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Hein, Wendy (2015) Defining the terrain for responsible management education: gender, gender equality and the case of marketing. In: Flynn, P.M. and Haynes, K. and Kilgour, M.A. (eds.) Integrating Gender Equality into Business and Management Education. Sheffield, UK: Greenleaf Publishing, pp. 98-121. ISBN 9781783532254.

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# **Defining the terrain for responsible management education: gender, gender equality, and the case of marketing**

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## *Abstract*

Despite the existence of significant links between gender, marketing and consumer research, and despite a wide-spread recognition of women's complex relationship with marketing and markets, the concept of gender equality has been widely neglected in this subject discipline. This chapter seeks to provide some understanding of what gender equality may mean through an exploration of various marketing practices, studies and teaching. It begins with a brief overview of marketing's disciplinary developments, followed by explorations of feminist influences in this development. The difficulty of finding appropriate definitions for gender equality in marketing leads to a discussion of how marketing institutions and practices contribute to persistently unequal gender relations. The chapter concludes by offering suggestions for how to address these inequalities, with a particular focus on agents of change, specifically within marketing teaching. Despite a growing momentum of gender equality awareness in marketing practice, teaching and scholarship, we need to realize the challenges that remain in achieving real change for women and men across the developed and developing world.

## *Key words:*

Gender, gender equality, marketing, consumer research, education.

## **Introduction**

Women have traditionally had a troubled relationship with marketing. On the one hand, marketing practices have been recognised as exploiting the traditionally female consumer (Catterall et al., 2000). On the other hand, women's future global earnings have the potential of reaching unprecedented dimensions, equalling GDPs of growing economies such as India and China, as they are estimated to increase by \$5 trillion over the coming years (Silverstein et al., 2009). Women's empowerment through marketing seems palpable. Yet controversially, this empowerment may occur through the very structures that were previously deemed as a source of oppression (Friedan, 1963). Additionally, although gender equality and empowerment of women are increasingly brought to our attention, understanding of what this means in a marketing context may not be straightforward. This chapter highlights the complexities between gender, gender equality and marketing, and the role of education and research.

Although gender issues in marketing have rarely been given the scrutiny they deserve, there is very little about marketing that is not gendered. Without turning to abstract

theories or academic jargon, a personal reflection on our daily lives makes us realise how most activities are gendered, including the objects we buy, the places we go, and the work we undertake. This may not always be readily attributed to marketing. Yet nevertheless, we can easily recognise how marketers have created specific consumer profiles that, alongside age, class and disposable income, are frequently defined by gender.

An example: a trip through the cosmetics department will reveal a plethora of soaps, lotions, creams, shampoos, gels or perfumes, all of which are generally designed for either men or women. How do we know this? Consider the advertising images that tend to be associated with these products, or their packaging. When it comes to the 'needs' they fulfil – in all honesty – we may find that products can be very similar in the purposes they serve (i.e. shampoos = wash hair), yet their distinguishing factor, in its most basic form, is still often their gender or the gendering they imply. We may also encounter products such as razors, shaving foams, a flurry of make-up products, as well as condoms or sanitary towels, which are not similar products, yet equally form part of specific gender and gendering practices. As we leave the cosmetics department, we may choose to visit clothing stores, department stores, shopping streets in general or, in fact, many other spaces that form part of everyday life. We regularly encounter sections that separate men and women. Even if there is no explicit male or female distinction, products or services often contain either masculine or feminine connotations: think of the food we eat, the films we watch, the books we read or the hobbies we choose. This separation commences at a very early age, as even young children's toys or clothes are often divided into those for boys and for girls (Auster and Mansbach, 2012).

These examples highlight how marketing has often benefitted and arguably furthered the differences between men and women, rather than promoting potential similarities. Distinct consumer needs are perceived to be at the very core of marketing and profitable markets (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010), and these needs are often said to be gendered. Little harm may be done with the existence of different shampoos, and sanitary towels are important products that should not be taken for granted (Scott et al., 2011). From the examples above we can understand that gender practices relate to our bodies and are often based on socio-cultural expectations. For example, men are expected to shave and women to apply make-up. The above descriptions also imply that our cosmetics department is set within the developed Western world, as different products and their availability may reflect different customs and values in other settings. Do marketers play a role in fashioning these customs, or do they support existing gender practices? In either case, their impact on the creation of gender distinctions may be greater than we at first acknowledge.

At this point however, we have been mainly concerned with the understanding of what gender means in marketing contexts. What about gender equality? The notion that marketing is fundamentally based on gender distinctions makes us think about possible meanings of gender equality. How can we aim for equality in marketing when gender means difference? Where does gender cause trouble in marketing and where does a separation between and within the sexes lead to material and social inequality? A more in-depth look at the many aspects of marketing may be worthwhile in an attempt to answer these and other questions.

This chapter commences with a brief excursion into the history of marketing as it developed as a scholarly discipline, followed by feminist influences on this development, particularly since the early 1990s. Subsequently, a discussion of the possible meanings of gender *equality* in marketing leads to a more detailed description of the structures and practices that have led to *inequality* in marketing. Understanding marketing research and teaching as part of institutions and practices that have reproduced inequalities, suggestions for resolutions and the challenges they present conclude the chapter.

## **Background to marketing as a discipline**

For the purposes of conceptualising gender equality in marketing, it is worth considering how marketing has evolved as a scholarly discipline. All too often, in both teaching and practice, marketing can be readily reduced to the ‘marketing concept’ (Borden, 1964), or the 4Ps of Product, Price, Place and Promotion (Constantinides, 2006), which are in some contexts extended to 7Ps, if we include People, Physical Evidence and Processes. Alternatively, we could choose to consult the (albeit changing) definitions of the American Marketing Association (AMA), which, as of July 2013, states that “[m]arketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” (AMA, 2013) Instead of accepting these, a brief review of how marketing developed, including the role of gender (equality) during this process, may provide some idea of how it became recognised in its current form and how it can be shaped in the future (Tadajewski, 2011).

