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Gender Identity, Gender Salience and Symbolic Consumption

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We would like to thank the U.K. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding the first author’s postgraduate studies (MSc in Marketing) at Manchester School of Management, UMIST, U.K. This article is based on the dissertation submitted as part of the MSc (Marketing) degree.
Feminist, postmodernist and poststructuralist debates have all challenged the way we look at sex and gender in relation to consumption. However marketing managers often treat sex and gender as isomorphic. Sex and gender are inter-related, but gender is not fully determined by sex because not all men are masculine and not all women are feminine. Gender is an increasingly ‘blurred’ construct, with a fluid quality that shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. We used a small-scale qualitative study to examine theoretically and empirically the interrelationships between sex, gender and symbolic consumption. We identified the importance of social contexts (private versus public situations) for the enactment and interpretation of gendered consumption.
INTRODUCTION

“One of the most basic dimensions of [consumption] symbolism is gender” (Levy 1959, p. 207)

Feminist, postmodernist and poststructuralist debates (see Butler 1999, pp. vi-xxvi for a review) have all challenged the way we look at sex and gender in relation to consumption. Recent discussions in consumer behavior research (e.g. Fischer 2002; Moore 2004; Palan 2001) have identified the difficulties which surround operationalizing and researching gender for consumer research and marketing management. In this article we use a small-scale qualitative study to examine theoretically and empirically the interrelationships between sex, gender and symbolic consumption, drawing particularly upon gender identity, gender salience and gendered products. This article is, in part, a response to the issues raised by Eileen Fischer (2002) about the importance of carefully distinguishing between sex and gender in studies of consumer behaviour.

Gender is one of the central analytic categories in marketing and consumer behaviour research (e.g. segmentation); and marketing managers often assume that sex and gender are isomorphic. They base their segmentation and advertising strategies upon the belief that masculine products will appeal to males, and feminine products will appeal to females (Alreck, Settle, and Belch 1982, cited in Worth, Smith, and Mackie 1992). Although sex and gender are inter-related (Deaux 1985), gender is not fully determined by sex because not all men are masculine and not all women are feminine (Bem 1974). Gender is an increasingly ‘blurred’ construct, with a fluid quality that shifts and changes in different contexts at different times (Kacen 2000). There are a variety of subject positions from which individuals can choose, across a range of masculinities and femininities.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex and Gender

For the purposes of this study we regard sex as a biological concept. This allows us to distinguish males and females on the basis of their physiological differences (Bristor and Fischer 1993). We take gender to be “a broad concept which addresses the perspective one takes on one’s own sex as well as incorporating a whole host of psychosocial variables which relate to it in a reciprocal way” (Gould 1996, p478). Recent studies have suggested that, firstly, people’s gender identity, (their own perception of themselves in terms of gender) may offer a more refined tool for exploring the impact of gender on consumer behaviour (Worth et al. 1992); and secondly “how gender is activated and made salient in different contexts” needs further examination (Moore 2004; Palan 2001, pii). Gould (1996) also argues that research into gender identity should focus on the effects of situation-induced gender salience.

Gender Identity

Gender identity is an individual’s sense of themselves as a man or a woman (Gould 1996). Since gender identity and biological sex are not necessarily congruent (Bem 1974), gender identity has been used to explain within-sex differences in terms of consumer behaviour in previous research studies. However there have been mixed results about the significance of gender identity for consumer behaviour. Some studies
have found gender identity to have an influence on symbolic consumption; for instance, masculine males were more likely to smoke masculine image cigarettes and feminine females were more likely to smoke cigarettes with a feminine image (Vitz and Johnson 1965). However, other studies have not found gender identity to be a significant predictor of consumer behaviour. For example, Allison et al.’s study (1980) explored the relationship between a person’s gender identity and their product gender perception, and they found that biological sex was a more significant influence on product gender perception formation than gender identity was. Palan (2001) suggests that many previous studies did not produce significant findings with regard to gender identity either because of conceptualisation problems or because gender identity was not salient.

Gender Salience

Gender salience suggests that a gender-related self-concept has to be activated in order for gender identity to have a significant influence in a particular context (Palan 2001). Although everyone has a gender identity, the salience of this identity varies between people and across situations (Howard and Hollander 1997). Many studies have failed to recognize the importance of gender salience. Gould’s (1996) typology captures how consumer behaviour can vary according to the differential intersection of gender identity and gender salience.

