

# WOMEN OF COLOUR VS INK: RACISM, SEXISM AND WHITE FEMINISM IN MODERN BRITISH TATTOO CULTURE.

**by**

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**Thesis submitted**

**for the degree of MA by Research**

2018

# Abstract

There has been, and continues to be, a rise of feminist subject matter within mainstream media and popular literature. Within, there is an area of literature that explores feminism and women within tattoo culture; the most popular being Margot Mifflin's 'Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo'. However, this media is often American–centric, and ignores an intersectional approach or doesn't acknowledge matters of race and racism, and the experiences of women of colour. LGBTQ+ women of colour are especially ignored, as is the cultural implication of being a tattooed woman of colour, or a woman of colour tattooist, within the United Kingdom.

Using a practice–based, research–through–design approach, the aim of this thesis is to investigate and challenge the idea that women of colour don't partake in modern tattoo culture, to highlight the experiences of tattooed women of colour within the UK, and to respond to the current UK tattoo culture from the point of view of tattooed women of colour.

Additionally, semi–structured interviews and a literature review are used to contribute to the argument that while there is a rise in visible tattooed women of colour and women of colour tattooists within the United Kingdom, there is a long way to go to reach the same representation and treatment as experienced by white men and women within UK tattoo culture, and that Eurocentric beauty standards, racism and the experiences of being a woman of colour greatly impacts our relationship with tattoos, both positively and negatively.

# Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my first supervisor Kate McLean, who guided and supported me throughout my research. Thank you for proofreading my research and the irreplaceable design tips. You've given me a platform to grow and helped me gain much needed confidence, I couldn't have done this without you. To Dr Alan Meades, I'd like to thank you for your emotional support and guidance, and for the much–needed feedback throughout my research. Thank you to Dr Ruth Sanz Sabido for your interest in my subject, and for helping me get started. I'd also like to thank the staff at the Broadstairs Canterbury Christ Church University campus for creating a welcoming environment to study in, and for always being there to help.

Additionally, I'd like to thank the interview participants. Without you I wouldn't have been able to complete my research. Your commentary was invaluable and helped shape me as both a researcher and a tattooed woman of colour.

Secondly, to my Aunt Edwina, who was continuously there with loving words, trips for ice–cream when I needed a break and the best hugs, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I'd also like to thank my friends for their endless love and support, especially Tamanna, Ange, Eli and Sean, who always knew when I needed a break, and without you, this year would have been void of many smiles.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my mother Beverley, who endlessly supported me throughout my research, and offered unconditional love. Without you I couldn't have finished my research. Thank you for listening to me talk about tattoos for hours, and for continuously helping me process ideas and troubleshoot problems. I'd also like to apologise for waking you up in the middle of the night to help me wrap my most recent tattoo. You've always been my rock, but especially through the past year, thank you for being a part of my life, and a part of my research journey through the smiles and the tears.

Lastly, I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother, Enid. I miss you every day, and I'm so thankful to have had you in my life. Your passing broke my heart, but awoke my love for tattoos, and now, whenever I look at my left arm I am reminded of you. Missing you always.

# Table of Contents

# 1 – Key Terms and Abbreviations

Subject Terms

- ‘Qpocttt’ or ‘qpoc’: Abbreviated descriptors in social media hashtags – qpocttt = queer person of colour tattooist; qpoc = queer person of colour.
- Flash Sheet/Flash Work: Tattoo designs drawn or printed on paper and displayed in tattoo studios, either as display items or available designs.
- High Street Tattoo Studio: A tattoo studio, usually on the high street, that allows for walk–ins, appointments, custom designs and flash work.
- Non–binary – a person “identifying as either having a gender which is in–between or beyond the two categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’, as fluctuating between ‘man’ and ‘woman’, or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time” (Valentine, 2016).
- Private Tattoo Studio: A tattoo studio that usually only works by appointment, doesn’t allow walk–ins and the session is kept private between tattooist and client.
- Queer: In the context of this research it is used as an umbrella term for gender and/or sexuality outside of heterosexual and/or cisgender.
- WOC: Women/woman of colour.

Design Terms

- Binding: The way books are bound together (Morlok and Waszelewski, 2018).
- Data Visualisation: A visual representation of data or information (Friendly, 2006).
- Typography: The visual aesthetics and organization of text (Practicaltypography.com, 2016; Designersinsights.com, 2012).

# 2 – Covering Statement

The subject of this thesis explores being a tattooed woman of colour within current United Kingdom. Over the past 15 years the UK tattoo industry has continued to grow, with tattoo studios in almost every high street and tattoos seen everywhere. There has also been a rise in the number of women becoming tattooists and getting tattoos, but rarely are tattooed women of colour visible in mainstream or tattoo related media.

The research addresses three key issues:

1. Understanding why tattooed women of colour aren't visible within UK tattoo culture and challenging that idea.
2. Highlighting the experiences of tattooed women of colour using interviews.
3. Responding to the findings of the research.

To do this, my Masters by Research submission comprises of two parts. One, a written thesis detailing my methodology and approach, analysis of relevant literature and a critical overview of the practice–based submission.

The second is the practice–based submission, which consists of three books and one poster: 1. The Tattoos We* Get (book); 2. Ink & Skin (book); 3. Invisible Melanin (poster); and 4. Restless (book). The books and posters have been placed into a pack in the order they are meant to be read. Each book refers to a different sub–category within the overall subject and relates to a discovery during the research project. The last, and main, practice–based submission (Restless) is a more personal submission; it offers insight into the feelings and experiences of being a tattooed woman of colour from the point of view of myself and interview participants. Presented in the forms of personal writing, illustration, embroidery and painting it is a creative response to the subject.

This research is designed to help people better understand the experiences of tattooed women of colour within the United Kingdom, and to show that tattooed women of colour exist. It will also help women of colour see themselves in an industry that has previously ignored them.

# 3 – Introduction

> "I'm getting ready to go back. Mainly 'cause everyone thinks I'm dead, or they're hoping I'm dead. One of the two, you know. Let me tell you, as far as a black person in the industry, I think that people resent this. Tattooing has been a white industry forever." – Jacci Gresham. (Seamstress, 2012)

Tattooing in Britain has an uncertain history, with historians and tattooists unable to agree on how tattooing came to be. Many sources cite that in 1769, Captain James Cook reached New Zealand and encountered tattooed Māori people (Banks, 1768), whereupon returning to England, introduced tattooing to the nation (Gay and Whittington, 2002). But, there is also contradictory evidence of tattooing within Britain from at least the fifth century among Celts, and documented encounters from Europeans and the British among the Americas, Asia and Africa (Caplan, 2000).

Today, there is an ever–increasing number of high street and private tattoo studios within the United Kingdom, with a significant number of women acting as both clients and tattooists. Studies and research into the relationship between tattoos and feminism has also increased, with academics challenging the idea that tattoos are a form of self–harm and negative body modification (Favazza, 1996; Pitts–Taylor, 2003) instead introducing tattoos as positive body politics while showing the bright and subversive history of tattooed women. Unfortunately, both narratives exclude, omit, or speak over the voices and experiences of women of colour (WOC).

Using a research–through–design approach, I aim to challenge the idea that WOC within 21st century United Kingdom don't partake in tattoo culture. As well as highlighting the experiences of tattooed WOC within the UK, and to respond to the current UK tattoo culture climate using various art and design methods, aided by interviews and traditional literature analysis, compiled into physical outcomes designed for tattooists and (tattooed) WOC. Additionally, three core research questions were created to help reach the aim of my research: How can unrepresented voices be uplifted using design?; Why does the UK tattoo culture lack diversity?; and How can design be used effectively to bridge the gap between WOC and UK tattoo culture?

# 4 – Methodology and Approach

## 4.1 – Methodology

Research–through–design, a practice–based approach is the main methodology used throughout this research. Where practice–based research is defined as "an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice"(Candy, 2006, p. 1) with the practice often being the outcome, research through–design, coined by Sir Christopher Frayling, is described as; "taking a problem outside of design and using design to address it" and; "taking design as a particular way of thinking and as a particular approach to knowledge which helps you to understand certain things that exist outside design." (RTD Conference, 2015). Frayling emphasises that design should be at the beginning of a project as a leader and generator of research. This allows for creative practice methods to be used throughout, with and as research.

I also use the Intersectional Feminist Frameworks (or IFFs) (Morris and Bunjun, 2007) which highlights a series of principles to be used within feminist academic research, including how woman's lives must be viewed holistically, that woman do not think the same way, nor do they have the same experiences or lives, that we must understand the past, in this case history/colonization, and finally; "We can never have all the answers. Situations change, ideas change. We are in a constant learning process." (Morris and Bunjun, 2007, p. 2).

As a graphic designer and illustrator, a practice–based methodology is vital in creating an outcome that visually relates to tattoos, is accessible and interactive and allows for WOC to be seen, as well as heard. Research–through–design also permits for multiple creative methods to be used consistently and coherently, while also granting space for more traditional methods of research, such as semi–structured interviews and critical analysis as part of the design/creative process.

In the case of research–through–design, the design process (the stages of the creative/design process/approach (Wallas, 1926) and the research process (the formula of approaching research: What? Why? How? And So What? (Gray and Malins, 2004) work in tandem, while still being individual to the researcher. This process creates a structure for the designer and offers a repeatable method, while still giving space to development in the face of unpredictability. Research–through–design can also be used in conjunction with other visual research methods (Gray and Malins, 2004) combining subject/research area, creative methods and the thesis format to create a practice–based research methodology.

The following list details my design process and the methods used in each stage:

Secondary Research/Literature Review: Secondary research analyses information or data collected by others and existing research and impacts both the design and traditional research portions of my thesis, it can also be known as background or initial research. Secondary research is utilised in Chapter 4 in the form of literature review and analysis, and in the design outcomes, especially 'Ink & Skin' in which secondary research is used to explain the process of tattooing dark skin, how ink reacts to different skin tones and the history of tattooed WOC.

Data Research: Within my research, data research relates to data collection. In Chapter 5.3 I detail the use of data collection to highlight the visibility of WOC tattooists in the UK which is used to form a final design outcome. Using an algorithm I've used previously, which requires the analysis and data collection of existing 'lists' found online, lists of UK female tattooists were collected (the only requirement being that they featured only UK tattooists as my research focuses on the UK)(see Appendix 1). With the collected lists, and one 'Misc.' list featuring WOC tattooists from relevant articles, I collected the genders and race of artists using their social media platforms (which unfortunately risked mis–gendering or incorrectly labelling race). The WOC collected from the data were contacted for interviews, but unfortunately none responded, which lead to finding new participants and partially outdated the data collected due to the ever–changing nature of online content. In the end I interviewed two UK based tattooists found through Instagram, and two tattooed WOC I knew personally. The interviews are discussed briefly in Chapter 5 and can be seen in full in the design outcome 'Restless'.

Design Research: Within my process, design research relates to researching designed material. In Chapter 5.1 I explain how I researched tattooed related printed material and analysed what is common and what works/what doesn't. This directly impacted the outcome of the final project, as well as the overall aesthetics of the design used through research and in the outcome.

Experimentation: Experimentation relates to experimenting in art & design throughout and as forms of research as per my methodology. A list of experiments can be found in Chapter 5.1. Experimentation was particularly important to the outcome as I wanted to step away from the expected methods of photography and illustrations, instead utilising different creative methods like sewing and printing, to connect the practice and the subject through visuals and methods, not just content.

Design Development: The design development phase categorises and collects the content of the project and applies those findings to an outcome. This process usually goes through a cycle

of applying the content, testing the design, reviewing the design, editing the design and repeating until the design has reached its completion goal. In the case of my thesis, the development cycle was repeated for each individual outcome – three books, and one set of posters, but the process was also used on projects that were eventually scrapped as their design and content couldn't fill the completion goal or were found to be unneeded.

