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ARTICLE

“The Miracle of You”: Women’s Sex Education and the Marketing of Kotex

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In 1967, Kimberly-Clark, the makers of Kotex, hired women’s marketing consultant Estelle Ellis to create and run the corporation’s new sex education program. The Life Cycle Center, which opened in 1968, did not produce advertisements, but rather developed sex education curricula for public school classrooms. Its program, the Life Cycle Library, divided women’s lives into distinct stages, tethering Kimberly-Clark goods and services to specific junctures of an idealized, heterosexual life. Ellis transformed the “life cycle” into a profitable, enduring marketing concept for Kimberly-Clark. She also extended the Center’s influence, rendering it a research and educational authority on women’s reproductive health for teachers, social scientists, government actors, and readers. Ellis’s career reveals how marketers infiltrated powerful sites of institutional and public health discourse, reshaping them to fit commercial aims and intentions.

> For each woman, the “image” she reflects, as well as her personal responses to the so-called sexual revolution, stems directly from the quality of her acceptance of her menstrual and biological life. The way is wide open for Kotex to pioneer in educating (and, if need be, in re-educating) women of all ages to new, constructive perspectives on their own sexuality.[1]
>
> —Estelle Ellis, marketing consultant and founder of Business Image, Inc., 1967

In 1968, Estelle Ellis launched the Life Cycle Center on behalf of Kimberly-Clark. The Life Cycle Center served as a policy, education, and research engine that freely distributed its sex education materials—known as the Life Cycle Library—to school nurses, parents, and public school teachers. The Center’s library of sex education booklets divided the life cycle into distinct stages, covering the biological, emotional, and social changes that Kimberly-Clark believed young women should expect as they moved through life. As elementary and high school students who used the booklets grew up, the Center offered new texts and an assortment of other materials catering to specific life cycle stages predetermined by Kimberly-Clark. These later booklets expanded to cover work and college, sex, same-sex intimacy and desire, social drinking, drugs, dating, companionate marriage and intimacy, and finally, motherhood. In drawing together sex education and the Kotex brand, Ellis positioned the Kimberly-Clark

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[1]“Market Analysis—Feb 1967—Marketing Benefits to be Derived from the Kotex Life Cycle Library,” folder 16, box 13, series 1, Estelle Ellis Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution [hereafter Ellis Papers].

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Life Cycle Center as an authoritative new educational resource available to women across the United States.

Although Estelle Ellis developed and ran the Life Cycle Center for its first few years of operation, she had little professional relationship to sex education. Rather, Ellis was a marketing consultant. She had begun her career in sales at *Seventeen* magazine in 1944. Her firm, Business Image, Inc., which she opened in 1958, was one of many new, small agencies that popped up on Madison Avenue in the postwar decades. Owned and staffed by young people, women, Latinos, and African Americans, these firms specialized in crafting segmented markets and commercial marketing vehicles—such as the Life Cycle Center—designed around a specific kind of consumer. While such organizations were often miniscule in scale when compared to the advertising agencies of this same period, firms like Business Image wielded enormous social and cultural power as they claimed to represent the needs and wants of specific groups of people. For example, in her 1967 Life Cycle Center proposal, Ellis invited Kimberly-Clark to imagine the market she and her firm represented: the collective long-term buying power of young, white, middle-class, school-aged girls as they grew up and moved through the Center's purposefully segmented life-cycle stages.

Estelle Ellis devised this marketing regime as a respectable sexual education program that was taken up in elementary and high schools across the United States. Through the Life Cycle Center, Ellis intended to define how readers imagined and understood their future lives. The Center's library of booklets divided the life cycle into distinct stages, each of which corresponded to a set of targeted marketing opportunities developed by Ellis and Kimberly-Clark. As sex education materials, the booklets tethered readers' collective understanding of their own bodily and emotional development to Kimberly-Clark's business strategy, connecting different moments in the life cycle to a variety of possible Kimberly-Clark products and services. Ellis segmented the idealized, normative life into sellable life stages, translating the very idea of the life cycle into a marketing concept that promised enduring profits to Kimberly-Clark.

This market vision of the life cycle was narrow, and it invested only in women of certain ages and biological capacities. It did not account for postmenopausal women or those who had not menstruated at all. Indeed, for Kimberly-Clark, the Center's value lay in yoking readers to a life-cycle structure that began and ended with reproduction. As new mothers gave birth to newborns, booklets with titles such as *Your First Pregnancy* and *Your Daughter and You* would bring the child into the very same Kimberly-Clark–branded life cycle to begin the process again. This vision of the life cycle flattened life and life change to procreative capacities and participation in heteronormative rituals. The Center was simultaneously a widely adopted classroom educational service venture and a marketing regime that mapped out a heterosexual life cycle schema for its readers—all defined by the commercial needs of Kimberly-Clark.

In addition, Ellis sought legitimacy for the Life Cycle Center by extending it into other realms of knowledge production and institutional power, such as public health and public education. She did so in order to capitalize upon the credibility of these arenas, as well as to push the Life Cycle Center beyond mere marketing. As a result, the Center's market-driven vision of the life cycle permeated many other institutions operating well beyond the business of menstrual products. Ellis argued that the Center's full valuation and reach would not be realized until it was legible to consumers, health, and educational leaders as a pedagogical and service authority on sexual and reproductive health, not a commercial marketing program. Ellis undertook an aggressive campaign to expand the Center's civic, academic, and corporate engagement and outreach. She ensured Life Cycle Center materials were donated to university, medical, and national health organization libraries, and she hired medical professionals to represent the Center, including a registered nurse who served as the organization's public-facing director. This nurse was charged with bringing the Center into professional and scholarly discussion over sex education; developing academic scholarship promoting the benefits of consumer service literature; and working with national, state, and local educational organizations to develop

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curricula that adhered to the Life Cycle Center's market vision. Moving well beyond advertising and marketing, Ellis believed Kimberly-Clark could do more than participate in conversations over public health and sex education: she believed the corporation should lead them.

Through the Life Cycle Center, Ellis fused sex education and marketing in the construction of a standardized, carefully segmented heterosexual life cycle presented to its readers as the ideal shape of their coming lives. This does not mean that readers either wholly or uncritically adopted this market vision. Rather, her work with the Center exposes one of the many ways that marketing experts have sought to shape everyday life. Indeed, by 1975 the vast majority of young Americans' first institutional encounters with sexual health education would not be through public-sector nonprofit health education programs, but instead through marketer-crafted, commercially sponsored films and texts produced by organizations like the Life Cycle Center and shared in the classroom as neutral pedagogy and curricula.[2] Ellis used the Center to shape how women encountered and understood their own sexual and reproductive health. She sought to bend this self-knowledge to her purpose while simultaneously infiltrating some of the most intimate and powerful institutions of the period: the home, the state, and the classroom.

Ellis's story intersects with scholarship in the history of childhood and post–World War II gender, identity, sexuality, and sex education, as well as studies in marketing, advertising, and public relations. Marketing regimes like the Life Cycle Center took shape in the wake of the boom in primary and secondary school enrollments in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Mass schooling reinforced uniform generational life stage categories and brought them to the attention of American business.[3] Marketers such as Ellis keenly understood the rise of uniform American public education and novel life categories like the teenager as lucrative opportunities to foster future consumption.[4]

When Kimberly-Clark hired Ellis to create the Life Cycle Center, it purchased the expertise of someone whose marketing skills were aimed squarely at the long-term commercial return of the white teenage girl. Ellis's marketing chops built on a historical legacy of understanding

[2]Lynn Whisnant, Elizabeth Brett, and Leonard Zegans, "Implicit Messages Concerning Menstruation in Commercial Educational Material Prepared for Young Adolescent Girls," *Journal of Psychiatry* 132, no. 8 (1975): 815–20.

