

CINDY LANGE-KUBICK

Lingerie feeds on insecurities



From loincloths to hair shirts, corsets to chastity belts, women — and occasionally men — have suffered the indignities of underclothing that served the function of constraint.

Let's talk underwear. Intimate apparel. Undies. Briefs. Drawers. Panties. Skivvies. While shopping the other day — an activity I rank right up there with having the plaque removed from my teeth — I was lured into the lingerie department by a friend.

A single friend, mind you — one who wears lacey, silky things under her tailored suits at the office.

I, a longtime married woman, who not infrequently retires for the night wearing curlers, cold cream and a faded, food-stained T-shirt, was not impressed.

Sure, they had every kind of undergarment imaginable. There were demi-bras and minimizers, tap pants and garter belts, bustiers and bikinis.

Wait, that's not all.

Remember when thongs were something you wore on your feet? And push-ups were a form of calisthenics?

No more.

Fig leaves never looked so good.

The racks were topped with photographs of Victoria's Secretesque models and slogans designed to appeal to women's bodily insecurities: "It Must Be Magic," "Hidden Fantasies" and "The Shaping System."

Gotcha. A full 75 percent of American women are dissatisfied with their bodies, and Madison Avenue has the answer.

And you thought the days of the Iron Maiden and corsets were long gone.

Personally, I gravitate toward substantial undergarments. The type of apparel that, when the elastic wears out, has a future life as a dust

rag or a car chamois. The kind of thing your kid pulls out of the laundry basket and tries to put on because he's mistaken it for a tank top.

I've gone the other route. I've attended lingerie parties — the '90s answer to Tupperware — and returned home carrying two ounces of red gauze and an empty wallet.

And somewhere in the recesses of my dresser are a pair of silk stockings, a garter belt and a matching brassiere — all in black.

But let's face it, lace itches.

And what were the Parisians thinking when they came up with "French cut" underwear? Please.

Give me a good ol' pair of briefs, the kind my mom used to wear, any day. Mom underwear. It's the kind of stuff that stays where it belongs. Some of these newfangled trappings seem to have a life of their own; they creep and crawl into places they don't belong.

In the lingerie business, form definitely does not follow function.

It follows our insecurities.

It follows the marketplace.

It follows societal rules and expectations.

From loincloths to hair shirts, corsets to chastity belts, women —

and occasionally men — have suffered the indignities of underclothing that served the function of constraint.

The constraint of sexuality.

The constraint of power.

But after all, isn't this what women want? Uplifted breasts? Confined behinds?

According to "The History of Ladies Underwear" (the title should give you a clue here), "It seems that in every age women feel the need to be pinched, strangled and squeezed in."

Gosh, it must be in the genes.

There certainly are no external forces defining the appropriate contours of my body for me.

I haven't taken any polls lately, but I'm betting most women would prefer an equal salary return on their educational dollar and wearing regulation cotton undies, to earning 60 cents on the dollar and wearing black silk teddies.

I know I would.

Next week a critique of the cosmetics counter. Makeover anyone?

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SIMON LIVERANI

U.S. causes Cuban woes, too



It's all very sad, I agree, but I also think that under Fulgencio Batista, the Cubans did not have a pot to piss in. That's meant literally, since indoor plumbing was a luxury unknown to the vast majority of Cubans.

The recent flood of boat people from Cuba is the natural consequence of a wrong policy toward that country since 1961. That is when the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Havana.

The Cuban-American community took advantage of the unprecedented publicity on national television to give new strength to their cause. Answering a reporter who asked about pre-revolutionary Cuba, one Cuban emigre replied, "It was paradise." Cuba before 1959 is shown as being the Garden of Eden, with Fidel Castro playing the part of the snake. Could we have a more partisan view than this? I doubt it.

The picture presented to us by television is truly tear-jerking. Decrepit emigres plead to see Cuba once more before it's too late, and stories about broken families abound. It's all very sad, I agree. But I also think that under Fulgencio Batista, the Cubans did not have a pot to piss in. That's meant literally, since indoor plumbing was a luxury unknown to the vast majority of Cubans.

The voices of these people are never heard on CNN, because they would tell us Castro was their savior. Living conditions for 90 percent of the population improved greatly after the revolution. Health care became available to everybody. In 1965, Cuba spent \$19.95 per person for health care, compared to \$1.98 per person in Mexico and 68 cents in Ecuador, according to Burns' "A Concise History of Latin America."

In the 10 years after Castro took over, the number of teachers in Cuba tripled, and schools quintupled. From 1953 to 1981, the percentage of children enrolled in school increased from 54 percent to 97.3 percent. This does not seem to me the work of a bloodthirsty dictator.

No one denies that Cuba has failed in its attempt to become an economically developed country or that present-day conditions are of absolute poverty. But the economic blockade by the United States is in great part responsible for this condition.

Any country in the world, whether socialist or not, would not be able to withstand such a lengthy sabotage of its economy. Cuba was simply not given a fair shot at developing, and it's a miracle that it has lasted this long. We should not rejoice, because when Castro falls, it will be a defeat for all those who believe in the right of self-determination.

Many of you will reply that any country that has the same leader for 35 years is nothing other than a dictatorship. Well, I didn't say Cuba was democratic. But why does the United States wage a war to restore a regime that won't allow women to vote in Kuwait, install a military dictatorship in Chile, and at the same time, destroy a country's economy in the name of democracy?

Maybe the people of Cuba were politically coerced, but at the same time, they were given free education from preschool to college, free health care and house rents that could not exceed 10 percent of their income. Among dictatorships, this seemed to be one of the least threatening to the ideals of freedom.

Now, the problem is how to stop

the flood of people into camps at Guantanamo Bay and in Panama. The reason they are fleeing Cuba is because the economy has collapsed, and Castro has no power to restore it. The only way the United States will be able to stop the immigration is by lifting the embargo. After all, it's probably cheaper than spending millions of dollars supporting 30,000 Cubans in various detention centers. All this money could be saved by releasing the economic stranglehold on Cuba.

The era before Castro might have been a paradise for some; it was a sort of Las Vegas of the Caribbean. Businesses used to prosper under a chronic state of corruption, and the few people who had money lived like kings. The people we hear on television complaining about being kicked out of Cuba prospered under a dictatorship that was a lot bloodier than Castro's.

In 1984, after 25 years of socialism, Cuba had an average annual growth rate of 4.7 percent, which was one of the highest in Latin America.

Now, if you ask yourself why this guy doesn't go to Cuba if he likes it so much, then you just wasted 10 minutes.

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