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Tattoo Narratives and Counseling

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision

by

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ABSTRACT

Much research has been done on tattoos and on those who acquire them, but most of the research has focused on negative correlations that might exist with people who have tattoos. This current research, however, showed that people's tattoo narratives can relate to how they view self, others, and the world, and to how they approach life. A narrative approach to qualitative research was used, and ten people participated in the study. Participants' views of self, others, and the world were discussed as these views emerged from the narratives. Their possible approaches to life were also addressed. Themes that emerged across participants were then considered. Implications for counseling practice and counselor education were also discussed.

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To all the participants: You made this dissertation possible. Thank you for your willingness to share your stories. I am honored that you opened up to me.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my big brother, Dennis Clay McCarty. I miss you so much. My soul still screams for you. This dissertation marks the end of the journey I embarked on after you died. God has since given me two daughters, and I dedicate the rest of my life to them.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

People express themselves in many ways. Some choose things that are easily changed, while others choose something more permanent, like a tattoo. But what motivates a person to get a tattoo? How do tattoos function? How might talking with clients about their tattoos facilitate therapy and strengthen the counseling relationship? Do people ever use tattoos to reflect their beliefs or how they live? The answer to such questions may be complex, but people with tattoos possess a deep history from which people can draw insight.

Throughout history people have tattooed their bodies (Buss & Hodges, 2017). For example, the oldest known tattoo dates back over 5,000 years (Ghosh, 2018). Ancient Egyptian priestesses tattooed their bodies, as did the Mongolian horsemen of the Steppe (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Many other people and cultures, such as the Maori, share in the rich history of tattoos. The Maori used tattoos to show status and affiliation; people have also used tattoos to signify their resistance to marginalization (DeMello, 2000). Though tattoos were and are often used decoratively, they have historically held even more meaning.

Just as tattoos are ubiquitous throughout history and around the world, so too is the mistreatment of people who have acquired them. Perception perhaps attributed to the mistreatment. One explanation of how perception attributed to mistreatment is that conquering nations often viewed those whom they conquered unfavorably. Because the people conquered were often tattooed, the ruling nations began associating tattoos with subhuman qualities (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Another illustration of the attributing effects of perception to mistreatment is that some religious authorities detested tattoos and believed it was a sin to have one (Marti, 2010); this, in turn, influenced how people treated those with tattoos. The mistreatment of people with tattoos occurred, however, even when people admired tattoos, as evidenced by European

explorers who decapitated indigenous people because they prized the victims' tattooed heads (DeMello, 2000). Despite such acts, European explorers helped usher in the reemergence of tattoos (Buss & Hodges, 2017).

Tattoos significantly gained acceptance, however, when some powerful people acquired tattoos and after the process of tattooing became less expensive due to electric tattoo machines (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Tattooing underwent a renaissance during the 1980s and 1990s due to the previous exposure of Westerners to tattoos during the World Wars, and due to tattoo literature that made it more acceptable for the middle class to become tattooed (DeMello, 2000). Even during the tattoo renaissance, people stigmatized those with tattoos among the working class. And as more people in the middle class began getting tattoos, the stigma attached to tattoos worn by the working class increased (DeMello, 2000).

Stigmas and taboos disregard the personally held meaning of tattoos, as people force their own meanings on those they stigmatize. Yet academic research has done little to understand the experience of an individual with tattoos or their way of approaching life, apart from increasing the stigma by focusing on a tattoo's possible link with negative factors (Garcia-Merritt, 2014). Tattoos are, however, more than any association with psychopathology, and a variety of factors have motivated people to become tattooed (Kosut, 2000). A desire to express personal identity and connection has motivated many people to become tattooed (Dickson, Dukes, Smith, & Strapko, 2015; Forbes, 2001; Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1999; Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017; Shelton & Okleshen Peters, 2006). Even when people randomly became tattooed, they often eventually used the tattoo to create or reflect meaning for their lives (Littell, 2003).

People have used tattoos, moreover, to record important life events and provide reminders of loved ones, goals, and convictions (Dickson et al., 2015; Garcia-Merritt, 2014).

People have also found a sense of uniqueness through their tattoos (Littell, 2003; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006), and people who were stigmatized have gained a sense of empowerment through their tattoos (Kosut, 2000; Mun, Janigo, & Johnson, 2012). Tattoos have also functioned therapeutically through the pain involved in the tattooing process (Littell, 2003). People have especially used tattoos to create and demonstrate meaning to the self and others (Tokarski, 2017).

Through use of symbols, tattoos have given people a foundation within the self for meaning, and, at the same time, provided the avenue to present this meaning (Dickson et al., 2015). A tattoo's meaning has often represented aspects of the inner self (Littell, 2003) and one's relationship to the world (Borokhov, Bastiaans, & Lerner, 2006). Through a tattoo's self-reflexive function, people have presented to themselves their self-conflicts, achievements, morals, and beliefs—thus reinforcing their self-worth (Kosut, 2000). For some, the process of tattooing was a symbolic mission of chronicling and creating their identity (Dickson et al., 2015). Tattoos have also revealed how people view themselves, others, and the world (Littell, 2003; Tokarski, 2017).

Above all, the greatest function of tattoos might be their communicative power (Kosut, 2000). Communicating the intended message of tattoos to the self or to others can be a powerful action, and narratives might be the perfect tool for such communication and, therefore, might fulfill a tattoo's greatest function.

Need for the Study

Researchers have only recently begun to ask the questions posed at the beginning of this introduction. Previous research predominantly focused on pathology, and a significant portion of current research continues to focus on a tattoo's possible link to pathology (Dukes, 2016). Broussard and Harton (2017) found that almost 30% of Americans are tattooed and close to half

of millennials are tattooed, yet people with tattoos have still subjected to stigmatization, and most research is still focused on investigating negative links with tattoos.

This study focused on the person as an individual, and sought to aid the counseling relationship by showing benefits that might occur when a counselor approaches the meaning of a client's tattoos in a collaborative way that shows interest in the client as an individual. Ignoring a client's tattoos can show the counselor's disinterest in the client; but more substantially, focusing on the tattoo for the sake of revealing a pathology in the client could sever the counseling relationship. My study uniquely focused on the client's own perspective, with no intent to pathologize the client.

Purpose of the Study

This narrative inquiry investigated how a person's tattoo narrative reveals, solidifies, nurtures, or otherwise communicates the person's way of approaching life. Tattoo narratives may help reveal and expand the self-concept, reveal the client's general beliefs about others and the world, and show how those beliefs lead the client to relate with others and the world around them. This study therefore can benefit the counseling profession by showing that a client can use tattoos to make meaning about the world, other people, and the self, thereby revealing how the client approaches life. To be sure, understanding how a client approaches life is important because it could help the counselor know the client better, and because knowing how the client approaches life can bring understanding to both counselor and client about whether the client is meeting life tasks in a useful and satisfying way (Adler, 1929; Sweeney, 2009). With hope, this study will convince counselors to attempt to understand and connect with their client through their client's tattoos; such effort can build trust in the counseling relationship and validate the client's experiences.

Research Questions

The following four research questions were explored to understand how tattoo narratives reflect a participant's views and their approach to life.

1. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of self?
2. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of others?
3. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of the world?
4. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect the way he or she approaches life?

Positions and Biases

Because the researcher affects the study more than any other instrument in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004), Patton (1999) argued that researchers must build credibility by making themselves transparent. Readers reasonably expect, therefore, to gain knowledge of this instrument. The main idea, Patton (1999) suggested, is to "report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation either negatively or positively in the minds of users of the findings" (p. 1198). Researchers use reflexivity both to communicate their beliefs and biases to the readers, and to ameliorate any negative effects resulting from those biases (Morrow, 2005).

It is to the end of transparency that I share my motivation for this research. I first became motivated to research people with tattoos while I was a counseling intern at a youth detention center. During one session, my client began talking about a police officer who treated him unfairly because of his tattoos. He also spoke of how others often judged him because of his tattoos (he became increasingly upset as he discussed examples of how others treated him). I then provided space for him to tell me about his tattoos. At first he hesitated because he expected me to judge him like others had previously done. He became more open when, against his

expectations, I was nonjudgmental. After a few minutes he began to talk about his tattoos' meaning with pride, and he discussed them the entire session. I took short notes while he told me about each tattoo and at the end of the session I provided him with a written summarization similar to a personal values statement. He became emotional after reading it and said that it was the first time anyone had taken the time to get to know him through his tattoos. He asked to keep the summarization. I felt our bond had strengthened significantly in this one session.

I hope the mental health profession begins to approach tattoos both in practice and in research with this type of nonjudgmental, cooperative, and open curiosity. Approaching clients in this manner might build trust and thereby strengthen the counseling relationship. It also might help clients build meaning and validate their experience and beliefs. My experience with approaching my client's tattoos involved a strengthening of the counseling relationship, meaning building, and validation of the client's subjective experience. This approach to the client's tattoos also provided a corrective emotional experience for him.

People generally expect certain things to happen in all relationships because of experiences in previous relationships—often based on childhood interactions with parents—and counseling relationships are not immune to these expectations (Teyber & McClure, 2011). Clients, therefore, expect counselors to respond in ways that are familiar and often unhealthy. When counselors anticipate these relational expectations and respond in a new way, they thereby give clients an experience that things can be different with at least some people. Counselors can then help clients generalize this new way of being to other people in their lives; such is the essence of a corrective emotional experience (Teyber & McClure, 2011). My client expected me to judge him for his tattoos. Our relationship, however, disconfirmed his expectations. For clients with similar experiences as my client had, listening to their tattoo narratives in a nonjudgmental

way can begin a corrective emotional experience. In any case, it can help build trust and can validate their experiences. All these things are vital to success in counseling (Teyber & McClure, 2011).

Reflexivity

I am a married White male and a father of two. Neither I nor anyone in my immediate family has tattoos. Though I once wondered if tattoos were unbiblical, that concern was alleviated after reading the bible and having a conversation with another person. I have often considered getting a tattoo, but it always seemed like a significant commitment. I have hesitated to get a tattoo because of its permanence. I have, however, considered getting two tattoos. The first tattoo I considered was one to memorialize my brother who died in 2010. The other tattoo I considered was my first daughter's name in its original language—and if I do get a tattoo it would probably be the one for my daughter. I am comfortable with people who have tattoos, and I admire tattoos and the art work and meaning they hold to people who have them.

I used the lenses of Adlerian theory and social constructivism to evaluate participants and interpret narratives. I had, therefore, a bias toward a holistic view of life, toward believing that people co-construct meaning as they interact with each other, and toward considering how people construct and maintain their way of approaching life through the meanings they make about themselves, others, and life in general (Sweeney, 2009). Throughout the process I sought the advice of the dissertation chair, and provided participants the opportunity for member checks.

Narrative inquiry involves a co-construction of meaning (Riessman & Speedy, 2007). According to Etherington (2007), people construct reality socially, and stories are negotiated between those who write the stories and their readers. The research relationship is a social relationship in which participants arrange, create, and alter stories. Each participant in the

relationship affects the structure and meaning of the resulting story (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). Because the participants and I created all narratives and their meanings collaboratively in this study, transparency and reflexivity are imperative. Through my transparency, readers can better understand the narratives of my participants in their proper context.

Limitations

This study had two limitations. The first limitation was that only two participants reported a race other than Caucasian or White. Another limitation was that only 30% of participants were female.

Definition of Terms

Below are definitions for terms that might be useful to the reader. The list of definitions is in alphabetical order.

Function is what a thing or behavior accomplishes by virtue of its nature.

Lifestyle is the set of convictions about people, the world, and the self that guides how one approaches life.

Motivation is the explanation, the cause, or the reason for behavior.

Pure purpose appears when the motivation for a behavior matches the behavior's function.

Ubiquity expresses the idea that something is extremely common and appears almost everywhere.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A Thematic History of Tattoos

This section of the literature review includes a thematic history of tattoos. The thematic history is focused on specific examples to highlight each theme. The review then explains what may motivate people to become tattooed and how tattoos function. The thematic history section includes various themes such as: the ubiquity of tattoos, taboo, pathology in academic research, and the reemergence of tattoos. The theme of ubiquity of tattoos includes a discussion of how tattoos have existed throughout most of human history (Bower, 2016; Buss & Hodges, 2017). Next there is a discussion of how those with power have stigmatized people with tattoos throughout history (Buss & Hodges, 2017; DeMello, 2000; Marti, 2010; Post, 1968). Afterward, I will describe how academic research contributes to the stigmatism of tattoos through its focus on pathology (Ferguson-Rayport, Griffith, & Straus, 1955). Finally, the reemergence of tattooing and how it became increasingly accepted will be described (DeMello, 2000).

The Ubiquity of tattoos

Oldest mummified tattoo. The oldest known tattoo belongs to Egyptian mummies that date back over 5,000 years (Ghosh, 2018). Previously, however, researchers have debated over which ancient mummy, Chinchorro or the Iceman, should hold the title of the oldest tattoo (Bower, 2016). Though once favoring Chinchorro, the evidence shifted to the Iceman. The Chinchorro mummy was a man from northern Chile that scholars once believed had the oldest mummified tattoo, dots that looked somewhat like a mustache (Bower, 2016). Although scientists previously dated the Chinchorro mummy anywhere from 6,000 to 8,000 years old, recent dating has corrected this age to 4,563 years old (Bower, 2016). This new dating, in effect, removed the distinction of the oldest tattooed mummy from Chinchorro and gave it to the

Ice man, otherwise known as Otzi (Bower, 2016). A group of hikers, in 1991, discovered Otzi thawing in the Austrian Alps (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Otzi, dated at 5,250 years old, had 61 tattoos that included lines around his wrists, ankles, back, and ribs (Bower, 2016). Otzi did not hold the distinction of having the oldest tattoo for long.

In 2018, researchers discovered tattoos on mummies in the British Museum (Ghosh, 2018). These mummies dated back almost 1,000 years earlier than Otzi. A male mummy had a bull and sheep tattooed on his arm. A female mummy had S-shaped patterns tattooed on her shoulder. These mummies were discovered a century ago, but researchers did not use infrared technology to find the tattoos on the mummy called Gebelein Man A until this year (Ghosh, 2018).

Egyptian tattoos. The oldest Egyptian mummy, according to Buss and Hodges (2017), is a 4000-year-old mummy known as Amunet. They described her as a priestess for the Egyptian goddess, Hathor. They hypothesized that, in Egypt, tattoos might have been a custom belonging solely to women. Some believe that Egyptian women wore tattoos to adorn themselves as they danced before the goddess Hathor (Buss & Hodges, 2017).

Steppe Horsemen. Ancient tattoos are by no means isolated to Chile, Austria, or Egypt. Ancient people from across the world have been tattooed. Some could be considered more beautiful than not only many primitive tattoos but also modern tattoos (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Beginning around 2,600 years ago, and spanning 400 years, the horsemen in the steppe of Mongolia adorned their bodies with tattoos (Buss & Hodges, 2017). The freezing temperatures in the area helped preserve many bodies with their tattoos intact.

One example of these horsemen is a Pazyryk chief. His body was tattooed with a fish, a horse, and other mythical type animals (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Upon looking at Buss and

Hodges's (2017) picture of the Pazyryk chief, one can make out the fish and the horse. The fish appears to be nearing the end of a jump, with its head coming down in the water and its tail thrashing in the air. The horse is likewise depicted in motion, his front and hind legs moving, having been extended in an exaggerative manner above its back. Looking at the chief's back, one can see a life in motion (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Imagine the horsemen chief who wore a tattoo of a horse depicted with no rider. What might his tattoo narrative reveal?

The Taboo of Tattoo

The word tattoo, interestingly, originates from the word stigma, which means a mark (Buss & Hodges, 2017). In keeping with the word's etymology, they explained that nations around the world have tattooed people as a way of marking them for slavery. The tattoo taboo is not victimless. While some taboos bring about stigmatization in various degrees, the taboo against tattoos has often brought about atrocious results and has been used to facilitate some of humanity's worst errors.

Western civilization. The views societies held toward tattoos changed, in large part, due to conquest. The Romans desired to set themselves apart from the people they conquered; one way of doing this was to abstain from tattooing (Buss & Hodges, 2017). The authors explained that the invaded lands provided slaves and gladiators for the Romans. These conquered people were often tattooed, leading to a belief that tattooed people were subhuman or criminal. The Romans therefore easily associated tattoos with ignorance, crime, and an overall immorality (Buss & Hodges, 2017).

Pope Hadrian I in the year 787, according to Marti (2010), banned Catholics from being tattooed, a ban established by Papal edict during the Council of Nicaea. The Pope called tattooing a savage act with ties to paganism (Marti, 2010; Post, 1968). Some see the Pope's

prohibition as continuing what seems to be a ban on tattooing in a biblical verse found in Leviticus 19:28 (King James Version) “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord.” Between the Romans’ and the Church’s view of tattooing, the stigma against tattooing in Western Civilization spread widely (Marti, 2010; Post, 1968). But the West was not the only civilization to stigmatize tattoos.

Specific subsets of people added to the taboo of tattoos (DeMello, 2000). Prisoners have tattooed themselves for centuries and still do so today. After World War II, motorcycle riders used their tattoos to voice their resentment against both the middle class and the working class (DeMello, 2000). The middle class feared the tattooed bikers and viewed them as dangerous outlaws. The fear of outlaw bikers strengthened ill perceptions of tattoos to such an extent that those negative views still remain. Outside of the bikers and prisoners, other stigmatized people began wearing tattoos (DeMello, 2000). In the 1960s, many hippies became tattooed. In the 1980s, punks started becoming tattooed (punks are people who challenge convention and the status quo). It’s difficult to define punks, because once the status quo changes to reflect them, it becomes uncertain whether you can actually still call them punks (Schofield, 2017). In any case, punks created their own look: They did their own tattoos, piercings, and hair styles. They usually did tribal tattoos because the abundance of black shading and lack of intricate detail made these tattoos easier to accomplish. Punks appropriated tribal tattoos from places like Hawaii and New Zealand. All these subgroups increased and strengthened the negative views the middle class held concerning people with tattoos. The more marginalized people wore tattoos, the more the privileged considered it taboo (DeMello, 2000).

Eastern civilization. In the Yohoi period, around 300 B.C., some people in Japan would adorn themselves with facial tattoos for religious purposes (DeMello, 2000). But a few hundred

years later, during the Kofun period, tattoos became stigmatized because of their use as a means of punishment (DeMello, 2000). Tattooing remained a taboo even during the Edo period, from 1600 to the late 1800s, when many people in the lower economic class wore tattoos (DeMello, 2000). Although tattooed people experienced stigmatism as a result of the taboo attached to them during the Edo period, the people of Japan, nevertheless, enjoyed a rich tradition of tattooing (Buss & Hodges, 2017). Japan's tradition of tattooing grew in large part from a Chinese work of fiction called *Suikoden*, or *Water Margin*. *Suikoden* is a story of 108 heavily tattooed outlaws who fought against political corruption (Buss & Hodges, 2017). The outlaws became heroes to the common people of Japan, and the Japanese authorities did not appreciate stories that engendered rebellion in the people (DeMello, 2000).

Tattooing remained criminalized even after the Edo period ended (DeMello, 2000). Criminals, like the *Yakuza* (an organized crime syndicate in Japan), continued to wear the full-body tattoos that had become popular through the fictional story *Suikoden*. This, in turn, strengthened the association between tattoos and criminals in the minds of the people of Japan, further stigmatizing the already tabooed tattoo (DeMello, 2000). Even in recent years, Japanese law requires tattooists to obtain a medical license, thereby threatening to shut down many tattoo shops (Johnston, 2017, September 28).

But Japan does not stand alone in the East's stigmatization of people with tattoos. In the southernmost part of China there is a small island called Hainan (Marti, 2010). The island of Hainan, once a remote place, is now a tourist attraction available mostly to the wealthy. The Li people, who have inhabited the island for thousands of years, enjoyed a rich tradition of tattooing that was mostly practiced by women (Marti, 2010). The author explained that the young females received their tattoos from other women, during their adolescent or teenage years. The process of

being tattooed was a rite of passage that carried on into adulthood (Marti, 2010). Tattooing held a very significant meaning to the Li, for if a woman was without tattoos then she could not rest with her ancestors; and for that reason, women would tattoo the deceased body of a woman who died without a tattoo (Marti, 2010).

But the Li no longer practice their long tradition of tattoos, since after China's communist revolution the communist regime did not allow forms of differentiation (Marti, 2010). The Li women abandoned their tattoo tradition under threat of severe punishment. Although there are still Li women alive today with traditional tattoos, these women tell the girls in their villages that the tattoos are meant to make girls ugly so that they will not be kidnapped (Marti, 2010). The Chinese government forced the older women to tell this narrative to the younger girls (Marti, 2010).

Pathology in Academic Research

Societies around the world and throughout history have stigmatized people with tattoos, in both Western and Eastern civilizations. Connected to the theme of taboo is another theme: pathology. Academic research largely contributed to the stigmatism of tattoos through its focus on pathology (Farrow, Schwartz, & Vanderleeuw, 1991).

The theme of pathology is not completely separate from that of taboo, as much of the current negative beliefs about tattoos resulted from modern correlational research on people with tattoos. Farrow et al. (1991) found that tattooing among adolescents was associated not just with drug abuse, but also with participation in satanic rituals. Braithwaite, Robillard, Woodring, Stephens, and Arriola (2001) found a correlation between tattoos and drug abuse. Therefore, they concluded that receiving tattoos put one at a greater risk for HIV—further stigmatizing those with tattoos (Braithwaite et al., 2001). Roberts and Ryan (2002) found increased drug abuse,

higher rates of sexual activity, and more violent behavior among those with tattoos. They concluded that since tattoos are correlated with such high-risk behaviors, clinicians who notice a tattoo on an adolescent should follow up that observation with a battery of psychological tests (Roberts & Ryan, 2002). Ferguson-Rayport et al. (1955) reported that tattooing could be the first hint that a young person has chosen a dangerous path.

Borokhov et al. (2006) divided tattoos into two groups—criminal and noncriminal. Criminal tattoos were those showing conflict with law. Non-criminal tattoos were mostly identified by the lack of criminal imagery and the presence of the wearer's worldview. The authors interviewed drug abusers with tattoos and discovered that the design and location of tattoos could reveal the type of drug someone abuses. For example, a tattoo on the arm facing down was said to mean the person has attempted to abstain from drug use (Borokhov et al., 2006).

Cardasis, Huth-Bocks, and Silk (2008) studied tattoos and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD). When comparing psychiatric inpatients who had tattoos with those who did not have tattoos, they found that those with tattoos were more often diagnosed with ASPD. Also, those patients with ASPD tended to have more of their bodies covered with tattoos.

Ferguson-Rayport et al. (1955) studied the difference in tattoos among people with personality disorders (PD) and people with schizophrenia. They looked at the number, the execution, and the content of tattoos. The authors explained that multiple tattoos were more indicative of PD, while people with a single tattoo were more likely to have schizophrenia than PD. They further discussed how people with PD more often have the tattoos executed in a haphazard manner—though listening to the narrative of the tattooed person might reveal a pattern in a set of tattoos which previously appeared haphazard. In contrast to people with PD,

people with schizophrenia, according to the authors, tended to have their tattoos executed in a precise manner. They explained that symmetry in the tattoos of people with schizophrenia can be found in the tattoo's location, content, and size (Ferguson-Rayport et al., 1955).

Regarding a tattoo's content, according to Ferguson-Rayport et al. (1955), people with PD tended to have many emblems while people with schizophrenia more often had only one. They found that both people with PD and people with schizophrenia had tattoos associated with their mother. But while those with PD associated their mother tattoos with sexual ambiguity or some lack of maturity, those with schizophrenia used their mother tattoos as a religious sign (Ferguson-Rayport et al., 1955). They found the theme of fate to be common among those with PD but not those with schizophrenia. The PD looks at the world through the eyes of fate, while the schizophrenic more likely sees the world as something operated by God (Ferguson-Rayport et al., 1955). They also discussed commemorative tattoos, which were found only on those with schizophrenia; those with PD used their tattoos more for the present (Ferguson-Rayport et al., 1955).

The Reemergence of Tattoos

Tattooing reemerged even in times of heavy stigmatization. It was, perhaps, inevitable that tattooing would return to the West as exploration exploded during the 15th century. Buss and Hodges (2017) discussed how during the 15th century, exploration increased among people in Western civilization. They claimed that this increase in exploration opened the world to travel and to business between lands. The explorers traveled to various continents and returned with stories of other people, often of people with tattoos (Buss & Hodges, 2017).

Captain Cook. The explorer credited with bringing tattoo interest back to Europe is Captain James Cook (Buss & Hodges, 2017). The European explorers returned to Europe with

tattooed captives (DeMello, 2000). In later years, explorers brought tattooed captives to the United States. The Europeans considered the captives both exotic and savage (DeMello, 2000). During the mid to late 18th century, some of his men returned to Britain from their voyages having acquired tattoos on their own bodies and bringing back drawings of tattoos they saw (Buss & Hodges, 2017). DeMello (2000) explained that Captain Cook and his men visited New Zealand and saw the Maori, who heavily tattooed their faces.

The Maori would preserve the heads of their friends after death for a variety of reasons (DeMello, 2000). First, it served as a memorial. Second, it secured the magic of the deceased. The European explorers even began trading some of their weapons for the preserved Maori heads (DeMello, 2000). This civil trade agreement became something more sinister, as the various tribes in New Zealand began to engage in tribal warfare. The conquering tribe would behead captives to sell the heads to Europeans (DeMello, 2000). Many Maori were murdered solely because their severed heads could be sold for money. For the Maori, a tattooed face was extremely perilous. The head trade, however, devastated New Zealand to such an extent that the Maori ceased preserving the heads of their deceased (DeMello, 2000).

The discussion of the Maori falls under the reemergence theme instead of the taboo theme. One might consider the Maori to be an example of the taboo theme discussed above. The Maori, however, fit more appropriately under the theme of reemergence for two reasons. First, the cause of the murders did not result from any negative views of tattoos. Europeans adored the way tattooed heads looked, which caused the heads to have high monetary value. This, in turn, resulted in explorers, along with some Maori, beheading the Maori. Second, returning to Europe with the tattooed heads directly resulted in the exotic status of the tattoo, which in turn engendered a desire to be tattooed among the nobles (Buss & Hodges, 2017).

Taking root and spreading. The exploration reintroduced tattooing to Western civilization, if only as a matter of intrigue for people of higher status. This intrigue resulted in powerful people becoming tattooed (Buss & Hodges, 2017). King Edward VII and his sons became tattooed in the early 20th century, and there were rumors that both Queen Victoria and the mother of Winston Churchill became tattooed (Buss & Hodges, 2017). In 1891, a tattoo machine was invented (Buss & Hodges, 2017) that amounted to an electric pen. Upon its invention, people could get tattoos much easier and much more affordably. Because of the reduction in price, tattooing became more suitable for those in the lower classes of society, which helped further the reemergence of the tattoo (Buss & Hodges, 2017).

DeMello (2000) explained that the World Wars resulted in an increase of people being tattooed. This was true not only of Europeans and Americans, but also of people in places like Japan. Easterners experienced a renewal in tattoo interest as Western interest increased (DeMello, 2000). Throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties (and perhaps even still today), people who were marginalized and people who felt mistreated by society used tattoos as a way to counter an oppressive culture (DeMello, 2000). Buss and Hodges (2017) stated: “Tattooing was used by these groups as an assertion of personal ownership of the body and a screen on which to project their struggles, wishes, and victories” (p. 19).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the tattoo culture experienced what is called the Tattoo Renaissance (DeMello, 2000). The practice of tattooing had become more sanitized, with needles being cleaned and replaced more often. Increasingly more people in the middle class began to acquire tattoos. DeMello (2000) further explained that three steps were necessary for tattoos to gain their place among the middle class. First, the working class was set to the side in order to make room for the middle class who did not desire to be seen as one of them. Second, new roots

had to be established. Third, tattoos had to be given new meanings to bring a more exotic flavor to tattoos and to move away from what the middle class viewed as deviant. Common to all three steps was the marginalization of the working class. DeMello (2000) explained that the way this shift happened was through tattoo magazines, people talking about tattoos in a different way, and the media presenting different views of tattoos. Also, role models for children, such as professional athletes, became tattooed. The tattoo had made its way into popular culture (DeMello, 2000).

A recent example of the perceptual change society has undergone regarding tattoos can be found in the Disney movie *Moana* (Musker, Clements, & Shurer, 2016). One main character in the movie, Maui, had many tattoos, one of which was called Mini Maui—a tattoo that would come to life and at times taunt Maui (Giardina, 2016). Society is moving from the stigmatization of tattoos toward their acceptance. The successful marketing of a tattooed hero to children clearly shows this movement toward acceptance.

The movie *Moana* does more than show acceptance of tattooed people (Musker et al., 2016). Maui's character also exemplifies the idea that tattoos have meanings that can change through time, and that tattoos can communicate these meanings to the bearer and to others. As Buss and Hodges (2017) wrote: "To live with a tattoo enables the image to continue unfolding its meaning throughout one's life" (p. 24).

Motivations for Becoming Tattooed

It is possible that the motivations for becoming tattooed reveal the purposes of tattoos. In other words, people want to accomplish something, and when they believe a tattoo can serve this purpose, they will become tattooed. To understand any behavior, it is necessary to comprehend its goal (Adler, 1927). Therefore, various motivations for getting tattoos and various functions of

tattoos will be discussed. The discussion of motivation will lead to a discussion of how tattoos function, which in turn will lead to a research method for discovering the meaning and purposes of an individual's tattoos—narrative inquiry.

Overview of Motivations

Some researchers have found that the most common motivation for becoming tattooed is a desire for both self-expression and creation of a sense of identity, with some studies showing, in addition to self-expression, an affinity for the tattoo's appearance (Forbes, 2001; Greif et al., 1999; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006). Tiggemann and Golder (2006) found that people generally get tattoos because they want to express their uniqueness in a way that sets them apart with respect to their appearance. Basically, people desire to look different because it makes them feel special.

Dickson et al. (2015) suggested that there might be no motivation that is primary to all others. They split the motivations of getting a first tattoo into two categories: internal and external factors. The internal factors they found among participants were spontaneous self-expression, bonds or reminders of important people in their lives, personal or inspirational statements, aesthetic symbolism, markers of life events, and affect management. The external factors for first tattoos were group affiliation and statements of independence.

Some people, as Tiggemann and Golder (2006) discovered, became tattooed because they wished to be unique. But others were motivated by a desire to feel connection, mark a religious commitment, be rebellious, submit to peer pressure, or look tough, cool, or mature (Naudé et al., 2017). According to Naudé et al. (2017), who asked 175 participants why they became tattooed, the most cited answers (25.1%) involved a desire to use the tattoo as a symbol for some sort of personal meaning, (e.g., life struggle). Many viewed the tattoo as a part of their personality.

Shelton and Okleshen Peters (2006), similar to Naudé et al. (2017), found motivations of conformity, personal-identity symbolization, rebellion, looks, self-control, and spirituality. Littell (2003) found that half were motivated to get a tattoo following a major loss and that they gave the decision much thought. According to Littell (2003), a desire to symbolically express meaning through symbols motivates many to become tattooed. Littell (2003) seemed to agree with other authors that people can be motivated by a desire for connection and for self-expression.

People have used tattoos for a variety of reasons and motivations. Prominent reasons were self-expression, identity, and connections (Dickson et al., 2015; Forbes, 2001; Greif et al., 1999; Naudé et al., 2017; Shelton & Okleshen Peters, 2006). Interestingly, some said they became tattooed without any motivating factors.

No Motivating Factors

Some people reported that they had no reason for getting a tattoo, that they made a random choice (Garcia-Merritt, 2014). Randomly choosing to become tattooed seems to be in contradiction of most who reported some type of motivating factor. Adler (1927) would disagree with those who reported that they had no reason in getting a tattoo. Under Adler's assumption of human behavior, tattoos should speak of something important in the wearer's self even if it is outside of that person's awareness. What important understanding might be gained from even these tattoos?

Littell (2003) found that even if participants had randomly chosen the tattoo, they still would use the tattoo to create meaning for their lives. For those who did not plan to get a tattoo, the important thing to consider is the context of the event (Garcia-Merritt, 2014). The tattoo itself simply points to the event that happened. Perhaps the place or the people present is what is

important. The events that led up to the tattoo might be the story, while the tattoo is there to hold that story. Or, for others, the pain of the process is the story (Johnson, 2007).

Kosut (2000) suggested that people's lives are in flux and open to many interpretations. Meanings shift and humans are not static creatures. The meaning of tattoos are also subject to change. Oksanen and Turtiainen (2005) asserted that the image on the skin remains constant, but the meanings and emotions associated with the image can change. In reviewing a tattoo magazine, Oksanen and Turtiainen (2005) shared a quote from someone who said that she didn't want a tattoo for meaning; she just wanted to have something beautiful on her skin. However, that does reveal her appreciation and longing for beauty. Additionally, reviewing the context of the event and what led up to the tattoo might bring even more understanding of the lady's beautiful tattoo (Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005). Might the tattoo serve to protect her self-image of beauty? Or might it serve to remind her to look for beauty in life? Clinicians can only guess what the answers are to those questions are, unless they participate with the tattooed client in an open discussion.

Functions of Tattoos

The discussion of no motivating factors leads to the function of tattoos. As explained above, even when there seems to be no motivation for getting the tattoo, the tattoo itself still serves a purpose. Function would explain how tattoos—even unplanned and random ones—still have meaning. Various functions of the tattoo are discussed below.

Overview of Functions

Tattoos can serve to record history of important life events, producing a visual map of one's life (Dickson et al., 2015; Garcia-Merritt, 2014; Kosut, 2000; Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005). They can provide reminders of loved ones, goals, and convictions (Garcia-Merritt, 2014). People

can find a sense of uniqueness through their tattoos (Littell, 2003; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006). For others, especially for the marginalized, tattoos can empower the self by providing a sense of autonomy and increasing one's self-confidence (Kosut, 2000; Mun et al., 2012). With regard to this autonomy, the tattoo can symbolize freedom (Littell, 2003). Tattoos can function to create and sever bonds, as well as to attract and repel people (Littell, 2003). Through this function, people can create distance between themselves and the person who is controlling their lives (Littell, 2003).

People can control who can see the tattoo through its placement on the body (Mun et al., 2012). The function of tattoos change depending upon placement (Littell, 2003). Conspicuously placed tattoos function for some sort of relational interaction, while ones placed in covered areas might possess more of a personal or intimate function (Littell, 2003). Any placement can work to attract or repel. Some people have freed themselves from controlling relationships by becoming tattooed when the controlling person found tattoos unattractive (Littell, 2003). Oksanen and Turtiainen (2005) relayed one participant's experience of the location of a tree tattoo on the back of her neck. The tree tattoo was always there, but it was behind her, thus representing something she had put behind her but from which she could never completely separate. Similarly, Littell (2003) discussed a participant who chose to tattoo the back of her neck. She believed that since she could not see the tattoo but knew it was there, then she could gradually approach her issue that the tattoo represented in a safe manner.

Pain in the Process

For some, the pain of getting a tattoo takes precedence over the actual image on the skin (Johnson, 2007). The process of getting a tattoo can reflect the life process with all its misfortune and pain. It can mirror the necessary characteristics one needs to make it through life—for

example, the characteristic of self-control (Johnson, 2007; Littell, 2003). As opposed to many other painful things in a person's life, the pain involved in tattooing is something the person can control (Johnson, 2007). Some reported that the pain of the process relieved them of their anhedonia—the inability to experience pleasure from ordinarily pleasurable activities—even if only briefly (Tokarski, 2017). The tattooing process can cause an adrenaline rush and keep people returning for more, which can be similar to addiction (Johnson, 2007). The short period of relief from anhedonia, along with an increase of adrenaline, can explain why some find tattoos addicting.