Completion and Delivery: The completion and delivery stage is the final stage, and means that the outcome can be delivered to its audience, in this case WOC (tattooed or not), and tattoo studios/tattooists. Initially, the final outcomes were meant to be exhibited, which would then be documented and compiled into printed material for evaluation, but due to unforeseen circumstances an exhibition was not possible, as such the intended delivery of the outcome changed, as discussed in Chapter 5.

## 4.2 – Approach of the Researcher

I received my first tattoo in 2016 – a small flower in remembrance of my late grandma. There was nothing that particularly stood out about the experience, the artist was kind and professional, it was over in 10 minutes, and I left with a small weight off my chest, my first piece of permanent ink and a growing understanding as to why people cover themselves in ink. However, I didn't really begin immersing myself within tattoo culture until my undergraduate dissertation which attempted to define the line between cultural appropriation and appreciation in tattoo culture, where I noticed the lack of people of colour, especially WOC and non–binary people of colour, within western tattoo culture, be it as tattooists, or within artist portfolios as clients, we're almost non–existent.

I am a tattooed WOC and intersectional feminist. I see ink as an expression of self, body positivity, growth and a form of art, but as much as I love tattoos, I'm also incredibly aware that there is rarely anyone who looks like me. Even with the rise of female tattooists within the UK, there are rarely visible women or non–binary people of colour. I approach this research as a queer tattooed WOC first, and a graphic designer and illustrator second.

# 5 – Understanding Tattooed WOC.

> "There was a time when tattoos belonged only to seafaring, hard–drinking macho sailors who, after a fit of drunkenness would wake up in some dingy tattooist's shop with the name of their latest love or conquest emblazoned on their arm." (Gilmore, 1996, p. 184)

Despite the growth in academic literature that approaches the subject of women and tattoos from a sociological point of view rather than a medical or psychological view, there is little literature that explores WOC and tattoos, and even less that relates to non–binary people and tattoos, outside of a passing comment or under umbrella terms. Literature that explores UK women and tattoos is almost non–existent, with most literature being American–centric or exploring non–western cultural tattoos from the viewpoint of Westerners. The following review explores those literatures and offers an introductory insight into UK tattooed WOC and the responsibility of UK tattoo studios.

## 5.1 – The Omission of WOC in Tattoo Specific Literature.

The study of body politics in connection with body modification and tattooing is a well–researched topic. The subject has been broached by criminologists, psychologists and sociologists in an attempt to understand the connection between body modifications and tattooing and the sense of reclamation, self and feminism, but is often connected to self–harm/mutilation (Favazza, 1996; Featherstone, 2000; Lemma, 2010; Howson, 2012). Almost always, when it comes to feminism and tattoos there is a distinction made between (white) male and female tattoos, from the differences between style, placement, reason and subject but race is rarely explored.

In a study of the cultural politics of body modification (Pitts–Taylor, 2003), Victoria Pitts explored through a series of interviews the ways of sexuality and gender and how it impacts and is impacted by body modification, piercings and tattoos, especially among women and queer people. Pitts draws the connection between Native and cultural body modification and tattooing and that of Western practices and how these methods have been replicated, reimagined and in some cases appropriated by (mostly) white western people. While women and people of colour aren't explicitly removed from the conversation, Pitts states, in the very beginning of her study that "there are people of color and non–Westerners who consider

themselves part of the body modification movement. I have not written a book that examines their experiences and bodies from their own points of view" (Pitts–Taylor, 2003, p. 20).

Dr. Beverly Yuen Thompson, in her study 'Covered in Ink' (Thompson, 2015) goes more in depth into the subject from the perspectives of herself, tattooists, tattoo collectors and family members of the aforementioned. As a WOC herself, Thompson's narrative draws upon her own experiences, and offers a more inclusive range of interview participants in terms of race than Pitts, with "forty–nine Whites, nine Latinas, three Asian Americans, one Black, five mixed race and no Native Americans" (Thompson, 2015, p.15). But Thompson admits how throughout her research she found few African Americans. Thompson follows up with "yet it is apparent that African Americans do get tattooed (…) I suspect there is a good deal of segregation in the tattoo world" (Thompson, 2015 p. 15) and mentions how she suspects many African Americans get tattooed by African American tattooists, possibly due to the history of racism within traditional tattoo studios. She also implies that the western 21st century tattoo culture isn't as accepting to WOC as expected, and that African American women especially get tattooed within their own communities.

Throughout the existing literature, there is almost always a statement made that the individual study explores that of western women, which seems to indirectly translate to white western women and fails to be inclusive. Amanda Hall offers a "westernized perspective on tattooed women" (Hall, 2014), asserting "that tattooing is an action that allows women to claim ownership of their bodies" (Hall, 2014, p. 2) and discusses the treatment and attitudes towards tattooed women. However, her white Western feminist focus fails to include the experiences of WOC, despite introducing how important skin is as a 'politic of flesh', which should also implicate that skin tone plays an important part of feminist and female tattooed body reclamation.

This is also reflected, though to a lesser extent, in the article 'Tattooed female bodies: Considerations from the literature' (Dann, Callaghan and Fellin, 2016) which aims to explore tattooed female bodies through an intersectional feminist lens and with a focus on British tattoo culture. However, early on in their article they summarize "here, an inter–sectional framework is utilised to address the intersections of class and gender" and "to understand women's experiences of tattoos we must explore how social class intersects with gender and age and sexuality," (Dann, Callaghan and Fellin, 2016, p. 43–44). Neither comments mention race when it comes to intersectionality or British tattoo culture, and bar a throwaway comment of "tattoos on women of colour, are not read in the same way as, for example, delicate and discreet etchings on a White (middle–class, able, straight) female body," (Dann,

Callaghan and Fellin, 2016) there is little mention of tattooed WOC or distinctions made between tattooed WOC and white bodies despite the differing experiences.

In Margot Mifflin's infamous 'Bodies of Subversion', Jacci Gresham, who is perhaps Americas most famous black female tattooist, mentions that she has never come across another female African American tattooist, despite having an ever–growing black female cliental (Mifflin, 2001). Gresham comments that her black female clients often get African symbols or white American icons with ethnic spins like her black Betty Boop designs. Gresham also tattooed one of the few African American tattoo collectors, the late Laura Lee, whose tattoos represent the civil rights movement, African American pride and the black holocaust (Mifflin, 2001), which reflects the idea that the tattoos that white women and WOC often differ in meaning and symbolism.

The perception of tattooed women has changed over the years as tattoos have become more mainstream, however the understood stigmatisations, perceptions and appearances of tattooed women is mostly limited to white tattooed women. A 2007 study by Swami and Furnham (Swami and Furnham, 2007) examined the perception of tattooed women by both men and women, specifically between blondes and brunettes and the number of tattoos. They found that the more tattoos the women had the more negatively they were perceived. Participants were a majority European Caucasian and the stimuli, in this case 2D illustrations, are seen to be white, able–bodied and slim, a visual demographic which is repeated within tattoo culture both online and in print.

In a study of alternative pin–up photography website 'Suicide Girls' (which showcases images uploaded by female models, many of which are tattooed), Botz–Bornstein notes that throughout observation of the website, "there was only one black woman and four or five Asian women. The overwhelming majority of models as well as members are white American" (Botz–Bornstein, 2013). Suicide Girls is just one of the many tattoo–centric pieces of media that favours tattooed white women over tattooed WOC. Tattoo magazines are majorly guilty of the same thing. This lack of representation within academic and non–academic spaces reinforces stigmas and maintains tattoo culture as an alienating place for WOC to be visible, especially for British WOC where we are removed both within tattoo culture/studios and within literature. This also strengthens the idea that even within alternative cultures and subcultures such as tattooing and body modification, WOC have little to no representation or acceptance as highlighted by African–American tattooist Lorri "Lady L" Thomas (Rosenthal, 2018).

The language used in Pitts' statement further reinforces the need and motivation of my research; commenting that people of colour and non–westerners "consider themselves" part of the body modification community rather that people of colour *are* part of the community. This implies that we are removed from the community or self–identified and therefore not (as) important to the conversation. Pitts' research and interview methods are clearly not intersectional or inclusive, something which is crucial to my own, instead Pitts' comments have contributed to my commitment to inclusivity and awareness of language as I conduct my interviews, and that the interviews must be conversation between two WOC rather than distant interviewee and participant.

## 5.2 – Tattooed WOC in the United Kingdom.

The previous section highlighted how current research into tattooed WOC has been primarily conducted in the USA and has included few first–hand experiences from WOC, namely black women. To understand the experience of being a tattooed WOC in the United Kingdom, the following section explores Britain's relationship with tattoos and tattooed WOC in Britain.

In the mid–1830s Rankin F.Harrison described his visit to Sierra Leone, where he detailed the King's Yard, a place that the British took rescued slaves of the Atlantic slave trade for rehabilitation as free men (F. Harrison, 1836). Every liberated African that crossed through the King's Yard had their name written within 'The Registers of Liberated Africans' along with physical identifiers such as tattoos, each a documentation of cultural body adornment (Olusoga, 2017) observed on the bodies of people of colour by the white and British.

Jordanna Balkin suggests that Britain's rule in Burma may have impacted modern British tattoo culture, and highlights the forced tattooing of Mah Gnee, a Burma woman who, in 1889, was forcibly tattooed by a white British policeman stationed in British Burma. Balkin poses that the tattooed Burma women were considered more modern and sophisticated to the British women, even as "tattooed women were taken as signs of weakness in British authority" (Bailkin, 2005). However, by the late 1800s, the tattoo craze had travelled to London and impacted wealthy Londoners and the lower class, with both traditional and facial tattoos (Caplan, 2000; Bailkin, 2005).

The United Kingdom has since seen a steady increase in tattoo culture. Between 2003 and 2013 there was a "173%" (The Economist, 2014) increase of high street tattoo studios within the UK, while a 2015 YouGov survey of 1669 GB adults revealed that at least 19% of British adults have at least one tattoo, with over half being female (YouGov, 2015).

When it comes to diversity in UK tattoo culture, diverse often refers to the tattoos themselves, as in they offer a range of styles as evidenced by individual artists portfolios, rather than the bodies the tattoos are on. In 2011, photographer Alex MacNaughton photographed 51 tattooed participants in London, compiling them into the visual tattoo bible 'London Tattoos'. In the introduction, Dr Matt Lodder claims that *London Tattoos* represents and highlights "the vast diversity that has always been present amongst London's tattooed" (MacNaughton, 2011, p. 9), and yet within the 51 participants only three are WOC.

Similarly, in the 'London Tattoo Guide', tattooist Alex Binnie comments that "London has an amazingly large, diverse and interesting" (Angell, 2017, p. 7) range of tattooed people to draw inspiration from and author Tom Angell makes sure to mention that London is a multicultural and progressive city (Angell, 2017). However, while the book boasts hundreds of pictures of tattooists and clients, there's no clear WOC, and while the tattoo studios featured may be welcoming and progressive places, it's clear that they are still (white) male dominated with male tattooists outnumbering female artists.

The one place where women usually outnumber men in UK tattoo culture is that of tattoo magazines, where women are more often at the forefront than men. Magazines like 'Skin Shot' (now 'Skin Deep'), 'Urban Ink', and 'Things & Ink' almost always feature women on the cover and throughout the inner pages, but as part of a noticeable pattern, they rarely feature WOC.

'Things & Ink' magazine offers an interview with Ermine Hunte, a black woman from Bedfordshire and one of only three interviews with a tattooed British black woman I've discovered during my research. Hunte comments that it's uncommon for black women to be tattooed and partake in body modification and goes on to mention that "it is mainly black people that comment negatively" (Woodward and Hunte, 2015, p. 29) about her tattoos, that elders judge her and her father doesn't understand. Huntes comment suggests that perhaps WOC, black women especially just don't get tattoos, but we know that to be untrue as evidenced by the history of tattooed black women (DeMello, 2007; Olusoga, 2017) and tattooed celebrities today.

