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**Thinking Through Feminist Theorising: Poststructuralist Feminism,
Ecofeminism, and Intersectionality**

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Abstract:

This chapter gives an overview of feminist scholarship and explains how it can help expose gendered assumptions in marketing and consumer research. The key aim is to help researchers gain a deeper understanding of three specific feminist approaches and how they may be used for analytic purposes. First we give a broad overview of the basic principles inherent in any feminist thinking before discussing these three bodies of feminist theorising: poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism, and intersectionality. The first two have already made strong contributions in consumer research whereas the third, intersectionality, has been largely overlooked and is where we see potential new directions for gender critique.

Keywords: feminism, poststructuralist, ecofeminism, intersectionality, gender, masculinist biases

**Thinking Through Feminist Theorising: Poststructuralist Feminism,
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Feminist scholarship has played a major role in revealing the gendered nature of much theorising that masks taken-for-granted assumptions about the roles of men and women in society and, of course, associated heteronormative ideologies. From the study of theology, through the physical and social sciences, to research in business studies, a feminist lens has brought new insights time and time again. As regards consumer research, feminist perspectives have exposed the feminized position of the consumer, along with the masculinist biases of marketing discourse that often reinforces gender norms, privileging masculine attributes and values (Costa, 1991; Bristor and Fischer 1993; Hirschman, 1993; Fischer and Bristor, 1994). Feminist perspectives enable us to address ideological biases, providing us with a position, framework or lens through which we can critique texts and practices that reinforce existing gender biases and inequalities between the sexes. Work on advertising, for example, can reveal underlying assumptions that denigrate women (see for example, Stern 1993, 2012; Scott 1994, Stevens and Maclaran 2007). Despite its analytical potency, however, much confusion still exists over what exactly comprises feminist scholarship, and how to use the many theories it espouses. Hence, in this chapter we aim to help scholars gain a deeper understanding of three specific feminist approaches that we regard as particularly useful. First we give a broad, explanatory overview of

the basic principles inherent in any feminist thinking. Then we discuss three bodies of feminist theorising and their relevance for marketing and consumer researchers, namely poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism, and intersectionality (for excellent reviews of other feminisms see Bristor and Fischer, 1994). We have chosen the first two primarily because this is where the main emphases between feminism and consumer research have been to date. We make no apologies that this is also where our own research is located, and where we have the most confidence in discussing feminist perspectives. The third body of feminist scholarship is where we envisage fruitful new directions for marketing and consumer researchers, as also indicated by Hearn and Hein (2015) in their review of missing feminisms.

Key Feminist Principles

There are many different feminist approaches and this sometimes leads to a sense of bewilderment for new researchers because each feminism has its own conceptualization of gendered power relations (Allen, 2016). For example, liberal feminist approaches call for power to be re-distributed (e.g. what counts as unpaid and paid work); poststructuralist feminism locates power as encoded in social interactions and institutions; while cultural feminism seeks empowerment through a re-valuation of the feminine. Thus, each branch of feminist thought comes with its own tenets that have implications for the mode of theorising it embraces (see Table 1 below for details of various feminist perspectives, but note this is only an indicative list of key types and some of their associated theorists).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1: Key Bodies of Feminism Scholarship (adapted from Maclaran and Kravets, 2018)

Although each feminism adopts particular theoretical perspectives, there are certain principles common to all feminist thinking. A first principle is that men and women should be equal, and feminists argue that this is not the case in most contemporary contexts, whether global or more locally defined. Second, as a male-dominated system incorporating all major social institutions (the economy, politics, language, the family and religion), patriarchy is responsible for this inequality. Feminist theory seeks to unpack the patriarchal structures in which we are enmeshed. Third, feminism distinguishes between sex and gender: whereas sex is the biological category assigned at birth, gender is socially constructed with ideals of masculinity and femininity differing significantly, depending on history and across cultures (also depending on other intersections such as ethnicity, social class and so forth, discussed later in this chapter). What it meant to be female or male a century ago would not be acceptable today, illustrating how certain gender norms are historically dependent. In addition, not all cultures make such restricted binary divisions of gender. Before the advent of European settlers, for example, Native Americans recognised 5 genders: female, male, two-spirit female, two-spirit male and transgendered. Their colonisers subsequently eliminated these multiple gender categories (Brayboy, 2016). More recently, governments in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh officially recognise

the *hijras* – those who are born male but identify with being female – as a third gender (Preeti, 2012).

