

# **How Gender Identity Affects Consumer Behavior: Overview and Historical Analysis**

**Lilly Ye**  
**Frostburg State University**

**Mousumi Bose**  
**Fairfield University**

**Lou E. Pelton**  
**University of North Texas**

*Gender is a central part of self-concept. The concept of gender has evolved from biological sex (male and female) to gender identity that examines gender from multiple aspects, including biological sex, psychological gender, and sociological gender role. And recent studies further suggested gender identity is a changing concept, and it needs to be studied under different context and with dynamic groups. The current study reviews the historical development of gender identity concept and its impact on consumer behavior; and presents that gender identity has more impact on consumer behavior as it becomes increasingly explicit over the past 50 years. Through the review, the study also points to the future development of gender identity and its potential influence on consumer perceptions, cultures, and social marketing.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gender is one of the most profound social factors that shapes and constructs our individual activities and group experiences. Social scientists have long debated the epistemology of sex, gender roles, and gender identity. Traditionally, researchers have asserted that the physiological characteristics of gender (e.g., genitalia, hormones, and neurology) were inextricably linked to one's gender identity. The biological perspective ascribes to an overarching assumption that one's gender identity is a veritable given upon birth (Darwin 1958; Freud 1933; Jung 1958). However, in today's changing market place, gender identity is increasingly blurred as a consequence of one of the most rapid and turbulent social-economic shifts since the 1960s. As such, gender as a complex social-psychological construct, has been distinguished from sex in that sex refers to a person's physiological identity, while gender refers to psychological features associated with physiological sex that are socially constructed (Bem 1974a, 1981; Spence and Helmreich 1978). It is important to understand gender from multiple aspects, including physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects, as gender identity is increasingly taking center stage in brand narratives, advertising message, and consumer perceptions.

Practitioners are targeting emerging gender market segments based on this trend wherein the stereotypical roles may morph into those that are influenced by multiple factors. For example, the increased emphasis on physical attractiveness and the feminine side of men has translated into popularity of a new breed of men: the “Metrosexual.” - those that are heterosexual, hip, concerned with their appearance and in touch with their feminine side (e.g., soccer player David Beckham and New York Yankee baseball player Derek Jeter). Since “metrosexuality” surfaced in the U.S. market years ago, the phenomenon has continued to snowball and “metro” has become an appealing characteristic. Similarly, today’s women resist gender-based stereotypes and actively negotiate their gender identity through searching new social and sexual roles (Abrams 2003). They are actively engaged in traditional male consumption territory such as NASCAR viewing and driving of all-terrain and rugged-look jeeps. However, it is important to note that not all brands have modified their image to adapt to this new metro trend. Many other brands have defended the traditional understanding of gender. For example, “Porsche Man has been used to defend the brand’s masculine image, protecting it from being associated with femininity and fighting against gender bended brand image (Avery 2012). Thus, one finds an interesting spectrum of gender identification of brands along with tensions between brands that morph away from stereotypical gender roles and those that believe in protecting the traditional gender role.

As marketing managers are paying attention to gender market segments based on both biological sex and a more extended gender concept, gender identity, which understands gender from psychological and sociological perspectives, is also increasingly attracting attention from academia. In today’s marketplace, our society is more open to the self-expression of one’s gender identity, marketers target consumers with their psychological gender rather than mere physiological sex, and individuals create, enhance, and celebrate their own defined gender identity through consumptions and possessions (Avery 2012; Palan 2001). Palan (2001) reviewed gender identity in consumer behavior and suggested some significant correlation between gender identity and consumer behavior, however, the results were mixed with regard to the effect of philological sex and gender identity. While some studies indicated that gender identity helps predict certain consumer behaviors such as brand choice and advertising evaluation (e.g. Fisher & Arnold 1990; Grohmann 2009), some other studies suggested that sex is a better predictor (e.g. Gentry et al. 1979; Schemitt et al 1988). Palan (2001) suggested that ambiguity of conceptualization of gender identity somehow contributes to the contradictory findings. Nonetheless, research in the past decade indicated that the gender identity concept is better received in literature with its positive impact on consumers. Consumers are increasingly engaging in creating, enhancing and accomplishing their gender identity through consumption (Avery 2012). In the same vein, academicians are also studying the importance of gender identity in the context of consumption. For example, Grohmann (2009) developed femininity and masculinity as two important brand personality traits and suggested that these traits have a positive impact on brand attitude and brand loyalty. Thus, given the ambiguity in conceptualizing gender identity and the fact that gender identity is increasingly becoming salient in the marketplace and attract much more attention in the past decade, both academia and practitioners should look at gender identity from a broader and updated perspective.

This study attempts to revisit the gender identity and consumer behavior issue, present the practical and theoretical advance in the past decade, and provide a updated overview of gender identity and its impact on the marketplace and the society. This review addresses the historical background of gender development, the theoretical foundation of gender identity and its application in consumer behavior in the past 50 years. Through the examination of extant research on gender identity and consumer behavior, we can look into its potential influence on the marketplace and the society and formulate future research directions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Gender: Historical Biases**

Gender is one of the earliest self-concepts and it is also a central component of self-concept. Individuals use it as an organizing principle for themselves and societies throughout history (Spence

