

Winner of the 2014  
Valentine J. Belfiglio  
Paper Prize

*Courtship at Seventeen:  
The Construction of Dissenting Feminine and  
Masculine Roles from 1955-1965*

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In the mid-1940s, white middle-class teenage females began to garner attention as growing free agents with money to spend and boys to date. According to renowned U.S. publisher, Walter Annenberg, these were also the young women who would lead America in the postwar era as citizen wives and mothers. Thus, a concentrated focus to help them transform from a girl to a woman began to take shape. In 1944, Annenberg launched *Seventeen*, a magazine geared towards young women aged 13 to 19, to address the economic, and more importantly in terms of this study, the sociocultural ideals and expectations of this demographic. Providing “sensible,” “wholesome,” and friendly advice to young girls on fashion, beauty, popular culture, and love, *Seventeen* immediately became the “bible” of the teen magazine genre by selling 94% of all copies published in its first year, 1 million after the first 16 months, and more than 2.5 million by July 1949.<sup>1</sup> According to *Seventeen*’s promoters, friends and family shared copies with each other, ensuring that the magazine reached over half of the six million teenage girls in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Thus, *Seventeen* was ideally

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<sup>1</sup> Kelley Massoni, “Bringing up ‘Baby’: The Birth and Early Development of *Seventeen* Magazine” (PhD. dissertation, Wichita State University, 1999), 48 - 49. *Seventeen* was part of a portfolio of magazines and newspapers published by Annenberg’s Triangle Publications, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Although many different cultural groups comprised teenagers, the focus of this research is on white middle-class teenagers because this was the target demographic of *Seventeen* during the time period being studied. Also, feminist historian Beth Bailey provides an understanding of the impact of the white middle class on American culture: “...what is important is not that every individual who encountered national conventions was middle-class, but that the conventions

positioned to project traditional images of masculinity and femininity in courtship in an effort to reinforce conservative gender roles at a time of shifting cultural norms.

The year 1955 is the starting point of this study because wartime newborns were just coming of age and becoming interested in *Seventeen*. The year 1965 serves as a closing point because it is immediately afterwards that the sexual revolution began to surge and teen culture increasingly became known as the “counterculture.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the years between 1955 and 1965 were a time of transition in regards to the expectations of teen boys and girls. An understanding of masculinity and femininity in the mid-1950s to mid-1960s is also crucial to this study. Feminist historian Beth Bailey describes these terms in the following manner:

Mid-twentieth-century masculinity and femininity, as defined through opposition to one another, translate readily into ‘traditional’ sex roles. Masculine men are powerful, dominant, aggressive, and ambitious; they...provide for their wives and children. Feminine women are dependent, submissive, nurturing and belong in the home.<sup>4</sup>

Teenage boys and girls in the time period being studied were culturally expected to become husbands and wives/mothers, respectively; therefore,

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were presented to the public as national conventions, that they appeared as uniform conventions of a dominant culture, and that they reached, directly or indirectly, a great majority of Americans.” See *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 11; Dawn Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 42; Cynthia L. White, *Women’s Magazines 1693 – 1968* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1970), 248-249. White mentions that *Seventeen* reached every teenager in America in three issues according to 1967 estimates; According to *Seventeen’s* website (<http://www.seventeenmediakit.com/>), their current annual circulation is 20 million, outselling its closest competitor, *Teen Vogue*, by 2 to 1; Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women’s Magazines in the United States: 1792-1995* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 117; Kelly Massoni, “‘Teena Goes to Market:’ *Seventeen* Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (as) Consumer,” *The Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (March 2006): 31. Before *Seventeen*, publications such *Parent’s*, *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* offered monthly columns starting in the 1930s about, or for, teenage girls. However, the fact that these magazines catered to the adult woman meant that the columns did not specifically address many teenagers’ needs. For more information, see Kelly Schrum, “Teena Means Business,” in *Debutantes & Delinquents: Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 138-139, 141.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on this point of view, see Rachel Devlin, “Female Juvenile Delinquency,” in *Delinquents & Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 86; also see Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 1. Although I studied non-fiction articles from several of the years in this time period, I only selected those that pertained to the scope of this study.

<sup>4</sup> Bailey, 98.

Beth Bailey's definition of masculinity and femininity is well suited for this study.

Advice on courtship proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s and was evidenced in magazines, like *Seventeen*, as well as books written by psychologists, sociologists, and statisticians. Along with the less-than-academic experts hired by magazines like *Seventeen* to write monthly columns or articles, these individuals created a national convention of courtship rules that defined the relationship between young men and young women.<sup>5</sup> *Seventeen's* advice defined masculinity and femininity based on such national conventions. Challenges arose as young women's and young men's roles and expectations in regards to courtship evolved to challenge the national convention, but the national convention itself remained virtually unchanged until the late 1960s.

