

I. THE CONSUMER ECONOMY AND WOMEN

Corporations operate in order to gain profit. They are aware that women control 75% of the consumer expenditures in America. This is why the female consumer is taught that if she only has the right deodorant, the right eye-shadow, and the proper up-lift, she will undoubtedly catch her prince charming and live happily ever after. In addition, big business is only too happy to sell her the products that its advertising has convinced her are necessary for her "well-being", possessions that every woman knows she must have in order to be "happy". Toward this end, the corporations have us spending our lives trying to make our way up the status ladder, and as a result, the market for consumer goods is selling more and more useless items.

Those items that are still necessary are more and more laden with useless accessories, fringes and decorations, anything that can be used to increase the price. Thousands of virtually identical items ---produced with enormous waste in duplication compete for your attention in supermarkets and department stores under different brand names. To make the system work, billions are spent on advertising to help you pick one identical product over another. Advertising is also used to manipulate you and to create needs that you never had before. This is combined with intentional efforts to reduce the quality of goods, causing products to go out of date quickly and become unfashionable so that you have to buy them over and over again.

All of us have been victimized by this system of consumer manipulation and product misrepresentation growing out of the profit economy. Since it is more profitable to create false needs than to meet the real needs of people--good hospitals, good schools, adequate housing and public transportation--these needs continue to go unmet. The major corporations continue to pollute the air and environment while manufacturing products that we as women are told we must have.

Women are, however, beginning to develop an awareness of how we have been spending our money. We are refusing to be ribbon and be-girdle ourselves to satisfy large corporations. Unfortunately, we

still have to deal with the business world. This chapter hopes to provide some clues to understanding the terminology of the money-maker in order to help you use your financial resources to their best advantage, as well as provide you with some reasonable alternative to spending money to fatten the pocketbooks of those who get rich off our bodies and our lives.



VIRGINIA BLAISDELL

II. Alternatives



~Katye Kollwitz

Only you can determine what material things you need in order to be comfortable. Once you determine what your needs are, it is a good idea to explore possible ways to meet them without having to purchase everything for yourself. One of the most important concepts of the women's movement has been sharing. It is not always necessary for each nuclear unit (family) to be totally self-sufficient. Rather, you may find women near you who would be delighted to work out some mutually beneficial arrangement for sharing things like appliances, clothing, cars etc. Other possibilities include shared child care or even group living, which are discussed in other sections of the manual.

Recycling is also a key to saving money. In case you don't already know about them, you should check out local thrift stores for almost any kind of product. Some carry everything from used (but functional) irons to decent clothing for yourself and your children. They are generally very reasonable as well as having many bargains in good condition. Some carry used furniture, which can be made quite attractive with a little creative reconditioning.

People's repair shops are beginning throughout the city. You can find out about them through checking underground papers and community bulletin boards. Some women are studying plumbing and car repair. You can find out about their skills through the Women's Center. The section on Housing contains some maintenance tips to help you develop some home-repair skills.