

Tattoos and the Female Gaze

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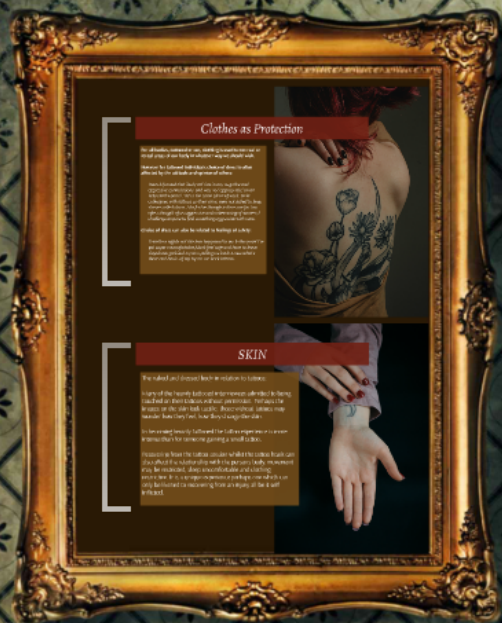
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Citation:

MCCREESH, Natalie (2017). Tattoos and the Female Gaze. In: The Space Between: Psyche, Body, Skin, Environment, Royal College of Art, London, 3 February 2017. (Unpublished) [Conference or Workshop Item]

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Conversing

I am wearing denim shorts walking through town, a woman comes up behind me and tries to touch the back of my leg where my new tattoo is visible by only an couple of inches. I spin around ready to give her a mouthful but am left speechless when I see she is dragging two small children behind her. Oh I just love your tattoo and have to know where you got it done, she exclaims I quickly give her the artists name and rush off.

- I am wearing denim shorts
- I am wearing a vest
- I am wearing shorts
- I am wearing jeans with ripped knees

More often than not these instances happened to women by men - reasoning behind this can be explained by the fetishisation (through the male gaze) of tattooed women.

Guéguen (2013)- 'when men saw the woman with the tattoo, they judged her as less athletic, less motivated, less honest, less generous, less religious, less intelligent and less artistic'

Swami and Furnham (2007) 'While men see tattooed women as less attractive, they also see them as more promiscuous.'





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Clothes as Protection

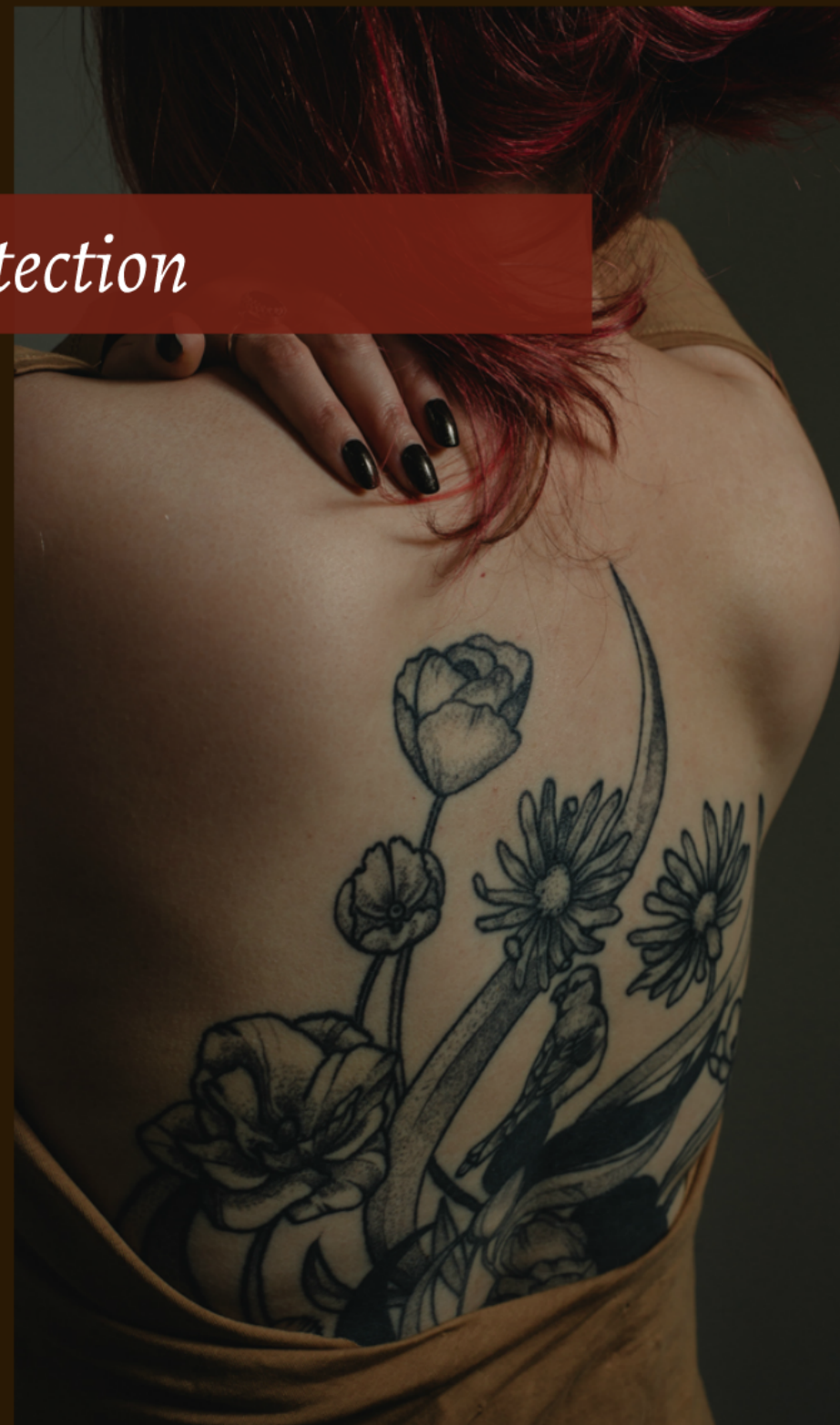
For all bodies, tattooed or not, clothing is used to conceal or reveal areas of our body in whatever way we should wish.

