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Men's consumer identities and their consumption norms in the *perceived, conceived* and *lived* spaces of spas

Abstract

This empirical study incorporates social space and gender into consumer behaviour research to explore consumer identities and consumption practices within the UK spa marketplace. By drawing upon the work of Lefebvre (1991), this paper contends that the relationship between gender, consumption and space is intertwined and reciprocal. Semi-structured interviews with ten men who visit spas reveal that spas influence the construction of men's consumer identities in multiple ways through empowerment, struggle and resistance that exist in the social spa space. The proposed theoretical framework reflects the dynamics between space, men's consumer identities and their consumption habits. The perceived, conceived and lived experiences that emerge through the data suggest that spas can transform into a gender-inclusive marketplace.

Keywords: space, spa, gender, masculinity, consumer identities, consumption norms

Summary statement of contribution

This research explains the synergetic relationship between space, gender and consumption through men's perspectives and experiences of using spa spaces in the UK. It builds on the current discussion on the link between gender and consumption, and consumption and space. Through application of Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of space, this study proposes a theoretical framework for exploring the marketplace, gender and consumer relations that influence each other through the impact of time, culture and history.

Introduction

Since early Roman times the spa has been known for its healing and restorative properties (Larrinaga, 2005; Lomine, 2005). In the modern era, spas have retained their status as a wellbeing space where curative and restorative bodily practices take place. In the UK, however, mineral waters are rarely used for medical treatments (Nilsen, 2013). Instead, throughout the 18th century spas gradually became known as venues for social experiences and holidays (Glover, 2011; Holloway, Humphreys, & Davidson, 2009). Consequently, social interactions and leisure have emerged as key motives for using spas in the UK (Klick & Stratmann, 2008).

Today, customers are also attracted to spas for pleasure and beautification. Due to a strong emphasis on body aestheticisation in consumer culture (Featherstone, 2010), the spa as a social consumption domain has been predominantly used and marketed as a female leisure space (Mintel, 2017c) in the UK. This raises a question as to how these female-orientated consumption zones meet the needs of men and contribute to the construction of their gender identities and spa consumption patterns. A recent survey conducted by Mintel (2017b) illustrates that the percentage of men visiting spas in the UK is growing. The number of British men purchasing spa treatments was 33% in 2017, representing a 3% increase since 2015. Thus, it is important to know how beauty and wellbeing places such as spas cater for the needs of men and how these wellness spaces impact men's constructions of gender and consumption. In order to answer this question, this paper draws upon Lefebvre's (1991) theorisation of social space and demonstrates how men's consumer identities and consumption patterns are produced, negotiated and shaped by and within the spa space in the western context such as the UK.

Only a limited number of studies have discussed social space in consumer research (Castilhos, Dolbec, & Veresiu, 2016; Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012; Klasson & Ulver, 2015; Laing, Keeling, & Newholm, 2011; Laing, Newholm, & Hogg, 2009; Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016; Visconti, Sherry, Borghini & Anderson, 2010). Of these, fewer still explored gendered practices through the lens of space. For example, Brownlie and Hewer (2007) demonstrated men's gender performance through culinary practices. Elsewhere, Klasson and Ulver (2015) explored the transformative impact of the domestic environment on the construction of masculine identities.

This qualitative research extends the debate on men's engagement in feminine social spaces (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Klasson & Ulver, 2015), expands the ongoing discussion on the relationship between gender and consumption (Costa, 1994; Dobscha, 2019; Fischer & Gainer, 1994; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Kimmel & Tissier-Desbordes, 2000; Mitchell & Lodhia, 2017; Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles, & Elliot, 2002), and consumption and space (Castilhos et al., 2016; Chatzidakis et al., 2012; Klasson & Ulver, 2015; Laing et al., 2009; Laing et al., 2011) within consumer culture theory. We synthesise these subjects into a theoretical framework which demonstrates the intertwined nature of space, gender and consumption. By integrating Lefebvre's (1991) concept of space as *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived*, we aim to demonstrate how the social spa space and available services within its premises influence the construction of men's consumer identities and their behaviour, and how gender and consumer identities transform the social space into an environment where empowerment, struggle and resistance occur (van Ingen, 2003). This framework also extends our understanding of how culture, time and history interact with space, gender and consumption. Every social space has its unique history, developed over time and within cultural boundaries (Lefebvre, 1991) which then

determines how consumption practices will be undertaken, lived and experienced. The proposed theoretical framework advances our knowledge about gendered practices that are subject to the influence of time, culture and history, and provides an insight into the *perceived, conceived* and *lived* experiences of customers that attend gendered consumption spaces. It can also be applied in practice to determine the positioning of spas within the wellbeing marketplace and assist marketers in effectively communicating spas as appealing gender-inclusive spaces.

This research offers three contributions to the consumer culture theory. First, we develop a theoretical framework that incorporates gender, consumption and space as intertwined entities that shape and influence one another. As such, we extend existing theory on the interplay between gender and consumption, and consumption and space. Second, we expand this framework by incorporating Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space as *perceived, conceived* and *lived*. Thirdly, we incorporate the aspects of time, culture and history as influences on the production of space, consumer gender identities and consumption practices.

The paper continues as follows. First, it outlines our perception of gender and discusses the link between gender and consumption, and consumption and space by drawing upon the latest developments in consumer research. It then introduces the theoretical framework derived from the review of the literature and integrates Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of space as *perceived, conceived and lived* to form a more advanced framework to be used in consumer research. The study then discusses other researchers' interpretations of Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad of space. The discussion of Lefebvre's concept of the production of space in the spa consumption context follows

before introducing the methodological design of the study. Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of space as *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived* is then applied to the data to demonstrate the three-dimensional functionalities of the spa space and the variety of ways masculinity is performed within the spa consumption domain. This framework is situated in the UK consumer context and therefore reflects the specific gender ideologies emerging from this setting. The paper concludes with the above-mentioned theoretical contributions and recommendations for practitioners as to how best position spas in the marketplace as gender-inclusive spaces.

What is gender?

Until recently, gender has been perceived as a dichotomous term that differentiated men and women based on their social behaviour, gender roles and cultural expectations. Albeit gender is defined and determined socially and culturally, in many instances is continued to be linked to sex categories, namely male and female. Whilst such differentiation is appropriate to mark biological differences between men and women, a different approach is required to explain their psychological (Carothers & Reis, 2013) and social differences. Furthermore, this dualistic view of gender reinforces the binary representation of gender and deepens social injustice by excluding the existence of 'other' or a third gender.

It is often assumed that communities where we work or live create socio-cultural differentiations and boundaries between men, women and those who do not fit into the heteronormative compounds. Yet, it is also other external influences at a mezzo level, such as advertising and marketing firms and/or departments, that shape gender perceptions, consumer identities and their preferences. Recent research suggest that markets continue to be segmented based on sex categories (Dobscha, 2019; Zawisza,

2019). This binary representation can be seen in traditional assumptions of gender in terms of colour associations (e.g. males with blue and females with pink: Dobscha, 2019) and activities that men and women stereotypically engage in (e.g. hunting and football etc. are seen as male hobbies: Fischer & Gainer, 1994; Littlefield, 2010; whilst cooking and body aestheticisation as female interests: Brownlie & Hower, 2007; Kimmel & Tossier-Desbordes, 2000; Ostberg, 2012; Woodruffe-Burton et al., 2002).

