

## Beyond Seduction: Intimate Apparel as a Tool for Identity Construction and Empowerment Among Gen Z Women

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of intimate apparel in shaping the identity, sexuality, and self-expression of Generation Z women. Additionally, this study investigates how intimate apparel functions as a tool for empowerment, body positivity, and self-care, in contrast to its traditional perception as a symbol of seduction. Using qualitative ethnographic methods, this study draws data from participant responses and media analysis to examine how personal preferences influence self-confidence, self-esteem, and social perceptions. The analysis in this study is specifically grounded in Michel Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self" as well as the framework by Jantzen, Østergaard, and Vieira (2006), which positions underwear as a practical instrument for women to autonomously control bodily performance and manage their psychological experiences and identities. Findings mapped through the Quadrant Matrix Diagram indicate that the majority of Gen Z women position themselves in the "Empowerment and Self-Affirmation" quadrant. For this majority group, underwear serves as an extension of identity and internal strength that liberates them from the dominance of the male gaze. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal a dual impact. While underwear holds great potential as a medium for resistance and self-actualization, some Gen Z women still face pressures stemming from cultural obligations, anxiety regarding stigma, and oppressive beauty standards resulting from social media idealization. This study emphasizes the transformative nature of underwear as a medium for self-definition and advocates for a continuous shift in cultural narratives to normalize inclusive representation. By challenging stereotypes, underwear can continue to evolve as an expression of individuality, authenticity, and agency.

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### INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the representation of women's bodies exists at a complex intersection of powerful patriarchal ideologies, conservative moral values, and the pressures of global consumer culture. Sociopolitically, the sexuality and bodies of Indonesian women are often subjected to discipline and control in public spaces, as evidenced by the growing influence of conservative Islamic groups leading to the enactment of anti-pornography laws and the persecution of popular cultural expressions deemed indecent (Madasari, 2021). This control

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is reinforced by state authorities practicing biopolitics to counter discourses of resistance or self-love in virtual spaces, out of concern that they might lead to the commodification of the body (Purwanti, 2020). At the same time, commercial culture and the media continue to be discussed by society through the lens of ideal beauty standards—represented by slim, tall, and smooth-skinned bodies—which are massively constructed by capitalism and consumerism (Dewi & Winduwati, 2019; Rosida, 2018). As a result, the bodies of urban women in Indonesia have become sites of ideological contestation full of contradictions, women are forced to constantly navigate the tension between the demands of modesty and collectivist norms on one hand, and the desire to embrace self-pleasure, social status, and bodily autonomy on the other (Mores *et al.*, 2025; Rosida, 2018).

Furthermore, intimate apparel or lingerie has historically been constructed within visual culture and advertising as an instrument of objectification serving the male gaze, a practice that often exacerbates women's anxieties regarding their body image and shape (Li, 2024; Zhou, 2022). However, alongside the rise of feminist consciousness and cultural shifts in consumer culture, the function of intimate apparel is now slowly transforming into a symbol of autonomy, self-care, and the celebration of body diversity (body positivity) (Zhou, 2022). This cultural shift is particularly crucial to study in the current digital era, where women's bodies within the modern fashion industry are no longer passive objects of exploitation. Instead, they have become a battleground for ideological power struggles and resistance in the pursuit of true self-empowerment (Devi *et al.*, 2022; Purwanti, 2020). Understanding the dynamics of lingerie consumption is vital for demystifying how modern women navigate their sexuality and agency over their bodies amidst the overlap of patriarchal values, social status, and self-pleasure (Rosida, 2018).

Previous studies have attempted to explore the intersection of lingerie, identity, and media. Jantzen, Østergaard, and Vieira (2006) find that lingerie consumption functions as an instrument of "self-technology" capable of enabling women to control their social performance and enhance their interpsychological and intrapersonal identity experiences. From a post-feminist media perspective, research by Wood (2016) and Gill (2007) highlights that lingerie triggers complex negotiations, where women can experience both pleasure and anxiety regarding the demands of feminine performance. In the digital realm, Hakeem's (2020) study on the *Savage X Fenty* fashion show demonstrates that inclusive fashion campaigns can challenge Western beauty standards and foster a sense of empowerment. Similar dynamics are also observed in Indonesia; inclusivity campaigns such as "Real People Real Body" by the brand *Nipplets* have proven capable of breaking down stereotypes by prioritizing comfort and body diversity beyond mere sensuality (Dewi & Winduwati, 2019; Pratiwi *et al.*, 2025).

