Gender Differences in Ritualistic Consumption

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In recent years, the study of "consumption rituals" (Rook, 1985) has gained a wide following within the consumer behavior discipline. Researchers have examined the consumption that occurs during Thanksgiving (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), Christmas (Sherry and McGrath, 1989; Otnes, Lowrey and Kim, 1993), Halloween (Belk, 1990), weddings (Otnes and Lowrey, 1993), and other occasions. Yet while many rituals have been examined, the gender differences that may exist during ritualistic consumption remain imperfectly understood. This session brings together three papers that examine the differences in male and female participation in consumption rituals. The first paper is "Women and Arts, Men and Sports: Two Phenomena or One?" by Brenda Gainer and Eileen Fischer of York University. This paper explores the extent to which rituals of attending sporting events serve the same purposes for men as arts attendance does for women.

The second paper is "Construction of a Meaningful Wedding: Differences Between the Priorities of Brides and Grooms," by Tina M. Lowrey of Rider College and Cele Otnes of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This paper explores the importance that brides and grooms attach to various aspects of the wedding and reception. The final paper is "Children's Understanding of Birthday Parties: A Study of Gender Differences" by Mary Ann McGrath, Loyola University of Chicago and Cele Otnes. This paper compares the importance that young girls and boys (ages three to five) attach to different aspects of the birthday party ritual.

Each paper in this session makes a unique contribution to our understanding of gender participation in consumer rituals. Specifically, Gainer and Fischer expand our current definition of rituals to include events that occur outside of the realm of holidays, and which appear to be quite gender-specific. Lowrey and Otnes continue their research on weddings, consumption rituals that now cost an average of $16,000 to create. McGrath and Otnes explore children's understanding of consumption rituals, a topic that has yet to be explored.

In lieu of a discussant for this session, the authors have opted to leave time for a more open-ended discussion among the participants at the conference. At previous sessions that have explored aspects of ritualistic consumption, the discussions from the floor have proven to be lively and enlightening.

This session should have wide appeal for those attending the gender and consumer behavior conference, as it examines gender differences that may exist across a variety of pervasive consumer rituals in American culture. Abstracts of papers and references follow.

REFERENCES


Fischer, Eileen and Stephen F. Arnold (1990), "More Than A Labor of Love: Gender Roles and


