

Women's consciousness changed press, TV

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 13th of 15 articles on popular culture in American life. The series was written for Courses by Newspaper, an extension program of the University of California, San Diego, and funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The series provides the text for an Oakland University course taught by Prof. Jesse Pitts. The views are the authors'.)



Betty Friedan, feminist lecturer and author, founded the **National Organization for Women** and was its first president (1966-70). Her book **"The Feminine Mystique"** (1963) is generally credited with sparking the current women's movement. She is also author of **"I Changed My Life"** and numerous magazine articles.

By BETTY FRIEDAN
In a certain sense, the modern women's movement, one of the most far-reaching revolutions of all time, began as a sudden, long overdue, pent-up, personal, massively reverberating "no" to the image of women embedded in popular culture.

There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image that I came to call the feminine mystique.

A strangely helpless, passive, not very bright, blonde little housewife was the only image there was on television, in movies, and in the women's magazines.

It was projected by commercials, family situation comedies, soap operas and game shows—from "I Love Lucy" and "Queen for a Day" to "As the Women Turn." The reality of the increasing millions of women already working outside the home was denied by that image.

We had to break through that image in our own consciousness and in the popular culture. The only weapons for doing this were the words, passion, will and actions that create new images.

The media had reflected the mass embrace and return of women to full-time domesticity after World War II and then distorted and imprisoned women in that image—the feminine mystique—now began to reflect and carry the images of women acting as persons in society.

IT WAS NOT possible in the 1960s to read newspapers or watch television as the blacks marched and protested

against living in America in anything less than full human dignity and equality, for women not to finally say, "Me, too."

Women had to demand to be taken seriously as people, not invisible sex objects or dumb blonde housewives.

"They don't need to use Mace or tear gas or bull whips and police dogs to keep women down in this country," I used to joke bitterly at the beginning of our revolution. "All they need to do is treat us like a joke."

It irritated us that, at first, the media always picked on the extreme, most extreme, or even the sexiest and most shocking of antics in the movement rather than the sober actions we were taking, which spoke to the condition of all women. But we quickly learned how to use those sexy antics to get the media's attention for our substantive issues.

TODAY, the housewife image can still be seen, especially in the commercials and the game shows and soap operas, whose audience is presumably those housewives and elderly people still at home during the day.

But the prime-time image of women is increasingly a bright, attractive, sexy, gutsy woman. Heroines, single, married, or divorced, are no longer passive sex objects, nor do they silently wave good-bye, but act adventurously in their own lives.

Mary Tyler Moore, lively, lovable editor on the fictional news station, gave such a happy human image of a woman as an independent person that several generations of young (and not so young) women alone stopped suffering if they didn't have a date on Saturday night.

Phyllis, Maude, Rhoda, Angie Dickinson in "Police Woman," even the "Bionic Woman" all comprise a more various, actively human image of women than that old dreary dream, "Charlie's Angels" are still sex objects, but they are also strong, or bright, and at least have their own adventures in life.

EVEN IN SOAP opera, the sassy heroine of "One Day at a Time" is not only a sympathetic, likeable, self-supporting divorced mother, as attractive as her two daughters but she had a younger boyfriend who adored her. ABC has hired the former head of NOW's (National Organization for Women) Task Force on the Image of Women as a consultant to set new standards to change or eliminate commercials which insult women. The dreary, dumb wife may soon be as rare on television as the Stepanchitch blackface.

And as a result of class action suits and other pressures from the women who work in television—and the women's movement groups who monitor it—more and more women can be seen as news commentators, producers, directors, and even camerapersons, on both local and network TV.

Barbara Walters will not be the last female anchorperson, and Marlene Sanders is outlasting some of her male colleagues as network vice-president for news and public affairs at ABC.

WOMEN'S MAGAZINES have also had to modify their feminine mystique, aiming now at the 40 per cent of American women who today work outside the home as well as in it, and who constitute a market as or more lucrative than those who still call themselves "housewives."

The tone of these magazines today also reflects a less simple and insulting image of that housewife—one who can evidently identify with complex, adventurous women as people.

These days, Ladies' Home Journal will picture a Mary Tyler Moore on its cover, along with an article by financial columnist Sylvia Porter on "Pensions for Housewives," an interview with Golda Meir, Katherine Hepburn on "Why I Never Wanted Children," and "What Women Can Do About Violent Crime."

The caricatures of Total Womanhood and Viva, Playboy, Hustler, Penthouse, Out, and points further pornography represent and play to male and female last ditch reaction against, and fear of, woman as person: wrapping her nude body in saran wrap and ostrich feathers or dehumanizing her into faceless genitalia, magnified in centerfolds almost beyond the size of life.

But Playboy stock is not doing so well on the market these days. Helen Gurley Brown's Cosmopolitan Girl has been a more interesting, lively graft of the new image onto the old sexual self.

A VERITABLE book industry has been created by women's new consciousness.

