

towels pure white, never sat down around a mahogany conference table in a board room on Madison Avenue or Wall Street and voted on a motion: "Gentlemen, I move, in the interests of all, that we begin a concerted fifty-billion dollar campaign to stop this dangerous movement of American women out of the home. We've got to keep them housewives, and let's not forget it."

A thinking vice-president says: "Too many women getting educated. Don't want to stay home. Unhealthy. If they all get to be scientists and such, they won't have time to shop. But how can we keep them home? They want careers now."

"We'll liberate them to have careers at home," the new executive with horn-rimmed glasses and the Ph.D. in psychology suggests. "We'll make home-making creative."

Of course, it didn't happen quite like that. It was not an economic conspiracy directed against women. It was a byproduct of our general confusion lately of means with ends; just something that happened to women when the business of producing and selling and investing in business for profit—which is merely the way our economy is organized to serve man's needs efficiently—began to be confused with the purpose of our nation, the end of life itself. No more surprising, the subversion of women's lives in America to the ends of business, than the subversion of the sciences of human behavior to the business of deluding women about their real needs. It would take a clever economist to figure out what would keep our affluent economy going if the housewife market began to fall off, just as an economist would have to figure out what to do if there were no threat of war.

It is easy to see why it happened. I learned *how* it happened when I went to see a man who is paid approximately a million dollars a year for his professional services in manipulating the emotions of American women to serve the needs of business. This particular man got in on the ground floor of the hidden-persuasion business in 1945, and kept going. The headquarters of his institute for motivational manipulation is a baronial mansion in upper Westchester. The walls of a ballroom two stories high are filled with steel shelves holding a thousand-odd studies for business and industry, 300,000 individual "depth interviews," mostly with American housewives.¹

He let me see what I wanted, said I could use anything that was not confidential to a specific company. Nothing there for anyone to hide, to feel guilty about—only, in page after page of those depth studies, a shrewd cheerful awareness of the empty, purposeless, uncreative, even sexually joyless lives that most American housewives lead. In his own unabashed terms, this most helpful of hidden persuaders showed me the function served by keeping American women housewives—the reservoir that their lack of identity, lack of purpose, creates, to be manipulated

3

Betty Friedan

"THE SEXUAL SELL"

(1963)

From The Feminine Mystique

Some months ago, as I began to fit together the puzzle of women's retreat to home, I had the feeling I was missing something. I could trace the routes by which sophisticated thought circled back on itself to perpetuate an obsolete image of femininity; I could see how that image meshed with prejudice and misinterpreted frustrations to hide the emptiness of "Occupation: housewife" from women themselves.

But what powers it all? If, despite the nameless desperation of so many American housewives, despite the opportunities open to all women now, so few have any purpose in life other than to be a wife and mother, somebody, something pretty powerful must be at work. The energy behind the feminist movement was too dynamic merely to have trickled dry; it must have been turned off, diverted, by something more powerful than that underestimated power of women.

There are certain facts of life so obvious and mundane that one never talks about them. Only the child blurts out: "Why do people in books never go to the toilet?" Why is it never said that the really crucial function, the really important role that women serve as housewives is *to buy more things for the house*. In all the talk of femininity and woman's role, one forgets that the real business of America is business. But the perpetuation of house-wifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business. Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the underused, nameless-yearning, energy-to-get-rid-of state of being housewives.

I have no idea how it happened. Decision-making in industry is not as simple, as rational, as those who believe the conspiratorial theories of history would have it. I am sure the heads of General Foods, and General Electric, and General Motors, and Macy's and Gimbel's and the assorted directors of all the companies that make detergents and electric mixers, and red stoves with rounded corners, and synthetic furs, and waxes, and hair coloring, and patterns for home sewing and home

Properly manipulated ("if you are not afraid of that word," he said), American housewives can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack—by the buying of things. I suddenly realized the significance of the boast that women wield seventy-five percent of the purchasing power in America. I suddenly saw American women as *victims* of that ghastly gift, that power at the point of purchase. The insights he shared with me so liberally revealed many things. . . .

The dilemma of business was spelled out in a survey made in 1945 for the publisher of a leading women's magazine on the attitudes of women toward electrical appliances. The message was considered of interest to all the companies that, with the war about to end, were going to have to make consumer sales take the place of war contracts. It was a study of "the psychology of housekeeping"; "a woman's attitude toward housekeeping appliances cannot be separated from her attitude toward homemaking in general," it warned.

On the basis of a national sample of 4,500 wives (middle-class, high-school or college-educated), American women were divided into three categories. "The True Housewife Type," "The Career Woman," and "The Balanced Homemaker." While 51 percent of the women then fitted "The True Housewife Type" ("From the psychological point of view, housekeeping is this woman's dominating interest. She takes the utmost pride and satisfaction in maintaining a comfortable and well-run home for her family. Consciously or subconsciously, she feels that she is indispensable and that no one else can take over her job. She has little, if any, desire for a position outside the home, and if she has one it is through force or circumstances or necessity"), it was apparent that this group was diminishing, and probably would continue to do so as new fields, interests, education were now open to women.

