

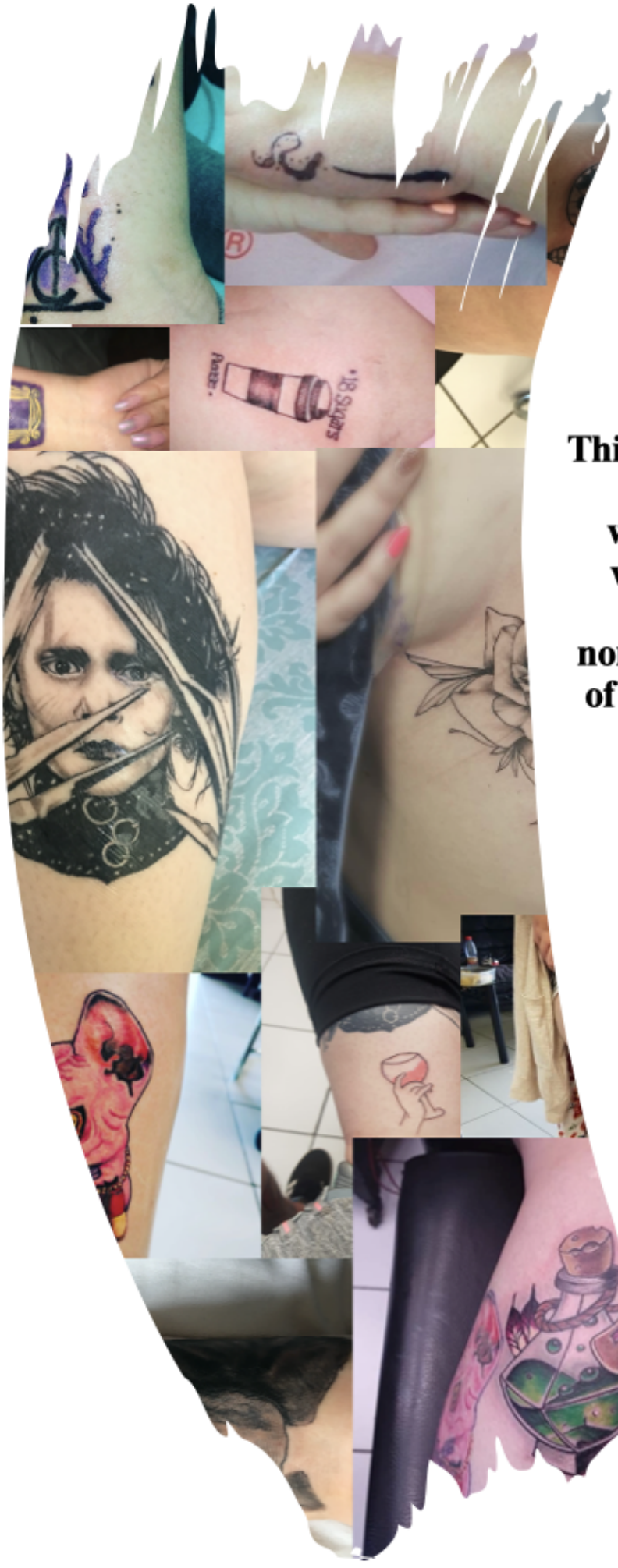
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This way for pain: subculture, witness and tattoo artists in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg

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This Way for Pain: subculture, whiteness and women tattoo artists in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg

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Abstract:

This is a study of women and their experiences working in the tattoo industry by looking at the relations of gender, subculture and white privilege, as well as the location of Johannesburg, where the research is based. White men dominate the tattoo industry in the Northern Johannesburg suburbs of Douglasdale and Blairgowrie. However, this has been changing as the subculture of tattoos begins to become less and less exclusive. As more women and different ethnicities join the evolving subculture that is the industry, you find a pushback by the "classical" ideals propagated by the nostalgia of being the "other" or feelings of rejection from the "norm." These feelings have always been a part of the tattoo artist subculture in South Africa. Through formal interviews with tattoo artists and employees at two studios and through observations, note taking and audio recordings, I found that although it is still a field dominated by white men, not only is the field of having and making tattoos itself changing, but it is also becoming more accepted into mainstream society. Here women artists can create their own spaces and become accepted into the industry, even though some still face discrimination and harassment.

Keywords: gender, race, whiteness, white privilege, women, men, tattoo industry, tattoos, subculture, counterculture, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Introduction:

The reason we are here

I grew up in a small town built around a coal mine. This mine is where my father worked for many years while my younger brother and I were still very small. For much of that time, we lived in the homes supplied by the mine. I recall this three-bedroom, one bathroom, one kitchen, dining room and living room flat where I spent the first years of my life. When my father realised his dream of becoming a tattoo artist, I do not recall much of his apprenticeship. I was too young, still in crèche. However, I recall the back room being turned into his first tattoo and piercing studio. I remember this because when I was around five, I wanted so badly to get a belly ring. At least until this older girl, around 16, came in to get her belly ring. I remember her letting out a scream. This deterred me from getting my belly ring for a few more years. Once my parents moved into the first home that they owned, the garage was redone into a full tattoo studio. This is where my father built his career as a tattoo artist and where we lived until I was in high school.

My father was never your run-of-the-mill nine-to-five kind of person. From a young age, he was made aware that he was different. He was a white English man from Zimbabwe in a very Afrikaans town. He was also diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. Something we share, but my experiences significantly differed from his. Growing up, he was an outsider. He was the boy who spent hours skateboarding. The one that listened to rock music and smoked weed. He stood out from the norm of white apartheid conservativism that existed at that time. He was sent to a technical school that focused on teaching their students to work more with their hands. However, this was not the only thing that led my dad to what would later become his passion. My grandmother, his mother, would make him and all her five children practice drawing. She thought it was vital for them to practice a creative outlet. Ironically, my dad remembers complaining about this when he was younger, saying, "When am I ever going to need to know how to draw?" He realised much later that it was the most essential skill he could have learned. The combination of being an outsider and this creative outlet led him to what was then considered a sub-culture. With tattoos and tattooing, he would fight the conservatives that continued to judge him. My father's passion from his blooming early career spread this love

and passion for tattoos to the whole nuclear family, from my mother, brother and myself, all becoming proud tattoo collectors.

This put me in a difficult position. As much as I had inherited the love for tattoos from my parents, and even though people's views about tattoos have slowly changed during my lifetime, I still needed to hide them when I began receiving them in early high school. As a white, middle-class girl who moved from a small town to Johannesburg and attended a Catholic high school, I had many reasons to hide my tattoos and piercings. One of these reasons was that my teachers viewed them as sins, which were forbidden in the school. As I grew up, I also noticed how people assumed the right to stare at me and make comments under their breath. I have heard things like, "Why would she do that to herself" or "You would be so pretty without those things." These comments are not the reason I tend to hide my tattoos in formal situations. My father, who has tattoos all over his face, is the one that advised me not to get visible tattoos because it will "make it harder to get a job in the future." People will often judge my intellectual ability because I have tattoos, thinking they are a sign of a stupid person.

I have experienced judgements concerning tattoos go even further than obnoxious stares and stereotyping. This is especially true if you have hundreds of tattoos all over your body, like my mother. She is covered from her neck, arms, hands, legs, feet and back. Usually, people with this many tattoos are judged more harshly than those with just a few tattoos here and there. My mother told me that when interviewing for her latest job, she honestly revealed her tattoos to the interviewer. She said she did not want the first impression to be dishonest. She was up against another candidate for the job, and the interviewer told my mother that the employment would be considered after a background check. They told her she would most likely not get the position, assuming the background check would show that she had a criminal record. Nevertheless, she got the job because, as it turned out, it was not a woman full of tattoos with a criminal record. It was the woman she was up against, the clean-cut, socially-contributing citizen.

Research question

Living around the tattoo industry through my father, I became aware that it is a white male-dominated space. A space with its own identity, it has its taste in music, fashion, style and even personality. It is a subculture that, classicly, is only available to white male artists

whom other white male artists have accepted. However, this space is evolving, and you can now see an influx of women artists, new styles, and approaches as the closed nature of the subculture is fading away, making tattoos less exclusive.

The practice of tattooing and tattoos themselves has become more widely accepted and fashionable. This is because tattoos are no longer the taboo they once were here in South Africa. Nowadays, every celebrity, regardless of gender and race, has some form of tattoo or modification that adorns their body. This lessening of the taboo and opening of the industry has allowed more women to begin working as artists.

This development has made me wonder about women's experiences in the industry. What do they have to deal with that their male counterparts do not? How is it different for them? What are the challenges or advantages they face? What is it that keeps them motivated to remain in tattoos? How do they carve out their own space in the industry? Finally, what is keeping other women from becoming tattoo artists themselves?

I began my research with these questions and sought out women tattoo artists working nearby. Through my father's connections, I came into contact with a studio in Douglasdale that had women artists working there but was owned by a man. My main focus, however, was on a women-owned tattoo studio in Randburg that I was communicating with.

Literture review

As I started to think about and conceptualise my research, it became apparent that race would play a part. As I told my colleagues that, in my experience, the tattoo industry is dominated by white men, they asked me how I was sure of this. I looked at the racial demographics of the areas where the two studios were located and realised they were majority white. In the studios, all the artists were white except for a single person. I realised that my research was not just about gender but also about race.

I wanted to understand the areas where the studios were located to understand better the experiences of the women artists who work there. These are two suburbs in the north of Johannesburg, known as Douglasdale and Blairgowrie and are predominantly white and upper-middle-class areas. I looked into the history of these places and how they began. This is so that

there is an understanding of how these areas functioned in the past. What they are and how they are viewed since the racial and gender demographics in the past influence how an area continues to be today. To do this, I focused on who first settled into these areas where people lived and moved on a daily bases. I also looked at Ivan Vladislavic's Portrait with Keys (2006), a collection of short stories that offers a nuanced look at Johannesburg. The stories cover diverse people, including the city's white and black residents, immigrants and refugees. Vladislavic (2006) can capture the complexity of Johannesburg and its residents. With this, I understood Johannesburg's complex and unequal nature and how its residents of different races share the unequal space.

Once I understood this, I moved towards the subculture's alternative spaces found in these areas. To better understand subcultures and especially counterculture movements, I looked at Richard Dick Hebdige's 1978 work on subculture and the meaning of style. Hebdige (1978) sets out his subculture model, where subculture rises as a form of resistance to the dominant culture and values. The style became vital once I began looking at all the images, colours, and decorations that the tattoo studios in Blairgowrie and Douglasdale used to decorate their spaces, where they fit into the suburban feel, using homes that exist already in this space and making use of structures that are commonly seen in these spaces. When looking at it from the outside, you would never say that these are tattoo studios. However, once you enter the gate or drive into the covered parking, you see the imagery and hear the sounds of the alternative subculture that streams through the doors where they do not really stand out but only fit in partially. They exist in the space together with the suburban. By this, I mean that they are not causing havoc as many might assume of the noisy, painted and colourful people that exit in the alternative world, but they are living in these what used to be and, in some cases, are still very conservative spaces.

