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The Girl Project

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She's accomplished, career-driven, economically independent, athletic, and sexually empowered—in short, she has everything early feminists could have hoped for. She's today's "new single woman" and also the subject of Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's book *Why There Are No Good Men Left*. Whitehead is not the only one to take notice of the "new single woman". Others too have begun to document the phenomenon, among them Kay Hymowitz, a contributor to *City Journal*, who has dubbed the changing lifestyle of single women the "New Girl Order."^[1] In *Prude: How the Sex-Obsessed Culture Damages Girls (and America, Too!)*, another author, Carol Platt Liebau lists the limitless opportunities available to young women in America which have afforded them a plethora of advantages in education, career, and overall life success.^[2] Yet, all the while describing this New Girl Order and the progress toward freedom and equality for women which it heralds, these same authors have begun to warn that the phenomenon of the "new single woman" is not without its problems. The main thrust of Whitehead's book, for example, is concerned with understanding why the modern-day accomplished and highly successful single woman is demonstrably *unsuccessful* in her pursuit of a husband. Hymowitz points out that the New Girl Order which seems to give women everything they could possibly want is also partially responsible for a worldwide drop in fertility rates and a "worrying ambivalence toward domestic life and the men who would help create it."^[3] Liebau highlights how the "sexual liberation" experienced by new single women greatly curbs self-fulfillment and damages their romantic lives. She writes, "Today, American girls are forced to navigate a minefield more challenging, difficult, and pressure-filled than ever before when it comes to one vital topic: sex."^[4] So, while new single women are given unprecedented opportunities and experience extraordinary success as compared to their earlier counterparts, they are, at the same time, fundamentally dissatisfied with their lives. Though successful, they are unhappy.

How, then, did the New Girl Order come about? Was it the result of a consciously pursued ideal or merely the result of economic and demographic shifts? And why are highly educated, successful women unable to find men to marry? These questions can only be adequately understood within the context of the feminist movement as a whole. In other words, the experiences and frustrations of the new single woman will only make sense when viewed as the next step in the conscientious movement for women's liberation.

This essay seeks to understand the nature and purpose of the "Girl Project" (the term coined by Whitehead for the education of the new single woman) in light of and in organic connection with the feminist movement in America. To this end, we will draw a brief but detailed sketch of the "new single woman" and then discuss the problems which she finds herself facing. This will be followed by the history and goals of the "Girl Project" as understood primarily by Whitehead and, then, so that we can understand the project even better, a look at the complex movement of feminism as a whole. In light of this examination, we will attempt to elucidate the errors underlying the Girl Project in order to understand why it has engendered intractable problems. Lastly, we will turn to one of the Girl Project's unintended consequences: the "child-man" phenomenon.

Who is the “new single woman”?

Who is the new single woman that has drawn so much attention? Whitehead claims that this woman does not fit any of the old stereotypes. She is not the “middle-aged secretary” or the “chaste old maid” whom everyone turns to for advice. [5] She doesn’t pursue a career in the city just to find a wealthy husband, or an underemployed woman who eventually leaves her job to get married. On the contrary, what attracts this young woman to the city is that “she shares its metabolism” because “both run on energy, excitement, novelty, talk, and espresso highs.”[6] Whitehead maintains that this woman is easy to spot because she is “the stylish young woman in black, a tote bag slung over her shoulder and a cell phone pressed to her ear, talking and gesturing as she makes her way down Wall Street or K Street or Newbury Street or any other major urban thoroughfare.”[7] She always appears to be on the move. She works long hard hours, works out to stay fit through regular exercise, and spends her evenings at clubs and bars hoping to meet attractive men. Hymowitz adds to this a more colorful illustration of the new single woman as “spending [her] hours working [her] abs and [her] careers, sipping cocktails, dancing at clubs, and talking about relationships.”[8]

Whitehead lists several defining features which shape the iconic image of the new single woman. Firstly, she is not defined by her “social rebellion” as were the Flappers of the 1920’s, or her “non-traditional work” as would be Rosie the riveter. On the contrary, the new single woman “embodies a new model of success based on educational and professional achievement.” [9] While old models distinguished women in terms of the absence of marriage, the new single woman is defined in terms of “the remarkable path she follows virtually from cradle to career.”[10] Hymowitz concurs here, stating that “Today’s aspiring middle-class women are gearing up to be part of the paid labor market for most of their adult lives; unlike their ancestral singles, they’re looking for careers, not jobs.”[11] This path guides young women’s lives and provides them with “an operating manual” for adulthood; it shapes their identity and goals.[12] Secondly, the new single woman is able to achieve (even at a young age) an independence that rests largely or completely on her own accomplishments and resources.[13] She has none other to thank for her achievements save herself and her own hard work.