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1. *A High Gender Attribution/Response* in which a person with a high gender identification, placed in a situation of high gender salience, would tend to make many gendered attributions and responses (Gould 1996).

2. *An Identity-Based Gendered Response* where a person with a high gender identification is in a situation of low gender salience, but would still make some gendered responses since their identity centres on gender (Gould 1996).

3. *Situation-Based Gender Attribution* where a person with a low gender identification is placed in a situation of high gender salience, and so would make some gendered attributions according to the situation (Gould 1996).

4. *Low Gender Attribution/Response* in which a person with low gender identification is placed in a situation with low gender salience and thus would make few or no gendered attributions or responses (Gould 1996).

The typology only indicates when there is likely to be a gendered attribution or response, not what its content is (Gould 1996). Gould (1996) argues that gender may not be relevant at all in some situations, since not everything is seen in gendered terms. This suggests, in turn, that the relevance of gendered symbolic consumption may vary according to the situation, reflecting Bearden and Etzel’s (1982) findings about the differential impact of public and private contexts on the symbolic consumption of luxuries and necessities.

Symbolic consumption and the gendering of products
Symbolic consumption suggests that people buy things not only for their functional qualities, but also for what they symbolise in relation to their self-concept. “One of the most basic dimensions of [consumption] symbolism is gender” (Levy 1959, p207). Gender identity is a major aspect within the working self-concept. Self concept is linked to symbolic consumption by the “significance of a product to consumers [which] depends on which of their ideas it enables and the importance of that identity – what it contributes to their overall sense of self” (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993, p. 210) i.e. their working self concept (Markus and Kunda 1986) and gender schema.

Consumers use products to symbolise their gender identity; and they also attribute gender to products, interpreting products either as gendered (i.e. masculine or feminine) (e.g. Iyer and Debevec 1986a, 1986b, 1989) or as gender-neutral. “With gendered products, the basic characteristics of the goods are acceptable by either sex, but the visible design features, advertising, promotion, and perhaps distribution of the product are modified to include symbols which identify it mainly or exclusively with one sex” (Alreck 1994, p.6). The gendering of products means implanting them with either a masculine or feminine image and identity by strongly associating them with the masculine or feminine sex-role stereotype through advertising and/or promotion.

The formation of gendered symbolic product images is influenced by a number of factors, including the gender of the advertising spokesperson and the retail outlet. Gendering a product can be achieved on a symbolic level by manipulating the gender connotations of the packaging, advertising and promotions. Subtle cues such as product names, textures, colours, patterns and shapes of the packaging contribute to the gendering of a product. Designs such as the colour, size and texture of objects play important roles in defining objects in terms of gender (Kirkham and Attfield 1996). In
one study, masculine and feminine gender images were successfully created for a product (soap), by assigning a masculine brand name (Tiger) and a feminine brand name (Rainbow) to the product (Alreck et al. 1982, cited in Iyer and Debevec 1989). All of the cues must be consistent with the desired gender identity (Alreck 1994). Allison et al. (1980) found that product gender perceptions are most directly related to the sex of the person who is stereotypically thought to use the product. Iyer and Debevec (1989) examined how far the perceived product-gender was related to the product purchaser, product user or product promoter. Their results suggested that the gender of the individual seen promoting the product was the most important cue in the formation of product gender, followed by who purchases the product and then by who uses the product.

Earlier studies treated product-gender image as a bipolar construct (see Morris and Cundiff 1971, or Vitz and Johnson 1965). However, later studies of gendered products viewed the masculinity and femininity of products as separate constructs, following Bem’s (1974) research on sex roles which classified individuals as either masculine, feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated. Iyer and Debevec’s (1986a) study used Bem’s (1974) matrix to categorise forty-three products and services into the four gender identities. They found that consumers classified the majority of products as masculine and feminine, and only a few products were classified as androgynous or undifferentiated. However some products are regarded as gender neutral (Faulkner 2001).

Although the symbolic gendered meaning of a product can be learnt through marketing tools such as advertising, the control over gendered symbolic meaning may flow from both consumers and producers, since consumers may appropriate and redefine the symbolic meaning of certain products (Hirschman 1980). Thus an
understanding of the active role consumers can play in creating gendered meanings for products is vital for marketers. In terms of the gendered symbolic meanings attached to products, there is potentially a three-way interplay in the market place between marketers, consumers and products.