Although studies on lingerie and body representation have been extensive, a fundamental research gap remains regarding how this phenomenon is specifically experienced by Generation Z. Most previous literature has focused on macro-level discourse analysis regarding the negative impact of the sexualization of Instagram influencers on body dissatisfaction (Prichard *et al.*, 2023), or how coercive "body positivity" messages can actually undermine women's basic psychological needs (Legault & Sago, 2022). In the Indonesian context, Mores *et al.*'s (2025) research has indeed touched on the consumption of lingerie as a form of "quiet luxury" rich in relational value, while Krismajayanti *et al.* (2025) examine the shift in Gen Z's fashion consumption driven by the need for self-actualization. However, no ethnographic study has yet sharply dissected the paradox or dual impact of social media

exposure on the construction of Gen Z women's sexual identity and bodily experience through the daily practice of selecting and using intimate apparel.

To analyze the complexity of lingerie consumption among Generation Z women, this study employs Michel Foucault's (1988) analytical framework of technologies of the self, as specifically applied to the study of lingerie by Jantzen *et al.* (2006). The selection of this framework is grounded in the academic urgency to move beyond binary perspectives that often position women's bodies only as passive objects of exploitation in the modern fashion world (Devi *et al.*, 2022), or the opposite, as victims of commodification in virtual spaces (Purwanti, 2020). Jantzen *et al.* (2006) affirm that lingerie is not only a functional garment but also an instrument of practice through which women actively manage their bodily performance to define both inter-psychological (social) and intra-psychological (personal) identities. Through this Foucauldian lens, the consumption of underwear is understood as a discursive strategy or tactic through which subjects strive to reclaim autonomy, pleasure, and agency over their own bodies against ideological repression (Jantzen *et al.*, 2006). This approach is highly relevant for explaining the cultural shift from objectification to subjectification and empowerment (Gill, 2007), thus enabling researchers to view Gen Z women as rational actors who use intimate apparel to navigate social power structures and express femininity authentically.

Furthermore, Jantzen *et al.*'s (2006) conceptual framework is essential for analyzing the paradox or dual impact of intimate apparel consumption that is intensified by the visual culture of social media among Gen Z. Today's post-feminist media culture often presents sharp contradictions. On the one hand, it celebrates freedom of expression and body inclusivity (Hakeem, 2020), yet on the other hand, it actually fuels self-surveillance and body dissatisfaction due to high exposure to sexualized imagery promoted by influencers (Gill, 2007; Prichard *et al.*, 2023). Jantzen *et al.* have pointed to a similar tension, where women's efforts to manage their identity through lingerie are essentially acts of entering a vulnerable arena of domination, a practice that can simultaneously trigger a sense of extraordinary confidence and discomfort. By adapting this framework, this study can critically analyze how Gen Z navigates the pressures of body positivity messages that sometimes undermine their basic psychological needs (Legault & Sago, 2022). At the same time, this theory facilitates an interpretation of participants' everyday tactics, such as prioritizing comfort (Wood, 2016), as forms of cultural negotiation and resistance against oppressive sexual norms.

To fill this academic gap, this study aims to deeply investigate the role of intimate apparel in shaping the identity, sexual autonomy, and self-expression of Gen Z women. Specifically, this study explores how intimate apparel functions as a medium of personal empowerment on one hand, yet remains in conflict with the pressures of body image expectations generated by social media idealization on the other. The novelty of this research lies in its ability to empirically capture this "dual impact" dynamic, demonstrating that for Gen Z, intimate apparel is not merely a functional garment or a seductive commodity, but a highly private transformative instrument for redefining their freedom and authenticity amidst an ever-changing cultural narrative.

## METHOD

This study employs qualitative methods through the exploration on how intimate apparel influences Gen Z's perspectives and experiences of sexuality. As described by Milgate, (2006) emphasizes direct observation of participants within their cultural context, using interviews

