New Insights Into the Role of Gender During Christmas Shopping

Cele Oines, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Julie A. Ruth, University of Washington

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New Insights Into the Role of Gender
During Christmas Shopping

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Many studies (e.g., Caplow 1982; Fischer and Arnold 1990; Sherry and McGrath 1989) discuss the fact that Christmas shopping—a subritual embedded in the Christmas holiday—is typically "women's work." That is, women are responsible for the majority of prepurchase, purchase and postpurchase activities (e.g., wrapping and distribution) related to Christmas gifts. In our examination of Christmas shopping, we offer an alternative explanation to the influence of gender with respect to this activity.

In the last week of December 1994, we conducted a survey among employees at a Midwest university (n=1100). The purpose of the survey was to explore many facets of Christmas shopping activities that respondents had recently completed. Four hundred thirty-six surveys were returned, for a response rate of 40%. The survey instrument included measures of two personality variables—public and private self-consciousness. It was our hypothesis that these variables, which relate to the self-concept of an individual, would moderate the effect of gender. In other words, we hypothesized that individuals high in public self-consciousness (awareness of how the self was expressed to others) would engage in more gift-selection activities than individuals high in private self-consciousness (awareness of how the self was expressed to self), and this relationship would be true regardless of gender.

A first MANOVA investigated the main and interaction effects of gender, public, and private self-consciousness on the set of gift-giving dependent variables. This analysis revealed all three independent variables to have main effects on the dependent variable set. To examine the specific effects of gender, a MANCOVA was conducted, where the number of recipients was included as a covariate, as a way of controlling for the effects of gender on the dependent variables (e.g., since women reported giving more gifts than men). The results indicate that when gender is controlled, private self-consciousness is significantly related to gift-giving activity. Those individuals who are high in private self-consciousness report spending less per recipient, spending less in total across recipients, and browsing in more retail sites. Thus, while women may bear the brunt of gift-exchange duties in American culture, our study reveals it is important to go beyond the "gender gap" and explore the personality variables that might influence gift-selection activities as well.

NOTE

1. References are available upon request from the authors.