'Urban Ink', unlike other magazines mentioned, does in fact feature WOC, and regularly. 'Urban Ink' is the only Urban tattoo magazine in the UK and features page upon page of dark–skinned tattooed women, but these images are among advertisements for cannabis seeds and articles on recommended bongs (Take Hits from the Bong, 2015). Such juxtaposition in printed representation of WOC, particularly black women, connecting tattoos to drugs and hip–hop, falls into stereotypes of "ghetto tattoos" rather than tattoos being seen as self–representation and art forms as witnessed in Angell's portrayals of white tattooed bodies.

Grace Neutral, a London based tattooist created a series of short documentaries with 'i–D Magazine' and 'Vice' in which she explores "individual expressions of beauty" (Vice and i–D, 2016) within different countries and cultures, often with a focus on WOC. In the penultimate episode, Neutral looks into the UK's tattoo boom and rise in body modification, but unlike the other episodes in the series, WOC are strangely absent.

Perhaps one of the only projects and pieces of media that visibly represents tattooed WOC within the UK is that of the 'Women with Tattoos' project, in which photographer Eleni Stefanou photographs and interviews tattooed women as a form of self–expression for herself and for the women featured. 'Women with Tattoos' is an inclusive project that features WOC and LGBT+ women with varying amounts of tattoos. Each structured interview offers insight into why women get tattooed and what those tattoos mean. The project fights the stigma that only white women get tattooed, and that WOC can't get beautiful and colourful tattoos. Stefanou herself claims that her goal is "to reveal the beauty and cultural depth that is seldom explored in tattoo magazines and mainstream media," (Stefanou, 2017).

## 5.3 – Tattooing Dark Skin and the Responsibility of the Tattoo Artist.

> "I don't want the dark canvases, they take away half your skill sets." – Steve Tefft (Spike, 2012)

Dark skin is something of an anomaly among tattooists. Many artists simply don't know how to tattoo or treat dark skin (Fireside Tattoo Network, 2015), while others will omit the dark skin they tattoo from their portfolio, leaving people of colour questioning if their skin *can* be tattooed which reinforces the idea that light skin is the ideal. This is especially so when tattooists lighten their client's skin as well. Australian tattooist Caitlin Thomas who in an interview with NPR comments that while she does tattoo dark skinned people, "it is not my responsibility to show diversity through my page," (Shah, 2016) but if it's not the artist's responsibility to be inclusive and show diversity, whose is it?

Anti–discrimination laws and the Equality Act 2010 protect people in the UK from discrimination based on age, gender, sex, disability, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, marital status and pregnancy status at work or education, and as a consumer or user of public services (GOV.UK, 2012). This means you're protected within tattoo studios, however most discrimination in tattoo studios is perceived as 'casual' including casual racism (Itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au, 2014) or sexism and is often only noticed by the offended party. With the lack of tattoo related HR and discrimination court claims regarding racism in

the workplace only having an average success rate of 16% (Renton, 2013), confrontation often isn't an option, especially for WOC.

There are only two laws that directly apply to tattoo studios in the UK: one; that it's illegal to tattoo anyone under the age of 18, and two; that the tattooist must register with the local authority (Wrexham.gov.uk, 2013). This means that when hiring new tattooists, tattoo studio employers usually apply their own specifications to applications, which can be defined in the following categories as identified by Andrew R. Timming (2011):

1. artistic ability;
2. personality;
3. education (distaste for educated artists, especially those with art degrees (Timming, 2011));
4. hygiene;
5. level of criminality (stealing, drug use and other non–violent crimes are often excused).

Timming (2011) identified that petty crime and drug use is generally accepted within UK and US studios, and that employers usually looked for well–rounded package with no mention of gender, sex or race. Tattoo studios are generally sole traders, and as such can apply their own, policies which generally includes 'No Hate' (no violence, sexism, racism, or homophobia) policies, however, this doesn't automatically mean those studios are filled with diversity and inclusion, or that it is a requirement as previously mentioned by Thomas.

Fortunately, there is a growing community of women and non–binary tattooists who are breaking the current tattoo studio mould and creating safe, inclusive studios, both in the studio and online.

The social media platform Instagram has an ever–growing community of visible WOC and queer people of colour tattooists. Pages like '*QPOC Tattooers'* only features tattoos by queer tattooists of colour or on the bodies of queer people of colour, creating, with a little effort, an inclusive and diverse community. Hashtag's '*#qpocttt*' and '*#DarkSkinTattoos*' are constantly updated with pictures of tattoos on and by people of colour to showcase talent and gain new clients. They also create an inclusive and diverse tattoo subculture on a platform that makes it easier to be accepted. Queer tattooist Charline Bataille mentions in an interview with Vice that "there is a real love connection between queer tattooers on the internet. I don't feel any competition or jealousy. I think it's powerful" (Baritaux, 2017).

Another queer tattooist, RIP Sally, mentions their awareness “as a white person who passes as male” that they have the responsibility to “allow marginalized communities more space and voice” (Baritaux, 2017) in the face of racism, misogyny and transphobia, showing that communities can and should lift each other up. RIP Sally also mentions that while the online community of queer tattooists is progressive and a safe space for those who may not feel comfortable in studios, these online spaces need to be created into physical spaces (Baritaux, 2017).

Brooklyn based tattooist Doreen Garner challenges the lack of African American representation in the tattoo industry, creating designs celebrating blackness and black history, often using images such as black panthers, cotton flowers and afro combs. Garner has also designed her studio to be a safe space for people of colour, a message reflected through her social media which is filled with tattoos on black and brown bodies (Ferrara, 2018).

Similarly, UK based tattooists Saira Hunjan, Heleena Mistry and Nikki Kotecha are challenging the stigma of tattoos among South Asians. Each artist channels their backgrounds and cultures into their designs by using South Asian symbols and decorations which has garnered a growing cliental of South Asians and non–south Asians (Adams, 2007) due to their inclusive ethical stance (Bhagwandas, 2012).

Not only do Hunjan, Mistry and Kotecha fight the stigma that South Asian’s don’t partake in tattoo culture within the UK, they also break the taboo within their South Asian routes (Sivathasan, 2018). Nikki Kotecha, who was available for interview, commented that she’s found community within the tattoo industry, and has been able to open her rather traditional family to the idea of tattoos as art and self–acceptance, something she hopes to pass onto her clients (see Appendix 4).

It’s clear that in contradiction to Thomas’ original comment, that tattooists who care about representation, diversity and inclusion will find ways to present those policies, either in their art, online, in studios or all three. The artists mentioned all feature wide ranges of skin tones within their portfolios, all free from skin–lightening filters and showing that tattooing dark skin isn’t a technical problem or impossible. Instead the artists embrace diversity and use their platforms to open the industry to minorities both as clients and new artists and have created an inclusive, friendly community.

# 6 – Design Response

Throughout research I have identified several gaps in the understanding and representation of tattooed WOC within the United Kingdom as well as an understanding of the experiences of tattooed WOC themselves. The following sections details further research in relation to my design process, my design process itself, creative methods, and the design outcome.

## 6.1 – Research and Experimentation

In response to and in partnership with the traditional literature research within Chapter 4, creative methods have been used as part of the research–through–design approach. The following four sections explains these methods, their findings and how they influenced the final designs:

(1) Anatomy of tattoos: The anatomy of tattoos relates to the complete tattoo process, but in this case focuses on the machine and the skin, as tattooists' difficulties with tattooing dark skin is one of the most visible forms of racial misunderstandings in tattoo culture. The first rendition of the electric tattoo machine was invented by Samuel O'Reilly in 1891, inspired by Thomas Edison's 1876 invention the 'mechanical pen' (C.W. Eldridge, 2004), which inspired the visual represent of the data collected. This process included purchasing, dismantling and illustrating the individual parts of a coil machine, repeating the method several times to get a better understanding of the tattoo process and the emotional connection to the machine (see Chapter 5.3). This repetition also led to understanding process of tattooing, skin and influenced the outcome 'Ink & Skin.

(2) Tattoo–related design: There has been an increase in the tattoo related media that utilises design, especially when it comes to printed material. As mentioned in Chapter 4, photographer Alex MacNaughton (MacNaughton, 2011) uses photography to visually document tattoos and tattooed bodies, a method also used by Arkady Bronnikov (Arkady Bronnikov, 2016) and Tom Angell (Angell, 2017). Each book employs tattoos, photography and narrative as identification and artistic visuals in research, presented in the form of printed design. 'The Tattoo Dictionary' (Aitken–Smith and Tyson, 2016) and 'Pen & Ink: Tattoos and the Stories Behind Them' (Fitzgerald and MacNaughton, 2014) utilise illustration in place of photography. More 'traditional' forms of printed design/art are seen within tattoo studios themselves, usually in the forms of flash books and flash sheets (Sanders and Vail, 2008). Most of the printed material relies heavily on visuals, be it photographs or illustration, but they

seem to suffer when it comes to typography, especially tattoo magazine 'TTTISM' (TTTism Magazine, 2017), where text falls off the edge of the page and in many cases is illegible. These findings directly contribute to the aesthetics and visuals of my practice, especially in terms of what worked (photography/illustration) and what didn't (typography), and how the feeling of tattoo related material can be translated into something inclusive.

(3) Culture: Tattoo culture has a plethora of subcultures while being a subculture itself. The western idea of tattooing has strong ties to the body modification and body art community, where many practices are directly influenced by non–Western practices (Thomas, 2014). To understand the influences and methods of traditional tattoo practices outside of the UK vs the influences and visibility of celebrity tattoo culture I initiated two small projects. The first project required scanning 'Decorated Skin: A World Survey of Body Art' (Groỳning, Anton and Dale, 2001) one of the most extensive body art/tattoo materials and illustrating each WOC and her tattoos mentioned within the book, along with the tattoos meaning. The second project used a similar method, but this time using online database 'stealherstyle.net' (Steal Her Style, 2010) which catalogues celebrities' fashion, piercings and tattoos. I studied the website for UK WOC with tattoos, and documented their tattoos, placement and meanings (where available). The two projects allowed for a better understanding of the anatomy and placement of tattoos, but also the cultural implications of tattoos for non–western WOC and UK WOC, as well as the notion of womanhood and feminism. These projects eventually evolved into outcome 'The Tattoos We* Get: A Zine'

(4) Experimentation research: Throughout research, especially when analysing printed and online design material the techniques used were almost always the same: photographs and illustrations. While I was sure that these techniques would be used in the final outcomes, I wanted to push the boundaries and experiment with different creative methods and how they could relate tattoos and WOC. The following is a partial list of practical art–based experiments undertaken, some of which were used in final designs, while others enhanced understanding to materials:

- Bubble painting with ink – an experiment in forming textures and patterns with ink and washing up liquid in water (see Appendix 5).
- Dry brush painting in which dry brushes and other objects are used with paint to create patterns and raised textures – to imitate keloids and tattoo ink (see Appendix 6).

- Dip dye paper in which paper is dipped into water–based ink – attempt to recreate tattoo 'bleeds' when ink is placed incorrectly under the skin (see Appendix 7).
- Textile weaving – mimicking 'skin stitching' where a tattooist weaves/stitches ink under the skin with needle and thread.
- Stick n Poke tattooing on fake tattoo skin – to first–hand understand the tattoo process (see Appendix 8).
- Diptychs project in which images relevant to tattoos and WOC were cut from magazines and arranged into small booklets in a connecting pattern (see Appendix 9).
- Sewing – Various projects (see Appendix 10 and 'Restless').
- Watercolour illustrations – to understand the process of flash sheet creation (see Appendix 11).
- Paper experiments to recreate ink under different skin tones varying in darkness and pigmentation (see Appendix 12).

## 6.2 – Filling the Gap and Identifying the Audience

It has become clear that tattooed WOC and WOC tattooists exist within the UK, but either aren't visible or are represented as stereotypes. I wanted to break those stereotypes, show our diversity and create something tangible. But there was no clear way of doing this and with the subject being so broad it would be impossible to attempt to include every tattooed person's experience or to tackle every problem. Instead, I created a manageable list of areas I wanted to tackle:

(1) As there are few visible WOC tattooists within the UK, and they are often far less visible than white female tattooists it's important to highlight the difference in visibility and the lack of diversity in tattoo related in media (see section 5.3).
(2) Challenge the stigma that WOC only get certain tattoos (leopard print, crosses, names etc) and explore the diversity of tattoos on WOC.
(3) Break the idea that dark skin can't be tattooed or is difficult to tattoo.
(4) Respond to the research using art and design methods and uplift tattooed WOC through interviews.

