

## RETHINKING THE ART OF TATTOO: A PERSPECTIVE OF INDONESIAN WOMEN TATTOO COMMUNITY

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### ABSTRACT

*The research analyzed why women decided to get tattoos on their bodies and how Indonesian women interpreted tattoos. The tattoo was a kind of art and a symbol since centuries ago. In Indonesia, having a tattoo was no longer considered taboo as it used to be seen as something that deviated from the norm in Indonesia, especially if it was possessed by women. The tattoo was also identical with crime and thuggery, in which people who had tattoos would be respected or feared by people. However, in recent years, there has been a phenomenon in the raising of female tattoo communities where tattooed women gathered and supported each other. The research used the tattoo concept by Thompson and Feminist theory by Kristeva to analyze it. The research applied a qualitative method in which the dataset were taken from interview with three women of the Perempuan Tatto Indonesia (PTI) community. The result of the interview is various. It shows that tattoo in Indonesian women's perspective is not seen as only a trend, fashion, or art. However, it shows self-expression and freedom to fight women's rights and gender quality.*

**Keywords:** *tatto, women community, shifting perception, life philosophy*

### INTRODUCTION

For years, tattoo has been a popular practice almost in every part of the world. It is an emerging body project in contemporary society (de Jong & Bruce, 2020). Across cultures and generations, people have tattooed their bodies (Gebaska-Kuczerowska et al., 2020). Overall prevalence among adults in industrialized countries is around 10–20% (Dieckmann et al., 2016). Most tattooed people can be seen in western countries because the contemporary practice of tattooing emerged there (Santos & Villafranca, 2019). The popularity of tattooing rises that one out of five persons in the United Kingdom has undergone a tattoo session (Dann & Callaghan, 2017). A tattoo is described in Merriam Webster's Dictionary as an indelible mark or figure fixed upon the body by the insertion of pigment under the skin or by the production of scars. Tattoos are considered a work of art, just like paintings hung in the museum (Ocampo & Castronuevo, 2016).

Tattoos draw attention and make people ponder the meanings behind tattoos (Naudé, Jordaan, & Bergh, 2017). Tattooing in Indonesia has been practiced at least since prehistoric times 1500–500 BC, but tattoo culture in Indonesia is still taboo. It often challenges the social and religious traditions of the country's Muslim majority. According to Handoko and Green (2020), urban tattoos initially appeared in the Yogyakarta region in the 1950s. They were primarily worn by street criminals and former prison inmates. According to Marianto and Barry, as cited in Handoko and Green (2020), have stated that in Jakarta during the 1960s and 1970s, tattooed people were often former inmates. After the collapse of the New Order in 1998, young people in the punk, rock, and black metal music movements were the first to embrace individual freedom and more liberal speech through tattoos. At that time, tattoos and tattooing practices served various purposes and connections, including amusement, following emerging trends among young people, rebellion, and creative expression. However, tattoos

still hold a negative stigma in society nowadays. Even though tattoos are widespread and growing in number, yet still controversial (Dillingh, Kooreman, & Potters, 2020).

Creating a tattoo involves a painful sensation of multiple skin punctures performed with a needle (Roggenkamp, Nicholls, & Pierre, 2017). There is no difference between females and males in pain intensity during tattooing (Witkos & Hartman-Petrycka, 2020). Tattooing is among identified risk factors for blood-borne diseases (Jafari et al. 2020) that involves skin piercing and potential blood contact. Unsafe tattooing carries an increased risk of poor health outcomes (Tran et al., 2018). It means that medical complications and health risks can occur when getting a tattoo (Rahimi, Eberhard, & Kasten, 2018). Some complications that can occur are infections, allergic reactions, foreign body reactions, and autoimmune diseases (van der Bent, Wolkerstorfer, & Rustemeyer, 2016). Brady et al. (2015) have stated that some tattoo-related skin problems can be treated with anti-inflammatory steroid drugs, while others might require surgery. Soran et al. (2017) have stated that small amounts of ink particles always pass into the lymphatic system and accumulate in lymph nodes. In addition, Sepehri et al. (2017) have explained that the ink does not ever really leave the body, though possibly a portion is excreted via the liver. Deposited pigments and other components are present lifelong in the human body (Laux et al., 2017).

