

Odor, Oh No! Advertising Deodorant and the New Science of Psychology, 1910 to 1925

Juliann Sivulka, Waseda University, Tokyo, JAPAN

The case study of Odorono deodorant demonstrates how the advertising changed public attitudes towards a product that the buyer was reluctant to acknowledge or discuss. Furthermore, the application of concepts from the new science of psychology to the advertising effort is also illustrated by the magazine advertising from 1914-1925. The work concludes with some tentative generalizations about advertising “delicate” products during the early 20th century.

By the 1920s, advertising content and style had gradually but decisively changed. As a business science – some would say an art – advertising expanded beyond simple product announcements that displayed a memorable brand name and attractive packaging to an emphasis on differentiating one product from others in the early twentieth century. Agencies seeking to gain a professional standing for their work eagerly supported the trend toward scientific advertising, and national advertisers with multi-million dollar budgets sponsored market and psychological research to ensure that their advertising proved an effective marketing tool. As new industries emerged, advertisers became strategic educators and promoters of habits of hygiene, dress, lifestyle, and new technology.

Admakers also explored strategies to encourage the public to buy more, not because they needed things, but because they wanted to own certain items, use certain products, and adopt certain lifestyles. In retrospect, Printers' Ink marked this important change as a shift from the “factory viewpoint” to concern with the “mental processes of the consumer,” from “objective to the subjective,” from descriptive data” to “talk in terms of ultimate buying motives.”¹ Countless new products – some of them packaged goods people had used for centuries like soap and other new products like deodorant and mouthwash – may be understood as material representations of that shift. By 1925 advertisers spent a billion dollars a year persuading Americans to buy the latest toothpaste, freshest mouthwash,

foamiest soap, the softest toilet tissue, or the most absorbent sanitary napkin.

Historians like Stephen Fox explore the advertising philosophies of the legendary admen in the Mirror Makers (1983), while Jennifer Scanlon examined a cadre of women copywriters at the Thompson agency during the 1920s in Articulate Longings (1995). Social historians such as Roland Marchand's Advertising the American Dream (1986) and Stuart Ewen's Captains of Consciousness (1986) have examined the advertisements as representing idealized roles and ideological values in the 1920s and 1930s. In the area of personally hygiene, Vincent Vinikas' Soft Soap, Hard Sell (1992) explores the early marketing of soap, mouthwash, and beauty parlors in the early twentieth century; while Sue Ellen Hoy's Chasing Dirt chronicles modernization and the culture of cleanliness in America. This work also builds on this scholar's previous study Stronger Than Dirt (2001) that focuses on advertising of soap from 1875 to 1940.

The far less examined area is the advertising history of “delicate products” or “unmentionables” addressing the application of the new science of psychology to early advertising. According to Aubrey Wilson and Christopher West, these are “products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when openly presented.”² Furthermore, the extent to which new discoveries of the unconscious mind played in development of advertising theory merits closer attention to better understand how admakers applied new ideas of psychology to motivate prospective buyers to purchase a group of products that for reasons of delicacy, decency, and even fear to receive the message in the decade after World War I. In particular, the research sheds light on the complex linkage between the admakers and the application of the new science of psychology to advertising as the business became more scientific.

This paper is based on examination of the case study of Odorono deodorant from 1914 to 1926 in the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising and Marketing History at Duke University. As for the application of

¹ *Printers' Ink Fifty Years*, New York: Printers' Ink, pp. 174-175.

² Wilson, Aubrey and Christopher West. “The Marketing of Unmentionables” in *Journal of Marketing* 45, no. 3, Summer, 1981, pp. 190-199.

psychology to advertising, relevant advertising journal articles and advertising textbooks published during this period were selected for examination, so that review of the campaign related to the primary material available to the advertising practitioners at the time. First, the paper will discuss the marketing of unmentionables, the public attitudes, and developments in the application of psychology to advertising to provide background for the more detailed discussion of the case of promoting Odorono deodorant.

MARKETING THE UNMENTIONABLE

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, American society considered frank talk of certain bodily functions in polite company inappropriate. Taboos against mentioning things related to natural bodily functions appears to be peculiarly Puritan in origin, found principally in Britain and the United States, a “shame culture” that began in the Victorian era.³ Nudity, sex, and eliminating wastes evoked widespread disgust, shame, or even horror. Restrictive social conventions resulted in a proliferation of euphemisms: “limb for leg,” “white meat” for chicken breast,” and “white-sewings” for women’s undergarments, among others. This, then, was the scene in which early manufacturers set out to make their fortune in marketing personal hygiene products or “unmentionables.”