As is evident in books written by leading academics of the era, such as sociologist Dr. Evelyn Millis Duvall and psychiatrist Dr. William C. Menninger, the ideals of femininity and masculinity were socially prescribed but individually learned. Both agreed that although the teenage years were a time of confusion, young men and women needed to understand the sociocultural expectations of them so that they had a solid foundation from which to build relationships through dating and eventually marriage.<sup>6</sup> Towards this end, Beth Bailey notes that cultural media, including popular magazines, advice/etiquette books, and high school textbooks, "disseminated to and reinforced for the national middle-class audience" what she describes as "a relatively coherent body of conventions...[and] interconnected to an amazing extent."<sup>7</sup> Although masculinity and femininity are changing codes of behavior based on cultural and historical forces, magazines like *Seventeen*, along with advice and etiquette manuals and textbooks, defined both ideals in a similar fashion in an attempt to protect a hegemonic concept of white American masculinity that was

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see Evelyn Millis Duvall, *Facts of Life and Love on Teen-Agers* (New York: Association Press, 1956). More than 2 million copies of Duvall's book were used in public schools, churches and by youth-serving agencies according to an advertisement in *Marriage and Family Living* 25, no. 4 (November 1963) and *Seventeen* named this as an advisory book for teenagers in 1965; also see William C. Menninger, *How to Understand The Opposite Sex* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1956). This book was published in four editions between 1956 and 1964. *Seventeen* also named this an advisory book for teenagers in 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Bailey, 8; Given that advice books and popular magazines for the most part corresponded with each other in their message to teenagers, a thorough analysis of teenage advice books of this era is redundant given the primary focus of this study is *Seventeen*. However, advice books may be mentioned or quoted when appropriate.

increasingly being challenged by other groups in the postwar era.<sup>8</sup>

Before embarking on a study of how ideals of masculinity and femininity were projected from the pages of *Seventeen* in regards to courtship, an understanding of *Seventeen's* outlook on appropriate feminine roles seems necessary. Feminist sociologist Dawn H. Currie argues, "As social texts, magazines make particular constructions of what it means 'to be a woman' possible by providing the logic and the 'rules' about what can be said and done (and therefore what is left unspoken and undone)."<sup>9</sup> In the mid to late 1940s, *Seventeen* reflected career minded young women in its editorials, given the success of women in the war industries and the military during World War II. Yet as women were forced out of the workplace to make room for returning veterans and other men, the magazine tempered such messages in favor of reflecting feminine women who looked forward to taking up their places in the home once again. Thus, the female ideal changed from Rosie the Riveter to June Cleaver, with the media telling women that their role was at home "...as beautiful companions, homemakers, mothers and consumers."<sup>10</sup>

Yet teenage girls during the 1950s and 1960s were neither silent nor passive in regards to *Seventeen's* editorial content. Although a few letters indicated the desire for more information beyond beauty and dating, these requests centered on acceptable and necessary female activities such as civil defense. Many more impassioned letters urged the editors to cover fashion, beauty, homemaking, and romance more while focusing less on citizenship, careers, and Atomic Energy. It was evident that the teenage girls writing to *Seventeen* were not only a product of their culture, but that they were also internalizing many of the subordinating cultural fairy tale narratives propagated at this time, such as the beauty myth or the happy homemaker ideal.<sup>11</sup> Sherrie A. Inness argues that the roles played by white middle-class

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<sup>8</sup> Bailey, 97. These other groups included career women, African-Americans, and Hispanics. On the role of magazines and the conception of masculinity, see Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900 – 1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 17. Although young women were the primary customers of *Seventeen*, it is evident through articles, such as Jimmy Westcott's recurring, "From a Boy's Point of View," letters received in "Any Problems? Boys Ask Advice About Girls" (June 1955) and Your Letters (April 1960, January 1962) that young men also looked through *Seventeen* and interacted with it.

<sup>9</sup> Currie, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Massoni, "Bringing up 'Baby,'" 226, 235-236. According to Massoni, "Seventeen's discourse moved away from [Editor-in-Chief Helen] Valentine's original feminist/progressive model of service and citizenship toward the more familiar traditional/feminine model of fashion, romance, and homemaking" at the urging of owner Walter Annenberg (234); See also White, 141.

<sup>11</sup> White, 240, 260; Schrum, 140, 155. These letters were backed by surveys conducted by *Seventeen* among its target demographic readership. According to historian Mary Ellen Zuckerman, the content of magazines has historically been shaped through letters from readers,

girls were important in illuminating “how our *entire* society has been structured on gendered lines and the important role played by girls’ culture in instilling the notion that the division between girls and boys is ‘natural’ and ‘right...’”<sup>12</sup> Once women internalized subordination, it would appear as natural and even beneficial; as a result, they would not necessarily have the motivation to change their situation.<sup>13</sup> It was within this gendered framework that *Seventeen* operated. Nevertheless, some girls did flirt with challenging prevalent norms, as evidenced by the letters received by *Seventeen*.

