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REVISTA BRASILEIRA DE PESQUISA EM TURISMO

## FEMINITY AT THE BEACH – ISSUES ON FASHION, GENDER AND TOURISM IN ARGENTINA

### A FEMINIDADE NA PRAIA – MODA, GÊNERO E TURISMO NA ARGENTINA

### LA FEMINEIDAD EN LA PLAYA – MODA, GÉNERO Y TURISMO EN ARGENTINA

*Regina Schlüter<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** This article analyzes structural changes which took place into industrial society around 1910, which allowed women greater freedom, beginning with sports and following with its incorporation into tourism practices after the First World War. Nevertheless, women's freedom while traveling was apparent, as the traditional habits remained very rigid, tailored to cultural patterns of subordination according to the dominating paternalism of the time. Towards the end of another great war, and coming in the decade of the '50s, women started acquiring their own strength to decide their destiny. This transition is reflected primarily in fashion, which this paper will discuss, focused on tourism, through examining feminine magazines of that time, as well as a collection of photographs of those decades.

**Keywords:** Social Studies in Tourism. Leisure and Tourism Activities. Gender. Fashion. Argentina.

**Resumo:** O artigo analisa as mudanças estruturais produzidas na sociedade industrial ao redor de 1910, que permitiram às mulheres terem mais liberdade, começando pela prática de esportes, seguindo, após a Primeira Grande Guerra, com a inclusão no turismo. No entanto, a liberdade das mulheres em viagem era aparente, desde que os costumes tradicionais continuavam sendo muito rígidos, de acordo com os preceitos culturais decorrentes do paternalismo, dominante naquele tempo. Será só no final da Segunda Grande Guerra que as mulheres começarão a ter força para decidir o próprio destino. Dita transição vê-se refletida principalmente na moda, que será analisada

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com foco no turismo, examinando revistas da época, assim como fotografias do período focado.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos Sociais do Turismo. Atividades Turístico-Recreativas. Gênero. Moda. Argentina.

**Resumen:** El artículo analiza los cambios estructurales producidos en la sociedad industrial alrededor de 1910, que permitieron más libertad a las mujeres, a comenzar por la práctica de deportes y, después de la Primera Guerra Mundial, con su incorporación al turismo. No obstante, la libertad de las mujeres cuando viajaban era aparente, una vez que las costumbres tradicionales permanecían muy rígidas, ajustadas a las pautas culturales subordinada al paternalismo dominante en aquel tiempo. Hacia el final de otra gran guerra entrando en la década de los 50 las mujeres empiezan a tener fuerza propia para decidir su destino. Esta transición se refleja principalmente en la moda, que será analizada con foco en el turismo, a través de revistas de la época de una colección de fotografías del período analizado.

**Palabras Clave:** Estudios Sociales del Turismo. Actividades Turístico-Recreativas. Género. Moda. Argentina.

## Introduction

Travelers in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were “often labeled as ‘adventurers’ and ‘explorers’ and such labels were generally attributed to men” (Harrison and Wilson, 2007:237). However, during the reign of Queen Victoria in England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women found their ways to travel which in many cases resulted in writings depicting the challenges they had to face (HALL and KINNAIRD, 1994). These travelers, “[...] were said to be privileged women, the oft-sheltered daughters of well-educated and highly regarded families” (HARRISON and WILSON, 2007:237) which traveled alone and not in company of their husbands.

After the First World War, in most countries women had obtained the right to vote, the feminist movement started to arise and slowly women began their way towards their personal realization through work and studies. But major changes became evident in the 60's with the appearance of contraceptive pills which permitted women to enjoy greater sexual freedom. At the time, some modification in gender relationships may also be observed, issued from the questioning of values related to everyday life (FELITTI, 2000).

As changes continued to take place within social structures they were reflected in fashion. As stated by Lurie (1994:32), it is a language that is the reflection of the habits of the time: *they are the mirrors, not the original*.

