BETWEEN FEMINISM AND FEMININITY:
SHIFTING CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF GIRLHOOD IN THE 1960S

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ABSTRACT

Jolie Sheffer, Advisor

Media and cultural studies of girlhood have shown that we live in a postfeminist era, when the label “feminism” evokes many negative stereotypes against women demanding greater rights and opportunities whereas eye-catching “girl” figures promote and advertise a stronger vision of femininity in the popular culture market. Tracking how “girls” replace “women” and become favored icons of feminism in contemporary culture, this dissertation analyzes the shifts in cultural depictions of girlhood in the 1960s. Examining magazines and newspapers’ coverage of Beatlemania in 1964 and 1965, Twiggy’s successful modeling career from 1966 to 1968, and the eventful Miss America pageants from 1968 to 1970, I find that mass media and popular culture institutions presented a series of new images and themes about girlhood that featured romantic desires for male idols, challenges to prevailing definitions of fashionable femininity, and an outspoken approach to controversial political and social issues. These new themes exemplify that the differences between girlhood and womanhood intensified along with the development of feminist movements in the 1960s, when mass media invested in constructing a new girlhood identity as a way to fend off changing views of womanhood and uphold some elements of traditional femininity. This new girlhood is thus an outcome of the oscillation between the feminist counterculture and traditional gender discourses in the 1960s. The development of the new girlhood in the 1960s can help in understanding the consumption of feminism in American culture today, where the power and freedoms the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s promised are taken away from older, professionally accomplished women and reserved for girlish girls and young women.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am an international student from Taiwan. English is not my first language and not the language that I grew up writing. This means that my committee, besides giving me critical feedback and ideas to facilitate the research of this project, had to help me become a better writer. What I found more alarming than the grammatical issues that non-native writers commonly make, was my initial lack of understanding of Western rhetorical traditions. In particular, I had to develop the ability to formulate my unique argument in an academic conversation. Thanks to the tremendous amount of time and effort each of my dissertation committee had spent guiding me to analyze and think through the subjects, I was able to cultivate my voice as a researcher. Without this my dissertation would not have been accomplished. My advisor, Dr. Jolie Sheffer, gave me specific and insightful feedback, which greatly helped with the overall development and organization of this project. Dr. Timothy Messer-Kruse gave me comments that inspired me to morph this dissertation into a cultural history project, a field I have always been interested in. Early on, when I was not sure about the larger framework of this project, Dr. Radhika Gajjala listed specific literature and encouraged me to start from gender and media theories. I also want to thank Dr. Andrew Hershberger, for being my graduate representative and for giving me astute feedback from the perspective of an arts scholar. I was truly blessed to have a committee so generous and so pleasant to work with.

An archival study like this would not be possible without valuable input provided by experienced librarians and archivists. I am grateful to a group of librarians and archivists at BGSU’s Jerome Libraries, who helped me find historical documents that this dissertation heavily references. Special thanks to Susannah Cleveland of the Music Library and Bill Schurk Sound Archives, and Stefanie Hunker of the Browne Popular Culture Library. Susannah introduced the music library’s collection of old teen magazines, and Stefanie showed me the popular culture
library’s exclusive collection of beauty pageant documents. It was a privilege to pursue my doctoral study at BGSU, which is home to one of the world’s largest collections of American popular culture materials.

I have been surrounded by a highly supportive community throughout my doctoral study at BGSU. I am thankful to all the professors I worked with and friends I made at graduate school, including my same-year cohorts and fellow graduate students I attended classes with. I was surprised by how much I learned from them and how often I adopted their words as my own, ranging from formal in-class discussions to random jokes they made. I want to thank Jason Clevenger, who gave me an opportunity to work as a writing consultant at the Learning Commons at BGSU, a wonderful learning experience that, through working with other writers, helped me stay focused on writing.

I was lucky to have my family on my side to go through this journey. I thank my parents for always believing in me and supporting my decisions. Finally, to my husband Nathen, who insisted that I had to take a break once for a while and brightened my days with a sense of humor and good food. Thank you.
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INTRODUCTION

Renowned dance critic and writer Deirdre Kelly was born in the late 1950s. Like a large number of American girls born during the post-war years and growing up in the 1960s, she played with Barbie dolls and recycled love stories between Barbie and her male suitors with friends. At first, this group of Barbie-loving girls was simply obsessed with the doll’s beauty and fashion style. Yet as they grew older, the girls started to twist Barbie’s look and treat the doll irreverently. Some gave their Barbies Mohawks, not caring that doing so would ruin the beauty icon’s appeal. Deirdre found herself “concerned about the effects of Barbie’s outlandish measurements on girls’ unhappiness with their bodies.”\(^1\) In hindsight, Kelly, who had not participated directly in the second wave of the women’s movement, believed this experience of growing up with Barbie inspired her to become a feminist writer. Deirdre is now one of the authors of ‘Girl Power’: Girls Reinventing Girlhood, an interview-based book that she co-authored with Dawn Currie and Shauna Pomerantz. With the title referencing to the Girl Power movement of the 1990s, their book documents how girls find feminist-inspired messages within commercialized popular culture.\(^2\)

This dissertation dwells on the same type of story that Deirdre and the other two authors unfold in ‘Girl Power’—a story about how mainstream media and popular culture functioned as a conduit of feminist messages for girls. Popular culture signifies girlhood in a complex manner. It normalizes a certain kind of “girlhood” and subverts it, serving as a guardian of traditional gender roles and a marketer of feminist thinking at the same time. Using examples from popular

\(^1\) ‘Girl Power’: Girls Reinventing Girlhood, p. xx.
\(^2\) “Girl Power” refers to a wide array of popular culture phenomena marketing the idea of empowerment for girls and young women. For example, Riot Grrrls punk music bands and pop music icons, such as Spice Girls, used the term “Girl Power” to promote a more self-expressive mode of girlhood.
culture representations of girlhood in the 1960s, I intend to participate in scholarly conversations about the commercialization of feminism as well as the production of a girlhood identity through mass media representations. Recognizing feminist sensibilities—whether they were overtly or implicitly communicated—in mainstream depictions of girlhood was a key motivation for this project.

A great number of cultural studies projects have employed mass media texts as a source to understand cultural perceptions toward girlhood and girls’ lived experiences. For example, one of the earliest cultural studies pieces exploring girlhood—Angela McRobbie’s *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991)—argues that popular teen magazines such as *Jackie* played a significant role in teenage girls’ personal lives. Analyzing the form, language, content, and publication of these magazines, McRobbie regards them not as manipulative, profit-seeking mass media tools imposing dominant ideologies on girls but as an exclusively feminine sphere where teenage girls learned about “a double-edged kind of individualism.”

McRobbie also analyzes how teenage girls consumed mainstream rock music, and she argues that the music has been a means of sexual expression for girls. In sum, the empowerment message teen girls could learn from mass culture was less about launching overt resistance against the dominant order than about self-exploration and self-expression. With this argument, McRobbie, a notable feminist scholar based in the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, brings together feminism and cultural studies.

Inspired by McRobbie, a growing number of studies focusing on American girlhood have expanded the link between feminism and popular culture. For instance, Ednie Garrison’s article “U.S. Feminism—Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave” recognizes the role the Riot Grrrl movement played in the formation of the third wave of

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3 Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture*, p. 114.
feminism in the mid-1990s. Joanne Morreale’s article “Xena: Warrior Princess as Feminist Camp” illustrates how the representation of Xena’s character in the popular TV series Xena: Warrior Princess (1995-2001) subverts traditional female stereotypes. Jeffrey Brown’s book Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture discusses key action heroines in comic books and action films as postfeminist figures. Unlike McRobbie, whose work selected texts that were primarily published for teenage girls, scholarship on cultural representations American girlhood has included texts targeting wider readerships. In studies about female celebrities, for example, scholars have routinely looked at print publications and TV shows geared toward a national audience, such as newspapers and music magazines, to discuss the construction of girlhood to the general public. In other words, mass media texts about girlhood ought not to be seen as just a girls-oriented subculture, but as part of widespread interest in youthful femininity in American culture. Therefore, this dissertation adopts McRobbie’s feminist framework and follows the girl studies scholarship that uses a wide array of media texts to map out an empowering image of American girlhood in the 1960s.

My project, however, will make two different contributions to the scholarship. First, I look at mass media texts published in the 1960s to examine the influence of feminism on cultural depictions of girlhood. The relationship between feminism and 1960s girlhood has received much less scholarly attention than the more recent counterparts. The majority of scholarly projects focusing on cultural depictions of girlhood have set their timelines in the 1990s and 2000s, with the Girl Power movement as one of the most researched topics. Although there are specific case studies using cultural phenomena like Barbie, Beatlemania, and Seventeen

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4 These studies of American girlhood define postfeminism as popular culture incorporating feminism and enacting feminist principles, often with young women and teenage girls as the subjects, behind the guise of neoliberalism.
magazine to disclose a vibrant teen girl market in the 1960s, few of them focus on these phenomena as legacies of feminism. Cultural studies work on 1960s girlhood, such as Juliette Peers’ *The Fashion Doll: From Bébé Jumeau to Barbie*, André Millard’s *Beatlemania: Technology, Business, and Teen Culture in Cold War America*, and Kelly Massoni’s *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine*, have analyzed the popularity of the cultural commodities among girls as a breakthrough in the popular culture industry, centering most of the discussions on the marketing and industrial aspects rather than on a new, progressive attitude toward girlhood communicated through media. Unsurprisingly, this is because the creation and popularity of these phenomena occurred either before or during the 1960s, nearly a decade before second-wave feminism became a full-fledged political movement in the 1970s. As a result, researchers usually do not compare those girls-oriented texts published before the late 1960s as feminist.

In my view, that a teen girl culture had flourished several years before women’s rights activists launched large-scale movements does not mean that there was no correlation between the widespread curiosity toward girlhood and feminism. My project aims to show that it is possible to apply a feminist perspective to examine cultural production of girlhood identities that happened before feminism became a large-scale movement. Until the late 1960s, popular texts did not advocate for a feminist movement; they helped foster an environment conducive to feminist thinking. The texts this dissertation selects do not reflect the impact of the feminist movement during the 1960s; they were part of the general culture of the 1960s that saw a growing number of American girls and women pursue a career outside of the home and a broader definition of femininity.
The second contribution of this dissertation is that I bring feminist cultural studies of girlhood back to the discussion of the ideal, normalized femininity. Academic literature applying feminism to examine cultural production of American girlhood often choose “tough” girl figures as the subjects of discussions: Princess Xena, Wonder Woman, Lara Croft, Katniss Everdeen, and Buffy Summers, to name a few. These girls’ abilities to fight, hunt, plant bombs, kill enemies and outperform men in physical and intellectual strength can easily explain why they are lauded as feminist symbols of “girl power.” In many cases, the girls’ beauty and sexuality become effective weapons to lure and subjugate men. In addition, Princess Xena has been recognized as a lesbian heroine, and hence a salient model of subversive femininity. My study, however, does not emphasize girls who pose a challenge to gender stereotypes and heteropatriarchy. Instead, my discussion begins with girls who live under gender norms—those white, middle-class American girls who conformed to cultural prescriptions of ideal femininity and stuck to restrictive, stereotypical feminine identities—and explores the implicit feminist sensibilities of mainstream presentations of this normative girlhood.

The oscillation between feminism and ideal femininity is the focal point in my analysis of 1960’s girlhood. Using archival materials published in the 1960s and placing them in the socio-political context of the counterculture, I aim to highlight that the tension between feminism and traditional femininity arose and convened in popular depictions of girlhood. As part of the response to the growing young population in the 1960s and vibrant youth culture, mainstream media and popular culture invested more capital in the growing teenage girl market. As a result,

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5 Youth culture during the 1960s includes a wide array of political, social, economic, and cultural movements with the baby boomer generation as the main player. Here, I focus on the cultural aspect, arguing that the teen girl culture in the 1960s was part of the larger trend of the popular culture industry making more investment in catering to young consumers.
cultural production of girlhood proliferated and diversified, contributing to a newer and more complicated way to narrate girlhood to the American public.

The overarching argument of this dissertation is the traditional views of girlhood changed throughout the 1960s in parallel with the feminist counterculture movement’s challenge to existing concepts of female sexuality, gender roles, and race. Examining magazines and newspapers’ coverage of Beatlemania in 1964 and 1965, Twiggy’s successful modeling career from 1966 to 1968, and the eventful Miss America pageants from 1968 to 1970, I have found that mass media and popular culture institutions revealed marked transformations in their treatment of sexual liberation, personal independence, and the civil rights struggle. Throughout the 1960s, American popular culture aimed at young women developed a public image of girls that differed markedly from traditional representations. The new image of modern girlhood was a white girl, aged between twelve and twenty, who was developing her sexuality, desiring greater personal freedom and political awareness while managing to reconcile with traditional expectations toward adolescence and femininity. These unconventional messages about girlhood, communicated through teen magazines and other nationally circulated print publications, gradually changed how girls thought about themselves and how popular culture treated girls in America.

On a broader note, this dissertation is about how girlhood gained subjectivity and complexities during the 1960s. It is about how a cultural identity, embedded with taken-for-granted simplicity and gender stereotypes, had suddenly become a battleground where feminist visions and traditional gender expectations collided and converged. As I delve into the meanings and significance of 1960’s girlhood, my analysis will interrogate the archaic understanding of a girl as a simple, innocent, and apolitical subject. Being held up as a symbol of ideal femininity in
American popular culture, girlhood sent out a message that a girl had no power to make any nonconformist choice or statement. I intend to draw attention to how the counterculture changed an identity group that had enchanted the public imagination for a long time yet its image had remained staid. In addition, I consider the importance of girlhood being widely recognized as a separate category from childhood and adulthood in post-war American popular culture. This discussion is tied to how girlhood became a more fitting symbol of ideal femininity than the new womanhood proposed by feminists, a phenomenon prevalent in contemporary culture that cultural studies scholars call postfeminist.

**Research Objectives**

This dissertation proposes and attempts to answer these questions: How do the meanings and images of girlhood change during the 1960s? What types of social forces contributed to those changes? How did the cultural representations of girlhood inform or even absorb those social forces? In what ways did feminism and the popular culture of girlhood interact with each other? What aspects of feminist ideas were accepted, modified, or rejected by mass media in their construction of girlhood? And finally, how did the shifting images and meanings of girlhood change the ways femininity was presented and understood in contemporary culture?

I believe a historical review of cultural depictions of 1960s girlhood is significant because the subject explains what forms of femininity are accepted or rejected by the American public and why. To clarify, femininity is a broad concept, encompassing womanhood and girlhood across different class, race, and gender backgrounds. However, there are fundamental differences between popular impressions of womanhood and girlhood. Women challenge sexism; girls find ways to survive under the patriarchal system and enjoy the status quo. Women are
revolutionary; girls are cooperative. To put it in a political spectrum, women are feminist; girls seek a compromise between traditional femininity and feminism.

Differences between girlhood and womanhood did not start in the 1960s. Since adolescence became a fixed identity category in the late nineteenth century, scientific and literary writers had separated girlhood from adult womanhood, defined and evaluated them in different manners. What I want to highlight is since the 1960s, popular culture had promoted a new girlhood identity and marked it as more modern than domestic womanhood and more genteel than the new womanhood proposed by feminist activists. In conclusion, the differences between girlhood and womanhood intensified along with the development of feminist movements in the 1960s, when mass media invested in constructing a new girlhood identity as a way to fend off changing views of womanhood and uphold some elements of traditional femininity.

In the following section, I historicize the term “girlhood” and develop a conceptual framework for my analysis of 1960’s girlhood. The girlhood I discuss refers to girlhood as a dominant cultural construct embodied by teenage girls’ lifestyle, activities, and identity. I also discuss the ideological conflicts about the girls’ roles in order to place the 1960s girlhood at the intersection between traditional femininity and feminism.

**Girlhood: A Symbol of Ideal Femininity**

My dissertation focuses on girlhood as an ideal, an imaginary construct which, with its pre-modern and virtuous connotations, inspired and benefited the nation state. In American culture, this ideal usually took the form of a white, upper-middle-class girl from her pre-teen to young adult years. A recurring theme in cultural representations of this ideal was the girl as sheltered in a domestic space and living under the protection and supervision of her family. As Lynne Vallone and Claudia Nelson point out, the Anglo-American girl of the nineteenth century
and early twentieth century might be a “home daughter in her early twenties, a wife and mother aged seventeen, or a self-supporting member of the workforce at twelve.” Tied to the domestic domain, this girl took up many notable traits of ideal childhood and womanhood. She was an innocent, docile child, much less troublesome and easier to indoctrinate than the mischievous boy. She was also a virginal, morally righteous young woman. These ideal traits had made girlhood a subject of what Lauren Berlant calls “national fantasy,” something that American citizens collectively praised, preserved, and identified as a common reality in the nation.

As a cultural ideal, the girl had a simplistic and innocuous image. What she could do and should do was distant from radical social and political movements. For example, Little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), the best-selling novel in the nineteenth century, and Shirley Temple, Hollywood’s most profitable star during the Great Depression, exemplified how girlhood could seemingly transcend turbulent realities the nation faced. In years marked by racial violence and intense social transformations, Little Eva and Shirley Temple, in mass-circulated books and movies, befriended and played with men and blacks without raising any concerns from even the most conservative parts of the country. The cases of Little Eva and Shirley Temple reflected the convoluted politics of performing girlhood in mainstream culture, where white girls, armed with unyielding innocence and supreme moral virtues, lived a life distant from changing social and political realities. They were properly sheltered at home and did not need to comply with ideological progression. They made themselves and everybody else happy under the patriarchal familial system. This puritan image would remain an essential part of American girlhood in a

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way that new social or cultural transformations appearing to change that image caused widespread criticism and anxieties in modern American history.

The Rise of Adolescent Girlhood

Fueled by rapid industrialization and waves of massive immigration from Europe, new definitions of girlhood emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Scholars of turn-of-the-century girlhood have noted how young working women’s financial independence and their leisure activities helped foster the rise of a unique adolescent identity in mass culture. In *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Kathy Peiss examines the leisure culture of “young working women” in New York City from 1880 to 1920. During this period, working-class youth, especially unmarried women, were ardent consumers of mass entertainment activities in New York City. As the majority of them worked in factories and earned their own income, they had spare money for shopping, attending movie theaters, and visiting amusement parks and dancing halls. They did so with both female and male friends and often without parental approval. Peiss points out that the leisure activities of these women, particularly the daughters of immigrants, helped foster a youth-oriented, mixed-sex urban culture in American cities. The significance of this new urban culture is it liberated the young women from the traditional “women’s place” at home and allowed them to experience more freedom in terms of consumption, friendship, and social interaction with men. Peiss thus highlights that the young women’s engagement in leisure experiences lifted them up from patriarchal governance over women and created a working-class version of new womanhood. The freedom that these young working women experienced was not only unseen in their mothers’ generation but also inaccessible to the upper-middle-class women, who were tied to the genteel ideal of domesticity.
What Peiss calls the working-class womanhood is synonymous to what Sarah Chinn calls “adolescence” in her book *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America*. Using generational gaps as a major theme and citing government documents, scientific and social reform writings, and literary pieces, Chinn interrogates how adolescence emerged as a distinctive identity category at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Like Peiss, Chinn focuses on working-class youth—especially daughters of immigrant families—and explores their work and leisure activities. She finds similar themes in the urban youth—their consumption of leisure, sexual freedom, financial independence, defiance against parental supervision, etc. Unlike Peiss, whose work argues for the rise of a new working-class womanhood, Chinn identifies an emerging identity category separate from childhood and adulthood. In a chapter analyzing Lewis W. Hine’s child labor photographs, Chinn finds that the photographs present working children—usually aged below ten—and “young people”—fourteen-, fifteen-, and sixteen-year-old working adolescents—in different ways. Photographs of younger child laborers are imbued with sympathy, where the child (often a girl) looks exhausted and frail. Her small body is overshadowed by giant machines. In contrast, photographs of fourteen- to sixteen-year-old workers show that these adolescents look confident and prepared. In the “Women at Work” series, Hine captures young working women in their late teens or early twenties. In these photos, adolescent girls work in “well-ordered, clear, and spacious” workplaces, and Hine focuses on the “subject’s youth, beauty, and concentration on her work.” The series also captures the young women working in a mixed-sex environment, showing a high level of “cross-sex sociability” among the young generation.  

expected to be sheltered and stay out of the workforce. Adolescents, on the other hand, were ready to enter the industrial world and skilled at operating all sorts of tools and machines. In addition, they were more energetic and more fun-loving than adult workers. As most of the adolescent girls were unmarried and worked in a factory (instead of at home), their work distanced themselves from domesticity and became the backbone of their individualism.

Both Peiss’ and Chinn’s books point out the emergence of a new girlhood identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in conjunction with working girls’ labor and consumption. In the cases they compile, we can see that young, white, and working-class girls, who stood at the crossroad between childhood and womanhood, were celebrated for their industrious labor while being criticized for their involvement in urban leisure activities, mixed-sex socializing, and defiance against adult, parental authority. This identity of girlhood inevitably crossed several lines—the line governing the domestic ideal of femininity, the line regulating a daughter’s familial roles, and the line limiting what a young woman wanted to do with the money, time, and energy she owned. As an identity category recognized for a level of autonomy, the tension between what a girl could or wanted to do and how she was expected to behave would continue to be a key force guiding cultural discourses about girlhood in the twentieth-century popular culture.

*The Dichotomy of Teenage Girlhood*

Between 1930s and 1960s, popular culture texts centering on girlhood proliferated. With the rising high school enrollment rates and the decline of child labor (partly due to the Great Depression), adolescents attended school for a longer period and joined in the workforce later throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Under these social circumstances, the term “teenager” appeared and it became institutionalized within popular culture. In several aspects, “teenagers” were
different from the working-class “adolescents” of earlier generations. Teenagers were primarily consumers and not laborers. The term transcended class boundaries, encompassing white teenagers of upper-middle-class and lower-class backgrounds. More importantly, because teenagers did not congregate to work and attend leisure activities in urban scenes, their collective identity was constructed and operated primarily through their schooling experiences and their consumption of mass media. Corporate media institutions quickly saw that teenagers tended to consume different media genres than other age groups, and they heavily invested in this growing teen market. The widely popular Nancy Drew series, which featured a teenage girl as the protagonist, debuted in 1930. Seventeen magazine, a magazine marketed toward teenage girls, debuted in 1944. As teenage girls spent more money on cultural commodities and generated a growing influence on popular culture, mainstream media, including publishing, reacted to the teenage girlhood with curiosity and anxiety.

Popular depictions about teenage girlhood displayed a contradictory attitude or, in Ilana Nash’s words, a “Madonna/whore dichotomy.” In American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture, a study of teenage girl characters in comic books popular between 1930s and 1950s, Nash finds that popular portrayals of adolescent femininity were reduced into a binary structure:

From the moment of their earliest proliferation in the 1930s, representations of teenage girls as heroines of mass-culture comic entertainments rapidly coalesced into a limited range of interpretive options: either the girl was a quasi-angelic creature, praised for her bubbly charm, her obedience to authority, and her
chastity, or else she was an exasperating agent of chaos who challenged the boundaries and hierarchies of a patriarchally organized society.\textsuperscript{9}

Nash’s study shows that the meanings of girlhood had become polarized from 1930s to 1950s, when mass culture industries and their consumers started to separate girls as an ideal from girls as a source of trouble. A girl who challenged traditional gender expectations and became assimilated into new social trends was more likely to be branded as a whore; a girl who seemed to fit perfectly well into the patriarchal system and distanced from forces of social change acquired an angelic image. Therefore, there was nostalgia toward the “home girl” archetype, “the little princess,” or “Daddy’s little girl” in cinema and dime novels. There was also disapprobation against girls who seemed to be too removed from the home setting. Magazines, particularly women’s magazines, routinely published editorial content interrogating the presence of “homeless girls,” who either were forced to, or choose to, wander outside at night. \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal} used the story of “homeless girls” to caution that traditional moral values holding girls to chastity were under threat.\textsuperscript{10}

Nash’s study ends with 1965, the year she believes the dichotomous tropes of teenage girls “splinter into numerous kinds of representations” due to changes in women’s and girls’ social circumstances in American culture.\textsuperscript{11} It is roughly the time my dissertation picks up and continues to track the follow-up changes in the popular depictions of girlhood. In my view, the dichotomy of girlhood that Nash proposes still existed in the late 1960s girlhood, yet it became less rigid. This is because the boundary between what was considered ideal and what was considered “bad” blurred, and the image of girlhood became more diversified. This shifting

\textsuperscript{9} Ilana Nash, \textit{American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture}, p. 2.  
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp. 98-104.  
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 18.
girlhood identity came with feminist intervention in cultural definitions of femininity and in popular culture’s response to changing gender expectations.

What is Feminism of the Sixties?

In this dissertation, I define feminism of the 1960s as a network of cultural forces centered on discussing and debating different meanings of femininity. It was manifested by mass media and popular culture, which produced a large amount of texts about and for women and girls. The prevalence of the texts showed widespread interest in discussions about femininity among the American public. A plethora of writings about women’s lived experiences emerged in the 1960s not only because female readers wanted to know more about how others expected their gender to be but also because the majority of American consumers were interested in topics about femininity. By referring to it as a cultural phenomenon, I broaden the scope and impact of feminism of the 1960s and approach it from a different angle than many scholars of second-wave feminism have done.

When it comes to the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of Americans tend to think of angry, “bra-burning” women first before some of the more knowledgeable readers list Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). This lack of thorough understanding of the movement is common in media, politics, and public discourses, where few people can pinpoint what it is, and more can quickly ridicule the movement’s overt radicalism. Feminist writer Jane Gerhard, author of *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of Twentieth-Century American Sexual Thought*, shares that when she, a young girl living in a Midwestern town, started to tell people she wanted to become a feminist, the first
reaction she received was people asking if she would burn her bras.\textsuperscript{12} A similar yet much more famous example is former Vice-President Dan Quayle’s “Murphy Brown” speech. The vice president blamed the 1960s as the starting point of America’s social breakdown. Quayle used the TV character Murphy Brown as an example, criticizing women with loose moral standards bearing children out of wedlock. From Quayle’s perspective, everything wrong with American society in the 1980s and 1990s, specifically controversial gender issues, started from the 1960s, when many women of his generation began to “glamorize casual sex and drug use.”\textsuperscript{13} The stories Gerhard and Quayle told show two common misunderstandings about feminism of the 1960s: first, it was misinterpreted as a series of sporadic events—the publication of a best-selling book written by a female author, news reports of angry female protestors, anecdotes about young women having casual sex, etc. Stories like these happened here and there throughout the 1960s and shared few direct links to each other. Second, many people believed that feminism belonged to a small group of young women having a temporary moral breakdown. What those feminists said or did seemed to have little to do with the general culture of the 1960s and with what the majority of American citizens had experienced. In this case, feminism appeared to be a subculture that was disconnected from mainstream gender discourse.

In addition to the above common misunderstandings about feminism, academics tend to understand the movement from a political and theoretical angle, focusing the conversation on specific organizations. Scholars of feminist theories refer to the goals and activities proposed by women in the 1960s and 1970s as the “Second Wave,” separating them from the first wave of the


women’s movement in the 1920s. Different from the first wave, which advocated for women’s voting rights and political involvement, the second wave began life from a reflection of women’s status, yet it gradually evolved into a demand for different ways of thinking about gender.

Linda Nicholson summarizes that second-wave feminism was roughly made-up of two political forces: the first was the Women’s Rights movement, which started in the early 1960s and was composed of professional women who tried to put pressure on federal and state institutions to end discrimination against women. The National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966 by twenty-eight women—including Betty Friedan—was a hallmark of this movement centering on women’s rights to work. This group demanded that the government establish programs such as day-care centers, job training for women, and tax deductions for working parents. They were dedicated to enhancing women’s rights through a legal and political means. The second force was the Women’s Liberation Movement, which did not emerge in the public eye until the 1968 Miss America pageant protest but had actually been forming among Left-leaning intellectuals throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. Inspired by Marxist theory, Women’s Liberationists saw the situation of women as an oppressed class, and male domination ran in every corner women’s lives—economically, politically, psychologically, and culturally. The Miss America protest in 1968 exemplified the movement’s challenge to the objectification of women in popular culture. In many ways, women’s liberation groups were more radical and revolutionary than women’s rights groups, with their demands encompassing wider topics like sexuality, gender ideology, and cultural representations of women.14

If we look into the nature and scale of the women’s rights and women’s liberation movements during the 1960s, we can see that most of the feminist groups and activities were on

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a grass-roots level. Their activities were part of the countercultural activism during the decade. Both movements had a large number of organizations and leading figures, which were responsible for holding activities (such as street protests), distributing and publishing key texts, and offering a wide variety of services and activities to their members. But if we observe how their ideas dispersed, what really occurred was a small percentage of American women shared their views and tried to draw wider attention to women’s issues. Put together, feminist organizations and protests in the 1960s were a large-scale movement, but their impact on average Americans was hardly comparable to that of mass culture products. Their activities and influences were spotted, concerning different groups of women in different contexts. NOW was a national organization and considered the largest women’s organization, but when founded in 1966, it only had three hundred charter members. The majority of documents considered seminal feminist texts today originally appeared as leaflets, posters, drafts, workshop talks, and personal memoirs, and they were circulated within the organization’s memberships. Some pieces were originally newspaper columns, and a few were published by a major corporate publisher. For example, Casey Hayden and Mary King, who were both activists working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), wrote a paper titled “Sex and Caste” in 1965. The paper discussed ideological oppression over women and became one of the first expressions of the need for a women’s liberation movement. Yet, the paper was circulated only within the SNCC as a discussion material among women of the committee.

For many scholars publishing work on 1960s feminism, feminism means a series of movements and an interconnected web of activities organized by women’s groups. As Ruth Rosen puts it in *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America,*
women’s grass-roots movements in the 1960s fundamentally changed the way Americans—especially American women—thought about women’s social status:

It took a women’s movement to address the many ways women felt exploited, to lend legitimacy to their growing sense of injustice, and to name and reinterpret customs and practices that had long been accepted, but for which there was no language.\textsuperscript{15}

Joining in a women’s liberation club at UC Berkeley in 1967, an experience Rosen described as turning her world “upside down,”\textsuperscript{16} Rosen had good reasons to argue that the grassroots activities helped spread feminist beliefs to a wider audience, particularly young women. It is undeniable that women’s groups based on campuses and in communities had propelled a large number of American women to realize that they were victims of several forms of gender repression. However, whether the organizational effort changed the way the majority of American women thought about gender or not was and is questionable. Feminism burgeoned when a significant proportion of American women became aware of the exploitation and injustice imposed upon them. Only when individual women gained consciousness of themselves could they have the desires to join in the feminist movements and raise others’ awareness too.

Although it is not my intention to downplay the effort and tremendous impact feminist activists and organizations had created, I believe that existing feminist scholarship’s focus on movements and organizational efforts underestimates the role popular culture played in mainstreaming feminist ideas during the 1960s. In fact, the majority of American women and girls were not part of a feminist organization. They had little access to radical writings and no

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. xii.
opportunity to hear original ideas from feminist activists. Then, how did American women and
girls know about feminism? How did concepts drafted by the feminist organizations get to be
accepted and even taken for granted by Americans today? Who taught them that a talented young
woman should be given equal opportunity to pursue a degree in higher education instead of
staying home and being a full-time wife? Who taught them that a woman could acquire access to
birth control? Who guided them to be aware of gender stereotypes? My answer is the majority of
American public learned about feminism not from activists or intellectuals, but from mass media.
Media and popular culture popularized feminist ideas through evolving representations of
girlhood.

