

*Man's man: representations of Australian post-war masculinity in *Man* magazine*

Chelsea Barnett*

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

This article examines the representation of masculinity in *Man*, a men's magazine, in post-war Australia. While the notion of the "sleepy 1950s" has implied a period of social conservatism and gender stability, the representation of (and commentary on) men's social, cultural and familial worlds in *Man* tells a rather different story. In a period in which Menzies's breadwinner masculinity idealised work and familial life as the source of men's satisfaction (and civilised society more broadly), *Man* positioned its imagined reader as desperately unhappy and frustrated by the confines of suburban life and marriage. There were limits, however, to the generosity of this critique. While trying to provide Australian men with an escape from the rigid confines of hegemonic masculinity, *Man* remained attached to a near-misogynist attitude to women. The distress and anguish of men, in this case, became another way to restrict the lives and choices of women.

Keywords: post-war Australia; masculinity; *Man*

The cartoon shows two figures. A man, balding and portly, stands wide-eyed and befuddled, his hands in his pockets and his shoulders raised high into the air in an almost frightened shrug. Dominating the scene is a tall, broad-shouldered woman. Dressed sharply in a fitted blazer and slacks, her hair elaborately styled in a French roll that highlights her severe, angular features, she points at a small collection of money on the table, the caption making clear her demand: "Is this mine or ours?"¹ (Figure 1).

This cartoon, which appeared in the pages of men's magazine *Man* in September 1946, is at first glance a quick, easy joke about a woman's propensity to claim her husband's money as her own. However, when viewed in the context of both the contents of the magazine and its time of publication, the image speaks to a larger concern regarding changing understandings of both masculinity and femininity after the Second World War, and into the 1950s. That the woman in the cartoon (more "masculine" than "feminine" in both appearance and demeanour) can make such a demand and thus assume financial control, suggests *Man* was not altogether comfortable with the gender order that was taking place in the post-war world.

The 1950s are often burdened by depictions of monotony, and the complacency and conservatism associated with the post-war years have long held purchase

*Email: chelsea.barnett@mq.edu.au

¹ *Man*, September 1946, 60.



Figure 1. Women assuming financial control. *Man*, September 1946, 60. National Library of Australia. Courtesy of Bauer Media Group.

in popular culture.² John Murphy has shown that these years “bear a heavy metaphorical weight of contemporary sentiments about gender, intolerance and national identity”; all too frequently, the 1950s are depicted as the period of gender rigidity “before” the

² For an outline of how the 1950s have been positioned and used in popular culture and political rhetoric, see John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2000), 1–9. The continued syndication of contemporaneous American sitcoms has perpetuated the perception of the 1950s as a time of strict gender roles. See Derek Kompare, “I've Seen This One Before: The Construction of ‘Classic TV’ on Cable Television,” in *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s*, ed. Janet Thumim (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2002), 22; Janet Thumim, “Introduction: Small Screens, Big Ideas,” in *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s*, ed. Janet Thumim (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2002), 1; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 23. American sitcoms from the 1950s, such as *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best*, have also contributed to the Australian televisual landscape, as they have been shown on Australian television since the first night of broadcasting in 1956. See Michelle Arrow, *Friday on Our Minds: Popular Culture in Australia since 1945* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2009), 29, 34; Nick Herd, *Networking: Commercial Television in Australia: A History* (Strawberry Hills: Currency House Pty Ltd, 2012), 48, 97.

transformations of the 1960s and 1970s.³ However, recent work suggests that the social life and cultural ideals of the 1950s were more dynamic and complex than recollections and popular depictions claim.⁴ As Murphy notes, full employment, flourishing prosperity and mass migration made for a transformative rather than a stable social world.⁵ Murphy states that, partly with the help of popular culture, middle-class values were imposed upon working-class Australians, often creating tension. For Murphy, then, if the tensions of this period are not recognised, representations of happy suburban life that reverberated throughout Australian cultural life are easily accepted.⁶ However, as *Man* portrays, this cultural landscape was far less stable than is often suspected. While focusing on the tensions between cultural ideals and social realities certainly challenges the image of the “sleepy 1950s”, I propose that such popular imagery can be further challenged by examining the cultural landscape of the era itself. By analysing *Man*'s portrayal of 1950s men, this article suggests that there were glimmers of discontent and uncertainty *within* the cultural domain. Far from simply functioning as a platform for middle-class conformity, *Man* revealed a middle-class world of masculinist unease.

This article examines how *Man* imagined the social and cultural world of 1950s Australia and the place of men within it. Through this imagined world, which in many ways mirrored the idea of the “sleepy 1950s”, *Man* told a story of desperately unhappy men, frustrated with the model of responsibility central to Prime Minister Robert Menzies's civilised world of comfortable suburban life. However, while questioning Menzies's vision of familial, satisfied masculinity, *Man* clung to rigidly “traditional” ideals of femininity that limited women's agency. *Man*'s story of unsatisfied men had implications for both men and women. Two theoretical frameworks inform this study. The first is that of Joan Scott, who asserts that gender is contextually specific knowledge about bodily difference.⁷ Within Scott's poststructuralist framework, I engage with sociologist Raewyn Connell's claim that multiple masculinities exist, ordered according to a hierarchy.⁸ However, an analysis of *Man* reveals that having a notion of a clear hierarchy masks the uncertainties and contestations that can unfold in the representation of masculine ideals. *Man* told a story of 1950s men striving for continued (male) authority, while questioning the connection between work and family, and male satisfaction.

Man represented a generation of unhappy men through its imagined social and cultural world. This study analyses both the visual and textual content of this world. *Man*'s cartoons, particularly, are interesting representations of the cultural landscape that existed, and, far from being passive entertainment, these cartoons revealed the cultural and social world *Man* imagined, as well as its commentary on that world.⁹ Moreover, viewing these various cartoons alongside editorial content reveals a remarkably consistent authorial tone in the

³ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 2; see also John Murphy and Judith Smart, “Introduction,” *Australian Historical Studies* 27.109 (1997): 1.

⁴ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 5; Marilyn Lake, “A Case of Male Justice,” *The Australian's Review of Books* (1997): 6.