[3]Following the industrial revolution, "girls" referred to any women who were employed and not married. While the teenager did not supplant girls, it did transform ideas about the nature and role of youth in American labor and culture as questions about respectability, citizenship, and development were brought into the classroom. On working girls, consumption, political demands, and pleasure, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999); and Sarah E. Chinn, *Inventing Modern Adolescence* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2009). On leisure and sexual intimacy, see Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1989); Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York, 1998); and Pam Haag, *Consent, Sexual Rights, and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY, 1999). On the post-war "girl" problem and the question of labor, see Jennifer Anne Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939–1947* (Toronto, 2007). On the teenager, see James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, 1988); Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York, 1996); Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience* (New York, 2000); Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teen Girls Culture, 1920–1945* (New York, 2004); and Ilanna Nash, *Teenage Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN, 2006).

[4]Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, "Business Propaganda in the Schools: Labor's Struggle Against the Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System, 1949–1954," *History of Education Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2000): 255–78; Kim Philips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York, 2009), 213–36; Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 145–93; and Caroline Jack, "Fun Facts about American Business: Economic Education and Business Propaganda in an Early Cold War Cartoon Series," *Enterprise and Society* 16, no. 3 (2015): 491–520.

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girlhood as a commercial market category.[5] The Center emerged from Ellis's work at *Seventeen* and *Charm* magazines, and advanced a vision of what Julian Carter has termed "normal sexuality"—a category bound to heterosexuality, middle-class social mores (in this case, buying power), and an unstated whiteness.[6] The Center never named race, but it was crucial for how Ellis plotted the long-term commercial viability of the Center's life cycle schema.

Since the 1960s, historians of gender and sexuality have indexed the myriad ways capitalism has operated in tandem with ideas about race and sex to shape the very contours of our most deeply felt intimacies. They have revealed how political economic orders like the postwar home were entwined with conceptions of normal sexuality.[7] Scholars have also documented both the implicit and explicit investments in whiteness and heterosexuality within these frameworks, interrogating how deviations from either were understood as aberrations or failures.[8] Ellis, too, relied on these stated and unstated frameworks to argue that generations of postwar girls would promise high commercial return in the future. An investigation of the relationship between market planning, sex education, and Kotex thus reminds us that questions of gender, race, and economy are inseparable.[9]

Both a sex education program and a commercial platform, the Life Cycle Center spotlights the reach and endurance of marketing strategies. Its national scale and lifelong aims underscore the scale and intent of public relations and marketing projects: to shape our collective public life, our expectations of the future, and our very sense of self. Historians have documented the strategies undertaken to inculcate commercial desire, defend free enterprise, and justify the accumulation and consolidation of corporate power throughout the twentieth century.[10]

[5]On the child as consumer, see Linda Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 2004); William Leach, "Child-World in the Promised Land," in *The Mythmaking Frame of Mind: Social Imagination and American Culture*, eds. James Gilbert et al. (Belmont, CA, 1993), 209–38; David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York, 1985); David Nasaw, "Children and Commercial Culture: Moving Pictures in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence, KS, 1992), 14–25; Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); and Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (Oxford, UK, 2004).

[6]On the intersection of whiteness and heterosexuality in the production of "normal sexuality," see Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940* (Durham, NC, 2007).

[7]Kimberly S. Johnson, *Governing the American State: Congress and the New Federalism, 1877–1929* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), 136–55; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana, IL, 1994); Mignon Duffy, *Making Care Count: A Century of Gender, Race, and Paid Care Work* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2011); Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York, 2012); and Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservativism* (Cambridge, MA, 2018). Most recently Laura Briggs has underlined these connections, emphasizing that all politics (and indeed, political economy) speaks to reproduction, see Briggs, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump* (Oakland, CA, 2017).

[8]On the fallacy of the mid-century white male breadwinner, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York, 1992). On the attachment of breadwinner philosophy to whiteness, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, 1998). On the intersection of whiteness and heterosexuality in the production of "normal sexuality," see Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness*. On racial difference as queer aberration, see Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437–65; and Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, 2003).

[9]See Amy Dru Stanley, "Histories of Capitalism and Sex Difference," *Journal of the Early Republic* 36, no. 2 (2016): 343–50; and Nan Enstad, "The 'Sonorous Summons' of the New History of Capitalism, Or, What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Economy?" *Modern American History* 2, no. 1 (Mar. 2019): 83–95.

[10]Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York, 1962); Richard Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900–1950* (Greenwich, CT, 1979); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream* (Berkeley, CA, 1985); Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York, 1989); Richard Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in*

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Ellis reminds us that the work of public relations and marketing was not just the quiet and underhanded movements of a few PR experts, nor the handful of Cold War scientists who "merchandised" doubt.[11] At the same moment the tobacco industry sought to stifle critiques through marketing campaigns that troubled the collective faith in scientific fact, Estelle Ellis promised Kimberly-Clark the power to command women's collective perspectives on their own sexuality. Historians have described how the nationally circulated sex education materials of the 1930s fostered a "common vocabulary for thinking about menarche, talking about it to girlfriends, and writing about it in personal diaries."[12] Marketers like Estelle Ellis, however, had their eye on something more than a common vocabulary or culture. They intended to use sex education to manufacture a common market as well.

Estelle Ellis and Postwar Marketing

When Estelle Ellis pitched the Life Cycle Center to Kimberly-Clark in 1967, she, like many other postwar marketers, hung her capabilities as a marketing expert on her ability to explain certain kinds of consumers (in this case, young women) to major merchandisers. Her marketing expertise did not emerge from formal training in the industry. As Ellis described it, her working-class Jewish childhood in Brooklyn meant she had grown up with the expectation of a life defined by employment and motherhood. She leveraged this narrative in her marketing work, arguing that in an era of booming employment for women, her biography provided a keen insight into the kind of future young girls should expect for themselves.[13]

Ellis began her marketing career in 1944 when she was hired at Philadelphia publishing magnate Walter Annenberg's Triangle Publications, working at the soon-to-be launched *Seventeen* magazine. At *Seventeen*, Ellis's youth allowed her to serve as a proxy for the magazine's imagined teenaged readership, and she was tasked with developing a marketing composite that could be used to teach merchandisers about the magazine's reader. In 1950, she moved to *Charm* magazine with former *Seventeen* editor Helen Valentine, revamping *Charm* from a magazine "for the business girl" to the magazine for "working women," extending the marketing project that Ellis and Valentine had begun at *Seventeen*.[14] After eight years at *Charm*, Ellis departed the magazine in 1958 to found Business Image, Inc., where she would develop the Life Cycle Center for Kimberly-Clark.

In her marketing work at *Seventeen*, Ellis's job was to construct and define a legible market for potential advertisers, combining both the teenager's current buying power as well as her

America (New York, 1990); Elizabeth Fones-Worth, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945–60* (Urbana, IL, 1994); Pamela Walker Laid, *Advertising Progress* (Baltimore, 1998); and Cynthia B. Meyers, *A Word from our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio* (New York, 2014).

[11]Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York, 1996); Karen S. Miller, *The Voice of Business: Hill & Knowlton and Postwar Public Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York, 2010).

[12]Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "'Something Happens to Girls': Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 1 (1993): 99–127, quote on 125; Lara Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, 2009).

