

Moving beyond binary opposition: Exploring the tapestry of gender in consumer research and marketing

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Abstract. *The last two decades have seen an exponential growth in research pertaining to gender issues in marketing and consumer research. This special issue of Marketing Theory, together with the ongoing Association for Consumer Research Gender, Marketing and Consumer Research conference series, now approaching its tenth iteration, demonstrates the continued interest in gender issues in our disciplines. Introducing the special issue, this paper's remit is threefold: it maps the substantive and theoretical developments of gender research within our discipline; it locates this work on gender within its broader context in humanities and social science; and it introduces the reader to the four papers in this special issue. The paper concludes that gender research has moved from the margins to become a strong body of work within marketing and consumer research. That said, there remains substantive opportunity for further development, where gender and feminist research can offer new insights, critiques, theories and approaches.* **Key Words** ● consumer research ● critical marketing ● feminism ● gender conferences ● gender theory

Introduction

The last two decades have seen an exponential growth and development of research pertaining or related to gender issues in marketing and consumer research. This special issue of Marketing Theory together with the ongoing biennial Association for Consumer Research Gender, Marketing and Consumer Research conference series now approaching its tenth iteration, demonstrates the continued interest in gender issues in our disciplines. Gender, in consumer and marketing research, marches forward. However, there are still significant aporias, absences and areas for future development evident within the field. Early concerns for example over disciplinary change (Bristor and Fischer, 1993; Hirschman, 1993) have all but disappeared from the gender research canon and feminism in particular seems to have fallen somewhat by the wayside (Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton, 2009; Catterall et al., 2005). There remain many areas within marketing and consumer research where gender and feminist research could offer new insights, theories and approaches.

It is clear that within western societies much has been achieved to ameliorate the inequalities between men and women that stimulated the early pioneers of gender and feminist research to make their voices heard. However, significant inequalities, drawn upon gendered lines, still remain a ubiquitous part of developed, western societies and are even more pressing in developing nations. Despite the fact that girls outperform boys on almost every marker at secondary education level in the UK, and in the workplace form nearly half of the workforce (Walby et al., 2008), the British labour force survey (2006) shows an enduring 21.7% gap between the gross hourly pay rate of men and women. Sex and Power (EHRC, 2008), the annual audit of women in positions of influence and authority in the UK, finds that the glass ceiling is still very much intact. Against all but a very few markers, progress towards gender equality at the highest level is actually in retrograde motion or virtual stasis. At the current rate of progress it is calculated that it will take another 75 years (an increase on the previous year from 65 years) to achieve an equal number of female directors of FTSE 100 organizations and around 200 more years to achieve an equal number of MPs in UK parliament. Women at present hold just 11% of FTSE 100 directorships (executive and non-executive) and the same percentage hold senior ranks within the police force. This figure drops to 0.4% of senior ranks in the armed forces. Only 9% of senior judiciary in the UK are women and 14% of university vice-chancellors. The UK (19.3%) and US (16.8%) are currently standing at 70th and 83rd place respectively in terms of the representation of women in parliament, outperformed by Rwanda (48.8%), Afghanistan (27.7%) and Iraq (25.5%) (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2008). As outlined by Gregory (2009) and despite decades of equality legislation, females trying to break into senior positions in organizations and public life are often faced with male 'homosociability'. This takes the form of old (and new) boys' networks, male bonding, banter and sexist humour and out of work activities that create a senior level culture characterized by hegemonic masculinity and are commensurately hostile to women participants (see also Connell, 2005; Nixon, 2003).

Gender inequality and lack of gender development are major problems in devel-

oping countries. In some developing countries the situation for women can be a daily life or death battle with extreme poverty, sickness and hyper-masculine cultural norms and values, resulting in significant differences in mortality rates, access to education, and employment above subsistence level between males and females. Despite the neoclassical economics view that increased trade and economic development result in increased equality between the sexes, studies have found that gender inequality remains robust and persists even after many years of economic development (Self and Grabowski, 2009). Marketing in its myriad forms is clearly implicated and enmeshed in the ongoing reproduction of global structures of gender inequality. Within the context of the global economy's requirement for flexible accumulation of cheap consumer goods, the exploitation of poor, uneducated, non-unionized and ultimately disposable women in developing countries proliferates through the use of sweatshop suppliers. Despite the discourse of corporate social responsibility, 'clean' and 'sweatfree' brands in marketing communications, often third-party supplier relationships are used to sever any legal or ethical requirements of the brand name company (Esbenshade, 2008). Advertising continues to present a picture of, and hence to reproduce, a world divided by cultural gender roles. Nassif and Gunter (2008) found that in UK advertising women appeared more often in domestic roles and settings and less often in occupational or leisure roles and settings, and were much more likely than men to promote body care and household cleaning products. In advertising media for sporting events, Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) found gender differentiation in the depiction of women and men athletes. For example, women athletes are less likely to be portrayed as active participants in sport and more likely to be portrayed in passive and traditionally feminine poses. In terms of the advertising and promotion of medical products, the Victorian discourse of the hysterical, excessive female body in need of control continues, with promotions relating to anti-depressants and mood-enhancing prescription drugs reflecting an ideology which maintains that depression is a female disorder (Curry and O'Brian, 2006) while unreliable, leaky female bodies are reminded through advertising of their public duty to hide menstruation and other natural bodily functions (Luke, 1997).

