Faces of Feminism: Chapter 5

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ALMOST EVERY WOMAN OF MY GENERATION can remember where she was the day she first came across Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique.* Judith Saidel, executive director of the Center for Women in Government at SUNY at Albany in New York, recalls that in 1963 she was completing her senior year at Wellesley College. In her course on the social and intellectual history of the United States, her professor had invited the students to choose one book from a list of end-of-course readings for a final discussion. On that list was the just published *The Feminine Mystique*, a blistering account of how American women had been stymied in their progress toward equality in the years after World War II.

The professor did not recommend the book especially strongly, but the title intrigued the graduating senior, so she bought it and took it with her for a weekend of reading and study at a friend's house north of Boston. "I was lying on a hillside," she recalls, enjoying the spring weather, occasionally gazing out at the ocean, thinking only vaguely of what I would do after I graduated, when I began reading *The Feminine Mystique.* I couldn't put the book down. I almost forgot I was supposed to read it for a course. It was riveting. As I worked my way through Friedan's chapters on Freudianism, on "sex-directed educators," and on the "selling" of marriage and motherhood, I realized that much about my life that hadn't made any sense could be explained by her theory. My view of myself and that of all the people I was until then trying to please was caught up in a "feminine mystique." My sense of life's possibilities changed that day, and they have never been the same.

Friedan's was not the first book in the postwar period to describe how women 's lives and their perceptions of their lives were shaped by a gendered society. Shortly after World War II, Simone de Beauvoir, a French intellectual, had written The Second Sex, an analysis of how, in the cultural tradition of Western culture, women were objectified by male writers, sometimes as "angels," sometimes as "sirens," sometimes as "witches," always as something "other" than humankind.

That experience of "otherness," de Beauvoir argued in brilliant critical prose, shaped women's views of themselves, sapped their creativity, and denied them a legitimate "voice" in Western culture. In certain intellectual circles on both sides of the Atlantic, de Beauvoir's book was known and much discussed. But the average American woman was not familiar with her analysis. Friedan's book, with its focus on the American woman's experience, spoke more directly to millions of women in this country, changing their understanding of their lives as it did Judy Saidel's and mine and Friedan's herself.

The "feminine mystique," as Friedan defined it, was an ideology perpetrated (intentionally, she argued) in the post-World War II period to return women to what a male-dominated society liked to think of as their "rightful place." Sold to the American public by the media, by social and behavioral scientists, and by sex-directed educators, this ideology caused women to be brainwashed into believing that success and happiness lay only in their traditional wife and mother roles and that the ad- venture of workforce participation during the war was a deviation from the norm. "Norm" in sociological terms means typical, average, or ap- proved; "norm" in the period of the feminine mystique, said Friedan, was extended by the newly popularized Freudian psychology to mean "normal." Any woman who resisted the pressure to return to hearth and home was deviant, abnormal, sick.

History is often cyclic, and it can be argued (and has been) that after a war as extensive and brutalizing as World War II had been, there is a desire on the part of a nation's population to return to "normalcy"-that is, to the political and domestic arrangements that predated the war. Add to this our nation's determination to avoid the economic dislocations and unemployment that had accompanied the Depression in the 1930s, and one could argue that it was necessary for the mental health of the men who had fought in World War II, and for the economy as a whole, that women free up jobs for returning Gls and soothe their troubled warriors' brows. Thus, the consumerism that first appeared as an "ism" in the postwar period, along with a celebration of the family, can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the sacrifice and deprivation caused by four years of war.

Nevertheless, as noted in previous chapters, women's rights were expanding in the years before and during the war and need not have been stunted after 1945. The need to produce war materiel brought to working class women (and especially women of color) industrial opportunities they had never had before. Equal pay became common in those industries where women ably took over "men's jobs," and the "career woman" was celebrated in fiction and film. Women made steady gains in higher education, the professions, and government from 1920 onward. During the sixteen years of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's steward- ship, women moved into advisory positions, and thirty-three pro-women bills were passed by the wartime Congresses.

