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Painted Bodies: Representing the Self and Reclaiming the Body through Tattoos

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My body is my journal, and my tattoos are my story. –Johnny Depp (qtd. in Stephenson-Laws)

Introduction

Tattooing has a long history dating back to antiquities and has historically been associated with social deviance and rebellion (Gustafson 17). However, contemporary associations with tattoos have shifted away from a subversive act to a socially acceptable form of expression (Atkinson, “Tattooed” 4; Kang and Jones 42; Kosut 1035-46). Personal experiences and social conceptualizations of tattoos are in a continual state of development, thereby removing the historical stigma attached to them. With an annual revenue of roughly $722 million and powered by highly trained and skilled artists, the tattoo industry is a growing segment of the art and fashion industry (“America’s Booming”).

The popular image of the tattooed individual as a young, working class male is outdated as more people, especially women, choose to be permanently inked (Kang and Jones 42). Women’s interest in tattoos has also been increasing since the 1960s (Kang and Jones 43). In fact, according to Braverman, women are slightly more likely than men to get tattoos (23% versus 19%). According to a 2012 Harris Poll, the majority of people who are tattooed are between the ages of 30 and 39 (“One in Five”). However, tattoos are most popular among college-aged students because the tattoo asserts their independence from authority figures such as parents, who have generally enforced strict codes of appearance upon them, making the first visit to a tattoo parlor a normative rite of passage in the US today (Armstrong et al. 22; Braverman).

Many tattoo artists and scholars believe that tattoos have been reduced to mere fashion accessories due to accessibility and commercialization, which has stripped them of their
countercultural nature and anti-fashion sentiments (James). However, other authors have suggested that contemporary tattoos have considerable psychological meaning for the wearer because the tattooed skin acts as metaphor for a person’s relationship with society and the self. A tattoo can simultaneously accentuate and mask one’s personal identity (DeMello 42).

**Tattoos, Self-Concept, and the Body Experience**

While commonly accepted explanations for deliberate alterations of the body have been rebellion, self-expression, or the visual display of a personal narrative, contemporary research claims that some people use tattoos to compensate for feelings of inadequacy (Harry 176). This argues the therapeutic potential of tattoos, which are less and less about demonstrations of male bravado and more about control of emotions and the body, and challenges hegemonic views of the body (DeMello 47). For younger people, tattoos are increasingly motivated by a desire to establish a stronger identity and self-image (Armstrong et al. 28), as well as a desire to assert control over oneself and independence in a “seemingly changing and insecure world” (Kang and Jones 43). Tattoos may be driven by a desire to establish greater control over the self with a focus on self-reflection. Several studies have examined the relationship between tattoos and constructions of the self (e.g., Armstrong et al. 27-28; Greif et al. 381; Mun et al.141-43; Swami et al. 103). People with tattoos consistently viewed their body art as an act of self-expression and a unique form of self-identification where the conferred uniqueness generates a new-found confidence and sense of self control that was not experienced prior to tattooing (Mun et al. 143-44).

A relatively understudied area is the examination of body art, specifically tattoos, and the body image interface. Body image is the mental perception a person has of their body, and
inaccurate perceptions or distorted body image often result in negative emotions such as depression and low self-esteem, as well as the development of maladaptive coping mechanisms such as eating disorders. For some people, tattoos comment on the wearer’s body image. For other people, the tattooing process and subsequent art may serve as an alternative therapy for coping with body dissatisfaction, healing, and transformation. Within this context, tattoos become social narratives that transfer pain and suffering into positive therapeutic benefits (Woodstock 793). Several studies have shown that tattoos confirm growth of self-acceptance and body appreciation. Viren Swami found that both men and women experienced significantly lower appearance anxiety and dissatisfaction after obtaining their tattoos and then significantly higher body appreciation, uniqueness, and self-esteem after three weeks (242). Men also reported lower anxiety three weeks after obtaining a tattoo. Tattoos may also serve as a protective factor against self-harm. Laurence Claes and colleagues found this to be true amongst a sample of body-centric patients with eating disorders who possibly viewed the tattoos as an expression of body care (17).

