

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW AT THE STIGMATIZATION OF VISIBLY  
TATTOOED INDIVIDUALS IN THE WORKPLACE

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the world of the *visibly* tattooed individual from their own vantage point, particularly in the work environment and whether, as well as how, tattoos have affected their career prospects in terms of being hired and promoted. Accordingly, I will examine how an image or symbol that is visible on the skin can have different perceptions by management and how it is perceived by, and effects, those with visible tattoos in the workplace. My goal is to ensure that non-tattooed individuals are able to understand that tattoos are more than just ink on the skin to be judged, particularly by those holding power in the workplace. From the standpoint of a heavily, visibly tattooed mothers, women and students I have a firsthand view of the difficulty society places on visibly tattooed people. Utilizing field research via a qualitative approach, I conducted and analyzed thirteen interviews. Utilizing interviews this enabled me to capture the experiences of participants whether management at a workplace, or visibly tattooed employees. Results indicate that tattoos have recently become more accepted to a certain degree, dependent on several factors, including the fine line between an individual who has a few visible tattoos and others who have what I have labelled '*body projects*.' I conclude that stigma and judgment in the workplace are very much alive for tattooed individuals and will continue to affect their job prospects in the short-term.

### **Key Words**

Stigma, Workplace, Tattoos, Body Projects, Qualitative Sociology, Workplace Policies, Sudbury, emotions.

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## **Preface**

When a journey is easy you do not learn from it, it may be harder but much more rewarding. This was said to me by a wise man when I was tired and frustrated, but it definitely kept me going. I wrote this defence not only to further my education but also to show my children that they could achieve anything.

Tattooing has always been near and dear to my heart and I wanted to learn more, therefore I decided to dive deep into the world of tattoos, stigma and the workplace. I hope anyone that reads this thesis can learn a little something about the complex world of tattoos.

## **Chapter one: Introduction**

Tattoos have changed over the years, it then becomes important to update our knowledge and understanding of tattoos to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis will discuss stigmatization towards visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. The purpose of this study is to expand the current understanding of the stigmatization of the visibly tattooed subculture, particularly in the workplace and the consequences it may hold. In other words “Are visibly tattooed individuals currently being stigmatized in the workplace?” This research has a main purpose of discovering if there is still stigmatization towards visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. Before moving forward I find it necessary to define the term stigma. Erving Goffman (1963) describes it as “The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places” (Goffman, 1963, p. 1). Goffman (1963) was trying to say that stigma is a mark put on the body that will expose something unusual and bad about this individual. For the purpose of this study the marker on the body is going to be referred to as the tattoo an individual possesses.

Historically speaking, tattooing does not only have one pathway, but many that could explain the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals. One of the most common historical understandings of tattoos is rooted in the treatment of gang members, sailors and criminals. Due to the rising popularity of body modification, especially tattooing, it is no longer confined to sailors, prison population and gang members (Millner, Eichold. 2001). In 2013, “21 percent of all Canadians had a least one tattoo” (Antony, 2017, p. 285). This statistic indicates that there is a

fair amount of people who have tattoos in today's society. This statistic helps to strengthen the argument that tattoos are no longer just for criminals, sailors and strippers. Due to the previous statement that tattooing is not just for sailors and criminals, themed television shows have helped the general public to understand the world of tattooing, to be able to see beyond the façade of sailors and criminals. This is where the importance of themed television shows becomes vital to the change in social understanding of visibly tattooed individuals, in this specific case the workplace.

Tattoo-themed television shows such as *NY Ink* (Original Media, 2011), and *Miami Ink* (Markowitz, Shutz, 2018), among others, put the tattooing community into the field of vision of mainstream culture. "Tattooing is now prevalent in mainstream popular culture, with little difference in engagement seen across socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds" (Kay, Brewis, 2016, p. 351). In other words, the influence of tattooing in mainstream culture does not affect the way individual's view tattooed individuals. Michael Rees (2016) took a quote from an unknown tattoo artist that represents the change in the world of tattooing. "The biggest change that I have seen in tattooing has been its acceptance by mainstream society. Tattooing has lost its outsider status" (Anonymous Tattoo Artist, 28 March 2015 in Rees, 2016). Because of this rise in popularity, does workplace stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals start to disappear or does it remain the same? While tattooing is by no means widely respected in Western cultures, its one-dimensional depiction as uncontested deviance is sociologically myopic (see <sup>1</sup>DeMello, 1995; Fisher, 2002; Friedman, 1996; Gallick, 1996). For a long time tattooing has been seen as a socially deviant practice, but with recent changes surrounding the perception of tattooing, it is now common to think that tattooing must be widely accepted. However, through previous studies

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<sup>1</sup> DeMello and al are found in Michael Atkinson (2014)

it may not be the reality for visibly tattooed individuals, the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals is still very common in the workplace. “Tattooed and pierced persons are viewed as irresponsible, unprofessional, and less qualified than their unmodified peers” (Ellis, 2014, p. 101). A deficit of information has created the continuation of negative attitudes towards the visibly tattooed individuals and has continued to perpetuate ongoing negative emotional, social and psychological effects onto this population.

It is crucial to remember that tattoos are of grave importance to the individuals who have them. Tattoos become a part of the self-concept for visibly tattooed individuals, being forced to hide tattoos due to workplace policies can cause them harm. Beverly Thompson explains the harm of covering up the authentic self, because others deem you must look like someone else’s self. “How attached is their self-identity to their tattoos? None of them could imagine themselves without tattoos; the thought was off-putting. Yet this is the disguise that many of them are forced to take on as they head to work” (Thompson, 2015, p. 112). Thompson (2015) explains how some non-tattooed individuals in a workplace do not understand how it feels to be on the other side. What if none tattooed individuals were forced to wear tattoos five days a week, how uncomfortable and embarrassed would they feel? This is the harm workplace policies can cause visibly tattooed individuals.

Certain areas of work may or may not allow tattooing to be visible in workplaces, such as retail stores, or fast-food outlets. For example, McDonald’s has a “no tattoo” policy and a uniform; as a result, any tattoos that are visible while wearing the uniform is not acceptable (Thompson, 2015. p. 103). This missing information can cause workplace concerns for tattooed individuals, based upon the behaviour of the manager. The information could cause visibly

tattooed individuals to be denied employment based on their tattoos, it may also cause issues with an individual's self-concept if the employers create a problem in regards to their tattoos.

The objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of stigma towards visible tattoos in the workplace, and the consequences of stigma in the workplace. Stigma—Goffman (1963) explains in short that individuals in society are going to observe each other and derive an impression of them with social cues that everyone can interpret as good or bad. Goffman defines stigma as “... referring to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier” (Goffman, 1963. p. 1). The resulting characteristic of that particular individual can be made and is then acted upon. This is where the theory of identity (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) helps to explain the identity of visibly tattooed individuals. The theory of identity of Berger and Luckmann (1967) is crucial to the understanding of stigmatization via visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. Their theory will help to identify how identity is shaped and how reality differs from individual to individual. Social construction shapes identity with social processes (Berger, Luckmann, 1967, p. 173), meaning that “tattoo identity” is shaped within society. The way individuals perceive visibly tattooed individuals will help shape their identity. Let me explain. Since tattooing has been continuously used as a psychiatric diagnostic tool in deviance, it is hard to see visibly tattooed individuals in any other light. “Not only does the assumption that tattooing is associated with various forms of criminal and/or pathological behaviour continues to inform psychiatric accounts of body modification, at the most fundamental level, I argue, it shapes the very form such research takes” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 131). This could affect individuals in the way they see themselves. As Charles Cooley explains we often see ourselves in the eyes of others.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain that once the identity becomes definite in society, the identity can be maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations (Berger, Luckmann, 1967. p. 173). Tattoo identity can change, be modified and maintained due to social relations. It is evident that over the last few years' tattoos have changed, and with that change came the change in social identity of the visibly tattooed individuals. As mentioned earlier, an example of this change is the media's view on tattooing. Television shows such as *Miami Ink* uncovered the world of tattooing, giving the general public a different insight of tattooing in general. This has affected the way the general public view tattoos, some may indicate that tattoos are widely acceptable, yet this thesis goes to uncover the world of stigmatization attached to visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. In no way am I saying that it is completely acceptable to have visible tattoos but I will agree that social perception has shifted towards the positive. One thing that is important to remember is that "societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge; these histories are, however, made by men [sic] with specific identities" (Berger, Luckmann, 1967. p. 173). At one time, the identity of tattooed individuals was associated with sailors, criminals and gang members, however, today this is not the case. The social dynamic in regards to visibly tattooed individuals has changed, and with that change comes the change in reality. How an individual is viewed in the eyes of the public on an everyday basis will constantly change their understanding of reality. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe and discuss how social processes affect the reality of every individual differently. Based on an individual's socialization they will interpret a situation differently, therefore social actors will construct a different reality resulting in different actions in social situations. This relates to the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace because every individual may perceive tattoos differently, every employment organization may

have different policies that have been constructed differently through their perception of reality, and the reality that visibly tattooed individuals face in the workplace. The reality of one visibly tattooed individual in the workplace may be different compared the next because of workplace policies, and the workplace itself. This study has many examples of how a different workplace and/or its policies can affect the outcome for visibly tattooed individuals. Cooley's "Looking Glass Self" which is the next step towards comprehending the dilemma of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. Charles Cooley's (1902) concept of the "Looking Glass Self" gives us insight into how identity is constructed through interpersonal interaction within a social context (Franks, Gecas, 1992). There are two parts to Cooley's theory: the first is that of self-consciousness (individuals are always seeing themselves in the light of others), therefore leading to the emotional connection of shame and pride to diverse actions, in theory controlling action of individuals in society (Scheff, 2005). In relation to visibly tattooed individuals Cooley's theory indicates that visibly tattooed individuals' self-concept may be affected by the negative perceptions of others. Therefore if the individuals continue to visualize themselves in this manner, it may cause them to feel shame about the tattoos, forming their personal identity. Consequently, the visibly tattooed individual may start to have a negative self-concept and/or veer away from obtaining more tattoos. If an individual is constantly told they are in the wrong, they will eventually start to stay away from a certain behaviour or activity. Cooley's looking glass self explains just this. Both of these consequences that are brought on by certain members of society are unjust in regards to visibly tattooed individuals.

For the remainder of my examination I will examine the following in chapter two through six. Chapter two will review the most relevant literature with attention to the following themes: historical relevance of tattoos, workplace stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals, social

acceptance, and gender. Other studies that have explored tattoos in the workplace and which provide a good foundation for the findings of this research will also be examined. Discussion will begin with an historical background, defining stigma and discrimination, gender bias, normative body, self-expression and culture, imagery and design, stigma and judgment in the workplace, tattoos as an identity marker, arbitration case, and covering visible tattoos at work.

In chapter three, I will discuss the theoretical considerations in relation to the identity and stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace, using theorists such as Goffman (1963), Cooley (1902)<sup>2</sup>, and Berger and Luckmann (1967). Goffman (1963) will provide insight into the concept of stigmatization and the effect that stigma can have on an individual. Charles Cooley's (1902) concept of "The Looking Glass Self" brings attention to how people shape their identities based on how individuals in society portrays them. Taking from Cooley's concept of the looking glass self, if individuals truly do see visibly tattooed individuals in such a negative light, it may begin to affect them negatively. In turn they will eventually start to see themselves in the eyes of those who express their opinion on them, whether positive or negative. Lastly, Berger and Luckmann's (1967) theory of the social construction of reality indicates how social processes and the histories of these processes shape identity. There are certain social behaviours and actions that are considered as key to the shaping of identity. For example, workplace policies, the environment of the workplace, whether an employee has to cover their tattoos, the attitudes and behaviours of the managers and depending on the workplace attitudes and behaviours of customers/clients.

In chapter four I will discuss the methodology used in the field study, which was conducted for this thesis. I have conducted a phenomenological study using thirteen participants that were

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<sup>2</sup> Cooley is cited from Franks, Gecas 1992 work *Autonomy and conformity in Cooley's self theory*.

divided into two groups. The first group is identified as visibly tattooed individuals and the second group is composed of management participants (defined as anyone who has the power to hire or fire employees). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both sets of participants using a semi-structured questions guide to uncover social perception around visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. All interviews were thematically analyzed, compared, and discussed. These themes are stigma, emotion, workplace policies, and the preconceived attitudes of managers towards visibly tattooed individuals. I will also discuss the limitation of this study.

In chapter five, I will present the results of my research, the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace and an exploration as to how the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals is still a factor in the workplace, despite the rise in the popularity of tattoos within popular culture. This section will clearly state the results obtained by this research in a comprehensive discussion on the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace.

Chapter six will conclude the thesis. I will also cover future research studies that could be conducted on this subject.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

“Tattoos violate dominant appearance norms” (Kosut, 2000. p. 81). In this chapter, the previous literature will be discussed in detail what encompasses stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. Looking at the emotions and reasoning surrounding tattoos will help develop a more comprehensive understanding of why tattoos are either still stigmatized in the workplace or they are not. First, I will explore the historical understanding of tattoos. Where it all began, how stigmatization became what it is today and how it affects individuals in their daily lives, especially in the workplace. Second, identity and stigmatization will be explored in terms of understanding where tattoos fit into identity, and therefore how that results into stigmatization. This is a crucial part of understanding tattoos in the workplace because identity is who we are. Third, gender bias, does the literature review indicate that there is a gender bias? And will it be duplicated in this study? Fourthly, I will discuss workplace stigmatization, how tattoos impact employment rates of visibly tattooed individuals and how these judgments always affect their daily life in the workplace. Lastly, I will discuss an arbitration case that occurred in Ottawa, Ontario regarding tattooed individuals (nurses) in the Civic Hospital. This is one of the first reported cases of tattoo policies being brought to court.

### **Historical Background**

Many individuals have a misunderstanding of where tattoos started and their primary purpose. Tattoos do not have just one point of origin; cultures around the world have used tattoos with symbolic meaning to indicate a message to others. As Chalmers noted “Tribal tattooing was found from around 60,000 BCE until modern days, and archaeological evidence dates the practices of tattooing as far back as 30,000 BCE” (Chalmers, 2009. p. 102). Another example predates Egyptian material by 1000 years. This mummy was found to have skin intact in 1991

with scarification that was done with charcoal and formed in geometrical-style patterns (Chalmers, 2009), Otzi a mummified iceman, has charcoal tattoos on his spine, behind his knee and on his ankle to indicate acupuncture locations (Chalmers, 2009). The mummy of Amunet, the priestess of the kingdom of Egypt, had tattoos that were thought to indicate sexuality and fertility (Anderson, 2014). Even before the discovery of tattooed mummies, there have been tattooed figurines and tools, perhaps used for tattooing, which date back tens of thousands of years (Anderson, 2014). The Pazyryk mummies and similarly those found in Scythian mummy's tattoos represent reunions after years of geographical separation (Chalmers, 2009). The most sophisticated, decorative and rank-symbolizing tattooing in tribal societies were practiced by Maoris of New Zealand; both males and females are tattooed, but with different designs and to different degrees, perhaps indicating a gendered difference in symbolism (Sander, 1988). There is also the Japanese body art form of Irezumi, which has been practiced for centuries. These are large body decorations depicting traditional themes, heroic characters, and highly symbolic images (Sander, 1988). The social and personal function of these tattoos is to belong to a group, enhance self-identity, talismanic protection and personal decoration (Sanders, 1988). With the evidence described above, it is obvious that tattoos have more than just one point of origin. The reason that this is prevalent is due to the fact that most individuals draw their judgment from the deviant undertones of tattoos. It is believed that people remember more the negative side of a situation rather than the positive. Which means individuals could be most susceptible to remember only the negative historical evidence rather than both positive and negative to make their judgment. Next the word tattooing or tattoo should be mentioned and described. This is also one of the first times tattoos were recognized in western culture.

The word “tattoo” is an adaptation of English speakers, who adapted the term originating from the Polynesian word *Tatau* used in Tahiti, which was exposed by the English captain, James Cook, who landed in Tahiti in 1699. Upon his arrival, he encountered heavily tattooed tribal members of Tahiti, which led to his first experience with tattoos. In result Cook and his boat crew instituted the use of tattoo to immortalized their sea travels (Anderson, 2014). This was the beginning of sailor tattoos.

Anderson (2014) explains another function of tattooing used by soldiers. The western notion of tattooing Crusaders got Jerusalem cross-tattooed on their chest; if they died at war, they would receive a Christian burial and Roman soldiers would obtain military tattoos (Anderson, 2014). Now that the positive journey of tattooing has been explained it would be biased not to explain the negative path of tattooing. In Japan criminals got tattoos to demonstrate different paths and milestones. Nevertheless, tattoos were also acquired to show lifelong membership in a group. In Japan tattoos were outlawed in the mid-nineteenth century until just after World War II; they used decoration from popular literature and wooden block images as inspiration (Anderson, 2014). Some tattoos can historically start off as a negative but later become a positive. During the Holocaust, Nazis tattooed identifying numbers on their concentration camp prisoners without consent, however, later on, some family members of the prisoners would get those numbers tattooed to remember the tragedy that occurred in Germany (Anderson, 2014). It is imperative to know that the tattoos in France, Italy and the Holocaust were part of non-consensual tattooing movements. Historically speaking the view on tattoos was quite linear (e.g. good or bad) but in recent years tattoos have become much more fluid, creating a large gray area that is relatively unstudied. Which indicates that tattoos have changed in terms of function and meaning.

It is evident that not all tattooing began with a negative purpose, many were cultural representations and were indicative of positive messages. It was not always about tattooing prisoners for public identification. Yet, in many journal articles that discuss stigmatization as the viewpoint of “gang members or criminals” In the next section I will explain stigma and discrimination in regards to visibly tattooed individuals.

### **Defining Stigma and Discrimination**

Until recently tattoos have generally been viewed as a social problem based on the norms of society, especially in Canada. This will be further explained and described with the help of Michael Atkinson (2004) in chapter four. In general, society still associates tattooing with substance abuse, delinquency and weapons possessions (Dukes, Stein. 2011). The common concept, which is often attached to tattooing, is stigma. Tattoos have been stigmatized for many years. Historically speaking a biblical reference dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century indicated the negative association with tattooing to sailors (Chalmers, 2009). Since the word stigma or stigmatization is often affiliated with this subject matter it is important to properly understand this term. Goffman writes that “[t]he Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the *moral status*<sup>3</sup> of the signifier” (Goffman, 1963. p. 1). In Goffman’s book *Stigma* (1963) it indicates that specific signs were cut and burnt into the body and which would signify to the general public that these individuals were slaves, a criminal or a traitor (Goffman, 1963). This symbol would give the understanding to the general public that these individuals should be avoided and that these individuals are polluted (Goffman, 1963). That is the original meaning of stigma; its definition used today has stayed the same to its former use. “Today, the term is widely

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<sup>3</sup> Moral status was not the original wording of Erving Goffman

used in something like the original literal sense, but is applied more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence” (Goffman, 1963. p. 2). Even though Goffman was the godfather of stigma, there are now predecessor that have taken his research to a new level. Michelle Helb and John Dovidio (2005) examined Goffman’s concept of stigma in their own work “*Promoting the Social in the Examination of Social Stigma*”. Just like it was done in this study, Goffman’s concept of stigma was explained but they pushed the boundaries by saying that just because one individual see’s stigma or feel stigma does not make it concrete. This is a very important to keep in mind when reading this thesis. I am in no way saying that all visibly tattooed people are constantly stigmatized, nor am I saying they all feel like that. I am explaining the perspective of the participants of this study towards the phenomenon of stigmatization. Now that stigma has been explained, the word discrimination is also often used in the discourse about tattoos and the workplace. The term discrimination is defined as “negative behaviour directed against people because of their membership in a particular group” (Kassin et al., 2013. p. 142). The next section will further discuss the term discrimination in regards to visible tattooed individuals.