1985). As gender and its social roles continue to be much debated, it is imperative that historical gender perspectives from philosophy, biology, and social sciences be explored to garner a better understanding of the epistemology of gender. Prior to 1960s, there was a general acquiescence that women and men were fundamentally different, both psychologically and sexually: men were viewed as inherently the superior sex, and that inequalities were predetermined by sex (Bem 1981). Bem (1993) and Bussey and Bandura (1999) summarized the three historical gender biases — androcentrism, gender polarization, and biological essentialism — that remain embedded in Western culture and still have oblique assumptions regarding sex and gender roles. Androcentrism, or male centeredness, not only suggests that men are superior to women but also sets male experience as a neutral standard or norm while considering female experience as sex-specific (Bem 1993). The gender polarization offers a historically biased perception that women and men are fundamentally different from each other and further advocates using the difference to organize the social world, such as modes of dress, emotional expression, and social role-taking. Biological essentialism rationalizes and legitimizes androcentrism and gender polarization biases; it treats gender differences as the natural and inevitable consequence of biological selection and evolution (Bem 1993, Bussey and Bandura 1999). According to these views, men are predetermined to be masculine and women are predetermined to be feminine. Furthermore, men should have appropriate social roles while women should have other definite and distinct roles (Grosz 1994).

Early biological essentialists' perspectives have been challenged extensively. One essentialism pioneer, Briffault (1931) studied the animal world and presented opposite evidence about male and female characteristics. Unlike Darwin, Briffault (1931) believed that gender dominance is not the result of biology, but of economic structures. Mead's (1935) anthropological research also concluded that conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity varied in different cultural contexts. Following the earlier theorists, recent researchers from psychology and sociology further studied gender from various aspects and argued that, no matter how subtle the biological differences, the actual impact of biological differences depends on an individual's situational context. In other words, individuals are primarily shaped by surrounding social environments, not by fixed properties (Bem 1981; Dickson 1982; Deaux 1985; Martin 1999). As such, previous research based on androcentrism, gender polarization, and essentialism over-emphasizes gender differences, but ignores gender similarities.

Some gender studies have ascribed to a cognitive perspective, alleging that individuals are not passive recipients of environmental input. Rather, cognitive approaches to gender contend that individuals are active information processors. Through active information processing, individuals can make sense out of nonsense and make order out of non-order (Martin 1999). The importance of gender lies in its categorizing role of bringing coherence to the environment, and gender bias may result due to the limitation of the human cognitive processing (Martin 1981, 1999; Tajfel 1969). Based on the early works of psychological stereotype (e.g. Allport 1954; Lippmann 1922), Kohlberg (1966) applied the cognitive interpretations to the area of sex role development. Kohlberg (1966) presented a theoretical approach to how children play an active role in their own sex role socialization, and his works generated powerful influences on all later gender cognitive development theories. Today, the social functions related to gender cognition are widely accepted. The idea that perceivers form a picture in their minds about sex and the usefulness of gender information categorization have been the underlying themes of gender thinking in the field of cognitive psychology and social psychology (Martin 1999).

Though there is no consensus on what constitutes gender and gender-related attitudes and behaviors, researchers today tend to agree that gender is multi-faceted and complex (Carter 1987). Two dominant theories, based on the notion that gender identity is associated with both cognition and socialization, are gender schema theory (Bem 1974a) and multifactorial gender identity theory (Spence 1985). Some researchers have challenged the dominance of the two theories. Foreexample, Lee and Schmann (2009) proposed a new generation of gender theory, contextual gender identity theory (CGIT), that suggested that gender construct vary by context. However, most researchers today still use the gender schema theory and multifactorial gender identity theory as the bases to study gender related consumer behavior.

## **Gender Schema Theory**

As cognitive gender theories in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Kohlberg 1966; Maccoby 1966; Tajfel 1969) provide a fertile ground for the development of cognitive oriented gender approaches, psychologists began to embrace the cognitive notions of schemas and scripts. Gender schemas are the product of gender theory development. Three approaches independently address gender schemas in the earlier 1980s, including Bem (1981), Markus et al. (1982), and Martin and Halverson (1981). These approaches share common assumptions and themes but differ in emphasis.

Gender schema theorists assume that individuals develop naïve theories about their gender and use naïve thinking to organize information and make decisions. As such, gender development involves a transactional process in which social environments lead to the creation of gender schema and the formation of gendered ideas. Of the three gender schema theories, the one proposed by Bem (1981) is considered most relevant for explaining and predicting consumers' individual differences associated with gender schemas (Gould 1996; Palan 2001; Stern 1987).

Bem's (1974a) gender schema theory is similar to the cognitive development theory in acknowledging an individual's constructive cognitive process. However, the gender schema theory has some important departures. First, it considers only the master of gender identity (*a propos* the ability of children to see themselves and others as boys and girls) rather than the gender constancy necessary for gender schema development. Second, it incorporates social learning theory and suggests that gender salience is due to socially-determined distinctions, not merely due to a physical sex difference as proposed by cognitive development theory (Bussey and Bandura 1999; Levy and Fivush 1993; Martin and Halverson 1981). Yet, gender schema theory suggests that traditional sex typing may not occur, whereas social learning theory assumes that traditional sex typing is inevitable.

The gender schema theory proposed by Bem (1981, 1993) provides a compelling account of how individuals' beliefs and cognitions about gender form around salient social categories. Within the society, gender is used broadly as a classification scheme associated with masculinity and femininity. In this classification scheme, individuals develop certain gender schemas as they respond to different social categorizations. Once the gender schema is developed, individuals think or behave in ways consistent with the schema. Accordingly, people would be placed along a bipolar continuum, with a highly masculine person at one end and a highly feminine person at the other. People who process high degrees of masculinity or femininity are sex typed (or gender schematic), while those who process low degrees of masculinity and femininity and those whose masculinity and femininity mitigate together are non sex typed (or gender aschematic). Generally speaking, sex typed males and females are more likely to be influenced by their gender schemas.

