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The Influence of the Green-Feminine Stereotype

*Understanding Cis Men's Motivational Representation and Gender Identity
Performance in the Context of Pro-Environmental Consumption*

Master Degree Project in Marketing and Consumption

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Abstract

The role of gender in shaping attitudes toward pro-environmental consumption is understudied and an enhanced understanding of the issue is called for by multiple scholars. Previous literature point to a green-feminine stereotype in which there is a cognitive link between pro-environmental consumption and femininity. In response, the purpose of this study is to explore how the motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption among male consumers is influenced by the green-feminine stereotype and how pro-environmental consumer behaviour is a performative act of gender identity, demonstrated through the two product categories of fashion and cars. Pro-environmental consumption as a gendered practice is further explored through applying Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. Empirical material was conducted using a qualitative approach through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews, limited to a purposive sample of Swedish cis men aged 25-65. The three final themes that emerged from the material through thematic analysis were labelled *rationality as motivational representation*, *the paradox of the green-feminine stereotype* and *the modern man and status*. Key findings suggest that male consumers are influenced by the green-feminine stereotype in how their motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption is primarily based on traditionally masculine values in a context that has been associated with femininity. In addition, pro-environmental consumption behaviour has been analysed as a performative act of gender identity, pointing to how disassociation or association with gendered consumer behaviour allows for gender to be practiced and norms to be reproduced.

Keywords: *sustainable consumption, pro-environmental consumption, Butlerian gender performativity, motivational representation, gender identity maintenance, masculinity, the green-feminine stereotype*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable consumption continues to gain substantial attention as pressing sustainability issues demands a wide and interdisciplinary understanding of the concept. With one of the sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations involving implementation of sustainable consumption and production patterns worldwide (UN, 2022), further emphasis is placed on understanding and researching promotion of sustainable lifestyles and consumption practices. While there is a current trend of increased focus on the concept of sustainability within the marketing discipline, Dobscha and Prothero (2012) claim that scholarly discussions on the role of gender seems to be lacking almost entirely, indicating that the role that gender plays in shaping attitudes toward sustainable consumption behaviour has not been adequately researched.

The gender aspect of pro-environmental consumption is particularly relevant since there is a clear divide between different genders in terms of their engagement in sustainable consumption. For instance, research suggest that women are engaging in sustainable consumption behaviour to a larger extent than men (Bulut et al., 2017) and that men are responsible for a higher energy output through their lifestyle and consumption (Räty & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010). Although the relationship between gender and sustainability has been overlooked to a large extent by marketing researchers, Dobscha and Prothero (2012) suggest that the intersection has been studied within social sciences, pointing to the important role of gender in the conceptualization of sustainability. Hence, there is an apparent need for a socio-cultural understanding of gender in a sustainable consumption context. Having said that, it is notable that the limited research that does exist generally suggests that sustainable consumption patterns are influenced by gender identity or maintenance of gender roles rather than biological sex (Bloodhart & Swim,

2020). For instance, Pinna (2020) claims that adequate measurement of ethical intentions and behaviour must take measures of gender identity into consideration. Furthermore, Bloodhart and Swim (2020) argue that gender plays a significant role in sustainability issues and to enhance the understanding of how sustainable consumption is constructed, the authors argue that the concept must be studied through a gender lens.

Existing literature agrees that there is a widely held green-feminine stereotype and a cognitive link between femininity and the concept of greenness (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016). Female consumers' overrepresentation in green consumption behaviour is explained through traditional gender norms (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020), the view of women as the primary household caretaker (Dobscha, 1993; Godin & Langlois, 2021), and gender differences in motivational factors of green consumption (Lee, 2009; Tung, Koenig, & Chen, 2017). As stated by Borau, Elgaaied-Gambier, and Barbarossa (2021), evolutionary psychology and gender socialization theory align in their rationales when explaining the green-feminine stereotype, agreeing that men who engage in environmental consumption are perceived as more feminine because they behave in a more cooperative, altruistic, and 'feminine' way, while they are also perceived as more feminine because they deviate from the traditional masculine gender role. The previous findings that point to sustainable consumption as a perceived feminine behaviour is relevant to Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, viewing gender as a series of gendered acts through time. Since pro-environmental consumption behaviour have been found to have strong associations with femininity (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Borau et al., 2021; Brough et al., 2016), interpreting sustainable consumption as a type of behaviour that allows consumers to 'perform gender' may provide an insightful perspective in the context of sustainable consumption by applying Butler's (1990) theoretical lens. The Butlerian perspective constitutes one of the most prominent contributions within the social sciences for understanding the role that gender norms play in shaping attitudes and behaviour. It describes gender as repeated acts and an embodied behaviour that relies on social conventions, ultimately producing and reproducing the gender norms in place (Butler 1990; 1993).

The gender gap and the role gender plays in influencing sustainable consumption behaviour continues to be vastly understudied (Bulut, Kökalan Çimrin, & Doğan, 2017) and there is an evident research gap relevant to the phenomenon of gender identity and motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption, especially among male consumers. For instance, Hand (2020) calls on researchers to explore male motivations for engaging in pro-environmental behaviours more in depth, understanding to what extent men are driven by for example competitiveness or status-signalling, but also to explore to what extent pro-environmental behaviour is perceived as a threat to men's gender identity. Gender-identity maintenance motives also demands further research, to determine whether male consumers' motives are more associative or dissociative in character (Brough et al., 2016). Moreover, Borau et al. (2021) encourages further exploration into individual profiles with varying predispositions along with their likelihood of holding the green-feminine stereotype and whether it constitute positive or negative connotations from their perspectives. Furthermore, existing studies of the intersection of masculinity and green consumption are to a large extent limited to the context of vegetarianism (Calvert, 2014; Carroll, Capel, & Gallegos, 2019; Modlinska, Adamczyk, Maison, & Pisula, 2020; Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2021; Schösler, de Boer, Boersema, & Aiking, 2015; Sumpter, 2015), which begs the question whether the gender effect is as prominent in other product categories. For example, men that rate the environment as the main reason for considering vegetarianism have been found to identify less strongly with traditional masculinity (Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2021), confirming the green-feminine stereotype (Brough et al., 2016). Having said that, Brough et al. (2016) have also been criticised by

multiple scholars for having overgeneralized the findings by failing to examine different types of product categories (Tung et al., 2017). Moreover, while Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity is well-established within the social sciences for understanding gender identity and gender norms, it is rarely applied in consumer research. Applying this perspective to the context of pro-environmental consumption would allow for exploration of such behaviour as gendered acts and contribute to an enhanced understanding of the role that norms play in motivating pro-environmental consumption. Arguably, sufficient studies of gender norms and its influence on motivations to engage in sustainable consumption behaviour is needed as Chatzidakis and Maclaran (2020) argue that to date, existing consumer research have failed to account for the complexity of gender norms and its multi-faceted ways in which it affects everyday consumption decisions and practices.

In response, this study aims to explore how the motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption among male consumers is influenced by the green-feminine stereotype and how pro-environmental consumer behaviour is a performative act of gender identity, demonstrated through two different product categories: fashion apparel that have traditionally been associated with femininity (Gupta & Gentry, 2016; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) and cars that have traditionally been associated with masculinity (Sovacool, Kester, Noel, & Zarazua de Rubens, 2019). Focusing on these two categories allow for relevant comparisons between product categories that have pre-existing connotations and associations in relation to gender. The term motivational representation is used to refer to the motivations that is voiced by the participants, distinguished from what may constitute subconscious motivations. The study will further contribute to the understanding of the studied phenomenon by exploring pro-environmental consumption as a gendered practice through applying Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, viewing gender as an embodied behaviour that relies on norms and expectations associated with gender. While the study is limited to cis men i.e., men whose gender identity corresponds with their biological sex, the study has a relevant focus on a consumer group that have been found to be reluctant to express their environmental concern through consumption (Bulut et al., 2017). The aim has been translated into the following research questions:

1. *How are cis men's motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption influenced by the green-feminine stereotype?*
2. *In what ways are cis men's gender identity performed through engagement in pro-environmental consumption?*

Since the term sustainable consumption accounts not only for the environmental impact, but also the social and economic dimensions (Martin & Schouten, 2012; UN, 2022), the term may be regarded of as an umbrella-term for various definitions used in academic research, ranging from ethical consumption (Chatzidakis & Maclaran, 2020; Pinna, 2020; Shang & Peloza, 2016) and responsible consumption (Piñeiro, Díaz, Palavecinos, Alonso, & Benayas, 2014), to a more distinguished environmental focus, using terms such as eco-friendly consumption (Brough et al., 2016; Tung et al., 2017), environmentally friendly consumption (Felix, González, Castaño, Carrete, & Gretz, 2021), green consumption (Zhao, Gong, Li, Zhang, & Sun, 2021), environmentally-related consumption (Dobscha, 1993) and the commonly used pro-environmental consumption (Borau et al., 2021; Hand, 2020; Mobley & Kilbourne, 2013; Swim, Gillis, & Hamaty, 2019). Additionally, reduced consumption in response to the issue of overconsumption may also fall under pro-environmental consumption behaviour (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Martin & Schouten, 2012). In this study, the term sustainable consumption will

be referred to as an overarching concept of which pro-environmental consumption constitute one key dimension, limiting the study to one of the three pillars of sustainability that encapsulates the relevant concept of greenness (Martin & Schouten, 2012).

The rest of this thesis is structured as follows. Firstly, the theoretical framework consists of a brief literature review of existing literature relevant to the green-feminine stereotype, masculinity and motivators to engage in pro-environmentalism. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity in relation to consumer behaviour further constitutes a foundation for how the concept of gender is understood in the context of this study. Subsequently, the qualitative methodology is explained and justified in terms of research approach, data collection process and method of analysis. The findings and analysis are then presented in three different themes: *rationality as motivational representation*, *the paradox of the green-feminine stereotype* and *the modern man and status*. Lastly, the concluding discussion involves a summary of the key findings in relation to the research questions as well as implications of findings and avenues for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The green-feminine stereotype

The findings of Brough et al. (2016) indicate that there is a cognitive link between femininity and the concept of greenness, which in turn influences how consumers that engage in environmentally friendly purchasing behaviour are perceived and how they perceive themselves in terms of femininity. For instance, it was found that consumers that engage in environmentally related consumption are not only perceived as more feminine by others, but they may also perceive themselves as more feminine for engaging in ethical purchasing behaviour (Brough et al., 2016; Shang & Peloza, 2016). Thus, Brough et al. (2016) argue that the green-feminine stereotype, recognized by men and women alike, can lead men to actively avoid consumption behaviours that may be perceived as green, simply as a way to maintain an image of traditional masculinity. This is believed to further contribute to the gender gap in sustainable consumption, even though Brough et al. (2016) have received criticism for overgeneralizing the results without considering variations between different product categories (Tung et al., 2017).