Hence, the current argument is that tattooed individuals choose to put tattoos on their bodies where other individuals could see them; hence it would not be considered discrimination (Thompson, 2015). The problem is that the legal definition of discrimination only pertains to a certain group of people and anyone who falls out of those categories are not considered to be discriminated against. “Discrimination against a particular category or type of person is only illegal against the few categories (race, colour, religion, national origin, or sex)” (Thompson, 2015. p. 90). This is a problem because tattoos have become such a common sight in today’s society but the mind set of certain individuals have not yet caught up with the times. Meaning individuals who have visible tattoos are still being discriminated against. In liberal democratic

societies it has been normalized that discrimination, according to Thompson (2015), should be challenged. “Even though a type of distinction can be legally used, that does not make it non-discriminatory” (Thompson. 2015. p. 90). Both of these terms are widely used in literature and research on tattooed individuals in any circumstance. It is also important to remember that I am not associating discrimination with Goffman’s definition of stigma. The reason both terms are explained is due to it’s repetitive nature in the previous literature. Stigma is referred to as a bodily sign that individuals use to discriminate others. Both terms are often used hand in hand, therefore making it essential to provide a definition for both terms.

It is not only in the job itself that holds stigmatization but also in the stages leading up to it; such as the hiring process. The stigmatization happens quite frequently during the initial hiring process. During the application process, the first few seconds are the most important, that is when an individual will form their initial impression about others; this process of impression gathering is a natural human behaviour (Deros et al., 2016. p.93). It is important to fathom that first impressions are made quickly and are made by serial presentations of visual and behavioural cues; the individual will make impressions as fast as the cues allow (Deros et al., 2016). It was previously mentioned that society holds on to one pathway of origin in tattoos, most commonly the negative one. Therefore forming an opinion about visibly tattooed individuals that can often lead to a negative first impression of this individual. This being said if we look at people who are attractive and those who are deemed less attractive, it is generally individuals who are more attractive that will be favoured compared to their counterparts (Marcus, Miller: 2003). In other words, impression management becomes essential to the lives of visibly tattooed individuals (Millner, Eichold. 2001). With impression management, the individual controls the impression and information they give off to the observing public (Millner, Eichold: 2001). It may be evident

but the reason attractiveness is mentioned here is due to its very close relation to tattooing. Because tattoos are on the body they become part of what individuals find attractive (Millner, Eichold, 2001). This is why it is important to understand physical attraction in relation to visibly tattooed individual. A study conducted by Swami and Furnham (2007) indicated that the rating of physical attractiveness decreased systematically with an increased number of tattoos. The study found that both female and male undergraduates in North American held more negative attitudes towards women with a visible tattoo, whereas the size of the tattoo was a predictor of attitudes only for individuals who did not have tattoos themselves (Marcus, Miller, 2003). “Self-consciousness” is the tattooed individual’s understanding of what other people think of tattoos and the individuals who are wearing them (Doss, Hubbard, 2009). The more the tattoos are visible, the less public self-consciousness the individual possesses (Doss, Hubbard, 2009). Therefore, the size and location of tattoos will often be influenced by the public’s self-consciousness that the tattooed individual has (Doss, Hubbard, 2009). Studies also found that the more tattoos a woman acquired, the less attractive she was perceived (Marcus, Miller, 2003). It may be hard to believe but for better or worse, a person look’s matter (Marcus, Miller, 2003). Physically attractive individuals are more favourable than those with less desirable looks (Marcus, Miller, 2003). This being said in Marcus and Miller study strangers assume that people who are physically attractive have better personality, they are more sociable, better parents and better employees than those who are unattractive (Marcus, Miller, 2003). In translation people without tattoos were seen more positively than individuals with tattoos. All characteristics of attractiveness will depend on the nationality and ethnicity but that does not mean that there are not certain characteristics that are universally attractive (Marcus, Miller, 2003). This is not to say that women are the only individuals being categorized as unattractive, however, they are seen as

more stigmatized than their male counterparts (Marcus, Miller, 2003). What all this means is that being a visibly tattooed individual is considered to be unattractive and stigmatized. In result individuals have a lower chance of getting a positive outcome in a job interview.

It is crucial to point out that even tattoos can be gendered. Female individuals who had visible tattoos were viewed more negatively than females without tattoos; and women with fewer more covetable tattoos gained more acceptance (Dickson et al., 2014). Subsequently research done by Baumann, Timming and Gollan (2016) indicated that women surgeons with tattoos scored less than their counterparts with no tattoos (Baumann et al., 2016, p. 35). The same result applied to women who were employed as mechanics. The same results were also indicated between male mechanics and male surgeons; those with tattoos scored less than their non-tattooed counterparts (Baumann et al., 2016. p. 35). To conclude this section tattooed individuals are still very much stigmatized in the workplace. As mentioned above women tend to be more stigmatized than males, the next section will give a brief glimpse into the gender bias of tattooing. Using Thompson's view points helps to implement a female perspective that is very important in this subject matter.

### **Gender Bias**

One of the most significant and inevitable arguments in tattoo research is the gender bias between women and men when acquiring tattoos. As Thompson writes, "[s]ince tattoos are considered masculine, men who are heavily tattooed are deemed more acceptable, but women who have multiple tattoos may be deemed inappropriate for their gender roles" (Thompson, 2015. p. 94). Therefore, Thompson explains that women facing different expectations based on their gender according to tattoo visibility would be considered gender discrimination (Thompson, 2015. p. 94). This form of discrimination is allowed to proceed based on gender norms tied to current culture. That being said, it seems a bit nonsensical since women now outnumber men as

tattoo collectors (Thompson, 2015. p. 95). Women are stigmatized twice as often as males, once on behalf of tattooed compared to their male counterparts and secondly, based on their gender and cultural norms (Baumann et al., 2016. p. 36). This data is supported by Swami and Furnham study conducted in 2007, which found that women with tattoos are perceived more negatively than their counterparts with tattoos. It is noteworthy to add that women are more likely to get tattoos that can be concealed and men are more likely to get tattoos in locations on their body where they can be readily seen (Fisher, 2002). It can be speculated that it is due to gender discrimination towards women.

There are reasons for wanting tattoos to be visible, including the demonstration of style, identification of a group to which they belong, or to demonstrate rebelliousness (Fisher, 2002). The reason to conceal can come from personal meaning or deeper embedded social stigma (Fisher, 2002); such as gender discrimination mentioned above. The next section will discuss the most in-depth meaning of tattooing according to the self.

### **Normative Body, Self-expression and culture**

*“Tattooed bodies are walking books, which can be read and interpreted” (Leader, 2015).*

Understanding tattooed individuals requires specific awareness, understanding why they have acquired tattoos and how it has impacted them. These points need to be understood before being able to maneuver into the workplace. It is important to understand some of the motivations and influences of the tattooed population and their reasons for getting tattooed in the first place. To a tattooed individual, the physical body is a canvas for the aesthetic value and this is where the body plays out the sociocultural movements (Albin, 2006). Tattoos are an active agent in lived experience, and the narrative that the agency is reinforcing in the telling (Leader, 2015). Body

modification started to instill new and diverse norms into the perception of beauty (Albin, 2006). Within interactions, the pages of the book (tattooed individuals) have aesthetic value and also a narrative content, which includes rich mythological and meaningful cross-cultural content (Leader, 2015). “The narrative is embedded in the ink, its meaning is not only in its origin but also in a deeper sense an instrument in identity formation” (Leader, 2015. p. 429). Later in this chapter I will discuss the motivation for obtaining tattoos.

It is not simply the understanding of the motivation but the consequences that follow these actions. Stripping away the self is one of the major consequences of stigmatization of tattoos. According to Mun, Janigo and Johnson (2012), 30% of their participants expressed that their tattoos resulted in gained confidence and experienced changes in their self-perception (Mun et al., 2012. p. 143). This goes right to say that one of Thompson’s (2015) participants expressed concern that she wished she had more insight on the effects of collecting tattoos at a younger age. Tattoos not only affected her work life but her social life and the life of her children. For example, she would get awful looks when she would volunteer at her children’s school functions (Thompson, 2015). Thus, the persistence of tattoos as a “deviant behaviour” would result in certain individuals suffering backlash and stigmatization. The concept of self-presentation involves an actor’s shaping of his or her behaviour to create a desired impression to others (Jones, Pittman, 1982). If individuals are interested in *managing* their self-presentation, they need to understand the cues that are associated with it, that will help to understand the perception process. Therefore, cues are used to formulate judgment or to make interpretative inferences about the individuals presenting those cues (Livesley, Bromley. 1986). Judging an individual quickly can cause some negative consequences in diverse aspect of one’s life. Judging someone requires two processes of our brains. Conscious strategy makes our brain think about what we’ve

learned about the cues of the individual, and come up with an answer or judgment (Gladwell, 2005). The second strategy is achieved more promptly; our brains are remarkably intelligent and are able to pick up problems almost immediately (Gladwell, 2005). What this means is that our brains can visualize a cue and make judgments quickly. These judgments might be based on tattoos, clothing, hairstyles, race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality and much more. Therefore I believe, if all we know is that the tattooed community is pessimistic, reactive and partakes in deviant behaviour, then that majority is going to judge them based on these assumptions. This is where the shortcoming of information takes the animadversion.

On the other hand, there are still some researchers who work to illustrate the positive attributes of the visibly tattooed population. With the fluctuation in judgment of visibly tattooed individuals it created a “shift in posture about tattoos from deviant to acceptable expression” (Dickson et al., 2014. p. 268). This does not exempt the shortcomings of information society still possesses. Despite the findings of Dickson et al. (2014), research still demonstrates that tattoos are continuously “in limbo” (Dickson et al., 2014). What this means is that the stigma around tattoos are always revolving. When an individual believes that tattoos are accepted (such as now with all the social media and the publicity tattoos receive), it may not always be the case for all tattooed individuals. Therefore, how can this society make a legitimate judgment with what is essentially false information? With the current rise in tattoos popularity, there is often the misconception that the tattooed population is no longer a stigmatized group; this is a false notion. “In the labeling theory, having a tattoo or piercing is considered to be primary deviance” (Dukes, Stein, 2011. p. 1549). To explain future primary deviance is negative reaction from society to a behaviour or action outside the norm of societal rules and that will therefore take the form of stigma and discrimination (Goffman, 1963). In result it would conclude that tattooed individuals

are “freak shows” (Bell, 1999). The labeling process would apply primarily to individuals with visible tattoos (Dukes, Stein, 2011). It is crucial to understand that the labeling process applies much less to individuals who conceal their tattoos (Dukes, Stein, 2011). Cynical reactions to primary deviance by society can take forms of stigma and discrimination (Dukes, Stein, 2011). With this being said stigma does not just appear without having a factual base, there needs to be some sort of event and/or behaviour that occurs to create said stigma at one time or another. This is demonstrated previously with Goffman (1963) explanation of the origination of stigma. “This is evidence that stigma is based on stereotyping behaviour” (Dickson et al., 2014, p. 274). With the public’s misconception that most tattoos are a sign of deviant behaviour, it removes much of the communication value that tattoos can actually carry. In Albin’s (2006) research, he indicates that having body modifications (tattoos and/or piercings), self-cutting and cosmetic surgery all had in common that they revolved around sexual attraction, self-image and finding expression in bodily action (Albin, 2006). Lane’s (2014) research also touched on the expression of sexual attraction and self-image, but indicated that this information was false and should not be considered a moral dilemma Keelan’s (2010) result indicates that those with tattoos are more likely to have several sexual partners (as cited in Lane, 2014). The information provided above can help conserve the antagonistic mindset that some individuals in society still bears.

Another factor that was often examined by researchers was school attendance and outcomes. Tattoos being associated with delinquent behaviour made a direct link low school attitudes and educational aspiration (Dukes, Stein, 2011). Silver et al. (2011) mentioned that adolescents with tattoos are less likely than their peers to attend college (Lane, 2014). The reason I mention education is the persistent judgment that tattooed individuals are perceived as uneducated. It is also paramount that we notice this type of research helps to preserve the

antagonistic attitudes that are often aimed at tattooed individuals. This is due to society not realizing that tattoos are often in motion. Their definition might change from culture to culture, individual to individual. Making a general assumption about tattooed individuals can create a negative impact with no factual basis.

## **Self-Presentation**

As we get up in the morning, we get dressed and do our daily routine showing people who we are by the way we dress, behave, and interact. A study done by Jung Mee Mum, Kristy A. Janigo and Kim K. P. Johnson explains that self-presentation can be described as a process individuals use to shape their behaviour to create a desirable impression to others (Mum et al., 2012). This study briefly discusses Goffman (1959) and Livesley and Bromley (1986) in the following approach. Goffman<sup>4</sup> (1959) concept of self-presentation is what will fuel this next section. The importance of self-presentation and how everyday details about the individual's behaviour allow others to make inferences about the motivation that underlies those behaviours (Mum, et al., 2012). Throughout life individuals are thought to control their behaviour to represent a desired attribute and to try and formulate the way that others see them (Goffman, 1959). People will generally manage their self-presentation with dress cues, the meaning of dress cues that form the foundation of other inferences, as well as having an understanding of the individual perception process (Mum et al., 2012). Livesley and Bromley's (1986) study works with teenagers and their understanding of self-presentation. Both these authors explain that self-presentation starts with cue selection; cue selection can be gestures, body language, facial expressions or articles of dress (Mum et al., 2012). The individuals observing others will pick the

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<sup>4</sup> Goffman as discussed by Mum, Kristy A. Janigo and Kim K. P. Johnson in their work "Tattoo and the self."

cues that are most noticeable to them. Tattoos can often be very visible and become a very dominant cue. Which will lead to those individuals to making an interpretive inference about the person being observed. Any additional attributes will be used to make interpretative inferences, resulting the individual observing can make assumptions about social class, this assumption can flow through to family members around the observed individuals (Mum et al., 2012). In conclusion, the observer can now shape their behaviour relative to the observed individuals.

Now putting both of these concepts together both authors agree that to communicate specific known attributes about themselves and consequently attempt to manage others' perceptions and behaviour. These concepts are very relevant in this thesis. A tattoo can communicate a message to the observing individuals and therefore changes their respective behaviours. I believe with the knowledge of both authors that it becomes a little clearer that individuals will stigmatize visibly tattooed individuals based on their images sported by the observed individual. Again I stand that not all visibly tattooed individual will be stigmatized and not all non tattooed individual will stigmatize others. The notion here is that tattoos can create a visible cue that may be distracting due to it's underlining history. It is not only the tattoo itself but sometimes the imagery and design can be the distraction.

### *Imagery and Design*

It is also known that imagery and design are bases for stigmatization. According to Fisher (2002);

*“On a deeper level, however, social and cultural homogeneity did not unite the tattooed, for the subject matter and aesthetics style of the tattoos created a fault—line that divided the classes” (Fisher, 2002. p. 94).*

One of the main focus points in my research is to comprehend what the tattoo means to the individuals who are sporting them, not to the individuals who are viewing them. The reason

this becomes important is because the intended value or message can be disrupted due to the perception of the observer. As mentioned before there is not set truth to an image, the meaning is in the eye of the beholder. Another aspect of tattooing is culture. Even though I did not focus on the cultural aspect of tattooing, it is worth mentioning its importance.

*“This physical appropriation of another culture was seen as a class commodity in which one’s social standing could be based on the consumption of other cultures form of what I call cultural cannibalism. Thus, the design of the tattoo was crucial for sending specific class messages for the wealthy, white tattoo designs were generally chosen based on personal experiences or characteristics among the working class” (Fisher, 2002. p. 95).*

The Maori people consider dark black lines (tribal) as a cultural significant tattoo. Even though Maori tattoos have been culturally appropriated, there are still individuals out there that hold that cultural significance. This makes judging a tattoo based on personal assumption difficult to pinpoint accurately.

It is clear that not many individuals take the time to process what the tattoo might mean to the tattooed individual (Leader, 2015). Regardless of whether tattoos are a visible mainstream sign or an obscure design, nothing should be known for as a fact before asking the individual. It is not always considered that tattooing can be used as a therapeutic coping strategy, therefore obtaining a therapeutic value to the individual. Tattoos can provide relief after traumatic events. This will be discussed in depth later in this chapter. It is important to consider what the tattoos might actually do for the individuals that are obtaining them. Due to tattoos always being in a flux, having one concrete opinion on tattooing can be troublesome.

*Kosut (2006) writes: “The act of tattooing permanently reinscribes the living body—thinking, breathing, sweating, wrinkling—with a type of agency that is ongoing and inexhaustible, as compared with the consumption and display of sartorial body modifications that are, by their nature, ephemeral and disembodied. Tattoos invite a level of engagement*

*because they become a permanent addition to the body/self” (Kosut, 2006. p. 1042).*

This goes to substantiate that tattoos are much more profound than the general public tend to believe and that it is imperative to recall that the only individual who has the key to the question about the image and the design is the beholder. When it comes to the world of work, management individuals are the people that are going to influence visibly tattooed individuals the most. This is due to the importance of money in everyday life. Management should always be conscious that they do not hold the answers to whom the individual truly is at first glance and dismissing someone from employment based on this assumption could be the cause of a wrongful hire; meaning hiring the wrong person for the job based on appearance.

Tattoos should never be read with your thoughts in mind, an individual should always try and put someone else shoes on their feet to be able to try and grasp what that tattoo means in any sense. This is confirmed by Pritchard (2000) quote indicating that if we constantly read tattoos based on their societal and culture inscription may cause some issues in having an accurate opinion or grasp on who the individual is. “It may well be, however, that to read the tattoo simply as a metaphor for the inscription of culture or society on the body, as an assignment, impression or shaping of external social and cultural contexts on individuals” (Pritchard, 2000. p. 331).

Individuals could also use their tattoos as a communication method (Doss, Hubbard, 2009). When an individual has multiple tattoos, the message can get a little blurred because there is a lot of sensory information for the public to absorb (Doss, Hubbard, 2009). The public could try and decode the many tattoos at once and in result having the incorrect message that the visibly tattooed individual is trying to convey. The more the tattoos are visible, the more the person wants to communicate a message (Doss, Hubbard, 2009). Having one single tattoo could

be much easier to decode. As previously mentioned the more visible a tattoo, the more the individual has little concern for the public's opinion. It is not always about the placement, but the deeper meaning behind the tattoo. Tattoos have much more power to the individuals sporting them than what people believe. Tattoos can also empower and give self-determination to individuals (Pritchard, 2000).

In a study done by Kosut (2000) she interviewed tattooed participants and asked them both about their tattoos and their meaning. One participant, a male aged 25, indicated that his tattoos were a rejection of mainstream society and that they were his way of showing personal success (Kosut, 2000). Another respondent, a female aged 23, indicated that her tattoos reminded her of the historical freak show era (Kosut, 2000). A male, aged 26 indicated that his tattoos were a self-portrait and how he saw himself in different stages of life (Kosut, 2000). "I used my body and tattoos to put memories in case I ever forget them," said a male, aged 27 (Kosut, 2000. p. 94). To identify the turning point in life, said a female, age unknown (Kosut, 2000). With all that being said, bodies are socially constructed through culture, "those with tattoos are mindful of not just the surface of their bodies, but also their physicality relates to their own being" (Kosut, 2000. p. 96). To conclude this section the previous testimony indicates the various ways in which a tattoo can be used. This goes with the previous statement that tattoos can be so very fluent and constantly changing.

Everyone in Kosut's study had a different reason for their images and design, in other words, had different reasons for their tattoos, period.

### **Stigma and judgment in the workplace**

*"It's common knowledge that tattoos are regarded as highly unprofessional" (Ellis, 2014. p. 106).*

Tattoos are not seen in a professional fashion and can often cause discomfort to the individual sporting them. In result this can create a negative atmosphere in the workplace. “How even her tattoos have caused her emotional stress, nonetheless, by directly encountering the gaze of others,” (Kosut, 2000. p. 86). Before embarking on this section, it is vital to remember that there is a paucity in the information and that this research hopes to affix information on the subject what I mean here is that the knowledge has been very linear and should be circular. The Workplace is the main location for this research. It is quite evident that if society has a pessimistic behaviour in general it will be a crossover into the workplace. “Anti-social archetypes that are associated with the presence of tattoos” (Kosut, 2000. p. 85). Leading to stigmatization and judgment of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. With tattoos being brought into the mainstream audience and that popularity targeting young adults; a new challenge presents itself for management staff (Timming, 2015). More specifically “it would appear that significant bias exists against the employment of persons with visible tattoos in the hospitality, beauty, retail and office sector” (Timming, 2015. p. 68). This research also indicates that 30% of the participants surveyed would employ a tattooed individual (Bekhor et al., 1995). Andrew Timming (2015) research using 25 interviews, one of the results indicated was that most participants that were in the management position concealed negative attitudes towards job candidates with visible tattoos (Timming, 2015). One manager indicated that even though he took pride in his own tattoos that were concealed, he believed that individuals with visible tattoos were unemployable and a lower class or persons living on welfare (Bekhor et al., 1995). This also an accurate representation of my own research results. A non-tattooed owner/operator of a liquor store indicated how much he hates tattoos and finds them fairly horrific (Timming, 2015). The question still remains, why does a majority of managers still indicate that individuals who

have tattoos are either delinquent and/or unfavorable characters? Even with the popularity of tattoos, they are still taboo among this group (Fisher, 2002). Thompson (2015) will help us to expand our notions of workplace judgment in an in-depth manner in her book *Covered in Ink*, discussed later in this chapter.

