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*Playing Bachelor:  
"Playboy" Magazine and Its Remasculinization Campaign (1950s-1960s)*

ABSTRACT: *Hugh Hefner's "Playboy" magazine revitalized the domestic activities of the American man. This essay reflects on the roots and creation of the magazine, which developed an exclusive lifestyle aimed at the pioneering bachelor and created a new ecosystem of advertising and commerce. Examining the approach Hefner and "Playboy" took to restore and revitalize American masculinity reveals the norm-defying and rule-breaking nature of the new male gender identity that the magazine helped to create.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; U.S.; Hugh Hefner; "Playboy" magazine; masculinity*

*Introduction*

Robert L. Green's 1960 *Playboy* article, "The Contemporary Look in Campus Classics," paints the particular image of a new breed of man—the "swinging bachelor"—and the *Bildungsroman*-style journey which said bachelor must take in order to transition to a professional yet jet-setting life.<sup>1</sup> A college student's passage from the fraternal environment of higher education to the new and strange world of business, so Green, *Playboy's* fashion director, tells his readers, demands a total attitude and clothing makeover. *Playboy* therefore presents the ideal man, a man both employers and women would be eager to have—in other words: wish fulfillment. The magazine's tone of prideful yet optimistic bravado, however, conceals an underlying assumption: to become this ideal man is impossible without *Playboy's* help and supervision. As part of their new manliness, American men exhibited—or were now supposed to exhibit—a wider range of talents and sensitivities toward topics previously considered feminine, helping transform the American ideal of masculinity into a multi-dimensional perspective. Espousing a stylish, post-schoolboy decadence, the *Playboy* of the 1950s and 1960s questioned gender norms, especially the hostile restrictions placed on the average man.

To understand the impact *Playboy* had, we need to consider the state of American gender norms—especially for men—in the period when the magazine first emerged. Answering the call of World War II, American men had rushed to the service of their country in the name of nationalism. Their homecoming from the theaters of war, however, forced them into an uncomfortable transition, namely, from aggressiveness to domestic tranquility, which contradicted the machismo of American military training. In his 2005 monograph *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s*, University of Maryland historian James B. Gilbert explores the stereotypes imposed upon middle-class men as they evolved during the Baby Boom (1946-1964), as well as the corresponding changes to expectations of masculinity and manliness. The Cold War threatened the existing order of patriarchal hierarchy just as it was at its most precarious in American

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<sup>1</sup> *Playboy*, August 1960, 63-65, [online](#), accessed April 7, 2020.

society.<sup>2</sup> In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), Elaine Tyler May, a professor of History and American Studies at the University of Minnesota, notes the emphasis of Cold War rhetoric on family security during this period of heightened skepticism and questioning of family roles and gender norms.<sup>3</sup> Ideas of masculinity struggled with the intervention of feminism and the socio-economic restructuring that strayed from the ideal of the single-income family, which had long been a pillar of the American ideas of masculinity.<sup>4</sup> Devising a new theory of manhood further agitated the social imbalance spawned by the war and the rise of communism's perceived ideological peril.<sup>5</sup>

Traditional Western culture had viewed manliness as the ability to exert or resist influence over a subject; meanwhile, motherhood signified the fulfillment of females' obligations to society.<sup>6</sup> With both genders isolated by cultural expectations, the major labor shift caused by the United States' entry into World War II destabilized gender assignments for the second time in less than two decades. After returning home, soldiers entered a radically changed landscape in which the traditional parameters of masculinity had been scrambled, in part by necessity, while they had been away. Women had entered spaces traditionally reserved for men, such as manufacturing or being the heads of households. Losing the certainty of their identity during an already fragile time—the years between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War—was demanding for an entire generation of men. This gender anxiety turned the public's attention to new sources of reassurance, including the opinions proclaimed in Hugh Hefner's eccentric new magazine, *Playboy*. This famous "bachelor pad" magazine offered a safe haven for the private examination of interests, a place which could rebelliously disregard the strictures of military, political, and suburban life.<sup>7</sup>

This essay first looks at Hugh Hefner's personal story to see how it typifies masculine fears of domination and ideological subjugation. It then studies *Playboy's* framework and clarifies the motives and structures necessary to reach the magazine's aim of propagating a new masculinity exemplified by distinct attire, behavior, and hobbies. Finally, *Playboy's* responses to public criticism concerning the degradation of women allow us to examine the discourse involved in the magazine's endless, inwardly focused re-evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup> James B. Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988; New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> See Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*; May, *Homeward Bound*.