[13]Anthropologists and communications scholars have documented the ways in which marketing and advertising professionals advocating for a specific consumer segment must perform their own position to the satisfaction of merchandisers who might be wary of engaging with that segment. See Arlene Davila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley, CA, 2012), 56–88, in particular 59–63; Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market* (New York, 2005), 64–95, on "professional homosexuals"; and Shalini Shankar, *Advertising Diversity: Ad Agencies and the Creation of Asian American Consumers* (Durham, NC, 2015), "Account Services."

[14]"Mrs. Valentine to Edit Charm: Returns to Street & Smith after Seven Years with Seventeen," *Women's Wear Daily*, Feb. 23, 1950, 2; "Charm to Alter Editorial Policy: Will Revise Coverage from 'Business Girl' to Wider Audience of Working Women," *Women's Wear Daily*, Apr. 14, 1950, 44.

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future commercial possibility. In early 1944, she commissioned a survey of the magazine's first-year readership. In the report, titled *Life with Teena*, a fictional, normative, and composite consumer named Teena the Teenage Girl narrated the study.[15] Figures like Teena projected a "race-evasive" normativity, which embedded reproductive heterosexuality and whiteness within what it meant to be typical or average in the United States.[16] This whiteness and heterosexuality were central, but not explicitly stated as such, to presenting Teena as a long-term marketing investment that was amiable to potential *Seventeen* merchandisers. Indeed, *Seventeen* would not feature a model of color on the cover—one of their "Teenas"—until 1971, when the African American model Joyce Walker appeared alongside a white model in a beach photo shoot.

The *Life with Teena* survey focused on aspiration and interest, interviewing young women who read the magazine as well as their mothers. Upon contacting a home, if the participants were aged between 12 and 18, the interviewer would proceed to ask whether they were enrolled in public, parochial, private, or business schools, or if they were in college. The survey then asked readers to think forward: if they were in high school, what did they hope to do once they graduated? If they were going to attend college, who would pay for further education? What would their majors be, and would they work after graduation? The topic of marriage came up much later in the study and was referenced only in relationship to employment, when the interviewer asked: "Do you think that you would like to work after you are married?"[17] The study mapped out young women's current buying habits and their employment situation—parsing out whether they were employed, received an allowance from their parents, or if they requested cash as needed. The interview then proceeded to place young women in relationship to broader patterns of domestic purchasing in the household, asking for examples of the products they had encouraged their family to buy. Finally, the interview concluded on how *Seventeen* ranked against magazines of a similar ilk, asking young women to expand on their relationship to reading the magazine, the circulation of articles and issues between them and their friends, and where such circulation occurred. In interviews with mothers, the survey focused on questions about purchasing patterns, asking how frequently they replaced goods such as girdles, skirts, sweaters, and party dresses, and, critically, the influence daughters had on family purchasing decisions. For mothers, the study ended on an open-ended question: "what plans do you have for … when she leaves high school?"—attempting to measure where mothers saw their daughter's lives taking them in the coming years.[18]

Ellis went to great lengths to personify Teena, using demographic and financial data to endow the composite with the more subjective elements of personhood. "Our girl Teena is sixteen years old. She's five feet four and a quarter inches tall and tips the scales at 118 pounds. She goes to a public high school, expects to graduate next year at the age of 17 and go on to college with a B.A. or B.S. in mind." The profile located Teena in a web of family relations in order to establish the readership's decidedly middle-class position and their influential role in family decision-making: "Her chances of going to college are good, since Teena's mother is in favor of higher education! And her father can afford to foot all her college bills. He's a

[15]*Life with Teena: A Seventeen Magazine Survey*, 1945, volume 1, folder 1-2, box 18, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[16]Ruth Frankenberg coined the term "race evasive" in *White Women, Race Matters.* More recently, Julian Carter has deployed it to describe ways in which whiteness was rendered redundant in the early to mid-twentieth century, when it was conventionally communicated through all articulations of normal or typical sexuality. Carter's framework is central to my argument here. See Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, 1993), 14; and Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1890–1940* (Durham, NC, 2008), 2–6. On statistical normativity and its power to define status quo, see Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). On whiteness as a form of possessive investment see Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia, 1998). On the benefits accruing to whiteness at mid-century, see Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (New York, 2005).

[17]*Life with Teena*, pp. 90–91.

[18]*Life with Teena*, pp. 92–93.

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professional man … a business man … a white-collar worker." Teena suggested a magazine readership that was middle- or upper-middle-class, with 63 percent of readers' fathers working as business executives, owners, and professionals, or in other white-collar occupations, and an additional 19 percent earning a living as skilled workers. The text framed its subject, Teena, as both a consumer and a worker, although the primary concern was not the work undertaken, but the income it generated:

> Teena could work her way through college if she had to … she earns money even now, minding babies after school. And it's not just "pin money" she's working for either … when Teena works she earns $13.48 a month—all of which she keeps for her own expenses. This, in addition to a regular family allowance—$2.13 a week. Which she spends on movies, bus fares, cokes, school supplies, lunches, candy, etc.[19]

With such specificity regarding working and spending, *Life with Teena* invited potential merchandisers to imagine exactly the kind of young woman Ellis wanted them to believe read *Seventeen*. And it worked. Two years after the publication of *Life with Teena*, Seventeen's circulation boomed—as did its portfolio of advertisers. In February 1947, the magazine hit one million copies per issue; by July 1949, circulation reached two and a half million.[20] In one set of pamphlets that went out to the advertising and marketing trade press announcing Teena's success, the copy asked, "When is a girl worth $11,690,499?" The answer: "when the magazine devoted to her interests surveys her needs—sets up a research department, a consumer panel, [and] a library of fifteen market studies to determine her powerful present, her promising future."[21]

Ellis worked at *Seventeen* until 1950, when she and editor Helen Valentine moved to *Charm*. The two redeveloped *Charm* to follow the marketing narrative presented in *Life with Teena*: young women bound not for housewifery, but for college and a career. During her time at *Charm*, Ellis successfully rebranded the periodical from the magazine for the "business girl"—a middle-class figure of mid-century industry who often worked in secretarial labor until marriage—to *Charm: The Magazine for Women Who Work*. While at *Charm*, Ellis argued that, as a consumer category, "working women" represented an enormous emerging market defined not by household management, but by autonomous spending and a fulfilling white-collar career.[22] Just as with *Seventeen*, Ellis used *Charm* to build her own capacity as an arbiter of postwar white womanhood. The women who read these magazines could be packaged and sold through composite types defined by heterosexuality, youth, whiteness, and ambition. The vision Ellis offered at both magazines was a bankable one—or, as Ellis described the Teenas she packaged, promoted, and sold: "a career girl, a college student, a mother! The happy ending writes itself."[23]

Marketing the Life Cycle

Ellis left *Charm* in 1958 to open her marketing consultancy, Business Image, Inc., which developed the Life Cycle Center for Kimberly-Clark. As she later recalled in an interview, with Business Image she set out to define "a market, give it visibility, establish its credibility, have

[19]*Life with Teena*, p. 1.

[20]*Seventeen*, Mar. 1947, 2.

[21]*Seventeen* promotional campaign materials, 1949, folder 6, box 25, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[22]"Mrs. Valentine to Edit Charm," 2; "Charm to Alter Editorial Policy," 44.

[23]*Seventeen* promotional campaign materials, Mar. 1946, folder 7, box 25, series 1, Ellis Papers. On the emergence of teenager as a postwar social category, see Palladino, *Teenagers*; and Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*. On Ellis and *Seventeen* in particular, see Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of* Seventeen *Magazine* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2010).

