RESEARCH ARTICLE

the journal of
consumer affairs   **WILEY**

"Generally, I live a lie": Transgender consumer experiences and responses to symbolic violence

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Abstract

In this article, our focus is on how trans consumers experience symbolic violence to draw attention to inequalities that may otherwise remain hidden. Unlike overt acts of physical violence, symbolic violence is subtle and occurs routinely throughout the course of everyday life. We address the following research questions: how do trans consumers experience symbolic violence, what are their responses to this, and what impact does this have on their wellbeing? Our findings demonstrate that symbolic violence functions at sociocultural, interpersonal, and individual levels for trans consumers. We illustrate the tensions trans people encounter between conforming to cisgender hegemony and living an 'authentic' life. The subtle, naturalizing power and misrecognition of symbolic violence appears challenging for the wellbeing of transgender consumers. The lens of symbolic violence usefully informs and integrates with the consumer vulnerability perspective that has previously been used as a theoretical framework to understand transgender consumers' experiences.

KEYWORDS

interviews, symbolic violence, transgender

1 | INTRODUCTION

The fragmentation and plurality of identities encapsulated by the term transgender means that it is an ideally suited to the focus of this special issue on genders. Consumer research with transgender people is very limited, with one of the few exceptions suggesting that "in a strongly binary, gendered marketplace, nonconformity frequently equals invisibility" (McKeage et al., 2017, 74). As Coffin, Eichert and Nolke (2019, 282) suggest, consumer researchers tend to focus on cis-gendered gay men, with "only cursory nods to the rest of the LGBTQ+ acronym." This has resulted in inadequate understanding about the ways in which trans people are impacted by deeply embedded gender norms, discourses, and power structures.

We are mindful of the challenges involved with defining transgender. Given the personal nature of gender identity, labels used in definitions are often contested and can inadvertently fail to capture the subjectivities of genders. Transgender is defined by Levitt and Ippolito (2014, 1728) as "an umbrella term that refers to individuals whose gender presentation is so different from ideals for the sex assigned to them at birth that it defies traditional notions of what it means to be male or female". However, this is not a hard and fast definition. Rands (2009) draws attention to the ways in which gender-related concepts such as gender expression and gender roles are brought together under the banner of 'transgender'. They describe the mis-alignment of body and experience; "Transgender peoples′ gender assignment does not match their gender identity" (421). For Hines and Sanger (2010, 1) "the term 'transgender' denotes a range of gender experiences, subjectivities and presentations that fall across, between or beyond stable categories of 'man' or 'woman'." This definition broadens the conceptualisation of gender diversity "across, between or beyond" binary. Gender non-conformity does not always mean transgender. Valentine (2007, 33) suggests that trans may include "feminine gay men, butch lesbians" and others. However, it is often the form of one's *own* identification with transness that matters and the boundaries of trans identities remain highly contested (Sutherland, 2021). This further highlights the difficulty in describing transgender experiences within the confines of a single definition.

Working within the domain of religious studies, Blyth and McRae (2018) note that trans people suffer different kinds of violence in society such as harassment and transphobic hate speech, physical assault, and the enactment of discriminatory legislation. These can be interpreted as symbolic, physical, and structural violence respectively. The joint statement issued by United Nations Entities in September 2015 also recognized the violence and discrimination associated with transphobia. It called for an "an urgent response" to protect all LGBTI people from the vulnerabilities and exclusions associated with widespread human rights violations. Within our own field, while previous consumer research has recognized the ways in which various types of violence impact the wellbeing of women such as sexual violence (Yeh et al., 2021) and street harassment (Rosenbaum et al., 2020), we have not yet sufficiently addressed this issue beyond the entrenched gender binary. In this article, our focus is on how trans consumers experience symbolic violence. Unlike overt acts of physical violence, symbolic violence is subtle and occurs routinely throughout the course of everyday life. It is a "gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such" (Bourdieu, 1994, 186). This subtlety and invisibility indicate the urgency of this research in drawing attention to the experiences of trans consumers that might otherwise remain hidden.

We address the following research questions: how do trans consumers experience symbolic violence, what are their responses to this, and what impact does this have on their wellbeing? Answers to these research questions are important because they have the potential to inform

understanding of the intricate links between gender and power and the role played by markets and marketing in the well-being of transgender consumers. Further, for Bourdieu (1996, 201), the lens of symbolic violence "enables us to anticipate the conditions under which a genuine gender revolution might become possible." Bourdieu's writings largely refer to the fixed binary of masculinity and femininity with a focus on the liberation of women. However, we argue that there is scope for such a gender revolution to go even further and better recognize a plurality of genders. In offering a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of trans consumers, we raise implications that could usefully inform public policy to support consumer well-being.

The article is structured as follows. We begin with a theoretical review of Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, drawing attention to its relevance to the study of gender. We then look at the limited research in the context of transgender consumers. The research methodology is outlined with reference to the feminist thinking which informed the research design. Findings are divided into three interlinked sections, examining different levels of experiences of symbolic violence. Finally, we conclude by discussing the contributions of the research for theory and practice.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMING: SYMBOLIC POWER, SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1977a, 1977b, 1984, 1989, 2003) work on power and domination explores the domain of symbolic violence in a society. His definition explains symbolic violence as: "any power that manages to impose meanings and impose them by disguising the power imbalance that underpins its strength" (Bourdieu 1972, 18, cited in Tiercelin & Remy, 2019). Bourdieu endeavors to explain how hierarchies and inequalities are maintained by underlying power relations in social structures that mask how certain groups within society come to be marginalized. Bourdieu's work explores "why it is that many forms of domination persist with relatively few challenges" (Chambers 2005, 327). Much consumer cultural work has adopted Bourdieu's theorizing to explore the reproduction of social inequalities and social hierarchies (Allen, 2002; Holt, 1998; Üstüner & Thompson, 2012).

