

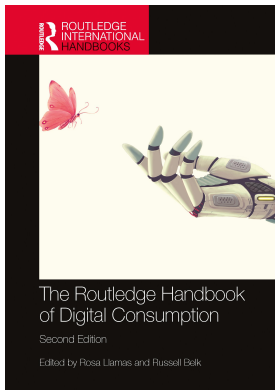
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 30 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Digital Consumption

Rosa Llamas, Russell Belk

Identity expressions of agender individuals in a digital world

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003317524-40>

Morgan Ketola, Schyler Selander, Ayalla Ruvio

Published online on: 26 Sep 2022

How to cite :- Morgan Ketola, Schyler Selander, Ayalla Ruvio. 26 Sep 2022, *Identity expressions of agender individuals in a digital world from: The Routledge Handbook of Digital Consumption* Routledge
Accessed on: 30 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781003317524-40>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

IDENTITY EXPRESSIONS OF AGENDER INDIVIDUALS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Morgan Ketola, Schyler Selander and Ayalla Ruvio

In 2020, the fashion industry seemed to go through a major transformation, as a genderfluid perception of fashion became a mainstream theme for many designers. Examples range from Marc Jacobs' provocative statement that "Gendered clothing is over" to fashion shows by Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Valentino that featured models identifying as non-binary, trans-genders, and cis men and women. These leading designers, as well as others, expressed their view about the irrelevancy of gendered clothing for fashion and self-expression. Statements such as these brought to public attention the notion of agenderism, which refers to the exclusion of gender as part of one's self-identity. It seems that the runway not only showcases the most recent fashion but also showcases the most recent social ideas.

In recent years, the LGBTQIA+ community has received increased public and academic attention. This growing civil discourse has led to greater visibility of the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as to advancements in their acceptance in society. The perception held by most heterosexual or cisgenders [those whose gender identity corresponds with their biological sex, (American Psychological Association, 2015)] is that the LGBTQIA+ community is a unified minority group with similar issues and a similar fight for recognition. Yet, this community is far from homogeneous. Its diversity is reflected in the way its sub-groups express their identity and uniqueness. Such diversity is also reflected in the level of inclusion of these sub-groups in society, and the level of awareness and understanding (or lack thereof) of the general public about the different sexual and gender minorities within this community.

This chapter aims to shed initial light on one of the least known and least understood minorities in this community – agender people. It explores the performative expressions of their gender identity and self-identity in the digital world. While the self may subsume several different identities (Belk, 2013), for the sake of simplicity, we will use the terms self and identity interchangeably.

Agender identity

The word "agender" was first coined on the internet in relation to God – "God is amorphous, agender, [...] so image can't be a physical or gender or sexual thing." (<https://www.them.us/story/inqueery-agender>). It was attributed to people only five years later and was associated with the LGBTQIA+ community only in 2013 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/>

fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html). That is not to say that people had never before experienced agenderism. However, it was confused or misconstrued as other forms of gender identities. The recent introduction of the term “agender” has resulted its adoption by mostly younger individuals. Being the youngest members of the LGBTQIA+ community, agender individuals are the most elusive and misunderstood minority group within the community. It seems that they “fly under the radar” of public discourse as well as academic research. They also diverge from the rest of the LGBTQIA+ community when it comes to their perceptions of gender and self-identity. While there are multiple definitions for each sexual and gender minority in the LGBTQIA+ community, in lay terms they can be identified as follows. Gay and lesbian individuals are those whose sexual orientation is towards people of the same gender. Transgenders are individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their biological sex, and queer is best known as an overarching umbrella term that encompasses any person with a sexual or gender identity that is different than heterosexual and cisgender (American Psychological Association, 2015). The ambiguity and generality of the term is appealing to many young individuals who are looking for a sense of community without a specific label. Although these minorities vary in their sexual and gender definitions of identity, they all share the acceptance of the collective convention of the binary perception of gender and formulate their self and gender identities within it. They also define their self and gender identities in positive terms as to who they are within this binary convention of gender. This is where agender people depart from other LGBTQIA+ community members.