Five to 6 million women had joined the workforce during World War II, 2 million in high-paying heavy industry. Even if women did not organize afterward to fight for their jobs or to gain compensation from the federal government for their wartime efforts, even if they did not retain their margin of opportunity in labor, in 1950 twice as many women were working as had been in 1940, and by 1952 women's labor force participation - albeit in lower-paid clerical and administrative jobs-exceeded what it had been during the peak of the war. And the majority of these working women were married. All this was new and could have signaled the real revolution ahead.6

But it is also true that most women had been on the home front in- stead of the battlefront during World War II and therefore could not lay claim to the heroic

experience many soldiers used later to win jobs and congressional, and even presidential, bids.7 Nevertheless, the 1950s could have brought advances to women in politics and industry. No longer were there the pressing social dilemmas that had marginalized the suffrage movement after 1920. The Roaring Twenties were over. The country had been humbled by a depression and a second world war more devastating than the first. Finally, firmly beyond the tumult that discouraged women from bringing their charges out in the open, one might have expected some positive changes after the shock of World War II wore off.

But that was not to be the case. As Friedan documented, and as every young woman growing up in that period knew well, within fifteen years of the end of World War II the realities and the perceptions of woman's place had reverted to a norm closer to that of the Victorian period than to that of the early twentieth century. To give just a few factual examples: There were more American women, proportionate to men, graduating from college in the 1920s than in the 1950s, and there were more women in Congress in the 1940s than in the 1950s. Not only was the extension of women's rights decelerated in the period after World War II. It was also as if something had thrown the whole process into reverse.

So powerful was the feminine mystique, and so effectively was it "sold" to the American public, that a collective amnesia seemed to settle over the nation, obscuring all the previous history I have sketched so far. In a history textbook I was assigned to read in college in the mid-1950s, the entire women's suffrage movement was compressed into a single chapter called "Prohibition and Other Events." A whole generation of postwar children grew up without any knowledge of the struggle for the vote or for other rights. Women in the 1950s enjoyed more legal rights than their foremothers, and the availability of birth control devices (not yet the pill) presented more opportunities for women to shape their lives. But without knowing the history of the struggle, young women could assume, as most of us did, that an enlightened country had simply given women the vote in 1920 and that there were no more battles to be fought.

Quite the contrary was true. Women were still denied equality before the law in employment, in pay, and in access to professional schools. There were quotas on women students in most medical schools. The nation's most prestigious law schools did not admit women at all, and women journalists, with few exceptions, were relegated to the "women's pages" or to women's magazines. There was hardly any scholarship on women that did not fit neatly into "home economics," and even though women were recruited to companies dealing with household products and cosmetics, the independent woman business owner could not be competitive in a world where banks could deny women credit simply for being women or for being married .

None of this was being addressed in the 1950s and 1960s, and had Friedan not provided her critique and her later leadership of a nascent new feminist movement, who knows how long it would have taken American women to realize they had been backsliding . On the eve of my graduation from college, the 1956 Christmas issue of the

then widely read Life magazine, dedicated to "The American Woman," said it all: The ideal American woman was white and middle class and frivolous and spoiled and fun loving and materialistic and beautiful and boy crazy and-if not already living it- dreaming of wifehood and motherhood in middle -class heaven, the envy of her sisters all over the world.

Bringing long hours of scholarship and a highly intuitive sensibility to the reality of the life of "privileged" American woman, Betty Friedan re- ported in her book that women in the 1950s were suffering a problem- the "problem that had no name," she called it-that they could neither identify nor deal with. How was it possible, she asked herself, that women were complicit in their own disempowerment? Where did this new "feminine ideal" come from, and who had a vested interest in perpetuating it? These questions brought her to the New York Public Library and to the field, where she conducted interviews.

