May 18, 2023

Re: “Selling the Soul of Things”

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this chapter. It is an early draft from the middle of my dissertation project, titled “Dress and the Sciences of Subjectivity in Twentieth-Century Anglo-America.” To help orient you to the text, I will briefly describe the overall arc of the project.

My main argument is that clothing was an integral part of the developing mind sciences. Theorists believed that it represented inner drives but, being on the surface of the body, it was also amenable to objective study. The creation of the category of transvestism, in particular, illustrated how attention to dress could lead to new knowledge about the self. This form of indirect observation was strengthened by researchers, including Ernest Dichter, in the first half of the twentieth century. Its growing use, however, invited critique by cultural commentators lamenting the state of American society in the 1960s and 1970s. Their arguments, largely around the narcissism of consumer culture, made an interest in things appear shallow and feminine. This disrupted the connection between clothes and selfhood developed earlier in the century, and researchers were no longer to unproblematically rely on that association for the basis of their science. In this moment of crisis, the field of fashion studies arose as a new and accepted way to continue thinking about dress.

I have been struggling to balance the arguments I hope to make in this chapter with the wealth of archival material I have collected on Dichter. This iteration of the chapter is my attempt to impose some structure, and I am eager to hear if it works (or not). I am also still trying to figure out how Edward Bernays fits into this story, and how much I should engage with his work. There is lots of work to be done, and I really appreciate your engagement with my work, especially in this rough form. I look forward to hearing any and all feedback.

Thank you for reading. And many thanks to the HISRESS organizers for making this possible.

Take care,
Chris

Chapter 3. Selling the Soul of Things: Consumer Psychology, Dress, and a Marketable Self

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Introduction: Ernest Dichter

In a report published by the National Institute of Drycleaning in 1956, a researcher named Ernest Dichter and a team from his Institute for Motivational Research expressed shock at what they had heard when talking with Americans about drycleaners:

> As we listened to people talk freely and uninhibitedly about drycleaning and analyzed the interviews sent us from the field, we again and again gained the impression that we were in one of those labyrinths of mirrors found in amusement parks. At every turn we encountered wild ideas, misconceptions, unrealistic expectations. We had, of course, expected to find irrational reactions, but we ourselves were surprised by the *frequency* with which we came across them and the *extent* of the distortions. We had succumbed to the tendency which many cleaners display to think of drycleaning as a matter-of-fact and humdrum subject.[1]

Over the next twenty pages, the team related its surprising findings, namely that the consumer was unable to be rational when it came to getting their clothing cleaned. The report catalogued a range of emotional responses from fear to shame to pride, illustrating a stark portrait of Americans in an age of anxiety over clothing care.

This was the first of three studies that the Institute for Motivational Research undertook on behalf of American drycleaners from the 1950s to the early 1980s. The resulting reports index many key themes that had developed in the psychology of clothes since the early twentieth century. Dichter made his name and his money in claiming to understand "hidden" drives in the consumer realm, which necessitated special techniques that eschewed what people said in favor

[1] "How the consumer really feels about dry cleaning," 1956, 794.1A, Box 30, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807, p. 5.

of what they really believed and what they actually did. Such a practice also relied on psychoanalytic theory, as illustrated in the talk of "distortions" hiding below the surface that controlled consumer behavior. Finally, the report itself illustrates just how valuable this information was for companies, especially when combined with practical recommendations.

The work of men such as Dichter is a prime illustration of just how popular this way of viewing objects had become by midcentury. Companies paid large sums of money to those who claimed they could understand the language of clothes and used those insights to market their products. In the process, the once-specialized psychoanalytic language of dress and self began to seep into the broader culture. Gender was central to this work, and the female consumer played a key role in the research.

This chapter uses the work of Ernest Dichter to illustrate the expanding remit of the psychology of clothes in the mid-twentieth century. Dress was often his first example when explaining to the public his broader philosophy on "the soul of things." To him, clothing indexed just how tightly humans were intertwined with objects, and how much the researcher could learn by understanding that relationship. This chapter uses some of the proposals and studies on clothing and personal appearance from Dichter's Institute for Motivational Research—those on dry cleaning, fur, and men's socks—as well as published books and articles by Dichter to map out the "psychology of the world of objects" he outlined through his work and to illustrate the influence of his ideas on American culture.

Dichter's Background

It is important, however, to situate Ernest Dichter within marketing thought and in the larger story of this dissertation. During the twentieth century, market research shifted from a field relying on intuition and practical experience to a discipline harnessing the tools of science

to predict the future behavior of individuals and of the market.[2] Dichter was a key figure in this process. His strand of motivational research drew explicitly on the social sciences and made a place for the expert consultant, who would travel between academia and industry to form new knowledge about consumers.[3] His biography is well known, both in scholarly circles and from his own autobiographical account of his life and successes.[4] While Dichter is often called the "father of motivational research," such an moniker has recently been the subject of much debate.[5] It is true that researchers, especially Paul Lazarsfeld, had sketched out the practice of using psychology and sociology to uncover motivations prior to Dichter's work. However, Dichter was known for his great panache, and his relentless self-marketing helped spread the ideas of the field further than they had gone before.[6]

The scholarly literature on Dichter usually centers on the relationship between American consumer culture and émigré intellectuals during the Cold War. One of the first historians to consider Dichter's work beyond of the field of market research was Daniel Horowitz, who brought Dichter into a larger conversation about public intellectuals and affluence in American society. From the Great Depression and through the 1970s, Horowitz writes, "affluence raised troubling issues of individual authenticity and social equality even as it promised the achievement of personal satisfaction in ways that strengthened the link between democracy and

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[2] Harmut Berghoff, Philip Scranton, and Uwe Spiekermann, eds., *The Rise of Marketing and Market Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Jean-Paul Guadillière & Ulrike Thoms, eds., *The Development of Scientific Marketing in the Twentieth Century: Research for Sales in the Pharmaceutical Industry* (London: Routledge, 2015).
[3] Jan L. Logemann, *Engineered to Sell: European Emigrés and the Making of Consumer Capitalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 100.
[4] Daniel Horowtiz, "From Vienna to the United States and Back: Ernest Dichter and American Consumer Culture," in *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research: New Perspectives on the Making of Post-War Consumer Culture*, ed. Stefan Schwarzkopf and Rainer Gries (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41–57.
[5] See Schwarzkopf and Gries, eds., *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research*, especially the chapters by Stefan Schwarzkopf and Ronald Fullerton.
[6] Stefan Schwarzkopf and Rainer Gries, "Ernest Dichter, Motivation Research, and the 'Century of the Consumer,'" in Schwarzkopf and Gries, eds., *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research*, 17.

capitalism."[7] Dichter, Horowitz notes, used his more specialized writing to argue in favor of an "affirmative culture" that yoked spending to happiness. Later thinkers would expand and politicize Dichter's critiques in books that became bestsellers.[8] More recently, Jan Logemann has also argued that Dichter was part of a group of European émigrés who helped construct the foundations of American consumer culture. Dichter, like many of these individuals, was strongly influenced by both his upbringing and education in Europe as well as by his later experience in the United States as a semi-famous public figure. In a time of professionalization of marketing research, outsiders such as Dichter were granted major opportunities.[9] Underlying all these discussions is the Cold War, which made the market a symbol of Western democracy and consumption a civic duty.[10] Regina Lee Blaszczyk, who has studied Dichter and especially his research for DuPont on men's fashion and synthetic fabrics, has made his ideas central to her concept of "imagining consumers."[11] Critically, Blaszczyk also places Dichter in a larger framework of "identifying oneself through possessions."[12] This chapter adds more concrete arguments for such a claim, connecting Dichter more explicitly with the psychoanalytic thinkers explored in Chapter 2.

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[7] Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 1.
[8] Ibid., 10–11.
[9] Logemann, *Engineered to Sell*, 3–6.
[10] Ronald Fullerton, "The Birth of Consumer Behavior: Motivation Research in the 1940s and 1950s," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 5, no. 2 (2013): 212–222; Daniel Horowitz, "From Vienna to the United States and Back: Ernest Dichter and American Consumer Culture," in Schwarzkopf and Gries, eds., *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research*, 41–57; Stefan Schwarzkopf, "Mobilizing the Depths of the Market: Motivation Research and the Making of the Disembedded Consumer," *Marketing Theory* 15, no. 1 (2015): 39–57; and Mark Tadajewski, "Promoting the Consumer Society: Ernest Dichter, the Cold War and FBI," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 5, no. 2 (2013): 192–211.
[11] Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Ernest Dichter and the Peacock Revolution: Motivation Research, the Menswear Market, and the DuPont Company," in Schwarzkopf and Gries, eds., *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research*, 129. See also Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019 [1999]).
[12] Blaszczyk, "Ernest Dichter and the Peacock Revolution," 128. See also Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865–2005: from Hearth to HDTV* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2009).