Agender individuals, in contrast to the rest of the LGBTQIA+ community, do not see the binary perception of gender as relevant to the definition of their self-identity. Instead, they embrace the idea of agenderism, which reflects a feeling of being genderless, without a defined binary gender identity or being gender neutral. There are different variants of agenderism and non-binary perceptions of gender, such as gender-distanced (anogender, apogender), gender-absence (gendernull, genderblank, gendervoid), gender neutral, and even genderfluid (or agenderflux). People can experience different aspects of agenderism throughout their lives as it can evolve over time. Agenderism challenges people’s definition of their self-identity as well as the performance and expressions of their identity. Agender individuals are the only minority within the LGBTQIA+ community who define who they are in terms of who they are not. This is a somewhat paradoxical definition because it can exist only in the context of the traditional binary perception of gender, as it centers around the rejection of such a view.

The diverse definitions above indicate that there are a wide range of ways of being an agender individual. This diversity, coupled with the “who am I not” based definition of their self-identity, makes it extremely challenging for agender individuals to express their identity. It also makes it very hard for the general public to understand this community and accept it. As such, in this chapter we explore the expression of agender identity in the digital world.

Digital expressions of agender identity

Most of the literature on online expressions of identity has the underlying assumption that consumers have a “real” offline identity and “virtual” online identity (e.g., Belk, 2014; Orsatti & Riemer, 2015; Schau, Gilly, & Wolfenbarger, 2003; Sheth & Solomon, 2014; Zhao, 2005), and these two identities do not always correspond with each other. This view was influenced by Goffman’s (1959) metaphor of a theater, where the “performance of the self” occurs on the “backstage” and the “front stage,” similar to the way identity is performed in life (Zhao, 2005). The literature on identity expressions on social media interpreted Goffman’s

(1959) metaphor in a way that the “backstage” self is one’s private, true, authentic self. The “front stage” self is the public, performative self that individuals present to others on social media (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015). The literature often viewed this version of the self as less authentic than the “backstage” one. This view led studies to explore the alignment between individuals’ self-presentation online and offline (Bargh, Fitzsimons, & McKenna, 2002; Ruvio & Belk, 2018; Schau et al., 2003; Sessions, 2009). Researchers explored deceptive and superficial self-presentation on social media (Attrill & Jalil, 2011); differences in self-presentation in nonymous versus anonymous environments (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008); the use of brands to construct ideal and actual selves on social media (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012), and attempts to reconcile conflicting presentations of identity (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

However, a new generation of consumers has challenged this segregated perception of online and offline worlds. Generation Z, born after 1995, is a generation of consumers that never knew a world without the internet and social media. For these consumers, there is only one world where they construct, maintain, and project their identity in a variety of ways. Indeed, Jain and her colleagues (2021) contended that “digital interactions and the surrounding digital environment is leading to the co-creation of a more fluid and dynamic self-concept, which demands a constant stream of reformulation.” Through these social interactions, consumers form and reform a narrative understanding of who they are (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015; Somers, 1994). These identity narratives consist of a wide range of behaviors and activities online, including posts, blogs, comments, shares, likes, games, avatars, tags, texts, emails, and content consumption. Jain et al. (2021) extended this view to include the digital activities of others, and other self-related activities online. Different social media outlets and their unique characteristics enable consumers to form and express multiple identities narratives through interactions with others. As such, identity narratives are dynamic, and ever evolving, but also fragmented, inconsistent, contradictory, and partial (Somers, 1994). Furthermore, Belk (2013, 2014) contended that the limitless and boundaryless virtual environment challenges the notion of the atomic core self (Belk, 1988) and enables the formation of multiple identity narratives that are continuously changing and evolving (Ahuvia, 2005; Bahl & Milne, 2010).

There is no doubt that gender is one of the most defining characteristics of the self (Butler, 1999; Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997) and has a very pronounced expressive and performative side to it. According to Butler (1993), similar to other aspects of the self, gender is a performative act or a set of manipulated codes governed by social norms. A “correct” or socially accepted performance of gender means enacting the social norms that govern gender (p. XX). Thus, according to Butler, performativity is an ongoing ritualistic behavior that should be decoded within a specific social context and cannot be viewed as an isolated, singular act. Failure to internalize a normative gender identity or the enactment of a gender presentation that is inconsistent with their physical configuration will often be considered “deviant behaviors” from what is considered “normal” and “natural” (Gagné et al., 1997). Those who follow this path are often encouraged or even coerced to conform to social norms.

