

## Gender and Ethical Consumption

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# Gender and Ethical Consumption: Towards a New Research Agenda

*Sarah Marie Hall<sup>1</sup> and Helen Holmes<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Geography, University of Manchester, UK; <sup>2</sup> Sociology and the Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester, UK.

## Why gender and ethical consumption?

With this introductory paper we make the case for a new research agenda centred on ‘Gender and Ethical Consumption’. To date, a host of exciting research, cutting across humanities and social and environmental sciences, investigates and interrogates the gendered nature of consumption. The debates therein are well-versed and widely cited - from Rachel Carson’s (1962) ‘Silent Spring’ to Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s (1987) ‘The World of Goods’, and Marjorie Devault’s (1991) ‘Feeding the Family’ to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) ‘Taste and Distinction’ - gender and consumption are regularly interwoven in academic works, and might readily be understood as comfortable bedfellows. Whether an overtone or undertone, the gendered dimensions of consumer culture have long been of academic interest.

Indeed, our own research has led us to consider many different crossovers between gender and consumption, whether in crafting (Hall and Jayne, 2016; Holmes, 2015), communities (Holmes *under review*) or in national discourses and ideologies (Hall and Holmes, 2017). However, conversations on the relationship between gender and ethical consumption are surprisingly, even suspiciously, quiet. This is despite the fact that the field of ethical consumption, as an arena of academic research - which, in its broadest definition, can be taken to include an array of practices and motivations, including sustainability, resourcefulness, and fair trading (see Barnett *et al.*, 2005) - has gained much traction since the early 1990s (Hall, 2011).

Research that has sought to address gender and ethical consumption to date includes Hawkins (2012) study of the gendered subjectivities of ethical consumption campaigns in the Global North. Also using qualitative methodologies, Cairns *et al.* (2013) investigate processes of mothering through organic food consumption. Bateman and Valentine’s (2010) study departs from these somewhat, whereby they explore the extent to which gender (which they define as sex differences) makes to US consumer’s ethical motivations, using survey methods. While we do not wish to dismiss these significant beginnings, we argue that there are so many fascinating possibilities worthy of further attention, whether in how ethical consumption is defined, understood, practised, performed, felt, enacted, crafted, measured, materialised, marketed, imagined, valued etc. according to gender norms, differences and relations, and across a range of contexts, industries, scales and histories. At a time of multiple uncertainties, instabilities and crises, from environmental, to social, political and economic (see Hall and Ince, 2017), when gender identity, morality and consumption practices are as significant as ever, we argue that gender and ethical consumption *matters*, even if this is not presently reflected in academic agendas.

With this collection, therefore, we aim to explore the ways gender and ethical consumption may converse, connect, or collide within academic research, in order to kick-start more consolidated and dedicated engagement with these debates. To frame these burgeoning discussions, we find ourselves asking three key questions:

- What can current research tell us about the relationship between gender and ethical consumption?
- What theories, methods or approaches might help us to better understand this relationship?
- What are the implications for understanding ethical consumption through the lens of gender, or gender through the lens of ethical consumption?

We also provided these questions to the authors writing in this issue, as a means of pushing and prompting the boundaries of their own scholarship and understandings of gender and ethical consumption. This framing also proved critical when authors' approaches to gender and ethical consumption were revealed to be wide-ranging and at times incompatible and contradictory.

## Approaching gender and ethical consumption

As already indicated, the connections between gender and ethical consumption are numerous, overlapping and interrelated, and this special issue does not, cannot claim to address all avenues in this ripe field of study. Needless to say, we identify two key approaches to taking forward this new research agenda, as observed from the contributions in this issue.

The first theme is 'gendered ethical consumption', or how the motivations, practices, and politics of ethical consumerism have gendered dimensions and can reveal gendered differences. Within this approach, authors tend to erect particular parameters to study, for instance in focusing on practice they might look at how something is made, consumed, discarded and so forth, or in politics focus on a particular social group, set of beliefs, or identity formation. Thus, one critique that might be made of such an approach is that it cordons off elements of ethical consumerism and subjects them to a gendered analysis, when in actuality the picture is more complex. Here, the way in which gender is understood and applied is also open to various interpretations: from critical perspectives that see gender as a socially constructed category indiscriminately applied to and used synonymously with 'sex'; to gender identities as manifest in materials, bodies and enactments that render them 'real', even in a relative sense (see WGSG, 1997). When gender is applied as analytical tool - i.e. to note differences between genders, gendered norms or preferences - this can inadvertently have the effect of reifying the very gendered assumptions that are the object of enquiry and may serve to entrench gender inequality and discrimination.

The second approach can be termed 'gender theory and ethical consumption', i.e. applying feminist or gender-sensitive perspectives to investigating ethical consumerism. This may include theorising ethical consumption by applying feminist theories and concepts such as care, responsibility, or embodiment (e.g. Hall, 2011; Hawkins, 2012). Alternatively, it may involve the application and utilisation of feminist-inspired empirical techniques and methodologies that value experience, voice and empowerment, or approaches that enrol compassion, reflexivity and subjectivity (see Davies, 2008; Moss, 2002; Roberts, 1981). Such an approach might also be described as 'gendering ethical consumption', in that by acknowledging and unsettling notions around gender and gendered dispositions, so too might the plurality of ethical consumption be opened up beyond binary concepts of ethical/unethical, good/bad, producers/consumers. How these two approaches sit together or

apart can allow us to critically deconstruct and interrogate understandings of both gender and ethical consumption, whilst simultaneously exploring connections within.

## The themed issue

This themed issue comprises a diverse set of papers and conversations about gender and ethical consumption, which together represent a step forwards in recognising this subject as an important and vibrant research agenda. Amongst the thirteen contributions there is much diversity to note, with studies located in various disciplinary traditions (including anthropology, business and management, design, development studies, economics, and human geography) as well as geographical contexts (including China, Denmark, Kenya, Spain, UK and USA).

The collection opens with Kirsi Niinimäki's paper on gender differences in ethical fashion. Using survey data collected with Finnish consumers, Niinimäki argues that motivations for ethical consumers can be differentiated according to gender which should be adopted within campaigning and marketing to encourage more sustainable consumption practices. Kiah Smith's paper then explores multiple conventions of ethicality in Kenya's French bean industry, and implications for when understandings of ethical sourcing differ between women smallholders, consumers and retailers. Focusing on Oxfam's *Behind the Brands* campaign, Lisa Stewart unpicks key lessons from the methodology and findings of the project, and makes the case for third party analysis of corporate reporting as a means of informing and empowering consumers in their quest for improving ethical standards of brands. Similarly, in their paper on building brand equity, Raymond J Jones and colleagues call for firms to centre gender identity within their corporate social responsibility initiatives, in order to ascertain more clearly how consumers might react to such initiatives within ethical consumer campaigns. Continuing the theme of branding, Andreas Chatzidakis examines the merits of EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality), a new form of certification that makes specific reference to gender-related injustices, though questions whether such schemes truly have transformative potential.

The next three papers in the collection turn their attentions to notions of leisure, luxury and conspicuous consumption. In their work on ethical fur fashion, and using interview data with female fashion designers, Jana Kliebert and Felix Müller deconstruct the complex stories of responsibility, care and alterity that encircle gendered ethical consumerism. Extending these discussions, and including further considerations of senses and embodiment, Lauren Greehy writes about how the materiality of perfume becomes attached to gendered discourses of ethical consumption, whilst extending current understandings of the olfactory within consumer experiences. In their paper on Chinese consumers, Fang and Podoshen argue that a focus on materialism can unveil insights into gendered conspicuous consumption in a growing economy.

A set of papers on the crossover between ethical and sustainable consumption and lifestyle choices then follows. Kate Burningham and Sue Venn illustrate how gender and relational dimensions of environmentally sustainable practice are necessary for understanding how ethical consumption fits (or not) within everyday family life. Similarly, Rebecca Elliot's piece considers gender and green consumerism, identifying how relational, practical and material dimensions are crucial for further work in this field. With a focus on veganism in Spain, Estela Diaz uses survey methods to reflect on the gendered dimensions of adopting certain ethical consumer lifestyles. Taking energy in the home as the locus of concern, Kirsten Gram-Hanssen and colleagues critically address the role of gender in smart home technologies and its pivotal role in future smart home transitions.

The collection closes ‘in conversation’ with Pauline Maclaran, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal, in an interview conducted by Andreas Chatzidakis that takes the reader through the interconnections between gender politics and ethical consumption, in the words of three foundational scholars. Ultimately, and as a key observation we can make from crafting this collection, different disciplines approach gender and ethical consumption in different ways, whether according to theory or method, epistemology or ontology, which leads to differing and disparate approaches and arguments. With our special issue we explore a full and colourful spectrum of approaches, leaving readers with threads they may wish to pick up, pull or plait together. We are excited to see what creations emerge!

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# Aesthetical or Rational: Gender Differences in Ethical Fashion Consumption

*Kirsi Niinimäki*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Design, Aalto University

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## Abstract

Currently the fashion system is in a state of imbalance and has huge environmental impact. Fast fashion consumption is part of this problem. To understand the issues behind fashion consumption and especially the gender issues, more research needs to be done. This paper presents an empirical study concentrating on gender issues in fashion consumption. The study focuses on the differences between females' and males' expressed reasons for their purchases, consumers' environmental worries and the short- and long-term use of garments. The main findings showed that women are more fashion-oriented consumers looking for emotional pleasures through aesthetical aspects, while men are a more rational type of consumers, emphasizing more garment quality and trustworthy fashion brands. These findings should be taken into account in attempts to encourage more sustainable behaviours and in pushing companies towards ethical actions and environmental marketing.

Keywords: Fashion; Consumption; Gender; Ethical consumption.

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## Introduction

Fashion is based on ever-changing styles, grounded in time and social acceptance. Fashion is a process of continuous change, which strongly connects to consumers' identity building through appearance and external symbols. Fashion takes a central place in our society, and fashion consumption plays an important role in fulfilling not only people's needs, but also desires. Fashion consumption includes many steps: selecting, purchasing, use, disposal of a product, but also it can include consuming services or experiences (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). During these different consumption steps, a consumer can consider ethical and environmental issues, or then not.

The fashion system creates desires for consumers to buy more and more. Fast fashion, which is based on fast manufacturing, huge consumption figures and even fast disposal, is the norm of the current fashion industry. Evidence of this fast material throughput in the system is seen in the increasing textile waste figures in all Western countries (Allwood *et al.*, 2016). This increase indicates the imbalance and unsustainability of the fashion system. Furthermore Western consumers own an increasing number of fashion items that are not actively used but stay in the wardrobe (Fletcher, 2012). This shows the huge size of fashion system, which effectively creates new fashion trends and products, and moreover desires for consumers to buy new and dispose of the old, despite the environmental impact of this industry and the environmental impact of current fashion consumption practices.

Fashion consumption is based on hedonistic consumption, which includes emotional, sensorial and fantasy aspects of product use or owning; it is motivated by the desire to look for pleasure (Kirgiz, 2014). It is said that “consumers prefer not only the best one, but also the thing that makes them happiest” (Kirgiz, 2014: p.201). “Pleasure seeking is the highest beauty” in hedonistic consumption (Hopkins & Pujari, 1999: p.273). Hedonistic consumers emphasize other reasons for purchasing than economic, such as: “...playing a role, entertainment, individual satisfaction, learning new trends, sensorial stimulation, social experience, communication with people who have similar interests, attractiveness of the reference group, status and authority” (ibid.: p.201). Hedonism and utilitarian consumerism can be seen as opposite ends of the spectrum of consumer behaviour. Kirgiz (2014) points out that the rational shopper focuses on price, quality and value. He argues that women behave more hedonistically and men as more utilitarian when shopping. These aspects need further investigation.

Even gender is socially constructed; in this study gender is approached as a binary construct of male versus female fashion. The current dominating fashion system is primarily based on this binary position of consumers’ physicality as either male or female consumers, and this is thus the basis for this investigation. As Bristor and Fisher (1993: p.519) argue, “gender is a pervasive filter through which individuals experience their social world, consumption activities are fundamentally gendered.” Schroeder (2003: p.1) also points out that “gender has become a boutique item in the mainstream mall of consumer research”, and therefore gender issues need further attention in consumption studies.

Some researchers investigating fashion consumption practices argue that men and women shoppers are becoming more similar (e.g. Kim, Sullivan & Forney, 2007; Anguelov, 2016), yet gender-related differences do still exist. Furthermore the meaning of fashion and fashion purchasing appears to differ by gender. Women spend more time shopping (or planning for it), and shopping offers emotional experiences, an escape from reality into a fashion fantasy world, and boosts in emotional levels, all of which appear to be more important aspects for women (Yurschisin & Johnson, 2010). Therefore more women than men have been seen as ‘addicted’ to fashion shopping and behaving unsustainably, such as impulse buying (Yurschisin & Johnson, 2010). Impulse purchasing is tied to the emotional side of consumption, quick decisions, and even a short use-time of garments and their easy disposal (Niinimäki, 2011). Earlier studies have shown that younger consumers are more attracted to impulse shopping than older ones (Wood, 1998), and women tend to practice impulse shopping more often than men (Johnson & Attman, 2009). However in online shopping, it is men who appear to do more impulse shopping virtually (Zhang, Prybutok & Strutton, 2007). On the other hand Workman and Cho (2012) argue that especially with young consumers, gender differences are small in fashion purchasing, especially in impulse shopping or in quality, brand or price purchasing orientation. Yet they found that men tend to prioritize convenience in purchasing and women recreational shopping and fashion-consciousness (ibid.).

How, then, do these emotional or value-based gender differences affect ethical consumption? Ethical consumption in the fashion field can be defined to mean more environmentally-conscious decisions when purchasing, using or disposing garments. Ethical consumption can be linked to attempts to buy less and favour ethical brands, to decrease the environmental impact during maintenance and to extend the use-time of garments. Furthermore the use of services to minimize one’s own ecological footprint can be seen as an ethical act in the fashion field (e.g. renting instead of buying). Ethical and green consumerism has become normal, common behaviour and especially so in the studied context, Finland, where the population is well educated and environmental awareness is high (Autio, Heiskanen & Heinonen, 2009). Yet the attitude-behaviour gap in the ethical fashion field still does exist, and only a minority of consumers are willing to enact their ethical

interests or act according to their environmental worries (Niinimäki, 2010). One study done in Finland (Niinimäki, 2010) showed that 63% of consumers were interested in ethical issues in general, 49% thought about ethical and environmental issues often, 17% thought about these issues when purchasing textiles and clothing, but only 9% of respondents could be defined to be ethical hardliners, who always actualize their ethical value base when purchasing textiles and clothing. Ethical hardliners have a more stable identity and value base than average consumers: in other words, they know who they are and they are thereby able to resist changing fashions and impulse buys. They have made an ethical commitment to follow their own ethical value base, and therefore they always evaluate purchase options based on ethical or sustainable criteria (Niinimäki, 2010). An earlier study has shown that environmentally active consumers are more often women who are well educated and have higher incomes (Oksanen, 2002). Yet in the fashion context, younger consumers with lower incomes are also interested in the environmental issues of clothing (Niinimäki, 2010; 2011).

Moisander (2001: pp.181-195) has identified three discourses in ethical and “green” consumerism. The first is an individualist moral discourse, where the consumer is a well-informed and rational individual actor, a “morally exemplary citizen”. The second discourse is an aesthetically and spiritually-oriented green consumer, who is connected to the voluntary simplicity movement. For example LOVOS (Voluntarily simplifying one’s lifestyle) or LOHAS (Lifestyles of health and sustainability) movements invite people to voluntarily lower their consumption or even income levels. Some movements even espouse voluntary poverty while also investing in good living, better life quality including health issues (e.g. organic food and eco-products), and even self-sufficient households. The third discourse is a consumer linked to asocial and fanatic activism. Accordingly, the profiles of green and ethical consumers are rational, aesthetical or activist. These profiles also have an emotional connotation. Fashion purchasing gives us experiences of emotional “highs”, especially for materialistic consumers (Richins *et al.*, 1992), but also consumers shop more and more on impulse when they are in a happy mood (e.g. Beatty & Ferrel, 1998). Therefore we can say that emotions play an important role in fashion consumption. But do both genders experience similar fashion emotions? How can we understand fashion consumption more deeply from the gender viewpoint? And are there still gender differences when fashion consumers are expressing their ethical value base and linking it to fashion consumption practices? This study has thus focused on gender issues in fashion consumption in order to open up new views on ethical fashion consumption.

## Research design

This study is based on empirical data collected in Finland in 2010 with a snowball sampling method, with a total of 203 respondents. An online survey was conducted where consumers’ attitudes to sustainable products and ethical consumption were mapped out. Of the respondents 70% were female. The respondents’ age categories are presented in Table 1. The respondents were highly educated: 50% had a Master’s degree (the average in the Finnish population being 27% with a Master’s degree), and 23% had gone through vocational school (39% is the corresponding average in the Finnish population). The income levels were as follows: 13% reported having no income, 39% reported having less than 2000 €/month, 27% between 2001-2999 €, 16% between 3000-4999 €/month, and 7% reported having more than 5000 €/month.

A total of 88% of men and 95% of women reported that in general they are interested in ethical and ecological issues in products and their manufacturing (for this question, on a five-point Likert scale: “I am interested in ethical consumption and

the environmental impact of products”). Furthermore the respondents’ ethical value base was probed through their garment purchasing with this question: “Ethicality, safety (free of toxic chemicals) and the environmental impact of textile products and production affect my purchasing decision”. The respondents’ ethical value base can be seen in Table 2 (the category “do not know” has not been included in this table).

**Table 1: Age**

Age category	Men (n)	Women (n)
18-25	9	51
26-35	29	69
36-45	15	12
46-55	5	10
56-64	2	1
All	60	143

**Table 2: Ethical interest**

Ethical interest	Never % “Not interested”	Seldom % “Do what I can”	Often % “Conscious consumers”	Always % “Ethical hardliners”
Female	7	20	47	22
Male	15	27	37	10

“Ethical hardliners” are consumers who are not only interested in ethical issues, but also realize their value base in their purchases, also when buying textile and garment products. It appears that female consumers report more often on their ethical value base than men, but let us continue the investigation of gender issues in ethical consumerism.

## Hedonism or utilitarian purchasing

Table 3 presents the respondents’ comments on the attributes that affect their garment purchasing. According to this study, the opinions are surprisingly similar comparing genders. The largest difference is seen in the aesthetical side of the garments. Women more often reported that a yearning for beauty was the reason for buying a new or particular garment. The need to follow fashion and changing trends was also more important for women than men.

Women are more often defined to be hedonic consumers who fulfil their need for materialistic consumption more than men, while men are defined to be utilitarian shoppers (Kim, Sullivan & Forney, 2007). This definition nicely describes the emotional side of fashion consumption, which has more allure for women than men. Hine (2002) has pointed out that shopping is one of the most favoured things women want to do, while for men it is the opposite, the last thing on which they want to spend leisure time. Shopping also seems to be an important social activity for women and even one way to express their creativity (Yurchisin & Johnson, 2010).

**Table 3: Reasons for garment purchasing**

Garment purchasing	Men %	Women %
Real need	78	76
Need to renew	48	51
Deep consideration	48	51
Impulse shopping	22	25
<b>Yearning for beauty</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Following fashion</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>
Social pressure for certain kind of appearance	8	6
Need to show own ideology	15	17

**Table 4: Garment purchasing**

Most important factors in garment purchasing	
Men	Women
1. Style 78%	1. Fit 67%
2. Price 67%	2. Style 65%
3. Fit 65%	3. Price 63%
<b>4. Quality 62%</b>	<b>4. Suitability for existing wardrobe 52%</b>
5. Suitability for existing wardrobe 47%	5. Quality 51%
6. Material 43%	6. Material 46%
7. Colour 40%	7. Colour 42%
<b>8. Brand 23%</b>	<b>8. Long lifetime 33%</b>
<b>9. Long lifetime 22%</b>	<b>9. Eco/ethical 30%</b>
<b>10. Eco/ethical 15%</b>	10. Easy care 18%
11. Easy care 12%	<b>11. Brand 10%</b>
12. Local production 3%	12. Local production 8%

Table 4 displays the answers to this question: “Think about your recent clothing purchases and name 5 of the most important factors for the purchase decision you made”. Some gender difference can be seen here. Quality, which links to a garment’s longevity, was less important for women than men. This is an interesting finding, as at the same time women are emphasizing the long lifetime of the garments more than men. High quality enables a garment’s long lifetime. According to this finding, the attribute associated with long life may mean different things for women than men; women are possibly looking more for the style and colour, the aesthetic dimensions, that last over time compared to men, who may more emphasize quality and perhaps a more classic style in their garments in general.

When the most important factors for purchase decision were discussed, garments’ ecological and ethical factors were in 9th place for women and 10th place for men. However twice as many women had chosen this option compared to men. As

women are reported to be more environmental aware than men and especially so in the fashion field, this finding is in line with earlier studies.

An interesting aspect is also the influence of brand. While an earlier study by Workman and Cho (2012) concluded there is no notable gender difference in garment purchasing from the perspectives of quality or brand, this study saw a different outcome. Men seem to seek or rely on a certain brand more often than women. An earlier study has shown (Niinimäki, 2011; 2014) that when seeking quality, something that is difficult to evaluate in the purchase situation, consumers rely on a brand that has earlier offered him/her the experience of quality, especially quality in use. The finding from the current study is in line with this, and therefore we can conclude that while men value quality in garments, they also seek quality through a certain reliable brand.

**Table 5: Satisfaction with latest purchasing**

Satisfaction with latest purchasing	
Men %	Women %
Quality 59	Fit 62
Fit 53	Colour 62
Feel and touch 48	Feel and touch 53
Use experience 46	Material 51
Expectations 42	Beauty experience 43
Colour 42	Quality 44
Material 39	Expectations 33

When asked about the satisfaction attributes with regards to the latest garment purchases, women emphasized aesthetical issues like fit, colour and the feel and touch of the garment when worn. Furthermore 43% of women reported being happy with the beauty experience, while for men this aspect was mentioned by only 19% of respondents. Men were satisfied with the quality, fit, feel and touch of the garment when worn and the use experience (functionality). These findings highlight that female consumers focus more on aesthetical aspects while men more on the rational side of fashion consumption. Moreover men were more satisfied in terms of their product expectations (42%) than women (33%), which might link to men's way of considering their purchasing more than women, as well as women's tendencies to buy fast fashion, low quality or even on impulse.

It is also useful to note the dissatisfaction issues with the latest garment purchases, which were also probed in this study. Men were dissatisfied with the provided product information (31%), e.g. information about the production location was missing. The location of manufacturing has been recognized to be one factor through which consumers evaluate the environmental impact of the manufacturing and the ethical issues in the working conditions of industry workers (Niinimäki 2011). In Europe and in nearby textile-producing countries like Turkey, working conditions are better regulated, compared to the situation in Bangladesh or other Far East countries. Moreover consumers trust that the industrial production has less environmental impact and that it is regulated and monitored by authorities in proximal countries (to Europe) compared

to production in China or further afield. Accordingly consumers want to trust “local production”, even if local extends to production in Europe. The second biggest issue in dissatisfaction was the shopping experience for men (25%). For example they commented that it was hard to find suitable and well-fitting garments, it was hard to evaluate quality when purchasing and it was hard to find enough information behind the product. The life span of the garment (18%) and quality in use (14%) also caused dissatisfaction for men. For women the ranking of issues causing dissatisfaction differs. The lifespan of the garment (25%), quality (24%), product information (24%) and shopping experience (23%) were nearly all equally important issues for women’s dissatisfaction.

## Environmental consideration during different phases in the garment’s life cycle

By asking “Did you consider the environmental impact of textiles in any of the following stages?”, the inquiry tried to map respondents’ awareness of the environmental impact of their own behaviour. Table 5 shows some gender differences. In general the most worrying stage for both men and women is garment disposal. Women appear to be more ready to find alternatives before purchasing. They are more ready to commit to an ethical act, by comparing brands and finding information. This might also link to the idea of a fashion hunt (e.g. Armstrong *et al.*, 2016): women tend to think about their fashion acts more than men, e.g. the shopping before the action of purchase. This is part of the fashion entertainment aspect, which seems to be also relevant in ethical fashion consumption. Therefore it is important that ethical companies try to be as transparent as possible with their design and manufacturing activities and ethical and environmental information provided to consumers.

**Table 6: Considering environmental impact during consumption phases**

Phase	Men %	Women %
when disposing	66	60
<b>when searching for alternative options</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>while purchasing</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>44</b>
when purchase need arises	22	25
while using	20	31

**Table 7: Considering environmental impact during different production phases**

Phase	Men %	Women %
Short life	68	78
Fibre cultivation	51	49
<b>Location of manufacturing</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Product processing</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>52</b>
Transportation	30	35
Fibre processing	30	36
Disposal of the product	28	34

In the survey, more details were also solicited about respondents' understanding of the environmental impacts of the textile industry through the question "Which production phases worry you most from the environmental viewpoint?" For women and men the short lifetime of clothing was the biggest worry (Table 7). "Honestly saying, when you love the colour of the garment when you're buying it, it is faded after the first wash. The quality of clothes is so low nowadays." The manufacturing location and product processing worry women more than men. One comment from the survey, "No idea about the product's background", conveys the wish to get more information about the manufacturing of this item. "For example the bad working conditions in the factories worries me." "For example all the chemicals they put into products cause worries." Women are also a bit more worried about the short life of garments. This finding is associated with the fact that women are more often the "fashion lovers", buying and consuming more garments than men, and at the same time being more conscious about the environmental impacts of the garment industry.

## Garment use

Respondents were asked to estimate the shortest time they have used some garments. In the survey, 10% of men and 22 % of women reported using some garment for less than one month. Respondents gave reasons for a short use time, such as low quality, impulse shopping and wrong purchase decision.

*Some things I have bought I will never use. The reason is that they have been impulse purchases from sales, and they do not fit into my style or with other garments in my wardrobe. And then I have these kinds of (especially T-shirt) garments that are ruined after the first wash. (woman, age 26-35)*

*I buy something that is affordable, then the product wears out after the first wash! It has happened to me a couple of times. (man, age 26-35)*

*Then (and this happens seldom), when you notice that something you bought does not fit nicely (physically or mentally), I look around to whom of my friends I could give it or then I give it to charity through some reliable organization. When I give away my old garments, they are still in such good condition that I will not throw them away as waste. (man, age 46-55)*

Based on the comments in the survey, women give more emotional reasons for their garment use or disposal and come across as quite honest. In contrast men try to point out that they have rational reasons even for the disposal of garments, and therefore they highlight that they are not unsustainable consumers.

**Table 8: The shortest use time**

Shortest use time	Men	Women
Less than 1 month	10	22
1-2 months	12	9
3-6 months	26	30
7 months -1 year	26	28
1-2 years	22	13

**Table 9: Longest use time**

Longest use time	Men %	Women %
<b>more than 5 years</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>66</b>
4-5 years	7	12
3-4 years	9	14
2-3 years	7	6
1-2 years	1	0
7 months-1 year	1	1

Moreover, respondents were asked to estimate the lifespan of their oldest and most used garment (Table 9).

*I have several garments from the 1980s that I still use. They were quite expensive when I bought them, but still after several times in the laundry (a good washing machine is included in this), they are like new, because the materials are top quality. Also styles and colours are classic, when you eliminate the effect of changing fashion trends. And taking care of your body is part of the process, so that you can fit in your old garments for decades. (man, age 46-55)*

This short description, a quotation from the survey, opens up the many levels needed for sustainable consumption: durability through high quality and a classic style, good investment in long life spans through higher prices and higher quality, good garment maintenance, and control of your body size.

*I have demanding taste, and therefore it is hard for me to find garments that I really like. Shoes do last long, because I take good care of them. Overall textiles and clothing last long, because I make long-term purchase decisions. I buy garments only when I find something really special, something I really like and are high quality. I hate badly made and low quality garments. I love garments that I have found, and I take good care of them, so that they last as long as possible, because if a garment I love starts to fall apart, I can't be sure I will find a suitable one to replace it. When I find something really wonderful, I buy 2 of them, so that I can use them for as long as possible. (woman, age 26-35)*

This quotation from the survey is a female description containing many connotations to the emotional side of fashion consumption. The long use-time refers to attachment, liking and loving the garment, but also taking good care of it, committing yourself to the garment. This emotional side of consumption can also be seen in the attachment process towards the garment (Table 10). These findings highlight the meaning of beauty in person-product attachment and long lifetimes of garments especially for female consumers. The meaning of beauty of the garment is a fundamental issue for female consumers, even in ethical clothing.

**Table 10: Attachments to garments**

	Men %	Women %
They fit well and they are suitable for the use situation	80	85
high quality	80	74
<b>I like the material</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>I like the style</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>69</b>
Easy maintenance	36	36
<b>I like the colour</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>They are beautiful</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>57</b>

## Discussion

This study has been quite exploratory, and the findings have limitations because of the size of the empirical data and the study being site specific. Perhaps this investigation raises more questions than it answers, yet it highlights several relevant issues regarding ethical fashion consumption and gender. The study was based on an online survey, mapping respondents' opinions more than real consumption habits, which limits the knowledge of the long-term impact of the factors in this study. Yet the study highlights some gender differences, which are also linked to ethical fashion consumption.

To draw conclusions from the previously presented findings, the argument can be made that women are more fashion-oriented shoppers looking for emotional pleasures and even fun through aesthetical aspects, while men are more rational and a utilitarian-type of consumers, emphasizing more on quality and trustworthy fashion brands. This is in line with the findings by Kirgiz (2014), who states that women are more emotional consumers and men slightly more rational ones. From these findings it can be argued that from the perspective of ethical consumption, women should be approached through aesthetical dimensions of design and use, while men should be approached more from quality and functional aspects in design and use. To foster sustainable consumption through longevity of garments, women should be offered aesthetical pleasures, while men more appreciate quality, which they seek through trustworthy brands. Moreover transparency in all ethical and environmental information behind the brand, design and manufacturing should be offered to the consumers, even if this might be more meaningful for women, who search for and compare this information before making their purchase decision. Also during the purchase event ethical information should be provided, such as eco-labels or QR (quick response) codes through which more information could be found online. For women who have the need for the fashion hunt and fashion experiences and who are more prone to impulse shopping, more information should be provided about the quality and expected durability and lifetime of garment when purchasing. This might affect their buying behaviour and decision making.

Boosting ethical fashion consumption is not easy, as ever-changing fashion trends and effective fashion marketing create emotional desires and needs that are challenging to counter. A better understanding of the gender issues behind fashion might offer some tools to build fashion offerings that can lead consumers towards ethical considerations, better product satisfaction, extending the use-time of garments and even slowing down fashion consumption.

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# Gendered Conventions of 'Ethicality'? Comparing smallholder values with ethical sourcing standards in Kenya

*Kiah Smith*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia.

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## Abstract

Within global food networks, multiple and diverse meanings of social justice, environmental sustainability, livelihoods, fairness and well-being (or 'ethicality') exist in parallel to those embedded in ethical sourcing schemes. This paper considers the dilemma facing ethical sourcing when consumer- or retailer-driven ethical values around social justice, environmental sustainability, livelihoods, fairness and well-being (or 'ethicality') - differ from the issues that women smallholder farmers may prioritise. Drawing on conventions theory and qualitative research with women French bean farmers in Kenya, the paper describes the ways in which meanings of 'ethicality' are highly gendered and context-specific. Findings suggest that women smallholders draw from a wide variety of domestic, civic and green conventions in order to make meaning of the livelihood outcomes that matter most to them within ethical trade networks. Only some of these are compatible with the market and industrial conventions currently underpinning fair and ethical trade.

Keywords: Gender; ethical trade; fair trade; conventions theory; smallholders.

