The Influence of the Sexual Revolution (pp. 74-84)

Katie Sutton

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan

Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
Sutton, Katie (2008) "The Influence of the Sexual Revolution (pp. 74-84)," Vulcan Historical Review: Vol. 12, Article 8.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol12/iss2008/8

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication.
In the 1960s, America experienced a time of social, political, and cultural unrest. Radical changes took place for women's rights and the understanding and acceptance of female sexuality. The sexual revolution, led by a generation of young teens and adults that desired more freedom in sexual roles and experiences than their parents, significantly changed women's roles. For instance, in the 1950s, remaining a virgin until marriage was one of the great all-American virtues that young women were encouraged to possess and maintain. In addition, cohabitating before marriage was strictly prohibited by society's rules and standards. Furthermore, women were becoming restless in their positions as housewives and searching for a change. As clinical psychologist, Dr. Roslyn K. Malmaud, observed in her research, "If her husband earned enough, she had the luxury of becoming a homemaker, deriving satisfaction from her family, home, community affairs, and leisure pursuits. At least that is what conventional wisdom led women to believe. Many became disillusioned." This statement insists that women were not as satisfied with the lives they were leading as they had been expected or even programmed to be.

As women played active roles in the Civil Rights Movement, many women began to question their own rights and sought more than the second-class citizenship they felt they had. This new women's liberation movement differed from the women's liberation movement of the early twentieth century, as they fought against gender stereotyping, for the freedom to express themselves sexually as women, and equality between themselves and men in the workplace. As psychoanalyst, George Frankl, describes it in his book, *The Failures of the Sexual Revolution,*
"[A] second feminist wave seeks to go beyond the old demands for constitutional equality, which characterized the suffragette movement, towards woman's liberation from a great many sexual and social taboos." The sexual revolution and the women's liberation movements of the 1960s seem to be inherently connected. As Frankl assesses, "Women have clearly borne the brunt of the repressive superego of patriarchy, and the freedom of women, their personal and sexual equality, must obviously play an essential role in any freedom movement." Dr. Roslyn K. Malmaud reinforces Frankl's stance. In her book *Work and Marriage: The Two-Profession Couple*, she states, "The first role to be bestowed is one's sex role, which is so intrinsic that it influences all other roles."

As changes in society occurred, the media tended to best represent those changes, particularly media directed at and for women. George Frankl agreed, "Women's journals, therefore, reflect the new aspirations and self-image of women of various ages and classes and their response to the sexual revolution." Women's magazines that often portrayed the American woman as a young and beautiful housewife, perfectly poised, with no need of higher education or a career outside of child rearing, began to be an outlet for change. As George Frankl wrote, "The sexual mores of a society are mirrored in its journals, and as sexuality has been openly adopted as a way of life this fact is brought home to the citizens via its news media." While some magazines witnessed more change than others, change was present in almost all of these magazines. *McCall's* magazine saw change, but it developed slowly and subtly over a period of time. Therefore, *McCall's* magazine served to change how women and their sexuality were viewed the 1960s. This essay provides evidence of such changes and focuses on *McCall's* magazines from 1955-75 in five-year increments, primarily from articles and advertisements.

*McCall's* magazine was initially created in the late nineteenth century as a women's fashion magazine full of dressmaking patterns. By the 1950s, under the direction of Editor Otis Wiese, it became one of many women's magazines to focus on the entire family. In 1958, new editor-in-chief, Herbert Mayes, redesigned the magazine's layout and identity. Soon the magazine was termed "The First Magazine for Women", solidifying its position as one of the "Seven Sisters" of women's service magazines. This status placed *McCall's* alongside periodical achievements
such as Redbook and Ladies Home Journal. Following this achievement, in 1966, McCall's hired President Lyndon B. Johnson's twenty-three year old daughter, Lynda Bird Johnson, as a contributor to the magazine, in an effort to appeal to a younger audience. Following this achievement, in 1966, McCall's hired President Lyndon B. Johnson's twenty-three year old daughter, Lynda Bird Johnson, as a contributor to the magazine, in an effort to appeal to a younger audience. Understanding the history of this magazine, as well as the key players in its production at this time, is crucial in understanding some of the changes that occurred. In addition, even though the editors wanted to move in a more progressive direction, the fact remained that men primarily dominated the upper tiers of management and decision making. McCall's was simply a magazine designed for women, not by them, a fact most evident in its earlier years.