According to Butler (1993) people experience a gender identity conflict if their desired performance of their gendered self is inconsistent with their biological sex (Gagné et al., 1997). However, Butler did not really address situations where the notion of gender is irrelevant to people’s definition of their self-identity. In the case of agender individuals, the conflict is not between “sex and gender, and gender and performance” (p.137) as Butler posits. The conflict is between one’s self-definition that excludes gender identity and societal

expectations about expressions and performance of a gender identity. The societal norms lead us to instinctively categorize every person we meet as a male or a female based on cues taken from the performance of their gender identity. When a person does not express any identifiable gender identity, it seems unnatural to us. Refusing to enact a public performance that coincides with one's physical configuration as society expects intensifies the individual's internal conflict. Furthermore, Butler (1999) does not discuss the dynamic of a "non" performance or rejection of gender performativity all together. As such, the way agender individuals shape the expressive narrative of their agender identity is a question that still demands an answer.

Consumption and possessions play an important role in the performativity of the gendered self, just as they enact any other manifestation of the self. The symbolic meaning of possessions enables them to bridge the gap between people's self-identity and their public self-presentation in a socially acceptable way (Belk, 1989). Society expects that possessions will be used in a recognizable and socially acceptable way to enact gender identity (Butler, 1993; Gagné et al., 1997). While in the physical world consumers use tangible possessions to construct the presentation of their identity, in the virtual world consumers have an endless variety of virtual markers they can utilize for identity expression purposes. Technology intensifies and empowers consumers' exploration and expression of the self (Belk, 2013; Jain et al., 2021; Turkle, 2005). In the case of LGBTQIA+ individuals, the digital world opens up channels of communication with similar others, provides access to relevant online communities, increases opportunities to form new relationships and friendships, and provides guidance, information, and support that may not be available offline (e.g., Adkins et al., 2018; McConnell et al., 2017; Talbot et al., 2020). All of these factors shape and are integrated into people's identity narratives. While there is ample research on the identity expressions of other members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the research on the identity expressions of agender individuals is extremely scarce. In the following sections we will present our investigation of the identity expressions of agender individuals online and offline.

Method and analysis

We conducted four in-depth interviews as our primary source of data collection. Three of the interviewees identified themselves as agender (ages 22–31) and one individual identified as non-binary (22). All four participants were assigned female at birth (AFAB). Our participants were open to sharing their experiences and providing access to their social networks, but recruiting additional participants in our in-depth interviews proved challenging. The initial contact with the community took place on social platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, and Reddit. Participants' names and other identifying information were changed.

Limited to conducting our interviews in virtual settings due to COVID-19 restrictions, we interviewed our participants using video communications such as Zoom and Skype. The interviews, which lasted from 60 to 90 minutes, started with a short description of the purpose of the study and an open-ended question in which we asked the participants to describe what agender was conceptually. We then asked them to share their journeys as agender individual and about their lives in general with a focus on the role that digital space played in their evolving identity, shaping who they are today. The participants provided a rich and comprehensive data about their journeys as agender individuals and the expression of their agender identity online. With the participants' consent, we recorded the interviews.

The process of interpretation followed the conventions of the hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1997). As such, all interviews were coded based on a thorough reading of

Table 33.1 Summary of Research Findings

Theme	Sub-themes	Main finding
The fluidity of the digital world as a facilitator of the fluidity of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of control • Segregation and aggregation of identity performances • Identity “performance shortcut” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital world provides greater control over identity presentation. • One can maintain separate identity presentations online, while striving to achieve an aggregation of a core identity • It is somewhat easier to present the desired identity performance online with fewer explanations and effort.
Strategies of agender identity performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender neutralization • Gender sterilization • Agender performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using hyper-performance of the opposite gender to counterbalance the birth gender. • Eliminating any gender identity-related elements from one’s identity performance. • Engaging in specific agender performance practices.

Source: Own elaboration.

the transcripts. We then identified common themes as well as unique experiences across individuals and contrasted them with the relevant literature (Walther & Schouten, 2016) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The interviews were analyzed separately as well as comparatively reflecting a hermeneutic interactive circle of analysis.

Findings

Our findings center around two seminal issues related to presentation of agender identity online: the fluidity of the digital world as a facilitator of the fluidity of identity, and strategies of agender identity performance. Table 33.1 presents a summary of our findings.