## **Multifactorial Gender Identity Theory**

Though Bem's (1974a) gender schema theory has received a great deal of support from the academic community, some researchers cast doubt on the all-encompassing nature of global gender schematization (e.g. Ashmore 1990; Deaux 1985; Eagly, 1987). Several theoretical proposals have been advanced to further address gender as multi-faceted phenomena. One prominent theory that has often been applied to consumer behavior is Spence's multifactorial gender identity theory. Though the multifactorial gender identity theory acknowledges that the gender schema theory captures a very important aspect of gender identity, it denies that any observable gender difference in any given society is unifactorial. Rather, it argues that diverse types of observable gender difference are multifactorial (Edwards and Spence 1987; Spence 1985, 1993; Spence and Helmreich 1972, 1978).

Recent social psychology literature increasingly emphasizes how gender is constructed in social interactions and situations. The multi-factorial gender identity theory expands the cognitive perspectives and provides dynamic and multifaceted gender schemas.

The multifactorial gender identity theory pushes the limit on previous cognitive thinking and provides a more sophisticated and finely tuned set of gender-related cognition (Palan 2001; Spence 1991). Spence and Helmreich (1978) called for a more restrictive definition of masculinity and femininity and preferred to describe the two traits as instrumentality (masculinity) and expressivity (femininity). Due to the

multiple causal nature of human behavior, the predictability of the two traits in regard to global outcome variables is not possible. Specifically, Spence (1993) proposed that children develop a sense of gender identity that is relatively invulnerable to change. Once gender identity is established, other factors will increasingly take over. Factors such as social norms and socialization may continually dis/confirm an individual's sense of gender identity. These gender differentiating factors are developed based on different individual histories and are not necessarily related to sex (Edwards and Spence 1987). Thus, the two core gender personalities: instrumentality and expressiveness are used to measure individuals' desirable aspects of gender personality traits, but not to individuals' multiple gender concepts such as gender schematization. Other variables, in addition to instrumental and expressive traits, needed to be incorporated to understand gender-related behaviors (Spence 1993).

Both gender schema and multifactorial gender identity theory state that gender personality traits (masculinity and femininity) are as important as philological sex in shaping individual behavior. While gender schema theory emphasizes measuring one gender factor, gender personality traits (femininity and masculinity), multifactorial gender identity theory requires incorporating several different factors. Though there is no consensus about what specific factors comprise gender identity, researchers tend to agree that gender identity must go beyond sex to include at least psychological gender (femininity and masculinity, the gender schema theory view) and gender role attitudes (Ashmore 1990; Palan 2001; Spence and Sawin 1985, the multifactorial gender theory view). Since 1960s, researchers have applied gender identity theories to understand the role of gender identity in consumer behavior, and have documented significant impact of gender identity on consumers' information processing, brand choice, gift giving, sports participation, and others. Although there are limited numbers of studies in the field, the effort to link gender identity and its relevance in consumer behavior has been consistent over the last few decades.

### **Gender Identity and Consumer Behaviors**

Western societies have changed dramatically over the past 50 years, and the mere assumption that men and women behave differently in terms of consumption becomes outdated and misleading for both marketing scholars and practitioners (Palan 2001; Stern 1988). Since the 1960s, researchers have begun to introduce gender identity theories and study different aspects of gender (other than sex) and suggest its possible impacts on consumer behaviors. Though only limited studies address multiple gender effects and consumer behavior, research in the area has continued unabated.

Gender shapes consumer behaviors in several ways. Previous research suggested that in addition to sex roles, individuals' levels of masculinity and femininity or their degrees of egalitarian gender attitudes may impact their information processing (Kempf et al. 1997; Palan et al. 2001), advertising attitude (Jaffe 1991), gift shopping (Fischer and Arnold 1990, 1994), art involvement and leisure activity (Gainer 1993; Gentry and Doering 1979), fashion consciousness (Gould and Stern 1989), and product and brand choices (Vitz and Johnson 1965, Fry 1971, Kahle and Homer 1985; Worth et al. 1992). Although these studies suggest that gender, as a multifactorial construct, is an important predictor in understanding various aspects of consumer behavior, some other researchers argued that sex is a better predictor than other gender effect variables in explaining consumers' self-descriptions, feelings, attitudes, and choices (Roberts 1984).

To present an accurate picture of gender and its effects on consumer behavior, Stern (1988) and Palan (2001) reviewed related literature and concluded that the insignificant findings regarding multiple gender effects and consumer behaviors are largely due to: 1) inappropriate operationalization and interpretation of gender, and 2) effect of time. For example, gender effects surfaced in 1980s and appeared to be implicit in its changes at that period. As a result, the up-to-date gender changes would not be apparent in some early consumer studies.

The new millennium provides an unprecedented opportunity to "wipe the slate clean, to abandon concepts, models and formulations once thought liberatory now considered incarceratory: to start afresh on the other side of the year 2000" (Brown 1999, P. 6). In the postmodern society, gender effects are increasingly becoming explicit (Kacen 2000; Holt and Thompson 2004). Consumers actively engage in creating and maintaining a sense of gender identity through the display of purchased products and brands

(Belk 1988; Holt and Thompson 2004; Spolter et al.). As gender identity becomes increasingly blurred, consumers use products/brands to fit their own gendered image and to show others a gendered self that may go beyond sex and traditional sex roles. Palan (2001) reviewed the literature in gender identity and consumers and provided insights on gender identity study in the new millennium. lately, researchers were not only increasingly interested in understanding different aspects of gender identity, but also investigated the dynamic nature of gender identity and its profound impact on consumer and society. This study followed Palan (2001) and summarized and updated researches on gender identity and consumer behavior in the last 50 years (from 1960s to 2016, see Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
**SUMMARY OF GENDER IDENTITY & CONSUMER BEHAVIOR STUDIES**  
**MODIFIED AND UPDATED BASED ON PALAN (2001)**