**Tattoos and the Female Body**

Traditionally, tattooed women are judged as both less physically attractive and sexually promiscuous (Pitts 70; Swami 238). However, perceptions are changing. Some women see their tattoos as a medium for appearance enhancement, one that usually challenges established hegemonic constructions of femininity (“Pretty in Ink” 224; Kang and Jones 45).Ironically, challenges to feminism are accomplished through the use of flowers, butterflies, hearts, and other feminine symbols on the lower back, hips, and similarly sexualized parts of the female body such as the breasts. (“Pretty in Ink” 226). For women who display such conventional
tattoos, their reclamation of the body actually reinforces traditional gender roles. The construction of an identity that conforms to customary markers of feminine beauty also emphasizes the meekness of the female form for the male gaze.

Tattoos simultaneously redefine femininity by challenging the associations between tattoos and masculinity (“Pretty in Ink” 219; Kang and Jones 44; Pitts 82). Current tattoo usage by women is viewed as diverging from conservative gender ideals because tattoos challenge images of the weak, sexually objectified, passive woman (“Pretty in Ink” 220). Women disassemble established cultural associations between femininity and weakness by creating alternative images of femininity through tattoos and overt gender bending, especially with the design and placement of the tattoos (“Pretty in Ink” 227, 230).

According to Pitts, tattoos also help women to renounce victimization, objectification, and consumerization in a world where the female body is commodified as the “exotic other” (82). For victimized women, tattooing helps reclaim possession the body from traumatic experiences, including disease and sexual abuse, through deliberate body modification (Kang and Jones 44). For example, tattoos are often used to mask mastectomy scars and body parts associated with physical and sexual abuse such as the breasts and legs.

**Conceptual Framework**

Societal appearance ideals and expectations about appearance behaviors are transmitted via sociocultural channels such as the media, peers, and family, and it is through repeated exposure to pressures concerning body shape, weight, and appearance that men and women internalize ideals of physical appearance and consistently use them to monitor their bodies. Social comparison theory emphasizes the comparison with others, as well as the acknowledgement of
dissatisfied responses by others, as significant in promoting general psychological distress. According to Festinger, the degree to which a person succumbs to social pressures depends on the extent to which they internalize ideals of beauty and then compare themselves to others for evaluation of their own self-worth (118-19). From this social comparison theory perspective, one expects that people will engage in a variety of harmful behaviors, some potentially destructive (e.g., disordered eating, surgical interventions, self-injury) to reduce discrepancies and to help them achieve congruity between their cultural ideal and perceived actual self-state. More immediately, these individuals will feasibly suffer from any number of emotional responses (e.g., body dissatisfaction or body shame) because they find their bodies do not match the ideal, which will affect their overall psychological well-being.

Higgins posited in self-discrepancy theory that people experience discomfort when they hold incompatible views, which psychologists call “discrepancies,” between their self-states (i.e., actual, ought, and ideal) (324). The theory proposes that people are motivated to match their self-concept (actual self) with ideal standards. Therefore, people with a negative self-image will work to improve themselves and approximate their ideal self, which will reduce discrepancies and overall body dissatisfaction.

**Current Study Inquiry**

The related topics of negative self-perception and body modification amongst both males and females create an opportunity to explore the connection between the growing popularity and consumption of tattoos. The purpose of this study was to explore the use of tattoos for negotiating body image and self-concept. The literature on tattoos lacks in-depth studies that examine body image and psychological well-being across various dimensions. Research has
shown that tattoos serve as brands, marks of identity, and even fashion statements. However, the authors of the current study were interested in the possible therapeutic implications for tattoo behavior considering rigid societal expectations for appearance. Perhaps tattoos can be used to reclaim the body from society and ultimately help reconcile ourselves together with our overly critical self-destructive views. Therefore, using the social cultural framework, specifically social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory, the authors asked the following research questions: (1) Do individuals with tattoos experience their body differently than people without tattoos? and (2) How does the motivation for the tattoos relate to the presentation of the self?

**Method**

This research was conducted in four phases with three different research methods: survey, focus groups, and face-to-face interviews. Following approval from the researchers’ university IRB, participants were solicited from a university located in the south-central US as well as from social media websites including Facebook and Reddit. For the survey portion, each participant accessed a secure website where they provided consent and then anonymously completed the previously described measures. There was no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**Survey**

In this study, 401 women (92.6%) and 32 men (7.4%) provided complete information on the survey; the mean age was 22 years (SD= 4.48; range 18-50 years). In terms of ethnicity, 100 (23.1%) identified as Hispanic/Latino. Regarding racial group status, the majority were White (n = 199; 46%). Further, the majority were single (n = 383; 88.5%) and were in college, or had a
college degree (n = 379; 87.5%). The majority of the participants lived in the southern states of the US.

