. Because Ally was still young when she started getting tattoos, some members of her family did not approve: “I think my mom and my aunt, when I was, when I was still living at home, I think they had a remark or two” [INT 4.54]. Even at this young age, Ally placed her tattoos where they could be hidden by clothing since she knew that visible tattoos could have an impact later in life: “Well, I am very careful about how I situate my tattoos ... so that it [sic] doesn’t impact on my profession at all one day” [INT 4.56].

Different Phases of Life: Through the Darkness into the Dawn. Ally’s most recent tattoo, a small semicolon, appears to be the one with the most personal meaning behind it since she based her reflective writing on this tattoo. It is also the only tattoo that is visible: “This is the only tattoo that I have that is visible ... I am usually very careful to not have any of my tattoos visible, but yet I chose to showcase this one for the world to see” [RW 4.1]. She wears this tattoo with pride even if others look at her in a negative light: “I feel so proud of my journey ... that it overrides the part of me that is scared of what people might say about me having tattoos” [RW 4.2]. The semicolon tattoo is a popular design that signifies the battle with mental health issues, specifically depression and suicide. Ally explains the meaning of this tattoo: “[W]ell, the traditional meaning of that [the semicolon] is that the author could have ended the sentence, but he or she didn’t; they chose to go on” [INT 4.42]. This tattoo is to remind Ally of the dark chapter in her life story when she struggled with mental health issues: “I’ve struggled with depression so much in my life” [INT 4.42]. “The story that this particular tattoo of mine tells is one of depression. I got this tattoo to always remind myself what I had experienced when I was young” [RW 4.4]. This tattoo not only reminds Ally of the hard times she had to go through but also celebrates her victory over

depression: *“I identify myself as a person who had to crawl their way out of the darkness, and so every time I look at my tattoo, it signifies hope, strength, and courage”* [RW 4.4]. The semicolon tattoo is also used as a sign of solidarity, to stand with others suffering with mental health issues: *“I want to stand in solidarity with people who still struggles [sic] with suicidal thoughts and who [are] struggling with depression”* [INT 4.42]. When Ally looks at her tattoo, it reminds her that she is the one writing the story and that her narrative continues: *“[E]very time I look at my tattoo, I am truly reminded that I am the author and my story is not over yet”* [RW 4.6]. While Ally experiences hard times in the past, she feels that she is leading a blessed life and she wanted to signify this with a tattoo. The seemingly simple word ‘blessed’ on her skin is a reminder of all the positive aspects in her life:

Then the blessed tattoo is just because I do believe that every single day I wake up, I am so blessed. Uhm, I have a roof over my head; I have a family who cares for me; I have amazing friends; and I just have so many opportunities [INT 4.42]

Different Phases of Life: Crisis of Faith. Another important chapter in Ally’s narrative was her struggle with her faith. This period of exploring what religion really meant to her is represented by her crucifix tattoo:

I recently went through sort of a crisis of faith where I was really struggling with questions that I had about, ja. But is Christianity just something that I was raised in or is it really something I believe in? Uhm, there is [sic] so many different alternatives. How do you know that what you chose to believe in is correct? [INT 4.42]

After struggling with these questions for a while and finding some answers, the crucifix symbolised and affirmed her newfound faith: *“So I think I ... came out of that crisis of faith having re-established my faith, and then I got the cross tattoo”* [INT 4.42]. Ally believes that her personalised worldview is still based on religion, but she is unsure whether other members of the religious community would accept her:

I, however, do not know if I would be classified as Christian ... amongst the Christian community. I believe what I need to believe to get by. Uhm, I do classify myself as a Christian, [but] I know there is [sic] a lot of people who won’t feel the same way because of my tattoos [INT 4.52]

In reflecting on Ally's narrative, it is clear that her tattoos are reminders not only of the hard times but also of the growth and progress that she has made in her life. She understands that all these events have shaped her into the person who she is today. Ally also expressed that she is not just a bystander but that she is the author of her ever-evolving life story.

4.1.5 Blair

Blair is a 26-year-old, Afrikaans-speaking female. She is studying towards her master's degree in art history. A particularly important character in Blair's narrative is her grandfather who, in her younger years, influenced her in looking at the world differently. These interactions with her grandfather developed Blair's creativity and prompted her decision to study art. During her undergraduate studies, Blair experienced some difficult times both academically and within her family. One difficulty for Blair during this period was that her grandfather became extremely ill.

Blair got her first tattoo at age 19 years, and it is hidden on her rib cage. The design is a realistic sparrow based on a photograph that she took herself. Her second tattoo is a colourful night sky in the shape of a leaf. This was also Blair's own design and is placed on the inside of her arm. She feels that her tattoos convey a part of her identity.

Paving Your Own Road. Blair is satisfied with the way in which her life is going, and she feels this is a crucial period in her life: "*I think it's a very important time, so it would be very odd to say that there is [sic] things that I don't like about it*" [INT 5.12]. This, however, does not mean that there are no difficult obstacles to overcome: "*... a reflective and volatile time period in its own right ...*" [INT 5.10]. In Blair's opinion, this life stage was easier for past generations: "*[I]t's not as easy as it was perhaps 30 years ago*" [INT 5.12]. Blair is now realising that she needs to become an independent woman:

[S]o it's sort of realising that, uhm, you can't always be dependent on other people for the rest of your life. You sort of have to start making your own way and paving your own road ahead and building that up on your own [INT 5.10]

While Blair is still dependent on her parents, she feels she is becoming more independent because she is earning some money from small jobs: "*I do work part time ... even if it is not earning enough money to support myself financially, it's still not a space*

where I have to go to my parents like, 'Okay, I don't have money' ... " [INT 5.16]. According to Blair, the direction that the next chapter of her life will take depends on the choices that she makes in this one: "So, the choices you make now are going to be quite relevant for the way down the road" [INT 5.10]. Overall, Blair is thankful for the opportunity to explore and to grow during this stage before moving into adult life: "I've been privileged enough to have the opportunity to be allowed to ... work on myself for a number of years before I have to take that step into, like, a solo adulthood" [INT 5.12].

Blair was adamant that tattoos express parts of a person's identity: "So tattoos definitely sort of convey identity for me" [INT 5.6]. Personality and life choices are some of the aspects that Blair feels contribute to identity and morality: "[I]dentity includes personality; it includes life choices; it includes, uhm ... sort of someone's morality scale as well" [INT 5.4]. Hence, a tattoo points towards a permanent choice that the individual made at a point in their narrative: "... for me, carry a meaning across because at that moment, you still made a choice to do something, get something permanent. Even if it's just something pretty, it's still... it's still a choice" [INT 5.6]. The message that Blair's tattoo sends out to the world speaks of imagination and exploration, a message that Blair feels is precise: "So, they might think that I am in like a creative research field, which would be quite an accurate description since I am in art history and it's a field that does look at images and stuff" [INT 5.8].

Birds of a Feather. Blair had a very close relationship with her grandfather: "[H]e sort of played a very big part in raising me; we were quite close" [INT 5.30]. She remembers staying with her grandfather after school and them spending time outside in the garden: "[A]fter school, we'd always sit by the birds, and there would be sparrows hopping around and my granddad would always make up stories about sparrows" [INT 5.30]. Sometime during her undergraduate studies, Blair's grandfather's health started to deteriorate: "[M]y granddad started getting really ill for the first time" [INT 5.30]. During this period of illness, Blair found comfort in the sight of sparrows: "[E]very time I saw a sparrow, it was sort of a comforting thing for me" [INT 5.30]. Hence, the idea of a tattoo of a sparrow was born. When researching sparrows, she determined that they represent creativity, and she knew that this was what she wanted:

I went to go look at the symbolism for sparrows and actually, they key toned [sic] as the birds of vigilance and creativity and that linked with me as an artist as well and, uhm, so that was just sort of a no brainer. [INT 5.30]

Blair was adamant that her tattoo should not only express the personal meaning that she attached to it but should also be unique:

[Y]ou get ones that actually have [a] very personal meaning, but, uhm, a lot of the times, you get someone who gets, for instance, the semicolon tattoo, but there are millions of other people who also have the semicolon tattoo [INT 5.20]

Therefore, Blair knew that for this tattoo to be truly unique, it would have to originate from the creativity that it was destined to represent: *“I don’t want someone’s stock footage on my skin. If I am going to wear it permanently, uhm, I want it to be something that completely comes from myself”* [INT 5.28]. Reliving her younger years, Blair sat in the garden again, this time looking at the birds through the lens of her camera: *“I took about a week, and I camped out early in the mornings, and I took photos until I found one that was really pretty for me, uhm, and that’s the one that I got as a tattoo”* [INT 5.30]. The little bird on Blair’s rib cage represents the influence that her grandfather had on her development as a creative person by teaching her to consider different perspectives:

[M]y grandfather definitely sort of persuaded me to look at things differently than other people do, and I think that is one of the big things that really nudged me towards, uhm, going into the arts ... it’s a very good quality that he carried across, a sort of constant curiousness almost, and that sort of conveys right into my art as well ... it’s a very deep meaning that comes across [INT 5.36]

Growing Through the Winter. Her grandfather’s deteriorating health in addition to other trials within her family contributed to Blair failing her year at university in 2013: *“[B]ack in 2013, I went through a really, really hard time; uhm, we had stuff happen in the family and I sort of ... I flunked that year”* [INT 5.44]. Watching motivational videos was one of the strategies that Blair used to cope during this challenging period, and one video in particular resonated with her: *“I watched a video from Vsauce [name of YouTube channel] where the movie was titled, Mistakes”* [INT 5.44]. By making use of trees and comparing events to tree carvings, the video showed how events in your life will stay with you: *“[H]e sort of talks about how we’ve made blunders and mistakes in history and how we’ll probably*

continue making mistakes. And he highlighted out at the end of the video that, uhm, mistakes are like, uhm, arborglyphs on trees” [INT 5.44]. Arborglyphs, or shapes and symbols that are carved into a tree, become a permanent part of the tree, similar to how negative events in an individual’s life shape them and become part of their identity. While these negative events cannot be erased, their impact can be minimised through growth and meaning-making:

[I]t will never go away. If it’s, if it is carved in a tree, uhm, the glyph will pretty much, according to how a tree grows, the glyph, glyph will stand in the same place and it might even get darker, but it won’t really go away. But the tree can make the glyph a smaller part of what it is. [INT 5.44]

Continuing with the tree symbolism, Blair explained that it is easy to give up when faced with a challenge: “[A]s winter approaches, most of the trees stops [sic] chloroforming production” [INT 5.44]. While the challenge might be unavoidable, perseverance could lead to something positive in the end:

[B]ut some trees actually spend extra energy ... which turns the leaves those red, purple, and blue and ... it’s a way for them to harness that last bit of nourishment from the leaves. So statistically speaking, winter is going to eventually come, but the brightest and most beautiful colours come from not giving up too quickly or too easily. [INT 5.44]

Blair knew she wanted to represent this message of perseverance in the form of a tattoo. Only after five years of drawings and designs did she feel that she had created a tattoo that would communicate the meaning and symbolism of the Vsauce video:

I’ve been wanting to get the tattoo ever since, and I couldn’t really ’cause it was such a profound thing for me that I couldn’t really find a design that did it justice. I was sort of mulling it over and drawing it [INT 5.44]

The design that Blair settled on was a colourful night sky in the shape of a leaf. The stars in the tattoo are also a reference to her grandfather and the time they spent looking at the stars:

... constellation based, uhm, colours as well, uhm, that was also a very big part of things that I love especially because I used to do stargazing and stuff with my

granddad ... that is one of the things that I can just link back to the tattoo; it carries a lot of meaning with it. [INT 5.46]

In tattooing, there are unwritten rules regarding the placement of a design on specific body parts. Because this tattoo has such a personal meaning for Blair, she had the tattoo placed on the inside of her lower arm and in such a way that it is the right way up from her perspective but it is upside down from the perspective of others: *“I told them that that’s not what I want. This tattoo isn’t for other people; it’s for me. It should be a constant reminder for me. So we had the text turn towards me, for me to read” [INT 5.46].*

Blair’s grandmother was unhappy with her getting the second tattoo. She did not seem to mind Blair’s first tattoo at all: *“[S]he was fine with the sparrow for some reason” [INT 5.52].* However, when Blair showed the second tattoo to her grandmother, she reacted in a negative way: *“ [M]y grandmother, with this one, when I showed it to her ... she’s like, ‘Is it permanent?’ and I am like, ‘Yes’, [and] she’s like, ‘Ag nee man’ [translates to ‘Oh no man’]” [INT 5.52].* The reason for her grandmother’s negative reaction seems to be rooted in the visibility of the tattoo: *“But, but why? And she’s like, ‘But it’s so big and it’s so visible” [INT 5.54].* In contrast, Blair’s own worldview is not built upon societal rules but on kindness and respect for one another. For Blair, it is more important to be judged on who she is as a person than on how she looks:

[T]he thing is, uhm, religion for me is not necessarily close-cut rules ... religion refers more to who you are as a person. So if I am gonna treat you with respect and kindness and love ... more to, uhm, who you are as a person and who you are to other people than what you look like [INT 5.58]

However, should it be necessary for Blair to hide her tattoo, she has found a novel way of doing so: *“[Y]ou get very cool ... tattoo covering make up now that if you, if I am one day in a professional environment ... I can just cover it up” [INT 5.50].*

In summarising Blair’s narrative, it becomes apparent that creativity is salient within her identity. Her tattoos express this on different levels and with multiple meanings. The sparrow reminds her of her grandfather who nurtured her growth as an artist. Furthermore, it celebrates her creativity since the tattoo is based on an image that she created. Blair also created her second tattoo, and it tells of a time when she felt like giving up but she persevered and survived the winter instead.

4.1.6 Zama

Zama is a 27-year-old, Xhosa-speaking female who is a student at the University of the Free State. Zama has experienced some very tragic events in her life, which have had a major impact on the person she is today. In 2013, her seven-year-old sister passed away, and three years later in 2016, she lost her brother to suicide. These events led to her struggles with her own mental health. Zama is currently finding life challenging because she feels that others have expectations of her that she is not meeting.

Zama was 23 years old when she got her first tattoo, a flower, in memory of her sister. Her second tattoo commemorates her brother and includes his name and birthdate. Only a few months after getting her second tattoo, Zama got her third tattoo, a semicolon, on her wrist. These tattoos not only serve as reminders of her siblings but also document the pain and struggles she faced during these dark chapters.

Still in the Middle. Balance and equilibrium are what Zama is looking for at this stage in her life: “[S]o you still in the middle and you still trying to find ... balance from leaving your adolescence and getting to adulthood” [INT 6.12]. Currently, Zama is finding life a little testing: “I think it’s challenging” [INT 6.16]. The outlook of individuals will determine how they deal with these difficulties: “But then again, it depends on how you see yourself” [INT 6.16]. Zama elaborates by explaining that some people may feel that they should have accomplished certain goals or reached certain milestones at this stage in their lives: “’Cause some people would expect that at this age, you should have certain things; you should have done certain things already” [INT 6.16]. These expectations that are not yet met could place a burden on the individual since one could have this picture in mind of how life should be: “And for someone who hasn’t [met these expectations], it puts a bit of pressure on you, and you think this is how, this is how it’s supposed to be” [INT 6.16]. Zama was the only participant who was of the opinion that her tattoos do not express any part of her identity: “I don’t think they play any part in ... no they don’t. I don’t think they do” [INT 6.6]. In contrast, Zama feels that her tattoos express something to others that is the opposite of what her identity truly is: “[T]hey [other people] only see me as ... a bad girl. They only see me as this tough, bad girl, ja. I give off the bad girl image, but that’s not really who I am” [INT 6.8].

Life Keeps Going On. Although Zama feels that tattoos are not part of her personality and that having tattoos means that others will perceive her in a negative way, she still got three tattoos. Before making this permanent decision, she consulted others to gain their insight: *“I also had this concern, and I discussed it with the lady I was seeing at that time, my psychologist”* [INT 6.90]. They came to the solution of placing the tattoos where they could be covered by long-sleeve shirts: *“I had to buy a couple of shirts when I go into interviews ’cause I also think people are going to be judging”* [INT 6.90]. Zama’s mother was against her getting a tattoo because of the pain: *“And my mom, my mom is, she just feared the pain and why would you do this to yourself?”* [INT 6.98]. After having a conversation about the meaning behind the tattoo, Zama’s mother understood why she would go through the pain of getting a tattoo: *“I only explain to her, and I told her and we laughed about it”* [INT 6.98]. However, people from Zama’s religious community reacted negatively to her tattoos: *“Yes, I have [had negative reactions] and it’s mostly religious people”* [INT 6.98].

After hearing the tragic narrative behind these tattoos, the meaning they have for Zama is clear. Her first tattoo consists of her sister’s name with a flower and an infinity love symbol. This tattoo is in commemoration of her seven-year-old sister who passed away unexpectedly: *“I lost my sister in 2013. She passed away and she was seven years old”* [INT 6.34]. After Zama had accepted her sister’s death, she felt that she needed something not only to signify the loss and the pain but also to serve as a reminder of her sister:

I felt like, okay, she is gone, but I still feel like I need something to represent the loss I felt, the pain I felt after losing her. And I might not have her again, but I have a reminder that ... she’s, ja—I have that reminder about my sister and what I went through after losing her. [INT 6.34]

This was a life-changing event for Zama, and she feels that she was never the same after this loss: *“[I]t changed me a lot. I saw life differently ... it changed me a lot. I was never the same after that”* [INT 6.40].

Three years later, after another loss in her family when her brother passed away, Zama got her second tattoo: *“I lost my brother in 2016, so I got it in 2016”* [INT 6.52]. This design includes her brother’s name with an infinity sign: *“The tattoo is also an infinity sign. It has his name, his date of birth and ... it’s also written forever and a heart”* [INT 6.56].

Zama believes that these two tragic events are connected. Her brother passed away from suicide, and Zama feels that the death of their sister played a role in her brother's struggle with depression: *"I lost my brother and I believe it was after the fact of having lost my sister. The way we lost her, he couldn't say anything and then he passed on as well"* [INT 6.44].

Later that same year, Zama got her third tattoo, a semicolon: *"... same year as I got the second one"* [INT 6.64]. *"[I]t's a semicolon"* [INT 6.68]. This tattoo, which is a popular symbol of struggles with mental health, represents not only her brother's struggle but also her own fight against depression: *"It's that is everything in my, it's with my brother and with me as well"* [INT 6.80]. The semicolon also signifies Zama's view that although bad things happen, life does not stop: *"[T]he only thing I can gather from all the things that happened is that life keeps going on"* [INT 6.74]. Stepping back when faced with difficulty is acceptable providing you continue to write your story: *"You can take a break; you can breathe, but just continue living. It doesn't mean it's the end of the world"* [INT 6.76].

In conclusion, Zama's three tattoos divulge details about the events that changed her as a person forever. The tattoos commemorate her siblings, and their names on her skin cry out with the inconceivable pain of losing them. Lastly, Zama's tattoos remind her that she is still alive and that her story needs to continue.

4.1.7 Frank

Frank is a 23-year-old, English-speaking male. He is an aspiring lawyer and is currently studying law at the University of the Free State. He is immensely proud of his Italian heritage and his family, both of which are prevalent in his narrative. Although most of Frank's stories are in relation to positive events, such as a trip to Rome with his brother and grandfather, he has also experienced some difficult times with the death of an aunt, the break up of a long-term romantic relationship, and his grandmother's fight against cancer. Despite this, Frank proclaims that life is always beautiful.

Frank has five tattoos, an angel on his back and three rings on his arm that were done in Italy. He also has the phrase 'Life is always beautiful' in Italian on his lower arm and Roman numerals on his upper arm. A rose with the breast cancer ribbon is Frank's latest tattoo; he came to the interview immediately after getting this tattoo done on his arm.

Sort of in No Man's Land. The search for independence is how Frank defined his life at the moment: "... *trying to find independence to some extent*" [INT 7.20]. Frank realises that this independence is accompanied by responsibilities: "[E]ntering into a world where you still have to fend for yourself, you have to, uhm, gain a whole lot more responsibility, uhm, paying bills, starting a family" [INT 7.20]. As a student, Frank feels that he does not have as much freedom as a working person of the same age: "[A]s a student, you don't have as much independence as you would like compared to a working adult" [INT 7.20]. However, Frank acknowledges that a student has much fewer responsibilities than a working person: "[Y]ou have less [sic] responsibilities as a student" [INT 7.20]. This does not mean that a person attending university does not have responsibilities but rather that one gradually gains responsibilities with time: "*I feel like you start getting a little bit more responsibility as the years go by*" [INT 7.24]. Similar to some of the other participants, Frank is adamant that he is currently preparing for his future: "[Y]ou starting building on this idea of what you want your future life to be ... thinking what you want your adult life to be and where you see yourself, and you start that foundation" [INT 7.20]. This process of building towards one's future is complicated by self-doubt regarding the choices made thus far, creating the ambiguous feeling of being stranded:

[S]o right now, it's challenging because you sort of in the no man's land ... it's time to start making decisions, and it can be a bit confusing 'cause you start thinking to yourself, Is this really what I want to do for the rest of my life? So, in that sense, it's, it's confusing, it's uncertain [INT 7.24]

For Frank, identity is what makes a person unique: "*I feel like identity is—every person has their own unique identity; not every person is the same*" [INT 7.6]. According to Frank, individuals select their own identity and others have minimal influence: "*A person's identity is determined by themselves and not generally other people. Not another person can influence who you are as a person*" [INT 7.6]. By using impression management, others' views are guided by the individual: "... *how you choose—how you want them to see ... you*" [INT 7.6]. In Frank's mind, having or not having a tattoo expresses a person's unique identity:

Definitely. I feel like tattoos are something not made for everyone. Not everybody can pull off tattoos. [Having a tattoo is] also based on your personality type that you are

... and some people choose to express themselves differently. Some people like to be a little bit more artistic in the case of tattoos. [INT 7.10]

Hence, the correlation between tattoos and identity is undeniable: *“So I feel like having a tattoo is directly proportionate to your identity as a person” [INT 7.10].* Lastly, tattoos create interest; others can enquire about the meaning behind the tattoo, giving the wearer the opportunity to express their identity verbally: *“[W]hen people look at my tattoos, they have to be like, ‘That’s actually really nice’, and then they sort of ask you questions ... it builds that curiosity” [INT 7.14].*

Life is Always Beautiful. Frank’s first tattoo is of an angel that was meant to represent his mother: *“[M]y first tattoo I wanted to get for my mother; it’s an angel” [INT 7.32].* But a few days before getting the tattoo, his aunt passed away: *“[A]bout two days before I had gotten my tattoo, an aunt in my family passed away” [INT 7.32].* Frank then made some changes to the design to allow the tattoo to be in honour of both his mother and his aunt, who was seen as the mother of the family:

[B]ecause my aunt had passed away at that time, I thought I was gonna get just the general concept because she is like the mother of our family, so I wanted to do something to commemorate her as well as my mother. So it’s got like a dual meaning to it, the first one. [INT 7.32]

At age 20 years, Frank got his second tattoo, the phrase, ‘Life is always beautiful’, in his grandfather’s handwriting: *“[I]t’s basically my grandad’s handwriting, and he wrote in Italian, ‘life is always beautiful’, and at the bottom, he signed, ‘Your Grandad’” [INT 7.52].* During this time, Frank was going through some difficulties, and his grandfather was someone he looked up to: *“So I was going through a bit of a ... like sort of a tough time ... and you know, my grandad is my role model pretty much, so I wanted to get something for him” [INT 7.52].* Even when his grandfather was in and out of hospital, he was always positive and that shaped the way that Frank looks at the world: *“[A]nd he always used to tell me, ‘You know, no matter what happens, you gotta see the positivity in life’” [INT 7.60], “... advice that I’ll carry with me for the rest of my life” [INT 7.62].*

Frank’s third tattoo is to commemorate a good life event that he shared with his grandfather and his brother:

[I]t was just something so special to me, something not a lot of people get to experience with their grandfather and their younger brother who ... coincidentally turned big milestones in their life. So I just wanted to get something to remember and to commemorate that trip that we had together. [INT 7.74]

In 2015, all three of them reached some milestone in terms of age: *“[I]t’s my grandfather’s age; he turned 70 in 2015, I turned 21, and my brother turned 16” [INT 7.74].* The tattoo consists of three sets of Roman numerals. Each set of numerals represents the age that Frank, his brother and his grandfather were in 2015. The coordinates of Italy are also part of the tattoo, representing the trip that Frank took to Italy with his brother and grandfather in 2015: *“[M]y grandmother and my mother bought us tickets to go to Italy, just the three boys, like a boy’s trip” [INT 7.74].* This trip was something that Frank will never forget: *“[I]t was just something so special to me, something not a lot of people get to experience with their grandfather and their younger brother” [INT 7.74].*

In keeping with the theme of family and culture, Frank’s fourth tattoo symbolises the relationship between him, his brother and his sister: *“It just symbolises, you know, the three siblings’ unity” [INT 7.84].* There is also a reference to Frank’s favourite city, Rome: *“... because I had gotten it done in Rome. Uhm, it’s my favourite city in the world, and they say Rome is the eternal city, so in Latin, I just put the ‘eternal’ in the middle” [INT 7.84].* Italy is prominent in the narrative of Frank’s life; he feels that his tattoos not only express his pride in his Italian heritage but also connects him as an individual to the culture: *“I am Italian. I am full-blooded Italian, full grown. Uhm, so for me, I like to just keep in touch with my culture, so if I can do that through the use of tattoos, then why not?” [INT 7.90]. “I am proud of my heritage” [INT 7.92].*

The latest tattoo on Frank’s body was still bandaged because he had only been tattooed a few hours before the interview: *“The last one I had gotten done today, 23 years old ...” [INT 7.86].* This tattoo represented his support for his grandmother: *“...[j]ust to commemorate her [his grandmother]. Just to show, you know, support ... for her” [INT 7.86].* His grandmother had survived breast cancer: *“[M]y grandmother had ... breast cancer” [INT 7.86].* Frank decided that this tattoo would be of something that his grandmother is very passionate about, so he got a rose: *“[M]y grandmother’s very big on gardening; that’s her passion, that’s her hobby, and her favourite flower is a rose” [INT*

7.86]. Frank's rose has the symbol for breast cancer around the stem together with thorns and falling petals:

I had gotten a big rose done on my arm, like this, with a couple of thorns. You can see the petals that are falling. And I got the breast cancer sign around the, uhm, around the stem of the rose [INT 7.86]

Despite this gesture of solidarity, Frank's grandmother does not approve of his tattoos: "[M]y grandmother always says your body is the temple of the soul ... everyone has their own views and say[s] you must keep it clean; keep your body clean from tattoos" [INT 7.110]. Frank feels that his grandmother's view is shared by older individuals within his faith but the younger members seem to have different opinions: "... but older generation of people within my Catholic faith, whereas, the younger generation don't see anything wrong with it" [INT 7.110]. However, Frank is adamant that his personal worldview is not based solely on religion: "Specifically, my religion—I don't feel it plays much of a role. Uhm, I am Catholic, so tattoos are seen as something taboo within my religion" [INT 7.104]. Instead, his worldview is something unique and personal that aligns with who he is:

I believe my religion should be something private and personal ... I don't like to brag about my religion or try to involve others ... it's just more something private for me. So, putting a tattoo on myself, I guess it would be something personal [INT 7.114]

This negative view on tattoos is not limited to the religious community; the professional world appears to hold the same view. As Frank aspires to be a lawyer in the future, he had to be mindful of this when getting his tattoos: "[W]hen I thought about it ... you have to be a certain way to be a lawyer If I wear a suit, then you can't really see" [INT 7.98] "... that I have tattoos. So that's the one thing. I also looked at the positioning of my tattoos very carefully ... for the profession one day" [INT 7.100].

Frank's narrative mainly focuses on the beautiful things in life, remembering loved ones and the events that shaped him. The bond with his family and his connection to his Italian heritage are expressed with the aid of his tattoos. Although Frank chooses to see the positive in every situation, he did experience some difficult times. It was during these challenges that Frank turned to his family for support. In conclusion, it seems that Frank's narrative hints at the idea that life can be beautiful if you share it with others.

4.1.8 Reese

Reese is a 22-year-old, Afrikaans-speaking male. Although he is in his final year of studying law, Reese is unsure if he will ever become a lawyer. He is an avid fisherman and enjoys the freedom that comes with being a student. Despite a turbulent period in the past, Reese has a good relationship with his parents. During his adolescent years, he had some discipline issues and was instructed to move out of the house for some time. Reese felt that during this turbulent time, the only constant in his life was his little dog.

Hence, the main inspiration for Reese's only tattoo was his dog. However, the tattoo incorporates so much more into its imagery than a simple portrait of a Jack Russel terrier. Describing this complex combination of items seems nearly impossible, with religious symbols such as rosary beads and a crucifix mixed with boxing gloves. Reese got this tattoo on his upper arm at age 19 years and feels that this tattoo tells the narrative of a dark chapter in his life, a chapter that he could have erased from his memory but instead chose to use to improve himself.

In Limbo. Reese is currently enjoying the freedom and independence that is associated with life as a student: "... *good parts is high levels of personal freedom ... that personal freedom is something which I love*" [INT 8.28]. This freedom affords him the opportunity to spend more time on his hobby: "*I don't have to go to work on Fridays; I can pack my stuff and go fishing. Or I can go fishing in the week if I wanna*" [INT 8.28]. Although Reese enjoys this freedom and independence, he acknowledges that there are disadvantages associated with being independent. One of the more difficult challenges seems to be the separation from his parents with whom he is very close: "*Challenges I would say is still like ... cutting the umbilical cord from my parents [sighs], you know? I've a very close-knit family*" [INT 8.28]. Another challenge facing Reese is his studies: "*I'm pretty much depending on finishing my degree this year; that would be the most difficult thing*" [INT 8.28]. Reese described his current life stage as an intermediate state: "*[I]t's a period where you are in limbo between being a teenager and a fully fledged adult ... the inter period, it's between ...*" [INT 8.26]. The sense of self and interactions with the environment create unique character traits that Reese refers to as identity:

[I]identity is cluster of ideas, which, which form[s] something that is unique, right? It, uhm, it's just sort of a, a combination of characteristics I'd say ... and for a person, it

is how they view themselves in relation to society ... how you see yourself, uhm, connecting with other people [INT 8.8]

Reese feels that he would not have had a tattoo if it did not express some part of his identity: *“Yes, most definitely. Otherwise I wouldn’t get them”* [INT 8.14]. Thus, he enjoys displaying his tattoo on occasions: *“[T]here might be a, a level of exhibitionism in having a tattoo ... and I think I do sometimes like to wear [a] short-sleeves [sic] shirt just to have people see I have a tattoo ...”* [INT 8.22]. However, the personal meaning behind his unique tattoo will only become clear once you know Reese:

I’ve embedded a very complex story into the finer details of my tattoo. And I think it’s something that you only get to know once you get to know me. But I think, the first thing that [when] people see them, ‘Oh that’s an interesting [tattoo]; it’s not like your usual tattoo. [INT 8.16]

Closing of a Chapter: The Dog, the Lion, and the Rose. Adolescence was a very turbulent time for Reese because he struggled to find his place:

I went through a really like rough, uhm, teenage years. I, uhm, was in like six different schools, and I got expelled out of two. And, uhm, I was really like ... I struggled a lot with ... fitting in socially [INT 8.44]

Reese’s relationship with his parents was also strained during this time due to his lack of discipline: *“And I had a lot of disciplinary issues ... and I felt like, you know, I, I, I also didn’t have a really good relationship with my parents at that time”* [INT 8.44]. This situation escalated to the point where Reese’s parents decided it would be best if Reese attended school in another city: *“I went to school in Cape Town ... they didn’t want me in the house”* [INT 8.44]. This is a chapter in his life that Reese would much rather erase from his memory: *“[I]t was really tough ... and it’s a time I’d rather forget”* [INT 8.44]. Instead of pretending that this did not happen, Reese decided to look back at this chapter and try to make meaning of his experiences: *“I understand that some of my biggest strengths lie in going back and understanding ... what exactly went down ...”* [INT 8.44]. Not only did Reese feel that his tattoo represented the end of this part of his life story: *“[M]y tattoo was to symbolise a closing of that chapter in my life ...”* [INT 8.44] but it also assisted with the healing process: *“it was more a healing experience than anything else ... I felt like extremely healed after I did that tattoo”* [INT 8.44]. Today, the tattoo reminds him of this difficult time

in his life and how it played a part in shaping him into the person he is today: “[W]ithout all those things happening, I also wouldn’t have been the person I am today” [INT 8.50].

As mentioned above, Reese’s tattoo is quite interesting and unique, with considerable meaning ingrained in every part of the design. In short, the design is of Reese’s dog transforming into a lion. There is a rose bush growing around one of its hind legs, and its front paws are wearing boxing gloves. Furthermore, the tattoo includes a rosary and a crucifix. Each of these components tells a part of the story of Reese’s life. During the turbulent times described above, the one constant in Reese’s life was his dog: “[M]y dog was always there for me ... uhm, my family could go and stay and go and stay, but my dog was the one constant” [INT 8.44]. Reese feels that he and his dog share certain characteristics:

I also see ... some of the characteristics that he shows, and I see that, I see it in myself. You know, he’s, uhm, a very tough, hardy doggy ... he doesn’t relent and ... despite everything, he still really loves his family, you know. He, he stays loyal to everyone. [INT 8.46]

The transformation of the dog into a lion not only symbolises the strength of character shared by Reese and his dog: “I turned it into a lion, which basically, like, would say, kinda plays on the dog’s personality” [INT 8.48] but also connects Reese to the continent of Africa: “... and it plays on the geographical location of where this time period played off” [INT 8.48].

