

**MORE THAN A CENTERFOLD: GENDER, POLITICS AND *PLAYBOY***

**1954-1988**

**THESIS**

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## Introduction

*Playboy* magazine has a unique place in American society. It was a trendsetter in the creation and recreation of gender roles and in the changing nature of consumerism in America. Hugh Hefner created the magazine in the early 1950's, based on the idea that if he was not fulfilled with the role of father and breadwinner, then other men probably felt the same dissatisfaction. He wanted to create a new type of magazine for men, other than the outdoor magazines popular in the 1950's. His magazine was for men who wanted "the good life," but for themselves, not a family, for men who wanted to stay indoors, enjoy the fruits of their labor and invite women in as overnight guests, but not as wives. The first issue, appearing in December 1953, cost a little over \$2,000 to make, sold 53,000 copies at 50 cents each and was "literally a success beyond Hefner's wildest dream."<sup>1</sup> Over the next thirty years his magazine, evolving with the times, grew so immensely in popularity that in 1984 its average monthly circulation of 4,209,824 magazines was well above its closest competitor, *Penthouse* (3,275,677). It had maintained this lead by a margin of at least 400,000 magazines per month since 1975.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the magazine's success, there is a surprisingly limited body of work on the history of *Playboy*. Although the magazine is often cited in secondary literature, this is usually done to reinforce the author's argument, rather than as a direct analysis of *Playboy*. Thomas Wyer's 1978 book, Reaching for Paradise: The *Playboy* Vision of America, was the exception. An in depth study of the history of the magazine, Wyer concentrated on Hugh Hefner as the center of the magazine and chronicled the changes throughout the magazine run. Focusing on various writers and editors that worked for *Playboy* over the years, Wyer interviewed many former and current *Playboy* employees

and also spoke with Hefner on several occasions. He also expanded his scope to discuss more than what was published in the magazine, discussing *Playboy* overseas, the *Playboy* Clubs, the *Playboy* Foundation and its philanthropic endeavors, and other areas, such as the magazine's financial success and general gossip about working for the magazine. His book did not address the merchandising aspects of the magazine or include any in depth discussion on the Playmates.

In Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America, (1988) John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman discussed *Playboy* in their chronicle of the changing nature of American sexuality. They specifically discussed *Playboy* as the first example of pornography created to replace the European pornography that had been consumed by American men fighting in Europe during World War II. They also discussed *Playboy* as one of the first to champion sexual liberalism and an ethic of success, prosperity and consumption for single men.

It was Barbara Ehrenreich, however, who made the first connection between *Playboy* and the creation of a new male gender role. In 1983, she published The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment, in which she tied the new role, the playboy, to consumables targeting men only as a way to reinforce this message. She also credited *Playboy* for giving men "public license to have fun on a mass scale" for the first time. This discussion of *Playboy*, however, was only one chapter in her longer work on "the male revolt," which she characterized as a symptom of mass neurosis and cultural atomization, brought on by societal permissiveness, consumer capitalism and societal controls that operated to make men "unquestioning and obedient employees."<sup>3</sup>

Other works attacked *Playboy* directly as misogynistic and degrading. Dangerous Relationships: Pornography, Misogyny, and Rape, by Diana E.H. Russell (1998) and Andrea Dworkin's Pornography: Men Possessing Women (1989) both cited *Playboy* and other magazines like it as instigators of violence by men toward women. They stated that the magazines' objectification of women created an unattainable image of women. When men realized they could not have this ideal, they reacted with violence. Their works, however, did not discuss the history of the magazine or trends in its content.

Many of the works focusing on the changing nature of masculinity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century discussed *Playboy* as an example of the creation of fantasies for men, but did not go into detail about the magazine specifically. This category included works such as Ronald Levant and Gigi Kopecky's Masculinity Reconstructed: Changing the Rules of Manhood-At Work, In Relationships, And In Family Life (1995) and Andrew Kimbrell's, The Masculine Mystique: The Politics of Masculinity (1995). While these works cited *Playboy* and its imitators as destructive to masculine identity because of the fantasy image they created, they did not take quite the fervent anti-pornography stance of authors like Dworkin and Russell.

Histories of the 1950's, like David Halberstam's The Fifties, discussed *Playboy* as a part of the rebellion against the consensus of the time, grouping it with The Beats and rock and roll. Halberstam was more interested in Hefner as a personality than in any specific discussion of the content of the magazine. Once again, in these works, *Playboy* was discussed more as an example of a larger trend than an instigator of change in its own right.

There are no works that directly discuss the changing image of the centerfold. Nor are there any works discussing the women chosen as Playmates, either directly or indirectly, as a group. In addition, there are no works that directly chronicle the changes in the magazine's layout and/or content and its effects on society. This work intends to fill in the gaps in the study of *Playboy*, using the existing literature as a platform from which to start. This study focuses on the magazine itself, discussing changes to the layout, content and style of the magazine in the context of changes in greater American society.

Hugh Hefner took a basic commodity, sex, and a basic message, that men did not have to be husbands and fathers to be successful, and built it into an immensely profitable magazine. Why was Hefner's magazine so successful? Certainly the nudes contributed to the magazine's initial success, but people *read* the magazine as well. How did the magazine build and maintain its large readership? How did the magazine present men with their new role? How did the magazine reinforce the new role? How and why did the magazine change over time, both in content and layout? What about women's involvement in the magazine, was it only as models, objects for men to covet? These questions can only be answered by examining *Playboy* within the context of greater American society and its changes over time.

The changes chronicled in the magazine fit into four decades, the 1950's, when *Playboy* established itself and built its audience; the 1960's and 70's, when they experimented with their format as America changed at a rapid pace, politically, economically and socially; and the 1980's, when the magazine, having firmly established its format and columns, took on something of a siege mentality in response to the Reagan administration's conservative politics and the rise of the religious right. The 1990's may

hold more changes for *Playboy*; however, proper distance in time is needed for objectivity in describing these trends.

*Playboy* has had an impact on our society. It has helped shape both male and female gender roles. It has reflected changes in American society, both political and social, for over forty years. Chapter 1 attempts to put *Playboy* into the greater context of American society from the 1950's through the 1980's, chronicling the changes in society, *Playboy's* reactions and society's reactions to *Playboy*. It specifically discusses Hefner's ability to exploit the consumerism of the 1950's to create a new gender role for men, his use of women's bodies in the magazine, and the magazine's political attitudes. Chapter 2 is a detailed analysis of *Playboy's* creation of a new gender role for men, the playboy, and the magazine's strategy of legitimizing and reinforcing this role through consumerism. Chapter 3 discusses *Playboy's* creation and recreation of the apex of female beauty as represented by the centerfold, chronicling its changes over the years in the context of greater societal changes. It also attempts to divine the extent of female readership, their opinions and possible influences on the magazine's content. The conclusion serves as a summation of *Playboy's* effects on society, as both instigator and chronicler. It also raises questions for further study.



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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Wyer, Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America (New York: Times Books, 1978): 10, 14.

<sup>2</sup>United States, Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, *Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, July 1986), 1409-1411.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Ehrenreich, The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1983), 45, 170.

## Chapter 1

### ***Playboy: The Creation of its Message and its Voice***

Since its creation, *Playboy* evolved with the changing nature of American culture. Sometimes the magazine discovered issues and trends a few years ahead of the rest of American society; sometimes the magazine simply mirrored shifts that had already taken place. For Hugh Hefner, *Playboy's* creator, this may have been the key to success. For example, although the message of the magazine appeared to rebel against the gender stereotypes of the fifties, it actually played on trends that coexisted with those stereotypes. During the cultural upheaval of the sixties, Hefner tried to keep up with shifting mores that allowed him to expand on his original message. By the 1980's, the success of Hefner's original vision was evident in society. Throughout the years, the magazine went through a myriad of changes, but the bottom line remained the same: whatever Hefner did, outrageous or conventional, he did it to sell magazines.

This marketing strategy determined the way Hefner and *Playboy* dealt with political issues. Hefner originally designed the magazine to take advantage of the shifting political and economic situation in America. Although he did not acknowledge the source of his new model of masculinity, the playboy would not have been born without these circumstances. In fact, during the early years, Hefner and the *Playboy* editors concentrated on creating, refining and advertising their new man to the exclusion of more obvious political issues. Not until they had established themselves did they jump, gingerly, into the controversies of the 1960's and 70's. By the 80's, under assault from the surging conservative movement, they had no choice but to defend themselves. Even then, however, Hefner continued to gauge his magazine against the political and

economic climate and to shape *Playboy's* image accordingly. He seemed never to forget the circumstances and lessons learned from the early days.

The most basic lesson was to take advantage of favorable economic circumstances. World War II had restored the American economy after the Depression by requiring full production and thus full employment. The economy continued to improve after the war. When the war ended and the soldiers returned home, they found an expanded job market, as factories converted to the production of new consumer goods. The plethora of new consumables, as well as the continuing military needs resulting from lingering tensions in Europe and Asia, fueled an economic boom which lasted through the next two decades and affected most Americans. Between 1945 and 1960, per capita disposable income increased from \$500 to \$1,845 per person. In addition, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, or the GI Bill, provided veterans and their families with numerous benefits, including low-interest loans to start businesses and purchase homes, as well as tuition and living expenses for college or vocational schools. All of these factors combined to allow more people to live a middle class lifestyle, to own their own homes and move into white-collar jobs, effectively doubling the size of the middle class.<sup>1</sup>

Consumption provided much of the continuous influx of money needed to maintain America's high levels of production and income. Taking advantage of the increased number of Americans with larger disposable incomes, industrialists produced more and more luxury items to serve the new, larger middle class. Advertisers focused on the home and all the possessions needed to have the best home. The government also encouraged people to spend in order to get more money into circulation. The new focus on domestic consumer goods reinforced a relatively new aspect of middle class society:

consumerism as a mark of status. In order to be considered a success after the war, a man had to own a home and fill it with the newest modern appliances, such as refrigerators and frost-free freezers, automatic washers and dryers, other electronic kitchen appliances, stereos, barbecues pits and televisions. Although consumerism was not new, never before had so many Americans been able to participate in a middle-class lifestyle. Similarly, the building of the interstate highway system made cars the preferred mode of travel, helped facilitate the boom in car sales and added car ownership as a mark of status.

In addition, business, governmental and societal leaders began to describe consumption as moral. Because it violated the traditional norm of delayed gratification and savings, however, supporters of immediate satisfaction had to find a way to make spending acceptable rather than a sign of moral decay. They accomplished this feat in part by emphasizing the patriotic aspects of supporting the American economy. They also tried to sell the new concept of “fun morality” espoused by contemporary sociologist Martha Wolfenstein.<sup>2</sup>

In part, industrialists and government officials used the male breadwinner image to further their cause. By this time, most Americans saw the role of breadwinner as “the only normal state for the adult male.”<sup>3</sup> A man could only achieve success by working hard to provide his wife and children with the luxury items they needed to show they were middle class. Thus, all advertisers had to do was change the male role slightly, so that men defined themselves as consumers as well as breadwinners, with both roles intimately tied to the home and family.<sup>4</sup>

Women's role in the new consumer economy was twofold. On the one hand, a woman was supposed to find fulfillment as a wife and mother. Thanks to all the new convenient appliances, the wife had plenty of time to devote to her children. This role was encouraged, as the men returning from war needed jobs and did not want to compete with women who had held them during the war. As both housewife and mother, women continued as the main consumers determining where and how to spend the household income. On the other hand, advertisers, realizing the same thing Hefner had, namely "sex sells," began to use women's bodies in advertising targeting men. This objectified women and presented them as a sellable object. This also served to create the idea of women as sex kittens, a role into which all the women of *Playboy* fit.<sup>5</sup>

Television also reinforced the message of the successful consumer, through advertising. Television showed Americans the latest products, while emphasizing the male breadwinner and happy homemaker roles. People saw the television families like those portrayed on "Leave it to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best" and tried to live up to that image. These programs showed that the role of father and husband was fulfilling, especially when supplemented with new consumer goods to replace the emptiness caused by monotonous, unrewarding white-collar corporate jobs.<sup>6</sup> In addition, by showing women enjoying their family life, as well as the problems caused by women stepping out of their roles, TV continued the "happy homemaker" image.

Against this backdrop, Hefner introduced an alternative to suburban life that did not "restrict men's sexuality to the domestic sphere" or link consumption (the new sign of a good American) to fatherhood and homeownership.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, it was initially an extension of the new happy image of America, featuring wholesome women, but without

their clothes. But *Playboy* always billed itself as a men's magazine, providing men with a voice in a world where they might be successful, but were not always enjoying their success. *Playboy* provided men with an alternative to the role of father and breadwinner as the only means of achieving status. Instead, Hefner gave them the image of the playboy, a man with money, who enjoyed "the finer things in life" such as gourmet food, wine, designer clothes, jazz, philosophy, technological innovations and beautiful women, just not a wife. Hefner called for a rebellion against conformity while simultaneously creating a new image for men to strive for: man as playboy.

Hefner, of course, used materialism to create the image. The magazine was filled with *things* the potential playboy had to own. In fact, Hefner used consumer goods to reinforce the playboy role for men in much the same way advertisers in the 50's used them to reinforce the roles of breadwinner and happy homemaker. This emphasis on consumerism made Hefner's challenge to the status quo a little less of a threat. In addition, Hefner began with a huge audience base since this new image and the magazine appealed to two groups of men. Single men who could not or did not want to fit into the husband/father role found a viable alternative. But it also appealed to husbands and fathers, who were eager for some excitement and able to live vicariously through the magazine without jeopardizing their status in society.

The 1950's was something of an "age of exploration" for *Playboy*. Hefner first published his magazine in 1953 and it bore little resemblance to the image conjured today by the word *Playboy*. Although the magazine was about rebelling against the stereotypes of the 50's, in many ways it was still tied to the mores of its time. Even the women were

not completely naked. Hefner, however, recognized a new niche in the market, recently brought to light by the publication of the Kinsey Report.

Actually two studies published in 1948 and 1953, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, respectively, Kinsey's studies "propelled sex into the public eye in a way unlike any previous book or event had done." Kinsey's work shocked Americans in a number of ways. First, his research was scientific, based on a large pool of interviewees, basically counting how many people "had done what, how many times, and at what ages." Second, this was the first report to catalogue the sexual habits of the white middle-class. Third, based on Kinsey's findings, the sexual habits of the white middle-class differed a great deal from the publicly espoused norms. His findings showed the "frequency and incidence of masturbation, premarital petting and coitus, marital intercourse, extramarital sex, homosexuality, and animal contact." Perhaps more importantly, it showed that these things occurred with a much higher frequency than the American people were willing to admit. Most importantly, no matter if people liked or hated the book, hundreds of thousands of people bought and discussed it. Opinion polls at the time indicated that a large majority of the public approved of scientific research on sexuality and wanted to learn more. In a time when fitting in to society was strongly encouraged, Americans could now feel secure in their sexual practices, not alienated.<sup>8</sup>

From this, Hefner learned not only that sex would sell, but that the American public was more than ready to buy it. Kinsey's reports cleared the way for more open discussions and portrayals of sexuality. Never mind that Hefner insisted the magazine was for men who enjoyed the "finer things" in life, the magazine always had sex at its

heart, as the centerfold. The “finer things” Hefner spoke of actually took several years to develop and many early features came and went before the magazine solidified into what it is today. In fact, much of the early run served as more of a how-to guide for men, teaching them how to live the life of a playboy. After the stress placed on success as father and husband, the role of playboy was a mystery. Who were its role models? How did one become a playboy? Basically, Hefner’s answer was “buy the right things.” In much the same way domestic consumer goods helped define and solidify the breadwinner and happy housewife roles, the male-centered products advertised in *Playboy* helped legitimize the role of playboy as successful in the eyes of American men.