In the early stages, the military condemned tattoos and claimed that tattoos were a public health hazard (Fisher, 2002). It was also said that it would negatively impact the soldier's life after they were released back into civilian life. The stigma related to tattoos did not confine itself to the army personnel, but also stigmatized anyone who acquired them.

For those with visible tattoos, once hired, maintaining successful employment means not showing tattoos, therefore, feeling inauthentic (Ellis, 2014). It is important to get clothes that fit, fit means being able to cover tattoos, making them invisible at all time (Ellis, 2014). Aimee Dars Ellis (2014) says: "Even heavily tattooed individuals can appear normal (Ellis, 2014, p.105)" (by "appear normal" Ellis means wearing the "proper" clothing); using the words "appear normal" is using a particular *normative* discourse that my study attempts to put to an end. This construct of "inauthentic" and "authentic" do not just apply to individuals looking for employment but also individuals who are experiencing workplace policy changes and new management (Ellis, 2014). Many of the participants she interviewed indicated that they believed tattooed individuals make more bad decisions; they were seen in a more negative light than individuals with no tattoos, tattooed individuals party more and they do not care about what others think (Ellis, 2014). This goes to show the social understanding that is still perpetuated to this day. A management participant indicated that her company often asked people to cover up their tattoos, that they were extremely unprofessional and that first impression that tattoos were a person's calling card (Ellis, 2014). A study conducted by Swanger in 2005 found that 86.67% of management

participants conveyed negative feelings towards tattoos in the workplace (Swanger, 2006). This conveys the message that tattooing still has a negative outlook on the world of the workplace.

As mentioned above, tattoos can prompt many different chain reactions in the course of an individual's life and it is important to consider how these events shape the identity of the individuals, therefore creating identity markers such as tattoos. Tattoos are not only seen as a physical marker for others to use as cues, but also serve as markers of self-identity and self-determination for the tattoo proprietor. Appearance is a central element affecting his or her self-definition, identity and interaction with others (Sanders, 1988). Which means that the appearance of the individual plays an important part in the hiring process. Physical attractiveness is one of the biggest factors noticed by hiring management, and tattoos diminish the physical attractiveness of individuals (Ruetzier et al., 2012). As stated previously the appearance of an individual correlate strongly with tattoos. The more that a work environment accepts tattoos; the more it accepts the person who carries them, ergo better results in the workplace (Ellis, 2014). There is also the counterargument that the applicant is the one to control the way they appear to others (Ruetzier et al., 2012). This arises a new question if holding back of getting tattooed interferes with the person's identity, should individuals consider concealing who they are? Beverly Thompson (2015) book is explained throughout this chapter, were she explains how concealing tattoos can mean concealing one's identity. It is paramount to note that even though this study may be dated, it is still relevant to current research results including mine. Choosing to mark one's body in this way changes the tattooees experience of his or her physical self and has significant potential for altering social interaction (Sander, 1988). Since tattooees are deemed to be responsible for their "deviant" physical condition, the mark is especially discrediting (Sanders, 1988). What this entitles is that a manager may use tattoos to discredit the individual

who is applying for a position. Even though tattoos are seen as an exclusionary marker fellow tattooees commonly recognize and acknowledge their shared experience, decorative tastes and relationship to conventional society (Sander, 1988). Tattooees often times have a common bond and understand amongst each other. This creates a common identity amongst visibly tattooed individuals. There is a problem with this notion because a person's motivation for obtaining a tattoo often changes from individual to individual. This so-called common identity could in fact help perpetuate the negative notion society holds against visibly tattooed individuals.

According to Leader (2015) and her project at Florida Atlantic University<sup>5</sup> the biggest concern for her and her team was “being denied a job because of visible tattoos, it’s not illegal but it still happens” (Leader, 2015. p. 435). Furthermore, she found that even though there is a lot of media coverage, and a subsequent increase in the popularity of tattoos, there is still much prejudice and stereotyping surrounding tattoos (Leader, 2015). There is still disapproval encompassing tattooing, which justifies the discrimination (Leader, 2015). The rise in popularity often creates a false assumption that tattoos are widely accepted by general society, which is a common misunderstanding. When looking at the media there are conflicting statements even from the most tattooed social lights we know. Kat Von D one of the biggest tattoo artists in the media carries a tattoo concealer as part of her makeup line, which can be purchased at *Sephora*’s (Ellis, 2014). Hence, I question if tattoos are so popular then why does one of the most famous tattoo artists on the market carry a tattoo concealer?

Even *Forbes Magazine* (2001) released an article indicating a research that they conducted revealing that negative perceptions are caused by *any* image, and their interviewees told applicants to cover their tattoos (Ruetzier et al., 2012). This clearly indicates that tattoos,

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<sup>5</sup> Project is to combat the stigma that still adheres and the discrimination that endangers the futures of our students (Leader, 2015)

culture and stigma are much more complex and not so black and white as individual previously thought. Even when doing research on tattoos, researchers can encounter resistance from the general public. A side note that I found very interesting about Leader's project is the resistance she encountered from the community. Leader (2015) writes, "We were surprised at the resistance and sometimes downright hostility to this topic" (Leader, 2015. p. 436). This study was published in 2015. This demonstrates that even in recent study tattoos still hold resistance in society and that this is not a old model. The next section could be one of the most crucial in relation to the argument regarding the meaning and importance of acknowledging the fluidity and diverse meaning of tattoos.

### **Tattoo Motivation and Therapeutic Values**

One of the most foremost arguments in this study is that tattoos hold more value than it's relation to deviance. The next authors will discuss the motivation and therapeutic values of tattooing, generating a greater understanding into the minds of visibly tattooed individuals.

Laura Buss and Karen Hodges (2017) in their recent article *Marked: Tattoo as an Expression of Psyche* they discuss the motivation behind tattooing. Buss and Hodges (2017) discuss five main motivations behind tattooing: self-empowerment, belonging, memorialization, messages to oneself and pain transformed into beauty. Self-empowerment refers to "being able to control their own bodies, making highly personal choices about what they expressed" (Buss, Hodges, 2017, p. 20). Belonging speaks of "belonging to one particular group" (Buss, Hodges, 2017, p. 20), military tattoos expressing where combat regiment. The memorialization is increasingly seen, in this sense it is getting a tattoo to commemorate a person or event (Buss, Hodges, 2017). This type of tattoo will be discussed in detail in the results of this thesis. A

message to oneself indicates a message that the tattooed individual does not want to forget (Buss, Hodges, 2017), this could be a message of self-worth such as “be strong.” Pain transformed into beauty takes a painful event or situation and transforms it into something beautiful on the skin (Buss, Hodges, 2017). An example of this type of tattoo could be battling cancer and being a survivor. This study further pushes the comprehension that there is much more to know about tattooing and the individuals wearing them. The therapeutic value of tattoos is only recently come to light. The next authors will help shed light on this circumstance. “Little focus has been placed on understanding what maintains engagement in mainstream tattooing and what the potential impacts are for individuals” (Kay, Brewis, 2016, p. 351).

Hannah Kay and Claire Brewis (2016) in their recent article Understanding Tattooing from an occupational science perspective discuss how tattooing have been adapted for individual needs and to create positive emotions (Kay, Brewis, 2016). As previously mentioned, “tattooing may also be a way for individuals to deal with life experiences as they can represent psychological and emotional healing” (Kay, Brewis, 2016, p. 353). In the result section of this research you will encounter several individuals who have obtained tattoos for this exact reason. The next section is an arbitration case from Canada that discusses tattooed nurses and the Ottawa Civic Hospital dispute regarding tattoos.

### **Arbitration Case**

The hospital argued that older patients were uncomfortable being treated staff with piercings and tattoos and it was their obligation to protect the welfare of the patients (Doorey, 2013). Given the stigma outlined above, one would expect that there must be consequences that follow the stigmatization of employees, or action employees can take to fight for the right to

have tattoos in the workplace. For a long time, there was not much being done from a workplace arbitration standpoint, until 2013. The decision called *The Ottawa Hospital*, involved the hospital wanting to put a policy in place enabling employees to show “large tattoos” and heavy piercings (Doorey, 2013). The arbitrator, Lorne Slotnick argued that the decision had to uphold to KVP testing (a previous decision called *KVP Co. Ltd*) (Doorey, 2013). Slotnick stated from the KVP decision:

*“A rule unilaterally introduced by the company, and not subsequently agreed to by the union, must satisfy the following requisites:*

- 1. It must not be inconsistent with the collective agreement.*
- 2. It must not be unreasonable.*
- 3. It must be clear and unequivocal.*
- 4. It must be brought to the attention of the employee affected before the company can act on it.*
- 5. The employee concerned must have been notified that a breach of such rule could result in his discharge if the rule is used as a foundation for discharge.*
- 6. Such rule should have been consistently enforced by the company at the time it was introduced.”*

—Doorey, 2013

The arbitrators proved that the patient care was not at risk. Even though the hospital argued that KVP was outdated, the arbitrator argued that the rules were unclear and ambiguous.

The hospital argued that older patients were uncomfortable being treated staff with piercings and tattoos and it was their obligation to protect the welfare of the patients (Doorey, 2013). “Mr. Slotnick compared the case to a grievance by Toronto-area firefighters 40 years ago over a ban on sideburns. As sideburns were controversial in 1972, so tattoos and piercings are now. Anyone who has taken a stroll on a summer day knows that tattoos are no longer confined to sailors, stevedores and strippers” (Blackwell, 2013. p.UN).

The final vote was in support of the Civic Hospital Staff. The main reason was the lack of evidence of any legitimate business/service related harm associated with tattoos, piercings or lab coats during off hours (Doorey, 2013).

Even though this was not a human rights case, arbitrator Lorne Slotnick gave a very good argument to this effect.

*“This is not a human rights case. But there are echoes of old human rights debates here. The employer’s argument is explicitly based on its willingness to accept and acquiesce to patients’ perceived prejudices and stereotypes about tattoos and piercings, even as it offers no evidence that these have any impact on health outcomes. The employer suggests in its argument that the union wishes to ‘force’ patients to deal with hospital workers flaunting their self-expression through tattoos and piercings. But while tattoos and piercings are not protected under human rights laws, the evidence in this case was clear that many of the employees regard those aspects of their appearance as an important part of their identity. The hospital could not and would not accede to the wishes of a patient who might be uncomfortable with a care provider based on the employee’s race or ethnic identity, even though some patients might harbour those types of prejudices. However, the hospital seems willing to comply with other types of prejudices and that has no link to the quality of the health care received by the patient.”*

—Lorne Slotnick (2013)

Another arbitration case from the Chicago Police Department was fielded by three Chicago police officers, a federal lawsuit against the department in 2015. They challenged its new policy stating that uniformed officers needed to cover their tattoos (Gorner, 2015). The new policy stated that body branding and tattoos could not be visible on officers while on duty, or representing the department, whether in uniform, conservative business attire, or casual dress (Gorner, 2015). If tattoos were on the neck, face or hands they had to be covered up by skin tone bandages or tattoo cover-up tape. The three officers indicated that it went against their First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and expression; all three officers served in the military and had tattoos on their arms (Gorner, 2015). Two of the three officers had tattoos of St. Michael

the patron and protector of police, mariners, paratroopers and sickness, which held spiritual significant (Gorner, 2015). A number of officers spoke out against the move, saying their tattoos are part of their identities (Gorner, 2015). It is sad to say that in October of 2015 a federal judge threw out this case. This just goes to show that even if visible tattoos contain a positive message, showing support for their fellow officers, it is still not acceptable to show tattoos in the workplace. It also demonstrates that in some jurisdictions tattoos are still widely seen as a “deviant” symbol and not yet seen as mainstream and accepted in the workplace. Thompson’s book *Covered In Ink* has opened a wide range of knowledge and intuition into the world of tattooing in the workplace. Thompson (2015) argument is that tattoos should not be judged based on previous knowledge of tattooing. That the world of tattooing has changed greatly over the years and society needs to follow in order to diminish or even eradicate stigmatization and judgments of visibly tattooed individuals (Thompson, 2015). Thompson’s (2015) work adheres remarkably to my work in this thesis. My strong belief is that visibly tattooed individuals should be observed as a puzzle, having a self-presentation that is simply different than others. Not so black and white as it seems. Visibly tattooed individuals simply go about identity and managing/coping with life in a different way then societal norms accept. In the next few sections I took what I believed, to be one the most relevant part of Thompson’s (2015) book to help alleviate some of the misconceptions of visibly tattooed individuals. One restriction about Thompson (2015) book is that her population was female. The reason that I used Thompson in such great length is due to her advanced understanding of tattoos in the workplace and of stigma and discrimination. Her book encompasses many diverse aspects, instead of one viewpoint. The next section will discuss the world of tattoos in the workplace.

## **Tattoo Discrimination and the Work of the Workplace**

Often times when speaking in a public place and we hear discrimination in the workplace, individuals will often associate it to race, class, culture and much more. In my own experience stigmatization towards tattoos in the workplace is often justified with explanation such as “I would not want tattoos showing in my restaurant, I do not want people thinking we hire criminals.” In result it is often difficult to think of tattoos in the workplace being associated with discrimination. The word discrimination is often not associated with tattoos in the workplace. It is often said that it is not illegal for employers to ask that tattoos not be shown in the workplace in consequence it is not discrimination and will not be accountable for their actions (Thompson, 2015). Mind you the concept of discrimination is distinction (Thompson, 2015). Thompson (2015) says, discrimination against a particular category or type of person is only illegal against the few categories included in Title VII; everything else, such as being overweight, unattractive or tattooed, is fair game (Thompson, 2015. p. 90). Please note that Thompson (2015) is in the United States but is being used in principle. Keep this in mind that even though it is not against the law, it is still discrimination indicate Thompson (Thompson, 2015).

In the Thompson (2015) study, one particular concern stood out, hiding or covering tattoos in the workplace. Before tattooing, the tattoo artist would advise the participants of the repercussion neck, face and hands tattoos could have in the work environment (Thompson, 2015). This also indicates that even tattoos artists are aware of the stigmatization surrounding tattoos. A study conducted by the Harris Poll (2012) indicated that one in five adults in the U.S. has a tattoo and for the first time in a long time, women are more likely to have tattoos than men (Thompson, 2015. p. 99). These statistics have also been supported in previous research

mentioned above. This has a very heavy importance in terms of gender bias, for a long time tattooing was believed to be only for males, and seen as a masculine attribute, this is no longer the case (Thompson, 2015). On the other side, one quarter of non-tattooed people described tattooed people as less intelligent, less healthy, and more rebellious (Thompson, 2015). Overall this may indicate how the managers may perceive tattoos in the workplace. Another survey conducted by Vault.com indicated that 42% of managers would have a lower opinion of tattooed individuals, and 58% said they would be less likely to offer that individual the job (Thompson, 2015. p. 99). This data set goes to explain exactly why tattooed individuals still have a very difficult time in the workplace, and how relevant stigmatization and judgment are in society today. Even though there is a rise in the popularity of tattoos. It is not only the job that holds the stigma but the hiring process. It is evident that the job interview process is the very first impression an individual will make on management.

### **Visible Tattoos and the Job Interview**

As this study evolves it has become relevant that visibly tattooed individuals are going to experience prejudice in the employment market. The participants in the Thompson (2015) study indicates that they would not go to a job interview with visible tattoos. Marisa Kakoulas a legal theorist brought to my attention that Thompson's (2015) Covered In Ink book pinpoints that a good percentage of control over appearance is exercised at the hiring stage, because this is where the manager chooses if the person fits into the work environment (Thompson, 2015). In other words, this means do tattoos fit the workplace. And if the tattoos are covered then does the individual applying for the position fit into the workplace environment, in relation does their appearance fit in with the appearance of the workplace. As a result, due to the number of applicants, which varies it, would generally be unknown to the tattooed applicant if he/she were

being rejected because of the tattoos or not. Thompson (2015) implies, she knew of someone working in the Law field and had the chance to interview her. “While she fights against this prejudice in the workplace, she also realized the power of appearance that is given to employers through the legal system” (Thompson, 2015. p. 100).

### **Covering Up Identity**

Due to the discrimination and attitudes towards tattooed individuals, there is no doubt that individuals know when and where it is appropriate to conceal tattoos or not, one place being worked. There are certain areas of work that visible tattoos are fitting, such as constructions or mechanics (Thompson, 2015). This does not mean they are generally accepted but more commonly seen. Certain areas of work may or may not allow tattooing to be visible in the workplace, such as retail or fast food. For example, McDonald’s has a “no tattoo” policy and a uniform, as a result, any tattoos that are visible while the uniform that is worn are not acceptable (Thompson, 2015, p.103). There is a list of tattoo-friendly workplaces that can be obtained on the Internet. Some of those places are Hot Topic, IKEA, Home Depot, FedEx-Delivery, Best Buy, Lowe’s and Google (Thompson, 2015, p.103). It is important to remember that the individual hiring can still have a bias against tattoos that can create certain difficulties for the visibly tattooed individual.

The main action that visibly tattooed people do to protect their employment is to cover up at work. This is the most concrete way to avoid stigmatization. There is a situation that tattooed individual’s face that is often forgotten or overlooked. Covering up tattoos is often covering up an individual’s identity. I realize that this section has previously been discussed, due to Beverly Thompson flow of argument I have chosen to put most of her work together.

Certain participants that Thompson (2015) interviewed for her studies indicated that they had a problem with covering up tattoos in the workplace.

*Elisa is a participant who struggles with tattoos in the workplace. She is twenty-two and has recently graduated from Florida International University with a degree in women's studies. Elisa brought out some of her work shirts to demonstrate how her sleeves are not always long enough to cover her tattoos, and music is her passion. A fact that she wants to commemorate and carry with her wherever she goes. Music is central to her identity. But this identity needed to remain covered at work, even though she also sports bright red bands on her otherwise black hair. Elisa was working as a secretary at the university, and so she was already struggling as a recent graduate to separate herself from the students. Her dyed hair and tattoos added to the difficulty, as her appearance would be more associated with being a student than a department secretary. (Thompson, 2015, p.104)*

Dressing professionals also adds to commanding authority, tattooed individuals are not always seen and respected in that aspect. One of Thompson's (2015) participants indicated that when her coworkers found out about her tattoos, her coworkers felt that she had *deceived* them by not showing who she truly was. This creates the question whether an individual should conceal their tattoos after hours. Thompson (2015) comment that the discussion of tattoos in the workplace should be changed from ink on the skin to job performance. Simply because you have tattoos does not mean you are not able to perform your duties in the best of your ability and sometimes better than others. It is crucial to my studies that this be fully understood because as I have mentioned before despite the social developments we have achieved, visibly tattooed individuals are still greatly stigmatized in the workplace.

This explains how identity has been impacted in the workplace for tattooed individuals and how important it is to stop the discrimination and judgment. This story exhibits how tattooed individuals have to be vigilant and always guarded to make sure their tattoos do not peek out in the workplace (Thompson, 2015). Part of being guarded also means being careful with the material in which the individual's clothes are fabricated with (Thompson, 2015). Making sure

that the tattoo cannot poke through in any way. This ensures that other colleagues and clients are not aware of the tattoos. This makes clothing options much more difficult. In result it is very difficult for people who have tattoos on their hands, necks, face and forearm to be in the workplace (Thompson, 2015). Conceals them would consider makeup or makeup tap. The participants in Thompson (2015) say that they underestimated how much attention they would receive due to having tattoos. When Thompson (2015), questioned her heavily tattooed participants if they enjoyed the attention they would receive in public, they answered, “No Way!” (Thompson, 2015, p.106). There was a very small portion of participants that indicated they would not have a problem talking to strangers if they walked up to them in public. Many individuals believed that tattooed individuals do it for attention but that is not quite the case. Tattoos can and most often times are very personal, even though it is displayed on the skin.

Covering up can also present a challenge when individuals get together outside the workplace. This could also mean covering up at a summer event or at the pool. It makes it very difficult when the weather is warmer and visibly tattooed individuals are not sure if they should suffer from the heat or keep their full identity covered (Thompson, 2015).