These four areas became the foundation for my practice–based outcomes and helped mould the overall concept. As mentioned previously (p. 11), the initial idea was to hold an exhibition and then document the materiel and exhibit, but this unfortunately fell through. Instead,

during time spent within tattoo studios being tattooed I realised they keep a wide range of printed material, including books and posters which would be the perfect method to present my research. This led to the concept of tattooed melanin presented through printed materiel in the form of posters and books, which would allow for texture experimentation to represent skin, to have a physical representation of the research, and for the outcome to be accessible both in studios and in general.

My initial intended audience focused primarily on women of colour, tattooed or not, and how I wanted to create a representational outcome for women of colour to refer to and see ourselves and our tattooed history in. During research the audience grew to include that of tattoo studios. Outside of being a place where the outcome could be displayed, tattoo studios (and non-WOC tattooists) as an additional audience solidified the outcome being educational (in an emotional/empathetic sense) that tattooed WOC exist and need to be better represented by the main tattoo industry demographic. Ultimately, however, the main audience remained that of WOC and tattooed WOC, with the intent of creating something designed by and for (tattooed) WOC.

## 6.3 – Presenting Data

According to a study by Statista, as of 2015 there were more tattooed women and tattooists in the UK than there were men (Statista, 2015), but there's no mention of race. To understand the disparity between WOC and white female tattooists I needed to collect a broad selection of data that scoped across the UK. As mentioned in Chapter 3 I used an algorithm I've used previously that requires the collection of data from pre–existing online lists which are then categorized per source.

There are hundreds of tools online to help with the creation of data visualisation, each with their own merits, but many of these work with numbers and the creation of more traditional charts and graphs (Anderson and Daniels, 2016; Thomas, 2017), where this project needed to visually represent the art of tattooing and be emotional and personal, a method identified by Stefanie Posavec and Giorgia Lupia in Dear Data:

> We prefer to approach data in a slower, more analogue way. We've always conceived *Dear Data* as a "personal documentary" rather than a quantified–self project which is a subtle– but important– distinction. Instead of using data just to become more efficient, we argue we can use data to become more humane and to connect with ourselves and others at a deeper level. (Lupi and Posavec, 2016).

The visual response to the data I've collected needed to make an emotional impact upon the viewer, not only through what the data represents, but visually, as a piece of art and design.

There were two problems that needed to be solved first, one of those being how do you portray statistical data when you're not using mathematical grids or graphs? And how do you connect the data and your subject into a design? As a designer, artist and someone deeply attached to the subject, as mentioned previously, I wanted the data to make an emotional impact, while still bringing in elements of tattooing and women. Several designs were tested, such as black power fists and tattoo machines painted to show the data, but none gave the right impact (see Appendix 13).

The final design, two posters that use elements of 'exploded drawings' details the parts of a coil tattoo machine. The design splits the data into its respective halves; one for the white female tattooists, and the other for the WOC tattooists.

Visually, it makes an impact through the instant difference between the two illustrations, one filled with tattoo machine parts to represent the 26 white tattooists, while the other only has 1 machine part (made up of 3 smaller parts), to represent the 3 WOC. However, the data visualisation has a deeper story; the illustration that represents the 3 WOC shows the top contact binding post, which also has the contact screw. The contact screw is an important component and has the potential to change the performance of the tattoo machine. This reflects tattoo culture; from styles, techniques and design to the very history of tattoos, people of colour, especially WOC have always had a deeply rooted place in history, and this is no different with tattoos. Without WOC, without the contact screw, tattooing would be very different to how we know it today.

## 6.4 – Typography and Aesthetics

Several scholars and designers have identified that people associate typefaces with different emotions, tastes or feelings (Koch, 2011, Velasco et al., 2015, Hyndman, 2016) and that the font choices heavily impact the audiences view on the product, be it a webpage, book or other.

When it comes to tattoos, there are three popular font types associated with them: script type to mimic handwriting, bold illegible text for one- or two-word tattoos and 'sailor' text, an homage to traditional sailor tattoos.

Unfortunately, these fonts are generally visually unappealing, difficult to read, and don't work with large amounts of text. They do however have a visual connection to tattoo culture, something that needed to be portrayed within the outcomes.

Using the idea of type impacting feelings and visual connections, alternative, visually pleasing but heavy, bold and sharp fonts were identified to represent traditional tattoo style fonts, as well as to show the anger and hurt that woman of colour can face in the UK industry:

- Overpass; designed by Delve Withrington with multiple styles and weights (thin, light, regular, bold etc) allowing for hierarchal scales and easy readability.
- Bluu Next; designed by Jean–Baptiste Morizot, Bluu Next has visual connections to some of the type used in traditional bold tattoos but is much more legible and can be used with small or large amounts of text.
- Pirata One; designed by Rodrigo Fuenzalida, Pirata One also has visual connections to the type used within traditional bold tattoos but is softer compared to Bluu Next.
- Ancient; designed by Jorge Paulino is a direct representation of type used within traditional tattoos but more legible.

Each typeface was then assigned a role in the final outcome, as suggested by graphic designer Douglas Bonneville (Bonneville, 2010), as a form or harmony.

Overpass is used as both body text and title text in all printed material as it's a softer and calmer typeface. Bluu Next, Pirata One and Ancient are used within 'Restless', 'Ink & Skin' and 'The Tattoos We* Get' respectively. My use of Overpass within each outcome creates a connection between the outcomes, while the other typefaces create individuality and relate to the material content and the tattoo aesthetic. For the hand–crafted elements such as the embroidery, paintings, prints and illustrations I used typefaces individual to each illustration. I make use of traditional tattoo type in several of the embroidery pieces, as their purpose was to make a visual impact, taking traditional tattoo aesthetics and combining them with messages relevant to the subject that counter racist/sexist tattoo culture.

I also broke the traditional typography rule of not using fonts larger than 12pt as body text. This was for both aesthetic purposes but also as it's suggested that a larger font can extract a stronger emotional connection that smaller font sizes (Bayer, Sommer and Schacht, 2012).

Much like with typography, the overall aesthetics needed to reflect tattoo culture, while being legible, designed with design principles and reflecting WOC. Many tattoo related designs use the same aesthetics of red and black colours with harsh imagery (Tattoofinder.com, 2008; Aitken–Smith and Tyson, 2016; Angell, 2017) and are very masculine in appearance even when

created for or by women. While there isn't anything wrong with this, everything begins to look the same, which limits design possibilities.

As each part of the project has its own hand–crafted content with its own aesthetics and visuals, the overall aesthetics are limited to the design of the printed material, not the hand–crafted content. The typography is combined with soft, more feminine colours, such as pastels, light pinks, primary colours and harsh blacks and reds to represent the multidimensionality and juxtaposition of tattooed WOC, while still connecting to traditional tattoo aesthetics. The overall design integrates functionality and legibility with the aesthetic, not only visually but also through paper textures and book bindings in what is known as "a 4D experience" (Nikolov, 2017) which allows for the aesthetics and usability to work in balance and support the content.

## 6.5 – Outcome

As identified in Section 5.2, there were four areas in the subject of UK WOC and tattooing that I wanted to tackle and represent. Instead of creating one outcome that addressed all areas, I kept each area separate and dedicated one printed outcome to each section. This allowed for each area to work on its own at an individual level and together as a group outcome. This meant the outcomes are easily digestible and permitted me to experiment with different creative and design techniques combined with traditional text and photographs, and present them in a clean, accessible way. The items I produced can be reprinted as needed and compiled into mailable packs for future distribution and dissemination of the findings. Additionally, each outcome uses different paper which represents various skin textures, and different binding techniques, which contributes to the 4D (aesthetic) experience.

The following section details each outcome:

'The Tattoos We* Get'

A small, A6 zine featuring over 50 illustrations inspired by the tattoos I've seen on WOC throughout my research and my own tattoos. As mentioned previously, during research I discovered that there is a stereotype of the tattoos that WOC get and that anything outside of these stereotypes is considered 'white', as well as the fact that almost all tattoo flash sheets either feature white bodies or are designed with white bodies in mind. To challenge this, I took inspiration from the tattoos on WOC I've seen and designed over 50 tattoos in black and grey that would work on darker skin. The tattoos range from more delicate tattoos to bold tattoos and feature a range of themes and imagery as to best showcase the diversity of WOC tattoos. The design of the zine takes inspiration from traditional tattoo books and flash sheets, using

only three colours; red, black/grey and white. The zine itself works as a flash sheet and would allow for WOC to directly take a design to a tattoo studio, with the knowledge that the design would work on their skin tone, and that the tattoo artist could easily replicate it.

'Ink & Skin'

An A5 booklet that tackles the idea that dark skin can't be tattooed or is too difficult to tattoo. The booklet features a visual history of tattooed WOC from diverse cultures and explains how tattooing has been within these cultures for decades, if not centuries and proposes the question that if tattooing has been amongst people of colour, WOC especially for so long, why is tattooing dark skin such a problem in the UK? The booklet uses traditional research methods, and focuses on fact, rather than response, going on to explain the process of tattooing and how tattooing dark skin works. Unlike the other printed material, 'Ink & Skin' includes an interactive element, in that the viewer uses printed acetate to see how different ink colours work with different skin tones, this is to create a relationship with the viewer, and works as a learning tool for tattooists or those interested in the process of tattooing. The colours used within 'Ink & Skin' are on the softer side, using pastel colours and soft primary colours in contradiction to the covers and opening/closing two pages which resemble that of traditional tattoo books. The booklet also uses subtle design elements to visually represent the matters discussed in the book, and the differences between tattooing dark and light skin. The cover image is difficult to see to represent how tattoos can be hard to see on darker skin. On pages 30-31 the black background of the pictures and the blackness of the page don't match, which represents the way that often the lines and the black shading of tattoos don't match. While on pages 34–37, the red in the centre represents a sun burn.

'Invisible Melanin'

As mentioned in chapter 5.3, 'Invisible Melanin' is two data visualisation posters that show the disparity between white female tattooists and WOC tattooists in the United Kingdom. The posters are printed on both sides of a single sheet of paper which is folded when combined with the other outcomes as part of a pack. For the visualisation I used watercolour paints to hand paint the tattoo machine elements, which were then digitally edited and connected with the data. The choice to use watercolours to illustrate the tattoo machine was a nod to tattoo ink, as they have a similar consistency. Additionally, a popular tattoo style is that of watercolour tattoos, which are difficult to replicate on dark skin.

'Restless'

The outcome, ‘Restless’, is a 100+ page hardcover book that features four semi–structured interviews, personal writing and hand–crafted content. The book is a response to my research, it takes in everything I have discovered and learnt throughout, including that of projects created throughout research. It also uplifts and gives a platform to the voices of tattooed WOC, including that of two tattooists.

‘Restless’ uses mostly pastel and black backgrounds to compliment the images placed throughout and to counter the traditional red, black and grey tattoo book. Out of the printed outcomes, ‘Restless’ is the furthest from traditional tattoo aesthetics and makes the least visual representations to how dark skin is tattooed through the design choices (e.g. the cover of ‘Ink & Skin or the watercolour of ‘Invisible Melanin’). The design of the book was to be softer and open, to be something beautiful and delicate in contradiction to the difficult subject and sometimes harsh imagery and the sensitive nature of the interviews.