Bourdieu's ideas on power and domination have enabled researchers to explore the gendered nature of status distinctions. As much feminist research has established, the omnipotence of gender in all social interactions is axiomatic (Krais, 2006). Bourdieu gives little attention to the relationship between gender and capital, and particularly the ways in which gender may itself be a form of capital (Thorpe, 2009). Reproducing traditional binaries in the division of labor between men and women, with masculinity the public (economic) side and femininity the private (cultural, domestic) side, Bourdieu's view of gender as a form of capital is unclear (Skeggs, 2004). He does, however, consider gender to be a construct embodied in the individual's habitus which produces a gendered view of the world.

For Bourdieu (1984), the social world is bound by the individual's habitus as their internalized cultural landscape that consists of ways of thinking and behaviors that are acquired through (gender) socialization. The habitus unconsciously reproduces and reinforces dominant gender practices and discourses as the 'natural' state of things or 'the way things are.' The illusion of the 'natural' essence of values, norms and practices is entirely arbitrary: "the most crucial aspect of habitus is that it naturalizes itself and the cultural rules, agendas, and values that make it possible" (Webb et al., 2002, 43). As a result, those who step outside dominant gender

identity ideals risk marginalization. This helps to explain why the at-home fathers in Coskuner-Balli and Thompson's (2013, 37) study were so keen to monitor mass media representations and advertisements for "moments of recognition" that added legitimacy to their collective gender identity. Importantly, prior work has established that the habitus is not static but dynamic, changing and developing as the individual navigates through and in their society. Conceiving habitus as a "*generative* structure" (McNay, 1999, 100) opens possibilities for the evolvement of habitus during secondary socialization in adulthood (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013) and for diversifications in the gendered habitus.

Symbolic violence (or symbolic power − the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably in Bourdieu's writing [Lumsden & Morgan, 2017]) refers to the lived experiences and feelings of stigmatization, devaluation, and illegitimacy of marginalized groups in society. These feelings of anxiety, awkwardness, shame and so on work on the individual both through the objective hardship of being marginalized, and also through the subjective experience of the individual, whereby they self-blame or self-police in their efforts to resist symbolic domination. For example, Lumsden and Morgan (2018) discuss how symbolic violence takes place in online spaces through silencing and trolling on social media platforms. The authors additionally emphasize the importance of not only the acts of symbolic violence, but the ways in which victims respond to their harassers. The extent to which such resistance is possible for a given individual is entirely dependent on the amount and type of resources (cultural, economic, symbolic) available to them—as Samuel (2013, 403) points out, "the durable conditions... do little to provide the resources necessary to resist."

Bourdieu discusses symbolic violence in terms of everyday practices, showing how symbolic violence goes unnoticed through what he explains as misrecognition. Misrecognition of symbolic violence means that "practices that would ordinarily be deemed as problematic or 'violent' eventually gain social acceptance through particular discourses, practices and policies" (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, 149). For Bourdieu (1996, 199), acts of misrecognition lie beneath "the controls of consciousness and will." Power relations are disguised such that those who experience symbolic violence fail to recognize it as an act of domination, and unwittingly reproduce the dominant norms and values through their social interactions. As Morgan and Thapar Björkert (2006, 448) suggest, "symbolic violence is so powerful precisely because it is unrecognisable for what it is."

While misrecognition can occur across different contexts of power relations, Bourdieu (1996) suggests that acts of misrecognition are more central to symbolic violence within the case of gender domination than any other. A relevant example is Ourahmoune and Özçağlar-Toulouse's (2012, 96) research that reveals how Kabyle women are willingly complicit with structuring patriarchal forces in a way that maintains social order so that "the circulation or exchange of women remains under male control." The alignment between social structures and mental structures is evident of a "sense of limits" (Bourdieu, 1994, 159) whereby "the agents' aspirations have the same limits as the objective conditions of which they are the product" (161). McRobbie (2004) discusses this in detail by examining the denigration of working class women in reality TV programs. Contrasting the representations of working class women and the middle class presenters who are higher up the social hierarchy; she points to the inevitable failure of participants to climb the ladder. Marginalized groups strive to achieve legitimacy within a social system that will never allow them to be successful; the resources and power to disrupt and challenge dominant systems can be constrained by institutional and structural factors, thus further reinforcing domination.

Drawing on Bourdieu's understanding of habitus as a generative structure that is "lived," McNay (1999, 101) draws attention to the "potential creativity" within the reproduction of gender identity. This highlights the temporal dimension of the habitus and the dynamic and open-ended nature of dominant gender norms. On the one hand, this can reinforce the social domination and marginalization of certain groups, and on the other hand, it can open up space for the destabilization of conventional practices. Given the dynamic nature of the social world, this means that the subtle effect of symbolic violence reinforces its legitimacy, working through gradual acceptance of what may have previously been seen as socially unacceptable. However, this does not mean that there is no resistance on the parts of the marginalized, indeed reflexivity is a key concept in Bourdieu's theorizing of power. Bourdieu (1996, 199) suggests, there is always room for "cognitive struggles" that question the undisputed and "brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation" (Bourdieu, 1994, 164). A prime example is Vikas et al.'s (2015) analysis of how subordinates can neutralize the symbolic violence of the elite following a process of marketization that calls into question the relevance of prior dispositions. Nevertheless, notions of gender are deeply entrenched, meaning that they are often at odds with the realities of contemporary culture (McNay, 1999). Velagaleti's (2017) dissertation research exploring the impact of social change on consumer legitimacy reveals the persistence of symbolic violence for the same-sex couples within the wedding industry. However, the study is limited to the experiences of gay and lesbian identities with lack of inclusion of transgender people noted as a limitation. In the following section, we review previous research on transgender consumer experiences to provide contextual grounding for our findings.

