

P R I O R I T Y M A L E // H I S T O R Y



Helmut Newton

Take a letter, Mr Jones: Is there anyone more qualified than Dian Hanson to compile the definitive history of (pant pant) men's (puff puff) magazines?

SEX·APPEAL



Dian Hanson has pawed over 80 years of men's magazines to deliver the ultimate tribute, writes *Melissa Pearce*.

You'd expect at least a smattering of salaciousness when talking to a pornographer who has worked in men's magazines for 25 years. But Dian Hanson, sexy books editor at Taschen Books, former editor of *Leg Show* (the world's most successful fetish magazine) and self-described "erotic anthropologist" is a marvellously cerebral, naughty girlfriend. As she traces the journey of her most ambitious project – a six-volume history of men's magazines from 1900 to 1980 – she is more likely to repeatedly intone "absolutely" in

agreement, or attribute her "completist" research to her "Pavlovian" training. But when she slips in an unmistakably sexual analogy, you feel as though you've brushed against an electric wire.

Hanson knew the project was a wonderful idea when her publisher, Benedikt Taschen, suggested it, but assembling the research material was another matter.

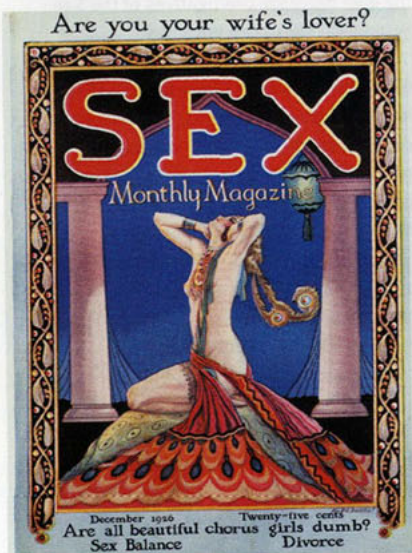
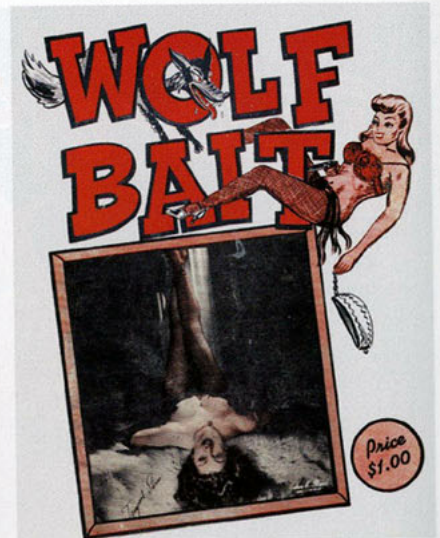
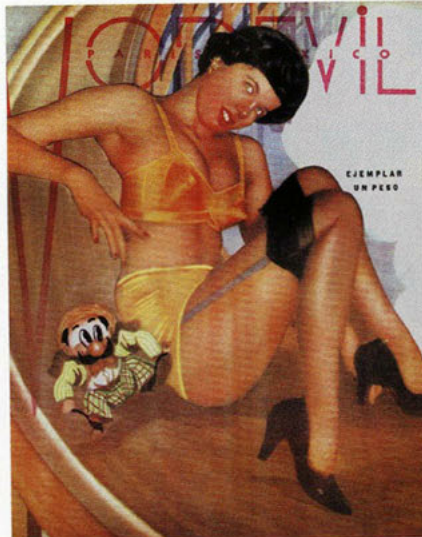
"In earlier times men's magazines were kept under the counter or hidden in a man's house, back behind the furnace," Hanson says. "So it's not as if there are big public archives to draw on."

EBay was the launch point and Hanson put in 12-hour shifts at the peak of her online bidding addiction, which led to her buying 1,500 magazines: "The first month was terrifying. After that it was the world's happiest spending spree."

Hanson bought her first pornographic publication at 18 and recalls reading her father's secret magazines with her brother as a child. She developed a fascination for drawing women's breasts when she was six.

As an adult, she is intrigued by the social and historical perspectives of magazines and meticulously records their ownership lineage and mutations in content. It's almost as if she has an advanced psychology degree in the perverse along with her polished business acumen.

Hanson has found that while there are international quirks of taste (such as the Japanese abhorrence of pubic hair and their treatment of bondage magazines as prized cultural artefacts), in most countries men's



Oh, saucy!: The 20th century was a tough one, and it's hard to say what may have transpired if magazines such as (clockwise from top left) *Burlesk* (1942, US), *Vodevil* (1954, Mexico), *Wolf Bait* (1952, US), *Glance* (1959, US), *Jem* (1959, US), *Sex* (1926, US) and *Duke* (1957, US) had not existed to inspire men and offer them moral support. Would the Nazis have won? Probably.



publishing fluctuated alongside political and economic upheavals. South American material, for example, was particularly hard to find as there was such political turmoil in the continent across the 20th century.

The first sexual revolution in the West occurred in the 1920s and a proliferation of daring European titles followed. However, it was dampened by a period of censorship in the following decade, although the Depression encouraged the need for sexual material.

