How the Girls Really Are?: Images of College Women in LIFE Magazine during the 1960s

by

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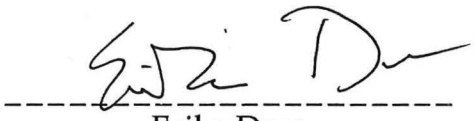

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Thesis directed by Associate Professor Erika Doss

As an icon of American popular culture, LIFE magazine had a profound impact on an entire generation of American youth. When Henry Luce wrote his prospectus for LIFE, he wrote, "to see, and to be shown, is now the will and expectancy of half mankind." This study examines how LIFE's photographers and editors presented college women to look at during the 1960s for that "half of mankind". Drawing upon the work of feminist film critic Laura Mulvey and historian Wendy Kozol, this thesis explores how LIFE's stereotypical imagery of women was applied to college women during the 1960s. Issues of "separate spheres," sexuality and masculinization are all addressed and framed in the context of the history of education for American women and the feminist movement of the 1960s.

The first section deals with LIFE magazine itself and how it structured its imagery of college women. The next three chapters deal with images in the context of their specific articles and time periods, and includes comparisons with photography from Playboy magazine. The conclusion draws the thesis into the present, making a comparative analysis of college women in LIFE today. This study illuminates the ways

in which LIFE's imaging of college women has evolved, and also how it has remained static. The goal is to use the imagery in question in a discussion about the changing roles of women over the course of the 1960s and how those roles were perceived by the American public.

This thesis is dedicated to my son,

Crispin Theodore Taylor.

I hope you read this some day
and find it as obvious and maddening
as I do.

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Mostly I want to thank my husband, Brennan Taylor, for putting up with me. I couldn't have done it without you.

December, 1996

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Introduction

During the 1960s, the United States went through a period of social turmoil. Among many things, Americans' values concerning the status of women were challenged and changed during this time. As an icon of pop culture, LIFE magazine often simultaneously reflected and constructed American attitudes. In its photographs, LIFE's photographers and editors applied ideas about traditional American womanhood to college women. This application was problematic because of all of the social changes occurring in American society, most notably the re-emerging feminist movement. In utilizing a traditional visual vocabulary to portray college women, for example, LIFE published images of women that recorded a progression in higher education from the search for an MRS. degree to serious careerism. But because their visual vocabulary was standardized, the magazine's editors and photographers were unable to break away from traditional value systems. This dilemma perfectly mirrors American social attitudes toward the changing roles women assumed in 1960s America.

My argument will begin with an examination of LIFE Magazine, how its photographers and editors created images that influenced two American generations, and how the depiction of women integral to its conception affected the photographs of college women. For my thesis I chose three articles, one from 1960, one from 1965 and one from 1969.

These articles were chosen for their visual impact and their focus on photography.

This thesis will examine three categories of photos: crowd scenes with men and women together (a crowd can be as few as two people), crowd scenes with women only, and scenes of women by themselves. Using these groupings, I will discuss them within the context of the three articles chosen, considering various issues such as historical attitudes toward women's education, separate spheres of male and female influence, women's sexual status, and the emerging feminist movement. This analysis will elucidate how LIFE's visual conception of college women changed - and didn't change - with America's conception of womanhood. My intent is to uncover the complexity of LIFE's portrayal and America's conception of college women during one of the most dynamic decades of the twentieth-century.

Chapter 1: God the Photographer and LIFE's Ideal of the American Woman

In this chapter I will explain how exactly it is that LIFE was able to use photography to reflect and construct an ideal of American womanhood all at the same time. Central to my argument are two points: that the kind of photography people found in LIFE was no accident, and that these photographs were simultaneously an innocent reflection of common American ideas of the period. While they may seem to be contradictory components, these two points are actually the key to the common belief that "seeing is believing."

God the Photographer and the Construction of Reality

Photographs are deceptive. This is because we, as a culture, are not taught to view them with a critical eye. Everyone has heard the saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words." This statement testifies not only to the power of pictures, but also to the absolute verity they are assumed to possess. It is exactly this attitude that Henry Luce wanted to exploit when he began editing and publishing LIFE in 1936. Luce knew how powerful pictures were, and he knew that the public would respond favorably to a picture-oriented magazine. After all, Luce's other publications, Time and Fortune relied more heavily on pictures than any other news magazines, and this set them apart and ahead of other magazines in the genre.[1] What most viewers did not consider when they looked at LIFE was the

painstaking process of selection that the magazine's editorial staff and photographers practiced in order to give to the public the product they felt was just right.

When How LIFE Gets the Story was published in 1955, writer/editor Stanley Rayfield answered what was probably a common question among Americans:

> "'By what magic,' asks one reader in more flowery words than we would dream of using, 'does LIFE draw to it so many millions of Americans...?'"[2]

Rayfield's answer was a mini-manifesto on LIFE's philosophy of photography. Of the seven criteria he cites for the creation of LIFE's "magic", the three that are key to my point are:

> Willingness to risk danger and physical discomfort, Ability to use camera equipment, reportorial skills and every imaginable production device to convey exact meaning and An appreciation of the American right to know and enjoy what is going on.[3]

What is central to the above three points is that they assume that photographs can convey exact meaning, that their meaning can be *known* by the American public, and that LIFE photographers are expected to go to extreme lengths to present such meaning. That a photograph tells exactly

the story a photographer expects is debatable. What is true is that a picture is capable of being interpreted in more than one way, and that there are often subtexts of meaning unimagined by those taking and choosing pictures for publication. While their original intent was undoubtedly included in the photographs published by the magazine, other themes that may not have been intended were inevitably included, such as the ideal of American womanhood, and an ideology about how women are to be portrayed in photographs. As Wendy Kozol states in LIFE's *America*,

> "Rather than reduce representations to singular meanings, it is far more productive to consider visual images as problematic sites open to different readings depending on historical conditions and the reader's orientation."[4]

At the same time, it is important to note just how far the magazine's photographers went to get a desired picture. Dora Jane Hamblin's accounts of photographic excess in her book, *That Was the LIFE* illustrate beautifully why she terms them all "God the Photographer":

> ...the photographers epitomized the casual arrogance which permeated the entire staff. LIFE was the most important magazine in the world....And because it was built on pictures, the lordliest of all its lordly crew was the photographer. Photographers managed to persuade a staggering number of persons that this was true.[5]

This lordly manner included asking admirals to move whole fleets of ships for better aesthetic effect. As often as not, the demands that the photographers placed on themselves were just as grueling as those they demanded of others. For example, in a June 22, 1955 issue, photographer Wallace Kirkland wanted to photograph a male Tilapia fish hatching its young from its mouth. In order to get the difficult final shot, after several failures, he and his assistant created a special tank thin enough that the fish could not turn around, while the camera was placed at the bottom of the tank facing up. The assistant then transferred the father fish to the special tank, carefully keeping its mouth full of young shut. When the fish was released into the tank, it swam directly at the camera, spitting its young as it came.

The lengths to which LIFE photographers went to get the shot often led to ground-breaking technologies and record-breaking events. For the June 15, 1953 story on the coronation of Elizabeth II, LIFE's color lab, engravers and presses worked overtime to get printed versions of the story out ahead of schedule. In order to meet the weekly deadline, 102 airplane flights, day and night, flew for three days to get issues of LIFE to newsstands on time - the first time airfreight was used for such a purpose. This allowed the magazine to cover a story in full color - usually a seven week process - in the same time as it would have taken to print it in black and white. For a December 24, 1951 story on paintings by Tintoretto,

photographer Dmitri Kessel pioneered the use of polaroid filters on camera lenses and lights to minimize photographic glare.[6]

The meaning of these feats is clear; LIFE photographers got what they wanted, when they wanted it - expense, personal discomfort or inconvenience be damned. Henry Luce wanted people "to see life, to see the world," and LIFE's photographers were the eyes through which America saw Luce's vision of that world. Combine this with an editorial staff that carefully chose which of the photographer's pictures went to print, and you have a precisely planned product, with no element left to chance. If I apply this principle to images of American women chosen for publication in the magazine, it reveals that LIFE's editors and photographers had a specific vision of what and who American women were and what they were about.

LIFE and the Ideal of the American Woman

When Henry Luce put LIFE magazine together during the 1930s, he had a definite editorial vision. He meant to represent America the way he thought it should be represented. As Kozol points out,

> The editors conceived of LIFE as a magazine directed at midwestern, middle-class, white Americans who held conventional ideas about domestic roles...[7]

Not only do these gender roles include the ideology of domesticity I just described, but they also embrace women as the object of the male gaze. In LIFE's case, the standard of beauty was represented by the white, elite woman. In Luce's manifesto for LIFE, he explicitly states that one of the magazine's functions is to present women as objects of visual pleasure,

> To see life; to see the world....(to see) the women that men love and many children; to see and *take pleasure in seeing*....[8]

Not only does Luce's concept for the magazine stress female beauty, but it links women with children, emphasizing and reinforcing traditional gender roles. This illustrates two of LIFE's major themes concerning images of women. As I said before, traditional gender roles are important. But so too are *pretty* women. The focus on "the babe shot" is a hallmark of LIFE photography. Frankly, this is not all that surprising. From a purely business standpoint, it would have been suicide for Luce not to include beautiful women in his magazine. Advertising says that sex sells, and offering beautiful, sexy women to look at was just good business sense on Luce's part. So was the standard representation of men and women's cultural roles.

LIFE's emphasis on traditional gender roles was not some kind of nefarious phallocentric plot. It was a simple reflection of the contemporary cultural values during the 1960s. Strict gender roles for

men were as much a part of the cultural vocabulary as those for women. Men were still expected to be the sole breadwinners, according to cultural norms. This not only placed a tremendous burden upon men and their self-esteem when they could not fulfill this ideal, it further reinforced the roles women were expected to fill. But by portraying women this way, LIFE's editors and photographers were perpetuating ideas about traditional gender roles. As explained above, no photograph that ran in LIFE was chosen by accident. This implies that the editors and photographers wanted those traditional gender roles reinforced in the pages of the magazine.

The encouragement of traditional gender roles in society had far-reaching consequences for women, and extended even into the legal sphere. *Hoyt vs. Florida*, a case examined by the United States Supreme Court in 1961, illustrates how ingrained traditional gender roles were. In the case, the defendant, a woman, charged that the 14th amendment to the Constitution had been violated because Florida State law automatically "exempted" women from jury duty, thus there were not female members on the defendant's jury. In order to be called to jury duty, women had to register, rather than be automatically included in the pool. The Supreme Court ruled that the exclusion of women from the judicial process was not unconstitutional because,

> ...woman is still regarded as the center of home and family life. We cannot say that it is constitutionally impermissible for a State, acting in pursuit of the general welfare, to conclude that a woman should be relieved form the civic duty of jury service unless she herself determines that such service is consistent with her own special responsibilities.[9]

The automatic exemption from jury duty was based on the need for mothers to stay home and take care of their children. Rather than allow women to defer jury duty on such grounds, they were automatically exempt from the process. This illustrates how much a part of the American psyche domesticity and strict gender roles still were.

