

## **The Self-Image of Tattooed Women within the Social Interaction Space in the Society**



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**ABSTRACT:** This scientific paper discusses how tattooed women interact in social life with the majority of people having a negative view of tattoo images. A tattooed woman interacts socially and culturally. It is in this social space that she negotiates with her social world, in various ways, such as allowing the tattoo image on her body to be openly seen, or she tries to cover it up when the woman considers negative or positive views of the tattoo images on some parts of her body. The approach used to understand tattooed women's interactions with their social life was the Looking Glass Self proposed by Charles Horton Cooley, which discusses how the looking glass self analogy affects the development of a person's self-concept.

This was a qualitative study designed to answer the problem of how tattooed women interact with their socio-cultural world which has positive and negative views. Qualitative method of a tattooed woman life story was applied to explore experiences regarding their social interactions. This study involved 3 case studies to answer such problem. This study found that there were different negotiation processes between a tattooed woman and another, along with different cases of tattoo image ownership.

**KEYWORDS:** Self-Image, Social Interaction, Tattoo

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Humans undergo physical changes as part of being and together with other bodies in the material and social world (Kosut, 2015: 32). The body, as a cultural and biological entity born simultaneously, immediately succumbs to the modification process at birth, which ends when the neural congestion in the fat body is finally exposed. The practice of body modification is usually characterized as an act in which a person plays an intermediary role in his bodily changes (Johncock, 2012: 241). Physical experiences and processes, such as aging, disease, and death are experienced the same everywhere, but understanding on these experiences and processes depends on the individual person and the cultural context in which a person lives.

According to Shilling (2003: 4-5), in order to show their identity, people are involved in various "body projects" that seek personal construction for the benefit of health and beauty of the body. For people whose desire changes to be truly manifested in their own flesh, their bodies become a screen through which culture can see or fail to see that the culture itself is reflected. Wegenstein found that people who were surrounded by make-over bodies can produce a desire for someone to do the same thing but also produce a circular gaze, namely "I see myself in someone else's body, and other people's bodies tell me how I look" (Gentles-Peart, 2015: 2).

Tattoo means scratches on the skin surface of the human body (Setiawan & Jayanegara, 2016: 29), which comes from the Austronesian language. Skin scratching as an art is widely practiced among Austronesian people. It was one of the earliest technologies developed by the Proto-Austronesian people of Taiwan and the coast of South China before or at least 1500 BC, before Austronesian expansion to the islands of the Indo-Pacific. Tattoo traditions, including facial tattoos, can be found among all Austronesian subgroups, including the Aboriginal Taiwanese, Southeast Asian Islanders, Micronesian, Polynesian, and Malagasy people (Cremation Ink, 2021).

Tattoo is made in two ways. The first is through scarification, which is scratching the surface of the skin using a sharp object, deliberately causing a wound, and when the wound heals it will form a prominent mark on the skin surface. The second is by making a needle-small hole in the surface of the skin with a pointed object according to desired image pattern. Through these holes, the ink, dyes or pigments is inserted under the surface of the skin (Marianto & Syamsul Barry, 2000: 2).

In modern social life, when influential major religions emerge in society, it is undeniable that tattoos always cause controversy in various societies, civilizations and eras. The connotation of tattoo is negative, discriminatory, and has stigmas attached to someone who has a tattoo image, both male and female. Especially, a woman is expected to look elegant and graceful. So, when people find a tattooed woman, various judgments about the tattooing behavior will emerge (Soeprapto, 2002: 112). Charles Horton Cooley (2017: 29-32) argues that in social life that has the nature of freedom, there is still a conflict between choice and

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social suggestion. We can position Cooley's thoughts in the social life of the tattooed woman, where her choice to get a tattoo is interfered with the rules of the surrounding community.