The idea of the rose bush started with a song that Reese felt had some meaning in his life:

I kinda really like this one [song] from Tupac [name of artist]—you know, the rose that grew from the concrete. And I kinda run, ran with that. That’s why I got the rose bush that grows around the dog’s legs. [INT 8.48]

The symbolism of the rose bush surviving despite its harsh surroundings is something that Reese can relate to in his own life: “... has a connection to, to my ... teenage years because I feel like ... despite what people thought was gonna happen, I kinda like turned out okay” [INT 8.48]. The boxing gloves pay tribute to the sport and the coaches who helped Reese deal with his aggression and who helped him achieve some discipline in his life:

I kinda found solace in boxing in my life ... a lot of boxing coaches influenced me and ... kinda helped me to get back on the straight and narrow. And, uhm, it's also like a play on, you know, fight of life. [INT 8.50]

The last components of the tattoo are a rosary and a crucifix; these helped ground him in his faith: *“And then the cross, obviously, at that [sighs] time ... sort of grounded me in my, my faith”* [INT 8.52]. Reese struggled with his religious views and lost his faith for a few years: *“I kinda went through a, a bit of a ... dark spot for three years, but I kinda regained my faith in the last year or so”* [INT 8.52]. After a trip to Poland, Reese explored his faith, and after struggling, settled on a view that suited his ideas about religion better than the traditional views:

I was in Poland for a while, and I went to Auschwitz and ... I kinda like sat there and thinking there can't be a God if this can happen. But ... after I've spent some time reading the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and I ... found a more, lesser [sic] strict, more open way of looking at faith. So I wouldn't say that I look at the Christian exceptionally strictly; I'd say I look at it exceptionally liberally. [INT 8.96]

Currently, Reese is experiencing another inner conflict. When he got his tattoo, he made sure it was not visible because he saw himself becoming a lawyer: *“I would probably never get a tattoo that's visible”* [INT 8.64], *“... in a way [that] if I work in a professional environment they'd never see it”* [INT 8.66]. Although his tattoo is hidden when he wears long-sleeve shirts, it is still visible in short-sleeve shirts. Because of this, Reese has experienced some negative reactions from people: *“I've felt some animosity with certain really conservative people ... and some older people”* [INT 8.92]. This negative view of people with tattoos has caused Reese to rethink his chosen career path. He is somewhat unsure of his willingness to follow a career path where he, as a tattooed person, is not fully accepted: *“But then there is a deeper question of whether or not I'd actually want to work in an environment where people have a problem with seeing tattoos”* [INT 8.66].

It is clear that this unusual tattoo of a little dog represents Reese's identity as a loyal and resilient individual with the heart of a lion. This tattoo helped with the healing of emotional wounds and concluded an important chapter in Reese's narrative. Reese understands that one has to make meaning of the past to ensure a better future, and his tattoo expresses all the meaning in one, not so simple, image.

4.1.9 Lennon

Lennon is a 20-year-old, Afrikaans-speaking female. She is studying zoology with the aim of becoming a veterinarian. She is from a close-knit family, and she loves playing the violin and the piano. Lennon's three tattoos represent these aspects of her life story. She got her first tattoo at the age of 15 years and shared this experience with her family who all got the same tattoo. Her second tattoo is a treble clef musical symbol on her hand. At 18 years old, she got her third tattoo, an outline of a dachshund inspired by her own dog.

Emerging into Your Own. According to Lennon, emerging adulthood and especially student life present problematic hurdles that need to be overcome: “[O]bviously, there are some difficult things that come with it, especially as a student” [INT 9.12]. Lennon considers financial matters to be her greatest obstacle, especially unexpected expenses: “[W]ell, finances are always one [challenge] so ... as a student, you struggle with this, and then you—things pop up that you have to pay” [INT 9.14]. The need to be more independent makes this a difficult situation because asking for money from one's parents is not seen as the first option: “[Y]ou don't want to run to your parents because obviously, you wanna emerge into this adulthood. So running back to them isn't really the best decision to make” [INT 9.14]. However, facing these challenges prepares the emerging adult for the next stage in life by providing valuable life lessons:

[A]ll of the difficulties really make it better because then you just learn how to be better ... as you struggle, you learn ... better ways to deal with it, so that you know that you are equipped for the future. [INT 9.12]

Thus, struggling with challenges should be viewed as a positive experience because it builds resilience: “[G]etting over that financial struggle by yourself is actually something good” [INT 9.14]. For Lennon, this period of emerging adulthood is associated with establishing an identity: “I think as you are emerging into adulthood, you are emerging into your own” [INT 9.10]. At this stage, individuals begin to direct their own lives by taking more responsibility for their life choices: “... starting to make your own decisions” [INT 9.10]. However, Lennon is fully aware that other individuals could have an impact on these choices: “[O]ther people can influence those decisions” [INT 9.10]. Similarly, Lennon sees identity as being moulded by the individual and those with whom they interact: “[Y]ou get shaped by a lot of people around you, but how you respond to that and how you shape

yourself ... I would say is your identity. How you respond to everything” [INT 9.4]. In spite of her tattoos being somewhat unusual, Lennon likes to think they express something about the elements that shape her identity:

I think they will also just see that obviously, this is something that she identifies with and really likes and she would like to share with the world. Or it can be weird because some of my tattoos are ... odd. [INT 9.8]

A Lifeline of Belonging, Passion, and Dreams. Lennon made it clear in her statement that her tattoos are a representation of her life narrative: *“So I think it really does ... give a lifeline ... of what I am and was and ... becoming”* [INT 9.74]. Her first tattoo is a scroll with her initials on it. It also includes the initials of her parents and her sister: *“It, it’s a ... like half a scroll with the initials of our family on it”* [INT 9.26]. This tattoo commemorates their family unit that faced some unavoidable changes to the status quo:

[A]t that time, she [Lennon’s sister] was in her matric year, so we knew that now she would go off to college, or move away, or work or whatever. So we wouldn’t be together anymore, and we wanted to get something to just represent us, even though we are split up. [INT 9.34]

The family shared the experience and pain of being tattooed as a unit, adding an exclamation mark behind the meaning of the tattoo: *“[W]e went as a family to the tattoo parlour”* [INT 9.30]. Similar to all families, there were certain disagreements between the members of Lennon’s family: *“[W]e kinda had some fights as a family”* [INT 9.76]. During these difficult times, Lennon and the other members of her family used the tattoos as a reminder of the bond and the trust between the four of them:

*So I think the fact that we had the tattoo kinda made us go back to, you know, what we have ... this represents ... a happy family. So every time there was some s*** going on, we would go back to, ‘But you know, this was once a thing, so we can just trust this again’.* [INT 9.76].

Despite the connection that the tattoo has to family, some of Lennon’s extended family members disapproved of her tattoos: *“I think mostly just family like grandparents”* [INT 9.82].

Lennon's second tattoo is a musical symbol because she plays the piano and the violin: *"This one is the base and treble clef"* [INT 9.44]. This tattoo represents her love of music, a passion she has embraced from a young age: *"I started with music at the age of four, so it went a bit about my life"* [INT 9.48]. The year she got this tattoo was meaningful in terms of her music since she felt that the guidance of a great teacher helped her grow musically: *"[I]n Grade 11, I was still developing, like, a lot in my music 'cause I had a really good teacher at the school and like, a lot of opportunities to grow"* [INT 9.48]. This tattoo is placed on Lennon's hand, which makes it very visible when she plays her instruments: *"[W]hen I play piano, this is how it looks. So, you can see it while I play and the violin as well"* [INT 9.52]. Lennon chose the placement because she wanted to express her passion during a performance: *"So, I wanted to be like—look!"* [INT 9.54].

Lennon has a passion for animals and especially loves her dog. Hence, Lennon decided that her third tattoo would represent this love and passion: *"[I]n Grade 11, I got a dachshund, and, uhm, it's not only representative of my dog ..."* [INT 9.60]. Although, this tattoo carries multiple meanings, it is simplistic in design: *"I decided, no, simple outline of the dachshund to not only represent my personal feelings towards my dog but towards animals"* [INT 9.60]. Another reason behind this tattoo can be found in Lennon's dream of becoming a veterinarian: *"I really want to study veterinary sciences, so I wanted to get something ... about animals"* [INT 9.60]. She feels her visible tattoos will not have an impact on this dream since the veterinary science field is more accepting of tattooed individuals than other occupations: *"I think with the veterinary sciences specifically, they [are] not as iffy"* [INT 9.78]. This fits with Lennon's personal worldview of acceptance and growth rather than simply following orders:

[Y]es, I am religious, but I am not religiously following something that was written by people ... I feel like the fact that I am accepting myself, accepting the things around me, try[ing] to grow as a person should mean something to that ... religion because that's what you want out of a religion—to feel better about yourself and the people around you [and] to get some sense of happiness and comfort out of it. [INT 9.80]

In conclusion, Lennon's tattoos reveal her dreams for the future and her love for animals, particularly her dachshund. The tattoos on her hand help her express her passion for music, especially while playing her instruments. Lastly, these tattoos help her to remember that she belongs, even during difficult times when she is separated from her family. They

serve as a constant reminder that overcoming everyday struggles will be rewarded in the future.

4.1.10 Kai

The final participant, Kai, is a 21-year-old male, with Afrikaans as his home language. He is studying biochemistry and genetics at the University of the Free State. Kai grew up in a home where body art such as tattoos was admired, and his mother has tattoos of her own. At school, Kai felt that he was perceived as a nerd, and he decided to change this image by getting a tattoo.

Kai feels that his tattoo expresses his identity, but it is not central to who he is. He got his only tattoo at the age of 16 years, and his mother helped him to choose a design. He decided to get a tattoo on his upper arm of a dragon holding a yin-yang symbol. Kai's tattoo has a double narrative behind it, one of which he shares with anyone inquiring about his tattoo. The other narrative is more personal.

Still Evolving. Currently, the best part of life for Kai is reaching certain goals that he has set for himself: *“[I]t’s very fun to see the path you’re on and to see your checkmarks, ‘Okay, I’ve got this; I’ve got this; I am getting closer to the end goal’ and stuff like that”* [INT 10.14]. He is also enjoying the relative freedom of being a student, and he feels that his parents are starting to treat him differently: *“[I]t’s very freeing to feel like you are your own person. No one can tell you this or that ... they [referring to his parents] don’t push as very much like they would when I was young”* [INT 10.14]. While Kai mentions that he thinks he grew up fast, he does not feel that he is an adult yet: *“I don’t feel like I am already grown up, but it’s still evolving”* [INT 10.14]. This evolution brings with it the need to question perceptions about the self: *“[Y]ou start questioning ... things about yourself and not just accepting what other people say”* [INT 10.10]. Kai’s current life stage is perfect for identity exploration and moving closer to the true self: *“[T]hat’s the time where you just find yourself ... a time where you just decide who you truly are”* [INT 10.10]. This true self is an amalgamation of many different characteristics, some chosen by the individual and some assigned to them:

You decide what you want to be, and there is [sic] some aspects that you are, even if you don’t decide it, and that together make—it’s a combination of sociology but also

psychology and just what you want to do, your dreams and all that also all rolled into one. [INT 10.4]

Kai feels that his tattoo represents one facet of his complex true self: *“For me, it’s, it’s not necessarily part of my core — identity, but it was definitely a distant aspect I put into the column that I call my identity, if I can explain it like that”* [INT 10.6]. Kai’s tattoo is meant to express a part of his identity of which others are unaware: *“I just want to show them there is a darker, not darker, but a different part”* [INT 10.24]. Along with this search for a true self, Kai feels that he is building towards a future: *“... a time where you just decide ... what you can become, what do you want to be, who you want in your life”* [INT 10.10].

Judging a Book by its Cover. Kai’s only tattoo consists of a Japanese style dragon, holding a yin-yang symbol: *“... yellow dragon holding a yin yang”* [INT 10.22]. Kai started by explaining that his tattoo has two distinctly different meanings attached to it. The first meaning is the one he shares with others if they ask about his tattoo: *“I have a reason I tell people ...”* [INT 10.24]. Although Kai is adamant that this version of the narrative behind his tattoo is not a lie, he admits that the meaning was constructed after he got the tattoo: *“[T]hat’s the story I tell people. It is true ... uhm, but there is [sic] some aspects like when I got the tattoo; that meaning was not apparent”* [INT 10.24]. The story that Kai tells other people connects more to the traditional meaning behind his tattoo in which dragons symbolise protection, power, and wisdom: *“[D]ragons, they’re old and wise and some of [the] people don’t want to mess with them because they’re angry, but some are where people come to for advice”* [INT 10.28]. Kai sees himself as the dragon: *“The dragon is me ...”* [INT 10.32]. The yin-yang symbol represents the dualism and equilibrium that he found in his life: *“... the yin-yang balance. So I found balance in my life, and I was trying to keep it”* [INT 10.32].

The other meaning is more personal for Kai, and he seldom shares this with other people: *“[A]nd then there is just the, more, reason why I actually got it”* [INT 10.24]. In this version of the narrative, the actual design of the tattoo is not important: *“[T]he art of the tattoo itself wasn’t actually that important”* [INT 10.24]. Here, the meaning is derived from the image Kai presents to others as a person with a tattoo: *“Just the fact that, uhm, that I wanted people to see me differently ...”* [INT 10.34]. *“[T]he aspect that I had a tattoo just showed what type of direction I wanted to go with my life and what I want[ed] people to see”* [INT 10.24]. Kai felt that people judged him based on his physical appearance without

getting to know him first: “[A] lot of people think I am overly nice, or I am a nerd” [INT 10.24]. “[T]hey perceive me like they judge the book” [INT 10.34]. Kai wanted to show that making this assumption was a mistake and that there is another side to him: “I wanted to give them a hint that inside the book is not the same as the cover shows” [INT 10.34]. Thus, Kai felt that a tattoo would express his dualism to the world: “I just want to show them there is a darker, not darker, but a different part” [INT 10.24].

Kai grew up in a house where body art was embraced as something to be admired, and this accepting environment had a positive influence on his decision to get a tattoo: “... body art and certain tattoos and piercings ... it was seen as beautiful; it wasn’t the type of house of, ugh, it’s not good. It, the house I grew up in, just made it more comfortable” [INT 10.42]. The fact that Kai’s mother has tattoos did play a role in his decision to try to alter his image with a tattoo: “I didn’t want to be an exact copy, but it’s just—it did influence me; and it did, like, this is a way I can ... express myself” [INT 10.42]. Kai’s mother was also involved in the decision-making process regarding the design of Kai’s tattoo: “[S]he wanted to advise me and I was with her, and that’s why we decided on rose gold because the red wouldn’t have been efficient” [INT 10.40]. This process was seen as a bonding experience between Kai and his mother because it was something unique that they shared: “[M]y mother was like, ‘Oh, bonding thing; this is something we have in common’” [INT 10.47].

In contrast, Kai’s father and stepmother were not so accepting of his tattoo: “[S]he [referring to his stepmother] and my father, uhm, they didn’t react as well” [INT 10.47]. Kai felt he could understand this negative reaction, especially from his stepmother because she had made some uninformed decisions when she was younger: “[S]he made a lot of impulse decisions and saw how it ruined lives, so that’s why. So I understand how she reacted. She still supported me; she was just like, ‘The next one, just tell me’” [INT 10.47]. Kai also received some negative feedback from members of his church, mostly older members: “[T]he older generation in the church react[s] differently” [INT 10.65]. Although Kai’s unique worldview is built around religion, he does not adhere to all the actions expected of a religious person and he feels that other members of his religion may reject him:

I am religious, but I don’t go to church and stuff like that ’cause I feel they would not, they would get offended as if for me for doing this to myself. Uhm, but me personally ... I don’t think it clashes; there’s no reason why tattoo would be bad in my eyes and religion. [INT 10.65]

Kai did, however, clarify that he ascribes the negative reactions to the generational gap rather than religion: *“I think it’s more a generation than actual religion problem”* [INT 10.65]. He reiterates this sentiment by stating that the younger generation is far less disapproving of tattoos: *“My generation’s more of a, of a—we are more interested than judgemental”* [INT 10.8]. Kai stated that the biology and science field are filled with tattooed people: *“If you look at the science people working in labs nowadays, every one of them have something; there’s something odd like a tattoo or a piercing”* [INT 10.57]. Kai continued that in the biology and science field, your accomplishments are more important than your physical appearance: *“[I]n the bio, biology and sciences ... people don’t look as much at the physical as they look at the CVs”* [INT 10.57]. According to Kai, for scientists, tattoos seem to be a way of displaying their uniqueness as they are more aware of their identity:

They want to be themselves and because personally, I don’t know, I think personally, scientists have a broader understanding of who they truly are than most people. It’s just the—how they think and how they analyse situations and stuff like that. So I think that they like disproving other people, so I think that is a part of why they would ... be different. [INT 10.63]

Reflecting on Kai’s double narrative regarding his tattoo, it becomes clear that Kai wanted to express multiple meanings. Outwardly, Kai sees himself as a dragon, a symbol of wisdom and good for some while being feared as an agent of evil by others. This duality, which Kai feels reflects his identity, is also represented by the yin-yang symbol, reminding him of the balance that he needs in his life. Furthermore, the socially constructed stigma assigned to people with tattoos helps Kai express his view that identity is more than what is seen at first glance.

4.2 Salient Themes Across the Narratives

In the first section of the chapter, each participant’s narrative was presented and how the participants felt that their tattoos connected with their life stories was discussed. From these unique narratives, it became clear that even the simplest tattoo can contain a plethora of meanings. In the following section of this chapter, the salient themes generated from the data are presented. This is not intended to be a comparison of the narratives of participants since each story is unique but rather a means to bring out the distinctive variations in the themes.

The first theme, *Affiliation: Belonging to a family*, concerns the participants' use of tattoos to express their connection to a single person, their family of origin, or a larger group. Every participant incorporated a sense of belonging in their narrative, and their tattoos served as permanent symbols of these connections. This need to express belonging was found to coexist with the search for independence that characterises the emerging adulthood stage. The exploration of how tattoos were used as reminders of events that took place within the participants' life stories is demonstrated in the second theme, *Reminiscence: Remembering the events that moulded the narrative*. Some of these events are remembered with joy while others were the most challenging times that the participant had to face. In both cases, the permanent reminders on the participants' skin speak of the significant impact that these events had in shaping their narratives.

Next, the focus shifted to the resilience shown by participants after enduring challenging periods in their life story. In this third theme, *Perseverance: Surviving the difficult times*, some participants reported that their tattoos helped them through the difficult times whereas others felt the tattoo represented the closing of the chapter. Tattoos became symbolic reminders of the strength within the participants and served as motivation to continue fighting during the challenging times. *Opposing viewpoints: Bridging the generational gap* is the fourth theme. Here, the reactions that the participants received from other people upon seeing their tattoos are reported. It became clear that regarding tattoos, a divide exists between participants and the older individuals with whom they interact. Seemingly, older generations still hold on to the stigma attached to tattoos. One way of bridging this gap was to explain the deep personal meaning behind the tattoo, and this caused some critics to adjust their standpoint regarding tattoos.

The last theme generated from the data was named *Identity: Exploring and expressing my unique self*. Participants felt that their tattoos expressed parts of their unique identity to the outside world. Some participants made a great effort to ensure that their tattoos were as unique as they were. Another way that participants expressed their uniqueness was through their personal worldviews.

4.2.1 Affiliation: Belonging to a Family

Family was mentioned in every participant's narrative, and it seems that tattoos were, in part, used to express a lasting connection to this family group. This connection is most obvious in

Kahlo and Lennon's tattoos. Kahlo's tattoo reads "everything for the family", and she admitted that her family plays a huge part in her decision-making. The affiliation was confirmed for Kahlo when her sister and parents had the words "everything for the family" tattooed on themselves. Kahlo also mentioned that she hoped that the next generation of their family would adopt this tattoo. Lennon's tattoo incorporates her initials and the initials of her immediate family members. Lennon was able to share the experience of her first tattoo with her family since they all got the same tattoo together. During difficult times or when they are separated, the tattoo reminds them that they belong. Frank has multiple tattoos connecting him to different members of his family. An angel on his back represents his mother and his aunt, who was considered the mother of the family, while a rose on his arm joins him to his grandmother. His grandfather and siblings are linked to more than one of Frank's tattoos. Zama's tattoos represent the bond she had with two of her siblings who sadly passed away. For her, the tattoos are a way of continuing their existence even though she understands that they are gone. Peaches felt as if she did not belong anywhere after her parents were divorced. For a few years, she felt as if she were without a family until she realised that although her family may look different, she is still a part of it.

For other participants, their tattoos connected them to specific members of their family who they felt contributed to their narrative in some way. Audrey and Blair both cited that their grandfathers inspired at least one of their tattoos. Audrey could always rely on her grandfather when her family situation became unstable due to her parents moving away and leaving her to finish school. The connection to her grandfather became more obvious once she mentioned that both her tattoos are based on the tattoos that her grandfather had. Audrey hopes to be the kind person that her grandfather was, and she feels that his life story serves as an inspiration to her while she is writing her own. Blair acknowledges that her grandfather significantly contributed towards her becoming an artist by teaching her to look at the world differently. The tattoo of Reese's dog tells of the times when he felt isolated and as if his dog were his only family. Although this was not always the case in the past, Reese's family, including his loyal little dog, are now extremely close. Growing up in a family where body art was accepted showed Kai that tattoos can be a way of expressing oneself.

Lastly, tattoos expressed belonging and connections to larger 'families'. Their semi-colon tattoos connect Ally and Zama to a community of people who have struggled with mental health issues such as depression and suicidal ideation. Some of Frank's tattoos

represent his connection to Italy and his Italian heritage, while Kahlo's Spanish tattoo represents her family's Cuban decent. Only Peaches felt that her tattoo disconnected her from her cultural heritage in which tattoos are still deemed unacceptable.

In contrast, participants described themselves as becoming more independent from family. For Peaches, after relying on others to take care of her, becoming more independent was sometimes overwhelming. Audrey felt that her independence was forced by circumstances after her parents moved to the UK. Although Ally still relies on her parents for financial support, she feels that she is mostly independent and responsible for managing her own life. Blair sees the money that she is earning from working at the university as contributing towards her becoming a more independent person. Frank feels that his life is currently about gaining independence and responsibilities. He is of the opinion that the more independence a person gains, the more responsibilities they have. Reese is enjoying the independence of being a student because he can go fishing whenever he feels like doing so. Lennon mentioned that one of the most prominent hurdles she faces as a student is in relation to finances. Since she is attempting to become more independent, she considers asking her parents for money as less of an option than previously. Lastly, Kai experiences independence as his parents trusting him more to make his own decisions.

During this period of becoming independent, participants used tattoos to signify that they were still affiliated with others. The struggle between becoming an independent person while still belonging to a larger group seemed to be a prominent challenge for participants. Tattoos were used to ease this internal conflict and to declare their membership to the family, affirming that their individual narratives are part of the overarching family narrative.

4.2.2 Reminiscence: Remembering Events that Moulded the Narrative

Tattoos were also used to remember significant periods or events in participants' lives. Participants felt that these positive or negative events and periods helped shape them into the individuals that they are. Moving from Cuba to South Africa and away from family and friends must have been a difficult experience for Kahlo's family, and although Kahlo was too young to remember this time, she sees this as a positive event because it brought their family together. Her tattoo reminds her of the event that they shared as a family and all the happy times that they spent together. Even the act of getting the tattoo is remembered as a joyful event since Kahlo shared it with her sister. Audrey's tattoo points to specific times spent with

her grandfather, particularly the times when he was understanding and kind while everyone else was displeased with her. In addition, Audrey thinks about events from her grandfather's narrative and the lessons that she vicariously learnt from them. Similarly, a realistic sparrow on Blair's rib cage takes her back to sitting on the grass, listening to the silly stories her grandfather would make up about the birds. These fantastical stories would help nurture the creativity within Blair and support her in becoming the artist she is today.

A third participant, Frank, described life events shared with his grandfather. A trip to Rome with his brother and grandfather was such a life-altering event for Frank that he wanted a permanent reminder. Another is his grandmother's battle with, and subsequent victory, over breast cancer. Although Ally experienced some difficult times, she had the word 'blessed' tattooed on her as a reminder of the positive chapters in her narrative. One of her tattoos reminds her of how she has grown from a rebellious party girl to a top student who aspires to become a psychologist. Reese remembers the time spent in the boxing ring with fondness because it was here that he found an outlet and a place to belong. Performing music gives Lennon a sense of pride, and her musical tattoo on her hand reminds her of her Grade 11 year at school. During this period, Lennon made enormous strides in her musical ability within a short time. Because Kai's mother helped him make decisions about the design of his tattoo and was there when he got it, the dragon reminds him of this bonding experience.

Although some events would seem to be best forgotten, the participants chose to get permanent reminders of these events. For some, the tattoo helped in the healing and meaning-making process while for others, the tattoo brought closure after dealing with the event. The divorce of her parents changed Peaches' life completely. This event stripped her of her sense of self, and the years that followed were the most difficult in her young life. Since Peaches felt that that this event shaped her, she wanted to remember it with a tattoo. The transition from high school to university was a challenging time for Audrey. She started questioning some of the traditions and beliefs that had formed a significant part of her adolescent life. She is reminded of this period of exploration and adaptation by her crucifix tattoo. When Ally looks at her tattoos, she is reminded of the different phases of her life, including her struggle with depression and her crisis of faith. By reflecting on these difficult chapters, Ally is reminded that her narrative could have ended but instead, she continued to write her story. Blair's second tattoo reminds her of the bad events in her story that seemed to occur at approximately the same time. During 2013, her grandfather fell ill. She also failed

her academic year and was forced to repeat it. These events helped to strengthen her view that a person should never give up.

Lennon's first tattoo is a reminder of an uncertain time not only in her life but also in the life of her family as her sister prepared to leave for university. Kai's tattoo reflects on a time when he felt that his life was unbalanced and that others were judging him without knowing the true Kai. The difficult events memorialised on Frank's skin include a difficult break up of a long-term romantic relationship and the support he received from his grandfather. In addition, an event that shook his entire family, the death of his aunt, is also remembered through a tattoo. With his complex tattoo, Reese marked the difficult chapter in his life of being sent away from home due to discipline issues and his trip to Poland where he experienced a crisis of faith. These events moulded Reese and although he admits he would like to forget those events, true strength comes from remembering them. The events that are commemorated by Zama's tattoos are truly tragic, the loss of her sister and a few years later, the loss of her brother. These events changed Zama and she was never the same thereafter. The semicolon tattoo reminds her of the time following these events and her own struggle for survival.

4.2.3 Perseverance: Surviving the Difficult Times

The next theme generated from the participants' narratives involved perseverance in the face of challenges. These challenges are the difficult chapters that changed the participants forever. For some such as Reese, the tattoo helped with his healing and his closing of the chapter whereas for others such as Peaches, the tattoo represented the growth she experienced through surviving the challenges. Peaches felt that by redefining what the concepts faith, hope, and love meant to her, she could look at her situation from different viewpoints. This enabled her to grow into the resilient person she is today. Ally told of her struggle with depression, equating her journey to crawling out of the darkness. Her tattoo signifies the strength and courage it took to survive that dark period. Where her narrative could have ended so easily, Ally decided to continue and fight and today, she is making her way towards being able to assist others who are experiencing something similar.

The tragic events in Zama's narrative, initially the death of her sister and later, the death of her brother changed her forever. These events led to Zama's mental health deteriorating, leaving her fighting depression, the very disease that had claimed her brother's

life. Reflecting on the period surrounding these events, Zama realised the importance of self-care and that taking some time during difficult periods is not only acceptable but essential. This self-care helped her during her struggle with depression and reminded her that life continues.

Blair illustrated this theme brilliantly with her metaphor of trees, showing that one cannot prevent winter but that perseverance will lead to positive outcomes. Her own determination was tested during 2013. Blair feels that she continued working hard and that she bounced back a better and more determined person than ever. Reese explained his decision to design his tattoo around his dog by pointing out that his dog is very loyal; he never gives up, and he is tough and resilient. Reese saw these characteristics within himself, and although he sometimes felt similar to a rose planted in concrete, he never gave up and continued to grow. Not only was boxing an outlet for Reese's aggression, it also taught him discipline. Reese feels that looking back on this period, making sense of what happened and learning from it, has made him a stronger person.

The motto, 'life is always beautiful', helped Frank deal with his own difficult period after the breakup of a long-term romantic relationship. Frank's grandfather instilled in him the idea that no matter how hard life became, if you look for something beautiful, you will find it. Frank's resilience is grounded in the beauty of life. Although Kahlo was only two years old when her family moved to South Africa, she feels that this event created an unbreakable bond between them. Without any support from other family members, Kahlo, her parents, and her sister persevered to build a better life for themselves. This strong social support system helped Kahlo to endure the difficult times.

When confronted with a challenge that causes Audrey to start doubting her capacity to persevere and overcome it, she looks at her tattoos. These two small marks on her skin remind her of the final conversation she had with her grandfather; he told her that in hindsight, she will understand why she has to face the obstacles that come her way. Thus, she looks at her tattoos with pride, remembers the resilience her grandfather showed during his life, and bravely confronts her challenges head-on.

4.2.4 Opposing Viewpoints: Bridging the Generational Gap

Although tattoos are becoming more popular and accepted, especially among emerging adults, the stigma attached to tattoos by older generations has not been erased completely.

Most participants had negative encounters with other, mainly older, people. Most of the critique seemed to come from family and members of the participants' religious community. Kai stated that although it was the people at church who displayed negative reactions, he felt it had more to do with the generational gap than religion, per se. Kai's father and stepmother also did not react well when he told them about the tattoo. Peaches' father does not approve of her tattoo, and as mentioned in her narrative, she ascribes her father's negative view to his culture and occupation. Peaches also experienced negative reactions from members of her church. Similarly, Kahlo reported that she received negative reactions from older church members. Audrey's deeply religious grandmother was the greatest critic of her tattoos, stating that tattooing is against their religion. Ally's mother and aunt did not like her tattoos when they first saw them, and they made some negative comments. Blair's grandmother was displeased with Blair's second tattoo and pointed to the placement of the tattoo, which made it visible to other people. Zama's mother did not understand why Zama would get a tattoo, and the reactions of some of the other people in the community were negative. Frank mentioned that his grandmother and the older members of the Catholic faith still perceive tattoos negatively whereas the younger generation has embraced the practice. Although Reese pays no attention to people criticising him, he did notice that some of the older people in his life were troubled by his tattoo. Similarly, Lennon's grandparents reacted negatively upon learning about her tattoos.

However, it appears that the negative views regarding tattoos of older generations can be changed. Some participants reported that these negative views changed after the critics discovered the meaning behind the tattoo. Although Peaches' father remains opposed to tattoos, her mother asked Peaches about the reason and the meaning behind the tattoo. Once her mother understood the meaning of the tattoo for Peaches, no further judgement was passed. Kahlo's father was initially upset by her tattoo until he read it and understood the meaning behind it. It was such a meaningful symbol that he subsequently got the tattoo himself. Kahlo feels that once the meaning of the tattoo is known, people will most likely change their view of the tattoo. Audrey felt that her grandmother ultimately accepted her tattoos. For Blair's grandmother, the tattoo itself was not the problem. Instead, she was concerned about the placement and whether other people were able to see the tattoo. This view became clear as Blair's grandmother had nothing bad to say about her first tattoo, the sparrow hidden on her rib cage. Zama and her mother were able to share a lighter moment about the pain of being tattooed after Zama explained the significance of her tattoos to her.

After having a conversation with his stepmother, Kai felt he could understand her negative reaction towards his tattoo. As she looked back on her own narrative and the bad decisions she had made, her reaction was driven by the fear that he would make the same mistakes as her.

This stigma attached to tattoos by older generations and society was considered when participants decided on the placement of their tattoos. The three participants studying towards becoming a lawyer, Kahlo, Frank, and Reese, all agreed that tattoos were not accepted in the profession and that they placed their tattoos so that they could be covered by the formal attire worn by lawyers. Her wish to become a psychologist played a large part in Ally's decision to place all but one of her tattoos where they would be hidden. Her desire to communicate her narrative regarding mental health outweighed her fear of receiving judgement from others and, therefore, she decided to place her semicolon tattoo on her wrist. When deciding on the placement of her tattoos, Audrey ensured that the tattoos could be covered by clothing if required. Before getting her first tattoo, Zama discussed the impact it would have on her career with her psychologist. She decided to place her tattoos so that they could be covered by long-sleeve shirts. Even with her visible tattoo, Blair found a way of concealing it with special make up should the need arise. In contrast, Lennon and Kai felt that their respective careers are more accepting of tattoos. Lennon mentioned that people involved in the veterinary sciences are not as concerned about tattoos as other professions. Furthermore, Kai stated that in the biology and science field, your accomplishments are more important than your physical appearance.

Hence, it appears that although tattoos are becoming more popular and accepted, there still exists a generational gap between older individuals who are holding on to the negative stigma attached to tattoos and the younger generation who believe that tattoos are a way of expressing oneself. While some people such as Peaches' father may never change their view, others may reconsider once the meaning behind the tattoo becomes clear. It is also clear that participants did not get tattooed impulsively but instead considered how the tattoo could affect them in the future.

4.2.5 Identity: Exploring and Expressing My Unique Self

Most participants seemed to agree that a person's identity is what makes them unique and that tattoos are a way to express their identity. Furthermore, identity was described by

participants as consisting of mainly two components. The first aspect was linked to self-perception and how individuals see themselves as a tattooed person. The second aspect of identity, according to participants, was the reaction and feedback received from society once the tattoo had been presented to them. This interaction between the individual and the environment shapes identity. Kai expressed this by stating that a person chooses some aspects of identity while other aspects are ascribed to them by others. Audrey felt that biographical details such as race and gender that are assigned to a person at birth are also incorporated into identity. Ally mentioned the role of the individual within society as a defining factor in identity. Reese said that anything that makes a person unique can be seen as part of that person's identity. For Kahlo, uniqueness is expressed in the way that individuals navigate through life in their own way. Blair concurred and felt that the moral choices made by a person indicate a great deal about their identity. In contrast, Frank feels that the perceptions that society have about individuals are guided by how the individuals choose to present themselves to society. This means that identity is the individual's choice. Peaches also referred to impression management when she mentioned how she uses make up when she wants to bring her femininity to the fore.

