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The Feminine Mystique



Synopsis

Landmark, groundbreaking, classic — these adjectives barely describe the earthshaking and long-lasting effects of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. This is the book that defined "the problem that has no name," that launched the Second Wave of the feminist movement, and has been awakening women and men with its insights into social relations, which still remain fresh, ever since. A new introduction by the bestselling author Anna Quindlen traces the book in her own story and how it was prescient on consumer culture as well as domestic issues. — Betty Friedan has been and remains a bridge between conservative and radical elements in feminism, an ardent advocate of harmony and human values. — Marilyn French, *Esquire* — "One of those rare books we are endowed with only once in several decades, a volume that launched a major social movement — Betty Friedan is a liberator of women and men." — Amitai Etzioni, author of *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society* --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

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Customer Reviews

It's common wisdom to think of the *Feminine Mystique* as a classical feminist text. This is perhaps the case, but I would like to argue that it is so much more than that. The book examines what society tells women about their lives -- education, career, family, sexuality, goals, values, and anything else. The book discusses what society tells women, who exactly promotes these views about femininity, out of what possible motives, and what toll do these views have on women, their family and their children. The basic thesis of the book is that femininity has been mystified, manipulated, and taught back to women, in their homes and schools and churches, in the novels

and magazines they read, etc -- that this mystification of femininity is a monstrous distortion of a person's life, resulting in emotional problems, marital and family tension, stifled careers, and general unhappiness... That we -- society -- have been living in denial of the condition women have been manipulated into, and therefore have been ineffectual in our help. That there are good reasons why things are the way they are -- it's embarrassing to discover just how economically profitable this distortion is. The Feminine Mystique is profound and penetrating in that it questions a state of affairs so many of us take (or have taken) for granted. The book appeals to reason. You won't find any "masculine logic" vs. "feminine logic" stuff here; Just logic: The book is a systematic expose of the problem, its toll on women, and its toll on the rest of the family -- men and children. The book is humane and compassionate in dealing with human suffering: It doesn't place men and women on opposite sides of some battle of the sexes, but rather places all of us on the same side -- the side of the victims -- of some really bad ideas that have been dominant in society for a long time. The book is frightening, because having read it, the magnitude and scope of women's suffering takes on a new meaning. The book is liberating, because having read it, you realise the mistakes you've made in your own life -- how you may have contributed to the problem, and you have a pretty good idea as to how to go about changing things -- your own life, and the way you deal with others. This is a great book.

I find the review below about the women who were "bored because their men looked after them too well" to be very amusing. Coming from a poor area like Appalachia when I was young in the 50s I don't remember being too well looked after by my men. My mother was beat every night by my father and then he left her when I was 14 and we both had to go out and get jobs. Of course one of the problems back then was that it was so hard for women to find good jobs and we just weren't educated for it. We had to work as waitresses and that was about all we could do until we got married and then when our husbands got layed off we had to find work again and I had to work in a pencil factory while I was married anyway even when my husband wasnt layed off, my husband wasn't making enough money for the both of us and all our kids. So see, we weren't all rich little house wives back then and the author herself doesn't say much about the poor. I will tell you this though, if there weren't books like this around my daughter wouldn't be a doctor today and having a secure future. Shed be working at some dead end job like I was waiting for a guy to marry her and then probably still having to keep a job to keep the kids clothed. I'm tired of anti feminist rich republican wives putting down the feminist movement. It helped my life and that is all I can say about it.

