



Gray Matter: Boxers, briefs or maybe both?

By Theresa Hogue

Reporter gets to the bottom of [National Underwear Day](#)

Bring up [underwear](#) in open-minded company, and you get an instant debate. In our office, for instance, there is heated disagreement regarding the eternal question, "[Boxers](#) or [briefs](#)?" We have decided, after much discussion, that women have a distinct abhorrence for whatever type of underwear their fathers wore. In a kind of reverse-Oedipal reaction, our unscientific survey determined that if a woman's father wore [briefs](#), she made sure to encourage her spouse or partner to wear [boxers](#), likewise those whose fathers wore [boxers](#) requested their significant others switch to [briefs](#). [Boxer briefs](#), however, were universally liked, our shaky theory being that those are a relatively new invention, and unlikely to be something we ever witnessed our father wearing (or saw in the laundry basket).

Why all this talk of [undergarments](#)? Because today, Aug. 10, is the third annual [National Underwear Day](#). According to the founders of the event, an online [intimate apparel](#) company called [Freshpair](#), Americans spend \$13 billion on [underwear](#) annually. On its Web site, visitors can sign an online petition in support of [National Underwear Day](#), which is celebrated simply by wearing your [underwear](#), and nothing else.

Now, this is by no means something I'd recommend, being as it's likely to at worst, get you arrested, and at best, really gross out your cubicle mates. The idea of a day devoted to [underwear](#) is, however, intriguing. Wearing [underwear](#) outside your clothes is something only brave fashionistas such as Carrie Bradshaw (of *Sex & The City*) might attempt, but even though most of us are actually grossed out when we see a woman's thong poking out of her low-slung jeans, we should take time to consider [underwear's](#) role in our daily lives.

According to a survey of 20,000 people posted on the Web site, 25 percent of men prefer [boxers](#) while 32 percent prefer [briefs](#). Another 28 percent prefer [boxer briefs](#), and 4 percent prefer [thongs](#). A whopping 7 percent prefer to go commando, that is, sans [underpants](#).

A more modest 6 percent of women prefer the au natural route, while 49 percent wear



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panties and another 28 percent prefer thongs. A strong 13 percent wear boy shorts, raising the question, do women who wear boy shorts prefer men in briefs? That remains unclear.

On the bra front, the average bra size in the early 1990s was a 34B, and has increased, presumably as our population has grown heftier, to a 36C average. The bra itself wasn't even invented until 1907, while men's first briefs appeared in 1935.

At <http://fashion-era.com/undergarments.htm>, visitors can read about the history of women's elaborate and mainly uncomfortable undergarments, mostly created to alter subtly or drastically women's shapes into more fashionable forms.

If you already complain about wearing underwire bras, take a look at 16th century iron corsets, worn to elongate and flatten, or a metal and whalebone corset from the 1600s, and the burdens of modern fashion will feel much lighter.

So while most of us won't be breaking out into our best Wonder Woman Underoos in the office today, go home tonight and take time to think about the wonders of underwear. Put on your favorite pair and give a toast to the joys of living whalebone free.

Theresa Hogue is the features reporter for the Gazette-Times. She has been known to covet adult-sized Underoos, and was a notorious underwear un-folder as a toddler and not to be trusted around the laundry basket. Gray Matter is a staff-written column occasionally appearing in the Corvallis Gazette-Times.

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