Although the study of teenage consumption is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that editorials and help columns were not the only items in *Seventeen* motivating women to aspire toward marital bliss and domesticity. The advertisements in *Seventeen* also centered on images of matrimony, showcasing items such as hope chests, fine china, and fine linens to tempt readers into following in their parents’ domestic footsteps.<sup>14</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Betty Friedan argued in her landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*, that, “magazines [were] deliberately designed to turn teenage girls into *housewife* buyers of things.”<sup>15</sup> Freidan’s comment pointed to the

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market research surveys and “purchasing behavior” (xiv). However, Kelly Schrum points out that, “The magazine listened to [their readers’] compliments and complaints in shaping and reshaping the image of the teenage girl it displayed for reader consumption, even as it maintained control of that image” (149). The late Marjorie Ferguson found five themes pertaining to the “cult of femininity” to be prominent in a content analysis of leading adult women and teen magazines conducted between the periods of 1949 to 1979, including *Seventeen*: “the importance of getting and keeping a man; the necessity of maintaining a happy family; the promotion of self-help, or emphasis on how women overcame misfortune and achieved perfection; the working wife as a bad wife; and how to be more beautiful” (Currie, 25); for more information, see Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, (London: Heinemann, 1983); for more information on the beauty myth, see Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Inness, *Delinquents & Debutantes*, 4. Jaime Loke and Dustin Harp’s study of the masculinity concept in *Seventeen* between the years 1945 to 1955 found three dominant themes: 1) young men were portrayed as more successful academically and vocationally than young women 2) young men served as “authoritative figures in judging acceptable standards for girls’ behavior and appearances,” and 3) the strict divide between masculinity and femininity was emphasized in terms of physical composition and intellectual endeavors (i.e. girls should not possess strong bodies or strong opinions). Their intent was not to analyze what they found but to show that these themes were there. This study departs from Loke and Harp’s in that it looks at how masculinity and femininity were portrayed in the subsequent 10 years in *Seventeen* (and analyze the reasons). See “Evolving Themes of Masculinity in *Seventeen* Magazine: An Analysis of 1945 – 1955 and 1995 – 2005,” *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 1, 8-10.

<sup>13</sup> Massoni, *Bringing Up Baby*, 241.

<sup>14</sup> Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Toronto: George J. McLeod Limited, 1963), 231; emphasis belongs to this paper’s author.

importance of understanding the power of consumption as a method of indoctrination for young women so they would assume what were considered *normal* gender roles according to society. In essence, *Seventeen* combined the art of appealing to teenagers' desire for consumption with an ideal image of femininity to which teenage girls should strive.<sup>16</sup>

While teenage girls were being socialized to upkeep a feminine sense of identity in the face of changing sociocultural and economic trends, teenage boys faced a crisis of masculine identity in the mid-twentieth century. In the late 1800s, the notion of white middle-class masculinity emerged in direct opposition to all that was soft and effeminate. As Michael Kimmel notes, "to be considered a real man, one had better make sure to always be walking around and acting *real masculine*."<sup>17</sup> Yet during World War II, girls who were officially awaiting the return of battle-hardened GIs from the battlefield were at the same time hysterically swooning over a "seemingly effete 'feather merchant'" 4F named Frank Sinatra.<sup>18</sup> According to writer Jon Savage, Sinatra's success, despite an appearance of frailty, a "distinctly unfinished quality," was a confusing phenomenon for men, young and old, because military rejects were not considered manly compared to the GIs who had served in the war.<sup>19</sup> Their resentment was epitomized by a group of sailors throwing tomatoes at a blow-up of the Sinatra, located across from a recruiting station in New York City in 1944.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, as more women entered the labor force in the 1950s, it appeared that the dominance of the white heterosexual male was diminishing. In the early 1950s, the discourse in the popular media about

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<sup>16</sup> Inness, *Delinquents & Debutantes*, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, New York: Oxford University Press (2006), 68-69 (Kimmel's quote was changed to italics by the author). The change in the nature of men's work from less physical to more intellectual, as well as the increasing numbers of women and immigrants entering into the traditional "male" sphere, necessitated a new definition of masculinity.

<sup>18</sup> A 4F was a person who was rejected from military service for a physical or mental disability. "Feather merchant" was a term used by GIs to describe the "well-ensconced" male civilian back home who not only benefited from the attention of girls but also enjoyed "high wages and the pleasures of civilian life." See Lee Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 78; see also John Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007), 442-445.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on the soldiers' treatment of Sinatra, see Savage, 442 - 444 and chapters 7 and 8 of Kitty Kelley, *His Way: The Unauthorised Biography of Frank Sinatra* (London: Bantam, 1987); Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 231.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Kuntz, "The Nation; From 4F to Eternity," *New York Times*, August 13, 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/13/weekinreview/the-nation-from-4f-to-eternity.html>.

