

The Bikini:
The Clash Between Self-Expression and Male Subjugation

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When readers flipped through their issues of *Women's Wear Daily* on June 3, 1964, they were reportedly shocked to find images of model Peggy Moffitt in a topless swimsuit. Austrian-American anti-establishment designer Rudi Gernreich had designed this waist-high bikini bottom with suspenders running between Moffitt's breasts. Avant-garde and controversial, this "monokini" galvanized public opinion. It received an enormous amount of press coverage, which contributed to the acceptance of more "modest" designs such as the bikini. Gernreich believed fashion could promote sexual equality and aimed to free women from the bonds of traditional, patriarchal fashion. Although he was a man, he found conforming and binding fashions that concealed women's natural curves to be problematic. Gloria Steinem named him "the American designer responsible for the desertion of the feminine" in her 1965 report on the monokini.¹ Consumers, however, perceived the monokini as a joke at women's expense rather than a garment that furthered women's liberation. Only three thousand suits were sold, as few dared to wear it. Nonetheless, Gernreich's design embodied the 1960s cultural shift toward new forms of sexual expression.²

In the 1960s, the rise of provocative dress as a fashion trend in the United States coincided with a feminist reawakening. This second wave of feminism advocated for more rights for women, such as control over their sexuality and reproductive rights. One group of radical Women's Liberationists attacked the fashion industry as patriarchal and degrading. Female

¹ Gloria Steinem, "Gernreich's Progress; Or, Eve Unbound," in *The New York Times: the Times of the Sixties- The Culture, Politics, and Personalities that Shaped the Decade*, ed. John Rockwell (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers Inc., 2014), 165.

² Richard Martin, *Splash! A History of Swimwear* (New York: Random House Inc, 1990), 113-115; Susan Ward, "Swimwear," Berg Fashion Library, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/view/bazf/bazf005556.xml?q=swimwear&isfuzzy=no>; and Arianna E. Funk, "The Bikini," in *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia*, ed. Annette Lynch and Mitchell D. Strauss (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 30-31.

defenders of the new fashions, however, argued that body-baring garments provided a novel opportunity for sexual expression.³ To this day, historians of fashion and historians of women's studies view the impact of fashion on women's liberation differently. For a long time, historians of women's studies asserted that sexualized fashion furthered male objectification of the female body. Although they make valid claims, they fail to acknowledge that revealing fashions also empower women by providing opportunities for sexual expression.⁴

One provocative garment, the bikini, epitomizes this paradox. On July 5, 1946, French engineer Louis Réard revealed the modern bikini at the Piscine Molitor swimming pool in Paris. He had constructed the garment out of less than 30 inches of fabric and called it the "world's smallest bathing suit." French showgirl and model Micheline Bernardini modeled the garment. Named after the Bikini Atoll, a site for post-war atomic bomb testing, the bikini became an instant hit. It immediately received 50,000 fan letters, mostly from men. Réard's invention was a continuation of a twentieth century movement that sought to create more practical swimwear for women and to conserve fabric for military purposes. Although women accepted the bikini in France and Australia, the bikini did not enter mainstream America until the 1960s. In the early 1960s, though most Americans still found it too provocative, young women began to embrace this new garment. Mass marketing aimed primarily at men helped to popularize the bikini by the end of the decade.⁵ Part of the bikini's appeal sprung from the fact that many women wanted to present themselves in a way that pleased men. They wanted to satisfy "the male gaze." Although

³ Betty Luther Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s & 1970s* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 16-21.

⁴ Linda M. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 2006), 1-11.

⁵ Funk, "The Bikini," 30 and Corey Adwar, "The Scandalous Story of the Bikini's Debut," *Business Insider Australia*, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/the-scandalous-story-of-the-bikinis-debut-2014-7>.

the bikini furthered male objectification of women's bodies, it also provided a venue for expression. The legacy of the bikini, along with other sexualized fashions of the 1960s, is emblematic of the continuous tension between sexual expression and male appropriation.

