



Female Gender Construction Under the Effect of Consumerist Culture

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Abstract. Consumerist culture is now playing an increasingly significant role in the female gender construction. It is born out of the existing gender system in society, and in turn reinforces and maintains the existing system. Women lose their subjectivity in it, and the solidification of gender construction causes various gender problems. This paper analyses how consumerist culture constructs female gender and the specific constructions in the field of consumption. Trying to promote the free, healthy and balanced development of women, and to promote gender equality and gender diversity.

Keywords: Gender Construction, Female, Consumer Culture.

1 Introduction

As a cultural trend and a lifestyle that emerged in the West in the 20th century, the rise of consumerist culture is a social phenomenon driven by the promotion of goods. This kind of thought has prompted the modern society's general public to be wrapped up in the value system and way of life in which consuming is uppermost. Consumerism has not only had a profound impact on the values and lifestyles of the West. It is also becoming a global trend as a cultural ideology that is having an impact on a worldwide scale as the goods, advertisements, agents and institutions of international corporations enter the markets of various countries. The consumerist culture changes and affects different societies and different groups. Among them, women are an important group. In terms of gender construction, consumerist culture has become one of the core forces of construction, exerting an increasing influence on female groups. By analysing the impact of consumerist culture on the gender construction of female, it is of great significance to understand the status and challenges of women in contemporary society, and to promote the development of women's subjectivity and gender equality.

2 Consumerist Culture and Female Consumption

In consumerist culture, symbolic value plays an important role in influencing people's consumption decisions, social interactions and personal identity construction. In Baudrillard's view, the use-value and exchange-value of commodities in traditional economics can only constitute the premise of consumption, but are not sufficient to constitute the whole concept of "consumption". In the consumer society, objects have another highly signifying value, a symbolic value. "to become an object of consumption, an object must first become a sign." [1]

In modern consumer society, the excess and homogeneity of products and services force enterprises to give more symbolic meaning to their products [2]. Correspondingly, after the basic needs are satisfied, people's consumption behaviour will evolve into symbolic consumption. In such a society, people have changed from being enslaved by objects to being dominated and disturbed by signs. Social consumption has entered a new period in which demand and consumption are unprecedentedly emphasised and stressed. Stimulating consumption, increasing consumption and guiding consumption have become the core tasks of capitalism. Thus, people's consumption is no longer limited to fulfilling their practical needs, but more often buying the symbolic value it represents. What is consumed is rather the meaning of the item in the system than the item itself.

In consumerist culture, women are often seen as an important group of consumers. Women's consumption is an area in which the forces of capital are competing to capture. In the current consumerist culture, women's consumer behaviour is also more invested in its symbolic value. Consumption has become a means of distinguishing groups, constructing differences and obtaining self-identification. Yet are women today really taking ownership of their consumption behaviour? The role and status of women in consumer behaviour has changed significantly between the past and the present. In the past, women were usually regarded as the shopping agents of the family. They were responsible for purchasing the family's daily necessities, food, clothing, etc. Their consumption behaviour was mainly limited to the needs of the family and its members. If women's proxy consumption in the family is a clear reflection of women's low status, then women's self-consumption under the patriarchal social system nowadays will inevitably be transformed into a kind of proxy consumption. However, the very nature of current women's self-consumption is seldom recognised.

When women today are self-consuming, the act of purchasing itself appears to be relatively autonomous, but it is not self-determined. Behind women's self-consumption, there essentially lies the controlling power of men. The dominant cultural values of society are a reflection of the distribution of power in the social structure. For a long time, men have been the main group in control of the economic pulse of society, and women's consumption tends to be shifted based on men's perspectives, and to change according to men's aesthetic standard. In this context, it has also been argued that women's self-consumption nowadays is actually a kind of "proxy consumption" in disguise [3]. Women's consumption arises in the framework of gender construction, and at the same time it is constructing women's identities and roles. Whether these women, who seem to pay by themselves and pay for themselves, have

full subjectivity in consumption is a topic that deserves in-depth exploration and debate.

