

SPANX ME: LIBERATE OUR LINGERIE

Spanx, garter belts, pantyhose, oh my!

Boomer midlife crisis #2,493- I'm looking for a [garter belt](#) that I bought years ago to engage in erotic folderol with a former partner. The goal is to protect my beleaguered [lady parts \(i.e. vaginal area.\)](#) I need the right garter belt for below-the-belt survival. After yeast infections and even more painful outbreaks on these tender tissues, I'm looking for liberation from things that rub me the wrong way..

Time for a mid-life lingerie manifesto.



We [Boomer women](#) want to look our very best-especially those of us still uncoupled. So we take the most sensitive parts of our body and chafe them with denim seams, encase them in polyester, bisect them with thongs, imprison them in airless pantyhose, and squash them into [Spanx](#) and other undergarments with the strength of tensile steel. We're supposed to be modern women, enjoying female liberation from girdles, corsets, hoop skirts, bustles, chastity belts-the suffocating, strangulating garments that endangered women's health and lives. But are we?

Once upon a time I was a clueless twenty-something traveling through France, equipped with the mandatory backpack and jeans. I almost fell into the English Channel as the overloaded backpack tipped me backwards, and had to be rescued by a doughty British tar who picked me up by my backpack's straps and deposited me on deck like an errant puppy. Once on shore, I made no friends on the [Paris Metro](#) carrying a backpack at just the right height to hit seated French commuters right in the face as I desperately clung to the pole. Merde, alors.

One night, we went to a working-class Moroccan bistro—it was all we could afford. The restroom was a few holes in the floor. I had to delicately balance myself over the hole so as not to stain my underwear or topple into the muck, while praying that the bottoms of my jean pants wouldn't soak up the surrounding effluence. A waitress waltzed in and whipped up her long skirt with no panties underneath. She was done in seconds, while I continued to totter in my Levis on the brink of disaster. (I was too preoccupied with my dilemma to notice—or care- if she washed her hands). Who was the freer female?

Not that we want to wax nostalgic about the good old days, as a brief review of the [history of horrors of ladies' lingerie](#) demonstrates.

To give them credit, the [Greek and Roman ideal body](#) type was a natural, pouting belly, large derriere, thick thighs and small breasts, which shows that the current skeletal style that fashion imposes on real women is the real mythology. Corsets date as far back as Crete. They weren't deadly-like the [hoop skirts](#) that caught on fire or became trapped in carriage wheels or machinery—but they did force organs to shift around, causing indigestion and constipation and eventually weakening back muscles. Nor did they leave much room for pregnant women's fetus-incubating bellies.



Skipping hundreds of decades, the [Sears Roebuck catalog for 1897](#) offered corsets starting at eighteen inches—[“the goal of all this winching was said to be a waist that a man could encircle with his hands.”](#)

There's the famous scene in [Gone with the Wind](#) when Mammy ruthlessly cinches in heroine [Scarlett O'Hara](#)'s mid-section to eighteen-and-half-half inches. (We won't even mention how this still [best-selling novel](#) and classic films also romanticizes slavery and glorifies the Ku Klux Klan. BTW, “Mammy”—played by actor/singer/songwriter [Hattie McDaniel](#)—was the first African-American to win an Academy Award). Scarlett's waist increases to twenty inches after three pregnancies, and she vows to have no more children, even if she loses Rhett

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Butler. What misplaced priorities—preferring a corseted waist size instead of [Clark Gable](#)-a decision probably due to a lack of oxygen to the brain, not to mention other body parts.

Which is why French revolutionaries [burnt corsets in Paris in the 1790s during the French Revolution](#) for “[freedom of worship and freedom of dress](#).” For years, [midlife ladies’ female hysteria was blamed on corsets](#), although it was considered to be shocking to go without one. You had to be a revolutionary to breathe.

[Amelia Bloomer](#) didn’t actually create bloomers, but she was an early advocate of comfortable clothes. “The costume of women...should conduce at once to her health, comfort, and usefulness; while it should not fail also to conduce to her personal adornment, it should make that end of secondary importance,” she stated. That Amelia was always a dreamer.



One would think that the eventual acceptance of women’s pants would create nirvana below the waist. But pants have seams and zippers and are designed for flat stomachs. Most women have curves, creating unwanted friction and a fundamental contradiction, right where I feel them the most. Pants and jeans are designed for women whose stomachs are as flat as a pancake, or preferably concave, and a thigh gap as wide as their hips. Even at 106 pounds soaking wet, my recalcitrant belly rebelliously curves outwards.

Enter SPANX— the new corset.

It’s hard not to resonate with the [Horatio Alger story](#) of [Sara Blakeley, Spanx founder, current billionaire, wife and mother](#)—a woman who triumphed over tragedy, overcame all odds, and won the trifecta. How can any boomer woman not praise her in solidarity? [She’s credited with reinventing the girdle, the control top, and shapewear in general, not to mention disappearing the panty line.](#)

But is all well in the brave new world of women’s shapewear?

[According to one study](#), Spanx and other shapewear compress the stomach, intestines and colon, aggravating acid reflux, erosive esophagitis and stress incontinence. Then there’s neuralgia paresthetica—tingling, numbness and leg pain because the peripheral nerve in the thighs is compressed—“it’s like putting giant rubber bands around your upper thighs and tightening them when you sit. Plus decreasing circulation, which can lead to blood clots.

Shapewear also traps moisture, predisposing wearers to both yeast and bacterial infections and folliculitis when bacteria get trapped among the hair follicles. Diabetic and generously sized women are especially at risk.”

If we don't have underwear that feels as good as it looks, we're still sisters under the skin—and below the waist—with the Chinese women who were crippled by having their feet bound, women whose ear lobes are enormously stretched by weights, and [women whose necks are stretched artificially to resemble human giraffes](#).



Will the neglected garter belt save us? [Garter belts are associated with kink, Victoria's Secret, and Fredericks of Hollywood](#). I was on the exercycle last night, watching a Mexican telenovela starring [Jane the Virgin's Rogelio](#) (i.e. [actor Jaime Camil](#)). In the drama of adultery, true love, and betrayal, the hapless bridegroom is plied with drink by his nogoodnik friends and *tempted by dancing girls—in garter belts*. He is finally seduced by the bride's nogoodnik sister—*wearing a garter belt*. The betrayed bride strips off her wedding dress in public, *revealing a garter belt*—and runs away from the altar. (Nothing jiggles as she runs, which is how we know this is a work of fiction).

I want to boogie like a [1920s flapper](#), free of chafing, bacterial incubation and saddle sores, while still being able to breathe. As wit, poet, and member of the Algonquin Club's Vicious Circle [Dorothy Parker](#) said, "brevity is the soul of lingerie." Liberate our lingerie! Bring back the garter belt.