The larger landscape in which Dichter worked was characterized by a broader psychologization of society and the formation of a therapeutic culture. What Nikolas Rose has termed the "generosity" of psychology allowed its language and theories to spread far beyond the disciplinary boundaries of the field.[13] As I have argued elsewhere, Dichter's practical psychology helped in this process, allowing for a slow reorganization of self and society around a psychotherapy of consumption.[14] Here, however, I focus on the particularities of Dichter and his work. What understanding of objects, especially clothes, did Dichter and his team advance? How did they put these ideas into practice? And, perhaps most important, what were the consequences of expanding this thinking into the public sphere, especially considering the connections between clothing and gender?

Dichter's Methods

Many of Dichter's methods aligned with those popular in midcentury social science. At the most basic level, this included projective tests and depth interviews.[15] There is also a repeated refrain in Dichter's work about the role of researchers, especially their status as "human candid cameras."[16] Researchers placed a high value on observation, but the reference to "candid camera," also the name of a popular television show that began in the late 1940s, indicates that this was supposed to be a form of passive observation. The allure of *Candid Camera* was that its subjects did not know they were being observed, which provided a supposedly more natural and

[13] Nikolas Rose, "Engineering the Human Soul: Analyzing Psychological Expertise," *Science in Context* 5, no. 2 (1992): 359–369.
[14] Christopher M. Rudeen, "Ernest Dichter's Fur Coat Models: Fashioning a Therapeutic Culture," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, DOI: 10.1002/jhbs.22228.
[15] On projective tests in the social sciences at midcentury, see Rebecca Lemov, *Database of Dreams: The Lost Quest to Catalog Humanity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
[16] "The Peacock Revolution: The Psychology of the Young Men's Market," [speech] February 18, 1966, 193.8D, Box 9, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.

intimate "snippet of life."[17] Only when unobserved, it was believed, did people behave "normally." The description of their observations illustrates the debts of Dichter's work to anthropological techniques, namely ethnography. "Notice the young man examining a sports or suit jacket.," Dichter wrote in his first speech on the Peacock Revolution, discussed in Part 3 of this chapter. "Not only is he feeling the material but he wants to hear the lining as it rubs against the fabric. Does it rustle elegantly?, or does it sound rough?, tough?, and unappealing?"[18] What is more, Dichter's research made nonhuman objects such as socks part of the community under observation. Being a "good" social scientist, he argued, meant "observ[ing] the sock purchasing situation," that is, "the situation where sock meets consumer."[19]

Dichter also relied on the methods of psychoanalysis. The quote at the start of this chapter mentions that researchers let "people talk freely and uninhibitedly about drycleaning." And in a speech on men's hosiery, Dichter asked consumers to "free-associate with the word socks."[20] Both instances built on the so-called "fundamental rule of psychoanalysis" outlined by Freud decades prior. Free association, Freud believed, would allow the patient to bypass internal resistance by providing material for the analyst to interpret.[21] In this way, it is a psychoanalytic form of indirect observation, which hopes to provide the observer a look into the mind unencumbered by what the individual says they are really thinking. Dichter also dedicated the final part of the speech to uncovering his respondents' "sock dreams," drawing on the language of Freudian dream analysis to propose future products for the men's hosiery market. "In order to look even further into the future, we put our more imaginative respondents on the 'couch' and

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[17] Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, hosts; Latif Nasser, reporter; and Matt Kielty, producer, "Smile My Ass," *Radiolab* (podcast), October 6, 2015, https://radiolab.org/episodes/smile-my-ass.
[18] Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution,"26–27.
[19] Ernest Dichter, "Soxology—A Strategy for Stimulating Sock Sales," [speech] December 2, 1966, 1963D, Box 87, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[20] Ibid., 12.
[21] See, for instance, Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, repeating, and working-through," (1914), *SE* 12: 147.

asked them to turn on their fantasy world. We then sifted through these consumer thoughts, desires, dreams and nightmares…"[22]

While the tools of social science positioned the respondents as subjects of research, this inclusion of explicitly psychoanalytic material blurs the line between patient, subject, and consumer. This was, in part, Dichter's goal. In an article for the *Harvard Business Review*, Dichter described a world in which stores are arranged as pharmacies for the masses. "I can imagine a supermarket," he wrote, "having special departments corresponding to different consumer moods. One of them, for example, might be entitled, 'Feeling Depressed Today? Here are all the articles you can buy which will help you get rid of your depression'; another might be identified, 'Feel Like Splurging? This is what you can do and buy.'"[23] The inclusion of these analytic methods, alongside more standard social scientific ones, therefore betrays Dichter's belief in the *healing* power of things.

In short, Dichter was both a social science researcher and a corporate adviser. In the first capacity, he was interested in categories and types, using established yet diverse methods to construct a view of the world and the place of objects in it. As a corporate adviser, however, he was also interested in practical advice and monetization, which guided his research and results. These two strands worked together in Dichter's life and career, making him an important figure to study how the ideas behind the psychology of clothes escaped the consulting room.

Arguments and Organization

This chapter plays out in three parts, each taking inspiration from a foundational figure in the psychology of clothes and centering a different object of Dichter's motivational research. The first section, guided by William James, focuses on dry cleaners as important sites of relationality,

[22] Dichter, "Soxology," 66.
[23] Ernest Dichter, "Discovering the 'Inner Jones,'" *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1965): 8.

where serious attention was given to the role of objects as part of the self. The second section, overseen by Joan Riviere, looks to fur coats as a means of working out the social aspects of gender. The third section, inspired by J. C. Flügel, shows how Dichter materialized and monetized psychoanalysis for the market, spreading the gospel of the marketable self. This section focuses on men's socks, which Dichter argued were uniquely positioned to provide information about their wearers. It was *in practice* that the psychology of clothing spread from psychoanalytic theory to cultural knowledge, which then paved the way for its treatment as a subject of critique in the mid- to late twentieth century.

Part 1: Dichter at the Cleaners

The National Institute of Drycleaning first reached out to Dichter and the Institute for Motivational Research in the summer of 1956. Along with their request for a motivational study, the group attached a survey they had contracted a few years prior that collected statistical information on its consumers. Dichter replied that while the NID had "quite a bit of information on the actual circumstances of the use of dry cleaning, the establishments and various habit patterns," his own Institute's contribution was "in the domain of the actual motivational survey."[24] As such, drycleaning seemed like an ideal case for the Institute.

Dichter was partially selling his own service with this distinction between circumstance and motivation, but it also gives a sense of how he differentiated his work from other types of surveying available to businesses and governments at the time.[25] The published report was prefaced with an introduction by a general manager of the NID, who defined the method as

[24] "Proposal for National Institute of Drycleaning," July 6, 1956, 794A, Box 29, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[25] On the use of surveys in the United States at this time, see Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

follows: "Motivation research is the newly developed application of basic psychology to market study. It involves interviews between consumers and trained psychologists who skillfully probe for the underlying motives which prompt people to buy or to feel favorably toward a product, a service or a company."[26] Commenting on surveys, Dichter argued that "answers of this type are not much more usually than rationalizations and can often be far afield from the real motivations." What is more, "only if these real factors are known can appropriate action be taken."[27] Here Dichter relies on adjectives to position the information his team provided as "real," which was contrasted with "statistical" information on mere "rationalization." Beyond that, Dichter emphasized the action potential of motivational information. Numbers told a story, but, critically, motivations gave one the tools to change it. While the earlier statistical study was titled "The Consumer Speaks," the motivational study was printed under the headline "How the Consumer Really Feels About Dry Cleaning."[28] The term "real" makes a reappearance, and a difference is staked on how the consumer spoke about dry cleaning and how they *felt* about it. The drycleaning industry seemed to be convinced, as they would go on to commission two further studies from Dichter, the first the following decade and the second in the early 1980s.

And what did these studies find? In line with William James' ideas of the "material self," Dichter viewed drycleaners as an ideal place to see how individuals formed relationships with clothes. The first two sections of this part look at the 1956 study for the NID and the resulting report, which features both analysis and a series of images relating to consumer's positive impressions and fears about sending out their clothes to be cleaned. The pictures are especially telling—alongside the text, these images illustrate how clothes could play out selfhood and

[26] "How the consumer really feels about dry cleaning," 1956, 794.1C, Box 30, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807, p. 4.
[27] Ibid, 1.
[28] Ibid.

relationality, and how, in this manner, social critiques could be displaced onto clothes. The final section investigates a follow-up study done in the early 1980s. A quiz prepared by Dichter's team based on its findings hoped to turn drycleaners into motivational researchers, applying the findings of these studies to their own customers to increase business.