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## Introduction

Ethical sourcing standards - such as the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative and the international brand of Fair Trade - bridge the domains of food production and consumption, providing a regulatory means to embed transnational justice or 'ethicality' into global production-consumption relationships. One of the main critiques of ethical sourcing, however, is that standards are 'partial and selective as to whose ethical interests they serve' (Neilson & Pritchard, 2009: p.152). Global food production is highly gendered, considering that women smallholder farmers contribute a high proportion of labour and knowledge in export-led horticulture in the global South, but still often lack control over income, land, distribution or other decisions crucial for achieving local sustainable livelihoods. Women also tend to be excluded from setting ethical regulations and implementing them on the ground.

Ethical sourcing has therefore been criticised for failing to incorporate gendered perspectives on social well-being, environmental sustainability and livelihoods, and for institutionalising the ethical values and priorities of Northern consumers, NGOs, governments and food retailers. These critiques are associated with limits to voluntary ethical initiatives

more generally (Challies, 2012; Utting, 2010) and in UK-Africa ethical and fair trade networks specifically (Barrientos *et al.*, 2003; Dolan *et al.*, 2003; Dolan and Humphrey, 2000; Friedberg, 2003a, 2004; Opondo, 2005; Tallontire *et al.*, 2005). It is very unlikely that they reflect the ethics of Southern producers whom they are intended to benefit (Blowfield & Dolan, 2008: p.18; see also Bacon *et al.*, 2008; Barrientos & Dolan, 2006; Dolan, 2008; Reynolds & Bennett, 2015). While there are many studies of the gendered content and impacts of ethical sourcing - such as the gendered division of labour in horticulture and rural households, employment conditions, and bias in code implementation and auditing, (see for example Barrientos *et al.*, 2001; Dolan, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Smith, 2014), few studies have explored the ethical values that women smallholders do hold in relation to the global food production-consumption networks they participate in.

Ethical standards are widely understood to reflect particular constructs of ethics depending on who is defining the standards, goals or desired outcomes (Blowfield, 2003). The paradox for ethical sourcing and its ability to embed transnational justice into food networks therefore lies in the capacity of multi-stakeholder ethical trade standards to balance the 'ethicality' of both producers and consumers enrolled into them. This is no easy task, considering the distance (both geographical, economic and cultural) between women smallholder farmers in the global South and consumers of imported, high-value horticultural products in the global North. In this paper, I argue that there is an opportunity to elaborate on the gendered meanings embedded in ethical trade standards through examining how the values defining ethicality in Kenyan-UK horticultural food networks are constructed, both by women smallholders and in standards themselves. This represents a shift from focusing on the content or impacts of ethical trade towards an exploration of how the meanings of food ethics are being shaped both from 'above' and from 'below' (see Friedmann & McNair, 2008).

Conventions theory considers how economic exchange depends on shared agreements about the meaning of 'quality', and helps to explain how it is that these meanings come into being (Neilson & Pritchard, 2009: p.42). In this paper, I apply conventions theory to consider how local, gendered values of 'ethicality' compare with those formalised in ethical trade schemes. Although little research has explored this question specifically with a gender focus, a key assumption is that women smallholders' constructions of ethicality will likely differ from those embedded in Northern-led ethical sourcing standards. Following a brief overview of conventions theory and its application to analysing ethicality, the paper describes findings on how women smallholder farmers understand or define their own well-being, income, food security and environmental sustainability within the 'ethical' food networks in which they participate. What conventions do they draw on, and how do these compare to the values embedded in existing ethical trade standards?

To answer these questions, I first present an analysis of four key ethical sourcing standards that regulate ethical sourcing (in this case, of French Beans) between Kenya and the UK, focusing on what is included in the codes and what conventions are used to justify them. I then explore women smallholders' values around 'ethicality' and the conventions that they use to justify these priorities. Findings are condensed from qualitative analysis of research with over 180 women smallholder farmers in Machakos, Kenya: women's own words (interview data); data generated via participatory methods such as wheel diagrams, field visits, and action research workshops; and as well as interview data from industry representatives and NGOs in Kenya and the UK. Ethical trade is shown to be largely based on civic and market conventions, though the valuation process is different for actors engaged in food production compared to those at other 'nodes' in the food network.

## Ethicality and conventions: theoretical background

Conventions theory makes it possible to compare the values of women smallholder farmers with those currently embedded in regulatory ethical trade, as it is concerned with ‘how actors materially and ideologically engage particular norms, rules, and quality constructions across production, distribution and consumption arenas’ (Raynolds, 2002: p.409). Sociological understandings of conventions theory focus on ‘worlds of justification’, and their associated ‘orders of worth’. Table 1 presents an overview of the seven categories of conventions:

**Table 1: Overview of conventions theory**

Conventions	Definition (world of justification + orders of worth)
<b>Market</b>	Price and economic value, investment, market supply and demand
<b>Civic</b>	Collective interest, common welfare, citizenship, fairness, equality
<b>Domestic</b>	Trust, social ties, interpersonal dependencies, dignity, place/locality, tradition
<b>Opinion</b>	Regard, reputation, recognition, esteem
<b>Inspired</b>	Grace, non-conformity, creativity, passion, emotion
<b>Industrial</b>	Productivity, efficiency, competency, testing, standards, certification, auditing
<b>Green</b>	Welfare of the environment tied to common welfare

*Source: Originated by Boltanski & Thévenot (1991) and developed more recently by Ponte & Gibbon (2005), Rosin & Campbell (2009), and Evans (2011).*

Of interest to conventions theory are, firstly, the constructs of meanings themselves, and second, the processes by which particular meanings come to be valued over others. ‘Worlds of justification’ are based on different political philosophies on how to achieve the common good. The ‘order of worth’ indicates how value is to be assigned to the participants (both humans and objects) in a given social interaction, which in turn suggests the types of actions that can justifiably be taken to reform social structures (Rosin & Campbell, 2009: p.37). In this case, the social structures of interest are the relationships between and within farmers, environments and economies that ethical sourcing standards seek to alter. This framework ‘provides both a vocabulary and a grammar for the public disputation of fairness and justice in social interaction’ (Rosin & Campbell, 2009: p.37). Ethical trade falls within the civic and industrial worlds, which is based on assessments, labels and certification systems regarding social and environmental impacts and a collective commitment to welfare (Ponte, 2009: p.239-240). The acceptance of ethical standards will depend on how the meanings of ethical are being constructed and by whom, as well as how those meanings resonate with existing understandings of food ethics.

Much of the existing work linking conventions theory with ethical sourcing applies the categories of conventions to understand how food quality is defined between the level of production and the level of consumption via certification and other audit technologies (see Campbell & Le Heron, 2007; Ponte, 2009; Rosin & Campbell, 2009). For example, Raynolds (2002) has shown how the success of fair and organic certification has appealed to consumers’ civic and green concerns, as well as domestic qualifications of trust; Renard (2003) has focused on the market conventions of fair trade; and Freidberg (2003b) and Dolan (2005b) applied conventions theory to the study of African horticulture to conclude that ethical trade reflects histories of colonialism.

Beyond quality, standards also incorporate ethical values. According to the extensive literature on ethical food production, trade and consumption (see for example, Crang & Hughes, 2015; Goodman *et al.*, 2014; Lang, 2010; and Rosin *et al.*, 2012), the relatively recent creation and proliferation of multi-stakeholder standards, regulations and certification schemes such as Fair Trade, the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) base code, GLOBALG.A.P. (worldwide Good Agricultural Practice certification) and industry codes of conduct is connected to the rising importance of a diverse range of ethical 'values' shaping food systems today. These include:

- quality (fresh, local, seasonal, sustainable source, authenticity);
- social justice (animal welfare, fair trade, labour rights and work conditions, income/affordability, access, socio-economic status, diversity, gender equality, well-being, land, hunger/food security);
- environment (climate change, land use, biodiversity, organics, soil, transport/food miles, harmony with nature and community, interdependence);
- health (safety, nutrition, culture);
- politics (democracy, justice, empowerment, rights, partnerships, authenticity, solidarity, autonomy, equality of outcome/opportunity/voice); and
- markets (fair trade, fair prices, convenience, aesthetics, ease and adaptability to new lifestyles).

In embedding these values (albeit, some more than others) into economic transactions, ethical sourcing standards have become 'strategic intervention[s] for addressing the social, economic, and environmental injustices of global agriculture' (Neilson & Pritchard, 2009). Many ethical sourcing standards govern the environmental and social conditions in Kenyan French bean supply to the UK, including the ETI, Fair Trade, GLOBALG.A.P. and Kenyan horticultural sector code, KenyaG.A.P (local version of GLOBALG.A.P). My analysis of their ethical 'values' (rather than the content of their checklists, which have been covered elsewhere, see Smith, 2014) indicates that while these standards certainly draw on shared understandings of what counts as fair or ethical, they vary in their inclusion or exclusion of specific values.

The only values common to each code are labour conditions, health and the inclusion of smallholders. Environmental issues and food safety and/or quality are the most comprehensively covered, including restrictions on pesticide use, soil management, pollution prevention, waste management and recycling, biodiversity, wildlife and water management; although how to achieve 'sustainability' in these areas is defined very differently across systems. For example, Fair Trade specifies restrictions on the use of genetically modified organisms, while GLOBALGAP and KenyaGAP allow this. None of the standards deal with land tenure issues, such as ownership, leasing, disputes or succession. The least clearly stated goals related to producer empowerment, gender, income, food security, and well-being are more variable.

Recognition of the gendered dimensions of these issues vary. Fair trade standards are the most comprehensive on social justice and gender issues, in that (a) the empowerment of marginalized groups and non-discrimination of women are included in Fair Trade principles; and (b) non-discrimination and positive discrimination on the basis of sex are specified in Fair Trade standards. Fair Trade also targets women in terms of minimum requirements for occupational health and safety, whereby pregnant or nursing women are not allowed to apply pesticides. Well-being and quality of life are most elaborated in the ETI's labour rights such as collective bargaining, freedom of association, choice, humane treatment and children's rights. Values around well-being and quality of life intersect with income: the ETI requires living wages to be paid, and the FLO

links income and development through community funds (see Smith, 2014).

Which conventions are being used to justify these priorities? Ethical sourcing standards reflect civic and green conventions that assess quality, safety, environmental and social justice through industrial norms and processes of standards, accreditation, audits, targets and policies. Civic, green and industrial conventions combine with market conventions around price, efficiency and competition. For example, Fair Trade uses market conventions to justify paying a price premium for certified products in order to contribute to local development for smallholders and their communities. This enables ethical standards to specify exactly how ethicality should be measured and implemented in supply chains. In my own field research in Kenya, however, many participants' expressed concern that the conglomeration of standards applying to women smallholders 'may not even be applicable, let alone be relevant' (Exporter, Nairobi).

This is because food ethics are not neutral, concrete or given, but:

*"[e]merge in the process of actions aimed at solving problems or co-ordination [...which...] may be tested and thus needs to be justified by drawing on a variety of criteria of justice that are broadly accepted at a particular time."* (Ponte, 2009: p.239)

This aspect of conventions theory makes it useful for exploring gender and ethical sourcing. Rather than focus on the categories of conventions themselves, the remainder of this paper focuses on conventions theory's insistence that multiple 'spheres of action' exist, and thus, that meanings embedded in civic/industrial conventions such as ethical trade standards coexist with broader understandings of ethicality. As Ponte (2009: p.241) puts it:

*"The plurality of possible worlds of justification of action drawn upon within certain spheres coexists with more localised and familiar understandings of what is just."*

Based on this approach, I now turn to applying the categories of conventions to assess how women smallholders define ethicality (in terms of livelihoods), compared to standards.

## Findings and discussion: comparing conventions

To explore the gendered values and meanings of 'ethicality' in greater depth, 180 women smallholders in Machakos, Kenya were asked to discuss how they define a 'good quality of life', using participatory action research methods. While only Fair Trade specifically claims to tackle livelihood issues, improving producers' quality of life is an implicit aim in all of the ethical codes operating here. As described previously, ethical trade regulations generally conceptualise quality of life through the lens of civic and green conventions that can be easily commodified in formal markets (such as minimum wages, working conditions, health and safety and ILO labour rights). But for women smallholders in Machakos, quality of life extends beyond those definitions in ways specific to gender, place and culture. In Table 2, women's own values are organised around income, well-being, food security and environmental sustainability; key elements of 'ethicality' that emerged during fieldwork. As there is not enough space here to discuss each of these themes in depth, I focus on just a few examples of each.

**Table 2: Overview of conventions used by women smallholders to define 'ethicality'**

Aspect of ethicality	Type of convention used by women smallholders	Priorities for measuring 'ethicality'	Comparison with conventions in ethical trade
<b>Income</b>	Market	Targets, quotas, 'fair prices', efficiency, fair market access	Competition, price premium
	Civic	Employment/unemployment, poverty	Living wage, regular employment
<b>Well-being</b>	Civic	Material, bodily and social well-being, community relations, fairness, future generations, control over own life	Poverty reduction, living standards
	Opinion	Hard work, perseverance	-
	Industrial	Discrimination, child labour	Labour rights
	Domestic	Jealousy and trust, tradition, 'good wife' norms, personal communication, gender relations	Trust in audit process
<b>Food Security</b>	Market/ industrial	Efficiency, supply and demand, risk, market access as development	Living wage
	Opinion	Identity, pride	-
	Civic/domestic	Having enough, nutrition/health, giving, caring, generosity, trust and theft, gender roles	Benevolence and obligation of North to South
<b>Environmental Sustainability</b>	Opinion	Hard work, success, failure, responsibility	Labelling and ethical consumption
	Green	Soil fertility, manure, crop rotation, low chemical use	Industrial measures of environmental impact
	Domestic	Place, traditional knowledge and techniques, gendered responsibility for environmental stewardship, gendered land ownership	Trust in audit process

Source: Author's own work (reproduced with permission from Smith, 2014: p.161)

Women's views as to the fairness of their food systems were diverse. They discussed the *market conventions* of efficiency, fair prices and market access alongside civic conventions relating to fair employment and poverty alleviation. Women's civic conventions included being able to improve living standards (shared in both ethical trade and smallholders' responses) and a multi-dimensional view of well-being incorporating material (having enough water, electricity, housing, clothing), bodily (health and nutrition) and social well-being (such as education, community/familial cohesion). For example:

- Income security was associated not just with wages, but also with the ability to invest, save and buy land, improve living standards and pay for children's education. These issues resonate with income security items in the ETI and Fair Trade,

such as a living wage, regular employment and investment in community funds (all civic conventions), although women did not use these terms.

- Despite the prevalence of market conventions (prices, targets and quotas) women smallholders were concerned with more immediate vulnerabilities such as unemployment, poverty, outmigration and drug use.
- Farming was seen as a way out of poverty, suggesting that ethical trade's civic concern with poverty alleviation resonates with smallholders – although it was not enough considering the high occurrence of hunger and food insecurity reported by participants.
- Freedom of choice, personal control over one's own life, community impacts of improved living conditions and community relations emerged as key elements of well-being, alongside personal happiness that comes from being able to 'provide everything to our family' (Jane, smallholder).

Trust and the value of personal, gender and community relationships - examples of *domestic conventions* – arose in the interviews as key elements in achieving well-being and food security:

- Food security was defined as having enough healthy and nutritious food to 'make sure there is supply of food throughout, and there is nothing stressing the grandparents and young sisters and brothers' (Agatha).
- Food security was also highly gendered, for 'when there's no food the burden is on the women' (Rose). Women's capacity to feed their families' nutritious food from their own farm was a source of identity and responsibility, and giving food to those in need was an important part of the women's culture.
- Women highlighted the gendered nature of traditional knowledge, household roles and responsibility for environmental management; 'Husbands and wives need to reach an agreement about how money should be spent if the women are to succeed in farming and improve their lives ... Because if they fail to do that, the women will remain weak, with burdens in their hearts, because their plants will never succeed. Better future for women is based on their husbands' (Caroline).
- Most of the women's *green conventions* around sustainable farming methods fit with existing industrial norms.

Women also spoke using *opinion conventions*, suggesting that hard work, pride, perseverance and success are attributes necessary for women farmers to achieve a good quality of life. As Sarah explained, 'if you want a quality of life, you must be hard working ... because without working you can't make anything for a better tomorrow'. Many of these norms were closely associated with religion and the definition of 'the good wife', just as Dolan (2001) found amongst women producers in Meru. Finally, this study found that women smallholders did not explicitly mention any of the notions of freedom of association or collective bargaining that are central to *industrial conventions* underpinning ethical trade.

## Conclusion

This paper has compared the values embedded in ethical trade standards with women smallholders' own definitions of desirable livelihood outcomes. Conventions theory has been used to analyse how diverse meanings of ethicality are constructed; that is, which 'worlds of justification' are being drawn upon by different actors when they seek to embed ethics into standards and certification schemes. This approach recognises that actors engage different norms, rules, meanings, definitions and constructions (i.e. conventions) depending on their position in food networks, and therefore, that these

meanings are subject to contestation, rejection or change. Conventions theory opens up the possibility that producers' values may differ from the norms underpinning existing ethical and fair trade standards. This is not inherently problematic, but relates to central questions underpinning the new food politics of quality (Goodman *et al.*, 2014) - of 'whose values' determine how food is produced, traded and consumed, and thus, whether it is possible for alternative ideas to replace problematic approaches of the past. Just as there is no universal understanding of quality (Ponte & Gibbon, 2005: p.7), there is also no universal understanding of ethicality. In this case study, ethical standards were found to reflect civic and green conventions that assess quality, safety, environmental and social justice through industrial processes of standards, auditing and accreditation. These combine with market conventions around price, efficiency and competition. They are normative, and specify exactly how ethicality should be measured and implemented in supply chains. But they are also highly variable across standards: quality, health, environment and labour rights were explicit across all or most of the codes analysed, while well-being was limited to living standards, living wages or labour rights. Upstream actors described the benefits of ethical trade regulations in terms of efficiency, prices and improved capacity to meet market requirements.

By contrast, women smallholders described many meanings of ethicality that have not been commodified or codified into industrial norms. While some of their well-being concerns (housing, education, sanitation, health, child labour) are codified in ethical trade's industrial conventions, many are not (i.e. most domestic, opinion and civic values, especially regarding gender roles and community relations). Many aspects of livelihoods were not seen by participants to be associated with fair or ethical trade at all, and women were largely unconvinced that the social, health or environmental outcomes promoted by standards were in their best interests. These findings support Lang's (2010) argument that within ethical standards, ethical values are more often selective, disconnected, and may not actually reflect the most important issues. They also support critiques that standards are partial, that 'value' is constructed by a multitude of actors, and that price is only one part of the process of valuing (see Blowfield & Dolan, 2008).

The analysis of conventions presented here has provided an innovative conceptual lens to better understand the processes through which priorities for ethical sourcing are justified and norms are engaged, with important lessons for ethical consumption. On the one hand, woman smallholders' definitions of ethicality appeal to civic, opinion and domestic conventions that reflect locally-based identities, domestic gender roles, community relationships and identity. These concerns do not currently figure in the conventions used by ethical trade – they could likely do so only through improved participation and empowerment of women smallholder farmers in the setting, monitoring and evaluation of ethical trade standards (see Smith, 2014). On the other hand, some civic conventions, such as saving income to alleviate poverty, are compatible with established market conventions of price. Consumers could push retailers for a more equitable setting of minimum prices in ethical markets beyond fair trade, or for more participatory guidelines for lending or savings services offered to smallholders. Finally, some quality of life indicators identified by Southern smallholders in this study would easily be shared by consumers in the North. Women's values and priorities around food security and environmental sustainability could potentially be codified, considering the pre-existence of human rights and legal frameworks (i.e. around the right to food and climate change mitigation/adaptation protocols) upon which industrial norms could be justified. Shared domestic conventions around care and obligation certainly reflect both smallholders' priorities and the charity approach to ethical consumption (see Hutchens, 2010).

According to Fuchs and Kalfagianni (2010: p.236), whether private institutions contribute to or hinder the conditions necessary to protect the poor and vulnerable is largely related to the effectiveness of the governance institution (in this case, ethical trade) to design policies that promote the public good (rather than private interests). Stakeholders will define this differently, as the application of conventions theory here has shown. Gender-sensitive research that aims to develop a deeper understanding of the processes by which particular ethical values become commodified over others is required.

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# The women Behind the Brands: Oxfam's investigation into supply chain practices of food and beverage companies

*Lisa Stewart*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Oxfam Scotland

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## Abstract

Oxfam's *Behind the Brands* research aims to provide consumers with information to hold food and beverage companies to account for what happens in their supply chains. It measures and assesses the performance of these companies across seven themes, one of which is Women. This paper examines three years of *Behind the Brands* research, delving into the methodology and findings under the Women theme. What does good look like for food and drink companies in terms of respecting women's rights? What issues are faced by women in the labour markets associated with this sector? How far are companies from best practice? What needs to change? Despite the need for further changes, improvements have been made by all companies throughout the lifetime of the *Behind the Brands* project. This paper will demonstrate the case for third party analysis of corporate reporting as a mechanism to inform consumers and drive higher ethical standards.

Keywords: supply-chain; food; beverages; workers; women.

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## Introduction

For modern consumers, one of the biggest challenges in making ethical choices is knowing what the right choices actually are. Great strides have been made in providing information and enhancing understanding of certain issues like battery farming, the ecological impacts of palm oil and the social impacts of cheap labour in the garment sector. Many Western consumers have an understanding of labelling schemes like Fairtrade, and know that in general shopping locally is better for the planet and for society.

That does not mean making ethical choices is easy. In our increasingly globalised and complex capitalist system, we are faced with ever more products and, it seems, ever less clear information on the supply chains behind them. More often than not, these are products produced and controlled not only of the brands we see on supermarket shelves, but by much larger parent companies. These parent companies might be linked to bad practices or even scandals that they want to keep far away from their popular brands.

This is one reason Oxfam created the *Behind the Brands* campaign in 2013 - to peel back the layers of complexity in the food and drink sector, giving consumers more of the information they need to make more ethical choices and ultimately to

help drive up standards of social and environmental practice. *Behind the Brands* remains focused on policy and transparency within supply chains, and mostly about the procurement of raw materials. Informing and empowering consumers was and is only one strand of the *Behind the Brands* 'theory of change', alongside investor engagement, and direct corporate engagement (Oxfam, 2014a). The three are not, and should not be, easily separated, but for our purposes here I will focus on what *Behind the Brands* has to offer the average consumer.

This article does not claim to be an impartial critique of Oxfam's work - I am employed by Oxfam, though I cannot take credit for devising the campaign. What I will do here is explore the methodology and outputs of *Behind the Brands*, delving into the detail of its findings in relation to women. This paper aims to demonstrate the case for third party analysis of corporate reporting as a mechanism to inform consumers and drive higher ethical standards through consumer choices and actions, utilising *Behind the Brands* as an exemplar.

## Oxfam's 'Behind the Brands' campaign

In 2013, Oxfam launched *Behind the Brands* to challenge the 'Big 10' food and beverage companies on their social and environmental policies and practices, and to amplify the voices of key stakeholders such as farmers, communities, consumers and investors calling on them to take action. The aim of *Behind the Brands* is to generate a 'race to the top' among the Big Ten to improve their policies across seven themes that impact upon food security (Oxfam, 2014a).

The core of the campaign is a scorecard, which is updated annually, and ranks the companies on their agricultural sourcing policies on seven themes: transparency, farmers, workers, women, climate change, land, and water. Several of these themes inevitably intersect, but for the purposes of this article we are going to focus primarily on the theme of women. When *Behind the Brands* launched in 2013, it did so with a focus on women in the cocoa industry – at Oxfam, we call this a 'campaign spike'. The selection of the 'women' theme as the focal point of the campaign reflected not only the importance of addressing women's rights from a moral and legal perspective, but also the critical role that women play in the global agriculture industry (Kidder, 2014). The assumption on launching this campaign was that global brands would begin to use the power they have with suppliers to improve conditions for women if they were to hear from a significant enough number of their consumers and investors (Sahan, 2016).

The selection of the ten companies included in the scorecard is based on two factors: global overall revenue and position in the Forbes 2000 annual ranking (Forbes, 2016). An exception is made for Mars, which is a private company and is therefore not included in the Forbes ranking. Mars is the largest privately held food and beverage company worldwide and the decision for its inclusion is based on overall revenues. The complete *Behind the Brands* scorecard shows the results of an assessment of the agricultural sourcing policies of the Big 10: Associated British Foods (ABF); Coca-Cola; Danone; General Mills; Kellogg Company; Mars; Mondelez; Nestlé; PepsiCo; Unilever. Crucially, the assessment exclusively focuses on publicly available information, such as annual reports, sustainability reports and supplier codes. This is critical in order to advocate, as Oxfam consistently does, for transparency and accountability.

Given that the scorecard includes a broader theme looking at workers, some may question the decision to have a separate theme for women. Indeed, when Oxfam launched the *Behind the Brands* campaign with a focus on women and gender, several industry insiders were baffled, questioning the value of seeking to specifically empower women (Sahan, 2016). The

reality is that across the world, there is often a lack of equal rights between women and men, particularly in developing countries. In addition to a full-time job, women may be expected to run the so-called ‘care economy’—e.g. raising children and caring for the elderly (Oxfam, 2015a). Eliminating gender discrimination has a positive impact on communities and can increase the efficiency of food production. Oxfam’s research shows that if women’s incomes increase, this usually results in improved nutrition and educational outcomes for their children and family (ibid).

In all its areas of work, Oxfam applies a lens of ‘gender justice’, analysing the impacts for women. Therefore, the ‘women’ theme of *Behind the Brands* focuses on gender-specific issues faced by the agricultural sector and specifically considers both woman farmers and woman agricultural workers. The scorecard assesses whether company policies aim to improve women’s livelihoods and encourage their inclusion in the food supply chain on equal terms. The scorecard also looks for policies that guarantee a discrimination-free and gender-equal working environment.

## Measuring performance on the ‘women’ theme - methodology and results

While for other themes in the *Behind the Brands* scorecard, Oxfam was able to utilise or borrow from existing global standards (including the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Carbon Disclosure Project or CDP), for gender no such standards exist. Oxfam was required to come up with new indicators in order to measure performance and progress. Following extensive research and consultation, Oxfam grouped the indicators within the ‘women’ theme under four broad categories: awareness; knowledge; commitments; and supply chain management (Oxfam, 2014a). These categories recognise that companies interact with gender in multiple, complex ways, and that their approach to women cannot be reduced to a single policy but ought to be considered across many policy and practice areas. Twenty-six indicators are measured within the theme, each falling within one of the four categories. These indicators are devised to be ambitious but also to be measurable: we cannot make judgements on the performance of things that we cannot count, or see evidence of.

### Awareness indicators

Companies must understand how they interact with women, and have awareness of the issues faced by women, if they are to have a positive approach to gender in their practices (Oxfam, 2014a). The indicators include: access to inputs, markets and training; access to land; discrimination against women as farmers and as workers; disproportionate responsibilities in providing food security; challenges faced by women’s civil society organizations; time poverty specifically faced by women due to household obligations.

Awareness of gender issues is particularly challenging when the deep-seated, often cultural, realities of gender inequality are taken into consideration. In poor families around the world, women and children often eat last and least, and are therefore more likely to suffer ill health due to a lack of nutritious food. Another challenge for women, and especially mothers, is time poverty. Women run the so-called ‘care economy’, i.e. they are usually expected to raise children and take care of sick and elderly people (Oxfam, 2015a). These expectations remain when they become cash-earners or are employed in jobs with overtime. An example of an activity considered within the care economy is the provision of water for the household. However, as water sources dry up, women must travel further to access water. As a result, girls may be pulled out

of school to help with such household tasks (ibid). It is vital that food and drink companies employing women and working with women in their supply chains are aware of these realities.

These 'awareness' indicators are where companies have consistently received the highest scores since the first scorecard was published in 2013. Within the awareness indicator category, scores were highest on technical agricultural aspects of gender inequality (access to inputs, markets and training); four companies explicitly recognized the lack of access that women have to services linked to the supply chain, be it inputs, markets or training. At the launch of the Scorecard, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Pepsico and Unilever all recognized this. By March 2015, all but three companies demonstrated recognition of the lack of access faced by women to inputs, markets and training. Scores were also higher under the indicator assessing the awareness of the role women play in food security in many rural communities, with Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Mondelez and Unilever demonstrating understanding of this important issue. By March 2015, Kellogg's, Mars, PepsiCo and Unilever had also demonstrated awareness of this issue, through the publication of statements and inclusion of narrative in reporting (Sahan, 2016).

The awareness category also considers projects that companies may have to empower or support women. Empowerment, while a broadly used term, was applied through the lens of "whether efforts were made to address the power disparity between men and women in agricultural production as well as economically" (Oxfam, 2014a). Even where companies had projects in place to address women's empowerment, they focused on the economic sphere rather than empowerment more broadly, for example Coca-Cola's "5 by 20" programme, which aims to empower 5 million women entrepreneurs by 2020 across its value chain (Sahan, 2016).

## Knowledge indicators

In the knowledge indicator category, *Behind the Brands* considers whether the companies are invested in tracking the specifics of their supply chains in relation to gender inequality and women. The indicators include: number of women smallholders it sources from; which commodities have the highest prevalence of women workers or smallholders; which commodities have women in a particularly vulnerable or at risk position.

A crucial indicator of good practice in this area is whether companies conduct impact assessments related to women's empowerment in specific commodities or countries. This would mean that they were specifically interrogating whether their activities or those of their suppliers have an impact or multiple impacts on women specifically, and seeking to understand what those impacts are in order to mitigate them. At the launch of the campaign and Scorecard, the knowledge indicator category was by far the weakest area within the "Women" theme for all companies. Only Coca-Cola, in part due to recent work it had done with Oxfam to understand its social impacts more broadly, assessed to satisfy the impact assessment indicator. By March 2015, four companies (Coca-Cola, Mars, Mondelez and Nestlé) had made significant progress in relation to the knowledge indicators. Three of the companies (Mars, Mondelez and Nestlé) did so in connection to the Women and Chocolate campaign spike, which explicitly asked confectionary companies to conduct impact assessments to better understand the barriers faced by women in their supply chains (Sahan, 2016).

This modest progress is to be welcomed. However, apart from impact assessments conducted in part of a supply chain, none of the companies (apart from ABF) systematically tracks gender issues throughout their entire supply chain – or, if they

do, they do not disclose it (Oxfam, 2015b). This remains a significant and pressing gap in the performance of food and drink sector actors in relation to gender. Without the right information on women in their supply chain, company policies cannot be properly developed or implemented.

## Commitment indicators

The category focused on commitments highlights a company's intention to put knowledge and awareness to action in a meaningful and sustainable way. The commitment indicators include: intentionally sourcing from women agricultural producers; commitments to improve the role of rural women in supply chains; commitments to address women's lack of access to water, land, technology, finance, training and markets; endorsement of the UN Women's Empowerment Principles; commitments to provide training and professional development to women producers and workers.

The levels of commitment by the various companies ranged widely when *Behind the Brands* first launched. Coca-Cola had made the most commitments and achieved a full score in this category. Meanwhile, ABF and Danone received zero for this category and unfortunately neither had improved much by March 2015 (Oxfam, 2015b). The highest scores were on the indicator assessing whether companies were making efforts to deliberately source from women producers with six companies demonstrating they were making efforts to achieve this.

Initially only two companies (PepsiCo and Coca-Cola) endorsed the UN Women's Empowerment Principles and only two companies (Coca-Cola and Nestlé) committed to providing training for women throughout their supply chain. By March 2015, seven companies had endorsed the UN Women's Empowerment Principles and five were specifically committed to providing training for women throughout their supply chain (Oxfam, 2015b). In 2013 no company showed they wanted to commit to addressing this in their supply chain: by March 2015, Coca-Cola and Unilever had commitments on this and both have continued to build on their programmes since then. Unilever reported that in 2016, they enabled access to training and skills for over 800,000 women in our extended agricultural supply chain, and they have set a target of reaching five million women by 2020 (Unilever, 2017).

## Supply chain management indicators

The supply chain management indicator category looks at a company's intention to address key supply chain issues by asking whether they expect their suppliers to take gender issues seriously. A company's actions are most meaningful when suppliers across a company's supply chain are held to the same robust gender standards. Therefore, the category asks whether supplier codes or guidelines explicitly promote: non-discrimination and equal opportunity; health and safety concerns related to women workers; establishment of women's committees that report to management to address and resolve issues; maternity and paternity leave; women's access to grievance procedures; mandatory training on sexual harassment and non-discrimination policies.

