

# **SINGLES' MAGAZINES AND THE RISE OF CONTINGENT COMMITMENT IN THE U.S. 1965-2000**

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Since 1965, young American men and women have delayed marriage, have had fewer children and have formed their first unions increasingly through cohabitation rather than marriage. These demographic changes occurred during a time of unprecedented economic affluence for the nation as a whole and rising education and career prospects for women in particular.

This dissertation asks two questions: How have courtship goals changed since 1965 and what brought about these changes? This is a study of changing commitment patterns among American young men and women during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century using gendered magazines as guidebooks for evolving courtship rituals. While often derided as frivolous, these magazines garner millions of readers. Numerous social and economic indicators support the messages of declining life-long commitment and rising contingent commitment—shorter-term relationships with no legal bonds—observed in these magazines. Gendered magazines, the new general-interest publications in a sea of specialty media, offer insights into the choices, fantasies and ambitions of young men and women since 1965.