The largest market for appliances, however, was this "True Housewife"—though she had a certain "reluctance" to accept new devices that had to be recognized and overcome. ("She may even fear that they [appliances] will render unnecessary the old-fashioned way of doing things that has always suited her.") After all, housework was the justification for her whole existence. ("I don't think there is any way to make housework easier for myself," one True Housewife said, "because I don't believe that a machine can take the place of hard work.")

The second type—The Career Woman or Would-Be Career Woman—was a minority, but an extremely "unhealthy" one from the sellers' standpoint; advertisers were warned that it would be to their advantage not to let this group get any larger. For such women, though not necessarily job-holders, "do not believe that a woman's place is primarily in the home." ("Many in this group have never actually worked, but their attitude is: 'I think housekeeping is a horrible waste of time. If my

youngsters were old enough and I were free to leave the house, I would use my time to better advantage. If my family's meals and laundry could be taken care of, I would be delighted to go out and get a job.'") The point to bear in mind regarding career women, the study said, is that, while they buy modern appliances, they are not the ideal type of consumer. *They are too critical.*

The third type—"The Balanced Homemaker"—is "from the market standpoint, the ideal type." She has some outside interests, or has held a job before turning exclusively to homemaking; she "readily accepts" the help mechanical appliances can give—but "does not expect them to do the impossible" because she needs to use her own executive ability "in managing a well-run household."

The moral of the study was explicit: "Since the Balanced Homemaker represents the market with the greatest future potential, it would be to the advantage of the appliance manufacturer to make more and more women aware of the desirability of belonging to this group. Educate them through advertising that it is possible to have outside interests and become alert to wider intellectual influences (without becoming a Career Woman). The art of good homemaking should be the goal of every normal woman."

The problem—which, if recognized at that time by one hidden persuader for the home-appliance industry, was surely recognized by others with products for the home—was that "a whole new generation of women is being educated to do work outside the home. Furthermore, an increased desire for emancipation is evident." The solution, quite simply, was to encourage them to be "modern" housewives. The Career or Would-Be Career Woman who frankly dislikes cleaning, dusting, ironing, washing clothes, is less interested in a new wax, a new soap powder. Unlike "The True Housewife" and the "Balanced Homemaker" who prefer to have sufficient appliances and do the housework themselves, the Career Woman would "prefer servants—housework takes too much time and energy." She buys appliances, however, whether or not she has servants, but she is "more likely to complain about the service they give," and to be "harder to sell."

It was too late—impossible—to turn these modern could-or-would-be career women back into True Housewives, but the study pointed out, in 1945, the potential for Balanced House-wifery—the home career. Let them "want to have their cake and eat it too . . . save time, have more comfort, avoid dirt and disorder, have mechanized supervision, yet not want to give up the feeling of personal achievement and pride in a well-run household, which comes from 'doing it yourself.' As one young housewife said: 'It's nice to be modern—it's like running a factory in which you have all the latest machinery.'"

But it was not an easy job, either for business or advertisers. New

market; increased ingenuity was needed to give American women that "feeling of achievement," and yet keep housework their main purpose in life. Education, independence, growing individuality, everything that made them ready for other purposes had constantly to be countered, channeled back to the home.

The manipulator's services became increasingly valuable. In later surveys, he no longer interviewed professional women; they were not at home during the day. The women in his samples were deliberately True or Balanced Housewives, the new suburban housewives. Household and consumer products are, after all, geared to women; seventy-five percent of all consumer advertising budgets is spent to appeal to women; that is, to housewives, the women who are available during the day to be interviewed, the women with the time for shopping. Naturally, his depth interviews, projective tests, "living laboratories," were designed to impress his clients, but more often than not they contained the shrewd insights of a skilled social scientist, insights that could be used with profit.

His clients were told they had to do something about this growing need of American women to do creative work—"the major unfulfilled need of the modern housewife." He wrote in one report, for example:

Every effort must be made to sell X Mix, as a base upon which the woman's creative effort is used.

The appeal should emphasize the fact that X Mix aids the woman in expressing her creativity because it takes the drudgery away. At the same time, stress should be laid upon the cooking manipulations, the fun that goes with them, permitting you to feel that X Mix baking is real baking.