The tattoo spaces in these areas are white-dominated. This domination comes not from the origin of tattoos but from the origin of Western ideals and ideas around tattoos. They are only for highly masculine white men such as sailors or bikers. This idea is a very American-dominated idea, where commercial tattooing originated. This same idea was brought into South Africa when tattoo studios and tattoo artists became a widespread phenomenon. This subculture that claims to be rejected by the larger society ends up doing the same thing to people they claim the larger society does to them. That is, reject them for their physical characteristics, style, and gender. This feeling of being discriminated against fueled the creation of the

subculture around white tattoo artists, who, despite feeling that they are "other", are still taking advantage of their white privilege. One can see the white privilege within the tattoo industry in these areas by looking at works and writings about white privilege, especially the wider-reaching white privilege prevalent in South Africa. I focused on Richard Dyer's 1997 book White for a broader description of whiteness. Then to understand whiteness in a South African context, I read Nicky Falkof's The End of Whiteness (2016), a book that explores the notion of whiteness and its role in shaping South African society.

Here Falkof draws from various sources, including interviews with people of different backgrounds, historical accounts, and cultural analysis. I also used the Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness (2022), an edited collection of essays and articles on the concept of whiteness and how it shapes modern society, especially chapters from Javeria Khadija Shah and Mark Schmitt. Shah uses Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to explain how whiteness fits into the different environmental and social systems. On the other hand, Schmitt describes stigmatising and how whites can stigmatise other whites when they do not follow the accepted way of being white. Further, I looked at Anoop Nayak's Critical Whiteness Studies (2007). I found how whiteness and white privilege connect to the past, and anyone of a different race was considered a lower class than a white person. This leads to the conservative ideas carried from the past to the present regarding the under-representation of black people within the tattoo studios I visited. It also helped me contextualise those alternative white people who identify through a particular counterculture are more concerned about/aware of other white peoples' judgment than excluding black people from their counterculture.

This leads to the focus of what this research discusses—the women in the industry in these areas and how these women experience the tattoo space. I started by looking at the history of women in tattoos from a North American perspective to understand how women first came to be in tattoos. I chose American history because more literature is needed on the history of women tattoo artists in South Africa. The work of Jessica Jin Long (2020) gives a historical overview of women in tattoos from the very beginning. The author also examines the industry's current state, the challenges women artists face, and ways women are working to change the industry.

My thinking was also informed by reading the research paper Self, Style and Service: A Qualitative Study of Gender, Labor, and Embodied Cultural Capital in the Tattoo Industry

by Evelyn Mitchell (2019), which looks at the relations of gender and labour in the tattoo industry and finds that men dominate the industry. I leaned on the experiences of the women tattoo artists I spoke to, who support what these women in the industry in American history had also experienced. I wanted to explore further how women in South Africa have been and are seen in the general workplace by looking at women's experiences in other fields and the tattoo industry in other countries. I looked at a research paper on Inclusive Workplaces by Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez (2018), which presents a model for creating inclusive work environments.

I looked at the article Why do people get tattoos? by Millian Kang and Katherin Jones (2007) to find out why women are motivated to get tattoos in the first place and enter the industry even though men dominate the space. For a more historical basis on this, I read Helen Bradford's (1996) Women, Gender, and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, which focuses on the Cape Colonies under British rule and provides insight into how the history of South Africa shaped its gender and power relations. I also used works on gender theory by Rachel Hare-Mustin and Jeanne Marecek (1988), which offers an approach to understanding what gender is and its role in shaping the individual. These insights are further supported by the experiences of the women I spoke with. I found that women tattoo artists are carving out a space in the industry for themselves, creating their own spaces. Through this creation, they are becoming steadily more accepted by the white male artists who are still in the majority of the community. Although I found that more people are looking at women's impact in the tattoo industry, there is still a lot of work and research to be done to create a substantial basis of knowledge on the challenges, struggles and experiences that women have faced and continue to face in the tattoo industry.

Methodology

The two studios and one freelance artist I spoke to come from the Johannesburg areas of Douglasdale and Blairgowrie. In Douglasdale, the tattoo studio is called Rising Dragon Tattoo, and I spent some time at the studio with the artists. I was observing how they work together. It was in this area, too, that I was able to get into contact with tattoo artist Cole Moebius, who is a freelancer. It was a week or two later, after I had visited Rising Dragon, that I could spend additional time at Ting’s Tattoos in Blairgowrie, the other studio I visited, and got to see how this tattoo studio functioned and how these artists worked.

The field research was performed during June, July and August of 2022. This consisted of observations, note-taking and one-on-one formal interviews with pre-set questions to get more standard contributions and feedback. During these three months, I actively engaged with the tattoo studios and freelance artists, trying to find time to meet and talk. This was done through email. I first contacted Angelo Pillay, an Indian man who is the owner and founder of Rising Dragon Tattoo, through a phone number I received from my father. He directed me to contact his shop manager via email address. Ting's email address was found online after a Google search.

Angelo runs Rising Dragon Tattoo and has two women and one man working under him; the men and women artists are all white. In contrast, Ting's Tattoos is owned and run by Kimberly Thorn, better known as Ting, a white woman with three other white women and one white man working under her. The freelance artist that worked around Douglasdale and other areas of Johannesburg is also a white male. I spoke to them in a scheduled conversation/interview. However, I only had the chance to talk to two women artists working under Ting.

During the time that I spent in these studios and with these nine artists and single shop manager, I was able to see the relationships that they had developed among each other, how they interacted with one another, the clients that they saw and the art they create and what they do in their free time. Some draw and some think of tattoo designs. During this time, these observations allowed me to understand how the women in these spaces work, how they fit in and how they are carving out a space for themselves. Many of the tattoo artists spoke to me during their free time. By this, I mean when they were not busy with a client. I prepared a list of questions to use during these conversations/ interviews, which would last anywhere from 30 minutes to my longest at one hour and 20 minutes. The days that I visited the studios were quiet days where few clients were coming in. I opted to use a voice recording app on my smartphone. In this way, I could be more focused on what was being said, how it was being said and the contributor's body language during the interviews. Most artists were uncomfortable with the recording and interview process at the beginning of each session. However, as we spoke more and got more into the flow of the conversation, everyone seemed to relax and forget that they were being recorded (Emerson et al. 2011, 105).When I was at the studios, I also observed the layout and chosen décor**.**I also contacted the studios to get images of tattoos that the artists

thought best represented their unique style, as some did not like the idea of photos being taken of them and also because I needed access to clients myself. These images are not focused on any part of the body but instead focused on the work that the artist does in particular.

I decided on this because of ethical concerns surrounding getting images of sensitive parts of people's bodies, and also, I wanted the artists to provide images that best represented them, which would be original designs and their best work. Because of issues around intellectual property, I did not want to include designs from other artists or artists online because then I would not be able to provide credit adequately.

Throughout my research, I also try to stay clear of terms such as "female" and instead opt to use words such as "women" to not exclude and instead include individuals that identify as women.

This work is broken down into three chapters. The first focuses on the tattoo studios in the northern suburbs and how they live in the sense of contradiction with the suburban environment they are located in. The second is about the whiteness and white privilege of the artists and how the tattoo subculture blinds them to their privileges. Finally, the third chapter explores women and their experiences in the tattoo industry in these areas and how they come to find their space.

Chapter One: Not standing out, not fitting in.

On the way to Rising Dragon and Ting's Tattoos, the homes you pass to get to these studios are nestled deeply into historic white suburban Johannesburg, hidden by tall walls and electric fences. Large SVUs roll around while black working-class people walk along the carefully-maintained curbside lawns and rows of trees to get to their jobs. People are going about their daily business as usual, hardly expecting that hidden behind the tall walls and in suburban homes, you can find your way to pain'. Blairgowrie and Douglasdale have been part of Johannesburg since the 1800s. They were founded by European farmers and later turned into and are still predominantly white suburbs. Douglasdale is home to Rising Dragon Tattoo, owned and run by the more-classical tattoo artist Angelo Pillay. In Blairgowrie, you find Ting's Tattoos run by owner Kimberly Thorne where there are more women artists than men. These

tattoo artists do not fit in with the people around them, but they are still part and parcel of the suburbs. In these spaces, the sub-culture of the tattoo industry and the tattoo world is sheltered by suburban structures where they do not stand out, but once you enter, you will not find coffee shops nor homes, but places where alternative people are paid to modify human bodies.

This chapter explores how these tattoo artists live in contradiction. The subculture of tattoos and the people therein feel that they are not accepted and excluded by conservative whites, yet they still form part of the neighbourhoods in which this conservatism is rooted. They work and live next door to the same conservative white society they feel has rejected them. This is a society that seems to be okay with the continued existence of these studios.

History of the suburbs: Blairgowrie (Randburg) and Douglasdale (Sandton)

Johannesburg is a city infamous for its inequality. In his book about living in Johannesburg, Ivan Vladisclavic (2006, 137) writes that "In unequal cities", those who have little "must survive somehow by preying on those who have more." A few kilometres away from the wealthiest square mile in Africa, Sandton, sits the sprawling township of Alexandra.

This inequality in Johannesburg is also split along racial lines, with Vladislavic (2006, 66) writing, "The white city is made of steel and glass, illuminated from within. It is printed on aluminium hoardings and Perspex sheetings. It is bolted down, recessed and double-glazed, framed and sealed, it is double-sided and laminated," while on the other hand, a township is "made of cardboard and hardboard, buckling in the sunlight. It is hand-painted on unprimed plaster, scribbled on the underside of things, on the blank reverses, unjustified, in alphabets with an African sense of personal space, and smudged. It is tied to a fence with the string" (Vladislavic 2006, 66).

Near Sandton is the wealthy suburb of Douglasdale, founded by Thomas Douglas and his wife Janet Alexander when they immigrated to South Africa in 1890 from Scotland (Africa Outlook N.d.) The Douglasdale dairy farm was formed in 1905 when it started delivering milk to the surrounding area in the 1930s. This Sandton suburb, where Rising Dragon Tattoos is located, was called Douglasdale in honour of its influence on the local community (Africa Outlook N.d.). One can still pass by the Douglasdale dairy farm that was formed in 1905 today and still produces milk for many South Africans. A 2011 census conducted around Douglasdale

found that of a population of 10,708 people living within the suburb, 55% were female and 45% male. Residents were mostly small family units, with the most common ages being 0 – 14 and 20 – 49, coinciding with parents and children (Firth 2011). In this 2011 census, they looked at the population's ethnic groups as well. People who identified as being white made up 66% of the population, second highest are those that identified as black African, who make up only 22% of the population. Then Indian or Asian individuals make up 8%, and Coloured people make up 3%—those recorded as another form 1% of the population (Firth 2011). The languages are as follows: English: 74%, Afrikaans: 10%, Other: 4%, isiZulu: 4%, isiXhosa: 2%, Setswana: 2%, Sesotho: 2%, isiNdebele: 1%, Sepedi: 0.89%, Xitsonga: 0.56%, Tshivenda: 0.29%, SiSwati: 0.17% (Firth 2011). These statistics indicate that Douglasdale is a suburb mainly composed of white English and Afrikaans-speaking people as of 2011.