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people see it as a new country to be communicated with and conquered and benefitted."[24] It was not an advertising agency *per se*. Rather, Ellis described the firm as a "creative marketing" consultancy, working with corporate executives who felt increasingly out of step with the shifting youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s.

Ellis rejected the notion that her firm be named after herself, suggesting instead through the title "Business Image" that her firm would work internally with major merchandisers to develop their own marketing strategies for teen girls.[25] The "image" in Ellis's Business Image, Inc. played on a popular trope of "image marketing" in the 1960s. Image marketing first came into vogue in 1955 thanks of Social Research, Inc. (SRI), a market research firm staffed by academics at the University of Chicago. SRI researchers argued that every encounter a consumer had with a product or advertisement contributed to the overall image of the brand in the consumer's mind, inviting them to incorporate the brand into their own self-conception.[26] This image concept allowed marketers such as Ellis to claim that their proximity to certain kinds of consumers' lived experiences gave them a more intimate sense of how these buyers might respond to a campaign. Business Image thus promised access to the interior lives and social expectations of young, white, heterosexual women. Indeed, when Ellis first proposed the Life Cycle Center to Kimberly-Clark in 1967, she insisted that the brand itself be pedagogical: Kimberly-Clark and Kotex would become a part of how readers would understand and segment their own lives. In the context of sex education, the power of establishing a brand image such as Kotex as a space for self-understanding throughout life was especially potent, mapping long-term questions about biological and emotional transformation onto the corporate brand. In essence, Ellis promised Kotex the same vision of future buying power that *Seventeen* had pitched to their advertisers: a dollar spent today would spell dividends tomorrow.

The Life Cycle Center's central marketing logic turned on the cyclical nature of the life cycle concept, which promised a variety of commercial possibilities to Kimberly-Clark as the Center's young readers grew up. Ellis's segmentation of the life cycle as a commercial strategy was not necessarily new in American corporate marketing. Since the 1920s, many service industries had placed an intense focus on life stages in advertising directed toward potential clients. The life insurance industry, for example, used the specter of death, the risks of old age, and the unknowns of tomorrow to play on a prospective client's anxieties and to argue that private insurance was a means by which they could protect themselves against an uncertain future.[27]

The Life Cycle Center went well beyond this kind of marketing strategy, however. Through booklets distributed in the classroom, the Center did not simply educate students on life cycle stages; it intentionally constructed them. From *The Miracle of You* to *Your First Pregnancy*, social or biological changes defined transitions between books, and Ellis framed these as opportunities for new Kimberly-Clark product lines and brands. At the end of Kimberly-Clark's Life Cycle Library, *Getting Married* and *Your First Pregnancy* primed readers for married life and motherhood, emphasizing the financial, emotional, and marital obligations of starting a family. *Your First Pregnancy* in particular spoke directly to a mother's connection with her newborn child, prompting the mother to use an additional guide published by the Center when her own child came of age. The Center drew readers into a teleology of reproductive heterosexual intimacy both embedded in and defined by Kimberly-Clark and its brands, all while framing postmenopausal women and women who could not reproduce as explicitly outside the normative bounds of the life cycle.

[24]Estelle Ellis interview with Tom Wiener, July 21, 1994, box 50, Ellis Papers.

[25]Estelle Ellis interview with Lu Ann Jones, June 12, 2007, box 50, Ellis Papers.

[26]Sidney Levy and Burleigh Gardner, "The Product and the Brand," *Harvard Business Review* (Mar.–Apr. 1955): 33–39.

[27]Dan Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered: Risk and the Rise of the Statistical Individual* (Chicago, 2015).

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In constructing life-cycle segments as distinct market categories, Ellis promised Kimberly-Clark the gold standard of all marketing strategy: a homogenous market of uniform consumers whose emotional life transitions would deepen their relationship to Kotex and Kimberly-Clark. Ellis argued that moments like experiencing one's first period, having one's first sexual experience, going to college, getting married, and beginning a family were both significant life events and times when consumers either switched brands or intensified their relationship to their current brand of choice. For example, the fourth booklet in the library, *The Years of the Independence*, defined its readers as late teens finishing high school and entering college or the workforce. Ellis suggested that this period of change "correlates with the period in her life when the first truly independent buying patterns are set up."[28] The booklet offered advice on navigating work and educational commitments alongside the potential social obligations of sex, syncing bodily change with consumer loyalty in an attempt to affix navigating these new concerns to Kimberly-Clark and its respective brands.

The life cycle concept played to both consumer and merchandiser. For Ellis and Kimberly-Clark, the model standardized life stages and managed moments of transition, enabling them to monitor how consumer needs would change. The life cycle model projected value onto the specific future it mapped out, promising homogenous markets of readers who shared in the same specific kinds of potential needs. It provided the firm with a blueprint to the life cycle of their consumers' lives, one which could be capitalized upon through line extensions and specific promotional outreach programs. For readers, the life cycle model broke their lives down into knowable moments. When handed out by teachers, school nurses, or parents, these booklets gained a tacit institutional or familial endorsement, attaching social and personal value to the attainment of the norms laid out in their pages. At the same time, the Center's pursuit of coherent life stage categories as markets functionally marked those readers who fell outside the bounds of the "normative" life cycle as failures. This included those who experienced queer desire, those who did not get married, those who experienced childbirth before marriage, and those who did not menstruate—all framed as aberrations.

Ellis proposed the Center as a significant departure from how sex education had been taught for much of the twentieth century. She argued there were benefits to rejecting the silence and shame that had historically defined both sex education and advertising around menstruation. These silences, in fact, had been purposely constructed by corporations like Kimberly-Clark. In 1921, Kotex had been promoted through a joint military–public health discourse, an emphasis on white respectability, and a focus on shame. Early Kotex advertisements featured white female nurses who suggested the napkins had been devised to use up leftover wood pulp–based absorbent materials, mass produced and supplied to the U.S. federal government by Kimberly-Clark during the First World War. Such advertisements framed Kotex as the solution to a problem that could not be publicly spoken. The company relied on the term "Kotex" (a portmanteau of "cotton" and "texture") for public discussion of menstruation, mapping a commercial brand and the representation of medical authority over biological functions. Kimberly-Clark also undertook efforts to distance itself from Kotex, creating a wholly owned subsidiary, the International Cellucotton Products Company (ICPC). Kotex packaging contained no reference to Kimberly-Clark until the ICPC was dissolved in 1946. And finally, the product's in-store merchandising placement positioned it close to the register in unmarked blue boxes, allowing customers to purchase with discretion. As one January 1922 advertisement suggested, Kotex was "Easy to buy. All embarrassing counter conversation is avoided by saying, 'A box of Kotex please.'"[29]

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Kotex advertising furthered this silence by emphasizing the dangers of frank discussion between mothers and daughters. In a series of advertisements in the late 1940s, Kimberly-Clark cautioned that broaching the topic of menstruation without the guiding

[28]*The Life Cycle Library, The Years of Independence* (Neenah, WI, 1978), folder 21, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[29]For a classic advertisement on this topic, see *Good Housekeeping*, Jan. 1922, 123.

