

THE NEW GIRL

*an appreciative appraisal
of the emergent modern female...*



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opinion BY JOHN CLELLON HOLMES A VIRGIN COED, on being asked why she is taking the pill, explains that just as she wants to feel absolutely free to say yes without fear of pregnancy, so she wants to be sure that when she says no she isn't using this same fear as a cop-out. A lyrically graphic book of poetry about sexual euphoria, composed largely in love's forbidden language, is the object of an obscenity action in San Francisco, and its author is neither Allen Ginsberg nor Henry Miller but a pretty young poetess in tank top and hip-huggers. A clear-eyed maiden in patterned stockings lists her five civil rights arrests with the same quiet pride with which her older sister once listed her sorority affiliation. A high-fashion model, earning \$50,000 a year, takes ten months off to gypsy around Europe with a hippie poet, making the *Provo* scene in Amsterdam, living on bread and wine on the beach at Iviza, and comes home to resume her career with no more scars to her psyche than the secretary of the past brought back from her proverbial two weeks of man hunting in the Poconos. A plain girl from a plain neighborhood in Brooklyn, driven by the urge to sing but refusing to accept the old showbiz rule that plain girls are doomed to being funny (so many Cass Dalys or Martha Rayes), creates an eerie beauty out of her large nose and aquiline features, inspiring thereby a whole style of kookie chic. Serious actresses, who have "done time" at the Actors Studio, appear fully nude in films or Happenings and do not feel like exhibitionists, much less whores. A folk singer devotes part of the fortune she has amassed with her ethereal, May-moon voice to the establishment of a school for the teaching of nonviolent direct action. A young socialite, bored by the charity-bazaar organizing and cotillion chaperoning that were the fate of her kind in other years, appears in underground movies, pals around with working-class minstrels from Liverpool and, far from being ostracized by her set, leads the march of Park Avenue down to the East Village.

Though these young women and their counterparts do not yet represent the numerical majority of their generation, there are strong reasons for believing that they constitute the advance guard of a new female attitude, an attitude that heralds the most profound change in femininity since the suffragettes, a change that is creating nothing less than a New Girl (the counterpart of the New Young Man), a girl with the very interests—sexual freedom and psychedelics, skindiving and the swim, Bobby Kennedy and Bobby Dylan, the New Left and civil rights—that so sharply distinguish that young man from his elders. Like all advance guards, this New Girl is pioneering the

... *self-emancipated, unabashedly sexy, charmingly individualistic and a joy to the men in her life*

territory her sisters will eventually colonize; and what has happened to her may well happen to all young women tomorrow. What has happened is the emergence, at long last, of the Postfeminist Girl.

What Joan Baez and Baby Jane Holzer have in common is not a similar moral or political attitude, any more than what Barbra Streisand shares with poet Lenore Kandel is an identical life style or clothes taste. Indeed, young women today are astonishingly diverse in their solutions to the question of how they want to live and toward what ends. What they all share, however, is a radically new relationship to the stereotypes that have defined womanhood heretofore—those stereotypes of wife, mother, spinster, courtesan, whore or ball breaker that were the only options offered to women in the past, roles that were conceived by men for the most part and reflected male attitudes that had their source in male needs. What the New Girls of today all exhibit in their various ways is an impatience with these roles and a rejection of the traditional idea that women, unlike men, are somehow supposed to be *fulfilled* by the roles they play, among which they would include the historically most recent, and emotionally least fulfilling, role of all (created by women themselves)—that of the feminist.

If the New Girl's impatience with role playing seems curious to some men, it is because these men forget that oppressed groups, in order to survive, are forced to act out the image of themselves that their oppressors find most acceptable. The Negro's evolution in America, for instance, could be described as a process of Stepin Fetchit turning into "Bojangles" Robinson turning into Harry Belafonte turning into Dick Gregory—all of which succeeding "images" revealed more about the white man's changing attitudes toward the Negro than the Negro's actual attitudes toward himself.