⁵ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 6, 7.

⁶ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 6.

⁷ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 2.

⁸ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 76.

⁹ Richard Scully and Marian Quartly, “Using Cartoons as Historical Evidence,” in *Drawing the Line: Using Cartoons as Historical Evidence*, ed. Richard Scully and Marian Quartly (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2009), 1.

magazine following the Second World War, even though many of the published cartoons were unsigned and the written content was clearly drawn from different writers (some attributed and some not).¹⁰ However, the intent of individual authors is not the question to ask of *Man*: what is most important is the set of meanings circulated within its pages.

Published from December 1936 to May 1974, *Man* established itself from the outset as an exclusively masculine endeavour. *Man* aimed to provide a quality monthly magazine that satisfied “the average male” while explicitly excluding women.¹¹ Richard White states that *Man* represented all social groups (except for the “well to do’ university educated”), covering “[in] *Man*’s way of thinking … just about everyone”.¹² Certainly, the magazine’s own description of its audience reveals a determination to target both the working and lower middle classes. Assuring readers that the magazine could be read “while … waiting for the wife at the hosiery counter, or minding the baby on her bridge-afternoon, or hanging around the bathroom door at your boarding house”, *Man*, from the very beginning, spoke to those men who either were already or would one day be entrenched in the routines of suburban life.¹³ Targeting this broad audience succeeded, and the magazine’s circulation peaked in 1953: one issue sold over 200,000 copies.¹⁴ Indeed, that *Man* reached its commercial high in the 1950s speaks to the central position that magazines held in Australian and, more broadly, western cultural life at the time.¹⁵

In spite of the magazine’s popularity during its lifetime, historical attention on *Man* remains scarce. White’s 1979 study remains the most cited study referencing *Man*.¹⁶ Tracing *Man*’s content and themes throughout its thirty-eight years of publication, White argues that the quality of *Man*’s content was at its highest in the 1930s, when its representation of Australian men reflected “something more real”.¹⁷ His assessment of

¹⁰ For example, see the anonymously written articles “I Have a Second-hand Wife,” *Man*, February 1957, 80–1; “How I Told My Son the Facts of Life,” *Man*, October 1955, 46–7.

¹¹ *Man*, December 1936, 6.

¹² Richard White, “The Importance of Being *Man*,” in *Australian Popular Culture*, ed. Peter Spearritt and David Walker (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Australia, 1979), 148–9.

¹³ *Man*, October 1937, 7.

¹⁴ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 147; Ross Laurie, “Fantasy Worlds: The Depiction of Women and the Mating Game in Men’s Magazines in the 1950s,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 56.1 (1998): 117.

¹⁵ For the impact of the *Australian’s Women Weekly* in the 1950s, and American women’s magazines in the 1940s and 1950s, see Sue Sheridan et al., *Who Was That Woman? The Australian Women’s Weekly in the Postwar Years* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002); Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women’s Magazines 1940–1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998), 1.

¹⁶ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 145–68. Some of the more recent references to White’s work include Johnny Bell, “Putting Dad in the Picture: Fatherhood in the Popular Women’s Magazines of 1950s Australia,” *Women’s History Review* 22.6 (2013): 1–26; Arrow, *Friday on Our Minds*, 40–2; Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 34–41, 205–10. For the only other exclusive study of *Man*, albeit focused solely on the 1930s, see Victoria Kuttainen, “A Lost Australian Story: *Man* in the 1930s,” *LiNQ* 36 (2009): 161–80. *Man* has also received attention from scholars examining a range of Australian magazines. See Jennifer Burton, “‘Fair Dinkum Personal Grooming’: Male Beauty Culture and Men’s Magazines in Twentieth Century Australia” (PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2008); Laurie, “Fantasy Worlds”, 116–24; Ross Laurie, “From Bodybuilders to Breadwinners: Depictions of Masculinity and Gender Roles in Popular Magazines in Australia during the 1950s” (PhD thesis, Griffith University, 1995).

¹⁷ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 165.

Man in the 1950s is less glowing, declaring that it was in these years “tired, tame and even a bit of a joke” and suggesting that the poor editorial quality resulted in a decline in circulation after 1953.¹⁸ White argues that *Man*’s man had “grown up, so naturally that he hardly noticed, from the young city sophisticate, through the trauma of the war, to the middle-aged, hen-pecked suburbanite”.¹⁹ No longer burdened with any “pretension to intellectual quality or sophistication”, *Man* and its readers instead clung to “middle-aged fantasies of impossible busts”.²⁰ *Man*, it would seem, was out of step with the times and, therefore, had become insignificant.

However, White’s assessment overlooks the cultural reach of 1950s *Man*. Its highest selling issue (1953) came in the middle of the post-war period, meaning that more men were engaging with the material. Indeed, it could be argued that the spike in sales was connected to the magazine’s editorial tone. Although White acknowledges the “barbershop” culture, in which men would enter that almost exclusively masculine domain and “[pore] over the inevitable barbershop *Man* while waiting for their short-back-and-sides”, the existence of this culture speaks to the public, communal conversations that were occurring around and in relation to *Man*.²¹ So too, 1950s *Man* is worth studying not least because it was the only output that targeted an exclusively male Australian audience.²² Like *Playboy*, first published in America in 1953, *Man*’s imagined world spoke only to men. While extant historiography reveals a similar post-war landscape in both Australia and America, *Man* and *Playboy* took quite different approaches to dealing with changing ideas of masculinity and femininity.²³ Close examination of *Man*, particularly in this period, reveals one example of the post-war conversation in which ideas about gender were facing intense negotiation.

Man, masculinity and the public sphere

Man defined the public sphere of the workplace and that of global political and economic affairs as a decidedly masculine space. It was a space that forbade femininity, perpetuating a dichotomy of “masculine” strength and “feminine” weakness. Readers were reminded that “weakness is never desirable, that it is never safe, that it should not exist”; any suggestion of femininity in this space was thus disparaged.²⁴ However, *Man*’s gendered understandings of strength and weakness should be read in the context of the Cold War, and Australia’s alliance with the western world. Reasserting a strong masculine ideal aligning with strict gender “roles” was instrumental in the aftermath of the Second

¹⁸ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 164.