Content: All content apart from certain photographs were created throughout my research. This includes illustrated and painted tattoo flash, tattoos on fake skin and fruit, digital illustration, embroidery and painting, photography and lino printing. The idea to use mixed media was to step away from only showing tattoos through photos or illustration, which has been repeated endlessly in printed media (see ‘London Tattoos’, ‘A Guide to London Tattoos’ and ‘The Tattoo Dictionary’). I wanted to experiment and explore how tattoos can be linked and shown through different methods and can closer relate to WOC. The hands–on approach of creating content also means that ‘Restless’ has more of a handcrafted and personal feeling to it, rather than being clinical and clean, there are mistakes visible on the paintings and printings that are expected to happen through traditional practices and that can happen when tattooing. Restless is also a narrative, it tells the story of my research and the emotional process of a tattooed WOC within a white industry. It begins in slightly darker tones and continues to protest the treatment of WOC within the UK tattoo industry, but ends on a more positive note, there is hope within the industry and for tattooed WOC and things are changing, as evidenced through the interviews.

Interviews: The interviews are included in their entirety with photos contributed by the participants as I was unable to interview them in person and take photographs. With the WOC tattooists, we discussed their experiences with racism and sexism within the industry, and how those experiences have shaped their work ethic. With the tattooed WOC we discussed their experiences as clients in the tattoo industry, as well as how their families, sexuality and gender have impacted their relationship with tattoos. The interviews were incredibly insightful and helped shaped ‘Restless’. The

stories told within the interviews were crucial to shaping 'Restless' and helped give a more diverse and specialised look into the UK tattoo industry, as each participant has very different experiences or relationship with tattoos, from the number of tattoos, to where they live and how they grew. There seems to be an unspoken message among the women that tattoos themselves are something good and beautiful and have helped improve the participants' self–love.

Design: The design uses a simple grid system that allows for all content to be easily legible and visible, as well as a large clear type to be more accessible for anyone who may have trouble reading smaller type and to show the hierarchy of information. In relation to the 4D experience (Nikolov, 2017), the book was printed on an uncoated paper in which rough texture causes content to print slightly duller and darker than coated paper, which coincidentally represents how tattoos look duller and darker under darker skin.

Ultimately, every step and decision made throughout research and design was made with the intent to visually represent UK tattooed WOC and show that we exist. From the foundation to the very end, tattooed WOC were the forefront of my research. While the target audience expanded to include tattoo studios and non-WOC tattooists, the main audience remained that of WOC, especially tattooed WOC. I wanted to create something for and by women of colour. Every question asked, every section of research, experimentation and sentence was made with the resolution to understand and share the stories of tattooed women of colour within the UK through an aesthetically pleasing, accessible outcome.

# 7 – Conclusion

Using a research–through–design, practice–based approach, this research aimed to challenge the stigmas against WOC within the United Kingdom tattoo industry, highlight and uplift the experiences of tattooed WOC and respond to the current UK tattoo culture.

During initial research it became evident that most mentions of tattooed WOC within historical literature were from the observation of white men, and that the descriptions of the tattoos on WOC were not from the people the tattoos were on but rather assumptions by the observer. Research into modern academic tattoo literature reinforced how often race is removed from the conversation, even when the researcher uses an intersectional approach.

The most beneficial finding during initial research was that the main response to the lack of visible tattooed dark skin, is that according to many tattooists both in the UK and USA, dark

skin is much harder to tattoo. This led to the discovery that it was a common occurrence among inexperienced tattooists or tattooists that primarily tattooed pale skin. While there is evidence that it's completely possible to tattoo dark skin, this offered the foundational understanding to why tattooed WOC may not be as visible in tattoo portfolios.

The main limitation was finding tattooed WOC and WOC tattooists to interview. I was only able to find six WOC tattooists in the UK, and just two responded and agreed to interviews. While the interviews were incredibly insightful and important to my research, it meant that outside of my own experience and the experiences of two friends who agreed to participate in interviews, I only had two first–hand accounts of the experiences of WOC working within the tattoo industry.

Most information that helped create the practice–based outcome came from the interviews, online articles from tattooed WOC and my own first–hand experiences as a tattooed WOC within the UK, though the lack of relevant information from initial research helped narrow down what needed to be tackled, and where tattoo specific literature was lacking, both in terms of content and design it greatly hindered finding credible sources as starting points.

Interview participants highlighted that while there is a rise in visible WOC tattooists, there is still an extremely long way to go to reach the same visibility as white men and women, and men of colour. Tattooed WOC within media are still greatly unrepresented and when we are represented it's usually in connection with stereotypes or in passing. This must be remedied by showing the diversity and multidimensionality of tattooed WOC, be it in tattoo magazines or otherwise. Research also helped conclude that the place of most visibility and acceptance when it comes to tattooed WOC and WOC tattooists is on social media, largely since WOC and queer WOC have personally created inclusive spaces outside of mainstream tattoo culture. Participants also highlighted how their experiences as WOC have impacted the tattoos they get or their feelings towards tattoos, and that race often impacts this, something that differs from tattooed white men and women.

While I believe the outcome successfully completes the research aims and works as a designed outcome both in connection with the written research and on its own, there is more research that can be done to better understand the experiences of tattooed WOC within the UK while also offering more visibility for WOC and giving WOC a platform to speak up about their experiences. Going forward, I would recommend interviewing more tattooed WOC to not only get better insight into experiences and stories of tattooed WOC in the UK but to also see if there any differences or connections between regional areas, either in experiences, visibility or otherwise. The tattoo industry also needs to do better in representing WOC, both as tattooists

and clients, by showcasing dark skin in portfolios and using tattoo related media to uplift WOC tattooists.

> "There is a difference between the tattoos that Black people and White people get," Jose said. "White people be getting thorns and skulls and demonic stuff. We usually get stuff that means something to us, *that displays our Blackness*, like Tupac's [tattoo of a] black panther." (Kirkland, 2013, p. 117)

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# 9 – Appendices

## Appendix 1: Original UK Female Tattooists Data Collected from Online Lists.

| **Inked Mag** | **Beautyatlasmag** | **Buzzfeed** | **Standard** | **Timeout** | **MyUniDays** | **Misc** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Keely Rutherford | Emily Malice | Joanne Baker | Harriet Hapgood | Lydia Hazelton | Vicky Morgan | Kanae (woc) |
| Kelly Violence | Bekkie Lohr | Chloe O'Malley | Rose Harley | Sarah Whitehouse | | Saira Hunjan(woc) |
| Lianne Moule | Harriet Hapgood | Rebecca Vincent | Rebecca Vincent | | | Gem Carter |
| Rachel Baldwin | Rebecca Vincent | Lydia Hazelton | | | | Josie Sexton |
| Valerie Vargas | Mel (mxl) | Emily Malice | | | | Bex Fisher |
| Rizza Boo(woc) | | Sam Whitehead | | | | Rachel Rose |
| | | Poppy Smallhands | | | | Stephanie Melbourne |
| | | Rae Robinson | | | | Charlotte Ann Harris |
| | | Dawnii Fantana | | | | Nikole Lowe |
| | | Georgina Hawks | | | | |
| 6 Women | 5 Women | 10 Women | 3 Women | 2 Women | 1 Woman | 9 Women |
| 5 White, 1 WOC | 5 White | 10 White | 3 White | 2 White | 1 White | 7 White, 2 WOC |

Table 1: Above shows the original 7 online lists of UK female tattooists analysed and collected in later 2017.The titles of the websites were data was collected from is in bold, with the names of the white female tattooists and WOC tattooists following underneath (which includes repeated names).

| |
|---|
| Keely Rutherford |
| Kelly Violence |
| Rachel Baldwin |
| Valerie Vargas |
| Rizza Boo (WOC) |
| Emily Malice |
| Bekki Lohr |
| Harriet Hapgood |
| Rebecca Vincent |
| Mel (mxl) |
| Joanne Baker |
| Chloe O'Malley |
| Lydia Hazelton |
| Sam Whitehead |
| Poppy Smallhands |
| Rae Robinson |
| Dawnii Fantana |
| Rose Harley |
| Sarah Whitehouse |
| Vicky Morgan |
| Kanae (WOC) |
| Saira Hunjan (WOC) |
| Gem Carter |
| Josie Sexton |
| Bex Fisher |
| Rachel Rose |
| Stephanie Melbourne |
| Charlotte Ann Harris |
| Nikole Lowe |
| **Total Female Tattooists – 29** |
| **WOC Tattooists – 3** |

Table 2: Above shows the final list of UK female tattooists from the original data (see Table 1) with duplicate names removed. The total number of female tattooists and WOC tattooists have been identified, and is used within 'Invisible Melanin'.

# Appendix 2: Risk Assessment

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **DATE of Assessment:** | 14/10/2017 | **ASSESSMENT No** | |
| **Assessed by (Name):** | Rebecca Glendining | **DEPARTMENT name or code:** | School of Media, Art and Design |
| **NATURE OF ACTIVITY:** | 1-2-1 Interviews | | **DATE OF ACTIVITY:** Numerous – Taking place through 2018 |
| **LOCATION:** | Locations to be decided – Will be in safe spaces for all parties. | **NEXT REVIEW DATE:** | June 2018 |
| **Approved by** | | **APPROVAL DATE:** | 27.11.17 |

Canterbury Christ Church University

**HEALTH AND SAFETY - RISK ASSESSMENT**

| Hazard | Persons at Risk & Nature of harm | Current Control Measures | Risk Rating Severity x Likelihood | Additional Control Measures Required *(Further action required)* | Revised Risk Rating | Action by who | Action by when | Date action complete |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Location Safety | All participants. | If interviews are to be undertaken in person the location will be mutually decided, and will take place in an easily accessible public location available to all participants.<br><br>If the interview is undertaken digitally, participants must choose their own safe location. | 1 | | | | | |
| Identification Proof | All participants. | If meeting for the first time, to ensure all participants safety, ID should be presented and the beginning of the interview. | 1 | | | | | |

| Risk rating | Likelihood of Harm | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Severity | 1 Very unlikely | 2 Unlikely | 3 - 50 / 50 likelihood | 4 - Likely | 5 - Very likely / certainty |
| 1 - Minor injury or illness | Low | Low | Low | Low | Medium |
| 2- Moderate injury or illness | Low | Low | Medium | Medium | High |
| 3- "3 day injury" or illness | Low | Medium | Medium | High | High |
| 4- Major injury or illness | Low | Medium | High | High | High |
| 5- Fatality | Medium | High | High | High | High |

| Risk rating | Action to follow |
|---|---|
| Low | No additional actions. Ensure controls in place are maintained. |
| Medium | Improve risk reduction measures within specified timescale. |
| High | Stop or restrict activity and make appropriate improvements immediately |

| Hazard | Persons at Risk & Nature of harm | Current Control Measures | Risk Rating Severity x Likelihood | Additional Control Measures Required *(Further action required)* | Revised Risk Rating | Action by who | Action by when | Date action complete |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Transport | All participants. | All participants must make their own way to the decided location, using safe and familiar means. | 1 | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

**All members of staff and where relevant students affected by this risk assessment are to sign and date to confirm they have read and understood it and will abide by it.**

| NAME | SIGNATURE | DATE |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Appendix 3: Completed Consent Form Example

Canterbury Christ Church University

# CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project: Exploring and understanding WOC and non–binary people of colour within tattoo culture: style, prejudice and white feminism.**

**Name of Researcher**: Rebecca Glendining

**Contact details:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Address: | School of Media, Art and Design<br>N Holmes Road,<br>Canterbury,<br>CT1 1QU |
| Tel: | |
| Email: | |

**Please initial box**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | ✓ |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. | ✓ |
| 3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential. | ✓ |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study. | ✓ |
| 5. I understand that the interview/conversation will be recorded and used within the above research outcome/study. | ✓ |

| Name of Participant | Date | Signature |
|---|---|---|
| | 26.6.18 | |

| Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher) | Date | Signature |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| Researcher | Date | Signature |
|---|---|---|
| Rebecca Glendining | 26/6/18 | |

Copies: 1 for participant

1 for researcher

**Exploring and understanding WOC and non–binary people of colour within tattoo culture: style, prejudice and white feminism.**

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by Rebecca Glendining.

### Background

There has been, and continues to be a rise of feminist discussions within mainstream media and recent literature, both academic and otherwise, including literature and media that involves the art of tattooing. However, most media that discusses and explores feminism within tattoos focuses on white women, and ignores the struggles, stories and culture of WOC, and non–binary/queer people of colour.

