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**REFRAMING GENDER AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION IN  
MARKETING AND CONSUMER RESEARCH: MISSING FEMINISMS, AND THE  
CASE OF MEN AND MASCULINITIES<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

Gender has been theorized and studied in many ways and across different disciplines. Although a number of these theorizations have been recognized and adopted in marketing and consumer research, the significance of feminism in knowledge construction has been largely remained what we would call 'unfinished'. Based on a critical reframing of gender research in marketing and consumer research, in dialogue with feminist theory, this paper offers theoretical and practical suggestions for how to reinvigorate these research efforts. The analysis highlights dominant theorizations of gender, relating to gender as variable, difference and role; as fundamental difference and structuring; and as cultural and identity constructions. This reframing emphasizes various neglected or 'missing feminisms', including queer theory; critical race, intersectional and transnational feminisms; material-discursive feminism; and critical studies on men and masculinities. A more detailed discussion of the latter, as a relatively new, growing and politically contentious area is further developed, to highlight more specifically which feminist and gender theories are mainly in use in marketing and consumer research, and which are little or not used. In the light of this, it is argued that marketing and related disciplines have thus far largely neglected several key contemporary gender and feminist theorizations, particularly those that centre on gender power relations. The potential impact of these theoretical frames on transdisciplinary studies in marketing and consumer research and research agenda(s) is discussed.

**Statement of contribution:**

This paper contributes to marketing and consumer research through presentations of neglected gender theories, based on reframing previous gender research in the marketing discipline. It finds that marketing has marginalized gender and feminism as political, and that

various theorizations have been sidelined. In particular, it draws on developments in the field of CSMM to illustrate neglected theorizations. It concludes with a discussion of future research directions that centre on gender and power relations, and the potential impact of alternative gender and feminist theories on marketing as a discipline.

**Keywords:** gender, feminism, critical studies on men and masculinities, marketing, consumer research

## Introduction

Gender knowledge construction is a central concern for marketing and consumer research (MCR), as reflected in this special issue. As a construct, gender has often been linked to feminism (Oakley, 1972). However, while research on gender advanced in marketing disciplines, feminism has often become muted, implied or sidelined, despite the opportunities it offers. The fundamental questions this paper addresses are: how is gender theorized in MCR? And, how do these connect with feminism?

Based on a framework of feminist conceptualizations, we critically analyze how gender theorizations have been brought into this research field. In particular, we examine how various versions of feminism have been acknowledged, and, if so, which have been adopted or neglected. This means examining different conceptualizations of gender and indeed feminism. In saying this, we see feminism as a wide-ranging set of theories, politics and practices that, in different ways, contest the dominant gender order. Feminism includes both feminist scholarship and feminist social movements influencing such texts. The article presents a critical reframing of gender scholarship in marketing and consumer research, and subsequently a case study on recent developments in critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM), a sub-field that has derived from feminist and gender scholarship.

The paper begins with the development of our framework, which informs our further analysis of gender research in MCR. Following this, we present several feminist theorizations and resulting research agendas that have been neglected in MCR, including feminist approaches to CSMM. We discuss the case of CSMM in further detail, including how men and masculinities have been studied in recent marketing and consumer research, as an example of how neglected feminist theorizations can advance the gender agenda. We chose this case for several reasons: first, it is a relatively new research area within feminist scholarship; second,

it is a growing area, in both MCR and more generally; third, it usefully highlights unevenness in the adoption of gender/feminist work in MCR; fourth, 'men and feminism' is a continuing, and long-running, politically contentious issue in feminism (Wiegman, 2002); and, finally, both authors have worked separately on this area over many years.

From this discussion of CSMM we seek to advance the gender agenda in marketing and consumer research by taking account of key neglected approaches in gender research, including: power, structural inequalities, patriarchies and transnational change; and epistemology, ontology, and knowledge construction. The paper concludes with key emerging issues, and their implications for gender research in marketing and consumer research.

### **Conceptual clarifications**

Marketing and consumer research, as generally working within its own paradigms (e.g. Arndt, 1985), is nevertheless a transdisciplinary field that has been influenced by theorizations from elsewhere. We investigate how gender has been understood and theorized in the broader field of MCR, which assumptions have been taken-for-granted and unchallenged. Through a (re)connection with theoretical roots we critically evaluate and challenge the fragmented and limited scope of MCR's engagement with feminist and gender theories. This and the following section highlight our framework in more detail.

We need to note that there are various feminist and non-feminist ways of researching gender and non-gender, referring to the dialectical relation between gender and feminism (Eichler, 1980). As such, it is often mistaken to place either gender or feminism above the other, or to argue that one should focus exclusively on one or the other. Gender is a concept, or more



precisely there are a variety of ways of conceptualizing gender; feminism is a social movement, and a relation of theory and practice, that leads onto feminist theorizing, feminist thinking and feminist action.

The concept of gender has been promoted by feminists as part of a critique of essentialist concepts of sex. On the other hand, there are complications: first, gender can certainly be used in non-feminist ways without any feminist commitment, and, second, some feminists (for example, some radical feminists, some queer feminists, and some poststructuralist feminists) critique the concept of gender and its usages, for obscuring the focus on women, and/or restricting gender-relevant categorizations, and/or essentializing gender and gender relations. Consequently, we acknowledge the wide variety of ways of understanding gender, which to some extent arise from different epistemologies, and from different disciplinary and transdisciplinary influences and traditions.<sup>2</sup> There is a similarly wide variety of feminisms, including liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical, culturalist, postcolonial, and transnational feminisms (Calás and Smircich, 2006), and in turn these emphases have their internal differences. Further elaborations and subtle differences persist within and between these broad approaches, for example, practice-based approaches to gender may be framed strongly within structural societal constraints or may be more processually in terms of ‘doing gender’.