The feminist drive for women's equality has given birth to over a century of activism, from the suffragettes of the early 1900s to the present time. This history is sometimes referred to as the "waves of feminism" to mark the different issues that dominated particular periods. The first wave (1840-1920) concentrated on property rights and political power (i.e. the right to vote); the second wave (1960-1980s) focused on issues around women's right to work, their role in the family and reproduction, particularly women's unpaid labour; the third wave (1990 onwards) concerned itself with the micropolitics of gender identities, and the intersections of various axes of oppression i.e. class, race, sexuality and so forth. Many commentators believe that a fourth wave of feminism is currently underway, spurred on by feminism's increasing recognition amongst younger women, a wave that began around five years ago with the publication of an article by Kira Cochrane in the Guardian newspaper in the UK in December 2013. Fourth wave feminism tends to focus on embodied feminism, politics, praxis and intersectionality, much of it fuelled by the internet. We are certainly seeing a resurgence of feminist activism, bringing with it a more collective spirit that challenges some of the third wave's individuality (see Maclaran and Kravets, 2018 for a more detailed overview of this history).

Having given this brief overview of key commonalities that bind feminisms together, as well as feminism's broad trajectory, we continue our chapter with a closer look at those feminisms we identified earlier, commencing with poststructuralist feminism. In

each case, we outline the main theoretical perspectives and give detailed examples relevant to consumer research.

Poststructuralist Feminism

Poststructuralist feminism has its roots in poststructuralism, an intellectual movement that emerged from the second half of the 1960s onwards. Associated with thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault, poststructuralism challenges traditional assumptions about what counts as knowledge and established ways of seeking that knowledge. More specifically, poststructuralism has a discursive ontology, which is to say that it sees language as constituting our reality. Language endows phenomena (be they objects, events, people, moods and so forth) with meaning, and provides a type of code with which to communicate. Significantly, however, language is not an objective, neutral practice (the traditional view), but rather a social and political practice of representation that reflects the interests and biases of the dominant group in a specific society. Consequently, poststructuralism seeks to expose how meanings are constructed through discourse i.e. systems of expression that carry ideological connotations as a result of implicit power relations. These meanings shift and evolve over time and cultural context.

Thus, poststructuralist feminists see gender as being constructed in discourse and the categories of male/female as being historically and socially situated, rather than being stable or fixed in meaning. In particular, they draw on the poststructuralist deconstruction of how conceptual opposites, referred to as 'binary oppositions' (e.g.

masculinity/femininity, mind/body, reason/emotion, culture/nature, active/passive etc.) depend on each other for their meaning. This meaning is also hierarchical, with one term usually privileged over the other. For example, stereotypical masculinity is associated with the mind, reason, culture and being active, whereas femininity is associated with the body, emotion, nature and being passive. Poststructuralism shows how the more privileged term (in this case masculinity) is dependent on its relationship to the other, less privileged term (i.e. femininity). For example, to be male depends on not being female, and being rational depends on not being emotional.

The earliest feminist critiques to enter marketing and consumer research in the 1990s – alongside the interpretivist turn – used feminist poststructuralist enquiry to interrogate the gendered aspects of marketing thought. Fischer and Bristor (1994) deconstructed the masculinist ideology embedded in marketing rhetoric, while Hirschman (1993) showed how consumer research was dominated by a masculine orientation. Joy and Venkatesh (1994) critiqued consumer research for ignoring the body and privileging a “man as computer” model of decision-making. Dobscha (1993) pinpointed the feminized nature of environmentally-related consumption (see also the next section on ecofeminism); and Stern (1992) used feminist reader response criticism to look at the influence of gender in constructing and interpreting advertising. In the discussion that follows, we discuss Fischer and Bristor’s aforementioned paper as a worked example to illustrate in more detail the key principles of a poststructuralist analysis.