To fully analyze the radical nature of the bikini in a 1960s context, it is crucial to understand the complete transformation of women's swimwear from concealing to revealing. In the nineteenth century, women's "bathing gowns" were long flannel dresses. They had multiple layers that concealed trousers underneath. Lead weights hung from the sides to keep the gowns from rising when the bathers entered the water. After mixed bathing became popular in the 1830s, men's bathing gowns shrunk to allow for vigorous swimming. Meanwhile, throughout the century, women's swim costumes concealed their figures from male eyes. Swimming finally became an acceptable leisure activity for women during the late-nineteenth century. The many yards of heavy fabric from which their swim costumes were made, however, limited women to bathing and splashing around in the water rather than swimming. Male designers and onlookers continued to believe that practical, and often more revealing, swimwear would compromise women's purity and modesty.⁶

In the twentieth century, women began to wear less conservative swimsuits, resulting in more ubiquitous objectification of the female body. In the 1920s and 1930s, it became socially acceptable for men to bathe topless. Meanwhile, for the sake of including women in sports, women's bathing suits shrank to more practical wool-knit one-pieces.⁷ The rise of beauty pageants in the 1920s also popularized less conservative swimwear. In the first Miss America pageant in 1921 in Atlantic City, female adolescents gathered on the boardwalk in tight,

⁶ Claudia B. Kidwell, *Women's Bathing and Swimming Costume in the United States* (Washington, D.C. : Smithsonian Institution Press, 2011), 7-20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-30.

patterned swimsuits before a crowd of beachside tourists. A panel of male judges used a breakdown of female features, largely focused on the body, to determine the winning beauty queen. The judges declared Margaret Gorman the first Miss America. They claimed that she represented “the type of womanhood America needs . . . able to shoulder the responsibilities of homemaking and motherhood.”⁸ The judges made their decision based upon the image of her body in a fitted swimsuit. They tried to hide it, however, by speaking about female virtues. Meanwhile, as beauty pageants became popular spectacles, women began to wear similar bathing suits on the beach. Even though the swimsuits were still bulky and conservative by today’s standards, they granted women a greater degree of mobility. Nevertheless, the whistles, comments, and stares from male onlookers limited women’s enthusiasm for their new beach apparel.⁹

Despite the liberalization of women’s swimwear up to World War II, post-war America quickly reverted to conservative styles. When Louis Réard invented the modern bikini in 1946, Americans immediately rejected it as naughty and “un-American” due to their conservative post-war ideology. Women had gained empowering new roles as workers, volunteers, and single parents as their husbands fought in the war. After the war, however, Americans wanted to recreate traditional families. Although the number of working women grew during the 1950s, Americans pressured them to conform to traditional gender roles. Many people criticized women who dressed in exposing clothing, believing they should wear “feminine” attire as stay-at-home moms. This image of conformity became apparent in the representation of women in magazines,

⁸ Christine Schmidt, *The Swimsuit: Fashion From Poolside to Catwalk* (London: Bloomsbury Academy, 2012), 47-49 and “People & Events: The First Miss America Beauty Pageant, 1921,” PBS, accessed May 1, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peoplevents/e_first.html.

⁹ Kidwell, *Women’s Bathing and Swim Costume in the United States*, 32-35.

billboards, and television shows in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Women often donned corseting gowns, heels, jewelry, and crowns as they smiled, swept floors, and served their families. Underneath their glamorous housework clothing, they struggled to conform to the hourglass beauty standard of the decade. Women suffered in the name of fashion.¹⁰

In the late 1950s, a wave of young American designers pushed for less conservative clothing. They were eager to create a national style and design more functional and comfortable women's wear. For instance, designer Claire McCardell, remembered today for creating the "American Look," believed that women should choose what they wore. She rejected binding and formal French styles. Instead, McCardell relied on the cut of the material at hand to shape clothing, including functional swimwear, to women's bodies. She avoided extra padding and understructures that would emphasize the female form.¹¹