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Our research aim was to investigate firstly, how consumers use gender as an organizing principle (Bem 1984) in their consumption; and secondly if there was any situational variation (Bearden and Etzel 1982) in the salience of gender identity (Gould 1996; Palan 2001) for the interpretation and enactment of gendered consumption meanings (Butler 1999).

The specific research objectives were:

- To establish the gender identity of respondents
- To identify the salience of gender identity in participants’ interpretation and consumption of products (i.e. gendered consumption symbolism).
- To examine the impact of situational context on the consumption of gendered symbolic products.

**Respondents**

We used a theoretical sampling approach (Mason 1996, p. 93; Silverman 2000, pp.105ff) to recruit four participants (two males and two female) between the ages of 18 and 24.
Method: data collection ~ semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used, following Palan’s (2001) argument that qualitative methods for research into gender identity may be successful particularly because gender identities are blurring (Palan 2001). Gould also argued that interviews could be “used to explore the nuances and effects of gender identification and salience” (Gould 1996, p. 482). Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit respondents’ views of gender salience and the gendered and situational contexts for symbolic consumption. The interviews were loosely structured to achieve ‘social interaction’ (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe 2001), allowing interviewees to discuss the topics at their own pace. A short vignette was compiled for each interviewee (Appendix) from observation and the interview discussions.

Method: data analysis

All the interviews were recorded on tape cassette and transcribed in their entirety. Analysis was ongoing during the data collection (Robson 1993). The transcripts were analysed through reading and re-reading, noting patterns and identifying different themes. Thompson and Haytko (1997) advised a reading strategy which allows researchers to develop a holistic understanding of each interview transcript whilst also noting similarities across the transcripts already analysed. This process allows earlier readings to inform later readings, with researchers recognising and exploring the patterns in the later readings that perhaps have not been noted in the earlier analysis. Notes were collected at the time of the interviews (e.g. interviewees’ non-verbal
communication and body language) and these notes were reviewed along with the transcripts throughout the analysis as recommended by Patton (1990).

**FINDINGS**

Gender Consciousness and Gender Salience

Respondents discussed how conscious they were of their gender during the consumption process; and when gender would be most salient to them in relation to their consumption decisions. Alan and Heidi both seemed uncertain at first whether they made consumption decisions based on their gender. After thinking about it during the interviews they both agreed that their gender did have an influence upon their consumption habits. Alan said that he did not buy books by female authors because he thought they were aimed at girls, and he would not want anyone to see him reading a ‘girly’ book. Heidi was also unsure at first whether her gender influenced her consumption:

“maybe my gender would influence my consumption for something like a female electrical product, like hairdryers and epilators and things like that, but not necessarily.”.

However, later on Heidi acknowledged that her gender did influence her consumption:

“if I was in a pub I would always order half a pint of lager, not a full pint because I would feel a bit manly drinking a pint, or holding a pint even, and yeah, just like all the girly drinks you know, you feel quite confident ordering them, but definitely if I wanted a lager, I would definitely order only half a pint so that I didn’t look manly.. ”
Kate was certain that her gender influenced her consumption habits. Kate made an important distinction between how conscious she was of her gender when buying the products, compared to when she was consuming them. She was very conscious of trying to portray a feminine identity to others:

“I am usually quite conscious of my gender when consuming products, but much more when I am actually using them. With clothes for example, I am particularly conscious of what they are symbolising in terms of my femininity.”

Rob seemed to be the most conscious of all the four interviewees about the products he consumed, and what they might symbolise to others in terms of gender. He regularly referred to what other people might think about what he was buying:

“When you are shopping you know that you will have to take those items to the cashier and you know that they are going to be looking and judging what you have bought, and looking at your products……so yeah I would be thinking about my gender when choosing products…”

However, Rob claimed that his gender would only influence his consumption decisions for certain products:

“I wouldn’t be conscious I suppose for food you know…..food items I wouldn’t be conscious of my gender, that’s the main one that stands out I think…..however, I would be very conscious of my gender when choosing alcohol drink, you see I tend not to buy alco-pops as I tend to think they are aimed at girls.”