First of all, in conducting their deconstruction, Fischer and Bristor (1994) review how the marketer/consumer binary opposition has developed historically in marketing theory. Tracking the conceptual distinction between production and consumption to the industrial era, and the separation of the public (world of work – production and marketer) and the private (world of leisure – consumption and consumer), they show how man and masculinity became associated with the former sphere and woman/femininity with the latter. Importantly, this discourse, locating consumption in the private, domestic sphere, served the interest of marketing managers by conceptualising the consumer as female and, therefore, passive, pliable and seducible. Then, analysing key marketing texts, Fischer and Bristor reveal how descriptions of the marketer-consumer relationship reflect these gendered positions with consumers always described in feminised terms. Their analysis notes where there are silences in the text (gaps or absences that denote potential, but suppressed conflict) as well as reconstruction (substituting an alternative meaning) to show how the rhetoric of the marketing concept conveys the marketer-consumer relationship as a battle between “male warriors and the females who occupy a territory they seek to conquer” (Fischer and Bristor, 1994, p. 326). We might expect that the notion of relationship marketing in business-to-business exchanges might be less gendered, but Fischer and Bristor disprove this by showing how the seller is positioned as the male partner and the buyer as the female one. They conclude that the conceptual evolution of the marketer/consumer relationship in marketing theory may best be described as circular, moving from the flirtatious connotations of the production orientation to the marriage partners of the relationship concept.

Later gender studies in consumer research have often used the work of poststructuralist gender theorist, Judith Butler, one of the best-known gender theorists who advanced feminist theorizing significantly by putting forward her theory of gender performativity, first in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and second in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Highlighting the fluid nature of gender and sexuality, gender performativity seeks to explain the relationship between discourse and the materiality of the body. A key Butlerian argument is that gender is not something we “have” i.e. it is not fixed or stable, but rather something we “do”, i.e. it is performed over and over again by our words and actions. Butler describes gender as “an ongoing discursive practice” and most importantly, sees it as open to “intervention and resignification” (Butler, 1990, p 33). Because gender identity involves iteratively performing and repeating particular cultural repertoires, there are also opportunities for changing the ongoing iteration of norms. For this reason Butler conceives of a subject that does not pre-exist, but rather is brought into being with each iteration. Hence, discourse is continually producing and reproducing the subject (see Maclaran, 2018 for a more detailed discussion of Butler’s work). Consumer researchers have used Butler to study new masculinities (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004; Brownlie and Hewer, 2007) and performative femininities (Martin, Schouten and McAlexander, 2006; Stevens, Cappellini and Smith, 2015; Tuncay Zayer et al., 2013).

One of Butler’s (1990) most useful concepts in her theory of performativity is that of “the heteronormative matrix” or what she later redefines as “heterosexual hegemony”. Butler sees this as playing a fundamental role in the maintenance of gender norms in a heteronormative society, by normalizing specific expectations of how sex, gender and desire should be enacted. These expectations focus around the strict binary division of

males and females and their concomitant masculine/feminine behaviours, as well as the naturalization of opposite sex desire. The heteronormative matrix thus normalizes women who desire men, and vice versa. Others that fall outside of this are regarded as abnormal or even as deviant. Those who do not conform to this idea of “normal” sexual behaviour may also be judged morally inferior (Rubin, 1993), as evidenced by many religious prohibitions about same sex desire. A wide variety of institutional and cultural practices have heteronormative discourses and assumptions embedded within them. The notion of the nuclear family – a male/female married couple living with their biological, dependent children – is often the taken-for-granted model that may influence us in unrecognised ways. For example, Kissinger (2005) shows how out-of-hours medical calls reproduce the heteronormative social order in their interactions. As they question patients, responding doctors are most likely to presume a nuclear family household, with the wife taking primary responsibility for the children.

Although heteronormativity is naturalized through constant repetition, it can be disrupted by acts that challenge its repetition and enact gender in different ways. Male musical performers like Bowie and Boy George, and female musical performers like Lady Gaga and Madonna, blend masculinity and femininity in new ways that challenge traditional binary divisions of sex, gender and sexuality. These resignifying practices can produce what Üstüner and Thompson (2015) describe as “ideological edgework” in their study of women’s roller derby. They identify market-mediated resignifications enacted by the female participants that include juxtaposing physical aggression and flirtatious behaviours. Ideological edgework of this nature, the authors argue, can push gender boundaries at both micro and macro levels by

encouraging reflexive awareness in participants that prompts them to question their roles and status in other areas of their lives.