As with many things, the utility of pain in tattoos is subjective and, therefore, can serve more than one purpose. It has even been used to assuage survivor's guilt (Johnson, 2007). When people undergo the process of tattooing, the accompanying physical pain can drive out the pain from a loss and possibly provide a sense of closure (Dickson et al., 2015; Littell, 2003). Unfortunately, the process does not completely remove the emotional pain. It does, however, locate the emotional pain inside the person in such a way that people can approach it (Dickson et al., 2015).

Creating Meaning

A major function of tattoos is the creation of meaning (Littell, 2003). Most people speak of their tattoos as having meaning (Tokarski, 2017). Tattoos can both create and demonstrate meaning to the self and others (Tokarski, 2017). Through the use of symbols, tattoos can give a foundation within the self for meaning, and, at the same time, provide the avenue to present this meaning (Dickson et al., 2015). The tattoo is such a powerful meaning maker that it can even change one's self-understanding (Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005).

For many, the favorite tattoo holds the most meaning (Dickson et al., 2015). Johnson (2007) found that the meaning of individual tattoos decreases as the number of tattoos increase, while Littell (2003) found the opposite. Those who flippantly get first tattoos might explain this discrepancy. Becoming dissatisfied, they would eventually make meaning for their tattoo. For example, one person who was unhappy with his meaningless tattoo chose to use the tattoo as a reflection of impulsivity (Mun et al., 2012). Upon discovering the utility of the tattoo for meaning making, they would then put more thought into their next tattoos (Littell, 2003). The tattoo, therefore, is filled with potential meaning (Kosut, 2000). The tattoos meaning often represents one's inner self (Littell, 2003) and one's relationship to the world (Borokhov et al., 2006).

View of Self and Others

According to Naudé et al. (2017), most saw their tattoos as an expansion of themselves, something that is part of them and who they are. Unsurprisingly, then, tattoos can function to reflect one's inner reality (Borokhov et al., 2006). They can contain one's self-conception (Garcia-Merritt, 2014). More broadly, they can represent one's beliefs about the self and others and life in general (Tokarski, 2017). Tattoos can show the emergent process of identity change throughout people's lifetime (Dickson et al., 2015). They possess the ability to present the self in a self-reflexive manner (Kosut, 2000). Through this reflexive ability, one's self-conflicts and achievements, one's morals and beliefs, are all able to be presented to the self—thus reinforcing one's self-worth (Kosut, 2000).

The process of tattooing can become a symbolic mission of chronicling and creating one's identity (Dickson et al., 2015). Tattoos can show people's relational self and, therefore, reveal how they view the self, others, and the world (Littell, 2003; Tokarski, 2017). People can

change their self-concept through tattoos (Mun et al., 2012). In effect, tattoos are both a creation and extension of people's identity and personality (Mun et al., 2012; Naudé et al., 2017).

Spirituality is often part of identity, and tattoos often represent a spiritual theme (Tokarski, 2017). Interestingly, meaning change seems to work in both directions. As the self changes, so too will the meanings of tattoos. Conversely, the very act of getting a tattoo can change one's view of self (Mun et al., 2012). Also, new tattoos can bridge the gap between people's present and future views of self (Tokarski, 2017).

As a form of self-expression, tattoos are rarely entirely personal (Mun et al., 2012). As discussed above, tattoos often contain people's relational beliefs and view of the self (Tokarski, 2017). People often direct these relational beliefs and self-concepts at others. There is a communicative aspect to the meanings of tattoos, both toward the self and toward others, and this aspect might be the purest function of tattoos.

Communicative Power of Tattoos

Tattoos can provide a powerful means of communication (Kosut, 2000). This communication is visual only, though it can often lead to verbal dialogue (Kosut, 2000; Naudé et al., 2017). Wymann (2010) defined tattooing as "a form of communication that operates through its own specific medium" (p. 45); the tattoo is that medium. Tattoos can produce a sense of intrigue in the viewer or a feeling of disgust; this, in turn, elicits the attention and conversation of the viewer (Wymann, 2010). The viewer might want to know the meaning of the tattoos or if getting the tattoos was painful (Wymann, 2010). The number of things tattoos can communicate would be difficult to count. People often use tattoos to communicate identity (Dickson et al., 2015) and disclose cultural information, as "the tattooed body is a distinctly communicative body" (Kosut, 2000, p. 82)

Many people who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp of the Second World War reflect how tattoos can communicate a variety of things. There, prisoners were tattooed with identification marks that comprised only numbers (Rudoren, 2012). Their tattoos communicated more than their dehumanization. Rudoren (2012) relayed a story of a girl who tattooed her grandfather's Auschwitz number onto her left forearm; her action communicated messages both to herself and to the original bearer of the number. The tattoos communicate the need to remember that such a horrible thing happened to a family member (Rudoren, 2012). Even while in Auschwitz, the numbers communicated a variety of messages simultaneously. People respected those with numbers between 30,000 and 80,000 because the tattoo communicated the bearer's ability to survive (Rudoren, 2012). Whether the tattoo repulses or attracts, they communicate powerfully.

Tattoos contain messages (Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009) and many people use them to talk about themselves, either through self-talk or relational communication (Littell, 2003). The communicative power of tattoos therefore brings us to the discussion of narrative, which is possibly the purest purpose of tattoos. Communicating, or transmitting, the intended message of the tattoo to the self or to others can be a powerful action. For such communication, narratives are the perfect tool.

Arriving at Narrative

There is more to be learned from receiving clients' tattoo narratives than the discovery of any link with risky behavior or psychiatric disorder. Tattoo narratives can possibly help uncover and expand the self-concept, reveal clients' general beliefs about others and the world, and show how those beliefs lead them to relate with others and the world around them. Pathological classifications of people with tattoos are beyond the scope of this study. This study is aimed at

discovering how a client's tattoo narratives reveal, solidify, nurture, or otherwise communicate the client's lifestyle. There is a more productive way of looking at tattoos than studying them in relation to pathology. What a tattoo means to the one wearing the tattoo is of greatest importance.

Narratives are key to the construction of the self, and tattoo narratives are no less important to that process (Kosut, 2000). The existence of the self assumes reflexivity (Giddens, 1991); it is the ability to see oneself from the outside. The self is ever changing (Giddens, 1991). Alcina (2009) stated that the self is "a continual construction of personal narrative" (p. 31); this narrative cohesively pulls together the differences in the self throughout one's life (Alcina, 2009). Tattoo narratives are how people weave their tattoos together in a way to tell a story (Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005). Kosut (2000) suggested that pictures speak volumes, and that behind every tattoo lies a rich story waiting to be mined. Tattoo narrative, then, is the mechanism by which people communicate to themselves or to others the various meanings of the tattoos; such communication accomplishes the purpose that motivated them to become tattooed.

Various motivations and functions of tattoos were explored in this review. Motivation and function are, with respect to their definitions, tightly linked (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). Motivation is, according to Stevenson and Lindberg (2010), the explanation, the cause, or the reason for our behavior—in this paper, motivation explains the behavior of becoming tattooed. Function can be what the person plans to accomplish with the behavior of becoming tattooed; and in that sense, function is equal to motivation. But function is also what a thing or a behavior accomplishes by virtue of its nature (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). In that case, function is sometimes unequal to motivation. This difference highlights the preeminence of narrative. When

motivation and function fail to overlap, it may be because motivation is subjective, while function is often objective.

Purpose includes both motivation and function; it is the reason behind our behavior. It is both the goal at which our behavior is aimed and, at the same time, the reason for which something exists (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). Therefore, to understand any behavior, it is necessary to comprehend its goal or purpose (Adler, 1927). When there is a discrepancy between what a participant intended by the behavior of acquiring a tattoo and what actually resulted from that behavior, then this study will highlight the difference; in those cases, motivation will describe what the participant intended, while function will describe what actually resulted from getting a tattoo.

Behavior that has a perfect overlap of motivation and function can be thought of as having “pure purpose.” The communicative power of tattoos might be the place of greatest overlap between motivation and function—making it the purest purpose of tattoos. Tattoos might be uniquely purposed to communicate to oneself and to other people the bearer’s view of self, others, and the world. And narratives can actualize that purpose.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Researchers employing a qualitative method conduct an open-ended investigation of the world that does not manipulate variables or the context within which the research is conducted. New paths often emerge, requiring the investigator to be flexible with, and open to changing, the research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). A qualitative approach to research was appropriate for this study because the researcher was less interested in generalized results and more interested in the individual participants. The population being studied has often been stigmatized; with that in mind, a qualitative methodology allowed participants to be understood and appreciated as individuals. This study used narrative inquiry, a research methodology within the qualitative paradigm. Narrative inquiry gives participants a chance to review their lives and to create new meaning through the cooperative action of storytelling (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is defined as a “study of experience when experience is understood as lived and told stories. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 426). When people tell their narratives, they share their lives and the core of who they are. As the self is always in flux, so too are the meanings behind the stories people tell. The listener does not simply hear people’s stories, but also participates in the reorganization. The narrator and the listener co-construct the narrative (Caine et al., 2013; Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

The purpose of narrative inquiry is not to arrive at certainty. Interpretations are always made tentatively (Josselson, 2013). What is known of participants is determined by who the researcher is, in combination with who the participants are in the research relationship (Caine et

al., 2013). Researchers understand participants from a certain vantage point—from where the researchers are currently situated in life, relative to the participants. However, participants are always changing and always moving. As they change, so too does our relative perspective (Caine et al., 2013; Josselson, 2013). With this in mind, interpretations can be nothing but provisional. Perhaps the interpretations in narrative inquiry catch a real glimpse into who participants are. Or perhaps the glimpse is only a partial understanding of who they are in relation to us, specifically. Both researcher and participants continuously change as they interact with each other; meanings are constantly changing throughout the research endeavor. Narrative inquiry, therefore, amalgamates two living subjectivities (Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

We, as people, become who we are by telling stories (Caine et al., 2013). Narratives, according to Polkinghorne (1991), coherently bring together various events in time into one story. People use narratives to construct and unify our identity. These narratives shape our self-concept (Polkinghorne, 1991). The story-telling nature of humans can be used in therapy for change—if we construct our self-concept with narratives, we can also reconstruct our self-concept with narratives. When clients reflect on something that happened, this reflection changes their experience of it (Polkinghorne, 2005). In turn, the interviewer’s reflection on participants produces the same effect, as Josselson (2013) declared, “to observe something is to change it” (p. 7).

A major function of a tattoo, according to the literature, is its power to reflect one’s inner reality and relational self through narrative (Borokhov et al., 2006; Kosut, 2000; Littell, 2003; Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005; Tokarski, 2017). Narrative inquirers study the lived stories told through narrative (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Narrative inquiry is therefore well suited to study the stories people tell of their tattoos. This study involved organizing data from each

interview into views of self, others, and the world; this is a modification of Fraser's (2004) domains of experience. This study also used thematic analysis to gather themes from the tattoo narratives for comparative purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fraser, 2004; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Theoretical Lenses

Researchers need a theory to guide them in narrative inquiry. I used two theoretical lenses for this study: primarily, Adlerian theory, and secondarily, social constructivism. Both theories fit well within a narrative framework.

Adlerian Theory

Adlerian theorists have stressed the equality of every human (Sweeney, 2009). For Adlerians, personalities consist of subjective interpretations and how those interpretations guide behavior. Adlerians are interested in the narratives people tell themselves, often taking a significant amount of time assessing these narratives through a lifestyle analysis (Sweeney, 2009).

Purpose and subjectivity. Adlerian theorists have suggested that all behavior has a purpose. People particularly choose behavior that they believe will help them belong or feel superior (Sweeney, 2009). All behavior is purposeful movement toward a goal (Adler, 1929); therefore, even the choice to get a tattoo is a purposeful behavior.

How do people arrive at having any specific goal? It begins with subjectivity. A behavior's motivating purpose is born from a person's subjective experience of reality. Everyone can react differently to similar stimuli because each person perceives the world uniquely. Their senses alter the objective data they receive from the external world, resulting in imperfect interpretations of reality (Adler, 1938). The way people interpret reality, according to Adler,

affects them in the same way as if their interpretations of reality were accurate. He suggested, for example, that if a person mistakenly thought his spouse was having an affair, then he would experience the same jealousy or anger that he would experience if his spouse were actually having an affair. Each person's subjective view of the world is therefore of utmost importance (Manaster & Corsini, 2009).

Holism. Adler conceptualized the mind and body as a whole, rather than separating them into parts (Sweeney, 2009). This holistic view includes the complete set of relationships people have, along with the cultural context in which people live. In other words, one cannot understand people apart from social context any more than one can understand people's thoughts and feelings apart from their goals (Adler, 1929). People's thoughts, feelings, and actions act as one force striving for the same goal (Sweeney, 2009). And at the same time, the way people construct their methods of striving toward their goals depends on their unique interpretations of themselves, others, and the world—this is the lifestyle or personality. More specifically, as people interpret their experiences they solidify the way they approach life, and this approach to life can be seen in every choice people make (Adler, 1938).

Lifestyle. A person's lifestyle is their personality (Mosak & Pietro, 2006). Everyone enters life with an inability to survive alone—this inability gives rise to feelings of inferiority (Adler, 1929). People attempt to solve these feelings of inferiority, to come to a place where they feel they can successfully meet and solve the tasks that life presents. Lifestyle is an approach to life that, hopefully, helps them solve these feelings of inferiority (Adler, 1929; 1938). When people seek to belong and to solve feelings of inferiority in a way that contributes to the good of society, then they are said to be functioning in a healthy way (this way of approaching life that contributes to the overall good of society is called social interest). Adlerian therapists and their

clients seek to collaboratively uncover the lifestyle—or approach to life—and discover to what extent their approach to life is motivated by social interest, with the hope of increasing social interest in needed areas (Adler, 1938, 1979; Sweeney, 2009).

Lifestyle assessment. Adlerian therapists assess lifestyles in three traditional ways: the family constellation, early recollections, and the life tasks (Adler, 1938; Shulman & Mosak, 1995; Sweeney, 2009). The family constellation is usually a formal interview for collecting information on family values, family roles, parental behavior, sibling relationships, and the overall atmosphere of the family life (Shulman & Mosak, 1995).

Receiving clients' early recollections is a very effective way to understand their lifestyle (Adler, 1929). When people remember an event, they retrieve the memory from long-term storage and bring it to short-term storage. Memories in short-term storage are recoded, therefore causing memories to change every time an event is recalled (Gordon, 1989; Mosak & Pietro, 2006). This recoding is more salient in earlier memories where there are more gaps in memory to be filled (Mosak & Pietro, 2006). According to Adlerian theory's presupposition that all behavior is purposive, recoding is also a behavior with a purpose—the purpose of maintaining a lifestyle; early recollections therefore give insight into a person's way of approaching life (Adler, 1929, 1979).

Adlerians also believe that all people must approach life tasks. These life tasks are love, friendship, work, spirituality, and self (Mosak & Pietro, 2006). How people approach these tasks reveals their degree of social interest and therefore the usefulness of their lifestyle (Adler, 1938). If the person strives to meet these tasks in a way that benefits society then the person has a useful lifestyle (Adler, 1938; Mosak & Pietro, 2006).

Adlerian theory fits well with narrative inquiry and with this investigation into tattoo narratives. The behavior of storytelling serves the purpose of constructing the self (Polkinghorne, 1991). Tattoo narratives, according to Adler's presuppositions, should function to construct and maintain the person's self or lifestyle. Therefore, Adlerians might expect participants' tattoo narratives to reflect their view of self, others, and the world.

Social Constructivism

The experience of reality is formed by social interactions (Boyce, 1996). Social interactions include more than conversation. The written word is also a social interaction (Fairclough, 2003). The interviews, the transcription of the interviews, the member checks, and the publication of the text are all social interactions; and as such, they all actively form the experience of reality (Boyce, 1996; Fairclough, 2003). Participants were involved in more than the interviews; performing follow-up contacts and member checks provided more levels of social interaction as their stories were co-constructed, and brought deeper meaning to the various plots of their lives. Allowing participants with tattoos the opportunity to co-construct meaning in their stories might have counterbalanced any stigmatization they might have previously experienced (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions

The following four research questions were explored to understand how tattoo narratives reflect a participant's views and their approach to life.

1. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of self?
2. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of others?
3. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of the world?
4. How does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect the way he or she approaches life?

Participants

This section includes a description of the recruitment and selection procedures and ends with a discussion of the two eligibility criteria. First, however, I explain why qualitative research involves selection instead of sampling and that the number of participants does not always need to be high.

Selection

Quantitative researchers use samples to draw conclusions about a population (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Procedures like random sampling assist the researcher in the quest to generalize findings (Maxwell & Delaney, 2004). The goal for this research, however, was not to generalize findings to a larger population. The term *selection*, therefore, better fits the goals of qualitative researchers who are not attempting to find a sample representative of a population (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Increasing the number of participants does not necessarily increase the quality of narrative research (Morrow, 2005). Researchers have suggested various numbers of participants. Some have suggested as few as three participants (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997), while others have suggested up to 30 participants (Morrow, 2005). Rossman and Rallis (2017) suggested that one to three participants are enough if the researcher uses multiple interviews. On the other hand, they suggested that fewer interviews per participant may require the selection of more participants. The main point is to continue researching until the data becomes redundant and thematic patterns have been observed (Morrow, 2005). Ten people participated in this study because this number allowed for a rich collection of data and at the same time protected the important themes from becoming too difficult to see (Kern, 2015).

Recruitment and selection procedures. I recruited participants in person, through flyers placed on the university campus and at tattoo shops located in my city, and through word of mouth. I scheduled the initial in-person interviews according to the needs and wishes of the participants, and conducted follow-up interviews either by email, phone, or in person, depending on the choice of the participants. I gave all participants \$20 for their willingness to take part in the study. Purposeful selection is a method of choosing participants who can fulfill the purposes of a study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I gathered information-rich data by using purposeful selection (Morrow, 2005). I chose a criterion-based strategy to accomplish that method, thereby ensuring that interviews resulted in relevant information (Morrow, 2005; Patton, 1999).

Eligibility criteria. Participants met two eligibility criteria. The study's eligibility criteria first required that participants be at least 18 years old, because researching minors requires parental consent (Herlihy & Corey, 2014). Also, most minors are not able to get tattoos because of legal reasons. Future studies, however, could provide useful information by studying minors who have tattoos. The second criterion for inclusion required participants to identify at least one tattoo as meaningful to them. This study involved how participants use their tattoos for some meaningful purpose; therefore, people did not fit within the scope of this study unless they had a meaningful tattoo.

Instruments

Semi-structured interviews give narratives a more natural flow; I therefore used Josselson's (2013) relational approach to achieve an empathic, semi-structured interview. The empathic aspect of the interview allowed participants to experience themselves as being heard, accepted, and valued. I made a semi-structured interview guide that consisted of 16 questions: Eight questions targeted each tattoo, and eight questions explored the participants' thoughts of

tattoos in general. I increased my study's rigor by using another instrument—reflexive memos—wherein I recorded the thoughts and feelings I experienced before and during the interviews. Such memos helped uncover any hidden assumptions or biases that could have altered my interpretations of the data (Josselson, 2013).

Data Collection Procedures

This section includes a description of informed consent, which includes data protection and safety of participants. The contact and interview process is also described.

Informed Consent

I sent the informed consent, along with a revised informed consent sheet that allowed for telephonic interviews, to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Arkansas for approval. I handed a copy of the informed consent to all participants and verbally reviewed risks and benefits of participation, confidentiality and its limits, and the voluntary nature of this research. I gave participants the opportunity to ask questions about the content included in the informed consent. The interviews did not begin until participants understood the meaning of what was written and provided consent to interview them, record the interview, and obtain pictures of their tattoos.

Data protection. I had an ethical duty to keep information confidential and to secure anonymity for participants (Herlihy & Corey, 2014). Therefore, I used pseudonyms in place of participants' names. I also kept participants' information (i.e., interview transcripts, audio and video files, and other documentation) in a locked cabinet and on an encrypted external hard drive. I took the above precautions to protect participants' data and to help them feel more comfortable sharing their narratives.

Safety of Participants. Because many societies have historically considered tattoos taboo, it was possible that participants had previously experienced negative interactions because of society's view of people with tattoos. It was therefore also possible that participants would experience negative emotions as they told me their story. I provided participants with empathic understanding, warmth, and a nonjudgmental atmosphere to help provide them psychological safety during the interviews. In cases of emotional distress, I also provided participants with the opportunity to be connected with a counselor. In addition, I communicated to the participants that they had the right to end the interview at any time, with no negative consequences for doing so.

Contact and Interview Process

I introduced the topic of study, checked for eligibility, discussed the collection of photos of their tattoos, and answered questions the participants asked during the first contact. We also set the time and location of the first interview during the first contact. I conducted all initial interviews in person, at a place and time of the participants' choosing. The interviews lasted from 39 minutes to 76 minutes, with a mean of 60.1 minutes per interview and a median of 55.5 minutes per interview. I began the interviews focused on building the research relationship, and I shifted the focus to the research topic after participants felt safe and comfortable (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Because an hour-long interview is sometimes insufficient to gather rich data or to provide narrative depth (Polkinghorne, 2005), I made subsequent contacts with participants. I transcribed each interview upon its completion and emailed the finished transcript to participants, giving them an opportunity to make changes to the transcript. Only after I gave the participants a chance

to email any desired changes to me did I look for initial themes that emerged. I then scheduled a follow-up interview to discuss the themes.

I conducted follow-up interviews either in person, by phone, or through email, for the purpose of member checking. This follow-up interviews, when in person or on the phone, took between 20 and 30 minutes. The follow-up interviews worked as a member checks that allowed participants a chance to collaboratively discuss initial findings and to verify that my interpretations matched what they meant to communicate. The member checks also helped ensure that I did not impose bias. The participants might not have addressed everything during the first interview; therefore, during the follow-up interview, I discussed with the participants important themes that emerged from the interviews of other participants. These follow-up interviews also provided me an important opportunity to ask participants about turning points in their narratives.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing data from interviews done in narrative research is vague, though some researchers have provided steps to conducting narrative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fraser, 2004; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Fraser (2004) advocated an integrated approach when desired or needed. Fraser (2004) described specific phases of analysis, unique domains from which the researcher can organize experience, and self-reflexive questions for each phase of analysis.

Phase One: Listening and Experiencing

Narrative researchers continuously pass through different points on a circle: interviews, analysis, and conceptualization (Josselson, 2013). Therefore, the manner in which I listened and interacted with the participants is connected to my analysis. Josselson (2013) described at length

the empathic, nonjudgmental, active listening style necessary during the interview process. I used her relational approach to interviewing. Though the interviewees' memory is imperfect, it is the meaning that their experiences hold for them that is most important. I therefore focused on the meaning they constructed from their memories through their narratives, with little consideration for whether they described literal events perfectly (Polkinghorne, 2005). It is important for researchers to truly hear their participants' stories and experience their emotions (Fraser, 2004). I therefore attempted to observe participants' emotions and body language when these stood out to me as significant.

Phase Two and Three: Transcribing and Interpreting

Participants were disadvantaged because interpretation happens during an act they did not participate in—transcribing (Kern, 2015). Also, many societies have a long history of stigmatizing people with tattoos. The United States is one of those societies and it is where all participants reside. That history led me to foster a research relationship that approached equality. A power differential also existed between me as a researcher and the participants because I had the final say over what was published. I ameliorated such inequalities by using member checks; specifically, I involved the participants in the meaning-making process by allowing them to review their transcripts and collaboratively discuss tentative findings.

Working towards equality was only part of the interpretive process. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that researchers must become familiar with the data to conduct a thematic analysis. To that end, they prescribed listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts multiple times while annotating ideas. The foundation for further analysis, they suggested, depends on repeated immersion in the data. I therefore personally transcribed all interviews and read them multiple times while listening to the audio. After participants reviewed the transcripts,

I printed copies of the transcripts and numbered each line of text (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Josselson, 2013).

I first attempted to divide the interviews into stories without consideration of the tattoos participants were discussing. Partitioning stories in that way, however, proved useless to me, as did looking at the printed copies. I struggled to find a useful way of coding themes and domains on the printed copies before finally deciding to code electronically. In the end, I electronically colored each tattoo story to increase ease of review and interpretation. For example, in the transcript of Pam's interview, I gave the text involving her second tattoo the color green. The colored text allowed me to scroll through the transcript and easily find the discussion of her second tattoo, which is on line 58 and lines 93-154. I partitioned and connected each tattoo narrative within each interview by coloring or highlighting text. After finishing the color coding, I was able to more successfully search for domains of experience and for themes.

Phase Four: Scanning Domains of Experience

Fraser (2004) identified four domains of experience relevant to my research questions and helpful for organizing information: intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural. These domains are artificial and were developed to aid rather than command researchers (Fraser, 2004). I conceptualized and applied the domains of experience to my research endeavor by renaming the domains and applying them in a way that largely aligned with Fraser's (2004) use of each domain. I scanned narratives for instances of the participants using their tattoo narratives to construct or maintain their view of self, others, and the world. I conceptualized view of self as fulfilling the intrapersonal domain, view of others as fulfilling the interpersonal domain, and view of the world as fulfilling the cultural and structural domains. I also scanned narratives for instances of stigmatization related to their tattoos.

Instances of any domain can overlap other domains of experience (e.g., a view of self can often also be a view of others). Fraser (2004) suggested that researchers should explain the logic behind how they allocated information to different domains so that the readers can make their own judgements concerning the researcher's choices; I therefore provided narrative evidence along with interpretations, and remained open to meaning that contradicted my assumptions. I marked domains of experience by including notes in the sidebar of the transcripts.

Phase Five: Commonalities and Differences—Identifying Themes

I grouped patterns together as they emerged across the various transcripts and as plots were uncovered (Fraser, 2004). In doing so, I detected commonalities and differences both within and between narratives (Riessman, 2008). Though I identified themes at both the individual and the group level, the focus I gave to the group level was meant to give greater depth and richness to the individual level. Much of the thematic information that emerged already existed in some form on my sidebar notes made during phase four.

Phase Six: Connecting Personal Stories to Systemic Structures

Personal narratives coexist with sociopolitical structures (Fraser, 2004); research, popular culture, political movements, and even discourse among everyday people in society are some of the aspects involved in sociopolitical structures. I identified these connections by coding the participants' beliefs and experiences of how society views and treats them. Though I coded these connections in the individual analysis, stigmatization was a major consideration under one of the themes between participants.

The Eddies of Data Analysis

Josselson (2013) discussed how researchers continuously pass through different points on a circle when transcribing, interpreting, and conceptualizing. I similarly circuited the phases of

data analysis. I individualized this process by creating two templates: an outline template and a restorying template. I used the transcript codes to complete the outline templates, which included the name of each tattoo, its location, and age when acquired. I also recorded the transcript lines where discussion of each tattoo could be found. The template provided space to record the participants' views of self, others, and the world, along with space for other important information for each tattoo. I included the transcript lines for all information. I added headings to the template as I coded each individual, returning to the outlines of earlier participants as needed.

I used the completed outline templates to fill in the restorying template. In this template I labeled each view (or domain) and arranged their evidential quotes in a more chronological manner for each respective tattoo within the various views of self, others, and the world. I also filled in information under headings for each individual tattoo. In addition to helping me locate themes, this also helped me view the participants' overall narrative in the order events happened in their lives. As I added information to the restorying template, I amended the outline template. As I amended the two templates, I also amended the transcript codes. This process resulted in not just one big circle, but in many circles existing in the overall forward flow.

I began by viewing the data analysis as moving through stages. At some point, I began viewing the process as a circle. As time progressed, however, I began to view data analysis as a river with many eddies. An eddy is a whirlpool in a body of moving water. A river can have many eddies. I used the templates as oars to navigate the eddies of data analysis.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Narrative researchers construct quality research in different ways than do quantitative researchers (Morrow, 2005). Quantitative researchers use methods such as reliability, validity, and generalizability when describing the quality of their research. But narrative researchers use

methods such as credibility, transferability, and dependability to produce rigor and trustworthiness in research (Patton, 1999). These qualitative methods parallel those of quantitative research but should not be mistaken as accomplishing the same thing (Morrow, 2005).

Credibility

Credibility most closely corresponds with internal validity (Morrow, 2005) and it is earned by achieving rigor (Patton, 1999). In accordance with Morrow (2005) and Patton (1999), I sought to perform a rigorous study by following methods and techniques of other successful researchers, and by reporting these techniques and how I adapted them. Specifically, I applied Josselson's (2013) relational form of interviewing and used Fraser's (2004) phases of data analysis, while adapting the domains of experience to fit my study. I communicated those methods in this chapter, and included an explanation of how my conceptualization of data analysis evolved as I created templates and experienced the process for the first time. Triangulation, member checks, and external auditing are also useful for achieving credibility (Patton, 1999).

Triangulation. Triangulation provides more depth to participant narratives. Researchers can achieve triangulation by comparing the data with other research, auditors, member checks, and reflexive memos (Kern, 2015). Another form of triangulation includes multiple participants and photographs, such as pictures of participants' tattoos (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Shenton, 2004). Patton (1999), however, cautioned against misinterpreting triangulation. Different data often gives different reports because different methods are sensitive to different details, so those discrepancies, according to Patton (1999), do not weaken the study's credibility. The correct stance, the author continued, is to use those discrepancies to achieve greater

understanding and a thicker description of that which is being studied. Researchers use triangulation because “no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations” (Patton, 1999, p. 1192). I triangulated by using reflexive memos, collecting photographs of participants’ tattoos when they were willing to share, conducting member checks, discussing the emerging domains and themes with the dissertation chair, and using an auditor.

Member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed that the most important part of a study’s credibility is the member check. In member checks, participants review the transcripts to ensure that what they are recorded saying is what they actually meant. Researchers also relay tentative interpretations to participants to allow them a chance to verify, expand, or contradict the interpretations (Shenton, 2004). I gave participants the chance to review their transcripts and change anything they wanted. I also gave them the opportunity to question my interpretations or offer me new interpretations.

External auditing. Peer debriefers make judgments about the researcher’s bias, the logic of the interpretations, and the closeness of fit between the study’s themes and the data. Most imperatively, the researcher should clearly describe the research process so that the auditor can make informed decisions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I kept logs of the process through reflexive memos, research logs, a timeline of data collection, and of all the completed templates, so that the study could be audited. A panel of experts familiar with this dissertation’s methodology and theory audited the research project and checked the interpretation of individual themes throughout the process.

Transferability

Transferability parallels generalizability in quantitative methods (Morrow, 2005). Positivists desire to generalize findings to a larger population, but this is not the purpose of

qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Researchers must give, according to Shenton (2004), thick descriptions so that readers can compare the study's context to that of their own and decide if the study applies to their situation. Thick descriptions report in detail the context, themes, and participants of the study—including a description of the researchers themselves (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thick descriptions bring the study to life by describing as much as possible in as much detail as possible (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Shenton, 2004). I reported detailed information of the narratives, themes, and participants of the study and reported the information within its context.

Dependability

Dependability parallels reliability in quantitative research. People construct reality socially, according to Etherington (2007), and stories are negotiated between those who write the stories and their readers. The research relationship is a social relationship in which stories are arranged, created, and altered, and each participant in the relationship affects the structure and meaning of the resulting story (Caine et al., 2013). The idea is to make how I have discovered as evident as what I have discovered (Etherington, 2007).

To this end, I kept reflexive memos of both my preparation and evaluation of the interviews. Before each interview, I wrote reflections of what I experienced while waiting for the participant to arrive. Current mood and feelings can skew interpretation; therefore, I noted my current mood and general feelings about the interview in my memos. After the interview, I recorded my reactions to hearing the narrative. Doing so could uncover hidden assumptions I held, as well as help ensure rigor by keeping interpretations accurate (Josselson, 2013).

Researcher Credibility and Limitations

Finally, my credibility also affects the overall credibility of the study, and Patton (1999) argued that researchers must build credibility by making themselves transparent. I have no tattoos because the decision to put permanent art on my body leads me to want the perfect tattoo, which has proven difficult to find. I admire tattoos and the art work and meaning they hold to people who have them. There was the possibility that people with tattoos would hesitate sharing their stories with me because I have no tattoos, thereby possibly limiting my study; this concern, however, was unfounded, since the participants graciously opened up to me with their stories.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three I reviewed the methodology. I described narrative inquiry and my theoretical lenses: Adlerian theory and social constructivism. I stated the research questions and subsequently described the participants (their demographics, the requirements they met for eligibility, and the selection and recruitment procedures). I reported the data collection procedures and the six phases of data analysis. The research experience led me to view data analysis as traversing a river with many eddies, and I created templates to assist in the process. I also explained how I ensured trustworthiness and, finally, I discussed limitations. Chapter Four includes a comprehensive discussion of the research findings, along with an analysis of themes and narrative plot structure within the individual and across the group.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Chapter Four includes an overview of the participants, a summary of the process used to analyze the data, a description of the interpretive lens used in the study, a thematic overview of individual narratives, a group analysis and synthesis, and a narrative summary. The narrative summary leads into Chapter Five. This chapter's results presentation was an attempt to balance each individual story with a common group story, without losing the individual for the sake of the group. Because narrative researchers prefer to keep stories together, I have attempted to give longer quotes where the opportunity arose (Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

Overview of Participants

Each participant identified at least one of their tattoos as meaningful. Pseudonyms stand in place of participants' names to maintain participant confidentiality. Demographic data, along with the number of tattoos and the age when participants acquired tattoos, is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Age, Number of Tattoos, Race, and Sex

Pseudonym	Age	Age when first tattooed	Number of tattoos	Race	Sex
Mark	40	18	4	Caucasian	Male
Jane	20	18	4	African American	Female
Cody	21	18	3	Caucasian	Male
Chad	27	20	3	White	Male
Lee	40	~ 25	3	White	Male
Jill	"Older person"	Early 20s	> 10	Cherokee	Female
Pam	24	17	6	White	Female
Wolfgang	33	18	> 12	White	Male
Jay	Middle Aged	18	> 26	Human	Male
Jim	20	19	4	Refused	Refused

The two youngest participants (Jane and Jim) were 20 years old. Cody was 21, Pam was 24, Chad was 27, Wolfgang was 33, and both Mark and Lee were 40 years old. Jay was middle aged and Jill identified as an older person. Two participants were in their forties, while one

participant identified as an older person. The youngest age for the acquisition of a first tattoo was 17 years of age. No participant had less than three tattoos. One participant had around thirty tattoos. Six participants identified as either White or Caucasian. One participant identified as Cherokee. One participant identified as human and another participant refused to identify race. A last participant did not identify race during the interview and did not respond to a follow up email about her race. Three participants were female and six were male. One participant refused to identify sex. Two participants lived in Alabama and two lived in Louisiana. The remaining six participants lived in Arkansas. All interviews occurred in the town in which the participants resided.

The Narrative Analysis

Multiple phases of data analysis were used, in keeping with ideas learned from Fraser (2004) and Josselson (2013). The first phase was listening and experiencing. This phase involved a relational approach to interviewing that included an empathic, nonjudgmental, active listening style (Josselson, 2013). The second and third phase was transcribing and interpreting (Fraser, 2004). I personally transcribed each interview and read them multiple times, making interpretations of each narrative during the process. Individual tattoo narratives were color coded and each line of the transcript was assigned a number. Member checks were performed on the transcripts and on the researcher's analysis of narratives.

The fourth phase was scanning domains of experience. Fraser (2004) identified four domains of experience helpful for organizing information: intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural. Fraser (2004) stressed that the domains are artificial and were developed to aid rather than command researchers; I therefore applied the domains in a way that aided the investigation of the study's research questions. In this study Fraser's (2004) domains of

experience were conceptualized as view of self in place of intrapersonal, view of others in place of interpersonal, and view of the world in place of Fraser's (2004) cultural and structural domains. I scanned narratives for instances of the participants using their tattoo narratives to construct or maintain their views of self, others, and the world.

