

MASTER'S THESIS

Discipline and female subjects: an analysis of women's experience in the learning and using of female underwear

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Discipline and Female Subjects:
An Analysis of Women's Experience in the Learning
and Using of Female Underwear

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Abstract

Female underwear has been a critical unit of analysis to costume historians, clothing specialists, fashion designers and feminist scholars for decades in that there exist symbolic associations between female underwear, individual woman's class distinction, women's modesty and women's social status.

This thesis attempts to explore, from the life stories of women, how everyday life conversations and discussions regarding the issue of female underwear, between mothers and daughters, female teachers and female students, among female peers, between women's pictorials and female readers, and between lingerie producers and female consumers, create the meanings between female underwear, the female body, female behavior and female sexual matter.

Specifically, this thesis employs personal reflection with some in-depth interviews to reveal that: in the process of learning how to use female underwear, adolescent girls are excessively anxious about the threat of male sexual harassment, the maternal control of daughters' bodies, female teachers' discipline on female students' behaviors, same-sex peers' comparison

of bodily development, and the culture representations of the female body. It reveals that adolescent girls are directed to regard the physiological and sexual changes of the female body as being "undesirable", "negative" and "anxiety-generating". This functions to restrict adolescent girls from exploring and expressing their sexual desires. The making of adolescent girls' self-restraint on sexual activities aims to maintain female virginity and the submissive female sexuality.

Also, this study explores the ways females use women's undergarments in their everyday life practice, which create the possibility for them to redefine the relations between female underwear, the female body, female behavior and female sexuality. In the process of reclaiming individuals'/women's right to speak for themselves, females, as active subjects, develop their subjective thinking and understanding of their lives and living. The struggle for individuals'/women's autonomy incites and empowers female subjects to think, question, challenge, criticize and even resist to those external authorities which bind and direct women's lives. In their ordinary forms of resistance, female subjects are able to formulate the rationales for their actions. The justifications provided by them are indeed in response to their fight for individuals'/women's autonomy.

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