While there has been much debate and discussion centring around inequalities between men and women and much feminist research published in this field, what we have also witnessed in recent years, both within academia and the popular press, are greater discussions and debates surrounding men, masculinity and male inequalities. At the time of writing, for example, Chris Cleave in *The Guardian* newspaper (2009) writes an insightful and thoughtful piece on the role of fathers in modern society and the difficulties many fathers face in their attempts to play a greater role in their children's lives, while at the same time organizations such as the *Fathers 4 Justice* group (Fathers 4 Justice, 2009) in the UK have engaged in a number of political activities to highlight their plight. Indeed, many of their so-called 'stunts' are akin to some of the early activities of the women's suffragette movement. What it means to be a man in modern day society is now discussed fervently, and what is particularly clear is that marketing plays a huge role here; and this is indeed reflected later in this special issue.

These examples, along with the papers in this special issue and the many, many conference papers presented at previous conferences on gender, marketing and consumer behaviour, clearly illustrate some of the gendered challenges faced in the contemporary world, and all are potentially enmeshed in various marketing activities. Hence, there is no denying that marketing is implicated in the perpetuation of gender inequality, and the relationship between marketing, gender and feminism remains an area of significance for marketing and consumer research in the 21st century. In this contribution we aim to outline a history of gender research in the marketing and consumer research disciplines, by focusing on the previous nine conferences on gender, marketing and consumer behaviour, and to locate the contribution of the current special issue within this history. Moreover, we suggest potential and possible future research directions to progress this important area of research.

Locating gender research

Since the birth of science and philosophy, 'gender research' has existed in many forms. In her study of gender in the substance of science, Londa Scheibinger (1999: 108) argues that, historically, 'western culture has committed enormous resources to the science of woman, studying the physical, moral and intellectual character of "the sex" as women once were called.' The early science and philosophy of sex difference and the study of the female versus the male are characterized by essentialist discourses in which the biological, intellectual and moral differences between the sexes were what was at stake. This early work encompasses Aristotelian views of the woman as anatomically colder than the male, her lack of bodily heat accounting for her weaker reason (McLean, 1983); Galen's view that the female body was an incomplete and lesser version of the male body, such that the female might even spontaneously become a male, although this might not occur in reverse, as nature always strives for perfection (Laqueur, 1999); while there are also Darwinian views of the female as a man whose evolution has been arrested. The female body as an object of science became hotly contested ground in male science, a terrain over which scientists and theorists captured intellectual terrain and commensurately, their academic authority. Laqueur (1999) outlines an historical account of the 14th-century dispute between Renaldus Columbus and Gabriel Fallopius over their competing claims to have discovered the clitoris, Fallopius famously declaring that he saw the clitoris first and any other claimants were plagiarists. Of course, these accounts of early anatomical science and philosophy seem humorous and more than a little ridiculous to us in the 21st century. However, as anthropologist Emily Martin (1987, 1991) explains in her study of how cultural stereotypes shape what scientists 'discover' in their research, the core assumptions of these early renditions of biological essentialism still resonate in contemporary biomedical, psychological and sociological discourses on gender and sex difference. Largely as a response to this, feminist and gender research emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the humanities and social sciences that aimed to address the hidden andocentrism in sci-

ence, to redress the absences of women as knowers, and to understand the lives of women from their own perspective, rather than as studied by male researchers, philosophers and scientists.

The discipline of sociology has historically been the driver of gender research. In 1972, feminist philosopher Anne Oakley introduced the term gender to sociology, and made the distinction between gender and sex as categorizations that might be used to theorize and research difference. The use of the term gender rather than sex as the analytical category of choice was an overt political switch, to indicate the constructedness of much of what had heretofore been considered biologically or psychologically essential characteristics. Gender was viewed as the socially and culturally constructed aspects of the differences between men and women, and sex as the biological distinctions. Much analytical and research effort at that time aimed to progress the notion that innate sex difference could not wholly account for the differences between men and women, but that the effects of cultural sex role stereotypes, child socialization and structural and institutional inequality were the predominant drivers of so-called sex differences. Feminist scholarship sought to expose and address these inequalities and to give voice to women who for the most part had been silenced through their absence from academic discourses. There was a broadening of the 'gender agenda' in the 1980s and 1990s as the assumption of the western, white, middle-class women at the centre of this 'gender agenda' was challenged and black, ethnic, queer and masculine gender research began to emerge. At that time, third-wave feminism began to challenge the essentialist discourses of prior feminist work, which took unreconstructed women's experience as its central tenet, and developing work utilizing post-structuralist and postmodern interpretations of discursive constructions of gender and the categories of male and female emerged.

