Introduction to the *Handbook of Research on Gender and Marketing*

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History will point to 2018 as the tipping point for all things gender. The evidence is everywhere, from more women running for political office to girls being saved from sex trafficking rings. The focus on gender surpasses typical academic discussions about political, social, and cultural effects. Gender has gone “mainstream” in 2018. This handbook could not come at a better time.

What brought about this gigantic shift in consciousness related to gender? Historians will point to the #MeToo movement, the exposure of sexual harassment, violence, and abuse cases happening at the highest echelons of government, corporate, and social organizations, the incremental movements made in micro-level organizations, such as families, to whittle away at stereotypes that inhibited girls and boys from branching out beyond accepted norms, as just a few of the tremors that precluded this tectonic shift. For those of us who have dedicated our personal and professional lives to advocating for change, the questions are not how and why but what now? But for those who have not considered the extremely complex nature of gender, permit me to provide an illustrative metaphor.

Describing the concept of gender is akin to describing a color. I'll use blue as it is my favorite and also, interestingly, has a “history.” There are many ways to describe the color blue: spectrum, variation, dark to light, hue, cadence, clarity, sharpness, depth, boldness, etc. Given this vast lexicon, it is clear that there is no universal definition of blue. Blue is in the eye of the beholder; blue represents different things to different people. Blue as a color has an interesting history. It was one of the most recent color words added to the English language and was legitimized as a symbol by the Catholic Church when they officially assigned it to represent Saint Mary. In France and the USA, for example, the color blue represents patriotism. In other cultures, blue represents nature. Blue has been used to describe objects and feelings like “blue moon” or “dress blues” or “feeling blue.” Advertisers are aware that blue signals strength to consumers. And parents in many countries use the color blue to reveal

2 *Handbook of research on gender and marketing*

the gender of their children prior to birth, even though the social phenomenon of assigning blue to boys is very recent (since WWII). The concept of blue being a masculine color and pink feminine is so culturally ingrained that some parents will swear it is genetic. In her groundbreaking comedy special, Hannah Gadsby dissects the genderification of pink and blue using her background in art history (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/arts/hannah-gadsby-comedy-nanette.html>). Blue is a color that is recognizable to every person regardless of race, ethnicity, national identification, social class, education, or career. Color-blind people are the exception to this universality, unable to see blue due to a genetic condition, however, new technology is now offering the means to overcome this deficiency. As one US judge said about pornography, blue cannot be defined but we know it when we see it.

Gender can be described in almost identical terms. Gender is as broad a category as the color blue. It is not monolithic in its meaning. It represents different things to different people. It derives its meaning and represents something unique to each eye. Social norms, historical contexts, and religion all serve as a means to create a shared meaning around gender. Just as we are taught the color blue from our first pack of crayons, social class, national origin, socio-economic status, education all impact the way in which we collectively view gender. And while some people may claim that gender, like the color blue, is a universally agreed upon discrete unit, the “dress that broke the internet” and modern icons like RuPaul and Chastity Bono prove otherwise. Those of us who view blue as a universally accepted color and gender as a static, biological category are stymied when asked to label those people who do not fall squarely in one category or another. And yet, gender, like blue, is not so generic a concept that its boundaries are immaterial and where its meaning devolves into a relativistic quagmire of nothingness.

In keeping with the color metaphor, gender as a marketing construct resembles the blue in the eight-pack of crayons. Blue is one color of eight that make up the core set of colors necessary for young artists just starting out on their creative exploration. Gender was initially introduced to marketing vis-à-vis psychology theory, which used the male/female binary to define gender and used binary scales to measure it as well. I call this type of gender research, “T-Test gender research.” T-Test gender research is research undertaken to test hypotheses related to independent and dependent variables, where gender is measured and used as a predictive variable. Male and female responses are compared, via T-Test, to test for differences, direction of differences, and strength of difference. T-Test gender research is not unique to marketing; it is found throughout

psychology, management, health care, education, and other major academic disciplines. It has led to problems of overgeneralization and essentialization. Hence, the restrictive views generated from T-Test gender research have real consequences that resonate through our personal, public, and professional lives.

