Feminist theory first appeared in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 1993 (Hirschman 1993, Bristor and Fischer 1993, Stern 1993). These three articles held in common that a feminist theoretical and methodological orientation would have benefits for research on consumer behavior, but did not focus upon the phenomenon of consumption itself as a site of gender politics. In other venues within consumer behavior, however, such examination did occur. For instance, a biannual ACR conference on gender and consumer behavior, first held in 1991, has become a regular event, stimulating research and resulting in several books and articles, in the marketing literature and beyond (Costa 1994; Stern 1999; Catterall, McLaren, and Stevens, 2000). This literature borrows much from late twentieth century feminist criticism, including a tendency to focus upon the American or western European experiences and a heavy reliance upon Marxist theory. As a result, consumption is often treated as a phenomenon peculiar to postindustrial capitalism—as are many marketing practices, such as advertising. Therefore, in our own literature as in the broader literature of cultural studies, the gender ideologies manifest in material culture are sometimes too easily attributed to the particular economic system of the postindustrial Western world.

Yet gender oppression has occurred under every economic system heretofore devised (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986, Rubin 1975) and, as consumer researchers, we recognize that consumption occurs under all economic and historical circumstances, not just under late twentieth century capitalism. Therefore, to the degree that gender ideology would be manifest in material practice, we should expect to find gendered, politicized consumption under any and all conditions in human historical experience. So, a truly feminist perspective would look to theorize consumption even under Marxist and non-industrial economies, expecting the politics of gender to occur in material culture everywhere. This paper examines the attempts made in the early years of the world’s largest and longest-running Marxist regime to eliminate both gender oppression and consumer desires at the same time.

**THE NEW WOMAN OF THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION**

Before industrialization and the October Revolution that followed, Russia was a farming nation whose population was more than four-fifths rural peasants (Clements 1982). As in the West, women had little status and virtually no political or economic rights. The specific articulations of gender ideology paralleled those in, for instance, the United States: women were the mothers, the nurturers, the church-goers, and the consumers. Their sexual behavior was regulated by an uncompromising double standard. They had little choice but to marry and seldom married their choice. Women were denigrated as less intelligent, less trustworthy, and less rational than men, but more emotional, more acquisitive, and more socially ambitious. Women were valued primarily for their looks, particularly in the upper levels of society; among the peasants, physical strength and stamina could also be a plus. In agricultural work, the women did traditional farm labor; as industrialization burgeoned, they were relegated to gender-specific jobs in factories. Opportunities, especially for education, were reserved for boys. Women, therefore, were by and large illiterate, unskilled, and economically vulnerable, as compared to men. All these ideas, prejudices, and disadvantages were carried into the post-Revolutionary world, just as they were carried through industrialization into modernity in the West.

The last days of the monarchy in Russia were a struggle among factions with different ideas about how the society needed to change. One faction was a group of feminists who, in an alliance with intellectuals, actually won the first stage of the revolution, which occurred in February 1917. However, in the more famous moment of October 1917, the Bolsheviks came to power, displacing their rivals in revolution, including the feminists. The Bolsheviks adamantly insisted that the path of freedom for women laid through alliance with the workers. They were scrupulous in avoiding any notion that might suggest women organize in their own behalf or that women’s oppression was peculiarly their own. Therefore, their ideology was explicitly anti-feminist in the sense that we now use that term. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did attempt to institute a number of reforms that were similar to those advocated by feminists in the West.

In the new order proposed by the Bolsheviks, women were to be the equals of men in both the workplace and the political arena. The revolutionaries saw that the household duties and sexual vulnerability of women hindered them from advancing to this role. So, they brought about a number of changes in law and municipal management that were intended to redress the imbalance. Communal housing, for instance, was supposed to allow for the collective raising of children and the sharing of homemaking duties, thus freeing women to work and attend Party meetings. Birth control was made available, abortion made legal, and divorce made easy (Fuqua 1996). These legal and infrastructural changes were not enough, however, to change centuries of gender enculturation. The problem had to be addressed on the ideological front as well.

