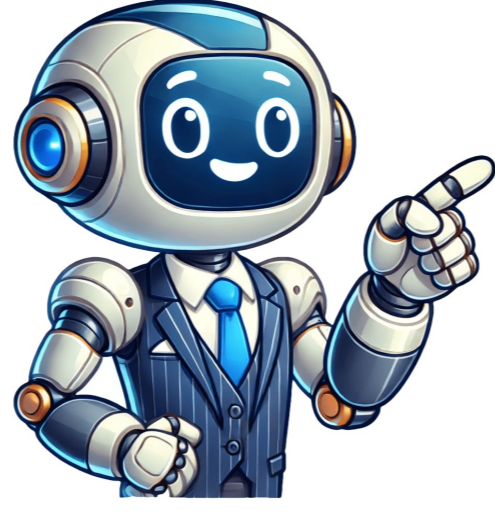


I'm not a robot



Playgirl Magazine: A Challenge to Playboy's Dominance ===== Lambert, a nightclub owner in Garden Grove, California, wanted to give Playboy a run for its money in 1971. With the help of William Miles Jr., he invested \$20,000 and opened an office in Los Angeles' Century City. The magazine featured nude centerfolds alongside hard-hitting features by and for women, with the first issue hitting the newsstand in June 1973. One of its cover lines: "Compulsions of the promiscuous woman." It sold out, moving six hundred thousand copies in four days. At its peak during the late seventies, each issue sold around 1.5 million copies. Playgirl's debut issue included lifestyle features and no full-frontal nudity. Playgirl's debut was met with success and controversy. Women could now compare men's bodies just as men compared women's, according to Nancie Martin, editor-in-chief for part of the eighties. "You take on the power of what was the male gaze," she says. However, some critics argue that Playgirl's true legacy is in normalizing sexually objectifying men. The magazine's impact extends beyond its circulation numbers. Ira Ritter, an ad exec and later the owner of Playgirl, states that the magazine paved the way for a product you could buy while on a diaper run or pumping gas. Playgirl provided an opening for male nudity to go mainstream, with Cosmopolitan's iconoclastic editor-in-chief Helen Gurley Brown making waves by publishing the first nude male centerfold. Some feminists like Gloria Steinem reviled Playgirl, but Playgirl was championed as progress for women, with articles on abortion and breast cancer. The magazine in its seventies heyday treated women as people, rather than just sex objects, according to Ira Ritter: remember the cleaning ladies at the osteopathic hospital where I worked in Allentown, Pennsylvania. They'd get a copy of Playgirl every month and sit there on their break cackling and looking at it. The chairman of the board at Hanes, the ladies' nylon company, said he didn't want to reach women who were reading our magazine - that wasn't his market. Estée Lauder wasn't interested in advertising with naked men, perceiving Playgirl as unwholesome and a threat to the status quo. My version of Playgirl was that after six, drugs were okay. So you'd get on the office intercom: "I have weed - does anybody have coke to share?" I think I didn't get stoned there twice. In our introductory issue, most of the models were modestly posed, with hints of pubic hair showing and nude shots from behind. The question of whether to show an actual erection was...well, a hard one. I grew up on the beach in Waikiki. Nudity didn't mean much to me. [Centerfold coordinator] Toni Holt approached me and my manager and asked if I wanted to pose naked. I had to put makeup on my balls and on my ass. I was tan at the time but had a white streak right around my privates, so I had to hire a makeup guy. He goes, "Well...I guess I'm getting paid for this." My shoot was in two places: on the side of the highway outside Palm Springs, and just off the fairway during an LPGA golf event - literally thirty feet from the side of the fairway, just behind the shrubs. Other than the fact that the shoots had a couple of nude shots and some shirt-off, boy-cheesecake...you weren't doing anything, just standing there trying to look attractive. It was fairly easy to get people to pose nude right off the street. I only remember one model who was reluctant to show his penis. The majority were people who didn't work out at all. They just were well proportioned. Now, every 12-year-old has abs. Nobody told me it was a nude centerfold! But I was game. We were doing the shooting and [the photographer kept saying], "Well, you can't show that." I said, "For Christ's sake, man, if it's gonna be a nude centerfold, that's what I was born with." They got a call for so many more that they turned everybody face-forward after that. My mom loved my pictures. At her memorial, her bridge club mentioned Mom had brought the magazine out, boasting, "This is my son." It's been over 40 years and I am still being asked [about] my decision. [Legendary Dodgers coach] Tommy Lasorda's wife asked me, "What were you thinking?" People love to ask, "Why did you do that?" I don't know; they told me to take my pants off, so I did. Our biggest problem was [that our male models] had only a history of Playboy, so our photographers and the men themselves would pose like they had seen in Playboy. They were photographing men as if they were women, lounging around on sofas. "Here's a guy lying on a sofa with a soft dick." It's like, what's he waiting for? He's waiting for you to pay him, I'm assuming. In 1979, at my first meeting with the editors, there was this huge argument about whether [models] should