Although there is some dispute regarding the origins of marketing, in particular regarding the first evidence of teaching marketing (Ellis et al. 2011), it is relatively well acknowledged that it emerged out of the wider field of economics (Jones and Shaw 2005, Stern 1993) and management science (Tadajewski and Jones, 2012). However, in its early stages it was not necessarily referred to as marketing, as teaching and practices focused on applying economic theory through improving issues of distribution, sales management or advertising. The fact that we are now referring to marketing and not, for example, distribution management was arguably due to a shift in focus from production, followed by sales, to a focus on marketing where business activities became more and more centred on customers (Keith, 1960). Whilst early writings of marketing retained a commitment to ethical practices (Tadajewski and Jones, 2012), over time, it became equated with persuasion and even propaganda (Bernays and Miller, 1928/2005; Shaw and Jones, 2005), and the creation of marketable demands that could be detrimental to consumers (Desmond and Crane, 2004). Motivated by the promise of ever-increasing profits, “understanding consumers’ needs, wants and desires became a priority.” (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 24). Locating profitable markets became the main purpose of marketing, disregarding concerns for societal implications.

Fuelled by investment into education from industry (Ellis et al., 2011), and in the aftermath of the Second World War (Tadajewski, 2012), marketing advanced in its direction towards becoming recognised as a science in its own right (Taylor, 1965), striving to emancipate from related subject disciplines. Often considered as opposing

this scientific view, successful achievements of motivation research in advertising and public relations rested on mainly qualitative and interpretive methods (Tadajewski, 2006), and provided marketing with a rather artistic status. The resulting tension of marketing as either an art or a science was eventually resolved as motivation and qualitative research became sidelined in rather trivial scholarly concepts such as consumer segmentation and psychographic profiling (Ellis et al., 2011), or incorporated in advertising practices which were removed from academic contexts (Stern, 1990; 2004). Marketing science as a research paradigm and in support of managerial functions triumphed in defining the discipline. Although this research aimed at understanding markets and consumers, its capitalist motivations largely disregarded societal consequences, or a focus on consumer diversity or well-being (Tadajewski, 2012).

Arguably, approaches that were previously deemed as artistic re-emerged in consumer research at a later stage, in the shape of naturalistic and interpretive stances (cf. Belk et al., 1989). These supported more critical perspectives that not all research could rely on consumers as rational, their realities as homogenous and objectively measured, and that not all research needed to be of (profitable) benefits to organisations. Similarly, early definitions by the AMA that tended to incorporate marketing goals of profitability and a focus on marketing management were complemented with the message that marketing should also be of value to “society at large” (AMA, 2013). This recognised marketing’s impact on social structures, and a greater need for accountability.

These and other more recent developments reflect movements towards embracing the diversity of the expanding field of marketing. Increasing transdisciplinarity has led to the study of marketing from various perspectives and recognises the importance of more critical approaches. However, these brief historical developments also highlight how certain practices and concepts have been privileged over time, and how the dominance of some practices and research paradigms, have subordinated other perspectives.. Marketing’s emancipation as a discipline was driven by power structures that represented organisations’ desire for rising profits, and understood the consumer as a source of increasing wealth. Values such as prediction, control and universalism led this managerial paradigm and sidelined approaches that were concerned with representing varied voices of differing social structures and critical engagement with power (Tadajewski, 2012). These directions in turn have informed our understanding and teaching of marketing, and its scientific base has remained relatively unchallenged and taken for granted until now.

### **Women and feminism in the formation of the marketing discipline**

Against this backdrop, we can begin to understand how concepts of gender and gender equality have evolved. The previously mentioned focus on specific paradigms, ways of researching and processes of transforming marketing into a science, also tended to exclude women. It would be incorrect to equate gender or gender equality with women or the feminine. Yet, in the absence of women, gender remained relatively unproblematic. Instead, masculine gender norms and the construction of hierarchies based on these became naturally accepted. Feminist movements were among the first to highlight the gendering of marketing and the

segregation of women in the field. Stern's (1993a) article on feminist theory in the marketing classroom is of particular importance in this context.

Stern illustrates changes in the marketing curriculum, comparing it to Lerner's (1979), and Schuster and Van Dyne's (1985) review of how feminist perspectives transformed teaching in the humanities. The six stages reflect changes, commencing with women as (i) absent from academic communities, (ii) towards early integrations (iii) following liberal feminist perspectives, (iv) followed by radical/women's voice feminism, (v) black/lesbian feminism, and lastly, (vi) poststructuralist feminism. Before women's entry into the academy, the great, white, Western canon (Gordon, 1997), labelled by Stern (1993a: 230) as the established 'great minds' curriculum, was widely accepted as underpinning research and teaching. During the early stages, 'women worthies'<sup>1</sup> (Lerner, 1975) were expected to measure up to established androcentric academic cultures, where masculine ideologies had provided the historical context (Bristor and Fischer, 1993). "Often at this point the departmental response was to hire a "tokenwomen" and assign her to teach a "Women and..." course." (Stern, 1993a: 231) Although this initiated an increasing presence of women and some expansion of the curriculum, the established paradigms remained unchallenged, and, in fact, became reiterated by female scholars who had been educated in this tradition. Not only did these women face tremendous insecurities as they were continuously reminded of their insignificance, considering the long history of knowledge production by their male counterparts, their presence (and shortcomings) also justified, even enhanced a male superiority in their scholarly legitimacy.

As feminist perspectives advanced from liberal to radical, and women realised the systematic discrimination they had experienced, angry and critical voices emerged. However, attempts to develop alternative research and teaching approaches were still lacking as women academics "too had been trained to think like men. They carried the baggage of patriarchal standards and accepted methods of generating knowledge" (Stern, 1993a: 231). Nevertheless, during this time the gendering of research and teaching became visible. As perspectives advanced to incorporate dimensions of race, class and sexuality, a postmodern or poststructuralist vision looked ahead to a multicultural future, envisaging a focus on inclusivity and pluralism. As Stern (1993a: 233) noted: "Diversity is the keynote of the 1990s, for the unisex urge of the 1970s has been replaced by the postmodern acceptance of difference".

Stern's (1993a) review simplifies the evolution of feminist advances in academia from the 1960s to the 1990s, but provides a frame of reference for the feminist developments and the current state of marketing. Although some aspects of the marketing discipline were touched by feminism, Stern argued that women were still at the early stages of entering the field, as their voices continued to be marginalised and dismissed by dominant structures and institutions. For example, to this day, the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Marketing Research* have yet to publish a feminist article, or work that problematises gender issues in marketing.

