

# Is television messing with your mind?

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Seen yourself on television lately?

Of course not. That handful of American women who *are* employed as on-camera "personalities" don't see *themselves* either. They see the same stereotypes you do. Spiro Agnew has put the attitude of many males: "Three things are untamable: fools, women and the salt sea. . . . We stand at the threshold of taming the sea. Taming fools and women may take a bit longer." Such stereotypes may or may not amuse those who run this country and its major television corporations—middle-aged, middle-class, white males—but they do very little to portray or enrich American women.

Frankly, I'm more interested in "people liberation" than in Women's Liberation. I think men are as enslaved as women by the constant pressure to prove their masculinity and treat women as sex objects. Men and women can help each other to be better—and they ought to be permitted to do so. But I also recognize that women have some special problems in our society—problems that have nothing to do with an aerosol can of "feminine hygiene spray." And as a Federal Communications

Commissioner required to license television stations in "the public interest," I have to listen to their complaints when they say that television is more of the problem than the solution.

What I hear is pretty unsettling. Marya Mannes said that television leaves us

... with nothing but the full-time housewife in all her whining glory: obsessed with whiter wash, moister cakes, shinier floors, cleaner children, softer diapers, and greaseless fried chicken. . . . Woman, in short, is consumer first and human being fourth.

Marion Delgado charged at a CBS shareholders meeting, "You use our bodies to sell products. . . . You blackmail us with the fear of being unloved if we do not buy." Franchelle Cadwell, the president of an advertising agency, said that "no force has demeaned women more than television." Mrs. Jean Faust testified last fall before the New York City Commission on Human Rights that "the insistent, subliminal message [from television] is buy, buy, buy: buy to get a husband; buy to make you more desirable; buy to make your floors

shine; buy to care for your children; buy to 'fulfill' yourself." In an article in *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, Donna Keck said that few women "realize the oppression of the system which propels them unrelentingly towards rotten goals." These women are not unfeminine freaks. They are thoughtful women like you, who have articulated what may have disturbed you as well.

These are troubling times of confusion and search for identity. Some look to drugs—usually such "acceptable" drugs as alcohol, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills openly pushed by television. Others look to religion, sex, encounter groups—everything from astrology to Zen. Television says your identity is to be found in the products you buy—the cosmetics, clothes, cars, and homes you "wear." But men and women who are wading in a surf of possessions are looking at their lives and asking, in the words of the popular song, "Is that all there is?" There must be more to life than commutating to boring jobs, in junky automobiles, through polluted air. There must be more relevant standards by which a woman can perceive her-

self than the silicone in her breasts, the spray on her hair. [Television is already selling \$2 million worth of brassières annually to nine-year-olds.] In *The Beautiful People's Beauty Book*, Princess Luciana Pignatelli said of her own body, "Sometimes I cannot remember what is real and what is fake." Whatever lies down that road, it is not human fulfillment.

Even though we know we are being taken, we are being taken," said William F. Fore, a Methodist minister. There is a \$3 billion effort every year to get you to turn off to yourself and turn on to the values of commercial television: conspicuous consumption, superficiality, and the quick "gill" solutions to life's problems.

If you want to help, write the National Organization for Women [1957 East 73rd Street, Chicago, Illinois 60649], whose members are monitoring television's portrayal of women. Meanwhile, for yourself, slow down. Turn off television and its "rotten goals." Walk in the woods. Sit on the beach.

If you've tried that other brand in tests, and it hasn't brought the happiness it promised, what have you got to lose? ▼