In this project, I refer to the feminist movement in the 1960s not as a demonstration nor
as an elusive theory proposed by thinkers leaning toward radicalism. I define the movement as
mass media broadcasting new feminine identities to millions of American consumers. This claim
is ostensibly different from the ones posed by the majority of feminist scholars, who, like Rosen,
had personal experiences of attending or witnessing the movement. They define second-wave
feminism as either a political movement, an intellectual attempt to interrogate the discourses of
gender, or a series of grassroots activities. I maintain that feminism in the 1960s developed and
expanded culturally, with a section of its core values and emotional base broadcast through
publications like Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) and Betty Friedan’s *The
Feminine Mystique*. One can also argue that the seeds of feminism were planted by magazine
content such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s long-running column “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” which exposed many unhappy realities of marriage to female readers.¹⁷

In my view, the feminist movement took place when a large number of American women started to evaluate their lives while taking note of their experiences and mediated messages about women. It happened when women, either married or single, pondered over what they really wanted to do and what options they had. It happened when women wanted to know other women’s stories, so they read magazines and books for women, resulting in skyrocketing sales of women’s magazines and books written by female authors. In conclusion, feminism of the 1960s is a prevalent cultural phenomenon evolving around mass media writings about women’s personal lives and women’s active consumption of those texts. In the following section, I use a few key texts as examples to illustrate how feminist ideas were communicated and popularized through mass media.

*Communicating Feminism on Mass Media*

Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) was an example of a mass-circulated text fueling millions of American women—especially young women—to rethink about what they could or could not do and why. Heavily advertised by a commercial publisher, the book became an instant sensation, selling millions of copies upon publication. Starting the book with a confession that she married very late (in her late thirties), Brown encouraged young single women to look beyond the marriage framework and invest in personal growth by working hard, earning money for self-expenditure, and dressing prettily. Financial and personal investment aside, Brown spent many pages teaching girls how to flirt with men, yet the most

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¹⁷ “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” was *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s advice column, which appeared in each issue in the 1950s and 1960s. It featured dramatic stories of married couples in disagreement with each other over a wide variety of issues, analyzed the situations, and provided advice for the couples to save their marriages.
audacious statement she made was that single girls ought to explore their sexuality and, if they liked, have sexual relationships with men. In general, *Sex and the Single Girl* was Brown’s defense of premarital sex as well as of women’s right to pursue happy, independent lives. With her optimistic tone and her promise of fairy-tale marriage, Brown’s book looked like a funny anecdote. Although Brown encouraged single women to disregard traditional moral standards when it comes to seeking sexual pleasure, she did not frame her ideas about women’s lives through discourses of gender equality. Brown believed it was possible for a single woman to find happiness from working and dating, and she constantly reminded young women to be honest about what they wanted and what they needed. Therefore, Imelda Whelehan regards *Sex and the Single Girl* as a feminist text because Brown was “questioning the normal economy of heterosexual relations at the time and foregrounding women’s right to pleasure, among other things.”

Brown wanted her female readers to be happy within or without marriage, but the happiness was based on the girls figuring out a balanced point between personal desires and social realities. Eventually, Brown was teaching single girls how to survive and enjoy personal freedom in a male-dominated world. The importance of self-reliance and of placing a woman’s needs over traditional gender expectations—a feminist belief—is one of the key messages *Sex and the Single Girl* revealed to its readers.

Similar to Brown’s best-seller, *The Feminine Mystique* was a mass media text raising women’s self-awareness. In the opening chapter “The Problem That Has No Name,” Betty Friedan drew a picture in which white, middle-class housewives had conflicted feelings toward what they received from mass media and what they thought about their lives. According to Friedan, women living in the 1950s and early 1960s faced a media-saturated world, where they

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received numerous conflicting messages about themselves. On the one hand, women’s magazines, TV sitcoms, and advertisements insisted that all women should embrace family life. Being a full-time housewife was their only career option. The ultimate feminine ideal was a picture of a suburban wife kissing her husband goodbye, baking cookies for her kids, and keeping her house clean and beautiful. On the other hand, major news media outlets, including *Time, New York Times, Newsweek,* and CBS Television, started to expose that not every American woman was happy with the only choice they were encouraged to have. Friedan compiled a list of descriptions of these reports, which displayed that the American suburban housewives were “trapped,” “dissatisfied,” and “felt left out.”¹⁹ The contradictory messages, which demanded women to stay home while cautioning them of possible unhappy results, were what the majority of American women received from media.

*The Feminine Mystique* was a best-seller in 1963 and was considered the book that launched the feminist movement. The popularity of the book helped Friedan and other women’s rights activists accumulate resources to establish NOW. However, if we read into the words Friedan wrote and discover female readers’ initial responses to Friedan’s writing, we can see that this book had little to do with any form of movements or activism. Instead, it was more about a collective psychological awakening among a multitude of young housewives. Stephanie Coontz calls it “A Strange Stirring,” referring to a widespread phenomenon that many suburban housewives, all of a sudden, knew the source of their unhappiness and were able to make sense of their lives after reading Friedan’s book. “My life changed.” “Everything just clicked.” The book “left me breathless.” “Now I could name the problem, and know it didn’t originate in my

These were common responses to *The Feminine Mystique* in readers’ letters to Friedan, who found Friedan’s descriptions captured their depressing situations as full-time housewives. According to Coontz, what made the book exceptionally significant to these women was how Friedan vocalized the fact that these women were victims to prevailing cultural prescriptions, which chained white women across all economic backgrounds to domesticity. In short, Friedan told the women they were the victims of a societal problem, of an unnamed systematic repression over women. This message introduced the concept “the personal is political” a few years before the phrase was coined by a women’s liberation activist, as Friedan invited the women to notice how a larger culture could dictate their personal lives.\(^21\)

Friedan’s book was, undoubtedly, thought-provoking. Yet, what should be highlighted is that throughout the book, Friedan does not provoke any idea radically different from what other media texts, such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s “Can This Marriage Be Saved?”, already said about women and the concerns raised by professional women. She narrated a phenomenon that many white middle-class women could relate to, adding vivid details of the agony and depression due to a lifestyle that kept them like prisoners in their own homes. Her writing was descriptive and emotional. It was also conservative, providing no remedies to treat the status quo. Notably, she did not challenge the prevailing assertion that women ought to be wives and mothers; she merely described the psychological pressure that many women may have experienced. However, the book became both a direct and indirect cause for many women to make life-changing decisions. Some decided to go back to school. Some demanded a divorce. And some signed up for women’s organizations.

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\(^{21}\) Stephanie Coontz, p. 20.
"The Feminine Mystique" was a mass-circulated publication. It was published by a corporate publisher (W. W. Norton), which profited from the outstanding sales of the book. This made the book more similar to Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* than the texts that circulated within feminist organizations, which were read by a much smaller pool of readers. In a nutshell, it is important to look at Friedan’s book not as a movement book but as a mass media text. Both *Sex and the Single Girl* and *The Feminine Mystique* were part of the mass media in the 1960s, which appeared to be astute to political uproars and social change. The books and their popularity were part of the media culture that paid attention to common feminine experiences. The corporate media institutions that published Friedan’s book and covered Beatlemania, Twiggy, and the Miss America pageant were ones that captured widespread interest in more diversified forms of femininity among American media consumers.

The argument I want to make is that mass media and popular culture provided important cues for the audiences to either understand or become familiar with ideas that could be loosely labelled as feminist. As Patricia Bradley observes, Friedan’s book began the trend that mass media played a major role in bringing feminism to “millions of women who otherwise might never have been connected to the [feminist] movement at all,” and *Sex and the Single Girl* persuaded young women that a life without marriage and dedicated to professional success was not the norm, but it was not that horrendous.\(^22\) The ways in which media texts brought feminism to their audiences varied. Friedan’s book inspired millions of American women to critically reflect on their lives, and many among them took actions to participate in movements for women’s rights and sexual liberation. Brown’s book encouraged girls to seek financial and sexual freedom.

In highlighting the relationship between mass media and feminism, my argument and my analysis share similarities with *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*, an anthology edited by Eric Schaefer, and Susan J. Douglas’ *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. Their projects, as well as mine, articulate how mass media texts carried messages that were different from traditional views of gender roles and behaviors in the 1960s, ending with the conclusion that mass media started the revolution. It is widely believed that feminist events in the 1960s and 1970s, including the women’s rights movement and the “Sexual Revolution,” forever changed Americans’ thoughts toward gender and female sexuality. What Schaefer and Douglas revealed was the change did not take off on the national level until mass media tipped in to popularize it and, in most cases, neutralize the originally radical ideas. As Schaefer highlights, the sexual revolution did not start in the 1960s; radical changes in average Americans’ sexual behavior and attitudes had been underway in the 1940s and 1950s, when young people talked about their sexual experiences under the table and experts analyzed sexuality as if it was some kind of a marginal cult, unrelated to the average Americans’ lives. It took a “rapidly and radically sexualized media” to account for “what we now think of as the sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s.”23 The revolution, in Schaefer and other contributors’ view, did not happen until readers were increasingly confronted with words and images describing sexuality in advertisements, news articles, mass-circulated magazines, novels, and movies. The movie industry was particularly groundbreaking in this regard, as explained in Christie Milliken and Linda Williams’ articles. The rise of low-budget films featuring scenes of nudity and actual sex, called “sexploitation films,” as well as the popularity of films exploring female sexual pleasure,

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notably those starring Jane Fonda, bespoke mass media’s power in altering the public opinions toward sex and gender in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Feminism, Girlhood, and Girl Culture}

In the above section, I have defined feminism in the 1960s as the proliferated discourses about femininity in mass media and popular culture. Those discourses included more profound and diversified accounts of girlhood across different media publications. In news magazines, teenage girls’ lives, career, and consumption started to receive more media attention. For example, In the April 13, 1959 issue of \textit{Life} magazine, an article titled “The Costly Hazard of Young Marriage” led readers to look into the personal stories of teenage marriage, a rising yet “perplexing” national trend.\textsuperscript{25} Focusing on how eighteen- and nineteen-year-old teenage girls dealt with and felt about their marriages, the writer noted their maturity while lamenting the sacrifice they had to make. Similarly, on the cover of the August 10, 1962 issue, the magazine introduced the feature of the week titled “Too Many Subteens Grow Up Too Soon and Too Fast.” The article focused on the story of a twelve-year-old Debby Yarbrough, who was a typical teenage girl of “a generation whose jumble of innocence and worldly freedom is unnaturally precocious—and alarming.”\textsuperscript{26} According to the article, many American pre-teen and teenage girls were keen to adopt different fashion styles from their mothers, were dating and partying with boys, and were intransigent to parental advice. As Beatlemania unfolded in 1964, many major newspapers and news magazines, \textit{Life} and \textit{The New York Times} included, covered teenage girls’ response and experiences to the stardom with detailed textual descriptions and close-up


photos. With the development of New Journalism and photojournalism, these newspapers and magazines offered a multi-layered narrative of girlhood, one that was characterized with the use of factual information and personal stories and aimed at making readers feel emotionally linked to the subject.²⁷

As a result, news media started to carve out an increasingly complicated picture of girlhood to the national audience. In this picture, girls might be hormonal, naïve, and too embedded in consumerism, but they displayed an ostensibly different set of manners and morals from the older generation. Generational gaps were a common theme in the descriptions, as girls were portrayed as spending more and more time with their peers and holding different opinions from their parents. Nevertheless, magazines and newspapers did more than inform their readers about what was wrong with the younger generations. With insightful descriptions about what these girls thought and did, the narrative often revealed a level of maturity and presented a stronger, more independent vision of girlhood. The narrative thus propelled the readers to understand the girls instead of criticizing them. This was similar to the narrative principle of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which invited readers to look into women’s lives and delve into the source of their unhappiness. In summary, the media culture that helped introduce feminist thoughts to the American public with various experiences of femininity was the same culture that highlighted the complexity of girlhood.

The flourishing of teen girl culture was an extension of the growing media interest in capturing and capitalizing on the diverse aspects of girlhood. A plethora of teen magazines appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s and many stayed active throughout the 1960s: *16 Magazine, ‘Teen, Teen Life, Teen World, Teen Screen, Tiger Beat, Pop Teen Magazine, Teen*

²⁷ David Sumner, pp. 139-141.
Pin-ups, Teen Scoop, Teen Talk, New England Teen Scene, Movie Teen Illustrated, and Teen Set, to name a few. Unlike Calling All Girls (debuted in 1941) and Seventeen (debuted in 1944), these new teen magazines covered wider topics than good moral behaviors and beauty and fashion features. The majority of them were celebrity magazines for teenage girls, with some of them focusing more on movie stars (Movie Teen Illustrated) and some focusing more on rock music stars (Pop Teen Magazine). These magazines served as an important guide for teenage girls to follow popular culture trends, especially the latest celebrity news. At that time, the fact that a large percentage of American teenage girls were avidly engaged in topics other than beauty and fashion was news to corporate media producers. Yet once savvy producers realized the appeal of pop stars to teenage girls, they invested in this fandom and broadened the boundary of appropriate behaviors and personalities for girls.28

For teenage girls, the increasingly elaborate observation of girlhood in national media, particularly the expansive content in teen-oriented print publications and TV programs, meant that they were exposed to a wider variety of messages about gender. There were more new stories about femininity and girlhood that they could digest and identify with. Studies conducted by media scholars have shown that teenager girls have a tendency to use mass media as a key source to understand and construct feminine identities.29 The proliferation of media narratives about women as well as teen media in the 1960s meant girls had more—and better—opportunities to encounter texts and images that helped them formulate more complicated understandings of their gender identity. Girlhood, as the media unfolded, concerned more than

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28 Diana L. Belscamper, "Your Ticket to Dreamsville": The Functions of 16 Magazine in American Girl Culture of the 1960s.
29 Horace R Hall and Andrea Brown-Thirston, in Understanding Teenage Girls: Culture, Identity, and Schooling (2011), point out that teenage girls tend to closely follow media images and texts to adopt a set of feminine looks, behaviors, and personalities that they desire to emulate.
beauty, fashion, family, and marriage. Teen celebrity magazines, for instance, spoke to girls creating elaborate fantasies about their idols while barely addressing marriage and motherhood. In fact, these magazines did not lecture girls on what they should do but addressed what they desired to do. They created a mediated moment situating girls at the center of their world, where girls gained a better view of what they desired as well as the rules and limitations they faced in real life. To a large degree, reading the diverse mediated messages about girlhood was akin to a self-exploratory process, a consciousness-raising moment that led them to question traditional standards of femininity and helped them to understand—if not lean toward—feminist ideas.

In *Where the Girls Are*, Douglas provides a sweeping review of mass-mediated image of women in the late 1950s and 1960s, a time when growing up with mass media helped girls formulate a new female consciousness different from older generations. Douglas examines a wide range of media texts, including movies, TV shows, news reports, magazines, advertisements, and popular music. She concludes that a recurring theme in these media texts was a fractured, conflicted answer to what an American woman was like, one that Douglas argues was split along with debating views on femininity at the time:

By the 1960s, the contradictions grew wider and more obvious, and the images and messages of this period were obsessed with shifting gender codes, riven with generational antagonisms, schizophrenic about female sexuality, relentless in their assaults on the imperfections of the female face and body, and determined to straddle the widening gap between traditional womanhood and the young, hip, modern “chick.”

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An example is the popular TV series *Bewitched*, where a witch was “not a murderous old hag but an attractive young housewife.” Douglas believes that these likable female characters with fantastic supernatural powers symbolized popular culture producers’ acknowledgement of “the impending release of female and political energy” while trying to “contain it technologically, through images of levitation, twitching noses, and poofs of fake smoke.” In similar shows, such as *The Addams Family, I Dream of Jeannie*, and *The Flying Nun*, Douglas sees the image of the “potentially monstrous and grotesque” women being transformed into the “beautiful and tamed.”

In these popular culture representations, women could be powerful and talented, but their power and talent must be carefully contained, confined to the private sphere, and packaged with beauty and elegance. Here, women’s newly gained power brought by feminism was simultaneously glorified and diluted by elements of traditional femininity.

Douglas called this contradictory image of femininity in mass media “prefeminist,” a term describing mass media texts which often portrayed girls as valuing their personal interests and ambitions while compromising with traditional gender expectations. In the prefeminist media portrayal, girls challenged sexism from a personal, non-political angle. They lived with feminist visions but did not want to acknowledge it. Douglas’ major argument is that those prefeminist media texts proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s. They propelled female viewers—especially young girls—to become feminists in the 1970s. “All the prefeminist glimmerings in girl group music, Beatlemania, perky teens, and women with magical powers” launched the process in which millions of American girls started to accept “some version of feminist ideology,” and they “began questioning, rethinking, and revising our sense of what it meant—or ought to

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31 Ibid., p. 126.
mean—to be an American woman.” The mass media representations of girlhood might be contradictory, constantly juggling between feminist and traditional views of femininity. Yet, they offered a new model of femininity for girls to think about their gender identity, to question imposed gender roles, and to seek after new models of femininity. In this way, girls growing up with mass media in the 1960s actually lived under the aura of feminism.

Douglas’ concept of prefeminist media moments offers a framework for this project to consider the growingly diverse and complicated representations of girlhood part of the feminist culture in the 1960s. Media representations of loud, perky, and confident girls carried a prefeminist undertone as they propelled girls to adopt new gender codes, behaviors, and attitudes different from the older generation’s. At the same time, the “contradictory” nature remained throughout the mainstream image of girlhood. Mass media did not move away from the prefeminist framework, as the mainstream image of girlhood was not fully aligned with the feminist version of femininity but was oscillating between feminist and traditional gender expectations.

In conclusion, there was a correlated relationship between feminism, growing media interest in girlhood, and teen girl culture. As the rise of feminism propelled media to offer more diverse forms of femininity, mass-marketing media outlets started to present a more complicated picture of girlhood. Teen media, including teen girl magazines, thrived in this climate and helped carve out a new image of girlhood characterized by a contradictory set of themes. Those themes included traits of traditional femininity (such as propriety, innocence, and domesticity) as well as those endorsed by feminist activists (such as professional ambition, body autonomy, and political engagement). With its spectrum encompassing the traditional view and the countercultural view,

32 Ibid., p. 160.
the mass media representations of girlhood avoided appearing to be too out-of-touch to the American public. They thus presented a popular form of girlhood identity, one that was acceptable to both older and younger generations who carried different expectations. Under this media culture of the 1960s, feminism occupied a spot in the construction of a new girlhood identity in America.

**From Counterculture to Popular Culture**

It is impossible to explain how feminism intervened in the shifting meanings of girlhood in mass media and popular culture without putting the topic within the context of the “culture wars” of the 1960s. To a large extent, how girlhood came to be a site of ideological conflicts between traditional standards and feminist visions of femininity was a legacy of the battle between the counterculture and the establishment culture. Scholars have compared the opposition between the counterculture and the establishment culture as a culture war. The “war” was actually a misnomer. It did not have an actual battlefield and did not involve any military combat. In reality, the war was a series of information exchanges and debates about a wide array of topics in the mass media domain—TV, newspapers, magazines, books, etc. It was a competition between two loosely categorized value systems—young vs. old, socially oppressed vs. privileged, and liberal vs. conservative—to persuade the American public to side with their views. The culture war did not start in the 1960s, yet it was intensified during the 1960s with definitions of femininity as a key site of debate.

*The Culture War*

In Andrew Hartman’s research on the history of the culture wars, the 1960s represented a watershed moment when many middle-class white Americans, who had previously been sheltered from the “acids of modernity,” discovered a huge cultural division in their seemingly
harmonious society. Indeed, unconventional views on race, women’s status, sexuality, and religion had always existed in the society, and the American public knew it. However, what really stunned the country was that people holding those views had come together. Joined by the baby-boomer generation, the “radicals” launched movement after movement over a wide array of issues, and eventually formed a cogent political force: “the radical political mobilizations of the sixties—civil rights, Black and Chicano Power, feminism, gay liberation, the antiwar movement, the legal push for secularization—destabilized the America that millions knew,” Hartman writes. With a significant portion of the young generation and radical activists standing on the same side on the most heated issues, the 1960s marked the birth of liberalism as a political entity as well as an institutionalized cultural value system. But, the rise of liberalism also meant the polarization of American society, which could be loosely divided as the “liberal, progressive, and secular Americans against their conservative, traditional, and religious counterparts.”33 To conservative parts of the U.S., liberalism posited a dangerous threat to the very core of American civilization. Anything that the liberals advocated, ranging from their political opinions to their fashion and musical tastes, ran the risk of offending the sensibilities of mainstream America.

Femininity was one of the battlefields during the culture war. With the rise of the women’s rights movement and the sexual liberation movement, Americans with different experiences and views of femininity started to debate what a woman should look and act like. Before feminists joined in the conversation, the mainstream discourses about femininity occurred exclusively within the framework of white, middle-class families. In the post-war American media, femininity was typically expressed through women’s abilities to knit and sew, wear makeup and jewelry, dress in brightly colored dresses, and have a slender yet curvy body. Beauty

33 Andrew Hartman, A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars, pp. 4-7.
and craftsmanship aside, the ultimate feminine accomplishment was motherhood, as practically every white middle-class American woman had expressed their identity through the domestic chores they could do and the number of children they had. Media creators and writers consistently addressed women’s issues based on their role in the nuclear family. The cultural attachment of femininity to motherhood and housekeeping, as Donnalyn Pompper comments, had restricted ways people think about how women may contribute to society.34

A new wave of feminist thought, which Philosopher Iris Young called gynocentric feminism, emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. The term describes how one carrying a feminist perspective can still embrace elements of traditional femininity instead of opposing them. Gynocentric feminism was developed from humanist feminism (represented by feminist advocates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) but held very different interpretations regarding the relationship between femininity and women’s oppression. While humanist feminists regarded femininity as a primary source of women’s repression, gynocentric feminists argued for the superiority of female experiences to male experiences and called for a broadening concept of femininity:

Gynocentric feminism finds in women’s bodies and traditionally feminine activity the source of more positive values. Women’s reproductive processes keep us linked with nature and the promotion of life to a greater degree than men. Female eroticism is more fluid, diffuse and loving than violence-prone male sexuality. . . . Femininity is not the problem, not the source of women’s oppression. But indeed

34 Donnalyn Pompper, *Rhetoric of Femininity: Female Body Image, Media, and Gender Role Stress/Conflict*, p. 35.
within traditional femininity lie the values that we should promote for a better future.\textsuperscript{35}

Here, the principle was not to abolish or attack feminine attributes imposed by the mainstream (supposedly patriarchal) society on women. Instead, it would benefit women and the society if people realized the values of femininity, adjusted our understandings of it, and recognized the diverse ways women had been contributing to the society.

Young found that even though humanist feminism had been the dominant feminist discourse in the 1960s and 1970s, it had been criticized by women with gynocentric views. These women, the “anti-feminists,” found the humanist denigration of domestic work offensive. They “take pride in the homes they decorate and bring warmth to, and regard their caring for children as a notable vocation. . . How dare you feminists claim these activities lack value, entail imprisonment.” Meanwhile, black feminists attacked the humanist portrayal of women as victims. For this group of women, the stories about suburban housewives that Betty Friedan wrote were meaningless. Black women simply did not have the “luxury” of being housewives only. As black men earned much less than white, black women had to work to support their families while taking care of housework. As a result, “black women typically learned to be tough, physically strong, clever, but usually also warm, sexy, and nurturant.”\textsuperscript{36} They presented a stronger and much more diverse image of femininity.

In the book *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*, the authors argue that the transition from humanist feminism to gynocentric feminism

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 177.
characterized the diversity of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, the majority of feminist writers and activists embraced humanist feminism, believing femininity was a weapon of the patriarchal culture to execute oppression over women. On the other hand, other voices emerged, calling for a greater respect to attributes and experiences that were essentially feminine, such as motherhood. Popular culture, with its growing spotlight on girlhood, resonated with this gynocentric vision. Unlike humanist feminism, popular culture did not ask girls to abolish their domestic roles or identify themselves as victims of patriarchal oppression. Instead, the shifting cultural representations of girlhood were operated on the premise that these girls were mostly marriage and family-bound, yet they could still accomplish more than the traditional feminine duties. Therefore, it can be said that media depictions of Beatlemania, Twiggy, and Miss America pageant girls, which were teemed with both new and old standards of femininity, demonstrated feminist sensibilities following the framework of gynocentric feminism.

*The Commercialization of Feminism*

Media executive Andi Zeisler recently published a book titled *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement* (2016), in which she criticizes how feminism has been a highly profitable name in the popular culture marketplace yet completely disengaged from its original political aims. Feminism today, Zeisler observes, is no longer about fighting for “the same rights, access, and liberties as men.” Instead, popular culture producers and consumers today have let “glossy, feel-good feminism pull focus away from deeply entrenched forms of inequality.” Although Zeisler mostly uses the examples of celebrities and music styles from the 1990s to 2010s to interrogate the commodification of

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37 From *Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*, p. 162.
38 Andi Zeisler, *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*, p. xv.
feminism—Emma Watson, Taylor Swift, and the Riot Grrrl movement, to name a few—she is aware that the trend had started as soon as feminism gained national media attention in the late 1960s. Even though one of the key strivings of women’s liberation movement was to reject commercialized presentations of femininity, “co-opting the language of liberation” occurred in advertisements of all sorts of products. Corporate institutions did not hesitate to take a free ride with ongoing feminist movements to celebrate the liberating messages about gender roles while sustaining most women’s unwillingness to have a direct link with feminism.39 The relationship between mass media and feminism, in Zeisler’s view, has always been about appropriation, exploitation, and depoliticization. In other words, popular culture ruined feminism, and any form of mass-market presentations of girlhood was essentially anti-feminist.

This project runs in an opposite direction from Zeisler’s argument. I aim to use the examples of 1960s girlhood to highlight a moment in which the dissemination of feminist ideas went in alignment with the growth and renewal of popular culture industries. It was possible that feminism (and any radical movements) and commercial culture were in a reciprocal relationship. As Thomas Frank gathers from his research of advertising industries in the 1950s and 1960s, people working in the business world did not regard the counterculture as a threat to the consumer culture they promoted; instead, they imagined the counterculture as “a symbolic ally in their own struggles against the mountains of dead-weight procedure and hierarchy that had accumulated over the years.”40 Frank’s argument took a step further from the theory of co-optation, one that many historians adopted to articulate how, in the 1960s, “business mimics and mass-products fake counterculture in order to cash in on a particular demographic and to subvert

39 Ibid., p. 8.
the great threat that ‘real’ counterculture represents.” \footnote{Ibid., p. 7.} Frank argues that people in the corporate world, especially those running mass media platforms, did much more than mimicking and faking countercultural themes. As the 1960s began, corporate media industries, especially advertisers, had revealed frustrations over a culture of conformity and bureaucracy. To the advertisers, the counterculture helped them to project a new ideology of business, “a living embodiment of attitudes that reflected their own.” \footnote{Ibid., p. 27.} In other words, the corporate revolutionaries were part of the counterculture and played a key role in bringing countercultural ideals to the American middle class, including feminism.

This dissertation includes the types of stories that Frank unfolds. When Gloria Stavers became the editor-in-chief of 16 Magazine and decided to take the magazine’s teenage girl readers seriously, when Diana Vreeland decided to use Twiggy as the key model to promote a more youthful fashion, and when Miss America pageant officials, journalists, and contestants tested the waters immediately after the longtime executive director retired, these people working in the world of corporate media—and their middle-class viewers—were undergoing changes and value conflicts that characterized the rise of the counterculture in the 1960s. They did not take a part in street protests or work with feminist groups. However, through their management and presence in mass media, as well as through their defiance against established traditions in their fields, they helped shape a commercialized version of feminism, which was a key element in the new cultural representations of girlhood. Girlhood, in this way, symbolized the convergence of the consumer culture and countercultural feminism in the 1960s.
Chapter Outlines

Girlhood in the 1960s was an arena of many ideological struggles. My study mainly follows the traditional and new messages about gender roles, with feminist theories and writings informing the rationale of my textual and historical analyses. I argue that the changing definitions of girlhood revealed in popular culture in the 1960s went in the same rhythm with young women’s growing awareness of gender inequality and their demand for greater freedom. In this way, I categorize the changing cultural representations of girlhood as part of a sentiment or movement that culminated in second-wave feminism. My work considers the consequences of feminist developments in the 1960s through the lens of popular culture, arguing that popular understandings of girlhood honed the voice and vision of feminists. What women thought, experienced, and did in the 1960s shaped the ways popular culture treated girls, and the contemporary image of American girlhood has its feminist origin planted in the 1960s.

With the above history and conceptual contexts about girlhood explored, this dissertation focuses on the shifting cultural representations of girlhood in the 1960s in three chapters: In the first chapter, I use teen magazine 16 Magazine’s treatment of Beatlemania as the site of study. I argue that the magazine’s presentations of the Beatles—pictures suggesting physical proximity with the male idols, articles featuring heterosexual intimacy, and fan letters inviting candid emotional revelations—defied the social and cultural norm of innocent girlhood. Reading the stories about the Beatles offered the fans, who were mostly girls in teen and pre-teen years, moments to imagine and rehearse having a romantic relationship with men. At the same time, consuming the magazine kept the girls within the realm of proper femininity. Stories about the Beatles not only limited the girls’ sexual and romantic desires on a virtual level but also taught them restrictions about pre-marital dating. The tension between feminism and traditional
femininity was displayed in how *16 Magazine* guided the girls to develop an imagined romantic relationship with male idols while in real life, they were kept away from having an actual boyfriend and building a heterosexual relationship with men.

Chapter Two focuses on mass-circulated magazines’ visual and textual representations of Twiggy. Pictures, captions, and articles about this seventeen-year-old model revealed an array of look, body image, beauty, and fashion statements highlighting mobility, empowerment, and resistance against feminine roles. These were themes separating Twiggy from traditional beauty standards and constituting a new fashionable girlhood. However, in constituting Twiggy as a populist model, magazines highlighted Twiggy’s innocent, child-like personality. The tension between feminism and traditional femininity was displayed in how Twiggy, a highly accomplished model, was also a little girl who did not want to leave mom and dad and a naïve teenage girl obedient to her boyfriend.

Chapter Three examines the Miss America pageants held between 1968 and 1970, when the pageant had undergone the staff change and faced challenges from civil rights and women’s liberation communities, which subsequently led the pageant to include the first black state representative into the contest and allow contestants greater control over their press image. Being vocal on issues of national issues, the contestants demonstrated a politically involved image and loosened the boundary of ideal girlhood. However, only white contestants were portrayed as vocal; the black contestant was timid and reluctant to comment on controversial issues. The pageant thus racialized the image of ideal girlhood, giving white girls more freedom to address social and political controversies while putting girls from minority groups within the terrain of traditional gender expectations.
With these three case studies, I collect evidence showing that mass media and popular culture depictions of girlhood constantly juggled between the feminist counterculture and the mainstream belief about femininity in the 1960s. I argue that a new picture of girlhood arose during the cultural wrestling between feminism and traditional femininity. In this picture, girls gained stronger subjectivity and more complicated personalities in popular discourses while retaining innocence and propriety. This part-revolutionary, part-traditional nature of girlhood encapsulated the acknowledgement of, as well as discomfort toward, feminism in the 1960s, specifically feminist critiques of existing discourses on gender roles and sexuality.

Methodologically, my study is located at an intersection between feminist studies and cultural studies. I use girlhood as a crucial indicator of cultural reproduction and cultural change that are particularly meaningful for women and girls. I also want to use girlhood in the 1960s as a starting point to reflect on the postfeminist culture in America today, when popular culture celebrates beautiful, talented girls while stigmatizing successful, ambitious women. To identify an origin of this ambivalent attitude toward the female sex in the current culture, I explore how feminism and femininity integrated and contested in cultural representations of girlhood during the 1960s.
CHAPTER 1. LOOKING FOR LOVE AND FANTASIES: ROMANCE, BEATLEMANIA, AND AMERICAN GIRLS

Dear John,

I love you, even if you are married, and I love all the other Beatles, too.

–Linda Borders, Houston, Tex.¹

Beatlemania is a tingling of the spine.

Beatlemania is a feeling unknown to anyone unwilling to listen to it. [ . . .]

Beatlemania is love.

Beatlemania is a risk worth taking.

Beatlemania is every girl’s wish come true. [ . . .]

Beatlemania is having someone of your own.

Beatlemania is a longing in the heart.