Further support for feminist theories was found in specific research communities, such as among consumer researchers. Responding to the lack of gender issues in the wider marketing discipline (Costa, 1991), the early 1990s saw a turning point in marketing and consumer research (Bettany et al., 2010) with the inaugural conference

on Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behavior. Various papers that drew on feminist theories were subsequently published in leading journals such as the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Adopting mainly poststructural or postmodern feminist perspectives during this time, they pointed out prevailing masculine ideologies which dominated in marketing and consumer research, and largely critiqued prevailing dualisms that reduced gender to male/female, masculine/feminine, objective/subjective, rational/emotional, active/passive, public/private, or producer/consumer dichotomies, with the former privileged over the latter (Bristor and Fischer, 1993; Hirschman, 1993).

Similar critiques emerged from postmodern feminist perspectives on marketing's use of the female body (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994). The body/mind dualism was argued to be pervasive in marketing and consumer research, and the often sexualised female body conceptualised as the object of masculine desire and regulation. The rational masculine mind was seen as opposing the emotional female body, affecting consumer culture surrounding the body in terms of "food, dieting, clothing, fashion, and exercise, to all kinds of phenomenological experiences concerning the body." (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994:339).

The rhetoric of the marketing concept became the subject of poststructuralist feminist critique by Fischer and Bristor (1994). Deconstructing the marketer/consumer discourse into understanding the consumer as female or feminine and the marketer as male or masculine, the article provided feminist readings of the development of the marketing concept from production orientation, sales orientation, customer orientation, to relationship orientation. The authors argued that marketers (male) imposed their offerings on the consumer, traditionally perceived as female. Marketing rhetoric, including traditional textbook discourse, was reinterpreted as exploiting and as virtually violating powerless consumers. Although a relationship marketing concept provided further recognition of consumers as active and emancipated, Fischer and Bristor's (1994) interpretations sought to address the power imbalances that exist between marketing producers and consumers. Marketing (theory) had therefore been fundamentally imbalanced.

An imbalance was also found in the reading of advertising images. Feminist literary criticism was used to examine advertising images and responses to these (Stern, 1993b). Ads were argued to be gendered texts that were either androcentric or gynocentric, containing masculine or feminine connotations, and while women were used to 'reading' both texts, men's interest remained on androcentric texts.

Lastly, Peñaloza (1994) equally challenged gender dichotomies in relation to body, identity and sexuality in her discussion of gender crossings. She offered some suggestions for how postmodern gender expressions are subverting or creating parodies of these gender dualisms, in short, how they 'cause trouble' (referring to Judith Butler's (2006) gender trouble). She argued that these should be considered in marketing contexts and that gender discourses are attached to "market offerings and marketing communications, such as products, advertisements, music videos and film" (p.361) which informed both gender production and consumption.

These are some feminist inspired works that played a key role in advancing our understanding of gender in marketing and consumer research. These and other

authors highlighted how gender had been essentialised and blindly assumed. Before then, it had not been sufficiently problematised or defined while a masculine lens was accepted as natural (Artz and Venkatesh, 1991; Stern, 1993b). Gender had been accepted as a constant or input variable, interchangeably used with the concept of sex (i.e. male or female), as opposed to being the outcome of marketing or consumer behaviour practices. Further, aforementioned feminist articles critiqued marketing's scientific claims of objective knowledge, and how women had been regarded as objects, rarely as subjects, of knowledge. Their critiques further extended to the use of machine metaphors in place of human (gendered) experiences; and the pursuit of profits instead of socially responsible behaviour. As such, feminist perspectives often blamed current market structures and advocated Marxist approaches (Hirschman, 1993). During this time it appeared that women's emancipation from markets (and marketing) was irreconcilable with capitalism, managerialism or profitability.

On the other hand, postmodern feminist calls for greater tolerance of differences and multiplicity, and for living with ambiguity and ambivalence (Fischer and Bristor, 1994), led to understandings of gender as subjectively constructed and privately 'consumed'. Postfeminist re-enchantments with marketing and consumer culture shifted perceptions of women's stereotypical role as consumers as oppressive, towards seeing them as empowering and even liberating (Maclaran, 2012). Women could now find the resources to construct their 'desired gender' in the market. This led to understandings of market feminism as a paradigm shift (Scott, 2006). Consumer culture also emerged as a refuge for men who sought to escape a masculine gender crisis (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Thompson and Holt, 2004; Tuncay and Otnes, 2008), and men emerged as negotiators of multiple identities. These postmodern, liberatory views (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) were also met with criticism as consumer power was a privilege largely reserved by men and women with the necessary capital, and excluded others who could not make the choices to become their desired, authentic or multiple self (Catterall et al., 2005). These tensions highlight the problematic relationship between feminism and market structures. They also emphasise the various feminist positions that could argue towards female empowerment and emancipation in marketing in multiple ways.

Since the surge of feminist research in consumer research during the 1990s, feminist voices have reappeared in isolated cases, for example highlighting the continued 'gender blindspot' of marketing research communities (Maclaran et al. 2009), or in edited works which summarise the complex relationships between feminism and marketing (Catterall et al., 2000). However, possibly due to its own fragmentation and conflicted views, feminism has not achieved the same impact in marketing and consumer research it had experienced during the 1990s, until now.

Feminism is not the only lens that has examined gender in marketing. Various other theories outside or related to feminism, such as identity, masculinity, queer theory or subcultures (Kates, 1999, 2002) have equally been applied. However, these perspectives have often failed to address gender as problematic or political in marketing. This seems to be changing with various projects, such as this PRME (Principles for Responsible Management) initiative, highlighting the continued issues that women and marginalised voices continue to face across the globe. Another notable example is Linda Scott's (2013) work which seeks to address women's issues in the developing world, in one instance through the provision of sanitary care and

sexual health education, highlighting how consumption and market feminism may not only be for the privileged, white middle-classes.

Ultimately, the review of current and past research in this chapter leads us to question what we can learn about gender equality from feminism. We have still not addressed the question of how we can conceptualise gender equality in marketing and consumer research.