Similarly, Maclaran and Otnes (2017) in their study of the regendering of the Sherlock Holmes myth in *Elementary*, premiered in the US on CBS in 2012, analyze various gender resignifications that challenge expected norms of the Sherlock narrative. The most radical change is in terms of its female (Joan) Watson, played by Lucy Liu. Yet the series resists falling into the anticipated heteronormative formula, whereby there are romantic or flirtatious overtones to the Sherlock/Watson relationship, and portrays this as purely platonic throughout the series. There are many other gender resignifications that encourage viewers to engage in more reflexive awareness of cultural norms. One resignification particularly worthy of note is the program's refusal to assess the transgender status of Sherlock's housekeeper, Ms Hudson (played by transgender actor, Candis Cayne). Although Sherlock and Watson acknowledge that she is transgendered, they do not attempt to discuss or explain this further. In not being subjected to scrutiny, Ms Hudson's transgendered status remains outside the gender binary and this silence effectively ruptures the repetition of heteronormativity.

Ecofeminism

Like poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism also questions a system of thought that places women and nature in opposition to men and culture. However, whereas poststructuralist feminist analysis focuses on language and its deconstruction,

ecofeminism explores ecology and the processes that protect or destroy the earth and its environment.

The term ecofeminism was first coined by French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne (1976), who connected man's domination of women as merely reproductive bodies to that of humanity's domination of nature and degradation of the environment. Her work challenged binary systems that inferiorised women, as well as the assumption that women were 'naturally' more akin to the body and nature. Whilst various schools of thought have since emerged in relation to how ecofeminism should be defined, it is broadly agreed that ecology and feminism are inextricably linked (Warren 1990; 2000). Ecofeminism argues for the connectedness and integrity of all living things, rather than a "masculinist mentality" that dominates women's bodies and sexuality and operates multiple systems of oppression to divide and destroy (Mies and Shiva, 1993, p. 14). Gaard (1993) draws attention to the political and ideological issues that underpin ecofeminism, suggesting that rights and responsibilities in Western society are framed within a dialectical system that privileges masculine values over feminine ones. This is based, she argues, on a sense of self that is separate rather than interconnected in Western culture. As such it lacks an ethic of responsibility or care. Ecofeminism's challenge is therefore to offer an ecological ethical theory that challenges the "self-other disjunction" (p. 3). To summarise then, ecofeminism ultimately seeks to question binary systems that are socially constructed to devalue women and the environment, offering economic, spiritual and political reasons as to why patriarchal values are harmful and destructive, calling for an ethic of care and a transformational philosophy of a connected, human, ecological self, rather than an individualistic, androcentric and anthropocentric self.

Within ecofeminism there are various foci: social ecofeminism, for example, emphasises the “ideological mystification” that sustains binary systems in society (Twine, 2001, p. 3), arguing that both gender and nature are socially constructed in inferior terms and that this leads to women’s, and nature’s, dominance (Merchant, 1980; Ruether, 2001). Cultural ecofeminism is based on the belief that women have a stronger emotional, spiritual connection to nature and thus are the ‘natural’ custodians of the environment (Spretnak, 1990). Plumwood (1993) also gives positive value and status to women’s connection with nature, critiquing the “negative cultural value” previously associated with both in Western culture (p. 8). She argues that “rational imperialism” (p. 12) upholds control over and distance from nature. In Western culture it “has systematically inferiorised, backgrounded and denied dependency on the whole sphere of reproduction and subsistence.” (p. 21). She further suggests that the instrumental attitude towards nature and women run in close parallel, and she calls for a critical ecological feminism “in which women consciously position themselves *with* nature” (p. 21). This approach is not without its doubters, with Ruether (1975), for example, noting that such a positioning may lead to an essentialising, oppositional discourse that places women in “romanticized servitude” to nature within patriarchy. Instead, Ruether advocates that women’s connection to nature is a social myth that should be transcended, and that more emphasis needs to be placed on other related forms of social oppression such as classism, racism and poverty.