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hand of Kotex was a risk, warning keen mothers not to share "some of the bogey ideas you picked up when you were a teen-ager" and to send away for Kotex educational materials instead. "A girl's first experience with menstruation can and does condition her for life," such ads warned, asking the mother: "Do You Scare Her to Death?"[30] These claims were more than the production of social anxiety that classic advertisements for products like Listerine sought to generate when they conjured up the social ill of bad breath. This was capital entering the most non-market of relations, attempting to perform a form of *in loco parentis* that undermined parents who sought to explain biological function—menstruation, in this case—to their own children. These ads were attempts to alienate parents and, in turn, assert control over a young person's first real experiences of puberty, sexuality, and bodily change. Thanks in part to this legacy of shame and silence, even when Ellis first proposed the Center in the mid-1960s, most American men and women remained largely divorced from a knowledge of their own bodies, let alone the opposite sex.[31]

The model of sex education adopted by Ellis and the Life Cycle Center was not without challenges, however. It was complicated by a broad, community-based resistance to sex education beginning in the early 1960s. Those resistant to sex education worried over the raw explanation of sexual intercourse devoid of romance and sanctity, the presentation of homosexuality and other 'maladjustments' as life choices (albeit as poor ones), and the adoption of less moralistic learning strategies that asked students to think about the dynamics of sexuality rather than static intimacy between different sex partners.[32] Many feared that such programs intruded upon the sanctified white, nuclear family—that is, parental authority to teach children about sex—and that any frank discussion of intimacy would lead to experimentation.

To mitigate the potential for blowback, Ellis argued that the Center could be strategically framed as a form of consumer education, capitalizing on the growing interest in consumer advocacy and programming that had, since the 1930s, worked both to soften Americans' perceptions of industrial capitalism and to celebrate free enterprise. Ellis argued, "The point cannot be over-emphasized since educational material can provide the added 'product benefit' so essential in establishing a competitive edge for the Kotex feminine hygiene products division.… There is reason to believe in time [Kimberly-Clark] may discover that soundly researched consumer service literature is the most wanted product premium of all."[33] By framing the Center as consumer service programming, Ellis spared the Center from pitched debates over the merit of sex education, even as it carefully advocated and extended a vision of normal sexuality that framed companionate intimacy and heterosexual sex in frank terms.

In order to get materials into teachers' hands, Ellis sent Life Cycle Center booklets to schools with a teaching guide that underscored how the booklets taught menstruation rather than sex education. To secure buy-in from teachers, the Center addressed educators through a public-facing nurse, lending the enterprise the bona fides of medicine:

> As a member of the educational community, you are well aware of the changing concepts of sex education. You are also cognizant of the growing demands for sex education programs in the schools. In every part of the nation, parents, educators, religious, medical and

[30]The "Do You Scare Her to Death?" Kimberly-Clark advertisement appeared in 1949 runs of *Parent's Magazine*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping*. On shame as a central anxiety around sex education, see Janice Irvine, *Talk about Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley, CA, 2002). On the contestation between parents and doctors in the production of medical texts, see Jennifer Burek Pierce, *What Adolescents Ought to Know: Sexual Health Texts in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Amherst, MA, 2011).

[31]This was revealed in the massive cultural response to the Kinsey reports and, later, Shere Hite's 1976 *Hite Report on Female Sexuality*. Alfred Kinsey, W. Pomeroy, and C. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, PA, 1948); Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and P. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, PA, 1953); Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on Female Sexuality* (New York, NY, 1976).

[32]Dennis Carlson, *The Education of Eros* (New York, 2013), 29.

[33]Ibid.

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> community leaders are engaged in a dialogue about the nature of such programs. Naturally, there are differences of opinions about course content for the various age groups. All authorities, however, are in agreement on one point: the subject of menstruation must be taught in context of a young woman's physical maturation and her healthy identification of self as a female.[34]

In this description, Ellis proposed the Center as a resource for instruction on menstruation and reproductive health instead of sex, framing menstruation as a biological function concerning "physical maturation" and "healthy identification of self as a female." The biologically based young person constructed in the Center's materials was likely intended to be a less controversial figure than the sexually aware youth so often vilified by opponents of sex education.

The letter to teachers suggested that Kimberly-Clark had followed the debate over sex education with a keen interest and was eager to revamp its education program "to the needs of the time," offering the booklets for free in any quantity alongside the popular, albeit aging, film, *The Story of Menstruation*—a Disney production that Kimberly-Clark had sponsored in 1946. School teachers and nurses also received special teaching pamphlets that detailed a number of educational services available through the Life Cycle Center.[35] Taken together, these materials worked to ease the Center into the classroom, framing its marketing materials as educational supports designed to benefit school nurses, parents, and teachers.

Reading the Life Cycle Library

The Life Cycle Library booklets ranged from early childhood to first pregnancy, with an additional booklet targeted at mothers of infant children. Each of the six published booklets were structured to frame menstruation and sexual maturation within the context of social, psychological, and emotional change. "This was done not only to widen consumer interest in Kotex educational materials," Ellis explained, "but to insure [sic] their acceptance and distribution at critical professional levels … among educators, doctors and nurses."[36] Such groups served as essential gatekeepers who made decisions on whether or not to implement the program and who would receive the booklets. The choice to target professionals was as much a marketing decision as it was a pedagogical one. By framing the Life Cycle Center as an effective educational program, Ellis could use it as a model for other corporate forays into the public school classroom.[37] While the Life Cycle Library was developed in consultation with a committee of sex education experts, it selected specific stages of the life cycle to "intensify and extend [Kotex's] sphere of consumer influence with women in each of the selected age groups." The booklets were "pinpointed to the life cycle changes of paramount relevance to the marketing of Kotex Products," developed as tools to bridge the reader's self-understanding with the brand itself.[38]

The first book in the series, *The Miracle of You*, opens by describing the biological changes underway in the pubescent body, anchoring them to a specific heteronormative reproductive

[34]"Letter Addressed to Educators Regarding Kimberly-Clark Life Cycle Center and Library," folder 1, box 25, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[35]On corporately produced educational content and the role of television in shaping the U.S. political landscape, see Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York, 2010); and Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC, 2011). On classroom educational film, see Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford, UK, 2012).

[36]"The Life Cycle Center: Where It's At and Where It's Going. A Business Image Overview," folder 1, box 4, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[37]"Revitalized Educational Program Progress Report #2," folder 16, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[38]"The Life Cycle Center," Ellis Papers.

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future. Subtitled "What It Means to Be a Girl," the booklet constructs menstruation as "the beginning of the remarkable journey that, slowly and wonderfully, can reach its highest point in parenthood."[39] Motherhood, it suggests, "is a natural desire for girls. Since menstruation makes motherhood possible you should think of it as a good and healthy bodily function.… In one form or another, all living creatures experience the cycle of infancy, childhood, adolescence and maturity."[40] The text then describes the maturation process underway in early puberty. Reflecting the scientific approach emphasized by Ellis in her marketing pitch, the booklet contextualizes reproductive biology using other mammals.[41] The final pages feature advertisements for a Kotex introductory kit designed for young women who might soon experience menstruation. The kit consists of Kotex "Miss Deb" sanitary napkins as well as the Miss Deb belt. The booklet, which arrived in a package including napkins and other service literature, promises the Center's careful guidance as young women grow up and through the life cycle.