Women, it must be remembered, have been full citizens of the U.S. for less than 50 years—only half as long as Negroes. Before 1920, they had little choice but to become so many *Little Women*, *Sister Carries* or *Madame Bovarys*. And, like Negroes, women's social emancipation (at least in terms of real equality of opportunity) remained, until recent years, largely a matter of a constitutional amendment that carried about as much weight as the paper on which it was printed. Also like Negroes, the psychic liberation of women from all the subtle hangovers of chattel status in the past has taken considerably longer. Its achievement may be only now in sight, and perhaps the most persistent hangover of all has been feminism itself.

"Psychologically, feminism had a single objective: the achievement of maleness by the female." So wrote Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg in *Modern Woman, the Lost Sex*. For the feminist played a role no less thwarting to her development as a human being than the patient helpmate or compliant mistress whom she hoped to supplant. If her aims were positive, the attitude

behind them was deeply negative. Though she was always loudly defending female rights, she was actually preoccupied with attacking male privileges. Her crusades for birth control, for the right to smoke and drink in public and for an abolition of the double standard in sex and business stemmed largely from her sense of outrage at injustice, rather than from a desire to live more fully, more experimentally, more permissively. And the feminist attitude did not vanish with the passage of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the vote.

In the 1920s, for instance, the emancipated woman bound down her breasts, chopped off her hair and stood at the speak-easy bar, knocking back bootleg with the men and thereby acting just like all strangers in a new church: She watched what the other guy was doing and imitated him. As an example, Lady Ashley (heroine of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*) reserved her ultimate contempt for the male character who "wanted me to grow my hair out. . . . He said it would make me more womanly," because her aim, of course, was to be *less* "womanly" in the feminine sense, associated, as that was, with the hateful past.

In the 1930s and 1940s, having discovered that male domination was fully as psychological as it was social, women became more openly aggressive, taking over the trousers as well as the causes once considered exclusively male and insisting that they were not only just like men but might even be superior to them. Indeed, one of Mary McCarthy's heroines, after a night of lovemaking with a businessman in a lower berth, could haughtily think of herself "as a citadel of socialist virginity, that could be taken and taken again, but never truly subdued. . . . She had come out of it untouched, while he had been reduced to a jelly." The women of those years wrote books that grimly attempted to prove that females were far more adaptable to the collectivized circumstances of modern life than males, and others that triumphantly stated that because the clitoris had measurably thicker nerve endings than the penis, female sexuality was immeasurably more rewarding than male.

All these feminist positions, however, had a single self-defeating characteristic in common: They defined femininity by comparison with, or in contradistinction to, masculinity. All were influenced by the viewpoint of the liberated slave, which seeks to first emulate, then compete with and finally destroy the ex-master. For at the bottom of it, the feminist was not seeking femininity at all but was still imprisoned by the idea that she could escape the demeaning role of "weaker sex" only by adopting yet another role: the masculinized woman.

Feminism was basically a movement of social reform, but though legislation

and changing mores gradually emptied it of substance, it continued to have a more or less fugitive existence in the platforms of left-wing political parties, where it was known as "the woman question." No better indication of its final and complete demise can be found than the fact that the New Left (in whose ranks there are almost as many girls as boys) may be the first radical movement in modern history that does not concern itself with women's rights at all.

Doctrinaire feminism would strike the dedicated young women of Students for a Democratic Society as an anachronism about on a par with Prohibition, for they simply do not feel like an aggrieved minority that needs defending. Indeed, even the special status immemorably reserved for women who "worked for the cause" (manning the mimeograph rather than the barricades) seems silly to the New Girl of today, in light of that hunger for immediate, personal involvement that is her strongest motivation. It would never occur to her to stay behind, mailing out leaflets, when the bus leaves for the Pentagon; and the idea that there are certain confrontations from which she is excused on account of her sex is an idea as foreign to her as taking to her bed during menstruation. Confrontation, putting one's self on the line, walking down a Southern street side by side with a Negro youth (and thus risking the ugliest epithet—"Nigger lover"—that a bigot can think of to hurl at a woman, a sexual epithet specifically designed to insult her femininity); all this is precisely the *point* of her involvement; for by refusing to accept even a role that might exempt her from the consequences of her beliefs, she is affirming her conviction that *all* role playing is degrading to a human being. To help the Negro escape the necessity of playing Uncle Tom, she is willing to forgo the protection that is accorded Little Eva.