Most participants felt that their tattoos expressed some part of their identity and uniqueness when coupled with the narrative and the meaning behind their tattoos. Participants referred to their tattoos as being personal and not something for the outside world. This statement may seem contradictory since tattoos, especially visible tattoos, can be seen as a form of impression management. Audrey feels that her tattoos are not meant to share her narrative with the world but to act as personal reminders. Therefore, Audrey pays little attention to the opinions of others regarding her tattoos. By placing her tattoo 'upside down', Blair confirmed that her tattoo was a personal reminder, and for others to receive its message properly, they would need to adopt Blair's point of view. Ally agreed that her identity is expressed within her tattoos; however, the messages that they convey could be unclear to those who do not know her personally. Ally's tattoos are personal bookmarks of the unique chapters, which combined create her narrative. Although Reese admits that he enjoys showing off his tattoo occasionally, he feels that fundamentally, his tattoo and the meanings behind it are personal. In contrast, Lennon feels that her tattoos express who she is to the outside world by conveying to others the elements of her life that she loves. Zama was the only participant who felt that her tattoos do not express her identity. On the contrary, she feels that her tattoos falsely represent her as a bad person to society.

The majority of the participants believe that their tattoos are a permanent representation of their identity. For this reason, these participants expressed the need for their tattoos to be as unique as they are. Blair felt that although some tattoos are not unique, they still carry deep meaning, for example, the semicolon tattoo. To ensure that each of her tattoos were one of a kind, Blair personally designed them. Lennon and Reese both described their tattoos as unique or unusual, agreeing that this testified to their own uniqueness. Kai felt that many people in the science field are stereotyped and that getting a tattoo is a way of differentiating oneself and showcasing uniqueness. According to Frank, having a tattoo makes a person unique since no two people will express themselves in exactly the same way even if they have the same tattoo. He added that tattoos also create an aura of mystery around the person wearing them, which leads to others starting conversations to find out more about the tattooed person.

Another important aspect that contributed to the uniqueness of participants was their distinctive worldviews. For some participants, it was important to represent their worldview with the aid of their tattoos. It would seem that most participants' views on how the world works is based on a general philosophy such as religion or culture. Yet, after making meaning of their own lives, they personalised these principals to correspond with their identity. Peaches was adamant that it is more important for her to be true to herself than to conform to what others want her to be. She uses the examples of culture and religion to demonstrate her point. Although she still considers herself part of her culture and religion, she feels that it is a modernised version, tailored to fit her unique identity. Kahlo believes that the religion in which she was raised prohibits tattoos. She explained this conflict by pointing out that her worldview is far less strict and extreme compared with the religion on which it is based. Thus, her worldview feels more congruent with who she believes she is at her core.

Audrey adjusted her view on religion after a period of exploration. Although her grandmother maintains that tattoos are against their religion, Audrey believes her crucifix tattoo represents her unique religious identity. For Ally, tattoos are not against her personal worldview, although she believes that certain members of her religious community disagree. She differentiates her unique view by referring to other members of her religion as "normal". Kai was another participant who made it clear that his unique worldview would not be accepted by members of the traditional religious community. According to Frank, religion should be personal and he sees no problem with tattoos from his personal point of view.

However, he is aware that tattoos are not accepted by the Catholic faith, and he considers himself part of this faith. Similar to most of the other participants, Reese relied on religion to guide his worldview during adolescence. A trip to the Auschwitz concentration camp site in Poland raised questions about the truth of his beliefs. He lost his faith completely and started to rebuild a more open and accepting worldview. Lennon believes that a worldview should guide a person in their personal development and not restrict this process with man-made rules. Thus, in her mind, tattoos and religion are not in conflict. Blair shared this sentiment by explaining that a good worldview should be about being a good person and not about blindly following rules.

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an outline of the results of the study was presented. The chapter was divided into two sections, with the first examining the individual narratives of each participant. Each narrative began with a short introduction of the participant. Thereafter, an attempt was made to tell the participant's story in a way that accentuated the connection between their life story and their tattoo(s). Peaches and her search for faith, hope, and love was presented first, followed by Kahlo who believes in 'all for the family'. Next was Audrey's commemoration of her grandfather, and Ally's different phases of life. Participant 5 was the creative Blair who was recalling her time spent with her grandfather in his garden. Zama's story was one of loss and hardship, while in contrast, Frank told of all the good times he had shared with his family. Reese explained the meaning behind his unique tattoo, while Lennon expressed her passion of both music and animals through her tattoos. The section concluded with Kai's statement that looks can be deceiving.

The second section of this chapter presented the salient themes that were present in most of the narratives. In the first theme, the participants' need to feel connected to others while simultaneously searching for independence was explored. It became clear that the participants felt that their individual narratives are interconnected with the narratives of those around them. Thereafter, the attention shifted to the events that participants considered significant within their narratives. Tattoos were used to aid in the healing process or to conclude the challenging period. For others, the tattoo represented positive experiences. In both cases, the tattoo served as a permanent reminder. In the third theme, the role of tattoos in the perseverance of the participants during difficult life events was investigated. Tattoos not only symbolised overcoming past challenges but also reminded participants of their resilience

when facing subsequent difficulties. In the theme, *Opposing viewpoints: Bridging the generational gap*, participants elaborated on the reactions they received from other people regarding their tattoos. It became clear that older individuals reacted more negatively towards the participants and their tattoos than younger individuals, pointing to a clear generational gap. In some instances, this gap was successfully addressed by explaining the meaning behind the tattoo. Lastly, although the participants made it clear that the primary reason behind getting the tattoo was personal, they agreed that their tattoos expressed unique fragments of their identity to the outside world. It also appeared that the participants' unique views of the world allowed them to get tattooed even when others around them might display negative feelings towards tattoos. In conclusion, it is clear from these results, that a single tattoo can carry multiple layers of meaning. In the following chapter, these results are discussed in more detail.

Chapter 5 - Discussion of the Research Results

The aim of the current study was to explore and describe how emerging adults used tattoos as an expression of their narrative identity. In this chapter, the findings from the previous chapter are discussed with the use of existing literature. McAdams and McLean (2013) indicated the different components that are used to measure narrative identity, namely agency, communion, redemption, and meaning-making. In order to ease the comparison of the relevant themes from the current study with the findings of previous studies, this chapter was structured according to the above-mentioned components. If tattoos are found to be an expression of these different components, it would be reasonable to conclude that the same tattoos must express the wearer's narrative identity.

Firstly, the concept of agency is investigated and the relevant themes from the current study are compared with the findings of similar research. In this section, an attempt is made to show how tattoos are used to express uniqueness and agency over the self and others. The next component that is investigated is communion, where the aim is to show how tattoos connect the wearer to others. The third section of this chapter is used to resolve the obvious conflict between being a unique agent while still belonging and conforming to a larger group. The objective of this section is to show that tattoos may assist the emerging adults of this study in finding a balance between these two constructs. The final section of the chapter explores meaning-making and how tattoos facilitate this process. By integrating the discussion around tattoos, emerging adulthood, and the different components of narrative identity, an attempt is made to demonstrate how emerging adults use tattoos in the expression of their narrative identity.

5.1 Agency: Writing My Own Unique Story

Agency is an important construct in various facets of psychology and has been defined in multiple ways (McLean & Syed, 2016). For this study, the definition given by Schwartz et al. (2005) seems most fitting. Agency is defined as taking responsibility for one's life and believing that decisions and outcomes are within one's control and that obstacles can be overcome. Arnett (2000, 2016a) concurs that taking responsibility for one's own life is one of the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. Emerging adults gradually take more responsibility for their daily lives in order to become self-sufficient and to make their own decisions. According to Arnett (2015), taking on more responsibility and having to make

one's own decisions forces the emerging adult to become more self-focused. This is not to say that emerging adults are selfish; instead, this phase of self-focus aids in identity exploration and gives a sense of agency.

In the current study, participants reported taking on more responsibilities. Participants also agreed that this period of self-focus prepared them for the future. Peaches mentioned that she is confidently dealing with life, while Kahlo said she is moving away from trivial issues and focusing on more important aspects of her life. Ally talked about actively working towards her future, while Blair feels that her future is dependent on the choices that she makes in the present. Trying to satisfy the expectations of others will create anxiety according to Zama, who felt that individuals should live life the way they choose. By attempting to deal with the current difficulties by herself, Lennon believes she is preparing herself for the future. This sentiment is shared by Frank who feels that he is currently laying the groundwork for his future. For Kai, his agency is tangible in the way his parents are stepping back and letting him make his own decisions. From this alone, it can be said that participants had some degree of agency over their own lives and decisions. Nunes et al. (2021) state that agency is an important aspect in the life of emerging adults because it assists with adaptation, while Arnett (2015) asserts that this self-focus is necessary for the emerging adult to develop the skills needed for adulthood. Furthermore, Schwartz et al. (2005) found agency to be important for identity development in emerging adults.

The mere act of getting a tattoo expresses agency (Alter-Muri, 2020; Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015; Martin, 2013). Once an individual has decided to get a tattoo, there are multiple choices to be made. Aspects such as the design, size, and placement of the tattoo are probably the most important things to consider. Other decisions that need to be made is which artist will create the tattoo and will it be in full colour or will it be a black and grey piece. These are all choices that are under the control of the person who is getting the tattoo (Martin, 2013). Kierstein and Kjelskau (2015) and Alter-Muri (2020) state that tattoos provide the individual with a sense of agency over their bodies, leading to a feeling of individuality and uniqueness.

The narratives connected to the tattoo create a link between body and mind, which leads to an empowered and more authentic sense of self (Leader, 2016). Within the current study, *Identity: Exploring and expressing my unique self* was the salient theme wherein the participants' sense of agency and uniqueness were presented. The participants in this study

reported that the choice to get tattooed was for themselves and/or for personal reasons. Audrey and Ally referred to their tattoos as personal reminders and bookmarks, respectively, making it clear that their tattoo was for no one but themselves. Blair emphasised the 'for me' stance with the upside-down placement of her tattoo. Blair designed both of her tattoos herself, thus ensuring their uniqueness, while Kai felt he had less agency since his mother had had some input into his design.

Buckle and Corbin Dwyer (2021) found that their participants regained a feeling of agency after a loss through controlling the design and placement of their memorial tattoos. Furthermore, control is exerted over when and with whom the tattoos are shared. This theme of agency and uniqueness corresponds with Carmen et al. (2012) and Naudé et al. (2017) who reported that the most prominent reason for getting a tattoo was related to personal meaning and the expression of a unique self. This finding was also reported by the study of Forbes (2001) in which the majority of participants reported self-expression and uniqueness as the motivation for their tattoos. Antoszewski et al. (2010) concluded that most of the time, tattoos are conscious decisions brought about by a need to express individuality. Dunlop et al. (2020) state that narrative identity seems to be individualised and highly personal. Thus, it is understandable that the participants in the current study expressed their narrative identities with the aid of their personal tattoos and the unique narratives that are attached to them.

As proposed by McAdams (2013a, 2015), the expression of individuality and uniqueness to the outside world is done by the actor self. The actor has agency over when and to whom the tattoo is revealed (Leader, 2016), and this control is referred to as impression management (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). Agency through impression management was evident in the current study. Frank believes that the actor guides the audience and their perceptions by making use of impression management. Peaches explained how she alters the amount of make-up she wears when she wants to be perceived as more feminine. Reese enjoys the attention he receives in some social situations when his tattoo is visible. Impression management was one of the main reasons behind Kai's dragon tattoo; he wanted to change the audience's perception of him being a nerd and portray himself as a more mysterious character who has more to offer than is initially apparent.

In order to facilitate impression management using their tattoos, participants from this study covered their tattoos in situations in which they did not want them to be visible. These participants reported that the need for impression management was highest within their

respective professional domains since they felt that tattoos were not fully accepted in these environments. Foulke and Romo (2021) reported that numerous places of employment still judge employees with visible tattoos negatively, and some companies still refuse to hire tattooed individuals. Other companies have strict policies, forcing employees to cover their tattoos while at work. Kahlo, Frank, and Reese are all currently law students. They all reported their intention to cover their tattoos when entering a professional setting. Although perceptions are changing slowly, they feel that visible tattoos are still unacceptable within the professional domain of law. Ally and Zama echoed this sentiment, stating that they will conceal their tattoos once they start working. The white coat that Kai will wear in the laboratory setting where he plans to work will keep his tattoo out of sight, while Peaches' choice of shoes will determine the visibility of her tattoo. In contrast to all the other participants who rely on clothing to cover their tattoos, Blair found special make up to cover her tattoo when she does not want it to be visible.

McNiven (2016) reported similar findings, with the participants in her study having to manage the line between cherished visibility and intrusive inquiries. Another similarity with the current study was that the prominent method for concealing tattoos was the use of clothes, giving participants the agency to find the balance between visibility and privacy (McNiven, 2016). Foulke and Romo (2021) found that emerging adults would reveal their tattoos to others when they felt it would promote bonding or serve as empowerment and identity creation. The tattoo was concealed when judgement from family was anticipated or when a positive professional identity needed to be maintained.

According to McAdams (2015), the guidance of behaviour for the attainment of future goals such as positive professional identity is one of the main functions of the agent self. Thus, a decision such as getting a tattoo will be guided by the agent self while considering the impact the tattoo may have in the future. The role of the agent self was observed in the current study, with participants choosing to place most of their tattoos where they could be covered. Zama even consulted with her psychologist about the positive and negative effects that she could anticipate once she had a tattoo. Only one participant from this study placed a tattoo where it would be regularly visible. Lennon wanted her music-inspired tattoo to be prominent while she plays her musical instruments; she, therefore, decided to place the tattoo on her hand. Kalanj-Mizzi et al. (2019) found a gender difference regarding the placement of tattoos. They found that the male participants in their study positioned their tattoos to be

hidden by corporate attire. Surprisingly, female participants were reported to place their tattoos in more visible locations such as the neck and hands. The contrast with the current findings could be explained by the fact that Kalanj-Mizzi et al. (2019) used only heavily tattooed individuals as participants.

The agent self is not only responsible for the individual's goals but also for their values and beliefs (McAdams, 2015, 2020). Emerging adults who lack a commitment to the values and beliefs that assist in guiding their lives are less likely to explore their identity. Instead, these individuals will merely conform to societal or cultural norms (Schwartz et al., 2005). Peaches touched on this statement when she said that simply conforming to values and goals provided by religion and culture was being untrue to herself. Her tattoo, a quote from the Bible, shows that she did not discard her religious values and beliefs altogether but that she re-evaluated and adapted them to fit into her personal worldview. This re-evaluation of values and beliefs against the ideological setting is an important factor in the shaping of narrative identity (Cierpka, 2014).

Re-evaluation of beliefs and values are also regarded as an important feature of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015, 2000; McAdams, 2015). Although the exploration of a worldview might start in adolescence, it is during emerging adulthood that these questions are addressed directly. At the end of emerging adulthood, most individuals have found a preliminary resolution to the questions they might have had about beliefs and values (Arnett, 2015). Religious belief is a factor that shapes an individual's worldview, and Arnett (2015) reports a significant change in religious beliefs and behaviour from adolescence to emerging adulthood. While 75% of the emerging adult participants in the current study considered themselves religious, only 30% attended regular religious services. Similar to Peaches, other participants in the current study referred to the re-evaluation of their religious beliefs and behaviours. After being in a religious-orientated school, Audrey's crucifix tattoo represents her stepping back from religious practices such as going to mass every morning and turning to a more personal way of practising her religion. Ally re-evaluated and personalised her beliefs after a crisis of faith and got a crucifix tattoo to mark this new spiritual outlook on life. Reese lost his faith entirely and had to rebuild a personal worldview; this was represented by the rosary in his tattoo. Kahlo and Frank both agreed that their religious beliefs were not as strict as those of many other members of their religion. Again, agency was prominent as participants created their own personal worldviews that guided their lives.

All but one of the participants from the current study reported themselves to be religious. From the above, it can be concluded that some of the participants used symbolic tattoos such as crucifixes, rosaries, angels, and Bible scripture to express their personal religious beliefs and values. Alcina (2009) refers to tattoos that express a life philosophy as “note to self” (p. 65) tattoos. She reported that five of the eight participants in her study had “note to self” (p. 65) tattoos (Alcina, 2009). The findings from the current study also correspond with those of Lombard and Bergh (2014) who found that participants not only used tattoos as religious symbols but also felt that their tattoos celebrated their religion. This religious symbolism and meaning behind some tattoos contradict the perceptions of non-tattooed individuals who predominantly believe that tattooed individuals are less religious (Broussard & Harton, 2018; Forbes, 2001; Hill, 2020; Naudé et al., 2017).

As reported by Bergh et al. (2017) and Naudé et al. (2017), religion and the fear of negative feedback from others within the religious community are the most prominent reasons that prevent individuals from getting a tattoo. This fear of negative feedback was validated in the current study with most participants reporting negative interactions with members of their religious community because of their tattoos. The theme, *Opposing viewpoints: Bridging the generational gap* illustrates how others reacted to the participants’ tattoos. Kai, Peaches, and Kahlo reported receiving negative feedback from members of their respective religious communities. Audrey’s grandmother was disappointed with Audrey’s tattoos, citing religious reasons for her view. Frank had a similar experience, with not only his grandmother but also other older members of his church disapproving of his tattoos. Ally, Zama, Lennon, and Blair also reported negative reactions from family members such as parents and grandparents.

However, some of these negative interactions had a redemption element to them as a positive outcome was reached after some discourse. This contributed to the participants’ experience of agency since having influence over the individuals with whom you share the environment is an important aspect of agency (McAdams, 2015). According to Leader (2016), tattoos and the narratives ascribed to them should be equated to any form of art that aims to move the audience from narrow presumption to an in-depth understanding and appreciation. Participants from this study influenced those around them to reconsider their negative views regarding tattoos, and in some cases, even changed those views. After initially being upset with Kahlo for getting a tattoo, her father changed his view after learning of the

meaning that Kahlo had assigned to the tattoo. Her father even got the same tattoo a week later. Kai and Zama felt that a conversation explaining the reasoning and meaning behind their tattoos influenced their stepmother and mother, respectively, to accept their tattoos. Audrey also felt that her grandmother accepted her tattoos as time passed, with the understanding of the significance that the tattoos had for Audrey. These changes in individuals' personal views on tattoos are slowly contributing to the increase in acceptance of tattoos in society. According to McLean and Syed (2016), with time and effort, alternative narratives can potentially change the master narrative within the society.

In summary, this section demonstrated that the self-focused participants in the current study experienced some degree of agency in their lives, as well as some agency over others. From the agent self deciding on the design and placement of the tattoo to the actor self determining when the tattoo will be shown, participants felt that their tattoos gave them control. The tattoos also represented the participants' personalised worldviews and their anticipated futures. Lastly, it was shown that the participants are using their alternative tattoo narratives to influence the overarching master narrative that still views tattoos negatively. From this, it could be concluded that participants' tattoos are expressions of their agency.

5.2 Communion: How Others Influence My Story

Humans have evolved to be social animals, and belonging to a group benefits both the individual and the group (Carmen et al., 2012). Multiple studies have found that tattoos are used to express and represent this belonging to a larger group (Antoszewski et al., 2010; Carmen et al., 2012; Lombard & Bergh, 2014; Hill et al., 2016; Naudé et al., 2017; Orend & Gagné, 2009). Communion is the next component of narrative identity and is defined as the interpersonal connection to a larger group and the experience of friendship, love, intimacy, and belonging (McAdams, 2015). Although emerging adults aspire to become more independent, this does not mean they become isolated. During this phase, relationships may change, but a sense of belonging is still important for the emerging adult (Arnett, 2015). As mentioned in the previous section, narrative identity is personal and individualised; however it is not free from the influence of the master narrative of society or culture (Dunlop et al., 2020). This means that the stories told by an individual are, in part, shaped by those around them. For the emerging adult, it is also important to feel as if they belong to a larger group while exploring their identity (Arnett, 2015).

The themes of *Affiliation: Belonging to a family* and *Reminiscence: Remembering events that moulded the narrative* consider the impact of others on the tattoo narratives of the participants. Most participants told narratives that centred on family members or entire family units and described how the nuclear events shared with these individuals shaped the participant's own identity. Peaches struggled to find her place in a broken family after her parent's divorce, while Reese found acceptance upon returning to his family after being isolated because of discipline issues. Zama had to learn how to continue living without her two siblings who passed away, and Audrey was forced into independence when her parents moved to the UK. During these difficult times, Audrey remembered her grandfather as always being understanding and caring. She also remembered the last conversation she had with her grandfather before he passed away. Frank remembered the different times spent with family building the bond between them. One of Frank's most important nuclear events was a trip to Italy with his grandfather and brother. Kahlo strives to live her life for her family and hopes that her tattoo will become a tradition in subsequent family generations. Lennon is sure that her family bond is stronger than any difficulty that they may face. Moreover, her music symbol tattoo is a reminder of her Grade 11 music teacher who helped her to grow as a musician. This aligns with the findings of Forbes (2001) who reported commitment to a group to be a prominent reason for the participants' tattoos, while belonging and love of family were reasons for tattoos in the study of Kalanj-Mizzi et al. (2019) on heavily tattooed individuals. Connection to family was a main theme in the study of Alter-Muri (2020). According to Schnyders and Lane (2018), the development of close relationships with others (both old and new) is one of the main developmental tasks of an emerging adult. Furthermore, the quality of relationships with peers and family has also been linked to better adjustment and well-being for emerging adults.

Memorial tattoos commemorating specific family members seem to be the most popular type of tattoo in several studies (Alcina, 2009; Alter-Muri, 2020; Dimitropoulos et al., 2016; McNiven, 2016). Memorial tattoos serve a dual purpose because they not only honour the individual but also remind the wearer of the impact that the person had on their narrative (Alcina, 2009). These memorial tattoos also help build communion as they present opportunities for empathic discussion and interaction with others (McNiven, 2016). Some participants from the current study told of the special people memorialised by their tattoos. Audrey's tattoos remind her of her grandfather and resemble the crucifix and anchor designs that he had tattooed on him. Blair is reminded of the stories her grandfather told her about the

sparrows as they sat on the grass. These stories helped nurture Blair's creative side and led to her pursuing a career as an artist. Multiple family members are memorialised on Frank's skin, from his grandparents and mother to his aunt and siblings. During the most difficult times for Reese, he felt that his little dog was the only family member that understood him. Therefore, his tattoo is designed around this loyal companion. Zama's tattoos are in remembrance of her siblings who passed away. More than half of the participants in the study of Alter-Muri (2020) reported having a memorial tattoo that was dedicated to someone close to them. The majority of the participants in the study by Alcina (2009) also reported having memorial tattoos. The participants in the recent study of Buckle and Corbin Dwyer (2021) regard their memorial tattoos as expressions of the bond and ongoing connection to the deceased loved one. The loved ones are integrated into everyday life when the participants look at or touch their tattoos. An interesting finding from the current study was that not all the memorial tattoos represented deceased family members. This could indicate that the emerging adults from this study wanted to commemorate the connection to special family members while these relatives were still alive.

In New Zealand, the *moko* tattoo is used to show connection to the wearer's family of origin. Every member of the family has the same design tattooed on their face to serve as a proud declaration of belonging (Bell, 1999). This is also the aim behind one of the more deviant tattoo subcultures in which members of a gang get the same tattoo to express permanent commitment to the group (Carmen et al., 2012; Nikora & Awekotuku, 2002). Two participants from the current study reported sharing a tattoo with their families. Kahlo and her sister got the same tattoo on the same day. A week later, both her parents got the same tattoo, confirming membership of their 'little gang' of four. Because of the inevitable separation of Lennon's tight-knit family once her sister leaves for university, the family got the same tattoo with every member's initials incorporated into the design. However, it would seem that these two cases are the exception rather than the rule since previous studies found that family members often react negatively to tattoos (Alter-Muri, 2020; Ball & Elsner, 2019). Furthermore, family's negative views on tattoos were a prominent reason for not getting a tattoo by non-tattooed participants in these studies.

One of the salient themes from this study, *Opposing viewpoints: Bridging the generational gap*, supports the claim that some family members react in a negative manner upon becoming aware of the tattoo. Participants told of the negative feedback they received

regarding their tattoos. In this study, most of the negative feedback that participants received was from family members. Peaches reported that her father did not approve of her tattoos, while Ally and Zama's mothers criticised their tattoos. Kai had to explain himself to his father and stepmother following their disappointment with his tattoo. For Audrey, Blair, Frank, and Lennon, it was their grandparents who disapproved of their tattoos. Other studies have also reported that a tattooed individual can expect to receive negative reactions from others (Bergh et al., 2017; Broussard & Harton, 2018; Naudé et al., 2017). Bergh et al. (2017) reported that most positive comments regarding a person's tattoo were from peers while negative comments were received from family. Almost half of the participants in the study conducted by Ball and Elsner (2019) reported a negative reaction from at least one parent.

From this section, it is clear how the emerging adult participants use their tattoos to express communion and connection to important people in their narratives. For some, their tattoos are reminders of difficult times connected to their families, while others remembered and commemorated specific family members and the good times they shared. Despite symbolising family connection, tattoos also instigated some conflict within families due to the individuals' different views on tattoos. This raises the question of agency versus communion, which is explored in the following section. In conclusion, it can be said that the emerging adults in this study use their tattoos to express the communion aspect of narrative identity.

5.3 Agency Versus Communion: The Search for a Balanced Story

In the previous two sections, it was shown how participants used tattoos to express their agency and own unique identities in addition to their communion and connection to their families. However, it was also clear that getting a tattoo (agency) caused conflict within the participants' families (communion). Are these two aspects of narrative identity in opposition to one another? Singer (2004) answers this question by stating that agency and communion could be at opposite ends of the same continuum. Furthermore, finding a balance between these two polarities is a crucial developmental task, not only for emerging adults but also in the construction of a narrative identity.

Positive identity exploration and development during emerging adulthood have been linked to parents who provide a good balance between support, freedom, and responsibility (Schnyder & Lane, 2018). The positive association between close parent relationships and

levels of agency supports the claim of Nunes et al. (2021) that the emerging adult's personal agency is shaped, in part, by interaction and connection to others. This is especially true for the relationship with parents. Lindell et al. (2017) found a positive association between close parent relationships during the emerging adulthood years and better adjustment to adulthood. Moreover, the parental relationship seems to improve during the emerging adulthood years compared with the previous adolescent phase (Arnett, 2015). Kai from the current study is a good example of this change in relationship with parents. He reported that his parents are treating him differently; they are allowing him to be his own person and are not as involved with his decisions as they were during his adolescent years. Reese also reported that his relationship with his parents drastically changed during his emerging adulthood years. During his adolescent years, it was a conflictual relationship to the extent that Reese was sent to boarding school. At present, Reese feels that his relationship with his parents is much closer.

According to Arnett (2015), in a national poll, 75% of polled emerging adults reported an improvement in their relationship with their parents, and 66% of parents agreed that the relationship had improved since their children's adolescent years. Schnyder and Lane (2018) propose that a reason for the change in the relationship with parents could be the decrease in strain on the relationship. This decrease stems from the emerging adult relying more and more on peers and romantic partners to meet interpersonal needs instead of parents.

According to Arnett (2015), the emerging adult's changing relationship with their parents is the foundation for the 'in between' feeling that is one of the defining features of emerging adulthood. Most participants from the current study reported this feeling of being in between. Peaches described her current experience of life as a transition period. For Kahlo, the prominent theme was moving away from adolescence and focusing on the adult life that is to come. Being in a transition phase in which the focus is shifting away from childhood and towards becoming an adult was the way Ally described her life at present. Zama is trying to find the balance between adolescence and adulthood and thus, she experiences this phase of life as if she is in the middle. According to Frank, emerging adulthood feels similar to being stuck in no man's land. Reese referred to emerging adulthood as being in limbo, a period of being in between a teenager and a fully fledged adult.

Schnyder and Lane (2018) found that the closeness of the parent relationship was positively associated with feeling in between, among other emerging adulthood dimensions. However, this finding was only significant for female participants. For the males in their

study, feeling in between was significantly linked with close peer relationships (Schnyder & Lane, 2018). It should be pointed out that Schnyder and Lane (2018) only recruited 18- to 20-year-old participants. This may indicate that the relationship between male emerging adults and their parents may start to change later than that of female emerging adults. However, in the current study, one female participant did not express this feeling of being in between. Audrey felt that the responsibilities she is facing are similar to that of an adult. She also reported not having a close relationship with her parents, who moved to the UK. Their emigration took away Audrey's chance to gain independence gradually.

In searching for the balance between agency and communion, it is important for the emerging adult to gain more independence and assume more responsibility gradually. This gradual transition prepares the emerging adult for the next life stage of adulthood (Arnett, 2000). When emerging adults are asked about the criteria for being an adult, the answers seem to include taking responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and being financially independent (Arnett, 2015). From the current study, it was clear that the gradual gaining of independence and responsibility was deemed an overall positive experience by participants, although it came with certain struggles. Peaches reported feeling overwhelmed by this new independence and being expected to be in control of her own life. Lennon, Ally, and Blair spoke about the financial aspect of independence and not wanting to rely completely on their parents for financial support anymore. Frank mentioned the increase in responsibility that accompanies the freedom he gained in this life stage. Reese said it best when he explained that he loves the newfound freedom but that "cutting the umbilical cord" is still a struggle.

Although it is a difficult experience, this struggle to become independent and separate from family could be advantageous to the emerging adult. Nunes et al. (2021) compared individuals who presented with high, moderate, and low levels of separation anxiety during emerging adulthood. Their study found that a moderate amount of separation anxiety during emerging adulthood leads to improved agency for the individual in adulthood. Thus, finding independence during emerging adulthood does not mean separation from others. Instead, the continued belonging to a larger group provides a secure base for identity exploration. Strong relationships with family allow emerging adults to reflect on the roles they play within the family, leading to a better understanding of the self (McAdams, 2013a). Thus, being connected to a family does not hamper but rather increases agency for emerging adults.

Tattoos can be seen as an expression of this search for balance between being a unique individual and still being connected to a family.

5.4 Meaning-Making: My Story is More than Just Memories

Similar to a tattoo that has a deeper meaning behind the visible image, narrative identity is not simply the sequential telling of the life story. The author self also needs to express the meaning derived from these life events and how they are connected to the self (McAdams, 2013a). This deeper meaning helps individuals to understand themselves by organising the past, present, and future into a coherent narrative (Dunlop et al., 2020). According to Dann and Callaghan (2019), the deeper meaning ascribed to tattoos serves numerous functions. The authors propose that personal meaning enables the tattoo to become a physical manifestation of a nuclear event, and it allows the wearer to create a narrative around the tattoo (Dann & Callaghan, 2019). By sharing this narrative with others, the individual shares parts of the self.

In the current study, Frank expressed this sentiment by saying that his tattoos create opportunities for him to share his identity with curious observers. Most of the participants agreed that their tattoos had deeper meaning and helped them share parts of who they are. Some tattoos may have more than one meaning attached to them, as occurred with Kai and Audrey. The dragon on Kai's arm represents the duality that Kai experiences within regarding finding a balance between good and bad. His tattoo also symbolises his strength and how he stood up for himself when he was perceived a nerd. There is significantly more to Kai, and it is this sentiment that constitutes the second meaning attached to his tattoo. Audrey also declared that her tattoos have a double meaning; they are both an expression of her personal worldview and a memorial to her grandfather. It would seem that the meaning attached to a tattoo is as important, if not more important, than the actual tattoo. Ally stated that the outside world would not fully understand what is expressed by her tattoos without the accompanying narrative. Reese also felt that the complex meaning embedded in his tattoo would only become clear as the observer learnt more about his life story.

The study by Dann and Callaghan (2019) emphasised this point and asserted that the observer would question the reason and significance of a tattoo if it was not accompanied by the personal narrative. People view Zama as a bad person in her community because they do not understand the meaning attached to her memorial tattoos. Dann and Callaghan (2019) also reported that non-tattooed individuals were more accepting of tattoos with deeper

personal meanings because they are seen as more than just decorations. This observation was also made in the current study. Participants reported that by sharing the personal meaning attached to the tattoo, the initial negative reactions of family members were transformed into different levels of acceptance.

These personal meanings are constructed by the author self through reflecting on nuclear events and other memories from the individual's life story. This process of reflection and meaning-making is aided by the use of autobiographical reasoning (McAdams, 2013a; McLean et al., 2021). According to Habermas et al. (2021), this autobiographical reasoning is critically important during times of change because it helps the individual to link and integrate new experiences with older memories. By creating these links to past events, the individual gains a better understanding of the new experiences. Hence, autobiographical reasoning appears to be essential for emerging adults as they face the age of instability and feeling in between (Arnett, 2015). Most participants from this study reported this instability and the feeling of being in between as the author self is attempting the first draft of their narrative identities. For Peaches and Kahlo, it is about shifting away from being a child and moving towards adulthood, focusing on what is to come. Ally feels as if she is transitioning between adolescence and adulthood, while Zama is looking for balance between the past and what is to come. Reese explained his current condition as being in an intermediate and uncertain state. Thus, for the actor- and agent-selves to understand the present and future better, they need the author self to make meaning of the past using the different components of autobiographical reasoning.

The first component of autobiographical reasoning is contamination. Here, the narrative starts out positive but is spoilt, leading to a negative outcome. The negative emotion and meaning attached to the outcome erase the preceding feelings of positivity (Dunlop et al., 2020; McAdams, 2015). In the current study, no examples of contamination were identified. One explanation could be that people are much less likely to get a tattoo that reminds them of a nuclear event that has a negative meaning attached to it. Another possible explanation could be the life stage in which the participants from this study find themselves. According to Arnett (2015), emerging adulthood is an age of possibility during which the emerging adult displays an overall positive and hopeful view of the world together with the belief that their lives will be better than those of their parents. Thus, participants might look at their narratives through a more optimistic and positive lens, putting negative outcomes into the background

for now. Participants in this study were found to conform to the above assertion from Arnett (2015) since their anticipated future narratives were positive and hopeful. They told of becoming successful professionals and of starting their own families. They felt that the hard work they are doing now would pay off in the future. This hypothesis is supported by Dunlop et al. (2020) who reported that participants with a positive or redemptive mindset told more redemptive narratives and that these constructs had a positive relationship to life satisfaction. In other words, an emerging adult with an overall positive outlook will focus more on memories with positive outcomes or redemption narratives.