The fluidity of the digital world as a facilitator of the fluidity of identity

Our participants’ identity narratives highlighted the power of the digital world in facilitating and intensifying the formation, exploration, and development of their identity (Jain et al., 2021; Turkle, 2005), and its critical role in shaping and reshaping identity narratives. The digital world not only intensified their identity exploration but also accelerated it. Previous research on gender identity conflicts indicated that gender identity conflicts take years to develop and be resolved (Ruvio & Belk, 2013), and while our participants went through similar stages of gender identity development as other members of the LGBTQIA+ community, this process appears to move faster online. Information is readily available online, questions are answered immediately, identities can be enacted simultaneously, supportive communities can be found, and experiences can be shared in real time (Bates, Hobman, & Bell, 2020; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014).

The fluid and borderless nature of the digital world enabled our participants to construct multiple identity narratives across multiple platforms. They maneuvered among these identities in a relatively effortless and safe way (Bates et al., 2020; Talbot et al., 2020). This dynamic

echoes Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity and challenges Goffman's (1959) metaphor of a theater. For our participants, the online presentation of their agender identity was fluid and flexible. The digital world provided them the freedom "to 'shop around' in the supermarket of identities" (Bauman, 2000; p. 83) and change their identities narratives at will. Align with Bauman's (2000) connotation that both identities and the performance of identities are fluid and ephemeral, there was no need for a "backstage" or a "front stage" (Goffman, 1959) separation of identities in the digital world.

The fluid nature of the digital world also provided our participants with a greater sense of control over their self-presentations and interactions online. This sense of control, whether real or perceived, was extremely important to them and to the process of creating an identity narrative. "How I present online, I spend a lot of time curating what I'm going to post, how I'm going to post it. So, I think there's a lot of time that goes into that..." (Revel).

Our participants were able to control not just the presentation of their agender identity across online platforms but also the audience for their performance. Using privacy and security controls, managing friendships and community associations, creating multiple accounts, and using aliases helped our participants manage their interactions (McConnell et al., 2017; Talbot et al., 2020; Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). "I don't post stuff on my normal page, but in my little groups, my family and friends don't really see my stuff, I feel a lot more comfortable expressing myself" (Caelan).

Similar to Bauman's (2000) notion of shopping around in the supermarket of identities, our participants were able to develop and try out multiple identity presentations in a compartmentalized and segregated way across virtual platforms and communities, with minimal social and monetary costs. This "identity play" is common in other situations involving identity explorations (Schouten, 1991). For example, teenagers engage in such play extensively as they form their adulthood identity (Zhao, 2005). Transgenders engage in "identity play" practices as they form their other gender identity (Ruvio & Belk, 2013, 2018).

Our participants even tried out different names before choosing the one that expresses who they are in an authentic way. Lou, another of our interviewees, shared:

I experimented with how I presented myself [online and in person]—chopped my hair off, dying my hair different colors, different clothing. I tried out about five different names before landing on Lou. I had all of my friends just call me one name for a while in online conversations or on the phone so I could get a feel for how I liked it.

Changing one's name normally symbolizes the end of one identity narrative, controlled mostly by others such as family, teachers, and friends. At the same time, it symbolizes the beginning of a new narrative (Belk, 2013), controlled and navigated mostly by the individual.

Nevertheless, the segregation of identity performance online, while common, was often done as a transitional phase with the goal of creating an aggregated core identity. Because these identities were only "try outs" and temporary, they were often fragmented, inconsistent, partial, and sometimes contradictory (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015; Somers, 1994). Our participants regarded the construction of an authentic agender core self (or the illusion thereof) necessary as a successful outcome of transforming their identity or resolving their identity conflict. They expressed the desire to present themselves in an authentic and consistent way both online and offline. Without a clear understanding of "who am I" as an agender person that is reliably performed, our participants continued to experience an identity conflict. Thus, whether illusory or real, they still sought a sense of a cohesive self.

Interestingly enough, our participants reported that performing an agender identity online is simpler and easier than performing it offline. In fact, the virtual world offers them a “performance shortcut” where they can present their agender identity immediately, with no explanations, stress, or difficulties.

[I use online forums to interact with others in the agender community] more so than in person. When you are online, you can just present yourself as your identity, you don't have to go through the awkward phase of coming out. You are just there from the start.
(Lou)

Yet, managing multiple identities selectively and effectively, even if done online, is not an easy task (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Talbot et al., 2020). Talbot et al. (2020) noted that at times “social media leakage” occurs, where identity performances collapse under the effort of trying to keep different identities separate from one another.

