



Jane Birkin's sheer nerve, 1969.

Film Center gala in Chicago dressed in a white Alexander McQueen minidress, the blogosphere had a field day discussing her prominent nipplitis and unsupported bosom. And a few days afterward, there she was again, letting it all hang out in an ivory Prabal Gurung halter top while speaking at the 2013 Licensing Expo in Las Vegas.

Going commando used to be the hallmark of provocative young celebs, whose drunken crotch flashes (Paris Hilton) and nipple slips (Lindsay Lohan) helped make *TMZ* a household name. But these days, elegant women, wearing elegant clothes at elegant events, are also embracing an underwear-free lifestyle—and risking the same wardrobe malfunctions as their less classy counterparts. At the Cannes Film Festival, Eva Longoria inadvertently showed off her bikini waxer's handiwork as she ascended a staircase in a slit-to-there mint green Versace gown. Anne Hathaway had a similar experience while exiting a car in a Tom Ford dress at the 2012 New York premiere of *Les Misérables*, much to the delight of the awaiting paparazzi. The Prada ensemble she wore at the Academy Awards, meanwhile, inspired two salacious new Twitter handles: @HathawayNipple and @AnnesNipples.

So what's behind this sudden aversion to under things? Are we entering a new phase of fashion feminism à la the Age of Aquarius? Emily Weiss, the much photographed founder of the hit beauty blog *Into the Gloss*, has taken a stance that would make Gloria Steinem proud. "A lot of bra marketing is about transforming you into something you aren't," Weiss says. "It's about creating this male image of what's sexy: pushing your boobs together, making them look three sizes bigger. It's feeding a lie instead of supporting your body or making you excited to put something on because it looks really pretty." And so, Weiss generally goes brassiere-free.

Though Weiss's lingerie philosophy is personal rather than political, according to Valerie Steele, the director of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, it is still very much in line with the ethos of the '60s and '70s. Back then, women rebelled against the torpedo-boobed "sweater girl" prototype of decades past by embracing a more natural look—and, famously, trashed their bras in 1968 in protest of the Miss America pageant. "It was liberation of the body," Steele says. "The idea was that you were naturally beautiful and perfect the way you were." »

WHAT LIES BENEATH?

For some of the world's best-dressed women, the answer is nothing. *Vanessa Lawrence* gets to the bottom of the underwear-free trend.

MEDIA SCRUTINY OF Gwyneth Paltrow's fashion choices is nothing new, but throughout a circuit of public appearances this spring, the clothes she had on her person attracted less attention than the ones she had apparently left at home: her bra and panties. At the Los Angeles premiere of *Iron Man 3*, the actress was extensively photographed in a sheer Antonio Berardi gown that showcased several inches of her Tracy Anderson-toned derriere. (The look introduced a new term into the sartorial lexicon: "side butt.") Later that month, when Paltrow accepted an award at the Gene Siskel

WHY NAKED TRUTH



Clockwise, from top left: Bosom-buddy looks from Sonia Rykiel's spring 1975 collection; Cara Delevingne hanging out in Burberry Prorsum, in May; Kate Moss at her 19th-birthday party, New York, 1993; Anne Hathaway's pointy Prada, in February; Gwyneth Paltrow's big reveal, in April; Rosie Huntington-Whiteley's side boob in Gucci, 2012; a look from Yves Saint Laurent, fall 1989; Jenna Lyons takes the plunge, 2012.

But just because women like Weiss are rejecting a *Maxim* magazine ideal of hotness doesn't mean they're uninterested in looking appealing—quite the opposite, in fact. “Going without a bra can look very sexy,” says Carly Cushnie, who with her partner, Michelle Ochs, designs the body-conscious fashion line Cushnie et Ochs. “But it's sexy in a completely different way. It's laid-back and less obvious.”

And in the realm of high fashion, it's really nothing new. Yves Saint Laurent famously sent braless models down his runways in even the sheerest of tops starting in the '70s. Today, you'd be hard-pressed to spot a bra on any Fashion Week catwalk—unless it's being treated as outerwear.

Lola Rykiel, the head of U.S. communications for Sonia Rykiel, says that when her grandmother introduced her signature striped sweaters sans brassieres in the '60s, “she wasn't saying ‘Burn your bra’ or whatever. She was just showing a sophisticated and natural way of wearing a sweater. It was not exhibitionist; it was about a sense of freedom.” The elder Rykiel never wore a bra, and her fashionable granddaughter is following her lead. A formfitting dress, Lola says, can “get killed” by the lumps and bumps that straps impose upon a silhouette.

The below-the-waist corollary to that is, of course, the visible panty line. The jewelry designer and girl about town Genevieve Jones admits that she occasionally leaves her knickers at home to avoid that fashion faux pas. “It's just with thin materials or things with cutouts that I don't want to show underwear,” she explains.

Until now, the alternative was to squeeze into a girdle or, more recently, a pair of Spanx, designed to provide a glass-smooth foundation for all manner of outfits. But the era of body shapers may be coming to a close. Those thigh-length undergarments are not suited for the revealing silhouettes currently dominating the red carpet—if there's anything

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more unappealing than a panty seam on the cheek, it's a glimpse of suntan beige control top. What's more, those glorified Ace bandages aren't exactly comfortable and can result in a frozen, cyborg-like silhouette—the body equivalent of an over-Botoxed face. The stylist Kate Young, whose clients include Natalie Portman and Michelle Williams, describes that phenomenon as “a tube of butt. It's so gross,” she says. “The whole point of an ass is that it shakes when you walk. It should move.”

But, of course, it shouldn't move too much. With actresses and civilians alike now putting in elite-athlete-worthy hours at the gym and juicing themselves down to 8 percent body fat, it makes sense that they'd want to show off the results. “Certain people don't wear underwear to prove that they don't have to,” Young says. “The message is ‘Look, my body's so incredibly good, I don't need any help.’ I would say it's a fuck-you move.”

Whatever the motivation, even the most ardent underwear avoiders admit there are some situations that call for covering up. “I mean, I'm not going to church in a sheer top without a bra,” says Jones, adding that she also wears a little something from Kiki de Montparnasse or Agent Provocateur for business meetings. “They're all in suits, so the least I can do is wear a bra.” According to Young, nipples should be the deciding factor. “If they're going to poke out, you should probably at least wear silicone covers so construction workers aren't going to hoot at you the whole day,” she says.

Jones, on the other hand, thinks visible nipples, in the right context, “are amazing—something a woman shouldn't be embarrassed about. I've worn things that I only discovered were sheer when the flashbulbs went off,” she says with a shrug. “I would be more bothered by a zit on my face.”

And Weiss, who is often seen sporting vintage denim shirts unbuttoned to mid-sternum—a look that, though popularized by such mainstream outlets as the J. Crew catalog, puts a bra-free girl at major risk of revealing more than she intended—also isn't sweating the idea of giving strangers a peek. “What's the worst that could happen?” she asks. “We all have them, we've all seen them, what's the big deal? At the end of the day, they're just boobs.” ♦