NO MAN'S LAND:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MIDDLE-CLASS

MASCULINITY IN *EBONY* AND *ESQUIRE*,

1948-1953

By

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INTRODUCTION

Masculinity in the post-World War II era conjures up a number of images and thoughts that remain vividly etched in popular memory. Sloan Wilson's 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* captures much of this iconic imagery, but it also illustrates the discontent present in the complicated world of postwar masculinity. Thomas Rath, the protagonist of the novel, struggles to finish the sentence "The most significant fact about me is…" during a job interview, and in doing so reveals his dissatisfaction with societal expectations and realities. Rath thinks of numerous responses to the question, such as "The most significant fact about me is that for four and a half years my profession was jumping out of airplanes with a gun, and now I want to go into public relations," and "the only reason I'm willing to spend my life in such a ridiculous enterprise is that I want to buy a more expensive house and a better brand of gin."[1] Even though Rath possessed many of the hallmarks of postwar masculine success, such as a car, a home, a wife, and children, the happiness and fulfillment it was supposed to bring remained elusive. Of course, those markers of success were not available to all men in the postwar period; but they were the standards that white, middle-class men measured themselves against as the societal norm.[2]

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[1] Sloan Wison, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 16.

[2] James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.

But what about African-American men? What was their image of masculinity?

Did it mirror white middle-class concerns, or was it something altogether different?

While there has been much written about white middle-class masculinity in the postwar

period, comparatively little exists about African-American men.[3] This study seeks to

offer a preliminary examination and comparison of masculinity among both middle-class

whites and African Americans in two contemporarily popular magazines, *Esquire* and

Ebony. With *Esquire* targeted at middle/upper-class white males, and *Ebony* focused on

middle-class African Americans, these magazines present an opportunity to explore the

construction of each respective group's concerns in popular media.

The central argument of this study is that after World War II, white, middle-class

men's emphasis on the nuclear family with the man as father, breadwinner, and head

of the household, was a reactionary attempt to maintain traditional standards of

masculinity in a world where women and minorities were contesting traditional gender

and social roles. However, societal changes affected home life and relationships as well,

causing a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity in white, middle-class masculine

identity. Middle-class African-American men faced a different set of factors constructing

their masculinity. Relying more heavily upon masculine ideals of citizenship, African-

American masculinity was concerned less with defining itself against women than it was

with breaking down the barriers of racial discrimination. By embracing full citizenship

as the primary factor in masculine identity, African-American men's fight against Jim

Crow was essential not only to their racial identity, but to their masculinity as well. Both

white and African-American men were living in a "no man's land," where they sought to

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[3] Ibid., 33.

defend, maintain, and establish their masculinity, albeit with different motivations and goals.

Before evaluating the state of American masculinity in the immediate postwar period, it is necessary to discuss the relevant material concerning the history of masculinity in America. More than any other work, Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America* provides a theoretical framework for this study. One of Kimmel's primary contentions is that American masculinity defined itself not by what it was, but by what it was *not*. In American history, Native Americans, immigrants, African Americans, women, and homosexuals traditionally represented what masculinity was not. After examining *Esquire,* this idea is evident in white middle-class masculinity's reactionary response in the postwar period to encroachment upon the traditional lines of gender definitions. Indeed, it was these others, mainly women, who white men blamed for causing the conflicts facing masculinity during this time.[4]

In *Homeward Bound: Families in the Cold War Era,* Elaine Tyler May asserts that the driving force behind the focus on the home, marriage, and the family in the postwar period was the anxiety that came with living in the Atomic Age.[5] This anxiety included fears of communism, the Soviet Union, and changes in gender and family roles. May, dealing primarily with the white, middle class, asserts that "to alleviate these fears, Americans turned to the family as a bastion of safety in an unsecure world."[6] The findings of this study draw that conclusion into question. That Americans in general, and

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[4] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).
[5] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era,* 1999 ed. (New York: Basic Book, 1999).
[6] Ibid., xviii.

men in particular, were insecure about the world at large is not in dispute. Rather, I argue

that the family was not "a bastion of safety" for men of the white, middle class in the

postwar period; the greatest contributions to masculine insecurity were not in foreign

affairs or atomic anxiety but arose within the home itself. Not only was the family one of

the primary sources of masculine insecurity, but it was also the space where this tension,

anger, anxiety, and insecurity manifested. The political uncertainty of the times affected

masculinity, but the main factor responsible for the focus on "traditional" values lay in

the masculine insecurity that those very values were slipping away, especially in regards

to women and the family.

In terms of African-American masculinity, Martin Summers' *Manliness and its

Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*

provides a much needed history. Summers argues that during this time "manhood

became less defined by production (or engagement in the marketplace), character,

respectability, and the producer values of industry," rather "middle-class Americans

increasingly unlinked manhood from the market…and began to define it in terms of

consumption."[7] Summers acknowledges that this transition was not universal among the

African-American middle class, and notes that some men still identified with the older

producer values of the self-made man. *Manliness and its Discontents* also presents a

solid framework within which to consider African-American masculinity. Summers

contends that most of the works dealing with African-American masculinity grant men of

color little agency. These studies, of which Kimmel's *Manhood in America* is one,

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[7] Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8.

consider African American masculinity only as a negative which 'normative' white masculinity defines itself against. Summers seeks to rectify this issue, intending his study "to recognize black men's agency while also taking the hegemonic power of white, middle-class men seriously."[8] Similarly, one of the goals of my research is to recognize the significance of white, middle-class masculinity in the construction of African-American masculine identity, while at the same time not using African-American masculinity exclusively as a negative to white, middle-class masculinity.

Tom Pendergast's *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture* offers an examination of many American magazines, including *Ebony* and *Esquire*, from 1900 to 1950. While the bulk of Pendergast's study concentrates on the pre-WWII period, some of it is relevant to this study. Pendergast essentially argues that through the facilitation of men's magazines, the Victorian ideals of manhood (the self-made man, personal character and integrity, citizenship) gave way to a masculine identity centered around consumption. *Creating the Modern Man* is well-researched and adds a valuable look at the role consumerism played in creating masculine identity. However, his focus on consumerism is at times too narrow, and in the cases of *Ebony* and *Esquire,* ignores some of the other trends that I seek to illuminate in this study. In terms of men's magazines aimed at whites, Pendergast contends that "editors and contributors to white magazines took an optimistic view of men's prospects, finding ample prospects for men to realize their goals, whether they were personal or work related," and that "contributors to such magazines did not depict themselves as victims…they often wrote with a sense of excitement and anticipation that speaks more to their need to master a

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[8] Ibid., 13.

new situation than to any sense of fear or weightlessness in the face of changing cultural norms."[9] This may have been accurate for the pre-WWII period, and perhaps superficially after, but a closer reading of *Esquire* in the post-WWII period reveals that rather than "excitement" or "anticipation," white, middle-class men felt anxiety and insecurity brought about largely by the "changing cultural norms" Pendergast dismisses. His works makes it clear that consumerism played a role in shaping masculine identity in American magazines. However, it was only one of several characteristics and trends present in the construction of masculine identity.

In his examination of *Ebony* and other African-American magazines, Pendergast finds the same shift from the Victorian ideals of manhood to one rooted in consumerism. He contends that the major difference was that "the presentation of masculinity within black magazines, for example, reveals that 'Victorian' ideals of character, hard work, and integrity retained their validity within the black community well after historians of white masculinity depicted them as outdated."[10] Pendergast argues that the publication and success of *Ebony,* beginning in 1945, marked an end to the embracing of Victorian ideals by African Americans, claiming that "they focused not on the qualities that made a man but on the accouterments that a made man enjoyed."[11] Additionally, he asserts that "*Ebony* eschewed the rhetoric by which earlier black magazines had framed black masculinity. Rejecting the self-made man rhetoric of the accommodationists or the rights-based radicalism of the *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, *Ebony* instead presented men who

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[9] Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture*, *1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 8.
[10] Ibid., 15.
[11] Ibid., 245.

made it on their personality and looks."[12] After examining *Ebony*, Pendergast's

conclusions again appear too narrowly focused on consumerism. Additionally, just as he

made the claim that the Victorian ideals of manhood remained viable among African

Americans longer than historians of white masculinity recognized, I argue that these

ideals continued in *Ebony*. Rather than rejecting the self-made man or rights/citizenship-

based conceptions of masculinity, *Ebony* presented a construction of masculine identity

that centered around those very values.

This study is divided into three parts. Part I examines the construction of white,

middle-class masculinity in *Esquire* magazine from 1948-1953. *Esquire* provides a

valuable microcosm in which to examine the state of white middle-class masculinity. It

was a leading men's magazine of the time, with an average circulation of 833,982 per

year.[13] However, its reach was considerably greater than this number indicates. Every

month a minimum of 471,619 women also read the magazine.[14] This is significant

because this study frequently deals with men and their interactions and opinions about

women, and women's responses. *Esquire's* total readership, including wives and people

outside of the subscriber's family, was approximately 5,301,307.[15]

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[12] Ibid., 256.

[13] This number was reached by taking the circulation numbers provided by *Esquire* for 1950, 1951, and 1952.

[14] Frederick A. Birmingham, "Editorial," *Esquire,* October 1952, 8.
This number was calculated using statistics on *Esquire's* readers from a survey in the magazine. Given a total circulation of 804,948, and the fact that 83.7 percent of those men were married, and 70 percent of those men's wives read every issue of *Esquire*, it equals a total of 471,619 women reading the magazine each month. It is a minimum because an additional 25 percent of women described themselves as occasional readers.

[15] This figure comes from taking a total of 804,948 readers, multiplying it by the average of six people outside of the subscriber's family who, according to *Esquire*, read the magazine each month, and adding the number of wives who read every issue.

After the publication of *Playboy* magazine began in 1953, *Esquire* wavered, but did not entirely change its format. *Playboy's* publication marked an important transition in terms of masculine attitude. Men were looking for new avenues to express their masculinity, and *Esquire* generally provided options within the framework of the nuclear family. *Playboy* promoted a bachelor lifestyle where breadwinning and having a family lacked the importance that it did in *Esquire.* This alternative was an appealing one to men; as Michael Kimmel explains in *Manhood in America,* it was "the decade's most significant cultural contribution to the stock of masculine escape hatches."[16] In *The Hearts of Men,* Barbara Ehrenreich argues that "*Playboy* presented, by the beginning of sixties, something approaching a coherent program for the male rebellion: a critique of marriage" and "a strategy for liberation (reclaiming the indoors as a realm for masculine pleasure)."[17] Although *Esquire* did not promote an outright rejection of marriage, it certainly critiqued it. As for the assertion that *Playboy* was the primary force behind a masculine reclamation of the home, *Esquire* clearly was promoting this trend before *Playboy's* publication. This is not to diminish the cultural impact that *Playboy* had; it is to note that *Playboy* took what *Esquire* promoted and elevated it to a level that *Esquire* was not willing to go. Despite some variance, *Esquire* continued to publish the same kind of articles in the face of the alternative that *Playboy* presented. However, in the mid to late 1950s, it was *Playboy* that became the preferred masculine refuge.

Part I argues that *Esquire's* construction of masculinity was far from the often idyllic imagery of the 1950s breadwinner. A closer look reveals a very different man.

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[16] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 254.
[17] Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1983), 50.

He is insecure in his masculinity because he fears that he may not measure up to societal standards. He may be the breadwinner, but he is anything but content. He may have a house in the suburbs, but he lacks control of it. His insecurity is most evident in his interactions with women. Masculinity took its insecurity and uncertainty and blamed it on women. If men were less manly, they thought, it was because women were in the workplace, or because women were in control of the home.

Masculine insecurity and uncertainty was often hypocritical and paradoxical in its defensiveness and anger. Men sought to be breadwinners, but grumbled about the stress and competition that came with it. They grew bitter about women's control over the home, but masculinity relegated women to that sphere. These contradictions make themselves clear in the pages of *Esquire.* The excessively angry attacks on women and marriage reveal the extent to which masculinity felt threatened by shifting gender roles. Not only does *Esquire* reflect these changes, but it also concurrently offered its own construction of masculine identity. *Esquire's* consistent portrayal of an increasingly unattainable masculine ideal exposes itself through the incongruity between the model depicted in its articles and the reality of what those articles actually demonstrate.

As for the home, men sought to stake a claim in the sphere they had willingly removed themselves from in the past. This conquest of the home took place one room at a time, as masculinity attempted to assert itself in new ways. With the workplace compromised, men turned spare bedrooms into dens, garages and basements into retreats, and attics into recreation rooms. It even spread to the kitchen, and the grill, as men crept into what they considered feminine territory in attempts to establish power in the home.

Esquire provided frequent suggestions and tips on how to turn the home into a more masculine friendly place.

Part II focuses on *Ebony* magazine from 1948 to 1953. *Ebony* magazine offers valuable insight into African-American middle-class masculinity in the postwar period. Although not exclusively a men's magazine, according to a survey conducted in 1950, *Ebony*'s readership was "evenly divided between men and women,"[18] *Ebony* demonstrated the concerns of African-American men in its pages. *Ebony* also had a large audience. By 1950 it had an average monthly circulation of over 350,000[19], by 1952 it was over 500,000,[20] making it the most widely read African-American publication in the United States.[21] Its large readership makes *Ebony* the most logical choice among magazines in which to examine the construction of African-American masculinity.