<sup>6</sup> For the history of gender roles in American society, see Mary P. Ryan, *Mysteries of Sex: Tracing Women and Men through American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 124.

### I. Hugh Hefner and His Empire

Hugh Hefner (April 9, 1926-September 27, 2017) defied his conservative upbringing.<sup>8</sup> After serving in the army for two years (1944-1946), he later pursued a more liberal—or, famously, libertine—path. Hefner studied Psychology in college, which equipped him for his future reconditioning of the American mindset. Working for the famous magazine *Esquire* directed him to his niche: advertising. Trial and error during his time at *Esquire* led Hefner to become a maven of exploitation, characterized by subtle manipulation rather than brute force. His unique approach and deft touch brought about many innovations in advertising, ultimately earning him a prominent role in the magazine industry.

*Playboy* emerged during a time when markets were shifting from industrial demand to mass culture. Within a matter of months after the end of World War II, America changed from a war economy back to a mix of domestic investment, entertainment, and a brand new high-tech industrial complex.<sup>9</sup> Stakeholders in new industries like aerospace engineering and chemical manufacturing were richly rewarded, and when the Korean and Vietnam Wars erupted, the security of these profits discouraged a shift back to the kind of state control and war manufacturing that the federal government had instituted during the previous global conflict. J. Paul Getty (1892-1976), an eminent industrialist, believed that the mentality produced by wealth formed a brighter, more optimistic man.<sup>10</sup> Hefner therefore advocated for, and attempted to reach out to, these young bachelors and entrepreneurs. According to Communications scholar Natalie Coulter, Hefner's magazine targeted "a particular guy: sophisticated, intelligent, urban—a young man-about-town, who enjoys good, gracious living."<sup>11</sup>

In a 1999 interview with NPR's Terry Gross, Hefner described his muse in plain terms: "I had a romantic notion of a time that I had missed in the Roaring 20s because I grew up during the Depression in the 1930s."<sup>12</sup> *Playboy* symbolized his chase for a past era. Drastic changes had occurred in American demographics and in the economy since then, and Hefner—along with many others—yearned for the indulgences of the high life. The war had suspended the American dream and reinstated the call to duty. Society had concerned itself with preservation rather

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive study on Hugh Hefner's life and work, see Steven Watts, *Mr. Playboy: Hugh Hefner and the American Dream* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008).

<sup>9</sup> For this historical context, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See J. Paul Getty, *How to Be Rich* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Natalie Coulter, "Selling the Male Consumer the *Playboy* Way," *Popular Communication* 12, no. 3 (July 2014): 139-152; *Playboy*, January 1963, 109; *Playboy*, September 1955, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Hefner, interview by Terry Gross, "Hugh Hefner on Early 'Playboy' and Changing America's Values," National Public Radio, 1999, audio transcript, [online](#), accessed April 7, 2020.

than pleasure. Lost in transition, men struggled to restore the positions they had acquired during the previous Age of Intolerance.<sup>13</sup>

High culture (or *haute couture*) often idealizes esteem, status, and money. Popular culture, however, has access to different avenues of appeal, which can draw in suburbanites with their as-of-yet untapped wealth. This was certainly true as the suburban middle class of America ballooned in the two decades after World War II. Since *Esquire* dictated the realm of high culture, Hefner targeted the opposite side of the spectrum, and his diverse background aided him in his conquest of popular culture. Experiments in trendy, mass-media culture either succeeded within a short period of time or failed quickly and miserably. Thus, a certain tenacity was needed for a magazine like *Playboy* to find a winning formula. To ensure its success, *Playboy* needed to avoid the pitfall of catering exclusively to the rich and thus alienating the bulk of American consumers, but if it stuck to a narrow, nostalgic representation it would become irrelevant almost as soon as it was printed. With many factors to weigh, the creator of *Playboy* strategized to avoid social rejection and annihilation.<sup>14</sup> In December 1953, Hefner published the first issue of *Playboy*, and from its first printing the company's fortune soared.<sup>15</sup>

