Women's and Men's Experiences in Service Settings

Eileen Fischer, York University

[to cite]:


[url]:

http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15615/gender/v03/GCB-03

[copyright notice]:

This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
One of the focal venues in the process of purchase and consumption is the service setting. In such settings, people encounter service providers who supply information about their offerings and contribute to their perception of the nature and significance of the product. They may interact with other customers and with service providers in ways that both reflect and contribute to their taken-for-granted understanding of their role in the marketing process. And they may observe both tangible and intangible elements of the service/product bundle that form input into their experience and evaluation of the product. Most interesting for purposes of this setting, experiences in and assumptions about service settings are likely to both reflect and contribute to the gendering of consumption in general, and of certain products or services in particular.

By studying men's and women's experiences in diverse service settings we are likely to learn, first, what kinds of cultural "rules" and stereotypes exist regarding how women versus men should and/or do shop for, buy and use specific products or services. The vast number of unstated assumptions concerning, for instance, who should do the shopping in a particular product category, or who is knowledgeable about and capable of choosing wisely a particular service, remain largely tacit, and research is required to document them.

In the process of documenting the tacit understandings about sex roles in the purchase and consumption process for particular products, research on women's and men's experience in service settings may help to explore how people's behavior and experiences are affected—both positively and negatively—by extant stereotypes. For instance, we may find that men and women avoid certain kinds of offerings, or feel frustrated when they are forced to seek them out, due to perceived gender stereotypes. In contrast, the value derived from other products and services may be enhanced because of the gender role associations manifest in particular service settings. This research may, ultimately, lead to insights on how service settings may be redesigned to help reduce or eliminate counter-productive effects that gender-related stereotypes can have.

The first paper in the session, by Fischer, Gainer and Bristor, explores the experiences anticipated by women and by men in a range of strongly "gendered" service settings, by which they mean retail environments where customers and/or service providers tend to be predominantly one sex or the other. They seek to establish both what factors make for highly gendered service settings and how people of the "wrong" sex feel in them.
The second paper in the session, by Otnes, looks in depth at a particular service setting—bridal salons—that caters exclusively to women and that is involved in the production of weddings which reflect and reproduce some of our most basic sex role stereotypes. Otnes explores gender-specific expectations that consumers bring to the experience and how the retail environment contributes to the process of the bride appropriately constructing her role in the wedding.

The last paper in the session, by McGrath, explores differences in what men and women regard as the ideal settings in which to shop. This work indicates that women's perceptions of ideal settings differ considerably from men's. McGrath explores the implications of her findings, suggesting that the reason men may appear to dislike shopping is because fewer service settings are as close to men's ideals as to women's.