

**A Phenomenological Study of Middle-Aged Adults Experiences of Tattoos in the
Workplace in Kwa-Zulu Natal**

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Bachelor of Arts Honours in Psychology degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Abstract:

Today, tattoos have gained popularity, especially with regards to middle-aged adults. However, those with tattoos working in white collar sectors are deemed as not portraying a professional work image. Therefore, it is believed that tattoos may hinder one's progress in the workplace. This research used a qualitative approach where semi-structured Zoom interviews were conducted with three middle-aged adults to describe their experiences of tattoos in the workplace. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data this resulted in five themes with the main theme being the views of tattoos in the workplace. Historically, tattoos were associated with traits such as deviance, rebellion, unprofessionalism, and non-conforming. Due to this, people who had tattoos in the workplace were frowned upon or judged to some extent because of the connotations associated with the tattoos and because of the lack of professionalism they displayed. The view of tattoos is changing, and tattoos have been deemed more acceptable in society due to their popularity and common occurrence. Although the findings suggest that tattoos are becoming more acceptable, there is still slight disapproval of tattoos in the workplace. Therefore, further research would be required to explore this phenomenon.

Keywords: middle-aged adults, tattoos in the workplace, tattoos, white-collar work sector

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A Phenomenological Study of Middle-Aged Adults Experiences of Tattoos in the Workplace in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Background

As presently known, tattooing is the practice of inserting ink into the surface of one's skin (Rao, 2018). Today, tattoos have gained popularity in society, as studies show that 45% of people between the ages of 30-49 years have tattoos (Holmes, 2018). However, as more people in this age group get tattoos, they are viewed as not portraying a professional image in the white-collar work sector. Tattoos, in turn, may hinder one's progress in the workplace or even prevent them from being employed (Mendez, 2015). These negative evaluations of tattoos can lead to unfair treatment concerning social interactions in the workplace. When employers are considering whom to hire, they must bear in mind the image of the company, as whom they hire will be representative of the company, therefore, employers may be hesitant to hire people who do not fit with the company's image (Hill, 2016). Potential employees may feel they are being discriminated against because of their tattoos and the current work employees who perhaps do not have tattoos may feel that the working environment is unfair (Hill, 2016). This can lead to people feeling they are being categorised which makes mention to the Social Identity Theory. This research aims to describe middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace and how this can impact their advancements in their career. This research can also be used to inform potential employees of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace as well as contributing to the field of Social Psychology.

Rationale:

This research can inform individuals who are considering or have tattoos of how they are perceived in the working environment. This is important when people are considering new employment opportunities as previous literature suggests that tattoos can impact one's professional image thus implying that tattooed middle-aged adults do not reflect a professional image when interacting with clients or other employees in the workplace (Mendez, 2015). The research can also help dispel negative views or connotations of prospective employers around individuals who choose to have tattoos. Most studies on tattoos in the workplace have been based overseas (Tiru, 2019) and due to the limited data available in South Africa, it is proposed the current research be undertaken qualitatively to assess the rationality of tattoos creating a presumed negative perception in the workplace and to set the scene for more detailed quantitative analysis in the future.

Problem Statement:

According to Mendez (2015), there is a presumed stigma around tattoos as they are not generally viewed as portraying a professional image in the white-collared work sector. As a result, tattoos may hinder one's progress in the workplace (Mendez, 2015). Research conducted by Dalia Research (2018, as cited in Holmes, 2018), indicated that 45% of people between the ages of 30-49 years have tattoos. As employers are reluctant to hire tattooed people because of their lack of a professional image this could result in more people struggling to find jobs because of their tattoos. This, in turn, could contribute to the rising unemployment rate of South Africa as tattooed middle-aged adults are unable to find work (Mendez, 2015; Smit, 2019). The current research could be useful to help shed light on middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the work environment in South Africa and their influence on future employment opportunities, to help curb the spiralling unemployment rate of almost 30% according to Statistics SA (Smit, 2019).

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this research is to qualitatively describe middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace. Thus, gaining insight into how tattooed white-collar workers are viewed in the workplace. Furthermore, one can establish whether tattooed middle-aged adults are categorised differently in comparison to non-tattooed middle-aged adults.

Research Question:

What are the experiences of tattooed middle-aged adults in the workplace?

Research Objectives:

To explore the experiences of middle-aged adults who have tattoos in the white-collar work sector

To explore the identity of tattooed middle-aged adults

To gain a deeper understanding of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace

Literature Review:

This section discusses the Social Identity Theory which was used to determine how tattoos impact one's identity as well as if tattooed people are categorised in the workplace or associate with a certain group. Furthermore, previous literature has been explored and several themes concerning tattoos in the workplace have emerged. Lastly, the key concepts of this research will be defined.

Theoretical Foundation:

The theory used in this research is The Social Identity Theory (SIT). The SIT is an interactionist Social Psychology theory that was introduced in 1978 by Tajfel and later, further developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 (Trepte & Loy, 2017). The SIT originated from the belief that belonging to a group can help people establish meaning in social situations. It is suggested that group membership defines people in regards to who they are and how they relate to other people as well as giving them a sense of identity within a specific group (Ellemers, 2019). This theory suggests that a person gains a sense of whom they are based on their group membership. People evaluate and categorise themselves based on the groups they belong to and fit in to (in-groups) and the groups they do not feel a part of (out-groups) (Trepte & Loy, 2017).

Three cognitive components constitute The SIT, which are; social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification (Vinney, 2020). The first component is social categorisation. This is how one organises or categories people based on their similarities and differences into certain social groups to make sense of the social world (Vinney, 2020). The second component is social comparison. This is how individuals compare their group with other groups regarding social ranking. Ideally, one would view their group as having a higher social ranking than the out-groups (Vinney, 2020). The third component is social identification. This is where one identifies as a member of a particular group. This will then encourage individuals to behave in such a manner that they believe other members of the group behave (Vinney, 2020). This theory is appropriate as it explains human behaviour through group formation and identity (Kim, 2013). Furthermore, this theory applies to this study as the idea is to gain an understanding of how middle-aged adults with tattoos are viewed and possibly categorised in the workplace.

Historically, tattooed people belonged to a group constructed and defined by society. By this, one was able to gain insight into this social group, how it impacted their identity, and how they were ranked in society as well as how out-groups (non-tattooed people) viewed these groups (tattooed people). This theory can be used to understand why people with tattoos are categorised into different groups of a deviant, rebellious, gang-related nature and so on (Weaver, 2019). The SIT can be used to explain how individuals achieve a sense of identity through obtaining tattoos thus showing their individuality and uniqueness in comparison to other people who do not have tattoos (Musambira, Raymond, & Hastings, 2016). One of the weaknesses of this theory is that it fails to explain in-group favouritism (Kim, 2013). To

overcome this, caution will be taken to ensure non-tattooed people are not highly valued over tattooed people or vice versa. The relevance of this theory links to the idea that in society, tattooed people have been categorised, taking on an “us versus them” mentality, tattooed people versus non-tattooed people (Kosut, 2015). Therefore, the idea is to understand middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace and how their tattoos have impacted their social identity in the workplace.

Literature Review:

Culture and Motivation.

Tattooing practices within different cultures may be viewed positively in some and could be disapproved of in others as they are seen as an act of self-mutilation (Kosut, 2015). Tattoos are a mark of individuality or can be used to express one's social or political associations. However, tattoos may portray a variety of meanings that are left open for interpretation by society (Kosut, 2015). Apart from expressing individuality, a person's motivation for getting a tattoo is varied. One may decide to get a specific tattoo based on their will to deviate from societal norms, to commemorate someone or something, to express themselves or show their association to a particular group (Rao, 2018). Factors such as age, gender, race, sexuality, social class and occupation, may affect one's choice on which tattoo to get (Kosut, 2015).