the new domestic male was considered evidence of this crisis of American masculinity. Men were portrayed as capable of shopping for groceries and housewares, cooking meals, and tending their children as their wives went out to have their “hair done, shop, or go to club meetings.”<sup>21</sup> Psychologists of the time expressed concern regarding the emasculation of men as they became more passive and ineffectual.<sup>22</sup> Since teenage boys were on the cusp of manhood, the domestication of men affected them as well. Toward this end, *Seventeen* showcased young men’s cooking prowess in different features. For example, 19-year-old Carole Leslie Gill wondered how effectively her beau, David, would use his brawny arms, ideal for changing tires, in preparing hor d’oeuvres and chicken a la king. When he made these and many more dishes successfully, she provocatively challenged (considering the social mores of the time), “For if David can do the cooking... why shouldn’t I do the proposing?”<sup>23</sup> In another article, a 17-year-old author informed readers that her beau Spike showed her how to grill hamburgers when she unsuccessfully tried to cook dinner for two, whereas other boys taught her what her mother had failed to: how to iron a man’s shirt.<sup>24</sup> Implicit in this statement was that men had to teach women how to do that which women should have been doing effectively on their own. Yet another feature indicated, “all the great cooks in the world are men.”<sup>25</sup> This emerging perception of men as excelling in the domestic sphere no doubt affected an increasing urgency to preserve white middle-class male hegemony in the postwar period through the 1960s, especially when boys and men were thought to be “‘confused about what they should and should not do to fulfill their masculine roles.’”<sup>26</sup>

Within *Seventeen*, this need was wholly evident in the nature of most other articles. For example, Jimmy Westcott, in his recurring series “From a Boy’s Point of View,” celebrated all that made it worthwhile to be a boy (i.e. young man): “Girls bake cakes: fellows eat them! Girls tell time: fellows beat it! Girls always go first: fellows can watch them!”<sup>27</sup> His statements touched

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<sup>21</sup> “The New American Domesticated Male,” *Life*, January 4, 1954, 42-45.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 187.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Leslie Gill, “Just Cooking: Man in the Kitchen,” *Seventeen*, January 1955, 86-87.

<sup>24</sup> Beatrice Wein, “Things I Have Learned from the Boys I Have Dated,” *Seventeen*, January 1955, 80.

<sup>25</sup> “Next Time a Boy Asks You to Dinner, Ask Him If He’s Going to Cook It!,” *Seventeen*, January 1964, 96.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence K. Frank, “How Much Do We Know About Men?” *Look*, May 17, 1955, 56, as quoted in Bailey, 103.

<sup>27</sup> Jimmy Westcott, “From a Boy’s Point of View: I’m Glad I’m a Boy,” *Seventeen*, November 1958, 10. *Seventeen* received several letters through the years celebrating Jimmy’s column, which is

on three factors that symbolized traditional male and female identity at the time: women as cooks for men, women as spectators of men's physical prowess, and women as objects to provide men with viewing pleasure. For all the talk of young men excelling as cooks, *Seventeen* was first and foremost a conservative magazine for white middle-class teenagers and its mission was to focus on traditional domesticity so that teenagers were well-positioned to realign masculine and feminine ideals according to traditional concepts in courtship and subsequently, in marriage.<sup>28</sup>

Notions of masculinity and femininity also collided in the economic realm of courtship. Prevailing etiquette in courtship (and even marriage) indicated that he paid and she did not because he worked and she did not.<sup>29</sup> According to Beth Bailey, "Dutch dating, both symbolically and literally, threatened to undermine the whole system of courtship...in modern America" because men lost the extra power that came from paying for their date.<sup>30</sup> Yet, young women were increasingly earning an income through babysitting, allowances, or other means. As a result, tensions arose when some girls thought about treating their boyfriends to a date, or paying for their own share. *Seventeen's* advice to girls who questioned how to go about doing this was cautiously male-centric. When a girl asked advice on how to go about paying for dates once in a while because she had more available cash than her boyfriend, *Seventeen* pointed out that although paying Dutch was sometimes acceptable in colleges and during an engagement, the girl "must give in [to Jim paying for dates] gracefully or deal a fatal blow to Jim's pride...Boys still like to look out for their girls – and aren't you awfully glad that they do?"<sup>31</sup> In another help column, an 18-year-old young man, Art Silber, answered a girl's query about wanting to pay for certain dates that she knows are beyond her steady boyfriend's economic capability. Silber responds, "Maybe you should just be glad you have a steady boyfriend who spends as much time and money on you as yours does – and forget those extra places you'd like to go but he can't afford."<sup>32</sup> Thus, *Seventeen's* advice clearly prioritized a young man's masculine pride, but at the expense of a young woman's desires.

Advice and etiquette books, with *Teenage Living* as a prime example, also emphasized that a girl could pay occasionally for events such as girl-

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probably why the column was present in almost every issue of *Seventeen* in the years studied. The only exception was when he was on vacation, at which point his sister took over.

<sup>28</sup> Breines, 11; Filene, 190.