### **Framing gender and feminist knowledge in marketing and consumer research**

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<sup>2</sup> These include approaches based on: biological and psychological sexual difference; social psychological measures of masculinity/femininity scales; anthropological and sociological analysis of sex/gender roles; ethnomethodological and phenomenological investigations; more structural(ist) societal framings of gender along with associated structural contextualizations of plural gender practices; historical approaches to the category of gender; constructionist, discursive, deconstructive, textual, and visual theoretical positionings; and material-discursive approaches, and its recent offshoots, such as ‘new materialist’ and ‘posthumanist’ approaches (see Hearn and Husu, 2011). In addition, there are major strands of theorizing from global, transnational, postcolonial, intersectional, STS (science and technology studies), queer and crip theorizing, as well as various attempts to combine or transcend these different approach.

Within marketing and consumer research, feminist perspectives and their potential contributions have been previously discussed by Bristor and Fischer (1993). They emphasize three major feminist traditions: liberal feminism, women’s voice/experience feminism, and poststructural feminism. Liberal feminism conceptualized women and men as being inherently the same, with their main (gender) differences resulting from unequal access to resources and opportunities. Women’s voice/experience feminism incorporated radical feminism and versions of socialist and psychoanalytic feminism, and conceptualized women’s experiences, bodies and socialization as inherently different to men’s, and perceived as inferior in dominant patriarchal perceptions. Poststructural feminism focused on the deconstruction of gender binaries from a basis of language and discourse, with the aim of opening spaces, thinking and practice on gender as multiple. These streams resemble or resonate with Kristeva’s ‘attitudes’ or ‘generations’ of feminism (cf. Moi, 1995),<sup>3</sup> often connected to feminist social movements frequently framed in three feminist waves (Gillis, Howie, Munford, 2004). Lorber’s (2005) reform feminism, resistance feminism, and rebellion feminism, and Harding’s (1991) feminist empiricism, standpoint feminism, and feminist postmodernism, respectively, can be seen as similar typologies (Table 1).<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1: Comparison of feminist framework**

<b>Bristor and Fischer, 1993</b>	<b>Harding, 1991</b>	<b>Lorber, 2005</b>	<b>Some key concepts of gender</b>
Liberal feminism	Feminist empiricism	Reform feminism	variable, constructed difference within sameness, role

<sup>3</sup> “1. Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality. Women 2. Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled. 3. (...) Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.” (Moi, 1995:12).

<sup>4</sup> Comparison of these three traditions can also be made with the framework of the variety of feminisms across, first, functionalism and interpretivism, second, radical structuralism, and, third, radical humanism (Hearn and Parkin, 1983), based on Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) sociological paradigms (cf. Arndt, 1985).

Women's voice/experience	Standpoint feminism	Resistance feminism	fundamental difference, interests, gendering, structuring, voice, experience, patriarchy
Poststructural	Feminist postmodernism	Rebellion feminism	identity, culture, deconstruction

Following these gender and feminist traditions, guided by Bristor and Fischer (1993), we discuss how they have been adopted in marketing and consumer research. In dialogue with these feminist frames, the following sections examine significant gender research within MCR. Significance here refers to a purposively selected range of gender research, based on which we analyse how Bristor and Fischer's (1993) feminist perspectives have been acknowledged or adopted, implicitly or explicitly. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we thoroughly studied gender and feminist-related research in dominant and high-ranking marketing and consumer research journals (such as the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research* and the *Journal of Consumer Research*); proceedings of ACR Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour conferences since their commencement in 1990; and other relevant publications, such as special issues, edited books, and relevant literature reviews. The resulting research streams relate to the following main gender and feminist theorizations: first, gender based on sex, and gender as variable, a binary constructed difference (within assumed sameness) and/or role, connecting with liberal feminism and feminist empiricism; second, gender as fundamental difference and structuring, connecting with women's voice/experience feminism and standpoint feminism; and third, culturalist approaches that draw on constructionist and discursive approaches, relating to poststructural and postmodernist feminisms. These are explained in some more detail in the subsequent section.

Following this reframing, examples of ‘missing feminisms’ that have emerged from feminist advances and been relatively neglected in this body of research are discussed. These include; queer theory; critical race, intersectional and transnational feminisms; and feminist materialist-discursive approaches. Lastly, we discuss one further ‘missing feminist’ perspective in more detail, the case of CSMM. This highlights which applications have dominated within the marketing disciplines, and which have ‘fallen off the grid’, and in turn speaks to the construction of the ‘marketing agenda’. In the light of this, it is argued that MCR has neglected several key contemporary gender and feminist theorizations, particularly those that centre on feminist politics and gender power relations.