By Connie L. Watt, A Teenager from Arlington, Va²

The Beatles, a Liverpool-based rock ‘n’ roll music band formed by members John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, first arrived in America on February 7, 1964. Just days after their arrival, Beatlemania took the country by storm. The British band was enormously popular and successful in America. Concert tickets sold out within seconds. Their record albums topped the charts. Radio stations played their songs in heavy

rotation. TV networks received enthusiastic response after they broadcasted performances, interviews, and stories of the Beatles. Photos of the four young lads populated practically every mainstream magazine. The Beatles were “here, there, and everywhere” in American culture. But, if Beatlemania in America had a face, it was not any member of the Beatles; it was the young female fan of the Beatles—a group of screaming teenage girls. Between 1964 and 1966, when the Beatles developed much of their careers in America, their fandom was composed of a large number of teenage girls. The girls were highly engaged fans, who not only purchased records and attended concerts but who also tried to interact with the Beatles members through letters and mediated communication. They followed stories of the Beatles in magazines, shared and exchanged information with other fans, and submitted content for publication. A handful of teen magazines thrived on the teenage girls’ zealous interest in the band.

*16 Magazine* was one of the key teen magazines that benefitted from Beatlemania. It had played a key role in the mediated interaction between the Beatles and teenage girl fans during the first years of the Beatles’ careers in America. Self-marketed as “America’s Most Imitated Magazine,” *16 Magazine* was famous for its stylish editing as well as its intimate portrayal of teen idols. It featured popular musicians and actors, but the content was rarely about music or acting but about how these celebrities were like as a person or a close friend. Enlarged photos showed them looking attentively at the camera as if they were talking to the reader. Articles and interviews focused on what they thought about their personal lives instead of what they did in their professions. In this “Dreamsville,” male idols were constructed as boyfriends, who shared personal details with the magazine’s predominantly teenage girl readers. Among all the idols, the

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3 “Dreamsville” was a key feature column of *16 Magazine*, which selected a few subscribed readers to meet their designated idols.
Beatles received the most attention and perhaps the most intimate portrayal at the height of Beatlemania. Take the June 1964 issue for example. Out of the thirty-three stories that this issue included, fourteen of them were about the Beatles: three about Ringo Starr, three about John Lennon, three about Paul McCartney, three about George Harrison, and two about the band as a whole, to be exact. And this number did not include advertisement pages, where readers could encounter more information about the band. Their appearances on this issue easily outnumbered other popular male idols, Dick Chamberlain (two stories), Elvis Presley, Paul Petersen, and the Beach Boys (one story respectively).

In this chapter, I look at editorial content about the Beatles from issues of *16 Magazine* published between 1964 and 1966, when Beatlemania was an omnipresent cultural phenomenon in America. I argue that the magazine played a groundbreaking role in representing the Beatles members as potential boyfriends to the magazine’s readers, who consisted mainly of teenage girls under the age of sixteen. It created a mediated space, where fans shared an imagined romantic relationship with the band members, and that romantic relationship was often interwoven with teenage girls’ desires to be socially and physically closer to young men or boys. When the girls read the stories of the Beatles and came to know them from the personal angle, they procured a chance to communicate with these young men and sustain a level of imagined intimacy. Textual descriptions covering details of the Beatles’ personal lives as well as close-ups of their faces offered teenage girls a physical dimension to build up and sustain their affection toward their idols. Through building an imagined romantic relationship between the Beatles and the readers, *16 Magazine* broke the traditional media treatment of teenage girls as an ideal of innocence and purity. This popular magazine created a narrative of girlhood in which romantic
relationships with young men were no longer scandalous but a valuable and self-assertive experience for girls growing up in the 1960s.

**How Beatlemania Liberated Girls**

Beatlemania is a term referring to the widespread fan frenzy over the Beatles. In England and in the U.S., this fan frenzy was mostly known to be displayed by teenage girls between twelve and sixteen years of age. Mass media paid more attention to this fandom than any other demographic groups. Reporters coined the term “Beatlemania” in 1963 to describe teenage girls’ collective obsession with the band that bore similarities to religious mania. Since then, pictures and articles of screaming girls at Beatles’ concerts constantly made headlines in England. When the band gave its first televised performance in America on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the TV screen showed an audience of screaming teenage girls. Their screaming was so loud that Ed Sullivan had to ask the girls to control themselves. As a media and cultural sensation geared toward teenage girls in America, Beatlemania began in 1963 and waned in 1966, when the band stopped giving commercial tours. During those years, stories of girls’ frenzied responses to the band, such as the one published by *New York Times* on February 8, 1964, were common in American news media: “There were girls, girls and more girls. Whistling girls. Screaming girls. Singing girls. They held ‘Beatles, we love you’ and ‘WELCOME’ signs.” Other reporters noted that these girls stood closely together, moaned, groaned, ripped their hair, pushed, and fell on the floor crying. Journalist accounts highlighted the fans’ animalistic behavior and maintained that it was a collective experience among this generation of American girls. Because their behaviors—such as lovesickness, uncontrollable emotional outbursts, and fainting—bore striking similarities

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to symptoms of female hysteria, photographs of large crowds of young, white, and properly
dressed girls who seemed to come from modest middle-class families bewildered and shocked
the country.

For those who had been one of the Beatles’ zealous fans or closely looked into what the
fans experienced during those years, Beatlemania was not a mere craze over male pop idols but
one of the earliest mass-scale movements launched by young people, specifically girls in their
adolescent stage, in post-war American history. Why the movement grew to be so dominant
could be explained from political, social, and cultural contexts of the early 1960s. Biographers
and scholars of the Beatles have illustrated that Beatlemania was the first sign of the generational
divide in the 1960s. The Beatles’ earliest career in America coincided with a widespread
cognitive awakening experienced by many young children and teenagers at that time, who started
to prioritize popular culture over conventional politics and develop new points of view different
from their parents. The arrival of the Beatles happened just weeks after the assassination of
President John F. Kennedy. Many marked the eerie connection between the tragic death of the
president and the exuberant rise of the rock ‘n’ roll band. Bruce Spizer, who put together an
encyclopedic book of Beatles’ early activities in the U.S., recalled that his third grade teacher
told the whole class “the President is dead. Class dismissed,” and then sat down and cried.6 The
eight-year-old’s mind picked up moments of watching television coverage of the assassination,
the president’s son saluting the casket, and then “I Want to Hold Your Hand” played on the
school bus radio. Eventually his interest in the joyous song outran news of the president’s tragic

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death. Similarly, in the memoirs collected by Penelope Rowlands and Garry Berman, fans remembered that their earliest memories of the Fab Four overlapped with the national mourning over the death of the president. Michael Laven admitted that whenever people asked “where were you when Kennedy was shot,” all he could think of was the “crystal clear” memory of the moment the Beatles played on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Sigrid Nunez was amazed by the “four demigods touching earth at the airport we were all just learning to call Kennedy,” angry at being too young to be allowed to go to see the Beatles.

In these fan memories, their attention switched from Kennedy’s death to the Beatles’ arrival, hinting at the youngsters’ intuitive refusal to let political news bother their lives. Many children and teenagers were confused by how every grown-up—their parents, their teachers, newsmen—seemed to be affected by Kennedy’s death. In contrast to their nonchalant reaction to the political turmoil, their immediate and enthusiastic reception of the Beatles pronounced what they cared about and what they did not. As fan Pete Kennedy explained, for many baby boomers “with all the energy of adolescence,” Beatlemania “was a generational desire to establish our ownership over our own generation and what our values were going to be.” Embracing the British Invasion just weeks after the president’s death, many teenagers announced that popular culture mattered more than American presidents in their lives.

Upon their arrival in America, the Beatles were popular among young people, but the band was particularly marketed to girls in their pre-teen or teenage years. The band created specific music and style to attract young girls. Michael Frontani indicates that the Beatles’ early

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7 Penelope Rowlands, *The Beatles Are Here!: 50 Years After the Band Arrived in America, Writers and Other Fans Remember*; Garry Berman, "We're going to see the Beatles!" : an oral history of Beatlemania as told by the fans who were there.
9 *The Beatles Are Here!* p. 238
10 "We're Going to See the Beatles!" p. 35.
image was marketed consistent with that of teen idols popular among girls. They were represented as “boys” rather than men, “four little mop-top boys” with friendly smiles. Yet what made the Beatles different was that they composed their own songs and lyrics in a form that could be easily absorbed into girl culture:

[The Beatles] wrote their own music and, in so doing, were in a unique position to exploit fully their core teenage, female market. By design, a significant portion of their songs dealt with relationships between the sexes, and most involved direct address of their young female audience . . . Working diligently at their craft, they eventually settled on a ‘little trick,’ as McCartney later called it: personalizing lyrics through the use of first-person pronouns and direct address of their young female audience.¹¹

Unlike actors, models, or most rock ‘n’ roll singers, the Beatles spoke to girls with their work. Their lyrics containing words of “love me,” “hold your hand,” “oh no,” and even “yeah yeah yeah” resembled the language girls used among the same-aged group. They seemed to have an endless source of creativity, always having something new to say and something to sing about. Consequently, millions of American girls became their most loyal fans. These girls demonstrated an unprecedented scale of admiration that was beyond the usual obsession with teen heartthrobs.

*The Culture of Romantic Yearning*

For girls in their puberty, being part of the Beatlemania was a life-changing experience that helped them identify their romantic and sexual tendencies. This cultural phenomenon occurred in a time when they became sexually mature and started to have sexual desires for the opposite sex. Childhood development studies, such as G. Stanley Hall’s widely read work

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Adolescence (1904), had proven that adolescents experienced dramatic physical and psychological changes. Hall offered explicit descriptions about adolescent boys’ sexuality. A chapter about boys’ masturbation was one of the earliest texts introducing adolescents’ sexual activities in a scientific, non-judgmental tone in America. As Jeffrey Jensen Arnett observes, decades later, Hall’s candid discussion of adolescent sexuality still alarmed the sexually conservative American society. Arnett also points out that Hall’s discussion of masturbation focused exclusively on boys because “evidently, masturbation among girls was something Hall either did not believe occurred or shied away from as too sensitive and potentially inflammatory to mention.”¹² The society’s refusal to address teenage girls’ sexuality meant girls were left on their own to deal with their sexual development. The lack of opportunities to understand or release their sexual energy propelled girls to embrace a cult-like culture of romantic yearning, in which their sexual desires were hidden under many forms of activities, most notably nonstop gossip about boys and dreams about their future husbands.

Beatlemania, characterized by a strong yearning for young male idols, was part of the romantic yearning prevalent in girl culture, yet what made it special was it took shape of a dynamic movement for girls to approach personal and sexual liberation, telling the society that girls had sexual desires too. Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs, in the article “Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” argue that Beatlemania was a precursor to the women’s liberation movement. Beatlemania was at its peak years in 1964 and 1965, and the women’s liberation movement did not come to a full shape until the late 1960s. Beatlemania was not a “movement,” and the screaming and rioting fans were not directly engaged in social protest. Yet by form and by scale, it was the first “mass outburst of the sixties” featuring women.

Many girls screaming for the Beatles in the mid-1960s came to adulthood in the early 1970s, when they faced the emergence of an organized political movement for women’s liberation. In hindsight, collecting information, scheduling meetings, and then screaming and pushing cops away in order to remain close to their idols were an important rehearsal for subsequent feminist demonstrations. Meanwhile, the authors remind readers that the girls’ hysterical behavior not only originated from their affection toward the idols but also concealed the frustration over many rules of decorum that only applied to girls:

The screaming ten- to fourteen-year-old fans of 1964 [. . . ] did have plenty to riot against, or at least to overcome through the act of rioting. In a highly sexualized society (one sociologist found that the number of explicitly sexual references in the mass media had doubled between 1950 and 1960), teen and preteen girls were expected to be not only ‘good’ and ‘pure’ but to be the enforcers of purity within their teen society – drawing the line for overeager boys and ostracizing girls who failed in this responsibility. To abandon control – to scream, faint, dash about in mobs – was, in form if not in conscious intent, to protest the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture. It was the first and most dramatic uprising of women’s sexual revolution.

Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs’ observation of Beatlemania, which they argue happened “in form if not in conscious intent,” suggests a physical liberation for girls. Beatlemania offered excuses for teenage and pre-teen girls to sneak out together away from adult supervision. Numerous fan accounts showed that the girls left their suburban homes for cities to attend the Beatles’ concerts

with or without parental approval. Moreover, they screamed and squealed “for months.”\footnote{Penelope Rowland, \textit{The Beatles Are Here!} p. 19} André Millard highlights that the screaming was a calculated act. Fans screamed throughout the concert because they did not go to the concert to listen to the music. They had bought the records and memorized the songs, “so the reason to attend the concert was to be there and affirm their allegiance.” Screaming also bore a sexual component. The pubescent girls screamed to release their emotional and sexual energy.\footnote{André Millard, \textit{Beatlemania: Technology, Business, and Teen Culture in Cold War America}, p. 131.} Reporters had compared the Beatles fans to mobs, highlighting their raucous and nearly violent presence. Yet Beatlemania was newsworthy exactly for these physical demonstrations. The ways the girls screamed, moaned, and twisted their bodies in public hinted at orgasmic responses. As a result, the girls captured attention and ignited widespread worries because they physically broke the gendered rules of decorum. Through being zealous fans of the Beatles, millions of American girls liberated themselves from norms of sexual purity and decorum. They rejected the traditional, puritan expectation of girlhood.

While Beatlemania has been better known as a physical spectacle, this chapter aims to highlight that the liberating power of Beatlemania also existed on a more subtle and cerebral level. For many girls who could not afford making the trips to see the Beatles in person, they sustained their frenzy mostly through consuming media. Putting spotlight on the media consumption of the Beatles’ fans, I argue for Beatlemania’s significance because it was a popular culture phenomenon that commercialized the culture of romantic yearning among girls, instead of suppressing or diluting it. Beatlemania generated a gigantic media industry, as the fans consumed a myriad of photographs, articles, newspapers, weeklies, monthlies, and fanzines to follow every piece of information about the Beatles. They treated the Beatles as imagined
boyfriends and searched for stories and photos to flesh out their romantic fantasies. As many fans admitted, reading the media representations was a deeply personal experience. These girls did not treat images, reports, and lyrics as disposable merchandizing but a token to cement the imagined link they wanted to have with the Beatles. Beatlemania was unique in a way that each girl built a private world centering around the intimacy and companionship between her and her beloved Beatle. Photographs, artifacts, and every piece of mediated information about the band provided a material base of the private world and served as a reminder of what media scholars have recognized as “the presumption of intimacy.” During the prime years of Beatlemania, teen magazines were arguably the single most important medium for capitalizing on teenage girls’ presumed intimacy with the Beatles. This media consumption not only introduced what the Beatles were like as boyfriends but also reflected what the girls wanted in a romantic or sexual relationship. The girls’ romantic desires, which were repressed at school and at home, found a way out under the guise of celebrity craze.

Among all the teen magazines, 16 Magazine stood out for its innovative and exclusive content that helped intensify girls’ presumed intimacy with the Beatles. The magazine played a paramount role in making the Beatles approachable to girls. Each of the four Beatles a unique persona and life story that girls preferring different types of men could relate. Ringo Starr was “self-conscious and shy. . . inhibited by his sense of inferiority.” George Harrison was the youngest among the four, and he had “boyish buoyancy. . . can send a room full of people into hysterical laughter with one of his poker-faced wisecracks.” He was also “easygoing, kind by

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nature, and delicate and cautious in his selection of friends.”

Paul McCartney was the most outgoing, “brightest” Beatle and was always “full of energy.” Having a happy, comfortable childhood, McCartney was an excellent student at school and a very sociable fellow.

John Lennon seemed to be the most complicated, troubled Beatle. Lennon’s mother died when he was fourteen. Spending most of time alone while growing up, he had always been an independent and “far-out thinker.” He carried a sense of “boldness” and superiority due to his outstanding talent. It was hard to understand Lennon at the first meeting, and “it takes a lot to make him bend to a friendship.” Yet once knowing him well, one would find out Lennon was a “subtle and biting humorist.”

It was not surprising that in most pictures published in 16 Magazine, John Lennon rarely smiled and appeared to be moody, an sharp contrast to the cheerful Paul McCartney.

In these descriptions, the Beatles were not unreachable stars. They were like average boys whom girls befriended at school or in neighborhoods. Some boys were shy, and some were outgoing. Some boys had a great sense of humor, and some were moody. The Beatles were exactly like the older boys next door whom teenage girls knew or secretly admired. Because it was not socially desirable for girls to express romantic interest in older boys or men, they transferred that interest in the Beatles, which, if not approved by adults, was at least backed by the peer culture. In other words, if they could not have a boyfriend, at least let them have a boyish idol to love. The popularity of 16 Magazine’s coverage of the Beatles illustrated the girls’ needs to stay romantically connected with their idols, which the magazine constructed as a crucial socialization process for girls growing up in the 1960s. In this way, this popular teen

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18 “George Harrison’s Life Story,” 16 Magazine, July 1964, p. 44.
magazine transformed the American ideal girl from one who was good, pure, and restrained, adding a tinge of romance and sex.

Despite its critical role in introducing new meanings of girlhood, it is important not to take *16 Magazine* (as well as other teen media capitalizing on Beatlemania) as creators of the culture of romantic yearning. Beatlemania was essentially a commercial phenomenon, in which producers of mass media recognized the spending power of the expanding teenage population and invested money and creativity in it. How *16 Magazine’s* editor Gloria Stavers discovered teenage girls’ serious interest in the Beatles was one of the stories that mass media invested in and profited from girls’ yearning for a romantic and even sexual relationship with men. The media changed the popular culture depictions of girlhood not by creating new meanings but by commercializing repressed sentiment that many teenage girls shared.

**16 Magazine and Beatlemania**

*16 Magazine* began life by capitalizing on teenage girls’ interest in male pop idols. It was the first magazine that self-identified as a girls’ magazine but did not focus on giving beauty tips or lecturing girls about maintaining good relationships with others.\(^{21}\) Instead, the magazine solely focused on girls’ idolization of male pop stars. The magazine was founded in 1956 under the title *All About Elvis* by Jacques Chambrun, a New York-based literary agent who had an eye for the magazine market. At that time, Elvis Presley was the biggest star, a “cash cow,” and Chambrun wanted to exploit Presley’s star value in any possible way. He compiled a bundle of previously published stories and photos of Presley, and he hired Desmond Hall and George Waller—both were experienced magazine writers and editors—to fashion the materials into a magazine.

\(^{21}\) Randi Reisfeld and Danny Fields, *Who’s Your Fave Rave?* p. vii
The sales were excellent, so Hall suggested the magazine be renamed as *16* to replicate the lasting popularity of *Seventeen* and to appeal to girls up to the age of 16. To build a deeper connection with these young girls, the magazine’s editor George Waller used the pen name “Georgia Winters” to communicate with the readers. Waller noticed that the readers not only liked to know about pop idols but also liked to talk about the idols. Therefore, he created “You’re Telling Me,” a section featuring the readers’ letters to Editor “Miss Winters” and the editor’s replies. Readers typically wrote to share their enthusiastic responses: they were happy when they read coverage of the idol. They were jealous if the idol was in a relationship. They were angry if somebody bad-mouthed the idol. Moreover, they always wanted to know more about the idol, “dying” to see more color pin-ups, begging for more coverage, which “Miss Winters” gladly provided. These letters showed that teenage girls deeply cared about pop idols and invested an emotional stake in them. *16 Magazine* thrived on the girls’ yearning and encouraged the emotional investment, which became a greater theme after Gloria Stavers replaced George Waller as Editor-in-Chief in April 1964, two months after the Beatles came to America.

Gloria Stavers played a guiding role in fostering Beatlemania on the pages of *16 Magazine*. She did so by making the magazine a platform for girls to fantasize about pop idols. In Randi Reisfeld and Danny Fields’ review of the history of *16 Magazine*, the authors mention that Stavers had an intuitive understanding of the magazine’s readership. She knew that “*16* is for the girls too old for Daddy’s knee, and too young for the boy next door.”[^22] Not allowed to approach romance and sexuality, these girls needed teen idols for emotional release. Stavers thus treated the girls’ feelings toward their idols seriously. She knew that the girls’ idolization of teen idols

[^22]: Randi Reisfeld and Danny Fields, *Who’s Your Fave Rave?* p. vii
stars carried a great deal of genuine and profound emotions, and she believed the magazine could profit from that.

One of the visible changes after Stavers’ takeover was more readers-contributed content. Stavers expanded the fan letters sections and published more fan creations, such as drawings and articles. As a result, the mediated communication took place not only between the magazine editor and the reader but also among readers. *16 Magazine* became a platform for fans to know what other fans were thinking and doing, which Stavers deemed highly important. According to Candy Leonard, Stavers “had enormous respect for the intelligence and emotional concerns of her readers, who wrote hundreds of letters a week bemoaning the fact ‘nobody takes them serious.’ She noted that her readers were ‘strangely aware of their tremendous economic power.’”23 The girls had time, money, and a surplus of emotional energy. These factors propelled *16 Magazine* to generate sophisticated representations of teen idols.

Unlike editors of most teen magazines, who recycled old stories and photos of popular idols, Stavers was dedicated to creating new and exclusive content. Under her operation, *16 Magazine* became home to many “never-before-seen” photos and stories of the most popular stars in the 1960s. Stavers asked the idols to address the magazine’s readers specifically, tailoring interviews in which the idols answered questions from readers. In addition, Stavers was supportive of new stars, including the Beatles. In 1963, the Beatles were a household name in England but were largely unheard of in America. Nevertheless, Stavers was willing to meet Brian Epstein and made the deal to introduce the band. From 1964 to 1966, Beatlemania was at its height in America, and *16 Magazine* was the teen magazine of Beatlemania in the country.

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Self-marketted as a magazine that showed “Always the Best of the Beatles,”24 it was licensed to distribute many exclusive posters and scrapbooks, promote the band’s public events, and sponsor official fan clubs. It published separate interviews with each Beatle and eventually created a section “Beatles Personal Letters,” which featured fans’ letters to the Beatles and the replies from the band members. Coverage was rarely about music. Instead, it focused on the Beatles’ looks, personality, and relationships. The members were referred to on the first-name basis. Every story of the Beatles was marketed as an intimate story, with its language suggesting authenticity and sincerity to “you,” the reader, giving girls the illusion that they were in direct contact with the idols. 16 Magazine soon became a magazine which girls sought after to follow news about the Beatles, and the extensive coverage about the Beatles drove the sales. Copies sold out quickly upon publication. Many fans ended up becoming subscribed readers because by the time they ran to the newsstand, “all the issues were sold out,” a reader named Nancy Cignicik told Georgia Stavers.25

Much of Beatlemania’s lasting impact on American girlhood relied on this close rapport between the band and the fan base sustained by 16 Magazine. When readers opened each issue, what they encountered was not reprinted photos or trite stories they had learned from other media but “intimate” stories narrated by the Beatles: what John, Paul, George, and Ringo like in girls, what they do with their girlfriends or wives, and eventually more about the women in the Beatles’ lives. These photos and stories were convincing material for girls to fantasize about their idols, often in a romantic or sexual manner. In a time when popular media dismissed topics about adolescent female sexuality, the Beatles’ stories in the teen magazine were the only media

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25 “You are Telling Me,” 16 Magazine, August 1964, p. 5.
source where young girls learned about love, marriage, and sex while building an imagined yet meaningful relationship with men.

In the following section, I analyze how *16 Magazine* represented the Beatles in ways that made it possible for adolescent female readers to construct a presumption of intimacy with the Beatles and eventually fulfill their romantic and sexual desires. I look at the pictures, interviews with each Beatle, and articles about their girlfriends or wives to pinpoint moments that invited the readers to fantasize. I also look at the fan letters section because it showed girls’ first-person narrative of their romantic fantasies. Even though the texts presented male idols, underlying them was an attempt to carve out young girls unnamed desires for heterosexual intimacy. In other words, those stories were not meant to be truthful accounts of the Beatles. Rather, the magazine used the popular band as representatives to reflect what the girls wanted to see in men. *16 Magazine* gave girls a portrait of the band molded after their fantasies. All the representations were tailored for girls, catering to what they dreamed about. As a result, these texts about the Beatles mirrored how girlhood adapted to include elements of femininity and female sexuality that were new in the 1960s.


*16 Magazine* was known for a large number of pictures of pop idols. Every single page contained at least one picture of an idol, and the majority of them were close-ups. These pictures were highly popular and demanded. Readers often wrote to the editor and asked for pictures of specific pop stars. For example, a reader named Betty Rollings wrote this request to Gloria Stavers: “Dear Miss Stavers, I am dying to get a big signed portrait of each of the BEATLES!
Please help me, I am desperate!”

This type of “desperate” request was common during the peak years of Beatlemania. Sometimes Stavers responded by supplying more pictures of the Beatles in each issue, tagging them in the articles or on the front and last pages of the issue. The result was roughly one third of the pages of an issue contained at least one picture of a Beatle. In addition, the magazine also created a special “Beatles Color Posters” section, which invited readers to mail one dollar to get “Beatles Panoramic Color-Poster.”

These visual objects were important assets of *16 Magazine* in the competitive market of teen magazines. The magazine was known for publishing high-quality photos, large color pin-ups, calendars, and portraits. Many readers subscribed because of them. One reader told the editor that photos of other magazines were “little, badly-printed, postcard-size pictures,” and only *16 Magazine* offered pin-up size, “and the color is great!”

The fact that these readers keenly demanded the pictures and paid attention to visual details manifests the importance of the visual representations to them.

Pictures of the Beatles appeared in all sizes, colors, places, and styles, yet they all evoked readers to fantasize about having a dynamic relationship with their idols. In feature articles, the majority of the Beatles’ pictures were not static still images. Instead, they captured kinetic, spontaneous moments, when the band members were photographed talking, walking, or doing something else. Photos of Paul McCartney examining a guitar, John Lennon walking up the stairs, Ringo Starr putting on a pair of boots, George Harrison talking to a friend, or all four of them sitting down and planning for an upcoming performance demonstrated the ordinary routine of the Beatle’s lives. Captions such as George Harrison being “caught in the cockpit” persuaded

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27 *16 Magazine*, July 1964, p. 3.
the readers that these photos were unscripted. They displayed what the Beatles did every day and highlighted their laid-back, relaxed facial expressions, giving readers an impression that these popular stars were easy to approach. Moreover, pictures of the members physically doing something rendered readers a stronger sense of physical proximity, as if they were in the same room watching the Beatles busily doing their work. The magazine had used these supposedly unscripted photos to persuade the readers that they could “find” the Beatles “here” in *16 Magazine.* Girls could always sneak a peep into the rock ‘n’ roll stars’ busy lives if they purchased the magazine.

Physical proximity, suggested by the photos, provided the young girls with an important condition to dream about their idols amorously. In fact, a large portion of pictures were imbued with sentiment and made to stimulate romantic or sexual fantasies. Colorful pin-ups and large-size individual portraits placed at the most noticeable places—usually on the front and back pages of the issues—were specifically marketed to invoke those fantasies. As the magazine described in the advertisement for “Beatles Color Posters,” girls could satisfy their imagination through keeping the pictures close to them:

Wrap yourself in Beatles! Wow—who’d a’thought it could be done? Well, it most certainly, beautifully and colorfully can! Here, for the very first time in America, is 16’s gorgeous special-color process, super-huge, luscious, wrap-around, panoramic BEATLES POSTER! Now you can look up and see Paul, John, Ringo

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30 Ibid., p. 50.
and George—big-Big-BIGGER-TAN-LIFE—smiling out at you from the wall of your bed-room, living-room, den—or any room you choose!31

Similar advertisements for the Beatles’ posters appeared in nearly every issue published between 1964 and 1966. They not only boasted about the size (“enormous” “super giant pin-up”) and quality (“beautiful, living color”) but also taught girls what they could do with the pictures (“pin up on your bedroom wall” or “kiss’”). If any girl wanted to fantasize about being with the Beatles, these high-quality pin-ups of “George, John, Ringo & Paul smiling, laughing and looking straight into your eyes” could satisfy the need.32

These advertisements revealed a high degree of intimacy the pictures brought to girls’ private lives. The posters were expected to appear in a girl’s private spaces, such as her bedroom, where the girl likely spent a long time viewing the pictures alone. Viewing the pictures was a complicated process. It required readers to stare at the pictures for a long time instead of skimming them. A girl had to exercise the imagination to capture the Beatles’ “bigger-than-life” presence. She saw the photos and imagined the Beatles were smiling or talking to her. A girl told Gloria Stavers that her “Beatles Giant Poster” made her feel “As though Ringo, Paul, John, and George are looking right at me!”33 Through the act of imagining, viewing these photos satisfied the girl’s desires to be close to her idols. At the same time, she had to have constant access to the pictures, spending hours of her day looking at the pictures. Thus, the magazine also offered “wallet photos” and “intimate candids,” which fans could put into their wallets and look at the pictures whenever they wanted. The constant presence of the pictures was necessary because what the visual provided was a feeling, instead of the Beatles’ actual presence. To

32 16 Magazine, July 1966, p. 27.
sustain the feeling, or to make it easier to retrieve the feeling, the poster needed to be hung up on
the wall of the room in which the girl spent most of her time.

Sexualized Pictures

How girls viewed the Beatles’ pictures bore many similarities to how men viewed pin-ups—a type of pictures that obtained its name when soldiers pinned up pictures of scantily clad women on the wall during the World War II years. According to Isabella Alston, these pictures featuring attractive women in alluring poses were “designed to be titillating to the male gender.” During the wartime, pin-ups were popular among soldiers due to a lack of interactions with the other sex: “These soldiers and sailors, mostly new recruits, had to leave behind wives and girlfriends to face the devastating conditions of war in which they lived in constant fear for their lives . . . The pin-ups, however, offered a welcome distraction if only for a few dreamy minutes.”34 Interestingly, pin-ups continued to remain popular after the war, when the polite and sexually repressed society of the 1940s and 1950s prohibited any form of sexual encounters outside of marriage. As access to the female body remained difficult or, for many young bachelors, impossible, male consumers turned to pictures of “vulnerable females who were taken by surprise in their state of undress or caught in a moment when they were unintentionally revealing.” This viewing process was “voyeuristic” in a sense that the male viewer was trying to capture the private, vulnerable moments they were not allowed to see in “good, wholesome girls” in the polite society.35 In other words, the boom of the pin-up industry during the post-war years was an outcome of young men’s limited access to sex and their pressing need to find an alternative to satisfy their curiosity toward the female body.

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34 Isabella Alston, Pin-up Girls, p. 6.
In the early 1960s, when the pin-up industry slowed down and was challenged by more explicit “skin magazines” (such as Playboy), girls demanded color pin-ups or posters of male idols out of the same motivation and similar social context. The “mammoth” colorful portraits, which girls could “kiss,” “hug,” or sleep by in the bedroom, allowed them to venture into sexual attempts—something they were discouraged from doing by family, church, and other social organizations. Only with the pictures they could touch—or imagine touching—the male body.

The male idol functioned as an imagined boyfriend, from whom girls distilled feelings of love and even sexual arousal. To sum up, whether it was pin-ups of voluptuous women or color posters of male idols, young American men and girls’ yearning for visual representations of such kind stemmed from their status of sexual repression. Viewing the pictures was a mechanism to negotiate their sexless lives and physical needs. By consuming images of the opposite sex, they were finding a way out in the society where their sexuality was checked (for young bachelors) or suppressed (for girls).

The main difference between the pin-ups consumed by young men and girls was the parts of body they displayed. Pin-ups for male viewers centered on the torso of a woman while color pin-ups in 16 Magazine solely focused on the face of a man. Facial close-ups of male stars were the most promoted type of images in 16 Magazine. These pictures, which displayed the idols’ heads in fine details, catered to girls’ sexual fantasies about young men. Because of their glossy color, quality, and placement, these pin-ups were the most attention-grabbing pictures in the entire magazine and were reserved for the most popular male idols of the time.

