Consumption and Gender: a Common History

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[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15529/gender/v01/GCB-01

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That there are close relationships between consumption and gender in contemporary society goes without saying. Who consumes what is still largely dependent on performing feminine and masculine roles in many cultures (Gould and Stern 1989; Schmitt, Leclerc and Dube-Rioux 1988; Taylor-Gooby 1985). However, the historical foundations of the relationships between consumption and gender have not been systematically studied. The study of the history of relationships between gender and consumption requires an analysis of not only the collapse between the categories of sex and gender -- i.e., male with masculine and female with feminine -- but also the origins of the separations between production and consumption as they relate to gender and sex. Such an analytical recount, be it a brief one, is the primary purpose of this essay.

Also, an attempt is made to understand the postmodern transformations that seem to be taking place currently in the relationships between gender and consumption. First, the consumption-production dichotomy is discussed. Then, the unity in the origins of gender and consumption is described.

**CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION**

What is the meaning of consumption in contemporary society? The response may seem simple, but even a cursory expedition into its meaning proves the complexity. Classical economists had some difficulties, enough to force them to come up with different terms: Productive consumption, consumptive production, consumption proper (Mill 1929; Say 1964). No "production proper," however. That is because any human productive activity requires consumption; consumption of time, energy, tools, materials, etc. How do these economists who formulated the contemporary definitions of the terms define consumption? It is the process where value is used, devoured, or destroyed. If nothing of value is created in this process, then it is consumption proper. But, if something of value is created while some value is used, devoured, destroyed, then this is productive consumption -- since all human creation of value requires consumption, in short, this is production.

Why go through this rather obvious, though brief, discussion? To show that any definition of what consumption and production are, their distinction, purely depends upon the meaning of value. If the community of definers see the outcomes from a process of consumption as something of value, production has taken place. Otherwise, it is a rather profane (common and ordinary) act of consumption (proper); pure use, devouring, destruction.

However, what has value is not so easy to decide. Nor is it possible to have an absolute definition. Rather, it is quite relative, to be defined by the culture of the time and society -- whether culture constructs this definition through the market, politics, social relations, or a complex combination of such.

Classical economists were rather satisfied with their categorizations, but Marx introduced further difficulties when he extended their labor-value thesis (Marx 1973). Exchange-value was not only an attribute of commodities produced by labor for the market, but the labor-power that produced these commodities was itself a commodity exchanged in the market, and, thus, had an exchange-value. Was consumption of food at home, then, a productive act since it "created" labor-power that had exchange-value in the (labor) market? Marx's answer was that in capitalism such consumption would not be accounted as production because exchange-value for labor-power entered the capital equation merely as a cost and did not, therefore, afford the capitalist any surplus-value toward realization and accumulation of capital (Marx 1973). Calculations of the gross national product (GNP) in capitalist economies today is a proof to this conclusion.

How did value come to be considered what it is in capitalism? Marx's implied answer was that were a capitalist to have a farm where s/he bred human beings to sell their labor-power in the market, thus getting surplus-value within the
exchange-value of this labor-power to realize and further accumulate capital, then the food, clothing, etc., these laborers consumed would have been considered productive, and the eating, sleeping, etc., that went on in this farm would be considered production. When the similar activities went on in the homes of the laborers, not affording surplus-value for capital, it was considered consumption proper. The efforts of the home-maker at home to feed and keep the laborer were not productive. The home-maker was a "consumer proper," as was the laborer when s/he was at home. The laborer became a "producer" when s/he was in the factory, working for the capitalist, producing commodities. The above "narrative," the story of reality in capitalist society, is specific to just that, the capitalist society. This narrative became very much that of modern society, built on capitalism, scientific technology, and the ideology of the market economy. But, the development of the market has itself a history. This history is intertwined with the separation of the public and private domains, articulation of gender categories, the growth of commodity production, and legitimation of private property. It is also the history of the emergence of the concepts of consumption and production, and the system of values which produces these concepts.

A COMMON HISTORY OF CONSUMPTION AND GENDER

While human beings have always consumed, the concept of consumption as separate from production seems to have its roots in other separations: Separation of home from workplace, separation of time for work (job) from time for play (recreation, leisure), separation of the public from the private. With these separations came the separation of consumption from production in concept. Increasingly, activities at home, during play, in the private domain came to be considered consumptive. Production was done in the public domain, the factory, office, workplace.