Despite good practice in some other areas as outlined above, it remains the case that very few companies have any reference to women specifically in their supplier codes or guidelines. Only Unilever explicitly addresses any women's issue other than general non-discrimination in its supplier code, including issues that pregnant women might face.

This indicator category also asks if companies require suppliers to track and report on the gender breakdown of their workforce and women small-scale producers - no company could demonstrate this. This emphasizes the “gender-blind” nature of the sourcing practices of the world’s largest food and beverage companies (Sahan, 2016).

At the heart of the *Behind the Brands* campaign is the desire to see the companies that own the brands that consumers trust, use their leverage to change the way their suppliers behave on key issues. When it comes to women, this would mean real improvements in the lives of women farmers, workers and producers. While there has been an encouraging, and increasing, level of commitment from the Big 10 to understand and tackle the issues faced by women some progress, there is little evidence that the food and beverage companies are attempting to change supplier behaviour to ensure gender inequality is addressed.

## Turning research findings into consumer power

Oxfam utilises the *Behind the Brands* research process, and its findings, to influence companies directly – but maximum progress cannot be achieved without the involvement of consumers. *Behind the Brands* acts as a source of information and a call to action for members of the public, asking them to engage directly with brands and the companies behind them, to drive positive change. With its focus on transparency, it also aims to make still more information available to consumers directly from companies, through the promotion of enhanced commitments and disclosures. In order for *Behind the Brands* to be taken seriously by stakeholders including consumers, investors, and companies, Oxfam took responsibility for the fact that its research and asks had to be well researched, credible and realistic.

The whole concept of creating a ‘race to the top’ falls apart without key players making improvements, the theory being that early improvements will be followed by a continuing trend of progress and improving performance (Oxfam, 2013b). It is far more likely that progress will be made by at least some of the companies in the scorecard, if pressure is applied by the stakeholders they care about: their customers, as well as other groups like investors.

In 2013, Oxfam launched *Behind the Brands* with a “campaign spike” focused on women in the cocoa industry. “Spikes” are a tactic used to make a broad issue accessible by zoning in on a tangible level of details. In this “cocoa spike”, Oxfam did not just deal directly with the companies, it also asked members of the public to support its campaign. Focusing on the three biggest cocoa operators (Mars, Mondelez and Nestle), Oxfam supported over 100,000 people to directly tell this companies via social media that they needed to do more to address the disadvantages faced by women in their supply chains. Within a year, all three had started to move in the direction of *Behind the Brands* criteria, and others in the sector followed. Over the first two and a half years of *Behind the Brands*, over 700,000 people took action to contact companies on at least one of the themes, directly contributing to the pressure required to achieve positive change (Wilshaw, 2015). The readiness of these major brands to respond to pressure from consumers demonstrates how public campaigns, such as Oxfam’s, can highlight issues and trigger changes in corporate practices.

Critically, Oxfam’s campaign did not ask consumers to boycott any company or companies – it asked people to engage constructively with companies to drive standards up, just as Oxfam itself was doing. This is central to Oxfam’s approach as a ‘critical friend’ of the private sector. Of course, the *Behind the Brands* information is publicly available to investors and members of the public alike to do with it what they choose – it is possible, indeed likely, that this information has been used

to guide changes in shopping behaviour and decisions. There is a role for interested consumers too – they can ask themselves whether and how the action they are choosing to take in buying something (or not) is generating the maximum level of positive change. In almost all cases, a greater degree of influence can be wielded by making contact with the brand or parent company of that product to explain the decision. This feedback is amplified still further when consumers join together in a campaigning group, whether getting behind an organisation like Oxfam or forming a group of their own. Positive or negative, companies take customer feedback seriously, and the more they hear from customers about the importance of how they understand and deal with issues faced by women in their supply chains, the more seriously they will take it (Wilshaw, 2015). Behind the Brands is about leveraging the power held by large food and drink corporations – but it is fundamentally about leveraging the power of the consumer, too.

## Conclusion

The continuing work of Oxfam's *Behind the Brands* research and campaign has found that the world's largest food and beverage companies are making progress in the adoption of specific policies and commitments that contribute to the empowerment of women. Fuelled by the actions of hundreds of thousands of supporters, Oxfam's *Behind the Brands* campaign has achieved success in getting momentum behind a further focus on women's empowerment in supply chains. Sadly it remains the case that all ten are particularly weak in demonstrating that they track where women are in their supply chains and in requiring their suppliers to improve conditions for women – meaning that in this area, as well as others, work remains to be done by Oxfam and by consumers in driving further change.

*Behind the Brands* is just one example, in one sector, that demonstrates the importance of focusing on issues faced by women when considering problems in the global agricultural economic system. Although we have focused on gender in this article, and the gender-aware approach advocated by Oxfam is a necessary one, it is neither practical nor sensible to isolate gender when thinking about supply chain issues. Indeed, broader issues affecting markets and supply chains, including workers rights and the direction of travel of public policy, have significant impacts on women too (Oxfam, 2016). *Behind the Brands* explores these under other themes, but for reasons of space they are not explored in detail here.

This campaign also demonstrates the value of credible information in enabling the public to be part of a campaign for change. Oxfam's work to influence the private sector relies on deep engagement with the target companies and industry experts, research expertise within the team, and rich, complex indicators and datasets. This complex picture is necessary in order to achieve the level of accuracy and credibility that this topic demands and deserves – but it does not make for an easy campaign “story” to share with the public. That is why Oxfam's scorecard, at the heart of the campaign, is so important. It allows consumers, investors and companies to see at a glance what the performance of the food and drink sector looks like across seven ethical themes, including gender. The more that this can be done, with complex information simplified and presented in an accessible to consumers, the better able we will all be to make informed decisions and be part of driving positive change. This could and should mean real change in the lives of women – responsible consumers do not want food to reach their plates at the expense of women in some of the world's poorest countries, and information like that in *Behind the Brands* helps empower them to make ethical choices and hold corporations to account.

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# Building Brand Equity: Creating Customer-Brand Congruence by appealing to Gender Identity Differences with CSR Initiatives

Raymond J. Jones III<sup>1</sup>, Timothy M. Reilly<sup>1</sup>, Brooklyn M. Cole<sup>2</sup> and Janet R. Jones<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Minnesota Duluth, Minnesota, USA; <sup>2</sup> Radford University, Virginia, USA.

## Abstract

Businesses often struggle to identify the benefit of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs in terms of both business and consumer outcomes. We propose that utilizing an identity perspective, based on appealing to gender identity differences embedded in social identity and the value-action gap theories, to assess how CSR programs allows for a greater level of understanding how consumers will react to them. We go on to posit that by focusing on gender identity, firms can add value and benefit from CSR initiatives if they shift their efforts toward strengthening brand equity and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Gender, Identity, Brand Equity, Marketing

## Introduction

While some continue to debate whether ethical and social programs (e.g., corporate social responsibility CSR) are just marketing tactics, there is a wealth of evidence of the global initiative toward social justice and environmental protection/preservation. Therefore, social related causes and sustainability are becoming a growing concern for firms and their stakeholders. These pressures from macro forces (e.g., governments, social trends, industry norms, and competition) are creating new norms for organizations to systematically change how they operate (i.e., produce goods and services in an ethical and responsible manner (Alsmadi, 2007)). These norms are also becoming embedded in what consumers expect from businesses in terms of their impact on society (Lubin & Esty, 2010).

*‘...customers are looking beyond compliance issues to how we’re handling waste, whether our suppliers pay fair wages, and even if we’ve eliminated printed documentation and moved everything on-line’ (McNulty & Davis, 2010: p.134).*

Not only are these pressures forcing organizations to change, CSR practices are also increasingly becoming more institutionalized across industries through international standards and stock indexes; as well as at the organizational level through the development of new corporate officer positions (e.g., CSR Office, Chief Sustainability Officer, Director of CSR Marketing and Communications to name a few), the creation of CSR reports and ethical codes of conduct to fulfill requests from key stakeholders, and the promotion of those practices (e.g. green marketing).

While implementation of these social related practices and programs are becoming commonplace, researchers have found conflicting results regarding whether and how they are beneficial to the firm in terms influencing consumer behavior (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), differentiating the firm strategically (Sharp & Zaidman, 2010), and generally creating a true competitive advantage (Thomas, 2001; Lopez, Garcia, & Rodriguez, 2007). If the development and promotion of CSR practices is only enough to create competitive parity for a firm; is there way that organizations can actually benefit from the large amount of resources being utilized to create these programs? From a marketing perspective researchers have started to address this issue by focusing more on strengthening brand relationship and connecting with consumer identity over trying to actually change consumer behavior (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Lee *et al.*, 2012). While we believe this path is a wise path forward, there is still a significant gap in the literature in terms of differentiating this congruence between consumer identity and brand, especially with regard to gender variance.

On its surface, gender may appear to be as “simple” as ones sex. In the case of many marketing managers, sex category is often used as a proxy variable for gender, and sex is generally delineated into that of male and female (Westwood, Prtichard & Morgan, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Springer, Stellman & Jordan-Yougn, 2012). While we do not ascribe to such a simplistic view of gender, it is important to note that it is just one of the many different approaches for examining gender. A more sophisticated view is from a sociological perspective where gender is perceived as a negotiated social construct that is performed, identified, and acted upon by actors within different cultural and institutional contexts (Butler, 1988). We will, throughout this article, focus on feminist gendered components and characteristics in terms of how consumers identify with those socially constructed concepts. This is by no means to suggest that all females carry these characteristics or that all males do not, only that certain traits might associate with various socially constructed views of gender types. As we continue our discussion on gender and CSR initiatives we attempt to bridge the socially constructed view of gender with that of a simple proxy currently utilized by many practitioners, given that this complex construct is extremely informative when used to investigate how consumers react to marketing and social initiatives.

As many practitioners have highlighted ‘Women are most powerful consumers, and their impact on the economy is growing every year’ (Breenan, 2015). Women drive nearly 80% of all consumer purchasing through their buying power and influences (Breenan, 2015; Moss, 1999). For example, Nike had \$5.7 billion in sales of women-specific products in 2015 and women’s products account for 46% of all gender-specific products at REI. Additionally, Silverstein and Sayre (2009) highlight that almost 80% of all advertising budgets are spent on appealing to women. It is therefore curious that there is a paucity of research focusing on how to influence this huge market segment through ethical or social marketing campaigns. There is even more of a concern that there has been limited research focusing on CSR and the female identity of consumers given the significant amount of theoretical work relating to gender variation toward ethical and social causes (Ford & Richardson, 1994; Dawson, 1997; Signhapakdi, 1999; Lämsä *et al.*, 2008). Even in this long tradition of examining the variance (based on gender) on the proclivity toward social and environmental causes, much of the research only tells us that unless the consumer is predisposed toward ethical consumer behaviors, marketing campaigns focused on ethical and social issues have minimal influence on actual behaviours (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), with little variance between the genders (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Therefore, we want to highlight a path forward on how to potentially create more than just competitive parity.

Since prior research points to other aspects for segmenting markets such as income, education, social status, price, values, convenience, etc. that are better predictors of behavior over ethical or social marketing (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000), we

build this on a perspective of congruence between consumer identity and brands by highlighting that there are significant differences between the gender identities. Resources may therefore be better utilized toward understanding and capitalizing on that congruence rather than on focusing on changing behaviours. More specially, we draw on aspects of social identity and ideal-self theories to highlight gender differences with regards to identity and how focusing on those differences may potentially be a more useful way to capture the true benefits of ethical and social marketing; potentially highlighting an opportunity female consumers have to influence change in consumption practices by contributing social justice issues (D'Souza & Taghian, 2017; Piñeiro, Díaz, Palavecinos, Alonso, & Benayas, 2014).

## An Identity Perspective

Utilizing a combination of social identity theory and an understanding of the value-action gap allows we discuss how marketers can gain a more nuanced understanding of how consumers react to CSR initiatives, especially when identifying variables such as gender in their target market. First, as noted previously, there are significant differences in how a person views and presents their identity to others based on their gender. Feminine identity is often associated with values such as nurturing and togetherness while masculine identity can emphasize a need for uniqueness and competitiveness (Deaux, 1985; Twenge, 1997). This suggests that while all people may value societal initiatives, these consumers identifying with these specific traits (whether they are male or female) are more likely to find value in those that fit with their current identity structures. Prior work has operationalized this concept, albeit outside the domain of gender, by investigating what they called the 'consumers' perceived congruence with their own characters and that of the company' as well as a customer's support for a given CSR domain (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001: p.227). They go on to say:

'More generally, consumers' personal support of a CSR domain appears to be a key determinant of their sensitivity to a company's CSR efforts. Therefore, if a company's choice of CSR domains is dictated at all by market considerations rather than just by ideology, managers may want to research a variety of CSR initiatives and select those that enjoy the highest and most widespread support among the company's key consumer segments' (2001: p.227).

Gender is an inherently useful variable with which to understand consumer heterogeneity when reacting to ethical and social initiatives, and the *identity* lens provides an advantageous way to assess and understand these differences. This begs the question though: If gender matters, what is its influence? Fortunately, existing research gives us insight into the role gender plays, as well as to the importance of understanding the nature of consumer identity.

## Creating Commitment through Social Identity

According to social identity theory, individuals understand themselves through identification with a collective group that is distinguishable from others (Turner *et al.*, 1979; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Organizations often attempt to distinguish themselves from other brands based on their CSR endeavours. The notion of organizational identification focuses on how the individual integrates an organization into their view of self thus making it a component of their identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). In essence, it becomes a part of who they are and how they define themselves. The extent to which you identify with an organization determines behaviour in terms of membership in that group (Ellemers *et al.*, 1999). Individuals are more prone

to relate to groups they perceive match a part of their identity and consider that group as unique (Tsui *et al.*, 1992; Shamir, 1991). CSR activities focused on environment, poverty, or health care initiatives can create the perception of similarity in beliefs or values. This holds true from a gender perspective, as prior research points to women viewing their individual social responsibility towards society to be more salient than men, and further, females tend to have a greater expectation for ethical and social activities by organizations (Hatch & Stephen, 2015).

Going further, two motives linked to identification, including the desire to maximize continuity (Goldberg *et al.*, 2010; Hogg & Terry, 2000) and the desire to maintain a positive self-evaluation (Sedikides & Strube, 1995), offer an even stronger argument that a focus on creating commitment (e.g., brand loyalty) is a salient perspective. Self-continuity is the degree to which individuals show preference toward similar others (Goldberg *et al.*, 2010). The self enhancement motive is the desire to develop and maintain positive beliefs of self-induced by individuals' psychological needs (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Together these motives work to reinforce the alignment between the individual and organization, resulting in continued commitment (affective organizational commitment) and in the case of consumer behavior creating a stronger commitment to the brand. These motives are especially relevant in the notion that gender identity is inherently a part of a consumer's self-concept (Friemuth & Hornstein, 1982). Consumers will therefore reinforce their concept of self (especially in the case of femininity and masculinity (Grohmann, 2009)) through self-expression by way of attachment and identification with a brand that is symbolically congruent with their self-image or those of the group they wish to be associated with. This is especially true if marketers can appeal to specific traits (e.g., nurturance, interpersonal warmth, communion; Deaux, 1985) that are closely linked to those traits embedded in CSR programs and initiatives (and often considered essentialized feminine traits) and may be congruent with consumer self-image no matter if they are male or female. Therefore, the degree to which organizations can create organizational identification, a sense of belonging and reinforcement of positive self, may be the key to longevity in purchasing decisions.

## Value-Action Gap: Appealing to Ideal and Actual Self

Recent research highlights that women (as measured by the gender the consumer self-identified with) may show a significantly stronger positive feeling toward CSR initiatives than men across multiple CSR domains (Jones *et al.*, 2017). Interestingly, while attitudes were more strongly influenced for females, this did not translate into significant differences in CSR related behaviours with males more likely to engage in CSR behaviours than females, despite the attitude difference (Jones *et al.*, 2017). These findings illustrate the importance of understanding the value-action gap when assessing how CSR initiatives will influence actual consumer behaviour.

The value-action gap is often suggested to be driven by a consumer's perception of their self, specifically the difference between ideal and actual selves (Mowen & Minor, 2006). The ideal-self is 'how a person would like to perceive himself or herself' while the actual-self is how 'a person actually perceives him- or herself' (Mowen & Minor, 2006: p.111). There is often a gap between a person's ideal-self and their actual-self. This gap between ideal-self and actual-self is evident when viewing consumers' stated values and ideas against their actual behaviour. Prior research has supported, that a gap does exist between a consumer's environmental values and attitudes and their behaviours (Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008). Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008: p.282) describe this in their research as the value-action gap. As Jones *et al.* (2017)

suggest, the value-action gap with regard to gender identification may be a useful way for organizations to create stronger brand relationships through calls to action relating to ethical or social issues, as research has highlighted that women may feel a stronger desire to be engaged in local activism (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001). This may be of even more importance given the selectivity hypotheses asserting that females will assimilate all available cues, while males are thought to be selective when processing information and only assimilate salient cues (Meyers-Levy & Mahaswaran, 1991; Wolin, 2003). Therefore, marketers have the opportunity to more effectively provide comprehensive cues toward female consumers, who are more sensitive to recognizing brand images and personality dimensions that match their self-concepts (idea or actual) (Lau & Phau, 2010). If marketers are therefore able to identify how their ethical and social programs fit with their consumer's self-concept they have the ability to strengthen customer loyalty.

The value-action gap helps us understand the interplay between our ideal-self, and our actual-self in terms of both identity construction, presentation, and behaviour. While the those consumers identifying certain feminine ideals may lead to higher attitudes towards the organization when utilizing CSR initiatives, these attitudes should not be expected to drive behaviour unless that those attitudes match current consumption practices. This value-action gap is potentially stronger for those consumers with female gender identities than male identities, and shows that even minimal switching costs will significantly reduce CSR related consumer behaviours. Further, a consumer may feel good about a company and what they do, but if these feelings do not fit with the reality of their daily consumption experiences they are unlikely to influence behaviour. For example, recall the introduction of a biodegradable bag by the SunChips brand by Frito-Lay in the USA in 2008 which was removed from shelves because the bag crinkled too loudly. While many consumers would say that biodegradable packaging is something positive, the reality of a loud snack chip bag was not well liked. The point here is that while the idea of the biodegradable bag may have fit with consumers' ideal-self in some way, the fact was that this new biodegradable bag did not fit with the daily reality because the bag was too noisy, hence highlighting the limitations of CSR initiatives on actual consumer behaviours.

We do not, however, suggest that the value-action gap is a deathblow for the viability of CSR initiatives. While the value-action gap often focuses on getting consumers to change their behaviours, we feel that it is also important to look at the influence of CSR initiatives on current consumers. We propose that CSR initiatives, especially those that match gender identities of a company's target market, will significantly increase both brand equity and brand loyalty. Brand equity tends to be conceptualized as an attitudinal construct (Keller, 1993) and as such provide a logical means for organizations to engage with their existing customer base.

## Adding Value to Brand Identity

Brand equity is generally defined as the value of the brand to the consumer outside of the utility of the good or service itself (Aaker, 1992). In the case of CSR initiatives, especially with those consumer who identify with certain traits (e.g., nurturance, interpersonal warmth, communion), organizations have an effective way to increase this value. By identifying the makeup of their target market, a company can find a straightforward way to increase the value of their offerings to consumers. As shown previously, female consumer attitudes tend to react more strongly to CSR initiatives (Signhapakdi, 1999), so for practitioners basic demographic information can be used to help determine the influence of a CSR program. CSR programs should also be

helpful in markets with little product differentiation, if there is little difference between offerings between competitors a CSR program may create additional value needed to entice current customers to stick with the product and possibly even sway a new customer's choice.

Similarly to brand equity, we propose CSR initiatives will be influential on a consumer's brand loyalty - as long as they are currently customers. If a customer has already evaluated a company as worthy of having their business, a CSR initiative may push them to behave more loyally towards that company. The value-actions gap suggests that while customers may not change their behaviour based on CSR initiatives, such initiatives may be used to reinforce existing behaviour.

## Conclusion

Social responsibility and social causes are often frustrating for marketers as it is hard to tell how these programs may influence consumer's perception and behaviour. Using an *identity* lens, we have identified several key mechanisms for this influence. First, CSR initiatives generally fit better with certain identities (which are often considered to be essentialized feminist traits), and this fit leads to stronger attitudes for those that identify with those traits, no matter their sex category. Second, while these stronger attitudes are important, they will not necessarily lead to changes in consumer behaviour. While social identity theory helps us identify the interplay between gender and consumer attitudes, we must also take into account the role of the value-action gap when determining the value of CSR initiatives to the firm. The value-action gap suggests that while consumers may feel strongly about CSR initiatives, it is unlikely to lead them to engage in new behaviours based on that information. This does not mean that CSR initiatives lack value though as it is clear that both brand equity and brand loyalty for existing customers can be influenced with these tactics. Overall, it is important for an organization to identify the fit for their CSR initiatives with the current and target markets, as well as to understand that CSR may enhance the value of existing behaviours. Finally, by focusing on *identity* researchers have an opportunity to inform practitioners how to move past simple sex categorization in their marketing by offering new strategies to employ into how actually tease out gender identities in their marketing campaigns.

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# Gender and Ethical Consumption: Lessons from the EDGE

*Andreas Chatzidakis<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Royal Holloway University London, UK

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## Abstract

EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) is a relatively new certification that stands out for its explicit reference to gender-related injustices. It has the potential to significantly expand the ethical consumer agenda, not least by juxtaposing questions of gender recognition to more traditional consumer preoccupations with health (e.g. GMO and non-GMO certifications), environmental preservation (e.g. various organic labels) and trading relationships with the Third World (e.g. Fair Trade). Gender-related struggles, however, remain a structural, not an individual, affair and any attempt to responsabilise the consumer should be viewed with suspicion in the current neoliberal milieu. At stake is the inability of EDGE-style initiatives to engage with the more radical and transformative interventions that are urgently needed in combating gender inequality.

Keywords: EDGE; ethical consumer; gender politics; feminism; neoliberalism

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## Introduction

A large bulk of consumer studies has documented consumer enthusiasm but also confusion and frustration with the ever-expanding list of labels that implicate their everyday purchasing and non-purchasing choices in certain forms of social and environmental justice. Amidst the current plethora of labels, the “EDGE” certification, an abbreviation for Economic Dividends for Gender Equality, stands out for its explicit reference to gender-related injustices. Through this new certification, first launched at the World Economic Forum in 2011: “a clear picture emerges of a company’s commitment as measured in terms of equal pay for equivalent work, recruitment and promotion, leadership development training & mentoring, flexible working and the company culture.” (<http://www.edge-cert.org/our-impact/how-edge-creates-change-2/>). Such a clear picture is said to have already emerged on the working floors of IKEA, L’Oreal, Deloitte and INSEAD University. Meanwhile the scheme has been enthusiastically supported by powerful figures such as Hilary Clinton (during her speech at Professional Business Women California Conference), calling it an “exciting initiative” that “help companies measure and hold themselves accountable for creating a more equal workplace” (Abramson, 2017).

To be sure, narrowing the gender pay gap is a critical aim and EDGE is not alone in this ongoing feminist struggle. However, EDGE is rather unique in foregrounding the (ethical) consumer as a key agent in the struggle for gender equality in the workplace (Tulshyan, 2014). By proposing a distinct and recognisable label, male and female consumers alike are

indirectly invited to reward those companies that have ostensibly achieved transparency in their gender policies and punish those that have not through their ultimate form of self-expression: purchasing and non-purchasing choices. In this paper, I argue that there is a positive side to this initiative but also a negative one. Let me begin with the positive one.

## Recognising Gender as an Ethical Issue

Ethical consumers are broadly viewed as having “political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives” in being “concerned with the effects that a purchasing choice has, not only on themselves, but also on the external world around them.” (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2005: p.2). Although such definitions remain common across different theoretical treatments and disciplines (Chatzidakis, Carrington and Shaw, 2016), the role of gender inequality as a distinct ethical issue that may inform consumer choices remains conspicuously absent in the academic literature. By and large, explorations of gender either view it as a “background variable” affecting ethical choices (along with other demographic characteristics such as race and age) or, more recently, as a distinct – more “feminine” – mode of ethical reasoning that is based on notions of care and caring, as opposed to abstract principles of moral justice (e.g. Pereira Heath *et al.*, 2016; Shaw, McMaster and Newholm, 2016).

The EDGE certification challenges such understandings by counter-posing, in practice, gender equality as a distinct consumer choice alongside - and often in opposition to - more traditional ethical consumer preoccupations pertaining, for instance, to health (e.g. GMO and non-GMO certifications), environmental preservation (e.g. various organic labels) and trading relationships with the Third World (e.g. Fair Trade). What are consumers supposed to choose when faced with products that are Fair Trade but not EDGE-certified? Or perhaps are EDGE-certified but not free of animal testing?

Beyond such dilemmas, EDGE is appropriate in re-asserting gender equality as an “ethical consumer issue”. At the very least, this would be in line with decades of feminist struggles highlighting that the demand for “recognition” – exemplified in so-called identity-based politics and new social movements (see e.g. Fowler, 2009; Webb, 2010) – is as pertinent and as valid as the struggle for “redistribution”, aka the fair and equitable distribution of economic (and environmental) resources (Fraser, 1997). Gender-based equality and recognition are pivotal, as Judith Butler (2005) puts it, in “constructing the intelligibility of the subject” (p. 30). In Ples and Maak’s words (2004: p.131), recognition should be the central principle in any theory of business (and consumer) ethics:

*“We want our loved ones to love us, our friends and colleagues to recognize us for what we are and what we do, our employer to honour our achievements and our governments and fellow citizens to respect us and our rights as free and equal citizens”.*

For Butler, such forms of recognition are fundamentally intertwined with questions of economic redistribution; to see them as separate serves the interests of capital (see Butler, 1997).

Notwithstanding, the current consumer ethics literature is preoccupied with questions of social and environmental justice – for example, trading relations with the Third World and minimisation of environmental harm. Although gender-based discrimination is often subsumed under broader boycott calls and product/service ratings (including those by [ethicalconsumer.org](http://ethicalconsumer.org)), it is fair to say that contemporary ethical consumer activism has so far been primarily focused on struggles for the re-distribution of economic and environmental resources rather than struggles that combine recognition

politics with redistribution. EDGE reminds us that to experience gender-based discrimination in the workplace, or any other kind of identity-based discrimination, is an ethical issue of utmost significance.

## Commoditising Gender, Neoliberalising the Consumer

To recognise gender-based oppression as an ethical issue, however, is different from contemplating and putting into practice the best strategies and tactics in ameliorating it. As the interview with Pauline Maclaran, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal (this issue) illustrates, feminist (and queer) activism always had a rather contentious and complicated relationship with the marketplace. And this relationship has become even more complex. EDGE is prominent but certainly not alone in the ever-expanding list of initiatives that make corporate and market-mediated appeals to sisterhood and gender-related solidarity: from “feminist knickers” (endorsing Who Made Your Pants company) to empowering sneakers (Adidas’s “All for #MyGirls” campaign) and into gender-neutral children’s books (Let Books Be Books). Common amongst these is the infusion of neoliberal tropes of entrepreneurship and (consumer) choice at the very heart of (some) contemporary feminist logics and practices. As Pauline Maclaran (see Maclaran *et al.*, in this issue) puts it, this is the era of “moral economies” or “moralised brandscapes” that co-opt feminist resistance and turn it into marketable commodities. For its critics, this is hugely problematic, not least because it obfuscates the institutional and structural factors that perpetuate various gender-related injustices in the first place (e.g. McRobbie, 2009; Oksala, 2011; Fraser, 2013). Accordingly, it hardly matters if the same consumers who are unable to afford EDGE-certified products (or “feminist knickers”, gender-neutral shoes and so on) are the same ones who experience gender-related discrimination in their own workplace (and beyond). Progressive gender activism should concern itself with the rights of all workers regardless of gender, race, age, and disability – and it should certainly be independent of their purchasing power.

The archetypal supporter of EDGE is, in many ways, Catherine Rottenberg’s neoliberal feminist: someone who is continuously “mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair” (Rottenberg, 2014: p.420). Importantly, they do so not only by embracing entrepreneurialism and accepting full responsibility for their life-work balance, as Rottenberg explains, but also through actively producing and displaying their reputational and moral value in the marketplace (cf Alvedsonn, 2013; Zwick, 2013). Put differently, neoliberal consumer-citizens become bits of “human capital” (Brown, 2015) by being productive both in their workplace and their consumptionscapes. Meanwhile, what is entirely disavowed is any form of more collective action or genuine participation in what is often now called the commons. The rationality at work here, approximates what Steve Miles (2010) defines as complicit communality, “a process which implies a connection with the public realm and yet establishes that connection through individual engagement so that the communal experience is with the ideology of consumption as opposed to with any kind of a discernible complicit” (p.177). Mimicking corporations, individual consumer-citizens become invested in displaying a more humane and caring image, one that responds to public sensibilities but only through the comfort provided in the reassuringly atomized realm of everyday shopping. By implication, caring logics and practices consistently fail to translate into more collectivist and politically radical modes of action (cf Miller, 1998).

## Lessons Learned?

The wider literature on the ethics and politics of consumption has long highlighted the inherent tensions and contradictions in attempting to address questions of social and environmental justice through the market. Put briefly, the increased moralisation of everyday consumption epitomises aspects of neoliberalism and the ways in which conservative governments encourage individuals to assume an ever-expanding list of responsibilities amidst, of course, the demise of traditional welfare institutions (see e.g. Littler, 2009). In doing so, as Carrington, Zwick and Neville (2016) argue, practices of ethical consumption not only save

*“capitalism from itself but also bring about a different kind of capitalism: more just, more sustainable, kinder, and so on. In this fantasy, consumers’ everyday ethical consumption practices ensure capitalism’s survival rather than digging its grave”* (p. 23).

Gender-related consumer activism is no different: by supporting projects such as EDGE individuals could be seen as complicit in the ideological construction of a more gender-equal, less patriarchal capitalism. To be sure, this is not to say that individual and corporate supporters of EDGE are not sincere in their intentions. But, as Peter Fleming and Marc Jones (2013) have vividly demonstrated in the case of Corporate Social Responsibility programmes more broadly, this is ultimately irrelevant. Such initiatives remain piece-meal solutions to structural problems. Their relationship to more progressive social movements proves to be, at best, “parasitic” (Fleming and Jones, 2013), in that they serve to let corporations off the hook--or, at the very least, give them a more favourable image-- for problems that they have often created in the first place. Likewise, market-mediated feminist activism legitimises atomised logics and practices that could not be further away from the decidedly collectivist and utopian projects of second wave feminism, lamented in the political memoirs of Lynne Segal (2017) and Sheila Rowbotham (2016) among others.

More nuanced analyses of ethical consumerism observe that “the consumer” is hardly ever the primary agent of change in efforts to politicise and moralise consumption practices (Barnett *et al.*, 2010). Instead, ethical consumption can be viewed as “an organised field of strategic interventions” (Ibid: p. 13) whereby a variety of actors across micro, meso and macro levels employ consumer-oriented discourses in their attempt to achieve a variety of outcomes (Caruana and Chatzidakis, 2014). For example, third-sector organisations may use evidence of “consumer demand” for ethical products in their attempt to push for further legislation against polluting businesses, forms of extreme labour exploitation and so on.

Likewise, EDGE can be viewed as a strategic intervention that recognises gender inequality as “an ethical issue” and which may contribute to a variety of positive discursive and institutional shifts in favour of gender equality. Notwithstanding, it would be wrong to ignore that the certification comes at a very particular historic and socio-economic moment: one in which an expanding list of social, environmental and (now) identitarian struggles are being reframed as matters of corporate initiative and individual choice, while disavowing their fundamentally structural nature. Consumers’ support for EDGE-style initiatives should be viewed as, at best, symbolic; at worst, as an unwelcome distraction from the more radical and transformative interventions that are urgently needed in combating gender inequality.