### **What is gender equality in marketing and consumer research?**

Throughout all this, we have to acknowledge that (gender) equality is used implicitly, and at times explicitly within some of the research mentioned above (i.e. Bristor and Fischer, 1993; Catterall et al., 2005). Yet, no known attempt has been made to systematically define it in marketing or consumer research. The below conceptualisations are therefore tentative and rely on feminist advances in the field where the term has appeared most often.

From the above discussions, we can already see that defining gender equality is a problematic task. Depending on the feminist perspective we adopt, meanings of gender equality can vary widely, with some arguing that significant advances have already been achieved, as, for example, women's emancipation can be connected with changes arising from postmodern market structures (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), others proposing that we have yet a long way to go (Catterall et al., 2000). This becomes particularly evident in the debates between postfeminist and critical feminist perspectives, as the former perceive markets as empowering and the solution to gender issues, the latter as exclusive and the source of trouble. There are, however, several lessons we can learn from all these perspectives which can inform our understanding of gender equality.

Feminism continues to incorporate activist and grassroots movements, which have however been neglected of late in marketing contexts (Catterall et al. 2005; Dobscha and Prothero, 2012). Feminist perspectives share a vision of equal rights and, to some degree, equal valuing of different points of view, no matter how distinct they are (Scott, 1988). As such, feminists share pragmatic stances in their acknowledgement of action as a driver for change (Scott et al., 2011). Activism towards the recognition of marginalised voices can also be integrated into marketing teaching and research.

Feminist theory in marketing also led to the further definition and problematisation of gender and sex. As a result, sex became widely understood as the biological distinction between male and female, and gender as the socio-cultural construct (Catterall, et al., 2005). Both, however, were seen as 'causing trouble' in marketing, as the body became the site for gendering practices (Peñaloza, 1994) as well as socio-cultural customs, as illustrated in the introduction to this chapter. Biology and socio-cultural expectations often conflate in practices and their marketing (Scott et al., 2011). While we may therefore seek empowerment for women, we need to understand that 'women' is not a universal category (Bristor and Fischer, 1995), but that empowerment needs to be considered contextually. Additionally, gender is not just problematic for women, but also for men (Catterall et al., 2000).

Contextual and cultural issues of gender equality are further illustrated by the problematic relationship between marketing and market structures. Consuming ‘for the greater good’ as exemplified in Scott’s work may improve material, lived realities of young women in Sub-Saharan Africa, and their empowerment and education may eventually lead them out of oppression from male regimes. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that their human rights continue to be violated and that men’s behaviour in these contexts remains unchallenged. It is argued that gender equality issues are therefore based on unequal gender relations, and their socio-cultural and contextual perpetuation need to be addressed through marketing and consumer research.

Informing this debate, we have to acknowledge that oppression continues on the basis of persistent dualisms of masculine/feminine, strong/weak, rational/emotional, public/private, etc. Despite deconstructions of these in academia (and critiques of alternative concepts such as ‘fluidity’ (Borgerson and Rehn, 2005)), the unequal valuing of knowledge in the academy continues (Catterall et al., 2000). Similarly, marketing persistently reproduces stereotypes that become accepted across cultures, and practiced in consumers’ everyday lives across the globe. These practices (re)create material differences from which marketers frequently benefit, and do little to challenge existing power structures. Additionally, the constructed distinctions between men and women have been important to marketers, as often similar products are designed and marketed differently to men or women.

On the other hand, ‘equality’ does not have to mean ‘the same’ or ‘gender neutral’. Distinctions between genders are often important, in particular when it comes to the valuing of body differences, such as in healthcare contexts as seen in Scott’s (2013) example of sanitary care and sex education. ‘The same’ or ‘different’ is therefore not the solution to our problem of defining equality (Scott 1988). Rather, the issue lies in the continued construction of gender stereotypes, myths (Stern, 1995), or customs that often underlie dualisms, and their integration in social structures and institutions that marketing readily relies on. For example, the private or domestic spheres continue to be depicted as women’s spaces whereas the public or workspace continues to be dominated by men (Friedan, 1965; Gentry and Harrison, 2010; Collinson and Hearn, 2005).

Taking a pragmatic stance (Scott et al., 2011), we have to move beyond these critiques and question what the alternatives are. What should action be directed towards? Should we think of gender equality in terms of diversity, neutrality, or, as poststructuralist feminists suggested, ambivalence and ambiguity? Arguably, either or all of these are contextually dependent. The re-theorising of gender to incorporate meanings of gender equality may be important in academic circles, but what matters more is how this can be translated into marketing practice and teaching. Have we even experienced gender equality in marketing at some point in time? Or are we, as Stern (1993a) highlighted, too socialised in our own participation in ‘masculine marketing and consumer cultures’ (in research, teaching and practice) that we cannot imagine alternative approaches?

A conception of alternatives requires a more thorough understanding of the (un)equal relations that are embedded in marketing institutions and practices. It may be worth thinking of specific contexts of where *inequality* and discrimination have been

observed in marketing and consumer research. The following sections are dedicated to this, followed by suggestions of alternatives for teaching, researching and practicing gender equality in marketing and consumer research.

### **Inequality and discrimination in marketing and consumer research – where and how?**

Some examples of where inequality has been observed have already been broached in the above discussions. As a result of the historical development of marketing as an academic discipline, women's perspectives have tended to be excluded. As women entered the field, their perspectives were rarely acknowledged as 'different' or equally valued in their own right. Women entering these academic structures were openly discriminated against, and although discrimination is less obviously detected nowadays, it continues to this day (Hirschman, 2010). Whether discrimination is based on sex, race or age (or a combination of these), the pay gap between female and male academics in marketing departments persists (Blackaby et al., 2005). Women's work, even in public educational landscapes such as the UK, emerges as less materially rewarded than men's. Thus, we could argue that women who seek to climb the ladder in academic cultures are still accepted as 'women worthies' (Lerner, 1975) who need to be measured according to standards that are institutionally established by predominantly male superiors, peers and academic cultures. Alongside their research, this may also affect their teaching and decision-making in curriculum design.