A cadre of Bolsheviks was assigned to “reeducate” the female peasantry. Called Zhenotdel—in English, the “Women’s Section”—this group was formed entirely of highly-educated middle and upper class women. The Zhenotdel membership was, therefore, substantially different from the typical Russian woman, much as early feminists in the United States and Great Britain were better educated and more privileged than the average woman in those countries. The women of Zhenotdel undertook to change the beliefs and practices of their countrywomen through a variety of means. Various events were planned and communiqués issued. Mechanisms devised to convert the female population to the thinking of the rulers are hauntingly similar to those used in capitalist countries, particularly the publication of women’s magazines (Tolstikova, 2000). For instance, Zhenotdel published *Rabotnitsa* (translates as “Woman Worker”), a vehicle that was, in many ways, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* of Soviet culture. *Rabotnitsa* became the leading women’s magazine in Russia and was published continuously during Soviet rule. Every page of it was controlled by the Party, first by Zhenotdel and then, when Stalin eliminated the “Women’s Section,” by the leaders of the Party themselves. (Over the course of the Soviet regime, control of the press was always centralized within the top levels of the Party and tightly managed.) Additional mechanisms included special events, like International Women’s Day, and other, less popular magazines, such as *Krestianka* (“Peasant Woman”) and *Kommunistka* (“Communist Woman”). Eventu-
ally, the Soviets would even publish a fashion magazine aimed at the "correct" education of women.

Using this highly controlled and fully integrated ideological apparatus, the Communist Party of the early Soviet Union tried to compel its citizens to give up the notions of gender they had held for centuries. Always, however, the position was pointedly Marxist, rather than feminist. For instance, in the first issue of Rabotnitsa (1914), a story called "Nataasha’s Dreams" appears. It tells of a woman worker fired right before the New Year holiday. Depressed, Natasha went home, took a nap, and had three dreams. The first two dreams presented her with solutions to her real life problems, including marriage. On awakening each time, she realized that her life would be a misery under the conditions of the dream. With the third dream, however, Natasha learned that happiness was really possible if only she would join her brothers and sisters who struggled for the people’s equality.

The integration of the press under the guidance of the Central Party allowed a kind of ideological "cross-ruffing." For example, another early short story, "A Newspaper Girl!" (No. 4, April 19, 1914) told about a young woman who lost her husband and had to sell commercial newspapers to support herself. She met a boy who convinced her to read and sell Pravda instead. It changed her life: even her dark and cold environment became sunny and warm. Suddenly, she had a purpose. Thus, much as feminists in the West sometimes argue that the ideology of capitalism is seamless and unavoidable in its cultural artifacts, we find a relentless continuity in the works of the Soviet regime.

Capitalist imagery is given almost magical power by Western feminists. Its alleged tendency to distort reality, to heroize a narrow set of ideals, to psychologically manipulate viewers has been criticized a great length, particularly where advertising is concerned. Yet Soviet art has been similarly criticized. From Socialist Realism to Constructivism, the styles approved by the regime were used to propagandize its policies, to glamorize its view of daily life, and to present its ideals of women (Bonnell 1991, Groys 1990). In short, the images of the Bolsheviks were consciously used as a tool in "forming the psychology of the New Soviet person" (Groys 1990, p. 139). Images of women were employed in the same unabashed way that fiction was used to propagandize for the regime. For instance, the cover of the 1923 Rabotnitsa looks much like a Soviet poster: the image of a woman worker unfurling a protective banner over the countryside (Figure 1).

This grand image of a working woman is one of many manifestations of the Revolutionary ideal woman. It its first days, one of Zhenotdel’s main goals was the creation of the "New Woman." Like the New Woman of the American feminists of the same period, this new ideal was to be active and independent, transformed into a fully-functioning, productive person (Clements 1992). In the Soviet version, however, the identification with the proletariat revolution was an essential element. This tough equal of men was even expected to look like a soldier of revolution. Usually young and militant, she was often dressed in a leather army jacket and pants, topped by a big furry hat and a Browning slung on her hip (Stites 1978). This suspicious narrowed eyes of the state militia member in Figure 2 epitomizes the type—she appeared in Rabotnitsa in 1924. Another frequent incarnation is that of the dedicated worker, like the one on the cover of the August 1924 (Figure 3).