as supplementary tools to gain deeper insights into their experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Similarly, (Creswell, 2014) highlights that qualitative methods are inherently descriptive, allowing for the easy identification of patterns and themes within complex social phenomena. To rigorously frame this exploration, the study applies Michel Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self', drawing upon the analytical framework established by Jantzen *et al.* (2006). This theoretical lens is practically applied during the observation and interview stages to analyze how participants utilize lingerie as a strategic instrument to negotiate their inter-psychological (social) and intra-psychological (personal) identities, effectively managing their bodily performance and self-image. By combining ethnographic observation with other qualitative techniques, this research aims to provide a rich and detailed understanding of the role intimate apparel plays in shaping identity and sexuality. Primary data was gathered through a combination of responses from student participants and analysis of the YouTube video *Express Yourself with Intimate Apparel* by Diana Villarroel. The respondents consisted of 14 Generation Z female students from various study programs at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. This specific demographic was deliberately chosen because urban university students accurately represent a critical segment of Gen Z who actively navigate the complex intersection of modern digital consumer culture and traditional societal norms. Furthermore, the YouTube video was selected as a supplementary cultural artifact because it epitomizes the contemporary digital narratives of body positivity, inclusivity, and self-expression that heavily influence Gen Z's consumption habits and mindset. The study employed open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore participants' underwear choices, the motivations behind these preferences, and the psychological and emotional impacts of wearing intimate apparel. These methods allowed for a structured examination of cognitive, affective, and conative aspects related to intimate apparel, aligning with Creswell's (2014) emphasis on systematic data collection tools for qualitative research. By integrating ethnographic methods with qualitative analysis, the research offers a comprehensive exploration of how intimate apparel functions within cultural and personal contexts, shedding light on its impact on identity, behavior, and perceptions of sexuality among Gen Z. Data analysis was conducted through multiple steps to ensure a thorough interpretation of the findings. First, the researcher examined how intimate apparel is represented in popular culture and the media. The YouTube video was summarized to extract relevant information, and respondents' answers were analyzed to uncover their personal feelings and attitudes toward underwear and its relationship to sexual identity. The study further investigated participants' perceptions of how underwear is designed and how these designs influence broader ideas about sexuality. By combining insights from media analysis and participant responses, the research identifies critical themes and patterns, offering a nuanced understanding of the intersection between intimate apparel, identity, and sexuality among Gen Z individuals.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Researcher successfully conducted interviews regarding defining the role of intimate apparel in Generation Z, as well as the impact of Generation Z visualization in influencing them in wearing and their views on intimate apparel, as is captured at Figure 1.

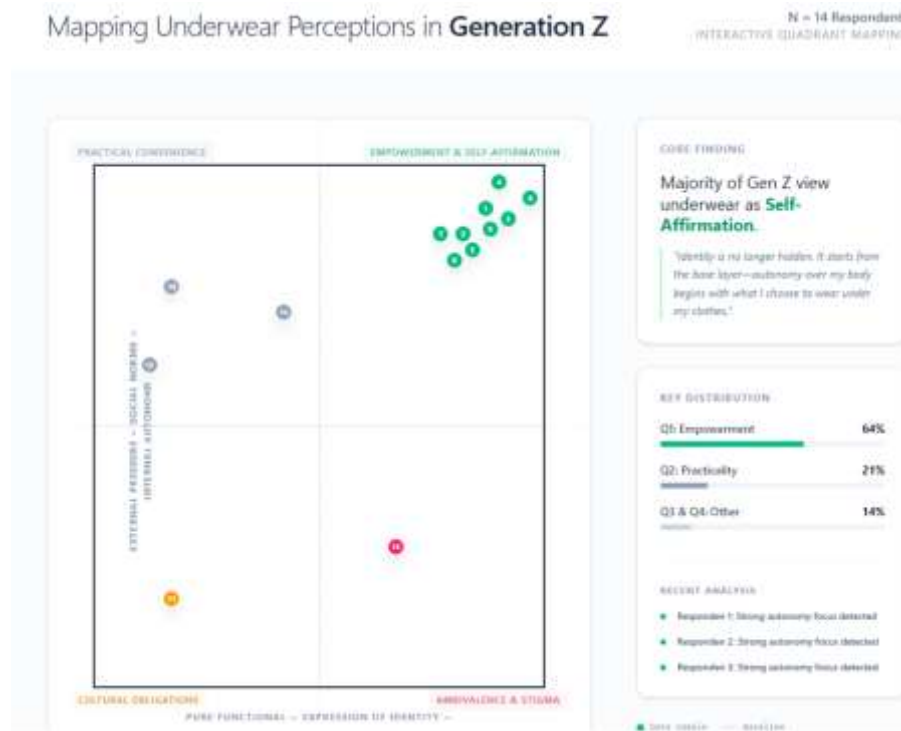


Figure 1 Mapping respondents perception  
Source: made by researcher through NotebookLM

Figure 1 provides a sharp analytical visualization of the complexity of Generation Z women's perceptions of underwear, mapping their positions along two main axes. The horizontal axis (X) measures how underwear is perceived, ranging from a purely functional perspective on the left to a tool for self-expression on the right. Meanwhile, the vertical axis (Y) represents the source of motivation for wearing underwear, ranging from external pressure or social norms at the bottom to internal autonomy and self-care at the top. This mapping effectively debunks the assumption that Gen Z is a homogeneous group, while demonstrating that their bodily experiences are heavily influenced by the negotiation between personal drives and cultural expectations.

The majority of participants in this study were concentrated in Quadrant 1 (Upper Right), which represents "Empowerment and Self-Affirmation." Among the respondents in this group, 9 stated that lingerie serves as an extension of their identity and internal strength. Respondent 1 explicitly stated that lingerie is an "extension of her identity" that helps her feel empowered and confident. This finding aligns closely with Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self," in which undergarments function as instruments of practice to exert control over bodily performance and autonomously define feminine identity (Foucault, 1988).