¹⁹ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 164. ²⁰

White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 164. ²¹

White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 148.

²² Other popular magazines in circulation at the time included *Australasian Post* and *Pix*. However, these were not produced for an exclusively male readership, but instead aimed to reach as many working-class women and men as possible. See Julie Ustinoff, “Hit Him with Your Handbag!”: Homophobia in Australian Magazines of the 1960s,” in *Homophobia: An Australian History*, ed. Shirleene Robinson (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2008), 129.

²³ Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity in Transition* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1979). See also Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

²⁴ *Man*, August 1953, 4.

World War and during the early years of the Cold War. As Elaine Tyler May states, American (and thus western) superiority and the containment of communism required “the ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and distinct gender roles for family members”.²⁵ Similarly, in Cold War Australia, masculinity was understood to exist within both the public and private spheres, given its “natural” superiority, while femininity was relegated to the private world of family life. Maintaining these gender ideals was seemingly instrumental in defending the country against the communist threat. Reinforcing the association of “masculine” with strength and “feminine” with weakness, as well as stressing the importance of the home to Cold War defence, *Man* considered those men who deserted their country and sympathised (or even liaised) with the enemy, to be on par with women who thought it acceptable to break up the family home in search of freedom:

A wife is free to think and act; but she is not free to think she would like to sleep in another man's bed, nor is she free to over-spend her husband's money, or to pledge his credit beyond reason....

She has her freedom—but it does not allow her to do things which would break up the home.

So in politics. No man is free to think in a way that would destroy the national house in which he lives. He is not free to bring about a condition of chaos in an ordered world. He is not free to plan against the system of life to which he belongs.²⁶

In this interesting use of a domestic metaphor to describe a public world, *Man* advocated understandings of both masculinity and femininity that converged with Menziesian rhetoric in the interest of maintaining national security in times of uncertainty. Indeed, Menzies's 1942 speech “The Forgotten People” conveyed an understanding of gender that would shape his vision once re-elected prime minister in 1949. His declaration that the home is where “my wife and children are; the instinct to be with them is the great instinct of civilized man” clearly marked femininity within the private sphere, and masculinity as able to flourish there (as well as in the public sphere).²⁷ Further, as Judith Brett has stated, if Menzies's “forgotten people” carried his values and politics, then the communists were in stark opposition.²⁸ K. A. Cuordileone has suggested that increasing female presence in the American workforce in the 1940s and 1950s “undercut an older ideal of manhood” that “was defined by a sense of mastery over one's world and authority over others”.²⁹ This trend of rising numbers of female workers was also occurring in Australia, with the female workforce expanding at a greater rate than the

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⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 19.

²⁶ *Man*, June 1947, 5.

²⁷ Robert Menzies quoted in Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 23.

²⁸ Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, 70.

²⁹ K.A. Cuordileone, “Politics in an Age of Anxiety”: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960,” *The Journal of American History* 87.2 (2000): 528.

male equivalent between 1947 and 1961.³⁰ Thus, those women who sought independence and autonomy, whether sexual, financial or professional, blurred the lines between expectations of both masculinity and femininity, and the roles subsequently aligned with each. *Man's* representation of men's lives opposed these blurred lines, which would ostensibly move Australia further into the realm of the communists. While "deviant" masculinities, such as the increasingly visible male homosexual, were of wider social concern in relation to the national interests (although not to the same extent as in the USA), *Man's* treatment of women in the workforce revealed a fear of subverted expectations and definitions of gender that would, according to the magazine, unnecessarily trouble the waters in a time of international uncertainty.³¹

Anxieties about the workplace were not limited to Cold War fears. *Man's* portrayal of the public sphere revealed a sense of uncertainty and unease about the place of both women and men in the workforce. Work and wage earning has been (officially) synonymous with Australian masculinity since the early twentieth century, when, in 1907, Justice Henry Higgins introduced the concept of the "family wage", marking a man's place in the workforce and a woman's in the home.³² Work and breadwinning were given further importance in the aftermath of the Second World War. As Stephen Garton notes, it was believed that the manhood of returned servicemen could be "bolstered" if those women who had taken up work during the war could "[relinquish] their employment, [service] men's domestic needs, and ... [recognise men's] status as breadwinners".³³ The workplace, then, was a place in which masculinity could ostensibly be upheld after the war, and, with low unemployment and high wages defining the 1950s economy, its association with breadwinning appeared unproblematic.³⁴

However, this was not so in the pages of *Man*. Far from providing a simple and unquestioned portrayal of men's working life, the magazine gave voice to a sense of frustration and anger with the impersonal and even conformist nature of 1950s corporate life. Joe L. Dubbert suggests that the seemingly "normal social groove" of 1950s America was actually the mass absorption of individual men into large institutions, leading to an "erosion of individualism".³⁵ Other scholars of both Australia and America have noted the subordination, rather than empowerment, that could eventuate because of the "emasculating demands and humiliating hierarchies" that proliferated in

³⁰ Stella Lees and June Senyard, *The 1950s ... How Australia Became a Modern Society, and Everyone Got a House and Car* (Melbourne: Hyland House Publishing Pty Limited, 1987), 74. See also Karen Hutchings, "The Battle for Consumer Power: Post-war Women and Advertising," *Journal of Australian Studies* 20.50–1 (1996): 66. Although women's presence in the workplace was increasing, many women faced discrimination in their professional lives, were paid less than men, and were restricted to "female" positions such as secretarial duties, teaching, and nursing. See Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 31; Lees and Senyard, *The 1950s ...*, 74.

³¹ Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (Collingwood: Black Inc, 2012), 217.

³² Mark Hearn, "Securing the Man: Narratives of Gender and Nation in the Verdicts of Henry Bourne Higgins," *Australian Historical Studies* 37.127 (2006): 3.

³³ Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), 207.

³⁴ John Murphy, "Breadwinning: Accounts of Work and Family Life in the 1950s," *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work* 12.3 (2002): 63.

³⁵ Dubbert, *A Man's Place*, 242.