When people get tattooed and want to remove it due to the harmful effects, they will do tattoo removal. Laser lights have been used by dermatologists for tattoo removal through photothermal interactions (Kim et al. 2020). The laser approach targets certain chromophores (D'Arienzo et al., 2018). Taken from the United States Food and Drug Administration (2016), laser treatment does not remove the tattoo ink out of the body; instead, the relatively large pigments of the ink are broken down into much smaller particles, which are transported through the body and stored in the lymph nodes or other tissues. Infections may be due to incorrect procedures or not maintaining aseptic techniques from the start of tattooing until wound healing (Liszewski, Jagdeo & Laumann, 2016; Serup, 2017). Even though the process of tattooing is generally linked with pain, it is not recommended to take analgesics prior to the procedure. It has been found that such medicines may increase bleeding during tattooing (Rodriguez et al., 2016). To prevent infections, the beauty services market requires detailed analysis and recommendations to guarantee health safety (Popalyar et al., 2019).

It is proven that tattooing has been involved a painful sensation and also seen negative. In Indonesia, tattoos are seen as something 'contrast' with society norms (Rokib & Sodiq, 2017). Handoko and Along (as cited in Handoko & Green, 2020) have explained that tattoos still create negative feelings within a broader conservative Javanese society. Good people are those who follow social norms, which are not wearing tattoos or piercings. That is why tattooed people are often

seen negatively because tattoos may be correlated with destructive behaviors, such as violent behavior, weapon carrying, drug use, increased drinking habits, and earlier sexual activity.

Furthermore, tattooed participants also tend to find difficulties in getting jobs. It is proven in Timming's study. He has stated that many tattooed individuals believed that they could not find employment because their tattoos are visible, suspicions that hiring managers confirm. Most hiring managers in Timming's study explicitly have stated they would not hire a visibly tattooed candidate, both because it would mar the company's image and because of their personal dislike of tattoos (Timming, 2015). It is in line with the research that has stated that stigmatizing and discriminating against people with visible tattoos and body piercings may lead to the termination of employment of talented employees, which could negatively affect organizational productivity and growth (Adisa, Adekoya, & Sani, 2021). The risky behavior associated with tattoos is high amongst tattooed adolescents that are associated with high drug and alcohol use, risky sexual activities, as well as illegal or violent behavior (Swami et al., 2016). Having tattoos also could lead to different psychological issues like depression, inflated self-esteem, worthlessness, and anxiety (Pedro, 2016).

This social stigma and discrimination lead people to certain opinions about tattoos. People who do not have tattoos view tattooed people as more rebellious, less intelligent, less sexy, and less attractive because it is deviant. This applies to both men and women, but women are seen differently. If women wear tattoos, they are seen even more negatively. Tattooed women are associated with less attractive, promiscuous behaviors, and heavy drinkers (Vanston & Scott in Dukes & Stein, 2014). Tattoos have been a masculinity practice in men, making women question why they take part in the practice. It is also in line with Brown's (2020) statement that women with visible tattoos and body modifications continue to face social and cultural stigma and discrimination because of their physical appearance. It is because tattoos have historically been linked to criminal activity, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, and violence.

Despite the negative stigma in society, tattoos have brought different meanings and ideologies in the past decades. Due to globalization and technology development, there is more variety of tattoos and new tattoo techniques. Because of that, many people support and enjoy the process of tattooing. They are interested in tattoos because of their interpretations, and it has been correlated with art. Along with time, tattooing becomes a matter of fashion, and everyone starts to tattoo letters, sentences, figures, sceneries, and art objects. Furthermore, tattoos may have symbolic meaning or simply result from choices to become decorated (Tasha as cited in Rewathy & Linojah, 2019). The interest in having tattoos does not only come from men but also women.

Women are expected to follow beauty standards

that have been set in society. Prianti (2013) has stated that the beauty standards for Indonesian women show physical appearance as the ultimate answer for women to conquer the world. Women with big hips are considered as the ideal woman. Having lighter skin, thinner body shape, and looking younger are seen as women's power to succeed in life. Having a tattoo means that they do not conform to the standards. As tattooing becomes even more popular, women want to obtain themselves by setting tattoos as the standard of beauty, especially young women (Farley, Hoover, & Rademeyer, 2019).

There are some positive values for women with tattoos. Some wear tattoos to hide their scars and make their skin look prettier. As stated by Kertzman et al. (2019) that have stated that tattooed women have higher self-esteem than non-tattooed women. They tend to be adventurous and creative. Having a tattoo shows that someone wants to tell the story or message. It is in line with Hill (2020) that stated the visual nature of a tattoo invites telling a story.

Tattooing has undergone remarkable growth in Indonesia since the early 2010s. Small, clean tattoo studios can now be observed in the fashionable areas of small and large cities alike throughout the islands of Java, Bali, and Sumatera (Hegarty, 2017). As stated in the Cambridge dictionary, in general, 'community' refers to the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality. To be more specific, in the internet and telecommunications contexts, 'community' is defined as a group of people on social media who have similar interests or want to achieve something together. Like many other human interests, specifically in art and pop cultures, such as music, sport, and architecture, there are also some communities that consist of tattoo enthusiasts.

