

## DOCUMENTS

*Little Boxes, 1962*

Lit - tle box - es on the hill - side, lit - tle box - es made of tick - y tack - y, Lit - tle  
 box - es on the hill - side, lit - tle box - es all the same. There's a  
 green one and a pink one and a blue one and a yel - low one, — And they're  
 all made out of tick - y tack - y and they all look just the same. And the  
 boys go in - to busi - ness And they mar - ry and raise a fam - i - ly In  
 box - es made of tick - y tack - y And they all look just the same.

Little boxes on the hillside, little boxes made of ticky tacky,  
 Little boxes on the hillside, little boxes all the same.  
 There's a green one and a pink one and a blue one and a yellow  
 one,  
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky and they all look just the  
 same.

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And the people in the houses all went to the university  
 Where they were put in boxes and they came out all the same;  
 And there's doctors, and there's lawyers and there's business  
 executives  
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky and they all look just the  
 same.

And they all play on the golf course and drink their martini dry  
 And they all have pretty children and the children go to school  
 And the children go to summer camp and then to the university  
 Where they are all put in boxes and they come out all the same.

*Coda (retard like a music box running down)*

*The Problem That Has No Name, 1963*

The suburban housewife—she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife—freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of.

In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their station wagonsful of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor. They baked their own bread, sewed their own and their children's clothes, kept their new washing machines and dryers running all day. They changed the sheets on the beds twice a week instead of once, took the rug-hooking class in adult education, and pitied their poor frustrated mothers, who had dreamed of having a career. Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands. They had no thought for the unfeminine problems of the world outside the home; they wanted the men to make the major decisions. They

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gloried in their role as women, and wrote proudly on the census blank: "Occupation: housewife."

For over fifteen years, the words written for women, and the words women used when they talked to each other, while their husbands sat on the other side of the room and talked shop or politics or septic tanks, were about problems with their children, or how to keep their husbands happy, or improve their children's school, or cook chicken or make slipcovers. Nobody argued whether women were inferior or superior to men; they were simply different. Words like "emancipation" and "career" sounded strange and embarrassing; no one had used them for years. When a French woman named Simone de Beauvoir wrote a book called *The Second Sex*, an American critic commented that she obviously "didn't know what life was all about," and besides, she was talking about French women. The "woman problem" in America no longer existed.

If a woman had a problem in the 1950s and 1960s, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of a woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor? She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it. If she tried to tell her husband, he didn't understand what she was talking about. She did not really understand it herself. For over fifteen years women in America found it harder to talk about this problem than about sex. Even the psychoanalysts had no name for it. When a woman went to a psychiatrist for help, as many women did, she would say, "I'm so ashamed," or "I must be hopelessly neurotic." "I don't know what's wrong with women today," a suburban psychiatrist said uneasily. "I only know something is wrong because most of my patients happen to be women. And their problem isn't sexual." Most women with this problem did not go to see a psychoanalyst, however, "There's nothing wrong really," they kept telling themselves. "There isn't any problem."

But on an April morning in 1959, I heard a mother of four, having coffee with four other mothers in a suburban development fifteen miles from New York, say in a tone of quiet desperation, "the problem." And the others knew, without words, that she was not talking about a problem with her husband, or her children, or her home. Suddenly they realized they all shared the same problem, the problem that has no name. They began, hesitantly, to talk about it. Later, after they had picked up their children at nursery school and taken them home to nap, two of the women cried, in sheer relief, just to know they were not alone.

Gradually I came to realize that the problem that has no name was shared by countless women in America. As a magazine writer I often interviewed women about problems with their children, or their marriages, or their houses, or their communities. But after a while I began to recognize the

telltale signs of this other problem. I saw the same signs in suburban ranch houses and split-levels on Long Island and in New Jersey and Westchester County; in colonial houses in a small Massachusetts town; on patios in Memphis; in suburban and city apartments; in living rooms in the Midwest. Sometimes I sensed the problem, not as a reporter, but as a suburban housewife, for during this time I was also bringing up my own three children in Rockland County, New York. I heard echoes of the problem in college dormitories and semiprivate maternity wards, at PTA meetings and luncheons of the League of Women voters, at suburban cocktail parties, in station wagons waiting for trains, and in snatches of conversation overheard at Schrafft's. The groping words I heard from other women, on quiet afternoons when children were at school or on quiet evenings when husbands worked late, I think I understood first as a woman long before I understood their larger social and psychological implications. . . .

If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. It is far more important than anyone recognizes. It is the key to these other new and old problems which have been torturing women and their husbands and children, and puzzling their doctors and educators for years. It may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."

### *Segregation in the Suburbs, 1994*

Roosevelt, L.I.—When Marshella Atkinson's parents decided to leave Brooklyn for Long Island, the enthusiasm of friends and teachers made her smile with anticipation.

Perhaps they pictured the swimming pools of nearby Levittown, or the shopping centers of Garden City, or the well-stocked library and spotless corridors of Plainview-Old Bethpage High School. Ms. Atkinson is not sure.

But four years later, the 16-year old does know one thing: they could not have meant Roosevelt, where boarded-up houses dot the walk home from high school and people complain that their streets are last to be plowed by the town of Hempstead, where Roosevelt is the most troubled section.

"I think they set it up so that when a black family moves here, it ends up in Roosevelt," said Ms. Atkinson, a junior at Roosevelt High School. She glanced at a hole in her classroom ceiling where tiles had been ripped away.

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