

## MASTER'S THESIS

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

Kung, Shuk Mei

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

KUNG Shuk Mei

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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.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Theoretical Framework	30
1.1. The Symbolic Meanings of Female Underwear	31
1.2. Female Underwear and the Patriarchal Order	38
1.3. "Commercialized" Female Underwear	41
1.4. The Return of the Female Subject	49
Chapter Two: Methodology	59
2.1. A Personal Reflection: on Learning about Female Underwear	65
2.2. The Interviews	80
2.3. The Background Information of the Five Informants	82
2.4. Some Notes on the Interviews	88
Chapter Three: A Brief Overview of the History of Female Underwear in Hong Kong	91
3.1. 1950s Hong Kong	93
3.2. 1960s Hong Kong	95
3.3. 1970s Hong Kong	100
3.4. 1980s Hong Kong	102
3.5. 1990s Hong Kong	112
Chapter Four: Breast Development and the Learning of the Social Practice of Wearing Female Underwear: an Anxiety-Generating Process	122
4.1. Breast Development and Sexual Harassment	124
4.2. Reaching for mothers - But Not Always Getting Their Help	131
4.3. Maternal Control - Threat and Violence	136
4.4. The Making of Female Prudery	142

Chapter Five: Women's Undergarments and the Control of Adolescent Girls' Sexuality	147
5.1. Recognizing the "Undesirable" Change in the Female Body	149
5.2. "Undesirable" Sexual Maturation and the Control of Adolescent Girls' Sexuality	155
5.3. Adolescent Girls' Self-Restraints and the Patriarchal Suppression	158
5.4. The Making of the Female Object	167
Chapter Six: Some Reflexive Thoughts on the Social Practice of Wearing Women's Undergarments	174
6.1. Awareness of the Patriarchal Order	175
6.2. Restrictions on Body Gestures and Female Responses	179
6.3. The Body Being Gazed at	184
6.4. The Body in the Culture Industry	192
Chapter Seven: Re-claiming The Autonomy Of The Female Body	203
7.1. Little Wai Wai's Strategy	204
7.2. Consent, Not Coercion	207
7.3. Turning the Female Body into a Territory of Pleasure and "The Female Gaze"	217
7.4. The Formation of Women's Autonomy	225
7.5. Turning the Feminine Body into a Weapon to Resist	243
Conclusion	252
Appendix A: Memorandum of Interview	265
English and Chinese Bibliography	267
Curriculum Vitae	280