Both social and cultural ecofeminism acknowledge the role of history and society on mutually reinforcing the dualistic thinking that characterises many cultures, which has

resulted in men and women being defined in opposition to one another (Gruen, 1990; Warren, 2000; Warren and Cheney, 1991; Gaard, 1993; Plumwood, 1993; Twine, 2001). Such dualistic thinking leads to further “hierarchical mappings”, argues Twine (2001), and mitigates against a more complementary and inclusive emphasis in society. Accordingly, environmental concerns are often framed as a feminist issue, and as such are trivialised by the dominant culture (Plumwood, 1993). Perhaps Plumwood (2002) put it most succinctly when she wrote that the ecological crisis is about the reluctance of the cultural “mind” to acknowledge and adapt to its material “body” (p. 15). In so saying, she points to one of the most powerful post-Enlightenment binaries, namely the male ‘mind’ pitted against the female ‘body’. Dobscha and Ozanne’s (2000) study offers an ecofeminist critique of this particular binary in relation to the marketing of and women’s consumption of feminine hygiene, household cleaning and beauty products, which positions nature as the enemy.

Over the past 25 years there have been a number of studies in the marketing discipline that adopt an ecofeminist perspective. In 1993, for example, Dobscha put forward a research agenda on environmentally-related consumption. She argued that an ecofeminist perspective would enable us to place less emphasis on rationality, the dominant model of the marketplace, and more on the emotional aspects of consumers’ connection to the earth, including the interdependency of nature and humans. Such an approach, she suggested, offered greater contextual depth to understanding environmentally-related consumption behaviours, as it emphasised the emancipatory potential of such a perspective for consciousness raising and critique in relation to

existing patterns of marketing and consumption, and helped promote change in ways that benefitted all consumers and the natural environment.

In her study Dobscha (1993) argued that marketing discourse upheld cultural and social dualisms, depicting women as “wood nymph” and “earth mother”, and giving them sole responsibility for saving the planet (p. 37). Drawing on Plumwood’s (1993) work, she concurs with Plumwood that this places women in the role of “angel in the ecosystem” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 9). This is of dubious value to women and to nature, however, as it trivialises both as outside the dominant cultural narrative. Nevertheless, Plumwood (1993), has argued that women’s role as nature’s custodians, whilst problematic, has some validity in that it links women to values “which our culture needs now to affirm” (p. 10). This is a view supported by Dobscha in her work. In the UK McDonagh and Prothero added to the discussion about marketing’s anti-ecological practices (1997), suggesting that marketing contributed to the imbalance between culture and nature by reinforcing patriarchy and upholding the rights of those in power, thereby supporting existing social structures and relations. They argued that an ecofeminist perspective enabled us to question these taken for granted structures that support men’s domination of women and nature, and ultimately this might lead to more responsible marketing and consumption.

Some years later Dobscha returned to ecofeminism in a study with Ozanne (Dobscha and Ozanne (2001). A feminist methodology and hermeneutical method was applied to study female ecological consumers. The authors approach was to privilege informant perspectives, embrace parity between the researcher and researched, seek to

establish intimacy and trust, and aim for praxis, namely social change (Reinharz 1992). Participant observation, interviewee-guided interviews and auto-elicitation methods were used to conduct qualitative research with women who were members of an environmental action group in the US that questioned marketplace practices. Key findings were around the concept of the ecological self, living the ecological life, and the ecological life as a force of change. Whilst their study focused on a specific group of female consumers, the authors identified the wider implications of their research for marketing managers, environmental groups and regulatory agencies, their objective being to bring about praxis. They concluded that the concept of a mutual self (a self-in-relation-to-nature), rather than an individualistic self, helps foster a non-dominating approach to life that is based on respect and constraint towards the natural world. They drew on a metaphor of citizen-as-conservator, which they argued offers a powerful oppositional discourse to the prevailing, unquestioned one in the marketplace, and has emancipatory potential for women who are actively concerned with, and engaged in, marketing and consumption practices that make them feel more connected to nature.