The post-World War II trend toward domesticity was also explained by the generally unattractive nature of careerism for women. On the average, women's wages were lower than those of their husbands, and so jobs held by women were not really careers, they were jobs. Opportunities for women in the work force were few and far between, whether a woman had a college education or not. As Elaine Tyler May puts it in her book, *Homeward Bound:: American Families in the Cold War Era,*

> The limited nature of most women's jobs legitimated employment for married women, while reinforcing women's subordinate position in the occupational hierarchy. For young married women, then, the strain of holding a job may not have been worth the meager rewards.[10]

Obstacles to advancement and a low pay scale made careerism unattractive to young women. Though May's focus is on the 1940s and 1950s, it reflects the atmosphere in which the college women of the 1960s had been raised. These women had grown up with social expectations of motherhood and domesticity. College, for them, was not necessarily a means to a career, but a way to meet a highly educated young man to marry.[11]

In fact, for many college men, this is exactly what women were supposed to do. As historian Paul A. Carter notes, one Princeton man said,

> Yes, I can describe my wife. She will be the Grace Kelly, camel's hair coat type. Feet on the ground, and not an empty shell or fake. Although an Ivy League type, she will also be centered in the home, a housewife. Perhaps at forty-five, with the children grown up, she will go in for hospital work and so on.[12]

Such a statement reflects some of the expectations 1960s college women encountered. But there was another role-model 1960s college women grew up with, and that was the working woman. They did exist, and in great numbers. In 1960, statistics show that there were 22,516, 000 working women in the United States, 34% of whom were married, and 44% of whom were single (the categories being single, married and

widdowed or divorced). As the decade progressed, and the feminist movement swung into action, 29,898,000 American women were working, 40.4% were married, and 51.2% were single.[13] Despite social ideas that stressed the contrary, women were working. What this reveals is that social expectations for women were ambiguous and mixed, and no less so for the expectations society placed on women in higher education than for women in the work force.

During the Colonial period, schooling for American girls was considered frivolous. When public schooling began in the colonies, little girls were often not allowed to attend school. In some places, if they did attend, they were kept separate from the boys, and went to school in the mornings before the boys came, and returned in the evening when the boys left. The remaining time was spent at home helping their mothers and learning the necessary skill to become productive wives.[14] In fact, for most families, female education was strictly counter-productive to survival.

During this period, women were the sole providers of goods utilized in their households. There were exceptions, but those were limited to women wealthy enough to buy what they needed (soap, cloth, etc.) and /or had slaves or house servants to complete daily chores for them. Higher education for most women represented lost productivity,

and it is no wonder that it was scoffed at by many. In 1792, Noah Webster remarked,

> (a good education) renders the ladies correct in their manners, respectable in their families, and agreeable in society....(a woman's) real merit (lay in her) domestic worth.[15]

Almost 150 years later, strict gender roles were still Advocated in American society, and higher education for women was still considered a luxury. By the late 1950s, however, that attitude had changed. In her book, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media,* Susan Douglas explains that women during the late 1950s and during the 1960s were actively encouraged to enter college. The reason was simple: the arms race. Or more specifically, the impact the launch of Sputnik in 1957 had on the American psyche during the first years of the Cold War. What followed was a great push for the education of America's children in order to compete with the Soviet Union. This push included both girls and boys, who had to be educated to culturally and technologically outstrip communist Russia.[16] That sort of education came, especially, in college.

This push for higher education was reflected in LIFE magazine stories in the early 1960s of the huge influx of young people going to college. LIFE's editors and photographers stressed to the public how much fun college could be, further encouraging attendance, and they did this for

women as well as men. For the men, the lure of college came by presenting college women as hot babes. For women, LIFE's lure was college as a female bonding experience - what I call "the slumber party aesthetic," and a hunting ground for the MRS. degree, with lots of eligible young men. Careerism was the main reason for men to attend college - the babes were just an added incentive. Not so for women. In popular parlance, a MRS. degree was the main reason for female college attendance. Universities themselves perpetuated this ideology. In 1965, U.S. News and World Report ran a story called "If Your Daughter Wants to go to College..." in which one Eastern state university president said of unfair enrollment policies favoring men,

> State universities face a serious dilemma in this matter (the attendance of women at their colleges). They are set up to primarily provide professional training in scientific and technical fields, chiefly of interest to men.
> Liberal arts and education are attractive to girls. Yet, to limit enrollment there to women students, as a means of balancing total enrollment between men and women, would be patently unwise. It would deny careers to men in many fields where they are needed.[17]

Though women were encouraged to go to college, as Douglas states, they were obviously not taken seriously as careerist. This somewhat schizophrenic attitude is later reflected in art by feminist artist, Cindy Sherman. In her first series of photographs, named *Untitled Film Stills*,

Sherman. In her first series of photographs, named *Untitled Film Stills*, Sherman dressed up in costumes resembling female images in 1950s and 1960s B-movies (Ill. 1). The photographs parody the media-created images of women, exposing their artificial nature. A comparison between one of Sherman's photographs and a LIFE photo of a college girl is a useful illustration (Ills. 1&2). In both photographs, the women lie in reclining or semi-reclining positions. They are lit from one side, and each has a vapid, innocent look on her face. This look is more striking in Sherman's photograph, as she is making fun of the kind of expression that is photographed so seriously in Illustration 2. Though she is fully clothed, the college student's posture and eye contact with the camera imply sexual availability. That availability is spoofed by Sherman in her state of partial undress and her refusal to look at the camera. While the young college student makes the viewer acknowledge her sentience by staring into the camera (however slim her intelligence may seem to be), Sherman's photo makes her completely available to the viewer without having to face the fact that she is a person, and not a mere object of visual and sexual pleasure. LIFE's imagery of college women is as fetishistic as Sherman's work, and in fact, photographs of college women in LIFE often resemble the iconography parodied in Sherman's work, reflecting this same tendency within the American attitude toward such women.

Illustration 1: Cindy Sherman

Illustration 2: Mount Holyoke student, 1965

In the public mind, career women represented a threat in many ways. They threatened the traditional role of the male as the sole breadwinner for the family. This would have been especially menacing to an adult public whose first-hand memories of the Great Depression's severe unemployment would remind men of the inability to fulfill the breadwinner role. In Cold War terms, the combination of careerism and women smacked of communism, a system in which men and women worked side by side in the same jobs. By focusing visually on the icon of the ideal American woman and traditional gender roles, LIFE's photographers and editors constructed images of college women in such a way as to mitigate this perceived threat, thus revealing the unease with which America viewed college women and working women. The telltale characteristics of this visual fetishization is the subject of the rest of my study.

Endnotes

1. James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 83.

2. Stanley Rayfield, *How LIFE Gets the Story* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1955), 1.

3. Rayfield, 2.

4.Wendy Kozol, *LIFE's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 6.

5. Dora Jane Hamblin, *That Was the LIFE.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), 49.

6. Rayfield, pp. 8-9, 76-77 and 44-45.

7. Kozol, 39.

8. Quoted in Loudon Wainwright,*The Great American Magazine: An Inside History of LIFE* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 33. Emphasis added.

9. *Hoyt vs. Florida*, quoted in Mary Beth Norton, ed., *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1989), 389. In this case, the defendant claimed that a different ruling by the court would have changed the guilty verdict the jury had given her for the murder of her husband, because women jurors would have been more sympathetic.

10. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 77.

11. May, 79.

12. Paul A. Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 88.

13. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Labor Force Status of the Civilian Female Population, by Marital Status and Age: 1960," *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 82nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 214. And U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Civilian Female Population - Total and Labor Force, by Age and Marital Status: 1969," *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 91st ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 224.

14. Thomas Woody,*A History of Women's Education in the United States*,, vol. 1, (New York: Octagon, 1966), 137-144. The historical divisions for the history of women's education I use in this paper come from Linda K. Kerber, "'Why Should Girls Be Learn'd and Wise?': Two Centuries of Higher Education for Women as Seen Through the Unfinished Work of Mary Alice Baldwin," chap. in *Women and Higher Education in American*

History, John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe, eds., (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 20-1.

15. Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), 266.

16. Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*, (New York: Random House, 1994), 21-22.

17. "If Your Daughter Wants to Go to College...," U.S. News and World Report, 58 (24 May 1965): 55.

Chapter 2: Pictures in Context, 1960

In this section I put issues provoked by images of college women into the context of the three specific articles chosen. The first, "Freshman Class, 1960," portrays college women conservatively, and adheres closely to ideas about women and higher education formed before and during the post-war era. The second article, "How the Girls Really Are," focuses on the issues of sexuality and masculinization of college women. The last article, "Lady into Tiger," addresses all of these issues equally, and, while in some respects it represents a drastic change from the 1960 article and its concerns, in many ways the value system it represents is unchanged.

As individuals who inhabited a space that was socially neither simply "single working girl" or "married woman," America's ideology about womanhood did not fit them. Though they expected to become wives and mothers, college curricula was preparing these young women for careerism, whether they chose to take that path or not. In an attempt to reconcile conflicting ideas about women's roles that fit yet did not fit college women, the magazine published photographs that sent mixed messages.

Looking at LIFE's pictures of college women during the 1960s, I was struck by how few pictures showed men and women together. That is to say, the visual coverage of college activities kept men and women apart

in a striking way. There were plenty of pictures of men and women in photographs together, but the men and women were seldom *together* in these photographs. Immediately the ideology of separate spheres came to mind. The idea that men and women inhabit and control complementary but different spheres of influence is not new. How does this ideology apply to the photographs of college women from LIFE in the 1960, 1965 and 1969 articles? It is the long history of separate spheres in the psyche of Americans (as well as human beings) that guides this visual separateness. But there are also many traits linked to gender separation in schooling and religion that apply here in a specifically American way.

"Freshman Class, 1960"

In 1960, when LIFE magazine published "Freshman Class, 1960," it was informing the American public about the huge influx of young people to institutions of higher education. This fits with Douglas' statement about the Sputnik scare. If America were going to keep up with the USSR technologically, then everyone had to get moving, get the proper education, and begin to produce cutting-edge technology. This doorway into education was similar to the ideology of Republican Motherhood that opened educational doors for women in the eighteenth century.

Social obstacles to education for girls were huge, as I have explained, but they came crashing down after the Revolutionary War with

the ideology of Republican Motherhood. After the war, the idea spread that women were the natural educators in the home. Their constant access to children made them the obvious vessels for passing on Republican ideals. This meant that women had to be educated in those ideals, and in any other knowledge or rhetoric that Americans wanted their children exposed to at an early age. According to Mary Beth Norton, author of *Liberty's Daughters*, Benjamin Rush, in an address to the Philadelphia Young Lady's Academy titled, "Thoughts Upon Female Education,"

> By justifying his suggested reforms through reference to the demands of a republican society, he linked women's private development to political imperatives....he did want to create a new type of American woman.[1]

With the ideology of Republicanism came the creation of the "English Classical Schools", what we know today as High Schools. In 1824, the first high school for girls was established in Worcester, Massachusetts. While Republicanism helped encourage education for women in the eighteenth century, Anti-Communism did the same for women in the 1950s and 1960s. But, how does this fit with the "segregated" images of college women in LIFE in 1960?