In the marketing and consumer disciplines, the history of gender research has followed a path similar to that outlined above, albeit with an understandable delay. Early research on gender is found predominantly in the consumer behaviour discipline, undoubtedly due to the disciplinary roots of consumer behaviour in behaviourist and cognitive psychology. Much of this early research follows what Haynes (2008) calls 'gender-as-a-variable'. That is, early gender research examined and measured essential sex differences across a number of consumer contexts. Undoubtedly a great deal of this work has addressed questions of great importance to those concerned with gender issues. This type of sex/gender research is still evident in marketing and consumer research today; for example Dahl et al.'s (2009) recent experimental study of differences between men and women's attitudes and responses to sex in advertising. This 'gender-as-a-variable' research we would call 'sex difference' research; and while this research is undoubtedly valuable and interesting to consumer and marketing researchers, we would make a distinction between this and what we would call 'gender' research. Gender research has an implicit critical impetus that challenges essential sex differences, and a political agenda for social and cultural change. Gender research in marketing and consumer disciplines can be mapped through a history of the Association of Consumer Research Gender Conferences, which now follows.

A (brief) history of gender in marketing and consumer research

While a complete meta-analysis of all the articles published in the nine gender conferences that span two decades is beyond the scope of this paper, we did assess all of the competitive papers and special sessions in order to look for general trends in topics to see if our past can lend insights into our future. The inaugural gender conference in 1991 saw an initial burst of interest and excitement about the concept of gender as it relates to consumer behaviour. Many of the topics that were represented in that first conference such as technology, identity, gender roles, and male/female differences on important marketing variables, were still present in the 2008 conference papers. What has changed in the 18 years since the inaugural conference is the distribution of papers among these topics. In her foreword to the 1996 conference proceedings, Janeen Arnold Costa called for an expansion of our notions of gender to include the issues of homosexuality and international perspectives. She found the papers in this conference to be more 'sophisticated' because by and large they were 'moving away from the simple societal dichotomy of male/female'. This level of theoretical sophistication has continued to improve, as researchers in marketing and consumer behaviour gain a better understanding of the complexities of gender and feminist theories and the tremendous potential they hold when applied to our discipline; indeed this was reflected in the theme of the 2008 conference, 'Moving Beyond Binary Opposition: Exploring the Tapestry of Gender in Consumer Research and Marketing'.

The inaugural conference in 1991, entitled, 'Gender and Consumer Behavior', hosted by Janeen Arnold Costa at the University of Utah, saw an impressive array of topics regarding gender at the intersection of marketing and consumer behaviour. While many of the papers (43%) focused on what we have termed 'sex difference research' (simple tests to determine whether men or women responded differently to the same stimuli), there were also papers that dealt with substantive gender issues, such as gender roles, gender symbolism, gender transgressions and gendered identity. These papers set the stage for later contributions, by broadening our narrow focus from biological differences to include the notion of social and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Furthermore, we saw emerge from this first conference some of the first papers that explicitly cited feminist theory as a rich framework from which marketing and consumer researchers could draw. Those researchers who discussed feminism were pioneers who paved the way for future scholars to utilize feminist principles in their research later in the decade and into the 21st century. Fortunately, many of these researchers are still present and productive in our field today, thus guaranteeing that feminist scholarship will hold a place within the field for years to come. Many papers emanating from this conference were published in Europe and the US in the following years, rendering the 1990s a key political era of change in the disciplines of marketing and consumer research. Papers emerge during this decade that engage with a broad range of academic feminist activism. Hirschman (1991b, 1993) exposes masculinist ideology in consumer research, and Bristor and Fischer (1991, 1994) outline feminist thought and its potential contribution to and impli-

cations for consumer research. Penalzoza (1991, 1994) critiques gender dichotomies in consumer research and highlights the critical importance of engaging with previously excluded groups and alternative problematics. Joy and Venkatesh (1994) critique the transcendence of the body in consumer research and examine the production and consumption of gender through bodily rituals. Feminist researchers in marketing and consumer research also apply feminist critical theory to marketing issues and problems, for example, Fischer and Bristor (1994) bring feminist post-structuralist analysis to bear on the rhetoric of marketing relationships, and Stern (1993) utilizes feminist literary theory to analyse advertising texts. Ozanne and Stern (1993) illustrate various ways in which feminist theory can be utilized by consumer researchers, and Dobscha (1993) applies ecofeminist theory to the study of environmentally responsible consumption.