*Gender in MCR as variable, constructed difference (in sameness) and role: links to liberal feminism and feminist empiricism*

Dominant research on gender in MCR has traditionally focussed on binary sex differences, rooted in sex roles (cf. Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Gilly, 1988; Fischer and Arnould, 1990), personality or identity scales (cf. Palan et al., 1999; Kiecker et al., 2000; Palan, 2001; Schertzer, 2008) or sex typing (cf. Graham, 1991). While some of this work can be linked to liberal feminism, the more prevalent research on sex/gender as a variable, or ‘gender effects’, absorbs gender into mainstream research. More recent examples include the measuring of sex differences in connection with advertising (cf. Fisher and Dubé, 2005; Dahl et al., 2009), brand responses (cf. Klink, 2009), and consumer loyalty (cf. Melnyk, van Osselaer and Bjimolt, 2009). Further examples of gender essentialization based on (women’s) biology emerged in studies of hormonal differences linked to consumer behaviour (cf. Durante et al., 2011; Wang and Griskevicius, 2013). Despite widespread critique of this work, including the conflation of sex and gender, or the reduction of gender based on

biology, psychology or fixed identity (Bettany et al., 2009), its persistence and high academic ranking highlights that marketing scholars continue to be particularly interested in understanding fundamental differences between men and women, and perhaps tacitly assume that these differences define gender. Further problems with the sex/gender role approach (Eichler 1980), include its lack of cultural specificity, its relative lack of analysis of power, change and social structures, its methodological difficulties in measurement scales, and its reification of masculinity/femininity dichotomies.

The connection to liberal feminism is therefore tentative for some of this work as it largely pursues a research agenda that is removed from advancing gender social relations. A distinction might therefore be usefully drawn here between sex/gender differences research in MCR that is non-feminist and mainstream in orientation, as in some of the above examples that essentialize 'gender', and other work on sex/gender differences, that is linked more explicitly to liberal feminist and feminist empiricism traditions and the social construction of gender. Moreover, we note that the neat division into sexed male and female consumers is not axiomatic.<sup>5</sup> Having said that, the feminist empiricist sex/gender model has prompted path-breaking work on gender, especially at social psychological, interpersonal and group levels. It remains a powerful, if somewhat limited, gendered way of researching marketing and consumers.

*Gender in MCR as fundamental difference and structuring: links to women's voice/experience feminism and standpoint feminism*

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<sup>5</sup> Critical feminist biologists, such as Fausto-Sterling (2000), have developed sophisticated, grounded accounts of how biology does not conform to a two-sex female/male model but is much more variegated in many possible sexes.

Feminist debates on the concept of gender has spawned kindred terms, such as gendering, (referring to how people, situations, objects and schemas can be given meaning, empirically and analytically, through gender) and gender structures. Some of the problems identified with sex/gender role theory and sex/gender differences approaches have led to a focus on various, more complex gender theorizations. Some early examples of ACR Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour conferences challenged essentialist and stereotypical assumptions about sex, gender and gender differences, and was subsequently published in leading journals, such as the *Journal of Consumer Research* (cf. Bristor and Fischer, 1993; Hirschmann, 1993; Stern, 1993a). Based on this, more structural, if not structuralist, feminist perspectives were introduced into marketing and consumer disciplines, resting on Marxist tenets that saw marketing, consumption and the advancement of women's interests as contradictory. In retrospect at least, they can be seen as representing a qualified movement towards a feminist standpoint epistemology which resonates with Bristor and Fischer's (1993) women's voice/experience feminist perspective, in which knowledge is linked directly to social positioning, and in which the social and bodily foundation of sex/gender is emphasized as a source of knowledge.

The introduction of such feminist perspectives became a catalyst for edited books (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 2000), feminist critiques of marketing's disciplinary developments (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 2005; Maclaran, Miller, Parsons and Surman, 2009), marketing industries (Maclaran and Catterall, 2000), and education (Stern, 1993b; Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999; 2002). Similarly, women's portrayal in advertising remains an important area of study at Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour conferences to this day (Gurrieri et al., 2014). Marketing and consumer history has been analyzed explicitly from

women's, and implicitly from structural feminist, perspectives (Maclaran, 2012; Tadajewski and Maclaran, 2013), though rarely in relation to theories of patriarchy.

These critiques, however, appear to have had limited impact on the structures of knowledge production. As Stern (1993b) noted at the second conference on gender and consumer behaviour, *The Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Marketing Research* did not feature any feminist articles, and this continues to be the case to this day. This potentially raises questions about the acceptance of feminist perspectives by the dominant, mainstream marketing academy. Interestingly, greater attention to feminism entered gender research in MCR at a time when poststructuralism became particularly influential in mainstream gender scholarship, and it is to this we now turn.

*Gender in MCR as cultural and identity constructions: links to poststructural and postmodernist feminisms*

Following particularly postmodernist and poststructuralist feminism, a range of MCR work emerged critiquing a previously assumed androcentrism and dominant masculine subject positions, seeking to deconstruct persistent binary opposites in marketing (cf. Peñaloza, 1994). Further examples include feminist critiques of the rhetoric of changing marketing concepts (Fischer and Bristor, 1994), and marketing's focus on the gendered body (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994). This work provided the groundwork for more critical engagements with women and gender, and the gendering of consumers, and promoted attention on cultural aspects and diversity (cf. gender, consumer behaviour and marketing conferences, Bode and Tolstikova, 2006; published articles such as Takhar, Maclaran, Parsons and Broderick, 2010; Ourahmoune and Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2012; and edited books, such as Otnes and Zayer, 2012). A consequence of these more critical perspectives was, at times, that a focus on the

consumer individualized gender, and liberatory postmodernist feminist perspectives further contributed to gender theorizations as based on managed identity projects (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Gender emerged as multiple, fluid, ambivalent and ambiguous, and markets became the discursive resource. The market as a source of empowerment, as opposed to oppression, characterised the troubled relationship between women, men and marketing (Scott, 2006a,b; Maclaran, 2012; Zayer, Sredl, Coleman and Parmentier, 2012).

