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Gender and Green Consumerism:
Analyzing a case of domestication of women—the green-cleaners of the planet

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze the gendered nature of green consumerism. Commonly suggested interconnections between green consumerism and female subjectivity are discussed so as to find reasons and plausible explanations for women's relatively greater susceptibility to environmental concern. Two alternative accounts, reflecting two different world views, are discussed and analyzed in terms of their ideological compatibility with sustainable development and gender equality.

While marketing practitioners have long recognized the gendered nature of consumption activities, consumer researchers have tended to show little or no interest in gender differences in consumption. As a theoretical variable, gender has been largely ignored in consumer research on the assumption that it is irrelevant to the topic of interest. Much of the research reported in major journals, for example, appear to assume gender neutrality, treating gender as a dichotomous background variable measured mainly to assess the representativeness of the sample. It is also customarily used as a "dummy" variable to account for the distorting influence of unspecified gender related effects that are not in the focus of interest in the study. In studies where there a purposive attempt is made to investigate the gendered nature of consumption activities, gender has been and still is typically conceptualized, as a dichotomous variable, sex or gender, explaining essential, biologically and/or culturally determined, differences in the motivations and behaviors of male and female consumers (e.g., Evans et al. 2000).

A number of feminist consumer researchers have focused their research on exposing unequal treatment and opportunities of men and women at the market place (e.g., Hill and Dhanda 1999; McLaran et al. 1998), and unmasking sex-role stereotyping and the exploitation of the female body in advertising, for example (for a review see Wiles and Wiles 1995). Some feminist scholars have also contested the epistemology of mainstream marketing by deconstructing the ideological, generally masculine, biases inherent in the Enlightenment inspired research orientation dominant in marketing and consumer research (e.g., Bristor and Fischer 1993; Desmond 1997; Hirschman 1993a). Less attention, however, has been paid to the social construction of gender and gender roles in consumer culture, and the role of marketing activities in producing and reproducing those roles and gender identity (such as Venkatesh 1994; Fisher and Gainer 1994; or Joy and Venkatesh 1994). Grounded on the modernist assumptions of body, identity, and sexuality as a dichotomy, gender has traditionally been conceptualized as a bipolar, mutually exclusive categorization, as Peñaloza (1994) has put the point.

There are more and more market phenomena, however, where these dualist and essentialist conceptualization break down (Hirschman 1993b; Firat 1994; Peñaloza 1994; Roberts 1981). Efforts to categorize consumption
phenomena as male/masculine or female/feminine may well become less and less illuminating and less useful, as women continue to enter the 'masculine' domain of the public sphere, and as male consumers' 'feminine' -labeled needs and wants as are incorporated into marketing strategies (Peñalosa 1994). A consideration of gender at a theoretical level might shed light on both empirical problems seemingly unrelated to gender as well as on phenomena and behavior unreflectively attributed to essential gender differences or conventional gender roles.

Moreover, from a feminist point of view, marketing strategies that unreflectively accept the dominant cultural distinctions between ‘male’ and ‘female’ or ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, and capitalize on social expectations and stereotypical sex-roles may be exploitative and contributing to gender inequality. Gendering products and brands, and marketing communication messages in order to target men and women on the basis of stereotypical sex-roles (Alreck 1994) or observed (universal) differences in their information processing characteristics (Evans et al. 2000) may well perpetuate and reinforce the oppressive systems of representation and the dominant patriarchal ‘sex-gender system’ (de Lauretis 1989) that tends to be systematically linked to the organization of social inequality.

Arguably, therefore, consumer research would significantly benefit from a more thorough and self-reflective analysis of the gendered nature of consumer behavior and the role of marketing activities in the construction of ‘gender’. To illustrate the benefits of a more gender sensitive approach to consumer behavior, this paper presents an analysis of the gendered nature of green consumerism.