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Feminism, then, is dead as a social movement; but is the New Girl really free of the psychic prejudices that succeeded it? Some raw comparisons may be illuminating.

In their day, Ingrid Bergman and Elizabeth Taylor flouted accepted social morality by changing marital partners without waiting to be divorced. Both risked, and suffered, the wrath of an outraged public, meanwhile portraying themselves as martyrs to a love so great it transcended custom. But both quickly married their lovers once they were free to do so. New Girl Julie Christie, on the contrary, lived openly and happily with her former mate, blandly announced that she had no plans to marry and averred that it was nobody's business but her own.

After Hedy Lamarr appeared nude in *Ecstasy* in the 1930s, she spent most of

the rest of her career trying to live it down, confessing in interview after interview what a mistake it had been and refusing to pose for any but the most decorous pinup pictures. But when Vanessa Redgrave appeared nude in a movie in the 1960s, she did not feel that she had compromised herself or her craft, much less that the Academy Award nomination that she received for the role was a tribute to her figure rather than her talent.

Edna St. Vincent Millay's arrest in connection with the Sacco-Vanzetti case was the culmination of her revolt against the moral double standards of her time; for in her eyes, radical sexual attitudes assumed radical political ones. The young activists of a few years ago, however, who could (and did) boast of civil rights jail records as long as their arms, considered themselves morally superior to girls with none and would not have countenanced being treated like camp followers by anybody.

The difference is simple: The female rebels of the past defied the conventional roles of womanhood and then more or less meekly paid the price for that defiance, whereas today's New Girl thinks of herself as affirming her integrity as a person (a person who happens to be a woman) and fully expects to be rewarded for this affirmation by an increased sense of her individual worth.

All signs indicate that it is femininity itself that the New Girl seeks to experience and define afresh. She wants to know nothing less than what it is like to be a female human being, no longer either a willing or a rebellious appendage to some man but her own unique self. In the process, she has discovered that many of the assumed differences between men and women are shabby myths and many of the denied ones have a stubborn reality. For instance, at one and the same time, she can assert that her intelligence is as powerful as any man's and can also admit, with no feeling of inferiority, that it tends to operate on a different current—A.C. rather than D.C., as it were. But that she wants to accept and inhabit herself as a woman (and not one or another version of Adam's rib) is clear, no matter where you choose to look.

The most basic role that women were required to play in the past was that of the mannequin, the clotheshorse, the *living* doll. Unlike men, women were compelled to experience themselves as objects—vessels of purity or seductiveness, fragile beauty or fleshly allure—things to be adorned, posed, desired and possessed. In this sense, women's fashions were so many costumes that identified the roles that women had chosen, or were compelled to play. It was assumed that a girl's morals were reflected in her necklines.

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*"We went through all this last year, but I can't recall
that it did any good."*

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The New Girl, however, is not interested in dressing up, or down, to men's unexamined conceptions of women. Not for her to feel that her body is shameful and thus, at the onset of puberty, to buy her cashmeres three sizes too big and lower her skirts to disguise the fact that girls have comely knees or risk being thought "fast and loose." Not for her (if she is a few years older) to allow herself to be gotten up in a succession of grotesque "new looks" by one or another Mr. Fruit, whose evident intention is to distort or humiliate her femininity.

Instead, she comes hurrying down the street in her white plastic boots or plum-colored snubby flats, her figure *there* for all to see—in miniskirt or minipants or miniseparates; her dress, more than not, designed to reveal her lingerie and her lingerie, more than not, designed to reveal her body; violets in wild clusters on her panties, bra more of a window than a garment; wearing her pajamas in the street and, like as not, little more than a smile in her bed; arraying herself in a veritable peacock profusion of bold colors and bolder prints, of wild fabrics and even wilder designs—all of which add up to a style that is kinky, pert, daring, frivolous, flamboyant, theatrical and unabashedly sexy; a style whose basic ingredients seem to be flair and imagination, a style that is above all an *eccentric* style, resulting from *boutique* browsing, hours of experimentation before a mirror and an eagerness to discover her own taste and her own chosen image.