Evidence for a lack of gender focus in the marketing curriculum was already presented above. The canon of the 'great minds' (Stern, 1993a), as represented by established marketing concepts and following primarily motivations of managerialism and profitability, continues to play the most significant role in marketing classrooms across the globe. Stern (1993a) communicated the issues she faced in her attempts to introduce courses on feminism and marketing, and ultimately circumvented departmental restrictions by cross-fertilising programmes with the Women's Studies department at her university. This highlighted the institutionalisation underlying current marketing programmes and concepts, and the barriers to introducing a focus on gender issues. Arguably, these courses are less attractive to students as the connection between gender, marketing and (profitable) business has so far been unacknowledged (although this may be changing with new evidence of gendered consumer power). Alternatives have been offered in the form of teaching 'critical reflection' (Catterall, et al., 2002) which may not only incorporate the teaching of critical awareness of gender problems, but also of other global issues such as poverty, corruption or sustainability which can also be connected to marketing, and gender (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2000; Dobscha and Prothero, 2012). Arguably, critical thinking is also a skill that is desired by employers. Fundamentally, we have to acknowledge that marketing curricula are shaped in response to student and job market expectations (Scott, 1999).

Students' perceptions of marketing and skills required for accessing marketing industries need to be understood in connection with their own consumption of marketing. Marketing producers are also consumers of marketing practices, including services, products, spaces and messages (Peñaloza, 1994). Marketing plays a role in our everyday lives, which makes it possibly more permeating on social structures than other disciplines. Its producers therefore have a significant responsibility, as they

influence the products that are designed, for whom and how these are communicated. As a field of employment, female participation increased significantly in marketing (Maclaran and Catterall, 2000; Maclaran et al. 1997), although this was not always unproblematic. Discrimination and women's perception of working in male cultures was also observed here. For example, advertising cultures, as prominently illustrated in the US television series 'Mad Men', continue to be built on male exclusivity to this day (Nixon, 2003; Nixon and Crewe, 2004). In fact, research has compared the macho behaviour in advertising agencies to men's locker rooms (Bird, 1996). Furthermore, although women are embarking on marketing careers, they rarely come to occupy leading positions. The number of female creative advertising directors in the US currently stands at 3%, which have led to some movements in the industry in the last years (3% Conference, 2014). This means, that although women are largely recognised in their consumer power (the 3% movement claims that women represent 80% of consumer expenditure in the US), 97% of advertising messages are designed and created under male creative leadership. Women have started to voice their frustration over this, and there is some evidence that senior management structures are changing, as, for example, the four biggest advertising agencies in Boston are currently managed by women (Leung, 2014). However, so far activities have mainly focused on the US and there is a need for generating further awareness which should lead to more wide-spread change.

Marketing industries are thus further examples of structures or institutions that are predominantly led by men. Considering their role as marketing producers, this may explain the gender issues that have developed over time. For example, advertising has often been the source of conflict for many women, through the portrayal of sexist images, and practices that have led to their sexualisation and objectification (Goffman, 1979; Kilbourne, 1994, 1999; Gurrieri, Brace-Govan and Cherrier, 2014). Indeed, in Kilbourne's (2013) latest documentation edition of "Killing us softly", she argued that instead of observing progress in the kind of images directed towards women, they have increased in either subtlety or provocative sexualisation. She also related advertising and marketing to popular culture (Featherstone, 1991). Comparing popular culture in our environment to water in a fish tank, it is as ubiquitous as oxygen, whether we are conscious of it or not. Similar to Kilbourne's initiative, the MissRepresentation project aims to generate awareness regarding inappropriate images directed at women and the effect these have on women's self esteem and their perceived subordination in society (The Representation Project, 2014). Some examples of similar UK campaigns addressing the lack of 'equal' representation in the media include the 'No More Page 3 Campaign', relating to the continued portrayal of nude women on page 3 in the daily UK newspaper *The Sun* (No More Page 3, 2014). Interestingly, these movements and campaigns are often fostered by social media, such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook or Tumblr (McPherson, 2014).

Advertising does not hold sole responsibility, as other industries relating to popular culture also play significant roles. For example, music industries and music lyrics have often been recognised as sources of women's discrimination, one case in point being the hip hop culture (Arthur, 2006). Additionally, the Geena Davis Institute researches the portrayal of female characters in children's media and actively campaigns for the increasing representation of girls, particularly in active roles (Geena Davis Institute, 2014). The lack of appropriate role models in TV genres such as soap operas was also noted in marketing and consumer research (Stern, 2005;

Stern, Russell and Russell, 2005, 2007). As before, the majority of these activities has thus far concentrated on the US and therefore addresses particular cultural contexts. However, given the influence of the US in the global marketing production, it is important to carry the momentum of these campaigns into other contexts. European countries, such as Sweden have recognised issues of marketed images of women as posing public health concerns, to the degree that these are now informing policy regulation debates (The Swedish Women's Lobby, 2014).

Besides these activist movements in relation to advertising and popular culture, marketing scholars have equally critiqued gender images (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998). However, as with feminist theory, ads were often subject to multiple interpretations that depended on the spectator (Brown et al., 1999). Furthermore, women are not the only targets of advertising. As marketing and consumer research started to incorporate issues of masculinity in gender debates, the male gaze on marketing images was also argued to shift (Patterson and Elliott, 2002) or expand its boundaries to previously unknown territories (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004), although differences in positions between men and women were still recognised. Men were also found to police their own 'look' according to idealised images in their environment, albeit to a lesser extent than women (Elliott and Elliott, 2005). More recent analyses of gender in advertising highlighted how men and women continue to be portrayed in stereotypical roles. For example, women continue to occupy mothering roles and men's portrayals as the active parent is often ignored, although the number of single and active fathers has increased over the last few years (Gentry and Harrison, 2010). Marketing images and popular culture therefore promote gender structures alongside products or services, and hold back cultural development by reinforcing stereotypes (Fischer and Bristor, 1995). They connect with lifestyles that advertisers perceive as desirable. This however places the onus back on marketing producers and their perception of 'desirable' gender relations.