However, gender is a much more complex term. In fact, it is fluid. Behaviours that for years were perceived as appropriate explicitly for men or women can now be embraced and exhibited by the opposite and/or third gender due to cultural and social changes, such as women's emancipation, gay liberation movements (Messner, 2007) and gender equality policies (Krizsan & Lombardo, 2013). The theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1993; 2009) explains the transformative nature of gender. It implies that gender norms are predetermined and reaffirmed through performativity. Repetitive acts enhance gender performances making them strongly engrained in the person's social life. However, the beauty of performativity is that gender can be reproduced in new and unexpected ways thus breaking the boundaries of deeply entrenched social norms. The reproduction of gender and social norms always occurs through a negotiation with power (Butler, 2009). Joy, Belk and Bhardwaj (2015, p. 1742) illustrate this by drawing upon the view of Judith Butler:

The theory of performativity presupposes that norms act on us before we have a chance to act at all and that when we do act, we recapitulate those norms, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but always in relation to the norms that precede us.

As a result, gender performativity opens new ways of expressing one's gender and provides opportunities for different experiences in both social and private spaces, and this would not happen without 'undoing and redoing norms in unexpected ways' (Butler, 2009, i) and in opposition to the hegemony. This fluidity permeates both the social categories and their intersectional elements such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and/or sexual orientation. The emergence of new gender identities, namely lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgendered (LGBT) breaks gender binary and its direct associations with a specific sex and gender attributes. Transgender, in particular, 'highlights limitations of binary categorisations of gender and of sexuality' (Hines, 2011, p. 140). If previously gender (e.g. a man/woman) was directly linked to sex categories (male/female) and consequently to gender attributes (e.g. masculinity/femininity), today these dualisms are being deconstructed (Steinfeld et al., 2019), showing a wider variation in gender identities. This suggests that gender needs to be discussed in relation to the concepts of sexuality and/or sexual orientation, race, social class and ethnicity which, according to Taylor (2011, p. 38) contribute to the 'social division and the ways these are experienced, reproduced and resisted in everyday life'. When gender-related concepts are taken into account, gender then emerges as a plural and intersectional term that goes beyond defining differences between men and women but also between different subtypes of men and women (Zawisza, 2019) in consumer markets.

Gender and consumption

Consumer research demonstrates that gender is a core socio-cultural aspect that informs consumer practices (Avery 2012; Costa, 1994; Davis, Lang, & San Diego, 2014; Fischer & Gainer, 1994; Kimmel & Tissier-Desbordes, 2000). Over time, these practices may

become associated with a specific gender; indeed, in the Western culture, until recently sport was perceived as a men's leisure activity, whilst fashion and shopping were perceived as women's interests. Fischer and Gainer (1994) argued that boys were introduced to sport by their male role models such as fathers, brothers and other male family members, which led to men taking sport for granted as an activity solely for men. Messner (2007) also argued that sport in the American context was closely associated with men because of the perceived requisites of physicality, aggressiveness and competitiveness. In contrast, the acquisition of goods (in particular, fashion garments and cosmetics) were closely linked to women's interests (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Campbell, 1997; de Grazia & Furlough, 1996; Kimmel & Tossier-Desbordes, 2000; Ostberg, 2012; Woodruffe-Burton et al., 2002).

Gender distribution across consumption practices was until recently guided by gender roles and clearly divided gender construction zones which reinforced gender binary. The main role of a man was to ensure financial support for his family (Burton, Netemeyer & Lichtenstein, 1995; de Grazia & Furlough, 1996; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Tuncay, 2006). As a result, men mainly performed their gender in the public domain. By contrast, a woman's role involved caring for the health, wellbeing and provisions of the household, which led to women constructing their femininities predominantly in domestic (Costa, 1994; de Grazia & Furlough, 1996) and shopping environments (de Grazia & Furlough, 1996; Nava, 1997). Therefore, the perceptions of masculinity and femininity were closely linked to the specific sex categories and strongly informed by the consumption practices within the gendered social zones.

Today, consumer research records growing evidence of changing gender constructions. Gender dynamics are shifting and are particularly visible within social and consumption zones. In Western cultures, men's identities are no longer formed solely through breadwinning performances at work and rebel acts in consumption spheres (which historically created man-of-action enactments, heroic masculinity discourses and performances: Holt & Thompson, 2004). Recent evidence suggests that men are now more comfortable embracing parenting roles (Molander, Keppe & Ostberg, 2018; Ostberg, 2019) and other domestic duties such as cooking (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Klasson & Ulver, 2015) whilst their wives or partners construct breadwinning identities at work (Chesley, 2011; Murgia & Poggio, 2013). Physical appearance and body image have begun to take a bigger prominence in men's lives (McNeill & Douglas, 2011; Mintel, 2017a). For example, generation Y men prioritise facial skin care products over shaving creams (41% in comparison to 28%: Mintel, 2017a) and confidently engage in fashion consumption (McNeill & McKay, 2016). Broadly speaking, men are gradually shifting their focus away from hegemonic masculine ideals that traditional work and sport environments dictate to aesthetical values that consumer culture creates. These repetitive appearance-enhancing performances take the contemporary men beyond the boundaries of heteronormativity and away from the stigma of gay or 'otherness' enforced by and through Western hegemonic logic. These examples suggest that beauty industry is no longer exclusive to women but also meets the needs of gay, transgender or cisgender men thus widening the spectrum of customers and the inclusivity of the consumption space for all genders with different intersectional elements.

However, such change comes with tension and resistance. The media takes a somewhat conflicting stance towards gender values and performances. On one hand, it fosters

gender equality within the consumption territory and feminizes men through fashion and beauty product consumption (Mitchell & Lodhia, 2017). On the other hand, it continues to portray men as protectors and breadwinners leaving traditional and patriarchal gender values undisturbed or unchallenged (Molander et al., 2018). It celebrates the old gender order and continues to present breadwinner and/or muscular male body images in advertising (Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011; Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Zawisza, 2019). Unsurprisingly, leisure activities such as football and body beautification remain depicted and envisaged as men and women's practices respectively (Messner, 2007; Mitchell & Lodhia, 2017; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008) thus reinforcing the gender binary.

As consumption of certain products and services continue to be aligned with a particular gender, it is difficult for cisgender consumers to engage with gendered products and services since their gender constructions in the marketplace can be perceived differently, for example, as feminine (Mitchell & Lodhia, 2017; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008) and thus as homosexual (McCormack, 2012). This highlights the complexity of consumer gender identities and consumption practices within specific social zones, which due to cultural and historical influences remain used primarily by men or women. This paper argues that gender and consumption are constructed as synergistic entities that shape the consumption space alongside time, culture and history, which all, according to Lefebvre (1991), leave a significant trace within the space. As such, it is difficult to challenge deeply entrenched beliefs and accept new gender and consumption values within the marketplace despite its power to produce and reproduce social relations (Lefebvre, 1991; Kohn, 2003).

This echoes the debates on men and masculinities in mainstream consumer research that emphasise men's vulnerability and ambivalence in relation to feminine practices (Hearn & Hein, 2015; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008; Zayer & Neier, 2011). Consumer research has acknowledged that men are not 'genderless' (Bettany, Dobscha, O'Malley & Prothero, 2010). Their gender constructions can vary from traditional masculine behaviours (such as breadwinning, participation in sport, hunting or do-it-yourself work: Fischer & Gainer, 1994; Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Littlefield, 2010) to more fluid expressions of the social self that can also embrace feminine practices (for example, cooking, parenting or shopping for beauty products: Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Klasson & Ulver, 2015; Mitchell & Lodhia, 2017; Molander et al. 2018; Ostberg, 2019; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008; Zayer & Neier, 2011). However, the latter activities may not be comfortably performed by both sexual minorities and the heterosexual male consumer group. Transgressing social norms is viewed as a precarious act (Joy, Belk & Bhardwaj, 2015). Thus, a more pro-active role is required from marketing professionals in creating more gender-inclusive marketplaces.

