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The construction of class and gender identity is based on the many interrelated roles women occupy -- worker, mother, wife, etc. It is therefore instructive for consumer researchers to explore how these constructions affect them as consumers. A culturalist perspective on class and gender relations assumes that individuals are social actors who develop strategies and interpretations within the structural constraints of their lives. Such a perspective leads to questions about how women construct identities, how they explain the social and gender division of labor and their own position with these structures, and how cultures and ideologies of family and work interact with dominant and popular cultures.

Drawing on three diverse frameworks: the growing literature on work and working-class women; sociological accounts of office work, the organization and control of the labor process, and women's work culture; and literatures emphasizing class consciousness, ideology and subcultural theories, this paper explores the material conditions of the workplace which shape and structure women's social identity. Feminists have consistently shown that these conditions are not separate from the family, community, nor the material relations of consumption. Thus the context of the workplace can be used to explore semiotic aspects of class, gender identity and awareness such as: how women dress and signify themselves; how they decorate their workplace; what magazines they read and what their consumption patterns are; and what discourses they use to categorize themselves. The research is based on a model that postulates that the presence or absence of a work culture mediates the intersection of personal biographies and workplace structures to produce specific social identities. Then, rather than assuming that women's gender identity correlates to their sex, this research uses ethnographic methods, which accord women epistemological primacy.


2It should be noted that gendered assumptions do not necessarily mean that marketers think of consumers as female. Rather, as contemporary feminist theory suggests, gender is a fundamental category which informs our thinking, and our views of gender relations are social constructs with a pervasive influence on the way we view a considerable range of social phenomena.