Not surprisingly, the principal problems encountered in marketing “desirable unmentionables,” products that offered the benefits of comfort and hygiene, centered around the communication process. Since purchases are made only when the need is sufficiently acute to overcome the threshold of embarrassment or fear explains Wilson and West. Either the normal channels of distribution or media refuse to carry the advertising messages or buyers are unwilling to receive the messages. The marketing of unmentionables is, by the fact that they are not talked about, more difficult than the marketing of conventional products and services. The marketing strategy may, then, require an intensive application of media, message, and purpose of the message in order to overcome society’s resistance threshold to mentioning the by unmentionable.⁴

At this time, new insights on human nature came from the science of psychology that suggested innovative approaches to overcome society’s resistance to the advertising of “delicate products”

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PERSUASION

During the Progressive Era (1901-1916), advertising expanded as a business science beyond simple brand identification to incorporate consumer research and

targeting, competitive analysis, media planning, and creative strategies to get selling messages across to consumers about products, brands, and corporate image. As marketing and advertising research studies gradually began to replace advertisers’ intuition about who the audiences were, what they wanted, and how best to reach them, admakers also began to apply the science of general psychology to the main problem of advertising: How to attract the consumer’s attention; and, get the customer to do something about your message, such as go to the store, buy one particular version of a thing or something they had never seen before.

Academic psychology first became involved in advertising at the beginning of the twentieth century. As early as 1897, ideas on the new science of psychology began to circulate with A. G. Tansley’s book The New Psychology and Its Relation to Life. Since the early 1900s, the theories of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and psychologist Carl Jung also began to circulate in the United States. As knowledge of human nature was considered one of the great factors in advertising success, pioneering psychologists began to establish a scientific foundation to the practice of persuading people through the mass media to obtain goods or service or adopt a point of view.

In 1903, Walter Dill Scott of Northwestern University published his Theory of Advertising. It dealt with a few principles of advertising that are more closely connected with the influencing of human minds, such as attention, the association of ideas, suggestion, mental imagery, and the return coupon. In the same year, Scott also published a series of articles “The Psychology of Advertising” in Mahin’s Magazine, the Atlantic Monthly in 1904, and eventually as a book in 1908, that set down the foundation of the study. After stressing the benefits of advertising research, Scott discussed a broad range of psychological topics such as perception, attention, memory, volition, emotion, suggestion, and habits. Publication of these two books Scott’s work on psychology in advertising “may be set down as the beginning of the study of appeal as a science by advertising men in general,” writes advertising historian Frank Presbrey.⁵

As early as 1904, Scott presented his work on “mentality and advertising” to businessmen, such as the Sphinx Club in New York City. In the same year, Printers’ Ink also reprinted part of the series of Walter Scott’s articles on psychology of advertising in an article titled “Advertising and Psychology” (1904). Soon other articles on the topic appeared as regular topics also in other advertising trade journals with such titles “Advertising to

³ Carl B. Holmberg, *Sexualities and Popular Culture*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1998, p. 44.

⁴ Wilson, pp. 190-199.

⁵ Presbrey, Frank. *The History and Development of Advertising*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Duran, 1929, p. 443.

the Mind,” “Suggestion as Power in Advertising in Advertising,” and “Psychology and the Market.”⁶

Other scholars published the results of university investigations and experiments in psychology. In 1911, for example, Edward K. Strong of Columbia University published The Relative Merit of Advertisements: A Psychological and Statistical Study, a study to determine whether psychological tests could be employed to determine whether psychological tests could be employed to estimate the value of advertisements before they were actually used. He concluded that such an investigation would be valuable, citing the studies of Walter Scott, Harlow Gale, and G. L. Hollingworth. In the same year Hollingworth also reported his scientific analyses to a weekly series of roundtable discussions with advertising men in New York City. In addition, Hugo Munsterberg, a German-American professor at Harvard, discussed his “Experiments on the Effects of Advertisements” in his lectures as a visiting professor at Berlin University in 1912, which he published that same year. But the interest of advertising practitioners did not develop without some efforts on the part of these and other psychologists, as a continuous effort to persuade advertisers and other businessmen to purchase their research.

Advertising textbooks reported similar forays into the application of psychology to the practice. Occasionally an entire chapter to the science of psychology appeared with references to different types of persuasive arguments, appealing to instincts, and the use of suggestions as evidenced in these early textbooks: George French wrote The Art and Science of Advertising (1909), Daniel Starch produced Principles of Advertising (1910), Howard Bridgewater wrote Advertising (1910), and Hollingworth contributed to Advertising: Its Principles and Practices (1915).