Thirdly, the new single woman is well educated—which explains how she is able to achieve such a high degree of independence. Whitehead points out that in a relatively short period of time, women have become the majority on undergraduate college campuses. [14] What’s more, these women are not only seeking to obtain degrees within traditional “female” fields, but also in traditional “male” fields such as biology, business, engineering, and computer science.[15] The increase in opportunities, however, takes place even earlier; Whitehead shows that new career paths were already opened for these young women at the high school level. In the last thirty years, the American high school has become more “girl-friendly” by allowing young women equal opportunity to pursue traditionally “male” fields.[16] What is more, high schools have also expanded overall opportunities for girls in order for them to prepare adequately for college. Whitehead writes,

They’ve created special academic programs for the advanced, talented, and gifted, established international study opportunities, boosted school participation in math and music competitions, expanded their athletic facilities, designed programs to encourage participation in nontraditional Olympic sports, and created opportunities for advanced high school students to take courses at nearby colleges. [17]

While the same programs have been offered to male students, the response of female students is worth noting. For example, the college-prep program known as Advanced Placement (AP), has grown in popularity since it was instituted for male students in 1955. Whitehead observes that between 1960 and

2001, the number of students taking AP exams went from 10,531 to 800,000. [18] The percentage of female test takers has steadily increased from 35 percent in 1985 to 45 percent in 2001.[19] Young women taking college preparatory classes are not only focusing on stereotypically female subjects but are also taking more and more “male” subjects.[20] Whitehead also points out that the popularity of all-female educational institutions gives evidence of the growing emphasis on the academic “fast-track” for girls.[21] Many of the advocates of these schools claim that they allow young women to excel in traditionally male fields without the negative competition from their male counterparts.[22] With these statistics in mind, it is clear that the accomplishments of the new single woman are due largely to the educational opportunities she has received.

The fourth characteristic which marks the new single woman is that she is athletic. Along with focusing on keeping her physical body trim and fit, she is actively involved in a variety of sports. Whitehead writes that popular sports played by the new single woman include lacrosse, soccer, baseball, field hockey, and basketball. [23] While many of these are offered in schools, it is also the case that more and more parents are encouraging their daughters, as they once encouraged their sons, to excel in the world of athletics.

Not only is the new single woman well-educated, athletic, economically independent, and career driven, she is also sexually liberated. [24] This, in large part, is because the new single woman grew up after the sexual revolution. Pre-marital sex has been normalized for her; it is “no big deal.” She sees it plastered all over mass media: in movies, television shows, magazines, and literature.[25] Whitehead observes that by the time she has reached high school, a teenage girl has learned to be frank and open about sexual matters in coed company and to speak about her sexual needs in a matter-of-fact way.[26] Along with this normalizing of sex, the new single woman has come to expect sex as a normal part of dating relationships; as another way to express feelings of love.[27] More than likely, she had her first sexual encounter in her late teens. Carol Platt Liebau writes that the National Survey for Family Growth, taken in 2002, found that 53 percent of girls between fifteen and nineteen (and 38.7 percent of those between fifteen and seventeen) had already had intercourse.[28] What is more, this sexually liberated single woman is taught (through mass media most particularly) to be more aggressive than in times past. Liebau pays particular attention to this, calling young women the “new sexual aggressors.”[29] She offers evidence not only from personal observation of young girls and women in public settings, but also cites a piece from the 16 July 2000 edition of *The Washington Post Magazine*. This piece noted a “trend of girls who openly pursue sex, brag about sex, lie about sex, [and] boldly offer themselves as sexual objects” in a way formerly attributed to male behavior.[30] At the same time that the new single woman is growing up with a matter-of-fact attitude towards sex and taught to be sexually aggressive, it is interesting to note that she has also been educated from childhood about the inherent “dangers” of sex. Whitehead notes that concerned parents and teachers have filled her head with “advice, admonition, and formal teaching in proper touching, sexuality, contraception, condoms, STDs, sexual molestation, the risks of unprotected sex, and date rape with the goal...to be ‘healthy, safe, and in charge.’”[31] In this way, she has been taught simultaneously that sex, while normal, is also rather hazardous.

The sixth and final characteristic of the new single woman is that she is self-focused. She is educated to pursue *personal* success—excellence in academics, athletics, and in her career. What is more, the new single woman is told to put aside the sexual mores of times past and be assertive in her quest for sexual self-fulfillment.