The Beatles were common subjects of these color pin-ups in the issues published between 1964 and 1966. For example, in the July 1964 issue, Ringo Starr’s pin-up appeared on the second page (on the other side of the cover), and Paul McCartney’s pin-up was on the last page of the
issue. In August 1964, the issue started with George Harrison’s pin-up on the second page and ended with John Lennon’s pin-up on the last page. These were the pictures the reader saw when she opened and closed the magazine. Not only were these color pin-ups placed at the most attention-grabbing areas, they were designed in a way that girls could feel comfortable to stare at the faces for a long time and imagine they were physically close to the idols. These were life-size portraits, with the idol’s eyes and mouth placed at the central area. The arrangement created “kissable” moments. The reader could attach her mouth to the picture and imagine she was kissing the man she so adored. Meanwhile, the Beatles posited themselves to be kissed. Ringo Starr and George Harrison chuckled with opened mouths, their hands touching their cheeks. They appeared to be having a pleasant conversation with someone sitting close to them. Paul McCartney puckered his lips, looking at the camera attentively. John Lennon tilted his face towards the camera, rested his head on his hand, and appeared to be waiting for a response from someone on the other side of the camera. Their body positions and facial expressions invited attention from the reader (See Figures 1.1 & 1.2).

Figure 1.1 Color pin-up of Paul McCartney, Sixteen, July 1964, p. 67
Comparing pin-ups for young men and the Beatles’ face shots, one could find a fundamental distinction regarding how young men and women’s sexual desires were marketed. It was more socially acceptable for a young man to lust after a young woman’s body, including her body parts considered sexiest. Pin-ups for men aimed at stimulating sexual desire by centering on young women’s breasts and buttocks. Meanwhile, consumer culture exercised more restraints when it came to young women’s sexual interest. The most a Beatle’s pin-up could display was an enlarged face shot with the idol’s puckered mouth at the center of the image. For instance, in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2, both Paul McCartney and John Lennon’s mouths were placed in the middle of the pages. There were clearly signs of makeup on their lips, with Paul’s lips painted red and John’s shaped perfectly. This type of visual display aimed at inviting the girls to kiss or imagining kissing the idols on their mouths.

In America, kissing was a subject that was carefully framed and monitored in mainstream media. In his semiotic study of popular culture, Marcel Danesi finds that many world cultures, including early Christian culture, held kissing more as a social or spiritual act than as a romantic
or sexual gesture. The knowledge that a kiss could release “love hormone” and lead the kissers to be sexually attracted to each other was fairly recent and made well-known by mass media portrayal of couples in love in the twentieth century. In America cinema, there had always been a tradition of keeping kissing an act imbued with romantic and sexual connotations. Classical Hollywood movies often ended a film with a kiss between a man and a woman. By kissing each other, the couple reached a supreme level of commitment. The kiss thus suggested that the couple entered a committed, long-term, and possibly sexual relationship.³⁶ Because of its sexual connotations, kissing was rarely discussed in teen media.

When 16 Magazine invited girls to kiss the Beatles’ giant, brightly glossed pin-ups, it encouraged the girls to experiment with the action of kissing a man, which no other major media outlets had done. In André Bazin’s theory of photography, a photographic image is not just a piece of reproduced medium of an object but “the object itself.” In a photograph, the object is “freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shared, by virtue of the very process of becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.”³⁷ The fact that the model photographed is the model himself is even more the case in 16 Magazine’s advertisement of the Beatles’ pin-ups. Instead of saying the girls are going to kiss the photograph of a Beatle, the magazine said they are going to kiss the idol himself. They could enjoy the titillating feeling of kissing a man they adored.

The Beatles were “kissable” idols because they displayed a safer version of masculinity. First, they did not appear to display threatening sex appeal. They did not look perfect. Ringo

³⁶ Marcel Danesi, *The History of the Kiss: The Birth of Popular Culture*
Starr showed his big nose. George Harrison showed his crooked teeth. They all had disheveled hair, left untrimmed and unstyled, hinting at a sense of ease and casualness. Their poses also suggested a disregard of formality. They were either smiling, talking, or paying attention to the camera holder. They stared at the camera with sincere smiles or inviting gazes. It was easy for the reader to read into their emotions. In this way, the Beatles’ pin-ups in 16 Magazine showed a different imagery than other male idols. They were different from widely adored heartthrobs with muscular shoulders and sneering smiles (such as Elvis Presley and David Mccallum) or handsome actors with perfectly trimmed hair (Richard Chamberlain and Paul Peterson). They also looked different from other rock ‘n’ roll stars looking nonchalant (such as the Rolling Stones). The Beatles were friendly, good-looking, and “kissable,” yet they were not threatening with overt masculinity. In addition, race was an implicit factor in 16 Magazine’s selection of the Beatles as the kissable idols over other male stars. Unlike Elvis Presley, whose musical styles, dance moves, accent, and even demeanor were heavily influenced by Southern black culture, what the Beatles performed, especially in their earlier career in America, was Anglo-American whiteness. As a result, white, middle-class girls in their pre-teen years could feel comfortable kissing the Beatles’ pictures without causing themselves, or their parents, concern about being obsessed with non-white, threatening masculinity.

Girls received these visual representations of the Beatles with a variety of activities. They kissed the pictures, wrapped their bodies with the pictures, drew pictures of the Beatles, and decorated their bedrooms with the pictures. These activities showed girls’ engagement into the peer culture and caused competition, as girls started to compare the number of qualities of the Beatles’ pictures they owned. For instance, Betty Grewell, a self-identified “ardent BEATLE fan” told Gloria Stavers: “I can’t thank you enough for offering that fab color poster of them.
Mine is on the wall right over my bed—and all my girl friends are green to have one like it.”38

These seemingly silly, innocent interactions with press images were the only acceptable ways for girls to experiment with physical intimacy and sexuality.

Drawing pictures of the Beatles was common among ardent fans, who submitted their drawing to *16 Magazine*. This move showed a higher level of dedication. It took girls a great amount of time and energy to sketch portraits of the Beatles’ facial close-ups with pencils. It meant the girls probably spent hours gazing at the pin-ups and observing detailed facial features before they drew the pictures for submission. This creative process demonstrated girls’ ability to glean inspiration from the pin-ups. They also developed emotional links between the pictures and themselves, especially those they pinned up on the wall of the bedroom.

In post-war America, where most children and teenagers from middle-class families could afford having their own bedrooms, bedrooms were the most individualized and intimate space for young people. The bedroom was also the place where young people spent most time alone and came to realize what they liked. It was a space of personal exploration, an important process for teenagers to make connections between themselves and the outside world. Siân Lincoln calls the teenage bedroom a “hub of activity.” In the bedroom, teenagers conducted a plethora of activities they may or may not want to be caught doing. They slept, listened to music, drank, took drug, watched videos, masturbated, had sex, or meditated. This was the space where teenagers committed themselves to a host of activities to “seek out their individuality and independence.” Therefore, the material and media items they populated the room with, most commonly framed photos, records, books, magazines, stuffed animals, musical instruments, were

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38 “You’re Telling Me!” *16 Magazine*, April 1965, p. 3.
significant in their construction of self-identities.\textsuperscript{39} When girls pinned the large-size pin-ups of the Beatles on the wall of their bedrooms and spent many hours a day contemplating them, the Beatles entered the zone of their romantic and sexual fantasies. It is through this active consumption and engagement of visual representations that the girl found ways to rehearse how to look at, and what to look for in, a man she adored.

The visual representations of the Beatles changed as the band started to develop a different professional route in the late 1960s. They sought to appeal to a more mature audience and stopped being lovable moptops from England. They grew long hair and moustaches, put on glasses, and created psychedelic music. Some of them—most notably John Lennon—were increasingly active in countercultural politics. They all became husbands and fathers, making news headlines with their divorces and infidelities.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, they were less convincing subjects to cater to teenage girls’ romantic fantasies. As Gloria Stavers noted in March 1967, the Beatles were “bound to seek their own self-expression.”\textsuperscript{41} At that time, Stavers probably realized that it was harder to portray the new Beatles to the magazine’s readers. In 1967, the Beatles stopped being the subject of the color pin-ups. The magazine also stopped advertising the band’s posters. The readers could still see the Beatles, yet they could only see the latest pictures of the band on the fringe of the article. What they saw was a much older, moodier, and more serious-looking group. The Beatles had stopped portraying—or \textit{16 Magazine} had stopped portraying them—as potential boyfriends to girls. The declining coverage of the band at this time disclosed the magazine’s agenda in deciding what kinds of male idols could be subjects to girls’ romantic

\textsuperscript{39} Siân Lincoln, \textit{Youth Culture and Private Space}, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{40} In 1968, John Lennon divorced Cynthia Lennon, and Paul McCartney separated from his longterm girlfriend Jane Asher.
fantasies and what could not. Girls were only allowed to gaze at smiling and clean-shaven men. Even though the magazine’s visual representations evoked girls’ romantic or sexual fantasies, they also framed what kinds of men were appropriate to fantasize about.

“Intimate” Stories: What Girls Learned about Relationships from the Beatles

To summarize 16 Magazine’s coverage of the Beatles between 1964-1966, “intimate,” “secret,” and “personal” were the key words. Each story about the Beatles was marketed as “intimate” and written by someone who personally knew the Beatles well. The magazine highlighted that it had information that the band confided to the editors and hence was never seen elsewhere. The content of the articles was rarely about music but about what the Beatles were like as friends, boyfriends, or husbands. The earliest coverage, such as “John Lennon Answers 40 Intimate Questions” and “Ringo Starr’s Life Story,” gave biographical accounts characterized with the members’ personal views on what had happened in their lives. These unauthorized stories were often told from a first-person perspective or teemed with plenty of quotations, creating an impression that it was the Beatles narrating their life stories to readers. When most U.S. media outlets focused on the Beatles’ professional achievements and their frantic fans, 16 Magazine depicted them as average young men who struggled at socializing with girls and longed for romantic relationships. However, after August 1964, when it was a widely-known fact that all of the Beatles were either married or dating, the magazine shifted the focus from readers’ fantasies to the band’s love lives. In articles such as “Are All Four Beatles Married?” and “How

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Paul Has Changed Jane’s Life,” the Beatles’ relationship with their wives or girlfriends became
the subject of the romantic drama.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{16 Magazine}’s articles featuring the Beatles’ love life demonstrated a significant
depture from how media had previously reported celebrity romances to young audiences. In
general, mass media until the 19xx tended to avoid addressing celebrity’s private lives. Married
couples did not display affection publicly. Romantic encounters outside of marriage were either
taboo or considered not newsworthy. The most notable example was how major news networks
decided not to report anything about President Kennedy’s extramarital affairs even though they
held substantial evidence. Reporters felt “wrong” to reveal public figures’ private behavior to
their audiences.\textsuperscript{44} In the 1950s and 1960s, media products for younger audiences, including teen
magazines, held an even more reserved message regarding love and romance. Romance was a
popular topic in teen magazines, but these publications gave a platonic, logical image of
adolescent dating, something that was allowed but must be done with caution and parental
permission. It was a complete opposite to the sneaky, naughty stories of Beatles’ romances that
\textit{16 Magazine} introduced.

In her historical analysis of \textit{Seventeen}’s content, Kelley Massoni indicates that adolescent
dating was not a taboo but was kept innocent. Dating among young boys and girls was primarily
a process of knowing each other on an intellectual level. Articles about this topic focused on
teenagers’ conversations, instead of actual, physical interactions. Article titles such as “What Do
Boys Like?” and “Getting Along in the World” defined romance as a cognitive curiosity toward

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{16 Magazine}, Sep. 1964, pp. 38-40; Alan Freeman, “How Paul Has Changed Jane’s Life,” \textit{16 Magazine}, February
1965, pp. 44-46.
the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{45} In articles titled “Somebody Would Like to Meet you” and “Just the Way You Look Tonight,” the magazine was more generous in giving girls beauty tips to help them look more attractive to boys than explaining what they actually had to do with their dates. In these articles, boyfriends and girlfriends did not kiss and did not hug. They traveled together to somewhere close (such as parks or beaches) so that they did not have to stay overnight. Teenage romances could be fun, but they should never violate moral conduct.

Reportage of celebrity romance followed similar rules. Physical contact between a man and a woman were rare and were done under limited circumstances. Pop stars touched and hugged each other in public for professional reasons. For example, prior to getting married in 1967, Elvis Presley was shown in \textit{16 Magazine} flirting only with actresses he performed shows with. For example, an article described Jocelyn Lane and Elvis “holding hands and watching television together. Alone” while they were filming \textit{Tickle Me}. Annette and Frankie Avalon kissed each other because they were filming \textit{Muscle Beach Party}. Articles depicting celebrities in a romantic light often carried a promotional purpose. These stars were just acting or rehearsing for a show, the magazine assured. They were not in an actual relationship. What the stars actually did with their dates was kept unknown to readers.

\textit{16 Magazine’s} coverage of the Beatles’ romances opened up what had been deemed indecent to teenage girls. It treated the Beatles as subjects of genuine love stories instead of gossips. Unlike Paul Peterson or Elvis Presley who had one or two “girl friends” here and there. In the mid-1960s, the Beatles were in open, stable, and monogamous relationships. John Lennon was married to Cynthia Lennon. Paul McCartney was dating Jane Usher. George Harrison was dating Pattie Boyd. And Ringo Starr was dating Maureen Cox. The Beatles were very much in

love, and they were loyal to their partners. The magazine created long articles to introduce Cynthia Lennon, Jane Usher, Pattie Boyd, and Maureen Cox to their readers. They were important people to the Beatles and not just some anonymous women associated with male stars. What readers learned from *16 Magazine* about the Beatles were, as Gloria Stavers insisted, not gossip but true romance. Stavers went further to write an article collecting “rumors” from other teen magazines and criticized them as “Those Unfair Evil Beatle Rumors.” She told readers that only *16 Magazine* can get those nasty rumors “straightened out.” On this note, articles about the Beatles’ romances were intended to be truthful accounts, rather than packaged publicity spin. Readers sought to learn specific and supposedly truthful details about the celebrities’ love life, and they took them seriously.

Articles of the Beatles’ romances often toyed with possibilities of premarital sex. In the September 1964 issue, readers learned that “Paul calls Jane his girlfriend.” Even though he “will not even admit that she is his steady,” he “took Jane along on his vacation to St. Thomas in the Caribbean.” They would “go out for an evening of sightseeing, or share a quiet meal,” and then “they returned to the hotel before 11 P.M.” It was “more of a honeymoon trip than a vacation.” In a cautious tone, the unnamed writer assured readers the actual honeymoon did not happen. The couple did not share the same room: “careful scouting showed that Jane shared a suite with Maureen Cox, far away from the suite in the same hotel shared by Paul and Ringo.” The writer admitted that what the Beatles did—vacationing with women they were not married to—might be scandalous. But in a strange conclusion, the writer reminded that these young lovers were adults and could take responsibilities for themselves: the Beatles “caused a bit of not-so-happy talk on that snobbish little island, for the residents felt that the young couples should have been

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chaperoned. However, all parties involved were of legal age—so that was that.” Here, the article made a nuanced message: young couples were allowed to take overnight trips as long as they exercised self-control (in the case of Paul and Jane, staying in separate rooms). Similar to what Paul and Jane did, George Harrison took Patty Boyd to Ireland, Hawaii, and Tahiti. Again, the articles assured readers that nothing scandalous could possibly happen between them because they were chaperoned by a married couple: “John and Cynthia again were along.”  

47 The lovers seemed to hold a high moral standard by avoiding physical contact, but photos of the shirtless men and their girlfriends in short shorts lying on a yacht seemed to suggest otherwise. Details of the couples enjoying an evening dinner till very late at night while staying in separate rooms or traveling with chaperones revealed the teen magazine writer oscillating between the popular band’s liberal practices and mainstream disapproval of pre-marital sex. 

48 The ups and downs between Ringo Starr and the eighteen-year-old Maureen Cox were in several ways more controversial than other Beatles’ romances in 16 Magazine, leaving sharp-eyes readers to calculate the odds of pre-marital sex and unplanned pregnancy. Earlier reports of the relationship stated that Ringo “looks more like the marrying kind” than other Beatles, and Maureen was a shy and “mysterious” girl who did not like to give interviews. The couple reportedly met each other and started to date when Maureen was only fifteen years old. They shared a simple and sweet relationship like most teenagers: she “lives with her mum,” and Ringo “calls her every day.” She calls him “Rickie,” and he called her “Mo.”  

49 In 1964, the couple appeared to be a model for all teenage romances. But the image of sweet puppy love 16

49 As Bob Spitz summarizes in The Beatles: The Biography, none of the Beatles were known for being chaste. It became common knowledge among many reporters that the four all had records of cohabitation and casual sex with female fans before and during their marriages.
Magazine constructed soon disappeared, as the relationship started to develop in a direction that teen media typically avoided covering. In the February 1965 issue, Maureen “flatly denies that she is engaged or even thinking about marriage to Ringo. She says they are very good friends.”

Yet three months later, 16 Magazine announced, “RINGO takes a Wife!” For the magazine that liked to give prolonged stories about what male idols did to court girls with excruciating details, this article announcing Ringo and Maureen Starr’s wedding was unusually short. The description only took one third of the page. In plain, matter-of-fact language, it reported that the couple applied for a marriage license on February 9 and hosted a wedding on February 11. It was a quick and quiet wedding so that the “famous Beatles drummer could marry without attracting large crowds.” An article published one month later implied that the couple did not seem to be ready for the married life. They were often apart in the first weeks of their marriage: “Ten days after that Caxton Hall ceremony she kissed Ringo goodbye and he flew away to Nassau for film work. Three weeks later she was with her husband for 48 hours before he hurried off again to shoot scenes in the Austrian Alps.” News of Maureen’s pregnancy was not revealed in the magazine until February 1966, when the article “At Home with Ringo, Mo and Zak” announced the birth of the couple’s first son without revealing his birthday. By that time, the newlyweds had ceased to be subjects of romantic stories. While 16 Magazine continued to create romantic stories featuring Paul McCartney and Jane Asher, George Harrison and Patti Boyd, and John and Cynthia Lennon, Maureen was battling with “loneliness” because her husband “has to be away so much.” The girl alluded to have had a shotgun wedding was no longer a subject of the ideal

52 “What It’s Like to be Married to Ringo!” 16 Magazine, June 1965, p. 59.
53 Yet major American media had covered Zak Starkey’s birthday on September 13, 1965, only seven months after his parents’ wedding.
romance. She became someone that the magazine preferred not to report to the readers, and she nearly disappeared from the 16 Magazine’s pages after the birth of her first son.

16 Magazine’s feature articles about the Beatles’ love lives were an important source for girls to learn what they could do and could not do in a romantic relationship. In a time when teen media capitalized on teenage girls’ interest in celebrities’ love lives by offering them shallow and often inaccurate coverage, 16 Magazine’s articles about the Beatles’ romances were authentic and detailed. It was understandable that girls showed great interest in 16 Magazine’s “intimate” stories about the Beatles’ romantic relationships and demanded more coverage of such kind. Eventually the Beatles and their girlfriends or wives served almost as relationship advisers, to whom girls looked up for advice on dating. Girls learned about “How to Hold Your Guys” from Cynthia Lennon, copied “Jane Asher’s Kicky-fab Fashions,” and collected beauty tips from Patti Boyd. They took lessons from girlfriends or wives of the male idols they adored to enrich their knowledge of what men liked in girls and how they could become more attractive to men. Meanwhile, they were also warned—by “cautious scouting” and the magazine writers’ occasionally judgmental tone—of the impropriety of premarital sex. To sum up, these romantic stories capitalized on girls’ fantasizing about heterosexual relationships while upholding the values of sexual purity.

Mass media provides children and adolescents models for social behavior. Young people imitate stars’ behavior, including those that are not socially approved. In the 1960s, teenage girls looked particularly closely at the media’s portrayal of male-female interactions as social cues, especially at a time when media may have been their only source of information about pre-

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marital relationships.\textsuperscript{55} When there was a lack of models of premarital dating in reality, they perused media descriptions of celebrities’ love lives to glean information about what they could and could not do when they dated. As a Beatles fan told Stavers, “I love de-coding those wild secret messages each month!”\textsuperscript{56} The readers knew that the magazine did not reveal complete details, but it did provide many clues to “decode.” Behind the factual descriptions about Paul McCartney inviting Jane Asher for a late-night sightseeing, George Harrison spending holidays with Pattie Boyd, or Ringo Starr asking Maureen Cox to be his personal assistant, some readers enjoyed decoding what had happened behind the closed door. As a result, reading these stories and surmising the “wild” things happened within the stories became processes for girls to familiarize with premarital relationships. Overall, girls received the message that they were allowed to date without being subject to scandals. They learned what people did when they were dating. Moreover, they learned what was legitimate to do and what was sneaky. In this way, stories of the Beatles’ romances taught girls—most of whom did not have a boyfriend—important messages about love and relationships. In an age when most of them did not or were not allowed to build heterosexual relationships, the “intimate” stories of the Beatles romances functioned as material for girls to understand love and to rehearse having a romantic relationship with men.

**Love Letters to the Beatles**

Since *16 Magazine* started to cover news about the Beatles, it received a large number of fan letters demanding to correspond with the band members. To respond to this popular request, in October 1964 the magazine created a section “Beatles Personal Letters.” The magazine

\textsuperscript{55} Patrick E. Jamieson and Daniel Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950.*

\textsuperscript{56} “You’re Telling Me,” *16 Magazine,* August 1964, p. 5.
advertised this new section in the September issue, claiming that this was an “exclusive” offer for “you lucky 16 regulars”: “YOU CAN WRITE TO THE BEATLES AND GET A PERSONAL ANSWER! Nowhere in the whole wide world—except in 16 Magazine—can this be done!”\(^5^7\) The magazine promised that the “boys” would read the letters in person and answer any questions, building a direct rapport between girls and the male idols. The section ran consistently between October 1964 and August 1965, accumulating hundreds of published letters exchanged between the Beatles and girls who wrote to them. Girls wrote about every topic to the Beatles, but the majority of them expressed how much they loved the Beatle(s). The section quickly became a hub of love letters, where girls revealed personal emotions hoping to receive a reply from the band.\(^5^8\)

The success of the fan letters section echoed a significant movement during second-wave feminism. According to Margaretta Jolly, letter writing was a common practice in the feminist communities during the 1960s and 1970s. It took the forms of intimate love letters between lesbians, mother-daughter correspondence, passionate announcements and manifestos calling like-minded “sisters” to take actions, and part-autobiographical, part-expository essays enunciating the impacts of sexism on women’s lives. In a time when mass media lacked fair coverage of feminist activities, these letters were not only a key communicative channel among women but also revealed the sophisticated process in which the female writers constituted “the individual sense of self-expression,” which led them to acquire more sense regarding what it meant to be a woman in a patriarchal society.\(^5^9\) To theorize the popularity of letter writing among

\(^{5^7}\) 16 Magazine, September 1964, p. 41.

\(^{5^8}\) The published letters were predominantly signed by writers with girlish names, such as Beckie, Vicki, Patti, Jori, etc.

\(^{5^9}\) Margaretta Jolly, In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism, p. 3.
feminists, Jolly argues that it established the “self as relational” as feminist epistololarity, in which women realized their self-observation and personal feelings mattered to the society and even more so to women sharing the same experiences. Therefore, their private correspondence, either shared with another woman or circulated within a small women’s group, carried social values. Letter writing, on this note, played a key role in consciousness-raising, as the inward-looking process helped women know more about themselves, their relationships with other women, and their positions in the larger society.

The fans’ “personal letters” to the Beatles (technically, to 16 Magazine) revealed a similar process in which girls raised self-consciousness about themselves. On surface, the girl wrote the letter to tell the Beatle she “love” him. Yet in reality, the girl was writing the message to figure out what love meant and, to be more specific, what made her qualified to love a man. What fans wrote in the letters was mostly about themselves. Typically, a girl began the letter by asking a question or introducing something about herself, and then she asked what the Beatle thought about it. For example, “Do you have a race horse?” a girl named Marie Caretta asked Ringo Starr. She then said that she was going to get a horse in the summer, before she ended the letter with “I love you very much.” Similarly, a girl named Ava Ave asked Paul if he like poodles. If he didn’t, what kind of dog he preferred? A girl named Sue Ryan asked George Harrison: “Are you and your family close-knit?” She then told Harrison her family was very close. In these fan letters, a girl learning playing guitar would tell Paul McCartney how much she enjoyed playing the instrument. A girl having freckles would ask if George Harrison minded dating a girl with freckles. A girl living in a rural town would ask if the Beatles liked countryside.

\[60\] Ibid., p. 80.
Unsurprisingly, there were many girls asking what kinds of girls the Beatles liked. These questions did not come out of nowhere. What the girl did were basic dating lessons: recognizing her strength or weakness, identifying shared interest or values with the man she adored, and building a rapport with him. Albeit simplistic, these moves were essential for a romantic relationship. The girl was practicing how to initiate a relationship with a man through writing the letter to the Beatles.

Some girls took the chance to practice how to express “love” to a man. When they used the word “love,” they acknowledged they harbored intense, uncontrollable yearning for the men. For example, “Dear Ringo, ever since I saw you on The Ed Sullivan Show I have been in love with you,” a “‘lil’ Diane” wrote to Ringo Starr.\(^{62}\) A pair of friends wrote “Dear John, my girl friend and I are both in love with you. We think you are the most handsome and wittiest person of all.”\(^{63}\) A Carol Peebles from New Orleans wrote: “Dear John, this letter comes with a million kisses. I am terribly sick, you know. I have Beatlemania and will never get well, but who wants to? I nearly fainted when I heard you sing here.”\(^{64}\) At that time, it was risky for a girl to reveal candid messages like these. Admitting they could not stop thinking about a man and even falling “sick” would lead them to be accused of lovesickness or hysteria, the main reasons why the young fans were scolded by parents and ridiculed by media. Even the girls knew such types of behavior were socially unacceptable. As several of them shared, it took a lot of “nerve” to “admit I have a big crush” on a Beatle.\(^{65}\) People around them called them “nuts” or “a little squirt” for carrying so much deep affection toward their idols, and they shared these experiences of being

\(^{64}\)“Beatles’ Personal Letters,” 16 Magazine, February 1965, p. 20.
derided with both the Beatles and other fans. In a society where girls could not admit feeling excited about a man, they pronounced it through composing the fan letters and sending them to the teen magazine.

Although writing personal letters to the idols provided girls with a valuable chance to practice initiating a relationship and admit their yearning for a man, it was also a compromise. It was love in perpetual rehearsal and could hardly be realized, and girls coped with this reality with different levels of compromise. Some demanded an actual answer: “Dear George, I love you and I was just wondering if you love me,” Mary Jane Forsythe asked (George Harrison did not answer her question). More accepted the fact that the love was one-sided: “Dear John, I love you, even if you are married,” a Linda Borders wrote to John Lennon. Similarly, a Gilda Shellikoff told Ringo Starr “I still love you even though you’re married.” Usually questions or messages like these were left unanswered by the Beatles, who were more willing to give personal details about interest and hobbies. Despite a lack of reactions to love messages, letters proclaiming love to a Beatle repeatedly appeared in the section, showing girls’ desire to manifest their strong feelings of affection with or without direct feedback. In some cases, girls revealed they had written multiple long letters—“6 to 15 pages long,” a girl claimed—and did not expect the letters would actually be published or read. These cases showed that letter-writing was a self-satisfactory process, in which a girl released feelings of affection by putting words of love on paper. Whether the man replied her love messages or not did not matter; what mattered was

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the girl actually wrote down “I love you” and sent the words for publication. Her yearning could be shared on a public platform.

Writing love letters to the Beatles was a practice more than an actual communication. It was part of girls’ rehearsing communications with men. As Maggie Wykes and Barrie Gunter illustrate, girls know they will grow up. They will date men and possibly marry them. The magazines “offer them glimpses and possibilities of what that new self might be.” Based on the fan letters to 16 Magazine, one would find that most of these girls did not have boyfriends or had never dated. They probably did not have any actual experiences communicating with boyfriends or even vocalizing their love toward someone. Writing fan letters provided the rare chance when they could rehearse what it felt like to actually express romantic feelings to a man. Contrary to what the older generation preached, dating required practice. A girl needed practice to know how to see beyond the surface of a man and identify the man she wanted. Moreover, they needed practice to express her romantic interest, to realize she actually loved a man. What 16 Magazine offered the girl was such kind of practice.

In a time when teen publications advised girls not to initiate a relationship with a boy, especially not to be the first one to vocalize interest in him, girls writing countless love letters defied a predominant cultural stereotype about adolescent femininity. During Cold War America, popular culture products for girl viewers often imposed “a passive model of femininity.” Girls waited for love, instead of chasing after love. The most they could do was trying to make themselves more beautiful to attract suitors. In this context, personal letters to the Beatles

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72 Girl Culture, p. 51.
73 16 Magazine, for example, advised a girl to “try to be more attractive and appealing” to attract the boy’s attention instead acknowledging she liked him; 16 Magazine, March 1965, p. 18.
reversed the norm of heterosexual dynamics by inviting girls to declare their romantic interest in men. For the first time, popular culture not only allowed girls to express their romantic yearning but also encouraged them to do so. In this process, girls did not necessarily know more about the Beatles; what they knew more was about the romantic sides of themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used the color pin-ups, feature articles, and fan letters to the Beatles in 16 Magazine to explore how Beatlemania brought teenage girls to know more about and even experience their romantic yearning. Color pin-ups offered girls a visual base to imagine kissing or hugging the men they liked. In some cases, girls hung up the pictures on the wall of their bedrooms, where the pictures triggered their sexual fantasies. “Intimate” stories created by the magazine writers gave girls a glimpse into celebrities love lives. In these stories, premarital sex was an elusive subject that the writers used to attract attention as well as to caution girls about boundaries of dating. “Personal Letters” to the Beatles provided girls a platform to build a deep relationship with the idols. In the process of introducing themselves and declaring “love” to the Beatles, girls made sense of their feelings of affection and rehearsed what it felt to communicate with men they loved. Consuming these texts motivated teenage girls to accomplish an important growing-up experience that was against the traditional expectations of femininity. When these girls spent much of their childhood living under the 1950s’ culture of containment, political, social, and cultural forces indoctrinated them with an image of girlhood characterized with a passive, innocent model of adolescent femininity. Media and cultural operation of Beatlemania created a narrative of girlhood incorporating romantic and sexual fantasies toward male idols. In this way, Beatlemania romanticized girlhood, introducing love and celebrity crush as a collective, almost must-have experience to American girls.
CHAPTER 2. TWIGGY IN AMERICA: MOBILITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND POPULISM AS NEW FORMS OF FASHIONABLE GIRLHOOD

“Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him . . . how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting.”

—Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 1963

“Send that leggy ironing board back to Britain. We would much rather have their oil slick.”


Scholarship on American popular culture of the 1960s often referred to British model Twiggy as an iconic figure of the decade. Her ultra-thin body, doll-like big eyes, short hair, and young age constituted what was commonly described as the fashionable image of young girls in the 1960s. Coming to America at the age of seventeen, Twiggy received a great deal of media coverage, which focused on her age, her modeling career, her looks, and her down-to-earth personality. Her success reflected a growing expectation for a new version of female beauty in the 1960s America.

In this chapter, I argue that Twiggy’s media representations attached a series of new meanings to girlhood in America. Browsing through articles and pictures from Life, Look, Newsweek, Vogue, Ladies’ Home Journal, Seventeen, and Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World, I conduct a textual and visual analysis of the editorial content and advertisements of Twiggy to explore how Twiggy was represented in these popular mass-circulation magazines. I find that

descriptions of Twiggy had encompassed increased mobility, an affirmative attitude toward ordinary beauty, and a balance between empowered femininity and domesticity, which were different from how a beauty ideal had been introduced in post-war America. Twiggy’s media image was new and attention-grabbing in the late 1960s because it directly addressed teenage girls’ spending power and encouraged girls to be fashionable through self-reflection, clothing, and make-up. By analyzing examples from popular magazines’ coverage of Twiggy’s modeling career in the U.S. throughout 1967, I investigate how definitions of girlhood changed in this period. The magazines used Twiggy to articulate what a modern teenage girl was and what she should act and look like.