The masculine ideals presented to African Americans by *Ebony* vary greatly from those espoused by *Esquire*. As stated earlier, African-American masculinity primarily centered around ideals of citizenship, or what could be called "state-sanctioned" identities. Racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws significantly impacted African-American men's conceptions of masculinity, necessarily differentiating their experience from that of whites. Several articles in *Ebony* suggest that full citizenship for African Americans was essential for masculine identity, for acceptance as men. The ideals of masculine identity and those of rights-based citizenship became inseparable. In the pages of *Ebony* this construction of masculinity came out in several ways; one of the most prominent was that of military or government service. Through state-sanctioned

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[18] John Johnson, "Backstage," *Ebony*, September 1950, 12.
[19] John Johnson, "Backstage," ibid., October 1950, 12.
[20] John Johnson, "Backstage," ibid., November 1952, 12.
[21] John Johnson, "Backstage," ibid., February 1950, 10.

occupations, especially in light of the paramount importance of patriotism in this period,

many African-American men sought to make their case for citizenship through military

or government service. *Ebony*'s consistent portrayal of African-American men in these

occupations suggests a construction of identity that fused ideals of masculinity with those

of citizenship.

In many cases, *Ebony* featured women in non-traditional occupations in a positive

light that would have never appeared in *Esquire*. It becomes apparent that *Ebony* favored

the promotion of racial unity and success rather than a "war of the sexes." However,

other articles indicate that serious tensions existed between African-American men and

women, and while gaining full-citizenship was paramount to masculine identity, issues

between the sexes were also connected to citizenship ideals and affected masculine

identity as well.

Part III presents the conclusions of this study, along with a comparison of

masculine identity between *Ebony* and *Esquire*. What becomes clear is that despite a

society that increasingly presented white middle-class values as the standard, men outside

of that definition did not necessarily have the same experiences, or the same ideals.

While white, middle-class men sought to defend their masculine identity from changing

conceptions of gender roles and sexuality, middle-class African-American men

constructed their masculine identity around attaining full citizenship and ending the racial

discrimination that prevented equality. White men felt as though masculinity was under

attack, mainly from women, while African-American men faced an assault on their

masculinity from American society in general. The differences in experiences suggest

that masculinity needs to be thought of and studied in terms of *masculinities*, dependent

on a multitude of factors. In the case of *Ebony* and *Esquire*, it is apparent that during this

period the construction of masculine identity varied greatly along racial lines.

Part I

Masculinity in *Esquire*

CHAPTER I

MASCULINITY UNDER ATTACK

One thing is certain about the state of masculinity in the postwar period; it was in flux. Men were living in a world where traditional gender roles were crumbling around them, or at the very least undergoing drastic changes. This insecurity is evident in a memorandum from the publisher of *Esquire* that assures readers that there "will not be any letdown on *Esquire's* traditional fiction, pictorial glamour, and humor."[22] Indeed, *Esquire* pledges it will "continue to delve into the details of a man's world…in spite of the onslaught of rough fate and outraged women from the outside."[23] Another article attempts to reassure the male reader that "he is the dominant male of today… you can hear his roars from here over the attempted feminized invasion of man and his works," proclaiming that "our man wants his *Esquire* masculine… In a world of confused ideals of quality, where the loudest voice sometimes is mistaken for the truest, he looks to *Esquire*."[24] If men could not count on the "outside" world, they could find solace within the pages of *Esquire.*

Political uncertainty and controversy served to amplify masculine uncertainty and anxiety following WWII. This is clear in "Portrait of Joe," an article in which Robert C. Raurk describes the mindset of the average American man. He states that "Joe based his

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[22] G.T. Sweetser, "Memo From The Publisher," *Esquire,* January 1950, 5.

[23] Frederick A. Birmingham, "Editor's Note," ibid., January 1950, 8.

[24] G.T. Sweetser, "Memo From The Publisher," ibid., February 1949, 5.

existence on a basic premise that, if we were honest, decent and worked hard, everything would come right for Joe. Let the big boys take care of the grand scheme, and Joe would fall into line with the details." This, however, was no longer the case. When a man sought guidance and looked towards Washington, he saw "trusted key figures portrayed as traitors and near traitors."[25] The current system had failed; the Red Scare created an environment where men could no longer rely on elected officials to be men who exemplified American masculinity.

The Red Scare cast a shadow of uncertainty over masculinity, shaking men's conceptions of safety and security. It led to confusion about what it meant to be an American, and what it meant to be a man. Raurk explains that "He [Joe] sees trials conducted in which native-born Americans, like Joe, are suddenly portrayed as spies and communists tools and traitors. It's unbelievable to Joe that a Brooklyn girl like Judith Coplon or a book-learned boy like Alger Hiss could suddenly become a villain, clean shaves, bobby sox and all."[26] Being a communist certainly was not masculine. It was pink. It was soft. It was un-American. These events troubled men so much because those involved were people just like them, and people that they knew. This brought everyone's masculinity and identity under suspicion, escalating the anxiety amongst an increasingly chary masculine population.

While Cold War politics and the Atomic Age certainly affected masculinity, the only war that was apparent in the pages of *Esquire* was the one with women. In an "onslaught of rough fate,"[27] men often found themselves working alongside women in

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[25] Robert C. Raurk, "Portrait of Joe," ibid*.,* July 1951, 18.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

the office. As Raurk noted in one of his several barrages against women, "if there is one thing an average…man cannot stand from a lass [it] is competition on his own terrain." [28] Aside from the fact that some men may not have been used to working with women in a business setting, their very presence in the workplace subverted the prescribed gender boundaries of the nuclear family. If women were working for wages, men believed breadwinning would lose its validity as a measure of masculinity. Men traditionally had used the workplace as a masculine proving ground, and women's appearance there was compromising that masculine sphere.

The backlash against women in the workplace was particularly severe after WWII because many women had already proven themselves capable of handling typically masculine jobs during the war. This resentment and insecurity comes through in articles that relied on sweeping sexist generalizations to assert masculine dominance in the workplace, such as "Women: The Overrated Sex," by J.B. Rice. The article begins with Rice complaining about the current state of publications printing articles about how women are the stronger sex. He then took on the issue of women in the workplace. He explained that the slogan "Equal pay for equal works," was inaccurate because "most 'career' girls are so intrigued by the first two words that they forget all about the last three."[29] Rice continues by explaining that "the average female is too busy making a cozy little home out of her office to do much real work."[30] Similarly, he mocked sympathy for women, assuring readers that "being a woman is time-consuming occupation in itself," with things like "drinking milk in the morning, having tea and

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[28] Robert C. Raurk, "What had God Wrought?" ibid., September 1950, 193.
[29] J.B. Rice, "Women: The Overrated Sex," ibid., February 1950, 30.
[30] Ibid.

cookies in the afternoon, make-up, and minor repairs to clothes, and hair that must be everlastingly fixed."[31] Additionally, working women had to make time for gossiping and "long intimate conversations in the ladies room," not to mention the "essential shopping that must be done on the noon…hour."[32] Rice's attempts to belittle working women actually legitimized the post-war threat that they posed to masculinity and its refusal to evolve.

Aside from attacking women, the article also draws attention to the predicament facing the ideal of breadwinning. Apparently discounting motherhood and homemaking, Rice asserts that women "rarely are called upon to take care of more than themselves."[33] This contrasts with "poor Joe Zilch" who "is expected to support not one but four people and think nothing of it."[34] Rice's statements indicate that his definition of "work" pertains only to wage earners, and as he previously made clear, women had no place working for wages. This produces a dynamic where masculine identity is contingent upon generating an income, and feminine identity is tied to homemaking and childrearing, which represent duty, not work. Rice comments further, lamenting that "men bear the brunt of the knock-down-drag-out fight, often called—with classic understatement—'breadwinning.'"[35]

Rice was in conflict with his own definition of masculinity. He wanted women out of the office to preserve the legitimacy of breadwinning, but was unhappy about the responsibility it placed on men. Despite the fact that breadwinning was essential to

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 30.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

1950s masculinity, it was sometimes more of a burden than a point of pride, exemplifying masculine uncertainty.

The paradox of masculine breadwinning was also a way for men to absolve themselves of responsibility for not being the ever-present head of the nuclear family their position idyllically warranted. Further demonstrating masculine defensiveness and misplaced animosity, another editorial asked women if they "suppose that [their] guy *enjoyed* all those years at the office."[36] It explained that they would much rather be at home, and that the current state of society rendered spending less time at the office nearly impossible. It asked wives to consider "the hours in a man's life which he spends indoors by a desk, while that boy-scout dream of his burrows deeper into the subconscious, and Daniel Boone's long rifle rusts beyond repair."[37] This served to make women feel guilty for a situation they could not ameliorate. The references to the frontier and pioneering were indicative of masculinity's urges for an alternative to breadwinning as the standard definition of manhood, harkening back to the days when a man could legitimately prove himself a man against the forces of nature.[38]

The writers for *Esquire* were not simply a misogynistic segment of masculinity. The letters from readers in response to J.B. Rice's article indicate that a majority of the men who wrote in agreed. H.H. Benner, from Chicago, writes that "the only trouble with Dr. Rice's article is its brevity." Benner goes on to state that "I shudder to think of the number of innocent country boys who are regularly swindled into marriage by sweet

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[36] Frederick A. Birmingham, "Room and Bored," ibid*.,* April 1954, 6.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)

talking women."[39] One anonymous reader stated that "I was taught that women were the equal of men," but "your article has brought me to my senses at last."[40] Martin Watkins, of New York, thanks Rice for the article and adds that, "my wife and I have had long discussions over the subject but now that she's read the article, her arguments have faded into nothingness. She's decided to give up the career dream. You'll never know how happy that makes me."[41] In the last instance, the article had a tangible societal impact. The nature of these responses indicates a male desperation to grasp for anything that sought to revert gender roles to those of bygone eras. Men were struggling for arguments and evidence, and again *Esquire* provided a refuge.

Despite the fact that some women wrote articles in *Esquire* portraying a feminine perspective on the issues surrounding masculinity and women, others took an overtly masculine outlook. This made for mixed signals to the male audience, adding to their confusion. In the article "Tears in the Ladies Room," Elaine Greene wrote about female executives. After declaring that she had many female friends and that she was capable of being very feminine, Greene admitted that "there is something sick and dangerous, not to mention occasionally ludicrous, about the woman executive. She is a hypocrite. She is an egoist. She is unprofessional. She plays office the way little girls play house. She forces an unbusinesslike [sic] relationship on every member of her staff." While not directly criticizing all working women, the message this sent to men was that women did not want other women in a position of authority in the workplace. In contrast, Greene explained that "there is something healthy and comfortable, not to mention occasionally

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[39] H.H. Benner, "The Sound and the Fury," *Esquire,* May 1950, 10.
[40] "The Sound and the Fury," ibid*.,* June 1950, 16
[41] Martin Watkins, "The Sound and the Fury," ibid*.,* June 1950, 16.

exciting, about the male executive."[42] If the idea of the male executive was comfortable, it was only because of societal complacency with patriarchal dominance in the office.

The high levels of insecurity that characterized the masculine response to women in the workplace highlighted just how uncertain masculinity was. One writer asserts that married women who also had a career were "doing their damnedest to wreck marriage as well as home life in America."[43] To solve this problem he advised a radical solution; "no man [should] propose marriage until he has found out whether or not the girl he thinks he wants to marry is willing and happy to give up any thought of a career outside the home."[44] If she harbors any such desire, the man should simply move on. Again masculinity was caught in a trap of its own insecure defensiveness. The only way to rid the workplace of women and to salvage breadwinning, was to forgo the marriage and family that masculine breadwinning was supposed to support.

The reactionary assault on women spread outside of the workplace as well. This demonstrates both the extreme insecurity of masculinity and its desperation to assert its superiority over women. Women's presence in the workplace led men to seek new avenues through which to define their masculinity. The article "Orpheus Was No Lady," by Herbert Kubly, criticized women in the world of music. Kubly explains, "The history of music has hair on its chest and although the feminists won't admit it, the facts prove that the kind of creation best handled by women is not musical." He claims that "feminists, looking at the record, complain of unfair discrimination in a male-dominated sphere. But with all their wailing, they cannot hide the cold, cruel fact: women are lousy

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[42] Elaine Greene, "Tears in the Ladies Room," ibid., April 1951, 103.
[43] Merle Miller, "The Wife Who Works," ibid., April 1954, 47.
[44] Ibid., 103.

composers."[45] J.B. Rice exemplified this trend as well when he stated that, looking back at history "it's pretty obvious that anything requiring hard work or brains is a man's work."[46] Rice claims that women were no match in athletics, and that even in fields such as typing and shorthand notation, men held the records. The article asked if it could be the case that women simply want "to avoid the strain involved in soaring to new heights on wings of achievement."[47] However, Rice believed that women, in fact, "don't want to excel." As far as intelligence goes, he asserts that IQ tests were biased, and even women who have high IQs had not achieved anything in life anyway.[48] With so many unsubstantiated attacks against women it is a wonder that an article like this would be taken seriously. The fact that it was, and that it received letters of praise, points to the fact that the article was not solely designed to make women feel inferior. Rather, it attempted to reassure an increasingly insecure masculine population that although they were losing ground in some arenas, men were still firmly in control of others, regardless of how defensive they seemed in the process.