Art and Religion.

Vail (1999, as cited in Kosut, 2015), suggested people who get tattoos may view their tattoos as a collection of art through socially interacting with others in society. Historically, tattoos played a role in the organisation and operation of social, political, and religious institutions. Furthermore, some people's tattoos symbolise their association with a particular group (Kosut, 2015). For example, having a tattoo of a cross could elicit religious connotations. The types of tattoos a person had were often as a result of societies social systems (Kosut, 2015). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tattooing was associated with society's outcasts such as criminals, gang members, sailors, or of a lower class. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tattoos were knowingly associated with people who did work in the underground economy, these people were involved in extortion, petty crime, and prostitution (Kosut, 2015). Today, tattoos are viewed more positively however, there is still a presumed stigma around tattoos. Due to this, some workplaces view tattoos as not portraying a professional image and are more sceptical when hiring people with tattoos (Mendez M. , 2015).

Tattoo size.

Hill (2016) conducted a study that sought to explore whether having a tattoo evoked negative judgements from other people, by examining one's perceptions of others based on the presence or absence of tattoos. The sample consisted of 70 males and 319 females from eighteen years of age and older from a psychology department (Hill, 2016). The participants completed a three-part online survey. A three-way multi-variance analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was done and the results showed that smaller tattoos had less of an effect than larger tattoos did (Hill, 2016). Large tattoos create greater issues for concealment as well as elicit negative judgements from others, as tattoos are viewed as unprofessional and disregard the workplace appearance norms (Hill, 2016). This study is relevant for the current research as it makes mention to tattoos in the workplace which is in line with the current research being described. By including this study, it may help depict how tattoos are viewed in the workplace; thus, informing readers who want to get tattoos of how they could impact one's chances of employment. The limitations of this study are that the sample used consisted of university students and not working employees themselves.

Tattoos in the workplace.

According to Hilliker (2012) tattoos have been deemed more socially acceptable in society. However, due to the historical nature of tattoos, certain traits such as rebellion, deviance, unprofessionalism and so on is still associated with them. This can negatively affect individuals who are considering finding a job (Hilliker, 2012). Dean (2010 as cited in Hilliker, 2012) researched issues around consumer perceptions of workers with visible tattoos. It was hypothesized that customers who had tattoos would have less judgement towards tattooed service providers than non-tattoo customers (Hilliker, 2012). The results also revealed that there was a difference in attitude toward people with tattoos in white-collar occupations versus blue-collar occupations. According to Dean (2010) studies conducted suggest there is a more prevalent stigma in white-collar professions (Hilliker, 2012). This is supported in that many white-collar professions restrict the presence of visible tattoos. It was further hypothesised that older adults hold more negative views of tattoos in the workplace than younger people do (Hilliker, 2012). Older adults associate negative connotations with tattoos whereas younger people appear more accepting of tattoos, it is important to understand the difference in attitudes toward the non-tattooed and tattooed employees (Hilliker, 2012). Hilliker (2015) noted that tattoos may not be a common practice to everyone but if they are, they should not be a reason to deny a person of a job opportunity. Furthermore, one's appearance is an important first

impression in the world of work and as more people choose to get visible tattoos, their choice to get them could potentially hinder their chances of advancing in their careers (Hilliker, 2012).

Another study was conducted on whether tattooed individuals were looked down upon in their work profession due to the presence of their tattoos (Hilliker, 2012). The sample consisted of fifty students, ten males and forty females. A survey was administered to measure the attitudes towards tattoos in the workplace as well as the potential personality characteristics of tattooed individuals (Hilliker, 2012). The results showed no significant results that displayed negative attitudes towards tattooed individuals in the workplace. However, there were relationships established between rebellion, attractiveness, respectfulness, orderliness, and tattoos (Hilliker, 2012). Whilst this study showed no significant results regarding negative attitudes towards tattooed individuals this is useful to the current research as it seeks to describe how tattoos are viewed in the workplace. This study used university students whereas, the current research focused on middle-aged adults. For future studies, a qualitative study should be conducted, and a different age group should be utilised.

The hireability of tattooed people.

Research conducted by Timming; Nickson; Re and Perret, (2015) quantitatively examined the effects of body art on job applicant's hireability ratings. The sample consisted of 182 respondents. The participants participated in a study on an online laboratory. They viewed images of people with tattoos and piercings and were told to rate them on a 7-point scale as to how likely they would be to hire the person in the picture (Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2015). The results revealed that when viewing the photos of the tattooed and pierced applicants it showed lower hireability ratings than the non-tattooed or pierced people. The findings suggested that the negative effects of tattoos on employment chances are low for job applicants looking for non-customer facing work (Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2015). Whereas, in customer-facing work positions, tattoos are associated with low hireability ratings. This suggests that tattoos could potentially hinder one from being employed due to their lack of a professional image (Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2015). This study applies to the current research as it examines how tattoos could impact an individual's image in the workplace.

The views of tattoos in the workplace.

Rao (2018) conducted a mixed-method study examining the perceptions of visible tattoos and pierced professionals. Qualitative interviews as well as an online survey was used to understand the attitudes of people who had visible tattoos and piercings (Rao, 2018). The interviews showed mixed results when examining the views people had towards tattoos, thus, showing,

not all people held negative perceptions on tattoos and that there were some positive perspectives as well (Rao, 2018). The survey showed that 71.3% of people did not view tattooed or pierced individuals differently from non-tattooed or pierced individuals. Furthermore, 7.4% viewed tattoos positively and 21.3% viewed them negatively (Rao, 2018). This study has shed light on how the industry and the public viewed tattoos. This study is relevant to the current research as it can aid in explaining how tattoos are viewed in the work world as well as how others view tattooed people. This can help bring about solutions on how to deal with tattoos in the future (Rao, 2018). The potential downfalls of this study were that the study was conducted overseas and interviewed managers on how they view tattooed employees (Rao, 2018). The current research aims to describe middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace. This will be achieved by using semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the employee's experiences of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace.

The views of tattooed versus non-tattooed people.

Mendez (2015) conducted a study that investigated how undergraduate students viewed tattoos by administering a questionnaire with photos of tattooed and non-tattooed people. It was hypothesised that a difference would be evident between men and women on how they viewed tattoos in the workplace (Mendez, 2015). The results showed no difference between how men and women viewed tattoos in the workplace. However, there was a difference in how the participants viewed visible tattoos as compared to those who had no visible tattoos (Mendez, 2015). This study is relevant because it can be useful for someone to understand how they would be viewed if they have tattoos or if one is considering getting a tattoo, this study may aid them in making an informed decision on whether to get a tattoo or to get one where it can be easily concealed (Mendez, 2015). This study takes on a quantitative position whereas; the current study aims to take on a qualitative stance. The findings show there is some difference towards people who display visible tattoos and those who do not (Mendez, 2015). This can link with the current study as to how tattooed middle-aged adults are viewed in the workplace. One of the downfalls of this study is that it uses undergraduate students whereas; the current research will use middle-aged adults.

Positive and Negative views of tattoos in the workplace.

Tattoos have elicited both negative and positive views from society. According to Martin and Dula, (2010), Resenhoeft, Villa, and Wiseman, (2008, as cited in Drazewski, 2014), Most studies found that tattooed individuals are viewed more negatively than those who do not have tattoos. In a pilot study conducted by Drazewski (2014), participants were told to examine

tattooed and non-tattooed people explicitly and implicitly, out of this, a tattoo stigma was confirmed. The results showed that tattooed participants were rated lower than non-tattooed participants on overall effectiveness. In a similar study conducted by Timming, (2016) he examined employee's chances of being hired with and without tattoos. Although most research has reported negative views of tattoos in the workplace, this research makes mention to the idea that tattoos can also have a positive effect as tattooed employees can portray an alternative image for an organisation especially those which target a younger more edgy customer base (Timming, 2017). Furthermore, by having a unique branding and marketing strategy the presence of tattoos would be more accepted and people would be less discriminated against for having tattoos in the workplace (Timming, 2017). This study relates to the current research exploring the views of tattoos in the workplace.