But the dilemma again: how to make her spend money on the mix that takes some of the drudgery out of baking by telling her "she can utilize her energy where it really counts"—and yet keep her from being "too busy to bake"? ("I don't use the mix because I don't do any baking at all. It's too much trouble. I live in a sprawled-out apartment and what with keeping it clean and looking after my child and my part-time job, I don't have time for baking.") What to do about their "feeling of disappointment" when the biscuits come out of the oven, and they're really only bread and there is no feeling of creative achievement? ("Why should I bake my own biscuits when there are so many good things on the market that just need to be heated up? It just doesn't make any sense at all to go through all the trouble of mixing your own and then greasing the tin and baking them.") What to do when the woman doesn't get the feeling her mother got, when the cake *had* to be made from scratch? ("The way my mother made them, you had to sift the flour yourself and add the eggs and the butter and you knew you'd really made something you could be proud of.")

By using X Mix the woman can prove herself as a wife and mother, not only by baking, but by spending more time with her family. . . . Of course, it must also be made clear that home-baked foods are in every way preferable to bakery-shop foods . . .

Above all, give X Mix "a therapeutic value" by downplaying the easy recipes, emphasizing instead "the stimulating effort of baking." From an advertising viewpoint, this means stressing that "with X Mix in the home, you will be a different woman . . . a happier woman."

Further, the client was told that a phrase in his ad "and you make that cake the easiest, laziest way there is" evoked a "negative response" in American housewives—it hit too close to their "underlying guilt." ("Since they never feel that they are really exerting sufficient effort, it is certainly wrong to tell them that baking with X Mix is the lazy way.") Supposing, he suggested, that this devoted wife and mother behind the kitchen stove, anxiously preparing a cake or pie for her husband or children "is simply indulging her own hunger for sweets." The very fact that baking is work for the housewife helps her dispel any doubts that she might have about her real motivations.

But there are even ways to manipulate the housewives' guilt, the report said:

It might be possible to suggest through advertising that not to take advantage of all 12 uses of X Mix is to limit your efforts to give pleasure to your family. A transfer of guilt might be achieved. Rather than feeling guilty about using X Mix for dessert food, the woman would be made to feel guilty if she doesn't take advantage of this opportunity to give her family 12 different and delicious treats. "Don't waste your skill; don't limit yourself."

By the mid-fifties, the surveys reported with pleasure that the Career Woman ("the woman who clamored for equality—almost for identity in every sphere of life, the woman who reacted to 'domestic slavery' with indignation and vehemence") was gone, replaced by the "less worldly, less sophisticated" woman whose activity in PTA gives her "broad contacts with the world outside her home," but who "finds in housework a medium of expression for her femininity and individuality." She's not like the old-fashioned self-sacrificing housewife; she considers herself the equal of man. But she still feels "lazy, neglectful, haunted by guilt feelings" because she doesn't have enough work to do. The advertiser must manipulate her need for a "feeling of creativeness" into the buying of his product.

After an initial resistance, she now tends to accept instant coffee, frozen foods, precooked foods, and labor-saving items as part of her routine. But she needs a justification and she finds it in the thought that "by using frozen foods I'm freeing myself to accomplish other important tasks as a

tithe: I hate drudgery. Synthesis: I'm creative!

This means essentially that even though the housewife may buy canned food, for instance, and thus save time and effort, she doesn't let it go at that. She has a great need for "doctoring up" the can and thus prove her personal participation and her concern with giving satisfaction to her family.

The feeling of creativeness also serves another purpose: it is an outlet for the liberated talents, the better taste, the freer imagination, the greater *faculties that she would display in an outside career.*

The yearning for creative opportunities and moments is a major aspect of buying motivations.

The only trouble, the surveys warned, is that she "tries to use her own mind and her own judgment. She is fast getting away from judging by collective or majority standards. She is developing dependent standards." ("Never mind the neighbors. I don't want to 'live up' to them or compare myself to them at every turn.") She can't always be reached now with "keep up with the Joneses"—the advertiser must appeal to her *own* need to live.

Appeal to this thirst. . . . Tell her that you are adding more zest, more enjoyment to her life, that it is within her reach now to taste new experiences and that she is entitled to taste these experiences. Even more positively, you should convey that you are giving her "lessons in living."

"House cleaning should be fun," the manufacturer of a certain cleaning device was advised. Even though his product was, perhaps, less efficient than the vacuum cleaner, it let the housewife use more of her own energy in the work. Further, it let the housewife have the illusion that she has become "a professional, an expert in determining which cleaning tools to use for specific jobs."

This professionalization is a psychological defense of the housewife against being a general "cleaner-upper" and menial servant for her family in a day and age of general work emancipation.

The role of expert serves a two-fold emotional function: (1) it helps the housewife achieve status, and (2) she moves beyond the orbit of her home, into the world of modern science in her search for new and better ways of doing things.

As a result, there has never been a more favorable psychological climate for household appliances and products. The modern housewife . . . is actually aggressive in her efforts to find those household products which, in her expert opinion, really meet her need. This trend accounts for the popularity of different waxes and polishes for different materials in the home, for the growing use of floor polishers, and for the variety of mops and cleaning implements for floors and walls.