The survey portion of the study consisted of demographic questions, body image measures (i.e., body shame, body surveillance, body part satisfaction), and sociocultural factors affecting appearance (i.e., investment in appearance, the degree to which individuals feel pressure from external sources to look a certain way, and to what degree they incorporate societal attitudes about beauty and appearance into their self-schemas). The survey data was analyzed through a series of analyses of variance and multiple regressions in order to determine whether the presence of tattoos was related to body image.

Focus Groups and Interviews

The focus groups and interviews were conducted over the span of a year. The participants were solicited from the survey pool discussed above. The first phase of focus groups was composed of thirty tattooed individuals (female= 20; male= 10) between the ages of 20 and 26. The second phase of focus groups was comprised of 9 tattooed individuals (female= 5; male =4). At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to fill out a short survey with demographic information, descriptions of their tattoos (e.g., number, placement, design), motivations for the tattoos, and finally to discuss their views of their body. These questions were then discussed as a group. Two group discussions on motivations for obtaining a tattoo and beliefs about normative behavior and stigmatization of tattoos were conducted with 30 college-aged volunteers. Interviews were conducted with four veteran tattoo artists of different backgrounds and specializations (female=1; male=3). Three of the artists practice in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and the other is located in Denver.
The two authors acted as the primary coders for the focus group and interview data. After examining the data, the initial coding framework was developed through an inductive process (Grounded Theory), thereby creating original categories rather than relying on already existing coding schemes. Phrases and terms that summarized participant responses for each open-ended question were then compiled. The summary phrases and terms were then reduced in a second phase of coding and categories collapsed. The resulting categories were then compared with descriptions of each theme from existing literature on tattoos and body image, which the first author had compiled prior to coding. Four external coders, who were unfamiliar with the study, were given the responses from the focus groups and interviews and the final coding scheme after a two-hour training session on coding. The first author clarified the categories and the students then independently coded the participants’ responses. The inter-coder agreement for the focus groups ranged from 78% to 100%, and agreement for the interviews ranged from 81% to 100%.

Findings

Regardless of motivation, participants exhibited a desire to project a specific impression of themselves visually on their body as personal reminder of who they are or want to be, or for others to inquire about. Three primary themes emerged through the combined empirical and qualitative analyses: (1) Commemoration and Coping; (2) Extensions of the Self and Redefining the Self; and (3) Reclaiming the Body. For the first theme, tattoos are used to mark events in one’s life and usually had a connection to the body. The second theme explores the use of tattoos to communicate something about one’s identity or negotiation of identity. The third theme specifically suggests the use of tattoos as a means for taking control over the body.
Commemoration and Coping

Kuwahara suggests that people use tattoos to visually and permanently communicate their inner emotions and collective pasts on their skin (17-18). The overt visual display of the personal narrative may create interest and even dialogue with others. For the tattooed individual, tattoos often serve as physical reminders of past life events. Depending on the occasion, the tattoo may be celebratory, or it may allow for reflection on potentially painful experiences and the subsequent personal growth and/or empowerment. For example, one participant describes how her tattoo serves as a reminder for her grandfather: “The rosary I got for my grandfather. I placed it around my neck because that is where I usually wear my other rosaries.” For other participants, their tattoos provide them the opportunity to reflect upon specific events and emotional states such as depression, and the ensuing positive affects created by the tattoo(s) (see fig. 1). One participant explains,

I wanted to remind myself that I am here, so I looked up the suicide awareness ribbon…I wanted to be able to see it when I looked in the mirror. This tattoo is located right below my collar bone on the right side. The tattoo for me is a reminder that I have a purpose here on the earth. I went through and still to this day am constantly going through episodes of sadness. The tattoo has a yellow ribbon which is for suicide prevention, I did not know about the semicolon symbol at the time when I got the tattoo which is also another suicide symbol so I got the yellow ribbon. I have had thoughts of suicide and almost went through with it one time so when I was able to get a tattoo I got it to constantly remind and keep myself focused. Whenever I feel sad or not wanting to be here I look at the tattoo and it helps me to realize that I need to keep focused.
Fig. 1. A participant’s yellow ribbon tattoo for suicide prevention. Author’s photograph.