In fact, throughout the 1950’s, *Playboy* concentrated more on establishing, and then reinforcing, the image than they did on the political or social issues of the time. Certainly, this emerged in part from the attitude of consensus that dominated the 50’s. Primarily, however, the focus resulted from the need to devote the majority of the magazine’s attention to building and maintaining its audience. During the 50’s the magazine featured as many pieces of fiction as it did photo layouts featuring naked women. Humor and fashion pieces ran more frequently than actual articles, which appeared about as often as travel pieces. Every issue contained at least one work of fiction, one pictorial and one humor piece. The same cannot be said for fashion and articles. This statement, however, must be qualified, for the only times the magazine did not run some type of fashion articles were Decembers, when they ran numerous articles on gift suggestions, many of which were clothing items and accessories. The magazine also added separate food and drink pieces, written by food and drink editor Thomas Mario for the first twenty years of the magazine’s run. Mario had a particularly wordy



style, with phrases like “ a mischievous mollusk’s piquant personality” sprinkled throughout his work.<sup>9</sup> These pieces were more about appearances than actual cooking, stressing ways to make men appear to be a chef and attractive ways to present food and drinks. *Playboy* also added *modern living* as a semi-regular feature, providing an avenue for large-scale consumer goods, previously untapped by the fashion pieces. Sports and entertainment pieces appeared sporadically, focusing on a wide range of sports, but almost exclusively on jazz when discussing entertainment.

Slowly, opinion and personality features began to appear in the late 50’s. At the same time however, standard articles began to appear less frequently. The opinion pieces were more about current styles than current politics and the personality features tended to focus on playboy role models. In addition, *Playboy* often ran articles that really should have been relabeled, such as the 1958 article on how to be better at chess. Basically, pieces that logically would have been about politics were not. However, the inclusion of opinion pieces was important, as they would later be used to introduce controversial issues.<sup>10</sup>

The sixties brought great changes for *Playboy*, as they did for the whole country. The Equal Rights Movement that began in the 1950’s was gaining ground and publicity by the 1960’s. By 1962, *Playboy’s* editors realized they needed to discuss the civil rights issues, as more and more of the country became aware of the growing movement. In the early 60’s, *Playboy* writer Murray Fisher discovered a half finished interview with Miles Davis by a fairly new writer, Alex Haley. He and Haley became friends and Fisher encouraged the completion of the Davis interview, recognizing that the African-American musician had more to talk about than just music. Fisher saw the pieces on jazz as the perfect segue

into the civil rights movement. He encouraged Nat Hentoff, then *Playboy's* jazz critic, to write an article about race. In 1962, even before the Davis interview was finished, Nat Hentoff's "Through the Racial Looking Glass" appeared in *Playboy*. In the piece, Hentoff predicted most of the attitudes, issues and rhetoric that would mark the civil rights movement. He discussed the violence within the black community caused by oppression, the rise of the "black is beautiful" movement and even racism within the black community. He even predicted that SNCC, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, would play a prominent role in the development of the civil rights movement. With this, the magazine began its involvement not only in the civil rights movement, but also the greater world of American politics.<sup>11</sup>

The magazine continued to run pieces about civil rights and slowly added pictorials featuring African-American women, such as its June 1963 "The Girls of Africa." This pictorial drew interesting responses from readers. Although there were the standard letters alleging that *Playboy* had finally gone too far, there were also letters of support. One of the most interesting of these letters thanked *Playboy* for the photos and then added this social commentary: "What wonderful possibilities are suggested when all humans are free to crossbreed and enrich the human race-and it looks like such interesting work."<sup>12</sup> From the rest of the letter, it was clear that the author viewed African-American women as attractive, saying that in this more enlightened age he hoped his son, or at least his grandson, would be able to date and/or marry a black woman. Although the author of the letter seemed to see African-American women as equal to white women in beauty and as a possibility for a mate, he was also still a product of his time, viewing all women as commodities.

In 1965 *Playboy* took a huge step and introduced the first African-American centerfold, Miss March, Jennifer Jackson. The magazine received considerable feedback, both positive and negative, from its readers concerning civil rights. Several people wrote to thank *Playboy* for not only showing that “beauty has no racial barriers,” but also for treating Jackson “as simply another American young lady with the physical endowments necessary to qualify her for the pull-out page.”<sup>13</sup> *Playboy* did not address her ethnicity in the article accompanying her centerfold, perhaps to lessen the outcry they expected from her appearance. They were not wrong. Many readers were offended by the inclusion of an African-American centerfold. Many returned the picture. One reader wrote in protest that though he was concerned about being classed with “bigots, racists, reactionaries and sundry other things currently in vogue,” he still encouraged the magazine to return to its previous playmate type, which was “more in line with the thinking of the vast majority of (*Playboy's*) readers.”<sup>14</sup>

Eventually the letters to the editor section became the venue for heated debate about civil rights. More than just facilitating discussion, these letters actually reveal the state of mind of the average reader concerning civil rights issues. Even people who wrote to praise *Playboy* for adding minorities and addressing civil rights issues still used derogatory language and racially based arguments. For instance, one woman wrote to chastise the magazine for degrading women, using the argument that “if we are going to give the Negroes, the Japanese, the Jews, the Germans and the rest of the world an equal share,” why not women too?<sup>15</sup> Another reader wrote to claim that a particular interviewee must know about jazz and the blues because he was an African-American,

though the author of the letter had only good things to say about the interviewee, blues and jazz.<sup>16</sup>

*Playboy's* second step in discussing civil rights came in the form of their famous interview section. The magazine started by publishing Alex Haley's interview with Miles Davis in 1962. During the interview Davis openly discussed racism, both overt and covert, especially in the music industry, and what was to be done about the situation, specifically integration.<sup>17</sup> *Playboy* went on to add interviews with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963 and 1965, respectively.<sup>18</sup> *Playboy* also interviewed George Lincoln Rockwell, leader of the American Nazi Party.<sup>19</sup> Alex Haley, an African-American, conducted all of these interviews. While the published interviews never addressed Haley's ethnicity, it did show that *Playboy* was taking sides, of a sort, in the civil rights debate. By sending an African-American interviewer, *Playboy* showed that it did not harbor racial prejudices in the work place. Interestingly, while *Playboy* chose to interview prominent men in the struggle for civil rights, they chose to interview a member of the right-wing fringe, rather than a moderate who would likely have spoken about the need to slow down integration. *Playboy* continued to run articles about civil rights and, possibly based on the volume of letters pouring in, added panel discussions on racial issues and the *Playboy* Forum, which quickly replaced the letters to the editor section as the place for heated racial discussions.

*Playboy* also embraced the Black Power movement, although after the movement was already well known.<sup>20</sup> They published interviews with Charles Evers and Huey Newton. In addition, many of the African-American women featured in the magazine sported

cultural symbols associated with the Black Power movement, such as the Afro. Once again, the magazine supported the movement once it was no longer quite as controversial.

In the 60's, *Playboy* also began championing the drug culture that was quickly becoming a marker of the 1960's hippie culture.<sup>21</sup> Articles on marijuana were the most popular, especially after Dan Wakefield's "The Prodigal Powers of Pot" appeared in August 1962.<sup>22</sup> But the magazine took it further, as the Forum became a national pot lobby and The *Playboy* Foundation gave legal and financial aid to convicted users. Eventually Hefner used *Playboy* Foundation funds to set up NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.<sup>23</sup> Although *Playboy* moved on to discuss other drugs, in particular, hallucinogens because of their link to sex, they retained the same treatment of the material. The articles always contained a history of the drug in question, its uses, myths about it, the pros and cons of its use, and always stressed its illegality. When *Playboy* interviewed Timothy Leary in 1966, the article drew a huge response, most of it praise. In an effort to provide their readers with the most accurate information possible, *Playboy* however, printed letters from two different sets of doctors, discussing bad LSD trips and de-emphasizing LSD's properties as an aphrodisiac.<sup>24</sup>

*Playboy* also chronicled the many other movements of the 1960's, such as the ban-the-bomb movement, anti-nuclear groups, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the women's movement, and both right and left wing political movements. Most of the discussion on these topics appeared in the form of interviews with prominent members of the movements or the *Playboy* Forum; this strategy allowed *Playboy* editors to introduce topics but distance themselves from controversial issues. For example, whereas articles on the women's movement could have been perceived as *Playboy* supporting the

movement, interviews with Helen Gurley Brown and Ayn Rand expressed the views of the interviewees. As the 60's wore on and Hefner became more of a celebrity, the magazine was able to persuade more and more prominent Americans to write for, or at least be interviewed by *Playboy*.

Although *Playboy* addressed many topics during the 1960's one stood out as particularly unusual for the magazine: its support for the admission of the People's Republic of China (PRC) into the United Nations. In 1963, both Frank Sinatra and Bertrand Russell advocated admission of the PRC into the UN in interviews with *Playboy*. Eventually historian Max Lerner started writing for *Playboy*, often pleading the case for admission. This was unusual for *Playboy* because up until that time, the magazine rarely devoted any attention to foreign affairs. Perhaps this was the magazine's way of easing into the subject. By having interviewees, especially a playboy role model like Frank Sinatra, discuss foreign affairs, the editors could gauge their audience's response and interest in the topic.<sup>25</sup>

*Playboy* eventually tackled the Vietnam War. At first, the coverage was fairly innocuous. In November 1965, Second Lieutenant John Price wrote to *Playboy* from Bien Hoa with a money order for a lifetime subscription. Price was under the impression that in the US, the first issue of a lifetime subscription was hand delivered by a Playmate and he hoped that the policy could be stretched to include him in Vietnam. Never mind that the policy only applied to cities with *Playboy* clubs, Hefner knew an incredible promotional opportunity when he saw one. After fighting Pentagon red tape, Hefner sent Playmate of the Year Jo Collins and a photo crew to Saigon on January 9, 1966.<sup>26</sup> The article about the trip was very conventional and very patriotic, openly comparing this

stunt to World War II trips by pinups Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth. *Playboy* continued its coverage of Vietnam with other letters from soldiers and a few articles on soldiers busted for smoking pot.

By 1969, however, *Playboy* had become more serious about the topic. In that year, *Playboy* published an interview with Norman Thomas, the six-time Socialist presidential candidate, who spoke openly about what the Vietnam War was doing to the country and what Americans were doing to Vietnam. By this time, the anti-war movement was very vocal. At college campuses around the US, teach-ins were becoming the popular mode of protesting the war. During teach-ins, students and faculty participated in lectures, debates and discussions about Vietnam, looking for better solutions. As the civil rights movement continued to grow along side the growing anti-war movement, their supporters could see a common goal. Anti-war protestors sometimes carried signs with messages such as, "GET OUT OF SAIGON AND INTO SELMA" or "WAR ON POVERTY NOT ON PEOPLE." *Playboy* continued its coverage of Vietnam with Arnold Toynbee's interview and an eyewitness account of the war, once again using the interview format to tackle controversial issues. In December 1967, John Kenneth Galbraith spoke out against the war, saying "the assumptions that took us to Vietnam have been shown by history to be false. Therefore, we should not be there." He went on to say that more people were realizing this, and as they did, the demand for American withdrawal from Vietnam would only grow.<sup>27</sup>

As *Playboy's* discussion of politics, particularly Vietnam, increased, the letters to the editor page became a who's who of senators and congressmen, writing to support or contradict one another. In addition, more congressmen agreed to write for the magazine.

Senator William Fulbright contributed “For a New Order of Priorities at Home and Abroad,” in which he criticized America’s Vietnam policy not only for its impact on the US and Vietnam, but also for its impact on US relations with other countries.<sup>28</sup>

It took Hefner’s experience with the 1968 Democratic Convention, however, to push the magazine into taking a much more partisan stand on issues. Hefner was in Chicago, using his house as a gathering place for friends in town for the convention. On the evening of the police riots, Hefner left his house to see what was going on. When Hefner talked back to a police officer, he was shoved to the ground. He was unhurt and his encounter seemed insignificant when compared to the atrocities police officers perpetrated on protesters, newsmen, bystanders and everyone else. The event was, however, very significant for Hefner. Although in the past, the magazine tended to tackle issues through interviews and the Forum, after the convention Hefner was ready to take a concrete stand on issues. He began openly supporting candidates, such as George McGovern, donating money, his mansions and more importantly, the pages of his magazine.<sup>29</sup>

As America moved into the Nixon years, the magazine’s voice developed further. Vietnam dominated American culture and politics, including *Playboy*. The list of congressmen writing to or for the magazine continued to grow. David Halberstam wrote on the Americanization of Vietnam in 1970 and the Vietnamization of America in 1971. Calls for withdrawal from Vietnam became more frequent in American society and in *Playboy*’s pages, as editorials, in letters and in articles. *Playboy* was firmly anti-war. But as the war ground along into the 1970’s, appearing never to end despite guarantees from Nixon of imminent peace, *Playboy*’s coverage lightened. Although the war



officially ended with the Paris Peace Accord in early 1973, by 1972 much of *Playboy's* coverage of the war was already wistful, discussing the war in the past tense, ready to move on. This was in line with the rest of the American media, which basically dropped all coverage of Vietnam after the Accords.<sup>30</sup>

After the war, Americans just wanted to forget and in many ways so did *Playboy*. Although the magazine continued to cover politics, especially the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation, in many ways the magazine took on a lighter, more informative tone. In addition, *Playboy* refocused on sex. Hefner's insinuations aside, the sexual revolution was over and sex was no longer the taboo subject it was when Hefner began publishing. The sexual permissiveness that resulted from the sexual revolution not only opened the way for *Playboy*, but for imitators, such as *Penthouse* and *Hustler*. More competition also encouraged more relaxation of sexual taboos. Based on these changes, *Playboy* began publishing pictures of women in more provocative poses and showing pubic hair starting in 1971. Pubic hair became not only a regular feature, but the focus of the centerfolds by 1972. All of these changes reinforced the objectification of women. In addition, *Playboy* also included articles on pornography and orgies.

From its beginnings, *Playboy* had always championed the sexual revolution. During the late 60's, openness about sexuality and sexual experimentation grew among the youth as a result of the "free love" movement and wider availability of the birth control pill. Hippie culture encouraged free love, at "anytime, any form, out of wedlock, and especially without guilt." These sentiments were in line with Hefner's philosophy and the magazine quickly began espousing the great benefits of free love. In many ways it was as if *Playboy's* message had finally caught on. Because Hefner wanted the playboy

to be swinging, but responsible, the magazine began publishing information on birth control and the importance of sex education, always citing a wide range of experts.<sup>31</sup>

Building on this momentum, *Playboy* in the 70's became more explicit sexually. The *Playboy* Advisor column, added to the magazine in 1960, had answered questions on a wide variety of subjects. By the early 70's, however, the column changed its tone, becoming more sexually oriented and explicit in its answers. Many of the letters to the advisor wanted detailed information about sexual acts and positions that the average American would never have dreamed of asking during the 1950's. Continuing this trend, by the end of the 1970's, *Playboy* had changed the style of its photography, showing women in more provocative poses, fully nude with pubic hair visible, more in line with the styles of *Hustler* and *Penthouse*. The photos were glossy and airbrushed. The addition of the Data Sheet made it easier to categorize the women who appeared in the magazine, reinforcing the image of women as objects.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout its history, *Playboy* has consistently presented women as one more commodity to be sold. The beautiful women portrayed in the magazine were accessories, used in much the same way as the clothing and other goods that designated a man a playboy. The centerfolds only reinforced the image of women as objects.