Tattoo communities are used to be known as 'tattoo conventions'. It has a role in providing a place or a platform for tattoo artists, collectors, and simply tattoo lovers to interact and engage with each other. As stated by Thompson (2015), tattoo conventions also serve as a venue where tattoo artists can do networking, get new insights, and see the development in this industry, and it is possible for them to get new clients. Other than that, by joining this tattoo convention, tattoo artists have an opportunity to gain exposure.

Due to the digitalization era, it can be said that there are no longer any communication and location barriers. Through the development of the internet and social media, many kinds of digital communities around the world can be found that are easier to create, choose, and join those communities related to someone's interests. This is also applied to tattoo communities that are no longer limited to studio-based interactions but expanded through the use of digital platforms, so there is also virtual interaction. Barron (2020) has argued that using social media as the digital tattoo studio can build a 'digital' relationship between the tattoo artists and their clients or their target market, enhancing trust between both parties.

Tattoos are usually associated with masculinity and criminality due to their 'label' as a popular practice with gangs and in male prisons (Thompson, 2015). Thompson (2015) has also argued that how the criminality associated with tattooing historically affects both men and women in different ways. While tattooed men are seen as masculine, tough, and potentially criminals, tattooed women are treated as prostitutes or as sexually adventurous women by society. For women, tattooing can be considered as an action in challenging the ideal of 'beauty'. However, it is also an action to show and to proclaim the authority of their own body (Thompson, 2015).

In Indonesia, it can be found many tattoo communities, especially in social media such as Instagram and Facebook that have many members or followers. There are some tattoo communities such as Indonesian Subculture, Komunitas Tattoo Indonesia, Komunitas Masberto, Indonesian Professional Tattoo Association (IPTA), and Indonesian Tattoo Foundation. They provide a platform for tattoo artists, tattoo enthusiasts or collectors, or just tattoo lovers to share, discuss, and even promote their tattoo-related works. Then, the researcher finds an interesting tattoo community called 'Perempuan Tattoo Indonesia'.

Perempuan Tattoo Indonesia (PTI) is a tattoo community that is pioneered by a mom who has four children named Agustin Yustina. With her friend, Flo Putri Arum as the admin, Agustin created Perempuan Tattoo Indonesia on Facebook in 2017. In an interview, she explains that the reason why she decided to create this tattoo community. It is because she sees that in the tattoo industry, women have minimal access and limited platform, especially in social media, to show their tattooed bodies and express the authority of their own bodies. The stigma created by society associating tattoos with criminality also becomes another reason why PTI is created. People's motivations for getting tattooed vary; they are either having fun and admiring the artwork or having philosophy and meaning behind it. Tattooed people wear it as an identity and their way of expressing themselves. While others write their diaries, some people choose to tattoo their bodies to express their feelings and witness their journey in life. Some people feel the need to get tattooed because they want to 'write' messages and reminders permanently to anchor them in their bodies, leading to a form of expressing self-love (Buss, & Hodges, 2017). They are aware that they own a special body that is why they want to decorate it with tattoos.

Not only being active in social media such as Facebook and Instagram, but the people in PTI also do a campaign to break society's negative stereotypes about tattooed people, especially women, by doing some direct social activities. Their first social activity was held in the same year when PTI was created. They held a charity event for children who have HIV/AIDS in Solo, where most of the committees are tattooed people. PTI is created to support and appreciate female tattoo artists and tattoo lovers. However, this online tattoo community is also open for male tattoo artists

and tattoo lovers to join. In the research, the researcher would like to elaborate on why women decided to get tattoos on their bodies and how Indonesian women interpret tattoos.

Santos and Villafranca (2019) have argued that tattoos are also a form of non-verbal communication, in which people can wear tattoos that reflect their personalities and life experiences without having to explain the meaning behind them. These indicate the public's perceptions of who they are, which reveals their self-concept. The practice of tattooing has been amazingly successful and popular due to globalization and the modern mindset. Because of that, some people choose to get tattoos to mark themselves permanently.

As tattooing becomes even more popular, women want to obtain themselves by setting tattoos as the standard of beauty, especially young women (Farley, Hoover, & Rademeyer 2019). Women are also interested in getting tattoos because they want to challenge the dominant body culture. According to Thompson (2015), tattoos symbolize regaining women's bodies as a form of confrontation for many women.

It is common for society to see tattoo communities that consist of males or men. However, as time goes by, there is a phenomenon in the raising of female tattoo communities where tattooed women gather and support each other. DeMello in Thompson (2015) has stated in her study of the tattoo community that women are much more apt to explain their tattoos in terms of healing empowerment or control. Thompson has agreed and explained that tattooing can be considered an action in challenging the ideal of 'beauty' for women. However, it is also an action to show and proclaim the authority of their own body, which means tattooed women can freely and bravely express themselves for who they really are.