In marketing, however, the legacy can be found in how companies use gender and other demographic categories to target consumers. As STP (segmentation, targeting, positioning) strategy began to gather steam, demographic variables were typically easy ways to partition the market. According to undergraduate marketing textbooks, variables such as gender, ethnicity, geodemography, age, education level, and occupation are the most commonly used when creating STP strategies. When the baby boomers were the predominant consumer segment, these variables served marketers well. Homogeneity bred complacency and led to the continuation of what I call “lazy marketing.” Lazy marketing is when companies use demographic variables like gender and ethnicity and then create false differences in order to gain market share. For example, Bic created a “Pen for Her” that was marketed to women by way of pink and purple pens with a higher price-tag than the traditional option. The market is replete with examples of products based on false differences. Practically every product at a typical drug store falls into this category. And while there are products that must differ due to biological differences – feminine hygiene products for example – these products make up a very small percentage of products claiming biological differences where there is no medical or health-related proof of difference.

Marketers continue to create products based on false differences because this previously brought positive results. Yet, in the wake of the cultural shifts mentioned above, consumers are beginning to question the differences being pushed at them from the marketplace. The toy industry provides a robust case study of this pushback. Consumers, ahead of companies, are beginning to view gender as a nuanced social construct, rather than a biological category.

MOVING BEYOND BINARY OPPOSITIONS

In 2010, I co-edited a special issue on gender for a marketing journal (Bettany et al. 2010). We titled the introduction to the issue, “Moving beyond binary opposition: exploring the tapestry of gender and marketing.” In this chapter, we called for a rethinking of gender research in marketing in order to move us past T-Test conceptualizations of gender. We wanted to signal to the marketing academic community that the topic

4 *Handbook of research on gender and marketing*

of gender was much richer than just studying differences between men and women. We also wanted to encourage particularly junior scholars to explore the outer edges of this tapestry: sexuality, stigma, intersectionality, feminism. This chapter was our attempt to set a research agenda for the upcoming generation, to give them the freedom and confidence to enter into uncharted territory in order to engage in groundbreaking and potentially impactful research. I am proud to say that the chapters in this volume prove that we accomplished that mission. The chapters that inhabit these pages show that gender and marketing provide a rich, robust, and interesting background with which to think about the future. We've graduated to the 64-box of crayons with its greater array of blues. The ultimate goal is to provide a spectrum where boundaries between shades are impossible to discern.

I organized this book to loosely reflect the trajectory of gender research in marketing from its past to its present to its future. Thus, the book begins with an overview of the early use of gender in segmentation strategies and as a means to attract customers via advertising campaigns. In Chapter 1, Zawisza traces the origins of gender as a marketing variable. This chapter provides an important backdrop by which we can view how gender played an important role in the formation of early marketing theory. It also provides the perfect springboard into subsequent chapters by stating that while gender was a stable variable historically, recent studies have begun to question the validity of measuring gender in such a rudimentary way.

In Chapter 2, Drenten, Harrison, and Pendarvis trace the origins of videogaming both as a subculture and as a marketplace. They provide important coverage of the evolution of videogaming as a cultural and market phenomenon and provide important research directives in order to move the research stream beyond its roots as an industry made by men for men. The videogame industry must acknowledge that the products they produce support and in some cases reproduce negative stereotypes related to gender, race, and ethnicity. The authors also reiterate Zawisza's point about moving beyond seeing gender as a binary variable. Videogaming is very clearly gendered and moving forward, researchers in this area should embrace the more cultural view of gender that is presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3 provides an important global perspective to the issues surrounding gender. Sredl argues that traditional views of gender and feminist theory have come from a position of privilege, namely white, western, affluent. Her application of transnational feminism to market

issues provides researchers with a necessary alternative perspective when studying the role of gender at the intersection of marketing and public policy.

Chapter 4 addresses another important topic in gender: the role of the body in understanding how consumers navigate their own lives and public spaces such as marketplaces. Brace-Govan and Ferguson provide a brief overview of the waves of feminism (which will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 10 and critiqued in Chapter 11) and then connect the current wave of feminism with research on embodiment. This connection propels marketing researchers to pursue new ways of using the body in marketing messages as well as viewing their customers as more than biologically male or female.

Chapter 5 delivers on the call for more research on the body in marketing by looking at the role of the body in the consumption and production of social media. Studying hashtags generated by consumers allows marketers an unbiased view into their preferences, hopes, desires, fears, and perceptions. Consumers who choose hashtags that reflect something about their bodies are communicating to their followers and fellow hashtaggers information unfiltered by marketing surveys, interviews, or sales data. Public policy researchers would also benefit from using body hashtags in order to address social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, and domestic violence.