The mainstream media narratives revealed many contradictions. On one hand, they highlighted her youthful and light-weight body as well as her determined facial expression to denote a sense of mobility, empowerment, and challenge to prevailing definitions of fashionable femininity. On the other hand, they infantilized her image when it came to her relationship with family and her much-older boyfriend. Moreover, the narratives also focused on Twiggy’s working-class background and her down-to-earth personality. These narratives posited new beauty statements centering on teenage girls. Instead of following the footstep of fashion icons and copying their styles, teen magazines and women’s magazines promoted a distinctive fashion persona for teenage girls. Twiggy functioned as a palpable figure of this new fashionable girlhood burgeoning in the 1960s and prefiguring part of what we now understand as American girls.
A New Fashion Icon for Teenagers

Twiggy’s arrival in the U.S. was newsworthy at the time because she was the first high-end fashion model ostensibly identified for populist, youthful appeal. As Patricia Soley-Beltran observes, she was the “cockney kid” whose look and personality embodied an “innocence and image of youth.”2 Not only was this youthful image popular among teenage girls, it was also well-accepted by women who keenly followed latest fashion trends and eventually adopted her youthful look. Twiggy’s enormous popularity propelled the fashion industry and mass media to formulate a set of languages and images to constitute new beauty concepts associated with girlhood.

In the 1950s, a girl transitioning from childhood to adulthood had few fashion icons to identify with. Inspired by high fashion designers from Europe, most notably Christian Dior, the mainstream representations of fashion focused on bringing femininity back to average American women rather than seeking out a symbol for the expanding young generation. According to Kate Nelson Best, the introduction of Christian Dior’s New Look in the spring of 1947 was a turning point in America’s fashion journalism. The New Look not only rekindled mass media’s interest in covering high fashion news but also consolidated a fixed image of fashionably femininity in post-war America.3 The New Look embodied the return of the feminine look and ended the masculine, informal wartime fashion trends worn by working women.4 The New Look attracted a large amount of media attention mainly because of its high-profile fans, such as First Lady Mamie Eisenhower, the Duchess of Windsor, Jackie Kennedy, and socialites of the sort.

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2 Patricia Soley-Beltran, “Performing Dreams: A Counter-History of Models as Glamour’s Embodiment,” p. 100
3 During the wartime, only a small number of media outlets covered fashion news. Fashion magazines, such as Vogue, primarily focused on the home front and the domestic industry. See Kate Nelson Best’s The History of Fashion Journalism.
4 As men went to the war zone, women had to mend the lack of male labor in the workplace.
Although it successfully brought back the feminine look to the fashion industry, the New Look was not a fashion style for teenage girls. It could not be emulated without delicate corsets, bras, panties, girdles, stockings, and other underwear pieces to lift up a woman’s breasts, accentuated her bust, and tighten her waist. The layered skirts and sculptural jackets, typical of the New Look designs, limited women’s movements. The New Look valued proportion, control, and luxury. It was, in other words, a fashion design for women who attended parties or ceremonies, walked slowly, and quietly sat down. It was not for teenage girls, who had less money and a more physically active lifestyle.

This is not to say that the fashion industry neglected teenage girls’ fashion needs. In response to the growing teenage population, the U.S. clothing advertisers promoted a home-centered fashion style of girls. Pictures of girls in pajamas appeared on the covers of shopping catalogs and teen magazines, forming the key image of fashionable girlhood. As Kelley Massoni observes in the fashion pages of Seventeen:

Home and hearth often served as the backdrop for the young models, many of whom sported pajamas. Indeed, although bedtime wear was rarely featured in Seventeen’s war-period fashion pages, it became a postwar fashion staple. Appearing in fashion features in more than half of the magazine issues of this time period, models wearing jammies even graced the covers of two issues: June 1950’s “How to Be Pretty” and October 1949’s “Your Home and You.” Among all the fashion photos taken in home settings, those featuring fleece robes, frilly
nighties, and flannel pj’s best signified the cozy warmth of the 1950s domestic ideal.\(^5\)

As home became the only place teenage girls could be fashionable, mass media promoted girlhood as a domestic ideal.

Twiggy’s arrival as a top professional fashion model defied the high fashion’s definition of femininity as an immobile figure as well as the media narrative of fashionable girlhood as a domestic ideal. Fashion magazines and teen magazines played a pioneering role in rewriting the media representations about femininity and fashionable girlhood. Twiggy was a watershed figure in the history of *Vogue*, a prestigious high fashion magazine. Diana Vreeland used Twiggy to introduce a series of new fashion styles that she termed “Youthquake.” In essence, “Youthquake” meant a departure from the New Look, which had dominated American fashion from 1947 to the mid-1960s. Vreeland introduced a series of youthful fashion designs to the magazine’s readers, such as mini-skirts, romper suits, and other “Swinging London” features, often with Twiggy as the model.\(^6\) Teen magazine *Seventeen* quickly followed suit, replacing the cover of a girl in a pajama with that of Twiggy in a mini-dress.

The rise of Twiggy as a teenage fashion icon changed the ways U.S. fashion media defined and marketed fashionable femininity. First, youth became an indispensable factor in the fashionable look. Gone were the days when fashion magazines used older-looking women to market fashion styles that were more compatible with a sedentary lifestyle. Women, especially young women, desired to have a more dynamic lifestyle, and fashion should reflect that desire. Additionally, teenage girls’ vitality became a central theme in the image of fashionable girlhood.

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\(^6\) Daniel Delis Hill, *As Seen in Vogue*, “Youthquake in the Sixties and Schizophrenia in the Seventies”
What fashion meant for girls was not just the comfort and safety they enjoyed at home but also the personal freedom they could have beyond the domestic circle. In sum, these changes reflected the declining importance of home in a girl’s life. Stories of Twiggy demonstrated an attempt to understand girlhood not using family and school as the setting but focusing on the girl’s body, look, clothing, and personality. In general, they put spotlight on a teenage girl’s individuality as well as her differences from the wholesome, feminine look. These narratives first appeared in mass-circulated magazines.

**Twiggy in Magazines**

Magazines introduced Twiggy to America. By magazines I referred to those mass-circulation magazines that had subscriptions advertised to all consumers and were usually sold at newsstands, bookstores, gas stations, and grocery stores. In the 1960s, magazines were one of the most dominant media genres and provided Americans with an encyclopedic understanding of their country. As Thomas Frank put it, “In the sixties, television was only beginning to surpass magazines as the advertising showplace of note, and to get a feel for the consumer dreams of the decade, there was no substitute for simply slogging through old mass-circulation publications like *Life* and *Ladies’ Home Journal* issue by issue.”

Magazines’ popularity, based on circulation records, soared throughout the 1950s and reached a peak in the late 1960s. In 1950, the typical American read an average of 0.98 magazines per month. The number continued to grow in the next two decades: 1.05 in 1960, 1.1 in 1965, and 1.20 in 1970. This meant that the country that had nearly two hundred millions people read at least a similar number of magazines per month.

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8 Ibid., p. 2.
throughout the 1960s. The magazines that covered Twiggy included those best-sellers that sold millions of copies per issue. In 1967, Life had an average weekly circulation of 7,449,865, and Look, a bi-weekly magazine, had 7,671,328. Women’s magazines also reached new and even larger readerships in this period. Ladies’ Home Journal had 6,804,779 copies sold each month, and McCall’s had 8,566,910. Vogue, a magazine of high fashion, had a smaller readership: 441,971 copies sold per issue in 1967, yet it was a significant increase since Diana Vreeland became the magazine’s editor in 1962. Meanwhile, Seventeen, a monthly magazine targeting teenage audiences, had a circulation record of 1,361,745 copies per issue.

These staggering numbers of circulation records mean that magazines, a popular mass media genre, had the power to create the buzz that attracted the national audience to pay attention to the covered topic. When the magazine editors decided to cover Twiggy’s stories or even put her pictures on the covers, millions of Americans saw Twiggy’s 90-pound body and knew the seventeen-year-old British model was the latest trademark of fashion and female beauty. In 1967 alone, American magazine readers encountered pictures and articles about Twiggy nearly every month. Twiggy appeared on the covers of Seventeen and Ladies Home Journal twice and on the covers of Vogue four times. She was also on the covers of Newsweek, Harper’s Bazaar, and McCall’s. Major news magazines, such as Life, Look, and The New Yorker, tailored numerous pages to introduce Twiggy to millions of Americans who might or might not be interested in fashion. Life, for instance, covered Twiggy in February, March, and April. The recurring appearances of Twiggy in these mass-circulated magazines encompassing different

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9 As of July 1, 1966, the estimated population of all fifty states was 195,857,000. N. W. Ayer & Son’s Directory Newspapers and Periodicals 1967, p. ix.
10 Vogue’s circulation record in 1960 was 419,858 copies per issue. The number grew to be 499,513 in 1963 and fluctuated around 450 thousand copies throughout the 1960s.
11 N. W. Ayer & Son’s Directory Newspapers and Periodicals 1967
readerships meant that she was somebody that every informed media consumer knew and hence a topic of national conversations.

In her American readers not only saw new fashion trends but also sensed a new way women and girls evaluated their appearance. Not everybody was comfortable with that. Some saw the demise of traditional beauty ideal in the fashion industry. Some lamented the line between who was beautiful and who was ugly blurred, and there was no longer a set of tangible criteria to define what made a woman pretty. The unprecedented popularity of Twiggy changed not only the definition of fashionable femininity but also the relationship between high fashion and female beauty.

The extensive media representations of Twiggy changed the way mass media understood fashion. Fashion writers started to realized that fashion could encompassed more than the supreme yet often fixed forms of female beauty. Simply put, fashion should not just be about beauty. It should be about the fluidity of femininity, the way women and girls thought about their bodies. It should also be about self-expression, in particular how women and girls used their look to comment on their gender identities. The success of Twiggy proved that those factors were marketable and fashionable.

In fact, the multi-layered representations of Twiggy in different magazines displayed mass media’s attempt to capture the values of fashionable femininity beyond the framework of female beauty. With their genres encompassing news magazines, women’s fashion magazines, and teen magazines, the magazines provided different angles of Twiggy to different readerships. News magazines, such as *Life* and *Newsweek*, paid more attention to Twiggy’s innocent character while puzzling over how the ordinary teenager became the world’s most successful
supermodel. *Look* revealed how Twiggy’s body and the fashion she represented deconstructed femininity. Ladies’ *Home Journal* sniffed at Twiggy’s childish personality and fashion. *Vogue* highlighted Twiggy’s youthful qualities, in particular her mobility. *Seventeen* linked her body and fashion style to average teenage girls. *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World* addressed Twiggy’s playful side and her close relationship with her family. To summarize these magazines’ descriptions, I found that physical mobility, self-assertion toward her look, her working-class background, and her innocence were the major themes. These themes, strategically different from then-existing narratives about adolescent femininity and sending many contradictory messages, contributed to an image of teenage girls that was highly marketable in the 1960s. They set a tone for how a teenage girl fit into the fashionable femininity.

**The Mobile Girl**

Mobility is a recurring theme in magazines’ representation of Twiggy, especially magazines whose readership was largely composed of women and teenage girls. These magazines highlighted the theme through a great number of dramatized descriptions about her eye-catching facial expressions, light weight, and constantly moving body with both pictures and words. Those descriptions stressed her geographical mobility—frequent travels across the Atlantic Ocean and around the world—as well as her bodily mobility. Pictures of her in all magazines consistently showed her in a jumping, walking, or ready-to-move pose, and words that suggested the freedom of movement that ordinary girls could enjoy in their lives. *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World* described her as having a “mobile face” and showed her dancing, playing with animals, and jumping in a romper suit “for those good times when you want the
freedom to bounce around at a picnic, or stroll through the park—or for any bouncy time!" The cover of the June 1967 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal* showed Twiggy playing up nine different facial expressions. *Newsweek* showed a picture in which she “bounces gaily in her own romper suit.” *Life* showed a series of pictures of Twiggy contorting her mouth to make clown faces. The typical modeling pose she made was having her legs wide open, her hip popped to one side, and her feet on tiptoe. Her feet were never fully on ground, and she never stood still. She was either moving or about to move.

These positions suggested greater physical freedom for girls, in physical and metaphorical sense. Physically, they implied that the teenage girl was not limited to the domestic space. She had a vibrant life outside of home and was able to build her personalities unrelated to her role as a daughter and a school girl. Metaphorically, they implied she could jump out of the existing framework of femininity, in which female beauty was tied to her domestic roles, particularly her ability to sexually excite her husband and nurse children.

In addition, Ashley Mears, a former model and author of *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*, indicates that pictures highlighting a model’s mobility have an uplifting effect. It demonstrates the model’s abilities to control her body and comfortably display her body in front of the camera. Mears claim that these abilities can be translated into a model’s self-driven personality:

> Working on the aesthetic surface requires mental and emotional engagement, and over time and through practice, the surface and the feeling begin to blend into one. By working on the body, the model produces a particular kind of self, which

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12 *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World*, p. 4 & p. 39.
can be mobilized in the form of “personality” to increase the likelihood of success.\textsuperscript{13}

In other words, seeing a model moving her body is seeing her trying to be successful. Twiggy’s mobile body was an indicator of her investment in being successful in her profession. By focusing on Twiggy’s mobile body, the magazines added the concept of personal success into the image of fashionable girlhood.

\textit{Girl in the Air}

Between 1967 and 1968, \textit{Vogue} published a series of feature articles using Twiggy to promote the latest fashion trends. In these articles, Twiggy was frequently photographed in a leaping pose while wearing different types of outfits. For example, in “Vogue’s Eye View: The Daring Young Romantics Taking the World by Charm,”\textsuperscript{14} a 17-page feature article advertising fashion for the fall season, Twiggy jumps in jumpsuits and shirt dresses. She also jumps in high heels, in a red Kalgan lamb coat, in a long black evening dress, in a striped dirndl dress and black tights, in a lace dress, and in a greige gabardine jacket and pants. Not every type of outfits she wore was suitable for jumping. The girl is “daring” in the way that she does not seem to care about the limits the sophisticated outfits imposed on her body. Women usually had to act cautiously when they wore high heels or expensive lace dresses. Twiggy does not seem to worry about damaging those fashion luxuries. Some of the pictures in the article capture an acrobatic moment. When Twiggy leaps in the air, her hands are spread wide open to maintain balance of her body (Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, & 2.4). She looks more like a circus dancer than a traditional fashion model.

Figure 2.1 Twiggy in *Vogue*, vol. 150, no. 2 (August 1, 1967), p. 52

Figure 2.2 Twiggy in *Vogue*, vol. 150, no. 2 (August 1, 1967), p. 58
These jump shots were the creation of American photographer Richard Avedon, who was one of the new group of photographers that Vreeland hired. Avedon was famous for having his models dance and leap into the air. According to Norbeto Angeletti and Alberto Oliva, Avedon’s photo shoot of jumping models not only changed the style of *Vogue*’s fashion photography but
also introduced a new way to look at fashion models.\textsuperscript{15} Before Avedon populated \textit{Vogue} with photographs of jumping models, models in women’s fashion magazines were “glamorous, recherché, poised” ladies.\textsuperscript{16} They stood, sat, and leaned their bodies against a wall, producing an elegant, static posture. Their presence was meant to be watched. The value of fashion items was built on women’s static figures and their presumed idyllic lifestyle. On the other hand, models twirling their bodies or jumping in the air resulted in dynamic movement. These poses required viewers to follow models’ bodily movements and created a different viewing process, in which the female body was not something to be evaluated but something to be followed.

Twiggy’s dynamic pose showed a drastic difference from how fashion models posed. In what \textit{Vogue} describes as “the return of Madame X,” Twiggy wears a long black wool dress and heeled shoes with her feet off the ground to reenact the famous portrait painted by John Singer Sargent (Figure 2.6). Yet nine years earlier, in the March 15, 1958 issue, when then 21-year old Jean Harvey Vanderbilt also dressed in a long black dress to reenact the “Madame X” portrait, she stood firmly on the ground, showcasing her “clear-cut beauty of feature” and “rare beauty of figure and carriage” (Figure 2.5).\textsuperscript{17} Although both models were referencing Madame X and both were noted for their young age and thin physiques (\textit{Vogue} mentioned that Jean Harvey Vanderbilt had a “small waist” and “small head”), Mrs. Vanderbilt’s body was posed like a statue while Twiggy’s was jumping. Apparently, what’s so “daring young” about the fashion that

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\textsuperscript{15} Norbeto Angeletti and Alberto Oliva, \textit{In Vogue: The Illustrated History of the World’s Most Famous Fashion Magazine}, p. 194. \\
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 182. \\
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Vogue} 131.6 (Mar 15, 1958), p. 56.
\end{flushleft}
Twiggy modeled, which *Vogue* claimed was for “the romantic young girls of today,” was not determined by the designs of clothes she wore but by the young model’s leaping body.\(^{18}\)

![Figure 2.5 Mrs. Vanderbilt as Madame X in *Vogue*, vol. 131, no. 6 (Mar 15, 1958), p. 56](image)

Figure 2.5 Mrs. Vanderbilt as Madame X in *Vogue*, vol. 131, no. 6 (Mar 15, 1958), p. 56

![Figure 2.6 Twiggy as Madame X in *Vogue*, vol. 150, no. 2 (August 1, 1967), p. 51](image)

Figure 2.6 Twiggy as Madame X in *Vogue*, vol. 150, no. 2 (August 1, 1967), p. 51

This set of Madame X pictures reveals a fundamental difference between the discourses of female beauty in the 1950s and 1960s. Mrs. Vanderbilt is elegant. Her hair is coiffed. She

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 47.
appears in profile, with traditional portrait in background. She looks away from the camera, making no eye contact with the viewer and hence not communicating with the viewer. Her pose draws attention to her beauty. The viewer should evaluate the woman as a beauty object instead of caring about her thought or her personal qualities. Twiggy looks at the camera, building a dynamic with the viewer. With a black wide hat, flared sleeves, and pointed shoes, Twiggy was compared to a witch. This outfit invites the viewer to speculate what kind of magical skills she has. In this way, the model herself is the focal point of the picture rather than the beauty she displays.

By putting a spotlight on Twiggy’s jumping and off-the-ground body, *Vogue* provided a new answer to what forms and ideas of femininity were fashionable. The youthful, mobile body replaced the static figure of older women as the new model of fashionable femininity. Twiggy’s active physique emphasized the vitality of a feminine body, providing a visual cue of young women having surplus energy for opportunities outside of home. On this note, fashion should not be a force that contained a young woman’s energy by sealing it under layers of expensive fabrics. Fashion should make it easier for her to move. Fashion trends for teenage girls reflected this growing desire for mobility.

*Girl on the Move*

Teen magazines like *Seventeen* and *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World* used Twiggy to promote a new fashion style that was in tune with teenage girls’ daily routine that required them to move a lot. As *Seventeen* pointed out in the issue of March 1967, the first time Twiggy appeared in *Seventeen*, mobility was a norm in teenage girls’ lives. The article “Dieter’s
Clipboard” reported that an average girl was “moderately active,” and her daily schedule full of dynamic activities resulted in her lean physique:

She spends five hours in light activities, like telephoning, studying, classwork; eight hours in light exercise—walking about, helping with the dishes, shopping, typing rapidly; three hours in active exercise—fast walks, sports, gym; eight hours sleeping. If you’re a gung-ho sort of person, always on the go, you may lose weight much faster than the ‘average’ girl.\(^1\)

In this description, the life of an “average” teenage girl was all about moving. She constantly moved herself from one site to another—from the classroom to the gym, from school to the workplace, and from shopping malls to home. She exercised her hands and her feet, handling chores while doing both indoor and outdoor activities. Other than the time she spent at school, her time was split between her personal hobbies (going to gym, shopping) and domestic labor (handling chores). Because there was a plethora of tasks she had to accomplish each day, the girl had to move “rapidly” and had a more rigid routine (regulating how many hours she could shop, exercise, and sleep). This routine was highly gendered, experienced by teenage girls and the growing number of career women. Having a professional career while taking care of most of the domestic duties, a woman carried a greater amount of physical labor and had to move faster. Here, the teenage girl’s mobile lifestyle hinted at growing opportunities yet a more exhaustive lifestyle that awaited her when she grew up.

Yet in 1967, fashion and teen magazines saw mobility as a right that young women and teenage girls gained instead of a heavier toll on their physical labor. *Seventeen* especially used Twiggy to celebrate teenage girls’ mobile lifestyle. For the July 1967 issue of *Seventeen*,

\(^1\) *Seventeen*, March 1967, p. 196.
Twiggy, in a short shirt dress and tights, strides across the cover (Figure 2.7). The British and American flags on the background celebrated greater personal freedom that white girls of Anglo-American culture enjoyed. The magazine included pictures of Twiggy leaning her body forward, kneeling, and standing with crossed arms and stretched legs (Figure 2.8). The whole issue was centered on Twiggy, promoting a summer fashion style for girls based on Twiggy’s mobile body. The front page of the issue shows an illustration of a Twiggy-like girl (with a thin body, short shopped hair, short skirt, and knee socks) moving a truck of gifts. The illustration is captioned “summer resolutions: lose weight, get a gorgeous tan, earn enough money for a back-to-school wardrobe,” highlighting the importance of physical fitness and financial responsibility for girls.

The issue’s feature series was “Twiggy Models a Wardrobe Designed by Seventeen.” The wardrobe includes striped coats, dresses, shorts, and tights that the girl can wear on and off campus: “top of the knee for class, that long-legged look elsewhere.” It also includes tops, skirts, knee socks, and berets that the average girl can wear for any outdoor activities as well as “close-hugging” dresses that she can wear when she goes to a party.20 This mobility-inspired fashion was not limited to the summer season. In September 1967, Twiggy appeared on the cover of Seventeen again. This time Twiggy wore coatdresses while she sat on a bench outdoors, went on a picnic, played at school, and rode a boat. Through Twiggy’s modeling, Seventeen marketed the clothes by associating the dresses, skirts, shorts, and stockings with girls’ recreational activities.

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Commonly represented as a model to advertise latest fashion materials, Twiggy was most often seen wearing shirt dresses, miniskirts, and romper suits, with the edge of the clothes eight to ten inches above the knee in both articles and advertisements. She also wore panty hose, stockings, and patterned tights with short skirts. By covering her long legs with hosiery and leggings, Twiggy does not appear to be revealing. Instead, she appeared to be suggesting that
fashion was something a girl should feel comfortable moving in, instead of something she posed in. As depicted in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Twiggy’s own “leggy, twiggy look” was played up by a “mini-mini-skirted” dress, made by “amazingly lightweight and easy to sew” fabrics.\(^{21}\) Comfort and ease were the marketable features of the fabrics that Twiggy put on. In general, fashion should not be a burden that prevented the girl from moving. Every outfit that Twiggy model was short and simple while covering her body from head to toe. As a result, the girl could easily walk fast, run, and even jump effortlessly without worrying about exposing her body.

At the same time, the mini-skirts, dresses, pants, and coats, through Twiggy’s twisting body, highlighted flexibility. She stretched her legs wide open when she wore a sweater dress. She popped her hips when she put on a mini-skirt and tank top. She bent her leg when she put on knickers and tights. Twiggy’s poses, which involved a lot of stretching and twisting, were different from the ways models used to pose in *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Other models stood, sat, lay down, or attached their bodies to the fabrics, Twiggy moved and stretched out the fabrics. As mini-skirts and shirt dresses were relatively new to the womenswear market, Twiggy was teaching the readers of *Ladies’ Home Journal* how to wear the new fashion style with a sense of freedom to move their bodies.

The theme of mobility that magazines attached to Twiggy’s body and fashion choices lifted girlhood from the domestic setting. This made Twiggy’s image different from how girlhood had been represented in fashion media as a domestic ideal. In *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, Wini Breines argues that “young, white, middle-class girls” lived under “a culture of containment,” where they were strictly segregated from men.

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\(^{21}\) *Ladies’ Home Journal*, June 1967, p. 64.
and blacks.\textsuperscript{22} Home was the safest place and thus the only place for girls to experiment with fashion. Different from that tradition, Twiggy was not associated with domesticity, at least when she was represented as a fashion model.\textsuperscript{23} She was not a sleepwear model. Photos of her wearing mini-skirts and jumping in the air either had a blank background or were taken in an outdoor setting. This girl was not contained to domesticity. Instead, her mobile pose and fashion style implied her vibrant life outside of home.

This image of mobilized girlhood was not Twiggy’s creation. It came in parallel with a demand for greater personal and professional freedom shared among many women in the 1960s. Betty Friedan’s book \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (1963) and the founding of National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 manifested many white, middle-class women’s desire to leave the claustrophobic domestic space. Simply put, women did not just want to stay at home. They demanded freedom to participate in activities outside of home, at school or in the work place. While Friedan and other feminist activists vocalized this demand through protests against gender discrimination at the workplace, fashion media translated it into a teenage model’s mobility. Part of Twiggy’s success in modeling came from her ability to maximize the element of mobility through her pose and fashion. Her frequent appearances in popular teen and fashion magazines added mobility to the fashion image of American girlhood.

\textbf{The Look of Empowerment}

Despite her enormous success as a fashion model, Twiggy was rarely referred to as particularly beautiful or attractive. Letters readers wrote to magazines’ editors showed that many believed Twiggy’s appearance defied the standards of female beauty at that time. Images of her

\textsuperscript{22} Wini Breines, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{23} Media reported Twiggy not only as a fashion model but also as a celebrity. The later section of this chapter will address her personality.
skinny body confused, shocked, and even disgusted some readers. Many of them openly criticized her sticklike physique. One Colorado reader asked to “send that leggy ironing board back to Britain.” One female reader from Minnesota, named Mary, disagreed with the writer’s description of Twiggy’s legs as “expressive”—“I’ve seen more expression on a cow’s legs, and the cow at least had the dignity to stand like a lady.” Another reader offered an interesting analysis of Twiggy’s physique and fashion styles, “history shows that you can measure a nation’s strength by the principles of its females. Britain and France, once great, are now noted for nothing much but unkempt hair styles and short skirts.” A “Mrs. Violet Narducy” shared that she had the same measurements as Twiggy when she was a teenager, and everybody told her to go to see a doctor.24 Look’s readers also did not react to her look well. A female reader wrote: “Twiggy is so sexless that it’s repulsive to me, a woman, to think she could have any kind of a following.” Another female reader criticized her “swaybacks.”25 Letters like these showed that readers of news magazines, composed of older generations of men and women, disliked Twiggy’s flat chest and lack of curves (she was compared as a “leggy iron board”). Some pointed out the frailty of her body (she could not “stand like a lady”; she should go to see a doctor). Some simply considered her ugly (“unkempt hair styles” and “repulsive”). These readers wondered such a girl became a top fashion model, who was traditionally a symbol of utmost female beauty.

It should be noted that Twiggy did not try to comply to the existing standards of female beauty. Like what she admitted: “I know I’m not beautiful or glam.”26 Commenting on her appearance, Twiggy did not identify herself as a model of beauty. Nevertheless, magazines kept

putting spotlight on her body and facial look. What kind of qualities intrinsic to her body and look made her modeling successful?

I argue that much of Twiggy’s appeal and why her appearance disturbed some readers came from the fact that some of her most-circulated images bore an empowering message. Here, empowerment was displayed in how her facial look defied male control and how her body bore few traits of feminine sexuality. Twiggy’s body lacked overt sexual appeal. Living in a visual culture that glorified the wholesome, feminine look, many readers found Twiggy’s look unique but not beautiful.

*Resisting the Male Gaze*

Some of the most well-known photographs of Twiggy featured her big eyes posing a direct stare at the camera. Without any smile on her face, her lips held tightly together, she looked serious and, at times, provocative. These photographs appeared in advertisements, magazine feature articles, and even magazine covers. One example was the “Introducing Twiggy Lashes by Yardley” advertisement. The eyelashes advertisement, which made common appearances in *Seventeen* and other popular magazines, included a close-up of Twiggy face. Her big and dark fringed eyes, placed at the center of the photograph, stared straight at the camera. Together with her tightly closed lips and her sharply curved eyebrows, her face denoted a sense of hostility and intimidation (Figure 2.9). Different from always smiling, angelic girl-models in magazines, this girl did not smile. Instead, she stared at the viewer assertively, with no signs of switching her attention elsewhere. She did not look particularly upset. Her unreadable expression made this girl harder to understand. As a result, she claimed her authority and guarded her subjectivity with a provocative stare.

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27 *Seventeen*, October 1967, p. 57. The advertisement appeared several times in later issues.
Such photographs of Twiggy’s face deviated from the way as well as the purpose women were represented in visual arts. Women did not pose for paintings or photographs in such a sharply provocative manner. It disrupted the pleasure of looking at her, and that pleasure, as John Berger argued, was rooted in the male viewer’s power to control his sexuality. According to Berger, a long-established tradition in Western visual arts holds that “the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him.”

The woman always has to lay bare her body to be surveyed by the man. Her presence is seen and judged as sights. She does not look at others. She looks at herself and wonders how she would be judged by the male surveyor:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. . . . From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her

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identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. . . .

*men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly and object of vision: A sight.²⁹

Berger utilizes a plethora of paintings and fashion advertisements as evidence of his argument. In the pictures he chose, none of the women pose a steady gaze at the painter/surveyor. The women, mostly nude, look at the surveyor with “a sign of her submission to the owner’s feelings of demands.”³⁰ She is inviting the surveyor to appreciate her body, “offering up her femininity as the surveyed.”³¹ What she feels about herself and toward the surveyed does not matter. She has to fully cater to the surveyor’s examination over her beauty. Direct eye contact is impossible: “The woman’s attention is very rarely directed towards him. Often she looks away from him or she looks out of the picture toward the one who considers himself her true lover—the spectator-owner.”³² The woman does not take an active stand to gaze at the painter/camera-holder; she is there to be watched. Her beauty is there to be evaluated. She has to show her passivity and submission. Indeed, women in paintings and photographs are always beautiful and sexually attractive, especially those showing her in nudity or scantily

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²⁹ Ibid., pp. 46-47.
³⁰ Ibid., p. 52.
³¹ Ibid., p. 55.
³² Ibid., p. 56.
dressed. But that sexy imagery “has nothing to do with her sexuality” but is “made to appeal to his sexuality.”33 The woman appears to be sexy, but the man is the agent exercising his sexual passion. Signs that hint at women’s ability to control and exercise power, such as direct eye contact and fixing gaze, are minimalized because they threaten the male spectator, disrupt their visual pleasure, and challenge his power. As a result, images of women tilting their heads away to avoid direct eye contact with the viewer permeated classical paintings and even modern advertisements.

The dichotomy of men as the surveyors and woman as the sight is extended in the concept of the “male gaze” proposed by Laura Mulvey. Mulvey pointed out that in Hollywood cinema, the woman is an image while the man is the bearer of the look. The woman is a passive subject displaying her body while the man is the active subject gazing at her. This arrangement follows the gender dynamics in traditional Western paintings:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional 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. . . . The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of the guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylized and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look.34

33 Ibid., p. 55.
In classical Hollywood films, women are not only unable to watch; the wholesomeness of their subjectivity is also chopped off. The frequent use of fragmented scenes on women’s body parts robs her of individuality and subjects her to be an object to be gauged. Women thus are reduced to be the recipient of the male gaze and put in a powerless position. Women’s appearance in films connotes their lack of power and individuality. They are there only to be seen and are subdued to the power of male gaze. The visual pleasure is built on women’s lack of power.

The ability to gaze symbolizes power in visual culture because it means the subject is in an active position to interact with others and show his individuality. Traditionally, the power was exclusively held by men and the nobility. Women and the poor are only seen in a “reassuring” pose. Berger pointed out that only the poor “smile showing their teeth, which the rich in pictures never do.”35 Facial expressions with smiles or soft and gender eyes demonstrate the subject is giving away power to the viewer. This is why fashion magazines (and magazines of other genres) often feature smiling women on the covers. Men are more often to be seen to be serious and posing a direct, provocative gaze at the viewers. Women, children, and the poor, on the other hand, smile at the ones—presumably men—better-off and having more power.

Characterized by a direct and sharp stare at the camera holder, Twiggy’s look disrupted the gender dynamics in traditional visual culture by showing a young and beautiful woman regaining her agency of looking. It was a look that did not capitalize on the female subject’s sexuality and did not invite the viewer to exercise his power to survey the subject’s body. It was the woman holding her power by staring at the viewer and interrogating the viewer’s intention. On this note, Twiggy’s look implicated an attempt to retain a sense of power. She presented a stronger version of femininity by looking at the surveyor and not being subjected to the male

35 John Berger, p. 104.
gaze. The girl does not posit herself to please the male viewer with her submission. Her look freed her from being a prey to men’s sexual desires and framed a new way to evaluate female beauty while not sexualizing the woman. It was thus a look of empowerment.