<sup>29</sup> Bailey, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Claudia Hatch, "Any Problems?," *Seventeen*, February 1955, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Art Silber, "Art Answers Your Problems," *Seventeen*, January 1959, 88, 119.



ask-boy dances but she would need to hand the tickets over to the boy when he picked her up at her house. This was symbolic of the girl handing control of the date over to the young man. This book stated three reasons why boys should always pay for their dates. First, a boy would not ask a girl out if he could not pay for the date. Second, it would hurt his masculine pride if a girl paid for him. Third, the boy may feel the girl owns him if she pays for the date.<sup>33</sup> However, it was perfectly acceptable and desirable that a girl should feel owned and taken care of by boys. The date payment scenario as described in *Seventeen* and the advice manual is telling for two reasons. First, it correlated to the national convention that men worked and took care of women. Next, paying for a date was tied to a man's sense of manliness and pride, which needed to be protected at all costs given the recent assault on masculinity in American culture.

While men were trying to protect their male subculture, at least some academics perceived women as trying to intrude into the same.<sup>34</sup> Evidence of this appears in *Seventeen*, where some readers were disappointed that their beaux liked to spend quality time with their guy friends. Others thought the guys could not really function without a girl to take care of them or plan their activities. In response to a girl who asked whether she should let her boyfriend go out once a week with the guys, Jimmy Westcott responded "My grandmother used to say that the way to keep a man contented was to let him have spending money and one night a week with the boys."<sup>35</sup> Like concerned adults of his time, Westcott was looking backward in an attempt to recover or reinforce traditional gender codes in regards to masculine and feminine roles.<sup>36</sup> Hanging out with the guys was a male prerogative and women need not intrude. In another feature, *Seventeen* showcased two guys who spent a Saturday night hanging out with each other, checking out cars and girls, crashing parties, and eating at the local hangout. The boys' activities on Saturday night were chock full of masculine flavor and it did not have a feminine touch or the inclusion of

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<sup>33</sup> Nell Giles Ahern, *Teenage Living* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 34, 204. This textbook was part of the Riverside Home Economics Series and was published in three editions between 1960 and 1966. Statistically, responses to a representative national sample of high school students in 1950 showed that 37% did not mind girls asking boys on a date and 25% thought a girl paying for half the date expense was acceptable. These numbers dropped to 26% and 18%, respectively, by 1961. See John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920 - 1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 231.

<sup>34</sup> Bailey, 105; for more information, see E.E. LeMasters, *Modern Courtship and Marriage* (New York: MacMillan, 1957), 484-513.

<sup>35</sup> "From a Boy's Point of View: Out-Going Basket - What Boys Like, Dislike, Think About Girls," *Seventeen*, April 1955, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Bailey, 108.

female friends. Some young women may have felt threatened by the exclusion of their sex, as evidenced by this letter sent to *Seventeen*, in which the reader stated, "Your picture story shows boys can not get along without us, even if they do boastfully protest."<sup>37</sup> In another article, a girl wrote asking for advice regarding her boyfriend who constantly allowed his friend to tag along. All she wanted was at least one night a week alone with him. She was given the following advice:

...Dave is caught in an emotional crossfire. He wants to be with you, but he *needs* to be with his boys. Secretly, Dave is unsure of his newly developed manhood, and making your twosome a threesome serves two purposes in his mind. First, because he probably still isn't completely comfortable with you, [his friend Kenny's] presence puts him more at ease – both with you and himself. And second, being with another boy reassures Dave of his masculinity. As he and Kenny share private jokes and show off for each other, each strengthens his own shaky self-image.<sup>38</sup>

Essentially, the advice concluded by letting the writer know that she should break up with Dave if she could not handle having his friend around but to understand that Dave gave the writer the most he could give. These letters and features are telling about the relationships of guys to girls, masculinity to femininity. Guys, when left to their own devices, were expected to cut loose and participate in activities that reinforced their manhood. Yet if men were able to enjoy their time without girlfriends around, women, who were culturally expected to date and have a boyfriend to be popular, could perceive this as a threat to their courtship and marriage aspirations. In addition, the feminine woman was expected to take care of her man, helping bring out the best in him. Guys cutting loose on the town were indicative of the lack of a taming female presence. As Beth Bailey notes, there was not only a crisis of masculinity, but also a crisis of femininity taking place in the mid-twentieth century. While men were feeling more and more domesticated, women were seen to be "exercising too much power – whether by stifling masculinity or by assuming masculine traits themselves. Since power defined masculinity, women's appropriation of power threatened proper gender relations."<sup>39</sup>

*Seventeen* addressed the crisis of femininity in an indirect manner. Masculinity and femininity were portrayed as being mutually defining, the

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<sup>37</sup> "Your Letters," *Seventeen*, May 1960, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Abigail Wood, "Young Living: Answers to Your Most Personal Problems," *Seventeen*, July 1961, 107.

