

AMERICAN THOUGHT THE REALITY OF THE DAY

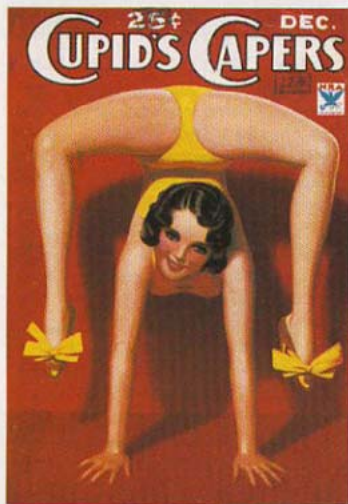
A Glimpse of Stocking

- The History Of American Men's Magazines

WHAT'S the difference between art and porn? In the American girly mags of the Twenties, the models looked straight into the camera, which was seen as a come-on, and the censor insisted they kept their lingerie on. In the 'nude studies' magazines of the same period, they looked demurely to one side and were allowed to bare their breasts for the professed benefit of art students who couldn't afford life models. As Edmund Leja, a glamour photographer who worked for both types of mag put it: 'If they looked away, it became art.'

Such were the tactics and subterfuges of a 100-year war of attrition between publishers and censors for the right of American males to buy an eye-ful on their local newsstand. The battle dates back to the Victorian era. As Dian

From 'spicy' pulp fiction and sexy movie mags, to the rise of the Playboy empire, Douglas McPherson thumbs through 100 years of American erotica (We just hope he doesn't go blind)



Cupid's Capers, 1933



Burlesk, Aug 1942



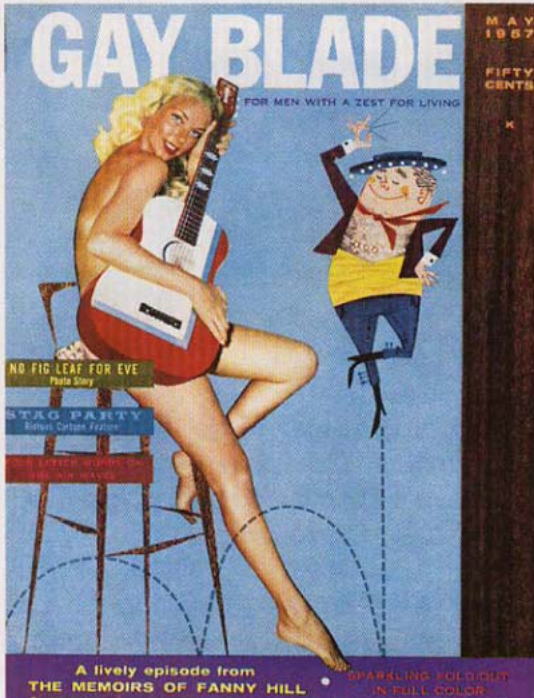
Hanson puts it in the newly-published first tome of her six-volume work, *The History Of Men's Magazines*: 'By 1865 camera and negative technology were sufficiently advanced that they could be mastered by ordinary men - who promptly began taking and distributing photos of naked women.'

Factor in a literacy boom among the post-industrial revolution working classes, and cheap distribution courtesy of an expanding railway network and the seeds were sown for the rise of men's magazines the world over. The

cradle of erotica was France, where the first openly sold girly magazines came in the form of theatre programmes for Parisian cabarets, which included photos of bare breasted dancers, in the 1870s.

As early as 1860, however, euphemistically titled 'Romance' magazines were being sold discreetly in New York. Naturally, their sexually explicit prose found a ready male readership and, equally naturally, they quickly came to the notice of those who were outraged by such 'corrupting' content. In