The rise of a more sexualized celebrity culture in the 1950's also influenced women's transitions from more conservative styles. As Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield became sex symbols in films and pinups, women saw more revealing clothing than ever before. However, the majority of women did not believe these celebrities' sex appeal was attainable and instead emulated the style of less provocative celebrities such as Audrey Hepburn.¹² Almost all women abandoned heavily corseted clothing by the end of the decade. However, they still did not accept two-piece bathing suits, even those that covered the upper leg and lower stomach.¹³ No woman with "tact and decency," according to *Modern Girl Magazine* in 1957, would dare to wear the bikini.¹⁴

¹⁰ William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *The 1950s: American Popular Culture Through History*, 81-100.

¹¹ Rose, *American Decades*, 165-167.

¹² Young, *The 1950s*, 81-87.

¹³ Funk, "The Bikini," 30-32.

¹⁴ Adwar, "The Scandalous Story of the Bikini's Debut."

The 1960s marked a radical break in women's fashion. "Up, Up, and Away," a *Time* trend report from 1967, emphasized one common theme among the fashion trends of the late 1960s: a rejection of conservative attire. Some of the trending garments included miniskirts, tights in bold and eccentric colors, sheer blouses, free-form dresses, unstructured bras, and revealing swimwear, such as the bikini. Clothes became more "free and unbinding," as skirt and dress lengths went "up, up, and away."¹⁵ Skin-tight garments also became popular. First created in 1958, spandex allowed bikinis and other swimwear to fit as tightly as a second skin. Many traditionalists protested against the skin-tight clothing. They believed that wearers of those garments lacked respect for their bodies by revealing their exact forms. Meanwhile, young people, the main participants in both the Sexual Revolution and other parts of the 1960s counterculture, readily embraced this clothing.¹⁶

In this decade of political and cultural upheaval, the bikini finally began to infiltrate American culture. In the early 1960s, photos of nightclub girls in bikinis in Australia received widespread press coverage. American women were initially aghast, believing that wearing a two-piece string bathing suit was indecent and self-degrading. Nonetheless, such incidences around the world had clearly caught the attention of American artists and journalists. In 1960, Bryan Hyland released his song *Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polkadot Bikini*. This catchy song about a girl who is afraid to show herself in a bikini reflects American women's tentativeness about this new garment. Additionally, the bikini made major appearances on countless movie posters and movie screens. In 1963, actress Ursula Andress donned a tight, white bikini in the first James Bond movie, *Dr. No*. As adolescents engaged in beach parties, a

¹⁵ "Up, Up, & Away," *Time Inc.* 90, no. 22 (1967): 78. <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=fc6be>.

¹⁶ Ward, "Swimwear" and "That Crazy, Crazy World," Mount Holyoke Historical Atlas, accessed February 29, 2016, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hatlas/1960s/world.html>.

series of light-hearted beach movies, *Beach Party* (1963), *Bikini Beach* (1964), *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965), and *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965), popularized the image of the bikini all over America. Thus, the bikini had entered American culture through music and film by the mid 1960s. However, members of the youth revolutions of the 1960s were the only ones who actually wore it. They rebelled against their parents' traditional standards of self-presentation, gender, and morality. Equating nudity with freedom from traditional fashion restraints, they used the bikini as a vehicle for self-expression and reform.¹⁷

Although rebellious youth accepted sexualized clothing, male excitement popularized this type of dress among almost all women during the 1960s. Created in 1955, *Playboy* magazine published nude and semi-nude images of women for male subscribers, thus legitimating the male gaze. The success of the magazine led to the first Playboy Club in 1960, where hostesses in revealing bunny costume corsets served male customers food and drinks.¹⁸ In 1963, second-wave feminist Gloria Steinem exposed various *Playboy* practices as an undercover Playboy bunny for *Show Magazine*. Women were “expected to contribute a fair share of their personal appearances for the club,” Steinem revealed. Steinem witnessed women interviewing for jobs at the club in corseting costumes and “bikini style panties,” knowing they would please male customers. The club treated her as “an IBM machine” and created a profoundly dehumanizing environment.¹⁹ Despite *Playboy* magazine's exploitation of women's bodies, psychoanalyst Theodore Reik recognized that women gained more active roles in their sex lives at the same time. In *Playboy's*

¹⁷ Funk, “The Bikini,” 30-32 and Schmidt, *The Swimsuit*, 4-27.