In addition to feeling threatened, some of the articles presented an air of jealousy that the societal focus was apparently no longer on men. Robert C. Raurk illustrates this in his article "What has God Wrought?" While still criticizing women, bitterness comes through in his prose. Raurk describes his interpretation of women's current situation, testifying that: "Nothing she owns ever fades, rips, or shrinks. Psychiatrists and agony columnists worship at her feet, to tell her how wonderful she is. All our

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[45] Herbert Kubly, "Orpheus Was No Lady," ibid., March 1950, 41.
[46] Ibid., 110
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

communications—newspapers, magazines, radio, television, moving pictures fawn on her. Her marriages are made in heaven."[49]

This masculine perception of women clearly exhibited jealousy and animosity for the attention that women garnered. Certainly, not all magazines were fawning over women. *Esquire* was not. If women's marriages were of heavenly construction, they clearly would have to be referring to some institution other than the one chronicled in *Esquire*. Women were marrying the same men who wrote and agreed with these venomous and defensive attacks on females. Raurk continued his dissection of "this frail creature, victim of her own intolerant ambition," by pinning some of the blame on men, when he stated, "I largely blame the gentlemen for letting the broads get out of hand."[50] He assailed women, claiming that "the initial mistake was made in treating women like people. We did them no favor when we allowed them the rights and privileges of the male, while subjecting them to few of the penalties of masculinity."[51] The penalties of masculinity included "breadwinning," from which men sought to exclude women. What Raurk and other men were upset about was their perception of women being able to partake in the positive aspects of masculinity while being spared the negative ones. What they did not realize was the hypocritical absurdity of the situation that their insecurity and uncertainty had constructed. Men sought to keep women from "breadwinning," thus sparing them a negative aspect of masculinity, while at the same time expressing anger that women were not subjected to it.

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[49] Robert C. Raurk, "What had God Wrought?" ibid.*, September 1950, 61.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

Women did not take these attacks without issuing a response of their own. Women responded by writing letters to the editor of *Esquire*, and by writing several articles. In *The Problem with Women is Men*, Betty South suggested that many of the problems that men had with women were of masculine creation. She wrote that "before World War I, men made good livings at manly things like driving railroad spikes, herding cows thither and yon, and stoking fiery furnaces in steel mills. But in your generation the rich, red blood of the pioneer fathers paled."[52] South boldly stated what men were fighting to suppress: the fear that they could not live up to their fathers, and that the avenues of asserting masculinity through occupation were no longer as easily defined. These feminine retorts served to add to the insecurity of an already backpedaling masculinity by penetrating through the facade of masculine confidence with critiques too evident for outright dismissal.

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[52] Betty South, "The Problem with Women is Men," ibid., April 1952, 51.

CHAPTER II

MARRIAGE, RELATIONSHIPS, AND SEXUALITY IN *ESQUIRE*

The tension between the sexes played itself out in the arena of romantic

relationships and marriages. If men were insecure in their masculinity in general, they

were, at best, frustrated in their relationships with women. Nonetheless, *Esquire* clearly

promoted a married lifestyle over that of a bachelor, despite the conflict over changing

gender roles.

World War II affected gender relations in a number of ways; not only did it

physically separate many couples as sixteen million men enlisted in the armed forces, but

it also presented women with an opportunity to pursue employment options that were

previously unavailable to them.[53] In *Domestic Revolutions,* Steven Mintz and Susan

Kellog explain that "few wartime developments had so great an impact on American

family life as did the rapid entry of women into the labor force," adding that "nearly half

of all American women held a job at some point during the war."[54] As the previous

chapter discussed, men's anxiety over women's entrance into the workforce en masse

was palpable. Many men believed that it compromised their role as breadwinner, an

essential element of their masculine identity. Mintz and Kellogg note that "for the first

time in American history, more than half of all women workers were married. The

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[53] Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 161.
[54] Ibid.

middle-class taboo against a working wife or mother had been irrevocably broken."[55] For

many men, however, the masculine ideal of breadwinning and the domestic role it

mandated for women was too important to give up.

The experiences of American men in WWII amplified the desire for a more

traditional relationship, and a more traditional woman than the era's archetypical "Rosie

the Riveter" embodied. Mintz and Kellogg explain that WWII placed a multitude of

strains upon American families, and notably on the relationships between men and

women.[56] They argue that "as a result of separation and female independence, World

War II had, for the first time, made America's families vulnerable to infidelity on a large

scale."[57] Several articles in *Esquire* illustrate men's anxiety over changing gender roles

at home through their interactions with foreign women.

In "What's Wrong with Our Women?" Leland Stowe explains that during WWII

"millions of American men got a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to compare their women

with those of other nations. For the first time in U.S. history, the American female

encountered large-scale competition from foreign women."[58] The exposure to foreign

women led many American men to criticize the changing gender roles of American

women, especially the movement away from domesticity. Comparing American and

foreign women, Stowe asserts that "you can sum up the whole situation pretty accurately

in this fashion: *most women of non-American background and nationality are brought

up to please men*,"[59] whereas the American woman is "the most spoiled and self-centered

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 171.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Leland Stowe, "What's Wrong with Our Women?," *Esquire.,* September 1948, 94.
[59] Ibid., 96.

woman in the world. The most aggressive. The most unhappy and dissatisfied…. She is less feminine and less interested in men than are women of other lands; she is less interested in husband, home and family."[60] Underlying these criticisms of American women is an insecurity among American men that women's entrance into the working world would end her domestic role. The article describes her as "unsatisfied" and "less feminine" because men perceived these changes in gender roles as an attack on masculine dominance. If men derived a sense of masculine identity from being a provider and a breadwinner, working women compromised that ideal.

The desire to escape change and find a traditional relationship led some men to seek partners outside of the United States. In *The Secret of Love: Have American Girls Forgotten?,* Betty South wrote about the trend of soldiers marrying foreign women during their tour abroad, especially those divorcing their American wives to do so. South and one such American wife interviewed a Colonel who was returning from Berlin to get a divorce. The woman with South asked if the European woman's appeal was that she will "look and act dumb so you great big men will feel more great and big?"[61] The Colonel replied that "she doesn't have to act. She really feels that way." He continues, explaining that "our highly prized 'American way of life' has made our women aggressive and hard. You are not truly feminine anymore."[62] The Colonel explains that the woman's husband did not realize what he was lacking until he "experienced what it is really like to live with a woman who is content to be just a woman and who thought he

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[60] Ibid., 93.
[61] Betty South, "The Secret of Love: Have American Women Forgotten?," ibid.*,* February 1951, 113.
[62] Ibid.

was wonderful because he was her man."[63] This trend, and the Colonel's comments, illustrated the yearning among men for women who subscribed to traditional definitions of gender and relationship roles. That men were willing to endure complications and inconveniences to obtain more subservient women is confirmation of the reactionary defensiveness and insecurity of masculinity in changing with the movement of society. The typical masculine thought was that, unlike themselves, women fought for and desired the changes they were undergoing.

Masculine anxiety and insecurities presented themselves in many of *Esquire's* articles about marriage. A collection of sayings and proverbs titled "What Every Young Man Should Know," attempted to cast a humorous glance at love and marriage. It is also illustrates men's underlying thoughts about the institution at the time. Some of the quotes illustrated masculinity's fear of declining power, of no longer being in charge of their household, such as "if you want peace in the house, do what your wife wants" and "a man may be a fool and not know about it—but not if he is married."[64] The majority of the quips showed a great deal of animosity towards wives and marriage, one jesting that "when a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread Hell," another that "a wife is only perfect twice; when she's carried into the house and when she's carried out."[65] The anger and dissatisfaction with the current state of marriage emerged in these aphorisms, only partially concealed by comedy.

Masculine discontent also surfaced over a perceived loss of control. Men believed that they had lost, or were losing, control over their relationships with women.

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[63] Ibid.
[64] "What Every Young Man Should Know," ibid.*,* May 1950, 104.
[65] Ibid.

One article on the process of wedding planning explained to men, "you will be told whether the wedding will take place in the daytime or evening, whether it will be formal or informal, and whether or not it will be an indoor or outdoor ceremony."[66] The fact that marriage started without masculine input contributed to the power polemics of the relationship itself.

Men were upset that they appeared to be losing some of the advantages they had once held. Bob Hope explained that because women "were making dough themselves," they now had "a chance to take a closer look at the opposite sex."[67] He summed up the situation succinctly when he wrote that "man stopped being important as a meal ticket."[68] You needed "a dash of romance," and to worry about "how you smelled," not how much you made.[69] This was not entirely accurate. Despite the outcry over women in the workplace, females as the primary breadwinner were still the exception. What is important was the message that this trend of financially-independent women sent to masculinity: We do not *need* you. This is not to say that there was a concerted effort by the majority of women to promote this image. It did, however, compromise masculine ideals of breadwinning. With masculinity already insecure, it was evidence enough to inspire the often vicious attacks on women found in the pages of *Esquire.*

Men were not the only ones who were upset; the dissatisfaction of women confronted them as well. In "The Problem with Women is Men," Betty South suggested that men focused so much on worrying about themselves that they did not realize how they looked to women. She stated that, as women, "frequently we're embarrassed for

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[66] O.E. Shoeffler, "Notes on Nuptials," ibid.*,* May 1951, 92.
[67] Bob Hope, "In Defense of American Women," ibid.*,* September 1950, 41.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

you. Often, as wives, we're ashamed of you."[70] On the complaint that women do not

stay home enough because they served on too many committees or spend too much time

doing civic duties, South explains, "that, gentleman, is due to your laziness as citizens

and your utter inadequacy as companions."[71] Men, it seems, were no longer living up to

the standards set for them. South furthers the image of inadequate masculinity when she

attacks men's performance as lovers, stating that, "we are spending our time with rank

amateurs who run out of inspiration in about ten minutes. No wonder we've got

complexes."[72] She was also sure to correct the assumption among men that the changes

in women were "a symbol of our rising discontent with ourselves. We say, 'No, we are

not discontented with ourselves. We are discontented with you.'"[73] Feminine discontent

with masculinity served to magnify the dissatisfaction men had with themselves.

South leveled serious accusations at men, characterizing them as embarrassing,

lazy, poor companions, and worse lovers. Unlike the numerous letters that women wrote

into *Esquire* when it printed articles attacking females, men just took the criticism. One

man wrote in to say "guilty as charged"[74] and another conceded that the article was "the

most straightforward and wholesome spanking we've had in a long while."[75] Such was

Esquire's portrayal of masculinity: utterly insecure, lacking confidence, and lashing out

at women in hopes of reverting social relations to a system where they had an advantage

simply by being men.

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[70] Betty South, "The Problem with Women is Men," ibid.*,* April 1952, 128.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 129.
[73] Ibid.
[74] John T. Cody, "The Sound and the Fury," ibid.*,* June 1952, 8.
[75] Donald Allen, "The Sound and the Fury," ibid.*,* June 1952, 8.

Further complicating an already convoluted situation, complaints by women against masculinity lacked consistency. Helen Lawrenson, while still discontented with men, put forth another side of the feminine perspective in her article, "What Has Become of the Old Fashioned Man?" She concedes that men were correct when they said that women were bossing them around, but suggests that women were "sick and tired of this role."[76] She declares that women wished they would meet a man "just once, who would say to them 'Woman, hold thy tongue!'—and, most important of all, who would be man enough to get away with it."[77] She presents an image of male-female relationships that reverted to an era that many men were longing for. Lawrenson continued by describing how a man should deal with his wife, suggesting that men "say to her, 'Look! You're my girl and I love you, but you're going to do as I say.' You'll be surprised how happy she'll be."[78] Masculine desires and some feminine urging for outmoded gender roles clashed with evolving social trends, exacerbating existing uncertainty and insecurity reflected in *Esquire*.

Not all men reacted with anger. Some changed with the times and did their best to take advantage of them. With gender relations on a path towards equality, the negative reaction of men towards women was not altogether surprising. A balancing of power inevitably meant less power for men. One article in *Esquire* proposed that the bumbling, inept husband icon featured in popular media was actually the intentional construction of intelligent men. The article called for praise of the "unique and often brilliant talent of the breadwinner who sits back and relaxed while his lady is taking great pride in some

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[76] Helen Lawrenson, "What Has Become of the Old Fashioned Man?" ibid.*,* February 1951, 42.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 115.

simple chore of household mechanics she thinks Daddy is too dumb to handle."[79]

Whether this was applicable in all cases is not important; tactics like this suggested a

passive-aggressive mindset. Being a handyman was part of the masculine image. That

men were willing to subvert that role to pass on more work to their wives indicates the

level of animosity that men, in their masculine insecurity and uncertainty, harbored for

women.