Conventional lay discourse and a body of research on pro-environmental consumption suggest that women, as compared to men, tend to be more concerned about environmental problems and, also, tend to be more likely to express this concern by engaging in ecologically responsible behaviors (e.g., Granzin and Olsen 1991; Hacket 1995; Freeman 1991; Moisander 1996; Ottman 1993; Puohiniemi 1995; Roper Starch Worldwide Inc. 1996; Uusitalo 1986). The typical explanations proposed for gender differences in green consumption usually refer to women’s role in society as ‘home-makers’ and ‘family care-takers’. However, considering the crucial impact that the numerous consumption activities typically found with the female sphere of life, e.g., household shopping mainly performed by women (e.g., Dholakia 1999), have on the environment, an essentially more profound understanding of gendered nature of green consumption still continues to be called for (Dobscha 1993).

Moreover, numerous scholars discussing green marketing have argued that green marketers need to consider new theories and ways of viewing the world, human beings and nature, involving fundamental changes in the marketing practice and in the dominant social paradigm (Dobscha 1993; Joy and Auchenlech 1994; Kilbourne et al. 1997; McDonagh and Prothero 1997; Meriläinen et al. 2000). Therefore, marketing practitioners should engage in a reflexive deliberation (Gergen 1997) of the taken-for-granted views on environmental problems and the role of marketing in sustainable development. When building brand identities or designing segmentation and marketing communication strategies to target women, then, green marketing managers need to see to it that their activities are not reproducing the dominant exploitative world view and the dominant systems of representation involved. Furthermore, the challenge of green marketing would seem to be to engage in radical questioning of the dominant discourse on marketing and consumption, exploring, building and introducing new, more sustainable culturally shared meanings and subject positions for citizens as consumers.

Toward this end, this paper analyzes and explores interconnections between green consumerism and female subjectivity so as to find and critically reflect on plausible explanations for women’s relatively greater susceptibility to environmental concern. In the sections that follow, the role of marketing and
consumption in the social construction of gender is first discussed to elaborate on the theoretical perspective adopted in this paper. Then, two different gendered subject positions associated with green consumerism, reflecting two different worldviews, are discussed and analyzed, as possible targets for green marketing, in terms of their ideological compatibility with sustainable development and gender equality. First, the conventional account referring to women’s essential tendency to care is discussed. It is concluded that the social construction and symbolic gendering of green consumerism as female ‘earthcare’, e.g., through green marketing and public awareness campaigns appealing to this representation of green consumerism, may involve unanticipated problems. From an ecofeminist perspective, it is argued that such a conception reflects and reproduces an androcentric and exploitative worldview, and, also that the ethic of care that this ‘earthcaring’ apparently involves may not be suitable for the abstract and impersonal nature of global environmental protection. As an alternative, an equally plausible subject position associated with green consumerism, a reformist environmentalism reflecting an ecocentric egalitarian worldview, is then presented and discussed. Finally some implications are drawn for future research.

MARKETING, CONSUMPTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER

Much of the research on gender dynamics of consumer behavior has taken an essentialist view of gender, focusing on stable biologically or culturally determined differences on trait and behavioral tendencies and on stereotypical sex-roles. Such a view largely ignores the socially constructed and contested nature of ‘gender’, and fails to account for the complex recursive ways in which persons, objects and behaviors are being gendered. Moreover, as Barrett (1995:8) has observed, these approaches to gender largely ignore the power relations associated with gender. Undermining the dynamic processes by which gender relations are contested and negotiated, marketing research and practice focusing on essential sex differences or sex-roles, thus, tends to reify expectations, exaggerating consensus, and failing to appreciate the alternatives to stereotypical norms concerning gender roles and identity. Therefore, marketing and consumer research would significantly benefit from a more elaborate theoretical analysis of the gendered nature of consumption and the role of marketing in the social construction of gender in society.