The views of visible tattoos on white-collar workers.

A quantitative study conducted by Dean (2011), examined how customers perceive visibly tattooed workers. A questionnaire was administered to university students aged 18 to 24 years. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding the appropriateness of employees appearance, the confidence levels of the service provider's capabilities, service satisfaction, and the likelihood of recommending the service provider (Dean, 2011). The findings revealed that young adults found visible tattoos on service providers to be inappropriate and had less confidence in the tattooed individual's capabilities than the non-tattooed employees. This may suggest that people are more likely to judge tattooed people who have white-collar jobs as they are deemed as deviating from how a professional should look. Service satisfaction and recommendations were also lower regarding tattooed service providers (Dean, 2011). This study shows that visible tattoos can be negatively perceived and this, in turn, may have negative consequences for a business or employees (Dean, 2011). The current research may draw on this study as it can give employees an idea of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace. This study focuses on the perceptions of visible tattoos on white-collar service providers (Dean, 2011), which the current research aims to explore. This study is relevant as job applicants or employees need to consider how tattoos could affect their professionalism in the workplace as well as how other employees perceive them in the workplace (Dean, 2011). The downfall of this study was that it did not focus on employee's experiences of having tattoos but rather on how tattoos were perceived in the workplace. Furthermore, the sample consisted of university student. To overcome these downfalls the current study will explore middle-aged adults' experiences of tattoos in the workplace.

From previous literature, one can see that tattoos have mostly been deemed as portraying an unprofessional image in the white-collar work sector. Thus, resulting in difficulties finding employment or advancing in one's career. Most of the studies conducted took on a quantitative perspective which is indicative of a gap in the literature, pointing to the lack of qualitative studies. Furthermore, these studies were conducted overseas thus, showing a lack of studies from a South African perspective. Lastly, the literature examined the perceptions and attitudes of tattoos in the workplace and did not directly focus on middle-aged adult's experiences. This research attempted to fill this gap by utilising qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of middle-aged adults experiences of tattoos in the workplace.

Conceptualisation:

Middle-aged Adults.

Dolberg and Ayalon (2017) refer to middle age as the life stage that falls between young and old age and is roughly defined by an age range of 40 to 65 years of age (Dolberg and Ayalon, 2017). This term is defined as this is the age category that the current research examined to gain an understanding of their experiences of tattoos in the workplace.

Tattoos.

Armstrong, Greif, and Hewitt, (n.d., as cited in Rao, 2018) stated that tattoo is derived from the Tahitian term *tatu* which means a permanent mark or image that is made on the body by inserting a pigment under the skin with the use of a needle (Rao, 2018). This concept is defined as it is the focal point of this research when examining how they are viewed in the workplace.

White-collar jobs.

According to Hopp, Iravani and Liu (2009), white-collar jobs are defined as an office or desk job but are not limited to these. White-collar workers may hold a managerial, professional, or administrative position in the workplace (Hopp, Iravani, & Liu, 2009). This concept is of importance to the research as the aim is to describe middle-aged adults' experiences of tattoos in white-collar work sectors.

Methodology:

This section will discuss and explore the following, the research paradigm, the research design, the population, the sample and the methods used, data collection methods, data analysis methods and lastly, the trustworthiness of this research.

Paradigm:

This research utilised the interpretivist paradigm which aimed to understand and describe human behaviour and experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Interpretivism was influenced by phenomenology which is an approach that seeks to consider subjective interpretations of humans and their views of the world as the starting point in understanding social happenings (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). An interpretivist approach aims to give a different view of a situation, analyse it and provide insight into a particular group and how they make sense of their experiences they have endured (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). This paradigm was chosen as the aim of the research is to understand middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace. The ontological position of the interpretivist paradigm states that reality is subjective, meaning people experience and interpret certain situations and events differently from one another thus, showing there are multiple views of a single event (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Furthermore, information was gathered on middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace to gain an understanding of their subjective experiences. The epistemological position of interpretivism states that as one's understanding and knowledge of the world and reality grows and is constructed; it broadens one's view of the world allowing for different views to be formed through interactions with the social world (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). For example, as understanding is gained from middle-aged adults about their experiences of tattoos in the workplace, people can construct how they view tattooed people. The axiological position of interpretivism states that uniqueness is important (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Cipolletta, Faccio, Berardi (2020, as cited in Kertzman, Kagan, Hegedish, Lapidus, Weizman, 2019) stated people get tattoos to express their feelings and personality thus, indicating that tattoos are a way of developing a unique identity and could build up one's self-image (Kertzman, Kagan, Hegedish, Lapidus, & Weizman, 2019).

Research Design:

The research aimed to describe middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace. Furthermore, this research adopted a phenomenological design (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). According to Husserl (1889), Phenomenological studies aim to understand the nature of an experience and focus on what it means for an individual. Therefore, the research aimed to capture a detailed description of the experiences of middle-aged adults with tattoos in the workplace. Due to the descriptive nature of this research, it adopted a qualitative approach which aimed to describe, understand and explore behaviour or phenomena (Davis, 2014). This study was cross-sectional as it aimed to describe the experience of a certain population that was

being observed (Allen, 2017). In addition, deductive theorising was used due to shifting from a broad view to a narrow view of the topic being researched (Bezuidenhout, 2014). The research aimed to describe the experiences of tattoos in the workplace; this was further narrowed down to focus specifically on white-collar middle-aged adults' experiences of tattoos in the workplace.

Population:

For this research, the target population was white-collar workers who had tattoos. To narrow this down, the target population adopted parameters (Pascoe, 2014). The population parameters were middle-aged adults with white-collar jobs who had tattoos in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Due to this, the best accessible sample were middle-aged adults who had tattoos and that worked in white-collar work sectors. Middle-aged adults with tattoos were selected from various white-collar work sectors. This age was chosen as it was suggested that tattoos were not highly accepted in the past, however, tattoos seem to be gaining more acceptance in today's society but still remain under scrutiny in white-collar work sectors (Weaver, 2019). This chosen population was appropriate as it aimed to answer the research question that focused on middle-aged adults and their experiences of having tattoos in the workplace.

Sampling:

The unit of analysis for this research was participants, specifically their responses to their experiences of having tattoos in a white-collar work sector. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, non-probability sampling was utilised as the researcher did not have access to the whole population (Pascoe, 2014). The sampling method that was used was purposive sampling (Pascoe, 2014). The reason for this method was to purposely choose participants that represented a certain group of people (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). Purposive sampling involved choosing elements that needed to be included in the sample, therefore, people who matched the characteristics needed were used and those who did not were disregarded (Pascoe, 2014). Purposive sampling was used as it saved time in regard to selecting participants as there were certain characteristics that the participants needed to be included in the research (Pascoe, 2014). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher did not have direct access to the participants and therefore, used the snowballing sampling method along with purposive sampling. The snowball sampling method is similar to purposive as they both recruit people with certain characteristics who fit the population parameters (Pascoe, 2014). However, with the snowball sampling method, it allowed the researcher to ask the participants that had agreed to participate in the research if they knew of others who met the population parameters and were interested

in participating in the research (Pascoe, 2014). The sample utilised was middle-aged adults who had tattoos and worked in white-collar work sectors. The sample size originally consisted of four participants, however, due to a lack of response, and withdrawals, the sample consisted of three middle-aged adults of which were all Caucasian and consisted of two females and one male who had at least one tattoo and worked in a white-collar work sector.

