

FEATURE

The Woman Market

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

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

American women, perhaps more than any other women in the world, must fulfill their role as heavy consumer. 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 woman'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.

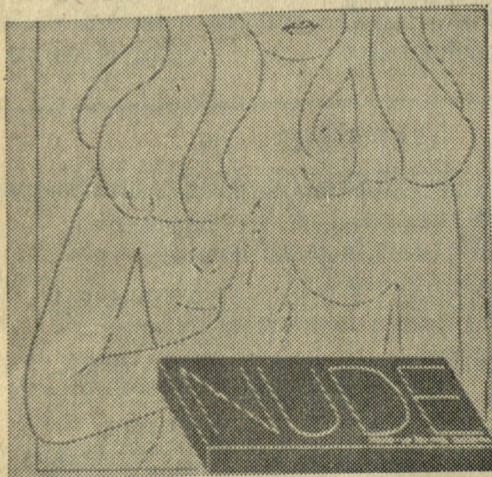
"Could you be the last woman to be using just one deodorant?" an ad for another vaginal deodorant queries.

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 American woman. 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 the newly discovered need. If the product is successful, the company's profits increase. If not, there's always another "need".

"The only advantage of my small bosom is that I can wear see-through fashions without looking obscene! (Next to me, Mia Farrow is buxom!) What cosmetics can I use to make my breasts prettier?"



Kenneth has a brand-new bosom-make-up kit, Nude . . . holds three products: Bosom Highlighter for top slope of breast; Cleavage Delineator to brush between breasts for contouring; and Tip Blush—rosy, transparent liquid—for the nipples. (Kit is \$7.50; products can also be used on other areas of your anatomy.) You could use regular face makeup — foundation, rouge, or blusher—but it might rub off on your clothes—or his.

Basically, there are two problems with corporate 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, American 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 American companies continue

to produce dozens on 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 television advertising, twice the amount spent on the poverty program in the same year.

The advanced technological era that America has recently entered should make for greater freedom for Americans.

But American technology has generally granted the opposite effect, and American women 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 American 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.

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

This August is a new high, carrying 357 advertising pages, 245 in 4-color . . . 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 American 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 inexpensively) dressed and (despite an occasional anglo-looking black model) white. The impossible teenager.

And the youth market booms.

Young American 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 sandy side," (Seventeen, June, 1969).

In America, a young woman's buying habits and personality develop side-by-side. Corporate

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 is never has to be made explicit.

As long as technology is controlled by men pursuing profit and corporate expansion, human beings, especially women, cannot participate except as investments and markets.

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, 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, chameleonlike, 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 girl's 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.