Redemption narratives are the opposite of contamination narratives and are the second component of autobiographical reasoning. Here, a narrative about a negative nuclear event or memory progresses into a positive outcome. The initial negative feelings are overridden by the positive meaning attached to the memory of the event (Dunlop et al., 2020; McAdams, 2015). The theme *Perseverance: Surviving the difficult times* from this study interlocks with redemption narratives. Tattoos were used to remember and express the difficult times that participants overcame and the healing and growth that occurred after the negative nuclear event. Peaches was devastated by her parents' divorce, and her perception of love and family was crushed. She believes her resilience helped her to overcome this situation, and by redefining the meaning of these constructs, she can once again believe in faith, hope, and love. Audrey's parents moved to another country, leaving her feeling alone and abandoned without any social support. But through her struggles, she learnt to be an independent person. Ally told of a negative time in her life when she questioned her faith. She overcame this feeling of being lost through her exploration of different views and feels that her faith is now stronger than ever. She also got a tattoo that reminds her of how blessed she is considering all the issues she had to deal with during her younger years.

Blair's resilience was tested during a year in which she felt everything went wrong. She continued working hard, and today she is more determined than ever to become a successful artist. She expressed the sentiment of redemption best when she said that you cannot prevent winter but with perseverance, there will be positive outcomes. During his adolescent years, Reese struggled with discipline issues that isolated him from his family. He found the sport of boxing, and from all the work and effort expended in the boxing ring, he gained a new sense of discipline. Today, he feels that his greatest strength was found in reflecting on the past and understanding these negative nuclear events. By understanding and

making sense of these times, Reese could alter his life path and reconnect with his family. Frank's motto, 'life is always beautiful', originated from one of the most difficult times in his life in which a long-term relationship ended. Lennon's family experienced some difficult times but ultimately, they learnt that the bond between them was stronger than any challenge they would encounter. Kai's family situation forced him to grow up fast, and he feels that this helped him during high school when his peers referred to him as a nerd. These hard times also strengthened the bond between him and his mother. Carrere and Peake (2020) reported that some of their participants had hardship tattoos. These tattoos not only reminded the participants of the difficult times but also served as motivation to continue moving forward (Carrere & Peake, 2020). The tattoos are symbolic of the participants' strength and perseverance.

According to Dann and Callaghan (2019), narratives surrounding mental health are a specific type of redemption narrative. Although some participants spoke about mental health struggles during their difficult times, two participants had tattoos that specifically symbolised their mental health struggles. During her adolescent years, Ally found herself in a dark place. Instead of ending her story, she fought back and today, she is passionate about helping others who are struggling with mental health issues. Zama did not have one but two tragic nuclear events in her narrative, the passing of both her siblings a few years apart. Overcoming the grief and depression that followed these events showed her the importance of self-care and taking time for herself. Both these participants decided to get a semicolon tattoo to represent not only their struggle with mental health issues but also their overcoming of them. Project Semicolon uses this symbol for suicide prevention (Alter-Muri, 2020), and this small tattoo connects thousands of individuals to a community that aims to tell a redemptive narrative about mental health. This implies that individuals take the redemption stories from others and internalise them, and this assists them in the creation of their own redemption narratives.

Dunlop et al. (2020) found that redemption narratives were positively correlated with life satisfaction. Other studies have linked redemption narratives with higher scores on measures for generativity, well-being, and positive health behaviours (Perlin & Fivush, 2021). The tattoo is not only a representation of the wearer's strength regarding mental health but also becomes a form of self-care that aids in the therapeutic process (Dann & Callaghan, 2019). Furthermore, it was found that the tattoo provides an opportunity to discuss mental health with others (Dann & Callaghan, 2019). This self-care view on tattoos contrasts with

the view of Kierstein and Kjelskau (2015) who reported that tattoos are a form of controlled self-harm. Hence, healing occurs through the pain that is inflicted on the self when getting the tattoo. Although the pain that is experienced when getting the tattoo may play a part in aiding the healing, it appears in the current study that the redemption narrative attached to the tattoo is more important to the participants. By sharing their narratives, they hope to inspire others vicariously to overcome their own mental health issues.

When an individual learns a lesson from another person's story, it is referred to as a vicarious narrative, and this is regarded as an important aspect of redemption narratives (Dunlop et al., 2020). Thomsen and Pillemer (2017) state that the emerging adults in their study could readily recall nuclear events or other important memories from their parents' life stories even though the emerging adults were not part of the event. In the current study, a few participants had vicarious narratives that influenced them and their own narrative identity. Audrey told of her grandfather who had to overcome multiple obstacles as he worked his way up from a dishwasher to a main chef. Audrey feels that she learnt to be the resilient and independent individual that she is today partly through her grandfather's story. Her grandfather's narrative is integrated into the meaning she ascribes to her tattoos. They are constant reminders not only of his struggles but also of his redemption. Kahlo's vicarious narrative revolves around her family moving from Cuba to South Africa when she was still very young, too young to remember these events. However, through the stories told by her parents, she understood the challenges that they faced. She learnt that family is the most important aspect in life, and this sentiment was expressed in her tattoo. Frank spoke about the courage and strength that his grandmother showed in her fight against cancer. Similar to the other two participants, this vicarious narrative had such an enormous impact on Frank that he got a tattoo in order to make the story permanent. Reese saw a strength and resilience in his little dog that he wished he could have. He felt that his little companion inspired him to be tenacious and to persevere.

Syed and Azmitia (2010) report that vicarious narratives are as important for identity development as the individual's personal life story. Lessons learnt from the vicarious narrative are incorporated into the way that individuals understand and interpret their own life story (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). Panattoni and Thomsen (2018) and Thomsen and Pillemer (2017) found significant similarity between participants' personal narratives and the vicarious narratives they told of others regarding agency, communion, and redemption. This

was also demonstrated in the current study with Audrey describing her resilience in facing life with no social support. This is very similar to her grandfather's story of having no one to rely on while working hard to better his life. Kahlo's parents gave up everything and moved to South Africa for the benefit of their young family. Kahlo's narrative revolves around making every decision with the family's best interest in mind.

Reflecting on the arguments above, it was revealed that the deeper personal meaning attached to a tattoo is as important as the tattoo itself. Participants felt that sharing this meaning with others was equivalent to sharing a part of themselves. The importance of autobiographical reasoning was discussed, especially for the author self of the emerging adult who is facing constant changes during this phase of instability. Contamination and redemption are two aspects of biographical reasoning, and it was shown how tattoos were used not only to remember the hardships but also to express the redemption narrative that followed. Lastly, it was shown that vicarious narratives influenced how individuals tell their own story and that some tattoos are an expression of these vicarious narratives. Thus, tattoos are used to aid in the meaning-making process by serving as reminders of nuclear events and expressing the deeper redemption narratives linked to these events.

5.5 Conclusion: The Moral of the Story

The aim of this chapter was to present the findings from this study and to discuss them in conjunction with existing literature. This was done by dividing narrative identity into smaller components such as agency, communion, and meaning-making in order to ease the integration of the themes from the current study.

The first section of this chapter discussed agency. It was shown that participants from this study had some sense of agency and that tattoos played a part in strengthening this feeling. Tattoos were used to express the participants' unique self and their personal worldviews to others. However, the participants had control over when they would share their tattoos and with whom. Tattoos also assisted some participants in gaining agency over others as they altered the other person's negative views on tattoos. From this section, it was concluded that the emerging adults from this study used tattoos to express agency and self-focus.

In the second section of this chapter, communion was discussed. It was shown that narrative identity is in part, shaped by those with whom we interact. Family is important for

the identity exploration of emerging adults. Most of the narratives told by the participants illustrated family members as important. This section showed how tattoos not only signified a connection to a family unit but also commemorated specific family members. Despite this, it was found that most family members reacted negatively to the participants' tattoos, causing some conflict. By including family in their tattoos, participants expressed their sense of communion.

In the third section, the conflict between being a unique individual and conforming to a group was explored. It was found that finding a balance between these constructs was important but not easy. However, this feeling of being in between that was experienced by the emerging adult participants is necessary since it ultimately leads to more agency. Tattoos helped in expressing the search for balance and its ultimate discovery.

The final section of this chapter reported on meaning-making and how narrative identity is more than merely a chronological story of the person's life. All the participants in the current study agreed that their tattoos had deeper personal meanings attached to them. Thus, the tattoo not only commemorates the nuclear event but also expresses the deeper personal meaning that was created by the wearer. Participants used biographical reasoning to explore negative nuclear events and transform them into redemption stories. They also told of the vicarious narratives that influenced their own life story. From this section, it is concluded that tattoos were used to express the meaning-making process that arises during emerging adulthood.

When all of the above is considered, it is clear that tattoos are not merely a decorative image on the skin for the emerging adults of this study. Tattoos help the emerging adult to embrace the newfound freedom and independence during the age of self-focus. Tattoos are a permanent declaration of belonging to a family during the phase of instability. From the actor self who is controlling the visibility to the agent self who is guiding the placement to the author self who is giving deeper meaning, every aspect of the tattoo contributes to the expression of the emerging adult's narrative identity.

Chapter 6 - Key Findings, Limitations, and Recommendations

In this, the final chapter, the aim is to emphasise the key findings and to conclude the study by combining all the arguments in an attempt to highlight how tattoos were used to express the narrative identity of the emerging adult participants. The unique findings from this study are presented together with the contributions they might make to the respective fields of study. In an attempt to improve the trustworthiness of the study, the limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research in the fields of tattoos, emerging adulthood, and narrative identity are made.

6.1 Summary of Most Significant Findings

The aim of this section is to present an overview of the most significant findings of the study. In this qualitative study, data were collected with reflective writing exercises and semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed by means of thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). Firstly, each participant's data were presented individually to highlight their unique narratives and experiences. Secondly, a cross-section analysis was performed to identify the salient themes from the unique individual narratives. Five salient themes were generated: 1) *Affiliation: Belonging to a family*; 2) *Reminiscence: Remembering events that moulded the narrative*; 3) *Perseverance: Surviving the difficult times*; 4) *Opposing viewpoints: Bridging the generational gap*; and 5) *Identity: Exploring and expressing my unique self*. These themes were discussed in conjunction with existing literature on tattoos, narrative identity, and emerging adulthood. In an attempt to ease the integration of the results with literature, the components of narrative identity proposed by McAdams and McLean (2013) were used as a framework for the discussion. These components are 1) agency, 2) communion, and 3) meaning-making. This study provided significant insight into narrative identity development among emerging adults with the aid of tattoos.

The current study showed that participants used tattoos as an expression of agency by deciding where to place the tattoo and when to share it with other individuals. Furthermore, tattoos provided agency for most participants, giving them the ability to influence people close to them to change their negative views on tattoos. This aligns with the view of Leader (2016) that tattoos are similar to other art forms where the onlooker can be moved from shallow presumptions to in-depth appreciation. The findings of this study would suggest that this movement from presumption to appreciation is facilitated by the meaning attached to the

tattoo. This finding not only supports the claim that alternative narratives can change the master narrative over time (McLean & Syed, 2016) but also extends this understanding by showing the importance of the meaning-making process regarding this change. Furthermore, this study also showed how the influence of the alternative narrative over the master narrative could be directed through the vicarious narrative.

Participants incorporated the vicarious narratives of the people close to them into their own life stories. This corresponds with other studies (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017) that found vicarious narratives to be important for the development of a narrative identity. The current study provides a unique perspective on vicarious narratives, showing that they are not always passed down from older to younger generations. By sharing their narratives with older members of their families, participants influenced these individuals to incorporate the participants' views of tattoos into their own narratives. Furthermore, participants used tattoos to express their affiliation with a larger group and their intimacy with specific individuals. This finding corresponds with multiple other studies that found communion to be an important reason behind participants' tattoos (Alcina, 2009; Alter-Muri, 2020; Antoszewski et al., 2010; Carmen et al., 2012; Dimitropoulos et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2016; Lombard & Bergh, 2014; McNiven, 2016; Naudé et al., 2017; Orend & Gagné, 2009). Being connected to a larger group such as a family was a prominent theme in most of the participants' tattoo narratives, with some participants' narratives including specific family members. These findings support McAdams' (2015) conceptualisation of communion as including both affiliation and intimacy. The findings from this study regarding communion strengthened the claim by Arnett (2015) who stated that belonging to a larger group is important for identity exploration during emerging adulthood.

Another significant finding of this study was that tattoos were not only symbolic of nuclear events but also representative of the deeper meaning attached to these events. Narrative identity theory proposes that narrative identity is not merely the retelling of events but the meaning that was derived from these events (McAdams, 2013a). This study contributes to the theory by showing a significant similarity between narrative identity development and tattoo narratives regarding meaning-making and biographical reasoning. Hence, the findings of this study show the importance of continued research on tattoos for the expansion of the narrative identity theory. The study also shows the possibility that narrative

identity development may be promoted when there is something physical such as a tattoo to which meaning can be attached.

This study supports and strengthens McAdams' (2013b) model of the self in narrative identity theory. The current study showed that the actor, agent, and author self were expressed through tattoos. The actor self used tattoos in the performance of its different social roles and used impression management to determine when to display the tattoos. This corresponds with the findings of Doss and Hubbard (2009) that the actor self will use impression management when performing its social roles. In the current study, the agent self used tattoos to express values and goals, and it was shown that most participants have personalised their worldviews, which aligns with McAdams (2015). Finally, the author self used tattoos to express nuclear events and the meaning-making narratives linked to these events. The three layers of the self and the specific use of the tattoo then combined to create the tattoo narrative. This not only shows that these layers are indeed interconnected but also that studying all three layers when doing research on narrative identity is important.

The findings showed that the emerging adults from this study were in the process of creating a narrative identity. This supports the claim by McAdams (2013a) that narrative identity exploration is a major developmental challenge for emerging adults. One aspect that influences both identity development and the experience of the emerging adulthood phase is the socio-cultural context in which individuals find themselves (Naudé & Piotrowski, 2022). Multiple studies (Naudé & Piotrowski, 2022; van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020; van Lill & Bakker, 2020) have pointed to the importance of emerging adulthood research within South Africa because of its unique social-cultural context. Therefore, this study adds a unique perspective on the narrative identity development of a group of South African emerging adults. By presenting the applicability of the pillars of emerging adulthood within the South African context, this study contributes evidence that supports and extends the predominant view of 'one stage, multiple pathways' (Arnett, 2016, p. 232) within emerging adulthood theory.

Participants from this study felt that this was a time to focus on themselves in order to build their future. Some literature proposes that self-focus should be viewed in a negative light (Pratt & Matsuba, 2018). The findings of this study contradict this notion; it was found that self-focus is seen as an important preparation for adulthood, which aligns with the findings of Arnett (2014). Furthermore, tattoos expressed the in between feeling while

searching for the balance between agency and communion. Being both an individual and belonging to a group is important for the emerging adult; however finding the balance is a difficult task. Tattoos created a safe base for exploration of identity by serving as a reminder of their communion. This is in agreement with Singer's (2004) view that agency and communion are not in conflict but are on the same continuum, and that finding a balance is the important aspect. Participants had different experiences regarding their current life stage, with some enjoying the exploration and others finding the transition into adulthood more difficult. However, most participants agreed that they were in a transition phase, moving from adolescence to adulthood. Words such as no man's land and limbo were used to describe where participants found themselves. The majority of participants were optimistic about their futures, including future vocational and family aspects.

There was a strong theme of resilience, with participants stating that they had overcome and moved past the bad chapters in their life stories. Most participants told redemption narratives in which negative nuclear events were turned into positive narratives. No contamination narratives were identified in this study in which positive nuclear events led to negative narratives. This points to an overarching positivity among the participants of this study. Lastly, participants from the study were shown to be exploring and developing their unique identity and personalising their worldview. From the above, it is clear that the pillars of self-focus, in between, possibility, and identity exploration (Arnett, 2000, 2014) apply to this group of South African emerging adults.

When considering all of these significant findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the emerging adults from this study used tattoos as an expression of their narrative identity. Moreover, the study showed how the same tattoo with the same narrative could express multiple different aspects of narrative identity. Furthermore, the findings of this study showed that Arnett's pillars of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) were applicable to a sample of South African emerging adults. This study also showed the similarities between narrative identity theory and emerging adulthood theory.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Despite the insightful findings of this study, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. The aim of this qualitative study was not to generalise the findings to the larger emerging adult population. With the sampling methods employed in

this study, the objective was not to obtain a representative sample. However, according to various authors, in an attempt to improve the transferability of the study, the researcher should report on all aspects of the research, including the limitations (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Morrow, 2005). Therefore, it is important to emphasise that this study and its findings represent a snapshot of the experiences of a specific group of emerging adults. The sample consisted of predominantly white individuals, with no representation of the black male population. Another demographic limitation was religious orientation. Nine of the ten participants were religious and all of them identified as Christian. Finally, it should be noted that all the participants were university students. Emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2016a) emphasises the multiple paths that are taken by emerging adults and asserts that non-university-attending emerging adults may have different experiences. Thus, to assist the reader in determining the transferability of the findings of this study, all the above-mentioned limitations should be taken into account.

The next important component that might have imposed some limitations on the results of the study is the researcher. With thematic analysis, the themes and all that is brought to the research process cannot be seen as objectively but rather as subjectively produced by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, researchers should provide information on themselves, including their own limitations (Morrow, 2005). The limited experience of the researcher must be highlighted as a possible limitation to the study. This was the first qualitative study carried out by the researcher, having previously conducted only one quantitative study. The researcher also had limited experience in qualitative data-gathering techniques such as semi-structured interviews. A more experienced interviewer might have asked questions in a different way, and this might have led to more in-depth and richer data. All attempts were made to minimise the effect of this limitation on the study. The researcher was supervised by an experienced researcher throughout the entire research process. In addition, researcher reflexivity was adhered to as recommended by Berger (2015) and Jootun et al. (2009).

Language might have been a limiting factor for this study. According to Carrere and Peake (2020), language plays a vital role in the construction and expression of an individual's identity. The construction of a second-language identity and the influence on identity of having to learn a second language is a new area of focus for research. The indication is a possible difference between an individual's first- and second-language identity (Nematzadeh

& Haddad Narafshan, 2020). Data gathering was conducted in English and, therefore, some of the participants were unable to express themselves in their first language. This might have influenced them when telling their very personal narratives and a richer description might have been obtained had they expressed this narrative in their first language. It is important to mention that the University of the Free State is an English-medium institution and that all students must have a reasonable understanding of the English language.

The final factor that may have limited the findings of this study is the data collection. The researcher attempted to increase credibility through using different data collection techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), namely reflective writing and semi-structured interviews. However, not all the participants returned their reflective writing exercise, meaning that most of the findings were based on the single, semi-structured interviews. Using a single interview may have also limited the amount of data that were obtained by denying participants the opportunity to reflect on their tattoo narratives. Reflexivity and meaning-making are processes that allow for the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of knowledge over time (Gelmez & Bagli, 2018; Jasper, 2005). If follow-up interviews were implemented, the participants might have been able to perform the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of their narratives a few more times, leading to more detailed and richer data.

Despite these limitations, it is argued that the findings from this study add valuable knowledge to the fields of emerging adulthood and narrative identity in the South African context.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Various recommendations for future research can be made regarding emerging adulthood, narrative identity, and tattoos. Some of the recommendations are related to the limitations of the current study while some recommendations are aimed at new directions for future research.

Firstly, it is recommended that this study is replicated in different contexts with diverse participants. By comparing the results of these studies, important information could be gained on the similarities and differences in narrative identity development among emerging adults in different cultural contexts. Both emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014) and

narrative identity development (McLean et al., 2018) are heavily influenced by cultural context.

The second recommendation for future research focuses on the methods used for collecting data. Implementing follow-up interviews could provide more data because the participants would have time to reflect on their narratives. Moreover, the use of other data gathering techniques would produce other unique data. By using focus groups, the co-construction of tattoo narratives and narrative identity could be explored. According to Leader (2016), we are living in an age in which identity is increasingly constructed in the digital world. It is also undeniable that the visual aspect of the tattoo is lost when only written or spoken data is used. Thus, the recommendation is made for the use of digital storytelling as a data gathering technique. This would allow for the integration of the digital identity and the visual data inherent in the tattoo into the narrative.

The third recommendation is a longitudinal research design for future research. Emerging adulthood is a life stage that spans 11 years (Arnett, 2014) and during this time, identity is explored. This means that an individual's views and experiences may be slightly or even completely different at the end of the stage from what it was at the beginning. Narrative identity development is also a continuous evolving process of constructing and reconstructing the life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Collecting data at different points during emerging adulthood would provide rich data on how individuals progress through this stage and how their narrative identity changes as exploration progresses. Another interesting phenomenon to investigate with a longitudinal study is the changes that may occur in the tattoo narratives and the meanings ascribed to the tattoos over time.

An interesting phenomenon that occurred not once but twice in the current study was that of an entire family unit having the exact same tattoo. This was taken to represent a sense of belonging. However, each individual within that family unit will have a unique life story and will ascribe a slightly different narrative to their tattoo. Comparing these unique tattoo narratives that are linked to the exact same tattoo may provide insight into the development of narrative identity within family units. The influence of vicarious narratives within families is seen as important in the development of a narrative identity (Breen et al., 2017). In the current study, there was some evidence that for one family at least, the children's tattoo narratives had an impact on the parents' life stories. The popular semicolon tattoo shared by multiple individuals could serve as a good base for such a study.

As mentioned throughout this study, the socio-cultural context is an important aspect for emerging adults and their identity development. The master narrative is the story of the social-cultural context while alternative narratives rebel against these stories. Master and alternative narratives, and their interactions, are important constructs within narrative identity theory (McLean & Syed, 2016). Comparing the narrative identity development in individuals who adhere to the master narrative with that of individuals who tell alternative narratives would be an interesting study. Furthermore, it is proposed that alternative narratives can influence and change master narratives over time. A possible pathway for this change that was uncovered in the current study was that participants altered the vicarious narratives of the people close to them by changing their views on tattoos. Hence, another recommendation for future research arising from this study is the exploration of how individuals use their alternative tattoo narratives to influence and counter the overarching master narrative.

The final recommendation for future research focuses on the balance between agency and communion. Finding this balance is important for emerging adults as they gradually move from being family orientated to self-focused (Arnett, 2000). As both these aspects are deemed crucial for narrative identity development (McAdams & McLean, 2013), exploring how individuals set about finding the balance would provide important knowledge within the fields of narrative identity and emerging adulthood theory. This is an aspect that seems to be overlooked in literature, with few studies focusing on the balance yet multiple studies reporting on the importance of agency and communion.

6.4 Conclusion to the Study

The aim of this final chapter was to provide a conclusion to the study by presenting an overview of the most significant findings together with the limitations and recommendations for future research. This study was aimed at exploring and describing emerging adults' expression of narrative identity through the use of tattoos. The insight and findings from this study contribute to the existing literature on emerging adults, narrative identity, and tattoos.

Tattoos are becoming more popular among emerging adults. However, for the participants in this study, tattoos are not simply the result of an impulsive decision that is made as a fashion statement or an act of rebellion. In fact, the participant's tattoos were well-thought-out symbols of events and people who had shaped their life stories. Tattoos aid the three parts of the self that make up an individual. The actor self uses the tattoo as an aid

for impression management while performing its different social roles. The personalised worldview of values, beliefs, and goals for the future expressed by the tattoos helps the agent self to plan the road ahead, while the author self uses tattoos as bookmarks of nuclear events and symbols of the meanings made from reflecting on these events. Tattoos also provide emerging adults with a sense of agency and a way to express their uniqueness during this stage of self-focus. Additionally, it was shown that tattoos are a permanent declaration of belonging in the age of exploration and instability. In the midst of feeling in between, tattoos serve as roadmaps of where the individuals come from and where they are going. There are many different reasons for getting a tattoo, but seldom will the tattoo and its accompanying narrative fail to reveal some aspects of the wearer's identity. Therefore, research on tattoos should continue to increase because it can provide useful insight into this complex construct, namely the emerging adult's identity development.

In the first chapter of this study, it was suggested that all research on tattoos attempts to answer the following fundamental questions: What can be so important to an individual that they will endure the pain and risks that come with getting a tattoo? What can be so important that a representation of it should be permanently placed under the skin? From the results in this study, this complex question seems to have a simple answer. The self. What can be more important to an individual than the people and the experiences that make them who they are?

“Tattoos are about owning our identity in the world. They’re about proclaiming who we are without having to say a single word. People with tattoos have an unbreakable sense of their authentic selves.”

Anonymous

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form



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March / April / May 2018

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant

We would like to invite you to take part in this research study: *“Tattoos as an expression of the narrative identity of emerging adults”* which forms part of the bigger research project *“Being born free”: The third decade of life for a country and its emerging adults.* Your participation will entail doing a reflective writing exercise and taking part in an individual interview of approximately one hour.

The reason we are doing this study is to contribute to existing knowledge regarding identity development amongst emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29 in South Africa. We want to gain a better understanding of how individuals express their narrative identities (life stories) through the use of tattoos. We are sure you will benefit from this study as it may be insightful to reflect on your tattoos and their meaning.

As researchers we do not foresee any risks associated with participating in this study. We will ensure that all information remains confidential and anonymous. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw your participation at any point with no further repercussions. Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, we will refer you to a qualified expert to assist you. Participants will be referred to either the Adult practice of the Applied Masters program (051 4012890) or Student Counselling and Development Centre of the University of the Free State (051 401 2853) (these are free services).

Thank you for your time and effort.

Yours sincerely,

Francois Naude – Researcher

Prof Luzelle Naudé - Supervisor



Please complete this page.

Research Project: *“Being born free”: The third decade of life for a country and its emerging adults*

Research Study: *“Tattoos as an expression of the narrative identity of emerging adults”*

Principal Researcher: Francois Naude

Supervisor: Prof Luzelle Naudé

Name and Surname: _____

Email: _____
(Just in case a follow up interview is required)

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations he/she has indicated in the above letter.

Signature

Date



Appendix B: Reflective Writing Exercise



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March / April / May 2018

REFLECTIVE WRITING EXERCISE

Dear Participant

This will be phase one for data collection for the study: Tattoos as an expression of narrative identity amongst emerging adults. For this phase you are requested to choose one tattoo that you feel have a lot or the most meaning to you personally. Think about the story it tells and how this story shaped your identity. During this self-reflection I want you to write down everything about this tattoo, its story, how looking back made you feel and did thinking about the story maybe make you see yourself in a different way? I also want you to include a visual representation of your tattoo. This can be a picture or a drawing. This reflection can be done over a period of time and does not have to be done in one sitting.

Please return the reflection to me when you are done via email.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Yours sincerely,

Francois Naude – Researcher

Prof Luzelle Naudé - Supervisor



Appendix C: Interview Schedule
Tattoos as an expression of the narrative identity of emerging adults

Individual interview questions

At the onset of the interview the researcher will:

- Establish rapport with participants.
- Explain the purpose of the research.
- Discuss the ethical issues as stipulated in the informed consent form and sign the form.
- Complete the biographic section of the survey.
- Explain to the participant that narrative identity is about constructing a life story and that they should use the lens of their life story to look at and answer the questions.
- Explain that there are no right or wrong answers and that the participant can take some time to think about the question before answering.

Question 1: Identity

- What does identity mean to you?
- Do you feel that tattoos are part of your identity?
- If someone should look at you and your tattoos at first glance, what is the message you want to convey to them through your tattoos.

Question 2: Emerging Adulthood

- What do you understand under the term “emerging adulthood”?
- How do you experience the stage of life you are currently in?
- Do you feel that tattoos are becoming more prominent under emerging adults?

Question 3: Tattoos

- When did you get your first tattoo?
- Can you tell me about it and the story behind it?
 - How long did it take you to finally decide that you were going to get a tattoo?
 - How did you decide on what to get?
 - Tell me about the meaning of your first tattoo.
 - How did people close to you react about your first tattoo?
- How long does it normally take you to decide on a design?
 - Do you look at the traditional meaning behind a design or do you create your own meaning?
 - How do you choose an artist to do the tattoo?

- Do you feel that some, or all, of your tattoos express parts of your life story?
 - Tell me about your other tattoos and the stories they tell.
 - Do you have a favourite tattoo? Tell me about the meaning behind it.
 - How does that meaning connect to your life story?
- Do you feel tattoos interfere with other parts of your identity like work identity or religious identity?
 - Do you think your tattoos did or will intervere with you finding a job?
 - How do others in your religious group view your tattoos?
 - How does their views on tattoos impact on your religious identity?

Participants will be thanked for their contributions.

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance



Faculty of the Humanities

04-May-2017

Dear **Prof Naude**

Ethics Clearance: **Emerging adults in a transitional society**

Principal Investigator: **Prof Luzelle Naude**

Department: **Psychology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2017/0230**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Prof. Robert Peacock
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of the Humanities



Appendix E: Example of Reflective Journal

Reflections after the interview with some participant

Peaches – 20 March 2018

I was somewhat nervous before the interview as this would be my first. I always use humour to try and put myself at ease and it seemed to work for Peaches as well. She was friendly and did not seem to be nervous although she said that she was. The interview was over in a flash, and I was thinking at the end that this was way too short. In my mind the interview should last about an hour and not 20 minutes. My initial feeling was that I was too rigid with my questions. I also felt like there was not really any useful data in the interview. Luckily, my supervisor assured me that there will be data to analyse and that these feelings of doubt are normal. Listening back to the recording was different from the few previous focus groups that I facilitated as a research assistant. One of the explanations for this difference might be the fact that this was my data, I had to make sense of this recording. My accent while speaking English irritated me and I promised myself to never say “Ok” at the start of a sentence again. On reflecting on this first interview, I felt that Peaches was the perfect first participant for me. Her friendly and calm way helped me to relax. There were also some negative events attached to the tattoo narrative that made me aware that this will probably be the case for my other interviews as well.

Kahlo – 04 May 2018

A few weeks have passed since my first interview. I had time to listen to the interview and to realise that there are some useful data in there. Thus, I was more optimistic about this interview than I would have been if this was a few days after the first interview. I was attending a research workshop on the day of this interview and had to excuse myself as this was the only time the participant was available for the interview. Kahlo was relaxed and friendly. After the interview I again felt that it was too short and that there was no data to use. This might have been because the meaning of the tattoo was quite straight forward, or so it seemed to me at the time. I think in my mind I thought that there had to be a negative event of some sort connected to the tattoo for it to be valuable. Again, on listening to the recording I realised that there was good data in the interview. I also realised I still said Ok a lot.

Audrey – 11 May 2018

I felt a lot more relaxed before this interview as Audrey was someone I knew. I was wondering before the interview if the fact that we knew each other might influence what she would feel comfortable telling me. Looking back, I do not think this played a role at all. Unlike Peaches, who talked about the negative events in her narrative without it affecting her, Audrey was visibly upset by talking about some of the events in her narrative. This caught me off guard and I felt some panic. I feel like I did a good job of not showing my distress to her. At the end of the interview, I asked a question about her grandfather, and she started crying. After she got a tissue, she said I should repeat the question, but I jumped to another question and then wrapped up the interview. I spent some time afterwards thinking if I should have asked the question again. Would I have gotten some rich data from that answer? My conclusion was that no data would have been worth distressing her for longer by pushing her to answer.

Zama – 16 May 2018

If all my other interviews felt too short, this one felt like it took an eternity. The first thing that caught me off guard was that she answered no when asked if her tattoos express some part of her identity. Luckily, this was my sixth interview and I have learned that you should just continue. When I heard the stories behind her tattoos it became apparent why she answered no to that question. Having had the experience with Audrey, I tried to not shy away as much from asking the questions. However, I did still feel really bad for making her talk about these events.

Data Analysis

I wanted to transcribe all my interviews myself as this is part of the first step of data analysis. However, it was taking too long and I decided to ask a research assistant for help. Thus, I transcribed the first five interviews, and the research assistant transcribed the second five. This decision was made easier because I conducted all the interviews myself. Therefore, I had some familiarity with the content of the interviews. I also made sure to read through the transcriptions while listening to the audio to ensure the accuracy.

At the beginning of the analysis process, I again felt like I did not get nearly enough data. Again, the reassurance from my supervisor helped me to continue the process despite this fear. At the start my biggest struggle was just the issue of how to functionally do the

coding. I would print out the transcripts and start coding by hand. Then I decided that it will be faster with some sort of program, and I searched for free software. This also did not help, and I abandoned the software route. Looking back this switching of methods might have been stalling tactics due to me feeling unsure about the process.

I felt that it was important to tell each participant's narrative as a stand-alone case first. They shared some of their best and worse moments with me. Using this data for only cross-sectional analysis would almost feel disrespectful. Thus, the decision was made to have two analysis processes, one on individual narratives and the other on cross-case themes.

After going through the process a few times, I managed to construct four salient themes from the cross-case analysis. My supervisor said that she feels there is another theme that I am not seeing. This was a little frustrating period as I could not see this theme she was seeing. Even though I was frustrated, my supervisor did not give me the answer. She guided me until I could build the last theme. I feel this frustration and struggle is important especially for novice researchers. Once you resolve the thing that is frustrating you it really is empowering. You really feel like you are the researcher and not just typing information your supervisor feeds you. This also showed me how important it was to have another person, like my supervisor, analysing the data. I would have missed valuable data if I was the only person grappling with the data. Only once I started writing up my results did I feel like I have worthy findings.

General Reflections

The process was a stop start process where there would be periods of good progress and then periods where nothing would happen. Sometimes the stop periods were caused by outside forces and other times I just had to step away as I was stuck. I don't feel this is necessarily a negative thing. The breaks in between the productive periods provided time to think and often times an a-ha moment would just appear and inspire me to return to the research. Sometimes these a-ha moments frustrated me as it meant starting a chapter over or making significant changes. However, these changes always led to a better end product. Again, I am lucky to have a supervisor who encouraged these changes and supported me when I got stuck. Now at the end of the process I again have some doubt whether or not my findings are good enough or relevant. I do however know that I learned so much about research process and about emerging adulthood and narrative identity. I also got to learn more about something that is close to my heart, Tattoos.