2.1 | Transgender consumer experiences

Trans and gender diverse identities have received little attention in consumer research. Much of the consumer research on gender has focused on the experiences of mainly white, middle class populations, but Krais (2006) reminds us that "doing gender," as described by West and Zimmerman (1987), is not universal but rather "variations on a theme." An individual's gendered experience is shaped by the social construction of masculinity and femininity, how the body is perceived and defined through expressions of gender, thus determining the individual's identity as either masculine or feminine. For example, research often prioritizes gender differences (e.g. Ooi, 2020) which assumes stability of gender and again reproduces a binary understanding of gender which seems to neglect the "variations on a theme."

Further, gender and sexuality are often treated as a single characteristic; sexuality depends on gender for its foundations "but their consistent linkages in the research literature speak to stereotypical images of gender and sexuality" (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998, 174). The normative categories of heterosexual and homosexual require stable classification of the hetero/homosexual person's gender and the gender of the person(s) to whom they are attracted (Holleb, 2019). The cisheteronormative focus of much research means that little to no attention is paid to non-normative identities.

Another reason for the lack of focus on transgender consumers is the tendency to speak of the identities encapsulated in the LGBTQ+ acronym as a whole, rather than the fragmented, intersecting variety that exist in reality. One study that adopts this approach that is pertinent to the current research is Martin et al.'s (2021) investigation of the convergence of marketplace and symbolic violence in how the tobacco industry has historically targeted the LGBTQ community. They define marketplace violence as "actions and narratives of powerful market actors

that perpetuate inequalities and/or inequities on less powerful market actors, often by manipulating the marketplace relationships that exist between consumers and producers" (Martin et al., 2021, 69). Recognizing the subtle and invisible ways in which violence occurs in market relationships, Martin et al. (2021) show how the acceptance and complicity of symbolic violence by members of the LGBTQ community undermined the social movement response to a smoking-related health crisis.

One of the only studies to exclusively focus on trans issues is McKeage et al.'s (2017) analysis of transgender consumer experiences of vulnerability within the market system. Baker et al. (2005, 134) define consumer vulnerability as "a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products." Although McKeage et al. (2017) do not speak of symbolic violence, there are aspects of their data that suggest symbolic violence is evident. For example, they find that the largely taken-for-granted acceptance of the male and female gender binary can lead to a traumatic consumer experience in terms of interactions with service personnel and exclusion from gendered physical retail space and products. Being gendered by the market in this way can lead to passive consumers' responses. From the lens of symbolic violence, such powerlessness may be derived from misrecognition, and the naturalized sense that to feel inferior in this way is the "natural order of things."

In consumption contexts, the illegitimacy produced by dominant systems is reflected in limited offerings, restricted access to products, and an absence of products which cater to the specific needs of particular groups (Velagaleti, 2017). These factors can create feelings of anxiety and vulnerability, which in turn negatively impact upon consumer wellbeing. Ruvio and Belk (2018, 108) refer to the identity conflicts experienced by trans people who are sometimes forced to establish dual gender identities, one which they practice in secret with possessions that they view as "forbidden fruit" and one which they practice openly as their socially acceptable gender identity.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This paper takes insight from feminist methodological thinking in regard to Bourdieu's concepts. Feminist methodologies, or as Taylor and Rupp (1991, 127) explain, "a feminist perspective of the research process" in consumer research are rooted in the works of scholars who fought to be heard in the 1990s, where a more holistic view of and an appreciation of gender biases in research empowered new insights into consumer experiences (see Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Woodruffe, 1996). For example, feminist work challenges essentialist stereotypes of gender and critiques marketing practices like the portrayals of men and women in advertising. The transgender community can experience significant research fatigue and is habitually marginalized. This meant that care was taken in the recruitment of participants and conduct of the data collection.

In-depth interviews have been extensively used as a key qualitative method in consumer research, as researchers' epistemological understanding is "that consumers' lived experiences can primarily be understood through their expressed subjective narratives" (Arsel, 2017, 939). A total of 16 interviews were conducted between November 2019 and August 2020. Due to COVID-19 and local lockdown procedures, the majority of interviews took place over Skype or Zoom video calls, lasting 45 min to 2 h. Social media platforms offer an amplifying effect of calls for interview participants. The researcher's social media networks and contacts with LGBT+ organizations helped to reach potential participants, who could then request more information

TABLE 1 Participant details

Participant	Gender identity	Pronouns	Age	Location
Alex	Agender	They/them	24	Scotland
Ali	Nonbinary	They/them	19	Scotland
Carrie	Trans woman	She/her	47	Scotland
Casey	Trans man	He/him	37	England
Cassia	Trans woman	She/her	41	Scotland
Charlotte	Nonbinary	None[a]	30	Germany
Debi	Trans woman	She/her	59	England
Emma	Trans woman	She/her	67	England
Georgie	Genderqueer	She/he/they	26	England
Lucas	Trans man/agender	He/him	19	USA
Mars	Demi boy/nonbinary	He/they	20	England
Paul/a	Nonbinary	They/them	70	Scotland
Rei	Trans masc/nonbinary	They/them	39	Denmark
River	Trans man	He/him	20	Mexico
Sal	Trans man	He/him	24	Scotland
Valentine	Nonbinary	They/them	21	Scotland

[a]Charlotte asked that no pronouns be used so Charlotte is referred to by name only.

by email. This meant that only those who felt comfortable and well-informed of the research purposes were contacted directly. Several interviewees were recruited in this way. A snowball sampling method was employed in order to reach further potential participants, with some of those interviewed sharing the call for participants with their friends and networks. Table 1 below shows details of interview participants. The sample ranged in age from 19 to 70 and encompassed a plurality of gender identities.