The emergence of the green-feminine stereotype can in part be explained by social norms. Firstly, the deeply rooted stereotype of women as the primary caretakers of households is believed to contribute to the perception of women as responsible for the natural environment. As stated by Dobscha (1993), women carry the main responsibility for household purchases and therefore, the active decision to engage in environmentally-related consumption is placed primarily on women. Furthermore, Dobscha (1993) explained how women have traditionally been, and continues to be, connected to the natural environment in various ways, including through symbolism and terminology that depicts the environment as feminine, such as the 'mother earth' and 'mother nature' discourses. For instance, Takedomi Karlsson and Ramasar (2020) argue that green advertisements by the fashion industry are in part leaning on the essentialist notion that women are naturally nurturing and inherently closer to nature. However, since their study showed that the gender effect on willingness to change behaviour depends in part on values linked with technology and self-enhancement, Mobley and Kilbourne (2013) argue that explaining gender differences within the context of environmentalism with traditional socio-biological arguments are too deterministic and inadequate, not recognizing the complexity of the matter. What such ideas fail to incorporate is the complex socialization of gender roles (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020).

Women tend to be socialized to care and to carry the responsibility for their family members, including the 'future generations', which is believed to influence their concern for environmental issues, since failing to conform to the social norms in place can lead people to feel shame and guilt (Godin & Langlois, 2021). For instance, due to the deeply rooted notions of what it means to engage in successful 'mothering' and achieving ambitious standards of care, which is strongly linked to perceived femininity (Godin & Langlois, 2021). Furthermore, such gender norms may be regarded of as a special category of moral norms that contributes to the shaping of consumer's ethical decision-making (Chatzidakis & Maclaran, 2020). As found by Pinna (2020), it is femininity, as in sensitivity to others, that is the main driver of ethical intent in consumption and not that women possess a more prominent moral identity than men.

Socialization processes are believed to explain gender differences in values that in turn may influence pro-environmental attitudes, for instance, socialization processes that influence women to value egalitarianism and men to value hierarchy to a larger extent (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020). In the context of sustainability, the egalitarian view considers all living beings as deserving of equal treatment and opposes hierarchical power structures that places humans' rights and needs above the ones of other species. As such, Bloodhart and Swim (2020) argue that environmental concerns are not linked to the biological sex but affected by complicated socialization processes that influence how men and women see humans' right to domination in the natural environment.

Having said that, men are not exclusively socialized into neglecting the environment, and not all studies support the idea that female consumers are more environmentally concerned than their male counterparts (Grønhøj & Ölander, 2007). Social and environmental issues constitute a major concern for many men as well, although research suggest that women tend to possess a stronger willingness to express such concerns and engage in sustainable consumption behaviour (Bulut et al., 2017; Dobscha, 1993). Perhaps this can be explained in part by the social norms and expectations in place, based on the idea that gender differences stem from gender as a social construct rather than inborn tendencies (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Butler, 1990) and the fact that men have been found to be more concerned with gender-identity maintenance than women (Brough et al., 2016). For instance, Grønhøj and Ölander (2007) did not find much difference in green consumption attitudes between men and women, but that there was a gendered division of household responsibilities within Danish nuclear families in relation to pro-environmental practices. Their findings indicate that men generally took responsibility for outside practices such as waste disposal whereas women were more inclined to take responsibility for more 'feminine' practices, such as organic household purchases.

Masculinity and pro-environmental consumption

In contrast to the various studies of vegetarianism that confirm the green-feminine stereotype (Calvert, 2014; Carroll et al., 2019; Modlinska et al., 2020; Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2021; Schösler et al., 2015; Sumpter, 2015), Littlefield's (2010) study of varying masculinity expressions within the deer hunting subculture highlighted opposing findings. Firstly, cultural stereotypes of violence against animals and domination over nature and women were not found to be prominent themes. Instead, multiple expressions of masculinities emerged, and in contrast to stereotypical expectations, these involved family-related values, social connections, immersion in nature and a deep care for the environment and animals. Hence, both ecofeminism and the studied hunters place emphasis on care for animals, family and friends, and one's place in the world (Littlefield, 2010).

In addition to gender differences in sustainable consumption engagement, gender stereotypes and social norms also influence how men and women perceive, act and respond to the concept (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020). This idea is supported by Pinna (2020), who found a strong link between femininity and ethical intent, while masculinity had the opposite effect in their study on gender identities as determinants of ethical intent. Moreover, Felix et al. (2021) found that the green-feminine stereotype can be triggered in part by packaging colour, suggesting that green packaging negatively affect the perceived level of masculinity. In turn, this decreases the perceived product effectiveness, since there is a strong correlation between gender and the level of perceived masculinity and perceived product effectiveness (Felix et al., 2021). To illustrate, male consumers perceive environmental-friendly products as more effective when it is perceived masculine, while such an effect is not evident among female consumers. As suggested by Brough et al. (2016), the willingness for men to participate in green behaviours can be affected by either threatening or affirming their masculinity. For this reason, masculine branding may be more effective than traditional green branding when targeting men, but also in altering the feminine associations attached (Brough et al., 2016).

As mentioned previously, research of gender consumption suggest that men are responsible for a higher energy use than women because they tend to consume more meat than women and drive longer distances (Räty & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010). Since excessive consumption have been found to be associated with stereotypically masculine traits such as status, power and wealth, it helps to explain why reduction of consumption by default is perceived as more feminine, according to Bloodhart and Swim (2020). However, this may not be true for all product categories, since female consumers are responsible for a large proportion of over-consumption within the context of fast fashion, for example (Gupta & Gentry, 2016; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

Men's motivators to engage in pro-environmental consumption

The underlying motivators for engaging in green consumption behaviour seems to differ based on gender. For instance, when measuring gender differences in motivational factors of eco-friendly apparel consumption, Tung et al. (2017) found that men and women were generally motivated by different factors. For female consumers, their green self-identity served as the sole motivator to engage in eco-friendly apparel consumption. In contrast, the male consumers showed a weak relationship between their green self-identity and purchase intent, but rather, cognitive involvement was found to be the determinant of their intentions. The authors explained this by suggesting that men tend to be motivated by the cognitive aspects of involvement such as responsibility, emphasizing the value and necessity of eco-friendly apparel rather than the identity-induced images or messages that women are believed to be more likely to be persuaded by (Tung et al., 2017). However, among consumers that aspire to engage in green consumption, female consumers were found to be more motivated by intrinsic values of environmental concerns, whereas male consumers were motivated by the rewarding self-worthiness that may result during and after engaging in green consumption behaviour (Lee, 2009), questioning Tung et al. (2017) idea of cognitive involvement as the key motivator.

Sustainable consumption is also strongly linked to gender through status. According to Bloodhart and Swim (2020), status generally decreases rather than increases when consuming sustainably. Although some status-induced exceptions include organic products and solar panels, Bloodhart and Swim (2020) argue that most sustainable consumption behaviours involve reduced ownership, monetary savings, and less activities such as traveling. However, despite the decreased status resulting from such environmental consumption, Borau et al. (2021) introduce the notion that environmental consumption can be used to signal not only feminine

qualities of altruism, but also parental care and men's potential and commitment in romantic relationships, enhancing men's status as a potential partner. For instance, Borau et al. (2021) found that men can benefit from what is perceived as a more feminine, eco-friendly behaviour because engaging in environmental consumption signals good-mate qualities, including altruism and partner commitment, which were found to be preferred qualities among heterosexual women that perceive such men as more desirable long-term partners. These findings are in line with Shang and Peloza (2016), suggesting that although ethical consumption may threaten men's gender identity, male consumers are more likely to engage in ethical behaviour in the presence of observers of the opposite sex, something that the authors explain by sexual selection and the use of ethical consumption to express desirable qualities to potential romantic partners. As suggested by Shang and Peloza (2016), male consumers engage in ethical behaviour when association with femininity is perceived positive to the potential romantic partners. As stated by Bloodhart and Swim (2020), gender differences in sustainable consumption behaviour are also interconnected with overall lifestyle practices and other social identities.

In addition to the significance of gender, studies also point to age, income, education, environmental concern, and peer effects as key determinants of sustainable consumption (Lazaric et al., 2019). For example, peer pressure is believed to be a major determinant of sustainable consumption, in part because peers are one of the main sources from which individuals learn about sustainable behaviour, strongly influencing one's environmental values and behaviour (Lazaric et al., 2019). Perhaps peer pressure also plays a role in motivating gender-maintenance. Gender differences in sustainable consumption are often linked to gender roles and associated practices, yet patterns in gender-maintenance and avoidance of feminine-oriented practices indicate that stereotypes strongly influence men's engagement in sustainable consumption, especially as men show a stronger preference to adhere to gender role norms (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020).

Furthermore, values and attitudes related to technology is believed to influence the relationship one has with the environment (Mobley & Kilbourne, 2013). For instance, men that expressed scepticism toward technology showed higher levels of willingness to change their consumption than those men that adhered to what is referred to as the 'technofix mentality' (Mobley & Kilbourne, 2013). The technofix mentality describes a technological optimism and strong belief that technology can solve major issues such as those related to the environment caused by consumption, which in turn leads individuals to be more reluctant to change their consumption habits as a result (Mobley & Kilbourne, 2013).

