Abstract

In the post-industrial American city, consumption and women play new and crucial roles. As service, tourist, shopping, and entertainment industries take prominence over or supplement the more explicitly male industrial and financial industries, women entrepreneurs have become significant actors in the city (Benson, 1988; Green, 1997). Femininity overlaps with bourgeois values in gentrification, giving women's actions a special import (Jackson & Thrift, 1995). The 'ladies' of gentrification produce new interpersonal dynamics on the streets and sidewalks, helping to facilitate neighborhood change, spread safety and stimulate new community ties. This analysis is based on a multi-year field study and extended interviews of the neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn in New York City. In the past decade, this ethnic working-class neighborhood's primarily male industrial landscape and female domestic sphere has been supplanted by new mixed-gender, quasi-public spaces. Drawing on Jane Jacobs' concepts of "eyes on the street" and "public characters" (Jacobs, 1961), I characterize women entrepreneurs as "faces on the street" who serve a key role in the transformation of neighborhood streets. This study focuses on the role of women in the gentrification process as an attempt to address the broader issue of the role of women in urban studies (DeSena, 2000; Leavitt, 2003).

Citation


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