Chapter 6 draws attention to a blindspot in marketing and consumer research: sex. Despite its universality and the amount of money spent on it, sex remains a largely taboo, untapped domain in marketing. Walther has been on the forefront of this movement with her work on the use of sex toys among married couples in Brazil. This chapter presents data from that work and also provides an important foundation chapter for future researchers interested in undertaking important topics such as sex-related product marketing and consumption, sexual activities that are bought and sold, and the role of sex in marketing strategy. Walther's work focused exclusively on the heterosexual relationship, as does most of our work on consumers. Fortunately, a later chapter (Chapter 12) talks about consumers who are not heterosexual and advocates for more inclusive research that represents all forms of sexuality and gender expressions.

In Chapter 7, Knudsen tackles the worldwide phenomenon of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* book trilogy. These books and subsequent movies were consumed by women in record numbers but what was the appeal? This chapter delves into the ways in which female consumers interpreted the books in terms of meaning and appeal. Knudsen provides a feminist critique of this phenomenon, concluding that for this group of female

consumers, the books provided a means to maintain community, inspire sexual exploration, and improve current relationships.

Chapter 8 presents a framework by which to look at gender with a critical lens. Steinfield et al. devised a framework with which to label and address issues related to gender justice. This chapter provides scholars with the necessary framing tool with which to confront significant social problems where gender is the core element of inquiry. This framework serves to guide both scholars and practitioners within and outside of marketing, thus illustrating the degree to which gender justice permeates all echelons of society.

Ostberg discusses the changing landscape of masculinity in Chapter 9 by confronting new versions of masculinity that moved some men from positions of breadwinner to a co-partner in both work and home life. Sweden's progressive laws have foisted this role upon its men by requiring them to take paternity leave. Analysis of the repercussions of this law shows that instead of eroding masculinity it has in fact moved to expand the domains that a "real man" inhabits.

In Chapter 10, Maclaran and Stevens provide an important introduction to feminist theory as it has been applied in marketing and consumer research. While a complete history of feminist theory would take up several volumes, this chapter successfully distills three types of feminist thought that have the potential to generate further scholarship on gender in marketing. Feminist theory began creeping into marketing as early as 1985 and had its vanguard year in 1993. Yet, it did not have the impact that gender scholars had hoped for and lost momentum after that. This chapter attempts to reinvigorate the application of feminist theory in gender studies in marketing. This chapter is well timed with the global gender movements that are simultaneously occurring.

Rome, O'Donohoe, and Dunnett build on the previous chapter by proposing a new way to look at feminist theoretical shifts in Chapter 11. While most feminist scholars talk about feminism as a series of "waves," these authors object to that metaphor. They instead propose a new way of categorizing feminist work by looking at types of identification. This new categorization serves to break down the neoliberal stance that has historically occupied feminist thought. They argue that perhaps this new categorization may move feminism into a less political space but that this potential de-politicization may allow for a more macro-level perspective.

In Chapter 12, Coffin, Eichert, and Nolke provide a call-to-arms for the marketing discipline to finally acknowledge the presence and market power of the LGBTQ community. This chapter extends work that categorized the scant extant literature on LGBTQ consumers in marketing and provides a significant launch pad for scholars interested in the

topic. By providing historical context, gathering the research already conducted, and proposing future research streams, this chapter will aid those scholars interested in studying this particular domain of inquiry but who have previously not had access to these works through their formal education or advisory guidance.

Finally, in Chapter 13, Sanghvi illuminates the very real challenges female politicians face when they run for office in the USA. Sanghvi lays out a research agenda for scholars in marketing who wish to pursue studies that lie at the intersection of politics, marketing, and gender. She also emphasizes that intersectionality must be considered when undertaking any research endeavor that focuses on gender. Intersectionality will aid in increasing the lenses with which we see women in order to carefully consider as well the importance of race, social class, sexual orientation, ableism, and nationality.

REFERENCE

Bettany, Shona, Susan Dobscha, Lisa O'Malley, and Andrea Prothero (2010), "Moving beyond binary opposition: exploring the tapestry of gender in consumer research and marketing," *Marketing Theory*, 10(1), 3–28.