Gendered product categories

The green-feminine stereotype may influence male consumers' attitudes and motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption in various ways, however, the gendered associations ascribed to different product categories is also likely to play an important role, as different products have traditional associations with masculinity and femininity (Gupta & Gentry, 2016; Sovacool et al., 2019). In this study, focus will be placed on the two gendered categories of fashion and cars.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, female consumers are overrepresented in fast fashion consumption, exhibiting a stronger demand for new fashion items (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) and concern for appearance (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). This makes fashion and apparel a particularly interesting product category to analyse in the context of masculinity and pro-environmentalism, because despite the green-feminine stereotype, research suggest that

extensive consumption of unsustainable fast fashion and apparel stills signals femininity (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). As stated by Gupta and Gentry (2016), the traditional idea of fashion as a female practice has induced men to disassociate themselves with fashion and appearance as preoccupation with such practices has been ascribed femininity, and in some cases, homosexuality. This is relevant in the context of pro-environmental consumption, since Brough et al. (2016) emphasizes the need to explore whether male consumer motives for this form of gender-identity maintenance is associative or dissociative in its nature. For example, by avoiding 'feminine' fast fashion consumption behaviour, masculinity is perceived to be maintained (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). Furthermore, when engaging in fast fashion consumption, Gupta and Gentry (2016) found that men and women behave differently, in attempts to adhere to gender roles. Their findings showed that contemporary male fast fashion consumers avoid in-store hoarding and browsing behaviours and instead exhibit urgent buying behaviour that allows them to balance the traditional masculine consumer role that places importance on rationality and function with the more feminized consumer role that is concerned with body and appearance. By adhering to traits ascribed to masculinity, including competitiveness and achievement orientation, male consumers were found to be motivated to complete their fashion shopping as fast as possible since this allows them to 'deemphasize his consumption behaviour and further communicate that he is not too careful with his appearance but at the same time is concerned about it' (Gupta & Gentry, 2016, p. 257). Moreover, Holt and Thompson (2004) argue that men are balancing the traditional masculine role with the more feminized and progressive masculine role by dramatic structuring of everyday consumption. This is done by applying competitiveness to mundane household activities that have traditionally been stereotyped as female. This produces a sense of importance to such practices that makes one's contributions seem vital (Holt & Thompson, 2004). In addition, these findings may help explain the results of Tung et al. (2017), who found that male consumers report that they are primarily motivated to engage in eco-friendly apparel consumption by cognitive aspects (responsibility, value and necessity) rather than by a green self-identity. However, these results do not account for variations between product categories as different products may be associated with different gender roles.

For example, in a study of Nordic transport and mobility, Sovacool et al. (2019) found that men attach more importance to status, sex appeal, ownership, speed and acceleration whereas women showed stronger preferences for pro-environmental and safety features of vehicles. Having said that, men use and own both electric and non-electric cars more often than women yet drive longer distances and are less frequent users of public transport than women (Sovacool et al., 2019). While these findings in part support the green-feminine stereotype, it also raises the question of what is perceived 'pro-environmental' consumption behaviour in the context of vehicles as it may refer to both ownership of electric cars and reduced driving distances. For instance, electric cars are described as a pro-environmental alternative to petrol or diesel cars. However, the main motivations to purchase electric cars among male consumers are not necessarily related to the environmental impact (Sovacool et al., 2019). Simultaneously, both electric and non-electric cars as marketed products have become associated with masculinity. For example, certain electric car brands, such as *Tesla*, have become symbols of status and sex appeal (Sovacool et al., 2019). This means that the findings of Sovacool et al. (2019) are somewhat in line with previous research on male consumers' motivators of pro-environmental consumption, including different forms of status-signalling and sex appeal (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Borau et al., 2021; Shang & Pelozo, 2016) as well as masculine branding and packaging (Brough et al., 2016; Felix et al., 2021).

Butler's theory of gender performativity

In understanding how actions that are restricted by gender norms informs and affects pro-environmental consumption decisions and motivations among consumers, this study draws on philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's influential theory on performativity.

When applied to the concept of gender, Butler's theory of performativity (1990) builds on Austin's (1962) idea of performative utterances when suggesting that gender is constructed through speech acts and nonverbal communication. In doing so, Butler takes on a post-structuralist perspective in distinguishing between sex and gender, viewing ideas about gender as social constructs grounded in social norms. Furthermore, Butler's theory of gender performativity suggests that norms 'act on us' before any active decision to act is made and once we do act, the norms that govern us are reiterated (Joy, Belk, & Bhardwaj, 2015). Hence, while norms may be reiterated in new or unexpected ways, this is still done in relation to the norms in place.

Moreover, there is a significant difference between performance and performativity in that performativity is not a series of planned, conscious acts, but rather a series of effects that is produced and reproduced over time (Butler, 1993). According to Butler (1990), gender is defined as the stylized repetition of acts through time. It relates to the sense of feeling feminine or masculine through certain behaviours that are practiced repeatedly. As stated by Andéhn, Hietanen, and Lucarelli (2020), Butler shifts the idea of identity as an essential property to one that is constantly reproduced through its enactment. Thus, Butler's idea of performativity is that the subject is merely constituted through its constant repetition of 'acts' that ultimately reproduces norms (Cabantous, Gond, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). In other words, these series of effects are not chosen by the subjects, but changed and developed through societal and cultural forces, designating meaning and perceptions into acts and behaviour that informs the subjects. In addition, Butler (1990) argues that non-stylized acts do not exist and that all acts are to some extent gendered i.e., interpreted and perceived as more or less feminine or masculine. Relevant in consumer culture research, institutions that influence the normalizing framework of societal and cultural forces may include marketing, advertising and mass media that systematically induce consumers into pursuing certain identity and lifestyle projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

While Butler (1993) refers to gender as a fluid entity that is constituted through social and cultural norms and conventions, gender is described as a set of behaviours and expectations that all people are conditioned into from birth (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012). This claim is notable since it questions individual agency which is particularly interesting in a marketing and consumption context. For instance, Joy et al. (2015, p. 1742) argue that individuals do not have the ability to make independent decisions, as individuals are 'the products of the ongoing process from which our view of self and of the world are derived'. This also means that seemingly unconscious consumption decisions are believed to be heavily influenced by external forces. In consumer culture research, for example, advertising and media are viewed as producers of consumer lifestyle and identity instructions, by inducing marketplace ideologies and meaning into consumers' acts, wants and aspirations (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). To some extent, marketing and media may therefore influence how certain behaviours or acts are interpreted, and perhaps encouraged, in terms of masculinity or femininity. Thus, performance of certain behaviours on the market may be regarded of as tools for constructing and performing individuals' identities and gender (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Furthermore, performativity explains in part why social gender roles and expectations are difficult to change, since it is negotiated constantly in relation to existing norms (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012). Gender is believed to be performative in that it is developed and constituted from the outside, with the meaning of gender inscribed through the agreed social codes and signifiers of different types of behaviour. Additionally, these signs are not natural, but possess cultural value as if they were natural because they have been repeated and ritualized over an extensive period. As stated by Rittenhofer and Gatrell (2012), gender is situational and performed in line with expectations about social gender roles.

In summary, according to Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender should be regarded of as a verb and not a noun i.e., something that is practiced and performed through rituals and acts. One fundamental assumption of performativity is that gender is a socially prescribed practice rather than an inherent characteristic (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012). Hence, gender is not necessarily viewed as something to be or to have, but an embodied behaviour that relies on social conventions.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretivist research philosophy

Since the ontological assumptions and beliefs influence how the study is conducted and designed, the methodology is here explicitly stated and justified through the research philosophy of interpretivism. Firstly, the current study operates within an interpretivist paradigm, a post-positivist philosophical perspective that places emphasis on the understanding of how humans interpret or construct the social or psychological world in a certain context (Creswell, 2014). In contrast to positivism, interpretivism is concerned with the understanding of human behaviour rather than exploration (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The ontological perspective of interpretivism is based on critical reality and constructionism, suggesting that multiple realities exist that may vary over contexts and time, thus, the realities are context bound (Creswell, 2014). Hence, reality is understood as subjective, i.e., based on perceptions and experiences that varies between individuals (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This implies that the researcher is only presenting one version of social reality and therefore, the reality that is presented should not be considered as definitive (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, constructionism views social entities and categories, such as culture, as socially constructed and constantly negotiated by social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2015), which implies that knowledge is available only through social actors (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In the current study, this perspective is particularly evident in the view of gender norms as socially and culturally constructed.

Interpretivism is distinguished by its humanistic, subjective, and qualitative characteristics (Creswell, 2014), concerned with subjective and shared meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Since the aim of the study concerns motivations, gender identity and personal ideas and values, it is deemed appropriate to approach the issue through a qualitative methodology that is in line with the research philosophy.

Qualitative methodology is characterised by its focus on analysis of words and visual data, close researcher involvement with the subjects of an investigation, contextual understanding, and rich data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This methodology is also believed to contribute to the value of the research, since the literature review showed that issues related to the intersection of gender and pro-environmental consumption have to date been limited to studies using quantitative methods

to a large extent. By applying a qualitative research approach, the researcher is able to produce a more in-depth analysis and interpretation of spoken words to gain an understanding of the participants' inherent values, attitudes and behaviour that is relevant to the research aim (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews

Guided by the formulated research questions as stated in the introduction, the most appropriate form of interview methods is arguably the subjectivist interview research approach, concerned with revealing the authentic experiences of the participants through interview questions regarding the participants' perceptions, understandings, perspectives, and emotions rather than statistical information or hard facts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Rather, this method allows for underlying thoughts, attitudes, and personal experiences to be explored and understood more in depth using a semi-structured interview technique. In addition, this method is in line with the interpretivist epistemological position that is described as inter-subjective, recognizing the involvement and interference of the researcher in co-creating understanding with the respondents, allowing the researcher to interpret and combine the empirical evidence with logical reasoning (Creswell, 2014). Other useful methods for this purpose include the use of focus groups or group interviews that encourage group interaction, however, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, there is a possibility that the material will not accurately reflect the experiences of each participant since some participants may feel intimidated or simply unwilling to share their personal perspective in a group setting (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For this reason, individual interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for collecting empirical material.