Along with a focus on hard work and career advancement, young women’s new economic independence has afforded them a greater variety of leisure opportunities. Hymowitz takes particular

notice of this trend, stating that these young women spend their free time at “trendy cafés and bars...fancy boutiques, malls...gyms for toning and male-watching; ski resorts and beach hotels.” [32] She also cites *The Economist’s* observation that these women spend their disposable income “on whatever is fashionable, frivolous, and fun.”[33] The new single woman, then, is most concerned with her own self-fulfillment and flourishing lifestyle.

All in all, the new single woman seems to have it all: She has the money to pursue the lifestyle she chooses, she has grown up with a plethora of educational and athletic opportunities at her disposal, and she has been taught to have no sense of shame about her sexuality. Yet, strikingly, though these advancements seem to mark a progressive step for woman’s equality, they also signal new set of struggles and issues. As stated earlier, the young women of this generation are finding it difficult to maintain lasting relationships with members of the opposite sex. Although they have had many pleasurable “flings,” these women complain that the men they date do not want to marry them. Hymowitz writes that the favorite topic of conversation in the New Girl Order is “men’s reluctance to commit.” [34] Whitehead notes that these women who are “accomplished, sophisticated, working singles in their 20’s and 30’s” and “have a surer sense of who they are and what they want in a future life mate” are simultaneously lacking the “supportive social system for their love lives” which women enjoyed in the past.[35] Because of this, the “process” by which these new single women attempt to find husbands is very often “chaotic, unintelligible, and full of unexpected twists.”[36] This is, of course, a source of much anxiety and is one of the main reasons why the lack of stable relationships is such a popular subject of conversation.

Another negative consequence of the new single woman’s lifestyle is the damage she has suffered as a result of being sexually liberated. Liebau’s work, *Prude*, is wholly dedicated to this thesis. She insists that the so-called liberation offered to young women needs to be re-evaluated, asking if it really is empowerment for a young girl to see her primary objective as the eliciting of lustful reactions from men.[37] Liebau observes that young women are exactly like men in a “do-me feminist’s perfect world”: free to satisfy their sexual desires on their own terms.[38] Yet, she concludes that young women, in trying to be like men, are denying themselves truly satisfying lives. Despite the media’s message to the contrary, women are still more emotionally invested in relationships than men are, and they want attention, affection and connection.[39]

A third trend observed among young women is that despite being successful, they are also *stressed out*. The stress begins in childhood as parents put increasing pressure on girls to take advantage of the educational and athletic opportunities available to them and urge them to be successful both in the classroom and on the sports field. The stress continues and intensifies through high school, college, and after graduation. As young women enter the marketplace, they encounter strong pressure to specialize and advance in their careers, which means that women now have the added stress of rising to the top of the corporate ladder. In *Supergirls Speak Out: Inside the Crisis of Overachieving Girls*, author Liz Funk notes the intensity of the pressure young women face today:

Today’s ‘it’ girl isn’t *Clueless’s* flighty heroine Cher—but she has Cher’s style and social calendar, with the ambition of Hilary Clinton, the sports skills of Mia Hamm, the wit of Maureen Dowd, and the fake happy endings of a Kate Hudson movie. The ‘it’ girl is pretty, smart, and always in control. At first glance, she’s, well, perfect.[40]

Funk states further that the stereotypical Supergirl “has it all: the good grades, the blossoming career, the impressive activities résumé, the ambitions, and also the good-looking boyfriend, the perfect body, and the impressive social calendar.” [41] This image, projected by the mass media and echoed in part

by parents, teachers, and peers, instills in young women the sense that they need to excel in everything, “academically, professionally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and be in perfect balance...be a ‘perfect 10’ in every area [because] they think that perfection is not only desirable, but possible.”[42] In an article reviewing Funk’s book, “Supergirl Meltdown: How Middle-class Girls Today Are Under Unprecedented Pressure to Succeed,” Sarah Hughes notes that the pressure on young women to have everything carries with it the standard that women must excel in *both male and female spheres*: “they must be good at ‘girl’ stuff—cultivating relationships and being empathetic—as well as being good at ‘guy’ stuff—competing aggressively both at college and in the workplace.”[43] Further, the many opportunities that women are told they are privileged to have only heighten the pressure to succeed. Hughes is critical of this trend because the resulting stress has led to an increase in eating disorders, depression, and anxiety.[44]

Interestingly, both Hughes and Funk point out that even as women succeed, they are convinced that their accomplishments do not amount to anything. The insecurities these single women face, in other words, have not been dispelled by what they have achieved. The upshot here is that this step forward in the struggle for women’s liberation is not without serious drawbacks.