The "hancement" she has been persuaded to seek in the housewife "profession," when, in actuality, "her time-consuming task, housekeeping, is not only endless, it is a task for which society hires the lowliest, least-trained, most trod-upon individuals and groups. . . . Anyone with a strong enough back (and a small enough brain) can do these menial chores." But even this difficulty can be manipulated to sell her more things:

One of the ways that the housewife raises her own prestige as a cleaner of her home is through the use of specialized products for specialized tasks. . . .

When she uses one product for washing clothes, a second for dishes, a third for walls, a fourth for floors, a fifth for venetian blinds, etc., rather than an all-purpose cleaner, she feels less like an unskilled laborer, more like an engineer, an expert.

A second way of raising her own stature is to "do things my way"—to establish an expert's role for herself by creating her own "tricks of the trade." For example, she may "always put a bit of bleach in all my washing—even colored, to make them *really* clean!"

Help her to "justify her menial task by building up her role as the protector of her family—the killer of millions of microbes and germs," this report advised. "Emphasize her kingpin role in the family . . . help her be an expert rather than a menial worker . . . make housework a matter of knowledge and skill, rather than a matter of brawn and dull, unremitting effort." An effective way of doing this is to bring out a *new* product. For, it seems, there's a growing wave of housewives "who look forward to new products which not only decrease their daily work load, but actually engage their emotional and intellectual interest in the world of scientific development outside the home."

One gasps in admiration at the ingenuity of it all—the housewife can participate in science itself just by buying something new—or something old that has been given a brand new personality.

Besides increasing her professional status, a *new* cleaning appliance or product increases a woman's feeling of economic security and luxury, just as a new automobile does for a man. This was reported by 28 percent of the respondents, who agreed with this particular sentiment: "I like to try out new things. I've just started to use a new liquid detergent—and somehow it makes me feel like a queen."

The question of letting the woman use her mind and even participate in science through housework is, however, not without its drawbacks. Science should not relieve housewives of too much drudgery; it must concentrate instead on creating the *illusion* of that sense of achievement that housewives seem to need.

To prove this point, 250 housewives were given a depth test: they

first was a completely automatic dust- and dirt-removal system which operated continuously like a home-heating system. The second, the housewife had to press a button to start. The third was portable; she had to carry it around and point it at an area to remove the dirt. The fourth was a brand new, modern object with which she could sweep the dirt away herself. The housewives spoke up in favor of this last appliance. If it "appears new, modern" she would rather have the one that lets her work herself, this report said. "One compelling reason is her desire to be a participant, not just a button-pusher." As one housewife remarked, "As for some magical push-button cleaning system, well, what would happen to my exercise, my feeling of accomplishment, and what would I do with my mornings?"

This fascinating study incidentally revealed that a certain electronic cleaning appliance—long considered one of our great labor-savers—actually made "housekeeping more difficult than it need be." From the response of eighty percent of those housewives, it seemed that once a woman got this appliance going, she "felt compelled to do cleaning that wasn't really necessary." The electronic appliance actually dictated the extent and type of cleaning to be done.

Should the housewife then be encouraged to go back to that simple cheap sweeper that let her clean only as much as she felt necessary? No, said the report, of course not. Simply give that old-fashioned sweeper the "status" of the electronic appliance as a "labor-saving necessity" for the modern housewife "and then indicate that the modern homemaker would, naturally, own both."

No one, not even the depth researchers, denied that housework was endless, and its boring repetition just did not give that much satisfaction, did not require that much vaunted expert knowledge. But the endlessness of it all was an advantage from the seller's point of view. The problem was to keep at bay the underlying realization which was lurking dangerously in "thousands of depth interviews which we have conducted for dozens of different kinds of house-cleaning products"—the realization that, as one housewife said, "It stinks! I have to do it, so I do it. It's a necessary evil, that's all." What to do? For one thing, put out more and more products, make the directions more complicated, make it really necessary for the housewife to "be an expert." (Washing clothes, the report advised, must become more than a matter of throwing clothes into a machine and pouring in soap. Garments must be carefully sorted, one load given treatment A, a second load treatment B, some washed by hand. The housewife can then "take great pride in knowing just which of the arsenal of products to use on each occasion.")

Capitalize, the report continued, on housewives' "guilt over the hidden dirt" so she will rip her house to shreds in a "deep cleaning" operation, which will give her a "sense of completeness" for a few weeks.

("The time willing to try new products and 'deep clean' advertising holds out the promise of completion.")

The seller must also stress the joys of completing each separate task, remembering that "nearly all housekeepers, even those who thoroughly detest their job, paradoxically find escape from their endless fate by accepting it—by 'throwing myself into it,' as she says."

