



3-26-2021

Velocity and Vertigo: Gender Trends in Consumer Research: In Conversation with Fernando Desouches, Linda Ong, and Linda Scott

Catherine Coleman
Texas Christian University

Linda Tuncay Zayer
Loyola University Chicago, ltuncay@luc.edu

Linda Scott
University of Oxford

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/business_facpubs

 Part of the [Business Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Coleman, Catherine; Zayer, Linda Tuncay; and Scott, Linda. Velocity and Vertigo: Gender Trends in Consumer Research: In Conversation with Fernando Desouches, Linda Ong, and Linda Scott. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 6, 2: 286 - 295, 2021. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, School of Business: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/713186>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Business: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).
© the Association for Consumer Research, 2021.

Velocity and Vertigo: Gender Trends in Consumer Research: In Conversation with Fernando Desouches, Linda Ong, and Linda Scott

CATHERINE COLEMAN, LINDA TUNCAY ZAYER, FERNANDO DESOUCHES, LINDA ONG, AND LINDA SCOTT

As part of an interactive series emergent from the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* issue dedicated to gender, this article supports a panel conversation with industry luminaries who are leading the charge on issues of gender and consumer research—Fernando Desouches, Linda Ong, and Linda Scott (see fig. 1). Panelists were selected by the coeditors of this special issue and were provided questions in advance in order to generate discussion. These industry leaders joined us to discuss pressing issues of gender, markets, and consumers today, where industry is in relation to some of these issues, and what these thought leaders expect to see moving forward.

In this panel conversation, industry leaders examine trends related to gender, such as those shaped by generational differences, technologies, and the urgent consequences of the pandemic. Indeed, millennial and Generation Z consumers display greater acceptance of various expressions of gender and family than older generations. These more racially and ethnically diverse digital natives, who were looking hopefully ahead to the opportunities of a growing economy, are now among the most vulnerable to the uncertain future amid the fallout of a global pandemic (e.g., Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends: <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far>). The pandemic further highlights the disproportionately negative economic vulnerabilities of women, LGBTQ+ communities, and disenfranchised groups around the world. The panelists discuss the mutually intensifying confluence of these events. Amid the velocity of change, creating a sense of vertigo described by panelists, Mr. Desouches, Ms. Ong, and Dr. Scott find that

there is hope for a more sustainable balance that overcomes toxic expressions of genders and allows for more authentic expressions of identities, and they discuss the role of organizations in brands in realizing these possibilities. The panelists additionally point to the ambiguities of digital and social media, including ways in which they have given consumers more control over narratives of consumption in consumer-brand relationships but create the echo chambers that may isolate consumers. The panelists discuss best practices for professionals to responsibly navigate the politics of gender through marketing.

The panel conversation took place on August 18, 2020, via Zoom. It was moderated by two of the coeditors of this issue, Dr. Linda Tuncay Zayer, professor of marketing at Loyola University Chicago, and Dr. Catherine A. Coleman, associate professor of strategic communication at Texas Christian University. The conversation occurred several months into the global COVID-19 pandemic amid a heightened sense of the various sociocultural, political, and economic issues foregrounded by the pandemic and other global reckonings (e.g., Black Lives Matter, racial justice movements, politics of global health, #MeToo). These forces necessitate a recalibration in marketing approaches to genders and re-humanization of values and practices.

This interview has been edited for length and flow.

Linda Z: We are so grateful to have three leaders in this space, who have generously agreed to join us in a conversation about what they see as some of the pressing issues of genders, markets, and consumers today, where industry is in relation to

Catherine Coleman is associate professor and director of graduate studies, Strategic Communication, at the Bob Schieffer College of Communication, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX, USA. Linda Tuncay Zayer is professor of marketing at the Quinlan School of Business, Loyola University Chicago, IL, USA. Fernando Desouches is managing director, New Macho of BBD Perfect Storm, One Oliver's Yard, 55–71 City Road, Old Street, London EC1Y 1HQ, UK. Linda Ong is CEO and founder, CULTIQUE of CIVIC, 636 N. Almont Drive, Bungalow F, West Hollywood, CA 90069, USA. Linda Scott is Emeritus DP Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, University of Oxford, and founder of the Global Business Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment.