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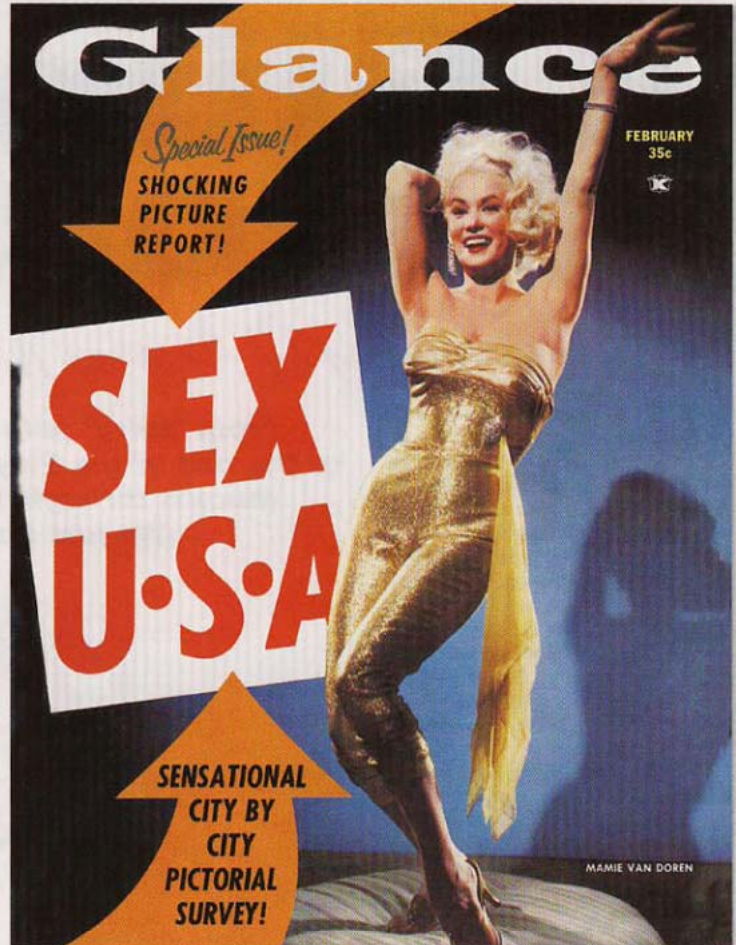


Gay Blade, 1967

1868, America found its first anti-porn protester in Anthony Comstock. So determined was Comstock to stamp out home-grown porn and the flood of imports from Europe, that his campaigning led to the 1873 Comstock Law, which banned the sending of 'obscene, lewd and lascivious' material through the US mail.

An inadvertent side effect of the resulting publicity was a huge new demand for the type of material the majority of US males had previously not known existed - and with typical entrepreneurial flair, American publishers rushed to meet the demand while exploiting every loophole they could to keep themselves out of jail.

At the dawn of the 20th century, *Vanity Fair* was the raciest mag around. Featuring photos of reclining girls in the sort of copious underwear that revealed less than much of today's outerwear, the magazine lagged a long way behind illicit imports of the French 'art' magazine *L'Etude Académique* which was printing uncensored full-frontal nudes as early as 1900. But *Vanity Fair* was still a taboo buster, not least for the Sapphic undertones of



Glance, 1959

Escapade, 1956



invariably tempted their purchasers with a cover painting of a well-endowed woman in a state of undress.

Sometimes the images leaned towards bondage with bound women menaced by guns and knives. Others spurred dominatrix fantasies, portraying the girls as gun-toting villainesses. While the pulps were popular with both sexes, dedicated men's fiction magazines began to appear in the mid-Twenties with titles such as *The Live Wire* and *10 Story Book*. Their covers tempted newsstand browsers with cover lines like 'Girl Photos!' and 'Pictures! Pictures! Pictures!'

It was, of course, the pictures men wanted to see and publishers catered to their desires under a number of guises. With the rise of Hollywood came a flood of sexy film magazines such as *Film Fun*, *Movie Humor* and *Real Screen* which featured glamorous photo spreads of lingerie-clad starlets. Humour magazines, meanwhile, mixed pin-up photos with risqué cartoons depicting voluptuous femme fatales. Aimed at troops, *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang* was perhaps the first modern American men's magazine in 1919. The genre continued into the Twenties with titles such as *Chicks & Chuckles*, *Girls & Gags*, *Wink*, and *Titter*, which were essentially burlesque shows in magazine form.

Common to the movie mags, humour mags, and 'spicy' fiction titles such as *Silk Stocking Stories* and *Stolen Sweets*, were the pin-up girl cover paint-

its 1903 'Bifurcated Girls' issue which dared to show women in trousers at a time when the concept was scandalous.

It was during the Twenties that American men's magazines took off. The widespread introduction of cars, dance music and reliable latex condoms contributed to a mood of freedom. Strip-tease was introduced to the burlesque theatres of America's big cities and the demand grew for raunchier reading matter. The forerunners of dedicated men's magazines were the pulps. Named after the newly invented wood pulp paper that allowed their cheap mass production, the pulps covered many types of fiction, including westerns and detective stories, but



Whisper, 1953

ings by artists such as Peter Driben, George Quintana and Alberto Vargas. Magazines from this golden age of cover art today command huge prices among collectors and the images have been recycled to add retro glamour to countless record covers and advertising campaigns ever since.