Data Collection:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data was collected through online semi-structured interviews. The interviews were initially said to take place over Skype but due to the unfamiliarity of Skype, Zoom was said to be more accessible as most of the participants had Zoom over Skype. Zoom interviews had various advantages and disadvantages. The advantages included it was easy to use, the researcher and participant did not have to endure costs to travel to the interviewing venue, this, in turn; saved time (Garner, 2012). In addition, Zoom was convenient, it had data management features and security features (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). Zoom was supported on various devices such as a computer, phone, and tablet thus making it easier for the participant to access the platform. Zoom had a built-in record button and did not require an additional device to record the interview and once the interview was finished, the recording was automatically converted to an audio file and did not require a third party software (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). This ensured the protection of the data collected. In addition, if the researcher missed any information during the interview, they were able to relisten to the recording to establish what they missed. The disadvantages of Zoom included there were connectivity issues and audio problems which caused frustration, communication issues and missed information during the interview (Garner, 2012).

Strydom and Bezuidenhout, (2014, as cited in Du Plooy-Cilliers et.al. 2014) suggested that semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of one's life experiences. Furthermore, it allowed for freedom within the interviewing process and encouraged the participant to elaborate on their experiences. It also allowed the researcher to ask probing questions which maximised the amount of data collected (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). The researcher made use of an interview schedule which entailed a list of six open-ended questions which ranged from broad general questions to narrow specific questions (see annexure D). (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014) This allowed the participant to elaborate on their experiences of having tattoos in the workplace and the researcher was able to shift the focus of the interview when they felt necessary, this allowed for flexibility in the research

(Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). As some of the advantages of semi-structured interviews were highlighted, the disadvantages were that they were time-consuming and resource-intensive as the researcher required detailed answers and had to transcribe the interviews afterwards (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Due to the busy nature of white-collar workers, it was often difficult to decide on a time and date to set up the interview.

Before the data collection process commenced the participants were contacted over WhatsApp, to confirm that they were interested in participating in the research. This platform was secure as the messages were end-to-end encrypted (WhatsApp Inc., 2020) After the participant agreed to participate in the research process, an email was sent to them containing information explaining the research, consent forms as well as a demographic questionnaire that needed to be completed (see annexure A-C). They were instructed to fill in the forms and email them back to the researcher before the interview could be conducted. Once the consent forms were received, the researcher ensured that all the participants had access to stable Wi-Fi connection or sufficient data and had Zoom on their computer or smartphone. After this, the researcher then confirmed a time and date with the participants to do the interview thereafter, the researcher went onto Zoom and created a meeting. By this, a unique code and password were created which the researcher then emailed to the participant. This created a sense of security as no one else could enter the meeting without the code and password (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). The interview was recorded and ranged from twenty to twenty-five minutes and when the interview ended the recording was automatically saved on the computer which the researcher then moved onto a hard drive for safe storage.

Data Analysis:

The purpose of data analysis was to reduce the amount of information collected, answer the research question and to focus on answering the research objectives as well as draw conclusions from the findings (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Due to the qualitative nature of the research, the data has been analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis entailed finding themes or patterns within the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was an easy and quick analysis method to learn especially if the researcher was new to the method. It was useful for summarising key points from large amounts of data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Due to the flexibility in thematic analysis, it can result in inconsistency and an absence of coherence when constructing themes that emerged from the data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Braun, Clarke (2006), and King (2004, as cited in Nowell, et.al, 2017), stated that thematic analysis was used when the researcher wanted to examine the different perspectives from the participants by emphasising the differences and similarities in their views. Thus, forming a coherent idea of the experiences of tattoos in white-collar work sectors. The disadvantages of thematic analysis were that it was such a broad analysis method which made it difficult to focus on one aspect. In addition, the reliability of thematic analysis was also questioned as it is based on the researcher's interpretations of the data. Due to the lack of structure in thematic analysis in comparison to other qualitative methods, it resulted in the researcher feeling uncertain on how to do a proper thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In overcoming this, the researcher consulted with their supervisor to ensure that they were correct in their analysis method.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis process consists of six steps which included.

I. Familiarising yourself with the data collected:

During this step, the researcher transcribed and read over the data collected from the Zoom interviews and searched for meaning and patterns in the data. This was a time-consuming process however, it was necessary to do to gain an understanding of the data as well as become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the researcher examined the question of “how have your tattoos impacted your sense of identity?” the researcher read the data across the participant's answers to become more familiar with it.

II. Creating initial codes:

Once the researcher was familiar with the data collected from the interviews, the researcher then developed codes. Codes reveal a part of the data that seems to be interesting to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, the researcher worked on a computer and highlighted certain parts of the text in colour to show patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcript was then placed into a table with parts of the text highlighted and assigned a code to it. Once all the data was coded, a list of all the different codes that were found in the data was compiled in a separate document (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Relating to the example previously used, the researcher coded that tattoos did add to one's sense of identity.

III. Identifying themes:

This phase involved organising the codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A list of all the codes was compiled and each code was examined. The codes were highlighted in a colour that represented a certain theme and placed in a table under the appropriate theme. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, once the data was coded themes were found across the data. Five themes emerged which were the views of tattoos in the workplace, sense of identity, non-tattooed versus tattooed people's views of tattoos, generational differences in views of tattoos and societal views of tattoos (now versus then).

IV. Review and Examine themes:

Once all the themes were created, they were reviewed to determine whether they needed to be broken down further, if the themes could merge or if they were not well researched (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, the themes were reviewed to see if there were patterns and to determine how valid the themes were to the research. Once all this was completed, there was a clear idea of what the themes were, how they related to one another and what they revealed about the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

V. Defining and Naming themes:

This phase involved identifying and understanding the essence of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A detailed analysis for each theme was written up including how it was suited to the data gathered as well as the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By the end of this phase, the themes were named and defined and further refinement was done if necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the researcher found that sense of identity was a theme and explained that identity played a role in how their tattoos added to their sense of identity and defined who they were.

VI. Producing the Report:

The last phase entailed writing up the report which explained to the reader that what the researcher found was valid as it was confirmed by previous literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then wrote a report that presented the findings from the analysis process (see findings and interpretation section). This included the use of direct quotes from the participants that related to the specified themes, the research question and previous literature that was reviewed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step aimed to show how accurately the analysis process reported on what was found regarding the experiences of middle-aged adults who had tattoos in the workplace.

Trustworthiness:

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, trustworthiness was used to determine the credibility of the research findings (Koonin, 2014). Trustworthiness refers to a source or object being honest and reliable and can be divided into four concepts namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Koonin, 2014).

Credibility was ensured as the researcher spent extended periods of time with the participants to gain better insight into their experiences (Koonin, 2014). As well as the researcher ensured they had a firm understanding of the participant's answers by constantly paraphrasing and asking for confirmation. Dependability in research speaks to the idea that the research is consistent and can be repeated by other researchers (Koonin, 2014). In this research, external researchers should be able to examine the data and arrive at similar conclusions.

Confirmability refers to how accurate the findings are that emerge from the data collected (Koonin, 2014). The researcher is required to have described the research process fully to aid others in examining the research design. Furthermore, if another researcher were to be analysing the data they should arrive at similar conclusions to the current researcher (Koonin, 2014). Therefore, the researcher was mindful of their own bias that could potentially affect the research process and a thorough collection and analysis of the data was also completed. Transferability refers to the potential of the research findings to be applied to a similar scenario and report similar results (Koonin, 2014). As the results cannot be generalised due to differences in working environments, a similar study can be done in different white-collar work sectors so that one can gain an understanding of other middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in other white-collar work sectors. By this, each sample could add a new perspective or elaborate on new experiences regarding having tattoos in the workplace.