A collaborative, conversational interview approach was taken to facilitate "joint exploration of research questions" (Vera-Gray, 2017, 64), and to help address power balances in the research relationship. The researcher shared their own stories of exploring gender identity and gendered consumption in building rapport and to help in leveling power balances in the research. This is a key tenet in feminist research approaches, where questions of power and inequality are considered within the research design itself (Gunaratnam & Carrie Hamilton, 2017). This was of particular concern when conducting research with trans people, as historically they have been poorly treated as research "objects" and may be suspicious of the researcher's purposes and motives. Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton (2009, 662) call on consumer researchers to consider research practices not as a "depoliticised set of techniques," but to deliberately think of the connections between researcher and researched. In recognizing that our choices throughout knowledge production have "moral consequences" (Hutton & Heath, 2020, 2701) and following suggestions from Zimman (2017) and Vincent (2018), the researcher proactively asked contributors if they wished to use their real name or a pseudonym of their choice and took care to use inclusive and affirming language throughout the interview process. Language issues are important because words are not value-neutral but "socio-historical constructions, with specialist assumptions about their meanings" (Grenfell, 2014, 23).

In conducting analysis of interview data, transcripts were produced from audio recordings of the interviews via Nvivo software. Data were coded under broad headings which were then further developed to enrich interpretations through an iterative process of analysis. Extensive notes were taken for the PhD research this article is based upon, allowing the researcher to craft and map connections and links across topics discussed in the interviews. These notes were also revisited during writing to further immerse the genderqueer PhD researcher in the research context and develop thoughtful understandings of the participants' experiences.

4 | FINDINGS

The findings are divided into three sections to demonstrate that symbolic violence functions at sociocultural, interpersonal, and individual levels for trans consumers. This aligns with understanding that power in gender relations manifests at macro, meso, and micro levels (Steinfield et al., 2019). Sociocultural, interpersonal, and individual levels represent overlapping and distinct areas of the experience of symbolic violence. Similar to prior work that has identified these levels as important for understanding cisgendered heteronormativity (Donovan & Barnes, 2020), each contribute and influence one another but are also still experienced independently, as these findings explore.

4.1 | Sociocultural: Symbolic violence in the media

In the recent years, trans and nonbinary people have become increasingly visible through media and advertising representations. Marketing and media have significant power in (re)creating and supporting the dominant social norms of gender; how to act, how to dress, how to present and conduct oneself socially in acceptable ways are reinforced by representations of social interactions in advertising and media such as TV shows, movies, and music videos. The appropriate ways to be, think and do is naturalized through these discourses; the habitus "denotes a way of being" (Costa and Murphy 2015, 7), and divergence from norms becomes markedly "other."

The social norms of gender (re)created by advertising and media often either do not feature trans bodies, or only show certain bodies. Eris Young describes this in their book They/Them/Their, specifically noting that representations of nonbinary people present an image that's "thin, rich, beautiful, white, and able-bodied." Carrie also speaks of this when she thinks of her childhood and how she noticed the lack of trans representation in media: "there were no trans people in mainstream media other than comedians... occasionally a documentary [would show] a really miserable post-op transsexual in a miserable relationship with a miserable wife, going into a miserable shop to buy a miserable-looking dress!" Carrie laughs as she says this, but she also expresses how this representation felt off-putting and caused her to delay considering her transition; she did not want to be miserable! Ultimately though, Carrie felt that despite the memories of negative portrayals of trans lives, she would benefit greatly from pursuing her own transition goals.

These findings are reflective of the naturalizing discourse of transness as something miserable, deviant, or even dangerous that has been present in the UK media for some time. As Pearce et al. (2020) explain, the United Kingdom has seen a substantial growth in anti-trans public feeling since the 2017 announcement of a governmental review of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The negative reaction to such reforms, in particular a process of self-determination to

change the sex marker on a birth certificate, has been compounded by opinion pieces published in a range of media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. Drawing on the work of writers like Germaine Greer and Janice Raymond, media hostility in the UK is reflecting a long-standing sex/gender essentialist position where trans women are represented as an especial threat to cis safety. This hostility spreads beyond impacting only trans women but can affect anyone who identifies under the trans or gender diverse umbrella. For example, Paula discusses the power of this type of discourse in delaying or denying a realization and acceptance of being trans:

> "I think the nail in coffin, which put me in a box for the next 30 years or so, I was around 20. And it was the time that Germaine Greer became a big name. She said something along the lines of being a woman and not having a penis. And I thought, if an important person like that is saying that, then obviously I'm not trans."

Paula goes on to speak of finally coming to terms with their feelings about their gender, having struggled with depression and suicidal ideation for many years. Because of the importance placed on the rhetoric of someone like Germaine Greer, who was a respected and acclaimed voice of (radical) feminism, Paula felt unable to claim a trans identity until later in life. They use the phrase "nail in the coffin," evoking a sense of dread and association with death and finality, to describe how this made them feel. This is reflective of the tensions between primary and secondary socializations (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013) with Paula only truly ascribing to their secondary habitus later in life. Paula lived for many years in denial of their transness and nonbinary identity, and now at the age of 70, they are exploring gender more freely. They speak animatedly of wearing patches and t-shirts using the colors of the nonbinary pride flag, having overcome their hesitation and suppression of any sense of being trans. Paula does not directly express regret for years lost "in a box," but speaks wistfully of how they see younger generations exploring and "playing with gender" in ways which, due to negative perceptions of transness, felt closed to them in their youth.