Losing herself in her work—surrounded by all the implements, creams, powders, soaps, she forgets for a time how soon she will have to redo the task. In other words, a housewife permits herself to forget for a moment how rapidly the sink will again fill with dishes, how quickly the floor will again be dirty, and she seizes the moment of completion of a task as a moment of pleasure as pure as if she had just finished a masterpiece of art which would stand as a monument to her credit forever.

This is the kind of creative experience the seller of things can give the housewife. In one housewife's own words:

I don't like housework at all. I'm a lousy houseworker. But once in a while I get pepped up and I'll really go to town ... When I have some new kind of cleaning material—like when Glass Wax first came out or those silicone furniture polishes—I got a real kick out of it, and I went through the house shining everything. I like to see the things shine. I feel so good when I see the bathroom just glistening.

And so the manipulator advised:

Identify your product with the physical and spiritual rewards she derives from the almost religious feeling of basic security provided by her home. Talk about her "light, happy, peaceful feelings"; her "deep sense of achievement." ... But remember she doesn't really want praise for the sake of praise ... also remember that her mood is not simply "gay." She is tired and a bit solemn. Superficially cheerful adjectives or colors will not reflect her feelings. She will react much more favorably to simple, warm and sincere messages.

In the fifties came the revolutionary discovery of the teenage market. Teenagers and young marrieds began to figure prominently in the surveys. It was discovered that young wives, who had only been to high school and had never worked, were more "insecure," less independent, easier to sell. These young people could be told that, by buying the right things, they could achieve middle-class status, without work or study. The keep-up-with-the-Joneses sell would work again; the individuality and independence which American women had been getting from education and work outside the home was not such a problem with the teenage brides. In fact, the surveys said, if the pattern of "happiness through things" could be established when these women were young enough, they could be safely encouraged to go out and get a part-time

things" is no longer the prerogative of the rich or the talented; it can be enjoyed by all, if they learn "the right way," the way the others do it, if they learn the embarrassment of being different.

In the words of one of the reviewers, "the two books are embarrassed of being different."

49 percent of the new brides were teenagers, and more girls marry at the age of 18 than at any other age. This early family formation yields a larger number of young people who are on the threshold of their own responsibilities and decision-making in purchases.

But the most important fact is of a psychological nature: Marriage today is not only the culmination of a romantic attachment; more consciously and more clear-headedly than in the past, it is also a decision to create a partnership in establishing a comfortable home, equipped with a great number of desirable products.

In talking to scores of young couples and brides-to-be, we found that, as a rule, their conversations and dreams centered to a very large degree around their future homes and their furnishings, around shopping "to get an idea," around discussing the advantages and disadvantages of various products. . . .

The modern bride is deeply convinced of the unique value of married love, of the possibilities of finding real happiness in marriage and of fulfilling her personal destiny in it and through it.

But the engagement period today is a romantic, dreamy and heady period only to a limited extent. It is probably safe to say that the period of engagement tends to be a rehearsal of the material duties and responsibilities of marriage. While waiting for the nuptials, couples work hard, put aside money for definite purchases, or even begin buying on an installment plan.

What is the deeper meaning of this new combination of an almost religious belief in the importance and beauty of married life on the one hand, and the product-centered outlook, on the other? . . .

The modern bride seeks as a conscious goal that which in many cases her grandmother saw as a blind fate and her mother as slavery: to belong to a man, to have a home and children of her own, to choose among all possible careers the career of wife-mother-homemaker.

The fact that the young bride now seeks in her marriage complete "fulfillment," that she now expects to "prove her own worth" and find all the "fundamental meanings" of life in her home, and to participate through her home in "the interesting ideas of the modern era, the future," has enormous "practical applications," advertisers were told. For all these meanings she seeks in her marriage, even her fear that she will be "left behind," can be channeled into the purchase of products. For example, a manufacturer of sterling silver, a product that is very difficult to sell, was told:

Since buying is only the climax of a complicated relationship, based to a large extent on the woman's yearning to know how to be a more attractive woman, a better housewife, a superior mother, etc., use this motivation in all your promotion and advertising. Take every opportunity to explain how your store will help her fulfill her most cherished roles in life. . . .

If the stores are women's school of life, ads are the textbooks. They have an inexhaustible avidity for these ads which give them the illusion that they are in contact with what is going on in the world of inanimate objects, objects through which they express so much of so many of their drives . . .

Again, in 1957, a survey very correctly reported that despite the "many positive aspects" of the "new home-centered era," unfortunately too many needs were now centered on the home—that home was not able to fill. A cause for alarm? No indeed; even these needs are grist for manipulation.

The family is not always the psychological pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of promise of modern life as it has sometimes been represented. In fact, psychological demands are being made upon the family today which it cannot fulfill. . . .

Fortunately for the producers and advertisers of America (and also for the family and the psychological well-being of our citizens) much of this gap may be filled, and is being filled, by the acquisition of consumer goods.