The fifth phase was identifying themes—commonalities and differences (Fraser, 2004); I identified themes across participants to give greater depth and richness to individual narratives. The sixth phase connected personal stories to systemic structures (Fraser, 2004). The main structures of interest relevant to this study involves the counseling profession (how counselors can interact with clients with tattoos and how counselor educators can address this issue with students) and how research can be better conducted by the social sciences concerning people with tattoos.

Within each narrative there are turning points. Turning points can involve a major decision or a crisis, or they can involve another person intervening in a way that alters the narrative's plot (Kern, 2015). Examples of turning points can include, for example, what prompted a person to finally get his or her first tattoo.

Interpretive Lenses

I used two theories as interpretive lenses for this study. The first lens was Adlerian theory. Adlerian theory is directly relevant to the research questions and Fraser's (2004) domains of experience. The second lens is social constructivism and it was chosen because I believe the researcher and participant co-construct meaning.

Adlerian theory. The narratives overwhelmingly contained important aspects relevant to Adlerian theory. The purposive nature of behavior is imperative to Adlerian theory (Adler, 1929). To that end, all narratives revealed some degree of purpose attached to most of their

tattoos. For example, many narratives revealed that the purpose of a tattoo was to reflect and participate in relational bonds; this purpose also connects to two of the tasks of life important to Adlerian theory, specifically the tasks of love and friendship (Mosak & Pietro, 2006), which implies that people, at least sometimes, get tattoos for the purpose of meeting a life task.

Participants' narratives revealed the subjective nature of experience, and this agreed with the high value Adlerians place on phenomenology. For example, participants' interpretations varied regarding the pain involved in getting tattoos. Consideration of the participants' views of self, others, and the world demonstrated the importance of the Adlerian view of holism, because each view often made more sense when stated along with the other views. In fact, all narratives included views of self, others, and the world. From most narratives a lifestyle could be understood; that is, the participants' approach to life could often be understood from their view of self, others, and the world.

A key concept to Adlerian theory is social interest. Recall that social interest is an approach to life that contributes to the overall good of society (Adler, 1938). The narratives displayed degrees of social interest. For example, a theme of unity and cooperation was found across participant narratives. Social interest, according to Adlerians, requires courage (Adler, 1938). A theme involving courage emerged in participants' narratives. No theme in the narratives contradicted any key Adlerian concepts.

Social Constructivism. Meaning does not exist in a vacuum (Boyce, 1996). Both the participants and I experienced the co-construction of meaning during the research process. During the interviews more than one participant created meaning for what they previously considered a meaningless tattoo. During a follow-up interview one participant expressed how validating it was to hear me interpret his approach to life and how, though the interpretation was

accurate, it was something he had never considered. Through follow-up interviews participants and the researcher helped each other create meaning.

The above experiences contrasted some of the participants' previous experiences. Some participants discussed how others were judgmental of people with tattoos, and how talking with someone who viewed tattoos differently helped them. For one participant, my nonjudgmental stance seemed to mean more to him precisely because I had no tattoos. Society and culture also seemed to influence participants' beliefs about where tattoos should or should not be placed. This could often be seen in how participants' connected their opinions about the location of tattoos with how society would react.

Thematic Overview

Twelve themes emerged and will be discussed at length in the section on group analysis. The themes can be seen in the discussion of each individual's narrative as well. Note how the following themes revealed themselves in the individual narratives: courage to grow through struggle and change, journey of faith, reflect and assist self-concept and growth, encountering emotion, responsibility, memorialize, love for family and friends, unity and cooperation verses discord, reflect and participate in relational bonds, trust and care in the artist-client relationship, positive results from sharing narratives, and perception and treatment of people with tattoos. The research questions involved how a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of self, others, and the world, and an approach to life. It is therefore appropriate to explore these questions within the individual narratives before discussing group themes.

Mark's Narrative

Mark, a Caucasian male who is married with children, was 40 years old at the time of the interview. He has four tattoos (see Table 2). Mark grew up going to church. He was always

smaller than other kids his age, but he considers himself to be more responsible than other people, partly because he has had more life experience than many people. He moved out of his parents' house at the age of 16 and is now married to his second wife.

Table 2

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo name	Tattoo location	Age acquired
Japanese Trinity	Back	18
Star of David	Left shoulder	21
Greek Trinity	Right shoulder	23
Ebed Adonai	Arm	24
War Torn Angel	Unknown	Future

Attending to the Narrative

The interview took place at his dining room table. His wife was home, but in a different room while the interview took place. He spoke at a rapid pace, which seemed to be his normal mode of speaking rather than being caused by anxiety. He knew exactly what his tattoos meant and why he got them. He felt compelled to communicate to me that his tattoos had definite meaning and that all tattoos should have meaning. Mark discussed his tattoos out of order.

Tattoo 1—Japanese Trinity

Mark got his first tattoo on his back at the age of 18. The tattoo is a Japanese Trinity, which appears to be a set of three commas forming a circle. He talked about this tattoo only after he discussed his fourth and third tattoo. One day he went into a bookstore and saw a Japanese art book. He found in it a picture of a Japanese Trinity. He said the symbolism of the Japanese Trinity “just kind of resonated with me” (Mark, lines 321-322).

Mark described himself as not “living a proper Christian life” at the time he acquired his first tattoo (Mark, line 322). He was questioning his faith and who he was but he still believed in Christian teachings. He described his life at that time as having a lot of turmoil. Mark said,

A lot of turmoil. Truthfully. I um. I was living on my own I, you know, just graduated high school, um, just hanging out with the wrong crowd. And I was living with a guy named John then. Uh, it was. They were doing a lot of drugs. I never really got into the whole drug thing, but they were doing a ton of drugs and I just kind of having to live where I can live. I don't know, not a good time in life. (Mark, lines 366-370)

Mark then described his experience of getting the tattoo. He went with his friends to Mardi Gras and had a bad experience getting his first tattoo. He almost never got another tattoo because of this experience. He shared,

And being in Mobile, Mardi Gras is a huge thing. So I turned 18. And I went to the big, the quote unquote big tattoo shop in town, which was just a dive, come to find out. It was a terrible place. But the guy, is. OK. So at the time I'm 5-foot-9, I might have weighed a Buck 20. Maybe. I'm just skin and bones. So this guy, you know, he has a very heavy hand. If you're not familiar with heavy hand, it means like they really, they kind of sit the needles a little deeper and they kind of push into you more, so it kind of goes deeper and it hurts a lot more. On top of this, this guy was very, very hung over, very hung over. And I got it like it's like right on the spine, under my collar of my, on my back. And being that little, I promise you I can feel the needles ricocheting off of my spine. It hurt like nothing I've ever felt in my life before. Thank God it's small. It's kind of like if you can close your hand, it's like maybe the middle finger to thumb. Maybe a little bigger than that, but that's, that's about right. It looks a little different now because I've had touched up since. It's a little bit bigger now. Because the guy was again, hung over, and the lines were bad and the, where it's supposed to be sharp, it was rounded and dull and it ended up terrible. Scarred, real bad. Lucky for me I hung out and, you know, I have that friend who did tattoos after that and um, I had someone fix it for me. So it's a lot better now. Much sharper, cleaner. Looks a lot better now. You know, it was just a very terrible. (Mark, lines 327-344)

The artist acted unprofessionally and irresponsibly. Mark considered this to be a terrible tattoo that was done by someone who did not care for him. A friend later touched up the tattoo, and this increased Mark's satisfaction with it. Notwithstanding Mark's negative experience and initial feelings, this tattoo served a specific purpose—it reinforced his beliefs after going through a time of questioning. His motivation matched the tattoo's function; he wanted it to reinforce his beliefs and it has. This tattoo means to him that he is a Christian.

Tattoo 2—Star of David

Mark put the Star of David on his left shoulder when he was 21 years old. He did not consider getting a tattoo again for a couple years after his first one, because of the terrible experience. After he recovered from the experience, and became willing once again to get a tattoo, he took a year deciding what to get.

His life had calmed since the time he got his first tattoo. He was nearly married. He was working at a bank and still living on his own. Mark said “It was a good time, kind of feeling secure in who I was and where I was going” (Mark, lines 469-470).

He enjoyed his second experience with tattoos; by this time he had become friends with a tattoo artist. His brother, his sister-in-law, and his soon-to-be wife (who is now his ex-wife) accompanied him for a fun night. Although getting this tattoo was less painful than the first, his satisfaction with this tattoo is low because of its condition and placement. Mark said,

This is terrible, because it's all faded. It was very, very pretty when it was first done and I could've had it touched up many times. I probably should've had it touched up. Um, I mean it's, it's hard on your body. You got to maintain it to some degree. I hate to say that that's the most forgettable one I have, but really, you know, cause like I said, I don't really take my shirt off much because I'm pale and I'm redheaded. I don't, how often do you really look at your shoulder? Not, not a whole lot and I rarely look at myself in that mirror, you know, without clothes on, so I don't really see it that much. Which is a terrible thought now that you're making me think about it. For some reason I see the Greek Trinity more. Don't know. Maybe that's probably the reason I haven't got it fixed because it has kind of faded away where I just don't think about it as much. Stop making me think. (Mark, lines 422, 424-426, 497-499, 502-504, 507-509)

Mark's motivation is consistent in his choice of tattoos. He chose this tattoo to solidify what he believed. The location of this tattoo, however, inhibits the tattoo's function from perfectly matching his motivation. He hardly sees this tattoo and so it rarely reminds him of or solidifies his beliefs. It does, however, still serve the purpose of solidifying his beliefs in one way. The faded, worn condition of this tattoo reminds him of the effects of his life struggles.

Tattoo 3—Greek Trinity

Mark then acquired his third tattoo, a Greek Trinity, on his right shoulder; but not before he deliberated on it for eight months. For Mark, the major considerations included the permanence of tattoos, the money involved, and the meaning that would be attached to the tattoo. He explained,

Even if the finances were readily available, the meaning, and as you said, the permanence of it, has to take precedence over everything else, that's with the money or not. I had to have a concrete reason why I'm going to scar my body and go through the pain. (Mark, lines 288-291)

Mark finally decided to get the tattoo. His brother went with him and they both got one. This was a special event for Mark because his younger brother soon left home for the military. Mark said,

I was thinking about getting a Trinity somehow and then my little brother comes to me, he's turning and he just turned I think 19 or 20 and he's about to go into the army and he's like: "Hey, I've, uh, I've been thinking about getting a tattoo." I was like: "Yeah me too, I've been thinking about getting like a Greek Trinity." He's like: "Me too." So essentially it just kinda worked out where we went to the tattoo shop and side by side and the same time to shop and people I knew and got our, our tattoos at the same time. And um, yeah, that was cool. Cool experience because that was right before he went to the army. (Mark, lines 180-187)

During this time, he worked at a bank, was dating his first wife, and was an assistant youth pastor. His purpose with this tattoo matched that of the previous tattoos. He was again motivated by a desire to remind himself of who he was and what he believes, and the tattoo serves that function. An additional function the tattoo serves is that it reminds him of his brother. Similar to the previous tattoos, this one means that he is a Christian.

Tattoo 4—Ebed Adonai

During this time Mark was a newlywed 24-year-old who played the drums for his church worship services. He chose his arm for this tattoo, and he took at least six months to decide. He

wanted something that would stand the test of time. His ex-wife, who had acquired a few tattoos since Mark got his last one, had gotten a tattoo on her wrist by using a word in a 150-year-old Hebrew lexicon. He finally decided it was his turn and, after finding a phrase he loved in that same lexicon, went to the tattoo shop. The Hebrew text he chose translates to Worshiper of God. Concerning the condition of and his satisfaction with the tattoo, Mark said,

Right now I need to get some touch up on it, it's so old now. You see it starting to bleed in together? Like that right there, when he first did it, he made a little mistake. It wasn't a circle, it was more of a square. So he had to go back and make a circle and it kinda bled into the other character. You see how as it gets older, how they start bleeding out? I mean it's 16 years old. So as it ages, you know, you grow, your skin grows, ink moves and starts shifting in your body. So like you see a sailor, 80 years old with tattoos and they're all, they look old and blurry and stuff and you know that that's why. Even though this is just straight blue, normal tattoo color ink, it starts to blur and fade over time. (Mark, lines 158-159, 161-163, 165-168)

A desire to remember what he was doing, and why he was doing it, motivated him to get this tattoo. The tattoo does indeed function as a reminder of what he does and why: The tattoo translates to Worshiper of God, and he played drums in a church worship band. He said, “you see this and it's like, you know, you know what you're meant to do” (Mark, line 149). While the Star of David’s location hindered the tattoo from completely fulfilling its purpose, this tattoo’s location aids in the fulfillment of its purpose. Mark said the tattoo is “a constant reminder because I'll always, that's my drive hand, so I always see it when I play” (Mark, lines 12-13). Mark likes this tattoo the most. Its meaning involves his belief in God and his drumming, which directly relates to him being a worshiper of God.

Future Tattoo—War Torn Angel

Mark wants another tattoo, but money, geographical barriers, and lack of time hinder him. The geographical barrier involves the distance between him and the tattoo artist. He would

prefer to use his out-of-state friend; but traveling to another State takes money and time, and he does not feel he can do it right now because he has so many responsibilities.

Mark saw an angel tattoo on a friend fourteen years ago. Mark intends on transforming the image into his unique angel. He wants his angel to look rusted and tattered with chunks broken off and bolted back together. The purpose is to get a tattoo that will represent the effects his journey has had on him. This tattoo would declare that life changes people and it would show his resolve in the face of struggle.

Tattoos in General

Mark's experience with tattoos improved considerably since his first one. He progressed from a horrible experience with a tattoo artist to befriending four tattoo shop owners. He said of the general experience of getting tattoos,

It's a strange feeling. Cause you go into it with the anticipation, knowing you're getting something on your body forever, but knowing it's going to hurt. Anyone that says a tattoo doesn't hurt is a liar because someone shoving needles in your arm, putting ink in your arm and you know, it's just going to hurt. And obviously it did. There's a point where you're just kind of, you know, you're excited because you know you're going to do it and you get nervous because you know what you're going to do. During it you're hurting but you're still excited and you know, but when it's all done you're, you're pleased and you're, uh, relieved. (Mark, lines 80-85, 87-89)

He described a terrible itching during the healing process, and stressed the importance of not scratching the tattoo during this time. He must fight the itch for close to a week. Mark explained,

Imagine it as like maybe you burned your arm, right? And you had to make, get a skin graft and you have to let the skin graft heal, it has to set in place because if you mess with it, you stand a chance of ripping that skin graft up. Then you're doing yourself more damage and the place looks more mangled and more terrible than it did before right? It's kinda the same thing. You know, it's, it's there and it's open wound and if you start messing with it, it's going to get all mangled and nasty looking. And then what are you going to do? Because it's going to scar and you can't really tattoo over scars very well, especially if what I have is one color and you get a tattoo over it it's not, it will never be the same color again. (Mark, lines 101-109)

Mark believes tattoos are mostly accepted these days, though some older people still dislike them. He thinks it is more rebellious to not have tattoos. Close to 65% of the population younger than 45 years of age, according to Mark, has tattoos. The stigma involved in tattoos today, he suggested, is attached to gang, prison, or otherwise profane tattoos.

Mark stressed the importance of getting meaningful tattoos that are not random. His all have the same basic purpose. He usually takes more than half a year choosing a tattoo, because he holds a high value on being responsible. Mark acknowledged that some people hate his tattoos and others love them; but he gets tattoos for himself, not others.

Domains of Experience

Elements for all three domains of experience emerged from Mark's tattoo narrative. Data analysis of his view of self, others, and the world revealed his lifestyle.

View of self. Mark views himself as unique because he was behind his peers in physical development and because he is more than just a normal everyday Christian. He feels he is a unique Christian because he has tattoos and because he shares his faith respectfully. Additionally, he became more responsible than his peers so that he could successfully meet life's unique demands on him. For example, he left his parents' house when he turned 16 and had to provide for himself at a young age. He views himself as needing reminders of who he is; more specifically he thinks he needs reminders of what he believes and reminders that he is a worshiper of God. Concerning his view that he needs reminders, Mark said, "Pretty much all my tattoos are about ... what I believe, why I believe. Even though all but my forearm is covered ... it's a reminder to me when I see them, of who I am and what I stand for" (Mark, lines 212-214).

His fourth tattoo reminds him of important parts of himself that are easily lost after having a new baby. He said,

My wife had a baby and he's four months old and you know, I didn't play drums at church for maybe six months now you know, with the previous, you know, with her not, with the pregnancy and then with the baby and me also working 50 plus hours a week, it's been very tired. But you see this and it's like, you know, you know what you're meant to do what you're supposed to do, what your giftings and callings are and it, it's a kind of reminder of: "You need to get back into church and get back into your calling and doing what you're supposed to do." (Mark, lines 145-152)

He also views himself as capable of growth and constantly changing. He compared the faded and worn condition of his second tattoo with his own life:

I'm always changing. As a person we're always changing. We're always learning, always changing who we are to some degree. But it's kind of like kind of the whole, you know, it's old and tarnished now, almost. I'm 40 years old, I'm not the same as I was 22 when I got this thing, 21 when I got it. It's just who I am, you know, 20 years ago is not who I'll be now or who I will be in 20 years. (Mark, lines 447-449, 453-455)

View of others. Mark views others as people who, though often irresponsible and thoughtless, are nevertheless capable of growth. The natural maturation of beliefs, as well as interactions with other humans, change people. Mark views others, therefore, as not only capable of change themselves, but also capable of changing him. He said "There's the core of who I am. But the people around me shaped me, mold me, make me who I am. The people in your life have effects on you and change your course of history" (Mark, lines 455-458).

View of the world. Mark views the world as an agent of change in his life. The world can change him in a variety of ways. For example, education and experience as well as the everyday challenges of life come together to change his beliefs. The fires of life can change Mark in both good and bad ways. To explain this change, he compared how the Sun had faded all the beautiful color from his second tattoo with what the Sun does to baseball cards left too long in the store's glass display. You could tell which cards did not sell, because the Sun had faded their colors. He then applied the fade of the tattoo and of the baseball cards to himself. He said, "I thought about it, it was kind of like, you know, just a reminder that you know, where I

was to where I am and you can see how time changes stuff. As a person we're always changing” (Mark, lines 445-447). Later, while discussing his future tattoo, Mark said,

It's essentially going to be an angel. I want these big metal wings, like all rusted and tattered, like it's been through a war, like all around it. It kinda represents, I guess me and what I've been through, especially with the, you know, the metal wings that had been worn, torn, rusted and chunks broken and bolted back together. (Mark, lines 563, 565-566, 572-574)

Mark's Lifestyle

Mark's view of self, others, and the world reveal his lifestyle, which might be stated as follows: I am at my core a Christian. I am constantly changing and growing. Other people have power to change me. The world—the fires of life—can also change me for good and for bad. Therefore, I choose to protect (through constant reminders) the core part of me which I will never allow to be destroyed—my faith and relationship with God.

Turning Points

The major turning point for Mark was his choice to reinforce his beliefs with his first tattoo. He had moved out of his parents' house when he turned 16, during a time of great external and internal turmoil. He lived with people who were abusing drugs, and he was unsure of who he was and he had many questions about his faith. Finally, after he was 18 years old, he made a decision to reinforce the core of who he was. He said,

Like I said, I wasn't at the time it was a lot of turmoil. I wasn't sure who I was or where I was going. Even though I had my basic belief system set. When 18, I don't think anyone has their basic belief system fully formed yet. I mean your, your brain is not capable of recognizing all that yet. You're still young and growing and I don't know. It's just, it's reinforced, reinforced what I was, I guess what I was feeling sure I believed. (Mark, lines 373-377, 391-392)

Mark has since chosen every tattoo to reinforce who he was and what he believed. After a period of turmoil, change, and uncertainty, Mark decided that at least one part of himself was no longer subject to change.

Jane's Narrative

Jane was a 20-year-old African American female with four tattoos and six ideas for future tattoos (see Table 3). She acquired her first tattoo at the age of 18. Her parents divorced when she was young, but she described her family as supportive. She is the oldest child and has two younger brothers, and stepsiblings. Her youngest brother was 13 years old at the time of our interview. She attributes her high pain tolerance to roughhousing with her brothers. Jane became a Christian when she was 7 years old. She is highly energetic and social, and she knew at a young age that she would be the wild child of the family. Tattoos is one way she achieves this wildness. When she was in middle school she would draw crosses on her hand between her thumb, thinking about the day she would get a tattoo.

Table 3

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo name	Tattoo location	Age acquired
Cross and Heartbeat	Left ankle	18
Mountain Range	Foot	19
Arkansas	Left forearm	19
Arrow	Front right shoulder	20
Home is Where your Roots lie	On Arkansas tattoo	Future
Rose with Writing	Rib cage	Future
Butterflies	Shoulder blade/back	Future
Sibling	Unknown	Future
Mother/Daughter	Unknown	Future
Semicolon	Unknown	Future

Attending to Narrative

Our interview took place in a university play therapy room. The room had a couch and other comfortable chairs. Jane smiled often and talked faster than most people. She laughed a lot and contagiously exuded high energy. She became even more excited as she talked about nature, her friends and family, and her faith. Jane valued meaningful tattoos, yet not all her tattoos

seemed to have meaning when the interview began. One tattoo that had previously meant nothing to her, however, became meaningful during the interview. Experiencing the creation of meaning excited me.

Tattoo 1—Cross and Heartbeat

Jane acquired this tattoo during her first college semester. Jane had planned all her tattoos prior to attending college, and about five months prior to turning 18 years old she began telling everyone that she would begin getting them on her birthday. They thought she was joking. The day of her birthday finally arrived and her entire family, other than her father, was at the party. She told them, while eating the birthday cake, that her dad was on his way to take her to a tattoo shop. She planned on getting Butterflies, because her dad was paying for it and the Butterflies would be expensive. Her mother, however, did not like the idea, and asked Jane to only get her nose pierced, and so Jane acquiesced. Jane knew that she was about to go to college and could then get a tattoo whenever she wanted.

Jane then went to college, having already completed one semester. She barely had any school work during this semester, and spent most of her time “enjoying life, going to football games, and making friends” (Jane, lines 93-94). She was 18, and felt simultaneously like an adult and not an adult. Even though she was now in college, free to make her own choices, she did not get her tattoo until her friend called one day, asking Jane to come to the tattoo shop. Watching her friend get a tattoo reawakened Jane’s desire. She was ready. She went home and immediately called the tattoo shop to schedule an appointment, but no appointment was needed because the tattoo shop took walk-ins. When she hung up the phone her roommate said she wanted to get one, too, so they both went the next day and got one together.

Her dad would not pay for one at this time, so the more expensive butterfly tattoo would have to wait. She saw a picture of a cross and a heart connected by a heartbeat, and thought it was perfect because God is always with her. She chose this tattoo for more than money issues. Jane also knew her mother would more likely accept a Cross and Heartbeat tattoo, and thought it could help ease her mother into the idea of her daughter getting more tattoos. So even before first becoming tattooed, Jane was planning how to desensitize her mother so that she could get multiple tattoos without upsetting her mom too much.

Jane went to the local tattoo shop where her friend had called her from. She had to give herself a pep talk, however, before she entered the shop. She thought she was going to cry because of the anticipation of pain, so she held her friend's hand. She released her friend's hand as soon as the artist began, because it did not hurt. Jane compared the feeling to that of being poked. The experience was the opposite of what she expected. Her friend did experience pain, however, because the artist tattooed her rib cage. So it seems—as in other participant narratives—that the location of the tattoo determined the degree of pain.

After the artist finished, Jane walked funnily for fear she would ruin the tattoo. The artist assured Jane it was OK to walk normally. Jane later discovered that the people who worked at that tattoo shop were from her hometown. She really enjoys going to that shop and plans on getting the rest of her tattoos there.

Jane took very good care of this tattoo because it was her first one and because she wanted it completely healed by the time she saw her parents. Jane's father only asked where she got it and how much it cost. Having the answer, he told her she did good and that he approves. Jane thought the tattoo's meaning could win her mom over, and she was right. Jane said,

And so at first she was like, she showed it off to everyone, at church, at, she'd be like, "Jane, show them your tattoo." And then she'd explain it, "You see there's a cross and a

heartbeat. I like this one. It's growing on me." And then she'd be like, "Don't get anymore." I was like, "Mom you know I'm getting more." And she goes, "I know." But um, but this one, she got okay and was happy with it. So I'm like, "Yay." (Jane, lines 223-228)

This tattoo has a variety of purposes, from stabilizing her and assuaging her self-doubt to reminding her of who she is and what she is like. Jane said, "So I'm like, it reminds me, if I'm not doing what I need to do—checking myself and realigning myself up. I can't think of specifics, but I know when it does happen it's a quick like psychological thing" (Jane, lines 198-200).

Tattoo 2—Mountain Range

Jane got this tattoo during her second semester in college. She was still making new friends, and shortly after the semester began she started a relationship. By May she was shocked to still be in the relationship, because she had never been in one that long. The relationship brought her boyfriend out of his shell and calmed her down at the same time. Her boyfriend bought her this tattoo to celebrate being with her for three months. They planned on getting one together, but her boyfriend was picky. Jane tried to show him ideas but none of them worked. He finally told Jane that he would take her to get hers even though he was no longer getting one.

Jane knew she would get a mountain tattoo more than a year before getting it, but was not sure where she wanted it placed. She first considered the middle of the arm, but backed away from that idea and settled on the foot. She showed the tattoo artist a picture of mountains and the artist drew it. The picture pleased Jane. They collaborated on the design and it was the artist's idea to add the mountain's shade.

Though this tattoo did not hurt, the needle did hit a nerve, sending her foot into shock.

The artist reassured her. Jane said,

This one didn't hurt but the thing was at one point the needle went over one of my nerves. And that didn't really hurt, it just put me in shock because I wasn't ready for it. I was just chillin' on the little thingy, whatever we sit on I don't know what it's called, I can't think

of the name for it. I was just sitting on it and was just leaning back talking, watching the tattoo artist doing the tattoo. I was just chillin' and all the sudden I'm like, "Ohh. What?" And um, cause when he went over the nerve to do, I think it was like right here on the tallest mountain, and over on that line, it just went over and I was like, "[a shocked sound]" my foot went into shock. It was shaking. I was trying to figure out what was going on. He just held my foot down and right after he passed it, I was fine again. I was like, "What." He was like, "Yeah, we just kinda went over a nerve and your foot just went into shock." And I was like, "Oh. Okay." And I just went back to talking. (Jane, lines 306-316)

This tattoo represents Jane's love of nature. She loves the outdoors, particularly hiking and kayaking. The tattoo's location is related to the tattoo's meaning; it is on her foot. This tattoo, like her first tattoo, stabilizes her. Nature grounds her and this tattoo reminds her of nature.

Tattoo 3—Arkansas

Jane got her third tattoo as a sophomore. During this time, she declared her double major and was taking theater again. She had not done theater—a thing she loved dearly—since before she started college, and the lack of theater in her life saddened her.

The desire for another tattoo came suddenly. She said "I just woke up, I had an itch to get a tattoo. I was just like 'I wanna get this tattoo, I wanna get this tattoo'" (Jane, lines 434-435). Jane and her boyfriend went to a different tattoo shop because the one she liked was busy. She had considered putting an Arkansas tattoo on her ankle, but ended up putting it on her arm. She wanted this to be a matching tattoo with her boyfriend.

Jane's uncle, who has a huge Arkansas tattoo on his shoulder that says "Born and Raised," thought she was trying to be like him. Her coworkers gave her a difficult time about this tattoo and questioned her choice, but her boss defended her.

This tattoo means that she is an Arkansan and that Arkansas is beautiful. Her desire to represent her home State motivated her to get this tattoo. The tattoo has been a conversation starter and she is always happy to share what it represents.

Tattoo 4—Arrow

Jane got her Arrow tattoo half a year later, during a very stressful 19-hour semester. One day in class she saw her friends looking at tattoo pictures, talking about getting \$20-discount Friday 13th tattoos. Jane thought about how hard she had worked and how scholastically successful she had been, and concluded she deserved a treat. She chose the Arrow tattoo because it was the option with the smallest 13 that, she figured, could be easily feathered out in the future. She bought an inexpensive tattoo to relieve her stress. She described this decision as impulsive and she expressed regret, saying,

It bothers me sometimes. Honestly, it's been bothering me. Cause I was like super stressed when I got it and I was just like: "I deserve it and I'm just gonna get one." And that's what I did and now I'm just kinda like: "Ugh." And it bothers me looking at the 13... This one was impulsive and it means nothing. And so it throws me off. (Jane, lines 579-581, 593)

She saw people she knew at the shop and hung out and talked a while. Her turn finally came after waiting a while. She described the relaxing experience of hearing the needle buzz:

I was just kinda laying there. Honestly, this one, because it was so close to my face and I could really hear the needle buzzing, for some reason it reminded me of a massage chair. And I told the tattoo artist: "I feel like I'm in a massage chair." And they were like: "What?" I was like: "With the buzzing, I feel like I'm in a massage chair." ... it was relaxing (Jane, lines 567-570, 572)

Jane took care of this tattoo for no more than two days. She expressed self-doubt and dissatisfaction over her choice and regretted that the tattoo meant nothing. Her motivation to reward herself and ease her stress seemed to have failed; the tattoo did not fulfill its purpose.

Something happened, however, while she was sharing her narrative—tattoo meaning blossomed.

As she reflected on her impulsive decision, the tattoo became something more. She said,

It's not so much a regret, because I don't like having regrets. It's kinda like, I have it here and it doesn't really mean anything and I'm like: "You know what, this just shows sometimes you shouldn't just rush into things. Yes you wanted this. Sometimes you should just sit back, stop, look at everything, take a breath, and then go on and it'll be okay." But this time I just really wanted a tattoo and really needed one right then. Um ... It's becoming something ... it reminds me: "Don't be impulsive." Though I don't really care for the Arrow it will like, I guess it does have a meaning of don't be impulsive. (Jane, lines 778-782, 784, 796-797)

Future Tattoos

Jane wants to add the words "Home is Where your Roots are" to her Arkansas tattoo.

This tattoo will remind her and help stabilize her amid temptation. She said,

I'm gonna get things added to it, like: "Home is Where your Roots Lie." Above and under it. Because like, it is where my roots lie. And knowing what I wanna do in the future, like, having, hey: "Remember where you're from." Because I know where I'm gonna go in the future. It's gonna be busy it's gonna be a lot of temptation and craziness around me. So I can remember: "This is where you're from. Embrace it." (Jane, lines 476-481)

Jane also plans on getting a Semicolon to represent her history with suicidal ideation and her victory over it.

Jane wants to get a Sibling tattoo and a Mother-Daughter tattoo. She is trying to convince her 13-year-old brother to get a tattoo when he turns 18. This tattoo will hold the meaning of their unbreakable bond. She's unsure what to get with her mom, or even if her mom will agree to it. Her tattoo with her mother, like her Sibling tattoo, would reflect their bond. She also wants to get two tattoos for her nanna. She wants a Rose with Writing and a set of Butterflies. The Butterflies will represent not only her grandmother but also the beautiful change that can happen in people's hearts. She wants to put the rose on her ribcage, with the words I Love you from here to the Moon and Back. The rose tattoo will represent her close relationship with her nanna. She said,

I have a really good relationship with my nanna. So that's gonna be on my side. Actually it's gonna be on this one because it'll be close to my heart, because my nanna is super close to my heart. Um. And then I'm debating with that one if I want, because I also got her handwriting. Every time if we're talking on the phone or if I'm there and about to leave she'll say: "I love you from here and to the moon and back." We've been doing that for I don't even know how long. So before I left to come back to Fayetteville, last time, I had her write it down on a piece of paper. And so either I'm going to get um, that, her hand writing with: "I love you from here to the moon and back." Either I'll get it intertwined with the rose going in between the leaves, or I'll get another tattoo with the moon and get it going around the moon. I haven't decided if I want it around the rose or the moon yet. I'll probably honestly get it around the rose so they'll both be right there together. (Jane, lines 620-631)

Domains of Experience

Elements for all three domains of experience emerged from Jane's tattoo narrative, and her lifestyle emerged from the data upon analysis of her view of self, others, and the world.

View of self. Jane's faith is a vital part of who she is and she views herself as a Christian who represents Jesus. She views herself as an outdoorsy person who is interested in things that represent and aid growth. She said "I love the outdoors, kayaking, hiking. Hiking is like my favorite thing to do. My favorite activity, hobby. If I'm not at school just being outside in nature" (Jane, lines 322-324). She views herself as a strong overcomer. She said,

Sometimes you could've ended but you kept going. That means a lot to me because at one time in my life I was suicidal. I have overcome. I'm out of that phase. Thankfully. Because that was a dark period in life. (Jane, lines 692-694, 697-698)

View of others. Jane's view of others involves her belief that God is always with her and supporting her. Family is vital and supportive. Others edify her and prepare her for life. Her brothers, for example, prepared her by making her strong and increasing her pain tolerance. Not everyone can handle her high energy; but some, like her boyfriend, not only handle her energy but also balance her. Jane said,

So first semester is like that times ten. All the time. Sometimes my roommate was like, "This is too much for me right now. Can you not?" I'm like, "I'm sorry I can't." Um and

then like, second semester he calmed me down cause we're completely opposites. We took a personality test. He's exactly opposite of me. (Jane, lines 284-287)

View of the world. Jane views the world as a place where beautiful change can occur.

She said,

And while we're speaking of my nanna there's one more for my nanna. It'll be butterflies because they are her favorite creatures. And at first I was like why would I, because like, at first butterflies didn't really mean that much to me. But um, when I start thinking about butterflies, they start off caterpillars and they're ugly and everyone is like ugh that's a caterpillar. And then they go in this cocoon and they change, and that change makes them beautiful. And there's something about that that I really like. But I didn't, it occurred to me. My nanna, I forget exactly how she did it. But she correlated the change of the butterfly to the change that happens with Christians when we're born again. I think that's exactly how she did it. The born-again part. Um. I was like: "Man, that's beautiful." So I'm gonna get two butterflies, a bigger one and smaller one, on my shoulder blade and back. It'll be a bigger one and smaller one, kinda like following after each other. (Jane, lines 631-642)

Nature is her home and it grounds her, helping her know herself. She described how nature secures her:

If I had a choice I would go hiking every weekend or every other weekend. I don't have time to do it that often, but I go hiking whenever I can. Um, finding new trails and new places to hike. And sometimes camping depending on who I'm going with. And kayaking. And pretty much anything outdoorsy is what I like to do. Cause being out. There's certain things that really calm me. And being outside in nature and looking at how beautiful it is is really calming for me. And so, thus I got mountains, because hiking is the main thing that I do... Even all my wallpaper on my phone. With all these messages I have. It's one of the trails I most recently hiked. Um. That's like the Buffalo. We were like on a bluff line that was, not that wide. We were pretty much almost against the rocks and were just casually walking and we got to a place where we could sit down and relax, and we were like, "This is beautiful." And it was the Buffalo and we were taking pictures and that's been my wallpaper since then. It's just like, it's also the last time I had time to hike so I'm like, "ooh." But I like hiking a lot especially in the winter. I prefer hiking in the winter. So. I got it cause nature and everything grounds me so it's on my foot. (Jane, lines 326-332, 334-341)

Jane's lifestyle. From the above views of self, others, and the world, an image of how Jane might approach life can be formed. This image might resemble the following statement: I am a strong, overcomer. Others are supportive and balance me. The world is beautiful and nature

grounds me. Therefore, nothing can defeat me because I'm strong and energetic and others, along with nature, support and ground me.

