

CAPPED AND STRAPPED

WOMEN'S SWIMMING IN BRITAIN

1920 - 1970



Fig. 1. Lucy Snowe, *The Swimmer in a Pond*, 2015

ANASTASIA STANNARD

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ABSTRACT

The title of this thesis refers to the design/use of women's swim caps in Britain between 1920-1970 and the role they played in changing notions of femininity and the emancipation/constraint of female swimmers. Key primary sources include swim caps, bathhouse regulations, branding/advertising, film, newspapers and magazines – these providing an insight into the consumption and user experience of an often overlooked accessory. This dissertation brings to light how women's opportunities to swim were countered by patriarchal power and regulation.

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Baths and Wash Houses Historical Archive

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASA	Amateur Swimming Association (1886-2017)
FINA	Fédération Internationale de Natation Amateur (1908-)
WWI	World War One (1914-1918)
WWII	World War Two (1939-1945)

Baths and Wash Houses Historical Archive

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation charts the design changes in women's swim caps in Britain between 1920 and 1970. This was a particularly significant period as the rise and fall in the use of swim caps coincided with a climate of modernism, transformation and increasing emancipation for women, alongside changing notions of health and femininity.

The swim cap raises various issues around the regulation of women and ideas of femininity - rules enforced by many local pool committees restricted the times and days when women could swim and imposed on female swimmers the wearing of caps - this leading to the swim cap becoming a gender-dividing garment that I argue oppressed women throughout the period.

While the swimsuit and swim cap share many of the same issues reflected in the history of women's swimwear generally, my research shows that the swim cap had its own unique history linked to developments in women's hair and beauty cultures, about which this thesis offers interesting new perspectives.

My research questions are concerned with theories of gender and power, examining how the swim cap itself, was a vehicle for patriarchal notions that led to the control, constraint, and compliance of the female swimmer. I argue how media and advertising used the swim cap to shape and sexualise the public perception of the female swimmer, and how design changes of swim caps contributed to the marginalisation of women's swimming over this time.

The focus of this study will be based around public swimming pools within Bathhouses and open-air lidos, as well as beaches, attended mainly for pleasure/recreation. Chapter one deals

with the systems of power operating around women's swim caps and the design change from function to fashion in the pre-World War I (WWI) period (1920-1939) and ends with a short case study that highlights how compliant female swimmers became in order to meet patriarchal expectations. Chapter two focuses on the changing notions of gender as the production of fashionable swim caps peak and subsequently decline in the post-World War II (WWII) period (1945-1970) and concludes with a short case study which demonstrates how the swim cap found a new market.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and empirical framework employed throughout this dissertation develops from *actor-network theory*, a socio-material approach devised by sociologist Bruno Latour in the 1980s, focusing on interactions of people and things, between matter and meaning. Latour explores how artifacts can be intentionally designed to 'shape the decisions we make, the effects our actions have, and the way we move through the world'.¹ Applied to the swim cap, actor-network theory places the material and physical object at the centre of a wider discussion of power, agency and networks, providing a broader context to understand how through the construction and use of swim caps, certain values and political goals were achieved/promoted. Latour argues that power lies in the collective actions of others within a network, and is the consequence of people's behaviour, not the cause.² This approach was instrumental in examining how the swim cap acted to constrain female swimmers, by considering what the most powerful components of the network are, the components with most agency and why they have that agency.

¹ Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law, *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992) pp. 225-258.

² Bruno Latour, 'The Powers of Association', in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, ed. by John Law (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) pp. 264-280.

I also draw on the sociological theory of *symbolic boundaries*, ‘conceptual distinctions made by social actors that separate people into groups’ to explain how the swim cap became a gender-dividing garment and the tensions that this caused.³ Since the 1960s literature on symbolic boundaries has gained momentum, as academics from varied disciplines have combined research on symbolic systems and indirect forms of power. Drawing on literature relating to power and the female body from numerous disciplines, primarily sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and gender studies, I argue that the swim cap played an integral role in maintaining social order/standards around traditional notions of femininity that ultimately constrained the female swimmer.

In *The Civilising Process*, 1982 [1939], German sociologist Norbert Elias analyses the emergence of a boundary between civilized and barbarian habits to show how indirect forms of power i.e., social rules and sanctions develop internal restraint/standards of behaviour in individuals.⁴ Similarly, French philosopher Michel Foucault’s notion of the *docile body* demonstrates how *disciplinary power* sees individuals internalize and reproduce knowledge surrounding what is ‘correct’ and ‘proper’ through disciplinary practices.⁵ Both contend that this timeframe saw an increase in self-regulating behaviours – one example of this can be found in the practices of women’s hair grooming, which are discussed in the main body of this dissertation. Drawing on themes central to anthropologist Mary Douglas’s anthropology of pollution - Douglas examines the order-producing role of rituals in creating boundaries grounded in fears and beliefs, offering interesting perspectives of how social concepts of aesthetics, hygiene and etiquette can become subject to social sanction, to manage/uphold

³ Michèle Lamont et. al, ‘Symbolic Boundaries’, *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2, 23 (2015) pp. 850-855.

⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

moral values and social rules defined by beliefs in the dangers of dirt.⁶ This internalization of what Foucault terms 'proper' links to Douglas's idea of community-wide complicity being successful in upholding a taboo. If subjects internalize what is supposed to be 'correct' then they also uphold notions of what is not correct thereby maintaining taboos. Using Douglas's theories, I examine why women's hair was considered a pollutant while men's was not, and why the assumed norm at that time was that women's hair should be covered/concealed whilst swimming (as was the custom more generally in public spaces).

Additionally, feminist theories have also shown how the female body can be a particular target of disciplinary power. Philosopher, Sandra Lee Bartky, and sociologist, Angela King, demonstrate how 'fashion and beauty practices manipulate, train and mark the female body' to conform to prevailing norms of feminine beauty and attractiveness.⁷ Bartky builds on Foucault's notion of docile bodies to suggest that women living in a patriarchal culture in which they are judged and objectified by sexist standards of femininity, are likely to adopt these standards and prefer to fulfil them.⁸ Feminists term this internalisation of an oppressive ideology, *deformed desires*, whereby women choose to oppress themselves and adapt their preferences according to their opportunities without control or awareness.⁹ Furthermore, King explores how 'woman' has historically been 'discursively constructed (condemned) as inferior yet also threatening to man, thus is in perpetual need of containment and control, and is thus subjected (condemned) to particular disciplinary techniques'.¹⁰

⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

⁷ Angela King, 'The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5, 2 (2004) pp. 29-39.

⁸ Sandra Lee Bartky, 'Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power' in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988) p. 77.

⁹ Anita Superson, 'Feminist Moral Psychology', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/feminism-moralpsych/> [accessed 2 December 2021].

¹⁰ King, 'The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body', pp. 29-39.

Literature Review

Although swimwear has garnered much academic interest from dress/fashion historians, swim caps have been broadly overlooked/neglected, regarded as accessories/adjuncts to the swimsuit. While Claudia Kidwell, Susan Barton, Patricia Campbell Warner, Sarah Kennedy, Christina Probert and Irina Lindsay provide extensive histories of women's swimwear throughout twentieth century Britain, their primary focus has been on the swimsuit.¹¹ However, collectively these accounts include the social attitudes to the changes in swim fashion and explanations of wider influences on swimwear, such as America and Hollywood, which provide useful context that is also necessary to consider in relation to swim caps. Only Probert and Lindsay reference the design changes to the swim cap across this time, however, neither give much further analysis/explanation. Probert's research, based on changing perspectives of the British fashion magazine, *Vogue*, offers insight into the aspirational ideas/images being marketed to women throughout the century - *Vogue* significantly influencing women's fashion decisions across social classes.¹² Probert also links swim caps to women's hats and suggests that when women were no longer required to wear hats in public, the demise of the swim cap followed. Meanwhile, dress historian, Beverly Chico, includes a useful entry of the 'bathing cap' in her *Cultural Encyclopedia of Hats and Headwear*, providing an overview of the changes and influences on women's swim caps in America and Britain from the 1890s to the twenty-first century.¹³ Swim caps over this period have been referred to by many different names: bathing hats/caps, bonnets, helmets etc., all of

¹¹ Claudia Kidwell, *Women's Bathing and Swimming Costume in the United States* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968); Susan Barton, *Sportswear* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Patricia Campbell Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Sarah Kennedy, *The Swimsuit: A Fashion History from 1920's Biarritz and the Birth of the Bikini* (Isle of Wight: Cameron House, 2007); Christina Probert, *Swimwear in Vogue Since 1910* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1981); Irina Lindsay, *Dressing and Undressing for the Seaside* (Essex: Ian Henry Publications, 1983).

¹² Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt, 'Vogue in Britain: Authenticity and the Creation of Competitive Advantage in the UK Magazine Industry', *Business History*, 54 (2012) pp. 67-87.

¹³ Beverly Chico, *Hats and Headwear around The World: A Cultural Encyclopedia* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 43-45.

which can be understood as items worn on one's head during swimming - for consistency I use the term *swim cap* throughout this dissertation.

More broadly fashion theorists, Jennifer Craik and Joanne Entwistle, explore the role of fashion in gender identity and the wider relationship between the female body and society – their research is particularly useful in understanding how fashion links to constructs of femininity.¹⁴

Within sports history, swimming has been relatively neglected, only garnering academic attention in recent years. While a commemorative history commissioned by the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), the national governing body responsible for the development and regulation of swimming, written by historians, Ian Keil and Don Wix, does provide a broad overview of the official history of swimming in Britain (1869-1994), it lacks full academic citations and there is little attempt to relate the development of swimming to broader social/cultural contexts.¹⁵ However, social historians, Christopher Love and Catherine Horwood, more than compensate for this. A special issue of *The International Journal of History of Sport* (2007) authored by Love, provides a comprehensive social history of swimming in Britain, paying particular attention to women, their access to swimming, their dress and regulations of dress, the development/impact of mixed bathing and how women's social marginalisation in swimming reflected fundamental divisions in society.¹⁶ While Love focuses on an earlier period (1750-1918) his research offers key historical context. Horwood further examines these gender issues, focusing on the advent of mixed bathing at the beaches

¹⁴ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994); Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Ian Keil and Don Wix, *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994* (Leicestershire: The Swimming Times, 1996).

¹⁶ Christopher Love, 'Splashing in the Serpentine: A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800–1918', *The International Journal of History of Sport*, 24, 5 (2007) pp. 563-712.

and swimming pools in Britain between 1900-1939, examining the tensions of political and moral restraint against changing public opinions and the mood within popular culture, also attributing many of the restrictions women faced to the patriarchal society and authoritarian controls that promoted traditional codes of female modesty, conduct and physiology.¹⁷ Horwood demonstrates how changes in women's swimsuits (exposing more of the body) highlighted conflicting attitudes to modesty and sexuality, creating tensions around what women concealed/revealed – of which the swim cap can be considered a key component – and argues that the changing image of the female body in the public press, and new ideals of female beauty/body shape/fashions, ultimately helped to sexualise swimwear/the female swimmer. However, Horwood maintains that despite these restrictions recreational swimming offered a liberating experience for women.

Focusing on how the image of the female swimmer was disseminated through the mass media in the interwar period, cultural historians, Adrian Bingham and Mike Huggins, examine how the mass circulation of popular daily newspapers and cinema newsreels respectively, promoted traditional notions of femininity, even when the focus was sporting achievement, suggesting that this representation could not deviate from the ideal norm – emphasising women as decorative, which in turn helped constrain women's achievements.¹⁸ At the same time, both argue that women were sexualized as never before, with advertising devoting more space/time to fashion than any other subject, with the dual purpose of illustrating the latest fashions for women – keen to appeal/exploit the newly emerging female consumer – while also providing often-provocative images of women's bodies, encouraging men to regard them

¹⁷ Catherine Horwood, "'Girls who arouse dangerous passions': women and bathing, 1900-39", *Women's History Review*, 9 (2007) pp. 653-673.

¹⁸ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Mike Huggins, "'And Now, Something for the Ladies': Representations of women's sport in cinema newsreels 1918-1939", *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007) pp. 681-700.

as sex objects and women to prioritise their sexual appeal to men as the measure of their social worth. Their insights into media from this time will be particularly helpful when analysing my own primary sources.

In an edited collection of essays on consumption, gender and ideas of modernity, Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Dan Malleck, further examine how the interwar period was key to establishing/naturalizing certain behaviours across gender and class. Of particular interest are articles by cultural historians, Marilyn Morgan and Fiona Skillen, who explore the relationship between women's swimming and advertising/consumerism in the modern age. Morgan describes how the mass media shapes and perpetuates our cultural construction of gender/gendered stereotypes and shows how female athletes were 'consumed, constrained, and eroticized under the gaze of the market' - the female athlete being celebrated only if she conformed to social standards.¹⁹ Morgan suggests that competitive female swimmers helped fuel an expanding swimsuit industry that ironically led to the swimsuit phase of beauty pageants and the sexualization/marginalization of the female swimmer. This demonstrating that independence and self-actualization became two more forms of dependence and submission, as female swimmers found themselves craving public adulation. Skillen also identifies women's relationship between physical recreation and social interaction, suggesting sociability was a key motivation for women's involvement in swimming.

Despite the academic focus on the relationship between swimwear and women's bodies, there has been little investigation of the relationship between the swim cap and female grooming.

¹⁹ Marilyn Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', in *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism before the Baby Boom*, ed. by Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Dan Malleck, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) pp. 136-60; Fiona Skillen, 'Women, Identity, and Sports Participation in Interwar Britain', in *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism before the Baby Boom*, ed. by Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Dan Malleck, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) pp. 115-135.

However, there has been growing academic interest in hair cultures that can be richly applied to this study of the swim cap. Whilst this broader research doesn't focus on the swim cap, it can be utilised to offer insights into its use. Prior to recent work, hair symbolism has been little studied in Britain and North America, with the exception of sociologist, Anthony Synnott, who in 1987 suggested his theory of opposites, in which the grooming/styling of men's and women's hair creates a gender binary.²⁰ In more recent work, cultural historian, Geraldine Biddle-Perry's anthology pays particular attention to the social and cultural significance of hair in the twentieth century to demonstrate how daily practices of hair form part of a complex network of normalizing standards and discursive mechanisms, to perform and police social boundaries.²¹

Methodology

Alongside these theoretical parameters and secondary sources, this dissertation draws on a substantial range of primary evidence to investigate swim cap manufacturing, consumption, and user experience.

Few swim caps survive from the pre-WWII period, in part due to the ephemeral nature of rubber and also to wartime appeals from the Ministry of Defence for donations of rubber (including swim caps) toward the war effort.²² As a result, I have had to look for examples of British swim caps within UK/International Museum collections and vintage sellers/collectors, supplementing these with a wide range of primary sources.

²⁰ Anthony Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38, 3 (1987) pp. 381-413.

²¹ Geraldine Biddle-Perry, *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

²² 'Ban on Rubber Articles', *The Times*, 27 December 1941, p. 2; 'Give up your rubber', *The Daily Mail*, 16 April 1942, p. 1; 'The Need for still more Rubber is Urgent!', *The Daily Mail*, 29 June 1942, p. 4.

Brand information and advertising have been key sources for understanding manufacturing and consumption practices of swim caps, and this dissertation references a combination of leading British and American manufacturers producing/selling in Britain across this period - significantly, the British brands: Leyland & Birmingham Rubber Company, W. W. Haffenden, all general rubber manufacturers; and American brands: Jantzen and Kleinert's, exclusive manufacturers of women's swimwear and underwear/apparel respectively. Additionally, in-house company news magazines: *North British News* (1948-1966) and *Jantzen Yarns* (1928-1956) gave further insight into swim cap production/consumption, while patent designs (1927-1975) available from the Espacenet database, chart design changes/technical developments in swim caps. Furthermore, contemporaneous trade magazines have given insight into the sales/marketing of swim caps and also women's hair styling/care: *Chemist and Druggist* (1859-2016) held by the Wellcome Collection - a leading pharmaceutical trade magazine supplied to pharmacies across Britain, tracks the changing marketing strategies and commercial development of swim caps throughout this period; *The Eugène Waver* (1928-1947), held by the National Art Library - a hairdressing trade magazine for a leading London salon with branches that operated across Britain, features women's popular hairstyles and haircare management, with specific advice for female swimmers in the interwar period - of particular interest is their annual marketing campaign involving the use of professional female swimmers.

In exploring the experience of swimming/swimming cultures, I have taken a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from a wide range of sources including various journals/magazines: *The Swimming Times* (1923-2019), the official magazine of the ASA, the longest running swimming magazine in the world, as well as editions of the *Swimming Magazine* (1914-1918) published by the Royal Life Saving Society which featured a ladies column on women's

swimming news that makes reference to the inadequacy of early swim caps for women – both held in the ASA historical archive; *Baths & Bath Engineering* (1934-35), the official journal of the National Association of Bath Superintendents, held by the Baths and Wash Houses historical archive, which show developments in Public Baths filtration, and highlights the male-dominated management. Other sources include an independent *Report on Public Baths* (1918) by Agnes Campbell, which provides useful details about the early access/regulation of women's swimming in Britain; and the swimming manual *How to Swim* (1918) by professional swimmer, Annette Kellerman, containing specific advice regarding swim caps, written for women from a female perspective, which was unusual for the time.

Furthermore, film archives have provided essential new primary evidence of how swim caps were presented and actually worn. Different film formats have provided useful source material: Hollywood films/aqua-musicals and British Pathé newsreels showcasing the latest swimwear fashions and the idealised female swimmer; while newsreel footage/photographs of amateur female swimming clubs and paid synchronised swimming performers highlight the aspirations of ordinary women, and the influence this idealised image had. Meanwhile home-footage of British holidays taken between 1930-1970, held at South-East Screen Archive, alongside candid holiday photographs reveal how ordinary women wore their swim caps. Railway posters and travel guides have also been useful in highlighting how these aspirational images were spread, as well as showing how the image of the female swimmer became a profitable marketing tool.

Newspapers and magazines via the British Newspaper Archive and Gale Digital Collections have been an essential source of contemporaneous advertisements for swim caps, as well as articles relating to fashion, fitness, and politics which illustrate the broader influences and

trends that existed over time, providing important context to women's swimming. To yield a wide-ranging perspective I have drawn from a cross-section of popular daily tabloids, magazines, and regional newspapers that catered to a range of classes: The Daily Mail (1896-), The Daily Mirror (1903-), The Illustrated London News (1842-2003) whose weekly publications included: - The Sketch (1893-1959), The Tatler (1901-), Britannia and Eve (1929-1955); Picture Post (1938-1957); and the Brighton & Hove Herald (1922-1971), Thanet Times, Hasting's & St Leonard's Observer, Fleetwood Chronicle, and The Liverpool Echo. Of particular interest are the male and female reader's comments/responses relating to female swimmers' beauty regimes.

SYSTEMS OF POWER: PRE - WWII 1920-1939

Changes in attitudes towards health and hygiene, hair cultures/grooming, the influence of cinema, and the regulations that sought to manage changing ideas of sociability (prompted by mixed bathing) – these were all ideas that resulted in developments in swim caps over this time. On analysing these topics through the lens of power, discipline and regulation, it is apparent that swimming was crucial in both liberating women's bodies and in perpetuating patriarchal power over them.

HEALTH

Changing priorities surrounding health enabled women access to swimming on a par with men, but only for a short time as health quickly became a means by which patriarchal society and capitalist markets sought to channel female swimmers into more conventionally feminine appearances and behaviours, by regulating what they could wear and how/when they could swim.

According to Love, the benefits of swimming on women's health and well-being had been praised from the 1870s onwards.¹ Although few women could actually swim, swimming came to be extolled as an excellent sport provided that the exercise was not too violent, and the bathing costume was modest.² Gradually this activity became regarded as a healthful exercise and later as a recreation.³ By the 1920s, a government drive to improve the nation's health post-WWI, and a rapid growth in leisure provision, saw health increasingly framed as

¹ Love, 'Splashing in the Serpentine: A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800–1918', p. 595.

² Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: women, doctors and exercise in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) p. 82.

³ Kidwell, *Women's Bathing and Swimming Costume in the United States*.

an individual achievement rather than a consequence of fate.⁴ Meanwhile a huge rise in health consumerism and the ideology of the fit and beautiful body, prompted many women to pursue swimming.⁵

An increase in legislation relating to women i.e., their gaining the right to vote, providing access to education, and the option to divorce, as well as a greater number of organisations representing women's interests, resulted in the notion of a newly liberated 'modern woman'. Sport and exercise were amongst the most conspicuous forms of modernity and quickly became associated with women's emancipation and increased independence. This was most visible in the newly attired female swimmer, whose reduced one-piece swimsuits revealed more of the body, allowed for greater movement and considered function and comfort, where earlier more elaborate bathing costumes had prioritized the societal expectation of concealing women's bodies; close-fitting, rubber, helmet-style swim caps replaced the loose gathered oil cloths knotted over one ear and the straw hats or scarf turbans, worn for bathing rather than for swimming (Fig 1).⁶

Women's new swimsuits were based on men's swimming costumes (Fig 2), the standardisation and similarity of swimsuits helping to create less distinction between male and female swimmers although rules remained stricter around female body exposure.⁷ The swim cap remained a notable difference, since men seldom wore caps. With the new swimwear came a new female body – or rather, the female body was reconstructed to

⁴ Charlotte Macdonald, 'Body and Self: Learning to be Modern in 1920s-1930s Britain', *Women's History Review*, 22 (2013) pp. 267-279.

⁵ Virginia Smith, *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity*, (Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 308.

⁶ Annette Kellerman, *How to Swim* (New York: George H. Doran, 1918) pp. 46-47; Kidwell, *Women's Bathing and Swimming Costume in the United States*, p. 30; Lindsay, *Dressing and Undressing for the Seaside*, p. 39;

'History of Swim Caps', *Epic Sports*, (2015) <https://swimming.epicsports.com/swim-cap-history.html> [accessed 21 June 2021]; Kathryn Westcott, 'The Bikini: Not a brief affair'. *BBC News* (5 June 2006).

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/5130460.stm [accessed 16 January 2021].

⁷ Keil and Wix, *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994*, pp. 187-188.

resemble a boyish body, lacking breasts and hips.⁸ Attributes of femininity were replaced by those of androgyny resulting in the female body being seen as a reflection of health instead of purely an object of gender – this, enabling greater social acceptance of women's full participation in swimming.⁹

In 1922 the *New York Times* reported that 'when a woman swims the English Channel it will have to be acknowledged that there is no physical feat in which she may not compete with man'.¹⁰ Inevitably perhaps, a woman not only swam the Channel but made the crossing a whole two hours faster – American swimmer, Gertrude Ederle, breaking the men's record.¹¹ Ederle's feat in 1926 prompted many British women to attempt the long-distance swim themselves with a significant rise in the import of rubber swim caps to Britain resulting (Fig 3). Realising the market potential in Britain, American manufacturers such as swimwear brand Jantzen began manufacturing rubber caps in 1927, replacing their knitted 'beaners' whose popularity had waned presumably because these would have been highly impractical for actual swimming. By 1928, Jantzen was extensively advertising and selling in Europe, and through their English representative, Mr Lemaire, had hired Hilda Harding, a Channel swimmer, to demonstrate their products and lecture sales staff in British stores.¹²

Advertisements for swim caps illustrate how manufacturers were keen to align their products to these popular female distance-swimmers (Fig 4), one such company using Channel swimmer, Millie Gade-Corson, to endorse their caps as fit for such purposes. It should be noted that a swim cap patent (Fig 5) from this time also shows a design that mimicked the hairstyle of the first British female Channel swimmer, Mercedes Gleitze (Fig 6). Whilst this

⁸ Harold Koda and Richard Martin, *Splash: A History of Swimwear* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990) pp. 60-62.

⁹ Kidwell, *Women's Bathing and Swimming Costume in the United States*.

¹⁰ Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', p. 138.

¹¹ Jenny Landreth, 'Suffragette Swimmers', *Countryfile Magazine* (8 June 2018) pp. 62-67.

¹² Arthur McArthur and Tor Lundgren, *History of Jantzen by John A. Zehntbauer* (San Francisco: Jantzen Yarns, 2009) p. 98.

cap was more ornamental than functional, and unlike the kind Gleitze herself wore (Fig 7), it demonstrates manufacturers' celebration/support of the athletic female swimmer, realising her marketing value to potential female consumers who were keen to emulate them – if only in appearance.

More typically caps at this time were based on men's aviator style helmets with chin straps, often unadorned and worn purposefully to keep hair out of eyes, protect ears and provide comfort.¹³ While there are few advertisements for men's swim caps, American adverts from 1927 (Fig 8) show caps of this design/style being sold to both men and women.