Hundreds of products fulfill a whole set of psychological functions that producers and advertisers should know of and use in the development of more effective sales approaches. Just as producing once served as an outlet for social tension, now consumption serves the same purpose.

The buying of things drains away those needs which cannot really be satisfied by home and family—the housewives' need for "something beyond themselves with which to identify," "a sense of movement with others toward aims that give meaning and purpose to life," "an unquestioned social aim to which each individual can devote his efforts."

Deeply set in human nature is the need to have a meaningful place in a group that strives for meaningful social goals. Whenever this is lacking, the individual becomes restless. Which explains why, as we talk to people across the nation, over and over again, we hear questions like these: "What does it all mean?" "Where am I going?" "Why don't things seem more worth while and when we all work so hard and have so darn many things to play with?"

The question is: Can your product fill this gap?

"The frustrated need for privacy in the family life," in this era of "togetherness" was another secret wish uncovered in a depth survey. This need, however, might be used to sell a second car. . . .

In addition to the car the whole family enjoys together, the car for the husband and wife separately—"Alone in the car."

breathing spell one needs so badly and may come to consider the car as one's castle, or the instrument of one's reconquered privacy." Or "individual" "personal" toothpaste, soap, shampoo.

Another survey reported that there was a puzzling "desexualization of married life" despite the great emphasis on marriage and family and sex. The problem: what can supply what the report diagnosed as a "missing sexual spark"? The solution: the report advised sellers to "put the libido back into advertising." Despite the feeling that our manufacturers are trying to sell everything through sex, sex as found on TV commercials and ads in national magazines is too tame, the report said, too narrow. "Consumerism," is desexing the American libido because it "has failed to reflect the powerful life forces in every individual which range far beyond the relationship between the sexes." The sellers, it seemed, have sexed the sex out of sex.

Most modern advertising reflects and grossly exaggerates our present national tendency to downgrade, simplify and water down the passionate turbulent and electrifying aspects of the life urges of mankind. . . . No one suggests that advertising can or should become obscene or salacious. The trouble lies with the fact that through its timidity and lack of imagination, it faces the danger of becoming libido-poor and consequently unreal, inhuman and tedious.

How to put the libido back, restore the lost spontaneity, drive, love of life, the individuality, that sex in America seems to lack? In an absent-minded moment, the report concludes that "love of life, as of the other sex, should remain unsoiled by exterior motives . . . let the wife be more than a housewife . . . a woman . . ."

One day, having immersed myself in the varied insights these reports have been giving American advertisers for the last fifteen years, I was invited to have lunch with the man who runs this motivational research operation. He had been so helpful in showing me the commercial forces behind the feminine mystique, perhaps I could be helpful to him. Naively I asked why, since he found it so difficult to give women a true feeling of creativeness and achievement in housework, and tried to assuage their guilt and disillusion and frustrations by getting them to buy more "things"—why didn't he encourage them to buy things for all they were worth, so they would have time to get out of the home and pursue truly creative goals in the outside world.

"But we have helped her rediscover the home as the expression of her creativeness," he said. "We help her think of the modern home as the artist's studio, the scientist's laboratory. Besides," he shrugged, "most of the manufacturers we deal with are producing things which have to do with homemaking."

"In fact, the manufacturers are producing things to develop the

We sell them what they ought to compete with men. This can be manipulated along. The big problem is to liberate the woman not to be afraid of time cooking, cleaning."

"That's what I mean," I said. "Why doesn't the pie-mix ad tell the woman she could use the time saved to be an astronomer?"

"It wouldn't be too difficult," he replied. "A few images—the astronomer gets her man, the astronomer as the heroine, make it glamorous for a woman to be an astronomer . . . but no," he shrugged again. "The client would be too frightened. He wants to sell pie mix. The woman has to want to stay in the kitchen. The manufacturer wants to intrigue her back into the kitchen—and we show him how to do it the right way. If he tells her that all she can be is a wife and mother, she will spit in his face. But we show him how to tell her that it's creative to be in the kitchen. We liberate her need to be creative in the kitchen. If we tell her to be an astronomer, she might go too far from the kitchen. Besides," he added, "if you wanted to have a campaign to liberate women to be astronomers, you'd have to find somebody like the National Education Association to pay for it."

The motivational researchers must be given credit for their insights into the reality of the housewife's life and needs—a reality that often escaped their colleagues in academic sociology and therapeutic psychology, who saw women through the Freudian-functional veil. To their own profit, and that of their clients, the manipulators discovered that millions of supposedly happy American housewives have complex needs which home-and-family, love-and-children, cannot fill. But by a morality that goes beyond the dollar, the manipulators are guilty of using their insights to sell women things which, no matter how ingenious, will never satisfy those increasingly desperate needs. They are guilty of persuading housewives to stay at home, mesmerized in front of a television set, their nonsexual human needs unnamed, unsatisfied, drained by the sexual sell into the buying of things.