How did the new single woman come to be?

Having taken a detailed look at what defines and sets apart the “new single woman,” let us now turn to the forces that have shaped her. Whitehead contends that the new single woman is not primarily the result of a demographic or economic shift, as Hymowitz would suggest, but rather the outcome of a consciously pursued ideal. She writes, “Today’s single women are like specimen orchids. They’ve been bred to win prizes.” [45] In other words, this phenomenon is the result of what she calls the “Girl Project”—a “self-conscious and highly successful social project whose chief purpose was to prepare young women for adult lives of economic self-sufficiency, social independence, and sexual liberation.”[46] The goal of this project was to instantiate a new tradition of girl-rearing that would prepare girls for adult lives without dependence on marriage rather than for lives as wives and mothers.[47] What is important to note is that the Girl Project’s aim was not to challenge marriage as an institution or a personal choice for women, but rather to offer women an alternative path on which to embark. Formerly, the benefits of “satisfying work, a good income, sex, a nest, and a nest egg of their own” were only accorded to those who were married; the Girl Project sought to provide a way for women to achieve all of this on their own.[48] And the way to achieve it was through higher education and early career development and preparation.

The new path which the Girl Project forged diverged in many ways from the former one that led to marriage. First of all, it began earlier in life and lasted longer. Whitehead states that the intended time frame for this social project was from age two or three through the mid-twenties, and possibly even into the early thirties. [49] Secondly, according to the “old” path, singlehood was seen as a kind of stepping stone between graduation and marriage. The “new” path, however, gave an innovative meaning to a woman’s being single. Rather than singleness being seen in a negative light, the Girl Project opened up this time to be a positive and more protracted stage in which a woman could primarily focus on her own pursuits. Whitehead writes that this stage “combines some of the communal features of college life with the new responsibilities of earning a living, paying off college, and gaining some measure of financial and residential stability.”[50] The new path projected by the Girl Project is also more demanding and fast-paced than the old. The traditional path towards marriage, which gave women training in the domestic arts and educated them according to what they would need

for their future lives as wives and mothers, did not require a college degree.[51] The path oriented towards economic independence stresses precocious performance and achievement, the acquisition of time management and goal-setting skills, early exposure to the world of paid professional work, an academically challenging school career, admission to a good college, a baccalaureate degree, and perhaps a graduate or professional degree as well, and then the successful launching of a professional career.[52]

The final difference between the path created by the Girl Project and the former, more traditional path was the specific training given to women to prepare them for lives in the competitive corporate world. Rather than being taught the virtues that would attract a suitable husband and aid in their future marriages (e.g., helpfulness, charm, niceness, thrift, patience, personal sacrifice and forbearance), these young women were trained to be assertive, competitive, to strive for individual excellence, and to take initiative and responsibility for their future economic lives. [53]

What was the inspiration for the development of the Girl Project? Whitehead notes two principal sources: the feminist vision of an independent life for women rooted in paid professional work and the divorce revolution. [54] As to the first, she notes that feminism in the 1960's sought to enable women to pursue opportunities in education. By the 1970's this goal expanded to include other areas such as sports.[55] The feminist vision prompted them to put their energies into ensuring that the rights of women would be expanded and protected. The second source of inspiration—the divorce revolution—was not only a social trend, but brought with it its own pedagogy. Whitehead writes that as state after state adopted no-fault divorce laws in the 1970's, the divorce rate began to rise until it reached a historic high in the 1980's.[56] It can be concluded that a good percentage of new single women have had personal experience with divorce. The pedagogy of the divorce revolution espoused by parents, teachers, girls' advocates, and youth leaders alike was that marriage is not a stable, economic partnership but rather somewhat of a “gamble” and that the women who suffered most from divorce were the ones who were economically unprepared. With the looming possibility of divorce, it no longer seemed wise to prepare women only to be wives and mothers. Instead “it seemed more practical and realistic to prepare girls for lives of economic self-sufficiency and social independence.”[57]

Whitehead marks the beginning of the Girl Project with the signing of Title IX of the Omnibus Education Amendments into law by President Richard Nixon in 1973. Title IX states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” [58] The signing of Title IX was preceded by a statement made by President Nixon's Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities in April of 1970 which linked sex discrimination in education to a denial of employment opportunity.[59] Although Title IX was originally concerned with women's education, it was eventually applied to the education of girls as well.[60] Because of this amendment, the need for women's total equality began to be more widely recognized. Statistics bear out that Title IX was extremely successful: In 1957, only 35.6 percent of women were enrolled in higher education but by the year 2000, this statistic had risen to 56.1 percent.[61] Title IX also helped to break the barrier for girls in the world of athletics. In 1970, only 7 percent of women were active in intercollegiate sports compared to 42 percent in 2000.[62]