have hard-ons. We were in a restaurant and I'm sitting there with all of these women, three martinis into it, listening to them fight. I remember the waiter looking at me like, "What the hell is going on here?" They didn't want a full-on erection, so the photographer shot pictures as I went down...giving them the opportunity to select the degree of erection. My shoot was in two places: on the side of the highway outside Palm Springs, and just off the fairway during an LPGA golf event. Other than the fact that the shoots had a couple of nude shots and some shirt-off, boy-cheesecake...you weren't doing anything, just standing there trying to look attractive. It was fairly easy to get people to pose nude right off the street. I only remember one model who was reluctant to show his penis. The majority were people who didn't work out at all. They just were well proportioned. Now, every 12-year-old has abs. Playgirl's Gay Problem Playgirl's struggle to represent diverse models reflected a broader challenge in the publishing industry. In an effort to attract a wider audience, the magazine attempted to feature more black male models, but faced resistance from its white-owned leadership. Sher Bach recalled morning meetings where the topic of discussion would often revolve around the appearance and physique of male models, with a focus on whether they were deemed "attractive" enough for publication. This atmosphere perpetuated a mindset that certain body types or features were more desirable than others. Charmian Carl, who served as the magazine's editor-in-chief, argued that women's desires and preferences were often overlooked in favor of catering to male expectations. She emphasized the need for representation and empowerment, stating that women needed a platform to explore their sexuality freely. Despite these efforts, Playgirl continued to face challenges in its representation of diverse models. Black male models were frequently relegated to smaller spreads within the magazine, with some photographers expressing reluctance to work with them due to budget constraints. Dean Kestor noted that securing models who fit the magazine's ideal was often hindered by financial limitations. This issue led to a lack of diversity in terms of physique and representation. In contrast, other publications such as Black Inches achieved significant success in featuring black male models on their covers, despite facing similar concerns about demographics and audience reception. The decline of the print edition of Playgirl in 2009 marked the end of an era for the magazine. Its struggles to adapt to changing reader habits and the rise of free online content had a lasting impact on its trajectory. The magazine's rise to fame featured Levi Johnston, the father of one of Sarah Palin's grandchildren, and its legendary issue-release parties. ===== Playgirl stopped regular print publication, but continued as a quarterly or less frequent online presence. The print rights were acquired by Magna Publishing Group in 2011. Gone are the days of topics like breast cancer and marital rape, and interviews with Maya Angelou, replaced by content targeted towards gay readers. At the end of its print incarnation, Playgirl's vice president of marketing stated that it was a case of diminishing returns. The magazine had pioneered the normalization of male nudity, which no longer hurt an actor's career as much. Nicole Caldwell recalled parties where models would attend topless and be given sex toys and condoms. Colleens Kane said she walked from her job at Bust to a corporate cubicle environment dedicated to producing hardcore pornography. Greg Weiner described Levi Johnston as nervous during his shoot, while Daniel Nardicio credited Andy Cohen for helping him secure the actor's participation. Michele Zipp mentioned Carl Ruderman discovered the idea of featuring gay content in Playgirl, leading to its revamp in 2002. The magazine's past featured smart women who wrote for it, but was still owned by men who did not support a feminist publication. Playgirl magazine was founded in 1973 by Douglas and Jenny Lambert. The idea behind it was to create a magazine that would allow women to explore their sexuality openly. They wanted to give women the opportunity to look at pictures of naked men and pay money for them, just like men do. The magazine's mission statement was to showcase real men in real spaces, as opposed to anonymous nude bodies on seamless paper backgrounds. The first issue featured Scott Dutton, a blond hunk posing for a female photographer. His photo captured the tone of the publication, which was freedom and playfulness. This encapsulated Playgirl's approach, described by Dennis Forbes: "real men showcased in real spaces." Over time, the magazine featured many famous actors, athletes, singers, and models. The