Sixteen minutes to the South of Douglasdale is the Randburg suburb of Blairgowrie. A relatively quiet area described as very quaint, according to online publications:

"Nothing much happens in Blairgowrie, which is a good thing, as it is essentially a place where people return at the close of business to hang their hats and rest up. (SA Venue N.d.) it is a cosy, tree-lined neighbourhood with a slightly bohemian feel."

However, there are a lot of businesses, restaurants and shopping locations around the area despite its sleepy description. In the middle of the 1800s, white farmers came to settle in Blairgowrie, the location of Ting's Tattoos, and before this, little was known about this small area (Blairgowrie Community Association 2013). Randburg began when the "Boers" arrived from the Great Trek in 1838. One of the earliest farmers in this area was named J. Labuschagne, who owned the Boskop farm in the 1860s. After this, in 1891, William Gray Rattray purchased a section of the Klipfontein and named it Craighall after his hometown in Scotland. This section of Craighall, as we know it today, consists of Craighall Park and Blairgowrie (Blairgowrie Community Association, 2013). Rattray mostly used the farmland in Blairgowrie for agriculture to grow fresh produce to be distributed to Johannesburg. In the year 1902, Rattray opened some of his lands to be used for residential plots (Blairgowrie Community Association 2013). However, Rattray's daughter Doris Grey McChesney applied to the Johannesburg City Council in 1940 to develop a township on a section of the "Craighall on the farm Klipfontein No.4", and this is when Blairgowrie came to be in 1941 (Blairgowrie Community Association 2013).

A census from 2011 shows a population of 12,049 reside within the Blairgowrie suburb, and its demographics are similar to those of Douglasdale. This population split is 53% female and 47% male; there are a variety of different age groups that live their lives within Blairgowrie. Those aged 0 – 64 are the most common (Firth 2011). The ethnic groups within the area of Blairgowrie comprise 62% white individuals, the second highest being black Africans making up 25% of the population, and Indian or Asian individuals making up 9% of the population. Then Coloured individuals were only 3%, and those recorded as others were 2% (Firth 2011). The languages that are most commonly spoken in Blairgowrie, again similar to Douglasdale, are English: 71%, Afrikaans: 10%, isiZulu: 4%, Other: 4%, Setswana: 3%, Sepedi:2%, isiNdebele: 2 %, isiXhosa:1 %, Sesotho: 1%, Tshivenda: 0.89%, Xitsonga: 0.60%, SiSwati: 0.21%, and Sign language: 0.13%. Here we can see that Blairgowrie, as of 2011, has a higher population of white individuals as well as English and Afrikaans being spoken by a majority of the population, indicating that Blairgowrie, as is Douglasdale, is a predominantly white suburb. They are so similar that you can barely tell the demographics apart.

The areas where both studios are located are majority white, with histories of wealth stemming from either European or Boer roots. The history of South Africa allowed the privilege to remain in these areas. The artists at these studios are supported by the privileged, suburban clientele who live here.

This way for pain

Leslie Avenue generally has signs everywhere stating that it is an area frequented by hijackers. Once deep into Fourways enough, I turned left onto Penguin Drive. After, I take another left onto Van Riebeek Street, named after the country's first Dutch coloniser, and then right onto Crawford Drive. A large stand-alone double-story grey house with white pillars is nestled into a quaint suburban area.

Very few, or at least I, would not have assumed this upmarket suburban home in Douglasdale would be a tattoo studio. For me, the classic "tattoo shop" or studio would usually be located in a mall or a strip mall. Growing up, my father's studio was in our garage. He had transformed it into a tattoo shop. The stereotypical idea of a parlour has glass windows and doors with the logo and the studio's name plastered. So an unassuming, seemingly ordinary

family home from the outside made me remark, "Is this it? This is such a strange place for a tattoo studio." However, according to Google-aggregated websites, it is often rated among the best tattoo studios in Johannesburg.

To enter the studio, you walk by a swimming pool that can be seen from inside, constantly drawing visitors back to the culture of the northern suburbs that this tattoo shop is surrounded by. The shop manager Clive, shares that the pool used to have its pool cover over it; however, this led to many failed coffee deliveries and many guests having to suddenly break into a panicked run when they realised that they were walking on the pool cover because they did not see the sign. Walking past the pool, you come across a sign that says, "This way for pain", and another flashing sign saying "tattoos" and "piercings." This is when you know you have arrived at Rising Dragon Tattoo on 64 Crawford Drive.

When you enter the studio, you are welcomed by Clive, standing behind a desk with a glass sign that reads "Welcome to Rising Dragon Tattoo". This resembles the usual glass window and logo found in more traditional studios. There are two skulls on the counter, one black and one white, carved with intricate details with a small pot plant behind them. You can find the artists' business cards and pamphlets before the skulls.

This is reminiscent of the "classic" style of tattoo culture, which is present and visible in the decoration choices that cover Rising Dragon's walls with more skulls and smoke and darkness. Occasionally you can see pops of colour too. This is a reflection of the studio's owner. When asked about his tattoos during our interview, Angelo laughs and says, "The types of tattoos that I have [are] very old, so the style of work that I have is very old-school, so it looks a bit hardcore, but my kids love it." He says that today's tattoos are considered art, whereas "old-school," classic tattoos like he has, which he received decades ago, are not. "So, I have like proper old-school tribals, skulls, you know, like back in the day stuff, but now, it's different. The work that we do is art, not [just] 'tattoos.'" Angelo sees skulls and tribal designs as old-school and 'hardcore,' we can see that the décor that covers the studio walls resembles the same hardcore "old-school" rebellious culture that tattoos once were part of. Although Angelo knows and can see that the tattoo industry and world are moving away from this into what he considers a more artistic space, he still connects himself and his studio to the old-school idea of what a tattoo studio looks like.

The jewellery room in Rising Dragon is decorated with wallpapers with designs of dragons that are black and grey and certain spots of bright, almost neon colours that pop out. In tattoos, there are different types of dragons which all have unique symbolism. Generally, dragons are symbols of power; they are also associated with strength, wisdom, prosperity, and good luck (The Dragon Shop 2019). Chinese dragons emerged from imperial China, where they were a symbol only to be used by the emperor (The Dragon Shop 2019). They are also considered protectors and helpful to humanity, which contradicts what they represent in Western symbolism, an enemy to be destroyed. Even the positions that the dragon is depicted flying in are essential. If the dragon is depicted flying upwards, it is a good omen, but if represented flying downwards, it is a bad omen (The Dragon Shop 2019). A rising Chinese dragon is the symbol of the studio. These dragons also represent masculinity. The "Rising Dragon" representing the studio is a positive, powerful and masculine omen for an alternative business (Murphy and Muscato 2022). It represents the "old-school" nature of the business owner and the success and reputation of his shop.

Moving from the jewellery room into a room where the tattoos are designed, you spot a Roman solder statue standing between two pot plants creating a triangle. The statue has been painted as if the soldier has received several tattoo designs across its body with a black marker pen and has its toenails painted. The message is clear: It is going against the dominant culture by messing with classic ideas that exist around the masculinity and conformity of soldiers.

When you exit this room through the double doors and turn to the right, walking past one of the pot plants, you enter the space of women artists Adrianne Black and Angelo's apprentice Brittany Wyatt, who also assists around the studio. Despite the studio looking like a family home on the outside, once you enter, you know this is a business place. Nevertheless, you can see that a family exists in this house by watching the artists' work and engaging with one another.

The morning of my visit, Hendrick Strydom, a senior male artist, started pulling Clive's leg by telling him not to hit on me, and Clive, clearly embarrassed, said, "Ag man! She's married!" The whole tattoo studio and the artists inside constantly joke around, making it feel like a little family of people who are very close to each other and like spending time together. Angelo sets the rules for the shop in a patriarchal role; he resolves the conflicts and is well-respected by the other artists. The shop is managed by Clive, who takes on a role similar to an

elder sibling. The artist that can be seen as the youngest sibling, who does things for everyone, is Brittany, the apprentice. Then you have Adrianne and Hendrik, who crack jokes and do their own thing, taking the role of younger siblings.

In the room that Adrianne tattoos, the walls are decorated with black wallpaper sporting images of faces made of swirling smoke and more skulls. This room has a distinctly underground feel because of its darkness. In certain countries, tattoo shops are forced to exist "underground" and obscure. In Japan, while tattooing is legal but socially unacceptable, tattoo artists do not advertise and must work in hidden, unassuming spaces (Kanpai 2021). In South Africa, tattoos are not illegal, but the feeling of contraband exists in the industry, or at least exists, as evidenced by the spaces some tattoo artists keep. These dark spaces, maintained through styling, colour and décor, carry the nostalgia of the unaccepted and rejected and are juxtaposed by the fact that artists need a considerable amount of light to accurately tattoo. This can symbolise rebelling against society, conformity, and conservativism.

Directly across from Adrianne's studio space is the kitchen. This is where the artists have their coffee in the morning and prepare for their day, chatting with one another; when it comes to lunchtime, this is where they warm their food. Here they banter back and forth or talk about designs and get colleagues' feedback or guidance on the design. The next tattoo studio space is for Hendrik. In this space, the senior artist can do whatever he wants; it is entirely his. He has a TV on the wall where he can choose what music he would like to listen to, and across from this room is owner Angelo Pillay's tattoo studio space. As you enter the room, you see a massive amount of bright, colourful artwork covering the walls in contrast to the rest of the studio. A television is also mounted onto the wall here, playing whatever Angelo wants to listen to, like Red Hot Chilli Peppers, reminiscent of the 90s, during the tattoo session. Next to the TV is a huge glass sliding door that looks out over the pool, allowing much natural light to enter and sneakily remind visitors that this studio is a converted suburban home. The other tattoo studio I visited during my ethnography was a converted building in suburbia.

Ting's Tattoos

It was a cold winter morning early on Wednesday, the 20th of July, when I left to go towards Ting's Tattoos in Blairgowrie, Randburg. I drove up to Beyers Naude Drive and towards Cresta Mall, turning left into Judges Ave to Malibongwe Drive, where there is another

women-owned tattoo shop called SheKnows Ink. Ting's is located on the left-hand side when driving down Hunter Street. The tattoo studio is situated within a building that looks like a vintage or classic petrol or gas station from the 60s or 70s. You would not think otherwise, as one of the first things you notice is a car workshop, but on closer inspection, you see a coffee shop and nursery owned by a man who dresses in tight skinny jeans and has a greaser aesthetic. Ting's Tattoos, the tattoo studio owned and run by Kimberley Thorne, also known by her nickname by many "Ting", is located between this coffee shop and a casting director room.