Gender, Consumption and Situational Contexts
The nature and strength of the influence of gender varied depending upon the consumption situation. All the interviewees stressed the importance of the social context in relation to the salience of their gender. All the interviewees claimed that they would be much more conscious of their gender when they were in a public situation, and this would in turn affect what they consumed in order to portray their preferred gender image. Heidi said that when shopping for food, she would be conscious of not buying male food products:

“You try and get things at the checkout that are not ‘guy’ foods, to make you look like a big fat pig, or a man, you know, you wouldn’t see a girl’s basket with a load of beers and pizza and crisps, that is what I would imagine a bloke’s basket to look like, but then….if I was with a group of guys I would eat and drink all of that stuff…..but only if they bought it….I wouldn’t buy it myself!” (Heidi).

The social setting of consuming alcoholic drinks in a bar was mentioned by all of the interviewees as a social context in which their gender was very salient, and it would influence which drinks they consumed. Heidi described how she would change her consumption habits if she was the only girl with a group of males, consuming what she saw as a male drink in order to fit in with the rest of the group:

“for drinks for example, if I was the only girl with a group of lads I would definitely just have a bottle of beer, or just drink whatever they were drinking because you kind of want to fit in ……With blokes you would just try and fit in with the situation that you are in and if I was with a group of lads I would definitely drink what they were drinking and eat what they were eating, rather than buying my own food and drink which were more feminine. I would just want to fit in with them” (Heidi).
A number of reasons could be offered for why Heidi chose to fit in with the others by consuming masculine drinks when she was with a group of males. Perhaps this was because she was confident about her gender identity as a feminine woman, and did not mind being seen consuming masculine products in certain situations? Alternatively, it could be that Heidi is a high self-monitor [although this was not examined in this study], and thus she bases her actions upon the social-self that she feels she ought to portray (Engel et al. 1995). When she is with an all male group, the social-self she feels she ought to portray is masculine. Heidi’s behavior could also be explained in terms of the social identity perspective of gender (Maldonado et al. 2003) where individuals have multiple identities, and the situational context can stimulate a certain identity to take temporary precedence over the other identities. Heidi felt she normally has a feminine gender identity, however, when she is the only woman in an all male group, she perceives herself as part of that male group. She changes her behaviour to become more masculine, by consuming masculine products in order to fit in with the group identity. This also confirms the importance of gender in the context of the working self-concept (Markus and Kunda 1986), since Heidi’s male identity becomes activated as the working self-concept in certain situations.

In contrast to Heidi, Kate was quite definite that she would not change her consumption habits to fit in with the gender of her social group:

“If I was the only girl with a group of lads, I would still consume the same products that I normally would. For example I would still eat the same food and I would definitely still order what I consider ‘female’ drinks. So they would all be ordering their pints and I would have my vodka and orange or a glass of wine. I would be conscious of my gender, but even in different situations or contexts I would still consume products which I normally would, I wouldn’t change” (Kate).
Unlike Heidi, Kate said she would be even more conscious of her gender if she was the only woman with a group of males, and she would consume feminine products in order to portray her femininity even more prominently,

“In fact, if I was with a group of guys I would try and assert my femininity even more prominently. I would want to stand out as the only girl and try and be feminine. And so I would try and wear particularly feminine clothes and I would definitely still order girly drinks, even more so than usual probably… I can fit in quite well with lads, and they often view me as one of the boys, so I would try and be more feminine and girly by drinking girly drinks and wearing feminine clothes so that I stood out as a girl. I definitely wouldn’t be seen dead drinking a pint of beer to fit in with the guys” (Kate).

Both Alan and Rob were adamant that they would not change their consumption of male products if they were the only male with a group of females:

“Even if I was the only boy with a group of all girls - I would still buy what I would buy if I was with a group of boys. I would still buy the male products, I wouldn’t consider having a girly drink for instance because anyone could see me and take the mick. I would just consume what I normally drink” (Rob).

Rob felt that he would probably be more conscious of being a male in an all female environment, but this setting would definitely not make him consume more feminine products, but might prompt him to consume particularly masculine products: “...if anything I would want to portray my masculinity even more because I was the only male with females” (Rob). Kate had also said that she would consume more feminine products than she usually would if she was the only woman, in order to display her femininity even more overtly in an all-male setting. Rob, like Kate, claimed that he would more conscious of his gender when his gender was in the minority. This corresponds with the distinctiveness theory of gender salience, which claims that when a
person’s gender is in the minority, it makes it more distinct (Abrams, Thomas, and Hogg, 1990).