This early work on academic psychology explained that a successful ad works because it creates a connection between the product being advertised and some need or desire that the audience feels. These links, called “appeals,” fall into two categories: logical and emotional. Logical (or rational) appeals base selling pitches on either the product’s performance features or its ability to solve a problem. The reason-why copy style worked best for small, inexpensive, frequently purchased items that could be cheaply offered as samples and sent through the mail, such as cigarettes, toothpaste, and soap. In contrast, emotional appeals base selling pitches on the satisfaction that comes from purchasing the product and then owning it or making a gift of it. Such soft-sell copy styles built prestige for large, expensive items bought infrequently and seldom on

⁶ “Advertising and Psychology,” *Printers’ Ink* 2 March 1904. “Advertising to the Mind,” *Judicious Advertising*, October 1906; “Suggestion as Power in Advertising in Advertising” in *Profitable Advertising*, September 1907; and “Psychology and the Market,” *Advertising and Selling*, December 1909.

impulse, like pianos and automobiles. An extremely strong appeal tells the consumer: This is *the* product that will meet your needs or fulfill your desires.

Although fundamental to advertising today, these ideas seemed novel and revolutionary in 1910 – especially the idea that skillful use of appeals to both transitory feelings and deep emotions could move products faster than any other approach. Powerful emotional appeals such as fear, vanity, and eroticism were seldom used until the 1920s.⁷

Although some agencies expressed no interest in the new ideas, others, like the J. Walter Thompson agency (JWT), seemed obsessed with discovering – and then exploiting – the secrets of human nature. But it would be Helen J. Lansdowne Resor, a J. Walter Thompson copywriter, who added the essential appeal to the rational sales argument when her celebrated ad for Woodbury’s facial soap first appeared in 1911. The ad featured a painting of an attractive couple and a provocative headline that invited the audience to read further: “A skin you love to touch.” The ad copy featured a skin-care regimen and closed with an offer for a week’s supply of soap, plus the art from the advertisement. Instead of merely selling soap, the landmark ad visualized the product promise: If you buy Woodbury Facial Soap, the world of romance, love, and luxury were yours. Sex could sell a lot of soap. In the next five years, sales of the Woodbury line skyrocketed over five-fold from \$515,000 in 1915 to \$2.58 million in 1920.⁸

Although Helen Lansdowne Resor is widely held to have pioneered the development of a whole new approach to consumer advertising using emotional appeals supported by detailed claims and scientific evidence. However, the other part of the creative revolution was James Webb Young, who had succeeded Lansdowne as copywriter at the Thompson agency’s Cincinnati office in 1912 and later moved on to the New York City headquarters. As the “pattern-maker,” Young created the first ad, or series of ads, which would set the theme and style for a campaign, and others then would carry out under his editing. It would be here that Young took on the delicate task of selling deodorant, a product that most women thought unnecessary.

In what follows we go into the case study of Odorono deodorant and Webb’s selling approach to shown not only how suppliers of unmentionables have changed public attitudes, but also how, in one case, the discourse of the “delicate” topics of perspiration and body odor were carefully managed in advertising in the late 1910s and the 1920s.

⁷ Copy approaches 1910-1920, see: Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes*, Belmont, California, Wadsworth, pp. 107-115.

⁸ “The Story of Woodbury’s Facial Soap,” (January-February 1930): 5, Woodbury Soap Account Files, box 1, folder: Andrew Jergens, Company, 1930. J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

ODO-RO-NO AND PERSPIRATION ODOR

The advertising of personal hygiene products demonstrates perhaps the greatest achievement of advertising of the late Victorian era. From the perspective of more than a century, today men and women might be amused to read the prevailing literature of advice. Representative of the era, Marion Hubbard's *Eve's Daughters or Common Sense for Maid, Wife, and Mother* (1882) warned that the growing girl, in the process of maturing, will throw off perspiration. "It is so offensive to others, so humiliating to the one thus affected, and so nauseating" when blended with perfumes to which many resort in the futile hope of overpowering the "palliative of the evil."⁹ Since societal standards dictated that a proper person pretend that most bodily functions did not exist; the "right" thing to do was to be silent on these matters in polite company.

When perspiration emerges from the pores, it is a colorless, odorless, complex mixture of compounds. However, when it emerges from the underarm, the secretions of the billions of bacteria, which thrive on moist skin, produce a characteristic odor. But we can't completely stop our bodies from sweating – nor should we. Sweat is a signal that our internal climate control system is working properly. The body maintains our temperature by regulating heat loss, and 80 percent of that happens through the skin. When we get too hot, sweat is one of the main ways we cool off. For most of us, sweat isn't something we generally pursue. There's the wetness. The stickiness. The odor. The embarrassment. Part of the problem is that society today interprets "you are as you smell." If we are good, we smell good. If you're an inherently bad individual, you smell bad. It's reflected not only by the way we treat others, but even in our language – somebody's a "stinker."