The desired change in gender relations was often articulated in material terms through the New Woman. As a member of the ideal revolutionary force, the New Woman was expected to be a kind of nomad, a person whose belongings could fit into a suitcase, whose room was furnished like a monk’s (Boym 1996). All personal life was subjugated to the needs of the regime. Beauty, for instance, was defined by Zhenotdel by a paraphrase from Lenin as “everything that complies with the interests of proletariat struggling for socialism" (December 1927, p. 15). Rabotnitsa emphasized that good looks came from physical fitness and should not be enhanced with "unnatural" means like jewelry and cosmetics. Yet the New Woman, like the supermodel of the postmodern capitalism, was typically quite thin. Her slenderness was supposed to be a strike against the overeating that characterized the bourgeoisie, but Naiman comments that the New Woman ideal promoted anorexia (much like Western consumer culture today) (1999).

Many people, whether revolutionaries or not, were getting thin under the Bolsheviks. The first few years of the new regime were marked by famine, general economic scarcity, political instability, and war. The regime showed remarkable insensitivity to its starving citizenry, choosing to feed itself by sending militia into the countryside and forcing peasants to give up grain at gunpoint. Many peasants resisted and some were shot. The government tried to solve shortages by centralizing distribution of consumer goods to the working population. Rationing was rigid—citizens attempting to get more food were summarily executed. Almost all industries were nationalized and private trade was declared illegal (Nove 1992). Economic hardships were, therefore, accompanied by an extreme concentration of political authority and the violent crush of daily life.

From its brutal first years, the Soviet regime was quite unsympathetic to the problem of providing goods to ordinary folks. Throughout the life of the Soviet government, centralized economic plans would focus primarily on heavy industry and defense production, rather than consumer goods. As a result, consumer choice was always extremely limited, even in times (such as the late Stalin years and the Kruschev reign) when the government at least gave lip service to providing more material comforts for its citizens. Furthermore, the consumer information and distribution systems that became so sophisticated in the West were never developed in Soviet Russia. Consequently, supply was always unstable and goods procurement always problematic for the ordinary family, particularly the women.

Some historians focusing of the experience of Russian women (Clements 1982, 1992, 1997; Gorsuch 1992, 1996; Koenker 1995; Fuqua 1996; Sites 1978, Wood 1997), argue that the inattention to consumer goods in the early years of the Party was one reason that women did not achieve the goals of equality advocated by the Bolsheviks. While middle class housewives in the capitalist countries were able to take advantage of the labor-saving devices of consumer culture to work for women’s rights (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986), Russian women found that their household duties only became more onerous under the Bolsheviks. The focus on heavy industry and defense production meant than none of the labor-saving inventions brought to women in the West during this period made their appearance in Russia. Instead, women there continued to produce clothing and prepare food according to labor-intensive methods that had kept them at home for centuries. Shortages and general economic instability meant that women, as the primary consumers, had to spend more time procuring goods for their families than before and had to pay more attention to budget-stretching and creative solutions typical of women in times of scarcity. Far from being liberated to participate in Party politics, women had to spend more time finding food and other provisions for their families than they had before.

The insensitivity of the regime to the economic problems of its citizenry meant that little aid was available from the state, throwing women back into patterns of familial dependence. Thus, family ties in some ways actually strengthened under a regime determined to
loosen the effect of kinship on women. Some historians argue that a resurgence of patriarchal behavior during this period was a way of enforcing stability on a society increasingly characterized by chaos (Clements 1982). And, as a practical matter, a conservative reaction among men seems to have resulted in increased demands that daughters, as well as wives and mothers, stay home to attend to family life rather than go to political meetings. At the grassroots level, women who did manage to attend Party meetings were often relegated to housekeeping duties (making Revolutionary decorations, sweeping the floors) anyway.