The 1991 conference introduced the marketing academy to a world of possibilities. While some topics found footing after this conference (such as feminism and gift giving), other topics that were raised at the conference have yet to take hold. Notably, two articles discussed sexism in advertising (Cosgrove, 1991; Kolb and Langefeld, 1991). While this topic garners much attention in the popular press (notably the *Killing Me Softly* series), it does not get as much attention within the mainstream advertising research community. Also, two papers focused on sexuality (not sexual orientation, which does get attention in later conferences), particularly, prostitution and pornography (Hirschman, 1991a) and sexuality as in sexual activities (Gould, 1991). This topic has not received much attention either, perhaps because of the perceived barriers or many cultures' discomfort with the subject in general.

Another strong component of the conference was its international and cross-cultural presence, both in terms of topics and presenters. Studies of gender in Zimbabwe, Norway and Yugoslavia all underscored the importance for studying gender within different cultural contexts (Glefjell, 1991; Jacobs, 1991; Milicic, 1991).

What emerges from the excavation of the contents of this first conference is how 'on the right track' we were even in our first attempt to define the domain of gender within marketing and consumer behaviour. As Costa pointed out in the 1991 foreword:

the papers represent a wide array of sub-topics ranging from sexism and advertising to gifting behavior, to exploration of self and much more. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used ... in addition some of the papers ... adopt a feminist approach, calling on us to look at our profession, our research, our field, and this topic in a critical fashion.

The 1993 conference, also entitled, 'Gender and Consumer Behavior' and once again graciously hosted by Janeen Arnold Costa at the University of Utah, continued in the tradition of moving gender research forward by continuing its emphasis on gender theory, feminist scholarship and sex differences. In addition, this conference saw an increase in articles focused on technology (Bamossy and Jansen, 1993; Rudell, 1993); international perspectives (Bamossy and Jansen, 1993; Jacobs, 1993; Kocuturk and Karapazar, 1993; Venkatesh, 1993); and critical thought about the

portrayal of women (Bristor and de M. Fontenelle, 1993; Dishman, 1993; Lennon, 1993); and men (Fischer and Halpenny, 1993). There was a continuation of feminist scholarship with an infusion of postmodernism, shaped by Firat and Venkatesh's corresponding work. Bristor and de M. Fontenelle, and Firat all contributed work that infused postmodernism into the discussion of feminism.

This conference also saw a surge in context-determined consumer situations. This increase coincided with shifts in the discipline away from context- and time-independent methodologies, notably the lab experiment, toward a different way of viewing the field that claimed that consumer behaviour should also be studied in situ. Costa's (1993) work on women in the Mountain Man experience, Browne and Francis's (1993) piece on skateboarders, and Gygi and Fahr's (1993) discussion of belly dancing in the modern world embodied this shift in perspective.

This conference improved its international focus in its second incarnation, both in terms of topics covered as well as scholars who participated. Studies that focused on Turkish and Indian consumers were presented (Kokturk and Karapazar, 1993; Venkatesh, 1993) as well as a paper that focused on the connection between gender and land-use policies as they applied to developing nations (Jacobs, 1993). While the majority of studies continued to be concerned with sex difference research, even these became more sophisticated, with discussions of gender roles and norms (Jaffe and Berger, 1993); gender socialization (McGrath and Otnes, 1993); and gendered consumption contexts (Lowrey and Otnes, 1993).

The 1996 conference saw a name and content change to reflect the dynamic nature in which gender was being integrated into the marketing discipline. The third conference on Gender, Marketing, and Consumer Behavior acknowledged the critical role marketing plays in the discussion of gender by adding marketing to the conference's title. With Janeen Arnold Costa at the helm yet again, two new innovative sessions were born: the books session and an interactive panel described as advocating 'directions for research in this field as we move forward into the next millennium' (Costa, 1996). Costa also acknowledged that this conference resembled more of a 'symposium' than a traditional 'conference'. This difference was highlighted by fewer traditional competitive and special sessions and more panels, invited presentations, and the infusion of scholars who had not previously participated in the gender conference but were doing important work in the field.

Figuring prominently in these invited presentations was Linda Scott (1996), who presented her work on images of women in advertising using feminist, Marxist and structuralist lenses. Thompson and Haytko (1996) presented their work on gender and fashion, a theme subsequently developed and published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 1997. This paper on fashion was partial evidence for the increased interest in clothing and fashion that began in the 1993 conference (Browne and Francis, 1993; Damhorst and Fiore, 1993; Rucker et al., 1993).

Costa and Scott's call for more cross-cultural and critical work in the area of gender and marketing reflected Costa's previous commitment to strengthening this facet of the conference (even though the amount of papers in the conference that focused on international activities had dropped slightly from 1991 and 1993). Venkatesh (1996) also contributed work in this important area by illuminating



the important connections among gender, political ideology, consumerism and globalization. Technology also continued to strengthen, with three papers focusing on various aspects of technology including computer usage (Bamossy and Jansen, 1996) and video games (Dodson and Nielson, 1996). Other noteworthy research into highly gendered consumption spaces focused on weddings in the context of service encounters (Otnes, 1996) and wedding gift-giving (Englis and McGrath, 1996).