There was a growing emphasis on physical appearance as both an explicit marker of modernity and an indicator of health, and athletic images were used to sell a variety of products, often unrelated to the sport depicted (Fig 9).¹⁴ The image of the female swimmer in her new swimsuit and cap quickly became a popular marketing tool, and through its use, set a standard that women were expected to meet if they wanted to present themselves as modern.

While physical activity was promoted as necessary for good health, the prevailing view remained that competitive sport was not appropriate for women, who were perceived to lack the physical/mental strength to swim distances; they should be discouraged from participating in marathons etc. One article reporting on 'Why Men Are Still Superior' references Dr Harry Campbell's view in a lecture he gave at the Institute of Hygiene in 1926, which appears to confirm the above:

¹³ Chico, *Hats and Headwear around the world: A Cultural Encyclopedia*, pp. 43-45; 'Hats off to Swim Caps', *Aqua*, (March 2015) <https://aquamagazine.com/service/hats-off-to-swim-caps.html> [accessed 4 August 2021].

¹⁴ Paul R. Deslandes, 'Health and Hygiene', in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle-Perry (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) pp. 93-111.

The statement made by a recent woman swimmer of the Channel that women are equal to, indeed surpass men in athletics, is just nonsense...women are not adapted like men for a strenuous muscular life...they should seek to achieve and to maintain as high a level of physical fitness as their circumstances permit.¹⁵

The medical community was responsible for promoting these ideas, believing that the primary function of the female body was motherhood. A medical journal in 1928 stated that women were unsuited to violent exercise and athletics due to 'their more delicately organised nervous system'.¹⁶ This article was written by Dr Adolphe Abrahams, who acted as medical officer of the British Olympic teams between 1912 and 1948, where a comparison of men and women's swimming events clearly highlights the cultural belief of male strength and stamina over female weakness and frailty – women being limited to shorter distances and fewer events than men - underlining the social belief that women simply couldn't (or shouldn't) do the same distances as men.¹⁷

Sociologist, Rose Weitz, theorises that as women gained independence, so they threatened the patriarchal society that she believed was keen to retain the balance of power in its favour. Weitz suggests this was achieved by promoting ideas of female frailty and by setting 'harsher standards of beauty' – both means of repressing women.¹⁸ As Skillen states the expectation for modern women to be involved in sport also offered an opportunity to acquire some essential attributes of the young modern woman: a slim figure, graceful movement, and clear

¹⁵ 'Why Men Are Still Superior', *Reynold's Illustrated News*, 14 November 1926, p. 17.

¹⁶ Adolphe Abrahams, 'Arris and Gale Lecture on the Physiology of Violent Exercise in Relation to the Possibility of Strain', *The Lancet*, 3 March 1928, p. 435.

¹⁷ E. Jokl, 'Physical Activity and. Aging', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 6 (1972), pp. 96-99.

¹⁸ Rose Weitz, 'A History of Women's Bodies', in *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour*, ed. by Rose Weitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 3-12; Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 131-134.

complexion – suggesting that female sport was really another strand of beauty culture.¹⁹

Morgan asserts that by the mid-1930s, the images of the sporting woman that signified modernity had vanished, replaced by a more traditional ideal of womanhood, which feminized and eroticized female athletes and suggested that women's virtue lay in their physical beauty.²⁰

Despite increasing numbers of women participating in marathons (by the beginning of 1934 eight of the eighteen authenticated Channel swims had been completed by women), there was a sharp decline in media reporting of these activities.²¹ The tone of advertisements and reports on female swimmers changed drastically, often featuring beauty, appearance, and the aesthetics of women's bodies in sport rather than women's athletic accomplishments.²² One article in *Picture Post* (1938) emphasising that 'Swimming is not only a sport. It's a useful beauty treatment too'.²³ As reminded by Bingham, 'women were presented as serving a decorative function, and even when the focus was sporting achievement, the representation could not deviate from the ideal feminine norm'.²⁴

Morgan has argued that the advances by female endurance swimmers were counterbalanced by the efforts of manufacturers and advertisers who transformed the image of the female swimmer from serious athlete to sexy starlet as swimsuits and caps shifted from plain, functional items to embellished, fashionable garments.²⁵ Fashion magazines and newsreels of the time reflected a growing interest in women's swimwear, often promoting complete outfits

¹⁹ Fiona Skillen, "Woman and Sport Fetish": Modernity, Consumerism and Sports Participation in Inter-War Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29, 5 (2012) pp. 750-765.

²⁰ Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', pp. 136-160.

²¹ Huggins, "And Now, Something for the Ladies": Representations of Women's Sport in Cinema Newsreels 1918-1939', pp. 681-700.

²² Campbell Warner, *When the Girls came out to play: The Birth of American Sportswear*.

²³ 'Crawling on Land', *Picture Post*, 15 October 1938, pp. 54-55.

²⁴ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 74.

²⁵ Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', pp. 136-160.

for swimming including decorative/feminine accessories such as parasols, shoes, capes, and caps (Figs 10, 11) – see also candid photographs that confirm that there was a keen market for this amongst female swimmers (Fig 12).

Health continued to be a key factor in marketing toward the female swimmer, however, ‘health’ was now something that could be achieved via appearances, being connoted by a slim form, conforming to norms of physical beauty, adhering to fashionable standards by wearing a modern swimsuit and swim cap. A poster (Fig 13) designed by Charles Burgess, Director of City Leeds Baths & Washhouses, supplied to Public and private Baths nationwide and sold via *Baths & Bath Engineering*, demonstrates how this image of the female swimmer pervaded.

This fueled the demand for fashionable caps: technical improvements in rubber production and manufacturing in the 1930s led to thicker moulded and embossed caps in a greater number of colours/textures (Figs 14, 15), these replacing thinner rubber caps with stitched/glued attachments (Fig 5) that tended to split more easily.²⁶ New decorative caps were marketed to recreational and serious female swimmers alike (Fig 16) – advertisements of swim caps featuring non-functional aesthetic details such as decorative moulded motifs from shells, scales, and flowers, to hair mimicking the short fashionable waved styles of the period (Figs 17, 18), with the sole purpose of adorning the wearer, proliferated at this time, and added to the idea of female swimmers being viewed as objects of desire.

Kleinert’s ‘Roxy’ swim cap for women featuring a moulded wreath design ‘becoming [to] every face’ was available in ten colours and three sizes (see advertisement Fig 19). Marketed

²⁶ Lindsay, *Dressing and Undressing for the Seaside*, p. 39.

equally to 'lido lovelies' and 'diving champions', Kleinert's claimed that these caps could 'safeguard the money you spend on your hair', while their plainer 'Roxy Polo' cap for men, in a much smaller feature relegated to the bottom corner of the advertisement, emphasises the caps' ability to protect men's ears. This not only reflects the chiefly female market for swim caps, but also the gendered marketing of beauty to women, and health to men. This half-page *Daily Mail* advertisement from 1938, includes testimonials from female swimmers, schoolgirls, distance swimmers, professional swimming instructresses, and mothers of champions - demonstrating an awareness by Kleinert's, an American rubber/clothing manufacturer, of the growing market for female swim caps in Britain, who by the 1930s had established production here and would become market leaders in swim caps until the 1970s.

H A I R

The suggestion by Kleinert's that their cap would save women money on their hair speaks to the social significance of hair and hair management to the female swimmer at the time. Women's grooming habits in the interwar period had a significant impact on the use and development of the swim cap. According to sociologists, Synnott and Asia Friedman, men and women's grooming practices were vital in the construction of gender ideals/norms – opposite hair practices being used not only to identify men and women in society, but also to make sure they are symbolically opposed.²⁷ Traditionally long hair has been equated with feminine beauty and morality, while short hair symbolises masculinity; Synnott argues that deviation from this oppositional norm can act as a powerful symbol/tool to challenge convention, arguing that women who cut their hair short increase their air of control and power, gaining autonomy.²⁸ The rise of feminism in the 1920s and the social changes

²⁷ Asia Friedman, *Blind to Sameness: Sexpectations and the Social Construction of Male and Female Bodies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

²⁸ Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair', pp. 381-413.

wrought by WWI caused a re-evaluation of women's hairstyles; many embracing a modern short bob-cut (Fig 20) - this breaking with traditional gender ideals and symbolising a desire for wider political and social change, as well as the spirit of the modern, active and carefree woman. Advantageous to the female swimmer, these shorter, lower-maintenance, modern hairstyles meant women could more easily wear the form-fitting/functional rubber swim caps that were better at keeping water out, as opposed to the earlier soft, voluminous fabric caps that had previously been used to accommodate longer hair.

In an article in *Britannia and Eve* from 1929, titled 'Your hair - the Long and the Short of it', a beauty columnist stated that 'when woman first turned her attention to bobbing and shingling her hair, perhaps she dispensed with a greater part of the care which her mother and grandmother took to keep their hair well brushed and combed'.²⁹ It was not just their hair that women were dispensing with - they were dispensing with tradition, at a time when patriarchal authority and an old social order were seen as under threat.

However, by the 1930s hairdressing had become big business - developments in hair colouring and perming prompting the expansion of modern hair/beauty salons, and an increasing range of haircare products from shampoos, conditioners, and tonics. Hollywood became a major influence on hairstyles during the 1930s, and remained so throughout the century, helping re-establish traditional feminine ideals of beauty as determined by patriarchal film directors. The softer, longer, waved, and bleached hairstyles seen on-screen were emulated here in routine practices requiring care, repetition, and the purchasing of products. When permanent waves became available and were sold as twice-yearly ventures involving many hours of chemical/heat treatments, these were costly but desirable options

²⁹ Sonia, 'Your hair - The Long and the Short of it', *Britannia and Eve*, 18 January 1929.

deemed as 'crucial economic and social investment[s] for independent, young female consumers' not simply as part of a beauty routine, but as a powerful component in the social construction of femininity.³⁰ Historian, Paul Deslandes, confirms that hair styling and grooming were promoted as embodied forms of cultural and economic capital that men and women not only could but had to invest in for personal and social well-being - advertisers attached specific meanings to 'healthy' hair by linking ideals of physical appearance and hygienic practices to those of personal satisfaction and social acceptance (Fig 21).³¹ If we apply Foucault's ideas about governmentality to hair and its management as a part of social modern practices, the upkeep and grooming of hair can be seen as a disciplining process for women, for which 'docility' or its rejection has 'rewards and penalties'.³² According to Foucault, the docile body is a governable body and as Synnott confirmed gendered haircuts can encourage social order. While innovations in the cutting and styling of hair during this period can be seen as emancipatory to women when understood in Foucault's terms as 'technologies of self', the return to conventionally 'feminine' hair in the 1930s and the new spaces (salons) designed solely for women's hair/beauty helped re-establish oppositional gender differences and reinforce the boundaries of patriarchal authority. Through feminine grooming regimes, Bartky identifies that it is 'women themselves who practice this discipline on and against their own bodies...as a form of obedience to patriarchy' - this internalised behaviour emphasising the indirect power identified by Elias and Foucault.³³

³⁰ Richard Corson, *Fashions in Hair: The First 5000 Years* (London: Peter Owen, 1965); Caroline Cox, *Good Hair Days* (London: Quartet Books, 1999); Biddle-Perry, *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, pp. 143-162.

³¹ Deslandes, 'Health and Hygiene', pp. 93-111; Royce Mahawatte, 'Hair as a social metaphor' in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle-Perry (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) p. 49.

³² Thomas Lemke, 'The Birth of Bio-politics: Michel Foucault's Lecture at the College de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality', *Economy and Society*, 30, 2 (2001) pp. 190-207.

³³ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990) p. 80.

As a result of women spending more money on their hair, female swimmers sought measures to protect their investment, this reflected in the advertisements for rubber swim caps, which promise to preserve women's hairstyles and prevent saltwater/treated pool water from damaging their hair or it reacting with the chemicals used in its styling - Kleinert's 'Absolutely Watertight Roxy' cap (Figs 22, 23) guaranteeing to 'Keep your Perm Permed', and 'Curls bone dry! – Waves stay "Perfectly Set"'. Think what it will save on hairdressing costs!'.³⁴

Similarly, women's magazines at the time reveal increasing advice from beauty columnists on how to protect one's hair from sea/pool water, while hairdresser's advertisements (Figs 24, 25) reassured women that their perms could withstand swimming (presumably with the implicit use of a swim cap), conscious that this was a popular pursuit of their modern female clientele.³⁵

Annette Kellerman, an influential swimming champion who wrote one of the first guidebooks by a woman on women's swimming, identified that wet hair was a significant reason that discouraged many women from becoming proficient swimmers. This was confirmed by a report of Public Baths in 1918 that stated for women 'the difficulties involved in hair drying are considerable, and constitute one of the chief objections to swimming where no proper provision for this is made'.³⁶ Hair drying facilities while available in the 1920s were often heavy and unsafe, and despite developments in the 1930s/1940s to produce safer, portable models, these would have been luxury items that few women would have been able to afford

³⁴ Keil and Wix, *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994*.

³⁵ Zoe Diana Draelos, 'Hair Cosmetics', in *Hair Growth and Disorders*, ed. by Ulrike Blume-Peytavi and others (New York: Springer, 2008) pp. 502-513.

³⁶ Agnes Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-Houses in the United Kingdom* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1918), p. 63.

- making swim caps an essential item to keep one's hair dry.³⁷ Kellerman advised women that to protect the hair as much as possible they should wear a 'rubber cap that will fit tightly about the ears, and if one does not do the trick...[to] wear two and sometimes three'.³⁸ Home-videos of seaside holidays show women following Kellerman's advice (Fig 26).

While swim caps claimed to prevent hair from getting wet and to adding a touch of glamour to female swimmers, there is a deeper history to women protecting their hair. Indologist, Patrick Olivelle, identifies the capacity of women's hair to arouse men - the exposure of women's hair in public has often been prohibited, loose hair being a sign of domestic informality and even of sexual intimacy - society requiring hair to be covered or dressed in some way i.e., clipped, shaped, coloured, or waved, to eliminate its potentially erotic signalling.³⁹ This puritanical cover-up traces back to the Middle Ages when the church decreed that women's hair must be covered in public, thereby establishing a link between covering one's hair to ideas of morality, that carried on until the mid-twentieth century; Probert attributes the continued use of swim caps over several decades to the fact that they conformed with this etiquette ruling that hats should be worn outside.⁴⁰

Although swim caps covered the hair as was required, caps still carried erotic connotations. Parallels can be drawn between the swim cap and the Victorian 'boudoir' cap worn by women to protect hair while sleeping. Fashion historian, Lorraine Smith, argues that boudoir

³⁷ 'In Pursuit of Beauty: Hair, Hair!', *Culture NL Museum* <https://www.culturenlmuseums.co.uk/story/in-pursuit-of-beauty-hair-hair/> [accessed 2 February 2022].

³⁸ Kellerman, *How to Swim*, p. 49.

³⁹ Patrick Olivelle, 'Hair and Society: Social Significance of Hair in South Asian Traditions' in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Culture*, ed. by Alf Hiltebeitel and Barbara D. Miller (Albany: The University of New York Press, 1998) pp. 11-51 (p.16).

⁴⁰ Probert, *Swimwear in Vogue since 1910*.

caps also provided a safe and contained version of sex appeal during a state of undress.⁴¹ In a similar way, swim caps allowed women the safety of using an established visual language to present a known and thereby safer version of erotic appeal during a much more public state of undress. While women's swimsuits were evolving to reveal more of the female body than had ever been seen in public before, becoming socially acceptable under the guise of health and fitness, it could be argued that the continued wearing of swim caps was not only down to women feeling a social pressure to maintain beauty standards, but was rooted in earlier ideas of protecting women's modesty. As Craik notes, women's swimwear produced contrasting messages of modesty and sexuality.⁴² This illustrates Elias's notions of civilising behaviour where over time women had come to internalise this rule of protecting their hair, in order to protect their reputations and perhaps explains how swim caps helped negotiate social tensions during mixed bathing, when men and women were able to socialise together in public for the first time wearing less than ever before. Interestingly, boudoir caps were still being marketed to women in the 1930s (Figs 27, 28), having evolved into a helmet-style similar to swim caps, proving that women continued this traditional practice/custom of protecting their hair at night as part of their beauty regimes. A reader's letter of 1939 in *Picture Post* (Fig 29) highlights that married women also subjected themselves to these nightly rituals, this demystifying the extent a wife would go to in order to conform to social standards.

HOLLYWOOD: THE MALE GAZE

The top-down diffusion of power/governance imposed by the male film studios in Hollywood highlights a clear patriarchal power structure that can be seen as a way of disciplining

⁴¹ Lorraine Smith, 'Chapter Five: A Safe Version of Sex Appeal', *Lingerie for your hair: Can hats be underwear?* (2020) <https://underpinningsmuseum.com/exhibition-lingerie-for-your-hair-can-hats-be-underwear-chapter-five/> [accessed 10 January 2022].

⁴² Craik, *The Face cf Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*, p. 133.

women's bodies. The circulation of typologies of glamour learned from Hollywood films was consumed by women in Britain during the 1930s and emulated in a way that translated into the fusion of swimming and the use of different types of swim caps.

The cross-cultural influence of American cinema in Britain played an important role on the female swimmer and swim cap and became a major influence during the interwar years - Hollywood films contributing to the desirability of swim caps and reinforcing the image of the glamorous swimmer. By 1939 over 20 million Britons (60% female), of a population of just under 50 million were weekly cinemagoers (Fig 30), of these, most audiences were young, from working and middle-class backgrounds.⁴³ Social historian, Carol Dyhouse, suggests that in the 1930s the glamour of Hollywood films and film stars portraying modern working girls were key to providing an image for women to aspire to.⁴⁴ Historian, Sally Alexander, suggests that going to the cinema was an aspirational experience to young women who did not have access to that many ways of improving their lives, the cinema represented an affordable escape from dreariness.⁴⁵ Additionally, historians Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas, assert that cinema was undeniably modern and national in its reach, offering more than 'escapism': providing 'a critical perspective through which to negotiate one's place in the world'.⁴⁶ The legacy of Hollywood glamour in the 1930s was that it demonstrated new ways of looking, being and living as a woman: in the words of film historian, Annette Kuhn, it 'extended imaginings of what a woman could be'.⁴⁷

⁴³ Huggins, "'And Now, Something for the Ladies'": Representations of women's sport in cinema newsreels 1918-1939', pp. 251-255.

⁴⁴ Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2010) p. 164.

⁴⁵ Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in the 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London: Virago Press, 1994) p. 223.

⁴⁶ Laura Beers and Thomas Geraint, *Brave new world: Imperial and democratic nation-building in Britain between the wars* (University of London Press, 2011) pp. 1-38.

⁴⁷ Annette Kuhn cited in Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*, p. 47.

Swimming became a popular vehicle in film to introduce glamour and mild scandal, particularly as there were strict regulations surrounding showing underwear, which could be neatly avoided by using swimwear. Film was particularly suited to convey the active body, and newsreel representations of female activities helped embed women's sports into the fabric of British life, presenting modern femininity and women in public space. As Huggins states, this was mediated almost entirely through a male gaze/commentary, in-line with traditional values of gender where women's sport had to 'balance prowess with femininity to be accepted... [also] expected to look good, and be caught up in dress, appearance and superficiality in sport, quite unlike expectations of men'.⁴⁸

Hollywood promoted fashionable artifice and ornament through spectacle, but on-screen performances and promotional images offered an aspirational version of modern femininity that was socially acceptable and therefore highly desirable for young female cinemagoers. One particularly influential American film, *Footlight Parade*, first shown in Britain in 1934, featured a Busby Berkeley poolside spectacle of synchronised swimmers wearing high heels with scantily clad bathing suits and swim caps covered in sequins or moulded to mimic hair. These lithe, young, female swimmers had been instantly transformed from sportswomen into glamorous showgirls (Fig 31). Reaching the top twenty in the box office, this film popularised synchronised swimming – the glamorous spectacle appealing to both men and women, and also conforming to patriarchal notions of an appropriately feminine activity for female swimmers.

⁴⁸ Huggins, "“And Now, Something for the Ladies”: Representations for women's sport in cinema newsreels 1918-1939", pp. 681-700.

By the late 1920s, technical innovation saw swimwear outside the field of professional swimming quickly become associated with enhancement and exposure of the female form, this to facilitate performance and display - clearly illustrated by Jantzen's iconic logo of the 'diving girl' which evolved into a more idealised version throughout the twentieth century (Fig 32).

In addition, Eve's Film Review produced by Pathé, a short weekly film series presented in cinemas, advertised the latest bathing fashions, designed to appeal to women who were interested in fashion, celebrities and movie stars. Suggestive images of women with playful titles, such as 'Costumes for Sea and See' (Fig 33) and 'For Ladies – Adam may glance' (Fig 34) emphasize that women's swimwear was now for viewing rather than just for swimming. Evidence from the surviving correspondence between Pathé and the public suggests that alongside the critics and the women for whom the series was intended, Eve's Film Review also had an appreciative male audience, perhaps because of the frequent shots of women wearing very little.⁴⁹ Whilst it can be argued that these newsreels presented exploitative images of women as objects of fascination, film historian, Jenny Hammerton, claims that following WWI, when many women were unmarried and seeking husbands, women's interest in sports were partly motivated out of self-interest. With fewer men (women exceeded men in Britain by 1.5-2 million) 'films focus on the body beautiful, [was] really encouraging women to look their best in order to snare a man'.⁵⁰ This motivated a new kind of consumer, inspired to replicate the glamorous movie star image, which appeared achievable.⁵¹

⁴⁹ News on Screen, 'Eve and Everybody's Film Review', <http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/series/80> [accessed 21 January 2022]

⁵⁰ 'Pilates, dancercise, aerobics...it started here', *BBC News*, (2005) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4265035.stm> [accessed 4 January 2022]

⁵¹ Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 90.

Developments in swimwear saw the introduction of Lastex in 1934, an elastic thread that revolutionised the look and feel of costumes, turning them ultimately into ‘suits’ such as those worn by the Hollywood stars that every young woman wanted to emulate. However, these were expensive, and a swimming costume was still a luxury item for most women, the knitted costume remaining the norm until after WWII.⁵² Swim caps were a more affordable accessory that allowed working- and middle- class women to quickly/easily access Hollywood glamour. A survey undertaken by the Ministry of Labour in 1929 indicated that the weekly pay of young female factory/office workers aged between 18-24, ranged from twenty to forty shillings, which after living costs could allow an estimated fifteen shillings every two months to spend on clothing.⁵³ For women of lesser financial means, swim caps ranging from one to six shillings* (between 1924-1938), offered a much more realistic way of emulating an upper-class life of leisure. Through this accessory, social aspirations could be acted out and temporarily realised. *Based on prices from adverts (see Figs 4, 10, 11 16, 19).

Keen to profit from this new consumer market, swim cap patents from this time imitating the costumes of on-screen stars, demonstrate the influence of Hollywood on the predominantly male swim cap designers. Patent designs by Henry North, of whom very little is known, show caps mimicking hair in moulded rubber (Fig 35), and even incorporating earrings (Fig 36). An undated/unlabelled vintage cap (Fig 37) - most likely produced by an American manufacturer due to its provenance – shows the same kind of style as these patent designs and appears to be from a similar period, possibly inspired by Josephine Baker (Fig 38), a glamorous dancer/performer at the time.

⁵² Horwood, “‘Girls who arouse dangerous passions’: Women and Bathing, 1900-1939”, pp. 653-673.

⁵³ H. Llewellyn Smith, *New survey of London life and labour*, II (London: P. S. King & Son Ltd, 1930-5) p. 468; David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920-c.1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement - A New History* (London: Macmillan Education, 2008) pp. 94-98; Cheryl Roberts, ‘A Price for Fashion: A Young Working-Class Woman’s Wardrobe in 1930s London’, *Apparences: Histoire et Culture du Paraître*, 7 (2017) pp. 1-22.

While glamour was an important factor in women's swim caps, it must be remembered that wearing a cap was still a requirement imposed on female swimmers, for rather different reasons than simply to enhance women's appearance.

H Y G I E N E

Ongoing debates about the health/hygiene of women, their swimming with or without cap, and their dirtying pool water etc., highlight concerns about the policing of the female body.