Recently, gender research recognised the impact of marketing professionals on consumer markets. By segmenting consumers based on biological differences, they reinforced the binary concept of gender limiting the diversity of consumer and gender identities (Dobscha, 2019; Zawisza, 2019). Marketers can correct this by celebrating consumer social differences and moving beyond displaying the hegemonic masculinity and gender dichotomy in commercial advertising (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2014). The new marketing approach can then create more gender-inclusive consumption spaces.

Space and consumption

The conceptualisation of space has received some attention in consumer culture research. Existing literature has identified that spaces can be public (Chatzidakis et al., 2012; van Marrewijk & Broos, 2012; Visconti et al., 2010), domestic (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Klasson & Ulver, 2015) or virtual (Laing et al., 2009; Laing et al., 2011). They also have the power to shape and transform consumer habits. For example, Laing et al. (2011) uncovered that health experiences shared across virtual spaces allow healthcare consumers to take charge of their health instead of seeking advice from medical professionals. Chatzidakis et al. (2012) suggested that a shared space not only shapes ethical and green consumer decisions but can also work as a site of social transformation, fostering and supporting local businesses. Consumer research has also addressed consumer vulnerability that spaces of everyday life (such as public and digital) can create (Saatcioglu and Corus, 2016). Such research also highlighted the significance of geographies in producing markets and sociospatial entities that can be explored through the four spatial dimensions of place, territory, scale and network (Castilhos et al. 2016).

Indeed, spaces have the power to transform not only consumption but also consumer identities. By partaking in new practices consumers break gender stereotypes and the accepted gender order. This consequently blurs binaries linked to not only gender performances but also the segmentation of social environments. In their work on Jamie Oliver's brand construction through cooking, Brownlie and Hewer (2007) argue that men's growing interest in cooking reclaims the domestic kitchen (a traditionally feminine space) and transforms it into an inclusive zone suitable for men to construct their identities through culinary performances. Such acts transcend binaries between feminine and masculine practices, between the domestic and public space, and between work and

leisure pursuits (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007). Klasson & Ulver (2015) extend this debate by demonstrating that a feminine space can influence the construction work of gender and produce a variety of masculinity meanings through culinary practices within the domestic kitchen space. Their research on men's engagement in food preparation suggests that feminised masculinities constructed in the culinary space change to hegemonic masculinities. This transformation is achieved through competition and the use of kitchen gadgets that masculinise the domestic space.

While the majority of consumer research focuses on the transformative impact of space on consumers and consumption (Castilhos et al., 2016; Chatzidakis et al., 2012; Klasson & Ulver, 2015; Laing et al., 2009; Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016), a new argument emerges from the discussion on space: that the link between space and consumption cannot be one-sided. In fact, consumer markets can also have an impact on space through shaping and negotiation. Therefore, this paper demonstrates the dual and interactive relationship between space and consumption as shaping and being shaped. It shows that consumer practices can be viewed and explored not only as the outcome of space but also as an impact on space. Furthermore, gender cannot be excluded from this synergy as it is closely linked to consumption (Costa, 1994; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Kimmel & Tossier-Desbordes, 2000; McNeill & Douglas, 2011). Thus, this paper contributes to consumer culture theory with a theoretical stance that takes into account the entities of gender, consumption and space shaping one another through continuous and simultaneous interaction (see Figure 1).

<Please Insert Figure 1 here>

We extend our contribution to the consumer culture theory by drawing upon Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space and propose that space in relation to gender and consumption emerges as *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived*. Furthermore, interactions between gender, consumption and space take place within a specific timeframe, culture and history. From here, we will introduce Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of space to demonstrate the connection and interaction between gender, consumption and space, followed by other researchers' interpretations of Lefebvre's triad of space and an application of these ideas to the spa consumption context.

Lefebvre's (1991) theory of social space

The French post-structuralist and social theorist Henri Lefebvre published his work entitled 'The Production of Space' in 1991. He conceptualised social space as a space used for a specific purpose, thus it is a social construct because it embodies social relationships. It is comprised of the *social relations of reproduction*, which refers to relations 'between the sexes and between age groups', and the *relations of production*, which describes the division of labour and its representation in the hierarchical social system (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 32). These forms of social relationship intersect and contribute to forming social reproduction. This double and triple interaction is captured in the triad of space that Lefebvre called the *spatial practice (perceived space)*, *representations of space (conceived space)* and *representational space (lived space)*. Each represents a different type of space (physical, mental and social respectively). To explain the conceptual triad of space, Lefebvre brings in the *body*. The same approach will be replicated here.

Spatial practice or perceived space

Lefebvre (1991) differentiated space into three forms. The first, known as *Spatial practice* (or *perceived space*) is a physical space produced through interactive practices. According to Lefebvre, social space is a product of the social actions of individuals and their collective groups, and thus embraces not only production and reproduction but also the characteristics of each social formation. Social practices through the involvement of the body, be it hands or sensory organs, determine the individual and collective use of the space and produce a space of a specific society. 'From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). It ensures continuity and cohesion, which 'implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) essential for the functioning of society.

Representations of space or conceived space

The second form of social space is the *Representations of space* (or *conceived space*). In addition to spatial practices, the social space can also be produced by knowledge. It is the dominant space in society and is conceptualised through verbal signs such as language. Lefebvre argued that the conceptualisations of space are first produced by scientists, planners, urbanists, etc. who 'identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). According to Lefebvre, the perceptions of space reproduce the process of the production of space. In his view, the production of space is not a mere representation of things or practices located and executed in a specific space, nor is it a mere discourse of the space. It subsumes both. At this stage of the production of space, theoretical representations reproduce the space through the system of verbal signs and a continuous engagement with past and present. Any historical events that occur

leave an indelible mark within the space. Yet, the space comprehended always remains a *present space*:

given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality. Thus production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas

(Lefebvre, 1991, p. 37).

The *representations of space* demonstrate the societal understandings of space formed in a specific time and history. They are objective, abstract but subject to revision and change which occur in and through the *lived space* (Lefebvre, 1991).

Representational space or lived space

Representational space is a *lived space*. The *lived space* consists of imaginary and symbolic elements pertinent to a specific history of a societal group and its individuals. It is experienced through the images and symbols directly associated with it. Lefebvre views the *representational space* as a space of inhabitants and users that is dominated and ‘hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate’ (1991, p. 39). Any deviation from existing social practices (such as changing gender constructions) subsequently changes the mental space. Therefore, the *lived space* does not obey rules nor is subject to consistency because it is fluid and dynamic, situational and thus relational (Lefebvre, 1991).

The triad of space discussed, in the view of Lefebvre, is not an abstract model. The *perceived*, the *conceived* and the *lived* forms of space are interconnected, and therefore the subjects of a specific space can freely move through and engage with all parts of space

– the physical, the mental and the lived. History here plays an important role because together with time it connects the three modes of production of space. Yet the triad of space not only demonstrates the history of space but also the history of representations and their relationships: ‘with each other, with practice, and with ideology’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 42). However, and succinctly demonstrating the fluidity of space, ‘...each mode of production has its own particular space’ and ‘the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 46).