Another suggestion put forth was to concede power to women because it would

make them happy, and men's happiness would be the ultimate byproduct. An article by

Will Stanton suggestd that men intentionally took the wrong side of an argument,

likening it to "climb[ing] out on a limb and leav[ing] a saw where your wife can find

it."[80] It appeared that masculinity's only chance was to forgo equality entirely. As the

author's friend dolefully explained to him, "Men were born to suffer…it doesn't matter

how we feel as long as the ladies are happy."[81] The deluge of articles in *Esquire*

attacking changes in gender roles indicate that to many men their feelings did matter.

Marriage was one area that garnered a relative consensus no matter the writer's

position on the gender/power spectrum; it was encouraged. Except for a few notable

exceptions, such as women with career ambitions, and despite *Esquire*'s general

degradation of females, most articles encouraged getting married along with the idea of

the nuclear family. It was also important to stay married. Paul Kearney warned men

that, in terms of divorce, "the one thing you can generally count on is that the man pays

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[79] Herb Garris, "So You're a Handy Man," ibid.*,* July 1950, 94.
[80] Will Stanton, "Winning the War with Women," ibid.*,* March 1954, 71.
[81] Ibid.

in the end."[82] Getting in the requisite jab at women, he noted the suffering will be worse

"if he's parting from a vindictive wench who is determined to exact revenge."[83] Another

article detailed a man's imprisonment for failing to pay alimony. He states that in prison,

"each of us had pretty much the same story: a divorce, a vindictive ex-wife, a loss of a

job or the failure of a small business." Female readers of *Esquire* could find a message as

well. Mary Shour warned women who were considering divorce that "one far-from-

perfect husband is much the same as the next far-from-perfect husband."[84] Masculine

uncertainty in itself led to an increased dependence on marriage and traditional roles to

draw a sense of security.

Complacency in marriage was subtly, and sometimes explicitly, encouraged.

Betty South's article on American military men who were leaving their wives for foreign

women also sent a message to women about marriage. While it overtly criticized the

practice, it left the impression that if women valued their marriage they should sacrifice

any sort of independence to appease their husbands.[85] Much as Mary Shour told women

that one imperfect husband was the same as the next, Helen Lawrenson cautioned men

not to leave their older wives for a younger woman. She explained to men that rarely

were their new romances what they think they will be, warning men that a new woman

will try to change him while "your old wife knows all about you. She's used to your

ailments, your weaknesses, your defects, your bad habits. Usually, by this time, she's

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[82] Paul W. Kearney, "Divorce: Confusion's Masterpiece," ibid., May 1950, 53.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Mary J. Shour, "Blueprint for Divorce," ibid., June 1950, 118.
[85] Betty South, "The Secret of Love: Have American Women Forgotten?," ibid., February 1951, 113

given up trying to reform you and accepts you as you are."[86] Urging men to stay where they were, she quoted a man who left his wife as he lamented that, "'I may have been bored …but at least I was comfortable.'" Given that men were increasingly uncomfortable in many arenas they once firmly controlled, if they managed to retain dominance in the home, then boredom was a small price to pay.

Portraits of unmarried men in *Esquire* were less common, and almost non-existent in a positive light. In "The Case for Unwed Fathers," Dr. J.B. Rice laments the lack of options that are available for men who have a child out of wedlock. He explains that there were numerous institutions in place to help women, and asks "but what of the unmarried father? How many social agencies are organized to help him? None. Society's only interest is to run him down, hang it on him, and make him marry or pay…. He not only *has* problems, he *is* one."[87] Although the article takes a conciliatory tone, it is clear that the negative aspects facing a man in this situation far outweigh any positives gains from remaining unmarried.-

A notable exception to *Esquire*'s general promotion of marriage is Jimmy Cannon's article "A Bachelor's Confession." Published in 1948, Cannon emphasizes many of the issues that men faced with women, but breaks with tradition by arguing that staying unmarried was a viable alternative. He begins by leveling accusations at women and marriage, stating that "the married man in this country is an economic serf who works for the most demanding master in the history of slavery."[88] Referring to women as "parasites," Cannon observes that men hang out in bars to avoid to being at home. He

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[86] Helen Lawrenson, "Don't Trade in Your Old Wife," ibid.*,* March 1954, 35.
[87] J.B. Rice, "The Case for the Unwed Father," ibid., November 1948, 47.
[88] Jimmy Cannon, "Confessions of a Bachelor," ibid., October 1948, 47.

notes that a "man's home has become a prison instead of a castle."[89] Cannon reaffirms

many of the masculine insecurities present during the period, but differs in his declaration

that "marriage is for suckers. I'll take the freedoms of a bachelor."[90] As one of the only

articles specifically not promoting marriage, it is notable that this article appeared in

1948. However, it is similar to the majority of other articles dealing with male-female

relationships and the critique of women. While married life was certainly *Esquire*'s

preferred masculine ideal, other options were at least presented.

Masculine insecurity and uncertainty come through in articles about dating, as

well. In "Be Careful Casanova!," Will Bernard warned men about the perils they faced

trying to make the first move on a women. Bernard explained that men need to, "be

careful with your kisses! While the law allows a certain amount of romantic

aggressiveness, woe to the man who picks the wrong time, the wrong place, the wrong

girl!"[91] Robert Raurk commented on the dating world, claiming that men have "come to

a tyranny of romance, second-guessed and experted [sic] on all sides. It's bolstered by a

great feminine conceit and nibbled at by a great feminine insecurity."[92] Ironically,

masculine insecurity was creating many of the problems that men were having with

women.

Some articles in *Esquire* tried to assuage masculine fears about women and

marriage, while others gave men advice on picking a suitable partner. One article

suggested that men not be intimidated by intelligent women, explaining that, "she greatly

improves your chances for having intelligent children" which are less of a hassle than

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 110.
[91] Will Bernard, "Be Careful Casanova!," ibid.*,* November 1951, 63.
[92] Robert C. Raurk, "Cupid Has Two Heads," ibid.*,* January 1951, 47.

"dull-witted" ones.[93] An additional advantage was that smart women would entertain themselves, requiring less work for men. One article encouraged men to marry despite their misgivings, suggesting that, "the thought of marriage is natural for a woman…but there is something alien in the idea of marriage to men."[94] Another sought to reinforce the idea of male dominance through the transition from dating to marriage, claiming, "now your real courtship *begins*. This kitten has a mind in the making; it must be bottle-fed, guided, and inspired—and sometimes even backed into a corner with blank pistol and chair."[95] One article provided a detailed scoring sheet for men to rate their partner to judge her candidacy for marriage.[96] All of these articles promoted the idea that, despite all the tension and insecurity between masculinity and femininity, marriage was still the correct decision.

Women were not the only "other" that men perceived as threatening. As the bulk of the articles in *Esquire* suggested, the changing role of women presented the most tangible danger to masculine institutions. However, a few articles mentioned homosexuals, and one article was devoted entirely to the issue of male homosexuality. Robert Raurk stated in his portrait of the average American men that "he [Joe] becomes accustomed to a word he never heard before in polite society—homosexual."[97] This suggests that discussion of homosexuality occurred more often than in the past, and that it was distressing to the average male. Raurk wrote that statement in the same article that addresses the Red Scare, clearly in reference to federal government's persecution of

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[93] Fred C. Kelly, "Beautiful but Bright," ibid.*,* December 1950, 99.
[94] Theodor Reik, "Are You Afraid to Marry?," ibid.*,* September 1950, 45.
[95] "The Art of Courtship: How To Woo A Woman and Leave No Doubt About It," ibid.*,* May 1950, 99.
[96] Paul Green, "How To Rate Your Mate," ibid.*,* February 1954, 60.
[97] Robert Raurk, "Portrait of Joe," ibid.*,* July 1951, 18.

homosexuals known as the Lavender Scare. As David K. Johnson explains in his

masterful study *The Lavender Scare,* purging homosexuals from the federal government

was the primary concern, more so than Communists. Just as there was a perceived

infestation of communists in the workplace, a similar network of homosexuals was

thought to exist.[98] Johnson explains that "many Americans began to conflate

homosexuals and Communists. The constant pairing of 'Communists and queers' led

many to see them as indistinguishable threats."[99] Although seemingly unrelated, in the

immediate postwar period both Communism and homosexuality represented a departure

from contemporary masculine ideals. In *Manhood in America,* Michael Kimmel argues

that it was "no wonder that Senator Joseph McCarthy so easily linked homosexuality and

communism—both represented gender failure," noting that "the trappings of gender

failure were all around us in the 1950s."[100]

Although the federal government was actively removing homosexuals from their

jobs en masse, a female writer in another article charged men with having "failed to act

against the blatant upsurge of homosexuality (indeed, having casually accepted it)."[101]

She went on to complain that, "an urbane, take-it-for-granted attitude about homosexuals

has encouraged them to come out of their once-secret world."[102] While there was clearly

anger at the fact that homosexuality appeared to be more prevalent and acceptable, it was

not the same level of threat that women posed. Much as the male and female writers in

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[98] David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 31.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996) 236-237.
[101] Maggie Smith, "The Well-Kept Husband," *Esquire,* April 1954, 107.
[102] Ibid, 47.

Esquire charged that the problems men faced with changing female gender roles were men's fault, they were confronted with the perception that an increasing presence of homosexuals was due to masculine deficiency.

Another article in *Esquire*, titled "For These are the Bedeviled," by John McPartland, focused on homosexuality, and looked at the anxiety that it caused in the workplace. It began with a paranoid hypothetical situation, stating that, "the fellow who has the desk next to yours at the office is friendly—a little too friendly, perhaps. He seems anxious to please you; maybe he talks too much; his gestures are nervous and a bit exaggerated."[103] The article then asks the question that the reader should be asking themselves, "can the guy be a 'queer'?"[104] Women violated the sanctity of the workplace, and homosexuals did as well. Similar to the way the Red Scare cast suspicion over everyone's identity, a masculine fear of homosexuality inspired by the Lavender Scare brought co-workers' actions into question.

The most compelling evidence of masculine insecurity comes through the article's discussion of homosexual tendencies in heterosexual men. The article asks the question of what to do if "you suddenly find that you yourself are thinking brief, surprising, unwanted thoughts, making unplanned gestures, or unexpectedly saying foolish and silly things."[105] The article reassures readers of their masculinity and heterosexuality, stating, "some experts even insist that the subject of homosexuality is unpleasant and repulsive to most of us chiefly *because* we've had these disturbing periods of uncertainty about

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[103] John McPartland, "For These are the Bedeviled," ibid.*,* July 1950, 51.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

ourselves."[106] In fact, McPartland explained, "all of us do have some normal homosexual tendencies."[107] While McPartland sought to ease insecurity and worry, the result was that the article advised men to examine their coworkers and themselves as potential homosexuals.[108]

In the pages of *Esquire,* masculinity's reaction to supposed threats varied a great deal. Men reacted negatively and vocally to women in the workplace and to shifts in gender roles and dynamics. Masculine insecurity was so great that it attacked women in any way that it could and was largely unable to present factual arguments. The lack of coverage of homosexuality was due partly to the taboo it still carried at that time, and because of the generally-accepted view that it was an illness.[109] What remained consistent throughout *Esquire*'s construction of masculinity was its uncertainty, anxiety, and insecurity. Men perceived that the avenues of masculine definition available to previous generations were no longer available, and, therefore, sought new places of definition. Men had no more worlds to conquer, no more frontiers to explore. This led men in the postwar period to attempt to retake something they had surrendered long ago: the home.

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[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid., 141.

[108] The majority of the article chronicles the hypothetical lives of three fictional homosexual men, and discusses the causes and treatments for homosexuality. Given that it is a product of its time, it would serve no purpose to analyze what was then the scientific thought in contrast with current interpretations.

[109] John McPartland references several psychologists at the time who speak of homosexuality as an illness curable through treatment. The fact that no readers wrote in to provide an opinion to the contrary evidences its general acceptance, at least by the readers of *Esquire*. For more information on homosexuality in the Cold War era, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004)

With *Esquire*'s portrayal of the masculine sphere of the workplace being compromised by women, men sought to reclaim the home, one room at a time. However, it was not a direct or conscious retaliation. Men no longer believed that they could find masculine solace in the workplace, and, therefore, sought to establish such places in their homes. An editorial in *Esquire* calls for a change in the situation that results in "every cocktail party with the women fussing and feathering in the living room and bedrooms, and the men, by a homing instinct sadly suggestive of exile, gathering in the kitchen and the basement."[110] It suggests that men needed something besides "the 'living' rooms where no man can really live, only suffer."[111] Uncertainty and insecurity caused masculinity's discontent within the household; if men were breadwinners and heads of their homes, why should they not have space within it dedicated solely to them?

The idea of creating masculine space within the home is not unique to the immediate postwar period, and, in fact, has its origins at the beginning of the twentieth century with the creation of dens. Michael Kimmel explains in *Manhood in America* that the den began to appear in homes as "turn-of-the-century designers carved out a distinctly male space in the home as an antidote to feminized Victorian parlors."[112] This grew out of the doctrine of separate spheres, which designated the home as feminine and almost everything outside of it, especially the workplace and marketplace, masculine. Kimmel argues that "men were excluded from domestic life, unable to experience the love, nurture, and repose that the home supposedly represented," and rooms like dens and

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[110] Frederick A. Birmingham, "A Man's Home is His Castle," *Esquire,* June 1951, 6.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996) 111.

studies allowed "a man to return to the home without feeling like a wimp."[113] Although the desired result was the same, men in the immediate postwar period were responding to a different set of factors, primarily the insecurity caused by women's presence in the workplace. The thought that women were coming into the office and compromising the sphere of the working world led some men in the immediate postwar period to make inroads within the home.

