Gender 2000 Summary of Panel Remarks

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There is great promise in the emergent research on sex, gender and feminism. This is particularly true given the rise of the (not unrelated) streams of research on critical theory, postmodernism, international comparisons, and "marginalized" consumers (including, for instance, immigrants, gays and lesbians, and poorer consumers). I group these streams because, together, their growth indicates a recognition of the fact that consumers are not just the objects of marketing actions, but are multifaceted beings who vary greatly in the ways in which they are served by and constituted within, the North American capitalist system.

The challenge we face is to fulfill the promise(s) latent in this work, and to help shape our societies in ways that work for those whose interests we are only beginning to acknowledge and attempt to understand. This challenge must be addressed in several ways. I will single out two. First, we must conduct action/advocacy research directed toward better serving those least privileged by current marketing practice, social structures and government policies. Second, we must pursue critical research to penetrate further the ways in which the marginalization of groups of people (particularly in their roles as consumers) is shaped and perpetuated by dominant social structures.

Pursuing research such as this will not be easy, for any number of reasons. First, the subject matter and approaches may not yield research results publishable in mainstream journals, and for many of us our own survival is tied in part to such practices. Second, the research we conduct must be ever more sensitive to the differences as well as the similarities within groups: notably, the issues and problems that confront women as consumers vary tremendously across ethnic and racial groups, income and education levels, ages, and sexual orientations. Third, as consumer researchers we must take up pressing issues associated with consumption (such as those related to providing adequate nutrition and other basic resources) while overcoming the limitations of dominant conceptualizations of consumption as passive, recreational, and/or frivolous.

The dangers we face mirror the challenges noted above. There is a risk that we, having once "discovered" the various perspectives informed by gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, age and the like, will move on in search of new publishable topics. Another danger is that we will do only the "easy" research, or only that which is palatable in the mainstream. As scholars concerned with gender, and the host of associated issues, we must consider ourselves to have some responsibilities toward those about whom we have written and thought.