Resisting Traditional Gender Roles

Traditional gender roles are based on a binary paradigm that generates a series of cultural prescriptions regulating how males and females are supposed to look like and behave. In the 1950s and early 1960s, when representing a fashionable female body, fashion media followed the prescriptions and highlighted a set of physical traits considered feminine, such as long flowy hair, full bosoms, and an hourglass figure. In general, the feminine body left the viewer an impression that it was soft, warm, and wholesome. It went in alignment with the traditional gender roles ascribed to a woman, who was expected to become a mother who was able to nurse children and a young, healthy woman who could sexually please a man.

Twiggy’s bony figure decidedly lacked the hourglass curves associated with female fertility. In post-war America, media and popular culture put much attention to teenage mothers and girls who were aspired to be mothers. Teen magazines taught girls how to cook, sew, babysit, and decorate houses. It should be noted that these magazines, which valued teenagers’ independence, did not specify they needed to follow their mothers. They were simply told by the magazines to do those jobs that their mothers did. In the 1950s, when one-third of eighteen- and nineteen-year-old girls were married, teenage mothers were more a norm than an aberration.

Because they were expected to become mothers, teenage girls often dressed like adult women. For instance, on the covers of Seventeen published in the 1940s and 1950s, the models looked younger and smaller, but the way they dressed—in aprons, long chiffon dresses, or suit
coats—resembled models on the covers of women’s magazines. They already had women’s bodies, curvy and hourglass-shaped. Even though the models of the magazines represented teenage girls aged around seventeen, they were flaunting their femininity and maternal attributes. Their voluptuous bodies signaled their ability to be healthy and productive mothers of Cold War American families.

Twiggy’s body did not have those maternal cues. Her no-shape figure sought to reverse the rigid pattern of the feminine body. In the controversial picture photographed by Burt Glinn and published in Look, Twiggy stands beside a mannequin (Figure 2.10). She shares the mannequin’s hairstyle and pale complexion, only that her body is smaller than the already skeletal mannequin. The light-colored tight shirt she wears further highlights her anorexic body. There is no outline of breasts and buttocks, and her swayed back insinuates that she does not have strength enough to straighten up her whole body.36 Twiggy’s was not a body prone to pregnancy and motherhood. This is why Life readers mocked her as a cow not being able to stand and even used her as an example to argue about the loss of strength of the whole nation. Again, Twiggy’s thinness was not the main issue—entertainment and mass media already glorified women with narrow waists; her flat chest and willowy figure was what was new. Her body did not show obvious signs of a young woman’s fertility and strength, and that bothered the older generation, who tied the new model of beauty to a failure of will in the cold war against communism.

Yet for girls, Twiggy’s thin body represented a new kind of freedom—freedom from worrying about the productive value of their sexuality. According to Linda Benn DeLibero, who reviewed Twiggy’s success with a historical analysis and her memories of being a thirteen-year-old girl in 1967, Twiggy’s body “accrued to itself a certain power by virtue of its sexlessness, a power that had a great deal to do with Twiggy’s popularity among young girls in the sixties.”

The body symbolized a space for girls to be girls and not to worry about sex and its implications on their bodies. For the generation that grew up receiving loud yet ambiguous messages about sex, Twiggy represented freedom to ignore all the contradictory messages about sex that often bewildered teenage girls. In 1960, the first oral contraceptive was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration. In 1965, the Supreme Court ruled that it was legal for married couples to use birth control. By the mid-sixties, mass media teemed with information about birth control and abortion, which also became part of common conversations among married couples and college students. Yet when girls posed questions about sex health, they were told, unhelpfully, to

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37 Linda Benn DeLibero, “This Year’s Girl: A Personal/Critical History of Twiggy,” p. 54.
“ask your minister, ask your physician, ask your mother,” as a *Seventeen* reader complained.38 Girls received highly contradictory messages about sexual health. On one hand, they knew new forms of birth control existed and were being applauded by many women, particularly those active in the women’s movement. On the other hand, they were told again and again by authority figures at home, church, and school, that premarital sex was sinful and even dangerous. The links between sex, birth control, and women’s freedom was not clarified to this young group. As a result, sex became either a taboo or a worrisome subject for girls. I read Twiggy’s body as embodying girls’ discomfort with the negative connotations associated with sex, while retaining the freedom and ease that birth control advertisements promised. Twiggy herself seemed to be anti-sex and did not need the adults in her life to watch out for her behavior. Her body seemed to represent freedom from sex, as much as sexual freedom.

*Not a Boy. Not a Girl*

Twiggy was photographed in a male suit to market a non-feminine look to teenage girls. In *Seventeen*, a Super Poster Ltd. advertisement sold a “Giant 6 * 2 FT Super Poster” of Twiggy wearing a suit and men’s leather shoes (See Figure 2.11). The advertisement included these words: “It’s Twiggy in black and white. Twiggy bigger than life. Twiggy generating the gender of her generation.” Here, Twiggy’s gender-neutral look was advertised as a fashionable idea for teenage girls. Meanwhile, stating Twiggy “generating the gender of her generation,” the advertisement used Twiggy as a model to encourage teenage girls to appreciate unconventional look and jump out of how the older generation defined female fashion. However, it should be noted that this advertisement was not an attire advertisement. It did not sell the male suit and

38 *Seventeen*, November 1967, p. 4.
leather shoes that Twiggy wore to *Seventeen*’s readers. What it sold was an image of a different gendered look, a “giant poster” for teenage girls to have fun with.

Unlike the advertisement on the page of *Seventeen*, which carried a more playful, experimental tone, news magazine writers looked at Twiggy’s cross-dressing in a more cynical tone. *Look* published an article titled “Is it a girl? Is it a boy? No. It’s Twiggy.” The title suggested that Twiggy’s look could not be classified into the binary gender categories. The article pointed out that Twiggy’s cross-dressing was a marketing strategy. The fact that her suit and her leather shoes were handpicked by Justin de Villeneuve (Twiggy’s alleged boyfriend and manager) as part of “the Justin-Twiggy Collection” uncovered the marketability of a girl dressing.
As Fred Davis points out in *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, the fashion industry has always encouraged women to experiment with some sort of identity ambivalence. In his analysis of androgynous dress, Davis finds that the industry invites women to borrow clothing items from men to play with ambivalences of gender. The fashion industry’s celebration of cross-dressing, however, is deceptive because it does not aim to give women more freedom in terms of expressing their gender identities. Instead, it is more a mechanism pulling women with deviating taste back to accepted gender identifications:

To forestall discrediting insinuations of “butch lesbianism” or “gay transvestism,” Western dress codes operate to blunt any too blatant appropriation of the opposite gender’s identity. It is characteristic, therefore, for cross-gender clothing signals, even the more common and variegated women’s borrowings from men, to be accompanied by some symbolic qualification, contradiction, jibe, irony, exaggeration, etc.

In *Look*’s pictures of Twiggy cross-dressing, she was in an oversized suit. The article included two pictures of Twiggy wearing a man’s suit and tie. She sits with her legs wide open, implying exaggerated masculinity. Yet this suit-wearing model is not a masculine figure. She leans on her boyfriend, let her body be overshadowed by a real man (Figures 2.12 & 2.13). In the *Seventeen*’s advertisement, Twiggy tilted her right foot like a ballet dancer. These dressing and posing elements demonstrated contradiction, irony, and exaggeration and formed an intentionally gawky image. An implicit message to teenage girls was cross-dressing could be fun. They could spend some money trying out novelties and ambivalences, yet it could not be a legitimate dress code.

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As Davis conforms, the fashion industry never seeks to reverse the dominant gender discourse and never challenges the subordinate status of women. What fashion can offer is, at most, sartorial compromise. In the case of Twiggy, her cross-dressing was temporary and superficial. As Twiggy said, “I’d like to be a boy if I could change back into a girl again.”

That she was allowed to dress and pose like a man was grounded on her personality as a docile, innocent girl, who was not able to do things more audacious than putting on a boy’s clothes. On this note, the suit and tie she wore functioned like a set of costumes for the girl to play with her look. This fashion style encouraged girls to participate in the experiment to mimic the male dressing code and sought to profit from the costume industry.

Figure 2.12 Twiggy and Justin de Villeneuve in Look, vol. 31, no. 7 (April 4, 1967), p. 87

Fashion writers today often refer to Twiggy as a model pioneering an androgynous look, yet the term “androgyny” did not appear in any media descriptions about Twiggy in the late 1960s. What magazine writers and readers saw in this teenage model was the disappearance or irrelevance of traditional dressing options that made women feminine. In sum, the rise of Twiggy meant teenage girls were given more freedom to try out different fashion looks. The new fashion image did not require girls to flaunt their feminine sexuality, and attracting male attention was no longer the primary goal. In this way, Twiggy presented a new image of fashionable girlhood that was more centered on how the girl viewed herself than how her body was evaluated by others based on traditional beauty standards.

A Populist Model

Magazines introduced Twiggy as not only a high fashion model but also a young celebrity having a likeable persona. The writers paid much attention to Twiggy’s family, personality, love life, and her activities behind the camera. As a fashion model, Twiggy was this
cutting-edge figure who wore mini-skirts, showcased her non-feminine body, and challenged the traditional beauty ideal in several ways. Yet as a teenage celebrity, Twiggy was hardworking and down-to-earth. She was an innocent teenage girl in love with her boyfriend, with whom she shared a cordial working relationship. Additionally, she was a docile daughter from a working-class family and, despite her modeling success, remained close to her family. This was why even though many readers disliked Twiggy’s appearance, nobody—with the only exception of Judith Crist, a writer of *Ladies’ Home Journal*—found Twiggy’s childish personality and her lack of professional background problematic.

In this section, I focus on media depictions of Twiggy as a teenage celebrity. I find that teen and news magazines had focused on Twiggy’s innocence and lack of sophistication to construct her as a likable teenage girl. In this case, Twiggy’s media image sent a populist message, making this fashion model appealing to American teenage and working-class readers, who actually knew very little about fashion. I borrow the term “populist model” from Fred Davis’s division of the “fashion system model” versus a “populist model.” The fashion system model refers to a model who works under the established systems in Paris and Milan. Her performance was approved by the fashion-buying publics there. A populist model does not belong to the Euro-centric systems and can be anyone catering to “teenagers, feminists, gays, promoters of ethnic consciousness, Third World peoples, etc.” What populist models say and do tend to reflect the realities of their “lived worlds.”

In the context of the late 1960s fashion world, Twiggy, a teenager from a working-class district in London, was a populist model because she was not trained by professional fashion designers and photographers to demonstrate

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the Milan or Paris-based high fashion aesthetics. The most valuable assets she displayed were a teenage girl’s untutored vitality as well as a working-class girl’s conscientiousness.

Crafted Beauty

Five foot six inches tall, reportedly weighing only 90 pounds, Twiggy was thin, but her thinness was not the main reason why her look was described as unconventional. Before Twiggy, a handful of models and actresses had been known for having a thin physique: Audrey Hepburn, Jean Shrimpton, and Celia Hammond, to name a few. They were all considered beauty icons. What made Twiggy different from them was Twiggy was not marked down as an elegant, sophisticated beauty. Her strong Cockney accent, her childish character, and her reliance on her boyfriend-manager, who had no previous experiences in model managing, signaled a lack of professionalism that other high fashion models possessed. Judith Crist of *Ladies’ Home Journal* made a comparison between Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton. Shrimpton, like Twiggy, was an English model associated with the “Swinging London” fashion. Yet while Shrimpton showcased her long, flowy hair, Twiggy cropped hers short to the nape of her neck. Shrimpton was womanly and seductive. Twiggy was boyish and untutored. Beauty models like Jean Shrimpton were beautiful in an elegant, feminine, and natural way; Twiggy’s beauty seemed comparatively crafted and could be more easily mimicked. Moreover, Shrimpton’s was a top beauty model “with an eye on professional longevity.” Twiggy was just a teenager who accidently captured fame in “a decadent society that idolizes the least cultured, the least distinct, the least vital of its emanations.”

A writer for an esteemed women’s fashion magazine who had reviewed many

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42 Shrimpton was known for having a romantic relationship with esteemed photographer David Bailey at the height of her modeling career.
models’ success, Crist believed that Twiggy’s success was purely accidental and happened in a society that no longer had a structured taste for beauty.

Crist’s cynical remark on Twiggy was an example of fashion pundits’ inability to capture the model’s populist appeal to teenagers as well as to the youth-idolizing mass society. Twiggy did not seek to be beautiful, at least not in a way that most high fashion consumers assumed female models should be. Yet this not-so-pretty girl worked hard to look attractive. She told Life reporters that she spent two hours to do her eye makeup. She shared more details with Seventeen readers about how she painted her eyes:

When I’ve got it right, I darken it with a dark brown powdered eyeliner, then I use a thin line of black liner as close to my lashes as possible. I use black mascara—the kind with the bits in it—on my top lashes, then put on my fake lashes. I buy different kinds, usually the double-thick hair ones. I often put on two or three at a time, then I mascara my bottom lashes and do the black lines. I sketch them in first lightly with black eyeliner, then I darken them. I usually do between nine and eleven.  

The multiple “I” statements, details as specific as how many times she brushed her lashes, and pictures of her putting on make-up demonstrated how much work and research she invested in polishing her look. Here was a girl who spent hours a day painting her own lashes, applying cream to her face twice a day, and spending seven hours in the salon to get her hair cut. This girl might not be a natural beauty, yet she worked hard to make herself fashionably beautiful. As a result, Twiggy made a convincing case to market cosmetic and hair product to teenage girls as she was very open about how she relied on those makeup tools. Articles introducing her beauty

tutorials conveyed a message to girls that beauty was something they could (and should) work hard and spend money to achieve, whether their natural appearance met the dominant beauty standards or not.

Here, Twiggy’s beauty statement carried a self-affirmative message. Different from what pundits in Milan and Paris say about female beauty, Twiggy showed that beauty could be crafted and modified. This message especially catered to teenage girls from a working-class family, who had less money to purchase top-notch beauty products and knew little about elaborate make-up techniques that only Hollywood actresses, high fashion models, and professional beauty artists knew how to do. As a teenager and a successful model, Twiggy showed that fashion should be universally accessible to all white girls. As long as they worked hard, they could be included into the realm of fashionable girlhood.

*A Teenage Girl in Love*

Magazine writers had noticed the power Justin de Villeneuve had in Twiggy’s modeling business. By title, he was Twiggy’s manager, but multiple sources revealed that the relationship between Twiggy and him was also cooperative, mentoring, friendly, and romantic. Fashion and women’s magazines gave a skeptical comment on the relationship. Polly Devlin of *Vogue* and Judith Crist of *Ladies’ Home Journal* noted that Twiggy, a naïve teenage girl, had been manipulated by her ambitious boyfriend-manager, who had an “avid, insatiable appetite” for success.45 In fact, Twiggy had never hidden her close relationship with Justin de Villeneuve. Yet in news magazines and teen magazines, the ways this relationship was represented contributed to Twiggy’s populist appeal, especially to teenage readers.

Teen magazine *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World* offered an extensive depiction of the relationship between Twiggy and Justin de Villeneuve. Justin de Villeneuve’s original name was Nigel Davies. He was a friend of Twiggy’s older sister and was the first person discovering her potential as a model. Before he became Twiggy’s boyfriend and manager, he worked as “a bookie’s office boy, inept amateur boxer, antique salesman, interior designer” and had no solid footing in fashion. Yet this did not prevent him from trying anything he could to help Twiggy start her career. He came up with the name “Twiggy” and a French-sounding name for himself, hoping to gain more recognition in the fashion industry in Europe. The manager-model duo shared a romantic relationship, but details within the relationship were not articulated. Twiggy told the writer “I guess you’d say we’re in love.” Yet they were not engaged. “We’re engaged to be engaged,” she continued. At the same time, an unknown source told the writer that “Justin has the confidence of her parents [. . .] he has her best interest at heart, they would assure you.”

From these accounts, the teen magazine left the romantic relationship an innocent touch. This relationship was approved by Twiggy’s parents, and it contributed to the seamless cooperation between the manager and the model. In other words, the relationship uplifted Twiggy’s success. Similar to how *16 Magazine* encouraged teenage girls to foster an imagined romantic relationship with male idols, the depiction of the romantic relationship between Twiggy and Justin de Villeneuve told the readers that there was nothing wrong with having a romantic relationship with a man, as long as the relationship was done carefully and could actually benefit the girl’s personal growth.

Similarly, *Life* emphasized Twiggy’s innocence toward the relationship. She admitted that Justin de Villeneuve was “the first boy I’ve ever gone steady with,” yet at the age of 17.

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46 *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World*, p. 4.
ideas of engagement and marriage were not in her mind: “teen-age marriages—I mean, it’s daft, ain’t it?”⁴⁷ Typical of what a teenage girl was like when she fell in love for the first time, Twiggy was cheerful, grateful for having this relationship. She respected him, relying on him to make every decision. In this way, Justin de Villeneuve functioned like a trustworthy big brother to her. At the same time, she was reserved. Ideas of a long-term commitment was not in her mind, and she did not think of—at least did not mention—developing the relationship in a sexual way.

In sum, the magazines’ accounts carved out a picture of a teenager girl thriving on a romantic relationship. The picture helped highlight Twiggy’s easygoing personality. She was able to cooperate with a man and gave him credit for her success. She respected him and did not let love tarnish their working relationship. She was a teenage girl in love but benefitted professionally from the romance. This romantic side of Twiggy drew attention from teenage girls who wanted to have a short romantic relationship with a man just to learn from a man and grow from the relationship.

_A Home Girl_

Magazines’ representations of Twiggy put much spotlight on her family background and relationship. For example, _Life, Newsweek, Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World_ offered extensive coverage of Twiggy’s family: “She lives now, where she has always lived, in a semi-detached, brown-brick home in a working-class district of Northwest London along with mum, dad (a carpenter for TV stage sets), a sheep dog, a Persian cat and a Teddy bear named Growler,” the _Newsweek_ article describes.⁴⁸ Her humble origin and her rapid success in modeling was referred to as a rags-to-riches story. At the same time, writers consistently diluted Twiggy’s

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independence and professional success via giving an infantilized picture of her personality. This seventeen-year-old girl who earned $120 an hour for professional modeling in a foreign country also needed parents’ cuddling and slept in a room full of toys.\footnote{Life, Vol. 62, No. 13 (March 31, 1967), p. 28; the “Newsfronts” section reported that Twiggy was paid $120 an hour for photographic modeling at New York.} According to Vogue writer Polly Devlin, Twiggy’s look was “lacquered with a stony stare of arrogance,” but she “wouldn’t know what arrogance mean.”\footnote{Vogue, March 15, 1967, p. 65.} The empowered girl knew nothing of her empowerment. Life reported that “She lives with her parents in a modest home in the northeast of London. She starts her day at 7:30. Her mother always makes her porridge for breakfast.” An accompanying picture showed Twiggy lying on her bed playing with stuffed animals.\footnote{Life, Vol. 62, No. 5 (February 3, 1967), p. 36.} Asked to comment on her modeling tour in New York, she told the Life reporter that “I have to go to the top and tell me mum.”\footnote{Life, Vol. 62, No. 13 (March 31, 1967), p. 28.} Ladies’ Home Journal writer Judith Crist described that Twiggy lived in a “bubble” encircling “Mum and Dad and her Pygmalion-promoter and herself.” The durability of the bubble relied on “if indeed the teen-agers—who are the only ones who can get away with Twigginess—have the spendable money for supporting the style.”\footnote{Judith Crist, “What Twiggy’s Got,” Ladies’ Home Journal, June 1967, p. 60.}

Crist’s remark touched upon a subtle link between a family-loving Twiggy and teenage girls’ spending power. When girls spent money on products that Twiggy modeled, they consumed not only a distinguished fashion style but also a girlish personality, characterized by a girl’s reliance on her parents. In return, a good family relationship provided the girl with ideal financial and emotional situations to focus on fashion. Teen magazine Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World published several pictures of Twiggy with her whole family. Twiggy wears a stylish
mini-dress, which provided a sharp contrast to her more modestly dressed mother and sisters. In one picture, she sat across the laps of her mother and two older sisters. In another picture, she sat on a high stool and the rest of her family sat on the floor, creating an impression that the rest of the family members put their youngest daughter in a privileged spot. In the third picture, Twiggy stood in front of her families, her hands holding her mother’s and her sister’s. Physical arrangement demonstrated how this little girl rose to the top by relying on her parents’ and sisters’ physical strength (Figures 2.14 & 2.15). Despite Twiggy’s lucrative career, the magazine stated that it was her father taking major financial responsibilities: “[Twiggy] has always had a very close relationship with her family. Her father has always worked hard to make a living so that he could provide for his family.” Her glamorous status as “today’s new queen of the fashion world” came from her family’s financial support and their protection of their little sister.

Figure 2.14  Twiggy posed with family, in Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World, p. 26
Figure 2.15  Twiggy posed with family, in *Twiggy Her Mod Mod Teen World*, p.28

This family-oriented side downplayed Twiggy’s individuality yet made her fit into a traditional American value based on a small, closely knitted nuclear family. She played out the roles of “dad’s little girl” and a little sister of the entire family, with which other successful models and actresses refused to be associated. For example, in March 1968, *Life* dedicated a cover and a 7-page article titled “Fonda’s Little Girl, Jane” to describe Jane Fonda’s successful acting career. Even though she was the daughter of a famed actor, she strived to escape from the shadow of her father by finding a “European way” to live and develop her career.54 To put Jane Fonda and Twiggy into comparison, Jane Fonda was an independent woman, who did not need support from her family to achieve success; Twiggy was a girl who liked to stay home and demanded support from her family. In the end, Fonda established an outstanding film career in Europe, was recognized by elite film critics, and became a feminist.55 Twiggy stayed on the pages of magazines and remained a media daring representing fashionable girlhood.

55 Fonda was involved in feminist and civil rights movements in the 1970s.
Conclusion

This chapter examines what new meanings of fashionable girlhood arose from magazines’ representations of Twiggy. In introducing Twiggy as a fashion model and a teenage celebrity, magazines had constructed a new version of girlhood characterized with mobility, empowerment, and populism. The theme of mobility was demonstrated in Twiggy’s leaping body and the simple fashion style she modeled. It became an overarching theme of teenage girls’ physicality in relation to their desire for greater personal freedom. Because they grew up in a time when they learned women had more professional opportunities than before, they envisioned an active lifestyle not limited to a home setting.

The theme of empowerment was displayed in close-ups of Twiggy’s face, in pictures of her body lacking obvious signs of fertility and maternity, and pictures of her dressing disrupted the binary gender categories. Some of the most famous photographs of Twiggy featured her direct, aggressive stare. These photographs defied how women were traditionally represented in visual culture by presenting a girl refusing to be surveyed by the male gaze. She claimed an active spot in the visual dynamics. Her stare symbolized her power to guard her subjectivity. The pictures thus mapped out a provocative image of girlhood that magazines had utilized to promote fashion products to teenage girls. Pictures of her body lacking obvious signs of fertility and maternity revealed that a fashionable body of a teenage girl took a step away from traditional gender expectations. Her cross-dressing revealed the marketability of a teenage girl borrowing clothing items from men and playing with a pretentiously masculine look. The empowering look displayed in these pictures stemmed from a lack of sexual appeal.
However, this moment of empowerment was both reinforced and compromised by visual and textual descriptions shaping Twiggy as a populist model. She provided a model of self-crafted beauty, reminding teenage girls to disregard existing beauty standards and created a fashionable look on their own. She was in a romantic relationship with her manager-boyfriend, whom she fully trusted for every decision. She was also an average teenage girl from a working-class family, had pets, slept with toys, and liked cuddling with mom and dad. Put together, these accounts showed that a teenage girl was independent when it came to beauty and fashion, but she was reliant and submissive when it came to managing her career and family life.

By analyzing the themes of mobility, empowerment, and populism in visual and textual depictions of Twiggy in magazines, I conclude that as an icon of fashionable girlhood, Twiggy’s look was groundbreaking and empowerment, demonstrating more feminist influences. However, as a teenage celebrity, she was beauty-conscious, innocent, and submissive. She challenged the high fashion definition of female beauty but complied with traditional traits of a feminine personality. In Twiggy, magazine readers saw a contradictory picture of fashionable girlhood, one that bounced back and forth between feminist expectations and traditional expectations for female beauty. This picture formed the base of fashionable femininity today.

Due to the emergence of women’s lib and the oft-violent campus activities of many of the girls’ peers, politics and controversy are among the first things reporters are likely to ask about . . . The girls did not knock their more activist counterparts, they just made it clear the politics of protest and the skyrocketing drug problem aren’t part of their lives.

— “Girls Free to Answer All Question”

The Miss America Pageant was a powerful beauty pageant franchise that promoted ideal femininity through showcasing beautiful and talented girls to a national audience. Historically the pageant had reflected and even shaped the American feminine ideal, which ran in concert with the traditional expectations of femininity supported by mass media. Central to the Miss America image was a carefully maintained distance between girlhood and dissenting views on gender roles. An ideal American girl, as the pageant portrayed, was one who conformed to hegemonic gender roles and cooperated with the value systems of the white and upper class portions of society. This tradition began to change in 1968, with the retirement of a key executive in the organization, a protest against the pageant launched by women’s liberation activists, and the creation of the first Miss Black America pageant endorsed by African American civil rights communities. These events set off a series of adjustments the Miss
America pageant would made in subsequent years. The adjustments, including the entry of the first black contestant, changes to the interview portion to include controversial political topics, and an increased emphasis on youth in promotional documents manifested the pageant’s responses to the social and political turmoil of the late 1960s. These responses not only changed the face of the long-standing beauty pageant but also contributed to a new definition of American girlhood as a politically relevant subject.

In this chapter, I trace the changes that had taken place in the image of ideal girlhood the Miss America constructed between the years 1968 and 1970, when the pageant, a franchise influential in shaping the national culture, faced pressure from the growing counterculture, especially from the feminist and civil rights movements. I list the traditional themes of ideal girlhood that the pageant proposed, following what aspects of the themes the pageant activists protested and how the pageant reacted to the criticisms. The pageant, criticized for its white supremacist and patriarchal vision of femininity encompassed in a white, middle-class girl’s demure personality, did not abandon its conventional beauty standards, but it allowed the contestants greater freedom to approach political topics and share their viewpoints. Collecting examples from the pageant’s programs and newspapers coverage of the 1968 to 1970 Miss America Pageants, I focus on moments that articulate politics of representation different from the dominant paradigm of the “ideal” American girl as politically silent or conformist. I argue that the pageant, which adjusted its standards on ideal girlhood, offered a glimpse at how countercultural movements affected popular culture institutions. Critiques voiced by black and feminist groups did not erase the pageant’s conventional portrait of an ideal girl with white skin and gentle demeanor; but collectively they propelled the pageant to present a stronger image of
girlhood—one that incorporated black women’s outspoken stance for gender equality and feminist activists' audacity to utter dissenting political views. The Miss America pageant thus became an arena where various ideologies of racial and gender politics converged, helping to formulate new meanings of American girlhood.

**Faces of America’s Ideal Femininity: Mermaids, Queens, Princesses, and Girls**

The Miss America pageant occupied an important position in American culture for several notable reasons. First, it was the oldest and arguably the most famous beauty pageant in the United States. Second, as a powerful cultural institution broadcast by national media, it regulated the image of ideal femininity to Americans by showcasing physical attributes of young women while simultaneously echoing the mainstream belief of what an ideal American woman should look and act like. Calling the winner “America’s Ideal Girl,” the pageant capitalized on the cultural imagination of ideal girlhood. American society in different historical periods held different values and beliefs toward a woman’s look, demeanor, and individuality, and those changing ideas were reflected in how women of different appearances and character were chosen as winners in the pageant’s long history. Before the late 1960s, the Miss America pageant had been a show of traditional feminine ideal, in which contestants were often associated with prominent feminine figures to demonstrate a list of physical and moral qualities conservative Americans liked to see in women. At the same time, the values they enacted and how they enacted them revealed the ways in which ideal femininity was imagined in American culture. The beauty and personal attributes the winners presented were not always common among average American women. Yet in these selected pageant girls’ performance, judges, journalists,
male viewers, and even the government saw a model of feminine ideal that they wanted all
women to follow.

Mermaids and the Anti-Flapper Girls

The Miss America pageant started in 1921. It was originally part of the “Fall Frolic,” a
local festival that Atlantic City officials and businessmen created to keep summer tourists
staying in this resort city for a few more days. Yet the event called “Inter-City Beauties,” a
beauty contest featuring young women dressed in bathing suits, soon captured attention not only
from tourists but also from national media. One newspaper reporter used the term “Miss America”
to describe the crowning of the winning girl. It soon became the official title of the contest,
which remained popular in the subsequent years.¹ The success of Miss America reflected crucial
social and cultural factors of the Roaring Twenties. One of them was the genteel, eugenics-based
idea of “pursuing a new image of American female.” A large number of beauty contests
mushroomed during the 1920s, when the white female body became a spectacle of a national
ideal. The ideal reminded the growingly diverse American population of the “ultimate aesthetic
superiority” of Anglo-Saxon aesthetics and highlighted the “ugliness” of immigrants and
minorities.² The press image of winners and contestants of the Miss America pageant met this
agenda.

The earliest winners of the contest that would become the Miss America pageant were
called mermaids. Newspaper photographs showed that from 1921 and 1927, winners posed in
bathing suits and held Golden Mermaid Trophies. They stood side by side with “King Neptune”
and were surrounded by flowers and foliage as decorations when they paraded down the Atlantic

¹ Miss America official program, 1949
City boardwalk. These mermaids, with their robust physiques and bright smiles, looked distinctively different from the trendy flapper—young and smart women who put on heavy make-up, wore see-through dresses and short skirts, smoked cigarettes, and embraced sexual freedom. As a judge put it, Miss America was “a rather fair girl, with rather straight lines, broad shoulder for swimming, a clear eye and clear, intelligent face.” While flappers displayed the confidence and nonchalance of mature women, the Miss American winners—most of them were teenagers—showcased teenage girls’ vigor and naiveté. Kimberly Hamlin further points out that the popularity of the contestants stemmed from not only a backlash against flappers but also anxieties over the women’s right movement in the 1920s: “frequent reports of women working, voting, and running for office, combined with images of independent, carefree flapper, deeply upset the balance of gender relations and precipitated a cultural backlash against women.” Just when women started to demand more egalitarian treatments in public areas, tourists and media reporters turned their attention to girls who were innocent and homely and called them America’s ideal girls. The pageant’s earliest success, to a large degree, came from the mermaids’ ability to perform those traits with their wholesome bodies and warm smiles.

Despite the extensive media attention it garnered, the pageant was in a financial abyss in 1927. As the event drew more spotlight, it attracted more pungent criticism from the conservative-minded reformers, who found the sight of young, unmarried girls showing up in public dressed in swimsuit scandalous. As a result, businessmen withdrew their sponsorship,
and there would be no Miss America pageant from 1928 to 1932. When it was revived in 1933, the pageant started to promote a different feminine ideal.

**Lenora Slaughter’s Intervention**

Academic and journalist literature of Miss America history suggests that Lenora Slaughter played a paramount role in consolidating a fixed image of Miss America girls in the postwar years. Joining the pageant in 1935 as the executive director, Slaughter institutionalized the pageant and tightened up the press image of contestants during her 32-year tenure. The official program of the 1968 Miss America Pageant used the first content page to announce Slaughter’s retirement, in which she was described as having “imagination, daring, persistence, and above all, good taste” and was credited with “mould[ing] a meandering and virtually defunct Beauty Contest into what is now known internationally as the Miss America Pageant.” The words “good taste” specifically referred to Slaughter’s reform on the media image of the girl the pageant presented.