In line with that, Kertzman et al. (2019) have explained that tattooed women have higher self-esteem than non-tattooed women. They tend to be adventurous and creative. Nourishing people are positive, supportive, and optimistic people who are also capable of making a person feel good about themselves (Devito, 2014). Nourishing people have similarities in what they think, feel, and act and these kinds of people can be found in a community.

Kruse (2012) has stated that people can grow personally, socially, and independently in a community. Being a part of the tattoo community can help people have more courage to express who they are and expose their creations related to their interests. The previous research done by Amos (2019) has explained that in the tattoo community, tattooed women feel more comfortable and open to express themselves without fear of judgment. Within a community, they also share a common link.

Supporting the previous statement from another perspective, women who achieved success in the tattoo industry in the 1970s, regardless of their popularity, were trendsetters in fighting patriarchy and popularizing femininity in the industry (Long, 2020).

Additionally, she argues that nowadays, women have faced less resistance to getting tattooed and pursuing tattoo art since the 1980s. Women are able to find work in new fields such as marketing, modeling, journalism, and social media management that are related to the tattoo industry.

Embodiment practices were highlighted by feminist theorists in the 1990s and 2000s, who emphasized how the female body was not just an object, but a 'process of becoming', a performance created through regulated practices (Budgeon & Butler as cited in Thompson, 2019). The feminist theory focuses to emphasizes issues of female embodiment as an arena for both oppression and liberation, such as reproduction, sexuality, beauty practices, and violence.

According to Kristeva, as cited in Nasreen (2013), feminism is one kind of ideology that excludes religion. Feminism should be understood through the individuality of women, as the empowerment of women depends on an individual's writings, contributions, and socialization. She rejects the idea of seeing women from pluralism avoids the phrases such as 'all women are exploited' or 'women are exploited in all aspects'. As cited in Nasreen (2013), Kristeva also argues that there is a counterbalance in society, and it depends on uniformity and accessibility of individuals in all areas, including information through language. She suggests that three matters are important for women's individual development: internalization, exploitative understanding, and acknowledgement. This theory not only focuses on gender issues but also on general social change, breaking down the barriers, thereby gaining the same point of view and removing the false stigma. Kristeva in Alaei and Barfi (2014) believes that people should accept the differences of the semiotic and the symbolic mode and put these modes in parallel. These modes relate to sex and gender. The distinction of sex and gender is impossible. Men and women should be aware that sex and gender are not independent. The conceptions of gender and sex are in this process are fold. Men and women are rational beings that are essentially the same, so that in their journey, they must be treated fairly and equally.

Women see tattoos from various perspectives. Most of them see tattoos as a manifestation of beautifying themselves and a means of self-expression. However, there are social sanctions such as social rejection due to a modified body and others that they will feel over time, especially when they dare to challenge the standards of beauty that exist or grow in social circles. In this research, the researcher analyzes how these women in the PTI community are viewed by society in terms of the theory of feminism.

## METHODS

In Indonesia, it can be found many tattoo communities. The high number of tattoo communities in Indonesia is also in line with the rise of female tattoo communities. The research analyzes why

women decide to get tattoos on their bodies and how Indonesian women interpret tattoos. The researcher has found many tattoo communities. However, due to the research's needs, the female tattoo community, which has 230.000 Facebook group members called Perempuan Tatto Indonesia (PTI), has been chosen. The qualitative method was used in doing this analysis. Data are collected by interviewing three informants that include the pioneer, the admin, and the member of the PTI community.

In the process of finding and selecting tattoo communities, the researcher finds that PTI is suitable for the research because it is a tattoo community pioneered by a woman named Agustin Yustina. With her friend, Flo Putri Arum as the admin of PTI, Agustin created PTI on Facebook in 2017. The relevant questions have been formulated for three women in PTI. There are a few steps that have been done in order to collect and analyze the data.

First, the researcher contacts PTI's pioneers and members. After that, the researcher interviews three informants from the community through a video conference platform. The interview is recorded and saved for transcription. The researcher asks several questions related to why those women join PTI, why they decide to get tattooed, how society views them, and the effects of getting tattooed. Second, the researcher makes the transcriptions of the recorded interview sessions' videos that have been conducted. Third, after reading the videos' transcriptions, the researcher chooses and collects the informants' relevant answers to the research topic, to be classified into several major categories. The categories include why the community's members wear tattoos and how they define tattoos.