Once she had answers to her satisfaction, she began promoting her ideas. And the consequences were enormous. A population of women that had been virtually depoliticized was made to look again at the choices it had made, this time in political terms. Her analysis became part of the dogma and one of the founding themes of the second wave, and her energy, as promoter and later cofounder and first president of the National Organization for Women, gave the movement its first victories in the legislative arena.

Thus, Betty Friedan is crucial to a certain class of women who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s and not just because she wrote a book that many women read and were moved by.13 further analysis actually changed the course of American women's history, first by identifying a phenomenon-the feminine mystique-no one J1ad previously isolated or de- scribed, then by providing an analysis of how such a set of beliefs came into being, and finally, by giving the feminine mystique a limited place in history.

I personally responded to being of the "second sex" by leaving the country after graduation from college. In 1963, I had just returned and was trying to figure out why I was not more successful either as a journalist or as a graduate student. For me, reading The Feminine Mystique, handed to me by my mother in summer 1963, only a month or so after Judith Saidel had discovered the book on her reading list at Wellesley, the message was loud and clear: The set of beliefs that had begun in the aftermath of World War II and held sway while I was a college student did not have to be. Bett)' Friedan's book would change my life, too.

The Story of the Book

As is often the case with germinal thinkers, Betty Friedan did not set out to *write The Feminine Mystique* but simply to collect some survey data about her graduating class of 1942, which had left college in the middle of World War II. The occasion for her report was the class's fifteenth re- union. The year was 1957, and Friedan had been struggling for some years to maintain a career as a freelance writer while being married and

bringing up three children. Battling what we would later call sexism in the feature-writing field, she found the women's magazines to which she was relegated unwilling to assign her articles of general interest. So, when McCall's magazine asked her to write an article about what had happened to her Smith College classmates in the fifteen years since graduation, she accepted the assignment with alacrity.

She had not set out to be a freelance writer. She Had studied psychology at Smith College and thought for a while of graduate school in that discipline but did some freelance writing instead. When she married and became a mother, she brought her full complement of intelligence and energy to that role. As Friedan recounts her history, she bought an old house in Westchester County, New York; fixed it up; bought another home and fixed up that one, too; and was in every sense a "supermom," all the while trying to work as a freelance writer. She found writing compatible with her domestic responsibilities. She could interview people over the telephone and work at her typewriter while the children slept.

Her preference was to write serious features about women, if that was what the women magazines wanted, and about world news, science, and culture. But as she would document in her book, the women's mag- azines of the time were not just reflecting women's interests in the late 1940s and 1950s; they were defining women's interests for them. Unless she wrote about homemaking, travel, toddlers, beauty, self-help, or self--improvement, she had no market for her work. Query letter after query letter to Better Homes and Gardens, Vogue, Family Circle, and other women's magazines came back rejected. Unwillingly but pragmatically, Friedan learned to write what the women's magazines wanted.

The McCall's assignment appeared, at first, not too different. The mag- azine gave her the title and the article's theme: "The Togetherness Woman," expecting, as did Friedan herself, that in her survey and inter- views with her classmates, she would find them knee-deep in "together- ness" (a catchphrase for 1950s family life). privileged, satisfied, and happy. Friedan agreed to the assignment and, well in advance of the re- union, sent her female classmates a detailed questionnaire asking about what life had been like for them, about marriage, about the birth of their children, about what had surprised them most about life after college, and about what they expected of the rest of their lives.

From their returned questionnaires, however, Friedan noticed a tantalizing pattern, nothing she had been looking for or had expected. Despite privileges and the protection provided by a middle-class family in- come, many of these women were deeply dissatisfied with their lives. It was not that they said so directly. But as a sometime student of psychology, Friedan recognized clues that all was not well in the suburbs. Later, in her follow-up interviews with classmates, she noted more serious symptoms of depression such as unexplained fatigue, lack of hope for the future, and lack of interest in the world outside their families. When she confronted her women subjects with her observations, they could not themselves articulate the cause of their distress.