The best way to deal with body odor is the obvious: Wash with soap and water. The longer you go without washing, the more dead bacteria can accumulate. Although bathing removed many odors, deodorants and anti-perspirants are required to complete the operation. Technically, a deodorant is a deodorizer, a substance, which removes bad odors or changes them to pleasant ones. Applied to the underarms, deodorants mask the natural odor of perspiration by absorbing it.

Trademarked in 1888, Mum, the first commercial deodorant contained zinc oxide to fight bacteria came in a cream form that had to be applied with the fingers. Until the introduction of Mum, women discreetly washed their underarms with a solution of ammonia and water. Others used dress shields to avoid perspiration ruining fine clothes. In the 1900s, Mum lost market share to Everdry Anti-

Perspirant, which could be applied with a cotton swab. Still, Everdry stung the skin and often damaged clothing. But it would be Odorono that proved the most successful among these early brands of deodorant, when a schoolgirl built a business that approached the million dollar mark in sales in fourteen years, selling a little known toilet preparation was quite an achievement.

Brand Origins

Odo-ro-no, as it was later named, was a prescription of Dr. A.D. Murphey, originally made for Cincinnati surgeons who were hampered by perspiration during operations. Later it was used in the Murphey family instead of dress shields. The women applied the red-colored deodorant just before going to bed, and they had to hold up their arms until the application had dried. If a woman put on her underthings while it was still damp, it could ruin the material. Still, Odorono had very definite possibilities.

Edna Murphey, the doctor's young daughter, named the product Odo-ro-no (a play on the words "Odor-oh-no") and first sold the product to her friends through sampling. She resolved to sell Odorono to drug stores. She went store to store with some of the bottled preparation, and in every instance, she was turned down. Instead of giving up in 1910, she borrowed \$150 from her grandfather, opened an office, and stocked it with bottles and labels. She ceaselessly worked for five months putting up the preparation and directing a small force of house-to-house canvassers, or women solicitors who worked on commission. Then, unable to continue to pay the rent, Murphey moved the business to her home, where for two years she worked without any help except from her father in the evening. Her workshop was the basement, with the office upstairs in her room. There she wrote sales letters and circulars, encouraged by the increasing number of users, but discouraged by the cost of making new users and the amount of time it took to convince anyone that checking perspiration would not affect their health.¹⁰

Although a few drugstores did place orders for Odorono on consignment, the bottles had to be taken back with few exceptions. From the beginning, however, Murphey used every customer to try to form a dealer connection, and the business kept going on their sales to the small surrounding towns. In 1912, Murphey secured a booth at an Atlantic City exposition, but the demonstrator could not sell any Odor-o-no at first and wired back for cold cream – to sell and cover expenses. Five gallons were bought and sent. Fortunately, the exposition lasted all summer. When people found themselves perspiring more in the heat, interest in the product increased. Ultimately, users

⁹ Hubbard, Marion. *Eve's Daughters or Common Sense for Maid, Wife, and Mother*, New York: Anderson and Allen, 1882, p. 108.

¹⁰ Od-ro-no Company. 1925-1936. Account Histories, box 13 of 21, Account Files, J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

in all parts of the country were obtained. In turn, these users provided more dealer connections.

After the Atlantic City exposition, Murphy began small newspaper advertising in a few towns where Odor-o-no had more than one distributor and where rates were inexpensive. By 1913, Murphey spent \$4,000 in newspapers of fifteen different cities, while sales reached \$30,000. She wrote all the advertising copy, and an artist friend designed the layouts. The first "big" advertising effort was done in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After signing up seven or eight dealers to order a half gross each of the product, Murphey began a twelve-week campaign of eight-inch advertisements that ran over the dealer's name. It worked. The same simple plan was offered in one city after another, and finally Chicago. She also found that the media arrangements needed to print the advertisements involved a myriad of details and time-consuming tasks, and she turned to an advertising agency for assistance.¹¹

The Odor-o-no Account at JWT

In 1914, the Thompson agency took over the advertising account. The initial appropriation of \$14,000 was used to run mostly small advertisements in women's magazines, such as Ladies' Home Journal and Vogue. The four-inch, double column ads were all type, except for a line drawing of the Odorono bottle that Murphey had designed. Based on the agency's experience with Woodbury's Facial Soap, the Thompson agency had the product in almost every drugstore in America within a year. Several other factors made this product succeed. At the time, there was nothing else like it on the market; the fact that the product worked; and women who used the product recommended it to other women.¹²

