

GOING COMMANDO

It's not just Britney, Lindsay, and Paris: Throngs of women are tossing their thongs. We report on the invisible party line. **By Lindsay Van Gelder**

For many women, anecdotal evidence suggests, underwear is no longer considered an essential.



As anyone who has an Internet connection knows by now, there's apparently an underpants shortage in Hollywood. If you've been curious to get an eyeful of Paris, Lindsay, Britney, and other celebrities...well, your wish is their commando.

But what's most notable about the flashing fad isn't that these stars will do pretty much anything to get attention, but that the vast majority of young celebrities have also declared commando their new manifesto. "So many girls do it that I have to keep fresh panties in my kit—they're a staple," says Hollywood wardrobe stylist Amanda Reno, whose clients borrow designer clothing. In fact, she adds, about the only group

of women among her clientele who still consider underpants essential are those over 40. "At least 70 percent" of younger actresses show up lingerie-

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less for fittings and shoots, she reports.

Many regular women also seem to have decided that underwear is overkill. "It's amazing how often you open

the curtain, and the customer isn't wearing undergarments," says the manager of a fashionable boutique in West Hollywood. A 2004 study of several thousand people by the underwear company Freshpair showed that 6 percent of women and 7 percent of men go commando every day...and anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers are much larger now, particularly in places like Southern California and Miami, where warm weather intersects with a sexually overheated fashion vibe.

The no-panties phenomenon has meant that some boutique owners now have to assume the function of dressing room decency censors. Since other customers may be trying on the same garments, sanitation is also an issue. At the trendy boutique Belle Gray in Sherman Oaks, California, a male sales-

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string on the side, no lace or anything that can cause a bump.”

Capitalism meanwhile has come to the rescue for those who want to put *something* between coochie and trousers that’s not a thong. The Commandos Patch (available at gocommandos.com) and the Anti-panti (antipanti.com), both from California companies, are similar disposable inserts that adhere to the crotch of your jeans.

Women report that when you go commando often enough, donning drawers ceases to be part of your morning routine—even in situations where it ought to be. “One time I forgot and went to a sample sale, and everyone was like, Oh, my God,” adds the TV producer. (She was already down to her birthday suit before she noticed.)

Still, casual fashion is one thing and full-on sexhibitionism is another. “I think for certain women it’s a comfort issue, and there are women who are just a little more Bohemian and European,” says the West Hollywood boutique manager. “Then there are other women whose little secret used to be wearing sexy lingerie. The next step up of sexiness from that is to cross your legs and let a guy

know you’re not wearing underwear.”

In other words, if you want to up the ante, lose the panty.

Way back in 1979, Brooke Shields launched an entire advertising campaign on what didn’t come between her and her Calvins. Even harder-core was Sharon Stone’s notorious leg-crossing scene in *Basic Instinct* in 1992.

The escalation of risqué conduct

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isn’t surprising, though: Coarse behavior is contagious in our culture, says Debbie Then, a Los Angeles psychologist who specializes in appearance issues. “There’s a psychological principle called ‘the effect of mere exposure,’ although I hate the pun in this situation. How it works is this: When you

see something often enough, even if it’s initially repellent to you, it becomes familiar. And we like things that are familiar. We live in a world of observational learning that’s been accelerated by the speed with which information reaches us. When teenagers see these party girls all over the Internet, more and more will get drawn in.” Monkey see, monkey flash a view.

Whether or not lap dancers in limos are your role models, there remains a question: Is dispensing with drawers hazardous to your health? “There’s just not a health reason for underwear,” says Miriam Cremer, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the New York University School of Medicine. “The real issue, especially for women who are prone to yeast infections, isn’t the underwear, but how tight your clothes are.” Skin-tight jeans are problematic, with or without the panty line. Skirts are slightly dicier, according to Marisa Messori, a gynecologist at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach. “Transmission of disease isn’t a problem,” she says, “but you could get an irritation. If you want to let it all hang out, do it in your own bed, on your own sheets.”

The great thing about your own bed, of course, is that there’s no dress code to worry about. And, unless you’re Paris Hilton (or Britney), no cameras.

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clerk was mortified when a bare-butt customer fell out of the curtained dressing room with a pair of tiny trousers at half-mast around her knees. “She was apparently jumping up and down trying to squeeze into them and lost her balance,” reports another sales associate. The old adage about wearing clean underwear in case you’re in an accident clearly needs to be updated.

The real question, of course, is: Why are so many women dropping trou (and upping skirt)? Maybe we’re spending so much time, money, and teeth-gritting pain waxing and grooming that we subconsciously want to show off.

Maybe it’s a weirdly progressive sign that women can be as lewd as men. (After all, Jim Morrison of the Doors was arrested for exposing himself nearly 40 years ago.) Or maybe the world has become so numb to provocation that the last realm left is public puna. After all, it’s not just that women aren’t wearing underpants; they also want you to *know* they aren’t wearing underpants. As Amy Poehler cracked on *Saturday Night Live*, “What’s next? Stars pooping out of windows?”

At least part of the explanation

is purely utilitarian, having to do with the constantly changing relationship of outerwear to underwear. Historically, it all began with bikini panties. (Actually, first there were up-to-the-waist, dead-white lower-torso burkas, but no one remembers them, so we’ll start the timeline with bikinis.) As jeans got tighter and tighter, and as leggings and sweats became more popular, the dread of visible panty line encouraged women to switch from bikinis to thongs. But thongs aren’t flattering on many bodies, they nastily floss your butt, and when the “whale

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tail” inches up over the top of your pants, it looks about as appealing as food caught in your teeth.

As the midriff gained prominence in recent years and pants were slung lower and lower, many women simply decided that ding, dong, the thong was dead. “I hate when you see girls sitting down and their thong straps are visible over the waists of their low-rise pants,”

says makeup artist Jeannia Robinette. There’s also a general sense that any underwear at all just adds an extra layer to the silhouette of a piece of clothing. “I’ll wear boy shorts with some outfits, but when I’ve got on a great pair of jeans, I won’t wear a thong,” says one television producer in Los Angeles. “I notice with tight pants that it makes a visual difference—you look a little skinnier, and you feel lighter, too.”

On the red carpet, there’s a fine art to calibrating when to go commando and when not to. “I personally would never allow it with a miniskirt,” Reno

says. “But there are certain longer dresses that have no room for a panty line. When it’s also a really sheer dress, it’s a judgment call. We look at it under the light.” If the woman has “a full Brazilian wax—there can’t be one stray, errant hair,” commando might be the way to go; if not, Reno prefers Calvin Klein Shimmer String thongs, which “have a nude (*continued on page 145*)

DO YOU EVER GO COMMANDO?
Do they or don't they? Besides paparazzi shots, there's another way to find out which celebrities go commando: Come right out and ask. By Jeffrey Slonim

DONATELLA VERSACE
Never. I just like lingerie too much.

KERRY WASHINGTON
Just for fun sometimes.

KIMORA LEE SIMMONS
[whispering]: I am going commando tonight.

HEATH LEDGER
I am right now.

EVA LONGORIA
I...ah, no....

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