Although the women she interviewed tried hard to repress this truth, taking care of husband, home, and children was not a fulfilling role- postwar propaganda notwithstanding. Friedan concluded that these women were suffering from more than "housewife's fatigue" - a syndrome the women's magazines occasionally wrote about. It was, Friedan thought, not at all physical in origin but a psychological response to being entrapped in a life and lifestyle supposedly the envy of the world (certainly the envy of America's less privileged races and classes), but not in itself fulfilling for "overeducated" women. The women Friedan surveyed and interviewed could not admit to any of this because if they did, the whole fabric of their lives would unravel. Society had placed such a strong emphasis on the role of wife and mother that to suggest one wanted more than that was abnormal- a virtual taboo.

And so Friedan's book began to take shape. It began with the problem that has no name and proceeded to name it- the feminine mystique- to document it, and to analyze its manifestations and its cause. In one stroke, Friedan took the problem from the realm of inner traits, where it could be dismissed as just another female neurosis, and exposed it as an ideology-that is, an artificially created belief system grounded (in good measure) in myth. Indeed, myths that are social in origin may be (and usually are) internalized by large numbers of people living in some com- mon group, but they are only "true" so long as they are believed. Furthermore, as anthropologists know well, myths are neither accidental nor purposeless. Their function is to establish social control.

How did society come to believe that modern women, having been liberated from the physical hardships of preindustrial life and the exigencies of constant pregnancy, still belonged full time in the home? Juliet Mitchell, a British philosopher and social critic writing eight years after Friedan, proposed one answer to that question.10 Mitchell wrote that in preindustrial times, adult women had had four time-consuming home functions to perform: production (of food, household goods, and the family's clothing), reproduction (s ix to eleven pregnancies over a lifetime), childrearing (of four to eight children), and the duties of help- mate and wife.

The Industrial Revolution and the shift of the population in Western industrialized countries from rural to urban areas, wrote Mitchell, had displaced production of food, household goods, and clothing from home to store; had reduced reproduction from full-time childbearing to the birthing of four or fewer children; and had limited childrearing to a shorter time span. To replace the lost functions, and to keep women from exploring their other capabilities, society had created new norms by which childrearing (even of a few children) and the companionate function (continuing to attract and please a husband) were elevated to represent the full-time fulfillment of a modern woman's femininity.

In the face of such pressure, what else could a modern woman do, whose husband was succeeding in the world of work, except turn her two remaining functions into life-fulfilling goals? Children would be fussed over, ferried around, and invested with their

mother's own frustrated fantasies. Husbands would be seduced, cajoled, expected to provide a lover's attention. It is not surprising that in this setting, elixirs that promised "eternal femininity" found willing customers and that a $2 billion cosmetic industry began to flourish in America.

Meanwhile, the wife whose husband, either because of race or class discrimination, was not able to provide material -based "togetherness," not even to properly support a family, was made to feel deprived that she had to go to work. She, too, bought into the feminine mystique, wishing to enjoy the full-time wife-and-mother role and blaming her husband when his income made it impossible for her to do so.

Friedan (and Mitchell after her) documented what had been a sea change in American women's values and behavior in the short period from the end of World War II until the beginning of the 1950s. Two out of three privileged college women were dropping out to marry, according to a Mellon study of Vassar students; college had ceased to be a launching pad for a meaningful career.

By 1956, Vassar women were defining themselves exclusively in terms of family. "They do not expect to achieve fame, make an enduring contribution to society, pioneer any frontiers, or otherwise create ripples in the order of things." Marriage rates went up significantly during the period of the feminine mystique, just as the average age of marriage for women was going down. In the 1950s, for the first time in American history, the typical bride was twenty. Was this just a "return to normalcy," as the women's magazine editors claimed? Or was something more sinister at work?