Clothes and Relationships

One of the major findings presented by Dichter and his colleagues was that people do not think about clothes, and by extension their care, in a rational way. As the report published by the NID put it, people tend to see their clothing through "emotional spectacles," a phrase that allows us to show how clothing plays an integral part in constructing the self, both internally and externally. By "emotional spectacles," the report meant that unconscious feelings colored how people saw their clothes. Beyond that, spectacles are an accessory themselves, one that dictates how people see the world and others around them. One can also read the word "spectacles" another way, denoting performances or displays that are visually striking. From the Latin for "public show," spectacles are events with great visual impact.[29] Clothing, too, is selected for much the same reason, as a public display of one's identity meant to elicit emotional responses in others. In this duality, of seeing and being seen, clothing finds its place at the heart of the construction of selfhood.

This finding came from thirty-two initial depth interviews conducted by Dichter's Institute. "We found that people tend to have a strong narcissistic investment in, and attachment to, their clothes," the report read. "As a result, they are likely to think of them as being more valuable, newer and better looking than they really are." They argued that this finding had

[29] My thinking on this point is influenced by the discussion of "marvels" in Jenell Johnson, *American Lobotomy: A Rhetorical History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014) and "iconicity" in Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

applications for drycleaning in two main ways: one, women (in particular) often overestimated the value of their garments, and two, they "feel that their clothes must be handled carefully and gently when they are being cleaned." More broadly, this claim was used to introduce the many "irrational beliefs, fears and expectations" women had about the process of drycleaning.[30]

This idea was elaborated in the NID bulletin. The finding was first explained as a matter of fact. "In part this is readily understandable. An individual's clothes belong to him, and have a certain value. Usually he has selected them, so that they are a reflection upon his taste." The report continued, however, by saying that "there is far more to it than this. This study yielded additional evidence of something already well established in clinical psychology. Clothes are peculiarly personal. In psychological terms, they are almost *a part of oneself*—an extension of the body image."[31] In this passage, researchers from Dichter's Institute perform their expertise—the finding is "readily understandable" but only "in part," and it took their methods to find the deeper meaning. Moreover, the report presents the finding as "already well established in clinical psychology," positioning Dichter in the lineage of the "psychology of clothes" that this dissertation has traced in its first two chapters.

This claim is further substantiated using interviews undertaken by study researchers. The report cited the case of an office manager from Chicago who mentioned that she had once pinned a note to a dress that read, "Please be good to this dress."[32] Elsewhere in the report, this claim is implicitly upheld through slippages between washing one's body and one's clothes, indicating their interchangeability. For example, a respondent from California commented favorably on a new drycleaner she had recently used by saying "Your clothes smell fresh when you call for

[30] "Two phase summary of progress report; consumer phase of study; NID phase of study," November 1956, 794B, Box 30, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[31] "How the Consumer Really Feels about Drycleaning," 5. Emphasis in original.
[32] Ibid.

them and look fresh, making you feel as though you could go on home and have a shower with no doubt that the clothes from the cleaner are as fresh as the underthings you are wearing."[33]

Illustrations accompanying the printed report illustrated the "life" of clothing. Beneath discussion of how the consumer wants the drycleaner to give her clothes individual attention is an image of a man welcoming a woman's suit into his shop. The suit is drawn in motion, though there is no woman inside the garment. Through the open door we see the racks of clothes and the work of the cleaner in progress, indicating the highly detailed image consumers have at the front of their minds—of a drycleaner attending respectfully to an individual item of clothing—that contrasts with what they know deep down, that the work of a drycleaner does not lend itself to such individual attention. A few pages prior, two men are shown exiting a drycleaning shop. One man's suit is wrinkled, his face likewise contorted into an angry countenance. The other man stands tall, quite literally beaming in his pristine outfit. The way one's clothes are treated, this image tells us, can have a profound impact on one's life.

Clothes and Critiques

As the earlier section's use of the word "narcissistic" illustrates, nascent cultural critiques bubbled up in the ways people spoke about clothes. This self constructed through clothing was gendered one. The female pronouns in the progress report, where the heading identified the customer with "emotional spectacles" as female, were justified by evidence researchers had gathered suggesting the "housewife" was put in charge of her family's clothing. "She takes this responsibility seriously," the report added.[34] Unlike the progress report, which used third-person plural pronouns when speaking about "people's" attachment to clothes, the report sent out to members of the NID was more explicit about the gendered component of this phenomenon. The

[33] Ibid., 17.
[34] "Two phase summary of progress report."

study "showed anew that people, women particularly, have a marked emotional investment in their clothes." The quote above, which immediately followed this sentence and explicated the "readily understandable" part of the finding, used male pronouns.

This gendered discrepancy in access to rationality was itself rooted in psychoanalytic ideas. As historians Jonathan Metzl and Anne Harrington have persuasively argued, the midcentury United States professed its allegiance to biological psychiatry while Freudian psychoanalysis continued to hold sway over theorizations around mental illness.[35] The influence of psychoanalysis is present here, just as it was in the pharmaceutical advertisements analyzed by Metzl, in depictions of motherhood and family. As previously stated, the main message was that consumers had many irrational fears and resistances—the material of psychoanalysis more broadly. It is perhaps not a surprise, then, that the psychoanalytic mother, the source of all things irrational in the early twentieth century, makes an appearance.[36] In a series of quotes on consumer misgivings, we see the following: "I have no idea why we think it might be hard on clothes to clean them regularly. It's just something my mother told me and I guess my husband's mother told him."[37] This quote locates irrationality in the figure of the mother, who stands in for the past and a resistance to reason.

This idea is repeated a few pages later. The report moves on to discuss the reservations consumers have about bringing new clothes in for cleaning, namely a concern that they will never again look the same. The researchers inserted the following quote: "I have a feeling that

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[35] Jonathan Metzl, *Prozac on the Couch: Prescribing Gender in the Era of Wonder Drugs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Anne Harrington, *Mind Fixers: Psychiatry's Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

[36] On the cultural idea of the mother in the early twentieth century, see John Neill, "Whatever Became of the Schizopherenogenic Mother?" *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 44, no. 4 (1990): 499–505; Marga Vicedo, *The Nature and Nurture of Love: From Imprinting to Attachment in Cold War America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[37] "How the Consumer Really Feels About Drycleaning," 7.

when something is new I'd rather wear it as long as I can before I get it drycleaned. I suppose it dates back to Mother and the old-fashioned idea of 'Keep your new things clean because they'll never look as nice after they've been cleaned.'"[38] Here "Mother" and "the old-fashioned idea" are again conjoined to explain the source of an unfounded belief. Just below this quotation is another image. The drawing shows a stern older woman using a brush to beat dust and dirt out of a suit. Meanwhile, she looks down on a young girl, who watches the process keenly. In this girl's hand is a doll, hanging limply by its arm and facing the viewer. This image illustrates the transfer of (mis)information through generations, from the older woman to the young girl (to the doll, representing her future daughter). The mother scowls, indicating that this suit is a disappointment. Perhaps the young girl identifies with that suit, afraid of being beaten herself. Through past emotion, and not present experience, attitudes toward clothing and its care are thereby transmitted from mother to child. This image, presented as subtext to the quote above, gives the reader a sense of how consumer misgivings have come about and why they continue to take hold in the face of rational evidence. The domineering mother, who appears both in the respondents' thoughts and in the pages of the final report, illustrates the source of consumers' insecurities over their clothes, extensions of their own bodily selves that they worry will disappoint their family members as they had once dissatisfied their mothers.

Clothes and Types

In September of 1981, the same month that Sandra Day O'Connor became the first female associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Dichter and his team once again turned to the question of dry cleaning. The client this time was the International Fabricare Institute, a successor to the National Institute of Drycleaning. The proposal sent by Ernest Dichter

[38] Ibid., 9.

Motivations Inc., which had also undergone a change in name and structure, indicated the organization's goal of updating the picture of consumers' attitudes to dress for "today and today's people."[39] Once more, dry cleaning provided Dichter a look into consumers' thoughts about clothing more broadly.

Included in the resulting report was a quotation from an article in *Time* magazine about Giorgio Armani and recent fashion trends. "Clothes are the fabric of history, the texture of time," it read. In the words of that author, clothing provided "a tactile key into the past."[40] In Dichter's reading, fashion had developed a new meaning that drycleaners could harness: "Since clothes are an extension of a persons life style [sic] and the drycleaner an extension of this person we are encountering another new potentiality for the modern Fabricare Plant." Beyond the maxim of "clothes make a man," it was becoming more widely understood that dress influenced one's life, contributing to "your success, your mood and your outlook on life."[41] Dichter himself had been instrumental in spreading this mentality. What is new here is the more public discussion of these ideas, which made the repeat study even more important for the drycleaner.