Fernando Desouches

Managing Director
New Macho of BBD Perfect Storm



Fernando Desouches is the Managing Director of New Macho, the male expertise division of the London-based advertising agency BBD Perfect Storm. Originally from Argentina, Mr. Desouches has more than 20 years of experience in marketing to men, including at Unilever, where he served as Global Brand Director for Dove Men+Care and led the second (of only two) Lynx/Axe repositioning. He is a regular speaker at industry events such as AdWeek EU, renowned institutions such as UNWomen Unstereotype Alliance Summit, and universities around the world. He was recently recognized by IPA (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising) on their 2020 iList of role models championing inclusivity in the advertising industry.

Linda Ong

CEO + Founder
CULTIQUE of CIVIC (a Seacrest Global Group Company)



Linda Ong is CEO + Founder of CULTIQUE, the cultural insights and strategy venture of CIVIC (a Seacrest Global Group Company). Prior to this, Ms. Ong served as Chief Culture Officer at the award-winning Civic Entertainment Group, which serves the world's most recognizable multinational companies, such as HBO, Facebook, and the NFL. Prior to joining Civic Entertainment Group, she was CEO and Founder of TruthCo., a company devoted to cultural insights and brand strategy for entertainment and media companies. She is a popular speaker and commentator on complex cultural issues, and she has received various honors for her work, including as Fast Company's 100 Most Creative People in Business (2014) and as Innovation Ambassador to the 2014 UN World Summit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the 2015 UN Media for Social Impact Summit.

Dr. Linda Scott

Emeritus DP Professor of
Entrepreneurship and Innovation
University of Oxford

Founder
Global Business Coalition for Women's
Economic Empowerment



Dr. Linda Scott is Emeritus DP World Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Oxford. She is also founder of the Global Business Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment, a group of 11 multinationals that work together to initiate, test, and facilitate women's economic empowerment programs. Dr. Scott works with corporations, agencies, governments, and NGOs to design and test programs to economically include women. Dr. Scott's most recent book, *The Double X Economy*, is one of 15 books nominated for the *Financial Times* & McKinsey Best Business Books of 2020 Award. Her book is currently being translated into seven languages.

Figure 1.

these issues, and what they expect to see moving forward.

The moderators introduce the panelists. Their biographical information may be found below.

ON INFLUENCE OF CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER ON WORK OF MARKETERS

Linda Z: With three Lindas in the discussion, I'm going to use last names. Linda Ong, I'll start with you. Our first question is: how have consumers' perceptions with regard to gender changed and how has that impacted your work?

Linda O: I think that it's interesting because I'm not so sure that consumer perceptions have changed, but the generation has influenced the conversation, which is forcing different people to enter these conversations that a lot of them have never had before or have even been willing to have. The way

that we categorize culture, we look at it in three dimensions along the curve. The dominant conversation, or the most top of mind conversation today, is one about how gender is changing. That's largely being influenced by an emergent wave of conversations brought on mostly by millennials and Gen Zs, where they look at gender very, very differently. Of course, on the other end of the curve, you've got more traditional, conservative folks, of which there's many in this country—they tend to be older—who are very rooted in their gender perception. I think the interesting thing is probably people's own perceptions are changing minimally, but the conversation has become more dominant because of the influence of Gen Z and millennials.

Linda Z: Thank you. Fernando, what are your thoughts on that?

Fernando: Yeah, it is very similar. So I will take it from the perspective I know more—that is, men. When we work for brands, we see this difference. There

are men—and maybe the majority of men—that have a more traditional view on what masculinity, men, and gender is, where you have more progressive men that say, okay, that could be more fluid. The thing is, from there, you cannot say there is one type of consumer; you need to open that. So you need to be very careful to not try to impose one view over the other view, because if you want to impose a progressive view, the more traditional men will reject that. This is what happened before with Gillette in the last year when they tried to do that. At the same time, if you go with a traditional view, you will be rejected for the other. So for us, the best way is to think more outside the box of progressive and traditional and just show what is a theme they say is emerging and is coming as part of the real representation of the world as he sees it. That is, that genders are becoming more fluid without making it a statement. Because as soon as you make a statement, you put yourself, as a brand, into a progressive or traditional box, and then you will have the backlash from the other side.