<sup>39</sup> Bailey, 105

yin to the yang.<sup>40</sup> As the notion of women's liberation gained momentum as a cultural changing force, the need to protect traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity became urgent. Girls were advised that the brighter their flame, the duller their beau's light would shine. On the other hand, polishing a beau's ego would help a girl increase her own.<sup>41</sup> Marriage was reinforced as the end goal and desire of the feminine girl. *Seventeen* challenged one of its 16-year-old readers, who wrote in saying that she wants to have a career in music and to "escape men and marriage." "Of course you can 'escape' men and marriage. But who wants to?...To be frank, we think you may be worried that a boy won't be as docile to control as a violin or a piano..."<sup>42</sup> The implication was clear: the young woman wanted to be in control and that is why she did not want to get married. Therein lay the crisis of femininity. Women may have wanted to exert a bit of independence but the ever-tightening constraints made them appear as power hungry or nonconformist.

Some doctors recognized that "every woman has some masculinity in her nature, just as every man has some femininity in his."<sup>43</sup> At the same time, other academic experts expressed a need for women to "regain their femininity – in part to rescue men, in part for their own sakes."<sup>44</sup> Books such as *Teenage Living* appeared to follow the thought process of such experts that women needed to study femininity in an effort to help their men feel more masculine. The chapter titles emphasized this focus: Beauty, Boys, Clothes, Food, Gifts, Parties, etc. Girls were told that the sign of true love was when they were more concerned with the needs of their beau than their own.<sup>45</sup> In *Seventeen*, intelligent girls were advised the following:

If you've got an awful lot of knowledge stowed away in that pretty little head of yours...keep it on the shelves for a while, and take it down only when it's needed. In that way, there'll be more chances in the conversation for the fellow to take over and prove that he's the smartest guy you ever met.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Abigail Wood, "Young Living: How to Let a Boy Know You're Alive," *Seventeen*, August 1958, 190, 214.

<sup>42</sup> Abigail Wood, "Young Living: I Just Can't Say No!," *Seventeen*, September 1959, 170, 230.

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Renatus Hartogs and Helen Jill Fletcher, *How to Grow Up Successfully* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1961), 110-111.

<sup>44</sup> Bailey, 106.

<sup>45</sup> "What Love is Not," *Seventeen*, February 1960, 149.

<sup>46</sup> Jimmy Westcott, "From a Boy's Point of View: Feud for Thought," *Seventeen*, March 1960, 13.

Again, feminine women were being socialized to put the needs of their beau first while suppressing those desires that did not conform.

At the same time the crisis of femininity was being addressed, articles in magazines emphasized various traits of masculinity. This was reactionary, of course, because some sociological academics of the 1950s believed that sex roles were converging towards the feminine.<sup>47</sup> As such, men needed to do self-checks to guard against this eventuality. *Nation's Business* featured a quiz, "How Masculine Are You?" for men to gauge the extent of their manhood. Quiz takers learned that real men preferred sports and did not cry at the movies.<sup>48</sup> Towards this end, in this time period there was an emergence of the cult of toughness that emphasized physical hardihood, vigor, and essentially, everything unfeminine. The need to exhibit manliness was also applied to courtship. Whereas conformity was desirable in women, conformity in men was equated to emasculation if it meant embodying traditional characteristics and attributes such as chastity.<sup>49</sup> Thus, young men may have had to resort to bravado (even lies) in order to appear as manly men in the eyes of their peers.

In a *Seventeen* article featuring a panel of six boys on the topics of courtship and moral standards, one of the panelists, Jay, discussed how he would tailor the details of his Saturday night dates based on his audience and whether he needed to impress them with "my prowess, my masculinity. They're usually some fellows that you want to think you're pretty hot stuff."<sup>50</sup> He went on to say he would feel sorry for the girl he dated because in the retelling of events, a simple good night kiss was embellished until her reputation was in shreds. The double standard is apparent here in that women were expected to remain chaste before marriage (lest their reputation be ruined) but men like Jay emphasized their willingness to not conform to prove that they were masculine men. Jay later

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<sup>47</sup> Breines, 26, 30. She notes that most sociologists of the time "who did address gender rarely did so from the perspective of women" (26). Thus she culled the viewpoint on gender from the following prominent sociologists of the time and their major works: David Reisman (*The Lonely Crowd*), William H. Whyte, Jr. (*The Organizational Man*), John Seeley (*Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life*), Jules Henry (*Culture Against Man*) and essays on the family by Talcott Parsons. All these authors wrote books at the beginning of, during, or right after the 1950s.

<sup>48</sup> Jack Harrison Pollack, June 1950, 53 – 55.

<sup>49</sup> Donald J. Mrozek, "The Cult and Ritual of Toughness in Cold War America," in *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1980), 178 – 191. It is noteworthy that some of the guys interviewed by *Seventeen* over the years felt it was okay for men to have sex before marriage whereas girls who did so were considered *fast*. Out of a panel of six girls interviewed in July 1959, three girls stated that they expected their future husbands to have sexual experience even though the girls would remain chaste; see "What Girls Think About Sex," *Seventeen*, July 1959, 98-99.

