During the 1950s, as during the 1920s, the advertising industry sought to stimulate demand for the consumer products and services of businesses (see text pp. 910–912, and, on the 1920s, pp. 745–750). The marketing campaign was not without its critics, among them Vance Packard. The following excerpt is from his book *The Hidden Persuaders*.

MARKETING EIGHT HIDDEN NEEDS

. . . Selling emotional security. The Weiss and Geller advertising agency became suspicious of the conventional reasons people gave for buying home freezers. In many cases it found that economically, the freezers didn’t make sense when you added up the initial cost, the monthly cost added on the electric bill, and the amount of frozen leftovers in the box that eventually would be thrown out. When all factors were added, the food that was consumed from the freezer often became very costly indeed.

Its curiosity aroused, the agency made a psychiatric pilot study. The probers found significance in the fact that the home freezer first came into widespread popularity after World War II when many families were filled with inner anxieties because of uncertainties involving not only food but just about everything else in their lives. These people began thinking fondly of former periods of safety and security, which subconsciously took them back to childhood where there was the mother who never disappointed and love was closely related with the giving of food. The probers concluded: “The freezer represents to many the assurance that there is always food in the house, and food in the home represents security, warmth, and safety.” People who feel insecure, they found, need more food around than they can eat. The agency decided that the merchandising of freezers should take this squirrel factor into account in shaping campaigns. . . .

Selling reassurance of worth. In the mid-fifties The Chicago Tribune made a deep study of the detergent and soap market to try to find out why these products had failed to build brand loyalty, as many other products have done. Housewives tend to switch from one brand to another. This, the Tribune felt, was lamentable and concluded that the soap and detergent makers were themselves clearly to blame. They had been old-fashioned in their approach. “Most advertising,” it found, “now shows practically no awareness that women have any other motive for using their products than to be clean, to protect the hands, and to keep objects clean.” The depth-wise soap maker, the report advised, will realize that many housewives feel they are engaged in unrewarded and unappreciated drudgery when they clean. The advertiser should thus foster the wife’s feeling of “worth and esteem.” His “advertising should exalt the role of housekeeping—not in self-conscious, stodgy ways or with embarrassingly direct praise—but by various implications making it known what an important and proud thing it is or should be to be a housewife performing a role often regarded . . . as drudgery.” . . .

Selling ego-gratification. This in a sense is akin to selling reassurance or worth. A maker of steam shovels found that sales were lagging. It had been showing in its ads magnificent photos of its mammoth machines lifting giant loads of rock and dirt. A motivation study of prospective customers was made to find out what was wrong. The first fact uncovered was that purchasing agents, in buying such ma-
muffins fell, and the wives would blame the cake mix. Or the package would say, “Do not add eggs.” Typically the milk and eggs had already been added by the manufacturer in dried form. But wives who were interviewed in depth studies would exclaim: “What kind of cake is it if you just need to add tap water!” Several different psychological firms wrestled with this problem and came up with essentially the same answer. The mix makers should always leave the housewife something to do. Thus Dr. Dichter counseled General Mills that it should start telling the housewife that she and Bisquick together could do the job and not Bisquick alone. Swansdown White Cake Mix began telling wives in large type: “You Add Fresh Eggs . . .” Some mixes have the wife add both fresh eggs and fresh milk.

Selling love objects. This might seem a weird kind of merchandising but the promoters of Liberace, the TV pianist, have manipulated—with apparent premeditation—the trappings of Oedipus symbolism in selling him to women past the child-bearing age (where much of his following is concentrated). The TV columnist John Crosby alluded to this when he described the reception Liberace was receiving in England, where, according to Mr. Crosby, he was “visible in all his redundant dimples” on British commercial TV. Mr. Crosby quoted the New Statesman and Nation as follows: “Every American mom is longing to stroke the greasy, roguish curls. The wide, trustful childlike smile persists, even when the voice is in full song.” TV viewers who have had an opportunity to sit in Mr. Liberace’s TV presence may recall that in his TV presentations a picture of his real-life mom is frequently flashed on the screen, beaming in her rocking chair or divan while her son performs.