Obviously, *Playboy* had ignored the development of the women's movement. Encouraged by the success of the civil rights movement, women pushed for equality throughout the 60's. Before *Playboy* even addressed the subject, The Feminine Mystique had already brought to light the loneliness and lack of fulfillment that characterized the lives on many housewives, sex discrimination was legally banned through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the National Organization of Women (NOW) was founded.<sup>33</sup> By

the late 60's, the women's movement had developed militant strains, such those that advocated violence or lesbianism. Much of the mainstream media had already covered the women's movement. Perhaps Hefner delayed addressing the issue because he could not find a way to reconcile the magazine's image of women as objects, there for men to enjoy, and its liberal stance on human rights, which included women.

Not until 1970 did *Playboy* publish an article addressing the women's movement. *Playboy* contended at the time that it always believed a women's place was not in the home, "that she should enjoy a career" and "not be limited to a double standard in sex." *Playboy's* first article about feminism and the women's movement, "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig," called the movement "a major drive by American women, the Labor Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to give women an even break in the job market." The article was not so kind to all groups within the movement. It denigrated the militant aspects of the movement for trying to do away with biological differences. In fact, the article did not even legitimize the militant wings of the movement, simply referring to them as "crackpots" or "crazy." After the article, *Playboy* received numerous letters to the editor and even some interoffice memos from female staff members concerning *Playboy's* position.

Eventually, based on a memo from Hefner, *Playboy* developed its stance on the women's movement. The magazine supported universal availability of birth-control information and devices, equal pay for equal work and the repeal of abortion laws. They believed that women should be as free as men to explore and enjoy their sexuality and should not be bound by societal roles such as homemaker. They did not support radical feminists, labeling them more anti-masculine than pro-feminine. Clearly *Playboy* was

walking a fine line. They supported the central aspects of the women's movement, no longer controversial by the early 1970's. The aspects of the women's movement that were still radical, and more importantly, directly contradicted or endangered the playboy role for men, were labeled crazy and not treated seriously.<sup>34</sup>

*Playboy's* stance on the women's movement was not quite so simple. Despite criticism from most branches of the movement, *Playboy* continued to publish articles about the movement and featured many discussions on the issues in the Forum. They responded to floods of letters from all positions in both the letters to the editor and Advisor sections. The *Playboy* Foundation also funded the pro-abortion battle, the League of Women Voters, three day-care centers, IUD research, a rape support group in Chicago and groups on women's civil rights.<sup>35</sup>

Just as Hefner overlooked the contradictions within his stance on women, Americans chose to ignore many of the lingering problems as they moved out of the 60's. Feelings of great disillusionment after Vietnam and Watergate overshadowed the 70's. The recession of 1975 did not help matters.<sup>36</sup> Americans were ready to forget about the country's failures and get on with their lives. Television, sports and movies were the focus of American free time. The 70's were also marked by "crazes" such as disco or the physical fitness rage.

*Playboy* followed its market. Certainly the magazine continued its coverage of politics and current events, such as its infamous Jimmy Carter interview, but that was no longer the magazine's focus. During the 70's, *Playboy* refocused on fiction and entertainment, devoting its attention once more to fashion, sports, music and humor. While the magazine ran these types of articles during the 50's, their incarnations in the 70's were

less of a lesson and more of a suggestion. Perhaps this can be attributed to the success of the original message. Men no longer had to be told how to be a playboy and could have more flexibility in their role. Perhaps it was also a result of the stress on individuality during the 60's.

As the 70's rolled into the 80's, the greatest changes to *Playboy* were structural. The magazine continued to add new columns and features, almost doubling the number of pages. Many were regular features or editorial columns. In 1984 they added *Men and Women*, columns addressing sex roles and stereotypes, *Dear Playmates* and *The Playboy Guide*. A sports section and *20 Questions*, a short interview, were added in 1985. Of course, they also continued to run surveys and quizzes on music, movies and sex, the *Ribald Classics*, fashion pieces and *modern living*. *Playboy* continued to publish articles, but by the 80's, half were about computers and half were about celebrities. Many of the political topics were relegated to one of the *Playboy* columns, where the editors could say whatever they wanted, but the audience was also able to easily identify editorial opinions and skip them if desired. *Playboy's* treatment of the women's movement was also moved into the editorial columns. In addition, some of the columns reflected Hefner's status as a star. Several of the new sections were snapshot-type pictures from Hefner's mansions and legendary parties, a sort of self-congratulatory pat on the back to Hefner for not only being a success in business, but for becoming a star himself. Perhaps the addition of a second interview forum was intended as another avenue for discussion of controversial issues.

After Reagan's election in 1980, the country moved in a more conservative political direction. The rise of the Christian coalition made censorship and pornography major

issues and *Playboy* suffered a slump in sales during the 80's, with a 1,586,059 drop between 1978 and 1984.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps in response to the changes in society, *Playboy* seemed to return to the format of introducing controversial issues in interviews or as a particular person's opinion, not the opinion of the magazine. For instance, in 1984, pieces on sports, music, art and sex were often labeled *articles*, while a piece on the deteriorating state of the media was labeled *opinion*.<sup>38</sup> *Playboy* kept up with the trends, such as the fitness craze of the 80's, when they ran *modern living* sections on the home gym and fashion sections on workout clothes.<sup>39</sup>

There were a few issues in the 80's that *Playboy* was willing to discuss openly. AIDS became the focus of a large portion of *Playboy's* attention. *Playboy* was primarily concerned with educating its readers on AIDS. In October 1983, *Playboy* ran an article describing what little was known about the disease at the time, how it was spread and dispelling many of the myths about AIDS, such as it being a gay disease. The article pointed to further research as the only hope for controlling the disease. It then faulted the Reagan administration for cutting the Center For Disease Control's funding and being slow in making funds available for AIDS research.<sup>40</sup> Questions on AIDS began appearing in Dear *Playboy* and the *Playboy* Advisor, while it became a topic of much discussion in the *Playboy* Forum.

*Playboy* continued the trend of educating its readers with a 1984 article on cocaine, stressing the dangers of the drug. The goal of the article was to give readers clear information about what cocaine does to the body, how it works, typical side effects, its addictive properties and where to call for help. The article was very formal and long (10 pages) for an article in *Playboy*. It focused on the research of experts, quoting several

doctors, with in depth discussions of their research. It also contained detailed technical explanations and several statements from former and current cocaine users. While the article was meant to be an informative piece, the author did not try to hide his bias, concluding his article with statements such as “Cocaine is dangerous.”<sup>41</sup>

Why the magazine that championed legalization of marijuana and actively linked sex and hallucinogens took a negative stance against cocaine is open to conjecture. Times had changed; 1984 was very different than the 60’s. Perhaps Hefner was growing up, accepting the repercussions of the playboy lifestyle. The informative nature of the article, however, was in line with the other informative-type articles, such as the ones on AIDS and others on subjects like traffic safety.

Censorship also occupied the minds of *Playboy* editors. After Reagan’s election in 1980, the religious right began to grow significantly in numbers. They wanted a return to the “family values” of the 1950’s and began numerous campaigns to reform society and use Christian moral standards as the measuring stick for decision-making in the US.<sup>42</sup> For *Playboy*, this translated into a direct attack on the magazine, as Americans jumped on the anti-pornography bandwagon. As *Playboy*’s sales experienced a slump in the 80’s, the magazine began an anti anti-pornography campaign of its own. *Playboy* faulted Reagan for much of the anti-porn fervor. They cited an \$800,000 grant to Dr. Judith Reisman as the beginning of a war on pornography, quoting Reisman saying, “Defense of pornography is based on the spurious notion that freedom of speech actually exists.”<sup>43</sup> They went on to cite this as an example of government’s intrusion into the private lives of Americans, an increasing trend that bothered *Playboy*.

*Playboy*, though under attack by the religious right for its lack of morals, still used the interview format to express its dissatisfaction with the Reagan administration, namely by interviewing foreign political figures. In 1985, *Playboy* published its interview with Fidel Castro, the leader of Cuba and a headache for seven American presidents. By interviewing Castro, *Playboy* was able to publish a view of America that was not easily expressed in the US at the time. In addition, since the US did not recognize Castro's government, for many Americans this was one of the few portrayals of Castro not clouded by governmental assumptions. In 1987, when *Playboy* published its interview with Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos, the deposed leader of the Philippines, considerable stress was placed on their colonial mentality, their Americanism, their dependency on US support, the extent of US involvement in the Marcos' government and the lack of US support the Marcos' received at the end of their regime. Although America was never directly attacked, clearly this was another opportunity to discuss US intervention without it being filtered through the US government.<sup>44</sup>

The changes to *Playboy* in the 1980's appeared to be result from three trends in American society. First of all, *Playboy's* politics changed to something of a siege mentality, as a reaction to the conservative turn of the country. The magazine itself also became more cautious, as America moved father away from the 60's and became more disillusioned. Secondly, as more of the repercussions of the counterculture became apparent, such as the spread of AIDS and new health and safety concerns, *Playboy*, in some ways, went back to its educational approach from the 50's in discussing these topics. The magazine tried to inform its readers about the dangers of life in the 80's,



presenting very technical articles intended to give the reader as much information as possible.

The third major factor contributing to changes in the magazine was changing American culture. In the 80's, "yuppie," or young, urban professional culture began to spread across America. It was the result of the huge growth in professional jobs. Yuppie culture started with people in high-tech jobs, then quickly moved into other professions, such as law, media, marketing, advertising, health services and government jobs. Yuppies were young, single people, usually living in urban areas, with large disposable incomes. They helped transform consumerism in America. These were the people who popularized townhouses and condominiums as the proper form of city living. Although obsessed with personal growth, self-improvement and counterculture values, they tried different methods than the hippies had. Yuppies attempted to achieve their goals through new consumer goods, such as the myriad of diet and exercise products introduced in the 80's, the increase in gourmet restaurants and health eating, or the incredible advent of computerized technology. Television shows were even marketed to the young professionals, such as "Hill Street Blues," "Miami Vice," "St. Elsewhere," and "LA Law," so they could see themselves on TV. Once again, success in America was based on what you owned, but now status was based on being single, working in a professional job and owning the latest in technological advancements, whether they be for exercise, cooking or recreation.<sup>45</sup>

In many ways, these single individuals consuming for themselves, not their families, marked the success of *Playboy's* original message from the 1950's. The adoption of this trend by a cross section of the American public gave *Playboy* the opportunity to market a

wide variety of products to a large audience and the advertising, both actual and in the guise of articles, increased dramatically throughout the late 70's and into the 80's.

In many ways, the magazine had come full circle, now selling little pieces of the world it rebelled against in the 1950's. The new consumers of the 1980's, inundated with technology and the singles lifestyle, yearned for some hominess, and in an effort to cater to its audience, *Playboy* also began to include articles and consumer suggestions for ways to make one's home a type of sanctuary (sounds like suburban families in the 1950's) and ways to relax, such as vacations in the country. In a world where sex was no longer free, thanks to AIDS, *Playboy* had to temper its message on sexuality, but retained its consumer message, defining success based on having the right products. In that way, *Playboy* was able to create and reinforce the male gender role of playboy.

<sup>1</sup>Michael Schaller, Virginia Scharff and Robert D. Schulzinger, Present Tense: The United States Since 1945, Second Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 26-27; Thomas C. Reeves, Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156, 95.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Ehrenreich, The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1983), 45.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 15.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Corber, Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>5</sup>Joan Jacobs Brumberg, The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls (New York: Random House, 1997), 198-199; For a more in depth discussion of this period, see David A. Horowitz and Peter N. Carroll, On the Edge: The U.S. Since 1941, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Belmont, CA: West/Wadsworth, 1998), chapter 3 and 4; Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (Basic Books, Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), chapter 1, 2, 5 and 7; Schaller, Scharff and Schulzinger, Present Tense, chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup>Corber, Homosexuality in Cold War America, 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 9.

<sup>8</sup>John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 285-286.

<sup>9</sup>Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 62.

<sup>10</sup>John Howard Sims, "Executive Chess," *Playboy*, October 1958, 69.

<sup>11</sup>Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 131; Nat Hentoff, "Through the Racial Looking Glass," *Playboy* (July 1962): 64.

<sup>12</sup>G.M Whitney, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (July 1963): 8.

<sup>13</sup>P. Justin Mullen and G. Donald Lovett, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (June 1965): 12.

<sup>14</sup>"Interested Reader," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (June 1965): 12.

<sup>15</sup>"Name Withheld," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1963): 22.

<sup>16</sup>"Name Withheld," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1964): 8.

<sup>17</sup>"*Playboy* Interview: Miles Davis," *Playboy* (September 1962): 57.

<sup>18</sup>"*Playboy* Interview: Malcolm X," *Playboy* (May 1963): 53; "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King," *Playboy* (January 1965): 65.

<sup>19</sup>"*Playboy* Interview: George Lincoln Rockwell," *Playboy* (April 1966): 71.

<sup>20</sup>For more information on the Black Power movement, see Douglas T. Miller, On Our Own: Americans in the Sixties (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1966), 137-144, 288-290.

<sup>21</sup>For a more detailed discussion of hippie culture, see Terry H. Anderson, The Sixties (New York: Longman, 1999), chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup>Dan Wakefield, "The Prodigal Powers of Pot," *Playboy* (August 1962): 51.

<sup>23</sup>Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 143.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 145.

<sup>25</sup>"*Playboy* Interview: Frank Sinatra," *Playboy* (February 1963); 35; "*Playboy* Interview: Bertrand Russell," *Playboy* (March 1963): 41; Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 155.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 156.

<sup>27</sup>Anderson, The Sixties, 64-66; Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 157-159; John Kenneth Galbraith, "Resolving Our Vietnam Predicament," *Playboy* (December 1967): 139.

<sup>28</sup>Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 159-160.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, 161; For more information of the 1968 Democratic Convention, see Anderson, The Sixties, 119-124.

<sup>30</sup>Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 162-163; Horowitz and Carroll, On the Edge, 232-234.

<sup>31</sup>Anderson, The Sixties, 139; Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 208.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, 202-204.

<sup>33</sup>For more information on the women's movement, see Miller, On Our Own, 307-326; Sara M. Evans, Born For Liberty: A History of Women in America (New York: The Free Press, 1989), chapter 11-13.

<sup>34</sup>Morton M. Hunt, "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig!" *Playboy* (May 1970): 94; Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 233-235.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, 241.

<sup>36</sup>Reeves, Twentieth-Century America, 220.

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<sup>37</sup>Diane E.H. Russell, Dangerous Relationships: Pornography, Misogyny, and Rape (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1998), 29.

<sup>38</sup>*Playboy* (March 1984): 7; *Playboy* (April 1984): 7; *Playboy* (June 1984): 7; *Playboy* (September 1984): 7.

<sup>39</sup>"Gym Dandy to the Rescue," *Playboy* ((March 1984): 117; For more information on the fitness craze, see Barbara Ehrenreich, The Worst Years of Our Lives: Irreverent Notes from a Decade of Greed (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 18-21.

<sup>40</sup>David Nimmons, "AIDS: Journalism in a Plague Year," *Playboy* (October 1983): 35-36.

<sup>41</sup>Laurence Gonzales, "Cocaine: A Special Report," *Playboy* (September 1984): 112, 202.

<sup>42</sup>For a more detailed discussion of the religious right, see Horowitz and Carroll, On the Edge, 286-297.

<sup>43</sup>Larry Bush, "Fat Grants and Sleazy Politics: Reagan's Porn Paranoia," *Playboy* (August 1984): 51-52.

<sup>44</sup>"*Playboy* Interview: Fidel Castro," *Playboy* (August 1985): 57; "*Playboy* Interview: Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos," *Playboy* (August 1987): 51.