Numerous scholars have argued that marketing and consumption play a significant role in the social construction of gender in contemporary Western societies (Costa 1994, Fisher and Gainer 1994, Joy and Venkatesh 1994, Peñaloza 1994, Venkatesh 1994). Drawing on de Lauretis (1989:9) it may be argued that marketing, both research and practice, and consumption are part of the sociocultural system of representation in which gender is constructed as “the product and process of both representation and self-representation”. Marketing may be viewed as a ‘technology of gender’ or as an institutional discourse that has the power to control the field of social meaning and, thus, to produce, promote, and ‘implant’ representations of gender (Ibid. p. 18). Costa (1994:8), for example, has argued that gender differentiation and hierarchy are maintained and even furthered in consumption and marketing activities. On one hand, consumers use market products and services in the self-representation or enactment of male and female categories. They act out maleness or femaleness through gendered body rituals, mannerism, roles, dress, and practices, using an array of products and services that they consider appropriate for this process (Joy and Venkatesh 1994; Peñaloza 1994). Knowing this, marketers draw from social conventions concerning maleness and femaleness and try to incorporate the appropriate gender-related meanings into market offerings (e.g., Alreck 1994).

On the other hand, gendered consumption activities and marketing practices also contribute to the social construction of these gender categories, changing, reproducing, and strengthening stereotypical gender roles and the cultural definitions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, for example. As Peñaloza
(1994:361) has argued, gender is inscribed in and articulated by particular commodities. Therefore, in a sense, marketers and consumers are both involved in coinciding processes of “gender production” and “gender consumption” (Peñaloza 1994).

Unsurprisingly, then, a number of feminist marketing scholars have argued that the ignorance or insensitiveness toward the social and cultural embeddedness of gender roles and identity in mainstream marketing and consumer research appears to imply a male-centered gender ideology (e.g., Bristor and Fisher 1993; Hirschman 1993a). As numerous critics have pointed out, in the history of human kind, the assumptions that have guided the social construction of gender as patterned differences, tend to have been developed and refined in contexts dominated by men (Mills 1988; Acker 1992). Gendering processes and practices have thus involved the subordination of women, either concretely or symbolically. Consequently, in ignoring the gendered nature of consumption, marketing and consumer research admits only one vision: that of the constitutive male subject (Joy and Venkatesh 1994).

GREEN CONSUMERISM AS FEMALE ‘CARING’ FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental concern as part of the traditional female sex role

Explanations suggested for female susceptibility to environmental concern frequently build on the traditional and arguably stereotypic images of women as ‘nurturing mothers’ and ‘caring home-makers’, assuming that for female consumers, the concern for environmental quality is just another way of acting out their traditional sex role. Empirical research indicates that

[to] be a ‘real woman’, a woman must be nurturing. She must always and in every circumstance put home and family first!”

as Alreck (1994: 8), for example, has summarized her findings. Therefore, the dominant gender order would seem to define and order a concern for the well being of future generations as normal and ideal for women.

These explanations imply a view of green consumerism as a form of female caring. Such an idea is usually based on the notion that, owing to biological sex differences and/or socialization and gendered developmental pathways, women have a distinctive emotional or moral inclination to ‘care’ (e.g., Gilligan 1983; Chodorow 1989), i.e., to attend physically, mentally, and emotionally the needs of another (Davies 1995: 18-19). Gilligan (1983: 79), for example, has maintained that women have a conventional feminine voice ... defining the self and proclaiming its worth on the basis of the ability to care for and protect others.

This feminine ‘voice’ or quality is, thus, often assumed to make it quite natural for women to empathize and concern themselves with environmental protection.

Sometimes this female readiness for care giving is seen as a special competence of women as terrestrial experts of earthcare. In much the same way that women have been symbolically associated with and seen as part of nature in the history of Western societies (Merchant 1980), they are now believed to be somehow closer to or connected with nature and, thus, inherently more inclined to environmental protection. Using Merchant’s (1996:xv) somewhat provocative terms, women are seen as “planetary caretakers” and “green cleaners”, who are assumed to undertake the task of “earthcare” along with the other duties of the domestic arena and the female sphere of life.