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# Femininity and the rise of ‘ethical fur’: How fashion designers create alternative understandings of value and construct gendered identities

Jana M. Kleibert<sup>1</sup> and Felix C. Müller<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Goethe University Frankfurt am Main; <sup>2</sup>Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS), Erkner.

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## Abstract

The consumption of fur fashion is a deeply gendered phenomenon. This gendered nature derives from multiple sources and spans from more traditional, status-oriented fur usage to the more recent (pro and anti) politics of fur. In this contribution we investigate how gendered identity is constructed in a relatively new market segment: ethical fur fashion. The term ‘ethical fur’ is controversial among practitioners and not clearly defined. It encompasses a great variety of notions. Using the examples of four female fashion designers, we seek to identify relational dynamics throughout fur fashion designers’ professional biographies which link female identity to ideas of being caring, ethically responsible and alternative to the mainstream of fur fashion.

Keywords: fur, fashion, ethics, gender, consumption

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*“It’s not traditionally women’s work and certainly the fur industry is not run by women. But this effort, this ethical fur effort, seems almost exclusively to be run by women” (ethical’ fur fashion designer #1, interviewed in March 2017).*

## Gender and the fur industry

The highly gendered nature of fur clothing – the design, manufacturing, retailing and consumption of fur attire – is a long standing topic in studies of fashion. Traditional fur consumption, concentrating on craft-made high value items like coats, signifies status, but also gender difference: Bought by men, fur clothing is predominantly worn by women, thus displayed on female bodies and reflecting in turn on the economic status of men. In more conservative societies, practices of gift giving and inheritance often involve fur clothing, stabilizing ties of reciprocity as well as lines of social differentiation (Magee, 2015).

On a symbolic level, the female body has served as a projection plane for multiple images, emotions and values present in the discourse surrounding fur. The association between female sexual desirability and fur has been established for over a century (most notably since the publication of Sacher-Masoch’s novel *Venus in Furs* in 1870) (Emberly, 1997). It is

perpetuated through fur fashion photography and advertising. However, when environmentalism, feminism and other emancipatory movements took off in the 1970s, fur, together with other animal-related issues, became the subject of a heated conflict of images and values, focalizing once again female bodies: “Acting as a form of “guilt politics,” [the animal rights group Lynx] urged women to reject fur in order to exhibit a morally as opposed to a materially superior status, thus giving birth to a new ideal of femininity, the moral or ethical woman.” (Bolton, 2004, quoted in Beard, 2008: p.451). Beard continues to argue that although these politics did not result in the eradication of fur-fashion, animal rights group were successful “in making the wearing of fur socially unacceptable to a wider audience, giving rise to the idea that being ethical could also be fashionable” (ibid.).

Most notably, anti-fur campaigns run by the animal rights organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), focused on the female fur consumer as an object of stigmatization. Rather than criticizing the producers, traders and financial beneficiaries of fur (predominantly male), anti-fur imagery portrayed the fur-wearing woman as cruel, ugly and excessive, thus drawing on centuries-old imaginations of feminine morality and immorality (Skov, 2005). Even though fur attire in recent years has become more diverse and increasingly includes men’s garments (typically via trimmings and collars), symbolic projections remain entirely focused on the female body.

For female fashion models, being pro or anti-fur is a career defining choice which is announced on professional profiles and social media accounts. However, ‘switching sides’ and staging the move visibly can also be part of publicity strategies adopted by high-profile fashion models and designers alike. Thus, while Naomi Campbell, once famous for ‘rather going naked’, turned into the face and body of furrier Dennis Basso’s advertising campaign in 2011, Giorgio Armani announced the brand’s withdrawal from fur early in 2016.

## A new perspective: Gender and ‘ethical fur’

In this contribution, we add a new perspective: the rise of ‘ethical fur’ and its implications for positioning strategies and identity constructions of female designers who use or reference fur in a specifically ‘ethical’ manner. Since the late 1990s, and in response to changing societal attitudes towards fur as well as successful anti-fur campaigns, the fur industry, specifically the marketing organizations of European and North American fur breeders, have employed a new strategy. It entailed engaging with fashion design and re-contextualizing fur, moving from traditional production and consumption practices towards the world of branded luxury, fashion mass markets and fast fashion (Skov, 2005; Rantisi, 2014a). As a consequence more female creative labour (fashion design) was introduced to a domain hitherto characterized by male creative labour (traditional craft-based design and production<sup>1</sup>) (Rantisi, 2014b). While the production and trade of fur skins has reached all-time highs in recent years, traditional furriers have been the main losers of this shift in the way fur is produced and consumed. Female-dominated fashion design labour is therefore perceived as an intrusion into an otherwise male domain. However, the associational set-up of the fur sector, particularly the very influential trappers’ and breeders’ associations who act as key stakeholders of fur design centres and marketing organisations remain male dominated. Such

1 - The profession of the furrier is male in terms of habitus, image, self-perception and actual gender distribution of professionals. However, the traditional production of fur items also involves fur sewers or seamstresses who work for a furrier and according to his cuts and designs, putting them into practice. This labor is or was more frequently performed by women. This division of labor and the hierarchy imbued in it represents another aspect of the gendered nature of traditional fur production.

incumbent structures, while cultivating very old-fashioned ideas of femininity in relation to fur, seek to utilize the more extensive symbolic and reflexive space of contemporary fashion design for creating and marketing fur fashion. This is done by sponsoring and training designers who work with fur. Rantisi (2014b) finds that such arrangements serve to keep more female creative labour precarious while appropriating its value.

Along with increased design-orientation, fur associations have put an emphasis on countering accusations of animal cruelty by positioning fur as the ecological, responsible, and ethical choice: Being a durable, adaptable, biodegradable and regenerative material, fur is said to be more sustainable than its 'petroleum-based' alternatives. In addition, the industry stresses that most furs come from 'responsible farming' or from hunting and trapping in line with traditional, indigenous practices or efforts of ecologically necessary population control. Therefore, for a designer, using the term 'ethical fur' to mark out a unique market position in contrast to an implied conventional, 'unethical' form of fur places them in opposition to traditional fur sector representatives and may lead to conflict with key industry actors. Nevertheless, a growing number of independent brands and designers employ implicit or explicit notions of 'ethical fur' to position themselves on the market. We argue that such efforts are highly gendered and strongly connected to female identities, both in terms of the designer's professional persona and her biographical experience. We also argue that such 'ethical' identities are exacerbated and reinforced by media discourses: Once acclaimed as 'ethical', brands and designers find it difficult and/or unnecessary to escape the category. All designers we encountered who work with 'ethical fur' are women, reflecting the introductory quote. While some traditional male furriers have embraced fashion design and haute couture, their positioning is much closer to traditional ideas of fur and luxury.

We situate our contribution within literatures of ethical (gendered) consumption on the one hand, and gendered production and its ethical dimensions on the other hand. Ethical consumption has been problematized with regard to the complicated entanglements of identity, practical decision rationalities and ethical values (Barnett *et al.*, 2005; Beard, 2008) as well as the complexities of translating notions of ethical production and consumption into the management of value chains (Hughes, 2001; Hughes *et al.*, 2008). The problematically gendered and often feminized nature of production in garments and fashion commodity chains has been noted previously (Leslie, 2012; Rantisi, 2014b; Reimer, 2009; Werner, 2012). At the production floor level, the feminization of garments and textiles value chains in particular, has been explicated by a dependence on cheap, flexible and casual female (and often also racialized) labour that continues to rely on the 'nimble fingers' and exploitability of women workers in the global South. Beyond sweatshop workers, at the design stage, the high risk and uncertainty involved in the volatile and short life-cycles of fashion, has similarly made fashion design work prone to feminized labour.

In this contribution, we draw on publicly accessible sources such as media articles. We also use interviews with fur fashion designers which we conducted as part of our research project 'Geographies of dissociation – The social construction of value from a spatial perspective'. We use a small set of individual examples taken from our research on the fur industry, women who design and manufacture 'ethical' fur garments, to demonstrate that despite the extremely diverse of notions what the term 'ethical' can mean, some key themes connect female identity and 'ethical fur'-based positioning strategies.

## Gendered consumption, gendered production and ethical fur

The notion of 'ethical fur' does not refer to one well-defined concept. Instead it is a highly ambiguous term which encompasses a great variety of possible 'ethical' business, production, and consumption models. These draw on very different notions of what is ethical, some of which are contradictory. They may involve the re-using of fur-skins already available in various ways (up- or re-cycling), focusing on fur sourced in acceptable ways (e.g. hunting for population control), or even not using real animal-fur at all. In the following, we focus on several women fur-fashion designers, who give meaning and engage with the term 'ethical' fur in distinct ways, revealing the highly contested meanings of ethical consumption and its gendered nature.

### (i) Synthetic Fur

Artificial, synthetic fur is widely used in the fashion industry. Depending on the intentions of the speaker, the material is referred to as 'fake fur' (thus dismissing it as an inferior imitation of real fur) or 'faux fur' (giving it a more stylish, elaborate ring). The role of synthetic fur is highly contested in debates surrounding the ethical implications of fur consumption: Does it represent a viable ethical alternative to real fur? Is it problematic in itself due to its origin in petroleum and its contribution to non-biodegradable waste? Or is wearing synthetic fur, by way of imitating and celebrating its look and feel, an endorsement of real fur? The examples of two female designers and their brands, both established in high fashion, serve to demonstrate the ambiguous nature of synthetic fur – the term we will use for the sake of neutrality – and ethical positioning strategies involving the material.

Stella McCartney, daughter of Paul and Linda McCartney, has championed ethical and ecological fashion since the beginning of her career as a fashion designer. McCartney is one of the most outspoken representatives of the fashion world and does not spare her colleagues when she addresses problematic issues. Her approach is holistic: In her own collections, she addresses issues such as longevity, the origin of materials, the ecological footprint of their production, and working conditions in factories. She also contributes to broader efforts to transform the fashion system. A vegetarian like her parents, she uses neither leather nor fur. In interviews, she frequently cites her upbringing, having lived on an eco-friendly farm as a child, as the defining influence for her stance on ecology and animal rights. Media-representations of her biography particularly highlight the maternal influence: Stella's loyalty and admiration towards her mother Linda who established a vegetarian food brand.

Until recently, Stella McCartney's creations did not feature synthetic fur. But in 2015, a year in which real fur was overwhelmingly present on catwalks, McCartney began showing creations involving synthetic fur. A key impulse, she explained in a 2015 interview with *The Guardian*, was the demand and preference of younger (female) consumers for the material: *'modern fake fur looks so much like real fur, that the moment it leaves the atelier no one can tell it's not the real thing. And I've struggled with that. But I've been speaking to younger women about it recently and they don't even want real fur. So I feel like maybe things have moved on, and it's time, and we can do fabrics which look like fur, if we take them somewhere else.'* (*The Guardian* online, 9 March 2015)

Stella McCartney received praise from animal rights organizations such as PETA, who themselves are divided on the subject of synthetic fur. Praise by campaigners, possibly even enrolment into their agendas, can contribute to the sharpening

of an ethical profile. London-based fashion designer Hannah Weiland established her brand 'Shrimps' in 2013. Its reputation is almost entirely based on her extravagant usage of brightly coloured synthetic fur. While the designer explained that her choice of material was triggered by a coincidental encounter and not by an explicitly ethical agenda, increasingly she responds to external appreciation of her brand as an ethical one by reproducing an ethical narrative in interviews. Hannah Weiland explained that she wears leather and plans to use animal-based materials in future collections. Nevertheless, through acclaim from animal rights organizations, her brand retains an ethical connotation. 'Shrimps' focuses on women's fashion. Though being pursued as a 'young' brand, Weiland insists that she caters to all age groups: *'My mom wears [Shrimps clothes] and she's 60, my Nanna wears them and she's 92. I'm 26 and my sister's 20, we all wear them'* (Observer online, 2 November 2016).

## **(ii) Accidental Fur**

In the forested landscape of New England, road-kill next to highways is a common sight. Upon moving from Denmark to the US in 2013 [Fur-Fashion Designer #1] saw a responsible business opportunity in scavenging the animal carcasses and using their fur to make bespoke fur garments. As a Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate with a focus on sustainable business development and an outsider to the fashion industry, in 2013, and, she relates her identity as a mother to starting her accidental fur-fashion business:

*'I was horrified of all the bodies on the street. I was a new mom, I was feeling very maternal, I was... that natural feeling that we have towards other things when we are filled with hormones [...] and I thought what can I do that makes a difference in the world? Certainly around nature and animals because I have always cared very deeply for nature and for animals [...] so fur seemed an obvious answer'* (interview March 2017).

Since the humble beginnings, media attention on her business model and her persona has been disproportionate to the scale of her business and international in scope. Her customers are primarily female, urban and upper-middle class consumers (she identifies them as 'Wholefoods'-clientele) and who want to consume ethically but still look glamorous. [Fur-Fashion Designer #1] does not actively use the term 'ethical' for advertising her collection (though others label her fur-garments this way), and rather refers to 'compassion' and 'responsibility' as distinguishing criteria of her collection.

## **(iii) Fur as By-Product**

Starting off as a stranger to fur [Fur-Fashion Designer #2], came in contact with the material during her studies in fashion design at Berlin's University of the Arts (Universität der Künste). In a project named 'Real Fake' carried out in collaboration with both real and faux fur providers, students were asked to reflect on the implications of using faux fur or real fur in their creations. In her assignment, [Fur-Fashion Designer #2] concluded that real fur is the more aesthetic as well as responsible choice.

*'I had no choice, apart from my natural appreciation of the material, than clearly saying that basically fur is much more beneficial in more than one respect. It is really sustainable, which you cannot say for all the plastic materials. And when animal rights campaigners shout "oh the poor animals" – at the end of the day it is a blue whale that suffocates of all the plastic waste. [...] I just need to glance at [real fur] and I immediately see and especially feel: If you touch this, it is like a breeze, and if you compare it with the artificial stuff, sorry, I do not relate to it, I would never wear it'* (interview January 2016).

A senior furrier involved in the project introduced her to the craft. As a designer at the beginning of her career, she chose working with fur as a way to create a unique position. '[The usage of fur] does define me. [...] It distinguishes me that I engage with it. Because none or hardly any of the young people really do it' (ibid). However, she felt uncomfortable with using farmed fur and instead sources her furs from meat-agriculture and hunting. Though not explicitly labelling her work as 'ethical fur', [Fur-Fashion Designer #2] understands ecological and animal welfare-responsibility as part of her brand identity.

*'In my business it's wild-caught foxes which are shot anyway, and instead of burying the skins, as hunters usually do, I take the stuff and use it to make great things. [...] These are all animals which come from the food industry. The animals are killed for the meat. I eat the rabbit, too, and as I said it is more logical to me to use the animal from beginning to end'* (ibid).

Having been trained as a fashion designer and not a furrier, her approach to fur is unconventional. Regarding cuts, treatment and material combinations, she feels unbound by traditional professional norms which she defines in generational terms, but also in terms of gender:

*'Sure, the knowledge about the material is very important. But sometimes you have to break a structure to arrive at something new. And especially the more senior men who work with fur today would not dare to do certain things in practice.'* (ibid)

## Conclusions

In this contribution we linked gender and ethical production and consumption. We empirically explored the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings of 'ethical fur' using the examples of several female (fur) fashion designers. As we could show, ethical fur is a female topic. While the number of cases is too small to claim universal validity or to come up with a consistent explanation, the examples offer intriguing insights into the dynamics of 'ethical' brand identity formations and their gendered nature. In sum, our findings resonate with Barrientos' study of gendered production networks, in which she highlighted women's role in raising quality at the production and the consumption side of cocoa-chocolate and thus showed the gendered societal embeddedness of both production and consumption in global production networks (Barrientos, 2014).

Female fashion designers who engage in 'ethical fur' apparently are embedded in multiple dynamic relationships and contexts, each of which is gendered, and which, by interacting with each other, reinforce gender identity. The first, and maybe the most surprising of these relationships, is the family context, specifically the maternal relationship (going both ways) with its strong impact on identity formation. Both the adoption or transfer of a caring attitude from mother to daughter and the experience of feeling maternal foster a professional ethos which resonates with very gendered ideas about being responsible and caring (see also Hall, 2016). The second relevant relationship is the one to other professionals – fellow designers or furriers. With fur as a traditional male, craft-based domain, being a female designer provides a degree of creative distance as well as obstacles to simply copying the traditional furrier's role. Being in some way alternative to or different from the mainstream of fur is an element of identity which can easily grow out of experiences made in the course of professional socialization as a female designer approaching fur. The third relation is the customer-relationship. The question of ethical fashion consumption – as fashion consumption in general – is gendered, too. The accounts of customer-interaction we found both in the media and in our own interviews exclusively make reference to female customers. With the two realms of production and consumption being so strongly gendered, the intersection of both and the discursive transactions occurring

at this intersection serve to reproduce gender norms. Finally, a brand's identity is also the product of ascriptions by the media. Thus, ultimately a fashion brand's identification as 'ethical' also follows gendered interpretative patterns, which are embedded in media discourses on consumption and fashion.

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# Thoughts on perfume: luxury and rhythm

*Lauren Greehy<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Geography, University of Manchester

## Abstract

The paper situates the importance of dedicated research into perfume, a complex commodity, and the multi-sensorial experiences, practices and memories associated with particular scents. This is done by giving closer consideration to the gendered and ethical discourses associated with the consumption of luxurious commodities, and the prosaic rituals and rhythmic practices that individual bodies construct around the use of perfume. Focusing on perfume as both luxurious and ordinary, understanding this commodity can be done by investigating the ways in which individuals embody the materiality of perfume in everyday life through its olfactory effects and the rhythms that become associated with its use.

Keywords: luxury; rhythm; materiality; embodiment; olfaction; consumption.

## 1: Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to introduce perfume as a material object and luxurious commodity that, through smell or 'olfaction', influences the bodies that wear it in profound ways that are, presently, poorly understood. The paper situates the importance of research on perfume and its olfactory effects in everyday consumption, and raise questions about how such research can be undertaken. The aims of this paper are three-fold: (1) to situate perfume as a material object that possesses a generative and transformative agency, (2) to illustrate the ways in which perfume can influence the individual body through symbolic attachments, and (3) to identify some of the ways in which perfume is embodied, practiced and remembered. The paper compliments this special issue by highlighting the importance of perfume as commodity that is embodied, practiced and attached to gendered and ethical discourses.

The material-turn in the social sciences argue for the centrality of material objects in research precisely because materials mediate human activity in everyday life, and the use of objects transforms the human and non-human actors in potentially unforeseen ways (Latour, 1994). Consumable material objects have consistently featured throughout history and "they continue to determine struggles and contradictions within man's activity... from the general rivalry emerge the struggles of certain powerful groups: the social classes" (Lefebvre, 1968: p.134).

Little is known about the classed and gendered experience of perfume consumption, let alone whether or not perfume is ethically consumed. However, it is acknowledged that women's bodies are synonymous with the consumption of luxurious goods and the accompanying narratives forged by brands (Calefato, 2014). Time and again semiotic analyses of signs (e.g. advertising campaigns) with perfumes have demonstrated these associations (see Mazzeo, 2010; Williamson, 1978) but they

only provide a partial insight into the social-life of perfume when it is bought or gifted. The centrality of signs in previous research with perfume has negated both the emotional and lived experience of the perfume wearer and any material environmental implications of producing and consuming perfume. Yet, this paper does not seek to dismiss luxurious discourses but rather situate those narratives as one component that can be used to understand the ways in which perfume becomes embodied by the affectual wearer, and by which perfume becomes attached to gendered and ethical discourses. This paper is an invitation to examine the effects of perfume (the material object) in everyday life through olfactory encounters (the body) and present a case for researching complex commodities.

## 2: A critique of the thing

The interdisciplinary scope of the material-turn in the social sciences is vast. Throughout much of the 20th century matter and materiality was dismissed in favour of the linguistic-turn that reduced bodily experiences to a series of signs, images and symbols. A fundamental proposition of the material-turn is that, as Iovino (2012: p.52) argues, is a “reaction against some radical trends of postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, which it regards as “dematerialising” the world into linguistic and social constructions”. Here, neo-materialism interprets the world as a “densely intertwined... tissue of experience” (Abram, 2010: p.143) which permits new interpretations of how material objects are mobilised and mediate everyday lives.

A significant contributor in elevating the status of material objects in the social sciences has been actor-network theory (ANT). It is argued in ANT that non-human entities, such as ‘materials’ (stone, wood, leather) and the ‘materiél’ (language, agendas, discourse, instructions) are mobilised everyday to ensure that a productive activity meets the objective set by the individual (Lefebvre, 1991: 71). The ‘material’ and ‘materiél’ are conceived of as ‘actants’ with a generative capacity to influence and transform how humans and non-humans interact and change one another through practice (Latour, 1988; 1994; 1999). A fundamental position of ANT is that material objects mediate action in everyday life, and the basis for understanding the ‘social-world’ is through the associations between humans and non-humans and their relational effects (Latour, 1994). Placing emphasis on neither a ‘subject’ nor ‘object’ as with classical social theories, ANT challenges the traditional dichotomy and is a clear example of a theoretical approach to understand the role of non-human actants in the everyday lives of humans. However, ANT is resigned to describing the associations between humans and non-humans which is uncritical and has been regarded of as a flat ontology that pays little attention to the inequalities between actants (Harman, 2009).

More recently, objects have been conceived of as emergent - matter is not a “blank slate” but it is involved in a process of intra-activity (Barad, 2007: p.151) that mediates human activity and can affect changes in the human - which permits non-humans to enter and withdraw from relations that exist as a part of heterogeneous networks. In this case objects should be understood as “permanently mysterious and to some extent inexhaustible... allows material-semiotic researchers to progress (slowly) by maintaining a tension that a flat ontology too quickly relaxes” (Pierides and Woodman, 2012: p.675). Thus, to understand the interactions and grasp the multi-sensorial experiences between individual bodies and perfume requires material objects to be understood as possessing a generative agency.

A unique argument introduced by the pioneering work of Karen Barad in her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), challenges the commonplace ontological understandings of matter which is poignant for grounding vibrant materialism in

upcoming research with perfume. For Barad, matter “does not refer to an inherent, fixed property of abstract, independently existing objects; rather, ‘matter’ refers to phenomena in their ongoing materialization” (2007: p.151). Matter “is not a blank slate”, it is not “immutable or passive”, but is a “stabilising and destabilising process of iterative intra-activity” (Barad, 2007: p.151). Conceiving matter as “a doing, a congealing of agency” (Barad, 2007: p.151) grants an appreciation of the materiality of objects and how those objects influence and mediate human activity. Matter is “neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentic, not a fixed essence or property of things” (Barad, 2007: p.137).

The generative becoming of material objects is an act of “absolving matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism” (Bennett, 2010: p.3) and in the case of perfume involved human actants. For example, wearing perfume is often remarked of as a ‘final touch’ in getting ready before leaving the home where it’s potency is at its peak, however, for others perfume is applied directly after other bodily cleansing rituals so the scent is absorbed directly into the skin becoming an olfactory extension of their individual identity. Both the individual and the perfume are engaged in a generative becoming with the perfume’s agency being transformed from existing in the bottle to the skin, and the body experiences emotional, symbolic and olfactory effects with using perfume. Very little is known about how perfumes - an intimate and emotive worn cosmetic - are embodied by the affectual wearers. Acknowledging the generative agency of perfume reveals the commodity to be more complex than previously assumed. Neo-materialism allows the vibrancy of objects and their influence on human bodies to be grasped. To grant ‘things’ a central position alongside bodies permits a multi-dimensional understanding (see Cook *et al.*, 2017) of the ways in which perfume is consumed and practiced in everyday life, but more importantly how perfume is embodied and remembered.

### 3: Luxury and ethical consumption

Luxury is complex term – despised and adored in equal measure – steeped in myth and discourse spanning centuries, and communicated through a variety of mediums, such as images and material objects (e.g. advertising campaigns from luxury brands to the rarity of a mink fur coat). The discourse of luxury maintains its aura in everyday life when those material goods are worn, possessed and coveted. They imbue status and power where rarity implies limitation, uniqueness and elegance (Kapferer, 1997). For Calefato “luxury is intrigue and deceit, domination and abstraction” (2014: p.1). To be luxurious is to be at the forefront of modernity: possessing the latest material goods, such as space (exclusive addresses), technology (cars, smart phones, home appliances etc.), worn goods (clothing, cosmetics etc.) and beyond. However, this is not to say that the historic narratives of luxury, such as the opulence and grandeur of European aristocracy throughout the centuries have dissipated; rather luxury represents a classed experience which is inherently embedded in struggle.

European liberalism of the 19th century was concerned with the morality of consumption practices at a time where capitalist modes of production were revolutionising everyday life. A classic definition of luxurious consumption is a practice of denoting an individual’s wealth. Veblen argued that “throughout the entire evolution of conspicuous expenditure, whether of goods or of services or human life, runs the obvious implication that in order to effectually mend the consumers good fame it must be an expenditure of superfluities. In order to be reputable it must be wasteful” (2007[1899]: p.49).

The practice of luxurious consumption in the 19th century, not unlike the present, represents the struggle and

disconnection from labour in the production of these goods. This raises questions regarding the ethical and moral consequences of producing such material objects to be possessed by the few:

The study of history leads me continually to contemplate with sympathy and satisfaction the opulence and luxury of the few amid the hard lives of the many, because it presents itself as the practically necessary soil in which beauty and the love of beauty grow and develop... and become abiding possessions of the race (Sidgwick, 1894: p.16)

Of course, luxurious consumption has not always been justified through the aesthetics of love and beauty that the practice has been used to imbue. A more critical account of luxurious consumption suggests that the practice is detrimental to the corporeality of everyday life, for instance:

It is the end that justifies, and the noblest end is not the only end. There may be occasions when expenditure on champagne may be justified. Yet we rightly condemn as luxurious the man who drinks champagne or Benedictine at every meal; for in this case the end does not justify the means, which involve the destruction of the labour of many days and many years for the gratification of an unimportant moment (Davidson, 1898: p.73)

The repetition of consuming luxurious commodities, from champagne to glamorous gowns, reduces the extravagance, opulence and uniqueness of the 'moment' to something which seems banal. If prosaic practices and rituals with material objects are negated then we deny the complexity of the relationship between the body and material objects at their most ethereal level. On the practice of ethical consumption, Szmigin and Carrigan argue that "ethical purchasers have political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives for choosing one product over another but that what unites them is a concern regarding the effect their purchasing has on the external world" (2005: p.608). However, perfume is an intimate worn cosmetic, whilst its use generates olfactory effects for the wearer and other individuals encountered, thus the purchasing and practices of perfume use is almost exclusively contingent on bodily practices, memories and interpersonal experiences.

The construction of a luxury brand often involves forging mythical narratives that imbue the uniqueness and rarity of the goods that they produce. These mythical narratives typically mobilise imagery reflecting beauty and sensuality to convey to the consumer that their goods will confer this type of identity for the consumer in their everyday life. For example, in the creation of legendary brands Vincent (2002) argued that these narratives are timeless and captivating and their meanings are sustained across cultural borders. In a classic example of a semiotic analysis of branded advertising materials, Williamson (1978) suggested that visual association of celebrities with luxury goods symbolises a beauty that is obtainable by the consumer. Beyond the obvious effects of celebrity association luxury brands often seek to transcend the personification of beauty (Rutherford, 1994) which is particularly relevant for the consumption of perfume.

Perfume use is ephemeral by nature – existing temporarily on the skin and in dialogue with the air – generating olfactory effects for the affectual user and the individuals that they encounter every day. For example, Chanel N°5 is the perfume that defined the 20th century (Mazzeo, 2010), and the branding of the scent has forged a legendary brand. Perfume is embodied and emotional: "N°5 encourages dreaming, fantasising, and remembering all those elusive, annoying, frustrating things about love and sex" (Lippert, 1999: p.28). Generally focusing on language and images that brands use these studies have sought to identify the meanings constructed by brands for their products, and what these materials are intended to imbue and evoke in consumers. Brands buttress their stability and image by crafting narratives and myths imbuing the rarity, uniqueness and corporeality of their products. The narratives and myths deployed by brands are beholden to a myriad of geographical,

temporal and material entanglements that appear pervasive, but can be elucidated with a degree of sophistication that considers the spaces that commodities, like perfume, occupy (see Pike, 2015). However, interrogating the narratives that brands construct provides only a partial insight into the how luxury goods are embodied and appropriated by the consumer in their everyday lives.

## 4: On the body and rhythm

To appreciate the materiality and narratives which are intertwined with perfume will only ever provide a partial insight into the complexity of this commodity. The lived experiences with perfume in everyday practices involve two essential components: the body and temporality. Here, the relationship between the body and perfume is emergent, unfolding over time, and are synonymous with one another and cannot be separated in analyses.

Olfaction, the human sense of smell, has been neglected and betrayed by Western philosophy being characterised as a mute sense (Ackerman, 1990). For example, Plato remarked in *Timaeus* that “the faculty of smell does not admit of differences of kind; for all smells are of a half-formed nature, and no element is so proportioned as to have any smell” (1892: p.488). Olfaction has since become embedded in a hierarchy of senses; falling behind chromatic and auditory sensory perception. However, sensory perception does not occur separately as “the five senses do not travel along separate channels, but interact to a degree few scientists would have believed only a decade ago” (Cytowic, 2010: p.46). A hierarchy of separately functioning senses, it is argued, betrays the body:

*“Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metamorphization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body. The living body, being at once ‘subject’ and ‘object’ cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the ‘sign of non-body”* (Lefebvre, 1991: p.407; emphasis in original)

*“Anyone who is wont... to identify places, people and things by their smells is unlikely to be susceptible to rhetoric...the sense of smell had its glory days when animality still predominated over ‘culture’, rationality and education – before these factors, combined with a thoroughly cleansed space, brought about the complete atrophy of smell. One can’t help feeling, though, that to carry around an atrophied organ which still claims its due must be somewhat pathogenic”* (Lefebvre, 1991: p.198)

Odours have a spatial existence and consistently generate olfactory effects, whilst philosophy has characterised the sense of smell as ineffable, representative of a bygone era of human evolutionary history, odours feature in our everyday lives. The “abhorrence of smells produces its own form of social power. Foul-smelling rubbish appears to threaten the social order, whereas the reassuring victory of the hygienic and the fragrant promises to buttress its stability” (Corbin, 1986: p.5). The ineffability of scents does not detract from their presence in everyday life, nor does it detract from the complexity of the relationship between the body and perfume, as “transitional objects to which desire becomes attached in seeking to escape subjectivity and reach out to ‘the other’ are founded primarily on the olfactory sense; this is true also for the erotic object in general” (Lefebvre, 1991: p.198). To understand the corporeal relationships that individuals construct with perfume it is pertinent that the body is the first point of analysis as sensory perception is the basis for lived experience.

There are multiple aspects of temporality that are particularly relevant with perfume use, such as the temporalities of everyday rituals with perfumes to the breadth of olfactory memories acquired throughout the lifecourse. The everyday rituals and rhythms will be discussed here and their relevance to prosaic perfume practices will be elucidated. Everyday life is associated with the rhythmic routines practiced by an individual at a particular point in both time and space (Lefebvre, 2014), and involves the symbolic attachments to the ideas, objects and spaces that accompany the practice of everyday life. The concept can be understood dialectically as “illusion and truth, power and helplessness; the intersection of the sector man controls and the sector he does not control” (Lefebvre, 2014: p.40). The everyday is therefore:

*“The most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden. A condition stipulated for the legibility of forms, ordained by means of functions, inscribed within structures, the everyday constitutes the platform upon which the bureaucratic society of controlled consumerism is erected”* (Lefebvre, 1987: p.9)

Everyday life and rhythm are inseparable concepts and both vitally important to make lucid the complexities of the relationships between human bodies and the material object of perfume. Perfume is a complex commodity perceived through a sense that is under-represented in social science research and this can be remedied by exploring and elucidating upon the symbolic attachments, practices and rhythms with perfume.