To spark wide public interest, *Playboy* capitalized on the seductive allure of supermodels like Marilyn Monroe who was included in the magazine's debut issue. Unlike other publishers at the time, Hefner often skirted the norms of decency in the publishing industry by engaging celebrities for naked photoshoots, both to showcase their vulnerability and to allow his audience, by proxy, to become voyeurs. In more subtle ways, though, Monroe became attached to the bachelor lifestyle. She exemplified the ideal spouse—decadent but sensitive, intelligent but submissive—and women like her were accessible only via the *Playboy* lifestyle. On the other hand, Monroe was unquestionably famous, and by “riding her coat-tails” *Playboy* was able to collect on second-hand marketability. Nevertheless, *Playboy* clearly rejected women from its original audience, despite featuring them between the pages. The magazine's subtitle read “Entertainment for Men” (with “Men” in bold letters). In the words of the first issue: “If you're somebody's sister, wife, or mother-in-law and picked us up by mistake, please pass us along to the man in your life and get back to your *Ladies' Home Companion*.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The “Age of Intolerance” is a label for the 1920s, rhetorically used as a counterpoint to the simultaneous temperance movement. See Elizabeth Fraterrigo, “The Answer to Suburbia: *Playboy*'s Urban Lifestyle,” *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 5 (July 2008): 747-774, here 749-750.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Weyer, *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 195; Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (New York: Berg, 2001), 149; Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Weyer, *Reaching for Paradise*, 15-21; Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 80-81.

<sup>16</sup> *Playboy*, December 1953, 3.

The ideal *Playboy* bachelor had to match clear criteria. Non-negotiables included gender (male) and race (white), but there was some flexibility when it came to status. The magazine rejected African American consumers by bolstering the “swinging bachelor” as racially unattainable for them. However, there had already been a black vision and guide for style since 1945: *Ebony*.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, *Playboy* existed as a dream and a sale for America’s postwar white males.<sup>18</sup>

## II. The Frame

The folds of *Playboy* utilized a variety of tactics to captivate its readers. Interview articles created a platform for cultural elites to provide an air of sophistication, as well as a venue for advertising. Political coverage flooded the pages as well. *Playboy* contributors based their columns on the tastes of the modern man—as defined by *Playboy*: testosterone-fueled sports, politics, war, and the economy. To facilitate conversations along these thematic lines, *Playboy* issued a call for knowledgeable, creative writers.<sup>19</sup> New hires brought in colleagues who, in turn, spread the brand’s name and expanded the potential audience. Hefner commissioned renowned authors and editors, such as A. C. Spector, to elevate the *Playboy* brand. Spector frequently outsourced to Norman Mailer who compared himself to Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). Mailer shaped an iconic section for *Playboy*: stimulating literature. The world remembered Hemingway as a fictional genius, so Mailer incorporated his literary devices into even more masculine and sexual prose. Eventually, Mailer embraced nonfiction, which faced somewhat tougher scrutiny by *Playboy*’s readership.<sup>20</sup> Never losing sight of the magazine’s masculinization aim, Mailer’s installments focused on contemporary entertainment and current events. Articles were transformed, like magic, into literature. This strongly affected how *Playboy* was perceived by its readers. Men believed these articles made them more sophisticated or raised their intelligence. Sophistication, in turn, pushed the folds beyond primitive erotica which had always existed. In *Playboy*, men believed, sex and brains coincided.<sup>21</sup>

Hefner also selected business researcher Shepherd Mead to fill some of *Playboy*’s columns. Mead’s attitude toward *Playboy* and its impact on masculinity overlapped with Spector’s and Mailer’s. “Simply feed the facts to your subconscious and then relax. The more you relax, the better. Forget the problem. The answer will come to you. Sometimes it will come while you are shaving, or while you are sinking a putt. But it will come,” affirmed the ardent capitalist.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For more on black power’s male movement, see the 1970 publication *The Black Revolution: An Ebony Special Issue*. This addresses myths and objectives regarding black masculinity.