Whitehead notes the significance of Title IX, not only in its widening of opportunities for women, but also in the way it affected parents, teachers, and those principally involved in girl-rearing. Increasingly, sports were not only emphasized as a hobby for girls to pursue, they were also viewed as a means for instilling in women the strong character traits they would need to succeed in future careers. [63] At the

same time, the Girl Project did not just want to “borrow” male traits and project them onto women; rather, it wanted to synthesize these attributes with much of the “moral purity and social uplift of the girlhood tradition.”[64] The girls who were encouraged to play sports were taught to be role models and ambassadors in their competitiveness. Whitehead also observes that simultaneous with the instilling of these “strong” character traits in girls was the forming of a new physical image for girls to embrace. This image projected the message: strong is beautiful.[65] In the same way that the new “virtues” were a synthesizing of male and female traits, this new physical image “is neither traditionally feminine nor androgynously feminist [but rather] borrows elements from both and comes up with a synthesis of feminine strength.”[66]

The Historical Roots of the Girl Project

All evidence points to the fact that the Girl Project has been highly successful. Women are now excelling in the worlds of academics, athletics, and business and becoming financially independent. Further, from childhood, little girls believe they have the opportunity and ability to be anything they desire to be. A whole new world has been opened to women. They have been offered an alternative to the path of marriage and given the tools to navigate it effectively.

Unfortunately, the success of the Girl Project has not necessarily translated into a *happier* woman. Even though the new single woman is, on the whole, wealthier and leads an active life with plenty of leisure time, she still tends to be frustrated with her lot in life. Why is it that with all her success she still feels inadequate? Why is the fact that she is able to gratify her immediate sexual desires not enough to bring her true satisfaction? Finally, why is it that in all her accomplishments she can find no means to help her find a good husband?

In order to understand and respond to these questions and to more fully delve into this “failure” of the Girl Project, it is important to situate it within the feminist movement as a whole in the United States. Although Whitehead claims that the Girl Project came to be in order to provide more opportunities for women, this does not seem to account for the radicality of this phenomenon and its consequences. In other words, the Girl Project can only be understood properly as the next step in the feminist vision of a new womanhood.

In a book written for the Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics entitled *The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution*, Marguerite A. Peeters gives a thorough outline of the history, goals, and specific assumptions of the feminist movement. At the beginning of the 19th century, women were excluded from much of public life; they could not vote, own property, or participate in politics or higher education.[67] In addition, the industrial revolution created a rift between the economic and domestic spheres and, consequently, stripped the home of much of its dignity.[68] With this segregation and marginalization of women both socially and politically, women began to form themselves into movements to demand change. As women’s rights congresses and movements began to succeed in obtaining greater equality before the law, feminism began to pursue other objectives: it fought for socioeconomic parity and access to employment usually reserved for men; it also sought access to contraception and abortion as conditions of respect for women’s rights.[69] Key leaders in the feminist movement such as Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) and Emma Goldman (1869–1940) were particularly vocal in terms of anti-conception and abortion campaigns.[70] It was these strong and charismatic leaders and the individual successes of the various congresses that fueled the growth of the feminist movement.

What were the goals of the feminist movement in the United States? While citing the various forms that feminism has taken in the course of its history—e.g., Egalitarianism, Marxism, and Eco-Feminism—Peeters states that the objective common to them all is to “eradicate from culture the causes of feminine ‘inequality’ and ‘oppression’ and to restructure society from top to bottom according to their own ideological scheme—a scheme of deconstructing the established order and the order written in nature.” [71] Key here is the feminist assumption that the oppression of women is rooted principally in their *nature*. Consequently, the feminist vision was to liberate the woman from her nature in order that she would be free to recreate herself.

One can begin to deduce the assumptions which undergird feminism from looking at its goals. A key philosophy guiding the movement was that of noted feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir who believed that the being of a woman was not a “given” but rather a social construct. [72] Beauvoir succinctly states, “One is not born a woman, but becomes a woman.” [73] Further, according to Beauvoir, the construct of woman takes various forms which depend on her attitude. If the woman is passive, she submits to the traditional ideals of femininity and becomes a spouse and mother. [74] An active woman, on the contrary, is one who “liberates herself, becomes ‘herself’ and lives for herself, [thereby being able to] *own herself* and *control her destiny*.” [75] This woman radically frees herself from any fundamental relationship to men, others, and to God.