In its initial years, McCall's magazine represented the typical American ideal of the average housewife. She was a magnificent cook, the family chauffeur, the maid, and did everything with ease and a smile. She was beautiful, poised, and executed each and every daily task with grace. In many ads, she could be found cooking or performing some chore in a dress, a pair of heels, a strand of pearls, red lipstick, and not a hair out of place. In the January 1955 issue of McCall's, an ad for Dusharme hair creme read, "For those who care enough to look their best." This ad presented the common idea at this time that for a woman, looking her best was her first and foremost responsibility. Another article entitled, "What Shall I Wear?", discussed the selection of the perfect outfit for every occasion, as if dressing the part was a woman's biggest concern. As Maggie Gallagher, author for the Universal Press Syndicate, wrote in Enemies of Eros, "You'll catch a glimpse of the frightening demon in mainstream women's magazines whenever an article reflects a little on the problems women face." Gallagher referred to the "devouring housewife" as a "demon", implying that becoming such a woman would be frightening to her.

This belief in a woman's supposed obsession with superficial things continually appears in McCall's throughout 1955. In the June issue, there is an article with the young Queen Elizabeth of England entitled, "The Queen's Beauty Secrets". The entire article focused on the Queen's make-up and hair tricks and never once discussed her political or social views. Another somewhat astonishing piece belittling the female mind's capacity for anything beyond the role of the perfect housewife is
entitled, “Tis the Day After Christmas.” This “comic” portrayed a father and mother assembling a child’s new train set and said, “Father mulls over the curious hitches / Afflicting the train and its multiple switches / While, Mother assembling the bits on the floor, / Worries about her intelligence score.” This article not only reinforced the housewife ideal, but also showed women as inferior to men.

Later, in the August 1955 issue, the article, “Why Women Act That Way,” appeared. The article set out to answer questions such as, “Why are women so clumsy at pitching a ball and running?” The reply suggested that women were built with a broken, vertical bone structure, which provided a “carrying-angle” with which to hold a baby. The article read, “Men run straight and gracefully and women awkwardly, throwing their legs around in a circle,” and continued, “Women have a harder time with ordinary balance and are more prone to tumbles.” The conclusion drawn assumed that women were not only intellectually inferior to men, but that they were also physically and biologically inferior as well.

McCall’s issues of the 1960s, although some stereotyping remains, exhibit some beginnings of change. Women were photographed in tennis shoes and occasionally in pants. Quick-fix dinner ideas placed less emphasis on home-cooked meals. Still, in the January 1960 issue, a questionnaire, “Before You Leap,” asked young women twenty-five questions to consider before marriage. These questions included, “Can you cook seven full meals that he likes?,” “Do you willingly limit seeing friends of yours that he dislikes?,” “Can you toss of your own bad mood to comfort him for his?,” and finally, “Has he pointed out things about you he doesn’t like and have you changed because of what he said?” These questions painted a portrait of the woman’s role.

In spite of articles that still portrayed women as no more than housewives, the changes that began to appear in 1960 were strides in the right direction. For instance, in the February issue of McCall’s, an excerpt from Sir Anthony Eden’s memoirs discussed the Suez Crisis of 1956. This was one of the first articles in McCall’s that discussed something deeper and more intellectual than skin care, housekeeping, or child rearing; its focus was political. In addition, in the March issue, there was an ongoing segment entitled, “The First Year,” where newlyweds were encouraged to send in their questions to be answered by the editors at
One wife wrote in that she wanted to pursue a college degree because she felt the gap between her husband's knowledge and her own was widening. She said that her husband did not feel like she should pursue higher education, because he liked her the way she was. The editors responded by saying, "We think you are dead right in pursuing a degree!" This attitude reflects a change in the perception of women pursuing higher education.

In addition to strides made in the content of the articles geared toward women, advertisements were also changing in the early 1960s. In several issues of *McCall's* from the year 1960, women were shown in more revealing swimwear, lacy lingerie ads, or nearly bare bodies to advertise some sort of beauty product. This advancement was far from the perfectly poised images of women in the 1950s. Advertisements such as these explored female sexuality, something that had not been attempted by mainstream media in the past. These explorations were evidence of the developing sexual revolution. As the generation of young adults growing up in the sixties began to realize the importance of sexual freedoms, magazine advertisements reflected that change in attitude. As George Frankl said, "Women's journals, therefore, reflect the new aspirations and self-image of women of various ages and classes and their response to the sexual revolution." Frankl insisted that marketing during the 1960s focused on getting young women "to buy all the props needed for [their] rebellion." He believed that this "new identity" was facilitated by the industries that found their way into magazine advertisements. He argued, "The chemical industry is there to enhance and regulate your body smell with a variety of deodorants, it can improve your skin, your hair, your teeth, your eyes, your lips, give you a suntan, soften you, smooth you, cleanse you, and hygienise you." He continued, "If, after all these things, that teenage joie de vivre, that scintillating sense of wellbeing and happiness sometimes eludes us, then the establishment will provide us with the necessary mood enhancers." Although Frankl's observation seems humorous or satirical, it held true based on many of the advertisements found in *McCall's* 1960 issues that seemed to exhibit more sex appeal.