<sup>50</sup> "Young Living: What Every Girl Should Know," *Seventeen*, July 1958, 58.

went on to say that he wanted to have fun before he married because once the knot was tied, “you’re not you anymore. You’re we!....And I don’t look forward to a little lady screaming, ‘Go wash the dishes, Jay.’”<sup>51</sup> Jay represented those men who wanted to remain an individual non-conformist as long as possible because marriage meant women would gain the upper hand at the expense of the man’s masculinity.<sup>52</sup>

In a different article, football was deemed to be “a rugged he-man sport, based on deep-down qualities of courage, physical fitness and good sportsmanship. And not a single fellow would play it if the girls didn’t turn out to watch.”<sup>53</sup> Girls were encouraged to cheer guys on at sports and they could even play some less rugged sports with their beau, such as tennis, but they were warned repeatedly to not play too well or competitively lest they embarrass him. Furthermore, boys were portrayed as the conquering types and the aggressors in relationships but the expectation was that girls would check them if they went too far. The message to women was thus convoluted: they were expected to be the subordinate female and not overshadow their beau in manly activities, but at the same time they needed to support his ego and control his ardor.<sup>54</sup>

*Seventeen* played a critical role in reinforcing the feminine ideal for its readers. An example of the focus on hyper-femininity and domesticity appeared in a February 1960 feature entitled “It’s Great to Be a Girl: And It’s Pure Bliss When You’re Good At It.” Its importance in delineating the femininity of women in relation to the masculinity of men was evident through the following quotes. It started by stating, “The most gorgeous thing about being a girl is that it’s a man’s world.”<sup>55</sup> This statement immediately positioned the young woman within a sociocultural gendered construct, in case she had any allusions towards equality of the sexes. It went on to say that in a man’s world:

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<sup>51</sup> “Young Living: What Every Girl Should Know,” *Seventeen*, July 1958, 59.

<sup>52</sup> For those interested in seeing the male/female power play in marriages as portrayed in other aspects of popular culture, the “Dagwood and Blondie” comic strips are a good example of the “henpecked” husband and the “aggressive and victimizing” wife. See Breines, 32 for more information.

<sup>53</sup> Jimmy Westcott, “From a Boy’s Point of View: Cheering the Boys On,” *Seventeen*, November 1961, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Claudia Hatch, “Any Problems?” *Seventeen*, May 1955, 148, 150; For more on masculinity and sexual relationships, see “Six Boys Discuss Dating and Morals,” *Seventeen*, July 1964, 86-89, 110-112 and Dr. Daniel Sugarman and Rollie Hochstein, “Love and Sex,” *Seventeen*, July 1965, 94-95, 128-129; Breines, 117.

<sup>55</sup> “It’s Great to Be a Girl: And It’s Pure Bliss When You’re Good At It,” *Seventeen*, February 1960, 96.

...the dear boys are, appropriating most of the tiresome work like earning a living, winning track meets and having summit conferences, leaving us girls to have babies, wear lipstick and bind up the wounds of the heroes who have been winning (or losing) track meets and having summit conferences.<sup>56</sup>

A truly feminine woman knew that 1) her appearance mattered (hence, the lipstick), 2) her ultimate duty in life was being domesticated (having babies), and 3) her station in relation to the masculine male who earned the living or played the hero. The same article went on to say that some women worked outside the home but it was a real woman who recognized where her true “tender proficiency” lay.<sup>57</sup> Tellingly, the next line noted that “not all females are feminine” because femininity is “the state of being pleased to be a woman” and recognizing that there are things “which require physical drive and endurance that he does better, and she is glad of it.”<sup>58</sup> Significantly, this article pointed out that the real and true sign of femininity was in the “acceptance of men in their endearing and maddening entirety...[a feminine woman] is deeply protective of the male ego.”<sup>59</sup>

Another sign of femininity was the acceptance wholeheartedly of “both the pleasures and responsibilities of being a woman,” and was evidenced by a woman’s keeping the vote and the clothing allowance but conveying “the illusion of one who has difficulty negotiating a door handle” in a winsome manner.<sup>60</sup> Feminine women were encouraged not to call out to the waiter over her beau’s head to correct an order he placed, lest it hurt his self-esteem; it was better to eat the wrong food. When a girl respected her beau’s opinions, showed deference for his choices (even when it impacted both of them), and showed appreciation for his clumsy efforts to show her courtesy and protection, she would be enabling him to establish his masculinity. The man who did not assist his date was not only discourteous, but he was also unmanly because he failed to demonstrate his control and protection over the female.<sup>61</sup> The feminine young woman may have challenged his masculinity, causing him to become resentful or antagonistic, when she unwittingly co-opted that which was his prerogative as a protector, leader and aggressor. Some examples of these challenges included calling him instead of waiting for him to call her, offering to pay for part of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 96 - 97.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>61</sup> Bailey, 110.

the restaurant bill, beating him at tennis too often, or disagreeing with him on politics. At the same time, a feminine woman's:

