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Faja

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Faja

Abstract

The faja is a compression undergarment, similar to a girdle. The faja is worn very tight on the body to create an extremely curvy hourglass figure. The undergarment shifts organs and flesh and has been said to reduce one's appetite. The degree of figure shaping and body compression depends on the fabric composition. Versions can be found in mixtures of spandex, cotton, nylon, or latex; the less forgiving the material, the more flattering the effect. The undergarment may be closed with hooks, a zipper, or both.

Disciplines

Art and Materials Conservation | Fashion Design | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts

Comments

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FAJA

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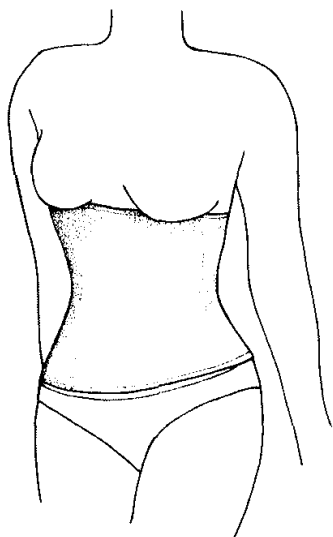
The faja typically extends from under the bust to below hip level. This type is often made of a material called Powernet, a very firm net-like fabric construction of spandex, nylon, and cotton. However, a variety of shapes and sizes can be found. One version is full-body jumpsuits, which may include covering of the upper arms, legs, and bust area. However, these jumpsuits are typically seen with the bust area open to show the bra. These full-body versions are also marketed as postsurgery garments. They appear to be engineered for function rather than aesthetic appeal. Another version is the tight bellyband, similar to a corset, closed with a center front row of hooks and eyes. These versions can be found in an array of colors and are often accented with lace to add sex appeal.

History

Faja is the Spanish word for wrap. The faja originated in Colombia as a postsurgery medical garment for liposuction patients. Its postoperative function is to reduce swelling to make sure that the skin tightens as desired. People then adopted it for everyday wear to mold their figures to a more idealized, curvy version as seen on celebrities. Colombian manufacturers designed and fabricated the fajas for nonmedical wear, as did manufacturers in Brazil, Chile, and other parts of the region. The Colombians' designs evolved most successfully, eventually earning them the veneration of the entire region. Colombian fajas are known for their ability to not roll up or bunch and are very compressive. This tight compression is known to help women instantly hide up to four dress sizes.

The Faja in the United States

The faja came to the United States as a result of immigration. Colombian women who moved to the United States continued to use the faja as a body-contouring device, with



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a large population centered in Queens, New York. In the beginning, only Latinos and black women were interested in wearing the faja; however, it eventually spread to wider use, as U.S. consumers realized the effectiveness of the faja for figure control. Use began to spread throughout New York State, even to areas where Latino populations are small. Several companies import fajas from Colombia to sell in the United States.

Influence and Impact

While the faja continues to be marketed for postoperative wear as well as postpartum wear to reduce the size of the abdomen, its use has expanded as a tool to achieve a current fashion silhouette. This is similar to the roles that girdles have played over the years. Today, there are two major fashion trends that drive the popularity of the faja. The garment is especially popular among younger Latina women trying to achieve the idealized “Coke bottle” or “guitar-shaped” figure. Young women who are part of the counterculture that mimics 1950s pinup girls have also adopted the faja. Even slender young women use the faja to create the hourglass figure that allows them to fit into waist-emphasizing fashions such as capri pants, swing skirts, and halter tops. They see this sexy self-presentation as a type of female empowerment.

More well-known support undergarments, such as Spanx, introduced women to the concept of extra help for figure problems and made the idea of shaping the body with compressive undergarments more acceptable. The faja has taken this to the extreme, with the act of donning one often compared to a battle of woman versus fabric. This is in stark contrast to feminist women of the 1970s who cast off such constrictive undergarments as symbols of repression. It appears that young women of today are willing to endure some discomfort to create their desired appearance.

See also CORSET

Compare to CHEMISE

Further Reading

La Ferla, R. “A Sly Wink to Pinups of the Past.” *New York Times*, May 17, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/17/fashion/a-sly-wink-to-pinups-of-the-past.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

Nir, S. M. “Rediscovering a Shortcut to an Hourglass Figure.” *New York Times*, May 16, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/16/nyregion/with-fajas-tight-as-corsets-shortcut-to-hourglass-figure-is-rediscovered.html>.

■ ELLEN C. MCKINNEY

FEDORA

The fedora is a soft felt hat with a medium-width (approximately 2.5-inch), slightly curled brim. The brim is often worn with the front snapped down and curled up at