But the first problem the agency faced was to overcome the fear that the perspiration remedy could not possibly be safe. To dispel this deep fear, the agency used an authoritative tone and scientific approach. These advertisements carried such headlines as "Excessive perspiration – what causes it – how to cure it." They offered a sample of Odorono with a booklet for six cents and dealer's name ran below the ad. This simple plan worked. Within a year, distribution had become national with the product in practically every drugstore. In 1915, sales had reached nearly \$65,000. Orders even came from England and China, so a large export business also began to develop.¹³

In this period, Murphey continued to invest a large percentage of the company's sales into advertising, rather

than paying salesmen and demonstrators, when she began the magazine advertising. For years, one man constituted the sales force, and he did little actual selling. Also, a small factory was also built near Dr. Murphey's residence by her grandfather, and she then moved the business out of the home.

However, the agency still had some difficulty in convincing Murphey that the name of the product should not be largely displayed. This was to get the greatest number of readers to read the advertisement through the end, instead of creating an unfavorable attitude toward the product. To test their hypothesis in 1916, the agency ran a split run, a half-page ad in Vogue magazine in which they worked out Murphey's idea, and on another half page in the same magazine their thought. The agency's idea to mask the name of the product out pulled the other ad ten to one.

For four years, the advertising, which Young created for Odorono since its introduction, had been a success. But in 1918, the business failed to show an increase in sales. The Thompson staff then conducted an extensive home-to-home survey to find that nearly every women knew of Odorono; about one-third used the product; and two-thirds felt had that they had no need for the product. "I don't have excessive perspiration, I don't need it. My sister uses it, or my mother uses it, I don't need it."¹⁴ So the problem became clear. If Young had apparently reached all the women who suffered from excessive perspiration, how was he going to convince the other two out of three women who were unsure whether they needed the product?

The Romance Appeal

The market investigation led to a radical change in the advertising. Instead of small space ads, Young created a more "sensational form" of the romantic appeal for Odorono.¹⁵ The full-page ad appeared in the Ladies' Home Journal in 1919, which it with a picture of a man and a woman, about to embrace, in a moonlit garden. With this ad, Young penned one of the most famous lines in advertising history: "Within the Curve of Women's Arm" followed by a subhead that read: "A frank discussion of a subject too often avoided." The copy went on to elaborate on the idea that you could offend other people through perspiration odor and not even know it yourself:

A woman's arm! Poets have sung of it, great
artists have painted its beauty. It should be the
artists have painted its beauty. It should be the daintiest, sweetest
thing in the world. And yet,
daintiness, sweetest thing in the world. And yet,
unfortunately, it isn't, always.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Young, James Webb, "My Advertising Ego-Biography," 1954, Colin Dawkins Papers, box 5, folder 1: James Webb Young. Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Young, James Webb. 1959. *Full Corn in the Ear*. Colin Dawkins Papers, box 5, folder 1: James Webb Young. Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

There's an old offender in this quest for perfect offender of which we ourselves may be ever unconscious, but which is just as truly present. . . . For it is a physiological fact that persons troubled with perspiration odor seldom can detect it themselves.

Otherwise the ad was all type, long copy, and no display of the name of the product.

It was the first advertisement of this type with that kind of emotive appeal. The ad built largely on the purpose of making women suspect that they might be offending in a way that fastidious people could not condone. Interesting personal situations with the direct "you" application were used. Furthermore, the point was stressed that what while the reader might be wholly ignorant of her need of a deodorant. She might be perfectly "clean," yet in a moment her social graces, her personal charms, might be negated by the offensive odor of perspiration. This was the fundamental appeal. "Anyone who had sat next to Little Eva after her dancing would have smelled out the reason for such copy," recalled Young.¹⁶

With this sensational advertisement, Young repositioned Odorono from a proprietary medicine to a beauty aid, enhancing any women's charms. Thus, the subject of the underarm toilette shifted an unmentionable topic to one of primary importance to every woman. When the agency ran the daring Odorono ad, it so insulted some two hundred Ladies' Home Journal readers that they canceled their subscriptions. When many of Webb's women friends had learned that he wrote the ad, they even told him that they could no longer to speak to him. He had so insulted American women.¹⁷

To create a social prestige for the product and its use, the media planners assigned dominant space to the campaign in better class publications such as the Ladies Home Journal. Creating an acceptance of the idea among those socially important, the agency reasoned that it would work down through the various classes of society. So successful was the advertising that Odorono's sales rose 112 percent in a year. As a result, Murphey continued to increase the advertising appropriation year. In 1920, she spent over \$100,000 in women's magazines, while sales reached over \$417,000.¹⁸