<sup>18</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 173-174; Coulter, “Selling the Male Consumer the *Playboy* Way,” 139-152.

<sup>19</sup> Sauer and Starck, *A Man’s World?*, 181; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell, “Norman Mailer,” 199-218.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, “Norman Mailer,” 199-218.

<sup>22</sup> *Playboy*, November 1954, 28.

Mead's feel-good voice rarely caused more harm than good. With masculinity on the decline in the public sphere, boosting self-esteem served as a major source for self-improvement. *Playboy* became a champion of narcissism, with commensurate gains in the magazine's revenue.<sup>23</sup> Gradually, *Playboy* invaded the minds of men, which proved to be the most time consuming and difficult part of masculine revitalization. Yet, another aspect remained: the physical makeover.<sup>24</sup>

In the May 1954 issue, a map labeled "*Playboy's* Progress" illustrated the invasion of male culture in a step-to-step process, beginning with the town home. Reluctance to embrace this new, suave bachelorhood mentality persisted in many rural areas, which explains the regionally specific opportunities bachelors pursued. Advertised products and events popped up in urban centers but not in America's heartland. As the modern man chased his dream, his journey and achievements had to reestablish his control in the city.<sup>25</sup> Although masculinity began to flourish in its customary sectors of society, *Playboy* intended to expand manhood into unknown territories. The 1956 "Dress Right" Campaign marked the first move toward a new male connoisseurship, and a 1959 installment titled "*Playboy* Penthouse" strengthened this move. Since fashion and home décor traditionally resided in the feminine sphere, Hefner prepared for an invasion of this sphere to expand the potential revenue of his magazine and its advertisers.<sup>26</sup>

From shoes to belts, the "gentleman's wardrobe" gave the bachelor lifestyle a distinct look. Men in the pages of *Playboy* radiated poise not seen since before the war. Their carefully selected wardrobe and accessories equipped them to enter American society with a new frame of mind. Employers, *Playboy* told its audience, found these men quite attractive in all categories. "How to Apply for a Job" hit the stands in the May 1954 issue. Shepherd Mead wrote that the labor market disliked specialization; thus, a valuable, hireable man should focus on personal skills and determination. The middle class exemplified these qualifications, giving it an air of social mobility that had been inconceivable in a previous age but, because of the peculiar state of the American economy, now became a reality for a short while. Average jobs paid the bills and allowed for occasional splurges.<sup>27</sup>

With a picture-perfect appearance and job secured, spending money on leisure and entertainment was *Playboy's* nirvana. For the former servicemen, weapons became their collector's items of choice. The magazine advised readers on the best antique guns to add to their cabinets. Referring to the Second Amendment, *Playboy* spoke to heart of every countryman. The battlefield had always been a man's world. Now, men could admire weapons in a typically non-lethal environment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Joan Acocella, "The Girls Next Door: Life in the Centerfold," *The New Yorker*, March 13, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 163.

<sup>25</sup> *Playboy*, May 1954, 22-23; Fraterrigo, "Answer to Suburbia," 751.

<sup>26</sup> Coulter, "Selling the Male Consumer the *Playboy* Way," 139-152.

<sup>27</sup> Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 88-89; *Playboy*, May 1954, 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Playboy*, October 1962, 79-81.

Another one of *Playboy's* pleasurable forms of conspicuous consumption involved very literally consumption. As food played a variety of roles with regard to culture, gender, race, and sexuality, *Playboy* connoisseurship delighted itself with the culinary arts. With the right recipe, men could impress their women and show refinement and sophistication in a realm that was traditionally their women's domain. In a sense, *Playboy* coopted the masculine role of the chef and made it accessible to the average—well, *Playboy*—man. After the meal, conversation was another battle men had to fight. A 1955 feature, “*Playboy* at the Punch Bowl,” covered the model conditions for dating and parties.<sup>29</sup> A perfect bachelor would host, serve, entertain, and rush to fix any complications. By *Playboy's* reckoning, women treasured attentive men. One reader attributed his success with women to *Playboy's* differentiation between sex and reality. The magazine's remasculinization campaign was changing behavior.<sup>30</sup>