Other contributions to the theory of social space

Since Lefebvre’s conceptualisation other researchers within marketing (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016), sport sociology (van Ingen, 2003) and cultural geography (Soja, 1996, 2010) have added further perspectives to explain the triad of space. For example, Soja (1996) calls *spatial practice* a physical space or a *Firstplace*. The *Firstplace* perspective reflects the material form of space that is perceived as real (Soja, 1996). It establishes a hierarchical order and creates boundaries between different socio-groups, which as a result emerge as the ‘geographies of privilege’ (Soja, 2010). Spatial practice, in his view, represents the process that produces ‘the material form of social spatiality’ through human interactions, behaviours and experiences (Soja, 1991, p. 66). For Saatcioglu & Corus (2016), this mode of space has the capacity to create exchange value; whereas van Ingen (2003) postulates that this mode of social space demonstrates how bodies through spatial practices interact with physical space. Therefore, *spatial practice* or *perceived space* goes beyond physical space since human actions produce and reproduce not only specific places, but also specific social relations (van Ingen, 2003). Saatcioglu & Corus (2016, p. 234) demonstrate the close interconnectivity between these three modes of space by

positing that ‘social practices produce spaces and these spaces, in turn, produce, shape, enable or constrain social practices’.

Representations of space or *Conceived space*, according to Soja (1996), are *Secondspaces*. They are imagined and constructed through discourses. Van Ingen (2003) explains that people engage with such places ‘through our thoughts, ideas, plans, codes and memories’ (p. 203). The conceived space is abstract and imposes order which can be achieved ‘via control over knowledge, signs, and codes: over the means of deciphering spatial practice and hence over the production of spatial knowledge’ (Soja, 1996, p. 67). Van Ingen (2003) adds that space conceptualisations through collectively agreed signs and codes create space representations, which then have the power to control how bodies engage with that space. This power of control can have either a liberating or repressing impact on the users of the space (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016).

Representational spaces are directly *lived social spaces* (van Ingen, 2003). Soja (1996) calls them *Thirdplaces*. They demonstrate how the material and the abstract space interact. This interaction of spaces manifests when users try to take control over the social space (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016), resulting in the reproduction of the lived space into a ‘counterspace’ which Soja (1996) describes as a space ‘of resistance to the dominant order’ (p. 68). This invokes the multitude of conflicting interests that create tension between various players of the social place (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016). In summary, ‘...thirdspace embodies all sorts of conflict, lived experiences, tension, resistance and human agency among diverse stakeholders’ (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016, p. 236).

The concept of space in the consumption context

Within spas, the *perceived* space is therefore how users think of the spa space, which will likely be impacted by their own motivations for attending the spa. For example, whereas some perceive the spa as a venue for exercise related activity (an energetic space), others may perceive the space as a more relaxing setting for beautification or socialisation activities. These differing motivations for attending a spa result in varied interactions with the spa space. The *conceived* spa space was therefore first constructed by those individuals who designed the spa environment, influenced by their own interpretations of what a spa *should* offer its guests. For example, should spa planners perceive men and women as having differing needs from the spa environment this may lead to distinct spaces tailored to each gender. Such decisions are likely to have been informed by planners' wider perceptions of what society expects from the spa environment; after all, in a raw commercial sense such spaces will be judged on their ability to attract and retain guests. Finally, the *lived* space is what is experienced by users and is therefore a potential space where conflict may occur, for example should males feel less comfortable using particular spa facilities that are oriented around beautification rather than fitness. Spa users may therefore employ strategies in order to make the *lived* space as comfortable as possible, which may include only utilising certain facilities or accompanying particular friends or family members on spa visits.

Lefebvre argued that space and social relations are closely connected and intertwined with power. He distinguished the material and the social as distinct forms of space, with the former being measured and mapped and the latter interpreted as *lived space*: 'The space of the users and inhabitants of space who seek to increase the use value they get from the space' (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016, p. 235). Lefebvre (1991) calls space a social

reality or ‘a set of relations and forms’ (p. 116). His view can be drawn upon to explain the connectivity between the sociocultural norms and consumption practices within which gender plays a strong role. Perceptions of masculinity and femininity formed through time underline spaces which are appropriate for men and/or women to engage in. In the past, these distinctive sociocultural barriers have been used to segregate gender practices, and consumption has not been excluded from this trend (Costa, 1994; Fischer & Gainer, 1994). Despite various gender movements taking place over the last century, including women’s emancipation and gay liberation (Messner, 2007), thus allowing for stronger gender fluidity within work (Chesley, 2011), domestic, leisure, consumption and fashion zones (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007; Klasson and Ulver, 2015; Molander et al., 2018; Ostberg, 2012; 2019; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), some consumption activities remain perceived as appropriate specifically for men or women. Lefebvre (1991, p. 110) explains that:

every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical. In short, every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics (site, climate, etc.).

Spas represent a particular leisure consumption zone, and have been shaped and formed as an area of beauty and relaxation typically sought by women (Intel, 2017c). In the past, industrial developments significantly contributed towards the division in men’s and women’s roles, with men and women constructing their identities at work and the

domestic and beautification zones respectively. This means that social spaces have been shaped through time, cultural and historical dimensions which then affected consumption preferences. De Grazia & Furlough (1996) identified that gender segregation within social spheres was influenced in the 19th century by industrialisation, men's subsequent identification with wages and labour, and women's focus on home and consumption environments.

Van Ingen (2003) stresses how essential it is to acknowledge the importance of historical impact on the production of space. In her view, it is problematic when

...spaces are made to appear as though ahistorical, devoid of any indications of social struggle around their production and maintenance. A focus on place must emphasise that spatiality is socially produced and that actual material bodies and identities are also produced and maintained in specific social spaces

(van Ingen, 2003, p. 209).

Soja (2010) agrees that research should incorporate social, historical and spatial perspectives, without privileging one over others, when exploring the social world. Therefore, social practices should not be interpreted as sole influencing factors shaping and forming social spaces because spaces can equally contribute to the formation and development of social practices and the identities of those who consume them. With this in mind, Lefebvre's (1991) theorisation of social space, applied to the context of spa consumption and explained through time, cultural and historical dimensions, is used in this paper to link the concepts of gender, consumption and space and form a conceptual

framework (see Figure 2) to enhance our knowledge about gendered practices and assist marketers in creating gender-inclusive marketplaces.

<Please Insert Figure 2 here>

The following part of the paper will discuss the methodological design of this study. It will then apply Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad of space to analyse the shared spa experiences of research participants in order to explain how this particular experiential leisure space impacts and is being impacted by the development of men's consumer identities and their spa consumption practices.

Research Methodology

Spa contexts in this research

The spa sector is multi-faceted, with offerings ranging from facilities incorporated into mainstream hotels to more specialist spas with dental or medical emphasis, those themed on a particular culture (e.g. Ayurvedic and Hammam) and those based in alternative locations such as casinos, cruise ships and airports (Spaseekers.com, 2019; Tang, Grace, Tan-Chew, & Leung, 2018). In this study the selected spa contexts were those most commonly found globally, namely resort spas (where facilities are offered as part of the wider hotel offering), day spas (with no adjoining accommodation), Turkish baths (as part of historical and cultural heritage) and club spas (linked to a gym/health club: Spafinder.com, 2018). According to the Global Wellness Institute (2018), the spa sector encompasses almost 150,000 spas with global revenues estimated at \$93bn. Given that 78% of these spas belong to the above-named categories these were a logical point of focus to ensure participants had relevant experiences to share during interviews.