Figure 2. Work a source of subordination and unhappiness. *Man*, January 1955, 15. National Library of Australia. Courtesy of Bauer Media Group.

the workforce.³⁶ This fear of subordination and loss of individuality found a home in *Man*. One 1955 cartoon showed an employee receiving a gift from his superior, the caption (and the employee's saddened expression) belying the seemingly positive ritual: "... and so in gratitude for his twenty-five years of devoted service I should like to present this token of our esteem to whatusizname here!"³⁷ (Figure 2). The workforce and the male participation in it were not unquestioned obligations, but rather sources of the insecurity and concern conveyed by *Man* in the 1950s. Murphy has acknowledged that work and breadwinning are considered central to ideas and understandings of masculinity, writing that "it is virtually a truism in the literature that working to be a provider is the key to men's sense of identity".³⁸ However, given *Man*'s resentment concerning the ease with which masculinity and breadwinning were associated, it is no longer enough to link the two unquestioningly. Rather, recognition of experiences and emotional responses outside the dominant narrative must be taken into account when discussing understandings of masculinity of the 1950s.

While *Man* represented a sense of frustration and anxiety about the workplace, it was also simultaneously protective of it, especially when considering the rising presence of

³⁶ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 241. See also Mark Peel, "A New Kind of Manhood: Remembering the 1950s," *Australian Historical Studies* 27.109 (1997): 151; Bryce Traister, "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies," *American Quarterly* 52.2 (2000): 296.

³⁷ *Man*, January 1955, 15.

³⁸ Murphy, "Breadwinning", 61.

women in the professional sphere. What *Man* emphasised above all else was male dominance and superiority: while uncertain about the synonymy of work and identity, *Man* never considered the workplace appropriate for women. Rather, the magazine considered it a “naturally” masculine domain, a place that was rightfully and historically free from the “domestic” influence of women. *Man* looked upon the increase in the numbers of female workers as the 1940s gave way to the 1950s unfavourably, and the magazine voiced its resentment openly. Ultimately, the presence of women in the workforce blurred the understandings of masculinity and femininity and the implicit power to which *Man* clung, and, as the definitions and boundaries of femininity were being reworked, anxieties about masculinity and what it meant to be a man in the 1950s became more prominent. Worry about “masculine identity” was linked to a desire to maintain rigid distinctions between the definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity, and the belief in the “historical certainty and efficacy of such distinctions”.³⁹ The belief in the “masculine” public sphere was particularly relevant after the war, as returned servicemen, both in Australia and America, relied on work to reaffirm the idea of masculinity espoused by repatriation schemes.⁴⁰ After the war, men expected women to return to the home and find their satisfaction with homemaking and raising children; as Dubbert asks, “[in] short, could women once again be women so that men could be men?”⁴¹

Man expressed fears of the changing definitions of femininity and their negative effects on masculinity most prominently through cartoons and jokes. Cartoons, especially, were a major element of *Man*’s approach to portraying gender. While ostensibly light-hearted and harmless, *Man* used cartoons to depict dissatisfaction with the changes underway in the post-war years. Lynne Segal’s psychological study of western masculinity notes the use of humour to convey feelings of anxiety, especially in the 1950s: “[if], as Freud has argued, the function of joking is the reduction of anxiety, then male anxiety was running very deep at the time”.⁴² Further, she states that misogynist humour (a hallmark of *Man*) is often used by men “to discipline women—a type of propaganda for male dominance and a warning to women of the consequences of challenging it”.⁴³ The presence and function of such humour in men’s magazines have been acknowledged by other scholars, and when read in the context of *Man* in the 1950s, demonstrate the unease produced by the potential loss of “natural” male territories.⁴⁴

Cartoons and jokes that related to working women had a dual function: not only were they used to represent frustration and concern over changing understandings of gender, but they were also used as a means of reasserting masculine superiority. *Man*’s working women were belittled and patronised, reduced to sexual objects existing for the sole purpose of male sexual pleasure. Additionally, in no circumstance was a working woman

³⁹ James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 9.

⁴⁰ Garton, *The Cost of War*, 80–1; Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, 76–7.

⁴¹ Dubbert, *A Man’s Place*, 17.

⁴² Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London: Vigoro Press Ltd, 1990), 21.

⁴³ Segal, *Slow Motion*, 22.

⁴⁴ Bethan Benwell, “Introduction: Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines,” in *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*, ed. Bethan Benwell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 16.

depicted at any level higher than a secretary, serving to reinscribe ideas of “traditional” feminine jobs. Those female secretaries who *did* appear in *Man*'s cartoons, the magazine made clear, were hired solely for their sexuality and the potential for (and probability of) sexual adventure. Marilyn Lake has argued that the Second World War provided the chance for women to “step into an alluring, exciting future”, offering sexual and romantic adventures rather than “old, traditional ‘roles’”.⁴⁵ However, Lake's analysis, which sees the popularity of marriage and domesticity in the 1940s and 1950s not as a retreat to conservatism but rather as the “triumph of modern femininity … women attempting to live as female sexual subjects and explore the possibilities of sexual pleasure”, suggests female sexual agency and autonomy.⁴⁶ These traits did not factor into *Man*'s portrayal of women; rather, the magazine explicitly portrayed femininity within very specific boundaries. Female sexuality was emphasised for the benefit of male readers. A female worker's skill set was considered secondary to the sexual promise she offered—a stance made clear by a 1956 cartoon in which a woman is depicted being interviewed for a secretarial position. In the cartoon, the woman's low-cut dress, high stiletto heels and glamorous wide-brimmed hat reinscribe the male interviewer's (and *Man*'s) position: “You obviously don't have much secretarial experience, but so long as you're familiar with typing, shorthand, filing and general procedure I suppose I can teach you the rest …”.⁴⁷ By reducing the woman in the cartoon to a sexual object, *Man* not only belittled working women and made clear its position on the prospect of female autonomy, but also emphasised male superiority. The male interviewer was already in a position of power (being her superior at work), but attempted to further his authority by offering himself as a teacher.