Turning Points

Jane's narrative revealed four turning points: her overcoming of suicidal ideation, her decision to get her first tattoo, her decision to go into theater, and her decision to return to theater. Jane did not talk about her first turning point of overcoming suicidal ideation, other than to say she had overcome it. Her second turning point involved her decision to finally get her first tattoo. Even though at college she was able to make her own decisions about tattoos, she still did not get one. This turning point happened when she saw her friend getting a tattoo. She said, "I came up there and then when I was watching her get a tattoo I was like, 'Man, I want my tattoo.' So, I went the very next day to get my tattoo" (Jane, lines 79-81).

Jane's teacher and friend played important roles in her third turning point. Jane explained her initial decision to become an actor:

I've had this dream since 6th or 7th grade. I was in GT. And for Black History month my teacher was like, "We're gonna talk about um, Black History. But we're not gonna do. Everyone does Rosa Park, everyone does MLK. Do someone different. You're in GT, do something different." So me and my best friend, at the time, we were just like, "Let's do Morgan Freeman." And so we did Morgan Freeman and ever since then my dream, dream role and everything has been to be in a film with Morgan Freeman, a spy film. I don't know why I want to be in a spy film. I really want to be in a spy film because I think it would be really bad ass to be in a spy film. But be in a spy film with Morgan Freeman and him be like my boss and be like, "Okay, I need you to do this mission" and I'm like, "Alright. I got you." Um. But I would just be okay with doing any movie with Morgan Freeman. I'd be very satisfied in life. (Jane, lines 386-396)

Jane had gone her entire freshmen year of college without theater when a friend played a key part in her final turning point. Jane shared,

I think the only change I had from Freshman to Sophomore years was I declared both my majors. Um. I was actually taking theater classes again because I pretty much took about a year off from theater after high school and I was really sad about it. And so my roommate from Freshman year was like: "Jane, either you get back in theater or you stop

complaining.” She goes: “I don't care which one you decide but stop complaining to me, if you miss it just do it.” So, by that time I was back in theater. (Jane, lines 461-466)

Cody's Narrative

Cody was 21 years old at the time of our interview and had three tattoos, with ideas for two additional ones (see Table 4). Cody has played basketball since he was 3 years old. His grandmother died when he was 6 years old and, though he does not remember a lot of the times he spent with her, the times he does remember are very special to him. Cody's growth plates were bad when he was a kid, so he wasn't very athletic when he was younger. Even so, he became better at sports and fell in love with basketball after he began growing. His passion for the game was so great that, when he broke his right wrist in the sixth grade, he trained himself to play with his left hand. It was either stop playing basketball for over a month or learn to play left handed. He worked so hard at playing with his left hand that he now can only play left handed.

Table 4

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo Name	Tattoo Location	Age Acquired
Basketball and Heartbeat	Left forearm	18
Cherokee Wolf Tribal	Left shoulder	20
Necklace	Left bicep	21
Sibling	Unknown	Future
Cross	Ribs	Future

Attending to the Narrative

I first met Cody at his place of employment and the first thing that stood out was his height. Our interview occurred at the university's play therapy room. He was amiable and passionate. Cody thanked me for the chance to share his story. He believed that this research was important and wished more people would look at tattoos nonjudgmentally. Cody talked at a slow

speed and was very calm, remaining so throughout the interview. I felt his passion as he spoke of three topics: basketball, his family, and the way others view people with tattoos.

Tattoo 1—Basketball and Heartbeat

Cody got this tattoo at age 18; he chose a basketball attached to a heartbeat. Cody's brother already had many tattoos and had received them all from the same friend who lived in another town. Cody liked the way his brother's tattoos looked, so he chose the same artist. Cody looked at a variety of tattoos before going to the tattoo shop, yet he found none with meaning to him. The answer became clear, however, after he reflected on his current life—basketball. Yet he still considered the decision for a couple months. He developed multiple ideas for a basketball tattoo, but needed to ensure basketball would remain meaningful in the future. He finally decided that the meaning would last. Basketball made him who he is, so even if his passion for basketball faded it would still be incredibly meaningful. He had to wait, though, because he was in high school and lacked the money. He eventually asked his dad for a birthday tattoo, and his dad agreed to do it, on the condition that Cody received his scholarship.

His dad took him to a tattoo shop for dry needle run so he could experience what it would feel like. After the dry run, Cody decided to put tattoos on his left arm since it did not hurt as much. Even though he had an idea of how it would feel, he said he “was still nervous cause like, I second guessed myself. Is this really something I want on my body for the rest of my life” (Cody, lines 127-128). Though Cody began with anxiety and doubt, the experience ultimately relaxed him and sparked a craving for more. He said,

I mean, once he started the feeling was like no other. Um. I know a lot of people say it, but it really is an addictive feeling. After a while you get, you really want another one. It's so easy to just pick it up and go get one. But I want stuff on me that's meaningful. But it's definitely something that, I mean I got this one and I love it, I mean it was a really good feeling. It was super relaxing and, I don't really know how to describe it. But I was definitely ready to, once I got it done I was like: Okay I'm gonna take care of this one and

start looking at what I want next. It's relaxing. And the feeling. It's like when your arm goes to sleep. Like, that's pretty much all it feels like. It's really not that bad of a feeling. Um. You know when they start coloring and stuff it's a little bit different, but it just feels like your arm is tingling and sleeping. I mean. I know it's a weird feeling you don't really like. But it feels good. (Cody, lines 129-135, 138-142)

This tattoo shows his love for basketball, and its location gives its meaning vitality. Cody explained,

I work in short sleeve shirts. So a lot of people do see my tattoos and they ask me: "What's that mean?" or "I really like that." I show them. It's out in the open. There isn't really anytime I don't think about it. It's right there. I can see it all the time. It's not like it's on my back where I can forget about it. Um. Which is one of the things, I wanted to keep it in my forefront, you know, where I see it. I'd rather be able to see it, so I can look at it instead of it being somewhere, it loses meaning, I think at that point. (Cody, lines 73-78)

Tattoo 2—Cherokee Wolf Tribal

Cody's second tattoo is a Cherokee Wolf Tribal on his left shoulder. Three things motivated him to get this tattoo: his grandma, his love for wolves, and his height. His grandma made him a blanket when he was younger. He said,

Ever since I was little, I have this blanket that my dad had when he was younger. His mom, my grand mom made it for him. It has wolves on one side and blue backing on the other. It's what I fell in love with. I slept with it all the time. They also, when my dad's, they had these pillows that had wolves on them. They put me and my brother's names on one and my sister's name on the other one. I love wolves. (Cody, lines 234-239)

Cody wanted to know where his height came from, and his dad discovered they were part Cherokee and their family's height skips generations. His great-great-grandfather was a 7-foot 2 full-blood Cherokee. Cody used this tattoo to describe that part of his history.

After a couple months considering tattoos, none seemed right until his friend showed him a picture. Though he eventually chose that picture, he hesitated. He said, "I put some consideration into what it's gonna mean. I'd go over every scenario. Is this offensive? Is it gonna

mean something to me in ten or twenty years. And is it something I want on my body” (Cody, lines 427-429)?

The meaning of this tattoo involves his love for his grandma and an explanation for his height. The tattoo’s purpose is to hold those meanings and describe his history. The tattoo also invites communication. Though he does not constantly talk about the tattoo, he does think about it every day because of its location.

Tattoo 3—Necklace

Cody’s third tattoo is an image of the Necklace his dad gave him when he was 14 years old. His dad told him to never lose it and always wear it. His dad has Cody’s name in a cloud tattooed on his right forearm, and his father and brother have matching tattoos; so Cody wanted something for his dad, but it had to be meaningful. He chose the Necklace. It took him a year, however, to save the money, and he no longer wanted to travel out of town for tattoos. Hence he asked people to recommend a place, and he eventually found a shop in the town he lived.

He went to the tattoo shop alone, but his girlfriend came by to see him while he was there. There were hardly any customers, so he was able to sit for the tattoo as soon as he arrived. He experienced more pain with this tattoo, because it was down the middle of his bicep. He delightfully surprised his father. Cody said,

I came home and said I have something to show him. I showed him and he's like: “I like that, why did you decide to get it?” I told him: “You might not remember, but you told me to always wear it and never lose it, so I tattooed it.” He said: “Honestly, I would've never thought about that.” He actually loved the idea. He actually thought about going to get one just like it, since you know, my brother and him have matching tattoos. (Cody, lines 212-216)

This tattoo means his dad loves him, and it is his favorite. It reminds him to be the man his dad knows he can be, it was his creative way of obeying his father’s wishes, and it connects him with his dad. Cody said,

If something was to happen to my dad, I have that on me. It's part of me. It's something that really connects me to him. Um. Since he has been a big part of my life. It's got a lot more meaning to it than my other ones. (Cody, lines 309, 446-448)

Future Tattoos

Cody said he wants two additional tattoos: a Sibling tattoo and a Cross for his grandmother that will include her birth and death dates. Cody's Sibling tattoo would remind him of his sister and represent and hold their bond; though they have never seen each other, they talk regularly. Similarly, Cody spent little time with his grandmother because she died while he was young. He does, however, remember the special moments they shared. Cody's purpose for this tattoo will be to remind him of the bond they shared. Little things in life can make the strongest bonds. One such bond involved Spaghettios. She always told him to chew his Spaghettios, and it is his last memory of her, a very precious memory to him.

Tattoos in General

Tattoos describe his history, explains his life, defines who he is, and makes him unique. People in Arkansas, according to Cody, tend to look at tattoos negatively and often assume people with tattoos are bad. Tattoos scare some people. Most people, however, like his tattoos. For example, when he worked at the grocery store, his boss did not make him cover his tattoos. He has had mostly good interactions concerning his tattoos; even so, some people mock his tattoos and others underestimate his tattoo's meaning, while older people think tattoos are sinful. Cody wishes people accepted tattoos. He said,

I watched a video on it a couple weeks ago. This guy was working on the side of the road on his bike, right outside the place he was getting a job interview. He had his shirt off and he's covered in tattoos all over his chest, back, and legs. He was working on his motorcycle outside the store to video it and see reactions. And the guy who was going to do his interview walked by and made a snark comment. The dude never turned around, so he never saw his face. A couple minutes later the dude throws on his suit and walks in and they have this conversation and he's like: "I'm ready to hire you." And he's like, "I will not work for you." And he looked at him like, "Why?" He took off his suit and shirt

and was like, "The guy who was on the side of the road who you made the snark comment about working on his bike, that was me. You'd never tell it because I'm wearing a suit. But I will never work for you." And I wish it wasn't that way. Yes people can cover them up and look completely different but, to a point it, it shouldn't be a stigmatism. People shouldn't be looked down. (Cody, lines 532-545)

Domains of Experience

Elements for all three domains of experience emerged from Cody's tattoo narrative, along with his lifestyle and turning points.

View of self. His heartbeat is basketball; and his height, which is connected to basketball, defines him. Indeed, Cody is meant to play basketball: Not everyone is 7-foot tall; not everyone will train to be left handed; not everyone gets a Basketball and Heartbeat tattoo; not everyone tattoos a Necklace that tells him to be the man his dad knows he can be. All his tattoos are about who he is destined to be. It is who he is, so of course he pursues basketball and is a good man. Moreover, he loves and thrives in challenge. He said "Give me a challenge. Give me something I can really shine at that really challenges who I am and what I'm doing" (Cody, lines 389-390).

View of others. Though others can be judgmental, he also finds support and edification in people. His family and friends accept and understand him. His dad loves him and believes in him. Cody said,

No matter what my dad and I've been through, at the end of the day, like, I still, he calls me, and he hangs up the phone saying: "I love you." It's something that's super, right there all the time. I don't go a day without talking to my dad. I've had, I've messed up stuff in my life, um, with my credit, doing stupid stuff thinking: "Oh yeah, I can afford this." And I can't. So my dad actually is someone I go to with anything, "Okay, this is what I want or need to do and this is my budget, can you help me"? He helped me start my own business. He's someone I go to on a lot of stuff. Any decision, any big decision I have in my life, I wanna get dad's opinion. Nine times out of ten he's done the stuff before I've done it. So it's something that, let me get his ideas on it. My dad is a big part of my life, so it means a lot to me. (Cody, lines 448-458)

His friends understand and accept Cody for who he is. They allow him space to be himself and are there when he needs them. He said,

I've played football and baseball. And I've had buddies that were super passionate about it and that's what drove them. They woke up in the morning and were like: Okay I've got a game today. And they'd focus on that one. We all played most sports until middle or high school. And then we all split and went to the sport we really wanted to play. At that point we didn't lose our friendship. We understood we were focusing on this one, this is what we wanted to do. And after everything was done and said, like during the summer when we don't have as many sports we'd all get together and have our friendship back. (Cody, lines 91-98)

View of the world. The world offers safe haven in family. In discussing the Necklace, Cody said “Family is a big thing” (Cody, line 208). In discussing his future Sibling tattoo, he said “You know, family, it means a lot to me” (Cody, line 307). His Sibling tattoo is about family protecting each other. Cody also connected his future tattoo for his grandma with the importance of family.

The world, though sometimes unfair, rewards those who challenge themselves. It is unfair that some people have to cover their tattoos while others do not. And it is not right that so many people look down on people who have tattoos. Though there exists such unfairness, there is nevertheless reward for the determined. Cody said,

I just put more effort forward for it and challenged myself. It's a little bit different playing the game as a left-handed person. Um. Cause most people are right handed. To the point it kinda gives you an advantage because there's things you can do a little different than most people because you are left handed. So it's something, I mean, I challenged myself for it. (Cody, lines 415-419)

Cody's lifestyle. From Cody's views of self, others, and the world, his way of approaching life can be seen. Accordingly, his lifestyle might be: Even though the world can be unfair, I find safe haven and support in family and friends. Therefore, I am unafraid to challenge myself—to strive to be the man I am meant to be—and there is nothing I cannot accomplish. Because he is striving to be the man he is meant to be with support of his family, what could stand in his way? Cody approaches life with courage.

Turning Point

A turning point in Cody's life happened after he broke his wrist. He was only an adolescent at that point, but basketball already meant a lot to him. Though he had always practiced, even before his growth spurt, it was after he broke his wrist that he decided he would do whatever it took to play basketball. He went from right to left handed. From this point on he knew that with enough dedication and determination he could be the person he was meant to be.

Chad's Narrative

Chad is a 27-year old gay White male who had three tattoos and was considering getting an additional one (see Table 5). He is highly educated, comes from a middle-class socioeconomic background, and considers his upbringing privileged. He earned his bachelor's degree in music and then moved to Arkansas to earn his master's degree. He moved back home to Kansas to work professionally, before moving back to Arkansas for his doctorate. Chad played cello in an orchestra and sang in a choir while earning his bachelor's degree, and during his junior year they performed the Chichester Psalms. He is the youngest of all his cousins by at least 20 years.

Table 5

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo name	Tattoo location	Age acquired
Hebrew Bible Verse	Left forearm	20
Arrows	Right tricep	23
Flowers	Right forearm	25
Geometric Shapes	Unknown	Future

Attending to the Narrative

Our interview took place in a university play therapy room. I previously thought that tattoos gotten on a whim would hold less meaning. This interview proved me incorrect. He got

his tattoos on a whim and they are full of beautiful meaning. Chad was well dressed, calm, and respectful. Chad was very approachable. He became emotional while discussing his niece and nephews, and his love for them filled the room.

Tattoo 1—Hebrew Bible Verse

Chad long knew he wanted a tattoo; even so, he took a while choosing exactly what to get. He drew various ideas and searched the internet, yet despite his efforts he failed to find the right tattoo. He continued looking while he began his junior year in college. He played in the orchestra and choir during that semester, and one of the pieces they played was the Chichester Psalms (composed by his favorite composer, Leonard Bernstein). Part of the third movement is a bible verse about living in unity. The performance significantly affected Chad. He said,

I was really moved by that piece, I really loved it, for multiple reasons. One, Leonard Bernstein had always been my favorite composer, so being able to perform his music, I think as a music student for me was really cool and empowering. And then at the very end of the third movement of the piece the choir sings this line acapella, so without any instruments going at the same time. It's such a quiet moment of this kinda boisterous piece, and it, I think listening to it was really powerful to me, but like I said I learned it from the choir and also from orchestra, so I got to do it on both ends. And being a part of the process of creating that music was really cool, too. Yeah. And I even, I play it all the time. I still listen to it on my iPod sometimes. It's probably my favorite piece of music. So that line to me, I loved the meaning of it and I loved that part of the piece specifically. So I wanted to memorialize it on my arm. (Chad, lines 55-65)

One day, as he looked at the music to the Chichester Psalms it became clear he wanted it for a tattoo. He chose to have the line transliterated from Hebrew to English, to keep it true to the music. The verse in English says “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). The artist transliterated the verse on his arm as, “Hineh mah tov, Umah na'im, Shevet ahim Gam yahad.”

Chad took a friend with him to the tattoo shop because the thought of pain disquieted him. While at the tattoo shop and waiting for his turn, an event foreboded an unpleasant experience. He said,

So like, when I was waiting to get mine done there was somebody in a chair getting a tattoo done at the time. And he was, um, like big, muscular guy, had probably a hundred tattoos all over his body. And he was getting one on his shoulder and he passed out. And so I was sitting there waiting for my turn and I see this guy pass out and I, I immediately was kinda scared. (Chad, lines 20-24)

However, Chad's turn came and he did not faint. He had a good experience, after all. The difference between scratching and tattooing, Chad explained, is that you become accustomed to scratching while you never get used to being tattooed; it's a constant cutting. Chad's arm twitched a couple times while being tattooed, which concerned him because he did not want to shake the tattoo gun off course. The artist reassured him.

Chad is impressed with this tattoo, as it the most meaningful one and the best quality. The tattoo means equality, unity, and the brotherhood of humanity. His purpose in getting this tattoo was to memorialize the music and to outline his beliefs.

Tattoo 2—Arrows

One day the desire for another tattoo hit him, so he began drawing and he searched the internet for images. He finally decided he could use Arrows to represent his niece and nephews.

He said,

I think I was struck with that, "I want a second tattoo" feeling. Why not think about what I wanted. I looked at a couple things online, drawing random things, but then one day I was doodling and made an arrow, and I was like, "Oh that'd be cool to do." And at the time, I only had two nephews and a niece at the time. And I was like, "Well, wouldn't it be cool to get a tattoo that talks about, represents who they are," you know. So I decided I would get one arrow for each and leave it at three. Because at the time I also thought, "If I have another nephew or niece or anything like that, I can add to it pretty easily." (Chad, lines 148-155)

Chad explained the special place they have in his heart:

I never really understood what it meant to have a new baby in the family when I was growing up. Cause if my cousins had kids it wasn't really, I felt like it didn't affect me so much. But I remember the first time I went and met my nephew I was like, it was over. He was so special to me and he still is. It's one of those things that's like, it's unconditional love. You get to see them and you're just happy. You see their face in a picture and you get happy. You go hang out with them and even when they're being bad and running around the house and screaming it's still such a wonderful experience because you get to be with them, you know. So I, I love having nephews and a niece When they say tea party you go and have a tea party. If they wanna play horseback riding, they ride on your back for an hour—you do it. Um. And that. Even one of my nephews lived with me a couple of weeks when my sister was going through some trouble. I think even that was a new experience for me, too, because before they would come over and we'd hang out, we'd have a good time and play, send them home to mom and dad. But then when my nephew had to live with me for a while, it was a new experience because it kinda almost made me feel like a father figure because he, his dad's not really in his life. So being able to be that for him was really impactful for me. And it's something my sister actually tells me a lot. She talks about how like, she's just really happy that his name is Marcus, that he can have a father figure when his dad doesn't do that for him. And think, too, part of it is I'm a gay man and like, I don't know if I'll ever have kids. I would love to have kids someday but I just, I can't guarantee that's gonna happen, whether that be financially or just whatever. So I think, having four of them now, yeah, it fills this void um, that, I don't know will ever be filled on my own. So it's great to have them. (Chad, lines 191-195, 197-200, 203-213, 216-220)

Tattoo 3—Flowers

His niece and nephews once again inspired his choice of tattoo. He looked at many designs of flowers, but could not decide between colored or shaded flowers. The decision became easier after he contemplated the time they spent together—they loved coloring. Hence, he chose a colorless outline of flowers. He drew it, made the appointment, and got the tattoo the following week. Chad thought it might be a stupid idea, until the kids came over and colored on it for the first time.

Chad has no desire to add color, because to do so would take something special from his niece and nephews. This tattoo's purpose is actively relational. In the literature review it was claimed that the communicative power of tattoos might be the purest purpose of tattoos. Chad's flower tattoo casts doubt on that claim. The tattoo functions relationally, and it is clear that Chad

had this exact thing in mind when choosing the tattoo. His motivation for picking this tattoo, and not another one, exactly matches the way it is functioning. He uses this tattoo to have exciting bonding experiences with his niece and nephews and there seems to be a perfect overlap between his motivation for getting the tattoo and the tattoo's function.

Tattoos in General

Chad plans on getting Geometric Shapes as a future tattoo. He does not, however, ascribe any meaning to this future tattoo. Unlike most participants, Chad gets his tattoos on a whim. He said "I get tattoos on a whim. A lot of times when I think of my idea I end up going within the next like, couple days to get it. But I've never regretted one" (Chad, lines 49-51). Chad views tattoos as a part of who he is; and he does not believe they need meaning. He said,

It's funny, too, because I feel like, from my perspective, I've always felt like a tattoo doesn't have to have meaning. And I think that's why I always moved so quick, too. But at the same time I feel like all mine do have meaning. So it's a two-sided coin. To one extent I don't think they should have to have meaning. If you like the design go put it on your body, that's cool. But then on the other side of things, every single one of mine has a very deep meaning to me. (Chad, lines 263-264, 267-270)

Domains of Experience

Elements for all three domains of experience emerged from Chad's narrative. Chad's lifestyle likewise presented itself upon reflection of his views of self, others, and the world.

View of self. Chad is aware that he might never have children of his own, but he also views himself as a good father figure. His first tattoo highlights how he views himself as a respectful and cooperative person who believes in equality and unity. He said,

Yeah, so the words, like I said, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Um. And, to me that's just a really powerful statement. For one, I feel like that kinda outlines my beliefs in a way. I believe in equality and unity. I think as I've gotten older I've explored a lot more topics I'd say related to diversity, inclusion, and equity. And I think I've become one, more firm in my various beliefs around different social identities. But also I think it just added to my understanding of respecting other

identities, even the ones I don't share with people. And this tattoo just totally reflects that I think. (Chad, lines 68-70, 92-96)

View of others. Chad's niece and nephews fill a void in his life. He views everyone in the human race as his brother and as having intrinsic worth as a human being. He said, "It all comes down to treating individuals like an individual, like they're a person and respecting their humanity" (Chad, lines 85-86).

View of the world. Chad views this world as existing without any God. The world, furthermore, can make people feel unaccepted. He said,

So like, when I finished my master's program and I was job searching I remember I had that internal dialogue, "Do I show my tattoos, do I ask if it's okay to have them out at work, do I need to always wear long sleeves?" Kinda the same thing with my piercings, do I need to take them all out, you know. (Chad, lines 100-104)

Even though Chad had those concerns, he has never experienced negativity toward his tattoos; and the anxiety about being judged concerning his tattoos eventually faded. He said,

I'd say the funny thing is when I first was job searching I was very nervous about that and I was like, "I always need to keep them covered in interviews and not mention them." But then as time went on I kinda flipped and I was like, "The tattoo is a part of who I am. It's on my body. And it's not going away unless I pay thousands of dollars, which I don't have, and I don't wanna do." I knew, it was kinda one of those things like, "If I'm coming to the job, it's coming with me." Um. I feel like this day and age people are fairly accepting of tattoos, even being visible in most environments. And so I started to keep my piercings in, show my tattoos and not really worry about the reaction, because if for some reason that disqualified me from the job then I probably wouldn't have been happy in that job anyway. (Chad, lines 104-113)

Chad's lifestyle. When Chad mentioned his atheism, his focus was not on his atheism—the focus was on the brotherhood of humanity. Immediately prior to saying people should respect everyone's humanity and treat them well, Chad said,

I think the funny thing about it, so I guess I, I'm an atheist, so I don't believe in religion. And my undergrad institution was a religious institution. I wouldn't change that, I loved my experience there. But this line is also from Psalm 133, which, I think I have a respect for I'd say the Psalms especially just with my musical background and also because a lot of my very close friends and family are very religious and I respect them for that. Um.

So. Even though it's a religious thing and I don't necessarily follow or believe in a religion it's still really important to me, I think, to have. (Chad, lines 74-80)

His atheism is connected with how he treats others. Chad confirmed, in the follow-up interview, that he believed humans are most likely alone and therefore must care for and respect each other. His lifestyle can thus be stated as follows: I'm a loving person. Others have intrinsic value that the world sometimes misses. Therefore, I seek to show love to others and live in peace with everyone.

Turning Points

A turning point that led Chad into holistic learning involved his cello professor. His professor sent him a student who had behavioral and learning issues because she hoped the music lessons would give the student an outlet. Chad became frustrated because the student was stubborn, so he expressed his dismay to his cello instructor. Chad's teacher, during their private cello lesson, talked with him about the issue. She said that "the job of educator is not to teach people to play scale right. Educate them to be a better people no matter what you teach them to do" (Chad, Follow up). Chad's cello teacher, at that very moment, did for Chad exactly what she instructed him to do for others. In that moment Chad decided he would teach holistically.

The next turning point happened at a conference for student leadership, where his dedication to holistic learning became more solidified. While there, he learned about educating the whole person. He decided to go into higher education while at the conference. Chad said that his cello teacher "was the exit ramp, and the conference was the new road" (Chad, Follow Up).

Lee's Narrative

Lee is a 40-year old White male from lower Alabama. He has one daughter and he lost his wife to Lupus a decade ago. He loves to hunt and fish and spend time with friends. He did not acquire his first tattoo until he was 25 years old (see Table 6).

Table 6

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo Name	Tattoo Location	Age Acquired
Superman Symbol	Right shoulder	25
Chinese Grief Symbol	Left shoulder	34
Unforgiven	Inside right forearm	35
Man of Constant Sorrows	Back	Future

Attending to the Narrative

Lee talked at a slow pace. He seemed sad through much of the interview because his tattoos reminded him of his deceased wife. He shared that he did not like talking about his loss, but that he prepare himself for what it would feel like telling his story. He only smiled while explaining the reason his friends called him the Man of Steel.

Tattoo 1—Superman Symbol

Lee's first tattoo is the symbol Superman wears on his chest. His wife chose it for him. They wanted to get a tattoo together; but she could not get a tattoo, because of the blood thinner she took. He worked many hours per week during this time. When he was not working he would take his wife and young daughter boating; one day, while on the river, they discussed tattoos. Immediately upon leaving the river and dropping off the boat, they went to the tattoo shop. He agreed to get this tattoo for two reasons: devotion to his wife and rebellion from his mother.

Lee had a mixed experience at the tattoo shop. His sunburn from boating all day increased the discomfort of getting the tattoo. Anxiety arose within him because ink and blood covered his shoulder, shielding the progress from his vision. In due time the artist finished and cleaned Lee's shoulder. Lee and his wife were disappointed until Lee told the artist to outline it in blue. Finally, upon completion, they were happy.

This tattoo's meaning has changed with time. At first it meant he was the Man of Steel, specifically the way his wife meant it. The tattoo soon gained additional meaning from his friends. He said,

The wife and I were trying to make another baby, so we were having a lot of sex. And so that's how my nickname The Man of Steel came about. That and my friends started calling me that for a different reason. But that's why my wife called me that. Well, they heard her calling me that every now and then. Superman. The Man of Steel. And they never did understand. And then, um, one night we were going ATV riding and several of my friends there at my house, they had been drinking pretty heavy that day. And I had my firearm, um, an automatic colt pistol. And um, my friend wanted to look at it. And he'd been drinking and of course I've got sense enough to know not to hand a loaded firearm to a drunk, so I commenced to unloading the pistol. It malfunctioned and went off in my hand. Long story short, the bullet didn't go out the barrel. The case exploded on the side of the pistol, inside the chamber, not inside the chamber, um, with the bolt in the rear position. And when it exploded that's exactly what it did, it exploded like a firecracker. It made the gun sound, but the bullet had no force behind it because it wasn't in the chamber. Any time a firearm case explodes, if it's not in a chamber, if it's not enclosed like that, the bullet is pretty much rendered useless. Well anyway the bullet was still in my hand after the explosion occurred. And all my friends heard the gun sound, you know, and I opened my hand and there the bullet was in my hand. And because they were highly intoxicated, they thought that I fired the gun and caught the bullet in my hand. It's a funny story, really. That's a true story and that is how it happened. (Lee, lines 17-20; 24-38)

Lee's wife died between the time he acquired this tattoo and his next tattoo, and the Superman Symbol's meaning shifted with her death. It now means he is his daughter's hero. He sees this tattoo every time he sits in his rocking chair and every time he wears a tank top. The visibility of his tattoo assists the tattoo's purpose of both reminding him he is responsible for his daughter, and communicating to her that he is her hero. He said the tattoo "reminds me of my family and my late wife and what I need to still need to do for my daughter. It makes me think I need to be there now for my child" (Lee, lines 76-78).

Tattoo 2—Chinese Grief Symbol

Lee got this tattoo about a decade after his first tattoo and a couple years after his wife died. He visited Fort Walton Beach, Florida and was doing things he and his wife once enjoyed.

While there he got drunk and, on a spur of the moment decision, got another tattoo in remembrance of his wife. He chose the Chinese Grief Symbol because it was amendable: He could add other symbols as he gained experiences. There is, in this case, less overlap present in Lee's motivation and this tattoo's function than is present in his other tattoos. Even after years of life experiences, he said, "I haven't added to it and I really can't think of anything to add to it. Maybe one day I will. But it's kinda been a disappointment because I haven't" (Lee, lines 190-191). Lee became less satisfied with this tattoo as it lost its purpose of amenability. In addition, the tattoo's location partially hinders it from its other purpose: reminding him. He said, "It's on my left arm, upper shoulder, so I don't see it much. But I do see it occasionally and when I do it reminds me" (Lee, lines 108-110).

Tattoo 3—Unforgiven

Though Lee acquired this tattoo on a spur-of-the-moment decision when he was 35 years, he had wanted the tattoo since his wife died. The tattoo is Old English writing that says "Unforgiven" and it spans the entire length of his forearm. He used a nonprofessional to save money on such a large tattoo. Even though he did not go to a tattoo shop there were a lot of people there. He said,

Actually, there was a lot of people there at one of my girlfriend's houses. Actually, it was her nephew that done it for me. And there, her brother was there and several other friends there. I guess her son was there. I didn't have any family there. But they were such good friends of mine. I met them at a real dark time in my life. Jane, she had been going through a lot of the same thing I was going through, and we really connected and bonded together. We became friends. After he finished it, I got my arm cleaned out and we went out and spent the night out on the town. I knew the guy who did it since middle school. He was always a good artist as far as drawing stuff on paper. I trusted he'd do a good enough job to satisfy me. However, I didn't know that he has never actually tattooed a person before. (Lee, lines 124-132)

He is not completely satisfied with the way it looks and plans on paying a professional tattoo artist to touch it up in the future. He is, however, satisfied with its meaning. The tattoo means

that Lee sometimes feels unforgiven and has many regrets. He said, “I had this word put there because at the time that was really how I felt and had been feeling that way for several years” (Lee, lines 120-121). This tattoo’s purpose is to remind him of that feeling.

Future Tattoo and Tattoos in General

Lee wants his next tattoo to be a large crucifix with the words “Man of Constant Sorrow” around the crucifix. This tattoo would communicate to people both that Lee is a sad person and that God is sorrowful. After explaining his future tattoo, he spoke of how tattoos are becoming more accepted. He said,

Some older people, I suppose, don't really care for them, maybe snub their nose at them. The younger crowd I don't think pays any attention to them, because tattoos, I believe, have become more popular in the last 15 years than they had been before. Before it was usually a symbol of rebellion or project a tough guy image. And I guess through changes in our society it turned more into an art. It's art on someone's body that they're expressing. But in general, people get tattoos for certain reasons. (Lee, lines 199-204)

Domains of Experience

Elements for all three domains of experience emerged from Lee’s tattoo narrative. A discussion of Lee’s lifestyle is given from an analysis of his view of self, others, and the world. A discussion of various turning points in his narrative then follows.

View of self. Lee views himself as Superman, at times as a failed Superman. He sees himself as his daughter’s hero. While speaking of his dedication to his daughter, he said,

She's had a hard time with her mother gone so I have to be there for her and be her rock, her Man of Steel, her Superman, her hero. I want her to know that whenever she sees the Superman Symbol on my arm, that I am her hero and that she can count on me for anything at any time. (Lee, lines 68-70, 193-195)

Lee allows himself to be mistreated so that he can provide for people important to him. He views himself as someone who must help others and he feels guilty anytime he fails to do so. He said,

There's a lot of people that lean on me sometimes and I feel like I have to be there for them. And I try to go out of my way when they need me. I'd cut my arm off and give it to 'em if they needed it. lot of times I feel guilty when I can't do more. I really feel guilty and helpless when someone needs me and I can't provide or deliver it. (Lee, lines 174-175, 177, 179-180)

Lee often feels unforgiven and he is full of regrets. When speaking about his Unforgiven tattoo, Lee said “The past comes up and haunts you. I start feeling regrets for certain things I’ve done or didn't do. Um. Things I wish I’d have done different and things had worked out a little different” (Lee, lines 156-158). The Unforgiven tattoo is the most visible. He put it where he would see it always—a constant reminder of his regrets. More than his grief, and more than his job as a protector, he is determined to always remember his regrets and failures. His first tattoo reminds him of his responsibility and his third tattoo reminds him of all the times he has failed his responsibilities. This reinforces another view of self.

Lee views himself as a depressed person who is bereaved and full of constant sorrows. His second tattoo, the Chinese Grief Symbol, is the Chinese word for grieved. His future tattoo will include the words Man of Constant Sorrows. He said,

I want a rather large one on my back. I want a large crucifix on my back and then, with Old English writing around it and the top and bottom of it, I want it to say: The Man of Constant Sorrow. To me it would mean, people that read and see it would know I'm a rather sad individual, I don't get happy very often or stay happy for very long periods of time. (Lee, lines 207-209, 211-212)

View of others. Lee views others as dependent on him. Though people are dependent, they often reject both his and God’s help. Lee spoke of how others make God sorrowful when they reject His help. God, like Lee, is full of sorrow; and they are sorrowful for similar reasons.

He said,

But, personally, if you think about Jesus. God loved us so much, like the bible said, He gave His only Son. Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to die for us. Not only was He willing to die for us, He was willing to be humiliated and tortured for us. And yet everybody, every person, man, woman and child on this Earth has turned their back on

Him from time to time. Some more than others, of course. But for Him to be there with His arms sailed open wide just ready to welcome us no matter what we do, and then have people turn their backs and act a certain kinda way or whatever, spit at Him, curse at Him, to me I think that would be sorrowful. (Lee, lines 212-219)

View of the world. The world reminds Lee that he is not Superman. Life accumulates all his past failures and assaults him with them. He said,

I still feel that uh, maybe that I'm not forgiven. I know the bible says that I am. My past sometimes comes back to haunt me and cause a lot of problems for me. And the bible says that when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior that all old things have passed away and everything is become new, that I am reborn and a new creature. And I don't always feel that way. It's a reminder I feel that way. I have to believe what the bible says. I mean, I don't necessarily have to, I wanna believe it. And I do believe it, so. (Lee, lines 116-120, 167-168)

Lee's lifestyle. From Lee's view of self, others, and the world a picture of his approach to life can be seen. It might be worded as follows: I am obligated to be Superman for people and I often fail. Others need help but often reject it. The World reminds me that I am not Superman. Therefore, I feel depressed.