centerfolds became increasingly muscular and less hairy, reflecting changing cultural ideas of the male body. Despite these changes, most of the men on the cover made eye contact with the viewer and smiled. They were not idols to be worshiped from afar but rather the object of a fantasy seduction. I had the opportunity to work with Richard Armas in 1997 at his Hollywood studio. He was one of the most prolific fashion photographers of those days, known for creating some of the sexiest and most iconic Playgirl pictorials. Playgirl and its lasting impact on American culture have left an indurable mark. Founded by Douglas Lambert in 1973, the magazine aimed to challenge traditional erotic men's magazines like Playboy, which was founded by Hugh Hefner. The publication faced legal issues with Playboy over trademark infringement but managed to settle amicably. Playgirl Magazine's Evolution: From Voyeuristic Fantasy to Hard-Hitting Journalism The magazine's early days were marked by a shift from mainstream acceptance to more titillating content, with models and celebrities often objectifying themselves for the sake of the publication. In the '70s, Playgirl featured men with long hair and bodies that epitomized working-class fantasies. This aesthetic continued into the 2000s, with Arnold Schwarzenegger becoming a symbol of male physicality. However, photoshoots also explored the idea of young office workers fantasizing about their coworkers. The magazine's focus on voyeuristic fantasy has led some to argue that it caters to men's desires rather than their own experiences. Playgirl's past contributors, such as Truman Capote and Maya Angelou, were drawn to its more serious journalism during its early years. However, the magazine changed hands several times, leading to a decline in its journalistic focus. Today, Playgirl is attempting to shift its brand, moving away from full-frontal nudity and towards more mainstream content. Despite this shift, the magazine still features nude men on its covers, citing the changing cultural landscape as a factor. With the rise of social media, users can access sexual content anywhere, making Playgirl's focus less necessary. The magazine's past has also included conservative eras, such as during the late Reagan years when it ran less explicit content. However, Crescent's acquisition saw the publication become more overtly adult-oriented. Today, PlaygirlTV offers video content with more explicit material, although this is not promoted by the main brand. The magazine still attracts a dedicated audience, and its attempts to incorporate celebrity covers and interviews have driven sales. The rise of celebrities like Maluma has made it easy for magazines to capitalize on the public's obsession with their personal lives. Even Meryl Streep's cover helped drive sales, despite many being embarrassed by their purchase. Playgirl's approach to sex and celebrity culture is undeniable, driving discussions in its interviews with famous women like Grace Jones and Jane Fonda. The publication has navigated changing times, from the objectification of men to the rise of social media and changing attitudes towards sex. people who are gay", he added with a smile. Daniel agreed that men who are straight and hot attract the attention of the gay audience because they have been fetishized as heterosexual men. "I remember this guy, Rian Buzzini, who was Playgirl Man of the year, and also worked as a model for Versace," said Mickey. "Playgirl was the only place where you would see attractive men doing things other than being sports figures or movie stars." When the magazine was run by a gay man, they featured many gay porn stars, recalled Mickey. In 2007, the magazine was going to the white party in Palm Springs and Southern Decadence of New Orleans, but it started moving away from its focus on women. "It had become a gay magazine," he said. "But again, there are gay magazines, and I don't think Playgirl needs to be one - gays are welcome to look, of course." Trans representation is gradually appearing, with stars like Jinx Monsoon, especially at a difficult time for trans people in US laws. Right now, Playgirl is undergoing a major change, dealing with the shift from print to digital. "It doesn't matter really if you're print or digital, people will see you in a digital format," reflected Mickey, who also works at Paper. "I'm used to that from Paper." Many brands don't produce advertising campaigns for print because they don't get enough returns. Playgirl has lost its connection with young people, and Daniel feels its rich history as part of American pop culture needs to be highlighted, which is what the book intends. "You see it in references in Greg Arakki movies, Tina Fey's skits," ze said. "It would be hard to deny its relevance."

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