Not all women were in equally bad shape. A system of privileges that would persist throughout the life of the Soviet Union took root in the first years of famine and civil war. Initially, the Party rationalized that the top echelon serving the needs of the Party (and,
presumably, the people) had to be supplied with basic goods so that they would not waste valuable time searching for necessities. Thus, special rations were accorded to members and their families. Bolshevik women therefore "enjoyed material benefits—the best food, clothes, housing, and transportation available" (Clements 1982: 234). Thus, the distance between Zhenotdel and the average Russian female grew wider, contributing to the sense of separation between the inner Party and the populace, rather than furthering a feeling of solidarity.

The history of women in Russia—as the history of women everywhere—is also a history of everyday life. The absence of attention paid by the ruling regime to the needs of everyday life—for food, for clothing, for acceptable shelter—fell most heavily on women, forcing them to use most of their energies to provide basic necessities for themselves and their families. In the end, their encumbrance by the needs of the home were no less than in the United States—and their participation in the political system no more. Ultimately, the agenda of political equality was undermined at least in part by the government's failure to recognize women as the consumers of the society. This, of course, is a situation directly counter to that of the United States, in which the attempts of corporations to "turn women into consumers" has repeatedly been cited as a cause for their oppression (for instance, Garvey 1996, McCracken 1993, Scanlon 1995). Yet the Soviet pattern demonstrates the opposite effect—as well as the continued oppression of women in a supposedly non-consumer society.

**NEP AND THE NEW BYT**

As central to Russian culture as the oppositions of gender is the binary between the material and spiritual. From folklore to propa-
ganda, the dangers of the material and the banality of everyday life, or "byt," are contrasted to the virtues of the spirit and the world of the mind, or "bytie" (Boym 1996). The word "byt" is so heavily fringed with distinctively Russian connotations and cultural associations that many scholars have claimed it cannot be translated into English, much as they also say that the word "privacy" cannot be translated from English into Russian (ibid). For our purposes the contrast is instructive: in the English-speaking world and many other cultures, the "private sphere" of home, women, and consumption was less valued in Russia than the "public sphere" of politics, men, and production (see Costa 1994). Because of its location in the private sphere, the word "byt" is associated with family life and is a feminine term. And it is at the cross-section of privacy, gender, and every day life that the new Communist ideology of consumption was built.

Given the inattention to consumption needs and the negative effects of material shortages on the political agenda in the early years, it is interesting that the next few decades in Soviet history are marked by an obsession with the politics of material culture. Succumbing to the dissatisfactions of the populace, the Party instituted a new economic strategy in 1921. Initiated by Lenin, the "New Economic Policy" (or "NEP") was intended to restore the state economy, to ease pressure on the peasants, and to allow the overstrained population a break from rationing and shortages, primarily by allowing the reinstatement of private production and trade (Ball 1991). Though touted as a softer transition to a communist utopia, many "true revolutionaries" saw in the NEP a dangerous opportunity for backsliding into capitalism and its "bourgeois" preoccupation with material comforts. Such interest in material goods was seen by the revolutionary radicals as a contradiction of Bolshevsk values. In 1922 Alexander Kollontai, a famous woman Bolshevik, wrote an article called "The New Threat" against the NEP. Her largest concern was that NEP were forcing out women from the productive sphere back to the home which would again make her dependent on men, a "doll-parasite." When such a woman became a "NEPmanka"—the wife or a mistress of an entrepreneur made newly rich by NEP—she became a symbol of his wealth, displaying too high heels, too red lips, and too much fur bought with "ill-gotten income" (Kollontai cited in Wood 1997: 176-177).

Party hard-liners rushed to stigmatize specific consumption behaviors as frivolous, individualistic, and petit-bourgeois. Beginning in the early 1920s, therefore, Party communications witnessed the emergence of an elaborate ideology of goods, which came to be known as the campaign for the "new byt." Interestingly, the word "byt," though colloquial and literary use before 1900 appears in no dictionaries published prior to the Revolution of 1917. By 1927, however, this one entry took up six full pages in the Soviet Encyclopedia. The growth in the relative importance of the concept in the minds of the keepers of information reflects the ideological initiative.