By 1965, images of women in *McCall's* magazine had evolved from only ten years prior. Women were photographed with much
shorter hemlines, in many more pant outfits, and generally less poised, such as women lounging at home in a pair of blue jeans and a loosely fitting work shirt. Other pictures revealed a sexier side to women, such as one advertisement for a new fashion—the mini-dress—where the young model posed standing with her legs apart, smoking a cigarette. As George Frankl addressed the new direction of women's fashion during the sexual revolution, "The fashions are more daring, more colorful and there is less emphasis upon restraint in the service of elegance." Another article included in the March 1965 issue, "The High IQ and the Small Bosom. Do they really go together?" included a doctor's analysis that a correlation does exist. In the April issue, an article criticizing the establishment of marriage, "A Long Hard Look At Marriage", said that many American housewives surveyed agreed that they were not satisfied with their roles and felt like they are missing out on something. Articles such as these conveyed that women were ready for a change. In the era of the sexual revolution, tensions rose regarding gender roles, and many women found themselves on the verge of the new women's liberation movement.

In another article in a 1965 issue of McCall's, one ambitious, young writer, Marya Mannes, attacked the popular modern-day female hero as depicted in the media. She claimed that all too often, the hero was a prostitute or some other sort of "sex-career girl", and worst of all, she admitted that audiences loved them. Mannes wrote, "She is: the girl who seldom withholds her flesh or favors and who receives in turn if not cash, then the lust and attention of the faceless mass." She believed that this kind of appeal is something that few housewives and "nice girls" could aspire to, yet they felt compelled to try. She discussed advertisements "impregnated with sex" using words and phrases like "invitation," "promise," "magic intoxication," "anything can happen," and "wet" to describe lipstick. She further attacked Helen Gurley Brown's work and Hugh Hefner's Playboy. She argued that by these things, "You get a nation of girls who want to look like playmates, a nation of women acutely worried about their sexual competence, and a nation of men who wish the girl next door were Carroll Baker." Mannes continued to focus on the current rage for nudity in entertainment, and the idea that a woman's breast size was more important than the size of her heart.
or the wealth of her mind. Although this article was a great stride for McCall's, since this magazine rarely contained articles on the topics of sexuality, there were still advertisements throughout the same issue encouraging young women to dye their hair blonde, become a bronze beauty, and enhance their breasts. In conclusion, this opinion of an industry "impregnated with sex" was only the opinion of an individual, not a reflection of an entire magazine changing its course.

It was in the 1970 issues of McCall's that more significant changes were found. The most obvious differences were present in the subject matter of many of the articles. Articles such as "Betty Furness: The Cost of Living" and "One Man's America" by Eugene McCarthy discussed serious topics and shared opinions on economic, political, and social issues in America. In "Betty Furness: The Cost of Living," former White House Assistant for Consumer Affairs, Betty Furness, shared with readers the challenges of her new job as a lobbyist for more than eight million housewives. She felt there was a need for these women to have representation in Washington, because they made up the majority of consumers in America, since they generally had the responsibility to purchase groceries and other similar items for the entire family. In the case of the article, "One Man's America," Eugene McCarthy, United States Senator and former presidential candidate, discussed his views on the Vietnam War and its questionable legality, government policies, civil rights riots, poverty, and student protests. These types of articles exhibited the most change in McCall's. After all, it was only fifteen years earlier that nearly every article concerned maintaining a happy husband or the daunting task of selecting the most perfect outfit for each occasion.

In addition to the articles' change in subject matter, advertisements continued to advance the portrayal of women as sexual beings with sexual needs and desires. One advertisement for Sardo bath oils read, "When you live with a man...", which implied that two individuals do not have to be married to live together. This was a very different view from that seen in earlier years where a married couple's bedroom would often be pictured with two identical twin beds rather than one double bed. Another advertisement showed a man and a woman kissing as the man laid the woman down on a table. The caption read, "Things don't
happen the way they used to. But they still happen."31 This perfume advertisement directly referred to a more conservative time period. As one author summed up this period of change, "The sexual revolution here manifests itself essentially in the projection of the woman as a person who intends to participate in the world without in the least giving up her femininity and glamour."32 Although sexual and social taboos were changing at this time, beauty products' advertisements remained effective at selling "glamour." They just had to alter their content to fit the culture.