Appendix F: Reflective Writing and Interview Transcripts
Participant 1 – Peaches

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	My tattoos are... Visible/hidden	Does any close family member have tattoos
1	Female		Black	Xhosa	Student	Yes	In between	Both	No

Peaches did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 1

- 1.1. **Interviewer:** Ok, so welcome. This is interview one for tattoos as an expression of narrative identity in emerging adults. Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it. Uhm, we did go quickly through the informed consent form, so you understand everything there? (Participant nods) Ok. And then I'm gona start with some questions, if you don't understand please ask. We can stop and explain. So, the first question will be what does identity mean to you?
- 1.2. **Participant:** Identity to me is, is how I see myself and and what I identify with, with which group do I identify with. Am I female? Am I male? Do I feel more female? Do I express myself as female, yes. That to me is identity. How I express my my feminine side. Do I wear make-up? Am I just...am I a girly girl, am I just a normal girl, yes? That's identity to me.
- 1.3. **Interviewer:** Ok. Uhm, do you feel tattoos make part of your identity?
- 1.4. **Participant:** For... I think... For there was a time where I thought it didn't. Uhm, but now I do. Cause mine specifically, uhm, reminds me of a part of me that I uhm, outgrew, but which was very important to me.
- 1.5. **Interviewer:** Ok. Then if someone should look at you and I don't know...If they see your tattoo for the first time, what is the message you want that tattoo to convey to the person, just like a short message.
- 1.6. **Participant:** The the the, my tattoo conveys hope.
- 1.7. **Interviewer:** Hope? Ok.
- 1.8. **Participant:** Hope.
- 1.9. **Interviewer:** So, going on to emerging adulthood. What do you understand under the term emerging adult?

- 1.10. **Participant:** It's someone that's coming into terms of being an adult, so you shifting from the adolescence in where you don't have pretty much a lot of responsibility and you going into a phase where you are starting to accept responsibility.
- 1.11. **Interviewer:** Ok, so you are an emerging adult now, so how are you experiencing this stage of life? How is it different from being a child and how do you think it will be different from being an adult?
- 1.12. **Participant:** I think every stage when you, when one has to transition it's always a difficult transition because you were so used to being someone that was spoon fed or other people had to take responsibility for you. And now when you an emerging adult you have to take that, you know, by the horns and you have to be that one that takes responsibility and accountability for yourself. And it becomes very difficult, and it's overwhelming. But I think it's important for the person, or me to remind myself that it is ok, coz I'm only transitioning so its ok, it's ok to feel overwhelmed and a bit, the difficulty of the transition.
- 1.13. **Interviewer:** Ja. Ok, so now we are going to move on to the tattoo questions. I'm just gona... Ok, so I see here on your biographic details you have one tattoo. Uhm, so when did you get it?
- 1.14. **Participant:** I got my tattoo last year, late last year.
- 1.15. **Interviewer:** Ok, how old were you then?
- 1.16. **Participant:** I was 22
- 1.17. **Interviewer:** How did you decide what you gona get?
- 1.18. **Participant:** Do I tell the story behind it or just the decision?
- 1.19. **Interviewer:** Ja just like you want.
- 1.20. **Participant:** Well, the the the the the des...I have words, I have faith, hope and love and it's from a bible scripture in the Corinthians. I'm a person maybe in let's say between 16 and 18 or let's say 19. I had a lot of self-doubt, I doubted myself a lot and uhm, I questioned everyone that was around me uhm, it's something that I overcame, but I felt it was a very important time in my life. Because I did not have those uhm, three uhm, aspects. Faith hope and love and and when I discovered uhm, obviously we lean towards the bible when we try to find meaning in why we don't have certain things and why we feel a certain way uhm, I lean towards that scripture. And it it gave me so much that I felt it was very important for me and that why when I when I saw the words and I that's I knew that's what I wanted, I knew I wanted that process to be reflected on

me and so I started Googling if there are words and examples but yea, I initially knew where I wanted it to be and how I wanted it to be.

- 1.21. **Interviewer:** Ok, so how long did it take you to basically decide?
- 1.22. **Participant:** It took me 3 years no 2.
- 1.23. **Interviewer:** 2 years.
- 1.24. **Participant:** 2 years. To decide whether I wanted it on my body specifically or just in my mind, yes 2 years.
- 1.25. **Interviewer:** Ok, so you said now it is almost like a religious meaning for you?
- 1.26. **Participant:** (acknowledges)
- 1.27. **Interviewer:** So, I am just gona jump ahead a bit to another question that is gona tie in with this...uhm,... How do you think other people in your religious group views tattoos and...
- 1.28. **Participant:** Well, I have had incidents at church where people would be like but but, but the body is the temple of the lord and uhm, they criticise it a lot. They reflect negatively on tattoos, and I understand that it's their perspectives its its its what they choose to concentrate on when they read the bible but uhm, I I I I accept peoples perspectives, but I know why I got that tattoo and I don't think god is gona condemn me uhm, or or shun me if I have a tattoo.
- 1.29. **Interviewer:** Ok so you don't feel like there's a clash? There are two identities one with your tattoo identity and then a religious identity?
- 1.30. **Participant:** No. I I accept my identity and in in in religion specifically I feel like my religion matters more than the religion I have to have. The identity I have to have in church. So, I am this person throughout. In church, in in my spiritual life I am me. I accept me.
- 1.31. **Interviewer:** Ok so how did the people close to you react for the first time when they when they saw you had a tattoo?
- 1.32. **Participant:** (laughing) I I had nega...I had ok my mother was not uhm, she's not a very judgmental person and she tends to ask why she listens to your reasons behind it. But I think my father because of cultural reasons looked down on it. And I think he still struggles with it even today because I don't think he understands. To him obviously he works at the department of correctional services so he has had this association with tattoos with people that are imprisoned so he says why would you want to be someone like that? Why would you you know you are in a gang now? To him it was difficult it's difficult.

- 1.33. **Interviewer:** Ja so for him basically you think there's there's a clash between culture...
- 1.34. **Participant:** Yes, and and and and how I choose to live my life.
- 1.35. **Interviewer:** Ja
- 1.36. **Participant:** And and the tattoo and what he has seen growing up because I think in their times a tattoo was not something to look forward too. It was something that associates you to something bad and demonic and and to him it was like a no and he still struggles with it even today. I had to like wear closed shoe because he gets, he he he it irritates him, and I understand that because of his reality but he also I think try to understand my reality because of the different environments.
- 1.37. **Interviewer:** So, do you think you there's a reason why your cultural identity has changed uhm, from the one your father has so uhm, or do you think still your cultural identity clashes with the tattoo identity?
- 1.38. **Participant:** I feel like for my father he is deeply rooted in culture and he has the culture where nothing is modified. It's like the the big the culture that's that's culture to him. And I grew up in a society where culture's been questioned, and it's been modified. So, with him it will clash but with me it's like we have modified this. We have worked towards this and he's still there because that's that's how he grew up. That's his perception. He's there and I'm like there it's like you are modified and I'm not. I stick to the basics, you just moved you know yea
- 1.39. **Interviewer:** Ok
- 1.40. **Participant:** So, I think that's why we clash
- 1.41. **Interviewer:** So basically, you saying you actually almost construct your own cultural identity?
- 1.42. **Participant:** Yes
- 1.43. **Interviewer:** And then you incorporate like all the other things into....
- 1.44. **Participant:** The changes yes.
- 1.45. **Interviewer:** Ja ok that is interesting. Ok so now we're getting into the deep life stories. Uhm, part. Uhm, you did touch on the the the faith hope and love. So... if you look at that how does it almost express your life story so if you can tell me your life story based on those 3 words...not the whole thing from beginning to end but...
- 1.46. **Participant:** Ja ok...
- 1.47. **Interviewer:** how does how does it make your identity and how does it carry it over and tell people

- 1.48. **Participant:** So shortly uhm, I think when I was 16 my parents got a divorce and I went into an immediate negative state, I was very negative. I I I was not a religious person. I was introduced to the bible, but I would not consider myself religious then because I did not understand what it is to be religious, but I blamed god, I blamed god for a lot of things at that time. And that's where the faith comes in. You know I lost faith in everything. I lost faith in the definition of what marriage is and what a family structure is and what it meant to me. And uhm, so I had to work on regaining that faith back and just letting go and just getting that faith back. And then with hope I think that when you are at those years and something happens to you that changes your life you think you are doomed. You think because my parents are separated this is how people are gona look at me; I'm going to be the girl that has divorced parents and that is going to be my label. But I never really looked at my parents and said they did this because they were unhappy, and they were not satisfied. I just looked at me and and you never find hope when you look at yourself alone and when you consider yourself alone. You have to look at hope considering all parties like there's hope for them just to co parent and be my parents but not be together. And there's hope for me to get married and look at marriage in a different light. And with love I felt that I have to love myself. It has to start here before I can actually love my parents and expect them to love me and not say you guys didn't love me because you divorced. That's not love. Love is them making a decision that what we have is not working and if if if we really love each other we have to let go. And if I really loved them, I would have accepted that they had a difficult marriage. So, I had to work on loving and understanding what love really means. Yes, so those are the 3 words.
- 1.49. **Interviewer:** Good so by basically telling that story to yourself and then you constructed a reality that as you tell it you change the story basically from something bad to something good. So, do you think you got the tattoo and then changed the story into something good or was the story, did you already have the story changed and felt ok I'm good about this I'm gona put the tattoo too uhm, to remember that. Or was the tattoo like part of the process of changing the story
- 1.50. **Participant:** I think I understood the meanings of faith hope and love before I had the tattoos. I I found it very important for me. It was a very life changing experience for me just to work on me because in life you you have your parents tell you don't do this don't do that at that time, I had to work on me. It was difficult, I don't wana lie it was a difficult experience, but it was worth it for me, it was so important that those words had

to be on me. It they had to be on me. So, I first had to understand why faith why hope why love and then put it on me.

- 1.51. **Interviewer:** Ok. Ok so here you said uhm, where I asked if you think that tattoos can tell a story about your life for the person wearing it you said yes and no. Can you give me an
- 1.52. **Participant:** An elaboration?
- 1.53. **Interviewer:** Ja
- 1.54. **Participant:** uhm, I feel like my tattoo in some way expresses what I've been through, expresses my life. But I've met people where they have tattoos to associate them with something and uhm, it it it I there was a church outreach I participated in because I was so interested in why people initially got their tattoos before I got mine and I was speaking to this guy and I asked him if he knew what his tattoos meant and he said no. Because I was in jail for a certain amount of time, I had to have this tattoo you know so it doesn't mean anything about him. It means that he went to jail and got a tattoo so he could be part of something. Does it say that he is a person that maybe are are did activities of that gang? I do not know, and he will never tell me, but I do not see it in him. I do not see a number defining him but with me I can see how these words define me.
- 1.55. **Interviewer:** Ok well I think that is all the questions I have for now. So, thank you very much for your time
- 1.56. **Participant:** Thank you.
- 1.57. **Interviewer:** And then we will end the interview

Participant 2 – Kahlo

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
2	Female	22	White	English	Student	Yes	In between	Visible	Yes

Reflective Writing 2

- 2.1 What this tattoo means to me
- 2.2 When I was about 16 years old, I went with my sister to one of her friends who was a tattoo artist - I didn't ask my parents as I knew they would have said no until they saw the actual tattoo. I have always wanted a tattoo, but I always told myself it had to be something that would stay true to me till the day I die, something that will never change and actually something that I live for. I never wanted pictures or drawings I knew I always wanted words/sentence of anything that means a lot to me. When I was deciding what I wanted to get done one phrase/sentence came to mind - "todo para la familia". It means "everything for the family" (in Spanish - my home language). When I was younger, I would always watch a show on Nickelodeon everyday - it was about a Mexican American family and at the end of every episode they would say "todo para la familia, everything for the family". And somehow those words stuck with me for over 10 years and I never let go of those words.
- 2.3 I was born in Havana, Cuba and my parents made us move to South Africa when I was about 3 years old - in order for them to give us a better life here with more opportunities. This all meant leaving behind our whole family and just us 4 coming to South Africa. It has always been just us 4 and that is what makes me so family oriented, I do everything for them, and it will never change, we are very close. After I got the tattoo - my sister decided she wanted it too and she got it done. We went back home, and my parents were so shocked and upset for like a second and immediately when they read it, they loved it, and a week thereafter my mom and dad got it too.
- 2.4 Every time I am in a situation where I have to chose between my family and others, I always look back at it and I'm reminded of the choice that I will always make. It

happens very often that I look back to remind myself that all the late nights of studying, long drives and almost any situation I remember that it's everything for the family. I also strongly believe that this tattoo will also move along to when I have a family some day and carry the same meaning to me.

2.5 Please find attached the visual representation of the meaning behind the tattoo. As well as a picture of the tattoo itself.

2.6 Please let me know if anything else - and I will contact you soon to let you know when I am available for the interview - please just let me know if it should be this week and I can then let you know when I can.

2.7 Thanks

2.8 Kind regards

Interview 2

2.9 **Interviewer:** Uhm, this is tattoo as an expression of narrative identity of emerging adult this is interview 2, thank you so much for your time.

2.10 **Participant:** It is a pleasure.

2.11 **Interviewer:** Uhm, for helping me. I am gonna...we quickly went through the informed consent forms and you signed it, you have your copy, is there any questions you'd like to ask me about it?

2.12 **Participant:** No questions.

2.13 **Interviewer:** No questions, okay. I will be asking you some questions here, there is no right or wrong answers you can say how you feel, what you think...uhm, I, I will be taking a few notes don't worry about that, that's just for my...uhm, to remember...things because I don't remember very well.

2.14 **Participant:** [Laughs].

2.15 **Interviewer:** So, I am gonna start off...the first questions will be about identity, uhm,...if you think about identity what does that mean to you? What does identity mean to you?

2.16 **Participant:** Uhm, it's definitely who you are obviously and how you...how people see you...and how, I don't know you, how do you say like you conduct yourself and...I don't know the way you live basically like I am not really sure but I think so ja just the way basically people see you and the way you see yourself.

2.17 **Interviewer:** Okay. Uhm, do you feel tattoos are part of your identity?

2.18 **Participant:** Uhm,...I guess so yes ja they, everyone always wonders o why would you have one, like is it, is it okay for you to have one and everything, but at the end of

the day...ja it's shows okay look I wanna show everyone something about me that I believe in or whatever so it's basically ja. I forgot the question now

- 2.19 **Interviewer:** [Chuckels]
- 2.20 **Participant:** But yes, I know exactly I know that's exactly what I meant like...ja.
- 2.21 **Interviewer:** Okay [long pause] uhm, just shortly if someone sees your tattoo for the first time, uhm, what is the message you think you; you want to convey?
- 2.22 **Participant:** Well
- 2.23 **Interviewer:** Without actually telling the whole story or something just what do they see when they look at your tattoo?
- 2.24 **Participant:** Firstly they never understand what it is, so then I always have to explain it...and then they get it and then uhm, most of the time they just usually like they always like it, they like where it the placing of it...I don't know uhm,...and they also like the message afterwards when I tell them like when I quickly because it's quickly just to say okay what it means and then they all do like it, I don't know they see it quickly I don't know.
- 2.25 **Interviewer:** Okay. So the second set of questions will be on emerging adulthood...uhm,...that is people between 18 and 29 [long pause] so if I ask you what do you understand about emerging adulthood [long pause] if I say to you emerging adulthood what do you think...that will mean?
- 2.26 **Participant:** Okay so you leave behind all your childlike things and ways like... you know you have to focus more on the more important things instead of necessarily just uhm,...doing what's fun and what...is easy, you don't necessarily, you can't necessarily do that anymore you have to now look into the future, you make, you make really like uhm, like informed decisions, without actually just going for it you have to think about it and it's... more...I don't know, emerging adulthood I don't know. You just have to let go of...the past I wanna say and then you just have to look [phone rings] towards the future always [phone rings].
- 2.27 **Interviewer:** Okay...uhm, [phone rings] you're in the phase of emerging adulthood now [phone rings] so how do you experience this stage of life? [phone rings]
- 2.28 **Participant:** For me for some reason lately it's been very easy [phone rings]...I don't know I've [phone rings] for, since actually I came to university...I don't really have...the ideas that I had when I was let's say in school or matric or anything [phone rings]. Now it's all just basically ok now what I am doing now I have to do this [phone rings] in order for...later on for everything [phone rings] to go how I want it

to. So, I don't necessarily [phone rings] I don't enjoy... [phone rings] youthful things anymore as much I'm more of like...I don't know I just like to be more...how do I say aduly but...I like growing up.

2.29 **Interviewer:** Ja.

2.30 **Participant:** Ja I don't know. Like have responsibilities and I don't know.

2.31 **Interviewer:** If you look around at people your age uhm, that, that are emerging adults do you think tattoos are becoming more, more prominent?

2.32 **Participant:** Yes, I do, they definitely are. I see lots of people, especially before when I was in school everyone was all you know, but now everyone is...all about getting tattoos.

2.33 **Interviewer:** Okay so now we getting into the real questions about tattoos. Uhm, when did you get your first tattoo?

2.34 **Participant:** I think I was 16.

2.35 **Interviewer:** 16?

2.36 **Participant:** Mmm...ja 16 or 17 but I think 16 or 17 ja one of those two.

2.37 **Interviewer:** Uhm, how many tattoos do you have?

2.38 **Participant:** One.

2.39 **Interviewer:** Just the one?

2.40 **Participant:** Mmm

2.41 **Interviewer:** Good [long pause] is there like a story behind it you can tell me?

2.42 **Participant:** Yes. Should I repeat basically what I said in my email?

2.43 **Interviewer:** Ja

2.44 **Participant:** Uhm,...I've always wanted to get one cause of being very family oriented, and I've always from being young I always knew I wanted to get one I just didn't know where exactly what. Uhm, I always knew it had to be something that went with me till I die basically, something that I really believe in. And uhm, then when I started thinking about what to get I thought the only thing that came to mind was this one show that I watched when I was young uhm,...where they used to say [expression for family] which means everything for the family, and then I thought well that sounds cute ag very nice and it also would look very nice so then I thought okay that's the best and it will definitely go with me forever and till now I can't think of anything else I would get, maybe if I get married and that person's...really I know that person's gonna be there for a while then I'll also maybe get like their name or something or it's gonna be like writing or something...ja.

- 2.45 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay so...how long did you, did you take to decide finally that...you know from wanting it to go okay I am getting it?
- 2.46 **Participant:** Uhm, I am gonna say...we can say like...I wanna say like 3 months...or 6 to 3 months...3 to 6 sorry...ja [long pause] cause it was actually quite a quick idea.
- 2.47 **Interviewer:** Okay.
- 2.48 **Participant:** But I've always wanted one
- 2.49 **Interviewer:** Ja.
- 2.50 **Participant:** But then I thought in that moment it was perfect to do it and then I thought okay...let's do it.
- 2.51 **Interviewer:** Okay and you said it, it's about family so how did your family react when you showed it to them?
- 2.52 **Participant:** Uhm, I went to go get it done with my sister. And my sister has previous tattoos and when she saw that I got it she thought o it actually looks nice and she got one same time as well. Then we both went home cause I was on holiday by my sister, then we both went home and my dad was literally waiting for us outside and he came outside and I was wearing like a short top but you could see what's on my shoulder and then he could see it and then he said what's that, it was still red and everything and then I said no it's a tattoo and then he was all...he was pretty upset for literally 2 seconds and then uhm,...when he read it because obviously he had to come close to read it and when he read it he was like o it's really nice and then my mom loved it as well, they all loved it actually pretty quickly and then they all decided to also get it.
- 2.53 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay so do you feel that this tattoo expresses like your life story...uhm,
- 2.54 **Participant:** Ja I definitely do yes
- 2.55 **Interviewer:** [long pause] so uhm, can you maybe tell me something about your family that...that you feel maybe this express?
- 2.56 **Participant:** We're all very, very close and we've gone through a lot. Uhm,...we are only the 4 of us here and...I don't know how else to explain it uhm,...ja we very, very close and it is literally the way we've been living forever it's everything for the family. It's whatever you do, you always think about okay...do I go out with friends for a weekend on Easter weekend or do I go see my family that hasn't seen me for 2 months. Then you always think no definitely and they all do the exact same like...no matter what comes to it's always...that's your answer.
- 2.57 **Interviewer:** Okay so ja family is, is very like important in your life?

- 2.58 **Participant:** Mmm [long pause] very.
- 2.59 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay so you are studying at this stage, right?
- 2.60 **Participant:** Mmm
- 2.61 **Interviewer:** Law if I am not
- 2.62 **Participant:** Yes
- 2.63 **Interviewer:** So, do you think...this tattoo can...maybe interfere with your career, with your identity as a lawyer?
- 2.64 **Participant:** I used to think it, even when I, when I got the tattoo I thought okay one day I am gonna...hopefully be a lawyer and everything and it is probably gonna be a problem but at the rate that I see things going and how the world's changing and everything and everyone sees everything differently, this is not the worst thing in the world to have a tattoo it's not ja literally not hurting anyone or doing anything, and it shouldn't really say...like it, no one should judge you based on that whatsoever uhm,...so before I used to think yes it's a maybe that's actually the best reason why I didn't know if I should get one or not and then as soon as like now, nowadays since even university I thought, actually you know millions of people have tattoos by that time when I am a lawyer one day hopefully then everyone is gonna have a tattoo basically so...everyone must just...deal with it basically.
- 2.65 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay and how about your uhm, religious identity, do you feel there is a clash there...with your...tattoo?
- 2.66 **Participant:** Definitely I know that it's definitely wrong...it shouldn't be. I am religious, I am just not...an extreme, I am not at that extreme I just believe nicely and everything the way I do...like inside I don't have to go and show it anywhere. But uhm,...at the end of the day I feel like there is nothing wrong with it. It's who you are and that's the reason why we are put here, to be who we are and do whatever you need to do. And at the end of the day...it, the clash doesn't...I feel like at the end of the day it won't be...no one actually knows what is right and what is wrong so...one day we'll know, one day we won't know, it doesn't really matter it's just a tattoo.
- 2.67 **Interviewer:** Okay so you feel that those identities all integrate quite well in yourself...uhm, how do you think other people will view it, let's say other people from the same religion uhm, have you had like encounters with some of them?
- 2.68 **Participant:** I have actually yes with a lot of older people obviously...not really young people, old people like to say something...then at the end of the day again when they get the message they say okay well...it's not that bad I guess and...people

- see it in a different way but I feel like always when they...know the reason then they sort of look back and they like maybe and then their whole religion thing is just take a little side step and then they think okay it's not the end of the world it's okay...ja
- 2.69 **Interviewer:** So, you feel, so you feel that because there's a actually meaning behind it...it, it doesn't have as big an impact just if you just got
- 2.70 **Participant:** Ja
- 2.71 **Interviewer:** A flower
- 2.72 **Participant:** Ja
- 2.73 **Interviewer:** For no reason
- 2.74 **Participant:** I always feel like there is always a reason anyway behind anyone's tattoos even if you just get it because you like it. There's a reason you like tattoos so you go, and you get your tattoos. But uhm,...ja I don't know I feel like...ja it's because of the meaning but still, everyone has some reason behind it and...it's all, I don't know people just need to relax and need to...like take people for who they are. No matter what they do or what they have on whatever.
- 2.75 **Interviewer:** Okay. You said you did this with your sister, and she got the same
- 2.76 **Participant:** Mmm
- 2.77 **Interviewer:** How does that make you feel...because it's about family so
- 2.78 **Participant:** It makes it much more, it shows that I actually really have, like the reason for it like...it's the reason like it...how do I say...pushes the reason more and it shows others like immediately I knew it was meant to be that tattoo like I just knew it. I had other ideas uhm, to get and then this one stuck the most and...when she got it, and then the rest of them also got it uhm,...it showed I don't know just...made me realise even more why I got it
- 2.79 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 2.80 **Participant:** Ja
- 2.81 **Interviewer:** Who is the rest of them?
- 2.82 **Participant:** My sister got it, my dad got it and my mom got it.
- 2.83 **Interviewer:** So basically, the whole family?
- 2.84 **Participant:** Ja
- 2.85 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 2.86 **Participant:** Ja
- 2.87 **Interviewer:** Okay

- 2.88 **Participant:** And I hope maybe one day if I had children, they 'll just want to do that as well.
- 2.89 **Interviewer:** That's interesting [long pause] okay, well that's all the questions I have I don't know if you have anything else you want to add? You have any questions for me?
- 2.90 **Participant:** Why tattoos?
- 2.91 **Interviewer:** Well I am uhm, covered and... I am very interested in why other people, because ja I know some of them I just go because I like them, others have meaning so I am interested in why do people get tattoos actually, and...how it impacts your identity
- 2.92 **Participant:** Mmm
- 2.93 **Interviewer:** Ja that is the reason behind this
- 2.94 **Participant:** Mmm
- 2.95 **Interviewer:** So, I hope I will find some good answers
- 2.96 **Participant:** Ja sorry I am very
- 2.97 **Interviewer:** [laughs] no
- 2.98 **Participant:** I don't know it just meant a lot.

Participant 3 – Audrey

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
3	Female	24	White	English	Student	Yes	Grown up	Both	Yes

Reflective Writing 3

- 3.1 My crucifix tattoo was my first. My inspiration therefore stems from the passing of my grandfather. Antonio Teixeira immigrated to South Africa from the Island of Madeira at the age of 10. After declining to enroll in school, he managed to secure work as a kitchen boy. Coerced by fellow dock-boys, Tony found himself at the mercy of an ink needle while under the influence. An awakening to a Pirate-themed Parrot perched upon the arm of a crucifix, told him the story of the night's occurrences. Despite this 'fall from grace', he thence became skilled as a chef and moved on to work as head cook on various sailboats in the Cape Town Harbor. Married at nineteen, he began a small fruit shop in the Free State.
- 3.2 Sickness disrupted his simple life several years later, in the same year of his daughter's marriage and granddaughter's birth. His family and religion allowed him to stand steadfast against the undesirable predicted outcome of diagnosis. A religious, family-devoted, loving, hardworking man lived a healthy, pleasant life some 10 years later. However, this what not to be. Some days before his granddaughter's tenth birthday, Tony passed away.
- 3.3 My grandfather's passing has been with me all these years. His pain and suffering will forever be etched in my memory. Too young to comprehend at that time, I have reflected annually upon his anniversary of death and recall the happy memories of good times and laughter. Despite his sickness, my grandfather strove to work until he could work no longer. To entertain his young granddaughter while down and under the weather. To have the patience for her when no-one else did.
- 3.4 His final utterance of "one day you will understand, one day you will know and remember this instance". His message comes to mind when I am in doubt, when I have encountered a challenge, I believe I cannot overcome. Thus, I bare my tattoo proudly. A reminder come to be on my nineteenth birthday of the strength and courage of a

foreigner come to this land with nothing but mind and pride. Thus, if nothing I too have my mind and the courage I have molded and come to wield in my daily life.

3.5 In memoriam of my grandfather. The person I hope to one day be. In mind and soul.

Interview 3

3.6 **Interviewer:** Okay so tattoo interview number 3. Thank you so much for your time and for helping me. We did go through the informed consent form, is there any questions about that you need to ask?

3.7 **Participant:** No nothing.

3.8 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Okay thank you. So, the first questions are gonna be about identity. Uhm, there's no wrong or right answers, you can just say what you feel even if there is a question you don't want to answer you can just tell me and we will skip it.

3.9 **Participant:** Okay.

3.10 **Interviewer:** And go on. So, my first question will be uhm, what does identity mean to you?

3.11 **Participant:** Okay, so identity basically has to do with everything about a person uhm, age, gender, race all biographical information. Uhm, as well as who the person is, both in social settings and at home so in their private life. Uhm,...

3.12 **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you feel that tattoos are part of your identity?

3.13 **Participant:** Most definitely.

3.14 **Interviewer:** Okay [long pause] tell me if someone looks at your tattoos for the first time, somebody that doesn't know you. What is, what's the message you want your tattoos to...to uhm, convey to them?

3.15 **Participant:** Okay well uhm, people who don't know me...I don't really mind what they think of my tattoo. It's not a message I am trying to convey to them it's something personal. So...uhm, what they interpret from the tattoo is obviously their own understanding. I prefer...not to have them make assumptions about my tattoos or the fact that I have tattoos. Uhm, it's mostly for me.

3.16 **Interviewer:** Then we'll move onto emerging adulthood. So, what do you understand under the term of emerging adulthood?

3.17 **Participant:** Okay so from last year emerging adulthood is obviously from the ages 21 to either 25 or 29. Uhm, so basically the period of time...including the age that you are

in, in your lifespan uhm, emerging adulthood when I think about it, it is mostly people who are either just entering the workforce or people who are still studying.

- 3.18 **Interviewer:** Okay so at this stage you are an emerging adult and how are you experiencing this stage of life?
- 3.19 **Participant:** Very difficult. Uhm, it's an adjustment, uhm, being an adult is not at all fun or easy. It comes with a lot of responsibility and time management and compromise. So, it is difficult.
- 3.20 **Interviewer:** Okay so can you tell me some of the adjustments or the things that you feel are difficult for you? That was different when you were an adolescent?
- 3.21 **Participant:** Okay uhm, ...responsibility was relatively easy to adjust to and to take on. But uhm, I find that I am technically living with a roommate at the moment uhm, my parents are no longer here...in South Africa they have recently moved to the UK, so that in itself was a massive adjustment for me uhm, I feel like I've lost that connection with my parents, so having to adjust to that and now the added responsibility of not having a social support...group that is in the same country as me I am finding things difficult. But uhm, taking on responsibility, doing things myself the independence part of it was fine.
- 3.22 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay if you look at emerging adults do you think tattoos are becoming a more prominent part of...the way that they express themselves?
- 3.23 **Participant:** Definitely uhm, though I think that some people who have tattoos don't necessarily attach meaning to it. Uhm, they just think it's cool and then they get whatever they like. Uhm, but I, I see even on campus and out of campus that a lot more people are being more open with showing tattoos, having them in visible places rather than hiding it away.
- 3.24 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay so when did you get your first tattoo?
- 3.25 **Participant:** That's is, that's the problem uhm, I think my first tattoo was in my first year which was 2013...there about plus minus.
- 3.26 **Interviewer:** And can you tell me what it is, what, what is the tattoo?
- 3.27 **Participant:** Okay so my first tattoo is a crucifix. Uhm, I got it basically in commemoration of my grandfather... uhm, do you need more info?
- 3.28 **Interviewer:** Ja you can tell me if there is like a story behind it or
- 3.29 **Participant:** Okay
- 3.30 **Interviewer:** Or meaning you have

- 3.31 **Participant:** Alright so like I said I got it in commemoration of my grandfather, he actually passed away a few years before I got it. Uhm, but basically after ii turned the legal age is when I decided that it was okay for me to do so. Uhm,...so...he had a tattoo as well that also had a crucifix so that's almost my motivation as to why I got this kind of tattoo specifically. Uhm, [long pause] and at that point in time when I got it the religious significance for it was greater than it is now. So, it actually had double meaning
- 3.32 **Interviewer:** Okay [long pause] well uhm,
- 3.33 **Participant:** Sorry did I answer more than one question?
- 3.34 **Interviewer:** No, no, no I just think we can, we can it's we would have gotten there but let's go there...to did you feel that the tattoo with like your identity, your tattoo identity your religious identity didn't like quite mix...what happened there?
- 3.35 **Participant:** Uhm, okay in a way it did not mix uhm, my grandmother's a roman catholic so she's very religious. So, for her me getting a tattoo especially a crucifix was...from her perspective not...part of religion it was actually against religion. Uhm, according to her...but according to me it's what symbolised my religious identity as well as the place my grandfather had for me in my life. Uhm,...so ja there was and was not conflict at the same time.
- 3.36 **Interviewer:** Okay then it also [struggling over word] it caused some conflict within the family...like with your, did it have any influence on like your relationship with your grandma or
- 3.37 **Participant:** Uhm, at first my mother told her I broke the news to her over the phone and she wasn't in Bloemfontein at the time. And it made her really upset she called the whole family in an outrage and shouting and screaming at whomever she could. Uhm,...but her reaction on seeing it was better...like I think she controlled herself more. Uhm, so by the time I got my second tattoo she was, she is still upset about it, she still makes some spikey, offensive comments. But uhm,...I don't think that original, emotional connotation to it is as great as it was originally as when I told her.
- 3.38 **Interviewer:** Ja. Okay and then you said that it, it held a, a religious meaning but not so much anymore. Can you tell me what it meant to you now? Or what it meant to you then and how did that change?
- 3.39 **Participant:** Okay so uhm, in first year I was obviously still trying to find myself, and uhm, from school I was in a Catholic or Anglican school, so religion played quite a significant role in my life. I mean we had chapel every morning at school and then

when I got to university, uhm, the double meaning made sense to me at that time cause uhm,... I was still in the phase in my life where religion had to have a very big role. And now a couple of years later I find that it's not as big a role as it used to be. I don't associate religion necessarily with actively going to church, being part of uhm, prayer groups and stuff like that uhm, I am still reading scripture I find that I've gotten to a comfortable place where if I just pray by myself in my own time then that's how I view my religion.

