

The Gendered Bottle: Meaning-Making in Luxury Packaging

Magdalena Petersson McIntyre
University of Gothenburg
magdalena.petersson@cfk.gu.se

Consumer society is an important arena for constructions of gender and sexuality that most people in the Western world interact with daily. Since the early days of packaging, gendered identities have attracted enormous interest with marketers and designers (Hine 1996). Some packages are designed to negate gender differences, while other packages shamelessly exploit gendered pleasures and sexual indulgence. Nowhere is the latter clearer than in the world of perfumes.

The paper discusses the meanings of gender in the marketplace based on a project on constructions of gender in perfume packaging. Meaning is constructed in complex ways through flows that go in many directions. It is neither generated with consumers nor marketers, but should be seen as a kind of hybrid or network that emerges from negotiations between different agents (Cronin 2004). Material objects, but also agents such as consumers, designers, manufacturers and producers are part of the meaning-making of packages. The paper builds on interviews observations from a trade fair for luxury packaging, and on interviews with three different market actors. The paper discusses cultural practices and the different gendered meanings and processes that circulate in the understandings of the meaning of perfumes and their packaging.

THE GENDERED BOTTLE: MEANING-MAKING IN LUXURY PACKAGING

"A customer is not an idiot! She is your wife"! That is what we used to say. Today we say this: "A customer is not an idiot! She is your boss!"

The words come from Marie-Rose Trican, marketing executive of *Clarins Cosmetics* during a lecture on the future of luxury packaging at *Luxe Pack*, in 2009. Trican's words express some different trends in the self-image of the contemporary luxury packaging industry. The customer is still foremost a woman, but not a passive or foolish housewife. She may even be your boss. Today's customer demands real quality and value for money. Above all, perhaps, the words signal a wish in the luxury industry to keep up with times and to challenge taken for granted ideas on what the consumer may be like, to 'respect' those who buy their products and who might even work in the industry. The words also contain a form of women's empowerment and perhaps a dig to a world out there who might suppose that cosmetics represent a superficial women's ideal. The words of Trican are met with applause and cheering by the mostly female audience. Her empowering words land just right in the self-image of those who presumably both work in the industry and consume the products for personal use.

In Cultural Studies the so called market has often been approached with suspicion. Resistance, subversion and criticism have been fields of interest and studied in ways that have tended to make markets and market forces into the enemy or the opposite of such practices. O'Connor (2005) calls this a demonization of capitalism that has led to a view that has excluded important aspects of economic activities and cultural practices from the field of study. Alternatively, when studied, the commercial field has been approached with a taken for granted, simplistic or one-sided critical way. Scholars working with consumption, market practices and economic activities have however pointed to the importance of seeing production and consumption as mutually constitutive (Jackson et al 2000), as creations of chains of translations (Latour 1996, 2005) and as constructions with no definite meanings, as processes that are neither predetermined nor go in any particular direction (Nixon 2006, Mort 2000). Everything, including economics, is contingent and culture and economy can therefore not be seen as separate spheres that interact, but rather as incomplete fields that overlap and are mutually constitutive (Laclau 1990:24, in Nixon 2006: 26). Markets have also been approached as performative (Callon 1998, MacKenzie 2009, Cronin 2000). The language of perfume commercials tells us that there is a plethora of different (mostly feminine) subjectivities to choose from and that we can change over time. With Butler (1990, 1997) this can be analysed as performative; identity is an effect of cultural practices, not a cause. Advertising and consumer goods have been analysed as performative in the sense that the segments of the population that they address aren't reflections of truths, but constructed in the very appeal (Cronin 2000).