The New Girl's fashions all emphasize femaleness (whether the model be The Dragon Lady or Alice in Wonderland) and they are mostly created by women, and young women at that. More than anything else, these clothes express the conviction that the female body is superbly natural, sensuous and efficient; that it was created to move (rather than stand still) and to move men (rather than the envy of other women). When designer Mary Quant was asked what was the *point* of the new fashion, she replied unhesitatingly: "Sex." In short, it is clear that the New Girl, even in her manner of dress, is declaring a fresh awareness of herself and of men and, above all, of the relation between the two.

What most distinguishes the Postfeminist Girl from her mother is her attitude toward sex, and her own sex in particular. It is not so much a question of a wider moral latitude as it is a matter of deeper self-knowledge. I don't mean to imply that women are, in actual fact, exclusively sexual creatures (in thrall to their biology and its cycle) when I say that almost every aspect of the New Girl's personality reflects her final freedom from the sexual status that was the

fate of women in the past. But nevertheless, a female's life, until recently, was defined by two all-but-irrevocable facts: the necessity of marrying young, which her subservient economic position made almost obligatory, and the constant possibility of pregnancy, which her gender made the essential condition of her existence. Like it or not, she was reduced to the level of a sexual object (as much by her body as by the male's), and if her emotional life often remained stunted, it was because she could never fully escape from the phantoms of marriage and motherhood that seemed to haunt her future. If most women dutifully played the roles of wife and momma (or felt guilty if they did not), it wasn't only because there were few other roles available but because they could not conceive of themselves *except* in terms of the mating and mothering to which their very bodies seemed to condemn them.

All this has changed now and it has changed forever, and the single most important factor in that change has been, quite simply, the advent of the contraceptive pill. At one stroke, it accomplished a triple liberation that centuries of *coitus interruptus*, calendar counting and precautionary technology had never been able to achieve. It freed women from their own biology, putting into their hands (rather than men's) an inexpensive, simple-to-use, foolproof method of preventing conception and even controlling menstruation, a method that involved neither temperature taking, humiliating diaphragm measurements well before the act nor mood-breaking diaphragm insertions just prior to it. No longer does a girl have to premeditate her desire by deciding whether to take her "equipment" along on a date or risk being overcome when unprepared. No longer does a girl have to excuse herself to "outwit" her anatomy at the very moment when she feels most like indulging it. And the degree to which the pill has made possible the preservation of feminine dignity and integrity is suggested by this reaction (on the part of a 22-year-old) to the famous diaphragm-fitting scene in Mary McCarthy's *The Group*: "My God, how could any girl feel that sex was going to be good, much less *fun*, after being so clinically groped and measured by a total stranger that way!" To the New Girl of today, the very mechanics of contraception before the pill tended to demean a woman in her own eyes.

But in freeing her *from* her body, the pill accomplished something considerably more important: It freed her *to* its desires. By allowing a woman to enjoy sex without either the fear of pregnancy or the embarrassment of premeditation, it encouraged her to discover sexuality *itself*—female sexuality. All nonerotic

considerations having been removed, women can at last confront their sexual natures with the same libidinous directness that men have always exhibited, a directness (as Lenore Kandel says) that "devour[s] all my secrets and my alibis"—with the result that in the past ten years we have learned more about female sexual response than in the ten centuries that preceded them, and we have learned it from women themselves.

But the third liberation that the pill made possible may have the most far-reaching consequences of all, because, having freed women from biology, and thus sexual reticence, it freed them from men as well and from men's wishful images of them. No longer dependent on a man to marry her if she "gets caught," released from the secondary sexual role (and all its distractions) that this dependency imposed on her, the New Girl is finally free of role playing itself and has entered into an equality with men, psychic as well as legal, in which she can at last discover and develop a uniquely individual and a uniquely feminine personality.

