

Virginia Cowles made her debut in Boston in 1928-29. A year later Peggy LeBoutillier came out in New York. They've been through the approved mill—the right schools, the right parties, the right people. And here's what they think of the formula

## Society Girl

By Peggy Le Boutillier  
and Virginia Cowles

**T**HE society girl is less of an individual than any other class member. She is, in miniature, a perfect reflection of American mass production. She looks alike, she talks alike, she thinks alike, she plays alike. She is the result of a formula. And from the time of her birth her life is run according to this formula.

Her father is a professional man, a banker, a lawyer, a merchant. Whatever his line, he has business prestige. He may have family; he may be self-made. He belongs to good clubs; he is in the social register. He provides the money, his wife the social opportunity.

Their daughter is sent to a smart kindergarten, or tutored by a governess. After two years of nursery rhymes and weaving she goes to a correct day school, such as Miss Chapin's or Brearley, where she learns her ABC's in the best environment. She is brought and fetched by the chauffeur. She studies obediently. She snatches glorious moments in the washroom, chatting with the right young ladies.

At fourteen she is sent away to boarding school. This school, like the previous ones, is chosen, not for its academic standing, but for its smart patronage. It may be Fermata; it may be Foxcroft; it may be Farmington. Whichever it is, it is amiable, expensive, and although it may not pique her imagination or stimulate a thirst for knowledge it satisfies her parents in the matter of correctness.

### Popularity Above All

She enjoys these years. She has crushes on the older girls; she plans midnight feasts; she tells doubtful jokes; she plumbs into the facts of life. She adores discussion of "deep" subjects. She has current passions for actresses and actors. She likes to be a leader; to be on the tennis team, the basketball team, to hold class office, and she is willing to work for it.

She writes hundreds of letters, and reads aloud the letters she receives from her friends. Her interest in and curiosity about boys increases daily.

Her vacations are spent at the films, tea-danc-



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ing, buying clothes. She attends subscription dances; her mother has carefully arranged a membership in the Holiday dances, the Cosmopolitans, as a preliminary to the big fight. Even at the age of sixteen tremendous emphasis is placed on popularity. Her greatest satisfaction is to pass for eighteen or nineteen. She craves sophistication.

Then comes the finishing school in Paris run for American girls. Here she has the opportunity to get the finer points of instruction, to study French culture, history and literature. But since the primary aim of her previous schooling was to guarantee social friendships, and not to give her an educational foundation, she has the ability neither to concentrate, to evaluate, nor to think. Therefore she fritters her time away scoffing at museum trips, evading lessons, resenting her seclusion.

### The Product of the Formula

Her thoughts center on her imminent *début*. She awaits in it all the things she expects of life: the excitement, the pleasure, the romance. She is a little afraid. She consolidates her popularity by an extensive correspondence with her beaux and girl friends at home.

She returns. She becomes, as a *débutante*, the focal point of her family. Everything is done for her; she takes it all for granted. She is keyed up to step out and take her place in the world.

She is ushered into her dreamland on a landslide of publicity, generosity, compliments, flowers, beaux, committees, proms. She is treated with the glory of an opera singer although she has done nothing to deserve it. She is immature, unsure and susceptible. She believes this life of all take and no give is a genuine one.

When her year is over and the tumult and the shouting dies, she rolls out of the *débutante* machinery as uniform as an engine from an automobile plant. The formula is completed; she is the finished product. She takes her place as a young society woman. What is she?

She has a good body; she flaunts it. Her attraction lies in her immense vitality, her flash. Her bearing is self- She is cordial without discrimination to everyone who is accepted in her sphere of society; she is snobbish to outsiders. Her veneer of gayety is unbroken.

She is smartly dressed. Her clothes are current. She patronizes only shops which have an established reputation for smartness; she copies the fashion magazines. She lacks elegance and in-

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dividuality. Her skin, her hands, her hair are well-groomed.

She talks on any subject from Roosevelt to roller-skating. She has decisive hearsay opinions, although her knowledge is scant. She discusses sex and its variations with interest, and as unself-consciously as clothes and Bermuda. She shines in relating her activities; her success lies in an amusing exaggeration of fact. She enjoys hearing herself talk. Her vocabulary consists of stock words and expressions, which she uses indiscriminately; such as lousy, amusing, swell, pansy, smooth, bitch, divine, revolting, ass, bender, grand, amazing, flop, dull, on the make, hard to take, pulled a fast one, beautiful white body.