Further, while *Man* positioned women's sexuality to benefit men, the predatory nature of men was celebrated, especially when a woman refused a man's sexual advances. A 1956 cartoon showing a haughty young woman walking past two men in the office highlighted the voracious sexual appetite of men in the 1950s. The cartoon's caption read, “She's a perfect secretary, types fast … runs slow”.⁴⁸ The male claim to sex, situated here in the work environment, not only served to undercut the woman's haughtiness through sexual aggression, but also mirrored the sentiments expressed in other cartoons that depicted the male “hunt” for sex. In one 1956 cartoon, two gun-toting men spy a pair of voluptuous females in the distance, the caption making clear that the “real” hunt is about to begin: “Dave, put away your gun and let's go huntin'”.⁴⁹ (Figure 3). In another cartoon, a pair of cavemen, each holding clubs and dragging smiling women along the ground by their hair, snicker at a fellow caveman trying to woo a woman with more humane techniques (that is, by openly professing his admiration): “Orkle still has a lot to learn about women”.⁵⁰ The “caveman's” treatment of women was a recurring motif, with a 1955 poem titled “A Primitive Rugged Type … Trumpets His Challenge” continuing *Man*'s endorsement of the male predator:

⁴⁵ Marilyn Lake, “Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II,” *Australian Historical Studies* 24.95 (1990): 269.

⁴⁶ Lake, “Female desires”, 283.

⁴⁷ *Man*, July 1956, 33.

⁴⁸ *Man*, July 1956, 91.

⁴⁹ *Man*, August 1956, 59.

⁵⁰ *Man*, June 1956, 22.

I guess that I'm a caveman,
Just a gusty he-man sort,
I drink and laugh among the men,
And win trophies at my sport;
I keep my women in their place,
And do not have to crawl,
I look the whole world in the face,
And when there's a tune, I call:
And now I'm married it's the same;
For home and wife and cub,
I have my weapon of defence—
The caveman's arms—the club.⁵¹

By linking the persistence of men in the workplace to that of the “primitive” cavemen, *Man* not only emphasised a man’s “right” to sex, but also encouraged a masculine identity that reinscribed male superiority in this way. Such efforts to assert an ideal of masculinity reveal the unhappiness in *Man*’s story about the changing post-war gender order. Dubbert states that the powerful positions of men in political and economic institutions “meant that they controlled other people”.⁵² However, the rapid growth in the number of female workers was an unwelcome threat to the power and authority that *Man* felt naturally and historically belonged to men. In response, the magazine did everything in its power to uphold male dominance.

Man, masculinity and the private sphere

Man’s anxieties regarding the expectations concerning breadwinning and the definitions of masculinity were not limited to public spaces. Indeed, one of the magazine’s major themes was the anxiety concerning men’s responsibilities to their wives and children. Additionally, alongside this concern was an undercurrent of anger and resentment concerning the prospect of female autonomy and control within a relationship. Although the magazine itself was resigned to the inevitability of marriage, *Man*’s treatment of masculinity within the private sphere was nevertheless focused on frustration and discontent with the breadwinner role and its relationship to marriage.

Marriage and the family unit were central to the task of social reconstruction after the Second World War, with advice literature, return fiction and magazines (targeted at men and women alike) prioritising not only the family, but also male presence within the family.⁵³ In the American context, Hollywood films were instrumental in portraying a

⁵¹ *Man*, March 1955, 27.

⁵² Dubbert, *A Man’s Place*, 249.

⁵³ Lisa Featherstone, “‘The One Single Primary Cause’: Divorce, the Family, and Heterosexual Pleasure in Postwar Australia,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 37.3 (2013): 351; Garton, *The Cost of War*, 178–9.

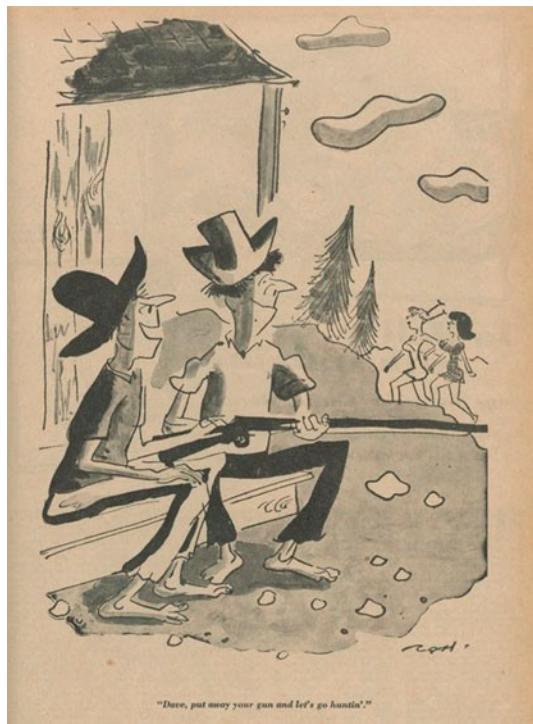


Figure 3. The male hunt for sex. *Man*, August 1956, 59. National Library of Australia. Courtesy of Bauer Media Group.

specific post-war gender order. The 1946 film *The Best Years of Our Lives* explicitly connected marital stability with healthy masculinity: three returning veterans “broken in mind, body, and spirit” needed the “care and tending of strong, courageous women who restore their … health, as well as their manhood”.⁵⁴ Indeed, marriage was essential to the dominant definition of masculinity in the 1950s. Barbara Ehrenreich’s seminal work on masculinity and American men of the 1950s states that the average age of men when they married was twenty-three, “and according to popular wisdom, if a man held out much longer, say even to twenty-seven, ‘you had to wonder’”.⁵⁵ Her study proceeds to delineate the centrality of wage earning to maleness and one’s role as a husband and father: “[if] adult masculinity was indistinguishable from the breadwinner role, then it followed that the man who failed to achieve this role was either not fully adult or not fully masculine”.⁵⁶ Hence, if the worth of a man depended on his relationship with a woman and his success as the financial provider, any concerns or anxieties regarding masculinity

⁵⁴ Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, 65. See also Sonya Michel, “Danger on the Home Front: Motherhood, Sexuality, and Disabled Veterans in American Postwar Films,” in *Gendering War Talk*, ed. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 260–79.

