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To cite this article: Zeynep Arsel, Kirsi Eräranta & Johanna Moisander (2015) Introduction: theorising gender and gendering theory in marketing and consumer research, Journal of Marketing Management, 31:15-16, 1553-1558, DOI: [10.1080/0267257X.2015.1078396](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1078396)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1078396>



Published online: 07 Sep 2015.



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## EDITORIAL

# Introduction: theorising gender and gendering theory in marketing and consumer research

Gender permeates into the market in domains ranging from institutional practices to product design to advertising to mundane consumption patterns. It is also a challenging social and cultural category to inquire into, frequently reduced to a dichotomous variable such as male/female or masculine/feminine. In contemporary consumer culture, however, these dualist categorisations and essentialist conceptualisations often break down and become problematised (Holt & Thompson, 2004; Peñaloza, 1994; Zayer, Sredl, Parmentier, & Coleman, 2012). Moreover, from a feminist point of view, marketing strategies that unreflectively accept the dominant cultural distinctions between ‘male’ and ‘female’ or ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, and capitalise on social expectations and stereotypical sex roles, may be exploitative and thus ethically suspect: they perpetuate and reinforce the oppressive discourses and practices that are linked to social and gender inequality.

In empirical research on marketing and consumer research, the concept of gender has been defined and used in a myriad of ways so as to contribute to a better and more self-reflective understanding of the gendered nature of consumer behaviour and of the role of marketing activities in the construction of gender (Bettany, Dobscha, O’Malley, & Prothero, 2010). Several scholars have explored and critically examined the gendered nature of not only consumer identity projects and cultural models (Eraranta & Moisander, 2011; Eräranta, Moisander, & Pesonen, 2009; Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010; Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Kjeldgaard & Nielsen, 2010; Littlefield, 2010; Maclaran & Catterall, 2000; Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander, 2006; Ourahmoune & Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2012; Schroeder, 2003; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Thompson & Holt, 2004; Valtonen, 2012) but also marketing theory and practice (Beetles & Crane, 2005; Brace-Govan, 2010; Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Fischer & Bristor, 1994; Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Joy & Venkatesh, 1994; Meriläinen, Moisander, & Pesonen, 2000; Ostberg, 2010; Ourahmoune, Binninger, & Robert, 2014). While these works have significantly advanced our knowledge of the workings of gender in the marketplace, there is still room for further theoretical development in the field.

For this special issue, therefore, we invited contributions that draw on gender as a theoretical concept and work towards *theorising gender and gendering theory* in the field of marketing and consumer research. We draw attention to the idea that gender is not a naïve category that merely reflects the social world. Gender is rather a cultural category that is underpinned by socially constructed and contested assumptions and norms about identity and sexuality. In contemporary society, these

assumptions are manifest in a number of ideas and practices that guide and constrain the ways in which human actors may perform their identities, seize opportunities, and experience well-being in life.

In feminist research, scholars typically differentiate between two or three strategies of 'gendering' existing theory. According to Sainsbury (1994), for example, gendering involves 1) the problematisation and refashioning of mainstream theories and concepts, on one hand, and 2) the rejection of conventional theories and the development of alternative ones, on the other. In a similar vein, Squires (1999) has identified three distinct approaches to gendering theory: 1) inclusion, 2) reversal, and 3) displacement. In the context of marketing and consumer research, this might entail the following: 1) inclusion of women in the market and theories of the market from which they are currently excluded in the name of equality politics (liberal feminism); 2) reconfiguration of the market and theories of the market so that they become more open to women's gendered specificity in the name of difference politics (radical, maternal, or cultural feminists); and 3) destabilisation of the apparent opposition between the strategies of inclusion and reversal in the name of diversity politics (postmodern or post-structuralist feminism).

In this special issue, we present seven original articles that take up the task of *theorising gender and gendering theory* in the field of marketing and consumer research in new ways, accommodating recent intersectional, material-discursive, and practice-oriented theorisations. Connecting the study of marketing and consumer behaviour to different theoretical perspectives on gender, the articles explore and critically examine the gendered nature and dimensions of contemporary marketplace activity. Through innovative conceptual development and insightful empirical analyses, the articles offer important scholarly contributions to the literature on gender, marketing, and consumer research and advance our understanding of gender as lived experience and socially regulated performance. These papers also frequently employ an intersectionalist perspective, theorising gender as only a part of one's subject position, which is constituted by mutually reinforcing categories.

Ai-Ling Lai, Ming Lim, and Matthew Higgins, in their article, 'The "object" single: exploring the gendered experience of singleness in Britain', draw on the writings of Judith Butler to explore and critically examine the gendered experience of singleness, as a culturally pathologised 'object other' in Britain. Based on an empirical study, the article elaborates on the ways in which singles negotiate their marginal status vis-à-vis the marketplace and broader society. The study demonstrates how single women are overtly subjected to the disciplinary power that produces their 'object' position. It also shows that while single men have seemingly averted the disciplinary gaze, their singleness, nevertheless, remains tenuously tethered to the dominant heteronormative framework. Overall, the article contributes to the literature on gender, marketing, and consumer behaviour by developing the concept of 'abjection' as a theoretical lens that allows us to better understand the ways in which the contemporary couples-oriented marketplace perpetuates the naturalisation of heterosexual relationships and the heteronormative framework that characterises much of the existing research in the field.