In LIFE's pictures of college women, the editors and photographers chose to publish photos that kept the sexes segregated. This is not always

blatant, physical separation (except in one article), but a social one. In the photographs where men and women are together, the overwhelming sense the viewer gets is that of complimentary roles. Men and women appear in the same photographs, but they aren't really having the same experience. In pictures from the 1960 article, "Freshman Class, 1960," women and men are participating in the same activities, but women are pictured in little clusters together among the men. In a photograph of freshman orientation (Ill. 3), the photographer has chosen a composition in which the rows of auditorium seats stretch toward the viewer, whose attention is immediately drawn to the two young women in the lower right of the picture. A single man sits on either side of the two women. Further left sit two more women, also framed by men. Behind the first two women, three women sit together, with another freshman man on the right and an empty seat (followed by a seat occupied by a male again) to the left. The caption below the photograph reads "Flood of grown-up war babies finds colleges unready..." The auditorium is wall-to-wall with incoming students, and seems a bit overwhelming. Even though they are surrounded by the men, women are the obvious focus of the photographic composition. Men and women are sitting in the same physical space together, but women cluster among the men in small groups of two or three. These women are not alone among men, though men surround and may even accompany them.

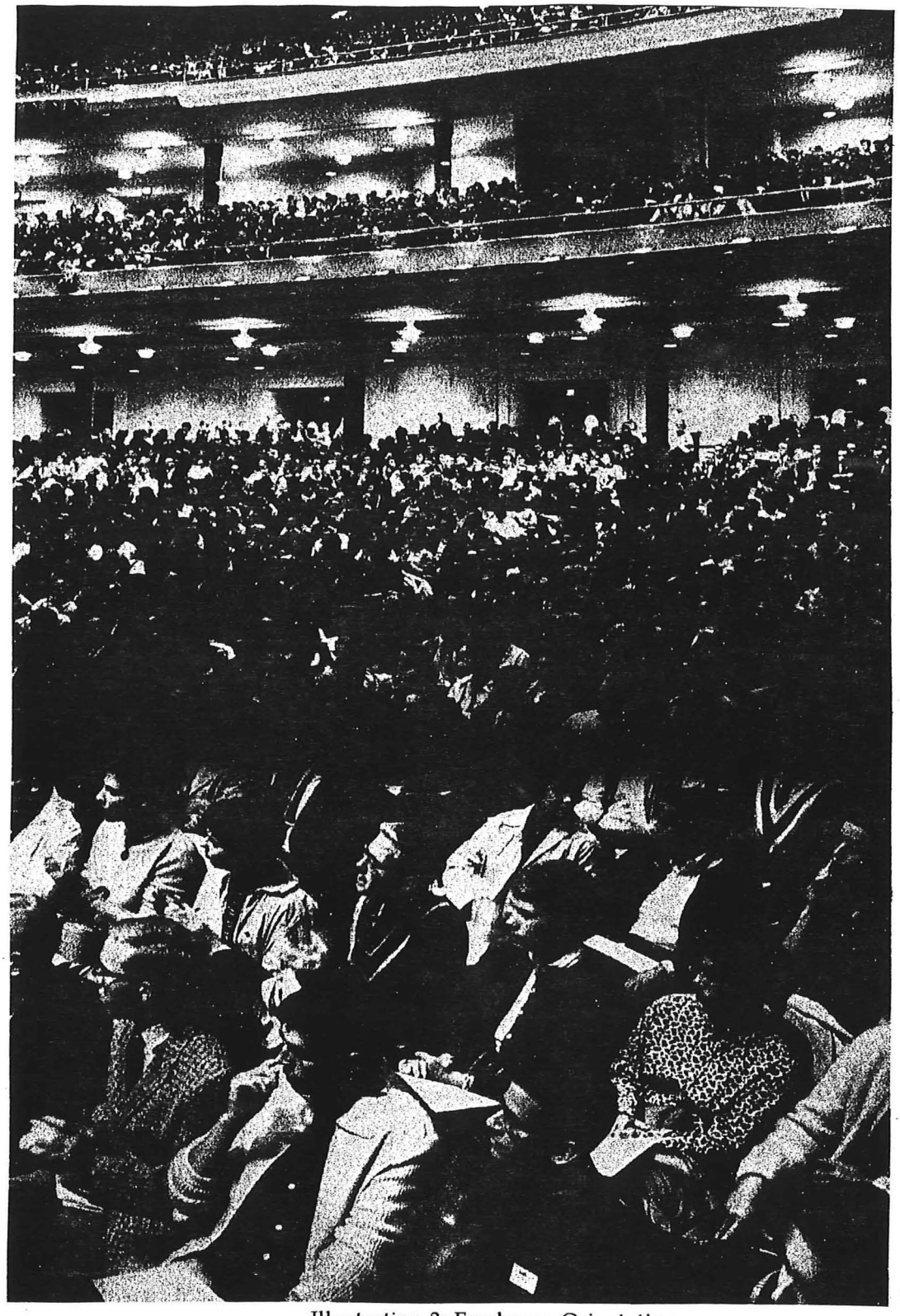

Illustration 3: Freshman Orientation

In the photograph of a long, tedious-looking registration line, a young man sits relaxed, elbows on knees, and looks at his class schedule (Ill. 4). The long, serpentine line winds its way from the upper right corner of the picture toward the viewer, and ends near a group of three women who stand together in the line, unsmiling. One woman holds registration papers in front of her body a bit nervously. The other two stand with their arms crossed protectively in front of themselves. The young man in the foreground sits at their feet, and to the right of his figure a sign projects vertically outside of the picture frame. To the right of the women, a man in a dark suit turns his back to them while conversing easily with one of the other women standing in line. The combination of the sign post, and the man in the dark suit creates a frame around the three women. One of the three wears a dark dress, which is highlighted from behind by the white blouse of another woman. The other two women wear white blouses, and this color scheme sets the three women off from the dark foliage in the background. The three of them stand close together, and look in the same general direction, giving viewers the sense of a tableau. Though the caption below the photograph emphasizes the actions of the man in the center foreground, the visual emphasis is on the trio of women who stand behind him. Above the photograph, the text of the article reads "Make-Do on Campuses," and the body of the text describes a "sea of fellow arrivals" and students

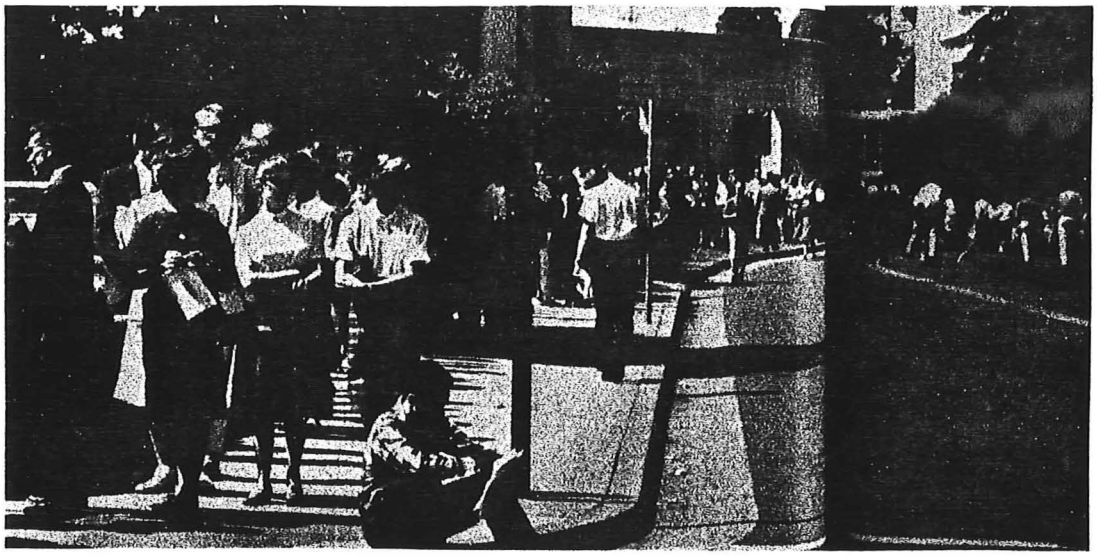

Illustration 4

undergoing "emotional shock." The text implies an oppressive atmosphere, and the women, whose body language looks distinctly more uncomfortable than that of the men, stand close-enough together to imply that they are a group.

In a third picture, freshmen students from Berkshire College stand in front of a junior high school where classes have overflowed temporarily (Ill. 5). In the foreground of the picture stand two women - the only two women immediately identifiable in the photograph. Their lightly colored sweaters and blouses set them apart from the nearly-identically dressed men of the picture, further emphasizing their presence. Their body language is somewhat stiff, with hands folded in front of their bodies, and they smile only slightly. The caption below emphasizes the "swarm" of junior high school students, which isolates the college students in the center of the picture. As the only two immediately identifiable women in the photo, they are isolated further against the wall of male college students who stand behind them.

There are three elements common to all three of these pictures. The first is that none of the women pictured are alone among men. They all stand safely in groups, even if only two at a time, among men. The second is that women are the focus of the photographic composition. Considering Luce's manifesto and LIFE's reliance on the Babe shot, this