Another participant explained that she also used her tattoos to commemorate trying times in her life (see fig. 2):

When I first decided to get a tattoo, I was in a very transitional phase of my life. I had a lot of people telling me what I needed to be doing. My tattoo is a compass.

To me it represents finding my own direction and going my own way.

Fig. 2. A tattoo of a compass to represent finding one’s direction in life. Author’s photograph.
Another participant used her tattoos during her struggle with depression (see figs. 3-4):

I got the tattoo on my best friends 22\textsuperscript{nd} birthday. Before I got it I went through a lot of hard times (depression), but things started to getting a lot better for me. I wanted an arrow on my ribcage because to me it symbolizes “keep moving forward.” I think my tattoos enhance my appearance, but that was not the original intention…I liked the meaning of the ouroboros and thought the circular placement would be good around the ball of my shoulder…The one on my thigh is an ode to Sylvia Plath/The Bell Jar and my struggle with depression.

Fig. 3. Tattoo of ouroboros. Author’s photograph.
Fig. 4. Participant’s ode to Sylvia Plath/The Bell Jar. Author’s photograph.

**Extensions of the Self and Redefining the Self**

When people have incompatible views of the self they frequently negotiate and renegotiate their self-states to create a balanced sense of identity. Tattoos may help an individual alter self-perceptions and how they define themselves to others. Because people believe that the socially attributed meaning in the act of tattooing, and the tattoo design itself, can be passed on to the individual, people are more likely to choose a tattoo design that is congruent with a corresponding positive self-image and the identity they want to project to others. The findings of this study show that several participants acquired their first tattoo when they reached the legal age of 18. For these individuals, tattoos are a rite of passage into adulthood and a symbol of their autonomy from parental authority and disapproval. Many of the participants admitted to utilizing social media platforms to research designs for their tattoos, sometimes using celebrity emulation as a method for reducing discrepancies in the self-states. According to Martinet al., a weak identity facilitates “psychological absorption with a celebrity in an attempt to establish an
identity and a sense of fulfillment” (75). Maltby et al. also found correlations between the pathological aspects of celebrity worship and poor body image (17). Moreover, researchers and tattoos artists alike credit the popularity and status of contemporary tattoos to celebrities (Woodstock 786). Traditional associations of deviance with tattoos are antiquated, and celebrities are now considered “positive deviants” whom others like to emulate (Woodstock 788). Several participants referenced the role of celebrities in their tattoo choice. For example, one participant explains, “I have a shark that means ‘blood is thicker than water’ and the placement was influenced by Soulja Boy because he has a cool stomach one,” whereas another reports, “I got my first tattoo on my hip because I idolized Megan Fox.”

While the tattooed individuals were more positive about their celebrity inspired tattoos, the tattoo artists were less adulatory. Several artists agreed that tattoos are no longer about rebellion, but rather celebrity worship and emulation. One artist claimed that people he tattoos think the tattoos will make them as “cool” as the celebrity. Another artist lamented, “Ten years ago, people would discuss the [tattoo] design with the artist. Now, people show a highly edited photo of celebrities or people who they want to emulate” thinking it will make them just like that person.

**Reclaiming the Body, Emotional Pain, and Renegotiating the Self**

The results of the survey analysis revealed noteworthy relationships between gender, body image, and tattoo behavior. There were statistically significant differences between males with tattoos and those without tattoos with respect to body shame and body satisfaction. Males with tattoos had lower body shame compared to the male participants without tattoos. Males with tattoos also exhibited higher levels of body satisfaction (especially with the face) compared to male participants without tattoos.
There were also statistically significant differences between females with tattoos and those without tattoos. For example, female participants with tattoos exhibited higher levels of general body dissatisfaction compared to female participants without tattoos. Female participants with tattoos also scored higher on body surveillance, meaning they experience themselves from an objectified perspective and also monitored their appearance with regularity. Contrasting, the female participants with tattoos in this study were less likely to invest in their overall appearance, specifically they were more apathetic about their appearance and did not engage in extensive grooming behaviors compared to the women without tattoos.

