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'Trappings' of power, promise, purpose

You've heard of the power tie. Well, when the topic turns to women and their power trappings, a three-letter word just isn't big enough to fit it all in.

Try a book. Tiffany Ludwig and Renee Piechocki did. Their project *Trappings: Stories of*



Sherry
Lucas

Women, Power and Clothing (Rutgers University Press, \$29.95) explores those topics through interviews and portraits of 61 participants from 15

states, including ours (Oxford's Clara Lee Arnold is on the cover). A Jackson signing and talk with video is at 5 p.m. today at Lemuria Book Store.

In all, the authors' six-year journey had them talking to more than 550 women and girls across the country, covering the gamut from office workers to fashion execs, students to stay-at-home moms, elected officials to cowgirls and tomboys.

Trappings of power can be as obvious as boxing gloves, as subtle as shoulder pads, as showy as evening gowns and comfy as jeans. But all reveal something about the woman within.

Creative cohorts

Ludwig of Glen Ridge, N.J., and Piechocki, now of Pittsburgh, met in 2000 while working on an arts conference in New York City, and just clicked. Destined for something more interesting than setting up chairs, they stayed in touch.

"We wanted to do a project about women and we wanted to do a project that got us out of our studio. We didn't want to make a painting or a sculpture together," Piechocki said.

"We wanted to do something with people." They crafted the question, "What do you wear that makes you feel powerful?"

Picture Wonder Woman's laso of truth.

It's a fitting image for the question that served as a springboard for girls and women to talk about what power means to them and how they express it.

The book is just part of their "Trappings" collaboration. Exhibitions in galleries and museums are another aspect; they're pursuing a show in Oxford and are open to others. A key part is the Web site, twogirlsworking.com, the project's public archives.

All sides

The creators aimed for diversity — regional, age, cultural background, economic status, education status — for a picture of power, how it fits in our culture, how individuals react to it.

"The stories are so multilayered," Ludwig said.

"There are women who really embrace power, there are women who really reject power and all of their voices are included in this."

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