Born to Be Mild?: Women in a Male Consumption Domain

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Few products have a more powerfully masculine image than that of the Harley-Davidson Motorcycle. Consistent with the bike's masculine image, its riders (the Harley-Davidson consumer subculture), clad in black leather and adorned with tattoos, visibly manifest such values as brotherhood, machismo, and the search for uninhibited freedom (Schouten and McAlexander, 1992). In this male culture, a woman's position is usually on the back seat of the bike (Hopper and Moore, 1990). However, Harley-Davidson counts among its customers a small, but significant and growing number of women riders. By purchasing and riding Harleys, these women have ventured into a male consumption domain. Through data collected as part of Harley-Davidson Motor Company's annual new customer survey and informed by field work that has spanned nearly three years, this presentation will examine how the interests, preferences, and other consumer behaviors of women bikers compare to those of their male counterparts. While interesting for its own sake, this comparison contributes more broadly to our understanding of gender and consumer behavior.