Findings and Interpretation:

In this section, the findings from the research will be discussed making mention of what was found when describing middle-aged adults' experiences of having tattoos in the workplace.

Results and Discussion:

In analysing the data collected through several interviews, thematic analysis was used to allow for an in-depth description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In doing so, five themes emerged which were the views of tattoos in the workplace, sense of identity, non-tattooed versus tattooed people's views of tattoos, generational differences in views of tattoos and lastly, societal views of tattoos.

In this section the findings from the research on middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace have been presented with, various quotes from the participants to support the credibility of the findings. Lastly, the findings have been comprehensively linked to previous literature and to the research question and objectives to support the discussion. The participants which were all middle-aged adults as they fell in the age range of forty- sixty-five years of age. Participant A was forty-two and was an attorney, participant B was fifty-four and was a foreign exchange dealer and lastly, participant C was fifty-three and was a business owner. The participants were all interviewed over Zoom to gain insight into what their experiences were of having tattoos in the workplace.

Theme 1: View of tattoos in the workplace.

All participants stated that having visible tattoos in the workplace, especially in white-collar work sectors, does have an impact on one's professional image. However, if the tattoos are concealed, they were less likely to pose a problem. The data revealed that participant A and B who had visible tattoos would cover them at work so that they could present themselves in a professional light to their clients.

Participant A: *“a business owner will have an image and that, that's an identity that's associated with a tat- a person who has a tattoo might not fit in with that corporate image.”*

On the other hand, participant C did not feel that their tattoos impacted their professional image in their working environment. However, they only stated this as all their tattoos were easily concealed.

“...the way you approach people, I think generally will come before people even notice your tattoos...”

According to Hilliker (2012), tattoos have been deemed more acceptable in society but still have negative connotations attached to them in the workplace. For example, Hilliker (2012) states that characteristics or traits such as rebel, deviant, unprofessional and so on elicits negative connotations. This could potentially impact people who are trying to advance in their career (Hilliker, 2012) Dean (2010, as cited in Hilliker, 2012) researched consumer perceptions of workers with visible tattoos. The results revealed that there was a difference in attitudes toward people with tattoos in white-collar work sectors versus blue-collar work sectors (Hilliker, 2012). People with tattoo in white-collar work sectors were deemed unprofessional

whereas there was not such a negative perception of people with tattoos in blue-collar work sectors (Hilliker, 2012). Participant B states:

“...I’m not being sort of facetious in this way but if I was a bricklayer or a or was a lifesaver who cares...”

Furthermore, this suggests that there is a more prevalent stigma regarding tattoos in white-collar professions or professional work environments (Hilliker, 2012). This idea is supported as most white-collar work sectors state in their dress code that the presence of visible tattoos are not seen as reflecting a professional image (Hilliker, 2012).

As the participants have reported they believed it was more appropriate to conceal their tattoos given that their working environment required a professional appearance when interacting with clients. This was supported by participant C.

“...if you can cover it, if you can cover it with your clothes like on your arms or on your actual body or something like that then I think you're fine.”

According to Antonellis, Berry and Silsbee, (2017) if visible tattoos can be easily concealed employers tend to be more accepting of people who have tattoos in the workplace. Furthermore, these authors argued by one covering their tattoos when interacting with clients, the clients are more likely to perceive them more positively than if their tattoos were exposed. Tattoos portray a certain image and this links with the traits or characteristics as mentioned previously. Therefore, if one can cover their tattoos they are professionally presenting themselves and are less likely to be judged by the client or consumer (Timming, 2017).

Regarding workplace image, two out of the three participants stated that tattoos did not seem to fit the ethos of the corporate world as white-collar jobs were originally seen as a suit and tie job and tattoos did not fit this image. Therefore, if a person constantly must cover their tattoos to fit in with the work environment, they will not be happy in their job.

Participant A: *“if somebody tells them they need to hide their tattoos da-daily then they must just rather go find another job, they not going to fit in with the ethos of the company.”*

From the quote above it seems that tattoos seemed improper in working environments and that employees should present themselves more professionally. It was argued by Naudé, Jordaan and Bergh (2017) that people who had visible tattoos would be less likely to be hired.

As tattoos communicate various messages to people in society such as the person's views, personality, affiliations or expressing themselves through tattoos (Belkin & Sheptak, 2018). In stating this, participant A and B stated that when they forget to cover up their tattoos, they are self-conscious of them.

Participant A: *"And have I forgotten that I am going to meet with someone and have got a shorter sleeve on and being very self-conscious of it, yes."*

In the workplace, the idea is to portray yourself professionally. However, one cannot do this if their tattoos are visible for the client to see. According to Martin and Dula, (2010), Resenhoeft, Villa, and Wiseman, (2008, as cited in Drazewski, 2014), Most studies found that tattooed individuals are viewed more negatively than those who do not have tattoos. This shows that when interacting with clients, the employee is likely to fall victim to judgement and discrimination because of their tattoos and the stigma that is attached to them (Drazewski, 2014).

As mentioned before tattoos have a history of deviance and social stigmas attached to them from history. Therefore due to this, tattoos remain frowned upon in certain areas specifically in the workplace (Antonellis, Berry, & Silsbee, 2017). Ideally when one holds a position in a professional working environment image is important (Antonellis, Berry, & Silsbee, 2017). However, in summary, all the participants reported that they would be mindful of the tattoos they got and the limits in their working environment out of respect for the client and their own image.

Participant A: *"I am still cognizant of uhm my profession and the limitations in which it is going to accept things you know, respectfully so not, not begrudgingly so."*

Theme 2: Sense of Identity.

All the participants agreed that their tattoos added to their sense of identity in the sense that they all got tattoos which they could identify to the meanings of them. Furthermore, they got tattoos to express who they were as an individual and to show that they were their own person and did not need to do things to fit in with a particular social group.

Participant C: *"I never ever got a tattoo to fit in or to belong to something different or to belong to a group or a crowd or I was influenced by someone that had tattoos that said come on you got to get a tattoo."*

According to the Social Identity Theory (SIT), it states that by one belonging to a certain group it can give them a sense of who they are in proportion to their group membership (Ellemers, 2019). The SIT is composed of three cognitive components which are; social categorisation, social comparison and social identification (Vinney, 2019). Social categorisation suggests people organise other people into particular social groups to make sense of the social world (Vinney, 2019). All the participants did not feel they viewed themselves differently to others who did not have tattoos. However, participant B stated that others who did not have tattoos could possibly socially categorise people who had tattoos.

“I don't think I'm a part of a social- social group, okay. But other people might perceive that by seeing the tattoos.”

The second cognitive component is social comparison makes mention to how individuals compare their group (the group they belong to) to other groups (groups they do not belong to) (Vinney, 2019). One could view this as grouping tattooed people versus non-tattooed people. In this instance, the participants reported no negative views from non-tattooed people. In fact, the participants stated that when interacting with others who had no tattoos showed great interest in their tattoos.

Participant B: *“you also get inquiry, people that inquire why you got it and obviously those, ninety-five per cent of people that inquire or majority of the people that inquire is the fact that uh they wouldn't do it themselves.”*

Regarding the third component, social identification, this is where a person identifies themselves as a member of a particular group (Vinney, 2019). All the participants reported that they did not feel a part of a social group. Due to the social history of tattoos and their associations to various traits or labels such as rebellion, deviance, unprofessionalism, crime and so on, Antonellis, Berry and Silsbee (2017), noted that some employers may be reluctant to hire people with tattoos due to their own biases towards tattoo as well as what their preconceived ideas are of a tattooed person's traits or personality type (Weaver, 2019).

Participant C: *“uhm a lot of older employers almost associate tattoos with uhm oh, that person must take drugs, biker or things like that which is obviously not true at all”*

All the participants got their tattoos in their first tattoo in their forties (participant A: forty; participant B: forty-six and participant C: forty-five years old) and stated that there was less pressure from others to get a tattoo and they felt less concerned about being judged for getting a tattoo.

