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Clothing serves as opening for discussions

SPARTA — Clothes may make the man, but they are far more likely to define a woman's feeling of power.

Tiffany Ludwig and Renee Piechocki traveled the country asking women to tell them about the clothing that makes them feel powerful. They then produced videos, audio tapes, and a book full of the responses they got.

They were back in Ludwig's hometown on Sunday, Nov. 11, to show videos and sign books at the ISD church, one of the places they conducted early interviews.

In one video, Ann Berry, a quilter, writer and teacher talked about feeling powerful when she wears lipstick, but not needing any when she was on a retreat with other quilters. Another interviewee, who is pregnant in the video,



Tiffany Ludwig, above, and Renee Piechocki, take turns signing their book "Trappings: Stories of Women, Power and Clothing."

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'TWO GIRLS WORKING' PRESENT THEIR PROJECT

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talks about the importance of wearing her own clothes for as long as she can.

But, "Trappings," as the project is called, "is not about clothes," Piechocki explained. "We chose the question as a way to engage women in a conversation about power."

The name of the project refers not just to what we wear, Ludwig said, "it's a tricky word, there are many other interpretations."

The two met when each was supplementing her artist income by working at a conference of the National Association of Artists' Organizations in 2000.

"We learned we worked together well; we had to figure out what we wanted to do," Ludwig said.

When they decided, they starting with women they knew, including Ludwig's mother who brought them to the ISD. "We interview people in their own spaces," Ludwig said, which included locations in Andover and Lafayette as well. They ended up traveling the country, generally finding someone they knew who

could put them up and introduce them around, but occasionally cold-calling.

They financed their travels, which included a trip to Alaska, with grants. Among the groups that helped were the National Endowment for the Arts, the Mid-Atlantic Endowment for the Arts, the Heinz Foundation and the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities. Often they were welcomed by an arts group, such as the University of Mississippi Art Department in Oxford, Miss, or the Santa Fe Art Institute.

At first the project was meant to be audio and video only, but a book grew from it, Piechocki said.

They produced their work as "Two Girls Working" because "that clearly describes us," Piechocki said.

There is another project in the works, but they are keeping it a secret. Since Ludwig lives in Glen Ridge and Piechocki in Pittsburgh, they are working mostly by long distance.

They can be found on the Internet at twogirlsworking.com.