Viewed chronologically, the covers show how American ideals of beauty and sexuality evolved over the decades. In the Thirties, the emphasis was on dramatically elongated legs, which were enhanced by stockings and high heels and often shown waving in the air or suggestively astride phallic symbols from broomsticks to seahorses. During World War Two, sophisticated seductresses were replaced by cheery, apple-cheeked virgins. The servicemen overseas needed pin-ups more than ever but didn't want to believe the wives and girlfriends they left behind had anything but chastity on their minds.

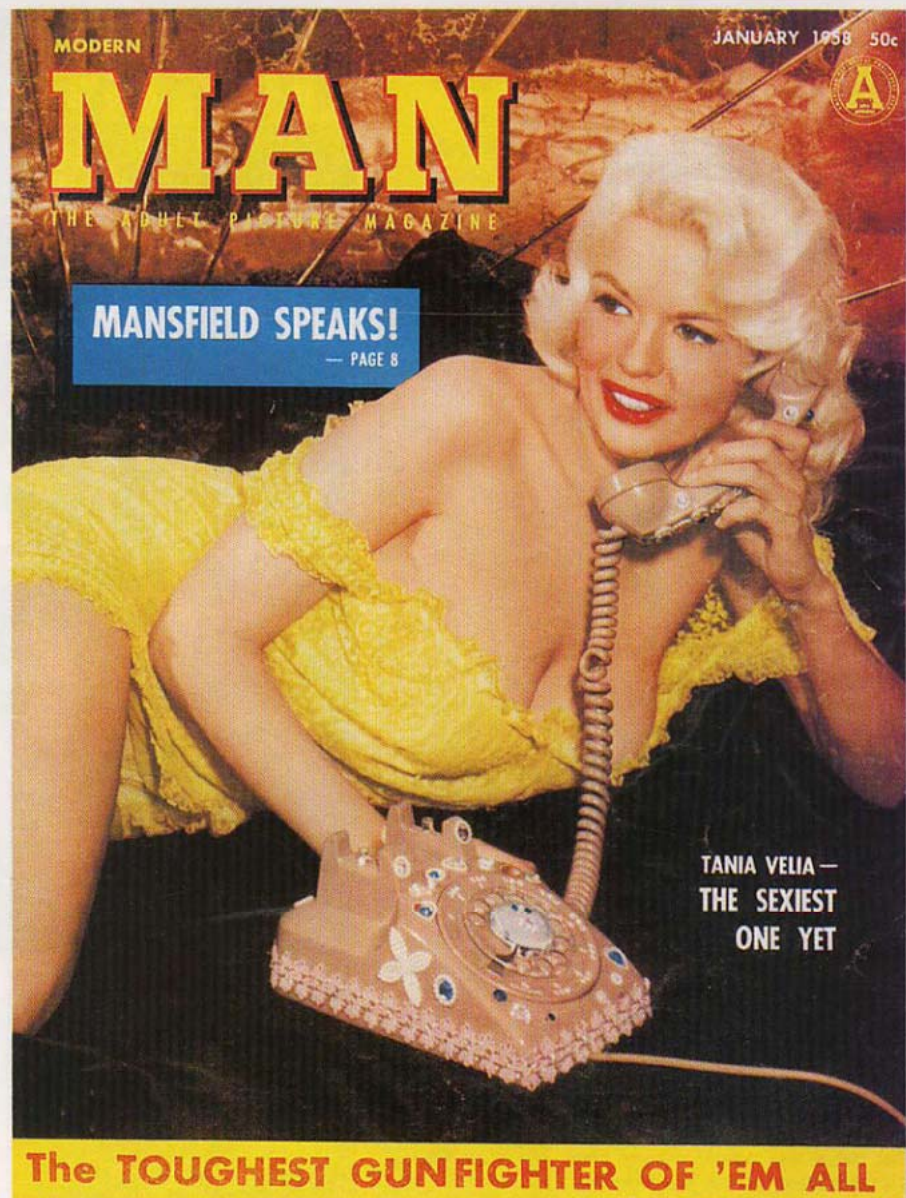
In the post-war Forties and Fifties, figures became curvier and erotic emphasis shifted from legs to breasts that stood out like artillery shells. One function of the glamorous cover paintings was to compensate for the tameness of the heavily censored photographs inside. Nude photos were allowed only in the guise of artists' aids such as *Art Group Quarterly*, *Artists' Notebook* and *French Art* where, despite their arty pretensions, the poses tended to be more erotic than those in the average 'life' class.