Moreover, the relevant themes of motivational representation and gender associations in the context of pro-environmental consumption constitute the foundation for the interview guide (see appendix 1), consisting of several open questions related to the themes that emerged from the theoretical framework. Producing this type of interview guide is particularly useful for semi-structured interviews with the main advantage being that the materials are systematic and comprehensive while the researcher maintains the freedom to deviate slightly from the prepared interview questions, keeping the tone conversational and not too formal (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). One challenge of semi-structured interviews, however, is the possibility that participants interpret the questions differently and therefore provides responses that may be difficult to compare (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Having said that, given the limited resources and scope of this study, the semi-structured interview method is deemed superior when compared to the unstructured and open interview approach that demands several extra rounds of analysis, since it lacks the systematic and comprehensive dimension (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

While the interview questions may be worded differently in the semi-structured interviews, the aim is to provide open questions that encourage more speech and a mixture of direct and indirect questions that are appropriate for sensitive topics (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As stated by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), gender issues are one example of a sensitive topic in business research that should ideally be approached by using a series of related indirect questions before entering the sensitive issues that the researcher is aiming to explore. This technique has been adopted in the current study when producing the interview guide and during the interviews by placing themes and prepared questions to be discussed in a loose order, approaching the potentially sensitive gender issues strategically. Additionally, the researcher actively attempts to ensure neutrality by avoiding leading questions that may influence the participants' responses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Purposive sampling

In essence, the research topic will be explored through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews, limited to a purposive sample of 6 Swedish cisgender men aged 25-65. This form of purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that ensures that those included in the sample are relevant to the posed research questions, particularly useful in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In addition, it is believed to be an appropriate sampling method in the current study since it allows for the researcher to ensure variety in the sample so that the members differ slightly from each other in terms of characteristics (Bryman & Bell, 2015), for instance, by including participants of different age groups, geographic locations, and professional careers. Such general information and practical details may help to contextualize the participants' answers (Bryman & Bell, 2015). While purposive sampling, being a non-probability method, does not allow generalization, it is believed to contribute to the overall accuracy of the findings since this slight variety in the sample ensures that different perspectives and experiences relevant to the research questions may be explored.

In terms of sample size, there is no set numerical requirement in qualitative studies but rather, the aim is to reach theoretical saturation in which further data acquisition is not deemed necessary (Bryman & Bell, 2015). While saturation is difficult to justify or explain, a set number of required participants does not serve a purpose in qualitative studies, according to Bryman and Bell (2015). Nonetheless, a larger sample size is believed to be required depending on the scope of the study and whether comparisons between groups within the sample will be made (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Since the focus of the current study is to understand the motivations, beliefs and perceptions of a specific consumer group, no further group comparisons will be carried out, but rather comparisons between the individual experiences shared. Analysing the rich material of qualitative research also tends to be more time-consuming, which helps to justify smaller sample sizes when compared to quantitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, since the scope of this thesis is limited in terms of time and resources, the relatively small number of interviews carried out can in part be justified, although it may be one of the main limitations of the study. Instead, emphasis is placed on gaining deep and rich insights that is contributing to enhancing the understanding of the studied topic.

Data collection process

Due to the different geographical locations of the participants, all interviews took place digitally via video conference tool Zoom. The main challenge of video conference interviews, however, could be the potential of technical difficulties that may disrupt both the interview and the recording of it (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, each participant was informed about the format and encouraged to secure stable internet connection and to try the chosen video call program prior to the scheduled interviews as a measure to avoid technical difficulties and interruptions. The participants were also asked and agreed to have the interview recorded, using both audio and video. The use of video recordings is believed to be useful not only for interpreting the interaction between the participant and the interviewer (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), but it is also an effective way to simulate an in-person interview scenario. Being allowed to visibly see each other throughout the interview, it is likely to have contributed to a more natural and comfortable dialogue. This is perhaps particularly desirable when aiming to explore sensitive topics and the participants' personal experiences. In contrast to telephone interviewing, recording audio only, video conference tools make it possible to observe body language and physical responses to certain questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, video recording with audio allowed for the researcher to be fully present during the interview with the advantage of not having to keep extensive written notes, advantageous for identifying

and asking relevant follow-up questions and probing questions without such distractions (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Thematic analysis

The material that was conducted through the interviews was used for thematic analysis which allows for data to be coded and interpreted in reference to the research questions and existing literature (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The analysis of the material was produced by following the six phases for thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases entail familiarization with the data and initial coding, followed by search, review and labelling of emergent themes before producing the analysis report in a way that tells the overall story of the relevant findings through selected extracts.

To begin with, the recorded interviews were transcribed, word by word, which is time-consuming but an effective way for the researcher to get familiar with the material (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Transcription allows for a more thorough and correct examination of the responses (Bryman & Bell, 2015) which makes it worthwhile and manageable, especially since the sample size of the current study is somewhat limited. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), immersion in the material is critical and involves repeated and active reading, i.e. being attentive to meaning and patterns while re-reading the transcripts. Before developing themes, the initial coding phase allowed for the researcher to systematically code interesting features of the data around the research themes. Moreover, when working through the material, coding may be performed manually or using software programmes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Due to the depth and breadth of the empirical material, the NVivo 12 Pro software was used to efficiently organise the coded data using relevant tags and labels. Initially, the material was coded into 22 different codes. Subsequently, the codes were sorted into potential themes and sub-themes, of which the relationships and levels are visually represented in an initial thematic map (see Figure 1 below).

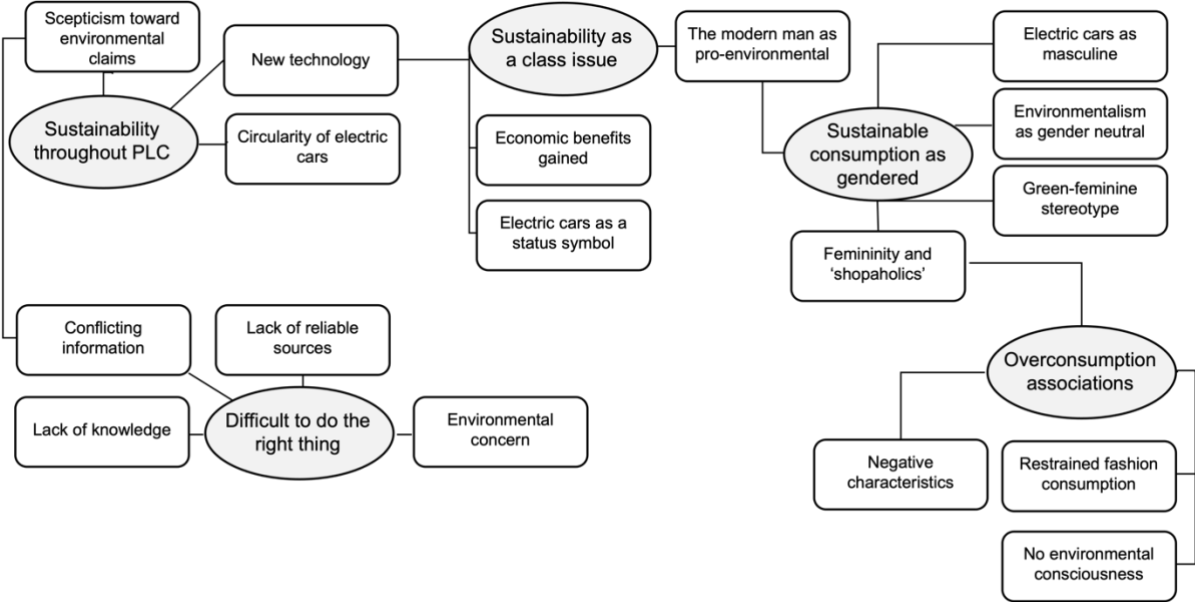


Figure 1: Initial Thematic Map

The initial thematic map was then reviewed further to ensure that the included themes are coherent, meaningful, clear and distinct from other individual themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved re-structuring of some of the themes and codes, with some themes merging and other to be eliminated due to lack of supporting data. In this phase, the individual themes must

also be considered in relation to the entire data set to ensure that the thematic map reflects the overall data in an accurate manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In turn, this resulted in three clearly labelled themes, defined and refined so that it reflects the narrative of each theme, but also in relation the overall map of themes emergent from the material. The three final themes were labelled *rationality as motivational representation*, *the paradox of the green-feminine stereotype* and *the modern man and status* and are discussed in depth in the subsequent chapter.

When producing the write-up of the analysis, the researcher followed the suggestion of Braun and Clarke (2006) in attempting to provide a coherent, non-repetitive and logical account of the story of the data. This was done by including sufficient data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence and significance of each theme, linking it to both the research questions and literature review. For instance, extracts that were believed to communicate the essence of each demonstrated argument were supported by particularly vivid examples, such as direct quotes from the transcripts.

Ethical considerations

While no written agreement was produced, all participants were informed about the research project prior to the interviews. Not only was aim and background of the study briefly explained, but also how the information provided by the participants would be used for analysis of the studied phenomenon. As stated by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), this ensures the participants' informed consent to participate in the study. The participants were also informed that the interview would take approximately 90 minutes but were asked to set aside up to 120 minutes since the length of the interview were set to depend on the length of the answers and that long answers were indeed encouraged for the purpose of conducting rich and insightful information.

Moreover, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) highlight the importance of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. In the current study, all participants have been anonymized by removing any personal identification from the material and any personal information regarding the individuals will remain confidential. Following the recommendation made by Bryman and Bell (2015), participants will be referred to in the report by their assigned pseudonyms (Participant A-F).

Quality of research

When assessing the quality of the study, the researcher referred to the concept of trustworthiness, known as one of the key criteria of qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The concept of trustworthiness provides an alternative to quantitative measures of reliability and validity, considering the four main dimensions of *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. Although the criteria were assessed after having conducted the study, all dimensions were considered throughout the process.