Slaughter saw her job not only as a beauty pageant administrator but also as a guardian of ideal femininity. She kept a close eye on what the girls wanted to do with their pageant experiences and how they presented themselves to media. Beauty and talent brought a girl to the competition, yet only the girl who behaved with propriety could carry the title of Miss America. Frank Deford, a senior writer at *Sports Illustrated* who published a book about Miss America in 1971, reported that Slaughter always had “a crusader’s impulse to drag Miss America into respectability” and was responsible for changing the outlook of the pageant “from cheesecakery to do-goodism.” Sarah Banet-Weiser describes that Slaughter transformed the pageant from a

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7 Deford, pp. 150-151.
“’leg-man’s’ spectacle into a respectable civic venture.’” In Slaughter’s view, when a girl entered the pageant, her primary role was to live up to the high bar of ideal femininity.

It should be noticed that Slaughter’s definition of ideal femininity carried her personal bias and a racist undertone. She introduced “Rule Seven” into the pageant’s by-laws, the new rule that restricted Miss America participants to girls “in good health and of the white race.” All contestants were required to “list, on their formal biological data sheet, how far back they could trace their ancestry. In the pageant’s continual crusade for respectability, ancestral connections to the Revolutionary War or perhaps the Mayflower would have been seen as a plus.” Not only did the contestants have to be white, they were also expected to have connections with a small, wealthy, and prestigious circle of American society. Any non-white contestants were barred from entering the competition, and it was much harder for girls from a lower-class background to succeed in the competition.

In addition to setting up the race- and class-specific rules, Slaughter identified three venues for qualified contestants to display ideal femininity. First, a scholarship program was set up in 1945, which offered winners generous awards to pursue a college degree. The program was heavily marketed by the pageant to persuade the public that Miss America was not only a beauty contest but also an organization promoting advanced education for young women. In this way, the pageant offered the girls a venue to highlight their intelligence. Secondly, Slaughter recruited a group of Atlantic City society matrons to chaperone the contestant while they stayed in Atlantic City. The involvement of older, predominantly married women eventually developed into a structured hostess committee. For example, in the 1966 pageant, the hostess committee

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8 Sarah Banet-Weiser, p. 38.
10 Elissa Stein, *Beauty Queen: Here She Comes*, p. 48.
had sixty-nine members. These members, all by the title of Mrs., were constantly around the contestants. Their responsibilities were:

They give the same loving care and attention to the contestants that they would give to their own daughters. They help them maintain their busy schedules, escort them to all Pageant events, advise and assist them with public interviews and pictures, encourage them during talent rehearsals and production routines, and watch over their general health.\(^\text{11}\)

This description showed that “society ladies” had great power over contestants’ every move. They were there to supervise the girls’ behaviors and made sure they did not do anything scandalous. For instance, the girls were not allowed to talk to men except for their fathers, brothers, and pageant officials. Through the chaperon program, Slaughter made sure the girls met the high moral standards.

The third venue was the press image, specifically the thematic image that contestants performed to attract media attention. There were three distinctive types of themes that Slaughter as well as pageant officials came up with to present contestants to the public: queens, fairy tale princesses, and southern belles. Through visual and textual cues, these three themes framed the ways contestants performed Slaughter’s vision of ideal girlhood.

*Queens*

Immediately after Slaughter joined its administration, the pageant started to present the winner as a queen. Henrietta Leaver won the title of 1935 Miss America. Unlike the previous winners, photos of her victory showed that she sat on a high-backed armchair, was dressed in a

\(^{11}\) The 1966 Official Program, p. 13.
coronation robe, wore a crown on her head, and held a scepter. Miss America was no longer a mermaid but a queen. Whereas in the 1920s, Miss America winners were announced, introduced to the audience, and photographed in an outdoor setting befitting a summer festival, the “crowning” of Leaver as Miss America 1935 happened in “a packed ballroom of 5,000 visitors.” Miss America had entered a new era of pomp, circumstance, and publicity. Leaver’s dressing style, pose, as well as how she was crowned in a luxurious indoor setting to both on-site and national audiences mimicked the coronations of British monarchs. Since 1935, the pageant’s official programs had consistently branded the contestants with royal identities. Licensed photographs of Miss America winners showed a crown-wearing, scepter-holding girl. Captions referred to state representatives as “America’s Reigning Queens.” Yet unlike British queens, whose serious expressions in official coronation portraits signified the supreme political power they held, the “America’s Reigning Queens” smiled coquettishly. Although they dressed like queens, underneath they were the friendly, perpetually happy all-American girls.

Princesses

In the article “Princess Literature and the Miss America Pageant,” Iset Anuakan reveals that the Miss America pageant has incorporated a handful of motifs and tropes from princess mythology. The pageant has constructed the contestants as princesses through associating them with famous princess characters. For example, an advertisement included in the 1960 official program referred to the contestants as “America’s Cinderella” and “a host of princesses.” The pageant also created a salient princess imagery out of the girls via “limited versions of body

12 The 1949 Miss America Official Program, p. 49.
15 The 1960 Miss America Official Program, p. 67.
types, hairstyles, and racial differences.”¹⁶ The pageant contestants all had a slender physique. They were not too tall, not too short, and not overtly curvy. Their long and flowing hair was neatly tied into a bun. As nearly all popular princess stories in America originated in Western Europe, the princess analogy the Miss America pageant sanctioned adopted the “Anglicized version of beauty” as the only “measurable trait” and denied the presence of women of ethnic minorities.¹⁷ Black women were nonexistent until 1970. In the 1950s the pageant had a “Miss Indian America,” which was a sub-contest for “Indian girl contestants.” The winners, dressed with their native styling and jewelry, were assigned to be “an honored guest at the National Finals.” She appeared “on stage nightly in Convention Hall” to greet guests and contestants.¹⁸ By creating a sub-contest for Native American girls, the Miss America pageant reinforced the princess myth by excluding formal participation of Native Americas and putting them in a separate category for non-princesses. The Miss Indian America was there to smile, greet people, and welcome real (white) princesses to claim their titles.

Moreover, even the people the contestants were shown surrounded with—most visibly handsome men and older women—reinforced the princess imagery. Anuakan observes that the contestants were accompanied and potentially courted by young and handsome men: “the unnamed suitor appears in the backdrop as the male announcer—a young, attractive Bert Parks, then Ron Ely, later Gary Collins.” Anuakan’s observation explained a pageant tradition of having young, handsome, and college-educated men as “official escorts,” who escorted contestants to walk on the stage.¹⁹ Another tradition of the male “suitors” was the involvement of the members

¹⁶ Iset Anuakan, p. 112.
¹⁷ Ibid., p. 113
¹⁸ The 1956 Official Program, p. 4; The 1957 Official Program, p. 4.
¹⁹ See, for example, the 1963 official program, pp. 20-21.
from the army. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the pageant invited choirs from the army to perform. The presence of the army choirs not only illustrated patriotism but also constructed contestants as princesses being courted by eligible bachelors. For example, the 1956 pageant included a performance given by Naval Aviation Cadet Choir. The official program gave the following description of the choir: “Imagine the impact of sixty men, not only young, not only scholastically brilliant, not only talented—for they are all trained singers, not only brave—for they are all flyers, not only handsome—for the time being, UNMARRIED!!” The capitalized word “UNMARRIED” emphasized the role of the men as potential suitors of the princesses—the young, beautiful, and single pageant contestants. The contestants’ physical attributes and their interactions with men matched the princess characters created by Grimm Brothers and animated by Walt Disney. They were, in Anuakan’s words, a “passive, blond, childlike” figure. Waiting to be courted by men, they did little to arrange their personal lives.

**Southern Belles**

Since 1945 and through the 1950s, contestants’ fashion style and demeanor constantly matched that of Southern belles and debutantes, both known for exhibiting highly disciplined femininity. Many contestants, whether they were from the South or not, looked and acted like Southern belles. Frank Deford noticed that many girls were ostensibly Southern-styled, very open about their Southern accent, and even prided themselves on being “a real Southern gal.” He called them “the modern Southern belle.” Kate Shindle, Miss America 1998, found that when the Miss America pageant was first broadcast on national TV in the 1950s, the pageant lined up the contestants and made them play up a vision of “idealized 1950s Southern belle femininity.”

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20 The 1956 Official Program, p. 10.
21 Anuakan, p. 114.
22 Deford, p. 221and p.238.
The contestants all wore fluffy dresses and ball gowns, showcasing their narrow waists molded by corsets. They “float[ed] up and down the endless Convention Hall runaway in orderly fashion,” forming a TV spectacle. 23 In fact, moments of fifty girls representing their fifty states walking down the runaway in the theatrical ball gowns not only awed TV audiences. They were also one of the most photographed scenes during the pageant. The photographs appeared on newspapers’ front pages and covers of the official programs.

Dresses tied each Miss America contestant to the antiquated Southern ideal of female beauty. An “official pageant gown,” sponsored by fabrics company Everglaze and worn by the winner for her portrait, was typically a ball gown with a hoop skirt and layers of fabrics, such as the one worn by Bess Myerson, Miss America 1945, and the one worn by BeBe Shopp, Miss America 1948, when they were introduced in the pageant programs. Even though neither Myerson nor Shopp were from the South (Myerson was a Jew from New York; Shoppe was from Minnesota), their pageant gowns bore striking similarities to the costumes Vivien Leigh wore when starring as Scarlett O'Hara—arguably the most famous Southern belle character—in the widely popular movie Gone with the Wind (1939). 24

The theme of Southern belles functioned not just as an impressive visual scene. It also served as a powerful reminiscence of the pre-industrial femininity in the antebellum South, when a white woman, free from the burden of domestic burden as well as any form of economic activities, dedicated all of her time and energy to polishing her look and demeanor. If she was single, she focused on attracting male suitors. If she was married, she focused on socializing and entertaining guests. Wherever she went, she was charming, well-dressed, and talking to people

23 Kate Shindle, Being Miss America: Behind the Rhinestone Curtain, p. 40.
24 The 1954, 1955, 1959 official programs offered the details of Miss America winners’ official pageant gowns.
nicely. For both men and women living in the post-war American society, it was soothing to watch this picture of Southern belles populating the stage of the Miss America contest. For women, it signified a world without housework. For men, it fulfilled a nostalgic fantasy, in which there was no such thing as a working woman, and whether a woman should work or not was irrelevant. In this fantasy, every woman seemed to perpetually be a girl.

Through queens, fairy tale princesses, and Southern belles, the Miss America pageant had imposed a shallow yet extremely narrowed picture of femininity on ideal girlhood. A queen, a fairy tale princess, or a Southern belle was either a fictional character or a character linked to a distant, seemingly mythic past. They had few connections to realities. By marking them down as American’s ideal girlhood, the pageant neglected the everyday struggle that American women faced and reduced girlhood into a socially irrelevant category. As a result, the image of ideal girlhood was a glamorous picture of femininity without any substantial meanings. However, because these characters were familiar to the American audiences, they became templates the pageant could easily apply to shape the girls’ media image while wiping out traits unrelated to the narratives about the characters.

*Politics of Ideal Femininity*

For Slaughter, the last thing pageant contestants should do was to be to be a political figure. Slaughter insisted that any conversation about politics was likely to tarnish a girl’s imagery as a queen (who, in modern European history, tended to be politically neutral), a fairy tale princess, and a Southern belle (both were politically irrelevant characters). By “political,” Slaughter referred to any political positions that were not part of the U.S. government’s current policies. During Slaughter’s tenure, it was a taboo for contestants to take a part in political events
or even address political issues. The pageant was proud of the “civic duties” that the contestants accomplished, such as raising war funds or visiting soldiers. Yet when it came to projects that challenged the government’s stance, Slaughter was vehemently opposed. In Bess Myerson’s biography, the first Jewish Miss America recounted how Slaughter was furious at her cooperation with the Anti-Defamation League, a non-governmental organization dedicated to protect the Jewish people in America against anti-Semitism. Slaughter viewed Myerson’s actions, such as touring high schools and making appearances representing the Jewish organization, as a political move. She accused Myerson of “squandering the good name of the Miss America Pageant by making highly publicized appearances at political events.” After Myerson, any moves possibly related to politics were non-existent throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, when the pageant distanced the girls not only from politics but also from the public sphere more generally. When mentioning past winners, the official program downplayed their college degrees and careers while highlighting their married lives, listing the men they were married to and how many children they had. Former Miss Americas’ media image was put far away from political and social controversies. Indeed, after their reigns ended, former Miss Americas were expected to disappear into the anonymity of the suburban home and family life.

Toward the end of Slaughter’s tenure, Miss America had become an ultra-conservative franchise that imposed strict restrictions on femininity. Despite the ongoing racial conflicts, the women’s rights movement, and anti-establishment skepticism posed by the younger generation, Miss America managed to keep its exclusively white contestants silent about race, gender, and anti-government protests. Slaughter played a crucial role in upholding this silence, at least in front of the mediated audiences. For instance, when a reporter asked Deborah Bryant, Miss

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America 1966, to share her views on the absence of “negro girls” in the contest, the interview was abruptly stopped by Slaughter, who insisted that Miss America “shouldn’t have to answer a question about a national problem. . . . She’s not the President.” This “no national problem” statement summarized Slaughter’s (and Miss America’s) stance on ideal girlhood in the late 1960s. In a decade marked by youth activism, an ideal girl was a safeguard of the white traditional version of femininity. She cared about her look and her family. She was poised to be a full-time housewife and mother. Anything other than that was beyond her concern. Her young age and her unduly submission to establishment values distanced herself from movements that demanded more rights for women. The ideal girls Miss America presented were not associated with activism. However, after Slaughter retired, they would, through a partly cooperative and partly competitive relationship with the civil rights and feminist movements, build a more politically active image on media.

The Loosening of Ideal Femininity

The crowning of Judith Ford as Miss America 1969 showed early rumblings of how some of the pageant’s long-held conceptions of ideal femininity started to lose ground. It could be taken as the first time the pageant adjusted traditions to cope with growing countercultural ire toward the staid image of femininity. Unlike most Miss America winners during the Cold War era, Ford was a bubbly blonde. A junior national trampoline champion, she won the talent preliminary with a spectacular trampoline performance. When the majority of contestants chose to sing, play musical instruments, or perform dramatic readings, Ford displayed her outstanding athleticism. After she won the title, media paid much attention to the color of her hair and her

26 “Miss America Aide Avoids Rights Issue”
27 She was the only blonde-haired winner since 1957. The other winners all have brown hair.
athletic ability. Reporters had sensed that this new Miss America seemed to possess something new. *Life* put a full-page picture of her jumping on a trampoline, saying she presented “a new way to get to be Miss America.” Similar to how Twiggy’s unconventional look changed fashion media’s definitions of female beauty, Ford’s blonde hair and athleticism indicated that the pageant, in that first year without Slaughter in the administration, started to embrace a wider definition of ideal femininity (Figures 3.1 & 3.2).

![Figure 3.1 Judith Ford on the cover of 1969 Miss America Pageant official program](image)

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28 *Life*, vol. 65, no. 12, (September 20), 1968, p. 91.
The fact that Ford’s blonde hair attracted widespread media attention illustrated how ideal femininity had previously been defined in an extremely narrow fashion in the Miss America pageant. When Ford entered the contest, state pageant officials told that she was “too blonde,”\textsuperscript{29} which might decrease her chance of winning. Popular conceptions of blonde women were they “have more fun,” implying their propensity for partying and excessive spending.\textsuperscript{30} Marilyn Monroe’s persona of dumb blonde in movies such as \textit{Gentlemen Prefer Blondes} reinforced the stereotype of blonde girls being materialist and even morally loose. These were stereotypes about beautiful girls that Slaughter tried to disengage from the name of Miss America. By contrast, brown hair seemed to portray a more reserved edition of female beauty. Even though both blondes and brunettes entered the competition, a brunette was more likely to win the title.\textsuperscript{31} The predominance of brown-haired Miss Americas indicated the pageant’s

\textsuperscript{29} Paul Anthony Arco, “There She Is, Miss America: Catching up with Judi Ford Nash,” \textit{Northwest Quarterly}, June 9, 2014.
\textsuperscript{31} The pageant also had very few red-haired winners. Only Venus Ramey, Miss America 1944, was listed as having “auburn” hair.
unwillingness to let the girls stand out for their special physical traits. In general, Miss Americas were an army of homogenous beauties. Nobody looked too different from each other, and nobody was unique. Physical consistency displayed in the winners’ hair color and measurements was a way to minimalize their individuality. Therefore, when Judith Ford’s blonde hair made into news headlines in 1968, it showed the pageant had started to allow the girls to highlight their individual differences.

Ford was also the first Miss America recognized for her athleticism. By performing a trampoline routine that had qualified her to compete in the Olympics, Ford had several accomplishments that seemed to challenge the pageant’s requirements of ideal femininity. What Ford performed was an intense and competitive sport that required a great deal of physical strength. Miss America contestants usually did not display any sort of athleticism because it was considered unfeminine to do so. For example, state pageant officials told Ford that she was “too athletic. Miss America isn’t supposed to sweat.”³² Contestants typically chose singing, dancing, instrument-playing, acting, and storytelling for their talent preliminaries. Such types of performances not only emphasized the girls’ serenity but also reinforced limitations on what skills and talents girls could learn. Music and acting were usually performed in an indoor setting. Traditionally, girls learned how to sing, play instruments, and act at church or at school and put them into performance in community gatherings. It was especially important for girls in the upper-middle-class society to acquire those talents so that they could put on good shows during fundraising or charity events. This socialization experience could explain why girls competing for the Miss America title usually had outstanding singing or acting skills. Meanwhile, judges were predominantly professional opera singers, orchestra directors, and Hollywood stars. They

³² Paul Anthony Arco
evaluated the contestants based on how well they sang or acted. In other words, the talents the pageant valued were those that could entertain guests in a socializing event. Sports did not belong to this category. Ford’s athletic performance was not something a girl could entertain the crowd with in a fundraising party. What she displayed was an elite athlete’s dedication to perfection and competitive spirit. She brought sportsmanship to the Miss America’s definition of ideal girlhood.

Ford won the 1968 Miss America pageant. For several reasons, her victory symbolized the pageant transitioning from an authoritarian institution, which imposed an extremely narrow definition of ideal girlhood, to one that started to allow girls to expand the definition of that ideal. The 1968 pageant was the first pageant without Slaughter since 1935. It meant that the contestants could make non-traditional decisions and not worry about Slaughter’s opinions. Ford’s trampoline performance, for instance, was something that Slaughter would have frowned at. In addition, journalists observed that it was easier to interview the contestants, who were more vocal in uncovering their views on “controversial” topics—the women’s liberation movement, drug use, and the war in Vietnam. Such types of interviews, which would have been interrupted by Slaughter just a few years ago, now took place and became main topics guiding the media descriptions of the girls. At the same time, the women’s liberation movement and black civil rights groups came to challenge the pageant’s representation of ideal femininity. These countercultural influences forced the pageant to loosen its narrow definitions of ideal girlhood by adjusting its views on race and gender roles.
Miss America under Protests

On September 7, 1968, hundreds of women’s rights activists put on a theatrical protest against the Miss America pageant in front of the Atlantic City Convention Center. Aiming to attract as much attention as possible, these women conducted a series of actions considered shockingly “vulgar”: they took out bras, girdles, false eyelashes, high heels, and copies of Playboy and threw them into a trash can. They crowned a live sheep as Miss America. A woman carried signs that read “Welcome to the Miss America Cattle Auction.”33 One protester held up a poster of a naked woman whose body parts were labeled “Chuck,” “Rib,” “Loin,” “Round,” as if she were a cow ready to be slaughtered. What the activists tried to attack, through the symbolic “cattle auction,” was the sexist portrayal of women in mass media and popular culture.34

New York Radical Women (NYRW), one of the women’s liberation groups that organized the protest, published a manifesto titled “No More Miss America.” The manifesto asserted that the Miss America Pageant was the epitome of every cultural oppression against American women, including the enslavement of young American women into “high-heeled, low-status roles” and forcing them to comply with “ludicrous ‘beauty’ standards.” The pageant exploited “young, juicy, malleable” girls to inculcate the “ideal” for American women, which was the “Degrading Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol.”35 This protest received a great amount of media coverage, broadcast by network television and reported by Life, Time, New York Times, and other major news agencies. The media coverage drew national attention to the effort and ideas of the women’s liberation movement, which was previously a distant and scattered social

33 Charlotte Curtis, “Along with Miss America,” New York Times, September 9, 1968, p. 54; a bystander said the protesters were “vulgar.”
35 “No More Miss America”
force. Many feminists, such as Robin Morgan, regarded the protest as a critical success as it brought many feminist ideas into national conversations.

Women’s liberation movement was not the only countercultural group protesting against the Miss America pageant in September 1968. When the activists, composedly mostly of white women, held signs criticizing the pageant’s objectification of young women, a few blocks away, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) staged a beauty contest for black women at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. The Miss Black America pageant was created by the black activists to pinpoint the racist history of Miss America pageant, which in its nearly fifty-year history of representing America’s “ideal” girls had never had an African American state representative.36 In addition to criticizing the pageant’s racist standards of female beauty, the Miss Black America proposed a different version of ideal beauty. Saundra Williams, a nineteen-year-old black girl from Philadelphia, won the title of Miss Black America 1968. Like Judith Ford, who won the 1968 Miss America pageant, Williams was beautiful and talented. Yet unlike Ford, who recoiled from addressing protests launched by youth, blacks, and feminists, Williams was vocal about all those controversial issues regarding race, gender, and the Vietnam war.

What drew the women’s liberation activists and black civil rights communities to target the Miss America pageant was this powerful cultural institution, for nearly fifty years, had consolidated itself as the most legitimate representative of ideal girlhood in America. This ideal girlhood, however, was covered under a conservative veil. Each year, the winner toured around the country, spoke at large conventions, and met the President, all televised and documented by

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36 There were African American contestants in the county and state preliminaries, yet none of them became a state representative and appeared in the national contest up until 1970.
major media outlets. In the 1960s, with the growing tension of the Cold War and generational divide, Miss America became a title associated with nationalism, the establishment, and anything the political right cheered for. For instance, despite the growing unpopularity of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, the institution sided with President Nixon’s decision to continue America’s involvement in Vietnam. The cover of the 1969 Miss America Official Pageant program was titled “The Sound of Young,” and representing the sound was “the fine young women who composed the third Miss America USO Unit to entertain the servicemen stationed in Vietnam” and “encourage and brighten the days of our countrymen.”

Media reports often covered the pageant girls’ “tremendous contribution” in going to the combat zones and entertained the soldiers. The pageant’s unduly support for the pro-war policy and its affiliated politically conservative ideology led many activists to believe the institution was not qualified to represent ideal girlhood.

Political issues aside, central to the women’s liberation and civil rights activists’ argument was the Miss America’s manipulative use of ideal girlhood. “No More Miss America” highlighted that their overarching goal as to challenge a long-taken-for-granted myth that girls were supposed to be “malleable” and programmed to follow the dominant values: consumerism, racism, patriarchy, to name a few. By molding girls as “inoffensive, bland, apolitical,” Miss America signaled that a proper female citizen should abolish personal views and be conformist. As a way to criticism the Miss America’s definition of ideal girlhood, the Miss Black America pageant chose a girl who was vocal about controversial topics and active in civil rights activities as the winner. In a nutshell, what the activists vehemently attacked— and sought to change—was

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37 The 1969 Miss America Official Program, p. 37.
38 “Pageant USO Unit Honored”
the stereotype of girls being conformist and easily controlled. This image of girlhood ought not to be the “ideal,” the activists argued. They reprimanded the pageant for integrating conformity into the national paradigm of beauty. To sum up, the protest made famous the fact that the pageant manipulated girls and girlhood, rather than reflecting “natural values,” and its definition of ideal femininity was problematic.

On the surface, the pageant and media dismissed the critiques posed by the activists. The women’s liberation activists were often ridiculed as being jealous of the contestants’ beauty or simply unreasonable. The *New York Times* reporter Charlotte Curtis found the spectators of the protest “unsympathetic.” One man said the demonstrators were “vulgar.” Another man told them to “go home and wash your bras.”  

39 Several activists were arrested and fined.  

40 Even though no actual bras were burned —the protestors simply threw the items into “Freedom Trash Can”— “bra-burning” became the dominant image attached to the women’s liberation movement, tainting it with absurdity. Although they collected these derisive remarks about women’s liberation activists, journalists noticed the general concerns of the protestors and used them as material to interview contestants and report the pageants in the subsequent years. Other than the contestants’ appearances and the outfits they wore, journalists started to take note of how the contestants reacted to the feminist critiques and affiliated civil rights topics.

At the same time, the pageant defined any impacts made by the feminist critiques on the girls’ press image. For instance, Nathan Zauber, the executive director after Slaughter, believed that the image of Miss America “is still the same” as it had been in 1921 and 1951, regardless of

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39 Charlotte Curtis “Miss America is Picketed by 100 Women.”  
contestants’ increasing interest in political topics. However, a rule banning contestants from talking about controversial topics was lifted in 1970, merely two years after the protest launched by women’s liberation activists. For the first time in the pageant’s history, contestants were allowed to share their thoughts on social and political issues. I believe, as many news reports suggested, that the protest had propelled the pageant to make this adjustment. The lifting of the rule subsequently changed how media represented the “girls” vying for the crown.

In sum, we can see the relationships between the Miss America protests, pageant officials, and contestants as a triangular competition, mediated and judged by media/journalists. The protest propelled journalists to adopt new criteria to evaluate the overall performance of the pageant and individual performances of each contestant. The pageant, facing pressure from the protest and the more and more inquisitive media, allowed contestants to respond to the protest. In the end, it was up to each contestant to find a balance between new expectations (posed by the protest and media) and the pageant’s position. They had to decide how far they wanted to address the feminist critiques, at the risk of breaking the pageant’s rules. They also made statements based on their personal identities and their understanding of controversial topics. The following sections present how individual contestants made different decisions in response to different expectations toward ideal girlhood.

**Beauty with Character**

When Pamela Eldred became Miss America in September 1969, the pageant was in the aftermath of the protest launched by women’s liberation activists one year earlier. On the one hand, the pageant officials still required the contestants to follow the existing rules and stay away

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41 Margaret Bauman, “Jersey’s Girl Would End War, Agrees with Nixon.”
42 “Girls Free to Answer All Question”
from controversies. The pageant did not make any structural changes to cope with the feminist critique. On the other hand, expectations arose, from public opinions and among the contestants themselves, propelling the girls to demonstrate more individuality. In the article based on the interview with Eldred, journalist Marta Robinet referred to the public interest in knowing something about the new Miss America that “hasn’t been said before.” Besides her blonde hair and flashing green eyes, the new Miss America—and many pretty girls—wanted “character”: “I don’t really think I’m striking and that my eyes flash. Too many pretty girls are very sad people. I want character. That is beauty.” Asked what she thought about having to answer serious questions, Eldred answered “We do have brains. It’s my obligation to show that I do.”43 As a winner of the intense competition, who bore the responsibility to represent the pageant, Eldred probably sensed it was not wise to criticize how the pageant discouraged contestants from sharing thoughts on controversial topics. What she offered was a different definition of ideal beauty. She believed that a beautiful girl did not have to be silent. As Miss America 1970, she believed it was her job to show beautiful girls had intelligence and unique character too.

Eldred’s desire to be a Miss America with character was an example of how a contestant attending the state and national competitions in 1969 and 1970 had to juggle between different expectations projected by herself, media, and the pageant. Since the 1960s, journalists often asked the contestants to share their views on ongoing issues regarding race, gender, and the war in Vietnam. After the women’s liberation protest in 1968, such questions became more common and direct. The pageant, however, consistently asked the contestants to avoid offering any views in discord with the U.S. government. This resulted in some conflicts between contestants and the pageant officials.

43 Marta Robinet, “Miss America Wants Character.”
A few months before the 1970 pageant, Kathy Huppe gave up her Miss Montana title for refusing to follow the pageant’s order to take back her anti-war comments. She criticized the pageant on media: “They wanted a nice, safe, middle-of-the-road approach. They didn’t approve of my strong anti-Vietnam feelings. But rather than go along with their rules, I resigned.” This report highlighted that the pageant and the contestants not only endorsed different political positions but also had different views regarding how an ideal girl should behave. For Huppe, an ideal girl could also be vocal and opinionated. It was dictatorial that the pageant suppressed her dissenting views and hence eliminated a character trait that she deemed important in her identity as Miss Montana. As incidents like this drew media attention and public criticism, the pageant eventually had to adjust the rule, allowing the contestants attending the 1970 pageant to express their opinions to show that the girls did not live in a vacuum and knew nothing about the counterculture movement. This adjustment showed although the pageant officials disliked branding the girls with activism, they did find it was important to let media show that the girls were informed about ongoing political and social turmoil.

The result was these contestants faced new kinds of challenges in 1970. Whether they wanted it or not, the girls had to be ready to answer questions about controversial topics and face critiques. In the article “To Miss America…,” a journalist noted that a girl running for the title of Miss America 1971 had more obligations and matters to take care of than a contestant in the mid-1950s. “Times have changed,” the journalist wrote. The simpler days when Evelyn Ay could won Miss America 1954 by speaking “in my most sincere Miss America way” and smiling “my very best Miss America smile” had gone. The journalist reminded the new generation of

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44 Bob Lardine’s article on Miss New York State
contestants that they had to accomplish more than doing sweet talks and smiles. They were
scrutinized not only by the judges and audiences but also by “another America”:

You can do the same in 1971, doing honor to yourself, your family, and the
Pageant organization. But you should remember that there is another America
beyond the sweetness and light on the stage of Convention Hall while NBC’s
television cameras capture your every move. Be prepared for the America that is
not all white; it is black, red, and what have you. Be prepared for the Women’s
Liberation adherents who regard you as little more than a piece on display. Be
prepared for that segment of young America that is in revolt against the
establishment.⁴⁵

This report, albeit critical of the women’s liberation activists and youth movements, manifested a
different expectation toward the ideal girlhood Miss America presented. Using a second-person
point of view, the reporter warned that the girls must “be prepared” for critiques of their
conformist behavior. The key message here was the girls must do something and say something
showing the critics they were more than a beauty in display. A more implicit message was the
girls had to fight back against feminists and youth activists to keep the reputation of Miss
America from being further tarnished. Here, the Miss America’s ideal girlhood became a weapon
for the establishment to counter the challenge of feminism and youth activism.

In 1970, contestants were often asked to express opinions over issues of women’s rights,
drug use, and the war in Vietnam. Their answers shared many similarities. They usually agreed
with parts of the protesters’ ideas, but none of them were in a complete agreement with the
protesters. Phyllis George, Miss America 1971, was noted for “openmindedness toward the

⁴⁵ “To Miss America…”
liberation movement.” Although she did not consider herself a symbol of exploited womanhood, she believed she had something to learn from the women’s liberation activists: “I would like to sit down and talk with the women’s lib people. They’re fighting for something they believe in. Day-care centers and equal pay and free abortions sound fine, but down in Texas we don’t hear much about it at all, and I would like to try to find out more about their goals.” However, George called herself “a conservative” and disagreed with violent strife launched by college students, who she thought were immature.  

Similarly, Hela Yungst, Miss New Jersey, accepted that some of the ideas of women’s liberation were right but disagreed with any “aggressive” moves. She thought the Vietnam War should be ended, but she also agreed with President Nixon’s plan of gradual withdrawal. Abortion was “up to the woman involved, but legalized abortion could be taken advantage of.”  

Cynthia Harrison, Miss Oregon, said “except for the equal pay for equal work segment of their issues, I don’t respect their [women’s liberation movement] ideas.” Phyllis George, Hela Yungst, and Cynthia Harrison’s replies were typical among the contestants, who respected parts of bits of the countercultural objectives but frowned on violent demonstrations. In general, the contestants were well-informed about the controversial issues, but they posited to be more reasonable than the young people who went to street protests. 

Despite the girls’ compromising views on countercultural issues, journalists took note of their knowledgeable and vocal performance. When interacting with media, these girls no longer needed to post sheepish smiles and answer questions with a non-confrontational approach; as one journalist noticed, the new pageant girls were “vocal, active, and have opinions.”

46 “Campus Strife Doesn’t Pay, Miss America (Texas) Says”  
47 Margaret Bauman, “Jersey’s Girl Would End War, Agrees with Nixon.”  
48 “Beauty Queens Are Vocal, Active, and Have Opinions”
and personal opinions over controversial issues characterized their press image and formed a new image of ideal girlhood.

