

Candid commercialization

Sexual liberation?

With *Glamour* and *Mademoiselle* hitting the college market, *Cosmopolitan*, perhaps the closest thing to the girls' version of *Playboy*, confronts the working girl.

The magazine's editorial policies and advertisers use the image of the sexually-liberated young woman to sell products.

American women are far from sexually liberated, a fact that publications like *Cosmopolitan* effectively betray. For instance, the lead article in the July *Cosmopolitan* is "39 Men Tell a Nice Girl Like You What Turns Them On." Another article discusses the best tactics to use in seducing married men. The magazine never talks about genuine love among human beings.

Sex is just another sales gimmick. The "breakaway girl" provides an excellent market, but she herself is a product, packaged and sold with the help of industry and advertising, to the man of her choice.

Marriages mean good business. Every new household is a new consumption unit, TV Guide indicates in a New York Times ad, Nov. 6, 1968.

"Nothing makes markets like marriage. There's setting up the house, and future business in raising a family. All together it's big business, appliances and house furnishing to bigger cars."

As a middle-class housewife, a woman is a ready market not only for the beauty products she has grown accustomed to wanting, but for myriad household soaps, cleansers and appliances.

Her new image is that pretty, efficient homemaker, lovingly choosing her family's bathroom tissue and toilet bowl cleanser.

And if she becomes hassled by the routine of meals-dishes-laundry, business offers her headache remedies and time-saving cleaners to ease the situation.

The more hassled she becomes, the more she demands a life beyond the home, the more receptive a market she is.

A restricted world

"Why is it never said that the really crucial function, the really important role that women serve as housewives is to buy more things for the house?" writes Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*.

"In all the talk of femininity and woman's role one forgets that the real business of America is business. Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the under-used, nameless-yearning, energy-to-get-rid-of state of being housewives."

Since as a homemaker the American housewife can have no control over the world outside her home, she is effectively cut off from the rest of society, particularly by the media.

Her world is the home. Her magazines—like *McCall's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Day*, *Redbook*, and *Good Housekeeping*—talk almost exclusively about children, beauty, food and housekeeping.

The July issue of *McCall's* for instance, includes articles on California and New Orleans patios: Beauty: The Sun Catchers, Menus for the Family Reunion, A New Life, A New Love; Audrey Hepburn at 40; The Case Against Little League Mothers and the Faith of Mamie Eisenhower. Only one article—The Revolt of the Young Priests—

breaks through the perimeters of the woman's world.

Television is much the same, with daytime TV—prime viewing time for housewives—taken up with inane quiz shows and soap operas.

In 1967, for instance, during the Fulbright hearings on the Vietnam war, CBS made a rather major decision about housewives.

"Fred Friendly, who was working with the News Division at CBS at the time, quit over the decision," writes Alice Embree, in an article for a yet unpublished book on women. "CBS broadcast an I Love Lucy rerun instead of the Senate hearings—not because the rerun was part of television folklore, but because the commercial surrounding it involved money.

"Friendly reports in his book, *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control*, that one of the unpublished reasons for the CBS decision was the fact that housewives, not opinion leaders, were tuned in at the hour, and housewives weren't interested in Vietnam."

Creative housekeeping?

The daily work of the American housewife is generally boring and repetitive—and certainly doesn't require much thought. Business is aware of this. But rather than trying to alleviate her work so she is free to do other things, corporations in the woman market bind her even more by creating new household problems and then new products to "solve" those problems.

All people desire creative forms of self-expression, and business knows housewives can be convinced that their home-making tasks are creative.

As a motivational research expert put it:

"In a free enterprise economy, we have to develop a need for new products.

"And to do that we have to liberate women to desire new products. We help them rediscover that homemaking is more creative than to compete with men. This can be manipulated. We sell them what they ought to want, speed up the unconscious, move it along."

So housewives are told, of course, your work is meaningful and important. Why, mother is important to the family. She is the protector—she protects her family from germs by using Lysol spray disinfectant and by cleaning the toilet bowl regularly with Sani-Flush. Of course, her life has meaning. She keeps her family healthy by feeding them "Wonder Bread to make the most of their wonder years."

Industry sells to anyone

Although most advertising is aimed at the white, middle-to-upper-middle income American, industry will sell to anyone, rich or poor, black or white, as long as she pays the price.

So we have scenes like the one we observed on a New York subway: a poor Puerto Rican woman, with children squirming around her, reading the latest issue of *Vogue* magazine.

We have worked with young girls from poor families, often of racial or ethnic minorities, who read *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*. They learn that the way a woman makes it is by looking like the models in the ads. And they spend large parts of their salaries on clothes, cosmetics (which they apply too generously) and synthetic hair pieces that fool no one.

Or if a woman simply can't afford all the regalia of success—she may see herself as a failure as a woman, as inferior to the glamorous magazine creatures who swish around in long scarves, go on high protein diets or decorate their living rooms in Italian provincial.

An excerpt from *Forbes Magazine*, April 15, 1968, puts the whole crass process on the line: "One Harvard grad recalls his on-campus interview with a P&G (Procter and Gamble) recruiter several years back. 'We sell products that aren't much different from anyone else's', the recruiter told him. 'We sell them because someone will buy them, not because they are socially good. If we could put shit in a box and the customer would buy it, we'd sell it.'"

The intent of advertising

And, an ad for the Magazine Publishers' Federation run in *Advertising Age*, April 21, 1969, helps clarify the intent of advertising:

"'But Mother!' (says a Beautiful Blonde modelling a "nude look" fashion) "'Underwear would hide my fashion accessories.'"

"It wasn't long ago that all exposure was indecent. Today it's vogue. Admittedly spunky. But not spurned even in the safe suburbs.

"How did it happen?"

"Magazines.

"Magazines turned legs into a rainbow. Magazines convinced a gal she needed a flutter of fur where plain little eyelashes used to wink.

"Magazines have the power to make a girl forget her waist exists. And the very next year, make her buy a belt for every dress she owns . . .

"And the ladies love it. And beg for more.

"When she gets involved with herself and fashion, in any magazine, she's a captive cover to cover . . ."

When you're a "captive cover to cover," all the talk about "breakaway girls," and happy homemakers with more free time, more money and the powers of femininity sounds pretty irrelevant.

And the "ladies" don't really "love" being captives; they are afraid not to play the game. The roles a woman can hold in American society are so limited that to relinquish her function as consumer (and all that involves) would be very threatening.

So as captives, American women continue to carry a heavy social and economic burden that allows American corporations to expand markets and increase profits.

Woman: a decorated body

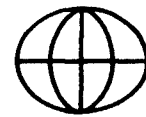
It is useless and absurd to ask corporations to think of women as human beings. Corporations cannot possibly do this.

Alice Embree clarifies the transformation of woman as human being to woman as object:

A woman is supposed to be a body, not a person—a decorated body. If she can successfully manage that transformation, then she can market herself for a man. The commercial creates commercialized people in its own image; and the marketed commodities create people who think of themselves as marketable commodities."

Think about these things the next time you pick up one of your favorite women's magazines. Perhaps your human (and naturally beautiful) face will tingle from a corporate slap.

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