Now the agency had evidence that the educational campaign had worked, and the market for Odorono had changed. To understand the shift in market demand, Thompson agency had interviewed 482 women to learn the following: 1) The proportion of the total market then held

by Odor-o-no. 2) The strength of the competition. And, 3) The reasons for not using a deodorant preparation. The findings proved significant. Of the American deodorant market, 22% of the women used Odor-o-no; 19% competing products; and 59% used no deodorant. Furthermore, nearly one-half of the non-users insisted that they did not need a deodorant.¹⁹

The Thompson agency concluded that Odor-o-no had a generous share of the existing market women's market for deodorant, but that there was another greater market – the non-users who felt that they did not need to check perspiration. From the agency's perspective, however, many of these women incorrectly believed that they did not need a deodorant. They did. They simply were not conscious of the fact. It became then the task of advertising to make women realize it, and this furnished the advertising with a new objective. Thus, advertising needed a more powerful yet subtle appeal.²⁰

The Copy Change of 1920

In 1920, Young next shifted the Odorono copy from scientific copy to a friendly chat with confidential advisor "Ruth Miller" on the "delicate" issue of a woman's toilette. Although Ruth Miller appears as a fictitious trade character on the Odorono Company staff, the ads personified Ruth Miller as a woman to whom the reader could intimately disclose her personal feelings on this subject, a woman that she could ask for reliable advice in the correction of her own perspiration problem. Not a new idea, Lydia Pinkham had long offered advice to female readers, as did Ruth Knox for Knox Gelatin. But here Young not only wrote copy that appeals to women, but he also wrote as the voice of a fictitious spokeswoman, the first "Mary Hale Martin," who spoke to housewives about what they could do with the food in Libby cans through advertisements, brochures, and company

The advertising design mimicked the popular tabloid newspapers' personal interest stories and advice-to-the-lovelorn columns, the ads took the form of quick-tempo socio-dramas in which readers could were invited to identify with the temporary victims of social shame. Now the protagonist was not the product but the potential consumer, suffering vicariously of social shame or personal fear.

Headings of the full-page ads took the form of a question to involve the reader. Typical of this genre, ads asked the reader: "Why will so many married women consider themselves so safe? . . . Is it that they are blind – or just indifferent – to the secrets of appeal which single girls

¹⁶ Young. "My Advertising Ego- Biography."

¹⁷ Young. "My Advertising Ego- Biography"

¹⁸ Od-ro-no Company. 1925-1936. Account Histories, box 13 of 21, Account Files, J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

¹⁹ Ibid. See also "Report on Odorono Investigations," 1929, Account Histories, reel 37, J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

²⁰ Ibid.

know so well?" A long, confidential chat explains the secrets of appeal that every woman should know. Another ad asked the reader: "Soap and Water clean – of course! But still are you above reproach? . . . One great toilet fact that two million women now recognize – that cleanliness does not always mean daintiness."²¹ As a result, the intimate, personal tone of Ruth Miller's discourse induced thousands and thousands of women to write her letters of the most confidential sort. These letters, as well as the sales, demonstrated that advertising had established Odor-o-no as an essential part of the toilette for discriminating women the world over.

In shaping the sales messages, Young made assumptions about the gendered nature of the audience, and used them to create provocative arguments for improving oneself and how to emulate the habits of richer people that proved much more effective than simply emphasizing practicality and price. Similar to Lansdowne's work for Woodbury Facial Soap, Young also knew too well one of the fantasies that many American women dreamed of and responded to by creating images in advertising of a man's complete attention and adoration. In part, the effectiveness of such ads was the promise: Trust me, the ads would say, in effect, and you will have your heart's desire.

This Odorono campaign coupled with Lansdowne's provocative Woodbury's Facial Soap helped to establish JWT as the leading industry authority on advertising to women using powerful emotive appeals—vanity, sex, fear, and emulation. They presented provocative arguments for improving oneself and aspiring to the lifestyles of richer people. This strategy would be further developed in the 1920s and continued as an effective strategy in cosmetic and toiletry advertising through the present day. Before long in the 1920s, many other ads followed with this "your best friend won't tell you" theme.