Linda Z: Interesting. Linda Scott, do you want to jump in?

Linda S: I basically agree with the first two speakers, and I think I would just emphasize a little bit more about the trend going forward. It does seem to me that it's quite got a lot of speed. And a reminder that opinions about, for example, gay marriage, at least in this country [the United States] change really fast. Ideas about women have changed very remarkably. So I think I would call attention to the velocity of change as much as anything. I do agree that there is still a very large number of people who maybe are not quite up to speed yet, in terms of their buying practices. And I also think that there is a very vocal, very, very vocal minority that can really push back. I've been watching a lot among very conservative men. There are some men out there who really have a rage response when you challenge anything with regard to them with gender equality, gender fluidity, anything. They're heavily invested in traditional masculinity, and they can be bad trolls, and so I do think it's a high-risk environment right now.

Linda O: I would just love to add to that. I 100% agree with everything that you guys have said. What

we've noticed is that a lot of the trends that were underway before the pandemic have been accelerated and intensified. Actually, we talk about this moment in time right now as a perfect storm, which is really defined as a confluence of seemingly unrelated events that are happening on their own, but when they join together they have the effect of intensifying each one. So what's happening now when you have the pandemic, economic inequality, racial injustice, political chaos, climate change, all these things, global world disruption, that everything just starts becoming, to Linda's point, more extreme. So what we've seen now, to just double down on what she just said, is the ascent of Gen Z values as becoming normalized mainstream. Now to Fernando's point, not everybody likes this. So just because those values are now being discussed widely in culture, we can't imagine that everybody's adopted them. Just in the way that Facebook started as a millennial, funny little site and now everybody's grandmother's on it. Those Gen Z values don't stick just to Gen Z. They have an effect on the whole conversation.

Fernando: [I was] mentioning Mexico before, and of course there is an international dimension to it. So we work with brands in different countries, and it's interesting because even more traditional societies, one is the Mexican, now they are seeing that if they don't adapt to the Gen Z values, they can become obsolete very quickly. So this is coming to even areas that, as Linda O. is saying, everything is accelerating, we can see that could be positive, but at the same time there is a lot of vertigo.

Linda S: If I may, I think that there is something kind of in the wings that people are not quite paying enough attention to, and that is that the pandemic and economic downturn has had a disproportionately negative effect on women around the world. As I described in this book I've just written, it is amazing to see that the economic constraints on women around the world are the same. It's hitting them the same. It's not only the childcare thing but also the industries that they're focused on, and I'm surprised that things haven't hit the fan yet because there's already a lot of data out to show this, and it is quite significant. I think that one of the political actions that women can take, particularly

on a global level, is to vote through their consumption. In a lot of countries, they just don't have much political power or economic power other than that. And so I do think that could be part of the perfect storm that Linda O. is referring to.

ON POLITICS OF GENDER AND CONSUMER RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRANDS

Linda Z: Linda, since you brought it up, how have the politics of gender really influenced consumers' relationships with brands?

Linda O: Well, I think everything is politicized now, and we're in an era where wearing a mask is now seen as a political statement, where riding a bike is a signifier of protest. Everything communicates. Fernando used the word vertigo. I love that. I might use that now. Men are very confused at this moment in time, and women are really tired—exhausted, you know—and it's just created this amazing level setting where anything can change. There are studies now that say that consumers are ripe for the picking for brands right now because they're in a position where they can make many, many choices and change their brand loyalty very quickly. So now is an interesting time to start really building brand loyalty and relationships because everything has been leveled. I think that's also why things are so easily politicized because there's just rubble all around us. As Linda Scott said, the very vocal minority can really create a lot of . . . I mean, that's my biggest concern about the pandemic is when the vaccine hits. It's going to be a whole other "s-show" because there's going to be a whole push back on vaccines, just as bad or even worse than the masks. Right now, everything becomes politicized and weaponized because it can.