Historically, in many cultures, work and play, toil and recreation were largely merged (Cameron 1973; Udy 1970; Weber 1976). Consequently, concepts of leisure and recreation are relatively new (Touraine 1974). Rather, for many human beings, before the appearance of societies where substantive and persistent specialization took place, where some decided and others labored, life was a continual and perpetual series of tasks, some more enjoyable than others, but all required for subsistence as subsistence was known to be. With growing commodity production where tasks began to be performed not just when and where needed, but accumulations occurred for future needs or for trade and barter, especially with the development of markets, the separation of work from consumption time, or when commodities were produced versus used, became a recognized phenomenon (Applebaum 1984; Udy 1970).

With greater specialization, production organized in mass quantities, came the separation of the home(stead) from the workplace; a separation of where family or household matters were practiced from where social or public affairs were run (Reiter 1975; Sacks 1975; Saffioti 1978). Production (laboring to produce commodities to be exchanged in the market) increasingly became delegated to the public domain, the factory, office, agency, etc. A certain cultural myth, an ideology developed alongside this transfer of "productive activity" to the public domain. In this domain, the truly "important" matters above individual, family issues were organized, formulated, and carried out. "Useful," "creative," "value producing" activities had no place in the private domain, the home. Home was for recreation, leisure, and consumption. The people in the private domain did not "work," they rested, played, consumed. Chores to be done at home were banal, profane activities. They were unproductive, petty tasks that required no expertise or "knowledge of importance." These meanings were signified mostly through the valuation practices in society, that is, acts which promoted or demoted, rewarded or condemned, dignified or degraded, glorified or oppressed, remunerated or exploited the tasks done, and those who did these tasks, in the private and public domains. In many cases, these practices contradicted the rhetoric, for example, about the importance of motherhood. The valuation practices signified that important things were going on in the public domain. People there were producing, contributing to the economy and the society, to the welfare of nations. In the public domain people were making decisions that influenced nations, humanity. In the private domain, people played, and did other insignificant things, such as, eat, clean, cook, sleep, rear children.

Consumption, activity attributed to the private
domain, was selfish, solely for the individual or the family. It did not create anything of significant (economic) value for the society, humanity. Its sole purpose was to replenish the individual to carry out the really important, meaningful, and valuable activities in the public domain, for production. Production was creation, it added something of value to human lives. It was treated, therefore, as a sacred activity (Polanyi 1977; Saffioti 1978).

In societies which later formed the western civilizations women came to primarily occupy the private domain and men the public domain. This, in fact, may have been largely due to many chance occurrences and accidents as evidenced from other cultures that did not specialize in the same way (Draper 1975; Sacks 1982). With time, these accidental occupations were reinforced by the resulting structures. Essentialist arguments regarding women's biology, birth giving, and child rearing do not seem to hold given that in many other societies, the separation of the public and the private did not occur, or women and men occupied the domains in different proportions, or women dominated the public domain (Rohrich-Leavitt, Sykes and Weatherford 1975; Webster 1975). In many such cultures, as we specifically know in Africa (Hafkin and Bay 1976), the colonizers would not recognize the women and would refuse to deal with them, forcing the men to take the public roles mirroring those of the colonizers. Thus, traditions that were different were forced to change (Boserup 1970; Sacks 1982). Even in western societies, the occupation of the private domain by women and the public domain by men was largely mythical, that is, believed and promoted to be so more than indeed being the case -- especially in the experiences of certain subcultures (Lerner 1973, pp. 240-284). The myth did, however, reinforce a greater separation of men and women into the domains as reflected in the examples of women being forced into the homes following the Industrial Revolution in England and following the two World Wars in the U.S.

Following the colonial and merchantilist periods, then, commodity production exploded, market exchange largely began to dominate and determine all other forms of socio-economic relations. That is, capitalism entrenched in the industrializing societies of western civilization. Categories of gender were constructed on the meanings that generated from the roles attributed to public and private domains. Given the sex specializations into the two domains, the feminine and the masculine collapsed with female and male. Sex and gender became inseparable. Sex defined the biological qualities but gender afforded them their meanings, roles, and status, in short, their culture. Feminine (female) was the consumer, in the home, the private domain. Masculine (male) was the producer, in the workplace, the offices, the political arena, the public domain. Consequently, given the values and meanings attributed to production, masculine qualities were positive in the culture that developed. Males did things that counted in the accounting of national wealth and income. Women's activities at home were worthless, consumptive, and economically discounted. Given this mentality, masculine activities in the public domain were worthwhile, therefore, meriting payment. Feminine activity at home did not contribute to national income, therefore, did not merit to be paid (Gardiner 1979).