The paper discusses the meanings of gender in the marketplace based on a project on constructions of gender in perfume packaging¹. If gender is everywhere it is also important to examine the meanings of gender representations in everyday and inconspicuous objects. Gender ideologies are reflected in the material world, but the material world is simultaneously an active part in the constructions of gender, in a process that is dual (Wajcman 2004). The overall aim of the project is to study why packages look the way they do. An important standpoint is to avoid agency being ascribed to one particular agent, such as the industry

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(Cochoy 2004). Meaning is constructed in complex ways through flows that go in many directions. It is neither generated with consumers nor marketers, but should be seen as a kind of hybrid or network that emerges from negotiations between different agents (Cronin 2004). A renewed interest in materiality within cultural studies has meant that everyday objects, such as in this paper, packages, can be approached from an interest in their part of constructing gender. The material world is no longer seen as passive, but as a complex co-agent in the social world but without any pre-existing meaning (Barad 2003). All through the history of packaging gender has been an important dimension. Since the early days of packaging, gendered identities have attracted enormous interest with marketers and designers (Hine 1996). Package designers have tried to find the forms for best seducing housewives until today where men are targeted with whiskey-drenched barbecue-products and women targeted with pink power tools; marketers participation in changes in cooking and building practices. The seductive aspect of packaging is best expressed through luxury packaging, an area with a particular appeal to gender and sexuality. Perfume packages may not be inconspicuous or even every-day; as part of the luxury industry they clearly signal something different than that.

Material objects, but also agents such as consumers, designers, manufacturers and producers are all part of the meaning-making of packages. Visual analysis cannot alone account for the many and often contradictory ways in which people make sense out of the market and what this means to them. In this paper I draw on observations from *Luxe Pack* and interviews with market actors to discuss how gender as a process is given meaning in the industry of luxury packaging, a commercial sphere that rarely has been given any credit in Cultural Studies as an agent for transformation of gender relations. With ethnographic interviews with actors in the field the ways in which they make cultural sense of packaging, perfumes and sales, can be discussed.

Consumer society is an important arena for constructions of gender and sexuality that most people in the Western world interact with daily. Beauty practices have undergone substantial changes in the last decades and many scholars have pointed to men's increased participation in such practices as expression of changes in masculinities (Nixon 1997, Mort 1996). In a discussion on perfume packaging Partington (1996) argues that the never ending diversity of perfumes necessitates a gender analysis that is plural. The diversity in perfume packaging should be taken as evidence that specific and unprecedented (polyvalent, multiple) ways of being men and women, and of being sexual beings, are developed within contemporary culture wherein men and women are relating to commodities in quite new ways. Perfume packages can be seen as raw material for the production of gender, she argues, in ongoing processes where market economy never fixes gender relations (Partington 1996).

LUXE PACK

Luxe Pack is an annual trade fair for the business of luxury packaging held in Monaco in October each year. In 2009 I was there to make observations for my study on packaging and gender. The exhibition hall at Grimaldi Forum was gigantic with red carpets covering several floors. It was packed with visitors. Hundreds of exhibitors from all over the world had their latest and most prestigious packages on display for new possible clients to see and get inspired from. Empty perfume bottles were the most common exhibition object, then other containers for cosmetics. Hundreds of different mascara brushes in bright colours could be seen on one table. This is the arena of the packaging industry, not primarily the luxury industry. *Alcan Packaging* occupied one of the biggest spots. They presented their latest innovation, a rolling applicator that they had developed for L'Oréal and that "will give a completely new result" their representatives assured all who looked or listened. The product had been developed through listening to "women" through focus group interviews and the

company advised others to do the same if they want to be successful. While the importance of respecting women was brought up by several of the exhibitors, men were simultaneously described as a “problem” yet to solve. In spite of the growing market for skin and beauty care for men, men and masculine products have a dubious relationship to luxury, it seems.

GENDER – A TREND?

One section at *Luxe Pack* was devoted to an exhibition on future trends in luxury packaging. Three different trends had been identified by a jury consisting of representatives from different universities as well as the industry. One of these trends was “Comble des genres/ Accentuating Gender” and described as follows:

Masculinity and femininity are taken to extremes, with brands exaggerating their respective portrayals. The world of male beauty is materialized by violence and primary urges, while female beauty takes refuge in the refinement of the boudoir, a bower of seduction and femininity.

