

Do gender identities of femininity and masculinity affect the intention to buy ethical products?

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## TITLE PAGE

(I) TITLE: **Do Gender Identities of Femininity and Masculinity Affect the Intention to Buy Ethical Products?**

(II) RUNNING HEAD: **DO GENDER IDENTITIES AFFECT ETHICAL INTENTIONS?**

(III) AUTHOR INFORMATION AND AFFILIATION:

**Mariella Pinna,  
Department of Economics and Business, University of Sassari  
Sassari, Italy  
E-mail: mapinna@uniss.it**

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## Do Gender Identities of Femininity and Masculinity Affect the Intention to Buy Ethical Products?

### Abstract

This study shows that gender identity affects ethical intentions. We investigate the intention to purchase ethical products through a survey study among young consumers in Italy. Measures of planned behavior, internal ethics, self-identity, and moral harm, together with proxies for individual gender identities of femininity and masculinity are included in our model of intention to purchase ethically. Results show that femininity significantly increases ethical intent, whereas masculinity has an opposite effect. These findings are robust to gender. In fact, the relations of femininity and masculinity on the intention to consume ethical products hold when the subsamples of males and females are considered. This study relates to the ongoing debate regarding the determinants of ethical decision-making and the feminine stereotype by extending the understanding of the attitude-intention gap in ethical consumption among young consumers in Italy. Finally, implications and avenues for further research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Ethical decision-making, attitude-intention gap, gender identity, youth, theory of planned behavior, femininity, masculinity.

## 1. Introduction

The importance of sustainability has rapidly increased over the past three decades (e.g., Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2010). Consumers are concerned about overproduction and overconsumption. According to Nielsen (2018), 49% of individuals are willing to pay more for ethical products, and 81% feel strongly that companies should help improve the environment. Therefore, sustainable practices are an important opportunity for companies (e.g., McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006; Vanhamme, Lindgreen, Reast, & van Popering, 2012). Big brands are jumping on the bandwagon to develop clean, safe and socially responsible products. For instance, since 2017 Adidas has produced shoes from plastic debris found in the oceans, and Procter & Gamble is planning to introduce bottles made of 25% recycled plastic for the 500 million bottles sold annually with its haircare lines (Europe Consumer Trends 2018). Policy makers and organizations are also developing policies and targeted actions to boost sustainability among consumers and firms. In addition, the European Commission is leading the fight against plastic pollution and has recently voted in favor of a comprehensive set of measures, in the form of the “Single Use Plastics” EU Directive (European Commission, 2019), to help tackle plastic waste and implement the European strategy for a circular economy.

Despite this attention and growth, daily ethical practices are far from being widespread. The market share for ethical products (i.e., environmentally friendly, Fairtrade products, etc.) is inexplicably low compared to the consumer proclivity towards them (Eckhardt, Belk, & Devinney, 2010; Jacobs, Petersen, Hörisch, & Battenfeld, 2018). As environmental and social issues increase, understanding what drives or hinders consumers to follow their ethical values “is a challenge of theoretical and practical relevance and also of critical importance to ‘mobilize the consumer’ towards positive environmental and socio-economic outcomes” (Caruana, Carrington, & Chatzidakis, 2016, p. 215). If left unaddressed, “[...] this gap would continue to frustrate producers of ethical products who rely on traditional, attitudinal market research methods, only to find that actual demand often falls far short of their initial projections. In turn, this limits

the availability of ethical product alternatives and thus limits movement toward more ethical consumption” (Prothero et al., 2011 p. 32).

The present study relates to two strands of literature. The literature on the decision-making processes leading to ethical consumption guided us towards a model that includes both external predictors (i.e., impediments) and internal antecedents (i.e., moral obligation, self-identity) of consumer intentions to purchase ethically (e.g., Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010; Caruana et al., 2016; Chatzidakis, Kastanakis, & Stathopoulou, 2016). For instance, ethical consumption is inhibited by external factors such as uncertainty in ethical choice (e.g., Hassan, Shaw, Shiu, Walsh, & Parry, 2013) and a presumption that ethical products are limited (e.g., Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2011). On the other hand, internal factors (i.e., socio-demographic and psychological features) such as consumer’s ‘willful ignorance’ about product ethicality (Ehrich & Irwin, 2005) and moral disengagement (e.g., Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014) have been identified as important negative influencers; while moral obligation and self-identity have been respectively pinpointed as positive internal predictors of the intention to consume Fairtrade (Shaw & Shiu, 2002b) and green products (e.g., Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2014).

