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A Research Agenda for (Gender) Troubled Times: Striving for a Better Tomorrow

CATHERINE COLEMAN, EILEEN FISCHER, AND LINDA TUNCAY ZAYER

s we gathered on Zoom to begin this editorial, a typical COVID-19 experience unfolded. Working from our living rooms, kitchens, or closets (Eileen) we checked in as to how each of us was coping, knowing that we were navigating multiple responsibilities and uncertainties. Having assured ourselves that we were all "fine, really, okay," we proceeded to get down to work, only to have Linda's kids start vying for her attention because of course—she's not just trying to write an editorial, she's also overseeing the online learning they are supposed to be doing. If we needed it, our shared experience was living proof of how the pandemic has impacted all of our-inevitably gendered—lives. All of us are trying to share our spaces with family members who are attempting to accomplish things in homes that were not designed for the purposes for which they are being tasked. And one of us is trying to do her work at the same time she's overseeing the care, feeding, and education of two kids.

Little did we imagine when we crafted our call for articles for this special issue the profound disjuncture between "the before times" and our current surreal circumstances. The once taken-for-granted institutions in society—work, school, family, government—have been significantly disrupted due to the pandemic. More than ever, due to both the pandemic and the heightened salience of systemic racism, the problematic facets of existing institutions are now exposed. And the resulting inequities are stark. While research published in this issue was not born out of the context of multiple tumultuous global events, including COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter social justice movement, we recognize the unique opportunity we have in this editorial to speak to the current moment.

If this moment teaches us anything, it's that gender issues are more pressing than ever, and that the intersections

between systemic racism and gender-based inequities are even more important to attend to now. As we look to the future, uncertain as it is, we seek to encourage transformative gender and consumer research scholarship that will continue to shine a spotlight on these issues, with the goal that collectively, as a scholarly community, we can work to advance knowledge that can fundamentally shift the conversations, the resources and the actions of a broader community.

In recent years, there has been a renewed energy focused on gender research (Zayer et al. 2020) with several special issues dedicated to understanding the intersection of gender and marketing (Gurrieri, Previte, and Prothero 2020; Dobscha and Östberg, forthcoming). We also draw attention to the fact that gender is not a "problem" to be fixed but rather an organizing institution (Martin 2004) that shapes human experience at its core. In our current moment, gender can literally be life or death, as research points to perception among men that face coverings are a sign of weakness and finds men are less likely to wear masks, proven by the scientific community to abate the spread of the virus (Petter 2020). According to the World Health Organization, in Europe, men made up 70% of all intensive care admissions related to COVID-19, and they constituted 57% of all deaths (Petter 2020).

In our view, the events of 2020 have implications for gender research that are far-reaching and that inevitably intersect with issues of race and class. To inspire research that begins to explore these implications, we highlight but three suggested avenues for future research. These suggestions are intended to be illustrative and inspirational, as they can by no means be exhaustive.

The pandemic has brought to the forefront the deep and broad inequalities across the globe, many of which are entrenched along gendered, socioeconomic, and racial lines.

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The first issue we flag for attention is the research required to better understand the root causes of, and the ways of addressing, the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on those who face barriers to accessing critical market resources. The striking example here is racialized women and men, who in many regions of the world already faced greater obstacles to participating fully in markets prior to the onset of the pandemic.

One context where this disparity is particularly evident for racialized men and women is the healthcare market. Research on American, Canadian, and European populations has documented that Black men and women have been much more likely than white individuals to contract COVID-19. Yet based on long-standing inequities in access to healthcare and systemic racism in the healthcare system, members of these communities, particularly Black consumers in the United States, are less likely to seek out and trust the services of healthcare providers and medical scientists (Gramlink and Funk 2020). Research will be required to see how this dysfunctional dialectic affects the extent to which racialized minorities access vaccines to combat coronavirus once they become available. Research will also be warranted in regard to whether vaccines are equally accessible to consumers in developing and emerging economies already facing gendered and racialized access barriers (Whang 2020).

Food and housing markets are equally problematic, and acutely so for women. According to research conducted by the National Women's Law Center in the wake of the pandemic, compared to their white counterparts, Black, Latina, and other racialized women have been more vulnerable to food insecurity and to be late in their rent or mortgage payments (Tucker and Ewing-Nelson 2020). For instance, one in six report that they had not had sufficient food in the past week, and almost 25% of Black women and 15% of Latina women stated they were late in their rent payments (Smith 2020; Tucker and Ewing-Nelson 2020). These are global issues, with the number of people experiencing food insecurity in West and Central Africa having doubled and in Latin America having tripled during the pandemic (CARE Policy Report 2020). Moreover, as a recent CARE Policy Report (2020) demonstrates, the pandemic is exposing gender inequalities and flaws in existing food systems, pointing to inequities in women's production, provision, and consumption of food. While globally, the majority of food producers are women and girls, their lack of access to information and resources means they produce 20%-30% less than men. Yet they are responsible for 85%-90% of household shopping and food preparation and they consume less and often last, ensuring first that other household members have access to what limited food there may be. Despite these significant consequences for women, many global solutions to hunger in light of COVID-19 do not reflect these gendered inequities, nor do they provide gender-based solutions. Future research must empower women's voices and be informed by understandings of the implications of gender-based inequities.