Turning Points

Lee's narrative revealed two turning points. The first turning point was when his wife talked him into getting a tattoo. This marked the beginning of Lee using tattoos to express who he is and how he feels. The other turning point was the death of his wife. Though he was no longer his wife's Superman, he was still his daughter's Superman and he tried to be everyone else's Superman as well. It was almost a decade between his first and second tattoo. He was motivated by his wife's death to never forget those how love him. He said, "The tattoo reminds me not to forget our loved ones or people who stand beside us no matter what" (Lee, lines 101-102).

Jill's Narrative

Jill is a Cherokee female who identifies as an “older person” and who works as a mental health counselor. At the time of our interview she had at least eleven tattoos, receiving the first one when she was 22 years old (see Table 7). Her tattoos overflow with thoughts of nature, spirituality, and relationships.

Table 7

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo name	Tattoo location	Age acquired
Tiny Rose	Back of neck	22
Kokopelli	Left upper arm	Early twenties
Dove/Faith/ Floral	Left arm	~ 6 years ago
Wolf and Poem	Left arm	~ 6 years ago
Tree/Balance/Grace	Right arm	~6 years ago
Rose with Writing	Right arm	~6 years ago
Elephant	Back of neck	Unknown
Friendship Sign	Left calf	Unknown
Indian Symbol	Left ankle	Unknown
Bird Exploding	Stomach	Unknown
	Under neck	Unknown

Attending to the Narrative

We conducted our interview in her counseling office. She only allowed me to take pictures of a few of her tattoos. A major difference between this interview and the others was that discussion of specific tattoos often lacked the breadth of information that other participants gave for their individual tattoos. The interview lasted about as long as the others. The participant might have felt rushed because of how many tattoos she had. The result is that most tattoos have little actually said about them; what was given turned out to be more of a gloss of the various tattoos. She went in more detail about tattoos in general than she did about any one tattoo she had.

Jill did not share her story in the order she got her tattoos, and it was not clear she knew the temporal order. Consequently, I did not list her tattoos in temporal order as I did for other participants. She did, however, remember she acquired the Tiny Rose first, and then Kokopelli. Other than Kokopelli, her sleeves were almost all acquired around six years ago. The Bird Exploding is her latest tattoo. Another difference is that I put tattoos in groups, because it seemed the more natural way of discussing her tattoos.

Tattoo 1—Tiny Rose

Her first tattoo was a Tiny Rose on the back of her neck that she got while spending time with friends during her college years. She discussed her spur-of-the-moment decision:

I was in college. In my bachelor year. I got this teeny, Tiny Rose. It was on my shoulder. A bunch of us girls being silly and getting all giddy and excited about doing something so daring. So, there was absolutely no significance than probably my first rebel yell. Yeah. I mean, no one knew. I don't even think I showed my mom until, I mean the rose is no bigger than maybe 2 inches. We were in Memphis and it was a bunch of us girls from college and we were going to get a small tattoo in an inconspicuous place. (Jill, lines 39-45)

Jill later covered this tattoo with another because of the poor quality. She explained:

Only because I think the tattoo artist at the time had bad ink and it was just, you couldn't even, it was a teeny tiny, I mean it was tiny, maybe an inch. So after a while, the ink wasn't good, that's something you need to be careful with. The ink, the quality, that's why it's important in my opinion, if you're going to be getting a tattoo and finding that artist, you need to make sure they're in a clean, and their ink is good, you just ask. If they seem sketchy well, I wouldn't go to them. They say, "Oh yeah I'll do your tattoo for 25 bucks." I wouldn't do it. I just wouldn't do it. I wouldn't have covered that one up if it didn't look like someone just through ink on me because it was my very first tattoo (Jill, lines 203-208; 220-221)

Tattoo 2-4—Left Sleeve

Her second tattoo was Kokopelli (the god of hope, happiness, and fertility). She wanted this tattoo since she was in high school, when her church group spent a summer doing Vacation Bible School (VBS) in Arizona with the Hopi Indians. The Hopi Indians love Kokopelli. Her

parents, however, did not love tattoos. She said, “My mom about fell on the floor as an adult when I started getting tattoos. So, I didn’t get my Kokopelli until I was in my twenties” (Jill, lines 26-27).

The Kokopelli, in addition to its literal meaning, brings to her mind both the bible and her life’s work with children. It also memorializes that summer. She said, “It represents when I went to spend the summer with the Hopi Indians and did the VBS with the kiddos. It was amazing” (Jill, lines 31-32). Kokopelli plays a flute to make children happy and help them dance, and Jill works with children in therapy.

Next on her left sleeve is the Dove and the word Faith. When introducing these tattoos, Jill said, “I do believe in God and Jesus. And I don’t know. Nature means a lot to me” (Jill, line 9). She also wanted a Floral design on her arm to represent beauty and peace in God’s creation. Stella, whom Jill described as a great tattoo artist, designed and tattooed her entire left sleeve except for the Kokopelli. Jill said,

You mean Stella? Yeah she’s a wonderful tattoo artist. These are actually her, like—nobody else has this. She draws these things. She's actually an artist and she has her artwork—her and her husband has a—he does portraits and she does more nature, kind of different trees and stuff. So she literally drew this. So it's not a. A lot of tattoo places use stencils. You go in and pick it out. Um. I had an idea in my mind. So when I went in and talked to her about it she created it and she drew it on here and went at it. (Jill, lines 51-56)

Tattoos 5-6—Right Sleeve

Jill’s totem is wolf, and her fifth tattoo is the Wolf and Poem. The wolf is by her wrist and there are paw prints leading up to the poem on her upper arm going back behind the shoulder. She does not have the poem memorized, but it is about being an Alpha and preferring solitude while traveling in a pack. The poem ends with “Quiet beauty, God’s child” (Jill, line 103). Jill said,

The wolf print is just because of the wolf. I had written a poem about being a lone wolf and my son was like, "Why don't you put that on your arm?" We had to condense it because it was long and wordy. So, my son writes. He took my poem and made it more user friendly to put on my arm. So, that's how that came to be. So, he was with me when I got that wolf on my forearm, but he wasn't with me when I put the poem on my arm, um, in and around the print. (Jill, lines 79-84)

Stella also did the right sleeve. Jill said, "She drew the Tree. Balance, Grace, and Faith in God. The Tree—nature. This one, the Tree was first, the flowers second, the flora. But Stella did it all" (Jill, lines 92-93). She spoke of how these tattoos bring together a picture of how God's grace gives us stability and balance through nature.

Tattoo 7-11

Jill's seventh tattoo is a Rose with Writing. She chose it for the purpose of covering the first tattoo. The writing says, "Each for the other and both for God" (Jill, line 69); Jill believes that is how all relationships should be. A tattoo artist by the name of Red Beard did this tattoo. Red Beard is her friend and favorite tattoo artist. She said, "And Red Beard did it for me. He's my favorite. He's retired now. He lives in Hot Springs" (Jill, lines 222-223).

Jill's eighth tattoo is an Elephant and her ninth tattoo is a Friendship Sign. She said, "I collect elephants. So, this is an original Elephant. I always thought it was kind of funny out of all the tattoos I never had an Elephant one and I don't know why I never did" (Jill, lines 106, 189-190). Elephants, according to Jill, represent power and beauty and love. This tattoo, like the previous one, is about relationships. Concerning her ninth tattoo, the Friendship Sign, Jill said,

My best friend's is on the back of her neck. It's just an infinity sign, well it's not an infinity sign. It is, just means, it's a Friendship Sign. It's Egyptian or something, but it's, it's somebody's. Indian or whatever, I don't remember who came up with the insignia. (Jill, lines 111-114)

Jill's tenth tattoo is an Indian Symbol. She found this one while looking through a book. Red Beard did this tattoo, also. This tattoo hurt Jill more than others. She said,

And the one on my stomach is just an Indian Symbol. I don't think it means anything. It's just something I really liked. It looks like a sun. It's cool. I got it out of a, um, Red Beard did that one. I saw it on, while I was flipping through an Indian book or a history book. It was just on a page. I really liked the way the sun. I guess it represents the sun, but it doesn't really look like it. Anyway. That one hurt. (Jill, lines 125-129, 262)

Jill's eleventh tattoo is what she described as a Bird Exploding; she intended it to be an explosion of freedom. She was experiencing a horrible divorce at the time; but while the divorce was horrible, it nevertheless marked a new stage of freedom in Jill's life. She would soon free herself from an abusive relationship.

Tattoos in General

Jill does not plan on getting additional tattoos. When asked if she had any ideas for new tattoos she said,

I don't know if I'm going to do it or not. Some people who get tattoos will get them, they'll put it on their side. My son has some on his side. I don't know. I feel like if I'm going to go through this pain I want people to see them. Even the one on my stomach you can see it, at least you can see it sometimes during the summer. If I go wear a bathing suit or something obviously you'd see it. But the ones on my shoulder, the one on the back of my neck, if I had my hair up you could see it. So I want people to see it. I don't care. I don't feel like I need to hide. So I wouldn't know where I'd put it, I guess with all of that said. I'm not sure where I'd put it. Not unless I could incorporate it, but there's no more space on my arms. Some people ask me, one of my friends who has complete sleeves asked me, "Well are you going to finish? Are you going to fill it in?" And I'm like, "I don't think so. I like it like this." This is finished. I can't think of anything that wouldn't take away from the story, not unless I put some more squiggles in there, but I don't want any more colors. I'm so dark. (Jill, lines 135-144, 146-147)

When asked about the experience of getting tattoos, Jill compared it to the pain of giving birth. She explained,

Well and you've never given birth either. All I can think of is I gave birth, that was always the joke, I gave birth naturally so I can handle the pain, because it hurts. There's no getting around it. It is true that on more fleshy skin it's not as bad. But the more you get on your bone or up here on your shoulder I about fell out on the floor when Stella was doing that, especially when she was doing the little, I don't know what you wanna call that little swirly thing, where she had to make some shadows. I thought I was going to turn green. I sat through the whole thing, I didn't stop. It took two hours to do this one. It took about an hour, about an hour. (Jill, lines 160-166)

Jill acquired her tattoos in Hot Springs, Eureka Springs, and Memphis. She makes friends every time she gets a tattoo. Speaking of Stella, Jill said “Stella always gave me discounts. So it's kind of hard because I would refer people to her, we're kind of friends” (Jill, lines 169-170). Jill considers Red Beard, who is also her friend, to be an incredible tattoo artist. He is, in addition to a tattoo artist, an astronomer. Jill loves both Red Beard and his wife, and Stella and her husband.

Jill's purpose for getting tattoos is to tell a story in an artistic way. She said “They just all represent pieces of my life. It's art and it tells its story. And if someone is curious they can ask” (Jill, lines 131, 271-272). She wants people to see her tattoos. Her tattoos also give her more ways to communicate by making her more approachable, as can be seen by how her tattoos help negate stereotypes people can have of Christians. She said,

But like when I go on mission trips and stuff like that I stick out like a sore thumb. But I think it helps people relax because Christians think you gotta, I don't know, you can't look like me, and it warms them up faster. (Jill, lines 290-292)

Jill said that tattoos are becoming more and more accepted in society. This acceptance, she suggested, is partly due to famous people wearing them. She said “Adam Levine. He's got those beautiful tattoos on his arms and he's got them on his back. And there's a tattoo artist there in California. I'd imagine nobody looks down on him” (Jill, lines 363-365).

The main example in Jill's life of someone judging her for having tattoos happened years ago when a mother did not want Jill working with her child. The mother thought Jill would pass on demons through her tattoos. Jill said nothing came of it and she has not had an experience like that since. She discussed something other participants did not: There is more stigma involved in being a tattoo artist than there is in having tattoos. She said, “Nobody seems to like tattoo artists because they get this stupid, I mean some of them do deserve it but not all tattoo artists are like these creepy people” (Jill, lines 349-351).

Jill had advice for people who consider getting a tattoo. The advice was to use a good tattoo shop and get something meaningful because tattoos are permanent. Many people think you can now remove tattoos, but Jill warned,

Because man, that laser stuff, even though they go in and can pull the ink out, you will always still have that tattoo, it's just faded. It is still permanent. They cannot. This is ink. Little bitty cauterized ink injected into the top layer of your skin. And so to reverse that they're just pulling. But that's your pigment. You can look at people who go through, and that hurts, the laser stuff, and it's so costly. (Jill, lines 311-312, 314-316)

Jill stresses, to the adolescents she knows, that they consider the future before getting tattoos.

She also suggests that they try henna before getting a tattoo. She said,

That's what I would say for someone who doesn't have a tattoo at all and is really considering one. I tell the kids, the young people, "You've gotta remember, this is with you, you're going to grow with this." And uh, and then if anyone wants them on their, girls want them on their tummies and they haven't had a baby yet. I'm like, "Don't do that. Think about what happens when you get pregnant." I just want people to think. But I think Henna is, for those who are really considering it and old enough, I think Henna tattoos are the way to go because it's with you when you get up and go to bed and you're looking at it and kind of getting used to it. (Jill, lines 304-311)

Domains of Experience

Jill's tattoo narrative included data relevant to all three domains. A discussion of her lifestyle is given from an analysis of her view of self, others, and the world, before finally considering her various turning points.

View of self. Jill views herself, paradoxically, both as a lone wolf and a communal person. Even though she prefers to be alone she is drawn to be with others. Jill said, "I follow my, the Indian way. My totem is wolf, so I'm kind of a loner but I like to be with people as well. Wolves like to travel in packs" (Jill, lines 61-62). She views herself as a person of faith who is at home in nature.

View of others. Jill views others as providing opportunities for stable, mutually beneficial relationships. When discussing her right sleeve (specifically the Tree, Balance, and

Grace tattoos, with a cross to indicate faith in God) Jill credited God for life's holistic essence and for the balance by which nature existed. Relationships, according to Jill, are meant to include God and benefit all members. The writing above the rose that covers up her first tattoo says, "Each for the other and both for God" (Jill, line 265). She believes people should work together for the common good, and that each person benefits the other members and each relationship involves God.

View of the world. Jill views the world, in its natural state, as a place of balance and security. Creation brings a wonderful peace. She said, "I just think nature is just beautiful and everything that God did was beautiful, and the peace" (Jill, lines 36-37). In speaking of her right sleeve, specifically the tree, the word Balance, and the word Grace, Jill addressed the holistic nature of life. She said,

So the balance is the stability that God gives and in nature trees provide balance to, you know, from the flora to the root system to the canopy of leaves and stuff so it kind of incurs balance for nature. And then, God created that. And then the tree, and the birds that are exploding out of the tree. (Jill, lines 93-96)

Jill also views life as a place where power and beauty can be found in caring relationships. She said, "And I love elephants, because of what they signify in nature, again. You know, the power and the beauty, but the kindness. They take care of each other, take care of their young. Just a beautiful creature" (Jill, lines 106-108).

Jill's lifestyle. Jill seems to see an intimate connection between who she is and how creation nourishes her. The physical world is connected with each individual. Her tattoos show that it starts with the roots and the flora and continues to the canopy and the leaves. The birds are exploding from the canopy top (she also uses birds exploding—in another tattoo—to represent breaking free from abuse). The birds are with the wolf prints that lead to the poem, which is

connected with the wolf near her wrist. So God uses nature to give her the ability to break free into who she is—the lone wolf thus becomes drawn toward other people.

If her views of self, others, and the world were put together, her lifestyle might be stated as follows: Though I often prefer being alone, others provide opportunities for stable, mutually beneficial relationships and the world in its natural state provides balance and security. Therefore, I value community.

Turning Points

Jill uses playful activities in her therapy sessions to help children get better. The turning point for her work with children happened when she volunteered for VBS one summer. She said,

And then the Kokopelli, when I was in High School, I lived in Texas. Our church group got together and went to Arizona to spend the summer with the Hopi Indians. And so one of the things about the Hopi Indians is Kokopelli which is, the quote: "god of Hope, Happiness, and Fertility." And so doing VBS with the kids. I was young then, so I couldn't do it then, but it stuck in my brain. He carries a pipe. Not a pipe. Like a flute. He plays songs. I don't know, that's just the saying. For children, to make children feel happy and dance. I was a teenager and my mom about fell on the floor as an adult when I started getting tattoos. So I didn't get my Kokopelli until I was in my 20's. So I just had it in my mind and I never really. You know I thought about tattoos, Indians have tattoos. (Jill, lines 14-18, 22-23, 26-28)

Another major turning point in Jill's narrative happened when she broke away from the abusive relationship. She said, "Well with the bird breaking free I was getting ready to embark on a divorce, unfortunately. That was terrible" (Jill, lines 187, 192-193). She used her last tattoo to signify her freedom from the person who emotionally abused her.

Pam's Narrative

Pam is a 24-year old White cis woman. At the time of the interview she had six tattoos and planned on getting an additional tattoo (see Table 8). She identifies as queer and has been in a heterosexual relationship for two years and they are currently living together. Her goal is to work with LGBT students, most likely while employed in Student Affairs. She acquired her first

tattoo at the age of 17. Pam is from central Arkansas and identifies as privileged. She grew up middle class and is a candidate for a masters in higher education and student affairs (she earned her Bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in German). Pam never had money problems before becoming a graduate student, but is now poor and on food stamps. Her parents divorced by the time she was a junior in high school.

Pam's family loves tattoos and tattoos play a major part in her family's life. Her sister had 13 tattoos by the age of 20, and plans on being a tattoo artist. Pam and her family have spent time with some big names in the tattoo business.

Table 8

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo Name	Tattoo Location	Age Acquired
Robots	Left shoulder	17
Great Perhaps 1	Left ribs	18
Floral	Back	~ 19
Great Perhaps 2	Right ribs	~ 20
Old Main	Left thigh	~ 21
Butt Bat	Above Old Main	~ 23
Ghosts	Unknown	Future

Attending to the Narrative

We met in a private room at the university library during a storm. Pam spoke calmly and seemed eager to be part of the study. Similar to a previous participant, Pam also created meaning for one of her tattoos during our interview. The co-creation of meaning is exciting.

Tattoo 1—Robots

Pam was a junior in high school when she got her first tattoo. She spent months thinking about it before acquiring it, and chose this tattoo because she likes psychology and it matches one of her mother's tattoos. She said,

I got that one when I was seventeen. Um. And. Part of it. So my mom is a little obsessed with robots. And she actually designed these; and she has one on each shoulder. Um So I knew if I matched her, she would be more likely to sign the underage consent form. Also, I liked the design because (a) I get to match my mom's and then (b) I've always been interested in Psychology and it was like the Id and the Superego type of, um, imagery. (Pam, lines 20-24)

Though the tattoo has meaning, Pam mostly just wanted a tattoo. She said, “But this one was more like I wanted to get a tattoo so I placed meaning on it so I could get my mom to sign papers and I haven't regretted it one bit. I love it” (Pam, lines 58-60).

Her mother already had a devil tattoo, and she got an angel tattoo at the same time Pam was getting her angel and devil Robots. The Robots, which her mother designed, represent the id and the superego. She described her first experience getting a tattoo. She said,

I was nervous. But the woman who did my tattoo was really sweet. Turns out shoulder blade is a pretty painless spot to get it comparatively. So, the pain wasn't too bad. And, also, I felt super cool because I was 17 getting my first ink and one of the first in my friend group in high school to get a tattoo. (Pam, lines 38-41)

Tattoo 2—Great Perhaps 1

Pam got her second tattoo right before graduating high school. The book *Looking for Alaska* inspired her. The tattoo quotes the book's main character when he answers why he is leaving home. He answered, “I go to seek the Great Perhaps” (Pam, line 95). Likewise, Pam was soon to leave home for the first time. She said,

I was going to be leaving home for the first time and starting my adventure at the University. I loved that book and felt it would be a good parting thing to do before I left home. I've never done that before. I chose the University because it was far away from home. It was time to get out. And I wanted to seek my perhaps. (Pam, lines 105; 150-152)

This is one of Pam's favorite tattoos, and it means she wants to seek her Great Perhaps while she still lives. Pam thinks of this tattoo often, and she uses the tattoo to remind herself to be brave. She is committed to being okay with discomfort because that is how she grows.

Pam spent months planning this tattoo, trying to get it perfect. She even picked text to match what she thought could be the main character's handwriting. She said,

I spent months looking at fonts to pick out the perfect one. I tried to find a font that I would imagine the other main character would write like. Her name is Alaska and she was the manic pixie dream girl of the book. So there's so many font generators on the internet so I would just go through and put the quote in and looked at thousands of fonts—well, hundreds of fonts—before I picked the one I liked the most. And, it looks like handwriting; it's a little bit girly. It looks like the way Alaska would write. Again, I thought about it a long time and tried to make sure I got the perfect, exactly what I wanted before I got it. (Pam, lines 115-118, 120-124)

Pam likes the experience of getting tattoos, but she enjoys it more when someone is with her. She said,

It's nice to have someone with you to hold your hand. Because it hurts. The rib one was the most painful spot. I remember it took about 45 minutes and it was pretty bad because it's right on the bone. So it was different. but it wasn't bad. It just hurt but that's part of it. (Pam, lines 126-127, 129-130)

Tattoo 3—Floral

Pam got the Floral tattoo on her back when she was a sophomore in college. She quickly explained that this tattoo did not have meaning like her others, and that this tattoo might therefore be wrong for the study. She said,

I was like: Well I got two that are meaningful; I'll just get a pretty one that takes up most of my back. So that one's probably not relevant to your study. I just thought it was pretty. I've always been really into floral patterns and I wanted something unique and pretty. But yeah. That one's not super deep. (Pam, lines 158-160, 162-163)

Pam did, however, put a lot of thought into this tattoo. She looked at many images of flower to decide one the best pattern. She even went to Crystal Bridges and took pictures of floral art to send to the tattoo artist. Her experience getting this tattoo was more extreme than the previous experiences. She said,

This one was more intense because it was 8 hours in all of tattooing. I did a 4 ½-hour session and a 3 ½-hour session. It was interesting because nerves in your back cross in a lot of weird ways and so like some places I didn't feel at all, and some places he'd be

tattooing down here and I'd feel it up somewhere else. Very bizarre. Very long time. (Pam, lines 166-169, 17)

While intensity of the experience brought a sense of pride to Pam, she nevertheless seemed somewhat uncomfortable about the tattoo. On the one hand, she likes showing her Floral tattoo, but on the other hand she gets concerned that others will judge her based on the tattoo's cost. She said,

The question I get a lot about my big one is how much it costs. And I feel like I don't like telling people I spent this much money because it makes it sound like I'm bougie (*like short for bourgeois*) and wasteful. And I think people kinda judge me sometimes. If they ask me, sometimes I tell them and sometimes I'm like: "A lot but I don't wanna tell you how much." Um. It was about a grand. But I also got it my sophomore year of college. I was living in the dorms. I wasn't paying, I was working but I wasn't paying bills, so I was able to save up that money. (Pam, lines 388-394)

Pam indeed put a lot of thought into designing this Floral tattoo. She wanted to show it off and she especially enjoyed the memories of being tattooed by a prominent tattoo artist.

But it was cool because that shop—Black Cobra in Sherwood—the guy who did my back also did my mom's half sleeves and um, him and his coworker Katie were on Ink Master a couple years after I got this one. So they were on a TV competition and did really well. So it is a fun bragging point that I have art from them on my back. I like showing this one off a lot. Um. Cause. It's bragging rights. I'm tough. I sat for that long for a tattoo. The artist is pretty prestigious in the tattoo world and was on TV and stuff. Um. And also Black Cobra, that shop has been a good tattoo home for my family. My mom has gotten several tattoos there, my little sister, she's 20 and wants to be a tattoo artist and so they've been mentoring her as she works on becoming a better artist as she potentially one day apprentices under them. So it's a good family feel down there. Um. And so it's just cool to be able to spend time there as well. (Pam, lines 171-174, 180-186)

Pam discussed getting multiple tattoos from various prominent tattoo artists. This aspect of her tattoo can be compared to someone getting an autograph from a famous person. The comparison would, however, fall short because Pam was not only able to get a signature, she was also able to spend hours hanging out with the tattoo artists. This tattoo means that she is tough because she endured such a lengthy tattooing process. The tattoo also gives her bragging rights because of the prominent tattoo artist. She also feels special, having spent so much time with the tattoo artist.

Later in the interview Pam expressed feelings of validation over discovering that this tattoo does hold meaning to her.

Tattoo 4—Great Perhaps 2

This tattoo is her second tattoo's sister piece. She went to Germany for six weeks for study abroad to complete her German minor. She loved the experiences in Germany and she wanted to get a tattoo as a reminder of those times. She struggled to find the right tattoo and the right tattoo shop. Pam said, "I was thinking about, like, um, some kind of floral piece again... but (a) it's hard to shop for tattoo artists in another country as it turns out, and (b) even the ones I found had weird hours" (Pam, lines 195-197).

She happened on the perfect tattoo while at a train station. There, in the station, she found the book *Looking for Alaska* written in German. Pam scoured the book until she found the same quote she had tattooed on her left side, and she eventually found the matching font.

Her and a few classmates then found a tattoo shop and each of them got a tattoo that day. Getting this tattoo, like its sister piece, was an extremely painful experience because it was on the ribs. She was also concerned about the language barrier, but her concern was partially eased by the thought that any artist could do script. Pam said,

That was interesting because they were German, the artist. And so trying to. I was pretty conversational. I haven't practiced in a long time now, but I was able to communicate, but then there was like that language barrier still, making sure I got exactly what I wanted. Um. They were like asking me about the meaning of the tattoo and it was hard to like, portray the nuance of the Great Perhaps in German to them. But they were super nice. They did a good job. That was another. I was like. Any decent tattoo artist can do script. So at least I didn't have to like worry a whole lot about their technical skill. I think they did a great job. And it hurt like a bitch. (Pam, lines 209-215)

This tattoo means that she is brave. The tattoo reminds her of the good times in Germany, and that it is a good thing to seek new experiences and to live in a degree of discomfort. And that

is exactly what she went through to get this tattoo: The process of finding a tattoo artist and tattoo shop in a foreign land was new and uncomfortable.

Tattoo 5—Old Main

Pam wanted a tattoo to commemorate her experiences at the university. However, because she wanted something unique, she chose a major university building instead of a school mascot. Pam said, “I felt like, getting a Razorback, no matter how well done it was, would look real redneck. I see Razorbacks on people. I see like WPS on people sometimes. But not a lot of people have Old Main” (Pam, lines 238-239, 242-244). The building has a clock, and she asked the tattoo artist to set the clock to show the month and year she would graduate.

Pam got this tattoo while home for winter break, and so her family went with her to a trusted tattoo shop. This time the tattoo artist hit her nerve and caused her leg to twitch. She said,

So getting this one, it took about 3 1/2 hours. It was that same friendly shop. I knew people there. I got to chat with people. My mom was there. My sister was there getting her first tattoo, of her cat on her leg. This one is just a little bit weird. it didn't hurt super bad. But the sciatic nerve goes down your leg, and so, every once and a while he would hit it and my foot would kick involuntarily because he was stimulating that nerve. And it's a lot of straight lines so it was really hard to sit still for that one because I was involuntarily moving. Um. But it was fine. (Pam, lines 245-251)

This tattoo memorializes her time at the university and it is a symbol of her university pride and of home. She said, “Old Main is such like a beacon. Whenever I come home from Little Rock, coming up 49 and round the bend I can see her. And I'm like: “I'm home, finally.” And so that one is really significant” (Pam, lines 240-242). Recently the meaning has become more focused on the feelings of home because she has noticed systemic problems in higher education.

Tattoo 6—Butt Bat

She got this tattoo on a whim while at a tattoo convention with her family (she decided before going that she would not get a tattoo). Pam said,

Watching, hanging out with my mom and sister, my sister was getting a pretty big tattoo from one of her idols. Um. Yeah it was 2017. And so, the artist's name is Duffy Fortner and she is a prominent female tattoo artist and she was on Ink Master the same season as our friends. And so, it was just cool she was in town because she's from Maryland and she was in town for the convention. I told myself I wasn't gonna get a tattoo that weekend because I was like: "There's no reason for me to spend this money; I have no idea what I'll even get; this is unnecessary." And now I have a tattoo. (Pam, lines 270-276)

Pam attributed no meaning to this tattoo, as well. It was, however, another tattoo done by a prominent artist. Additional meaning came as she discussed her motivation for picking the tattoo. At the time it was trendy for tattoo artists to tattoo heart-shaped butts. Pam decided to get a trendy tattoo, but in a unique way. She had recently had an experience with her boyfriend, and that experience led her to add a batt concept to the butt heart. She said,

I had recently gotten back from a trip to Austin with my boyfriend. We got to see the bats off the bridge. Something crazy like two million bats that live under this bridge in Austin and at night you can go and watch them take off at night. They eat two tons of bugs a night. It was so cool. Bats are adorable. And that trip was a lot of fun for the two of us. And also there was like a, once, the first time we went to my family's cabin—me and my boyfriend—we were hanging out by the creek behind it and there are a lot of bats feeding and they would get really close to us. It was a super sweet moment. (Pam, lines 280-287)

This tattoo has a similar meaning that the Floral tattoo has, in that it was done by a prominent tattoo artist. The tattoo also reminds Pam of two special experiences with her boyfriend. Upon realizing meaning in yet another tattoo, Pam said, "I guess they all kinda have meaning, now that I'm talking about it out loud" (Pam, lines 292-293).

Future Tattoo—Ghosts

At the time of our interview she wanted a tattoo of two ghosts (she acquired it between our first interview and follow-up interview). One ghost says to the other, "Who put these bodies

between us” (Pam, line 311). Her and her boyfriend, according to Pam, had a forbidden love; and one of her boyfriend’s favorite songs includes that quote. The tattoo reminds her that she will die and to live her life accordingly. She also uses the tattoo as a reminder to love herself.

Additionally, the tattoo reminds her that, one day, she will never again be separated from her loved ones—love will overcome. The tattoo excites her because it holds so much meaning.

Tattoos in General

Pam gave advice on picking tattoo shops and getting tattoos. Like Jill’s advice about henna, Pam suggested that people first spend a while imagining the tattoo on the body before getting it. As for picking tattoo shops, it is important to go to a clean shop and to have a tattoo artist who is willing to cooperate. She said,

Trust your gut with tattoo places is really important. So when you walk in and you feel a little bit skeeved out then you probably should not get a tattoo there. But, I feel like, tattoo shops I’ve been in, have, like, the cleaner they are. They smell clean. Also, when artists are willing to work with you and show you all of their work instead of, um, like if they have a portfolio, a physical portfolio rather than just, “You can look online,” um, willing to talk to you beforehand. Happy to like move placement, give you their opinion. It’s hard to explain because I feel like I know when a place is clean and professional. (Pam, lines 45-51)

Pam also stressed that the interactions with tattoo artists can be unique and special, and that these experiences can increase the tattoo’s significance. These thoughts became part of the building blocks of the creation of meaning for a couple of her tattoos. She said,

It’s really cool to have art from prominent people in the tattoo industry. It’s not like they just signed it. I spent an hour and a half talking to Duffy while she worked on me. I spent 8 hours in all talking to Matt O’Baugh while he tattooed me. It’s a cool experience to like, interact with those humans for so long while they’re arting on you. And like, it’s especially cool because a couple of them were on TV. But my sister is doing the same thing, you know, she’s 20 and has 13 tattoos. But she just went to Dallas to get a tattoo from her idol who is another female tattoo artist. And she was just excited to spend five hours with that person, picking her brain about what it’s like being a woman in the tattoo industry. So I think there’s like some cool personal bits, if you choose to do it. (Pam, lines 352-354, 356-361)

People usually like her tattoos. On the one hand, she has not received judgment about her tattoos, but on the other hand she mentioned that some people have scoffed at her Butt Bat tattoo. Early in the interview she expressed concern about people judging her for her expensive Floral tattoo, but she did not report such judgment ever happening. She does not feel stigmatized for tattoos; she rather feels privileged as a White Southern woman. Though one employer wanted her tattoos covered, she did not consider that a significant issue. She believes the stigma attached to tattoos steadily decreases as the amount of people with tattoos increases.

Domains of Experience

Pam's tattoo narrative included data relevant to all three domains and various turning points.

View of self. Pam views herself as an accepting person. She accepts both herself and others and believes she should be “unapologetically myself” (Pam, line 421). She said,

I feel like the idea of like taking the best parts and the worst parts of a human. Those are both equally important. I think that that got a little bit stronger in my life—that idea that we are a sum of all our parts. Not just the best and not just the worst, and like, remembering that's true for other people as well. (Pam, lines 69-72)

She views herself as brave, and dares to risk new and uncomfortable experiences because she desires to continuously learn and grow as a person; such is shown both by her two Great Perhaps tattoos and by her repeated decision to place herself in new situations. She also sees herself as a tough person (she emphasized in the follow-up interview that it is not important for others know she is tough).

Pam views herself as an encourager who helps others be brave and view the world, themselves, and others with compassion. She said,

Going into student affairs. I just want to be able to plant some positive seeds in students and help them be critical thinkers about the world we're living in and okay with being uncomfortable and okay with challenging their thoughts and learning and growing. Um.

So just like those little seeds into other humans to be compassionate. (Pam, lines 337-340)

View of others. People often lack courage to love themselves and others, and many people experience shame. Pam said, “I recently read a book called *The Body is not an Apology*, and it's a lot of what body shame does to people and loving yourself is a radical idea nowadays and a radical action” (Pam, lines 317-319).

People often have difficulty seeing past their prejudices. She said, “Also the idea of like, if there weren't physical bodies, like so many problems would be, if people could look past physical bodies and just look at your ghosts basically, um, then a lot of problems wouldn't be problems” (Pam, lines 319-321). Pam’s concern over what people might think of her expensive Floral tattoo shows the belief that people can be judgmental. This belief is also confirmed by the scoffs she has received about her Butt Bat tattoo.

View of the world. Pam views life as a struggle that rewards those brave enough to seek its mystery. The Great Perhaps is the “great mystery of life and it's ok to go into things not knowing what to expect” (Pam, line 108). She said,

It says: "I go to seek the Great Perhaps." And, it's on my left side. So, that one I got. It's a quote from the book, *Looking for Alaska*. And, the premise for this book (it's by John Green) the main character, Pudge is what he goes by, Miles. So the main character, Miles, he decides to leave home and go to a boarding school. It's like the adventures of him leaving home for the first time, spending time away from his family and at the beginning of the book his family says, "Well why do you want to leave? What's pulling you to leave home?" And his character is obsessed with the last words of people. And so he pulls out one of his biographies, it's of a French poet, Francois Robles (I don't know if I'm saying it right), and his last words were, "I go to seek the Great Perhaps." And Miles says: "I don't want to wait until I die to seek my perhaps." And, I get chills when I talk about that one. (Pam, lines 94-104)

Life brings inner struggle, and this struggle is crucial for growth and change to occur within the individual. She said,

That's how you grow. People who aren't ever uncomfortable don't learn new things. I just got done yesterday with diversity in higher ed course and I was pretty uncomfortable through the whole class but I learned a lot, because they talk about social justice issues. And I also think that standing up for those types of issues makes you uncomfortable and, but that's how you make change and how you change yourself, so I think that it's a real important skill to have and always work on. (Pam, lines 141-146)

Pam views love as stronger than even death. After death the physical world can no longer separate people. Believing she might outlive her boyfriend, she said, “And if that's the case then our ghosts will always be together” (Pam, line 328). Death, according to Pam, cannot separate love.

Pam’s lifestyle. She is brave and accepting, others often lack courage, and life is a mysterious struggle that rewards the brave. Those are the views of self, others, and the world that I saw emerge from her narrative. In a member check, Pam stated her lifestyle as follows: I am human. Others are also human. The world is a tough place. Therefore, I do my best to courageously seek growth and I try to help others do the same.

Turning Points

In our follow-up interview Pam stressed that the initiation of her relationship with her boyfriend was a major turning point in her life. She said, “He really challenged me” (Pam, Follow Up). He helped her be more accepting of others and, especially, more accepting of herself. The relationship relaxed her and helped her come out as a person who is queer. She began to separate herself from the expectations of others and, instead, be her own person.