This segment demonstrates how covering up is not as simple as non-tattooed individuals may believe. Tattooing can affect much more of self-identity than the general public may seem. It can cause psychological consequences to the visibly tattooed individual, alongside discomfort in the workplace.

As mentioned before having visible tattoos steps outside the normative box that has been created in society. “The largest impact of appearance-based discrimination falls upon those who step outside the bounds of a normative appearance based on White, middle-class, clean-cut, and attractive standards” (Thompson, 2015, p.110). These standards are obviously displayed in the

media, fashion ads, television and movies (Thompson, 2015). The consequences of discrimination are the emotional toll of needing to cover one's authentic self, to resemble someone she/he is not (Thompson, 2015).

### **Towards Workplace Tolerance**

Thompson (2015) gives an example that would help make visibly tattoos in the work place that much more acceptable. Thompson (2015) gives examples of individuals wearing t-shirts that have political slogans printed on them and were told they could not wear them. It was at a later date that the decision was made that these individuals could in fact wear the clothing because of the First Amendment. Students wearing the face of a deceased were asked to take the shirt off, the shirt was also banned because the school did not want to be seen as supporting suicide, the death was later ruled an accident, therefore the students could wear the shirt (Thompson, 2015). A student wore a shirt that said "Jesus is not a Homophobe" and was banned, as a result the family of the student sued the school (Thompson, 2015). Another woman wore a shirt that said "If I wanted the government in my womb I would have fucked a senator" was kicked off an American Airline Flight (Thompson, 2015). These examples go hand in hand with tattooed individuals in the workplace because often individuals get judged and stigmatized based on their tattoos, which often can be a statement similar to the t-shirt of the woman in the airline. Self-expressions are established not only through fashion but also through body modification such as tattooing (Thompson, 2015). There is something society can do, even though labour unions are becoming weaker (Thompson, 2015), unions can help by protecting the employees by making any changes to dress codes or tattoo policies that are made and approved by the union (Thompson, 2015). It is important to remember that labour laws are won through the struggle of social movements which demand rights they not "given" without pressure (Thompson, 2015).

p.117). One reoccurring argument much like the one made in the Ottawa decision is that it makes clients or patients uncomfortable.

One common argument that I still hear, “It’s for the customer, because they feel uncomfortable” (Thompson, 2015). Also, I’ve heard, “the customer is priority and customers want clean-cut individuals.” Thompson (2015) mentions that this argument has been used for a long period of time to uphold separation. Thompson (2015) explains that even if customers are uncomfortable they will get used to it, just like everything else in the past that needed to change and has changed. In my opinion, this is very true. Seeing more heavily visibly tattooed individuals in the professional workplace would help change the perception of visibly tattooed individuals (Thompson, 2015). This would be a step towards further social change.

## Chapter three: Theoretical Consideration

This chapter will discuss the following scholars and their theories. Erving Goffman wrote *Stigma* in 1963, which speaks of body stigmatization and how the general public perceived and interactions with a stigmatized person. Dr. Peter L. Berger and Dr. Thomas Luckmann wrote *Identity Theory* in 1966, this theory discusses how individuals perceive their reality and interactions they encounter. The next theorist is Charles Cooley, who wrote *The Looking Glass Self* in 1902. This theory explains how individuals see themselves in the eyes of the general public. The last scholar is Michael Atkinson, who wrote, tattooed, *The Sociogenesis of a Body Art* in 2004. This book discusses how Canadian society perceives tattoos, how individuals are perceived as deviant, and how tattoos can change the life of the individual with tattoos.

Erving Goffman: Stigma

Before it is possible to undergo his theory of stigma, it is important to understand Goffman's perceived comprehension of the word stigma.

*“The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.” (Goffman, 1963, p. 1)*

This is a very strong statement in terms of understanding the stigmatization visibly tattooed individuals face. As Goffman (1963) suggest visual aids were once placed upon people to indicate something deviant and to stay away from these individuals. This may be true when discussing visibly tattooed individuals, tattoos can be described as the visual aid that society utilizes to place judgment. With that being said “stigma, then, is really a special kind of

relationship between attribute and stereotypes” (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). Goffman (1963) also indicates that stigma can have two perspectives. First does the individual know that the stigma about him/her is known or second does he believe that no one knows about it (Goffman, 1963). When speaking about visibly tattooed individuals, it can be speculated that most individuals are aware of the stigmatization that surrounds them, on the other hand, it can be speculated and argued that to have visible tattoos one must not put much importance to what others think about themselves. I personally do not agree with this argument, whom you chose to be may not be accepted and hiding who you are may cause consequences to an individual as previously discussed.

The last link that is important to comprehend before moving to Goffman’s other concepts are the link between stigma and tattoos today. In his definition, Goffman indicates that individuals were forced to obtain tattoos. But in today’s society it is a choice. The issue here is not whether tattooed individuals were forced but the understanding behind the tattoos and the interpretation of the public. Just as Goffman’s understanding was that people with tattoos were stigmatized, so are individuals in today’s society. Regardless of being forced or not, the public perceptions appears to be the same. “The common aspect that most definitions of stigma is that it’s dynamic in nature, or the fact that it is embedded and evolving within social interactions, norms, context and values” (Helb, Dovidio, 2005 p.157). This supports Goffman’s understanding of stigma and reinforces the understanding that stigma has not changed greatly in its comprehension. In the next few section visibility of the stigma, personal identity, the self and others, and deviance will be discussed.

## **Visibility**

In this particular study it is fundamental to comprehend Goffman's (1963) explanation of visibility. The question is how well or how badly the stigma adapted to provide means of communicating that the individuals possess it (Goffman, 1963). The more the stigma is visible the more the social identity of the individual is encountered by others (Goffman, 1963). In terms of visibly tattooed individuals, whether they chose to disclose their tattoos or not will indicate what social identity other individuals encounter. The consequence of this may be small but repeated on a daily base that together can be immense (Goffman, 1963). The consequence of repeated stigmatization is displayed by the visibly tattooed participants in this study and will be discussed in the results and discussion section. The visibility of a stigma must be distinguished from its "known-about-ness" (Goffman, 1963. p. 49). When an individual stigma is very visible, his merely contacting others will cause his stigma to be known about (Goffman, 1963). Walking around in the street or going into an establishment needing service can cause the stigma to be known about. After this stage is completed the visibility must be distinguished from one of its particular bases namely obtrusiveness (Goffman, 1963, p.49). The individual having the interaction with the visibly tattooed individuals will form an opinion on this individual. When a stigma is immediately perceivable, it is still important to evaluate how it affects the flow of interactions (Goffman, 1963). These steps will often times affect visibly tattooed individuals the most. Considering how difficult it can be to conceal a heavily tattooed body, especially during the hot days the general public might make a hasty judgment based on the individual's tattoos. This judgment can happen from far away before any interactions take place. This can create consequences to the visibly tattooed individuals that can often be costly, such as the previous examples of the workplace job interview. Lastly, the visible stigma must be disentangled from

certain possibilities of what can be called its “perceived focus” (Goffman, 1963. p. 49). What this means is does the tattoos disqualify him as being normal in societal terms. As mentioned previously, the literature review still indicates that tattoos contain negative connotations and therefore resulting in negative consequences. Goffman (1963) gives ugliness as an example, ugliness will impact primarily social situations, menacing pleasure in the company of others (Goffman, 1963). With all of the discourse around visibly tattooed individuals, an inference statement can be made that this also applies to visibly tattooed individuals. Ergo the stigma does not affect solidarity task but those tasks involving working with others; which is also true for visibly tattooed individuals and the workplace that may or may not accept visible tattoos.

### **Personal Identity**

Before beginning to explain Goffman’s take on personal identity, it is paramount to know what Goffman defines as personal identity. Personal identity is a “mark or identity pegs and the unique combination of life history items that come to be attached to the individuals with the help of these pegs for his identity” (Goffman, 1963. p. 57). In other words, the identity that others see. As Goffman’s (1963) analysis of the interactions of stigma and what he calls normal people has never required both individuals to get to know each other on a personal level, which makes sense. Stigma management is something individuals are faced with every day, especially visibly tattooed individuals. Stigma is based on stereotyping or “profiling” of what individuals in society call “norms” of conduct and of the person character. Someone with visible tattoos is going to have to work harder at managing the stigma of the public life (Goffman, 1963). Concealing tattoos can be one way to manage the stigma, depending on the level of the visible tattoos; this may not always be easy or possible. Goffman (1963) mentions something very important regarding the limitation of the visibly tattooed individuals. The limitation of visibly tattooed

individuals in this situation is not physical but psychological. Goffman (1963) indicates that the more individuals with the stigma interact with others, it is possible that others will begin to look past the stigma of the individual. One of the biggest issues surrounding visibly tattooed individuals is that others have a very difficult time looking past the stigma and often are not given the chance for others to get to know them.

There is one caution Goffman (1963) declares which is extremely imperative to acknowledge

*It is more important here, however, to see that the various consequences of making a whole array of virtual assumptions about an individual are clearly present in our dealings with persons with whom we have had a long-standing, intimate, exclusive relationship (Goffman, 1963, p.53).*

There are also historical features that will hinder the relationship with this person, which means there is standardization that everyone anticipates from others regarding their behaviour and nature (Goffman, 1963). This statement can help clarify why individuals in the general public have held on to the long-standing notion that visibly tattooed individuals are deviant and why this pessimistic notion is still relevant today. In other words, making quick judgment on visibly tattooed individual can produce consequences.

There are two important statements to do about personal identity according to Goffman (1963) that need to be discussed. The first, what is true to others about visibly tattooed individuals may not be true to others. The second, tattooing can be known as a positive mark or identity peg.

### **The Self and Its Other**

Sociologically speaking the main issue concerning visibly tattooed individuals or the stigmatized group is their place in social structure; this means the contingencies these individual faces when having social interactions (Goffman, 1963, p.127). Sometimes this cannot be deeply

understood without reference to history, the political development and the current policies of the group (Goffman, 1963). In terms of tattoos it has been a reoccurring issue that individuals return to historical references to make judgment on the visibly tattooed individuals. This is one of the core issues details in this study, due to the change in direction of tattooing it is no longer accurate to link tattooing to one of its historical origins.

In life it is said to have conditions in the social life that everyone shares, a set of normative expectation (Goffman, 1963). When these rules are broken, there needs to be restorative measure but this cannot always be the case with identity norms (Goffman, 1963). One of the main arguments one this research is that tattooed individuals cannot be fully understood simply by looking at them. The failure or success of maintaining norm effects directly on the psychological integrity of the individuals that holds the stigma (Goffman, 1963). This means that social norms can have a psychological impact on the visibly tattooed individuals. As Goffman (1963) says “One can say, then that identity norms breed deviations as well as conformance” (Goffman, 1963. p. 129). Also the case with visibly tattooed individuals, since the norms of beauty and what is considered to be normal, were created tattooed individuals have been left out. These norms of beauty and standards have created visibly tattooed individuals to be deviant.

### **Dr. Peter L. Berger and Dr. Thomas Luckmann: Identity Theory**

The identity theory is not extensive in its length but in its context. Identity is subjective and therefore stands in a dialectical relationship with society. “Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations” (Berger, Luckmann, 1967. p. 173). In regards to tattooing the ideology of tattoos being a deviant behaviour has been shaped through social relationships throughout history. Visibly tattooed

individuals shape their self-concepts based on these social processes, because tattooing is considered abnormal or going against social norms visibly tattooed individual face social repercussions that could affect their self-concept. Berger and Luckmann (1967) acknowledge the significance of history. “Societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge; these histories are, however, made by men with specific identities” (Berger, Luckmann, 1967, p. 173). This statement also brings out the issues of women and the body, which was approached in chapter three. Society has since changed in regards to tattooing, they are no longer condemned to the historical basis of deviant behaviour but used as self-expression, and coping mechanisms. Examples of this will be discussed in chapter five: Results, and chapter six: Discussion and has also been described in chapter three: Literature review. One of the major issues in discussing the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individual is reality. In the next section tattooing in regards to subjective and objective reality will be discussed.

### *Objective and Subjective Reality*

Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe the ongoing relationship between subject and objective reality. The reason this is so vital to the subject matter of tattooing is that there is no concrete evidence that *all* visibly tattooed individuals are deviant. Experience of each individual in society in regards to tattooing is subjective.

*“When the generalized other has been crystallized in consciousness, a symmetrical relationship is established between objective and subjective reality. What is real ‘outside’ corresponds to what is real ‘within.’ Objective reality can readily be ‘translated’ into subjective reality, and vice versa” (Berger, Luckmann, 1967, p. 133).*

Hence the stigma towards visibly tattooed individuals could be seen as subjective reality.

Deduction made from this subjective reality onto visibly tattooed individuals may be the cause of

such strong opinions, in other words, stigma. Berger and Luckmann (1966) express how important it is that when understanding subjective reality it is crucial to understand both sides of the coin, meaning comprehending objective reality as well. As individuals go out into society, they project themselves into the social world but at the same time they internalize that social world as objective (Berger, Luckmann, 1967). Every time a visibly tattooed individual goes out into society both the others and the visibly tattooed individuals are internalizing it as objective reality. For example, if one member of society has a bad experience with a visibly tattooed individual they may internalize this as objective reality, in result creating the beginning of what they may use to stigmatize other visibly tattooed individuals.

In conclusion, objective and subjective reality start at a very early age, once socialization begins, individuals start to understand what is acceptable and what is not, learning the societal dialect (Berger, Luckmann, 1967). I argue here that one may know what society demands of you, but this does not mean it is correct for every individual. As previously mentioned tattoos can create much comfort and support for individuals but in terms of society can create negative consequences. I believe that what individuals know about society and tattoos can be objective in terms of historical significance but in terms of everyday interactions can be subjective.

### **Charles Horton Cooley: Looking-Glass Self Theory**

The Looking Glass Self explains that individuals see themselves in the eyes of others. Cooley's Looking Glass Self is explained in two proposals. First, self-consciousness involves continually monitoring the self from the point of view of others. As Cooley put it, we "live in the minds of others without knowing it" (Scheff, 2005, p. 147). In regards to tattooing this could be perceived as difficult due to the internal struggle of liking oneself and being liked by others. As

mentioned above reality can be subjective and there is no concrete evidence indicating that *all* tattooed individuals are deviant meaning objective reality. If multiple individuals perpetuate that visibly tattooed individuals are deviant, visibly tattooed individuals exposed to this mind set may look at themselves in this respect. The next proposal explains that repercussion of the first proposal. “Second, living in the minds of others, imaginatively, gives rise to real and intensely powerful emotions, either pride or shame” (Scheff, 2005, p. 147). As previously mentioned if tattooed individuals see themselves in the light of others that may potentially discriminate visibly tattooed individuals, it could result in feelings of shame and powerful emotions. This again can create an internal struggle from the visibly tattooed individual. Does this individual choose to be internally happy and content with oneself or give rise to the opinions and demands of society?

### **Michael Atkinson: Tattooed, The Sociogenesis of a Body Art**

Michael Atkinson has written one of the most informative and moving books on tattooing for the Canadian society. It would be absurd not to mention him in this current research. Sociogenesis and personality structures and Life-course transition and Representation: the deviance tightrope is going to be the two focuses of this section.

#### *Sociogenesis and Personality Structures*

While reading Atkinson (2004), it becomes very obvious that “tattooing is best conceptualized as an interdependent social activity” (Atkinson, 2004. p. 129). As previously mentioned I often get the question, “why are you doing your thesis on tattoos, no one cares anymore?” in my own experience I believe this is not accurate. Attitudes do change from geographical location to the next and Atkinson provides a deep understanding into Canadian

attitudes. “As standards of civilized behaviours are promulgated within figurations as normative to buttress ideologically the actions, behaviours and positions of the ruling dominant social codes of conduct are established” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 129). In results personalities are constructed and/or transformed over time and within society. As individuals grow in their society, norms become apparent and there indication that those norms must be followed. With the creation of norms, come the creation of deviance, positive and negative. In result deviance has a negative backlash that we all know as stigmatization. Atkinson (2004) attests that individual must self regulate to avoid facing stigmatization. “Fearing both the formal punishments levied against affective outburst and the social stigma assigned to unbridled behaviour, individuals carefully self-regulate all facets of their public conduct” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 129). This again demonstrates the argument I made earlier, does a visibly tattooed individual become happy with oneself or do they make society happy. Atkinson (2004) mentions one tool that became predominates in society is to control the deviant behaviour was shame. “An important aspect of this personality (-trans) formation process is the extent to which *shame* becomes a constitutive element of self-regulation” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 130). Just like Goffman (1946) talks about shame so does Atkinson (2003).

*“Shame or embarrassment about one’s actions represents a conflict between individual behaviours, social expectations of appropriate behaviours that define and hold together social relationships, and one’s personality structures” (Atkinson, 2003, p.130).*

The reason shame works so well is due to the fact that it is not only an external struggle with the members of society but also an internal struggle and tension with the self. In result individuals of society try and avoid anything that will cause shame, therefore any behaviour punishable by shame will most likely be avoided. This is easily related to tattooing, the act of tattooing is seen as a shameful behaviour therefore individuals try and stay away from it but as demonstrated not

everyone does. I argue here that the emotions of being happy with oneself, being able to sit alone in a room and be content, can have a stronger emotional pull than dealing with the emotions of shame presented by society. Getting tattooed is a right that every individual has, and they should not feel ashamed to use that right.

Tattoos are not only used internally but externally to give non-verbal cues to others in society during interactions. Atkinson (2004) mentions that the body can be used as a text, in result tattoos become part of that text, part of that information.

*“Arguing that the body transforms into a text through which one is able to represent one’s distinction, status, and affective control, Elias (1983, 1991b, 1994, 1996) pointed to the ways in which bodies become intextuated with communicative social symbols. In particular, he noted how the body turns into a primary text upon which an individual’s ability to control effect and portray desirable images of the self can be gauged” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 131).*

The problem here is that the body is controlled by social norms and becomes a dominant marker of what society believes to be acceptable and not acceptable. The historical significance of tattoos in Northern America has had a major impact on social norms of the body. The next statement provided by Atkinson (200) demonstrates how history has affected the body.

*“As discussed previously, the history of tattooing in North America indicates that marginalized social groups have utilized the body as a billboard of political protest through tattooing practices” (Atkinson, 2004, p.143).*

This cannot be said for everyone that has tattoos but a very good understanding of what they are visualized as. Canada is often seen as a pluralistic rather than a melting pot of social subcultures; subcultures that meet each other through shared institutions, rituals and patterns of social interaction (Atkinson, 2004). Through the creation of norms the creation of outside groups also

happen. Atkinson (2004) indicates that an outsider group will gain more respect the bigger the group becomes; resulting in more people accepting and respecting more body art styles. Canada does have cultural tolerance with leads to attitudes becoming more elastic about tattooing. It is important to understand this is a sign of figuration with unanticipated change (Atkinson, 2004). What this means is that in society today tattooing should no longer be seen as deviant but the change has not happened as anticipated. The purpose of this section was to solidify the argument that the attitude surrounding tattooing in Canadian is not as positive as we may believe (Atkinson, 2003). Atkinson (2004) affirms this by saying “the pressure to contain negative affect is viewed by enthusiasts like him to be a fundamental part of the Canadian habitus” (Atkinson, 2004. p.139). It also solidifies how important norms and socialization is when discussing visibly tattooed individuals and their stigmatization.

The next section from Michael Atkinson (2004) will discuss how tattooed individuals are perceived in Canadian culture. Atkinson (2004) will give his understanding of what tattoos should be and indicate how tattooing are not as accepted as individuals may think, this is one of my own going statements.

### *Life-Course Transition and Representation: The Deviance Tightrope*

One of the foremost understandings of tattooing is deviant behaviour. “Do you get your tattoos to shock people?” I have been told. In fact that is not the case, yes some individuals do like the shock value but other motivations can be symbolically chronicling life transitions or status passages on the skin (Atkinson, 2004. p.156). Tattooing can play a big role in transforming the self. One of the biggest attractions of tattooing is the long-lasting marker of life transition on the skin, also what it could communicate with the public (Atkinson, 2004). As mentioned above

motivation for getting a tattoo change from person to person. Motivations in Northern America are always fluctuating (Atkinson, 2004).

