

Germs
(BOTTLE BACILLUS)

Flakes

Scales



Gee, You're Stinky!

The intimate questions of postwar advertising fanned body insecurity into flames of paranoia.

By Steven Heller

Body odor, foot rot, bad breath, dandruff, psoriasis, acne—these maladies have been around since pre-humans emerged from the primordial ooze. Yet it was primordial admen during the early 20th century who made these facts of being human into plagues of such biblical proportions that only name-brand medicated pads, soothing creams, and scented sprays could possibly purge the demons from body *and* soul. B.O., halitosis, zits, and flaking skin may not be much fun, but barrages of persuasive ads made average Americans believe that affliction with one or all was un-American, antisocial, and downright unchristian. The scourges Madison Avenue made famous were curable, but if they went untreated, heartbreak (of psoriasis or otherwise) was the ultimate punishment.

“Advertising helps to keep the masses dissatisfied with their mode of life, discontented with ugly things around them,” wrote Stuart Ewen in his book *Captains of Consciousness*. “Satisfied customers are not as profitable as discontented ones.” Indeed, in the thriving post-World War II economy, this technique effectively increased consumption of sundries and medicinals and, in turn, helped prop up prosperity. There was no better way to herd consumers into stores—and women into again-compulsory kitchens—than to magnify the importance of ersatz-hygienic values through cautionary ads that attacked odors and vilified blemishes.

This strategy, endemic to postwar economics and aesthetics, grew out of marketing triumphs established decades earlier. In 1919, an ad campaign for Odo-Ro-No, a deodorant for women, first invoked the dreaded shorthand “B.O.” for body odor. Earlier ads for perfumed powders and salves merely claimed to be sweet-smelling, but once the manufacturers of Odo-Ro-No launched an assault on perspiration—offering customers their patented “Armhole Odor Test” and warning that B.O. would hamper social acceptability—insecurity marketing took off like wildfire. It worked, especially with the women who were the ads’ primary targets, but with men, too, who wanted to be attractive and were similarly prey to insinuation. In a 1950 ad for Lifebuoy soap, one such insecure gent confessed, “I’d always thought B.O. was something that happened to other people. Then I realized that B.O. was the reason I wasn’t popular with others.”

Ridding the body of bacterially induced rancid vapors became a McCarthyesque offensive in the postwar years, opening the market for other patented curatives. Once again, the foundation had been well laid in the years between the wars. Listerine mouthwash, for instance, was originally marketed as a general antiseptic. After World War I, though, Listerine ads began referring to bad breath as the scientific-sounding “halitosis,” and promised “germ-killing action.” The brand immediately captured (and kept) a niche as the leading oral cure-all, and basic bad breath was no longer an unpleasant occurrence but a major blight. By the late ’40s, these ads memorably featured the pathetic case of Edna, who was “often a

You Can say Yes to Romance
Because Veto says "No" to Offending
 Veto
Veto says "no" to harming skin and clothes!
 No offense... you see, gentle... Glycerin's health, less caustic... Veto is harmless in any normal use. Besides, you want to see clean, your next single friend. The Veto also contains Precipitated Calcium's exclusive ingredients to make them safe. So after deodorant use in the "boudoir" be sure always to follow up with your shower!
ALWAYS TO VETO IF YOU VALUE YOUR CHARM!

HOW CAN HE EXPLAIN TO HIS sensitive young wife?
BUT, BILL, THIS HAS TO BE OUR QUIET EVENING AT HOME!
THERE ARE SOME THINGS A HUSBAND JUST CAN'T MENTION TO HIS WIFE!