The manipulators and their clients in American business can hardly be accused of creating the feminine mystique. But they are the most powerful of its perpetrators; it is their millions which blanket the land with persuasive images, flattering the American housewife, diverting her guilt and disguising her growing sense of emptiness. They have done this so successfully, employing the techniques and concepts of modern social science, and transposing them into those deceptively simple, clever, outrageous ads and commercials, that an observer of the American scene today accepts as fact that the great majority of American

women have no responsibility for sending women home, they are surely responsible for keeping them there. Their unremitting harangue is hard to escape in this day of mass communications; they have seared the feminine mystique deep into every woman's mind, and into the minds of her husband, her children, her neighbors. They have made it part of the fabric of her everyday life, taunting her because she is not a better housewife, does not love her family enough, is growing old.

Can a woman ever feel right cooking on a dirty range? Until today, no range could ever be kept really clean. Now new RCA Whirlpool ranges have oven doors that lift off, broiler drawers that can be cleaned at the sink, drip pans that slide out easily. . . . The first range that any woman can keep completely clean easily . . . and make everything cooked taste better.

Love is said in many ways. It's giving and accepting. It's protecting and selecting . . . knowing what's safest for those you love. Their bathroom tissue is Scott tissue always. . . . Now in four colors and white.

How skillfully they divert her need for achievement into sexual fantasies which promise her eternal youth, dulling her sense of passing time. They even tell her that she can make time stand still:

Does she . . . or doesn't she? She's as full of fun as her kids—and just as fresh looking! Her naturalness, the way her hair sparkles and catches the light—as though she's found the secret of making time stand still. And in a way she has . . .

With increasing skill, the ads glorify her "role" as an American housewife—knowing that her very lack of identity in that role will make her fall for whatever they are selling.

Who is she? She gets as excited as her six-year-old about the opening of school. She reckons her days in trains met, lunches packed, fingers bandaged, and 1,001 details. She could be you, needing a special kind of clothes for your busy, rewarding life.

Are you this woman? Giving your kids the fun and advantages you want for them? Taking them places and helping them do things? Taking the part that's expected of you in church and community affairs . . . developing your talents so you'll be more interesting? You can be the woman you yearn to be with a Plymouth all your own. . . . Go where you want, when you want in a beautiful Plymouth that's yours and nobody else's . . .

But a new stove or a softer toilet paper do not make a woman a better wife or mother, even if she thinks that's what she needs to be. Dyeing her hair cannot stop time; buying a Plymouth will not give her a new identity; smoking a Marlboro will not get her an invitation to

ing what she really needs or wants.

A full-page ad in the *New York Times*, June 10, 1962, was "Dedicated to the woman who spends a lifetime living up to her potential." Under the picture of a beautiful woman, adorned by evening dress and jewels and two handsome children, it said: "The only totally integrated program of nutrient make-up and skin care—designed to lift a woman's good looks to their absolute peak. The woman who uses 'Ultima' feels a deep sense of fulfillment. A new kind of pride. For this luxurious Cosmetic Collection is the *ultimate* . . . beyond it there is nothing."

It all seems so ludicrous when you understand what they are up to. Perhaps the housewife has no one but herself to blame if she lets the manipulators flatter or threaten her into buying things that fill neither her family's needs nor her own. But if the ads and commercials are a clear case of caveat emptor, the same sexual sell disguised in the editorial content of a magazine or a television program is both less ridiculous and more insidious. Here the housewife is often an unaware victim. I have written for some of the magazines in which the sexual sell is inextricably linked with the editorial content. Consciously or unconsciously, the editors know what the advertiser wants.

The heart of X magazine is service—complete service to the whole woman who is the American homemaker; service in all the areas of greatest interest to advertisers, who are also business men. It delivers to the advertiser a strong concentration of serious, conscientious, dedicated homemakers. Women more interested in the home and products for the home. Women more willing and able to pay . . .

A memo need never be written, a sentence need never be spoken at an editorial conference; the men and women who make the editorial decisions often compromise their own very high standards in the interests of the advertising dollar. Often, as a former editor of *McCall's* recently revealed,² the advertiser's influence is less than subtle. The kind of home pictured in the "service" pages is dictated in no uncertain terms by the boys over in advertising.

And yet, a company has to make a profit on its products; a magazine, a network needs advertising to survive. But even if profit is the only motive, and the only standard of success, I wonder if the media are not making a mistake when they give the client what they think he wants. I wonder if the challenge and the opportunities for the American economy and for business itself might not in the long run lie in letting women grow up, instead of blanketing them with the youth-serum that keeps them mindless and thing-hungry.