Explanations of this type sometimes imply a homogeneous social grouping or a category of ‘women’ in which all women recognize themselves. However, to get a more profound understanding of gender dynamics in green consumption it would seem important to
recognize explicitly that gender intersects with other social identities during the practice of daily life. Considering gender identity as fixed, closed and unchanging seems unwarranted (Gilroy 1997; Hall 1996). Being a woman may be experienced differently depending on one’s age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and possibly also on a number of other personal factors. Nevertheless, the stereotypic idea of women having a natural inclination for caring undoubtedly imposes a powerful demand upon women, setting a standard for the ‘feminine character’ and a norm for how women should behave. Therefore, for a female green consumer, caring may well constitute an important signifying practice in her self-representation as ‘female’ and ‘feminine’, and an important source in her attempts to develop a unified narrative of her gender identity.

Problematic implications of appealing to female caring to promote sustainable development.

Considering the powerful social expectations that exist for women to be caring and nurturing, it would seem logical and of good marketing practice to design claims, appeals and arguments that draw from the idea that environmental concern is somehow natural for women and that ‘earthcare’ is but a natural element of the female sphere of family and home-making. It is argued here, however, that as regards the global long-term sustainable development goals, such persuasion strategies may involve problematic implications at least for two reasons.

First, at the level of discourse and gender order, the representation of green consumerism as a form of female care giving may be viewed as problematic because it draws on and perpetuates a patriarchal discourse on gender. Assigning women the role of ‘planetary homemakers’ may be considered questionable because this image of women reflects a patriarchal ‘domestication’ of women and, thus, contributes to male dominance and female subordination, of which this particular phenomenon—women as care-takers of the earth’s household—is a symptom (Dobscha 1993; Merchant 1996). Undoubtedly, the attribution of women’s participation in green consumerism to simple care work reflects the traditional view of women as devotedly caring homemakers who are—or at least should be—by nature somehow inherently emotionally and morally more inclined to caring and nurturing than men. As Wilson (1995:179) somewhat sarcastically puts the point, women are considered as “properly confined to the home, where their more delicate sensibilities fit them for rearing children and sustaining refuge from the cruelties and competition of the outside world”.

Moreover, from an ecofeminist perspective it may be argued that marketing activities that reproduce and reinforce systems of representation that perpetuate a patriarchal social order contribute to the degradation of the natural environment. In Western societies where the realm of emotions, nature and the female are considered inferior to rationality, technology and the male (e.g., Merchant 1980), patriarchal conceptual frameworks, which involve dualistic, value-hierarchical thinking coupled with a logic of domination, sanction the twin dominations of women and nature, as Warren (1990) has argued. She, as ecofeminists in general (e.g., Merchant 1980, 1996; Warren 1994, 1997), sees the root cause of environmental degradation in oppressive conceptual frameworks, i.e., in the sets of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, assumptions, and worldviews that explain, justify, and maintain relations of domination and subordination. Ecofeminist critics have, thus, emphasized the need for a fundamental economic, political, and cultural transformation (McMahon 1997; Sandilands 1999), and called for major changes in theory and practice of marketing (Dobscha 1993; McDonagh and Prothero 1997; Meriläinen et al. 2000). From this perspective, then, green marketing activities appealing to the ideas, images, and norms associated with ‘earthcare’ as a distinctively female responsibility, thus, seem incompatible with sustainable development. Representing the green consumer in this way, as a resource for the ‘economic man’ (McMahon; Mellor 1997) reproduces a patriarchal oppressive
conceptual framework and, as a result, reinforces the dominant mechanistic and anthropocentric world view that can be seen as the ultimate cause of environmental problems.