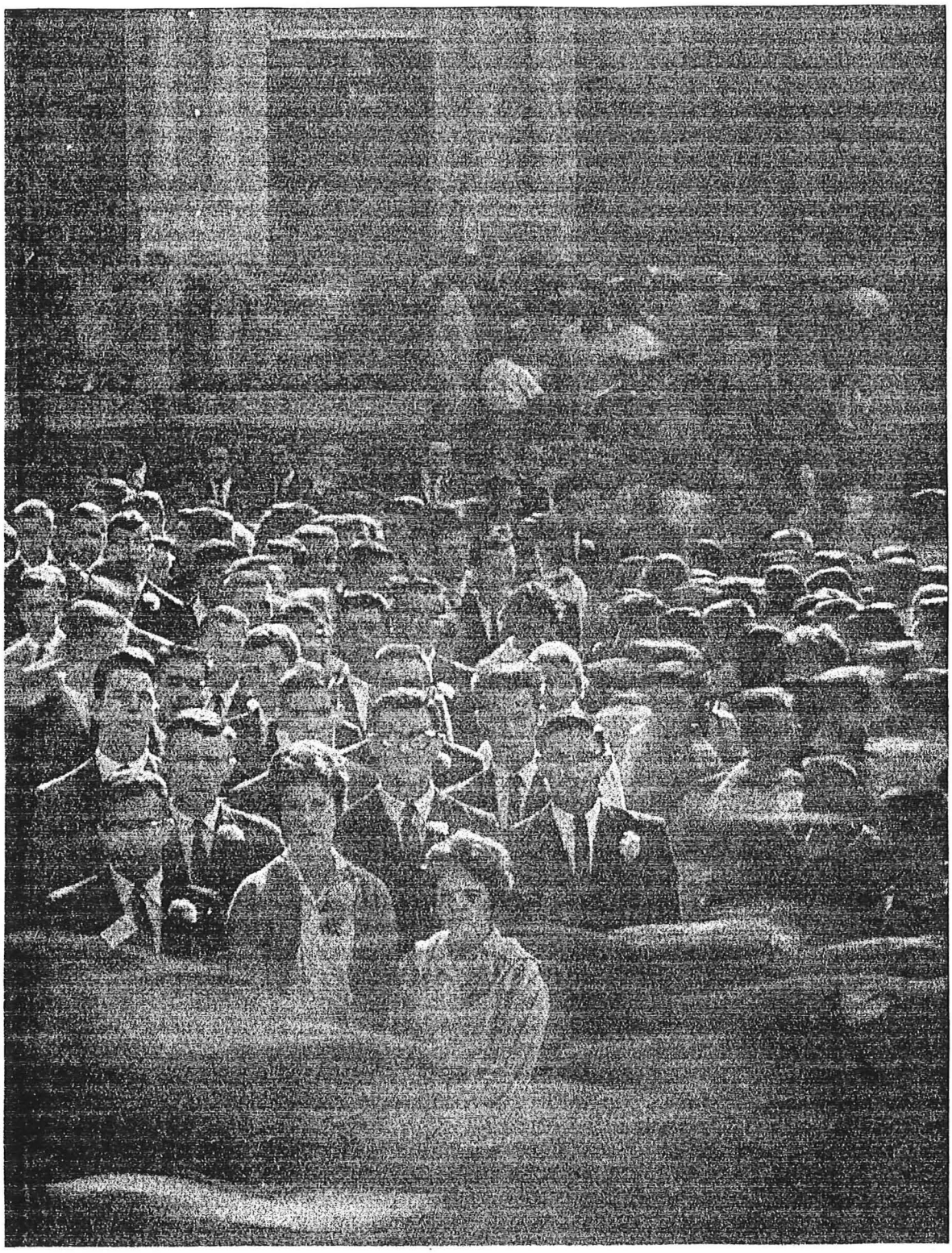

Illustration 5

comes as no surprise; a pretty girl should be the focus of the picture wherever possible. But these women are not mere babes. For the most part, they look like PTA mothers hanging out on college campuses. These women, safe with each other, integrated into a setting swarming with men, represent the ideal of the American family as constructed by the media and mass culture of the post-war era. Women are at the heart of the American family, as they are at the heart of the photographs mentioned. And while women and men occupy the same physical spaces in the photographs, as they do in the real world, they do not occupy the same social spaces, either inside the pages of LIFE or outside of it. The obvious discomfort of the women shared in all three photographs indicates their social separation from the men, and makes them seem more alien in the campus atmosphere. They are participating in academia, but are not completely comfortable in it. In other words, college is a macrocosmic representation of the American family ideal. This is the other side of what Wendy Kozol discusses in her book, *Life's America* when she says, "LIFE's representation of private life visualizes an imagined community that merges personal and political symbols."[2]

Kozol argues that the private became a signifier for personal and political ideology during the post-war era. In their pictures of college women in the 1960s, LIFE also used the public to signify the personal and political symbols of domestic ideology. In light of the Sputnik threat, and

the need for Americans, both men and women to pull together and win the cold war, this particular method of portraying the problematic social niche of college women is an elegant solution for resolving the need for women to participate in public education, without women's professionalism threatening the social role of men as sole breadwinners.

As mentioned before, part of the reason for the ideology of separate spheres in pre-industrial American culture was the idea that a woman was responsible for a great deal of the production of consumed goods. This included the production and care of children (to put it crudely), who were both the bearers of lineage and a source of free labor. A man's worth, both then and in the 1960s, was measured in his worth as a breadwinner. A man who was not able-bodied or well-educated would not have been considered as good a potential provider as one who was. A man's job, in essence, was (and often still is) a signifier of his masculinity, his worth as a man. Women, on the other hand, as primary providers of children, and managers of household affairs, become judged by their sexual characteristics and domestic skills. Big breasts and attractive facial features, which arouse men sexually and encourage them to breed, become prime characteristics of a woman's potential child-bearing value. Her ability to look comfortable in the home (a sign of domestic competence) is also important. Looks become the signifier of a woman's worth. Crossing the line between these spheres was a dangerous prospect. Popular opinion

of the Seventeenth Century held that women's minds could be snapped by too much intellectual effort. This is illustrated in a passage by a man of the period, John Winthrop:

> Mr. Hopkins...came to Boston and brought his wife with him...who was fallen into sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason...by occasion of her giving herself wholly to reading and writing, and had written many books....For if she had attended her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, etc., she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her.[3]

But it was also considered a social danger to let women read just anything, as is illustrated by the story of a young woman, Abigail Colman, whose elopement and disobedience to her father is attributed to her desire to read romantic fiction. That desire had been motivated by the ease with which Miss Colman read.[4]

Though this attitude was not nearly so extreme in the 1960s, the idea that education made for "wandering wombs" and disobedience in women was not completely abolished as illustrated by the hostility that was often meted out toward the growing feminist movement. And this danger is also apparent in the pictures of college women that were printed in the 1960 article I have been emphasizing. It is portrayed most

commonly in the separation of women from men - if not physically then socially. But it is most potently illustrated when the women are alone among college men.

Separating women from men in art has been a long-time habit of artists and art historians. Johann Zoffany's painting, *The Academician of the Royal Academy* (1771-72), is a portrait painting of the founders of the British Royal Academy (Ill. 6). There were, in fact, two founding female members, Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, who are conspicuously absent from the dynamic company of the founders. Instead of portraying them bodily among the other artists, Zoffany decided to have their portraits hang on the wall behind the other figures. The women are separated bodily from their colleagues. They are also separated professionally and culturally by Zoffany's representation. On a practical social level, Kauffman and Moser were not portrayed in a studio setting in order to avoid blemishing their reputations as ladies. Not only were artists considered to be somewhat dubious company during this period of time, but situating respectable women in a studio with naked models would have been absolutely beyond the pale. But as British feminist critic Val A. Walsh states,

> Female art students have accounted for 50 to 60 percent of all students since the 1890s...:acceptable, even necessary perhaps, given the woman as muse/mistress/model/child

Illustration 6: Academicians of the Royal Academy

> syndrome so persistent in Western art practice.... In the studio, women are expected to be girls, and visually compete with the art; to be unconventional, visually interesting, even shocking, but not speaking subjects.[5]

As illustrated in Chapter 1 by the U.S News and World Report article, women attending college were not taken seriously as academics. This is further emphasized by the fact that many schools determined the number of women to be admitted by how beneficial they were to the "social mix" on campus.[6] The babe shot and the MRS. shot in LIFE's story, "Freshman Class:1960" exemplifies the objectification of the women. In one photograph, a woman walks down the sidewalk at Southern Illinois University (Ill. 7). Lining the sidewalk are men, all seated. The men frame the sides of the photograph, while a building frames the back, with the woman, Esther Hayes, standing in the middle foreground. All eyes are on Esther. The caption above the photo indicates that the "mass appreciation" and "admiring once-over" are being enjoyed by Hayes. This places Hayes in the position of future spouse and (implied) housewife. In the interest of encouraging college enrollment, this photograph is a win-win situation for both men and women. Men at college got to check out babes, while women at college got to check out prospective husbands. What is strictly left out of the picture is the prospect of careerism for Esther Hayes.

Illustration 7

Domesticity on campus is further emphasized by another photograph of two women sitting in bed together doing homework (Ill. 8). The bed on which they sit is covered by an afghan, and the women are surrounded by stuffed animals. Both are wearing nightgowns. The women smile. The way they lean toward each other, as the one woman explains a problem to her roommate, implies perfect comfort and easy friendship. The caption above them reads, "Close quarters in emergency trailer settlement...require Joan Wethington, Norma Sickneier to share bed in 'family-style unit'." Though mention of 'close quarters" and "emergency" housing imply the same crushing atmosphere, the photographer has allowed more open space in the background of this photograph, giving it a more open, friendly atmosphere. These women are at ease with one another, alone in a "family-style unit." The entire situation looks strikingly like a slumber party. Rather than making college a hostile atmosphere, this photograph makes it inviting. The message seems to be that women are most comfortable with one another (no men) in a home setting.

This is typical of the kinds of pictures LIFE prints of college women. It belies a double-standard perpetuated by the media, which is that women are supposed to go to college in order to make America competitive, but that the edge college-educated women will give the country is somehow not linked to careerism. While sexist, it is also an

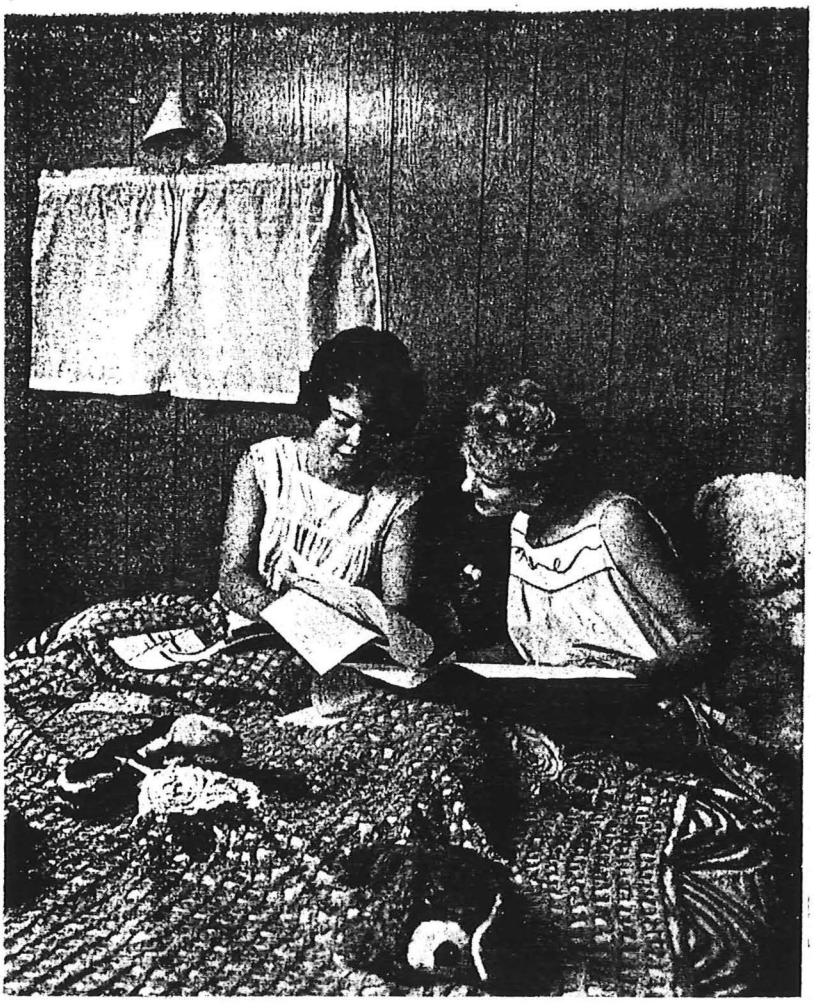

Illustration 8

accurate reflection of historical attitudes common to American thought on women and higher education, as well as to the year 1960 in particular. But there is more to this photograph than a simple attempt at making college look attractive. In fact, LIFE's photographers and editors are carefully constructing a moral image of college women, while at the same time making them seem to be sexually available.

Esther Hayes walks alone down the sidewalk between two rows of seated men, all of them with eyes on her. Though she smiles, her sidelong glance and stiff body language suggest that the experience is a distinctly uncomfortable one. This is not a woman who would be mistaken for a "bad girl" - ie. sexually available - and her unease at being alone with men emphasizes this fact. She is conspicuously under the scrutiny of what Laura Mulvey describes as the male gaze.