In its expanded usage, "byt" implicitly recognizes the broader cultural, governmental, and ideological dimensions of daily life. The term, for instance, was often used in Russian anthropological writing to refer to the everyday culture of other populations and appears in set phrases like "byt and customs" or "byt and culture." This word thus refers generally to the way things are done, to the assumptions of culture as they are manifest in practice. It is "byt" that gives life in a certain place its particular organization and character. Though "byt" refers specifically to the arena of private affairs, those supposedly not regulated by the state, it also refers to the infrastructure that daily routines support. It is, therefore, a word that implicitly recognizes the separation between private and public as illusion. Further, the usage of "byt" covers daily social interactions, including shopping, interpersonal messages, and, importantly for our purposes, communications with the state ( Fitzpatrick 1999).

Thus, "byt" is also a word that recognizes the reach of material culture into ideology.

The campaign for the new byt that began in the 1920s shows the Soviet government had come to see that a key to the success of its social reforms and ideological initiatives was to change the material objects and practical routines that embody and act out—in every culture—a society's politics. Through the Lenin and, especially, the Stalin years, the politics of object ownership would become exquisitely politicized. Over the next three decades, the Party's vigilance in the politics of everyday objects would reach levels that are truly absurd: material symbols of decadence or capitalism or counterrevolutionary thought were vigorously erased from paintings, removed from homes, and used as evidence against enemies of the state. The very presence of simple objects like a rubber plant or a porcelain elephant could be mute testimony to the presumed Western sympathy, counterrevolutionary politics, even fleeting doubt of the owner. Doubt or dissidence thus expressed could result in suspicion and, ultimately, arrest and death. In fact, it was the concept of the new byt that put down the basis for the Soviet secret police house searches that became a daily terror under Stalin—the ultimate breakdown between public and private. Thus, from being disavowed by the early Bolsheviks to being the blunting instrument of Stalin's police, the ideology of consumption went from periphery to center stage. In the process, controlling the habits of byt became the practical edge of Marxist theory.

Since "byt" was associated with the private sphere (and thus with women), the official campaign for the new byt was undertaken by Zhenotdel. There were several areas pinpointed for combating the bourgeois influence of "domestic trash": (1) family (since the private familial sphere was seen as a spontaneous generator of middle-class values, as well as a space that preserved religion), (2) domestic realm (elimination of housework; widespread attraction of women into the labor force) and (3) further extension of the "New Woman." As the creators of daily life, women were key to the success of the new byt. Nevertheless, women were also seen by the Bolsheviks as the most vulnerable to succumbing to the temptations of NEP.

The iconography of the new byt was thought out to the last detail—down to the buttons on one's clothing some have said. But probably the most lasting, insidious, and representative of the new byt initiatives was communal housing. As a microcosm of the socialist city, the "house-commune" was "not just a retreat for the individual, a place marked by personal traces and memories; rather, it was a public and therefore ideologically charged site" (Boym 1997: 163). The plan for communal housing, initiated by Lenin, implied a different kind of person, someone not entitled to a room or private space, but to a certain square footage. As a result, a large home would be carved up "mathematically and bureaucratically, as if it were not a "living" space, a real home once inhabited by real people, but some topological abstraction. As a result, countless apartments in major cities were partitioned in the most bizarre manner, creating unlivable spaces, long winding corridors, back entrances, and labyrinthine interior yards" (ibid: 168). The destroyed sense of privacy was pathetically reconstructed by people who hung doorbells outside their rooms or strung up a sheet so that they might have sex in private. The fulfillment of the communal housing ideology was the kitchen. Communal kitchens were supposed to free women from the toils of cooking for their families. Instead, kitchens became the site of jealous guarding of utensils, foodstuffs, and fuel, as well as bickering and criticism.