Second, at the level of individual or self-representation, green marketing activities based on appealing to female care giving may be viewed as problematic because of certain features of the approach to morality, the ethic of care, that it seems to involve. It is argued here that such an ethic emphasizes aspects of moral reasoning that, in spite of being well-suited to the private sphere of family and friends, may not be appropriate for green consumerism because environmentally responsible consumer behavior requires consumers to abstract themselves from concrete personal contexts of everyday life. Following Clement’s (1996: 16-19) reasoning about the limits of the ethic of care to address most issues of the public sphere, it is argued here that, because of certain features of the ethic of care, it might be impossible, immoral and unhelpful to use this type of ethical reasoning in the context of green consumption.

In practice, the type of caring discussed here as ‘earthcare’, might not be possible because the ethic of care is best suited for situations that involve a concrete personal context. Caring usually requires a feeling of being socially or emotionally connected to the object of care. This feeling is typically based on real encounters with and responses from individuals as well as attention to the uniqueness of the individual and the situation, which can usually happen only in the context of personal relationships (e.g., Noddings 1984; Tong 1993). In the context of green consumerism and ‘earthcare’, however, the context is often very abstract and involves distant and unfamiliar objects of care, such as tropical rain forests.

Moreover, the fact that the ethic of care can be best characterized as an ethic of personal relations also leads to the problem that ‘green consumerism’ acted out as an instance of ‘earthcare’ might sometimes lead to immoral behavior because such an ethic would express partiality toward those closest to us or whom we experience as emotionally physically and culturally similar to ourselves (e.g., Tronto 1987; Tong 1993).

And finally, it may be argued that the distinctive priorities set in the ethic of care, i.e., meeting individual’s needs and maintaining relationships to others, might fail to meet the moral demands of green consumerism, which almost always involves the resolution of conflicting claims. The ethic of care fails to offer green consumers fair ways to settle conflicts that arise when resources are scarce and when not everyone’s needs can be attended to. As Broughton (1983) has pointed out, a principle of help or care does not work in situations where helping one agent harms another. Unfortunately, however, environmentally responsible consumption requires the consumer to constantly resolve such conflicts of interests. Therefore, caring may not always be a helpful approach to green consumption.

The ethic of care may be considered problematic also more generally from a feminist point of view, because it has been socially coded as a feminine ethic, characteristic to activities and experiences that are traditionally considered as part of women’s sphere of life. As Williams (1991: 97) points out the ethic of care amounts to resuscitation of traditional stereotypes of women, which are used to rationalize male dominance and subordination of women. According to some feminists (Clement 1996, 6), the ethic of care is viewed as an unjust demand upon women, because it requires women to take care of men and men’s interests at the expense of themselves and their own interests. In other words, the ethic of care compromises the autonomy of the caregiver and is therefore inconsistent with feminist goals. Furthermore, as discussed above, the restriction of the ethic of care to personal contexts means also that such an ethic is incapable of addressing any large-scale social issues and, thus, according to the feminist critique, does not provide political resources for challenging women’s oppression.

In sum, it may be concluded that attempts to attribute women’s relatively greater
susceptibility for environmental concern and green consumption to conventional images of women as natural 'caregivers' and 'nurturers' of the domestic arena can be problematic for both feminist goals and environmental protection. Such reasoning, grounded on a patriarchal oppressive conceptual framework and on the ethic of care, amounts to resuscitation of traditional stereotypes of women, generally used to rationalize the subordination of women. Moreover, the representation of green consumerism as female earthcare reflects and reproduces the dominant anthropocentric and mechanistic Western worldview that may be argued to have given rise to the exploitation of nature and the degradation of the environment. Therefore, appeals to women's 'caregiving instincts' may not be ideologically appropriate in green marketing and social marketing interventions aiming to promote ecologically sustainable ways of consumption.