Products, services and advertising are examples of marketing and marketed constructs that become symbolically and materially branded with gender meanings, which often reflect unequal valuing of men and women. They fundamentally affect how women and men live their lives. This can be seen in the construction of spaces and practices. In this context, sport can be recognised as another institution historically led by men (Brace-Govan, 2010). As a result of men's visibility in sport, reports from the UK women's sport and fitness foundation found that between 2010 and 2011 women's sport attracted 0.5% of the overall sponsorship market in the UK (WSFF, 2011), although audiences of women's sporting events grew. The market support for female advances in traditionally male spaces and practices has thus far been neglected, and has led to the activist 'Big Deal?' campaign in the UK. Similarly, sporting spaces often ignore gender differences, for example in their provision of facilities (Hein, 2010) or in branded servicescapes, in cases such as the ESPN zone in the US (Sherry et al., 2004.). These restaurant chains and arcade game retail outlets often explicitly addressed an exclusively male audience, and implicitly branded masculinity in details such as the food menus. ESPN zones have now declined in popularity in the US, forcing many outlets to close.

However, we can find many other examples of marketed spaces where gender becomes symbolically, implicitly or explicitly, embedded. Obvious examples include restaurant chains, such as Hooters, but less extreme cases abound in common retail

settings that divide male and female spaces, and some contexts from which men are often considered as passive, if mentioned at all (Otnes and McGrath, 2001; Tuncay and Otnes, 2008). Examples include some cosmetic, clothing and grocery retail spaces, or activities such as gift shopping, which tended to be accepted or contested as either women's work or leisure (Thompson, 1996; Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles, and Elliott, 2002). While gender may appear relatively unproblematic in these instances, and spaces have also emerged as sites of subversion or transgression from gender norms (Thompson, 2013), they nevertheless contribute to our understandings of the type of spaces that are designed for men and women and regulate access and behaviour in these settings. They reflect a finely tuned marketing system of socio-cultural gender expectations.

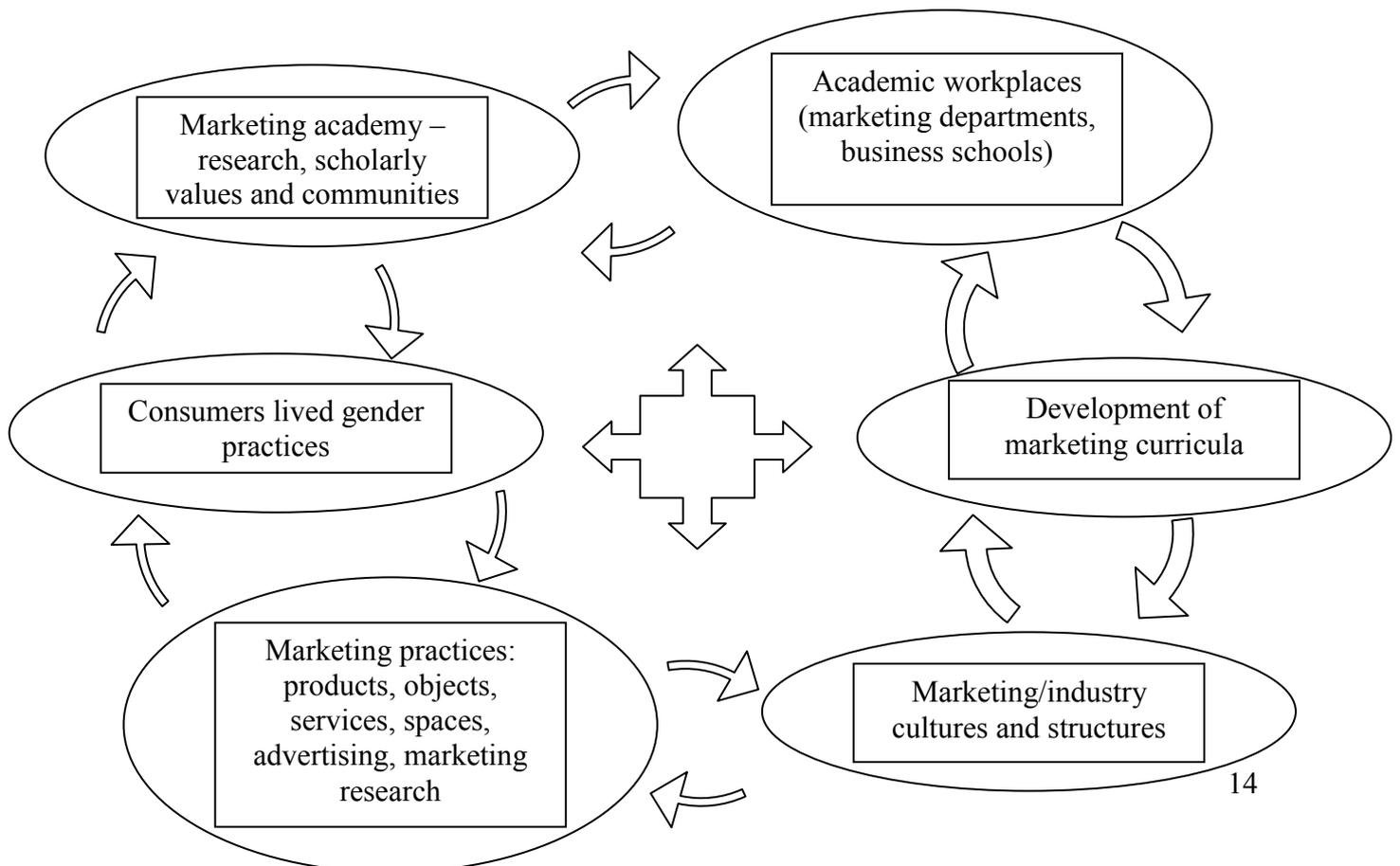
Marketing thus contributes to how consumers shape their lives on a daily basis. Their construction of gender is not just a private choice, but is also influenced by the gendering of products and services, etc. Arguably, products and services are based on consumers' needs. However, considering feminists critiques of power, they may be based on marketers' needs for profits (Fischer and Bristor, 1994). Of course, bodily needs can differ between men and women (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994). However, these 'needs' largely reflect the socio-cultural and historical constructions of gender relations, and the conventions that have become accepted between men and women. As such, although we may be more alike than different in our gender (Carothers and Reis, 2013), gender differences are fodder for marketers as they provide the possibility for the expansion of product ranges. The emergence of the metrosexual male, originally a dismissive term for men who engaged in vanity-boosting consumption practices (Simpson, 1994), was arguably a marketing invention (Salzman et al., 2005), as beauty and care products which had been previously deemed unsuitable for men had now found a new market. In marketing terms, this permitted the sale of more moisturiser; in consumer terms, it provided further resources for the construction of the 'effeminate male'.