...tears and fears and tempers can be as dear to a man as your virtues...he takes your arm at crossings, he catapults across a room to help you on with your coat, he pulls a chair out at the table, not because you are a tower of strength, but because you are gloriously fragile and cannot possibly cope by yourself.<sup>62</sup>

This article placed the secret to protecting white male hegemonic masculinity at the feet of the feminine woman. A lack of femininity is construed as a direct attack on masculinity. Men could not feel like real men if women did not act like real women. Ironically, young women were not expected to disagree with their beau's political viewpoints but they were expected to know about politics so they could please their men by being attentive and knowledgeable during conversations.<sup>63</sup> The contradiction at the heart of this discourse on femininity and its effect on masculinity is this: if men were dominant and women subservient, why did women need to help men feel more masculine?

The response to "It's Great to be a Girl" varied, as evidenced by the letters sent to the magazine. One girl said the article left her "feeling luxuriously fragile and feminine" whereas another said the description of femininity was hypocritical as it left out "the feminine girl who can think!"<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, such blatant portrayals of feminine wiles in relation to masculinity were not lost on men. One young man, who found the article when browsing through his sister's copy of *Seventeen*, wrote that it gave him the impression that women were superior and men could only prove their masculinity if the woman made it possible. He concluded by saying, "I'd like to state that I do not consider myself in the slightest need of feminine help for boosting my ego."<sup>65</sup> On the one hand, he noticed correctly that *Seventeen* positioned the achievement of true masculinity in the hands of feminine women, thus undermining the actual achievement of masculinity by men on their own terms. On the other, he did not argue the need for women to be true to themselves. In short, women needed to be feminine but their motives needed to be kept under wraps so men could continue to feel good about themselves.

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<sup>62</sup> "It's Great to Be a Girl," 138.

<sup>63</sup> "Etiquette," *Seventeen*, July 1964, 16.

<sup>64</sup> "Your Letters," *Seventeen*, April 1960, 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

Even as femininity was being emphasized to help men feel more masculine, the rising focus on women's equality made an impact on men. There is evidence of some conflation of femininity with feminism, especially in the realm of chivalry. In one article, an 18-year old girl noted that when she waited for her beau to open a door for her, he told her, "Every time I open the door for you, Linda, I feel you're using your femininity to gain an unfair advantage."<sup>66</sup> One letter writer lamented that chivalry was dead because femininity was dead; whereas another stated that it was girls' fault that chivalry was dead. Along these lines, a male writer indicated:

We boys desperately want girls to be girls, not he-men who can completely take care of themselves. And the simple fact is that American girls are utterly independent. It's confusing to the male when a girl capable of creaming him at touch football and explaining Dalton's Atomic Theory still wants to be shielded from the cruel world. A man wants a feminine woman...making boys more romantic is a girl's job!<sup>67</sup>

When a girl wrote to *Seventeen* saying that she was every guy's pal but had never dated a boy, she was advised: "To make yourself feel - and therefore exude - your femininity, think of the boy more as a boy, play up to his manliness."<sup>68</sup> One way she could do this was to let a book be too heavy to carry so he could come to her rescue. In essence, it was in the girl's hands to rekindle romance and chivalry by playing the part of the subordinate feminine woman. Men escaped responsibility for the decline in romantic gestures and chivalry. As the women's liberation movement gained momentum, society would continue to blame the loss of chivalry on women.

The years between 1955 and 1965 were a time of transition in American society. There was an emerging consensus that the sexes were becoming more and more equal everyday and this in turn challenged national conventions defining masculinity, femininity, and the rules of courtship. White, middle-class men seemed to be losing their position of undisputed dominance while more women were entering the work force instead of focusing solely on their domestic responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> Threats to white masculine hegemony included domestication of the American male and women's assertion for power in courtship and marriage. While advice manuals also supported traditional gender roles, *Seventeen* served as millions of young women's trusty companion and teacher. This allowed the

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<sup>66</sup> Linda Wetherbee, "Why Can't Boys Be More Romantic?," *Seventeen*, November 1961, 172.

<sup>67</sup> "Your Letters," *Seventeen*, January 1962, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Abigail Wood, "Young Living: Why Am I Unlucky in Love?," *Seventeen*, April 1965, 153, 189.

<sup>69</sup> Breines, 10-11.



magazine to play a critical role in constructing gender ideals for young women by projecting traditional masculine images of young men. *Seventeen* worked to help young women realize their place in a relationship and in the world. In the ten years that this study focused on, evidence was found of girls being increasingly socialized to exude femininity. In the process, *Seventeen* gave women the impression that they alone could help their men feel masculine. This mixed message gave young women a false sense of superiority over men while at the same time women were led to believe that they were at fault for the loss of romance and chivalry because some of them were not feminine enough. While both men and women were victims of sociocultural idealization, the emerging differentiation between feminine and unfeminine women was a foreshadowing of the division among women in the nascent women's movement.