<sup>45</sup>For a more detailed discussion of yuppie culture, see Horowitz and Carroll, On the Edge, 263-265; Ehrenreich, The Worst Years of Our Lives, 1-143.

## Chapter 2

### *Playboy* Creates “The Playboy”

*Playboy* is and has always been a men’s magazine. From its first issue, Hugh Hefner made this very clear. It differed, however, from the standard men’s magazines, which focused on the outdoors, hunting, fishing and war stories. Instead, *Playboy* provided something new: the message that men could stay indoors and enjoy themselves, with nudes in every issue to confirm their heterosexuality. Moreover, at a time when society emphasized the importance of the family, the magazine sent a clear, concise message about manhood and ways of achieving status outside of marriage and fatherhood. Hefner and the editors took advantage of the potential inherent in the rising incomes of working and middle-class men and steered their new male image toward the consumer market, creating a fantasy version of manhood. In the beginning *Playboy* taught working-class men to be middle class; later they established a world that men could live in vicariously. Even if men could not have the women, they could buy the products and feel, in some way, a part of the *Playboy* world.

Men loved the message and the magazine and eagerly encouraged the venture. They wrote in great numbers to express their pleasure at a magazine that stayed indoors. Especially during the first year’s run, men also wrote to make suggestions about other material they wanted to see in the magazine, such as articles on “gentlemen’s sports,” rather than just football and boxing. They also requested book reviews, pieces on men’s fashions, stories on real-life playboys and even crossword puzzles. With the exception of the crossword puzzles, all of these early suggestions not only appeared in the magazine, but became staples and helped spread Hefner’s message in a more effective manner.

*Playboy* also handled its early critics wonderfully, answering the allegation that the magazine was not suited to the vast majority of the population with the statement: "We believe the adult male has a right to a magazine of his own-not a magazine for the entire family, but especially styled to a man's interest and tastes," which included sex.<sup>1</sup>

The message to men was clearly stated from the very beginning of the magazine. Hefner saw himself as the leader in the war for men's independence, calling for men to join the "fraternity of male rebels."<sup>2</sup> In fact, Hefner attacked the idea that maturity was really something for which to strive. It was "slow death" or conformity, but certainly nothing to be enjoyed.<sup>3</sup> Hefner's basic message was simple; men should rebel against the roles of husband and father as their only means of achieving status. In place of the traditional roles, Hefner provided the playboy image as a means of showing success. Taking this message about masculinity a step further, the magazine showed men how to become the image through a myriad of products the playboy had to have. They not only told the man what to buy, but also what to think and how to act. With the later addition of The *Playboy* Advisor column, *Playboy* even told the readers what to do when they wrote in with questions, ranging from the simple to the bizarre, on all subjects, but especially sex.

In the post World War II world, when Americans had more money than ever before, Hefner's message challenged the idea that a man had to have a house and wife to maintain his status as a mature, successful adult. This message may seem tame when filtered through today's standards, but in the 1950s it seemed like a cry in the dark. Americans in general, and men in particular, had more money than ever after World War II, due to wartime savings, booming war industries and opportunities provided by the GI

Bill. This meant that men could be targeted as consumers in their own right, not just consumers for their families.

In *Playboy's* first editorial, Hefner outlined a sophisticated existence that emphasized the importance of consumer goods. In his words, playboys “enjoy[ed] mixing cocktails and an hors d’oeuvre or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz and sex.”<sup>4</sup>

*Playboy* still championed work, but for oneself, not a family. In addition, through the years *Playboy* became even more skilled at providing its readers with a way to spend extra income and simultaneously flaunt one’s earnings, offering an “escape from domesticity” without “giving up bourgeois comfort.”<sup>5</sup> The magazine provided commentary on the correct cars, clothing, liquor, food, cologne, stereo systems and other gadgets the playboy needed to show off his success.

Even from the very early days of the magazine, Hefner included mechanisms for showing men what they could and should buy in order to live the *Playboy* life. “The Men’s Shop,” a column filled with leisure items geared almost exclusively toward upwardly mobile, single men, typified the magazine’s approach. Often featuring clothing, the column’s authors emphasized the importance of the right accessories and even jewelry. Mindful that more men traveled for work, the authors included hangers, ironing and traveling kits, wooden valets, tie hangers and cuff links. Along with such traditionally male products as smoking accessories, alcohol and car gadgets, the authors introduced the latest technology in tape recorders, cameras, blenders, antennae, clocks and even an automatic razor blade sharpener. Proving its “hipness,” the column also peddled trendy items such as the travel capsules “containing enough suds for a basin full

of washing,” the hangover kit containing “tomato juice, aspirin, wash cloth, mints, ice bag, chewing gum, Alka Seltzer and the heartfelt condolences of your editors” and the travel breakfast kit, containing everything for breakfast for two, including a two-slice electric toaster and electric hot cup. Almost immediately renamed “*Playboy’s Bazaar*” and moved to the back of the magazine, it still carried the same kinds of products, and it “showed Hefner’s intuitive grasp of magazines as merchandisers and mail-order department stores.” In addition, by moving the merchandising to the back, *Playboy* made more room throughout the magazine for advertisements and articles featuring a vast array of new products for men.<sup>6</sup>

*Playboy’s* editors shrewdly worked continuously to expand to their new market. Starting in November and December 1956, *Playboy* ran articles suggesting Christmas presents for “him and her.” These articles were generally five to ten pages in length and were really more advertising than article. Page after page featured photographs of new products with descriptions and prices under the pictures. Not only did these articles provide suggestions for proper presents for the women in a man’s life, they also told men which new products they needed in order to retain their status. Expensive and designed to impress, their recommendations included items such as furs, imported liquor and foods, electronics, designer clothing, jewelry and cologne. Eventually the Christmas articles became outright suggestions for extravagant spending. As the expanding economy of the 1980s allowed it, the gifts became more outrageous. For example 1983’s article included BOB (Brains-on-Board), a \$3000 robot, the \$5750 Wurlitzer jukebox, a Porsche pocket lighter, \$110 and a wristwatch television, \$495.<sup>7</sup>



Back in the 1950's, however, *Playboy* editors searching for consumables had to be more innovative. Feeling constrained by the still limited male product line, *Playboy* editors claimed some traditionally female areas for their new male consumers. In July 1957, *Playboy* ran "The Man and His Bath," a two-page article about the important pleasures of the bath for men. In the article, the authors encouraged men to take full advantage of their time in the bathroom in "solitary splendor." In addition, they outlined appropriate types of towels, soap, brushes, shaving gear, grooming aids and bathroom furnishings, as well as the proper times to bathe as opposed to showering. Just in case the reader was confused by the types of products to use, a three page, full color spread featured all the latest products, with descriptions and prices under the pictures. The article advised the man it was not just acceptable to spend time and money on himself in the bathroom, it was necessary in order to truly enjoy life. With all the products easily identified by their photos, these articles also made it easier for men actually to follow through and buy the products.<sup>8</sup> This was but the first in a long line of articles featuring toiletries for men.

Eventually *Playboy* even featured the bathroom itself, with a one-paragraph article suggesting men redecorate their bathrooms with the products featured on the four-page full color photo spread. Insinuating, in *Playboy's* ever-joking manner, that there was something wrong with a man uninterested in the article's featured item, the author reiterated the heterosexuality of the male bather. "If a two-for-tub (whirlpool bathtub) doesn't rub you the right way, we'd say your social life is definitely going down the drain." Descriptions and prices accompanied the products featured. Again, by the eighties, the products were much more extravagant and expensive, such as the \$2740

shower with heated towel holders or the aforementioned tub for two which sold for \$7700.<sup>9</sup>

By September 1957, *Playboy* was ready to take on the kitchen as a new area for men to dominate and enjoy. The authors expected men not only to cook, but to excel at it. After all, according to the magazine, while “women generally outrank men in culinary experience, so men, traditionally, dominate gourmet cooking and gourmet dining.” The authors offered the great chefs of the world as proof of this statement. Although the actual preparation was to be left up to the servants, the article stressed the importance of the master of the house being seen by his guests (why else would he be in the kitchen?) putting the finishing touches on the dishes. In this way he gave the meal his stamp of approval, bringing “elegance, grace and importance to informal and intimate dining.”<sup>10</sup>

Essential to this image was the proper equipment. According to *Playboy*, the “gourmet uses handsomely wrought, masculine gadgetry, functional...fine-lined and clean-limbed, (it) gleams with the colors of polished metal and oiled hardwoods, man-sized gear.”<sup>11</sup> Once again, just in case the reader was confused about the proper quality and style of cookware, a three-page, full color spread accompanied the article, giving descriptions and prices for all its wares. These were not the flowery kitchen utensils geared toward housewives, but the most modern, hi-tech, complicated kitchen appliances, in order to show “This is a Man’s Kitchen!”

Eventually *Playboy* turned the whole house into a man’s domain with semi-regular articles on the complete layout and furnishings of the proper bachelor pad. In September and October 1956, *Playboy* ran a set of articles, with full color pictures, on the ideal bachelor pad. They provided blueprints, full-color artist’s renderings, photos,

descriptions, brand names and prices for a majority of the furniture and electronic equipment outfitting the apartment. The article focused on the necessity of the bachelor pad being modern, furnished in a sparse, masculine, utilitarian style, with easily transformed “areas” rather than well-defined rooms, enabling the *Playboy* to entertain guests in all numbers.

Over the years, *Playboy* continued to emphasize the importance of the single man’s home. Sometimes they featured the “pads” of real life playboys, such as architect Charles Moore.<sup>12</sup> More often, these articles focused on what the reader could do to make his home more “*Playboy*-like.”

In 1970, however, *Playboy* updated the original article describing the bachelor pad. Although there were some differences, the articles were remarkably similar; even some of the wording remained the same. Like the original, the 1970’s bachelor pad screamed modernity and elegance. Both apartments featured the latest in electronic stereo, television, recording, monitoring and cooking technology. Everything was set up for the ease of the bachelor and to help him in his quest to “get the most enjoyment out of life,” especially where women were concerned. Designed for entertaining and showing off one’s status through the latest in technology and design, the apartment was supposed to prove the man’s skill as chef, host, entertainer and successful businessman. Both articles clearly stated that the apartment was intended for the businessman, with separate studies to facilitate work. The second article even included the statement that the in-home office would provide an “income tax break, as you can deduct the cost and depreciation of equipment and supplies, plus a percentage of the annual upkeep.”<sup>13</sup>

The most glaring difference between the two articles, other than the newer technology and some changes in style (though fewer than might be expected), concerned individuality. While the 1956 article told the bachelor what he should want in an apartment, the 1970 article stated that the authors were merely providing suggestions and that each man should “have his own preferences... choice of colors, textures, works of art and personal *bibelots* (emphasis in original).”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, by 1970, the *Playboy* editors felt that men had taken their message to heart, that men now understood the alternative to marriage and family as an indicator of status. Perhaps the stress on individuality resulted from the changing context of the times. As Americans emerged from the 1960s, people were still encouraged to “do your own thing.”<sup>15</sup> This change came from the hippie sub-culture, a “minority counter to the majority culture (who) changed society (and) fundamentally altered America.”<sup>16</sup> With these things in mind, the editors changed their tone, somewhat, to more of a suggestion than a necessity.

Almost two decades later, *Playboy* further updated the “pad.” By 1987, American society seemed to reflect the image Hefner proposed in the 1950s. As the “yuppie,” or young urban professional sub-culture spread, more and more people made personal achievement their top priority, with family and security coming in second. The 1980s became known as the “Decade of Greed.” Also, by this time, production caught up with the consumer message and buyers could choose from a vast array of large-scale items. With this in mind, the 1987 apartment article focused on types and styles of furniture, stressing suggestions, such as making sure to have ample storage space, rather than dictating what the apartment “must have” in order to be fashionable. Also, the economy, though not mentioned directly, played a large role in the article. After the serious

problems with recession and inflation throughout the early seventies and continued problems during the early eighties, people were desperate for economic relief. Whereas the former “bachelor pads” were all large, roomy apartments, some even duplexes, the 1987 article focused on how to make the most of a studio (one room) apartment. *Playboy* focused on what they referred to as “newer high-rise spaces,” where “space is at a premium.” In a time when more and more people sought single city life, money and space were not as easy to obtain.<sup>17</sup>

By 1987, the decorating style finally changed. Previously, the newer *Playboy* apartments were just updated versions of their predecessors, with the latest hi-tech gadgets and new colors for furnishings. With the studio apartment, *Playboy* became more realistic, focusing on the apartment the single man in the city was most likely to be able to afford. *Playboy* also featured warm, homey furniture, rather than chrome, reminding the readers, “This is the Eighties... No more hard-edged, right-angled lines about what makes the man.”<sup>18</sup> The photo spread featured warm-colored woods, wicker, floral prints, overstuffed sofas and chairs and antique rugs, all in deep, warm tones. This was certainly a departure from the previous furniture. No longer did men have to live in an environment that screamed masculinity, or perhaps the definition of masculine had finally changed enough to encompass a warm, inviting home.

Perhaps *Playboy* simply responded to its expanded audience. By the late 1980s, just as many women as men were striving for the “yuppie” lifestyle. Perhaps *Playboy* recognized this phenomenon and gave its studio apartment a unisex décor, with the hopes of appealing to its wider audience. The article’s focus on hominess was also a commodity *Playboy* could now sell. For years, editors had preached that the *Playboy*

lifestyle, full of glamour and designed for show, rebelled against “hominess.” Perhaps the article focused on the hominess of the studio apartment because it was something lacking in the lives of a majority of yuppies, both male and female alike. It could even be attributed to something as simple as changing styles.

There were other differences from the earlier versions as well. *Playboy* moved the section featuring the brand names and prices of the furnishings to the end of the article, at the back of the magazine, reinforcing the idea that the man should use his individual tastes in furnishing his apartment. In fact, approximately one third of the pieces featured were actually the property of “wealthy, worldly *Playboy* editors.” Perhaps the most telling piece about the article was its author, Joanna L. Krotz, a woman. In spite of all these differences, however, the basics of the philosophy (if it feels good, do it) were still there, spelled out at the end of the article: “Remember, rules are made to be broken. Nothing has to match-it just has to look and feel good. And the bottom line is this: It’s your home; make it a place to come home to.”<sup>19</sup>

*Playboy’s* merchandising seemed to know no limit and raised intriguing questions. In 1984, for example, they added the column “*Playboy’s* Gifts for Dad’s and Grad’s,” labeled *merchandise*.<sup>20</sup> With no article, it was simply three pages of products with brand names, descriptions and prices under the pictures. Was such an article anything more than an ad? This raised the question of the relationship between *Playboy* and the companies producing the new products. Even without records to show that the companies paid for the merchandising space, a reciprocal, beneficial relationship can be inferred. After all, Hefner helped to turn men into consumers and publicized categories of consumption for that consumer, enabling new industries to grow. In turn, the

companies advertised in *Playboy*, where the corporations knew they could reach a large market for their products, reinforcing the consumerism aspect of Hefner's message and providing the funds to expand the *Playboy* empire.<sup>21</sup>

The male makeover went beyond the surface level. They did not just create man as consumer. *Playboy* also told men what to think-about themselves, women, politics, sports, fashion, literature and especially sex. Providing more than just a model for the playboy, it also showed men how to be good businessmen, entertainers, hosts, chefs, citizens and lovers, all through a variety of articles and special features. Perhaps more importantly, *Playboy's* "teachings" hinted that men needed to be taught, implying that they did not know these things innately.