Interview design

Data was collected using an interpretive grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), acknowledged as suitable for studies exploring consumer behaviour (Goulding, 2005) and where new insight and understandings are required for theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Goulding, 2002). Given the exploratory nature of this research, which aimed to explore the synergetic relationship between gender, consumption and space in the context of gendered consumption, this data collection approach was deemed appropriate owing to a lack of research into men's views on the spa space and their consumption of spa services.

Men's perspectives on and experiences of using spas were gathered through a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. All interview participants identified as either current or past users of spas, and therefore had some familiarity with common spa practices and environments. Whilst various cosmetic practices have become increasingly accepted amongst men (e.g. hair removal (Clarke & Braun, 2018), dermatological treatments (Girdwichai, Chanprapaph & Vachiramon, 2018)), we were keen to ensure participants felt comfortable discussing what remains a woman-dominated service environment. As such, our opening questions addressed their wider lifestyles, and as this tended to lead to conversations about topics such as exercise, well-being and travel it was then possible to focus specifically on spa consumption. From here, questions were broken into two core themes, although in practice the open-ended nature of these and subsequent probing by the researcher meant many of these topics became intertwined:

- **Spa Consumption:** Questions here focused on the frequency/nature of spa visits, the facilities they most commonly engaged with, their motivations for attending

and whether this was done alone or with others. These followed the introductory lifestyle discussion and sought to further relax participants.

- The spa environment: Questions here were designed to encourage reflection on the dimensions of space in a manner accessible for participants. For example, “*Which services do you use in the spa space?*”, “*Who do you interact with during a spa visit and how important are others to your spa experience?*” were used to open a conversation about perceived space. Conceived space was addressed via questions including “*What do you perceive as suitable spa etiquette and why do you feel this way?*”, “*How do you and the society perceive spas?*” Finally, lived space involved discussions on questions such as “*To what extent do you feel comfortable in a spa environment?*” and “*Have you ever experienced any tension or discomfort in a spa?*”.

Throughout these interviews, participants were also asked to reflect on how masculinity influenced their consumption patterns and practices. This required a loosely structured approach to interviews, with broad statements used to instigate discussion (e.g. “*Does society view spa consumption as a suitable activity for men?*”).

Research participants

In total, ten research participants were interviewed in the north east of England. These men come from different geographical areas (north east of England, north west of England, London and Italy – only recently moved to the UK) and cultural backgrounds (British, Asian, Italian: see Table 1). Their work and life experiences are varied and have an impact on the formation of their identities as men and consumers. Variation in age (from early 20s to retired), sexual orientation (heterosexual and homosexual), class and

work occupations (from skilled manual occupations to higher managerial and professional occupations) contributes to the formation of different men's consumer identities and their spa consumption preferences which will be revealed in this research.

<Please Insert Table 1 here>

Sampling, data collection and analysis process

In total, interviewing lasted for almost nine hours and generated 306 pages of text. All interviews were conducted by the first researcher and took place in either the premises of a hotel with spa facilities, the workplace of the researcher or the research participant or a café. Four of the interviews were conducted in the premises of one hotel which had granted permission to speak to men at the end of their spa visit. Whilst this provided potential access to a number of men, in many cases it proved difficult to engage these respondents in lengthy interviews – as Table 1 indicates, the interviews with Scott and Robert (names changed for anonymity) lasted no more than 18 minutes.

Other men were recruited via the snowball sampling method, which is deemed appropriate where the research population is small and difficult to access (David and Sutton, 2004). Thus, the researcher predominantly relied on recommendations from her own networks to find participants.

The data were analysed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We looked for patterns and coded the interview transcripts separately. We then compared the codes and grouped them under the categories of *men's motives, favourite activities, services used, types of spas, frequency of visits, spa companions, duration of visits; men's*

perceptions of spas, the society's perception of spas, the benefits of using spas; masculinity, acceptable/non-acceptable masculine behaviour/activities; men's struggles and resistance. We then compared the categories with the literature on space and reduced the number of categories by grouping them under the three core concepts in line with the Lefebvre's conceptual triad of space. The category *perceived space* embraced all the themes related to men's use of spas and their spa preferences. The codes related to the perceptions on spas and masculinity from the point of view of men and society were grouped under the category *conceived space*. Finally, the category *lived space* was used to reflect the barriers that obstruct men from using the spa space.

The analysis revealed that the spa space is *perceived, conceived* and *lived* by the men. Men's spa visits are linked to health, bodybuilding, relaxation, pampering and beautification; and shaped by the men's perceptions of masculinity, historical and socio-cultural specifications formed within specific timeframes. The three conceptual categories such as *perceived space, conceived space* and *lived space* in line with Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of space will be discussed in the findings section and supported with excerpts from the ten interviews with men.

Findings

From the interviews, the spa space emerges as a good fit with the conceptual definition suggested by Lefebvre (1991). As the men's perspectives reveal, spas embrace all three aspects of space – the *perceived*, the *conceived* and the *lived* – meaning that the spa space is understood by the interviewed men not only based on the practices that take place within spas but also on what this space represents to them and how it is *lived* or consumed and experienced. To better understand relationships within the triad of the *perceived*, the

conceived and the *lived*, Lefebvre (1991) brings in the body as the subject of a society or a group. The same approach will be adopted here in explaining the concept of a spa space. The men's perspectives on a spa space, construction of their identities and consumption norms will be revealed by placing the male body in the centre of the discussion.

Spatial practice or perceived space

The spa space is described by Lefebvre (1991) as a physical leisure consumption space derived from and created by specific spatial practices and individuals. By describing their favourite activities in spas, participants reveal a range of services available that consequently construct spas into zones for relaxation, enhancement of health and bodybuilding:

My favourite [spa activity] is to go to the steam room, the sauna, the hydro massage, to move from different rooms, have a shower and then go back again: staring, relaxing on a comfortable chair and moving to different rooms. There is not the best place, let's say. But the combination of the three is good because after I've done all three I feel very relaxed. I feel very well.

(Andrea)

Services that construct a spa space as *perceived* space are of a physical, therapeutic and pampering nature. They are aimed at enhancing emotional and physical health sought through escapism:

(...) And so the succession of the rooms where the temperatures vary: like a plunge pool, cold pool, there are showers and so on – very impressive... great sort of ambience of a place, very clean, assistance everywhere telling what to do. And on that occasion I have booked in for a back

massage. They come and find you when it's your time. And they take you to the place for a back massage. I had a back massage, my daughter had a back massage, [name of wife] does not enjoy massages... and so we sought that place out and that was a great experience. We often said we should do it again. (...) I enjoyed it. Loved it. And we said we'll do it again. It's a great way to just relax really. We all, we feel as if it is healthy for us to go through that process. It's a little bit of – it's like a bit of pampering really to be looked after in that way. Have those facilities. So it's something to look forward to and enjoy and so it's all of the things that you've said. And ...it lived up to it.

(John)

While Andrea and John mention the relaxation and pampering benefits that the associated spa services endow, other participants reveal that they attend spas for fitness, relaxation and attainment of a more attractive physique:

To keep fit, I think, I love to go to a gym and just to relax in the day as well really. It's nice to get into a sauna, steam room, swimming pool and stuff. Yeah.

(Scott)

...Probably in the earlier days for a better body, to be honest, to be able to be more attractive to the opposite sex.