¹⁸ David Allyn, *Make Love Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 18-23.

¹⁹ Gloria Steinem, “A Bunny's Tale: Show's First Exposé for Intelligent People,” *Show Magazine: The Magazine of the Arts* (1963).

<http://dlib.nyu.edu/undercover/sites/dlib.nyu.edu.undercover/files/documents/uploads/editors/Show-A%20Bunny>

1962 issue, “the Womanization of America,” he asserted, “what is astonishing to me is that women, more and more, are taking over the active roles in sex, which was not so before.”²⁰

Playboy originally intended to profit from the male gaze by marketing the sexualized woman. Ironically, its sexualization of the female body also empowered women in their sex lives.

Another publication, *Sports Illustrated*, also furthered male appropriation of female bodies in exposing apparel. Created in 1954, *Sports Illustrated* released its first swimsuit issue a decade later. The swimsuit issue aimed to provide predominantly male subscribers with pictures of fashion models dressed in body-baring swimsuits in exotic settings. Although the 1950s and 1960s marked an increase in women’s involvement in sports, *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit models posed suggestively, rather than actively. (See Figure 1).²¹ These magazines positioned women as objects of male desire, but they did not receive criticism and became widely accepted.²²

The subjugation of women in body-baring garments extends beyond enterprises capitalizing upon the female image. Even well-intending champions of progressive fashion contributed to the prevalence of the male gaze. When Gernreich designed the aforementioned topless swimsuit, he believed it would destigmatize female nudity. Instead, others took the opportunity to exploit women’s bodies. For instance, in 1965, club owner Davey Rosenberg revitalized his Condor Club in San Francisco by dressing go-go dancers in topless swimsuits. The “topless bar” became an instant sensation. America immediately deemed San Francisco sexually liberating, but erotic entertainment was neither progressive nor liberating. Whereas Gernreich aimed to fight traditional standards of femininity, Davey Rosenberg sought to profit

²⁰ Allyn, *Make Love Not War*, 21-23.

²¹ “Bahamas: The Out Islands Are In,” *Sports Illustrated*, January 17, 1966 in “Every Cover of the SI Swimsuit Edition,” *Sports Illustrated*, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.si.com/sports-illustrated/photo/2016/02/13/every-cover-si-swimsuit-edition/51>.

²² Schmidt, *The Swimsuit*, 17-19 and Martin, *Splash!*, 133-135.

from female nudity. As a man who charged clubbers to see women in semi-nude swimwear, Rosenberg actively commodified women in sexualized garments.²³

These garments not only mainstreamed male subjugation of the female body, but also catalyzed a rise in anxiety surrounding body image and eating disorders. By the mid 1960s, the feminine ideal had returned to a slim, Twiggy-like body. The sizing charts from Sears Catalogues in 1964 and 1966 underscored the changing beauty standard. In 1964, the Junior styles, created for adolescents and smaller women, featured casual and pre-teen like fashions. The majority of young women bought the fashionable Misses styles. By 1966, however, the Junior styles featured the hottest trends, including sexualized and body-baring garments. Those who were not small enough to fit into the garments had to shop in the much more conservative Misses section. This sizing change pressured women to lose weight.²⁴ Additionally, the 1958 *Time* article “Chemise at Sea” recounted women’s desire to wear bikini cover-ups because they believed their bodies were not slim enough for men to see.²⁵ Many women who did not look like the feminine ideal turned to magazines that featured articles on intense exercise, dieting, and plastic surgery.²⁶ During this decade, amphetamine, a drug that suppressed one’s appetite, became widespread. Some women even injected chorionic gonadotropin hormones into their bodies to stimulate rapid weight loss. As *Time* summarizes in a 1960 fashion report, the anxiety

²³ Allyn, *Make Love Not War*, 23-28.