Early on in production, *Playboy* ran business oriented articles such as "The Top of the Heap," and the "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying" series. The former was a basic business tips-type article, while the series was actually a humor feature. In its typical fashion, however, *Playboy* told its readers just as much, if not more, through humor than through straightforward articles. For example, the articles frequently provided funny examples of what not to do on the job. The "How to Succeed..." series did give men some straightforward advice, such as what to wear to an interview, while other articles explained how the stock market worked and how to utilize it. In April 1981, they ran the article "How to Outgun the IRS," featuring tips by a former IRS employee.<sup>22</sup>

*Playboy* also addressed entertainment for this new type of man. Without the burden of a family, these men had more money and free time. *Playboy* quickly added a travel column to address this surplus. The column featured male-oriented vacations: the best

beaches and bars for meeting women, gambling in Las Vegas and even pieces on a Safari in Africa and a tiger hunt in India.<sup>23</sup> Through the years, the travel column featured numerous islands and European countries. When Shel Silverstein began to write travel pieces for the magazine, the column became an amalgamation of travel and humor, once again reinforcing *Playboy's* use of humor in delivering its message.

The “what to think” aspect of *Playboy's* message went farther than just business and vacations. Throughout the years, the magazine told men which sports to follow, at times featuring the “manly” sports like football and boxing, at times featuring the “gentlemanly” sports, like golf, sailing and tennis. *Playboy* even covered hobbies and fads. For instance, they ran features on success at chess and poker and in 1956, an article on how to appreciate modern art. They even ran two different articles on handwriting analysis, twelve years apart, both showing men how to identify a woman’s personality based on her handwriting. In the 1980’s, when the health and fitness craze swept through the nation, *Playboy* responded with articles on exercise, healthier foods and even a piece on furnishing one’s home gym.<sup>24</sup>

The magazine also instructed men in their new roles as host and chef, with numerous articles on how to throw parties and the very popular *food and drink* column, which provided recipes and even made suggestions for proper accompaniments. Most of the articles on parties simply repeated what earlier versions said. *Playboy* even featured two incredibly similar articles on yacht parties, in 1957 and in 1970.<sup>25</sup> Differing only in the style of bathing suit worn (or casually thrown on deck) and some of the décor, the articles both featured similarly posed shots and ended with the same shot of a couple kissing. Perhaps this can be attributed to laziness on the part of the editors, or a lack of interesting



stories in February 1970. In a broader sense, it showed that the basic *Playboy* message on parties had changed very little from 1957 to 1970.

*Playboy* also provided commentary on a vast array of political and quasi-political issues. Numerous politicians wrote letters and articles for the magazine. The addition of the *Playboy* Forum gave the editors another avenue for reactions to current events. In addition, *Playboy* interviewed some of the most famous and influential people through the years, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, George McGovern, George Lincoln Rockwell, Timothy Leary and Ayn Rand, to name just a few.<sup>26</sup> Not only did these interviews provide insight into current events, they also offered *Playboy* editors the chance to comment on these events indirectly. Readers got their turn in the form of letters to the editors. *Playboy* used its interviews for more than just political awareness. Especially during the early years of publication, the editors chose interviewees who exemplified the “*Playboy* lifestyle.”

All of these articles combined to show the new playboy how to act. He was ready to be the best businessman, host and entertainer, as well as ladies man. Hefner was well on his way to developing fully a world for his new playboy. Through these articles, Hefner provided alternatives to home and family for men. He told men what was important in life-success-and then gave them the intellectual tools to succeed. *Playboy* created a man who could appreciate the “finer things,” the “Picasso, Nietzsche and jazz” referred to in the original message.<sup>27</sup>

The last and perhaps most essential characteristic of the new man *Playboy* created was sex. *Playboy* championed sex as the most basic common interest among men, saying that they were “a little suspicious” of men who were not interested.<sup>28</sup> In fact, *Playboy*

editors used sex to ward off any charges of homosexuality that might emanate from their championing the single life. This was particularly important in the 1950s, when homosexuality was a serious allegation, a diagnosis of a psychological problem and almost as damning as the label “communist.” The psychiatric community described homosexuality as “the ultimate escapism ... (by) men who are overwhelmed by the increasing demands of ... masculinity.” Characterized as incompetent and fearful, homosexuals suffered from society’s vision of them as failures. In a world where marriage and family were the only means of achieving status and proving masculinity, homosexuals had no role. Hefner insulated his contrary message from such charges by emphasizing heterosexuality, most obviously through the nudes. Basically, in every issue, “there was a Playmate to prove that a playboy didn’t have to be a husband to be a man.”<sup>29</sup>

Just as Hefner used consumer goods to challenge male domesticity, so *Playboy* editors moved sexuality from the bedroom and backseat into the living rooms of America. In addition to the nudes, however, *Playboy* widened its audience’s understanding of heterosexual sex. In the guise of articles and letters, *Playboy* explained the mechanics of sex, discussed how to get it, when and where to have it and how to be good at it. The addition of the *Playboy* Advisor column provided another forum. Never mind that the questions, ostensibly from readers, covered a wide range of topics, especially about sex, or that the authenticity of many letters seemed questionable. The fact was that the Advisor column gave the editors a chance to explain “how to” aspects to its audience, sometimes in rather graphic detail, outside of the articles. The fact that the editors were “answering letters from readers” only served to legitimize their responses. The

combination of the articles, the letters and the nudes meant that sexuality permeated the magazine. In addition, *Playboy* relished its role as teacher in matters of sexuality. In fact, in Hefner's opening remarks in the first issue, he stated that the magazine was "fulfilling a publishing need only slightly less important than one just taken care of by the Kinsey Report."<sup>30</sup>

*Playboy* often focused on how men should view and treat women, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. This part of the message probably changed the most throughout the years, as the women's movement permanently altered male-female relationships. In the fifties, *Playboy* ran features on how to tell if a woman stuffed her bra, and more discretely, told men how they should view women. One such article, for example, outlined the bust, waist and hip measurements favored by a majority of men, while another explained how to avoid becoming a husband. Even as early as 1955, *Playboy* ran an article telling men that it was acceptable to have one night stands with a willing woman because she enjoyed it too. By 1956, *Playboy* went so far as to run a feature on how to tell if a woman will "put out." In addition, after the success of the "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" series, *Playboy* ran a "How to Succeed With Women Without Really Trying" series. Again, this was satire, but it gave a clear message to men about how to treat women, more as objects to conquer, use and then discard. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the *Playboy* attitude toward women was the 1956 article, "Training Your First Wife." Basically, *Playboy* treated women as objects "who could be rented (for the price of drinks and dinner) one night at a time."<sup>31</sup>

But *Playboy* was also realistic, recognizing the fact that many of their readers were not single, or rather "free in spirit only." In the early years, *Playboy* ran features such as

“How to Handle Money in Marriage.” Although the message of the article was not to give much of “your hard earned money” to a woman, at least *Playboy* addressed women as wives. Usually the only images of wives in *Playboy* were negative images in cartoons. However, *Playboy* always recognized the married man as reader and featured products for him as well, such as advertisements for wedding rings.<sup>32</sup>

While the traditional emblem of the sexual revolution, the advent of the birth control pill, only helped hasten the spread of *Playboy*’s original message about women, the women’s movement had a monumental impact on the magazine. The birth control pill did give women sexual freedom, but this meant that more women were able to participate in the *Playboy* lifestyle, where women were guests for the night. The women’s movement challenged the unequal treatment of women in society. It addressed issues such as eliminating wage discrimination, providing legal guarantees of equality, birth control, childcare, abortion and family violence. For *Playboy*, however, the women’s movement’s impact on sexuality was paramount. Tired of being “defined sexually in terms of what pleases men,” women rebelled. Women took back control of their own sexuality through works such as “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” by Ann Koedt (1969), which proclaimed the clitoris as the key to women’s sexual fulfillment. This effectively severed the last ties between sex and “marriage, babies and even men themselves.” Sex became something women did for themselves and men who were not willing to fulfill their role as equal partner in giving and receiving were not welcome.<sup>33</sup>

The *Playboy* editors basically embraced this aspect of the women’s movement by the 1980s. The most glaring examples of *Playboy*’s acceptance of women’s new sexuality appeared in “The *Playboy* Advisor,” concerning foreplay and sex roles. When people

wrote with questions about sex, the editors' answers invariably reflect the attitude that both partners should reach orgasm, showing that the editors believed a healthy sex life was for both partners, not just the man. The editors were strong advocates of foreplay, of numerous different types. Incorporating or increasing foreplay was the most common answer to sexually related questions, from both men and women. *Playboy* also constantly reiterated the idea that sex roles are mutable. Time and time again, they advised being open and honest with one's partner, sharing fantasies and trying new things. "It's all loveplay, and the longer you make the fun last, the better it is." The editors also regularly cited other sources, usually self-help books, as other avenues for more detailed answers to sex questions. The editors even cited works other than The Playboy Advisor on Love and Sex, by the *Playboy* staff, featured with its price and mail order address.<sup>34</sup>

*Playboy* took its role as teacher seriously outside of sex as well. By the 1980's *Playboy* was covering issues like rape and AIDS, trying to provide helpful, accurate information. *Playboy* even covered driver safety, with the article "Night Moves: How to Ease on Down the Road Safely After Dark."<sup>35</sup> The article cited a wide variety of authorities, from police officers to driving school presidents. The theme was safety, a far cry from the original message, when safety was the last thing on the *Playboy's* mind. The magazine still advocated the "*Playboy* lifestyle," but "looking out for number one" had a different meaning.

By 1988, *Playboy* had traveled through several permutations. As the nation lived through, and was forever changed by the experiences of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s, so was *Playboy*. In some ways, it is as if *Playboy* lost its innocence (if that word can be

applied to pornography) along with the country. Certainly AIDS, more than any other issue, helped rein in the original *Playboy* lifestyle. But the message had certainly left its mark on the American man. *Playboy* gave men an alternative to the father and husband role and they loved it. By 1988, enough people had embraced the lifestyle prescribed by Hefner's magazine that countless other magazines and products grew to fill the new market. The most telling sign that the original *Playboy* vision was weakening, and interestingly, the most telling sign that the message had succeeded in the first place, came in the form of an article in 1988 on "the lore and lures of fly-fishing." The magazine that started by bringing men indoors was taking them back out again. However, it was just as clear that the message had succeeded. Whereas the outdoorsy magazines of the 1950s were about adventure, the fly-fishing article stressed its relaxing qualities. They also stated, "aggressiveness is less important than patience and persistence." The article was geared toward the men *Playboy* had created, the fast-paced, worldly businessman, as a means of relaxing, of escaping a world where the role of rebel had mutated into the norm.<sup>36</sup>

In many ways, Hefner was, and still is, the ultimate entrepreneur. He saw the possibilities created by men as primary consumers. He simply borrowed the blue print of domestic consumerism prevalent in the 1950's and used the same mechanism, consumer goods, to create and reinforce his new male role, the playboy. His message, that men could find success and fulfillment outside of the role of father/breadwinner, caught on with huge numbers of men, who wanted to live that life either literally or vicariously. He also had the ultimate marketing tool: naked women. In the 1950's his challenge to the traditional male role was extremely controversial; however, he used the nudity as his

hook, a way to get men to pick up the magazine. Even if they did not agree with the message, most men were still interested in the centerfold and still bought the magazine. Without the centerfolds to draw his audience, at least initially, his message about men's roles might not have been as successful.

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<sup>1</sup>S/Sgt. J. A. Robinson, Letter to the editor, *Playboy*, March 1954, 3; Bob L. Mowery, Jim Nuzum, Jr., and Art McNeeze, Letters to the editor, *Playboy*, March 1954, 3; Editor's response to letter from Armin J. Edwards, *Playboy*, August 1954, 3.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 120.

<sup>3</sup>Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 45.

<sup>4</sup>Editorial, *Playboy*, December 1953; quoted in Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 11.

<sup>5</sup>Susan Bordo, *The Male Body* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 121.

<sup>6</sup>"*Playboy's Bazaar*," *Playboy*, January 1954, 4-5; February 1954, 4; March 1954, 4; April 1954, 4; May 1954, 9; June 1954, 4; February 1955, 52; April 1955, 51; May 1955, 50; August 1955, 51; October 1955, 57; June 1956, 61; "*Playboy's Bazaar*," *Playboy*, August 1955, 51; May 1955, 50; June 1956, 61; Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 10.

<sup>7</sup>"*Playboy's Christmas Gallery of Gifts: for him, for her*," *Playboy*, November 1956, 59-63; "Presents Perfect," *Playboy*, November 1969, 185-187; "Extensions of Man: A New Approach to Christmas Giving," *Playboy*, December 1969, 183-192; "*Playboy's Christmas Gift Guide*," *Playboy*, December 1983, 119-123.

<sup>8</sup>David Grayson, "The Man and His Bath," *Playboy*, July 1954, 28-30, 71.

<sup>9</sup>Johnny, We Hardly Know You: Splashy Ways to Jazz Up the Bath," *Playboy*, April 1984, 116-119.

<sup>10</sup>"The Gourmet Bit: Gear and Gadgets for the Bachelor's Buffet," *Playboy*, September 1957, 27-28.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>"A *Playboy's Pad*: New Haven Haven," *Playboy*, October 1969, 126-129, 186.

<sup>13</sup>"*Playboy Plans*: A Duplex Penthouse," *Playboy*, January 1970, 234.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>15</sup>Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 192.

<sup>16</sup>Anderson, *The Sixties*, 130.

<sup>17</sup>Horowitz and Carroll, *On The Edge*, 264; Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America*, 246, 239; Joanna L. Krotz, "Urbane Renewal: How to Turn a Nothing Studio Apartment into the Ultimate L-Shaped Room," *Playboy*, December 1987, 141.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 214, 215.

<sup>20</sup>"*Playboy's Gifts for Dads and Grads*," *Playboy*, June 1984, 119-121.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>22</sup>"The Top of the Heap," *Playboy*, June 1954; "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying," *Playboy*, June, July, August, September, October, November 1954; "The Stock Market," *Playboy*, March 1970; Paul Strassels, "How to Outgun the IRS," *Playboy*, April 1981, 146-147, 154, 232-238.

<sup>23</sup>"A Tiger Hunt in Cooch Behar," *Playboy*, May 1957.

<sup>24</sup>"Modern Art," *Playboy*, August 1956; "Handwriting Analysis," *Playboy*, September 1957; November 1969; Schaller, Scharff and Schulzinger, *Present Tense*. "Gym Dandy to the Rescue," *Playboy*, March 1984, 117-119.

<sup>25</sup>"*Playboy's Yacht Party*," *Playboy*, July 1957; "*Playboy's Yacht Party*," *Playboy*, February 1970.

<sup>26</sup>"*Playboy Interview*: Martin Luther King," *Playboy*, January 1965, 65; "*Playboy Interview*: Malcolm X," *Playboy*, May 1963, 53; "*Playboy Interview*: George McGovern," *Playboy*, August 1971, 55; "*Playboy Interview*: George Lincoln Rockwell," *Playboy*, April 1966, 71; "*Playboy Interview*: Timothy Leary," *Playboy*, September 1966, 93; "*Playboy Interview*: Ayn Rand," *Playboy*, March 1964, 35.

<sup>27</sup>Editorial, *Playboy*, December 1953; quoted in Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 11.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 24, 51.

<sup>30</sup>Unsigned Editorial Statement, "The *Playboy* Advisor," *Playboy*, April 1981, 67; Weyr, *Reaching For Paradise*, 11.

<sup>31</sup>"How to Tell if She Stuffs," *Playboy*, April 1954; "Measurement Men Prefer," Burt Zollo, "Open Season on Bachelors," *Playboy*, June 1954; Jules Archer, "Don't Hate Yourself in the Morning," *Playboy*, August 1955; "Will She?," *Playboy*, January 1956; "How to Succeed with Women Without Really Trying," *Playboy*, November and December 1955; "Training Your First Wife," *Playboy*, May 1956; Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 50.



