Special Session: Gender and Ritualistic Consumption

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Of late, the topic of ritualistic consumption has received increased attention in the consumer behavior literature. Yet, because of the diversity of ritualistic occasions in American culture, and because many studies point to highly gendered behaviors during participation in these occasions (e.g., Belk and Coon 1990; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Otnes and McGrath 1994), this topic should remain salient to researchers interested in such issues as gender socialization, gender role differentiation and the fixedness or flexibility of gendered participation in these occasions.

Thus, this session brings together researchers who have focused on consumer rituals in American culture, and whose presentations will either shed new light on the role of gender in well-researched occasions (Otnes and Ruth), or continue to explicate the gendered patterns of consumer behavior in occasions that have not received their due by consumer researchers (Belk and Dodson; Englis and McGrath). For example, the paper by Cele Otnes and Julie Ruth, "New Insights Into the Role of Gender During Christmas Shopping," offers evidence that certain personality variables related to the self-concept may be as important as gender in determining the level of participation in Christmas shopping. The paper by Russell W. Belk and Kimberly Dodson, "Gender in Children's Birth-day Stories," explores the ways in which children's books explicate the relationships between genders, places in the home and world, social roles and group emphasis, and how these books have changed their depiction of these phenomena over time. The paper by Basil Englis and Mary Ann McGrath, "An Analysis of the Framing of Women as Marriage Partners Through Subcultural Patterns of Wedding Gift Giving," explores the ways in which apparently "gender-free" gifts, such as money, nevertheless convey subtle messages regarding gender role expectations in a marriage. The discussant for this session, Michael Solomon, is recognized as a leading researcher in the field of symbolic consumption. He can offer astute insights into the papers presented, as well as the ways in which research in this area can be broadened.

Thus, this session should be of interest to those attending the Third Conference on Gender and Consumer Behavior for the following reasons: (1) it sheds new light on a fascinating and still underresearched area of consumer behavior; (2) it features a wide variety of ritual occasions, thus offering an inherently interesting agenda for those whose focus is symbolic consumer behavior; and (3) it features a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative methods that illustrate how multiple approaches can explore the issues pertaining to gender and consumer behavior.

NOTE

1. References are available upon request from the author.