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## The Porn King and the Hamburger Chain

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Hefner, age 77, is featured wearing his trademark silk pajamas and holding a large hamburger. "People always ask me, 'Hey Hef, do you have favorites?'" Hefner goes on to say, "I love them all. It just depends on what I'm in the mood for." In at least one ad, Hefner's statements are interrupted with appearances by young women, one of whom says, "I feel for Hef. It's so hard to choose." The commercial ends with an announcer declaring the ad's theme: "Because some guys don't like the same thing night after night." Is that the way they talk down at your local fast-food joint?

Carl's Jr. is selling its hamburgers to a target audience of young men by touting their variety as tantamount to sexual experience. Hugh Hefner, who has never before served as an advertising spokesman, explained why he is now undertaken his first major marketing campaign in his fifty-year career: "I have never been one for doing commercials, but this seemed like a good business opportunity since we share a similar target audience—namely guys." Well, at least those guys who buy both hamburgers and porn.

Andy Puzder, President and CEO of CKE Restaurants, Inc., echoed Hefner's statement. "We're appealing to an audience of young, hungry guys who expect a quality product but want to have something different from time to time. As a pop icon, Hefner appeals to our target audience and credibly communicates our message of variety." Credibly communicates our message of variety? That's obviously not the real message.

Carl's Jr. is taking the low road in its approach to selling hamburgers to young men. By using Hugh Hefner and sexual innuendo, the company obviously seeks to get the attention of the young male market segment and translate this interest into corporate income. The tag line of the campaign, "Because some guys don't like the same thing night after night," is an obvious reference to sexual promiscuity. What else could it mean? Nevertheless, company spokesman Caroline Leakan had the audacity to deny that the commercials have anything to do with sex. "We're sorry people took offense, but we are standing by our advertising. There's nothing sexual about them." Keep talking to yourself, Ms. Leakan. No one is going to buy that fabrication.

David Morrison of Twentysomething, Inc., a company that specializes in marketing to youth, explained that Hugh Hefner "has become the gentle grandpa that has just a little of the wild side." Using Hefner is a safe gamble for Carl's Jr., Morrison explains, because he "has none of the controversy of the past and none of the pressure of the present." We'll see. How many parents see Hugh Hefner as a "gentle grandpa?" That image is just too creepy to take seriously.

While Carl's Jr. tries to increase sales of its "Six Dollar Burger," the company is really promoting a lifestyle perfectly consistent with the Sexual Revolution. As a result, the restaurant company is now pushing pornography into America's living rooms during the family hour. Will anyone care? CKE, Inc., which operates both Carl's Jr. and Hardee's restaurants, is no stranger to controversial advertising. In a former ad, the company featured a young woman riding a

mechanical bull as she held both a hamburger and the saddle of the gyrating animal.

The Hefner ad series comes at a critical turning point in America's moral culture. Pornography has now gone mainstream and is woven its way into the texture of American life through advertising, entertainment, and marketing.

America's descent into a culture of pornography is another dimension of our culture's tendency to "define deviancy down," as explained by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. As moral standards are continually negotiated downward, what was considered deviant in one generation becomes the mainstream culture of the next.

All this comes as Playboy magazine has just celebrated its 50th anniversary. The magazine appeared in late 1953, featuring a seductive black-and-white photo of Marilyn Monroe on its cover. Hefner invented the magazine as a manifesto for the Sexual Revolution and pandered to the pornographic tastes of young men from the very beginning. Until the development of Playboy, pornography was relegated to back alleys and was marginalized from mainstream culture. Hefner's vision was to transform pornography into a swanky magazine that would appeal to young men as a token of sophistication. The magazine would represent the "Playboy philosophy" that would blend hedonism and high society into a whole new lifestyle.

Hefner sold the magazine by selling himself as well. Tim Carvell of McSweeneys.net explains, "In launching Playboy, perhaps the smartest thing Hugh Hefner did was in establishing his personality as that of a witty, urbane, sophisticate who enjoyed the company of many, many women." That is an understatement, Hefner became an icon of sexual promiscuity and multiple sex partners. The Playboy philosophy packaged naked women as sexual enticement and transformed male readers [if reader is even the right word] into sexual predators.

Hefner was born into a conservative family and was reared in the Methodist denomination. By his own reckoning, he was a virgin at age 18 and had never smoked or indulged in alcohol. That didn't last long. Hefner's world was transformed by reading Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. He became a devotee of Kinsey's [fraudulently researched] theories of sexual liberation and promiscuity. As biographer Thomas Weyr argues, Kinsey's vision of sexual diversity and unrestrained libido became Hefner's new religion. As it turned out, this new religion caught on quickly.

Playboy's success transformed the magazine business and opened the way for a flood of pornographic magazines that would follow. In the wake of Playboy—which featured "only" naked women and explicitly sexual content—came Penthouse, Hustler, and a host of other magazines that pressed the envelope even further. The explosion of pornography on the internet was made possible only by the Playboy revolution.

For pornography to be commercially successful, Hefner had to transform pornographic images into a product that would be considered pornographic, but not perverted. As one of the lead architects of America's sexual transformation, Hefner not only made millions of dollars—he left an indelible mark on American society. In an article published in *Christianity Today*, Reid Mercer Schuchardt described Hefner's success: "What pornography needed to be profitable on a mass scale was to be removed from the sexual ghetto and brought into the living room. It needed someone to adopt it, domesticate it, and teach it manners. As a myth maker on the scale of Walt Disney, Hugh Hefner did for porn what Henry Higgins did for Eliza Doolittle."

Schuchardt also traced the mainstreaming of Hefner's sexual transformation. "If you're younger than 40, you might mistake Hefner's topsy-turvy world, for normal, since it's the world you were born into. Hefner succeeded in inverting traditional sex roles."

Looking at nude women in a magazine became a token of cultural sophistication. Pornography left the back alleys and ended up on the magazine racks of respectable stores. In the wake of the magazine came videos, Playboy Clubs, and an entire product line featuring the magazine's trademark bunny.

Along the way, Hefner also made a fortune. He had to borrow \$8,000 in 1953 in order to finance the magazine's first issue. Since that time, the company has grown into a multi-million-dollar enterprise that may book a profit of nearly \$25 million dollars in 2003.

Moving on from the magazine, Playboy has become a big player in domestic television and is also highly involved in

international television and publishing. He has big plans for Playboy in the digital age.

Strangely enough, Carl's Jr.'s use of Hugh Hefner in its advertising comes as Playboy is increasingly identified with aging baby-boomers rather than with the younger cohort the company says it is trying to reach. Younger men are increasingly attracted to what are now called the "laddie magazines." With titles including Maxim, FHM, and Stuff, these magazines have become real competition for Playboy and the other older magazines.

Carl's Jr. is taking a big risk with its new advertising campaign. The company evidently believes that reaching young men by using an elderly pornographer as spokesman is worth alienating and offending families and others repulsed by their scandalous marketing plan. Will families put up with this kind of irresponsible corporate behavior?

Hugh Hefner has become a garish cartoon of the Sexual Revolution—an aging lothario wearing silk pajamas. He remains a moral adolescent, caught in his sexual fantasies and unable or unwilling to move into moral adulthood. The real influence of his pornographic enterprise is millions of warped and wounded lives, broken marriages, and all the ugly manifestations of sexual degeneracy.

Carl's Jr. is counting on Hugh Hefner to sell hamburgers. But we're kidding ourselves if we think that's what Hugh Hefner's really selling.

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