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Menstruation, marriage and motherhood: These were the central facts of female life heretofore. But this is no longer true and young women today exercise a degree of control over these facts that has made it possible for each of them to say and mean that she "enjoys being a girl." That unsettling moment, when the arrival of "the curse" and the budding of breasts were such a shame and an embarrassment to young girls, is no longer an ordeal. In this era of the training bra, 12-year-olds are envious of 13-year-olds *because* they have bosoms; and 14-year-olds, anticipating a beach party that is scheduled at an inopportune time, borrow Enovid, not to prepare for something sexual but to postpone anything biological that might curtail their fun. As the teenage heroine of Rosalyn Drexler's *I Am the Beautiful Stranger* puts it: "I'm so glad I got my period. I waited a long time. Now so much will change." It is this note of outright eagerness to be initiated into the mysteries of womanhood that is new.

College girls, 44 percent of whom (according to a recent survey) feel that premarital sex between engaged couples is perfectly all right, nevertheless insist that their moment of sexual decision be as free as possible of the dilemma once expressed by the paradoxical "If I do, he'll think I'm cheap. But if I don't, he'll think I'm prudish," just as they refuse to accept the male prejudices to which this age-old female watchword referred: "Don't act too bright, or he'll be intimidated. But don't act too dumb, either, or he won't be interested." Girls today simply do not regard themselves as being

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BREAKFAST BEIGNETS

- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 2 teaspoons grated orange rind
- 1/4 cup butter
- 3/4 cup flour
- 3 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 oz. brandy
- Oil for frying
- Confectioners' sugar

French *beignets*, a very smooth, light type of fritter, sometimes called *beignets soufflés*, are eaten both as a main course for breakfast and as a breakfast sweet.

In a small heavy saucepan, heat milk, orange juice, orange rind and butter until butter melts and liquids are boiling. Add flour all at once and stir constantly until batter leaves sides of pan. Remove from fire and turn into mixing bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, beating very well after each addition. Add salt, vanilla and brandy. Beat well. Store batter, covered, in refrigerator until needed. Into an electric skillet preheated to 370° pour 1/4

in. oil. Drop batter by tablespoons into hot oil. Fry *beignets*, turning once, until well browned on both sides. Check the first *beignet* removed from pan to make sure inside is completely cooked. Drain on absorbent paper. Sprinkle lightly with confectioners' sugar. Serve with *beignet* sauce below.

BEIGNET SAUCE

- 1/2 cup orange marmalade
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon orange juice
- 1 tablespoon curaçao

Chop marmalade on cutting board until pieces of peel are minced very fine. Turn marmalade into a saucepan. Add cream, orange juice and curaçao and mix well. Heat very slowly just before serving. Pour onto serving plates and place *beignets* on top, or pour into sauceboat and serve separately with *beignets*.

These are but a few of the flavorsome fixin's that can help keep the morning after from becoming nought but a mourning after. And so to bed.



THE NEW GIRL

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governed by masculine preconceptions such as these.

But it is the young single woman in the city, probably no longer a virgin and just as probably regarding this fact not as a troubling loss of innocence but as a valuable gain of experience, who best epitomizes the New Girl. Her life may be either a female facsimile of the hip bachelorhood of her male counterpart (her pad equipped with the same Herb Alpert LPs, wire wine rack, deep-enough-for-two divan and copper pot for that "special" casserole) or she may have taken to the lofts with her young man, living in the careless, tribal, improvised poverty of those who have dropped out. But whether her trip is to a dating bar for the purpose of meeting likely male swingers (a bar that she can enter, drink in and exit from alone, if no one strikes her fancy) or into inner space via LSD (a trip she makes equally on her own), the New Girl's venturesomeness implies, above everything else, an almost complete absence of all those tensions about "being single" that were etched in stress lines around the mouths of girls in their mid-20s heretofore.