Another turning point for Pam was the first time she moved from home to seek her Great Perhaps. This was the beginning of her major life choice to be brave and unrelenting in seeking growth and experience. A related turning point is when she went to Germany, to again seek her Great Perhaps.

Wolfgang's Narrative

Wolfgang is a 33-year-old White male with at least twelve tattoos (see Table 9). He got his first tattoo of a Pentagram on his back when he was 18 years old. He has lived in North Louisiana his entire life and his parents raised him as a Christian. Between his birthday being on the edge the school year, and his mom holding him back a year because of a speech impediment, he was then two years older than most kids in his class. Wolfgang suffered depression and anxiety and has struggled with suicidal thoughts on an off throughout his life. He began studying philosophy as a young teenager, and training in Gracie Jiujitsu at age 19. He worked in a liquor store in his early twenties and, by that time, he had fully rejected his family's faith and had embraced atheism. Currently he is a low-level prepper: He has firearms, trains in martial arts, and is undergoing EMT training.

Table 9

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo name	Tattoo location	Age acquired
Pentagram	Lower back	18
Yin Yang	Underside of arm	19
Phoenix	Shoulder	20
Batarang	Outside arm	Early 20s
Poincare Disk	Shoulder	Early 20s
Beast	Foot	Early 20s
Rubik's Cube	Inside calf	Early 20s
Gracie Jiujitsu	Ankle	22
Pinup Girl	Leg	Early 20s
Entropy	Leg	Early 20s
Warrior Quote	Unknown	Future

Attending to the Narrative

We did our interview at a Starbucks in Louisiana. While waiting in line for coffee, he said he had just returned from a National Rifle Association (NRA) meeting in Texas. He also emphasized that he was not a political conservative. He was very philosophical throughout the

interview. During the interview I found myself wanting to have deep conversations with him about philosophical things and wishing we were talking outside of an interview setting.

Wolfgang expressed clear passion as he discussed various topics in his narrative. He also seemed professional. Of note, though he had many tattoos, not one was visible.

Tattoo 1—Pentagram

Wolfgang got a Pentagram tattoo in rebellion when he became an 18-year old. At this time in his life he was not sure what he wanted to do with religion, but he did know he was mad at God. Though a desire to rebel motivated him, he still nevertheless made sure he could hide the tattoo from his mother. He said,

I actually got it on my lower back, which is a weird spot. But at the time I lived with my mom and so I had to, I wanted to get it somewhere I could hide it because I didn't want to get in trouble for it. So I needed something I could cover up when I came out of the shower. It's kind of a weird spot to get it but that's what I went with. (Wolfgang, lines 33-36)

He also wanted to feel pain. His friends were cutting themselves; and he, like his friends, wanted to use physical pain to temporarily relieve his emotional pain. But unlike his friends, he found a healthier way to do it. He said that “it was just the right level of pain” (Wolfgang, line 26).

This tattoo’s meaning involves his path into being antireligious, and its meaning intensified over time. When he got the tattoo he was frustrated with religion, whereas now he self-identifies as an anti-theist. While the tattoo itself was meant to help him rebel, the process of being tattooed was meant to cause him pain and thereby relieve his emotional pain.

Tattoo 2—Yin Yang

When Wolfgang first began high school he started studying Bruce Lee’s beliefs. Wolfgang suffered much emotional pain and he sought help through Bruce Lee’s way of approaching life; this was his first step into philosophy. He then moved into a similar

philosophy—Taoism—before he got his second tattoo. His second tattoo is a Yin Yang and is one of his more meaningful tattoos. He is now more of a Buddhist, but he says that Buddhism and Taoism have many similarities.

This tattoo means that life is holistic. He told the story of how the moon and its reflection are the same thing. Good and bad are the same thing, but it is more accurate to discard the label good or bad. He said, “And they're not actually good and bad. They're just the two. One's the reflection” (Wolfgang, line 116).

Tattoo 3—Phoenix

He got this tattoo on his shoulder when he was 20-years old. He described that time of his life:

I was still really having problems with anxiety and depression. And a lot of it goes to not fitting in, being a more Left-leaning person in the South has its problem. And as a young person you're not generally equipped to deal with those problems. (Wolfgang, lines 156-159)

The purpose of this tattoo is to remind Wolfgang to continue fighting and to never give up; and it reminds him that he not only survives hard times, but that he emerges from those times better and wiser. The tattoo also reminds him that determination and perseverance is honorable. This tattoo tells him that he does not have to be defeated.

Tattoo 4-5—Batarang and Poincare Disk

His fourth tattoo was a Batarang—one of Batman’s tools. He said, “It was the “Batman Begins” movie. I felt like somebody finally did justice to a Batman movie. And so I went and got that newer, sharper Batarang that they used for that movie” (Wolfgang, lines 216-218). He liked the new Batman movies because they were more real. He said, “I liked the old movies for, as a movie lover I appreciate the older ones. But if you think about a more reality based or comic book based, that was the first one I felt” (Wolfgang, lines 230-232). The reason he likes the new

movies is related to his belief that the only path to happiness is to courageously seek the truth and accept things the way they are. He consistently seeks to view things in the most realistic manner possible.

His fifth tattoo was the Poincare Disk, which is a geometric shape. This tattoo is on and around the Batarang. The Batarang blends into this tattoo and it is difficult to see anything but the Poincare Disk. It is checkered with black against the color of his skin. At this point in his life he was earning a math degree and studying philosophy and physics. The significance of the Poincare Disk is that it is a non-Euclidean shape, which relates to how things seem different from various perspectives. This, too, connects to Wolfgang's belief that one must seek to view things the way they truly are if happiness is to be attained.

Tattoos 6-8—Cross, Beast, and Rubik's Cube

The next three tattoos are the Cross, Beast, and Rubik's Cube, all of which he got during his early twenties. One day he accompanied a friend to a tattoo shop and decided to get something himself. He saw a picture of a cross and liked the way it looked. Some time later he got the Japanese word for "Beast" on his foot. People often misjudge the meaning of that tattoo. Wolfgang said "They think like, 'Oh, what, do you think you're cool or a badass?' I'm like, 'No. It was my cat's name.' That's always a funny interaction'" (Wolfgang, lines 269-271). He also has the Rubik's Cube on his calf, which he got because he liked its colors and shape.

Tattoo 9—Gracie JiuJitsu

Wolfgang got the Gracie JiuJitsu symbol tattooed on his ankle when he was about 22 years old. He began training in Gracie JiuJitsu while still a teenager. This tattoo is a symbol of his dedication. It also relates to his belief that success comes from respecting yourself and others. He believes that since he is trained in Gracie JiuJitsu then he can defend himself successfully

without having to injure the person attacking him, and he has encountered such situations since he began training. This tattoo means that martial arts is his life's focus. Wolfgang said,

I have the Gracie JiuJitsu symbol, which I've been doing since I was about 19. And that's meaningful because the main focus of my life is martial arts. And jiuJitsu has been a main focus of it. That one is very meaningful to me, because, to get something like that, you're saying, "I'm doing jiuJitsu for life." I'm not going to be one who does it for a few months and quits, which is the majority of people. Even at that point I was two or three years into it. But I already knew, I knew instantly I'd be doing jiuJitsu my whole life. The Gracie JiuJitsu symbol, that's one of my meaningful ones. (Wolfgang, lines 327-334)

Wolfgang believes Gracie JiuJitsu is beautiful in the way it helps people defend themselves against larger opponents. He believes martial arts, and specifically Gracie JiuJitsu, is important for women and children. He said,

I mean that, you know, just one, it's one of the only martial arts that can make the claim to actually be effective. UFC solved that dilemma for us. You used to have all these different martial arts, and everyone believed in them, and then the UFC came along and said, "No, you've all been doing silly stuff. Here's what works." And jiuJitsu came through clean. It came out the other side as effective. Not only is it effective, it's definitely the only one that can claim, well, I don't wanna generalize too much. It's one of the only ones that can claim to work against a bigger opponent, which is important for women, kids, smaller people. (Wolfgang, lines 336-343)

Tattoos 10-11—Pinup Girl and Entropy

In his early twenties he got a Pinup Girl tattooed on his leg that covered his entire calf. He later covered this tattoo with another tattoo. He places a high value on being prepared for life and on helping others be prepared. He was teaching people self-defense and did not want his tattoo of a Pinup Girl to keep people away. He said,

I have a Pinup Girl on the side of my leg, my whole calf. And when I was teaching women and children jiuJitsu classes, again nothing happened that made me do this, I just know how people feel about things, and so proactively I had that covered because I felt it wasn't the right image to teach women and kids self-defense with a big Pinup Girl on your leg. So I got that covered up. (Wolfgang, lines 185-190)

He chose to cover the Pinup Girl tattoo with the tattoo of the word Entropy written in graffiti. At that time in his life he was teaching people how to defend themselves and studying

mathematics and physics, and the part of his school studies involved entropy. The tattoo itself resembled the concept of entropy. He said,

When I got the Pinup Girl covered up, I actually got it covered up with graffiti, saying Entropy. With physics the law is that the natural state of things is decay, so over, as a function of time things become more disorganized not more organized. And it also made sense that I was covering up a tattoo which, here we are making this mess on my leg of a cover of a tattoo, and Entropy. Some people like to oversimplify it and use the word chaos, but it kinda made sense. (Wolfgang, lines 371-373, 379-382)

Future Tattoo—Warrior Quote

The Warrior Quote says, “Only the warrior chooses pacifism. All others are condemned to it” (Wolfgang, lines 508-509). This tattoo means you must be diligent and prepared.

Respecting yourself as a person and respecting others as human beings will lead you to be a useful member of society. You can only live in true peace by being the warrior, the person prepared. Everyone else must live in peace out of fear.

Tattoos in General

Wolfgang got most of his tattoos for the purpose of using physical pain to take his mind of emotional pain. Later he began getting tattoos more for their meaning. He has at least a dozen tattoos and none of them were visible during the interview. He said,

I've always made sure to keep them not on my forearm, not on my neck, because if anything I know that, I never know what career I'm gonna end up in or what I'm going to be doing by the next year, so I've always made sure to be responsible and not, um, make it to where I can't get a certain job one day down the road. (Wolfgang, lines 178-181)

Wolfgang usually goes to the tattoo shop alone. He gets tattoos for himself, not to show of to other people, and he prefers to not talk about his tattoos. He said,

I think that's a big difference between me and most people. As I see them get tattoos, I feel like they're getting tattoos to show off and get other people to see, and I'm not saying anything negative about that. I'm just saying a difference, there's a difference because I think most of mine are genuinely for me. I don't show them often. I don't talk about them. Usually if anyone even sees one or I'm in a tank top and they say, "Oh what does that one

mean?" Usually my response is, "It means I wanted a tattoo." Or, "It means I like tattoos." (Wolfgang, lines 278-285)

Though he gets his tattoos for himself and prefers to not talk about them, people nevertheless still ask him about them. The tattoos function to invite conversation, yet this is contrary to his motivation in getting the tattoos. He said about others asking him questions, "I'm not really looking to have that conversation. And so normally I'll very dryly respond to the question of, 'What does that one mean?' with, 'It means I like tattoos.' And then I walk off" (Wolfgang, lines 289-291). Tattoos, for Wolfgang, are like a personal totem pole.

Domains of Experience

Wolfgang's tattoo narrative included data relevant to his view of self, others, and the world. A discussion of his lifestyle is given from an analysis of his view of self, others, and the world. A discussion of various turning points in his narrative then follows.

View of self. Wolfgang views himself as different than others. He identified himself as an outlier. One way he sees his uniqueness is in religion: Wolfgang is an atheist living in a town full of theists. He also views himself different in self-respect: While others cut themselves to relieve their emotional pain, he chose a non-destructive way to ease his emotional pain. He also views himself as different with regard to politics: He tied his emotional problems to his uniqueness in politics by saying, "And a lot of it goes to not fitting in, being a more Left-leaning person in the South has its problem" (Wolfgang, lines 157-158). In addition, he views himself different from others in his motives for getting tattoos: He gets them for himself, while others get them to show off. Finally, he views himself as different with regard to dedication and life focus: For example, while most people quit martial arts after only a few months, he is committed for life. He said,

Most people would rather talk about whatever show they've been watching, or this or that. That stuff just doesn't interest me. I mean, the focus of my life is martial arts, and

my philosophy ties into it. It's not one of those things I probably, I don't have the time or energy for it. (Wolfgang, lines 569-572)

Wolfgang also views himself as an overcomer. He survives difficulties and emerges stronger. He never quits, because he believes there is something better for him after the trials. He said,

On one of my shoulders I got a Phoenix. And, you know, the most basic understanding of it is the mythological creature that went up in flames, was destroyed, and then it came out of the ashes and was reborn. And just in a very general sense, surviving things, coming out of situations tougher and better and wiser. (Wolfgang, lines 147-150)

Wolfgang views himself as prepared. He places a high value on being prepared for life and on being a useful member of society. He said,

I try to be someone who is very independent, with martial arts, with weapons, with keeping food and water stored up. Nothing crazy like the people on the prepper show. I'm not that level of it. But I think we should be a little more ready for if things went bad. And so, what I'm doing with my life, which is mainly martial arts, any work I do is to support that. I'm looking to go into pre-hospital, EMS, working on the ambulance. And even that motivation was to be, have medical, hands-on training, so that if someone gets hurt, whether it be myself or someone else, I can help that. (Wolfgang, lines 498-504)

View of others. Wolfgang views other people as lacking courage; they refuse to do what is necessary to be useful and to survive. They are not dedicated to preparing themselves.

Wolfgang said,

And so when I look at others, especially Americans. Well, I guess it's not just Americans, it's kind of the world as a whole. First of all countries are just, people are becoming more, I hate to, I see it as pathetic. They don't work out, don't take care of themselves. I don't know, whatever it may be, learning a second language, learning, getting medical training so that whenever your grandfather falls over with chest pains or chokes on his, you know, Thanksgiving dinner, you can't do anything. Like I, I feel like people just can't do anything anymore. And obviously I don't think everyone should, well it would be cool if everyone took it as obsessively as I did, but I feel like that's just because I'm obsessive by nature, but I'm not asking everyone to take it as far as I do where you are specifically, like, try to be ready for combat and natural disaster and all of it. But people could do some, whatever their interest is, whether it's foreign language, medical training, fighting, whatever, people could choose even if it's just one of those things, I'm not saying everyone should choose as many of them as I do, but they could have one of them. And like you said, be useful to yourself and others. Whereas I see people getting away

from that. They have their fair share of distractions these days, like any of us do. So I mean I understand it. But I wish I would see them take a stronger, simple, self-responsibility. (Wolfgang, lines 513-519, 522-531)

View of the world. Wolfgang is not only an atheist, but he also believes that religion obstructs human progress. He introduced the Church's persecution of Galileo as an example of how religion thwarts scientific progress. In addition, Wolfgang views the world as a place that fails to prepare people for life; thus people must be dedicated to preparing themselves. The world requires one to have the lifestyle of a warrior. He said,

True martial arts, the art or the study of war. That's what it's supposed to mean. It's not supposed to mean you go punch a bag three times a week for your cardio. It's supposed to mean a lifestyle of being a warrior. (Wolfgang, lines 506-508)

Wolfgang views this world as a place that requires self-respect and respect for others in order to be successful. Respect is more effective than bloodshed. He said,

I guess jiu-jitsu is, I see the same beauty in it that I found in Taoism and Buddhism... Because you go from the traditional martial arts of just beating someone's face in or kicking them and breaking their leg or whatever, and then here is this, you know, translated it means the Gentle Art because you essentially, it's not striking, it's grappling with submissions. So you essentially tie the guy up, try to stop them from hitting you, and then when the time is right you choke them unconscious. And the fight is over now. Which is not only useful for a smaller guy versus a bigger guy, but it's a way to, you've just stopped a fight or ended a fight without just beating the guy's face in or harming them... So it's not like you had to give up, at the cost of effectiveness, to try to be more or less harmful to your opponent. It just happens to include both, which is just amazing to me... I've been in several altercations where if I didn't know jiu-jitsu, where if I had gone with my younger years of boxing and kickboxing, I would've had to just maul this guy, just beat his face in, whereas jiu-jitsu I was able to clinch him and hold him until he calmed down, or choke him. And then when he woke up he usually is less interested in fighting. And nobody's hurt. I'm not hurt. He's not hurt. Bam. Juijitsu, it's beautiful. (Wolfgang, lines 349-350, 352-359, 361-363, 365-369)

Though Wolfgang claims to dislike people, he sees value in humanity. This world is, according to Wolfgang, without a god; and therefore humans are alone. Humans only have each other and should strive to be there for each other. Wolfgang also views life holistically. He said,

And you have to realize that the moon and the moon's reflection in the ocean aren't two separate things, because one couldn't be there without the other. You're not gonna walk out and see the reflection in the water and then look up and the moon's not there. And vice versa. So you learn to think of things not as bad and good. And not as opposites. People always talk about Yin and Yang and they're usually referring to things as opposites. And they've missed the entire point of the Yin Yang idea in Taoism. They're not opposites. They are the same. You can't have hot without cold. (Wolfgang, lines 102-104, 106-110)

Wolfgang believes things are not as they seem, that choice is an illusion, that life naturally decays, that accepting reality is the only way to happiness, and that unhappiness is what motivates us to seek truth. He said,

But that is my belief system. Specifically, that's actually something I came up with. If I had to define it, I would say, "Happiness is you trying to get your views and expectations as close to reality as possible." The bigger that gap is, the more unhappy you are. The closer you can get that gap the happier you are. (Wolfgang, lines 418-421)

Wolfgang's lifestyle. If his views of self, others, and the world were put together, it might look as follows: I am unique, courageous, dedicated, and prepared. Others are unprepared and lack courage to do what is necessary. The world is a dangerous place. Therefore, I do everything I can to protect myself and prepare others.

Turning Points

One turning point involved using his first tattoo to rebel against his parents' religion. Another turning point was when he first used tattoos to help with his emotional pain. He said,

When I was younger I had depression and anxiety problems. And I saw a lot of my friends cutting themselves or doing different bad things. And so that's where I was like, "Well, here's a healthier way to do it." Cause even by then they had started to get really strict on, it had to be sterile, it had to be clean, you had inspectors that came in. So it wasn't like old school tattoo places where you got an infection. I was like, "Alright, that's a much better outlet for these problems." So that's what started me with tattoos and piercings for sure. (Wolfgang, lines 4-10)

Another turning point happened when he began reading the book about Bruce Lee's philosophy of life. He said,

I can almost say that was my first step to studying and becoming a philosophical type person, because like I said I started that book in junior high, maybe. And that was a good read to start me down that path to learn and think about things different. (Wolfgang, lines 117-120)

Jay's Narrative

Jay is a tattoo artist with over thirty tattoos (see Table 10). He is of Irish decent and has practiced martial arts since he was 7 years old. His parents were Pentecostal. As a teenager he rebelled against his religious upbringing, but he eventually returned to his faith. After Jay's father died he developed a drinking problem and eventually separated from his wife of 15 years (but only for a month). He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and is a former drug addict.

Table 10

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo name	Tattoo location	Age acquired
Kanji Dragon	Back neck	18
New Addiction	Hands	Unknown
Medieval/Celtic	Arm	Unknown
June Bug	Wrist	Unknown
Oldest Daughter Tattoos	Unknown	Unknown
Heaven 916 Miles	Unknown	Unknown
Bipolar Dolls	Unknown	Unknown
Tattoo Machine	Unknown	Unknown
Tribal Flash	Arm	Unknown
Apocalypse	Back	Unknown
Heart Tattoos	Chest	Unknown
The Fly	Unknown	Unknown
Demon	Ribs	Unknown
Witchy	Unknown	Unknown
Cartoons	Right thigh	Unknown
Stop	Above knee	Unknown
Brass Knuckles	Knee cap	Unknown
Shine	Unknown	Unknown
Kids' Faces	Inside leg	Unknown
Martial Arts Tattoos	Feet/right palm	Unknown
Web	Elbow	Unknown
Tear Drops	Face	Unknown
Helm of Awe	Temple	Unknown
Jesus and Demon	Neck	Unknown
Self-Hate	Knuckles	Unknown
Fad Tattoos	Entire left arm	Unknown

Attending to the Narrative

Our interview took place at his place of employment, as he tattooed a client. Jay was dressed in shorts and a T-shirt. He was very soft spoken and shared his narrative while tattooing one of his clients. He had so many tattoos that he barely talked about each one individually. At times he would pause his story so he could concentrate on his work. I wrote up Jay's results differently than the other participants because Jay has so many tattoos and because he only skimmed the surface of many of them. In the following section his tattoos are grouped together into four categories; these categories are (1) Artist-Client (2) Love for Family and Friends (3) Making a Difference, and (4) Conflict.

Artist-Client Tattoos

Two tattoos are in this category. Jay got the Kanji Dragon on the back of his neck when he became an 18-year old; this is his first tattoo and the only tattoo for which he knew how old he was. By this time, he was addicted to drugs. He moved out of his parents' house and got a tattoo because his parents disliked them. Someone helped Jay when he arrived at the tattoo shop because he was unsure about the entire process. Jay said,

I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I didn't know how to go about picking my first tattoo. I kinda walked in and I had somebody kinda walk me through the process of getting a tattoo. It was different. It was new, something new. (Jay, lines 4-6)

Jay often talks to his clients about this tattoo. He does not want people to regret the tattoo he puts on them. He tells his clients, "Look, don't just, don't get it just to get it, because you think that's cool, because these things don't wash off" (Jay, lines 21-22). Jay cares for his clients and wants to do more with his career than make money. His tattoo artist was helpful, and Jay hopes to be helpful to his clients as well.

Jay also has a tattoo of his first Tattoo Machine. The man who trained Jay, and who gave him his first Tattoo Machine, freehanded this tattoo. Jay explained that many artists use stencils, and that he was currently using stencils on the person sitting in his chair. Jay looked at the guy he was tattooing and mentioned that while this person must trust him, he had the chance to see a pre-design and ask for changes before the tattooing began. Jay then contrasted this to the amount of trust he had in the artist who did the Tattoo Machine on him. Jay trusted his artist 100% because it was freehand.

Love for Family and Friends Tattoos

Seven tattoos are grouped into this category. Jay has several tattoos related to his daughters. The first in this category are the tattoos his daughter chose. He wanted to involve his daughter in this important part of his life. Jay said,

On my upper thighs I have, just right above my knee is just covered with cartoon characters and stuff because when I was learning how to tattoo my oldest daughter was a toddler and I would take her to the tattoo shop I was training at and take her to the wall where we'd have all the pre-drawn pictures and told her to pick something. She'd gravitated to all the cartoon characters. So she'd pick it and I'd put it on me to practice. (Jay, lines 116-121)

Jay has a tattoo of his oldest daughter's name on a tattoo machine; he got this tattoo because his career is part of his life and his daughter is his entire life. He also got his daughter's name tattooed on a tanker car to honor his friend. He said,

It's got a real significant meaning because one of my friends, one of my dear friend's youngest daughter's birthday is 9/14, she was born two days before one of my friends had a still birth and it was 9/16. So that's the significance to that. So whenever I got my daughter's name, I paid tribute to my friend. We've been friends for many years. (Jay, lines 43-47).

He had tear drops tattooed on his face in memory of people who have taught him throughout his life. He decided to get a tear drop any time someone like that dies. Many people mistakenly believe the tear drops are prison tattoos, but he has never been to prison. Jay also has

a tattoo that honors his father's memory; it is a fly's body with a horse's head. The Fly is wearing his father's favorite sports-team hat and is drinking from a duct taped water bottle. The tattoo also has the words "Haus Fly"; this is how his dad said the words. This tattoo helped Jay say goodbye to his father and find some closure. It memorializes a loved one and holds a tremendous amount of meaning. The tattoo itself is therapeutic.

Jay has a series of Heart Tattoos: a heart tattooed on his chest with a Chinese letter for his wife, an Italian letter for both his daughters, a Cross, and a Jiu-jitsu Triangle. He grouped all these tattoos close to his heart because they resemble everything dear to his heart. He also has a tattoo set showing his New Addiction; his sober date is on his left hand and his wife's name with their anniversary date is on the other hand. These two sit opposite each other because one symbolizes his freedom from drug addiction while the other symbolizes his new addiction—his love for family. Jay made sure to get a tattoo to warn himself in case he ever took his family for granted again. He and his wife separated for a short time and he never wants to experience that agony again. To achieve the warning, he acquired a tattoo by his knee with the month and year he and his wife separated. This tattoo tells him to stop, to never do that again.

Making a Difference Tattoos

These tattoos highlight Jay's desire to make a difference in this world, to help people, and to solve problems. He acquired a Charles Manson quote that says, "Do something witchy" (Jay, line 108). This tattoo reminds Jay to do things people will remember, while he is still in this world. He has brass knuckles on his knee cap to remind himself that tough love is sometimes the best way to help. He also has a tattoo of darkness to let him know that he should be a light in this world. Jay wants to leave a good mark, not just any mark.

Jay has various tattoos related to martial arts. These include boxing and jiu-jitsu tattoos that remind him to have a strong defense. Not only must people adopt this attitude in martial arts, but they must also adopt this attitude in all areas of life. In order to make progress people must meet problems with their strong side. Jay said,

That is everything in life. If you have a um, if you have a weak defense to problems that come your way then they're gonna overcome you. If you have a weak mentality on anything then it's gonna overcome you. (Jay, lines 185-187)

Conflict Tattoos

Jay has a tattoo of Bipolar Dolls because he received a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. These dolls show that emotions can be uncontrollable. He said, “They're just the emotions that are wrapped together and they're bound together because you can't control which one you're on. It's just there” (Jay, lines 51-52). He also has the Self-Hate tattoo: the word “Self” tattooed on one set of knuckles and the word “Hate” tattooed on the other set of knuckles. Now that he no longer hates himself he wants to cover these words. He said,

I almost hated myself and I just hated just to exist. And I guess now, I don't guess the meaning has changed so much as it just went away. I'm actually getting that covered, I'm getting my knuckles covered, because I'm not, I love my life. (Jay, lines 200-203)

Jay has a tattoo on his side that looks like a Demon busting out of his ribs. This tattoo reminds him that there is always a conflict inside of him and that the bad is always trying to win. Similarly, he has a Jesus and Demon tattoo: a demon with his mouth sown shut on one side of his neck and Jesus on the other side. This tattoo means both good and bad are ever present. He also has a tattoo of the Apocalypse on his back to remind him of his Christian faith.

Tattoos in General

Impulse initially guided Jay's acquisition of tattoos, but tattooing other people, and realizing that he wants to cover an entire arm of tattoos, changed him. He said,

When I first started getting tattoos, it was pretty much spur of the moment, "I'm getting a tattoo, today." Now, I have so much thought put into every tattoo I get. And a lot of that comes with being a tattoo artist and knowing and seeing things and having the experience, having to cover my entire left arm instead of starting with a clean canvas. (Jay, lines 224-227)

Jay wants his clients to love their tattoos; he therefore prefers that his clients consult him prior to the tattooing. The pre-consultation accomplishes two things: It allows the client to meditate on the tattoo before getting it, and it allows Jay sufficient time to design the tattoo.

Jay feels similar to a therapist because his clients tell him things they cannot tell anyone else. He is not ashamed of his past, so he will tell his story to clients when they have been in similar situations. Clients often only want someone to listen to them, and Jay is happy to oblige.

Jay recommended the experience of getting a tattoo. He explained that you feel all the emotions at once when you get a tattoo. There is anxiety, trust, and pain. The experience will bring a natural high and other physical reactions such as numbness. While being tattooed he said you become more in tune with body. People can feel regret, pain, joy, pride, vanity, and self-worth all at the same time.

Though Jay thinks tattoos are becoming more accepted, he still sees people mistreated because of tattoos. He stressed that he has experienced stigmatization because of his tattoos; his hometown still stereotypes heavily tattooed people. When asked if he experienced stigmatization, he said,

Most definitely. People that are, tattoos are becoming more mainstream and more popular. But, especially in this area, people who are heavily tattooed are still kind of stereotyped. "They're on drugs." "You've got a criminal record." "If I leave my car unlocked are you gonna go through it?" Those kind of, just the basic stereotypes. Well, with reason, there's definitely a reason for it. Because way back, before decent people started getting tattoos, tattoos were reserved for prisoners and bikers and things of that nature. But even before that they were a form a social status. Um. In more ancient days, or in Polynesian lifestyle, they're social status. Warriors have their face tattooed and people respect them because they are warriors, great people. (Jay, lines 252-259)

Domains of Experience

Jay's tattoo narrative included data relevant to his view of self, others, and the world. A discussion of his lifestyle is given from an analysis of his view of self, others, and the world. A discussion of various turning points in his narrative then follows.

View of self. Jay views himself as a family man and a good friend. He loves his life—specifically he loves his family, friends, religion, and martial arts, and he cherishes those people who have invested in his life. He said,

I have a heart on the center of my chest that is basically, it has a, Chinese letter for mother and Chinese letter for wife, which is for my wife. And then I have Italian letters for daughter for both my daughters. It has a cross for my religion. And it has a jujitsu triangle in it. And, because I do Gracie Jujitsu and have for many years, and that is pretty much everything that is close to my heart, close to my heart. (Jay, lines 77-81)

Jay views himself as a good friend who makes a difference. He wants to leave his mark on this world so that people will remember him when he's gone. He said,

That is a quote from Charles Manson. When he sent his disciples to do whatever, he never told them to go kill somebody. He said, "Go do what we're doing. Make your mark. And make it witchy." Which basically mean, "It's time for everybody to know that we're here. It's time for everybody to know that we're hear. We need to introduce ourselves and gonna make it witchy." So do something witchy to me kinda means, "Leave your mark. Do something to let people know who you are and leave your mark. Leave an impression." (Jay, lines 110-115)

He does not want to leave just any mark, though. Jay is committed to contributing to the overall good of humanity. He said of one tattoo, "It's darkness and it says, 'Let your light shine.' Or it says, 'This little light of mine,' which means even in the darkness let your light shine" (Jay, lines 133-135). Jay shines his light through his love for family and through his career, in which he uses tattooing as a way to help people.

View of others. Jay views people as helpful; multiple mentors invested in his life. He views friendship as vital and believes other people, in general, are important and to be valued.

He shows this by his desire to help everyone who comes to his place of business. Jay views family as a necessary factor in health and happiness. For example, when he separated from his family he was miserable and described it as the worst time of his life. Drug addiction sits on one side of the spectrum and a symbol of his love for family sits on the other side of the spectrum, showing them as contrasting elements of his life—one symbolizing misery and the other symbolizing the opposite. He said,

I've got my wife's name, because she is my right hand. She's everything to me, and family is everything. And right beside it I have our anniversary date. Because on the left hand I have my sober date. Um. So, I put my New Addiction with my love of my family right opposite of it. (Jay, lines 29-32)

View of the world. Jay views this world as a place where there is always pressure to do wrong. There is a war within everyone over right and wrong. Good and bad are always fighting for people's attention. He said, "Everybody's got the devil and an angel on their shoulder. Speaking in your ear" (Jay, lines 163-164).

Jay views character as more important than outer appearance. This, however, does not mean that perfection is required. Mistakes happen (everyone has a past) but the past does not define people. Jay said,

Because if you realize every single one of my tattoos, all that's doing is telling you about my past. I can't tell you, I don't have one tattoo that's going to tell you about my future. That's not written yet. So if you want to learn about my past you can ask me about my tattoos. And a person's past is what makes them who they are, for certain. But it doesn't have to define them. (Jay, lines 316-319)

He views life problems as requiring strength and dedication; the only way to become victorious in life is to have a good defense. Jay described the martial art of jiu-jitsu:

Jiu-jitsu is a way of life, and a self-defense art. So in battle they used to would use their strong arm for their shield because if you don't have a good defense, you don't have an offense. So you'd use your strong arm for your blocking arm. So I'm right handed, so my self-defense art went on my right hand. So you defend with your strong side. And see, sport tactics are, have been washed out a lot of people's thinking. I'm gonna get on my

soap box real quick. Sports tactics has washed out a lot of people's thinking about how to really truly defend yourself. So if I'm a boxer I stand with my power back, because I wanna land that big power shot. If I'm a kicker, I wanna stand with my power leg back because I wanna land that big kick. But if he blows through my weak side, I don't get the chance to use my strong side. So why don't I meet you with my strong side, back you up and then use my strong side? If I can blow through your strength. Because he's doing the same thing, he's coming with his strong side. So why would I meet your strong side with my weak side? You've gotta meet strength with strength. If I can get you on the back up, that's when I can switch and throw with my power. (Jay, lines 167-170, 172-176, 178-183)

Jay then connected this to all areas of life. It not only works for fighting and defending oneself from physical attacks, it also works, and is required, for facing all of life's problems. He specifically related it to victory over drug addiction. He said,

That is everything in life. If you have a um, if you have a weak defense to problems that come your way then they're gonna overcome you. If you have a weak mentality on anything then it's gonna overcome you. Let's talk about my drug addiction. I've been sober for over fifteen years but let's talk about that. Had I met it with kind of uh, "I guess I'll get clean today," with no will or determination, then I'd probably still be on drugs today. If you don't meet problems head on with your strong side you're not gonna overcome your problems. (Jay, lines 185-189, 194-195)

Jay's lifestyle. Jay's love for his family, friends, and life motivate him. His views of self, others, and the world can be combined to make the following lifestyle: I am a family man, a good friend, and I desire to help people. I have difficult life struggles. Others also have difficult life struggles. Though some people are judgmental, many people are helpful. The world is full of temptation to do wrong and full of hardships that can only be overcome by a strong will and determination. Therefore, I am committed to making a mark for good on this world through my commitment to family and through tattooing.

Turning Points

Jay once hated himself. He experienced a lot of depression. Because of these feelings he tattooed the words self and hate on his knuckles. He now wants to cover those tattoos because he has changed. He said,

I've got, well. My knuckles. One has the word "Self" and the other has the word "Hate." I was going through a time where depression was a big part of my life. At that point it was, um, it was, it was, I almost hated myself and I just hated just to exist. And I guess now, I don't guess the meaning has changed so much as it just went away. I'm actually getting that covered, I'm getting my knuckles covered, because I'm not, I love my life. (Jay, lines 199-203)

Another major turning point for Jay was when he and his wife separated. He was miserable. It was at this point that he decided to never take his family for granted again. Never again would his family break up. He said,

I had a um, and above my left knee I have a date. It's actually a month and a year. My wife and I was separated for a month. We had been married for 15 years and we were separated for one month. It was September of 2009. And that was like the worse month of my life. I was just, I had a lot of stuff going through my head. I put that date right above my knee. Mainly because it was an open spot and kinda, when you're sitting thinking, "I see it right there." I put it in red because red means stop. (Jay, lines 121-127)

The last major turning point for Jay involved his faith. His parents raised him in a Pentecostal church, but he rebelled by the age of 18. Jay eventually returned to his faith. His turning points involve a return to sobriety, family, and faith. He said,

On my back, I've gotta mess. I've got what is supposed to be a scene that is basically the end of the world. It's got the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Four angels. Um. And just um, a battle scene from the end of the world, but it's messed up. So we don't talk about that one a whole lot. But it just, it was just a reassurance of my, you know my, as I got older and by the time I got this done I had come, I had gotten sober and clean and I had gotten a lot back in to a center and it was just kind of a reminder of my Christian roots and my upbringing. And everything in life I think comes full circle. (Jay, lines 70-75, 77)

Jim's Narrative

Jim is a 20-year old male with four tattoos (see Table 11). He got all of his tattoos when he was 19 years old. Jim was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and has lived with seizures since the age of 15. He feels socially awkward and has a history of causing himself physical pain. He was evicted from his home a month before the interview. Jim felt it imperative to understand that demographics are not important, and that it is rather the

individual who matters. He described his home, at the time he acquired his tattoos, as a drug haven.