More recently, Stevens, Kearney and Maclaran (2013) adopt an ecofeminist perspective to explore anthropomorphism in marketing, specifically applying an ecofeminist lens to dairy advertising featuring cows. Their methodological approach was to unmask the ideological subtext beneath these advertisements, deconstructing and uncovering what is “implied, concealed and excluded” (Scott 1995). This “reading against the grain” is a key element of feminist research (Flynn and Schweickart, 1986). The approach enabled them to re-read texts relating to these advertisements in order to reveal an underlying androcentric ideology laden with

gendered assumptions. They adopted an “expert” readings of texts approach, as advocated by Hirschman (1998), in order to expose those underlying ideological biases. A selection of dairy advertisements featuring cows were identified that used anthropomorphic advertisements and were androcentric (male-centred) and anthropocentric (regarding humankind as the centre of existence) in their approach. The authors identified three key themes: 1) disconnection from nature; 2) the concept of the monstrous feminine (drawing on French feminist Kristeva’s work); and 3) mastering “the other”. They concluded that adopting an ecofeminist perspective enabled them to expose deep-rooted cultural assumptions, and the vested interests of the dairy industry.

Building on this work, the authors then did a study of a specific brand mascot used by the Borden Dairy in the USA, namely Elsie the Borden Cow (Stevens, Maclaran and Kearney, 2014). The interpretive study traced the cultural meanings attached to cows through history, revealing their gendered significations. They then told the story of Elsie from her creation in 1932 to the present day. The study applied the three key themes identified in the earlier study to analyse a wide range of marketing communications related to Elsie. From this analysis, the authors identified an overarching conceptual metaphor of benevolent mastery in relation to Elsie the Borden Cow. This metaphor was one that depicted man as a “concerned and caring custodian” (p. 115), pointing to the term “animal husbandry” as symptomatic of this androcentric and anthropocentric perspective. Their findings thus recall Plumwood’s (1993) observation that humans are positioned as “rational stewards” managing and controlling nature for its own best interests (p. 16. Using an ecofeminist lens, the

authors were therefore able to challenge the anthropocentric narrative that resided at the heart of the Elsie story.

Adopting an ecofeminist perspective enables us to critically unpack, expose and problematize seemingly innocuous social, cultural and marketing practices that are the norm in our society. Stevens, Maclaran and Kearney (2014) also suggest that a close analysis of this long campaign testifies to “phallogocentric characteristics of instrumentalism and control of nature” that “reinforce a Western, masculinist, cultural domination of and sense of separation from nature and the feminine” (p. 120-121), setting humans apart from the natural environment and placing them in a privileged position over nature. The study enabled the authors to consider the co-creation processes between the company and the general public that sought Elsie’s anthropomorphism, concluding that Elsie is a good exemplar of the Dominant Social Paradigm in Western industrial societies (Kilbourne 2004) that permeates our social, cultural, political, economic and technological practices, and that validates our continued dominance of the natural world.

Whilst a sustainability discourse now seems to be more prevalent in marketing (see for example, McDonagh and Prothero, 2014), ecofeminism continues to be a powerful means with which to critique contemporary marketing and consumption practices. Paddock (2017), for example, has applied an ecofeminist framework to understand women’s food consumption on the Caribbean islands of Turk & Caicos. Her ecofeminist approach enabled her to connect micro, meso and macro levels and thus go beyond the dominant tropes of “affordability” and “food choice” to reveal the multiple forces that militated against healthy food consumption for the women in her

study. Ballard (2017), has applied an ecofeminist approach to deconstruct PETA's advertisements, which she argues, somewhat ironically promote 'heteropatriarchy', including violence and the sexual exploitation of women. Yudina & Fennell (2013) apply an ecofeminist perspective that enabled them to expose the exploitative treatment of animals in tourism sector discourse. More recently, Yudina & Grimwood (2016) drew on ecofeminism's ethics of care to critique the exploitation of polar bears in Canada, demonstrating how current tourism practices upheld patriarchal ideologies in relation to the exploitation of non-human others. Ecofeminism has been found wanting for other researchers. Contrary to the above studies, Littlefield (2010) critiques ecofeminism in his study of men and hunting, challenging many of its central ideas, as he argues that the relationship the men in his study had with nature was more nuanced and reflected multiple masculinities and multiple attitudes towards nature.