Participants from Atkinson (2004) study indicated that tattoos should be something personal, unique and special about the person. A tattoo is part of someone sense of self. “Tattooing may also be a way for individuals to deal with life experiences as they can represent psychological and emotional healing” (Kay, Brewis, 2016, p. 352). It is not always about defying social norms when obtaining a tattoo, tattoos can hold much more value than this.

With the entire rise in popularity, in my experience it is a societal assumption that tattooing is so common that they are now accepted. The next quote from Atkinson indicates differently. Atkinson describes the way Canadian perceive tattooing the best:

*“Even though Canadians appear to be more tolerant of a mélange of corporeal experimentations and cultural preferences about the body, the dubious shadow of deviance lurking over the practice prevents it widespread acceptance” (Atkinson, 2004, p.163).*

Atkinson (2004) final sheds some light on the consistent negative attitudes towards visibly tattooed individuals. It is imperative to remember that the moment a body project is started an outsider image is labelled therefore Canadians actively walk the tightrope between deviance and social respectability (Atkinson, 2004). Atkinson (2004) reminds us that tattooing continues to be sought out actively as a method of aligning one’s identity with non-normative behaviours or ideologies (Atkinson, 2004, p.165). In Canada tattooing is still currently associated with deviant behaviour, such as street gangs or prisoners (Atkinson, 2004).

*“Despite the assumption that the increased prevalence of tattooing in Western cultures is a general indicator of its acceptability among*

*middle-class established groups, Canadians tattoo narrative indicates that such an assumption is not entirely valid” (Atkinson, 2004. p.183).*

That being said getting a body project does not mean one individual wants to align on self with deviance but more a self-expression of meaningful forms (Atkinson, 2004). Many individuals fight with the dominant construction of tattooing, some of Atkinson's participant in his study indicated that their tattoo was not a sign of deviance but had meaningful significance (Atkinson, 2004). Tattooing has become a sign of personally meaningful difference other than being a rebellious action (Atkinson, 2004). This indicated the enduring social stereotypes about tattooing held by many Canadians (Atkinson, 2004. p. 185). The new generations are unconcerned with deviant status but older generations are well aware of the deviant standing in Canada (Atkinson, 2004).

Another motivation for tattooing is the ability to manage negative emotions or painful emotions in a quasi-normative way (Atkinson, 2004). This is pivotal to understand and to remember in this current thesis research. Atkinson's (2004) participant constantly talk about how tattooing can be liberating emotionally, a way of venting with the body. People often use social deviant behaviour that is culturally tolerable as a strategy for coping with the situation that is psychologically stressful (Atkinson, 2004). Other individuals use it to control anger, inflicting tattooing to the self instead of lashing out at others (Atkinson, 2004). Certain of Atkinson (2004) participants indicate that Canadians tattoo to relive stress and/or emotional pain and it is proven to help to cope with experiences (Atkinson, 2004. p. 195). The in-depth discussion regarding tattooing and the emotional attachment has been described in an earlier chapter of literature review.

The final thought of Atkinson's book is a quote:

*“Feeling that they are prisoners of popular culture, tattoo enthusiasts claim that people are limited in the potential range of personal (bodily) expressions available given established Canada more” (Atkinson, 2004. p. 201).*

Individuals are much more than the ink on their skin, judging them by the simple understanding of deviance does many individual unjust. It can also be speculated that the norm created by society does hold certain individuals as prisoners of popular culture when speaking of the body expression, who we are and self-concept.

This chapter and the five authors mentioned will give a deeper understanding of a theoretical plate form to the findings in this study. Each scholar provides knowledge into the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in a different way. Goffman (1963) theory of Stigma provides knowledge into how individual become stigmatization and insight on how the interaction between both non-tattooed and tattooed subjects might develop and how they may be perceived. Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) theory of identity will produce insight into the reality of each individual. This will help understand the point of view of both tattooed and non-tattooed individuals. Charles Cooley’s (1902) theory of the Looking Glass Self can provide knowledge into how visibly tattooed participants perceived themselves according to the way they are perceived by others. Lastly, Michael Atkinson (2004) book dives into the Canadian ideology and perception surrounding tattooing. This knowledge is beneficial considering this study is conducted with Canadian individuals. To conclude this chapter is beneficial into formulating comprehensive knowledge that can potentially be added into society understanding of visibly tattooed individuals.

## Chapter four: Methodology

In this chapter I explain how the study was conducted and the tools that were used to conduct the analysis. In the next few pages I will explain the epistemology, phenomenology, sampling methods, population of interest, theoretical framework, data collection tools, analysis, procedure and ethical and problematic considerations.

### Epistemology

The epistemology for my research is going to be based on phenomenology. In the next few subsections I will discuss symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, the population of interest, sample methods, theoretical framework, data collection tools, analysis, procedures and ethical and problematic considerations.

#### *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is defined as the study of phenomena as experienced by human beings. According to Sloan and Bowe (2013) phenomenology is explained as follows.

*“Phenomenology focuses on people’s perceptions of the world or the perception of the ‘things in their appearing’” (Langdrige 2007, p. 11). Phenomenology is often defined in terms of the study of phenomena as people experience them—human experience in his or her life (von Eckartsberg 1998) (Sloan, Bowe, 2013, p. 1293).*

In other words, phenomenology focuses on the way visibly tattooed individuals and the general public perceive the world around them. When using phenomenology, as a method the researcher must follow certain tasks, which is collect the data, analyze the data and report the findings (Sloan, Bowe, 2013). The reason phenomenology was used for this thesis was due to stigma being a lived experience that was sought to be common amongst multiple people (Creswell, 2013). Therefore what is common amongst my tattooed participants is that they

believe to have lived stigma based on their tattoos. Once the phenomenon is explained it is important to explain the essence of the lived experience (Creswell, 2013). The essence for the participants will be described in the results, the essence is the what and how of the experience (Creswell, 2013). In the subsection of analysis, my procedure will be fully explained.

### **Sampling Methods**

The participants were gathered using the convenience method of snowball sampling. Due to snowball sampling it will not be possible to generalize the research results. Purposive strategy “are chosen not for their representativeness, but their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research” (Schwandt, 2015. p. 269). The snowball effect is one person telling another person about the study and so on and so forth. This strategy gave me the ability to gather individuals who were relevant to my research question, which became pivotal when answering the question, “Are visibly tattooed individuals currently being stigmatized in the workplace?” Advertisements were posted on the Internet describing the study and the criteria that needed to be met by both groups. All contact information was also provided to potential participants. In the case of managers cold calls and e-mails were made to promote the research and gain participants. After every interview participants were asked to contact me if they had other individuals in mind that would potentially like to participate in this study. I handed each participant my business card with all contact information for easy communication. The sampling size is composed of thirteen interviews: six management participants (five males and one female) and eight tattooed participants (three males and three females). This sample was composed of nine males and four females, age ranged from 20 to 39 years of age.

## Population of Interest

All of the individuals who participated in this research were adults in Sudbury, Ontario, and could be of any adult age and gender. The information gathered came from two different sets of individuals. The first group is visibly tattooed individuals who are presently employed and the second group of individuals in the management position. The first group had two major criteria, tattooed needed to be difficult to conceal in the workplace, meaning visible and currently in the workplace. The second group of individuals needed to be in the position to hire and/or fire employees.

Table 1: Characteristics of Tattooed Participants.

Visibly Tattooed Participants			
Participants	Gender	Age	Employment
1	Female	24	PSW
2	Male	20	Customer Service
3	Female	21	Chef
4	Female	35	Office Receptionist
5	Male	32	Mechanic
6	Male	35	Firefighter
7	Male	39	Customer Service

Table 2: Characteristics of Management Participants.

Management Participants					
Participants	Gender	Age	Employment	Tattooed	Visible
8	Male	28	Firefighter/Arbitrator	Yes	Yes
9	Male	33	Store Owner	No	No
10	Male	37	Store Manager	Yes	No
11	Male	39	Health Care Field	Yes	No
12	Male	33	Film Production	Yes	Yes
13	Female	32	Office Manager/HR Advisor/Recruiter	Yes	Yes

## Theoretical Framework

The framework for this research will be that of symbolic interactionism. This encompasses the symbolic meaning individuals have developed and relied upon to process the variety of social action around them (Ritzer, 2010). Symbolic interactionist perspective is based on a micro-level analysis. “Symbolic interactionist approaches are based on micro level analysis, which focuses on small groups rather than large-scale social structures” (Kendall, Murray, Linden. 2004, p. 27). In terms of symbolic internationalism it is important to understand exactly what a symbol encompasses. “A symbol is anything that meaningfully represents something else” (Kendall et al. 2004, p. 28). In this regard tattoos are going to be the main symbol in this research. Tattoos have the ability to give information to other individuals without any verbal communication and therefore are interpreted by the receiver.

*“Symbols are instrumental in helping people derive meanings from social situations. In social encounters, each person’s interpretation or definition of a given situation becomes a subjective reality from that person’s viewpoint. We often assume that what we consider to be ‘reality’ is shared; however, this assumption is often incorrect”* (Kendall et al. 2004, p. 28)

Tattoos are often a symbol that can create miscommunication in a social situation. Each and every individual in society will have a different viewpoint on tattoos that will construct their reality. To these individuals it may be seen as factual reality and to others, it may not. This is truly the heart of this study, because many individuals assume that others collectively share their reality when this may not be the case.

According to Herbert Blumer (1969), symbolic internationalism rest on three simple premises. The first premise is that “human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). These objects can be such things as a pair of

ice skates, a text book, school or a government facility. The second premise is that “the meaning of such things derive from, or arise out of, social interactions that one has with one’s fellows” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). The third premise is that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). In other words, symbolic interactionism looks at the meaning as a social production that is created by defining the activities of people through their interactions (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). It is important to remember that the process of finding meaning must go through a process of interpretation, in other words, self-interpretation (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Therefore tattoos can go through the process of interpretation and become a symbol based on the person interpretation.

### **Data Collection Tools**

This study focused on discovering the stigmatization that currently affects visibly tattooed individuals. This encompassed attitudes surrounding tattoos and lived experience from both groups of participants. Uncovering this stigmatization was accomplished with depth interviews. Both groups had semi-structured interview guides, which were composed of questions from previous literature review and my own experience as a visibly tattooed employee. A semi structured interview is described as that the “interviewer, has in mind a number of questions that they wish to put to interviewees, but which do not have to follow any specific, predetermined order (Grix, 2004, p.127). The reason semi-structured interviews were utilized was due to it’s degree of flexibility. The flexibility here refers to the ability to pursue unexpected lines of inquiry suggest Grix (2004) when conducting the interview. This gave the advantage of having multiple different points of data. Interviews had an average length of forty-five minutes to two hours. This method enabled the participants voice to be clearly heard. All interviews were

conducted at a location determined by the participant at their convenience. Location included coffee shops, parks and the interviewer’s resident. At the time of the interview all participants were handed a consent form and informed their rights (confidentiality) as participants (Please see Appendix for a copy of the consent form). All participants signed the consent form before starting the interview. The consent form also gave participants a sense of the goal and expectation of this thesis. Once the interview was conducted all interviews were stored at Laurentian University in the thesis advisors office, in a locked filing cabinet.

### **Analysis**

These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Coding was conducted using thematic analysis. Themes were creating upon reviewing participants’ responses and discovering commonality and repetitions in each interview. Specific attention was given to certain words, and statements. The themes will sharpen an understanding of the data, some of my codes were useful others were not (Bryman et al, 2012). After creating my codes I reviewed them and sharpened them. It is imperative to note a different set of themes, and codes were used for both sets of participants. Quotes from participants that had the ability to help describe a pertinent finding where dully noted. Any sensitive information has been coded to provide participants with anonymity. Themes for each group will be discussed in a table format below.

**Table 3: Visibly Tattooed Participant: Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Rational</b>
<b>1.1 Judgment</b>	
<b>1.2 Fired</b>	Revoked the right to work at a determined location because of having tattoos
<b>1.3 Not accepted by family</b>	Family members not accepting the individual tattoos
<b>1.4 Coworker attitude</b>	The attitudes of coworkers towards the

	participants tattoos
<b>1.5 Career Change</b>	The obligation to change employment due to the implication of tattoos
<b>1.1.5 Tattooed career individual</b>	People who have white-collar employment and are visibly tattooed.
<b>1.6 Not accepted by friends</b>	Friends do not accept participants tattoos
<b>2. Emotional</b>	
<b>2.1 Positive Emotions</b>	Positive emotions relating to the participants specific tattoo
<b>2.2 Painful emotions</b>	Negative emotions relating to the participants specific tattoo
<b>2.3 Symbolism</b>	The symbolism relating to a specific tattoo
<b>2.4 Regret</b>	Regretting a tattoo or a tattoo placement
<b>3. Reason for tattoos</b>	
<b>3.1 Tattoos with no meaning</b>	Tattoos that have represented anything
<b>3.2 Purpose tattooing</b>	Tattoos with a symbolic meaning
<b>4. Acceptance</b>	
<b>4.1 Accepted by family</b>	Family accepts the individual tattoos
<b>4.2 Accepted by friends</b>	Friends accept the individual tattoos
<b>4.3 Workplace acceptance</b>	Workplace accepts the individual tattoos
<b>4.4 Self-Acceptance</b>	The individual has better accepted themselves through tattoos
<b>5. Individual specification</b>	
<b>5.1 Background</b>	The background story of the individual
<b>5.2 Visible tattoos</b>	Are the tattoos visible
<b>5.3 Cover up</b>	Does the individual cover up or mention covering up their tattoos
<b>5.4 Reaction to stigma</b>	The individual reactions to stigma
<b>5.6 Self-awareness</b>	The individual is aware of what their tattoos can ensue
<b>5.7 Tattoos</b>	Tattoos in general
<b>5.8 Ideology</b>	A persistent concept that is perpetuated through time and can be passed down for generations
<b>6. Workplace policies</b>	
<b>6.1 Policies forbidding tattooing</b>	A workplace policy that does not allow visible tattoos in the workplace
<b>7. Gender difference</b>	
<b>7.1 Female judgment</b>	Female being judge due to tattoos
<b>7.2 Male judgment</b>	Males being judged due to tattoos

**Table 4: Management Participant: Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Rational</b>
<i>1. Stigma</i>	
1.1 Public influence	Does public opinion influence the hiring process
1.2 Family Acceptance	Does the individual family accept tattoos
1.3 Positive undertaking	Does the individual have a positive undertaking with tattoos in general
1.4 Negative undertaking	Does the individual have a negative undertaking with tattoos in general
<i>2. Policies</i>	
2.1 Policies forbidding tattoos	Does the workplace have a policy that forbids tattoos
<i>3. Perceived image</i>	
3.1 Cupcake	What is the reaction to the cupcake image
3.2 Gory Not accepted	Was the neck tattoo not accepted
3.2.2 Gory Accepted	Was the neck tattoo accepted
3.2.3 Priest	Does tattooing on a priest make a difference on how the individual viewed them
3.2.4 Young man completely Tattooed	What did the individuals think this young man did for a living?
<i>4. Individual Specification</i>	
4.1 Tattooed Manager	The individual is a tattooed manager
4.2 Visibly tattooed Manager	Does the individual have visible tattoos
<i>5. Gender differences</i>	
5.1 Female	Is there gender differences with females
5.2 Male	Is there gender differences with males

Using the codes above, I was able to analyze the research and come to a sound conclusion about stigma that visibly individual face in the workplace.

**Procedure**

Each interview started with an introduction of the research being conducted and of myself. During this process I explained the reason I was doing the research and what I hope to

discover. All participants agreed that the research is a very interesting topic and a subject that often came up in their lives. I continued to explain the consent form and how their privacy was of the utmost importance to me. I also explained that all identifying markers would not be in the research to provide them with the utmost privacy. I asked if there were any questions before I started asking questions.

The first question asked to every participant was if they had any tattoos. I then asked them the significance of their tattoos. Once they became comfortable, I asked them if their tattoos had impacted their employment and/or employment opportunities. Because I used a question template the conversation for each and every participant took its separate journey. With the strong rapport that was initiated I was able to have more of a conversation than an interview. This created participants to feel less stressed and more comfortable, as if they were talking to a friend, which allowed me to get more in-depth information. This leads to having more significant data that would help understand the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace.

Management participants were asked to view four pictures to obtain their different reactions to both sets of pictures. One set of images was Hello Kitty's cupcake tattoo and the other one was an image of a throat being cut with blood dripping down. This set of images was to analyze the difference between a socially acceptable picture and an image that was considered to be gory and inappropriate. The second set of tattoos was a priest with arm tattoos, and a young man covered in a body project. This set of tattoos was to analyze the judgment response. I asked each management participant if they would have a social issue with a tattooed priest. The second image of the young man that was completely covered in tattoos was used to see if they could guess what this young man did for employment.

As each interview terminated, I asked all participants if they had anything else to add or if they had any questions I could answer. All participants seemed to leave happy and excited to see the end result of this study.

### **Ethical and Problematic Consideration**

When dealing with social exclusion, ethics became a priority. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, before embarking on any research this study received approval from the Laurentian Ethics Committee. The aspirations for this research are to help eliminate the stigmatization of the tattooed subculture and to help fill the void in prior research on visibly tattooed populations in the workplace. The more people understand the story behind tattoos; my hope is that fewer tattooed individuals will be stigmatized.

It is vital to first recognize the risk I could potentially pose to participants. The first group of participants (visibly tattooed subculture) could potentially feel some form of anxiety, discomfort, sadness, however, these are all normal human emotions and do not pose more than minimal risk to the participants. The tattooed populations have already been stigmatized and therefore trying to push them further into stigmatization will be difficult (Dickson et al., 2014). Due to the nature of the conversation I prepared emergency contact information for each participant (National Suicide Hotline, Sudbury Crisis Center). Because of the sensitivity of the interview I looked for verbal and non-verbal cues that would indicate that the individual was having a difficult time emotional or psychologically. These cues helped me take different actions if needed to help the participants or to stop the interview altogether. All interviews proceeded very well with no emotional or psychological risks.

Different risk management techniques were held for the second group of interviews, the management participants. To ensure that the participant privacy regarding the employment, each

interview was held at a convenient location anticipated beforehand with the participants to avoid any potential social and workplace conflict. This was done to hopefully extinguish any scrutiny, and negative backlash that managers might experience.

The final risk I consider is my own safety. I ensured that all interview locations were not only safe for the participants but myself. I informed family members of my location and duration of the interview to help protect myself if anything was to happen. I trusted my instinct and judgment in every situation.

Now that I have explained the risks, there were some limitations to this study. One of the limitations to this study is not having the chance to interview the parents of the participant to understand where they perceived their judgment on tattoos. Another limitation was not being able to see the social surroundings of all participants. It would have been helpful to not only see parents but also see the social circle in which the participants interacted. This would also apply to the management participants in terms of workplace. Additional information could have been gained by having more social information on the workplace. I am also aware that this could be another ethical issues if not conducted properly.

All data will be stored securely to ensure privacy to all participants. All consent form was locked in filing cabinet and audio files kept on an encrypted memory storage device in my thesis advisor's (Dr. Pierrot Ross-Trembley) office. The transcripts were stored in my personal laptop that is password protected. None of this information that was stored on my computer had names or identifying characteristics of participants.

I ensured that my research was ethical in every step to ensure proper and trustworthy data gather and analysis. I upheld my standards to the Tri-Council policy and that of Laurentian University.