The female, specifically in visual culture, the female body, became the representation of the feminine which was the "ideal" consumer in western culture. She "went shopping" while he worked. She spent his money or earnings. Her frivolousness in buying and consuming became a major topic for jokes in the culture. She was such a "consumer" that he had to always restrain her appetite for consumables. In the cultural ecstasy of constructing these meanings, the fact that the privacy of the private domain was sheer myth, an illusion, went unnoticed. Indeed, the structure and forms of what went on in the "private" domain were determined by the politics and culture of the public domain. This determination became more and more forceful as the products bought in the market increased their role at home.

THE MARKET AND THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DOMAINS

The separations briefly discussed above, which entrenched the concept of consumption separate from production, and contributed greatly to the modern concepts of gender and value, must have been paramount in the formation of the market as we know it in contemporary society. The importance of these separations in the development of modern culture cannot be
overemphasized. Without the separations of home and workplace, public and private, work and recreation, the "market" is only a site, a location, where trade or barter takes place between tribes or communities. The market, conceptualized as the population of actual and potential customers, consumer units (individuals, households, organizations, etc.), can only make sense given such separations.

The market was not instantaneously the focus for activities in the public domain, however, when the separations first occurred. Neither was it the dominating force in legitimizing culture, meanings, values, and socio-economic practice that it is in contemporary society. The primacy of politics and social (kinship) relations continued and did not become subordinated to the market for some time. This subordination has increased with the growing transfer of creative activity at home (private domain) to the socially organized workplace (public domain). As studied elsewhere (Fatat and Dholakia 1977, 1982; Fatat 1987), creative activity at home has been increasingly substituted by products bought in the market. Thus, activity in the private domain has increasingly become one of following instructions and standards in using these products. Consistently, activities such as, gardening, weaving, cooking, baking, knitting, etc., historically performed at home, have diminished and are substituted with canned foods, ready-made clothing, frozen dinners, packaged bread, etc. There are several characteristics of this substitution which are important in the construction of the contemporary consumption patterns and culture. A short discussion of these characteristics is in order with the caution that the history discussed is one that is not representative of all circumstances or events but only of the dominating tendencies. Specifically, this is the history of tendencies in western civilizations.

Originally, many of the products produced in the public domain were those that helped creative activities at home. These were products such as sewing machines, raw wool, spinning and knitting tools, agricultural tools, home building tools, etc. Such products have been replaced by their end products, where the consumer in the private domain no longer has to create them but finds them in the market ready for consumption (Braverman 1974; Campbell 1987; McCracken 1988; Weinbaum and Bridges 1979). Now, the activity at home is not largely one of creating consumables but "consuming" them. Also, for durable consumables, the market is enlarged not only for supplying the durable itself, but for providing the products to maintain or "keep" it. Specialized household cleaners to keep the refrigerator and the bathtub and the furniture, etc., odorless and clean are good examples.

Whatever creative activity, or "production" in the classical economics sense, occurred at home has, thus, increasingly been substituted by the products that are produced in the public domain within publicly or socially organized production units. In a sense, creative labor at home is substituted by "productive" labor in the public domain. This is good, from a capitalist perspective, since the labor-power in the public domain is productive; it creates surplus-value, contributes to realization and accumulation of capital and, thereby, to the welfare of nations. The more labor is transferred from the private to the public domain, the more products of labor in the public domain are purchased in the market to substitute labor at home, the healthier and the economy and larger the national wealth.

The transfer of labor-power from home to the public domain, however, did not mean that people (women, who occupied the private domain) were always transferred from the private to the public domain. The transfer was in terms of, what Marx called, abstract labor, not concrete labor. The actual history of this transfer, of course, is much more complex with women and children being pulled into the factories as cheap labor initially during the industrial revolution and, then, returned to the home as "pure" consumers, their labor in the workforce being substituted by machines and male workers. The cooptation of "family wages" and other labor demands for benefits, etc., into the political agendas of the industrialists seems to have had much to do with the necessity of mass consumers for a market to grow with growing mass production (Gardiner 1979; Zaretsky 1978). Indeed, households had to be populated during the day in order to have continual consumption to absorb the increasing production capabilities in the public domain. So, while they used more and more products produced for the market in the public domain, substituting for the labor they earlier did at home, women were simultaneously returned to the private domain in order to "consume" the products...
(Braverman 1974; Campbell 1987). With the growth of industrialization and the necessity to sell more and more products in the market, the character of consumption at home indeed changed, as mentioned earlier, from creative to consumptive types of activities.