In addition, this preamble indicates how marketing thought had incorporated more intense segmentation, a practice that Dichter himself had been instrumental in championing. Richard Tedlow has identified a four-stage sequence in marketing history in the United States. The final two stages in his model are segmentation, which began in the 1920s, and hyper-segmentation, an era that took shape in the 1980s.[42] The main finding of the 1980s study, in line

[39] "Proposal for a Repeat Study on Drycleaning and Fabricare," September 1981, 2930A, Box 123, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[40] Jay Cocks, "Giorgio Armani: Suiting Up For Easy Street," *Time*, April 5, 1982.
[41] "Report of a Repeat Motivational Research Study on the Opportunities and the Future of Fabricare Plants," May 1982, 2930B, Box 123, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[42] Richard Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), quoted in Bergoff, Scranton, and Spiekermann, *The Rise of Marketing and Market Research*, 2.

with these general shifts, was the identification of new "psychographic groups," in Dichter's words.[43]

Women, for one, were divided into three primary groups based on their relationship with work in and outside the home. With typical flair, Dichter heralded the arrival of "a new type of woman":

> We call her the balanced type of woman. We used to see the career woman. She was basically insecure and afraid to on the one hand to act purely as a woman. She competed with men. The other type on the other end of the scale was the housewife or better labelled the "mousewife." She too was insecure, afraid of playing occasionally the role of men. She was convinced that a woman's place is in the home, in the kitchen, and in taking care of the children. Women's lib, economic factors, greater demands by consumers, all have resulted at first in a revolt on the part of women, and gradually creating a merger between the housewife role and the career role in the "balanced type of woman."[44]

Like much of Dichter's rhetoric, this announcement of novelty was overstated. Dichter had himself forty years earlier defined a tripartite typology of women into "career women," the "pure housewife," and the "balanced woman."[45] In addition, the next section of this chapter demonstrates how this typology was expanded into more varied classifications through research into fur, which had taken place decades earlier. The arrival of the balanced woman, then, was more of a return.

The report indicated that "The balanced type of woman wants to behave in line with her group psychology." As such, it was of the utmost importance that more than just researchers could identify this type; drycleaners were to learn how to spot this woman so as to "give

[43] "Proposal for a Repeat Study on Drycleaning and Fabricare," 1–2.
[44] "Report of a Repeat Motivational Research Study on the Opportunities and the Future of Fabricare Plants," 9.
[45] "Electrical home appliances in the postwar world—a psychological study on women's attitudes," 1945, 55, Box 3, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807. This study formed the basis for one of Betty Friedan's critiques of Dichter's work and its "perpetuation of housewifery." See Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 197. Friedan's work will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. See also Horowitz, *The Anxiety of Affluence*, 56–57.

attention to the characteristics of the shell of this group."[46] To that end, Dichter's company developed a questionnaire to determine the proportion of each type in society and provided a quiz to guide the drycleaner in recognizing the type of women entering his shop. The institute estimated the incidence of each type based on agreement with six statements, such as "I hate housework," (typical of the career woman); "I enjoy being at home" (a characteristic of the "Mousewife"); and "It's easier to pay someone to clean my home and clothes so I'm free to do what I want to do" (designating the balanced type). They found that fifty-nine percent of women belonged to the balanced type, while thirty percent and thirty-nine percent fit the career and "mousewife" types, respectively.[47] Researchers also asked women if they would like to "remain" feeling that way. Balanced women were confident in their position, they discovered, as opposed to the other groups who felt they might like to change. "This is a sophisticated measurement of future trends," the report argued, but one that was "easy to understand."[48]

The information gathered about these "types" of women was condensed into a six-question "quiz" to help the drycleaner recognize and speak with them. Each question included three answers, scored with either one, two, or three points. The second question, as an example, concerns what customers say about clothes. The three options were A) "Please take really good care of them"; B) "They are hardly worth cleaning"; and C) "Discuss[es] individual stains and problems." Answer A was worth one point, answer B two points, and answer C three points. The "best" score overall was eighteen, and those with high scores were "probably clothes conscious and a balanced type." The cleaner was to "compliment her on her taste and interest in clothes [and] [s]ell her on advantages of coming more often." Those who scored between nine and

[46] "Report of a Repeat Motivational Research Study on the Opportunities and the Future of Fabricare Plants," 10.
[47] This implies that one could be of more than one type at a time.
[48] "Report of a Repeat Motivational Research Study on the Opportunities and the Future of Fabricare Plants," 70–71.

twelve were career women for whom "cleaning of clothes is a sober necessity." For this group, the drycleaner was to "reassure customer of your *efficiency*." Finally, those near the "lowest" score of six were probably "mousewives" who feel "guilty, overly concerned with having her clothes taken care of." In dealing with these women, the drycleaner was told to "avoid throwing clothes on floor." Beyond that, the cleaner was also supposed to "Compliment her on her care and housewifely duties." Underneath this information, the quiz indicates that men "should be scored similarly," but that if they bring in their family's clothes three points should be added to their score.[49]

Not only does this quiz indicate the value judgment favoring the balanced type (note the language of "best" score and "lowest" score, which could have easily read highest and lowest instead), but it also represents a way in which Dichter's work spread a practical psychology of clothes to larger groups of people. In filling out and utilizing the quiz, the drycleaner would become a proxy researcher continuing the work of Dichter's Institute. They would observe people's interactions with clothing, collect data, sort women into types, and develop practical responses based on their findings. According to Rose, tests were "the paradigmatic technique" of psychology's "calculable person," one who, being known, could be controlled.[50] While it is difficult if not impossible to know if this quiz made its way beyond the confines of the report, this process is indicative of how engaging with Dichter's work spread his way of thinking beyond institutional spaces.

In this series of studies on dry cleaning, we can see key points of Dichter's intellectual world that were proselytized through various channels all the way to the consumer. In

[49] The quiz is included as an appendix to "Report of a Repeat Motivational Research Study on the Opportunities and the Future of Fabricare Plants."
[50] Rose, "Analyzing Psychological Expertise," 359.

drycleaning, one laid bare the feelings attached to clothes. These feelings were of great interest to industry, who, through Dichter and his team, learned about the many emotional reasons behind customer behavior. Results were most useful when they could be translated into practice, as the test dramatically indicates. These associations hoped to turn each of their members into a researcher who, armed with Dichter's theories and tools, could perform a psychology of clothes to increase business and regard for the profession.

Part 2: Domesticating Fur

In the fall of 1957, John A. Kellogg, the vice president of the Institute of Motivational Research, met with representatives of the Lynn Farnol Group to discuss the current state of the fur industry.[51] Americans had been hesitant to buy furs after the end of World War II, sending the industry into what its leaders had called a nearly decade-long "doldrums." American manufacturers blamed the slump on consumers' reluctance to pay for the rising costs of fur, and hoped a research program conducted by the Institute could change fur's image and overcome that resistance.[52] For the low price of $18,500, the Institute was happy to work on their behalf.[53]

Researchers conducted preliminary interviews to give the Associated Fur Manufacturers a sense of what questions the Institute would ask. The aim of the investigation, it became clear, was not so much to change the industry itself as to alter how it was perceived. Price, for instance, was investigated as a psychological problem: the Institute hoped to uncover how the industry could exploit "all the built-in psychological advantages of fur…as a means of taking the edge off

[51] Lynn Farnol was also a figure in the growing field of public relations, largely working with film studios such as Samuel Goldwyn Productions. See "Lynn Farnol, 63, Press Aide, Dies," *New York Times*, April 1, 1963, 27.
[52] "Fur Industry Sees No Changes in 1948," *New York Times*, January 3, 1948, 23.
[53] This would be equal to about $200,000 in 2023. "A Creative Problem Analysis and Proposal for a Motivational Research Study of the Problems Currently Faced by the Fur Industry in Expanding Its Market," September 1957, 943A, Box 41, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.

the real or psychological expense involved in the purchase of a fur coat." The "soul" of fur was also a key player in the investigation. Fur was characterized by "certain sensuous qualities" that lent it "a life—an electricity—of its own" and that distinguished it from wool, cotton, or synthetic fabrics.[54]

This section analyzes the Institute's investigations into fur to demonstrate how clothes were used to understand the performative nature of femininity, laying bare its emptiness. Building on the work of Joan Riviere, discussed in Chapter 2, I show how these studies indexed emerging social forms, namely postwar population shifts and the intense pressures faced by families to embrace consumer culture. Next, I argue that Dichter believed fur had a subjectivity that existed alongside that of women, which exposed the artificiality of gender roles. This work, in attempting to materialize the "being" of women, showed it to be a verb and not a noun, a performance requiring constant effort to hide the relationships propping up the façade.