²⁴ Jo B. Paoletti, *Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism, and the Sexual Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 42-44.

²⁵ “Chemise at Sea,” *Time Inc.* 71, no. 15 (1967): 88.

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=19&sid=2143>.

²⁶ Allyn, *Make Love Not War*, 13-17; Martin, *Splash!*, 129-134; and Nicolas Rasmussen, “America’s First Amphetamine Epidemic 1929-1971,” US National Library of Medicine, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2377281/>.

surrounding body image ultimately caused many women who did look like the feminine ideal to resist wearing the bikini.²⁷

This tension between revealing female dress and male approval became a point of contention in one of the most important movements of the 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminism.²⁸ (The so-called “first-wave feminists” had advocated for women’s political rights, such as the right to vote, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.) Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* launched this second wave of feminism. She took one of the first overtly feminist stances in the 1960s. Friedan attacked educators, magazine editors, and social scientists for portraying women as housewives who found happiness solely in family. In 1966, Friedan and other women’s rights activists formed the National Organization for Women (NOW), a Civil Rights Lobbying Group that focused on legislative reform. NOW worked to pressure the government to enforce laws against sexual discrimination in various realms, including the workplace.²⁹

Because they wanted to be taken seriously despite their radical ideas, second-wave feminists found femininity to be an integral part of their self-presentation. Although many NOW members participated in critiques of fashion and beauty culture, they continued to wear makeup and traditionally feminine attire. One NOW leader believed that in order to “liberate . . . Women where it counts . . . I cannot spend time nor energy, *nor can any of us* . . . on the maxiskirt, hot pants, makeup, bras, and the shaving of legs.” She believed that focusing on these seemingly

²⁷ “Not Too Near the Water,” *Time Inc.* 76, no. 3 (1960): 59.

²⁸ Hillman, *Culture Wars*, 70-80.

²⁹ “The National Organization for Women’s 1966 Statement of Purpose,” NOW, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://now.org/about/history/statement-of-purpose/>; Sara Margaret Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 11-22; and Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960 (Critical Perspectives on the Past)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 3-11.

frivolous topics would distract the movement from critical legislative battles. Additionally, it would actually take away women's freedom to choose what they wanted to wear. Moreover, NOW's members wished to dress as the antithesis of the stereotypical ugly, crazy, and lesbian feminist.³⁰

On the other hand, many Women's Liberationists, the radical, younger generation of second-wave feminists, critiqued new fashions because they were supposedly designed to seek male approval. They asserted that the growing fashion and cosmetics industry appropriated female autonomy through commodification of their appearances. Additionally, activist Ellen Willis explained in the 1969 issue of *Mademoiselle* that a "girl" is taught to be "preoccupied . . . with how she looks instead of what she does."³¹ They argued that beauty culture and capitalism were intertwined in perpetuating women's status as sexual objects rather than intellectuals or leaders. The Women's Liberationists used unfeminine dress to combat these socially constructed gender roles the fashion industry supposedly promoted. They dressed in a practical and comfortable uniform to escape from the male gaze. Some examples of their clothing included unisex jeans, baggy shirts, and combat boots. They also cut their hair short and abandoned shaving and makeup in order to discard patriarchal female beauty standards.³²

Many women, including other members of the Women's Liberation movement, however, appreciated the autonomy and opportunity for sexual expression that provocative garments offered. Many of these individuals participated in the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s. During the Sexual Revolution, both genders challenged prevailing notions of sexuality. The advent of the

³⁰ Hillman, *Culture Wars*, 60-82.