Fashion may also be seen as a system composed by signs that allow establishing relations using a non-verbal language; and the construction of speech is performed using color, types of fabrics, and accessories. That is how "identities are constructed, from the insertion of the subjects into the social, political, economic and aesthetic contexts" (LIMA de CARVALHO, 2001:137). This language was possible due to the fact that since ancient time man covered his body using basically the elements he could easily find, which led to adjusting himself to social and cultural environments, thereby initiating clothing conformities (ENTWISTLE, 2002:22).

To become a member of a social group implies to consciously and unconsciously regard the expectations of the group into which one is immersed, but also it is necessary to find certain elements that point towards a differentiation to enhance one's personality. Stoetzel (1966), based on G. Simmel, indicates that fashion satisfies the desire of meeting with others but at the same time remain distant and mark differentiation.

Within the frame of this phenomenon a marked imitation tendency is observed, which indicates the highest social levels on behalf of those who seek to climb socially. On the other hand movie stars, famous singers, sports people and political persons may be converted into models due to their elevated public exposure.

Even though fashion, as a social phenomenon, has been widely analyzed by outstanding social scientists from Veblen to Bourdieu, Barthes, George Simmel, Umberto Eco, amongst many others, the same has not occurred with fashion and tourism. The purpose of this paper is to show how general tendencies in fashion have influenced women's behavior during their holidays since 1910.

### **Involvement of Women in Sports and Tourism (1910 -1930)**

Ladies fashions started shortly before the First World War due to the necessity to achieve greater freedom of movement. The most notorious alteration is the gradual disappearance of the corset allowing the waistline to recover its real (natural) size. Saulquin (2006:55) states that, notwithstanding the advertising campaign launched in 1903 and 1904 by the famed fashion designer, Paul Poiret, regarding the end of the reign of the corset “only in 1910 was he able to change the feminine figure presenting a fashion which outlines the natural curves of the feminine body inspired by the American dancer Isadora Duncan”.



Photo 1 – “Daring” bathers during the *Belle Époque*

Source: Photographic Department of the National Archives – Buenos Aires, Argentina

At seaside resorts such as Mar del Plata, Argentina, restrictions to “preserve moral standards” were still considered and according to Sebreli (1984:62) only the most daring women ventured to go to the beach “enveloped in large black capes with white trimmings, reaching the ground, and then handed them over to their maids, or to the intrepid lifeguard accompanying them, who offered his arm for support” (Photo 1).

Nevertheless, matters did not take long to be modified. Nearing the '20s, important changes took place in women's roles, with the possibility of entering the working world, even though with restrictions, and dedicate themselves with greater enthusiasm to sports (SCHLÜTER, 2008). These changes also were mainly observed at the beaches, where "various parts of the body remained visible" as may be seen in Photo 2.



Photo 2 – Bathing suit and dressing gown in Mar del Plata (1925)

Source: Photographic Department of the National Archives – Buenos Aires, Argentina

The first complete bathing suit was black, made of a very thick interweave fabric, so that it fit tightly to the body upon leaving the water. Nevertheless, it tended to deform and represented a great weight when wet producing a great discomfort. The deformity of the bathing suit was 'saved' by the dressing gown, which could be made of a thick towed-fabric to avoid the cold feeling usually appearing upon leaving the sea, as well as a lighter one to better bear the sun's rays. It was required to use a rubber bathing cap. Men's bathing suits were also made of a similar knit-fabric and had straps.

In Argentina travel gradually became accessible to women after the First World War.

We wish to travel to change atmospheres, to break the monotony of the daily routine of our lives. But each and every trip requires the planning of an itinerary, and this, on numerous occasions is decided upon by the will, the taste, or even the feminine whim (EDITORIAL ATLÁNTIDA, 1933:395).