Women, forced back to the private domain through social policies in industrialized western economies lived extremely paradoxical lives and confronted paradoxical rhetoric and behaviors. Postmodernist claims of paradox in modern life would be well supported by the condition of women in the private domain. First of all, the so-called "private" domain was not private at all. Rather, the practices in the public domain and their products, in terms of political-legal outcomes and in terms of products for consumer markets, largely determined life and relationships in the "private" domain. Women's lives were not private by any means. They were, in many respects, private properties of men. The feminine that was signified as the consumer became the consumed, commodified and objectified to be used by men. Husbands owned their wives and all other "assets" in the household (Saffioti 1978). A woman could do little without the man's permission (Chodorow 1979). This happened at the same time much praise and flattering of women went on in the public rhetoric. As mothers, especially, women were put on pedestals; for raising the stout sons and looking after their needy men -- sending them to glorious wars?

Other paradoxical circumstances in the private domain were, maybe, more telling in terms of consumption culture. While women were praised for undertaking their important social tasks of childrearing and taking care of men, they were belittled for being such consumers. Consuming, after all, was valueless; a profane and banal act. But, if they did not consume, their prudence, negatively influenced the expansion of the market, therefore, the wealth (read as capital accumulation) of the nation. They were criticized, made fun of, devalued for being "consumers," and yet if they were not "good consumers" they hurt national economic growth. This contradiction in rhetoric and economy has produced much paradoxical indoctrination of women. They have been given contradicting signs regarding what they ought to be, how they should look, and more recently, the images they should represent (Butler and Paisley 1980; Suleiman 1986). To a large extent, this seems to be an inevitable part of being a "consumer."

Over the history of modern society, women have occupied the private domain, the domain of the feminine qualities, and thus, woman, feminine, and consumer have largely collapsed together in their representations. Enjoying going shopping, thinking about consuming with fondness have come to be considered feminine qualities. Being associated with the public domain, the masculine is associated with production. The male, occupying the public domain and imbued with masculine gender qualities, is the producer, the bread-winner, since he produces value in the market. The imprinting of the above discussed significations and representations in the conscious and subconscious mentalities of people in modern society has contributed greatly to the orientations in marketing; possibly the ultimate institution of postmodernity in contemporary western civilization.

CONSUMPTION AND GENDER IN POSTMODERNITY

There is much speculation that, especially in the advanced capitalist economies of the West, we may be (fast becoming) entrenched in a postmodern culture (Angus and Jhally 1989; Fekete 1987; Kellner 1989). Furthermore, there are suggestions that in this postmodern era the character of consumption and gender may be changing, or that certain characteristics present but suppressed in modernity may be beginning to dominate (Foster 1983; Kaplan 1988; Ross 1988). Specifically, there may be an increasing disintegration of the close connections among sex, gender, and consumption (Firat 1990).

The conditions of postmodernity and their effects on marketing and the consumers have been investigated elsewhere (Firat 1990 and 1991; Sherry 1990; Venkatesh 1989). One of the most addressed conditions is hyperreality; that is, the becoming real of what is originally hype or a simulation, as well as the inclination of the postmodern consumer to experience or live the simulation rather than the real (Baudrillard 1983a; Eco 1986; Wilson 1989). The realization of the hype or the simulation is facilitated through powerful signification and representation processes which imbue signifiers (verbal, visual, or material signs or symbols that represent things
making them intelligible) with meanings (the signified) different from the original or past meanings. This is possible because, as semioticians have recognized at least since Saussure, all signifiers are only arbitrarily linked to the referents which they originally signified (Santambrogio and Violi 1988). The predominance of continual signification and resignification of signifiers in postmodernity (Foster 1983), specifically through marketing practices, results in an omnipresence of disjointedness and discontinuity; what many postmodernists discuss as fragmentation (Lyotard 1984; Wilson 1989). It becomes no longer possible to find centered connections to historical origins or jointedness among the different images represented using the (now remotely) familiar signifiers. Rather, it is the excitement or ecstasy of the fragmented moments of exposure to signs or communication that is sought (Baudrillard 1983b). In postmodernity, commitment to seeking a central meaning for life experiences, which was a requirement in the modernist sensibility, is transcended (Gitlin 1989). The spectacle (sensational, exciting (re)presentation of images) takes the center stage (Debord 1983).