> In their traditionally exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkely, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire.[7]

As the object of this gaze, Esther Hayes is very uncomfortable. By contrast, women in the other photographs, who are in the company of other women, are comfortable, and, in fact, do not receive this wolfish

attention. The same kind of ease is seen in photographs of women in groups without the presence of men (Ills. 8 & 9). The women all share an easy camaraderie, conspicuously absent in the photos where women and men are together. The fact that these women seem to be socially segregated from the men, while the women who are alone are not, speaks volumes. If the women in groups together are signifiers of domesticity and the ideology of separate spheres, then the women alone with the men can be said to be integrated into the male social sphere, on the same social level, competing with the men; they are signifiers of female careerism. Like Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, these women are transformed into objects of the male gaze by the photographer.[8] While this was socially, if not professionally advantageous for Kaufman and Moser, Esther Hayes is placed in socially awkward, even slightly dangerous-seeming situations. To the viewer's eye, she is extremely vulnerable. What is implied here is that women alone among men are sexually available, and "good girls" should be uncomfortable there. The message of LIFE's photographs is clear: women are welcome at college, so long as they aren't too ambitious and don't try to compete with men. This subtle separate-spherism is reinforced by the exclusion of women from the Ivy League colleges. The true purpose of an Ivy League education is to get a jump-start on a promising career. By allowing women to be excluded from these institutions, the public and the administrators sent the

Illustration 9: Women's Dormitory

message that women were not considered serious careerists. The photographs reflect the schizophrenic social space college women occupied in the American psyche: women should go to college to help strengthen America, but they shouldn't step outside the bounds of their accepted social roles or try to compete with men in the work place. By choosing particular situations in which women looked uncomfortable (the registration line, walking the gauntlet between two groups of men) and then including homey photos of women comfortable in accommodations that may as well be their bedrooms at home, LIFE's photographers and editors set women up to look strange in any situation but a domestic one.

Sputnik may have been a catalyst for the large influx of students at the beginning of the 1960s as Douglas suggests, but the idea of the space race was not the only driving factor behind soaring college attendance rates. Those who had college educations under their belts would have higher-paying jobs. Larger income meant more buying power, and large numbers of people who could buy high-ticket items would 1) fulfill the American dream of home ownership and 2) spur the ideology of the capitalist system, overpowering communist ideology. As home was the sphere of woman, targeting women as consumers only made sense. After all, expensive items like washers and dryers, stoves, refrigerators and all manner of baby necessities fell under the purview of women's buying power. Rushing to colleges made as much sense for women as it did for

men. But here the breadwinner role comes into conflict with pure consumerism. If men were to be the major income earners in a household, then women's buying power would be decreased. As labor statistics listed in chapter 1, a good number of women (nearly 1/3 of all married women) worked outside the home. In the end, this threat to male breadwinning was mitigated by traditional attitudes about women and education, attitudes which dated back to the eighteenth century.

What resulted were images of women that represented them as June Cleaver clones, comfortable in groups, but uncomfortable when alone among men. This discomfort was especially important in containing any kind of implied sexual activity between college men and women. This fear, which buzzed around in the American psyche like an angry hornet, was very real, given the advent of the birth control pill in the same year.

LIFE's photos of women alone with one another did more than assuage fears of premarital sex. They also projected a homey image, which fit with the images that placed women in the center of the campus life. Representing college women in this way implied that college was much like home, and that women were the stabilizing, moral force in coeducational situations. These images further implied that, though they were in college together, men and women did not really have the same

experiences. College became a macrocosm for home life; men and women have separate spheres of influence (work, the outside world and home and family respectively), and that women and men sharing the same educational experience in no way implied that they were competing with one another.

Endnotes

1. Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 268.

2. Kozol, 101.

3. Mary Beth Norton, ed., *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1989), 21.

4. Kerber, 23.

5. Val A. Walsh, "Eyewitnesses, Not Spectators - Activists, Not Academics: Feminist Pedagogy and Women's Creativity" chap. in Katy Deepwell, ed., *New Feminist Art Criticism*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 51-52.

6. U.S. News and World Report, 54.

7. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," chap. in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 19.

8. It must be noted that simply by being in a magazine, all women in these photos are objects of the gaze, both male and female. But these two women are shown being gazed at by men in the photographs with them, while the women in groups with each other are not.

Chapter 3: 1965 and "How the Girls Really Are"

In a way, LIFE's coverage of college during the 1960s prepared young people for the experience. By showing photographs of giant chess games played out on dorm room windows and piano-smashing upperclassmen, 1950s youth were familiarized with American ideas of what college was all about. In the 1960s, as college life changed, the image of college changed in LIFE magazine, and so did its images of women in college. Women stopped being motherly, with a hint of babe, and became members of total, outright babedome. In the 1965 article, "How the Girls Really Are," the way women looked was drastically different, although the message was essentially the same: women are on campus to get men and to be gotten by men, not to seriously pursue a career.

"How the Girls Really Are" was published in response to a booklet created by students at (all male) Princeton, rating 17 of the women's colleges in the area. The Princeton booklet really ticked off a lot of women, because it implied that the women at these colleges (Bryn Mawr, Smith, Mount Holyoke and Bennett, just to name a few) were dogs, and not worth the trouble. LIFE, which had a number of women staffers who had graduated from these colleges, offered the public a seven page spread showing the country just how wrong those men were.

Women were to be seen and not heard many times in American history, both socially and educationally (usually the later because of the former). In the early seventeenth century, the sole purposes for higher education was to prepare boys for work in the clergy or as politicians - occupations that were utterly off-limits to women.[1] That is not to say that there were no women who wanted higher education for themselves and their daughters. On the contrary, many women wrote and spoke out against the prejudice of "female learning." There were many arguments against women receiving any sort of higher education. But perhaps the most troublesome, especially to women who wanted to be married as well as educated, was the idea that all that book learning made a woman unattractive. This idea of the Virago, or masculinized woman, is as old as ancient Greece. If an woman has ever been complimented by someone saying "you drive like a man," well, they've essentially been told that they must not be a real woman, because women can't drive as well as men. But ancient history is not the only place from which the specter of the virago reared its ugly head. This is exactly the assumption under which the Princeton men were writing their booklet. To refute the booklet's assumptions that "(Bennett College) doesn't' offer much besides woods," and "you can tell a Cliffe a block away," LIFE's photographers and editors gave viewers a plethora of babes to ogle at.[2]

In fact, the visual style of these pictures is nearly identical to that of the visual style of pictures in Playboy magazine of the same era. This is not a shock, considering the impact LIFE magazine had made on the industry, or how few models of imaging women were used in the media. What is surprising is just how similar the style is. The look of the woman in Illustration 10 is a dead match for photos of Kim Novak in Playboy (Ill. 11) Her head is tilted down, eyes looking straight at the camera. In both photos, the women are lit dramatically from one side, emphasizing facial features and evoking Film Noire imagery of "bad girls." In fact, the photograph of Ann Wearin, the Bennett College student, is even more dramatically lit than that of Playboy's photo of Kim Novak. The stark, heavy, black and white lighting transforms the sultry atmosphere seen in the Novak photo and turns it into an image seething with sexual "danger." The point of this "come hither" look, and dramatic lighting makes Wearin even more sexually alluring, even more available than the super siren Kim Novak in Playboy. That kind of availability is difficult to attain, since the whole point of the Playboy publication is to make women available to the male gaze.

In Illustration 12, a well-dressed young woman sits at a dinner table and looks directly at the camera. The lighting is dim and she smiles at the viewer, hand resting model-like on her chin. The flame of the candle, which appears to be atop a table set for two, hovers just below her

Illustration 10: Bennett student Ann Wearin

Illustration 11: Kim Novak in Playboy (detail)

Illustration 12: Susan Hill

Illustration 13: November 1965 Playmate

face, emphasizing it. In a Playboy photo from November, 1965, the Playmate of the month sits across from the viewer, also at a candle-lit table (Ill. 13). The position of the candle is nearly identical in each photo. But in the Playboy photo, the Playmate looks away from the viewer, conversing with a man. Other men also appear in the periphery of the photo. In contrast, Susan Hill, pictured in the LIFE photo, sits at the table alone and focuses her attention on the viewer. The focus of the LIFE photograph is tighter than that of the Playmate, giving the photo of Hill a more intimate feel. Once more, the photographer has created a picture that makes the college student more immediately available to the viewer than a Playboy photograph. Though this availability is of a less sexual nature than in Illustrations 10 and 11, Hill is susceptible to the male gaze and it appears to the viewer that she is there for him alone, unlike the playmate in Illustration 13.

Not all of the photos in LIFE or in Playboy were meant to depict sexual availability. January 1965's playmate of the month is pictured going about her daily routine, walking out of a grocery store (Ill. 14). Also engaging in everyday activity is Barnard College junior Susan Wheeler Davenport (Ill. 15). Both women look away from the camera to the right, allowing the viewer to scrutinize them both without having to confront them; the viewer is free to look for as long as he wishes. The fact that both women seem to be unaware of the camera reinforces the desire to gaze at

Illustration 14: Susan Wheeler Davenport

Illustration 15: January 1965 Playmate

them indefinitely. By photographing the women performing mundane actions, the photographer also allows the viewer to indulge in the voyeuristic fantasy of intimacy. The viewer feels close to both women, and is encouraged even further to look at them.

The pictures from both magazines use the camera to its best advantage, making the women attractive and glamorous. The visual vocabulary is the same: the college women and the playboy women are photographed in the same way. The tilt of the head, the smile, the LIFE-like candid shots of shopping or riding a bike or playing baseball is all done in the same fashion. As Rickie Solinger points out in her essay, "The Smutty Side of LIFE,"

> But in 1953, fresh-faced, sixteen-year-old LIFE and newborn but jaded *Playboy* shared the same block in a kind of national neighborhood - the marketplace. In the context of the market, the magazines shared an understanding of the financially remunerative potential of babes, and of their power as symbols of sex difference and resistance to the allegedly masculinized modern woman."[3]

As Solinger's points out, LIFE is presented college women not as the viragos of the Princeton booklet, but as sexy and desirable as any Playboy playmate.

Within the context of LIFE's desired goal, this portrayal of college women becomes problematic. In its attempts to refute the assertions of "Where the Girls Are," LIFE's photographers and editors end up answering the problem of the virago on Princeton's terms, not on the women's terms. Much of the article gives these college women a voice, allowing them to shoot back the kind of criticism laid on them so heavily by the booklet. But by presenting these women not only as babes, but often as desirable and more available than Playboy Playmates, LIFE's photographs insinuated that what the Princeton undergraduates said in "Where the Girls Are" is true, at least in part. In fact, the large caption on the second and third pages of the article reads: "The first lesson: you just can't generalize about them - at least not today." This implies that what the Princeton undergraduate's book says was true at some point in time. Deeper reading into the text of the article reveals that the editors of LIFE really believed that women at Radcliffe could unequivocally be categorized by,

> ...the obsolete Radcliffe stereotype of a frumpy bluestocking with no make-up. Once it was possible to categorize the girls - when they still dutifully molded themselves in the images ordained by the founders of their colleges.[4]

Rather than making the stereotypes about college women seem unimportant and silly, LIFE's photographers and editors give them weight, and in so doing, somewhat subvert their own intent.