The marketing of products, services and their communication affects consumers and their understanding of gender. Marketing educates us in our gender practices and socialises our expectations of how and what we should consume as men or women in specific socio-cultural contexts. We can already see how products, such as toys, affect the gendering of children from a very young age (Auster and Mansbach, 2012; Pennell, 1994). However, gender norms can also be played with through ambivalence and irony, as consumers can avoid stereotyping (Hein and O'Donohoe, 2013). Nevertheless, products and objects take on symbolic meanings that distinguish consumers, and consumers in turn use these symbolic resources to identify themselves and others. Gender meanings therefore play a role as much for marketing producers as for consumers. The symbolic and material power of marketing transcends into conceptualisations of behaviour appropriate for women and men (Catterall et al., 2000). This does not just affect women, but rather the relationships, roles and practices negotiated between various men and women. It is these relations and their construction across contexts that are often unequally valued and can lead to material differences. In terms of consumption and production, women continue to take primary responsibility for childcare and the domestic. Work in these private spaces has now started to become 'outsourced' as a result of the increasing professionalisation of women (Epp and Price, 2008), highlighting its material and economic value. Current reports from the UK emphasise that childcare costs for some

parents have now exceeded average monthly mortgage repayments (Family and Childcare Trust, 2014; Richardson, 2014). Consumer research has previously underlined the struggling and juggling lifestyles of women, as they are now expected to manage career, family and households (Thompson, 1996). Across the globe, we can identify clear gender differences in how consumption and production are valued (Nelson, 1998; Ruwanpura and Humphries, 2004) and marketing could play a role in changing these assumptions as opposed to reinforcing them.

Consumers and their gender in turn inform scholarly marketing research, and the conceptualisations of gender, as well as the research tools, are far from equally valued. Within the marketing academy, gender differences continue to be perceived as natural, and gender as an ‘effect’ is rarely defined or problematised. For example, differences in behaviour or tastes are mainly examined regarding managerial effectiveness (cf. Wyllie, et al., 2014), not in terms of social implications. Women and men are, in the first instance, perceived as different, not as the same (cf. Myers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991). The unequal valuing of different research paradigms and the topics that are published in high quality journals in turn affects what and how we research. For example, Maclaran (2010) presented a critique of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) that measures scholarly output across institutions in the UK (cf. Harley, 2002; Maclaran et al., 2009). Two of the highest scoring journals in the area of marketing are the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Marketing Research*, both of which, as previously established, do not contain research where gender equality issues have been vocalised. How is it possible to argue for the importance of gender issues in marketing when this debate cannot be found in its leading outlets?

This closes the circle as the unequal valuing of research in turn influences the structuring of academic departments; those with ‘higher quality’ research as defined by peer-reviewed publications in highly ranked journals advance. The cycle that has been constructed in this debate is illustrated in Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1. Marketing institutions, practices and structures as sites of unequal gender relations*

In this cyclical movement of the marketing system described above, from curricula of marketing education, to industry, to marketing practices, to consumers, to research, we continuously encounter unequal gender relations that are embedded in these hierarchical structures, institutions and practices. Providing the overall context for this vicious cycle, we could also add a critique of the entire marketing concept, as it too (re)produces and reflects inequality, not just between men and women, but between those who 'have' and others who 'have not'. It is an exclusive system that, so far, has been led by those in power or who possess capital (Fischer and Bristor, 1994; Catterall et al., 2005). As a result, there are limited possibilities for organisations to 'do good', as return on investment and profitability are the most significant benchmarks (Crane and Desmond, 2002).

Thus far, we have mainly considered marketing and its impact in the developed world where main material differences are based on class and race distinctions (Bristor and Fischer, 1995), but where women have made significant advances (Scott, 2003). However, any changes to marketing systems in the developed world should also lead to material differences in the developing world where gender relations are far more unequal and firmly rooted within traditions and histories. How can this be achieved? How can we break the cycle of (re)production of inequality?

### **Resolution/challenges of inequality in marketing**

Historically, women appear to be absent from marketing structures or institutions. If they were present, they were largely invisible or undervalued in their roles, or their presence did little to challenge institutional gender power structures (Lerner, 1975). Additionally, the above discussion shows that marketing institutions and structures reach further into everyday lives and cultures than we may have previously anticipated. Women's representation, participation and greater visibility may therefore not be the sole solution, as we saw earlier, that the entry of women into academic departments actually reinforced male structures. Importantly, it is necessary to build awareness regarding the lack of gender problematisation in marketing across these areas.

We could start by re-conceptualising equality to reflect the problem of gender relations. For example, the concept of inclusivity (Anderson, 2008) sought to promote equality amongst men's differing masculinities based on sexuality in fraternal settings. Extending this concept further to reflect a respect for differences in gender relations, inclusivity also provides possibilities for thinking beyond productive dualisms of masculine/feminine, male/female or producer/consumer (Borgerson and Rehn, 2005). This would mean that gender equality is not just an issue concerning women, but also men. Another theoretical alternative may be found in the concept of intersectionality as it depicts gender relations between men and women from different class, race, age, sexuality, religion and cultural backgrounds (Gopaldas and Fischer, 2012). Inclusivity and intersectionality may, however, conceal the material

differences that persist between men and women, and may not problematise gender issues fittingly. Critical and historical marketing studies (Ellis et al., 2011, Catterall et al., 1999, 2002; Tadajwesi, 2011) may present a relevant research community that could carry these reconceptualisations further.