Fernando: I don't know if it's gonna answer this, but I think that [for] every action, there's a reaction. This is why I'm working with men, honestly, because I recognize the need for femininity to arise in the world. When working in men's brands, I realized that our vision of masculinity was so wrong. We're putting pressure on men, and those men will not give a space to the feminine, nor women

to arise because they are indefensible. From that became a reaction, that is, myself starting a movement from brands to help men to relax, so we can have the rise of femininity and a more sustainable gender balance over time. Maybe what we are seeing now is this overpoliticization brings humanization, and we are seeing brands entering in that space recovering the values of what is being human. [In the US], after so many years of dehumanization of Black men and women, now we are seeing a tendency that nobody can hide, and we need to rehumanize them. That could spill over to the rest of society. So there is in the same battle we are talking about progressive and traditional, everything is in the extremes. But something I hope will emerge from that is something new, and this is what I think we are facing.

Linda O: Now I just wanted to add on to that, we did a study on masculinity last year. One of the things that we saw was that for centuries since the patriarchy existed, men were always defined as not being women. That was the sole definition. Don't be emotional. Don't be feminine. It was always a definition against women. So now when women are taking on, in many countries (the US especially), more traditionally masculine qualities like strength and power and economic earning and leadership, we saw in this pandemic that it was female leaders that did the best in terms of containing the crisis. That puts men at a crisis because if they've only been defined by not being women, what are they? I think it's great that you started this, Fernando, because that is a conversation that needs the next couple of centuries to figure out.

Fernando: Yeah, it would take time. I really celebrate, as you said, the race of a new leadership. We know that if we continue building leadership from very narrow masculine ambition, there is no autonomy. We just copy, not just men, but men and women.

Linda O: Women copy men. And that is very toxic too.

Fernando: Now we are seeing this more balanced nuance of leadership that incorporates both, to be honest, and you see in the leaders from New Zealand, Germany, even the guys from Singapore, South Korea, how they are really more balanced in

the leadership—mixing the soft and the hard. And I really celebrate that from my area of expertise, because it gives you an alternative, something that you can follow—a leader, for an example.

Linda S: I'd like to go back, if I may, to a little bit ago when Fernando was talking about the need for the rise of femininity in the world, of femininity obviously very broadly defined. I agree with that a lot. I think that is something we really need. There are values associated with that, maybe fairly or unfairly. I do think also that we need a redefinition of masculinity, and some of that is associated with this idea of a macro rise in femininity. But I think that—well, it's true that men have been defined in terms of not being women—there is a whole list of things that they have been defined as needing to be in order to be men, and one of those is, for example, violent, denying emotions, and all that kind of thing, which is what the APA has now called toxic masculinity. I think most of us are well to the point, including the men, of just being done with that stuff. But I do think you still see some very weird stuff out there. I pay a lot of attention to children these days because I have a granddaughter, and the marketing of violence is increasingly worrisome to me. I do want to mention the most retrograde commercial I have seen in at least 20 years. The first time I saw it I nearly fell off the sofa, and now every time I see it I'm like, "who does this?" It's a Sketchers commercial. Some of you may have seen it. It's got Howie Long in it, who's a former pro football player. At the end of it, he's in some kind of VIP lounge, and these three women come along to him, just right at his shoulders where you never serve food, and they offer him all these different luxury foods with this look on their face of I'm going to seduce you . . .

Linda O: Like a harem.

Linda S: Yes, exactly. They're like a harem, and it's just so evocative of this old ethic of women serving, and of adoring women. Honestly, it looks like 1963, and even older people will see this, and I think men will see as much as women that it's so offensive. Okay, I'll just give off my political orientation here and say I watch mostly MSNBC. They are running it, and I'm like, "how did this get on this station?" So there's some really off the wall stuff out there.

WORKING WITH BRANDS TO AUTHENTICALLY REPRESENT GENDER AND INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

Linda Z: In relation to that point, what are some of the challenges that you're navigating in terms of working with [clients and brands] to represent gender in authentic ways and also to incorporate this idea about intersectional identities?