Rhythm can be defined succinctly as “everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm” (Lefebvre, 2004: p.8). Rhythm cannot be understood as an abstracted concept concerned with the simple allocation of ‘clock-time’ to the performance of productive activities, but rather an embodied understanding of the temporality of everyday lived experiences involving bodies and materials. Rhythms are formed through repetitive practices and allude to how materials mediate action and the process of embodiment. For example, the generative agency and materiality of perfume is transformed from when it is on display in the bottle on a dressing table to when it is sprayed upon the body and in dialogue with the skin. Perfume becomes embodied through rituals over time, generating a multitude of personal meanings and narratives. For the affectual wearer finding the ‘right’ perfume for them is a way of articulating their personal identity on an olfactory level which alludes to the multi-sensorial complexity of wearing perfume. Thus, to understand the complexity of the relationships that individuals undertake with perfume requires an embodied notion of both rhythm and materiality which are manifested in experiences of everyday life.

The opulence and rarity that accompany narratives of luxuriousness have been evidenced in a historiography of capitalism, written by men, that often presumes (and emphasises) that there is a feminine propensity for unproductive expenditures on commodities such as clothes, jewellery, flowers and perfume, to name a few (Calefato, 2014: p.57). Here, the female body is the personification of luxury with a mark of veridiction (Greimas, 1985: pp.101-110). The tantamount symbolic associations with luxuriousness and the aestheticisation of the womanly body; the consumption of perfume is personal, embodied through rhythmic practices and generating olfactory effects that are stored in long-term memory. The modern world aspires to be odourless – a dressage on the sensory organ; rhythms are conditioned in the external spatial environment where everyday life is practiced (Lefebvre, 2004), but these rhythms are then inscribed upon the body. In our attempts to be hygienic, clean and odourless the physical body is positioned as an entity with personal bodily rhythms of cleanliness (e.g. showering, deodorants etc.); however, perfume becomes a material object used for aesthetically distinguishing individuals, on an olfactory level, from one another. It is through the body, female or male, that the concepts of life, materiality and

temporality “cohere become essential attributes of what they are” (Ollman, 1990: p.37). By situating the body as the first point of analysis, mobilising the multi-dimensional ontology from the material-turn and introducing the temporalities of rhythm can reveal the social life of scents in everyday life.

## 5. Conclusion

The literature and ideas discussed here provide new insights to the corporeal relationships with complex commodities that are experienced through under-researched form of sensory perception: olfaction. Olfaction has been conceived of as a mute sense (Ackerman, 1990), but this should not deter research on everyday encounters with scents. Far from an atrophied organ, olfaction and odour memory demonstrate an abnormal excellence (Engen, 1983). Appreciating the materiality of perfume – and its ability to influence the affectual wearer – alongside the multi-sensorial experiences (e.g. the bottle shape, the textures, the colour and feel of perfume) of olfactory encounters and the symbolic narratives constructed by brands is an essential first step in elucidating the social life of perfume. Perfume is an apt example of a conspicuously consumed luxury good and worn cosmetic that is intimate, embodied, and emotional. Perfume is more than just a consumable commodity and understanding the narratives that affectual users construct with scents – involving emotions, spaces, interpersonal experiences and memories – can reveal the importance of olfaction in the everyday. Dedicated research on the many fascinating aspects of perfume can reveal the complexity of the commodity, the ethical and gendered discourse mobilised and embodied during consumption and narratives of luxuriousness that accompany the everyday experiences of our sense of smell.

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# New Insights into Materialism and Conspicuous Consumption in China

Yiwei Fang<sup>1</sup> and Jeffrey Podoshen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of BOS Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, USA.

## Abstract

This paper provides insights based on recent literature and findings that relate to materialism and conspicuous consumption among Chinese consumers. There is a specific focus on gender related issues and implications on consumer well-being. Our work is intended to assist in both conceptual and hypothesis development for other interested scholars.

Keywords: Materialism; Conspicuous Consumption; China; Gender; Ethics.

## Introduction

In recent years a number of studies have suggested and posited that Chinese culture is moving towards increased materialistic dispositions (Don and Dholakia, 2015; Hsu and Huang, 2016; Yang and Stening, 2016). Many view this as a negative given the troubling outcomes related to materialism (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012; Podoshen *et al.*, 2014). To many, this may be of little surprise given China's rapid growth in GDP, which has hovered between 6.9 – 10.6% (World Bank, 2016) and its purchasing power, which has been growing exponentially. China's aggregate retail sales have more than doubled since 2008 (National Bureau of Statistics China, 2016) and its value system, based on a hybrid of the teachings of Confucius and Chairman Mao offer an interesting and unique landscape to study materialism and conspicuous consumption as Chinese consumers (especially young adult consumers) find themselves in the eye of multiple, conflicting socially-driven consumption philosophies and practices.

This paper examines recent literature and findings related to materialism and conspicuous consumption among young adult Chinese consumers with a focus on gender. While this work offers no empirical tests, it is intended to assist in both conceptual and hypothesis development for other interested scholars.

## Young Adult Chinese Consumers

Young Chinese consumers are experiencing a process of reshaping their consumption values. They are subjected to the influence of three sets of values including: communistic values that emphasized personal sacrifice and contribution to the state, Confucian values about frugality and saving up for long-term needs, and materialistic values that are about spending money for personal enjoyment (Chan, 2003). On the surface, rapid economic development may spur materialistic values

to become the dominant disposition in Chinese consumption behaviors. After decades of suppression of materialistic and luxury-oriented desires under the impact of both Confucian and communistic values, Chinese consumers now have the ability and access to obtain different and more unique kinds of products and services. They no longer hide their desire towards the appeal of consumption and show keen enthusiasm to chase and display hedonic enjoyment on social media (Duan & Dholakia, 2013). Contrary to the traditional Confucian values of delaying satisfaction and engaging in thriftiness, and the Maoist value of sacrificing individual enjoyment for the greater good, expressing consumption and hedonic desires in China is no longer a sin that needs to be concealed. In opposition to traditional Chinese frugality, consumers are now paying more attention to the consumption of luxury goods. In 2012, Chinese consumers accounted for one-third of the global sale of luxury fashion brands Prada and Gucci (Riedel, 2012). Luxury goods sales in China is expected to hit 74 billion euros in 2020 (Statista, 2014).

Despite the impact of economic development, young adult Chinese consumption values contrast sharply from their parents. Contrary to their parents' generation who experienced the Cultural Revolution, young Chinese adults have developed their own values under the impact of globalization and China's economic and social reforms. Their growing sense of personal freedom and hedonism differ sharply from their parents' austerity and consumption habits shaped by the Cultural Revolution (Yang & Neal, 2006). These younger consumers are more materialistic than their parents in terms of centrality, uniqueness-seeking, and acceptability related to social influence (Gu & Hung, 2009).

Consequently, when it comes to consumption behavior, young Chinese adults are primarily influenced by the mass media, including TV and social media, while their parents are mostly influenced by income (Gu & Hung, 2009). At the same time, the one child policy in China enlarged the gap between the two generations. Global luxury brand, Coach, for example, finds that most of its customers in China are young women between 25 and 35 (Ostapenko, 2012). Some even suggest that the generation born in the 1980s under the one-child policy wound up being spoiled by their parents, spending what they want without much forethought about the implications. As the only child in their homes, they received undivided attention from their family (Veeck, Williams & Jiang, 2002) and as a result they tend to care more about their own happiness than those in the past and are willing to buy impractical and conspicuous items often with the financial support of their parents.

Although conspicuous consumption is becoming a dominant force in China, traditional cultural values are still deeply rooted in many Chinese consumers' minds and this makes China's macro-level economy extremely unique. For example, because of the traditional Chinese value of saving money for long-term needs, many Chinese people not only have the habit of saving money ingrained in them but also tend to have a conservative attitude towards debt. There is a strong cultural disposition to take care of family members for the long-term and this means money must be available and wealth should not be highly leveraged. Many individuals' pursuit of hedonism is restrained by their wish to build up savings to support their parents and families (Thompson, 2011). The saving rate of China in 2014 was 49% (The World Bank, 2014) and consumption made up 35% of the country's GDP (Dexter, 2015). Most Chinese consumers still prefer cash over credit cards. Thus, young Chinese like to spend on conspicuous items but still contend with the tradition of thrift. Further, the uncertainty about medical and educational expenditures also lowers individuals' consumption of nondurable goods (Zhou, 2012) and at the same time, the value of frugality has led to the use of counterfeit products that merely "show" the brand but lack durability and quality. The market of counterfeit products in China is developing almost at the same speed as that of luxury goods (Wang & Lin, 2009). The use of counterfeit products shows that Chinese customers remain price conscious while pursuing

attractive outwardly showy consumption behaviors. All this is happening while family, the center of Chinese traditional value systems, is still an influential and classical virtue in modern China.

For many young consumers though, the primary motivation and purpose of consumption is to improve reputation and social status and not necessarily to show their individual taste and personality (Jin *et al.*, 2015). This behavior pattern originated from the relational orientation social value in Chinese culture. In a relationally-orientated society, individuals define themselves with their social status and interaction with one another. Thus, the notions of “mianzi” (face), “guanxi” (personal relationships), and “renqing” (favor) are particularly noticeable as they can show individuals’ social status and are related to success (Wang, Siu & Barnes, 2008; Wang & Lin, 2009). In addition, because these traditional values also require people to view themselves from the perspective of others (Liu, Wang, & Leach, 2012), Chinese consumers are very concerned about their identification in society. Thus, in Chinese culture, consumption not only fulfills basic utilitarian needs but the behavior also meets a social need for identification, status and social recognition (Thompson, 2011). Purchasing luxury goods becomes a convenient way for Chinese customers to gain face (Zhang, Tian, & Grigorious, 2011) and acts as a social signal to show off financial success (Thompson, 2011). Not particularly aware of differences among different luxury brands, Chinese customers consider them symbols of wealth and success simply because they are seen as luxurious (Ostapenko, 2012). These luxury goods clearly assist in social interaction (Li, Zhang, & Sun, 2015) and Chinese people can quickly discern who is “wealthy” or not by simple cues related to the use and display of prestige brands. This helps maintain the social order that relies on status within the community. Thus, the primary motivation for Chinese consumers to consume luxury products is not necessarily for the products’ quality or to present individual personality, but to show off their social status and establish their reputability.

Though it may not seem so, the reshaping of Chinese consumption values did not happen overnight. Instead, changes in consumption values partly lie on the inherent inconsistencies of the traditional culture (Lin & Wang, 2010). Historically, Chinese were known for their emphasis on education. However, this was largely because it used to lead to government employment, which would ultimately land material and social success (Lin & Wang, 2010). It is important to note though, the old Chinese proverb, “Within books, one can find houses of gold.” Therefore, the value of education is, in fact, somewhat related to materialism.

In China’s long history of highly centralized political structures, Confucian values, which encourage individuals to respect the social order, live according to their social status and value self-discipline, were favored by the power elites throughout. These Confucian values were trumpeted by the ruling class in much of China’s history, tempering individuals’ desire for materialism and hedonism. At the same, the deep-seeded, internalized Chinese dream for a better and more comfortable life was suppressed by a variety of environment factors and was alternatively expressed through other, more socially-palatable aspirations like education. When the country opened its doors to the world during the economic reform, individuals’ desires of materialism and hedonism rose to the surface as the control of the system was diluted by the realities of cash inflows and a boom in manufacturing.

Today, the reshaping of consumption is unbalanced among different social classes, as well as between those in different regions of the nation. Today, income inequality is a severe societal problem. The Gini coefficient (a measure of income dispersion) for pre-tax market income in China increased from 0.28 in 1980 to 0.44 in 2000 and 0.52 by 2013 (Cevik & Correa-Caro, 2015), meaning there is a greater gap between rich and poor. This enlarged gap in China has led to unbalanced

consumption spending where the poorest 17% of the population account for over 30 percent of the total consumption spending and the poorest 30% account for only 16% (McKinsey Quarterly, 2013). In other words, the majority of the population is purchasing very little while a small fraction of people are actually buying the luxury products. Wage and value disparities between those in urban and rural areas also show different consumption values across the country. Rural Chinese tend to save a higher percentage of income than urban Chinese because the traditional frugal value is still influential in rural China (Lin & Wang, 2010). Consequently, rapid economic development has led to a feeling of imbalance and even strife among citizens in many sectors of the nation.

## Chinese Consumers and Gender

Literature in Marketing has suggested that, in terms of materialism and conspicuous consumption, men often score higher than women (Segal & Podoshen, 2012; Workman & Lee, 2011). However, men are less likely to purchase contemporary fashion products than women (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2005) because they tend to be more concerned about practical use of purchases (Salman & Li, 2013). Traditionally, men have been found to be more highly involved with durable goods, such as cars (Bloch, 1981). Women, while generally less materialistic than men, are more likely to score higher in impulse buying tendency than men (Segal & Podoshen, 2012). Because fashion brands are seen as an important signal of consumers' identification of fashion consciousness and personal achievement (Kamineni, 2005), some posit that women exhibit their materialism in a way different from men. Workman and Lee (2011) suggest that women consider it more important to acquire possessions than men. It is posited that while shopping, women spend more resources (money, mental and physical effort, time) than men (Falk & Campbell, 1997), and their investment in these resources may lead them to believe that possession is more important. It is important to realize that much of this literature occurred during periods when many considered there to be only "two genders," thus these results and insights might prove differently in a more modern context.

Gender differences also exist in the way male and female consumers reason their consumption. While research points to the assertion that women give more emotional and relationship-orientated reasons to consume, men consider shopping to be need-driven that should be completed in minimal time and effort (Laroche *et al.*, 2000; Dittmar, 1989). This difference is also reflected in their advertisement preference. Female consumers have more positive attitudes towards advertisements of connected themes, indicating relationships, caring and commitment to others, while male consumers have more positive attitudes towards individualistic themes, appealing to independence, uniqueness and difference (Wang *et al.*, 2000).

In the case of China, the traditional ancient Chinese value systems, especially Confucianism, strongly emphasize traditional notions of masculinity, differing social roles of men and women, and the social hierarchy between them (Leung, 2003), thus, it is believed by many that gender identities are largely socially constructed and performed. It was traditionally men's priority to seek the opportunity to impress others with higher social status. The belief that money is a symbol of success significantly affects Chinese men's compulsive buying, while it has no significant effect on Chinese women (Li *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, one might suggest that men should be more materialistic than women in China. At the same time, however, the Marxist-Maoist institutions highlighted gender equality in work. Mao once claimed that "women hold up half the sky," encouraging women to work in the society. As a result, Chinese females command the highest degree of financial independence among Asian females (Shao, 2014). In a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit, 76% of Chinese women

considered themselves joint breadwinners in their family, 20% higher than the Asian average. 67% of respondents said they would buy for their children and family when they over-indulged themselves shopping, while the Asian average was only 41%. Chinese females have strong purchasing power and tend to spend more money on their own consumption, especially in e-commerce (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014). They no longer conform to the traditional Chinese female stereotype of selflessness and self-sacrifice to their family (Hung *et al.*, 2007). Thus, although males traditionally might reflect Chinese realities related to materialism, recent social changes allow Chinese females to transform into a more powerful, and, potentially more materialistic consumption group as their role changes.

## Discussion

China's economy continues to grow at a very rapid rate and many more Chinese people have adopted consumption behaviors similar to those in the West. Given the results of Podoshen *et al.*'s (2010) findings that comparatively indicate increasing levels of materialism among Chinese young adults and more recent research that suggests higher dispositions towards Chinese materialism in general (Podoshen *et al.*, 2010) it is possible that materialism and conspicuous consumption may be elevated among both men and women. Since Chinese consumers have enjoyed rapid economic development at rates rarely seen in many economies, materialism's related values are also likely to show an increase. Specifically, after years of suppression related to conspicuous products, Chinese society has more aptly embraced luxurious desires and the appeal of goods that denotes status in a more capitalistic environment. Even though Confucian and Maoist values are still important in Chinese society, we believe the rapid ascension and the strong upward trajectory of consumer spending inevitably has led to an increase in conspicuous consumption.

Traditionally the influence of Marxism highlighted gender equality in Chinese society and women have long been encouraged to work and consume. With potentially higher levels of materialism among women, it will be interesting to see how and if there is any relationship between this variable and marriage. Materialism is negatively correlated with the desire of marriage (Li *et al.*, 2011) and materialists are often less satisfied with their lives (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Wright & Larsen, 1993) while marriage is positively related to life satisfaction. Marriage can increase happiness (Diener *et al.*, 2000) those who choose to get married tend to have higher satisfaction in general, and certainly this is the belief in Chinese society as well. However, past research has shown that in China, there is not a significant difference in terms of conspicuous consumption and materialism related to marital status (Eastman *et al.*, 1997; Meng, Yang, & Yu, 2011). These past studies, however, occurred when China's economy was only a fraction of what it is today in terms of GDP and consumer purchasing power. Therefore it is important to re-examine this.

It is also important to note that in 2016, when China's aggregate economic growth was the slowest in the past quarter century, President Xi Jinping announced a series of economic reforms to deal with overspending. Chinese government agencies implanted changes to make foreign capital outflows more difficult and also worked to combat inflation. Inflation has caused much concern for Chinese consumers in recent months and its been widely reported that Chinese consumers had slowed spending on European style luxury goods for some time (Hancock, 2017).

Van Auken *et al.* (2014) provide some interesting insights and thought on the relationship between materialism and the future of China's consumption patterns. For example, while China has experienced sustained GDP growth, aspects of their

“new” economy are very much consumption-based and they will need to rely on consumer spending. The government generally looks to stimulate demand for Chinese-made goods and services. Young Chinese are being groomed by many to become the new middle and upper-middle consumption drivers of the greater economy (Boumphrey, 2007). As Xie *et al.* (2013) and Van Auken *et al.* (2014) mention, these young consumers are also receiving messages and signals that possessions and products will lead to greater levels of overall happiness and fulfillment, as well as increasing social stature. In this respect some of these consumers are experiencing positive emotions even before they gain material wealth. In other words, consumers are feeling a level of excitement based on anticipated happiness and well-being. Ironically, as Podoshen and Andrzejewski (2012) find, materialism can often lead to more negative outcomes and related dispositions such as a fixation with object acquisition, compulsive buying (Roberts, Manolis and Tanner, 2003) and family-related stress (Roberts, Manolis and Tanner, 2006).

With all of the ramifications in mind, China is in a situation that few nations find themselves in, whereby they must strike a balance between stimulating consumption (in a more consumption-based economy) and maintaining steady growth in a value system that can potentially cause harm to future generations of Chinese people. As it stands now, there is still a significant divide between the wealthy and poor in much of China. Possessions and materialism can further exacerbate these boundaries and may even transform gender relations and norms. In this respect, it would be beneficial for further examination into the young adult Chinese population and to learn about the “why” in terms of materialistic values. Further, it would be extremely helpful to examine gender in terms of consumption orientations as China hits more bumps in the road in its rapid ascension to that of a global economic superpower.

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# Understanding and Practising Sustainable Consumption in Early Motherhood

Kate Burningham<sup>1</sup> and Sue Venn<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sociology, University of Surrey, UK.

## Abstract

This paper explores when environmentally sustainable consumption occurs for new mothers, and how their constructions of sustainable lifestyles align with, or are challenged, by the everyday priorities of family life. The study involved longitudinal qualitative research with new mothers. Interviews focused on how ordinary consumption shifted or remained stable, with sustainability only being explicitly discussed in the final interview. Environmentally sustainable modes of consumption were adopted when they were considered to be in synergy with the over-riding project of doing family. Participants constructed environmental sustainability as an ideal at odds with the reality of everyday family life. We suggest there is a need for greater attention to the gender and relational dimensions of environmentally sustainable practice, and for the promotion of holistic discourses of sustainable consumption which align sustainable living with the maintenance of family life.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption; sustainability; motherhood; family life;

## Introduction: New mothers, everyday consumption and sustainability

The significance of family relationships is recognised within studies of consumption (e.g. DeVault, 1991; Miller, 1998; Lindsey and Maher, 2013). Consumption practices are informed by family identities and relationships and play a fundamental role in the 'doing' of family (Morgan, 2011).

How mothers orient to consumption and the role it plays in the construction of appropriate mothers has received much attention (e.g. Thomson *et al.*, 2011; Taylor *et al.*, 2004; O'Donohue *et al.*, 2014; Casey and Martens, 2007). New mothers are bombarded with product marketing and encounter shifting routines and financial resources which shape domestic consumption contexts and decisions. Research focuses on the choice, purchase and use of products through which caring work is done and identity is constructed (e.g. Clarke, 2004; Miller, 2014), but there is also interest in more mundane consumption such as laundry practices (Pink, 2016) and family meals (Halkier, 2014). Such work:

*'puts up front that consumption is frequently a social activity conducive to and illustrative of the nature of social relations, including gender relations, rather than an activity engaged in by an individual solely for their own "selves" (Casey and Martens, 2007: p.6)*

To date, however there has been little consideration of sustainability within such research.

Recent work on the sustainability (in particular the energy and water demands) of consumption practices often focuses on activities (such as cooking and laundry) which take place within the context of families and are performed by women (Shove, 2003). However, the insights of research on family practices are rarely drawn on. While ‘the interactions between different actants within and around the site of the home’ (Strengers, 2016: p.766) or ‘interpersonal dynamics’ (Pullinger *et al.*, 2013: p.80) are recognised as significant in informing household resource use, the language of gender, identity, family and relationships remains largely absent.

Thus work on domestic consumption as part of family practice is largely separate from that on everyday consumption and its implications for sustainability. As Jamieson indicates:

*‘A detailed understanding of the intersections of familial or intimate relational practices with environmentally consequential practices is needed to illuminate the possibilities of social change’* (2016: p.356)

This paper contributes to this research gap and focuses on where modes of consumption activity - which might be deemed environmentally sustainable - emerge for new mothers and how they understand and respond to the concept of sustainable lifestyles.

Both sustainable and ethical consumption are complex and contested concepts. Hobson suggests that sustainable consumption:

*“broadly denotes the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and foster a certain quality of life, while minimising environmental harm to ourselves and future generations”* (Hobson, 2013: p.1).

While Barnett *et al.* define ethical consumption as:

*“any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment or obligation towards distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of the activity to the actors involved”* (Barnett *et al.*, 2005: p.29).

Thus there is clear overlap between the concepts and they are often used interchangeably. One key distinction might be that consideration of environmental issues is always an integral part of definitions of sustainable consumption but may not be within ethical consumption. Another is that the notion of ethical consumption involves self reflection on consumption practices, while some discussions of sustainable consumption rely on evaluations of the impact of activities without the actors involved necessarily reflecting on this themselves. Our research interests were framed in terms of sustainable consumption so we use that term throughout the paper, however much of the discussion could equally be considered to be about ethical consumption.

## The Study

We conducted research exploring how everyday consumption changed or remained stable through the transition to motherhood.

40 participants were recruited (in London, Kent, Fife and Lancaster & Morecambe) and each was interviewed three times<sup>1</sup>: prior to the birth of the baby; six to eight months after the birth and approximately 8 months later. No mention was made of sustainability until the end of the final interview.

More participants were recruited from socio-economic groups A, B and C1 than C2, D, E<sup>ii</sup>(see Appendix 1). However, our sample includes women with diverse occupations and economic circumstances. At the start of the project participants ranged in age from 20 to 39. The majority were white British although there was some ethnic diversity amongst the sample. We did not ask questions about sexual orientation but all had, or had had, male partners.

In-depth interviews were conducted in participants' homes. The first interview explored what was important about their home, food purchase and consumption, modes of transport and leisure activities, and participants were asked to reflect on how these things may change as they start a family. If participants spontaneously raised ethical or sustainable consumption issues (e.g. organic food, energy use, concerns about materialism, waste) these were pursued, but they were not explicitly introduced into the conversation. Subsequent interviews followed a similar format with participants reflecting on what had changed since the previous interview and their feelings about this.

Our analysis presents two separate, but linked elements, which develop an understanding of the limited possibility of sustainable everyday consumption within the context of early motherhood. We begin by exploring what shapes everyday consumption practices in early motherhood and then consider data from the final interviews in which participants talk about their understandings of the concept of sustainable lifestyles.

## Doing sustainable consumption and doing motherhood and family

Participants explained everyday consumption practices in terms of what works for them given their characterisation of the reality of early motherhood. This reality is comprised of three intertwined priorities- a new orientation around the baby- to being a good mother and doing family life; new routines and a sense of time squeeze, and concerns about financial resources and the importance of thrift (Burningham *et al.*, 2014).

At times, for some, there was synergy between these priorities and more environmentally sustainable modes of consumption. However, for others (and for the same people at different times), practices which run counter to the demands of sustainable consumption are justified on the basis of these same priorities. The key point is that it is these priorities, which together constitute the reality of early motherhood, which shape consumption practice in this period.

Existing work on new mothers and consumption emphasises the important role played by commodities in the transition to motherhood, however, ordinary, inconspicuous consumption is also shaped by the new identity of motherhood and orientation around the baby. This is less about displaying appropriate identity through consumption choices and more about how activities are organised so that they fit with what is deemed best for the baby.

This is notable in relation to heating. Evidence of a link between overheating and cot death ensures that room temperature is a subject which new mothers engage with (e.g. Lullaby Trust, 2016). While health advice focuses on avoiding babies

<sup>i</sup> Five participants were recruited as replacements for individuals who dropped out after the first interview. These replacement participants were interviewed twice - before their baby was born and six to eight months later. Their second interview included the questions about sustainable lifestyles asked to other participants in the third interview.

<sup>ii</sup> Recruitment company used the NRS scale which has the advantage of being based on a simple question about occupation but is a very limited measure of social class as it ignores issues of wealth and of partner's occupation.

overheating, participants' concerns were often that their baby might be too cold:

*“and previously we'd just have been a bit colder and wouldn't have turned the heating on, if it was two of us we'd just put a jumper on, but because we worry about her we'll have the heating on”* (Fiona, London, Int 3)

*“my heating bill has gone up.... yeah, and if it was just me I wouldn't mind chucking a blanket round me but it's ... (baby's name)”* (Paula, Kent, Interview 2)

Thus energy consumption practices are clearly shaped by considerations of care for other family members.

Concerns about the baby's wellbeing also recurred in discussions around food shopping and consumption. Previous research has illustrated how 'good mothers' seek to 'preserve their children's purity and protect the environment' through choosing organic baby foods (Cairns *et al.*, 2013). We have multiple examples of this, but highlight here how everyday practices of shopping for food are also shaped by ideas of what is best for the baby. A clear change in some of our participants' shopping practice was the adoption of shopping online for groceries. Online grocery shopping has been linked to less food waste (WRAP, 2013) and fewer car journeys. It was positively evaluated because shopping with a baby was often described as un-enjoyable, and because it freed up time to 'do stuff' as a family:

*“I online shop now... Honestly shopping with him's hideous, and unpacking the car is hideous and I thought we'd give it a go, realised it wasn't as difficult as I'd always envisaged and never looked back.”* (Charlotte, London, Int 3)

*“because of how busy I've got and because of how Olivia is now, in that she doesn't enjoy going to the supermarket and I don't want to take her to the supermarket on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday because they are our days to do stuff, I do it on-line now.”* (Kelly, Kent, Int 3)

Concerns about the baby's welfare and the experience of 'time squeeze' ( concerns about a shortage of time and an acceleration of the pace of daily life, Southerton & Tomlinson, 2005) also converged to shape some participants' gardening practices. Before her daughter was born Kelly had been using her greenhouse to grow vegetables. In the third interview she explains:

*“We had a greenhouse, maybe the first time you came and we've attempted some things down there. But we've had it, because it was a bit unsafe down there last summer, we had it all tidied up down there, so there isn't really the..*

**I: You've got a playhouse instead?**

R: Yes.

**I: And a slide and a swing?**

R: Yes.” (Kelly, Kent, Interview 3)

The move from greenhouse to playhouse, slide and swing provides a strong image of the way in which priorities have shifted with motherhood and how concerns about what is best for the baby, not only in terms of avoiding danger but also about enhancing their pleasure, shape consumption decisions.

Thus new mothers' orientation around the baby's wellbeing and around the need to preserve family time, along with an increasing sense of time squeeze, shape modes of everyday consumption, with varying implications for sustainability. There

is ongoing flux in what is deemed best for the growing child and what works for the family as routines and finances shift over time.

## Understanding sustainable lifestyles

At the end of the final interviews we asked participants what they understood by the term 'sustainable lifestyle' and whether they considered their own lifestyle to be sustainable. Most understood the concept in terms of environmental sustainability:

*"I would interpret that as being more energy aware, down on your food waste as well...and also maybe not using the car unless we really have to."* (Lucy, Scotland, Interview 3)

*"Well for me a sustainable lifestyle is leaving as little impact on the earth ... so try not to waste food, try not to pollute, try not to use your car that much, try not to be wasteful of anything of energy, or of money or of food."* (Mary, Lancaster Interview 3)

Normative assumptions about what constitutes sustainable behaviour at the household level are shared widely (Gibson *et al.*, 2011) and overwhelmingly attribute responsibility to individuals (Hobson 2004, Middlemiss 2010). Participants understood sustainable lifestyles to be about things which they should - or should not - do, and pointed to their pro-environmental actions. Some participants indicated that these actions were motivated primarily by considerations of the baby's safety or by thrift:

*"We are quite good when it comes to energy and things like ... we won't leave lights on if we are not in the house... I don't like plugs being left on especially now that Travis walks around and picks things up."* (Polly, Scotland, Interview 3)

*"So I do try to turn the lights off and I do try not to waste water and things, but to be honest I do it more for my own pocket than for other reasons."* (Rachel, Kent, Interview 3)

These accounts reinforce our earlier observation that what might be regarded as environmentally sustainable consumption practices emerge when they are aligned with the priorities of early motherhood.

## Environmentally sustainable lifestyles: an impossible dream

What is notable, however, is that an environmentally sustainable lifestyle was ultimately constructed as unachievable, even by those who had clear ideas about what it entailed and some sense that it was desirable. This is best illustrated through examples.

Charlotte is a teacher and her husband is also employed, they own a house and car. By the final interview she was working part time and pregnant again. Here she talks about what a sustainable lifestyle means:

*"I mean in my little ideal head I'd quite like to go and live in some nice green little commune ... not commune, but do you know what I mean? Solar panels and a sustainable lifestyle.... I think we're probably less sustainable realistically. We eat less organic fruit and veg because we can't afford it. We do use the car...if we want to go and see people for two hours, to do it by public transport becomes a pain... Disposable nappies are not sustainable by any stretch of the imagination. We use the washing*

*machine more, an awful lot more... I'm aware of it, but not aware of it enough to do anything about it or aware of some of my choices. I don't like a lot of my choices, but I find it's just a reality of life ..."* (Charlotte, London, Interview 3)

She starts by outlining an ideal sustainable lifestyle, but through repeated use of 'little' ('my little ideal head' and 'nice green little commune') she diminishes and gently pokes fun both at herself and at the idea of sustainable lifestyles. This idealised vision is dramatically contrasted with the demands of reality governed by financial constraints ('we can't afford organic'), time pressures ('public transport is a pain') and the need for convenience and cleanliness (disposable nappies, washing machine use). A sustainable lifestyle is constructed as being about green living and a matter of knowledge ('I'm aware of it') and individual choice ('I don't like a lot of my choices') and is found to conflict with the everyday reality of ordinary life as a young family.