## Chapter five: Results and Discussion

“The fully and visibly stigmatized, in turn, must suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their stigmatization on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament” (Goffman, 1963, p. 127). In turn many individual who have tattoos put their heart and emotions into their tattoos. Therefore just like Goffman (1963) indicated visibly tattooed individuals wear their stigmatization on their sleeve. In the next section this thesis will depict the stories of individuals who have been interviewed in regards to visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. What was surprising to find was the amount of personal story, personal attachment and emotions that were put into most tattoos. Every individual had a unique story to tell when it came to their tattoos. Each participant was in different fields of work and therefore, their response to tattoo stigmatization was different. The male respondent group comprised of two customer service workers, a firefighter, and a mechanic, while the female group included a personal support worker, a chef, and an office receptionist. Participant 1 indicated the most workplace stigmatization out of all respondents. Even though she was raised with a father that had tattoos and never saw a problem with it, it was evident that the stigma she received continued to affect her to a certain extent. Her story will be further discussed in this chapter. Participant 5 indicated that his mother was not too keen on his tattoos but she eventually got used to it. The stigma he received in the workplace was still evident. He only got his neck and hand tattoos after he believed his job was secure, which took seven years. Participant 6 is a firefighter who also started getting visible tattoos after his job was secured. He also indicated that he was well aware of all the stigmatization of tattoos in the workplace and how hard it could be to obtain employment with visible tattoos. Participant 4 could show her visible tattoos in the

workplace but she also understood workplace judgment, and as a result, she had tattoos that could be easily concealed if required. Lastly, participants 4 and 7 both worked in a retail setting. Participant 7 alleged that even though his workplace did not have policies against it, the public was not so accepting. Participant 4 had visible tattoos on his forearm that could be easily concealed if he wanted to. The last two participants discussed concealing; this term should be explained before we continue. Concealing is a technique that is used to control the information the public is receiving about oneself. “Some of the common techniques the individual with a secret defect employs in managing crucial information about himself cannot be considered. Obviously, one strategy is to conceal or obliterate signs that have come to have the stigma symbol” (Goffman, 1963, p. 92). Even though one’s stigma can be concealed, this does not mean that it does not exist. This is especially hard with tattoos since, as Beverly Thompson (2015) notes, it does not take much for tattoos to become revealed due to clothing malfunctions. In the next few sections, I will discuss visibly tattooed participants and their experiences with workplace stigmatization. It is important to remember while reading these results that these statements of the situations are the perceptions of the individuals that are being interviewed.

### *Reason for Tattoos/Emotions*

The first step in understanding tattooed individuals is to understand who these individuals are, in other words, to understand their motivation for obtaining a tattoo. Once the motivation is understood, it becomes easier to understand what the individual is trying to communicate to the external social world. The images that the individual chose may not always have the same meaning to others therefore communication can become crossed. All participants were asked if they had visible tattoos, and if they had a particular meaning; all participants indicated yes to this

question. One participant that stood out was participant 3 and the story behind one specific genie tattoo.

*“The genie I had a lot of stuff happen to me when I was younger, I went through a lot of trauma. A genie resembles you getting three wishes right, and it has to be fulfilled. My first one was I was a wrestler, I was really good at it, I had a scholarship to Brock University and I was going for my goal medal round and I was wrestling a girl because she travelled all the way from Ottawa and no one showed up for her match because she was too big... She was in that unlimited weight class and drove all this way, so I was the weight class down so I said oh well, I’ll wrestle you and she ends up breaking my anterior cruciate ligament, my lateral collateral ligament and my meniscus. All in one shot. The second one, I finally got the surgery for my neck I was finally getting back to training, working really hard, I gained a lot of weight, and I was walking to the walk-in clinics and I got run over by a bus 6 months after I got my surgery done. And then I’m still alive I recovered I got better but I always had this pain I had blood cloths what happens when you have blood cloths they because pulmonary embolism and you have a stroke. So I had a stroke at 20 years old... That’s the third wish, and if I can over come all of those I can over come anything. This is just a little reminder of those things I went through in my life and if I can get through those I can get through anything” (Participant 3, 2016).*

I previously discussed how visibly tattooed individuals are often regarded as deviant individuals. In this case we can recognize that this deviance had no part in the decision to obtain tattoos. This is an individual trying to cope with her traumatic event. As discussed by Buss and Hodges (2017) tattooing can be used to take pain and transform it into something beautiful. This particular tattoo crosses into another one of Buss and Hodge's motivations and that is memorializing an event or person. Participant 3 is also acknowledging the three particular events that happened that changed her outlook on life.

Meaningful tattoos do not always have to come from a traumatic even, but can come from the body, mind and soul. One participant describes her sleeve as being spiritual; she says, “it’s all about the third eye” (participant 1, 2016).

Participant responses help illustrate how tattoos can be used to display personal preferences. Personal preferences can indicate what a person is like, and or what they are interested in and also personal values. Participant 4 described her wolf tattoo.

*Interviewer: Which one was first?*

*Participant 4: The first one was on my hip and it's a wolf's head and I got it done when I was 18.*

*Interviewer: Does that one have a meaning?*

*Participant 4: I have always loved wolves.*

She also indicated later:

*"I always thought people should be more like them. When they are hungry, they don't kill more than they need" (Participant 4).*

Wolves to this individual had a connection to her own self-concept. Wolves are animals that individuals are often afraid of but they do not realize that they are animals who are faithful to their pack and as the participant indicated they do not kill for pleasure but for the need to feed themselves. If you look deeper into the tattoos it can say a lot about an individual, there is a reason people chose certain images.

Tattoos provide information to the public that the tattoo collector wants to bestow upon others without verbal communication. This information can also be a happy memory that the individual does not want to lose hold of. As described before tattoos can be used to memorializing a special event (Buss, Hodge, 2017). There are two participants that display cheerful memories in different ways. The first participant holds on to childhood memories that bring him joy. This participant loved the television program Batman that brought him fond memories of his childhood.

*“It was the first TV show I ever really liked when I was a kid”  
(Participant, 7)*

*Participant 2: was this one of an umbrella with a candle and a chain around it. All my tattoos are related to my dad. My dad passed away when I was 18 from cancer. They are a momentum of certain things that relate to my relationship with him.*

*Interviewer: Is there a reason why you chose your dad?*

*Participant 2: I always had a lot of cool ideals but it serves as when you get older memory tend to fade, I'm not saying I would never remember anything for my dad but when I look at the tattoos it's like I remember this with my dad. It reminds me of my dad's personality, and things we used to do.*

Participant 7 demonstrated a memory, something he could look at and smile. Participant 2 explained that he did not want the good memories of his father to fade away. He believed that if he got them tattooed he would have them forever. It should be important to consider that people's perceptions of someone else's chosen tattooed images may not align with that of the tattooed individual. This is potentially important to remember when making judgments of a tattooed individual. “So far, the analysis of social interaction between the stigmatized and the normal has not required that those involved in the mixed contact know one another personally before the interaction begins” (Goffman, 1963, p. 51). That being said I believe this is where we are encountering problems. Since we do not know the individual how are people stigmatizing these individuals?

Tattoos can also be used to commemorate loved ones either living or passed on. This gives the individual the feeling that the deceased will never truly leave their side; it creates a measure of closeness. One participant explains how hard the passing of her grandfather would be and what she did to commemorate him on her body forever.

*Participant 3: My chest, I got carry on after my grandfather passed away from lung cancer ... it was my favourite my chemical romance song, welcome to the black parade. And I was in the car, listening to the song with my mom and we got the call my grandfather had passed away and it just stuck in my head. So I got that tattooed.*

*Interviewer: what was the emotional impact of your grandfather and was tattooing a way to cope with it?*

*Participant 3: My grandfather was more of a father figure than my actual father, so when he died I was lost ... sounds dumb but the tattoo was a way to have a piece of him with me everywhere, and when I looked in the mirror I wouldn't cry but I remembered that he was always with me.*

Loss or trauma can sometimes cause an experience so painful that it becomes very difficult for an individual to recall or explain verbally. This is where tattoos become extremely important.

Andreas Kitzmann explains how tattoos and loss and/or trauma become important.

*“There is not enough space within this chapter to fully explore these competing claims regarding the unspeakable nature of trauma; however, the tension between the two ‘camps,’ so to speak, provides an entry into the role that tattoos might play in the articulation of profound experiences of loss or trauma on the part of individuals” (Kitzmann, 2016, p. 41).*

Every individual will perceive his or her reality different than others (Grix, 2004). In result, individuals will handle trauma and/or loss in a different way. Tattoos have become a medium for individuals to cope with such an experience and become at peace with oneself.

Lastly, it may not be even be the image that holds the key information but the style in which the tattoo is done. This can be said for participant 5:

*“Swallows are supper traditional and they are really old school and that's the way I have been going lately. I'd figure my neck was a good spot for that” (Participant 5).*

It was not so much the swallows that were the main focus of the non-verbal communication but the style in which it was done. The style in which the tattoo is done is another form of information for the perceiver. In my own personal experience people will tend to talk to you

about the image itself, and not the style in which it is done. There are so many details in tattoos that when looking at them or making a judgment it is important to look at the whole image before making an inference on the individual or the tattoo. Tattoos are also very subjective and sometimes the only way it is possible to obtain a clear and correct understanding is to ask the individual that is wearing them. Cooley's (1902) concept of the looking glass self indicates that individuals see themselves in light of others. Hence if the public constantly perceives visibly tattooed individuals in a negative light, they may start to perceive themselves in the same light. Therefore if the general public continues to see tattooed individuals in this light, it could have a negative impact.

A certain image can be offensive to one person and mean something entirely different from the next individual. This is another clear example of subjective reality. When speaking with participant 5, it was quite obvious that this was in effect. He also understood the repercussion society would have on him and was able to take the precaution necessary before getting this particular tattoo.

*"I'm not saying I avoid tattoos for a specific reason I just never went out looking for offensive tattoos. I have the Jesus symbol (fish) but with Satan written on it. But it's not visible. I made sure to put it somewhere that when I wear a skirt the little old grand mama won't see it.... I didn't get it to be offensive it was more of not good not evil" (Participant 5).*

The symbol of the fish to represent God has a long-standing history. This participant understood the meaning society had given to this symbol but chose to get it tattooed regardless.

Understanding and knowing the social meaning of the tattoo, indicated to the participant that he should get this particular image tattooed where he was able to conceal it even though it did not have the same meaning as society implicated. This is another example of how hard it is to judge

a tattoo based on face value. Things are not always what they seem to be. This is also related to the previous comment about Cooley's (1902) concept the looking glass self.

Participant 8 indicates a second example of misinterpreting a tattoo meaning. He obtained a skull and cross bones on his forearm; many individuals could perceive this image as being a pirate, that of death or poison. The participant does not think of it that way.

*“No, the skull and cross bone because the Jolly Roger always had a meaning to me ... not too much pirate but more of a free-thinking. Does their own thing, that's what it represents to me. Whether social things attached to it, I don't live on a ship; it's more a flag for people who do their own thing” (Participant 8, 2016).*

When we see the flag of a skull and cross bones on a ship, most of the time our minds will think pirates and the behaviours that are associated with it. For this participant it was more a symbolic representation of the pirate, not being held back by social constraints but being able to be whom he chose to be.

Just as participant 5 considered the most appropriate placement for his tattoo due to its social meaning, it is often important to consider tattoo placement when observing visibly tattooed individuals. When proceeding into getting a tattoo, a common question is “Do I want people to see it?” This intrigued me into asking participants if they ever thought of getting visible tattoos and the social repercussion they may face.

When asking participants if they ever thought before getting visible body art, the response was mixed. Participant 3 explained:

*Participant 3: I honestly thought that society would have matured and that it wouldn't be as a big deal as it is*

*Interviewer: So we can say you thought about it to a certain extent, it just didn't pan out to what you expected?*

*Participant 3: Yea, Basically*

The next two participants declared that they were already in their desired field therefore there was not much thought put into the tattoo placement.

*“No not really. I got my ‘Visible’ first sleeve after I was a full-time firefighter” (Participant 6, 2016).*

*“Hell no. I don’t care what people think” (Participant 1, 2016).*

Other participants thought long and hard about the placement of their tattoo and waging the outcome of work and social life.

*“I got the one on my forearm in December 2014. I got the first one thinking it would go up to here (lower down the arm). But then I said I got over it, it would suit it if I went further. And I would still be able to conceal it with a long sleeve” (Participant 2, 2016).*

There are three types of responses being displayed by these participants. The first participant expressed that she believed society would have changed by now understanding that tattoos are more than negativity, self-harm or deviant behaviour. The second set of participants explained that they had already proven their worth to their respective employment therefore there was not much thought put into how visible the tattoos would truly be. Lastly, participant 2 understood the social backlash that could potentially happen but was able to take the appropriate path to ensure he would hopefully not feel this backlash. The next section will talk more about the acceptance visibly tattooed individuals felt and the positive outcome tattoos can bring to these individuals.

### *Acceptance*

Acceptance is one aspect of the tattoo world that, to some, can be important and not to others. Acceptance can come from family members, friends, workplaces and the social surroundings in which the individual has become immersed. Even though tattooed individuals

get tattooed for their own personal needs and want, it also becomes difficult when the people around them do not accept who they have become or becoming. It creates shame and disappointment in the tattooed individual. One participant in particular being the most covered in tattoos in the family indicated his mother's great dislike for his tattoos.

*"I was raised by a single mother and she was very much against it ... she would comment when I came home with a new tattoo but once I got my sleeves done and started getting more and more she just gave up and stopped saying anything at all" (Participant 5, 2016).*

Another participant indicated how her parents had different opinions on the idea of her getting tattoos.

*"My dad doesn't care, my dad's covered. My dad signed till I was 18. But my mother and grandmother aren't too fond of them. They are super religious. But the grand kids don't care" (Participant 1).*

Getting tattoos can become a difficult internal struggle because of parental and family pressure and negative attitudes towards tattoos. When those individuals feel the negative attitudes of their family towards tattoos, it can be difficult for them to go against this particular attitude and breaking the bond between them and that family member. Atkinson (2004) affirms this by indicating that individuals feel shame and embarrassment when they go against the norms of the family. "By the same token, individuals who value familial bonds tend to avoid the shame and embarrassment accompanying contra-normative behaviour" (Atkinson, 2004, p. 213). The issue I have here is if individuals understood that tattoos could create a coping mechanism for anything from trauma and/or loss, to a better individual self-concept. Tattoos would not create such tension between friends and family members. This would also provide significant ease in the life of a visibly tattooed participants.

Acceptance of friends has not varied much between participants. Most participants indicate that their inner circle accepted their body art.

*Interviewer: Friends react?*

*Participant 5: “No, but I mean I surrounded myself with like-minded people. I don’t have friends who are visibly tattooed” (Participant 5, 2016).*

*“Honestly my friends thought it was bad ass” (Participant 3, 2016)*

*“Friends think it’s neat” (Participant 4, 2016).*

Acceptance from social peers is important when contemplating self-acceptance. Atkinson (2004) attests this by saying that in this case visibly tattooed individuals put high importance in the opinion of their peers. “When considering the social impact of their body’s play, and the image of the self emitted by tattoo projects, enthusiasts place a high value on the assessments made by either group of close friends” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 218). Therefore, the decision to obtain a tattoo can heavily depend on whether individuals feel they have peer acceptance or not. Once the decision is made, and the individual has obtained the tattoo, it is vital to look at workplace acceptance and its positive and negative outcomes.

Workplace acceptance is at the center of this thesis and has a great importance.

Workplace acceptance changed from individual to individual, and between different careers. Certain individuals were already in the workplace when commencing on their tattoo journey, other individuals starting altering their body earlier on in life. One participant indicated that he had tattoos when he started his employment, but he decided to get his hands tattooed after he felt his employment was secure.

*“I was able to hide them all when I got the job that’s for sure” (Participant, 5, 2016).*

*Interviewer: How did people react when you got your hands and neck in those seven years? Did people look at you differently?*

*Participant 5: At that point they know me enough and had seen enough of my tattoos that it didn't shock them that I would do something like that. Aside from one or two comments from the sales people, which I don't deal with very often, nobody even gave it a second look (Participant 5, 2016).*

This participant demonstrates how he was accepted in the workplace once they get to know his worth to the company and his personality. As he mentioned before he made sure his tattoos could be covered when he interviewed for the job initially but was not concerned in later years of his employment. His statement demonstrates just how aware tattooed individuals are of the stigmatization surrounding their tattoos. The next examples will help explain just how important it is to accept visibly tattooed individuals, due to its great importance on their future career, and their lively hood.

Other individuals commented that their tattoos were not taken lightly and did cause some problems with certain employers. One participant commented that she was not only judged at work but also during her schooling/job training.

*"I worked for one company I had dread locks and the piercings and tattoos. The employer told me maybe if I took everything out I could find myself a rich man and I wouldn't have to work. She still talks about me when she's orientating new people that you can't look like me" (Participant, 7).*

*"School was the worst. I went to school with a guy and he had full sleeves they made him wear long sleeves in the summer for his placement. They made me get the diamond stretchers. Stupid watch to cover up the wrist" (Participant 7)*

Tattoos stereotyping and judgment can create an assumption about visibly tattooed individual that can truly harm their work experience and in result harm their future. Atkinson (2004)

authenticates this by stating that one of his participants knew that having tattoos would rule him out of any service employment. Also Andrew Timming (2015) indicates that his participant was aware of the negative stereotyping in regards to tattooing before he started in the workplace. “Issac, a former welder currently collecting benefits, admitted that his tattoos would automatically rule him out for a service sector job” (Timming, 2015, p. 71). Tattoos do not mean that the individual is not adequate to do their job, in fact I believe that with some individuals it has no correlation. There are always exceptions to this statement, and it is always difficult to generalize for all visibly tattooed individuals. Therefore if employers could look beyond the image of the tattoo, they could potentially hire a very valuable asset for their organizations. This stresses the importance of acceptance.

In conclusion, acceptance can affect the way individuals see their own self-concept. Most participants indicated that their friends accepted their tattoos but family acceptance created some issues at one point or another. Workplace acceptance demonstrated a mix balance between other participants. Certain individuals indicated a lot of hardship other participants indicated a mild standing. Workplace acceptance creates hardship for individuals that can create long-term situational problems for the tattooed individuals. Participants in this study demonstrated no sign of criminal tattoos. Other than one participant, no other participant indicated harmful, racist, negatively affiliated tattoos. Therefore giving no reason not to hire the visibly tattooed individuals other than personal bias and judgment on behalf of the managers or hiring committees. Again, I stress how important education is on visibly tattooed individuals and how tattoos can create positive coping strategies for the individuals in question. The next section takes those feelings and reaches deeper into the comprehension of visibly tattooed individuals in regards to the stigma they face.

## *Stigma*

Stigma is a perception of reality. Therefore as mentioned before what may be reality to one may not be reality to others. Goffman (1963) indicates the credibility and dis-credibility of stigma. “An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the uselessness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). That being said this next section will discuss the stigma faced by the visibly tattooed participants. Stigma is a very wide category; these results will show that stigma and judgment follow a visibly tattooed individual everywhere he or she goes. The reason that these results are vital to this research is due to its insight on the social understanding and thought processes behind tattooing. These results could also be very important into understanding the self-concept of the visibly tattooed individual. The concept of the looking glass self will help individuals understand how important their judgments can really be. It is very important to remember that glare, looks, stares are still very critical non-verbal social behaviour that is presented in many of the participants’ interviews. Stares are still considered part of stigma and judgment as presented above by Beverly Thompson (2015). Participants did not always say that they would receive comments but most often they would indicate some kind of eye contact with their tattoos. Participants also pointed out that the public would move directions from their current location to avoid having contact with them. One participant mentioned not being served when he was waiting for service at an establishment.

*“I’ll be looking at them waiting for service and they will serve people that got there after me and ignore me when I asked them a question... I usually walk up and go somewhere else. I have the same money as everyone else if they don’t want it, someone else does” (Participant 5, 2016).*

This is a very impressive representation of how individuals perceived visibly tattooed individuals in social settings. The next few statements are also examples of public perception, and human behaviour towards visibly tattooed individuals. It is important to remember that the individuals making comments, or non-verbal cues towards visibly tattooed individuals in an establishment may also be the individuals responsible for making hiring decision in their own workplace. This demonstrates the ongoing beliefs about visibly tattooed individuals or even tattoos in general. Another individual worked in customer service and received stigmatization at work by a public member of society.

*“A customer didn’t say anything to me, but they went to customer service desk and complained to my manager that I was unprofessional and that I didn’t apply to the dress code and that it was inappropriate for the workplace” (Participant 7, 2016).*

Another participant pointed out that he received a glare from individuals in his golfing community.

*“Where I do find I get the most look and that vibe is because I’m an avid golfer. There is etiquette to golf. Around the golf course and the club house, people see me show up with a sleeve tattoo and I get looks because it’s a country club setting” (Participant 6, 2016).*

Another setting where tattoos are not deemed acceptable is being a parent. Even as a tattooed parent, there is a stigma attached to it. One participant indicated that it became more predominated when her son was born.