The trend was illustrated with different perfume packages. For women, fantasy animals and creatures, ornaments, girlishness, boudoirs and romantic flower scenes were displayed with scents like *Féerie* by Van Cleef and Arpel, by Nina Ricci, *Daisy* and *Lola* by Marc Jacobs, *Music* by Harajuku lovers, Chantal Thomass, Fancy Love. For men, sport and expressive symbols of masculinity such as footballs, identity badges, fists, tennis rackets and sports cars were themes used in scents such as Diesel’s *Fuel for Life*. Paul Smith’s *Man*, Issey Miyake’s *L’eau pour homme*, Cartier’s *Roadster*, Offensive, Lacoste, JP Gaultier *le Male* and Ungaro.

Interesting here is not only the way in which this trend and these scents were presented, but the fact that accentuated gender was described as one trend out of three. Hence you cannot use this trend analysis to say that perfume packaging is moving in the direction of accentuated genders since there are many other trends as well. Accentuated gender is not a way of fixing the representation of gender on the market, but to present exaggerated gender as a possibility; a choice. Exaggerated gender becomes one of many versions of a fragrance wardrobe and one a deeper level, also one of many possible ways of doing one’s gender.

Next trend is called “transmutation”:

Consumers are individuals with multiple aspects. They reveal different facets of their personalities throughout a fragmented day: mother/father, work colleague, sensual lover... Packaging reflects this lifestyle evolution. It needs to be discovered from several angles before being fully understood and suggesting the appearance of a distinct shape and feeling. It has to go beyond that first glance to participate in the emergence of a different concept.

In this trend, gender is not at all present, not mentioned, except in mother/ father that appear to be equal and exchangeable concepts. Either you are a mother or a father, you still act the same. It highlights a choosing individual; “consumers are individuals with multiple aspects”. Consumers have different roles during the day; this is called a life style evolution and illustrated by packages that look different depending upon what angle you choose to look at them from. It can be packages that change, for instance a lipstick from *Urban Decay* with a picture of a man in the lid. If you twist it the model gets undressed, if you touch it, it diffuses pheromones. This is comedy, but since it is on a lipstick also about acknowledging a female visual desire to men’s bodies, an empowering message in a way similar to that of Trican. Change, roles and comedy are emphasized here; a different approach to gender than in the first trend. Transmutation associates to change and can be seen as an expression of a view on gender as “transmutable” and of all cultural identities as somehow accessible for all. Such

aspects were however not emphasized here, even though one must say that it lies in the concept.

The third trend is: "Apaisement/ Soothing" :

In these times of economic uncertainty, brands are opting for appeasement. Monochrome colours, rounded or oval shapes, the choice of sober materials, discreet décors and simple messages... Far from reflecting technical simplicity, appeasement allows the product to express itself with luxurious elegance and sobriety.

This is yet another version where also some known unisex scents are placed. Perhaps this says that appeasement isn't supposed to have any gender, or that it stands above gender. Gender is something you can choose to do in an exaggerated form and choose not to do in a neutral form.

These three different trends highlight some important aspects of perfume packaging and gender. On one hand the exaggeration of masculine and feminine is said to signify new trends. Next, something completely different is said. This is significant, not just for *Luxe Pack*, but for the making of gender in perfume packaging in general. As soon as a characteristic is pointed out, it turns itself inside out. The relations between the market and gender representations cannot be fixed but are in constant change, just as described above with the argument by Partington.

TREND ANALYSIS 2

Inspired by the trend analysis of *Luxe Pack*, I have done something similar in my paper; I have identified three characteristic ways of talking about gender in the industry. An important starting point for me is that even though many seem to think that gender is something that you choose to do or not to do and that packages in themselves are neutral – this isn't true. Packages cannot easily be read visually to reveal meaning, they need to be approached as material-discursive effects and objects that are interpreted, understood and made sense of by consumers through practices such as consumption. I draw on three-four different interviews to illustrate this. The trends that I have identified, or rather discourses; ways of talking and understanding gender in relation to perfume packages that also are materialized through package design are:

1. Gender as choice, something that an individual chooses to participate in or not.
2. Needs and function are masculine, luxury is feminine
3. Playing with stereotyped genders.