Unlike Rising Dragon, which is a three-bedroom house. Ting's is a one-room refurbished garage/petrol station. It has a more open-plan tattoo studio rather than individual rooms for separate artists. The outside front of the studio is decorated with a giant black and white moth with orange, red and yellow lines that run from the beginning of the studio glass to the end. Once you enter the studio, you see half of Ting's is painted black and half a dark/deep red, almost maroon. Black is the favoured colour of the wall in many tattoo studios. Like Ting's, in Rising Dragon, black is used throughout the studio. The colour black, according to Gavin Evans (2017) and his exploration of the meanings of the colour spectrum, can mean different things in different cultures. In Western cultures, black can represent mourning, sadness, and death (Evans 2017, 388). On the other hand, in ancient Egypt, black represented life and rebirth (Evans 2017, 360). The colour usually has a negative representation; things like misfortune and evil are usually tied to black (Evans 2017, 361). It is also a colour associated with rebellion which could be part of why many tattoo studios like to have dark or black aesthetics (Evans 2017, 387).

A now-empty tank or aquarium that I think used to be home to some critter is on the front desk, where you meet tattoo artist Vincent. Sometimes if you are as early as I was, you will be greeted by Ting herself. The front desk is where you check in for your appointments with one of the artists. Decorating the counter are plastic plants and skulls, just like in Rising Dragon.

Skulls in tattoos have many different meanings. Some are decorated with colours, and others look like the real thing. There are skulls with roses that sit above the critter container. Some of the more common understandings of the skull in the tattoo world are death, morbidity, anger, and decay, as explained by the artists at Iron Brush Tattoos (2021) in the US and Alyssa McCormack (2021) from Tattmag.com. Skulls can also symbolise toughness, strength, and

overcoming challenges, including death (McCormack 2021). The skeleton is left behind even when the soul has passed. Therefore, it is a symbol of permanence (Green 2009). Sugar skulls, often used in Mexican-themed tattoos, symbolise life. Many individuals get skull tattoos as a form of rebellion against authority (McCormack 2021). According to Hebdige (1979, 2), the British punks of the 70s and the movements of art and music surrounding them can be seen as a revolt against the dominant, conservative culture. Skulls are often a symbol seen in punk movements, as in album cover art, band names and imagery. The skull is one of the key symbols of the tattoo artist subculture.

Hebdige (1979, 2) states that the meaning of "subculture" is always in dispute. However, it can be understood as the expressive forms and rituals of "subordinate groups who are alternatively dismissed, denounced and canonised." At different times subcultures have been treated by societies differently. Sometimes as "threats to public order" and others as "harmless buffoons." Subcultures take up styles from mundane objects – items, music, clothes, hairstyles, attitudes – that take on double meanings (Hebdige 1979, 3). The word "subculture" brings forth ideas of secret societies and the "underworld", similar to Adrianne's room in Rising Dragon (Hebdige 1979, 3). For tattoo studios, the aesthetics, the paint on the walls, and the hanging artwork are symbols of the style of the studio in question. Style, in a subculture, is "pregnant with significance" (Hebdige 1979, 18). This style interrupts the process of normalisation and goes against nature (Hebdige 1979, 18). The "classic" style of tattoo spaces fits this description, especially with the constant inclusion of decorative skulls and other dark motifs. Even though Ting's is more esoteric than Rising Dragon, it does maintain some links to this classic style.

Behind the counter is a room where Ting and her artists have the tattoo equipment: the grips and tips, everything they will need to start and complete your tattoo. On the wall behind the counter, there are many different nik-naks. The cluttered aesthetic is reminiscent of old-school tattoo studios, with different little objects and pieces that Ting likes. These pieces cover the shelves and counter spaces. They cover the walls. There is a vintage display counter that houses the jewellery that is for sale. This counter before the entrance space is also home to statues from different belief systems, such as Buddhism. The walls surrounding the artists are filled with frames of their achievements, the things they like, and something to match who they are in the space where they spend most of their time designing and tattooing.

As the artists prepare for their day, drinking coffee and getting ready for their clients, the sound of the latest pop grows in the studio. The right side of the tattoo studio is where artists Ting, Megan and Megan F work. The two newer artists, like Tarryn, are set up across from them with their own space. Ting's tattoo studio has this very esoteric feeling regarding its décor. A look and feel more connected to the newer mindset that tattoos are art. However, the studio has this link to the old-school tattoo world with the cluttered space, the dark walls and the skulls that cover the countertops. Paintings, images of women, and artworks of characters such as Frankenstein cover the largest wall in the tattoo studio. This particular artwork of Frankenstein is the exact copy of an artwork I gifted to my father and mother, which is currently hanging in my father's tattoo studio, which would be considered a more old-school shop similar to Rising Dragon. Ting's esoteric aesthetics and links to the old-school classic subculture of tattoos show a tattoo shop in the middle of the classic and the modern. A shop in the middle of the industry-wide change that is happening.

Ting's space also has pictures of her and her family and drawings by her child. In contrast, Megan F's space is filled with perfectly placed images she likes. Each of these spaces is filled with tables that hold the equipment artists need when they tattoo and large mirrors for their clients to get up and look at the completed tattoos. The studio has a roll-up door in the back leading to an outside covered waiting area with comfortable seating, like lounge patio furniture. In the mornings and afternoons and when the artists have lunch, they chat in this area. On breaks, they relax here and chat with their customers. This area is also shared with the coffee and nursery shop next door. When you walk past the patio furniture, you find the kitchen and the bathroom for the artists and clients.

Outside in this area, you can easily hear the music playing from within Ting's. Something that surprised me was that the music that was being listened to was music that I had heard on the radio earlier that day on my drive to the studio. This was hip-hop and pop music, music that is more connected to contemporary culture. This particular song was from woman rap artist Megan Thee Stallion.

Music as style

Music is a vital part of tattoo studios. Very rarely are people tattooed without something playing in the background. This makes sense as this is meant to be a creative space, and music

is another creative way for people to express who they are. As with the imagery and décor that the studios use, the music they listen to often embodies "counter-culture" and is rebellious. Alternative music is popular such as Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Nirvana, Iron Maiden, Kings of Leon, A-King and many other heavy metal, alternative rock, punk and pop bands that usually echo throughout tattoo studios.

The extremeness of heavy metal and similar musical movements is often disliked by more conservative, popular culture. The Grammys still does not have a "Best Metal Album" award, nor a "Best Punk Album." Those listening to this music have often been seen as delinquents or deviants from this popular culture leading to the othering of members of the subculture that enjoys this music.

It is a subculture that enjoys skulls as decoration, black clothing, and gothic makeup that authors like Nicky Falkof (2016) have linked to perceptions of deviant and almost anti-conservative culture when viewed in the light of the conservative mainstream white South African society. Just as Kings of Leon are now considered somewhat benign, there is this nostalgic feeling for some tattoo artists' connection to these unaccepted antiquated perspectives of the tattoo industry and the rebellion against them. As with race and sex, rebellion, style, and subculture go hand in hand (Hebdige 1979, 58). Older artists and bands are usually listened to by artists that belong to the "old school" or classic idea of tattoos; these are usually men born in the 60s or 70s, which is the same period the term "counter-culture" first grew to relevance with the emergence of the hippy movement (Hebdige 1979, 148). I knew of one tattoo artist that refused to play anything other than metal from the 80s and 90s in his studio. This music is seen as a nostalgic extension of their counter-culture. Meanwhile, younger artists will listen to different genres and styles, including the latest popular hip-hop or rap music and artists such as Machine Gun Kelly.

In-between suburbia

Both these tattoo studios are placed in conservative, quiet suburbia. Nothing on the outside of these studios hints that they are spaces of counter-culture. They fit in with the rest of their respective suburbs. On closer inspection, however, you find little eccentricities that lead into the tattoo world. In Blairgowrie, what appears to be a petrol station is home to Ting's Tattoos. These two studios are located within structures already existing in these suburbs but

have very different inner workings than what can be experienced in the surrounding areas. The tattoo culture here has in the past been considered a sub-culture and is a culture that is now emerging into the mainstream. However, there is still a difference between remnant "old-school" and newer ideals. These can be seen in the type of decoration, music and even the employees within the two studios. As a skull, part of the skeleton becomes the only thing left behind when a body decomposes, so does the skull. The alternative culture that the skull represents continues to be displayed between these places in the middle of change. These studios do not stand out from their white suburban areas, but within, they carry remnants of history and ideals rooted in counter-culture and rebellion.

Chapter Two: White comfort

I have experienced many different tattoo studios in Johannesburg and beyond. Almost all of them were run by white men. At one of these studios, an artist refused to tattoo black people. This artist once told me of a client that they had. The client had called to book an appointment with the artist, an Afrikaans-speaking white man. The client booked the appointment over the phone and in Afrikaans. The client had an Afrikaans accent, too, so to the artist, they sounded white, and the artist was sure of their whiteness. When the client showed up for the tattoo appointment, the artist realised that the client was black. He could not turn the client away because he had agreed to work with them. After tattooing the client, the artist complained to me that the client was demanding, that they wanted the design altered so many times, had too many opinions, and they demanded the music be changed. The artist said that this was typical behaviour for "those people." What becomes clear in this racist story is that because the client was initially believed to be white, they were already assigned privileges based on their perceived race.

However, this privilege – namely, being fussy and demanding without being judged - was lost as soon as the artist met the client. This privilege was entirely linked to the perceived race of the client, and this loss of privilege prompted discrimination even though if a white client had done the same, they would have been seen as an individual who is simply concerned about the artwork that was placed on their body and not seen as demanding. This behaviour would have been seen as normal, acceptable and not worth remembering. In my research, nine out of the ten contributors working in the two tattoo studios were white. There was a single

person of a different race. While the white contributors explained that they joined the tattoo industry for non-financially motivated reasons, including the job being a creative outlet that allows them to have more flexible hours, wasn't a mundane office job, and that they got to do what they loved every day, the Indian contributor made it clear he joined the industry because he saw an opportunity to make a significant amount of money, remarking that cash was the reason he tattooed. I argue that the white contributors were mostly unconcerned about the financial reasons because of white privilege. This privilege brings financial stability where it isn't their first concern, and they have the ability and opportunities to think about their dreams and creative outlets and do what they want to do. However, black people in South Africa are often confronted with financial struggles faced by their families. Therefore Angelo, the Indian contributor who insinuated he had a poor upbringing, remarked several times that it was money that attracted him to work in the industry.

In this chapter, we look at how racial privilege causes some tattoo artists to be able to choose self-expression and realisation in terms of their work and how other artists instead focus and work towards financial compensation first. We look at how whiteness creates and allows this privilege that is not readily available to people who are of other races. Yet, I show how from the perspective of white artists, this discrepancy is hardly mentioned. Instead, they highlight their difference from those more conformist whites. This takes us to white culture and how white people react to those that don't fit within its more conservative boundaries. With a focus on how people who choose to decorate and express themselves in ways such as tattoos, piercings, music and fashions alternative to those of the conservative norm feel like they are looked at as if they have turned away from what is considered the white norm and become the "other."