*“I get more looks now that I have him, especially when his dad and I walk together. He’s fully tattooed and has piercings. We get looks a lot” (Participant 1).*

All three of these statements are excellent an example of the level of acceptance society currently has regarding visibly tattooed individuals. I have heard from many people that tattooed

individuals are no longer stigmatized and that it's not a big deal in this day and age. These examples are providing more contexts into that false statement. The body has been a symbol to display information for a very long time. This is confirmed by Atkinson (2003) when he indicated that norms, values and beliefs affect the way we see the body. "Quite some time, then, before Goffman's (1959, 1963), Foucault's (1977, 1979), or Bourdieu's (1984) expositions on the regulation of bodily shape, display, and functioning in society, Elias had clearly acknowledged the body as a dominant marker of cultural norms, values and beliefs" (As Cited in Atkinson, 2004, p131-132). All things considered, the norms, values and beliefs about the body that society has impacted human behaviour. It has been quite evident with the statements above.

The next section of examples will hit closer to home for participants. Family and friends can also be responsible for part of the stigmatization happening to a visibly tattooed individual. One participant indicates her mother's dislike for tattoos.

*"My mom is going to be 60 years old this year and she still is like I don't know why you like them they are terrible, how could you do that to your body" (Participant 4, 2016).*

Participant 2 indicated that it was about respect for the elderly people in his life.

*"When I go to see my grand ma I wear long sleeves. It gives me a different image. The respect is the biggest thing about it" (Participant 2, 2016).*

Participant 1 pinpointed the same type of concern that participant 2 indicated about family.

*"My mother and grandmother aren't too fond of them. They are super-religious" (Participant 1, 2016).*

Other participants indicated humiliation from family members at a family event.

Interviewer: Can you think of the first time you were judged?

*Participant 3: Probably at my sister's graduation dinner was that relative of my father's, she was, so pish posh and lovely, it just sucked... We were all having a good time and laughing and*

*she looks at me and says that's disgusting. I was like thanks for ruining the mood.*

As mentioned before, these experiences once again show us how society is still struggling with visible tattoos acceptance. These are close family members that are creating an individual to have internal conflict and confusion about who they are. Cooley's (1902) mentions the six ways the looking-glass self-concept works. "The looking-glass self identifies an important process involved in self-concept formation utilizing the dramatic and easily grasped imagery of a mirror; (2) it offers a straightforward proposition on the relationship between interpersonal and personal variables; (3) it is relatively easily operationalized and tested; (4) it emphasizes the social and interpersonal aspects of the self; (5) it is part of the quintessential interaction process of role-taking; and (6) it makes intuitive sense in a culture characterized by a heightened concern with personal appearance" (Cooley mentioned in Franks, Gecas. 1992. p. 50). This displays how important a person's social world can be to their self-concept; it is crucial to remember that family is a part of that social world. It is important to remember that even if the family knows whom the tattooed family member is, they are still creating judgment based on the choice to have tattoos. Atkinson (2003) describes how close family relationship can impact an individual self-concept. "Owing to the closeness of family relationships and their impact on the self, condemnation from specific family members carries more weight than other family members' reactions" (Atkinson, 2014, p. 214). This is one of the most important forms of acceptance for an individual. This could change their self-concept, which would better serve them in the workplace. This could also help change the social viewpoint on visibly tattooed individuals, therefore helping to change the way individuals are seen in the workplace.

*Workplace Policies*

Workplace policies differ from area to area and from the position of employment to the next. The workplace policy may not always be written in stone but they are a social workplace norm that individuals dare not to go against it, due to its heavy consequences it may bare. Many participants said that it was not so much about the policies that affected them but more the silent attitude of the management personnel. Baring their tattoos visible to the public without covering them up was a choice made based on when and where they believed the time was right and work was not one of those places. Goffman (1963) will explain how individual chose to hide their stigma to avoid tension in social interaction. “The individual’s object is to reduce tension, that is, to make it easier for himself and the others to withdraw convert attention from the stigma, and to sustain spontaneous involvement in the official content of the interaction” (Goffman, 1963, p. 102). One participant mentioned that she placed her tattoos where they could be easily covered up even though they were visible when she made that decision.

*Interviewer: Did tattoos change your career path?*

*Participant 4: No it didn’t because every single place that I have tattoos it is easily covered up.*

The participant was obviously well aware of the stigma that tattoos could bring and how they could eventually cause her issues at work if she was to move employers. These participants experience is a direct example of how stigmatization is very much alive in the workplace for visibly tattooed individual. Another participant indicated that again the positions she applied for did not have workplace policies against tattooing but the ideology and attitudes in the workplace was very much against it.

*Participant 3: I’m a registered drug and alcohol counselor and I can’t get a job because I am young and covered in tattoos. It sucks really bad, I would be amazing at that job if someone would*

*give me the chance. I have been battled addiction and everything before. I know what it's like, but they won't give me the chance or a shot to prove it.*

An individual that changed her life around, and could help others do the same have been denied employment in a career she could be great at doing because of having tattoos. Goffman (1963) attests that this failure to maintain these body norms will cause psychological integrity for the individual. "Failure or success in maintaining such norms has a very direct effect on the psychological integrity of the individual" (Goffman, 1963, p. 128). I have learned that it's not all about the legal law and policies against tattoo, it is often the social norms and mentality that can and do hinder individuals in prospective employment chances. The final discussion surrounding visibly tattooed participants is the gender differences as a visibly tattooed individual. It is important to note that this study did not have equal female and male participants and that this is their opinion and the findings of this study has found.

### *Gender Difference*

Gender difference may be confusing to the general public but if they are observed closely they may be apparent. The tattoo world started by males getting tattooed, it therefore became a male dominated industry (Thompson, 2015). When women wanted to get into the tattoo subculture (tattooees or tattoo artist), it was very difficult and the stigmatization that lied behind it was immense. "Because the tattoo industry has been constructed as a masculine arena, behaving in a masculine manner works well within the environment, whereas femininity may create dissonance" (Thompson, 2015, p. 129). The previous statement is just a surface view of the gender differences that lie in the tattoo world. Gender was not a prevalent theme in this study but it was worth mentioning the participants view on the subject.

One participant mentioned how he saw the difference between female and male participant.

*Interviewer: Do you think opinions change because you're a male?*

*Participant 6: Oh Ya.... Because I'm a man it's seen as attractive but being a woman it is seen as more in your face and not accepted as much.*

This represents how gender differences are still very apparent to society even in the tattoo world. It is still very difficult for women who obtain tattoos to feel comfortable in public. Gender was not discussed significantly by the participants but Leader (2016) will validate that woman that goes against the feminine norm will have issues in a social context. “Nonetheless, women’s tattoos do have real-world ramifications to the extent that they defy socially sanctioned standards of feminine beauty and force the recognition of a new, largely self-certified ones” (Leader, 2016, p. 183). To relate this to the workplace it is socially acceptable for men to have tattoos, therefore it may impact the way they are perceived in an interview.

All participants in this study indicated having issues in regards to stigmatization at one point or another. The forms of stigmatization varied from being humiliated by a boss at work, customers in an enterprise not wanting to be served by a visibly tattooed individual, in social settings (golfing or taking a walk), and finally by family members. All of these forms of stigmatization are elements that help explain the complexity of workplace stigmatization that visibly tattooed participant faced every day. The relationship between all of these forms of stigmatization is that they are linked by social interaction and organizational interaction. In other words, the individuals that are causing visibly tattooed participants to feel stigmatized in a public setting

may also go to work, and relay the same ideology in the workplace. Society is a mass network of interactions that do not end at one participant but a vast of interaction in that person life. For example, an individual that does not want to be served by a visibly tattooed participant may work, may help in the socialization of children and may be active in social settings bringing this discriminatory idea of visibly tattooed individuals with them in all interactions.

### **Management Participants**

Management participants had a more complex response to certain questions because certain individuals belonged in both categories. What I mean is that certain managers had visible tattoos (5 had tattoos and 3 out of 5 had visible tattoos) and this may impact their viewpoint on tattoos and/or create conflicting statements.

It is critical to acknowledge that there are certain fields of work that can have visible tattoos and others that cannot. A participant indicated that he had visible tattoos that were acceptable on one side of his professional career but not on the other.

*“Unless it’s offensive, it’s really too bad, I have two sides to my job, I have the side that firefighter, then the other side dealing with the labour. It’s all from arbitration and litigation. Dealing with politicians. You almost have to talk about it in two different ways. On the firefighter sides it’s no big deal. On the political side it’s a huge deal, when I’m dealing with lawyers and politicians in arbitration I cover everything.”*

Due to the gender, employment and age of the participant I have chosen not to disclose what participant indicated this statement. This will provide total confidentiality and avoid any ethical issues. This is a very good example of how one individual can live on two sides of the self in one employment. Another example of how society is not as accepting as we would like to think.

Management participant 12 works in the arts field, and he indicated that seeing someone without

tattoos is the stranger than seeing tattoos. Even though he is a manager that has the ability to hire and fire, at one point in time he also has to be hired.

*“I work in film, production companies, but I’m hired by a department head in my case a key grip, his covered in hundreds of tattoos. He was actually pushing me to get it... I was sitting in the shop waiting for him and we were bored I was like I should get a tattoo but he encouraged me. But he has the full sleeves, neck tattoos. There was nothing like that at work, even though he hires me to work on these jobs, but there is someone who is paying the bills, I have never gotten any slack because I’m filming there are a lot of tattoos, a lot of people who work in film well they call us carny right we work weird hours, on the road a lot and people like that tend to get tattoos I guess” (Participant 12, 2016).*

Being managers of the key grips, he describes how he would hire someone if tattoos came into play.

*Participant 12: Of course. I hire them based on if, I can talk to someone for 10 minutes and know if they are going to work out. Even if someone came up to me and they had neck tattoos, I would hire them, but I would be more inclined to be their friends. I wouldn’t hire someone just because of the tattoos, they have to have the ability to do the jobs. Either or it doesn’t affect my decision. They fit in because we all have tattoos but that’s it.*

This is a case of tattoos being part of the workplace; certain careers do not care about the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals. Andrew Timming (2015) describes this as the industry affects. “Specifically, where customers are demographically more likely to be tattooed, employees them to be selected that in-group demographics” (Timming, 2015, p. 71). This thought process limits the chance that visibly tattooed individual will work in white-collar employment. Working capability should be based on skills, competencies and knowledge not what colours they carry on their skin.

Participant 13: indicated that certain individuals were allowed to have visible tattooing and others did not.

*Interviewer: What where the different positions in your field that can have tattoos and those who cannot*

*Participant 13: Attendants and Valets cannot show any visible tattoos, office staff can. If the tattoo is political, gruesome, racist, etc., even the office staff would have to cover up.*

Therefore even in the same company tattooing can be accepted in one aspect but not in the other. It is obvious that the tattoo subculture is much more complex than expected even when it comes to the people that are doing the hiring. Hire management and her clients tell participant 12 what she can and cannot accept when it comes to tattoos and body modifications. In result even if she is the one that does the hiring process she is not always in control. In the next section workplace policies, how management perceive different images and the stigma that surrounds tattoos will be discussed in the view of the management participants.

### *Workplace Policies*

Workplace policies do not indicate the manager's ideological thinking. Therefore not all workplace will have policies but this does not mean that workplace stigmatization does not exist. There was only one manager that indicated that there was a workplace policy written in the guidelines.

*Interviewer: do you know of any workplace policies against tattoos?*

*Participant 12: my work?*

*Interviewer: yes... Do they have a policy in place indicating that you cannot have tattoos in this field or that position, cover up policies?*

*Participant 12: Only for the hotels ... they can't have tattoos, and if they do, they have to be 100% covered*

Beverly Thompson (2015) expresses concerns over policies against tattoos in the workplace. “Part of the discussion of tattoos in the workplace should be about changing the focus from tattooed skin to job performance, workers’ rights, and job protection” (Thompson, 2015, p. 103). It is all too often a conversation about tattooed skin, and not about anything else. If an individual had tattoos, this would not impede on their working ability in a hotel, in any position. I do understand how difficult it is to change the mentality surrounding tattoos but it is time. All other participants indicated that they had no written policies on tattooing but that they would not be acceptable in every position offered in the establishment.

*Participant 11: It depends on the field, but for the agency here it depends on the role. My position is one thing, but I have street workers, that work with vulnerable populations, that work on the street who are comfortable with tattoos that would be fine.*

*Interviewer: what position would be more relented?*

*Participant 11: Director, executive director... I wouldn't say they wouldn't get a chance at all. Of course you would have a chance but you would have to understand it would affect them. It would not stop me from hiring them if they had all the credentials absolutely not. But I will have a conversation about in some scenarios they will be people that will be distant with you because of that and it depends on how you handle it ... you'll have to shine even brighter.*

Therefore, indicating that even though it is not written in stone, there are some underlying “rules” to having tattoos in the workplace. With this being said, owners are also aware of this issue and they also have their business to take care of. The next participant indicates how he has this understanding.

This participant owns his own business and said that if there was a lot of people that would be against tattoos that he would have to tell individuals to cover up.

*Interviewer: What if your customer had a problem with that? And we won't tell the name of the business but let's just leave it as you work*

*with the tobacco industry. What if the clientele would stop coming to you, would that impact your decision?*

*Participant 9: If there was a lot of people that would stop coming because they have a problem with it, I might ... but because of the nature of my business it's more common to see people who are tattooed coming in themselves. So in that business it wouldn't affect it anyways.*

Even when owning your own business, it is obvious that tattooing is not as simple as it seems. It is not only about your attitude towards tattoos but also the attitudes of other people, in this case the customers. It is about trying to change the attitudes of everyone in society, not just the individuals that are managing the establishments. One way of helping individuals change their attitudes towards tattoos is to comprehend the way people see perceived images and then try to shed some light into it.

### *Perceived Image*

It has come to light that the image being perceived by the management participant has an impact on their decision to judge or not to judge the visibly tattooed individuals. Just like in daily life, people do not generally like bloody, death related images or something that can be perceived as frightening. Also keep in mind the significance of the image or in this case tattoos, they will have different essences for every individual, who either has obtained the tattoo or is observing it. Berger and Luckmann (1967) affirm that socialization can cause threats to subjective reality and it is therefore important to keep a balance between subjective and objective reality. "Since socialization is never complete and the content is internalized face continuing threats to their subjective reality, every viable society must develop procedures of reality maintenance to safeguard a measure of symmetry between object and subjective reality" (Berger, Luckmann, 1967. p. 147). Therefore it becomes evident that socialization has an effect on stigmatization since we often use subjective reality to make that deduction. In other words, an individual should

take this into consideration while attempting to make judgment on others. Being aware of your own subjective reality and how it can influence others. I mentioned above that if dominant society could see that tattoos are so much more than what individuals believe them to be. I showed the management participant two images of tattoos one is a Hello Kitty cupcake and the other is a bloody and gory neck tattoo. One management participant showed much interest in both tattoos.

*“I would probably think why did you get Hello Kitty? It’s giving you a stamp in time, it was popular in a certain aspect of life and that’s not a bad thing. In time is that something; to me it’s like in 15 I would say things why did I get that. But the cupcake as a whole is a decent piece but it depends on the person. The tattoo is nice, the colour is nice, the line work is great, there is creativity but it’s still a snap shot in time. Is that still something you would want later; they both have their own positive and negative. But I think what you’re looking for in an emotional response. As a manager I would have a problem with that (blood). Because we haven’t turned that corner in society yet we would have a problem. And personally I would love to have a conversation with this individual to see if they truly appreciate what it represents, because I’m in a position that I have seen decapitation I don’t know if he would get it, if he has ever seen it in real-life. Respect for what that means” (Participant 8, 2016).*

Other participants reacted differently; he was more skeptical of the bloody tattoo. He gave a very common reaction to the gory tattoos.

*Interviewer: So what is your opinion on this tattoo?*

*Participant 9: a little scarier dark?*

*Interviewer: what would you think of the individual?*

*Participant 8: I would be a little more hesitant to be honest...*

*I proceeded to ask the individual a little more behind the tattoo.*

*Interviewer: And what kind individual they would be.*

*Participant 9: I’m thinking more the person frame of mind, it wouldn’t mind seeing it. It would just give me a sign that maybe this*

*guy is well not emotional unstable but unhappy. Or less pleasant, it would send off those vibes. I don't think I wouldn't hire him because of that but I would look deeper.*

*Interviewer: Do you think the image changes the way people see tattoos? Just to clarify it's the colour makes a difference. Do you think different jobs would change, I know you own your own business now but do you think some tattoos belong in certain places? Do you think certain jobs should keep them out?*

*Participant 9: I don't think so, but there are places where some types of tattoos would be more acceptable than others.*

*Interviewer: What do you mean?*

*Participant 9: Say for like fine dining restaurants having someone comes up to you with their arms covered with gory tattoos would probably not be the best setting. As a business owner that would be where I would draw the line against stuff like that. Just because and not necessarily because most of the customers older generation would not understand.... And it's not necessary, in my opinion. I would think of that older generation. But I think there is a line for certain establishments (even though the time in changing).*

Both these examples demonstrate that there is still management that believe tattooing is only suitable for certain employment, even though they do not know what the tattoo symbolizes to the individual. The person is being judged straight from their tattoo and not who they truly are or their ability to work. Another management participant reflected what the previous participant indicated.

*Interviewer: two images would you see a difference?*

*Participant 11: One is for shock one is not. It's a statement it's quite a strong statement. The cupcake is not intimidating the other one is. Its wow!!!! (Neck.) Good for you but I couldn't do it!*

*Interviewer: Do you think it might be a societal thing? Where people might accept the cupcake?*

*Participant 11: This one very bloody. If you don't walk around telling people what that's for. It's just human nature, one doesn't love blood but one loves icing. I can see the beauty, I don't like people dying it's*

*not my thing. I would say he must have gone through a rough life to be able to get that done. I don't put it into satanic or religious. Gutsy, he won't be working for a white-collar job. That's the thing with those tattoos they usually find a job to go with it. That can be really expressive. It's a conversation piece, if you're trying to draw attention and talk about it.*

Mirroring how society still sees tattooing to a certain extent. As mentioned before, I often hear that tattoos are so widely accepted; tattooed individuals should not have a problem getting employment. As a fellow tattooed individual, I have experience that would also indicate differently. Another management participant stated that she would not be able to hire individuals with gory tattoos of any kind.

*Interviewer: What do you think of this one (neck tattoo)?*

*Participant 12: Someone constantly fighting with the will to live and trying to make it work*

*Interviewer: could you hire someone like that?*

*Participant 12: No, unfortunately not.*

After asking her if the tattoo would change in different sectors of her employment, she indicated that it would change but tattoos that are deep as she called it, upper management would never say yes.

*Interviewer: earlier you said some individuals could have visible tattoos other could not.... Correct?*

*Participant 12: Oh Ya!*

*Interviewer: would that also go for image difference?*

*Participant 12: Yes, they can have visible tattoos but upper management would definitely say no to that.*

*Interviewer: Anything gory negative, etc.*

*Participant 12: A tattoo like that is deep ... it'll make people uncomfortable and my work wouldn't risk it.... Ya, anything gory.... Wouldn't fly at our work.*

This does not only show that tattoos in the workplace are still struggling to be accepted but also the attitude of the general public has not yet comprehended how tattooing is no longer for criminals and gang members but can be a very positive affirmation to the tattooed individual. Atkinson (2004) indicates that this ideology has limited the employment chances of visibly tattooed individuals. “While the argument remains credible that in Canada and other Western societies tattoos, deviant images, and social stigma tend to go hand in hand, this proposition often limits the sociological analysis of tattooing as a powerful form of human expression” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 23). It’s often this limitation that causes individuals of the general public to be enabled in seeing the other side of tattooing and how crucial it could be for a visibly tattooed participant. A question that was asked to the management participant is what they would perceive as a negative image in their eyes. This question was structured to gauge their perception of negative images and what could potentially be seen as a stigmatized image to each individual.

*Interviewer: What would you consider a negative image when considering tattoos?*

*Participant 12: I don't have a negative opinion but the opinion of higher up management is that it looks dirty.... Gang-related.... they say that clients feel fearful*

*Interviewer: exactly earlier you said swastika, so anything with a negative connotation.*

*Participant 12: Oh Ya ... sorry, if you have tattoos that represent racism or discrimination, I immediately don't want to associate myself with you. I've only ever seen that once though.*

A racist tattoo has social connotations of its own. The author Andrew Timming (2015) explains the issues surrounding racial tattoos, specifically swastikas.