The philosophy of Beauvoir provoked women to reject the oppression of marriage and motherhood and seek, instead, a new construction that brought liberation. A new construction meant, of course, a *deconstruction* of the traditional ideals of womanhood. If the old constructions were innate, then they could continue to be used against women. Gender feminists therefore sought to establish a distinction between *sex*, one’s biological characteristics which are unchangeable, and *gender*, feminine or masculine traits whose differences are socially constructed and therefore changeable. [76] This distinction posited a rift between one’s body and social function, thereby affirming the feminist principle that “biology is not destiny.” With the emancipation of women from the ideals formerly placed on them, feminists were able to “recreate” the ideal of womanhood.

It is clear from this brief discussion of the feminist movement that its primary goal was to eradicate any sense of traditional femininity in order to construct a model that was independent of any essential relation to the body, men, or God. Peeters, therefore, draws the conclusion that the feminist movement was essentially *anti-feminine*. [77] One could make the claim that feminists were not only seeking to have the same rights and opportunities as men, but, more basically, to have the right *not* to be feminine. Ironically, in this they were actually agreeing with their “male oppressors” that their femininity (as mothers and spouses) was something to disdain.

The fundamental assumptions of the feminist movement and its (negative) reaction to femininity allow us to better understand the Girl Project—and some of the problems it has engendered. The economically independent, athletically ambitious, career-driven, sexually liberated new single woman is none other than the long-awaited feminist ideal of reconstructed womanhood. It is she who has taken the place of the old ideal, who was oppressed in her role as spouse and mother. The new single woman has everything her feminist predecessors hoped for, yet, as already mentioned, she is dissatisfied with her life. She does not feel liberated, but, rather, oppressed by the pressure to excel in every arena. More than that, one can make the claim that the problems resulting from the Girl Project stem from the essentially “anti-feminine” education of women. In being trained to be independent of man, she presents no complement to him, and he, in turn, feels no impetus to unite with his “other half.” So, while the feminist ideals behind the Girl Project were meant to give rise to a happier and more fulfilled self-reliant woman, they have sadly fallen short of this goal.

The New Feminine Ideal and Men

While the women in the New Girl Order were being cultivated like prize-winning specimen orchids, where were the men?

Kay Hymowitz, one of the authors previously mentioned, has devoted her most recent book to this subject. In *Manning Up, How the Rise of Women has Turned Men into Boys*, she expounds upon the parallel phenomenon of the “child-man” that has arisen alongside the “alpha-girl” of the New Girl Order.[78] She describes this child-man as the opposite of the alpha girl:

If she is ambitious, he is a slacker. If she is hyper-organized and self-directed, he tends toward passivity and vagueness. If she is preternaturally mature, he is happily not...she drinks sophisticated cocktails in mirrored bars, he burps up beer on ratty sofas...If her aspirational hero is the urbane Carrie Bradshaw [of *Sex in the City*], his is well, the potty-mouthed and -brained Adam Sandler.[79]

Hymowitz sets out to prove the existence of this “child-man” mostly through cultural anecdotes since “no one keeps data on the number of men with *Star Wars* posters in their bedrooms.”[80] Even as she acknowledges the critics of this method, Hymowitz finds it striking that these anecdotes continue to pile up and believes that they show a fundamental change in the experience of the modern man.

What is the evidence for this? Well, Adam Sandler’s movie career for one. Sandler has become famous for his films of male arrested development, and they have garnered over \$2.5 billion worldwide. [81] Something in his work is resonating with the audience. Hymowitz also notes the arrival of *Maxim* in 2007, a magazine that sought to be an “anti-*Playboy*” that would supply readers with what they say they want, rather than with any of the magazine’s own philosophies.[82] What did the editors discover? The modern single man wanted to hear simply that he did not have to grow up.[83] *Maxim* has responded in kind with a medium that provides its readers ample amounts of child-man entertainment. Other examples include shows such as the *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and Comedy Central’s *The Man Show*, famous for featuring half-naked women, interviews with porn-stars, drinking songs, and a theme song that includes the lyrics “Quit your job and light a fart/Yank your favorite private part.”[84] Perhaps, though, the single biggest datum pointing to the existence of the child-man is the multi-billion dollar video game industry. The rise in the use of video-games by men ages 18 to 34 is striking:

A study of video game use in the last quarter of 2006 [found that] almost half—48.2 percent—of 18- to 34-year-old American men had used a console and did so on average *2 hours and 43 minutes per day*. (That’s 13 minutes more than 12- to 17-year-olds...)[85]

How did this “child-man” come to be? Was he the intentional consequence of a quest for liberation by male activists? Hymowitz poignantly describes the child-man as the “lost son of a host of economic and cultural changes.” [86] He is the result of several factors: the demographic shift she has entitled “pre-adulthood,” the *Playboy* philosophy, feminism, the new media, and a muddled cultural sense of what it means to be a husband and father.[87] For Hymowitz, the new stage in life described as “pre-adulthood” has affected both men and women and is a term that describes those who see themselves as “in transition” to adulthood.[88] While young men and women who describe themselves as “pre-adults” may be considered adults legally, they lack the social identity that accompanies settling into an occupation, home, or marital family that has almost always been associated with adulthood.[89] Pre-adults are waiting to marry until later, seeing marriage as something that they will do once they have mastered self-definition.

As was already discussed earlier, for the modern woman (or the “new single woman”) the stage of pre-

adulthood is the fulfillment of the feminist goal of giving women the opportunity to define themselves in new ways. Without the pressure to marry and the newfound freedom of self-exploration, women are able to put off marriage indefinitely in order to pursue their careers. Instead, they find themselves in a world which caters to them. As Hymowitz sees it, the fundamental truth of this new stage is that “girls rule.”[90]

If “girls rule” in pre-adulthood, where do the boys fit in? Enter the child-man. As the culture was giving women new and unprecedented opportunities to succeed, it was telling men that not much was expected of them. Hymowitz notes that in times past, adult manhood was almost universally associated with marriage and fatherhood. [91] While there are exceptions to this, it is noted by anthropologist David Gilmore that manhood was a “critical threshold for boys to pass through.”[92] In other words, cultures have consistently provided boys with expectations of what they must do in order to become men. Most often, this meant marriage and fatherhood, and even despite any exceptions, these expectations still held fast. Hymowitz does take into consideration earlier cultural attitudes that evince men’s frustration and distaste for their duties and responsibilities; yet, despite these, there remained considerable social and economic pressure for men to be grown-ups.[93]

Today, men find themselves in a culture that does not give them this impetus. While the child-man’s father and grandfather knew that adult manhood would likely entail marriage and fatherhood (even if this was after some youthful years of a bachelor lifestyle), the modern man finds himself in a culture that does not expect much from him. The women in the New Girl Order are not interested in him as a husband or a father (at least not yet), and certainly not as a provider. Hymowitz notes that “women are quick to remind people that although they like the idea of getting married, they don’t actually *need* a husband or even want one very much.”[94] Further, the media supplies the child-man with endless opportunities to fill his life with entertainment as well as reinforcing the expectation that he do so.

As previously stated, the frustrations of the alpha-girls, or new single women, of the New Girl Order are better understood when placed within the context of the feminist movement as a whole. The same can be said for the child-man. If the alpha-girl was a culturally pursued ideal of feminism, then the child-man was an *unintended consequence*. As modern women freed themselves from the “oppressive” feminine ideals of marriage and motherhood, modern men were no longer defined by an expectation to be a husband or a father, or even to pursue any new ideal of manhood. While the alpha-girl defines herself by her career, athleticism, and sexual empowerment, the child-man finds that there are no expectations for him; he does not have to grow up. He is free to pursue the career of his choice or no career at all—and whatever his income, it is purely at his disposal. The child-man is also free in his sexual pursuits of women. Liberated alpha-girls provide him with the perfect opportunity to find sexual pleasure without the pressure to marry them.[95]

Kay Hymowitz’s book, then, helps to give a more adequate understanding of the plight of the new single woman in her frustrated search for a “good man.” As the above review concludes, “In being trained to be independent of man [the new single woman of today] presents no complement to him.” Thus, while the alpha-girl complains that “there are no good men left,” the child-man responds, “Why does it matter? You don’t need me.”

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[1] Kay S. Hymowitz, “The New Girl Order,” *City Journal* (Autumn 2007).

[2] Carol Platt Liebau, *Prude: How the Sex-Obsessed Culture Damages Girls (and America, Too!)* (New York: Hachette Book Group USA, 2007), 203.

[3] Hymowitz, "The New Girl Order," 5.

[4] Liebau, *Prude*, 3.

[5] Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Why There Are No Good Men Left: The Romantic Plight of the New Single Woman* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 62.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Hymowitz, 1.

[9] Whitehead, 62.

[10] Ibid, 63.