A number of interviewees mentioned the Netflix documentary "Disclosure," which involves several trans people discussing the history and background of trans representation in media such as film and TV. The documentary is notable as the focus is fully on trans perspectives and there are very few, if any, cisgender voices featured. Prominent trans creatives and actors such as Laverne Cox, Susan Stryker, Chaz Bono and Alexandra Billings guide the audience through the history of trans portrayals in (mostly American) cinema, scrutinizing the impacts of damaging and flawed depictions of trans people's lives. For interviewees like Valentine, Lucas and Mars, who are in their early 20s, this documentary is one of the first media pieces available to them which focuses on trans lives, and particularly showcases trans masculine and trans men's perspectives. This is notable as there has been significant, often hostile, focus on trans women in media, as mentioned previously. Valentine explains that they were unaware of the trans masculine character Max in the TV show "The L Word" until they saw the storyline mentioned in "Disclosure," and although they felt positive about seeing this character, they were ultimately disappointed in the story: "'I've not really seen many trans masculine characters. And I've never seen the 'L Word' so I didn't know. Obviously, Max is in that. When they went through that, I was like, oh, this is good. And then I was like, oh, wait. This didn't end well, unfortunately!" The limited representation of trans masculinity is not always an affirming experience. While such representations serve as "moments of recognition" (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013, 37), their infrequency is indicative of a slow journey to legitimacy. As a result, trans consumers are placed as subordinate in the social hierarchy that "serve [s] to demarcate their socially marginalized status" (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013, 21).

Considering once more the notion of habitus, the resources available to trans masculine consumers such as Valentine, Lucas and Mars are limited and constrained by binary gender socialization and norms. Media provide resources for cultural capital, but when there is little to no media which reflects one's authentic identity, the 'natural way of things' is reasserted through the habitus. In this way, symbolic violence is perpetuated. Having reflected on the wider sociocultural experience, the next section of the findings goes on to explore symbolic violence at the level of interpersonal interaction. We begin by looking at family interactions and service encounters, then discuss misrecognition as an element of symbolic violence at this level.

4.2 | Interpersonal: Symbolic violence in family and marketplace interactions

Gender nonconformity through visibly presenting outside of binary gender categories can subvert and disrupt social norms, and those who challenge such norms often face hostility (Ritch & Dodd, 2021). Symbolic violence is not straightforward to avoid because its power lies in its subtlety. Part of this is due to misrecognition of symbolic violence; those who experience symbolic violence fail to see it as such, as everyday practices disguise power relations (Bourdieu 1977a, 1997b). Furthermore, those who reinforce dominant norms in the social world do so unaware of how others may experience this as symbolic violence. This section looks at the interpersonal level of interaction with family and strangers, drawing on experiences of home life and using commonplace public facilities.

The title quote for the paper—"Generally, I live a lie"—succinctly encapsulates home life for some the interviewees. As Debi says this, her expression is resigned and there is frustration and unhappiness in her voice. Her wife refuses to acknowledge Debi as a woman, which Debi says has made home life almost unbearable. Rejection by family members is a very real risk when coming out as trans, and participants in this research describe a range of reactions from well-intentioned misunderstanding, to the transphobia Debi finds at home.

Georgie talks about concealing parts of themselves to maintain relationships with family: "although my father was comfortable with me opening up about my sexuality when I was a teenager, gender was just not in the cards. And it's so difficult sometimes. I'm aware of the fact that with this being my career [in LGBT advocacy] for many, many years, my father wouldn't even tell people what I did... it meant I couldn't talk about it." To avoid or mitigate the effects of family discomfort, trans people begin to consciously or unconsciously regulate themselves, presenting in ways congruent with childhood or past expressions of their gender. This kind of strategy is also used by some trans people to help them offset gender expression that is less credible as cis (Marques, 2019).

Ali has had similar experiences with family; the value of using the correct pronouns for Ali is overlooked through misunderstanding how and why misgendering can be hurtful. Misgendering refers to an active choice to use incorrect pronouns or a deadname, which can be seen as symbolic violence in failing to recognize a trans person's humanity (Jones, 2020). Ali does not believe there is anything malicious in their father's refusal to use the correct pronouns, but that "I think he doesn't think it's important to get my pronouns right... I think he views non-binary things as like a choice, whether you respect it or not." Moral codes and distinctions are evident in the pronouns used by Ali's father and in his commitment to a moral habitus (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013) that is based on conventional gender norms. Here, misrecognition of symbolic violence on the part of Ali's father requires that Ali accepts that their father may

not respect their non-binary identity. Their father does not understand the importance of this identity to their child and fails to see misgendering them as symbolically violent practice.

Misrecognition is a key element in the insidious power of symbolic violence. Gender as a binary construct between male/female, masculine/feminine is so ingrained that very little effort is required to maintain dominance of the social hierarchy (Schubert, 2008). From a young age, misrecognising the source of distress as being somehow different from others without knowing why, trans people can experience challenges to their core sense of self (Ruvio & Belk, 2018). This is particularly poignant when Cassia says that she still has "cringey reactions" to herself but also to other trans people and queer people. The perception of transness as 'other' is reflected in Cassia's feelings of discomfort with her own sense of self as well as awareness of her reaction to other trans people. Her comment is reflective of the ways in which misrecognition lie beneath "the controls of consciousness and will" (Bourdieu, 1996, 199). Cassia's "cringey reactions" illustrate the gender shock (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015) she experiences from diversifying beyond taken-for-granted gender norms. Although now proud to claim the identity of a trans woman, Cassia still has difficulty in breaking free from the naturalizing discourse of transness as something deviant.

Aligning with other research on the normative nature of gender in consumption contexts (Arsel et al., 2015), discomfort for trans people can also manifest in navigating social spaces and service encounters, sometimes creating physical health difficulties. Access to facilities such as bathrooms and toilets becomes difficult as there is a risk of hostility when using public spaces. Actions of non-trans users who seek to regulate access often stem from a perception of trans women particularly as dangerous, leading to questioning and confrontation of anyone who does not visibly conform to feminine social norms (Patel, 2017). Avoidance then becomes a coping strategy for trans people; being reluctant to access toilets or changing rooms in case of harassment places limits on use of space, as they are unable to travel too far from home. This impact on physical health and wellbeing, as Casey describes: "If I could, I would avoid going to the bathroom. I worked to the point where I think on multiple occasions, I would rather wet myself than go to the bathroom." This also illustrates another form of misrecognition of symbolic violence, as Casey takes upon himself the responsibility for the comfort of cis others. By his avoiding bathrooms to avoid confrontation, cisnormativity is reasserted. Like Casey, a trans person could misrecognise how cisgender norms is upheld and determines appropriate bathroom usage, simply because they are (quite rightly!) concerned for their own well-being and safety. The power of dominant social practice of "who can use which bathroom" goes unseen in this example. This example introduces the idea of how symbolic violence within interpersonal interactions can impact behavior at the individual level. We unpack this further in the next section.