- 3.40 **Interviewer:** Okay...so ja that's good. So...basically...you, your story you integrated everything you had and now you are finding yourself
- 3.41 **Participant:** Yes
- 3.42 **Interviewer:** So, you fall into that...that whole identity of religion and goed, and stuff
- 3.43 **Participant:** Ja
- 3.44 **Interviewer:** Okay that's good. Uhm, [long pause] we did all that. Okay so, the second tattoo...uhm, can you tell me what that is?
- 3.45 **Participant:** Okay so my second tattoo is an anchor tattoo. Also related to my grandfather, he was actually a chef on uhm, ships in Cape Town. And uhm, ironically his tattoo was obviously like uhm, almost like sleeve tattoos so there was more than one picture or...uhm,
- 3.46 **Interviewer:** Design?
- 3.47 **Participant:** Design uhm, so he also had that anchor tattoo as part of his design. Uhm, but so that was the motivation for me as well but my reason for getting the tattoo was to...show me or rather ja help me become more grounded...uhm, remind myself that I have more strength and courage than I sometimes think I have.
- 3.48 **Interviewer:** [long pause] so do you feel that...looking at that tattoo or knowing it's there it did help you get that groundedness and did help you to...develop that...part of you
- 3.49 **Participant:** Most definitely. I catch myself uhm, seeing the tattoo sometimes cause it's not in a place I see it all the time as my wrist tattoo so when I see it I am reminded instantly that okay but like you're going through a rough time just calm down, think about it you're not alone, you have people that support you and it does help me push on sometimes...ja
- 3.50 **Interviewer:** Okay [long pause] so I am interested both tattoos are based on your grandfather?
- 3.51 **Participant:** Mmm

- 3.52 **Interviewer:** So...what role did he play in your life what part of your life?
- 3.53 **Participant:** Uhm, okay so when I was younger my folks moved to Bloemfontein before I did uhm, because I was still going to school so they couldn't take me out of school it was like almost the end of the year. So, I had to wait a bit so during that time I was staying with my grandparents. And he was a little sick at that point in time uhm,...so he was basically my father figure when my dad was like somewhere else. Uhm, and he did, he supported me a lot, he was the more chilled grandparent so less of the smacking and the shouting and more of the joking buying me treats uhm,...calming everyone else down when everyone was like mad at me for doing something wrong. Uhm,...so he was that sort of role model for me
- 3.54 **Interviewer:** So, you say he had like a big part in who you became as a person?
- 3.55 **Participant:** Definitely ja
- 3.56 **Interviewer:** Okay [long pause]
- 3.57 **Participant:** Sorry François can I get a tissue somewhere?
- 3.58 **Interviewer:** Oh
- 3.59 **Participant:** Wait I think I have one in my bag, where is my bag? Sorry
- 3.60 **Interviewer:** No don't be sorry uhm, I am, I am almost done.
- 3.61 **Participant:** Okay ja...you can ask [opening packet of tissues]
- 3.62 **Interviewer:** Okay do you feel like...your tattoos will interfere like with other parts of your identity like maybe work?
- 3.63 **Participant:** Okay uhm, I have provisioned for that...when I get my tattoo. I make sure that I have it in a place that I know, and I can see but uhm, if I do need it to be covered up it's easy to do that. So uhm,...ja I know in the workforce nowadays it's not so much of an issue but when I started my tattoos it was still controversial so I made sure that I could hide it if it was necessary
- 3.64 **Interviewer:** Okay [long pause] we did the stuff about identity uhm, religious identity. I think that's all I have for you
- 3.65 **Participant:** Okay
- 3.66 **Interviewer:** Thank you so much
- 3.67 **Participant:** No thank you Francois uhm, let me know if you have follow up questions or anything or if you want to clarify something
- 3.68 **Interviewer:** Okay ja I will send it to you when I transcribe it
- 3.69 **Participant:** Ja

Participant 4 – Ally

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
4	Female	26	White	Afr/ Eng	Student	Yes	Grown up	Both	No

Reflective Writing 4

- 4.1 For this reflective writing exercise, I choose my semi colon tattoo. I got this tattoo a couple of months ago and had no reason for getting it other than I really wanted another tattoo. This is the only tattoo that I have that is visible. It is placed on the inside of my wrist and it is interesting for me to reflect on it as I am usually very careful to not have any of my tattoos visible, but yet I chose to showcase this one for the world to see.
- 4.2 I think that if I had to explain my choice of making this tattoo visible VS the other one's that aren't visible, I would say that in my mind tattoos are still frowned upon by society and so I try to not have that as a prominent part of my identity, but I think I feel so proud of my journey regarding depression that my identification with it is so dominant that it overrides the part of me that is scared of what people might say about me having tattoos.
- 4.3 Looking back at getting the tattoo and reflecting on what the meaning of it was when I chose it and how I felt about it compared to how I think about it now is completely different. It is almost as if consciously I was drawn to the design and common meaning of it, because unconsciously I associated it with these positive attributes that just took a while to surface.
- 4.4 The story that this particular tattoo of mine tells is one of depression. I got this tattoo to always remind myself what I had experienced when I was young, and to signify that I think about the people who still struggle with depression every day. The story that my tattoo tells shaped my identity in the sense of when I think about who I am, the part of my life where I struggled with depression will forever be incorporated in my identity. I identify myself as a person who had to crawl their way out of the darkness, and so every time I look at my tattoo, it signifies hope, strength, and courage.

- 4.5 At the time when I got the tattoo it had been 5 years since I last experienced depression, and in that moment, it did not represent the words that comes to mind currently when I look at it. At the time that I got the tattoo it was simply a design that I was drawn to. But what it means to me personally has evolved over time.
- 4.6 In reference to whether it makes me see myself in a different way, I would say that ever since the meaning of the tattoo changed for me, I started seeing myself differently. Not just as another person who can identify with depression, but rather someone who had enough passion for life to fight back. Now when I every time I look at my tattoo, I am truly reminded that I am the author and my story is not over yet.

Interview 4

- 4.7 **Interviewer:** This is tattoo interview number 4. Thank you so much for helping me. So, we went through the informed consent forms are there any questions you have about informed consent?
- 4.8 **Participant:** No
- 4.9 **Interviewer:** Okay...the first couple of questions will be about identity then we'll move onto emerging adulthood and the last set of questions will be about the tattoos and the stories behind them. So, if I ask you about identity, what does the word identity mean to you?
- 4.10 **Participant:** To me identity means who you are...and where you fit into society, what your role is, what you like other people to identify you as ja
- 4.11 **Interviewer:** Okay do you feel that tattoos can be a part of your identity?
- 4.12 **Participant:** Most definitely
- 4.13 **Interviewer:** If someone should look at your tattoos for the first time, what is the message that you want to convey to them?
- 4.14 **Participant:**[long pause] my tattoos to me resemble different phases or...things that I have been through in my life uhm, I think for every difficult stage or every breakthrough that I've had I've gotten a tattoo that resembles it in some type of way...so at first glance, someone who doesn't really know me isn't gonna understand uhm, my tattoos...but people who know me either intimately or just very close friends they, they will understand what my tattoos mean.
- 4.15 **Interviewer:** Okay so moving on to the emerging adult...questions. What do you understand under the term emerging adult?

- 4.16 **Participant:** Emerging adulthood is the period between adolescence and becoming an adult, where you have time to explore and...see different options and alternatives and just to find yourself and to almost prepare for your adult grown up life.
- 4.17 **Interviewer:** Okay so you are an emerging adult now. How are your experiences of this stage of life?
- 4.18 **Participant:** I am having a great time at the moment uhm, it does have its challenges at or at the beginning of emerging adulthood I would rather say I had quite a few challenges...coming from adolescence into this more responsibility type phase where you now have to stand on your own two feet and...uhm, [sighs] have to learn what life is really all about uhm, but ja now that I've been doing it for a few years uhm, ja I think I am more efficient now and I've sorted out the challenges and I know how everything works [chuckles] or I hope I do so ja I am at the moment I am just having a great time uhm, I think I am very, I feel very fortunate every single day that I am able to have this period in my life, especially for such a long time uhm, I've literally been studying since I was 18 so ja uhm, ja I am just having a great time...exploring.
- 4.19 **Interviewer:** Okay so on your biographical details...you said you regard yourself as an adult.
- 4.20 **Participant:** Yes
- 4.21 **Interviewer:** Or grown up...so do you care to tell me where you feel like you're grown up and maybe not emerging adult anymore?
- 4.22 **Participant:** Well in the sense of my parents aren't uhm, anywhere close to me my like for example my father lives in Morocco, works and loves there at the moment, so even though I don't make my own money to pay for my bills I get a set amount of money and it's my responsibility to make sure that I come out with set amount of money and that my rent is still paid on the 1st and my water and electricity [struggles over word] is paid, no one is going to clean my house for me, no one is going to do my shopping for me and also with my studies I don't have anyone asking me o do you have any homework, do you have any assignments so that type of thing I feel like I do have the responsibilities of an adult, but I do also feel like an emerging adult in the sense of I don't I am not completely in the adult phase cause I don't make my own money to pay for my bills
- 4.23 **Interviewer:** Okay if you look around...to other emerging adults around you, do you feel that tattoos are becoming more prominent in this group of people?
- 4.24 **Participant:** Yes, I do believe so.

- 4.25 **Interviewer:** Okay...do you see more tattoos how do you?
- 4.26 **Participant:** Uhm,...ja it's uhm, I would be sitting next to someone in class and I would be like oh my friend's doing a study on tattoos or I'll just randomly see a tattoo and then you are so shocked at first because a few years back I remember when I was still studying in Cape Town no one had tattoos and if someone had a tattoo they were the scum of the earth or someone who's life wasn't going anywhere uhm, and now you see people in a honours class you know every...every second person there has a tattoo so...ja I think it's becoming more acceptable, it's becoming more prominent uhm, ja
- 4.27 **Interviewer:** Okay thanks so we're moving on to the tattoo questions now. And the first one will be when did you get your first tattoos, how old were you?
- 4.28 **Participant:** [long pause] sjoie that's quite a while back I can't remember exactly.
- 4.29 **Interviewer:** Okay but it was
- 4.30 **Participant:** I was still in my teenage years I was a bit too young to get a tattoo still
- 4.31 **Interviewer:** Is there any story behind your first tattoo or...uhm, was it just like something you did on...impulse?
- 4.32 **Participant:** I remember the design I chose was very impulsive and just like a girly design but do remember I wanted to get a tattoo to sort of be rebellious, so that was the...the first motivation for that.
- 4.33 **Interviewer:** [long pause] uhm,...did people close to you see the first tattoo...at first or did you keep it like a secret for a while?
- 4.34 **Participant:** No, it was a secret because like...all of my other tattoos they are...that one was the best hidden.
- 4.35 **Interviewer:** So, if you decide to get a tattoo how long do you think about it, how long do you take to decide what to get?
- 4.36 **Participant:** I think that I get a tattoo every time that I accomplish something big or went through a struggle uhm, of some sort and then uhm,...my mind is already made up that I want to get a tattoo because it's not such a big step for me it that makes sense, and then I'll maybe play around with the design for two weeks, but I am pretty adamant that I do want to get a tattoo. It's just my mind isn't completely made up about 3 different designs, which one I would like.
- 4.37 **Interviewer:** Do you look at like the traditional meaning that is attached to the design, to fit what you want, or do you just get the design that speaks to you?
- 4.38 **Participant:** I have a few like my latest tattoos I did go on what the traditional meaning is behind it, but my other tattoos no it's, it's definitely my own meaning, personal that's

why I said when someone who doesn't know me at all looks at all my tattoos it would be like okay that doesn't make sense at all [chuckles] but it's because it has personal meaning to me.

4.39 **Interviewer:** And then how did you choose the artist that did your tattoos?

4.40 **Participant:** Well at first, I just went to a woman because it was more comfortable for me. That was my first tattoo artist, who did a few of my first art pieces and then now I am at a very well established artist here in Bloemfontein and I chose his work or his, his ja shop simply because I had so many recommendations that he was the best and I really have to agree with that so.

4.41 **Interviewer:** So, do you feel that all of your tattoos or some of your tattoos like...expresses a part of your life story?

4.42 **Participant:** Yes, most definitely. I have a playboy bunny because when I was younger or I got it at the point in my life when I was quite the little party girl, uhm, and I felt like that represented the phase that I was finding myself in. I also now my latest work is a semicolon, a blessed tattoo and then also a cross. And the semicolon is...well the traditional meaning of that is that the author could have ended the sentence but he or she didn't they chose to go on and because I've struggled with depression so much in my life and now that I've defeated that sort of dark hole if you want to call it that, I want to stand in solidarity with people who still struggles with suicidal thoughts and who struggling with depression so that is why I got that. Then the blessed tattoo is just because I do believe that every single day I wake up I am so blessed uhm, I have a roof over my head, I have a family who cares for me, I have amazing friends, and I just have so many opportunities and then the cross... I recently went through sort of a crisis of faith, where I was really struggling with questions that I had about ja but is Christianity just something that I was raised in or is it really something I believe in. Uhm, there is so many different alternatives how do you know that what you chose to believe in is correct. So, I think I...came out of that crisis of faith having re-established my faith and then I got the cross tattoo.

4.43 **Interviewer:** Okay so you basically explored...your religious identity...and then...when you...almost decided on it then the tattoo was like a...uhm,...

4.44 **Participant:** Affirmation

4.45 **Interviewer:** Ja like an affirmation...to remind you of that.

4.46 **Participant:** Yes...yes.

4.47 **Interviewer:** Do you have like a favourite tattoo?

- 4.48 **Participant:** Yes, I would say my semicolon is my favourite tattoo, ja my favourite tattoo.
- 4.49 **Interviewer:** Okay...and that was also some...something that you had to...work on and uhm, explore your identity in that sense get...with mental health issues and stuff and get over it?
- 4.50 **Participant:** Yes well I had to make peace with the fact that I was uhm, someone who suffered from severe clinical depression for many, many years and that I as well had a suicide you know ideation [struggles over word] so uhm,...I think I don't know if I've made peace with it uhm,...ja that's just me saying I know where I was and now I stand in solidarity with people who's still going through it.
- 4.51 **Interviewer:** Okay getting back to the religious part of it...uhm,...do you think you're...identity as a person with tattoos uhm, clashes with what your religious identity is?
- 4.52 **Participant:** To a certain extent uhm,... I however do not know if I would be classified as Christian...amongst the Christian community. Uhm, so I sort of...think about religion as I believe what I need to believe to get by, uhm, I do classify myself as a Christian I know there is a lot of people who won't feel the same way because of my tattoos uhm,...so in that sense yes it does clash but since I don't see Christianity or define it as the same way as your normal...norm of how a Christian should act is, I don't think it conflicts to the point where it actually causes me any internal...uncomfortable feelings.
- 4.53 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay did you have any encounters with people with...uhm, religious people that...like oppose you talked about tattoos and that isn't...acceptable?
- 4.54 **Participant:** Uhm, yes I think my mom and my aunt when I was, when I was still living at home I think they had a remark or two but not...I don't know if it was uhm, religiously motivated or if it was just not acceptable in their eyes...uhm,...but ja no I don't really mix with people who are that judgemental so no I don't hear a lot of remarks... about... religion and tattoos.
- 4.55 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay and then lastly like a vocational identity...do you think your tattoos will have an impact on that?
- 4.56 **Participant:** Well I am very careful about how I situate my tattoos uhm, the only visible tattoo that I do have is my little semicolon on my wrist. Which I don't think is the worst thing ever I can cover it with a watch or with a bracelet or something because I am very well aware...of the fact that as a Psychologist or I am a aspiring Psychologist

but as a Psychologist one day you're not allowed to wear any type of logos or you know be biased in some type of way so I am not going to put a cross on my arm or something like that. But uhm, ja I've been very well aware of where I put my, my tattoos so that it is only people who...is very close to me who is aware that I do have tattoos...uhm, so that it doesn't impact on my profession at all one day.

4.57 **Interviewer:** [long pause] well I think that's all the questions I have for you. So, thank you very much for helping me. And I hope you have a good day further.

4.58 **Participant:** Thank you.

Participant 5 – Blair

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
5	Female	26	White	Afr	Student	Yes	Grown up	Both	Yes

Blair did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 5

- 5.1 **Interviewer:** So uhm, welcome thank you very much this is tattoo interview number 5. Uhm, we did discuss informed consent; is there any questions you have about consent?
- 5.2 **Participant:** None
- 5.3 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Uhm, so I am gonna start off with a few questions on identity. Firstly, can you tell me what does identity mean to you?
- 5.4 **Participant:** Uhm, identity basically refers for me as a person's individual personality and their place in this world so uhm, identity includes personality, it includes life choices, it includes uhm,...sort of someone's morality scale as well. But uhm, identity for me is sort of a way that you sort of place your mark...in, in our world...so it's just a little unique little niche of a person.
- 5.5 **Interviewer:** And do you feel that uhm, tattoos are a part of your identity?
- 5.6 **Participant:** Uhm, I definitely feel so tattoos for me contribute uhm, not only your life choices or your specific emotions at a time uhm,...some uhm, I know a lot of people who sort of just get tattoos because they want a nice picture or whatever the case might be and even though it's for me carry a meaning across because at that moment you still made a choice to do something, get something permanent even if it's just something pretty it's still...it's still a choice. So, tattoos definitely sort of convey identity for me.
- 5.7 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay so [clears throat] let's say if somebody looks at your tattoos, without knowing you uhm,...what is the message you think they will, they will get from it?
- 5.8 **Participant:** Uhm, well I only have one visible one. So, the one that is visible uhm, they'll most likely get a very artsy feel from it, it's quite colourful and very intricately designed. And they also might get a bit of a scientific feel like maybe this person is into research or science for a bit because it's got a scientific term next to it and very like

clean cut designs, and uhm, lettering and so on. So, they might think that I am in like a creative research field which would be quite an accurate description, since I am in art history and it's a field that does look at images and stuff.

- 5.9 **Interviewer:** [long pause] so then we're gonna move onto the emerging adulthood. What do you understand under the term emerging adulthood?
- 5.10 **Participant:** Oh sort of be sort of bracket where I am right now I am 26 so uhm, right now I am bust with master's degree and I am sort of slowly learning that you now that it's not just...it's not gonna be studies for the rest of my life there is a point where I'll have to start thinking about getting a home and getting finances and life insurance and policies and all that together so it's sort of realising that uhm, you can't always be dependent on other people for the rest of your life, you sort of have to start making your own way and paving your own road ahead and building that up on your own so emerging adulthood is a, is a quite of a, a reflective and volatile time period in its own right uhm, and as you sort of break the way for who you are going to be one day. So, the choices you make now are going to be quite relevant for the way down the road.
- 5.11 **Interviewer:** Okay you touched on this a bit, and now uhm, is there any experiences you are having while being an emerging adult that's uhm, conflicts or things you like about it, things you don't like about it?
- 5.12 **Participant:** Uhm,...I think it's a very important time so it would be very odd to say that there is things that I don't like about it. I think perhaps not, it's not as easy as it was perhaps 30 years ago to just sort of get in it and start a life and you can't just take any sort of chance and think you're going to be financially sound for the rest of your life you have to really sort of plan ahead there is a lot more planning now than I feel there was several years ago. But I also think that it is a good thing cause we a lot more conscious of uhm, our life expectancy and what the choices we sort of need to make to have an adequate or a fulfilling life. So even though it's really volatile and it's a really uhm, competing market I don't know if market is the right word to use but uhm, I think it's a good thing that at least for me I've been privileged enough to have the opportunity to be allowed to you know...work on myself for a number of years before I have to take that step into like a solo adulthood. So, I think it's a good thing, I can't really say that it's a bad experience because every bad experience will shape the way your are going to end up.
- 5.13 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay uhm, in your uhm, biographic details you marked that you feel you regard yourself as a grown up

- 5.14 **Participant:** Aaah [laughs]
- 5.15 **Interviewer:** Uhm, is there, is there some, some, some parts of your life where you feel okay, I am doing grown up things?
- 5.16 **Participant:** Uhm, I definitely if I sort of have to look at all my friends my age, I tend to be more responsible with things than they are uhm,... I even though I am still studying I do work part time uhm, as an archive assistant and as a research assistant, and I also give extra classes in my free time and I am a tutor as well so uhm, even if it is not earning enough money to support myself financially it's still not a space where I have to go to my parents like okay I don't have money to go to the movies or need to give me pocket money while I am studying it's not a case of where I have to go do that with my parents I sort of...decide where I am going and what I want to do of my own free will with my studies and I also help with uhm, maintaining the house to quite a large extent. Uhm, so in that case if I have to sort of in perspective look at myself with accordance to my friends my age I am bounds ahead so it's I, I consider myself not really like an adolescent teen or in that progression anymore because I am already post grad by all definition I am more into the adult world now then for someone that is in their final year
- 5.17 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 5.18 **Participant:** For instance.
- 5.19 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay so [clears throat] if you look around at other emerging adults or people you know in that phase do you think tattoos are becoming more prominent?
- 5.20 **Participant:** Definitely, uhm, I think especially since uhm, there is a lot of I don't wanna say like pop culture but there's a lot of popularity surrounding tattoos and there is a lot of sub culture uhm, especially getting the very common ones like uhm, semicolons and anchors and things like that have that whole you know I continue to find meaning uhm, meaning towards it. But uhm, it's definitely becoming more socially acceptable I've seen more people nowadays with tattoos then I have ten years ago for instance so it's sort of a it's, it's a very prevalent culture now to get tattoos uhm, it's very, it's not necessarily rare that you get ones that actually have very personal meaning but uhm, a lot of the times you get someone who gets for instance the semicolon tattoo but there are millions of other people who also have the semicolon tattoo so it is sort of a sub culture on it's own
- 5.21 **Interviewer:** Mmm ja

- 5.22 **Participant:** Uhm,...but it, it is a very prevalent thing nowadays.
- 5.23 **Interviewer:** [long pause] so it's almost that uhm, if we take the same semicolons it, it almost gives you a, another identity you identify with...a large group of people than went through the same
- 5.24 **Participant:** Mmm definitely
- 5.25 **Interviewer:** Same type of thing as you. So, move onto the tattoo questions then. The first is when did you get your first tattoo?
- 5.26 **Participant:** Uhm, I got my first tattoo age 19, which is about 7 years ago. Uhm, on my rib cage.
- 5.27 **Interviewer:** Can you tell me what it is, what type of design it is?
- 5.28 **Participant:** Uhm, it's a very realistic tattoo of a tiny sparrow. Uhm, I sat...it took me about a week to get a photo that I really like cause I had to design my own tattoo so I didn't want uhm, no offense to tattoo artist but I don't want someone's stock footage on my skin if I am going to wear it permanently uhm, I want it to be something that completely comes from myself. Uhm, you know and not an artist's design or whatever the case might be. They obviously they have input cause they'll know what works on skin and what not, but the initial design comes from me and that was a photograph that I, I we had a photograph done as a tattoo of a sparrow on my rib cage.
- 5.29 **Interviewer:** Okay so how did you decide that, that specific photo is the one you want?
- 5.30 **Participant:** Uhm, I, we actually studied fine art we were busy with a video art project and uhm, I can't even remember what the assignment was but I remember at the same time at my grandad's started getting really ill for the first time and uhm, he sort of played a very big part in raising me, we were quite close, and uhm, he, he used to uhm, he had a lot of birds so he was like a bird breeder and uhm, we used to always after school I'd stay there after school for most of my uhm,...school career but uhm, after school we'd always sit by the birds and there would be sparrows hopping around and my grandad would always make up stories about sparrows and then when my uhm,...when he got sick I sort of every time I saw a sparrow it was sort of a comforting thing for me and then I went to go look at the symbolism for sparrows and actually they key toned as the birds of vigilance and creativity and that linked with me as a artist as well and uhm, so that was just sort of a no brainer, I really wanted a sparrow so I took about a week and I camped out early in the mornings and I took photos until I found one that was really pretty for me uhm, and that's the one that I got as a tattoo.

- 5.31 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay uhm, [clears throat] so you said now that you took you looked at a, a traditional meaning I can almost say of what a sparrow represents, and then...you incorporated it with what you wanted it to mean and
- 5.32 **Participant:** Mmm
- 5.33 **Interviewer:** Okay so you said it was like creativity
- 5.34 **Participant:** And vigilance
- 5.35 **Interviewer:** [long pause] okay [long pause] so you touched now on, on the meaning...is there anything else you wanna talk about that first one the meaning behind it, stories how did it, maybe how did your grandfather influence your life to be who you are now?
- 5.36 **Participant:** Uhm, my grandfather definitely sort of persuaded me to look at things differently than other people do and I think that is one of the big things that really nudged me towards uhm, going into the arts uhm, I always used to sit and draw outside I think and stuff like that but he really emphasised really looking at something I know it sometimes you uhm, walk through life and you sort of say o this is a pretty tree or this is a pretty flower and you go on but what my grandad sort of encourage me to do is really like stop and pay attention and go look at all the textures of the tree and how it is growing and the ground it was in and it was the same with flowers and with birds. It's sort of a really intense connection with your environment instead of just sort of going through it in like you would just normally walk on a mission somewhere but uhm, that's sort of really engaging with your environment, really paying attention to the finer details and not just with environment but with people as well so we would sort of overly engage and then invested in uhm, a person and their lives and so on so it's a, it's a very good quality that he carried across a sort of constant curiousness almost and that sort of conveys right into my art as well, who I was as an artist and sort of still who I am as a researcher now. So, it's a very deep meaning that comes across as foundation is laid for that.
- 5.37 **Interviewer:** [long pause] so how did you decide on the artist? That did that tattoo for you.
- 5.38 **Participant:** Uhm, the artist that I went to go get my first tattoo I was actually in primary school with her. Uhm, we were fiends back then and when I decided to get a tattoo, she also just started her tattoo internship. So she was still an intern at that point, she wasn't already a qualified artist and I did my tattoo with her and she did a phenomenal job and now she is a qualified artist and uhm, I considered going back to

her but I couldn't get an appointment and I had a very short gap, but regardless uhm,...I was very I, I basically I chose her because it was my first tattoo and she was someone who I sort of felt comfortable with going for the first time cause it is quite an intense experience and it's quite it's on my ribcage

5.39 **Interviewer:** Mmm, mmm

5.40 **Participant:** you know quite close to uhm, your body as well uhm, so sort of like uhm, sort of sensitive areas on your body as well so getting that area specifically done by a female artist was I guess a little bit more comforting than it would have been getting done by a male artist for instance

5.41 **Interviewer:** Ja. Okay so let's move on to your second tattoo. And were gonna do the same. When did you get your second one?

5.42 **Participant:** Uhm, this one is about a month and a half old now. I got it just after my birthday, which was the 21st of march so I think I got this one on the 30th March or something like that it was less than a week away from my birthday that I got this tattoo.

5.43 **Interviewer:** Okay and so how did you decide to on that specific design?

5.44 **Participant:** Uhm, this tattoo design has basically been milling in my head for the past two years uhm, it, it carries across a load of meaning uhm,...the, the first time I sort of encountered phrase [names phrase] which is written just underneath the, the picture part of the tattoo uhm, back in 2013, uhm, I watched a video from v sauce where the movie was titled mistakes and where he sort of talks about how we've made blunders and mistakes in history and how we'll probably continue making mistakes and he highlighted out at the end of the video that uhm, mistakes are like uhm, arberglif on trees so the glif might...it will never go away if it's if it is carved in a tree uhm, the glif will pretty much according to how a tree grows the grif, glif will stand in the same place and it might even get darker, but it won't really go away but the tree can make the glif a smaller part of what it is. So uhm, that was one of the first part of it and then he moved on to say that uhm, this is where the base meaning of tattoo comes in as winter approaches most of the trees stops chloroforming production and then you see teratonoites and uhm, they are always present in leaves because that yellow and orange leaves but some trees [interviewer clears his throat] actually spend extra energy to produce anticides which turns the leaves those red purple and blue and it's a way of sort of protecting the trees against the harsh sun rays and sort of against insects looking for parasitic homes and it's a way for them to harness that last bit of nourishment from the leaves so statistically speaking winter is going to eventually come but the brightest and

most beautiful colours come from not giving up too quickly or too easily. So back in 2013 I went through a really, really hard time uhm, we had stuff happen in the family and I sort of I flunked that year in art uhm, so I had to redo that year it was a very hard year for me and that was sort of the only, not the only but it was one of the major sources that really pulled me through it and so I've been wanting to get the tattoo ever since and I couldn't really cause it was such a profound thing for me that I couldn't really find a design that did it justice I was sort of mulling it over and drawing it up and eventually when I knew what I wanted to get I struggled with where I wanted to get it and eventually I decided on my arm as well and uhm, tattoo artist will most more often than not actually turn the text around so that when your arm is next to your body the text will be underneath

5.45 **Interviewer:** Ja

5.46 **Participant:** Or other people to read, and I told them that that's not what I want this tattoo isn't for other people it's for me. It should be a constant reminder for me so we had the text turn towards me, for me to read uhm, so I designed everything myself uhm, the geometric design, something that I really enjoy doing sort of a...and if you look at all my sketches uhm, geometry plays a very big role and then also the sort of constellation based uhm, colours as well uhm, that was also a very big part of things that I love especially because I used to do stargazing and stuff with my grandad when I was a kid as well uhm,...so that is one of the things that I can just link back to the tattoo it carries a lot of meaning with it.

5.47 **Interviewer:** Uhm, okay we talked meaning, is there anything...more you want to add about uhm, meaning maybe stories...uhm,...but I think we covered it pretty good

5.48 **Participant:** Mmm

5.49 **Interviewer:** Okay...So how did people close to you react the first time they saw like you had tattoos whether it be the first one or the second one?

5.50 **Participant:** Uhm, I, I think blessed is perhaps not the right word but my you always worry about your parents, especially in your early student days. And they were just sort of you have to live with it on your body for the rest of your life so whatever you get just make sure that you know it's, it's gonna be something profound and I know the other concern was just get it in a place where one day when you are old you can hide it if you want to. So I am like okay that's fine and that's partly why I got the first one on my rib cage uhm, but this place is well if I really want to I can just cover it up with a sleeve and you get very cool uhm, sort of tattoo covering make up now that if you if I am one

day in a professional environment where they are like no you can't show your tattoos then I can just cover it up

5.51 **Interviewer:** You can just cover it up mmm

5.52 **Participant:** But uhm,..it's I don't have any sort of bad reactions or I know my, my grandmother with this one when I showed it to her uhm, she was fine with the sparrow for some reason but with this one uhm, she's like is it permanent and I am like yes she's like ag nee man

5.53 **Interviewer:** [laughs]

5.54 **Participant:** But, but why? And she's like but it's so big and it's so visible and I am like but that's kinda the point...uhm, that's why it's, it's really pretty at least to me it's really pretty but uhm, it's, it's meant to be shown that's why I got it in a place where you can see it

5.55 **Interviewer:** Ja

5.56 **Participant:** And where I can see it the whole time...so uhm, it was, that was sort of the only weird reaction that I got, everyone else had very wonderful reactions so

5.57 **Interviewer:** Okay...do you feel that tattoos can interfere with uhm, other parts of your identity, so I see you marked self as religious so let's say your religious identity...uhm, do you think tattoos interfere with that?

5.58 **Participant:** Uhm, not really the thing is uhm, religion for me is not necessarily close-cut rules like o you need to be this way you need to protect your body you need to do this it's not rules. It's for me religion refers more to who you are as a person so if I am gonna treat you with respect and kindness and love that is more religion than I am gonna you know dress properly and walk straight and you know convey these rules in a strict and orderly manner because that's what some book says uhm, to me religion links more to uhm, who you are as a person and who you are to other people, then what you look like so uhm, there is a very famous phrase uhm, if your body is a temple why aren't you allowed to decorate the walls...for instance and that is what tattoos are. It's similar to you can have the same if your body is sacred then why do you wear earrings, it's or piercings or make up for that instance o it's just, this is just a form of permanent make up if you will. Uhm, somehow it doesn't interfere for me in fact it might actually help convey to a certain sense I know a lot of people get religious tattoos...as a reminder there is a very popular trend to get rosary beads for instance and that's actually a, a, a sort of a help with religion as opposed to it.

- 5.59 **Interviewer:** Did you, did you have any uhm, encounters with people in your religious group that uhm, may be talked about tattoos and
- 5.60 **Participant:** No, not at all really uhm, pretty open-minded group I think [laughs]
- 5.61 **Interviewer:** [laughs] okay...well that is then all I all the questions I have for you thank you so much is there anything you would like to...to know?
- 5.62 **Participant:** No, I am good thanks.
- 5.63 **Interviewer:** Okay thanks so much for your time.
- 5.64 **Participant:** Okay.

Participant 6 – Zama

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
6	Female	27	Black	Xhosa	Student	No answer	In between	Both	Yes

Zama did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 6

- 6.1 **Interviewer:** Uhm, thank you very much, this is tattoo interview number 6. Thank you so much for your time. We went through the uhm, informed consent quickly, is there any questions you have about the informed consent?
- 6.2 **Participant:** No, I'm good.
- 6.3 **Interviewer:** Are you good? Okay, so I am going to start with the first question, what does identity mean to you?
- 6.4 **Participant:** Identity it, it's who I am basically. It's who I am, how I identify myself with. It's, it's just how I identify myself with society I think...ja. And who I am within the larger society and the environment. So basically, it's me who, how I see myself.
- 6.5 **Interviewer:** Okay, so...that identity you have of yourself and who you are do you think that tattoos play a big part in it or a small part or any part at all?
- 6.6 **Participant:** I don't think they play any part in...no they don't, I don't think they do.
- 6.7 **Interviewer:** Okay so if somebody would look at the tattoos that you have, without knowing you, without knowing your identity, what do you think...they will, they will get from just looking at your tattoos, what message will they give?
- 6.8 **Participant:** Uhm, they, they only see me as...a bad girl, they only see me as this tough bad girl ja I give off the bad girl image but that's not really who I am.
- 6.9 **Interviewer:** Okay so the, the image they will get is not actually who you are?
- 6.10 **Participant:** Yes.
- 6.11 **Interviewer:** Okay...so then if we go onto emerging adulthood...what, what do you understand under the term emerging adulthood, when I say emerging adulthood what does that mean to you?