Gendered Products

All the interviewees agreed that the majority of products are gender specific. Interviewees were asked whether they would buy a gendered product that was the opposite gender from their own, and whether this would change according to the situation. Heidi said that an overtly masculine product would put her off buying it, “Um, like a Yorkie bar? Yeah, I think it does because I definitely would not buy a Yorkie bar because they are advertised towards men”. Kate also used the example of chocolate bars to describe her view:

“Smaller and smoother chocolate bars like a Swirl or a Flake are definitely female, whereas something like a Yorkie bar or a Toblerone are definitely male, and I wouldn’t buy them because I think I would look really manly” (Kate).

Rob was very certain that he would never consume a feminine product, and that if a product had been marketed for females, he would never buy it himself:

“It would definitely put me off, because one of my friends might see me using a female product and they would take the mick or something, so even if I liked the product I wouldn’t consume it if it symbolised being female” (Rob).

Rob realised that it was not the actual product which he disliked, but the feminine symbolic features which it portrayed. Alan made a similar comment:

“I wouldn’t drink alco-pops [feminine product] in any situation, no, I think that because of the image that it has, I wouldn’t choose to buy it even if I was
completely on my own, even though they do actually taste OK, they are just thought of as girly aren’t they and I would look stupid drinking one” (Alan).

Kate said that she sometimes bought masculine products, and products aimed at men,

“I think some of my trainers are boys’ trainers and sometimes some of my clothes are, but most of the time people can’t tell this so it doesn’t matter.”

However, she said that people cannot tell that the products are masculine. So in this sense, although she saw herself consuming masculine products, this is only true for products which were not obviously masculine. Thus she did not consume products which overtly symbolised masculinity.

However, a distinction can be made between buying and consuming products. Both Alan and Rob claimed that they would not be self-conscious about consuming feminine products at home. However, they would only consume the products which they perceived to be feminine if their mothers had bought the products. They would consume feminine products at home, but they would not buy them for themselves:

“I would be much less conscious at home, because basically nobody is going to be around to make me conscious of what I am consuming – but only if my parents had bought the products – like my Mum, I would consume them but I wouldn’t buy them” (Alan).

“Yeah, I would be much less concerned if I was at home with my family, it wouldn’t matter at all then what you were using if you were at home with your family. I would drink an alco-pop at home with my family if my Mum had brought them, but it would matter completely if you were in a social situation. You would maybe want to use more designer products or something that really symbolises that it is a male product to others.” (Rob).
DISCUSSION

Gender Identity

There was evidence of the influence of gender in the consumer behavior reported by all our participants. However it was more difficult to ascertain the extent to which gender influenced consumer behaviour. All the interviewees talked about their gender identity. The males (Alan and Rob) espoused masculinity; while the two females (Heidi and Kate) espoused femininity. Both Alan and Kate acknowledged the relevance of gender to their consumption choices. Kate talked about often being particularly conscious of her gender. This links with the construct of gender-consciousness whereby Gould and Stern (1993) suggest that individuals may be schematic or aschematic with respect to gender in terms of their gender-consciousness and also their gender identity. Thus, Kate may be schematic with respect to her gender identity which might heighten her consciousness of gender in certain circumstances, so that gender becomes an organizing principle for her consumption behaviour in certain social contexts where gender imagery is particularly salient.

Gender salience

Gould (1996) argued that studies of gender identity should focus on the effects of situation-induced gender salience. His typology (1996) (figure 1) identified four gendered attributions and responses linked to the interaction of gender identity, gender salience and consumption situation. The behaviour of both Rob and Kate are examples of the first gendered response (see figure 1, Gould 1996). It is a response defined by
high gender salience and high gender identification, which results in many gendered responses. Alan’s behaviour can be described in terms of the second gendered response proposed by Gould’s (1996) typology (figure 1) when he was discussing not being willing to consume alcopops in any circumstances. It is an identity-based response, but in a situation with low gender salience when he is on his own.