In many cases, they could have an opinion as to the destination of their vacations. This can be observed in the concepts outlined next in the particular style of a journal of that time:

Feminine tourism is the head of tourism, in its widest sense. The observations of color and shades that women put into travel cannot be denied. They are the salt and the happiness of the trip. Only a misanthropist would think of going on a trip, or an excursion, to a point where no daughters of Eve are present. The tours, the cruises, the vacation days always endeavor men to pass such times in the company of their families, and what family does not include women? (EDITORIAL ATLANTIDA, 1933:397).

As may be seen in this case, it is not about an independent woman who decides her destinations on her own, but rather of the woman who complements the idyllic family image of the period, who really depends on the male decisions and uses some pretexts to achieve her objectives.

Showing up at argentine tourist destination of groups who did not belong to the traditional families forced those belonging to the high class to search for new ways of social differentiation, which were mainly manifested in fashion. Families pertaining to the national *elite* sought to differ in their way of dressing, which even meant to contravene some social conventional standards by the use of non-conventional articles not accepted during the every-day life in large cities. Other elements playing an important role in the fashion of that time were the accessories, whose use was launched by the magazines and feminine newspaper's supplements of that period. The fact that belts, shoes, handkerchiefs and bags were due to their production conditions goods of lower costs than 'haute couture' and the coming up of the pret-à-porter allow to consider the accessory as a *transformer* which *simultaneously completely refurbishes a wardrobe* adapting it to the season's tendency. Consequently,



they became a sign of short-lived temporariness and, precisely, due to their attainable cost that facilitates their permanent renewal made possible a type of accelerated semiotic circulation. Therefore, the accessory is located in the center of a real system of semiotic economy, a fact of basically seasonal, cultural, and social turnovers (ESCUDERR CHAUVEL, 2001:103).

Travel could take place within Argentina due to the very efficient railroad service at that time, or by the popularity of the automobile and the improvement of roadways. Trips abroad were also included by way of “maritime cruises reaching as far as Japan or Palestine” (EDITORIAL ATLANTIDA, 1933).

Ladies magazines which appeared during the '20s provided within their tourism sector not only advice in fashion issues, but also made reference to what was the acceptable or inappropriate pattern of behavior, such as, how to behave on certain occasions, what to eat and what to wear in order to look more *beautiful and attractive*. This section, called *feminine tourism*, was later extended to travel guides. Both kinds of publications did not disregard those aspects related to trip preparations, according to the type of transportation to be used.

Clothing was mostly conventional, generally made up of skirt-and-jacket suits, skirts and blouses. The basic difference is observed amongst the accessories: hats and gloves for a train trip, woolen socks for plain trips, silk kerchiefs for the neck and handbags with a small pillow for sea trips, a light but warm traveling rug, and a matching turban and scarf for road trips. Cruises allowed the use of wide-leg pajamas, which looked more like skirt-pants and which also became fashionable to use on walks along the Promenade at Mar del Plata. This was really a clothing article that could only be used at home or within the vacation environment of Mar del Plata, anywhere else, it was totally banned. Wearing pants in public was considered totally indecent, vulgar and of bad taste (MacDONELL SMITH, 2004).

On the other hand, Monneyron (2005) mentioned that pants were seen in Great Britain towards the end of the XIX century as an outrage to masculine



prerogatives. Quoting Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, he adds that Queen Victoria herself stated “that pants were an offence against the sanctity of British homes, and were susceptible to provoking both the emancipation of women, as well as the degradation of men” (MONNEYRON, 2005:37).

### **From Rebelliousness to Sensuality in Fashion**

During the greater part of the '40s people mostly centered their interests on the destruction caused by the Second World War and in its later reconstruction, but did not avoid that in 1946 the famous “bikini” was born, which due to this circumstances did not really succeed until many years later. Nevertheless, on the beaches a two-piece bathing suit was being used with more frequency and consisted of a pair of small shorts and a bra as top (Photo 3).



Photo 3 – Appearance of “two-piece” swimsuits

Source: Photographic Department of the National Archives – Buenos Aires, Argentina

Bathing suits also became more attractive, with shorter shorts and with a “small skirt” added to the lower front part. Lighter fabrics were used, as well as brighter colors.