In all of the pictures in "How the Girls Really Are," there are no pictures of men. There are powerful pictures of female solidarity, however. In printing "How the Girls Are," LIFE gave young women attending these colleges a national outlet for protesting their treatment by the Princeton men. Just two years before, Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, had given voice to "The Problem that Has No Name," the one that compelled women in the post-war era,

> ...to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights - the independence and opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for.[5]

Friedan's book began a trend among many women that culminated in the movement for women's rights during the 1960s, and it was a contributing factor to the women's movement as it manifested on campus. But it was not the only catalyst. College women involved with organizations like the Students for a Democratic Society and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee found that, while these organizations

stressed equality for all people, what they practiced was equality among men. As Mary King wrote of the SNCC in 1964,

> Maybe the only thing that can come out of this paper is discussion -amidst the laughter - but still discussion. (Those who laugh the hardest are often those who need the crutch of male supremacy the most.)... And maybe some time in the future the whole of the women in this movement will become so alert as to force the rest of the movement to stop discrimination and start the slow process of changing values and ideas so that all of us gradually come to understand that this is no more a man's world than it is a white world.[6]

The picture on the first page of "How the Girls Really Are" shows a group of women all leaning over the balcony or porch rail of a campus building (Ill. 16). The women are all compressed together in the picture, but their smiles, laughing and relaxed posture suggest not only camaraderie, but a powerful *togetherness.* In a similar photo, a group of women talk in a dorm room (Ill. 17). They sit on the floor or on the bed, talking and laughing easily. The close-up view of the camera and the postures of the women, which contrast sharply with the posed nature of most LIFE photographs of women, indicate a high level of intimacy. The accompanying text implies that the women are sitting around, discussing the contents of Princeton's booklet with scorn and amusement, reinforcing their solidarity in the face of the book's ridiculous statements.

Illustration 16

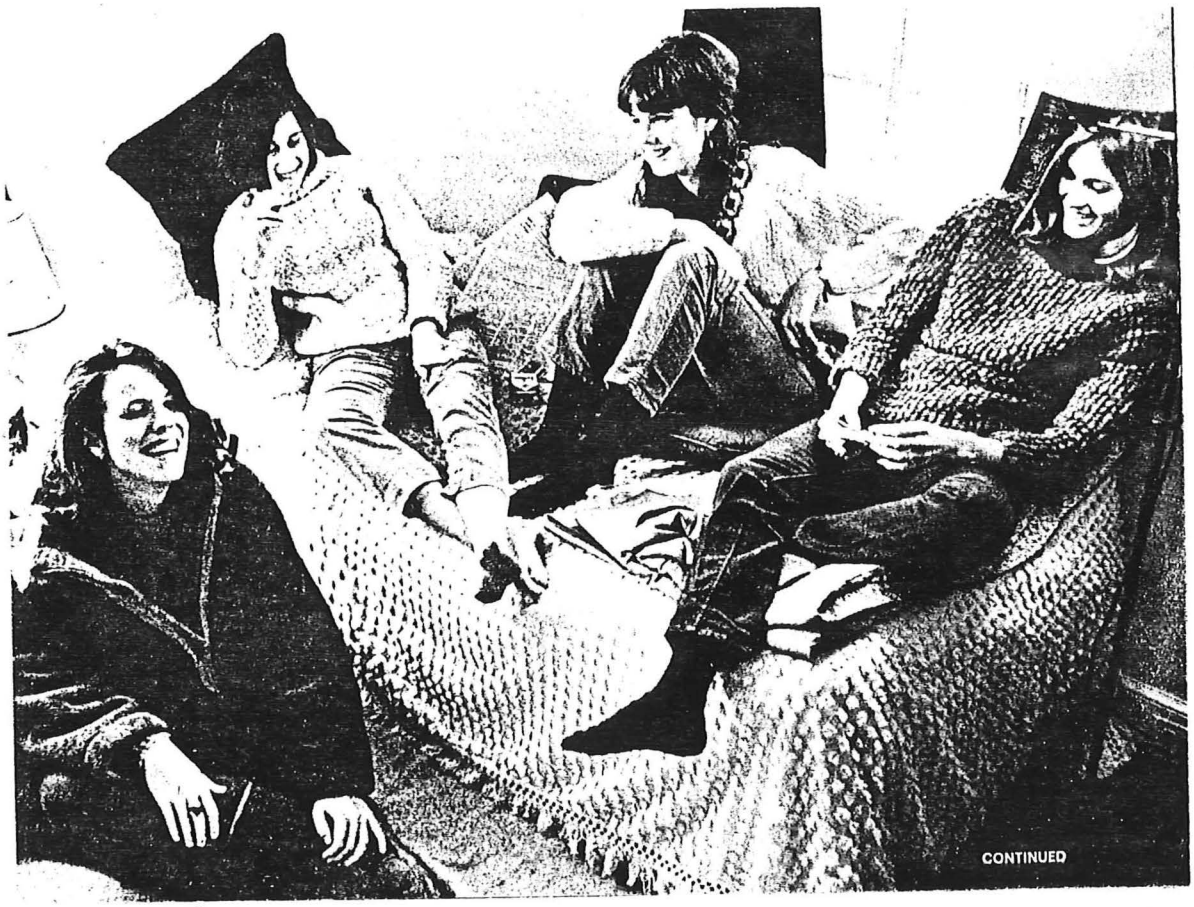

Illustration 17

In another illustration (Ill. 18), two women stand in a brightly lit hallway. They are relaxed, and the blonde woman in the foreground leans against the wall, wearing a medium-dark sweater and light pants. The woman in the background is brunette and wears darker colors, broken up only by the bold horizontal pattern of stripes on the blouse beneath her sweater. She wears an intense gaze, staring directly at the camera. Combined with her dark clothing, which stands out against the white background, pushing her form toward the viewer, her gaze represents a strong presence, and she "backs up" the woman standing in front of her, both visually and emotionally. These are powerfully feminist images of women. The caption next to the photograph quotes one of the women as stating that she has a hard time reconciling, "striving so hard for an education and then washing diapers."[7] This is a strong feminist statement. In the caption accompanying another photograph, one woman exclaims that she plans to reconcile marriage and career by continuing to pursue a career in architecture, which she can "keep up" after she's married.

However, in between these two photographs is a bold-faced caption that reads, "In short, beauty is truth, truth beauty." This pulls the viewer's focus back to the women's physical attractiveness, and away from issues of careerism and feminism. The feminist power of the images is also subverted by the absence of any men. The "sisterhood" is taken out of

Illustration 18

the context of actual campus life, and the result is that the images seem to be of separatism, reinforcing separate spheres on campus for men and women.

The spectre of separate spheres may serve a larger purpose here. After all, college women who do not live at home are away from parental influence for the first time in their lives. This brings to mind another 1965 article in the January 8 edition of LIFE. The article featured a nice Southern Baptist boy going to college at Yale. The article's title announced that Tim was "A Set Up for Cultural Shock," and explained how difficult it was for this young man to adjust to life at Yale because of his "clean living baptist ways" (sic). This was an article about a nice young boy who was distressed at all of the drinking and carousing that went on in the Ivy League social circles. It can also be said to be an attempt on the part of LIFE's photographers, writers and editors to present the domestic side of college men - safe, wholesome, hardworking. It is a glimpse of college men that gives a new twist on the magazine's usual college cut-up stories without sacrificing the genre. It is not remarkable that LIFE ran this story. What is remarkable is how it relates to this study. There are no parallel articles featuring women in LIFE magazine during the 1960s, nor, would I venture to say, during the entire run of the magazine. The absence of a story about the "cultural shock" women may have experienced when they got to college, much less young women of the Baptist faith, suggests

something: the assumption that life for most college women would be little different than the one that they left at home. No one wanted to think about college women carousing. By carousing I do not mean general high jinx or participation in student protests. No, when I say carousing, I mean sexual adventures. But the ideal of the attractive American college woman clashed with the ideology of the chaste American college woman. It was assumed, after all, that college men were "sowing wild oats" during their college years, but if they weren't doing it with college women, who were they doing it with? The public's unspoken fears about premarital sex among coeds were worsened by the advent of birth control pills in 1960. Now young women could have sex without the fear of pregnancy. Obviously, college women were in on the action, but folks just didn't want to admit it.

Playboy magazine serves as an example. During the year 1960, 11.9% of women aged 18-24 were in college. But in Playboy magazine, only 1.8% of the women featured were college women.[8] In fact, in 1960, there was only one college woman featured in Playboy's pictorials, and she was a clerk at a law firm taking law classes at night. She was not a full-time "college girl." By 1969, 20.9% of women in this age group were attending college, but only 12.9% of women featured in Playboy were college women. But if one eliminates the European women from the pool, only 9.68% of

Playboy's women were American "college girls."[9] Playboy magazine tried to distance itself from more family oriented magazines like LIFE in its first issue,

> We want to make clear from the start we aren't a 'family magazine.' 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...[10]

As stated above, Playboy and LIFE were not very different visually, despite what its editors might say. Judging from the above statistics, it wasn't all that different in its outlook of the American college girl, either. The big difference between LIFE's pictures and Playboy's pictures were a few bare breasts and butt-cheeks. This might not be significant if Playboy were a magazine targeted solely at professional men. In fact, it was not. A large part of Playboy's intended audience was college men, and they had a College Bureau to take care of this audience. In fact, many colleges had campus representatives for the magazine, presumably to recruit bunnies, but also to conduct college surveys, provide correspondence with college students and local advertisers, and recruit subscriptions.[11] Bearing this in mind, Playboy's 'coverage' of college women is woefully underrepresentative. The theme of this under representation is clear; there are women you look at, and there are women you marry. American

college women are the latter, and 'professional' women (pun intended) are the former. And sometimes the twain will meet. But not very often.

The purpose of "How the Girls Really Are" was to give voice to women of the colleges reviewed in Princeton's heinously sexist booklet, "How the Girls Are." LIFE's main concern was to dispel the myth of the virago perpetrated by the Princeton "study." In it, drop-dead babes talked about Ivy League men with much disdain. These pictures, nearly identical to those published in Playboy, rather than emphasize the women as attractive intellectual equals, puts them in the spotlight of the male gaze. But the photos of the women are also powerfully feminist, showing a strong sense of camaraderie among them, and one woman even mentions her reluctance to try to reconcile her hard-earned degree with washing diapers. At the same time, none of the women are in the company of men, and this removes them from the reality of campus life. Thus, the ideology of separate spheres is again emphasized, and images of powerful women separated from the male realm hearkens back to the cult of domesticity.

The Cult of Domesticity developed during the nineteenth century, and it furthered the advancement of women's education. This ideology was similar to that of Republican Motherhood, but had at its center the

notion that women were morally superior to men, and thus should be educated in order to make the world a better place,

> If half the effort and expense had been directed to enlighten and improve the minds of females which have been lavished on the other sex, we should now have a very different state of society....So sure and apparent is this maternal influence , that it has passed into an axiom of philosophy....and yet strange to say, the inference which ought to follow, namely, that in attempting to improve society, the first, most careful and continued efforts should be to raise the standard of female education...has never yet been acted upon...[12]

No one at this time argued that women should have careers, but that working as teachers or in charitable organizations was, in fact, a kind of duty on the part of women in order to improve the world. A woman's place was nowhere but the home, but "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

In the 1960s, it was fear of communism and the need to spur capitalist enterprise that opened doors for women in education. This is borne out by the growing number of women entering the work force. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in 1960 some 22,516,000 women were in the labor force, meaning that 34.8% of American women were working. In 1965, 36.7% of American women were working. While the difference represents only 1.9% more women working, the numbers rise steadily

during the entire decade. As more and more colleges began to admit women, careerism became a more viable option for women, and the public began to take careers for women seriously. This did not mean they were comfortable with the notion, however.