The 1996 conference possessed different elements from the previous two conferences, which seemed to allow the conference to break out of the bounds of traditional conference protocol to introduce new and exciting ways to present innovative ideas from interesting scholars. This new, more fluid structure, allowed for a sense of community to develop among researchers, as well as exposing junior faculty and doctoral students to invited presentations that were more in-depth and focused than traditional session presentations. The other inevitable change that would occur after 1996 is that Janeen Arnold Costa would no longer be the organizer. The torch was passed into the capable hands of Eileen Fischer and Dan Wardlow, with a change of venue from Utah to San Francisco.

Not surprisingly, the San Francisco locale allowed the gender conference to 'come out of the closet'. While scholars early on in the conference's history were calling for issues of sexuality to be included as a relevant topic of discourse, it wasn't until the 1998 conference where we saw presentations directly related to sexual orientation. While sexual orientation as a topic of discourse is not an exclusively gendered concept, queer theory emerged out of the gender studies discipline, and being gay, lesbian, or transgendered is a gender issue.

This conference presented the greatest array of topics compared to previous years. The number of studies that measured differences between men and women decreased, and in their place more nuanced studies of gender emerged. A theme of 'the man' emerged at this conference, putting men's consumption behaviours under a gendered lens. This is an important shift in that it reflects the discipline's understanding that men are not the standard against which all theory is tested, nor are they 'genderless'. Their masculinity affects their interactions with the marketplace in ways that are important for researchers to understand. Holt and Thompson's (2004) paper, subsequently expanded and published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 2004, on 'neo-traditional masculinity' reflected on the notions of patriarchy that positively and negatively influenced their male respondents. Previous gender conferences had centred on men as subjects very infrequently and within the limited subject space of clothing. This shift is important to note because all of the papers that are being published within this special issue are written by men, and three of them have men as the central subject of the research. While some may view this as a disturbing trend, we view it as healthy, showing the range and depth to which gender permeates the field of marketing and consumer behaviour as we near the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

The 2000 conference, hosted by Cele Otnes and Jonathan Schroeder at the University of Illinois, sustained this trend toward gendering the masculine by including papers on different interpretations of masculinity by French and American

men (Kimmel and Tissier-Desbordes, 2000) and expanding our understanding of men's shopping behaviours (Otnes and McGrath, 2000). The international focus also maintained a presence with papers by Houston (2000) on Japanese consumption behaviours and Veeck et al.'s (2000) discussion of the implications of China's one-child policy. Theories such as gender role, gender socialization and gender portrayals in advertising were also represented. The topic of gender portrayals in advertising seemed particularly prevalent (Brunel et al., 2000; Cohen, 2000; Stevens and Maclaran, 2000; Stole, 2000; Wolin, 2000). This area of research seemed to be benefiting from the introduction of theories of representation by such scholars as Schroeder and Borgerson, who first began applying ideas of representation around this time (Borgerson, 2005; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998) from disciplines such as culture studies, political science and literary theory.

More reading of popular cultural 'texts' also emerged during this conference. Stole (2000) interpreted daytime TV in post-war America in terms of the changing gender dynamics of the era. Dobscha and Foxman (2000) interpreted letters between consumers and a retailer by adopting the literary lens of epistolary novels; and O'Donnell and Wardlow (2000) cultivated a better understanding of 'coolness' by analysing the film 'Clueless'.

Catterall and Maclaran (2000) continued the discussion about gender in the context of the marketing discipline begun in the 1991 conference by illuminating the 'feminizing' trends within marketing, notably that more women were entering the marketing field in terms of students, managers and academics. They speculated that this feminization trend needs to be addressed by feminist scholars in order to present a clearer picture of the feminine subjects that dominate both the consumption arena and increasingly the academic landscape.

In 2002, for the first time the gender conference did not take place on American soil. Dublin was the location for the sixth iteration of the conference and with this change of venue we saw, aside from the obvious increase in participation by European scholars, an increase in the types of perspectives applied and critiques levied. Not surprisingly, this conference had the fewest number of traditional sex differences papers to date. What replaced this genre of studies were more nuanced and complex examinations of gender in marketing and consumer behaviour. The papers at this conference highlighted our movement forward as a discipline by including 'cultural, political, sexual, and philosophical realms that make gender such a compelling and complex research topic' (gender panel discussion).

The intersection of gender and identity occupied a good portion of the papers and presentations at this conference. Interestingly, many of the identity papers focused on the role of the body. The body has historically been ignored in many disciplines, due to its historical positioning in opposition to the mind (Firat, 1991, 1993). This conference included five papers that placed the body as subject. Seebaransingh et al. (2002) and Goulding and Follett (2002) explored the augmentation of the body, either through body part augmentation (in this case breast) or permanent body adornment (tattoos). Houston (2002) continued her important work by examining the explosion of consumption practices centred on artificial reproductive technologies, while two other papers explored the relation-

ship between marketing practices and body image (Banister and Hogg, 2002; Hall and O'Mahony, 2002). Marcoux's (2002) paper found that 'physical practices' such as moving are gendered, in that they represent a very real connection between body and gendered activities. His ethnography showed that the body constrains or permits changes in consciousness.