Poststructuralist conceptualizations of gender as identity projects eventually linked this approach to consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), where the feminist connection to poststructural and cultural theories became muted or diluted (Bettany et al., 2009). Research on men and masculinities in MCR followed a similar path to feminist gender theorisations, as discussed in greater detail below. CCT aimed at understanding culturally situated consumer experiences and has become a growing sub-discipline that provided a new rubric for work on cultures and identities in consumer research. In a somewhat different way the concept of 'consumer culture' is also often gendered, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly in non-gendered mainstream studies. For example, consumption has often and historically been linked to femininity and the domestic, and production to masculinity and the public world (Östberg, 2012a, 2012b). A binary, bifurcated (Smith, 1990) and more static assumption of public and private, mirroring 'public' production and 'private' consumption, is distinct from a circulatory model where constructions of public/private and production/consumption/regulation/representation/identity (Hall, 1997:1) are entwined.

Outside CCT, there are some sub-fields of MCR where studies of gender and, to some degree feminism, have been rather extensive. For example, ACR gender, marketing and consumer behaviour conferences continue in their biennial format and are often connected to special



issues, such as this, or isolated publications. Nevertheless, the mainstreaming of feminist research, and the opportunity offered by feminisms in their variety has yet to be taken advantage of. We discuss some of these ‘missing feminisms’ in the following section.

### **Missing feminisms, and the case of men and masculinities**

This reframing, based on an updating of Bristor and Fischer’s (1993) work, has thus far sketched some of the dominant tendencies and broader themes of how marketing and consumer disciplines have employed feminist theory in gender research, implicitly or explicitly. As such, it has addressed the knowledge production process of gender within the discipline. Furthermore, from this framing we recognize that across the broad spectrum of MCR, certain approaches to the study of gender have dominated the research agenda, even within a certainly diverse discipline. Perhaps most importantly, several key contemporary gender and feminist theorizations are omitted. Indeed, there are many opportunities for further gendering in research on marketing and consumer research. A very important first contextual issue here is that questions of power, patriarchy and feminist politics more generally have often been downplayed in MCR’s engagement with gender and feminism, even in structural and poststructural approaches. So, what is missing from the framing so far – and specifically in terms of more recent developments in feminist theory and thinking?

#### *Queer theory*

First, since the late 1980s there have been major expansions of poststructuralist feminist theory through *queer theory* (for some links to MCR see Kates, 1999, 2000; Goulding and Saren, 1999), and related challenges to dichotomous views of gender echoed in crip theory (McRuer, 2006). These developments in feminism were not well reflected in Bristor and

Fischer's (1993) framing. A pervasive constraint in conceptualizing gender is the persistence of dichotomies. The 'troubling' of what are perceived as stable fixed identities (Butler, 1990) is the main analytical theme of queer theorists; gender and sexuality are theorized as a social construct that is unstable, fluid and subject to regulation through power/knowledge discourse. The disciplinary power of heteronormativity is destabilized when lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexual (LGBTQI+) experiences are made visible as political. Identities of age, class, ethnicity, racialization and sexuality *inter alia* intersect, creating new possibilities for gendered bodies that contest hierarchical binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, woman/man, and so on. This may offer new ways of thinking about how heteronormative attitudes and behaviours influence what it means to be an appropriate or 'successful' consumer. Although queer theorists have been cited by MCR scholars, this is not the same as explicitly developing queer MCR, especially beyond references to sexualities.

#### *Critical race, intersectional and transnational feminisms*

Second, alongside these deconstructions of sex, sexuality and gender, and even abolition of taken-for-granted sexual-gender categories, there has been a major growth of feminist scholarship on the connections and intersections of gender with other social divisions, within what has come to be known as *intersectionality theory* (for conceptualizations in MCR see Gopaldas and Fischer, 2012; Gopaldas, 2013). This has built on related perspectives such as *critical race theory* and *black feminism* (Hill Collins, 1990; for general discussions in MCR see Bristol and Fischer, 1995), and is in turn informed by and informing of global, postcolonial and *transnational feminisms* (Desai, 2006). Although critical race, intersectional and transnational perspectives have been raised in MCR, these have usually remained at

conceptual level or developed without a central focus on gender and feminism. We return to these connections later in the paper.

### *Material-discursive feminism*

Third, another largely ‘missing’, and increasingly important, approach concerns the intersection of poststructuralist and materialist theorizing of gender. There has been significant recent research on materiality in MCR in the form of assemblage and Actor Network Theory; (Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Epp and Price, 2010; Epp, Schau and Price, 2014), often linked to CCT (Bajde, 2013); however, theoretical roots in feminism and links to gender are rarely addressed (Bettany, Kerrane and Hogg, 2014). Some of the feminist theorists who are influential within this tradition, such as Donna Haraway and Karen Barad were specifically highlighted in the calls for the 12th Conference on Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behavior, and indeed this special issue (see also Borgerson, 2014; Vehviläinen, 2014). These developments mirror recent feminist science and technology studies (feminist technoscience) in which there is a (re)turn to materialism, beyond a strict separation of the material and the discursive/semiotic (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). Barad (2001, 2007) has shifted focus onto how matter comes to matter, extending discussion to non-human matter. Foundationally, Haraway (1989, 2008) has addressed how ‘matter’ is constructed, through human/non-human species interactions. In this view, gendering in MCR is in need of much more fundamental rethinking as contingent material-discursive processes, rather than the actions, behaviours or performances of individual or collective marketers or consumers.

### *Critical studies on men and masculinities: a case study*

Finally, a strand that has developed rapidly within feminist theory, and has been taken up to some extent within MCR has been *critical studies on men and masculinities*. Accordingly, to illustrate the potential for setting new research agendas through a broadening of gender and

feminist theorizations, we turn our attention to this case and its uneven adoption in MCR. Indeed gender is just as relevant in relations within genders, intersections of gender and other social divisions, and deconstructions of gender categories, but these theorizations have had limited impact on MCR. Moreover, the ‘missing feminisms’ of queer, intersectional, transnational and material-discursive feminisms noted are also major influences on and interact with contemporary developments in CSMM.