By the 1920s the pursuit of health/fitness saw the role of Baths and swimming pools shift to physical training and exercise, and the nineteenth century practice of keeping the swimmer clean to a pre-occupation with keeping the water itself clean, whereby gender/class played a significant role.⁵⁴

The Association of Bath Superintendents established in 1921 sought to unify the men in charge of Bathhouses across Britain, where no previous association/communication or common standard had existed. Carrying out a report in 1923 on the filtration/purification of Bath water, the findings were published and sent to every superintendent in England and Wales. This prompted the Ministry of Health to publish *The Purification of the Water of Swimming Baths* in 1925, establishing a new standard.⁵⁵ The publication led to the installation of many chlorination and continuous filtration plants in the late 1920s/early 1930s replacing the 'fill and empty' system that existed before – where pools were emptied twice a week and cleaned by hand. First-class use was when the water was freshest, becoming

⁵⁴ Hana and Alastair Laing, 'History', in *Taking the Plunge. The architecture of bathing*, ed. by Marcus Binney (London: SAVE Britain's Heritage, 1982), pp.14-19 (p.16).

⁵⁵ Ministry of Health, *The Purification of the Water of Swimming Baths* (London, England: H. M. Stationery Office, 1929)

cheaper as the water deteriorated. A report carried out in 1918 on Public Baths across Britain by Agnes Campbell, found that from the point of view of the management ‘a ladies Bath gives more trouble than a man’s’ costing Bathhouses more in terms of cleaning as women were considered to make the water ‘more quickly fouled by nap from their costumes, and by stray hairs’.⁵⁶ As a result there was less interest in accommodating women, as well as being a deterrent to female swimmers. While ‘filling and dumping’ and then, later, filtration dealt with the visible signs of dirt in a swimming pool, that was only one level of cleanliness. Though concerns about hygiene have always partly been about the health of the human body, they are also intimately bound up with concerns about physical appearance and social order.⁵⁷

Douglas states that ‘the boundaries between the physical and the social operate as a set of ordered relations constantly under threat of contamination from *matter out of place*’, uncleanness and dirt, that is, bodily waste products, if left untreated/uncontrolled threaten to pollute and disrupt the social order.⁵⁸ Although it is perceived as being potentially less dangerous than bodily fluids, for Douglas hair represents a problematic emanation: ‘every head hair has a disgusting character even when it seems to be in place’.⁵⁹ The threat of pollution is managed at two levels: ‘firstly, instrumental— influences that reinforce social pressures and uphold moral values and social rules defined by beliefs in the dangers of contagion; secondly, expressive— the “symbolic load” that such beliefs carry with them’.⁶⁰ It would follow that the capping of female swimmer’s hair, stands to correct the metaphorically precarious and threatening nature of the social and physical body’s boundaries, or at least manage such anxieties.

⁵⁶ Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-Houses in the United Kingdom*, p. 63.

⁵⁷ Deslandes, ‘Health and Hygiene’, p. 93.

⁵⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, p. 41, 165.

⁵⁹ Alf Hiltebeitel and Barbara D. Miller, *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Culture*, (Albany: The University of New York Press, 1998), p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

One male swimmer in the late nineteenth century, fearful of sharing the water in which women had swum, believed this was sufficient reason to exclude women from Bathhouses.⁶¹ Douglas argued that ‘pollution fear’ could be developed as a method of social control, whereby purity rules become a form of social legislation that could be weaponised to exclude, or used as a tool to manage.⁶² This early male viewpoint highlights the long-held belief that women’s bodies were thought to be unclean and offers some explanation as to why female swimmers faced so many regulations - the swim cap being a tool and one means of managing female swimmers.

An article featured in *The Ladies Section* of the Royal Life Saving Society magazine in 1915, written by another woman confirms/promotes the belief that a swim cap was an accepted necessity for a woman, revealing that:

‘the majority of Baths now enforce the wearing of caps by female bathers, which is obviously as it should be. It is neither pleasant nor hygienic to swim in a limited space of water in which anyone and everyone has had their hair floating’.⁶³

Similarly, Campbell’s report recommended the rigorous enforcement of ‘what should be the invariable rule in regard to the wearing of caps’ by female swimmers - believing that rules and regulations of bather’s personal hygiene were intended by health authorities to maintain pool water in order to reduce disease.⁶⁴ Clearly there was a sense of compliance in women who were prepared to accept that their hair could cause disease if not covered when swimming, this suggesting an environment where a set of norms defines accepted behaviour.

⁶¹ Keil and Wix, *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994*, pp. 21-22.

⁶² Mary Douglas, ‘Purity and Danger: Leviticus – a Retrospective’ (seminar at Clare College, Cambridge, 21 October 1997) pp. 30-35.

⁶³ Lady Dorothy, ‘Can Caps Be Made Watertight?’, *The Swimming Magazine*, March 1915, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-Houses in the United Kingdom*, p. 63.

The developments in women's costumes throughout the 1920s/1930s and new filtration systems introduced in the 1930s would have resolved the issue of women's costumes fouling the water, making it more financially viable for Bathhouses to accommodate women and reduce the need for sanctions in their dress/access. However, new claims from Bath managers regarding women's hair blocking filters led to the reinforcement of the rule for women to wear swim caps, while men's hair wasn't considered as contributing to these blockages.

It is also interesting to note how the swim cap for the modern female swimmer in the early 1920s was presented as a device for hygiene, *protecting others from women's hair*, widely believed to be a pollutant; but that by the 1930s with developments in pool filtration, and increased availability of haircare products and grooming practices, this argument could no longer stand, and a new reason had to be found to enforce the swim cap rule on women. Subsequently, the swim cap transmuted into a device for *protecting women's hair from getting wet*, as new social standards of beauty/morality determined that women's hair and appearance would define their attractiveness/social status. It is clear to see how commercially minded swim cap manufacturers would have benefited from encouraging these ideas, creating continued, if not increased demand for their swim caps with ever-changing fashions, but it could be argued that this marketing strategy masked a deeper/more sinister desire to control/regulate female swimmers, and that by emphasising focus on women's physical appearance this hindered their emancipation, reaffirming patriarchal power.

MIXED BATHING, MIXED FEELINGS:

SOCIABILITY AND REGULATION

The increasing popularity of swimming and the introduction of mixed bathing resulted in an increase in female swimmers prompting more scrutiny/regulation of them.

While many local authorities provided greater opportunities for mixed bathing, Public Baths around Britain in the 1920s only offered single-sex sessions where female swimmers were given little provision, reflecting the view that swimming was for the most part a male preserve. Baths continued to follow the legislation set out in the Baths and Washhouses Act of 1846 prohibiting men and women from bathing together.⁶⁵ Numerous local authorities provided separate entrances to Baths to maintain separation of the sexes, sometimes providing additional women-only pools which were usually much smaller – patriarchal Bath committees limited women's access to one or two days a week, often over the least popular hours, ultimately prohibiting working women.

Mixed bathing in Public Bathhouses remained technically illegal until 1925, however, older ideas of propriety ensured that sessions within Bathhouses were strictly regulated: additional costume requirements, curtains shielding the entrance to changing rooms, supervision by both male and female attendants, bathers often entering/leaving the water on separate sides, and spectators prohibited (Fig 39). Regulation 8 of the Liverpool Corporation Baths in 1928 stated 'all females [must] wear an approved bathing costume and cap of approved pattern' during mixed bathing and applied a strict admission policy where males had to be accompanied by females, and young boys and girls by their mothers and fathers.⁶⁶ By the 1930s there was a boom in construction of open-air pools and lidos (Figs 40, 41), leaving hardly a town/city without one, Government loans being freely available to local authorities to carry out works commissioned in the public interest.⁶⁷ These new public spaces not only made swimming more widely accessible providing a substitute for going to the seaside, but offered further opportunities for sociability where men and women could meet.

⁶⁵ Love, 'Splashing in the Serpentine: A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800–1918', p. 587.

⁶⁶ 'Mixed Bathing', *The Liverpool Echo*, 30 August 1928, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Janet Smith, *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open-Air Swimming Pools of Britain* (English Heritage, 2005) pp. 22–23.

As social historian, Ken Worpole argued, the sign 'Mixed Bathing at ALL times' was worn as 'a badge of pride and free-spiritedness' by lidos, which helped create 'new spaces of public informality in the city...[and] helped to break down the barriers between men and women in public, especially in the minimum attire and part-nudity'.⁶⁸ Newsreel footage by Topical Budget (which reached a weekly audience of 5 million) further promoted the spirit and fun to be had by all at the lido (Fig 42), showing men and women freely/equally enjoying themselves, but also highlighted the continued social expectation for women to wear caps.⁶⁹

The popularity of women's swimming posed a serious problem for respectable society around how much of the body could decently be exposed in public, especially during mixed bathing. Keil and Wix stressed how dress could reflect 'probity and respect for legality', and at that time swimwear determined by patriarchal society was chiefly concerned with the preservation of female modesty'.⁷⁰

The ASA issued a costume law for competitive female swimmers in 1912 which remained the standard up until 1936, although no reference was made to swim caps (Fig 43). However, an advert for W. W. Haffenden's Submarine swim caps in 1936 (Fig 44) suggests caps were purchased by many women, boasting annual sales of 100,000.

Although the ASA was a private organisation, it was keen to promote swimming for all, and wielded significant influence over public swimming too.⁷¹ Many local authorities adopted its rules and policies, also adding their own regulations, such as the Leeds Central Baths in 1922

⁶⁸ Ken Worpole, *Here comes the sun. Architecture and Public Space in Twentieth-Century European Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000) pp. 114-115.

⁶⁹ Luke McKernan, 'Topical Budget 1911-1931', *BFI Screen Online*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/583128/index.html> [accessed 4 February 2021] (para. 3 of 4).

⁷⁰ Keil and Wix, *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994*, p. 187.

⁷¹ 'Bathing Censor', *The Weekly Dispatch*, 19 February 1925, p. 11.

that insisted that ‘all bathers must wear ASA regulation costumes, which must be approved by the bath’s superintendent or his representative...[and] females must in addition wear caps of approved pattern’.⁷² No specifics are given for what this entailed, however, this addition immediately marked a clear difference between male and female swimmers, and was perhaps influenced by Campbell’s 1918 Public Baths Report – helping to establish a social norm.⁷³ Charges for swimming were left to the discretion of local authorities, and as the 1918 Public Bath Report shows these remained low. Men and women were usually charged the same amount, however, women often had to meet additional expenses in the matter of costumes and caps, which could be hired from Public Baths.⁷⁴ Manchester Corporation Baths regulations of 1918 include a hire charge for men and women’s costumes (tuppence each), and for women’s caps (a penny) with a deposit (a penny) to be refunded on return. Including the cost of admission (sixpence) a woman could pay a total of tenpence in order to swim.⁷⁵ Few working-class people owned swimwear owing to its price and limited usage, hence the cost of hiring or buying suitable swimwear greatly affected their access.⁷⁶ Despite the apparent inequalities, tens of thousands of women were attending pools.⁷⁷ Historian, Jihang Park, suggests women made little effort to break such social controls. The advent of mixed bathing being seen as an encounter where women could ‘meet a handsome young socialist, or young professional, well away from inquisitive family eyes’.⁷⁸ A reflection of the success of mixed bathing facilities is that very few women-only clubs and societies for social swimming survived - they were an oasis from the male gaze but

⁷² ‘The Swimming Season’, *The Yorkshire Post*, 6 June 1922, p. 10.

⁷³ Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-Houses in the United Kingdom*, p. 63.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

⁷⁶ Exhibition Archive: Riviera Style, ‘Bathing Beauties: 1895-1919’, *Fashion and Textile Museum* (2020) <https://fashiontextilemuseumblog.wordpress.com/2020/05/27/exhibition-archives-riviera-style/> [accessed 30 September 2021].

⁷⁷ Campbell, *Report on Public Baths and Wash-Houses in the United Kingdom*, Appendix I pp. 1-241.

⁷⁸ Smith, *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity*, p. 321; Jihang Park, ‘Sport, Dress Reform and the Emancipation of Women in Victorian England: A Reappraisal’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6 (1989), pp.10-30 (p. 10.).

something ultimately few women wanted, preferring the ambience of the poolside and the beach, with its increasingly glamorous associations for young women and family ambience for the married woman.⁷⁹

The main censor of mixed bathing was Tonbridge Councillor, Donald Clark. Clark drew great media attention from *The Daily Mail* with his views in 1920 that:

By making girls look like wet Scotch terriers, mixed bathing stops more marriages than any other cause [stating] much of the unrest in the country is due to the barbarous licence in women's dress'.⁸⁰ 'In one way I am glad to see that my campaign has born good fruit. It is noticeable that since I compared women coming out of the water to bedraggled Skye terriers, they have been more particular about bathing caps. Wherever I go now I see some very becoming and picturesque bathing caps.'⁸¹

However, one female reader challenged Clark's views, in a letter to the Editor of *The Daily Mail*, reporting that she has never worn that 'atrocious bathing cap', swimming with her 'fair hair flying loose, and salt water has only had the effect of making it more golden and curly', nor has she worn the 'ugly regulation bathing suit', and yet she met her husband who was first attracted by her appearance while bathing – 'I was known as "the Mermaid", so in appearance I evidently resemble, when bathing, that fabled nymph rather than the hideous creature sometimes taken to be a typical girl-bather. At all events, my husband thinks so.'⁸²

According to Bingham, *The Daily Mail* prompted much controversy over mixed bathing and the shifting notions of morality. By presenting Clark as a 'representative of Victorian

⁷⁹ Horwood, "'Girls who arouse dangerous passions': Women and Bathing, 1900-1939", pp. 653-673.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 659.

⁸¹ 'Mr. Clark on Mixed Bathing Crowds', *The Daily Mail*, 30 August 1920, p. 3.

⁸² 'Mixed Bathing and Matrimony', *The Daily Mail*, 4 August 1920, p. 4.

propriety...[and] turning him into little more than a figure of ridicule', the media helped to undermine 'traditional' standards and clarify definitions of 'modern behaviour'.⁸³ Bingham claims that newspapers generally took the side of modern fashions and behaviour.⁸⁴ Images in the popular press and the accompanying support for modern fashions increased the acceptability of the wearing of swimwear and thus caused local authorities to bow to popular opinion and relax regulations. Apart from this allegiance to modernity and increasing circulation, the popular press had another reason for embracing images of scantily clad women - such images were frequently used in advertising, which was designed to appeal to the growing female readership.

By the 1930s mixed bathing had become more widely accepted, and in 1932, *The Times* reported an appeal by the ASA secretary, Harold Fern, for public pools to offer mixed bathing at all times, arguing that this would be in the financial interest of local authorities too.⁸⁵ The ASA were keen to use the growth in entertainment, enjoyment, and recreation to promote the need for *everyone* to be able to swim, for safety as well as fitness.⁸⁶ By 1930 most schoolgirls in Britain were being urged to engage in some form of physical activity - swimming proving popular. Fig 45 shows children's swimming lessons at the Warrington Bathhouse, where girls unlike boys were expected to wear swim caps. Another benefit of mixed bathing was that it enabled greater numbers of girls and women to learn to swim, since men who had previously been afforded the opportunity and encouragement to learn, could now teach them.⁸⁷

⁸³ Adrian Bingham, 'The Original Press Baron: The Role and Legacy of Lord Northcliffe', *The Daily Mail Historical Archive 1896-2004* (2013) <https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/adrian-bingham-original-press-baron-role-legacy-lord-northcliffe> [accessed 30 September 2021] (para. 12 of 14).

⁸⁴ Bingham, *Gender Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, p. 146.

⁸⁵ Horwood, "'Girls who arouse dangerous passions': Women and Bathing, 1900-1939", p. 663.

⁸⁶ Keil and Wix, *In the Swim: The Amateur Swimming Association from 1869 to 1994*, p. 166.

⁸⁷ Jenny Landreth, *Swell: A Waterbiography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) p. 25.

Perhaps this financial incentive was all that was needed, since increasing numbers of Bathhouses across Britain saw mixed bathing become commonplace throughout the mid-1930s - moral concerns being quickly abandoned for the sake of capitalism.⁸⁸ This is shown in the advertisements and posters for Bathhouses (Fig 46), lidos (Fig 47), and coastal resorts that shamelessly used the female figure to entice customers - almost exclusively focused on glamorously attired young women (unattached and seemingly available for liaison) wearing modern swimsuits and caps. This, reaffirming the newly established social acceptance in both women's appearance and behaviour.⁸⁹

CASE STUDY: THE EUGÈNE MERMAIDS

The Eugène Mermaids, a popular group of female synchronised swimmers in 1930s Britain, draw together the various issues that related to modernity, glamour, spectatorship, and the viewing of women's bodies.

Hired by Eugène Suter, a well-known London hairdresser, as part of an advertising campaign to promote his 'permanent wave' hairstyling, the Mermaids toured Britain's Bathhouses and seaside resorts giving twice and sometimes three times daily performances in salt or chlorinated water, aided by rubber swim caps. At the end of a performance, a mermaid would remove her cap, emerging from the water with her wave intact, demonstrating the 'lasting beauty of the Eugène Wave'.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Angela J Latham, *Posing a Threat – Flappers, Chorus Girls, and other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s*, (Wesleyan University Press, Hanover NH, 2000) p. 65.

⁸⁹ Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside – Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006) p. 182.

⁹⁰ 'Eugène presents The Eugène "MERMAIDS"', *The Eugène Waver*, June 1934, p. 13.

Suter proclaimed that short hair was ‘not a whim of fashion...[but rather] significant for an adaptation to modern existence’ – the Eugène wave and his Mermaids epitomising the modern girl (Fig 48).⁹¹

Conscious of the growth of swimming both as a sport and as a spectacle, it is not difficult to see the influence of popular Hollywood films such as *Footlight Parade* (1934), on Suter’s marketing. Eugène’s Mermaids performed trick swimming, ornamental floating and acrobatic diving, just like the cinematic showgirls.⁹² The trade journal, *The Eugène Waver*, often included/reported on Hollywood hairstyles– conscious that customers would be seeing the latest styles in films. Like many other businesses, Eugène was quick to use glamorous depictions of the modern female swimmer to align his industry with commercial interests. The media celebrated the Eugène Mermaids attractive demonstrations and ‘their performance [was] considered to be one of the most spectacular of any team of ladies’, helping reinforce notions of suitable appearance/activities for female swimmers.⁹³ Demonstrations proved popular with the public and the managers of swimming pools/lidos, drawing in crowds of up to 5000 people per matinee, confirming that this idealised female swimmer was a profitable prospect. When the Mermaid’s manager, George Elliott, was asked ‘What is a Mermaid?’, he replied ‘A Mermaid is a haddock with sex appeal!’ – haddock being a popular fish at the time and of high commercial value.⁹⁴ This comment reflects the Mermaids appeal to a male audience despite attendance records showing that women generally outnumbered male spectators by four to one.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Mary Pandos, ‘An Hour with The Rulers of our Heads’, *Britannia and Eve*, 1 August 1929.

⁹² ‘Eugène Mermaids Here Again: New Summer Tour of the Popular Seaside Resorts commences this month’, *The Eugène Waver*, June 1935, pp. 6-8.

⁹³ ‘Eugène Mermaids’, *West Middlesex Gazette*, 22 June 1935; ‘Water Cabaret in Fleetwood Bath’, *Fleetwood Chronicle, Fylde News and Advertiser*, 23 July 1937; ‘Bathing Pool St. Leonards’, *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 26 August 1937.

⁹⁴ ‘What is a Mermaid?’, *The Eugène Waver*, October 1934, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

Chosen for their ability as water performers and ‘not for the quality of their hair’, Eugène’s mermaids were intended to appeal to the everywoman. This was also reflected in Eugène’s pricing, a full-head perm lasting four to six months and costing 21 shillings.⁹⁶ At a time when a factory/office worker’s weekly pay ranged from 20 to 40 shillings, the cost of a perm would have made a glamorous hairstyle an affordable prospect for many women.⁹⁷ However, with additional maintenance - Mermaids washed their hair once a week, and used curved combs to set the wave in wet hair - this would also have been an investment in time and money, but one women were clearly willing to make. Swim caps being an extra but necessary cost to maintain these beauty standards until the 1970s.

Many of these Mermaids had already achieved significant athletic feats such as: Sunny Lowry, a long-distance swimmer who had just completed the Channel in 1933; Gladys Powsey, England’s Premier High Diver; Florence Barker, a silver medal winner from the 1924 Olympics; Marjorie Heywood, North-country diving champion; and Pat Lock, a diving champion of Gibraltar.

One might wonder why women like Lowry would have chosen to become a Mermaid. Perhaps since her athletic achievements were not officially recognised until 1958, she may have felt pressure to conform to society’s expectations to be acknowledged, in addition to earning a living within the limited paid opportunities for female swimmers.⁹⁸ This confirms Morgan’s earlier argument that the athletic accomplishments of female swimmers were often

⁹⁶ ‘Eugène’s Minimum Price Policy’, *The Eugène Waver*, Nov 1934, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁷ Smith, *New survey of London life and labour*, II, p. 468; Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920-c.1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement - A New History*, pp. 94-98; Roberts, ‘A Price for Fashion: A Young Working-Class Woman’s Wardrobe in 1930s London’, pp. 1-22.

⁹⁸ ‘Channel swimmer Sunny dies,’ *Manchester Evening News*, 19 April 2010, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/channel-swimmer-sunny-dies-944392> [accessed 6 February 2022].

devalued and demonstrates how professional swimmers had to balance femininity with careers and adapt/conform to social standards of beauty. Note the transformation of Sunny Lowry from athlete in training (Fig 49), wearing a two-piece costume which led to her being berated as a 'harlot' in the media, to Eugène Mermaid (Fig 50), conforming to the more socially accepted/celebrated image of the female swimmer: slim, modestly dressed, with permed hair and make-up.⁹⁹

Patriarchal powers and normative behaviour controlled by media and fashion, established an acceptable version of the female swimmer, and a growing commercial market that would only continue into post-WWII Britain, explored in the next chapter.

⁹⁹ 'Channel swimmer Sunny dies,' *Manchester Evening News*, 19 April 2010, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/channel-swimmer-sunny-dies-944392> [accessed 6 February 2022].

ILLUSTRATIONS: CHAPTER 1



Fig. 1. Marshall & Snelgrove Advertisement, Bathing Costumes, August 1887 - Note the bathing machines (in use until the 1920s) used for changing into these rather impractical bathing costumes, intended to maintain women's modesty - often made with wool, making them incredibly heavy when wet and difficult to swim in.



Fig. 2. George Hoyningen-Huene, Bathing suits for men and women by Lucien Lelong, 1929

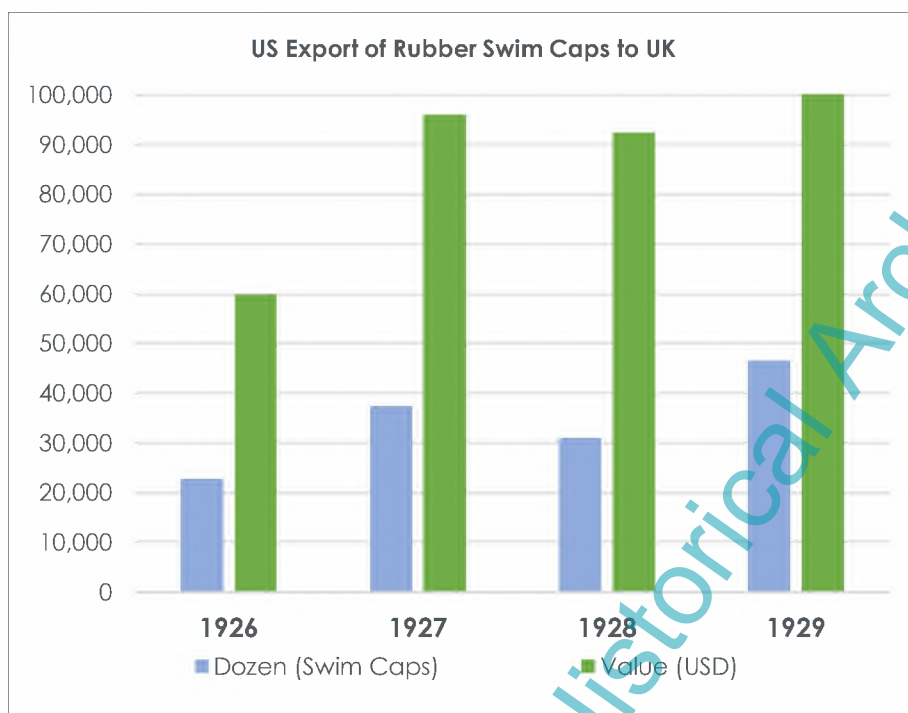


Fig. 3. Harry Wright Newman, European Markets for Rubber Sundries & Specialties, 1928.

**NO BETTER PROOF
THAN THIS!**

**A SPECIAL DISPLAY
OF THE FAMOUS
SUBMARINE
CHANNEL SWIM
BATHING CAP**

and other Bathing Necessities
is being made by the Stores
mentioned below.

The "Submarine" is the CAP
that was selected by both the
successful lady Channel swim-
mers of last year.