⁵⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Norwell, MA: Anchor Press, 1983), 14–5.

⁵⁶ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 20.

and what it meant to be a man in this era would and could be expressed as a commentary on the relationship between men and women. And, indeed, it was.

Man's continued use of humorous cartoons to represent anxiety and concern focused the magazine's commentary (on relationships between men and women) on both the process of courtship and the "reality" of married life. *Man's* readers were repeatedly warned of the dangers of the courtship process: namely, that a woman was concerned with a man's financial security (or, more bluntly, his wealth) far more than she was with love, personality and compatibility. Exemplifying *Man's* portrayal of husband-seeking women, a 1954 cartoon shows a woman telling her rejected male suitor, "Yes darling, you're one in a million ... but I want one WITH a million".⁵⁷ Indeed, *Man* regarded the male responsibility to provide financially for a wife with considerable hesitancy and apprehension. While cartoons provided indirect advice to men, the magazine also took on the task of communicating advice directly, through articles and columns. This advice, however, was unvarying across the editorial forms, no matter their tone, emphasising that, while ostensibly humorous, cartoons and jokes revealed as much about the "reality" of married life as did textual content. Anecdotes and instructions detailed the dangers of the courtship process, and how it could be navigated to maintain masculine superiority. Certain "types" of women were warned against. The 1957 article "So You'd Like a Glamour Girl" explicitly warned that "Glamour Girls" like June, the article's subject, came, literally, at a price. In order to compete for her affections, men needed to "improve" themselves: "New suit. Ties. Hats. Socks. And, because of eternal hope, new underwear. At last ... he was in the sartorial sense, anyway, worthy of her".⁵⁸ Unlike *Playboy*, which, in its advocacy of the bachelor lifestyle, "saw consumption as a desirable pastime for American men", *Man* portrayed material consumption as a frustrating necessity.⁵⁹ After all, there was no guarantee that a man would be rewarded sexually, nor was he even guaranteed to be considered first in her affections. June, the article explicated, was quite willing to accept gifts and lavish weekends away, but eventually turned her considerations to Harold, whose Jaguar "made the difference".⁶⁰ *Man* clearly depicted the frustration of the courtship process and the implicit balance of power that existed: women were portrayed as manipulative and ravenous for goods, craving a lavish lifestyle, and men could not compete if they could not provide.

The prospect of female autonomy and financial control within a relationship was repetitively forewarned, and considered even more dangerous than a man's need to compete sartorially and materially. The article "13 Ways to Stay Single ..." imagined a bachelor lifestyle more commonly envisioned in *Playboy* and warned that men would be trapped into marriage by rapacious, predatory women, stating that men had to be constantly on the lookout for the moment when a certain "look" appeared in a woman's eye:

⁵⁷ *Man*, July 1954, 34.

⁵⁸ *Man*, December 1957, 80.

⁵⁹ Carrie Pitzulo, "Bachelors and Bunnies: *Playboy Magazine* and Modern Heterosexuality, 1953–1973" (PhD thesis, The City University of New York, 2008), 95.

⁶⁰ *Man*, December 1957, 80.

And this, as most married men know, can miraculously change—at the sight of a baby's napkin or a vacant building lot—from casual companionship to a shrewd assessment of the male as a potential breadwinner and father of her children.⁶¹

Further, the increasing accessibility of overseas travel meant that a woman could ostensibly spend her youth traversing the globe, returning only to find a husband or, indeed, to marry the man she had “secured” before her departure. *Man* resented this level of female independence, particularly as it often came at the expense of male freedom:

The male, meantime, has been caught in a cleft stick. So that he can become the bread-winner, he just has to stay on the job and build himself up. Many a young man is trudging to and from work, month after month, saving a few pounds a week, while his fiancee is gadding about the Continent, spending money that could have bought a block of land.⁶²

Those females who embarked on overseas travel subverted the expectations and understandings of both masculinity and femininity that *Man* advocated. Rather than bringing a “glory box … full of sheets, towels, blankets and mysterious underwear” into the marital home, the prospect of travel, of adventures to “Brussels, Bath and Baedakar [sic]”, filled women’s minds, affording them a level of independence that belied their “roles” as passive wives and mothers.⁶³ Moreover, this level of female independence reduced men to positions of subordination and dependence on women; *Man* feared that its readers, rather than being able to take financial control, would be forced to relinquish control of the money that they themselves earned. The magazine explicitly warned its readers of the potential of female control within a relationship. *Man*’s story of unhappy men articulated the fear that, despite the hard work of these men and *their* capacity (and responsibility) to earn wages, women would ultimately gain control. Unfortunately, for *Man*’s readership, however, the magazine could offer no viable solution. Despite declaring that a man was smart if he could avoid marriage, ultimately one did succumb, for, as the magazine admitted, what other choice was available?⁶⁴ “The soundest way to avoid popping the question is not to go out with girls. The end result of this, however, is equally fatal”⁶⁵

Man therefore depicted marriage as an unavoidable part of Australian life in the post-war years, no matter how much the magazine disparaged the prospect. Here, *Man* sits in stark contrast to *Playboy*, the American men’s magazine and eventual cultural icon that encouraged men to eschew marriage and children in favour of an alluring and titillating bachelordom.⁶⁶ Rather than advocating a similar rejection, *Man* attempted to make the best of a bad situation: *Man* encouraged its readers to choose the right woman to marry. In doing so, the magazine emphasised, above all, the importance of male superiority. One column titled “I Have a Second-Hand Wife” encouraged men to marry once-divorced

⁶¹ *Man*, February 1958, 16.

⁶² *Man*, May 1958, 85.

⁶³ *Man*, October 1958, 23.

⁶⁴ *Man*, October 1958, 59.

⁶⁵ *Man*, February 1958, 17. That this admission appeared in “13 Ways to Stay Single …,” the article most similar to *Playboy*’s encouraged bachelordom, furthers the gap between the respective lifestyles that *Man* and *Playboy* were advocating.