Other identity research explored interesting intersections between gender, culture and technology. Chen et al. (2002) considered online dating in China and found that while the internet allowed for more freedom of gender expression (wider ranges of masculinity and femininity), it did not provide full liberation from the dominant gender role provisions of the culture. Szmigin and Carrigan (2002) found women in their 40s attempting actively to create future selves even as they battled the confines of what it means to be a woman in the present.

The 2002 conference also highlighted some important feminist work. Cadman et al.'s (2002) discussion of memory work, Prothero's (2002) early work on introspection, and Hyatt's (2002) illuminating piece on transgendered consumers all helped to claim more theoretical space in the area of gender research in consumer behaviour and marketing.

The 2004 conference showed a return to the US, organized at Madison, Wisconsin, by Craig Thompson and Linda Scott, with a continuation of several themes. Gender identity research continued to flourish in exciting and important areas (Parsons and Broadbridge, 2004). The types of consumers included those who participated in Goth subculture (Goulding and Saren, 2004); female drug addicts (Borrowman and Costa, 2004); cross-dressers (Nelson and Hegland, 2004); fantasy game participants (Park and Deshpande, 2004); overweight consumers (Askegaard, 2004); and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) consumers (Chen and Aung, 2004; Maclaran and Stevens, 2004), showing the great depth and breadth of applications of gender theory in consumer behaviour and marketing.

There also seemed to be a strong theoretical bent at this conference. The work of Judith Butler was introduced and discussed. Butler's theories on gender are not directly related to the field but have great potential for impact, given her writings on the very nature of gender, sex and sexuality, particularly as they relate to language and identity. Her writings, which state that gender is a performance that can be 'worn or not worn rather like a particular combination of clothing' (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2004), stands as one of her most important contributions to gender theory, with widespread implications for gender research in consumer behaviour and marketing. This gender fluidity notion was reflected in other works as well (Caru and Cova, 2004; Nelson and Hegland, 2004). The use of clothing to express, repress, flaunt, assimilate or otherwise define one's experience and interaction with the world is a consistent theme throughout the nine gender conferences, and Butler's work provides more depth of analysis about this work than has been previously undertaken.

Brown (2004) maintained the tradition started by Stern and cultivated by Scott in applying reader-response theory. What sets Brown's work apart is that he chose to apply the literary critique technique to one of the most famous articles in the marketing field: Leavitt's 'Marketing Myopia', which first appeared in *Harvard Business*

Review in 1960. Brown's results served as a reminder to the field that indeed sex and gender are distinct concepts. While this is a foregone conclusion in the fields that pioneered gender studies (women's studies, sociology, social psychology), many marketing and consumer researchers continue to use these terms interchangeably, essentially ignoring the rich gender work that has been accomplished both within and outside the borders of the gender conferences.

In 2006, the eighth conference on Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour moved to Edinburgh, with Lorna Stevens and Janet Borgerson at the helm. This conference carried forward the agenda to consider, question and problematize gender in marketing and consumer research. Of note within this conference was the now burgeoning interest in the construction and maintenance of masculinities in consumer culture, with two competitive paper sessions and a special session dedicated to this issue. What is interesting here is the changing nature of research into masculinity, with papers addressing issues on what might have historically been considered female or feminine arenas of consumption or concern, for example masculinity and cooking (Brownlie and Hewer, 2006); images of male bodies in advertising (Senic and Podnar, 2006); and men and fashion (Kaiser et al., 2008). The queer perspective on masculinity was considered in papers with topics as diverse as marketing research categorization (Drinck and Kreienkamp, 2006); homoerotics in advertising (Oswald and Ourahmoune, 2006); and media representation (Rinallo, 2006). An equally strong theme in 2006 was an interest in motherhood in marketing and consumer behaviour, with a special session on researching motherhood (Prothero et al., 2006) considering the methodological issues around mothers researching mothers. Further papers on this theme of motherhood dealt with a myriad of issues, including motherhood identity in car consumption (Martin et al., 2006) and non-western perspectives on motherhood (Dedeoglu, 2006; Hashim and Woodruffe-Burton, 2006). Hamilton and Catterall (2006) presented a paper on social exclusion and motherhood, thus picking up an important political thread of emancipatory gender research begun in 1991. The feminist torch was carried forward by Bettany (2006), who presented a paper on feminist epistemology developing and updating the ideas of Bristor and Fischer (1991) and Hirschman (1991a, 1991b) from the first conference. Apart from these papers and themes, the conference continued to engage with the diversity of topics that underpin gender research in marketing and consumer behaviour and reflect the international flavour of those disciplines.