3 Social Constructionism's Theory of Gender and Female Gender Construction

Gender is not an innate trait, but is constructed in society. Consumerism, as a socio-cultural force, is involved in the process of constructing female gender. Social constructionism's theory of gender is the basis of the consumerist force's involvement in the construction of gender. Social constructionism's theory of gender emerged during the second wave of the feminist movement. After the first wave of the feminist movement, feminists found that the status of women had not substantially improved. Women were still being oppressed. So feminism began to rethink the underlying causes of women's oppression and gender inequality. Their focus shifted to the Western intellectual tradition, and they began to re-examine and reconsider it. Social constructionism's theory of gender is precisely one of the theoretical results of this feminist exploration.

The idea that gender is socially constructed has been proposed. This theory emphasises that gender is a product of social constructions rather than a purely biological trait. It is argued that gender is constructed and shaped by social, cultural and historical factors, and that gender cognition and gender roles are given in the process of socialisation. Joan W. Scott points out that gender is the primary way in which power relations are represented. In other words, gender is the source and primary means by which power is performed[4]. The derivative relationship between gender and power is rooted in the traditional biological determinism of gender. Social constructionism's theory of gender is based on the critique and rejection of the biological determinism of gender in traditional patriarchal societies.

Biological determinism has its roots in the essentialist perspective of Western philosophy, which holds that everything has an intrinsic, fixed and general nature. Thus, in the view of essentialists, both sexes have unchangeable essential attributes determined by biological factors. Gender is an intrinsic trait that describes an individual's personality, cognitive processes, moral judgement style, etc. Like other individual traits, it is rooted within the individual. This view sees the gender as a binary, which constructs two opposing sets of characters: rational and emotional, courageous and passive, strong and weak, public and private, etc. These strategic oppositions place men in a position of superiority and women in the position of the "other".

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir discusses "Eternal Feminine" and sharply criticises the "sexual monism" in psychoanalysis represented by Sigmund Freud. According to Beauvoir, biology cannot answer an important question: why are women seen as "the other"? Why are women defined as a group that is not the default norm? She refutes the traditional gender theory's misconception of biological determinism and argues that gender differences are not determined by biological differences. With a great deal of text and abundant evidence, Beauvoir reveals the falsity of biological determinism in the gender conception. She denies the assertion of biological determinism and ba-

ses the starting point of social constructionism's theory of gender on the rejection of the former[5].

If one blocks out the gender differences between the sexes and looks at the sexes only from a biological point of view, it can be seen that the two genders are not as distinct as social norms would lead us to believe. Butler argues that it is precisely the obsession with determining identity that leads to oppression. The point is to look at the logical structures and processes by which the gender binary is constructed, not what biological appearance creates the socialised form of gender - it is how the discourses of biological sex and gender are dispatched for power that produces the gender binary. Grounded in this key point, Butler proposes the theory of gender performativity. The notion that gender is not an innate attribute but is realised through social practices and performances. She argues that gender is performed and constructed through everyday behaviours, actions, language, etc. And these performances are a system of symbols that shape gender identity with constant repetition. Individuals shape their gender expression and identity in accordance with social norms and expectations in order to conform to the society's expectations of gender.

From the moment a newborn leaves the mother's womb and the doctor declares its sex, the system of gender identity construction begins to function. How each gendered individual uses the culturally defined system of gender meanings determines the gendered appearance of that individual. This involves a range of choices, from the way you dress on the outside to the way you identify yourself on the inside, and the choices you make determine the degree to which you conform to a particular gender. "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its result"[6]. Gender becomes a practice of intention, it is a repeatedly performedativity that responds to the gender directives sent out by the culture. Women's consumer behaviour is also a form of gender performativity. In a consumerist society, women demonstrate their gender identity and social roles by purchasing specific products, choosing specific brands, displaying specific consumption behaviours and pursuing specific symbols. Women's consumer behaviour is also a form of gender performativity. In a consumerist society, women demonstrate their gender identity and social roles by purchasing specific products, choosing specific brands, displaying specific consumption behaviours and pursuing specific symbols. The act of consumption itself reflects the social construction of women's gender, while the internalisation of gender identity within women's consumption reinforces this gender construction.