THERE'S A WOMANLY OFFENSE—GREATER THAN BODY ODOR OR BAD BREATH!
 More than ever before in her life, a young wife must realize how important it is to always put ZONITE in her fountain system for hygiene (keeping clean internally), her charms and health—after her periods; that it's difficult for germs to get a foothold when hygiene is practiced. And she must constantly be on guard against an offense greater than body odor or bad breath—no odor she may not detect herself but is so apparent to other people.
 That's why well-informed women depend on ZONITE. NO OTHER LIQUID ANTISEPTIC-GERMICIDE TESTED FOR THIS PURPOSE IS SO POWERFUL, YET SAFE TO TISSUES AS ZONITE.
A Refreshing Rinse!
 A woman no longer has to use disagreeable products, overstriving solutions of which may gradually cause serious damage. Now she will rely on weak homemade solutions—none of which has the remarkable disinfecting and germicidal action of ZONITE.
 Developed by a famous surgeon and scientist—this ZONITE principle is POWERFULLY EFFECTIVE YET POSITIVELY NON-TOXIC, NON-IRRITATING. You can use it as directed as often as you want without the slightest risk of injury.
Gives extra Internal and External Hygienic Protection from Odor
 ZONITE deodorizes not by just "washing"—it actually destroys, dissolves and removes odor-causing waste substances.
 Use ZONITE and be assured you won't offend. And ZONITE has such a soothing effect and promptly helps relieve any itching or burning; ZONITE gives daily external hygienic protection, too, leaving you with such a refreshed dainty feeling—knowing that you will not offend. Available at any drugstore.
NO OTHER TYPE LIQUID ANTISEPTIC-GERMICIDE TESTED FOR THE DOUCHE IS SO POWERFUL, YET SAFE TO TISSUES
FREE! NEW!
 For amazing, enlightening new facts concerning fresh discoloration of intimate physical parts, recently published—mail this coupon to Zonite Products Corp., Dept. TB-46, 100 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.
 Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____
 *Offer good only in the U.S.

"I wanted to fall through the floor

—when I heard that whisper!"



"I could hardly believe it, but it was true! As I passed by Helen and Grace, I heard them whisper . . . 'B.O.'! They were whispering about me."



"I'd always thought 'B.O.' was something that happened to other people. Then I realized that 'B.O.' was the reason I wasn't popular with others."



"So I decided to get some Lifebuoy and use it every day! And does it work! Lifebuoy gives me all-over and long-lasting protection."



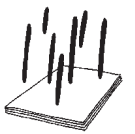
"Now I'm glad I heard that whisper. It's easier for me to get along with people and make new friends now that I'm using Lifebuoy!"

HOW TO STEP UP PROTECTION AGAINST "B.O." (body odor)

Tests prove that Lifebuoy not only stops "B.O." but that you can build increasingly better protection against "B.O." by bathing with Lifebuoy every day. Try it. Bathe with Lifebuoy for just seven days. See how fresh and clean your skin feels. When you know that a daily Lifebuoy bath



USE IT



Use this issue... to swat pesky mosquitoes that interrupt your drawing

Poof!
there goes
perspiration

Now try Stopette—the deodorant that changed a nation's habits!

A new deodorant has to "have something" to compete with all the old favorites! Stopette has everything—in three short years has become a national best seller. Until you try it, you won't know the wonderful, wonderful news about anti-perspirants!

Just an effortless squeeze of the Stopette flexi-plastic bottle does it. No messy fingers. No fuss, no muss. You don't touch Stopette, hardly know it touches you.

Stopette stops odor instantly . . . keeps underarm area free of excess moisture. Harmless to skin or clothes.

Other products are now being made to look like Stopette—but nothing is quite like the original Stopette Spray Deodorant. Exclusive formula by Dr. Jules Montenier. Two sizes, 2 1/4 oz. —\$1.25, and 1 oz.—60¢.

JULES MONTENIER, INC., CHICAGO

Stopette
THE ORIGINAL
SPRAY DEODORANT

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ILLUSTRATION BY HAPPYPETS

Opening Spread: Detail from ad for Listerine Antiseptic and Massage, from Lambert Pharmacal; appeared in *Time*, August 4, 1947. **Opposite page, top:** Ad for Veto, from Colgate Palmolive, in *Ladies' Home Journal*, June, 1948.

Bottom: Ad for Zonite for Newer Feminine Hygiene, from Zonite Products, in *True Romances*, March, 1950. **This page, left:** Ad for Lifebuoy Health Soap, from Lever Brothers, in *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 17, 1947. **Right:** Ad for Stopette Spray Deodorant, from Jules Montenier, in *Life*, August 7, 1950.

Following spread: Comic strip for Kolynos toothpaste, by Frank Robbins; Robbins's ads appeared in Sunday color comics pages. Additional art research by Leif Peng.