The 2008 conference moved to Boston, MA, co-chaired by Andrea Prothero, Susan Dobscha, Shona Bettany and Lisa O'Malley. Following on from the previous conference, we saw a diversity of gender topics. Again, papers emerged concerned with constructions of masculinity. Avery (2008), who won the best paper award – a new development for this conference – presented on the negotiation of hegemonic masculinity in online forums, while Kaiser et al. (2008) discussed fashion and the negotiation of masculine identity. Two papers presented seriously ironic discussions of male appendages, the beard (Looyson and Kaiser, 2008) and the penis (Ostberg 2008), the latter of which appears in this volume. Feminist concerns experienced a most welcome resurgent interest, with papers using a feminist

lens to examine female sport (Brace-Govan, 2008); the historical critique of consumer culture (Martens, 2008); a call for more research into materialist concerns of equality and social justice (Catterall et al., 2008); a consideration of feminist philosophical perspectives (Welsh, 2008); and a dialogue between hegemonic masculinity and ecofeminism (Littlefield, 2008). The last paper appears in this volume, representing this tranche of gender research. Again, international and non-western perspectives were evident, showing the endurance of the international theme of these conferences. Takhar et al. (2008) examined Sikh dating sites; Jafari (2008) presented a poster on a feminist reading of consumption in Iran; and Minowa (2008) on St Valentines day in Japan. Following this international stream, Kjeldgaard and Storgaard (2008) presented on the negotiation of feminine identity in Mexico, the paper also appearing in this volume.

In sum, these nine conferences contributed much to the discussion and sense-making about gender as it relates to consumer behaviour. Unfortunately, until recently, these papers had not been included in any searchable database. Now, thanks to funding from the Association of Consumer Research, the articles are in process of being archived and added to their searchable database (at the time of writing, Volumes 7 and 8 were available). This move will only increase the visibility of these fine works, and improve the dissemination of gender concepts and theories into the larger, mainstream marketing and consumer behaviour fields. This special issue also contributes to this goal with four special and important papers.

Contributions to the special Issue

Contributors to this special issue represent a myriad of approaches to gender research, which reflects the breadth and scope of the field at the start of the 21st century. First, Kjeldgaard and Storgaard ethnographically explore the consumption by teenage women of the Mexican telenovela *Rebelde*, in order to analyse how processes of marketplace transition and the negotiation of gender are handled by navigating between countervailing cultural meanings of tradition and modernity, conformity and rebellion, in globalized forms. The research highlights the shift in gender studies towards how gender discourses, including what it is to rebel or conform as a woman, become something akin to actors within highly complex negotiations of identity construction, circulating within a simultaneously global and local cultural terrain. This paper additionally highlights the fragile and slippery nature of culture within emerging and transitional economies and, importantly, alongside this, reflecting contemporary theoretical approaches to gender in the wider humanities and social sciences how young women's identity projects are ongoing, fragile, contradictory and iterative, always under scrutiny and 'up for grabs' (Butler, 1993). In addition to this, they outline and explore the political potency of media offerings in presenting some ontological anchorage in the challenging construction of a feminine identity within this context.

Ostberg also follows this theoretical approach towards gender construction, by presenting a playful and ironically powerful look at comparative penis size within

the context of masculine body ideals. Through the use of discursive interpretive repertoires, he illustrates how the norm of an appropriate penis size is socially and culturally constructed by exploring the negotiation of the tension between the taboo nature of full male nudity and the silence around penis size, together with the evidently culturally crucial male bodily characteristic of having 'enough'. This paper adds to a strong emerging theme in gender research, that is, studies of the construction of a masculine identity in contemporary society (Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004).

The third paper presented in this special issue also focuses upon the construction of masculine identity. Gentry and Harrison investigate male role portrayals in advertising, noting that the traditional masculine hegemony in the US is still seen almost exclusively in television commercials, even at a time when masculine roles in society are changing rapidly. These writers argue that portrayals of gender roles in commercials have not become more gender neutral. While women are being shown in less stereotypically traditional roles, male portrayals still reflect a very traditional masculine perspective. These authors call for marketers to support a more gender neutral and less stereotypical male portrayal within advertising, not only to reflect changing gender norms within society, but to ameliorate the impact these normative masculinities have upon their male consumers. Gentry and Harrison's paper continues to develop the male as a central subject of research position that we first witnessed in the 1996 conference, and we believe research in this field will continue to grow and develop in the marketing and consumer research field in the future.

In the final paper in this collection, Littlefield explores the potential of ecofeminist discourse to examine the various expressions of masculinity found in the deer-hunting subculture. This writer finds figurations of masculine identity that challenge the stereotypes of male hunters, mapping a terrain of masculinities in which concern for nature and the wider ecosystem oscillate with techno discourses of gun and gear. It is indeed an interesting development within the gender field, in our discipline, to see feminist theories applied to notions of masculinity. While this has occurred in other disciplines, it is a giant leap forward to see this happening in the marketing and consumer research field, and bodes well for future research.