A true connoisseur occasionally purchased extravagant items, a nod to the ecosystem of advertisers behind the magazine. Home décor aligned very strongly with a sense of class, and *Playboy's* vision resonated in households across the nation. Used as simple conversation starters, paintings and sculptures implied finer living. Masculinity drifted from bravado to sensitivity.<sup>31</sup> Sports, however—as they had since time immemorial—offered an outlet for aggression. Instead of causing chaos, newly masculinized athletes harnessed anger into energetic passion. In January 1954, *Playboy* published instructions on how to score boxing matches, regardless of the apparent victor. The magazine recognized the social power of sporting events. During primetime games, shops closed their doors and chose entertainment over money. American nationalism claimed sports just as much as the flag. Men deserved a viewing in complete relaxation, and Hefner provided lists of critiques and products to increase “his” viewers' enjoyment.<sup>32</sup>

An all-encompassing segment called “The *Playboy's* Bazaar” recurred in almost every issue. It advertised (and presumably helped sell) shoes, grills, coasters, portraits, and various other items. Essentially, the advertisements listed any items within reason and social demand. Hefner dedicated articles to a variety of markets but operated the “Bazaar” as all-inclusive. *Playboy* termed itself “a pleasure-primer for the adult male.”<sup>33</sup> With such a comprehensive volume in hand, men had no reason to seek other sources, alternate perspectives, or, most importantly, other subscriptions. Attaining total authority over his readers allowed Hefner to dictate the terms of his new masculinity. Men re-instated themselves as kings of leisure,

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<sup>29</sup> *Playboy*, January 1955, 16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 84-85; *Playboy*, January 1955, 16; James K. Beggan and Scott T. Allison, “‘What Sort of Man Reads *Playboy*?’ The Self-Reported Influence of *Playboy* on the Construction of Masculinity,” *The Journal of Men's Studies* 11, no. 2 (January 2003): 189-206.

<sup>31</sup> Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 86; *Playboy*, April 1955, 48.

<sup>32</sup> *Playboy*, January 1954, 16-17.

<sup>33</sup> *Playboy*, July 1955, 50; *Playboy*, April 1954, 50.

governing society and the economy. From movies to songs, the “swinging bachelor” took physical form, and his masculinity soon outgrew its original state.<sup>34</sup>

### III. “Stag Party” Revolts

*Playboy’s* intrinsic aim—to take a cynical view—was to rescue masculinity from the perceived terror of ambiguity and completely repudiate the concept of gender neutrality.<sup>35</sup> Masculinity would be “masculine” again. *Playboy’s* very first issue proposed ideals of sophistication and spice linked to pure machismo, and yet it was not as rigid or uncompromising as war-time gendered nationalism. Sophisticated sexuality became a new facet of the modern man, and under the watchful gaze of *Playboy*, a restoration of manhood could occur.<sup>36</sup> One aspect of the fragility exhibited by American masculinity can be seen in the antagonistic way *Playboy* approached femininity. During World War II, women had routinely joined the workforce and become heads of households while their husbands and fathers were away. According to Syd Mead, *Playboy’s* pioneer designer, postwar males appeared as the weaker of the two sexes and were prone to manipulation. Cartoons in *Playboy’s* February 1954 edition allude to men succumbing to the influence of feminism.<sup>37</sup> The message was clear: the American male had fashioned himself according to women who had somehow infiltrated the system.

Hence, some voices became more outspoken in their criticism of the (then) current state of maleness. The renowned American journalist Norman Mailer called for “remasculinization:” since women had overstretched their previous boundaries, Mailer viewed masculinity as a goal that had to be achieved. The key to this remasculinization, according to *Playboy*, was to provide an alternative path. Escaping the claustrophobic nature of breadwinning allowed men to be potentially successful again, if only by redefining what “success” really was. *Playboy* offered a clean slate and a chance to try again, instead of humiliation and constant reminders of perceived impotence.<sup>38</sup>

To reach paradise, connoisseurs of this new masculinity had to be judicious. The magazine outlined a plan of action relative to the times and responded to changes in male culture. Monitoring these variables ensured, ironically, that reality aligned with *Playboy’s* futuristic aims. “I tried to create [...] a magazine for the indoor guy but would focus specifically on the single life—in other words, the

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<sup>34</sup> *Playboy*, July 1961, 78-79; Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> This section’s title (“Stag Party” Revolts) is a reference to Hugh Hefner’s original idea for the title of his magazine—before he landed on *Playboy*, namely, *Stag Party* which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “an all-male celebration held for a man about to be married.”