The girl of today intends to marry, but she sees marriage as the *culmination* of a relationship that has survived intimacy, not as the beginning of one. She is looking for Mr. Cool, not Mr. Clean, and she will probably pass her 27th birthday with no nightmares of spinsterhood disturbing her dreams, much less those of the young man who may be sleeping beside her. Meanwhile, she is busy, inquisitive, excited, unsentimental (though not unromantic) and, above all, vividly alive. Probably she is more responsible than her boyfriend for making this the first dancing generation since the 1940s; and certainly male willingness to explore bolder sartorial, not to mention tonsorial, styles has been encouraged by her enthusiasm for the new—that enthusiasm for game playing itself that always emerges when one is no longer required to act a part.

Just as the assumption that all girls are feverish to get married has been proved obsolete, now that women are as free to experiment as men, so the notion that females are driven by some darkly visceral urge to have babies has not survived their ability to avoid them if they so choose. The matter is now firmly a question of voluntary decision, and soon there may be no reason the abortionist's curette cannot join the parental shotgun in the same oblivion. The New Girl probably wants babies—sometime. At least, she's no longer involved in the fierce denials of the so-called maternal instinct that made some of her older, "emancipated" sisters such a bore. But she's in no hurry. Or she's in the sort of



"Business is up 1.37 percent this quarter, and you ask why we're dancing?"

hurry that Mary Quant expressed when she said, "Gestation is so slow, so out of date. I really don't see why it can't be speeded up." Which must stand as some ultimate in freedom from biology.

In any case, the New Girl refuses to act as though pots and pans, much less diapers and douches, add up to a satisfactory or fulfilling life; and you can bet that this lyric by The Mamas and the Papas describes her emotional expectations to a tee:

*Words of love so soft and tender
Won't win a girl's heart anymore.
If you love her, then you must
send her
Somewhere where she's never been
before.*

This is at once an announcement that today's girl is free of her own sentimentalities and a warning that she can no longer be approached in terms of them. But if it sounds somehow antiromantic, it is also clearly prosexual. Done with roles herself, impatient with all the *routines* to which role playing leads, the New Girl fully expects her young man to act the same.

It could be argued, for example, that the very willingness on the part of the girls of the civil rights, free-speech, love or peace movements to dare fire hoses, cattle prods, tear gas and jail cells constituted the most decisive factor in spurring on their young men, for it was an unequivocal sign of the extent to which the Postfeminist Girl had severed herself from the clinging-vine, going-steady, bouncy-cheerleader roles of the past, and it served notice that she would no longer consider the football hero or big man on campus as her exclusive masculine ideal. In fact, it may well be that mutual commitment to the dangers and fulfillments of personal action has bound together the boys and girls of this generation in a compact that is actually *sexual* in nature, because each has passed the same rite of maturation in the other's presence. This similarity of male and female experience (sitting in together or tripping out—it doesn't matter which) is the most distinguishing characteristic of the New Youth, all of whom have more in common with one another than they do with any of their elders, regardless of sex.

But certainly today's girl feels that "words of love" are somehow empty unless they are grounded in the facts of life and, aside from being respected as a woman, she wants to be encountered as a human being. In return, she no longer expects such outworn gallantries as having her arm taken when crossing a street (her hand is much more to the point), nor does she get offended if the conversation strays from the demure, the lily-white or the trivial; and, as a consequence, the old-fashioned concept of the lady has little more meaning for her than the old-fashioned concept of the whore,

neither being descriptive of the wide range of feminine experience that she is discovering.

Postfeminism has freed the girls of today to a candor and an articulateness about themselves that has infused all the arts; and never before have there been so many first-rate writers, painters and musicians among women, some of whom are so good that the age-old put-down, "It isn't *what* she does, it's the fact that she can *do* it at all," is now hopelessly moribund. Talents as sizable as Doris Lessing, Marisol and Buffy Sainte-Marie do not need to be apologized for with qualifiers such as *woman* writer, *lady* sculptor or *girl* composer. They are so accomplished that their gender has no bearing on the level of their achievement, though it has a great deal to do with the nature of the work itself, which is intensely, unapologetically feminine and makes no attempt to cultivate, much less ape, the masculine preconceptions that have dominated the arts for centuries—preconceptions that older artists such as Mary McCarthy and even Simone de Beauvoir tried so stubbornly to anticipate, and disarm, on their own terms.