GREEN CONSUMERISM AS FEMALE QUEST FOR AN ECOCENTRIC EGALITARIAN SOCIETY

...feminism is intrinsically a movement to end racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism. (Warren 1997, 4)

Environmental concern as an element of an ecocentric egalitarian ideology

Another way of looking at green consumption and its gendered social and motivational antecedents is to view green consumerism in a wider setting of environmentalism and the other reformist social movements that have emerged in the Western societies, beginning in the 60's and 70's, as a critique to the mechanistic world view (Merchant 1989; Scheffer 1991; Konttinen 1996). The rise of green consumerism and its development into a legitimate social/societal project in the 1980's may be viewed to reflect a more profound cultural transition that continues to be underway in most Western societies (e.g., Welford and Goudson 1993; Shrivastava 1995; Konttinen 1996). The associated changes in social values, and the way people perceive, know, and structure reality have given rise to a number of social movements, such as environmentalism, the peace movement, and women's liberation movement. Characteristic to most of these movements appears to have been an explicit criticism of the dominant materialistic and mechanistic worldview, and an emphasis on pursuing a better quality of life as opposed to constant economic growth and technological progress.

This cultural transition appears to subsume, at least partly, the concerns of both environmentalists and women, its critique having significant implications for both sustainable development and women's liberation or feminist goals (Braidotti et al. 1994; Merchant 1980, 1994; Mies and Shiva 1994; Sandilands 1999; Warren 1990, 1994, 1997). Hence, it is proposed here that the fact that the ecocentric and egalitarian concerns and goals of the environmental movement concur with the basic concerns and interests of the women's liberation movement may plausibly explain why women tend to be more susceptible to environmental concern than men.

As Merchant (1980; 293) observes, a clear egalitarian perspective, i.e., a belief in human equality with respect to social, political, and economic rights and privileges is characteristic of both the women's liberation movement and the environmentalists. Women are struggling to free themselves from cultural and economic constraints that have kept them subordinate to men in Western societies, whereas environmentalists, with their holistic presuppositions about nature, are pointing up the essential role and equal value of every part of an ecosystem. Maintaining that each part—each species, each individual, male and female—contributes equal value to the healthy functioning of the global earth's ecosystem and, thus, has also equal rights, environmentalists are accordingly advocating the leveling of value hierarchies in society by way of decentralization and non-hierarchical forms of organization for example (Millbrath 1986:100).
Moreover, both the women’s liberation movement and environmentalists have been sharply critical of the dominant Western worldview and its reductionist science which, by reconceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctions both the domination of women and nature. Both of these social movements tend to be critical of the cost of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy’s approach to nature and society. The women’s movement has, for example, critically pointed up the loss of meaningful productive economic roles for women in early capitalist society, and criticized, quoting Merchant (1980: xxiv), “the view of both women and nature as psychological and recreational resources for the harried entrepreneur husband”. The environmentalists, similarly, have opposed the exploitative linear mentality of forward progress, emphasizing the need to live within the cycles of nature, focusing on the costs of progress, the limits to growth and the deficiencies of technological decision making (Harré et al. 1999; Scheffer 1991).

Consequently, there seem to be grounds for assuming that, at least for some women, the environmentalist and the feminist goals are intertwined, and for these women green consumerism may well represent a way of advocating new values and social structures that are based on domination of neither nature nor women as resources but on the full expression of both male and female talent and the maintenance of environmental integrity. Female green consumers might well feel that they are contributing to a cultural transition, which one of the founders of a Swedish, New Age oriented, women’s personal development center describes in a women’s health magazine (Hälsa 1/97: 31; translation by the author) as:

an ongoing change of paradigm, in which the dominant patriarchal worldview is replaced by a new [paradigm] with an emphasis on cooperation, equality, and respect for the entire ecosystem.

It may well be that among the female green consumers, there are women who—either consciously or unconsciously—perceive the female sex and themselves as the special victims of environmental destruction. In such a case, for women green consumerism arguably represents both an environmentalist endeavor to advance the transition to ecologically sustainable world and, also, a way of striving for the emancipation of women.