These discourses overlap, intersect and are intertwined.

GENDER AS CHOICE

Lena is retail coordinator at a major Swedish cosmetics and perfume retailer for duty free goods. I ask her to describe the perfume market and she says that it is different nowadays. People don't just have "their scent", buy it and stay happy. "Men" are a growing market, she continues, but adds that this year there actually hadn't been much news for men. Not compared to for women. Just like at *Luxe Pack*, Lena describes coming trends as on one hand exaggerating femininity, such as in Marc Jacobs scent *Lola*. "Extremely girlish" or "extremely neutral" are trends, she says. She shows me a scent called *Clean* to show what she means by "extremely neutral". Clean smells like soap, clean washing etc. according to product descriptions. Though it must be noted that cleaning and laundry have cultural feminine codings and cannot be said to be unisex in any direct way. Clean's packages are also

“clean” and clear of ornamentation, décor and images. Lena brings up these opposites because she finds them interesting and doesn’t think that they are conflicting. Interesting is also the fact that the opposing trends don’t seem to be taking different market segments as their target groups. By “inventing” a concept called “fragrance wardrobe”, the opposing messages can be marketed to the same groups of consumers. You can be “clean” today and a seductive Lolita tomorrow. Genders, feminine and masculine are presented as choices that can be chosen or discarded. “Extremely girly” becomes possible, desirable and meaningful when it is not seen as the only choice, but as a temporary one. It doesn’t claim to say anything true about feminine essence, since tomorrow you can choose to make your gender in a different way. Important to point out is also that choice associates to a feminine way of relating to consumer goods. It is scents for women that are discussed in this way. The choice of fragrances for women is much greater than that for men and it should be noted that far from all consumers keep to the segments that have been set up by marketers. According to Thomas (2008) 30% of those who buy so called men’s fragrances are women who buy it for their own use. Choice still emerges as something feminine, a characteristic that is associated with what it means to be a woman. In my study I have often encountered descriptions of women as beings in constant search for new consumer goods and men as rational consumers who buy and use the things that they need.

Male scents do to a larger extent seem to claim something “true” about masculinity in line with a representation of men as need-oriented consumers. Though this isn’t a water-proof definition, men are increasingly addressed as desiring consumers and choosers. Lena shares the view on men’s and women’s consumption practices described earlier and is from that perspective happy to tell me about an episode where she had observed a change in this. At a time when she was walking around in a department store she noticed all the men in the perfume section that seemed to be “just standing there, looking and smelling their scent samples”. She was surprised to see this, she tells me, because she had yet not realized that men had become so independent, sure of their own taste and capable of making own consumption choices. “Wow’ these men are really making choices”, she tells me that she said to herself. Really, “women” are more interested in news, she says. Guys keep to the things they know work. ”But it has become more accepted to be straight and interested in grooming”, she adds. Consumption here emerges as a practice that is intertwined with gender as practice.

Postmodern choice was discussed and celebrated during the 1980s in Cultural Studies, John Fiske’s well known analysis of Madonna were later ridiculed and criticized for being uncritical, the ways that Madonna changed her looks and styles. I am not trying to say that this is possible, but that it is the way that it is understood by many consumers and market actors and that such an understanding has particular effects for the way that gender is understood. Also that consumption is a practice that can’t be taken for granted to reinforce gender differences, negotiations are ongoing.

Marketing language shapes our ways of thinking about ourselves, presents choice between possible identities that we may not have thought of or knew of. At Luxe Pack the concept “Fragrance wardrobe” was discussed as something that helped launch the idea to consumers that you can have many fragrances at the same time, not just one. “I can be whoever I want”, is the message delivered, and used to promote this way of relating to consumption. Lena says this about fragrance wardrobes.