Fernando: In my case, the way I realized is the best—we briefly talked about this before—is by showing representations of what is the reality. Instead of making any statement about different genders, you show, don't tell. For example, when we did the campaign for the relaunch of the Axe brand, it was in the beginning of 2016 at the Super Bowl. After many, many years when the brand was talking about men conquering women, and as many as they can—it was supertraditional and so one guy with one or many women—and then we went to a new definition of attraction based on connection and based on anything a man and a woman can be to be connected. But we haven't made any statement on it. We show that guy dancing on heels and doing boogying, and we say this is attractive and that is attractive and that's attractive, and this was very well endorsed by people and most by women, even by men. So people were ready for this. We have two key learnings. First, brands shouldn't do a statement on gender. Brands should work on redefining the emotional place they connect with their consumers. What came from Lynx/Axe was attraction, and for Dove Men + Care we're doing it with care; for Ruffles it was attraction and for whiskies we are doing it for legacy. You define what is the area of emotional connection, and you rework on that to make it more acceptable to these days, and you show a fair representation of genders and people from now, which is somehow related, I think, with what Linda Scott was saying before. It's more about show, don't tell the world as expressed in different genders. Why make a statement? When you make a statement, you are stereotyping.

Linda O: I would totally agree with that. We have a theory of what we call the next wave of diversity, which we've entitled "omniculturalism." That is meant to be an evolution of multiculturalism. Think of the multicultural model, which is used

predominantly for race, but it is sort of a proxy for any kind of difference. So the multicultural model is essentially a pie chart based on population. This is how a lot of our notions of difference—whether it's gender, race, religion, sexuality—all that is really based on demographics and in large part on the census and institutional ideas of identity that were inflicted really on the public and became sort of a structural underpinning of advertising. We're talking about consumer marketing here. What happens when you look at a multicultural model is it's always from the point of view of the most populous. So that tends to be White men. And it tends to be straight White men, straight cis White men, and very often straight White Christian cis White men. We all talk about the male gaze, but there's the White gaze, and there's the straight gaze, and there's all those different perspectives. What we're seeing now, thanks to digital culture and also because of the rise of millennials and Gen Z values, is that intersectionality of all those different identities is functionally much more interesting and practical when you're trying to market to somebody than using demographics. For example, I'm Asian, but I probably have more in common with a White dog lover of French Bulldogs than I may have with someone who's Asian because of the way that I was brought up, which is not very stereotypically Asian. To lump me in there is a misdirect because then you're going to get messaging to me that I don't really care about. I think it's the same anytime you're talking about difference. "Omniculturalism" basically starts with its premise that everybody is different, by nature, and that does away with this notion of demographic similarities, which creates tokenism and stereotypes and all kinds of things that we're trying to undo and decolonize from right now in culture. This idea of really looking at everybody as an individual and finding the commonalities for your brand or your product—if it's dog food and you can reach French Bulldog lovers with a very discreet message much more easily than you can reach a woman 18 to 49. I think that's the other thing about Omniculturalism. It looks at anybody within a prescribed sector as a whole spectrum, as part of a whole spectrum of diversity. Black people are not all the same; Asian people are not all the same; women are not all the same—big surprise.

We've talked about that from the beginning. To be able to take into account these different spectrums across intersections is really what we look to more as a psychographic model.

Linda S: I would like to point out a consumer product that I have come in contact with lately that I think really is an amazing innovation. Mattel has a series of dolls out called Creating a World, I think it is. They call them their first gender neutral doll. I would say, having actually seen them and played with them, that they're better described as the gender fluid doll. They come with all these different clothes that you can kind of mix and match and change their hair and everything. I think it very much communicates that this is not a binary proposition and that it's a creative proposition. I think this doll shows that you create yourself in whatever way. That goes to what Linda Ong is saying, I think. I read up on the development of this, and it was really interesting. Mattel very consciously researched this. They now have quite a history of being a little bit more leading edge. They were the first to get rid of pink and blue aisles at the store. I do think that there's some benefit to being leading edge on this stuff, but clearly it is risky. I think there's some risk in this gender fluid, but the dolls are beautiful, their clothes are wonderful. I really like it, and I think it's really cool.