- 6.12 **Participant:** I think it's, it's someone who is in a transition between adolescence and adulthood, so you still in the middle and you still trying to find...balance from leaving your adolescence and getting to adulthood.
- 6.13 **Interviewer:** Okay so I see here on your form you also marked that you are in between adolescence and grown up so you feel you are now an emerging adult?
- 6.14 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.15 **Interviewer:** Can you tell me about how you experience this life stage going from adolescence being now an emerging adult, is it challenging, or do you think it's more fun?
- 6.16 **Participant:** I think it's challenging. But then again it depends on how you see yourself. Cause some people would expect that at this age you should have certain things, you should have done certain things already. And for someone who hasn't it puts a bit of pressure on you, and you think this is how, this is how it's supposed to be I am not sure I am answering your question?
- 6.17 **Interviewer:** Ja, Ja.
- 6.18 **Participant:** Ja so this is how it's supposed to be, or this is how it's meant to be. But it, it is a bit challenging...for me.
- 6.19 **Interviewer:** Okay...and do you think tattoos are becoming more prominent...around uhm, around uhm, people who's in the emerging adulthood?
- 6.20 **Participant:** I think so...I, I think so I think yes and no. Cause it's, it's at the same...being an emerging adult, doesn't mean like, most people like getting them, so even so even in that phase or, or stage in life some people are getting them and some people are not getting them. So, it, it depends.
- 6.21 **Interviewer:** Ja it's still more a, more a personal choice
- 6.22 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.23 **Interviewer:** Than just
- 6.24 **Participant:** Than just being in the status
- 6.25 **Interviewer:** O okay so then we'll go to the tattoo questions now. When did you get your first tattoo?
- 6.26 **Participant:** I got my first tattoo in 2014.
- 6.27 **Interviewer:** 2014?
- 6.28 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.29 **Interviewer:** Okay so...can you tell me what, what it is? The tattoo?
- 6.30 **Participant:** The tattoo is...okay I can actually even show you. It's a flower

- 6.31 **Interviewer:** Okay
- 6.32 **Participant:** It's my sister's name and the infinity love, infinite love symbol.
- 6.33 **Interviewer:** Okay can you tell me why did you get that what...what's the reason for getting that?
- 6.34 **Participant:** Okay I lost my sister in 2013. She passed away and she was 7 years old. I call her my sister but she's not my sister, she's my brother's child but that's how I related to her. So, for uhm, when she passed away, I felt like okay she is gone but I still feel like I need something to represent the loss I felt, the pain I felt after losing her. And I might not have her again, but I have a reminder that...she's ja I have that reminder about my sister and what I went through after losing her.
- 6.35 **Interviewer:** So, so did it change you in anyway when this event happened in your life? Uhm, did it change you, who you are, how you see things?
- 6.36 **Participant:** Yes, it did definitely. You mean losing my sister?
- 6.37 **Interviewer:** Ja, ja
- 6.38 **Participant:** Or getting a tattoo?
- 6.39 **Interviewer:** No losing your sister
- 6.40 **Participant:** Yes, it did, it changed me a lot. I saw life differently and...I, I still struggle to till this day to understand, to okay I understand that life happens, but you just never expect it could happen the way it happens. I don't know we have certain ideas of how it's going to happen, but it doesn't get to be like that, but ja it, it changed me a lot I was never the same after that.
- 6.41 **Interviewer:** Okay.
- 6.42 **Participant:** Can I also add that it didn't just change me, it changed my family as well. Everyone was different.
- 6.43 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 6.44 **Participant:** And...after even after losing my sister, later on I lost my brother and I believe it was after the fact of having lost my sister, the way we lost her he couldn't say anything and then he passed on as well.
- 6.45 **Interviewer:** Okay uhm, you said you had 3 tattoos neh?
- 6.46 **Participant:** Yes, I did.
- 6.47 **Interviewer:** So, the second one? When did you get that?
- 6.48 **Participant:** I got the second one after I lost my brother
- 6.49 **Interviewer:** Okay
- 6.50 **Participant:** Like...when was it? Sorry let me think

- 6.51 **Interviewer:** No take your time
- 6.52 **Participant:** I lost my brother in 2016 so I got it in 2016
- 6.53 **Interviewer:** 2016?
- 6.54 **Participant:** Yes.
- 6.55 **Interviewer:** And that was for your brother? Can you uhm, tell me what the tattoo is?
The design or?
- 6.56 **Participant:** The tattoo is also an infinity sign, it has his name, his date of birth
and...that, it's also written forever and a heart...yes
- 6.57 **Interviewer:** Okay so...you, your first two tattoos is about family and
- 6.58 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.59 **Interviewer:** So, would you say that that's a big part of your identity to be close to
family and?
- 6.60 **Participant:** Yes definitely
- 6.61 **Interviewer:** Okay
- 6.62 **Participant:** Family is yes, it is everything for me
- 6.63 **Interviewer:** Then we can go to the third tattoo. When did you get that one?
- 6.64 **Participant:** I got it in 2000 and like same year as I got the second one
- 6.65 **Interviewer:** Okay so that was 2016?
- 6.66 **Participant:** Yes 2016 as well
- 6.67 **Interviewer:** And what is that one?
- 6.68 **Participant:** It's, it's a semicolon.
- 6.69 **Interviewer:** Okay I know this one?
- 6.70 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.71 **Interviewer:** So, you want to tell me about...?
- 6.72 **Participant:** That one?
- 6.73 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 6.74 **Participant:** This is when I got to a point where I was like cause my, I lost my brother
to suicide. And so, I felt like it was, it was hard for him to talk and like we didn't like
understand as well. So, I felt like no matter what happens I think the only thing I can
gather from all the things that happened is that life keeps going on
- 6.75 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 6.76 **Participant:** You can take a break you can breathe but just continue living, it doesn't
mean it's the end of the world.
- 6.77 **Interviewer:** Okay so did you get that also uhm, as a representation of your brother?

- 6.78 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.79 **Interviewer:** Or did you struggle yourself with
- 6.80 **Participant:** It's that is everything in my, it's with my brother and with me as well...yes
- 6.81 **Interviewer:** Okay so uhm,...that semicolon there's uhm, quite a few...people that does carry that so uhm, does it feel like having that, that you are a part of like a subgroup almost you know people supporting each other when somebody sees you have that, they know okay you went through the same thing as me and you can almost identify together?
- 6.82 **Participant:** Uhm, okay I've never met anyone who has it. But I feel like ja it's probably that cause most people don't understand, but when someone sees it they'll be like oh...and then they get to talk about the experiences they've had as well yes I think it's, it, it would make me identify with certain people
- 6.83 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 6.84 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.85 **Interviewer:** Okay and also like you said how it's, it's something that starts the conversation then you can actually inform people about like thing about suicide and depression and everything?
- 6.86 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.87 **Interviewer:** Okay do you think that your tattoos uhm, you said they are both visible and not visible, so it depends on what you're wearing obviously
- 6.88 **Participant:** Yes
- 6.89 **Interviewer:** Uhm, do you think that will interfere with other parts of your identity like maybe when, when one day when you want to get a job...do you think there will be a, they will interfere or not really?
- 6.90 **Participant:** Yes I, I think they will cause I also had this concern and I discussed it with the lady I was seeing at that time, my psychologist...she made me understand but that again...I also feel like it puts more pressure on you when you have an interview you have to try and cover them up, especially with the one I have on my wrist. I had to buy a couple of shirts when I go into interviews cause I also think people are going to be judging they won't understand why the tattoo is there or what happened so they see you as this person who has a tattoo and already they think we cannot associate with us type of so it has

- 6.91 **Interviewer:** And then...uhm,...religious identity, do you think it interferes with...uhm, religious identity or for yourself does it really...having tattoos cause I know like my a lot of religious people don't think it's
- 6.92 **Participant:** It's
- 6.93 **Interviewer:** It's good to have tattoos...for yourself do you feel that, is it like a conflict in your, did you make peace with that and
- 6.94 **Participant:** The, the there is conflict...but I am okay with it. I, I got to a point of like no, no, no I am doing it for myself. Like I, I don't have to be explaining or satisfy people. Okay honestly who are like going to give me a job or help me in anyway...so it's for me. And I feel like the only people that feel ashamed and is the people I meet who are going to help me get a job or whatever that's why I got those long shirts.
- 6.95 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 6.96 **Participant:** But besides that, for me it doesn't affect...there is pressure to not have tattoos, but I do not care honestly.
- 6.97 **Interviewer:** Okay. Do you, did you have any experiences with people like...being against telling you that you can't have tattoos for any reason?
- 6.98 **Participant:** Yes, I have and it's mostly religious people. And my mom, my mom is she just feared the pain and why would you do this to yourself. But it...like I only explain to her and I told her, and we laughed about it but then so everyone else I honestly do not care what they think or what they have to say about my tattoos.
- 6.99 **Interviewer:** Okay well that's all the questions I have for you then
- 6.100 **Participant:** Okay
- 6.101 **Interviewer:** today, so thank you very much for taking part. And for your time...uhm,

Participant 7 – Frank

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
7	Male	23	White	Other Italian	Student	Yes	In between	Both	No

Frank did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 7

- 7.1 **Interviewer:** Okay so this is tattoo interview number 7. Thank you so much for your time
- 7.2 **Participant:** It's a pleasure
- 7.3 **Interviewer:** I do really appreciate it. Uhm, we did uhm, give you the informed consent form, are there any questions about informed consent?
- 7.4 **Participant:** None whatsoever
- 7.5 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Okay...so the first part of the questionnaire will be on identity, so I am just going to ask you what does identity mean to you?
- 7.6 **Participant:** Identity uhm, I feel like identity is every person has their own unique identity not every person is the same and we choose to identify ourselves basically pretty much on identity so everyone is different in their own way and everyone is specifically recognised by their own unique identity and what they feel like they pretty much how they identify themselves. A person's identity is determined by themselves and not generally other people, not another person can influence who you are as a person. So, to me identity is just how you perceive yourself and what you choose and other people how you choose how you want them to see...you pretty much...if that answers the question.
- 7.7 **Interviewer:** Ja...so basically you, you, you, you saying you build your own identity?
- 7.8 **Participant:** Identity ja...it's not created by other people it's how you perceive it to be
- 7.9 **Interviewer:** Okay. And then do you feel like tattoos are a part of your identity?

- 7.10 **Participant:** Definitely I feel like tattoos are something not made for everyone, not everybody can pull off tattoos, also based on your personality type that you are...and some people choose to express themselves differently, some people like to be a little bit more artistic in the case of tattoos. So, I feel like having a tattoo is directly proportionate to your identity as a person.
- 7.11 **Interviewer:** Okay. If someone should look at you without knowing who you are or what your identity is, and just see your tattoos I don't know if they are visible, uhm, ja so but if they could see your tattoos without knowing you
- 7.12 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.13 **Interviewer:** Uhm,...what do you think...they would your tattoos would convey at first sight to somebody?
- 7.14 **Participant:** Uhm, it depends that also comes into like I also think it plays an important role in the profession you're entering into as well as in the social context of things. So in the 21st century like today you see a lot more people having tattoos so they will have a whole different approach on how they see tattoos as where the older generation I guess it just depends on who is looking at your tattoo and what they would think so the older generation of people would have a bit of a problem with it because in their time it wasn't fashionable it was a bit taboo of people having tattoos but nowadays I feel like it's a more comfortable situation, where people have tattoos and everyone will have their own opinion but majority of people nowadays won't really bat an eyelid if you have a tattoo or if you don't have a tattoo we are sort of at that in between stage now where people...some people are gonna be okay with tattoos other people won't be okay with tattoos but the tattoos that I have personally I don't like to have something too bulky personally that's just how I am, I like to have something a bit more delicate when people look at my tattoos they have to be like that's actually really nice and then they sort of ask you questions you, your more approachable as a person I feel if you have tattoos cause it's a sort of a good conversation starter for anyone like it builds that curiosity my tattoos are a bit more curious than...other people's and they have a little meaning behind it so they always have to ask me what are your tattoos and why did you get this sort of tattoo?
- 7.15 **Interviewer:** Okay if I...if I tell you emerging adult
- 7.16 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.17 **Interviewer:** What, what do you understand
- 7.18 **Participant:** Emerging adult?

- 7.19 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 7.20 **Participant:** I'd say an emerging adult is someone who's uhm,...trying to find independence to some extent because...right now as a student you don't have as much independence as you would like compared to a working adult, you have less responsibilities as a student, so I'd say an emerging adult is someone close to finishing their...student study life entering into a world where you still have to fend for yourself, you have to uhm, gain a whole lot more responsibility uhm, paying bills, starting a family, children I'd say that's an emerging adult is the idea of you, you starting building on this idea of what you want your future life to be. So, an emerging adult is not necessarily an adult yet but along the lines of thinking what you want your adult life to be and where you see yourself and you start that foundation...through the emerging adulthood.
- 7.21 **Interviewer:** Okay so you are in that stage at the moment.
- 7.22 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.23 **Interviewer:** How do you experience this part of life? Are there challenges? Is it more fun?
- 7.24 **Participant:** Uhm,...definitely now that I am entering the adult phase of my life, I feel like you start getting a little bit more responsibility as the years go by...so right now it's challenging because you sort of in the no man's land. You not a, you're not a full grown adult yet where you work and you paying off bills, but you in that stage where you are finishing up and it's time to start making decisions and it can be a bit confusing cause you start thinking to yourself is this really what I want to do for the rest of my life? So, in that sense it's, it's confusing, it's uncertain, but at the same time you have to come and make a decision at some point. So, the best way to describe it is for me is confusing, it's uncertain.
- 7.25 **Interviewer:** Okay...and then do you feel like tattoos are becoming more prominent in this age group?
- 7.26 **Participant:** Definitely uhm,...with anything whichever uhm,...whichever years you wanna look at if we look at 20th century compared to the 21st century, it's more of a I feel like it's become a fashion statement nowadays tattoos it's a form of expression whereas in...other years if we look 30 years back there was another form of expression...uhm,...doing drugs was more fashionable back in the day smoking for example smoking was way more popular back in the 80's and 70's than it is now.

Uhm, now it's the era of where people are getting more and more tattoos express themselves in a different way.

7.27 **Interviewer:** Mmm

7.28 **Participant:** So, every era I feel has their own way of expressing themselves so right now in the 21st century tattoos are it

7.29 **Interviewer:** Cool so then we are getting to the fun part of the tattoos. Uhm, let me just...okay good...five. When did you get your first tattoo?

7.30 **Participant:** I got my first tattoo when I was...18 years old, I was 18 when I got my first tattoo. It was the end of my matric year sorry no I was 19. I just turned 18...it was the end of my matric year I got it done in Italy.

7.31 **Interviewer:** Italy?...Uhm, can you tell me what it is?

7.32 **Participant:** Okay so my first tattoo I wanted to get for my mother it's an angel on the back of my shoulder a quite big angel about 30 cm. Uhm, I had gotten it for my mother because her name is Angela. So, I thought it's a nice angel holding a baby and at the time uhm, about two days before I had gotten my tattoo an aunt in my family passed away. It was unexpected she had passed away, so the original concept of my tattoo was I was gonna put an angel holding a baby and then my mother's birthday at the bottom. But because my aunt had passed away at that time I thought I was gonna get just the general concept because she is like the mother of our family so I wanted to do something to commemorate her as well as my mother so it's got like a dual meaning to it the first one.

7.33 **Interviewer:** How

7.34 **Participant:** That's the first one

7.35 **Interviewer:** Ja, how long did it take you to decide to get that first tattoo? How long did you

7.36 **Participant:** Uhm,

7.37 **Interviewer:** Think about getting

7.38 **Participant:** Started wanting to get tattoos at a very young age, I think I was about 13 years old when I decided I wanted, I knew I was gonna get tattoos. And then the idea stuck of an angel when I was about 16, so about two years, two to three years before I actually got it done. Then I decided I wanted another one, but I've always had different ideas about different tattoos I wanted to get but that angel specifically stuck with me for about three years.

- 7.39 **Interviewer:** Three years okay. And how did people react when they saw this first tattoo?
- 7.40 **Participant:** Everyone had a lot of different opinions obviously my grandmother in the beginning I didn't tell her I was gonna get a tattoo, so I just showed it to her and at the beginning she was, you could see she was a little bit confused. Because of the tattoo and what it meant; she was fine with it. But the older generation obviously has a whole lot of problems my ex's father for example he was completely against tattoos, so he...right off the bat pegged me as a
- 7.41 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 7.42 **Participant:** As a heathen and a Satanist just because I have tattoos, but its varying people have varying opinions on it
- 7.43 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 7.44 **Participant:** But majority of people generally don't have a problem with my tattoos, they actually like it. Even my grandfather for example he's very old school, very old fashioned, but he likes my tattoos. He doesn't have an issue with it.
- 7.45 **Interviewer:** Okay can we move to number 2?
- 7.46 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.47 **Interviewer:** Can you tell me when did you get that one? Or how old were you
- 7.48 **Participant:** When I got
- 7.49 **Interviewer:** The second one
- 7.50 **Participant:** Oh, the second one?
- 7.51 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 7.52 **Participant:** The second one I had gotten done... a year and a half later I had just I was 20 and a half. Uhm, it's the one on my forearm it's basically my grandad's handwriting, and he wrote in Italian life is always beautiful and at the bottom he signed your grandad. So I was going through a bit of a...like sort of a tough time...and you know my grandad is my role model pretty much so I wanted to get something for him you know he is also been through a lot of stuff and I feel like having that tattoo is something that no one else has it's my grandfather's handwriting and that made it very special for me. So, every now and again when I am having a tough time, I just remember life is beautiful no matter how you see it.
- 7.53 **Interviewer:** Okay can we go a bit into the, you said you had like a tough time
- 7.54 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.55 **Interviewer:** You don't have to give details

- 7.56 **Participant:** Mmm no of course
- 7.57 **Interviewer:** But how did...resolving that
- 7.58 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.59 **Interviewer:** Change you in any way or then how did getting the tattoo change your identity?
- 7.60 **Participant:** Okay so going through a tough time I uhm, my ex and I had broken up after 4 and a half years that was like the first thing that happened, uhm, my grandfather fell very ill, he's been constantly in and out of the hospital because he has a certain illness, and he always used to tell me you know no matter what happens you gotta see the positivity in life, you have to see like there is no point in brining yourself down about certain things. Everything in life happens for a reason, but whatever that reason is...it is beautiful at the end whatever does happen, it's for a good cause. It ties into a little bit of a religious sense type of thing, but I didn't wanna connate it to a religious point
- 7.61 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 7.62 **Participant:** Of view, more of my grandfather giving me...advice that I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.
- 7.63 **Interviewer:** So that definitely like made an impact on you
- 7.64 **Participant:** Mmm
- 7.65 **Interviewer:** And on who you are
- 7.66 **Participant:** Ja
- 7.67 **Interviewer:** How you see the world
- 7.68 **Participant:** Definitely, definitely more...it's more of an optimistic
- 7.69 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 7.70 **Participant:** Point of view rather than a pessimistic or a realist
- 7.71 **Interviewer:** Let me just quickly have a look. Okay let's go to the third one. How old were you then?
- 7.72 **Participant:** The third one I was I just turned 21. I just turned 21 years old.
- 7.73 **Interviewer:** O okay.
- 7.74 **Participant:** The third one is on the...on my inner right arm. It's basically uhm, in roman numerals, it's my grandfather's age, he turned 70 in 2015 I turned 21 and my brother turned 16 so it's those roman numerals together. And at the bottom of it I put the coordinates of Italy. So, because of the coordinates of Italy my grandmother and my mother bought us tickets to go to Italy, just the three boys like a boy's trip. And

during that trip it was just something so special to me, something not a lot of people get to experience with their grandfather and their younger brother who...coincidentally turned big milestones in their life so I just wanted to get something to remember and to commemorate that trip that we had together.

7.75 **Interviewer:** Okay

7.76 **Participant:** So, it doesn't have any deep significant meaning

7.77 **Interviewer:** Ja

7.78 **Participant:** It's just significant to me so that I can show my kids and my grandkids one day, that I had a trip with my brother and my grandfather which I'll always cherish.

7.79 **Interviewer:** Well it seems that uhm, family is playing a big role

7.80 **Participant:** Definitely in all my tattoos

7.81 **Interviewer:** Ja but let's go to number 4 then.

7.82 **Participant:** Mmm

7.83 **Interviewer:** And how old were you then?

7.84 **Participant:** Number 4 I was 22 years old I had gotten it done last year...June, July had it done in Rome, Italy. Uhm, it's this one...on the bottom part of my forearm pretty much, it's just three rings. So, I've got a younger brother, and a younger sister so it's the three siblings. I had gotten the ring, the big one for me, the middle one for my brother, the smaller one for my sister. It just symbolises you know the three sibling's unity. Uhm, and then because I had gotten it done in Rome, uhm, it's my favourite city in the world and they say Rome is the eternal city so in Latin I just put the eternal in the middle. Just as a little thing for me. But every tattoo I have is basically symbolic of family.

7.85 **Interviewer:** Okay and then the last one?

7.86 **Participant:** The last one I had gotten done today, 23 years old, 23 and a half years old. Uhm, my grandmother had...breast cancer about a year and a half ago she had breast cancer and her favourite flower my grandmother's very big on gardening that's her passion, that's her hobby and her favourite flower is a rose. So, I had gotten a big rose done on my arm like this with a couple of thorns you can see the petals that are falling. And I got the breast cancer sign around the uhm, around the stem of the rose...just to commemorate her, just to show you know support...for her.

7.87 **Interviewer:** Okay uhm, okay so we...it's all about family

7.88 **Participant:** Mmm

- 7.89 **Interviewer:** Uhm, can you maybe tell me...I see Italy also plays a big part why...why Italy? What's
- 7.90 **Participant:** Uhm, I am Italian. I am full blooded Italian, full grown. Uhm, so for me I like to just keep in touch with my culture so if I can do that through the use of tattoos then why not
- 7.91 **Interviewer:** Okay.
- 7.92 **Participant:** Ja I am proud of my heritage as well so
- 7.93 **Interviewer:** And then you are studying law if I am correct?
- 7.94 **Participant:** Yes indeed...final year
- 7.95 **Interviewer:** Uhm,...how do you think your tattoos will...uhm, play a role or how can I put it will
- 7.96 **Participant:** With my occupation?
- 7.97 **Interviewer:** Ja will interfere with your professional identity
- 7.98 **Participant:** Uhm, so basically when I thought about it...entering into the legal profession it's quite a staunch it's very rigid you have to be clean you have to be a certain way to be a lawyer. But I thought about it and more and more people are getting tattoos so maybe back then it was a big problem with people having an issue with how you might be perceived as a person but nowadays more and more people are getting them so it wouldn't be as taboo in the long line of entering into the working profession I might set a precedent for other people to get tattoos. Uhm, but generally the people that I have spoken to in the profession generally don't mind...me having tattoos especially because they are going to be hidden most of the time. If I wear a suit, then you can't really see.
- 7.99 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 7.100 **Participant:** That I have tattoos. So that's the one thing I also looked at the positioning of my tattoos very carefully...for the profession one day cause I know that's still today you still might get some people that might be a little offended or don't trust you as much because you have tattoos. Uhm, so the placing of them also I looked at very carefully because I am going to be a lawyer you have to be seen a certain way. But I think more along the lines I will show them a bit more. But right now, it might be a little bit of a problem but my future employers they really don't see an issue with it as long as it doesn't interfere with my work or
- 7.101 **Interviewer:** Ja

- 7.102 **Participant:** So, they really don't mind. But then again you do get some firms that will have a problem with it and some who don't so. We are in a time where people are fence sitters when it comes to tattoos.
- 7.103 **Interviewer:** Ja okay uhm, the last thing we are gonna talk about is religious identity so how do you think tattoos fit in with your religious identity?
- 7.104 **Participant:** Specifically, my religion I don't feel it plays much of a role. Uhm, I am catholic, so tattoos are seen as something taboo within my religion. Uhm, but if I had to get something I wouldn't necessarily... I am a big fan of angels, not because I am catholic, but I feel they are very symbolic. Not too specific my religion so for me tattoos won't play that big of a religious role I feel like people use religion as an excuse to get a tattoo not because of something I know a lot of people get bible versus a lot of people get a cross because they feel it's...adding on to their religion but in the same tone of breath I feel like they are just using religion as an excuse to get a tattoo...majority of the time. So for the sake of saying I really want a tattoo but I don't know what I want to get so they fall onto religion, cause it's something that they will carry with them forever, but it's not necessarily a good enough reason to get a tattoo
- 7.105 **Interviewer:** Ja.
- 7.106 **Participant:** That's just my personal opinion [laughs]
- 7.107 **Interviewer:** Ja. So, you touched on it now but other people
- 7.108 **Participant:** Mmm, mmm
- 7.109 **Interviewer:** In your religious group, how do they view tattoos?
- 7.110 **Participant:** Oh, uhm, I guess it also varies because with catholic you get different sides of the extreme, with any religion you get the staunch Catholics who believe tattoos are wrong...uhm, my grandmother always says your body is the temple of the soul. It's God's temple of the soul, so I always make a joke and say there is nothing wrong with decorating your temple so everyone has their own views and say you must keep it clean, keep your body clean from tattoos but older generation of people within my catholic faith whereas the younger generation don't see anything wrong with it. So, you can argue from both sides I guess playing devil's advocate.
- 7.111 **Interviewer:** And was there like a...a time where you maybe struggled to bring these two tattoos and religion together?
- 7.112 **Participant:** No
- 7.113 **Interviewer:** Never went through something like that?

- 7.114 **Participant:** No never. I never had any trouble, I always...I believe my religion should be something private and personal my relationship with God is something private I don't like to sorry, I don't like to brag about my religion or try to involve others into my religion it's just more something private for me. So, putting a tattoo on myself, I guess it would be something personal and I wouldn't want other people to see that specific tattoo if it had to be religious.
- 7.115 **Interviewer:** Well that's all the questions I have for you. Is there anything you would like to add, to ask?
- 7.116 **Participant:** No, how many tattoos do you have?
- 7.117 **Interviewer:** Me...I think about 11 I'm not
- 7.118 **Participant:** Ah nice!
- 7.119 **Interviewer:** Depends whether you count
- 7.120 **Participant:** [laughs]
- 7.121 **Interviewer:** Count them as one big piece or like
- 7.122 **Participant:** How old were you when you got your first tattoo?
- 7.123 **Interviewer:** I was...eish 20 ja I, I was a late starter like 25 I think
- 7.124 **Participant:** Oh
- 7.125 **Interviewer:** Ja then I never stopped [laughs]

Participant 8 – Reese

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
8	Male	22	White	Afrikaans	Student	Yes	Grown up	Both	Yes

Reese did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 8

- 8.1 **Interviewer:** Uhm, tattoo interview number 8, thank you so much for your time I appreciate it a lot. Uhm, we went through the informed consent form; are there any questions you have regarding that?
- 8.2 **Participant:** No.
- 8.3 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Okay thank you. So, the first part of the questions I am gonna ask you is related to identity.
- 8.4 **Participant:** Yes
- 8.5 **Interviewer:** So, if you can maybe tell me what, what do you think of when I say identity, what does that mean to you?
- 8.6 **Participant:** Well would you say identity connected to the person itself of just identity as an abstract concept?
- 8.7 **Interviewer:** Well what does, ja you can maybe do both that will be great if you can say what identity means to you as a person and how do you see it?
- 8.8 **Participant:** Well as an abstract concept its obviously identity is cluster of ideas which, which form something that is unique right. It uhm, it's just sort of a, a combination of characteristics I'd say...and for a person it is how they view themselves in relation to society or persons around them. So, I would say...ja identity would be formed around how you relate yourself to certain groups of people, how you uhm, feel about yourself ad how you see yourself uhm,...connecting with other people so that's how I see it. Basically, your position on the planet.
- 8.9 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.10 **Participant:** And in relation to other people
- 8.11 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.12 **Participant:** Ja

- 8.13 **Interviewer:** Ok ja that's basically a...a correct answer [both the interviewer and participant laughs] but ja you, you nailed it. Uhm,...do you feel that tattoos make a part of your identity?
- 8.14 **Participant:** Yes, most definitely. Otherwise I wouldn't get them
- 8.15 **Interviewer:** And if someone should look at the tattoo you have now, without knowing you and without knowing the story behind it...what, what, what's the story or the, the something unique you want that tattoo to tell that person who is looking at it?
- 8.16 **Participant:** Well look my tattoos is on the outside of my arm...right so...uhm, I am a law student so I usually wear long sleeves...so people never really see my tattoos it's more something for...myself but if someone sees it while I've had a lot of weird uhm, questions you know, is that a meerkat is that a ferret, what is that? Uhm,...I don't think it would tell too much of a story uhm, because I...I've embedded a very complex story into the finer details of my tattoo. And I think it's something that you only get to know once you get to know me. But I think the first thing that people see them o that's an interesting it's not like your usual tattoo
- 8.17 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.18 **Participant:** That's what I get usually. It's usually about the style and design uhm,
- 8.19 **Interviewer:** Okay uhm,
- 8.20 **Participant:** I don't know if that answers your question?
- 8.21 **Interviewer:** Ja, ja, ja. So ja you basically it's more like a personal thing there is not like a...an immediate message you want anybody to see, it's like a personal thing for you...and they need to...maybe ask more questions before they can understand what is going on?
- 8.22 **Participant:** Ja...obviously I think...there might be a, a level of exhibitionism in having a tattoo I mean it's been with us for thousands of years...uhm,...and I think I do sometimes like to wear short sleeves shirt just to have people see I have a tattoo but it doesn't go further than that you know?
- 8.23 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.24 **Participant:** It's not conveying any message, but uhm, once you get to know me, you'll understand what the message is so
- 8.25 **Interviewer:** Okay. Well the next few questions is then on emerging adulthood. And if you can just say...what you understand under the term emerging adulthood, if you...have to think about it?

- 8.26 **Participant:** Well I'd say it's a... I don't want to say it's a period where you are in limbo between being a teenager and a fully-fledged adult but it's basically that... the inter period it's between...being, being a fully-fledged adult and maybe working or having a more formal and set life. To and between an adolescent you know being at school so basically being at varsity.
- 8.27 **Interviewer:** Ja, uhm, how do you experience this stage of, of your life now? What's the challenges? What's the good parts?
- 8.28 **Participant:** Uhm, good parts is high levels of personal freedom. Uhm, I am a, I am a fisherman so I love driving everywhere and going fishing a lot I compete in fishing so for me I don't have to go to work on Friday's, I can pack my stuff and go fishing or I can go fishing in the week if I wanna so...that personal freedom is something which I love. Challenges I would say is still like...cutting the umbilical cord from my parents [sighs] you know? I have a very close-knit family and my mom is...someone who...tends to...act differently if she feels an element of, of control slipping away, you understand? So, I'd say at this moment you know I'm, I'm pretty much depending on finishing my degree this year that would be the most difficult thing. So
- 8.29 **Interviewer:** Do you feel that tattoos are becoming more prominent under emerging adults?
- 8.30 **Participant:** Uhm,... I would say so yes, I think that the...the taboo around tattoos has, has sort of diminished...you know. Uhm, it's something sort of everybody is getting but I try not to...I don't, I don't like to say that I got it cause someone else go it
- 8.31 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.32 **Participant:** Ja but I, I, also try not to...to uhm, prey into other people's tattoos you know? I understand if it's a personal thing for you.
- 8.33 **Interviewer:** Okay so now we're getting to the...tattoo questions. Uhm, you said you, you only have the one...uhm, when did you get this tattoo?
- 8.34 **Participant:** When I was 19, so that's about...2015 I think.
- 8.35 **Interviewer:** Okay...so that was quite young.
- 8.36 **Participant:** Yes.
- 8.37 **Interviewer:** Uhm,...okay can you describe just basically describe what it is?
- 8.38 **Participant:** O okay so it's basically my dog...which is a Jack Russell but it's, it's been designed by an artist a separate artist to the actual tattoo artist. Uhm, to I didn't want to recreate my dog in exact fashion

8.39 **Interviewer:** Ja

8.40 **Participant:** Because that would just creep me out especially after he dies you know and I made the dog turn into a lion and the dog is sitting on a...rose bush...and it, the rose bush grows up the dog's legs...you can see and it's got a rosary with boxing gloves and a cross.

8.41 **Interviewer:** Okay that is very interesting.

8.42 **Participant:** [laughs]

8.43 **Interviewer:** So, let's get into the story behind it...if you don't mind

8.44 **Participant:** Yes, yes, yes...so...firstly I... [sighs] I think the best way to approach the story would be to just give you a brief overview of why I actually got it. So...I went through a really like rough uhm, teenage years I uhm, was in like 6 different schools and I got expelled out of 2. And uhm, I was really like...I, I struggled a lot with...fitting in socially...do you understand? And I had a lot of disciplinary issues...uhm, and I felt like you know I, I, I also didn't have a really good relationship with my parents at that time. Uhm, to the point where I...I went to school in Cape Town...you know just...you know they didn't want me in the house you understand? So it was, it was really tough...uhm,...and it's a time I'd rather forget but I understand that some of my biggest strengths lie in going back and understanding...what exactly went down...ja. Uhm,...and basically...what my tattoo was to symbolise a closing of that chapter in my life and it was more a healing experience than anything else. Uhm,...I felt like extremely healed after I did that tattoo...and [sighs] basically how this leads up to...my life story is that...my dog is 12 years old now and I got it when I was 10 and my dog was always there for me...uhm, my family could go and stay and go and stay but my dog was the one constant. And uhm, I always felt like I could speak to my dog about how I feel

8.45 **Interviewer:** Ja

8.46 **Participant:** And say listen, and my dog wouldn't judge me whatever I'd say what I feel. And he would always be happy to see me, so...I thought that I'd, I'd go with that cause I see my dog as a symbolisation of that...and I also see...some of the characteristics that he shows and I see that, I see it in myself you know he's uhm, a very tough hardy doggy he's been living for 12 years and he really doesn't he doesn't relent and uhm, he doesn't, despite everything he still really loves his family you know he, he stays loyal to everyone.