I thought of it myself. Made it up (laughs). Then I read about it. You choose. Today I’m black. Tomorrow I’m blue. No one should tell me who I am. Here is the wardrobe. Who do you want to be today? We offer you a wardrobe of scents. Wardrobe is a good description. You wear it like a piece of clothing. To have

many fragrances is a potential that more and more start to realize. You become curious. Who would I like to be today and who could I be today?

Anna, who is a buyer at a major Swedish department store, tells me something very similar. You should choose a scent that you like and not worry too much whether it is for men or for women. Scent is personal and changeable and we should have a wardrobe of them. Buy many different fragrances and choose the one that suits you today, she advises.

NEEDS AND FUNCTION ARE MASCULINE, LUXURY IS FEMININE

Lisa keeps a shop where she sells beauty products for men. She opened her company because she says she felt that guys needed an environment where they feel comfortable and at home in order to take the first step to start shopping. For this reason her shop targets men only. She also saw potential in this market; it will grow in the future. It is an exciting market, she thinks, since it deals with what she calls “breaking taboos; what you may and may not do”. “It is not really about male beauty. You don’t sell to make them better looking. It is more problem solving, health and a holistic concept. Not about looking good or young, but about getting a good shave, to look and feel fresh”. “It [beauty and skin care] should make you feel masculine”, she says. Lisa thereby illustrates an understanding of masculinity as a feeling that consumer goods help to bring out; bodies and minds become masculine with the help of objects and scents. It is a view that defines masculinity as a project of consumption, but anchors it by referring to more stable definitions of masculinity such as needs and function.

During the interview Lisa comes back to the “taboo-breaking” aspects that she says are important for her. She is not trying to make all men wear cosmetics, but thinks that it should be a right to use products regardless of whether you are a man or a woman. Whether or not you can get products to solve your (skin-) problems should not depend upon your gender, just as women shouldn’t have to wear make-up to be considered feminine. Historically, she continues, men have been just as vain as women. All new products, such as deodorant, have been met with suspicion and often seen as unmanly. For Lisa this is important and she doesn’t see herself as a commercial actor that works to just sell and make profit. The shop is in some ways also a political project for her, a way of getting out a message. Her products can be described as main stream, targeted for a main stream market, hence in no respect ‘alternative’ from a more traditional definition, as in for instance ecologically produced food. This highlights the importance of not excluding commerce from the field of cultural studies or to have taken for granted ideas on what commercial actors do.

Lisa’s story illustrates some interesting gendered aspects on the consumption and marketing of beauty products. Historical references are used to point out that it is actually not “unmanly” to engage in beauty practices, an expression of a belief in not crossing gender boundaries in the wrong way. Also, needs and functionality are values used to proofing that practices and products are masculine. Lisa talks about shaving as “a way in”. It is easier to show a product if it is connected with shaving, she says. Many have problems with shaving, she continues, and need help to solve those. She shows me some “classic razor knives” that have just arrived. “That’s what’s coming now. Old, primitive and classic, it’s tradition and for many it is very masculine”, she says. “You can’t get more male than that”. She adds that it is however not for everyone, hinting that masculinity consists of layers.

Luxury on the contrary emerges as a specifically feminine value in the interviews. Lisa thinks “sportiness” is a common value in perfume packages for men and “that isn’t luxury, if anything it’s youthfulness”. Luxury for men could be simplicity, elegance, quality and brands. Balance, she continues. For men, it must never be “too much”. Luxury in ads can be expressed as “a guy around 30 to 35 years, rich heir, has money, bit of a player, surrounded by rich, beautiful people, Monte Carlo-setting, gambles”. Money and cars, Lisa continues, designed in line with clothes and accessories.