Table 11

Names, Dates, and Location of Tattoos

Tattoo Name	Tattoo Location	Age Acquired
Nikki Six	Right forearm	19
Dagger	Left knee	19
Riddler	Left side	19
Door	Right wrist	19
Yin Yang	Bicep/arm/neck/collar	Future

Attending to the Narrative

We conducted our interview at a local coffee shop. Jim talked fast and emitted passion throughout the interview. He shared openly when he discussed cutting and burning himself; and his view about these actions differed from my preconceived beliefs and challenged my perspective.

Tattoo 1—Nikki Sixx

Jim's admiration for Nikki Six, a member of the band Mötley Crüe, motivated him to get a tattoo of Nikki Six's initials on his right forearm. Since Jim was 16, he respected Nikki Six. He said,

Cause Nikki Sixx, Motley Crew was my favorite band for a long time. The world's most notorious rock band, they're all about the partying. Everything. I was all about the partying back then. Actually, when I was 16, I got the book from my friend. And I drew just these lines right here and the initials. I drew it on my hand, going from my mid palm down my wrist a little bit. It's actually an idea I had since I was 16, come to think about it. I forgot all about that. (Jim, lines 30-32, 34-37)

The book he mentioned was *The Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star*, which chronicled Nikki Sixx's drug addiction. Jim respected the band member's ability to party, and he wanted to be just like Nikki Sixx.

He wanted a tattoo so much that he considered letting his non-professional friend tattoo him (an illegal act for his friend). His friend, however, declined. Jim said,

The first tattoo I got, I was pretty eager to get this tattoo. I really wanted one. And back in the apartment I used to live at we had in-house tattoos, which are incredibly illegal, I get that. I was gonna get it at my friend's place but he said, "No, not for your first tattoo, not for one that has that much meaning to you." (Jim, lines 1-2, 29-30)

Lacking his friends willingness, Jim went to a local tattoo shop. Though he enjoyed the experience, he had to avert his eyes once because it seemed the artist was cutting his skin open. He said,

Oh my God it felt so good. I could just talk to him the entire time. It's just when he started on these lines here by the initials, I had to kinda look away cause it looked like he was cutting my skin open. Come to find out that's exactly what was happening cause I am a bleeder. It was blowing blood out, it was great. (Jim, lines 102, 104-107)

At first this tattoo meant Jim wanted to party and use as much drugs as possible, but it now means (in a general sense) that he should never give up. Jim uses this tattoo to inspire himself to keep going, to tell himself that if Nikki Sixx could damage himself so much and survive, then Jim can also survive what this life brings.

Tattoo 2—Dagger

Jim then got a Dagger on his left knee with the number 13 on it. This was a discount Friday the thirteenth tattoo, and it was one of his most painful. He almost broke down into tears while the tattoo artist worked on his knee. He decided to put meaningless tattoos on his left leg. Jim said, "I had made the decision years prior that my legs were going to be the tattoos, the things I put all the pointless tattoos on" (Jim, lines 83-84). This was, however, another tattoo in which meaning blossomed during the interview. Jim became excited as he discussed what it meant for him to partition his pointless tattoos, because he began to realize meaning in his tattoo. He said,

But thinking back on it now, I talk about my knee cap tattoo and most people laugh and I'm just right along there with them, "This is so stupid, I got a tattoo on my knee cap." When you think about it, it's not meaningless, because it brings joy to me to talk about it. You know. And that has a lot of meaning for me. So I take no shame in showing off my knee cap tattoo. (Jim, lines 115-119)

In that way the tattoo's meaning blossomed during the interview, and perhaps because of the interview. He explained that though life is hard, it is important to smile through the difficult times. This tattoo brings Jim joy. It brings him respect from others because it was so painful. And it makes people laugh, which is important to Jim.

Tattoo 3—Riddler

Jim's friend knew someone with a Riddler question mark and convinced Jim to get one, too. He wanted to have matching tattoos with a friend so at first he was going to get the tattoo on his chest. He changed his mind, however, because he believes people have low opinions of breast tattoos. He spent a year thinking about this tattoo before finally deciding to get it on his side.

Some think kneecaps are more painful to have tattooed, but Jim's experience proved otherwise. Jim said,

People say the kneecap tattoo hurts worse. I'm like, "No. You're funny." Take it from someone who has a tattoo on his kneecap and side. Whenever I started getting this tattoo, he was like, "Do you need me to stop for a few minutes, go out and smoke a cigarette?" I was like, "No man, I think I got this." But that border though, the outline, was the absolute worse part. You have to stay completely still when the needle is in, so you have to get yourself into this little routine during the tattoo process itself, at least I did. Every time it would lift up off my skin, I'd take a breath and hold it in, relax my stomach muscles cause when he comes back in I can't be tense. But I gotta prepare for that pain somehow. Just relax the muscles, focus all the tension I've got here in my chest so that this part doesn't get messed up. (Jim, lines 154-162)

Jim expressed regret over this tattoo because he thought it was pointless, but he also appreciated it because it gave him confidence. He said,

I felt like I didn't wanna wear a shirt for months and months. I had a tattoo on my side. I had to show it off, man. And it just boosted my confidence just tremendously. Like the meaning behind it, there's not much meaning behind it. It's just the confidence booster I

needed at that time for sure. The Riddler tattoo was the only one I had actual regret for, because I looked at it and didn't see the point. But I could never deny the confidence it gave me. It was the biggest thing. I tell people, "I may regret the tattoo, but I cannot deny the confidence it gave me." (Jim, lines 142-145, 324-327)

Tattoo 4—Door

He contemplated getting this tattoo for three years. First, he wanted to have a Door with a person standing by it, with the Sun and trees in the background, and wind blowing through the door. He settled instead on a barely opened door. He chose to put the number 13 on it to pay tribute to Friday the 13th. He included a rose and peace sign to fill in the tattoo.

Jim had a difficult time with the healing process for this tattoo because a crisis happened in his life and he did not know how to deal with it. He said,

One day I found out something and it drove me crazy and so the only way to get that out was to climb a tree. And this was a few days after I got the tattoo. And as soon as I got down I was like, "Dang it. I just got a tattoo and I went and climbed a tree." God. I felt so stupid. (Jim, lines 280-283)

This tattoo is about possibilities. The wind that Jim considered including would have symbolized a world full of possibilities. He said it was "like a wind of possibilities blowing through the door" and "I want to open my doors, every day, to a world of possibilities" (Jim, lines 224-226). He tries to turn negative into positive. The tattoo also reveals Jim's fondness of superstitions, though he does not adhere to them as much as he has in the past. He said,

I think Superstitions are interesting. I may not be the most superstitious or follow them completely. But there's something I've always said about superstitions: they're a great way to keep your ass in check. If you see a sign, acknowledge it and see about where you need to go from there. If you see a penny tails up, you pick that up, you leave it on the ground. If you pick it up I feel sorry for the rest of your day. Superstitions. I mean, I don't necessarily believe in any power behind them anymore. I've just gone through a lot of changes in the past month. There's a lot I look at that I used to look at. I just. I can't quite wrap my head around how it fits in as one of my beliefs but I can definitely see now, it's an interesting world living up in my head. (Jim, lines 250-257)

Future Tattoo—Yin Yang

Jim wants an additional tattoo. It will be a tree of life and a white rose, moving from his bicep to his neck and then his collar bone. The white rose would then be reflected as a black rose. This tattoo will be Jim's uniquely designed version of Yin Yang. He believes that there is an equal balance in everything and everyone; this relates to his belief that one must deliberately turn negative energy into positive energy. He said,

I've been dealing with seizures since I was 15 years old. In the beginning I didn't know what they were. But I do know as an adult I have the strength to overcome them, I really do. It's just a matter whether or not I decide to take control of the seizure or let it come out a little bit. That's another little balance right there. Cause that's negative energy built up inside of me that I do need to release every once in a while. So, I would find, if I started feeling one coming on I'd find different ways to channel it, especially through my arms. When I worked at Papa Johns, a box I had to carry was incredibly heavy. The box itself weighted 40 pounds. I'd take that and would just slam it up there. Because the seizure makes your muscles tense up and you can lose control on it, and you can take all that tension, all that energy, those 40 pounds and just shove it in there, take another, shove it in there. Your body is tensing up cause this stuff is heavy. Take another one, shove it in there. It gets the energy out. It's the negative energy that needs to come out. (Jim, lines 388-399)

For Jim, life becomes easier when he finds a balance between negative and positive; this transformation, for Jim, often requires a physical transaction, and most often a level of physical pain. Sometimes, Jim has found, physical pain is the best way to get relief from excruciating emotional pain. He has a history of causing himself physical pain. He gave up cutting himself for burning himself, because he believes burning is healthier than cutting (it leaves no scars and does not damage him). This means that he can cause himself pain without actually harming himself. Now, he prefers to experience tattoos instead of burning.

Tattoos in General

Jim explained that there are different levels of pain involved in getting a tattoo, depending on location, and that different people have varying reactions and experiences with

being tattooed. While some fall asleep while being tattooed, others might experience a sexual feeling. The pain of tattooing reminds Jim of cutting himself. He said, “A tattoo is one of those things that it's a constant in and out of your skin, in and out of your skin, slicing through it” (Jim, lines 171-172). In fact, pain has been, for Jim, one of the most important elements of tattooing. He likened tattoos to the candle wax he used to burn himself and talked about how tattooing was even better than burning because tattoos are also beautiful.

It's the same concept as the candle wax: You get the pain without the scarring. But with tattoos it's like a different, you get the pain and artwork. You get to turn your body into something beautiful through your pain rather than tearing it up because you feel like there's no other way. (Jim, lines 212-214)

Domains of Experience

Jim’s tattoo narrative included data relevant to his view of self, others, and the world, as well as multiple turning points.

View of self. Jim views himself as brave and determined. Like Nikki Sixx, he never gives up. He said of Nikki Sixx, “Inspiration right there: Just keep going and going and going. It may have taken me an hour to walk to work and I may have lost 10 pounds every day, but you know what, I did it” (Jim, lines 12-14). He also views himself as a positive person. He said,

I laid my scooter over in my grandparents' yard one day, and I just slammed on the ground. The scooter landed on me. My right shoulder hit the ground like a rock. I could use it for a couple days. I couldn't use my right hand for the next couple days. That night I treated it like a prosthetic arm. It was excruciating. But it was fun. I got to use my left hand. I made a makeshift sling for my right hand so I didn't have to worry about pressure. I did laundry one handed and cooked one handed. (Jim, lines 318-323)

View of others. Jim views others as imperfect, but also open-minded and supportive. He said, “Most people I roll with are open minded people. I hang with really open-minded people” (Jim, line 337). He views others as individuals, but also believes everyone stereotypes people. He said,

Age, race, gender. Those are all like, guidelines for how you'd expect someone to act or think or speak. We're all judgmental. We're all gonna take one look at someone and immediately judge them. It's just in our nature. There's no shame in it. You say you're not prejudice, well you're prejudging everyone you look at. I promise you. Those are all just stereotypes. What matters is the individual themselves. Not the age. Not the race. Gender. No. The individual themselves. (Jim, lines 518-523)

View of the world. Jim views the world as painful, balanced, and full of possibilities.

Life becomes easier, according to Jim, when there is balance between negative and positive. He said, “I do know there's light in the dark and dark in the light. There's an equal balance between everything. And if you find that balance, life becomes easier” (Jim, lines 382-384). In Jim’s view, though the wind of possibility always blows, it is nevertheless easier to be negative than positive. Positivity must be earned and deliberately sought. He said, “Positivity is something you have to work for. You have to earn it. Negativity comes naturally” (Jim, lines 344-345).

Negative energy, Jim believes, must be transformed into positive energy by releasing negative energy in the most positive manner you can manage. He said, “You have to release the negative in a positive way. Turn the negative energy into positive energy” (Jim, line 401).

Sometimes physical pain, according to Jim’s experience, is the best way to accomplish this transformation. Jim spoke of what he did one time when he received bad news:

So I got some candle wax and did the whole process. Poured, poured. Oh man. That release. That release right there. You know, you don't even tense up your wrist. You just leave it relaxed. And the heat is a shock wave that gets sent throughout your entire body almost and man, it is so good. (Jim, lines 207-210)

He believes that learning and growing from life requires the courage to take risks. If someone is timid, they might not make it. He said,

Lessons are pointless if you just receive them. You've gotta do something to acknowledge them. Do something with those and see if it actually works. Take that risk. Always take that risk. The cliff may be 60 feet in the air, but you've just climbed all the way up and there's water right there, there's a nice lake and you jump into it. It looks scary. But there's no other way down. Don't let yourself think there's another way down. Make your stride, make your distance between getting to the cliff short and fast. Less

time for hesitation. The cliff over at the riverside, it's like 20, 25 feet in the air, and I learned that real quick. If you wanna jump off that, go on ahead. Give yourself five or six feet, though. Don't give yourself 10 or 15. It doesn't matter if you want to extra speed; I promise you, you don't need that extra speed. You just need enough speed to get you through that five or six feet. The more you think about it the less time you'll spend doing it and the more likely you won't do it. You keep running to the edge of that cliff and turn around and walk back a little bit, go again. No. At that point, if you think about the edge you're gonna stop. What you need to think about is jumping. Just jumping. And then when you're in the air think about how you're gonna land because I promise you if you're jumping from 20 or 25 feet in the air I promise you it's going to hurt. (Jim, lines 471-481, 483-488)

Jim's lifestyle. From Jim's view of self, others, and the world one can see a possible lifestyle that can be stated as follows: I am determined and open-minded. Others are open-minded, but also judgmental. Each person is important as an individual. The world is hard and life can be excruciatingly painful. The world, however, is full of possibility waiting to be seized. The way to overcome the excruciating pain of life is to transform negative energy in the most positive manner you can manage. Therefore, I never give up, I take risks, I transform negative into positive, and I seek to be adventurous in moving toward growth.

Turning Points

Jim's first turning point happened as a teenager when someone gave him the book about Nikki Sixx. At that point he knew he wanted to party and saw that he was not partying enough. He said,

I can definitely tell you that a significant, there's not necessarily a significant part in the book itself. But it just appealed to me as a younger teenager and just wanting to get out there and party and felt like my inner partier wasn't getting out enough. (Jim, lines 49-51)

The next turning point occurred when he decided he no longer had to live up to Nikki Sixx the partier; rather, he could now live up to Nikki Sixx, the recovered addict (the book described both aspects of Sixx's life). Jim's first tattoo changed meaning as Jim's life changed. He said of his own change,

I learned on my first year out on my own as an adult just how many times in a short few months your life can actually change right before your eyes. My life went down one direction, another direction, all the sudden it just exploded in front of me. So even though it may be a permanent image on your body, like, it can still apply to the different aspects of your life you've already gone through or that you may go through. Like I said, now it's just an encouragement to keep me going. I'm only 20, but still I grew up a lot and, yeah, just completely changed. (Jim, lines 18-23, 25)

Jim also had turning points centered around causing himself pain. He began cutting himself while a young teenager, moved to burning himself with candlewax instead, and then began using the tattoos. Now, through tattoos, he not only can keep himself from self-injury, he can also make beautiful things through pain.

Group Analysis and Synthesis

In the individual analysis, I explored each participant's narrative and offered information on his or her possible lifestyle from the emergent views of self, others, and the world. All narratives answered the research questions by including views of self, others, and the world, and an approach to life. Turning points within each participant's narratives also emerged. In the group analysis and synthesis, I discuss twelve common themes that emerged while comparing and contrasting narratives.

Courage to Grow through Struggle and Change

All but one narrative included the courage to grow through struggle and change. Chad's narrative lacked this theme; it did not, however, contradict the theme. Pam believed one must consistently do uncomfortable things to grow. She exemplified courage in moving far from home and traveling to a foreign land. Pam believed courage was needed for social justice to spread.

She said,

That's how you grow. People who aren't ever uncomfortable don't learn new things. I just got done yesterday with diversity in higher ed course and I was pretty uncomfortable through the whole class but I learned a lot, because they talk about social justice issues. And I also think that standing up for those types of issues makes you uncomfortable and,

but that's how you make change and how you change yourself, so I think that it's a real important skill to have and always work on. (Pam, lines 141-146)

Cody did not allow injured growth plates stop him from playing basketball; rather, he practiced harder. His growth plates corrected themselves in time, but then in the sixth grade he broke his right wrist. Rather than quit, he chose to struggle until he gained the ability to play with his left hand. He said,

So I mean, like I said when I was younger I had some stuff happen. And it messed up my growth plates. So I wasn't ever really, I didn't have the height to say I'm gonna be really good at this. But it was still something I was super passionate about and I drove myself to do better. Obviously, I hit my growth spurts and things changed. One of the prime examples of me challenging myself is when I was in the sixth grade I broke my, I'm right handed. I write with my right hand and everything. I had broken my wrist. It was either don't play basketball for six weeks or go out in the yard and shoot with your left hand. I actually forced myself to be left handed, which kinda sucks because I can't shoot with my right arm anymore. But everything I do other than sports is right handed. I actually turned myself into a lefty. Went into seventh grade and my coach who. So, in sixth grade you can travel, it's travel ball. Coach Trumbo was the coach for that, he was also the seventh-grade basketball coach and knew I was right handed. So I show up for practice on my first day of school in seventh grade. I had my cast off and started shooting. He comes over and goes: "Why are you shooting with your left hand"? And I explained it to him. And he's like: "Not many people can force themselves to." I'm like: "I didn't want to stop. I didn't want to stay at home for six weeks." (Cody, lines 398-413)

Jim heavily abused drugs. He talked about letting go of shame and about how everything from drug abuse to a rock in a shoe can and should be used for growth. He said,

I don't feel any shame for it. It's all a part of who I am. It's a part of what made me who I am today. I feel, I see no reason. And even Nikki Sixx looking back on his drug years and him feeling any shame. Man he's almost sixty. What does that matter to him anymore except for how it made him who he is today. It's a matter of being able to see past the shame, quote unquote, (I got finger quotes up). The shame. Of being able to see that everything that has happened to you are the building blocks of who you are. They're not necessarily the building blocks. Just. Life is full of little lessons. Not just little ones. Big lessons. Enormous lessons. Lessons that are as small as the dust on your feet. I've walked to work and had this little crumb of a rock in between my foot and shoe I just thought, "How can this impact my life in a bigger way? What kind of, what can I take from this little bitty pebble of gravel and put it into my life in some way?" Just gotta know, gotta be able to open your mind and look for those things. Look for those lessons. (Jim, lines 457-460; 462-468; 470-471)

Journey of Faith

Participants' faith emerged in seven narratives. Mark's journey of faith included a Christian upbringing, a period of questioning and rebelling, and resolution of major portions of those questions and a return to his faith. He used his tattoos to remind himself that he is a Christian. He said, "Pretty much all my tattoos are about what I believe, why I believe. Even though all but my forearm is covered. It's a reminder to me when I see them, of who I am and what I stand for" (Mark, lines 212-214). Jay, similarly, was raised in a Christian household. He rebelled as a teenager and, like Mark, later returned to his faith. He used a tattoo to remind him of his journey of faith. He said,

I've got what is supposed to be a scene that is basically the end of the world. It's got the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Four angels. Um. And just um, a battle scene from the end of the world, but it's messed up. So we don't talk about that one a whole lot. But it just, it was just a reassurance of my, you know my, as I got older and by the time I got this done I had come, I had gotten sober and clean and I had gotten a lot back in to a center and it was just kind of a reminder of my Christian roots and my upbringing. (Jay, lines 70-75)

Not all journeys of faith went in the same direction. Wolfgang, similar to Mark and Jay, grew up in a Christian household, and, like them, rebelled. He began frustrated with religion in general, then accepted atheism, and from there journeyed to antitheism. He, like Mark and Jay, used tattoos to assist his journey. When discussing his Pentagram tattoo, Wolfgang said,

I was frustrated with religion and didn't know how I felt. Whereas now I'm a, I hate labels but if you're gonna use one I'm an atheist. More specifically, more accurately, would probably be antitheist. So I'm definitely more, continue down that path. (Wolfgang, lines 38-41).

While he was moving away from his parents' faith, he began moving toward a holistic view of life that involved Buddhism and Taoism. Wolfgang also used a tattoo once again to relate this part of his journey of faith when he acquired the Yin Yang tattoo.

Reflect and Assist Self-Concept and Growth

All ten participants used their tattoos to reflect and assist their self-concept and growth.

Jane used her tattoos to help her be who she believed she was. She said,

It helps sometimes calm me. Cause sometimes when I'm having a bad day I'll look at my tattoos and it'll be like "You're like this Jane. Remember when you got this? Remember Why you got this?" And I'm like, "Okay. Let me stop." (Jane, lines 32-34)

Wolfgang used his tattoos as a Totem pole that reflected who he was and his growth throughout his life. He said "I've always thought of them like a Totem pole, right. Every part of your life is important. Just because you're not that person anymore doesn't mean that wasn't an important step of you becoming who you are" (Wolfgang, lines 42-44).

Likewise, Mark used all of his tattoos to reflect and assist his self-concept. When he discovered who he was and wanted to be, he used tattoos to set it his self-concept in stone. He said, "I just wanted something to kind of solidify who I am and how I felt about myself and what I believed in" (Mark, lines 479-480).

Though Jay has also used tattoos for this purpose, he warned against assuming too much. Tattoos, he explained, can describe much about a person, but they cannot magically tell what a person will do or be in the future. He said,

Because if you realize every single one of my tattoos, all that's doing is telling you about my past. I can't tell you, I don't have one tattoo that's going to tell you about my future. That's not written yet. So if you want to learn about my past you can ask me about my tattoos. And a person's past is what makes them who they are, for certain. But it doesn't have to define them. (Jay, lines 316-319)

Encountering Emotion

Seven participants used tattoos to encounter emotion. While Lee's tattoos often brought grief, Jim experienced joy, inspiration, and confidence from tattoos. In addition to those emotions involved in having tattoos, Jim also used the actual process of being tattooed to deal

with his emotions. He used the excruciation of getting tattoos to deal with negative energy. Jim said,

I had a friend, three years younger than me, she was going to get her first tattoo. She had a rough life growing up you know. And she was a really bad cutter. She was the one girl that I would constantly worry about. She was that bad. She took everything so much on her, she was an empath so she didn't just take her own emotions, she felt everybody's. It was really rough on her all around. I told her, "You have so much negative energy. You have so much negative thoughts. This is a great way for you to actually FEEL all that pain, all that EXCRUTIATION, and put it into one little area and let that be your way of cutting almost." It's excruciating. She got a tattoo right there. Oh! (Jim, lines 177-184)

Similarly, Wolfgang used the pain of getting tattoos to encounter and deal with emotions. He suggested that people his age commonly inflicted self-pain at a young age. He said,

Having these emotional problems you aren't mature enough to deal with yet, and you wanna act out. People do it in different ways, but that was one of mine. and I think that seems to be a pretty common concept for people my age, was pain. Whether you inflict it to yourself, physically or emotionally, or whatever. That was my route, because I thought that was a little bit better to go do it, to have a professional tattoo me or do piercings or whatever it may be. (Wolfgang, lines 17-22)

Jay did not use the pain involved in tattoos. He did, however, recommend getting tattoos because of the emotions involved. He said,

You should get a tattoo. You get to feel all the emotions at once in a tattoo. All the emotions at once. You get to feel the nerves of doing something, stepping out of the box and having to trust another human being. That is the first part. Right now he is having to trust me. And that's. We don't know each other. Like we met each other like a week ago. And he's gotta trust me now. So that's right out the gate, the unsure, the trust issue. And then you've got to um, you feel the pain. You feel the nerves of your body start to release the endorphins, which is almost a natural high. It is um, like your body it starts. People say you go numb. But it's not that you go numb. It's that your body is releasing those endorphins. It's a natural high. You feel more. You're more in tune to what's going on in your body. And then you also, um, depending on the tattoos location, you get to feel the regret almost immediately because some of this shit hurts bad. 'Why did I do this?' But then when you get done and look at it, ideally, there's the sense of joy because you have something good that's on you, something that looks good on you. But then, I've heard cases where there's immediate regret because it didn't look so good. (Jay, lines 265-277)

Responsibility

All participants discussed issues of responsibility. Mark felt he had to be more responsible than others at a young age. He moved out of his parents' house at the age of 16. He therefore had financial issues to think about when considering getting a tattoo. He said,

When you're going to 19, 20, 21 years old and you live on your own and you have a car note and insurance. And it's hard to come up with being a responsible adult, I've always been pretty much a responsible adult. I just couldn't blow money on tattoos, you know, I'd much rather have groceries and pay my power bill on time than going to spend it on a tattoo. (Mark, lines 278-282)

Jill explained that it was irresponsible to get meaningless or frivolous tattoos. She suggested slowly stepping into tattoos by first getting a henna tattoo. She felt compelled to share her insight with others, especially people younger than herself. She said,

Well I already said about frivolous, but I really mean that. I would not. I hear a lot of the kids I work with say, "Oh I'm going to get this tattoo and I'm going to do this." They'll want to get Mickey Mouse or they'll wanna do something that's the fad movie for the day. I think the Avengers are, is that the movie out right now. So you know I'll be like, "Now you remember, this is with you for the rest of your life." I'll tell people who don't have tattoos at all, I encourage them to get Henna tattoos because that'll stay on you for a while and you can, you're living with it, it doesn't, it just fades off. (Jill, lines 296-302)

Chad, in contrast, preferred impulsively acquiring tattoos. He said, "I get tattoos on a whim, to an extent, because a lot of times when I think of my idea I end up going within the next like, couple days to get it. But I've never regretted one" (Chad, lines 49-51). Though he mentioned, multiple times, that he gets his tattoos on a whim, he nevertheless is not financially irresponsible with tattoos; for example, he explained why he has yet to get his next tattoo: "I've been wanting to get another one for a couple months, but I just haven't done it. Once I got money. I have an idea, just need the money" (Chad, lines 133-134, 136).

Issues of responsibility manifested differently in all participant narratives. For many, responsibility involved taking time to think about the tattoo before getting it. For Chad this was

not the case. Others determined to get meaningful tattoos (this also was not the case for Chad). Chad's sense of responsibility concerning tattoos expressed itself in his financial priorities.

Memorialize

Eight participants used a tattoo to memorialize a person or event. Jay used multiple tattoos for this purpose. The tattoo memorializing his father exemplifies the theme perfectly. He said,

And this is the one that is, gotta be one of my favorites. It is a fly's body with a horse's head. It's got a lot of nuances in it. Uh, he's wearing an OU hat. He's drinking out of a water bottle that's wrapped up in duct tape. It's um, this was for my daddy. My dad passed and it took me two years to design that tattoo. When my dad passed, he um. When I was growing up my entire life he used to call me Haus fly. You know a horse and fly. He was a big OU fan and he always wore a ball cap. So I put the ballcap on his head. And the water bottle, my dad traveled a lot and he had that water bottle wrapped up in duct tape and he would coffee in it, he'd put diet coke in it, he'd put whatever he was drinking in that water bottle. In that water bottle. So that was the significance of that one. And I wrapped as much of my memory of my dad as I could into that one tattoo. My dad was country to the core and that was the thing, haus fly. That's what he called me from day one, so. It was supposed to be horsefly, but with his country accent it was haus fly. And that's even the way we spelled it when I put it on there. I spelled it wrong on purpose. I think about that daily. I have to celebrate everything that tattoo represents instead of dwelling on the fact that he's gone. That tattoo, really honestly a lot of my tattoos have meaning, but that tattoo had the. A lot of people say they get tattooed for therapy. Um. That tattoo right there had closure for me. My dad had been passed for two years when I got that tattoo. And I had actually had troubles with um, with drinking after my dad passed because that was the only way I knew to cope with it. Um. But you know, that tattoo actually brought me some closure. And it helped me say goodbye in a sense, but I've always got him with me to, so I didn't really say goodbye. I've got his embodiment with me in the tattoo. (Jay, lines 83-84, 86-87, 89-95, 97-100, 215-222)

In like manner, Lee used tattoos to memorialize both his feelings of unforgiveness and his wife. His first tattoo preserves the memory of his wife. He said, "Now it reminds me of my late wife and my dedication to my daughter" (Lee, line 68). He also decided to use the Chinese symbol for grief to remind him of his wife.

Jim, somewhat differently, wanted to memorialize one of his superstitions. He does not believe in superstitions to the extent that he once did; be that as it may, he nevertheless chose to

preserve superstitions in a tattoo. Others acquired Friday the 13th tattoos because of finances, but not Jim. He said,

I was like, "Okay, I want a 13 in there because it's a Friday the 13 tribute. I don't care where, as long as it's hidden." He hid it in that peddle, right there. I like the idea in the superstitions behind the day and how careful a superstitious person has to be on that day. This past Friday the 13th I had forgot all about this. But um, this girl and I was in Bentonville and were trying to get our water, our electric switched over from her grandmother's name to my name. And so we shut the water off that day. And then all our luck ran out all the sudden. We couldn't get on the lease cause two of us were under 21. And so we had to pack up shop and move to Fayetteville. It was just a total day of one Friday the 13th. It's the first one I ever actually experienced. (Jim, lines 240-248)

Love for Family and Friends

Nine participants discussed positive interactions, thoughts, or feelings regarding their family or friends. Wolfgang is the only participant to not discuss this topic. He did, however, mention that he dislikes people in general. As for his family, he chose to leave his parents' teachings of religion and go his own way.

Cody's narrative involved multiple stories about family. In all these stories, his feelings toward his family were positive. He lit up as he discussed his love for his grandmother:

I remember bits and pieces. But we talked a little before she passed away and she told me to do whatever I could, um, one of the last things she actually told me, and I'll never forget it, because when I was younger I ate Spaghettios every day and I'd inhale them. I was six when she passed away. And one of the last things I remember her telling me is to make sure I chew my Spaghettios up. It's something that's, it's not meaningful by any means, it's not like, I just got an insight into life. But it's something that ties me to her and it's something, the only bond we have, that only we can have. It was constantly a joke and um, some days she would, every day after school. And so when she said it that's one of the last things I remember her saying. I'm sure she said something after that, but that's what stuck. I remember her telling me she loved me. Not to say that's not meaningful, but there's more personal connections than I love you. (Cody, lines 345-356)

Jane wanted to get a Sibling tattoo because of the love between them. She said, "And so with me and my brothers, they're my brothers. I love them. They're not going anywhere. They're always gonna be there for me and I'll always be there for them" (Jane, lines 667-669).

In addition to affection, participants also included family or friends in their tattoo adventures. When asked if he took someone with him to the tattoo shop, Jim responded, “Every time, never alone before. It's one of those things. I'm socially awkward so if I go into a setting like that I'd rather have a buddy with me” (Jim, lines 361-362). For many, the involvement of others in the experience increased the significance of the tattoo. Mark's third tattoo, for example, held special meaning due to his brother's involvement in the experience. He said,

I was thinking about getting a Trinity somehow and then my little brother comes to me, he's turning and he just turned I think 19 or 20 and he's about to go into the army and he's like: “Hey, I've, uh, I've been thinking about getting a tattoo.” I was like: “Yeah me too, I've been thinking about getting like a Greek Trinity.” He's like: “Me too.” So essentially it just kinda worked out where we went to the tattoo shop and side by side and the same time to shop and people I knew and got our, our tattoos at the same time. And um, yeah, that was cool. Cool experience because that was right before he went to the army... Um, and obviously has a special meaning with my brother involved in getting those together. (Mark, lines 180-187, 211-212)

Unity and Cooperation versus Discord

Themes of unity and cooperation versus discord emerged in all ten narratives. As an example, Jill expressed her belief that everyone should work together. She said, “I think we should all be for each other but also be both for God. So my friends, family, significant others. It should be that way” (Jill, lines 73-74). Wolfgang also spoke of the need to cooperate because of our shared situation. He said,

And actually going back to my earlier philosophical discoveries, when I was studying religions and wasn't sure where I stood on it, and started studying multiple religions, that was the only fact I could come up with is, "Hey, we're a lot of humans that are the same on the same planet." That was the only premise I could start with. Anything else was already jumping to conclusions or had holes in it and too many gaps in them. That was the only thing I knew I could start at, was, "Okay we're all on this rock together, let's do the best we can together." (Wolfgang, lines 540-547)

People, Jim believed, benefit from cooperation; but he faulted religion for striving against human progress. He said, “Who knows what we could have now if it wasn't for the church holding back

science because it disagreed with the books they worshipped. Galileo specifically comes to mind” (Wolfgang, lines 75-77).

Lee also reported discord. Though Lee himself tried to cooperate and help others, he recounted a situation wherein someone mocked his Superman Symbol tattoo. During that interaction, Lee’s desire to cooperate as a family man interfered with his desire to fight. His story combines cooperation and discord. Lee said,

Actually, not long after I got my first one, the Superman, I had a coworker that was a real idiot, and real fortunate that I was able to contain myself. He wanted to poke fun at it for some reason. And just the way he acted, the type of person he was, I didn't like him. And for him to do that and for me to sit there and have to take it because I didn't want to lose my job, so I can provide for my family, and not knock his teeth out with my right hook, um, really angered me. And I'm still angered about it to this day. I have not forgiven him for it. (Lee, lines 228-235)

Reflect and Participate in Relational Bonds

All participant narratives included the reflection or participation in relational bonds. Chad chose his third tattoo for the express purpose of participating in a relation bond with his niece and nephews. His flower tattoo is actively relational in nature. He said,

So I decided to get flowers. And the funny thing about this one is when I was planning what to get, I looked at all these designs of shading flowers, colored flowers, kinda everything, um. But then, it made me think of spending time with my nephews and niece, like, one of their favorite activities is coloring. So that's why I actually just left it like an outline. Because whenever I'd go over there, they'd color it in with markers, um, and they would draw in it. It became this thing where every time I'd go over, they'd ask if they could do it. They'd be like, "Can we come color on your arm?" And I would let them, you know. And so I, I would sit down with them. A lot of times one of them would sit in my lap and another would sit in the chair next to me and they'd have markers out and color on it and fill it in and, um, just color it in with whatever color they wanted. And I didn't care. They could go outside the lines, whatever but. It was like a bonding thing. I thought it would be a fun activity. I remember when I was first getting it, too, I told all my friends, "I think I'm gonna leave it blank, that way if they want to color on it they can." I remember it was just an idea. I remember thinking, "Is this a stupid idea? What would my friends think about that?" But the first time they came over and they colored on it, like, you can tell they had so much fun with it. Part of it was probably the fact that they were like coloring on my skin which is probably a no-no, because they're not allowed to do that. But the second part is, "We can color on uncle Chad and it's fun." I enjoyed it. And

every time I'd go babysit, like I said, after that they would ask. And even to this day when I go over there my 6-year old nephew will be like, "Can we color on your tattoo today?" (Chad, lines 26-237, 242-251)

Comparatively, Jane also used tattoos to participate in relational bonds. She said, "I feel it gives me more to talk to, more ways to communicate with people than anything" (Jane, lines 769-770). She also is considering getting a Sibling tattoo to reflect the bond between her and her brothers. Jane said,

I really like the permanence of a tattoo, because once you do get it. Like, I know now you can get them removed, but like I said, I don't want to get any removed because when it's there I want it to be there because it holds that bond, it holds that meaning, it holds that relationship. (Jane, lines 664-667)

Cody likewise wants a Sibling tattoo to remind him of his sister, whom he has never seen in person. The tattoo would not only represent their bond, but would also be a bond. He said,

Another big idea for a tattoo is actually tied to my sister. Um. My sister and I actually never met. She lives in Wisconsin. But we talk constantly. We're both at a point in our life where we both have good jobs. She has my nephew um, and, so we're not at a point where either one of us can up and leave. But it's something where, I don't know. It's like we've been friends for so long, being brother and sister, we've talked but we've never been together. She's still one of my best friends. She wants another tattoo and I do, too. She bounced around the idea of getting matching ones. One that says. Mine's an arrow, it says: "My sister's protector." And hers is a key that says: "My brother's keeper." So it's another that isn't, it's a generic, not unique by any means. But it's one that's, really is a bond between a brother and sister. Even though we're thousands of miles apart that bond is super strong. We still talk every day. Um. And we're still involved in each other's life. We each know what's going on. I'm going up there this summer and we're supposed to go get them. It's the thought process. This has been another thought for quite a while, it's just, when are we actually going to get them. You know, family, it means a lot to me. And to have something to remember them by, because I mean, no one is around forever. (Cody, lines 294-308)

Though Wolfgang reported disliking people and not wanting to talk to others about his tattoos, his tattoos nevertheless invite such conversations, thus compelling him, at least for a time, into interactions with others. A clearer display of how Wolfgang has participated in relational bonds through his tattoos regard his Pinup Girl tattoo; he covered it for relational

reasons—he wanted to help women and children. In spite of the discrepancy of this theme for Wolfgang, his narrative does include multiple stories of participation in relational bonds (even when at his displeasure).