White cash

When asked to tell me a little about himself, Angelo, who has been in the tattoo industry for over 20 years, shares that "Oh, there's not too much. Tattooing is life. You know, I started when I was 19. So that's all I know. And basically, I work seven days a week, so there wasn't much time for any hobbies, or you know, just come to work. Go home. That's it." And he continues, "Yeah, it's full-on, like, lifestyle. So, it's the wake-up. It's life. Breathe. Tattoo." Angelo is what is referred to as an "old-school" tattoo artist and is the co-owner and founder of Rising Dragon Tattoo along with his wife. He is originally from Durban, and he, like many

other artists that I spoke to, came to the tattoo industry from another profession. A profession that he was neither passionate about nor, more importantly, was being paid well for. In his own words, "I was a salaried clerk for a short period of time. And on my way to work since I didn't have a car and stuff. I used to take the bus home. So, on the way to the bus station, I would pass this biker tattoo shop. And that captivated me; I would stand there looking at the work through the windows, and I would get late. I'd miss my bus. So that was my first interaction. And when I saw that shop and walked into it, you know and asked questions and saw the flash designs on the wall and heard the buzzing of the machines. That was it for me." Although that tattoo world captivated him, he told me that it was his own experience in how much he paid for his own tattoos that motivated him to really enter this industry. Angelo jokes that the thing that first brought him to work in tattoos was "cash." He didn't have much money growing up, and he wanted more. In the beginning, his becoming a tattoo artist had a lot to do with the financial aspect of the industry. He was not being paid well in his previous job as a wages clerk as he was young:

"I needed to get paid. In the beginning, it had a lot to do with finances because I had… I wasn't getting paid too good at my job. Obviously, I was young, so I was getting what I was supposed to be getting. But we kind of come from a poor- not… I wouldn't say poor. We didn't have much money. So, I wanted to better myself. So, I saw how much I spent on tattooing on tattoos for myself. And then I realised, okay, you could make a decent living out of this."

When Angelo speaks about his past, he takes a lot of pauses. He thinks carefully about the words he uses and about the ways he broaches subjects that he doesn't feel completely comfortable talking about. He is hesitant to share that he had financial struggles growing up. He didn't come from a wealthy family, and he wanted more for himself. "Cash" became a clear motivator. Money was the biggest factor for him to enter the tattoo industry.

Being white in South Africa's tattoo industry is a different experience. "Whiteness affects peoples' experiences, their senses of themselves and their opportunities in and the engagement with the world" (Falkof 2016, 6). In both the tattoo studios that I visited, there were mainly white employees. To be exact, nine out of the 10 contributors I interacted with and that were employed by the studios as artists were white. However, when questions about why they entered the industry came up, the other nine white contributors all said that it was something else that had brought them to the tattoo industry. They liked the idea that tattoos

would not take up a lot of their time and that it was a job that let them be creative. Some said that this was not their first choice of profession, and they had been in other fields, such as design, before moving into tattoos. Some even came in and out of the tattoo world and were working in other places before they found that being a tattoo artist was where they wanted to be.

In South Africa, "whiteness was both an entry into power and a privilege." This privilege is one of inheritance, and this power is both financial and social (Falkof 2016, 166, 170). I argue that white tattoo artists do not need to take into consideration the financial aspect of being a tattoo artist because they already live with the financial privilege granted by their race. Instead, their focus is on finding an occupation which allows them to realise themselves.

Artists such as Cole, a 35-year-old white male freelance tattoo artist from Zimbabwe who was brought to the industry out of curiosity and the prospect of doing something in the art field, said he didn't want to be stuck in a position that was not creative and didn't allow him to be an artist.

"I left [Zimbabwe] when I was 14. We moved to Port Elizabeth. That's where I got my matric. Then from there, I moved back up to Joburg and started working as a waiter, bartending, you know, just trying to make a bit of extra bucks. Didn't do very well at school. It wasn't really interesting. And yeah. I did the bartending thing for a few years, and one day, I sobered up, and I was like, I really want to, you know, set myself up for the rest of my life. I like don't want to be serving tables. There's no question. So, I was like, cool, and just started looking around. And one day, I saw that a tattoo studio opened in the centre that we were working in, and it hadn't really occurred to me [that tattooing was an option], but it was art. So, I was like, shit, let's go check it out. I walked in there. And yes, since then, I was hooked, man; I love the whole aspect, the whole design behind it, the history behind it, the culture behind it. And since then, I haven't really looked back. Yeah, it's definitely what defines me. I'd say I couldn't see myself doing anything else. I think if I had to work behind a desk, I'd probably become Charles Manson."

This comment from Cole shows that the ability he had to go from a job that he felt no passion for to a job that he was curious about without any concern for the financial aspect, shows that the privilege of being white allowed him to explore his desire to be more creative

rather than have a steady but uninteresting income. He was searching for more of a vocation than a job.

Brittany, who is a white female artist of 24 years of age, born and raised in Johannesburg, shares how she became a tattoo artist:

"I always really enjoyed tattoos as an art form. I always thought I was gonna get a bunch. But I always just thought I was gonna just be like a customer, not in the industry. And then I did a bunch of studying that I didn't enjoy. I started a bunch of different degrees and quit a bunch of different degrees. And then, eventually, I just thought that life is too short not to do what you want to do. I can do anything and know I'm not going to fail."

The ability that she had to go from degree to degree and job to job, and even to visit different countries (she worked in a retail store in the UK), as she told me on a different occasion, was in great part thanks to the fact that she wasn't particularly limited by structural conditions and was financially privileged. Brittany's concern was self-fulfilment and not one of financial stability or building a career. It was to find herself and what made her happy.

Many other artists stated that it is the ability to have a flexible work schedule, the ability to do what they enjoy or to take a chance on their creative ability which outweighs the importance of the money that could be made. For them, the money is an added benefit.

Vincent, who is the apprentice and shop manager for Ting's Tattoos, is a white male of 24 years of age from Krugersdorp; he followed many different paths before he came to tattooing:

"I was a diesel mechanic, and I am actually, by trade, a diesel mechanic. Very Krugersdorp thing to be. Just like everyone is a mechanic of sorts. But then I kind of was around- like I quit my job to go pursue riding [BMX bicycles] more as like a full-time job. And through that, I ended up spending a lot more time in tattoo studios, talking to artists. Like I was just always in tattoo studios. Wherever Taz [his girlfriend and another tattoo artist] was I was, I would just come and hang out because I was allowed to. It's a cool space to be in. So that's kind of how I discovered I like tattoos, like who influenced me into the scene."

Vincent also has many other hobbies and activities that keep him busy; he is what he calls a "professional fun haver" and shares that he is living the dream of doing tattoos.

Skin deep culture

In his 1997 book titled White, Richard Dyer writes that for the global society being white is being 'normal' (Falkof 2016, 165). He said that whiteness and being white are not anything that makes people stand out and is very rarely spoken about. However, Sara Ahmed disagrees with Dyer's sentiments stating that it is only to those who are white that whiteness is 'invisible' (Ahmed 2004 cited in Falkof 2016, 165). Those who are not white can very clearly see those who are white and the privilege that is inherited with whiteness (Falkof 2016, 165). This is also evident in the white space that is the tattoo world. The white tattoo artists have come to the tattoo industry for their "dream careers", whereas others like Angelo have come to improve their standard of life. Whiteness in South Africa, especially during and after the apartheid era, came not only with the "passport to privilege" but the benefits that came with social and economic aspects as well (Falkof 2016, 190). While Brittany was able to pursue multiple degrees and Vincent was able to transition from being a mechanic to BMX riding to tattoos because he simply enjoyed it more, Angelo wanted to pursue a lucrative career because he came from a more disadvantaged background.

According to Anoop Nayak's (2007) definition, whiteness is a modern creation, and it is something that always changes depending on the time and place. Whiteness is something of a social norm that has become intrinsically linked to an "unspoken privilege", and if more people understand what whiteness is and everything it encompasses, this will help people adopt less privileged behaviour and privileged thought, leading to more social cohesion among society (Shah 2022, 280). Shah (2022, 281) believes that there are two major understandings of whiteness when looking at it from an ecological perspective. First, using Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological approach, whiteness can be seen in social circumstances, and the people in an individual's cultural and environmental surroundings, and this social context influences them and their behaviours. The second is in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, where whiteness is seen as a social construction that comes from Western colonisation, and people of different races will experience and understand the white "socio-ecological system" differently (Shah 2022, 281). It is this whiteness that is viewed as a norm that continues to allow people who are racially white to still benefit from their whiteness and its social privileges

(Shah 2022, 281). It is this normalisation of whiteness, and lack of understanding of how it works and that it is influenced by culture and environmental aspects, that allows the unspoken privilege to continue to exist and play out as it does. You are able to see this privilege in the differences when Cole and Angelo speak of their experiences during their different apprenticeships:

Cole shares that his apprenticeship was full of chores and how he felt that he was really at the bottom of the hierarchy:

"Like shit flows downhill, and you've got to be at the bottom of the hill with a bucket. You got to make sure that you mop that shit up properly, and as soon as you have mopped up that shit, there's more shit coming your say. So, it was just… it was a challenge. I just remember it being so much. There was a lot that you had to constantly…- you were constantly running, and you never had a moment to settle, and it consistently felt like shit. Because I suppose you're starting at the bottom, and then you look around, and you see what people are achieving. And it's just it's tough. But once you make it, it gets better."

Angelo has a different perspective on what otherwise sounds like a similar experience:

"You know, I was pretty young. So I knew I had to start from the bottom. And for me, it was, it was a lot of fun. It was fun. Actually. I didn't mind the work. I didn't mind the sweeping. I didn't mind the washing of cars and making needles and sterilisation. I didn't mind all of that. For me, it was a learning experience. I knew what it was gonna lead to. So I didn't mind it at all."

The way that the two artists speak of the experience shows that although they both know that it is a great achievement that one receives at the end of this journey of being an apprentice, they view the experience in very different ways. While Cole saw his apprenticeship as an obstacle to the goal of being a tattoo artist (catching shit with a bucket) and as a social degradation, Angelo found the work fun and said it was a learning experience. I suggest that this difference in the narratives of the same process has to do with the entitlement that surrounds white privilege and the lack of privilege that is available to different races in South African culture. It has to do with entitlement because Cole was expecting his apprenticeship to be something else, and when his expectations were not met, he did not greet it as a learning

experience but rather as a hindrance. Angelo didn't let his expectations of what it meant to be in the industry affect how he got to where he needed to be.

Blinding whiteness

The white tattoo artists, who belong to the subculture of tattoos, are unaware of their own privilege. Artists like Cole talk about how they are being discriminated against by others, be it by other artists or the conservative society they equally rebel against (and yet are part of, as I showed in the first chapter). The white tattoo subculture believes it is a counterculture to the white conservative norm, and this concern overshadows and makes them unaware that they themselves have the same privileges and the same capacity to discriminate.