This research project's main goal is to explore, understand and uplift the stories of WOC and non–binary/queer people of colour, while also highlighting the prejudice faced within tattoo culture and revaluating white feminism within tattoo related literature.

### What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be required to participate in a subjective conversation with researcher Rebecca Glendining of their experiences within tattoo culture regarding race and the treatment of WOC/non–binary people of colour within the tattoo industry

### To participate in this research you must:

Participants must have at least one tattoo.

- Participants must be over the age of 18

### Procedures

You will be asked to take part in a recorded conversation with Rebecca Glendining. Interview/conversation time may vary, but should take no longer than 2 hours. The conversation is to be casual but insightful, and opinions are to be respected.

## Feedback

Feedback may be given at the request of the participant.

## Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by researcher Rebecca Glendining and supervisors Kate McLean and Ruth Sanz Sabido. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

## Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

## Any questions?

Please contact Rebecca Glendining at [REDACTED] for information/questions on participating or the research itself.

Or –

Contact first supervisor Kate McLean at kate.mclean@canterbury.ac.uk.

Or –

Contact second supervisor Ruth Sanz Sabido at ruth.sanz–sabido@canterbury.ac.uk.

# Example Interview Questions

**As the interviews are to be semi–structured, these questions are subject to change and are to be used as a loose guide on the subject and to help lead the conversation.**

**The following interview questions relate to WOC and non–binary people of colour.**

1. What is the story behind your tattoo? / What are the stories behind your tattoos?

2. How do you feel you're treated as a WOC or non–binary/queer person of colour within tattoo culture?

3. Do you feel comfortable as a WOC or non–binary/queer person of colour within tattoo culture? E.g. do you feel comfortable entering tattoo studios?

4. Have you experienced racism within tattoo culture?

5. Have you ever had problems getting tattoos due to your skin colour?

6. Do you have any stories you'd like to tell that stand out for you as a WOC or non–binary/queer person of colour within tattoo culture?

7. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Why?

8. Do you have an opinion on white feminism within tattoo culture?

9. Do you feel that white feminism affects you? Negatively or positively? How?

10. Has the history of tattoos influenced you? E.g. – what you get tattooed, styles, colours, artist, where, history of tattooed women, culture, etc.

## Appendix 4: Interview Example

**Interviewer: Could you talk a bit about how you got into tattooing?**

Participant: I've always wanted tattoos since being super young, and I went through all the basic job options like being a doctor and a dentist etc all the typical Asian ones (laughs). But my mum sat me down and basically said I won't be able to have tattoos in those professions. and I've always been really keen for art so then it clicked, and I thought "oh why don't I just become a tattooist!" So, I went to university after finishing A Levels mainly just to experience Uni life so I never had doubts about missing out, but I absolutely hated it, and I ended up dropping out after my 1st year and contacted someone I knew who worked in a tattoo shop. I was told to come in with my portfolio to have a chat with them, and I thought this was going to just be a chat about my work and them giving me tips on how to get into the industry, but next thing I knew I had an apprenticeship offered to me!

**Interviewer: That's amazing that you got an apprenticeship right away! How long have you been tattooing now?**

Participant: I started my apprenticeship 1 year ago in July, I did my first tattoo in December just gone and have really been tattooing frequently since February.

**Interviewer: What about your first tattoo; how was the experience? Was it that that really made you want to go for becoming a tattoo artist?**

Participant: Getting my first tattoo was so much fun, the pain wasn't even a factor (laughs). I got an anatomical heart on my forearm which has been strung down by a needle and thread to give the effect its stitched to my arm. It has quite a deep personal meaning to me and it's a drawing I did myself and took to an artist to tattoo it for me. I remember loving seeing something new on my body and got addicted to that feeling. It also made me feel a lot prettier and I think that's a big reason I get tattoos and why I want to tattoo others. I love the confidence it gives me in my own skin. My tattoos are something I want to show off all the time and they make me feel happier and more comfortable in my skin, so I want to be able to do that for someone else.

**Interviewer: That sounds beautiful, and I totally agree about tattoos helping with confidence and falling in love with our bodies. It's wonderful that that's one of the reasons you want to tattoo others. How was doing your first tattoo?**

Participant: My first was actually me tattooing my own leg! It was super fun and again I couldn't feel it much, so I was quite happy doodling away. It's a thing in some apprenticeships that you have to tattoo yourself before anyone else, so I didn't have a problem doing it. Obviously, I was nervous because I didn't want something ugly on my leg, but I made sure I practised drawing it loads before so when it came to it I wasn't so nervous. I enjoyed it so much so that solidified it for me that I wanted to do this forever. Sounds so cheesy!

**Interviewer: Not cheesy at all, it's great that you enjoy tattooing so much, I'm sure it comes across in your work.**

Participant: Yeah definitely, which is why I'm also very passionate about people doing what they want to their bodies, because if it makes them feel good inside then who is anyone to tell them otherwise.

**Interviewer: I get you! there's a lot of body politics when it comes to tattoos, especially on people of colour… do you think being a WOC, South Asian to be specific effected your tattoo experiences?**

Participant: To be honest I haven't received too much criticism outside of my family. Other people of colour haven't come up to me and made comments thankfully. But I was extremely nervous telling my grandparents about my new career choice, it took me and my mum to break it to them slowly and educate them about the industry and show them it's not just for gangsters and prisoners and bikers anymore. And now they love it!

Participant: But showing my tattoos to the rest of my family was also a nerve–wracking experience, not so much for me, I'm quite confident about my tattoos and I have quite an abrupt attitude about it. I love my tattoos and they're not hurting anyone, so I don't care if others have a bad opinion on them... but the thing I was nervous about was what my family would think of my mum and grandparents. I didn't want anyone thinking any less of them or thinking they had failed in raising me because that's not the case at all.

Participant: I would say its changed my experiences in the way of I can't be free about them in front of my family and I can't really talk to any of them about it because they're all stuck in their ways, but apart from that I've not had any bad experiences!

**Interviewer: It's good that your family has been so supportive! How has it been in the studio?**

Participant: The people I work with love the fact I'm Asian and am quite happy expressing myself with tattoos, they don't look at me any different from the way they see each other, and I work with 6 middle aged white British males (laughs). I can see my career possibly being a bit

of an uphill battle though, like I'm fully aware women and people of colour in the industry sometimes will lose customers over their gender or skin colour so maybe I've just not been around long enough to experience that myself yet.

**Interviewer: I'm glad you've been having good experiences in the industry! That's really refreshing to hear.**

Participant: Yeah, I mean I think I've been quite lucky with it so far! Who knows what will happen in the future though.

**Interviewer: Has your close family been more accepting of tattoos/tattooing in general? your mum sounds really supportive!**

Participant: Yeah, my mum is literally my biggest fan! I've taught her a lot about the industry and she now really respects the hard work tattooists put in and how it pays off and she sees tattoos as a form of expression and art now which I think is a great achievement. My grandparents are so supportive too, they just want me to be happy mainly and that's what means the most to them.

**Interviewer: That's so amazing! it sounds like you've got a really good support network within your family!**

Participant: I do. I'm really lucky!

**Interviewer: You mentioned that you work with middle aged white British males and that women and people of colour sometimes loose customers. Do you think the UK tattoo industry is becoming more accepting to WOC tattoo artists?**

Participant: I've noticed a bit of a rise in WOC tattoo artists but there still seems to be few that are visible or who actually make it all the way through I think! I reckon with younger generations getting more into the industry people are now becoming more accepted yeah, but I still don't think there are enough people of colour or women tattooists or even WOC tattooists around, so it's difficult to say if they're more accepted until there are enough about, but I know I am greatly accepted where I work.

**Interviewer: Is it common for people to not making it through their apprenticeships? do you think it's more difficult for WOC or do you reckon is it more about self–drive?**

Participant: It's extremely common for people to not make it through apprenticeships! Tattooing apprenticeships are designed to wean out the people who aren't cut out for it and people who think tattooing is all about 'rock and roll'. It shows who's going to stick through the hard work and the tough days and being treated badly and it shows who really wants it.

Participant: I do think it's more difficult for WOC to be taken seriously by people, but I wouldn't say my apprenticeship has been harder. I think it depends on your personal mindset too though because if the guys in the shop are being mean to me I'll throw it back at them and then they ease off. Obviously they weren't being meaner to me because I'm Asian, but the way I act and accept my own differences is used to my advantage rather than against me.

**Interviewer: I get you. It sounds like you've got to have a pretty thick skin and have confidence in yourself and your work to make it both through the apprenticeship and in the shop full time.**

Participant: Yeah that's exactly it. You've got to have a thick skin and just know who you are and that you're worthy, otherwise people will throw that back against you.

**Interviewer: We briefly mentioned body policing and in one of your Instagram posts you made a really good and strong message that everybody should be allowed to decorate their bodies how they want (or not if they want), could you go a bit more into this?**

Participant: Basically I just think that people should be free to do what they want with their bodies without being looked at differently. As long as the modifications aren't offensive and hurting anyone then what's the big deal in my opinion. I think people who either don't have tattoos themselves or who look down on tattoos in general are living in a very dated mindset, and they also don't understand where tattooing came from, like its origins and they don't know any of the struggle that tattooists back in the day used to go through just to attempt to make a living out of something they loved so much. If someone does have all the knowledge of it and knows the ins and outs and still has that opinion then fine, but I really think those who form opinions and make judgements about people based just on what they can see in front of them with no background knowledge of why that person is tattooed or what it means to them or even just the industry in general… I think those people shouldn't have as much of a say as they do right now.

**Interviewer: Exactly! I've noticed as well that a lot of people against tattooing don't have tattoos themselves and/or don't understand them and aren't really willing to understand them.**

Participant: Yeah, and so many people (I've witnessed it first hand) will change their ideas of what they wanted for a tattoo just because of what others think, like their parents or their mates down the pub, and it's like why are you doing that? if you wanna go get a tattoo of something then go and do it if it's going to make you feel good.

Participant: I just don't think other people's opinions should carry such a heavy weight. Yes, take others opinions into consideration, because it could pay off and it may make someone think twice about something, but I think at the end of the day people should do what makes them happy.

Participant: It's our skin, it's our body that we have to live in, so we get our own ultimate personal say.

Participant: From the WOC side of things its really going back to the family thing. Like having tattoos hasn't made me any less respectful to my elders or my family members, but it has made me feel more comfortable in my skin so that should be the only thing that matters.

**Interviewer: Yeah, I think family plays a really big part for WOC when it comes to tattoo, sometimes expanding to our culture and sense of self, if that makes sense?**

Participant: And for those family members who worry about people not loving me and not being able to find a husband because I have tattoos, that's also very wrong because in our generation now everyone loves tattoos! And anyway, someone should love me for me not for what I've chosen to do with my appearance.

**Interviewer: Yes! Tattoos are really personal, maybe not always in what they actually are but what they mean to us! it's kind of... reclaiming ourselves and helping us accept and love ourselves even when other people don't.**

Participant: Yes!!!! I love that, and agree with it completely

**Interviewer: I've noticed you do a lot of beautiful Asian tattoos and designs, could you talk about that? is it something you really enjoy doing, or is it more personal?**

Participant: Yeah doing ornamental styles of tattoos (basically just line work in really ornate patterns and mandalas and stuff) is my favourite!! I actually think it stems from when I was younger I always had henna on my hands and feet, any chance I could my mum would do henna on me, she also was a henna artist for Asian brides, so I really love the look of tattoos looking kind of like jewellery and gloves on hands etc, so I think actually a lot of my work is influenced by that.