The connections between sex and gender are not immune to this omnipresent fragmentation. Enlargement of the market, a locus of fragmentation of all life experiences through the ever increasing numbers of specialized products, each promoting and necessary as a spectacle for fragmented moments of consumption (Jameson 1983), both fosters and requires all individuals to take part in the consumption ethic. Males need to take as much part in the "consuming ethic" as the females who have historically been associated with it. Consequently, there is a separation taking place between sex and gender categories which historically had collapsed as explained earlier. The historically completed commodification and objectification of the female body, as the representation of the feminine, is being extended to the images of the male body as well. The meanings originally attached to the feminine and the masculine are becoming diffused across the sexes; specifically in advertising and art (Kaplan 1987; Kroker and Cook 1986; Levin 1988; Tomlinson 1990).

This does not, however, necessarily signal the kind of equality sought by movements, such as, feminism. Rather, as the male is drawn into consumption, and as women are increasingly in the labor-force outside the home, both women and men play the feminine and the masculine images now embracing a tolerance for the cultured male and female egos. After all, fragmentation also affects the self-concepts and personalities which now transcend the requirement for a centered, unique self. Rather than a persistent character under all circumstances (a modernist quest), the postmodern person represents images; different ones as needed in different situations to be "marketable" (Fels 1990). As males represent the consumer images imbued with the feminine significations, they also acquire the commodification and objectification of the feminine, now equally subjected to the same forms of domination as females who historically represented the feminine. The market appropriates and resignifies the expressions of equality nurtured in feminist movements turning the male into a consumer "equal" to the female. At the same time, women who enter the labor-force are called to represent masculine images, equally fragmented in their experiences within different situations. Overall, this experience for both sexes, which could be very positive in liberating both sexes from the gendered roles they were historically locked into, also carries the potential of reinforcing these roles; no longer on the basis of sexual discrimination, but on the basis of both sexes reproducing the ideal images of the "consumer" and the "producer." The danger here may be that by evolving into these ideal images people will get caught up in the whirlpool of the market and be consumed themselves as the products.

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This paper explores the influence of gender role stereotypes upon scientific role stereotypes, with a focus upon qualitative consumer research. After arguing that the dominant model of science is a male model, aspects of qualitative research are discussed that conform to feminine as well as masculine gender stereotypes. It is concluded that a non-gendered androgynous approach to qualitative consumer research is most appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

While Gherardi and Turner's (1987) book title, Real Men Don't Collect Soft Data, is meant to be facetious, the issue that it raises is a serious one. This discussion is about the relationship between gender role stereotypes and scientific role stereotypes. For the traditional model of science is the traditional model of maleness.

An initial indication that these stereotypes may be related is seen in the metaphors that we use in describing quantitative data as "hard" data and qualitative data as "soft" data. Were the prevalent metaphors instead "wet" and "dry," there might be reason to hope that the traditional view of science is not entirely male-biased. But, alas, it is not so. As Keller (1983), Benston (1989), and others have noted, the dominant model of science variously labeled as scientific method, empiricism, realism, or positivism, is a male model. It enshrines as the characteristics of good science the very characteristics stereotypically called masculine in western society: rationality, distanced objectivity, control, and reductionism. Such a science eschews the traits our society stereotypically regards as feminine: intuition, emotional subjectivity, caring, and holism. Gherardi and Turner (1987) only slightly exaggerate the consequences of this macho bias in social science:

"Collecting hard data means making hard decisions, taking no nonsense, hardening one's heart to weaklings, building on a hard core of material using hard words to press on to hard won results which often carry with them promises of hard cash for future research and career prospects. By contrast, soft data is weak, unstable, impressionable, squishy, and sensual. The softies, weaklings, or ninnys who carry it out have too much of a soft-spot for counter-argument for them to be taken seriously; they reveal the soft underbelly of the social science enterprise, [and] are likely to soft-soap those who listen to them. They are too soft-hearted, pitying and maybe even foolish to be taken seriously, so that it is only right they should be employed on soft money" (p. 5).