Participant C: *“I think because I got it at such an old-older age, there wasn’t a form of peer pressure or, or needing to fit in or anything, it was a free personal decision on own to do it.”*

Historically, tattoos were frowned upon as they were associated with deviating from societal norms and falling into a rebellious and devious social group (Hilliker, 2012). Furthermore, a person with tattoos was said to have certain traits such as non-conforming, unprofessional and others as well (Hilliker, 2012). Today, tattoos have gained more acceptance and are becoming a popular form of art as they said to be creative, fashionable and to some extent (Neuhaus, 2018).

As tattoos are being perceived in a more normative manner today. Therefore, regarding identity, participant A reported that getting a tattoo when they were older was different in comparison to getting one at a much younger age and now the tattoo meant much more to them as it was about accepting oneself and being happy with who they were.

Participant A: *“There is something different about getting a tattoo when you’re older and you’re more comfortable in your own skin and happy with who you are, and you worry less about what people think.”*

According to Wymann (2010, as cited in Naudé, Jordaan and Bergh, 2017), tattooing was a practice of communicating certain messages about the wearer. Furthermore, the body became a work of art expressing the person’s identity as to who they are (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017). Blanchard and Sanders (1994, 1989, as cited in Naudé, Jordaan and Bergh, 2017) stated that tattoos also symbolised one’s need for identifying as an individual or as part of a group. Furthermore, tattoos were also seen as one gaining or establishing control over their body to do what they wanted (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017).

Participant B and C confirmed this as they emphasised the idea that they got tattoos to express their individuality and state that it was their own body and could do what they wanted without judgement.

Participant B: *“It adds to my identity in a way that it’s my body and I can identify to the meanings of the tattoos.”*

Several studies found that most people got tattoos to express themselves and to create a unique identity for them. Furthermore, it was suggested that tattoos allowed people to be different from the average-looking person through obtaining tattoos (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017).

Often there are various reason and motivations for getting a tattoo in the first place and this varied from participant to participant. Participant A stated:

“was a statement of securing who I am...”

on the other hand, for participant C it was

“to do something that was out of- very much out of my comfort zone.”

Armstrong et.al (2004b, as cited in Naudé, Jordaan and Bergh, 2017) also stated that there were social and psychological reasons why people choose to get tattoos. Some reasons include; for expressing oneself, having a sense of freedom, to commemorate someone or something, coming across as tough or simply getting a tattoo because they could (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017).

Theme 3: Non-tattooed versus tattooed people’s views of tattoos.

Upon seeing visible tattoos, all participants stated that there was a definite reaction from non-tattooed people. These reactions were both negative and positive. Participant B stated that people could possibly react negatively towards them because they have tattoos, and a form of judgement could be passed.

“People see my tattoos, some might take offence to the fact that well because they won’t do it and I’ve done it, take offence, you know pull the mickey out of you...”

Resenhoeft, Villa and Wiseman (2008); Martin and Dula (2010, as cited in Drazewski, 2014) found that tattooed individuals were viewed more negatively than those who did not have tattoos.

In contrast participant A felt that there was no judgement passed on the fact that they had tattoos, however, they mentioned the judgement would differ from generation to generation.

“...I don't think there is a massive judgmental thing unless it's from a uhm... somebody older than you, a generation that don't accept tattoos.”

Regarding generational views of tattoos, older generations are more likely to hold negative views of tattoos and tattooed individuals (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017). Historically, tattoos were taboo and were associated with the outcasts who deviated from societal norms. Such people were sailors, criminals, gang members and other marginalised groups. Therefore, due to this, the older generation still hold negative beliefs about tattoos even though the views and

attitudes of tattoos are moving towards a more positive and accepting position (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017).

On the other hand, some reactions towards tattooed people could be positive, all the participants reported positive reactions to their tattoos from non-tattooed people. These reactions stemmed from a place of curiosity about the tattoos and from a place of non-tattooed people wanting to get one themselves but were too anxious or scared.

Participant A: *“most people who don't have tattoos and look at other people with tattoos look at it from a shucks you're brave, I'd love one but I don't like I don't have the courage to get one”*

The participants noticed that non-tattooed people seeing their tattoos were as Participant C stated,

“It's almost like it starts to be a talking point. It's a, it's almost like a, a gate opening to a conversation.”

In a study conducted by Armstrong et.al (2002b, as cited in Naudé, Jordaan and Bergh, 2017) they discovered that both non-tattooed and tattooed people viewed others with tattoos in a positive light and stated that they were viewed as being unique, interesting, brave, self-confident, desirable and enjoyable.

In addition, all the participants stated that most people who asked about their tattoos showed a silent appreciation for the tattoos.

Participant B: *“They will actually look at the tattoo and will ask or say something that is pretty cool and then would ask is it sore? You know? Because they would appreciate the art...”*

In summary, there are different thoughts on what is acceptable and what is not according to non-tattooed individuals' views of tattoos. Participant B confirms this as they stated,

“I think you've got the two different schools that have that sort of reaction to your tattoos.”

Drawing on the workplace, it is believed that tattooed individuals will have a more challenging time in the workplace regarding how they interact with clients and the professional image they have to maintain in the workplace than opposed to non-tattooed people.

Participant A: *“A person who has a tattoo might not fit in with that corporate image.”*

Dean (2010, 2011), Arndt and Glassman (2012, as cited in Timming, 2017) examined consumers views of tattooed employees, they concluded that people reported a negative experience when interacting with tattooed employees (Timming, 2017). In addition, Doleac and Stein (2013, as cited in Timming, 2017) discovered that consumers would be less likely to purchase products or services from employees who had visible tattoos, thus having a negative impact on the company (Timming, 2017). From an employer's perspective, they may have preconceived ideas and judgements towards tattooed applicants or employees as tattoos were associated with certain traits and behaviours such as rebellion, non-conforming, engaging in risky behaviours or activities and so on (Timming, 2017). By this, employers may be more inclined to employ non-tattooed people over tattooed people (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017).

Theme 4: Generational Differences in Views of Tattoos.

When it comes to tattoos, there are noticeable differences in how tattoos are viewed by different generations. Furthermore, all the participants stated that the younger generation was more open to the presence of tattoos whereas the older generations still displayed some disapproval of them.

Participant A: *“if I am in a uhm younger crowd like, somebody more my age group or younger it's like acceptance and it's older it feels judgemental.”*

As society is changing at a rapid pace so are the views of tattoos. Today, tattoos are more accepted among the younger generation but remain under scrutiny with the older generation. Due to the differences in values, ideologies, culture and behaviours among these groups, this impacts their views of tattoos either positively or negatively (Lopez & Kultgen, 2020). Relating to the views of tattoos, as mentioned previously tattoos were deemed unacceptable and posed as a problem in work environments as they were not seen as portraying a professional image (Lopez & Kultgen, 2020).

In addition to the generational differences in views of tattoos, over time they have been associated with different meanings and things. For example, participant B stated that the motivation and reason for getting a tattoo has changed.

“... You'll find it's the younger generation that now see it as a form of self-expression, or an art and are more acceptable to that.”

Tattooing has been around for thousands of years and historically was associated with rebellion and social deviance. However, today, tattoos have moved away from the deviant nature and are now seen as a socially acceptable form of self-expression (Strubel & Jones, 2017). This

suggests that the reason and motivation for getting a tattoo has changed and the historical stigma attached to tattoos is diminishing (Strubel & Jones, 2017). Although one's reason for getting a tattoo is varied, factors such as the person's age, gender, race, sexuality, social class and occupation may influence or dictate one's choice on what tattoo to get and where to place it (Kosut, 2015).