4.3 | Individual: Symbolic violence through "shapeshifting" and "self-policing"

The tensions created in presenting an authentic transgender self can make a trans person highly self-aware of how they navigate social interactions. As noted by Seregina (2019, 466) in their discussion of gender crossplay, "the performance of gender remains a strict norm that one cannot easily change." Barker (2019) explains that some trans people alter their presentation in order to navigate public spaces more safely, presenting as more masculine or feminine depending on the perceived risk of harassment or threat. They describe this as a trans person's ability to "shapeshift." Ynda says: "If I do choose to wear more strongly femme-coded styles of

clothing, I'll usually either get changed at my destination or cover any skirt, playsuit or dress with a long coat, so as not to draw attention in more 'general public' spaces." Drawing on Thompson and Üstüner (2015), this is illustrative of how Ynda has to manage discontinuities across social fields. Ynda is comfortable expressing femininity in certain, carefully selected, safe spaces, such as the homes of friends. Such heterotopias (Foucault, 1986) are often regarded as distant from and in opposition to dominant spatial contexts where established gender norms continue to exert disciplinary power. Within public spaces Ynda is aware of how their appearance may attract notice and thus self-polices by concealing their femininity and blending in. Pantazopolous and Bettany (2010) suggest that heterotopias can support identity construction during experiences of same-sex relations. We likewise reveal how certain spaces can offer trans consumers respite from the gender expectations within the broader social field. However, for trans consumers this is not simply a matter of identity construction but also of safety.

Visible gender non-conformity, an appearance that is ambiguous with a binary gender category, creates a threat to the social dominance of cis, hetero, white male capitalism (Goldberg & Beemyn, 2021), and can often result in hostility. Trans people may thus learn in which situations and circumstances it is safe to present authentically, and in which it is safer to 'pass'. For many trans people, "passing" becomes vital for evading a perceived threat of physical violence. 'Passing' is a form of recreating gender displays "in order to render transgender status invisible to other in social interactions" (Marques, 2019, 212). Carrie says that although she feels confident navigating social interactions in consumer environments like pubs and shops, she is aware of her "otherness" as a trans woman: "the more effort you put into stereotypical feminine presentation, the less bullshit you're going to get." For Carrie, who has worked in consultancy, there is a definite contrast in how she has been treated prior to and following her transition. Presenting as a woman, she has found that she is talked over more frequently in meetings and her contribution is often overlooked. Although she laughs as she talks about this "aesthetic learning experience" (Seregina, 2019, 468), and says that she feels as though it is part of being a woman and she is glad to be accepted as such so readily, this seems to be a double-edged sword for her. She feels much less able to challenge dismissive behavior, as to do so would align with the emotion script (Turner & Stets, 2006) of 'aggressive' or 'bitchy' qualities in a woman.

Similarly, for Georgie, expressing femininity can be a cause of discomfort, so that they self-police the ways in which they dress in 'female clothing'; "it makes you feel vulnerable... so often it [the clothing] is designed to accentuate the femininity of your body, that's what I'm uncomfortable with." This suggests that efforts to be read as a binary individual can involve the minimisation of gender diversity to enhance social legitimacy. In presenting femininity to a standard apparently indistinguishable from cisgender people, this may then mean that the individual unintentionally reinforces social norms through (un)consciously 'self-policing' their appearance and conduct.

When gender diverse individuals experience a level of distress particular to how they appear in public, they may take action to suppress, alter, or disguise an aspect of themselves. Emma talks about her ambivalence toward using makeup. Despite wanting to wear makeup in some circumstances in order to express her femininity, she feels uncomfortable doing so. She discusses the experiences of cisgender women, whose experimentation with makeup during teenage phases are broadly seen as a part of growing up: "most cis women who wear makeup, they learn in their early teens, mid-teens, they make the mistakes then... in my 50s, I don't want to do those experiments." Emma feels that, having transitioned later in life, she has missed out on the opportunity to experiment in the same way. She is highly aware of how an older trans woman could be perceived as looking odd or "trying too hard" to appear feminine, reminiscent

of how the "legitimatization of appearances requires others' validation" (Ourahmoune & Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2012, 97). Although Emma is assured in her appearance and in 'passing' as a woman, she prefers not to stand out by wearing makeup as she feels unfamiliar and less confident with its use.

These types of experiences suggest that trans women are constrained by an awareness of the ways in which they are "other" when compared to cisgender women. This point to another element of trans self-policing at play which may be difficult to overcome, the ingrained social habit of comparison to others. Awareness of difference could have further negative impact on wellbeing, as being self-aware adds an additional layer of reflection. Although they strive to be accepted, this does not mean that they do not resist inequality based on their gender as well. Bourdieu (1996) reminds us that reflexivity, challenging and rebelling against social hierarchies, is central to theorizing power.

A strategy of "rebelling" (Hill & Sharma, 2020, 561) to unsettle and impair the dominant norms in a social environment can be empowering. Emma remarks that others may have difficulty accepting her, but she sees it as their problem to deal with, so she is unapologetic about being herself: "I'm going to be noticed even if I'm hiding in the corner and trying to shrink away. So okay, if I'm going to be noticed, I will walk into the room now. Hello!" Emma is aware that her simply being trans may attract considerable notice in public, but instead of adopting a strategy to fit in more closely, she embraces the fact that she sometimes stands out. She is rebelling against social norms which dictate the proper conduct in these circumstances (blending in, not calling attention to her transness), responding with her positive and outgoing personality, and leading the interaction in a forthright way. To a certain extent, Emma's rebellion here is at odds with her reluctance to stand out through makeup discussed above. This indicates how rebelling may create tensions for the individual as they struggle with contradictions in the socialisations and dispositions which form their habitus, what Mouzelis (2007, 2) refers to as "intra-habitus conflicts". These tensions between socialization which compels conformity, and disposition which seeks authenticity, creates incongruence that in turn, encourages trans individuals to develop a deeper reflexivity.