The "Happy Housewife Heroine"

How much is our behavior shaped and constrained by the movies we see and the fiction we read? Being a writer and somewhat of an expert on women's magazines, Friedan had a hunch that the women's magazine editors had been major players in the effort to send American women back into the home. She began The Feminine Mystique with a content analysis of women's magazine fiction and general interest articles, contrasting story titles and plots, topics, and reader response to articles published before the war with those published afterward.

She looked at advertisements, how-to articles, photo stories, and pro- files, but it was in fiction and general interest features that she located a 180-degree shift in emphasis. Sometime just after the end of the war, the women's magazines had turned domestic. Serious fiction by some of America's best fiction writers was replaced by formulaic stories, and the heroines, who had once included high-flying aviators, intrepid foreign correspondents, and interesting nonconformists, were suddenly either "happy housewives" or wannabes. Where current events and analysis of international affairs had once had their place in Mademoiselle, Redbook, and Woman’s Home Companion, after the war "Life Adjustment," "Marriage and the Family," and "How America Lives" took over.

The change in magazine fiction and general interest articles led Friedan to an in-depth exploration of how the expectations of what it meant to be a woman had become focused more on the home and less on "public" life. She reviewed the writings of prominent anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists- those of Margaret Mead, Talcott Par- sons, and Sigmund Freud in particular- and continued her interviewing of media and business leaders, educators, and even more women. In time, Friedan was able to trace a general shift in society's view of woman from active participant in all aspects of life to "specialist" in the home.

But the mystery remained. Why had the shift occurred? And who benefited from the feminine mystique as Friedan described it: Husbands who did not want their wives competing with them for status? Employers who could exploit their able women workers and pay them less, all the while telling them that their real purpose lay not in providing financially for their family but in putting a good dinner on the table? Whoever it was profited from women's passive acceptance of a segregated and second-rate status at work. Indeed, a European describing life in America in the 1950s said that the whole system rested on the "artificial buoyancy" provided by occupational segregation by race and sex. No matter how meager one's skills and incompetent one's overall performance, this observer said, if a person was white and male, he could not sink to the bottom because the bottom was fully occupied by women and non-whites.

One other explanation, not entirely rejected by Friedan, is a quasi--Marxist one-namely, that capitalist society, particularly after demobilization, needed a full-time consumer class to drive up the demand for goods. What better "consumer" was there than a full-time homemaker and mother to buy the goods manufacturing plants produced? In fact, the 1950s did see an enormous upsurge in the manufacture and purchase of durable goods-automobiles, homes, home furnishings, appliances-goods that had been unavailable during the war years. Was that not stimulus enough?

Friedan thought not. The feminine mystique, she concluded, was an artificial construct made up by manufacturers, in co- operation with advertisers and the media, to sell to the American public an ideal woman constantly available for shopping. "In a free enterprise economy," she quoted one unidentified market researcher as saying, "we have to develop the need for new products. And to do that we have to liberate women to desire these new products. We help them rediscover that homemaking is more creative than to compete with men.

... We sell them what they ought to want." Hence, Friedan concluded,

the feminine mystique was the result of a conspiracy.

Alternatives to Conspiracy

It is tempting to try challenging Friedan's conspiracy theory. As mentioned, anthropologists tell us that after a war there is an almost atavistic urge to repopulate. America lost fewer soldiers than other countries in World War II, but the deaths of even three hundred thousand, together with the life interruption of nearly five years of war, could, by itself, have generated some kind of conservatism in gender roles. Men dreamed of home in their foxholes or on their warships, and women dreamed of having them home. This explains (even without the profit motive) the proliferation of single-family homes in the years after World War II and the emergence of the suburbs. That a great many men and women could not afford even the lowest-priced houses, and that many women had to provide sole support for their dependents, did not fit neatly into the American Dream is indisputable. But winning the war gave our country the right to dream its dream, however fanciful it might be.