This shift also confirms Gill's (2007) argument regarding post-feminist culture, where there is a transition from the objectification of women's bodies to subjectification centered on individual choice and empowerment. Furthermore, the autonomy established in Quadrant 1 is significantly influenced by the digital ecosystem, which is beginning to deconstruct the dominance of the male gaze. Respondent 2 emphasized that lingerie is not about pleasing others, but rather about "owning one's own body and expressing personal style." Bella's narrative reinforces Zhou's (2022) study, which notes that modern women are increasingly aware of their rights over their bodies and no longer wish to be constrained by the male gaze

when consuming lingerie. Body positivity and inclusivity campaigns on social media, as highlighted by Hakeem (2020) and by Dewi and Winduwati (2019) have proven to empower Gen Z to celebrate their body shapes authentically and independently.

Shifting to Quadrant 2 (Top Left), which describes “Practical Comfort,” there is a minority group—including Respondents 10, 12, and 14—who possess high internal autonomy yet refuse to link lingerie to identity. Respondent 10 and Respondent 12 view lingerie purely as a functional item, where their reluctance to explore is based more on the physical discomfort of the fabric than on social pressure. Respondent 14 also stated that their consumption is motivated by physical comfort alone. This pragmatic attitude reflects the findings of Wood (2016) and Pratiwi *et al.* (2025), who highlight that the discourse on comfort is one form of critical negotiation by modern women to resist the visual imperatives of feminine sexuality that demand they appear sensual.

On the other hand, Quadrant 3 (Bottom Left) reveals the reality of “Cultural Obligations” that still bind some women, as represented by Respondent 11’s experience. Respondent 11 did not find any sense of empowerment or self-expression in lingerie; for her, lingerie is a tool to meet social expectations tied to norms of femininity, marriage, and cultural propriety. This phenomenon underscores that in Indonesia, women’s bodies often remain sites of ideological contestation constructed by patriarchal values (Rosida, 2018). The purchase of lingerie in this context transforms into a form of “quiet luxury,” where consumption is directed more toward relational affirmation and life’s ritual transitions (such as wedding preparations) rather than public identity statements (Mores *et al.*, 2025).

The most ambivalent position is found in Quadrant 4 (Bottom Right), occupied by Respondent 13, representing the “Ambivalence and Stigma” category. Respondent 13 theoretically recognizes that lingerie has the power to boost self-confidence, yet she chooses not to consume it due to the high stigma and societal judgment against women who wear it. Respondent 13’s fear reflects the negative impact of the objectification of women’s bodies, which remains prevalent in Indonesia’s virtual and cultural spaces (Purwanti, 2020). Furthermore, this reluctance highlights the risks of sexualized imagery on social media, which has been shown to trigger body comparisons, body shame, and self-dissatisfaction among young women (Prichard *et al.*, 2023; Legault & Sago, 2022).

Overall, the interpretation of this matrix confirms the existence of a dual impact of intimate apparel consumption on Generation Z. On one hand, underwear has transformed into a powerful instrument of resistance, self-actualization, and self-care (Krismajayanti *et al.*, 2025). On the other hand, however, the shadow of cultural expectations, oppressive beauty standards, and anxiety about stigma continues to loom over their autonomy. This mapping confirms that Generation Z are not passive consumers; they are subjects who actively, selectively, and sometimes contradictorily strive to redefine the meaning of their sexuality and freedom amidst an ever-changing society.

### **Intimate apparel influences women’s perceptions of their sexuality**

Lingerie often serves as a vital instrument for self-expression and women’s empowerment. When women choose lingerie that aligns with their self-concept, it significantly boosts their self-confidence and sexual agency. The act of wearing aesthetically pleasing and well-fitting lingerie, regardless of others’ judgments or perceptions, directly contributes to the development of a sense of personal autonomy. This dynamic is highly relevant to the framework proposed by Jantzen *et al.* (2006), which positions lingerie as a ‘technology of the

self'; that is, a practical instrument through which women consciously manage and control their bodily performance to stimulate pleasure, comfort, and their internal psychological identity experiences. The application of this framework is empirically demonstrated through participants' responses, such as Respondent 1, who affirmed that lingerie is an "extension of her identity" that makes her feel empowered from within, and Respondent 11, who uses lingerie to embrace and authentically express various facets of her personality. Thus, intimate apparel intersects directly with feminist ideals in reclaiming women's sexuality and rejecting external judgment. As argued by Jantzen et al., what has historically been criticized as a tool of patriarchal control is now reclaimed and transformed by women into a tool of empowerment to create freedom and sensation for their own bodies.