The real crime, no matter how profitable for the American economy, is the callous and growing acceptance of the manipulator's advice "to

get them . . . even before they learn to read, the big beautiful ads almost as easy as "Look, Sally, Look," the magazines deliberately designed to turn teenage girls into housewife buyers of things before they grow up to be women:

She reads X Magazine from beginning to end . . . She learns how to marry, to cook and to sew and everything else a young woman should know. She plans her wardrobe 'round X Magazine's clothes, heeds X Magazine's counsel on beauty and beauty . . . consults X Magazine for the latest teen fads . . . and oh, how she buys from those X Magazine ads! Buying habits start in X Magazine. It's easier to START a habit than to STOP one! (Learn how X Magazine's unique publication, X Magazine-at-school, carries your advertising into high school home economics classrooms.)

Like a primitive culture which sacrificed little girls to its tribal gods, we sacrifice our girls to the feminine mystique, grooming them ever more efficiently through the sexual sell to become consumers of the things to whose profitable sale our nation is dedicated. Two ads recently appeared in a national news magazine, geared not to teenage girls but to executives who produce and sell things. One of them showed the picture of a boy:

I am so going to the moon . . . and you can't go, 'cause you're a girl! Children are growing faster today, their interests can cover such a wide range—from roller skates to rockets. X company too has grown, with a broad spectrum of electronic products for worldwide governmental, industrial and space application.

The other showed the face of a girl:

Should a gifted child grow up to be a housewife? Educational experts estimate that the gift of high intelligence is bestowed upon only one out of every 50 children in our nation. When that gifted child is a girl, one question is inevitably asked: "Will this rare gift be wasted if she becomes a housewife?" Let these gifted girls answer that question themselves. Over 90 percent of them marry, and the majority find the job of being a housewife challenging and rewarding enough to make full use of all their intelligence, time and energy. . . . In her daily roles of nurse, educator, economist and just plain housewife, she is constantly seeking ways to improve her family's life. . . . Millions of women—shopping for half the families in America—do so by saving X Stamps.

If that gifted girl-child grows up to be a housewife, can even the manipulator make supermarket stamps use all of her human intelligence, her human energy, in the century she may live while that boy goes to the moon?

Never underestimate the power of a woman, says another ad. But that power was and is underestimated in America. Or rather, it is only

estimated in terms that can be manipulated at the point of purchase. Woman's human intelligence and energy do not really figure in. And yet, they exist, to be used for some higher purpose than housework and thing-buying—or wasted. Perhaps it is only a sick society, unwilling to face its own problems and unable to conceive of goals and purposes equal to the ability and knowledge of its members, that chooses to ignore the strength of women. Perhaps it is only a sick or immature society that chooses to make women "housewives," not people. Perhaps it is only sick or immature men and women, unwilling to face the great challenges of society, who can retreat for long, without unbearable distress, into that thing-ridden house and make it the end of life itself.

ENDNOTES

1. The studies upon which this chapter is based were done by the Staff of the Institute for Motivational Research, directed by Dr. Ernest Dichter. They were made available to me through the courtesy of Dr. Dichter and his colleagues, and are on file at the Institute, in Croton-on-Hudson, New York.
2. Harrison Kinney, *Has Anybody Seen My Father?*, New York, 1960.

4 Stuart Ewen “... IMAGES WITHOUT BOTTOM...” (1988)

Style, hard to define . . . but easy to recognize.

—MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENT FOR HATHAWAY BLOUSE

Each week on television, a taut-faced woman named Elsa Klensch hosts a program titled “Style.” The prime focus of the show revolves around the new designer collections, transporting us to major fashion shows around the world, but there is more.

Some features center on the homes of the people in the world of fashion design: castles in the countryside near Rome; converted farm houses in rural Connecticut; fabulous playpens overlooking Paris. Still other items deal with the daily lives of people employed in the “world” (one dare not call it *industry*!) of fashion. We follow a tawny Milanese mannequin through her regular two-hour body and facial treatment at Sergio Valente. We observe a busy New York model, rollerskating and taking tap-dance lessons; intimately sharing her longing to “make it” in the musical theater. We glide through the byways of Tokyo with Toko, a slender fashion model with “the most famous Japanese face in the world.” Her spare time, we learn, is divided between shopping for her new apartment and practicing traditional Japanese Buddhism. Materialism and its spiritual rejection coexist without conflict.

Accompanying commercials blend right in, telling us of the slimming value of Tab cola, or of the way that Henry Grethel clothing will lead us into accidental and anonymous romantic encounters with beautiful women—or men—in elegant hotel rooms.

We see that style is about beautiful mouth-watering surfaces, but we see more. Beyond displaying surfaces, the uninterrupted message of the television program is that style makes up a way of life, a utopian way of life marked by boundless wealth. The people we view apparently inhabit a universe of bounty. They wear dresses costing thousands. They live in castles. Their encounters with interior designers lead to unrestrained flights of fancy. Their desires, their fantasies, their whims are