Seen in this light, the phobic reaction of a number of traditional science consumer researchers against qualitative consumer research (e.g., Calder and Tybout 1987, 1989; Hunt 1989, 1991) can be seen to be a potential instance of not only scientism, but sexism as well. Within the male dominance of traditional science, the recent rise of qualitative methods in consumer research, organizational research, and communications research may be perceived by such critics as both a threat to the traditional model of science and a threat to male hegemony in social science research.

If there is a gender issue in the minds of some who challenge qualitative research, it may be worth examining whether, indeed qualitative research has a feminine character. Accordingly, in the following discussion I attempt to answer three questions, focusing on the context of consumer research:

1. What are the characteristics of qualitative research that would lead some to label it a feminine style of research?

2. What characteristics of qualitative research might be more properly called aspects of a masculine style of research?

3. What is the most appropriate and desirable set of characteristics with which qualitative research should be pursued?

While I do not wish to perpetuate gender stereotypes, since they appear to have been so
much a part of our views of science it is necessary that they be recognized and examined if an alternative, non-gendered, view of consumer research is to be constructed.

The "Feminine" Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Although there are numerous ways in which being a woman or a being a man differentially affects the nature of fieldwork experiences (e.g., Angrosino 1986, Easterday, Papademas, Schorr, and Valentine 1977, Fithorn 1986, Gregory 1984, Warren 1988), the concern here is instead with those characteristics of qualitative research that fit the female gender role stereotype. Foremost among these is that in qualitative research there is a lack of separation between subject and object. In the more traditional quantitative mode of research, the Cartesian dualism of subject/object separations urges maximum separation between the self and the other. Thus, the laboratory experiment in which the ideal is a "clean" environment where research participants (called subjects, but treated as objects) never encounter the researcher (who is seen as having the self-interested potential of biasing them). Anonymity between researcher and research participant is stressed. In qualitative research, on the other hand, the research ideal is a series of intimate in-depth interviews with informants. Feelings are cultivated rather than ignored and repressed. In more extreme post-modern research, reports are negotiated with informants and sometimes placed largely in their hands (see Clifford 1988, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Goodall 1991, and Jackson 1989). But even in less extreme variants of qualitative research, trust must be developed between researchers and informants and caring is necessary for researchers to be able to empathize with these participants and be able to appreciate their world views.

This leads to a second "feminine" characteristic of qualitative research: subjectivity reigns over objectivity. While quantitative researchers preserve at least the illusion of objectivity with double-blind experiments, double-blind research reviews, control of experimental conditions, and statistical hypothesis tests, qualitative researchers are more open to the interpretive character of their research. Even sophisticated computer programs to aid the analysis of qualitative data only help the researcher to see patterns that may facilitate interpretations; they provide no final answers (e.g., Belk 1988, Tesch 1990). The desire is to maintain a holistic perspective and not to restrict the analysis to a reductionist hypothesis test. Rather than separating the processes of theory generation and theory testing (as in quantitative research), qualitative researchers continually iterate between data and interpretation. Similarly, rather than view research participants as capable of only contributing data, qualitative researchers may seek participant interpretations and participant evaluations of researcher interpretations. Both the iteration between data and interpretation and the solicitation of participant interpretations suggest that the subjectivity of qualitative researchers is not a matter of introspection alone. It is nevertheless, inherently a process of subjective interpretation and qualitative researchers make no attempt hide this.

At the same time, the qualitative researcher has a more difficult time showing the method by which interpretations may have been developed. This is due to a third "feminine" characteristic of qualitative analysis: loose and symbolic thought dominates simple causal logic. Qualitative researchers are apt to use metaphors, attend feelings, and employ fuzzy intuitive insights. In these characteristics qualitative analysis has much in common with art and creativity (see von Oech 1983, Hanks and Parry 1983). This is seen in the two contrasting sets of characteristics that I have labeled as soft versus hard modes of thought (Belk, 1986, pp. 22-23):

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Because qualitative research deals with the richness and complexity of everyday life rather than a simplified numeric experimental or survey research version of this reality, it is much less prone to linear causal statements that \( A \) causes \( B \). Its simplifications are of another sort found in the metaphor, symbol, and feeling-evocative vignette. Qualitative research evidences and reports are not only verbal but visual (and conceivably even olfactory, gustatory, and tactile). Across these sensory modes there is a reliance on compelling metaphors and symbols. Rather than eschew an emotional vocabulary and sensual presentation for a dry chain of logic and a distanced third person account, a qualitative research summary is often first person and attempts to allow the audience to feel what those studied feel.