Last, the researcher analyzes and interprets the whole interview transcriptions about the living condition of the community, members' emotions and behaviors, decisions about getting tattoos, and the meaning of their tattoos. In the process of analyzing data, the researcher uses an encoding-decoding concept. The encoding process occurs when the online interview happens and the researcher transcribes the interview video. Then the decoding process occurs when the researcher reads, understands, and interprets the interview results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In collecting data, the researcher has interviewed three women who are the stakeholders of the PTI community. They are the pioneer, the admin, and the member of this tattoo community. Then, the interview results are the data that are being analyzed. The first data are interview result from the interview session with Agustin Yustina through Zoom meeting. She is the pioneer PTI who is also a mom with four children. She currently lives in Yogyakarta, and she is working in several places that she cannot mention.

The interview is addressed to Agustin by asking

when she started to get tattoos on her body and why she decided to get tattoos. She explains that it has been about eight years since she first got her tattoos. It was when she already had four children, and her youngest child was in kindergarten. Then, Agustin reveals the reason why she decided to get tattoos. Like the majority of people who get tattoos, she used to get tattoos because of fashion matters. She tended to follow the trend and what other people did at that time.

However, she also states that it is her way of expressing her feelings about having authority or autonomy on her own body, and she has the right to do anything to her body. This action is in line with what Thompson (2015) has explained that tattooing is considered an action to show and to proclaim the authority of their own body. She says that she feels that it is her own body. She deserves to do anything for her body. In the end, she decides to get her body tattooed.

*"Aku merasa bahwa ya ini tubuhku, aku berhak melakukan apapun terhadap tubuhku. Akhirnya aku men-tato."*

Other than that, she also has a reason why she chose certain figures or designs to be tattooed on her body. She chooses tattoo designs that have meanings in line and are suited to her character and life philosophy. Additionally, she states that she chose Patrick, a character from Spongebob, as her favorite tattoo among the others. It is because Patrick's character is in line with her personality and life that is full of freedom. He lives like there is no tomorrow and lives his life the way he wants. Agustin can relate to this because she is the only daughter in her family and the only one who has tattooed her body. She says that she is the only person who gets tattooed and tries smoking in her family. There are no other members that do something uncommon like her.

*"Saya satu-satunya keturunan dari orang tua saya yang perempuan yang tato, yang rokok gitu-gitu. Sisanya ga ada gitu, jelas itu yang aneh pada saat itu ya"*

This is related to what Santos and Villafranca (2019) have argued that tattoos are also a form of non-verbal communication, in which people can wear tattoos that reflect their personalities and life experience.

The next question is about how Agustin interprets a tattoo and its meaning. As stated earlier, she used to get tattoos because of trends and fashion but now, she has concepts of her tattoos, mostly about gender equality. As Kristeva, cited in Nasreen (2013), has said in feminist is actually screaming revolution in society, fighting for women's freedom, revealing that the main basis for women's oppression is the current gender system. This proves that Agustin wears tattoos as symbols to fight for women's freedom and equality, which also proves that tattooing can be an action in supporting feminism.

*“Kalo tato di awal-awal, saya ga mempunyai arti sama sekali, tapi setelah ke sini-nya, saya sudah mulai tertarik dengan Patrick, tato saya kebanyakan Patrick, Tan Malaka, lebih ke simbol-simbol kayak gini, ini kesetaraan ya, perempuan dan laki-laki, ya kayak gitu.”*

Agustin says that her first tattoo does not have any meaning, but as time goes by, she is interested in Patrick, Tan Malaka that focused on symbols like this. This is equality between men and women. Agustin also says that every decision that people make has an impact on their lives, including the decision to get tattoos. Based on her opinion, tattoos bring impact to the society and people's perspective of tattooed people.

*“Dampak yang paling kelihatan adalah cara pandang, akhirnya kan, cara pandang masyarakat terhadap saya, cara pandang masyarakat terhadap bertato secara general, khususnya saya, mungkin.”*

Agustin also states the effect clearly seen is from the way citizens view people who get tattooed, especially like her. However, she personally never faces the negative impacts because of her decision to get tattoos. She also states that she has to respect others' rules and not force them to understand her choices of getting tattoos.

*“... saya tidak pernah mendapatkan dampak negatif dari saya bertato, kecuali ketika saya ingin bekerja di tempat yang formal. Sebenarnya itu juga bukan dampak negatif ya,... kan setiap perusahaan punya peraturan sendiri-sendiri. Ketika dia tidak menerima orang yang bertato, ya kita hargai, gitu, bukan lantas kita langsung “oh kenapa sih orang-orang ga boleh kerja... begini, begini”, tidak menuntut rulesnya orang lain diterapkan pada apa yang kita pahami. Karena apa yang kita pahami belum tentu orang juga akan memahami itu.”*

