

WORK SHEET FOR "FEMININE MYSTIQUE" SEMINAR
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1. What is the Feminine Mystique? (pp37-8)
What does it mean for the women who accept it?
2. Given: The Feminine Mystique in action
What sorts of phenomena can we expect to find in women and society?
3. "The Problem That Has No Name" - what is it?
 - a. "First Clue": The problem cannot be understood in the generally accepted terms by which scientists have studied women, doctors have treated them, counselors have advised them. (p22)
 - b. "Can the problem that has no name be somehow related to the domestic routine of the housewife? When a woman tries to put the problem into words, she often merely describes the daily life she leads. What is there in this recital of comfortable domestic detail that could possibly cause such a feeling of desperation?" (p25)

4. What are the political implications, for us as propagandists, in the following:

"How can she believe that voice inside herself, when it denies the conventional, accepted truths by which she has been living?" (p26)

5. Sociological evidence. What is it, and where to find it?

"I became aware of a growing body of evidence, much of which has not been reported publicly because it does not fit current modes of thought about women." (p26)

6. Assuming that she does listen to the "voice" and that we manage to come up with convincing evidence of our own, how do we deal with this common notion:

"Few women would want to thumb their noses at husbands, children and community and go off on their own. Those who do may be talented individuals, but they rarely are successful women." (p20)

What are the hidden assumptions in the above? Is this a real or a non-choice? What should women choose? How hard will it be on us?

7. It is the practice, when a group sets itself up as the standard, not only to define the other group in relation to the standard but to ascribe characteristics which it is "proper" for that group to have. This is why we hear feminists talk about certain supposedly "feminine" attributes as "male fantasy." Keeping this in mind, what shall we make of the following statement made by a women's magazine editor:

"Most of the material used to come from women writers," she said, almost nostalgically. 'As the young men returned from the war, a great many women writers dropped out of the field. The young women started having a lot of children and stopped writing. THE NEW WRITERS WERE ALL MEN, back from the war, who had been dreaming about home, and a cozy domestic life.' One by one, the creators of the gay "career girl" heroines of the 30's began to retire. By the end of the 40's, the writers who couldn't get the knack of writing in the new housewife image had left the women's magazine field. The new magazine pros

were men, and a few women who could write comfortably according to were men, and a few women who could write comfortably according to the housewife formula.... Today, the deciding voice on most of these magazines is cast by men...the... formulas which have dictated the new housewife image are the products of men's minds." (pp47-8)

8. Motherhood. Discuss the following:

"For the mother, breast-feeding becomes a complement to the act of creation. It gives her a heightened sense of fulfillment and allows her to participate in a relationship as close to perfection as any that a woman can hope to achieve.... The simple fact of giving birth, however, does not in itself fulfill this need and longing.... Motherliness is a way of life. It enables a woman to express her total self with the tender feelings, the protective attitudes, the encompassing love of the motherly woman." (p51)

9. What are the implications, for us, of the following:

"When a mystique is strong, it makes its own fiction of fact. It feeds on the very facts which might contradict it, and seeps into every corner of the culture, bemusing even the social critics." (p53)

10. Woman's Problem.

"..the logic of the feminine mystique redefined the very nature of woman's problem...now that woman is seen only in terms of her sexual role, the barriers to the realization of her full potential, the prejudices which deny her full participation in the world, are no longer problems. THE ONLY PROBLEMS NOW ARE THOSE THAT MIGHT DISTURB HER ADJUSTMENT AS A HOUSEWIFE....In the women's magazines, it is solved either by dyeing one's hair blonde or by having another baby." (p54)

- a. What is the importance of who does the defining?
- b. Is this situation true today?

11. Discuss the meaning of the word "woman" in light of this statement:

"....this new image which insists she is not a person but a 'woman,' by definition barred from the freedom of human existence and a voice in human destiny." (p61)

What kind of label is this word? Is it merely descriptive of gender?

12. "Even the brightest boys at home want just a sweet, pretty girl."

- a. What does this say about men?
- b. About "love"?
- c. About us, if we go along?

13. OCCUPATION: HOUSEWIFE

Is this a legitimate occupation? In discussing, consider this question: "Why does 'Occupation: housewife' require such insistent glamorizing year after year?" (p58)