A brief rise of interest in eugenics (which was later discredited by the example of the Nazis) also allowed nudity (and it was always female nudity) into 'serious' magazines such as *Dawn* and the art deco classic *Sex*. It was the nudist magazines of the Thirties, however, that would eventually do most to break down the censorship of American men's magazines. The fact that the photos in *The Nudist*, *American Sunbathing* and *Modern Sunbathing* were almost exclusively of attractive women revealed their true agenda, as did the fact that the poses soon became increasingly sensual and 'arty'.

Nevertheless, it was *Sunshine & Health* (formerly *The Nudist*) that became the first American magazine to legally show pubic hair when, in 1958, its publisher Rev. Ilsley 'Uncle Danny' Boone finally won a 25 year campaign for exemption from the obscenity laws on the grounds that nudism had nothing to do with sex.

Throughout the swinging Sixties nudist mags were the only magazines allowed to show the bits even the art magazines had to airbrush out - and their sales went through the roof. Of course, more explicit material was always available under the counter, including European imports and home-grown product printed largely by immigrant pornographers in the ghettos of New York.

Throughout the Thirties, a whole generation of American men got their sex education from so-called Bluesies or Tijuana Bibles - the latter name being



Modern Man, 1958

Mr Cool, 1960

a ruse by the publishers to disguise their true place of origin. Often sold on the side by travelling salesmen, these anatomically explicit two inch by four inch comic strips were subversive and popular for two reasons: they lampooned the most famous and infamous public figures of the day -

and depicted them in every sexual position imaginable. Shortly after the end of World War Two - when gas masks were still an accoutrement of domestic life - an Englishman, John Alexander Scott Coutts moved to New York and launched America's first fetish magazine, *Bizarre*. Operating under the pseudonym John Willie, Coutts worked as artist, photographer, writer, publisher and distributor to produce glossy magazines full of striking images of bondage, whips, masks, boots and high heels.

Constantly on the run from the law, Coutts managed to produce just 26 issues of *Bizarre* between 1946 and 1959, but his groundbreaking work made him one of the most influential figures in the history of sex magazines. His dedication, meanwhile, suggests the breaking of American taboos may have been motivated more by art than money. There were easier ways for a publisher to earn a living than distributing illicit titles from the trunk of a car while keeping a constant eye out for the cops.

AMERICAN HOUSEHOLD THE REALITY CHECK

FIRST ISSUE OF OUR NEW SWINGING FORMAT:
MORE PAGES, MORE EXCITING FEATURES!!!
ROGUE
RABBLE - ROUSING PROTEST ISSUE



Bottom-Dive **B**uttrax
Gospel According to J. Edgar
God-That-Is, **S**winger's Island
101 **P**lays If She Protests
Year of the Great **D**isput
College for Hip Rebels
R&P: Sounds of **T**ribe
Political "Distortions"

Rogue, 1967

By the Fifties, American newsstand magazines had begun featuring topless women in a more openly sexual context. In 1951, *Modern Man* got away with nude photos by including pages of non-sex articles. It was a tactic noted and improved on by Hugh Marston Hefner who in 1953 borrowed \$8000 from his family and friends to launch the most famous of all men's magazines, *Playboy*.

The first issue carried no cover date, because Hefner had no idea when or even if the next one would appear. *Playboy*, however, had two ingredients that would ensure its immediate success. One was the now iconic centrefold of a nude Marilyn Monroe that Hefner had bought cheaply from a local calendar printer. The other was *Playboy's* seductive cultural agenda.

Launched in a gloomy era of the McCarthy anti-communist witch hunts and a general cultural Puritanism, *Playboy* tapped into America's latent progressive instincts in a way that foreshadowed the swinging Sixties by a full decade. While previous men's magazines pandered to a traditional blue collar view of masculinity, *Playboy* patented a new ideal: that of the sophisticated bachelor, with his stylish clothes, car and bachelor pad, where he indulged a hedonistic love of gourmet food, cocktails, jazz, literature and female company.