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<sup>32</sup>"Meet the *Playboy* Reader," *Playboy*, April 1958, 63; "How to Handle Money in Marriage," *Playboy*, August 1956.

<sup>33</sup>Schaller, Scharff and Schulzinger, *Present Tense*, 327; Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1969), quoted in D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 313; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 296.

<sup>34</sup>"The *Playboy* Advisor," *Playboy*, April 1981, 67; December 1983, 59; April 1985, December 1987 and June 1988.

<sup>35</sup>Gary Witzenburg, "Night Moves: How to Ease on Down the Road Safely After Dark," *Playboy*, April 1987.

<sup>36</sup>Geoffrey Norman, "Lords of the Flies: The Lore and Lures of Fly-Fishing," *Playboy*, August 1988, 82.

## Chapter 3

### The Playmates

Just as *Playboy* manipulated gender images to suit its purposes, the magazine, and specifically its Playmate of the Month, both reflected and shaped the image of the perfect female body type. The centerfolds provided, in fact, a physical record of the changing image of the perfect female body standards over time, standards to which many women, throughout the years, have admittedly held themselves.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, however, through the decades, the Playmate of the Month evolved from the standard pin-up type to show women of different nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, body types and breast sizes.<sup>2</sup> Created as a men's magazine about women, *Playboy* helped to set the parameters of beauty. The appearance of its Playmate of the Month defined physical beauty while the information provided about the women told readers what non-physical characteristics were important. Together they presented a specific gender image for women to try to attain. In much the same way *Playboy* used consumer goods to sell men the playboy role, it also utilized women's bodies, and the female gender image associated with their bodies, as the ultimate consumer good, to sell both magazines and the playboy message.

At the same time, because women consistently wrote to the magazine over the years, it also showed the metamorphosis of the female response to these shifts in image, as well as to the changing sexual mores of society. As the *Playboy* editors experimented with photography styles, body types and ethnic backgrounds, women themselves responded. Their letters indicated that they were active participants in the changing social and sexual climate. This was something the *Playboy* editors encouraged. Evidenced by their inclusion in the magazine, the letters showed, at least to some, that *Playboy* was more

than just a “girlie” magazine. These shifts, in turn reflected the transformations in society, cultural mores, social norms, ideas about what was and was not permissible to show and changes in societal acceptance that allowed the magazine to reveal more of the female body.

With the increase in consumer goods in the 1950’s, there was also an increase in the commodification of women’s bodies. Women were expected to turn to medicine and the marketplace for the answers to questions about their bodies. Mother-daughter relationships, in some cases, became more distant as more women worked outside the home.<sup>3</sup> Both of these trends broke down the traditional habit of women gaining information about their bodies from other women, making it easier to legitimize advertisers’ adjustment of the female body image to suit their marketing needs. The increase in domestic consumables meant that women were the targets of much of the 1950’s advertising. Advertisers also realized the same thing as Hugh Hefner: sex sells. Based on that idea and the success of enterprises such as *Playboy*, advertisers began using women’s bodies to sell a myriad of products.

Hefner used this new trend as he sought to fill the niche rapidly being abandoned by *Esquire*. Until this point, *Esquire* featured pin-ups as well as sophisticated, timely articles. As *Esquire* moved away from its sexual overtones, Hefner filled the gap by creating a magazine imbued with “social sexual values” and geared toward men who enjoyed the “finer things” in life: expensive clothes, good food, fine wine and the company of beautiful women.<sup>4</sup> All of the “finer things” became aspects of the magazine, with the beautiful woman at its center, as the Playmate of the Month.

Few would argue that the centerfolds played a significant role in the magazine's success. Beginning with the first issue's semi-nude shots of Marilyn Monroe, the centerfolds dominated the magazine. Men might read the articles, but they bought the magazine for the pictures. The nudes were the ultimate marketing tool, as men could buy the women of their dreams on the pages of the magazine. Recognizing this important fact, *Playboy* editors over the years carefully managed the image of the centerfold. The Playmate of the Month, for awhile the only nude in the magazine, reflected the image of Hefner's and theoretically all American men's ideal woman. This not only reinforced the proper image of the sexually attractive woman, it also served to solidify the role of women as sexual objects in society

The presentation of this ideal image changed, albeit gradually and subtly over time, in various areas such as layout style, extent of nudity, skin tone, ethnicity and body type. Changes in the magazine itself, i.e. photo style and layout, appeared much later, as society began to accept greater degrees of nudity and more suggestive poses. In addition, *Penthouse* began publishing its magazine in 1969, featuring its models in much more revealing and suggestive poses than *Playboy*.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the added competition of *Penthouse* not only sparked changes in *Playboy*, but also served to expose society to greater degrees of nudity, making the explicit nature of *Playboy* more acceptable

*Playboy's* first issue featured Marilyn Monroe as its centerfold. The picture showed Monroe nude, her breasts exposed, but her pubic region artfully hidden in shadow. For the next year, the centerfolds upheld this standard pin-up image from the forties: pale, voluptuous, Ruben-esque women, posed on solid backdrops in lounging positions and touched up to look like photos from the thirties and forties, when the color was added to

the photos after development. The women represented a wide variety of hair and eye color, but their body type remained essentially the same, representing the hourglass figure. They were only nude from the waist up and often they were posed so that their nipples were hidden. The magazine intended these centerfolds to serve as pin-ups; the names of the women were not given, there were no accompanying articles and the women were not featured anywhere else in the magazine. In addition, the centerfold was the only live naked woman in the entire magazine. All other images of nudes were cartoons. Although the nude cartoons still remain a staple in *Playboy's* repertoire today, especially the Vargas drawings, over the years they took a back seat to the increasing nudity of real women featured in the magazine.

The style of the centerfold changed in 1955. In February of that year, editors added more realistic colors and gave the centerfold less of a pin-up quality. October of 1955 brought a more significant change. In that issue *Playboy* featured two Playmates of the Month, both blondes with blue eyes, and ran an article giving their names and the process by which they were asked to pose for the magazine.<sup>6</sup> Although the article was very short, it started a trend that is still seen in *Playboy* today: an article describing the Playmate of the Month, her background and how she became the centerfold.

The October 1955 issue also started another trend that stayed with *Playboy*, although it changed more so over time than the article: more than one picture of the Playmate of the Month. Starting with the October 1955 issue, the Playmate of the Month was featured semi-nude (breasts exposed) in the centerfold, but several other pictures accompanied the article. These pictures featured the Playmate fully clothed, engaged in everyday activities or getting ready for her centerfold shoot. With the exception of the

January 1956 *Playboy*, which carried no article and did not list Miss January's name, this style became the standard format for every issue's Playmate of the Month.

After that, the editors slowly began to alter the physical aspects of the Playmate. Beginning with skin tone and continuing with body types, the magazine experimented with different appearances. Eventually they introduced women of non-western European heritage. Starting with Miss May 1955, the centerfolds began to have a darker skin tone; although they were still very pale, they no longer depicted women with alabaster skin, almost porcelain in appearance. The change from pale skin to deep tan evolved gradually with Miss April 1956, Miss August 1957 and Miss September 1957, all of whom sported a warm, honey colored complexion and red hair. Then, Miss December 1957, Linda Vargas, exhibited black hair, brown eyes and an olive complexion. There was no mention of Vargas' ancestry, although her surname seemed to indicate non-Western European origins. This hair/eye/skin tone pattern was repeated with Miss April 1958, Felicia Atkins, and although her career as a Las Vegas show girl was played up in the article, again, no mention was made of her ancestry. Perhaps these women were intended to test the *Playboy* audience, to see if they would accept dark skinned women as attractive.

Starting in 1958 and continuing over the next seven years, the number of centerfolds sporting suntanned skin increased slowly, until tanned skin became the norm and a pale complexion became a rarity. In 1958 there were nine pale and four tan centerfolds.<sup>7</sup> There were ten pale and two tan centerfolds in 1959, five pale and seven tan in 1960, two pale and ten tan in 1961, six pale and six tan in 1962, two pale and ten tan in 1963 and one pale and eleven tan in 1964. After 1964, tan skin became the norm, with very tan

skin (especially showing tan lines) providing contrast. From 1965 on, only nine pale women appeared as centerfolds.<sup>8</sup> Although it could easily be argued that the lighting and photography style affected the skin tones of these women, *Playboy* obviously chose to portray that particular skin tone at that particular point in time. This may also reflect the changing ideas of female beauty in greater society at the time. As Americans moved into the 1960's and a dark tan became a sign of beauty, more and more women tanned to achieve this standard. Perhaps it showed the influence of the popularity of the bikini in the 1950's and the increase in nude sunbathing as a part of hippie culture in the 1960's. It may have also reflected a gradual move toward showing dark skinned women, as the Civil Rights movement grew in popularity.

The next change in the physical appearance of the Playmate of the Month concerned the appearance of women representing ethnic groups other than those from Western Europe. From 1956 on, *Playboy* featured several centerfolds from foreign countries, but these women were from countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Canada, Holland and Belgium. Miss March 1961, Tonya Crews, was the first Playmate of the Month of non-western European ancestry whose ethnicity was addressed in the article accompanying her pictorial.<sup>9</sup> Crews was Native American, of the Choctaw tribe; her features, however, were Anglo. Miss August 1963, China Lee, was the first Asian-American Playmate of the Month. As the Civil Rights movement began to grow and gain national recognition, this may have been a way for *Playboy* to move slowly toward showing African-American women.

Lee's appearance, however, did not elicit the amount mail that followed the appearance of the first African-American centerfold, Miss March 1965, Jennifer Jackson.

After Jackson's appearance, many people wrote to *Playboy* to express their opinions about minority centerfolds. One letter praised *Playboy* for its good work, saying, "I am looking forward to seeing more Jenny Jacksons and China Lees, to show that beauty has no racial barriers." There were just as many people, however, who wrote in to complain that *Playboy* was no longer choosing centerfolds that were "in line with the thinking of the vast majority of (its) readers." Many readers simply expressed their displeasure by removing Jackson's centerfold and sending it back to the magazine. The diversity of the readers' responses reflected the extreme polarity in the country at the time concerning racial issues. By 1965, Civil Rights and the Black Power Movement dominated the news and congress passed the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965.<sup>10</sup>

The treatment of the women's ethnicity in the articles accompanying their pictures exposed the tentative way *Playboy* dealt with race and sexuality. There was no mention made of either Lee's or Jackson's ethnicity in the articles accompanying their centerfolds. Interestingly, the month before Jackson's pictorial, the centerfold article for Miss February, Jessica St. George, acknowledged she was of Greek descent. Another interesting fact was that both Lee and Jackson worked for *Playboy* as Playboy Bunnies in various *Playboy* Clubs. While many of the Playmates worked for the *Playboy* corporations in some way, often as secretaries during the early run of the magazine, at this point in time the editors still chose most of the Playmates from the general public. In April 1967, Gwen Wong appeared as Playmate of the Month. While Wong appeared to be of Asian decent, the article accompanying her pictorial described her as being of Chinese, Scottish, Spanish, Australian, Filipino and Irish decent. Wong also worked for



the *Playboy* Clubs as a *Playboy* Bunny. This hesitancy contrasted sharply with their articles analyzing the political aspects of racial issues.

The second African-American centerfold, Jean Bell, appeared in October 1969. While her physical appearance was very similar to Jackson's, Bell's article focused almost exclusively on racial issues, her struggles as an African-American woman and her successes in breaking the color barrier in her career.<sup>11</sup> *Playboy* was, essentially, taking a pro-black equality position. After this point, the frequency with which minorities appeared as centerfolds slowly began to grow, as civil rights moved from a fringe position to a popular liberal position. The first African-American appeared on the cover of *Playboy* in October 1971 and African-Americans began to appear as centerfold about once a year. In addition, as time progressed, the cover and more of the centerfolds showed an embracing of African culture and many of the women sported Afros as hairstyles.

Hefner tried to reconcile the contradictions between his liberal political stance and his exploitation of black women. In 1974, he explained that the reason "black nudes did not appear until after the civil rights and racial pieces" was because "black women were always viewed as sex objects and made welcome in the white man's bedroom, and not much good would be done for civil rights with that."<sup>12</sup> In reality, articles on African-American equality slowly began to appear in *Playboy* in 1962, at about the same time the magazine began to show women of non-Western European heritage. It was also ironic for Hefner to disparage the idea of women as sex objects, when *Playboy* reinforced that idea. Certainly the nudes were used to sell the magazine, but the magazine's treatment and categorizing of women only served to further objectify them.

Once they broke the color barrier, the editors introduced women of other ethnic backgrounds as centerfolds. Although they appeared with much less frequency than African-Americans, Asian-Americans appeared as centerfolds in June 1971 and April 1976 and Mexican-Americans appeared as centerfolds in January 1973 and November 1984. Also, during this time more women with olive skin appeared as centerfolds, but their ethnic background was generally not addressed. *Playboy's* embracing of all ethnic groups as beautiful certainly helped to diversify the magazine.

Even as the magazine began to diversify in terms of ethnic heritage, it retained its insistence on an hourglass figure. With the exception of Miss June 1971, who was extremely thin, Miss April 1973 and Miss October 1974, who both had small breasts in proportion with their buttocks, all of the women of ethnic minorities exhibited the standard, hourglass body type seen in the centerfolds. In the early days of *Playboy*, with the exception of Miss November 1960 and Miss January 1963, who were both petite, and Miss March 1966, who had small breasts, the hourglass body type was the standard. Not until late-1967 did some of the centerfolds exhibit a more athletic figure with proportional breasts. Although "one ex-editor claims that *Playboy* published more pictures of girls with normal breasts than with the watermelon kind," he also stated that Hefner would have preferred large breasts on all their models.<sup>13</sup>

The movement toward a more athletic figure was not clear-cut. The proportionally breasted figure experienced shifts in popularity with the hourglass shape in 1969 and 1970, experienced a resurgence in popularity when *Playboy* began to publish pubic hair, and was basically phased out with the advent of breast augmentation, when any body size could sport enormous breasts. In 1967, two Playmates represented body types other than

the hourglass figure. Miss August weighed only ninety-eight pounds and Miss November had a muscular, athletic figure. In 1968, almost all of the centerfolds were thin women with proportional breasts; Miss December, however, represented a return to the hourglass figure. Once again, in 1969 Miss January through Miss July were thin, while Miss September, October and November were hourglass shaped. Miss December 1969, Miss January and Miss February 1970 were thin, proportional women, with a return to the hourglass figure in March, April and May 1970. After 1970 the number of women with smaller figures certainly increased and thin women were fairly represented, however, the number of women with disproportionately large breasts increased as well.

As the editors changed the body type portrayed in the centerfold and featured more proportional and slimmer women, letters commenting on this change began to appear as well. For instance, Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan*, wrote in to express her pleasure that *Playboy* featured “a small-bosomed girl.”<sup>14</sup> Other women wrote letters specifically to praise the centerfolds, saying things such as: “The eye and I get a big charge from your magazine. The lovely flawless Playmates fill me with envy, for I can play the game but my uniform is baggy!” or “I look forward to your Playmate of the Month. Beauty is a thing to be admired and should be put to the public as artfully as your staff does.”<sup>15</sup>

Conversely, many women wrote in to address their displeasure with the bodies of the women portrayed in *Playboy*. For instance, one woman wrote to express her disgust at the June 1962 Playmate of the Month, whose breasts were unusually large and disproportionate to her body.<sup>16</sup> Another commented on a particular model whose figure, she felt, bordered on the “grotesque,” because of her disproportionately large breasts.<sup>17</sup>

*Playboy* also altered the frequency and extent of nudity in the centerfold. Starting with Miss November 1964, the additional photos of the Playmate that accompanied the centerfold were often also nude shots. In January 1971, pubic hair began to appear in these accompanying photos, although it did not make its first appearance in the centerfold until January 1972, and then only appeared sporadically, in August and October 1972. After January 1973, pubic hair became a regular occurrence in the centerfold, with the rare exceptions of April and June 1973 and August and October 1974.

