



GENDER AND AGE—OUR SUPERGLUED IDENTITY MARKERS

Gender and Age—the two markers of our identity, stuck to us as if “superglued.” Is there any moment in our waking life when we are not conscious of them? We are conscious of them in buying our clothes, in partaking of our foods, in choosing our recreation. We visit only those stores that sell the merchandise that suits our particular gender and age, buy music CDs that echo our generation’s psyche, and flock to places—public as well as commercial—where people similar to our age and of interest to our gender congregate.

Males and females do make different consumers. Tons of observational studies tell us that. To get a full skinny on that, a reading of these three books will be worth every minute of your time:

1. *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* by Paco Underhill (Simon & Schuster, 2000);
2. *Marketing to Women: How to Understand, Reach, and Increase Your Share of the World's Largest Market Segment* by Martha Barletta (Kaplan Business, 2006); and
3. *The Future of Men: The Rise of the Ubersexual and What He Means for Marketing Today*, by Marian Salzman, Ira Matathia, and Ann O'Reilly (Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

But keep in mind, these consumption differences are a moving target. The phrase “homemaker” has long stopped being tied to a specific gender, and the ritual of obsessive personal grooming has invaded the male specie. Bold consumers everywhere are defying the stereotype of their gender. Take comfort, however, in the knowledge that “putting more heart into gifts” is one thing on which men will never match up with women—except on Valentine’s Day, that is.

Age, our second unalterable characteristic, marks the progression of our lives. It affects what we consume, both when we are celebrating it and when we are defying it.

Celebration and defiance consumptions offer distinct opportunities to marketers. To harness these, keep a close watch on the psychology of the generations. Seniors, Boomers, Gen Xers, Gen Yers, teens—they all represent unique and individually alluring islands of opportunity. Commune with them, grasp their mojo, and then fashion your offerings for each age group separately.

And, for the population as a whole, keep a watch on the changing numbers. The fortunes of whole industries can swing as today’s Boomers reach their golden years and the Millennials become tomorrow’s 30-somethings. Marketers: Ignore population pyramids at grave consequences!