Although generational differences in views of tattoos still exist there has been little research conducted regarding whether negative stereotypes and stigmas of tattoos is present between the generations (Lopez & Kultgen, 2020). This was supported by Participant B by stating,

“... your older generation still isn't as free-thinking as the younger generation. But I think they're becoming more tolerable and acceptable to seeing tattoos.”

As tattoo consumption is becoming more popular and common, the older generation still holds negative views of tattoos because of what they symbolised back then. Now tattoos have been reconceptualised and are seen as a form of expression and adding to one's identity instead of a deviant and taboo act (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017).

Theme 5: Societal views of tattoos (Then versus Now).

The last theme being explored is the societal views of tattoos (now versus then). Throughout history, tattoos have had negative connotations attached to them and anyone who got a tattoo was deemed as different and showed that they rebelled against societal norms. Therefore, it was believed that only people of a lower class got tattoos (Strubel & Jones, 2017). Participant A confirmed this view from their parents by stating:

“Because I for them didn't capture the typical person who would get a tattoo. So, I was for them not that stereotypical person that would go and get a tattoo.”

Today tattoos have moved away from a deviant and rebellious nature and moving towards one that is more accepting of tattoos (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017). As tattoos have gained more popularity the negative associations and connotations attached to tattoos are falling away (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017). In stating this, all the participants agreed that tattoos were becoming more acceptable in society.

Participant B: *“I definitely agree with the fact that there's more leniency and more uhm acceptance... of tattoos then there were. I mean yeah... the attitude is softening towards that, towards them.”*

However, regarding the workplace, especially white-collar work sectors there is still controversy around the views of tattoos in the workplace as to whether they are accepted fully or not (Timming, 2017). As suggested by the participant's white-collar workers had a suit and tie image that they needed to adhere to and deviating from this could lead to scrutiny from others in the workplace.

Participant A: *“those kinds of people are not the stereotypical people in the past that would have gotten tattoos”*

In stating this, historically the types of people who got tattoos were societies outcasts as previously mentioned (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017). White-collar workers who got tattoos did not fall into this image. However, participant A stated there is a shift in views and said:

“People that you would think wouldn't have a tattoo are having tattoos so that stereotype of what type of person it was is starting to dismantle and the stereotype is starting to change.”

Historically, tattoos were more common among men and they had more flexibility regarding visible tattoos whereas women with tattoos were viewed more negatively and chose to cover them (Zrno, Frencl, Degmečić, & Požgain, 2015). Participant A and C stated that it was more appropriate for men to have tattoos over women.

Participant A: *“Men having tattoos was more acceptable uh than women and now it's, you know, it will even out at some point and it's getting more even but it's certainly not even”*

Dickson et al (2015, as cited in Roggenkamp, Nicholls, and Pierre, 2017) noted various motivations for getting a tattoo and these differed between genders. Ideally, men got tattoos that were more symbolic whereas females got tattoos to give them a sense of independence and a sense of self-expression (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017). Furthermore, some women got tattoos as a sign of claiming ownership of their body and for personal empowerment (Kosut, 2015). The men who got tattoos were seen as dominant and attractive whereas tattooed women were seen as more sexually promiscuous and less healthy (Zrno, Frencl, Degmečić, & Požgain, 2015). Naudé, Jordaan and Bergh, (2017) argued that gender roles played an important part in society as men were deemed as the more dominant sex and therefore, women who got tattoos were perceived as violating gender roles because in the past men had more acceptance regarding tattoo consumption than women (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017). Deal et al. (2010,

as cited in Baumann, Timming and Gollan, 2016) reported that employers may request that female employees cover their tattoos but do not ask male employees.

For centuries tattoos have been used to communicate certain messages of one's culture, status, identity, position and beliefs (Krutak, 2015). In the past tattoos symbolised individuality, expressing social or political associations or one's affiliation to a social group (Kosut, 2015). In addition, tattoos were also perceived negatively as it also symbolised "otherness" and deviant groups of people as mentioned previously (Kosut, 2015). Participant C stated that when they first told their family that they got a tattoo they were a bit shocked.

"...They were a little bit taken aback by it uhm because you know they're still from the day when you were a bit of a tart if you had a tattoo..."

Tattoos evoked negative feelings and views towards the wearer and because of this, they had a stigma attached to them (Kosut, 2015). All the participants stated that they got their tattoos in their forties and felt no pressure or need to have to do it but wanted to do it. Participant C then stated:

"If I had it maybe twenty years ago it might have been a different scenario... I think a lot of people are more accepting now."

In the present tattoos are viewed more positively and are becoming more acceptable (Kosut, 2015). Furthermore, they are a unique way of self-expression. In agreement with this, participant C stated.

"I think we trying to also find a way to express ourselves that is not, is a little bit different so our individuality, sort of artistic wise and what we like and uhm what we feel is important to us, uhm we use that as tattoos."

However, with this being said, it is important to be mindful of what and where tattoos are accepted (non-visible) and which ones are not (visible) regarding the workplace, specifically white-collar work sectors where visible tattoos are deemed inappropriate (Dean, 2010).

Participant C: *"I think you've got to consider where you would get the tattoo because unfortunately in society, certain things are allowed and certain things are frowned upon so as long as you can cover the tattoo or whatever, then you'll be fine."*

Conclusion:

In conclusion, although tattoos are gaining popularity they are still under scrutiny in the workplace, specifically the white-collar work sectors (Mendez, 2015). In this section, the

following will be discussed, the ethical implications, how the research question was answered, the implications of the findings, as well as making mention to the heuristic value of this research. Lastly, the limitations of this research will be discussed.

How the research question was answered:

The research question for this research was what are the experiences of tattooed middle-aged adults in the workplace? This was successfully answered as middle-aged adults' experiences of tattoos in the workplace were explored through interviews. In addition, the objectives of this research were to explore the experiences of middle-aged adults who have tattoos in the white-collar work sector, the identity of tattooed middle-aged adults and lastly, to gain a deeper understanding of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace. From the findings, it is suggested that tattoos are becoming more acceptable in society. However, when working in a white-collar work sector it is advisable to cover up one's tattoos to maintain a professional image in the workplace. As previously mentioned, tattoos did add to one's sense of identity as the participants stated they got tattoos to express their individuality and show that they were different from others. According to the Social Identity Theory, which is composed of three components namely social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Treppe & Loy, 2017). The participants reported they were not a part of a certain social group by having tattoos nor did they state they identified with a certain social group and lastly, the participants did not compare themselves to deviant individuals or non-tattooed people. As the perception of tattoos is changing, the participants reported no judgement towards them for having tattoos in the workplace. However, there is still a slight disapproval of visible tattoos in white-collar work sectors (Weaver, 2019).

Implications of findings:

This research on middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace aims to contribute to the field of Social Psychology. In addition, it attempts to add to the existing limited studies conducted on tattoos in the workplace from a South African perspective. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, it could give way to more detailed quantitative research in the future as the qualitative data could reveal more aspects in which quantitative methods could be more useful when making comparisons between two variables. The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how tattooed middle-aged adults are viewed in white-collar work sectors, as well as how tattoos could form part of one's identity. Finally, the research can be useful in informing employees with tattoos how they can maintain a professional image if

they have tattoos or if they want to get a tattoo thus, helping them decide whether getting a tattoo could potentially harm their professional image or impact their career progress.