In contrast with the work place, the home was something that men could physically change to suit their desires. *Esquire* featured many articles that advised men on how to convert their "Stone Age retreat into a modern, husband-saving chateau. For your place, Mister, is in the home, too."[114] The article suggests that a Family Room is an ideal space for men, explaining that, "when the kids entertain in the living room, advance to this secure position in the rear. When you're in here, you're out to casual callers."[115] That a man "advances" to the family room when his kids have friends over, when he is really retreating, indicates that men were seeking to establish places of masculine solitude, not to dominate the home. *Esquire* suggests that men convert a spare bedroom or an enclosed porch, stating that the "best bet" is "in your present dining room."[116] Ironically, the "family" room was to serve as a masculine refuge, even at the loss of the family dining room.

The idea that men wanted to claim an area of the home for their exclusive purposes was evident in several articles in *Esquire*. One article suggests that a man could have his "own pocket-size-kitchen-bar that can be tucked into a closet, or built into a

[113] Ibid., 158.
[114] "Home is For Husbands Too," *Esquire,* June 1951, 88.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

spare corner." Even if it appeared that there was not a lot of room for masculinity in the home, men could fit themselves into corners, or rooms that were unused or undesirable. Writer Will Stanton explains that he would "go out in the garage and sit in the car to relax my nerves."[117] In his home, he sometimes found solace in unusual places; he described watching socks swirling through the window of the washer as "the most peaceful prospect I had seen in a long time."[118] Stanton summarized masculine desire when he stated, "in times like these a man needs a place where he can relax after supper, put on carpet slippers and read."[119]

Modification and conversion of the home granted men space of their own; *Esquire* also promoted it as a solution to family problems. An article, aptly entitled "Wings Can Work Wonders," suggests that adding on to a home could ease familial tension. It suggested that if the reader had been having "too many family tiffs lately," that "the real cause is an overcrowded house."[120] It explains that "overcrowding breeds family squabbles. Children lack study and living space of their own. And overworked houses make for overworked wives."[121] Of course, what the article was really promoting was more space for everyone, including the men. If men could gain space of their own by adding wings to their house, then it was something desirable.

If converting a room or adding wings proved to be insufficient, designing and building a house to suit masculine interests was in order. In response to the burgeoning conformity of the suburbs, Darrell Huff suggests that "women are responsible for the

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[117] Will Stanton, "The Modern Home and How to <u>Avoid</u> It," ibid.*,* January 1952, 78.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] "Wings Can Work Wonders," ibid.*,* February 1952, 69.
[121] Ibid.

dishonest, flimsy, cramped, obsolete, cheaply pretentious and thoroughly uncomfortable

dollhouses that so many misguided families are inflicting upon themselves."[122] Given the

responses of men on numerous issues, it is not surprising that Huff blames housing issues

on women as well, noting that "when you come right down to it, the typical house is an

embarrassing place for a man to set his heavy foot."[123] Huff laments the problems that

modern men face in trying to establish an appropriately masculine home. He urges men

to take control of the house construction and planning process, to "tackle it the way you

would have a couple hundred years ago, loose in the woods with an ax…about to put up a

log cabin. How will you stay within your size and dollar budget and still get a house fit

for a man to live in?"[124] Huff's references to a bygone time of erecting log cabins,

presumably free of feminine influence, fits with men's perceived loss of control. The

numerous articles dealing with housing indicate that men felt that this loss of control

extended beyond their relationships with women and the feminization of the workplace,

and reached into the home as well.

Men sought not only space of their own in the home, but also to claim some

traditionally-feminine roles. This inclination was most apparent in cooking. *Esquire*

featured numerous articles on cooking tips, barbequing, and how to make food-

preparation more masculine. Some of the references were subtle, such as a recipe for "a

stout fish chowder that will put hair on a man's chest,"[125] or referring to barbeque as "a

man's job."[126] Other articles suggest that if men were tired of their wives' chicken

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[122] Darrell Huff, "Head of Whose House?," ibid., July 1948, 40.
[123] Ibid., 40.
[124] Ibid., 110.
[125] Harry Botsford, "Introduction to Bouillabaisse," ibid*.,* January 1950, 80.
[126] Botsford, "Barbeque: A Man's Job," ibid*.,* May 1950, 108.

recipes that they "throw away grandmother's cookbook and sprinkle a little masculine imagination on that bird."[127] In a later article, Botsford refers to the trend as "a resurgence of masculine cookery."[128] One article, "The Esquire Chef's Guide for Hosts," refers to "the power that cookery offers a man."[129] The article continues, instructing men to go "so to the kitchen!" and to remember "that apron you wear is the badge of an honorable and manly profession."[130] These articles reflect masculine insecurity about a man's place in the home. While the actions may not have been entirely conscious, it sent the message that men were attempting to compete with women in traditionally feminine territory.

Another article chronicled the rise of male gardening. It states that "beside the familiar cry of 'Get the women out of the office,' there is now a ringing new one… 'Get women out of the garden.' Plow the girls under, is the word."[131] The article continued, asserting that, "digging in the dirt…is a masculine urge."[132] Another article advises men on mechanized tools to distinguish their garden as masculine, explaining that, "the man with the mechanized hoe can get the good earth in a giving mood. All he has to do is get out there and dig—with the right tools."[133]

Both cooking and gardening provided an outlet for male insecurity and uncertainty around the home. Constant attempts to do better than women in household activities illustrated men's defensiveness and insecurity. The extent to which men

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[127] Botsford, "Belated Fanfare for Fowl," ibid., February 1950, 86.
[128] Botsford, "Man the Chaffing Dish," ibid., July 1951, 74.
[129] "The Esquire Chef's Guide for Hosts," ibid., November 1948, 88.
[130] Ibid., 88.
[131] "More Pants in the Garden," ibid., May 1952, 22.
[132] Ibid.
[133] "Gardens Are Growing Up," ibid., March 1952, 64.

cooked and gardened as an effort to threaten women's positions is difficult to discern. While this likely played a role, a more realistic assessment is that a reactionary defensiveness to prove masculine superiority over women led men to respond in this way. The fact that cooking and gardening were female-dominated fields made proving masculine dominance through them more enticing.

Part II

Masculinity in *Ebony*

CHAPTER III

"Until he is treated as a man, fully accepted as a citizen, he will not be happy."[134]

CONSTRUCTING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN *EBONY*

The postwar period was a significant time for African-American men. Many had just finished serving in WWII, albeit in segregated units largely kept out of combat duty, and returned to the United States with high expectations of an improving situation for their race. However, they still faced a great deal of discrimination at home. Jim Crow laws in the South and de facto segregation in the North were constant reminders to African Americans of their second-class citizenship. What emerges in the pages of *Ebony* is a strong link between attaining full-citizenship rights and masculine identity. Racial discrimination served as a barrier for African-American men who aspired to the Victorian ideals of manhood based upon citizenship. *Ebony*'s construction of masculinity during the postwar period both emphasizes the achievements of African-American men in state-sanctioned occupations, such as the military or government, and grapples with the racial barriers impacting African-American masculinity.

A number of articles during this period address the intersection of rights, citizenship, and masculinity. One article in *Ebony*, "Shangri-La in Vermont," succinctly illustrates the differences between the aspirations of white men and African-American men. The author explains that:

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[134] "Is The Negro Happy?," *Ebony*, December 1953, 132.

Just as every white man dreams of spending the rest of his life on some mythical South Sea island, far away from alarm clocks or atom bombs and surrounded by saronged cuties, so does every black man have his own dream—an imaginary isle of true democracy where he and his family can live and work, not as Negroes, but as full-fledged Americans.[135]

The ideals of African-American masculinity revolved around attaining full citizenship and equality. Their masculine ideals were not an escape from reality, but a legitimate participation in it.

Another article seeks to address the question of whether or not African-American men are happy, and how happiness connects with citizenship. The author states that an African-American man "can never experience normal happiness as long as he lives with the shadow of racial prejudice and discrimination," adding that "he can never be reasonably happy until he is fully accepted as a man among men."[136] Further cementing the centrality of rights-based ideals to masculinity, the author explains that "all the Negro wants from his fellow American is to be treated like other men;.… He wants to be allowed to exercise the same rights of citizenship exercised by other native-born sons."[137]

While *Ebony* consistently presented full citizenship and an end to racial discrimination as key tenets of African-American masculinity, it varied in its suggestions for reaching that end and its evaluations of the current state of race relations. Tacitly acknowledging that radical changes needed to take place, *Ebony* offered ideas for ameliorating the situation until then. The article "Why Not Go Back to the Farm?" discusses the plight of many African Americans who emigrated to urban areas after the war. The author argues that this movement "has served further to jam and cramp colored

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[135] "Shangri-La in Vermont," ibid., March 1948, 48.
[136] "Is The Negro Happy?," ibid., December 1953, 132.
[137] Ibid.

Americans into tight little covenant-covered islands in urban centers where they are isolated economically and socially from the mass of white city dwellers."[138] The author believes that if African-American men were to move to the country it would expose white Americans to hard-working African Americans of good character, insisting it was important that "the colored American…convince the mass of ordinary U.S. white people of his inate [sic] equality will all men, of his right to 'belong' to the community."[139]

Ebony occasionally featured articles about African Americans who had left the United States in search of greater freedom and equality. The editorial "Freedom Versus Pork Chops" addresses this issue, explaining that there is "a confusing dilemma for the Negro thirsting for first place manhood as well as a high living standard."[140] Describing the troubling choice facing African-American men, the author continues by asking "is he to forsake his homeland and go abroad where he can sit freely and equally with the most choice and most cultured of men…. Or is he to enjoy the fruits of a prosperous America but bow down submissively to 'Whites Only' signs?"[141] Generally, *Ebony* did not promote expatriation; however, some articles highlighted the benefits of relocating to a foreign country. In "Mexico," the author describes a group of African Americans who found a more tolerant environment south of the border, painting it as "a racial oasis south of Dixie."[142]

The responses of readers to articles about leaving the United States illustrate how much attaining full-citizenship at home characterized African-American masculinity.

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[138] "Why Not Go Back to the Farm?," ibid., September 1948, 44.
[139] Ibid.
[140] "Freedom Versus Pork Chops," ibid., February 1949, 60.
[141] Ibid.
[142] "Mexico," ibid., October 1948, 13.

The most telling letters to the editor came in response to an article about relocating to Africa. One reader angrily proclaims that "I *may* not have much of a future in America, but I intend to do the *best* I can,"[143] while another states that "we are Americans…not just Negroes but Americans! 'Back to Africa.' Bah!"[144] A third letter chastises supporters of this movement for failing "to recognize…that every day in every way Negroes are breaking down the barriers of ignorance and stupidity…breaking down the caste system. It's slow…but brother, *it's steady*!"[145] These responses illustrate that African-American masculinity was tied to ideals of achieving full citizenship in the United States, even though, as one editorial notes, "a Negro has to work twice as hard as a white man to prove himself."[146]

Just how African-American men could "prove" themselves and their masculinity was another area of contention within *Ebony*. Although the magazine began in 1945 with the intention of "reflecting the brighter side of [the] life of Negroes,"[147] it also looks seriously at racial issues. Sometimes, these articles illustrate how African-American men reacted to the denial of full citizenship, especially by filling the void with consumer goods. In the article "Why Negroes Buy Cadillacs," the author explains how conspicuous consumption allowed middle class African-American men a viable outlet in which to express their equality with white men. The author explains that "to a Negro indulgence in luxury is a vindication of his belief in his ability to match the best of white men. It is the acme of dignity and stature in the white man's world," going on to state

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[143] E.E. Clark, "Letters to the Editor," ibid., January 1948, 4.
[144] Harrison J. Holland, Jr., "Letters to the Editor," ibid., January 1948, 4.
[145] Lyle Stuart, "Letters to the Editor," ibid., January 1948, 4.
[146] "Are You Ready For Luck?," ibid., September 1950, 78.
[147] "Ebony's Fifth Anniversary," ibid., November 1950, 15.

that "if they cannot go to Miami for winter vacations, they can furnish their homes in the best Town and Country Magazine style. If they cannot drink at plush white night clubs, they still are able to buy the best whiskey and drink at home."[148] The author does not promote consumption as a substitute for the masculine ideal of citizenship, but he claims it is important to "put up that front that stamps one as a full, unfettered man rather than a second-class underling. It is part of the uphill fight for status."[149]

Another article examines other ways in which African-American men responded to discrimination with a more critical eye. In "The Fable of the 'Happy' Negro," the author perceives that "increasingly, however, the loud buffoonery of the Negro is becoming more and more a vehicle of aggression in addition to being a release from frustration."[150] The article goes on to contend that a determination to "stay ahead of the Jonses and bid for a better place in the community" has led men "to such other 'escapes' as loud clothing, reckless driving, bizarre pomp at lodge meetings, [or] owning a big Cadillac."[151] However, none of these things satisfied African-American masculinity. The previously discussed articles revealed that a true sense of fulfillment would only come from equality and citizenship. The author of this article makes the same case, explaining that "there is one facet of happiness in which the Negro has a special concern. It is to achieve the position of being as unhappy as the average white man."[152]

An editorial titled "Why Negroes Overtip [sic]" discusses why *Ebony* believes that African Americans tended to overdo things, including tipping. The author explains

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[148] "Why Negroes Buy Cadillacs," ibid., September 1949, 34.
[149] Ibid.
[150] "The Fable of the 'Happy' Negro," ibid., January 1949, 60.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

the motivations behind this response, stating that "he is so often segregated and discriminated against, the Negro sometimes overtips [sic] and overdresses and over-does in an effort not only to prove to whites that he is not inferior, but also to reassure himself."[153] The article displays a certain masculine anxiety tied into racial identity, as opposed to the anxiety caused primarily over gender identity issues found in white masculinity. The author also touches on the desire of African-American men to be accepted by society. Both the longing for acceptance and the anxiety it caused are evident in another passage from "Why Negroes Overtip [sic]." The author explains that "he wants terribly much to believe that if he is clean and neat, if he is personable and cultured, it will take some the 'curse' off of being black," because "having won the right of admittance, Negroes are now concerning themselves with the all-important issue of acceptance."[154] However, acceptance was a less tangible goal, and the fact that racial discrimination and violence were not mitigated by wealth, status, or education added to the anxiety of masculine identity for African Americans.