Understanding Postwar Society

Despite his promise to increase the market for fur coats, Dichter wrote in the proposal's introduction that "No product, of course, exists in a vacuum. Sales trends are not engendered mechanically but are, rather, caused by changing cultural habits, by new modes of living, by new needs on the part of the consumer." Dichter concluded, "If the fur industry wishes to increase its sales…it must understand and take advantage of the new possibility inherent in recent changes in living habits." While in part a sales pitch, the proposal indicated that the Institute was "particularly well qualified to discuss the pattern of living in America today" due to its "diversified experience in almost every area of consumer buying."[55] Dichter believed that

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 1–2.

attention to consumer goods endowed his company with a particular eye to emerging social forms; furs were the canary in the coal mine that was the United States at midcentury.

The research areas outlined in the Institute's proposal were numerous, but foremost among them an argument about "the new middle class." The studies Dichter had conducted since the Institute's founding in 1946 had led him to reflect on the many ways the American class structure had changed since World War II. The middle class, Dichter observed, had grown immensely in "actual and proportionate size," largely due to the entrance of "what was formerly the upper-lower class": craftsmen, laborers, and technicians. These were families that had previously been unable to access the trappings of middle-class life. As a result, they had yet to incorporate the "symbolic value" of luxury products into their traditions. These commodities, Dichter noted, included "fine china, crystal, sterling silver—or furs."[56]

Dichter expanded on this argument in his public-facing writings, using the case of fur to suggest that Americans had internalized these new class hierarchies. In 1965, Dichter published an article in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Discovering the 'Inner Jones,'" a play on the common phrase "keeping up with the Joneses" made popular by the comic strip of the same name. To keep up with the Joneses was to strive to be like the family next door.[57] Dichter saw in the postwar United States a new trend, however, "to be more subtle in one's conspicuousness." In his mass market paperback, *The Strategy of Desire*, Dichter wrote, "We are becoming more interested in keeping up with the 'inner Jones,' than with the too obvious outer one. We want the neighbor to guess at our wealth and status rather than to display it too openly." One's closet

[56] Ibid., 5.
[57] Dichter, "Discovering the 'Inner Jones'"; William Safire, "On Language; Up the Down Ladder," *New York Times Magazine*, November 15, 1998, 34.

became a key site of contestation over conspicuousness, and old status symbols such as fur coats became the battlefield.[58] As Dichter noted, fur was "a product in conflict with itself."[59]

The phrase "Inner Joneses" carries a wealth of assumptions. First and foremost, it hinges on the connection between inner and outer states, that one can learn about others' interiority by observing how they dress or what cars they drive. This builds on James's "material self"; these objects were a part of the self, and, being easily observable by others, constituted a clear way to position oneself in a rapidly changing society. The proposal for the fur study indicated that "because we live in a complex world where the individual seems to have little or no influence over international relations and affairs of State, there is a growing need to seek other areas where individuality can be expressed and will be acceptable." For women of the new middle class, Dichter continued, "this area has become the home and its furnishings and her own personal taste or flair in wearing apparel."[60]

Moreover, in its repetition in Dichter's writings over the course of his career, the phrase was harnessed as a way to argue that one could move from observing individuals to observing society as a whole. Postulating the existence of "Inner Joneses" allowed Dichter to expand his remit from individual motivations to cultural critique based on the interiorization of one's neighbors. Additionally, it helped to spread his brand of thinking on the psychology of clothes, making individuals into researchers who learned from their peers their place in the world.

Fur's Subjectivity

Given fur's complicated position in society, what was the industry to do? As part of the study, the Institute designed a special projective test using photographs of fur coats from current

[58] Ernest Dichter, *The Strategy of Desire* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002 [1960]), 87–88.
[59] "Proposal for a Motivational Research Study of the Problems Currently Faced by the Fur Industry," 30.
[60] Ibid., 10.

advertisements. The goal was "to determine the extent to which fur coats…'typical' of today's fur styles, actually match the personalities, the economic, social and cultural backgrounds of the largest number of American women today: i.e.[,] those in the Middle Income group."[61] In the process, however, the test helped to construct a roster of "fur coat models" arranged in a "feminine typology," creating a roster of ways of being for midcentury middle-class women.[62]

Test-takers were presented with six images of disembodied fur coats draped over whited-out female figures, each with twelve multiple-choice questions. The questions, the Institute argued, "offered each respondent the opportunity to mark off, on an especially prepared test sheet, her estimate of the economic, social, cultural and human interests of the woman who would be most likely to wear each coat."[63] This projective test was, notably, not open-ended. Unlike the ink blots of the Rorschach, for instance, the images presented here were not meant to spark free-flowing observation to learn about the psyches of individual respondents.[64] Instead, participants sorted the six coats into provided categories of middle-class womanhood.

The first question read, "the wearer of each of the furs on these pictures is most likely to be," followed by a list of ten occupations (and "not applicable"): housewife, sportswoman, artist, night-clubber, student, secretary, professional woman, "someone's 'sugar baby,'" community leader, and well-to-do widow. These categories were exclusive, and a test-taker could select only one for each coat. As it turned out, only rarely did a coat match up consistently with a single descriptor. Coat C was the only one for which a majority of respondents indicated a single

[61] "Appendix: fur photograph projective test," c. 1958, 943.1C, Box 41, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[62] "Blueprint for action for the opening up of lines of communication between the fur industry and the potential fur owner," May 14, 1958, 943.1B, Box 41, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[63] Introduction to "Appendix: fur photograph projective test."
[64] On the Rorschach test as a material "technology of the self," see Peter Galison, "Image of Self," in *Things that Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 257–294.

"wearer": this was, according to fifty-four percent of the sample, a night-clubber (thirty-two percent believed she was instead someone's "sugar baby").[65]

The remaining questions further iterated on this idea, defining the type of woman from all angles. The fourth question asked test-takers where they would be likely to find the fur, including options for different types of homes (a "fashionable apartment house" or "public housing project"), spaces of recreation (a "large exclusive country club" or "football stadium"), and places of employment for the woman or her husband (a "business executives dinner" or "typing pool of a large office").[66] The ninth question asked who purchased the fur coat, defining its wearer by her relationship to a man in her life. (Was she his wife? His fiancée? His mistress?) The final question, which featured the most detailed answers, asked explicitly about the woman's husband. Whereas the women were classified into broad groups, the men were given much fuller descriptions. The first option was "A family man, 30 years old, enjoys outdoor sports, takes long trips with wife and family." There was also "An advertising executive trying to impress himself with his feminine conquests."[67] Here again the women were erased from the picture, defined more by what was around them than personal qualities.

While the coats did not match precisely to the types of women presented on the test, this did not stop Institute researchers from hardening these categories into a typology. After the study ended, the Institute sent industry leaders a list of thirty action items. The fourth stressed the need to "examine the whole problem of fur-styling and fur-fashioning," emphasizing the "versatility" of fur. Along those lines, the Institute suggested "the creation of fur coat <u>models</u>, with imaginative names." There was a slippage here between the coat and the woman wearing it. The

[65] "Appendix: fur photograph projective test," i.
[66] Ibid., iii.
[67] Ibid., vii, ix.

first example given is "roadster," which "would be thus seen as a fur car coat whether it were made of mouton, beaver, or seal."[68]

The next action item suggested "broaden[ing] the social scope of the fur owner's femininity." Following that was a recommendation of "ad testing furs and feminine typology," which included this list:

> the suburbanite
> the school teacher
> the secretary
> the professional woman
> the housewife
> the committee woman
> the young career woman
> the young mother (out of doors with small children)
> the college student
> the mature, self-confident woman (in her 40's – 50's)
> the industrial worker[69]

Some of these names ended up in industry materials, including the college student and "career girl." A newspaper article from the mid-1950s argued that a "consumer-relations program" focused on such categorization "had played a big part in pulling the industry out of its doldrums."[70]

This "feminine typology" is at once totalizing and incomplete. The definite articles preceding each category defined them as homogenous groups, e.g., "the secretary." Whereas the fur photograph projective test used indefinite articles ("a well-to-do widow"), when crystalized into typology for the purposes of advertising the categories became ever more distinct. At the same time, however, women were defined by a variety of factors that contained the possibility for overlap and multiplicity. This typology defined women variously by age, location, and

[68] "Blueprint for action," 2–3.
[69] Ibid., 3–4.
[70] "Fur Industry Ends Prolonged Slump," *New York Times*, January 3, 1955, 83.

career. A housewife could also be a suburbanite, and the young mother out and about with her children could also have a career. What is important about this typology, then, is not its fidelity to how women were living but rather its participation in broader conversations of categorization and femininity at midcentury. Such projects opened space for women to partake in new ways of being, while further constricting their selfhood along recognizable axes of relating to others, namely the middle-class family.[71] Throughout the materials collected by researchers, fur has a subjectivity that coexists and, at times, supersedes that of women. The fur coat defined the woman, and the woman defined the fur coat.