Awareness of the marketing system of inequality may however not suffice. It is important to recruit 'agents of change' (Stern, 1993), who need to be positioned at every touch point of marketing institutions, structures and practices that reproduce inequality. In particular, these agents need to recognise that they are in positions of power. Change needs to be pragmatic, combining grassroots and activist movements with policy making, research and education as well as leading marketing organisations. Silverstein et al. (2009) pointed to the aggregate consumer power of women; this should be extended to the aggregate activist power of women. Considering the various grassroots campaigns that are now fighting for women's empowerment in the various marketing structures illustrated above, these voices need to join forces in order to form an unavoidable authority that operates from both the margins and the centre. Additionally, 'agents of change' should be differentiated to 'agents of leverage' (Silverstein et al., 2009) in that empowerment is not solely women's responsibility. The solution may not solely lie in the provision of time-saving products and services for women, as this does not address unequal division of labour (Collinson and Hearn, 2005). Rather, marketing should address issues of imbalanced valuing of work and power distribution within gender relations, meaning that women's empowerment should be everyone's responsibility. Agents of change therefore do not have to be women, but rather humans with a conviction that marketing can be used as a tool to empower women and marginalised voices. Thus far, gender empowerment has been lacking significantly in the marketing literature, and should be understood as a pragmatic concept that may find further resonance in critical theory (Murray and Ozanne, 1991), transformative consumer research (Mick, 2006), and action research (Ozanne, and Saatcioglu, 2008). Macromarketing may present a further research community that could incorporate these initiatives (Kilbourne et al., 1997).

Despite these initiatives, the problem of what gender equality may actually mean continues. The notion of marketing as facilitator of inequality across a wide range of institutions and practices is palpable. However, what are the alternatives? And how much does marketing contribute to the material or symbolic production of inequality? As much as we already know, detailed information and data are missing. This may also be a cultural phenomenon: the US seems at the forefront of advancing women's issues in these areas, and Scandinavia also appears to make positive steps forward, particularly in terms of education and policy. However, information is required from contexts where marketing systems are still predominantly male and where material differences between male and female, both as consumers and producers, are most significant.

We have started to encounter growing awareness of women's power as both producers and consumers in the developed world. As mentioned in the introduction, the aggregate consumer power of women has the potential of dwarfing rising economies such as China or India (Silverstein et al., 2009). Markets and marketing are therefore argued to present potential for empowerment. However, we need to consider who culturally and contextually defines meanings of production and

consumption. Even within the developed world, this has largely remained unchanged as women continue to work “for free” and/or for less than their male counterparts. Additionally, the reliance on existing market structures and institutions means we rely on existing power distribution. Even if women are empowered by consumption and markets, at this point this would mostly affect white, middle-class women in the developed world whose material and symbolic differences to their male counterparts may be minimal in contrast to women in developing countries. Just because women have entered the equation as they posit a profitable market, this does not necessarily lead to change. Rather, the momentum that is gathering needs to be used to (re)negotiate institutionalised inequality for those who are at the margins of markets and marketing.

We need to remain aware of women and marginalised voices in relation to class, age, race, sexualities, religion, particularly in the developing world. There is a need for greater awareness and empowerment of those who participate in alternative markets, to consider ways of redistributing power and capital equally. As marketers and marketing scholars, this should not only form part of any economic or political agenda, but as our sense of duty to humanity. A return to the ethical roots of marketing (Tadajewski and Jones, 2012) and considerations of gender and consumer vulnerability in marketing production (Coleman, 2012) may be fruitful research directions for this.

Regarding those who have the power to shape the curriculum, academics and educators need to (re)think their teaching. Gender issues and gender equality should become a central part of marketing education, and, if possible, not just at tertiary or university level. Scholars and academics have a responsibility to become agents of change to affect research and teaching directions of potential future business leaders. In this context, the difficulty of defining gender equality in the curriculum also remains. The final sections offer some suggestions for the development of teaching in this respect.

In the first instance, awareness of gender issues is key and critical reflection should be an important aspect of all marketing teaching (Catterall et al., 2002). The use of images and practical marketing material may be useful in this context, or the illustration of activist campaigns as mentioned above may provide good examples. Role playing in class and the sex reversal method may also serve to illustrate socially constructed, taken for granted gender differences (as quoted in Stern, 1993b; Fetterley, 1978; Russ, 1972). In this method, an advertising campaign or a product design is discussed, and after its conceptualisation the question is raised of whether gender roles or target audiences could be reversed. If the answer is yes, then why not place a man in the image instead of a woman? If the answer is no, then why not?

Lastly, we can argue that defining gender equality is a farce. Instead of providing universal answers for what gender equality may be, each of the areas in the marketing system illustrated above needs to be critically examined for its impact on gender relations. Treating women and men the same is not the solution, but neither is the insistence on categorical differences. Rather, we should exercise respect for contextual differences. Equality needs to neither ignore nor blindly accept gender differences as objectively true (Scott, 1988). Considering the vast range of examples of critical perspectives on marketing as producer of inequality, and the relativism of

what equality may mean as a result of diverse feminist perspectives, it is important to build a catalogue of positive, empowering examples (Scott, 2013). Even if these are still flawed, they should be recognised if they can change material and symbolic differences between women and men.

### *Conclusion*

The above discussion presents idealised scenarios. For more than 100 years, and arguably even before then, women have tried to emancipate, empower and gain equality in structures that socio-culturally and historically have been dominated by men. As we saw, even if this has changed women's lives in terms of the type of products or objects that have been deemed appropriate for them or the messages directed towards them, men continue to be at the helm of market(ing) systems. As idealised and naïve as above solutions may seem, even small changes may lead to greater impact. Arguably, with a growing consciousness of women's consumer and producer roles, we are observing a growing momentum in the struggle for gender equality. The fact that marketing practices have been acknowledged in the Women's Empowerment Principles (Women's Empowerment Principle 5, 2014) reflects this increasing awareness of the role of marketing in (re)producing gender stereotypes that are harmful to women and other marginalised voices, and ultimately society at large.

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Dr. Hein co-ordinates the marketing discipline in the [UN PRME gender equality working group](#) and is involved in research as part of the European FP7 TRIGGER project on gender cultures within research and science. She continues to publish findings from her ethnographic study on young men's consumption practices, which also includes gender implications on methodologies in marketing and consumer research. Her work has been published in journals such as the *Journal of Marketing Management* and *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, and has been presented at several Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behavior conferences, Association for Consumer Research conferences, as well as CCT and Macromarketing conferences.

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<sup>i</sup> 'Women worthies' or 'compensatory history' are terms used by Lerner (1975) to describe women who do not challenge or deviate from dominant, masculine structures, but rather accept them. Their achievements have been celebrated in history as they equalled those of men; however, she does not

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accept them as 'notable women', as this should relate to histories of women who were exceptional and stood apart from the mass, of either men or women.