**Cultural Implications of the Vocal Girls**

Although their vocalness made news headlines, contestants’ comments on political topics had caused few political effects. Miss America contestants were not considered political figures, and their opinions, either radical or conservative, mattered little to the political world. Their interest and knowledge in politics and social issues could only renew the press image of the girls and help the pageant attract more attention. In other words, the fact that the girls were allowed to address politics mattered more in the cultural dimension. I argue that the change of press image of Miss America contestants in 1969 and 1970 had two significant cultural implications on girlhood.

First, media reports featuring the contestants’ views on controversial topics carved out a picture of girls making dissenting ideas. This picture winnowed one aspect of traditional femininity that defined white women and girls with passivity and conservatism. White girls were seen as to be protected from major political and social changes and, as Slaughter’s remark “She’s not the president” implied, the girls did not have the legitimacy to make comments on national issues. Until 1960s, media and the public did not expect the girls to approach political issues. It seemed to violate a good girl’s nature to be knowledgeable about social and political controversies. In fact, in 1968, some contestants, including the eventual winner Judith Ford, found it hard to comment on the riot during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and police brutality. “I don’t really know who the blame belongs to. I hate to talk about this. It’s so
controversial,” Ford said.⁴⁹ The post-1968 contestants broke this tradition. Although they did not agree with those anti-government protests, they at least were well-informed about controversial topics.

The second cultural implication created by the seemingly vocal pageant girls was that girlhood was imagined as the vehicle to alleviate social conflicts. One of the most heated topics during the 1969 and 1970 pageants was the conflicts between the “old” and “youthful” values. The pageant officials, judges, and media often brought up the topic and lauded how the contestants, in spite of their young age, respected the old values. Pamela Eldred, Miss America 1970, was described as having an amicable relationship with her parents and willing to “accept values of her elders.” She had an independent mind, but that did not stop her from respecting adult authority: “I’m a firm believer in authority. I have a mind of my own, but why should I defy my elders if they are right, just for the sake of defying them?”⁵⁰ The pageant was a stern defender of what were called “old” values and defined them as respect for parents and the government. Young people’s activism and participation in civil rights protests were dismissed by the pageant officials as detrimental to the old values. Bert Parks, for example, called young protesters “young snotnoses” and said they posed a danger to “any of our values we hold sacred—like, say, respect for parents—of becoming anachronistic.” The snotnoses “screw this country up so badly,” and the pageant, with the beautiful girls “staunchly defending imperiled virtues,” was there to “correct [the] mistakes.”⁵¹

The pageant often evoked the narrative that the contestants had the ability to rectify rebellious youth and serve as a bridge between the old and new generations. In the article titled

⁵⁰ Robert K. Shoemaker, “Miss America Accepts Values Of Her Elders”
⁵¹ William J. Speers, “Bert Parks Shrugs Off Jokes in Upholding Pageant Virtues” and “Parks Backs Old Virtues”
“Miss America Judges Look for Qualities Separated from Today’s Youthful Strife,” Hal David, one of the judges in the 1970 pageant told the reporter “I came down here . . . and I found 50 terrific girls that made everything I read in the newspapers about youthful strife just fade away.” Hall and other judges believed their work at the pageant was a significant, saving-the-country mission: “they’re promoting a now uncommon wholesomeness in the American culture,” which apparently referred to the young generation’s defiance toward the establishment. When violent protests launched by college students made news headlines and shocked the older generation, the Miss America girls were expected by those who carried the old values to mend the trouble caused by countercultural activities. Since the girls were young and were the “representative of all that is best in America youth,” they were entrusted to build “rapport with youth.” One of their pressing tasks, according to Phyllis George, Miss America 1971, was to stop all those “civil rioting,” because “if there is no harmony and unity, nothing can be done.” George agreed with the causes and purposes of most countercultural movements, believing all the activists had their valid points. However, she disagreed with the violent means many young protesters took. “Youth today should have its say but should take the mature approach,” she said.

In summary, media and the pageant had molded Miss Americas as the legitimate leader of America’s youth in the wake of social and political unrest in the late 1960s. The girls were not only beautiful but also vocal, deeply caring about all sorts of struggle the country was facing. They were young, but unlike the rebellious youth on street and campus protests, they respected “old” virtues. They agreed with many countercultural groups’ ideas on changing the status quo but opposed violence. Putting all the media descriptions together, a new yet ambiguous image of

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52 William J. Speers, “Miss America Judges Look for Qualities Separated from Today’s Youthful Strife”
53 William J. Speers, “Miss America Seeks Rapport with Youth”
54 Anthony Burton, “Miss America Lauds the Lib”
girlhood arose: the girl was talented, modestly dressed, soft-spoken, and always smiling. What she appeared in media still displayed a picture of ideal femininity that the conservative and traditional part of America applauded. However, this picture also included a girl’s political consciousness and her audacity to address controversial issues, which were nonexistent in any cultural representations of girlhood until mid-1960s. With their understanding of conflicting views between the old and new generations, their sympathy toward some of the countercultural objectives, and their insistence on nonviolence and unity, the girls manifested signs of as astute and benign leader. Although this leader had little political power, culturally she carried girlhood one step toward social change.

“Black is Beautiful” Without Blackness

In 1970, Cheryl Browne became the first black contestant representing a state in the Miss America pageant. She obtained extensive media attention for being the first “negro” to compete for the Miss America title and breaking the pageant’s white girls-only tradition. Browne’s historic entry was, to a large degree, the pageant’s response to the protest launched by black civil rights groups, which, merely two years ago, hosted the Miss Black America contest and chose Saundra Williams as the winner to show that “black is beautiful too.” As a Miss America official joyfully boasted, now the pageant no longer had to worry about all those accusations of the institution being “discriminatory” against black contestants.

“Black is beautiful” was a slogan created by and commonly circulated within the black civil rights communities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was often brought up in media to flaunt traits of black women’s physical beauty such as Afro hairstyles. However, according to

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56 Ibid.
Maxine Leeds Craig, black women regarded “black is beautiful” as a multilateral statement. Black women used the phrase not only to reject white beauty standards and invited a positive outlook on their bodies but also to express “the spirit of self-love and exuberance felt by a generation that had found a new way to see itself.” In other words, the phrase promoted a self-assertive attitude among black youth. Furthermore, the phrase interrogated the presence of beauty standards itself, specifically the obsession with applying beauty standards to determine a woman’s worth that was dominant in a male supremacist society. Why were men evaluated by their accomplishments and women by their physical beauty? Why couldn’t the society look into a women’s intellectual qualities over her look? In short, women’s beauty, especially black women’s beauty, ought not to be skin deep; it should encompass more than that.\(^\text{57}\)

In Saundra Williams’s presentation, “black is beautiful” involved her witty comments and outspoken stance. Although Williams was the first winner of the newly created pageant, she already did and said something that contestants of the 1968 Miss America pageant were not allowed to or would not want to try: participating in civil rights protests and critiquing the racial issues in American society. Williams told *New York Times* reporter Judy Klemesrud she had led a student strike at her college a year ago and helped organize a student group called the Black Awareness Movement to protest against white business community. Having strong passion for racial issues, Williams believed that the title she won was “better than being Miss America” because it granted her legitimacy to address social experiences of black women. Additionally, Williams had her unique opinions about gender roles. She said “husbands and wives should do the same amount of housework” and noted “the male is getting awfully lazy,” drawing boos from the audience. Vocal, interested in social problems, active in civil rights activities, and not afraid

to make bold comments, Williams was, according to Klemesrud, “what the new black woman is about.”\textsuperscript{58} Based on her racial identity, she posed a completely different definition of ideal girlhood. A beautiful girl should not stay silent or conform to the establishment values. Intelligence, political awareness, and the audacity to fight against injustice should be taken into account to evaluate a girl’s beauty.

Although both the women’s liberation protest against Miss America and the Miss Black America belonged to waves of countercultural movement in the 1960s, they carried different views toward the role of beauty contests and ideal femininity. The women’s liberation activists generally distained the idea of beauty contests, believing it imposed unreasonable beauty standards on average women. The Miss Black America disagreed with the Miss America pageant’s white supremacist vision of female beauty and called for the inclusion of black women into the beauty contest. In other words, the black civil rights activists approved of the value of beauty contests, believing they could host the Miss Black America pageant to achieve two goals: to provide a positive model for black women to gain awareness of their beauty, and to ask the Miss America pageant to accept a more diverse version of female beauty.

By welcoming Browne as the first African American contestant, the pageant seemed to accept the proposal of the black civil rights groups and accept the “black is beautiful” concept. However, I argue that the pageant’s inclusion of black contestants came with the dilution of black women’s social and cultural experiences. Black girls could participate in the Miss America pageant as long as they did not look and act in a way that was ostensibly related to black women. The differences between Saundra Williams and Cheryl Browne demonstrated that there was a line between black communities’ and the Miss America pageant’s expectations toward black

beauty. Williams went to a “negro college” in Philadelphia. Browne represented a Midwest state that had a relatively laid-back attitude toward racial issues. Browne was originally from New York and attended a Christian college in Iowa. She frequently emphasized her religious background: “my family is fifth-generation Lutheran, and my minister recommended the college to me,” she told reporters.\(^{59}\) Therefore, to Iowans, she stood out not only for her racial identity but also for her intelligence and faith.

Williams and Browne also demonstrated differences in their appearances and talent. While Williams proudly exhibited her Afro, Browne had long and flowy hair. Williams said she wanted to prove that black women with “large noses and thick lips” were beautiful too;\(^ {60}\) Browne had long eyelashes, carefully waxed eyebrows, and a timid smile (Figure 3.3). Williams performed “a frenetic African dance”; Browne performed a ballet routine with classical music as the background (Figure 3.4).\(^ {61}\) With her look and her style, Browne was a pioneer in what Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin called “darker yet Anglo-looking features” that most black Miss America winners shared in the 1980s and 1990s. According to Watson and Martin, the success of popularity of black Miss America contestants, such as Vanessa Williams, “validated the prevailing white standard of beauty rather than championing a larger standard that accepted black beauty on its own merits.”\(^ {62}\) Miss America 1984 Vanessa Williams was light-skinned and blue-eyed. Other successful black contestants were either biracial or had physical features that were typically Anglo-Saxon (thin lips, flowy hair, heart-shaped face, etc.). On this note, the inclusion of Browne as the first black state winner was hardly a breakthrough. Instead, it

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\(^{60}\) Judy Klemesrud, “There’s Now Miss Black America”

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

reinforced the pageant’s ideology that only girls with white physical attributes could qualify for the title of Miss America.

Figure 3.3 A newspaper report introduced Browne as a “Negro” girl and a Luther College student with a picture of her timid smile

Figure 3.4 Cheryl Browne’s profile in the 1970 Miss America Pageant official program

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63 Scrapbook Newspaper Clipping about Cheryl Browne, Box 2, Folder 71, Beauty Pageant Collection
Physical and stylish appearances aside, the defining factor between Saundra Williams as Miss Black America and Cheryl Browne as a Miss America contestant was how they addressed controversial topics, especially race. Because the Miss Black America pageant was created by NAACP, of which Williams was a member, Williams was highly vocal of racial issues in America. She believed winning a beauty pageant title could help her work as a civil rights activist. She also wanted to use the title to bring positive impacts on black women’s self-perception of their beauty. In other words, Williams’ interest in becoming a beauty queen was primarily inspired by her identity as a black girl and her concern for negativity black women absorbed from media. Browne, on the other hand, gave few commentaries on her racial issues. Her racial identity seemed to mean little to her. “I’ve always gotten what I wanted in life. Race has never been a problem to me,” she said.\(^64\) This statement dismissed the existence of racism in her life and distanced herself from the majority of African Americans. It was counterproductive to black civil rights activists’ vision. Furthermore, she was not keen in addressing controversial topics: “I know all the reporters want me to say something controversial . . . But I’m going to fool them. I’m not going to.”\(^65\) In fact, journalists treated her differently. She did not experience the same type of interview that was requested of Miss New Jersey, Miss Pennsylvania, or Miss Delaware, in which they shared detailed thoughts on abortion, campus protests, or racial relations. Browne’s silence about controversial topics, especially her racial identity, showed that vocalness could be a white privilege. White contestants could be vocal about controversial topics and used the vocalness to elevate their media image; Browne did not have the privilege to do so. To fit into a white pageant’s outlook on black beauty, she had to stay quiet, low-key, and friendly.

\(^64\) Judy Klemesrud “Miss Iowa, the Black Girl from Queens.”

\(^65\) Ibid.
To sum up, Cheryl Browne became the first black state representative in the Miss America pageant because she was a black girl adopting white girls’ look and fashion style and showing little connections with African American civil rights movement. She was welcomed by the pageant, which used her as a convenient example to counter its growing reputation for racial discrimination. Media descriptions constructed her as a faithful, talented girl with little interest in ongoing social or political controversies. She was more portrayed as a darker-skinned white girl rather than a black girl. Her press image filtered out important experiences of battling racism, in which many same-aged black girls were involved. Browne’s participation revealed that the Miss America pageant’s definition of “black is beautiful” not only clung to the white standards of female beauty but also left out key social and political experiences common among black women. A black girl could only be accepted into the white ideal of femininity without blackness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the Miss America pageant’s shifting representations of ideal girlhood in the late 1960s. My findings, compiled from official programs and newspapers and focused on media representations of the pageant girls, displayed that the pageant, historically a staunch defender of the traditional ideal of femininity, adjusted its maneuver over the press image of contestants due to the retirement of Lenora Slaughter as well as pressure from women’s liberation movement and African American civil rights movement. The retirement of Lenora Slaughter in 1968 granted the girls greater freedom to do what they wanted to and perform and express themselves more frankly. Slaughter imposed a rule that banned contestants from addressing controversial topics and making any anti-government statements. After she retired, that rule was softened and eventually lifted during the 1970 pageant. Meanwhile, the “malleable”
comment posed by the women’s liberation activists propelled the pageant to embrace a more independent image of girlhood. In 1970, the majority of the contestants could eloquently answer reporters’ inquiries on women’s rights, campus protests, and the war in Vietnam. Their eloquence mapped out a vocal, confident, and politically conscious picture of girlhood, which defied how girls—especially white girls—were imagined in post-war American culture.

The 1970 pageant also welcomed the first black contestant. However, this contestant’s image and words did not follow civil rights groups’ opinions about black beauty. Instead, her appearance was more geared toward white standards of beauty. Compared to several white contestants’ loquacity over controversial political and social topics, the black girl showed little interest in answering the questions and dismissed experiences of racism and discrimination in her life. As a result, the first black contestant representing a state to compete in the Miss America pageant did not set out to represent black America.

These shifting media representations of Miss America contestants in the wake of counterculture have continuous impacts on the pageant as well as other popular culture products. Today, the pageant no longer lists contestants’ measurements. It keeps the talent and swimsuit sections and adds a “platform,” in which contestants articulate a specific social or political issues they feel passionate about. In the 2016 pageant, contestants answered questions about the upcoming presidential election and immigration issues. Savvy Fields, the eventual winner, made news headlines with her witty comment on presidential candidates. These questions, which the contestants answered at the risk of revealing their partisan views, were an outcome of the lifting of Slaughter’s “no national problems” rule in 1970. Two years before Fields’ victory, Nina Davuluri became the first girl of Indian descent to win the Miss America title. What put Davuluri

on news headlines, except for her racial identity, was she was a medical student and had a boyfriend. In other words, her intelligence and STEM background, stereotypical of Asian America students, qualified her for the title of Miss America 2014.

Popular culture has programmed us to think about girlhood in a certain way. In the case of the Miss America pageant, a powerful franchise marketing ideal girlhood, it absorbed the influences from feminist and civil rights movements in the 1960s and came up with a new picture of ideal girlhood. In this picture, white girls were personally driven, intelligent, and vocal about controversial issues. It led us to accept girls’ eloquence and interest in activism but limited the performance to white girls. It included the participation of girls from minority backgrounds but imposed traditional expectations on them. This double standard still lingers today and forms the political base of ideal girlhood.

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67 Alicia W. Stewart, “Here she is, the Miss America you don't know,” CNN, October 30, 2013.
CONCLUSION: BETWEEN FEMINISM AND FEMININITY

The Dilemma of Feminist Girlhood

I wrote a large portion of this dissertation in the months when Hillary Clinton was running for presidency representing a major political party—the first woman doing so in American history. During the presidential race, Clinton faced a whopping amount of scathing criticism not only from critics who disagreed with her political views but also from people who simply disdained her because she is a woman—a highly successful, ambitious woman who spent all her adult life in legal, social, and political arenas. Even those who claimed to be Democrats and those who are women admitted they held strong negative feelings toward Clinton. Michelle Goldberg, a columnist for online magazine Slate, observed that Clinton was arguably the least popular Democratic presidential nominee in modern history. Based on the surveys she collected from media outlets and from the voters she talked to, Goldberg listed two reasons most commonly cited by voters for disliking Clinton: she seemed to be disingenuous (“she lies blatantly”), and she appeared to be superior to everybody else (“She was putting down regular women, people who stay home and take care of kids and bake cookies”; “She’s above us peasants”). It should be noted that the voters Goldberg talked to were not rural, poor working-class voters whom media tagged as misogynists; among them were career women, educated white-collar professionals, and die-hard liberals. Goldberg summarized that people disliked Hillary Clinton because she has always been known as a “self-confident” woman with great ambition, qualities that Americans across many walks of life are not fond of seeing in women.1

In this dissertation, I aim to point out the changes in cultural representations of girlhood in the 1960s. Those changes included: white and middle-class girls could explore their sexual

desires by imagining a romantic relationship with male idols, their body and appearance could defy standards of traditional female beauty, and they could be personally driven, ambitious, and vocal about political issues. I argue that these shifting cultural depictions showed a negotiation between feminism and traditional gender expectations about girls. The rise of feminist movements in the 1960s propelled popular culture producers and media reporters to adjust depictions of girlhood, and those depictions had been a main platform where the viewers—especially girls—learned about feminist ideas. They also consolidated the image of American girlhood we often encounter in mass media today, one that is strong, confident, well-dressed, and vocal.

The image of girlhood concerns not just girls. It reveals how American culture as a whole understands, imagines, and consumes femininity. To be specific, what forms of femininity are popular and what forms are not? And why? If my findings on the changing meanings of girlhood were marked by compromise and a lack of a clear-cut conclusions, it is because the change was intertwined with a plethora of conflicting messages and spanned through a broad spectrum of gender. In the cases of Beatlemania, Twiggy, and the Miss America pageants, stories focusing on girlhood always oscillated between the traditional and new opinions toward gender. When pre-teen girls purchased teen magazines to collect textual and visual material in order to sustain their imagined romance with male idols, their desires for love, emotional and physical proximity with men could only be sustained through consuming media. In this way, teen magazines were a mechanism of release as well as camouflage. In reading page after page of celebrities’ love stories and kissing the idols’ portraits, girls hid their emotional and sexual desires under the guise of teen idol craze. They thus saved themselves from adult scrutiny. In the
case of Twiggy’s modeling career in 1967, the seventeen-year-old model’s enormous professional success, her youthful fashion style, and her unfeminine look were introduced along with an infantilized portrayal of her personality and familial role. Lastly, the contestants of the 1970 Miss America pageant were known for being more vocal about national problems and more racially diverse. Yet their vocal performance was guided by the expectation that the girls could balance the old and new values. They were the model youth that the pageant and media deemed fit to speak for the young generation. Furthermore, that performance was reserved to white contestants. The only black contestant in the 1970 pageant was not described as vocal about national issues—not even race. In the three case studies, I see the media depictions of girlhood went back and forth between new and old beliefs regarding what girls could and could not do. They applauded girls showing ambition and personal views, yet they also valued girls’ deference to traditional feminine traits. Ultimately, the version of girlhood that was accepted by the popular culture producers and consumers was one that blended feminist influences and traditional beliefs about femininity. By any standard, this new version of girlhood was far from revolutionary. But it did not take shape easily.

The unpopularity of Hillary Clinton and her failed presidential campaign, in my view, revealed complicated, often elusive, standards that many Americans have applied to evaluate girlhood and womanhood. The core value of girlhood—consolidating a perfect balance between feminist ideas and traditional gender expectations—poses a difficult task for women with successful public careers. Clinton was, in many ways, too feminist to be accepted by voters who held conservative views toward women’s status. Born in 1947, Clinton was a teenage girl and a young woman in the 1960s. She came of age with Beatlemania, Twiggy’s modeling career, and
the transitioning Miss America pageants. She grew up in a politically conservative household, with her father being a fervent anti-communist. Yet, when she went to law school in the early 1970s, she had developed full-fledged feminist views. Clinton’s early experiences were characteristics of what many American women of her age had been through. They grew up in a media-saturated environment, in which popular culture celebrated girls’ ambition and confidence. They were aware of gender discrimination as well as a collective desire among many girls to embrace a different life from their mothers. They were encouraged to work hard, develop a wide variety of interest, and build a more egalitarian relationship with men. Yet when they grew up and establish successful lives, the public started to treat them in a hostile way. Their demand for respect and love from their husbands became stories that were mercilessly ridiculed. Their confidence was interpreted as superiority. Their ambition showed a sign of manipulation. And their professional success was built on their disregard of women’s domestic responsibilities.

To be fair, Hillary Clinton was not the only target of such types of sexist attacks. It happened to almost every successful female politician and businesswoman. We have seen that recently happened to Kellyanne Conway, Elizabeth Warren, and Michelle Obama. It seemed that every woman too self-driven, too confident, and too ambitious was damning herself to some sort of massive vilification. But, the attacks they received varied by degree. Many indicators proved that Michelle Obama and Kellyanne Conway were more popular than Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren.² To a large extent, this popularity gap among the four successful women was because Obama and Conway held more qualities of traditional femininity and appeared to be less feminist than Clinton and Warren. Obama had been applauded as a devoted wife and a caring

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² For instance, the number of users following Michelle Obama’s Facebook page was much higher (about 16,575,085) than Hillary Clinton’s (about 9,954,151), as of December 9, 2016.
mother, who appeared on cooking shows to talk about family recipes and showed great interest in the food children ate.\(^3\) Hillary Clinton was famously quoted as refusing to bake cookies and prepare tea at home. Kellyanne Conway was the outspoken manager of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign. She was known for defending Trump’s controversial moves and debating with commentators with opposing views on national TV news programs. Yet with her long, flowy blonde hair, and always wearing bright-colored, stylish dresses, somehow her outspoken and confronting attitude had not been an issue. Clinton and Elizabeth Warren, always in pantsuits, were treated by conservative critics in much harsher ways. These cases demonstrate how girlhood and womanhood are located at an elusive spectrum of gender identities, are linked to different images and discourses in mass media, and are subject to different sexist standards.

My dissertation presents that the popular form of American girlhood was one that encompassed both feminist gestures and traditional femininity. This observation could be applied to cultural representations of femininity in general. Women and girls face double standards and ideological conflicts regarding their gender identity, yet in American popular culture, girls’ stories draw more spotlight and are more likely to be reported in a sympathetic tone. A goal of this dissertation was to identify the origin of the postfeminist culture today, when in popular culture, consumers laud the image of strong, independent, and talented girls; yet in the news media, audiences still hate successful career women. This double standard occurs not because the public love young girls and hate women. It is because, compared to the media representations of professional women, the mainstream cultural representations of girlhood have been more successful in blending feminist and conservative expectations of femininity. My study shows that

\(^3\) Michelle Obama launched the “Let’s Move!” campaign in 2010, which promoted healthy eating among children. In fact, during her public career, Obama had received numerous attacks, but I found those attacks targeted more on her racial identity (such as “angry black woman”) than her gender roles.
this blending process began in the 1960s, when mass media, in covering Beatlemania, Twiggy, and the Miss America pageants, discovered that the most popular image of American girlhood was a self-conscious, beautiful, and talented girl who could do well by herself in every aspect of her life, but she decided to compromise with traditional gender expectations and the patriarchal traditions.

**Postfeminism, Girlishness, and Popular Culture**

The shifting meanings of girlhood left a strong impact on contemporary popular culture landscape. Since the 1980s, female entertainers and heroines of movies and TV dramas posing a stronger version of femininity have consistently topped best-selling lists. The tremendous popularity of Madonna, Cindy Lauper, the Spice Girls, the sexually experienced single women in “chick lit,” and the superheroines in mainstream comics and action movies have led cultural studies scholars to introduce the concepts of “postfeminism” and “popular feminism” to describe these commercialized elements of feminism that mass media and popular culture portray from a neoliberal perspective. In *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, Angela McRobbie notes that postfeminism arose in a time when there was a widespread backlash against the seeming gains feminist movements made in the 1970s. By postfeminism, McRobbie refers to the commercialization of feminist language and gesture by cultural institutions:

Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’, these elements are then
converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture.\(^4\)

Using Bridget Jones, the protagonist of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, as an example, McRobbie illustrates that the feature of “infectious girlishness” is seen in most postfeminist figures. The girlishness expresses a “generational logic,” which marks a departure from the old-fashioned feminism while retrieving some palpable elements, such as sexual freedom, the right to smoke, having fun in cities, living alone, economic independence, to name a few.\(^5\) Only a girlish girl, or a girlish woman, gets to enjoy some of the fruits of feminism.

Many critics concur with McRobbie’s concept of postfeminism and propose that feminism continues to spread out its influence to younger women today through its salient presence in popular culture. In *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture*, Jeffrey Brown specifies that we have lived in a postfeminist culture. We consume feminist language and imagery without recognizing their political origin. The terms “feminism” and “feminist” have evoked a strong dislike for strong women—unfeminine women who are obsessed with competing with men and demand male privilege. However, in the *Resident Evil* series (2002, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012), *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2012), we see young heroines replace white men and take the roles of Rambo, James Bond, and Indiana Jones to assume “a masculine-identified role” within stories capitalizing on “masculine fantasies of empowerment.”\(^6\) Not only are these young women exceptionally beautiful and talented, they are strong, powerful, and lethal. They can kill men with a gun or a sword or by planting bombs. They lead a crowd to overthrow a regime. They can be political and

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\(^5\) Ibid., p. 12
military leaders now, assuming the most powerful position in the world. These strong female characters and their popularity have gone beyond what a feminist activist in the late 1960s and early 1970s could envision. At the same time, Brown finds that youthfulness is a consistent theme in these popular movies featuring strong heroines. The majority of the strong heroines are very young, and many among them are teenagers. They are also white and physically attractive. They fall in love with young men while carrying important missions. Their youthfulness seems to provide a convenient cover for girls to carry out feminist visions without being subjected to anti-feminist sentiment.

Studies of postfeminism such as McRobbie and Brown’s demonstrate that a girl has replaced a woman as the primary symbol of feminism in contemporary culture. Girlhood seem to selectively leave out negative attitudes feminism has been associated with while keeping elements that are more publically acceptable and/or more marketable. These new feminist (or postfeminist) figures are young, beautiful, and talented. They work side by side with men, and they see men more as allies or romantic interest rather than chauvinists who try to suppress women’s rights. They use cosmetics and follow the latest beauty trends. They can live alone, choose a lifestyle they want, and pursue a career they like. They seem to have endless choices and do not see themselves as victims of any forms of sexism. Therefore, they are not interested in any sort of movement for women’s rights, and the feminist movement in the 1970s has little appeal to them. However, the fact that young women today can be represented in this individualist guise and enjoy immense freedom is definitely an outcome of feminist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when mass media took note of women’s demand for change and encompassed new feminine experiences.
In contemporary America, feminism is not just a political and social movement but also a cultural performance. The fact that grassroots feminist activism no longer plays the leading role in vocalizing women’s demand for equality and freedom has resulted in many attempts to declare that “feminism is dead.” However, one of the main goals of cultural studies scholarship of girlhood, by introducing postfeminism, is to show that feminism did not just fade away. Instead, it is very much alive and vibrant, with its vision and principles heavily covered by media and marketed in popular culture and acted out by professional actresses such as Ally McBeal. In the twentieth-first century, we have seen Beyoncé proudly claim herself as a “feminist” in concerts, where she uses her bodily performance to defy discriminating messages against girls. At the same time, she and a group of female dancers are dressed in outfits that highlighted their shapely bodies and bared their legs, posing a sexualized image. Rebecca Traister, a columnist for *New Republic*, has declared Beyoncé the most powerful feminist of her time. Ironically, if we were able to send Beyoncé back to 1968 and ask what the women protesting against the Miss America pageant thought about the singer, we would definitely hear them compare Beyoncé as one of the “Degrading Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol.” Yet for this generation of girls, this pop diva—known for her singles such as “Single Ladies” (2008), “If I Were a Boy” (2008) and “Flawless” (2013), as well as her dynamic dance moves—is where they learn about sexist double standards in society. Beyoncé’s work, which addresses gender inequality and reminds girls that they have the right to fight against sexist treatment, reveal that feminism can be cultural performances of an attitude and a personality.

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7 In the June 29, 1998 issue, *Time* published a feature article titled “Is Feminism Dead?” and put the faces of Susan Anthony, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and actress Ally McBeal on the cover, alluding to the absence of high-profile feminist activists since the 1980s.

I use Beyoncé as an example showing that much of our understanding of feminism is derived from popular culture representations of girlhood rather than women’s rights activism. If girls and young women today believe that they, like boys and men, can pursue whatever dreams they wish, it is not because they take lessons from feminist activists but because they glean this message from popular culture texts they consume. They grow up with stories of strong heroines in movies and see inspiring examples like Beyoncé on TV. In other words, media and popular culture are the main source for women and girls to learn about feminism. A goal of my dissertation is to show that this has been the case since the 1960s, when mass-circulated magazines and newspapers told girls they could develop romantic feelings for a man, could follow unconventional beauty standards, and could comment on national issues. These mediated messages of girlhood formed an important sub-category of the development of feminism in the 1960s. To a large degree, they were responsible for popularizing feminist ideas, making the ideas proposed by a radical movement accessible to the majority of women in America. For girls growing up in the 1960s, they were more likely to develop feminist views from consuming popular culture texts about Beatlemania, Twiggy, and Miss America than going to street protests with women’s liberation activists. Feminism, in this project, is defined as girls gleaning messages from popular culture that inspired them to value what they wanted to do more than what the tradition required them to do. With this definition, I place my project in conversation with cultural studies using postfeminism as the main theoretical framework. I share the basic idea that some core feminist beliefs drafted by feminist writers and activists decades ago have continued to be present in popular culture and are most salient in texts juggling with the meanings of girlhood. My project provides an early example of the interplay between feminism
and popular culture. By analyzing texts that displayed new meanings of girlhood along with changing gender expectations in the 1960s, I hope to provide more historical contexts regarding how feminism gained a mainstream position in America.

Finally, I want to end this dissertation going back to affirm how popular culture can shape our thinking and imagination in a profound manner. My project focuses on a popular culture phenomenon, conducting a textual and visual analysis to tease out how mass-circulated newspapers and magazines portrayed a stronger, more independent vision of girlhood, which facilitated the public to become familiarized with key feminist concepts. I am not arguing that reading texts about Beatlemania, Twiggy, and the Miss America Pageant made Americans become feminist; what I want to express is these cultural descriptions of girlhood made it easier for readers to understand burgeoning feminist ideas in the 1960s. They resonated strongly with white, middle-class girls of the days, as the majority of them would opt to finish their college or graduate degrees, obtain well-paid jobs, and marry late. They started to live a life and create a feminine culture that was unprecedented in American history.

The idea that girls and young women are allowed to pursue whatever they want to pursue is a fairly new idea. It is, to a certain degree, uniquely American. The image of perky, opinionated teenage girl is what Americans see a lot in movies and TV shows. It is something Americans like and take for granted. But for people living in patriarchal cultures, which are still a norm in most areas of the world, it is simply unthinkable. As Ray Browne puts it, popular culture builds our world view: “It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, and diversions. It is our heroes, icons, rituals, everyday actions, psychology, and
religion — our total life picture.”⁹ Through conveying messages, images, language, and emotions that inspire girls to commit themselves to personal ambition and independence, popular culture offers us a way to become feminist.

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