In a social view, tattoo images on the body are still considered taboo. There are various things that support this attitude, such as the tattooing process that is considered unusual, many stories about tattooed parties committing criminal acts that refer to contemporary social problems, and still much more reasons (Arifin & Suardi, 2017: 7). Regarding the taboo view of some people and since tattoo is prohibited by some religious laws and society has not fully accepted it, we have to explore the woman motivation to keep tattooing their bodies. The era is getting more advanced, technology advance is accompanied by an increasingly open thinking about new things that are starting to be accepted by the community, and uncommon innovations are starting to be in demand. A page on Kompas.com written by Rahman Indra entitled "Women with tattoos are sexy?" (Indra, 2013) describes different conditions regarding the acceptance of tattoos by the public. In the past, tattoos were synonymous with delinquents and generally only men dared to put tattoos on their skin. Currently, the views are completely different. The number of women with tattoos on the body is increasing, and they are considered sexier, provided that the size and illustration chosen are in line with their characters and placed on the proper 'location'.

According to Berelson and Steiner (in Putra & Ratmanto, 2019: 61), communication can be interpreted as the process of transmitting information, ideas, emotions conveyed through symbols in the form of words, pictures, figures, graphics and so on. In addition to creating communication in society, many factors encourage a person to have a tattoo image, one of which is that tattoo is believed to add value to the beauty of the women body in the hope of attracting men attention. But, it is undeniable that tattooed women still get the negative stigmas given by the community around them. All these consequences must be faced by the tattooed woman for any decision to have a tattoo (Santoso, 2017: 9). This case is interesting to study because there is a conflict between self-will and the choice to get a tattoo based on the social view given towards tattooed women. Furthermore, based on the social conditions these women face, this study aims to explore what decisions the tattooed women will take on the tattoo images they have during social interactions within the society. A woman has the ability to oppose the general view that exists in the social world about tattoo images to interpret her self-image.

The views of the pros and cons will always exist in every decision that accompanies women to have tattoos on their bodies. Basically, tattooed women are also part of their social world, who cannot avoid the interactions with their surroundings. However, tattooed women still have the desire to manifest their will to get tattooed even though there are various views. The focus problem in this study is how the tattooed women interact with their social world through the negotiation process between themselves and the socio-cultural environment. This study is focused to observe how they interpret the positive and negative views of individuals in his social world towards them in the form of behaviors to perform related to tattoo images on their body parts.

Looking glass self theory proposed by Charles Horton Cooley was applied to explain the development of tattooed women's self-image, by observing how tattooed women react to other people's judgments of themselves, self-appraisal, self-expectation, and the effect of tattoo images on their social life. Further more, this study also aims to see how tattooed women interact or negotiate with their social environment based on the tattoo images they have.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction is a way of thinking about the mind, self, and society. George Herbert Mead (Morissan, 2009: 75) states that meaning arises as a result of interactions between humans, both verbally and nonverbally. Through the actions and responses that occur, we put meaning into words or actions, and because of this we can understand events in certain ways. The fundamental thing in this theory is the importance of meaning in human behavior, the importance of self-concept, and the relationship between individuals and society. Mead (Ayun, 2015) suggests three important concepts in this theory, namely:

1) Society. In light of symbolic interaction theory, society consists of mutually cooperating behavior among its members. Mead explains that society is manifested or formed by the presence of symbols in the form of signals from the body. With the existence of the human ability to pronounce symbols and act and respond to what is produced, human will empathize or take their role. Here, the community means a network of social interactions wherein the members give meaning to their own actions and the actions of others by using symbols. The important concept contained in this theory is interplay between responding to others and responding to oneself.

2) Self. Individuals interact with other individuals to produce a certain idea about themselves. It is a theory that reveals about self and how experiences interact with others. This theory consists of elements which consist of three dimensions. "The first dimension is the dimension of showing (display), regarding whether an aspect of the self can be shown to outsiders (public) or is it a private one. The second dimension is the realization or source, namely the level or degree in a certain part or area of the self which is believed to come from internal or external. The self-element that is believed to come from internal is called individually realized, while the element of the self that is believed to come from the person's relationship with the group is called collectively realized. The third dimension or so called the agent, is the degree or level of the active force generated by the self. The active element is an action taken by people, while the passive element is the opposite" (Morissan, Wardhani, & U, 2010: 136-137).

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Self-theory discusses about self-consciousness, where a person thinks of herself as an object, which means that when someone thinks of herself, he shows his awareness of herself. We have self because we can perceive ourselves as an object. The only condition for something to become an object is to give it a name and represent it symbolically. Teenagers often see themselves the way others see them. They will use the images given by the others towards them through the interactions they have with others. This can be done through the process of taking on roles or using the perspective of others in seeing ourselves, which will eventually lead us to have a self-concept (Sakti & Yulianto, 2013: 4).