Even though the '50s promised great fashion changes, in Argentina the first half of this decade was characterized by a gradual abandonment of conservatism. Important travel guides of the country, like the Peuser edition, continued with their section on "feminine tourism" establishing rules and guidelines to better enjoy their vacations, and with regard to the use of pants, accepting them but only at the holiday destinations.

When considering the vacation wardrobe, pants, "shorts", "slacks", "jeans", etc constituted one of the most important aspects. The various names correspond to the different lengths, and each of the models shall be adapted and applied to the types of feminine beauty. Incidentally, heavy persons (it was sufficient to be in this category if one had wide hips) were excluded from using such garments, which in all cases required a slim waist. [...] Returning to the subject of pants, we can never stress enough that these may be worn on the beaches practically at all times but never in the city. These are also inseparable garments to be worn by women who spend a season in the mountains (PEUSER, 1950:35).

Reference is also made to bathing suits but without forgetting something to cover up when outside the water.

Although Coco Chanel launched tanning into fashion at the beginning of the 1910's, the idea of losing the paleness of one's skin continued to be a concern in many countries, especially when there was an important amount of the local population with darker skin. Nevertheless, to sun bathe became a widely accepted practice and the way in which to implement sun-tanning upon arrival at destination was also included within the advice "for ladies".

*Apart from the details such as long exposure to the sun should last, which is already well known, it is interesting to know the times of day in which it is recommended to sun bathe, as well as the choice of the preferred location for this practice.*

*The most favorable moments are during the morning, around ten or eleven o'clock and during the afternoon, around four o'clock, after one has finished one's digestive process. With regard to the location, if possible, one should choose a spot protected from the wind, as a cold current, when the body is receiving solar heat, may be harmful (PEUSER, 1951:33).*

Over the years, sun tanning has been transformed into an element of social status, especially for those who during winter could travel to the opposite hemisphere and return indicating their economic capacity to travel.

*Sun tanning, eventually, is a type of ritual tattoo, which certifies the participation of the vacation ceremony. By means of sun tanning, the sun is converted into a fetish and indicates your belonging to an exclusive sect, that of the "vacationers" [...] the cosmetics industry even produced a substitute for the sun, by launching a sun-tanning cream. On the other hand, the use of this cream as has been observed by Vance Packard [The sex jungle], using the pretext of applying it, boys and girls may rub their bodies mutually (SEBRELI, 1984:132).*

*[...] As soon as the spot is chosen, the creaming up begins. This is done in a very open, uninhibited and sensual way. The whole body is creamed up with slow, massaging gestures. Arms go up, bodies twist and bend, and legs open up as necessary. The tanning may now begin, tanning considered an activity in its own right (ABRAMOVICI, 2007: 122).*

Parallel to this period a defiant movement was starting in the world against the meaning of quiet life in the suburbs, the nice house with its garden and the hard-working housewife taking care of husband and children. That is to say, against the ideal of the roles personified by Doris Day in her popular movies. This movement was also reflected in some film featuring Marlon Brando and James Dean with their sweaty shirts - now better known as T-shirts - leather jackets and tight jeans, who rebelled against family and labor conditions. Other actors also achieved the moment of triumph of the unsatisfied youth movement as the *baby boomers* gradually entered the market. This leads Lurie (1994:98) to point out that this cult towards youth, which had its height of fame during the 60s, was a homage rendered to economic power.

During those years, an inverse phenomenon occurred, in the way of an imitation of fashion, which generally is led by the higher classes towards the less favored. Saulquin (1998:128) also adds that the changes produced from 1950 onwards, modified "in a profound manner, the habits and practices, and which served as a democratization base, indirectly forwarding fashion

acceleration". This democratization is also observed during vacation time at the beach where, upon entering the following decade, the bikini started to triumph.

