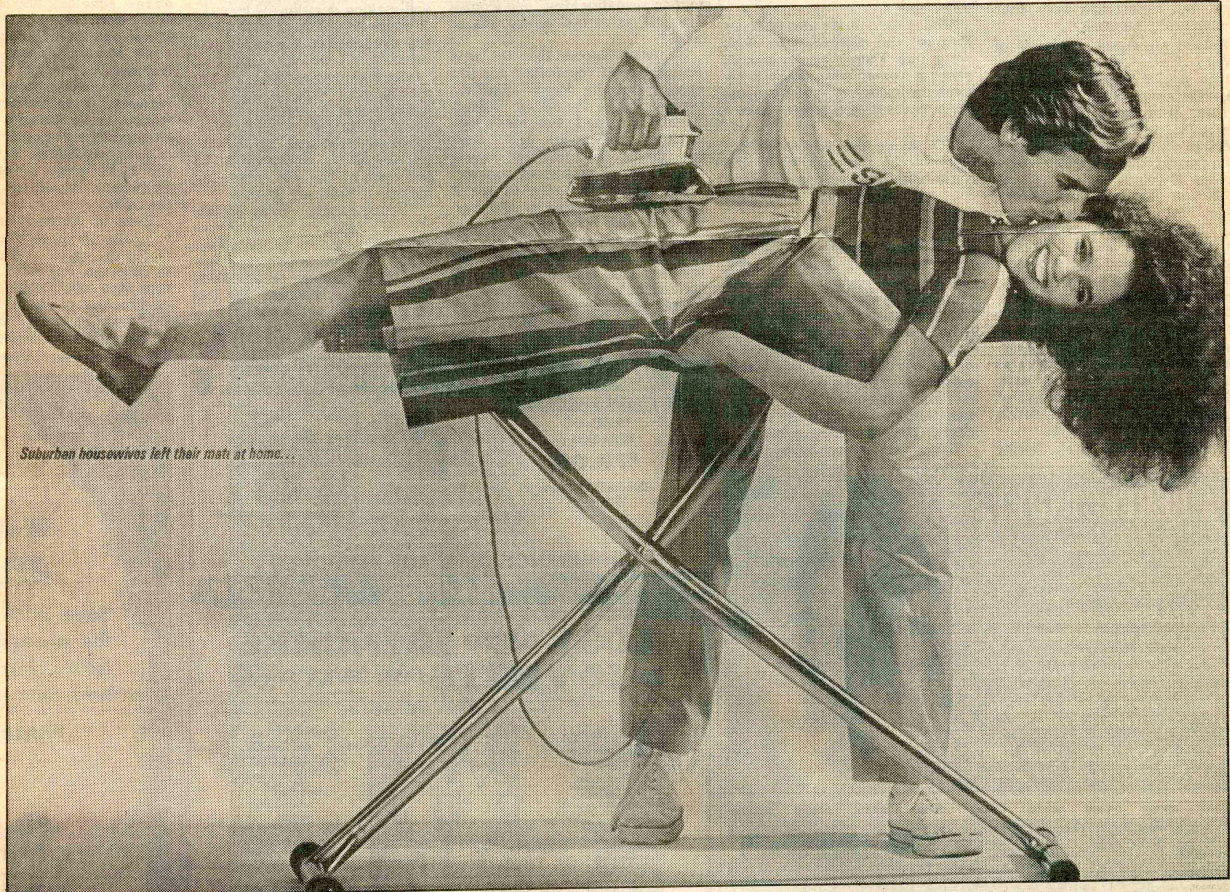


A woman's places
are kitchen and bedroom,
not board room, advertisements insist



Suburban housewives left their mats at home...

This 1982 ad for women's sportswear by Esprit encouraged violence against women, feminists charged

Sexism still (soft) sells

By Mary Gottschalk
Mercury News Style Writer

'YOU can only go so far, baby." That's the message advertisements pitch to women, says Ann Simonton, a Santa Cruz feminist who heads Media Watch, a local organization that keeps tabs on sexism in the media.

"Women are most prevalently shown (in ads) with children, in domestic household scenes. They're feeding the kids or cleaning the toilet. These are stereotype images that women are still doing domestic chores," Simonton says.

The messages such ads send out about the role of women in U.S. society may be subtle or subliminal, but because they are seen so often, they pack a wallop, she suggests.

"It's estimated that we see 500 ads a day without even trying. People love to think we have the ability to tune advertising out, but we need to admit it has us in its clutches in a very profound way."

Simonton notes that "we're also seeing more violence against women in advertising, a more ambiguous positioning where the consumer doesn't really know what's happening, yet there is a tease of violence."

"Part of that is evidenced in an ad where a woman is manacled because she is beautiful — portraying her as weaker, lower-class and powerless," such as last Wednesday's Valco Fashion Park ad, Simonton says.

That full-page newspaper ad for the Cupertino mall featured a model in evening gown and handcuffs with Santa Clara County Sheriff Robert Winter standing nearby.

Feminist organizations have been quick to criticize the ad as promoting bondage and the humiliation of women.