3) Thoughts. Thought in this theory is a process of interaction with oneself. The ability to interact that develops together with oneself is very important for human life because it is part of every action. Thought is also a thinking process that involves a series of stages. This stage includes defining objects in the social world, sketching the possible modes of action, imagining the consequences of alternative actions, eliminating something that tends to be deficient, and finally selecting the optimal mode of action. (Ahmadi, 2008; Sakti & Yulianto, 2013).

### The Looking Glass Self Theory

The term "the self glass self" was known by the public in 1902 in Charles Horton Cooley's work entitled "Human Nature and the Social Order". The self has a special side that is the humanness which is developed based on the influence of the surrounding social space, then the feeling of oneself is emerged because of the interaction with other people. Furthermore, Cooley argues that the harmonization of two different things between "self" and "society" does not mean limiting "self" in society, but when someone pays attention and tries to carry out harmony, then this action can determine whether the "self" effect in a person (who acts in a social space) can be accounted for or not (Cooley, 2017: 8).

In trying to understand this self-concept outside of Mead's original formulation, we must first understand the looking glass self thinking developed by Charles H. Cooley. Cooley defines the concept of looking glass self as follows: *a rather definitive imagination of what a person is like, that is, the ideas he provides that arise in certain thoughts and a kind of self-feeling determined by the attitude towards the relationship of thoughts and feelings to the thoughts of others. So, in imagination, we feel in other people's minds some thoughts about our appearance, our attitudes, our goals, our actions, our character, our friends, etc., and various things that are influenced by them* (Jalaludin Rakhmat, 2007: 99).

According to Cooley (2017: 8), we do it by imagining ourselves as someone else in our minds. Cooley calls this symptom looking glass self, as if we put a mirror in front of us. First, we imagine how we look to others, we glimpse ourselves as in a mirror. For example, we think our faces are ugly. Second, we imagine how other people judge our appearance. We think that they will find us unattractive. Third, we experience feelings of pride or disappointment. Here, people may feel sad or ashamed.

### Tattoos

In the Tahitian language, tattoos is called "tatau" which means sign. tattoos It is a series of body art with various themes, which are manifested in the forms of images, symbols, writings, and even photo replicas that are expressed and displayed on the surface of a person's body skin. For the owner, tattoo images are works of art that express their own pride and have certain meanings. For the creator, it becomes a work exhibited and collected as a step towards its fame (Pradita, 2013: 3). Tattoos are images or symbols on the skin of the body that are engraved using a needle-like tool and decorated with colorful pigments. Even though it's just an image, there are various functions of tattoos. Some are just a symbol of masculinity, to beautify one self, a sign of fertility and so on. In ancient times, people still used manual techniques and traditional materials to make tattoos. Nowadays, tattoos are made using modern tools. The tools for tattooing include tattoo machines, adapters and pattern making equipment, needles, gloves, ink containers, daubers, and other supporting tools such as alcohol, antiseptic ointments, tissues, designs, and photographic works (Liga, 2015: 3).

The presence of tattoos in modern society has experienced a change in meaning. Currently, tattoo has developed into popular culture or counter-culture which is considered by adolescents as a symbol of freedom and diversity. On the other hand, the elderly saw it as wild and very negative symbol. Thus the meaning of tattoo will depend on three contexts, namely historical events, the location of the text, and cultural formations. Previously, tattoos were originally part of culture or traditional ethnic rituals. But currently, they are developed into a part of popular culture. At a time when traditional tattoos are threatened with extinction, tattoos that have become part of pop culture are increasingly emblazoned on the bodies of modern humans and are increasingly favored, especially among teenagers. If someone has a tattoo, it is considered the same as rebellion. But it is precisely this term of rebellion attached to body art that makes this rebellious style popular and sought after by young people. There are several reasons that underlie why the younger generation is one of the objects in cultural transformation.