Still, the red Odorono formula was hard on sensitive skin and produced a slight rash in about ten percent of the cases. It also required time to use the product, as well as some objections to the color. So Murphey developed a white formula that was half the strength. In addition, the agencies market investigations showed that non-liquid deodorants, such as Mum deodorant that came as a cream, would always hold part of the market for deodorants. On the agency's recommendation, Murphy next introduced a new form of Odorono on the market, Crème Odorono, which gave the Thompson agency something "new" to talk about to old users as well as an opportunity to win over new customers.²²

In 1925, Thompson agency took the chance to reach an untapped audience for Odorono – men – who would double the potential market. Until now advertising had supported

the notion that the original, red-colored deodorant was for women only. But market investigations had found a number of men had taken to using the deodorant to check perspiration and offensive underarm odor. Hence, copy in the both general magazines and women's publications also emphasized reasons why men should use this product to check perspiration, offering a special men's booklet: "Perfect grooming consists of more than cleanliness." Another small space ad exclusively targeted men, it told them of the need to control perspiration. Here again shows how Odorono endeavored to reach as many potential customers as possible with their advertising.²³

During the period covered by the Thompson agencies for Odorono resulted in substantial sales increases each year, except for the years of 1921, 1922, and 1923 marked by unsettled financial conditions. Remarkably, sales for Odorono grew over seven-fold during a ten-year period, from nearly \$43,000 in 1914 to over \$305,000 in 1924. It also sold in 49 foreign countries, with advertising placed in American magazines; while Murphey no longer employed a single salesperson.²⁴

In 1929, Murphey sold the business to the Northam Warren Company based in Stamford, Massachusetts, whose products included Cutex nail polish. Since the company improved the product, first by introducing Instant Odorono in addition to the Regular, then by adding a convenient handicap of the older product.²⁵

THE FIRST IMPRESSION FORMULA

The Odor-o-no campaign helped establish a popular advertising formula in the 1920s and 1930s that historian Roland Marchand called, "The Parable of the First Impression." These ads suggested that one of the most important effects of using the advertised products was the self-confidence in the consumer it created.²⁶

The strategy underlying the first-impression theme was obvious. Appearance and material goods had a significant impact in the context of a mobile, urban society. People increasingly conceived of the details of their personal appearance and that of their home as an index of their true character. By presenting a desirable image, they also avoided the ridicule, guilt, and other forms of emotional

²¹ Odorono advertisement, *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1922.

²² JWT Staff Meetings 1 June 1928, 1927-1929, Minutes of Representatives, box 1 of 8.

²³ "Offers Book to Men." *Judicious Advertising* September 1925.

²⁴ Odorono sales history, Grody, N.S. to W. P. Meigs, letter in Odorono Account History. 3 July 1925. J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

²⁵ "Odorono, Magazine Experiences" bulletin (1936) in Odorono Account Files. 1925, 1926. box 13 of 21, J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

²⁶ Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream*, Univ. of Berkeley, 1985, pp. 208-216.

distress that resulted from being seen or revealed as deviating from the norm. Personal hygiene ads pictured case after case of women committing unforgivable social offenses, because their body odor, complexion, or teeth didn't measure up. The cumulative effect likely reinforced readers' impression of being surrounded by a host of accusing eyes and unspoken comments. Often the ads left readers feeling guilty and anxious, worrying about how their friends and acquaintances perceived their personal appearance. The right image was a simple matter of using the advertised product.

Although the unmentionability factor was neatly sidestepped with the Odorono campaign, the unmentionability of body odor itself became the central platform for Lifebuoy soap. In 1926, the Thompson agency shifted the selling argument for Lifebuoy soap from points about health care to social disgrace. Print ads dramatically made the point with the slogan "Lifebuoy Health Soap stops body odor." One ad portrayed "Poor Uncle Ed" as a "half-failure — too bad he never suspected 'B. O.' [Body Odor]." People never liked him. Despite his geniality, even men had denied him friendship. For all his ability, real success had always evaded him. Now he was past middle age — a lonely man — unpopular, just a half-way success—and all for the same unpardonable failing — "B. O." The insidious thing about body odor, the ad continued, was that the offender was the last to know. Even one's closest friends would not tell the individual; however, the friendly Lifebuoy advisor could. Lifebuoy soap gave "the marvelous freshness that lasts for hours, with never a hint of 'B. O.'" ²⁷

Further installments of the dramatic Lifebuoy campaign presented other social disasters from lost business to ruined romances. On later radio shows, a foghorn boomed "BEEE-O-O-O-O-O!" Fortunately, Lifebuoy Soap would "protect" its users. As these stop-smelling pitches ran, business boomed for Lever Brothers. The Lifebuoy campaign worked because the admaker struck a responsive chord with the public. But did these educational campaigns succeed in changing everyday hygiene habits and sell more deodorant?