Research	Sample	Scale <sup>a</sup>	Result
Aiken 1963	300F	CPI	Significant positive correlation between femininity traits and decoration, interest, and conformity dress clusters.
Vitz & Johnson 1965	97F 97M	CPI	Significant positive correlation between smokers' masculine personality traits and masculine cigarette brand image.
Fry 1971	216M&F	CPFI	Feminine individuals, including males and females, prefer cigarette brands with feminine brand images. And there is a stronger effect when individuals have higher self-confidence.
Morris & Cundiff 1971	223M	CPI	Males with high feminine traits and high anxiety have more unfavorable attitudes toward feminine hair spray products than do males with low or medium feminine traits.
Tucker 1976	13M	PAQ	Traditional sex roles are blurring relative to gender identification.
Burns 1977	99F	PAQ	Masculinity is a significant determining factor in wife's decision making power.
Gentry & Doering 1977	100M 100F	CPI PAQ	Psychological gender is a stronger predictor of attitudes toward leisure activities. However, biological sex is a better predictor than psychological gender for both attitudes and usage difference of different leisure categories.
Gentry et al. 1979	100M 100F	CPI PAQ	Biological sex accounts for more variability than gender traits with respect to perceptions of leisure activities.
Gentry & Doering 1979	100M 100F	CPI PAQ	Biological sex is more strongly related to attitudes and usages of leisure activities than is gender identity.
Golden et al. 1979	307M&F	BSRI (Long)	Biological sex is significantly related to product sex-typing, while gender identity is not.
Allison et al. 1980	174M 133F	BSRI (Long)	Sex is a better predictor of product perception than gender role self-concept. Product sex typing is based on sex, product, and interaction between sex and product.

**TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)**

Research	Sample	Scale <sup>a</sup>	Result
Martin & Roberts 1984	125M&F	BSRI (Long)	Psychological gender is significantly related to performance expectations of women entrepreneurs, while gender role attitudes significantly related to expectations of proven individuals regardless of their sex.
Gentry & Haley 1984	86M 82F	PAQ	Biological sex is a better predictor for ad. recall and ease of recall than is psychological gender. Furthermore, psychological gender within sex is more interesting than gender identity between sexes.
Coughlin & O'Connor	420M&F	BSRI (Long)	Masculine gender identity explains more difference in purchase intention as a reaction to female role portrayals in ad. than does biological sex.
Kahle & Homer 1985	84M 55F	BSRI (Long)	Biological sex is a better predictor for food preferences than is psychological gender.
Barak & Stern 1986	614F	BSRI (short)	Baby boomers and pre-boomers interpret sex role differently. Furthermore, masculinity scales seem to be self-assurance index, which may be more important to consumer behavior than femininity scales.
Qualls 1987	89M 89F	BSRI (Long)	BSRI, as a measure of sex role orientation, is positively related to household influence.
Stern et al. 1987	380F 380M	SIS	Develop SIS scale to examine psychological gender. However, SIS is strongly correlated with biological sex.
Jaffe & Berger 1988	100F 111M	BSRI (Short)	Psychological gender is significantly related to preference for sex role positioning in advertising, but the relationship differs by product categories.
Schmitt et al. 1988	120F	BSRI (Long)	Biological Sex is a better explanatory variable than psychological gender with respect to recall, choice and memory tasks.
Gould & Stern 1989	65M 70F	BSRI (Long)	Biological sex is a better predictor of fashion attitudes than psychological gender, but psychological gender is more important in examining within sex and between sex differences.
Fischer & Arnold 1990	299M&F	BSRI (Long)	Feminine gender traits are positively related to involvements in Christmas gift shopping for both men and women; Men are likely to be more involved if they hold egalitarian gender role attitudes.
Gould & Weil 1991	59M 68F	BSRI (Long)	Biological sex is a better predictor than psychological gender in explaining feelings, attitudes and gift choice. However, psychological gender is useful in explaining within-group difference.

**TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)**

Research	Sample	Scale <sup>a</sup>	Result
Jaffe 1991	200F	BSRI (Short)	Psychological gender is a useful predictor of women's response to advertisement. Masculinity is the driving force in explaining women's response to ad.
Worth et al. 1992	40M 72F	PAQ	Consumers prefer products described in terms of congruity with their self-perceived schema for masculinity or femininity; Interaction between consumers' self image and the type of product information conveyed is more important in influencing product evaluation than either of these factors alone.
Gainer 1993	147M 210F	BSRI (short)	Both sex and feminine gender traits affect art attendance indirectly through involvement. Furthermore, Feminine gender traits directly affect involvement, while biological sex indirectly affects involvement as a result of childhood experience with arts.
Gould & Stern 1993	135M&F	BSRI (Long)	Females are more privately gender-conscious than males.
Fischer & Arnold 1994	299M&F	BSRI (Long)	Both psychological gender and gender role attitudes explain more differences in Christmas shopping than biological sex.
Garst & Bodenhausen 1997	211M	GAI	Men who endorse traditionally masculine gender role attitude did not alter their attitude after exposure to non-traditional depictions of men.
Kempf et al. 1997	105M&F	PAQ	Psychological gender accounts for variance in several different measures of advertising processing confidence, including brand belief confidence, attitude toward the ad confidence and generalized information processing confidence, which is beyond what is explained by biological sex.
Palan et al. 1999	64M 51F	BSRI (Short) SIS PAQ	SIS scale is highly correlated with biological sex.
Palan, Areni & Kiecker 2001	64M 51F	BSRI (Short)	Men's involvement in gift exchange is sometimes incongruent with society's gender role expectation. Masculine male are far more likely than feminine male to recall gift giving experiences. Furthermore, feminine individuals are person-focused while masculine individuals were object focused.
McCabe 2001	529M& F	PAQ	Femininity traits are predictors for individual's psychological involvement with sports. Furthermore, gender role attitudes affect psychological involvements with sports.



**TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)**

Research	Sample	Scale <sup>a</sup>	Result
Hogg & Garrow 2003	13F 12M	BSRI (Long)	Consumers' responses to ad. differ on the basis of psychologically based self-schemas of gender identity: Masculine sex typed individuals may be less likely to access or use information presented within a given advertisement.
Tuncay 2005	431M& F	BSRI (Long)	Men who are androgynous or individual who are high in both femininity and masculinity traits may be negatively impacted by idealized gender images when they engage in self evaluation.
Feiereisen et al. 2009	1654	BSRI (short)	Gender identity congruity can positively elicit positive responses to advertising appeals.
Grohmann 2009	371M& F	Sex Role Identity	Developed femininity and masculinity as brand personality. The congruence between femininity (Masculinity) brand personality and self-concept can increase consumers' positive response.
Ye et al. 2012	152M 150F	BSRI (Short)	Psychological gender has a strong effect on consumers' brand perception
Ulrich 2013	212M 208F	PAQ	Consumers with traditional gender role attitudes are significantly more reluctant to accept cross-gender brand extensions, while no significant impact found for biological gender and psychological gender.
Spolter et al. 2015	19M 64F	BSRI (Short)	Self-gifting activates the masculine self-concept, while interpersonal gift giving activates the feminine self-concept.

<sup>a</sup> Different measurements were used in gender identity studies:

CFI (California Psychological Inventory) is based on the unidimensional gender identity model and treats masculinity and femininity as bipolar opposites. It was not used in consumer research after 1970s.

BSRI (Bem's Sex Role Inventory) and PAQ (the Personal Attributes Questionnaire) have dominated gender identity research since 1980s. Both scales treat masculinity and femininity as orthogonal constructs. BSRI has a long version (60 items) and a short version (20 items).

Other scales, SIS (Sexual Identity Scale) and GAI (Gender Attitude Index) were rarely used. SIS was found significantly related to sex and thus had no extra meanings (Palan 1999).

## CONCLUSIONS

As suggested in table 1, previous research demonstrates that gender identity has attracted consistent research attention, but inconsistent conceptual and contextual approaches. The past 50 years' research established that gender identity, as a salient and central identity, has not only defined who we are but also shaped our consumption, from how we process advertising information (Gentry & Haley 1984) to how we select brands (Ulrich 2013); from gift giving (Spolter et al. 2015) to sports participation (McCabe 2001). Gender identity has become pervasive in consumers' everyday lives.

Recent research further confirmed that gender identity is positively related to consumer behavior, and it helps explain meaningful variations on how consumers perceive, select, and use products and brands. Though earlier studies suggested that biological sex, rather than gender identity, serves as a better predictor for consumers' attitude and preference, however, recent studies indicated that gender identity is

a separate and strong dimension to understand the concept of gender, and we need to go beyond biological sex to include this important dimension in gender related studies.

The review of literature on gender identity and consumer behavior shed light on marketing theory, practice, and society. First, the literature review in the past 50 years provides an answer to the debate over whether psychological gender traits should be taken into account to study sex or gender related issues. Previous literature, especially the studies from the last decade, points out that psychological gender traits may be as important, if not more important, predictors of consumer behavior as physiological sex (Grohman 2009; Spoltor et al 2015). Psychological gender traits, including femininity and masculinity, both have unique and independent relationship with consumers' consumption. When gender congruity is supported, gender personality traits (masculinity and femininity) are better predictors than biological sex in explaining consumers' perception, such as advertising and brand attitudes (Feiereisen et al. 2009, Ye et al. 2012). In addition, recent research examined the dynamic and interactive nature of gender identity and suggested the application of contextual and interactional considerations to better complement gender identity theories.

The review of literature also indicates that gender identity is linked with consumer behavior. Managers need to prepare for a changing market with new gender identification. Market segmentation counsels that managers must carefully target gender-based segments to create positive consumer experience. If marketers just do business as usual and segment consumers by the physiological sex categorization, they would miss potentially beneficial segmentation opportunities that may be more efficient for allocating marketing resources. Rather than simply believing and perpetuating the view that Men are from Mars and Woman are from Venus (Gray 1992), it may be beneficial to identify the physiological, social, and psychological factors that contribute to gender-related consumer consumption. Furthermore, understanding gender identity will help managers formulate more effective communication strategy. As Schroeder and Zwick (2004) stated that gender remains central to the world of advertising and consumption, and managers need to apply gender identity in advertising to better speak to consumers' central identity based on psychological and sociological scheme.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Despite previous research efforts, gender identity and its related consumer behavior is still a understudied area. In practice, gender still takes center stage in many brand narratives and communications, such as the Old Spice Man who advocated: "ladies, you want your man smell like a man". And the gendered self-image not only affect consumers' product and brand choice, but also their self-defined roles in the society. Furthermore, gender identity is shaped by culture and social changes. Thus, it is important for marketing researchers to better understand gender and its impact in the future.