Furthermore, some articles in the 1970s issues directly addressed women's sexual roles and the need for freedom from the restraints of society's former portrayal of women. Although discussions of sex were not a new phenomenon to the magazine industry as a whole, it was a break from tradition for McCall's magazine.33 For instance, William Masters, M.D., and Virginia Johnson, co-authors of the controversial Human Sexual Response and Human Sexual Inadequacy, wrote the article, "Sex and the Married Woman," where they intended to give Americans a preview of the next phase of the sexual revolution. They focused on destroying "Victorian ideals" about sex roles and ending double standards in all aspects of sexual behavior including premarital, extramarital, and marriage itself.34 Another article found in the July issue was written by Dr. David Reuben. Its purpose was to answer women's questions on sexual conflict, and Dr. Reuben wrote:

Our society has a complete set of sexual taboos that narrowly restrict females' sexual activity. In fact, the only socially approved sexual outlet for women is within the framework of marriage. A woman who seeks sexual fulfillment any other way risks disapproval, rejection, and in some cases, ostracism.35

These articles finally recognized the female's struggle in the sexual revolution that had been going on in society for the past several years leading up to 1970. In summation, it was not until 1970 that McCall's seemed to experience change due to the sexual revolution. No longer were pieces of the magazine reflecting the change, but nearly every aspect of the magazine seemed to be influenced by it.
Finally, by 1975, the effects of the sexual revolution on *McCall’s* magazine were clearly evident and played an active role in the pieces that were highlighted. For example, one of the primary articles in the January issue was entitled, “The Pill: What We Really Know After Fifteen Years of Use.” This article praised birth control pills, calling them “a powerful catalyst in reshaping women’s dreams about themselves and in altering the world they live in.” This idea was prevalent among women’s liberation leaders and experts of the sexual revolution alike. In addition, articles appeared such as “When Husbands and Wives Disagree About Sex,” or explicit articles on sex therapy. There was also an article in the June issue called, “The New Doubts About Abortion,” which debated the issues of legalized abortion and some doctors’ and women’s fears. These articles represent the greatest changes in the magazine’s content since the mid-fifties.

Not only were articles on sex a popular topic at this time, but *McCall’s* also discussed women in the workforce and the female’s capability to compete alongside men for jobs or in athletics. For instance, “Women on the Job: From Housewife to Wage Earner,” by Janice LaRouche described the struggle many women faced in explaining and compensating for the many years they spent at home to employers. Other articles included, “More Women Entering Professions,” “Women on the Job: Dead-End Jobs,” and “Dressing For Success in the Workplace.” Another interesting article provided stark contrast to an earlier *McCall’s* 1955 issue. “The Not So Weaker Sex” discussed female athletes and their ability to compete alongside male athletes, often enjoying greater success. It stated that after reviewing several experiments conducted in a lab, few differences were found between men’s and women’s abilities. This article contravened an earlier article discussed entitled, “Why Women Act That Way.” All of these changes reflected the shift that was taking place in American society at this time due to the sexual revolution.

In conclusion, although changes in how *McCall’s* magazine portrayed women were subtle and developed slowly throughout the sexual revolution, they did occur. By the mid-seventies, women’s roles were much less defined for them by images of the “happy housewife” in the media. This was a direct result of the new sexual freedoms women were experiencing due to the sexual revolution. These freedoms were
expressed in *McCall's* through the subject matter of the articles and the content of the advertisements. Finally, while remaining a popular standard in the women's magazine industry, *McCall's* did reflect the changes of society's attitudes toward women and sexuality.

4 Ibid., 141.
9 *McCall's*, January 1955, 68.
12 "The Queen's Beauty Secrets;" *McCall's*, June 1955, 43.
16 Former British Prime Minister.
18 "The First Year;" *McCall's*, March 1960, 32.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 83.
24 "A Long Hard Look At Marriage;" *McCall's*, April 1965, 93.
26 Carroll Baker was a famous actress in the 1960s, who was quickly recognized as a
sex symbol in the movies.

27 Marya Mannes, “The Heroine With the Heart of What?”, McCall’s, June 1965, 18.
30 McCall’s, January 1970, 97.
31 McCall’s, March 1970, 10.
33 Good Housekeeping reflected on the impact of Freud’s writing on female sexuality in the early 1930’s.
36 “The Pill: What We Really Know After Fifteen Years of Use,” McCall’s, January 1975, 76-77.
38 “The New Doubts About Abortion,” McCall’s, June 1975, 121.
39 Janice LaRouche, “Women on the Job: From Housewife to Wage Earner,” McCall’s, September 1975, 68.
40 McCall’s, September 1975, 33.
41 McCall’s, August 1955, 43.