



## School of Social Sciences and Philosophy Assignment Submission Form

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**Date:**

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## Introduction to the Questions

The gender inequality phenomenon is both external and latent. For education opportunities, up to 11 million girls around the world might be pushed out of school permanently because of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>; For family violence, 1 in 3 women experience gender-based violence in their lifetime<sup>2</sup> and 1 in 4 women experience violence during pregnancy<sup>3</sup>; For personal health, 54% of people over 15 living with HIV were women<sup>4</sup>, etc. And there are still many inequalities which is potential, like Wikipedia maybe use different descriptions between genders (Wagner, Garcia, etc., 2015); STEM academic fields do not treat women as kindly as they do men (Casad, Franks, etc., 2021); and Criado also mentioned that gender inequality may appear in some potential fields, like snow-clearing, medicine, piano size, air condition temperature... (Criado, 2019). We are living in a world where “Male is the Subject; he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beauvoir, 1949/2009).

But recently, patriarchal capitalism covered postmodern society with consumerism making things become complex. We are pleased to see that along with the rise of the female liberal and independent female group, women are already an important part of the consumer. EY’s data showed that in 2018, the global incomes of women are predicted to reach a staggering \$18<sup>5</sup>, and they drive 70-80% of all consumers purchasing decisions<sup>6</sup>. However, the questionable fact is, can spending power be used to fully measure gender equality? In other words, does the act of consumption bring free empowerment or does it exacerbate gender inequality by exploiting women? After listing all these facts, our research question is clear: Under the social fact of gender inequality, does consumerism, as a postmodern manifestation of patriarchal capitalism, also participate in the act of female exploitation?

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<sup>1</sup> Millions more cases of violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancy expected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.unfpa.org/news/millions-more-cases-violence-child-marriage-female-genital-mutilation-unintended-pregnancies>. Last accessed: 26 October 2023

<sup>2</sup> Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>. Last accessed: 26 October 2023

<sup>3</sup> Official UN Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/announcement/2022/11/official-un-commemoration-of-the-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women> Last accessed: 26 October 2023

<sup>4</sup> Gender Data Portal. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/> Last accessed: 28 October 2023

<sup>5</sup> Top 10 Things Everyone Should Know About Women Consumers. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bridgetbrennan/2015/01/21/top-10-things-everyone-should-know-about-women-consumers/> Last accessed: 26 October 2023

<sup>6</sup> 20 Facts and Figures to Know When Marketing To Women. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescontentmarketing/2019/05/13/20-facts-and-figures-to-know-when-marketing-to-women/> Last accessed: 28 October 2023

## Literature Review

Let's go back to the postmodern Marxists for a moment and examine how the consumer society as an ideology affects humanity and feminism. Scholars of this school tend to break the veil of consumer society's warm and fuzzy feelings, which we can track back to Baudrillard's statement. He, on the one hand, symbolizes the object of consumption, and on the other hand, discusses the embodiment of consumption in the body:

*[...] Particularly the female body and, most particularly, the body of that absolute model, the fashion mannequin--constitutes itself as an object that is the equivalent to the other sexless and functional objects purveyed in advertising. (Baudrillard, 1970: 113)*

After him, many scholars use facts or data to prove his view. For example, Johnston and Taylor mentioned market advertisement uses feminism as their selling point but actually sells something harmful to female's body (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). The typical arguments in this field are that the representation of women in consumerism is "gazed", and that the beauty of their representations is invested in social and even political reproduction. So, there are scholars ask us to use feminist theories and feminist activism to criticize consumerism (Catterall, etc. 2005) and after that, Dimulescu held the view that beauty norm is constructed as a socio-political instrument in order to preserve the old, patriarchal regulation of women's bodies (Dimulescu, 2015), which made a further step in consumerism, political, and body.

On the other side, postmodern Marxist feminism focuses more on the patriarchal component of capitalism, and they analysis society feminism within this logic. Chizuko made several excellent descriptions in her books *misogyny* and *Patriarchy and capitalism*:

*Patriarchal societies [...] rules that determine where women and children belong [...] and creates double standards in patriarchy to discriminate against women. (Chizuko, 2019: 109-110)*

*The reason why Marxist feminists have chosen Marxism is that they believe that patriarchy is more than psychological domination and oppression and [...] is an explicitly material - social and economic - domination. (Chizuko, 2009: 22)*

In this school of thought, private ownership is the root cause of gender inequality, and its different norms customized for different genders, as well as modes of thinking under ownership, have influenced the spread of affirmative thinking. And even resistance to capitalism tends to fall into male-dominated cultural patterns.

Of course, there are also various literatures that assess the significance of consumerism for identity construction in a positive angle - and identity construction is an important part of women's liberation. These theories value the identity-constructing function of consumption, and we can find that consumer behavior does point to a certain degree to the rediscovery of the self. Even if this constructive function is sometimes not recognized by psychologists or sociologists, it has resulted in the creation of more conscious individuals. Some scholars regard identifying consumerism as a type of collective action problem and explain the persistence of social and collective dimensions of consumption practices and identities (Health, 2001; Trentmann, 2004). In addition, Micheletti points out that women's consumption processes - especially in the realm of political consumption on topics such as social justice, poverty, etc. - play a more critical role (Micheletti, 2017).

On top of that, some feminists would argue that most of the research previously conducted has portrayed developed, white, middle-class women while ignoring more marginalized areas, women of color, and underclass women. Therefore, there has been some feminist research based on the context of cultural diversity, they focus on developing countries, like China (Yang, 2023), Arab (Golley, 2004), Eastern Europe (Ghodsee, 2004) and India (Kumar, 1989), etc.

An important way to measure feminist consciousness among individual without a long questionnaire is education attainment, according to previous research, there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and feminist consciousness. As women are exposed to feminism in their education, or learn about feminist role models, they will have a clearer perception of their surroundings and thus become more accepting of feminist thinking. (Hart, 2006; Swirsky & Angelone, 2016)

After combing through the literature, this paper will hypothesize the questions previously posed. Since consumerism possesses liberal attributes on the one hand and exploitative attributes on the other, the first hypothesis is based on this:

- Hypothesis 1: Women with higher levels of education will consume more symbols of freedom; women with lower levels of education will consume more symbols of exploitation.

and that the equilibrium relationship between income and expenditures is likewise a measure of the degree of exploitation, the second hypothesis is:

- Hypothesis 2: More educated women do better than less educated women in terms of balancing income and expenditure.

Finally, we must make comparisons between the sexes:

- Hypothesis 3: Women are more likely than men to consume because of the anxiety of embodiment trafficked by consumerism is harsher.

Traditional analyses of consumerism and feminism have been dominated by theoretical studies, and the subsequent statistical testing of hypotheses through this paper can provide data to support this area.

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