The second avenue for future research that we want to highlight concerns the intertwined nature of the consuming that people do with their work lives, and the labor they "produce" within their personal lives. Existing consumer research has tended to artificially separate consumption and production spheres and historically replicated the "men as producer and women as consumer" dichotomy. The events of 2020 make it starkly apparent that, if we are to understand gendered lives, these distinctions cannot hold. In the United States, women have incurred reduced work hours (see, e.g., Collins et al.'s [2020] study on working mothers), have lost jobs at higher rates than men, and have experienced a greater pay gap due to the pandemic, disparities that are especially high among women of color (Dickler 2020). These factors have only magnified the already problematic work structures where women are more likely to take part in lower paid work and more likely to engage in unpaid work as caregivers (Clinton 2020). And we know from past epidemics that the impacts will be felt long-term. Looking historically at outbreaks such as SARS and Ebola, Lewis (2020) points out how men's wages returned to pre-outbreak levels at a faster rate than women's.

Against this backdrop, invisible labor has been rendered visible—labor that women are increasingly being called upon to shoulder—owing to the systemic disruptions that are still unfolding. Schooling (and thereby childcare) for many have shifted from institutions to the home and subsequently add to this unpaid labor for many women. Miller (2020) highlights how the inequities in domestic work, including childcare, have severe consequences for women outside of the home in the form of decreased pay and stunted careers. Indeed, hitting close to home are accounts of women in academia whose research productivity has plummeted since the onset of the pandemic (Zimmer 2020). Without an institutional support structure, women's choices have increasingly been limited. Families have been forced to make tough decisions on whose work is valued and who should engage in the unpaid labor so necessary to family life. In the United States, 1.1 million people (aged 20+) left the workforce between August and September 2020, with 800,000 of them being women. Of that staggering number, nearly half (382,000) were Latina and Black women (Gupta 2020). These decisions profoundly alter economic and social dynamics within households and thereby impact what is consumed and who has the power to make such consumption decisions. And while this has been excruciating to witness, many of these choices are open to those that are privileged, such as dual income and/or middle- and upper-class households, who have such a choice in the first place. While in the United States, it is being referred to as America's first female recession (Carrazana 2020), the effects are wide scale and even more pronounced globally, potentially undoing decades of gains for women according to the International Monetary Fund (Tappe 2020). While gender scholars have called for more attention to developing and emerging economies to meet the global challenges of gender equality (Zayer et al. 2020), the global pandemic brings urgency to these calls. While the medical risks of COVID-19 have been disproportionately high for men around the world, the economic impacts of the pandemic have been much harder on women, particularly in developing countries where women are overrepresented in informal labor markets without social support such as health insurance (Turquet 2020). Indeed, UN Women has echoed reports of gender equality faltering across the globe, including dire consequences such as forcing millions more girls and women into poverty, projected to be 435 million poor women by 2021 (UN Women 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has created the perfect storm for increased domestic violence and financial abuse (Commonwealth Bank 2020), creating a health and financial crisis in tangent. With a diminished capacity for work, and thereby reduced freedoms that come with earning an income, how will women's choices be restricted more broadly, including the freedom to consume such things as reproductive healthcare, housing, investments, and so forth? Moreover, as long as caregiving and domestic work is not legitimized as labor and rendered invisible, how will women (and men) fare?

A third important avenue for future research relates to the gendered topics of giving care and being cared for. The social, economic, and political conditions that shape both caregiving and being cared for (or not) come into sharp focus when we consider some of the issues that have become acute for LGTBQ people during the pandemic. Consider the fact that many of the sectors in which workers must give care to others (food service, hospitals, K–12 education, colleges, and retail) are among those most affected by the pandemic; juxtapose this with the fact that two in five LGBTQ people work in these sectors, compared to just one in five non-

LGBTQ people (Whittington, Hadfield, and Calderón 2020). What are the implications for LGBTQ consumers arising from their particular vulnerability either to job insecurity, or heightened risk of exposure to the virus, or both, as a result of the sectors in which they work? And what happens if an LGBTQ consumer needs to take a leave from their employment to care for themselves or someone else? Research indicates that LGBTQ workers facing a major life event are often confronted with leave policies that are at best underinclusive. Even for LGBTQ workers whose employers have a formal paid leave policy, one in five respondents to a 2018 survey reported that fears of discrimination would likely prevent them from requesting a leave if it would require disclosing their LGBTQ identity (Maxwell et al. 2018). And in jurisdictions lacking laws that prevent people from being fired simply because of who they are, LGBTQ workers also remain at risk of being fired if they are forced to come out when requesting leave. This particular form of precarity seems likely to have systematic implications for the consumption strategies LGBTQ consumers are deploying, but we know little about this topic as yet.