Firstly, credibility was ensured through member validation in which a selection of the interview participants was presented with an account of the findings. This allowed the researcher to confirm a strong correspondence and validity between the presented findings and the participants' experiences and perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Since qualitative studies do not aim to provide generalizable results, transferability of the study has instead been achieved through thick descriptions of both a literature review and the depth of the findings. In turn, this allows for other researchers to make judgements of whether the findings of the study may apply to other research contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The detailed descriptions of the research process are also believed to contribute to the dependability as all

steps, including the problem formulation and decisions related to the research design, appear logical and traceable (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In addition, providing a copy of the interview guide also strengthens the dependability of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Lastly, the study was conducted in accordance with confirmability, making clear links between findings and interpretations to the empirical material. However, while interpretations of the empirical material are perceived subjective, the interpretive and constructionist researcher perspective imply that the various interpretations that may emerge from the same data are all potentially meaningful (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Nevertheless, the analysis was produced based on the interview transcripts and research notes as well as previous literature and theories.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Rationality as motivational representation

In contrast to the established green-feminine stereotype (Brough et al., 2016), all participants expressed a strong concern for the environment and a willingness to make consumer decisions in line with this concern. For instance, several of the male consumers participating in this study listed the environment as one of their most important political issues. Moreover, despite socialization processes that tend to influence men to value hierarchy and domination over the natural environment above values of egalitarianism (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020), this was not a particularly evident theme in the current study's context of pro-environmental consumption. The view expressed by the participants aligns with the idea presented by Littlefield (2010), that in contrast to stereotypical expectations, masculine expressions may also take shape through a deep care for the environment and other living beings. According to the participants, environmental sustainability is believed to become even more important as time progresses and that neglecting the environment as an expression of masculinity is seemingly an outdated idea. As stated by Grønhøj and Ölander (2007), male consumers are not exclusively neglecting environmental issues more than their female counterparts. Some of the participants even expressed an awareness and guilt as they feel as if they are not practicing their concern in full, knowing that there is much more that they could do by for example educating themselves on how the products that they consume are produced and the materials used.

Having said that, when asked about gender associations in relation to pro-environmental consumption behaviour, the participants expressed a slight inclination towards association femininity and thus, carefully confirming the existence of the green-feminine stereotype (Brough et al., 2016). However, the participants were careful to mention any strong associations with gender in general and some made sure to distinct their own beliefs and interpretations from what they believed other's might think. For example, the green-feminine stereotype itself was questioned by some, suggesting that it exists but is likely based on false claims and prejudice rather than representing reality. In doing so, the participants confirmed the findings of Brough et al (2016) in that the cognitive link between pro-environmentalism and femininity exist, but on the other hand the participants emphasized that they personally would not necessarily make that connection consciously. For instance, while many of the participants confirmed the green-feminine stereotype, not all confessed to holding it themselves:

“No, I do not associate with it, but I can probably imagine that it is interpreted more feminine. Because if you sit in a very masculine seat, it can be perceived a little weak, a little fuzzy, a little 'oh, shopping should be green and nice'. That if you

are a very masculine driven person and look at this, I think it can be perceived that way.” – Participant F

Quotes such as the one above illustrates that while there may be a perceived link between traditional masculinity and a negative view of pro-environmental consumption, male consumers that do not necessarily identify themselves as very ‘masculine driven’ will oppose such ideas. In doing so, they practice their own gender identity through, in this case, gendered consumption behaviours, as such ‘repeated acts’ are what ultimately constructs gender from the perspective of Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity. Similarly, expressing negative attitudes toward pro-environmental consumption may arguably constitute an act that allows ‘masculine driven’ men to practice their gender identity, adhering to expectations and convention traditionally associated with masculinity while simultaneously contributing to maintaining such norms (Cabantous et al, 2016).

Interestingly, the findings of the current study are also in line with the study of Grønhøj and Ölander (2007) who did not see a gender difference in attitudes toward pro-environmental consumption, but a clear gender divide in how they practiced their pro-environmentalism. In the context of this study, this is particularly evident in how the male participants engages in and motivates pro-environmental consumption by balancing such acts with traits associated with masculinity.

To begin with, the participants showed a strong reliance on rationality in evaluating the environmental impact of their consumption. While there seem to be a consensus among the participants that pro-environmental consumption can be a tool for combating or reducing environmental issues, the participants generally questioned the effectiveness of such behaviour, calling for rationality, reliable standards and clear information to base their decisions on. Since rationality is an attribute that has traditionally been ascribed to masculinity (Gupta & Gentry, 2016), it could be argued that this type of reasoning among male consumers is a result of complicated and on-going socialization processes that encourages men to act on rationality to a greater extent than women (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Gupta & Gentry, 2016). While rationality has been ascribed primarily to masculinity, it constitutes a rather stereotypical view of gender differences in decision-making and in a consumption context, it becomes of great interest to consider the impact that gender performativity may have on the expressed motivational representation among consumers. For example, expressing motivational representation in line with existing gender norms, i.e., rationality, can arguably be interpreted as a form of gender performativity in which cis men are adhering to the masculine norms and values in place (Butler, 1990). In doing so, they are subconsciously or consciously voicing opinions and attitudes toward rationality and thereby establishing and practicing their masculine gender identity. Similarly, feminine consumers may voice a care for the environment over rationality when motivating pro-environmental consumption yet this can be interpreted merely as a normative expression of femininity and may not necessarily explain actual motivators. In other words, it is possible that consumers rely on rationality in the moment of purchase equally although when asked, they may actively adhere to traditional expectations associated with femininity or masculinity by expressing motivational representation in line with one’s gender identity.

Furthermore, one of the most prominent themes that emerged in conversations with the participants may also be interpreted as a barrier to pro-environmental consumption. In relation to the willingness to make informed and rational choices, the perceived lack of reliable information that incorporates all sustainability aspects of a product or service seems to be

resulting in a reluctance to engage in pro-environmental consumption, rooted in part in a scepticism toward environmental claims. The main argument being that it is impossible to determine the environmental impact of their consumption decisions because environmental claims tend to leave out aspects of the entire product lifecycle assessment of the product in question. In addition, participants indicated a frustration and scepticism toward the concept of pro-environmental consumption by referring to the contradicting information and beliefs taking place in the current environmental debate:

“You actually do not know. Someone says that petrol is the worst and someone is sure that diesel is the worst and someone says that electricity is wasteful depending on how it is produced. No, there is no one who you dare to trust in this. [...] What I am looking for is that you can weigh in all aspects of the environment, everything from how the product is produced, what material in general, whether it is clothes or cars, everything. That everything should be weighed in, how it is produced and what material, how the energy consumption is during the time it is used and how it can be reused when it can no longer be used. A unity for that would be good, so that one can understand.” – Participant A

Therefore, the ability to assess the sustainability on all levels of the product lifecycle was heavily emphasized by all participants of this study, calling for a more in-depth analysis of all elements involved. According to the participants, this needs to be done in a reliable way in order to allow for them to make an informed decision. However, although the participants recognized that pro-environmental consumption may lead to a positive change and showed a strong willingness to engage in such consumption behaviour, they simultaneously argued that the real change must be made at higher levels, shifting the responsibility in part to political forces and corporations. Additionally, all participants adhered to a technological optimism and a technofix mentality to some extent, which according to Mobley and Kilbourne (2013) may further foster a reluctance to change their consumption behaviour significantly. Taken together, this in turn may constitute yet another barrier for the male participants’ engagement in pro-environmental consumption, indicating that they are motivated only by actions that they believe are truly impactful. As such, what is perceived feminine in this context is not necessarily the expression of environmental concern through consumption, but rather the basis for examining what constitutes such practices:

“It could be that girls are better at signalling how good they are at caring for the environment, without further thought. That somehow, I still feel that it has become more 'girly' to care about the polar bears and show empathy for animals. But it's perhaps more what is symbolized than the actual impact. [...] It's my gut feeling, but I don't think men shop organically to symbolize to the same extent as girls.” – Participant C

Since rationality, scientific information and hard facts are associated with masculinity, basing consumption decisions on pure environmental marketing claims may be seen as a more feminine approach, i.e., perceived as naive, superficial or uninformed by engaging in pro-environmental signalling ‘without further thought’. This perception is somewhat supported by Tung et al. (2017) who found that green self-identity served as the sole motivator to engage in pro-environmental consumption among female consumers whereas male consumers were motivated by the cognitive aspects such as responsibility, emphasizing the value and necessity over the identity-induced images or messages that female consumers were believed to be more likely to be persuaded by. Taken together, these findings portray feminine consumers as

concerned with external validation and signalling as basis for pro-environmental consumption. While such claims may not necessarily be reflective of female consumer behaviour in reality, it reveals ideas and perceptions that may have contributed to constructing the green-feminine stereotype.

In turn, when this type of behaviour is performed it exhibits an achievement of ambitious standards of care, for the environment and other living beings, which is strongly linked to perceived femininity (Godin & Langlois, 2021). Pro-environmental consumption then becomes an act of gender maintenance and gender performativity for consumers that identify as feminine. Thus, it could be argued that engagement in pro-environmental consumption is interpreted as a gendered practice by the participants of this study, not because it necessarily signals environmental concern, but because it signals a desire for external validation of a pro-environmental identity that allows feminine consumers to subconsciously signal and practice gender, using Butler's (1990) terms. Arguably, these findings help explain why women show a stronger willingness to express environmental concerns by engaging in pro-environmental consumption behaviour (Bulut et al., 2017; Dobscha, 1993). Similarly, the findings illustrate how gender norms may influence consumers to practice masculinity by disassociating themselves with what they perceive as inauthentic pro-environmental signalling and by placing emphasis on the factual, evidence-based, environmental impact of their consumption behaviour.

The paradox of the green-feminine stereotype

Although the green-feminine stereotype was in part confirmed by the participants, it appeared as if the pre-existing connotations and gender associations ascribed to the two product categories of fashion and cars overshadowed the influence of the green-feminine stereotype. In fact, this study supports Tung et al (2017) in suggesting that the findings of Brough et al. (2016) regarding the green-feminine stereotype may not be representative nor as prominent across various product categories.