However for tattooed individuals choice of dress is often affected by the attitude and opinion of others:

I was informed that 'body art' has 'many negative and aggressive connotations' and was not 'appropriate' on an 'educated woman'. Yet in the same place of work, male colleagues with tattoos on their arms were not asked to keep sleeves rolled down. I do feel as though tattoos are far too often thought of as aggressive and unbecoming of women; I challenge anyone to find something aggressive with mine.

Choice of dress can also be related to feelings of safety:

Countless nights out this has happened to me to the point I've got super uncomfortable/don't feel safe and have to leave. Guys have grabbed my arm pulling me back to see what's there and backs of my top to see back tattoos.



SKIN

The naked and dressed body in relation to tattoos:

Many of the heavily tattooed interviewees admitted to being touched on their tattoos without permission. Perhaps the images on the skin look tactile, those without tattoos may wonder how they feel, how they change the skin.

In becoming heavily tattooed the tattoo experience is more intense than for someone gaining a small tattoo.

Recovering from the tattoo session whilst the tattoo heals can also affect the relationship with the persons body, movement may be restricted, sleep uncomfortable and clothing restrictive. It is a unique experience perhaps one which can only be likened to recovering from an injury all be it self inflicted.



BODY

Only when naked are tattooed bodies viewed in their entirety for the most part we are only seeing parts of a whole, parts which the owner has decided to reveal - the reveal is done using clothing.

Meanings too are concealed to the viewer unless the owner decides to reveal.

Tattoos are symbols on the skin which only the wearer knows the meaning, if indeed they do choose to attach a meaning at all to their tattoos.

Meanings may also become transient, changing or evolving as the person wearing them will do so too.





Female Gaze

Here we consider the female-gaze from the view point of how women perceive themselves as being seen by others and how they desire to be seen. If tattoos can add layer of meaning over the skin then, they can be used as a reminder of humanity, a confidence support, talisman:

I also have a noose on the same arm, which i got as a motivational love tattoo, I was in a terrible place last year and tried to take my own life and suffered badly with my depression so having this tattoo and being able to see it reminds me to love myself, cause I broke the noose and was brave enough to carry on.

My tattoos are my armour, I feel confident, stronger, like I have a protective layer over my skin.

This is challenged once again by the Male Gaze

My summer outfit consists of a tank top, shorts or a skirt. And my boyfriend.'(Thirkill-Clayborough 2016 Love/Hate zine)

*When I am with him it all stops. The inappropriate touching never happens. What is it about being with a male that protects a woman from these things?
(Thirkill-Clayborough 2016 Love/Hate zine)*



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