The social niche of college women became an even more complex problem for the American psyche. The fear of communism and the need for increased consumerism and technological advancement required increasing numbers of women to attend college. But their attendance thrust them into the traditional realm of the male, making it seem as though the two sexes were now competing. Historically, society has frowned upon this sort of thing, and painted women who try to compete with men as unfeminine. The image of woman painted by "How the Girls Really Are," implied that they be smart, pretty, non-threatening, liberated, chaste and available for men's desire. What this really means is that the feminist movement was making headway, and Americans were becoming confused about women's roles, and even more confused about how they could apply those roles to college women.

Endnotes

1. Woody, 146-7.

2. "How the Girls Really Are," LIFE, 59:25 (17 December 1965): 66A-71.

3. Rickie Solinger, "The Smutty Side of LIFE: Picturing Babes as Icons of Gender Difference in the Early 1950's," p. 8, Conference paper, Looking at LIFE Magazine, University of Colorado, Boulder, September, 1995.

4. "How the Girls Really Are," 66B.

5. Betty Friedan, "The Problem that Has No Name," chap. in*The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 11.

6. Mary King, "Position of Women in the SNCC, 1964," in *Freedom Song* (New York: William Morrow & Co., date not given) quoted in Norton, *Major Problems*, 395.

7. "How the Girls Really Are," 70.

8. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "School Enrollment by Level of School in Which Enrolled, by Age and Sex: 1950, 1955 and 1960,"*Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 82nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 107. Playboy statistics are from my own study of Playboy from the years 1960, 1965 and 1969. Statistics include only women enrolled full or part-time in college: they exclude graduates and drop-outs.

9. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census,"School Enrollment, by Sex and by Level: 1950-1985,"*Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 91st ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 107. Eliminating European women from the statistic makes sense when considering the relatively 'loose' reputation they have had in popular opinion.

10. Hugh Heffner, "The Playboy Philosophy" Playboy (January 1963): 41. Quoted in Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor, 1983), 43. Also see Solinger, 7.

11. "Comely Colleague," Playboy, 12:8 (August 1965): 82. In fact, the Playmate of the Month for this issue was the Assistant Manager of Playboy's College Bureau.

12. ----, "Maternal Instruction", 1845, quoted in Mary Beth Norton, *Major Problems in American Women's History*, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1989), 116.

Chapter 4: 1969 Turns Ladies into Tigers

"Lady into Tiger," printed in 1969, established the success of the feminist movement with the acceptance of women into Princeton University. Immediately, the problem of the virago crops up, not only because women had broken into a bastion of male academe, but also because feminists were painted by the media as hairy-legged, man-hating, bra-burning lesbians. LIFE, continuing the tradition of defending the "honor" of college women as smart AND beautiful, plasters the article with babes. But spectres of the issues of separate spheres and uncertain sexual status crop up in 1969 as well.

In the first illustration, a young woman walks on campus wearing a button that says "Bring Back the Old Princeton" (Ill. 19). She does not look at the camera, but rather directs her attention to the right while she smiles broadly. The nearby caption proclaims that she wears the button with ironic satisfaction, as it was distributed by alumni unhappy with the influx of women. This strong feminist image of a beautiful young woman would seem to kill the ideal of the virago. But the title of the article, "Lady Into Tiger," is placed right next to this photograph in large, bold-face type. It suggests that the demands of women to be admitted to Princeton, and colleges like it, is somehow more forceful than ladylike. As with other photos of women who do not look at the camera, the viewer is invited to scrutinize this young woman at his leisure. While he can take pleasure in

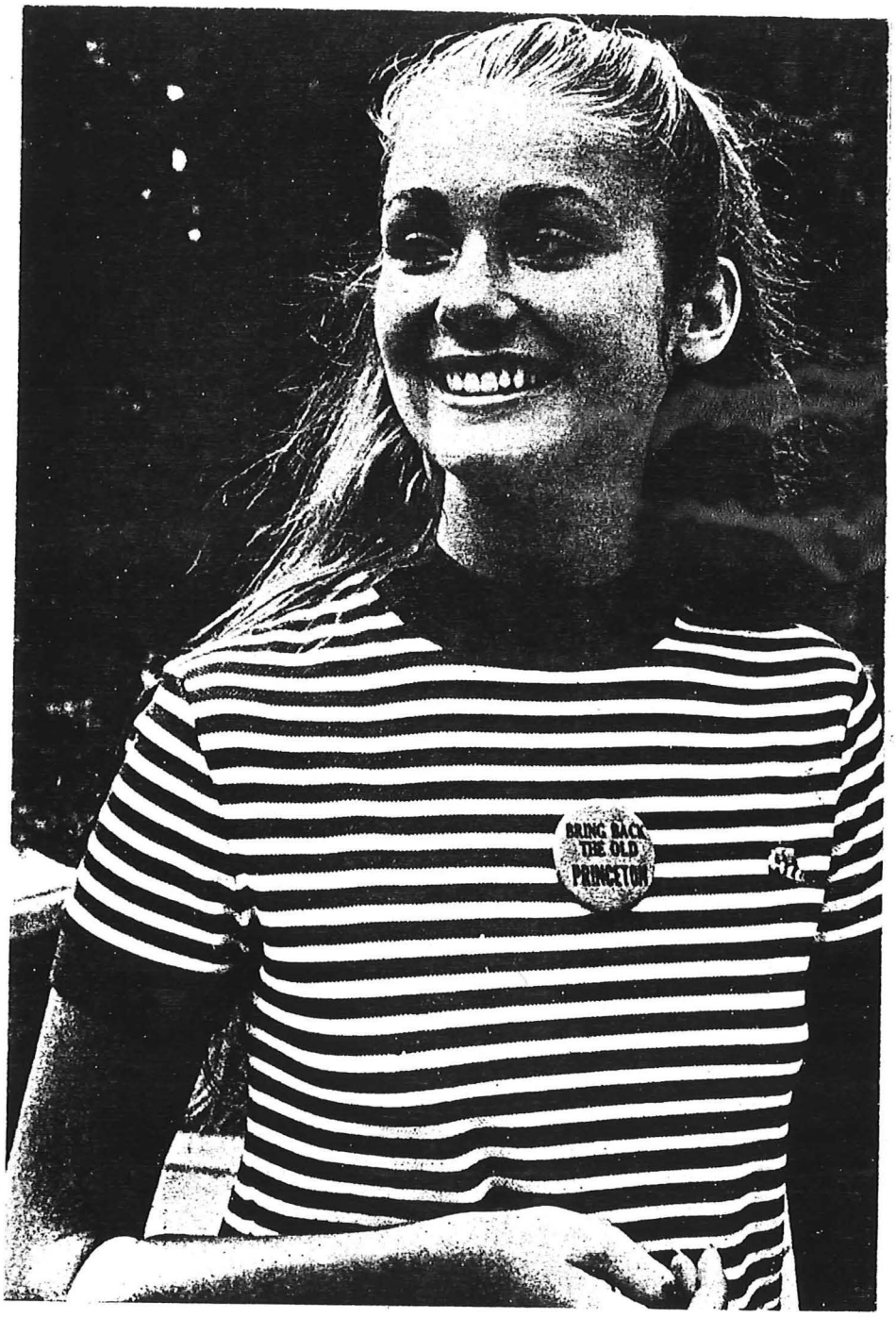

Illustration 19

her appearance, he can contemplate the aggressive behavior suggested by the accompanying text. The result is an image with a mixed message, and the viewer may not know how to react.

In another photo, a young woman emerges from the dorm in which all 101 new female freshmen are housed (Ill. 20). She strides confidently from the building, and her fashionable mini-skirt shows leg to advantage. This young woman does not look at the camera either, and her posture, modish clothing, and seeming ignorance of the camera are reminiscent of Illustrations 14 and 15, in which a college junior and Playboy Playmate go about their daily lives. This woman, too, is subject to the unadulterated male gaze. And like the women in "How the Girls Really Are," there are no men with her in the picture. The caption underneath this photo mentions that fact that not only are all 101 female freshmen housed in Pyne Hall, but so are 70 male students. This kind of contact between the sexes was never mentioned in the two earlier articles. In fact, it was strictly avoided. Though the image reminds viewers of the photos of attractive, chaste women from the 1960 and 1965 articles, the text here intimates that this attractive young woman will have daily contact with men.

Both of these photographs illustrate issues discussed in earlier chapters. They are babes, and they are separated from the male sphere of

Illustration 20

influence by the absence of males. However, the accompanying text of both photos punctures the conventions of previous articles and creates images of women that are less certainly stringent in their application of gender roles. The barriers of sexual segregation seem to come down in this article as well.

This is illustrated by a photograph of a young woman and man who stand facing one another (Ill. 21). Her back is to the camera, while his face and reaction to the woman are visible. She is dressed modishly, with a neat hairdo. She wears hip-huggers, and her midriff is bare below her polka-dot blouse. The bottom border of the photograph ends just below her butt, emphasizing both it and her bare back. The male student positively beams at her. Unlike other photographs of women and men together, she is far from uncomfortable. She stands relaxed, the tilt of her head and unidentifiable gesture suggesting a casual conversation with the male student. She's pretty sexy - far from bookish or motherly. Sexual contact between men and women on campus is well established with this image. This may not be so surprising, in light of events previous to publication of this article.

As stated in previous chapters, there was great concern over the sexual status of college women. Previous images of women, though they may have been inviting, were always carefully constructed to exclude

Illustration 21

men, thus eliminating any implied sexual contact. The lid was blown off of all of this in 1968, when the New York Times ran a story about students in "The Arrangement" - in other words, they were unmarried and living together. Many other news outlets followed suit, and LIFE ran its own story on the matter in May of 1968. Throughout the story, the writer emphasized the unattractiveness of the women taking part in the "arrangement," and the photographs chosen were decidedly unflattering to everyone. The article focuses most of its attention on one couple, Linda LeClaire and Peter Behr. Linda, a student at Barnard, was in the process of being expelled for her living arrangement. She is described as very unfeminine,

> Pilgrim plain, Yankee stubborn, she joyfully struts, swaggers and speaks over the sound of a jackhammer in the street.

Her boyfriend Peter, on the other hand,

> ...is, well, mostly just Peter, earnest, well-meaning and full of plans.[1]

As always, if men were expected to be "sowing wild oats" at this time, then the responsibility of chastity lay with college women. The writer's description is telling. According to him, Linda, obviously morally bankrupt, is unattractive and manly, lacking in any feminine virtues

whatsoever. LIFE's message about college women and sexuality is very well-defined. College women who don't are smart and attractive. College women who do lack every sort of beauty and grace.

But images of women in "Lady Into Tiger" are somewhat sexualized. In the text of the article, the writer describes women arriving on the "gothic campus" and,

> They found they liked it. "All of this is really wild....I mean, there are boys everywhere. We were sitting in our room and then a very male leg suddenly swung through the window."[2]

Women on the Princeton campus represented a new reality, not just for Princeton, but also for Americans. Princeton's new coeducational status was a hallmark of the areas women were breaking into that had previously been denied them. By emphasizing pretty women, subjecting them to the gaze of the camera and intimating sexual contact between coed students, LIFE was putting a different spin on the achievements of the feminist movement. Now that women were on the Princeton campus, they were available to men. This is not only implied by the text suggesting contact between men and women, but also by the aggressive nature of the article's title. Aggressive women, according to popular legend, invite sexual advances. By being so bold as to invade Princeton's campus, these women are "asking for it."