### **Gender Identity and Consumer Perception**

While much research to date have documented that the meaning of masculinity and femininity have blurred, some further suggested that gender identity and consumer behavior are not only related, but also exhibit a dynamic interaction given different contexts (Lee and Schuman 2009). For example, there has been tremendous discussion on social media about rompers for men. While construction workers, hazmat specialists and military aviators have been using some versions of such rompers for decades, the discussion has become intensive when such attire is used for making a gender bended fashion statement. Are contexts such as fashion compared to work creating such discussions or is the perceived seriousness of the purpose of consumption responsible for such differences in reactions? And how consumers embrace and create gender markers via product and brand consumption? Therefore, future research may explore the relevance of contexts as an important variable for gender identity. In addition, it is important to use a dynamic approach to understand gender as a comprehensive concept, and future study should examine the interaction between different aspects of gender identity and how these interactions lead to different consumer perception and choice.

On the other hand, as the boundaries of men and women are becoming permeable in consumption, many products and brands were using gender bended message rather than traditional sex association to communicate with consumers. However, Avery (2012) discussed how a gender-bending brand might encounter troubles when tapping into the segment occupied by the opposite sex. For example, Porsche Cayenne SUV male drivers engaged in hyper masculine behavior to defend their masculinity and disassociate themselves from potential femininity perception, and ensured their position in the “Porsche Man” brand community. Some marketers also distanced their brand image from feminine image by using slogan as “It is not for women” (Dr. Pepper). The tension between traditional sex role and changing gender identity might be an interesting research avenue. Future study might explore how consumers maintain the balance between the dichotomous pole of masculine and feminine gender identity, and understand the difference between men and women as they create gender related self-image.

### **Gender Identity and Culture**

Gender identity is closely related to cultural change. On one hand, there is evidence of consumers devoting themselves to maintaining the boundaries of traditional gender identity, on the other hand, popular culture tries to embrace gender as a much more blurred concept today. For example, while some consumers reject the blurred gender diversity and devote themselves to the traditional notion of gender identity through brand community (e.g. Porsche’s male owners use masculinity to define ingroup consumption, Avery 2012). some consumers have rejected traditional gender roles, displaying characteristics or partaking in activities traditionally associated with the opposite sex. Thus, gender identity is becoming an evolving concept that will be consistently challenged by popular culture, and thus it challenges marketing researchers to investigate the development of gender identity and its potential and pervasive impact on consumers and society. Furthermore, there are some consumers who may consider themselves in the light of traditional gender identities but may adapt their physical appearance to look androgynous. This outward androgyny has been used as a fashion statement and some of the milder forms (women wearing men's trousers/men wearing skirts, for example) are not perceived as transgender behavior. Therefore, it is important for future research to not only document such changes but also to understand the underlying socioeconomic and cultural changes that are drivers of such behaviors.

Whereas popular culture shapes gender identity and creates gender related consumption, there is also an urgency of anti-gender activities, agenderism, that calls for genderless consumption. In agenderism, the division of people into women and men (in the psychological sense), is perceived to be erroneous and artificial. Agendered individuals are those who reject gender labeling in conception of self-identity and other matters. They see their subjectivity through the term "person" instead of "woman" or "man" and the mix of these would vary across persons. What disappears in the idea of genderlessness is any expectation that some characteristics and dispositions are strictly attributed to a person of any biological sex. It is important that future research investigates the factors that drive agenderism and its role in modifying consumption.

### **Gender identity and Social Marketing**

Understanding the relationship between gender identity and consumer behavior also has a positive impact on society. Gender image and gender embedded cues are widely used in advertising and other marketing communications. Stern (1999) found the replete across contemporary advertising messages and media, “neither men nor women were treated without ideological ‘should’ in the standard sexual myths and stereotypes that dominate Western culture” (P. 7). Marketers are inclined to apply idealized gender role image in their advertising. For gender, schematic individuals, these idealized images may reinforce existing beliefs about their gender identity. However, for androgynous individuals, such images and advertisements may negatively impact their identity (Tuncay 2005). Thus, it is important to not only understand the broader social impact of advertising on gender identity but also to understand the impact of traditional gender roles in marketing communications among individuals where these traditional roles are blurred and challenged.

Furthermore, the role gender identity plays in conflicts in consumption is an important aspect that calls for future exploration.. From a consumers’ welfare perspective, gender role discrepancies have been

linked to certain social problems, such as eating disorders, role conflict, and depression (Tuncay 2005). It is important for marketers to overcome the stereotyped notion of gender that strengthens sex differences and advocates stereotypical gender roles. Though sociologists have documented the negative effect of gender discrepancy and the related social behavior, there are limited studies to understand the social effect or the dark side of gender related consumption. For example, future studies should pay attention to understand how egalitarian metrosexual consumers and traditional housewives respond to gender bending advertisements and brand message differently, and how feminine or masculine brand image will help enhance consumers self-image and reduce compulsive shopping when it is related to certain gender identity characters of the consumer . It is marketers' social responsibility to communicate to consumers up-to-date and balanced gender images, and this effort might lead to a healthier and more balanced society.

