



CULTURES OF CONSUMPTION PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES

A Consuming Public?

John Clarke, Professor of Social Policy, The Open University.

ABSTRACT

Who are we when we make use of public services? Increasingly, old identities of being members of the public or citizens have been challenged by images of us as consumers of services. As consumers, it is claimed, we have come to expect flexibility, accessibility, responsiveness and, above all, choice from the providers of services. These expectations have shaped the reform and modernization of public services, although they affect specific services in different ways. The changes are the focus of wider political controversies about the gains and losses that may result from such changing relationships. In this changing context, how do we think of ourselves in our encounters with public services?

BIOGRAPHY

John Clarke's work has explored the remaking of welfare states in Britain and the USA and the implications for changing relationships between states and citizens. He has played a distinctive role in bringing questions of cultural analysis – especially formations of nation, people and citizenship – to the study of social policy. His forthcoming book, *Changing Welfare, Changing States* (to be published by Sage in April 2004), explores some of these issues. At present, he is part of a research project in the Cultures of Consumption programme: 'Creating Citizen-Consumers: Changing Relationships and Identifications'.