Numerous factors account for this change. Competition with newer magazines such as *Penthouse* or *Hustler* forced *Playboy* to shift their style in order to keep selling magazines. The change may also have resulted from the growing sexual revolution, as everyday exposure to sexuality and nudity increased. In addition, by the 1970's the idea that "women needed special protections because of their biology was discredited."<sup>18</sup> Passage of Title IX legally ended discrimination on the basis of sex and women made gains in education, employment and sports that all served to legitimize the idea that women as a group did not need protecting. Although the goal was to give women the same social and sexual equality as men, coupled with the sexual revolution and relaxations of sexual taboos, these changes made it easier to objectify women, in turn making it easier to show more nudity and more provocative photography.

After the arrival of pubic hair in the centerfold, *Playboy* discontinued its original image of the centerfold as the girl next door. Early on, *Playboy* included numerous devices to show its audience that the women in the centerfolds were normal, everyday, nice young women. They often showed the Playmate of the Month playing with her pets or children (usually nieces or nephews, never her own children), shopping, and on one

occasion, cooking with her mother. These pictures served to reinforce the wholesome, girl-next-door image. These were not prostitutes, but rather, “(t)hey seemed to have stopped off to do a *Playboy* shoot on their way to cheerleading practice or to the sorority house.” The accompanying articles featured descriptions of how the magazine approached the woman to pose for the centerfold, her career or school, her family life and her goals. “Innocent-looking girls, more fresh-faced and bubbly than erotic or sophisticated,” the Playmates were supposed to represent normal women.<sup>19</sup>

*Playboy* editors used changes in the pictorial layout to alter this image. The secondary photographs were the first aspect of the centerfold to change. As previously mentioned, pubic hair made its first appearance in the secondary photos, before moving into the centerfolds.<sup>20</sup> At about the same time, the style of the secondary photos also changed. The Playmates began to be shown getting ready for their photo shoots, undressing and bathing. The style of the centerfold also changed; the Playmates began to be photographed in more provocative poses, often touching themselves.<sup>21</sup> This started with the Playmate touching her own breasts, but soon she was also touching her pubic area, often in such a way as to simulate masturbation. Further sexualizing the photographs, the focus moved from the breasts to the pubic region. The Playmates’ buttocks also began to be featured in shots where the Playmate was crouching or leaning over. All of these changes coincided with a relaxation of sexual mores as a result of the sexual revolution. They also served to further objectify the women in the pictures.

Three issues in 1975 greatly changed the layout and style of the centerfold. In the secondary photos accompanying her centerfold, Miss May 1975 prepared for and took a bubble bath with her female roommate. With this, shots of two women together began to

increase, perhaps a response to the increase in lesbian-themes in pornography. (By 1985, sister/twin-themed spreads were common as secondary pictorials.) Miss June 1975 was the first African-American centerfold to wear her hair in an Afro and the same month, nipples made their first appearance on the cover of the magazine. Miss July 1975 was the first centerfold with a tattoo and the first centerfold to be photographed with her legs spread to reveal her vagina, referred to as a “spreader” shot by the pornography industry.<sup>22</sup> Repeated in December of 1975, this style of shot shortly thereafter became a staple of the secondary photographs accompanying the centerfold. This also served to move the focus away from the woman as a whole to only a part of her body, further objectifying her.

Other changes to the centerfold layout followed. In February 1976, the centerfold photos began to appear as the glossy, airbrushed photos still seen in *Playboy* today. The centerfold also began to sport the signature of the Playmate of the Month, in a way, a nod to the original pin-up style of the centerfolds. In July 1977, editors added the Playmate of the Month Data Sheet to the centerfold layout. The Data Sheet has since become a mainstay of the centerfold section of every *Playboy*. A yellow page that the Playmate filled out in her own handwriting, it included her name, bust, waist and hip measurements, height and weight, birth date and place, ambitions, turn-ons and turn-offs, travel dreams and three sections asking her to complete a statement: “I’m a sucker for-,” “I’m always-,” and “Every woman should have-.” The Data Sheet gave the centerfold a standard by which they could be categorized and compared, as every Playmate filled one out. The Data Sheet also meant that less time had to be spent in the article accompanying the pictorial discussing the Playmate, her family, and her goals.

In fact, the accompanying article slowly dwindled down to a series of questions and answers about how the Playmate of the Month felt about being chosen for that position. The Data Sheets tended to portray the Playmates as highly sexual, focusing on their sexual interests and any unusual activities in which the Playmate had engaged. While the magazine claimed that all the information presented in the Data Sheets was always accurate, its authenticity was never the issue. The fact that the magazine consistently presented women who gave the same type of information on their Data Sheets showed that *Playboy* wished to portray that particular type of woman, highly sexual and unusual, as Playmate of the Month material. This was the ultimate means of objectifying the women in the centerfolds, as the reader now had a standard format with which to compare centerfolds. This also coincided with the drop off in the tactics that served to legitimize the Playmate of the Month as a normal woman.

In fact, the magazine took on a strategy of mystification of the Playmate of the Month. The movement of the photos' focus from the woman's face and breasts to her pubic region, the provocative poses, the simulated masturbation, and the Data Sheets all served to show how the Playmates differed from the average woman. Perhaps, after the sexual revolution, the girl-next-door was no longer unattainable. Perhaps *Playboy* tried to make the Playmates an inaccessible group in order to continue to have a unique product.

The magazine used more than just the centerfold pictures to reinforce this new image. For instance, in November 1979, two previous Playmates, Miss June and Miss July 1979, wrote letters to *Playboy* thanking the magazine for the opportunity to be Playmate of the Month. In Miss July's letter, she thanked all her "*Playboy* friends" for giving her such a wonderful opportunity to grow as a person, to travel across the world, to meet "authors,

artists, politicians, actors and musicians.”<sup>23</sup> She also credited the people at *Playboy* for being the only ones who could understand “the Playmate experience,” an experience that Dorothy Mays, Miss July, said changed her and other women “accepted as a Playmate” physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, although she never explained how.<sup>24</sup> Whatever her intentions, Mays’ letter served both to legitimize *Playboy* as something that helped young women, providing them with excellent opportunities, and also to promote the image that it was hard to become a Playmate. She implied therefore, that the magazine editors only selected special, above average women. At one point Hugh Hefner spoke against the idea that Playmates were something other than the average woman. He said, “(P)otential Playmates are all around you: the new secretary at your office, the doe-eyed beauty who sat opposite you at lunch yesterday, the girl who sells you shirts and ties at your favorite store.”<sup>25</sup> *Playboy’s* early aims to the contrary, many women throughout the years wrote in the hopes of becoming a Playmate of the Month, something they felt would be a great “honor.”<sup>26</sup>

The 1980’s brought a major change to *Playboy’s* pictorials. It concerned the secondary pictorials featured in the magazine in addition to the centerfolds. During the 1980’s, *Playboy* experimented with some of its additional pictorials. Although the centerfolds continued to follow the same trends from the seventies, the secondary pictorials, usually featuring women similar to the centerfolds, changed. In the 80’s the magazine began to feature older women in the secondary pictorials. This started in 1981 with a nude photo spread on Rita Jenrette, ex-wife of Congressman John Wilson Jenrette.<sup>27</sup> Although she was only 31 when she posed for *Playboy*, she was still considerably older than the majority of the centerfolds, who were rarely over 23 years



old. While *Playboy* probably seized the opportunity to feature her in its magazine because of her congressional connection and her ex-husband's recent conviction on bribery and conspiracy in the ABSCAM case, the magazine continued to show women who would not, traditionally, have been featured in the magazine.

For instance, in December 1983, Joan Collins posed for *Playboy*. Whether she was 48 years old, as she claimed, or in her 50's, as others reported, she was considerably older than any of the other women who had appeared in *Playboy*.<sup>28</sup> And Collins appeared nude. The photo spread and article were the major focus of the magazine, snagging the cover and appearing before the centerfold. Collins was the star of the wildly popular evening soap, *Dynasty*, which was in the top ten that year.<sup>29</sup> Collins was a star and that was the ultimate draw. Perhaps people bought the issue just to see how good a 50ish woman could look naked. Regardless, the issue was a success and *Playboy* continued to show women not traditionally associated with the magazine.

*Playboy* continued its trend of showing older women in 1984, with a pictorial of Terry Moore-Hughes, Howard Hughes widow.<sup>30</sup> Moore-Hughes was an actress throughout the fifties and sixties, and in 1984 had recently come back into the limelight as Hughes widow from a secret marriage in the early 50's. After long court battles, she received a sizable piece of his estate and began work on a book. She also agreed to pose nude for *Playboy*. At the time, she was at least 52 years old. Once again, the older woman featured was a star, at least at the moment. All the older women featured were famous in some way. This seemed to indicate that the magazine was willing to show older women nude only if they were well known, as a device to sell magazines.

The other group of women not traditionally associated with *Playboy* were large women. In 1984, *Playboy* did a pictorial called "Big & Beautiful," featuring large size models.<sup>31</sup> The models were a mix of women from modeling agencies specializing in Plus size models and everyday women *Playboy* found. The magazine gave the bust-waist-hip measurements for every model, but the weight (150lbs.) for only one model. Perhaps more interesting was the style of the photos. *Playboy* went to great lengths to make the photos tasteful. All the women were photographed in soft, fuzzy light and posed to look like Rubens' paintings, including hairstyles, backdrops and accessories. The short article accompanying the feature even introduced the photos by comparing them with Rubens' paintings, in a way, legitimizing big women as beautiful. This was certainly a departure from the norm for *Playboy*. Although it was the only photo spread of its type to appear in *Playboy*, it showed that the magazine recognized differing tastes in women's bodies.

Another possible explanation goes back to Hefner's obsession with continuously expanding his readership. By the mid-1980's, *Playboy's* format and the type of women shown had not changed drastically in years. With the increase in imitators, perhaps *Playboy* showed full-figured and older women as a way to try something new, to draw people to the magazine, if by nothing else, by shock value. Perhaps the move toward showing older women was a concession to long-term *Playboy* readers. As the original readers grew older, the magazine may have featured women in their age group as a means of reinforcing the older audience's identification with the magazine.

Or perhaps, modifying the types of women characterized as beautiful was an attempt to expand *Playboy's* already considerable female readership. Although *Playboy* is and has always been billed as a men's magazine, it has built and maintained a large female

readership almost since its inception. The sheer volume of letters to the editor from women over the years clearly shows that no matter how women perceived the magazine, they read it. While many women wrote because they found the entire magazine to be filthy and of no redeeming value, others wrote in praise of the magazine in general. The women who wrote praising the magazine often requested subscriptions; one woman even claimed she had read *Playboy* since its inception. In general, the women's letters usually fit into one of three categories: letters that concerned the nudes, those addressing subject matter, and those responding to specific articles. No matter what subject their letters addressed, they always expressed strong opinions about the magazine. As one female reader so aptly put it: "When a men's magazine has women subscribing to it (faithfully, I might add), you know you must be doing something right."<sup>32</sup>

In their letters, women stated that they were avid readers. Some women told *Playboy* that they read the magazine with their husbands, who had introduced them to it.<sup>33</sup> Some thanked *Playboy* for numerous things: providing a source of information about men, their likes and dislikes, acknowledging sex and sexuality as natural, "meaningful and beautiful," explaining women to men through various articles, "acknowledging women's lib and the fact that girls enjoy *Playboy*," providing criterion by which to measure themselves, and simply for stopping one woman from cutting her knee-length hair.<sup>34</sup>

In much the same way that early editions of *Playboy* strove to legitimize the magazine and portray the centerfolds as normal women, the women who sent letters also included information that served to legitimize and defend their interest in *Playboy*. For instance, one woman claimed that *Playboy* was wonderful and that she and her husband were avid fans who bought the magazine monthly. She also felt the need to make the statement,

“I’m an ex-PTA President and a Sunday School teacher, but I think you publish one of the best, most entertaining magazines around.”<sup>35</sup>

Women also wrote to *Playboy* to discuss sexuality and the morals they saw represented in society and in the magazine. For instance, when Edna’s Chicken Ranch in La Grange, Texas, the reality behind *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, was shut down in 1974, numerous women, defining themselves as mothers, wrote to *Playboy* in protest, saying it was a shame it was shut down and that they “would rather see (their) son(s) go to a place that (was) clean and educational than out on the street.”<sup>36</sup> Several other women wrote to thank *Playboy* for exposing the truth that women, too, enjoyed pornography, although one woman claimed that most ladies’ magazines contained material much more erotic than anything she had ever seen in *Playboy*.<sup>37</sup>

Many women found *Playboy* to be an excellent resource for ending the myth that mothers were not, and could not be sexy and that sex was a dirty subject. In a time when American women were struggling to break free of the Donna Reed-esque happy housewife role, *Playboy* provided a fresh approach and many women wrote in to praise the magazine.<sup>38</sup> One mother wrote to praise *Playboy* for its pictorial of singer Claudia Lennear, a mother, saying “By publishing photos of a woman who’s borne a child, you’re helping to quash the myth that under their clothes, all mothers look like cows.”<sup>39</sup>

On several different occasions, the mothers of centerfolds wrote the magazine to express their pleasure at their daughter’s treatment in the hands of *Playboy*, referring to the layouts as “tasteful” and their daughters’ treatment as extremely professional.<sup>40</sup> When Elizabeth Ann Roberts posed for Miss January 1958, her mother accompanied her during the shoot, giving her approval to the endeavor. This proved to be fortunate for

*Playboy*, as Roberts was not yet eighteen when she posed. The fact that her mother accompanied her and approved was, according to the magazine, one of the largest contributing factors in keeping Hugh Hefner out of jail.<sup>41</sup>

This was not to say that all mothers approved of *Playboy*. Many women wrote in to state their fierce objections to the magazine based on the fact that they were mothers and were concerned for their children.<sup>42</sup> One mother even accused the magazine of using “sex to lure innocent youth into buying (the) magazine so (it) can fill their minds with the evil Communist ideas.”<sup>43</sup> Another mother registered her complaint that *Playboy* was responsible for “children who may be molested (and) old women who may be raped.”<sup>44</sup> These women, however, did not elaborate on how *Playboy* promoted Communism nor did they offer any direct evidence of actual molestation or rape linked to the magazine.