**Interviewer: That's really beautiful, it's great that you bring happy memories into your work!**

END

## Appendix 5: Experiment with Ink – Bubble Painting

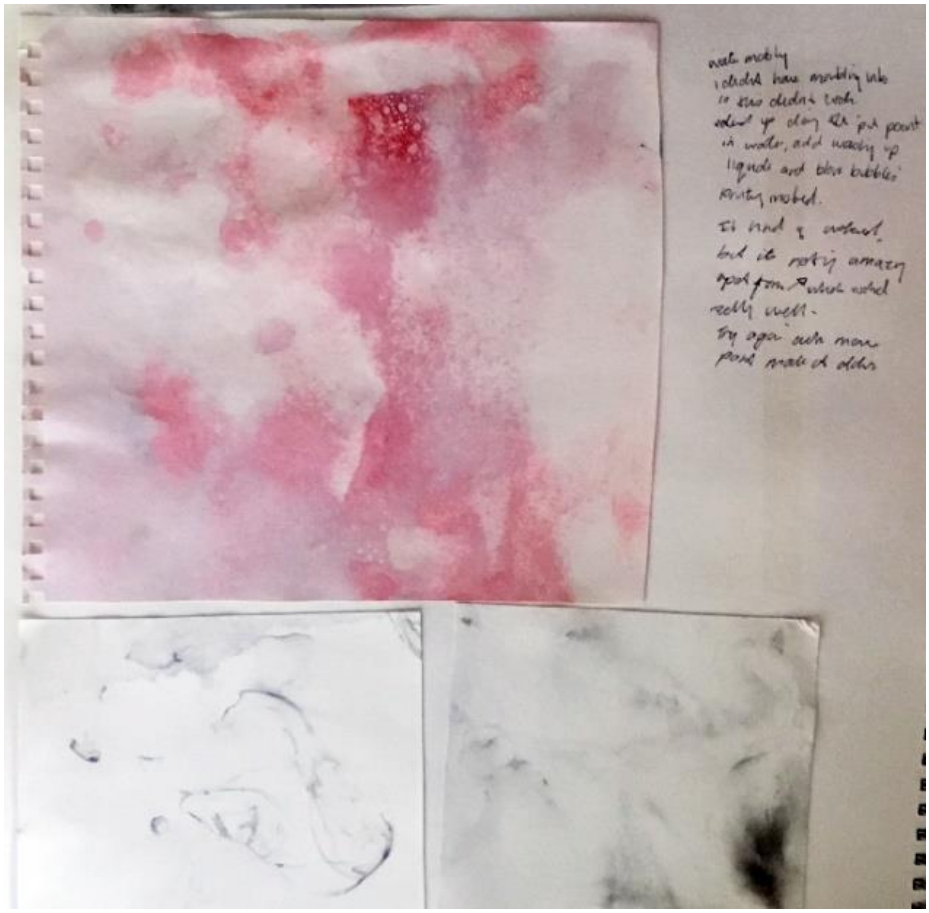


Image: Photo of one of the first ink bubble experiments.

Appendix 6: Dry Brush Experiments


Image: Photos of two dry brush experiments.

## Appendix 7: Paper Dip Dye Experiment

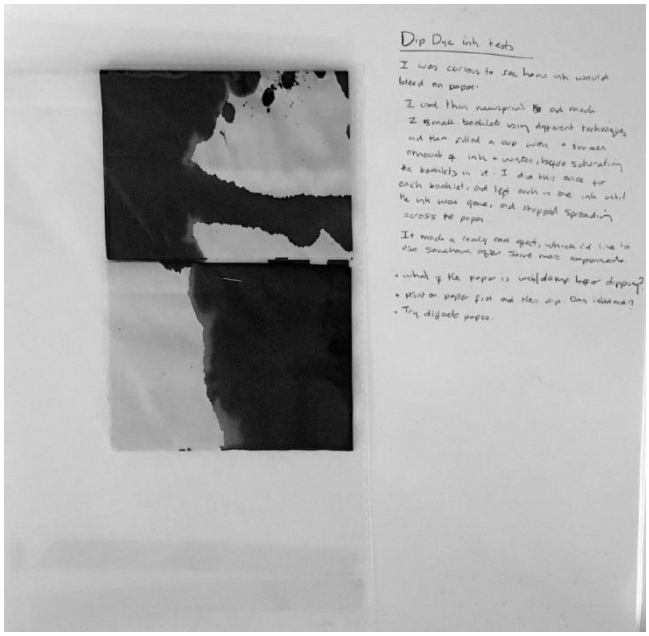



Image: Photo of paper dip dye experiment with commentary.

## Appendix 8: Stick ‘n’ Poke Experiment

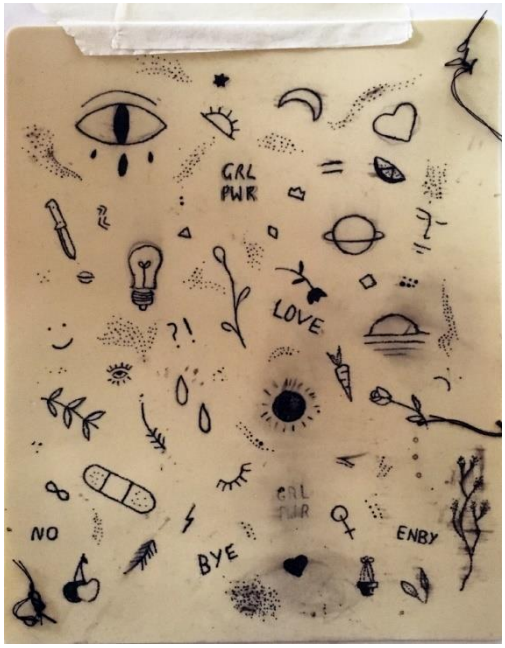



Image: One of the first stick ‘n’ poke experiments completed during research.

## Appendix 9: Diptych


Image: Series of 3 diptychs from magazines and newspapers.

## Appendix 10: Sewing Experiments

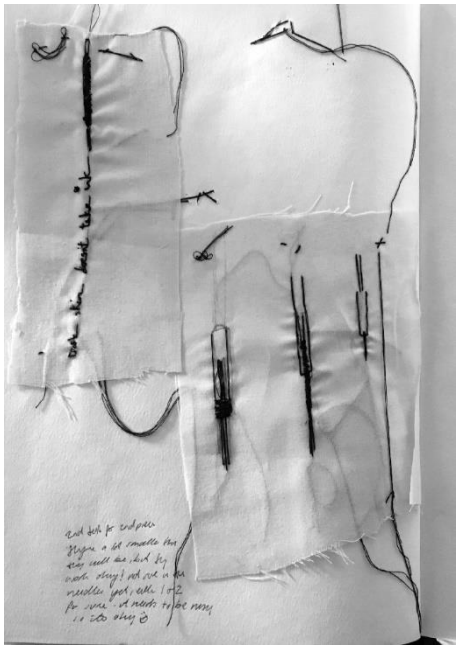


Image: One of the first sewing experiments. Playing with different ways to sew for final images used in ‘Restless’.

Appendix 11: Watercolour Experiments

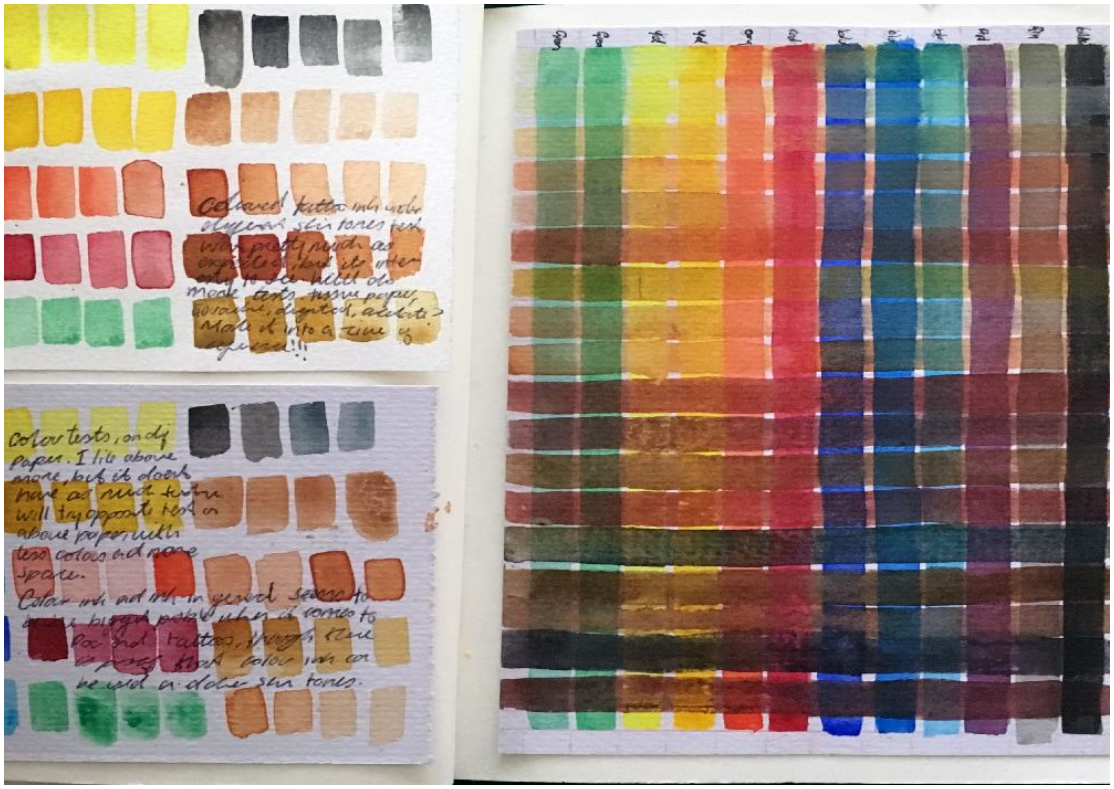



Image: One of the watercolour experiments for showing how ink works under different skin tones.


Image: One of the watercolour tests for the watercolour illustration flash sheet in ‘Restless’.

## Appendix 12: Paper Experiments


Image: Two photos of experiments in trying to show how colour and lines work under different skin tones. The first is using acetate and ink, and the second watercolour.

## Appendix 13: Presenting Data Experiments

Image: First experiment with presenting data, the blue represents white female UK based tattoo artists, the red represents WOC UK based tattoo artists. Each square is relative to one tattooist.

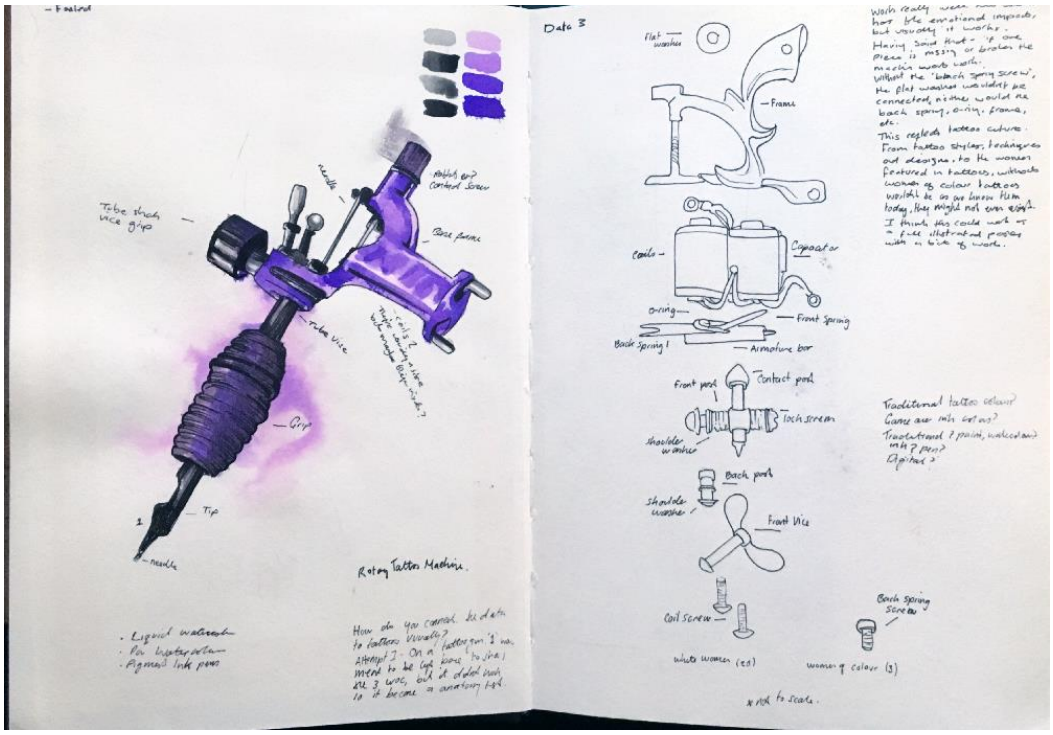



Image: Second experiment with presenting data and starting to split the tattoo machine into parts to each represent a tattooist.