John and Eric keep a shop/ business together and distribute skin care products for men for the local market. They have also developed their own brand of fragrance and I meet them for an interview in their shop. They tell me how they thought when they developed their brand. The actual scent is what is interesting, they say, not the way it is marketed. Like Lisa they point out the culturally specific aspects of scents and gender and emphasize that it varies over the globe how fragrances are received, male here- female there and vice versa. Like Lisa they started their business because they found the men's market interesting and exciting. They however still sell most of their ladies fragrances. And like Lena, they think that individual choice is important. You should be able to find a scent that you like, regardless of where in the world you were brought up.

Even though their prices are in line with most well-known international luxury brands, they are not in the luxury business, they tell me. "Luxury" is what the large fashion houses work with. Like Lisa, they think that it is hard to visually represent luxury for men. Many try, they say, but it rarely works out. It needs to be clean and masculine, they agree, and never too elaborated. That makes it difficult to express luxury in this business. It works with spirits where it is possible to be luxurious, extravagant and gaudy without becoming feminine, but not with perfume. Many producers are desperate in their search for masculine expressions, they think, and just end up being clichés. At the same time, that often seems to work, they add.

PLAYING WITH STEREOTYPED GENDERS

Lisa wants to challenge stereotyped genders and does this by highlighting needs that remain unacknowledged because of cultural definitions of masculinity. In the interviews we also discuss unisex. Unisex is something you rarely mention to consumers, Lisa says. If anything it is when women ask if they also can use the products? Never present anything as unisex, John and Eric advise. If you have a scent that really is intended for women, but you want to try to sell it to men, you need to do it discretely. Never bring attention to it by presenting it as unisex. "The problem is that there is no other word than unisex to describe it with":

"This is a scent for both men and women"!

"Is it unisex?"

"Eh no!" (laughs)!

Lena describes unisex too as a possibility or a choice; you don't need to feel confined to defined genders, you can choose what you like. Nothing is a given. Lena brings up Dolce & Gabbana's tarot cards scents. The five scents in the so called wardrobe are presented as somewhat unisex (though without using that word), but according to Lena *No 1* and *No 6* are typically male scents, while *3*, *10* and *18* are female. The scents are marketed with six supermodels, three men and three women, use tarot cards as names and put on display on shop-shelves for both men and women. Lena explains the concept to me. It has to do with freedom, she says. The shapes are pure and don't exclude anyone. We move in zones nowadays, she continues, we are not so rooted, these marketing concepts express that there are new ways of crossing boundaries [between genders and sexualities?]. The message is to choose what you want, to as an individual be able to stand above [culturally defined gender roles], she thinks. She then turns and says that she however thinks that you need to be very sure of yourself to choose one of these scents by Dolce & Gabbana. She doubts that many men would buy them, regardless how liberated they may be. The concept has more to do with getting attention, she thinks. Again, gender here emerges as a signifying process, something that an individual can choose to participate in or not. Just as in the trend analysis in *Luxe Pack*, gender becomes a value, or perhaps process that can be chosen, or replaced with other

values or desires; a consumer commodity and something more elusive, a sentiment, a feeling, that is still very serious.

Lena's way of defining the scents as male or female even though the producers have not is interesting on many levels. On one hand it refers to a consumer or fragrance competence. She simply recognizes the scent notes from other fragrances and the ways in which they have been gendered before. Producers need from that perspective not say whether it is "for him" or "for her"; consumers/connoisseurs will know it anyway. It is also interesting to note how gender can be communicated with the sense of smell here. On the other hand there is nothing to say that other consumers will interpret the scents in the way Lena has (even though she presents me with sales statistics from the different shelves that support it). This way of talking around unisex does perhaps puncture the choice-model in the way that it suggests that choice can only take place within a very limited set of options.

Unisex is a complicated message, it seems, and it is not necessarily so easy to choose between different ways of doing gender. The interviewees do many times seem to try to stabilize the meaning of unisex into more conventional ways of understanding gender, i.e. in a two-sex model or two make sense out of unisex in a masculine-feminine interpretive model.