This is facilitated by an additional "feminine" characteristic of qualitative research: the goal is one of understanding rather than explanation. Understanding is based on what has been termed knowledge of a phenomenon rather than knowledge about a phenomenon (Langer 1963). Knowledge about something can be stated in concise propositions and conclusions (see Belk 1991). It produces what Denzin (1989) terms cognitive understanding rather than emotional understanding. But a knowledge of something is experiential knowledge and requires a more extensive presentation attempting to create what Geertz (1973) called thick description. If successful, thick description will allow readers to place themselves in the situation described and to feel they know what it is like to be homeless or to be deeply involved with a collection or to first occupy a new house, regardless of whether they have experienced similar situations first hand. It is neither necessary nor desirable in the view of the qualitative researcher to provide a thin factual description if it does not aid in creating a thick evocative description. What is necessary is to provide those details that aid in evoking the essence of the phenomena. Like a good novelist or film maker, the qualitative researcher uses selected details to convey the essential feeling of the phenomenon. Knowledge about something may consist of a random assortment of details, whereas knowledge of something requires the recreation of those details that deepen understanding. When they are verbal, these details are often in the words of informants. For only by staying as close as possible to the views of informants is empathetic understanding likely to emerge.

A final "feminine" characteristic of qualitative research that I will consider is that it aims for a fully contextualized understanding of phenomena. In contrast to such imbedded understanding, quantitative consumer research seeks a decontextualized reductionist knowledge. Such knowledge often reduces to simple issues such as what advertising techniques facilitate brand recall, how arrangements of retail atmosphere affect sales, or how consumers appear to use attribute information in making brand choices. The danger of this reductionist approach to consumer behavior is that it is amoral. By ignoring the contextualized understanding sought by qualitative research, such researchers study simple effects without considering the impact of these effects on consumers' lives. Because positivist science emphasizes prediction and control, reductionist relationships offer the potential for manipulating rather than understanding consumers. Nonpositivist qualitative science, on the other hand, with its goals of thick description and understanding, provides few avenues for manipulating narrow outcomes. It instead provides broader and richer insight into how consumption phenomena are involved in human life. By developing caring relationships with the consumers and sellers studied, a more complete understanding of the human impacts of consumption is possible. This more humanistic perspective does not attempt or pretend to be value-free or neutral. It forces the researcher to consider the human and moral consequences of his or her research.
THE "MASCULINE" CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The preceding "feminine" characteristics of qualitative research coexist with certain "masculine" characteristics that are equally important to such research. This does not refer to those who would quantify qualitative data and pursue a positivist approach to qualitative research (e.g., Werner and Schoepfle 1987a, 1987b). Rather, the focus is on the general characteristics of qualitative research that have more in common with male gender role stereotypes. While there are fewer "masculine" characteristics than "feminine" characteristics in qualitative research, they are no less important.

One characteristic of qualitative consumer research traditionally associated with masculine stereotypes is that risk-taking is essential. At this point in time as qualitative consumer research struggles to gain acceptance in a field dominated by a quantitative research paradigm, one of the initial risks undertaken by the researcher is the risk that the work will not be accepted by editors, editorial boards, and colleagues. The qualitative field researcher also lacks the controlled world of the laboratory researcher and faces possible rejection by strangers both in the case of participant observation and depth interviewing. No small amount of courage and risk-taking is required to approach the stranger in field research, even though each successful experience teaches how open and cooperative people are with researchers who are truly interested in what they have to say. Once out of the field, the qualitative researcher faces the further risks that the data are unimportant and that meaningful interpretations will not emerge. There is no critical test that can be run that will concisely support or reject a priori hypotheses. Instead, the qualitative researcher must welcome the challenge of ambiguity and take the risk that the result will be worthwhile.