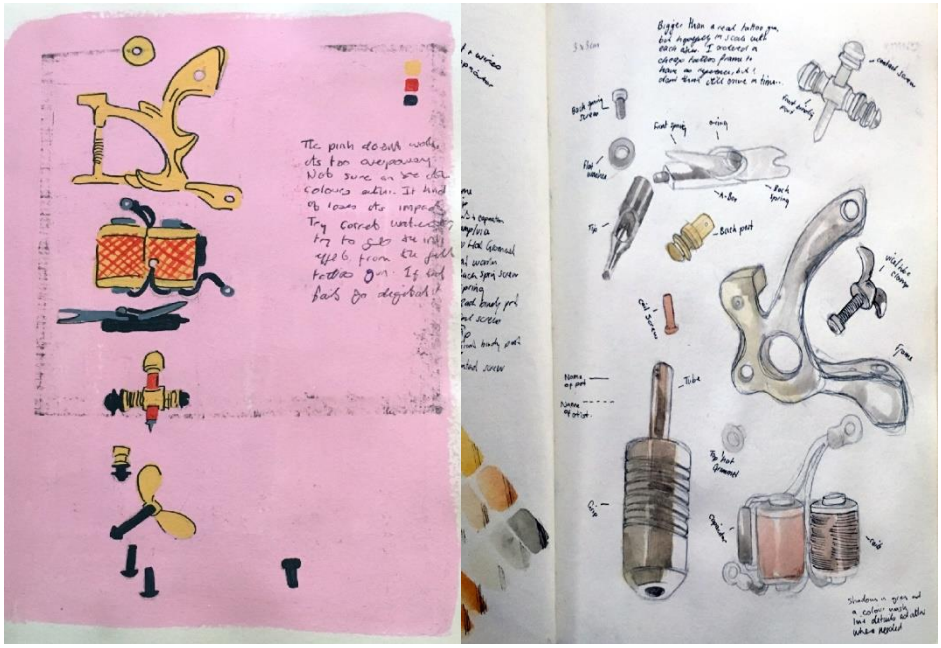



Image: Rough splitting of a tattoo machine between white female UK tattoo artists and WOC UK tattoo artists.

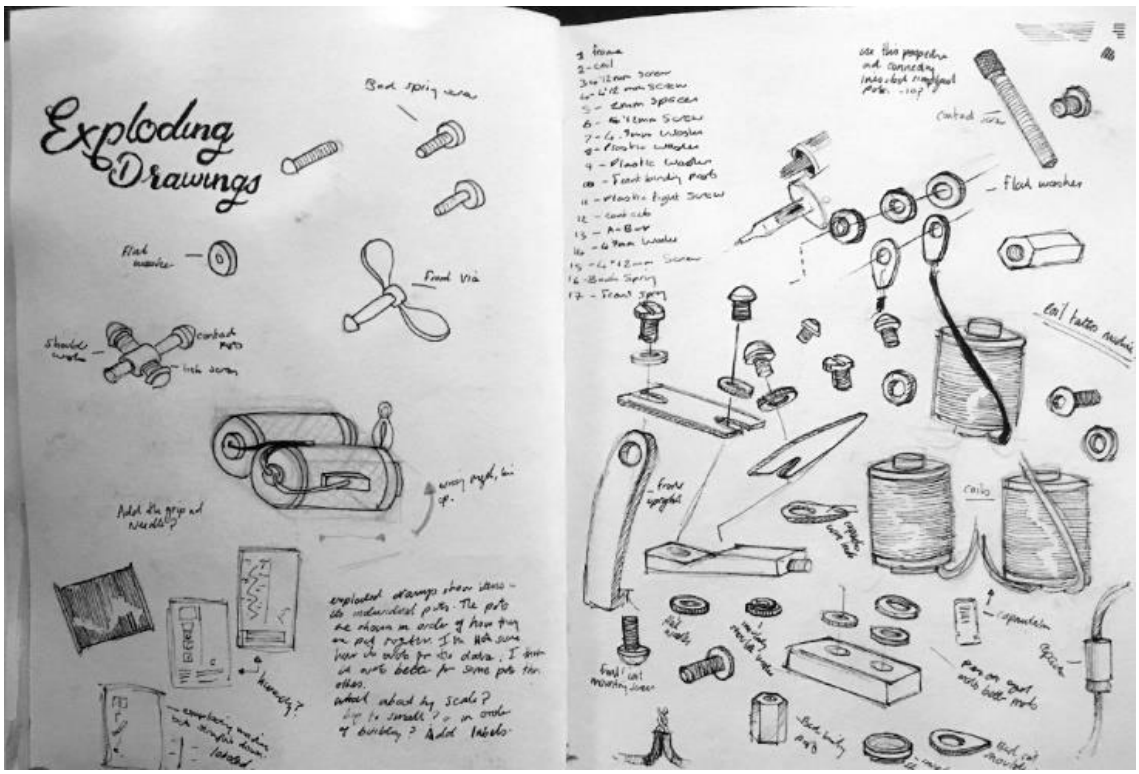



Image: Sketches over tattoo machine parts ahead of creating the final data posters.

## Appendix 14: Sketchbook Images and Experiments.

Note: Throughout research 4 sketchbooks were filled with experiments, notes and projects, as such, only a very small selection of images are included here.

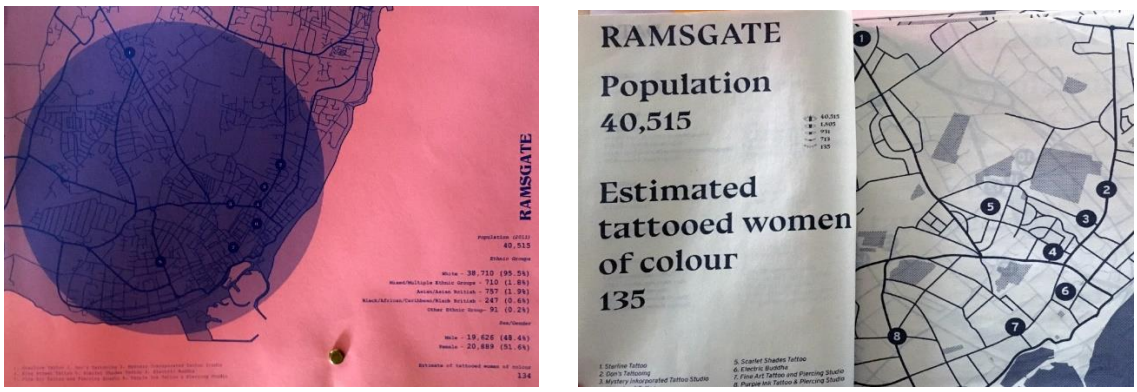



Image: Early concept images of showing the difference between location population, tattoo studio ratio and race/ethnicty ratio compared to the lack of visibile tattooed WOC in the UK.

Images: Early digital experiments of showing how ink shows under different skin tones using Von Luschan's ‘Chromatic Scale’.

Images: Another early digital experiment showing how ink shows under different skin tones , this time with a simplified version of Von Luschan's ‘Chromatic Scale’.

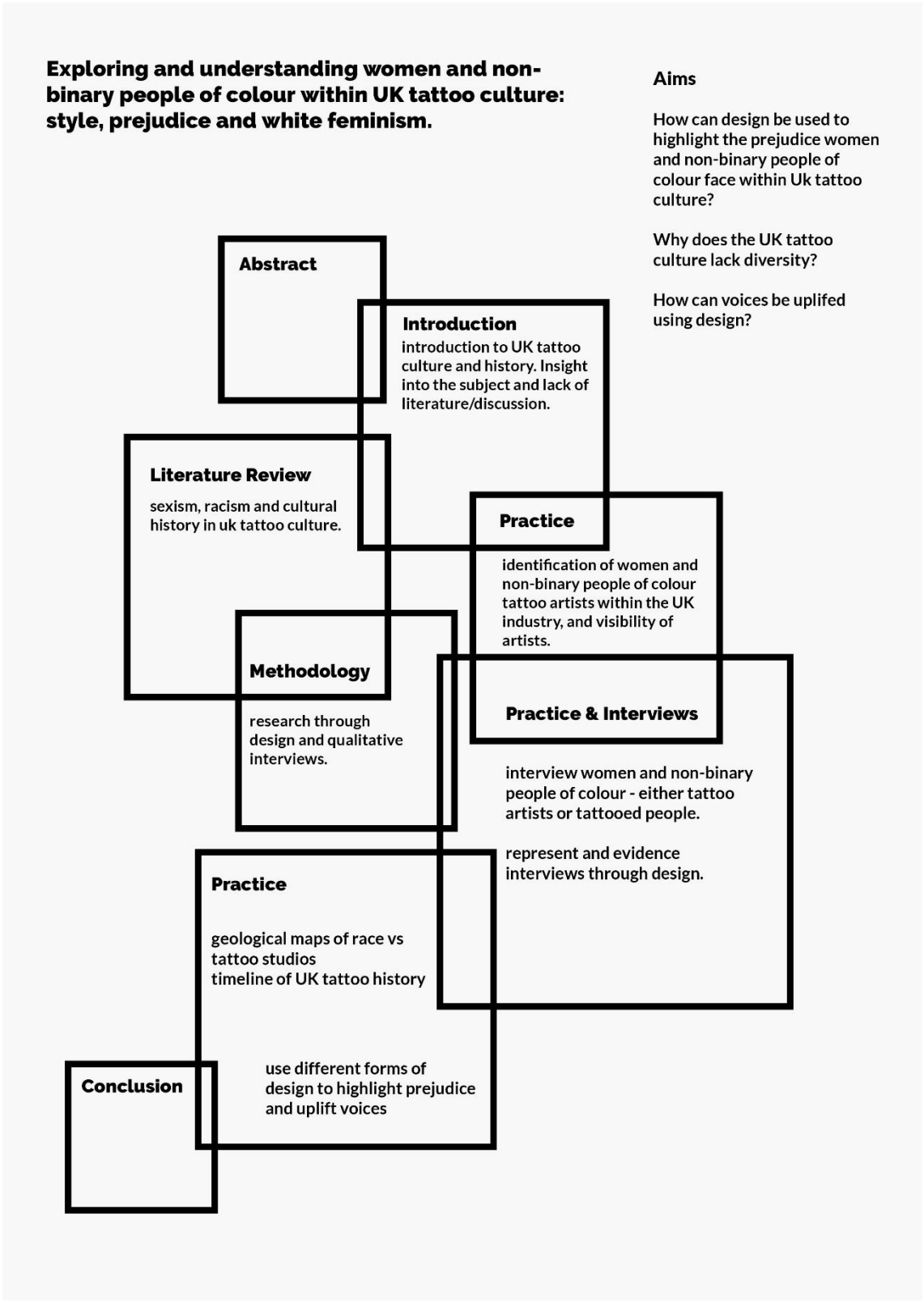

Image: Sketchbook illustrations of different ways to make ink, including that of prison ink.


Image: Illustrations from sketching showing some of the different tattoos WOC celebrities have. The first page features only American WOC celebrities, while the second page features only UK WOC celebrities.


Image: Sketchbook photo of a digital version of ‘Amour de soi’ and the traced version ready for inking. The final can be seen in ‘Restless’.


Image: First completed version of WOC flash sheet. The final version can be see in ‘Restless’.

Appendix 15: MA Design and Development Process Map



**UK tattoo culture subject and subculture map**