

Hamilton Spectator

Here's the skinny on skivvies

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"You wore tighty-whities to a wedding!" exclaimed a female friend to a 20-something male dinner companion on a recent Friday night at a pizza place in Chicago.

Not a strategic fashion choice on an occasion that ended with mixed company skivvy-dipping in the hotel pool, she scolded him.

His shame -- he did not offer his name to inquiring eavesdroppers from the next table -- points to the underwear-awareness revolution that's under way for men.

"Boxers or briefs?" has become a quaint question in an era that brings style- and comfort-conscious men boxer briefs, g-strings, trunks (proportional to Burt Lancaster's sand attire in *From Here to Eternity*) and even built-in condom pockets from a brand called basket.

Comfort, fit and outerwear are driving the underwear innovations.

The brand 2(x)ist has made a name for itself with contour pouch briefs that "are missing the slot where he can enter and exit without pulling down," said creative director Melody Fuhr.

"It snuggles him and if you were to turn the item sideways, it's like a nose, it has a profile."

Add such underwear upgrades to the list of credits for Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. The makeover show has mentioned its subjects' unmentionables on more than one episode.

Brands such as 2(x)ist and basket, which began with mainly a gay following, are seeing a crossover effect.

"The (gay) demographic is better at accepting new product," said basket brand director

Kelly Huegel. But since *Queer Eye*, she said, "we've gotten a lot of e-mails from (other) men and women wanting to know where they can get it."

Lower-slung denim, a trend spreading to men's jeans, and other close-fitting clothing have inspired a switch to sleeker styles with narrower sides, such as the trunk and bikini brief, said Dan Leppo, men's divisional merchandise manager for Bloomingdale's.

"Imagine stuffing a pair of boxer shorts in a pair of Seven (men's) jeans," he said. "It wouldn't be a great look."

For peekaboo fashion, Calvin Klein just added a men's underwear line called Pro Stretch with a red waistband. Diesel's new line includes a tricolour fitted brief.

Last month, online retailer Freshpair.com went very public with its campaign to designate Aug. 13 as National Underwear Day in the United States. Twenty models -- 10 men -- walked the streets of New York City in nothing but underwear, collecting signatures. The goal is 500,000.

A TV station covering the event canvassed men about their preferences, said Freshpair spokesman Sean Evans. "The first guy they stopped was wearing a thong," Evans said. "He said he didn't want any panty lines."

Underwear undercover

Some answers to the age-old boxers-versus-briefs question and other mysteries of the male underworld, according to 7,000 responses to an online survey by Freshpair.com:

- * 30 per cent of men prefer boxers.
- * 31 per cent prefer briefs.
- * 21 per cent prefer thongs.
- * 10 per cent prefer to wear nothing.
- * 45 per cent say they would like to wear g-strings but never have.

A superhero and minimalist

The Captain Underpants series may seem like potty humour but these tales of offbeat

superheroism are actually quite crafty, reaching reluctant-to-read seven- to 10-year-olds (and their parents). One book specialist calls them a "Harry Potter" for the younger set, with more than 29 million of the books in print.

Two new titles arrive in the next month or two.

From his drawers to her

Women's "boy briefs" are more literal than ever, borrowing the wide waistband and faux-pouch styling of men's.

A thong backlash, perhaps?

Brooke Timm, co-manager of Heartworks in Chicago, suspects it's simpler than that. The shop has sold scads of tank-and-brief sets from David & Goliath since introducing them about six months ago. The whimsical images and messages are the draw. "Some are silly, some are dirty," she says.

But they're all cute.

The pair that can stay there

Undyrugs are bathroom rugs whose motto -- see the headline -- says it all.

"No one's ever seen anything like them before," said Melinda Wolrab, design associate at Orange Skin in Chicago. "They're fun and original."

Their designer, Lawrie Wenner of Chicago, offers them on her Web site, Triplebstudio.com, for \$26 US.

GRAPHIC: Photo: Jason Wambsgans, the Chicago Tribune; Underwear for men has developed far beyond the traditional boxer shorts to briefs, thongs, g-strings and nothing at all. Some of the new styles which began with a mainly gay following are now crossing over into the mainstream.

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