Firstly, the participants placed great emphasis on sustainability assessment throughout the product life cycle and object to the idea that truly pro-environmental products even exist. Instead, the most pro-environmental consumption one can engage in, according to them, is restrained consumption. On that note, it could be argued that since the terminology around pro-environmental consumption is often referred to as consumption of ecological, environmentally friendly or 'green' products, perhaps it fails to account for other forms of pro-environmental consumption behaviour, such as restrained consumption or re-using products over time, a type of approach to consumption that was prominent among the participants of this study. Because contrary to Bloodhart and Swim's (2020) claim that reduction of consumption is perceived as more feminine because excessive consumption has been found to be associated with stereotypically masculine traits of wealth and status, the participants of this study provided contrasting experiences in the context of fashion and apparel, a product category that have traditionally been strongly associated with femininity (Gupta & Gentry, 2016; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

For example, the participants suggest that they engage in and prefer restricted fashion and apparel consumption, placing value on product quality and the possibility to re-wear the pieces over a long period of time. According to the participants, this behaviour is grounded in a lack of interest for fashion and a needs-oriented approach to fashion and apparel. This approach is in line with the previous findings of Gupta and Gentry (2016), suggesting that male consumers tend to engage in an 'urgent buying behaviour' of fashion items, for example by avoiding in-store browsing as a way to adhere to the traits of achievement orientation and competitiveness

that has traditionally been ascribed to masculinity. For instance, most participants agreed that purchasing clothes constituted a chore-like task that they wanted to place as little time and energy on as possible, with most participants suggesting that they do not conduct much research beforehand, if any, and is looking to efficiently solve their need rather than engaging in a pleasurable experience:

“It's a necessary expense that does not give me much joy, I think. It's a bit like paying the bill. You must do it, but it does not give me much. But I need to have a roof over my head, and I need to wear clothes. [...] It is a need, that must be purchased. And hopefully as rarely as possible. My trend when it comes to clothes is that I buy clothes and then I use them until they fall apart or no longer fit at all.”
– Participant E

Furthermore, they all shared the experience of re-wearing clothes until the pieces lost their function. For this reason, the participants placed value on both function and quality when engaging in fashion consumption, with the aim to be able to wear the items for as long as possible while simultaneously avoiding the ‘dread’ of having to purchase new items. According to Gupta and Gentry (2016), this typically male approach to fashion consumption allows men to balance the masculine consumer role in a context that is associated with femininity by explicitly placing importance on traditionally masculine values such as rationality and function over the traditionally feminine values of body and appearance. Moreover, the participants of this study exclusively explained how they aligned with this male shopping behaviour which Holt and Thompson (2004) would perhaps classify as an illustrative example of dramatic structuring of everyday consumption, i.e., applying masculine traits into activities that have traditionally been associated with femininity. Thus, it could be argued that this type of male approach to fashion consumption is, at least in part, rooted in ideas about gender expectations.

Moreover, while the participants did not list pro-environmentalism as the core reason for engaging in restrained fashion consumption, they all pointed to overconsumption of fashion as completely unsustainable and a type of behaviour that they clearly wanted to disassociate from, for various reasons. Not only because they interpreted it as environmentally unsustainable, but also as a waste of money and resources that could and should be placed on something less ‘unnecessary’. In fact, the participants expressed that they looked down upon consumers that engage in over-consumption of clothes and associated the behaviour with negative characteristics such as acting stupid, clueless, irresponsible, wasteful, unhealthy, insecure and egocentric. Additionally, the participants showed a lack of understanding for this behaviour as it appeared unclear to them why one would engage in such behaviour. However, some raised the question if it has to do with an increased pressure placed on women in terms of having a range of clothes to display, a female form of expression or that fashion constitute a form of status among women. Because in contrast to the green-feminine stereotype, this behaviour was strongly associated with femininity in the belief that it is more common for feminine consumers to purchase and own a large quantity of clothes:

“I think the majority are probably more feminine, but there are probably men who overconsume as well, but not to the same extent. You rarely meet a man on the street with 7 shopping bags in his hands, it is rare. Many men I think are a little more like me, they do not have to be equally extreme, but it is a necessary evil to have to buy clothes for them as well. [...] No, otherwise you might be a man but with a different sexual orientation, that's what I'm thinking.” – Participant B

Considering the traditional view of fashion and appearance as a preoccupation that has been ascribed both femininity and homosexuality (Gupta & Gentry, 2016), it is likely that the negative attitudes toward fashion consumption that is held by the participants is expressed and experienced in order to, consciously or subconsciously, disassociate themselves from such practices. In doing so, gender is maintained and performed through attitudes and behaviours that relies on social conventions (Rittenhofer & Gatrell (2012). Thus, the findings of this study support Gupta and Gentry (2016) in suggesting that disassociation of fast fashion consumption is potentially a tool for male consumers to practice gender identity maintenance. As highlighted by Bloodhart and Swim (2020), socialization processes is the source of gender differences in values. Hence, in a similar way that environmental concern is linked to these complex processes that influence how men and women stereotypically think about the natural environment (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020), it could be argued that gender differences in values that influence how men and women relate to body and appearance is likely to occur through similar socialization processes.

Similarly, the product category of cars has traditionally been associated with masculinity (Sovacool et al., 2019), an idea that the participants of this study supported by explaining how cars still constitute an interest that is dominated by men. It is a topic of conversation that the participants more often have with other men, but they also suggest that it is generally more accepted and aspirational to spend large amounts of money on cars among men. As such, it is not seen as ‘unnecessary’ spending in the same way that they perceived spending money on fashion items. Moreover, it was clear from the interviews that the participants did not necessarily view electric cars as entirely pro-environmental due to the concern of the product’s life cycle, but rather, as the less detrimental alternative to a new non-electric car. Therefore, the participants agreed that owning an electric car does not primarily signal pro-environmental concern. Instead, it was seen as a sign of wealth, success and status as well as an interest in new technology, traits that have all been found to be traditionally associated with masculinity (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Mobley & Kilbourne, 2013). Hence, in line with previous research by Sovacool (2019), electric cars were generally associated with masculinity in a similar way that non-electric cars were, for being a type of product that constitutes a typically male-oriented field of interest that involves both the traditional view of cars as masculine, but also in terms of association with innovation and new technology:

“It still feels like men care more about cars and car characteristics than women do, if you are to draw the big brushstrokes. I think so. Because it feels like men are discussing cars more with each other. That if I were to know how fast the new Tesla is accelerating 0 to 100, I will not call a female acquaintance. It's an inheritance that cars are simply male gadgets. [...] Maybe there are more men who are simply willing to spend the money on cars. [...] But it may be that you subconsciously draw the parallel, new cool technology - men. It can be that simple.” – Participant C

Thus, contrary to the green-feminine stereotype (Brough et al., 2016), electric cars were to some extent associated with masculinity, despite being referred to as the less environmentally harmful product within the category of cars. What is interesting in this case is that it is seemingly the underlying motivators behind pro-environmental consumption that determine whether it is associated with masculinity or femininity, and not the behaviour itself. Since electric cars currently is not believed to be consumed in the name of pro-environmentalism, the behaviour is not aligning with the green-feminine stereotype. In a similar way, restrained fashion consumption with a focus on quality and functionality is arguably a pro-environmental approach to fashion, however, the motivational representation among male consumers appears

to not to be grounded primarily in pro-environmental concern and the behaviour is therefore not necessarily associated with femininity.

In summary, when compared to the influence of the green-feminine stereotype, the participants showed a much stronger tendency of gender maintenance in relation to the two gendered product categories. While it has previously been suggested that men are more concerned with gender-identity maintenance than women (Brough et al., 2016), these findings may contribute to the understanding of how male consumer practice gender-identity maintenance in relation to the green-feminine stereotype. For example, it could be argued that the participants practiced gender maintenance in showing a willingness to disassociate almost entirely from fashion consumption and not to mention, engagement in fast fashion and over-consumption which was strongly associated with femininity. This is particularly notable since in both product categories included in this study, associations with masculinity were connected to what the participants perceived as the more pro-environmental alternative: electric cars and restrained fashion consumption, yet the participants initially agreed that engaging in pro-environmental consumption is seen as a slightly more feminine behaviour. Arguably, this makes for an interesting paradox in which there are conflicting stereotypical ideas about gender: that it is considered feminine to engage in pro-environmental consumption, but also that unsustainable over-consumption of fashion is interpreted as a stereotypically feminine behaviour while owning electric cars is associated with traditionally masculine traits and interests.

The modern man and status

As previously discussed, the motivational representation of the participants is seemingly not primarily related to pro-environmental concern, but rather, other motivators that may constitute forms of disassociation with stereotypically feminine practices and values. For example, rooted in the belief that the automobile industry is currently going through major shifts toward electrification, some participants expressed that what is appealing with electric cars is the economic benefits gained in terms of tax reductions, cost-effective fuel consumption, the second-hand value of electric cars and the sense of having made a good investment in general. Again, a rather rational motivational representation that does not convey much emotive appeal, in line with the previous findings on cognitive involvement as a male motivator of pro-environmental consumption (Tung et al., 2017). Furthermore, when the male consumers participating in this study explained how they engaged in or aspired to engage in what they perceive as pro-environmental consumption behaviour, they highlighted other motivators that are stereotypically associated with masculinity, including not only functionality, quality, effectiveness but also status and a fascination for new technology.

Through this motivational representation, the participants collectively portrayed an aspirational image of a 'modern man' in which a new, arguably pro-environmental, form of masculinity emerged that appeared to be rooted mainly in status and modernity. For instance, the participants suggested that the view of pro-environmentalism have somewhat shifted to become less feminine over time, as it is now believed to be less strongly linked to femininity than previously. The participants further suggested that the image of pro-environmentalists has drastically changed as it is now evident across all gender identities and political directions, perhaps as the political issue has become more accepted and gained a lot of attention in recent years. As a result, pro-environmental consumption is seemingly becoming not only acceptable among those who identify as male, but can even be seen as aspirational:

"I don't see anything negative about those who consume pro-environmentally. I look more negatively at the opposite side, so to speak. [...] Maybe there's a 'hippie'

stereotype, possibly. But I am starting to move away from it because I feel that it is becoming more implemented in society that you should buy eco-friendly. [...] One who cares about driving an electric car, possibly a more city-person that likes to grow vegetables and stuff themselves, for example.” – Participant F

This finding is of great interest since it helps to explain the weak relationship between the concept of greenness and femininity indicated by the participants, i.e., the relationship that is the very foundation of Brough’s et al (2016) idea about the green-feminine stereotype. However, the weakened view of the green-feminine stereotype may also be a result of a recent shift in what is considered to be ‘the modern man’, because emerging through this new-found importance placed on pro-environmentalism in society, is arguably a change in what constructs the image and expectations of modern masculinity. As suggested by Littlefield (2010), multiple expressions of masculinities may emerge within contexts that have pre-existing gender associations, and in contrast to stereotypical expectations, these may involve family-related values, social connections and a care for the environment. For instance, according to some of the participants of this study, the modern man is concerned with the environment in a way that rather exhibits a positive image of consciousness and sense of modernity:

“It feels a bit like 'modern man' to buy seasonal goods and be a little more aware when shopping for things. [...] I still think of men who just insist on eating meat and who should think it's gay to eat vegetables... Come on, how cool are they? Nobody likes them anymore. While a man who prepares a tasty vegetarian starter and then leaves with his Tesla - it's someone you think: wow! He has more status in 2022 than he who drives a muscle-car.” – Participant C

The above quote illustrates how there is a direct link between a positive view of pro-environmentalism and the concept of status, which was one of the major themes that emerged from the empirical material. Therefore, it is significant to consider the role that class and status plays in constructing the aspirational ‘modern man’ image in relation to masculinity and pro-environmentalism. Because as expressed by most participants of this study, associating pro-environmentalism with femininity is believed to be a rather outdated idea that is not necessarily an accurate representation of environmental concern today, although the cognitive link may still exist among those that may hold a less progressive view of masculinity. In turn, a more modern version of masculinity has emerged that appears to be rooted mainly in the participants’ associations of such behaviour with status. While the concept of status takes many forms, previous literature points to the relevance of status as a result of both desirable social qualities as well as financial positions (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Borau et al., 2021; Shang & Peloza, 2016; Sovacool et al., 2019).