For John and Eric, i.e. a small local brand, package design has been an important way to compete with international and established brands; to stand out on the shelf. They use pictures that are sexually suggestive, though not in a way that is usually seen in the perfume world. The most difficult thing of all, they say, was to find an expression that was sensual, but not sexist. "It is more difficult than you may think". Nudity is hard for men, they elaborate, in many countries that will not work to sell. In the interview they discuss the difficulties in navigating through this world, of wanting to challenge stereotypical depictions of men and women but still create images that speak the language of perfume; that is sensuality, emotions, sexuality and gender. Humour can work in some settings, but might not work in others. They tried to find a balance but say that they are not certain how well it worked. "It's a constant challenge". They in particular discuss a scent that they are working on during the time of the interview. They try to not make it unisex by taking away symbols for feminine and masculine but rather to have all at the same time.

Important here is that there is no easy or simple representation of gender, feminine or masculine here and the representatives of the industry do not emerge as manipulative or conscious 'knowers'. Rather they try to interpret the flow of culture to understand it. These three discourses on gender also reflect issues that are interesting for the industry and have relevance for increased sales. More genders give more possibilities for shopping, if you shop perfume out of a desire for who you would like to be, the more personalities you have, the more you need/want to buy. Men are still a growing market and luxury's feminine coding needs to be solved.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude my paper by emphasizing the importance for feminist cultural scholars to participate in the market and consumer society since interesting things and resignifications of gender go on there. The three discourses on gender, what do they mean and how should they be understood? When gender is presented as choice, it is through a process that hides power differences. It also hides the choices that we cannot make, perhaps because they are not on offer, or they might be on offer but we don't choose them anyway because we don't recognize them; the choices that we simply just don't make. Also, choice is not an equal practice, all cannot choose from the same pre-conditions. More, when gender is presented as an obstacle for the realization of needs, this is a statement than is in many ways critical to what is seen as culturally defined genders. At the same time it results in strategies that build on understanding masculinity as function- and need-based, making femininity into desire-, abundance- and

choice-oriented. By rediscovering male consumption roots, feminine and masculine are interpreted as still different. Women choose, men use. It is also heteronormative; luxury on display challenges heterosexual masculinity that builds on desiring the feminine other. There is a hegemonic masculinity at work here, where certain forms of masculinity are preferred. A will to challenge stereotyped genders appeared across the interviews. Some market actors that I met were critical of sexism in the industry and tried to contribute to change with their actions. Their stories also show how this can sometimes be difficult and not without problems. They were in some ways still conferred to the systems of meaning that run the world of perfume and beauty. Still, it indicates that commercial actors do not belong to an outside world and that their practices need to be taken seriously in many ways. I would also like to emphasize that these discourses shouldn't be seen as separate or connected with one of the interviewees, rather they are expressed in all the interviewed and entangled in each other.

In my paper I have shown some of the complexity in this commercial field. The trends in packaging illustrate new ways of showing men and women on and in relation to packages. The search for masculine expressions means that masculinity is commodified in new ways. The world of perfume is contradictory in the way that it one on hand very clearly divides the market in "for him" and "for her", and on the other throws this into chaos by offering so many different and contradictory ways of representing feminine, masculine and unisex. On one hand "accentuated genders" can be identified as one trend while it on the other can be denied that gender matters. Representations are fixed temporarily and the industry uses established conventions to communicate to consumers what a particular scent will do for them. Consumption society/ perfume world doesn't move in one clear direction, where gender representations are becoming more like this or more like that. Different and conflicting versions of feminine and masculine exist simultaneously (Partington 1996). There is if anything an excess in gender, all at the same time, an excess that has relevance for the meaning-making of luxury. Luxury is excess.

This fits well into a poststructuralist analysis of gender, gender cannot be defined or fixed, fixations are arbitrary and temporary. Gender is also given meaning through existing conventions for gender representation, beauty, body ideals and sexuality. The perfume world doesn't present any essentialist claims of genders because gender doesn't build on essences, it is performative. The discourses that I have identified contain some problems, but also signify the transformative force of consumption practices, gender is in constant making and makes a belief in true genders impossible.

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