One reason that a masculine identity based upon equality and full citizenship was essential to African-American men was because regardless of how successful one was monetarily, skin color was not something that could easily be escaped. As the above articles suggest, some middle-class African Americans purchased certain goods to match whites' material status. However, some successful African-American men went as far as to disparage and separate themselves from their race. An editorial, "Negroes Who Hate Negroes," describes a man known as "Mr. Big," and addresses some of his thoughts and problems. One anonymous "Mr. Big" stated that "There isn't a thing…that the black

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[153] "Why Negroes Overtip [sic]," ibid., July 1953, 96.
[154] Ibid.

man can do for me."[155] *Ebony* chastises this attitude, and further emphasizes the

importance of a masculine identity centered around full citizenship for all African

Americans. The author describes the precarious status of wealthy African-American

men, stating that:

> Mr. Big is frustrated because, although he is wealthy and lives as
> well as or better than many of his white neighbors, he is still a
> Negro. The social status, which he holds so dear, is constantly
> threatened. A new neighbor, a racial incident in which he is not
> even remotely involved, can bring his ivory castle crashing down
> about him overnight.[156]

The author contends that successful African-American men must recognize that they too

have a stake in gaining full-citizenship and racial equality, and urges them not to settle

for material goods. A unified front against discrimination also factored into the

construction of African-American masculinity in *Ebony*. The author explains that until

successful African-American men are "willing to stop pushing his dark brother down

instead of pulling him up, when he is prepared to stop hating and start helping him, he

will have come of age. He will then be a man among men."[157] Another editorial echoes

this sentiment, but from the opposite end of the spectrum. The author contends that "the

presence of dark faces in high places means a step closer to real racial equality. It

symbolizes greater participation in the American way of life."[158] The editorial continues

by noting the significance of racial and gender solidarity to African-American

masculinity, arguing that "prolonged jubilation by the black brother for the black brother

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[155] "Negroes Who Hate Negroes," ibid., December 1952, 112.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] "Editorial," ibid., January 1952, 78.

who makes good reflects growth to full manhood."[159] These examples illustrate that racial solidarity was also significant towards achieving the full citizenship and equality that were key tenets of African-American conceptions of masculinity.

Given the staunch anti-communism of the time, it is not surprising that numerous articles sought to demonstrate that African-American men were committed to the Cold War ethos. Often the fear of being tainted as un-American or communist led *Ebony* to be more reticent in its evaluation of the current racial situation, and to reaffirm the loyalty of African Americans to the United States. One article explained why there had not been any race riots recently, stating that "the story of the Negro's advances in five short years is a testament to its red-blooded virility and a powerful rebuttal to the tide of communism."[160] Another article, "How to Stop the Russians," suggests that giving African-American men equal rights would be a step in the right direction in the fight against Communism. The author explains that African Americans have a unique perspective, stating that "because we are Negroes who see in democracy our greatest opportunity for a good, decent life despite its failings on the color question, we can see better than other Americans how we can defeat the Russians at their insidious game," going on to emphasize that "in every crisis we have always proven the nation's most loyal patriots. All we ask for is a chance to prove it once again."[161] An editorial on the Korean War also illustrates this point well, explaining that "there is no doubt that Negroes everywhere are behind President Truman's move to block Russian aggression by force. Between democracy and communism, the choice for Negroes is clear and

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[159] Ibid.
[160] "Why No Race Riots?," ibid., May 1951, 100.
[161] "How to Stop Communism," ibid., November 1951, 106.

obvious."[162] African-American men were in a delicate position; in order to fully realize

the ideals of a citizenship and rights-based manhood, it was necessary to change the

current system. At a time when dissent was seen as un-American, it was of paramount

importance to emphasize their patriotism.

The most evident way in which *Ebony* labored to prove the legitimacy of African-

American men's desires for citizenship was through their portrayal and construction of a

masculine identity qualified through military or government service. By consistently

emphasizing the exemplary military and government service of African-American men,

Ebony was able to be critical of racial discrimination while remaining somewhat beyond

reproach. Generally, these articles highlighted the outstanding performance of an

African-American man or the importance and danger of the job. An article entitled

"Atom Bomb Guards" details nine African-American men who "watch over the world's

greatest secret."[163] The author makes sure to note the patriotism of African Americans,

stating that "since the earliest days of the U.S. history, American Negroes have had an

unbroken, unblemished record of loyalty and devotion to their native land."[164] To further

illustrate the importance of these men's jobs, the author reminds readers that "they are the

only men between the secret and the safety of all America should it fall in to the wrong

hands."[165] This also subtly exposes the incongruity in American racial discrimination.

By emphasizing the significance of African-American military and government positions,

Ebony raises questions about why it is that the fate of the United States could be trusted

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[162] "Is it a War of Color?," ibid., September 1950, 94.
[163] "Atom Bomb Guards," ibid., March 1948, 39.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 42.

to African-American men, but they were not able to dine, sleep, or even vote in many places.

Serving the same purpose, many other articles sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of African-American masculinity through military and government service. One article celebrates the physical prowess of an African-American soldier, stating that "six-footer Chester W. Ogden, the first man (Negro or white) to pace through the body-jarring physical fitness test with a perfect score of 500."[166] Another discusses the work of African-American atomic scientists, revealing that "among the hundreds of FBI-screened men of science working at the Argonne National Laboratories is a selected handful of Negroes" who "convert atomic material for useful purposes in medicine and industry."[167] Almost every issue featured at least one article discussing military or government men in a similar way, like the "daring Negro frogmen" who "demonstrate super-human courage in Navy's underwater demolition units."[168] These articles present the of image of African-American men who are not only deserving of full-citizenship rights, but are regularly risking their lives to protect the liberties of all Americans, liberties they often cannot enjoy themselves. Although not overtly, these articles demonstrate some venues in which African-American masculinity already equaled white masculinity in terms of performance. What is missing is nationwide white acceptance of African-American men as equal citizens.

Articles in *Ebony* about African-American military men often featured the approval of white soldiers and military commanders. The purpose of this was to show

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[166] "Negro is First Paratrooper to Attain Perfect Score in Stiff Physical Test," ibid., June 1948, 14.
[167] "Atom Scientists," ibid., September 1949, 26-27.
[168] "The Navy's Human Torpedoes," ibid., March 1951, 28.

that not only could African Americans and whites work successfully together, but also

that African-American men in highly-respected military positions could excel and be

accepted as men. A pertinent example of this is an article entitled "Negro Marines." In

the article, the author applauds the "many heroic achievements" that bear "ample proof

that colored Marines do live up to the [fine?] letter and spirit of the Corps."[169] The author

also includes an excerpt from a letter written by Major General William Rupertus that

speaks to the performance of African-American Marines in combat, reading in part that

"the Negro race can be proud of the work performed by the 7th Ammunition Company.

They have demonstrated in every respect that they appreciate the privilege of wearing the

Marine uniform and serving as Marines in combat. They have earned a sincere , 'Well

Done.'"[170] Another example is an article discussing the 3rd Battalion where the author

explains that "the scrappy 3rd Battalion has fitted in beautifully with the historic traditions

of the 82nd, which won 3,747 combat metals in the war. Their Southern-born white

buddies in the division have come to respect their qualities as real fighters."[171] An article

about an African-American sailor details how initially a small minority of sailors

objected to his presence, but eventually they "got to know and like him. He is now one

of the best-liked and respected members of the submarine's crew."[172] The author goes on

to explain that "he is no longer a Negro sailor. He is a full-fledged member of the crew

of the *U.S.S. Argonaut*."[173] Although African-American men were not yet equal

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[169] "Negro Marines," ibid., July 1952, 15.
[170] Ibid.
[171] "Crack 3rd Battalion Wins Respect of White Buddies," ibid., June 1948, 13.
[172] "Submarine Men," ibid., May 1950, 20.
[173] Ibid.

members of American society, *Ebony* portrays their success in the military as a significant step towards that goal.

The war in Korea brought more than just pledges of loyalty to the United States in the fight against Communism; it also brought the first integrated combat units. *Ebony* seized this opportunity to laud the achievements that integration brought to the armed services, and especially to African-American men. With military service being a significant aspect of a masculine identity centered upon citizenship, many African-American men were eager to prove themselves in battle. The article "War Heroes" offers a prime example of this. *Ebony* proudly proclaims that "in the first six months of the war in Korea, more Negroes won the coveted Distinguished Service Cross than in the entire four year history of World War II," and that this achievement was "a reflection of the new integration policy of the Army."[174] The article continues, praising the fact that "in Korea Negro GI's are getting a chance to show their fighting ability and are demonstrating that courage and heroism know no color."[175] By emphasizing the bravery and achievement of African-American soldiers and connecting it to the desegregation of the Army, *Ebony* is making the case that the military be viewed as a microcosm of American society. Once the military removed racial barriers, African Americans excelled and *Ebony* is positing that the same thing would happen if the United States ended Jim Crow and other forms of discrimination.

Whether through military service, government positions, or responses to discrimination, *Ebony* portrayed and constructed a masculine identity for African-American men rooted in attaining, proving, and legitimizing full-citizenship rights.

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[174] "War Heroes," ibid., May 1951, 15.
[175] Ibid.

Ebony encouraged racial solidarity in confronting the barriers that sought to bar African-American men from achieving that goal. The same discrimination that rendered African Americans second-class citizens also affected their conception of masculinity. As many of the examples illustrated, *Ebony* sought to evidence the validity of African-American citizenship and masculinity by emphasizing their service to the United States, especially in the military. *Ebony* consistently demonstrated the need for an African-American man to recognize how essential equality and full citizenship rights were to be "fully accepted as a man among men."[176]

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[176] "Is The Negro Happy?," ibid., December 1953, 132.

CHAPTER IV

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

The desire to achieve full citizenship was not the only factor shaping African-American masculinity during the postwar period. *Ebony*'s portrayal of gender relations and sexuality adds additional elements to the construction of African-American masculinity. It also provides an excellent point of comparison with *Esquire*'s depictions of how male-female interactions and sexuality impacted white masculinity. In general, anxiety and uncertainty about changing gender roles did not characterize African-American masculinity to the extent that it did white masculinity. *Ebony* generally preferred to emphasize racial solidarity instead of male-female conflict. *Ebony*'s concern with fighting against racial discrimination led to less critical depictions of women in non-traditional occupations, relatively open discussions of sexuality, and a generally tolerant portrayal of homosexuality. However, some articles reveal that African-American men desired a more domestic role for their wives and a more nuclear family, as typified by the white middle-class ethos of the times.

In *Ebony*, African-American masculinity was not alarmed with women working because African-American women had traditionally worked outside of the home. An article in *Ebony* entitled "The Women—God Bless 'Em!" illustrates the extent to which African-American perceptions of female roles differed from those of middle-class whites.

The author provides a short overview of the historical legacy of African-American women, explaining that:

> During slavery days it was the Negro woman who, through her kitchen and cabin door entrée to the master, interceded for her people. It was brave Negro women like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth who fearlessly preached against bondage and personally led their people to freedom…. After the Civil War the matriarchate became more pronounced. Mothers and grandmothers fed, clothed and kept the family together while the nominal head of the Negro house became a good-intentioned wanderer who seldom found his way back home…. Women today are still the breadwinners in many Negro families. In large numbers they till the soil and work in domestic service to support themselves and their children.[177]

As this excerpt clearly demonstrates, a masculine panic over changing roles was unlikely to occur when the "traditional" nuclear family was never a reality for African Americans. The author refers to men only as "nominal" heads of the household and indicates that many women were still the breadwinners in African-American families. In *Esquire*, such statements would have been accompanied by a bemoaning of deteriorating male power and changing gender roles, but in *Ebony* the article celebrates women's contributions. However, the article also goes beyond celebration and hedges towards criticizing African-American masculinity for limited contributions. The author contends that "for years Negro women have had to take the male role in fighting for, caring for and working for their families. Because of this…Negro men have become accustomed to depending upon their womenfolk for both brawn and brain."[178]

Ebony's portrayal of African-American gender roles reveals part of the catalyst for attaining equality. As many of the previous examples have demonstrated, African-

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[177] "The Women—God Bless 'Em!," ibid., May 1953, 78.
[178] Ibid.