The tattoo community in South Africa still believes it is outside the norm. This is especially true of those artists who consider themselves part of the "classic" style of tattoos. The idea is that whiteness is the norm, and anyone who goes against this norm, even other white people who do not behave in what is considered "white", for example, are "stigmatised" (placed within a stigmatised category) such as "hillbilly" or "white trash" (Schmitt 2011, 74). This can be seen by white youth during apartheid who enjoyed wearing the colour black, and liked going out clubbing and listening to "foreign" rock music. They were considered Satanic for listening to bands such as Iron Maiden and Metallica and experimenting with drugs. This was considered a "gothic subculture" as well as a part of the "heavy metal subculture". In these subcultures, some even had tattoos. Conservative whites believed that young people involved in this type of behaviour would be willing to give themselves to the devil (Falkof 2016, 16 -17 and 85). This alternative black-wearing, heavy metal-listening, devil-worshipping subculture that existed in the past that was so feared by conservative whites during apartheid has a strong affinity to the culture that existed and still exists within tattoo studios in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

This conservative judgement led to implications that this behaviour was a result of "the failure of the family, which signified a concurrent shift away from the unity and communality of the traditionally conservative South African nuclear unit" (Falkof 2016, 31).

This idea has been carried over into post-apartheid times. The idea of white conservative South Africa and that anything different is viewed as a threat. This is especially

clear when the nation, or country, is viewed through the recurring colonial metaphor of it being a human body. As a political body, the nation can be threatened through "pollution, contaminations and by the enemy within" (Falkof 2016, 5). These ideas of contamination and the enemy can be connected to any white person who dares to be different from this conservative white norm. These people will be labelled as "satanic," "white trash", and the "other". And this type of stigmatising is what many people with tattoos claim they had to face in the past and still in some capacity today.

Many of the artists still wear black because they work with a tattoo machine and ink, and it can get messy. Many want to preserve their clothes from ink stains. These artists still enjoy listening to bands that used to be linked to "satanism." Tattoo artists today believe that doing simple things like going to the shop or dropping your child off at school means having to face judgment from the client who thinks it's surprising to run into their tattoo artist at the grocery store. Or that a mother or father does not fit in or belong at a school drop-off around small children because they have tattoos and are considered "deviant". Artists say that they have to deal with comments like "you wouldn't put a sticker on a Bentley", referring to a person having a tattoo. Older generations of whites will struggle with the idea of tattoos. Ting told me that her own father makes negative comments about her tattoos:

"I've got my dad who says, I look like I've been beaten with the wet newspaper, or you know, the old, the old. They always say [things like] that."

These ideas of stigmatising are present today among those that are heavily tattooed. These ideas include that tattooed people are unemployed, unemployable, uneducated, or that they do not do daily activities and don't have small children and families because these ideas fit with the notion of the "traditional conservative South African" person or family. Tattoos have made certain groupings, such as white tattooed individuals, become the other, or at least feel like the other, the threat that white people fear.

Meanwhile, they are themselves white and enjoy the privileges afforded to their racial group. But the tattoo artists and people connected to this subculture are not aware of this privilege. Instead, they are aware of how they are seen and criticised by other white people. Also, at the same time that they dislike this criticism, they enjoy it and seek it out. They go to far lengths to use the same counterculture symbols addressed in Chapter 1, the skulls and the music. After all, it gives them confirmation and certainty that they are not like their

conservative peers. In fact, it allows them to know that they are the "others", which is read as a confirmation of their individuality.

We cannot ignore the impact and effect that the past of South Africa and the privilege that many white people were afforded over those that are labelled Indian, black and other still have on many South Africans today. This can be seen in many of the discussions around whiteness and white privilege. This privilege allows white people more opportunities to think about their hopes and dreams and choose a career based on more flexible hours and the ability to be creative. Meanwhile, these aspects were not the primary concerns of the single participant that is not white when choosing a career in tattoos. His first concern was the opportunity to make more money so that he could have a better life than the one he had growing up. Knowing this, we are able to see that the white culture that exists in South Africa has economic and social privileges attached to it that weren't always available to all of the country's citizens. This is made more evident when we see the white people who chose to exist outside of the white conservative "norm" that existed during and just after apartheid.

Many of the tattoo artists working today, who grew up during this time period, believe they are seen and treated as others because they did not fit into this norm. They chose to express themselves in different ways than what was accepted by the conservative white culture that, although disappearing, still exists in modern South Africa. It is this concern of being different in terms of lifestyle and symbols which, however, also distracts them from realising that there are people who don't have the luxury of being socially and economically within whiteness at all.

Yet, as this culture's hegemony of conservative whiteness, which Hebdige (1979, 27) describes as a social group exerting "total social authority" over a subordinate group, reduces in the country, we are now seeing more opportunities and evolving spaces for people of different races, in the case of my study of a different gender.

Chapter Three: Women in the Tattoo Industry - Women Artists' Experiences

Throughout the history of the tattoo industry, women were allowed and not allowed to take part in it. This is according to a 2020 thesis written by Jessica Jin Long titled "She Inked! Women in American Tattoo Culture." Jing Long details the history of women in the American

tattoo industry, how they got started in tattooing and how they historically existed in the industry. This history is marked by men making use of women to benefit themselves financially, which is especially true during the display of tattooed women at freak shows in the 19th and 20th centuries. After these displays ended, women were again excluded from the tattoo world because of the fear of women having agency. In the history of tattoos, women had agency for certain moments throughout time, which will be explored further below, and even then, this could not have truly been considered real agency since these women were always in some way under the control of a man. There were very few women who could make inroads into the tattoo industry and culture in the past.

In Johannesburg, in the present day, women-owned tattoo studios are not as rare anymore as they were in the early 2000s. Ting's Tattoos is owned by a woman, and it is considered one of the top studios in Johannesburg.

Women like Ting, despite being owners of tattoo studios, are still not going against the grain of male domination within this field because they're also choosing artwork that is of a more feminine style so that they don't encroach on the masculine style. This echoes the development in the US, where female artists have developed a new tattooing technique called "glitter tattoo" (Graves 2022). She adds spots of white ink in certain places that create the illusion that the tattoos are "glittering" or sparkling.

In this chapter, I argue that women tattoo artists in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg try to adapt and fit into the male tattoo environment more than the male tattoo environment tries to adapt to the women tattoo artists, and they do this through fitting into already existing spaces or creating their own niche. Looking through the roles that women played in the history of America's tattoo industry, as well as the experiences of women in the workplace in general and my ethnography, I show how these women attempt to not shake any feathers of the men in these spaces. The women artists in these areas do tattoos that are considered to be more feminine, and if they, the women, do tattoo designs that are considered more masculine, then they are classified as "honorary men" through statements like "she's one of the men" or that "she is up there with the boys." These women artists are frequently asked to do more mainstream styles than the male artists. Many men are called upon to do tattoos in the more classic styles they may be known for.

Where it all began

It is important to be aware that there is very little information and interest when it comes to looking at the experiences of women in this white male-dominated field of tattooing within South Africa. To understand how women first entered the tattoo industry, we need to start at the beginning from a Western perspective, especially the American perspective that was exported to the rest of the world. We go back to the years 1880 to 1940, and this is when we get our first look at the tattooed women performers (Jin Long 2020, 13). This is at the start of the dime museum, and the carnival freak shows in the United States. These women were called "tattooed ladies" [ladies] for obvious reasons and were put on exhibition under the label of being a "cultural exhibition" during the 19th and 20th centuries (Jin Long 2020, 13). However, for these women, the tattoos were neither cultural nor aesthetics; rather, they were a way for these women to earn an income, and these white working-class American women were willing to alter their physical appearance to gain access to "economic and social liberties" (Jin Long 2020, 13).

"The Tattoo Renaissance" occurred during the 1960s all the way to the 1980s. A time of cultural renewal for tattoos, which made tattoos more accessible and appealing to some of the American middle class, as it linked to "liberal rebellion, sexual freedom and global consumerism" (Jin Long 2020, 42). It was during this time of the Tattoo Renaissance that tattoos were linked to delinquency and the otherness that was not welcomed into America; it was during this time that tattoo artists tried to distance the tattoo industry from the stigmatisation that it had received from the 1940s and the 1950s. During this time, women were very much excluded from the industry. They were, therefore, not able to take part in expanding and destigmatising the field (Mitchell 2019, 2).

These opinions and stereotyping began to change in the 1960s and 70s, which led to the tattoo culture welcoming an influx of white youths who were aligning themselves with "feminist and civil rights activists", and it was this desire to align themselves with these movements that led them to receive tattoos (Jin Long 2020, 44). It was during the late 1960s and 1970s, with the expansion and attempts at destigmatisation and the second wave of feminism in the US and abroad, that women were encouraged to join fields that were previously dominated by men (Jin Long 2020, 45).

Many women were excluded from tattoo parlours because of sexist ideas because the men had made the tattoo parlour a space where they would tell each other about stories of their sexual conquests and acts of violence and to encourage and affirm men's masculine statuses. Jin Long (2020, 51) writes, "A large part of the subcultures that developed in tattoo parlours was the ostracism and objectification of women." The men felt that they were protecting the women from vulgar language, as well as protecting women from possible abusive and controlling partners, so they would deny women entrance to the tattoo subculture and or getting a tattoo unless they had permission from a father, husband or male guardian. The male tattoo artists' main concern was protecting the male exclusivity of the tattoo parlour space by denying women the right and ability to decide and control what happens to their bodies and using it as another way to objectify women (Jin Long 2020, 51). According to Atkinson, as stated by Mitchell (2019, 15), between the 1920s and 1950s, tattoos were the "territory" of working-class men. During this time, a handful of tattoo artists would teach their wives how to tattoo to increase efficiency in their shops. These women would colour in linework already tattooed by their husbands or tattoo directly from stencils known as "flash."

Previously excluded women were now joining and being accepted into the tattoo industry by creating "distinctly feminine" designs that assisted some women like Kate Hellenbrand and Vyvyn Lasogna and others to carve out a space for themselves in the male-dominated field of tattoos (Jin Long 2020, 44).

"These great female artists then used their success to further develop the tattoo industry as an artistic field and as a form of self-expression for other politically-minded individuals" (Jin Long 2020,46).

Male-dominated workplaces, like the tattoo industry, are understood to be places that, throughout history, favoured men over women, meaning that they are spaces of privilege for men (Mitchell 2019, 20). "Gender stereotypes fuel discrimination in the workplace; women are believed to be or treated as if they are less capable, less competent, more emotional and more demanding than men" (Mitchell 2019, 2).

With the modern influx of women into the industry, these women are starting to make their own way into the field of tattooing, and they're taking up space in what was previously a field that was entirely male-dominated. In order to completely understand the experiences and

journeys that women have had to take to get where they are today in today's tattoo culture, we take a look at how different movements of feminism and gender theories have pushed this new wave of women into the industry.