Critical studies on men and masculinities have been inspired by feminist, gay, queer and further critical gender scholarship. For some, to see men *as a topic* is still perhaps strange, and for this reason we provide a short introduction to the area before exploring how it has been adopted in MCR. The considerable growth of CSMM over recent decades has several implications for how men, marketing and consumer behaviour might be seen and understood, and how research in these fields might be fruitfully developed. The gendering of men involves both naming *and* deconstructing men and masculinities; distinguishing men as subjects or objects of analysis; and seeing men and masculinities as subject to change, no-change, and retrogressive change.

Over the last 40 years or more there has been relatively rapid growth of focused studies on men and masculinities (for example, Kimmel et al., 2005 [major handbook]; Flood et al., 2007 [encyclopaedia]; Whitehead, 2006 [five-volume reprint collection]; <http://www.xyonline.net/> [very large web resource]). There are now at least 16 specialist international refereed journals on men, boys and masculinities, as well as many journal special issues and international publishers’ book series. The wide-ranging international edited book, *Men’s Lives* (Kimmel and Messner, 2013), is now in its 9<sup>th</sup> edition. These many and various studies have shown there are as many ways of studying men and masculinities as there are approaches to the social sciences.

In theoretical terms, expansions of CSMM can be seen as developing from critical engagements towards both sex/gender role theory, and, to some extent, structuralist concepts of gender relations, such as patriarchy and male dominance systems; these latter perspectives have been largely neglected in MCR. Sex/gender role theory that was the dominant paradigm in gender research in the 1970s was subject to major critique as presenting static framings of men (Carrigan et al., 1985), and accordingly within CSMM this has been displaced by masculinities theory/ies (Kimmel et al., 2005).. Simultaneously, in the late 1970s feminist critiques of monolithic concepts of patriarchy and relatively fixed categorical approaches to gender (Rowbotham, 1979) appeared, resulting in differentiated, pluralized approaches to gender. This reformulation fitted closely with revisions of patriarchy as historical, multiple structures (Walby, 1986, 1990; Hearn, 1987, 1992). Gender could then be seen as about both plural femininities and masculinities, and structurally contextualized power-laden gender practices (Carrigan et al., 1985) – and increasingly also their deconstruction.

CSMM has a number of main features, beginning with the *specific*, rather than an implicit or incidental, *focus* on the topic of men and masculinities that takes account of *feminist, gay, and other critical gender scholarship*, and attends to the *explicit gendering* of men and masculinities. In this perspective men and masculinities are understood as *socially constructed, produced, and reproduced* rather than as just ‘naturally’ one way or another. Men and masculinities are analysed as *changing* across time (history) and space (culture), within societies, and through life courses and biographies. A central issue is the emphasis on men’s social relations between multiple men and multiple women, albeit differentially, to *gendered power*, spanning both *the material and the discursive* in analysis; and understood through the *intersections of gender with other social divisions* in the construction of men and masculinities (Connell, Hearn and Kimmel, 2005: 3). Overall, CSMM can be summarized as

*historical, cultural, relational, materialist, deconstructive, anti-essentialist* studies on men and masculinities.<sup>6</sup>

Relating these theoretical dimensions of CSMM to marketing and consumer research, we note that: first, there is growing momentum in studies of men and masculinities in relation to consumption; second, it tends to neglect connections with critical feminist/gender theory; it generally focuses on masculinities but out of the broader societal context and without attention to men's structural position(s) within the gender system called patriarchy; and third, one, perhaps the major, spur to the recent growing attention to men and masculinities has been from cultural studies and culturalist approaches.

Men have appeared in mainstream marketing research as part of gender as a variable or in studies of gender/sex differences. Although they often emerged in this work alongside women, both sexes were referred to as homogenous, fixed segments, with gender inscribed in unchanging identities or biology. In other instances, although men were, often explicitly, the main research participants, theorizations of their gender or gendering were not central to this work (cf. Belk and Costa, 1995; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Wooten, 2006). A deeper engagement with the field of men and masculinities, as influenced by cultural studies, commenced mainly with the study of representations and visualization. This work noted men's inversion or expansion of their gaze (Elliott and Patterson, 2002; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004; Rinallo, 2006),<sup>7</sup> leading to greater sensitivities that men too were gendered

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<sup>6</sup> The most important set of influences on CSMM has been propounded and developed by Connell and colleagues (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1995). This approach emphasizes: critique of sex role theory; use of a power-laden concept of masculinities located within patriarchy; men's unequal relations to men, as well as men's relations to women; and implications of gay scholarship and sexual hierarchies. More specifically, this has entailed distinctions between hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized (and sometimes other) masculinities; analysis of institutional/social, interpersonal and intrapsychic (psychodynamics) aspects of masculinities; and transformations and social change.

<sup>7</sup> see also Mulvey (1975), Neale (1992), Cohan and Hark (2012).