American masculinity was especially concerned with gaining full citizenship rights and acceptance in American society, essentially getting on equal footing with white men. If African-American men could break down the barriers of racial discrimination, perhaps they could gain greater acceptance in the "typical" role as head of their household. This is not to imply that there is a progression of masculinity; that one must attain Victorian ideals of manhood before eventually catching up with the times. Nor is it suggesting that the primary aspiration of African-American masculinity was to match a white middle-class conception of gender. However, it is clear that citizenship-based ideals of manhood, the desire for acceptance, and white middle-class conceptions of masculinity and gender roles affected African-American men. In terms of marriage and family life, the result reflects the discontent of African-American men with the current gender roles, and shows their desire to establish a nuclear family with themselves as the breadwinners and their wives as homemakers.

This trend is most evident in the numerous articles in *Ebony* that deal with African-American men marrying or preferring foreign women. Just as *Esquire* revealed that many white soldiers found more "traditional" women in foreign countries, *Ebony* illustrates that African-American men did as well. Although some articles appeared in *Ebony* about African-American men marrying German women, many articles focused on African-American men marrying Japanese women. The articles explained that many African-American men desired a wife who did not work outside of the home and who was generally subservient. In "The Truth About Japanese War Brides," the author describes the appeal of Japanese women, stating that "for centuries Japanese women have been trained to be humble servants to their husbands and sons. At almost all times during

a Japanese woman's life she is under the domination of some male…many Negro GIs like the pliant, agreeable kind of wives it produces."[179] The author also notes that with the popularity of Japanese women "many legends have grown up during the years about these dainty girls," but that "perhaps one Negro G.I. best summed up feelings regarding Japanese women when he said: 'Man, try to find a girl on Seventh Avenue that is as kind and sweet and appreciative.'"[180] What becomes apparent is that all was not well between African-American men and women. Although *Ebony* did not wish to promote intra-racial conflict, some of the articles reveal a tension that manifests in African-American men's desires for more "traditional" wives.

Another article in *Ebony* on Japanese brides features a couple who have returned to the United States. The article further illustrates both the appeal of "traditional" gender roles and the tension it created with African-American women. The author explains that "to all the Japanese girls their husbands are their 'masters,'"[181] which many men find appealing. One husband details how his Japanese wife acts towards him, reporting that "my wife waits on me hand and foot, gives me a massage when I come home from work, washes my back in hot water and turns down the bed so I can take a nap before dinner."[182] Further emphasizing this perception are comments made by one of the Japanese brides. She explains that "I feel it is my duty to do my husband's bidding and if this makes me different from American women then I don't know what to do about it because acting this way makes him happy. If he's happy I am happy."[183] The article also

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[179] "The Truth About Japanese War Brides," ibid., March 1952, 21.
[180] Ibid., 17.
[181] "The Loneliest Brides in America," ibid., January 1953, 23.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

notes that many African-American women are not friendly towards the Japanese brides in the United States. It discusses what is sometimes a lonely existence without many friends that is exacerbated because "U.S. Negro women accuse the Japanese brides of 'spoiling our men' and are hostile to them."[184]

The letters written by women to *Ebony* in response to these articles also display the tension created by African-American men's desire for women who conformed to "traditional" gender roles, although they generally fault women for this trend. One woman wrote in to complement the article but also to argue "that our fellows should give us a chance. Instead they marry and then run from woman to woman thinking we should be appreciative and tolerant."[185] However, most letters, especially those from women, blamed females for driving African-American men to foreign wives. Mrs. E.B.B. writes that "if more of our women would try 'spoiling' their husbands, they, too, will be as happy as these women are."[186] Jane Butts echoes that sentiment, stating that "there are many women in the world today who could learn a much needed lesson from these women."[187] A mother of four men who served in the military, and all married foreign women, wrote into *Ebony* to chastise African-American women, contending that "the Japanese War Bride article published in EBONY was a plain admission of guilt upon the part of the Negro women neglecting to be good wives and companions to their husbands."[188] She goes a step further and suggests that African-American men are going after women of different races because the relationships between African-American

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[184] Ibid.
[185] Sarah A. Trower, "Letters and Pictures," ibid., June 1952, 8.
[186] E.B.B., "Letters to the Editor," ibid., March 1953, 6.
[187] Jane C. Butts, "Letters to the Editor," ibid., March 1953, 7.
[188] Nellie Hand, "Letters and Pictures," ibid., July 1952, 11.

women and white men. She writes that "those of us who have lived in the South know of the relation between Negro women and the Southerners…. Let us fair-minded women think this—we are reaping what we sowed."[189] It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which African-American women were responsible for, or contributed to, African-American men's desire for women who conformed to "traditional" female roles. Although the letters written to *Ebony* about women, as well as other articles, lend insight into the male motivation.

Ebony's portrayal of African-American masculinity's conception of African-American women was complicated. As noted above, it recognized the contributions of African-American women, and even emphasized successful women in traditionally non-feminine occupations. However, within many of *Ebony*'s articles and letters, a masculine discontent with gender roles becomes clear. The men who wrote into *Ebony* were often highly critical of African-American women. One reader, John Dorn, wrote in to express his support of African-American men who do not wish to marry African-American women. Dorn explains that "I haven't as yet met one of our cherished colored women who would mean to be an honest, faithful wife…. Until our fickle-minded women wake up and treat our men sincerely…there will be many more bachelors and marriages to women of other races."[190] He goes on to declare that "I'm 30 years old, and really disgusted with our women."[191] Although Dorn was specifically referring to the features on Japanese brides, the discontent of African-American men with African-American women is also evident in other articles about marriage in *Ebony*.

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[189] Ibid.
[190] John Dorn, "Letters to the Editor," ibid., April 1953, 8.
[191] Ibid.

The masculine discontent of African Americans extended beyond the search for foreign wives, and permeated the articles written about marriage, sex, and relationships as well. A semi-annual feature in *Ebony* was an article on some of the most eligible African-American bachelors, and included what they desired in women. Although the specifics of what the men want vary, only one man claims to want a woman who works, with the article stating that "newspaperman Joseph 'Scoop' Jones…admits interest in an attractive semi-career girl still in her twenties."[192] Most of the men responded with answers that illustrated their desires for a dominant position in the relationship. Author Era Bell reports the bachelors' answers, writing that "surgeon Henry T. Towles, fiftyish…is fishing for a college girl who can cook and weighs no more than 140 pounds," while businessman Lafayette Ford, Jr. wants "a wife who 'will allow me to go and come without question.'"[193] A later article, entitled "Wealthy Bachelors," reinforces the idea that African-American men desire women who are willing to be homemakers. The author explains that "the old fashioned girl who is willing to cook, keep house and bear children for her husband is apparently still regarded as an ideal life partner by America's legions of widowed, divorced, or just plain single men."[194] A male reader, Leonard Archer, wrote into *Ebony* responding to the "Wealthy Bachelors" feature to both commend the men for remaining single as well as to level some criticisms at women and marriage. Archer decries that "in spite of the story books with their 'happy ever after,' [in] my forty-odd years of adult life …I have yet to see ONE woman worth the salt in the food she eats purchased with her husband's money…. Is it any wonder your wealthy

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[192] Era Bell, "Single Men," ibid., May 1948, 54.
[193] Ibid.
[194] "Wealthy Bachelors," ibid., October 1952, 33.

bachelors remain elusive?"[195] Clearly, African-American masculinity was not altogether content with the way male-female relations were playing out.

African-American women also made it apparent that men were not the only ones dissatisfied with the opposite sex. Several women responded to the articles about bachelors. One woman complained that "wealthy men never seem to be interested in a girl who had to work hard for a living,"[196] while a group of women wrote that "it would be better if those men would die an early death so some other men could receive those high positions."[197] The same editorial that celebrated African-American women's contributions also argued that African-American women were superior to African-American men. The author contends that "Negro women were never the weaker sex…. They are smarter…More than twice as many Negro women don the college cap and gown than Negro men," concluding that African-American women "excel over their men in…substantial ways."[198] Other articles in *Ebony* conveyed that some African-American women preferred not to marry. A feature on a female boxer explained that "Miss Thompson's ring life leaves little time for marriage plans."[199] An article on divorced women highlighted some of the positive benefits of not having a husband, noting that "some use freedom to start business careers, other to lead carefree, exciting good times," and also included divorced New Yorker Faith Benjamin's explanation that "the life of a divorcee is free. You can stay out as long as you want to, go where and when you

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[195] Leonard W. Archer, "Letters and Pictures," ibid., February 1953, 13.
[196] J.L.M., "Letters and Pictures," ibid., January 1953, 8.
[197] "Letters and Pictures," ibid., January 1953, 8.
[198] "The Women—God Bless 'Em!," ibid., May 1953, 78.
[199] "Lady Boxer," ibid., March 1949, 28.

please—in short be your own boss."[200] Although not always overtly critical, these letters and articles still demonstrated to African-American men that African-American women were not complacent.

Ebony's treatment of sexuality reveals another aspect of the magazine's construction of African-American masculinity. As stated earlier, *Ebony*'s emphasis on a masculine identity centered upon full citizenship rights and breaking down the barriers of racial discrimination also produced an environment conducive to open and frank discussions of sexuality. While *Esquire* lamented the public discussion of sexuality, *Ebony* portrayed a sense of masculine identity for African-American men that was not afraid to address sexuality openly. However, sexuality intersected with African-American masculine ideals of citizenship as another way to illustrate the merit for acceptance of African-American men into mainstream society.

One example of *Ebony*'s open discussion of sexuality addresses the importance of sex in marriage, and offers suggestions for married couples. The author, Ben Burns, explains that despite all of the reasons people believe their marriages are failing "the real cause of marital woe" is a "lack of sexual satisfaction."[201] Burns blames the increasing rate of divorce and desertion among African Americans on inadequate knowledge about sexuality, but also acknowledges that "the tendency is to blame the wife."[202] Burns argues that "with the new sexual morality of American women, marriage can no longer be taken for granted and is no longer for life. As long as there is freedom to divorce,

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[200] "Gay Divorcees," ibid., February 1950, 73.
[201] Ben Burns, "What Married Couples Should Know about Sex," ibid., May 1950, 54.
[202] Ibid.

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there is still freedom of another, a second choice."[203] However, this is not met with

alarm; rather, it is used to emphasize the importance of sexuality to a marriage. Another

article addresses the issue of maintaining a sex life beyond age fifty. Citing the Kinsey

Report, the article assure readers that "Sex, love, happiness are not ruled by a cruel

stopwatch. Although the pace of passion flags with the passing of time, satisfactory

marital relations can go on, scientific studies like the Kinsey report show."[204] Other

articles range from "Sex In High School"[205] to "Sex On The Campus"[206] to "Teen-Aged

Love Clubs,"[207] all reaffirming the idea that sexuality needed to be discussed. The last

article, "Teen-Aged Love Clubs," reports that "both white and Negro youngsters have

joined so-called non-virgin clubs in which sexual intimacies are qualifying

requirements…. The new love club vogue is alarming parents, educators and social

workers to whom the youth sex circles are symptomatic of a breakdown of national

morals."[208] Emphasizing the importance of openness and education, the article laments

the fact that "with sex, love and marriage still a hush-hush subject, little is being done."[209]

Reflecting the connection between citizenship-based masculinity and sexuality,

Ebony also took care to present a portrayal of African-American masculinity that refuted

many prevalent sexual conceptions. In *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in*

America, authors John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman explain that Jim Crow laws

stemmed from Southern white fears about African-American male sexuality, especially

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[203] Ibid., 57.

[204] "Is There a Sex Life After 50?," ibid., 28.

[205] "Sex in High School," ibid., December 1950, 24.

[206] "Sex on Campus," ibid., April 1951, 86.

[207] "Teen-Aged Love Clubs," ibid., April 1953, 83.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Ibid.

miscegenation. D'Emilio and Freedman note that "from its start, the system of Jim Crow relied on lynching as the ultimate weapon of enforcement," and explain that "apologists for lynching raised the specter of rape, the brutal assault of white women by sexually crazed black men."[210] They go on to describe how perceptions of African-American male sexuality directly impacted African-American men's fight for equality and acceptance, stating that "the accusation of rape encouraged the demise of white support for racial equality."[211] Because of this, it was essential to the cause of African-American masculinity's fight for citizenship to address the stereotypes, misconceptions, and fears about African-American men's sexuality.