First, the younger generation exists and becomes the actor in a process of finding identity so that they are easily influenced by attractive values. Second, the younger generation is very sensitive to environmental conditions and easy to make changes. Third, the consumption pattern of the younger generation is longer so that it needs empowerment to maintain consumption pattern. Usually, people who are marginalized by society have tattoos as a symbol of rebellion and self-existence, while children who are excluded by their families have tattoos as a symbol of liberation (Liga, 2015: 4).

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### Social View of Tattoos

The existence of tattoos has been considered a deviation. Tattoos are still considered as something that goes out of line with the applicable rules and values in society. In Indonesian society, except for big cities, conformity is still very strong where young people are considered normal, handsome and pious, if they are neat, clean, there are no tattoos, no piercings and so on. If there is even a slight deviation such as a pierced ear or nose, it will lead to gossip and reproach which quickly spreads anywhere. It is not surprising, therefore, that such youthful styles will quickly be perceived as something negative. The value of art emerges as an emotional, individualistic, and expressive entity. Art becomes a meaningful entity. With regard to tattoos, it can indeed be categorized as an artistic entity because in addition to being a visible form of artifacts that can be seen and felt, it also concerns aesthetic, simple, happy, emotional, individual and subjective values (Sumardjo, 2000: 68).

Tattoo has recently become more and more fashionable. If tattoos were originally part of traditional ethnic ritual culture, now they have developed into a part of pop culture. The development of this view of tattoos is shown by the characteristics of tattoos used in the community. However, in some other communities, tattoos also give off the impression of being grim, creepy, criminal, thugs full of violence and close to the world of crime that is accumulated in this body image art. Some people still consider it taboo. Eastern culture is still vulnerable and has a negative tendency towards this particular art. Most people still view the art of tattooing as identical with the perpetrators of crime. Cynical views are always directed at someone who has a tattoo. In fact, the average criminal likes to have tattoos but not everyone who has a tattoo is a criminal. Tattoos are a symbol of the expression of a free soul. Nowadays, the exploitation of the body through tattoos is growing because of fashion and lifestyle. The tattoo enthusiasts have expanded to include celebrities, sportsmen, young executives, teenagers, and housewives, especially teenagers. Not only among male adolescents, tattoos are also even growing rapidly among female adolescents (Puspa, Darmawan, & Pratiwi, 2015: 2).

### Tattoos among Women

The depiction of women's nature reality in society can be reflected as natural in the sense of biology, pregnancy, menstruation, childbirth and breastfeeding. This understanding does not forget to be accompanied by the construction of the values of women in society such as womanhood, fate, customs or habits, rights and obligations, where these values have been constructed as a view of the common nature and values of women within the society. A distinction that always exists in society always influence the construction of women's nature, the provisions in viewing this nature are dynamic (Kusmana, 2014: 783-784).

The tattoo symbol or image attached to the human body can be said to be a representative of women's freedom or in this case is a gender equation. It would be very difficult to say that the current tattoo is only a symbol of thuggery or ruthlessness, because when the tattoo is then attached to a woman's body, such perceptions can immediately disappear (Gumelar & Mukhroman, 2015: 75)

Tattoo enthusiasts come from all groups, from young to old, from college students to housewives to tattoo enthusiasts for various reasons. Many reasons can motivate women to have tattoos, one of them is the influence from the environment. Environment does play an important role in shaping a person's behavior/attitude, so it's no wonder that many teenage girls fill their bodies with tattoos due to being influenced by their surroundings. Permanent tattoo is the choice of teenagers, and the placement of tattoo images on their bodies depends on the personality and beliefs of women themselves towards tattoos (Lin, Donatinus BSEP, & Musa, 2020: 83).

Liberata Lin (in Lin et al., 2020: 83) states that there is a freedom of tattoo users to determine the image and position of the tattoo. Tattoos certainly have a lot of diversity in the meaning and image of each individual. The point is that with these differences each individual has their own understanding of the tattoo images they have. An understanding of tattoos will make people and tattoo users to understand more about tattoos. To tattoo or not, it's a private choice, since tattoos are something that sticks for life. If it is not removed through surgery or other medical procedures, the tattoo will be permanently attached to the body.

### METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative study to answer the research question. This type of qualitative study is used to collect data. The qualitative method tries to help researchers understand and interpret the meaning of an event, the interaction of human behavior, and other social symptoms that have been identified and formulated based on that perspective to be studied by the researcher (Gunawan Imam, 2015: 81).