### *Empowerment and Confidence*

Social media platforms and cultural campaigns play a crucial role in fundamentally reshaping public attitudes toward intimate apparel. Lingerie, which has historically often been viewed as purely a private, taboo matter or reduced to an object of male gaze, is now increasingly recognized as an expression of autonomy, self-love, and body positivity. Digital campaigns that openly showcase body diversity have significantly minimized the stigma surrounding the wearing and discussion of *lingerie*. This shift shows that virtual spaces have become an arena for women to reclaim the narrative of their bodies, transforming garments once considered restrictive into a medium of liberation and celebration of individuality.

This transformation of the narrative is strongly reflected in field findings, where participants use visual references from social media to reinforce their internal autonomy. Respondent 7, for example, highlighted that seeing women with diverse body shapes on social media makes her feel she has full control over the representation of her own body. In line with this, Respondent 2 states that *lingerie* is a crucial instrument for "owning her own body" and is not meant to please the gaze of others. These various digital initiatives ultimately promote lingerie as a form of self-care. When analyzed through the framework of Jantzen *et al.* (2006), this practice is a tangible manifestation of efforts to strengthen intrapsychological identity – namely, the ability of lingerie to create sensations of comfort, private pleasure, and affirmative experiences regarding "who I truly am" for the wearer on an internal level.

Through the analytical lens of Jantzen *et al.* (2006), visual community support on social media has proven to facilitate women in breaking free from outdated categorization schemes that often label them stereotypically. In their study, Jantzen et al. found that women, when consuming lingerie, are often haunted by the fear of stigma: they worry about being labeled a "cheap woman" (harlot) if their lingerie is too sensual, or conversely, seen as boring like a "housewife" (housewife) if their style is too practical. However, for Generation Z, inclusive campaigns on social media serve as a supportive medium for their "technologies of the self." These campaigns deconstruct these rigid binary rules by demonstrating that women can appear sensual, feel comfortable, and maintain control simultaneously without worrying about societal moral judgment.

In conclusion, the deconstruction of stereotypes through these digital campaigns not only empowers individuals privately but also expands the definition of beauty in the public sphere. Inclusive representation creates strong validation of Gen Z women's interpsychological (social) identities, ensuring that their presence is positively acknowledged by their social environment. Rather than feeling threatened by the mismatch between the

backstage and the front stage, as is often a source of low self-confidence in Jantzen *et al.*'s study, Gen Z participants use affirmation from social media to align these two realms. Thus, women from diverse backgrounds can now connect with *lingerie* purely based on autonomy, comfort, and terms they define themselves, making it an oasis of freedom within dynamic cultural expectations.

### *Dual Impact on Body Image*

The conscious and careful selection of underwear has been shown to have a massive positive impact on women's body image, particularly in promoting self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of empowerment. From Foucault's (1988) analytical perspective, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a manifestation of "technologies of the self," in which underwear is no longer viewed simply as clothing to cover the body, but rather as a discursive instrument used by individuals to actively manage the performance of their bodies, minds, and identities. In line with this perspective, Jantzen *et al.* (2006) explains that *lingerie* functions as a technology that facilitates the production of emotions and feelings, granting women autonomy to construct their own experiences of femininity at the intrapsychological (internal) level. By highlighting the body's natural features and providing comfort, *lingerie* allows women to feel more confident in their own skin, aligning with the *body positivity* movement that celebrates diversity and individual uniqueness.

The participants repeatedly highlighted how aesthetically pleasing and well-fitting *lingerie* directly contributes to their emotional well-being. Respondent 1, for example, articulated that *lingerie* is a crucial tool for appreciating her body, which she likened to an invisible "armor." This armor not only boosts her self-confidence but also provides a sense of full control over her body image in public spaces. This statement is reinforced by Respondent 4, who describes *lingerie* as a daily instrument of self-expression that affirms her autonomy and individuality, regardless of the outer clothing she is wearing. The understanding that *lingerie* is a manifestation of self-care is also emphasized by Respondent 6 and Respondent 7. Respondent 6 positions underwear as the center of her identity that supports her self-esteem, while Respondent 7 believes that this type of clothing plays a central role in boosting her internal connection to her self-worth.

However, the effectiveness of this "self-technology" heavily depends on the intentionality and precision of the garment – namely, the suitability of materials and the comfort of the fit. Respondent 2 explicitly linked the emotional impact of *lingerie* to its level of comfort when worn, noting that well-fitting undergarments bring a sense of peace and absolute acceptance of her body. Jantzen *et al.* (2006) conceptualized this as the experiential function of *lingerie*, where comfort is not just a physical matter, but a guarantee of certainty and a sense of security for one's personal identity among the demands of modern life roles. The importance of this deliberate selection is further emphasized by Respondent 5, who affirms that when carefully chosen, *lingerie* possesses an autonomous psychological power to boost one's mood and reconstruct self-image in a highly positive way.