Several articles in *Ebony* demonstrate its concern about dispelling myths and rumors about the sexuality of African-American men. One article, written by an anonymous female interviewee of Dr. Alfred Kinsey, sought to do just that. The article notes that Dr. Kinsey has checked it for accuracy, giving it greater credibility. The author, who goes by "Mary X," writes that "he [Kinsey] says additional interviews since his first report uphold his statement that there is little difference between Negro and white sexual activity on the same social level."[212] Here, the article is using a reputable source to reject the perception that African-American men are innately more sexual than white men. The article continues, and presents Dr. Kinsey's findings to combat "another common stereotype…a white belief most prevalent in the South," by explaining that "one question asked Negroes is: 'Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a white woman?' He has found an exceedingly small group that has crossed the color line. Most of these

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[210] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 216.
[211] Ibid., 217.
[212] Mary X, "What I told Dr. Kinsey about my Sex Life," *Ebony*, December 1948, 45.

sexual contacts are with prostitutes."[213] This is presented to dispute the idea that

segregation and Jim Crow laws must be maintained to protect white women. Using Dr.

Kinsey's data, the article emphasizes that few African-American men have had sexual

experiences with white women. Another article on sex within marriage comments that

African-American men are not abnormally potent, stating that "Negro men are no

different than whites in this respect, despite claims of more sexual competence among

Negro men."[214] With *Ebony*'s professed goal of "reflecting the brighter side of [the] life

of Negroes,"[215] the magazine did not devote a great deal of space to addressing these

concerns. However, the fact that the magazine addressed these issues at all indicates the

significance of sexuality to perceptions of African-American masculinity.

Another topic that *Ebony* addressed on several occasions was homosexuality.

While homosexuality was still primarily thought of as a disease during this period, the

publication of Dr. Alfred Kinsey's report on the sexuality of American men brought the

discussion of homosexuality into the public discourse. In contrast to *Esquire*'s portrayal

of homosexuality, *Ebony* generally exhibited more tolerance. It is likely that a

combination of sensitivity about intolerance and the focus on attaining citizenship rights

produced this attitude. In short, African-American masculinity's battle was primarily

with ending racial discrimination and gaining equality, and although sexuality factored

into this, homosexuality did not pose an immediate threat to achieving these goals.

Ebony's promotion of tolerance is evident in the previously discussed article

about the Kinsey Report. The article reports that "the Kinsey Report showed that

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[213] Ibid., 45-46.
[214] Ben Burns, "What Married Couples Should Know about Sex," ibid., May 1950, 54.
[215] "Ebony's Fifth Anniversary," ibid., November 1950, 15.

homosexuality and 'perversions' were far more widespread than generally admitted,"[216]

without any alarm or negative comments. Instead, the author informs the readers that "I

have friends who are admitted homosexuals. They are interesting people and their sexual

behavior does not in the least interfere with my ability to accept them as friends. Whom

they choose to love and live with is their business."[217] The article ends by calling on

Americans to be more tolerant of others. Another article discusses Lucky's, a Harlem

nightclub known for its friendliness to homosexuals. The author explains that "its

atmosphere is steeped in the swish jargon of its many lavender customers…. Male

couples are so commonplace at Lucky's that no one looks twice at them."[218] Although

Ebony did not directly address the ways in which the magazine presented homosexuals,

its relative tolerance and even positive approach are noteworthy. As stated earlier,

because *Ebony* was concerned with combating racial discrimination, it is probable that an

increased awareness of intolerance and prejudice influenced their coverage of

homosexuals. Just as *Ebony* highlighted the hypocritical treatment of African Americans

in the United States in light of the Cold War rhetoric of freedom and democracy, it would

have appeared equally hypocritical to in turn criticize homosexuals in a publication aimed

at promoting equality and tolerance.

　　　Ebony also regularly featured positive articles on female impersonators. One

article about a Chicago nightclub explains that the owner's "rules are few, simple and

inflexible to stay within the law. A female impersonator must be a good entertainer, must

not wear dresses and makeup outside the club and cannot accept invitations to sit at

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[216] Mary X, "What I told Dr. Kinsey about my Sex Life," *Ebony*, December 1948, 47.
[217] Ibid.
[218] "Harlem's Strangest Night Club," ibid., December 1951, 82.

customers' tables unless real women are present."[219] Another article reports on large

dances held by and for female impersonators annually in large cities. The author explains

that "ordinarily a man dressed in women's clothing and mincing down the street will be

picked up by the police and tossed into the nearest lock-up, but once a year in most big

cities the cops will look the other way."[220] The article also describes the female

impersonators, stating that "while most men are hesitant about revealing even slightly

feminine traits, the contestants at masquerades for female impersonators show no

inhibitions and do their best to look and act as much like a woman as possible."[221] While

it is difficult to discern whether the men in the female impersonator features were

homosexuals, the articles indicate that at least some of them were. Several of the articles

refer to police raids, arrests, and harassment that were common experiences for many

homosexuals at the time.[222]

     While *Ebony* is not specifically promoting female impersonators, it is offering

articles that do not portray the impersonators as aberrant, deviant, or threatening to

masculine identity.   Some of *Ebony's* readers wrote in to express their agreement and

appreciation of these articles. One reader, Victor Backus, wrote to commend *Ebony* for

its articles as well to express his concern that "America, unfortunately, is overrun with

people…who also would dictate whom one may love, [and] how one may love."[223]

Backus goes on to suggest that differences in sexuality mean no more than differences in

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[219] "Female Impersonators," ibid., March 1948, 61.
[220] "Female Impersonators Hold Costume Balls," ibid., March 1952, 62.
[221] Ibid., 65.
[222] David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 149.
[223] Victor Backus, "Letters and Pictures," *Ebony*, April 1949, 5-6.

skin color, stating that "perhaps it is also time for us to grow up and realize that an individual's sex life is—or should be—a matter of similar indifference."[224] Several readers wrote to *Ebony* about the female impersonator articles as well. One man commented that "I just dug the crazy new issue of EBONY with the article about 'Female Impersonators.' Man, this is the stuff we all want to read. Let's have more of it. It was not only interesting, but educational as well."[225] Another wrote "to congratulate you for putting out, as a March issue, one of the best magazines I have read. I was particularly interested in your 'Female Impersonators,' it was hard to face the incredible but true fact that those were men."[226] Although *Ebony* did receive some negative mail for these features and had a few articles from religious leaders that dealt with homosexuality as a problem, *Ebony* maintained its position. What these letters do illustrate is that many readers felt that *Ebony*'s position of tolerance, and sometime acceptance, was an appropriate response to homosexuality and female impersonators.[227]

African-American masculinity was primarily concerned with attaining equality and full citizenship rights, but the gender roles of the times also affected it. Despite *Ebony*'s desire to eschew conflict within the race, many articles clearly demonstrate the influence of white, middle-class gender standards on African-American men through their preference for a wife who was solely a homemaker. This grew partly from the intersection of citizenship-based ideals of masculinity with the desire of African-

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[224] Ibid., 6.
[225] Gabriel Maxwell, "Letters to the Editor," ibid., May 1953, 9.
[226] Frank Archer, "Letters to the Editor," ibid., May 1953, 9.
[227] I am not taking for granted that all of the men who chose to dress as women were homosexuals. As mentioned above, the articles referred to police raids, arrests, and harassment that frequently occurred in the homosexual community and at establishments friendly to homosexuals, so it is a reasonable conclusion that some of these men in the articles were likely homosexuals.

American men to gain societal acceptance. Additionally, *Ebony* sought to present an image of African-American men's sexuality that refuted many of the underlying fears supporting Jim Crow laws and discrimination. Lastly, *Ebony* did not perceive homosexuality as a threat to African-American masculinity and, therefore, demonstrated a tolerant, and at times accepting, portrayal of homosexuals. In sum, African-American men's focus on citizenship-based ideals of masculinity both influenced, and were influenced by, the manner in which *Ebony* presented gendered conflict and issues of sexuality.

Part III

Conclusion

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

By examining masculinity in *Esquire* and *Ebony,* from the similarities, the myriad

of influential factors, and the significant differences, it is clear that the construction of

masculinity is complex and dynamic. It is affected by the interaction of race, culture, and

time period in the creation of a masculine identity that is both contingent upon those

factors and active in their cultural construction. Not merely an issue of sex, masculine

identity is unique to a particular historical period, and within that, it is subject to an array

of influences. During the postwar period white middle-class men and middle-class

African-American men each faced unique sets of circumstances that influenced the ways

in which they perceived their masculinity.

For middle-class white men the state of masculinity in the postwar period was full

of uncertainty. The political climate of the Cold War added to masculine anxieties, but it

does not account for the level of insecurity and defensiveness that characterized the

period. What becomes evident in examining white masculinity during this period is a

heightened level of conflict between men and women in several arenas. The degree of

white masculine uncertainty and insecurity comes through in white men's reactionary

defensiveness to women compromising the masculine sphere. White men's defensive-

ness was so great that their arguments often went beyond any logical basis, serving more

as evidence of their insecurity than the dominance they sought to convey. The contradiction and hypocrisy prevalent in many of the articles about breadwinning further prove the great uncertainty of white masculinity in itself. White men attacked women outside of the workplace as well, with much the same result. When women responded with accusations and critical assessments of their own, white men were so insecure and unsure of themselves that they could not muster a logical response. Their attempts to establish masculine areas in the traditionally-feminine sphere of the home indicate the degree to which middle-class white men perceived that women compromised the workplace as a masculine proving ground. By reclaiming areas of the house one room at a time, white men sought to establish some sort of space of their own where they could comfortably be men. Despite the criticism of women, the most foreboding adversary to these men were themselves.

The culture of the times also affected middle-class African-American masculinity. As many of the articles in *Ebony* evidenced, African-American masculine identity was centered around attaining full citizenship rights and breaking down the barriers of racial discrimination. To this end, *Ebony* presented a construction of African-American masculine identity that emphasized military or government service, as well as loyalty to the United States. By highlighting state-sanctioned venues that accepted African-American men, *Ebony* hoped it would illustrate the legitimacy of African-American masculinity's push for full citizenship. Although *Ebony* promoted racial solidarity over gender infighting, some issues between African-American men and women are evident. Out of desire for societal acceptance tied to attaining full citizenship, African-American men often desired what they perceived was the typical or appropriate role for women;

that of homemaker. Attaining full-citizenship rights and combating racial discrimination also influenced the way in which *Ebony* portrayed African-American male sexuality. As an underlying fear of African-American male sexuality continued to prop-up Jim Crow laws, *Ebony* strove to illustrate the African-American men and white men were the same sexually; white fears of African-American male sexuality were unfounded and should not bar African-American men from enjoying full citizenship. The key tenet of African-American masculinity was to be accepted as a man among men in American society. Although African-American men were sometimes discontented with women, they were primarily concerned with their place as men in society. The desire to obtain full citizenship rights and be accepted as men into American society defined the construction of African-American masculinity during the postwar period.

Although clearly very different, white and African-American masculinity did share some commonalities in the postwar period. Both displayed a desire for women to function primarily as homemakers, despite arriving at that point by different means. For white men this desire grew out attempts to maintain patriarchal control, along with fear and anxiety over changing roles. For African-American men, this desire reflected a striving for societal acceptance and gaining equality with white men. Both groups were concerned with the acceptance of their masculinity in American society. African-American men directly linked this with attaining full citizenship rights, while white men feared that the avenues for establishing their masculinity were shrinking. World War II affected both groups. Among African-American men, it intensified and legitimized their fight for racial equality. Among white men, it demonstrated that women were capable of

performing well in typically male occupations, and symbolically marked a departure of women from the home.

Masculinity then, is a complicated and multifaceted construction particular to a historical period. Depending on one's race and class, conceptions of masculinity differ. What emerges is an understanding of several masculinities within a given historical period. That there were things in common between middle-class African-American and white masculinity is not altogether surprising. With the rise of mass consumption also came mass culture, and certain gendered expectations were likely to transcend color lines. Although for African-American men, the lack of equal access to places of consumption and employment opportunities to support a middle-class lifestyle continued into the Civil Rights movement. The differences between middle-class white and African-American masculinity demonstrate just how divergent those gendered conceptions were during this period. However, both conceptions of masculinity shared common characteristics of unrest and dissatisfaction that characterized the postwar period as a no man's land for masculinity.

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MASCULINITY IN *EBONY AND ESQUIRE*, 1948-1953

Pages in Study: 88   Candidate for the Degree of Master Arts

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Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine the portrayal and
       construction of middle-class white and African-American masculinity in two
       popular post-World War II magazines, *Esquire* and *Ebony*, from 1948 through
       1953. The study encompasses every issue of both magazines for the period of
       study. Drawing upon a larger understanding of historical constructions of
       masculinity, this study seeks to illuminate how and why middle-class African-
       American and white masculinity were constructed in popular magazines.

Findings and Conclusions: Race was a significant factor in the construction of
       masculinity in *Ebony* and *Esquire*, and accounts for many of the differences
       between white and African-American masculinity during the postwar period. In
       Esquire, white middle-class masculinity was characterized by anxiety and
       uncertainty over the changing roles of women in society and at home, responding
       critically and angrily to a perceived loss of patriarchal control and dominance. In
       general, marriage was encouraged and sexuality was not openly discussed in
       detail, reflecting the white middle-class ethos of the period. In *Ebony*, African-
       American masculinity centered around obtaining full-citizenship rights and
       demonstrating that African-American men were deserving of complete acceptance
       in American society. Issues involving sexuality were discussed more freely in
       Ebony, although there was a concerted effort to illustrate conformity with white
       middle-class standards in marriages and relationships.

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