We believe that ecofeminist thinking will continue to be relevant as we increasingly observe environmental issues being pushed further and further down many governments' list of priorities, and largely ignored in terms of marketing practices. Furthermore, ecofeminist thinking exemplifies how feminist approaches can contribute to unmasking the unquestioned and taken for granted "norms", reading against the grain (Flynn and Schweikart 1986) to offer a more problematic interpretation of cultural texts and discourses that may lead to our re-evaluation of those texts and discourses.

Intersectionality

The principle of intersectionality is a particularly strong thread running through the most recent feminist activism, often now referred to as the fourth-wave of feminism. Yet, intersectionality is not a new idea: it was also an important feature of third-wave feminism, a term used to refer to the different intersecting aspects of identity i.e. race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality that lead to discrimination or marginalization. Emerging as a forceful critique of second-wave feminist thinking, intersectional feminism challenged the domination of feminism by middle class white women, as well as the assumption that this group could speak on behalf of all women. As such, it was, and still is, heavily associated with Black feminism.

Although she did not coin the term (this is attributed to Kimberle Crenshaw, an American Civil Rights lawyer in 1989 – see Davis, 2008), bell hooks is certainly the best-known intersectional feminist. Her theorizing focuses on the intersection of race, class and gender. In her most famous book, *Am I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (hooks, 1981), she highlighted how both racism and sexism impacted on Black women in the US, ensuring their continued low class status. hooks was highly critical of white feminists who drew parallels between the oppression of women and the oppression of Blacks in the US. The logical outcome of such parallels, hooks argued, was that “all women are white and all Blacks are men.” To convey the interconnectedness of different axes of inequality, she coined the frequently cited phrase “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” For hooks and other Black feminists, each additional dimension of inequality makes an individual increasingly vulnerable and subordinate. In her book, *From Margin to Center* (hooks, 1984), she admonished Betty Friedan for focusing on a problem that was specific to white upper and middle class women in her early feminist text, *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan,

1963). Friedan's text - frequently accredited with starting second-wave feminism - constructed the bored housewife syndrome as a universal women's problem. But, as hooks so eloquently puts it:

She did not discuss who would be called in to take care of the children and maintain the home if more women like herself were freed from their house labor and given equal access with white men to the professions. She did not speak of the needs of women without men, without children, without homes. She ignored the existence of all non-white women and poor white women. She did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factory worker, a clerk, or a prostitute than to be a leisure-class housewife.

Against this background, then, it can be problematic to describe yourself as an "intersectional feminist", if you are not a Black woman. Now, with the broadening of the concept, the term is often appropriated by other groups and used outside its original context. Such an act risks diluting the term and erasing the history of its use - which was to convey and analyse the specificities of Black women's oppression in terms of racism and sexism (e.g. their historical enslavement in the US). The concept of intersectionality itself, however, is generally deemed a beneficial guiding principle for feminist thought and activism. In essence the principle helps us analyse difference and its effects in a more holistic and processual way. Intersectionality shows how the meaning between social categories is mutually constitutive, i.e. one category takes its meaning from its relation with another. That is to say, intersectional identities are not discrete from each other (Black, woman, working class, lesbian etc.) but relational

and, as such, always in process, shifting and changing in response to different contextual factors (Shields, 2008).

Over the last decade intersectionality has gained a much more prominent position across a broad spectrum of feminist thought (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013). Indeed, as Davis (2008) puts it, it has become something of a “buzzword”. In this respect, intersectionality has moved from being used as a structuralist metaphor for intersecting power sources, Carbin and Edenheim (2013) argue, to being regarded as a theory that unites different feminist perspectives, including poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives. According to Davis (2008), the reason for the concept’s increased significance is because it brings the politics of Black feminist theory together with poststructuralist feminist perspectives on the fluidity and instability of identity. Other feminist scholars (e.g. Knapp, 2005) reinforce this view by pinpointing how intersectionality, with its inclusion of race, gender and class, prevented feminism being side-lined by the emphasis on multiculturalism from the early 2000s onwards. In this regard, Carbin and Edenheim (2013) critique the arrival of intersectionality for providing a convenient unifying history for feminism that papers over the cracks between different feminisms and ignores ontological conflicts (such as structuralist versus poststructuralist assumptions). These authors describe intersectionality as “a consensus-creating signifier” that signals “a liberal consensus-based project (that ignores capitalism as an oppressive structure) in an increasingly neoliberal and conservative context” (p. 13).