³¹ "A Few Women Sizzle but Boycott is Fizzle," *Chicago Tribune*, October 30, 1975, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30162004>.

³² Hillman, *Culture Wars*, 59-72 and Paoletti, *Sex and Unisex*, 36-47.

birth control pill in 1960 launched the revolution and had a transformative effect on sex. It allowed men and women, specifically white, middle-class college students and post-college adults, to engage in free love. With the pill, women rejected traditional sexual relations in which men were dominant and women were passive. New fashions popularized during the Sexual Revolution, such as the bikini, also gave women more control over their sexual expression and womanhood. Feminists and other women who wore body-baring designs considered any fashion choice valid as long as the woman made it for herself. They argued that exposing clothing challenged the notion of passive female sex roles and freed them from reigning social mores of modesty. For instance, many second-wavers, much to the disgust of the Miss America activists, proudly protested for reproductive rights in miniskirts. One journalist in the 1960s even argued that the miniskirt brought women a “new feminine drive for full freedom and equality.”³³

This battle between characterizations of revealing clothing as liberating and oppressive came to the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The women competing in the pageant took pride in displaying their swimsuit-clad bodies before the judges and audience. Outside, a Women’s Liberation group, New York Radical Women, staged a massive protest in response to what they saw as the degrading nature of swimsuit contests. They threw their symbols of women’s oppression into a “Freedom Trash Can” near the entrance. Some of these items included bras, cosmetics, girdles, high-heeled shoes, and issues of *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan*. The media claimed that they had burned these items. This is why they are called bra-burners today. However, they clearly communicated their rejection of the pageant’s tradition

³³ Deidre English, “The Fear that Feminism Will Free Men First,” in *Making Sense of Women’s Lives: An Introduction to Women’s Studies*, ed. Lauri Umansky and Michele Plott (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2000), 490 and “American Experience | The Pill | People & Events,” PBS, accessed May 2, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/e_revolution.html.

of judging a woman by her appearance, especially while wearing a bikini.³⁴ The Women's Liberationists handed out leaflets titled "No More Miss America!" with ten aspects of the beauty pageant they protested. Their first point protested "*The Degrading Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol*" that the swimsuit contest promoted. Moreover, they compared the pageant to a county fair in which "nervous animals are judged [by appearance] . . . so are women in our society forced daily, to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous 'beauty' standards."³⁵ They also held posters that compared the pageant to a "cattle show" and models to "steak." With these signs, the Women's Liberationists fought against the dehumanizing way in which young women were judged based on their appearances in bikinis. (See Figure 2).³⁶

Many Women's Liberationists failed to recognize that the bikini, although often used to degrade women, helped to free them from traditional barriers to revealing their bodies. Admittedly, when men were eager to see women in revealing garments, the industry intensified that desire by cultivating the male gaze. Yet, when women craved autonomy and sexual expression, the bikini provided them the opportunity to do so in previously unimaginable ways. This paradox underscored the immense power of the fashion industry's responses to consumer needs. It reaffirmed the dominant yet flawed ideology, the male gaze. Through challenging the status quo, it also fostered newer ideas about women's freedom of expression. Throughout the 1970s, for example, *Sports Illustrated's* swimwear issue became more exploitative than ever. As more women engaged in athletics, pictures of models in bikinis were almost pornographically

³⁴ Kathy Peiss and Barbara Clark Smith, *Men and Women: A History of Costume, Gender, and Power* (New York: National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1989), 63-67.

³⁵ "No More Miss America!" in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 586-588.