Mrs. Corson is again wearing a
"Submarine" on her next Dover
to France Channel swim.

**No Better Proof
than this!**

Mrs. Corson writes:—

"Permit me to inform you that I
wore your excellent 'Submarine'
cap during my recent swim across
the English Channel and found it
satisfactory in every respect. I
selected your 'Submarine' cap,
which I used exclusively during
my training, because I found it
to be the only cap on the market
that protected my ears from
water and kept my hair dry. The
'Submarine' cap is the most com-
fortable swimming cap that I
have ever worn because of the
absence of any pressure on the
ears. I heartily recommend the
'Submarine' cap to all persons
indulging in aquatic sports."



**PRICE OF
"SUBMARINE"**

5/11

BRING PURE
RUBBER will
last for years,
therefore much
cheaper than
ordinary caps.

**OTHER BATHING
NECESSITIES ARE:**
SWIMMING RING,
POSEIDON 5/11
The "ZOO" WATER-
POLO AND BEACH
BALL, 2/6, 3/6, 4/6
The OLD DUTCH
TURKEY TOWEL
LINED BEACH
SHOE, 2/11; pair.
FUTURIST CAP 8/4.

**SEE SPECIAL DISPLAYS OF BATHING
NOVELTIES TO-DAY AT**

LONDON:

*Gorrings's, Harrods, Marshall & Snelgrove's,
Selfridge's, Stagg & Russell's.*

PROVINCES:

CHESTER ...	...	Densons, Ltd.
DUNDEE ...	...	D. M. Brown Ltd.
LEEDS ...	...	Thornton & Co., Ltd.
LIVERPOOL ...	...	Bon Marche, Ltd.
LOWESTOFT ...	...	Tuttle & Sons, Ltd.
PLYMOUTH ...	...	Spooner & Co., Ltd.
SOUTHPORT ...	...	Broadbent's, Ltd.
SOUTHSEA ...	...	Handleys Ltd.

Also every Drapery Store, Rubber Shop and
Sports Outfitter can supply "Submarine."

Memento of Channel Swim.

Autograph photo of
MILLE GADE CORSON
to first thousand buyers posting dealer's
receipted bill for a "Submarine" Cap to

WEINTRAUD'S,

Sole Concessionaires

(TRADE ONLY SUPPLIED),

12-14, WELL STREET, LONDON, E.C.1.

Fig. 4. Weintraud's Advertisement, Submarine Bathing Cap, 1 June 1927



Fig. 5. Constance Muriel Grinsell, Improvements in or relating to Bathing Caps and Helmets. UK International Property Office Patent, 1929 - *The representation of the head of hair may be produced by means of an attachment, such as, for instance, a separate member adapted to be secured by sewing, an adhesive, or other means, to the cap.*



Fig. 6. Unknown, Mercedes Gleitze, 1928 - *Wearing the 'Earphone' hairstyle: two plaits coiled over the ears.*



Fig. 7. Unknown, Mercedes Gleitze, 1926

2131.....0001 0H2130

Aviators' Style
 Beautiful
 Moire Design
 Regular 75c
 Retail Value
 Heavy rubber. For men and women.
 Shpg. wt., 4 oz. **59c**

6H2112	-Navy blue...	59c
6H2113	-Red	59c
6H2114	-Green	59c
6H2106	-White	59c

Aviators' Style Plain Cap
 6H2109-Natural color. Pure
 VintageDancer.....**47c**

Fig. 8. Unknown maker, Aviators' Style Swim Cap, 1927



Fig. 9. Tom Purvis, *Lubricating Oil for Modern Motors*, 1928 - Note the shadow figure in the background wearing the earlier impractical bathing costume and cap, symbolising the past, as the young modern female swimmer leaps forward in her helmet style swim cap and more revealing swimsuit.

The newest designs
in Bathing Costumes
and Wraps.

Bathing Costume Section,
1st Floor.



Gorringes Pay Postage in Gt. Britain and Ireland on these goods.

N. 257.—Attractive BATHING WRAP of latest design in good Terry cloth, in pretty colours with design in contrasting shade. Colours: Powder Blue/Apocot, Sage/Fawn, Grey/Orange. 29/6

This essential complement to Bathing Outfits is stocked in a large variety of styles and colourings in qualities ranging from 12/0 to 40/6

N. 258.—BATHING COSTUME, regulation shape, in fine fancy Wool Stock net of exclusive French design, perfect fitting. Colours: White/Purple, White/Red, White/Royal, White/Black. 18/0

Helmet shape rubber BATHING CAP, in all colours, trimmed white, 5/11 Gorringes can supply the regulation shape swimming dress, plain Black or Navy, in a large variety of material, Cotton, Wool or Silk.

N. 259.—BATHING COSTUME of exclusive design in Black Artificial Milanese Silk trimmed with squares of Black Tulle/Silk, outlined coloured braid, arranged to form Vandyke edged, short skirt. Colours: Black/White, Black/Red. 49/6

Pretty close fitting rubber BATHING CAP, in all colours. Trimmed to contrast — 4/11

N. 260.—Dainty BATHING COSTUME in Crêpe-de-Chine of excellent quality, separate tunic and knickers, tunic trimmed and finished with strips of self material giving fringed skirt effect. Colours: Jade, Royal. 89/6

Attractive rubber BATHING CAP of latest design, trimmed clusters of rubber flowers in contrasting colours. 6/0

N. 261.—BATHING COSTUME in the popular American two-colour design in Woolen Stockette, fancy top in colour on white ground, black knickers. Top made in trunk combination shape, without legs to prevent riding up, knickers edged with material to match tunic and cut to fasten securely with self belt at waist. Colours: White and Yellow/Black, White and Green/Black, or White and Red/Black. 29/6

Rubber BATHING HELMET submarine with raised lining carapace as used by the Channel swimmers — 5/11

Gorringes

Buckingham Palace Rd, S.W.1

FREDERICK
GORRINGE LTD

Fig. 10. Gorringes Advertisement, Bathing Costumes and Wraps, 1927

MANNEQUIN PARADES of BATHING GOWNS

A N attractive series of Mannequin Parades has been arranged to take place at Whiteley's this week, at 3 o'clock each afternoon, from to-day until Friday, May 25th. At these Parades beautiful Living Models will display a delightful collection of the season's newest Bathing Gowns, Wraps and Accessories in the Salon on the First Floor.

Admission is for women only, of course, and by ticket obtainable free, from the Information Bureau on the Ground Floor.

BATHING GOWN DEPARTMENT FIRST FLOOR.

No. 1.—Chiffon Bathing Gown with plain Knicker and fancy Top, a special feature of the new season's underwear. In Scarlet only. PRICE 25/9 Post free.

No. 2.—Fancy Rubber Cape in all colours and various styles. In good quality. PRICE, each 1/- Post free.

No. 3.—Bathing Shoes in smart plain style of Fancy Rubber. All colours. PRICE, a pair 2/11 Post free.

No. 4.—"Brudley" Swimming Costume in All-Wool, White Tops with coloured stripes and coloured Knicker with contrasting stripe down side. Navy/White/Orange, Army White/Scarlet, Black/White/Scarlet, Navy/Red/Green. In all sizes. Post free. PRICE 25/6

No. 5.—Steeple Beach Coat in fancy Terry Tossing of mixed substrings. Post free. PRICE 23/9

No. 6.—"Brudley" Rubber Cap in Rubber Cap. PRICE 5/11 Post free.

No. 7.—Fancy Rubber Cape in good quality. Dazzling style in all colours. PRICE, each 2/6 Post free.

No. 8.—Fancy Rubber Gown. PRICE, a pair 3/11 Post free.

No. 9.—"Brudley" Stockingette Swimming Costume. Knicker in plain colour and the Top White with stripes. It has the breezy attachment which makes these costumes so delightfully trim a slane. In Red/White/Blue and Black/Multi-Colour. All sizes. Post free. PRICE 10/9

No. 10.—Beach Cape of Terry Tossing in Multi Colours, with wide collar. PRICE 12/9 Post free.

No. 11.—Fancy Rubber Cap. Post free. PRICE 2/6

No. 12.—Cape Rubber Bathing Shoes, with fancy sections. All colours. PRICE, a pair 3/11 Post free.

Fig. 11. Lilywhites Advertisement, Mannequin Parades of Bathing Gowns, 21 May 1928



Fig. 12. Edward Malindine, *Southport holiday camp, Merseyside, 1928* – *fashion conscious women show how the new fashions were closely followed.*



Fig. 13. Charles Burgess, *Swim your way to Health*, *Baths & Bath Engineering*, May 1934
Capitalising on the image of the young modern female swimmer, this lithograph poster in three colours was supplied by the National Association of Bath Superintendents to Bathhouses across Britain, to customise with hours of opening, tariffs etc.

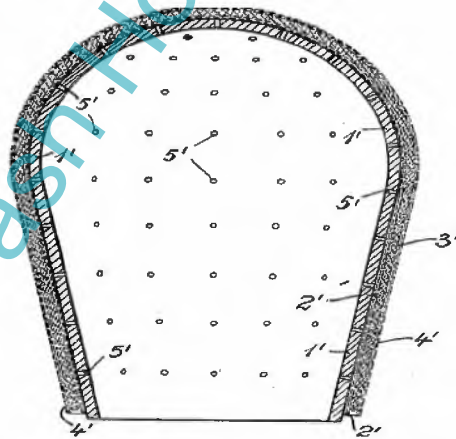


Fig. 14. I B Kleinert Rubber Co, *Improvements in and relating to the production of relief patterned rubber bathing caps*. UK International Property Office Patent, 1932 - *This invention concerns a process and an arrangement for the production of relief patterned rubber bathing caps, by vulcanizing a rubber mixture rolled out into sheets and placed in iron pressure moulds, allowing for the production of caps with several colours.*

BATHING CAPS
for 1931

BUTLER & CRISPE
80-82 CLERKENWELL ROAD
LONDON, E.C.

TELEGRAMS: ALLURWANT, LONDON
TELEPHONE: CLERKENWELL 3904

No. 6175M HELMET
Assorted Plain or Marbled Colours
per 2/- doz.

No. 255 TAM-O-SHANTER
With Tassel
Assorted Colours
per 4/- doz.

No. 251 FANCY HELMET
With Side Decoration
Assorted Colours
per 7/6 doz.

No. 290 RAINBOW DIVER
per 8/11 doz.

No. 1500 MOULDED HELMET
With Chin Strap
Assorted Colours
per 10/6 doz.

No. 474 DIVING HELMET
With Chin Strap
Assorted Colours
per 14/11 doz.

No. 694 NEW POLO HELMET
Assorted Colours
per 28/- doz.

Fig. 72a SUBMARINE
Assorted Colours
per 5/- doz.

No. 434 "THE GULL"
Moulded Helmet, with Ear Piece.
Assorted Colours
per 2/- doz.

Fig. 74a MOULDED HELMET
British Make. Assorted Colours
per 25/- doz.

Fig. 15. Butler & Crispe Advertisement, 'Bathing Caps for 1931', 2 May 1931



The **LEYSEA** BATHING CAP

Joan is wearing swim fashion's latest passion—the "Leysea." Comfortable and smart, it has "Nautilus" shell earpieces which give distinction to the cap, and ease to the ears.

Jean—a champion swimmer—in swim suits decides on the practical, and stylish, the "Leyland." It's a fast to put on sun, the "Leyland" protects permanent waves from impertinent waves.

Both models 2/6 each—in all colours, plain or jazz. From all stores and sports outfitters.



The **LEYLAND** BATHING CAP

The Leyland & Birmingham Rubber Co., Ltd.,
Leyland, Lancs. Creafin

Fig. 16. Leyland Advertisement, Bathing Caps, 15 June 1934 - There is little distinction between the 'Leysea' cap, 'fashion's latest passion', and the practical 'Leyland' cap, as both featured moulded patterns and decorative ear coverings.



Fig. 17. Leyland & Birmingham Rubber Company, Improvements in or relating to Bathing Caps. UK International Property Office Patent, 1930



Fig. 2.

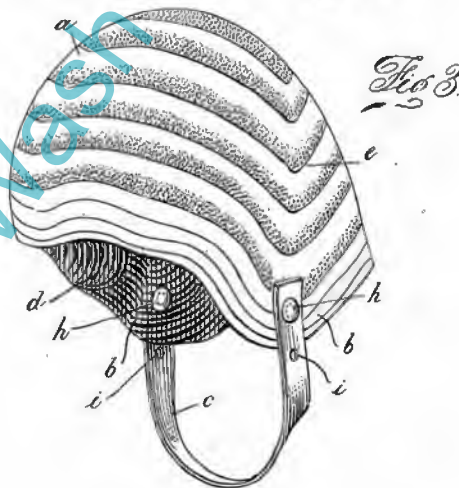


Fig. 3.

Fig. 18. Cecil Coleman Ltd, Improvements in or Relating to Bathing Caps. UK International Property Office Patent, 1936 – A cap which can be readily turned inside out, to provide the equivalent of two caps, one being of a different character to the other, thereby enabling a single cap to be used to match two costumes of a different colour or character.

The 'ROXY'

COLOURS: Red, Sage, Navy, Green, Yellow, Turquoise, Flesh, Brown, Black and White. Made in 2 sizes, 4 and 5. Choose the smaller if not too tight. *The closer the fit the better.*

5/11

The 'Roxie' PULS for MEN
Was promoting of the EAR, by securing the inrush of water under pressure, it evokes all Drivers to the importance of wearing a Watergrip Cap. Special Ear Protection as well as the outstanding Finger under the Watergrip 'Roxie' the Cap that all men had found.

Is plain minded: Black, White, Dark Navy, Brown. One size only — Men's.

5/10

[illegible]

Fill in NOW
for Free Booklet!

C. E. KLEINERT RUBBER CO. (DEPT. JAL-76)
25-26 NEWGATE STREET, E.C.1.
 Please send me your 1935 Dealer showing newest British
 Wear Accessories.

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____

Fig. 19. Kleinert's Advertisement, The Roxy, 30 May 1938



Fig. 20. Augusto Genina, Louise Brooks in 'Beauty Prize', 1930 – Brooks, a popular actress at the time, epitomises the idealised modern girl in this film, sporting a short bob-cut and modern bathing costume as she competes in a Bathing Beauty contest, perfectly representing a healthy girl, while also conforming to society's expectation that she aspires to be beautiful fashionable too.

' HARLENE ' HAIR-DRILL



For
Hair
Health
and
Beauty



WHETHER YOU ARE A MAN OR WOMAN YOU SHOULD COMMENCE THIS WORLD-FAMOUS HAIR TOILET EXERCISE NOW!

Here is a splendid opportunity for everyone to test the wonderful power of "Harlene-Hair-Drill" free of charge. You are invited to accept special trial supplies of the following three famous preparations. Just send the coupon below and your Free Gift Parcel will be despatched to you by return of post.

HARLENE HAIR GROWER AND TONIC

During Five Royal Reigns the name of "Harlene" has stood paramount and supreme. Thin, Impoverished and Skimpy Hair becomes thick, virile and richly abundant. Straggly, Brittle, Splitting Hair becomes elegantly neat, obedient to brush and comb, soft, and silky! Falling hair is stopped and new Healthy Hair commences to grow upon bald patches! Scurf and Dandruff quickly disappear. Price 1/1½, 2/9 and 4/9 per bottle.

CREMEX SHAMPOO

Delightfully refreshing and super-cleansing. Frees the hair from every trace of dust and dirt and is most beneficial to the scalp. FREE Burnishing Rinse included, 1/6 per box of 7 Shampoos. (Single sachets 3d. each.)

UZON BRILLIANTINE

Gives that final touch of distinction, imparts brightness and polish. This highly refined brilliantine is invaluable to those with over-dry scalp. In Liquid or Solidified form, 1/1½ and 2/9 per bottle, or 1/3 per tin.

From Chemists and Stores all over the world

SAMPLE COUPON

Send this coupon, with name and address and 4d. stamps for post and packing, for three FREE 'HARLENE-HAIR-DRILL' Samples.

EDWARDS HARLENE LTD. (H939),
20-26 Lamb's Conduit Street, London,
W. 6. 1

Stamp envelope with 1½d. stamp.

Fig. 21. Edward's Harlene Advertisement, Harlene Hair-Drill, 11 March 1939

AT LAST... AN ABSOLUTE WATER-TIGHT BATHING CAP

SWIM IN A ROXY

AND KEEP YOUR HAIR PERFECT

Like so many of the cleverest ideas, this ROXY Cap is very simple, and very effective! Look at the picture below. That inner flange forms an air pocket when the cap is worn—which keeps the hair ABSOLUTELY DRY!

HIGH DIVE, SURF BATHE, SWIM UNDER WATER—YOU SIMPLY CAN'T GET YOUR HAIR WET!

This is how the Roxy was Tested—An expert swimmer, the Lady Roxy Cap, she placed other bath paper over her hair inside the cap. Then she did everything from high diving to swimming under water, and when the Cap was removed her only hair that was wet was the paper was bone dry! The Roxy looks "good" too. It is a most elegant design and is extremely comfortable to wear. All the tests of them—have paid proof on proof. Take a Roxy with you and see!

LOOK INSIDE

Supplied in Nine Colours:
White, Black, Green, Navy Blue, Navy Blue, Navy Blue, Navy Blue, Navy Blue, Navy Blue.

5/11

ROXY
BATHING CAPS are made by
Kleinert's YOUR GUARANTEE!

Fig. 22. Kleinert's Advertisement, Roxy Bathing Caps, 22 June 1936

Kleinert's **ABSOLUTELY WATERTIGHT BATHING CAP**

LOOK INSIDE!
See the inner flange—when in water it forms an airtight pocket.

NOW PERFECTLY IT FITS!
So very comfortable and most becoming.

HAIR DONE DRY!
"High Dive, Surf Bathe, Swim Under Water"—no hair is too severe. It has taken 20 years but here it is: the Cap with the patented inner flange... which definitely keeps water out of the head of the Cap. Make sure of yours NOW.

Kleinert's **ROXY**

Proved and approved by the leading Swimming Clubs and by the 50,000 women who bought it last season; the 'Roxy' has caused something of a sensation. High Diving; Under-water Aquatics—no hair is too severe. It has taken 20 years but here it is: the Cap with the patented inner flange... which definitely keeps water out of the head of the Cap. Make sure of yours NOW.

5/11

Send for a free copy of the 1937 Edition of "The Roxy" and address to the Roxy Co., 114 Strand, LONDON, W.C.2.

Fig. 23. Kleinert's Advertisement, Roxy Cap, 8 July 1937



At Harrods
—A PERMANENT WAVE MEANS PEACE OF MIND

THIS summer, perhaps more than ever, a permanent wave is a fashion-necessity—for the new feminine modes demand a feminine coiffure. Expertly done in Harrods Hairdressing Salons, the result will enchant you with its natural charm; and will withstand hot weather, swimming and constant brushing and washing.

White or Grey hair will be waved at Harrods without the slightest danger of its assuming that yellow tinge which so often results from inexpert waving. Harrods guarantees a perfect wave without the slightest change of colour.

Harrods Hair Specialist will advise you on all hair and scalp trouble.

No charge for consultation.

Bobbed Hair ..	6 Gns.	A highly qualified Specialist will advise on all hair troubles, free of charge.
Shingled Hair from ..	3 Gns.	
Full Head (Long Hair) ..	5 Gns.	
Hall Head ..	3 Gns.	
Sole Pieces from ..	1½ Gns.	Harrods' Transformations and Shingled Wigs are made from finest natural hair. From 8 Gns.

Ladies' Hairdressing Salons First Floor.

HARRODS
 HARRODS LTD LONDON SW1

Fig. 24. Harrods Advertisement, A Permanent Wave Means Peace of Mind, 6 June 1928 - '...and will withstand hot weather, swimming and constant brushing and washing'



"LIFETIME NATURAL WAVES
where straight hair grew before!"

This is how the world's newspapers acclaimed the Christy Natural Wave. Now it can be yours—to beautify your hair for years to come! Look at these pictures: hair straight-as-poker transformed into glorious waves that grow deeper and lovelier with time. You can take a Christy Wave bathing or motoring, take it walking in wind and rain, take it to bed without so much as a pin to keep it in place. Then a quick comb through, and up it comes smiling, as deep and firm and beautiful as ever! Thousands have tried and tested the Christy Wave—found it true. Make its natural beauty yours! There is a Christy-licensed salon nearby, with operators trained to give you a genuine Christy Wave. But read about our sensational introductory offer—it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that is much too good to miss!

CHRISTY NATURAL WAVE



It makes your hair beautiful—naturally

Nature began it—the Christy Wave completes it. No heat, no chemicals, no troublesome fuss or bother. In just one hour the straightest hair is transformed into lasting, natural waves!

WONDERFUL FREE OFFER!

Special consultation treatment, value 5/-, to show you how your hair will look with the beauty of a Christy Natural Wave; plus a magnificent illustrated book revealing the whole secret of this modern miracle—this is the sensational free offer made to Picture Post readers.

Innocence to Elegance

On the left you see a "natural" wave, simple of all to keep in place. On the right, the same wave in the new Dauphin style, specially created by Pierre Moulin, Christy's world-famous hair expert from Paris.

POST THIS COUPON NOW!

To: KENNETH A. CHRISTY LTD 19 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1
 I would like to see how my hair will look with a Christy Natural Wave. Please send me free and post a free illustrated book and voucher entitling me to special consultation treatment.

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____

Only those distributing this ad are entitled to offer the above Christy Wave. Reserve all rights.

Fig. 25. Kenneth A. Christy Ltd., Christy Natural Wave, 25 March 1939 - 'You can take a Christy Wave bathing or motoring...without so much as a pin to keep it in place'



Fig. 26. Lance House, Seaside Fun, ca.1937 – A group of men and women enjoy a day on the shingle beach at Cooden. The women are seen pulling on rubber bathing caps – one woman with a perm carefully putting on two swim caps, the top cap featuring a waved pattern hairstyle, complete with chin strap for added security - and posing in their swimwear before dashing into the sea for a paddle and a swim. A male companion, in woolen swimming trunks, sans cap, joins them in the water.

Lastex YARN MAKES
POSSIBLE THE IDEAL
SLUMBER HELMET . . .

Keeping every hair in place yet never making its presence felt, this "Halo" Helmet fits every size of head, while the straps in front are adjustable to the waves. Repeated washing cannot destroy the gentle but lasting elasticity of LASTEX Yarn.

Obtainable from good hairdressers and stores, in Beige, Pink, Nil, Helio and Blue. Price 3/11. If unable to obtain, write direct to sole manufacturers, The BYARD Manufacturing Co., Ltd., Castle Boulevard, Nottingham.



An illustrated booklet telling you all about Lastex yarn will be sent on request to:-
LASTEX YARN & LACTAN THREAD LTD. (Dept. W.T.), 54 ST G. Mark Lane, London, W.I.
C.F.H.

Fig. 27. Lastex Yarn Advertisement, Slumber Helmet, 1935

Ladye Jayne

Picture is No. 834-Helmet. Price 2/6



"The Choice of Smart Women"

Re-shaped to suit Modern Hair Styles the ever popular Ladye Jayne Slumber Helmet continues to be the firm choice of smart women. Dainty, stylish and comfortable yet giving a perfect fit which retains your curls in position all night long. Secured under the chin with a soft ribbon (or "Quick-Tie" model to fasten behind the head). Sold by all good HAIRDRESSERS, STORES and ~~at~~ at 1/-, 1/6, 2/-, 2/6, etc.

Ladye Jayne SLUMBER HELMET

Fig. 28. Ladye Jayne Advertisement, Slumber Helmet, 14 January 1939

He Certainly Has Pluck

After having seen your article on "What a woman does for beauty," I can see that I must forgive my wife a little. She isn't the exception I imagined. Often I arrive home in the evening and do not see her face till the next mid-day, as she is resting with a mud-pack or some dreadful mask on her face. If she does remove it, it is only



to strap another face mask and fix a sleeping helmet on her head. Her efforts at slimming are often alarming. She went to the extent of sleeping in a rubber and elastic contraption which I had to squeeze



her into and then strap round her. She was encased from head to foot and looked like a mummy with the mask and helmet on her head. She gave this up, however, as she could only lie flat on her back in bed. I was very pleased as I could have about ten minutes extra in the morning not having to unstrap her and roll her "strait-jacket" off. I made a rough sketch of her and enclose it. All I can say is she certainly has pluck.