"Economic depression has always been really, really good for producers of sexual material. The Depression of the 1930s was a time of lawlessness, when the normal moral boundaries were smudged because people needed money so desperately," Hanson says.

That is when the Tijuana Bibles (which were actually produced in cities such as Chicago) lampooned the rich and celebrated criminals, and the personal ads were rife with women

wanting to hook up with men with money. "It sort of made whores of everyone."

Hanson explains the 1930s were an artistically rich period for beautifully painted covers after the censors ruled out photographic images of scantily clad women.

Turkey is an unexpected chapter but Hanson obliges with a pragmatic explanation: "[In Turkey] the reason there were these mild magazines – mine are mainly from 1949 to 1954 – was their leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who had come to power in the 1920s. He was instrumental in making Turkey a modern, secular nation once he achieved his military goals. He was very concerned about the arts and subsidised the publishing industry...and, of course, once you create a good, solid publishing industry, someone's going to produce sexual material."

Hanson says her CV has never helped her get boyfriends. "I think men are afraid of me – they're

definitely intimidated – and it's not helped by the fact I'm almost six-foot tall, curvaceous and have long blonde hair. And working for *Leg Show*, they would see me as a dominant character, which wasn't always the case."

Hanson began to collect titles formally once she became the editor of a men's magazine. Unsurprisingly, her collection is shaded by *Leg Show*, with a leaning towards fetish-related material. She likes the artistry of the 1930s titles and has a personal favourite in *Duke* magazine.

Duke lasted six months in 1957 and was a lifestyle magazine that featured the black stars of the day: Sammy Davis Jr, Harry Belafonte, Duke Ellington. It was heavily jazz- and fashion-oriented and was the first magazine devoted entirely to black models. Hanson believes the editor may have been spurred on by the beginnings of the desegregation movement in the US and that cartoons and articles about

P R I O R I T Y M A L E // H I S T O R Y



Ironic: It's interesting that in 1947 French men bought *Paris-Hollywood* to look at American women. Don't you find that strange?

to me asking how they could make their wives understand that the magazines actually help them be faithful to their wives. And yet so many women didn't understand and, yes, men are regularly divorced because of their collections, or the woman destroys the collection.

"Many women don't understand that masturbation is separate from sex in men's minds. I find it rather flattering, to be honest, someone masturbating to my picture...but most women feel demeaned by men masturbating to their photo and outraged if a man masturbates to someone else's photo."

Hanson may not have come across any notable female collectors during her research (apart from herself) but I have to ask her to address the growing appreciation by young women of the pin-up iconography of the old-school. Is this some kind of backlash against the ever hardcore prerogatives of the San Fernando Valley porn epicentre?

"It's funny, my boyfriend [English novelist Geoff Nicholson] and I were looking at some Italian magazines from 1954 and nothing was exposed whatsoever, and I was saying, 'This is how women wish it always was.' Not me – I like porn! But most women would happily pose for free if they felt they looked beautiful.

"Women would like to be portrayed as strong and sexy. They do not want to feel as if they're being degraded or turned into nameless masturbation fodder for men."

And what do men bring to this nostalgia?

"There have always been men who knew their limits but I think a fear of becoming jaded, where nothing will satisfy them, is making some men retreat and find pleasure in milder material. I am not in favour of censorship but I do worry about women [in porn] endangering their health and I encourage

"Stockings and garter belts...drinking and sprawled on the floor...looking at you like she was going to rip you apart"

interracial sex were pretty inflammatory at the time. Its decline might also be due to high production costs and distribution difficulties. The strangest thing was the cover model – always a wooden dummy.

The really good material was out of Hanson's price range and she is indebted to her collectors, who she frames in fond references.

One such man is Walter, from Tasmania, who furnished the Australian chapters in volumes three and four with titles from 1967 to 1972 such as *Man, Man Junior, Man and Adventure, Pad, Casual, Dare, Face and Figure, Gals and Gags, Glamour Photography, Swag and Squire*. Walter had kept his boyhood mementos under his bed in his mother's house. "It was a cleansing experience for

Walter," Hanson says. "He realised he needed to do it and he had to go through a bit of personal psychotherapy to be able to disconnect himself from these magazines."

Not that Hanson thinks there's anything wrong with men's magazines. She points out the idea of collectors being sad, pathetic single guys doesn't ring true with the largely middle-aged or older collectors she met, who were happily married, successful businessmen living comfortably in the suburbs. She links their age to the length of time and money it takes to amass a collection and store it properly.

"Working in men's magazines made me appreciate men more and understand magazines were a way of getting variety in marriage while honouring the vows. Men would write

women to refuse to do acts that hurt them and make them uncomfortable."

Hanson might say she's not the female dominant of *Leg Show*, but I get the feeling she knows how to get what she's after and won't suffer misogynist fools. And if I had to summon her as a pin-up from the golden age of girly mags I'd imagine her as a bad girl from 1959.

She takes my cue and sums up the spike-heeled Venus perfectly: "Black stockings and garter belts; thick eyeliner and red lipstick; drinking and sprawled on the floor, or standing with her hands on her hips, legs spread; looking at you like she was going to rip you apart." †

History of Men's Magazines (*Taschen*, \$85 per volume) is available from January.