For some participants, the act of tattooing was an attempt to take control over the body in its natural form. Tattoos are directly related to one’s view of his or her attractiveness. Therefore, tattoos may be used to draw attention to or detract attention from the body. Regardless of the specific function, the tattooed body was perceived as more attractive or more desirable than the non-tattooed body. By negating the subversive meanings of and the masculine associations with tattoos female participants attempted to redefine feminine beauty. Many sources acknowledge a shift in appearance codes with respect to tattoos (e.g., DeMello 49; James). The act of tattooing is no longer reserved only for working class males, as mentioned earlier. Over half of tattooed individuals are women who may use their tattoos to defy traditional gender codes (“One in Five”). However, women’s tattoos may simultaneously reinforce conventional gender codes by virtue of their placement on highly sexualized areas of the body (Kang and Jones 44).

For one participant in the current study, tattooing was used to come to terms with her body, specifically self-acceptance of her thighs, “When I was in high school I hated my thick thighs, but after moving forward I learned to love them…the placement on my thigh came at a time when my self-love was budding.” For other participants, tattoos were meant to draw
attention away from perceived problematic areas of the body. One female participant had been in a serious car accident, which required a tracheotomy. Several years after the accident and recovery, she was tattooed on the back of her neck to draw people’s attention away from the large scar on her throat resulting from the tracheotomy. Similarly, for another participant, his tattoos served as a distraction from the parts of his body with which he was concerned. He has multiple tattoos on his pectorals, shoulders, and calves. The participant remarked, “I had bad acne on my back… got the star to detract attention. I will also note that I am dissatisfied with my weight. I have tried building muscle weight, but have been unsuccessful” (see fig. 5).

Another participant used her tattoos to distract people from looking at her “fat arms.” She stated, “I always hated my arms, I thought they were fat so getting the rose on the shoulder would distract people from looking at it…. I got the lotus flower on my waist for the same reason” (see fig. 6).
Fig. 6. Participant’s lotus flower tattoo. Author’s photograph.

For another participant, tattoos were not for masking body parts but rather enhancing those she was satisfied with, “Overall appearance I would say I’m not happy but I’m coming to terms with it….I’m happy with my bust….but everything else I’m not happy with how I look…my tattoos enhance my bust but everything else is to flow with my body.”

For others, tattoos commemorated changes to their bodies and the new-found confidence they had at exposing those body parts. One participant explained,

I never disliked my face but I feel sometimes like I won’t ever be satisfied with my body. There’s always something about my body that I will want to improve. One of the main reasons I got the tattoo on my rib was because I had just lost 30 pounds and I felt confident about showing off an area that I was always afraid to.

Another, “decided to go through with the tattoos after a big weight loss process. The weight loss led me to the idea of getting them on my hips, reaching onto my abdomen because I am more comfortable with that part of my body.” In more troubling cases, however, tattoos tell stories of egregious emotional suffering and body dissatisfaction, where the pain associated with the
tattoos is frequently considered a therapeutic necessity for reconnecting with the body. For the one participant, she claimed to hide beneath her tattoos (see figs. 7-9):

Before I became thinner/more healthy I wanted to hide under [the tattoos]. Also before I was content with my overall appearance was when I got the majority of big pieces that cover large spaces. The mandala/flower of life…got them after I made a spiritual discovery and converted religion. Buddhism was a way of dealing with eating disorders, anxiety and depression.

Fig. 7. One of the participant’s larger pieces. Author’s photograph.
Another participant also used her tattoos to overcome a difficult time in her life (see fig. 10):

I went through a really difficult/dark time and when I got through it, I wanted to get something to remind me that I can get through anything. The design I chose because I used to have nightmares of what I went through and sometimes would stay up for days just to not have to sleep so a dream catcher seemed appropriate. I had it done on the ribs because I heard it was the most painful. I struggle with my
face a lot because I have acne so I feel everyone is focuses on that when talking to me. I used to compare my body to others and was extremely anorexic at one point but now I don’t focus as much.

Fig. 10. Participant’s dream catcher tattoo. Author’s photograph.

The tattoo artists have also noticed a motivational shift in their clientele. As the following examples show, they see more and more people using tattoos to compensate for perceived corporeal inadequacies, especially women. One artist suggested that “Women think tattoos will enhance them and make them more sexy.” Another artist agreed with this assertion, “Women are more concerned about how their body looks,” they tend to focus on where they place their tattoos because “They are trying to be someone else and they are settling.” A third artist suggests that these concerns tend to lead women to want tattoos in places commonly associated with femininity: “Females usually get their first tattoo on their wrist, side of ribs, or on their pelvic area/hip.”