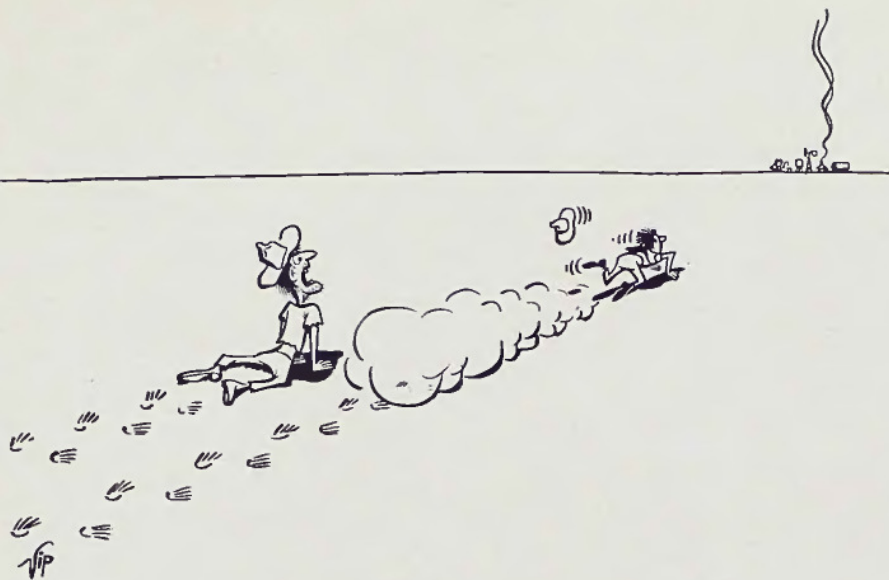
What is different in the works of these New Girls is not the subject matter (both

McCarthy and Lessing, for instance, write about similar types of women) but their attitude toward that subject matter—an attitude that makes use of, rather than trying to overcome or disguise, such distinctively female traits as subjectivity, compassion, sensuality, a taste for decoration and an involvement in the shifting immediacies of reality. If novelist Doris Lessing relies on these traits to creatively describe, for the first time, the elusive experience of female orgasm, critic Susan Sontag calls on them no less when she attempts to confront a work of art as nakedly and openly as she would a lover.

In such works, it is possible at last for men to glimpse the world of femininity from the inside: a world that is not exclusively made up of chintz curtains, baking dishes and billets-doux; a world in which *they* appear like slightly boyish Humphrey Bogarts as seen through the eyes of tolerant and affectionate Lauren Bacalls; a contemporaneously discordant world that is nevertheless keyed to the realities of the body and its unpanicked rhythms; the world you hear in the voice of Mama Cass Elliott, a voice that is as darkly oboe, as richly brocade, as *fat* (in the jazz sense) as the voice of a switched-on Lilith; that world of stockings to be rinsed out and emotional post-mortems



"... And in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice, you are to be divested of your rank, dishonorably discharged, and sent home with a note to your mother!"



"That's the trouble with most people today—rush, rush, rush!"

to be made, of sagacious hopes and shopping lists, which men leave behind when they put on their shoes and go away with a kiss and a promise to call; a world with an indescribable aroma of scent and sensibility to it. And the books and paintings and songs that describe this world are (as anthologist Barbara Alson has said): "tougher, less sentimental, less euphemistic . . . more often personal, much less often precious. And while not less feminine, certainly less ladylike." To which anyone, after all the Pearl Bucks and the Elizabeth Barrett Brownings of the past, will utter a profound "Amen!"