³⁶ "Protestors at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City," *AP Images*, September 7, 1968 in Betty Luther Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s & 1970s* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 64.

erotic. Meanwhile, many women, even some radical feminists, pushed for further swimwear miniaturization for more sexual empowerment. In 1974, Gernreich designed the modern thong bikini. Sold as either a one- or two-piece, the “tanga” remains one of the most scandal-inducing bikinis to this day. Not surprisingly, the tanga quickly assumed the name “a man’s dream.” Both exploitative and empowering, these developments marked changing fashion trends and cultural attitudes toward female sexual expression.³⁷

More recently, the bikini is still popular because of male approval. Although wearers of the bikini and other sexualized garments often feel confident and empowered, many male onlookers compliment, catcall, criticize, and exploit women’s bodies. Unequal gender standards still discourage women from wearing many other revealing fashions as well. One recently popularized garment with functions and taboos similar to the bikini’s is the sports bra. On July 10, 1999, Women’s World Cup Champion Brandi Chastain, inspired by a tradition among Men’s World Cup soccer players, ripped off her jersey after scoring the winning penalty kick. As she dropped to her knees in celebration, bearing her sports bra, over 90,000 spectators stared disbelievingly. Three major magazines, including *Sports Illustrated*, featured the iconic moment on their covers. The sports bra differs from the bikini in that it is less sexual and more functional. It thus receives fewer stares from men. It still is, however, emblematic of unequal opportunities in dress among male and female athletes as of 1999. Yet when Chastain ripped off her jersey, the sports bra defied traditional limits on women’s dress and became a form of empowerment.³⁸ (See Figure 3).³⁹ The legacy of the bikini is manifested in this clash between a liberating challenge to

³⁷ Martin, *Splash*, 131-137.

³⁸ Alison Gee, “Why Women's World Cup champion Brandi Chastain bared her bra,” BBC News, July 13, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27189681>.

³⁹ July 10, 1999, Getty Images in Alison Gee, “Why Women's World Cup champion Brandi Chastain bared her bra,” BBC News, July 13, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27189681>.

tradition and persistent gender inequality in fashion, sports, and American culture. These body-baring garments contribute simultaneously to female empowerment and male objectification.

Appendix

Figure 1:

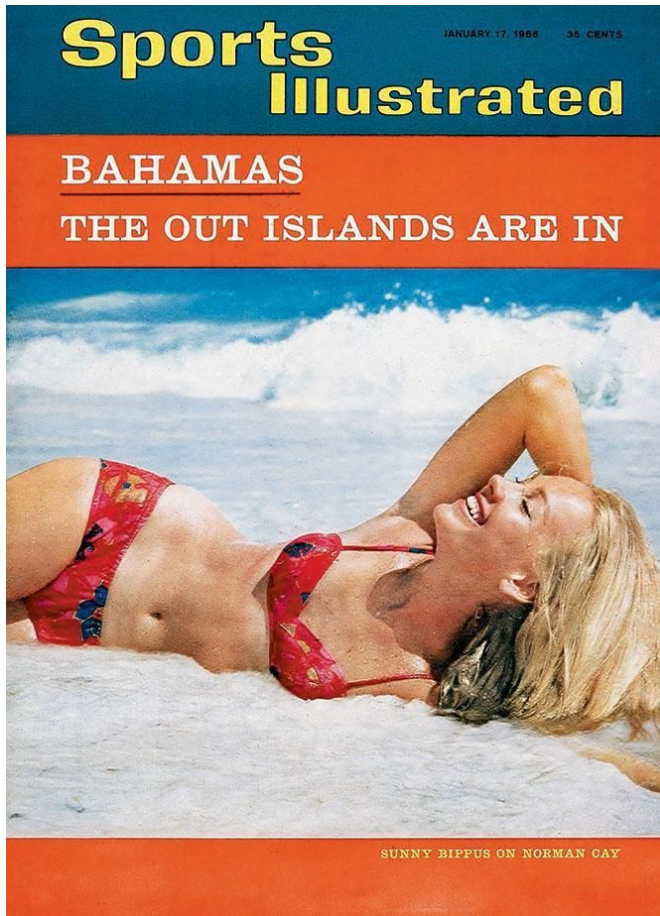


Figure 2:



Figure 3:



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