Linda O: You asked, Linda Zayer about specific clients and instances. Just to put a finer point on it, we work with a lot of people in the content business. Because of all the changes in the last 6 months, we're now looking at scripts and shows that were written before the pandemic and racial justice movements. So we're looking at how do you update scripts and ideas and concepts, so that they reflect more of a real-time awareness. We were working on a script that was a predominantly Black cast and a Black lead and executive producer, and the show creators were White and biracial, so it sounds like it's going to be on the up and up. And we reviewed the scripts, and the treatments of the Black characters were all pretty fine and aligned. It's a period piece, but for the period and for reading it today made total sense. It's about gangsters in the 60s, and there was a Black gangster. It's based on a true story. But then I was like, well, what about the Italian stereotypes? No one was really paying

attention to the Italian stereotypes. What about the female stereotypes? Well, the women aren't very developed. Here is an opportunity to bring these out. Then also the thing that really got me, which I think is connected to this idea of what are we putting out there in the world, was there were two words in the script that I took the most offense with, and it was "hot Latina." It's a secondary character who is just meant to be a distraction for a cop. But I'm like, first of all, Latina kind of bakes in hot, so you don't have to be redundant and to stereotype. You don't have to double down on the stereotype. But why can't it be a Latina CEO or Latina construction worker? Why does it have to be a hot Latina? I think that the commercial entities, the unconscious and implicit bias that they put into things—sometimes they're looking over here, but what they have to be doing is looking universally. To Linda Scott's point, a lot of the manufacturers like Mattel, who we actually work with, have good intentions, but then the toy buyers at Target say, but I have a boys aisle and a girls aisle, so you have to help me stock those, and the kids have to know which aisle they're on. There is that tension that people who are on the distribution end may have a different goal than the people on the creator end.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF BRANDS IN REFLECTING GENDER

Linda Z: What would you say is really the responsibility of brands or agencies in terms of their obligation to society and in reflecting some of these conversations of gender?

Fernando: I think it's more than just a society. They have a responsibility with the business. So we all agree we are in accelerating times. I think from what I'm hearing that Mattel has more chances to succeed than Target. I think the FTSE 100 used to have the average company age to be in the FTSE 100 was 75 years old, and now it's 15. So even big companies are declining fast. I am sure we are going to see more attitudes like the Mattel one. I know Lego because we are working with Lego that goes in that direction as well. We are seeing that the more innovative companies are looking for that edge.

That would change also the distribution channels at a certain point. But if they don't change, well maybe they feel the heat, not just socially, but in the business.

Linda O: Yeah, I would agree. I remember I was on a plane once, and I had a conversation with a guy who worked at Gillette, and I said, "why do women's razors have to be pink?" And he could not answer me. And I said, "and how is the razor really that different from a man's razor?" I would rather buy a blue one than a pink one, because the pink just feels very forced. And I think that, unfortunately, with the rise of consumerism in the last half of the twentieth century, we were given all these options because they were opportunities for business. I agree 100% with what Fernando said. Now, if you want to make decisions that are good for business, it's not about trying to force people to buy things they don't really need. A lot of advertising in the last half century was really creating problems that we didn't know we had, right, like your shirts weren't white enough and things like that. I think that advertising needs to decolonize and take responsibility for a lot of the stereotypes that they perpetuated—content too. So it's not to say it's only on content, but advertising often leads in terms of social progressiveness, so there's an opportunity, certainly. We haven't really talked about trans people. But I would say that the trans population, which is not huge, but they're much more visible, obviously. To Linda Scott's point about the dolls, what we're seeing is people want a high degree of personalization, customization, because—like the pink razor that is for women—doesn't really work in a world of especially increasing fluidity and especially among young people who don't want to be forced into these buckets.

Linda Z: Linda Scott, do you want to chime in, in terms of the responsibility of brands or companies or agencies?