Trust and Care in the Artist-Client Relationship

Eight participant narratives included discussion of this theme. Participants valued trustworthy tattoo artists. Pam and her family preferred tattoo shops that only employed artists who could be trusted. She said,

I got it in December because I went home for winter break and was able to go back to that shop that I trusted everyone there. It wasn't the same artist who did my back, but since they're all really good I knew I could do a walk-in and it would be fine. (Pam, lines 229-231)

Sometimes participants trusted whom someone else trusted. Cody, for instance, trusted a tattoo artist because his brother trusted him. He eventually stopped using this artist because of the distance required to get to the tattoo shop; but that he traveled far distances to begin with reveals the importance of trust in the artist-client relationship. He said,

We actually went to Harrison, um, that's where my brother got all his tattoos done and they all turned out really well. So, I went over to his tattoo artist. Um. So, my brother, he's been friends with this guy for a long time. My brother goes and gets all his tattoos done there, so I didn't know who else to go to, especially a little closer so it was just easier for me to go get it from someone I already knew did good work. (Cody, lines 24-28)

Jay's narrative, from another angle, revealed a definite care for his clients. He seemed to place high value on his clients' wellbeing. He compared his work to that of a therapist:

I don't mind telling my story. I've come out of the places that a lot of people who've sat in my chair are in. So, I'm an open book. And, a lot of people don't like to talk about their drug use. I'll tell you ever single bit of my drug use. I'm not ashamed of it, because that's not what I do anymore. But I did it. And my dad always taught me that a man is going to own his mistakes. And those are mistakes that I've made. To be a man I've gotta own that. And I own it. And hopefully, if I've got somebody sitting in my chair, and that's another thing, like, being a tattoo artist is a lot like being a therapist, cause I get to listen to problems. Um. And I tend to not give advice because, hell, I'm not certified to give

advice. A lot of times people just want an ear. They can't tell their mom, they can't tell their grand mom, they can't tell their friends, they can't tell anybody some of the things they're going through. But they can tell me because they know it's not going anywhere. So I can be an ear. But if somebody's going through something that I've got past experience on, I'll give 'em insight into my experience and where it led me. (Jay, lines 327-338)

Cody and Jim discussed how their tattoo artist cared for them. Cody's Necklace tattoo is in black and white because the artist closed shop early. He said the tattoo artist "wants to let it heal and then I'll go back to get the rest of it done" (Cody, lines 203-204). Jim likewise discussed an instance when the tattoo artist had trouble shading the tattoo. The artist eventually stopped the process before he finished, for fear of injuring him. Jim said,

But he had the hardest time with the shading for that one. He just kept going over and over and over and eventually he had to give up because he was just gonna scar me at that point. And I completely understood. (Jim, lines 277-280)

Positive Results from Sharing Narrative

Eight participants claimed they experienced positive results from sharing their tattoo narrative. They described the experience as relaxing, enjoyable, validating, relieving, and meaningful. Some participants gained insight into their tattoo's meaning and into their own lives through the process of sharing their narrative. Cody shared how he would appreciate a counselor asking about his tattoos and how sharing his story with a nonjudgmental person is relieving. He said,

The fact that people, there's people out there that don't look at tattoos in a bad way. That they understand that people who have them, have a story behind them and why they got them. So, I mean it's kinda relieving. I actually, I've had people in my life that never knew they had tattoos and found out they did, and it was, it was something that I knew they weren't judging me. You don't have that stigmatism. You wanna understand why people have them versus: "Oh, you have tattoos, you're a bad person." You're one of the few who understands that people have them for a reason, it's something meaningful to them. (Cody, lines 570-574, 578-580)

For Pam, the blossoming of meaning for a tattoo during the interview was “pretty validating” (Pam, line 438). She valued the opportunity to have a place to share her narrative in a way that helped her process her story and create meaning. She said,

I don't necessarily tell all of the meanings of my tattoos at once. People will ask about whichever ones are visible. So it was really cool to talk about and have a space where I can kinda brag on myself for a little bit. And what's important to me. Like I said almost every time I tell the one about the quote I get chills a little bit, because that meaning is really deep and meaningful to me. It was nice to. I'm an out loud processor, I've learned, and so talking out loud helps me think through things. So talking about all of these out loud at once, realizing that, remembering that the back was as meaningful as it was. (Pam, lines 431-437)

Lee, however, spoke differently of the experience. His tattoos reminded him of his deceased wife; he therefore experienced the pain of loss during the interview. He said, “I particularly didn't like bringing up my personal pains I've been through in the past. It's not a problem. I knew what my tattoos were, and I was prepared for it” (Lee, lines 246-247, 249-250).

Perception and Treatment of People with Tattoos

All ten participants discussed the perception and treatment of people with tattoos.

Wolfgang denied being stigmatized for his tattoos, and he attributed this to being able to hide them with clothes. His friends, however, tell stories every day of being treated poorly because of negative perceptions of tattoos. To show how people are treated, he told a story of how a popular restaurant chain treats its employees:

It definitely happens. So this one restaurant, for example. They're sitting there profiting off the girls having their breasts hanging out, clothes as tight as possible, and then they're actually made to use this (I don't know if it's spray or rub on) but it's this stuff that tries to cover up and make it like you don't have tattoos. "Hey, we're going to sexualize you and use you as much as possible. Oh, but you can't have tattoos. We have to cover those up." But I find it funny how hypocritical people can be. Here's one of the most antimoral jobs. Not the jobs, but the companies. They even have a thing against tattoos. It makes no sense. (Wolfgang, lines 194-197, 201-204)

Jill shared a story of a parent who did not want her near her child. The parent believed Jill would give her child an evil spirit because of tattoos. Jill said,

One time this lady thought they were, um, I didn't have this many, but she thought I was opening up myself to curses. That evil spirits were entering into tattoos. This one lady told me that. But that was so long ago. Now maybe some people, I don't know, I don't know what people think now. They don't tell me. That was that one time, maybe I had the ankle one, maybe I had that. I really can't remember. Long time ago. But I, no. I don't know why she thought that. I think somewhere in the old testament there's something about marking the body as not a good idea. So it kind of came out of that. I think that's what it was. It's when I worked at a Day School. And a mom didn't want me working with her kid because she thought I was going to pass on some evil spirit. (Jill, lines 277-285)

Seven participants discussed how tattoos are more accepted today than they were in the past. Pam believes the stigma is decreasing because the number of people with tattoos is increasing. She said, "I also think the stigma in general is getting better because they're more common and more people my age are like, going into the work force and we have tattoos" (Pam, lines 421-424).

Jay discussed the phases of acceptance tattoos have undergone. Tattoos, he explained, are viewed differently depending on times and cultures. Jay currently views society as moving toward a feeling of indifference toward tattoos. He said,

People that are, tattoos are becoming more mainstream and more popular. But, especially in this area, people who are heavily tattooed are still kind of stereotyped. "They're on drugs." "You've got a criminal record." "If I leave my car unlocked are you gonna go through it?" Those kind of, just the basic stereotypes. Well, with reason, there's definitely a reason for it. Because way back, before decent people started getting tattoos, tattoos were reserved for prisoners and bikers and things of that nature. But even before that they were a form a social status. Um. In more ancient days, or in Polynesian lifestyle, they're social status. Warriors have their face tattooed and people respect them because they are warriors, great people. It has most definitely went through different phases over time. It went from being a social status, it's still a social status but a negative social status. And now I think it's becoming more of an indifference. As time goes it's going to be indifference, like, "Oh, he's got tattoos." Or "He don't." (Jay, lines 252-259, 261-263)

Researcher Perspective

I strove to be aware of my own beliefs and biases concerning tattoos while I conducted the data analysis. Throughout the process, I discussed my beliefs about tattoos as needed with competent people. I also read transcripts multiple times in order to be more sure of my interpretations. In addition, I conducted member checks to ensure the interpretations were not fouled by any presupposition or bias on my part. I also checked my interpretations by regularly meeting with a panel of experts. One difficulty while interviewing was my desire to debate; this desire arose with Wolfgang in particular. He liked respectful debate and he said a couple things that I would have thoroughly enjoyed debating. I was able to stay focused in my role as interviewer and researcher, and avoided any debate. Every participant graciously shared their narratives.

Narrative Summary

Seven participants acquired their first tattoo while in their teenage years, and the remaining participants acquired their first tattoo while still in their twenties. Many chose to get their first tattoo as an act of rebellion.

The common narrative arc among the participants was a journey of self-discovery that involved a search for meaning which influenced or protected their lifestyle. Recall that lifestyle is a concept which originated from the Adlerian theory of counseling, and involves a person's view of self, others, and the world, and how that person uses those views to decide how to approach life.

The common arc began in a position wherein the lifestyle was in flux, and in some cases had broken down. From that position, participants began to seek meaning, and often used tattoos to assist their search. As they sought and made meaning, through their tattoos and through other

means, their lifestyle began to reform; they then continued acquiring more tattoos, often as a way of solidifying their lifestyle. It is a common story of self-discovery and protection of the self once found. From the tattoo narratives one can see the participants' lifestyles taking root. All participants displayed hints of social interest in their lifestyles; that is, their lifestyles involved a degree of consideration for the feelings and well-being of others. In addition, autonomy increased during this story of discovery and protection of lifestyles.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five includes a summary of this dissertation's research, along with implications and recommendations based on the study's results. To begin, I connect the dissertation's results to existing literature and to the dissertation's interpretive lenses. Implications for counseling practice and for counselor education are then discussed, followed by suggestions for future research.

Themes emerged from the narratives of each individual. These themes can be useful only if one does not assume they are true for all people with tattoos. Jay, one of the participants in the study, stressed that people cannot tell his future by looking at his tattoos and that his character is more important than his outer appearance. So the results demonstrate that is important to find a balance between observing themes across people and viewing a person individually.

Summary of Results

All participants discussed at least one meaningful tattoo. The age when they acquired their first tattoo ranged from 17 years old to 25 years old. Thirty percent of the participants were female. Sixty percent of participants identified as either White or Caucasian and two participants chose to not identify their race. One identified as Cherokee and another as African American. The total number of tattoos per participant ranged from 3 to over 26.

The study's research questions focused on how the tattoo narratives of each participant reflected his or her lifestyle. Specifically, the research questions were (a) how does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of self; (b) how does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of others; (c) how does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect his or her view of the world; and (d) how does a participant's tattoo narratives reflect the way he or she approaches life? Because each participant could interpret and use an identical tattoo in

multiple but subjective ways, answers to the research questions emerged in the individual analysis of each participant's tattoo narratives instead of in the tattoo itself. Analysis of individual narratives revealed that all narratives involved views of self, others, and the world, and an approach to life. Segments of individual narratives were displayed in Chapter 4 and showed how the narratives reflected these views and approaches. Themes emerged during the analysis, and participants matched each emergent theme in their individual way. The themes highlighted three key points of

- growth and identity,
- social interest, and
- therapeutic factors.

Growth and Identity

The following three themes highlighted the key point of growth and identity: (a) courage to grow through struggle and change, (b) journey of faith, (c) reflect and assist self-concept and growth. Previous literature did not link the courage needed to grow through struggle and change with people's tattoos, but Mun et al. (2012) did report that tattoos can increase self-confidence. Jim's Riddler tattoo, for example, increased his self-confidence. Adler (1927) wrote about courage and self-confidence as if they were closely related; self-confidence and confidence in society might combine to produce courage.

Past literature revealed that many people have used tattoos to mark a religious or otherwise spiritual commitment or to increase self-control (Naudé et al., 2017; Shelton & Okleshen Peters, 2006). Jane used tattoos to keep herself spiritually in check, to remind herself that she represents Jesus. Mark, similarly, having discovered that part of himself that he was unwilling to lose, used his tattoos to solidify his spiritual self.

Participants in this study used their tattoos to create, reflect, and protect their self-concept and the way they saw the world and others. These findings are supported by Forbes (2001) and Greif et al. (1999), who found that the most common motivation for becoming tattooed was a desire for both self-expression and creation of a sense of identity. Along these lines, Dickson et al. (2015) reported that the process of tattooing can create identity as well as chronicle identity. Tattoos, therefore, can reflect already held self-concepts as well as help maintain the growth one's self-concept has undergone. Additionally, Tokarski (2017) reported that participants' tattoos reflected their beliefs about themselves, about relationships, and about their worldview in general. In this study, as in previous studies, participants used tattoos to reflect, create, and aid themselves as they progressed through their quest of self-discovery.

This key point of growth and identity can be likened to the Adlerian concept of courage. Sweeney (2009) suggested that courage is necessary to see the beauty in the world and to gain new skills. Adler (1929) declared that "Only such persons as are courageous, self-confident and at home in the world can benefit both by the difficulties and by the advantages of life" (p. 16). Discouragement causes people to act in ways that do not benefit society; Adlerian therapists strive to encourage clients (Adler, 1938).

The effective solution to all life tasks, according to Adler (1929), depends on courage. One can, using an Adlerian lens, view the manner in which participants fit into the key point of growth and identity as revealing the way participants meet the life tasks of self and spirituality. Participants in this study courageously met both tasks. The tasks of spirituality and self were connected for this study's participants. The task of spirituality can include seeking life's purpose and grasping for its meaning, in addition to searching for a place with God (Sweeney, 2009). Jay left his faith when he was younger and returned to it later in life. Jay met this task through his

consideration for the well-being of others. Wolfgang rejected the faith of his parents, moving from a Christian to an atheist and finally to an antitheist; at the same time, his journey included a moving toward Buddhist and Taoist teaching. Wolfgang, like Jay, also met this task through his consideration for others' well-being (even while holding negative feelings toward people in general).

Participant narratives also revealed the task of self. Sweeney (2009) suggested that people need an internal locus of control for completion of this task. Participants did have an internal locus of control, so long as it is assumed that God and tattoos can be internal. This assumption is in part supported by Jackson and Coursey's (1988) study concerning the relationship between an internal locus of control and a belief that God is in control (i.e., God control). Their participants attended Black Baptist churches. The researchers found that belief in God control was correlated with an internal locus of control. In my dissertation, Jane exemplified Jackson and Coursey's (1988) study as she used her tattoos to remind herself that God controls her heart's first moments. Her tattoos reminded her of who she is, which essentially involved her relationship with God; and in that way she sought to meet the task of self and spirituality together. In contrast, Wolfgang had the paradoxical beliefs that he has no choice, and, at the same time, that he should choose to prepare for life. Participants met these life tasks with courage and with a consideration for the well-being of others (i.e., with social interest). Courage is a necessary ingredient for social interest, and where one is found the other is usually found in like quantity (Adler, 1929).

Social Interest

The following five themes highlighted the key point of social interest: (a) love for family and friends, (b) unity and cooperation versus discord, (c) perception and treatment of people with

tattoos, (d) reflect and participate in relational bonds, and (e) responsibility. According to Adler (1927, 1929, 1979), social interest must be developed and nurtured through empathy and cooperation, even though it is inborn; and social interest is a powerful measure of mental health. Social interest both requires preparation and motivates one to prepare. People must prepare themselves to benefit humanity because it takes work and dedication. Once social interest is developed in people, it motivates them to prepare themselves even more (Adler, 1938). There is, therefore, a cyclical relationship between preparation and social interest.

Along these lines, Wolfgang displayed social interest through his feeling of community through responsibly preparing himself to be useful to society. His narrative showed a degree of social interest, hinting that social interest lies on a continuum; this agrees with Adler's discussions of social interest existing in degrees (Adler, 1929). Jill's narrative revealed social interest in her belief that every relationship should benefit all members. Likewise, Pam's narrative showed social interest through her desire to help people accept and love themselves. Though the review of previous literature did not reveal a connection between a person's tattoo narrative and a preparation to benefit humanity, researchers have previously found that some people get tattoos to create bonds (Littell, 2003).

Feeling connected to the human community is an essential part of social interest (Adler, 1927). Naudé et al. (2017) supported this element of social interest when they found that one reason people get tattoos was to feel a connection. Along these lines, Cody discussed his desire to use a Sibling tattoo as a bond. Jane wanted to do the same with her brothers and possibly her mother, and Chad strengthened his already vibrant connection with his niece and nephews through his flower tattoo.

The participants' narratives also suggested that they have sometimes interacted with people who lack a healthy level of social interest. While most participants mentioned that an increasing number of people have begun to accept tattoos, most participants also discussed how some people still mistreat those with tattoos. To illustrate how mistreatment of people with tattoos still occurs, Lee reported that someone mocked one of his tattoos, Wolfgang mentioned that his heavily tattooed friends are daily stigmatized for their tattoos, and Cody passionately requested people to stop looking down on people with tattoos. These findings support the tattoo literature that showed a stigmatization against tattoos even as more and more people have accepted them (Broussard & Harton, 2017).

Themes that highlighted the key point of social interest involved three life tasks: work, friendship, and love. Almost all participants discussed family. Jim's narrative did not focus on family, though he did discuss his relationship to friends. Pam's narrative revealed a strong family bond involving tattoos, and Jay expressed a deep sense of family obligation. Lee, likewise, used his tattoos to remind himself of family and his responsibility to them. Pam desired to gain a career in Student Affairs through which she could help people. Chad, like Pam, spoke of using his job to help those he teaches become better people in all areas of life. Each of these purposes exemplified a high degree of social interest. Participants also met the task of love. To that point, Jane spoke of how she and her boyfriend complimented each other and helped each other grow. Pam discussed her boyfriend and how they will always be together even after death.

This dissertation is the first research that links tattoo narratives with the Adlerian concept of social interest. In addition to growth and identity and social interest, the narratives also highlighted the key point of therapeutic factors.

Therapeutic Factors

The following four themes highlighted the key point of therapeutic factors: (a) encountering emotion; (b) trust and care in the artist-client relationship; (c) positive results from sharing narratives; and (d) memorialize. Lee engaged his emotion of depression and his feeling of unforgiveness through two tattoos (one of which he has not yet acquired). Jim and Wolfgang used the painful process of getting a tattoo for the temporary relief of emotional pain. This finding supports Johnson (2007), who found that the pain experienced from tattooing can bring a sense of control to people who experienced pain from uncontrollable factors in life. Tokarski (2017) further reported that some people who were once unable to experience pleasurable emotion regained the ability after experiencing pain from tattooing.

Adlerians believe emotions fuel people's lifestyle (Sweeney, 2009). People believe certain things about themselves, others, and the world, and they use those beliefs to deduce how they should behave and approach life. As Sweeney (2009) stated, emotions are "the messages individuals send themselves that build the energy they use to act" (p. 20). From this perspective, Jim and Wolfgang used the pain of tattooing to alter their emotions, and thereby energize themselves to carry out the choices they already thought they should make.

Sierra, Jillapalli, and Badrinarayanan (2013) found that the ability to trust the tattoo artist correlated positively with the choice to buy a tattoo. The marketing focus of Sierra et al. (2013) is relevant to this dissertation's participants, in that they were more willing to purchase tattoos from a trusted tattoo artist. But this dissertation's participants journeyed deeper into the experience of trust than the simple decision of where they would shop. Pam spoke of how she collaborated with her tattoo artists and trusted their opinion of tattoo placement. Jay spoke of the intense degree of trust clients gave him. He mentioned that his clients told him things that they

have told nobody else. His clients trusted him to listen nonjudgmentally and to keep their secrets confidential. Jay's narrative also showed the deep care he had for his clients' welfare. As for the perspective of the clients, Jim discussed how his tattoo artist stopped working on him to avoid harming him (this is comparable to therapists backing away from a counseling technique when they believe it might harm a client). Some participants, like Jill, spoke of becoming great friends with their tattoo artists. Those narratives demonstrated that the relationship of trust and care between tattoo artists and clients had deeper roots than marketing.

Adler (1927) said "It is well known that those who do not trust themselves never trust others" (p. 156). All participants trusted a tattoo artist. One could therefore conclude that the participants also trusted themselves. If so, could this self-trust be something they earned from the difficulties and successes they experienced on their quest of self-discovery? Trust is necessary for cooperation, and cooperation is necessary for success (Adler, 1938). The participants trusted and cooperated with their tattoo artists.

Eight participants experienced positive results from sharing their tattoo narrative. They reported that they experienced the interview as relaxing, enjoyable, and meaningful. Some reported that they gained insight into themselves from sharing their narrative. During Chad's follow-up interview, for example, he discussed how his cello teacher taught him the importance of helping students become better people, regardless of what else they wanted to learn. It was during our discussion when he realized that, at the time his cello instructor taught him to be this way with his students, she was at that very moment doing that exact thing for him. Pam experienced it as validating. She also experienced the blossoming of tattoo meaning from sharing her tattoo narrative, as evidenced by her Floral tattoo developing meaning as the interview progressed. The positive results participants experienced from sharing tattoo narratives support

Kosut's (2000) suggestion that narratives, including tattoo narratives, are key to the construction of the self; the positive results also support previous literature that suggested the self is ever-changing (Giddens, 1991).

Adlerian therapists have given great weight to insight. Ingrained characteristics, according to Adler (1929), can be remedied only after people gain insight into their lifestyles and into the purposes of their behavior. Changing such characteristics requires increased personal insight into mistaken beliefs about the self, others, and the world (Adler, 1938). It is not, however, enough for people to gain insight, since they often forget these insights after they learn the purposes of their behavior and the genesis of their mistaken beliefs. Adlerian counselors have therefore encouraged clients to immediately act on these new insights (Sweeney, 2009).

Participants also used their tattoos to memorialize loved ones. Jay designed a tattoo to memorialize his father, putting everything about his father into the tattoo. This purpose for tattoos is supported by Littell (2003), who found that half of participants were motivated to get a tattoo following a major loss. Jay reported that his tattoo memorializing his father was therapeutic and helped him deal with his loss. Lee acquired multiple tattoos to memorialize his wife and the way he felt after she died. Interestingly, Adler (1979) theorized that people's lifestyles direct how they approach the reality of death. If Adler's view of death is correct, then Lee used his tattoos to promote his depressed self-concept.

Implications for the Counseling Profession

This research has multiple implications for different aspects of the counseling profession. Counselors and clients can benefit from the results of this research. This study can also inform counselor educators.

Implications for Counseling Practice

Counseling success requires a trusting and collaborative relationship between the counselor and client (Teyber & McClure, 2011). Counselors should therefore seek methods useful for building trust. Participants in this study expressed benefits they experienced from having a conversation about their tattoos; one such benefit involved the relationship between the participant and the researcher. The findings imply that if counselors invite clients to share their tattoo narratives, and listen empathically and nonjudgmentally to the clients, then counselors can likewise establish a trusting and cooperative counseling relationship.

The findings also suggest that counselors can help clients better understand their beliefs about self, others, and the world, and how they approach life, by actively listening to their tattoo narratives. By arranging these into a lifestyle syllogism, clients can evaluate how satisfied they are with their lifestyles. Clients can also gain better understanding into their mistaken beliefs and the purposes of their behaviors. Through gaining an understanding of clients' lifestyles, counselors can also better understand what their clients expect in relationships, thereby revealing how clients expect the counselor to interact with them.

The results of this dissertation imply that therapists can use tattoo narratives as a technique to assist in giving clients a corrective emotional experience. Understanding what clients expect from others can help counselors provide clients with corrective emotional experiences. To explain such an experience, Teyber and McClure (2011) suggested that people generally expect relationships to go a certain way, and the client therefore also expects counselors to respond in ways that are familiar (and often unhealthy) to clients. Anticipating these relational expectations and responding to them in a new way can give clients an experience that things can be different with at least some people. Counselors can then help clients generalize

this new way of being, to others in their lives. Accomplishing those things can give clients a corrective emotional experience (Teyber & McClure, 2011).

Comparatively, Cody had the beginnings of a corrective emotional experience through sharing his tattoo narrative, an example of how sharing a tattoo narrative with an empathic and nonjudgmental person can promote such experiences. He experienced someone who did not have a tattoo respond in a way that differed from some of his previous experiences. Counselors can also use insights gained from the tattoo narratives to give corrective emotional experiences in additional ways. For example, upon learning that a client generally expects others to make decisions, counselors can then be aware of this relational pattern and seek to emphasize and encourage client autonomy concerning therapy goals.

Lifestyles and tattoos have a complex causal relationship. In one causal direction, people can use tattoos to reflect and nurture their lifestyle, as seen in Mark's and Jane's tattoo narratives. Conversely, lifestyles can also affect a tattoo's meaning. For example, Jim changed the meaning of his tattoo as his lifestyle changed. The tattoo no longer meant that he wanted to be the ultimate partier and instead began to mean that he should keep going and never quit no matter what difficulties life brings. Because of this complex causal relationship, counselors can use tattoos as a guidepost for counseling progress. If tattoo meaning changes as the lifestyle changes, then this informs counselors to talk about a client's tattoos more than once to track progress in counseling goals. Adlerian theorists already track counseling progress through repeated collection of early recollections. Moreover, Eckstein (1976) believed that therapists can track client change by noting changes in early recollections and found through his research that early recollections do change after therapy. This dissertation's results, in fact, imply that counselors can use tattoo narratives to track client change and progress.

This dissertation's results give support for the need to build a trusting, collaborative, and effective counseling relationship. Listening to clients' tattoo narratives can help counselors and clients attain insight and can help counselors give clients a corrective emotional experience. Clients can also gain understanding of their lifestyles and determine their level of satisfaction with the lifestyles. Receiving tattoo narratives can also help track counseling progress.

Implications for Counselor Education

With an increasing number of people getting tattoos, counseling students could benefit from the perspective given through this dissertation. Broussard and Harton, (2017) reported that almost 30% of Americans are tattooed and that close to half of millennials are tattooed. As more and more people acquire tattoos, the probability of counselors in training having clients with tattoos increases. Soon it will become a matter of how many clients with tattoos a counselor in training will counsel during practicum and internship, rather than a question of if they will counsel such people. Counselor Education programs should therefore include discussions of people with tattoos, along with discussions of any previous and current stigma attached to tattoos. Counselors in training could benefit from learning how empathically and nonjudgmentally engaging clients about their tattoos can build a collaborative and trusting counseling relationship, and how these interactions can assist both client and counselor insight and change.

Classes on counseling techniques can teach that receiving tattoo narratives is a creative method of helping clients. Additionally, multicultural classes can explore the different meanings and purposes people assign to tattoos and how these different meanings and purposes might look different across various cultural backgrounds. Finally, educators leading practicum and

internship classes should encourage counselors in training to engage clients in discussions about their tattoos.

Limitations

One limitation to this study is that only two participants reported a race other than White or Caucasian. Studies that include more participants of minority races could add important findings to the knowledge base. Another limitation to this study is that only 30% of participants were female. Studies that include more female participants could also contribute valuable information..

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could seek to understand the possible relationship between inviting clients to share their tattoo narratives and the degree of trust in the counseling relationship. Does actively and nonjudgmentally listening to a client's tattoo narrative increase trust or otherwise strengthen the counseling relationship? A researcher could perform a case study to evaluate the effects of inviting clients to share tattoo narratives. In addition, quantitative methods could be employed for an experimental study. As an example of a quantitative experiment, all participants in the control and experimental groups would have tattoos. Participants in the control group would experience several therapy sessions during which the counselor does not invite the client to talk about tattoos, whereas the counselor working with participants in the experimental group would invite clients to talk about their tattoos. After a set number of sessions, the researcher would assess the quality of trust in the counseling relationship for all participants and then run comparative statistical analysis on the data.

Another recommendation for future research is to study the movement of tattoo narratives with counseling progress. As clients make progress in therapy, does the meaning they give to

their tattoos change? In what respect and to what degree might this change occur? This dissertation's results demonstrate that people can alter how they use their tattoos. More than once in this study participants changed the way they used a tattoo based on changes in the way they viewed themselves, others, or the world. As people's faulty or mistaken beliefs change, so too might the meaning of their tattoos.

A final recommendation involves the blossoming of tattoo meaning. The results demonstrate that sharing tattoo narratives can cause meaning to blossom in tattoos that previously lacked meaning; these results support the lens of social constructivism, which holds that experience of reality is formed by social interactions (Boyce, 1996). Future research could investigate this phenomenon.

Conclusion

This study shows how each participant's tattoo narrative revealed views of self, others, and the world, and approach to life. The study also shows themes that emerged across participants and the tendency for meaningless tattoos to gain meaning through narrative interaction.

The 10 participants in this study participated in one-on-one interviews that lasted approximately an hour each, and each participant also had the opportunity to give multiple member checks on the data and on the analysis of data. After transcribing their narratives, I used an Adlerian and a social constructivist lens to interpret the data, revealing the usefulness of using tattoo narratives in counseling practice. This revelation, in turn, implies that Counselor Education programs should discuss tattoo narratives as part of their training and teaching curriculum.

Underscoring this study is that there is more to be learned from participating in tattoo narratives than the discovery of any link to negative behaviors or negative attributes. Participants

reported positive effects from sharing their narrative with someone who listened to them in an empathic and nonjudgmental manner. In other words, a counselor will find it more productive to receive and discuss tattoo narratives to determine the client's view of self, others, and the world than simply studying them in relation to pathologies and disorders. This dissertation therefore invites researchers and mental health practitioners alike to listen to and participate in tattoo narratives in more useful ways.

This study emphasizes an important principle: When it comes to using tattoos as part of counseling, the meaning assigned to the tattoo by the client is of greatest importance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Hello!

My name is Danny L. McCarty and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Under the advisement of my dissertation chair, David D. Christian, Ph.D., I am conducting research regarding the experiences and narratives of people with tattoos.

Many people (though not all) report having meaningful tattoos. Researchers have traditionally focused on a connection between tattoos and pathology. I am not interested in drawing connections between pathology and your tattoos. My focus is on the meaning you give to your tattoos and the stories behind them. I am also interested in how counselors can facilitate therapy and strengthen the counseling relationship by participating in an open and validating discussion of a client's tattoos with them. I wish to promote counselor efforts at devoting time to understand and connect with their clients through their clients' tattoos.

Individuals who participate in this study will be asked to complete confidential interviews in person. Interviews are expected to last between 1 ½ to 3 hours and will be audio or video recorded. Participants will receive a \$20 gift card, as compensation for their time.

I am seeking people with tattoos who:

- **Are at least 18+ years old**
- **Identify their tattoos as meaningful**

If you are eligible and willing to participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you know anyone else who fits these criteria and may be willing to participate, I would greatly appreciate if you passed this message along.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Danny L. McCarty

Doctoral candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
The University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Information sheet about participation in a research study

Page 1 of 2

Study Title: Tattoo Narratives—Lives in the Making

Investigators: Danny L. McCarty

Purpose of the Study and your Participation

You are invited to participate in a study of the meaning people give to their tattoos and the stories behind their tattoos. I want to create a space for you to discuss your tattoos, the meaning you give them, and the stories behind them. Approximately 10 participants are expected to take part in this study.

Do you have to be in this study?

- The investigator will explain the study to you.
- Participation is voluntary. You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Participation in the research study

If you take part in this study you will be asked to participate in 1, in-person, audio or video recorded interview (in the case that you cannot participate in person, phone interviews or video chats may be used), and at least one additional follow-up that can take place in person or on the phone. You will also be asked to provide pictures of at least one of your tattoos or allow the researcher to take a picture of them. The initial interview will be approximately 1 ½ to 3 hours. The remaining interview consists of a shorter, follow-up interview that allows you to add or modify any information from the initial interview. Additionally, these interviews allow the researcher to clarify information and be sure he is interpreting the information you provided in the way you meant it to be understood.

Benefits of participation

A possible direct advantage of participating is the benefit of sharing your story. The therapeutic effect of feeling heard and understood may help you make meaning of your stories and better understand the plotline of your life. You may become more aware of the individual ways that you approach life. However, I am unable to guarantee that you will benefit from participation. The knowledge gained from this study may help counselors better facilitate therapy and strengthen the counseling relationship by participating in an open and validating discussion of a client's tattoos with them. Counselors may read this study and decide to devote time to understand and connect with their clients through their clients' tattoos.

Risks and discomforts

Risks of participating in this study may include psychological stress or discomfort. However, these risks are not likely to cause any serious harm to your mental or physical health. You may consider not participating if you feel this is a serious risk for you.

Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Page 2 of 2

Costs and compensation

All participants will be compensated for their time with a \$20 Visa gift card. There is no financial cost to the participant for taking part in this study. The university and the researchers have no plan to provide compensation for a physical or psychological injury. However, the researcher will provide a list of resources that offer low or no cost counseling services. This will allow you to seek counseling services if you need them.

Participant Privacy and Research Record Confidentiality

You will choose a pseudonym upon consent to participate. That pseudonym will be used to identify your information. Your pseudonym will briefly be linked with your first name and contact information, so that the primary investigator can contact you for a member check and follow up interview. This information will be stored in a secure file on an encrypted hard drive. Once follow up interviews have been completed, this information will be destroyed so that the data you provided cannot be linked back to you. As a mandated reporter, the investigator is required to break confidentiality if you disclose any abuse that occurred before you were age 18. If you share any experience of abuse before you were 18 years old, it will be reported to Child Protections Services.

Your interviews will be audiotaped or videotaped, but nobody other than the principle researcher and the transcribers (who would sign a confidentiality agreement), will view or listen to them. An external auditor or other affiliated researchers may read the de-identified transcript of the interview, but they will not hear your voice. The recordings will be kept in a secure, locked location and will only be used for research purposes. The recordings will be destroyed once the study has ended and materials have been kept for any length of time required by the Institutional Review Board. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law, court order, or at the request of the University of Arkansas. Your records may be viewed by the Institutional Review Board, but confidentiality of your records will be protected to the extent allowed by law. The data resulting from your participation may be used in publications and/or presentations, but your identity will not be disclosed.

Contact information

If you wish to stop your participation for any reason, please contact the principle researcher, Danny L. McCarty, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the dissertation chair, David D. Christian, at [REDACTED].

In addition, this research is being overseen by the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, you may contact them at:

Iroshi (Ro) Windwalker, CIP

IRB/RSC Coordinator

Research Compliance

109 MLKG Building

Fayetteville, AR 72701

Ph. 479.575.2208

Fax 479.575.6527

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Flyer**Do you have tattoos?****Would you like to share their meanings?**

If so, you may wish to participate in a research study focused on your tattoo's meanings.

Requirements:

- **At least 18+ years old**
- **Identify your tattoos as meaningful**

Participation is voluntary and confidential.

You will receive a \$20 Visa gift card for participating.

If you are interested in participating or if you would like more information, please contact Danny McCarty at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



To: Danny L. McCarty
From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Committee
Date: 04/09/2018
Action: **Expedited Approval**
Action Date: 04/09/2018
Protocol #: 1803109867
Study Title: Tattoo Narratives: Lives in the making
Expiration Date: 03/25/2019
Last Approval Date:

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: David D Christian, Investigator