



## Covered in Ink: Tattoos, Women and the Politics of the Body (Alternative Criminology)

By Beverly Yuen Thompson

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A small dolphin on the ankle, a black line on the lower back, a flower on the hip, or a child's name on the shoulder blade—among the women who make up the twenty percent of all adults in the USA who have tattoos, these are by far the most popular choices. Tattoos like these are cute, small, and can be easily hidden, and they fit right in with society's preconceived notions about what is 'gender appropriate' for women. But what about women who are heavily tattooed? Or women who visibly wear imagery, like skulls, that can be perceived as masculine or ugly when inked on their skin?

Drawing on autoethnography, and extensive interviews with heavily tattooed women, *Covered in Ink* provides insight into the increasingly visible subculture of women with tattoos. Author Beverly Thompson visits tattoos parlors, talking to female tattoo artists and the women they ink, and she attends tattoo conventions and Miss Tattoo pageants where heavily tattooed women congregate to share their mutual love for the art form. Along the way, she brings to life women's love of ink, their very personal choices of tattoo art, and the meaning tattooing has come to carry in their lives, as well as their struggles with gender norms, employment discrimination, and family rejection. Thompson finds that, despite the stigma and social opposition heavily tattooed women face, many feel empowered by their tattoos and strongly believe they are creating a space for self-expression that also presents a positive body image. A riveting and unique study, *Covered in Ink* provides important insight into the often unseen world of women and tattooing.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Thompson brings up a number of insightful points regarding self-expression, femininity, and the way in which heavily tattooed women navigate a society that is gradually becoming more accepting."-*Utne Reader*

"Covered in Ink is an excellent addition to the growing body of serious literature on tattooing. Based on extensive ethnographic research and personal experience, the author focuses on issues of central interest including beauty, presentation of self, gender roles, deviance, public interaction, and discrimination. The book is written in an engaging style and offers a uniquely interesting feminist take on an increasingly popular mode of body alteration."-Clinton Sanders,author of *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*

"Covered in Ink provides a detailed and gendered look at the lives of heavily tattooed women and how their choices to cover their bodies in ink represents both group belonging, yet a life that is still on the periphery of society, especially so for women who are expected to be pretty and sexy, not covered in large 'unfeminine' tattoos."-*Metapsychology*

"In this book, Beverly Yuen Thompson serves up a sophisticated sociology of the skin. From street interactions and family perceptions to legal constraints and workplace dynamics, she shows how the world of tattooing interweaves time and again with issues of gender and the body. As vivid as its subject matter, this book is itself a batch of beautiful ink."-Jeff Ferrell,author of *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking, an*

#### About the Author

**Beverly Yuen Thompson** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Siena College in Loudonville, NY.

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