

WOMEN AND THE BRA: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTO SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS OF ITS USE – SUMMARY

This paper presents the brassiere not just as an essential part of women's clothing which has undergone very interesting evolution, from a strip of cloth or leather covering and forming the breasts, through corsets in various shapes and sizes to the bra in the form as we know today. This rather personal part of women's underwear is also introduced as a phenomenon with many sociocultural and psychosocial aspects.

The first part of the paper focuses on different ways of forming and shaping of the bust throughout history, on innovations in textile technology which influenced the look of underwear in general, on the beginnings and evolution of the brassiere and on changes in its functions and symbolism in recent history.

The second part describes preparatory work for a modest qualitative study. It presents theoretical and methodological grounds of the study, including an essential introduction of basic principles and characteristics of qualitative research as a specific approach to social reality. How the research, which comprises semi-structured interviews with 21 female participants, is organized and put into practice is delivered further on, in the third chapter. Issues addressed in the interviews include the participants' level of satisfaction with the supply of brassieres on current underwear market, their views on functions of the brassiere and their use of said garment in the past as well as in the present.

The study gives an indication of potential trends in women's consumer behaviour in relation to the bra, suggests that the way women wear (or do not wear) bras manifests certain aspects of social conformism, and shows that the topic deserves further research, especially in the context of current ideal of feminine beauty.