

THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES
FEMINIST RESEARCH SPEAKERS SERIES FALL 2017 AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL STUDIES PRESENT

BEAUTIFUL SCARS: Online Discourse on Tattooing as Self-Care for Breast Cancer 'Survivors'

a lecture by Dr. Reisa Klein

Friday, November 3, 2017; 15:00 - 16:30

Senate Chamber
(3-26 Arts and Convocation Hall)

ABSTRACT

This talk investigates the growing trend of mastectomy tattoos as an alternative to reconstruction and their implication on the (de)regulation of women's bodies in the digital context. I explore how tattoos are incorporated into a "breast cancer culture" (King, 2010) as a form of self-care in the recreation of areola pigmentation after breast reconstructive surgery and in cosmetic masking of post-operative mastectomy scars. I am concerned with how online discourses of tattooing practices are drawing women's bodies into an emergent 'biopolitics' (Foucault, 1990; Rose, 2001), a productive type of power concerned with the risk management of a 'biomedicalized subject' where women are encouraged to care for their health through informed decisions via online media (Pitts, 2004) and through consumption and beautification techniques in line with normative femininity (King, 2006). Yet, online media can potentially operate as a site for the creation of new publics wherein women can retell the stories of their bodies through new practices of inscription outside of medicalized and masculinist reconstruction narratives. I perform a discourse analysis of Canadian expert and popular discourses in health websites, plastic surgery and cosmetic service websites, tattoo parlour websites, news media and social media. I argue that within digital media competing medical, pop cultural and feminist narratives intersect in ways that can contribute to an "awkward feminist politics" (Smith-Prei & Stehle, 2016) where women's hybridized medical, digital, tattooed bodies can operate as material obstacles to normative correlations between health, femininity and sexuality.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Reisa Klein is currently a postdoctoral fellow in Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta. Her postdoctoral research examines discourses of tattooing as a form of self-care for breast cancer survivors in digital contexts and their implications for the (de)regulation of the population. Reisa has a PhD in communication studies from Carleton University in Ottawa. Her dissertation *Beauty marks: Counter-hegemonic power of the body* explored the ways in which beauty operates in practices of resistance in diverse case studies including neo-burlesque theatre performance, fashion blogging and for Jewish female Holocaust survivors.

Dr. Klein is also a co-founder of international research group Centre for Historical International Studies in Gender and Press (CHISGAP), which includes a community of feminist media scholars from Canada, Brazil, France, Spain and Japan. Their current research project is a transnational comparative study on the level of standardization and internationalization of women's press. Reisa is also co-organizing a special issue of *Imaginations: Journal of Cross Cultural Image Studies* on "Reimaging Breasts" that draw together interdisciplinary scholars from the arts and sciences.



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