4 Practical Female Gender Construction in the Consumption Field

In today's consumption field, female gender constructs are more widely and deeply affected. The production of consumer goods is usually seen as being produced according to the needs of the masses, but under the wave of consumerist culture, this path no longer seems to be so effective. In addition to producing according to pre-existing

needs, capital forces will stimulate the desire to buy and shape consumer needs and preferences through various means.

Therefore, the field of consumption is no longer simply a place that produces consumer goods that people want, but has become an important place for shaping and controlling individuals. For women, they face a double impact. In addition to being constructed by the power of capital-driven consumerism, they are also confronted with the symbolic demands placed on women by patriarchal society itself. Thus, the construction of women in the consumer field is often broad, deep and powerful. On the basis of understanding the characteristics of the construction of women's gender in the consumer arena, it is necessary to focus on the specific manifestations of the construction.

In terms of products and services, many of them are positioned and designed according to established women's gender characteristics and needs. It is a regular market practice to introduce goods and services in accordance with market needs. But the drawback of the current consumer market in terms of product and service design lies in the division and segregation of women's needs according to the social gender construction system. The public are divided according to gender. On this basis, through the manufacture and binding of symbols, products are produced that fit into one identity but not another, and so there is a demand that belongs to a certain gender. From beauty and skincare products to clothing and accessories, businesses will launch products and services that are tailored to women's needs and aesthetic trends, shaping women's specific consumer needs.

Usually, symbols aimed at women are based on solidified societal gender constructions, such as beauty and refinement. Consumerist culture binds the commodity to the symbol, which constructs women's aesthetic and gender identity perceptions. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in contemporary society. Through brand marketing, commodity packaging and cultural symbols, the consumerist culture associates commodities with specific symbols, images or values, so as to influence consumers' purchasing decisions, identity and aesthetic standards. For women, some specific symbols are often tied to their consumer goods, such as the symbols of gentleness, romance, and elegance, which are often embodied in a variety of products such as women's apparel, accessories, and home furnishings.

In addition, in order to get consumers to accept the ideas conveyed by the symbols and willingly pay for them, capital forces will also create and promote certain ideas. This kind of "brainwashing" is not forceful, but skilful, and constantly changing packaging. For different periods of time, different regions and different groups of people, capitalists can come up with a set of highly persuasive and self-justifying rhetoric. For example, with the rise of women's status and the influence of feminist ideology, "women who pay for themselves are independent and self-loving" has become a powerful slogan. So consumption becomes a way of acquiring a certain quality. There is an implicit logic behind this, the higher the price you pay for the good, the more symbolic value you are buying. That is to say, if buying one type of goods or services implies refinement and love yourself, then buying the more expensive of them implies more refinement and more love for yourself, and choosing the less expensive implies less refinement and less love for yourself. And such a construct is not

just for a particular female consumer, but for the complete group of women. When the system of symbols and gender construction affect women at the same time, the resistance to symbols is no longer a resistance to a single commodity, but a resistance to a quality of femininity that is promoted in a gender structure, which means a resistance to the existing gender structure.

5 Conclusion

Exploring gender constructions in specific fields, such as the trajectory of female gender constructions in consumerist culture, promotes contemporary feminist explorations of subjectivity and ways of properly confronting the female subject. Critically examining existing gender constructions is inherently a form of resistance. In addition to gaining a more complete subjectivity and more autonomy, resisting the inherently exploitative and alienating content of consumerist culture is conducive to the free, healthy and balanced development of the individual woman.

Resisting the gender constructs in the cultural field of consumerism means taking on the consequences of resisting the whole set of gender norms and gender identities that are associated with it. But just as it is necessary to resist inherent gender constructs, it is also necessary to resist gender constructs in consumerist culture. Individuals can challenge gender stereotypes and entrenchment by rejecting behaviours and practices that conform to traditional gender norms, thereby promoting gender equality and gender diversity.

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