Social media can also open up avenues for rebelling strategies, where trans people can easily experiment and imagine their authentic selves freed from constraints. Debi likes Pinterest for this reason and she can collect images of dresses, shoes and make-up looks for herself in virtual space. For Mars, experimenting with make-up is a form of rebelling as he does not differentiate between "makeup for boys and makeup for girls, it's just makeup... I don't try to be necessarily masculine but it's still kind of annoying to deal with [makeup being perceived] feminine." For Mars, rebellion stems from his expression of femininity, using typically feminine make-up products, to complement and contradict his masculine presentation. Similarly, Sal talks about his realization that "gender isn't fixated on a piece of cloth or the colours or things you like." Other rebelling strategies may be less outwardly visible, for example when talking about clothing, Lucas mentions that he owns over 65 pairs of colorful boxers. When living at home, his mother removed any typically male undergarments from his wardrobe, and now he rebels by owning a collection which cannot be seen outwardly but makes him feel happy and confident. For Lucas, the boxers are "deliberate identity residues" (Cheded & Liu, 2022, 76) that enable hidden indulgence in his male identity, particularly on occasions when a more visible presentation could create interpersonal tensions. These acts of rebellion might be considered as attempts to incorporate self-care practices into daily life (Hutton, 2016) that foster empowerment in face of persistent symbolic violence.

Rebelling in these ways illustrates the importance of reflexivity in Bourdieu's theorizing of power. Awareness of their marginalized status fails to prevent participants from challenging

dominant gender norms, even if sometimes the rebellion is invisible. While these invisible acts of rebellion are empowering for our participants, they do little to change the status quo. Their invisibility means they have little impact on ingrained dominant gender norms. To engage in more outwardly visible acts of rebellion requires resources—psychological characteristics, social capital to publicize efforts to rebel, for example—that may not be easily accessed or consistently available, once again reinforcing the challenge of drawing attention to the plurality of genders.

5 | DISCUSSION

Exploring transgender consumer experiences through the lens of symbolic violence makes several contributions to theory. Steinfield et al.'s (2019) analysis of the reproductive market in Uganda is helpful in identifying how power in gender relations manifests at macro, meso, and micro levels. Here, we complement their focus on the power asymmetries of women and men's positioning in the social hierarchy by moving beyond the fixed and entrenched gender binary. Our findings demonstrated that symbolic violence functions at sociocultural, interpersonal, and individual levels for trans consumers and helps to draw attention to gender inequalities that may otherwise remain hidden. The lens of symbolic violence usefully informs and integrates with the consumer vulnerability perspective that has previously been used as a theoretical framework to understand transgender consumers' experiences (McKeage et al., 2017). Consumer vulnerability is succinctly defined as "a state of powerlessness" (Baker et al. 2005, 134). The Bourdieu perspective of symbolic violence that we have adopted here also centralizes power relations and imbalances. This point to a theoretical compatibility that has been largely unrecognized in prior work and can shed light on consumer responses to gender injustices.

McKeage et al. (2017) acknowledge that consumer responses to vulnerability can be either active (such as supporting and promoting gender-free products and spaces) or passive (withdrawing from the marketplace). Active responses draw attention to the "capabilities" (Steinfield et al., 2019) of some trans people to employ consumer choice to assert a sense of control over their gender identity. Our paper extends this work by demonstrating how capabilities, or lack thereof, link to consumer well-being. Active responses that enable trans people to present and express an authentic self are highly important in promoting feelings of self-worth, and inner contentment; "the lived experience of authenticity was also euphoric" (Jones, 2020, 260). However, what does this suggest for the well-being of those who employ more passive responses, such as passing or self-policing?

Findings reveal a paradox because although passive responses are intended to minimize emotional distress, they ultimately add to emotional distress. We have illustrated how trans people have to manage discontinuities across social fields (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015), and encounter tensions between conforming to cisgender hegemony and living an "authentic" life, freely disregarding or bending binary gender expressions. The inference is that the well-being of transgender consumers is adversely affected by these tensions. Being unable to fully express themselves or discuss issues important to them with family members has a negative effect on the participants' wellbeing as they manage their appearance and actions to fit with social gender norms.

Further, we build on the work of Ruvio and Belk (2018) in our discussion of these tensions; in their paper looking at the extended self, the authors discuss identity conflicts where "there might be a deliberate disconnect between one's inner identity and its public presentation" (ibid, 108). We use the notion of 'shapeshifting' to highlight how trans consumers navigate social

situations, altering their presentation and behavior to remain undetected as trans. Ruvio and Belk's work also mentions how their participants access cross-gendered possessions as they feel "compelled to lie, cheat, and steal" (Ruvio & Belk, 2018, 108). The ways in which this can impact the consumers' well-being is not within the scope of their study, but our findings illustrate a range of active and passive responses to the feeling of disconnect between the inner authentic self and the outer public presentation.