(Robert)

Little (2012) refers to spa practices as an investment in the self. They not only give health benefits but also control and regulate bodies. As it emerges from the interviews, the use of swimming pools, steam, sauna and Jacuzzi facilities in combination with fitness and beauty form a package of fitness, relaxation and pampering which regulate consumer bodies in accordance to aesthetic and masculine norms. Little (2012) views this range of practices as a self-management tool that men adopt in the spa space to enhance their masculine image and attain the ideal (Zayer & Otnes, 2012), heroic (Holt & Thompson, 2004) or hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2000) which even in different times and cultures remains desirable for men. Men attend spas to build an ideal self that can be created through health and relaxation practices, pampering or bodybuilding. These services within a health and wellness place construct both heterosexual and non-heterosexual men as health and image conscious consumers, who in return convert the spa space into a wellness oasis for the pursuit of the ideal and healthy masculine body.

The interviews reveal that the spa space is produced by a variety of practices starting from those that improve one's health and wellbeing to those that enhance ones physical appearance and image (Hanks & Mattila, 2010). They all form an experiential consumption product (Nilsen, 2013) designed predominantly to improve one's physical and mental wellbeing. Therefore, the described social leisure practices construct a spa space as one where health, wellbeing and pampering practices take place and at the same time form a segregated space for the health conscious and higher end of society. In this way, the spa space is formed into the spatial geography of privilege (Soja, 2010) accessible for those users who value recreational activities and have the means to afford them.

Representations of space or conceived space

The *representations of space* or *conceived space* are imagined and constructed through discourses. Looking at the spa space through time, historical and cultural dimensions, it becomes clear that this particular leisure industry has been shaped by all three aspects. The interviewees, whilst sharing their spa experiences, decode the historical and cultural meanings of a spa space. Despite the significant drop in using spas for medicinal reasons (Nilsen, 2013), William believes in the health benefits that the spa services give:

...there is a degree of a tradition here because using the Turkish baths was always something traditionally medicinal, health ... health element to it. Traditionally, I think ...

He then goes further to explain:

For me... to me the difference is when you walk out tingling. Yeah, your body like and that's the most visible sort of benefit because you know that your body has sort of released all the toxins and there is that thing about – I know when I go to a spa, if I go to a spa with sauna facilities and stuff like that, I will sweat it out. I like that feeling. Yeah. I will tolerate the heat as much as I can whether it would be the dry heat, the wet heat or whatever. I love all that. And I like that feeling of when I walk out and my body sort of like feeling clean and it tingles. I don't know how to describe it.

The men interviewed here appreciate the effectiveness of the spa services in curing minor ailments and enhancing their wellbeing. For example, John repeatedly emphasised the benefits he reaps from having his back massaged:

I used to take massages in an attempt to ease pain on a systematic basis but now I just do it because – it just leaves me with a sense of ... I don't know, wellbeing ... Yeah, quite hard to articulate but just leaves me with a sense of wellbeing. A whole massage process is an attempt to kind of soothe, manipulate muscles that are tense or knotted or – it's just a way – and also I think that, my understanding is that the oil that's used can sometimes be beneficial. So, for example, one lady told me – this is when I was having [a massage] on a systematic basis – for example, lavender oil contains some kind of ... analgesic. So it's like when it gets into the blood stream as a kind of pain relief – so that's nice.

Participants further decode the spa space as one that enhances their physical wellbeing through detoxification activities and massages. This is a traditional conceptualisation of a spa space inherited since Roman times and is still used in some countries as an alternative to medical treatments (Klick & Stratmann, 2008).

Lefebvre (1991) treats codes as interactional elements between the subjects, their space and surroundings. These codes in the stories of men are highly gendered since spa patrons appear to be predominantly women:

You know, the spas are up in Newcastle – the majority, I would say, 90 percent is the women.

(Thomas)

Since the main users of the spa space appear to be women, so the spa space is constructed by the subjects that use these facilities and by the practices that are catered to them. As a result, spas are conceived as feminine leisure centres for women's relaxation and beautification needs, even amongst men who have previously utilised their facilities:

For my wife. Yeah. Spas not for me – spas are for my wife to use. So really, I have never classed spas as something that a male would use.

(Brian)

Such spa conceptions have been informed and formed through time and social, historical and cultural developments. Whilst in the past shopping was associated with duty, nowadays it is envisaged and practised for pleasure and therapy (de Grazia & Furlough, 1996). Women are now associated with strong buying power and more disposable income that is spent not only for family purposes but also relaxation and treatments that are aimed to enhance one's physical wellbeing and physical appearance (Intel, 2017b, c). This explains why spas started catering for the women's needs and how pampering packages emerged for improving one's physical appearance. Thus, today a spa space applies a more modern approach to treating the consumer body in line with postmodern aesthetical standards (Featherstone, 2007) that emphasise narcissism and the body beautiful (Woodruffe-Burton & Ireland, 2012).

Spas within hotels and sport clubs are envisaged or conceived as masculine leisure spaces that attempt to meet men's health and fitness focused requirements. The majority of the men interviewed select spa products matching hegemonic masculinity values concerning physical prowess, strength and fitness (Connell, 1995; Grindstaff & West, 2011). Michael commented on the construction of men's identities in spas that reflect both the cultural and historical aspects of the North-East region and wider perceptions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2000):

I think men now, I think historically have been a lot busier but I think men go to saunas, steam rooms and gyms and stuff like that rather than go for a massage or a ... I think that's probably what more men do because it fits with their image. But I think the younger men so called metrosexuals are probably ... I'd think probably go to spas and stuff, I would think.

(Michael)

Men's consumer identities within a spa space are largely informed by social constructed gender norms. They are formed via regulated body strategies such as exercising at the gym followed by relaxation in the spa space. Recent research confirms that spas are being visited to increase physical and mental wellbeing (Hanks & Mattila, 2010; Little, 2012). The participants from this research behave similarly. They use fitness facilities in spas and relax afterwards to improve their physical and mental state. Although Michael believes that younger men attend spas not only for health but also relaxation and beautification reasons, Scott, as a representative of the younger generation of men, views beauty therapy as irrelevant for constructing his inner and outer self:

*It doesn't interest me really ...I don't – like I said, the reason I come is to –
I have certain things I want to do, like do some workout in a gym and then I
find it more relaxing just to sit around in a pool and sauna and stuff...*

(Scott)

Discussion of the construction of masculine identities reveals that a spa space represents values linked to health, fitness and prowess. When asked about their broader perception of spas, participants coded them as places ideal for constructing masculine identities through physical exercise, bodybuilding and subsequently relaxation. In contrast, cosmetic related practices remain associated with women's performativity.

Lefebvre's (1991) concept of space as a *conceived space* resonates with the theory of gender norms. *Conceived space* is an idea or a code that forms people's perceptions of the space. Gender norms are also perceived as codes of appropriate behaviour. In the sport context, van Ingen (2003) suggests that *conceived space*, in the form of knowledge, signs and codes, regulates sport and its participants. This aligns closely with the socialisation theory, which argues that behaviours appropriate for a specific gender are passed from generation to generation as sociocultural norms through institutions such as the family, educational establishments and church (Hofstede, 1984; Levant & Pollack, 1995; Nelson & Vilela, 2012). These societal rules dictate how society should behave. Similarly, Soja (1996) argues that *representations of space* impose order, and such discourses help to guide society and form consumption norms. The spa space, as the data reveals, is not exempt from these norms. It forms and is being formed by specific gender identities and their consumption practices, influenced by historical and cultural developments in a specific time.

