

# COTTONS AND LACES AND STRING, OH, MY!

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By Joni M. Fisher

My daughter says I have issues with underwear. Call me old-fashioned, but my generation wore theirs *under* their clothing, hence the term. Her generation wears theirs showing. A glance around the crowd at the movie theater reveals colored bras under sheer tops, bra straps riding along with spaghetti straps on tops, jockey shorts peering over waistlines and other such nonsense. Why is this generation so proud of underwear?

Are these teen boys so status conscious that they feel compelled to display the brand name of their jockeys? Are they short-circuiting the debate on whether they prefer boxers or briefs? Perhaps they are trying to prove by demonstration that they wear underwear rather than go bare, or go 'commando' as they say.

Are the girls trying to provoke the adults who burned their bras in the sixties? Is this the anti-women's liberation movement? Are they too stressed to finish getting dressed? What is this fashion statement saying? Like Don Quixote searching for meaning where none exists, my quest for answers continues.

The history of underwear from loincloth to bloomers, to corsets starts with nobles who wore undergarments centuries ago. Underwear use gradually filtered down to the peasants. Through the ages undergarments have been made of metal (chastity belts), cotton, linen, silk, nylon and other synthetics, leather, edible materials and paper. Alas, underwear has undergone more fundamental changes

than color and size in the last few decades, changes I readily admit being unprepared to bear.

When my daughter joined the high school junior varsity cheerleading squad the coach told the girls to wear thong underwear under their uniform bloomers. While fending off thoughts of Monica Lewinski, I listened to the coach explain her suggestion. Her spoken reason was that cotton panties showed a panty line. The unspoken reason, of course, was that after the girls get used to the thongs they will never again have the need to tug down their underwear during a cheer.

Granted, underwear tugging is quite unbecoming behavior for young ladies to engage in while standing in full view of a crowded stadium, but isn't putting 14-year-olds in thong underwear also unbecoming? The other moms laughed at my prudishness and assured me that when they were cheerleading decades ago they also wore the skimpiest of string underwear. Aghast, I took my daughter to the store and bought the ridiculously-priced things.

I guess I am a prude. My daughter labeled my underwear 'granny panties' and suggested a switch to something akin to colored dental floss. While offering the lame argument that my panties weren't true granny panties because they weren't all white, I was suddenly amazed at how large my underwear appeared when held up for mocking. The fear of becoming my mother sent me off to buy a pair. One doesn't try them on first, you know. So I went home and discovered why no one tries them on at the store. AAAAGH! It had to have been mislabeled four sizes too small. The sides cut into the skin on my hips creating a far more serious panty line than ever seen before by womankind. And let's address the

discomfort factor associated with thongs. Eons ago when I was my daughter's age, the sensation created by thong underwear was known as a wedgie, and it was inflicted on freshmen regardless of gender. Let's just say the experience of wearing a thong brought back memories that begged for therapy. No, really, can't we bring back something else uncomfortable? Like corsets?

Growing up in Wisconsin led me to think of underwear in terms of thermal layering as survival wear to ward off frostbite. If it had been available, underwear made of Berber® or Polartec® would have appealed to my generation. We wore long johns for a third of the year, so this concept of referring to elastic string as underwear seemed quite bizarre, hazardous to one's health, and sheer lunacy.

Nonetheless, having moved to Florida helped me replace long johns with less substantial coverage. My husband pointed to the lacy, stringy under things in the Victoria's Secret catalog and stated that I would look great in them, which would be flattering except for the fact that this is the first year he's had to wear glasses. Should I wait until his eyesight deteriorates further to compensate for the differences between me and the twenty-something models before indulging his fantasy? I have shoes older than those girls! I have progressed somewhat by no longer calling the Victoria's Secret catalogs 'sleaze wear.'

It is a defensive mechanism to denigrate the lithe, toned, mysteriously bosomy skinny young girls in these catalogs. Of course I'd love to look sexy and appealing like the stunning uninhibited models, but it would take a significant investment in plastic surgery, dieting and exercise to make such alterations. It would defy a few laws as well—gravity and inertia. The limits of my imagination

do not allow me to consider my forty-something body in clothes barely worn by models half my age and well below my weight class.

As my marriage enters its twenty-fifth year, I must consider ways to keep our private life fresh and new and interesting. Compared to radical changes in diet and exercise, the idea of a change of underwear becomes more and more reasonable.

It is time for me to embrace my sexuality by changing my underwear from white cotton cover-ups to clingy thingies. After all, it is just for me and my sweetie to see. Perhaps, like pantyhose and high heels, this is just another gender-based sacrifice women make for the benefit of men. Three behaviors I'll have to master in order to disguise the change: one, refrain from tugging them out of where they are designed to be; two, relax the startled expression on my face; and three, walk normally. Using that old fake-it-until-you-make-it strategy, I will behave as if I'm not being halved by piano wire. I will walk and sit and move as if wearing good old comfy cotton coveralls. Wish me luck.

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