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If the passage of time since enfranchisement, plus the pill, plus today's saner moral climate, have worked together to make the Postfeminist Girl possible, it may be the so-called generation gap that has made her a fact. For young Americans now are more passionately than ever before engaged in posing questions, and most of their questions have to do with the stereotyped life roles their elders expect them to take for granted. "The time it takes to hypnotize the young into standardization is called growing up" (as one of them has said), and they want no part of it. But never has a generation been less supine as regards its wars nor more committed as regards its causes. Never has a generation denied society so recklessly nor affirmed the individual so idealistically. And rarely has any generation felt so strongly, or with such sound reasons, that it constituted a community in itself that existed, separate and besieged, right in the middle of an uncomprehending environment, to which its very processes of awareness were alien and antithetical.

If the search for a new, more direct experience of the self is the overriding quest of this time, and if this means getting down to what Negroes call the nitty-gritty and existentialists call the essential reality, women may be better equipped than men for the arduous journey inward. Having been forced into masks and made to act as if the masks were real, having had no choice but to somehow survive as themselves *within* a role, and having at last gained that psychic freedom without which all social freedom is a sham, young women today are singularly prepared to function on the personal, subjective, nonabstract, *now* level where this generation (boys as well as girls) believes its truths will be found. In one sense, women have been in this territory from the beginning. They intimately know the disparity between the actor and the part he plays, between social codes and human nature; and it is this very disparity that has come to obsess young people today, revealing, as it does, the layer on layer of hypocrisy, deceit and complacency under which most older citizens of modern society bury their bad consciences, while the world worsens for lack of simple love and honesty. The antidote to this obsession is to tell it like it is, as the New Girl is intent on doing; and it may not be too farfetched to prophesy that the girls of this generation will affect its future as decisively as the boys.

Indeed, there are even signs of a temporary imbalance between the sexes, for which the New Girl is partially responsible. Some young men find it difficult to adjust to her expectation of full sexual pleasure, as well as moral equality; or her insistence that, insofar as she has come out from behind her masks, he

must do no less and meet her as nakedly as she wants to meet him; or her eager involvement in all the things that, up until now, he may have considered *his* province. Ironically, the New Girl's rediscovery of femininity may compel men into a re-evaluation of some of the more "he-mannish" aspects of masculinity, for she knows that having to prove one's manliness is as false as having to act womanly and, though she understands the dilemma, she has less and less patience with it, and this is bound to put a certain degree of pressure on men. Nevertheless, there are an equal number of signs that women have now evolved to a point where they can admit that today's men, far from being only protectors or breadwinners or Casanovas, sometimes suffer from the same anxieties, insecurities and identity crises that were thought of in the past as peculiarly female problems. Certainly the New Girl is better equipped than her older sister to offer that human understanding (as against simple mothering) that such problems deserve, and this feeling of likeness, this similarity of emotional experience, this sense of being in the same capsizable boat (in terms of the society) is a powerful asset.

There are even reasons to suspect that the eventual righting of these old sexual imbalances and the new, less antagonistic male-female polarity that could result may do away at last with the centuries-old notion that men and women are somehow unalterably locked in an oblique opposition to each other, like sumo wrestlers poised in an embrace at once violent and erotic—a notion that is at the bottom of what older generations have always called the battle of the sexes. There have been periods of armistice in this battle and there have been periods of armed truce, but the urge to dominate or undermine (from one side or the other) has gone on and on relentlessly.

What the emergence of the New Girl suggests is that at last there may be some hope for a real and lasting peace, in which the truly feminine and the truly masculine can exist side by side, acknowledging the similarity of desire that drives them to merge and the differences of consciousness that keep them happily distinct; neither any longer seeking to subject or subvert the other, but both united in the effort to cultivate those areas where polarities can converge.

In this light, the Postfeminist Girl is pioneering in what may be the emotional landscape of tomorrow, a new Garden of Eden from which only the sense of sin and dissemblance will be expelled, and clearly men will profit fully as much as she from her explorations into a more candid and authentic femininity. And meanwhile, they have the mingled pleasure and astonishment of her company.