8.47 **Interviewer:** Ja

- 8.48 **Participant:** Uhm,...so then I went with that idea first and basically...I understood that I have this, this dog which is something I am associate to ok I am associated with I associate my tattoo with a geographical location as well. So basically, I turned it into a lion, which basically like would say kinda plays on the dog's personality...and it plays on the geographical location of where this time period played off. Uhm, cause it's Africa and I actually have one of these spots is shaped like Africa [laughs] it's really cool uhm, and then...I...I kinda felt like okay the dog's just... the tattoo developer is like okay it's a dog so I said okay it's gotta have something right and uhm,...I... I kinda really like this one from Tupac you know the rose that grew from the concrete? And I kinda run, ran with that that's why I got the rose bush that grows around the dogs legs uhm, which obviously also has a connection to, to my...teenage years because I feel like...I really...despite what people thought was gonna happen I kinda like turned out okay do you understand?
- 8.49 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.50 **Participant:** I am finishing my degree this year and you know I feel like [sigh] I feel like I am...a far different person I've made a I don't want to say come back cause I kinda feel like...without all those things happening I also wouldn't have been the person I am today. Uhm, then the rosary was basically [sighs]...just an idea...at that stage of...it had boxing gloves as well so...I first discussed that I kinda found solis in boxing in my life in, in early stages you know a lot of boxing coaches influenced me and...kinda helped me to get back on the straight and narrow and uhm, it's also like a play on you know fight of life
- 8.51 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.52 **Participant:** And then the cross obviously at that [sighs] time...sort of grounded me in my, my faith. I kinda went through a, a bit of a...dark spot for 3 years but I kinda regained my faith in the last year or so. Uhm, so I felt like that...I, I felt like I kinda questioned myself about that particular detail of my tattoo whether it will stay relevant if I change my views but uhm, I felt like actually...help me get grounded even at times when I just you know went dark you understand
- 8.53 **Interviewer:** Ja...okay well ja thank you for sharing that because uhm, o that is...almost exactly what I am...what I am doing is like...people with difficulties in their lives and then...by retelling the story, by rethinking about the story
- 8.54 **Participant:** Yes

- 8.55 **Interviewer:** Actually, seeing okay but...I am not who I was back then, and you know I am not that person, but all those experiences did actually help me to be who I am so
- 8.56 **Participant:** Yes
- 8.57 **Interviewer:** Ja thank you for sharing.
- 8.58 **Participant:** My pleasure.
- 8.59 **Interviewer:** Uhm, obviously okay I can't ask you if you look to the traditional meaning because...yours are a custom piece
- 8.60 **Participant:** [laughs]
- 8.61 **Interviewer:** Uhm, so then the last little part is just about...how you integrate this...if I can call it like a tattoo identity with other parts of your identity uhm, like let's say your work identity first...like you want to be or you're studying law so obviously you're gonna be in a uhm, profession where that is not...so do you think there's a big clash between those two identities or not really?
- 8.62 **Participant:** Well to be honest with you [deep sigh] uhm, I have increasingly become distasteful of the legal profession especially on the corporate side you know I feel like...I felt a lot of basically I felt a lot of...existential...guilt...uhm,...knowing in my subconscious that there is different things that I want to do in life so...personally...I've told myself I try not to attach my own identity to the career I have. Now I'll get to the part of that, that links to my tattoo
- 8.63 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 8.64 **Participant:** Is that I don't know if I'll become a lawyer to be honest with you uhm, at this moment I am not, I am not totally convinced that I would...if I do I don't think it would be a problem because...I feel like...I would probably never get a tattoo that's visible, just cause the fact that it's like cause it tells a story you know it's not a story that I'd tell everybody
- 8.65 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.66 **Participant:** You know I don't have a problem with tattoos that are visible it's just you know its personal preference. So, I feel like... in a way if I work in a professional environment, they'd never see it. But then there is a deeper question of whether or not I'd actually want to work in an environment where people have a problem with seeing tattoos, so I mean [sighs] it raises a couple of questions for myself which I haven't answered yet.

- 8.67 **Interviewer:** Ja...okay so there's still like a little bit of a conflict between...uhm,...whether or not...your work identity is like set in not set in stone but
- 8.68 **Participant:** I would say my work identity is definitely not set in stone
- 8.69 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.70 **Participant:** You know at this...uhm, but, but I, I, I have to say that my work identity at the end of the day can be completely separate to where I am standing now. Uhm,...reason for that is you know the job market at the moment is like extremely tough
- 8.71 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.72 **Participant:** And especially law like...to give you an example...my average at university at this moment is 78% which is in the top 3% of the faculty. I applied to 34 firms...across the country and I didn't get into one. Now I kinda see that as the universe taking to me...but I mean just to show perspective you got 6000 graduates in like 600 jobs
- 8.73 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.74 **Participant:** So, for me I feel like I need to be more flexible. I can't build my identity around being a lawyer I need to be flexible
- 8.75 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.76 **Participant:** If I am, if I am able to do this I gotta do that you understand so...ja
- 8.77 **Interviewer:** Ja that's a good thing to you know be flexible uhm, it's also part of emerging adult is like exploring and then
- 8.78 **Participant:** Yes
- 8.79 **Interviewer:** When you're exploring, and you see this doesn't work...that's fine
- 8.80 **Participant:** Ja
- 8.81 **Interviewer:** That's what it's about and then you go into another, another direction so
- 8.82 **Participant:** I mean it's I, I take my sister for an example she's uhm, 5, 4 years older than I am and she started off uhm, doing acting...and afterwards she, she left the industry cause it was too much for her like she, she did like uhm, stage work you know and uhm, she went into academic route and she's you know she's living in London and she's doing her PhD
- 8.83 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 8.84 **Participant:** You know in philosophy which is totally different field than what she was in and the it was just like because she, she spent time and like found herself she, she explored a lot of different career routes

- 8.85 **Interviewer:** Ja even me, I decided at age 32 to come back to university
- 8.86 **Participant:** Yes, I mean
- 8.87 **Interviewer:** To study so
- 8.88 **Participant:** She also has a she, she kind of like desensitized me for tattoos [laughs] I don't know she; she got her first tattoo when she was 16 so [laughs]
- 8.89 **Interviewer:** Okay well okay the last part of this question is then on religious identity.
- 8.90 **Participant:** Yes
- 8.91 **Interviewer:** So first let's see did you, do you have any...conflict with people like from your religious group that are against tattoos?
- 8.92 **Participant:** Uhm, not really to be honest I've, I've felt some animosity with certain really conservative people...and some older people but you know to be honest I, I don't really move in those circles for me to...uhm,
- 8.93 **Interviewer:** Okay
- 8.94 **Participant:** I've a pretty small uhm, friend group so I, I haven't really, I haven't come into open conflict about tattoos ever in my life. Uhm,...it's not, it's not something which I've come across
- 8.95 **Interviewer:** Okay then and so how do you think your views on tattoos have impact on your religious identity? How do you...like mesh those two, or are there conflict in your mind?
- 8.96 **Participant:** Uhm, no not at all. To be honest like I went through a bit of a dark spot like I didn't, I didn't know what I believed for a long time I went to...I was in Poland for a while. And I went to Auschwitz and I kinda like experiencing of being at Auschwitz and it kinda like taught me...I kinda like sat there and thinking there can't be a God if this can happen but...uhm, after I've spent some time reading the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard and I really kinda like...found a more lesser strict more open way of looking at faith so I wouldn't say that I look at the Christian exceptionally strictly, I'd say I look at it exceptionally liberally
- 8.97 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 8.98 **Participant:** Uhm, and I see my personal view that majority maybe...60% of our interpretation God is pretty much a personification of...what we humans think he might be and uhm, you know just try and read between the lines so I don't, I don't see you knowing having tattoos as a problem. Uhm, you know if I can be more specific...uhm, I think that...old testament laws that might prohibit marking your

body just I think is created by men to...control the society of men or something which is actually the creed of God

8.99 **Interviewer:** Well that was all the questions I had for you. Uhm, is there anything you would like to ask afterwards now or

8.100 **Participant:** No

8.101 **Interviewer:** Or unsure about?

8.102 **Participant:** No, it was an interesting experience [laughs]

8.103 **Interviewer:** Okay well

8.104 **Participant:** Cool

Participant 9 – Lennon

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	My tattoos are... Visible/hidden	Does any close family member have tattoos
9	Female	20	White	Afrikaans	Student	Yes	Grown up	Both	Yes

Lennon did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 9

- 9.1 **Interviewer:** Uhm, this is tattoo interview number 9. Thank you so much for your time, I appreciate it very much. Uhm, we went through informed consent form are there any questions you have about the informed consent?
- 9.2 **Participant:** No
- 9.3 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Okay so...firstly I am just gonna ask you a few questions on identity and emerging adulthood. Uhm, like I said there is no right or wrong answers you just give me whatever comes to your mind. So, if I say identity what, what does that mean to you? The term identity?
- 9.4 **Participant:** Uhm, I think how you identify in your own opinion like you get shaped by a lot of people around you but how you respond to that and how you shape yourself...I would say is your identity. How you respond to everything.
- 9.5 **Interviewer:** Would you feel that tattoos are a big part of your identity?
- 9.6 **Participant:** Yes, definitely.
- 9.7 **Interviewer:** Okay let's say someone looks at you uhm, you said your tattoos are...visible and hidden but let's say someone looks at you for the first time they don't know you, who you are what's your story, they only can, they can only see your tattoos. Uhm,...what do you think is the message they will get about you, just looking at your tattoos?
- 9.8 **Participant:** Uhm, I think that's kinda depending on what kinda person is looking at you because a lot of people have this negative correlation with tattoos. But if it's someone with a neutral opinion about it, I think they will also just see that obviously this is something that she identifies with and really likes and she would like to share with the world or it can be weird because some of my tattoos are...odd [both the participant and the interviewer laughs] so they can have a weird opinion about it.

- 9.9 **Interviewer:** Okay. Okay so moving on to the emerging adulthood part. What would you understand under the term emerging adulthood?
- 9.10 **Participant:** Uhm, I think as you are growing up starting to make your own decisions, other people can influence those decisions but at the end it's about how you decide to go about things. So, I think as you are emerging into adulthood you are emerging into your own...everything kind of
- 9.11 **Interviewer:** Okay so as you are in this stage now of emerging adulthood uhm, how do you...experience this life stage? Anything that is very difficult or anything you are enjoying very much?
- 9.12 **Participant:** Uhm,...obviously there are some difficult things that come with it, especially as a student. But I think it's really good and all of the difficulties really make it better because then you just learn how to be better with it. So, as you struggle you learn how to live with it and how to...get better ways to deal with it so that you know that you are equipped for the future.
- 9.13 **Interviewer:** Are there any of those struggles that comes to mind how you can give an example of something you struggling maybe with...yourself?
- 9.14 **Participant:** Uhm, well finances [giggling] are always one so...as a student you struggle with this and then you, things pop up that you have to pay and now you just need to get money to give to a hoodie [giggles] that you have to buy with your department and then you need to figure out a way because you don't want to run to your parents because obviously you wanna emerge into this adulthood so running back to them isn't really the best decision to make so, getting over that financial struggle by yourself is actually something good.
- 9.15 **Interviewer:** Okay ja. Uhm, would you say that tattoos are becoming more prominent amongst emerging adults?
- 9.16 **Participant:** Yes, yes. But I don't think all of them is people who have meaning to them I think a lot of children are still in school, children in school are just getting it. Because it's this newly accepted thing, it's not that odd anymore to have it so...they get whatever and one day they like whoop whoops [both the participant and the interviewer laughs]
- 9.17 **Interviewer:** Then they regret. Okay so if I can ask you when did you get your first tattoo?
- 9.18 **Participant:** Uhm, beginning of grade 9, so I was 15.
- 9.19 **Interviewer:** Okay so that's quite young.

- 9.20 **Participant:** Yes
- 9.21 **Interviewer:** Can you tell me what it is?
- 9.22 **Participant:** What it is?
- 9.23 **Interviewer:** Ja what, what design or
- 9.24 **Participant:** Oh uhm,
- 9.25 **Interviewer:** Explain it a bit or
- 9.26 **Participant:** It, it's a...like half a scroll with the initials of our family on it
- 9.27 **Interviewer:** Oh okay
- 9.28 **Participant:** Yes.
- 9.29 **Interviewer:** Okay can you tell me, how did you decide to get this specific design?
- 9.30 **Participant:** Uhm, we went as a family to the tattoo parlour and then my mom wanted to do something that included the four of us cause initially it was going to be a thing about me and my sister. But then we decided so now it's going to be a thing about the four so I designed something that would uhm,...include the four of us without being too...uitspattig half so we decided on the initials and we just do it for the artist and he...did it.
- 9.31 **Interviewer:** Okay so did, did everybody in the family or the four people whose initials are in it did every one of them get the tattoo?
- 9.32 **Participant:** Yes
- 9.33 **Interviewer:** Okay so you said it was supposed to be about you and your sister, so can you tell me how did it come about that the two of you decided that uhm, you wanted to get something like that or the reason behind why you and your sister would get the same tattoo?
- 9.34 **Participant:** Uhm, at that time she was in her matric year, so we knew that now she would go off to college or move away or work or whatever so we wouldn't be together anymore and we wanted to get something to just represent us even though we are split up
- 9.35 **Interviewer:** Okay...so would you say family is like a big part of, of your identity or?
- 9.36 **Participant:** Yes, definitely.
- 9.37 **Interviewer:** Okay. Then okay you said you have five tattoos neh?
- 9.38 **Participant:** Yes
- 9.39 **Interviewer:** Let's go then to number two. How old were you when you got that one?
- 9.40 **Participant:** Now I just need to think when was the second one, uhm,. I think it was at the end of grade 11 so 17.

- 9.41 **Interviewer:** 17?
- 9.42 **Participant:** Yes
- 9.43 **Interviewer:** And then can you describe that one also?
- 9.44 **Participant:** This one is the base and treble clef for
- 9.45 **Interviewer:** Okay
- 9.46 **Participant:** Music because I play piano and violin.
- 9.47 **Interviewer:** Okay and then can you tell me, okay you covered now a bit of your music but like why do you feel you needed to get that?
- 9.48 **Participant:** Well I've always been because I started with music at the age of four, so it went a bit about my life and...in grade 11 I was still developing like a lot in my music cause I had a really good teacher at the school and like a lot of opportunities to grow in going to different shows and...I think it was just a good decision at the time to represent this is what I am at the moment and so
- 9.49 **Interviewer:** Okay so that one...is on your hand very visible.
- 9.50 **Participant:** Yes
- 9.51 **Interviewer:** Is there a reason why you think why did you put it there upfront where you know people see it? Very easily.
- 9.52 **Participant:** Uhm,...when I play piano this is how it looks so you can see it while I play and the violin as well
- 9.53 **Interviewer:** Mmm
- 9.54 **Participant:** So, I wanted to be like look [giggling]
- 9.55 **Interviewer:** You people to be able to see that one?
- 9.56 **Participant:** Yes
- 9.57 **Interviewer:** And then the third one?
- 9.58 **Participant:** Was matric, so I was 18
- 9.59 **Interviewer:** 18? And uhm, can you describe that one?
- 9.60 **Participant:** It's a dachshund because in grade 11 I got a dachshund and uhm, it's not only representative of my dog but I really want to study veterinary sciences so I wanted to get something...about animals but the whole paw print was too...everyone has a paw print not really knowing what it means to them so I decided no simple outline of the dachshund to not only represent my personal feelings towards my dog but towards animals.
- 9.61 **Interviewer:** Okay. And are you studying to be a vet now?
- 9.62 **Participant:** I am studying zoology at the moment

- 9.63 **Interviewer:** Zoology ja
- 9.64 **Participant:** Still waiting for Onderstepoort
- 9.65 **Interviewer:** Okay anyway number four?
- 9.66 **Participant:** Uhm, is the...permanent make up
- 9.67 **Interviewer:** O okay did you do that for any specific reasons or just...
- 9.68 **Participant:** [laughs] uhm, my aunt had it, she's...had it for ten years and it looked really good and I don't like putting on makeup every day because it irritates my eyes and it's like 2 minutes wasted, so her...beautician had like a special...on the permanent make up so she was like come with me and then we can get 10% off and I was like okay [both the participant and the interviewer laugh]
- 9.69 **Interviewer:** Okay, and then the last one?
- 9.70 **Participant:** O shit no it's four, it's like 4, 5. [pointing to eyes one at a time] Sorry.
- 9.71 **Interviewer:** Okay
- 9.72 **Participant:** Because it's two lines
- 9.73 **Interviewer:** Okay ja no it's fine so if you look...at your tattoos uhm, like if you put them together do you feel like they express your life story, can they tell your life story to people?
- 9.74 **Participant:** Yes, definitely. I think especially because I got them at different ages, I tried to keep them a year apart, because people always say it's gonna become an addiction so if I can just keep that boundary. But then each one is something important that happened that year or that I knew that would happen or that would come or that I am doing. So, I think it really does...give a lifeline...of what I am and was and...becoming.
- 9.75 **Interviewer:** Okay so if you look back now let's say the, the first one the family scroll uhm,...did it make do you, do you feel it made your life story stronger or did something change after that, that you had to maybe adapt to?
- 9.76 **Participant:** Uhm, ja well we got it as a family and then we kinda had some fights as a family so I think the fact that we had the tattoo kinda made us go back to you know what we have those, this represents as a whole and as a happy family so every time there was some shit going on we would go back to but you know this was once a thing so we can just trust this again
- 9.77 **Interviewer:** Okay now uhm, the last few questions is ...about how you integrate this tattoo identity basically with other identities so let's start with...maybe like a job uhm, you said you want to be a vet, you studying zoology now, how do you think...your

tattoos will influence your, or getting a job, or studying...for what you so let's say for a vet. Do you think there will be like conflict between the two...or not really?

- 9.78 **Participant:** Yes, I think that is also about matter of opinion of your lecturers or...the people that hire you. But I think with the veterinary sciences specifically they not as iffy as the medical students are. Getting to work with people, people you have to see every day. With us you're with a dog nobody sees you, so it's not really that strict. The vet's I have worked with, most of them have tattoos, some of them have very visible tattoos and don't even ask you about your tattoos when they see it because I don't think it really plays that big of a in specifically that...type of career.
- 9.79 **Interviewer:** Okay. And then the last questions is about your religious identity. Do you think there's uhm, clash between your religious identity and the, the tattoos?
- 9.80 **Participant:** No because, yes I am religious but I am not religiously following something that was written by people so...in the bible they say ja your body is a temple you shouldn't do this and this but that's, that's just a matter of their opinion again. I feel like we were given all this, I am not busy writing like I hate this and this I am just expressing myself more so I feel like the fact that I am accepting myself, accepting the things around me try to grow as a person, should mean something to that...religion because that's what you want out of a religion to feel better about yourself and the people around you. To get some sense of happiness and comfort out of it.
- 9.81 **Interviewer:** Tell me did you have any like conflict with other people, who...from the same religious group or from other religious groups who may be found your tattoos unacceptable?
- 9.82 **Participant:** Uhm, I think mostly just family like grandparents. But ja like from the same religion but uhm, I don't know if it was really for religion that they found a problem with it, just the fact that a 15-year-old girl got a tattoo so.
- 9.83 **Interviewer:** Okay ja. So basically...your views on tattoos did it, did it impact your religious identity, did it make you think about...your religion and change your...ideas about it or were you always like no...did you always see religion as the way you see it now?
- 9.84 **Participant:** Not always because as a child you're mostly influenced by your parents. So, for them if they doing it like this then you also doing it like this. But uhm, I don't think when I got my first tattoo I started doing something on my own but...ag I don't know the tattoos I don't think it played that big of a role in me seeing religion in another way I think that was just me growing up.

9.85 **Interviewer:** Okay

9.86 **Participant:** With tattoos or without them.

9.87 **Interviewer:** Well that's all the questions I have for you, thank you so much for taking part. Is there anything you would like to ask or want to know about...uhm, about the session or something you want to add maybe?

9.88 **Participant:** No

9.89 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Okay well thank you so much

9.90 **Participant:** Pleasure

Participant 10 – Kai

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Ethnic / Language	Student / not?	Religious?	Adolescent / In between / grown up	Visible/hidden My tattoos are...	Does any close family member have tattoos
10	Male	21	White	Afrikaans	Student	Yes	Grown up	Hidden	Yes

Kai did not submit a reflective writing piece

Interview 10

- 10.1 **Interviewer:** Uhm, welcome this is tattoo interview number 10, thank you so much for your time. Uhm, we did go through the informed consent form are there any questions you have about informed consent?
- 10.2 **Participant:** No.
- 10.3 **Interviewer:** Nothing? Okay so then we can go on. The first section will be about identity, uhm, like I said there is no right or wrong answers so whatever you think...you can just tell me. Uhm, so the first question is basically what does identity mean to you?
- 10.4 **Participant:** Uhm, identity it's a hard question but uhm, I think it's, it's just who you are there's no more aspects. You decide what you want to be and there is some aspects that you are even if you don't decide it and that together make it's a combination of sociology but also psychology and just what you want to do your dreams and all that also all rolled into one.
- 10.5 **Interviewer:** Okay...do you think that uhm, tattoos are a part of your identity?
- 10.6 **Participant:** Uhm, to some people they are uhm, some people, they it's definitely part of an identity but it could be the core part or just they...fixed it differs from everyone. For me it's, it's not necessarily part of my core...identity but it was definitely a distant aspect I put into the column that I call my identity if I can explain it like that
- 10.7 **Interviewer:** Okay. If someone should look at your tattoo uhm, without knowing you, without knowing who you are or what the meaning is uhm, what, what message do you think will they get from just looking at it?
- 10.8 **Participant:** Uhm,...well most people already know they look they immediately ask if they are interested like they want to know more. But there are a lot of people who just...they immediately retract and just think bad thoughts and all that, but I don't

think the, the judgement is as common as it was previous. My generations more of a, of a we are more interested than judgemental, but I think a lot of the older generation a lot of uhm, but this is not right this uhm, and stuff like that

- 10.9 **Interviewer:** Ja. Okay so the second part is then the emerging adulthood part. And if I say emerging adult, uhm, what do you, what do you, what does that mean to you?
- 10.10 **Participant:** Uhm, emerging adulthood I think that's the time where you just find yourself I don't think there's a age...range but it's more a time where you just decide who you truly are, what you can become, what do you want to be, who you want in your life just when you start questioning...things about yourself and not just accepting what other people say I think that's
- 10.11 **Interviewer:** Ja, so basically exploring everything?
- 10.12 **Participant:** Yes
- 10.13 **Interviewer:** Okay. So, tell me how do you experience this stage of your life are there any challenges that you find difficult or anything you find it's a as fun or something that you enjoy about it?
- 10.14 **Participant:** In this part...uhm, well I think I grew up very earlier, no specific reason just my family uhm, all of my family they were good to me and so and they raised me right and I have a lot of voortrekkers if that, you became a grown up much quicker than you understood what you want so uhm, this...part is I don't I feel like I am already grown up but it's still evolving uhm, and ja it's very freeing to feel like you are your own person no one can tell you this or that uhm, where the time like where my parents if they talk to me it's with respect and I understand like they don't push as very much like they would when I was young so just that freedom of being who you can be and who you want to be and just to see your own it's very fun to see the path your on and to see your checkmarks okay I've got this, I've got this I am getting closer to the end goal and stuff like that is also a very fun part of the, of this time, student life now.
- 10.15 **Interviewer:** Do you feel that tattoos are becoming more prominent in this for people that are in an emerging adulthood phase?
- 10.16 **Participant:** Yes, I think tattoos are much easier way for them to just show that they have control over their life and it's their choice so the emerging adulthood is a lot of time where the piercings and tattoos and all that start just to show that they can do what they want, they not children anymore.

- 10.17 **Interviewer:** Good well then, we will move onto the third section which is about the tattoos. So, when did you get your first tattoo?
- 10.18 **Participant:** Uhm, grade 10. So that's when I was...16
- 10.19 **Interviewer:** 16?
- 10.20 **Participant:** Yeah, ja
- 10.21 **Interviewer:** Okay so that's quite young. Uhm, can you maybe explain to me basically what it is or what the design is?
- 10.22 **Participant:** Uhm, it's a...gold but yellow dragon holding a ying yang...ja...you can see on the arm here
- 10.23 **Interviewer:** Okay. And then let's go into the story behind it, why you got it? All those things.
- 10.24 **Participant:** So ja so...I have a reason I tell people and then there is just the more reason why I actually got it. Uhm,...the reason I tell people is uhm, dragons mean and the balance of ying yang that I found balance and I want to keep it, that's the story I tell people it is true...uhm, but there is some aspects like when I got the tattoo that meaning was not apparent it's just...after I got it what I put to it uhm,...I got it because I...picked just sort of define...define me in that sense like not that the art of the tattoo itself wasn't actually that important, dragon ying yang was important but it was more the fact that the tattoo, the aspect that I had a tattoo just showed what type of direction I wanted to go with my life and what I want people to see was it made it easier for me to actually get through high school, it, I wasn't bullied or anything like that, that life was quite great it's just by getting the tattoo...it helped me get through it and made people see me in a different light uhm, a lot of people saw me one way I wanted them to see me in another way so and that's why I said I started saying it was me I had balance in myself and that's why I was getting a ying yang but initially it was that fact that I wanted...to people to see my true personality as this cause a lot of people they thought of me as this and this and still a lot of people think I am overly nice or I am a nerd or stuff like that I just want to show them there is a darker, not darker but a different part
- 10.25 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 10.26 **Participant:** Ja so it was just that way of showing people that I am more than just...the small bit you see ja that's the reason behind it.
- 10.27 **Interviewer:** Okay so did you, you chose the dragon...just, was it just because dragons like look cool and mean or did you look at the meaning that dragons had

traditionally or did you make up your own meaning and said okay a dragon will fit that the best?

10.28 **Participant:** I've always had a fascination with reptiles if I can say my spirit animal is a snake...uhm, and I've always had a fascination with dragons so the dragon I got is a very linear snake it was the best fitting of me I like dragons they old and wise and some of people don't want to mess with them because they angry but some are where people come to for advice so that's I chose dragon as my own meaning but I think it's part of more meaning of it

10.29 **Interviewer:** Ja

10.30 **Participant:** So ja but that's why the dragon because I was fascinated with dragons uhm, if I change it I maybe will turn the dragon into a snake but...the dragon itself is still it for some other reason the dragon and ying yang was very I wanted to go for those cause of what the dragon is and what in the fantasy world what they could mean danger but also advice to heroes who need it and shit like that.

10.31 **Interviewer:** Okay so, you said you, you basically have two reasons, one you tell people uhm, so uhm, let me just get that clear, the one you tell other people when, when I ask you okay o a dragon what why what's the reason you give them?

10.32 **Participant:** The dragon is me and the ying yang balance, so I found balance in my life and I was trying to keep it. That's what, the easiest one I tell people.

10.33 **Interviewer:** Okay. And then the private part is...

10.34 **Participant:** Just the fact that uhm, that I wanted people to see me diff...differently than they perceive me like they judge the book, but I wanted to give them a hint that inside the book is not the same as the cover shows. That's the private reason which if I tell people they will probably be like oh you are manipulating to see that I am not this

10.35 **Interviewer:** Ja

10.36 **Participant:** This makes them think more of me than what they see that uhm, the reason I got the

10.37 **Interviewer:** How long did you say it took you to decide okay from this from knowing getting a tattoo to...getting it

10.38 **Participant:** Uhm,...this one was very quick like I want another...two upper tattoos but those I've been deciding 3 or 4 years now if not longer but this one is very quick because at that time in my life of getting it, it was quite, it was very quick not enough time to actually decide

10.39 **Interviewer:** Ja

10.40 **Participant:** And I said I decided on ying yang that was immediately. My mother she, she has tattoos uhm, she wanted to advise me and I was with her and that's why we decided on rose gold because the red wouldn't have been efficient, it would have been more menacing than actually what I wanted and uhm, so...ja so it was actually quite quickly the, the time when I said like I would have wished I actually took longer I would have still gotten the tattoo but took longer and looked at more designs and stuff like that and didn't actually listen to my mother as much, cause I had a cool design that I wanted of like a white dragon and a black dragon flying around but she said that it would hurt more if the black and the white...but I quite liked that so I wish I didn't listen to her as much but as, but ja because grade 10 was coming and I didn't have so long vacation and stuff like that I decide quite quickly on it

10.41 **Interviewer:** Okay that's quite interesting that you, you say your mother has also tattoos, do you think that played any role in...in you deciding okay I am gonna, gonna like deal with this type of crisis with a tattoo?

10.42 **Participant:** That did definitely. She, my mother is as I said when she was younger she was considered a goth like with the piercings and dark hair and she has two important tattoos on her shoulders uhm, and that was she was, it also fascinated...fascinated me that my mother...did is how she dealt with things, and I didn't want to be an exact copy but it's just it did influence me and it did, like this is a way I can...express myself and it was just the fact of how she taught me body art and certain tattoos and piercings...it was seen as beautiful it wasn't the type of house of ugh it's not good it, the house I grew up in just made it more comfortable so I think I thought like her in that she just made it possible that I didn't feel afraid for asking for one so ja that's the influence in that.

10.43 **Interviewer:** Okay so the next question will be how did people close to you react when they saw it first well so obviously your mother wouldn't have been like as she

10.44 **Participant:** She's the one who bought it

10.45 **Interviewer:** Who bought it ja

10.46 **Interviewer:** Were there other people around that maybe didn't react so well when they saw it?

10.47 **Participant:** Yes, yes uhm, my grandmother and grandfather they, they were chilled not as into it as my mother, my mother was like oh bonding thing this is something we have in common. My grandmother and grandfather accepted it, then on my dad's

uhm, my dad and my mom never married uhm, so my dad married [struggles over word] another women, I am very close with her she is like a second mother, and she said that...she didn't feel that I should have gotten it at a young age because she was afraid that uhm, I would have made a mistake and regret it afterwards and stuff so she, she and my father uhm, they didn't react as well...to it uhm, but as you understand she was very afraid of impulsive decisions because my father's wife she had, she made a lot of impulse decisions and saw how it ruined lives so that's why, so I understand how she reacted, she still supported me, she was just like the next one just tell me

10.48 **Interviewer:** [laughs]

10.49 **Participant:** And then we will talk about it like she's the main reason I haven't gotten the second one I want yet. She said hold off so ja. So, she didn't, she and my father didn't react, they thought o no it was impulsive...ja so that's, that's they didn't react as warmly to it.

10.50 **Interviewer:** So, the other one's you are considering getting...uhm, are you...almost settled on what they will be and

10.51 **Participant:** Yes, I've decided I just want to talk to my mother still, but I've decided to get one when I finish my degree now. To finish one ja uhm, and the last one I want to get...very based on life when I've settled myself, the second one will also be hidden, it will be on my back...on the rise of my back but the last one I want to get will be actually, people will be able to get it, it will be a more prominent one, so I want it where when I get jobs people will not look at me physically but look at my CV after I've achieved something so they won't judge me if I put it out in the open. It's not a sleeve like I want something...on my hand like maybe palm snake something, something like that

10.52 **Interviewer:** Ja

10.53 **Participant:** Ja so that's the final one I will get but that will be very later in life like I said when I've had achievements and people will not look at me like oh tattoo probably bad but actually look at my CV like oh prominent doctor this this, this we don't care about the other things ja so...those are

10.54 **Interviewer:** So okay ja the last part you've touched on it now like uhm,...your work identity uhm, I don't know what are you studying at the moment?

10.55 **Participant:** Biochemistry and genetics

- 10.56 **Interviewer:** Okay so do you think...having tattoos would influence you, your work obviously yours you can hide so do you think...there will be like a clash when you need to find work between the two identities of tattoos and being professional?
- 10.57 **Participant:** It depends I think on the work actually. Uhm, like in the bio, biology and sciences it is extremely people don't look as much at the physical as they look at the CV's and stuff like that, that's why I, I, I think I can do it and people will still respect me and if you look at the science people working in labs nowadays, every one of them have something there's something odd like a tattoo or a piercing and some people you can see there is...most of them are that type of people personalities that would get the...this, this kind of thing
- 10.58 **Interviewer:** Ja
- 10.59 **Participant:** But I think in like business or stuff like where you have to work with new people, where they just they will have a look at you and they will make a decision on who you are, even if you have been working at a business for like 50 years they'll if, if you have new business partners you meet and then they'll make judgement where in the lab they are more looking at what you have accomplished, what you've given this research or that and these [struggles over word] techniques and not actually the physical so I think jobs where you have to make an impression like as a salesman or something like that, people will judge but ja some, some professions they will not, they will not influence that much.
- 10.60 **Interviewer:** Do you think maybe you've said now that there is a lot of people in the sciences that work in the labs that have a tattoo or a piercing do you think...that is because almost like the same reason as you everybody look at oh you, you, you wearing a white coat you a nerd working in the labs and then they...almost feel like you have to do something just to show but there is more to me than just the white lab coat?
- 10.61 **Participant:** I think, I think that's most of them have that reason, they probably have different emotional reasons and stuff like that but I also think that is a I think that is also one of the reasons as I said people usually judge quickly and especially scientists...they have a much broader perception on stuff like this and life on a general so I think it does pisses them off in the sense of someone forced you to do something or be what you want to be most people like scientist they don't want to be
- 10.62 **Interviewer:** Ja

- 10.63 **Participant:** They want to be themselves and because personally I don't know I think personally scientists have a broader understanding of who they truly are than most people it's just the how they think and how they analyse situations and stuff like that so I think that, they like disproving other people so I think that is a part of why they would...be different...ja
- 10.64 **Interviewer:** Okay and then the last few questions is about religious identity. Uhm, do you feel like as if there is a clash between your tattoo and your religious identity?
- 10.65 **Participant:** For myself no but I am religious but I don't go to church and stuff like that cause I feel they would not, they get offended as if for me for doing this to myself uhm, but me personally I...I don't it doesn't...it's not...I don't think it clashes there's no reason why tattoo would be bad in my eyes and religion uhm,...there's no like your body's a temple people draw numerals on temples of great historic events or glasses or stuff like that to make it beautiful but some churches for some people they are beautiful and to others they are ugly it's the same from...it's I believe that you would know if you do something wrong...spiritually you would definitely know so as the only botsing it would have with my religion is that I think some people, the older generation in the church react differently about worse upon it but like I said the new generation actually also they I have seen a lot of people at church ...they actually start even some uhm, uhm, dominies, preachers I've seen actually have tattoos so ja I think it's more a generation than actual religion problem.
- 10.66 **Interviewer:** Well, that is then all the questions I have for you. Thank you so much for helping me, uhm, are there anything you want to know now, any questions you want to ask me?
- 10.67 **Participant:** No
- 10.68 **Interviewer:** Nothing?

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