Linda S: I've worked with the Advertising Educational Foundation for a long time, and the kind of consensus was, "oh, well, we just reflect the culture, so it's not our fault if it looks bad." I do feel that it has changed, that there's a little bit more of a sense of responsibility. Not of all of them—I mean, whoever's making that Sketchers commercial. I think earlier that Fernando was saying, you

have to show. One of the things I noticed, because I'm old enough to remember when it wasn't like this, is a lot of the commercials just very suddenly show multicultural couples, LGBTQ people, couples, and men and women in alternative or non-traditional roles, especially dads. Every time I see something like that I think this is a really subtle way to move this culture forward because what you see on television does, according to research, eventually affect you. It's slow, but I also feel like the advertisers would not be putting this stuff out there if they didn't know there was a solid majority of people who want to see it or are not offended by it. I agree with what Linda Ong said.

Linda Z: Okay, thank you. I'm going to turn it over to Catherine for a couple more questions.

INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL LANDSCAPE ON MESSAGES OF GENDER

Catherine: Thank you, Linda. Fernando you use the term, "we're living in accelerating times," and perhaps in no small part as well to our digital culture. Linda Scott, you brought up early on the role of trolls and in response to brands. We've also talked a little bit about digital culture and identities—Linda Ong, you mentioned that. How has the digital landscape, including social media in particular, changed your relationship with consumers in terms of communicating these messages of gender?

Fernando: This is a difficult one. It seems that it shouldn't be difficult because the easy answer is, of course, you can go directly to the people you want, much more information, and so on. I think the digital age, of course, is one of the forces that was preexisting to the pandemic that the pandemic is accelerating and can go two different ways. One way could be that it can make our life easier, more connected at a distance. Now, we don't know where we are, but we already have Zoom in our everyday life. It's much more convenient, and that was totally enabled and accelerated through the pandemic. But I think there are forces on the digital world that we don't understand in full yet. One of those is the echo chambers, and this idea that even the connection of having all of these digital spaces and presence in social media can disassociate us and detach us from

ourselves by isolating us in communities, as we saw in politics. Now we saw today in politics that what happened here in Brexit or there with Trump, how by using social media you can land messages and get people trapped. I think that is seen in the making. I don't have an answer to that. Of course, for targeting it seems to be very beneficial. You can get, with a message, the person we like. Is that good for that person? I'm not sure yet. I think this is something that I don't know. Maybe the Lindas are more conclusive with that. In the beginning for me it was superpowerful. Now we see that maybe it has some dark spaces.

Linda O: I totally agree. I think the Internet has been the Pandora's box, especially as it concerns the just huge amount of fragmentation that exists in the world. I think the way I look at it from a consumer perspective, it has given the consumers a voice and has allowed them to take control of the narrative of consumerism in ways that now brands have to respond to them. Brands are now in the service business. And we see this now, especially with the fall of institutions since the recession, but of course in the last 6 months. The complete and utter lack of leadership and government to create any kind of unified narrative. It's really the brands that have to take a leadership position. The brands are staking a claim to values. The brands are staking a claim to action. Before any public agencies did, the brands were taking control. The fact now that brands are beholden not only in their product mix but their executive ranks and their diversity. Brands are being forced to be much more transparent about pay and equity and gender and race, and everything, inclusion. The hottest job to have right now is the Chief Diversity Officer, so that's because of consumer pressure. I think that's entirely credited to digital.

Linda S: This is not about digital, but it is about brands taking leadership on some of these things. As they mentioned in my introduction, I've been working for the last 10–15 years with major multinationals who do women's economic empowerment, which is mostly an outward facing thing. But they go into even very poor countries, and they do things like set up women-friendly, women-only supply chains and stuff like this. It's quite still somewhat experimental, but it has been interesting to me to watch the phenomenon, especially

talking about governments versus the private sector, because in places where women really have very few rights, the governments are not particularly inclined to do anything for them. And so when the corporations come in there, it creates a dynamic that pushes the government a bit because they may be, in some cases, more likely to listen to the private sector than to another government because that has all the politics and because they're looking for foreign direct investment. I've seen a couple of times, many times actually, where one of them went in and just made a huge difference among a certain community. I hope that some of that is both inside and outside value. It's been very impressive to see the kind of role they can take that kind of spurs governments on. I would say generally governments are really lazy.

THE FUTURE OF GENDER RELATIONS AND INFLUENCE ON MARKETING PRACTICE

Catherine: Perhaps we can be a bit forward thinking as well and talk a little bit about where you see gender relations are headed and how you think it's going to influence the way that you do your work, or the way that marketers are doing their work in relation to consumers.