J. H. Tyler, Penn, nr. Wolverhampton.

Fig. 29. Tyler, J. H., He Certainly Has Pluck, 24 June 1939

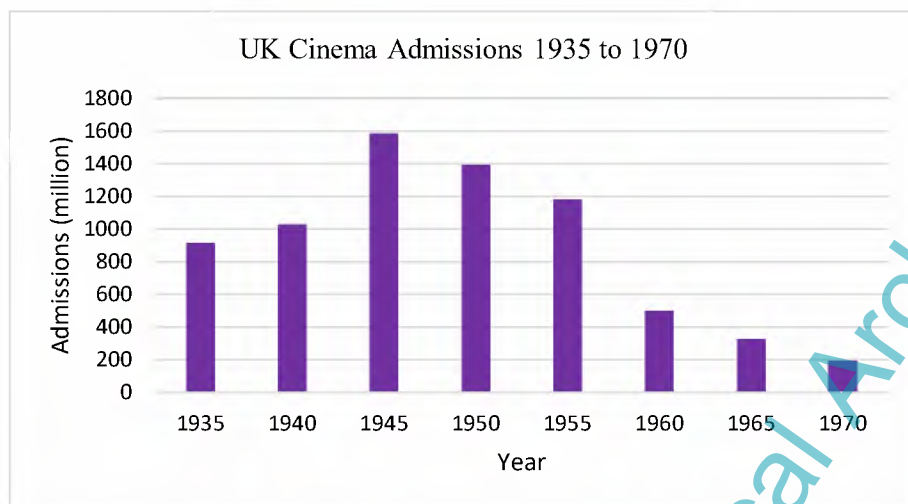


Fig. 30. UK Cinema Association: IHS Markit, UK Cinema Admissions 1935-1970



Fig. 31. Busby Berkeley, Footlight Parade, 1933/34 - The showgirl swimmers wear rubber swim caps moulded to mimic hair and are embellished with sequins and rhinestones to match their glamorous swim costumes.

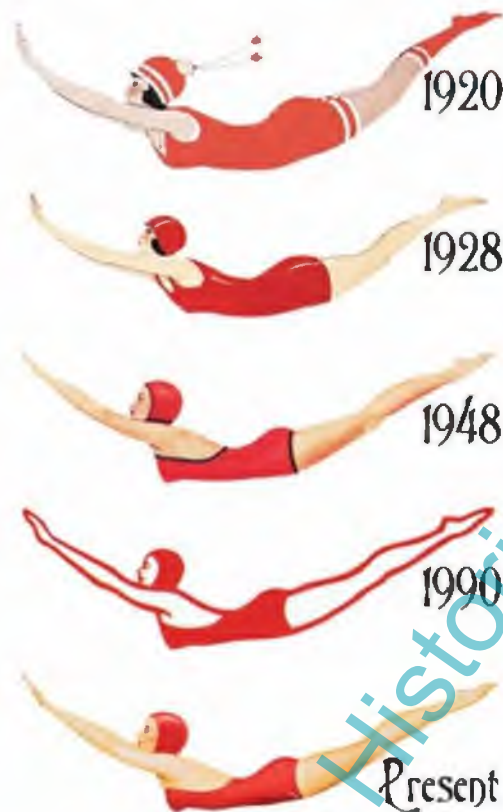


Fig. 32. Jantzen, Design evolution of the Diving Girl Logo. Note the contrast between the 1920 Diving Girl wearing a knitted cap and swimsuit similar to men's costumes at that time, and the 1928 model wearing a smaller, more form-fitting elastic costume and rubber cap. The model progressively getting slimmer and revealing more of her figure over time, the cap remaining a constant.



Fig. 33. Eve's Film Review, Costumes for Sea and See, 1929



Fig. 34. Eve's Film Review, For Ladies Only – Adam may glance, 1929 – 'Filmed on the Thames Riviera'

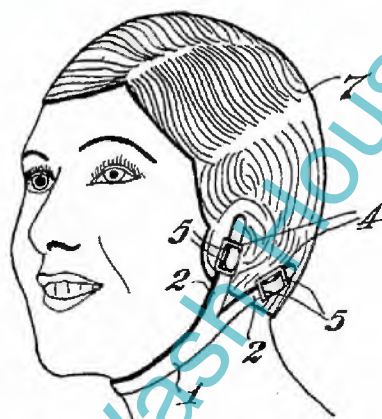


Fig. 35. Henry Charles North, A new or improved chin strap for Bathing Caps. UK International Property Office Patent, 1934

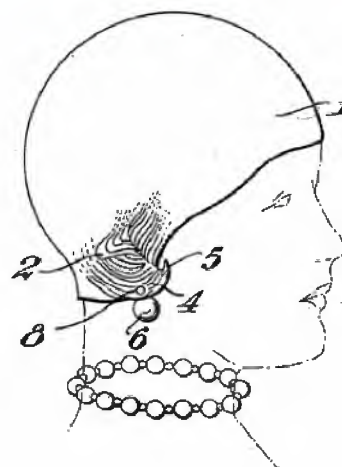


Fig. 36. Henry Charles North, Improvements in Bathing Caps. UK International Property Office Patent, 1933 – A cap having externally a number of wavy lines or ridges to simulate a wig, intended to enhance the imitation hair effect, in that it simulates a tress of hair extending from behind the ear forwardly beneath the ear. An object of this invention is to provide a bathing cap of attractive appearance, and to provide certain ornamentalations for the wearer, which will not in any way interfere with the free movements of the bather, ornamentation removably secured on the inner surface of the cap adjacent the ear of the wearer, to simulate an ear ornamentation.



Fig. 37. Unknown maker, Bathing cap with moulded hair and earrings, unknown date



Fig. 38. George Hoyningen-Huene, Josephine Baker, 1927



Fig. 39. Unknown maker, Jacobs Well Baths, 1933 – Note the cloth screens in the changing booths alongside the pool, and the male and female attendant, who are both present during times of mixed bathing.

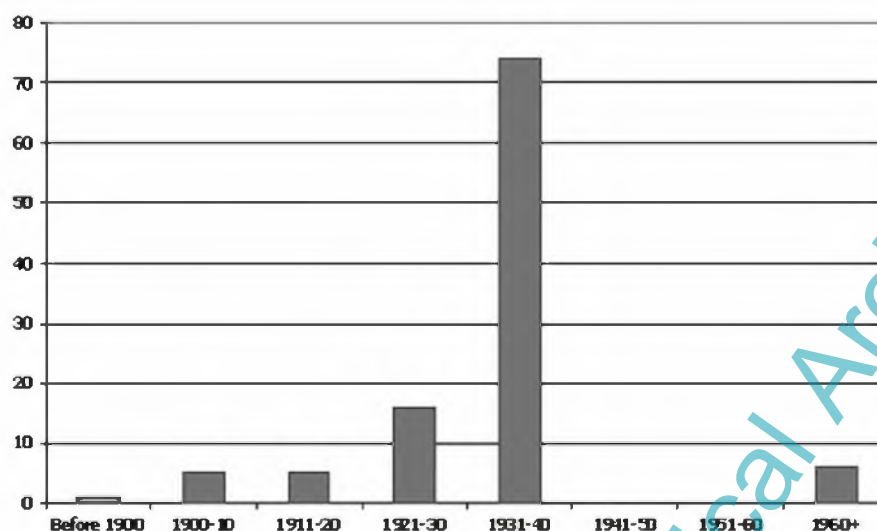


Fig. 40. Gordon Marino, Construction dates of lidos in Britain ca.1900-1960, 2010 - *The concentration of lido building is clearly shown to be in the 1930s, with commencement of the peak starting in the late 1920s. Escalating provision clearly focuses on the period during which physical culture was a major social force.*

London needs light and air



Parks, open spaces, swimming pools for healthy men and women of to-morrow

Wouldn't you like to live in a new London? A London with fields right round it, with more parks and playgrounds and swimming pools than any other city in the world. A beginning has been made on this great plan, Labour on the L.C.C., led by Mr. Herbert Morrison, has already acquired new "lungs" for London at Shooters Hill, Hainault Forest, Becontree, Brockley and Eltham. On May 25, 1936, at Victoria Park, E., Mr. Morrison opened the first of the great new London Lidos (see picture above). Labour plans more London Lidos, with special provision for the children and open-air swimming for everyone.

PULL TOGETHER FOR A BETTER LONDON

[P.T.O.]

Labour's great ideas— THE GREEN BELT AND THE 3-YEAR PLAN

We need fresh air! As London stretches further out, it becomes more and more expensive for Londoners to get into the open country. The London Labour Party's Plan will stop this. Mr. Herbert Morrison, as leader of the L.C.C., invited all the County Councils around London to apply for grants towards the cost of establishing a **GREEN BELT AROUND LONDON**. The L.C.C. itself is planning to preserve within three years immense open spaces, North, South, East and West. This three-year Labour Plan of health for London includes sports grounds, lidos, bowling greens, gymnasia, paddling ponds, and playgrounds on every side.

The Plan will pay for itself

At present much of London's money goes in building and running hundreds of hospitals, convalescent homes, tubercular clinics, etc. The cost is high because to-day London cannot breathe. Eleven die per 1,000 in London every year compared with 4.9 in Welwyn Garden City. Labour's Plan will reduce the illness burden. The L.C.C. will save money. So the swimming pools, playgrounds and Green Belt will pay for themselves.

Labour is making a better London

[P.T.O.]

No. 1756. Published by London Labour Publications Ltd., 259-261 Westminster Bridge Road, S.E.1 and printed by the Victoria House Printing Co. Ltd., 15 W. 17, Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

Fig. 41. London News, London needs light and air, 1936



Fig. 42. Topical Budget, Summer Arrives - When It's Nearly Autumn, 1924 – Men and women are visibly identified by the wearing/not wearing of caps, but nonetheless do not look inhibited.

64. Costumes. At Meetings where both sexes are admitted, and in all A.S.A. Championships, competitors must wear costume in accordance with the following regulations—

- (a) The colour shall be black or dark blue.
- (b) Trimmings may be used ad lib.
- (c) The shoulder-straps shall not be less than two inches wide.
- (d) It shall be buttoned on the shoulder, and the armhole cut no lower than three inches from the armpit.

NOTE.—For LADIES a shaped arm, at least three inches long shall be inserted.

- (e) In the front the costume shall reach not lower than two inches below the pit of the neck.

NOTE.—For LADIES the costume shall be cut straight round the neck.

- (f) At the back it shall be cut straight from the top of shoulder to top of shoulder.

- (g) In the leg portion the costume shall extend to within three inches of the knee, and shall be cut in a straight line round the circumference of each leg.

- (h) Drawers shall be worn underneath the costume. They must be of triangular pattern, with a minimum width of $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches at the fork; they must meet on each hip, and be of not less width than 3 inches on each side when fastened.

- (i) On leaving the dressing room, lady competitors over 14 years of age must wear a long coat or bath gown before entering and also immediately after leaving the water.

N.B.—It is requested that Manufacturers make their Costumes and Swimming Drawers in accordance with all these Regulations.

Fig. 43. Amateur Swimming Association, Costume Law, 1912 – *This remaining the standard until 1936*

SEA-WHIRL
16/3 doz. Retail 1/10

OLYMPIC SUBMARINE
50/- doz. Retail 4/11

SEA-SHELL
12/6 doz. Retail 1/6

5,000 DOZEN Bathing Caps in stock throughout the season

Made of the finest quality rubber, these moulded caps are stocked in the following colours: White, Black, Dark Blue, Green, Sage, Red, Orange, Pastel Blue, Pastel Green, Pastel Pink and Pastel Yellow. We guarantee that they will give satisfaction. Real photograph showcards, as shown, with orders of 3 dozen (Hairwave and Sea-Shell excepted.) Please send your enquiries to us mentioning the name of your wholesaler.

★ 100,000 Submarine Swimming Caps are sold each year because they keep the hair dry and protect the ears.

SEA-FLOWER
16/3 doz. Retail 1/11

HAIRWAVE
8/11 doz.

SEA-WAVE
12/6 doz. Retail 1/6

W. W. HAFFENDEN LTD.
12 WELL STREET, LONDON, E.C.1 Phone: NAT. 9318

Manufactured in England by

Fig. 44. W. W. Haffenden Advertisement, 5,000 Dozen Bathing Caps in stock throughout the season, June 1936



Fig. 45. Unknown maker, Warrington Baths, undated (c.1960s) - Girls and boys swimming lessons with teachers Bill Anderson and Sunny Lowry, Leigh Street Baths.



Fig. 46. Charles Burgess (Director of City Leeds Baths & Wash-houses dept.), Swim and Enjoy Life, April 1935
 Supplied by the National Association of Bath Superintendents to Bathhouses across Britain, marketing strategies shifting from earlier ideas of health (see Fig 13) to recreation, emphasising the enjoyment of swimming with the image of a young, smiling female swimmer in a modern swimsuit revealing her figure, giving a friendly wave.



Fig. 47. Septimus Edwin Scott, *New Brighton & Wallasey*, c.1934. An idealized female swimmer, seductively poised.



Fig. 48. Eugène Waver, *Comparisons*, February 1935

Two of the Eugène Mermaids contrast the old/modern female swimmer - Left: Miss 1935, Irene Ashton wears a modern swimsuit and heels, holding rubber chin-strap cap to protect her Eugene Wave. Right: Miss 1900, Mary June wears the traditional bathing dress and cap.



Fig. 49. Unknown maker, Channel Swimmer Sunny Lowry, 1932 - *In 1933 there were 18 attempts to swim the Channel and only Sunny was successful. Sunny swam in a two-piece swimming costume, cap, and goggles. Her achievement was not officially recognised by the Channel Swimming Association until March 1958, through the perseverance of her husband.*



Fig. 50. Unknown maker, The Eugène Mermaids on tour in Skegness, 1934

Back: Elsie Dobb, Billie Nereid, Eris O'Dell, Dinkie Nereid. Front: Florence Barker, Dorothy Salisbury, Sunny Lowry (centre), Nonie Butterworth, Lyall Butterworth - Note the mermaids hold their rubber chin-strap swim caps and wear long robes and one-piece swimsuits featuring modesty panels.

THE GENDER AGENDA: POST-WWII 1945-1970

With new social practices having been established in the pre-WWII period, this chapter will examine the later competing priorities of fashion, function and propriety, through the lens of gender constructs and notions of femininity, in order to explore how the swim cap enabled/disabled women's participation in swimming.

THE IDEAL FEMALE SWIMMER:

BATHING BEAUTIES

An increase in holidays post-WWII together with beauty pageants and swimming spectacles led to greater use of swim caps as fashionable rather than functional accessories, their becoming subservient to feminine ideals. This gradual change also filtered through into different forms of marketing. Synchronized swimming, however, offered some women good career prospects.

The cross-cultural influence of America in Britain during the post-war years played an important role on the female swimmer and swim cap. American cinema continually influencing British audiences, with admission numbers reaching a historic high of 1.64 billion across the UK in 1946, and high attendance continuing throughout the 1950s (Fig 1).¹⁰⁰

Sport glamorized by Hollywood, increasingly influenced the physical culture movement and established new standards of beauty that incorporated more traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity.¹⁰¹ Swimming took on new meaning through the popular aqua musicals such

¹⁰⁰ Sam Manning, *Cinemas and Cinema-Going in the United Kingdom: Decades of Decline, 1945-65* (University of London Press, Institute of Historical Research, 2020) p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Heather Addison, *Hollywood and the rise of Physical Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003).

as *Bathing Beauty* (1944) and *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952) starring Esther Williams, in which hundreds of synchronised swimmers performed in lavish water-based entertainments. Williams's glamorous costumes and hairstyles, her diving and synchronised swimming situated her 'as an object of the gaze rather than an active subject'.¹⁰² The synchronised swimmers in Williams's films wore exotic costumes and colourful swim caps that were stylishly decorated, adding to the visual spectacle - whilst Williams the star, in contrast, is capless but wears ornaments/flowers in her hair (Figs 2, 3). Oozing femininity, Williams's films established the type of swimming considered appropriate for women, 'a natural fit...because it could be decorative and seen as less strenuous' - an acceptable recreation for enjoyment and health.¹⁰³ Williams, a former professional swimmer turned Hollywood starlet was encouraged to shift from 'swimming fast to swimming pretty' (Fig 4) and came to epitomise the new ideal of a female swimmer, emulated by young girls everywhere - in this way women's swimming became associated with passivity and glamour.¹⁰⁴ Film historian, Rob King, argues that these women 'helped popularize a consumerist imagery of youthful womanhood that defined women's appropriate role as that of decorative, titillating spectacle'.¹⁰⁵

During those immediate post-war years in Britain, lidos picked up where they left off in 1939, not only as places to swim but as social centres and as places of regular entertainment.¹⁰⁶ Swimming once again proved extremely popular, offering a cheap form of relaxation where men and women could socialise, with user numbers of indoor and outdoor

¹⁰² Kara Elizabeth Fagan, 'The Spectacle of Female Athleticism in Classic Hollywood 1935-1955' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Iowa, 2016), p. 26.

¹⁰³ Sarah Batstone, 'Health and Recreation: The Development of bathing and swimming, c.1800-1970, with special reference to Birmingham and Thetford, Norfolk' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2000) p. 248; Landreth, *Swell: An Autobiography*, pp. 191-193.

¹⁰⁴ Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', pp.136-160.

¹⁰⁵ Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) p. 211.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open-Air Swimming Pools of Britain*, pp. 22-23.

Baths reaching record levels in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁰⁷ It was not until after the war that many were able to take advantage of the government's 1938 Holiday Pay Act - seeing the British seaside holiday peak between 1940 and 1960.

A popular summer entertainment was the Aqua Revue performed by synchronised swimmers who visited lidos across the UK, lido operators drawing inspiration from Hollywood's aqua musicals - one profitable means to subsidise a lido's income.¹⁰⁸

Beauty pageants were another popular entertainment feature at all the big resorts/seaside swimming pools around the UK. The first to gain recognition was *Morecambe's Bathing Beauty Queen*, which began in 1945 at the Super Swimming Stadium - capable of holding thousands of swimmers and spectators. Lidos were designed as sites to celebrate and cultivate a healthy body, and these bathing facilities provided a natural home for the beauty contest. By the end of the 1940s, every town had a contest, winners chosen on how they looked in a swimsuit – no caps required.¹⁰⁹ Cash prizes of up to £1000 in the 1950s (modern equivalent £24,000) undoubtedly incentivised young women.¹¹⁰ The beauty contest cemented the link between 'swimming' and feminine beauty, and as historian, Lois Banner identified, as the beauty contestant 'shed her clothes, donning a bathing suit so that more of her body can be seen, women also shed their association with morality, masked their professional skills, and became sex objects, competing in an arena where men were the judges and promoters'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Dr Ian Gordon, Simon Inglis, *Great Lengths: The Historic Indoor Swimming Pools of Britain* (English Heritage, 2009), pp. 227-229.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open-Air Swimming Pools of Britain*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁹ Kennedy, *The Swimsuit: A Fashion History from 1920's Biarritz and the Birth of the Bikini*.

¹¹⁰ Monique, Rivalland, 'Blackpool's bathing beauties', *The Times*, (2 August 2014) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/blackpools-bathing-beauties-xhmdwn0szcj> [accessed 6 December 2021]; National Archives Currency Converter: 1270-2017, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> [accessed 22 December 2021].

¹¹¹ Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', pp.136-160.; Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf, 1983) p. 264.

The bathing beauties emphasized that spectatorship was an inherent element in swimming as a twentieth century practice and called attention to the gendered politics that structured this exhibitionism and voyeurism, blurring the lines between the act of swimming and being seen.¹¹²

Sports historian, R. Gibbs, claims that until at least the 1950s the general consensus was to keep participation 'feminine, psychologically and physically undemanding, and directed away from any tendency requiring such masculine traits as endurance, strength and competition'.¹¹³ Femininity which became a codeword for 'attractive to men' and therefore 'heterosexuality', had to be maintained via participants' choice of activities, attitudes, and clothing, hence sportswomen were pressurised into unequivocal heterosexual representations. The image of woman and athlete remained largely incompatible. Sports historian, Sarah Batstone, argues that femininity in sport was definitely a handicap and participation required compromise - aesthetic activities prospered more readily by obtaining assent through concession to popular opinion, with femininity outweighing athleticism and achievement.¹¹⁴

As Craik identified, this managing of the female body was key to producing the desired social body – the body being 'the site on which feminine cultural ideas can be literally manufactured'.¹¹⁵ For Entwistle clothing is one of the most immediate and effective examples of the way in which bodies are gendered. It is therefore the case that items of clothing do not neutrally reveal the body but embellish it.¹¹⁶ In this instance, the swim cap can be viewed as a signifier of difference, serving to connote femininity.

¹¹² Fagan, 'The Spectacle of Female Athleticism in Classic Hollywood 1935-1955', p. 93.

¹¹³ R. Gibbs, 'Women in Sport', *Modern Athlete and Coach* 14, 3 (1976) p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Batstone, 'Health and Recreation: Issues in the development of bathing and swimming c.1800-1970, with special reference to Birmingham and Thetford, Norfolk', p. 248.

¹¹⁵ Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*, p. 45.

¹¹⁶ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, p. 141.

Such views were reflected in manufacturer's advertisements for swim caps and newsreel reports on women's swimming throughout the 1950s. For example, Puck's marketing of swim caps in 1950 offers contrasting messages for men and women - women's caps (Fig 5) featuring rubber flowers, providing 'protection' when worn for swimming, taking a bath and doing the dusting! Meanwhile men's caps (Fig 6) were designed simply for physical endeavours: swimming, diving, and playing water polo.

After the war ASA costume law was somewhat relaxed which prompted changes in men and women's swimwear - increasingly, women wore what they liked when swimming at the various lidos and beaches in Britain, reflecting a renewed interest in swimwear fashion.¹¹⁷ Rubber shortages and clothes rationing throughout the war meant that new swimsuits and swim caps were considered luxury items. But as fashion historian, Elizabeth Wilson notes, 'demand for it was emblematic of demand for a more abstract commodity: glamour'.¹¹⁸ By the mid 1950s consumer culture was in full swing and Britons were able to buy a wide range of swimwear, much of it designed in the USA but made under franchise in Britain. Textile manufacturers started to introduce decorative finishes and embellishments in their sports fabric ranges.¹¹⁹ Commercially produced for a mass market, women's fashionable swimwear during the period became increasingly unsuitable for athletic activity, positioning the feminine wearer as passive, decorative and sexualised.¹²⁰

Pathé newsreel footage of a London swimming club from 1953 reveals how young, working women embraced the opportunity to emulate the Hollywood synchronised swimmers.

¹¹⁷ Love, 'Splashing in the Serpentine: A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800–1918', pp. 586–602.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985).

¹¹⁹ Marie O'Mahony and Sarah E Braddock, *Sportstech* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002).

¹²⁰ Julie Ripley, 'Swimming Stars of the Silver Screen and the Construction of Gender in the British Surf, 1890–1967', *Journal of Dress History*, 3, 4 (2019) pp. 71–104.

Seeking glamour, enjoyment, and fun, these ‘part-time water babies’ (Fig 7) as referred to by the male commentator, spent most of their evenings practicing their moves and giving performances for charity. Female swimmers and divers, clad in their tightfitting bathing suits and competing in activities deemed appropriately feminine, served nationalistic and voyeuristic purposes, and were crowned the nation’s mermaids and nymphs.¹²¹

Later, Pathé newsreels (1965) show that synchronised swimming clubs maintained popularity, appealing to teenage girls. Performing at a Butlin’s holiday camp (Fig 8), the male commentator suggests that the group have the potential to be recognised at Olympic level, elevating synchronised swimming into the realm of a ‘serious’ women’s sport. Synchronised swimming became a demonstration sport in 1952, yet was not officially recognised as a sport until 1984, then for women only.¹²²

Synchronised swimming also offered women career opportunities - Liz O’Neill (married with three children) joined the *Aqua Lovelies* in 1950, and in an interview recalls wearing ‘lovely flowered hats’ [swim caps] (Fig 9), performing four shows daily from May to September, and receiving £16 a week, virtually the same as most top professional footballers of the day.¹²³

Keen to capitalise on the popularity of the aqua musical, swim cap manufacturers marketed caps specifically for this purpose (Fig 10), and even created a coronet model cap (Fig 11) in the style of Esther Williams’s showstopping Hollywood costume (Fig 12). It is worth noting that the crown made of aluminium, worn by Williams in *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952),

¹²¹ Fagan, ‘The Spectacle of Female Athleticism in Classic Hollywood 1935-1955’, p. 96.

¹²² ‘Fina and the Olympic Movement’, *FINA*, <https://www.fina.org/about> [accessed 2 September 2021].