A similar construction of sustainable lifestyles is evident in Iris' account. Iris was unemployed throughout the research period. By the final interview she had split from her baby's father and was living in a privately rented house in poor repair with an overgrown garden. She does not have a car or washing machine. Here she outlines her understanding of a sustainable lifestyle:

*"I don't know, are they on about like the stuff you have on your roof for the electric, solar panels and growing your own food and things like that... I prefer to save energy and grow your own food and have fresh things, but... at the moment with my garden being overgrown and everything it's going to take me ages to sort out if I did want to grow something out there. ... I just haven't got the time or the money to do the garden. ... all the women in my family are quite, 'oh I wish we had grown up in the country', they are all quite nature loving and they grow their own vegetables and they make their own cakes. So I think it's just the way I have been raised.... I would be happy living in a caravan in the middle of a forest somewhere...with a little growing patch outside, baking my cakes, I would be happy with that.*

***Interviewer: And so what, in the sense, what do you think would help you to live more sustainably now? What would be the biggest thing that would help you do it?***

*"I don't know. Having my garden finished I suppose, so I could grow stuff and have a compost heap and have recycling bins out there, but I can't do that ... if it was done already, I would just carry it on and I would do it and it would just be part of everyday. But it is, money and time mostly to actually get it done."* (Iris Kent, Interview 3)

While Iris' life is very different from Charlotte's, she shares a similar discourse of a sustainable lifestyle as a dream ('a caravan in the middle of a forest somewhere...with a little growing patch outside, baking my cakes'), a rural idyll entirely at odds with her life in a Kent town. For her, living sustainably involves living somewhere else entirely, and is not possible here and now.

Like Charlotte, Iris constructs sustainable living as about the environment and relying on individual preferences and actions. She focuses on issues around food and draws on family traditions to explain this (Hards, 2011, Jamieson, 2016, Henwood *et al.*, 2016). What constrains her, however, from even modest attempt to grow vegetables, is time and money. She indicates that living sustainably is currently not 'everyday' for her and that there would need to be physical changes in her surroundings and in local provision of services for it to become so.

Iris starts by constructing the concept of sustainability as something which is distant from her own life (what 'they' are on about). Her lifestyle almost certainly has a lower carbon impact than Charlotte's as she does not drive, have foreign holidays,

have money to spend on products and tries hard to economise on energy use (Druckman and Jackson, 2009). However, while Iris' life may involve low carbon impacts it cannot meaningfully be regarded as sustainable because it comes as a result of poverty and impacts negatively on her family's wellbeing.

## Sustaining family life

Several participants (8) initially defined a sustainable lifestyle in terms of maintaining family life:

*"for me it would be affording bills like rent and your basics, electricity and gas etc and food. Like I think as long as you have food in the cupboards, particularly for children, for me that is living sustainably...paying your bills and having a roof over your head-*

*You know I always want Will to feel like he is in a secure loving environment... As long as I can put food on the table, cook the meals, then for me that is living sustainably." (Dawn, Kent, Interview 3)*

*"I suppose something that you can keep going; living within your means... Kebab a week; Chinese. [laughter]...I suppose yes, I mean at the moment with the prices and stuff going up trying to reduce what we're spending so that we can keep the same level overall." (Ellen, Kent, Interview 3)*

There are interlocking economic and social dimensions to this understanding of a sustainable family life. It involves sufficiency to provide the basics for decent family life (Druckman & Jackson, 2010) which encompasses participation in activities which constitute family time (Ellen's takeaways). It is also fundamentally about the need for care for others within the family - Dawn emphasises the provision of 'a secure loving environment' for her son. From the perspective of new mothers maintaining the doing of family is a crucial part of the social dimension of sustainable lifestyles.

## Concluding discussion: Sustainable consumption practices and everyday family life

Our participants explain their consumption activities in terms of the reality of new motherhood - managing the interlinked demands to care for their child and be a good mother within the constraints of limited time and money. What we might see as *more* environmentally sustainable modes of consumption were adopted when they aligned with the priorities of new motherhood, but the same priorities also explained what we might regard as moves to *less* sustainable modes of consumption.

Most participants understood sustainable lifestyles in terms of environmental sustainability. While this was seen as something to aspire to, it remained a vision which bore little resemblance to the reality of everyday life. Living sustainably was constructed as an *individual* task, but everyday consumption was understood as profoundly *relational*. Thus there is an inherent tension between the individualised demands of current constructions of sustainable lifestyles and the relational character of consumption which means that sustainable lifestyles remain practically unattainable.

There is a need for holistic discourses of sustainable living which embrace the relational character of everyday life to be employed both in research and policy. In an exploration of the meaning of social sustainability Vallance *et al.* (2001) identify 'maintenance sustainability' as being about 'those ways of life that people would see maintained or improved' (p.344) and

emphasise the need for ‘a better understanding of how to frame sustainability goals so that they seem more consistent with that which people value and would like to preserve (2001: p.346). Our research shows clearly that new mothers prioritise the maintenance of family life, a concept which encompasses having enough to provide basic necessities such as food and shelter as well as participating in family activities, providing care and a sense of a secure future.

Rather than seeing family identities and care as problematic for sustainable practice a more positive reading stresses the importance of ‘focus(ing) now on circumstances enabling families and personal relationships to be part of the solution to “environment” issues, rather than part of the problem’ (Jamieson 2016: p.336). Any attempt to facilitate the uptake of more sustainable modes of everyday household consumption must be sensitive to the priorities and demands of family life if they are to have any chance of success.

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## Appendix 1

Table 1: Final sample by NRS socio-economic group and location

Socio-economic group				
	A, B	C1, C2	D, E	Total
London	6	4	0	10
Kent	2	5	1	8
Lancaster	2	5	3	10
Scotland	7	1	1	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>37</b>

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# Gender and green consumption: relational, practical, material

Rebecca Elliott<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, London School of Economics and Political Science

## Abstract

Drawing on recent research on the topic, this essay synthesizes a sociological approach to understanding the intersection of gender and green consumption along interwoven *relational*, *practical*, and *material* dimensions. Each dimension foregrounds the ways in which many researchers have complicated presumptions about both 'gender' and 'consumption' as analytic categories. Taken together, such an approach offers a response to the predominance of individual-centred, preference- or identity-focused models of green consumption. Situating future studies along one or more of these dimensions provides an organizing vocabulary and a tradition of research to build knowledge systematically and dialogically.

Keywords: Gender; green consumption; relational; practical; material.

In April 2017, to coincide with Earth Day, *W Magazine* published a feature entitled '21 Chic, Sustainable Items to Shop This Earth Day,' showcasing 'eco-friendly' organic cotton sweaters, carbon-offsetting gold and diamond bracelets, swimwear made from recycled plastic bottles, and vegetable-tanned leather bags (Grosso, 2017). That a style magazine ran such a feature is by now not surprising. Green consumption—typically defined as the consumption of goods marketed as environmentally friendly or sustainable—is big business. That this feature did not appear in the magazine's Men's section and was comprised entirely of women's apparel and accessories is also not surprising. Women are more likely to embrace such 'eco-friendly' (as well as other ethically branded) products. Numerous studies, across countries, have confirmed this finding (Bellows, Alcaraz & Hallman, 2010; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2003; Isenhour & Ardenfors, 2009; Luchs & Mooradian, 2012; Starr, 2009; Stolle and Micheletti, 2006; Roberts, 1996; Vitell, 2003; Zelezny, Chua & Aldrich, 2000).

Despite overwhelming convergence on this empirical observation, there is considerable divergence as to its social scientific, commercial, and political significance. Much of the research treats this as a puzzle of the 'gender effect,' where gender is a stable analytic category: a socio-demographic correlate that serves to describe a sovereign green consumer who can be identified, explained, and marketed to. Another strand of research has debated its implications: whether green consumption—or ethical/political consumerism more generally—is empowering or repressive for women. In this essay, I synthesize from the literature and my own research a sociological approach to understanding the intersection of gender and green consumption along *relational*, *practical*, and *material* dimensions. Here I address them separately as a way of organizing thinking on the topic, but these dimensions are of course interwoven in any given enactment of green consumption. Each dimension foregrounds the ways in which many researchers have complicated presumptions about both 'gender' and

‘consumption’ as analytic categories. In doing so, these researchers have exposed new valences to the relationship between the two. By formalizing the approach here, we can further explore avenues of empirical research beyond the (female) ‘identity’ of green consumers and their affinities for the kinds of conspicuously green products featured in glossy magazines, as well as leave aside unproductive binaries that require us to either celebrate or trivialize green consumption. Below, I address these relational, practical, and material dimensions in turn.

## The relational dimension

As an economic activity, green consumption involves relational work (Zelizer, 2012), meaning that it constitutes and differentiates social relations of various kinds—not only between people, but between people and objects, and between objects themselves. The very recognition, in our research and in the world, of something called ‘green consumption’ or of a ‘green consumer’ constructs a boundary between green and non-green products and between environmentally minded and environmentally apathetic or conventional consumers. The question then becomes: what role does gender play in constituting this boundary and in the social sorting that goes on along and around it? Fundamentally, examining the relational dimension of gender and green consumption begins from the premise that consumption is a social and socially structured act. It is not reducible to individuals, explained as a matter of idiosyncratic personal preferences that shape discrete choices of what to buy or use. Following from this, rather than fetishize a *real* ‘green consumer’, engaged in atomized self-directed projects of wants satisfaction and identity work, and who can be objectively specified as most commonly female, a relational perspective seeks to understand the ‘green consumer’ as a rhetorical construction (Cochoy, 2005; Trentman, 2006) who is gendered in particular ways (Cairns *et al.*, 2014). This shifts the analytical gaze from the empirical specification of consumers themselves to the examination of the political, commercial, and activist actors and institutions that work to fashion such a gendered rhetorical figure, shaping collective expectations that green consumers are or ought to be women, and particularly mothers (MacGregor, 2009).

Gender here then does not simply stand in for ‘women,’ nor is it a stable analytic category. Instead, gender is a process by which subjectivities are produced and shift over time and space, becoming salient through the work, discourse, and performance of green consumption undertaken by individuals *and* collective institutions (Butler, 1990; Nightingale, 2006). This raises questions about how and the extent to which green consumption becomes imbricated not only with femininity but also with masculinity (Brough *et al.*, 2016): why women, but also *why not* men? Conceptualizing gender more as a social process of ‘gendering’ also suggests that green consumption is not merely *symbolic* of gender (de Grazia, 1996). It can also constitute, trouble, or reconfigure gender subjectivities and norms related to care, parenting, and labour, both within the ‘private’ realm of the home and in ‘public’ spaces (Cairns, Johnston & MacKendrick, 2013).

The relational dimension to gender and green consumption also foregrounds the entanglement of gender with social class. As the opening anecdote suggests with its array of luxury goods, and as many studies have found, green consumption is a gendered form of class distinction (Cairns *et al.*, 2014; Elliott, 2013). Women are not a monolithic category any more than men are; the study of gender and green consumption should therefore treat this particular economic activity as one which socially sorts different ‘kinds of’ men and women from each other. Green products often carry higher prices, a kind of sustainability premium, and understanding the differences between products can require the willingness and ability to

spend time doing so, which is related (though not reducible) to social class (Schoolman, 2016). The expression of a taste for green products may also derive from the sub- or semi-conscious embodied cultivation and discernment provided by higher levels of education (Elliott, 2013). This combination of higher income and education yields the ability and preference of some women (and men) to engage in green consumption, reflecting and reproducing relations between gender and social class.

The relational dimension to gender and green consumption also scrutinizes the connection between people and products, and between the products themselves. The market for green products is itself socially structured, with goods classified in explicit or implicit rank-orderings relational to each other. For instance, the social connotations and symbolic meanings of electric cars, recycled paper towels, reusable water bottles, and organic soap will vary, in terms of both their relationship to social status and in their perceived masculinity or femininity. Those connotations and meanings become attached to products via the economic activities—which are at once and necessarily social activities—that constitute market transactions and that reshape categories of perception and appreciation, e.g. marketing (Bourdieu 2005). Put more simply, different green goods will mean different things to different people. In addition, the *same* green product may mean different things to different people. For instance, in Heffner, et al.'s (2007) study of hybrid cars, households ascribe different meanings to this product that shape whether they purchase them. It is through social processes in the market that male and female consumers are 'fit' or 'socially matched' to the products, green or not, that 'feel right' for them (Bourdieu 2005, 1984). As opposed to focusing on the consumer herself, the relational dimension urges greater attention to these social processes of fitting and matching in order to explain observations of the gendered character of green consumption.

## The practical dimension

The intersection of gender and green consumption can be further illuminated by following the practice turn taken in sociological scholarship on consumption more generally (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001). This relates directly to the relational dimension of consumption; attention to relational 'work' implies a focus on the *doing* of consumption. The idea of a sovereign 'green consumer' again gives way, in favour of an approach that understands consumption as a suite of (relational) practices (Warde, 2005). Rather than reflecting a stable identity, green consumption is instead the performance of such practices, which are, necessarily, also a performance of gender (de Grazia, 1996). This might lead us to ask, for instance, how green consumption figures into how men and women perform the tasks of daily life, e.g. bathing, doing laundry, shopping for food and preparing meals—many of which are habitual and routine, not implicated in the kind of self-conscious fashioning of identity or presentation of self that has long occupied the attention of many researchers (Warde, 2015). Examining the practical dimensions of green consumption elevates this mundane and ordinary character of so much of our daily consumption and expands the analysis to encompass not simply the selection of products but also their use (Adams & Raisborough, 2010; Barnett *et al.*, 2005). This directs attention to whether, or the ways in which, the *doing* of green consumption constitutes, sustains, or troubles the taken for granted status of various gender norms—particularly those related to gendered divisions of labour, care, and motherhood—and how practices of green consumption might vary according to gender (Cairns *et al.*, 2014; Cook, 2013).

Such an approach implies, also, ethnographic methods of study that can uncover gendered characteristics of green consumption that are inaccessible to the direct questioning of interviews or surveys (Hall, 2011). Men and women may not

be able to give an account of why they do or do not engage in green consumption, or their accounts may not match their actual behaviours (Jerolmack and Khan, 2014). Ethnographic methods provide access to routines, to the flow and sequence of consumption, which can supplement data on decisions, attitudes, values, and deliberation, collected in interviews and surveys.

In tandem with the relational dimension, conceptualizing green consumption as a suite of practices questions theorizations of stable (gendered) identities related to green consumption. Instead, we can characterize, and assess the significance of, the multiple and various consumption practices that tend to 'go together' with the performance of masculinity or femininity. These practices can be diverse and contradictory, changing over time and from context to context, highlighting that green consumption is not one kind of thing any more than green consumers are (Barendregt & Jaffe, 2014). Such an orientation allows us to overcome the Manichean view that green consumption is either manipulative of or emancipatory for women: it can be both, even simultaneously (de Grazia, 1996; Cairns, Johnston & MacKendrick, 2013). The vast quantity and variety of consumption practices suggests that some might disrupt patriarchal political norms or amplify the power of women to shape political/environmental outcomes, while others might marginalize and trivialize the contributions of women. Some green consumption practices might 'go together' with more conventional forms of collective political action, such as voting, protesting, attending a political meeting, or contacting politicians (Baumann, Engman & Johnston, 2015; Micheletti, 2011; Willis & Schor, 2012). Other practices might privatize, individualize, and feminize responsibilities for environmental stewardship for instance by connecting 'good' mothering to conscientious food purchases, which not only leaves women feeling burdened (Cairns, Johnston & MacKendrick, 2013), but also privileges the household as a site of problematic consumption while leaving untroubled environmentally destructive political economies (Johnston, 2008; MacGregor, 2006; Sandilands, 1993; Schultz, 1993).

## The material dimension

Attention to the material dimension represents perhaps the most profound reframing of research on gender and green consumption. Consumption, whether marketed as green or not, is always an environmental act (Hawkins, 2012). What we consume, but even more significantly how *much* we consume, contributes to the ecological crises facing the planet, with the rich world consuming disproportionate amounts of resources and producing tremendous amounts of waste. Where the relationship between gender and green consumption has been concerned, much of the research has focused on the cultural and symbolic dimensions of conspicuously green products and practices. Yet the urgency of the crises we face suggests perhaps resituating green consumption as a broader project of linking gendered local and global political economies to the structuring of *all* consumption and its material environmental impacts. We might ask not only about the significance of gender in the proffering of the kinds of 'eco-friendly' consumer goods featured in *W Magazine*, but also its significance to the way societies consume energy and water and dispose of waste. It is, after all, these patterns of consumption that will fundamentally have to change (Shove & Spurling, 2013). Men and women are differentially made to feel responsible for, and do respond by, consuming resources less or differently (Tindall, Davies, & Mauboulès, 2003; Schultz, 1993).

An interest in the material dimension of consumption relates to the practical dimension outlined above, as it speaks also to the everyday and habitual, and to use rather than selection: how we heat and cool homes, how we wash our bodies and

clothes, how we stock our fridges and pantries and when we throw food away, and so forth (Shove, 2003; Shove, Walker & Brown, 2014; Evans, 2011; Warde, 2015). These kinds of consumption practices do not offer the same kinds of opportunities for gendered *displays*, but they are nevertheless gendered. Gender is a relation through which access to water, energy, and other resources is distributed in societies. Furthermore, gendered ruling institutions, like states, define our mundane practices and standards of consumption, related to both the habitual and the deliberative. They regulate utilities, govern credit and retailing practices, define appropriate standards of consumption with statistics and property laws, and provide the framework of private consumption through social spending on infrastructure, housing, health, and education (de Grazia, 1996: 9). Greater elucidation of consumption-production linkages can connect the intimate space of the home, and the gendered consumption practices that concern it, to the national and global arrangements that make it possible to consume in different ways across space and time, with profound material consequences.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have gleaned and synthesized the insights of many researchers to identify the relational, the practical, and the material as productive dimensions along which to analyse the intersections and interactions between gender and green consumption. Though I have analytically parsed these dimensions here, I have addressed the connections between them in order to underscore that they are empirically interrelated. What unites these dimensions into a sociological approach is that they offer a way to characterize a shared but as yet largely uncoordinated response to the predominance of individual-centred, preference- or identity-focused models of green consumption. Many scholars have critiqued such models, and the epistemological and methodological commitments of neoclassical or behavioural economics that typically underpin them, but the work of articulating coherent alternatives is ongoing. Part of the difficulty here is that a sociological approach complicates rather than simplifies, seeming to replace theoretical parsimony with a multiplicity of contributing actors and institutions, co-constituted objects of study, overlapping or contradictory processes, structural determinants, and ambivalent consequences. Yet, as the discussion of each dimension above shows, such complication is necessary in order to bring into view facets of gender and green consumption that are not reducible to individual choice or personal preference, and that cannot be uniformly encouraged or condemned. Situating future studies along one or more of these dimensions provides an organizing vocabulary and a tradition of research to build knowledge systematically and dialogically.

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# Predictive ethical consumption: the influences of gender in the intention of adopting ethical veganism

*Estela Díaz<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Department. of Marketing, Economics and Business Administration, Comillas Pontifical University

## Abstract

There is evidence that relationships between humans and non-human animals are gender sensitive. However, the impact of gender in decision-making related to our interactions with animals have been largely neglected in research. The aim of this article is to investigate the influences of gender in the intention of adopting ethical veganism under the Theory of Planned Behavior (hereafter, TPB). The author collected primary data from 476 non-vegan Spanish university students and examined two models of TPB: the standard version and an extended version of TPB – by the addition of ‘general attitudes towards human-like attributes ascribed to animals’ (hereafter, human-like attributes) as an indirect predictor of intention. Highlights from the results are as follows. First, data suggests that, for both genders, social factors are more relevant than attitudinal and practical factors in forming the intention to adopt veganism. Second, results showed no significant gender differences regarding the effect of those three factors on intention. Third, findings revealed that the effect of that human-like attributes on behavioural attitudes were significantly higher for women than for men. Lastly, the overall predictive ability of the models was higher for men than women. More research is needed to better understand these gender differences.

Keywords: Veganism; gender moderation; TPB; human-like attributes; Spain.

## Introduction

As a society we have been researching and discussing ethical consumption for more than 40 years (Newholm & Shaw, 2007). Though we have come to know quite a bit, we still have much to investigate, especially when it comes to understanding how we form beliefs and make decisions (e.g. Connolly & Shaw, 2006). This need is particularly relevant when we analyse ethical consumption related to our interactions with non-human animals (hereafter, animals), such as ethical veganism (hereafter, veganism).

Veganism is a social movement, a political and moral stance, and a form of political consumption that advocates a new paradigm in which animals are not merely resources for human beings (Cherry, 2006; McGrath, 2000; Micheletti *et al.*, 2004). Veganism is a philosophy of life based on antispeciesism that shapes personal and social identity (Cherry, 2006). In other words, veganism can be conceived as a ‘life project’ or ‘life-planning’ –in Giddens’ sense (1991 in Larsson *et al.*, 2003)— that

rejects the symbolic meaning related to the use of animals: including domination, inequality, violence, and death (e.g. Allen *et al.*, 2000; Twigg, 1983).

For some authors, the aforementioned symbolic meaning not only reflects an anthropocentric ideology, but also reflects a patriarchal society (e.g. Adams, 1990; Fiddes, 1991). In short, 'gender permeates all aspects of life' (Sobal, 2005: 135), including our discussion of ethical consumption as it relates to animals (e.g. Kruse, 1999; Peek, Bell & Dunham, 1996; Rothgerber, 2012; Ruby, 2012). According to research, women (when it comes to animals) have more positive attitudes and show more positive behaviours than men. For example, women are more likely to become emotionally attached to animals, condemn their use and abuse, advocate on their behalf, and tend to ascribe higher mental capacities and moral consideration to animals (e.g. Díaz, 2012; Herzog, Betchart & Pittman 1991; Knight *et al.*, 2004; Kruse, 1999).

Gender plays an interesting role in our food and lifestyle choices. Research suggests that women are more positive towards plant-based diets, veg(etari)anism, and veg(etari)ans; more likely to reduce/avoid the consumption of animals or animal-based products; and more likely to adopt some type of veg(etari)anism when compared to men (e.g. Backman *et al.*, 2002; Beardsworth *et al.*, 2002; Ruby, 2012). Not only there are difference in attitudes and behaviour, some research points out that our belief system is also moderated by gender. For example, Potts and While (2008) observed that 65% of women cited compassion as a guiding principal for the reduction in the consumption of animals and animal products (compared to 15% of men). For further discussion of beliefs, see Rothgerber (2012).

Additionally, women and men are subject to different social responses regarding their decision-making. When it comes to food and lifestyle choices, it is no different. In general, some studies argue that meat consumption is perceived to be masculine, embodying strength and the rational world; while vegetarianism is perceived to be feminine, portrayed as weak and emotional (e.g. Rothgerber, 2012; Ruby & Heine, 2012; Sobal, 2005). This finding supports the idea that men perceive more negative social pressure than women when becoming a vegetarian or adopting a plant-based diet (e.g. Graça *et al.*, 2015; Lea & Worsley, 2003). However, other research revealed that women were constantly exposed to doubt about their decisions to become vegetarian and felt more pressure to go back to eating meat, especially by men (e.g. Merriman, 2010; Potts & Parry, 2010). For some authors, these pressures are due to paternalism and, as such, exist to question the self-determination of women and their decision-making capability (e.g. Adam, 1990; Merriman, 2010; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998). As of today, there is no consensus on the issue of gender-based social responses in ethical consumption. For example, some studies related to healthy and green lifestyles adoption suggest that women were more prone to receive social pressure than men (e.g. Backman *et al.*, 2002; Blanchard *et al.*, 2009), whereas other research found that men receive more pressure (e.g. Emmanuel *et al.*, 2012), and yet another studies did not find significant differences (e.g. Wyker & Davidson, 2010).

Lastly, research suggests that gender also influences how we perceive obstacles (and facilitators) while we make decisions about food and lifestyle. For example, data reveals that women experience less attachment to meat (Graca *et al.*, 2015) and experience higher levels of negative emotions (e.g. disgust) during consumption (e.g. Fessler *et al.*, 2003; Kubberød *et al.*, 2002; Lea, Crawford & Worsley, 2006a, 2006b). Additionally, Lea and Worsley (2003), while researching vegetarianism adoption, found significant differences in gender in more than half of the 25 barriers/benefits analysed. For example, the lack of availability of vegetarian products in stores and vegetarian choices when dining out was perceived more intensely by men than women. Some researchers stipulate that the perception about certain barriers could be related to gender roles assumed in society. Because activities related to food acquisition and preparation (e.g. shopping, cooking, and serving) continue to be

primarily associated with women (Mezzoni *et al.*, 2015, Ruby, 2012), this could explain why men, when sizing up tasks related to food, perceive them as important barriers.

Despite these findings, the impact of gender in decision-making related to our interactions with animals have been largely neglected in research (de Backer and Hudders, 2015; Rothgerber, 2012; Worsley and Skrzypiec, 1998). Fortunately, this negligence has not gone unnoticed. For example, some authors point to the need for future empirical research that specifically address gender issues in veg(etar)ianism (Merriman, 2010; Ruby, 2012).

The aim of this article is to address some of the shortcomings found in literature by investigating the influences of gender in the intention of adopting veganism. Specifically, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (hereafter, TPB) (Ajzen, 1985) was used, a theory widely applied in the study of ethical consumption (e.g. Shaw, Shiu & Clarke, 2000). According to TPB, there are three antecedents of behavioural intention: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norm (or perceived pressure from others) toward the behaviour, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2011). In general terms, TPB postulates that “the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behaviour, and the greater the perceived behavioural control, the stronger should be an individual’s intention to perform the behaviour under consideration” (Ajzen, 2011: p.188).

However, past research shows that the predictive power of TPB is enhanced when other variables are included in the model, which suggests that moral behaviours may add additional complexity to decision-making (Shaw, Shiu & Clarke, 2000). For our article, primary survey data from Spanish university students were collected and two models were examined: the original formulation of TPB and an extended version of TPB (the extended version adds one other variable, a background factor). In general, the inclusion of background factors is a recommended practice because it allows us ‘to advance in the knowledge of the determinants of human behaviour’ (Ajzen, 2005: p.135); nevertheless, their relevance needs to be addressed empirically in each domain (Ajzen, 1991; 2005). For this paper, the general attitudes toward human-like attributes ascribed to animals (hereafter, human-like attributes or HAA) were selected as our background factor because of its influence, shown in past research, on behaviours towards animals (e.g., Knight *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, the effect of human-like attributes in the adoption of veganism needs to be further examined.

After having reviewed existing literature, the following four hypotheses were proposed:

- *Hypothesis 1 (H1): Gender moderates the relationship between attitudes and intention of adopting veganism.*
- *Hypothesis 2 (H2): Gender moderates the relationship between subjective norms and intention adopting veganism.*
- *Hypothesis 3 (H3): Gender moderates the relationship between perceived behavioural control and intention adopting veganism.*
- *Hypothesis 4 (H4): Gender moderates the relationship between human-like attributes and TPB constructs.*

## Method

### Procedure and Sample

The study employed a structured, online and paper-and-pencil survey that included adapted versions of previously validated scales. Following Meng (2009), purposive sampling was used. For the electronic survey (via encuestafacil.com), participants were recruited by randomly inviting students on campus and by asking help from the university professors who distributed the survey amongst their students. For the paper-and-pencil survey, professors in three major universities were contacted to

distribute the questionnaires in their classrooms (from the faculty of law, sociology, and engineering); none of the students refused to complete the questionnaire.

The resulting data sets were examined to identify missing values, outliers, and errors; problematic observations were deleted. The three data sets (43.4% online, 12.9% on-campus recruitment, and 43.7% classroom recruitment) were merged into one data set for further analysis –since the survey administration method did not have a significant effect on the response (Mann-Whitney U test with Bonferroni correction was used). The valid sample (excluding vegans) consisted of 475 students (57.3% female) and were relatively young, with a mean age of 23.26 years (SD=6.1), covering six majors and 25 Spanish universities.

## Questionnaire

The self-reported questionnaire was based on previous TPB studies (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Kurland, 1995) and, especially, those used by Povey, Wellens & Conner (2001). Throughout the survey, the author provided formal definitions of vegetarianism ('exclude the consumption of meat and fish') and veganism ('exclude the consumption of all types of products, derived wholly or partly from animals, and services in which animals were used –e.g. meat, fish, eggs, honey, milk, silk, wool, leather, zoos'); both lifestyles framed animal concerns in a moral tone. The following measures are the object of analysis in the present paper.

(i) *Socio-Demographic* (e.g. gender, age) and *diet/lifestyle*. Students indicated, out of 10 options, which best described their diet/lifestyle. These were grouped into four categories: (1) 'avoids no animal products'; (2) 'avoids some animal products'; (3) 'vegetarian'; (4) and 'vegan'. For further analysis, vegans were excluded.

(ii) *TPB variables*. *Behavioural Attitudes towards Veganism* (ATTV) were measured with ten items (positive and negative attitudes towards becoming vegan in the next two years). During the data trimming process, 3 items were eliminated to achieve greater reliability and validity of the construct. *Subjective norm* (SNV) was assessed by asking normative pressures and the motivation to comply with four significant others ('parents/friend/partner/doctors'). *Perceived behavioural control* (PCBV) was assessed by asking control beliefs, control capability, and the difficulty to adopt veganism in the next two years. Finally, *Behavioural Intention* (INTV) was assessed with one item, which referred to the intention to adopt veganism in the next two years. All items were scored on 5-point scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree/No, not at all' to 'Strongly agree/Yes, totally'. The scales showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.8$ ).

(iii) *Human-like Animal Attributes* (HAA) scale was based on Herzog and Galvin's (1997) factor analysis and assessed by asking to rate on five statements: (1) 'affection for the species' (AFFEC); (2) 'presence of consciousness in these animals' (CONSC); (3) 'ability to suffer or feel pain' (SUFFR); (4) 'ability to experience emotions' (EMOTN); (5) and 'how much moral consideration the animal deserves' (MORAL). The questions were presented for 13 species of animals (pigs, chickens, cows, sheep, fish, shrimps, elephants, mice, dogs, cats, chimpanzees, sea urchins, and dolphins) using a 5-point scale scored from 1 ('None') to 5 ('Human-like'). The scale showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.9$ ).

## Analysis

For statistical analysis, SPSS v.22 and SmartPLS 3.2.3 programs were used. As in Herzog and Galvin (1997), the analysis of human-like attributes (HAA) was conducted by first collapsing the scores given by each respondent for all 13 species and

each of the five attributes. The author also performed a factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis with Promax Rotation) to explore the multidimensionality of TPB variables. The two-stage technique was adopted to construct a reflective first-order and formative second-order model (e.g. Becker, Klein & Wetzels, 2012). The evaluation of the measurement model for reflective indicators in PLS was based on individual item reliability, construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The structural model and its explanatory power were addressed by examining path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and their significance ( $p < 0.05$ ), as well as the models' variance explained ( $R^2$ ) and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) for women and men samples (Chin, 1998; Hair *et al.*, 2014). Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was performed to verify the statistical significance of path coefficients as well as to study the moderation effect of gender through the multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA). Lastly, the Blindfolding technique was conducted to evaluate the structural model's predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

## Results

After confirming the compliance of the measurement requirements of the two final models, the structural models were analysed, which assesses the relationships between the variables that predict the intention to become vegan and the moderation effect of gender on those relationships. Once the properties of the measures were checked, the next step was to evaluate the hypothesized relationships. The author provides two models to test the hypotheses: the standard TPB model (Model #1) and the extended TPB model (Model #2).

### Standard TPB model

Upon examination, the Standard TPB Model (Model #1) revealed that attitudes towards the adoption of veganism (ATTV), subjective norms (SNV), and perceived behavioural control (PBCV) significantly predict the intention to adopt veganism (INTV). Data also shows that subjective norms (SNV), followed by attitudes (ATTV), had the strongest direct effect on the

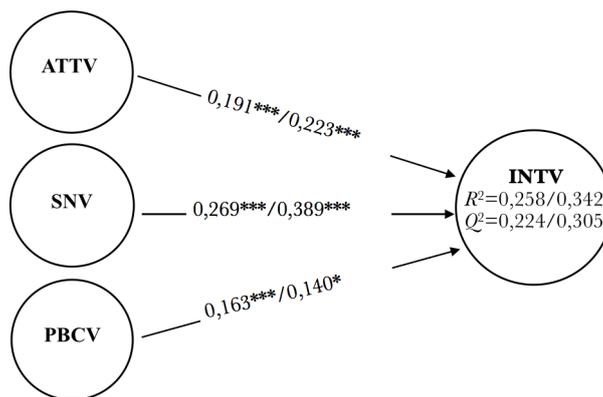


Figure 1. Prediction of the intention of adopting veganism (Model #1). TPB model for women/men.