This relationality inherent in the construction of "fur coat models" was part of the rebrand described by the Institute. Researchers wrote that one problem to be overcome was that "in the mass market, fur appears to contradict the modern woman's social and cultural image of herself."[72] Part of the conflict, they argued, was that fur was "ego-oriented" and not "family-oriented" like the bulk of products desired by the new middle class. The latter purchases were those "in which the whole family share[s] both psychologically and practically." For such consumers, fur "appear[ed] ego-oriented, selfish and non-social in their purchase framework."[73] To counteract this apparent selfishness, the Institute suggested that furs be advertised in "a family setting" to "show the pleasure and admiration of a fur garment derived by family members." As a "family" gift, the fur would lose its ego-orientation and eliminate any guilt from the wearer's "alleged self-indulgence."[74] An orientation to objects that made them part of an

[71] See, for instance, Veronica Campbell Hill, "Defining 'normal' in their own image: Psychological professionals, middle-class normativity, and the postwar popularization of psychology" (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin). Texas ScholarWorks, University of Texas Libraries.
[72] "Interim Memorandum for the Associated Fur Manufacturers Inc.," 943B, Box 41, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[73] Ibid., 3–6.
[74] "Blueprint for action," 7.

individual's wider social setting, alongside family and the home, was thereby advertised to the fur industry to sell more coats.

In all, the Institute hoped to craft fur as a "delightful necessity" for women and their families. The goal of Dichter was to wrest fur coats from their past associations and to connect them to broader cultural shifts occurring in the midcentury United States. One of the largest of these changes was in the formation and discussion about the developing concept of gender roles.

Materializing Gender

The materials collected by the Institute make clear how clothes, furs in particular, were part of the performance of middle-class womanhood. The fur coat's participation in the act of "womanliness as masquerade" (see Chapter 2) is nowhere clearer than in an example interview.[75] When asked about her pleasant feelings surrounding fur, a thirty-five-year-old New York housewife and mother replied,

> I guess I'll always be excited about fur, especially if I get a new one, which I hope to do. It's the kind of thing a girl looks forward to. It means something. It's feminine. People can see what kind of person you are. They can see that you're the kind of person you want to be. Everybody wants to be a woman in a fur coat, and when you have it, you've got someplace. 1 don't know exactly how to explain it, but I don't know any girls who don't want a fur coat.[76]

The woman states in no uncertain terms that fur is feminine. Beyond that, she clearly indicates that fur communicates the essence of a person to onlookers: "People can see what kind of person you are." This is an external expression of one's innermost self, not just in the moment but also in the future, the kind of person one *wants* to be.

[75] As an example interview, this should be not be considered representative or typical of respondents' thoughts about fur. It is nonetheless informative about what the Institute and its collaborators looked for in an interview. "Blueprint for action: Fur," 943C, Box 41, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[76] Ibid., 112.

The final phrase of this response communicates that being a girl and wanting a fur coat are synonymous, suggesting that a person who did not want a fur coat would not be a girl at all. "I even know some girls who feel permanently sad because they don't have one," the woman added.[77] To be a woman was to want and desire, and the fur coat represented materially this understanding. Such feelings were taught to younger women as well. The woman later said, "I'm bringing my daughter up right. She always wants to put on *Mommy's coat*. She'll want them. She's a real girl."[78] This response equates being a "real girl" with a desire to wear fur, a desire that comes from raising a daughter "right." Putting on "Mommy's coat," a coat made of fur, is to become a woman, to assume the mantle of the suburban matriarch.

Fur helped construct ideals of masculinity as well, both on its own and in its relation to femininity. The proposal for the fur study, for instance, included as one of the "emotional appeals of fur" its representation of man's "aggressive masculinity and his feelings of sexual potency." Dichter continued, "the fur rug in the bachelor apartment has become the symbol of this type of masculinity."[79] In his article for the *Harvard Business Review*, Dichter wrote about how displays of wealth historically functioned as a form of "psychological armor," discouraging attacks from potential enemies. "The fur of the beast," he argued, "used to be the telling trophy of the hero. It stated clearly to all intrepid competitors, 'I am mighty and strong. Don't challenge me." In the present day, the purpose of what Thorstein Veblen termed "conspicuous consumption" was in many ways the same. "Today, it is literally still the fur in the form of a mink coat bought for the tribal bride, which is paraded on her shoulders as a symbol of her lover's prowess."[80] Midcentury American masculinity, in another of its many purported "crises,"

[77] Ibid., 116.
[78] Ibid. Emphasis in original.
[79] "Proposal for a Motivational Research Study of the Problems Currently Faced by the Fur Industry," 21–22.
[80] Ernest Dichter, "Discovering the 'Inner Jones,'" *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1965): 6.

was constructed in part by such consumption—men, stuck in the suburbs and in office jobs, showed their "prowess" through their wives' closets.[81]

Despite the focus on femininity in the Institute's work on furs, men were omnipresent in the research. The fur photograph projective test, as noted above, included a handful of questions describing the husband of the fur coat model, while the final report emphasized "the special problems presented by the male shopper."[82] Interview schedules developed by the Institute made sure to include questions about husbands' feelings towards fur. The woman quoted above told the interviewer, "You know how men are. They don't care much about these things…. He'd like to see me in it—I talk enough about it, and he knows I want one, and I think he wants me to have it. It would give him satisfaction to get it for me, but he doesn't know how it feels, really."[83] The man gets his satisfaction through gifting fur, from seeing the fur on his wife, but not through the fur itself. As we will see later in this chapter, this was a way men could safely show interest in dress. The triangulation of desire among man, woman, and coat displaced an unaccepted fascination with clothing onto the normative heterosexual relationship.

Masculinity was thereby defined in contrast to femininity's range of emotions. Whereas the woman described her own excitement and desire, she attributed to her husband a *lack* of feeling, repeating the refrain that "he doesn't know how it feels, really." Other husbands, she noted, "think fur coats are silly, that women buy them to show off." This was unsurprising. "Of course she wants to show off. That's part of being a woman, I guess. We can't help it—it's built into us." Her husband, on the other hand, "doesn't make comments like that."[84] Showing off a

[81] On (white) American masculinity at midcentury, see James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[82] "Appendix: fur photograph projective test," vii; "Blueprint for action," 11.
[83] "Blueprint for action: fur," 115.
[84] Ibid., 115–116.

fur coat was "built into" being a woman, defining them as distinct from the men who thought that was "silly." Dichter, on the other hand, viewed this as a neurosis on the part of men.

Part 3: The Peacock's Socks

On December 2, 1966, Ernest Dichter gave a speech in Southern Pines, North Carolina, on what he termed the "fascinating new science of SOXOLOGY." Socks might sound like a strange thing to speak about, but Dichter was prepared to show his audience just how important they could be. Midway through his prepared remarks, Dichter quoted a Baltimore resident who told his team, "To me it's as if my socks had some historical value. There is something that is a part of me at one time and they express what kind of a person I was."[85] The main question Dichter had been tasked to answer was how to increase enthusiasm within the men's hosiery market—how could advertisers implore men to buy more socks and demand more variety in their socks?[86] Central to Dichter's response was this connection between socks, memory, and personhood. Especially for the men's market, focusing on emotions was key to effecting any real changes in behavior.

The study on which the speech was based was commissioned by the Textile Fibers Department at E. E. du Pont de Nemours & Company, an early vanguard in synthetic fabric development. Dichter and DuPont had a close working relationship, especially concerning these novel materials.[87] In speeches about this work, Dichter's science was translated from theory to

[85] Dichter, "Soxology."
[86] "A proposal for a motivational research study of the men's hosiery market," April 1966, 1963A, Box 87, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[87] This exchange is central to the work of fashion historian Regina Lee Blaszczyk, who has written extensively on a process she calls "imagining consumers" and the role of industry in the fashion world. See Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers* and Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Styling synthetics: DuPont's marketing of fabrics and fashions in postwar America," *Business History Review* 80, no. 3 (2006): 485–528. Blaszczyk's work, even when explicitly focusing on Ernest Dichter, is more interested in the interplay of firm and consumer culture. Blaszczyk, "Ernest Dichter and the Peacock Revolution," 126–139.

practice. The focus on speeches, as opposed to proposals, reports, or even published articles, allows us to focus on a different means by which Dichter spread his gospel, highlighting the importance that "practical applications" played in his work. As I will argue, selling goods to men was inextricable from the construction of masculinity. This means, first, that looking into the discussions about marketing men's dress can say a lot about masculinity and the role of social science in its construction, and second, that the association between women and interest in dress was still dominant. New forms of consumer culture and abundance in the postwar period, however, began to change how this was pathologized, laying the blame on women and not just on men as had been the case with transvestites (discussed in Chapter 1).

Dichter's comments on socks were given between two other speeches he made in 1966 and 1967, which provided the context of his remarks. Speaking in Scottsdale, Arizona, a few months before addressing the crowd about "Soxology," Dichter noted that he and his listeners were part of an ongoing revolution brewing in society.