¹²³ Liz Carrick, *Aqua Lovelies at Morecambe Super Swimming Stadium 1960s-70s*, Morecambe Bay Partnership H2H.0579, 2017, https://www.recordingmorecambebay.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/oral-history-interview-mrs-l-carrick-aqualovelies-morecambe-super-swimming-stadium [accessed 6 December 2021].

resulted in her almost breaking her neck during a dive, leaving her in a cast for seven months, and aware that greater emphasis was placed on her image than her safety.¹²⁴

Women faced increasing pressures on their body image - magazines across the class range ran articles to advise British women on how to emulate Hollywood glamour, which was now radically influencing sport and leisurewear design, these included exercise regimes, hairstyles, and make-up hints.¹²⁵ Wartime austerity had created a pent-up urge to spend money on beautification. In the post-war period, 'glamour' was in and British cosmetic sales rocketed – totalling £120 million in 1949, with an average personal spend of 3s.10d. a month.¹²⁶ As women became a powerful consumer force, the cosmetics industry also profited by linking feminine beauty to athletics.¹²⁷ For example an advert for waterproof mascara in 1955, suggested it was safe for swimming (Fig 13), thus making it possible for women to emulate the look of the models seen in swim cap newsreels, who appeared in full make-up. One such newsreel highlighting how the look (cap and make-up) could withstand a 'watering' (Fig 14), allaying any fear that swimming would compromise women's beauty.

Two articles from *Picture Post* (1952), reflect male readers views on female swimmers and beauty, both questioning whether bathing beauties can actually swim. One reader believing contestants should be judged on their swimming ability, while the other reader (Fig 15) would just like to meet a 'real outdoor girl who swims for the love of it (preferably without a cap) and does not mind her hair being wet!'.¹²⁸ However, not all men felt this way about women as the next section will show.

¹²⁴ Esther Williams, Digby Diehl, *The Million Dollar Mermaid: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) p. 219.

¹²⁵ Horwood, "'Girls who arouse dangerous passions': Women and Bathing, 1900-1939", pp. 653-673.

¹²⁶ Smith, *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity*, pp. 330-331.

¹²⁷ Morgan, 'Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers', pp. 136-160.

¹²⁸ 'Readers' Letters: Swim for it', *Picture Post*, 26 April 1952, p. 5; 'Readers' Letters: Do you really swim?' *Picture Post*, 10 May 1952, p. 12.

HAIR AND HIGH FASHION

Swim cap regulations often focused on women's hair and grooming - to understand the reception/use of swim caps post-WWII, it is necessary to look at contemporaneous hairdressing and grooming cultures. Two different types of swim cap emerged as a result of social influences, one relating to performance (functionality), the other appearance (fashionability).

Marketing, manufacturing, and wearing of swim caps carried on throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with changes in women's hair mirroring design changes in caps over this time. Previous swim caps hugged the head tightly, while new caps better accommodated the larger, fashionable hairstyles of the early 1950s - hair elaborately curled, coloured, and 'beehived'. These styles required frequent, often weekly visits to hairdressers and were accompanied by corresponding shifts in personal beauty regimens, hair hygiene practices, and consumer habits - a greater range of hair-care products having become available.¹²⁹ In 1954 the hairdressing industry had 'a turnover of £200 million a year...[operating] across 40,000 salons' in Britain, with perms still proving incredibly popular.¹³⁰ Women who spent money on hairdressing are likely to have been keen to protect their hair, and just as they might have chosen to wear a night cap - these still being marketed and sold in 1955 (Fig 16), they would also have been likely to buy a swim cap to protect their perms/colour.

Key considerations for manufacturers were to improve on caps ability to keep hair dry as well as to enhance women's appearance - both being important factors to women. Advertisements in the 1950s promoted new features such as hair seals and inner flanges intended to keep

¹²⁹ Deslandes, 'Health and Hygiene', p. 109; 'Do you really swim?' *Picture Post*, 10 May 1952, p. 12.

¹³⁰ Hilde Marchant, 'Half a Century of Perms', *Picture Post*, 64. 9, 28 August 1954, pp. 18-19, 42.

water out, as well as making comfort a greater priority with softer/more pliable rubber promising ‘no headaches’ or ‘half-dazed, half-deaf feeling’ (Figs 17, 18, 19, 20) - apparent issues with earlier caps.

Manufacturers boosted their advertising over Summer months, organising campaigns around key holiday dates, conscious that this is when sales would peak: W. W. Haffenden launching a major campaign shortly before the Whitsun holidays (Fig 21), aware that this was ‘the biggest buying week of the year for swimming caps’ – claiming to receive ‘a great many “where can I obtain” letters in response’.¹³¹ This suggesting that there was a strong consumer demand for a cap that would really keep hair dry.

These advertisements also highlight the different marketing approaches used by swim cap manufacturers. W. W. Haffenden’s ‘Empire’ (Fig 17) and ‘Trident’ (Fig 22) caps, from their ‘Submarine’ range of underwater swimming gear, promoted the caps practical features, i.e., earpieces ‘that would keep ones “ears safe”’ and ‘double row[s] of miniature “suction caps” round the interior rim, making the cap “positively watertight”’.¹³² It is apparent that the Submarine range was intended for the active swimmer/diver, focusing on functionality rather than fashion. In marketing to men in 1956, W. W. Haffenden’s ‘Submarine Skeleton’ cap (Fig 23) similarly emphasized the utilitarian purpose - ‘made specially for men who like or need ear protection’. Despite men’s swim caps having continually been available since before WWII, it is apparent that they were not commonly worn, typically considered a female accessory. An article that appeared in the British Medical Journal in 1953, brought to light the fact that a London doctor had treated five cases of ear infections in males in one fortnight,

¹³¹ ‘Trident’, *The Chemist & Druggist*, 6 February 1954, p. 21.

¹³² ““Suction-cup” Swimming Cap”, *The Chemist & Druggist*, 27 March 1954, p. 314; ‘Back to basic gear: the European dimension’, *Vintage Scuba Diving Community Forum*, <https://vintagescuba.proboards.com/thread/4032/back-basic-gear-european-dimension> [accessed 2 March 2022].

all caused by swimming. The doctor had suggested that ‘perhaps much illness and discomfort could be avoided if men could be persuaded to wear a type of bathing cap that would protect their ears...[perhaps] a pattern similar to a scrum cap seen on the rugger field’.¹³³ The open design of the ‘Skeleton’ cap differed from women’s caps, making no reference to protecting men’s hair - this perhaps being viewed as only a feminine preoccupation. Instead, advertisers sought to promote men’s caps on the basis of the health benefits offered.

Meanwhile, fashion-focused swim cap manufacturers such as Jantzen and Kleinert emphasized the decorative qualities of their caps in their advertisements, appearing to prioritize fashion over function. Although they still promoted the cap’s ability to keep hair dry, this was usually concerned with protecting the wearer’s image, for example Kleinert’s ‘Sava-Wave’ cap (Fig 18) promised to save-a-wave, with its ‘magic inner rim [that] keeps hair dry’, whilst the design also factored in women’s beauty, giving a ‘smoothly becoming browline every woman wants in her swim cap’. Similarly, Kleinert’s marketed their new floral swim caps as items women will ‘want to wear’ keeping one’s hair dry but more importantly ‘designed to flatter’ (Fig 24). Often designed by milliners, these ‘hat-like’ caps became statements in themselves, symbolising masculine and feminine – where Kleinert’s women’s caps were adorned with floral ornaments, buttons, bows, feathers, and pearls (Figs 24, 25, 26, 27), their ‘manly’ cap featured an image of a skull and cross bones (Fig 28).¹³⁴ As caps became more embellished, manufacturers were able to provide a greater number of designs in ‘various styles at many prices’, these ranging from 4s.6d. to 84s. (modern equivalent £4.72 to £88.04), being affordable to women from all backgrounds.¹³⁵

¹³³ ‘Points From Letters: Bathing Caps for Males’, *The British Medical Journal*, 2 (1953), p. 512.

¹³⁴ Janet Bright, ‘Be a Peach on the Beach’, *Times and County Mail*, 14 August 1959, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Bright, ‘Be a Peach on the Beach’, p. 13; *Rubber Journal and International Plastics*, 28 November 1959, p. 700; National Archives Currency Converter: 1270-2017, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result> [accessed 22 December 2021].

Alongside advertisements came a proliferation of beauty articles throughout the 1950s and 1960s, offering advice for women's haircare during their holidays. Beauty columnists recommended women wear caps to protect their hair from the damage of sea water, chlorine and sunshine – in contrast, men were being advised to simply rinse their hair in fresh water after bathing.¹³⁶ There were added steps women were encouraged to take to keep their hair dry as it was recognised that caps invariably failed to do this. A beauty advice column in 1953 highlights a reader's concern at keeping her hair dry, asking if there may be a 'special cap' as her current swim cap doesn't 'prevent the water soaking the back of my hair', this deterring her from swimming. The columnist advises it would be necessary to bind a crepe bandage firmly round the hairline and to wear a cap with an inner flange.¹³⁷ This response reflects the anxieties swimming caused women at this time, and the lengths to which many were prepared to go to maintain expected beauty standards. Other tips included pinning hair on the top of the head (Fig 29) and binding a chiffon scarf, or a length of transparent plastic tightly around the hairline prior to putting on your swim cap.¹³⁸ Harrod's sold a bandeau for 7s. 6d. (Fig 30) 'made of towelling with a foam rubber pad at the base of the neck' specifically to be worn under a swim cap to ensure a close fit - this costing more than most caps sold at the time.¹³⁹

Production of embellished swim caps reached its peak in the 1960s, and women still sought caps to keep their hair dry, as shown by the advice given from a beauty editor to a desperate wife after her husband mistook her wet hair for seaweed (Fig 31).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ 'Holiday? Not for your hair', *West London Observer*, 27 July 1956, p. 5.

¹³⁷ 'Beauty Hint: Keep Dry', *The Daily Mirror*, 19 June 1953, p. 12.

¹³⁸ 'Holiday? Not for your hair', *West London Observer*, 27 July 1956, p. 5; Anne Heywood, 'My seven ways to lovelier hair', *Daily Herald*, 10 July 1958, p. 6; 'Let your husband do the holiday packing', *West London Observer*, 3 August 1956, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Iris Ashley, 'A Bandeau is a Bather's Best Friend', *The Daily Mail*, 19 May 1960, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ 'Holiday Heart Cries', *The Tatler*, 28 June 1961, p. 773.

Despite women's concerns, a spokesman introducing Kleinert's 1961 collection stated: 'the days when a swim cap was simply a device to keep your hair dry are over. Now women want a cap that...looks up to date and really does something for them...[that] reflect[s] current millinery trends'.¹⁴¹ Tabloids in the mid 1960s confirm this transformation: 'Bathing caps used to make girls look as though they had been scalped. Now they make them look as though they're wearing pretty hats. From being a strictly practical item, bathing caps have blossomed into the sort of headgear that would do credit to the most exclusive milliner'; 'Gone is the old boiled-egg look. Today this form of headgear (Fig 32) has become big business and high fashion'.¹⁴²

Textile developments in the early 1960s saw a greater number of new elaborate swim cap designs made from/embellished with synthetic fabrics from waterproofed tulle (Fig 33), and ruched nylon velvet to 'bejewelled models and fur-trimmed affairs...[and] blue nylon wigs'.¹⁴³ Given the materials used it would seem that these swim caps were for lounging poolside, not serious lap-swimming. Accordingly, these new fashionable accessories came at a higher price, a collection shown in London in 1962 ranging from five to eight guineas.¹⁴⁴ One justification for the higher prices was given as manufacturing involved 'much delicate handwork'.¹⁴⁵

These luxury caps were worn by the likes of Princess Margaret (Figs 34) and also featured in films on leading Hollywood actresses such as Gina Lollobrigida (Fig 35) and Audrey

¹⁴¹ Peter Richards, 'Men and Matters: A Review of People and Events – Floral Indigestion', *Rubber Journal and International Plastics*, 3 October 1960, p. 926.

¹⁴² 'Beauty in a Bathing Cap', *The Daily Mirror*, 15 October 1965, p. 2; 'A long, long way from the boiled-egg look', *The Daily Mail*, 9 August 1963, p. 4.

¹⁴³ 'Kleinert Tulle Cap', *Rubber Journal and International Plastics*, 14 October 1961, p. 580; 'Velvet Swim Cap', *The Chemist & Druggist*, 16 June 1962, p. 656; 'A long, long way from the boiled-egg look', p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ 'But the Outlook is Dry', *Daily Herald*, 18 November 1961, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ *Rubber Journal and International Plastics*, 28 November 1959, p. 700.

Hepburn (Fig 36) cementing their status as glamorous/feminine/luxury accessories to complete the holiday look (be it at the beach or pool), as well as showing women how to wear them, i.e., matching their swimsuits (Fig 37). Such impractical swim caps would have discouraged women's active participation in swimming, serving only 'to confirm myths about women...as frivolous and obsessed with trivialities'.¹⁴⁶ As King identified, 'turning woman into an ornamented surface requires an enormous amount of discipline...cement[ing] woman's status as body, confirming her role as primarily decorative'.¹⁴⁷

As femininity became an increasing focus of the design of women's swim caps, it wasn't long before swim cap manufacturers began to experiment with false hair as ornament - according to Synnott, the belief that 'a girl isn't a girl without her hair may seem extreme, but Synnott argues that hair is part of the cultural definition of femininity'.¹⁴⁸ Kleinert's swim cap collection for 1958 included a cap with false 'bangs' made of permanently curled nylon hair (Figs 38, 39). In the 1950s and particularly in Britain, a fringe that stopped halfway down the forehead was popular - Audrey Hepburn (Fig 40), an influential figure/feminine icon, was the film star most associated with this look.¹⁴⁹

THE SWIM WIG

New materials/technologies saw caps transition into more realistic versions of fake hair, suggesting their ability to offer something beyond a device to keep hair dry - a complete transformation. This also marked a move towards a more natural image of the female

¹⁴⁶ King, 'The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body', p. 34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴⁸ Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair', pp. 381-413.

¹⁴⁹ 'From Long Locks to Short Bobs: A History of the Influence of Cinema on Hair Trends', *Culture North Lanarkshire Museum*, <https://www.culturenrmuseums.co.uk/story/from-long-locks-to-short-bobs-a-history-of-the-influence-of-cinema-on-hair-trends/> [accessed 26 December 2021].

swimmer, slowly paving the way for women to swim capless, however, fashion/consumer culture still dictating the need to hide one's own hair.

The swim wig was another new development that emerged in Britain in 1961 using synthetic materials such as nylon/acrylic - easily dyed and shaped to mimic the latest fashionable hairstyles. Introduced by Kleinert's, the 'Pompadour' claimed to be the first waterproof wig (Figs 41, 42), to 'look like a head of real hair...[keeping] its shape and curl when wet...guaranteed to dry quickly and stay curly'.¹⁵⁰ Kleinert's chief designer, Mrs Pauline Purchase claims 'they look lovely for splashing around the shallow water in...if you get this wet you just shake your head like a dog and the water flies off'.¹⁵¹

These new swim caps offered an alternative to the typical colourful/decorative caps and marked a significant change – while still attempting to protect/conceal one's actual hair, faux hair caps made it possible for women to give the impression of a more natural appearance while swimming and may perhaps have contributed to the social acceptance of women being seen swimming without a cap/wet hair in the years that followed.

Wigs generally were a popular accessory for women in the late 1950s and early 1960s, affording women time saved/freedom from styling their own hair, as well as an opportunity for experimentation - easy to change, changes could be made quickly and were not permanent (Fig 43).¹⁵² In addition to a wide range of shaping and styling options, one could instantly alter their hair colour. Hollywood continued to play a significant role in influencing women's fashion and establishing the feminine ideal that many women aspired to, with the vast

¹⁵⁰ 'The First Waterproof Wig!', *Brighton Herald*, 6 May 1961.

¹⁵¹ 'A long, long way from the boiled-egg look', p. 4.

¹⁵² Desmond Morris, *The Naked Woman: A Study of the Female Body*, (St Martin's Press, 2004), pp. 11-12.

majority of actresses during the 1950s/1960s, blonde, usually by design rather than genetics.¹⁵³ Being able to transform from brunette to blonde, even while swimming, was an accessible way for women to share in their glamour (Fig 44). Beyond a wig's capacity to physically transform the wearer, fashion historian, Nathalie Khan, argues that wigs offered women a new 'constructed and thus consumable identity'.¹⁵⁴

Technical advances in swim wigs saw caps being made with real hair that was waterproof-treated (Fig 45); alternatively salons were offering to plasticise women's existing wigs so that they too could be used for swimming (Fig 46).¹⁵⁵ As a result swim wigs could be made in a range of styles and were considerably more expensive - within five years swim wigs had risen in price significantly and would have been beyond the reach of most women - Kleinert's 'Pompadour' costing £1 19s. 6d. (modern equivalent £41.80), compared to a similar swim wig in 1966 costing £32 (modern equivalent £563.78).¹⁵⁶ Swim wigs had become luxurious fashion accessories, but as one designer confirmed, they were not actually suitable for wearing underwater or when diving; a fashion columnist also remarked that the treated 'hair' had none of the qualities (softness etc.) of real hair and a man would not enjoy running 'his fingers through this mermaid's crowning glory'.¹⁵⁷

In the late 1960s, fashion features in *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* reported a new trend of women wearing these waterproofed wigs post-swim (Fig 47), 'to cover up streaming rat's tails'.¹⁵⁸ Taking leave from the traditional sense of a swim cap, this option enabled women to

¹⁵³ Morris, *The Naked Woman: A Study of the Female Body*.

¹⁵⁴ Nathalie Khan, 'Cultural Representation', in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle-Perry (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) pp. 163-180.

¹⁵⁵ 'The wig that's made to set wet', *The Daily Mail*, 9 May 1972, p. 3; Judy Innes, 'Out of the water and into a wig!', *The Daily Mail*, 14 July 1967, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Dobson, 'Like water off a duck's back', p. 9; 'New Products: First Waterproof Wig', *Chemist & Druggist*, 18 February 1961, p. 155; National Archives Currency Converter: 1270-2017.

¹⁵⁷ Dobson, 'Like water off a duck's back', p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ Innes, 'Out of the water and into a wig!', p. 5; Prudence Glynn, 'All at sea', *The Times*, 30 June 1969, p. 7.

swim with their heads below the waterline, avoid having to wear a swim cap, 'the most effective uglier yet invented', or have 'lank hair in the evening' – since they could quickly hide it under a wig.¹⁵⁹

This underlines how the female swimmer continued to be a source of social anxiety as evidenced by the discourse sexualising/belittling her, and one can see in the next section how patriarchal powers had achieved to repress those who refused to conform.

‘SWIM GIRLS PROTEST’

Despite the seeming popularity of swim caps after the end of WWII (reflected by increased manufacturing and advertising), there was another side to this story, one relating to those women who were opposed to the gendered nature of regulations. Having challenged the status quo, they were met with patriarchal pushback by advertisers, Bath committees and male members of the public who upped the ante using language that objectified the female swimmer, resulting in harsher standards of beauty being imposed.

A *Daily Mirror* article from 1948 reported that Uxbridge swimming pool had 'reintroduced the pre-war bathing caps regulation for hygiene reasons' explaining that it had been relaxed during the war because of rubber shortages, but that since then more than half of their female swimmers had done away with their caps, seeing it as 'victimization', whilst the superintendent believed they were acting 'against public health and public decency'.¹⁶⁰ However, the women challenged this notion, arguing that men should be made to wear caps instead of women because of all the 'greasy stuff men put on their hair and pollute[d] the

¹⁵⁹ Prudence Glynn, 'All at sea', *The Times*, 30 June 1969, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ 'Swim Girls Protest At "Must Wear Caps" Rule', *The Daily Mirror*, 18 May 1948, p. 1.

water with'.¹⁶¹ *The Daily Mirror* appear to support the women's argument of gender bias, by referencing a North London magistrate who only the day before, had described a young man with 'enough grease on his hair to grease the main armament of a battleship'. The article prompted responses from two readers in the following days. One reader (B.B.B), interestingly preferring to not identify their gender, failed to see how hair:

cap or no cap...[could] "pollute" the pool' and saw this as 'one more example of petty dictatorship... [by those] invested with a little authority. Strange that a regulation regarding feminine headgear that no Prime Minister would dare to make is casually imposed by, shall we say, a gentleman of somewhat less importance!¹⁶²

Another reader, female, shared the view that 'men, too should be compelled to wear rubber caps when swimming... [because their...] hair creams float on the surface of the water, where it affects the eyes'.¹⁶³

An article from the previous year, suggests that women at the Doncaster Baths (Yorks) had also been swimming without caps during the war, but were now receiving complaints and the threat of being banned by the Baths committee who claimed that their 'setting lotion and other stuffs women put on their hair' was getting into the water and blocking up the filters, but that this could be kept to 'manageable proportions' if only they wore their caps.¹⁶⁴ By 1950 the rule for women's swim caps was still being reinforced in swimming pools, as *The Daily Mirror* reported on Newmarket's council that claimed women's hair had been clogging the filters.¹⁶⁵ This begs the question of how the filters were able to operate throughout the war, when the majority of pool users were girls/women who went capless.

¹⁶¹ 'Swim Girls Protest At "Must Wear Caps" Rule', *The Daily Mirror*, 18 May 1948, p. 1.

¹⁶² 'Viewpoint: Capping It!', *The Daily Mirror*, 19 May 1948, p. 2.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ 'Council may ban cap-less women from the baths', *The Daily Mirror*, 4 August 1947, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ 'No Cap, So No Swim', *The Daily Mail*, 30 June 1950, p. 5.

Whilst some women were frustrated by the swim cap rules which appeared to discriminate against them despite the fact that men were using hair products that could be ‘polluting’ the water too, patriarchal Bath committees stood firm continuing to enforce the rule for women only.

A 1950 advert for Kleinert’s swim caps in *LIFE* magazine (Fig 48) reported that women in America had also begun dispensing with their caps, encouraged by Esther Williams who had proved ‘that a woman with wet hair could look beautiful’. A disparaging comment then qualified their statement suggesting that only women with hair ‘long enough to braid and... a face like Esther’ could pull this off. Kleinert’s suggested that most women might prefer their newest range of ‘hat-like caps...both practical and fetching’ rather than earlier ‘skull-hugging caps [that] resembled peeled onions’.¹⁶⁶

This is another example of how patriarchy attempted to constrain female swimmers by suggesting that wet hair on the majority of women was an unattractive sight – a view confirmed in a reader’s letter calling for ‘ladies [to] please have some consideration for male onlookers’ and ‘take the precaution of tucking *all* their hair into a bathing cap’ to prevent them looking like ‘hard-worked sheep-dogs in a rainstorm’ (Fig 49).¹⁶⁷ Taking advantage of the swim cap rule for women, manufacturers and advertisers now claimed their latest caps were fashioned to beautify the wearer. This resulting in women being required to comply with the rules but also to conform with patriarchal expectations of fashion/beauty.

¹⁶⁶ ‘No Cap, So No Swim’, *The Daily Mail*, 30 June 1950, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Walker. K. H., Waterproof ‘Em, *Picture Post*, 26 April 1952.

In articles discussing women wearing swim caps, they have frequently been compared to hairless objects from boiled eggs (Fig 32) to peeled onions (Fig 48) and peaches (Fig 26).¹⁶⁸ In other reference to how women look with wet hair, they have been likened to hard-worked sheepdogs and wet Scotch terriers, their hair also described as like seaweed.¹⁶⁹ According to psychologists, women sexually objectified are associated with animals, while women objectified through a focus on appearance are associated with inert objects, the result of both being to dehumanise them.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, linguistic scholar, Caitlin Hines, in examining the language of sexism and the sexism in language, has shown how language, gender, power and identity interact, suggesting how larger social forces may impose and perpetuate identities through language use. In exploring the 'woman as dessert' metaphor, including fruit such as a peach, Hines explains 'women are not just objects, but sweet (that is, compliant, smiling), and not just desserts, but *pieces* or *slices*.' As desserts, women can be bought and sold, eaten, elaborately decorated, admired for their outward appearance, or, in the ultimate degradation, simply done without - desserts are optional/inessential/frivolous.¹⁷¹ Hines demonstrates that metaphoric expressions are loaded with implications, including some that work subliminally - such ideas once fixed in language, filtering into conversations between people everywhere - this demonstrating the power of language in perpetuating gender norms/expectations.

¹⁶⁸ 'A long, long way from the boiled-egg look', p. 4;f 'Swimming Caps: Rubber Hats to wear under water are fashionable new wave-savers', p. 45; Bright, 'Be a Peach on the Beach', p. 13.

¹⁶⁹ 'Waterproof 'Em', *Picture Post*, 26 April 1952, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ Kasey Lynn Morris and others, 'Women as Animals, Women as Objects: Evidence for Two Forms of Objectification', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44, 9 (April 2018) pp. 1302-1314; Horwood, "'Girls who arouse dangerous passions": Women and Bathing, 1900-1939', p. 659.