College girls, nurses, teachers, and businesswomen were the best users of deodorants, while housewives ranked "below average," according to a 1937 national survey of 17,266 men and women. On behalf of the deodorant "Mum," the advertising firm of Pedler and Ryan distributed their interviews across a distribution of social classes, ages, occupations, and locations. Beyond the age of 45, the use of deodorant sharply declined among married woman, showing that there was still a pronounced need for educational material. On the other hand, interviews with men revealed that the older man, the man who has "arrived," was the best deodorant user. Altogether the survey report showed that percentage of men who used deodorant was only 29.6

²⁷ Lifebuoy, advertisements in Account Files. 1928. Reel 197, J. Walter Thompson Collection, Hartman Center for Marketing Advertising and History.

percent. In considering the issue of why people did not use deodorants, the interviewers found one of the chief points made by the interviewers was that they considered a bath alone gave adequate protection.²⁸ Still, deodorant manufacturers had to continue aggressive and persistent efforts to convince Americans that no matter how clean that you were, you could never be too sure enough.

Whereas the Victorians had considered many bodily functions to be unmentionable, in the 1920s social standards of modesty became more relaxed and reflected the new urban attention of personal cleanliness. As a consumer market, this newly liberated public was far more receptive to ads for toothbrushes and toothpaste, mouthwash, deodorant, laxatives, sanitary napkins, and toilet paper. Ads for such personal care products were designed not only for building brand recognition, they also educated a mass market on the necessity of products most people did not know they needed.

Although health and beauty were promoted as the dual benefits of daily bathing and an oral health regimen, other marketing messages also relied on fear to convey their message. These campaigns revolved around "advertising by fear" or "whisper copy" that fostered new anxieties and offered new solutions. Yet all the ads carefully masked the "unmentionable" in sober, medical-sounding terms. For example, Listerine mouthwash provided a remedy for "halitosis," or bad breath; Absorbine Jr. effectively treated the fungus "Tinea Trichophyton" (athlete's foot); and Pompeian cream eliminated "comedones" (blackheads). And, Scot Tissue recounted tales of "Toilet Tissue Illness" or rectal disease caused by the needless use of harsh toilet tissue. Other ads linked women's emotional health to other physical ailments as evidenced in the successful marketing of Fleischman's Yeast, promoted as a laxative to eliminate poisons due to constipation and to restore health and good spirits. In fact, negative emotional appeals such as fear, guilt, and shame in advertisements of foods, toilet articles, medicine, and sanitary napkins nearly doubled over the decade, occurring in 10 percent of the advertisements in 1922, and 19 percent of the ads five years later in 1927.²⁹

Many of these ads also suggested that one of the most important effects of using the advertised products was not only the promise of health but also the self-confidence in the consumer it created. Certainly the J. Walter Thompson Company recognized the value of promoting consumer products as solutions for fearful individuals in a hostile world. The inferiority complex had become a "valuable thing in advertising," explained executive William Esty at an agency meeting in 1930.³⁰

²⁸ "Nation's Deodorant Habits Revealed, Soap Gazette and Perfumer, November 1937, p. 21.

²⁹ Burt, Harold Ernest. 1938. *Psychology of Advertising*. New York: Houghton.

³⁰ Marchand, p. 13.

Still, the ads offered more than cleaner and healthier bodies, they also promised popularity and self-esteem – now every woman could be a lovelier, happier person simply by using the advertised product. Thus, these advertising campaigns became a forceful agent of change, instilling in many Americans the middle-class habits of personal cleanliness.

In glancing back at the images of this personal hygiene advertising from the perspective of nearly a century, one is struck by the fact that the first impression formula based on a fear appeal has remained a constant decade after decade. Standards of modesty have relaxed, and the public is far more receptive to body-care products than in the 1920s. Since the subject of body odor has even become the inspiration for a popular song by the Who in 1967, titled “Odorono.” Similar to the earlier ads, the lyrics took the form of a melodrama about a woman who sang the best she ever sang, she looked her best, but her romantic interest Mr. Davidson never phoned:

She ripped her glittering gown.
 Couldn't face another show, no
 Her deodorant had let her down
 She should have used Odorono

Today ads for deodorant soaps still promise to protect what Odorono then called a “woman’s charms.” In the 1960s, people also heard: “Aren’t you glad you use Dial? Don’t you wish everyone did!” And for decades, Sure deodorant advertising has sold self-assurance to anxious people who empathize with the problem of offensive body odor, showing confident arm-wavers, putting their armpits on display with the affirmative lyric: “Raise your hand if you’re sure.” They are powerful brands, because they are directed at fundamental emotions. The quest for such ideals of appearance, health, and self-assurance would create a mult-billion dollar personal care product industry in the United States.

Finally, further research could consider documenting early advertising for other personal care products in America. Similar to deodorant, another group of products revolve around a matter of how American society came to define hygiene and appearance, such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, and mouthwash. This research may suggest new conceptions of consumers and consumer needs, as well new approaches to personal care product advertising.