The second booklet, *Your Years of Self Discovery*, which targeted the high school teenager, entangles notions of self-actualization, autonomy, and sexual identity by promising to assist young women in coming to terms with their own sexual desire along with the expectations of others. It places the responsibility of managing young men's desire on the female reader: "Male sexual desire is aroused, in general, much more quickly and easily than your own. A sweater that seems fashionable to you may appear sexually provocative to your date." This management succeeds, suggests the text, only through "self-discipline—controlling your own feelings, sexual and otherwise—even at those very moments when physical urges move you most strongly." *Your Years of Self Discovery* also introduces same-sex desire as naturally occurring in early adolescence in both boys and girls, but notes that this natural same-sex desire itself is a prologue to heterosexuality. "[I]t is a symptom of maladjustment," the booklet warns; it "indicates that the normal response to persons of the opposite sex has somehow been damaged. Professional counseling, in some instances might reverse the emotional direction into heterosexual patterns." The commercial section of this booklet featured profiles for Kotex sanitary napkins and tampons designed for this age group.[42]

The Years of Independence: Learning to Live on Your Own offered a wider gamut of advice, focusing on the transition from high school to college or employment and connecting these changes to new kinds of purchasing opportunities. The booklet engaged with a young woman's expanded social circle, dating, social activities, drinking, drugs, and sexual intimacy. "Among the decisions you'll be making for yourself," the text suggests, "concerns your attitude toward alcohol, tobacco, and drugs." The booklet argues that social drinking and drug use remain matter-of-fact for single life—but the latter activity, especially marijuana use, is "simply another crutch, another form of escape, another dependency that no young woman needs." It warns its readers about "hard narcotics and LSD" as carrying "obvious dangers," and that the universe of "sleeping pills, tranquillizers, psychic energizers (or 'pep' pills)" brings with them a host of their own risks. The booklet's discussion may have signaled these drugs as risks to stability, but it nonetheless framed their use as decisions which readers themselves would have to make.[43]

The Years of Independence also introduced what it called "the new morality" that came with sexual autonomy, a paycheck, and life away from home. "The new morality exists as a reaction to the old morality that imposed a rigid set of rules upon young women, while tacitly condoning another standard for men," the booklet reads. Reproducing the norms of heteronormative sexuality, the booklet argues that while the new morality promises women fuller access to their

[39]*The Life Cycle Library, The Miracle of You*, folder 21, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid.
[42]*The Life Cycle Library, Your Years of Self Discovery*, folder 21, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.
[43]*The Life Cycle Library, The Years of Independence: Learning to Live on Your Own*, folder 21, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

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sexuality, wanton sex outside of the bounds of heterosexual intimacy with an eye toward marriage "destroys what it is trying to achieve."[44] Alongside this advice, the booklet offered a discussion of same-sex desire in fuller detail than previous texts, framing queer intimacies as a risk to the heterosexual reproductive subject.

Published during the transition from the liberal politics of the U.S. homophile movement to the liberationist demands of the late 1960s and early 1970s, *The Years of Independence* constructed two types of maladjusted queer subjects for the reader to navigate: the gay man who she might develop feelings for and the gay woman who might develop feelings for her. It did not condemn queer subjects outright, however: "Homosexuals are not always easy to recognize. Although there are those who flaunt their homosexuality in dress and manner, many pass inconspicuously in the everyday world.… No one knows the precise cause of homosexuality. It is generally attributed to extreme identification in early childhood with the parent of the same sex."[45] When readers felt an emotional connection toward a gay man, the text suggests they be wary of pursuing it. While "male homosexuals can be interesting friends and good companions," the booklet warns, "the young woman who believes she is in love with a male homosexual is in for a deep disappointment":

> No girl, no matter how attractive or how eager to try, can effect this conversion. A male homosexual, seeking to escape what is for him an unhappy pattern, will sometimes enter into a relationship with a woman. This almost always ends disastrously. For, while he may be capable of the sex act with women, his deep emotions are reserved for men. Such a relationship requires a compromise of female identity that few women can, or would want to, make.[46]

The Years of Independence made no reference to the reader experiencing or navigating her own erotic or emotional queer desires. Just as homosexuality had been treated as a category of maladjustment in *Your Years of Self-Discovery*, the absence of the adult queer subject in *The Years of Independence* suggested a kind of gender failure in light of the normative reproductive life cycle forwarded by Kimberly-Clark, even if the booklets offered a fairly sympathetic treatment of queer difference.[47]

From *The Years of Independence*, the Life Cycle Library moved to marriage and the establishment of the family as a domestic unit. In *Getting Married*, the text opens with the proclamation "I Love Him and I Need Him!" documenting the promise of marriage, exploring the wedding night, and quickly moving into companionate intimacy and the challenges of maintaining normative sexuality. "One of your married friends may tell you that she and her husband have had a 'fantastic' sex life ever since their first night together. Instead of envying her, accept the fact that this is a most unusual experience," the booklet insists.

> Another friend may confess that after a year of marriage she has never experienced the full satisfaction of an orgasm but deceives her husband by "putting on an act" in bed. Like any other lie, such deception bodes ill for their relationship. For while sexual fulfillment will not guarantee the success of a marriage, complete intimacy between a husband and a wife is not possible without it.[48]

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Daniel Rivers, *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children in the United States since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015).

[48]*The Life Cycle Library, Getting Married*, folder 21, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

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Although the booklet describes the heterosexual sex act as aiming for mutual orgasm—a central tenet and promise of marriage advice manuals directed at women since the 1930s—*Getting Married* frankly broaches the challenges that come with intimacy, shifting the discourse of marriage toward a vision of companionate obligation, even in sex: “Occasionally, a couple succeeds in synchronizing their responses perfectly and thus achieve orgasm simultaneously. When this happens it can be a very beautiful experience. But since male and female timing and rhythms tend to be quite different, it is unrealistic and frustrating to make this a constant goal.”[49]

While the booklet suggests that the give and take of a relationship is the foundation of a well-adjusted and productive marriage, it nevertheless makes the challenge of achieving this intimacy the reader’s responsibility. The text warns that “despite her husband’s best efforts, a woman fails to reach orgasm because she is overtired, upset, or insufficiently aroused emotionally. Or it may be due to her inhibitions.” The work of companionate intimacy was placed squarely on the reader of the text:

> Your husband is not a mind reader. It will be very hard for him to discover what kinds of stimulation you enjoy unless you convey your feelings to him. Modern research has proved that most women can attain orgasm quickly if they understand their own bodies and feel free to communicate to their mates what does and does not give them pleasure.[50]

The final marketing materials in *Getting Married* reflected those in *The Years of Independence*, although the text also made overtures to the future financial obligations of parenthood. The Library ended with *Your First Pregnancy*, which looped the reader back to *You and Your Daughter*, completing the cyclical nature of the platform itself.

The life cycle concept advanced by the Life Cycle Center ended at reproduction—conceiving neither postmenopausal subjects nor nonmenstruating women as viable consumer markets. Intriguingly, Ellis’s original proposal for the Center included booklets for pre- and post-menopause: *The Middle Years* would have targeted 40- to 55-year-old women, and *The Mature Woman: Post-menopause—The Heritage of Femininity* was planned for readers aged 50–85.[51] The proposed booklets would have discussed sex during and after menopause, late-in-life marriage, the possibilities of hormone therapy, and remarriage after the death of a partner, with sections dedicated to “the expanded choices of Kotex Life-Cycle products with recommendations for use” in the “middle” and “mature years.”[52] Yet these booklets were never produced. Instead, the focus of the Life Cycle Center remained tethered to reproductive capacity. Reproduction was so central to how Kimberly-Clark viewed this program that Ellis went as far as to suggest that this consumer market might be extended through scientific advances in hormone therapy that would push a potential consumer’s menstruating years into their “sixties, seventies, and eighties.”[53] Just as the teenager supplanted the mother within American consumer capitalism, the cultural weight of American youth culture meant that the female consumer lost her commercial viability postmenopause.