⁶⁶ Pitzulo, “Bachelors and Bunnies”, 14.

women, who would allow male control primarily because they had been saved from social embarrassment: “[she] will always be appreciative of the fact that you *married* her ... This gratitude is your major advantage, young man. Use it well and wisely around the house, and you will always wear the pants”.⁶⁷ The fear of female control drove the advice the magazine doled out to its audience. Indeed, *Man* advised readers not to wed older women for fear of losing control:

An older woman regards herself as a mother as well as a wife. When children come, she regards the husband as the extra child ... in the case of the man who wants to be the normal head of the family, it does not work.⁶⁸

Man's emphasis on “normal” male authority in the home reveals concern about the demise of such a concept: female control and male subordination represented an unacceptable situation, and one that opposed the understanding of masculinity that *Man* advocated and wanted to uphold. James Gilbert's work on American post-war masculinity reveals that the fear of male passivity was linked to a fear of female dominance in marriage and in the home obtained by “[usurping] male roles”.⁶⁹ In this light, while *Man* questioned the definitions of masculinity and the “normal” responsibilities of men through the representation of male unhappiness, it espoused the “traditional” meanings of femininity. While men were rethinking their position as the breadwinner and pondering the restrictions brought by it, women were expected to remain passive and subordinate. No matter how unhappy *Man* portrayed its readers to be, *Man* made it clear that maintaining control and authority over one's partner was essential, and explained the importance of marrying the “right” girl. However, despite the advice given, marriage to the “right” girl did not necessarily ensure marital bliss (meaning, male superiority). On the contrary, *Man* depicted marriage as a victory for women not only looking to ensnare a man, but also wanting to exert control by assuming dominance within the relationship.

Like its depiction of courtship, *Man* portrayed marriage as centred on frustrations, with a loss of financial control. Men were warned that the girl who appeared obliging and agreeable, if she existed at all, would soon transform once the pair wed:

I used to think your tastes were class,
But now they're damned expensive:
Your quick perception, once admired,
Now seems far too extensive:
What used to be amusing chatter
Is now an endless stream of nagging,
Petulance I once thought cute
Is now just stubborn lagging:
What happened, then, to change all this?
Just that we entered wedded bliss.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Man*, February 1957, 80.

⁶⁸ *Man*, March 1958, 54.

⁶⁹ Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 67.

⁷⁰ *Man*, September 1955, 23.

Further, just as women could change from seeming agreeable to becoming annoying and burdensome, so could breadwinning itself. A 1953 cartoon demonstrated the multiple demands a man faced as a breadwinner: while the male subject sees himself as responsible and respectable, his son Jimmie sees him as the provider of abundant cash; his mother-in-law sees him as the devil; and “Susie—bless her” sees him as a lollipop, suggesting that Susie is a younger woman who looks to him as a “sugar daddy”.⁷¹ Breadwinning then, was not portrayed as an assurance of power, but rather as a contributor to the demise of *Man’s* masculine ideals. To be male and the wage-earner was no longer a guarantee of control within a relationship. Such representations refute Richard White’s claims of men of the 1950s “hardly [noticing]” the transformations of masculinity.⁷² Rather, *Man’s* representations of frustration and resentment about male responsibilities were overt, as was the articulation of the desire to be liberated from these burdens. However, the magazine also acknowledged that fulfilling these desires was virtually impossible, an acknowledgement perhaps best encapsulated in this 1950 poem:

There's hardly a morning passes,
And hardly a day goes by,
Without I set forth in the pride of strength
With a twinkle in my eye
And promise myself an adventure
With a lass to enliven my life—
But I have two beers with the boys at eve
And quietly go home to the wife.⁷³

While openly articulating frustration at the effect of marriage on men’s lives, *Man* did not passively accept this transformation. Rather, the magazine made efforts to assert a sense of masculine control and authority in the domestic sphere. Historians of the post-war era have dismantled the dominance of the “oppressed housewife” image, with some even arguing that the housewife of the 1950s was a crucial precursor to the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s, showing that women could gain autonomy and assert authority within the domestic sphere.⁷⁴ However, *Man’s* portrayal of the home challenged female dominance, marking the domestic sphere as but another site of men’s dissatisfaction.

Portraying the home as a place where masculinity could be asserted was again driven by a fear of female control. Already advocating male power in the workforce, and in courtship and marriage, *Man* used the domestic sphere to push the campaign for male superiority. Although *Man’s* resentment of female independence positioned women firmly within the home, the prospect of female control was feared there too. Tyler May’s

⁷¹ *Man*, June 1953, 41.

⁷² White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 164.

⁷³ *Man*, January 1950, 14.

⁷⁴ Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Sian Supski, “It Was Another Skin’: The Kitchen as Home for Australian Post-war Immigrant Women,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 13.2 (2006): 133–41.

work on Cold War America has drawn links between the home and the international climate of uncertainty, stating that at home a man could maintain authority “with a wife who would remain subordinate” without “risking the loss of security”.⁷⁵ However, Dubbert’s study of American masculinity positions the home as a source of resentment and frustration for men in the post-war years. According to Dubbert, men bore the burden of breadwinning and providing for their wives and families, and yet, “when the man finally got to his suburban home, he found it full of feminine furnishings and items that made him ill at ease, even resentful”.⁷⁶ By marking the domestic home as a space in which men could (and should) be in control, *Man* called for men’s breadwinning responsibilities to be recognised at the same time it questioned them.