[11] Hymowitz, 1.

[12] Whitehead, 63.

[13] Ibid, 64-65.

[14] Ibid, 65.

[15] Ibid, 65-66.

[16] Ibid, 67.

[17] Ibid, 68.

[18] Ibid, 69.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid. For example, in 2001, females made up 44 percent of AP chemistry test-takers, compared to 31 percent in the mid-1980's.

[21] Ibid. For example, nationally, since 1991, the average number of applications to girls' schools has increased 32 percent. Applications to Manhattan's private girls' schools have increased 69 percent since 1991. Along with this trend is the establishment of new girls' schools: between 1995 and 1998, 14 new girls' schools were founded. Ibid, 70.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid, 71.

[24] In using this term, I speak in terms of a modern understanding of liberty being that which is without limits.

[25] For example, 70 percent of all television shows were found to include some sexual content, with either portrayals of sex or discussion of sexual themes. This percentage was higher during prime time. This was not only the case in programs for adults; programs with teenagers have an even higher number of scenes with sexual content (at 6.7 per hour) than general programs (Liebau, 90). Liebau also has several striking statistics on the prevalence of sexual messages in music and advertisements. Cf. Liebau, 133-149.

[26] Whitehead, 74.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Liebau, 20.

[29] Ibid, 181.

[30] Ibid, 182.

[31] Ibid, 73.

[32] Hymowitz, 2.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Whitehead, 97.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Liebau, 184.

[38] Ibid, 187.

[39] Ibid, 187-188.

[40] Cited in a book review from *The Today Show's* website, "Stressed Out! The Life of a 'Supergirl.'" Original work is published as follows: Liz Funk, *Supergirls Speak Out: Inside the Secret Crisis of Overachieving Girls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Sarah Hughes, "Supergirl Meltdown: How Middle-class Girls Today Are Under Unprecedented Pressure to Succeed," *Daily Mail Online* (October 2009).

[44] Ibid, 3.

[45] Whitehead, 76.

[46] Ibid, 77.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid, 78.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid, 79. A recent article from a website dedicated to educating parents on how to raise teenagers makes reference to Girls Incorporated, a national youth organization with the goal of “inspiring all girls to become strong, smart, and bold” in order to encourage them to pursue careers in math, science, and engineering. Cf. Tara Swords, “Girl Power: Raising Smart Bold Girls,” *Preteen and Teen Channel*.

[54] Ibid, 78.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid. 79.

[57] Ibid, 80.

[58] Dorothy McBride-Stetson, *Women’s Rights in the U.S.A: Policy Debates and Gender Roles, Third Edition* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 153.

[59] Ibid. The official statement was: “Discrimination in education is one of the most damaging injustices women suffer. It denies them equal education and equal employment opportunity, contributing to a second-class self-image.”

[60] Whitehead, 81.

[61] Dorothy McBride-Stetson, 156.

[62] Ibid., 161.

[63] Whitehead, 88.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 92.

[66] Ibid., 93.

[67] Marguerite A. Peeters, *The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution: Key Concepts, Operational Mechanisms*, trans. Benedict Kobus (Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, 2007), 8.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid, 9.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid, 11.

[72] Ibid, 13.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid, 71.

[77] Ibid, 77.

[78] Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men Into Boys* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 72. It should be noted that other authors have begun to notice the plight of men today. See Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men* (New York, Basic Books, 2007), Kathleen Parker, *Save the Males: Why Men Matter, Why Women Should Care* (New York, Random House, 2008), Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Policies are Harming Our Young Men* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2013), and Helen Smith, *Men on Strike: Why Men Are Boycotting Marriage, Fatherhood, and the American Dream—and Why It Matters* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

[79] Ibid, 110.

[80] Ibid, xii

[81] Ibid, 110.

[82] Ibid, 112. Hymowitz notes that *Playboy* sought to project an image of an intelligent and cultured man, who emulated Hugh Hefner's famous quote that his ideal reader "enjoyed inviting a female acquaintance in for a quiet discussion of Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex."

[83] Ibid, 113.

[84] Ibid, 115–116.

[85] Ibid, 118.

[86] Ibid, 135

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid, 23.

[89] Ibid, 24.

[90] Ibid, 50.

[91] Ibid, 127.

[92] Ibid, 128.

[93] Ibid, 132

[94] Ibid, 72.

[95] And, notably, the rise in the use of hormonal contraceptives freed these men from the worry over unexpected fatherhood. Hymowitz devotes part of her chapter, "The New Girl Order" to exploring this cultural dimension. Cf. 60-63.