These kinds of charges inspired other women to write in defense of *Playboy*. One wrote in apparent exasperation: “If you don’t like *Playboy*, don’t read it. It is not a women’s magazine.”<sup>45</sup> Some women took the opposite approach to the same argument, seeking to legitimize the magazine as interesting to women. One such letter stated, “We are students at an all-girl college and every month we look forward to the next issue of *Playboy*.”<sup>46</sup>

The women who wrote to *Playboy* also often addressed the topic of age, whether it was their own or the models’. One woman stated outright that she was sixty-four years old and enjoyed the magazine.<sup>47</sup> When *Playboy* ran a pictorial on “older” women, some women wrote to complain that *Playboy*’s definition of ‘older’ as women over thirty was inaccurate, while another wrote to express disbelief at the models’ ages, stating “I hope I

look as young and beautiful as she does when I reach her age!”(The model referred to here was thirty-one).<sup>48</sup>

Another issue that prompted women to write to *Playboy* was the magazine’s portrayal of their various professions. For instance, three airline stewardesses wrote to the magazine in October 1957 to protest the choice of another stewardess as the July Playmate of the Month. They felt the centerfold would lead the public to view stewardesses as “nothing but a bunch of sex machines.”<sup>49</sup> In October 1968, two librarians wrote to protest their profession being classified with spinsters, claiming instead that they were members of “a noble and juicy profession.”<sup>50</sup> Many women, however, such as teachers, telephone operators, secretaries and musicians, also wrote to *Playboy* to express their pleasure at the portrayal of their chosen profession as sexy.<sup>51</sup>

For all the women who wrote to praise *Playboy*, there were just as many who wrote to condemn it. Their letters reveal much interesting information. In some cases, the women did not have a complaint about the magazine in general, but rather one aspect, such as when women wrote in that they found a particular Playmate to be in bad taste. One woman objected to the way *Playboy* treated Christmas, asking that they not tarnish the image of one of the few things Americans could still cherish.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, throughout the years, many women wrote to express their displeasure and disgust with *Playboy*. One woman wrote, “(p)ornography bores me, whether hard-core or ‘sentimental.’”<sup>53</sup> Another woman wrote with outrage that *Playboy* was disgusting and she did not know how its creators lived with themselves. One point of interest about her letter was her statement “We, as teachers, dedicate our lives trying to teach our youth that ‘God’s in His heaven-/All’s right with the world,’ but He also lets people like you live.”<sup>54</sup>

She made this statement and included the name of the school where she taught, yet never addressed the issue of separation of church and state, something *Playboy* vigorously championed. Many other women wrote to accuse the magazine of being anti-Christian, anti-family, pro-Communist and/or just plain filthy and degrading.<sup>55</sup>

In answer to such criticisms, *Playboy* might have reprinted the following letter from a female reader in 1955. She seemed to epitomize the response the magazine wanted to evoke in its female audience.

My good husband “discovered” your magazine some months ago and relishes it more when he shares the laughs with me. We are definitely “Christian minded,” with a deep spiritual feeling about marriage and parenthood and all things in general, but we cannot be so austere and pious that we are unable to enjoy the foibles and spice of life. I think that mature adults, with their values and principles straight to begin with, can read anything and everything, using the process of accepting and rejecting whatever they chance upon. ... The “Executive Secretary”<sup>56</sup> who was shocked by her employer’s copy of *Playboy* and saw to it that it never reached him must be a drip and very unsure of herself. What did *she* (emphasis in original) read it for, if he couldn’t? These hypocrites who make critics and censors of themselves give me a pain. I’m a “grandma,” so I can say this with some authority. Respectable, too, I intend to keep aware and alert concerning *all* (emphasis in original) phases of human life, so our very best wishes to *Playboy* through 1955 and keep up the fun for adults.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the fact that *Playboy* has always been billed as a men’s magazine, from its inception women have had some input. The women who found the magazine to be informative, intelligent and amusing subscribed to, wrote to, posed for and wrote for the magazine throughout its run. Even now the influence of women on *Playboy* is still growing, especially since Christie Hefner, Hugh’s daughter, took over as President and CEO of her father’s company. This, in one author’s view, may prove to be the “ultimate irony” of *Playboy*, that Hugh Hefner, as the “symbol of male chauvinism,” passes on his

legacy to “a confidently liberated woman of whom he is so fiercely proud that he nearly bursts when he talks of her.”<sup>58</sup>

Hefner’s desire to make his magazine a success explained his openness to limited female input. The risks *Playboy* took were to draw an audience, to sell magazines. When *Playboy* lagged behind a movement, the likely reason was to avoid losing readers. The styles of the centerfold changed to accommodate the shifting mores of the American public.

Along the way, the magazine served to codify the prevailing images of female beauty, showing America what was beautiful at the time. The magazine also helped define many of the non-physical characteristics considered to be attractive in women with its numerous articles, the articles accompanying the centerfolds and later, the Data Sheets. First the magazine showed that all women were and could be sexy by stressing the “everyday woman” nature of its centerfolds. Later, the editors mystified female beauty as something hard to achieve by creating a hyper-sexy image of its centerfolds, reinforced by the Data Sheets and the provocative nature of the poses. The same tools used to mystify the Playmate also reinforced the image of women as objects, used to sell the magazine and the “playboy” message. It is ironic that as society became more accepting of female sexuality, *Playboy* emphasized the exclusivity of its models. The magazine also drew a large female readership, as evidenced by the number of letters to the editor sent by women. Women were attracted to the magazine for its pictures and its content, writing to comment on both. In that way, from its inception, women have always had a voice in *Playboy*.



<sup>1</sup>Dee Taylor, Susan Counter and Lola Tuohey, Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1956): 8; "Names withheld," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1963): 14; Jo Barnes, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (March 1964): 14; Jennifer Self, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1964): 10; Dinah Willis, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1965): 18; Mama Speigelman, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (February 1967): 12; Mrs. Leslie Josephs, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1968): 14; Mildred Sutton and Fay Davis, Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1968): 20; Sara Ellen Totten, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1968): 22; Jan Kadar, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (March 1971): 18; Midge Mason, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1974): 12; Sharon Davenport, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1974): 12; Cinka Lewis, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1977): 18; Karen Addams, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1978): 17.

<sup>2</sup>Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise*, 201-202; Helen Gurley Brown, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1968): 16.

<sup>3</sup>Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997): 198.

<sup>4</sup>Hugh M. Hefner, "Playboy Interview: Hugh M. Hefner," interview by Larry Dubois (*Playboy*, January 1974); Wyer, *Reaching for Paradise*, 8.

<sup>5</sup>Russell, *Dangerous Relationships*, 28.

<sup>6</sup>"Playmate of the Month," *Playboy*, (October 1955), 26-28.

<sup>7</sup>There were two Playmates of the Month for October 1958, Mira Corday and Pat Sheehan, one pale and one tan.

<sup>8</sup>"Playmate of the Month" *Playboy* (August 1967); (April 1970); (February 1974); (August 1976); (October 1976); (May 1977); (August 1977); (November 1979); (April 1981).

<sup>9</sup>As previously stated, Miss December 1957 and Miss April 1958 both displayed black hair, brown eyes and olive skin, but there was no mention of their heritage or any ethnic background in the articles accompanying their centerfolds.

<sup>10</sup>P. Justin Mullen and Interested Reader, Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (June 1965): 12; Reeves, *Twentieth Century America*, 180.

<sup>11</sup>"Playmate of the Month," *Playboy* (October 1969): 132-135.

<sup>12</sup>Hugh Hefner, interview by Thomas Wyer, *Reaching for Paradise*, 142.

<sup>13</sup>Wyer, *Reaching for Paradise*, 202.

<sup>14</sup>Helen Gurley Brown, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1968): 16.

<sup>15</sup>Mrs. Jack Cooke, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1956): 4; Jo Barnes, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (March 1964): 14.

<sup>16</sup>Lois De Marco, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (June 1962): 14.

<sup>17</sup>Ann Hanley, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1962): 23.

<sup>18</sup>Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 198.

<sup>19</sup>"Playmate of the Month," *Playboy* (March 1964): 103-105; David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993): 575.

<sup>20</sup>Pubic hair's first appearance: February 1971, pubic hair's first appearance in the centerfold: January 1972.

<sup>21</sup>Starting in February 1973.

<sup>22</sup>United States, *The Report of the 1970 Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* (Washington, D.C.: 1970): 115-161; quoted in United States, Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, *Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, July 1986), 1357.

<sup>23</sup>Dorothy Mays, July 1979 Playmate, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1979): 20.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Look, January 10, 1967, p.56; Talese, *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, P. 106; quoted in *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 303.

<sup>26</sup>Dee Taylor, Susan Counter and Lola Tuohey, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1956): 8; Dinah Willis, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1965): 18.

<sup>27</sup>Rita Jenrette and Kathleen Maxa, "The Liberation of a Congressional Wife," *Playboy* (April 1981): 117.

<sup>28</sup>"Joan Collins," *Playboy* (December 1983): 306-307.

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<sup>29</sup> Steven D. Stark, *Glued to the Set: The 60 Television Shows and Events That Made Us Who We Are Today* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 219.

<sup>30</sup> "The Merriest Widow," *Playboy* (August 1984): 131.

<sup>31</sup> "Big & Beautiful," *Playboy* (March 1984): 74.

<sup>32</sup> Evelyn West, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (July 1954): 3; Mrs. Alys P. Griswold, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1962): 32; Grace Metalious, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1961): 16; Laurie Sayet, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1978): 17.

<sup>33</sup> Mrs. Ray Hitch, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (February 1955): 4; Mrs. J.E. Mosier, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1955): 3; Mrs. Katherine E. Williamson, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1956): 6; Ruth Goldman, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1963): 32; Mrs. Leslie Josephs, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1968): 14; Mrs. C.J. Hunkapilla, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1977): 16; Mr. and Mrs. Jesse A. Sears, Jr., Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1981): 16.

<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Richard F. Ryan, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1965): 14; Mrs. Leslie Josephs, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1968): 14; Jackie Lou Cooke, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1973): 11; Midge Mason, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1974): 11-12; Cinka Lewis, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1977): 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Katherine E. Williamson, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1956): 6.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Kathy Lormand and "Name withheld by request," Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (July 1974): 12.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Marcia Fouladi, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (February 1965): 10; Jackie Lou Cooke, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1973): 11.

<sup>38</sup> Mama Speigelman, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (February 1962): 12; Mrs. Leslie Josephs, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1968): 14.

<sup>39</sup> Sharon Davenport, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1974): 12.

<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Elinor Hellmann, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1963): 10; Rosemary Loving, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (June 1979): 19.

<sup>41</sup> "Underage Playmate," *Playboy*, (December 1958):

<sup>42</sup> Mrs. N. A. Quasebarth, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1955): 3; Mrs. Ruby Carpenter, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1956): 6.

<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Mae Bjornsen, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1963): 14.

<sup>44</sup> Mrs. Tyree Wilson, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1963): 24.

<sup>45</sup> Layde Pettio, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1956): 4.

<sup>46</sup> "Names withheld," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1963): 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ethel Buck, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1981): 15.

<sup>48</sup> Julie Adams, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (August 1977): 14; Karen Addams, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1978): 17.

<sup>49</sup> Dorothy Chapman, Kaki Ross and Shirley Hoffecker, Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1957): 4.

<sup>50</sup> Mildred Sutton and Fay Davis, Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1968): 20.

<sup>51</sup> Betty Gay Swan, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1954): 3; Lola Tuohey, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1956): 8; Sara Ellen Totten, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1968): 22; Sharon Davenport, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1974): 12.

<sup>52</sup> Eleanor Heimbeckner, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1957): 5; Lois De Marco, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (June 1962): 14; Linda L. Stokes, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (March 1972): 10.

<sup>53</sup> Faith Baldwin, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (March 1970): 20.

<sup>54</sup> Mrs. Audrey Cantlin, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1964): 20.

<sup>55</sup> "An Executive Secretary," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1954): 3; Mrs. D.D. Frateschi, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (February 1955): 3; Mrs. N. A. Quasebarth, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1955): 3; Debra A. Martin, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1955): 4; Mrs. Ruby Carpenter, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1956): 6; "A Virgin," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (November 1956): 7; "Unsigned," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (July 1962): 10; Mrs. Robert Carlson and Mrs. LeRoy Wood, Letters to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1962): 30; Lynda Williams, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (May 1962): 26; "Name withheld," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (April 1963): 22; Mrs. Mae Bjornsen, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (September 1963): 14; Mrs. Tyree Wilson, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (October 1963): 24.

<sup>56</sup> "An Executive Secretary," Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (December 1954): 3.

<sup>57</sup> Mrs. Ray Hitch, Letter to the editor, *Playboy* (February 1955): 4.

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<sup>58</sup>Wyer, Reaching for Paradise, 310-311.

## Conclusion

In many ways *Playboy* serves as a cultural marker for the second half of the twentieth century. Not only did the magazine chronicle many of the political changes, especially in the late 60's and after, that affected American society, it also played a part in the creation of new gender roles. In the 1950's, the magazine helped to create man as sole consumer, buying for himself, not for a family. The editors, borrowing from the domestic consumer model, reinforced this role with the articles and advertising on the pages of the magazine. As men bought into this role, advertisers realized they had a new market and more products for men were introduced, reinforcing the role *Playboy* created.

*Playboy* also used women as a commodity, to sell magazines and their message. The commodification of women in *Playboy* coincided with an increase in the commodification of women in advertising in general. As more and more products that had nothing to do with women's bodies, and were actually geared toward men, such as cars, tires, liquor, etc, used women in their advertising, more advertisers utilized women's bodies to sell their products, further objectifying women. This, combined with the relaxation of sexual taboos, enabled magazines like *Playboy* to display greater degrees of nudity and sexually explicit material.

Women also bought the message *Playboy* presented, even though it was geared toward men. As America progressed through the 60's and into the 70's, women began to demand their alternative to the playboy, a woman who could have success and status without a family. Women were finally given their "playboy" image when Helen Gurley Brown took over *Cosmopolitan*, "promoting a tamer, feminine version of sexual and material consumption," modeled after *Playboy's* message.<sup>1</sup> This allowed women to

embrace aspects of the playboy message, such as sexual freedom and individual happiness and success, without having to reconcile those aspects of the message with *Playboy's* use of women as objects. In that sense, yuppies, both male and female, were the children of the playboy image, putting career and success before home and family, focusing on consumable goods as a marker of status. Women's embracing of most of *Playboy's* message could also be an amalgamation of women's liberation and retention of femininity. Women were free to read *Playboy* and pornography like it, to enjoy their sexuality, yet still be feminine and alluring, much like the women portrayed in *Playboy*.

But the message was not so simple. As American society changed, so did *Playboy*. It became more political in the late 60's, when America could no longer ignore the vast array of political movements sweeping through the country. The magazine also changed the body image portrayed in the centerfolds, showing women of different ethnicities and body types as American standards of beauty changed. Hefner, however, could never get around the basic contradiction of espousing a liberal agenda while preaching and using conservative capitalist methods. Although Hefner portrayed himself and the magazine as champions of the liberal position, the magazine was always limited by the need to keep its audience.

*Playboy's* message has had a profound impact on our society. The number of magazines imitating *Playboy*, as well as the steady stream of letters to the magazine would seem to indicate that it had, at least, some effect. For instance, many women's letters still stress that they hold themselves up to the standard shown in the magazine. In addition, the number of letters from women to the magazine has not decreased significantly over time, but fewer and fewer of those letters express negative sentiments.

Does this mean that *Playboy* has been accepted by society, or simply that its contents are so widely known that those who would not appreciate it can avoid the magazine?

Perhaps it means the editors eventually stopped printing women's negative letters.

Perhaps it is more a reflection of greater changes in society, more sexual openness, a more cavalier attitude about nudity and desensitization in regard to women as objects.

Regardless of which answer is most accurate, it certainly shows that *Playboy* has firmly established itself as a part of American culture.

Will the magazine continue to stay abreast of the changing political and social climate in America? Will the representation of women in the magazine continue to change, and if so, how? Will women continue to be such ardent fans of the magazine? Will their readership increase or decrease? Will the magazine continue to reinforce its traditional *playboy* image, or will it affect, or be affected by, continuously changing gender images? Which trends in the 1990's will affect the magazine? These questions can only be answered through further study, as the magazine continues its run. However, *Playboy* certainly created quite the niche for itself. When it began, it was the only magazine of its kind. Now there are numerous imitators, so many they cannot be listed here, with more popping up all the time. In that way, *Playboy* was certainly a trendsetter, offering the public its first "respectable" form of pornography.

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<sup>1</sup>Ehrenreich, Hearts of Men, 45.

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