Ethical Implications:

Psychological harm was not inflicted during this research process as ethical clearance was received. In addition, information sheets and consent forms were administered to the participants beforehand (See annexure A-C). Anonymity was guaranteed as no names were recorded (Louw, 2014). Furthermore, during the Zoom interview, the camera was off therefore securing their identity. Confidentiality was limited because of the use of international servers by the company owners, as well as permanent security flaws in the systems (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). The recordings were stored on a password protected hard drive that only the researcher and supervisor alone had access to. The data will be stored for a maximum of five years and thereafter will be destroyed by erasing all the information. Participation was voluntary, and the participants could withdraw from the research process at any point (Louw, 2014). Regarding the ethical standards of the researcher, a code of conduct was constructed. Furthermore, the researcher ensured they were up to date on the research topic to avoid missing important information (Louw, 2014). The supervisor read through the research ensuring appropriate methods and precautions were taken as well. Falsifying information and distorting results were avoided (Louw, 2014). To ensure this, a peer review was conducted to ensure correct methods were utilised and that bias did not influence the findings (Louw, 2014). However, some degree of subjectivity will always present in research.

Limitations:

The scope of this research was too narrow as it only focused on middle-aged adults and their experiences of tattoos in white-collar work sectors in Kwa-Zulu Natal thus, disregarding the other work sectors, ages, and locations. In future, it is advised to use a broader age group, different working sectors, and locations. This research did not specify gender or culture which could have accounted for differences in experiences with tattoos in the workplace. Regarding accessing the population, it was difficult to find participants willing to partake in the research process and there were many who withdrew or did not respond thus highlighting the difficulty in finding a stable group of participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher did not have direct access to participants. Time-constraints were an issue regarding conducting interviews which was a time-consuming activity as the researcher had to transcribe the interviews thereafter. Not having access to stable and reliable internet for Zoom interviews also posed as a limitation as some information was missed.

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Annexures:

Annexure A: Explanatory information sheet



EXPLANATORY INFORMATION SHEET

Explanatory Information Sheet

To whom it may concern,

My name is Taryn Cilliers, I am a student at Varsity College, Westville. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Lucinda Johns about middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace specifically in white-collar work sectors. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of describing how tattooed middle-aged adults are viewed in the workplace, especially in white-collar work sectors. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the field of Social Psychology thus providing an idea of how tattoos are viewed as well as gaining a deeper understanding of how tattooed middle-aged employees are viewed which could be informative to tattooed adults seeking employment or to those who are considering getting a tattoo.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because as part of my Honours in Psychology degree we are required to complete a research project in our chosen field of study. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct a 30-40-minute interview over Skype to gain an understanding of your experiences as a tattooed white-collar worker in

the workplace. Before this can happen, I would need you to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the Skype interview as well as being recorded during the interview. During the interview, you will be asked certain predetermined questions and be required to elaborate on your answers to provide a detailed description of your experiences in the workplace.

You can decide whether to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your experiences of what it is like to have tattoos in the workplace. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary.
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so.
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interview, but only my supervisor and I will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Varsity College, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use direct quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you. Once the research process is over your information will be stored for a maximum of five years on a password protected hard drive which will then be stored in a safe to which only my supervisor and I have access to. After this period, the recording will be erased from the hard drive.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Bachelor of Arts Honours in Psychology degree. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Name: Taryn Cilliers

Cell phone number: [REDACTED]

Email Address: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Name: Lucinda Johns

Cell phone Number: [REDACTED]

Email Address: [REDACTED]

Annexure B: Consent form for participation



CONSENT FORM

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Taryn Cilliers on middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed over Skype for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected

Signature:

Date:

Annexure C: Consent form for audio and video recording



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to allow Taryn Cilliers to audio record my interviews as part of the research on middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I will be recorded during the Skype interview.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- The recordings will be stored on a password-protected hard drive which will then be stored in a safe.
- Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.

Signature:

Date:

Annexure D: Interview Schedule

<u>Demographic questions:</u>	
1.	Name:
2.	Age:
3.	Race (Please tick the appropriate box): ☐ Caucasian ☐ African ☐ Coloured ☐ Asian ☐ Other
4.	Gender (Please tick the appropriate box): ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
5.	Occupation:
6.	Location (where are you from):

Questions:

1. How old were you when you got your first tattoo and what was it?
2. What made you decide to get one in the first place? Why?
3. How have your tattoos impacted your sense of identity?
4. In your opinion, what would be an employer's reasons for not hiring a person with tattoos?
5. How would you think tattoos impact one's professional image in the workplace?
6. In society tattoos were often associated with deviance, rebellion, gang associations and so on. Do you believe there is still a presumed stigma attached to people being tattooed in the workplace today?

Thank for participation ☺

Annexure E: Ethical clearance letter



27 July 2020

Student name: Taryn Gilliers
Student number: 17230054
Campus: Varsity College, Westville



Re: Approval of Psychology Honours Proposal and Ethics Clearance



HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.



Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.



In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.

ADYTECH HOUSE

Inanda Greens
 54 Wienda Rd West
 Wienda Valley 2196
 P.O. Box 2369
 Randburg 2125



Directors: RJ Douglas (UK), JDR Desch*, MD Aitken*, PJ Coughlan* (*Non-executive)

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2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.



Supervisor
Lucinda Johns



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator
Dr Samantha Thomas

ADTECH HOUSE

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Annexure F: Final research report summary document table

Title: A Phenomenological Study of Middle-Aged Adults Experiences of Tattoos in the Workplace in Kwa-Zulu Natal

Research Purpose/Objective	Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review-Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
The purpose of this study is to qualitatively describe middle-aged adult's experiences of tattoos in the workplace.	What are the experiences of tattooed middle-aged adults in the workplace?	Understand the experiences of tattooed adults in the workplace. Useful for someone who has tattoos to determine employment opportunities. Dispel negative views of people who have tattoos in the workplace.	Timming, Andrew R. Dean, Dwane H.	Theme 1: Culture and Motivation. Theme 2: Art and Religion Theme 3: Tattoo Size. Theme 4: Tattoos in the workplace. Theme 5: The hireability of tattooed people. Theme 6: The views of tattoos in the workplace.	Interpretivist Epidemiology Give people an in-depth understanding of the experiences of middle-aged adults with tattoos in the workplace. Ontology Socially constructed. Differ from person to person Reality is constantly changing.	Qualitative Population Middle-aged adults with white-collar jobs. Middle-aged adults who have tattoos in the workplace.	Semi-structured Zoom interviews The use of an Interview schedule	Participant: Informed consent Voluntary participation. Anonymity and confidentiality Storing of information. Researcher: Peer review Researcher code of conduct.	Visible tattoos frowned upon in the workplace especially white-collar work sectors. All participants got tattoos at an older age (forties). Younger generation more accepting of tattoos. Views of tattoos are changing Tattoos add to identity.	Age group could be different or more broad Focus on a different work sector Gender differences in how tattoos are seen in the workplace Cultural differences regarding experiences with tattoos. Broader location not just focusing on KwaZulu Natal
Research Problem	Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theory	Theme 7: The views of tattooed people versus non-tattooed people. Theme 8: Positive and Negative views of tattoos in the workplace. Theme 9: The views of visible tattoos on white-collar workers	Axiology Unique versions of reality are valued.	Sampling	Data Analysis Method	Limitations	Key Contribution	
Middle-aged adults have tattoos, and this hinders one from progressing as tattoos portray an unprofessional image. Understanding the experiences of tattoos in the workplace could bring about solutions.	To explore the experiences of middle-aged adults who have tattoos in the white-collar work sector. To explore the identity of tattooed middle-aged adults. To gain a deeper understanding of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace.	Middle-aged adults. Tattoos. White-collar jobs.	Social Identity Theory			Non-probability sampling Purposive sampling Three participants	Middle-aged tattooed adult's experiences Thematic Analysis.	Small sample Time constraints. Limited resources. Studies used are from overseas. The COVID-19 pandemic limits face to face interviews.	Add to the field of Social Psychology. Add to the research done on tattoos in the workplace from a South African perspective. Inform future employees of how tattoos are viewed in the workplace.	