Environmentalist critique as a motive for green consumerism.

Owing to the profusion of ideological concerns underlying the environmentalist thinking, the environmentalist critique has taken various forms and manifestations among green consumers. It seems that the value expressive behavior associated with green consumerism involves a wide range of behavioral domains and personal goals. Therefore, in addition to assuming personal responsibility for environmental protection by adapting their consumption patterns, green consumers may aim to contribute to the transition to sustainable world by engaging in numerous forms of social behavior that they consider alternative to the dominant Western ways of human conduct.

As a critique of Western science, rationality, and knowledge some consumers may express their environmentalist concerns by participating in various forms of New Age oriented cults and personal development groups advocating alternative forms of religious thought, therapy and medicine for example (Merchant 1989: 269). Among some other green consumers, the high value they place for “quality of life”, as opposed to material wealth, may lead them to develop a strong desire for “inner growth” and to take a great interest in dynamic psychology and self-help literature (Fjeld et al. 1984; Konttinen 1996). Moreover, the view that the ontology and epistemology of the mechanistic worldview are exploitative of nature and the Third World (Mies and Shiva 1994) may result in some green consumers’ decision to boycott
multinational companies or to participate in various development projects.

In sum, the environmentalist critique as a motive for green consumerism may be expressed in various different ways. Nevertheless, it may be concluded that all of these behaviors and choices, potentially or in principle, would seem to advance the diffusion of the ecocentric worldview and contribute to the transition to ecologically sustainable world. Therefore, it is argued here that green marketing and environmental protection campaigns based on appealing to this ‘environmentalist-motive’ for green consumerism are more appropriate for the long term sustainable development goals than campaigns building on the ‘earthcaring’ - appeals discussed above.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to discuss and analyze the gendered nature of green consumerism so as to demonstrate the benefits of a more profound, gender sensitive analysis of why women tend to be more susceptible to environmental concern than men. Two motives, ‘feminine caring’ and ‘environmentalism with a feminist orientation’, reflecting two different world views, were discussed and analyzed in terms of their ideological compatibility with gender equality and environmental protection. As a conclusion, a number of propositions are suggested for further conceptual analysis and empirical research.

First, it is suggested that as regards the global long term sustainable development goals, green marketing and environmental protection related social marketing interventions based on appealing to women’s innate inclination for care giving may not be neither ideologically appropriate nor effective for two reasons. First, the conception of green consumerism they involve reproduces an oppressive conceptual framework, reflecting an anthropocentric and patriarchal world view, and second, because the ethic of care, presumably underlying the earthcaring -motive, may not be suitable for or applicable to environmentally responsible consumer behavior.

Second, as an explanation to distinctively female susceptibility to green consumerism, it is proposed that for some women, environmentalist concerns and feminist goals concur or are intertwined. It is suggested that for these women green consumerism represents both an environmentalist endeavor to advance the transition to ecologically sustainable world and, also, a quest for the emancipation of women.

Third, it is proposed that environmentally responsible consumer behavior arising from the environmentalist-motive discussed here potentially advances the diffusion of a more ecocentric world view and, thus, potentially contributes to sustainable development also in the long run.

As a conclusion, it is argued that green marketing theorists and practitioners need to consider new theories and ways of viewing the world, human beings and nature because sustainable development requires fundamental changes in the sociocultural systems of representation associated with consumption and business practice. As Kilbourne (1997:7) has pointed out, if environmental crisis were only a product of specific individual behaviors, the remediation would require only a transformation of those behaviors, through market incentives, legal action, or technological fixes. From an environmentalist and feminist perspective, however, this does not seem to be the case. Therefore, marketing practitioners are encouraged to engage in a self-critical reflection and deliberation (Gergen 1997) of the taken-for-granted views on environmental problems and the role of marketing in sustainable development.

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