Selling sense of power. The fascination Americans show for any product that seems to offer them a personal extension of power has offered a rich field for exploitation by merchandisers. Automobile makers have strained to produce cars with ever-higher horsepower. After psychiatric probing a Midwestern ad agency concluded that a major appeal of buying a shiny new and more powerful car every couple of years is that “it gives him [the buyer] a renewed sense of power and reassures him of his own masculinity, an emotional need which his old car fails to deliver.”

One complication of the power appeal of a powerful new car, the Institute for Motivational Research found, was that the man buying it often feels guilty about indulging himself with power that might be regarded as needless. The buyer needs some rational reassurance for indulging his deep-seated desires. A good solution, the institute decided, was to give the power appeals but stress that all that wonderful surging power would provide “the extra margin of safety in an emergency.” This, an institute official explains, provides “the illusion of rationality” that the buyer needs.

The McCann-Erickson advertising agency made a study for Esso gasoline to discover what motivates consumers, in order more effectively to win new friends for Esso. The agency found there is considerable magic in the word power. After many depth interviews with gasoline buyers the agency perfected an ad strategy that hammered at two words, with all letters capitalized: TOTAL POWER.

Selling a sense of roots. When the Mogen David wine people were seeking some way to add magic to their wine’s sales appeal (while it was still an obscure brand), they turned to motivation research via its ad agency. Psychiatrists and other probers listening to people talk at random about wine found that many related it to old family-centered or festive occasions. Some talked in an almost homesick way about wine and the good old days that went with it. A hard-hitting copy platform was erected based on these homey associations. The campaign tied home and mother into the selling themes. One line was: “The good old days—the home sweet home wine—the wine that grandma used to make.” As a result of these carefully “motivated” slogans, the sales of Mogen David doubled within a year and soon the company was budgeting $2,000,000 just for advertising—the biggest ad campaign in the history of the wine industry.

Selling immortality. Perhaps the most astounding of all the efforts to merchandise hidden needs was that proposed to a conference of Midwestern life-insurance men. The conference invited Edward Weiss, head of Weiss and Geller, to tell members of the assembled North Central Life Advertisers Association (meeting in Omaha in April, 1955) how to put more impact into their messages advertising insurance. In his speech, called “Hidden Attitudes Toward Life Insurance” he reported on a study in depth made by several psychologists. . . .

The heart of his presentation was the findings on selling life insurance to the male, who is the breadwinner in most families and the one whose life is to be insured. Weiss criticized many of the current selling messages as being blind to the realities of this man who usually makes the buying decision. Typically, he demonstrated, current ads either glorified the persistence and helpfulness of the insurance agent or else portrayed the comfortable pattern of life the family had managed to achieve after the breadwinner’s death, thanks to the insurance. Both approaches, said Mr. Weiss, are dead wrong. In a few cases, he conceded, the breadwinner may be praised for his foresight, but still he is always depicted as someone now dead and gone.

One of the real appeals of life insurance to a man, his probers found, is that it assures the buyer of “the prospect of immortality through the perpetuation of his influence for it is not the fact of his own physical death that is inconceivable; it is the prospect of his obliteration.” The man can’t stand the thought of obliteration. Weiss reported that when men talked at the conscious and more formal level about insurance they talked of their great desire to protect their loved ones in case of any “eventuality.” In this their desire for immortality was plain enough. But Weiss said
there was strong evidence that this socially commendable acceptance of responsibility was not always the real and main desire of the prospective customer. Weiss said it appeared to be true for many men but not all. "In many instances," he went on, "our projective tests revealed the respondent's fierce desire to achieve immortality in order to control his family after death. These men obtain insurance against obliteration through the knowledge that they will continue to dominate their families; to control the family standard of living, and to guide the education of their children long after they are gone."

Questions

1. What is the significance of Packard's choice for the title of his book? What concerns Packard about the marketing on which he reports?
2. How did the marketing studies reported by Packard lead businesses to reorient advertising and even to modify products?
3. Do you see evidence of marketing strategies being employed on behalf of political candidates and positions in political debates?