On the other hand, much like the nature of a disciplinary technology, *lingerie* also creates vulnerabilities that make it a double-edged sword. Respondent 3 highlighted this dual impact by stating that *lingerie* can be an extraordinary instrument of empowerment when it fits perfectly, yet becomes a psychological disaster when it fails to align with body expectations. Respondent 3's narrative is an empirical manifestation of what Jantzen *et al.* (2006) define as an "anomaly" leading to mood spoilage. When a woman wears underwear

that feels wrong or uncomfortable (the backstage realm), it can instantly undermine her self-confidence when facing the outside world (the frontstage realm). The failure of this garment to support physical comfort often leads to self-doubt, highlighting just how vulnerable and crucial the role of underwear is in maintaining the psychological equilibrium and social identity of Generation Z women.

### *Self-Expression*

Underwear plays a crucial role in shaping how women perceive their bodies. Well-designed underwear can foster body positivity by highlighting the body's natural strengths while addressing insecurities. By expressing themselves through aesthetically pleasing or well-fitting underwear – regardless of others' perceptions – women can cultivate a sense of personal empowerment. Through the lens of Foucault (1988), this practice is a tangible manifestation of “technologies of the self.” Choosing and wearing underwear is no longer just a routine of covering the body, but a transformative instrument through which the subject actively directs their own body to explore and communicate their unique identity. By aligning garment choices with personal preferences, women consciously challenge social norms and strengthen their autonomy. Whether visible to others or hidden beneath outerwear, these intimate garments serve as a deeply personal medium for self-discovery and authentic self-representation.

The function of lingerie as a tool for self-expression emerged as a central theme among many respondents, though it manifested in various ways. Respondent 1, for example, views lingerie as a direct extension of her identity, which significantly influences how she carries herself in daily life with comfort and confidence. This sense of self-expression is closely tied to her preference for brands that promote diversity and body positivity, which socially validate her identity. Similarly, Respondent 2 views lingerie as a tool for expressing her inner strength and femininity, which effectively alters her mood. For her, lingerie transcends the realm of sensuality; it is about having full authority over her body and showcasing her personal style. These findings strongly resonate with the analysis by Jantzen *et al.* (2006), who found that lingerie enables women to become intelligent manipulators of their moods and intra-psychological experiences, providing a boost (pepping up) to explore self-autonomy.

Social media has been a significant influence on Respondent 1 and Respondent 2, inspiring them to embrace self-expression through brand narratives aligned with their personal values. For Respondent 3, lingerie serves as a channel to explore her femininity and multifaceted personality. She deeply values the role of lingerie in allowing her to express herself authentically, whether she is feeling bold, playful, or simply confident. She rejects the portrayal of women reduced to sexual objects and believes that lingerie should represent a woman's personal connection to her identity, not merely conform to societal standards. A similar sentiment was expressed by Respondent 4, who uses lingerie to experiment with various aspects of her identity. For her, lingerie is not just for special occasions, but a daily tool for empowering self-expression, making her feel strong regardless of the outer clothing covering her body. In the context of Jantzen *et al.* (2006), the practices of Respondents 3 and 4 constitute a form of resistance against rigid and limiting social categorization schemes; they demonstrate that women can use lingerie to play with the boundaries of identity and construct a liberating femininity.

Respondents 5 and 6 also affirm that lingerie is an integral part of their self-expression. Respondent 5 feels that lingerie allows her to showcase various aspects of her personality,

which in turn enhances her sense of identity and self-confidence. On the other hand, Respondent 6 focuses on how lingerie gives her absolute control over her body and its presentation in both public and private spaces. Both respondents are heavily influenced by the social media ecosystem, where unfiltered body images and affirmative messages inspire their purchasing decisions. As suggested by Jantzen *et al.* (2006), visual support from the outside world serves to reinforce these women's interpsychological (social) identities. Social media transforms society's once-judgmental gaze into a space of validation, allowing women to position lingerie as a tool for empowerment rather than mere visual appeal.

On other hand, there is a group of respondents who do not associate lingerie with meaningful self-expression at all. Respondent 10 and Respondent 12 view lingerie purely as a functional necessity or a practical, optional accessory, without attaching any emotional value, pride, or identity connection. In contrast to this internal autonomy, Respondent 11 views lingerie through the lens of cultural and marital expectations; she sees it not as a free choice, but as an obligation that ultimately negates the garment's function as a means of self-expression.