Firstly, one of the main themes emerging from the interviews was the idea of pro-environmental consumption as a class issue, referring to the concept of economic status. This was raised on multiple occasions, across different product categories discussed. For example, the class issue was voiced in relation to the price margin on pro-environmental products which is believed to nudge consumers that are primarily driven by economic restraints to choose the less environmental product and vice versa. Thus, supporting Lazaric et al (2019) in that pro-environmental consumption is associated with income and education as well, the quote below demonstrates how the participants generally reasoned when discussing pro-environmental consumption as a perceived class issue:

“It can be a bit of a class issue as well. Because in many cases, the environmentally friendly alternatives are often a little more expensive [...] If it is a Swedish product, Swedish meat for example that I consider to be more environmentally friendly, then you have a higher margin on those products, which means that they are not chosen perhaps to the same extent. So, a class question, I think that it is a bit. And it probably has something to do with education as well. It is not uncommon for those who are more educated to earn a little more.” – Participant A

Based on the findings of this study, it could be argued that by engaging in pro-environmental consumption one may signal a higher economic status, simply due to the higher prices placed on such products. For example, this was evident in how the participants collectively seemed to motivate their engagement in restrained fashion consumption by placing emphasis on quality over price when making purchases. Similarly, the topic of economic status was also raised in the context of electric vehicles, with all participants recognizing that ownership of such cars signal wealth due to their large price tags. Simultaneously, all participants expressed strong desirability for owning electric vehicles themselves, motivated both by the possible economic benefits mentioned previously as well as the desirable ‘modern man’ image. According to the participants, however, not everyone is able to purchase such a car and therefore, it is primarily a sign of economic status rather than a sign of pro-environmentalism:

“Yes, it signals that they have money. He can afford it. Above all. He or they can afford to have an electric car. They signal it right now because they are so expensive. Namely that they have the capital to buy an electric car [...] Pure electric cars so far have a certain price range so that not everyone can afford it. So therefore, a pure electric car becomes more connected to having a higher financial status.” – Participant E

This is particularly interesting because as previously discussed, it appeared as if the participants perceived the practice of signalling pro-environmentalism as feminine. However, while the desire for external signalling and validation of a pro-environmental identity was interpreted as feminine, there is seemingly a desire among masculine driven consumers to signal and validate a status-induced identity in a similar way. As illustrated by Sovacool et al. (2019), men attach more importance to status, sex appeal and ownership over safety features when purchasing a car. In turn, this may indicate a stronger concern for self-identity over cognitive aspects within the context of cars as a product category, contrasting the previous findings of Tung et al. (2017). This indicates that the motivational representation in relation to self-identity and cognitive involvement depend on not only the product category, but also whether the self-identity in question is primarily related to pro-environmental concern or status as a concept.

Secondly, it is possible that the pro-environmental ‘modern man’ image is in part based on status in the context of desirable social qualities as well. As suggested by Borau et al. (2021), men’s engagement in pro-environmental consumption may signal altruism, parental care and their potential and commitment in romantic relationships, which was found to enhance men’s status as potential long-term partners. Similarly, Shang and Peloza (2016) claimed that male consumers were motivated to engage in ethical behaviour only when association with femininity was perceived positive to the potential romantic partners. Having said that, while such qualities may have contributed to constructing and normalizing the modern image of a pro-environmental masculinity, this view of status did not emerge as a prominent theme in the current study. Instead, the emphasis placed on status was predominantly referring to class and

economic status which is more in line with Sovacool et al's (2019) and Bloodhart and Swim's, (2020) findings on status-signalling as male motivational representation.

Furthermore, the seemingly male emphasis placed on status over pro-environmentalism can also be linked to the idea of hierarchy as valued over egalitarianism, which is a view that has been traditionally ascribed to masculinity through complex socialization processes (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020). Arguably, placing value on status indicates a desire to achieve a superior position in some sense. Thus, acting on these types of values could be regarded as a way to practice gender, simply by adhering to values of hierarchy between groups and individuals based on status.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how the motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption of cis men is influenced by the green-feminine stereotype and how pro-environmental consumer behaviour is a performative act of gender identity by applying Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, demonstrated through the two product categories of fashion and cars. This study has identified three main themes that contribute to the understanding of these consumer experiences, namely: *rationality as motivational representation*, *the paradox of the green-feminine stereotype* and *the modern man and status*.

Firstly, the motivational representation among male consumers were found to be influenced by the green-feminine stereotype in various ways, perhaps most prominently through disassociation from the perceived feminine practice of inauthentic pro-environmental signalling. For example, this was demonstrated by an expressed motivation to engage in pro-environmental consumption primarily based on rationality in the form of factual and evidence-based information on the environmental impact. In essence, male consumers appear to be motivated only by actions that they perceive to be truly impactful and environmental marketing claims do not serve as sufficient conviction. They were found to motivate their pro-environmental consumption through placing importance of traditionally masculine values including functionality, quality and effectiveness but also status and a fascination for new technology.

Furthermore, it is notable that the motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption is seemingly what determines the gender associations attached and not necessarily the behaviour itself. For instance, the motivational representation regarding consumption of electric cars are not primarily grounded in pro-environmentalism and for this reason it is not interpreted as a particularly feminine type of consumption. Similarly, a pro-environmental approach to fashion that involves restrained consumption with emphasis on quality and functionality is not motivated by pro-environmental concern and for this reason, the behaviour is not interpreted as feminine. Thus, the green-feminine stereotype appears to heavily influence male consumers, not to disassociate from pro-environmental consumption per se, but in how they express the motivational representation of such consumption. In turn, the findings of this study point to a paradox in which there are conflicting ideas about gender. While male consumers may recognize and confirm the existence of green-feminine stereotype, the gender associations with consumption of the pro-environmental alternative in both product categories evident in this study, i.e., electric cars and restrained fashion consumption, are strongly associated with masculinity, arguably in part for not being primarily motivated by pro-environmental concern.

Moreover, an integral part of the motivational representation found in the current study involves an aspirational perceived image of a pro-environmental ‘modern man’ that appears to be rooted in traditionally masculine associations of status, success and wealth. Interestingly, while male consumers may want to disassociate from the practice of pro-environmental signalling as a tool for confirming a pro-environmental self-image, a similar pattern emerged in how men typically motivate engagement in consumption through status-signalling of a modern man self-image. Since status-signalling may be practiced by male consumers through pro-environmental consumption of electric cars for example, this form of motivational representation arguably aligns with the green-feminine stereotype for being grounded in status over pro-environmental concern. In other words, the self-identity of the pro-environmental ‘modern man’ may be signalled through status-induced pro-environmental consumption. This in turn indicates that the motivational representation in relation to self-identity and cognitive involvement is dependent in part on the product category, but perhaps more significantly on the extent to which the self-identity in question is rooted in the feminine associated pro-environmental concern or the traditionally masculine concept of status.

It is evident from the findings of this study that the motivational representation is to a large extent based on values that have traditionally been associated with masculinity. Thus, the findings indicate that the motivational representation is at least in part grounded in expectations about gender. Moreover, when consumption practices and behaviour appear to be strongly associated with gender, engaging in such repeated acts is arguably a tool for practicing gender identity over time. From the perspective of Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity, it is through repeated acts that gender is constructed and maintained. For instance, the gender associations of pro-environmental concern are believed to stem from ideas about femininity and female gender roles. Therefore, when female consumers engage in pro-environmental consumption it may be interpreted as a form of signalling of environmental concern and ambitious standard of care, which in turn allows such consumers to practice gender. It is also through constant repetition of such acts that norms are reproduced (Cabantous, Gond, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). Similarly, consumers that do not identify as female are allowed to practice gender by disassociating with such practices that have strong associations with femininity. For example, in the context of the current study, expressing negative attitudes toward pro-environmental signalling or fashion consumption appear to be a tool for masculine driven men to practice traditional ideas about masculinity. This is done by opposing behaviour that is perceived feminine and by adhering to traditional gender roles that in turn are based on social conventions. Since gender is not necessarily practiced consciously (Butler, 1990), it is possible that consumption behaviour, motivational representation and reasoning approaches that have gendered associations are all different ways to subconsciously practice gender identity, as gender may be viewed as a set of behaviours and expectations that all people are influenced and socialized into from birth (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012).

In the context of pro-environmental consumption, the findings of this study illustrate how cis men practice gender through disassociating from feminine practices, including not only overconsumption of fashion and signalling of pro-environmental self-identity, but also by associating with masculine values of rationality and the image of the modern man. For instance, placing emphasis on rationality as a foundation for pro-environmental consumption decisions is a type of reasoning that is likely to be the result of socialization processes that have encouraged and continues to encourage cis men on how to act in accordance with their gender identity (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020; Gupta & Gentry, 2016). Thus, it could be argued that this reasoning constitute what Butler (1993) would refer to as the stylized repetition of acts through time, which is the very definition of gender according to her theory on gender performativity.