(Östberg, 2012a; 2012b; 2013). Beyond visual analyses, men's lives emerged as intertwined with images (Elliott and Elliott, 2005) and self-presentation as negotiated through popular and normative discourses (Östberg 2010). These negotiations of consumption norms, demarcated between safe and dangerous zones, highlighted the precarious nature of consumer culture for men (Rinallo, 2007). Although they were subject to change in socio-cultural contexts where popular masculine discourses ranged from the 'New Man' in the 1980s (Mort, 1988), to the backlash 'New Lad' of the 1990s (Nixon, 1990), the metrosexual (Tuncay, 2006; Tuncay and Otnes, 2008a; 2008b) and subsequently the übersexual (Rinallo, 2007) or retrosexual (Östberg, 2013), men's vulnerability and ambivalence remained particularly prevalent in consumption practices traditionally linked to the feminine (hence often gendering practices a priori), for example in shopping (Otnes and McGrath, 2001; Tuncay and Otnes, 2008a, 2008b).

In the wake of debates surrounding masculinity in crisis, consumption was equally found to become a resourceful arena for the construction of heroic (Holt and Thompson, 2004), phallic (Thompson and Holt, 2004) or productive identities (Moisio et al., 2013). Studies of men and masculinities thus became largely subsumed within a CCT tradition, addressing issues of style, fashion, body consumption, and 'new forms' of masculinities (cf. Edwards, 1997; Nixon, 1996, 2001; Mort, 1996; Simpson, 1994; Osgerby, 2001), with the notion of the commodified male contextualized within a society "that valorizes the superficial, the gaudy, the dominance of commodity culture" (Rojek, 2001: 90). There is in short a lure of the text and the visual. However, neither the gender differences nor the consumer culture approach attempted to challenge or critique existing gender power structures (based on feminist theorizations for example), whether culturally specific or not.

Although some studies adopted a more critical focus, for example, based on discussions of men in domestic roles (linking to the gendering of ‘the private’, cf. Gentry and Harrison, 2010; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013), in the context of relational aspects of men’s gender socializations (Littlefield and Ozanne, 2011), or humour in negotiating gender practices in intergroup relations (Hein and O’Donohoe, 2014), further political and structural aspects relating to issues such as patriarchy remained neglected. While this body of work has significantly broadened understandings and conceptualizations of gender within marketing and related disciplines, men and masculinities have tended to be examined in highly selective ways, potentially disregarding issues of power in gender relations. From this we suggest there is a need to go beyond the identifying of masculinities, and indeed femininities, as cultural, constructed, multiple and fluid, and point to a new agenda for gender analysis in MCR.

### **Concluding Discussion: Towards a New Agenda on Feminist Theory and Politics for MCR?**

In this concluding section, we highlight what we see as major current and ongoing debates at the interface of feminist theory, gender scholarship, politics and MCR: the first more substantive, the second more theoretical, and lastly a more direct relevance and implications for gender research in MCR.

#### *Power, structural inequalities, patriarchies and transnational change*

Whilst marketing and consumer research have been taking men and masculinities on board in specific, yet limited, ways, current broader and diverse developments on men and masculinities beyond MCR influenced by developments in feminist theory have now gone much further than identifying masculinities, masculine identities or masculine consumption



cultures (Petersen, 1987). Amongst these further wide-ranging developments are critiques of theory on masculinities, and indeed femininities.<sup>8</sup> To use the terms, masculinities and femininities, needs careful specification when applied in MCR – are they identity, practice, institutional patterns, structure, psychodynamics? Masculinities and femininities could be relevant in all of these ways, but the usage in question should be specified. This uncertainty around the meaning of masculinity has linked with debates on the exact usage of the Gramscian notion of hegemony.<sup>9</sup> To pursue such a feminist approach to marketing and consumer behaviour entails recognizing the location of men within gender power relations, including as superordinates – in terms of consumer power or the power of marketers and managers. Indeed, within dominant MCR there is a neglect of attention to men and masculinities in terms of men in power, whether as managers, owners or controllers of corporate management, finance, marketing, retail, advertising, or domestically, compared with the discourse of ‘new (man) consuming masculinities’. This is a fundamental lacuna. This leads onto the question of structural inequalities. Addressing broader structures and structuring processes of gender relations could further ignite discussions on issues surrounding political economy, for example, feminism and sustainability (Dobscha and Prothero, 2012), and broaden the limits of what we currently understand as marketing and consumption, as well as where gender plays a role and how it can be theorized. A key issue

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<sup>8</sup> For example, McMahon 1993; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Hearn, 1996, 2004, 2012b; Clatterbaugh, 1998; MacInnes, 1998; Petersen, 1998, 2003; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Demetriou, 2001; Whitehead 2002; Robinson, 2003; Howson, 2005; Schippers, 2007; Aboim, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from hegemonic masculinity, there have been explorations of ‘hegemonic heterosexual masculinity’ (Frank, 1987), ‘male hegemony’ (Cockburn, 1991), ‘the hegemonic male’ (Vale De Almeida, 1996), ‘hegemonic men’ (Dominelli and Gollins, 1997; Lorber, 2002), ‘hegemonic male sexuality’ (Mooney-Somers, 2005), and ‘the hegemony of men’ (Hearn, 2004). This involves re-examinations of the relevance of hegemony for CSMM from hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men, as far more taken-for-granted within gender hegemony (Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2005; Aboim, 2010). Specifically, the notion of men is far more hegemonic than masculinity. Masculinities may change but men’s individual and collective power may be little affected.

here is the persistence of patriarchy/ies, and related systems of male dominance, and such forms as neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1988), neoliberal patriarchy (Campbell, 2014), trans(national) patriarchies (Hearn, 2015), and structural gender inequalities, alongside the pervasiveness of transnational intersectionalities and ‘globalizing masculinities’ (Connell, 1998). This is partly through increasing impacts of transnational change and transnationalizations (Kaplan and Grewal, 1999; Connell, 2008; Donaldson et al., 2009; Hearn et al., 2013; Hearn, 2015).