This is a well-documented and well-researched book that discusses the problems faced by many American housewives. It was written in the sixties, when women were returning to their homes after the sexual revolution and the woman's right movement, when they were proudly filling in forms with "Occupation: Housewife" once again. These women were told by psychoanalysts, who mostly based their findings on Freud's theories, that a woman's sex life and happiness was ultimately found through living her life solely for her husband and children. The women Friedan studied and interviewed for this book were usually suburban wives, living in nice houses with their executive husbands who made a lot of money. These women had done everything right. They had married young: some barely finished or didn't finish high school, others dropped out of college, all for the goal of marrying their sweetheart and fulfilling the perfect image of the feminine mystique. These women had had many babies by natural childbirth, they sewed all their clothes and washed all their dishes by hand, they had breastfed them all, they had doted on their children's and husband's interests and goals so much that they lost sight of their own. And even though these women were living by the perfect standards set by the "feminine mystique", they were dreadfully unhappy. So many were seeing psychoanalysts without positive results, so many were harboring resentful, depressing thoughts, and contemplating everything from an extramarital affair to suicide. And the most common problem of all came to be known as "chronic fatigue syndrome". The women with this problem experienced listlessness and restlessness. They were always tired no matter how much they slept. Their joints and bones ached. They could not stay interested in or concentrated on one subject for a long period of time. They were physically with their children all the time, but never really there in spirit. And so, based on these findings, Friedan studied these women more, interviewed them more, and wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she published her theories. I found most of her ideas to be extremely well thought out, and I can imagine how much the American housewife of the sixties, and later, really needed these ideas. For instance, Friedan comments on how "housework expands to fit the time available", noting that the house of the working woman was always clean, even though she had a limited amount of time to clean it in, while the housewife who was perpetually cleaning and recleaning everything could never seem to "get anything done". Friedan also studied the ways in which these mothers affected their children, and most grew up to be dependant and irresponsible. The men looked for girls to marry who would take the place of their mother, who did everything for them, and the girls grew up to be stuck in the same trap as their mother, being a mother not only to their children but to their husbands as well, since their husbands had grown up under the feminine mystique and expected his wife to act as his mother had. Many

times, the mothers try to live the dreams they never got fulfilled because of early marriage and motherhood through their children, and this is never good. The most important thesis in this book, in my opinion, is the way in which Friedan pleads for women to become their own individuals. When a girl marries at seventeen, before she has even grown up herself, and has children of her own, her growing and learning process is stunted and she never finds out who she really is or what she really wants. When a woman waits on her family night and day, she loses such a big part of herself that she begins to feel like all she does for everyone else is useless and taken for granted. Friedan implores women to follow their own interests and not let the feminine mystique stunt their growth. She gives findings of women who finally went back to the desires and goals they had in their youth, as well as women who never left them but were the rare minority who combined motherhood with a career, and showed that they were no less women than the ones who stayed at home. In fact, having a life of their own improved the woman's marriage, family and sex life drastically when compared with the women whose worlds revolved around other people. I found a few problems with Friedan's book and although they are insignificant in comparison with the book's positive aspects, they are worth pointing out nonetheless. Mainly, although Friedan is very advanced for her time in suggesting freedom and independence for women, she was very discriminative against homosexuals. She spent the first half of her book refuting Freud's theories about women and stating how he was a bad psychologist with unexamined and biased theories when it came to this area. However, she backs up her thesis about "weak" homosexual men being drawn to the love of other men because of the relationship they still desire with their mothers with all of Freud's theories. I don't think she should tear Freud's theories apart when it is in her favor and use the same person to back her up when she is talking about a different subject. Also her book is still sexist in the sense that she always expects women to do the housework and, if they choose to have a career, manage it along with the housework, when what she should do is suggest that if the man and the woman are both working, the man and the woman should both help out with the housework. However, since her views were so revolutionary at this time I am sure she did not want to press it by suggesting men actually do "woman's" work, since her very suggestion that women can and should do "man's" work was already taking things far. On the whole this book was unquestionably fantastic. Although, fortunately, many women work today, some still face bias, prejudice, and discrimination from others, and this book goes to show that there is nothing wrong with a woman doing what she wants to do with her life just as there is nothing wrong with a man doing the same thing. And there are still some housewives caught up in the feminine mystique who should read the book and find out why they are suffering the "problem who has no name". I feel that this book has done a tremendous

amount of good for women throughout history after its publication, and it can still do a lot for them today...

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