Anu Valtonen and Elina Närvänen's article, 'Gendered reading of the body in the bed', inquires about how a gendered body interacts with the material. Building on an ethnographic study on Finnish sleep cultures, they conceptualise the bed as a socio-material gendered space that 'affords the sexed body a place to affect and to be

affected' (p. 1587). Their reading of object–person relation allows us to understand how mundane, embodied, and affective everyday experiences become gendered practices and vehicles for doing gender. They show how the bed affords capacities and experiences that become gendered. Following the affective-material turn, Valtonen and Närvänen also pay particular attention to affective states the object mobilises both during sleep and awakesness, and in between. Lastly, by studying an ostensibly passive practice, sleeping, which transgresses intention and consciousness that is typically attributed to states that consumer researchers study, they illuminate new ways of seeing the body, and its agency.

Anu Harju and Annamari Huovinen's article, 'Fashionably voluptuous: normative femininity and resistant performative tactics in fatshion blogs', synthesise Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital to demonstrate how fat fashion bloggers perform their identities. Their data consists of text and visuals from 12 blogs from bloggers that identify as fat or plus-sized. Using critical discourse analysis, the authors identify four practices that enable this: destigmatisation of fat, reappropriation of space for visibility, communality against exclusion, and mimicry for resistance through affiliation. Harju and Huovinen show that gender ideals such as normative femininity and beauty are not always oppressive, but they can be empowering when they are mobilised to serve as resources for resistance through subversive repetition even though this might sometimes masquerade as conformity.

Jeff Hearn and Wendy Hein, in their article 'Reframing gender and feminist knowledge construction in marketing and consumer research: missing feminisms, and the case of men and masculinities', assess the evolution of gender research in the field of marketing and consumer research, and contrast this evolution with the developments in feminist theory. They identify examples of 'missing feminisms' that have been relatively neglected in marketing and consumer research, including queer theory; critical race, intersectional and transnational feminisms; material-discursive feminism; and critical studies on men and masculinities. They focus on critical studies on men and masculinities as a particularly illuminative example of a growing area in gender scholarship that has been adopted in marketing and consumer research in a somewhat selective or uneven way. Overall, Hein and Hearn argue that marketing and consumer research has neglected specifically those gender theorisations that centre on feminist politics and gender power relations. They suggest some ways in which these theorisations could advance the gender agenda in this field.

Marcus Klasson and Sofia Ulver, in their contribution 'Masculinising domesticity: an investigation of men's domestic foodwork', look into what happens when young white heterosexual middle-class men enter into a previously feminised domain of activity and consumption – that of domestic cooking and foodwork. Situating their study in consumer culture research and drawing from R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Pierre Bourdieu's theory on social fields of cultural production, they illustrate how men configure their gendered identities in relation to cooking in the context of Sweden – a relatively gender egalitarian Nordic country, where the domestic sphere is not considered entirely 'private' but has long been a target of various types of state intervention and investment. Based on an ethnographic study with 12 Swedish men who share a strong interest in cooking, they identify three forms of masculinity – resistant, instrumental, and feminised masculinities – that these men enact as they engage in domestic foodwork. Klasson

and Ulver point out that while the young men incorporate some egalitarian gender ideals into their cooking activities, they also masculinise domestic foodwork in many ways.

Minita Sanghvi and Nancy Hodges' article, 'Marketing the female politician: an exploration of gender and appearance', contributes to the relatively new field of political marketing, by exploring the, so far, under-researched issues of gender, appearance, and power in this field. More specifically, the authors use Erving Goffman's theories on gender and performance (impression management and gender advertisements) to shed light on the ways in which American female politicians, their political experts, and their supporters experience the role of appearance in the marketing of the candidate, and how this appearance shapes voters' interpretations of the female politician. On the basis of the analysis of interview and focus group materials, Sanghvi and Hodges conclude that female politicians are subordinated through hyper-ritualised displays of social relations, and that appearance is repeatedly used to facilitate the objectivation of female politicians and devalue their candidacies.

Martina Hutton, in her article 'Consuming stress: exploring hidden dimensions of consumption-related strain at the intersection of gender and poverty', sets out to advance knowledge of the gendered nature and dimensions of poverty in contemporary consumer society. Focusing on social stress, as experienced at the nexus of gender and poverty, she explores and critically examines the complex interplay of gender, power, and inequality that underpins experienced consumption-related strain. Overall, her study contributes to the literature in this under-developed research area by shifting analytical attention to the gendered complexities of economic disadvantage, and by empirically illustrating how poverty is reinforced by complex gendered dynamics of inequality, ill health, and disability.

We thank the scholars who have generously provided commentaries for this special issue: Eileen Fischer; Annamma Joy, Russell Belk and Rishi Bhardwaj; Pauline Maclaran; and Jonathan Schroeder and Janet Borgerson.

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