ATTV=Attitudes towards the adoption of veganism; SNV=Social Norms towards veganism; PBCV= Perceived behavioural control towards veganism; INTV=Intention to adopt veganism. Beta-coefficients for women/men sample;  $R^2$ =Explained variance for women/men sample (0.19 small, 0.33 medium, and 0.67 large);  $Q^2$ =Model's predictive relevance for women/men sample (0.02 small, 0.15 medium, 0.35 large); NWomen = 272; NMen = 203). The differences between gender-specific path coefficients are not statistically significant (see Table 1). \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

intention of adopting this lifestyle (INTV), especially for men. Overall, the model did not display large predictive relevance (Q2) nor explained variance (R2) for neither gender. Interestingly, the explanatory power of the three variables (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) on the intention of becoming vegan was higher for men than for women. Figure 1 shows the results from the model for women/men subgroups.

Despite these differences, the multi-group analysis (MGA) – conducted to examine if the differences between women and men for path strength of the three factors (ATTV, SNV and PCBV) on behavioural intention (INTV) were statistically significant— showed negative results ( $p > 0.5$ ). As a result, hypothesis 1 (H1), hypothesis 2 (H2), and hypothesis 3 (H3) stated that gender moderates the relationships between attitudes towards the adoption of veganism and intention (H1), between subjective norms and intention (H2), and between perceived behavioural control and intention (H3) did not find support in our data.

## Extended TPB model

The next step was to analyse the extended TPB model (Model #2), which added the ‘human-like attributes’ factor to the standard TPB model, for both genders. First, results revealed that the effects of attitudes (ATTV), subjective norms (SNV), and perceived behavioural control (PCBV) on the intention of becoming vegan (INTV) did not change with respect to the standard model of the TPB (Model #1). In other words, the three variables continued to have the same predictive effect on behavioural intention than in Model #1.

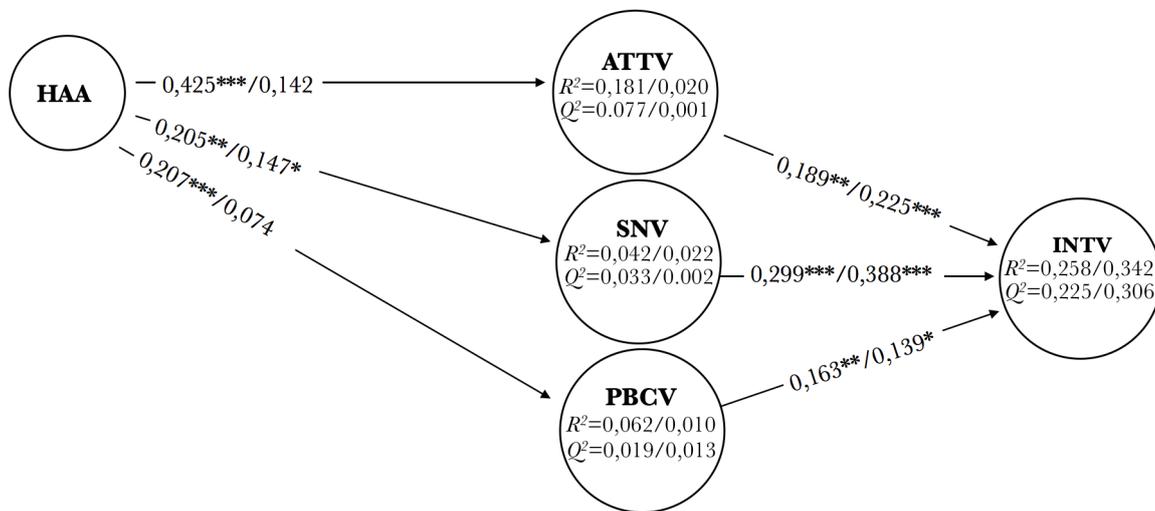


Figure 2. Prediction of the intention of adopting veganism (Model #2). Extended TPB model for women/men.

HAA=Human-like attributes; ATTV=Attitudes towards the adoption of veganism; SNV=Social Norms towards veganism; PCBV= Perceived behavioural control towards veganism; INTV=Intention to adopt veganism. Beta-coefficients for women/men sample; R2=Explained variance for women/men sample) (0.19 small, 0.33 medium, and 0.67 large); Q2=Model's predictive relevance for women/men sample (0.02 small, 0.15 medium, 0.35 large); NWomen=272; NMen=203). The differences between gender-specific path coefficients are not always statistically significant (see Table 1).

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Moreover, as proposed in general terms by the TPB, the inclusion of human-like attributes (HAA) in the model did not increase, for neither gender, the explained variance of the intentions (25.8% for women, 32.4% for men), nor the predictive relevance of the model. Figure 2 shows the results from the final model for women/men subgroups.

Second, upon examining the relationships between the human-like attributes and the three antecedents of intention, it became clear that gender differences in the paths from human-like attributes (HAA) to the three TPB components were present. For men, human-like attributes (HAA) only significantly predicted subjective norms (SNV). In contrast, for women, human-like attributes (HAA) also significantly predicted perceived behavioural control (PBCV) and, especially, attitudes towards the adoption of veganism (ATTV) (see Figure 2). To confirm the significance of these differences between both genders, the multi-group analysis (MGA) was conducted. MGA showed that gender only moderated the effect of human-like attribute (HAA) on attitudes towards the adoption of veganism (ATTV) ( $p=0.001$ ).

## Discussion

Moral aspects are becoming more relevant in consumer research. However, the use of animals, especially the consumption of their flesh, is so pervasive in our culture that ‘the issue of whether humans are ethically and morally entitled to do so is seldom considered’ (McGrath, 2000: p.53). Nevertheless, ethical-vegans reflect and act upon the aforementioned moral judgment in their everyday practices of consumption by rejecting the commodity status of animals.

Although veganism “is in” (Lundahl, 2014: p. 343), it continues being overlooked in empirical research, especially in social psychology and consumer behaviour (Povey, Wellens & Conner, 2001), which are key fields for understanding the individual decision-making process and for designing more effective intervention campaigns. Not surprisingly, our knowledge about those factors that predict and moderate the adoption of this lifestyle is very limited (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991).

This paper aimed to reduce this gap by investigating the moderating effect of gender on the intention of adopting veganism, under the framework of TPB, given that evidence shows that attitudes and behaviours toward animals are gender-sensitive (e.g. Herzog, Betchart & Pittman, 1991; Rothgerber, 2012). Specifically, the moderation effect of gender on two models of TPB was examined: the standard version and a competing version resulting from adding a construct related to ‘general attitudes towards human-like attributes ascribed to animals’ based on Herzog and Galvin (1997). No study, to our knowledge, has examined these questions.

The results of our study supports the standard TPB model. As proposed by Ajzen (1995), behavioural attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control have positive and significant direct effect on the intention to adopt veganism. Paraphrasing Ajzen (2011), this means that the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to the adoption of veganism, and the greater the perceived behavioural control towards that adoption, the stronger should be the individual’s intention to become vegan. In our case, data also suggests that social factors are more relevant than attitudinal and practical factors in forming the intention to adopt veganism. This finding is fairly unsurprising given the vast evidence regarding the major social implications of adopting veganism (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991).

Regarding gender influences in TPB model, the analyses revealed that there are no significant differences between women and men regarding the effect of attitudes towards veganism, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on the intention of becoming ethical vegan. In other words, gender did not moderate the predictive relationships between

the examined factors. This means that TPB explains gender differences that may exist in the composition of the constructs to predict behavioural intentions (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2012). While the findings contradict our hypotheses formulated in this paper, our results are in line with other research on ethical consumption (e.g. Emmanuel *et al.*, 2012; Wyker & Davidson, 2010). For further work in this area, it would be interesting to use a more heterogeneous sample as the homogeneous composition of our participants may have influenced the results.

The data from the extended TPB model fully supported the theory and partially supported the hypothesis in our research. As postulated by the theory, the inclusion of a new factor indirectly influenced the behavioural intention but did not improve the global predictive power of the model obtained by the standard TPB model. In future research, it would be interesting to examine if the inclusion of human-like attributes as direct predictor of the behavioural intention could lead to better results, which would indicate that those attitudes need to be salient in the messages, together with the other antecedents, to improve the intention to become vegan.

As hypothesized in this study, some gender differences regarding the predictive effect of human-like animal attributes on the TPB constructs were found. Specifically, analysis showed that the influence of human-like attributes in attitudes towards the adoption of veganism was significantly higher for women than for men. This finding is very relevant because it could explain, at least partially, the fact that veganism is a phenomenon more widespread among women than men; given the relevance that these attributes have had traditionally, and continues to have, in animal protection and veg(etari)anism campaigns. Future research could examine gender differences in the conceptualization of those human-like attributes given past evidence for gender differences in moral conceptualization (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) and in the ascription of animal capacities (e.g. Herzog & Galvin, 1997).

Interestingly, the predictive power of the two models we tested were higher for men than women. This finding gives rise to an important issue: the generalization of the validity of the TPB for both gender. In other words, is it possible that the TPB model itself is influenced by gender? According to some authors (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Harnois, 2012) the domain of psychology is not free of gender-bias as it takes (or used to take) more into account the psychological characteristics men than women.

In any case, we need to bear in mind that the explanatory power of the variables of both models and for both gender on behavioural intentions was not large. This result raises the question of causality between the variables and also raises the question about which other constructs could also predict the intention of becoming vegan for both gender (Díaz, 2016).

Lastly, it is important to note that the gender influences studied in this paper have dealt with the relationships between high order, multidimensional or more abstract constructs. Future papers could focus on examining the moderating effect of gender at the first-order construct level, an approach that would allow for a better understanding of the effect of the different dimensions of the constructs for each group.

In summary, these results show the need for continued research on ethical behaviour and ethical consumption related to animals under the watchful eye of the gender issue. At the same time, they challenge researchers and other social agents to reflect on opportunities to overcome gender differences; for example, designing ethical consumption programs that do not contribute to perpetuating a gendered phenomenon and society.

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# Gender and ethical consumption of energy in smart homes

*Kirsten Gram-Hanssen<sup>1</sup>, Mette Mechlenborg<sup>1</sup>, Line Valdross Madsen<sup>1</sup> and Anders Rhiger Hansen<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Aalborg University, Copenhagen, Denmark.

## Abstract

An adaption to smart technologies in homes will inevitably produce new conditions for everyday life and thus also for relations between gender and ethical consumption. The home can be seen as a feminine domain and research shows that men tend to be more technically interested, whereas women generally tend to be more environmentally concerned and engaged in taking action according to climate changes. The smart technology agenda, which now focus on a masculine ideal consumer, might therefore benefit from a stronger inclusion of women to support a successful adaptation of smart technologies in everyday life. Acknowledging how everyday life and home are gendered and that gender roles are produced and reproduced through everyday practices, is therefore vital to ensure a successful transition into a smart home future. Otherwise, the risk is that the development will contribute to producing further gender inequalities in everyday practices.

Keywords: smart technology; gender; home; energy; ethical consumption.

## 1. Introduction

Visions of the smart home have been formulated for decades, although consumers continue to be reluctant to buy such smart technologies, maybe because the technologies do not really solve any realized problems for them (The Economist, 2016). There are, however, reasons to believe that the slow development in adaptation of smart home technologies may change as there seems to be a combined effort from public and private actors in promoting these technologies, especially within the energy sector (Gram-Hanssen & Darby, 2016). This development is most pronounced in the global north, though also appearing more worldwide. Based on this understanding of changes in the energy sector, we will, in this article, discuss how such changes may influence and interact with consumers in their everyday life in homes, and specifically how this may interact with different gender roles from an ethical consumer point of view.

Ethical consumption includes the use of the consumer market for political or ethical purposes, where consumers use their wallet to vote for some products rather than others, or more generally for opting for different lifestyles (Micheletti, 2011). Consumer ethics, in relation to households' energy consumption, are primarily related to energy consumption as the major driver for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and climate change, and thus for severe environmental consequences. This also includes a north-south perspective, as energy consumption is mainly high in the global north that, whereas it is generally the global south that will suffer the most from global climate change.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the relation between energy provision and energy consumption was that the provision system was developed to respond to whatever demand was coming from consumers to support a modern lifestyle. A combination of new technological possibilities, liberalisation of utilities, goals of sustainability and inclusion of more renewable energy production, is however about to change this into the so-called smart grid developments (Wissner, 2011). Still more renewables are introduced into the electricity grid, and sun and wind power plants are only producing when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing. Therefore there is a system interest in persuading consumers to consume at times when the renewables are producing, and to reduce demand at other times. The new technological possibilities of ICT give promises of an improved possibility to control a system where many small renewable production units together are matched with many small consumption units.

If these visions of a smart grid are to be unfolded and work in real life, the consumer side of the production-consumption system also has to change (Christensen *et al.*, 2013). Within the literature there are different approaches described; from active participation of the households towards much more automated approaches of how utilities can partly control households' appliances (Darby and Pisica, 2013; Friis and Haunstrup Christensen, 2016; Strengers, 2013). However, no matter how this new way of linking production and consumption is conducted, it will influence, and be influenced by, the way households unfold their everyday practices from cooking and cleaning to watching television. To say that the everyday life of households are co-constructed with the development of infrastructures and technologies is not new (Shove, 2003), as well as it is not new that the introduction of new technologies in the home relates to development of gender roles (Cowan, 1983). However, to deal with the smart developments of the near future, it is imperative to combine these perspectives. Therefore it is also relevant to ask how the smart home and smart grid development might relate to gender issues. In this vein, it is further relevant to understand how ideas of home are constructed, how they relate to gender issues and how they may change historically, together with both material infrastructures and the social organization of the everyday life.

## 2. Why is gender important in studies on smart grid and smart home?

A house is a technical part of the urban infrastructure and as such linked to technical, economic and architectural developments. A home, on the other hand, is where we live our everyday life, maintain our social relationships and produce identity (Chapman, 1999; Després, 1991; Giddens, 1990; Gullestad, 1989; Mallett, 2004; Pink, 2004). The home is, as Gullestad puts it, the center of everyday life where human beings find meaning in their existence (Gullestad, 1989).

Home research has developed rapidly within the last three to four decades with the development of cultural studies and gender studies, but also with new approaches within anthropology, sociology, psychology, human geography, and what has been named *the spatial turn* in human science (Foucault, 1986). This has contributed to new understandings of home as an anchor of material, social and cultural perspectives on everyday life and domestic practices (Douglas, 1991; Massey, 1994; Miller, 2010).

The activities, relations and identities that are produced and reproduced in the home are highly gendered. First of all, because women traditionally spend more time and resources on tasks relating to home and households, like child caring, cooking and cleaning. Since the 1990s, decreasing birthrates, increasing numbers of women in education and the labour

market, active fathers and more singles living alone have had a great influence in modern Western societies and have led to a clear reduction in gender inequality in the performance of activities in conventional households. Despite this significant change, gender is still at play: women still have the largest workload in households, which in itself opens up to questions concerning the relation between everyday practices and home attachments, decision making about the allocation and distribution of resources, and who has the authority to change households' routines, consumption and activities (Chapman, 1999; Douglas, 1991).

Secondly, home itself is socially, historically and culturally gendered (Chapman, 1999; Pink, 2004; Sullivan, 2000). This means that inequality also has to do with structural implications related to historically and culturally profound discourses of gender, and more specifically to the production of gender roles and gendered space over time (Chapman, 1999; Gilles, 1997; Gullestad, 1989). As several researchers have argued, the modern home, suburbs and everyday life, have largely been seen as feminine domains, dominated by women and loaded with female activities, while public life, the city and the capitalism have been connoted masculine (Giles, 2004; Hayden, 2002). In the 1990s and 2000s this led to a deconstruction of (an argued) canonized masculine and urban understanding of modernity (Chapman, 1999; Giles, 2004; Hayden, 2002). At the same time it opened up a more nuanced understanding of the role of the male figure in traditionally female domains like childrearing, cooking and home caring (Gilles, 1997; Hayden, 2002). However, as studies show, gender discourses are still produced and reproduced by media, myths and cultural practices in the everyday life which, again, influences the way people conceive of themselves as gendered within a household (Butler, 1990; Gilles, 1997; Hayden, 2002; Pink, 2004).

Thirdly, performative studies have led to new approaches in research, focusing on how the fluidity of gender overlaps with sensory experiences, identities and everyday practices. As Pink argues, equality in households does not reveal anything about how this equality is experienced and perceived by men and women, nor does it account for the intentionalities and agents behind them. This means that the ways men and women practice their housework and home decoration point to different modes of resistance or conformity to gender discourses (Pink, 2004). This reveals how diversity and unevenness within a household are hidden in culturally informed experiences and tactics. If we fail to acknowledge this, the policies and new technologies that are developed will not be successfully adapted into household practices, and at the same time we risk – unconsciously – to contribute to producing gender inequality.

### 3. What do we already know about smart grid and gendered consumption and prosumption?

Research on gender and energy is quite limited, however, it has been established that gender issues influence energy use and the related choices, attitudes and knowledge (Clancy and Roehr, 2003). Sovacool highlights that a majority of authors in leading energy journals are male, and further that the emerging field of gender and technology calls for an interest in the field of energy consumption and gender, to broaden the focus on technologies to also include diversity and inclusion (Sovacool, 2014).

There are several reasons for the lack of research on gender and energy, especially regarding research on gender differences in relation to household energy consumption. The most important reason is that energy (e.g. electricity and heating) is consumed by households and measured at household level. Thus, household consumption is the outcome of

the collective actions of the householders and the interaction between them. However, there are examples of studies that investigate gender differences in energy consumption. Using survey data, Abrahamse and Steg (2009) find that there are no significant differences between men and women related to direct energy use and energy savings. The study is, however, based on a low number of respondents, and the survey was conducted for only one member of the households. A potential alternative approach is to look at data on one-person households; although this group would be biased according to social characteristics, such analysis could still reveal indications of gender differences in energy consumption practices, and through that gender differences in understandings of for example notions of comfort and cleanliness.

In a quantitative study on men and women living in single-person households, in four different EU countries, Rätty and Carlsson-Kanyama (2010) found gender differences in energy use, especially when including both energy consumed directly by the household and indirectly through consumed products, which have taken energy to produce. They report that the average single man in the study had a higher consumption level than the average single woman, which can also be related to men's higher expenditure. The main differences were related to mundane activities such as transport (car use) where men had a higher consumption level, and to the general consumption of food, hygiene, household effects and health. Women used slightly more energy than men on this general household consumption, while in some countries men consumed more meat. Other studies have reported that single men and single women own different energy-consuming appliances, respectively related to communication/entertainment and household chores (Clancy and Roehr 2003).

As a consequence of the difficulties of studying gender differences in households with more than one person, most of the studies either focus on gender differences in thermal comfort preferences (Brounen *et al.*, 2013; Karjalainen, 2007), specific behaviour (Andersen *et al.*, 2009), attitudes (Yang *et al.*, 2015) or habits (Hansen *et al.*, forthcoming). Regarding comfort preferences, the results are mixed. Using survey data, Brounen *et al.* (2013) find no indications of women having a preference for higher ambient temperatures than men, whereas Karjalainen (2007) find that women prefer higher room temperatures than men, and that men tend to control thermostats more often than women. Andersen *et al.* (2009) find that gender has an effect on window opening behaviour, and in a recent study by Hansen *et al.* (forthcoming), it is shown that women tend to wear warmer clothing such as warmer socks and sweater during winter than men. A study by Carlsson-Kanyama and Lindén (2007) confirms that temperature can be a conflicting issue to be negotiated in couples. However, in surveying both men and women in a household, Yang *et al.* (2015) find that couples (roughly) share attitudes towards heating energy use with the largest difference being according to attitudes towards thermal comfort.

Other energy-consuming household practices are also gendered, and it is seen that in heterosexual households men are responsible for technical solutions related to energy supply and house maintenance, while women are responsible for energy conservation in daily household tasks (Clancy & Roehr, 2003). For example, in a study by Carlsson-Kanyama and Lindén (2007) laundry tasks were mainly undertaken by women, and therefore incentives to conserve water and electricity in this regard increased the work load on women, as laundry was dried without tumble driers and washing machines were used during the night, which resulted in clothes to be hanged early in the morning, or the washing was done during weekends, when prices were low. In terms of house refurbishments though, the male of the household was in charge (Carlsson-Kanyama and Lindén, 2007). The perspective of gender and energy refurbishments was also studied by Tjørring (2016), who found that gendered everyday practices influence male and female householders' perspectives on decisions regarding retrofitting their house (Tjørring, 2016).

Another aspect relates to differences in interest and attitudes towards, for instance, climate change, where women seem to be more worried and engaged in taking action (Carlsson-Kanyama, Ripa Juliá, and Röhr 2010), even though it was also found that economic incentives were motivational for both men and women (Carlsson-Kanyama and Lindén, 2007). That women tend to be more environmentally concerned has been called the ‘feminization of environmental responsibility’ and ‘feminization of ethical consumption’ (Dzialo, 2017). It has been shown that this feminization of environmental concern and ethical consumption varies widely cross-nationally and therefore has to be seen in light of the national context of gender equality. These analyses of gender and ethical consumption also raise the important question of how ethical environmental consumption may put an extra burden on women, who then not only has the main responsibility of many daily household chores, but also has to be responsible for the major global sustainability problems (Dzialo, 2017).

The dominating smart technology agenda within the energy field strongly calls for a focus on gender and diversity within energy consumption in households, as pointed to in the introduction of this paper. Strengers (2013) has scrutinised this dominating trend underlining how the smart agenda, in terms of the consumer, has a narrow focus on an ideal user type, by Strengers (2013) termed the ‘Resource Man’. This ideal consumer in the smart energy grid is efficient, rational and technologically enabled. According to Strengers, this is a functional and masculine way of imaging the consumer from within male-dominated industries of engineering, economics and computer science (Strengers, 2013). Similarly, such gender differences are apparent in respect of interest and knowledge about energy supply issues, where men have stronger representation within the energy sector and much higher representation in management boards of European energy companies (Carlsson-Kanyama *et al.*, 2010; Clancy and Roehr 2003). A study by Fraune (2015) in Germany explored differences in women’s and men’s involvement, investment and decision making in regards to taking part in citizen renewable electricity production schemes. The study showed that men invest more in renewable energy, which also influences voting and control rights that appear as lower for women in citizen participation schemes and furthermore women have less leadership positions within such schemes (Fraune, 2015).

In developing countries women comprise the majority of inhabitants being vulnerable to energy scarcity, for example in terms of changes to the daily housework such as fetching water or fuel (Sovacool 2014). In a historical perspective, it has been shown that electrification in developed countries increased the time women spent on housework rather than decreased it, because of social changes in expectations to cleaning and other housework tasks (Cowan, 1983). Thus energy is a highly gender-structured issue; however, gender also intersects with other socio-economic characteristics such as age and income, when investigating energy consumption. A recently published report on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strongly underscores the importance of addressing gender in all types and levels of energy and sustainability related questions in research and innovation, together with other central issues of the SDGs: “(...) *gender inequality issues cannot be separated from actions to tackle poverty, hunger, poor health and wellbeing, maternal death, climate change adaptation, energy and environmental burdens, economic hardships, and societal insecurity*” (Lee & Pollitzer, 2016). This implies undertaking gender-sensitive analyses of interlinkages between energy use, choices and usages of technologies, as well as the impacts of energy efficiency measures on gendered divisions of labour and gender perspectives on energy projects (Lee and Pollitzer 2016).

## 4. Conclusion

This paper started by establishing that in the future we may envision changes in the relation between users and suppliers of energy and the importance of this in relation to gender differences in everyday life. We have shown how home and everyday life are highly gendered matters, and we have introduced studies on energy consumption and gender. We have, however, also pointed out that much more research on this important topic is needed, and for several reasons this includes research interests as well as ethical considerations that combine gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Ethical consumption related to energy and smart grid, is primarily related to the sustainability issues of climate change. Being an ethical consumer, and using the power as a consumer to influence the future towards a low carbon future, includes many different types of tasks, such as taking decisions on buying a-label appliances and energy retrofitting houses, as well as changing mundane everyday practices when cooking and doing laundry. As shown in this article these different tasks are often attributed respectively men and women, therefore it is also likely that ethical consumption in relation to smart energy will take slightly different forms according to gender. Research has shown that women tend to be more environmentally concerned than men, whereas men tend to be more technically oriented and interested. As both approaches are needed for a sustainable transition, ethical consumption may thus take different relevant approaches and these are most likely to be highly gendered. Further, when promoting ethical sustainable energy consumption it is important not to put the whole ethical burden on one gender.

From a gender equality perspective it is thus essential to highlight how technical changes in energy provision may also have profound consequences for gender equality, as there are differences in what everyday practices men and women perform in the home and because there are gendered differences in how decisions are taken. From the perspective of securing a low carbon, and thus sustainable, future energy system it is imperative to include understandings of gender and ethics. On the one hand because we might otherwise see unintended side effects of the technical changes, and on the other hand because the technical system interact with everyday lives of householders; and not acknowledging the differences in gendered lifestyles may seriously hamper the extent to how successful the future smart grid solutions will be. When public policy thus seeks to promote ethical consumption by the citizens, through technology, incentives and information, it is imperative that such policy for ethical consumption includes knowledge and understandings of gender differences in ethical consumption related to energy and sustainability.

In a research perspective, we have shown how it is essential to understand the differences and interplay within gender roles, and how gender interacts with social classes (and thereby lifestyles) to understand energy consumption. Otherwise, we will lose sight of important social dynamics of change and reproduction, and thereby insights on how energy consumption practices are performed, reproduced and changed. In addition, as all people consume energy, this is also a good case to study and better understand gender differences and how gender roles are produced and reproduced through mundane practices within the home, which, due to the non-reflexive and inconspicuous character of these practices, often seem to be hidden from observers and even participants.

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# In Conversation with Pauline Maclaran, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal

*Interviewed by Andreas Chatzidakis<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Royal Holloway University London, UK

I am a senior lecturer in marketing at Royal Holloway University of London. My research deals with the broader intersection of consumer culture with ethics and politics. More recently, this has included the ethics and politics of gender and I have been lucky to be friends with some of the best possible mentors. Prof Pauline Maclaran, a world expert on gendering marketing, has inspired me over most of my time at Royal Holloway. Dr Catherine Rottenberg is a younger feminist scholar that has already established a solid reputation, particularly for her acute and nuanced observations on neoliberal feminism. Finally, Prof Lynne Segal should need no introduction as one of the emblematic figures in socialist feminism, who has written extensively on a variety of issues, including more recent contributions on the politics of ageing and those cherished moments of “radical happiness”. More extensive biographies are included as an endnote.

Inspired by JCE’s special issue, I met with Catherine, Lynne and Pauline on 28th Apr 2017 to discuss the connections between gender politics and ethical consumption. Conscious of our distinct disciplinary backgrounds and experiences, we were not quite sure what to aim for or what was realistically achievable. We therefore experimented with an open-ended format where each of the interviewees had to explain what “gender and ethical consumption” may mean from within their own vernaculars, biographies and political struggles. This enabled us to outline some common themes in our emerging understanding(s). Below are some excerpts from our conversation. These are intentionally left in a somewhat raw format to reflect the unscripted nature of the interview, free from any predetermined agendas. However, we hope this will inspire further contemplation as different moments of gender analysis engage with recent understandings of ethical consumption.

**Andreas:** Lynne, do you want to start with some thoughts on socialist feminism and its relationship with ethical consumption?

**Lynne:** Where to start? When feminism finally bursts onto the scene in the 1970s, we—the so-called lucky generation of baby boomers—were eager to run away as fast as we could from that decade in which we had grown up, the 1950s, the decade of hyper-domesticity, of what we saw as the acquisitive, consumerist, conformist way of life in those households many of us had been born into. Instead, we expressed a passionate desire for equality and engagement in the world at large. Unlike our parents, and certainly mine, the last thing we ever wanted was any display of status, privilege or wealth, if we had any.

Quite the opposite, coming out of grass-roots Sixties’ New Left politics, women embracing feminism wanted to identify with ‘the people’, and in particular, with women everywhere, many of whom we knew had little to call their own. We were all too aware of the many ways women had been targeted as consumers in those post-war years, but also of the actual negativity we felt fashion often expressed towards women – as though a woman’s life was always one designed only to please others, and in particular to please men, wearing our high heels that could cripple us, and clothes that were rarely comfortable.

We would not be the type of women who dressed simply for their man. We listened to songs like those of the American folk singers, 'Hazel & Alice', I recall especially one called "Custom Made Woman Blues", which went like this: "Well I tried to be the kind of woman you wanted me to be ... Made to please and not to tease, The custom made woman blues".

What I recall is that in my feminist milieu, we bought most of our clothes second-hand, we preferred everything to be recycled. Our consumer patterns were part of the broader left scene, not just one involving women, but an aspect of an alternative politics where we were trying to live collectively, trying to cooperate and create new ways of caring and sharing all our skills and resources. These were absolutely the values of the moment, almost unrecognizable to many today.

What that means is that, I think, nowadays we would be described as ethical consumers [laughs], but we didn't describe ourselves as ethical consumers, we just saw ourselves as not wanting to play the capitalist game, and not wanting to play the patriarchal game. As I said, the concern with equality meant that the last thing you wanted to do was buy things to show off your status – which didn't mean that we were necessarily anti-consumption. We were certainly interested in sex, for the most part, although the '60s sex and drugs and rock'n'roll, for us, would connect more with alternative music, alternative cultural productions: women's theatre, women's art; women were trying to do everything for themselves; and in my house, which was a collective household, we would even cut each other's hair rather than [laughs]... You know, everything we did we tried to attempt it ourselves, rather than rely on a market, you could say that it was explicitly utopian...

**Andreas:** So Lynne, do you understand that as different from earlier feminist movements and their engagement with consumption?

**Lynne:** No, not entirely. It took us a while to discover, with people like Sheila Rowbotham digging away, into all that had been 'hidden from history', women's history, but actually what we did find is that what we were often trying to do had been done before. It wasn't just women leading bread riots, or working class women marching in the streets against their wages being cut, as in the USA during the Lawrence textile strike in 1912, demanding not just bread but roses too. Other women, usually middle-class women, such as the Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the USA in the 1920s, worked with other radical women on transforming domestic lives, via what they named 'household science'. They called for public provision for housing that would enable forms of co-operative living and home-crafts, in large apartments with swimming pools, tennis courts and dance halls. These women also admired free-flowing dress, like that worn by the dancer, Isadora Duncan.

Similar schemes were thought up in the UK, where some women, for example, the Scottish journalist Jane Clapperton, wrote of the need for collective housing, and the sorts of housing where it would be easier to share housework. Such ideas were sometimes quite developed, and indeed fed into ideas for municipal socialism...But of course, you know, with the coming of the Depression in the 1930s, this sort of more utopian thinking gets completely smashed, and not only smashed, but forgotten really. Forgotten. And so, when we second wave feminists emerge, we think we're brand new in terms of thinking about living more cooperatively and collectively...

**Andreas:** And how about contemporary forms of ethical consumption? How do you think your critique of consumer culture differed?

**Lynne:** Well, as I said, it was so much about creating an alternative culture, and an alternative world, and also you know, actually fighting the state, and fighting for different working conditions. It was absolutely broadly political, rather than simply based around consumption. This changed again, when the '80s and '90s came along, and particularly people

who'd done cultural studies were now critical of all those '50s and '60s sociologists and political theorists we had often read, such as Wright Mills, Reisman, Marcuse, Kenneth Galbraith and above all, the Frankfurt School, who had been critical of consumerism – ridiculing the 'cheerful robots' or 'one-dimensional man' seen as manipulated by the advertising industries into endless buying of goods.