It was Helen Bradford (1996, 351) out of the University of Cape Town that wrote that exclusions of women from African studies and imperial historiographies is something that should be seen as a "gross sin". The ideas that drove this exclusion from academics, the workforce and many other previously male-dominated spaces are ideas that women were driven by their "feelings and relationships", whereas men were more ordained for problem and task-solving roles. In these more present and modern eras, ideas of feminism and the ideas of feminists are becoming more accepted and popular (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988, 457). This came after half a century of women fighting for their voices to be heard, for women to be let into workplaces and be respected as peers among men. However, it was the rising interest and study of women and gender history that go hand in hand with the introduction of women into "economic and political power" (Roper 2022). This was mirrored in the tattoo industry in the US. It was Miliann Kang and Katherine Jones (2007, 43) that saw the interest in tattoos growing amongst women in the 1960s. Not only customers but also women tattoo artists. It is very rare to find a tattoo artist who themselves are not also a tattoo collector. According to Jin Long (2020, 45), "Women were not only objectified and looked down upon in tattooing circles, but were actively excluded from the industry until the late sixties." today, women make about half of the people who are tattooed in America, many women have used tattoos to confront the limited roles that have been available to the gender such as "wife and mother." These roles are linked to the ideas of domesticity. Tattoos have been used to define the roles that women see for their own bodies. Rejecting the idea that the body of a woman does not, or should not, call attention to itself beyond normative expectations; or that a woman's body cannot be free for the woman to do with as she pleases, i.e. getting a tattoo of whatever she wants

However, in South Africa, even though there is a higher population of women than there are men, there is still a very high discrepancy in the unemployment rate, as there are more women who are unemployed than there are men (Department of Statistics South Africa 2020). Keeping this in mind, we can also see that in South Africa, the people who are at a higher economic disadvantage are women when compared to men, and this can be seen when we look at unemployment figures and the statistics around women that have gone through physical or sexual violence by a partner (Department of Statistics South Africa 2015). When looking at the

treatment of women and children in South Africa has been greatly criticised by celebrities, news outlets and women themselves, so much so that "gender-based violence" is now directly linked to the abuse that women face by men. South African women are seeking more economic opportunities, more opportunities to claim a place for themselves and more control over themselves and their environments in a world traditionally dominated by men. Therefore with the history of tattoos being used to claim and demonstrate taking control over one's body – more specifically, a woman's body – the growing interest and popularity of tattoos is not surprising, nor is the increased interest and visibility of women in the tattoo industry, even though in South Africa the prevalence of these women is still somewhat small.

Women artists in Douglasdale and Randburg

Today, among white people in Johannesburg, it is rare for women to be outright told that their tattoos are not accepted or disliked. Usually, if you are a heavily tattooed woman, people will either stare at you or do a double-take. For instance, tattoo artist Tarryn shared that,

"I went to Sandton with shorts on and my Doc Martens shorts and ripped stockings. And I remember I got so many looks. People would like to look at me and be like, shake their heads at me. You know? After about a couple times going out with shorts or short sleeves. I kind of … you stop noticing it. So some people look at me funny. When I go out with my brother [who doesn't have tattoos], he sometimes is like, 'Do you notice how people look at you?' And I'm like, 'No, no, I don't.'"

However, women artists have noticed that judgement and dislike is slowly being replaced with genuine interest and appreciation in an artistic sense.

Ting told me, "I even had a situation where this old woman was staring at my – I've got my whole hand tattooed – and she's staring at my hand while I was in the bank, signing. When I was walking out, she came to me and said, 'I just want to tell you that your tattoo is beautiful.' And I thought that I was gonna get it now."

Today you can actually find tattoo spaces that are more influenced by women than men. Tarryn shared that one of the benefits of working at Ting's Tattoos is that there are basically no men working at the shop. She said, "I think it helps that there's also no guys here. I've noticed I have weird luck with guy tattoo artists. I don't know because, like, in [another tattoo studio] as well, like, the guys were very… they'd make jokes about women. I'd be chilled about it. I

wouldn't say anything because it's not my place. But they'd like… they were very like dark humour. So that's I think like 'oh, I belong in the kitchen'-type of thing. And you'd be, 'You're teaching me, Hi', and then sometimes they would be like ', No offence, it's just a joke.'"

Male tattoo artists continue to have these views on women today, saying that they could not have women apprentices because they could not be as tough and use coarse language with women as they would with a man. Jokes about women being in the kitchen and other sexist remarks are common.

Women in the workplace

Much of the research conducted in the workplace and how people experience shows that women do not experience the workplace as equals when compared to men. Some examples of this are that women are paid less than men in the same positions, and fewer women hold executive positions than men (Mitchell 2019, 2). Women in the workplace also often times have to deal with sexual harassment, especially from men who are in positions that control their payments and schedules (Michell 2019, 2). Some women in the tattoo industry, although not all men, still often have to deal with sexual harassment. This can be seen especially from male tattoo artists that are in superior roles in the tattoo studio.

Everyone should be able to contribute to society in equal ways, according to Ferdman 2017, 235 as cited in Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez (2018, 176):

"In inclusive organisations and societies, people of all identities and many styles can be fully themselves while also contributing to the larger collective, as valued and full members".

Ting said that the tattoo industry in Johannesburg is particularly cutthroat, an industry full of criticism and competition, which makes it a high-pressure job. This only adds to the pressure of being a woman in a male-dominated field.

"There is a lot of talk behind closed doors and criticism. 'This person did this tattoo, and it's not great.' It's a high-stress job, like it's cutthroat. It really is, like; it's it is very stressful. I usually try and keep a low profile," Ting says. "The industry is so saturated, and these tattoo

shops and tattooers are popping up everywhere. I feel a lot of pressure. So I do feel like it's not as friendly as it used to be."

For the women tattoo artists at Ting's Tattoos, doing their apprenticeship often came with a lot of activities, chores and errands such as running the front of the shop, picking up the other artists' children, fetching food for other artists and even picking up their laundry. When Ting and Tarryn were going through their apprenticeships, they felt that the duties that were required of them were more linked to their gender than their roles as tattoo artists.

Tarryn says, "You get like really old-school artists, or you get new-school artists. The new-school artists are chilled, or you get people that are really hard on you. Like, really, really, like, you got to scrub the floor with toothbrushes. Or you have to fucking pick up laundry for them. And you have to do like the craziest shit."

Ting further illustrates this, saying that "But I was doing a lot of things that didn't have to do with tattooing. Like they were a joke, and [the male artists] would make me like wash the car, or go and get them lunch every day. I even had to go on the school run, pick up their kids and stuff like that. I was also running the front of the shop, which had nothing to do with the tattooing. It was the clothing and the shoes and stuff."

She even had to confront her mentors about actually teaching her about tattooing. "One day, and I was like, 'Listen, are you gonna teach me how to tattoo because I'm not going to be your wife. I'm here; I want to help. I want to learn from you. But you make me do everything that's unrelated to tattooing.' So I was a little bit upset about that," she said.

Tarryn shared an experience with a male tattoo artist who tried to intimidate her while she was doing her apprenticeship: "It was a guy. He was psycho. I don't know if it was because I was a woman or because I was small or what. But like the one day he like pretended to go for me with a stick. Like a wooden pole. Like he like pretended to go at me. And I like freaked out because I was busy breaking down (my tattoo equipment). I had gloves on and everything."

She adds that the same male artist was old-school and "didn't treat women in general nicely. I mean, he was in the industry from when he was 15. Like he didn't matriculate. So he just believed he was better than everyone else. Because he was the cool kid. He got into

tattooing young. And now he's been tattooing for, like, 15 years. So he's like the shit, and he won a few awards."

One of the artists told me of a particular experience during their apprenticeship where the head male artist of her studio, her boss, would treat her specifically poorly. "He would have his good days and bad days; there were more bad days than good days. But yeah, he treated me [like shit]."

He would often instruct her to only work during the evening and not during the day because he wanted tattoo artists that could pay for their spot and not an apprentice. When she eventually left the studio, his behaviour became possessive against her. He felt betrayed, and he "felt like he owned me," she said. "He didn't want me to grow any more than I could have there. Like, he'll always be, 'No, you can't do this, you're not ready for this, you're not ready.'"

This eventually led to this female artist receiving threats of violence and having rumours spread about her to potential customers. She was not even 20 years old at the time.

The above experiences show that the although the tattoo industry has been open to women, there is still a very gendered way of thinking about women in the workplace and that women often have to deal with many forms of harassment and requirements that do not have anything to do with the job that they are training to do. This is because women are seen as emotional or less capable. They are required to do more so that they can prove that they belong in the male space. Women in the industry have to adapt their look, their skills and their way of speaking to others in order to be more convincing. This leads to women trying to behave in a "more masculine way" in order to mitigate the challenges that are often faced by women (Michell 2019, 3). This doesn't mean that the women artists are trying to become men, but rather they don't seek conflict with their male counterparts. Instead of calling out sexist comments or jokes from male artists, they laugh it off or simply continue with what they were doing.

For example, in one of the studios Tarryn was working, she states that when she wasn't doing things the way two other male artists liked or wanted, they would severely reprimand her. She told me:

"[The male artists] would like to murder me for stupid shit. And I would just avoid them for the day."

A niche of their own

During one of my visits to Rising Dragon Tattoos, the topic of Ting's Tattoos came up, and the artists there came. He called Ting a very good artist and made a comment that "Yes, Megan has very feminine, fine tattoos." When looking at Megan's work, her style makes use of very fine, clean lines which are solid, thin and that don't seem to break and look as if they were drawn with a single stroke. Some women artists tattoo artists have very delicate work and use soft shading, although some do use harsher or harder linework; these can also be seen as feminine.

Beverly Leun Thompson (2015) says that tattoos are "feminine" when they are "small, cute and hidden." These attributes can be seen in the feminine, even if, in modern times, women are more frequently getting larger and more visible tattoos. "Feminine" tattoos are still fine, dainty and have cute subject matter. Some artists like Ting have become known for their fine, small work. In particular, Ting says, "I have become known for [tattoos of] my little bees."

She says, "I'm a big fan of the fine lines. And anything floral, botanical, pet portraits, micro portraits, micro details."

Image 1: One of Ting's little bees. Photo taken by Ting and tattoo done by Ting.

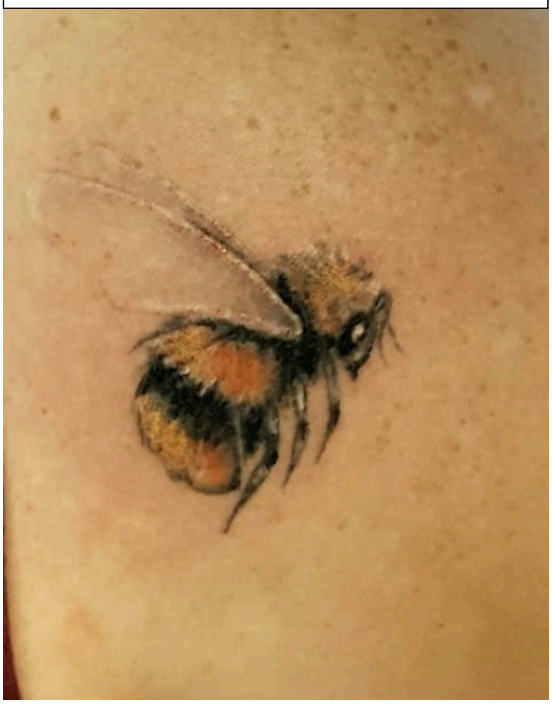




Image 2: Taken by Megan Fourie.

