

The skinny on skivvies ; It's not just a boxers vs. briefs world anymore:[Chicagoland Final Edition]

Wendy Navratil, Tribune staff reporter. Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Aug 24, 2003. pg. 6

"You wore tighty-whities to a wedding?!" exclaimed one 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 tricolor fitted brief.

This month, online retailer Freshpair.com went very public with its campaign to designate Aug. 13 as National Underwear Day. 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 percent of men prefer boxers.

31 percent prefer briefs.

21 percent prefer thongs.

10 percent prefer to wear nothing.

45 percent say they would like to wear g-strings but never have.

\$3.4 billion is what they spend annually on underwear.

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