In global and transnational debates and analyses of marketing and consumption, ‘culture’ still often becomes a legitimizing factor in the reproduction of gendered power. Further recognition and engagement with these issues may reorientate the gender research agenda, particularly regarding the role of marketing in the reproduction of gender inequalities. In contrast, an important part of these contemporary perspectives is the complexity of power relations, and the place of and change in men and masculinities in current contexts of postcolonialisms, racializations, neoliberalisms, technological change, transnationalizations, and transnational patriarchies. For example, note here the importance of seeing men and masculinities in relation to environmental sustainability, and future developments in ICTs, socio-technologies, sexualities, and composite social/virtual forms, in extending control by and control of men. This means framing consumption in terms of gendered environmental impacts. For example, men consistently travel further than women, men travel more by car, women more by public transport, and women’s trips tend to be more local. Explanations to these differences are linked to unequal gendered relations in the household and labour market and urban structures, as well as gender socialization. This means that men and women make different uses of shared transport systems (Transgen, 2007: 5).

Within any given income group ..., energy consumption differences between women and men are most pronounced in transportation. In the lowest income category, men expend 160% more energy on transport than women (21,372 MJ vs. 8,220 MJ). In the highest income category, men expend 48% more energy (75,624 MJ vs. 50,964 MJ). These differences shrink as income increases, but they do not disappear. They are significant because transportation is a major source of GHG emissions ... (Schiebinger, 2013, drawing on Rätty and Carlsson-Kanyama, 2009)

Other important contexts of where men and masculinities, power and consumption intertwine include processes of men's violence (Ellsberg et al., 2008; Hearn, 2012b), as indicated by UN reports.

Experts noted that notions of masculinities can be bound up with a number of factors, including the use and abuse of alcohol. Studies on partner violence in particular cite the harmful use of alcohol as presenting a complex contributing relationship to violence against women and girls, potentially exacerbating and increasing the severity of physical partner violence, as well as the first time perpetration of sexual assault. (UN Women, 2012)

The (re)production of unequal gender power relations has also been recognized as implicit in global health issues, such as increased HIV risk for women (STRIVE, 2014; Stöckl, Heise, and Watts, 2012) and, on the other hand, men's increasing suicide rates, which are exceeding death caused by cancer, road accident and coronary heart disease. Such conditions need to be seen alongside the de-centring of men, even dispensability, of certain men by age, class,

racialization or migration status that may or may not fall outside the world of consumption, but nevertheless provide a broader agenda for gender research.

### *Epistemology, ontology and knowledge construction*

An additional area of development concerns knowledge construction<sup>10</sup>. As already noted, in more recent feminist theory there are moves towards analysis that is *both* more materialist and more discursive, that is, material-discursive, material-semiotic or materialdiscursive (Hearn, 2014). This is especially important in relation to ontology, bodies, embodiment, violence and environmental threats (Haraway, 1992; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Hearn, 2014). Such a perspective links with feminist reconceptualizations of sex and gender, for example, as material-discursive, as gender/sex (Lykke, 2010), or gex (Hearn, 2012a) (the non-equivalence of male, masculine, masculinity, men), and the subversion, even abolition, of the taken-for-granted category of men as a social category of power (Schwalbe, 2014; Hearn, 2015). Gender categories are no longer fixed, but seen as subject to ontological and epistemological contestation. These kinds of theoretical debates are especially important in placing knowledge construction in marketing and consumer research into the bigger pictures of ‘North-South’ knowledge relations (Connell, 2008), and ecology, environmentalism, human-nature relations and trans-corporeality (Alaimo, 2010). For example, ‘the carbon footprint of masculinist (over)consumerism’ intersects with the ‘distant, cold neutrality’ of masculinist analysis of climate change (Alaimo, 2009). Such questions of knowledge construction illustrate the importance of determining which gender theories and which

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<sup>10</sup> For example, in summarizing feminist engagements with men and masculinities, Wiegman (2002) identified three dimensions: first, differences between women on how masculinity studies is constructed as positive or not for feminism, including rethinking sex-gender and the male bond; second, poststructuralist reconfiguring of the sex/gender relation, differences amongst men, and differences between masculinity and patriarchy; and third, female masculinity, and masculinity without men, through identification, not genetic corporeality.

feminisms are seen as appropriate, especially within the regimes of marketing, consumer research, and business and management studies, and perhaps especially their more critical branches. Knowledge construction is a central concern in how gender is brought into marketing and consumer research.

### *Implications for MCR*

Based on this reframing of selective existing and potential gender theorizations and their impacts on gender knowledge construction, the gender agenda in marketing and consumer research emerges as unfinished.<sup>11</sup> To be specific, the focus on gender in marketing and consumer research has arisen from analyzing consumers, as individuals or in gendered market segmenting and profiling, rather than consumption in and across societies. Consumers' gender is generally understood as biological, fixed or constructed as 'choice', reflecting the discipline's evolution from behaviourist perspectives. The consumer focus is complemented by assumptions of difference between women and men in gender research in marketing and consumer behaviour. This stands in contrast to recent advances in theorizations of gender that question this basic assumption as heteronormative. So when marketing research talks of gender in terms of gender differences, this assertion might be of ideological value (Hirschman, 1993): gender difference(s) continue to drive research, and may seem 'natural', so supporting existing hierarchies of disciplinary knowledge production. Furthermore, much gender research in marketing and consumer behaviour has adopted an interpretive approach whether sex role or culturalist, to its objects of study. Though this has