Situational context

The nature and strength of the influence of gender varied depending upon the consumption situation; and according to which working self-concept had been activated confirming earlier research (Markus and Kunda 1986). For example, Heidi said that her gender was very salient when she was in the social setting of a pub, and consequently she would never order a pint of beer in a pub so that she did not look too masculine in that situation. However, Heidi claimed that when in other social settings, such as being with an all female group at home, her gender would not be as salient, and thus her consumption habits would not be altered in that situation. Rob seemed to be the most influenced by his gender in terms of his consumption, but this could have been related as much to his age, as he was the youngest participant. Being a teenager is a very critical stage in terms of identity formation: “Teenagers actively search for cues from their peers and from advertising for the ‘right’ way to look and behave” (Solomon et al. 2002, p. 407).

There was a public/private split between consumption settings and gender enactment. Bearden and Etzel (1982) found that reference group influence was more influential for public consumption than private consumption. This also confirms to some degree what Wajcman (2000) states; gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed during social interaction (cited in Maclaran et al. 2004). The social
setting of being in a pub was found to be the situation where gender was considered most salient for all of the interviewees. All the interviewees claimed that their gender would be more salient when they were in a public situation as opposed to being in a private situation. Heidi said that she would consume male products when she was with an all male group, in order to fit in with them, but she would not actually want to be seen purchasing them. This finding may be an indicator of Butler’s (1999) suggestion that gender is a performance. For example, when the males are at home, they will consume feminine products, but when they are in a public setting, they feel that they have to perform their masculinity, and act as a male is expected to, and subsequently they will only consume masculine products. Also, Gould and Stern (1993) found that females were more privately gender-conscious than males, and this could be an indication of why the males said that they would less conscious of their gender when at home. The findings lend support to the argument that, “The meanings of consumer goods are grounded in their social context” (Elliott 1997, p. 286). In some settings, such as in the privacy of their own home, gender may not be salient to consumers, and this has been shown to have an impact on what they consume. However, in the majority of public settings, gender does appear to be an important aspect of one’s self-concept, as Spence (1985) claims.

Alan and Rob were more concerned about using female products, than Heidi and Kate were about using male products. Both Alan and Rob said that they would not purchase or consume feminine products in any public settings; and would only consume feminine products at home if someone else had bought the products. In contrast Heidi and Kate said they sometimes bought masculine products. The females seemed less worried about consuming masculine products in some situations, whereas the males said they would only do so if they were in a private setting, and had not purchased the products themselves. This supports earlier research which suggested that males have
more insecurities about using products which are considered typically feminine, than females have about using some typically masculine products (Kirkham and Attfield 1996). This corresponds with Alreck’s (1994) claim that women will sometimes accept masculine products, but males will almost always reject feminine products. This is a potentially important finding for marketers because it suggests that males can be easily put off a product if it has a feminine image of any kind.

CONCLUSION (INCLUDING LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS)

Gender is a very complex variable; and gender identity potentially offers one mechanism for a more refined understanding of the intersection between sex, gender and symbolic consumption. In our study gender identity influenced all the interviewees to some extent in their consumption behavior, which possibly just adds to the inconclusivity of earlier results as identified by Palan (2001). She argued that inconclusive results using gender identity in consumer behaviour studies might derive either from conceptualisation problems; or because gender identity is not salient. The schematicity of gender seemed to be important – and this can be independent of individuals’ views of their masculinity or femininity.

Gender salience and situational contexts were clearly two important influences on the interpretation of gendered consumption meanings. The interview data captured some of the complexity of individuals’ views of gender, confirming the potential richness of Gould’s (1996) typology. This emerged particularly in the discussion of public and private contexts for consumption – and might prove a useful route for further research in order to understand how products are used in the performance (Butler 1999) and enactment of gender.
However this was a very small-scale study, so it was not possible to elicit examples for each of Gould’s (1996) quadrants (see figure 1). Future research could usefully extend this very initial examination of Gould’s typology: firstly by talking to a greater variety of respondents from each quadrant; and secondly by eliciting more information about the content of each quadrant (e.g. in terms of attitudes, behavior and the performance of gender via symbolic consumption). Marketers continue to be faced by the challenge of trying to unravel and research firstly, the multifaceted nature of gender; secondly, how gender influences the purchase and consumption of different products and in different situations; and thirdly how the gendered meanings of symbolic consumption can be incorporated into integrated marketing communication strategies to achieve the maximum impact and minimize the negative interpretations of gendered imagery.
APPENDIX: SEX, GENDER AND CONSUMPTION