<sup>36</sup> *Playboy*, December 1953, 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 72; *Playboy*, November 1955, 45; *Playboy*, February 1954, 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor Joy Mitchell, “Norman Mailer: *Playboy* Magazine Heavyweight,” *The Mailer Review* 5, no. 1 (September 2011): 199-218; Brigit Sauer and Kathleen Starck, *A Man’s World? Political Masculinities in Literature and Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2014), 182.



period of bachelorhood before you settle down,” proclaimed Hefner.<sup>39</sup> Bowing to stolid tradition meant death in the eyes of the bachelor. By prolonging decadence, *Playboy* set aside tradition.<sup>40</sup> *Playboy* targeted the morality crusade, the lifestyle transformation, and the revolution in entertainment that was already well underway by the time the magazine was first published. In retrospect, Hefner reflected that *Playboy* was intended to be part of “a revitalization process.”<sup>41</sup> Since the wartime military had demanded standardization, men had concealed their individuality in exchange for solidarity. Following the wartime’s blurring of the gender divide, Hefner’s *Playboy* offered men a platform to explore their reclaimed masculinity, sexuality, lifestyle, and hobbies, with women receiving the majority of the backlash.<sup>42</sup>

Urbanity normalized *Playboy*. It symbolized an aspiration of manhood and defined the pursuit of manliness as occurring on one of two tracks: either the *Playboy* way or through self-exploration. Paradise, as constructed by *Playboy*, either meant anxiety or simplicity – up to a man’s discretion.<sup>43</sup> America could not contain Hefner’s far-reaching ideologies. The folds appeared in international headlines and encouraged revitalization in other postwar nations, especially liberal Finland. Masculinity might have disappeared momentarily, but it was not dead. The world was awaiting the resurgence of testosterone.<sup>44</sup> The bachelor lifestyle communicated new messages. One, aimed at capitalism, elevated wants over needs. *Playboy* proved the applicability of masculinity on paper: heterosexuality boosted capitalism.<sup>45</sup> Once men opened the folds, they questioned their appearances and status relative to the ideals of the pages before them. *Playboy* capitalized on men’s insecurities. Competitors like *Esquire* and *Ebony* chased after the same success by revamping their magazines to fill any voids Hefner might have ignored or missed, but their varied quality destroyed their slim chances. Only *Playboy* understood its self-made industry.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

The objectification of men and the exploitation of their wallets provoked fear in traditionalists. “The enemy [...] was clearly the right wing and [...] [the] Moral

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<sup>39</sup> Hugh Hefner, interview by Terry Gross, NPR, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 78-79.

<sup>41</sup> Hugh Hefner, interview by Terry Gross, NPR, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Amber Batura, “How Hugh Hefner Invented the Modern Man” [Opinion], *The New York Times*, September 28, 2017, reprinted in *Sex and Sexuality: Changing Perspectives*, ed. The New York Times Editorial Staff (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2018), 190-193, here 191; Beggan and Allison, “What Sort of Man Reads *Playboy*?,” 189-206.

<sup>44</sup> Sauer and Starck, *A Man’s World?*, 184.

<sup>45</sup> Beggan and Allison, “What Sort of Man Reads *Playboy*?,” 189-206; Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 175-176.

<sup>46</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 152.

