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Stereotype Has Changed- Is It Accurate?

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Did you know you were featured in the September issue of Mademoiselle? Perhaps in the confusion of cramming into your car the necessities of life for fall quarter at Iowa State, you missed reading “Young Tycoons of Kitchenland: Home Economists in Business.”

As prospective or present members of the home economics profession, we are always looking for publicity for our field — publicity in the best sense of the word — that which will give home economics the respect we have for it.

At first we felt that in changing the concept of the old-style home economist who is dressed in a uniform and dedicated to getting people fed and clothed to a more appealing figure — that of a dynamic woman in the business world — that we would attain the prestige we desired.

BUT HAVE WE GIVEN THE WRONG IMPRESSION?

Mary Anne Guitar, a well-known and competent journalist, portrayed the picture she, and many others, sees of members of the home economics profession of today. Some people accepted this impression — Mademoiselle magazine printed the article she wrote. Some people disagreed with her — Dorothy Lyle, president of the American Home Economics Association, wrote a letter of retaliation to the magazine.

Whether or not we accept the article, there is a point to be considered. Is this the picture we intended to give to people?

Miss Guitar states, among other things, that “the homemaker and the home economist now share, as often as not, the same sort of antidomestic philosophy.” “Home economics is moving away from the stove into the tough, unginghamed territory of business. Public relations firms, newspapers and magazines, food manufacturers, utilities and appliance companies have discovered that the best way to a woman’s household kitty is through another woman.”

Farther on, she says, “... one wonders what happened to the old-style home economist who thought her job was to see that the populace was well fed and that people got their money’s worth when shopping.” Home economics is a profession “which more and more is committed to serving business, not the public.”

“The student is rarely asked to decide which products are the better buy and for what reasons.”

“And teachers, too, could be selective, instead of uncritically using the free material which inundates them.”

Miss Guitar ends the article, which has described many home economists at work by saying, “It is unfortunate that she doesn’t always realize there is more than one way to accomplish this end,” (that of gaining respect for the field).

Back came the protest from AHEA: “It is unfortunate that an article which represents so much effort on the part of the writer and your staff, and which will reach a wide audience of young people, should be colored by an editorial bias that distorts facts and draws generalizations of an unwarranted nature. The profession of home economics includes about 80,000 employed women... How

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many of these women were interviewed by your writer to provide justification for a statement... (such as the ones above) ... These are statements which reflect on the integrity of our entire profession."

And so the issue of what really is the home economist and what is her philosophy comes up again. WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO PROVE? and WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE? are two questions that have not been answered to the satisfaction of even the most informed laymen. Perhaps this indicates some of the work left to be done by those now in the field.