Strategies of agender identity performance

One significant issue our participants struggled with was the performance of an authentic agender identity both online and offline. They dealt with this struggle using three strategies. The first was gender neutralization. This type of performance entails taking a zero-sum view of identity performance. In other words, if they were born female, they will engage in masculine hyper-performance to counterbalance the feminine aspect of their identity performance. This was the case with Caelan who tried

to hold myself in an almost more masculine way rather than feminine because I was raised feminine and that is how I hold myself. I find myself walking more how a guy typically would or sitting like a guy would. Kind of going against what I was raised with.

The second strategy was gender sterilization, which encompasses a variety of behaviors designed to “erase” or eliminate gender features. Examples include changing their names if they have a gendered meaning (clearly feminine or clearly masculine) and avoiding possessions that are gendered, especially in the early years, before they have come to terms with their agender identity. Lou, for example, reflected on her adolescent years and said that –

I really didn't like a lot of feminine things, I hated pink, I hated being super girly, I hated drawing attention, I never wore makeup or dresses, I never wore frilly clothes, I wasn't a big fan of my body.

These behaviors will often be the initial cues that they are “different” and will ignite the question – “who am I?” coupled with “what is wrong with me?” Other minorities in the LGBTQIA+ community have reported similar processes (Ruvio & Belk, 2018). As children, we tend to compare and contrast our preferences to what is considered the social norm as we create our self-identity (Gagné et al., 1997). Discrepancies between personal preferences and what is considered socially acceptable will be considered deviant behavior that needs to be corrected or punished (Ruvio & Belk, 2013).

Other elements of gender neutralization are changing physical features or behaviors that are socially associated with normative gendered performance. For example, Lou described changing her hair style: “My hair used to be down to my waist, and I chopped it all off. I like the sides of my head to be completely shaved down, it makes me feel a lot more comfortable.”

Normative gender behaviors sometimes resulted in a dilemma of gender sterilization. For example, for Lou, her breasts were something that she wanted to eliminate as a gendered feature –

I was born with boobs, so I do something that people call the “trans-man slouch” where you hunch your shoulders forward a lot so there isn’t a visible bulge because I don’t really like presenting myself with as someone who has boobs.

However, Revel struggled with the fact that society restricts the ability to show one’s breasts – “...but just knowing that society says that these [boobs] are inappropriate and that I can never, ever show them...”, which is true in an online environment as well –

...I can’t even post art on Instagram of a topless person and that stupid thing with Tumblr where they banned “Not Safe For Work” content and underneath that was “female presenting nipples” so just very stupid... very stupid things regarding my chest that annoy me.

Changing pronouns is probably the change that has received the most public attention, and is now regarded as a social norm. More and more individuals identify their gender identity in their email signature, for example, regardless of their connection with the agender community. The change in pronunciation removes the limitations of inherently binary language (Taylor et al., 2019).

It is pretty common for people to put their pronouns in their bio (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter). I honestly encourage everyone to put pronouns in their bios, in their email signatures; it really does normalize pronouns being a thing and to look for them.

(Caelan)

Unfortunately, for many of our participants, gender sterilization also meant cutting off connections with friends and family members who did not accept them for who they are. This is a very hard phase in their identity evolution that other minorities in the LGBTQIA+ community also experience (Ruvio & Belk, 2013).

The third strategy our participants used was agender performance. The agender community in general and our participants in particular also engaged in a quest for an agender performance that was projective rather than reflective. In other words, instead of neutralizing or sterilizing gendered performance, agender individuals look for a performance that will convey who they are, as opposed to who they are not.

There is a stereotypically “enby” (non-binary) look, which is like bright colors, and patterns and overalls. I find myself drawn more and more to crazy colored patterned clothes that are weird and fun. I feel more agender when I have my necklaces and all of that stuff.

(Caelan)

Yellow is pretty big, and I feel like it's because it's in the non-binary flag. Yellow and purple are pretty big because they are in our flag, and very easy color symbolism there.
(Lou)

As their identity narrative evolves, agender individuals tend to choose possessions or other identity-related elements that express their personal self-definition and view of who they are, regardless of how others interpret these elements. Online shopping plays an important role in the construction of their narrative (Belk, 2013) as it opens up a wide range of options in terms of style and sizes.