This study used a descriptive qualitative study design format, which will present the study results in the form of case descriptions, life stories of each key informant of tattooed woman as well as the meaning of the tattoo images they have (Bungin, 2007: 68). Furthermore, researcher used a case study approach in order to explore specific cases, certain groups of people with certain characteristics, and specific situations in depth, namely in the form of cases of tattoo images on women that will be elaborated more deeply through qualitative study. According to Danim (in Gunawan Imam, 2015: 113), the case study approach will limit the subject under study, but the discussion under study is still very broad in dimension. It is also illustrated that the case study does not have a water-like character (spreads over the surface), but only focuses on a certain unit of various phenomena.



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In this study, researcher used purposive sampling as a sampling technique. according to Bungin (Bungin, 2007: 107), purposive sampling is a strategy to determine which groups of participants can become informants according to certain criteria that are relevant to certain research problems. The nature of this sampling technique is flexible and open and the number of informants will adjust the needs and stability of the researcher during the process of obtaining data (Sutopo, 2006: 64).

Furthermore, the informants in this study were women who had a permanent tattoo image on their body and lived in the city of Surakarta. To assist in obtaining informant's contacts, researcher would take advantage of the Solo Tattoo Solidarity community which is headquartered in the Manahan area, Surakarta City. Solo Tattoo Solidarity consists of individuals from various regions in the city of Surakarta. It is expected that such technique can help researcher in obtaining key informants of tattooed women.

Informants:

1. Tara Ellyrna Dewi
2. Erwinda Ratna Puspita
3. Mega Buana

### **RESULTS**

This study examines the point of view of informants who interpreted themselves from the actions of others. This study then discussed research questions using the viewpoint of looking glass self-theory by Charles Horton Cooley, which describes how a person develops feelings about herself through interactions with other people, because Cooley here illustrates that society has what is called a "mirror" which reflects a self-image.

#### **Image of Tattooed Woman**

The views and judgments of informants regarding the current image of tattooed women are not only given towards themselves but also towards other tattooed women. Informant Nuna expressed her opinion, that all tattooed women had an image of a very brave individual since the choice to have a tattoo image was not an easy thing. Any consequences must be considered when deciding to put something permanent part of her body, while tattoo images were still considered negative by the society. According to her, the consequences that must be received were different based on the social environment in which the tattooed women live.

Furthermore, informant Mega expressed the view regarding the image of a woman with a tattoo on her body that was attractive, cool and brave. She argued that all women who decided to have a tattoo image were women who dared to make difficult decisions in her life, because according to her experience, deciding to get a tattoo was very difficult and had to be thought deeply. Mega also said that many of her friends and lecturers appreciated her courage to have a tattoo.

Informants Tara, Nuna, and Mega had thought deeply before making the decision to have a tattoo image. They had thought about the short and long term consequences, so they said that they were ready for everything they would face regarding the tattoo they have. Even informant Nuna developed the concept that tattooed women had an attractive side in society. Meanwhile, informant Mega said that she was proud to have a tattoo, because basically she likes to be different from the others. Mega also said that her daily environment, namely the environment of artists and lectures, gave praise for her tattoo images, so she felt positive support coming to her.

As described by Cooley, the positive self-image as a tattooed woman was developed by the three informants. This image will be implemented in social life with their primary group, because the intensive face-to-face relationship and the influence that the group provides is fundamental. This can be seen from the dress code of the three informants to show tattoo images on their bodies. This indicates that they apply a positive self-image when they exist in their primary group, and they do not try to cover up their tattoo images. Informant Mega also said that she did not hesitate to discuss with his lecturer about the tattoo she had, and was open to ask many questions via online social media.