Despite such criticism and the difficulty of defining exactly what intersectionality is – metaphor, theory, methodology, analytic framework or project (McKibbin et al.,

2015) – the concept’s influence continues to spread across scholarship, social policy and activist blogs. On contemporary feminist blogs, in particular, discussions about it are rife (see <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/C16EXfHXEAAF1Ck.jpg> for an excellent diagram of privilege and intersectionality). As can be seen from this diagram, the concept of intersectionality is expanding beyond traditional social identity structures (race, class, gender) to include a broader range of social markers that may also disadvantage, such as age, able-bodiedness, level of attractiveness, body type, religion, and so forth (Gopaldas, 2013). Intersections create opportunities as well as oppressions, depending on the advantages or disadvantages of each, and the power balance between them. So, although, for example, a white lesbian diverges from heterosexual norms, she has a racial advantage over other lesbians who are non-white and who will therefore experience double marginalisation. The term “privilege-checking,” refers to the advantages that society gives us (e.g. white, heterosexual, male) and being reflexive about our taken-for-granted advantages and how these underpin our own viewpoints.

Regarding consumer research, intersectionality has yet to make an impact, and to date there is a paucity of studies in this respect. Notable exceptions are Gopaldas (2013) who undertakes a detailed review of the concept’s evolution, and with his colleagues (Gopaldas, Prasad and Woodard, 2009) explores the relevance of the concept for consumer research, highlighting the phenomenological complexity required and its particular appropriateness for studies into consumer vulnerability. They (as well as Gopaldas, 2013) propose intersectionality as a paradigm that is premised on the multi-categorical, and sometimes multi-level, nature of the subject (ontological level). The paradigm’s two key aims (axiological level) are to reveal patterns of privilege and

oppression, in addition to foregrounding the lived experience of those who are marginalised.

In a further exploration of intersectionality and consumption, Gopaldas and Fischer (2012) revisit key consumer culture theory articles that, although they do not explicitly refer to intersectionality, implicitly use its logics in their analysis. For example, Holt and Thompson (2004) show how gender and class mediates lifestyle consumption, while Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) explore how political ideology dictates marginalised Black consumers' response to limited marketplace access.

Gopaldas and Fischer pinpoint areas for future research into intersectionality and consumption, namely: 1) overlooked social identities and categories and intersections; 2) more focus on transformative processes in consumer identity politics; 3) how social media reproduce identity structures and categories; 4) the role of marketing communications in representing marginalised groups; and 5) how emotions link to various intersectional consumption patterns.

Most recently, at the *Gender Marketing & Consumer Behaviour Conference* (Visconti and Tissiers-Desbordes, 2016) intersectionality features in relation to: LGBT consumers and gendered understandings of place (Coffin, Banister and Goatman, 2016); political marketing discourses (Sanghvi, Cantor and Bhanja, 2016); and Black female consumers' uses of apparel to communicate social identities (Morris, Thomas and Kahlor, 2016). In addition Wechie (2016) applies the concept to fourth-wave Black feminist online activism. Significantly - citing Calafell (2014, p. 266) - Wechie highlights the potential for intersectionality "to be depoliticized and whitened,"

making reference to the Beyoncé brand and its conformity to the white-dominated culture industry and dilution of any transformative racial politics.

Conclusion

In summary, then, this chapter first took a broad look at feminist scholarship and tried to clarify its many theoretical perspectives, highlighting their differences and similarities, as well as the commonalities of all feminist thought. Again, we remind readers that our table of feminisms is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to describe some of the more frequently mentioned types from past and present (see, for example, Hearn and Hein 2015 for other, missing feminisms from marketing and consumer research). We hope this table will encourage readers to seek out more information on potential feminist approaches appropriate for their own research. We focused our discussions on three important bodies of feminist theorising, but our choices were guided by our own research interests and studies so that we could give more worked examples of how feminist theories can be applied. To this end we demonstrated how poststructuralist and ecofeminist analyses are relevant to marketing and consumer research. Intersectionality has yet to make its mark in our field, and much more work is needed to critically explore this perspective, both in relation to the concept itself - especially its neoliberal, “whitening” connotations – as well as with regard to marketing’s role in consumer disadvantage and stigmatisation.

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