I like shopping online because it is where I can find the more “out there” clothes, like the fun unisex, funky, bright colors. I don't really know where to find that stuff in person.
(Caelan)

Now that I am out, I have really diversified my style and how I want to present myself because I know the people around me won't misgender me, even if I wear something kind of feminine. It's really nice to be able to wear what I want without having to worry about that.
(Lou)

Thus, while consumption has the ability to stigmatize one's identity (Sandikci & Ger, 2010), it can also liberate it and enable authentic self-expression.

Summary

This chapter focused on the online identity expressions of agender individuals. Creating an agender identity is an especially challenging task considering the fact that this identity definition involves the rejection of gender as part of one's identity. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study exploring this issue. Building on our in-depth interviews, we focused on two main themes that are indicative of agender identity expressions: the fluidity of the digital world as a facilitator of the fluidity of identity, and the strategies of agender identity performance.

It is clear from our participants' narratives that the digital world not only intensifies identity exploration and expression (Belk, 2013; Jain et al., 2021; Turkle, 2005) but also accelerates it. Our findings show that the fluid nature of the digital world enables agender individuals to express their identity online in various ways and develop multiple identity narratives simultaneously (Bates et al., 2020; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). These identity “try outs” are essential parts of the process of forming one's identity (Ruvio & Belk, 2013, 2018; Zhao, 2005). Interestingly, this fluidity also provided our participants with greater control over the creation and expression of their identity narrative. When it comes to forming and expressing their agender identity, our participants attempted to neutralize their gender presentation, sterilize it, and determine what an agender identity is rather than what it is not. Since identity narratives are built on an ongoing discourse between individuals and their social environment, the quest for the expression of an agender identity is an ongoing one and is a reflection of the community's quest for definition in the broader public discourse.

This quest for definition is an example of the fight for recognition and legitimization of marginalized communities in general. The digital world enables these communities to

dynamically form their unique identity narrative based on interactions between members of the community as well as non-members. By leveraging the broad reach of the digital world, these communities strive to become part of the public discourse. As other chapters in this book will convey, this effort comes with a price. As public attention diversifies, social biases become more prominent, and marginalized communities run the risk of becoming even more marginalized in society.

However, our chapter clearly shows that societal changes are possible, and consumption plays an important role in advancing and legitimizing these changes. Marketers are currently leveraging a genderless brand positioning and messaging to connect with agender consumers, while embedding their fight for recognition in the public discourse. For example, as mentioned previously, Marc Jacobs' debut of agender model Juno Mitchell during New York Fashion Week in 2020 trumpeted an inclusive and celebratory view of not identifying with a specific gender. In addition, leading brands in the cosmetics industry are breaking the dichotomy of masculine or feminine marketed products. Genderless marketing is emerging in consumer packaged goods, toy, and technology companies as well. Mattel has released a new product line of gender-neutral dolls called Creatable World. Apple features products with color options unassociated with gender. These initiatives challenge traditional binary perceptions of gender and their expressions and call for a redefinition of our conventions surrounding gender.

References

- Adkins, Victoria, Ellie Masters, Daniel Shumer, and Ellen Selkie (2018), "Exploring Transgender Adolescents' Use of Social Media for Support and Health Information Seeking," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(2), S44.
- Ahuvia, Aharon (2005), "Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(June), 171–84.
- American Psychological Association (2015), "Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People," *American Psychologist*, 70(9), 832–64.
- Attrill, Alison, and Rahul Jalil (2011), "Revealing Only the Superficial Me: Exploring Categorical Self-Disclosure Online," *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(5), 1634–42.
- Bahl, Shalini, and George R. Milne (2010), "Talking to Ourselves: A Dialogical Exploration of Consumption Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(June), 176–95.
- Bargh, John A., Grainne M. Fitzsimons, and Katelyn Y.A. McKenna (2002), "Can You See the Real Me? Activation and Self-Expression of the 'True Self' on the Internet," *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(1), 33–48.
- Bates, Adam, Trish Hobman, and Beth T. Bell (2020), "Let Me Do What I Please with It... Don't Decide My Identity for Me": LGBTQ+ Youth Experiences of Social Media in Narrative Identity Development," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 35(1), 51–83.
- Bauman, Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Belk, Russell W. (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, 139–68.
- Belk, Russell W. (1989), "Extended Self and Extending Paradigmatic Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(1), 129–32.
- Belk, Russell W. (2013), "Extended Self in a Digital World," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(3), 477–500.
- Belk, Russell W. (2014), "Digital Consumption and the Extended Self," *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(11–12), 1101–18.
- Boyd, Danah, and Jeffrey Heer (2006), "Profiles as Conversation: Networked Identity Performance on Friendster," In *Proceedings of the 39th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'06)* (Vol. 3, p. 59c), Hawaii: IEEE.
- Butler, Judith (1993), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith (1999), *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge.