¹⁷¹ Caitlin Hines, 'Rebaking the Pie: The Woman as Dessert Metaphor', in *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*, ed. by Mary Bucholz and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 145-162. (p. 151.).

THE TIDE TURNS: UNISEX HAIRSTYLES AND THE DECLINE OF THE SWIM CAP

Challenges to gender norms in the 1960s saw swim cap regulations change for male and female swimmers - shortly thereafter the wearing of caps by recreational swimmers being abandoned altogether. As women challenged notions of feminine beauty and embraced a more natural appearance, female swimmers dispensed with their caps and being seen with wet hair became socially acceptable. Although some fashionable swim cap options remained these had now become purely decorative and more like hats.

By the 1960s, a breakdown of formality and of many previously accepted standards caused more diversity in hairstyles than in any previous decade. Women's hairstyles ranged from bouffant to long, sleek and straight, while Vidal Sassoon's wash-and-wear geometric bob cut revolutionised haircare and became a key signifier of the new youth culture.¹⁷² Improvements in hairstyling tools such as the handheld dryer, and inventions of hair styling products made possible a wide range of styles from which a woman could choose. Additionally new unisex salons marked a shift to earlier gender-segregated hair practices.¹⁷³

Towards the latter half of the 1950s and early 1960s, beauty columnists increasingly suggest women forgo their perms in favour of shorter, casual cuts, and although some still maintained the swim cap a necessity, others were beginning to promote the no swim cap trend.¹⁷⁴

In a 1959 article titled 'How to be friends with your hair (even when swimming)', leading London hairdresser, Alan Spiers recommends a special holiday cut for women 'that takes to

¹⁷² Alice Beard, 'Fashion and Adornment' in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle Perry (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020) pp. 57-74.

¹⁷³ Biddle-Perry, *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, pp. 143-162.

¹⁷⁴ 'Exclusively for Women: Holiday Hair Care', *Kensington Post & West London Star*, 12 July 1957, p. 4.

the water like a duck and doesn't need a bathing cap to protect it'. Spiers advocates giving hair total freedom, short in the front, back and sides but still possible to dress in a 'sophisticated style for evening, with which you can wear pretty hair ornaments'.¹⁷⁵ Despite this, an article in July 1961 states 'hairdressers face one of the busiest weeks of their year because of all the thousands of women going on holiday getting a last-minute perm'. Once again Spiers intervenes, demonstrating his 'swim cut' in preference to 'tightly permed hair [which] looks terrible after bathing – "like mattress springs"' – featuring photographs of a model before and after a dip (Fig 50), captioned 'Look, no bathing cap! The girl in the swim hasn't a care about her tresses – for when she dries off, her hair-do is as good as new'.¹⁷⁶

Another article notes the trend of women going 'without a bathing-cap altogether and enjoy[ing] the wonderful feeling of freedom when you get to bathe bareheaded...wet hair look[ing] far more attractive than even the prettiest bathing-cap'.¹⁷⁷ The article makes reference to the many French and Italian women who already do this, as well as the new Duchess of Kent who had been seen water-skiing on her honeymoon with wringing-wet locks. Such a revelation no doubt being added to assure readers that swimming bareheaded would now be considered socially acceptable.

Similarly, the first Bond film, *Dr. No* (1962) introduced cinemagoers to a new female swimming icon, Ursula Andress, as she emerged from the sea in a white bikini with long wet hair (Fig 51). The 1960s is often referred to by swimsuit historians as the decade in which the

¹⁷⁵ 'How to be friends with your hair (even when swimming)', *The Daily Mirror*, 9 July 1959, p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ Sylvia Lamond, 'Get in the swim', *Sunday Pictorial*, 30 July 1961, p. 15.

¹⁷⁷ 'No-Cap Bathing Trend', *Thanet Times*, 11 July 1961, p. 8.

bikini gained social acceptance, a result of the new youth culture.¹⁷⁸ Despite the bikini having been around since 1946, it was not until concerns about modesty changed, and definitions of gender roles and social conventions changed, that bikinis replaced the bathing costume. Rather than encasing the body and imposing the desirable body shape, a more natural female figure was embraced. So too in everyday fashion, by the late 1960s wearing a hat outdoors was no longer common practice. As Probert argues that the etiquette in covering one's head with a hat when going out was partly why swim caps were expected to be worn by women in earlier decades and links the decline of swim caps in the late 1960s to this change in fashion/custom.¹⁷⁹

Another significant change in fashion that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s was seen in the longer hairstyles worn by men and the shorter hairstyles now worn by women. As Synnott claimed 'opposition to conventional sex roles, to conventional definitions of femininity and to the conventional norms for women is often expressed in opposition to conventional hair norms'.¹⁸⁰

Feminist writer and activist Germaine Greer in her ground-breaking study *The Female Eunuch* (1970), forcefully rejected the traditional role of women, and used standards about hair care to comment on oppressive feminine beauty ideals forced upon women:

I'm sick of the masquerade. I'm sick of pretending eternal youth . . . I'm sick of peering at the world through false eyelashes, so everything I see is mixed with a shadow of bought hairs;

I'm sick of weighting my head with a dead mane, unable to move my neck freely, terrified of

¹⁷⁸ Patrick Alac, *The Bikini: A Cultural History* (New York: Parkstone Press, 2002); Ariane and Michael Batterberry, *Fashion: A Mirror of History* (New York: Greenwich House, 1977); Gideon Bosker and Lena Lenček, *Making Waves: Swimsuits and the Undressing of America* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1989); Prudence Glynn, *In Fashion: Dress in the Twentieth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978).

¹⁷⁹ Probert, *Swimwear in Vogue since 1910*.

¹⁸⁰ Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair', pp. 381-413.

rain, of wind, of dancing too vigorously in case I sweat into my lacquered curls. I'm sick of the Powder Room.¹⁸¹

The rise of feminism in the 1970s caused a re-evaluation of hairstyles.¹⁸² Feminists attacked conventional norms for head hair, advocating 'natural' hair for women, with no dyes or tints, nor curlers, lacquers, wigs, or perms, i.e., the opposite of the prevailing fashions.¹⁸³

Young, white men embraced long hair, 'as a signifier of a feminized sensitivity and a rejection of narrow gender expectations for men to be strong and aggressive'. Popular boy bands who toured throughout Britain during the 1960s, such as the Beatles (Fig 52) and Rolling Stones (Fig 53) were highly influential in the styling of men's hairstyles as well, inspiring such haircuts as the 'mop'.¹⁸⁴

Public Bath regulations slowly began to change in the 1960s as Bathhouses had to acknowledge that the longer hairstyles worn by men would have also contributed to filtration blockages. Media reports show the introduction of swim cap rules for males in Public Baths across Britain, as their long hairs were found floating in the pool and clogging filters, and girls who had to wear swim caps, had complained about male swimmers with longer hair than their own.¹⁸⁵ Now that males were being included in the swim cap rule, gender was no longer the determining factor – hair length was – while 'no legal length' was stipulated, it was down

¹⁸¹ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970) p. 27.

¹⁸² Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair', pp. 381-413.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 381-413.

¹⁸⁴ Denise Wald, *Hair: The styling of Society*, Chertsey Museum: Online Exhibition <https://chertseymuseum.org/hair> [accessed 4 December 2021]; Kristen Barber and Chelsea Johnson, 'Gender and Sexuality', in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle Perry (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020) pp. 111-129. (p.120).

¹⁸⁵ 'On Caps! Order to long haired swim boys', *The Daily Herald*, 18 August 1964, p. 3; 'Bathing Caps for Beatle Styles', *The Times*, 18 August 1964, p. 5; 'Bathing Caps – By Order', *The Chronicle*, 6 June 1968, p. 3.

to Bath attendants to determine those ‘badly in need of a haircut’ and who would need to be ‘capped’.¹⁸⁶

No mention is made of short-haired females and whether they would be able to swim without a cap – in fact one East Coast resort told a mother that her daughter (who never normally wears a cap because her hair is very short) would be required to wear a cap, and when she asked if she could hire one was told they would have to wait as they were all in use, although boys with long hair weren’t required to use them, much to their dismay.¹⁸⁷

An article titled ‘Bathing Caps for Beatle styles’ highlights the popularity/influence of the Beatles, with boys in Glasgow copying their longer hairstyles now being required to wear swim caps at the local pool; *The Times* reporting that ‘the trouble was not serious’ – the tone differing considerably to earlier articles concerning women’s hair and issues of public health.¹⁸⁸

In contrast, a tabloid report by *The People*, highlighted the nonsensical logic of the swim cap rule, when it reported that nudists using the local Baths at Hinckley in 1969, during private sessions, were being required to wear caps: ‘in the interests of hygiene – we insist that they all wear caps – including the men, who have long hair these days’.¹⁸⁹

By the early 1970s several Public Baths decided to lift the regulation after finding attendance levels had dropped considerably - a Councillor in Hinckley realised large numbers of people had been discouraged from using the Baths, and decided to join the ten other swimming

¹⁸⁶ ‘Bathing Caps – By Order’, p. 3; ‘Bathing Caps for Beatle Styles’, p. 5.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Live Letters: Should boys wear bathing-caps at swimming pools where regulations make caps compulsory for girls?’, *The Daily Mirror*, 25 August 1964, p. 14.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Bathing Caps for Beatle Styles’, p. 5.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Modesty Cap’, *The People Sunday*, 17 August 1969, p. 5.

Baths in the area who had already dropped the ruling.¹⁹⁰ No mention is made of an improved filtration system that would be able to deal with the supposed problem of hair-clogging. Meanwhile, a headmaster at a boy's Primary School in Berkshire threatened to impose a swim cap rule on its pupils with long hair, as they claimed this had been causing blockages in the swimming pool filter. The headmaster finding this an effective deterrent when all the boys quickly cut their hair rather than face the jeers of 'skinhead' when wearing a cap.¹⁹¹ It seems probable that the issue of 'blocked filters' was a useful means to get swimmers to conform to rules, as it appears that once the swim cap rule was lifted, no more was heard about hair blocking the filters.

One can trace the beginning of the decline of swim caps being worn for recreation to the 1970s, with Bathhouses slowly lifting their regulations and images of wet hair in media becoming more commonplace (Fig 54). Additionally, newsreel footage of home holidays, show girls/women with natural hairstyles enjoying swimming without caps, and not worrying about getting their hair wet (Fig 55). However, a 1972 Thomson Holidays advert (Fig 56) highlights that women may still wish to look good in the evening after a day at the beach, but that this was no problem.

CASE STUDY: DAVID WILKIE

David Wilkie (1954-) a former competitive swimmer, draws attention to various matters such as gender inequality in swimming, challenges to established gender norms related to counterculture, and the eventual repurposing of the swim cap.

¹⁹⁰ 'Bathing Cap Ruling Goes at Hinckley', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 20 November 1972, p. 13.

¹⁹¹ 'Head puts boys in bathing caps', *The Daily Mail*, 21 May 1971, p. 3.

On winning at the 1970 Commonwealth Games, Wilkie, aged 16, drew great media attention for wearing a swim cap (Fig 57) reportedly because he was the first elite swimmer to do so.¹⁹² However, when Anita Lonsbrough (Fig 58) had won Britain's first Olympic Gold medal in 1960, there had been no such media attention regarding her wearing a swim cap - competitive female swimmers having worn caps in the Olympics since 1912, this simply meeting social expectations.

Wilkie's reported use of a swim cap emphasizes just how unusual it was for male swimmers to wear caps. Press at the time suggested this was to maximize streamlining within the water, although Wilkie claimed it was simply for keeping his hair out of his eyes, initially borrowing a cap from his Mum Jean to cover his long locks (Fig 59).¹⁹³

Following Wilkie's media coverage, manufacturers and advertisers realised the potential of a new market for the swim cap, just as demand for swim caps amongst female recreational swimmers was declining, caps no longer being a requirement for swimming.

Wilkie helped pave the way for the competitive swim cap and made it socially acceptable to male swimmers – his celebrity status creating new associations of sporting functionality/masculinity. Through competitive swimming, the perception of the cap lost its gendered association and became a new marketable accessory tied to fitness.

¹⁹² Andy Burke, 'Sporting Nation: "David Wilkie changed swimming" – Duncan Scott', *BBC Sport*, (25 July 2020) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/swimming/53483553> [accessed 30 September 2021] (para. 19 of 25).

¹⁹³ Richard Eden, 'Who d'you think you are – David Wilkie?', *Daily Mail Online*, (15 January 2017) <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4122782/Who-d-think-David-Wilkie-Olympic-champ-quits-health-club-ticked-lifeguard-swimming-fast.html> [accessed 30 September 2021] (para 16 of 18); Aidan Smith, 'David Wilkie on Olympic glory', *The Scotsman*, (24 July 2021) <https://www.scotsman.com/sport/other-sport/david-wilkie-on-olympic-glory-his-pal-elton-john-boarding-school-woes-blaming-warrender-for-losing-his-hair-and-why-he-prefers-duncan-scott-to-adam-peaty-3320808> [accessed 30 September 2021] (para. 16 of 37).

Following Wilkie's success, swimming and the attendant use of swim caps received a boost in popularity. American swimmer Mark Spitz thrilled the world by winning seven gold medals at the 1972 Munich Summer Olympic Games. Although he had not worn a cap at the Olympics himself, a 1973 Rolling Stone magazine cover (Fig 60) featured an illustration of Spitz in a glamorous floral swim cap, dubbing him 'America's Latest Pin-Up'.¹⁹⁴

By portraying Spitz as an aquacade showgirl, it appeared that the media were contrasting his incredible sporting achievement with the belittling 'swim pretty' efforts of Hollywood synchronised swimmers. Such comparison by fashion researcher Christine Schmidt highlights the continuing social disregard of the female swimmer - Spitz, the ultimate male swimmer of the decade, considered to represent 'something more than a vacant Hollywood convention'.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Christine Schmidt, *The Swimsuit: Fashion from Poolside to Catwalk* (Oxford: Berg, 2012).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

ILLUSTRATIONS: CHAPTER 2

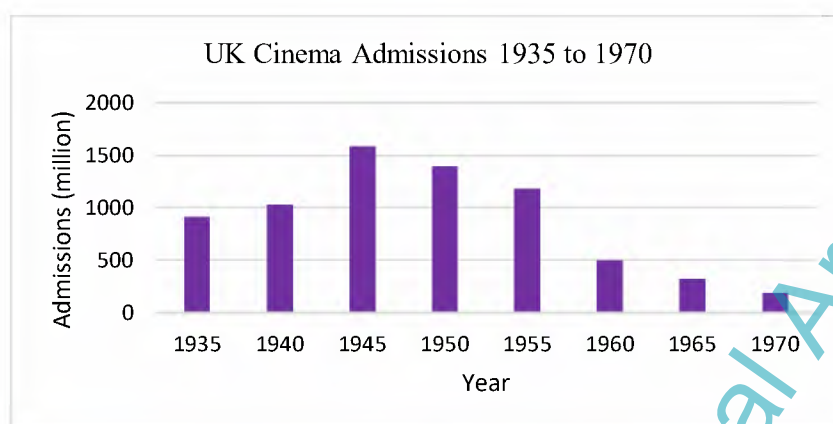


Fig. 1. UK Cinema Association: IHS Markit, UK Cinema Admissions 1935-1970



Fig. 2. George Sidney, *Bathing Beauty*, 1944 - Synchronised swimmers wear decorative pink bathing caps adorned with green and pink floral decorations to match their swimming costumes



Fig. 3. Mervyn Leroy, *Million Dollar Mermaid*, 1952 - Esther Williams wears a sequined red floral ornament in her hair, while her co-stars wear yellow bathing caps with floral ornaments adorned with crystals



Fig. 4. Mervyn Leroy, *Million Dollar Mermaid*, 1936 - Bicpic cf Australian swimmer Annette Kellerman played by Esther Williams, traversing Kellerman's early competitive achievements as steppingstones to a 'successful' and more 'reputable' career as theatrical performer and film star, this ironically paralleling much of Williams's own journey.

*At the sink
or in the swim..*

the PUCK
Undercaps give
perfect protection.
They sell all the year
through as a dust-cap, bath-cap
or swim-cap. Order Now—they're always
popular... never long before you need more!

Supplied in outers containing
4 dozen assorted (red, yellow,
pale blue and white). Each
cap backed in window car-
ton to show colour.

Retail
Price
1/6
INC. TAX.

PUCK BATH CAP
SWIM CAP
DUST CAP

GROVEWELL LTD.
656 Forest Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17
Only Wholesalers Supplied

Fig. 5. Puck Advertisement, At the sink or in the swim, 22 July 1950

*All Set..
to sell to MEN*

PUCK
SWIM CAP

Just the thing for men who
swim, dive, play Waterpolo,
this lightweight cap with
close-fitting chinstrap, keeps
hair out of the eyes, protects
scalp from swimming-bath
chemicals. There will be lots
of business here.
Supplied in outers containing
4 doz. assorted (red, yellow,
pale blue and white). Each
cap in individual carton.
Retail at 1/9 inc. tax.

*Order
this sure sell
line NOW*

Only wholes
supplied

GROVEWELL LTD.
656 Forest Rd., Walthamstow, London

Fig. 6. Puck Advertisement, All Set...to sell to Men, 7 January 1950



Fig. 7. New Pictorials, Water Ballet, 1953 - Girls of the Voyagers Swimming Club in London practice their water ballet moves in an outdoor pool. Started in 1950 by coach Frank Letchford, supplying water ballets to racing/ diving gala programs. 'They earn their livings these part-time water babies as typists, bank clerks, shop assistants, also among them are a stage dancer, a nurse and medical students. To learn these routines, the girls spend at least four evenings a week in the water. In three years, his girls have given over 300 shows all for charity'.



Fig. 8. Colour Pictorials, Synchronised Swimming, 1965 - Members of a North London synchronised swimming team perform a routine at Butlin's Holiday Camp. 'Swimming's a sport dominated by the youngsters, the record book proves it and some children know that only dedicated training can raise them to Olympic standards. Yet these water babies are lined up for something a little unusual for teenage talent, such regimentation is necessary because they're members of a North London club which specialises in synchronised swimming, an American inspired sport that's more like water ballet. It can be a competitive event judged on grace and interpretation and it's the star attraction for the poolside spectators at a Clacton holiday camp. The Americans who recently demonstrated their Olympic style on a world tour have a monopoly of the sport, but that won't last for long if these youngsters maintain their enthusiasm'.



Fig. 9. Unknown maker, Aqua Lovelies, 1960s



Fig. 10. Kleinert's Advertisement, Viking Fashion Caps are the new glamour!, 14 June 1956

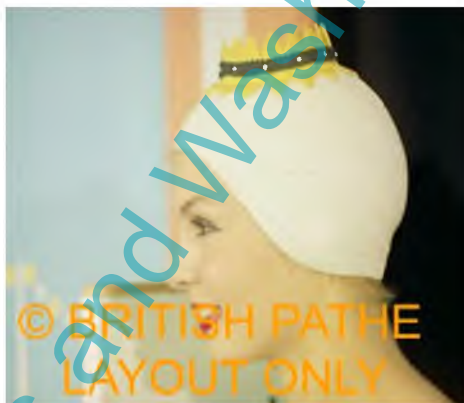


Fig. 11. Colour Pictorials, Model swim Hats, Past and Present, 1958 - Kleinert's Fashion Show: The male commentator's remarks whilst light-hearted, also typifies gender roles at this time - 'Now we see women's crowning glory has been properly crowned, the coronet model guaranteed not to slip over your eyes every time you curtsy to Father Neptune'.

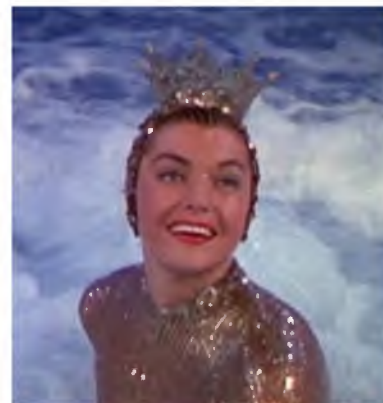


Fig. 12. Mervyn Leroy, Million Dollar Mermaid, 1952 – Esther Williams wears a gold sequined turban topped by an aluminium crown.



Fig. 13. Ciloréal Advertisement, A Permanent Tint for Eyelashes and Eyebrows, 22 October 1955 – 'The colour is not affected by soap and water, swimming or tears.'



Fig. 14. Unissued, Swim Caps, 1957 - Kleinert's Fashion show - the Punch and Judy set mimicking the seaside entertainment 'Finally Spray featuring an attractive spray of rubber flowers, you know at this rate with swim caps so chic, girls just won't dare to go swimming for fear of getting wet'.

Do They Really Swim?

Reader K. H. Walker (April 26) appears to be mistaken. The modern beautiful young woman thinks too much of her make-up and hair-do even to venture gingerly into sea or swimming pool.

Is there anywhere a Bikini girl or bathing beauty who actually swims?



Oh, for a real outdoor girl who swims for the love of it (preferably without a cap) and does not mind her hair being wet!

J. MACDONAGH, WARWICK.

Fig. 15. Macdonagh. J, Do you really swim?, 10 May 1952



But does your hair *stay* lovely?

Perhaps, like this girl, you've had a date with the hairdresser . . . your hair looked wonderful when you left . . . you thought your money well spent—or you may have lavished care and time on a special 'hair-do' at home—then what a pity not to take care of your hair afterwards!

Trouble starts during the night—even if you don't stir an inch while you sleep your new coiffure will be very much flattened by morning—and if, like many of us, you're inclined to toss and turn in your slumbers, well—look in the mirror next morning . . . heart-breaking, isn't it?

"But what can I do?" you ask. That's easily answered! RAYWARP make the prettiest slumber nets and caps. They keep every hair in place—and you stay glamorous, too!

And during the day? RAYWARP hairnets, made from the finest superstrong nylon, are your invisible ally.

Out of doors—shopping, gardening, cycling—RAYWARP's Fiesta nylon turban, pretty and easy to wash, guarantees a well-groomed look, always.

RAYWARP keeps beauty a-head



These nets are selected from a wide range to meet every need. Illustrated price-list on request.

RAYWARP TEXTILES LIMITED, NOTTINGHAM

RAYWARP HAIRNETS

Do You Agree?

We think the arguments used in our magazine advertising are sound and that many of the nine million readers of "Woman's Own" and "Woman's Weekly" are persuaded by them to buy Raywarp hairnets, slumbernets, and turbans.

Raywarp advertising, in fact, *does* sell our products; and other Raywarp lines are featured regularly in these women's interest periodicals.

If you have not received a copy of our current price list, post a card to the address below. If you already know Raywarp and believe in the power of advertising, stock up now — because nothing is worse for business than having to say: "Sorry, we're out of stock".

Raywarp keeps beauty ahead.



RAYWARP TEXTILES LTD., ALFRED STREET NORTH
NOTTINGHAM

Fig. 16. Raywarp Hairnets Advertisement, 'But does your hair stay lovely?', 25 June 1955

*Guaranteed to keep your
hair dry* **COMFORTABLY**

1.* Soft Rubber Flanges automatically adapt themselves to the contours of every head.

2.* Built Up Earpieces.

*These exclusive features make "Submarine Empire" the most comfortable and the most watertight swim cap obtainable. They prevent water from entering without pressing on the ears and without restricting circulation. There is no half-dazed, half-deaf feeling when wearing a "Submarine Empire."



Submarine
Empire SWIM CAP

8/9

AT BOOTHS AND ALL OTHER GOOD CHEMISTS, STORES & DRAPERS, ETC.,

W. W. HAFFENDEN LTD., SANDWICH, KENT

Fig. 17. W. W. Haffenden Advertisement, Submarine Empire Swim Cap, 5 June 1949

You must see
the **SAVA-WAVE** Swim Cap
this is the pack ...



...that holds the CAP

*Finest pure rubber, in white
and seven fashion colours.
Magic inner rim keeps hair dry.
Each cap tagged for display, and
individually packed for freshness
and easy stacking.*



...that's **WATERTIGHT** with **PERFECT COMFORT**

No wet hair — no headaches, with wonderful Sava-wave. It fits so comfortably, and is specially designed to give the smoothly becoming browline every woman wants in her swim cap.



Kleinert's **SAVA-WAVE**

45/- doz. retails at 6/6

Obtainable through your usual wholesaler.