## REFERENCES

- Abrams, Laura S. (2003). Contextual Variations in Young Women's Gender Identity Negotiations. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 27 (1), 64-74.
- Aiken, Lewis, R (1963). The Relationships of Dress to Selected Measures of Personality in Undergraduate Women. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 59, 119-128.
- Allison, Neil K., Linda L. Golden, Gary M. Mullet, and Donna Coogan (1980). Sex-typed Product Images: The Effects of Sex, Sex-Role Self-Concept and Measurement Implication. *Advance in Consumer Research*, 7, 604-609.
- Allport, Gordon, W. (1954), *the Nature of Prejudice*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.
- Ashmore, D. Richard (1990). Sex, Gender, and the Individuals. *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*, Eds. Lawrence A. Pervin, New York: Guilford, P486-526.
- Avery Jill (2012). Defending the Markers of Masculinity: Consumer Resistance to Brand Gender-Bending. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 29, 322-336.
- Barak, Benny and Barbara Stern (1986). Sex-Linked Trait Indexes Among Baby-Boomers and Pre-Boomers: A Research Note. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 14, 204-209.
- Belk, Russell W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139-168.
- Bem, Sandra, L. (1974a). Sex Role Adaptability: One Consequence of Psychological Androgyny. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 634-43.
- Bem, Sandra, L. (1981). Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex Typing. *Psychological Review*, 88, 354-364.
- Bem, Sandra, L. (1993), *the Lens of Gender*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Briffault, Robert (1931), *the Mothers, the Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins*, New York: Macmillan Company.
- Brown, S. (1999). Premonitions of Paradiso: Millennial Madness, the end of the end of marketing. *Proceedings of the Marketing Paradiso Conclave*, University of Ulster, Belfast, 1-13.
- Burns, Alvin C. (1977). Wives' Masculine-Feminine Orientations and Their Perceptions of Husband-Wife Purchase Decision Making. *Contemporary Marketing Thought: 1977 Educators' Proceedings*. Eds Barnett A. Greenburg and Danny N. Bellenger. Chicago: American Marketing Association, 521.
- Bussey Kay and Albert Bandura (1999). Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676-713.
- Carter, Bruce (1987). *Current Conceptions of Sex Roles and Sex Typing: Theory and Research*, New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Charles F. Halverson (1981). A Schematic Processing Model of Sex Typing and Stereotyping for Children, *Child Development*, 52, 1119-34. *Communication and Getting What You want in Your Relationships*, NY, New York: Harper Collins.
- Coughlin, Mauren and P.J. O'Connor (1985). Gender Role Portrayals in Advertising: an Individual Difference Analysis. *Advance in Consumer Research*, 12, Eds. Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Morris B. Holbrook. Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research, 238-241.
- Darwin, Charles (1958), *Autobiography: With Original Omissions Restored*, London, UK: Collins.
- Deaux Kay (1985). Sex and Gender. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 36, 49-81.
- Dickson, Peter (1982). Person-Situation: Segmentation's Missing Link. *Journal of Marketing*, 46, 56-64.
- Eagly, Alice H. (1987), *Sex Difference in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Edwards, Valerie J. and Janet T. Spence (1987). Gender-Related Traits, Stereotypes, and Schemata. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(1), 95-108.
- Feiereisen, Stephanie, Broderick A.J., and Douglas S.P. (2009). The Effect and Moderation of Gender Identity Congruity: Utilizing "Real Women" Advertising Images. *Psychology and Marketing*, 26(9), 813-843.

- Fischer, Eileen and Stephen J. Arnold (1990). More Than a Labor of Love: Gender Roles and Christmas Gift Shopping. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (30), 333-345. Fisher, Eileen and Stephen Arnold J. (1994). Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Role Attitudes and Consumer Behavior. *Psychology and Marketing*, 11(2), 163-182.
- Freud, Sigmund (1933). *The Psychology of Women*. in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, New York: W. W. Norton.
- Fry, Joseph N. (1971). Personality Variables and Cigarette Brand Choice. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 8, 298-304.
- Gainer, Brenda (1993). An Empirical Investigation of the Role of Involvement with a Gendered Product. *Psychology & Marketing*, 10(4), 265-283.
- Garst, Jennifer and Galen Bodenhausen (1996). Family Values” and political Persuasion: Impact of Kin-Related Rhetoric on Reaction to Political Campaigns. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 26(9), 1119-1137.
- Gentry, James W. and Mildred Doering (1977). Masculinity-Femininity Related to Consumer Choice. *Contemporary Marketing Thoughts*. American Marketing Association Proceedings, 1977, 423-427.
- Gentry, Michael and Mildred Doering (1979). Sex Role Orientation and Leisure, *Journal of Leisure research*, 11, 102-111.
- Gentry, Michael S. and Debra Haley (1984). Gender Schema Theory as a Predictor of Ad Recall. *Advance in Consumer Research*, 11, 259-264.
- Golden, Linda L. Neil Allison and Mona Clee (1979). The Role of Sex Role Self-Concept in Masculine and Feminine Product Perception. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 6 Ed. William Wilkie. Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research, 599-605.
- Gould, Stephen J. (1996). Gender Identity and Gender Salience: a Dual-Path, Person-Situation Approach to Gender Effects in Consumer Research. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 23, 478-483.
- Gould, Stephen J. and Barbara Stern (1993). Gender Consciousness: A Procedural Aspect of Gender-Based Schematic Processing. *Gender and Consumer Behavior Conference Proceedings*. Ed. Janeen Costa, Provo UT: Association for Consumer Research, 206-212.
- Gould, Stephen J. and Claudia E Weil (1991). Gift-Giving Roles and Gender Self-Concepts. *Sex Roles*, 24 (9/10), 617-637.
- Gould, Stephen J. and Barbara B. Stern (1989). Gender Schema and Fashion Consciousness. *Psychology and Marketing*, 6(2), 129-145.
- Gray, John (1992), *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving*
- Grohmann, Bianca (2009). Gender Dimensions of Brand Personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46, 109-115.
- Grosz, Elizabeth (1994). *the Essential Difference*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hogg, Margaret K. and Jade Garrow (2003). Gender, Identity and the Consumption of Advertising. *Qualitative Marketing Research*, 6(3), 16-74.
- Holt, Douglas B. and Craig J. Thompson (2004). Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 425-440.
- Jaffe, Lynn (1991). Impact of Positioning and Sex Role Identity on Women’s Response to Advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 31(3), 57-64.
- Jaffe, Lynn and Paul D. Berger (1988). Impact of Purchase Intent of Sex Role Identity and Product Positioning. *Psychology and Marketing*, 5(3), 259-271.
- Jung, Carl G. (1958), *The Undiscovered Self*: Boston, MA: Little Brown
- Kacen J. Jacqueline (2000). Girl Power and Boyyy Nature: the Past, Present, and Paradisal Future of Consumer Gender Identity. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 18(6/7), p345-355.
- Kahle, Lynn R. and Pamela Homer (1985). Androgyny and Midday Mastication: Do Real Men Eat Quiche? *Advance in Consumer Research*, 12, 242-246.