Representational spaces or lived space

With the term *lived space*, Lefebvre (1991) rejects the common understanding of space as physical and concrete. This term unites all available spaces and as a result creates a space that is both 'real' and 'imagined' (Soja, 1996), geographically and historically contingent and formed through socially performed practices (Stewart, 1995). Yet, the focal point which differentiates the *lived space* from others is struggle and resistance that take place in the *lived space* (van Ingen, 2003). For example, some men use spas exclusively for relaxation, detoxification and bodybuilding and do not engage in activities enhancing one's physical appearance and image. "*I'd expect to be ridiculed by my friends*", said John when asked why he did not engage with other treatments. The pursuit of the body beautiful can invoke laughter and ridicule from other men. This implies a traditional gender order with a clear divide between men's and women's interests and consumption territories.

Based upon our interviews, men who are concerned about their health and physical appearance find it hard to engage in experiential consumption within the spa space. Even for gay men, it is uncomfortable to be in a leisure space that is predominantly attended, *perceived* and *conceived* as a feminine space. Andrew, who falls into the category of a millennial and identifies as gay, resists going to spas without his male partner. In the following excerpt he explains why he would not go to a spa alone or with his female friends:

I think it's seen as quite as feminine things to do to go to a spa. So I think I could be quite aware that it would be probably less males there than females. And a lot of my girlfriends go to spa treatments all the time. It could be

friends and we have just met for lunch. So I am the only boy, so it means six girls and they would go to a separate area and it would be me by myself. So it's not really about fun for me, I suppose. So that's why I probably wouldn't go. I would still go but it wouldn't be on the top of my list to do.

Such reflections about spas reveal that social relations within the *lived* spa space encapsulate both struggle and empowerment. On the one hand, spas as a *lived space* represent exclusivity – these spaces are made available for wealthy visitors and are particularly focused around meeting the needs of women (Intel, 2017c; Tabbachi, 2010). As such, this spa consumer group is invigorated and empowered. In contrast, spa establishments conceived as feminine leisure zones create an atmosphere of struggle for men who value the curative and invigorating benefits of spas. Consequently, some men adhere to the traditional masculine standards and construct their identities by giving priority to their health and physical strength. These men form their consumer identities based on the traditional gender stereotypes and perform their gender in accordance to their sex category (Mavin & Grandy, 2013). As a result, they adopt a somewhat traditional approach to consuming spa services. Physical health and a good level of fitness are important to these men (Connell, 1995, 2000; Messner, 2007), thus perform their gender identities in a traditional way by exercising at the gym and relaxing around the pool area afterwards. These services and practices are safe for men to engage in as they are not equated to femininity and homosexuality (both of which are closely linked in men's conceptualisations of gender: McCormack, 2012), but to the hegemonic masculinity that men historically sought to obtain due to the associated power and status in social relations and structures (Connell, 1995, 2000).

In line with Connell's (1995, 2000) theorisation of masculinity, the analysis of the spa space demonstrates the plurality of masculinities and consumer identities constructed in spas. Despite the risk of being perceived as gay, some men, including gay, instead of engaging in regulative body practices, choose relaxation and treatments alone or with their loved ones:

I go to spas up and down the country because I travel a lot. I would say once every two to three weeks I have a proper spa. It is like a proper spa day where I go to the gym, go to the pool, have treatments and sometimes have spray tans, facials anything like that at all.

(Thomas)

But it's a sort of me time together where you can spend a bit of – you spend a sort of day together as well as getting the treatments and relaxation. So it's a whole experience.

(Steven)

Whilst some men strive to adhere to the hegemonic ideal by building a strong and fit masculine physique (Connell, 2000; Messner, 2007), Thomas, who is gay, and Steven, who is heterosexual, see spas as an oasis for relaxation and escapism alone or with their loved ones. They resist the traditional gender order, imposed by hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality as a regulative principle of men's gender and consumption performances (Connell, 2000; McCormack, 2012), and break consumption binaries related to gender. They purchase beauty treatments for relaxation and pampering purposes that help them to construct an inclusive masculinity (McCormack, 2012) which embraces

both masculine and feminine traits in men's leisure and everyday performances. As the excerpts from interviews with Thomas and Steven show, perceptions of masculinity and the means of constructing masculine identities are changing, giving increased space for freedom and choice in the consumption space.

A variety of masculinities and a variety of consumer identities are being constructed in contemporary spas. As such, they shift the traditional gender order, break gender stereotypes and negotiate hegemonic masculinity by pursuing not only wellness but also romance or an appealing body. Men who resist doing their gender in the usual way and purchase pampering packages for themselves solely or together with their loved ones, create what Soja (1996) terms counterspaces. These counterspaces break the boundaries of the 'privileged geographies' (Soja, 2010) and construct a space where men of different age, class, occupation and sexual orientation consume this leisure place. Such masculine performances blur the binaries and the boundaries between the masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual stereotypes, images and performances.

Men's shared experiences reveal that masculinity is not solely determined by physical capabilities but also cultural norms. In fact, '...gender inevitably intersects with the social structures created by class and race, as well as other dominant discourses in a given society' (Næss, 2001, p. 127). Whilst these norms are strictly performed by some men, they can equally be resisted and ignored by others. Thus, the *lived space*, together with its *counterspaces*, reflects contradicting ideologies (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2016). According to Saatcioglu & Corus (2016), oppression and resistance operate interchangeably within the *lived space*. As a result, social spaces such as spas are filled with tension and constant negotiation of one's place in social relations, determined by the

key aspects of consumer identities such as gender, race, age, ethnicity, nationality, family status, occupation and sexual orientation (Corlett and Mavin, 2014). Yet external factors of consumption geographies, including time, history and culture, play an equally vital role in organising the social and consumption order. It takes some courage and persistence for men to enter a spa space, which historically and culturally has been assigned to and occupied by women (Intel, 2017b,c), and take a confident position as a legitimate consumer of health, pampering and wellness services in the perceived feminine space of beauty therapy and wellbeing.

The *lived* experience, according to Lefebvre (1991), is influenced by the culture within which the body exists or lives. The culture within which the body lives influences how gender is performed within social surroundings, and this also relates to the consumption norms and derived consumption preferences. The construction of gender identities and consumption preferences within a particular space reveals the symbolic aspect of the *lived* space, which can be uncovered by sharing *lived* experiences. The symbolic aspect referred to here represents the struggles and power relations that both heteronormative and marginalised men encounter and engage in whilst consuming services in a spa space.

Conclusions

This research aimed to explain the interplay between the concepts of space, gender and consumption through an analysis of men's perspectives on the spa space. Men's views and experiences were analysed through the lens of space, which according to Lefebvre (1991) is not only material but also imagined and experienced. In Lefebvre's (1991) terms, the social marketplace is *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived*, thus never static but constantly changing due to the users that consume the space.

Data from the ten participants showed the intersection of Lefebvre's three conceptualised spaces and their levels of influence on men's gender and consumption performances. The theoretical application of spatiality to the spa context demonstrates the difficulty of talking about any of the three spaces without referring to the other two. *Spatial practices*, the *representations of space* and the *lived space* have been applied together to reveal how the spa space informs men's consumer identities and consumption preferences. Lefebvre (1991) argues that the conceptual triad of the *perceived*, the *conceived* and the *lived* cannot be treated as abstract and should be interconnected. This triad contributes to the production of space in different ways:

according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period. Relations between the three moments of the perceived, the conceived and the lived are never either simple or stable, nor are they 'positive' in the sense in which this term might be opposed to 'negative', to the indecipherable, the unsaid, the prohibited, or the unconscious.