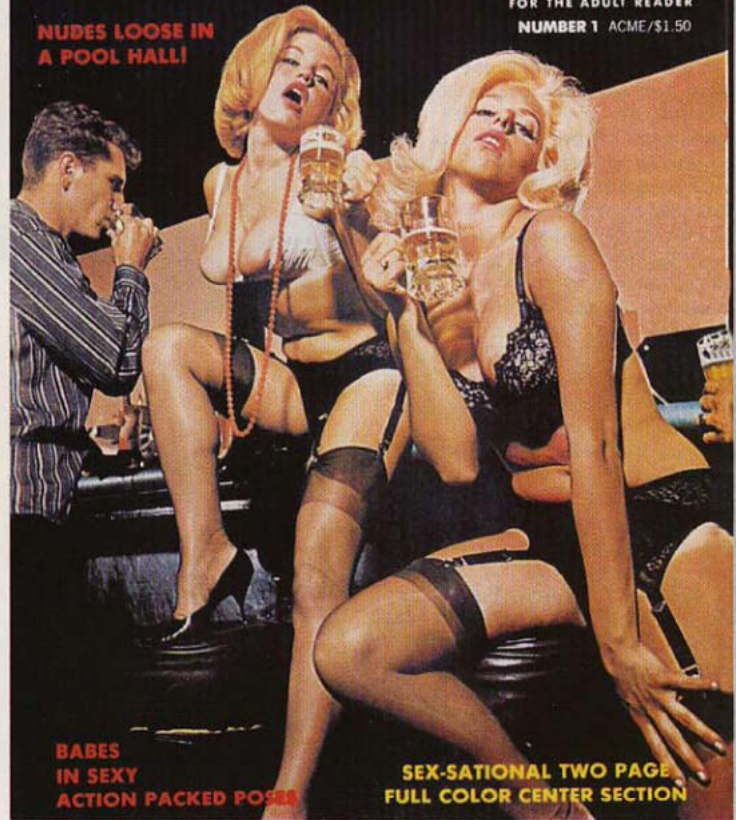
It was a lifestyle American men wanted to buy into. By 1960, when Hefner opened the first *Playboy* club in Chicago, the magazine was selling a million copies a month. By 1971, circulation had risen to seven million and the *Playboy* bunny logo and the 'bunny girl' costume worn by the *Playboy* club hostesses were recognised the world over.

There's an old joke about buying *Playboy* for the articles but, from the beginning, Hefner commissioned

Daring Dolls, 1953

DARING DOLLS

FOR THE ADULT READER
NUMBER 1 ACME/\$1.50

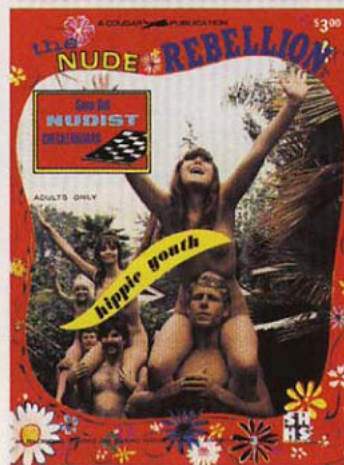


NUDES LOOSE IN
A POOL HALL!

BABES
IN SEXY
ACTION PACKED POSES

SEX-SATIONAL TWO PAGE
FULL COLOR CENTER SECTION

Nude Rebellion, 1967



The first two volumes of Dian Hanson's *History Of Men's Magazines* are published by Taschen, price £29.99. All images courtesy of Taschen



Satana, 1963



America's top writers to contribute heavyweight political and cultural interviews and literary fiction alongside the pin-ups. The trend caught on and throughout the Sixties, *Playboy* imitators such as *Rogue* and *Nugget* published work by serious writers such as John Updike and Graham Greene.

The success and respectability of *Playboy* was instrumental in relaxing the censor's grip on American men's magazines and paved the way for the much raunchier soft porn that would hit America's newsstands in the Seventies. Ironically, for a brand that would be seen in the Seventies and Eighties as the antithesis of feminism, *Playboy* actually helped the cause of female equality by encouraging a new kind of man who was not only unafraid of occasionally cooking for himself, but who actually liked women.

As Hefner stated: 'I was a feminist before there was such a thing as feminism.' As with the art studies and nudist magazines that preceded it, however, *Playboy's* respectability was ultimately just another in a long line of subterfuges that are still being used by the 'lads mags' of today to disguise the real reason men have always bought such magazines. As Dian Hanson knowingly acknowledges at the beginning of her own highly pictorial *History Of Men's Magazines*, 'Not even Anthony Comstock could have mustered the willpower to read this long-winded introduction before enjoying the photos that follow.' 📖