Man’s assertion of domestic masculinity took two forms. The first was the assertion of masculinity through identifiably and acceptably “masculine” activities and projects. While White sees the inclusion of the “Handyman” and “Motorman” sections in the mid- 1950s as the end of the magazine’s “intellectual quality or sophistication”, these new sections encouraged *Man*’s readers to claim a presence in their households without sacrificing masculine ideals.⁷⁷ The “Handyman” columns, in particular, created a space for domestic masculinity to be safely asserted: do-it-yourself projects were “free from any hint of gender-role compromise”, while separate workshops allowed men “to be both a part of the home and apart from it, sharing the home with their families while retaining spatial and functional autonomy”.⁷⁸

The second form was the continuation of the masculinist attitude that overwhelmingly defined *Man*’s content, propagated by the magazine’s cultural anxiety surrounding gender “roles”. In marking the public sphere as a masculine space, *Man* relegated women to the private sphere. However, the magazine advocated male dominance there too. While articulating, in the absence of a viable solution, frustration and unhappiness with the obligation of marriage, *Man* encouraged men to take charge in the space that it had marked as feminine. This is unlike *Playboy*, which used the domestic space and cooking to produce and represent the bachelor “through a rearticulation of the meaning of domestic space and culture”.⁷⁹ *Playboy*, a fierce advocate for the bachelor lifestyle, sought to rework the kitchen as a masculine space—where “masculine” meant sensual, suave and sophisticated—which was only possible because of *Playboy*’s rejection of marriage. In contrast, *Man* sought male dominance in a space where it had relegated women while simultaneously acknowledging the necessary (albeit reluctant) presence of men. This confusion about gendered spheres and gendered roles produced articles that communicated perverse advice: cooking was promoted as a “simple, do-it-yourself hobby that has very satisfying results”, cast along the same lines as “traditionally” masculine endeavours.⁸⁰ “Even though women, bless their

⁷⁵ Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, 86.

⁷⁶ Dubbert, *A Man’s Place*, 244.

⁷⁷ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 164.

⁷⁸ Steven M. Gelber, “Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity,” in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. Jennifer Scanlon (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 71–2. See also Nanette Carter, “Man with a Plan: Masculinity and DIY House Building in Post-war Australia,” *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 1.2 (2011): 165–80; Peel, “A New Kind of Manhood”, 152.

⁷⁹ Joanne Hollows, “The Bachelor Dinner: Masculinity, Class and Cooking in *Playboy*, 1953–1961,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 16.2 (2002): 145.

⁸⁰ *Man*, September 1957, 26.

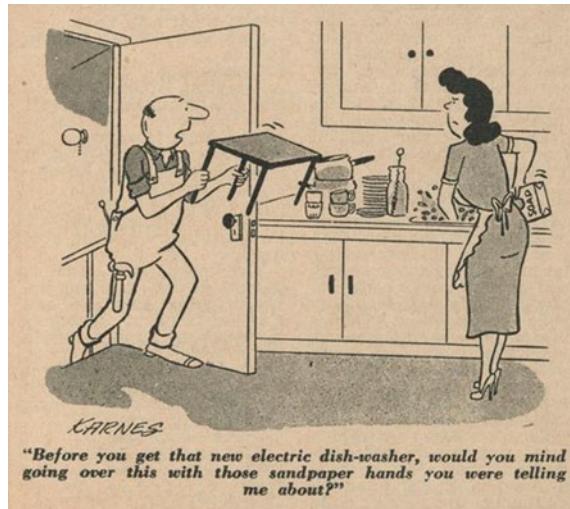


Figure 4. Belittling female labour. *Man*, July 1956, 83. National Library of Australia. Courtesy of Bauer Media Group.

little hearts, do most of it," *Man* declared, "there is nothing effeminate about cooking".⁸¹ *Man's* pursuit of domestic superiority intensified to such an extent that it questioned the need for women in the home altogether. A 1956 cartoon shows a man who is carrying a small table approaching his sink-bound wife and asking her, "Before you get that new electric dishwasher, would you mind going over this with those sandpaper hands you were telling me about?"⁸² (Figure 4). Threatening his wife with technology that would render her labour obsolete, the man in the cartoon reflects *Man's* anxiety about definitions of masculinity and gender "roles", which prevented the acknowledgement of women's work. To do otherwise would admit male dependence on wives and mothers, one that *Man* was not willing to make. Rather, the magazine asserted a dominating masculinity that extended beyond the public sphere to the "feminine" domestic environment, both challenging "traditional" definitions of masculinity (the domestic sphere cast as a feminine space) but upholding the notion of "masculine" usefulness and "feminine" frivolity. This blurring of men's and women's roles was a manifestation of *Man's* anxiety regarding changing definitions of gender, but one that, nevertheless, continued the magazine's near-misogynistic treatment of women. No domestic space was safe.

Conclusion

After reaching its commercial peak in 1953, *Man's* circulation figures declined, ceasing publication in 1974. Unable to compete with specialised magazines that focused attention on specific areas of interest (*Australian Handyman* and *Sports Car World*, for example, went further than *Man's* "Handyman" and "Motorman" sections ever could), *Man* ultimately fell short of the specialised advertising revenue that the competition attracted.⁸³

⁸¹ *Man*, September 1957, 26.

⁸² *Man*, July 1956, 83.

⁸³ White, "The Importance of Being *Man*", 165.

Further, more risqué “girlies” such as *Playboy* advocated the bachelor lifestyle and represented a definitive shift in the way sex was considered. *Playboy* made it acceptable for men to assume an overtly sexual personality, positioning sex as an important element in a man’s life.⁸⁴ With its reluctant acceptance of married life, *Man* could no longer compete.

However, while its commercial demise indicated that its social and cultural impact had come to an end, *Man* did indeed operate as an avenue of expression and commentary on Australian life. While Richard White suggests that it was only in the 1930s that the magazine presented “something more real”, this article reveals that it was actually engaged in a complex commentary on men’s lives.⁸⁵ *Man*’s story of unhappy, frustrated men challenged the suburban breadwinner model, and, in doing so, problematised the model of manhood we usually understand as central to 1950s life. While *Man*’s story of male unhappiness had implications for men, it also included a commentary on femininity that ultimately restricted women’s choices and agency. The magazine’s representation of unsatisfied and uncertain men suggests that the ideals of masculinity were under stress and reconfiguration in post-war Australia. Far from being a decade of contentment, the cultural and social world of the 1950s was both unsteady and, according to *Man*, a source of unease.

⁸⁴ Mark Jancovich, “The Politics of *Playboy*: Lifestyle, Sexuality and Non-conformity in American Cold War Culture,” in *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to the 1970s*, ed. David Bell and Joanne Hollows (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 74.

⁸⁵ White, “The Importance of Being *Man*”, 165.