

## 'Sexy' underwear is not the only way to feel feminine on Valentine's Day, academic says

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TV makeover shows and glossy magazines can leave women feeling guilty for not wearing "sexy" lingerie – especially on Valentine's Day.

But in fact, many different types of underwear could make them feel feminine, according to an expert on underwear consumption.

Dr Christiana Tsaousi, a lecturer in marketing and consumption at the University of Leicester's School of Management, believes underwear choices are hugely affected by personal taste influenced by social background, professional status and upbringing, and why every woman's underwear needs are individual. Her research on the subject is published today by SAGE in the *Journal of Consumer Culture*.

The 'shaping' underwear, for example, prescribed by reality TV shows, such as *How To Look Good Naked* and *10 Years Younger*, is an unhelpful way of thinking about how [women](#) should choose what they wear, Dr Tsaousi has concluded.

"On Valentine's Day, some women may feel the only way to feel feminine is to wear the "sexy" underwear promoted by the media in general. But this is really not the case."

"Reality makeover shows and media in general have one purpose – to make women look feminine in line with western ideals," she said.

"They present femininity as this thing where you feel nice about yourself

because you have a body that needs to be expressed. Having that as an aim, participants on the shows are given underwear that's going to mould the body in a certain way."

But Dr Tsaousi, who has conducted extensive research into the consumption of underwear, says that women think very carefully about choosing the right underwear for the right situation – and that comfort is often as important as "sexiness".

"Women learn to choose underwear for the right situation. In an ideal world, it would be good if reality shows acknowledge that women can feel feminine by wearing different underwear.

"Some women don't like these shows because they always show a specific type of femininity, which is not the reality in most cases. They can make you feel guilty about the way you look and the way you feel about your body if you aren't wearing underwear considered sexy.

"When partners are looking to buy underwear as Valentine's gifts for their wives or girlfriends, they should choose underwear which will fit their partners well and will make them feel comfortable – rather than the stereotypical tiny, uncomfortable types. This will ultimately lead to them feeling nice about themselves."

In her new paper for the *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Dr Tsaousi interviewed women from a wide range of groups and backgrounds, including university lecturers, young mums, and female rugby players. She looked at the influence of women's upbringing, profession, age, and social status on their underwear choices.

She found that some groups such as the young rugby girls favoured "cute" underwear while for others such as academics something that supports their professional dress was the main priority.

"The paper indicates that women's choices in underwear are determined by factors such as our ways of thinking, up-bringing, taste and status in society," Dr Tsaousi said. "The paper also suggests that women make similar judgements about their underwear as they would their outerwear."

For many women another big influence on their taste in underwear is their mother.

"We can't forget that the mother normally buys the first bra for her daughter. It is the first act of being feminine, and introduces girls to the idea that they are becoming a woman," Dr Tsaousi said.

Dr Tsaousi added that the study of the consumption of underwear is an area which has not been explored in detail by academics – but is very important to the market.

"Obviously women's outer dress is visible so it is under scrutiny by others. Underwear on the other hand is hidden but people make similar judgements.

"Other forms of dress have been widely discussed in consumption studies, but underwear is an area that hasn't been fully researched. It is quite important – we see that every day in the market from the variety on offer in clothes shops and specialised [underwear](#) shops."

**More information:** The paper, 'What underwear I like?' Taste and (embodied) cultural capital in the consumption of women's underwear, can be found at: [joc.sagepub.com/content/early/recent](http://joc.sagepub.com/content/early/recent) and will be available for free for a limited period of time.

Provided by University of Leicester

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