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<sup>11</sup> Echoing Bettany et al.'s (2009) assertions on the disciplinary status of gender, feminist discussions that commenced during the early 1990s within the discipline have yet to advance sufficiently in relation to contemporary feminist transdisciplinary debates that focus on continued global, social and structural inequalities.

been progressive within certain limits, it has been mainly related to individual experience, often rendering consumers as victims, heroes or most frequently 'negotiators' of norms. This, however, suggests that consumers have a choice to manoeuvre these norms, leaving such norms or structures unchallenged. Gender then becomes a question of lifestyle, of which 'option from the menu to choose', within given consumer cultures (Maclaran, 2012), stripped of political or social implications. Contrarily, gender is not always a choice (Butler, 1990) or a lifestyle that can be opted in or out of at any given moment in time; and even if it was, this does not address fundamental unequal gender power relations. Interpretive gender research in itself may not necessarily be so different from mainstream positivist research (Weber, 2004), though sometimes at least acknowledging different gendered realities. It is now tolerated in some business schools as not threatening (to 'the mainstream'), even if more critical than some versions of positivism. However, based on this mainstreaming, and considering close links between interpretivism and (some) feminisms, this may present opportunities to further introduce further feminist perspectives.

Similarly, in more recent years, poststructuralist, discursive, and deconstructive approaches have been adopted in some gender marketing and consumer research. These are often adopted without attention to their historical development in relation to structuralist, standpoint, and LGBTQ+ critiques. Poststructuralism is not dismissive of structure, but critical of structural totalizations; much discourse theory, whether Foucaultian or via Laclau and Mouffe is not anti-materialist; Butler's deconstructions rest on heavy engagement with Marxism; queer theory is a critical outgrowth of lesbian and gay politics. Forgetting such histories and connections can mean that 'new' theories, such as cultural studies theories, earlier constructed through Gramscian praxis of the former Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies

(Hall, 1982; Mort, 1998), can be used out of context, without their theoretical materialist or structuralist ‘baggage’.<sup>12</sup>

Above all, the word *power* is often sidelined in gender marketing and consumer research, even when power may be a dominant factor in gender relations. Issues of power are fundamental in all three areas previously highlighted: masculinities, power and hegemony; structural inequalities, patriarchies and transnational change; and epistemology, ontology and knowledge construction. Thus, we should address more explicitly the gendering of powerful consumers, power through consumption, alongside connections with gendered powerful marketers and marketing. Addressing power means identifying gender power within heteronormativity, racialization, embodiment, spatializations, virtualization, transnationalizations, and so on. In seeing gender relations as processes and practices/ed, rather than as men and women as different or isolated groups, research could focus on where, when and how gender becomes visible or invisible, subordinated or marginalized, along with mechanisms or structures facilitating this. Understanding power material-discursively, marketing research can productively engage with social divisions between consumers and marketers, locally and transnationally.

To conclude, we argue that feminism, or more precisely feminisms, have been insufficiently acknowledged in both the variety of strands in contemporary feminist theorizing and its socio-political impacts, and that these feminisms are of high value for future marketing and consumer research. Considering feminist advances and diversification into areas such as CSMM provides significant opportunities for reinterpretation or resurgence of feminist and

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<sup>12</sup> This is very similar to what has happened with masculinities theory. Originally framed by Connell (1983) through a Gramscian approach to hegemony, the multiple uses by others since have often reduced masculinities to local practices and discourses, out of structural context and without attention to legitimacy in reproducing patriarchy (see Hearn, 2004, 2012b: 594-595; Schwalbe, 2014). Masculinities can be discussed *ad infinitum*, but patriarchy is often taboo.

critical gender research in marketing disciplines. In the context of the politics of knowledge construction, gender and feminist research needs further prominence within marketing disciplines, as acknowledged by this special issue. Given the current dominance of research examining gender differences and culturalist gendered lifestyles, critical gender research has been ‘working from the margins’, challenging the mainstream from the ‘outside’, not reconstructing marketing and consumption through critiques of the dominant gender order. Our reframing highlights that critical feminist perspectives have not moved into ‘the mainstream’ of marketing and consumer research, and have been muted, diluted or sidelined. This may be due to dominant directions ‘interfering’ with this advancement, or a lack of engagement with fundamental feminist and gender theory in marketing and consumer research, which may have led to neglecting the ‘bigger’, political picture of research. Marginalization of critical perspectives that problematize gender structures and relations have meant that gender (theories and agendas) become attached to ‘something else’ (behaviourist agenda, consumer culture agenda, and related theories), rather than working towards the emancipation of feminist theory in its own right.

Given the rich, diverse and changing understandings of gender and feminisms, it may be difficult to comprehend what gender refers to, even making gender research appear a ‘lost cause’.<sup>13</sup> Gender is not everything, but we can understand it as one of few consistently fundamental structuring aspects of individuals and groups, bodies, experiences, relationships, societies and transsocieties. It has the potential of being all encompassing; yet this complexity makes it all the more difficult to tackle and its potential has yet to be embraced within marketing and consumer research. The diversity of feminist theorizations, including ‘missing feminisms’, may aid the process of politicizing gender research further and critically

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<sup>13</sup> To speak in marketing terms, feminism may be ‘incorrectly branded’ in terms of connecting with its political agenda, and thus without a clear ‘home’.



advancing understandings of gender in the field. Lastly, we need to acknowledge the centrality of knowledge (re)production in marketing and consumer research (Brownlie, Hewer and Ferguson, 2007), recognizing the vital importance of the politics of this process – including the political agenda in the gender agenda – for this changing discipline and the unfinished disciplining of gender.

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