When cis men engage in such acts, it allows them to feel masculine and reproduce the gender that they identify as. In other words, expressing motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption that aligns with existing gender norms may be interpreted as a form of gender performativity.

Furthermore, male consumers were found to have a strong willingness to disassociate from overconsumption of fashion and the fast fashion industry, a consumption behaviour that they associate strongly with femininity. Instead, such consumers were found to hold a typically male approach to fashion consumption that, according to Gupta and Gentry (2016), allows cis men to balance the masculine consumer role in a context that is associated with femininity. This was, for example, achieved by placing emphasis on traditionally masculine values such as rationality and function over the traditionally feminine values of body and appearance. Through such acts, gender is maintained and performed through attitudes and behaviours that relies on social conventions (Rittenhofer & Gatrell (2012). Hence, the findings of this study support Gupta and Gentry (2016) in suggesting that disassociation of fast fashion consumption is a tool for male consumers to practice gender identity maintenance.

Similarly, the 'modern man' image that emerged from the current study is a particularly interesting case from the perspective of Bulter's (1990) theory of gender performativity. Because gender is subject to ongoing negotiations in relation to the norms in place, performativity helps to explain why gender roles and the attached expectations are difficult to change (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012). Associating with the status-induced modern man image may be regarded of as a form of gender identity maintenance for cis men, since the behaviour allows them to balance feminine values of environmental concern and care with stereotypically masculine traits of status, power and wealth (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020). Hence, while norms may be reiterated in new or unexpected ways, this is still done in relation to, or in opposition to, the already existing ideas and expectations about gender.

To conclude, this study has shown how cis men are influenced by the green-feminine stereotype in their motivational representation of pro-environmental consumption by balancing traditionally masculine traits and behaviour in a context that has been associated with femininity. In addition, pro-environmental consumption behaviour has been analysed as a performative act of gender identity, pointing to how disassociation or association with certain gendered behaviour and expectations allows for gender to be practiced and norms to be reproduced.

Implications of findings

The findings of the current study contribute to an enhanced understanding for how gender norms and associations influence consumers in the context of pro-environmental consumption. This may have implications not only for theory and future research, but also for society, marketers and businesses.

Firstly, the motivational representation of male consumers to engage in pro-environmental consumption found in the study may serve as basis for shaping effective marketing strategies. For instance, placing emphasis on traditionally masculine values such as rationality, functionality, quality and effectiveness but also status and new technology in marketing communication may be beneficial when marketing pro-environmental alternatives to cis men. This is believed to efficiently communicate and appeal to a target group that has been found to be reluctant to engage in such consumption practices (Bulut et al., 2017) and more concerned with gender-identity maintenance than their female counterparts (Brough et al., 2016).

Recognizing how the motivational representation is in part influenced by associations with gender further allows for marketers to cater to cis men that may subconsciously seek to balance the male consumer role in the pro-environmental context that has traditionally been associated with femininity. Additionally, drawing on the seemingly aspirational image of the pro-environmental ‘modern man’ also constitute an opportunity for marketers and businesses that may benefit from this identity and lifestyle project. As suggested by Arnould and Thompson (2005), advertising and media may be viewed institutions that produce such consumer lifestyle and identity instructions through placing marketplace ideologies and meaning into consumers’ acts, wants and aspirations. Thus, marketers and businesses of pro-environmental products and services may strategically work to continue to normalize the idea of pro-environmentalism as a masculine practice by reiterating to the modern man image.

The study has further demonstrated how Butlerian gender performativity can effectively be applied in a marketing and consumption context. By interpreting consumer behaviour and attitudes as normative expressions of gender, meaningful discussions in relation to stereotypical ideas about gender and gender roles have been allowed to emerge. In addition, applying the gender performativity perspective to consumer research is achieved by viewing marketing, media and advertising as societal and cultural forces that, along with consumer practices, contribute to the designation of gendered meanings and associations into acts that informs the ‘subjects’, i.e., the consumers. Since Butler does not explicitly point to such institutions as the main source of a normalizing framework, this perspective is believed to constitute the main theoretical implication of the current study, contributing to the development and application of Butler’s theory within consumer research.

From this perspective, it can also be argued that marketers, advertisers and businesses hold the power to influence how behaviours or acts are interpreted in terms of masculinity or femininity. While gender performativity explains in part why social gender roles and expectations are difficult to change (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012), it is such institutions that heavily influence the normalizing framework of societal and cultural forces (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In a similar way that masculine branding is believed to be more effective than traditional pro-environmental branding when targeting male consumers (Brough et al., 2016), placing emphasis on the masculine values that emerged in the participants’ motivational representation may not only act as an effective marketing strategy that increase purchase intention among an important target group, but it may also work to alter the feminine associations attached.

Furthermore, societal implications of this study include an enhanced understanding for the role that gender identity maintenance plays in encouraging sustainable lifestyles and consumption behaviour. With global sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations, understanding sustainable lifestyles and consumption practices constitute an urgent matter on a societal level (UN, 2022). As research point to the importance of gender in the conceptualization of sustainability and how gender may influence attitudes toward sustainable consumption (Dobscha & Prothero, 2012), recognizing how pro-environmental consumption is an act of gender performativity further helps to explain the gendered difference in reported sustainable consumption behaviour (Bulut et al., 2017; Rätty & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010). The findings of this study also contribute to understanding the motivational representation of a significant target group that may benefit political agendas and policy makers in nudging male consumers to engage in sustainable consumption behaviour.

Limitations and future research

Given the complexity of the concept of gender and consumption behaviour, the current study is limited in several aspects. To begin with, the study is limited to the perspective of cis consumers that identify as male. While the sample represent an important and under-studied consumer group in the context of pro-environmental consumption, future research should extend the sample by studying the phenomenon within other gender identities as well. This would provide an understanding of how the green-feminine stereotype may influence the motivational representation and how pro-environmental consumption is perceived an act of gender among a variety of gender identities, including trans gender and female consumers. This would be a particularly valuable contribution from the perspective of Butler (1993) that views gender as a fluid entity which take shape in various gender expressions that is not limited to cis normativity. In addition, one of the main limitations of this study is the narrow sample of Swedish men. While the empirical material conducted is perceived meaningful and relevant, it is suggested that future research explore whether the gender associations and motivational representation varies among cis men between different cultures and nationalities as ideas about gender norms and expectations are believed to be situational (Rittenhofer & Gatrell, 2012).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that the participants may not necessarily have expressed their true attitudes, perceptions and associations held. Since gender issues are referred to as a sensitive topic in business research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), it is possible that the participants consciously or subconsciously withheld some of their personal thoughts or ideas in a research setting. Controversial opinions or ideas, for example, may not have been voiced due to the sensitive nature of gender issues, but also in relation to the sensitivity of pro-environmentalism as a political issue. Furthermore, the study is limited to motivational representation, i.e., the type of motivation that is expressed by the participants. While the findings that emerged from the empirical material was found useful and valuable, it begs the question whether the expressed beliefs align with the actual male motivators of pro-environmental consumption. For example, the participants emphasized quality and functionality when assessing fashion items, however, this simply represents their perception of their own behaviour when in fact, it is possible that other motivators subconsciously weigh in or even take priority during the moment of purchase. Therefore, it is suggested that future research explore whether the motivational representation is an accurate reflection of the actual behaviour in a consumption setting and thereby contribute to a greater understanding of the studied phenomenon.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study demonstrated how pro-environmental consumption can be understood as an act of gender performativity and the influence of the green-feminine stereotype through the two product categories of fashion apparel that have traditionally been associated with femininity (Gupta & Gentry, 2016; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) and cars that have traditionally been associated with masculinity (Sovacool, Kester, Noel, & Zarazua de Rubens, 2019). Due to the pre-existing connotations related to the product categories, the current study showed how this strongly affects how consumers perceive and engage in such consumption. However, to further contribute to the understanding of the issue, it is suggested that future research explore the phenomenon within a product category or industry that is seemingly neutral with little to no pre-existing gender associations. This would allow for relevant comparisons and insights on the role that pre-existing gender associations of product categories play in influencing pro-environmental consumption as a gendered practice, but also in the motivational representation of such behaviour.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Theme 1: The green-feminine stereotype and pro-environmentalism

Pro-environmentalism

- In general, is environmental issues important to you? Why/why not?
- How is your concern/lack of concern practiced? In what ways?
- What are your thoughts on technology's ability to solve environmental issues?

Pro-environmental consumption

- Is your concern/lack of concern reflected in your consumption? Is consumption a tool for you to express your concerns?
- Please describe what sustainable consumption means to you.
- What do you think that engagement in pro-environmental consumption signals about a person?
- Do you associate pro-environmental consumption with gender? Why/why not?
- Do these associations affect your motivation to engage in it? Does it make you avoid/engage in such behaviour?
- If associated with femininity, do you perceive men that engage in pro-environmental consumption as more feminine/less masculine?

Theme 2: Masculinity and motivations in pro-environmental consumption

Product category: Fashion

- Tell me about how you buy clothes. How often? Where? Why do you buy clothes?
- What is important to you when you buy clothes? Do you allow plenty of time for it? How does it make you feel?
- What is sustainable apparel consumption to you? And is that something that you engage in? Why? If yes, how does sustainable apparel consumption make you feel?
- Do you think that over-consumption of clothes signals anything about the person? Do you associate any characteristics with buying a lot of clothes?
- Based on your previous answer, does this perception affect how you purchase clothes?
- Do you associate over-consumption of clothes with gender? Do you associate fast fashion consumption with gender? Why?
- Do you associate consumption of 'green' clothes with gender? E.g., organic cotton or recyclable fabrics.

Product category: Cars

- Do you own a car? If yes, what type of car is it? Have you bought many cars in your life? Why did you buy that specific car?
- Describe your dream car.
- What is most important to you when purchasing a car?
- What is sustainable or pro-environmental car consumption to you?
- What are your thoughts on electric cars? Would you be interested in purchasing an electric car onwards? Why/why not?
- If yes, what is it about electric cars that appeal to you?

- Do you think that owning an electric car signals anything about the owner? Do you associate any characteristics/traits with owners of electric cars?
- Based on your previous answer, does this perception affect your willingness to buy an electric car?
- Do you associate electric car with gender? Why/why not? Do these associations affect your motivation purchase an electric car?