Majority and the Puritan part of society,” declared *Playboy's* creator.<sup>47</sup> Hefner lumped feminists into this category as well. This battle lingers to the present day, yet Hefner's responses never varied: “I consider myself [...] a very moral man [...] and morality has always been very, very important to me.”<sup>48</sup> Hefner figured, however, that young men hated the constraints of tradition. Therefore, for him to mold himself into an archetype seemed like a small price to pay for liberation. Bachelors praised *Playboy* for the recovery of their gendered identity. The “swinging bachelor” served as a contradiction to conservatism. The magazine helped reset the gender hierarchy, but the gender divide was still blurred as masculinity relished the perks of femininity.<sup>49</sup>

Female critics argued that the rise of this new masculinity undermined their sexual revolution. However, men often employed the rise of feminism as a motivator, and their reactions to feminism were complex. *Playboy* advisors routinely encouraged a respectful tone and dissuaded blatant sexism. The magazine aimed to decrease the polarization between the genders by loosening standards and broadening the male mind. Arguably, *Playboy's* remasculinization campaign also advocated for the women's sexual revolution.<sup>50</sup>

Despite its articles on color palettes and food cravings, *Playboy* failed to eliminate the sexual stigma long attached to it. Conservative voices hurled accusations at the magazine, namely, that popular culture emotionally destroyed people by promoting satisfaction through violence and sex; that its altering and abandoning of traditional realities distorted one's mental state; and lastly, that it inhibited the development of true high culture. Hefner responded to these accusations by stating that “the magazine never, ever has been anything even remotely related to pornography.”<sup>51</sup> According to Hefner, cultural norms were not overturned if sex was not portrayed as the primary objective. Hefner reiterated the purpose of his creation: revitalization. Articles rarely focused on eroticism; rather, *Playboy* incorporated pictures as bait but not as catch. Men selected the magazine for masculine gain. *Playboy's* larger goals dictated its provocative nature.<sup>52</sup>

As the magazine established its legitimate agency, the “Dear *Playboy*” column emerged to note positive feedback and respond to negative reviews. From his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Arthur Jeffries wrote, “*Playboy* is a hypocritical magazine [...] you allow [authors] to satirically slash the phoniness of

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<sup>47</sup> Hugh Hefner, interview by Terry Gross, NPR, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Hugh Hefner, interview by TIME, “Ten Questions,” 2009, audio transcript, [online](#), accessed April 7, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> For more on playmates, see Sofia Rios, “Joey Potter: A Final Girl Next Door,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 43, no. 3 (2015): 136-147, which defines a bunny and her role; Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies*, 93-94; Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 151; Coulter, “Selling the Male Consumer the *Playboy* Way,” 139-152.

<sup>50</sup> Beggan and Allison, “What Sort of Man Reads *Playboy*?,” 189-206.

<sup>51</sup> Hugh Hefner, interview by TIME, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 30, 92-93.

our society [...] [yet] you endorse and promote much of that same phoniness.”<sup>53</sup> Some men still feared that the “swinging bachelor” was unattainable through conventional means. The *Playboy* lifestyle subverted the bedrock of middle-class contentment. *Playboy* rejected the alleged hypocrisy by replying that “true sophistication [...] recognizes some of the ridiculous aspects of one’s own personality and [...] good-naturedly poke[s] fun at them.”<sup>54</sup> Although some men deemed the *Playboy* bachelor an imposition on society, the magazine merely presented the luxurious lifestyle as a viable option.

Over time, Hefner believed people would spend less money on his idealized bachelor lifestyle but this did not mean that he thought the lifestyle was fading. The “swinging bachelor” was an everlasting persona: a free-spirited man who refused to be tamed by outdated gender roles or politics, a newly-reformed man who sought libertine revolts against the errors of conservatism. The 1950s and 1960s marked the beginning of society’s upheaval. To contend against complacency required a substantial amount of promotion. With everything to lose and a target audience that considered itself subjugated, Hefner’s *Playboy* invigorated men to redeem the dignity that had been rewarded during war. To Hefner, nature expected male domination; therefore, the “swinging bachelor” wielded a great deal of potential. The magazine presented masculinity attractively by personifying hedonism. With leisure and pleasure as acceptable provisions of living, the male culture broadened its taste and reduced judgment. Men had left to fight in World War II with a rigid form of ethics but returned home to battle for a new lifestyle, memorializing the freedom they had defended.

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<sup>53</sup> *Playboy*, June 1960, 5.

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