## Social Success

Popularity is her life-blood; self-promotion her weapon. She goes out to be seen. She accepts invitations from everyone who is acceptable to her friends, regardless of whether she finds them dull. At a night club, a party, a speakeasy, a beach, a hunt meet, she will go out of her way to speak to acquaintances to make sure she is noticed.

She is an exhibitionist. She is always under the impression that everyone is looking at her, and she plays to the gallery. If she is lunching in a restaurant with a girl, her gestures, her animated talk, her beguiling smiles are not for her companion; they are for the man at the next table eating spaghetti.

She is two-faced. She is effusive and admiring with her friends and acquaintances; behind their backs she is viciously critical. She derives a keen enjoyment from this. By devaluating their attraction she lessens their power as rivals, and increases her own stature.

Her days are spent fulfilling a series of appointments from photographic sittings to committee meetings. When this becomes sufficiently monotonous to her she studies psychology, takes a secretarial course, goes in for art, takes a job. She enjoys impressing her friends with her artistic tendencies, or her business ability. She is usually hired for her social connections and the job consists of persuading her friends to buy clothes, permanent waves, etc. She is enthusiastic, she works hard. But at the mention of a trip South, a wedding out of town, an invitation to visit, she quickly vanishes from the business world. When life palls again she starts on another venture.

She appears to be on intimate terms with her family but actually she does not confide in them. She outlines her activities, her likes and dislikes, sufficiently to make them feel secure in their understanding of her. Her attitude is "what they don't know won't hurt them."

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Her ambition in life is to marry a man who, from a worldly point of view, is considered a "good catch." She plays to win and not for the fun of it. Every man she meets she eyes as a potential husband and if she decides she can do better she does not discard him but keeps him on the string under a pose of comradeship which she uses to enhance her own desirability and keep her in circulation.

She has no standards for living. She plays croquet without wickets. She is the victim of a debunking era. She degrades romance, reliability, patriotism, family devotion, conduct and good manners. She lacks the comprehension of love, the sincerity to love; therefore she does not believe in love. She accepts the first man who is pleasing to her friends and physically agreeable to her.

She will kiss any man who is attractive to her. She encourages advances to satisfy her vanity. When she realizes he is "on the make," she toys with the idea; she doesn't end the relationship. Until the bitter end there is no way for him to tell whether she will or she won't. And if she won't, she suddenly adopts a misunderstood attitude and scrambles, temporarily, to a Victorian pedestal.

She is a moral coward. She is afraid of the censure of her crowd. She hasn't the guts to take an independent line of action without first soliciting their approval. She has made life a great deal easier for the young man. She will tolerate anything he does for fear of jeopardizing her popularity. Men regard her as a "good sport" and to retain this admiration she accepts drunkenness, discourtesy, unpunctuality. If she is taken on a party with cheap women, if obscene stories are told, she may complain to other friends, but she continues to receive these men. Her excuse to the world is called sophistication.

When she does make the grade, when she does marry the proper catch, she enjoys no great awakening, no new awareness. Her circle of friends increases, but the horizon does not widen. Her attitude toward herself and her environment is permanent. Her development was not only retarded during her debutante year; it was completed.

Self-promotion is still her consuming interest. She becomes a matron with relish; she does it up brown. She capably runs the ménage. She entertains charmingly; she adores chaperoning house parties. She sweetly drives her husband to the train. She takes a mild job if she needs the money. She attends meetings, keeps appointments, is seen at the smart places. She even has a child the first year, and gives it absorbed attention on odd Thursdays. She loves her husband and her child very, very much. She is a very desirable young woman. And she wants everyone

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to tell her so.

### Perpetuating the Type

But when the newness wears down, when the glamour is thinned, the gap appears. Her lack of inner resources, and her inexperience in pulling her oar in a unit, muff the chances for compatibility. If she does not divorce she concentrates on being a social leader. If she does divorce she soon remarries. Her interest in moral questions does not wane, but her technique becomes more correct. With the background secured through marriage she can play the game with more discrimination, more sureness.

She perpetuates her type by raising her girls to be belles. They live according to the same formula and are ground out in the same pattern as she. They are paced through the school routine; they make successful débuts. Before the rising generation has a chance to get a new slant, to branch out, they are right back to where they started from. Thus the merry-go-round.

# Collier's

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