> We've all heard of the colonial revolution, the cultural revolution, the population revolution. Today I would like to describe to you another revolution that is about to explode—the Peacock Revolution. You're all aware of the fact that in the animal, bird and fish world the male is normally the most colorfu1 and attractive of the sexes; this is particularly true of the peacock, while in the human world men are the drab ones, women the colorful ones in dress.
> Something is happening—young men want, need and intend to change this situation. In the future there will be peacocks in the human world because deep down inside young men desire the same gratifications from wearing apparel that young women desire <u>and get</u>—the pleasure of using apparel as an outlet for expressing one's own uniqueness as a persona1ity as well as one's varying day to day moods.[88]

The ideas contained in this opening salvo showcased his deep intellectual debts to British psychoanalysis, especially the work of J. C. Flügel. The speech also flipped the script on the

[88] Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution."

desirability of certain gendered traits. Here, "the pleasure of using apparel" is a privilege men lack—by acting like women, Dichter argued, men would have the chance for self-actualization.

What was the Peacock Revolution? The title of the follow-up speech, "Down with the Barriers," indicates its defining element. As Dichter concluded there, "The spark of rebellion that was inherent originally in the Peacock Revolution will continue. The flames will burn down the barriers that have existed for generations. In their place we will find the actualization of all the potential creativity of generations of mankind."[89] These barriers were both those between men and women and those that limited the reach of the men's clothing industry. "The Peacock Revolution is a rebellion against the stereotyped clothing of the past. It is the revolt against the barriers involving age, sex, class, etc. which have restricted men's clothing for generation."[90] The fall of these barriers, Dichter believed, would allow full participation in the "supersonic era," the not-too-distant future in which "movement and a quick pace" will be worshipped and society oriented around activity and speed.[91] Such a culture would prioritize those things that helped individuals maximize their actions. This included showier clothes for men.

Flügel Reborn

Dichter's speeches on the "Peacock Revolution" display strong intellectual debts to the psychoanalytic ideas that made up the "psychology of clothes." Short of direct citation, it is here we see the some of the most explicit references to work of Flügel, tying Dichter into the larger psychoanalytic theory described in the previous chapter that formed in early-twentieth-century Britain on dress and the self.

[89] "Down with the Barriers—The Peacock Revolution Continues," [speech] January 27, 1967, 1978D, Box 88, Ernest Dichter papers (Accession 2407), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.
[90] Ibid., 51–52.
[91] Ibid., 33.

At the most basic level, Dichter marshalled the same tripartite structure of the motives of dress used in Flügel's monograph. Early in the second speech, Dichter argued that "Clothing's original purpose was to cover and protect, but in modern society the decorative aspect has gained far more prominence," indicating the importance of the motives of modesty, protection, and decoration discussed by Flügel.[92] Dichter also mentioned that tight clothing imparts a feeling of security on its wearer: the young man in tight-fitting garments "can feel his body and this feeling gives him the security of knowing that his body, his very self is intact."[93] In addition, there was explicit attention to dress and class, as both Dichter and Flügel indicated that fashion most often arises in the lower ranks of society who are more free to experiment.[94] Finally, Dichter alluded to Flügel's concept of clothing as an extension of the self, quoting a young construction worker who said, "I like to feel when I sit or stand the clothes adjust accordingly."[95]

Dichter's ideas on gender and dress also drew on Flügel's theories. Discussing the practice of cross-dressing, Flügel had noted that it represented "only a particular example of the general exchange of rôles" that occurs at certain times or for specific purposes.[96] Long before Judith Butler theorized the concept of gender performativity, and even before gender itself was elaborated, it was understood that one needed to dress the part. This idea was central to Dichter's understanding of men's fashions. One of the principal theses of his Peacock Revolution speeches was that men wanted to be able to use fashion as women did, to express personality as well as shifting moods. Women's fashions endowed the wearer an ability "express her individuality by always wearing fuchsia" and to "change moods, wearing little girl blue one day and sexy red the

[92] Ibid., 3.
[93] Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution," 11–12.
[94] Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, 141; Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution," 14.
[95] Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution," 35.
[96] Ibid., 121.

next." Dichter believed that men, as they grow up, became more inhibited and less likely to respond to color or fabric in a way that would allow them full grasp of the expressive powers of clothing—a return of Flügel's lament about the so-called "Great Masculine Renunciation."[97] However, Dichter also believed that, as men and women were becoming more equal in society, the stage was set for change. "Men are becoming more receptive to new clothing ideas," he stated in his 1967 speech, "because they are more secure as far as sex is concerned. They do not have to emphasize masculinity through clothes."[98]

This statement, which is notable for how explicitly it indicates the purposeful construction of masculinity, became a recurring theme in these speeches. Echoing the growing literature on "the man in the gray flannel suit," Dichter noted that conflict he observed between men wanting to express themselves via clothes and societal disapproval stemmed not from "the popular 'whipping boys' today for society's ills—our educational system, suburbia and mass communication." Instead, it appeared to result from "the emergence of a large and dominant business class in Western society." This caused a shift in dress:

> Historically, as more men began to work in business, there was a gradual change from dressing for a role…to dressing for the job.…Today's man is a lawyer, Madison Avenue executive or Neiman-Marcus salesman first when it comes to dress and he wants to look the part. He does not dress for his role as a man, as a woman dresses to be a woman first and a secretary secondarily, he dresses for his job.[99]

Dressing for a role allows one a broader range of expression of individuality, and the "peacocks of the future" were hoping to go back to that older way of living. Clothing was key to self-expression for Dichter, and men were to be afforded the luxury of more styles of masculine selfhood. New fashions, Dichter told the audience, "should…emphasize role playing."[100]

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[97] Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution," 28.
[98] Dichter, "Down with the Barriers," 20.
[99] Dichter, "The Peacock Revolution," 3.
[100] Ibid., 51.

Dichter's plan for men's clothing specifically held up women's ability to use material goods for self-expression as a model to be followed, not a pathology to be avoided. "The young married man takes his wife shopping with him," Dichter argued, "knowing she will most likely encourage him to try something different or more expensive, giving him an excuse to do what he would really like to do without creating the impression of being selfish—spending the family income to dress himself."[101] Instead of projecting the desire to look nice on women, the "healthy" thing to do was to sublimate that desire into self-actualization. The wife is not demonized for spending money on clothes but held up as a model for men to do the same.

I cite these particular examples not to exhaust their appearance in Dichter's remarks nor to indicate any straightforward uptake of earlier ideas. My goal is instead to situate Dichter, working at temporal and spatial distance from British psychoanalysts in the early twentieth century, as part of the same intellectual project, the one central to this dissertation as a whole. That Dichter was being paid handsomely to spread these ideas thereby indicates the change in climate wrought by postwar "anxieties of affluence," creating a culture that was more widely accepting to such theories. Wedded with Dichter's emphasis on practical application, which will be discussed in more detail below, this helped spread ideas of specialized scholars to a broader audience than ever before.

Socks: Hidden and Visible

Back to socks. Why did Dichter think socks were so important? Throughout his speech, Dichter emphasized how socks were unique among the various items of clothing. "A relatively uncomplex garment physically," he noted, "a sock is nevertheless very complex emotionally." Part of this was due to socks' "schizophrenic" role as both underwear and outerwear. As one

[101] Ibid., 22.

salesman from Nebraska put it, "They are a separate category because they are outerwear and underwear, sometimes they are seen and sometimes they are not. I think you have to think of them something like the cuff of a shirt, or scarf, hidden and visible."[102] Being both "hidden and visible," socks were garments with important lessons to impart to those willing to listen.

As a "second skin," socks were particularly revealing. Not only did they fit closely over the feet, but they were also often the first piece of clothing put on the body. When prompted, men shared strong feels about the literal and emotional support they felt from their socks. A New York businessman told researchers that "A new pair of socks is more pleasant than a new suit because socks caress you, they are intimate with the skin." He continued, "I like to put them on and I would prefer new ones all the time. They just feel good. They are more alive and responsive then."[103]

As socks readily revealed the body beneath them, they allowed the feet to provide clues as to their wearers' personalities. Institute researchers asked, "Supposing many men were standing behind a screen and all you could see was their feet, what could you tell about them?" The answer: quite a lot. The man with feet planted straight ahead was likely strong and direct. If his feet instead point inward, he was likely shy and introverted; if outward, then he was probably sloppy and extroverted. As the speech put it, "A man's feet are as roots to a tree or a foundation to a house."[104] Because feet and socks were often overlooked, Dichter went further and called them a "give-away zone of the body," one that could disclose important information even

[102] Dichter, "Soxology," 12–14.
[103] Ibid., 15.
[104] Ibid., 7–8. The feet continue to hold an important place in our conception of personhood. In August of 2020, literature professor Randy Laist published a piece in the online journal *Aeon* in which he argued that his shoes "act, even if at a subconscious level, as the literal foundation for my understanding of myself, specifically as that understanding informs my sense of where I can go—what kinds of projects are within my sphere of possible futures." See Randy Laist, "What do shoes do?" *Aeon*, August 11, 2020, https://aeon.co/essays/why-shoes-act-as-a-symbolic-foundation-for-human-identity.

without the person's knowledge. A woman from New York shared that "I size up a man in one minute when he walks into the room, just as soon as I see his socks….I feel I can tell you what he does from his ankles and also how well he likes himself, what kind of father he would be and so on."[105] As is clear from this speech, the social scientist, too, found lots to learn in thinking about socks.