The [low paid] employee is converted during his vacations into a "play boy" and the typist, into a vamp in her "bikini". Just as in the Renaissance carnivals, the slave disguises himself as the master and the real master condescends to play with him. On the beach, the social classes are confused into one category: the tourist class where apparently social hierarchies are forgotten and nudity is leveling. Tourism, as all cultural masses, tends to and as observed by Edgar Morin "ideally constitutes a gigantic club of friends, a large non-hierarchy family" (SEBRELI, 1984:144).

Jeans became clothing both for vacations, as for every-day life. At the same time, they launched the "unisex" fashion, as persons of both sexes indistinctly used them. Even though intents have been made to make jeans for women, the main designers launched their own line for women with a high purchasing power. On the other hand T-shirts have also become unisex garments as well as being an ideal complement for vacation clothing.

Added to jeans and T-shirts, the miniskirt appeared during the '60s, created by Courrèges in 1963 and launched in 1964 from London by Mary Quant. According to Saulquin (2006) it represents the protest against morals and modesty; nevertheless, Monneyron (2006:119) sees it as a seduction method, that is to say "one of the most reliable indicators of the way in which sexuality is conceived and lived". Towards the end of the decade, transparent blouses became popular and were used without bra and had a pocket at either side at the height of the breasts in order to make the garment still more seductive.

Faced with this new form of sensuality it is not surprising that this also reflected in the vacation wardrobe for 'sun and sea' destinations. In 1964 a new model appeared which revolutionized the world, but eventually did not manage to remain: the "topless" bathing suit, which consisted of a high panty, up to the navel from which two straps issued, which crossed the breasts, leaving them totally uncovered. The G-string or 'tanga' fared better, this being a minimized version of the bikini, leaving both buttocks visible, and which only

gained the market in the '80s. Nevertheless, these garments together with the miniskirt, the transparencies and the jeans have scandalized those who defended the traditions in force at the time, which according to Monneyron (2006:120), really only imply a transformation of habits.

The fact that these innovations were able to scandalize the defenders of the moral or, that could be flourished as emblems of a revolt against, clearly indicates that more than a dress code revolution what was going on was a revolution of habits (MONNEYRON, 2006:120).

This revolution continued during the following decades with the new roles assumed by women. [...] *Travel has simply escalated, as challenges to gender roles have increased and travel have become a more accessible avenue for exploring new territory of the self. The tourism industry has responded with specialized tours for woman. For example, advertisement for 'adventure' travel invite women to develop a 'new outdoor style' through the 'empowering experience' of traveling 'free of traditional gender roles and expectations'* (PRUITT and LAFONT, 1995:425). But regarding clothing they would not further reveal themselves in vacation destinations but rather in the role that they were assuming upon entering fully into the trade world thus providing a new kind of feminine tourism, that of the business travelers.

## **Final Comment**

Even though the period analyzed is very short as half a century is practically nothing in the evolution of society, the changes were important regarding the roles that were taken on and represented by women during that period of time. Under paternal tutelage women could not exercise their rights to take decisions on small daily matters nor could they decide on other matters of greater importance such as whom to form a family with, nor with whom to spend the rest of their days.

Regarding clothing, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a woman could hardly show her arms and practice sports with practically any freedom of

movement, up to fifty years later when she may show without restrictions any parts of her body that she wishes to expose.

Changes were produced slowly and in an asynchronous manner as there were women who fought to recover their rights followed by many raising the same liberation banners; whilst others, chose not to question the society in which they were destined to live.

Fashion continued to reflect the structural changes that were occurring and, at the same time, were indicated in vacation clothing mainly in those regarding 'sun and sea' destinations. These allow for a better analysis, because destinations such as ski centers do not allow modifications, as due to climatic matters the body must be totally covered and changes are reduced to colors and textures, without greater meanings for the purpose of this paper. In short, the fashion analysis in tourism allows paraphrasing the slogan of a brand of cigarettes that commenced in the '60s: "You've come a long way, baby...".

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