The above is a tattoo from Megan F, who is one of the more senior artists at Ting's Tattoos. The lines are very fine. It is a very clean piece, with soft shading. Overall, it gives a

feeling of being delicate work. She told me that "A lot of people come to me for fine line things. And flowers."

In terms of what they tattoo, you will generally see women artists draw the female form, as well as tattoos that can be described as "cute," "pretty," and will often use more and lighter colours than men.



Image 3. Taken by Kimberly Thorne 'Ting'.

To the left is a tattoo from Ting. You can see the soft shading similar to that of Megan F's work above. It is of a cute-looking otter as of it was water-painted on to the skin.

This is a style of tattoo that became popular only in recent years. Many other artists do variations of the water paint colour but it isn't a "classic" tattoo style.

The seahorse tattoo is by Adrianne Black from Rising Dragon Tattoo, which represents a more "classic" style of tattoos. Clearly very colourful and cartoonish, with pinks and light blues. It is also a very "cutesy" tattoo.



Image 4. Taken by Adrainne Black.



Above is a tattoo by Tarryn another artist from Ting's Tattoos. This is an example of a woman artist's own style. Tattoos like this are unique to Tarryn and people come to her for similar tattoos.

Image 5. Taken by Tarryn Brummage.

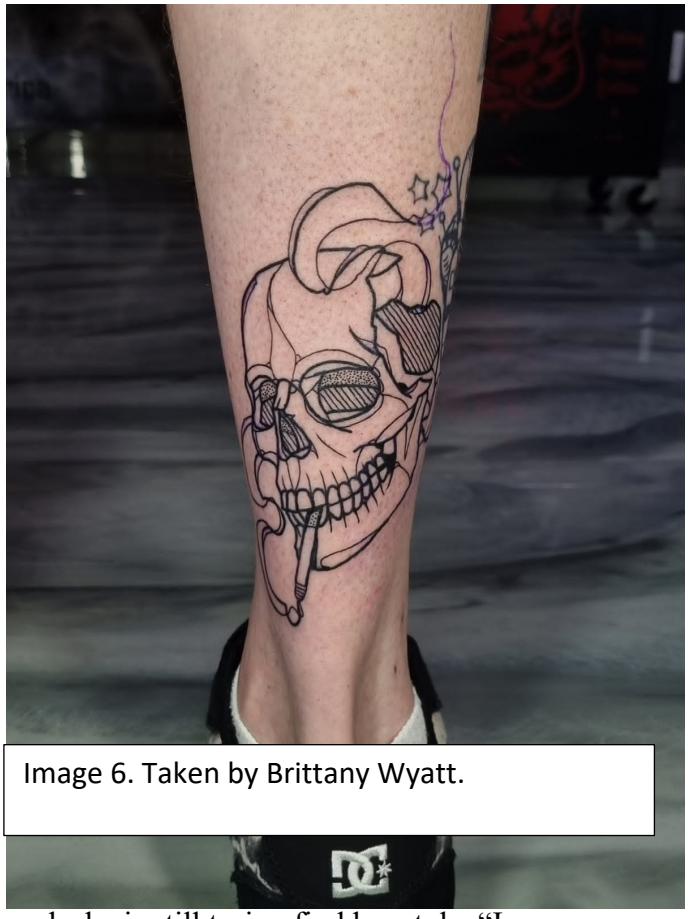


Image 6. Taken by Brittany Wyatt.

classic imagery like skulls as in this tattoo by Brittany, from Rising Dragon Tattoo. However this belongs to a style known as "geometrical" which is a modern style of tattoos. One which some classic artists dislike.

Brittany is the least experienced of the artists that I interviewed as the current apprentice at her studio. As such she is still trying find her style. "I have no idea what I want to do. I'm inspired by anything and everything."

She told me that she wants to make unique art and do something no one else is doing. "I just want to be groundbreaking."

In comparison, male artists at Rising Dragon and Cole who is a freelancer use thicker, darker linework, less colour and make use of a lot more black ink. The tattoos are larger,

more pronounced. The shading is more dynamic, less soft and the images are usually considered more masculine. This can be seen in the examples below from Hendrick, Cole and



Image 7. Taken by Angelo Pillay.



Image 8. Taken by Hendrik Strydom.



Image 9. On left taken by Cole Moebius.

The tattoo industry today is not what it was in the 50s and 60s, but it is clear that globally women have always been involved with tattoos in some capacity, whether it is being put on display as tattooed women in freak shows or being tattoo artists themselves. Tattoos for women were not an easy path to take, but they offered them the freedom and ability to grow and find more independence for themselves. To do things that they couldn't in society previously.

In contemporary tattoo culture, especially as seen in South Africa, we can still see some of the residues of the so-called "old-school" perceptions; however, women are entering the industry, carving out and creating at a faster rate than ever before, a space within the tattoo field through the adversity and challenges that they continue to face. This ability to have their own creative freedom, independence and space in this world outweighs all the negativity they may face at the hands of their male counterparts who have had control over the industry since its beginning.

Conclusion

In the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg, South Africa, the tattoo industry has been dominated by white men. These white men have created spaces that exist within white, conservative and privileged communities. However, they try to separate themselves from these communities by maintaining the "tattoo subculture" that nostalgically identifies them as the "other." This nostalgic subculture keeps these white men ignorant that the real other are people of other races and women. It also blinds them to their own white privileges. The white male artists, especially of the classic or "old school" style, have rejected people of other races and women to keep their hegemony of the industry in these areas. This, however, is slowly changing, and there is an influx of women tattoo artists entering the industry in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. However, due to the male-dominated nature of the industry these women artists are entering, they face harassment and are challenged by the dominant hegemony. To continue to thrive here, they have to create their own space or "niche" in the tattoos they do, and they have to learn how to avoid or laugh off negative reactions from their male counterparts.

Due to the location they are in, the tattoo artists that participated in this research have built their tattoo studios, and alternative spaces of tattoo subculture and style in majority

white suburban areas in Johannesburg, South Africa. Existing in suburbia, they are working out of transformed structures such as petrol stations and family homes, structures that are all too common in these locations. Therefore, these tattoo studios and the people who work in them do not stand out as they exist in spaces that have been there and will continue to be there. Despite this, because of the desire for uniqueness and their nostalgic want for the rejection from the white conservative norm, they do not fit in either. Now, these artists and studios exist in contradiction. Not standing out and not fitting in. At the same time suburban and extreme.

Within this alternative subculture of the tattoo industry in South Africa exists a white privilege. Even those in the tattoo culture who believe they are unaccepted are either unaware or choose to be unaware of the white privilege that they have and carry with them.

The ability to follow one's curiosity and need to fulfil a vocation or need for self-fulfilment is not something that is available to people of different races, as many of the contributors either thought that being a tattoo artist would be fewer hours and work or left jobs to seek a more creative outlet, i.e. Tattoos. It is also how differently the white tattoo artist experiences the tattoo industry and the work that it takes to become a tattoo artist. White contributors indicated that they thought of the apprenticeship that one needs to do to become a tattoo artist as a burden, a struggle and a hurdle in their path to becoming a tattoo artist that gets to self-fulfilling job. This is in contrast to Angelo, who looked at his apprentice as a learning experience that he found great enjoyment.

Further lack of awareness of white privilege can also be seen when we look at what specifically drew Angelo to the tattoo industry. He shared that although tattooing grew to be a passion for him in later years, it was the money that he believed he could make in the industry that drew him to begin tattooing. Angelo shares that his desire to have more than what he had growing up is what pushed him and motivated him to not only get tattooed but actually become a tattoo artist. Where for the other tattoo artists that I spoke to, financial compensation was consistently secondary. They would tell me that the first thing that brought them to the industry was a search for anything other than a 9 to 5 "boring" job, the search for a vocation and that the money, although necessary for survival, is a bonus to being able to do what it is they love.

It is important to note that, yes, for many years, people with tattoos and people who did tattoos have been rejected, stigmatised, made to be outcasts and in some ways discriminated against by many white conservatives, but this white male-dominated space of tattoos, even though as we know from their choice of décor and style longing for the nostalgic rejection from the white conservative norm, still needs this "uniqueness" that drives the lack of white privilege awareness in the tattoo industry. During my research, many contributors of white descent shared that they were searching for a vocation or self-fulfilment when they found and chose to enter the tattoo industry.

I argue that this community of tattoo people (artists and people around the tattoo industry and culture) who have been seen as outcasts in the past and still want to be seen as outcasts in contemporary times are not aware that they have access to privilege because they are white. This is in spite of the fact that they are seen as lower than white people with no tattoos by the more conservative white people; they still have the same privileges and sometimes even propagate some of the sentiments of the conservative whites within the tattoo industry. When it comes to race, there are still great strides that need to be made in how some tattoo artists welcome people of other races into the tattoo industry, and some continue to allow someone's race to be reason to treat them differently.

In today's world, we are seeing more and more women enter this previously male-dominated space, becoming tattoo artists and even owners of their own studios. It is also notable that more women are simply getting tattoos than ever before. Sexist jokes and behaviour have still remained and are part of the genetic makeup of the tattoo industry, even in contemporary South Africa. In having to deal with sexist jokes, comments, and in some cases even sexual harassment, and to ensure that they do not stand out for further abuse or be seen as too sensitive, women artists tend to become accepting of these behaviours. This is to keep working in harmony with the men. This comes in many ways, and it is such a masculine industry still that even when women are good at the artistry, they are seen as "one of the guys" or as "honorary men" rather than being seen as talented women artists.

The prevalence of women in the tattoo industry is growing not just in South Africa but worldwide. They are making a name and space for themselves, but they do this not without challenges. As in many other fields and workspaces, women face many struggles, such as sexism and sexual harassment, but it is their passion and desire to be tattoo artists that

keep them motivated and encouraged to continue pursuing a career in what is still considered a masculine space, one that is slowly changing and evolving. In fact, as tattoos steadily become more mainstream and accepted, the popular art that clients come to women artists specifically to do may eventually become the most common form of tattoos, overshadowing the skulls and rebellious darkness of classic tattoos.

With this research, my hope is to start filling in the gap that exists not only when looking at women in the workplace but women in the tattoo industry and, more specifically, in that space in Johannesburg, South Africa, where I live. I think that there is a large gap of information that does not exist when it comes to this ever-growing and evolving community. A community that I am part of. One that I was raised around and one that I love. I believe this research will further build on and create knowledge around tattoos in South Africa, the tattoo community, and the roles that women in South Africa have played in the tattoo industry, and also bring more people to question the white privilege that exists in the field, and in whiteness in general.

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Collage: images taken by Luis Monzon, Stephan Keith Preston, and Megan Fourie. The tattoos are modeled by Kristen Preston-Monzon. Tattoos are done by Megan Fourie, Stephan Keith Preston, and Willem Hurn.