Historians and social scientists studying life under the Soviets blame communal housing for widespread disfunctions in Soviet life ranging from sexual impotence to alcoholism to deep-seated resentments and irrational fear of embarrassment. On women particu-
The pages of Rabotnitsa promoted Party values in grimly austere consumer advice columns. Under the regular heading “For the help of a working woman,” there could be found instructions on how to build a device from the wooden planks that allows to cook food without somebody being present: “A cold box for the preparation of food” (January 1924). On the same page, a reader could find advice aimed at the consumption of found objects: on cleaning spots out of old fabric, as well as instructions how to make a crib out of a barrel. A few months later, there were instructions on how to make toys from refuse (No. 4, February 1924). Though such advice may appear appealingly similar to the “voluntary simplicity” of contemporary culture, it must be remembered that the real fact of continued shortages is reflected here—in actual terms, there was little that was voluntary about such “simplicity.”

Though the ideal New Woman promoted by the Party had rejected traditional values in the concrete forms of consumption—pretty dresses, cozy apartments, gramophones (Naiman 1993), real women were still seen as prone to domesticity, “female” interests, and petty values. And, indeed, in her study of the print shop culture of the 1920s, Diane Koenker finds that young working women greatly cared about dressing well and dancing; they plucked their eyebrows, used cosmetics, and dyed their hair (1995). Young party activists working in a factory of the same period reported cases of several young women workers who literally starved because they spent all their wages on silk stockings, make-up, manicures, fashionable low-cut dresses and narrow-toed shoes (Gorsuch 1992).

Rabotnitsa responded to the conflict between ideology and reality by propagandizing stories of women workers who made different choices, such as one group who decided never again use facial powder and cosmetics (No. 2, January 1927: 13). In October 1924, E. Kantorovich reported on a retreat for members of the trade union in the Soviet Republic of Belorussia. Women there made a group decision to get rid of their jewelry, even wedding rings. Because earrings were only for bourgeois women and barbarians, a modestly dressed office worker proudly took off her single decoration—small white earrings. “This was the power of the new thinking, a new daily life,” crowed the author.(25).

Despite their firm goal of resisting the imagery of capitalism and femininity, Party publications often contradicted their own messages. Dress styles similar to the infamous “flapper” of capitalist culture were fashionable among NEPmen—patterns were presented by the April 1926 Rabotnitsa. The dresses, with their typical lowered waistlines, are also accessorized with cloche hats and pointed shoes. Their intricately patterned fabrics, decorated with ruffles and bows are the height of the feminine (Figure 4). In an ad appearing in Rabotnitsa in July 1927 a dark, smiling beauty announced that “There is no gray hair anymore” and listed products that achieve this condition: natural hair dyes Henna and Basma (Figure 5). Despite the editorial attacks on cosmetics, ads for the State Fats Trust appeared on the pages of Rabotnitsa. Because this government agency was responsible for the production of cosmetics and soaps, the ads tout powder boxes, perfumes, and cosmetics, in addition to fine toilet soaps—and the imagery is highly stylized (Figure 6). For women who were not related to NEPmen or members of the Party, products such as these were often inaccessible. Furthermore, though the regime forbade certain goods, over time it had its own favorites (particularly for the elite), the display of which spoke of the owner’s political correctness—pink lampshades in the Stalin years, for instance. During periods when competition with the West put pressure on the Soviets to develop consumer culture—as in the Kruschev era—the machine flipped around to focus on encouraging women to decorate their homes and covet appliances. The approved status of such goods were announced, along with the gender politics of the moment, in the women’s magazines published by the Party.