Writing fictionally and nonfictionally about their problems and desires, the novels—and the few movies like "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore"—still wallowing in the problems caused by the feminine mystique. Reactions, miserable or spirited like



Maude (Beatrice Arthur), comforting and lowering over husband Walter (Bill Macy), is representative of the new image of women being projected on television today.



Mirror of American Life

Erica Jong's, have not yet been able to transcend the rage and create a new image.

Newspapers today carry a living, changing reality of women, creating new parameters for men and society, beyond any image of, or by, "women's lib." Women reporters cover finance, sports, and politics and are no longer segregated on the women's page.

That page is becoming a whole "life-style" or "living" section—as important and newsworthy as acts of violence and considered of equal importance to men.

TODAY, THE image of women in popular culture reflects more accurately the various realities of women moving—and the reactions against that movement—because many more women are involved in creating these images.

The actions women have taken—sometimes literal "class actions" in court as with Newsweek and NVC—have broken the barriers that kept women from decision-making jobs in the media.

The formal actions of the women's movement, and the daily repercussions in office and home, have finally made women visible as people, even to the male image makers who before saw them only as servant-housewives or secretaries, "girls," or passive objects of sexual fantasy.

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How cultural currents bring forth movements

By JESSE PITTS
Oakland University
Last time we discussed some of the cultural streams which influence the content of popular culture as they become specified into movements.

The movements, in turn, are incarnated in organizations that spread their faith with varying success and varying lifespans, out the Feminist Movement and the Radical Movement.

In the U.S., one of the most powerful streams is the Protestant stream, which is at the origin of this country and has sustained its march to the west and much of its foreign policy.

More people have joined Protestant movements and sects than have ever been touched by Marxism-Leninism. As a matter of fact, it is probably the strength of Protestant fundamentalism and its millenarianism (promise of an early coming of the millennium) that has largely immunized the American working class from the appeals of Marxism-Leninism.

THE CATHOLIC Church, at least until it entered the great turmoil of the post-council period, had been able to integrate mysticism and millenarian illuminations within its network of monasteries, convents and laymen's groups such as the Catholic Worker and Catholic Youth Organizations.

As a result, Catholics were less attracted to cults which developed around charismatic figures.

Cults have usually a short history, although they command often great commitments from the alienated, the marginal, the lonely, the emotionally disturbed who find in the cult a release from the guilt, the ego diffusion and the anxieties that cripple them.

It is a relatively small minority that remain in most cults more than a year, unless there is extensive screening at the beginning and ruthless force to lock the doors once the member has joined.

Frequently enough, the experience is a therapeutic one for both defectors and continuing members. The former learn that no one can give them paradise on earth and that they must reconcile themselves with the realities of social life. The latter are given a crutch without which many would be condemned to mental illness. Manson and Jones, who had important points in common, are, after all, exceptions.

What determines the success of a religious or political movement? The first answer is: We don't know. In human affairs, we are usually wise after the fact. Four factors seem to have some importance in influencing success or failure.

THE FIRST is the capacity of the basic propositions, which make up the cultural stream, to generate new movements, each carrying a new solution to the strains that affect the potential followers.

We can call this the "form potential" of a cultural stream. There is a two-step aspect to this: The stream throws up a Movement, and this Movement throws up several Movement Organizations, each of which spells out

a variant — more or less radical — of the general "solution."

Some Movement Organizations get nowhere. Others blossom, reach a peak and decline; some, whether very successful or not, have their message assimilated into popular culture and even into working institutions. It may be a generation before a new movement can take the relay of the last one.

There are cultural streams that have a high form potential and others that have a low form potential, but this potential is never infinite. Art styles and scientific theories, political and religious streams, and their immediate movements, can also exhaust their potential for innovation.

THE SECOND factor is the rate of application of the "forms" (solutions), whether as attempted incarnations into social reality or as flags of membership. The higher the rate of utilization, the faster the drain on the "form potential."

As flags of membership, forms do not have to be implemented in order to be effective rallying points. But just as like flags get worn and torn by the wind, forms (ideas) get worn and torn by time. Hope flies higher when the flag seems new.

The youth, in particular, like a new flag, which separates them from the tired warriors of the past.

THE THIRD factor is the objective success of the forms in alleviating strain. If the concrete application of the form seems successful, it may promote further growth of the movement. Religious movements need not succeed in building the City of God on earth. What they need to do is reassure the faithful that progress is being made and that eventual victory is certain.

Political movements are held to closer account. Sometimes they find some of their prophecies adopted by society while denying them credit for the accomplishment. Socialist leader Norman Thomas used to complain that the New Deal had stolen most of its ideas from Democratic Socialism.

New Dealism resurged in the 1960s when the socialist Michael Harrington made us aware of the new poverty. In combination with the pressures from the Black Movement, it gave rise to the New Society.

The latter seems to have been successful in defusing the Black Movement but not terribly successful in anything else. ("New Dealism" seems after the fact. Four factors seem to have some importance in influencing success or failure.)

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the fourth factor is the growth and fall of cultural movements, is the Mass Media. It will be the subject of the next article, which will also be the last of this series.

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