- Gagné, Patricia, Richard Tewksbury, and Deanna McGaughey (1997), "Coming Out and Crossing Over Identity Formation and Proclamation in a Transgender Community," *Gender and Society*, 11(4), 478–508.
- Goffman, Erving (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hollenbeck, Candice R., and Andrew M. Kaikati (2012), "Consumers' Use of Brands to Reflect Their Actual and Ideal Selves on Facebook," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 29(4), 395–405.
- Jain, Varsha, Russell W. Belk, Anupama Ambika, and Manisha Pathak-Shelat (2021), "Narratives Selves in the Digital World: An Empirical Investigation," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 20(2), 368–80.
- Kuper, Laura E., and Brian S. Mustanski (2014), "Using Narrative Analysis to Identify Patterns of Internet Influence on the Identity Development of Same-Sex Attracted Youth," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 29(4), 499–532.
- Marwick, Alice E., and Danah Boyd (2011), "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience," *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114–33.
- McConnell, Elizabeth A., Antonia Clifford, Aaron K. Korpak, Gregory Phillips II, and Michelle Birkett (2017), "Identity, Victimization, and Support: Facebook Experiences and Mental Health Among LGBTQ Youth," *Computers in Human Behavior*, 76, 237–44.
- Orsatti, Jo, and Kai Riemer (2015), "Identity-Making: A Multimodal Approach for Researching Identity in Social Media," ECIS 2015 Completed Research Papers. Paper 140.
- Ruvio, Ayalla A., and Russell W. Belk (2013), "A Process View of Transgenders' Self-Identity Conflict," In *Identity and Consumption*, eds. Ayalla Ruvio and Russell Belk (pp. 141–48), London: Routledge.
- Ruvio, Ayalla A., and Russell W. Belk (2018), "Strategies of the Extended Self: The Role of Possessions in Transpeople's Conflicted Selves," *Journal of Business Research*, 88, 102–10.
- Sandikci, Özlem, and Güliz Ger (2010), "Veiling in Style: How Does Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable?" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(1), 15–36.
- Schau, Hope Jensen, Mary C. Gilly, and Mary Wolfinger (2003), "We Are What We Post? Self-Presentation in Personal Web Space," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 385–404.
- Schouten, John W. (1991), "Selves in Transition: Consumption in Personal Rites of Passage and Identity Reconstruction," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(4), 412–45.
- Sessions, Lauren F. (2009), "'You Looked Better on MySpace' Deception and Authenticity on Web 2.0," *First Monday*, 14(7).
- Sheth, Jagdish N., and Michael R. Solomon (2014), "Extending the Extended Self in a Digital World," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 22(2), 123–32.
- Somers, Margaret R. (1994), "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23(5), 605–49.
- Talbot, Catherine V., Amelia Talbot, Danielle J. Roe, and Pam Briggs (2020), "The Management of LGBTQ+ Identities on Social Media: A Student Perspective," *New Media & Society*, 12, 1–22.
- Taylor, Jessica, Agnieszka Zalewska, Jennifer Joan Gates, and Guy Millon (2019), "An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Non-Binary Individuals Who Have Presented at a Gender Identity Clinic in the United Kingdom," *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 20(2–3), 195–204.
- Thompson, Craig J. (1997), "Interpreting Consumers: A Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers' Consumption Stories," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(4), 438–55.
- Turkle, Sherry. (2005), *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Vivienne, Sonja, and Jean Burgess (2012), "The Digital Storyteller's Stage: Queer Everyday Activists Negotiating Privacy and Publicness," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(3), 362–77.
- Walther, Luciana, and John W. Schouten (2016), "Next stop, Pleasure Town: Identity Transformation and Women's Erotic Consumption," *Journal of Business Research*, 69(1), 273–83.
- Zhao, Shanyang (2005), "The Digital Self: Through the Looking Glass of Telecopresent Others," *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(3), 387–405.
- Zhao, Shanyang, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin (2008), "Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships," *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(5), 1816–36.