- Kempf, DeAnna S., Kay M. Palan, and Russell N. Laczniak (1997). Gender Differences in Information Processing Confidence in an Advertising Context: A Preliminary Study. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24, 443-449.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence (1966). A Cognitive Developmental Analysis of Children's Sex Role Concepts and Attitudes. *The Development of Sex Difference*, Ed. E. Maccoby, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp.82-173.
- Lee, Eun-Ju and Schumann D.W. (2009). Proposing and Testing the Contextual Gender Influence Theory: an Examination of Gender Influence Types on Trust and Computer Agents. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19, 440-450.
- Levy, D. Gary and Robyn Fivush (1993). Script and Gender: A New Approach for Examining Gender Role Development. *Developmental Review*, 13, 126-146.
- Lippmann, W. (1922), *Public Opinion*, New York, NY: Harcourt and Brace.
- Maccoby, Eleanor (1966). *The Development of Sex Difference*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Markus, Hazel R., Marie Crane, Stan Bernstein and Michaeland Siladi (1982). Self Schemas and Gender. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 42, 38-50.
- Martin, L. Carol (1981). The Role of Cognition in Understanding Gender Effects. *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, 23, P113-149.
- Martin, L. Carol (1999). Cognitive Theories of Gender Development. *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*, Eds. Eckes and Trautner, Nahwah, New Jersey:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 91-122.
- McCabe, Catherine A. (2001). *Gender Effects on Attitude toward Sports Consumption*. Doctorial Dissertation, University of Kentucky Press.
- Mead, Margaret (1935). *Coming of Age in Samoa: a Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*. New York, NY: William Morrow.
- Morris, George P. and Edward Cundiff (1971). Acceptance by Males of Feminine Products. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 8, 372-374.
- Palan, Kay M. (2001). Gender Identity in Consumer Behavior Research: A literature Review and Research Agenda. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 2001(01),1-25.
- Palan, Kay M. and Charles S. Areni and Pamela Kiecher (1999). Reexamining Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Identity Scales. *Marketing Letters*, 10(4), 363-377.
- Palan, Kay M., Charles S. Areni, and Pamela Kiecker (2001). Gender Role Incongruity and memorable Gift Exchange Experiences. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 28(1), 51-57.
- Qualls, William J. (1987). Household Decision Behavior: The Impact of Husbands' and Wives' Sex Role Orientation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14, 264-279.
- Roberts, Lou M. (1984), "Gender Difference and Household Decision Making: Needed Conceptual and Methodological Developments," *Advances in Consumer Research*, 11, 264-279.
- Schmitt, Bernd H., France L, and Laurette D.(1988). Sex Typing and Consumer Behavior: a Test of Gender Schema Theory. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, 122-128.
- Schroeder, Jonathan E. and Detlev Zwick (2004). Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images. *Consumption Markets and Culture*, 7, 21-52.
- Spence, Janet T. (1993). Gender Related Traits and Gender Ideology: Evidence for a Multifactorial Theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 624-635.
- Spence, Janet. T. and Robert L. Helmreich (1972), Who Likes Competent Women? Competence, Sex Role Congruence of Interests, and Subjects' Attitudes toward Women as Determinants of Interpersonal Attraction, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 2, 197-213.
- Spolter W. Suri, Rippe C. and Gould S. (2015). Impact of Giving on Self and Impact of Self on Giving. *Psychology and Marketing*, 32(1), 1-14.
- Stern, Barbara B. (1987). Gender Research and the Services Consumer: New Insights and New Directions. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 14, 514-518.
- Stern, Barbara B. (1988). Sex-Role Self-Concept Measures and Marketing: A Research Note. *Psychology and Marketing*, 5(1), 85-99.

- Tajfel, Henri (1969). Cognitive Aspects of Prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 25(4), 79-97.
- Tucker W. T.(1976). A Long Day of Discrepant Behavior. *Marketing: 1776-1976 and Beyond*. Ed. K.L. Bernhardt, Chicago: American Marketing Association, 351-353
- Tuncay, Linda Y. (2005). How Male Consumers Construct and Negotiate Their Identities in the Marketplace: Three Essays. Doctorial Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Chjampaign.
- Ulrich Isabella (2013), The Effect of Consumer Multifactorial Gender and Biological Sex on the Evaluation of Cross-Gender Brand Extensions. *Psychology and Marketing*, 30(9), 794-810.
- Vitz, Paul C. and Donald Johnston (1965). Masculinity of Smokers and the Masculinity of Cigarette Images. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 49(3), 155-159.
- Worth, Leila T., Jeanne Smith, and Diane M. Mackie (1992). Gender Schematicity and Preference for Gender-Typed Products. *Psychology and Marketing*, 9 (1), 17-30.
- Ye, Lilly and Adrian Robertson (2012). Gender Identity: Does it Matter for Consumer Perceptions? *Journal of Business Diversity*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 81-92.