

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PANTS,

OR HOW TO INTERPRET PERSONALITY FROM HIS UNDERWEAR DRAWER.

As a woman, my thoughts about male underwear, if forced to think about it at all, are usually along the lines of “do I have to wash any?” and “do I need to buy him any?” From this, you will be clever enough to deduce I am in a loving relationship with a pant wearer. As a psychologist, however, my main thoughts centre on whether people are demonstrating any unusual behaviour associated with underwear, perhaps described as paraphilic - “what fetish will I encounter today?”

Hmm, yes, boring and even dark at times. There must be a middle ground here and that ought to be in the realm of personality. Psychological trait theory (developed by people such as Jung and Eysenck) tells us that emotions, thoughts, and behaviour vary between people, but are usually stable within an individual. So, the way we perceive the world and behave in a wide range of social and personal contexts is what makes each of us the person we are. Research demonstrates that fashion and clothing positively or negatively influences and regulates our emotions, and signals our gender, occupation, and status (Kwon 1994). This will necessarily be shaped by social constraints, but perhaps it is in the choosing and wearing of unseen clothing, underwear, that really shows our personality in its true, ahem, colours.

Wearing and buying underwear is about as personal a context as you can get. Everyone has a connection to underwear - even those who eschew the use of the pant for aesthetic, comfort or nefarious reasons have had some relationship with underclothes at some point. If we could tell what traits a person had simply by looking in their pants drawer we'd save an awful lot of time. So, strictly in the interests of science, I endeavoured to find out if the model, make and colour of pants could tell me anything about a man.

Historically, male underwear is somewhat shrouded in mystery. This is surprising in a sex that is happy to cavort around the bedroom in pants, despite their bedfellows wishing they'd put some clothes on. Look up women's underwear and there is no shortage of commentary about bloomers, bras and corsets, but not so with the simple pant. It seems our brethren have only been wearing pants, as we would recognise them, for a few decades. So the variety is limited in comparison to the choice that the female pant buyer faces. The male buyer needs to choose between two basic styles, the brief and the boxer, with very few, but ominously notable, exceptions. Briefs are common in both the male & female wardrobe, but there is definitely something about the level of support in the male brief that reveals the psychological make-up. Men who choose to wear these definitely achieve more “buoying up” in their lives. We're generally talking guys with more introspective outlooks than others and possibly more drive and ambition. Boxers are the comfort end of the market, and definitely associated with the “let it all hang out” kind of chap. This pant wear is definitely more laid-back and relaxed than the brief guy, he sees himself as a “dude”

There's always a splinter group no matter what we are talking about, and pants are no exception. Here we have the faction known as the Thong. Why anyone willingly wears thongs is beyond me. Perhaps it is a rite of passage that some men think they must traverse. Let's face it, entering a strict religious sect advocating chastisement of the body is not really an option in the modern world. Wearing of the thong may just replace that in the more masochistic personality.

Colour and material must also be indicators to personality. White snow-like expanses of cotton tell us the wearer favours cleanliness and practicality, whereas a darker colour like grey or black suggests introspection, free thinking, or, possibly, knowledge of an inability to keep white pristine. Another issue of importance in evaluating the pant wearer is how he acquires the clothing

that holds his most treasured masculine possessions. Does he run into the nearest department store, hurriedly grasping packets of the correct size and throwing cash at the assistant? Ah, a busy life full of energy, or possibly, he's embarrassed by the mere thought of his own underwear. Does he still have his underwear bought by his mother? Not indicative of a good decision maker. But, if he wears those lovingly purchased by his partner, then he is a trusting soul who will allow open access to his life. Or, he could just be lazy.

Seriously, if I advocated appraising someone's personality by examining his underwear, I would be drummed out of the secret society that regulates psychologists' behaviour. However, pant related behaviour is certainly an interesting area of scrutiny. So next time you find your loved one looking through your drawers, you will know she simply has your best interests at heart.

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