KLEINERT'S, WALPOLE HOUSE, NEW BOND STREET, LONDON W.1

Fig. 18. Kleinert's Advertisement, Sava-Wave Swim Cap, 14 November 1953



A swim cap which can be worn with or without a chin strap! An ingenious hair seal (pat.pend.) keeps the cap firmly in position while allowing ample hair space.

Made from silky, long-stretch natural rubber material in 2 sizes.

Colours: Snow White, Green, Royal, Red, Pink, Pastel Blue and Pastel Green.

From Boots and all good 4/11 chemists, drapers, etc. inc. tax

Made by **LONG & HAMBLY LIMITED**
Moulded Rubber Manufacturers
Empire Works · High Wycombe · Bucks

Fig. 19. Long & Hambly Advertisement, Cruiser Class Superior Comfort Cap, April 1950

**A GUARANTEED CAP
TO RETAIL FROM 2/11**

New Formula. Submarine Caps are now made from a new formula in a softer, more pliable rubber which, although light and elastic, outlasts the old stiff kind. This improved quality gives greater comfort and flexibility of fitting.

Of special interest is the new 'SEAL' model with the popular inner flange, to retail at 4/11d

Submarine
SWIM CAPS

Enquiries are welcomed. All orders charged through your wholesaler.

**W. W. HAFFENDEN LTD., RICHBOROUGH RUBBER WORKS
SANDWICH · KENT**



Fig. 20. W. W. Haffenden Advertisement, Submarine Swim Cap, 18 March 1950.

*Over 11 million people
will see this HALF PAGE
advertisement...*

Submarine
TRIDENT
THE MOST Comfortable SWIMMING CAP
EVER PRODUCED



*you can Enjoy
wearing your swimming cap*

6/6

appearing in the
DAILY EXPRESS

Our campaign this year is centred round this half-page advertisement, appearing on May 12th—a date especially chosen to give a clear week before the Whitsun holiday, the biggest buying week of the year for swimming caps.

**Submarine 6/6
SKELETON**

We have had a great many "where can I obtain" letters in response to our previous much smaller advertising campaigns. There is no doubt of the demand to come. Cut-out display stands which show actual cap with every order.

SIZES:

Small/Medium	21"/22"	Head
Medium/Large	22"/23"	"
Junior	19"/20"	"

COLOURS:
White, black, red, navy, pink, sky, yellow, apple.

Send us your card or bill head pinned to this page for a representative to call.

W. W. HAFFENDEN LTD., RICHBOROUGH RUBBER WORKS, SANDWICH, KENT
Telephone: Sandwich 3381/2

Fig. 21. W. W. Haffenden Advertisement, Submarine Trident, 7 January 1956

TO ANNOUNCE THE
NEW AND UNIQUE SWIMMING CAP...

Trident

REAL COMFORT *and* DRY HAIR

THE SECRET
IS IN THE
SUCTION CUPS



**THE CAP WITH ALL
THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES**

- FEATHERWEIGHT COMFORT
- POSITIVELY WATERTIGHT
- LONG LASTING



Individually packed in attractive
five colour Display Carton

ADVERTISING Campaign in Consumer
Press with a coverage of over 40,000,000
includes Radio Times and all leading
Women's Weekly and Monthly Publica-
tions backed by full colour point of Sale
Material

PLEASE ORDER
FROM YOUR
USUAL WHOLESALE
OTHER SUBMARINE
SWIMMING CAPS
FROM 2/11 RETAIL

RETAIL PRICE
INCLUDING P.T.

6'11

W. W. HAFFENDEN LTD. • RICHBOROUGH RUBBER WORKS • SANDWICH • KENT

Fig. 22. W. W. Haffenden Advertisement, Trident Swim Cap, 6 February 1954

**Bigger than ever
Advertising Campaign...**

including **HALF PAGE**
in the **DAILY EXPRESS**
TO MAKE EVEN MORE POPULAR THE FAMOUS

Submarine TRIDENT

THE MOST *Comfortable* SWIMMING CAP EVER PRODUCED

Manufactured from specially compounded low-modulus
rubber, giving featherweight comfort with maximum elas-
ticity. The resilient suction cups mould themselves to every
contour of the head making the cap completely watertight.
The ear pieces protect the ears from pressure.

Submarine SKELETON

Made specially for men who like or need ear pro-
tection. Adjusts to fit any head size. Black only.

The Submarine Range
comprises Clipper 2/9d.,
Standard 3/3d., Penguin
3/11d. and Seal 4/11d.

Send us your card or bill head pinned to this page for a representative to call.

W. W. HAFFENDEN LTD., RICHBOROUGH RUBBER WORKS, SANDWICH, KENT
Telephone Sandwich 3381/2




Fig. 23. W.W. Haffenden Advertisement, Submarine Skeleton, 7 April 1956

GLAMOUR IN THE SWIM



'GARLAND' AND 'MILLE FLEURS'—two of the highlights of this new range. The caps are available all over Britain at chemists and large stores, and cost from 7s. 6d. upwards.

The bathing cap has always been an orphan in the fashion world—and a sorry contrast to its more popular partner, the swimsuit. But these colourful new 'Viking' caps by Kleinert are the sort you'll want to wear; they not only keep your hair really dry, they're designed to flatter



A 'SELF-SUPPORTING' SWIMSUIT, for the faint-hearted. It's made in rayon and fastens with a highly-padded panel which keeps it buoyed-up in water. E. T. Skynner Ltd., of London, specialise in swimming equipment, manufacture it, and it's obtainable at Lillywhites.

Fig. 24. Glamour in the Swim, 12 June 1954 - Kleinert's caps are adorned in flowers and the models fully made up, mimicking a glamorous movie-star image.

NEW LOOK IN CAPS



THERE'S no denying it—the most glamorous of beach wear can lose its point when one dons one of those tight, bald-looking bathing caps. These two Viking fashion caps by Kleinerts illustrate the new trend.

The collection of tiny flowers is in pastels and bright colours and would pass for a cocktail hat. "Sun Flower," as the other is called, is covered with petals tipped with colour. Both will be obtainable locally.

Fig. 25. Bravery on the Beach: New Look in Bathing Caps, 21 April 1955



It is difficult to find a feminine-looking bathing cap. But it seems to have been achieved here. The cap above is made of tiny rubber roses, with a diamante "dewdrop" in the centre of each flower. (In red, pink, blue, yellow, green or black.)

Fig. 26. Eileen Ascroft, Look out! The new shape is changing YOU, 4 June 1955 - A fashion column promoting all things feminine, includes a bathing cap made of tiny rubber roses with a diamante 'dewdrop' in the centre of each flower, available in various colours.

Exclusively Yours

Be a peach on the beach

NO, these are not hats for poodle cap. Ideal, I am told, for the woman who are samples of the latest recruit into the fashion world—the swimming cap.

"Swim caps are hatter than ever before" (writes Janet Bright). And they are now as exciting to choose as new summer hats, are essentially feminine, yet practical.

All models are guaranteed to keep dry even the hair of the under-water swimmer; and the colours will not fade in the sun.

Most unusual in the range is the brimmed cap, featuring an elegant polka-dot brim, a froth of matching "feathers" and a pearl-studded bandeau.

Another design is the

Floral trimmings are also available on plain models, like the style in which fronds of rubber are artistically attached to one side.

For a cap that is really attractive, how about a neat little number: buttons and a



Among the new range of fashion-styled swim caps is this model which features a cascade of trimmings.

bouffant bow? Chic and eye-catching, it is one of the cheapest available and is supplied in a wide range of colours.

All the caps I have mentioned, and many more, can be bought at local shops at prices ranging from 4s. 6d. to (dare I mention it?) 84s.

Fig. 27. Janet Bright, Be a Peach on the Beach, 14 August 1959 - *C₁*fering fashion advise for Summer, this article titled 'Be a Peach on the Beach' is another example of the way in which women are objectified as beautiful when they are hairless i.e., when their hair is covered in a mass of feminine trimmings. Perhaps it may have escaped the reader that any amount of rubber flowers, bows, buttons etc. are considered more appropriate for swimming in than one's own hair.



Fig. 28. Kleinert's Advertisement, Mainly for Women, 13 February 1958 - Two caps from Kleinert's 1959 Collection – left: the 'polka-dot button' cap for women priced at 10s. 6d., right: the 'swashbuckling swim cap' for men priced at 4s. 11d. featuring a skull and cross bones - the designs symbolising masculine and feminine. The higher price reflecting the additional embellishment of bow and buttons.



Fig. 29. Unknown, Pincurls, updated



Fig. 30. Iris Ashley, A Bandeau is a Bather's Best Friend, 19 May 1960

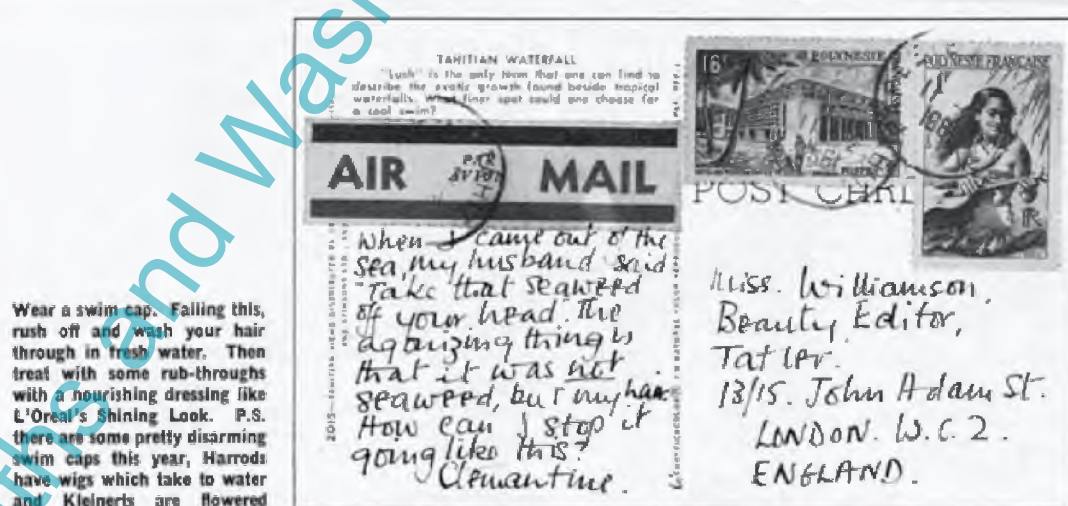


Fig. 31. Holiday Heart Cries, The Tatler, 28 June 1961



Fig. 32. A long, long way from the boiled-egg look, 9 August 1963 - Kleinert's swim caps from left: 'Monaco' rubber roses, 'Swim wig', 'Fiji'



Fig. 33. Kleinert's Tulle Cap, 14 October 1961 - 'Procfed tulle is used in a swim cap for the first time. Layer upon layer of tulle is mounted on a rubber base to form this Kleinert cap - one of the company's 1962 collection'. This style is not dissimilar to the traditional tulle night caps worn in the 1920s.



Fig. 34. Ray Bellisario, Princess Margaret at Sunninghill Park, Windsor 25 July 1964
Wearing Kleinert's 'Fiji' swim cap



Fig. 35. Basil Dearden, *Woman of Straw*, 1964 – Gina Lollobrigida



Fig. 36. Stanley Donen, *Two for the Road*, 1967 – Audrey Hepburn



Fig. 37. Clare & Keith Laflin, *Girl wearing checked swimming costume and 'Hedgehog' swimming cap on a pebble beach UK*, 1961



Fig. 38. Unissued, Swim Caps, 1957 - Kleinert's Fashion show: *Another attractive style for the girl who likes to show a fringe without getting her hair wet, the fringe or bang attached to the cap is made of permanently curled nylon hair which can be curled and reset to order. False bangs are a boon to some girls, so this style should be popular...Most of the new caps are strapless which does away with the double chin effect that straps often give a girl or at least some girls'.*



Fig. 39. Keystone. Bathing Caps on Show in London, 12 February 1958
Kleinert's Swim Cap Collection for 1958 in London: Fay Brooke displays 'Bang' - a white strapless cap trimmed in pink with false brunette hair in the front



Fig. 40. William Wyler, Roman Holiday, 1952 - Audrey Hepburn sporting the popular fringe hairstyle.



Fig. 41. Kleinert's, Viking Pompadour Blonde Wig, c.1960s - *Blonde nylon swim wig, 'hair' attached to a rubber base - available in blonde, platinum, black, pink rinse and blue rinse shades.*



Fig. 42. Kleinert's, Pompadour swim cap, 18 February 1961 - *'One of the latest rubber swim-caps in the Kleinert range avoids the 'damped down' look. On the left the blonde wears her own hair – on the right Pompadour, which is said to dry quickly and stay curly'.*

Hair by Marcel

12 Perfect Partners to have and to hold

This is the Matchmaker pledge
 Matchmaker pledge that a Matchmaker wig or hairpiece will give you more fun with your hair than you've ever had before. You can be Mata Hari, blonde or brunette, Jean Harlow, Veronica Lake, curlie girlie all in one day - a new you whenever you want!

Matchmaker pledge that their wigs and hairpieces go on easily, stay on firmly and are made from real hair. Matchmakers are made in twelve different styles in twelve different colours. Each colour is made up from several different shades just like your own hair. Set your Matchmaker yourself - it's best of all with Matchmaker rollers by Kenwood. Make a date with Matchmaker now. Drop in at a Matchmaker boutique and pick your perfect partner. And have fun...

match maker
 WIGS AND HAIRPIECES
 1 Long Wig 2 Medium Wig 3 Curly Wig 4 Playgirl Bendable Wig 5 Extra Large Topknot 6 Large Topknot 7 Two Medium Topknots 8 Curly Top 9 Marlet 10 Hair-ribbon plus Playgirl 11 Fringe plus Topknot 12 Six Highlighter on Ringlets

Matchmaker Division, Kenwood Manufacturing (Woking) Limited, Banstead, Surrey. Telephone Harrow 6400.

Fig. 43. Matchmaker Advertisement, 12 Perfect Partners to have and to hold, October 1968 - '...a Matchmaker wig or hairpiece will give you more fun with your hair than you've ever had before. You can be Mata Hari, blonde or brunette, Jean Harlow, Veronica Lake, curlie girlie all in one day - a new you whenever you want!'



Fig. 44. Colour Pictorials, Nylon Wig, 1963 - *A model wearing full make-up, cautiously swimming with her head above water, suggesting these caps are not really suitable for serious swimming, but are instead used to add a finishing touch to one's outfit for a glamorous parade around the pool/beach. Upon finishing her swim, the model removes the blonde nylon swim wig, hanging it to dry, revealing her naturally dark brunette hair, which she quickly/simplely combs back into its beehive style - the swim wig providing greater space to accommodate the larger hairstyle. The male commentary: 'Here's the girl with ingenuity thousands will admire, here's the girl with an idea thousands will copy. Just let her dry c.f and she'll show you. She's not bothering to towel her hair, because her real hair is safely inside a wig, a drip-dry nylon wig that's simply hung up after use'.*



Fig. 45. Jean Dobson, Like water off a duck's back, 5 April 1966 - *Model wears a waterproofed wig made c.f real hair by Elrhodes c.f Paris.*



Fig. 46. The wig that's made to set wet, 9 May 1972 - *'Suzanne Owens shows her bathing wig after it's had a ducking'.*



Fig. 47. Judy Innes, Out of the water and into a wig!, 14 July 1967 – Ulla Azzavour wearing a 'Beach Wig' after her swim.



Fig. 48. Kleinert's Advertisement, Swimming Caps: Rubber Hats to wear under water are fashionable new wave-savers, 13 February 1950 - In this article, earlier helmet-like swim caps are referred to as making women look like 'peeled onions' - this compared with the newer 'hat-like' swim caps which the manufacturer claims will make women more attractive i.e., the flowered bonnet (right) covered in 17 dozen rubber buds, the cap (top) printed with multicoloured polka dots and the cap (left) crowned with red rubber roses.



Fig. 49. Walker. K. H., Waterproof 'Em, 26 April 1952 - A male reader's letter from Picture Post suggests that wearing swim caps would have been a necessary step taken by women to maintain expected beauty standards.

Don't have a perm. Have a new-style cut instead, and...

Get in the swim

HAIRDRESSERS face one of the busiest weeks of their year because of all the thousands of women going on holiday next week-end.

Getting a last-minute perm is a national habit. The idea is that the hair stays firmly set—even in Blackpool, where the wind would shave the hairs off a gooseberry.

by **SYLVIA LAMOND**

Worst

NOW I don't want to upset the hairdressers, but I must report that some of the best operators in the business are advising against the holiday perm.

"It's the worst possible time to perm," says Alan Spiers, of Berkeley-square. "At the seaside, hair always suffers from salt water, grit and dryness caused by sun. And the damage to a tightly-permed head is much worse than to loose hair."

"The best time to perm is after the holiday—

much better. But expect to pay for the skill. Spiers's Swim Cut costs 15s 6d.

Slim

WANT to lose six pounds weight between now and August Bank Holiday?

You can—with the help of a new miracle diet, launched two days ago.

You must eat nothing but two special biscuits and a glass of milk three times a day—for a week.

The biscuits contain all essential proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals to keep you alive.

The diet is not ill for

☆ Look, no bathing cap! The girl in the swim hasn't a care about her tresses—for when she dries off (left) her hair-do is as good as new. Her secret: a special holiday "swim-cut."

It's the word RE-MEMBER...
 ● REMEMBER, be sure to keep in the shade on really hot days between 12 noon and 2.
 ● REMEMBER that you can get badly sunburnt even when it's cloudy.
 ● REMEMBER...

orics or the speedboat, and have always to remember when paying the bill to look for the next year! But don't say for August anyway. I guess we'll all manage to have a wonderful time.

Magic

Fig. 50. Sylvia Lamond, Get in the swim, 30 July 1961



Fig. 51. Terence Young, Dr. No, 1962 - Ursula Andress playing local shell diver, Honey Ryder



Fig. 52. David McEnery, The Beatles, 1965



Fig. 53. Alan Messer, The Rolling Stones, 1969

Silhouette Sunsoakers- the Fun, Sun Suits.

On your left, "Desdemona," a strapless one-piece with a shimmer, iridescent top. There is a halter tie to keep the suit in position when you're swimming. All nylon. Sizes: 12-36.

"Nefertiti," same fabric in a strapless bandeau-style bikini. Tuck the halter tie into the top. Sizes: 12-36. Both about £4. Just two of a whole range of Silhouette Sunsoakers.



Silhouette Sunsoakers-bring out the best in you.

Fig. 54. Silhouette Sunsoakers Advertisement, c.1970s.



Fig. 55. Unissued, Brighton Front and Pier, 1970-1973 – Holiday footage of young women enjoying themselves at the seaside, not wearing caps or worrying about getting their hair wet.



How to be a fish till five and a dish by six.

You know how it is on holiday. You start to relax. You pick up a little cotton nonsense that suits you, and a tan that suits you even more.

Then something quite unaccountable happens. Your husband invites you to dinner at the chic-est restaurant in town. And suddenly you wish you hadn't spent half the day under water without a bathing cap.

Which is where the Thomson rep comes in. She knows every local outfit from the riding stables to the water-ski



school, the tennis club to the car hire agency, and she'll book you in at the best hairdressers in two minutes flat.

It's not a favour. It's not a chore. Helping in every way she can is what she's there for. And if she couldn't do it, and didn't enjoy doing it, she'd be somewhere else.



We take the care...you're free to enjoy yourself.

Fig. 56. Thomson Advertisement, How to be a fish till five and a dish by six, 16 December 1972- '[On holiday...] you wish you hadn't spent half the day under water without a bathing cap. Which is where the Thomson rep comes in. She [...will...] book you in at the best hairdressers in two minutes flat.'



Fig. 57. Chris Smith, David Wilkie, c.1970s



Fig. 58. Unknown, Anita Lonsbrough, 22 June 1962



Fig. 59. Express/Stringer, Scottish swimmer David Wilkie at Heathrow Airport in London with the three medals he won at the 13th European Aquatics Championships in Vienna, Austria, 26 August 1974

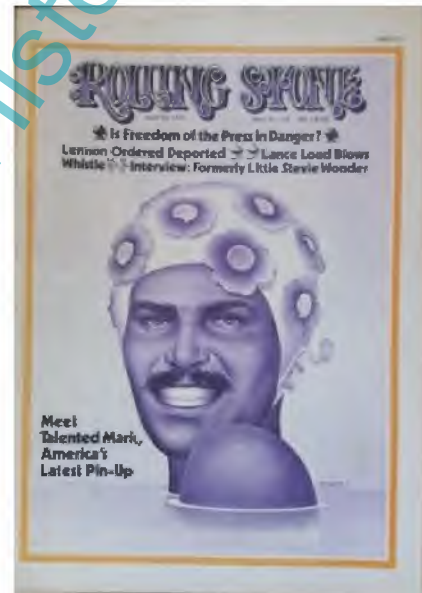


Fig. 60. Mark Spitz, *Rolling Stone*, 26 April 1973

CONCLUSION

My findings have shown that through media representations of an idealised female swimmer and the design/branding/marketing of 'feminine' swim caps, women were socially conditioned/coerced into disciplinary hair/beauty regimes and normative behaviours, that saw them not only comply with swim cap rulings, but also believe that these were necessary for public health and decency.

Creating a symbolic boundary between male and female swimmers, the swim cap played an important role in the creation of inequality and the exercise of power over girls/women.

Despite women gaining greater access to swimming over this time, fashion historian Valerie Steele noted it is important not to confuse opportunity and equality, as society dictates the acceptable behaviour and appearance for women practicing sport, and in this period, even the sports themselves.²¹⁸ Inequality vitiates freedom.

Although swim caps enabled women to engage with fashion, seemingly offering the opportunity for sociability and self-expression, my overriding take is that the swim cap was ultimately just another form of regulation and constraint. As Wilson suggested 'fashion and beauty practices can be about play and indulgence but pressure to conform to certain norms makes them more like a form of gruelling work'.²¹⁹

As the swim cap evolved from a functional item to a fashionable accessory, so it became a signifier of difference once again, this time as a means to feminise the wearer. Reflected in the design changes that took place over these years, caps became more decorative and less

²¹⁸ Claudia Kidwell and Valerie Steele, *Men and Women Dressing the Part* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1989) p. 94.

²¹⁹ Elizabeth Wilson cited in Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (Arnold: London, 1995) p. 212.

practical/functional - this shaping the female swimmer into watery ornament and achieving to reaffirm established social order. As anthropologist Hilary Leathem stated, ‘the notion of “governing by design” envisaged as the cultivation (or ordering) of particular beliefs and relations to history, is a poignant take-away’.²²⁰

Significantly, during periods when traditional gender roles shifted i.e., during WWII when women carried out ‘men’s’ work, and during the 1960s when the counterculture movement challenged conventional gender norms, women’s consciousness was raised over the inequality of the swim cap ruling. Despite female swimmers having protested against caps it was only when men were being required to wear them, that their refusal to comply enabled women to do the same. As Simone de Beauvoir stated:

oppressors cannot be expected to make a move of gratuitous generosity; but at one time the revolt of the oppressed, at another time even the very evolution of the privileged case itself, creates new situations; thus men have been led in their own interest to give partial emancipation to women.²²¹

Similarly, it was only with the uptake of swim caps by professional male swimmers such as Wilkie in the late 1960s/70s, and a growing social/cultural interest in competitive swimming, that the swim cap came to be seen in a new light. As manufacturers quickly adapted the design/marketing of their caps to capitalise on a new commercial market, swim caps lost their association as fashionable/feminine accessories, elevated instead to become functional/competitive tools. As a result of this change, the swim cap no longer held power to constrain female swimmers – as the very thing shifted, the pressure was lifted!

²²⁰ Hilary Leathem, ‘Our (Dis)Orderly World: Thinking with Purity and Danger in the 21st Century’, *History of Anthropology Review* 44 (2020) <https://histanthro.org/bibliography/generative/our-disorderly-world/>. [accessed 21 January 2022].

²²¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 301.

This thesis is particularly topical, given a recent ruling regarding the first black woman to represent Great Britain in swimming at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Alice Dearing was banned by governing officials from wearing a swim cap designed for natural black hair (the Soul Cap). Dearing claims current caps create barriers for many young swimmers from ethnic minority backgrounds, being unsuitable for their hair.

Issues around swim caps and the use of them, and the potential they have to marginalise and create hierarchies, continues in similar and different ways.²²²

²²² 'Tokyo 2020: Alice Dearing doesn't want young Black swimmers put off by Soul Cap ban', *Sky Sports* (2020) <https://www.skysports.com/more-sports/swimming/news/29177/12349287/tokyo-2020-alice-dearing-doesnt-want-young-black-swimmers-put-off-by-soul-cap-ban> [accessed 8 March 2022].

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