The question is continued by asking Agustin's view on women who have tattoos. She realizes that tattoos are still dominated by men so that when she sees women who have tattoos, she is very sure that the person already has considerations. However, she also states her pride when she sees women who have tattoos because she believes that it is proof of independence. As a founder of PTI, she sees that Indonesian women who have tattoos have a smaller scope than men. This is also the reason why Agustin founded PTI to provide a platform so that women who have tattoos are not afraid to express themselves. This action is in line with what Kruse (2012) has stated that people can grow personally, socially, and independently in a community. Being a part of the tattoo community can help people have more courage to express who they are and expose their creations related to their interests. In terms of self-esteem, Agustien agrees that tattooing

is a form of freedom in expressing the self when people have good self-esteem. This is in line with the argument by Kertzman et al. (2019) that states tattooed women have higher self-esteem than non-tattooed women.

*“Tato itu kan bentuk kemerdekaan diri. Dari situ kita sudah melihat kualitas diri kita. Ketika kita memutuskan bertato berarti kita sudah sadar. Kita tahu kualitas diri kita.”*

Besides that, she also explains that she is earnest about running this community. It can be seen from how she always monitors the group posts so that it is always conducive and every member feels comfortable.

*“Orang-orang berpikir saya ga punya kerjaan karena saya berada di grup terus. Karena saya bisa memberantas ketika ada bully terhadap perempuan, pelecehan secara verbal, saya keras banget di group itu, jadi bener-bener ya saya memantau group itu, bener-bener saya membuat nyaman member saya member perempuan saya bersosial media khususnya bagaimana dia mengekspresikan badanya dengan tato nya.”*

Agustin also shares that her decision to have tattoos is made when she already has a family. It is not an issue to those closest to her, such as family or friends.

*“Kan ketika saya memutuskan tato saya sudah berkeluarga sudah memiliki anak itu mungkin menjadi penilaian lain, ...gambarannya oh dia sudah...berkeluarga sudah tidak membebani orang tua, sudah mempunyai kehidupannya sendiri kayak gitu, jadi itu mungkin tidak begitu dipermasalahkan. Kalau dari orang-orang terdekat saya nggak, karena memang saya ini cuman tatoan aja, kehidupan saya itu normal aja seperti orang-orang lainnya, ...normal-normal aja sebenarnya.”*

From the interview with Agustin, the researcher can conclude that she first gets tattooed because she thinks of it as a trend and fashion, but she starts to have concepts along the way. Her tattoos bring her to establish the PTI community as a safe place for women to 'show off' their tattoos on social media. Aside from that, Agustin also fights for women's rights and gender equality through tattoos and her community. For her, tattoos are a form of self-expression and freedom. She also agrees that tattooed women will have higher self-esteem than non-tattooed ones, which is in line with the argument by Kertzman et al. (2019).

The second data is the interview result from the online interview session with Nurul Novikasari. She is a member of PTI, who is also Agustin's friend. Slightly different from Agustin's story, Novi gets her first tattoo because she is 'trapped'. In 2015, her

friend from Lampung, a tattoo artist, stayed at Novi's place for more than a month. At that time, her friend suddenly had a desire to get Novi a tattoo. After a long time to think about it, Novi then agreed to be tattooed.

*"Tatoku itu 2015, pertama. Itu terjebak. Jadi ada temen tattoo artist dari Lampung terus dia (tiba-tiba) mau nato. Aku belum punya tato sama sekali kan.... Tapi itu butuh waktu yang lama juga buat aku, apa namanya, mengiyakan ajakan dia. Soalnya aku gak mau kayak nato asal-asalan."*

She decides to get herself tattooed because of curiosity and her free spirit. Her first and favorite tattoo is a Javanese alphabet which has a meaning that she likes and is in line with her personality and life philosophy. It represents her personality which is refusing to be 'restrained' in what she thinks and does. Other than that, Novi also gets herself tattooed in Kalimantan. She loves the meaning behind one of her tattoos, which is the Engkabang flower from Kalimantan. This tattoo becomes her life principle and philosophy, which she wants to be helpful for her surrounding, both humans and animals.

*"Kalo ada tatoku itu, tato Kalimantan, bunga Engkabang. Bunga Engkabang itu tuh... bunga yang menghidupi semua makhluk hidup di hutan Kalimantan. Jadi tuh kayak aku tuh pengen... kayak yaudah, aku bisa berguna buat hewan, bisa buat manusia juga, gitu loh, di hidup aku. Dari Mentawai juga ada, dari Kalimantan same Sumatra sih."*

Novi's reason for choosing her tattoo design is in line with what Santos and Villafranca (2019) have argued that tattoos are also a form of non-verbal communication, in which people can wear tattoos that reflect their personalities and life experience. At first, Novi says that her family has difficulties accepting her decision to get tattoos since her family is very religious and she is the only daughter in the family. It makes Novi afraid of sharing her tattoos on social media. This is in line with what Foulke (2018) has argued that people do not reveal their tattoos because they fear being judged negatively. After three years, her family eventually accepts her, especially her father. Novi also argues that she is already grown up, and she has the right to do anything to her body. Novi's father lets her get tattoos because she is responsible for her own body. This is related to what Thompson (2015) has stated that tattooing is also an action to show and proclaim women's bodies' authority.