Future directions for gender research

What is clear from the articles presented in this special issue is that the negotiation of gender roles, whether masculine or feminine, is a contemporary concern for gender researchers. The emphasis on masculinity, as stated above, can be viewed as a positive development, indicative of the shift in gender issues towards a more central and mainstream position. Further, gender is to be considered as a two-sided coin, as constructions of masculinity, and what it is to be male, inevitably generate and constitute constructions of femininity, and what it is to be female. In addition to this shift towards the central ground in gender studies, the papers in this special issue also map the changing theoretical domain of gender studies

towards post-structuralist theoretics. The political imperative that emerges from this shift is to highlight the constructedness of gender and illuminate not only the challenges faced by men and women in their struggles with prevailing discourses to construct a coherent identity, but also to expose the implications of these normative forces, embedded as they are, within neoliberal discourses of choice and free will. The post-structuralist approach allows consumer and marketing academics to unpick and open for scrutiny, among other things, these normalizing discourses embedded within marketing, advertising and consumer offerings, which consumers are negotiating with to shape the gender terrain. That this special issue displays a post-structuralist worldview and commensurate politics is unsurprising, given the location of much of the contemporary work on gender within the consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) sub-discipline of consumer research, a sub-discipline dominated by this theoretical paradigm. Indeed, it could be argued that Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has all but subsumed gender research within its boundaries; and perhaps the political imperative this approach engenders – of the deconstruction of taken-for-granted forms, bodies, ideas and institutions that produce and reproduce the gender status quo – fits well in this newly emerging location. However, a many-pronged attack on gender issues (and as argued above, we are taking gender to be a political term in itself here) that was started in our discipline in the early 1990s is still required. We need to be particularly careful of the neo-topicalism that characterizes the highly competitive market for marketing and consumer research that voraciously feeds on the new and differentiated and we would suggest might fail to look back to what has still to be achieved. While recognizing the important political work done by constructivist analyses, we need to revisit the perhaps less theoretically contemporary liberal (Scott, 2005) and materialist (Catterall et al., 2005) feminist concerns over gender inequalities in homes (e.g. concerning violence towards women); workplaces (e.g. wage and progression inequalities and homosocial cultures); non-heterosexual and racial inequalities and their intersection with gender issues and feminist critiques (in all their guises) of prevailing norms, values, practices and lives. As the equality statistics above clearly and painfully demonstrate, early equality and social justice concerns of gender and feminist researchers are still apposite and their politically trailblazing early research agendas are still to be fully articulated and realized. At the same time, new discourses surrounding equality and social justice for men have also emerged, and, as Gentry and Harrison discuss in their paper in the special issue, marketers play a significant role in this discourse; as such it is imperative that research moving forward continues to address equality and social justice issues for all genders.

This special issue bears its roots from the 2008 conference on Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behavior held in Boston, MA, and co-chaired by ourselves. As the above discussion of this conference illustrates, conference papers clearly illustrate the depth and breadth of research in the marketing and consumer behaviour field, both in terms of research content and representation of researchers from diverse cultures and backgrounds; indeed there is a rich diversity in our small, but important field of gender researchers. The papers in the issue also demon-

strate the diverse nature of research in the field, again across diverse cultures and backgrounds. As Lisa Penalzoza and Helen Woodruffe-Burton prepare to carry the mantle for the 2010 conference, to be held in the Lake District of England, we are hopeful for the future of our field, as it continues to develop and move forward in new and diverse ways.

Acknowledgments

This special issue stems from the 9th ACR conference on Gender, Marketing and Consumer Research held at Simmons College, Boston, MA, in June 2008. We would like to thank everyone involved in the conference, from our gracious hosts through to our authors and reviewers, for making the conference possible and allowing the fruits of the special issue to begin to flourish. Second, we would like to say a big thank you both to the authors and reviewers for this special issue; the dedication and commitment shown to their respective tasks makes for what we hope to be an important contribution to the gender, marketing and consumer research field. We also acknowledge the support of Pauline Maclaran in championing the special issue for the *Marketing Theory* journal; thank you, Pauline.

Finally, we dedicate this issue to the memory of our colleague Barbara Stern. Her early work in the area of gender paved the way for those of us who followed her to pursue our own passions and to be assured that it would have a home in the discipline. Barbara's dedication was evidenced by the fact that in her last days, when she, but very few others, knew she was dying, she agreed to send us her old proceedings so we could move forward on the archiving project as well as be a judge for the inaugural best paper award at the 2008 conference. I (Susan Dobscha) now have her copy of the inaugural gender conference proceedings and was so sad to hear that when I went to return it, the library was closed. Thank you, Barbara, for everything you did for this conference and for all those junior faculty members that you reached out to and guided. You are already missed. Andy, Lisa, Shona and Susan.

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