Another explanation for the postwar reversion to pre-feminist values is that American women won the right to vote with corresponding access to education and certain occupations without a thoroughgoing nation- wide debate on men's and women's social roles. Given the complementarity of men's and women's roles in our society, there was no way to further women's rights and opportunities without calling into question the basis on which men claimed theirs. From this perspective, the achievement of the woman's suffrage amendment was but the first act in a drama that had to play itself out over time.

Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union also found their "equal rights" to be hollow. There, equal rights for women had to be introduced from above by the conquering communists: in 1923 in the Soviet Union, in 1945 in Eastern Europe. Although women benefited much from freedom to divorce, abortion rights, equal access to employment, and more or less equal pay, many of those privileges were taken away when the government had other priorities. Abortion is a case in point. Abortion was eliminated altogether during the Soviet Union's labor power buildup for World War II. Afterward, Communist Hungary restricted abortion, too, when the government became concerned about low birthrates among Hungarians compared to Gypsies in that country.

Access to the professions and to powerful government positions also shrank in these countries as a postwar generation of men came to maturity. And, as everyone knows, Soviet and Eastern European men never took "equality" beyond the kitchen door. In Soviet Women, Frances du Plessix Gray makes quite clear that women never ceased doing double duty there because the introduction of women's "equal rights" was not accompanied by a true, far-reaching sex-role debate. 16

From this perspective, the era of the feminine mystique was an important reminder of how little distance American women had really covered despite their suffrage victory. The new feminists' agenda picked up where the old feminists had left off: witj1 an analysis and bill of rights aimed at changing sex roles. Betty Friedan knew this

intuitively. How else could we explain the central place in her book of her criticism of Sigmund Freud?

The Attack on Sigmund Freud

A centerpiece in Friedan's analysis of the origins and social control function of the feminine mystique was her treatment of the impact of Freudianism on postwar thinking about women and gender roles. Betty Friedan was the first but by no means the last of a whole line of feminists to take on Freud and his theorizing about women. What was the reason for this focus? Friedan and others believed that Freudianism, the popularization of the ideas of Sigmund Freud, was a key factor in the construction and enforcement of the feminine mystique.

Every society makes arbitrary (but politically useful) judgments about the distribution of tasks, responsibilities, and privileges to certain groups. These distinctions do not simply affect gender definitions. Roles, privileges, and handicaps are typically assigned to higher and lower "castes," as in premodern India; to conquerors and "natives," as under colonial rule; and to slave owners and slaves, as in the antebellum South. Historians have always understood that these distributions are enforced by the powerful over the powerless and are reinforced by beliefs - beliefs that African Americans, for example, were intended by God to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, beliefs about who is "primitive" and who is not, beliefs about "God's grace," beliefs about the biological basis of sex differences, and beliefs about what is "natural" and what is "against nature." In turn, these beliefs are woven into religious teachings and further enforced by religious leaders.

Friedan reasoned that as modern societies became more secular and religion lost its hold, something or someone else had to fill the vacuum. In the place of religion, she said, came the behavioral scientists, psychologists, and sociologists. Their arguments were cbuched in new language but were familiar, nonetheless. Only the justifications and the punishment for nonconformity were new. In place of God's will came mental health and social stability. And in place of damnation came social ostracism, neurosis, and family instability. Coming from "experts," whom secularists respected in matters other than ethics more than they do religious leaders, the new belief systems were powerful, indeed.

Two of America's behavioral gurus were attacked in *The Feminine Mystique:* psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who found sex differences not just in biology (the phrase biology is destiny came to be a shorthand for a superficial reading of his views of women) but also in children's "natural" personality development from infant to adult, and sociologist Talcott Parsons, who believed sex-differentiated roles made for family stability.

Freud and Parsons had had their critics before, other experts who had dis- agreed with some of their findings or who had disputed some of their technical detail. But, except for Karen Horney, a Freudian disciple who had offered a more complex view of women's psyche, not before Friedan was Freudianism exposed as essentially conservative regarding sex roles.