In fact, Novi still gets negative comments from her neighbor. As Rokib and Sodiq (2017) state, tattoos are seen as something in 'contrast' with social norms in Indonesia. It makes tattooed people catch more attention and often be 'gossip'. However, she admits that as a tattooed woman, she is comfortable being a member of PTI, despite the fact that verbal sexual

harassment does frequently happen at the beginning of PTI since it is on social media and anybody can join. However, she manages to handle that well to help Agustin create a comfortable exposure platform for tattooed women.

*"Dibilang nyaman ya aku nyaman. Tapi di PTI itu masih aja ada pelecehan-pelecehan yang buat cewe-cewe yang tato kan kebanyakan ada yang tato di dada... tugas ku di sosial mediana PTI itu adalah aku ngomel-ngomelin yang melakukan pelecehan.... Waktu awal-awal banyak banget pelecehan-pelecehan gitu, tapi sekarang-sekarang ini dikit lah ga terlalu banyak kayak yang kemarin."*

Novi's answer is in line with what Amos (2019) has explained that in the tattoo community, tattooed women feel more comfortable and open to express themselves without having a fear of judgment.

Novi also explains the reason why she is at PTI; she admits that initially, because her friend is the founder of this community, so she automatically becomes a member of this community. She also adds that being a tattooed person is not a barrier to doing something good through social activities. This is related to Kruse (2012) has stated that in a community, people can grow personally, socially, and independently.

From the interview with Novi, the researcher concludes that, different from Agustin, Novi gets her first tattoo because she is trapped. However, it does not make her stop getting tattoos. She chooses her tattoos carefully based on her personality and philosophy. It is in line with what Santos and Villafranca (2019) have argued that tattoos are also a form of non-verbal communication, in which people can wear tattoos that reflect their personalities and life experience. With Agustin, she is in charge of 'kicking out' people who do harassment and making PTI a comfortable and safe place for women to express themselves freely. Aside from that, she also helps conduct social events. Not only for doing good deeds but also as a way to prove to people that tattooed people are not as bad as they think. Unlike Agustin, Novi has difficulties getting support from her family at first. She also faces negative comments from her neighbors. It takes three years for her family to accept her tattooed body.

The third data are the interview result from the online interview session with Angelina Manar. She is the co-pioneer of PTI, who is also a freelancer in the art industry. She currently lives in Yogyakarta, and she is also a traditional tattoo artist. In 2015, Angel got her first tattoo. Then, her love for tattoos led her to go even deeper in the tattoo industry until, in 2017, she became a traditional tattoo artist.

*"Kalo aku tatoan 2015, tapi berkecimpung di dunia tato, maksudnya bener-bener terjunnya tuh 2016 terus mulai jadi tukang tato 2017."*

When it comes to her reason for getting tattoos, she explains that the moment feels right, and the tattoo

design philosophy is in line with hers. Because of that, she decides to get tattoos.

*“Momennya dapet, terus filosofi dari gambar yang aku mau juga ternyata match di aku, makanya terus akhirnya aku mulai tatoan gitu.”*

The third data are from Angel. Angel agrees that tattoos boost her self-esteem. This is related to what Kertzman et al. (2019) have stated that tattooed women have higher self-esteem than non-tattooed women.

*“Cuma dampak positifnya adalah... Aku jadi makin pede, jelas, karena aku memilih untuk ‘Oke, aku punya tato, aku harus bisa menanggung semua resiko.’ ”*

Having a tattooed body makes her feel like a unique piece of art that draws more attention. The more people pay attention and are curious about her tattoos, the more confident and content. This is connected to Lucas, as cited in Santos and Villafranca (2019), that positive attention from people brings contentment and empowers tattooed people to control their self-concept.

*“... di saat aku punya tato, orang melihat tuh kayak karya seni...Karena orang pasti kan kadang ada yang kayak, ‘Itu gambar apa ya, mbak?’...Nah, jadi itu sih yang bikin aku mungkin tambah pede. Sama...seneng aja sih.”*

For Angel, tattoos are parts of herself. It is connected to what Sanders in Mun, Janigo, and Johnson (2012) have suggested that tattoos become a part of a person because it is a form of self-expression. Angel shares her story about two memorable tattoos that she had in Bali when doing campaigns about Orangutans. The tattoos are gifts from her tattoo artist friend, which are GWK (Garuda Wisnu Kencana) and a baby Orangutan. She says that those two are very precious because of her strong emotional attachment to a memorable life event in Bali back in 2019. This is related to what Santos and Villafranca (2019) have stated that tattoos symbolize love and dedication to something people want to remember permanently until death, such as memorable events, significant person, or things. The Orangutan campaign is Angel's dedication, and she wants the memory of it to remain in her life.