Ellis proposed the booklets be matched with a newsletter program that capitalized upon the growing popularity of health and wellness literature offered in magazines. “Covers designed to build circulation for magazines dramatize in bold type feature articles on the most intimate aspects of feminine hygiene and health.… Editorial research shows that the subject of health has replaced fiction as the primary audience draw.”[54] The newsletter would serve as a digest, gathering articles that concerned sexual reproduction and health. As Ellis suggested in an

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

[51]“Market Analysis—Feb. 1967,” folder 16, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[52]Ibid.

[53]“Educational Program Revitalization Effort—Marketing Benefits,” folder 16, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[54]“Market Analysis—Feb. 1967,” Ellis Papers.

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executive summary of the Center and its operation, "our basic purpose is to assure close harmony with the product managers' marketing plans and programs" and the Center's health education aims. "An effective 'educational' program could easily become the catalyst for a new corporate format built around the concept that Kimberly-Clark is bringing the consumer a helpful service—that it is a company dedicated to make [sic] a woman's life a little easier."[55]

After the Center launched in 1968, Business Image, Inc. began to tabulate reader responses in order to refine and reposition the booklets. After the first year of operation, Ellis selected and processed forty pages of response letters, both positive and negative, and broken down by region across North America. (The program was also marketed in Australia, but archived responses are exclusively from the U.S. and Canada.) These letters came from public health departments, Planned Parenthood, Catholic school teachers, children, health services directors, educational consultants, advocates for children with disabilities, nurses, mothers, principals, and state supervisors.[56] Across both positive and negative comments, those who wrote in recognized the Center as both an educational service as well as an advertising and marketing strategy.

In tabulated positive comments, Ellis found that readers appreciated the factual data about sexual health and especially the emphasis on emotional changes. One teacher, from San Antonio, praised the "company for ... doing a real service for those who benefit from these excellent materials." An associate director of public aid in Chicago suggested the booklets had "been welcomed by our girls and their foster mothers." Similarly, a school nurse from St. Joseph, Michigan, and a mother from Whippany, New Jersey, both agreed that the materials would be essential to the sex education programs being developed in their local school districts. Some parents recognized that the Library itself was a form of advertising. A mother from Detroit, Michigan noted, "My hearty thanks.… This is the best form of advertising any firm can do."[57]

Ellis also compiled critiques, which typically focused on frank discussions of sexual intimacy, with some parents responding with the threat of a consumer boycott. A parent from Phoenix, Arizona, named the product plainly: "advertising has reached the point of being repulsive," they argued. "I for one intend to boycott your products until you can find your way back to decency." A member of the Utah State Board of Education decried it

> … inappropriate to describe intercourse in some animals and in humans for these young students being introduced to maturation. It is true that we are living in a day when topics of sex are discussed more openly and frankly than has been the case in past generations. Within this more open sitting [sic] to have the wisdom of what to do and what not to do for the good of youth is paramount.[58]

A mother from Petaluma, California, threatened the Life Cycle Center on obscenity grounds, arguing that the educational materials spelled the end of her support for Kotex: "I have bought Tampax and Kotex all the time but now I will not buy your products anymore.… I am very much opposed to the filth that is being called 'Sex Education' and is pushed in our local schools.… Us gals are passing the word around." A parent from El Dorado, Texas, made a similar suggestion: "I am terribly disappointed in the Kimberly-Clark Corp. and in the future shall

[55]"Summary of Market Study," folder 16, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[56]"Analysis of Complimentary Letters" and "Analysis of Complaint Letters," folder 24, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[57]"Analysis of Complimentary Letters," Ellis Papers. Letters from users of the Center suggest that it did in fact transmit ideas about changing social mores, even if complaint letters rejected these changes. It is reminiscent of historian Sarah Igo's findings in respondents' work for the Kinsey and Middletown studies. See Igo, *The Averaged American*, 68–103, 234–81.

[58]"Analysis of Complaint Letters," Ellis Papers.

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be very selective in the brand of feminine products I buy." Many negative respondents committed to switch brands in response to the program.[59]

Indeed, later scholarly analysis of commercially sponsored sex education materials would condemn consumer education service programs outright. In one 1975 study, three clinical psychiatrists interviewed women aged nine to eighteen. They found that commercial materials emphasized products as solutions to menstruation and, in turn, puberty as a market and issue to be solved, arguing that "the major concern of these companies is with selling a product. Any educational endeavor they engage in must support their commercial interests. Their failure lies in their concern with avoiding controversial and unpleasant topics in communicating with potential consumers."[60] Ellis herself dismissed this kind of critique early on in planning the Center. She argued that as the booklets moved on and their narrative shifted toward marital concerns, navigating work, and the construction of ideal companionate heterosexuality, critiques about crass commercialism would fade from view. As young women who grew up with the platform began to have children of their own, their commitment to Kotex would lead them to dismiss concerns over the commercialization of sex education, let alone the very definition of the life cycle.

In their own usage studies of the Life Cycle Center materials, however, Ellis and her staff discovered the booklets had overlapping audiences. Younger readers frequently consulted all of the published material, even those booklets marketed to women above their age group. In later reviews of the Center's first years of operation, Ellis in fact celebrated this, claiming the "multiple readership of the books in the Life Cycle Library … [is] one of its greatest marketing strengths."[61] As young women encountered the booklets in elementary and middle school classrooms, reading ahead not only did the work of structuring life cycle stages, but invited readers to intuit and understand their future sexual and reproductive health entirely on Kimberly-Clark's marketing terms.

Legitimizing the Life Cycle Center

After two years in operation, Ellis issued a report and review to Kimberly-Clark advising on how the Center should develop in the coming decade. "The Life Cycle Center is a reality," Ellis proclaimed. "[I]t has substantial assets, most important of which is the point of view it reinforces with each periodical it publishes." However, "[t]he full value of the Life Cycle Center cannot be realized without an aggressive program to communicate its existence, its philosophy, its health-education benefits to women and the community at large." Ellis argued that the Center was "ready to move forward—to expand the dissemination of materials built up in the past three years via educational and market channels." She declared that, from 1970 onward, Kimberly-Clark had to "enlarge the Life Cycle Center's sphere of consumer and professional influence," targeting those institutional and professional networks that might lend it further legitimacy beyond marketing, giving Kimberly-Clark "access to organized groups via classrooms, clubs, and private and government agencies."[62] To do so would be to render "Kotex as an authority in the area of menstrual-related health problems, relating service authority to product authority." Ellis aimed to transform the Center into an institutional leader on sex education and public health.

Ellis undertook a number of strategies to deepen the Center's professional capacity. This included publicizing the Center with ads targeted at educational programs; donating bound volumes of Life Cycle Center materials to university libraries; and distributing materials to a

[59]Ibid.

[60]Whisnant, Brett, and Zegans, "Implicit Messages Concerning Menstruation," 815–20.

[61]"The Life Cycle Center," Ellis Papers.

[62]Ibid.

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variety of different organizations, such as Job Corps, Headstart, Upward Bound, state youth agencies, private resident camps, state and federal health and education agencies, and organizations on record as supporting sex education. "To place Life Cycle materials in the hands of the participants (people who are actually giving the courses in schools and on an extra-curricular level)," Ellis argued, "is to ensure an immediate hearing and to accelerate acceptance and requests for the books."[63] Such outreach accrued respectability for the program, insulating it from critiques of commercialism while allowing Kotex to manage a generation of young girls' understandings of sexual health.