When it comes to being cared for, LGTBQ consumers also face particular hurdles. A striking one relates to receiving necessary forms of healthcare, including but not limited to mental healthcare. The pandemic has had a profound impact on many people's mental health, and the World Health Organization warns that this impact is likely to be far-reaching and long-lasting (Rourke 2020). LGBTQ people may be particularly affected, as they are more likely to experience mental health challenges as a result of ongoing discrimination and marginalization; moreover, the problem is further exacerbated as phone and online support is simply not an option for those who are unable to speak freely in front of others about their identity, if they are confined in households that are unaccepting (LGBT Foundation 2020).

In the United States, even if they are able to seek the medical care they need, LGBTQ people are more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to lack health coverage or the monetary resources to visit a doctor, even when medically necessary. Recent evidence from the United States suggests that 17% of LGBTQ adults lack any kind of health insurance coverage, compared to 12% of non-LGBTQ adults and that 23% of LGBTQ adults of color, 22% of transgender adults, and 32% of transgender adults of color have no form of health coverage (Whittington et al. 2020). This can lead to inability to access needed medical care or to severe economic hardship if medical care is ultimately accessed. Research that attends

to gendered differences in the ability to consume needed healthcare is clearly required.

And research that examines the kind of caring that LGTBQ consumers may be experiencing within their own homes is also warranted. Many are isolating at home with people who are homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic, and a number report having to go back into the closet or to otherwise restrain themselves from enacting their gender identity on a day-to-day basis (LGBT Foundation 2020). We need to know more about how consumers are coping when they cannot count on being cared for or valued by people they are compelled to live with.

Having highlighted avenues for future research that have come into view owing to the tumultuous events of 2020, we now turn to celebrating and summarizing the studies we are pleased to publish as part of this special issue. We feel the articles assembled here are illustrative of the vibrant range of ongoing research related to genders, markets, and consumers. Each article is summarized in the following paragraphs.

Research on genders, markets, and consumers continues to be a vital area of research for consumer and marketing scholarship, and the paths are myriad. In this issue, we offer a range of research that addresses multiple important substantive areas, including LGBT advertising, gender and social media, gendered branding, and gender stereotypes, across both Western and non-Western contexts. We have also offered two panel discussions, which are available for viewing through video. One, moderated by Dr. Jenna Drenten, centers on the insights of three senior academic scholars in the field-Professors Pauline Maclaran, Lisa Peñaloza, and Craig Thompson—on gender research. The other panel is industry focused, interviewing three leading practitioners-Mr. Fernando Desouches, Ms. Linda Ong, and Dr. Linda Scotton hot topics and trends in gendered marketing, implications for business and society, and the future direction of genders, markets, and consumers.

Shepherd, Chartrand, and Fitzsimons (2021) examine LGBTQ representation in advertising in relation to a core element of brand personality—sincerity. Against the backdrop of calls for more inclusive advertising, the authors reveal consumer responses fall along political lines, as well as how LGBTQ consumers prefer representation by sincere brands and historically, sincere brands represent this community more favorably.

Veresiu and Parmentier (2021) examine what they term as the Advanced Style movement by exploring how women influencers, aged 50+ aid in transforming ageist and sexist

fashion and beauty markets through embodied resistance on Instagram. Similarly drawing from Instagram, Perera et al. (2021) draw from critical race and gender theories research on counterspaces, extending the challenging processes proposed by Case and Hunter (2012) toward understanding how women of diasporic communities, specifically western women of South Asian descent, create and utilize communal counterspaces on social media for well-being.

While much discussion is focused on changing gender roles, Spielmann, Dobscha, and Lowrey (2021) contribute research on brand gendering, specifically considering how gender bias explained through the "precarious manhood" principle may influence how consumers value gendered brands. In finding that men hold gendered bias against feminine brands, the authors propose a strategy of agentic branding, which they find to reverse biases.

Veloso et al. (2021) use institutional theory to understand the evolution of gender stereotypes across four historical time periods in an emerging market. In addition to pointing to the changing role of women in society, including greater participation in the labor force and in organized movements against discrimination, their research supports the many calls around the world for more equitable participation of women in senior positions in regulatory agencies, companies, and advertising industries to drive more positive representations in advertising.

And Warren and Campbell (2021) explore the implications of one particular gender stereotype that connects masculinity to not needing much sleep. Despite the fact that getting sufficient sleep is essential to physical and mental health, this article finds that there is a pervasive perception that men who get little sleep are more masculine, and that men who are thought to sleep more are subject to discrediting social judgements. This article provides valuable insights on the paradoxical fact that both adhering to and deviating from gender stereotypes can pose a risk to health and well-being.

We conclude by thanking the *JACR* policy board for the opportunity to coedit this special issue, as well as the authors who submitted articles and the reviewers who generously provided feedback. We are grateful for the opportunity and particularly value the platform this editorial has provided us to advocate for gender-related consumer and marketing research that addresses the triple themes of 2020: a global pandemic, the recession that this pandemic has sparked, and the rising tide of activism against systemic racism that we must not allow to recede. While there is much work left, we look forward to a continued momentum

on research on genders, markets, and consumers in hopes of building a better tomorrow.

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Thank You to Our Reviewers

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