Beyond the single Valco advertisement is the larger



Ad for Georges Marciano's Guess? jeans

question of how women are being portrayed by an industry that spent an estimated \$95 billion on advertising last year.

Patricia Carbine, editor and publisher of Ms. magazine, says there has been some progress over the past 15 years in portraying women, as well as men and children, in realistic ways. But, she says, "There is still a great distance to cover."

"We rarely see models in advertising who are other than very thin, very white and very young. It's a rare occasion when we see an older person using some product other than denture equipment. It's rare for us to see minority faces, it's rare for us to see women who are amply built."

"We're seeing a kind of norm in advertising that tells women, especially young women, that one has to be extremely thin to be acceptable. The fact that anorexia and bulimia are two of the major disorders among young women today has something to do with the kinds of images of women that we are constantly being presented with," she says.

"We are still not seeing a very diverse range of women as workers used in advertising. The marketing community has created a new image for advertising that is fairly consistent — a woman in a suit, a shirt, a tie and a briefcase. I think women are still waiting to see much more diversity in terms of job categories reflected in advertising. At the moment it looks like there is only one kind of worker," Carbine says.

Her feelings are echoed by Simonton, who, when asked if she could cite a positive advertisement, mentioned a Safeway ad that promises an honest deal to honest working people. "It uses women, men and children in non-stereotypical ways, such as women working in construction," Simonton says.

"A second thing that still needs to be cured," Carbine

See ADVERTISING, Page 2F

Cover Story

Ads still sexist, feminists charge

ADVERTISING, from Page 1F says, "is the inclination to suggest in advertising images and imagery that the new ideal American woman is a super woman. The message is that the new ideal woman we all ought to be shooting for is the woman who can do it all and does it all perfectly. It has been our experience here that women really resent it."

Roland Marchand, professor of history at the University of California at Davis and author of "Advertising The American Dream" (University of California Press; \$35), offers a historical perspective on the way women have been portrayed in advertising over the last 60 years.

"In the '20s and '30s women were portrayed, once they were married, as having full responsibility for the house and the upbringing of children, and as desperately anxious to live up to the expectations put upon them. These expectations involved the maintenance of youthful beauty and time to keep up with their husband's interests so the husbands wouldn't get weary or disinterested. They were seen as having a certain kind of responsibility to act as decorative figures in society," he says.

Today, Marchand says, "There

are many similarities. But the consciousness created by the women's movement over the last decade and a half has meant many of the portrayals are not as narrow or condescending as they were. But there are still plenty of examples of the kind of advertisements that portray women as decorative figures.

"Today there is the idea of Super Woman, the woman who does everything. There's a television ad where a woman says, 'I can bring home the bacon, fry it in a pan and never, never let you forget you're a man.'

"It's saying she can succeed out there in the business world and come home and be domestic and cook and still be sexy," Marchand says.

Diane Russell, sociology professor at Mills College in Oakland, says, "In general, the advertising industry just reinforces the conventional, traditional sex roles. The emphasis on women is to be attractive and beautiful above all else. This is the most damaging message, and I think the whole problem with eating disorders that has emerged comes from having such thin models held up as the ideal of the advertising industry.

"It's a very irresponsible indus-

try. All they're interested in is selling their products, no matter what abuse there is to consumers in the process. As long as it sells, it doesn't matter if it feeds on things like self-hatred and our insecurities."

Thomas Tutko, psychology professor at San Jose State University, says, "I don't think we will ever get away from having good-looking, sexy women as part of advertising. It basically has to do with arousing people and sexuality. We have so long looked at only men looking at women. But let's face it, now you have guys advertising shorts. You might say it's for the gays, but I don't think so. I teach a human sexuality class, and women are just as turned on by ads as men."

Simonton agrees that the new acceptance of "beefcake" ads is a change, but she doesn't think it's necessarily for the better. "Advertising is starting to turn men's bodies into a commodity, and I don't see turning the table and having men be sex objects as an answer."

She adds, "We need to see if advertising is serving us as a society and what we are losing as a result of being insensitive and callous, just because love and respect between men and women isn't in style right now."

Tutko says he is very aware of changes in the way women are portrayed in advertising. "In the

past, if you saw an advertisement with a group of businessmen, if there was a woman portrayed, it was as a stenographer. That's not the case anymore, you see women with briefcases and in committee meetings at the head of the table. There's been a marked improvement in portraying women in positions of power. But, it's still not equal and it's still not routine."

One thing that is certain to have an effect on future advertising is the number of women entering the field. In the '20s and '30s, Marchand says, "Advertising was very much a man's profession. Virtually nine out of 10 of the people who were writing copy, approving copy and making decisions were men."

While no industry-wide figures are available on the present percentage of women employees, "more and more women are in top management slots at advertising agencies and in corporations," says Marshall Raines, associate professor of advertising at San Jose State University. He points out that 55 per cent of the 400 advertising majors at SJSU are women.

"Young people coming up today are very sensitive to social issues and women's issues," he says. "They are concerned about misleading consumers or advertising that may be dishonest. They feel very strongly, and I see that as a means of upgrading advertising in the future."