In this article, LIFE's photographers and editors use the Playboy aesthetic to its fullest extent, right down to a nearly naked butt. But the face of the sex siren in Illustration 21 is absent, making her faceless, unidentifiable. As a non-entity, she does not really represent the rest of the college women who grace the pages of the article. In fact, another picture uses the same tactic to mitigate the women's' sexuality as was used in the 1960 article - that of the woman uncomfortably alone with a man.

In this photograph, a young man and woman sit next to one another on a sofa placed on the lawn outside a dormitory (Ill. 22). One can't help but connect this imagery with midnight makeout sessions on a living room sofa. Though the male student's posture is relaxed, and he earnestly discusses some unknown topic with the woman sitting next to him, her unease is a striking contrast. She holds her hands together in front of her body, playing nervously with her hair, and leans away from the male student with a look of uncertainty on her face. In appearance she is bookish with glasses and long straight hair that hangs behind her ears. All in all, she is a 1969 version of Esther Hayes, and the visual message is nearly identical. This image is particularly important, because it represents an attempt to contain the implications of sexual contact between the Princeton men and the new female freshmen.

Illustration 22

America's expectations for college women were multifaceted and often contradictory. The old belief that smart women can't be pretty was still firmly entrenched in some circles, but LIFE and Playboy were tearing down the walls of this presumption left and right. In light of the cold war and presumptions about communist women, it was an imperative that women in America be smart and sexy. Stereotypes about Russian women had a lot to do with trying to portray American women, all American women, as sexually attractive, as Susan Douglas explains:

> The Russians had lots of women engineers, doctors too, and we all knew what they looked like: Broderick Crawford in drag. It was because all their women were dead ringers for Mr. Potato Head that we knew their society was, at its heart, joyless, regimented, and bankrupt. No one was going to let that happen here. But it might if they took over.[3]

Portraying American women as attractive was a patriotic duty, not just a crutch for masculine insecurity. But college women weren't to be too sexy, because they still had to be "good girls." And if you weren't a good girl, you were bound to be ugly. This is a difficult standard to live by, especially in the age of feminism and sexual revolution, when sex becomes much more acceptable among young, unmarried couples.

As of 1965, college women had become babes and stayed that way. But in a way, this de-emphasizes the obvious achievement of Princeton

admission for women, because what is emphasized is the male perspective - hot babes on campus. At the same time, there is an attempt to contain intimations of sexuality, not surprising considering the shock of the "Arrangement" scandal of the previous year. The result is that LIFE, in some sense, clearly acknowledged that women's roles are changing at the same time that Americans were coming to accept those changes. More and more, women were breaking into spheres previously considered off limits. However, the way that America literally looks at women had not changed. And the reluctance to give up old ideas about women's roles, abilities and sexuality is clearly reflected in LIFE's choice of photographs.

Endnotes

1. William A. McWhirter, "'The Arrangement' at College," LIFE 54:22 (31 May 1968): 56-68., 58.

2. "Lady Into Tiger," LIFE, 67:12 (19 September 1969): 105-6.

3. Douglas, 22.

Conclusion: College Women Today

By portraying women in a certain way in photographs, LIFE magazine reflected American values about the place of women in society. In many ways, America's ideology of womanhood fit college women, who were, after all, women, whether they were in college or not. But women in higher education also broke away from traditional ideas about gender roles. Being neither career women nor wives and mothers, college women defied the stereotypes of both categories. LIFE's pictures of college women accurately reflect the ambivalence of Americans toward the changing social roles of women during the 1960s, specifically because they occupied a liminal social space.

Since 1990, LIFE's coverage of college women has been nearly non-existent. Where one might have found two or three stories about college women per year during the 1960s, now there may only be a story once every year, if that often. For the most part, this has much to do with the fact that LIFE is now a monthly, instead of a weekly publication. This necessitates that LIFE concentrate on more monumental stories. But what little coverage there is on college women is telling. The fact that college women are not big news suggests that women participating in higher education is commonplace. The acceptance of women's attendance at universities also indicates that careerism for women is considered routine.

The next logical step is to determine exactly what LIFE's current photographs of college women tell us about the magazine, and America.

In June of 1990, LIFE ran a story called, "How Much Is a Life Worth?," about a college woman who was fighting leukemia. The story takes place outside the sphere of campus life. In photographs, the young woman, Allison Atlas, is alone, or in poses one-on-one with supportive family members (Ill. 23). She is attractive, fitting LIFE's stereotypical babe shot. Underneath this particular photograph, a caption reads,

> After a family dinner, a card game and cookie making, it's well past midnight when Allison, described by her mother as the "glue that keeps this family together," says goodnight to her father.[1]

Since the bulk of the article takes place outside of a college context, the implications of domesticity for this young woman seem obvious. But *within* the context of the article, this is not quite as stridently sexist as it might seem. Since the article focuses on her illness, not her enrollment in college, the author's intent seems to be to create a normalized, homey, supportive atmosphere. Visually this is done by photographing a well-dressed Allison seated (the more powerful position), with her father smiling, standing behind her in the family kitchen. But what is assumed is that cookie making and family go together - a decidedly nostalgic view. There is an element of metonymy in LIFE's story about Atlas. In order to

Illustration 23

make her plight even more tragic, not only are her youth and beauty emphasized, but stereotypical ideas about American families who eat dinner and bake cookies together are used by the photographers and editors to make everything else about her life seem "normal."

In April of 1992 , LIFE's story, "Sandra Gets A Life," focuses on a welfare mother attending Wellesley College. Here, the emphasis is on issues of welfare and Sandra Sullivan's attempt to rise above her social position. Sullivan's otherness is clearly defined when she is photographed next to other Wellesley students, who are far more fashionably dressed and coiffed (Ill. 24). The article itself focuses on Sullivan's progress at Wellesley and her family background. But her poverty and "otherness" are emphasized even further than the article warrants. A recent family photo of Sullivan, her two children and ex-husband is a study in white trash aesthetics (Ill. 25). Sullivan stands overweight in her stocking feet, her ex, is dressed in dirty jeans and a white undershirt that is sorely in need of washing as well. Their children are alternately barefoot and standing in Minnie Mouse slippers. Throughout the entire article, Sullivan's weight is emphasized, and in the article's last paragraph, among her accomplishments are a 3.6 grade average, two years of sobriety, and losing 35 pounds. In order to full realize the American dream, it seems that Sullivan must not only shed her old lifestyle, but also her old body.

Illustration 24

Illustration 25

"Is This the Best High School in America?" was a LIFE story that ran in October of 1994. Concentrating on Stuyvesant High School in New York, the article features photographs of Stuyvesant graduates, Emily White and Arhima Jacobs (Ills. 26 & 27). White's picture places her underwater in a swimming pool, presumably at Cornell where she is now a student. The caption next to her photo tells the viewer that she doesn't' think success and academics are necessarily linked - that happiness is what's important. This, combined with a photo that takes her completely out of an academic context, hearkens back to 1965 photographs of the babes in "How the Girls Really Are." But the context, that of the importance of education, slips White back into the groove of things, and the viewer is left with a story that juxtaposes babes and academics better than any of the 1960 articles in this thesis.

The image of Jacobs is taken similarly out of context, as she jumps enthusiastically for the camera in her (presumably) Brown University uniform in front of the Manhattan skyline. Her cheerleading uniform, energy, and big smile immediately endears the viewer to her. The caption, emphasizing her extracurricular activities and interest in medicine, combine nicely a sense of vitality, attractiveness, and intellect. This is mitigated only slightly by the cheerleading uniform, a stereotypical symbol of bimbodome in America. But here there may be an attempt to fully Americanize Jacobs because of her race. Like the description of Atlas'

Illustration 26

Illustration 27

home life, putting Jacobs into the most American of all girls' outfits makes her less alien. In the end, Jacobs becomes the ultimate metonymous figure. "Is This the Best High School" is not about college women, but about America's low achievements in public education. African-Americans, one of the most disadvantaged races in this country when it comes to education, signify the failure of the public school system. By not only stressing Jacobs' academic achievements, but also her "typical Americanness," LIFE once again emphasizes the ideal of the American dream, and embodies it in Arhima Jacobs.

Two common threads unite all three articles, the lesser of which is female attractiveness. Comparatively speaking, it is a trait much more understated than it was in the 1960 articles of this study. But by emphasizing Sandra Sullivan's weight, LIFE makes it clear that the babe shot is still paramount in thought and publication.

The more important thread is that of metonymy in all three articles. These stories, though they feature college women, are not about college women. Rather, they are, respectively, stories about fatal illnesses, welfare, and the public education system. By using college women as signifiers of larger issues, LIFE indicates that higher education and career tracks for women are conventional enough not to warrant notice. The question of the virago seems to be wiped out.

Separate spheres is less definitely eliminated, since Sandra Sullivan is the sole caretaker and breadwinner of her children. Also, Allison Atlas is the only woman of the four who is pictured with a male college student, but he is safely faceless. However, the stress on academic achievement in the 1994 and 1992 articles indicates that women belong at college in the minds of Americans just as much as men do. In fact, the attraction to college is no longer a matter of the slumber party aesthetic or the hunt for the MRS. degree, it is about getting ahead in the job market. Academic achievement was never stressed in any of the three 1960s articles.

In turning college women into signifiers of other issues, LIFE manages to avoid the issue of the sexuality of college women. Since babedome is not as obvious an issue in these articles, it is easy to assume that it has become a non-issue, especially in light of the more liberal attitudes in the 1990s of "The Arrangement" so scandalous in 1968. But in the age of AIDS, it is possible that the absence of this issue from images of college women is more important. Whereas in the 1960s, LIFE's editors and photographers took pains to separate men and women so as not to intimate sexual contact, the implications were there in the photographs of Esther Hayes and the whole "How the Girls Really Are" article. Titillation and speculation could seep in. In the 1990s articles, the issue is completely invisible. It can be said that this is due to enlightened attitudes toward

women, and that "the gaze" is not as overtly acceptable as it once was. This is true in many ways. But the emphasis on the babe shot, subtle in the 1994 and 1990 articles, pronounced in the 1992 article, clearly lets the viewer know that looking is still acceptable on some level. The advent of AIDS has made sexual contact not just dangerous, but downright life threatening. By eliminating the issue of sexual contact on campus, LIFE's editors and photographers have curbed thoughts about AIDS among college women and men altogether.

Social change is a glacial process. In comparing images of college women from the 1960s and 1990s, one can see a great deal of progress has been made. Americans have come to readily accept the idea (if not the reality) of women and careerism. But babes are still important, and in this respect, things are the same. Subjecting women to the male gaze, making them embodiments of sex and sexual desire, is still a full-time part of the American psyche. In this way, women still continue to be the "other." to expect the overthrow of thousands of years of cultural conditioning in 30 years is unrealistic. Obvious progress has been made by women, as LIFE's photographs show. These photographs also tell us that much more progress needs to be made.

Endnotes

1. Susan Sheehan, "How Much Is A Life Worth?," LIFE 13:8 (June 1990): 110.