BEAUTIFUL PIN-UP..NOT SO GOOD CL



bridesmaid but never a bride,” approaching her “tragic” 30th birthday unmarried because she suffered from halitosis. Indeed, “you, yourself, rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won’t tell you.” Such “quick-tempo socio-dramas in which readers were invited to identify with temporary victims in tragedies of social shame” led to a new “school of advertising practice,” wrote the late historian Roland Marchand in *Advertising the American Dream*.

Copy-heavy, poorly designed alarmist advertisements, which closely resembled political manifestos, urged consumers to question every inch of their bodies; B.O. and bad breath were just two of the many sins. “Personal hygiene became a crucial piece in the puzzle that upwardly mobile strivers were constantly trying to assemble,” writes Jackson Lears in *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. “Physical processes that had previously been taken for granted began to acquire ominous qualities, as one can see (or smell) in the changing attitude toward odor.” Combining odor and dirt in ads tipped the consumer scales toward a national obsession with germ infestation. Lears cites an ad for Kleenex in which a nauseated housewife, bemoaning the nasty job of washing

handkerchiefs, is saved by the new disposable tissues.

Yet even this aspect of the holy crusade for biological purity had its beginnings 100 years before the postwar consumer boom; as early as the 1850s, clean hands joined white skin, white bread, and white sugar as emblems of refinement. All were cogs in the wheel of body management, a social construct that Lears refers to as “The Perfectionist Project.” This enforced marriage of personal hygiene to efficiency, on all strata of the social system, underpinned most national consumer advertising of the time.

Laxatives, for example, were promoted in the early 1900s to bring Americans in sync with the rhythms of modern life. As work hours conformed to Frederick Winslow Taylor’s time and motion performance systems, daily bodily functions were increasingly scrutinized with regard to the average workday. From this emerged the mantra of “regularity,” and laxative advertisements assailed constipation as an even greater menace to society than tipping. Colonics were marketed to purge the innards of “intestinal toxicity.” Kellogg’s Corn Flakes was one product born of this obsession; the toasted flakes of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, who was famously

LOSE UP!



Use this issue...
to hold up at a
concert instead
of a lighter

**Combining
odor and dirt
in ads tipped the
consumer scales
toward a national
obsession with
germ infestation.**

dedicated to purifying the inner temple of all toxins, were advertised as a medical miracle.

That approach eventually lost its punch, but the ethos of “tastes good and is good for you” remained fairly constant in advertisements that touted fundamentally unessential foodstuffs as key to the ideals of health and well-being that underscored American commercialism. Advertisers, in part capitalizing on a nation’s exhaustion from years of war, encouraged the so-called democratic freedom of “ignoring politics and worrying, instead, about the threat of scaly scalp, hairy legs, sluggish bowels, saggy breasts, receding gums, excess weight, and tired blood,” as Marshall McLuhan wrote in his 1964 book, *Understanding Media*.

The 1938 Wheeler-Lea Amendment broadened the powers of the Federal Trade Commission to regulate “truth in advertising,” but ad men continued to find ways to exaggerate human maladies. “There’s a womanly offense—greater than body odor or bad breath!” whispered the subhead in an ad for a feminine hygiene cleanser called Zonite. Under the headline “How can he explain to his sensitive young wife?” there’s a photo of a troubled businessman

with a thought balloon over his head that reads, “There are some things a husband just can’t mention to his wife!” Fortunately, Zonite was a “modern miracle,” because no other “douche is so powerful yet safe to tissues.” As it turned out, not only was this sort of process unnecessary, it proved unsafe indeed (to tissues and perceptions of female sexuality alike).

By the late ’40s, young women, in particular, had emerged as the quintessential American consumer for cosmetic and hygiene products. People who had sacrificed their luxuries during the war were ready to be seduced by even the most pedantic advertisements; they felt entitled to share in the new bounty and look good into the bargain. The industry embraced the beautiful money to be made from the endlessly self-replenishing markets of youth and those who craved youthfulness, and it promised that civilization would abruptly end if both women and men did not actively support the consumer society that promised to make America a better place to live, love, and pursue happiness. That psychoanalysis experienced a simultaneous boom in popular acceptance is perhaps nothing more than a curious coincidence. **P**