Meanwhile, Respondents 13 and 14 demonstrate a highly minimalistic engagement. Respondent 13 recognizes the theoretical potential of lingerie to boost self-confidence, yet chooses to distance themselves due to fear of sociocultural stigma. As for Respondent 14, they select lingerie selectively just for physical comfort and style, without making it central to their sense of self. These conflicting perspectives represent a complex web of discursive power according to Foucault (1988) where for some Gen Z individuals, the body and its clothing have successfully become sites of autonomous liberation, yet for others, they remain instruments reduced by cultural conformity, fear of stigma, or pure pragmatism.

### **Cultural and Media Influences through Social Media Platforms and Modern Perceptions of Female Sexuality and Intimate Apparel**

Social media has radically changed how we think about lingerie, transforming it from a private matter into a broader cultural conversation. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have normalized lingerie by featuring body-positive campaigns that celebrate all shapes and sizes. These movements encourage women to embrace their sexuality unapologetically and see lingerie as a tool for empowerment. As Respondent 1 noted, "Yes, campaigns about body positivity helped reduce stigma." This shift allows women to reclaim control over their image, presenting lingerie as something empowering rather than just provocative.

At the same time, social media can be a double-edged sword when it comes to shaping perceptions of lingerie. While it has created spaces for self-expression and acceptance, it also imposes high expectations through idealized beauty standards. Respondent 2 highlighted this tension, saying, "Yes, but it also creates pressure to have the perfect body." This contrast reveals the complexity of cultural influences, where women feel empowered to showcase their individuality but still face societal pressures to meet unattainable ideals.

For many women, lingerie has evolved into a deeply personal choice tied to self-confidence and self-care. Respondent 3 emphasized this autonomy, sharing, "Something I wear for myself, not for others." Respondent 5 echoed this sentiment, saying, "It's something I'd feel good in even if no one else sees it." These responses reflect a cultural shift where lingerie is no longer just about external validation but about how it makes women feel. It's a private act of self-love, rooted in comfort and self-appreciation.

This focus on personal connection doesn't mean society has entirely moved past stereotypes. The notion that lingerie is primarily for seduction still lingers in public perception. "Yes, people assume it's only for seduction, which isn't true," said Respondent 1, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of its purpose. Social media campaigns are working to challenge these outdated ideas. As Respondent 4 observed, "Yes, when used responsibly in campaigns, it can challenge stereotypes." These campaigns are reframing lingerie as functional, expressive, and empowering, helping to dismantle old prejudices.

Social media's ability to redefine lingerie also ties into broader discussions about authenticity and self-representation. While some portrayals feel empowering, others can come across as performative or insincere. Respondent 4 expressed skepticism, saying, "Yes, but sometimes it's overdone and feels fake." This highlights the need for campaigns to strike a balance between inclusivity and realism, ensuring they genuinely reflect diverse experiences rather than creating new pressures or ideals.

Moreover, the evolving portrayal of lingerie on social media reflects a larger cultural shift toward acceptance and autonomy. Respondent 5 remarked, "It's definitely more accepted now than before," pointing to the progress society has made. However, as Respondent 2 cautioned, "It depends on how it's portrayed, there's still stigma attached." This shows that while significant strides have been made, there is still work to be done in normalizing lingerie as a symbol of self-expression rather than an object of judgment.

In the end, lingerie is more than just an item of clothing, it's a reflection of individuality, empowerment, and cultural evolution. Whether it's seen as an act of self-care, a fashion statement, or a tool for breaking stereotypes, lingerie holds a multifaceted role in women's lives. Through intentional representation and inclusive messaging, social media has the potential to shape a world where lingerie is celebrated for what it truly is: a symbol of agency, confidence, and personal choice.

## Discussion

This study stems from the central question of how Generation Z women are redefining the role of intimate apparel in shaping their identity, autonomy, and sexuality. The study's key findings demonstrate that for the majority of participants, intimate apparel is no longer viewed only in functional terms or reduced to a symbol of seduction, but has transformed into an essential instrument for self-expression, personal empowerment, and self-care. There is a highly significant "dual impact". On the one hand, the material selection of the right lingerie can foster body positivity and affirm women's autonomous sexual agency. However, the surrounding social media ecosystem continues to create tension between the celebration of pure individuality and societal cultural expectations.

The findings of this study are fundamentally consistent with those of Jantzen *et al.* (2006), who conceptualized the consumption of lingerie as 'technologies of the self'. Similarly to Wood's (2016) findings among British women, the majority of participants in this study demonstrated that factors of comfort and aesthetic alignment with their personality enable them to discursively challenge the sexual norms that have long constrained women. This phenomenon reinforces the theoretical arguments of Gill (2007) and Zhou (2022) regarding post-feminist culture, where there is a major shift from passive objectification serving the male gaze toward the realm of subjectification. Generation Z women prove themselves to be rational agents who actively take control of the aesthetics of their own bodies to achieve intra-

psychological satisfaction, making these intimate garments an autonomous space where they are no longer subject to external judgment.