Linda O: Like a million dollar question.

Fernando: I will answer with a different question, and then we'll see if we can go back to this one. The thing I am focusing on now a lot, actually, is that as we have a stereotypes in genders, there are blind ones. Ones that we don't see very clearly. One that I work on a lot is how we define success for men or aspiration for men in a way that is very materialistic, very detached emotionally and through that we grow men who are performing to be who we are expecting them to be. Following that, that as Linda S. said before, brands show us this is the way to be or what is acceptable for society. So if we don't change that and open—I am not against materialism at all—but if we don't open that with the new values that we need to incorporate into masculinity, I see we will continue struggling to have this sustainable gender balance. It will be a force against that and a strong pressure to perform. So

I think that could be a way to hack the system. If we can change what men are performing to, and women who are embedded with the toxic or wrong view of masculinity also performed to, and open that, incorporating values that are more about acceptance, about legacy, about a healthy expression of the masculine and the feminine, maybe we accelerate the whole system. The place we want to get to is the place where men or women are comfortable with their own masculinity and femininity expressed as in the way they want that we call gender but also are okay that other people could be different. If we don't change what we are seeing as aspirational, that doesn't allow that to happen. It is going to be a struggle.

Linda O: I just wanted to add, I think that one of the other things that we've seen culturally is happening as a result of the pandemic and the social crises is this desire to be more human. That is about, again, erasing these artificial segmentations of multiculturalism and demographics and looking at this more omnicultural view, where you take everyone on their own terms and they can define their spectrum of race, gender, sexuality, religion, politics, ability, generation, all these differences that people have and just accept that everyone's going to define their identity on their own terms. And we also notice in this pandemic, people are really recalibrating what aspiration means. Aspiration used to be set by advertisers, as I said, and now what we see is the aspiration is to be human. I think for us, one of the most interesting moments for men, for masculinity, in the past half year is that when Kobe Bryant died, it was a huge emotional reckoning for men. You saw men weeping openly; you saw Shaquille O'Neal celebrated for crying on TV. That is a very, very different portrayal of men. I think more, to Fernando's point, we can celebrate the things that model behavior of humanity versus this is what a man is, this is what a woman is at a time when—increasingly, again, kids are seeing themselves as gender fluid and nonbinary—those distinctions are really odd, but let's be aspirational about what it means to be human today.

Fernando: And this is how brands can help. Because brands can make things aspirational. They were part of the problem. Now they can be part of the solution.

Linda O: We tell our clients, the brand's role now is to help society. Sometimes people say, "oh, can we air this ad?" or "can we do this script?" And we're like, "don't be fearful." Look at it from how does this script or this brand help society move forward.

Linda Z: That's so interesting. I just wanted to add quickly to Fernando's point. As many of you know, I do a lot of research when it comes to men and masculinity. Fifteen years ago I was having conversations with young men, and they were talking about this idea of success. Why does it have to be money makes the man, why isn't it that I'm the best at whatever it is I want to be—that could be a nurse or a teacher or whatever. So I just wanted to add that there is room in the conversation for that, Fernando.

Fernando: This is not sorted out. By no means. We did some research also 2 years ago in the US and the UK. Still even millennials, the way they construct success for themselves is still very materialistic, is still very emotionally restrictive. This is by no means sorted out. I saluted that human values

are more here. We have the pandemic, too, that can accelerate that, and then we need brands to make it aspirational, to open that space to see where you fit the best.

Catherine: Linda Scott?

Linda S: I just wanted to echo this idea of being human. This idea of creating the self instead of conforming to some rigid expectation. The time really is here for the men to break out. You know, the APA is saying based on 40 years of research that this hurts men, this horrible box that they're in, and I think going toward humanity and letting people create their own space and self is the way to go. It makes me hopeful.

Catherine: That's a really nice note to wrap up on.

Linda Z: Once again, we are so grateful for our guests for joining us. For additional context on these important topics, please see the rest of the issue on genders, markets, and consumers in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* coming out in spring 2021.

Catherine: Thank you.