#### **Self-Image of Tattooed Women in Society**

In this sub-concept, it will be analyzed whether the social values considered ideal for women regarding social experiences with tattoo images that they have can affect their self view which will lead to the formation of their self-image. Informant Tara responded to the ideal values labeled towards women in society by respecting all the ideal values that apply in each region and trying to take precautions such as wearing closed clothes to cover the tattoo images she has. She did not try to be what society expects her to be based on existing values, but in reality she did not hesitate to get negative views from others. However, she really maintained the feeling and dignity of her family, especially in the environment where her family live. Moreover, informant Nuna realized a consequence of having a tattoo on her body namely difficulty to find a job in a company or agency. She also said another consequence that it was difficult for the wider community to accept a woman with a tattoo image attached on her body. Therefore, in everyday life she tried to act preventively before making social interaction with the surrounding community. The precaution that she performed was in the form of wearing clothes to cover her tattoo image. She usually did it when she came to formal events, or when she picked up her child at school. This action was also one of the mandates of her parents. Tattoo image that was attached on her body did not affect the formation of self-image, but affected the social interaction in society related to the tattoo images she had.

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Informant Mega also argued that the ideal values found in society did not affect her, even though she felt inferior because in several occasions she heard or felt negative views that came to her. However, Mega admitted that she strived to be an individual who fitted the demand of the ideal body physically in her environment. Demands as a dancer were the reason for her to fulfill these ideals. Without realizing it, the environment also encouraged her, such as a lecturer warning if her weight increased. On the other hand, Mega herself also felt that she was not maximal while dancing if her body was not ideal.

The reflection of the thoughts and judgments of other people who did not know them and which led to negative views had led to insecurity feelings, but they also received a lot of positive appraisal from their close daily environment. Thus, the feelings that arose at the current time were dominated by feelings of pleasure and happiness over the decision to have tattoo images on their bodies.

A process where a person interprets other people's reactions to oneself can build feelings and ideas about her. If the result of self-reflection is pleasant within the mirror of the social self, it leads to a positive self-concept. And vice versa if a negative reflection appears, it leads to a negative self-concept as well. After we analyze the self-reflection of the informants, it can be concluded that it was supported and led to a positive self-image. Therefore, the mirror of social society that led to negative views had no effect on the development of their self-image as tattooed women in society. It can also be concluded that the informants reflected their positive self-image as tattooed women based on the mirror of their primary group, the majority of which gave them positive reactions and appraisal.

### Self-Image of Tattooed Women in Social Life

The findings are related to the research questions and the focus of the scope of the study, namely how women see themselves; tattoo on his body; development of self-image; and the negative views based on the social context. In order to simplify the data collection process, the four study focuses above were categorized into 3 conceptual findings. The first concept was "the social context of the meaning of a woman's self", how a tattooed woman defined herself socially as a woman in society. It can be summarized that the three informants still felt socially limiting values for women, such as ideal values; position; and women's bodies in society. The three social contexts apply in society unconsciously and have become a culture, so there will be negative views when women do not comply with it.

The second concept was "tattoos on the body of women in society". In this concept the informants told their life story of the tattoo images they had, such as the reason why they made a tattoo image; the meaning, motive, location, family reactions and judgments, peer reactions and judgments, interaction regarding the tattoo images; and other stories they experienced as a woman who had a tattoo image and lived in the middle of society.

Furthermore, the third concept was "the self-image of women with tattoos in society". In this concept the informants expressed their opinions and answers, regarding whether the first concept and the second concept had an effect in developing their self-image. The three informants provided the same answer, namely that they completely ignored the negative views of society, which came because the informants did not match the ideal values of women in society due to their tattoo images. So in developing the self-image, they answered that they were not affected by negative views of others, because according to them the intention and meaning of the tattoo images they had was not the same as the tattoo images owned by negatively oriented individuals. Furthermore, negative views came from the majority of people who didn't know them well, so they tolerated it and took it easy on it.

## CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the three informants did not make negative views as a factor that affected the development of their self-image as tattooed women. It is due to the majority of negative views, such as stares or streaks given to them, only came from the general public who were completely unfamiliar and had no relationship with the informants. Therefore, the three informants did not care about such views. Furthermore, there was an effect of tattoo image on the informants' social life, in case of actions they would take before starting interactions with the community, whether they chose to cover up or let the tattoo image be seen by others.

The three tattooed women admitted that in most of the opportunities, they chose to let the tattoo image on their body be seen by others. However, the informants also shared that they would try to cover up the tattoo images they had on several occasions as an effort to minimize problems or negative views towards them and their closest people, or due to their work. Based on the experiences of the informants, there were several ways to cover their tattoo images, such as wearing closed clothes or applying make-up to their tattoo images.

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