

**“The Problem That Has No Name”  
Taken from *The Feminine Mystique***

A young wife in a Long Island development said:

I seem to sleep so much. I don't know why I should be so tired. This house isn't nearly so hard to clean as the cold-water flat we had when I was working. The children are at school all day. It's not the work. I just don't feel alive.

In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans and *Time's* cover story on “The Suburban Wife, an American Phenomenon” protested “Having too good a time...to believe that they should be unhappy.” But the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported from *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* to *Good Housekeeping* and CBS Television (“The Trapped Housewife”), although almost everybody who talked about it found some superficial reason to dismiss it. It was attributed to incompetent appliance repairmen (*NYT*), or the distances children must be chauffeured in the suburbs (*Time*), or too much PTA (*Redbook*). Some said it was the old problem-education: more and more women had education, which naturally made them unhappy in their role as housewives. “The road from Freud to Frigidaire, from Sophocles to Spock, has turned out to be a bumpy one,” reported *New York Times* (June 28, 1960). “Many young women—certainly not all—whose education plunged them into a world of ideas feel stifled in their homes. They find their routine lives out of joint with their training. Like shut-ins, they feel left out. In the last year, the problem of the educated housewife has provided the meat of dozens of speeches made by troubled presidents of women's colleges who maintain, in the face of complaints, that sixteen years of academic training is realistic preparation for wifedom and motherhood.”

There was much sympathy for the educated housewife. (“Like a two-headed schizophrenic...once she wrote a paper on the Graveyard poets; now she writes notes to the milkman. Once she determined the boiling point of sulphuric acid; now she determines her boiling point with the overdue repairman...The housewife often is reduced to screams and tears...No one, it seems, is appreciative, least of all herself, of a kind of person she becomes in the process of turning from poetess into shrew.”)

Home economists suggested more realistic preparation for housewives, such as high-school workshops in home appliances. College educators suggested more discussion groups on home management and the family, to prepare women for the adjustment to domestic life. A spate of articles appeared in the mass magazines offering “Fifty-eight Ways to Make Your Marriage More Exciting.” No month went by without a new book by a psychiatrist or sexologist offering technical advice on finding greater fulfillment through sex.

A male humorist joked in *Harper's Bazaar* (July, 1960) that the problem could be solved by taking away woman's right to vote. (“In the pre-19<sup>th</sup> Amendment era, the American woman was placid, sheltered and sure of her role in American society. She left all the political decisions to her husband and he, in turn, left all the family decisions to her. Today a woman has to make both the family *and* the political decisions, and to too much for her.”)