A second "masculine" characteristic of qualitative research may seem to oppose its "feminine" subjective character as described above: rigor is necessary in data collection and analysis. This rigor is, however, not in opposition to the subjective nature of qualitative research and is in fact requisite for meaningful qualitative research. Qualitative research is "hard" work; it is often exhaustive physically and emotionally as well as in its coverage of the phenomenon of interest. Rigorous aspects of data collection include writing detailed and exhaustive fieldnotes and journals, spending lengthy amounts of time in the field, and keeping track of the abundance of materials being generated and gathered. By conservative estimate, each hour in the field takes three to four hours of time to write-up in detailed fieldnotes and reflective journals. Transcriptions of interviews take longer. Coupled with the months that are normally required to achieve intimate familiarity with informants and phenomena in the field, a qualitative research project can often take years to complete. Written materials often grow to hundreds or thousands of pages and visual materials must be indexed in order locate particular evidence. While analysis begins before data collection is completed, analysis also requires considerable rigor and vast amounts of time. Methods vary, even with contemporary computer-aided analysis. Procedures closer to the positivist end of the research continuum involve assigning multiple codes to each segment of written data. Less positivist approaches may forgo formal coding and employ more free-form searching of material with text-retrieval programs (see Tesch 1990). In either case, the analysis checks and rechecks interpretations and must marshall support for emerging themes. Rigor is essential. All evidences and apparent exceptions must be carefully examined. Only when the interpretation has been reformulated and refined so that there are no unaccountable exceptions is the analysis complete. Just as fieldwork can take months, so can analysis.

Nor is the research complete once an interpretation is agreed upon. A third "masculine" characteristic of qualitative research is that primary process thinking is supplanted by secondary process thinking in presentation of results. Primary process thinking is loose, nonlogical, and subjective; it is inductive and related to the creative process of discovery (Belk 1986, Suler 1980). Secondary process thinking is more formal, logical, and objective; it is deductive and related to the process of justification. While analysis benefits from primary process thinking, communicating insights to others requires secondary process thinking to consider implications and to effectively present these results. Compelling presentations still require creativity and writing skills, but the argument
suffers if it is wandering, vague, or mysterious. This does not mean that the researcher should abandon the attempt to make findings resonate as intuitively for the audience as they do for her or him, but these findings need to be ordered and structured in order to communicate effectively.

A final "masculine" characteristic of qualitative research is that findings are anchored in direct realism. The goal here is not the pseudo-objectivity of a reductionist emphasis on descriptive facts, but a broader realism revealing the internal realities experienced by consumers and constructed or mediated by the society in which they live. Findings are commonly presented through instances, stories, and quotations that bring the reader (or viewer) as close to the phenomenon as possible. The evidences and illustrations drawn upon are ideally concrete as well as rich and telling. The most realistic portrayal is also a complete portrayal. Thus, rather than an elegant but reductionist model based on generalizations, the ethnographic portrait gives attention to small details and to preserving individual perspectives without averaging over them or regarding minority views as mere outliers. In this insistence upon the direct and the concrete, qualitative research is ironically closer to characteristics of the masculine stereotype than is quantitative research with its recourse to indirect measurement and quantification.

SHOULD QUALITATIVE RESEARCH BE ANDROGYNOUS?

While her measurement procedures may be criticized, Sandra Bem (1974) advanced the interesting idea that psychological androgyny is a more versatile and functional state than either masculine or feminine self concepts. Her simple premise is that both masculine and feminine gender role stereotypes have positive traits and that a more ideal non-gendered self concept adopts both sets of traits -- forceful and gentle, analytical and sympathetic, willing to take risks and shy. If this formulation has some merit in our individual lives and self concepts, we might then ask whether qualitative research can also benefit from a non-gendered set of researcher characteristics.

As the above discussion of "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics is meant to suggest, I believe that the answer to this question is yes. The stereotypical male model of science is inadequate for qualitative consumer research, but so is an alternative stereotypical female model of science. What is needed is a combination of both. One way to achieve this balance is by employing a bigender team. But whatever the fieldwork advantages of this approach, the more complete solution is for qualitative researchers to attempt to shed stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity and strive for a psychologically androgynous personal approach to research. The complete qualitative researcher is hard and soft, wet and dry, as circumstances and research stage require.

This does not deny that qualitative research contradicts many of the "masculine" premises of dominant science. But to conclude that a "feminine" alternative is required would be equally wrong. What I believe is best for consumer research is a non-gendered approach that rejects both of these stereotyped extremes and at the same time calls upon the best of both. In this view "real men" and "real women" are first and foremost "real people."

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