The ability of Gen Z participants to reclaim the narrative over their bodies is intertwined with the crucial role of the digital ecosystem and inclusive cultural campaigns. According to Li (2024), massively objectified women and worsened body image anxiety, contemporary fashion discourse is gradually being dominated by a celebration of diversity. Findings regarding participants who feel empowered by unfiltered visual representations align closely with Hakeem's (2020) analysis of the inclusive fashion show *Savage X Fenty*, as well as research by Dewi and Winduwati (2019) and Pratiwi *et al.* (2025) on the local brand campaign *Nipplets* in Indonesia. These digital campaigns have successfully deconstructed Western beauty standards, shattered outdated categorization schemes, and transformed lingerie from a taboo subject into a celebration of individual uniqueness.

Although narratives of empowerment appear dominant, this study also reveals inconsistencies; some participants still view lingerie as a cultural obligation, or even feel alienated and intimidated by the shadow of societal stigma. This social media paradox can be explained through the research by Prichard *et al.* (2023), which demonstrates that exposure to overly sexualized imagery by influencers can actually trigger appearance comparisons and worsen young women's body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, Legault and Sago (2022) caution that forced "body positivity" messages can sometimes undermine psychological autonomy. In Indonesia's sociopolitical landscape, this ambivalence is entirely logical given the strong moral control held by conservative groups (Madasari, 2021) and state regulations regarding women's bodies in virtual spaces (Purwanti, 2020). This aligns with Rosida (2018), who affirms that the bodies of urban women in Indonesia continue to be a site of complex ideological contestation between self-pleasure and the constraints of patriarchal ideology.

Theoretically, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to expanding the application of Foucault's theory of technologies of the self to the dynamics of Generation Z's digital consumer spaces. This research affirms that current disciplinary technologies can be appropriated by subjects as tools for micropolitical resistance and the affirmation of agency. Practically, the implications of this study offer a clear warning and guidance for fashion industry strategists: traditional advertising approaches that objectify women to satisfy the male gaze are no longer relevant and may even provoke consumer resistance (Zhou, 2022). The industry is urged to adopt marketing strategies that emphasize inclusive comfort and the value of "quiet luxury," where the consumption of intimate apparel is more directed toward emotional well-being, relational affirmation, and respect for women's cultural boundaries of modesty, as recommended by Mores *et al.* (2025).

Although this study has presented rich qualitative ethnographic insights, it is not without a number of limitations. The concentrated focus on female university students in urban areas implies that these findings may not holistically represent the range of experiences of Generation Z women in Indonesia. Social class dynamics, as previously explored by Storr (2002) in the UK, or the role of higher levels of religiosity and stricter modesty norms in rural areas, have not yet been fully mapped. Therefore, future research is advised to expand the demographic scope and intersectionality of class, including comparisons between urban and rural consumers. Additionally, future research could utilize experimental quantitative research designs to precisely test the causal relationship between the intensity of exposure to inclusive campaigns on social media and levels of body shame when purchasing intimate apparel.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that for the majority of Generation Z women, intimate apparel has transformed from a functional garment or a symbol of sexual commodification into an essential instrument of autonomy and self-expression. Empirical evidence shows that 10 out of 14 participants actively position lingerie as a tool to boost self-confidence, celebrate body positivity, and manage their intra-psychological well-being regardless of external views or the male gaze. Interpreted through the lens of Foucault's (1988) and Jantzen *et al.*'s (2006) "technologies of the self," participants were found to strategically use lingerie to manage bodily performance in order to create personal autonomy. The significance of this study lies in its ability to fill a gap in the literature by presenting the cultural landscape of Generation Z. This study goes beyond previous findings by empirically demonstrating the 'dual impact' of the digital ecosystem; where social media successfully facilitates freedom of expression and inclusivity, yet simultaneously leaves ambivalence, cultural pressure, and fear of stigma for some other participants.

Although it offers in-depth theoretical and empirical insights, this study still has several limitations, particularly regarding the qualitatively limited sample size of 14 female students in the urban area of Surabaya. This demographic focus indicates that the findings cannot yet be fully generalized to represent the entire population of Generation Z women in Indonesia, particularly those living in rural areas or within communities characterized by more rigid conservative values (Madasari, 2021; Mores *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, future research is advised to expand the demographic scope of participants to include a wider variety of socioeconomic classes and geographic backgrounds. Additionally, a comprehensive quantitative approach or longitudinal (*diachronic*) research could be applied in future studies to measure the exact correlation between the intensity of exposure to inclusive social media campaigns and shifts in consumption patterns, as well as the evolution of cultural narratives regarding women's bodies in the future.

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