*“One of the more surprising results of the fieldwork is that two recruiters admitted to hiring employees with swastika tattoos, one of which was*

*visible on the neck. Both respondents pointed to the 'double meaning' of the symbol: its Buddhist origins and its subsequent adoption by the Nazi Party. Most recruiters found the swastika to be distasteful and rejected the dual meaning argument. Another hotel manager, explained, 'you can't give the customer a card' explaining that the employee is actually a peaceful Buddhist and not a neo-Nazi" (Timming, 2015, p. 73)*

Management participants tend to be much more hesitating when it comes to a potentially racist tattoo. Most organization will try and make sure to stay away from hateful and discriminatory tattoos, rightfully so.

Participant 10 said that gory and gross would be a consideration for hiring and the customers were also something to consider when hiring an individual with visible tattoos, which were considered to be gory or frightening.

*Interviewer: What would you consider a negative image?*

*Participant 10: I suppose if it was something gross or gory. Not talking about being cartoony but real gory stuff. That's a little extreme if you ask me. It doesn't mean I don't want to hire the person, but we would have to come to the conversation that I don't have a problem with it but the customers might have a problem with it.*

*Interviewer: So you do take customer service into account?*

*Participant 10: Yes*

Another participant indicated that it depended on the field of work the visibly tattooed person chose.

*Interviewer: What would you consider a negative image?*

*Participant 11: It depends on the field, but for the agency here it depends on the roll. My position is one thing, but I have street workers, that work with vulnerable populations, that work on the street who are comfortable with tattoos that would be fine.*

All of these statements are great examples of what society considers acceptable images. It is very clear that the major issue with both images shown was the gory throat tattoo. With this being

said it is fair to conclude that gory and frightening tattoos are not acceptable in most workplaces. The next section will discuss the results of a series of questions regarding stigma. Not only did the stigma that affects visibly tattooed employees but also the stigmatization surrounding the managers.

### *Stigma*

Socialization affects the way individuals created their own reality. This will in consequence affect stigma. This next participant illustrates how his parents disapprove of tattoos. Participant 8 indicated the dislike of his parents.

*Interviewer: To the best of your knowledge what does your family think of them or your parents think about your tattoos?*

*Participant 8: Oh they hated them when I first got them. There was no question about it. Awww, how they found out was back in the 2005 I had done a ridiculous firefighter calendar. And at the time I had I don't know if it was the whole back of the shoulder but I had my original and I had gotten my side piece here so then they had seen it on the news then, there was a special on it. It was an automatic overreaction about it.*

Another participant explained in a very similar situation with her father.

*Interviewer: What does your family think of tattoos?*

*Participant 12: Only my dad at the beginning. When I was younger, he would tell me no real man would marry a girl who ruined her body. My sister and I hid our tattoos until we were in our twenties. He saw them by accident when we went to Niagara and it wet on the boat.*

Another example that was not so extreme was participant 11. He was older when he got tattooed but his family was still concerned.

*Interviewer: To the best of your knowledge what does your family care about tattoos?*

*Participant 11: I didn't get mine till I was 30. They were like what the hell did you do. Why would you do that, but that was it no big issues?*

His parents got used to it but were still not pleased with them in the beginning. This helps explain the attitude individuals currently possess towards tattoos, even though people get used to it that does not mean there is not an initial dislike for tattoos. Tattooed stigmatization has come from generation to generation. This could either help explain why individuals are against tattooing or why they chose not to discriminate. In this regard I showed managers two images to gain their perception of stigma. One was of a tattooed priest and the other was of a young man fully covered in tattoos. I then asked for their different opinions on both of the images.

*Interviewer: what do you think this guy does (young tattooed man)?*

*Participant 10: a tattoo artist or piercing artists.*

*Interviewer: last picture (Tattooed young man)*

*Participant 12: Someone to party with but someone you can have a meaningful/intellectual conversation*

*Interviewer: what do you think he does for a living?*

*Participant 12: disc jockey or Information programmer*

*"I don't have anything negative to say about it ... if I'm looking at his clothes his hair, his ears, I would imagine his probably more in line with that line of work, something about being an artist"*  
*(Participant 8, 2016).*

*Interviewer: What career do you think this young man has?*

*Participant 9: Musician I'd say*

*Interviewer: I can see the concern for sure. OK two more pictures (Priest picture)*

*Participant 12: Hipster priest ... someone who definitely can get a younger crowd into the church*

*“I have no issues with that at all” (Priest image) (Participant 9, 2016)*

*“I’m not a religious dude, but it depends on the image” (Participant 12, 2016).*

All of the participants’ responses above had one thing in common; the young man with a body project was automatically categorized as working in the arts. Even though participant 8 made a great observation that it takes a lot of money to have that many tattoos, he also explained that he was in the arts. Therefore, even though individuals are not consciously aware, they are still making judgments that could impact visibly tattooed employees.

To conclude the perceptive of the visibly tattooed participants may imply that stigmatizations of their tattoos could still be relevant in their lives. One aspect that was interesting was to hear the viewpoint of managers regarding the perception of images. The majority of the managers indicated that gory/frightening tattoos would be highly unlikely to be accepted in the workplace. Managers were asked to give their opinion on two images of tattooed individuals. One image of a young man with a body project displayed the most stigmatization. This is not to say that the stigmatization was done maliciously. Even if the stigma was not intentional, it still creates the feeling of stigmatization for visibly tattooed individuals. Lastly, this section also demonstrated that it may not be the managers that have issues with visibly tattooed individuals but the owners, CEO’s, heads of organization and policy makers that could hold most of the discrimination towards visibly tattooed individuals. In any case this still affects the visibly tattooed individuals in terms of chances to get employment.

## Chapter six: Conclusion

Thirteen years ago I was just a teenager getting my first tattoo, here I am in the present day trying to get individuals to understand that tattoos are much more than just an image on the skin, much more than the gang symbol we have seen on television shows, and much more than that scary feeling in the pit of your stomach when that big biker covered in tattoos walks up to talk to you. Tattoos are a way to remember an event, a way of dealing with a bad experience, a way of not feeling alone when someone leaves our physical world. The stigmatization that is constantly being perpetuated is therefore inaccurate. What this study has found is that workplace stigmatization is still prevalent in today's society. Hiring committees are still afraid to hire individuals with tattoos because they do not want to diminish the brand of the organization. My thoughts are that if one organization such as the legal office would accept tattoos in the workplace, it may change the perception individuals have in the workplace. I do understand that tattoos are becoming more popular in the media in regards to medical professionals obtaining tattoos but in my one personal opinion I do not see many visibly tattooed doctors just yet. Without making much assumption this would need to be a study for another day. Workplace stigmatization can also impact the life of the visibly tattooed individuals to great lengths. One participant indicating not being able to get the job she knew she was meant for and that she had worked so hard to obtain during her schooling because of the stigmatization that was associated with her tattoos. If society continues to perpetuate this negative ideology based on a false notion, it will continue to affect visibly tattooed individuals in not only the workplace but also their lives in general. My final advice is as a visibly tattooed individual myself, and with the research that has been conducted it is important to be aware of the individual and who they truly are. Creating

an assumption based on one group of individuals is not fair to those that do not use tattooing in a negative way. There is a saying one individual can ruin it for many others. This quote is often seen as being unfair to others yet society may not realize that it continues to perpetuate this exact attitude. It is my hope that through this study individual had enough knowledge and information to realize the impact of stigmatization in the workplace.

## **Summary of Findings**

The summary of findings will discuss the most important findings of this research. The section will start with the most important finding and continuing with other relevant findings.

The most pertinent finding in this study in the perspective of the participants is that stigmatization still feels present to them in the workplace. Despite the lack of workplace policies, the attitude, views, and bias of the management team heavily affect visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace.

The second finding is the diversity of the way individuals portrayed their emotions, journey or event through tattoos. It was not only the image that mattered but also the style in which the tattoo was done.

The therapeutic value in which tattoos are used was a finding that would incite further research as discussed below. Many participants indicated that they obtained tattoos to coping with specific events, retain memories or memorialized the passing of an individual. This helps to take away the stigmatization attached to visibly tattooed individuals; understanding that it is not only about being deviant but coping with their own personal struggle.

The image that is being perceived is also very important. It was very evident that the more the image was seen as deviant (gory, scary, racist, offensive) to the perceived the more the individual was stigmatized. After talking to both sets of participants, it was obvious that there

was a disconnect between what the visibly tattooed participant wanted to portray and what the perceived was procured from the interaction.

Knowing your own biases is sometimes difficult, and this was clear when speaking with management participants. Some individuals indicated that they did not have an issue with visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace but would not give them a higher paying employment or be in charge of a company. Therefore there was still discrimination happening in the workplace, despite it not being visible to the managers themselves.

Gender differences were not the main focus of this study but there was a noticeable difference that visibly tattooed participants were aware of. Certain participants were aware those tattooed males were less likely to be discriminated against compared to their female counterparts.

It may not be glaring but the acceptance of family members and the immediate social surroundings is very significant for a visibly tattooed individuals. This acceptance helps with the growth and formation of an individual self-concept. This acceptance can make the difference between a self-concept that is positive for the visibly tattooed individual and one that is not. This study has been influential into understanding the current stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace. Through the completion of this research has become evident that the acceptance of the visibly tattooed participants by their social surroundings and the understanding of how and why the tattoos are obtained become vital to the dialogue around the stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals in the workplace.

## **Concluding Limitations**

There are certain limitations that this research has faced. First let's start with generalizability. This study is only composed of 13 individuals; this can create some issues with stating that all visibly tattooed individuals are going to obtain tattoos for certain reasons

mentioned above or that all workplaces are going to have stereotypical stigmatization of visibly tattooed individuals.

Goffman's theory of stigma and Burger and Luckmann theory of reality could be seen as a limitation due to its age. I choose to use these theories because of their important insight and knowledge on stigmatization and reality in which we see others. Many other studies indicated similar notions and understanding to confirm Goffman (1967) and Burger and Luckmann's (1967) understanding of both concepts.

One of the minimal limitations of this thesis may be the lack of books to provide another point of view, in further studies I will obtain more books.

### **Future Study**

A major reoccurring theme is tattoos used as a therapeutic coping mechanism. The next step into truly understanding the value of tattooing is to dig deeper into the psychological backdrop that deciphers and plans out the need and use of tattooing to help cope with traumatic events. Tattoo is far more complex than society seems to believe, there are social and psychological pathways that are taken to arrive at the decision-making process to obtain a tattoo. The more individuals understand those pathways the hope is to narrow the negative attitudes towards visibly tattooed individuals. It is my aspiration to achieve a doctoral research studying tattooing as a coping mechanism, and the therapeutic values of tattooing after traumatic events.

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## Appendix A: Tattooed Participant Question Guide



### Question Guide Visibly Tattooed and Stigmatization: The hurtful Prejudice

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#### *Tattooed participants*

##### **Section 1: Theme: Information on tattoo(s)?**

1. Do you have any tattoos? If yes go to 1. a. If no, conclude the interview and thank the participant.
  1. a. How many tattoos do you currently have?
2. What was your first tattoo?
3. Was there a special, or specific meaning or significance to this tattoo? If yes, go to 3.a.
  - 3.a. What was the meaning behind that tattoo if any?
4. When did you start getting visible tattoos or hard to conceal tattoos?
5. Why/when did you get your first tattoo?
6. Do your tattoos have one meaning or several?
7. Do you have any emotional attachments to your tattoos? If yes?
  - 7.a. What are these emotions?  
PROMPT: Describe or attach an emotion describing how you feel about each tattoo.  
PROMPT: Can you describe them further?
8. What is the reaction from your family to tattoos in general?
9. What is the reaction to your tattoos by your family members and friends?
10. What is the reaction to your tattoos from your employers? (take your time and record each in chronological order.)

##### **Section 2: Theme: Judgment/Stigma/Attitudes**

1. In your opinion, what do you feel is the attitude towards your tattoos from others, outside of your family?

2. What are some of the common comments you get about your tattoos?
3. Can you tell me about a time when your tattoos were perceived positively. If so, Why were they perceived that way?
4. How did you react (right away and the next time you saw that person)? (You can relate several instances, if you like.)
5. Can you talk about a time when your tattoos were perceived negatively.  
 PROMPT: Why do you think were they perceived your tattoos that way?  
  
 PROMPT: How did you react (right away and the next time you saw that person)? (You can relate several instances, if you like.)
6. Do people's reactions or judgments affect your everyday life? If yes  
 PROMPT: Can you describe how?
7. Have you changed certain decisions you've made, career choices, or other paths in life due to the judgments about you based on your tattoos? (e.g. changed your work or career path, etc.)  
 PROMPT: If so, describe how you went through that journey?
8. Can you tell me about your first experience with someone judging you either positively or negatively because of their reaction to your tattoo [s]?  
 PROMPT: How did this experience affect you?

**Section 3: Theme: Tattoos in the workplace**

1. Have you needed to cover/hide tattoos? Yes/No. If "yes" then Describe the situation(s).  
 1. a: What are the methods you used to cover the tattoo(s)?
2. In your opinion, how do you think having visible tattoos influenced your career or job choice?
3. Did you ever have a negative experience in the workplace in reaction to your tattoos?  
 PROMPT: To the best of your ability, can you describe in as much detail as possible how the situation unfolded?  
 PROMPT: Was it a manager or employee?
4. Have you ever been dismissed from a workplace because of your tattoo(s)? If yes,  
 5. a. In your experience why do you believe/think this happened? (MORE

PROMPTS.)

5. Have you ever had an employment start of positive and went turned negative because of the discovery of your tattoos?

PROMPT: Could you pinpoint it to a specific tattoo, or group of tattoos?

PROMPT: Could the placement of your tattoo(s) be in question? If yes, why do you say so?

PROMPT: In your opinion, do you believe that the image might be an issue and its potential meanings?

6. Is there anything I've missed that you'd like to add about your experience with tattoos?
7. Are there any questions or concerns that you have for me?
8. Thank You for Participating in this interview. (Always be sure to thank participants.)

Demographics:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your current employment?
6. Do you mind giving your income?
  - below \$10,000
  - between \$10,000-\$19,999
  - between \$20,000-\$29,999
  - between \$40,000—\$59,999
  - between \$60,000—\$79,999
  - between \$80,000- \$99,999
  - between \$100,000-\$109,999
  - between \$110,000-\$129,999
  - more than \$130,000
7. What is your educational level?
8. What is your relationship status?
9. What is your nationality?
10. What is your ethnicity?
11. What is your race?
12. What religion do you practise if any?

## Appendix B: Management Participant Question Guide



### Question Guide Visibly Tattooed and Stigmatization: The Hurtful Prejudice

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#### Management participants

##### Demographics:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your current employment?
6. Where is your residence (Rent/Own)?
7. Do you mind giving your income?
8. What is your educational level?
9. What is your relationship status?
10. What is your nationality?
11. What is your ethnicity?
12. What is your race?
13. What religion do you practise if any?

##### Section 4: Theme: tattooed individuals (WHAT ARE YOUR MANAGEMENT DUTIES, FIRE NOT FIRE, SUPERVISOR MANAGER, DISCIPLINE)

1. In your opinion how do you feel about tattoos in general?
2. Do you have any tattoos? Visible or not?
3. What was your first experience with a tattooed individual?
  - PROMPT: How did this situation unfold?
4. What are the first three words you would use to describe heavily tattooed individuals?
5. What is your first impressions of heavily tattooed individuals?
6. What do your parents and close family members think of tattooed individuals?
  - PROMPT: Please describe the emotional responses? (Anger, anxiety, stress, happiness, sadness, etc.)

7. Have you had any negative experiences with tattooed individuals?
8. What are the characteristics you think a person with many tattoos have?
  - PROMPT: Why did you pick these three characteristics?
  - PROMPT: Note to self: Make a list and go back and ask for an explanation.

Section 5: Theme: Tattoos in the workplace

1. Would you hire an individual with visible tattoos?
2. What would you consider a negative image when considering tattoos?
  - PROMPT: Why could you consider this a negative image?
3. Do you have a difference of opinion on viewing both these tattooed images?

- Picture one



- Picture two



- PROMPT: What is the opinion (one image at a time)
  - PROMPT: Please explain why you believe to have this opinion on these images?
    - These two images will be of two different tattoos.
4. Would your opinion change depending on the image?
  5. Would your opinion change from different employment you have had in the past and the one you have currently?
  6. Does your opinion change when looking at these two pictures?

- Picture one



- Picture two



Pictures will be of two individuals: one “well dress” with no tattoos or minimal tattoos showing, the other will be casually dressed with more tattoos showing.

7. Would you characterize individuals with tattoos to certain employment?
  - PROMPT: Please give examples
8. Does your place of employment have policies on body modification especially visible tattoos?
  - PROMPT: Please give examples?

## Appendix C: Tattooed Participant Consent Form



### Informed Consent Form **Visibly Tattooed and Stigmatization: The Hurtful Prejudice**

The purpose of this research is to evaluate perception of management staff towards individuals in a professional career setting. I will also examine the career path individuals with tattoos undertook during the course of their career and how having tattoos influenced that career path.

This study is being conducted under the direction of Anick Morin, with supervisor Dr. Reuben Roth of the Laurentian University Sociology Department. If you have any concerns or questions about the project, you can contact Anick Morin or Professor Pierrot Ross Trembley at 705-675-1151 extension #4362.

You will be asked to answer questions about your work environment, and your visible tattoos may have affected it. You will be interviewed about your experiences for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Any risks related to your interview are minimal. You may experience feelings of anxiety, stress, embarrassment or anger. Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to terminate your participation at any time without consequences.

This research may help inform future law and workplace policies that influence inclusion. It may also help to inform the public on the stigmatized and prejudiced perception of tattooed individuals in the workplace. Your response may also help the hiring processes for future individuals with visible tattoos.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions and you have the right to withdraw from the interview, or take a break, at any time. In the event you withdraw from the study, at your request, all of the information you provide will be destroyed.

All information you supply during the research will be held in strict confidence, your name or the name of your employer, or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any report or publication of the research findings. If you are quoted in any written report, you will be assigned a pseudonym (a false name) to ensure your anonymity. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The audio recordings and transcripts will be stored on password-secured computers in a locked office in the Laurentian University campus. Only researchers involved in this project will have access to any of these files. The interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed ten years after the completion of the project. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

All data for this project will be retained for 4 years after the completion of the project. Unless otherwise specified, data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet located in a locked office on the Laurentian University campus or on a password-protected computer. Only Anick Morin and Dr. Reuben Roth will be given access to collect data.

Participants will be asked to voluntarily provide a mailing, or e-mail, address, if they wish to receive a summary of this study's findings.

Feel free to contact me at any time at (705)675-1151 ext. 4362. You can also contact the Research Ethics Office of Laurentian University. The research office telephone number (705) 675-1151 ext. 3213, 2436 or toll Free at 1-800-461-4030 or e-mail [ethics@laurentain.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentain.ca)

Anick Morin  
MA candidate  
Graduate Program in Sociology  
Laurentian University

Certificate of Consent  
**Behind the scenes of the tattoo culture: The qualitative discourse of stigma and prejudices in the workplace**

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

**Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in “Behind the scenes of the tattoo culture: The qualitative discourse of stigma and prejudices in the workplace,” a study conducted by Anick Morin and supervised by Dr. Pierrot Ross-Trembley. I understand the nature of this project, and I agree to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dat

**Questions About the Research?**

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Anick Morin or Dr. Pierrot Ross-Trembley either by telephone at (705)675-1151 ext. 4362 or by e-mail at [rroth@laurentian.ca](mailto:rroth@laurentian.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact [ethics@laurentian.ca](mailto:ethics@laurentian.ca) or call 705-675-1151 ext. 2436 or toll-free 1-800-461-4030.

**Additional Resources**

Our goal throughout this research is to gain a better understanding of the working conditions in the Sudbury area and shed light on some of the issues faced by workers

within key industrial sectors. If your participation in this study causes you to feel a sense of distress, please contact one of the following agencies who will be able to provide you with advice and support.

**Sudbury Counselling Centre**

260 Cedar Street, Sudbury, ON P3B 1M7

Telephone: 705-524-9629

E-mail: [info@counsellingscc.com](mailto:info@counsellingscc.com)

**Canadian Mental Health Association Sudbury Branch**

111 Elm St. Suite 100, Sudbury, ON P3C 1T3

Telephone: 705-675-7252 or 1-866-285-2642

E-mail: [info@cmha-sm.on.ca](mailto:info@cmha-sm.on.ca)

**Suicide Hotline**

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

**Sudbury Crisis Centre**

127 Cedar St, Sudbury

705-675-4760 (24-hour hotline—365 days/year)

Toll free: 1-877-841-1101

Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. (no appointment necessary) 7 days per week