The gender ideology, like the preferred byt, also shows contradictions. In Stalin’s time, for instance, there is a strong emphasis on women workers, just as in the early years of the Bolsheviks; however, we also see a marked shift of emphasis toward family and maternity. Policy changes of the day show the same shift: birth control and marital policies of the Bolshevik period were abruptly reversed in the 1930s. As in the late teens, the facts behind the ideological shift were brutal: twenty million men were killed in the purges and wars that occurred under Stalin’s rule. Yet the Soviet leader clung to his strategy of winning global dominance through heavy industry. So, to keep up industrial productivity, women were encouraged to take factory jobs. At the same time, however, the need to replenish the decimated population caused the Party also to emphasize the traditional “feminine” side—motherhood, family, home-making. Thus, in a situation not dissimilar to the “superwoman” role criticized by late 20th century feminists, the Russian woman under Stalin found herself the head of the household, the major breadwinner (under great pressure to increase productivity), and the primary caregiver and home-maker. Stalin himself had a very low opinion of women and the return to domesticity evident in the propaganda of the time reflects this personal prejudice as well.

Western feminists often seem to have adopted the same kind of male-oriented “production” versus “consumption” values in their tendency to blindly valorize increased labor participation as a victory for women. One of the few statistics that suggests feminist success under the Soviet regime is that nearly half of the female population was employed by mid-century. Such “gains” occurred at great physical and emotional cost to Russian women—and developed in the shadow of massive murderousness. All the while, the status of women remained chained to the traditional gender roles the Soviets had inherited from the rural economy that preceded them. The problematic nature of the situation for women was justified, glamorized, glossed over, and generally “mystified” by the ideological apparatus of the Party, especially the women’s magazines. Therefore, the women’s magazines show the same kinds of “contradictions” feminists have found in Western ideological artifacts. And, in this case, the explanation also consistently lies in the political agenda of the ruling elite.

CONCLUSION

As a concept that bridges everyday life, social organization, and ideology, byt allows us to see the seamlessness between politics and consumption, however they are organized. It is a commonplace in cultural criticism to note that the growth of the Western-style capitalist economies depended upon consumption and, particularly, the enculturation of women to the role of consumers. But since, as we have noted, consumption occurs in all human societies, it is probably more precise to say that the growth of capitalist economies depended upon certain styles of consumption, certain roles for consumers, and certain systems for disseminating consumer goods and cultural information about them. Thus, the emergence of certain phenomena in the early twentieth century, such as color-coordinating objects and ensemble purchases led to increasing levels of consumption. In other words, the growth of capitalism depended on a certain byt.
The growth of the Soviet state also depended upon certain styles, certain roles, and certain systems of consumption. Because the Party’s agenda focused on heavy industry and military development instead of consumer goods, however, the prevailing ideology had to devalue private purchase in order to minimize the growth of consumption, rather than maximize it as in the West. Throughout the life of the Soviet regime, the supply of consumer goods remained relatively constrained and the choices limited. Therefore, the systems for consumption were considerably more rigid and consumer behaviors more regimented than in the West. Political imperatives were expressed in ideological messages that encouraged or discouraged certain byt. The Communist ideology that preached against individualistic consumption, indulgence in luxury, and the like was clearly attempting to control consumer desire in order that the production goals of the state could proceed unimpeded. And, though the notion of the New Woman has many parallels to the same figure in Western feminism, Russian feminists today suggest that the ideals of the Bolsheviks did not really promote freedom for women, but instead promoted Party politics: “For the majority of women, the ‘liberation’ offered by zhenodely was not freedom, but political mobilization which created additional burdens in a realm where women had little authority” (Fuqua 1996, p. 48). However, because there were, even under this totalitarian government, resistance and desire among the populace, there were times when it was more politic to play to the need for private goods. And there were, even among the Soviets, “liberalizing” forces that sometimes resulted in a temporary softening of the stance. Further, there were times in which the state needed to stimulate demand for certain classes of goods. And, as in other forms of government, provisions were made that allowed elites to circumvent the official system, resulting in obvious consumption inequalities. Thus, there are, just as in capitalist systems, contradictions in the artifacts—magazines, advertisements, film, and the like—that carry the ideology. The ideals for women disseminated through the regime’s ideology machine were, in many ways, as demeaning as any the American soaps and women’s magazines offered and were no less obviously hitched to the agendas of those in power.

Without exception, this literature puts the blame on capitalism’s consumer culture, as if consumption ideology could not serve a different, but equally gendered, economic system.
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