Ellis also hired a nurse to serve as a leadership figure for the Center, lending this marketing regime both medical and educational authority. She sought someone who understood that the Life Cycle Center served up "a unique business opportunity" and who could balance the "growth of an educational division of a major industrial corporation" with the directing of "a corporate consumer service program unique in the nation." Ellis intended the director to be an academic with a background in the fields of sex education and public health. They would perform the work of legitimation for the Center through participation in scholarly, trade, and public health conventions, speaking engagements, and presentations at forums on family life planning. In pursuing a registered nurse who would perform public relations in academic, educational, and public health circles, Ellis sought to balance out anxieties that might creep up when consumers recognized the Center for what it was: commercial marketing.[64]

In 1970, Kimberly-Clark hired Mary Louise Lennon, a graduate of Emmanuel College, to serve as director of the Life Cycle Center. Lennon had previously served as a community health representative for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York, which itself had for much of the twentieth century drawn the discourse of medical professionalism into its own marketing and advertising strategy.[65] In March 1970, Lennon assumed leadership over the Center while Ellis remained in an advisory capacity. Lennon soon began producing scholarly writing extolling the benefits of the Center as a form of consumer service. These pieces often narrated a history of Kimberly-Clark's consumer education programs, celebrating the firm's foray into education through the language of pedagogy and service. In an essay published in 1974, Lennon argued that "[b]eginning in the early 60s the mail indicated that women's questions were no longer in the narrow area of menstrual hygiene. Rather, women were [asking questions] on topics related to feminine development, such as developing sexuality, personal relationships, attitudes and behavior, as well as the role of women in society." The Center, argued Lennon, was simply a response to these inquiries.[66] Both Ellis and Business Image disappear in this narrative framing; the Center's mission emerges from the language of educational duty, the service ethos, and a commitment to consumer well-being.

Ellis also believed that as director, Lennon's training as a registered nurse could be used to influence readers' relationship with the Center—a connection Kimberly-Clark could exploit to develop a potentially lucrative trove of marketing data. Lennon invited readers and teachers alike to write in directly to her with their questions and concerns about reproductive and sexual health. Ellis intended these inquiries to serve as the foundation for highly tailored direct marketing campaigns. "The lists Mary Louise Lennon will be building in the coming years from

[63]Ibid.

[64]"Expanded Objectives for the Selection of a Director of Education for the Life Cycle Center," folder 15, box 13, series 1, Ellis Papers.

[65]Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered*, 55–89.

[66]Mary Louise Lennon, "Kimberly-Clark and the Life Cycle Center," *School Health Review* (Sept. 1973): 8; Mary Louise Lennon, "The Role of an Industry in Consumer Health Education," *Health Education & Behavior* 1, no. 31 (1972): 131–5. While Lennon's research addressed industry and the academy, she also wrote for newspapers. For her advice on honeymoon anxieties, see "How to Ease Those Honeymoon Tensions," *Carrol Daily Times Herald*, May 5, 1971, 29; and on women leaving for college, see "Being 'On Your Own' Poses Certain Challenges," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, Aug. 19, 1970, 30.

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requests for Life Cycle materials and information," noted Ellis, "will provide the nucleus for future direct marketing ventures. Computerized, as all consumer and professional names gathered by the Life Cycle Center should be from here on in, they will serve to build a customer bank of immediate value to Kotex and its regional sales offices."[67] Reader inquiries, many of which detailed pressing and intimate concerns about sexual and reproductive health, would generate a database of anxieties that Kimberly-Clark could use to develop new campaigns, product lines, and services.

Lennon succeeded in extending the Center's professional influence into public health and educational policy discussions. In 1972, she noted that the Center was organizing a "coalition of independent associations" concerned with public health and school education across a number of U.S. states and territories.[68] Led by the Center, the coalition would work with Nixon's proposed National Health Education Foundation. At the municipal level, Lennon brought the Center into direct conversation with public school boards. In a 1972 report prepared in cooperation with the director of family life education at Chicago Public Schools, Lennon highlighted the role of Life Cycle Center materials used in Chicago schools. The study emphasized the close, professional working relationship between the Center and the school board and highlighted the variety of Kimberly-Clark–sponsored materials that teachers used in the classroom. The report's publication served the very purpose that Ellis had envisioned for Mary Louise Lennon: to frame the Center as a public health and sex education institution rather than a marketing regime.[69]

Although the Center doubled down on a language of sexual health and family planning under Lennon's direction, its framework remained fundamentally commercial. Indeed, tying the Center to both state and educational institutions did far more than capitalize on the benefits of institutional affiliation. Through its engagement with institutional actors, the Center sought to lead a movement toward increased state investment in both public and private family-planning programming. This process lent further credence to the Center's life cycle model as scientific fact. In doing so, Ellis succeeded in bringing her marketing ideas about the normative sexual and reproductive life cycle of American womanhood into educational policy. This vision framed those who failed to meet gendered and raced norms of normal sexuality as irresponsible at best and failed citizens at worst, tethering women's conception of their own sexual health and well-being to Kotex, Kimberly-Clark, and their product lines.

Conclusion: Making and Marketing the Kimberly-Clark Life Cycle

The Life Cycle Center continued to publish and revise booklets into the early 1980s. In the 1990s it was wound down in favor of more targeted advertising campaigns that used a broader set of commercial media for marketing sex education to young consumers. In 1992, Kimberly-Clark and Kotex developed a new sex education program, *Becoming Aware*. Rather than deploying a life cycle program, *Becoming Aware* featured both a fictional narrative between young girls as well as materials directly advising parents on how to broach the topic with their children.[70]

Even with the end of the Life Cycle Center and library, however, its booklets continued to circulate, largely thanks to Ellis's efforts. In university and municipal libraries, public school classrooms, public health institutions, and the home, the booklets took on a sort of afterlife as they continued to be used within a number of different school curricula. This usage can

[67]"The Life Cycle Center," Ellis Papers.

[68]Lennon, "The Role of An Industry," 131–5.

[69]Mary Louise Lennon, "Selection of Family Life Education Materials Used in the Chicago Public Schools," *Journal of School Health* 42, no. 4 (1972): 233–7.

[70]Kimberly-Clark Corporation, *Becoming Aware: Sarah's Story, a Personal Informative Story about a Young Girl and Womanhood* (Neenah, WI, 1992).

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be attributed to both the retrenchment of state funding for public school education during the late twentieth century as well as the simple fact that many consumers kept them—a testament to the power of these marketing materials as educational texts that shaped and informed their young readers' perspectives on their own futures and lives.

Estelle Ellis sought to craft both a common market and a common culture out of public school sex education. Her work with the Life Cycle Center illuminates the sheer scale and pervasive influence of such marketing programs in the late twentieth century. As a marketing regime, the Center offers but one of many avenues for historicizing how marketing operates as a form of corporate knowledge production. Marketing professionals like Ellis hinged their work to other institutions to garner power. They capitalized upon both the language and credibility of those institutions in order to lend their own marketing regimes legibility and authority. Ellis offered Kimberly-Clark the opportunity to shape young women's sexual and reproductive health and to center their most intimate self-understandings upon the corporation, its brands, and its services. Whether in the classroom or at home, the Life Cycle Center provided its many young readers their first exposure to thinking about the shape of their upcoming lives. However, the future these booklets anticipated did not turn on the needs of their readership, but instead on the commercial aims of Kimberly-Clark.

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