Angel says that her first tattoo is Srikandi, a wayang character from Java. She decides to get this tattoo because she feels that women are free to express themselves and do whatever they want. This is in line with what Thompson (2015) has stated that tattooed women can be freely and bravely express themselves for who they really are. Here, Angel expresses her concern and thought about women.

Above the Srikandi tattoo, she has a lotus flower on her nape, where the central nervous system is located. Lotus flower has a similar meaning as Kwan Im Goddess, which are purity and compassion. She

places it on the center of the nerves as a life reminder that she wants to be someone who is compassionate and helps those in need.

*“Bunga lotus itu bunga...filosofi gampangnya kayak Dewi Kwan Im tuh, lho. Tapi aku kasih di belakang, jadi bener-bener di tunggak, karena buat aku kayak pusat saraf paling utama ya di situ, gitu.”*

For Angel, tattoos also play a role as a reminder of what she has been through in life. This proves what Buss & Hodges (2017) have argued some people feel the need to get tattooed because they want to ‘write’ messages and reminders permanently to anchor it in their bodies, which leads to expressing self-love.

Among her 12 tattoos, her favorite is the *engkabang* flower tattoo, which is the same tattoo that Novi has, as mentioned earlier. It becomes her favorite because of the philosophy behind it that she keeps in her life, and people will notice it when they look at her *engkabang* flower tattoo. The tattoo holds a meaning that whether someone is on top and successful or the other way around, he/she still can be kind and share happiness with the surroundings. This proves what Santos and Villafranca (2019) have stated that tattoos are also a form of non-verbal communication, in which people can wear tattoos that reflect their personalities and life experiences without having to explain the meaning behind them.

Angel personally feels the comfort of not being alone in what she has been doing, which is tattooing, as a part of the PTI community. Other than that, expanding networking is also one of the benefits that she gets because of joining the PTI community.

*“Aku merasa oh ternyata banyak temen-temenku yang sama kayak aku segala macem. Terus aku merasa lebih punya teman yang lebih banyak lagi.”*

It is also in line with what Thompson (2015) has stated that tattoo conventions or communities are a place where tattoo artists can do networking, get new insights, and see the development in this industry, and it is possible for them to get new clients. When asked about the view of women with tattoos, Angel shows admiration for the women who have tattoos in Indonesia because she knows that it is not easy. She also realizes that they have their own principles of life.

*“Pandangan aku melihat perempuan-perempuan yang bertato itu tuh bener-bener kayak buat aku, aku menghargai apa yang sudah mereka pilih, emang pilihan hidup itu. Apalagi perempuan kan masyarakat nomor 2 di Indonesia, jadi kayak oh mereka mereka berani memilih apa yang menjadi prinsip mereka pasti jelas, maksudnya prinsip untuk okay aku mau tatoan di tubuh yang kelihatan. Jadi aku menghargai terus kedua ragam.”*

Angel also reveals the reason she joins and still persists in terms of tattoos and PTI. She realizes that as a human being, as long as she does good things, she should support each other, as well as women who have tattoos in Indonesia. She also reveals that she would continue to do and continue her penchant for tattoos and dare to speak up and do positive activities. This is related to Kruse (2012) has stated that in a community, people can grow personally, socially, and independently. This is also in line with what Amos (2019) has stated that tattooed women feel more comfortable and open to express themselves without fear of judgment in the tattoo community. Within a community, they also share a common link with each other.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research has found that tattoos in three Indonesian women's perspectives show self-expression and freedom to fight women's rights and gender quality. That is what Agustin, the founder of PTI, viewed. She also thinks that tattooed women have higher self-esteem than non-tattooed. The three women in PTI prove that tattoos could be used as a symbol of freedom and equality.

The research has potential limitations. First, it is used the limited sample size. It only uses three women of the PTI community as the respondents in the interview, which is not significant enough to represent women's perspectives towards tattoos. Second, it does not use the age of data specifically. The researcher does not range the respondents based on age, such as 20 to 25, 26 to 30, and so on. As a result, the researcher cannot take the percentage and range well the women with the same point of view and different points of view. Through these research findings, more research needs to be conducted by using a significant and reasonable sample size with the specific age of data. As a result, future research can represent a significant result.

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