Consumption was rethought in cultural studies, looking especially at class fractions, and suggesting that actually people can consume 'subversively', in order to create their subcultures, and so on... in the Birmingham Centre, where Cultural Studies was founded, it became important to study, for instance the Mods or the Rockers, and other sorts of more dissident styles in subcultures consuming in order to create their own identities. The whole issue of identity production became important, as in Dick Hebdige's classic *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979)

And soon some younger feminists were writing about consumption and identities in the '80s and '90s, in a way that I was at first finding quite weird, seeing it as too detached from a more general socialist-feminist politics. However, Elizabeth Wilson, who was very much a Marxist-feminist from the socialist-feminist background I was describing earlier, wrote in her book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985), that feminists can't just reject fashion, as many of us had wanted to. In fact, of course, we never did reject fashion, we developed our own sorts of fashion that perhaps other people might have felt excluded by – those who weren't wearing their dungarees, or flowing smocks and so on. And so Wilson was talking about the pleasures of fashion, and that actually women often dress for themselves, not just for men, and so on; feminists needed to take account of that, and how good it was, or could be, to be dressing up and presenting yourself to the public. But, you know, being very class-conscious, and in fact in the Communist Party at the time, Elizabeth was also very concerned with who was excluded from being able to consume very much at all....

However, the notion of ethical consumption seems to take us back to the individual in a way in which I think we weren't thinking... we weren't thinking about it all in those individual terms, because feminism for us was all a part of the struggle for social transformation.

**Andreas:** Talking about the struggles for social transformation and the increasingly individualised times that we live in - over to you Catherine!

**Catherine:** OK, I will try and sort of lay out first why perhaps the notion of ethical consumption may be problematic for the moment that we are living in. Let me explain by drawing on an article that I happened to read last Monday entitled "The New Status Symbol". There Ben Tarnoff argues that the US has moved from the society in which conspicuous consumption is one of the key modes for understanding the dynamics of class dominance (which, of course, is always inflected by race and gender and sexuality) to a society in which conspicuous productivity is now just as vital to the public display of class power. But what is also interesting about the article is that Tarnoff's understanding of productivity has little to do with common sense "understandings" or even Marxist conceptions or even Fordist conceptions of production. It's no longer about the extraction of surplus value or the creation of commodities. In his words, "It's about how hard you work", it is about sheer time investment. And then he gives these great examples I think, reporting on Apple CEO Tim Cook, who told Time that he begins his day at 3.45 a.m., and CEO Marissa Mayer who told Bloomberg News that she used to work 130 hours per week. The article reminds us that Cook is practically 500,000 times richer than the average American – but he still wakes up at 3.45 am. This, Tarnoff suggests, is the hallmark of conspicuous production: it helps to justify the existence of an imperial class by

showcasing their superhuman levels of industry. In an era of extreme inequality, elites need to demonstrate to themselves and others that they *deserve* of this wealth. And the reason that I open with Tarnoff, why I thought he was so interesting as I was thinking about this conversation with you guys, is because I wonder whether ethical consumption is an adequate term, when trying to make sense of our current moment... We may need to move from an emphasis on consumption to notions of productivity. Not only are we constantly incited to invest more time, more energy in our places of work (and now they're all conceived as firms, whether it's a university or a business) in order to enhance potential returns, but we are also exhorted to work on ourselves endlessly. We even conceive of ourselves as mini-firms. So we invest in ourselves to improve ourselves, to develop our abilities, to appreciate our value over time. And leisure, Lynne, as you were talking about before, which was once protected time has become for urban professionals and aspirational classes about endless self-improvement. So, the reason I use Tarnoff is basically because, I read him as describing the neoliberal subject. This subject is individuated, entrepreneurial and responsabilised, meaning that this subject is totally responsible for her own self-care and is also completely informed by a cost-benefit calculus. Now I would even go further, and here I'm drawing on the work of Wendy Brown and Michel Fehrer, and I would say that under neoliberalism –and neoliberal rationality– human beings are being converted into specks of capital. What that means is that the self is basically converted into a resource in which all activities are construed as potential strategic assets for enhancing the self's future value. Our being becomes a resource that through investment –or what Tarnoff calls productivity– we accrue value. All we have to think about is the way that we are constantly branding ourselves or attempting to appreciate the value of different bits of ourselves – how to get more likes on Facebook, how to get re-retweeted or more followers on Instagram, or how to get more people to download our papers from academia.edu. Wendy Brown has a great quote, I think, where she says that under neoliberal rationality, as human subjects are increasingly being converted into specks of human capital: “the emphasis on entrepreneurship and productivity replaces an emphasis on commodities and consumption.” ...So, my sense is that there is a radical shift in frame, emphasis and value and that this has been happening for a while. My question then would take this form: Can consumption retain any of its explanatory power--and thus can ethical consumption retain its contested moral dimension --if we are interested in understanding our particular neoliberal moment...

**Andreas:** OK, We will return to this, but what about gender? what's the gendered dimension of these profound transformations – how does neoliberal feminism enter the picture?

**Catherine:** Here I would say there are two important factors that need to be taken into consideration when speaking about this mutual entanglement of feminism and neoliberalism. One is this really interesting phenomenon of the recent surge in feminist discourse in popular mainstream venues. Really what happens is that we've gone from what has been termed a postfeminist period, in which feminism was reputed in the media, to an era in which feminism is everywhere and everyone is claiming feminism, from Clinton to Ivanka! So, not surprisingly, once feminism is mainstreamed and popularised, feminism gets defanged of its oppositional and emancipatory potential – that would be part of my claim. More than just simply being popularised, though, feminism increasingly dovetails and converges with dominant ideologies and conservative forces across the globe. We see this with Le Pen and the National Front and Geert Wilders's Party For Freedom, where they use gender parity in order to further a racist, anti-immigrant agenda. And of course, in the US, there's a whole history of using gender oppression to justify interventions in countries with majority Muslim populations. And more recently we have the famous

feminist manifesto by Sheryl Sandberg, where she publicly endorses a feminism that is informed by market rationality.

This new variant of feminism has produced a new feminist ideal – certainly an Anglo-American one but also a European one – and she is a professional woman able to balance a successful career with a satisfying home life. A “happy work-family balance,” in other words, is currently being (re)presented as a progressive feminist ideal – and that’s striking, I think. And insofar as this is the case, then this new feminist ideal must not only be understood as helping to shape women’s desires, and behaviour, but, crucially, as producing a feminist subject informed through and through by a cost-benefit calculus. This is precisely neoliberal feminism, a feminism that’s unmoored from the key terms Lynne was talking about—equality, justice, emancipation— which have informed women’s movements, however problematically in the different streams, since their inception. So this variant of feminism disavows the socio-economic and cultural structures shaping our lives. And this neoliberal feminism spawns a feminist subject who accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is predicated precisely on crafting a work-family balance, which is itself based on the idea of cost-benefit... Given my analysis, I totally agree with Lynne that ethical consumption not only abets the intensified process of individuation, but I am worried that it fails to take into account the neoliberalization of our world.

**Andreas:** That makes sense Catherine, thank you. What would consumer researchers think I wonder...Pauline?!

**Pauline:** So, I think first of all, you know, from a consumer culture studies point of view, I thought what you both said was great and it really resonates with us, but I’ll be speaking, I suppose, a slightly different language.... What Lynne has given a real background to, the kind of rebellion that set the scene for the baby boomers, but that also set the scene for the co-option of rebellion by the market place, by capitalism really. And so what you see in the period that Lynne’s talking about, where the youth subcultures were hugely rebellious and it was all about the brave new world we were going to create and, you know, dropping out and tuning in, and really concerning ourselves with trying to change wider social structures. But in the ’70s, or rather the end of the ’60s and early ’70s, what you see is the start of what I would call the “ethical brands” coming in and the start of brands trying to coopt this rebellion by attaching themselves to social agendas. So you’ve got all these big brands of the ’60s that are now looked back with nostalgia, like the Mini, Harley Davidson, Benetton, the Body Shop, of course – I think the Body Shop would be the first in fact, and it’s certainly one of the really big ethical brands. So that was the start of tying brands and capitalism into social and moral agendas. And, for me, that whole movement is very significant, especially if we want to link it with ethical consumerism and feminism. For example, if we go back to the example of the Body Shop and Anita Roddick, that whole movement wasn’t just about sustainable consumption and fair trade - linking with producers in developing countries – and the whole recycling image it had. For example, you brought your bottles to be refilled, it offered all natural ingredients and the producers got a fair reward supposedly. So here we see not only the start of aligning production aspects with consumption and consumer choice, but also the emergence of a feminist agenda, because the Body Shop also challenged beauty ideals and women’s conformity to them. The Body Shop would often promote pictures of, curvaceous woman, and even naked woman and that was all seen as part of what we call the “rebel sell” in consumer culture studies. The rebel sell is what many brands used at that time (Harley Davidson, the MINI and, of course, Apple are all good examples). And still today the most popular brands usually have a rebel image if we think of brands like Innocent, Ben & Jerry’s, Virgin, and so forth. There’s usually a whole myth that goes with this type of image - how the entrepreneurs built themselves up from nothing, challenged the mainstream, conquered adversity and so on... And this, in turn, I think

now, if we fast-forward through the decades a little bit, ties into the whole neoliberal agenda, and its increasing emphasis on the successful entrepreneurial individual. And so, as rebellion is more and more something you can buy in the market place –because it resonates with your identity and your moral values,– we see the emergence of what is sometimes referred to as “a moralised brandscape”. Increasingly we see new companies attaching themselves to some kind of moral purpose or higher-order value. And so then people believe they have agency in creating their own identities through consumption, rather than being misled and manipulated (which is the more critically orientated sociological viewpoint). Because people feel that they are doing something positive at an individual level, they are less sensitive to the constraints of wider social structures. Hence the emergence of the neoliberal subjectivity and that’s really exactly what I would argue has happened to feminism. You see it really dwindling away as more and more feminism ideals are coopted by marketers and advertisers in what you call femvertising. I think this is an awful name, but, you know, you are an empowered woman if you are trampling over a man on the way to unlock your new car or whatever. This sort of female empowerment is very much the current marketing zeitgeist. So then the emphasis on productivity that you’ve talked about, Catherine, I think is really astute and I think that is exactly what is happening; that we have the enterprising self and feminism becomes part of that. But I would argue that putting the emphasis on productivity, we have to be careful that we don’t lose the consumption side as well...

**Andreas:** So Pauline, If I understand your point correctly we can have (neoliberal) “productivity” in work or production but we should not forget we also have productivity in consumption?

**Pauline:** Yes, exactly - you have both sides. You have the traditional production side, where producers have to prove that they share the passion with consumers, to prove themselves and their company authentic, and of course not be seen to be trying to make money – at the end, most narratives (or brand myths) are in this vein. It’s the capital that’s masked by these narratives, generally speaking. And then, on the consumption side, you have consumers becoming productive and doing the work for capital, as you said, so that much of consumerism, including consumers’ identity projects, rests on the work in material labour, where consumers are forming social relationships, emotional relationships, that actually give the value to the brand in the end..And for ethical consumption, I think it’s exactly that, that ethical consumption is now all part of this identity seeking, rebellion, in the market place and so the idea of ethical consumerism as actually having any real power I think is really questionable. And as you said, the bigger picture is this neoliberal lens and what it has meant for this relationship between consumption and production, and the whole masking of capital. And so it’s the workings of capitalism that are actually being hidden, particularly with the moralised brandscape. More and more brands are tying themselves to some sort of moral– I mean, you even have Coca-Cola! Before it used to be just specifically “ethical” brands, but now you have almost every brand climbing on the bandwagon. So you have Coca-Cola recently trying to solve the Pakistani-Indian conflict by setting up vending machines where the consumers in both sides could see themselves in links on screens and they could play games with each other; and Coca-Cola branded this “The Happiness Machine”. This is part of Coke’s agenda to save the world! So I think feminism very much falls into this co-optation narrative where it is used to sell more products...

**Andreas:** Lynne, is it fair to say that there is a key difference between what you defined as the market back then and what the market is now? For example, some collective arrangements around education, health care and other public infrastructures were not the market. Now they are the market. So what was the welfare state, you know, had a completely different role to play, so the claims, any claims to the welfare state, were of a different kind and nature to begin with...

**Lynne:** That's why Thatcher knew that what she had to do, her project, wasn't even primarily to change things economically but, as she said, 'to change hearts and minds,' so that everybody would begin to see themselves as little entrepreneurs, rather than people connecting to other people and wanting to look after each other. And so that is what the selling off, or privatization, of the public sector is all about: to put it in the hands of global corporations. So, you know, as James Meek in his book *Private Island* and others have written about, you know, the selling of the public sector is not even, primarily, an effort to save money, as we are told. We are still probably paying out more money to these private corporations who now run our services, and which own what were our resources., But ideologically it is to get rid of the sense of there being a caring, welfare state, that we can expect to depend upon. The whole idea of welfare entitlements was undermined, and everybody was to be a 'consumer', and soon enough in neoliberal rhetoric, an 'undeserving' consumer, or 'scrounger', though people might be trying to secure benefits for essential needs that they might formally have been seen as entitled to.

**Andreas:** So is there any space for progressive feminism via the market and ethical consumption more broadly?...

**Lynne:** You can't easily reconcile feminism with the market – you have to challenge it, given the structured inequality we live with, and given that many of the basic concerns of feminism, around care, commitment, interdependence and solidarity have nothing to do with markets. For me, the problem is that consumption is almost always individual. I always have to relate feminism to issues of equality, to connect it with those groups of people who are most marginalised: today, for instance, the asylum seekers. Or, rather differently, to those who are really struggling and having to work these long, ridiculous hours not because they are making five hundred thousand million – or whatever the super-rich are making, but because they are working almost all their waking hours and for pitiful wages in order to consume anything at all. There is no place here for that transformed world of care and commitment and community life that feminists once dreamed of, and even tried to create, when we were less disciplined by market forces...

**Catherine:** I am also sceptical. I think that we have to think about how a world in which consumption and the market place are conceived in such radically different terms, where there can be totally different kinds of distribution, egalitarian distributions of vulnerability, of precarity, in ways that make life sustainable and liveable for the vast majority of people on this planet, and I don't see how this can come about if we don't make a radical shift...

**Lynne:** I just want to say first that structural inequalities never simply eliminate themselves. I mean power never undermines itself. It always shifts only due to resistance, from the outside, always. However, the neoliberal agenda and rationality has resulted in the undermining of so many democratic spaces where that resistance could come from... So what I want to say is, no, I don't have any total objection to markets, but what people like Colin Crouch, in his book *Post Democracy*, and others have argued is that it is the obeisance to global market forces which has actually wiped out the capacity any real notion of free markets, especially for local markets, or markets where there is more possibilities for local producers and local consumers to come together in open collaboration, for consumers to have any genuine agency. This is because smaller markets are so easily wiped out by the ever-invasive corporations such as Amazon, or one of the other few global corporations. So you could say that it is the free-market itself that has been destroyed. And, of course, what some people say is that capitalism is just eating itself up. You know, through creating so much inequality and environmental ruin.

**Catherine:** I think that this is always a question because it's becoming harder and harder to conceptualize alternatives... Local alternative markets are amazing and wonderful but can they, and do they, ultimately lead to wider solutions. I mean, now the world is so globalised, and neoliberalised, is it enough to focus on the local...

**Pauline:** And often those local markets –thinking of the ones in London, but plenty of others– the local farmers' markets for example, are so expensive, that they are actually trading on that utopian ideal of going back to... you are in touch with the producers but, in fact, the price structures could only possibly be for well-off middle-class consumers. And they are not actually alternative structures...

**Lynne:** You know, some people talk about these contingent utopias, or everyday utopias ...And people, like in Exarcheia, it is people trying to create, I don't know, very cheap availability of goods through some alternative system, which usually involves people exploiting themselves, as in a way we did in the 1970s. I don't... It's paradoxical, because it's impossible to see how they'll survive for too long because they do tend to rely on quite a bit of self-sacrifice. And while at first people can say "Oh, this is nice, we're all doing it together, we are enjoying this"... you can't afford to do this... Well, if you are very young and unemployed, maybe for a while you can... So, I don't think... I've got nothing against all markets, or alternative markets, or ethical consumption. And I think it does go on. I mean, people do set up little spaces of resistance. I get my hair cut at a local barber's, which is creating this alternative space for trans people and anyone can come in and you pay whatever you feel able to pay. So that's another alternative market, and, you know... I think that, it's real and they've managed to survive. So, would that idea spread? I mean, in a way, maybe it will have to spread if everyone is to live in complete destitution, perhaps it has to spread...Even as models, as models, that some people might develop for the future... I don't know, it's terribly hard to see how we grow back the fangs of neoliberalism. I mean the tentacles are just everywhere, as you say, undermining public spaces. But then people are trying to recuperate these public spaces and I mean, we have to have some hope, don't we?

**Lynne:** And also, another thing is recycling things, recycling commodities. I mean, I still like to... Everything I'm wearing is second-hand, and has been. That's what I want, I mean that's what some people *do* like to be able to do...

Fredric Jameson said it's easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism... which reminds me also of something that Lenin said and that I've used in my book, which... he said that when times were more colourful, that the workers would take over and create an egalitarian state in workers' control, capitalism will sell workers the rope with which to hang themselves. But I said, in fact, what seems to be happening is capitalism is selling the workers the rope with which to hang *ourselves*.

**Catherine:** Well I would think about Andreas's ending and you raised the possibility of consumerism and ethical consumption as part of a much larger strategy and that will be a much better place than talking about hanging ourselves...

**Pauline:** [laughs] correct! There is a certainly a space for resistance in the market but one should not stop there...

**Lynne:** Well we're beginning with arguments around what is it to actually care for each other and care for the world. That is still at the heart of feminism and at the heart of green politics: how do we care for each other and care for the world. That's the only place to begin. Neoliberalism wants to destroy even thinking about that question.

**Andreas:** And again to play the devil's advocate, the likes of Daniel Miller will say that much of our caring labour is materialised *via* consumption...

**Lynne:** Well, I don't completely dismiss that, but what he doesn't seem to be interested in is the structures of neo-liberalism and the fact we have so little control over... the fact that many people are not able to go to the supermarket and buy what they want to!

## Bios:

**Pauline Maclaran** is Professor of Marketing and Consumer Research at Royal Holloway. Her research focuses on the experiential and symbolic aspects of contemporary consumer culture, especially in relation to gender issues. She has published widely on these topics and has co-edited and co-authored various books including *Marketing & Feminism: Current Issues and Research* (2002), *Critical Marketing: Defining the Field* (2007) and *Motherhoods, Markets and Consumption* (2013).

**Catherine Rottenberg** is a 2016-18 Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellow in the Sociology Department, Goldsmiths, and a Senior Lecturer at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel with a joint appointment in the Gender Studies Program and the Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics. Her current research project is on the rise of neoliberal feminism, and her most recent article, "Neoliberal Feminism and the Future of Human Capital," appeared in *Signs* (2017). Rottenberg is also the co-editor (with Dr. Sara Farris) of the themed issue "Righting Feminism" for *New Formations*.

**Lynne Segal** has been engaged in Left & feminist politics since coming to London from Sydney in the early 1970s. She teaches at Birkbeck, University of London, in Psychosocial Studies, and has published widely on feminism, gender and politics, including *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (1987); *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (1990); *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* (1994); *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology & Politics* (1999); *Making Trouble: Life & Politics* (2007); *Out of Time: The Pleasures & Perils of Ageing* (2014); her latest book is *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (2017).

**Andreas Chatzidakis** is a senior lecturer in marketing at Royal Holloway University of London. His research deals with the broader intersection of consumption with ethics and politics, working on projects such as consumer-oriented activism in post 2008 Athens and the role of care and relationality in everyday consumption. He has co-edited a book entitled *Ethics and Morality in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (with Prof Deirdre Shaw and Dr Michal Carrington) and just finished co-authoring a book entitled *Contemporary Issues in Marketing* (with Prof Liz Parsons and Prof Pauline Maclaran).

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## News

### Sweden

#### Book chapter looks at organisations building smartphone apps as 'ethical choice prescribers'.

In a new book called "Digitalizing Consumption: How Devices Shape Consumer Culture", Chapter 7 explores how smartphone apps are beginning to appear as a new way of promoting ethical consumption. Lena Hansson, from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden notes the appearance of a variety of apps designed to help consumer address ethical issues such as those from SeafoodWatch and iRecycle.

Three Apps, which appeared on Swedish market between 2012 and 2014, are looked at specifically in this study: they are the Fairtrade app, the 'GreenGuide' and 'shopgun'. The method she used for the study was apparently 'object ethnography'.

The Fairtrade app has a barcode scanning function which recognises if a product is in its database and provides more details. When the product is not there it returns "Oops Fairtrade-labelled (zero)". It also apparently has an interactive map for Fairtrade cafés and other premises. The 'shopgun' app also apparently has some barcode-scanning functions.

The research does not ask users about their experience of the apps, or measure success or extent of use, though it does suggest that this may be a useful area for further study. It is more focussed on how the apps frame ethical questions and deal with complexity in information presentation.

The wider book reflects on how "contemporary consumer society is increasingly saturated by digital technology, and the devices that deliver this are increasingly transforming consumption patterns. Social media, smartphones, mobile apps and digital retailing merge with traditional consumption spheres, supported by digital devices which further encourage consumers to communicate and influence other consumers to consume."

Through a wide range of empirical studies scholars from sociology, marketing and ethnology examine the effects of new digital devices on practices of consumption and

marketing, through topics including big data, digital traces, streaming services, wearables, and social media's impact on ethical consumption.

*Digitalizing Consumption: How Devices Shape Consumer Culture, edited by Franck Cochoy, Johan Hagberg, Magdalena Petersson McIntyre, Niklas Sörum: Routledge 2017*

### UK

#### Porritt describes consumerism as the enemy in the last of the successful seminars in the ESRC-backed project.

The 'Consumption Ethics: Interdisciplinary Meanings and Intersections' seminar held at Birkbeck College, London on the 14th of September marked the 11th and final seminar in the ESRC funded 'Ethics in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives' series. Over the last three years the series has successfully hosted a selection of prominent speakers from disciplines such as Geography, History, Marketing, Sociology and Theology. It has been the launch pad for a successful book, 'Ethics and Morality in Consumption', published in 2016, and pivotal in bringing together the academic network behind this journal. Through thematic events across the UK and the world, the seminar series has sought to connect a series of contemporary concerns in the social sciences around the interconnections between ethics, consumption and commercial practice.

*The last seminar...*

The 'Interdisciplinary Meanings and Intersections' seminar raised questions about how we define and talk about being 'ethical' in different ways. The day featured two guest speakers, Jonathon Porritt, an Environmentalist and Writer and Daniel Miller, Professor of Anthropology at UCL. The key note speakers were followed by a discussion panel that included a selection of prominent academics from the field.

During his thought-provoking talk entitled 'Consumerism is the principal enemy of ethical consumption', Jonathon Porritt dealt with the definitional difference(s) between consumption and (evil) consumerism. He posed that we are living in a world dominated by consumerism, an ideology, that dangerously places consumption at the heart of the modern economy. The talk questioned whether it

was possible to find a balance between our individual and collective needs – and asked the audience to consider how can we as consumers use our individual purchasing power to make our lives better, without making anyone else's considerably worse?

In a unique and inspiring talk, Professor Daniel Miller examined the proliferation of memes in social media as a form of consumption. He underlined the significance of social media as a source of consumption and argued that our online consumption activity, beyond buying things online, is a significant avenue for future research. The talk suggested that a meme could be a form of moral policing. Do the funny memes we all encounter everyday convey deeper moral/ethical meanings to those who flick past them on Instagram, Facebook and other online sources?

*The future...*

As this was the last event in the funded series, time at the end was spent reflecting on the last three years. People considered where the study of consumption ethics may go from here and the future of their newly forged working relationships. I sensed an overarching consensus from the attendees in the room that interdisciplinary, 'joined-up' thinking should (and will be) fundamental to their future work, in order to fully encapsulate the complexity and contextual nature of consumption ethics. I left feeling buoyed with positivity and excited to share our interest in such a fast-paced and forward-thinking research area.

**Eleanor Boyce (PhD Student at University of Manchester)**

Interviews with the speakers from the seminar, and other seminars held in the series, can be found at [www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/)

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## Finland

### Finnish ethical consumer explored in study at University of Turku

In April 2017, research by Iida Kukkonen entitled "Consolidation of the common good and a personal quest for virtue?" was published on the Turku University website.

This paper noted how interest in ethical consumption tends to be approached in academia through three separate

'frames' – the ethical consumer as a myth, the ethical consumer as a consumer-citizen and the ethical consumer as self-interested being.

The author undertook analysis of qualitative online data from Finland's largest forum (Suomi24), as well as analysis of quantitative data from the Finland 2014. Having excluded "boycotts and other types of consumer activism", she noted how the remaining "ethical and environmental consumer discourse was centred around the consumption of food, and meat in particular". Other economically and ecologically significant areas of consumption such as transport, energy and housing "were rarely discussed using ethical and ecological terminology considering their economic and ecological impact". She concluded that "commentators on Suomi24 do for the most part embrace the idea of ethical consumption, however such consumption is constructed as a highly individual practice". Data from the Finland 2014 survey confirmed that there are indeed socio-demographic differences between those who embrace ethical consumer attitudes and those who do not.

<http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/133840?show=full>

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## Chile and Brazil

### Study challenges mainstream ideas of ethical consumption though the concepts of ethical living and care in Chile and Brazil

On May 30th 2017, the British Journal of Sociology, reported on a study using data from 32 focus groups conducted in Chile and Brazil. The authors Tomas Ariztia, Nurjk Agloni, and Léna Pellandini-Simányi, explained how their research had revealed some limitations with "mainstream conceptualizations of 'ethical consumption' which equate the notion with conscious, individual, market-mediated choices motivated by ethical or political aims that transcend ordinary concerns". Also drawing on recent studies on the links between ordinary ethics and ethical consumption, they propose "a conceptualization of ethical consumption that does not centre on individual, market-mediated choices but understands it at the level of practical outcomes, which we refer to as different forms of 'ethical living'.

They develop these points through “describing one particular ordinary moral regime that seemed to be predominant in participants’ accounts of ethics and consumption in both Chile and Brazil: one that links consumption and ethics through care.” They show that the moral regime of care leads to ‘ethical outcomes’, such as energy saving or limiting overconsumption which result from following ordinary ethics.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-4446.12265/full#bjos12265-note-5202>

**Tomas Ariztia is on the editorial board of JCE.**

## UK

### With only 13% of UK companies meeting their obligations under Modern Day Slavery Act, academics discuss the possible role of consumers as agents for change.

The 10th seminar of the ESRC Ethics in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives series was held on 21 April 2017 at 11 Bedford Square in London. The theme of seminar explored the issue of the more than one million modern slaves working inside Europe and asked how we can, as affluent westernised consumers, remain blind to the plight of enslaved people when we are interacting with them in our everyday consumption lives. It also asked how this invisibility shrouding modern slaves in our communities could be removed? For many of the speakers the answers to these questions were complex and involved many different actors to form part of the solution.

The first speaker Aidan McQuade, Director of Anti Slavery International, argued against the idea that the consumer was solely responsible, or even able to solve, the issue of modern day slavery. Aidan postulated that power needed to be given to those who were most vulnerable to being enslaved, with this responsibility lying directly at the feet of governments to ensure “laws, policies and customs” acted to prevent slavery. In his view the role of consumers and companies was to hold governments to account to ensure that they promoted human rights.

Cindy Berman however, Head of Knowledge and Learning at the Ethical Trading Initiative, argued that new that industrial relation systems were needed to help provide mechanisms for grievances, as well as bringing actors within a supply chain to collaboratively address and prevent human and workers’ rights abuses.

Phil Bloomer, Executive Director of Business and Human Rights Resource Centre contended that there were companies “who try to do the right thing” and that recognition of best practices needed to be acknowledged. He said that no brand wanted to be connected with the issue of modern slavery, yet the recent enactment of the UK Modern Slavery Act - while seen as a major step forward in forcing companies to take responsibility on the issue - found only 13% of companies meeting their obligations under the act.

In the final session of the day we heard from Professor Rohit Varman, from Deakin University, who believed that the solution to modern slavery could not be found within the current corporate structure. He said “Companies may not use slaves but they create the conditions for slavery to prevail”. Contrary to others speaking at the seminar, he also believed that consumers were limited in what they could achieve and that the actual solution could only be found in addressing the issue of equality within societies.

The seminar highlighted that there are many different aspects to modern slavery and that some solutions were available, such as companies working to ensure workers within their own supply chains are not enslaved, or governments upholding their commitments to human rights. However as Professor Deakin points out there are many different facets of slavery which are unseen and it is those which are the hardest to tackle.

Interviews with the speakers from the seminar, and other seminars held in the series, can be found at [www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/business/research/researchevents/management/ethicsinconsumption/seminarsandevents/consumer/)

## Brazil

### Study shows how price promotions do not affect Brazilian consumers' decisions to 'punish' corrupt companies

In the journal *Consumer Behaviour Review* (2017 1 (1), 38-44), academics from the University of Sao Paulo, report on research looking at three variables:

- is a company ethical?
- is it corrupt?
- is there a price promotion?

KM Hamza, VKC Nogami, and J Andrade, (2017) explain how the purpose of this study was to verify if price promotion and company profile (ethical or corrupt) influenced purchase intentions. They conducted an experiment using 246 cases between subjects. Their findings showed how Brazilian consumers did not value the ethical behaviour of companies, but penalized corrupt behaviour. The price promotion stimulus was not effective, which meant that price promotion did not affect the willingness to pay. They concluded that the results suggested that companies in Brazil should behave ethically, if not for the reward they might get, at least to avoid "the punishment that consumers are willing to give them."

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vitor\\_Nogami/publication/317401594\\_Reward\\_and\\_Punishment\\_from\\_Consumers\\_Towards\\_Ethical\\_and\\_Corrupt\\_Companies\\_a\\_Study\\_on\\_Price\\_Promotion\\_and\\_Purchase\\_Intention/links/59393c120f7e9b32b716ca2c/Reward-and-Punishment-from-Consumers-Towards-Ethical-and-Corrupt-Companies-a-Study-on-Price-Promotion-and-Purchase-Intention.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vitor_Nogami/publication/317401594_Reward_and_Punishment_from_Consumers_Towards_Ethical_and_Corrupt_Companies_a_Study_on_Price_Promotion_and_Purchase_Intention/links/59393c120f7e9b32b716ca2c/Reward-and-Punishment-from-Consumers-Towards-Ethical-and-Corrupt-Companies-a-Study-on-Price-Promotion-and-Purchase-Intention.pdf)

## Korea

### Study shows that higher ethical standards within businesses lead to increased consumer loyalty.

In the July 2017 edition of the *Journal of Business Research*, two scholars from Korea and one from Hong Kong examine links between consumer perceptions of a company's ethicality and their loyalty as purchasers.

Eunil Park, Ki Joon Kim, and Sang Jib Kwon, report how the results of their structural equation modelling analysis (N=931) revealed that higher ethical standards within a company do lead to the perception amongst consumers that a company is committed to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This CSR commitment in turn induces greater satisfaction with and trust in the company. And this satisfaction with and trust in the company and its services leads to greater consumer loyalty.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.02.017>

## UK

### Research seeks to balance individual-focussed accounts of ethical consumption with socio-centric approaches through study of food practices

In the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* in June 2017, authors Yana Manyukhina, Nick Emmel, and Lucie Middlemiss, from the Sustainability Research Institute and Sociology Departments at the University of Leeds, engage with "two contrasting approaches to conceptualising and studying consumer behaviour that appear to dominate existing research on consumption".

They provide "a critical review of the dominant theoretical perspectives on consumption in general and ethical consumption in particular", highlighting their key assumptions and explaining how they preclude "a fuller understanding of the ways in which consumer practices are moulded and shaped". They present the findings from a qualitative analysis of consumers' ethical food practices to empirically demonstrate the role of human agency and social structure in creating and shaping ethical consumption. The paper aims to provide a consolidated account of consumer behaviour "which acknowledges and explains the complex ensemble of individual and systemic powers in which consumer practices are contained".

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jtsb.12139/full>