Making Socks Masculine

At its core, selling products to men was about this construction of masculinity. Dichter opened his speech on the men's hosiery market as follows:

> Men can be encouraged to smoke Marlboros, reach for Schlitz, wear permanent pressed trousers, buy vests and paisley print ties, purchase longer and heavier automobiles, and even to drink tea by appealing to their ideals of masculinity. In the men's clothing industry alone, many ideas that at first seemed impossible to sell to men were made easy by appealing to their masculinity: Drip-dry shirts, nylon hosiery, sanforized clothing, Bermuda shorts, prints, a 'little alligator' on a sport shirt and recently over the calf socks which ten years ago were called feminine or sissy. By using the right appeal, by making the products masculine, they were sold in astounding numbers.[106]

The problem the Institute studied for DuPont was therefore how to make socks more masculine, which involved understanding why men did not like to buy them in the first place.

An interest in socks, like an interest in clothing more broadly, was considered feminine. Dichter argued that "men fear an interest in socks. They try to pretend that they do not notice their own or other men's socks, for in our culture that would be too effeminate." Beyond that, "men are reluctant to experiment with different colors, textures and fibers in socks for that also is a feminine interest." A man from Nebraska told researchers that having a variety of socks was "just what the women do—it is not for men. I mean, for a man socks really aren't important." Dichter's telling observation was to indicate that this was an attempt to "underplay" socks; it was

[105] Dichter, "Soxology," 22.
[106] Ibid., 2.

not the case that socks were unimportant to men, but that to be a man, socks could not be important.[107]

Dichter labeled this downplaying men's "sock neurosis." Men, a salesman from Los Angeles believed, had a "mental block" on socks.[108] It is telling that this language borrows from psychiatry, and even more so that it pathologizes men while making women's attitudes the healthy norm. It also finds a lack of interest as the problem, whereas earlier in the century it was excessive interest that brought men under the gaze of the sexologist. Part of this "neurosis" was adherence to ill-informed gender roles. In associating "frivolousness with femininity," Dichter argued that men unfairly maligned women "as fickle creatures who go from one fashion to another, discarding the old fashions with ease." Because they refused to see themselves as sharing that quality, they went to great lengths to avoid getting rid of socks—including having dogs chew them up.[109] While men had long declared women as "fashion's slaves," it was them, Dichter argued, that were hindered by their "non-desire" to care about clothes.[110] This suggests a transitionary period where frivolity was not yet a damning trait, and a lack of interest in clothes was no longer a sign of health but, in fact, a sign of neurosis. Men, Dichter implored his audience, "must be encouraged to become more hedonistic, and frivolous."[111] These were not damning traits and could in fact aid self-expression.

The solution was to highlight just how masculine socks could be. For Dichter, the sock was a potential "hymn to masculinity," as in the case of women knitting socks for their lovers to

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[107] Ibid., 26.
[108] Ibid., 26–27.
[109] Ibid., 38.
[110] A poem published originally in *Life* magazine in 1900 about the so-called "trailing skirt" lamented that "Alas for women, fashion's slave; She doesn't seem to mind it." Henry Robinson Palmer, "A Ballad of the Trailing Skirt," *Life*, May 17, 1900, 418. For more on the trailing skirt and its role in discourses of fashion and medicine, see Christopher M. Rudeen, "The Battle of the Hemlines: Clothes and Illness in the Early Twentieth Century," *Fashion Studies* (forthcoming). Dichter's quote comes from "Soxology," 38.
[111] Dichter, "Soxology," 38.

"pay homage to their virility."[112] It was all about the performance, he argued. For instance, men considered putting on and taking off socks as embarrassing and dainty for men but as sexy for women. "Men need to be made to feel that they are actually quite interesting as well as manly when they are putting on and taking off their hosiery." He emphasized "that there is a man's way of putting on and taking off socks as well as a woman's way—just as men and women take off pullover sweaters, button jackets, light cigarettes and strike matches differently."[113] The relationship one had with objects was key to one's performance of gender. This discussion illustrates how aware Dichter was that gender was influenced by cultural factors, as well as a growing illustration of the separation between gender and sex. How one interacted with clothing or objects could be divided into "a man's way" and "a woman's way," providing a sense of one's gendered self both internally and externally.

Historian Bernice L. Hausman has argued that sex and gender became separated in the context of treating intersex patients in the 1950s.[114] Just as technology—for Hausman, plastic surgery and endocrinology—helped distinguish between the two terms, the materiality of objects and clothes allowed for further elaboration of the social foundations of gender. To provide just one example, consider the ways in which Dichter discusses power, be it physical, financial, or psychological. A major argument of "soxology" is that men saw a full sock drawer as a symbol of material and emotional abundance and were thus unlikely to part with worn-out pairs. Despite the talk in the drycleaner surveys about the growing role of men in washing the family's clothes, the parallel between how deeply a wife loved her husband and abundance in his sock drawer was hard to shake. When asked what he would do if he found his drawer empty, for instance, a

[112] Ibid., 6.
[113] Ibid., 26.
[114] Bernice L. Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

policeman from Orange, New Jersey, said, "I would be disgusted and want to kill my wife. I always want them ready and it's up to my wife."[115] This dramatic response indicates just how, through clothing and laundry, gender was constructed via subordination.

Putting Theory into Practice

Finally, I would like to turn to the most common phrase in the three speeches analyzed here: "practical applications." These were a fixture of Dichter's reports for clients. They stand out even more in his speeches, however, where the repetition and interruption of flow highlights their presence; this type of reporting was central to the Institute's work, even when the format dissuaded their inclusion. As the proposal for the Fur Label Authority noted, the Institute felt "that any report, to be of full value, must spell out ways and means of utilizing the findings to the greatest possible advantage of the client."[116] I argue that this sentiment is crucial to Dichter's role in expanding a psychology of clothing: to be of "full value," there had to be a movement from findings to "utilization." Dichter's position outside of the consulting room and adjacent to industry made money a defining factor of his work, and, when money was involved, it mattered that ideas led to practice. It was one thing for analysts to pose theories about development or the treatment of mental illness. Under the steady hand of Dichter and his abiding faith in consumer culture, ideas were only as good as their application.

Conclusion: The Critics' New Clothes

We can see in Dichter's speeches on the "Peacock Revolution" the changing tide that would make striving for possessions a cause for alarm in the coming decades. Speaking about the importance of satisfying one's inner needs, Dichter noted that "creativity and individuality are

[115] Ibid., 31.
[116] "Proposal for a Motivational Research Study of the Problems Currently Faced by the Fur Industry," 39.

becoming more meaningful and desirable than high-priced items alone." Dichter may have lauded the ability to buy happiness, but only if one's purchases aligned with one's needs. "The idea is getting across," he noted, "that the high-priced clothing is not necessarily the best clothing for everybody. The best clothing for some people will be what is most satisfying to the individual: The clothing that he likes is best for him."[117] As noted in the first chapter, men who took an interest in dress were pathologized as sexual deviants, transvestites who could become the object of study for the field of sexology. This midcentury moment, then, represents a point of inflection, wherein consumption was heralded by men such as Dichter as a positive psychological trait. It would be a brief moment, however, as women began to bear the brunt of critics' scorn in the years to follow these speeches based on this growing demarcation between consumer goods and creativity.

It was these applications in particular that made the ideas known to larger audiences. So, too, did they set the stage for public discussion and critique. The very term "hidden persuader," which was the source of great excitement as well as criticism, highlights just how important this transfer was from though to action. The persuader did more than just convince another of an idea; their transformative potential lay in the possibility of affecting their actions. As Vance Packard put it in his bestseller by that title, "All this probing and manipulation has its constructive and its amusing aspects; but also, I think it fair to say, it has seriously antihumanistic implications. Much of it seems to represent regress rather than progress for man in his long struggle to become a rational and self-guiding being."[118] Dichter was paid not just for his ideas but also for his ability to impact people's lives, which would prove a blessing and a curse.

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[117] Dichter, "Down with the Barriers," 10.
[118] Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York, Ig Publishing, 2007 [1980]), 34.