(Lefebvre, 1991, p. 46)

Data analysis reveals that not only does space construct social relations, identities and consumption preferences but consumers and their practices also influence the space through their gender constructions and consumption practices. This process is interactive and reciprocal and allows the space to be produced and reproduced into a new place. Our participants construct different consumer identities in spas due to men's different engagement with the spa space. The participants came from different generations, cultural and social backgrounds, and consequently their perspectives on spas and preferences for

specific services differ. This process (and the type of consumer identities they construct) is influenced by both the individual and society's view on men's selection of spa services. Some men reproduce the spa space in its traditional form as a *perceived* and *conceived* place for health enhancement and bodybuilding pursuits, whilst others resist the dominant order and attend spas not only for fitness but also for body beautiful motivations. They purchase beauty and relaxation packages alone or with their loved ones and change the *perceived* and the *conceived* spa space, which as a result evolves into a new *lived* space. This demonstrates the interactive and influencing force the *perceived* and *conceived* spaces have on the *lived* experiences of men, and how the latter dimension of space can reproduce and produce a new *perceived* and *conceived* spa space that is inclusive to all visitors.

The discussion on how men construct themselves in the spa space, not only as men but also as consumers, suggests that this process is also highly influenced by the external environment within which culture, time and history play a prominent role in organising the consumption and gender order. As such, these aspects cannot be ignored when exploring the interrelationship between space, gender and consumption. By being the result of past actions, a *conceived* space controls the production of services and their consumption – it either allows them to occur or prohibits them through the influence of time, history and culture (Lefebvre, 1991). Yet the *conceived* space is subject to change, meaning discourse on the spa space and how this leisure space is consumed change over time. Here, a key role is played not only by service providers who provide extra spaces or services to ensure the space is attractive for new customers, but also the users themselves who dare to consume services associated with different gender or sexual orientation.

The men's shared views in this research uncover the impact of time, history and culture. Men's experiences of spas reveal their interest in pampering their bodies through fitness and beautification regimes. However, engaging in the latter practice can prove to be difficult and involves a high level of tension since body aestheticisation falls outside the hegemonic masculinity image and norms. Furthermore, this tension is doubled since self-attentive practices are offered at a space that is perceived as feminine. Spas in the UK are more associated with luxury and pampering than health and wellbeing (Klick & Stratmann, 2008; Little, 2012; Mintel, 2017c), and this idea prevails despite the fact that many contemporary spas are based in hotels as part of fitness centres where exercising and bodybuilding practices also take place.

Spa businesses need to take into consideration this cultural issue when designing and promoting spas in the UK, and particularly in the north east of England where hegemonic masculinity values take prominence in men's consumption habits. Thus, promoting spas as leisure spaces that enhance one's physical wellbeing and body image through fitness and beautification can challenge pre-existing stereotypes. Fitness and body aestheticisation though should not be tied to a specific gender but targeted at everyone including men, women, third gender or gender –fluid individuals, thus allowing the spa space to be lived by multiple identities of spa service consumers. Such a promotional strategy will in time counteract the dominant perception of a spa as a women's space and help construct it as a representation of wellness and body aestheticisation for an increasingly health conscious society interested in improving body image and appearance. This approach will blur the binary that currently segments a spa place as suitable for specific feminine and masculine performances and will transform it into a leisure zone that is safe to consume for all spa-goers who conform to and who dare to

break traditional gender stereotypes and values. Whilst considering such strategies, spas will need to be mindful of their current customer base, that is one predominantly comprised of women, and ensure that any changes made to how the spa is perceived do not alienate the existing spa visitors.

Recommendations and further research

Whilst the number of interviews conducted for this study could be viewed as a limitation, it was felt that they were sufficient to explore the variation within men's gender and consumer identities being formed in a spa space. Furthermore, the excerpts used helped to meet the aim of this research which was to demonstrate the reciprocal influence between space, gender and consumption. This paper argued that not only does space shape men's identities and their consumption, but the latter two can also impact the consumption space (see Figure 1). Analysis of the data confirmed this theoretical stance. Men's attitudes towards and behaviour in spas shape the market space in a different way because of their differing gender identities. Some men envisage and thus consume spas as health and wellbeing spaces, whilst others attend them as pampering and beautification places. A range of masculine perceptions and forms of spa consumption emerged in this research due to the influence of time, culture and history on their gender identities.

Through an analysis of men's shared spa experiences, this paper demonstrates the interconnection between space, gender and consumption as influencing one another within a specific time, culture and history (see Figure 2). Whilst care needs to be taken when generalising findings from our modest sample and specific spa context, this theoretical framework can potentially be applied to a multitude of marketplace contexts,

since it is the artefact of many influences, is dynamic and continuously changing. Lefebvre (1991, p. 73) argues that:

(social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products; rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and /or (relative) disorder.

Indeed, cultural phenomena are embedded in marketplaces but consumers can re-contextualise practices to make them fit with their lives and lifestyles (Chelekis & Figueiredo, 2015).

As identified earlier, the current study focused its attention on the most common types of spas (resort, day, club and Turkish baths). However, future research may wish to extend the conversation of masculinity and space by exploring other forms of spa environment. Of particular interest here may be those spas with a focused cultural heritage (such as Ayurvedic spas) or those spas which have a specific medical purpose (e.g. dental spas which incorporate more cosmetic treatments). The current research also uncovered interesting variation in the frequency of spa visits across our sample; at one extreme a participant revealed spa visits every few weeks. As well as the significant time implications of such frequent visits, with regular visits may come increasing comfort with the lived space. Exploring this notion further with more intensive spa users presents a potentially fruitful line of future inquiry.

We also acknowledge that many of the traditional gender role distinctions considered in this paper (male as breadwinner/provider and female as domestic and family based: Alreck, 1994) are not universal truths. In cultures where such gender role distinctions vary this may lead to differing levels of comfort within the spa environment. Future research on alternative cultures where gender roles have been traditionally viewed differently (for example, African nations where traditional gender roles differ owing to differences in agricultural history: Alesina, Giuliano & Nunn, 2013) may add further nuance to this discussion.

This paper calls for more research placing bodies in the analysis of a marketplace, to demonstrate how the market space shapes and is being shaped by consumer identities and their practices within specific geographies. Castilhos et al. (2016) encourage a deeper engagement with geography when exploring markets. Indeed, the postmodern approach to researching spatialities offers new opportunities in research on the production of postmodern identities and consumption norms constructed through power and resistance in a social marketplace. Adding the subject of power into the gendered discussions of space can inform consumer research as to how gender relations change, become ‘visible and invisible, subordinated or marginalised, along with mechanisms or structures facilitating this’ (Hearn & Hein, 2015, p. 1641).

Gender power performances in this research were revealed through the spatial analysis of ten men’s spa consumption practices and experiences using Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of space as *perceived*, *conceived* and *lived*. Application of Lefebvre’s (1991) conceptualisation of space in the consumer behaviour field further demonstrates that gender, consumer identities and consumption are not static. Instead, they change as a

result of time, culture, history, space, products and services available within the marketplace. According to Chatzidakis et al. (2012, p. 498), when

space becomes place, it produces webs of meanings and connections between people, thereby bringing a sense of community and identity, which in turn paves the way for collective action. In a heterotopian space, these webs are about radical difference to the norms of the dominant society, a difference that generates 'utopic spatial play' as a crucial part of this meaning creation process. Importantly, utopic dynamics are not just about thinking but also about doing and thus a form of utopian praxis.

This utopian praxis opens doors for more engaged, fluid and diverse gender practices that are not tied to binaries, but represent holistic meanings which extend consumption to more diverse and inclusive lived experiences.

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