There are different types of labor involved in these responses. Aesthetic labor manifests in the embodied work of managing one's appearance through for example dress or make-up. This often involves the careful selection of gendered market objects that enable trans consumers to present a gender identity that is socially acceptable to others but that also encompasses (sometimes hidden) elements that met their own preferred gender identity. Drawing on Cheded and Liu (2022, 80), this is indicative of that "duality of the normative subjectivities and the abject all inhabiting the same body." Seregina (2019) also draws on the notion of duality in terms of performing the other and performing the everyday self. However, our focus on transgender offers an important point of distinction to this prior work. Unlike consumers who play with gender in spaces of fantasy (Cheded & Liu, 2022; Seregina, 2019), our participants are forced into a duality of gender performance in times and spaces where they do not have the freedom to express their preferred gender identity. They seek to minimize the distance between fantasy and reality, but this needs to be negotiated to align with temporal and spatial boundaries of interactions.

The emotional labor of managing their own feelings and potentially those of cisgender family or friends who react poorly to being corrected on pronouns or deadnaming falls on the shoulders of the trans person. Self-policing their reactions to microaggressions such as misgendering puts pressure on trans people in maintaining relationships. As Connell (2012) discusses in their analysis of trans and feminist politics, transitioning requires a re-entry into everyday life and thus much of the power rests with those other than the person transitioning or coming out; others' responses may dictate access to jobs or housing, for example. This power dynamic often goes unseen, as trans people who push for spaces to be more inclusive are frequently dismissed (Barker, 2019). Refutation of the experience of symbolic violence is itself an act of symbolic violence (Schubert, 2008). As Valentine, one of the participants infers, expectations of the moral habitus (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013) are such that "Good trans people don't get annoyed when they're misgendered." This aligns with Brady's (2011, 97) argument that "a kind of affective distance is required in order to remain inured from the pain and anxieties consequent of acts of symbolic violence".

The symbolic violence perspective reveals that another useful dimension to consider is visible and invisible consumer responses. There are large overlaps between visible and active consumer responses, such as trans people who embrace standing out as an opportunity to educate others. In the findings, we identified various invisible strategies (e.g. wearing colorful boxers) that have no broader impact but are nevertheless very important in contributing to an individual's sense of empowerment. While such responses will have little impact on dominant gender norms at the sociocultural level, their impact at the individual level should not be underestimated as they may go at least some way toward managing the emotional distress identified above. Internal conflicts and disorienting encounters are a part of trans people's lives as "the affirming experience most people take for granted of having themselves correctly reflected in the spaces they occupy day-to-day is unavailable" (Barker, 2019, 179). In the fields of mental and psychological healthcare, there are multiple studies discussing the increased likelihood of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and other conditions among transgender people compared to cisgender populations, even within the LGB+ community (Singh et al., 2013; Su et al., 2016;

Warren et al., 2016). This reinforces the importance of any form of consumer response that promotes empowerment, even if it has no impact on the status quo more broadly.

In recognizing the role that the marketplace can play in enabling and disabling symbolic violence, this study also raises implications for policy. Policymakers tend to focus on the equal rights and fair treatment of LGBTQ+ people as a group. While not denying the advances made and importance of such regulation, treating LGBTQ+ consumers as a whole assumes a homogeneous group of consumers. The findings presented in this article indicate that trans consumers have experiences that are particular to their gender identity that are not necessarily experienced similarly by all in the LGBTQ+ community. Equally, the findings have shown that there is variation in how trans consumers experience symbolic violence. For example, as "a subtle, euphemized, invisible mode of dominating" (Krais & William, 2000, 58), symbolic violence relies on the oppressed absorbing the world-view of the dominant; in this context trans blending in with cis. The findings reveal that for some trans consumers the idea of 'passing' as cis is misrecognition of symbolic violence, while others trans consumers offer more overt struggle against conforming to cis domination. These reactions and conflicts can then feel hurtful, creating further tensions within a heterogeneous LGBT+ community. This suggests that a complexity of trans experiences that cannot be adequately captured in the traditional tendency to conflate all LBGTQ+ experiences. Taking opportunities to tell stories that reflect "polyvocal realities" (Coleman, 2015, 52), there is scope for media on the intricacies of LGBTQ+ lives to blossom beyond decayed tropes and offer "moments of recognition" (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013, 37) that add legitimacy to lives and experiences.

Although our focus was on symbolic violence as an overlooked area of enquiry, it must be remembered that for trans consumers, vulnerability is often multiplied by forms of structural violence preventing full access to healthcare, employment, education and housing. This means that many are simultaneously struggling with structural violence through discriminatory policies, access gatekeeping in healthcare and poverty. "What's the use of gender-neutral clothing without the money to buy it? Why worry about a landlord respecting your pronouns if you can't afford rent?" Alex points out in their Buzzfeed article on trans visibility. Policy makers need to take a holistic account of the violence encountered by trans consumers, in all its forms.

The study also raises some implications for marketers. Understanding the construction, deconstruction and effects of gender is crucial for marketing (Visconti et al., 2018). Yet, the possibilities of symbolic violence within the field of marketing are rarely considered. As a result, there is insufficient challenging of traditional meaning systems that problematically reproduce gender as a hierarchical and binary construct. Bourdieu (1996, 201) tells us that any genuine gender revolution needs to "encompass not only an overthrow of order of things, of material structures, but also a mental upheaval, transformation of the categories of perception that lead us to collude with the perpetuation of the existing social order." This suggests that in order to eradicate gender injustices in the market there is a need to stop reproducing entrenched gender binaries that constitute the existing social order. In transforming categories of perception in ways that recognize a multiplicity of genders we can move toward a marketplace that is more welcoming of trans consumers.

Above, we noted that policy makers should take account of the heterogeneity of trans consumer experiences. It is only right then that we also acknowledge representational dilemmas (Hutton & Heath, 2020) as a limitation within this study. We are mindful that the perspectives put forward by the individuals profiled within this paper do not necessarily speak on behalf of all trans consumers. It was beyond the scope of this study to analyze difference among trans individuals from an intersectional perspective. In recognizing the potential of intersectionality in guiding feminist theorizing and activism (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019), the future research could

build on the current study by exploring marketing's role in the symbolic violence encountered by trans consumers in terms of how this intersects with other identities such as race and class.

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