

THE WOMAN MARKET

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Liberation News Service

Women may serve a variety of functions in our society, but a function all women serve is that of a domestic market.

And they serve it faithfully, almost eagerly, it would seem.

US and Canadian women, perhaps more than any others in the world, must fulfill their role as heavy consumers. If they don't, their whole identity — an identity created primarily by business and advertising will be shattered.

When a woman reads in her favorite women's magazine that: "unfortunately, the trickiest deodorant problem a girl has isn't under her pretty little arms," she starts to worry. Is my vaginal area ("the most girl part of you," the ad gurgles) giving off offensive odors? she wonders.

"Could you be the last woman to be using just ONE deodorant?" an ad for another vaginal deodorant queries.

She may not smell all that bad, but just to make sure, she picks up a container of FDS (Feminine deodorant spray) and Alberto-Culver Co. scores another point.

Alberto-Culver and other companies in the woman market understand the woman in our society. They know she's insecure, often unhappy with the narrow perimeters of her life, desperate in her efforts to catch and/or keep a man.

So the company anticipates a female insecurity that can be turned into a need, and creates a product to fulfill that newly-discovered need. If the product is successful, the company's profits increase, if not, there's always another "need."

Basically, there are two problems with corporate North America's approach to women — which can apply to its approach to all people.

First, business can hold no real concern for women as human beings. It must objectify all women as a "market" in order to increase growth and profits. Business is concerned only with the ways in which it can get women to buy. Whether the products sold are of any real use, or meet real needs, is unimportant.

Second, business creates excessive waste of resources, particularly through products made for women. People do not need 50 different kinds of soap to choose among, or 100 different types of lipstick. But companies continue to produce dozens of variations on the same useless themes, and thus divert energy, resources and money from more productive human goals.

In 1968, for instance, \$3.1-billion was spent on U.S. television advertising, twice the amount spent on the U.S. poverty program in the same year.

The advanced technological era that we have recently entered should make for greater freedom for us.

But technology has generally granted the opposite effect, and women in the society are the most alienated from and enslaved by it. As a group, women have little control over production and planning. They relate to the technological society primarily as a consumer market.

Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with consumption. But in this society, women are forced to consume large quantities of goods and services they really don't need or want.

Advertising is the mouthpiece for the companies that create products for the woman market.

On a very basic level, the advertising and editorial content of women's magazines like McCall's, Seventeen, Cosmopolitan and Mademoiselle are insults to women as human beings. So are the women's sections in newspapers and daytime TV.

Let's look at some of these insults and the ways in which they are used to keep women in their place as a domestic market.

Teenage girls are a market-in-training.

The people who run Seventeen magazine, the slick, top-selling teenage publication, understand the importance of the youth market.

An ad in The New York Times, June 18, 1969, reads:

"The Seventeen award to American industry for its investment in the country's young women under 20.

"Once again advertisers have demonstrated their realization that youth sets the pace.

"And once again Seventeen, their magazine, has broken all publishing records for a single issue.

"This August is a new high, carrying 357 advertising pages, 245 in 4/colour . . .

"Seventeen is the biggest circulation magazine in the young women's field — for 16 consecutive years, it has carried more advertising than any other woman's monthly magazine.

That's the strength of Seventeen."

The "strength of Seventeen" is not that it informs or educates young women, but that it sells advertisers' products.

The ad congratulates industry for "investing" in these young women, much as if industry were investing in some kind of new automobile or hairspray.

The focus of the advertising and editorial in Seventeen is fashion — clothes and cosmetics.

The projected image is young, super-slim, tall, carefully made-up to look "natural", tastefully (and not inexpensive-

ly) dressed and (despite an occasional anglo-looking black model) white. The impossible teenager.

And the youth market booms.

Young girls move into young womanhood with a number of insecurities, mostly about sex and boys.

Seventeen and the youth marketers have a beautiful answer. It lies in the right kind of clothes, and makeup. You "pamper" your skin, "cultivate the flowery look that becomes you," and "highlight your hair, especially if it's brown on the shady side." (Seventeen, June, 1969.)

A young woman's buying habits and personality develop side-by-side Corporate North America insures that the two will not be separated. What she wears and what she puts on her face become as important to her as what she studies in school and how she relates to other people.

If the advertisers play it right, a girl will no more abandon her Revlon blusher or her Clairol "Born Blonde" than she would abandon her fondest dreams.

And industry can even help formulate her dreams for her: Wallace Sterling, DeBeers Diamonds, Lenox china, Springmaid linen. The make-up, the clothes, the diets, the hair pieces and hair-colorings for an individual girl all point to one goal — to catch and keep a man. This type-casting of women is so obvious in the women's magazines that it never has to be made explicit.

As the young female consumer grows so does her spending power. Industry summons its resources to meet her new "needs".

Whether she's going to college or working in an office, she is told that she must maintain, even amplify the image created for her as a teenager.

Her magazines are Glamour, Mademoiselle and Cosmopolitan, especially if she's white and middle-class.

Glamour calls her "the breakaway girl," independent, energetic, strongwilled and, of course, chic. The breakaway girl is an important market, Glamour tells advertisers.

In fact, she has broken away from nothing. She may not rush out of high school directly into marriage, but she still fits herself into whatever image industry creates for her in a given year.

A fashion article in the June issue of Mademoiselle begins: "During the big jump from High School grad to free-wheeling college frosh, the look changes, adapts, chameleon-like, to the college spirit. Not only clothes — hair and faces too."

Mademoiselle tells her she's "freewheeling," so she can flatter herself that she's independent while being told what she must wear to college.

With Glamour and Mademoiselle hitting the college market, Cosmopolitan, perhaps the closest thing to the