CASE VIGNETTE: ROB

Rob is an eighteen year old male who saw himself as mainly masculine and not very feminine, claiming that this characteristic is one which is not usually true of his personality. It became very obvious during the interview that Rob, as an eighteen year old boy, is at an age where his appearance and image is extremely important to him. He seemed very conscious of what his friends think of him, or how they may judge him in relation to what he is doing, or what he consumes. He appeared to be particularly conscious of his gender with regard to the clothes he wears and also the alcoholic drinks which he consumes. Although Rob did seem very pre-occupied with what others think of him, he did not appear to want to portray a stereotypical ‘macho’ image of being aggressive and forceful. He also freely acknowledged that his personality characteristics included some very feminine traits. For example, he stated that he usually loves children, is understanding, and he is usually sensitive to the needs of others.

Rob saw advertising as a very strong influence in the formation of the gender image for a product. He felt that whether males or females are used in the adverts for products, was a strong influence on his perception of a product’s gender. He also claimed that the type of music that is used in the adverts, and also where the product is advertised, would be very influential in influencing his perception of a product’s gender. He suggested that the type of shop a product is usually sold in would have a weak influence on its gender image in his view.
CASE VIGNETTE: ALAN

Alan is a twenty-three year old male who saw himself as often masculine, and not usually feminine. Like Rob, Alan did not portray a particularly ‘macho’ or masculine image, instead he came across as quite a gentle and caring male. He said that he is usually warm, understanding and eager to soothe hurt feelings. For Alan the most influential factor for product gender formation was the type of shop which the product is usually sold in. He also said that where the product was advertised had a fairly strong influence upon his perception of the gender image of products.

CASE VIGNETTE: HEIDI

Heidi is a twenty three year old female, who espoused a feminine gender identity. In appearance, Heidi came across as quite a ‘girly’ girl; she dressed and acted in a fairly conventionally feminine manner. She was very tactile and gentle in nature. Heidi described herself as never or almost never aggressive, and from the interview this was confirmed by her gentle and caring manner. However, she did not come across as a ‘weak’ person, and she claimed that she it is usually willing to take risks and defends her own beliefs, which are two typically masculine characteristics. In general, Heidi claimed that she is often feminine, and not usually masculine.

Heidi initially claimed that she is not particularly conscious of her gender when consuming products. However, after some discussion during the interview, she acknowledged that she probably does take her gender into account when making consumption decisions. Heidi claimed that she would change her consumption habits depending upon whether she was in the company of males or females, claiming that she
likes to consume products in order to ‘fit in’ with the people and the situation she finds herself in at a particular time.

Heidi said that where a product is advertised has a very strong influence in helping her to form a gender image for a product. She also considers whether males or females are featured in the advertising, and also the colour and style of packaging to be strong influencers in forming gender images for products. She stated that the context the product was being consumed in had only a moderate influence on her perception of its gender image.

**CASE VIGNETTE: KATE**

Kate is a twenty-three year old female, whose gender identity seemed to combine the feminine and the masculine (cf. Bem’s androgyny). She came across as feminine, but also as a person who could easily adapt to different situations, fitting in easily in social situations with either males or females. She said that many of her close friends are males, and that they often see her as ‘one of the lads’. Kate seemed quite conscious of the fact that she is not always perceived as a particularly feminine woman. She saw herself as sometimes masculine, but usually as feminine. Kate claimed that she perceives herself as always a compassionate person, and is usually understanding and sympathetic. However, she also rated herself highly on more masculine characteristics, stating that she was always a strong personality, and is usually independent and assertive.

Kate said that whether males or females are shown using the product in the adverts has a strong influence on her perception of the gender image of a product. She also claimed that the type of shop that the product is sold in is a strong predictor of
product gender. Kate felt that the consumption situation had only a moderate influence upon product gender.
REFERENCES


Mason, Jennifer (1996), *Qualitative Researching*, Sage, London


Figure 1:
A TYPOLOGY OF GENDERED ATTRIBUTIONS AND RESPONSES

**Gender Salience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identification</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High Gender Attribution/Response</td>
<td>Identity-Based Gender Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Situation-Based Gender Attribution</td>
<td>Low Gender Attribution/Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gould 1996