Among the earliest writings of the new feminists, Naomi Weisstein's famous paper "'Kinder, Ktiche, Kirche' as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female" circulated in the feminist underground as early as 1968 and expressed with no holds barred the feminists' objection. Psychology, said Weisstein, did not just study women; it actually constructed, she said, a female psyche that fit with the discipline's self-serving view of how it wanted females to be.

Quoting psychologists whose writings influenced researchers and clinicians alike, she reminded her readers, who might never have heard of Bruno Bettelheim, Erik Erikson, or Joseph Rheingold, of what the "experts" were saying about women. Like Friedan's analysis, Weisstein's quotations informed and enraged her readers. For the Bettelheims, Eriksons, and Rheingolds were not just telling women how to behave; they were also telling women that anything less (or more) than their traditional behavior was inimical to society's health.

It had all started with Freud, who, as Friedan read aloud from pas- sages of his work on platform after platform, saw the "motive force" of women 's personality in "penis envy." The girl child's discovery of the anatomical difference between herself and her brother, according to Freud, caused her to feel that she and all other women (including her mother) were lesser beings, incomplete males. The wish for a penis was central to the Freudian view of women and girls. It explained why the "normal" female wanted a husband and (male) child as compensation, and it accounted for everything in her personality: her neuroses, her self-absorption, and her "lack of originality" and sense of jus tice.

Accepting her penis envy as inevitable was bad enough for a woman. Not accepting it was worse. If she tried to compensate for her missing part by mimicking the life or ambitions of a man, she was then in the throes of a "masculinity complex," doomed to a life of sexual immaturity and frustration. Freud missed the point, said Friedan and other feminists. Girls and women do feel inadequate, but not because of a missing penis; rather, they see themselves as deficient because of missing privileges and opportunities for self-fulfillment outside the home-typical in the kind of male-dominated society in which Freud himself grew up.

Freud never wanted to change society; he sought to help adult men and women adjust to it. Hence, he was essentially conservative when it came to women and women's roles.

But this still does not explain why Freud's theory had such a powerful influence on American popular culture decades after he had first published his "findings." Not many

Americans read Freud; fewer still met directly with a Freudian analyst. But beginning in 1940, after Freud died, his ideas found their way into books people did read or at least heard about. One popularization, Modern Woman: The Lost Sex, a best seller in the 1940s, applied Freud's view of women to American feminism. 23 "Normal female traits are receptivity and passiveness," wrote the authors, "a willingness to accept dependence without fear or resentment

... a readiness for the final goal of sexual life- impregnation."

It was the error of feminists to take women off "the female road of nurture."

Reading Freudians on women today makes us realize how much feminism's second wave changed popular culture.

Forty years ago, respected and much-sought-after American disciples of Freudian psychology could make pronouncements such as these: "We must start with the realization that, as much as women want to be good scientists or engineers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers."

Or, "Woman's ... somatic design harbors an 'inner space' destined to bear the offspring of chosen men, and with it, a biological, psychological and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy." 28 As Friedan and Weisstein knew so well and helped the rest of us understand, this was no longer a science of human behavior. This was wishful thinking on the part of men in power presented as if it were religious dogma: "When women grow up without dread of their biological functions and without subversion by feminist doctrine, and therefore enter upon motherhood with a sense of fulfillment and altruistic sentiment, we will attain the goal of a good life and a secure world in which to live."

The great failure of clinical psychology and the theories of personality on which it rested, said Weisstein, was that the "experts" were looking for inner traits without considering the influence of social expectations.

The question remained, as with the construction of the feminine mystique altogether: Why? Was it flawed thinking, too much reliance on clinical experience and not enough on experiment? Or were the experts merely doing their part in a centuries-long conspiracy to keep women in their place?

Betty Friedan thought she had an answer.