Conclusions

According to Kuwahara, tattoos are social inscriptions on the body that allow a person to relate to oneself (17-18). The current study reveals that participants are relatively desensitized to the behavior of tattooing. It no longer holds the same social stigmas of deviance and masculinity
that it has in the past. Contemporary tattooing is used to conceal or mask and, concurrently, reveal or enhance various facets of the self for both males and females.

Societal appearance ideals and related gender expectations are transmitted via sociocultural channels, such as the media. Over time and through consistent exposure to such environments, people internalize these ideals as reference points for self-evaluation. During the process of social comparison individuals scrutinize their own personal value. Comparison to appearance ideals and ensuing self-evaluation then leads to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their bodies. When people realize that they fall short of societal expectations (either real or perceived), it can have potentially detrimental effects on their self-concept that affect other behaviors, such as body modification. Self-enhancement, in the form of body modification, is meant to reduce discrepancies in self-views, which will also reduce insecurities. Ultimately, tattoos allow the wearer to reclaim their body from the self and societally imposed ideas of the perfect, yet unattainable, body.

Social comparison and identity instabilities may also result in celebrity emulation. For more vulnerable individuals, venerated celebrities often serve as the point of reference for social comparison because celebrity lives, and frequently appearance, are considered idyllic. Because it is difficult, if not impossible, to attain the celebrity lifestyle and appearance, a tattoo is an easily accessible alternative for people who over-identify with celebrities. Popular media sources, such as Glamour magazine even proclaim that small tattoos, “as seen on celebrities, make the perfect accessory on the red carpet—and in real life” (Temple). Tattoos are then reduced to an unequivocal quick fix for the person seeking instant self-completion.

The social comparison process and subsequent self-judgement is especially pernicious for women. During self-evaluation women often adopt an observer’s perspective of their own bodies
that is learned through gender socialization and body subjection to sexually objectifying
experiences for the benefit of the male gaze (Fredrickson and Roberts 174-75). Furthermore,
participants in this study revealed that cultural definitions of tattoos for women are quite fluid.
They now use the practice of tattooing to form new social constructions of the body, primarily to
reclaim the body from traumatic experiences and to draw attention away from areas of the body
that they perceive as intrinsically flawed. For these individuals, tattoos may serve as a
therapeutic solution to manage transgressions of the body. Similarly, Swami’s study of 82 British
men and women reported that participants reported lower appearance anxiety and body
dissatisfaction immediately after getting their tattoos (242). The participants who use
reclaimative language to describe their tattoos often referred to the death of a former identity and
the birth of new one that more closely approximates their ideal self-view, suggesting an elective
nature of identity that can be rewritten with tattoos.

Furthermore, Pitts proposed that body modifications, such as tattoos can neutralize a
“sense of body alienation” that results from sexual violation or physical abuse (71). The current
study substantiates Pitt’s claim and demonstrates that tattoos can reverse beliefs about the
grotesque body that has been disfigured by disease or accidents. Reinvention of the self through
disfiguring the body surface intimates that tattoos allow the wearer to achieve a more positive
self-regard by resisting normative messages of beauty. Furthermore, Tiggemann and Golder
found that individuals with tattoos scored higher on a need for uniqueness scale, but not on
appearance investment measures (314). The current study also suggests that people with tattoos
do not define appearance by societal ideals of attractiveness. A tattooed individual’s appearance
investment is not necessarily defined by traditional grooming practices but rather by the ability to
create a unique appearance through the use of tattoos, thereby challenging and even rejecting, standardized grooming habits.

Fashion has been described as an imitation game that also satisfies contradictory desires for differentiation (Entwistle 43-48; Simmel 543). Tattoos are one such fashion that satisfies the individual need for dissimilarity, while also providing an alternative, and somewhat subversive, environment where people can experience a sense of belonging, as well as acceptance of their bodies. Appreciation of the body may inevitably contribute to higher reported levels of body satisfaction and general self-esteem among the participants. Acceptance and support within the tattooed environment allows men and women to seek comfort within their bodies coupled with comfort about their gender identity and sexual assertiveness in a society that advocates heterofemininity through the media. The hypermasculine tattoo spectacle of the past has been revitalized as a strategic body modification for men and women seeking a new environment in which they can be proud of themselves and their bodies.
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