Perhaps more importantly, we contribute to the literature on the “female/feminine stereotype” (e.g., Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016) in ethical consumption by showing that, irrespective of the respondents’ gender, femininity traits significantly increase the ethical intention, whereas masculinity decreases it. Research on ethical consumption has clearly pointed out the differences in demand across gender (e.g., Luchs & Mooradian, 2012). In fact, women are more concerned than men about social issues (Eagly, Diekmann, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Koenig, 2004) and the environment (Koos, 2011), while men are less likely than women to demonstrate sustainability-oriented sensitivity and to practice ethical consumption (Davidson & Freudenburg, 1996; J. A. Lee & Holden, 1999). More specifically, men litter more (Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000), are less involved in pro-environmental behaviors (Dzialo, 2017), and recycle less (Zelezny, Chua, & Aldrich, 2000); whereas women display more favorable attitudes, higher moral obligation, and stronger inclinations toward products that contribute to social wealth (de Leeuw,

Valois, Morin, & Schmidt, 2014) and help the environment across age groups and countries (Zelezny et al., 2000).

Earlier studies, which have adopted traditional or extended versions of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model for ethical purchase decisions, have neglected the impact of feminine and masculine traits in shaping consumers' intention to buy ethical products. Our study relies on the extended version of the TPB as per Chatzidakis et al. (2016) for the theoretical basis, and proposes a model of intention to consume ethically that accounts for the psychological gender-related traits of femininity and masculinity.

Although we do not claim that the identities of masculinity and femininity alone determine the realignment of the gender gap in ethical consumption, our study offers a novel explanation for this phenomenon. Specifically, we posit that the mismatch between attitudes and intentions in ethical consumption stems from traits of femininity (held by both men and women) rather than gender differences (i.e., being female or not). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first research providing evidence on the influence of gender identities of masculinity and femininity on the ethical decision-making of young consumers in the context of Italy.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we present a brief overview of the literature on consumer decision-making in ethical consumption, combining it with prior studies on gender identity. Next, we develop our empirical model specification and formulate the testable hypotheses. Finally, we present our data and the empirical evidence. We conclude with a discussion of the implications and limitations of this research.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development**

A plethora of definitions have been adopted to describe consumer behaviors that reflect the impacts of consumption on society and/or environment (e.g., "sustainable consumption" Prothero et al., 2011; "socially responsible consumption" Lee & Cho, 2019, Prendergast & Tsang, 2019; "ecologically concerned consumption" Fraj & Martinez, 2007). Some of these terms specifically refer to either

environmental concerns (e.g., pollution, recycling, energy and resource use, green mobility) or social issues (e.g., safety at work, community empowerment), and others account for both aspects. Hereby we treat “ethical consumption” as consumer behaviors both influenced by concerns for social issues and/or concerns for the environment (Carrington et al., 2010). Ethical consumption is an individual’s conscious and deliberate choice to buy products or services which are consistent with his/her moral beliefs and deeply related to sustainability issues. In this sense, consumption research defines a variety of issues as “ethical”, such as environmental concern, health and safety risks, animal welfare, fair trade, labor conditions, and human rights (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2005).

Ethical consumption has received increasing attention during the last three decades (e.g., Caruana et al., 2016). Studies on ethical consumption behavior follow two main lines of research: interpretive and psycho-attitudinal research (e.g., Caruana et al., 2016). On the one hand, interpretive studies investigate the social-cultural influences that have contributed to the appearance of ethical consumption, placing the focus on the *collective* dimension or community-based aspects of ethical consumption (e.g., Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Autio, Heiskanen, & Heinonen, 2009; Belz & Peattie, 2009; Caruana & Chatzidakis, 2014). On the other hand, by exploring context-specific issues (i.e., consumers’ lack of time or inertia) and psychological constructs (i.e., self-identity, moral obligation, care) that have the power to “mobilize” a consumer towards ethical choices, psychological and attitudinal research has addressed the *individual* dimension of ethical consumption, (e.g., Carrington et al., 2010; Papaoikonomou, Ryan, & Ginieis, 2011; Shaw, Shiu, & Clarke, 2000; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

Within the psychological and attitudinal stream of ethical consumption literature, the most influential theoretical framework is Ajzen’s TPB (1985, 1991) as it provides a useful initial platform for understanding consumer ethical decision-making (Chatzidakis et al., 2016). The TPB model has been successfully applied to ethical consumption contexts, such as fair trade products (Shaw & Shiu, 2002b), organic food consumption (e.g., Annunziata, Iannario, & Pascale, 2011), and sweatshop clothing (L. M. Hassan, Shiu, & Shaw, 2016), thus allowing consistency and comparability in this area of research. The rationale behind the TPB model presumes that consumers’ ethical attitudes translate into consistent ethical

intentions, and, in the end, into actual ethical behaviors (e.g., Fukukawa, 2002). However, inconsistencies between what consumers think, what they intend, and what they actually do, across several ethical consumption contexts, have been also identified (e.g., Hassan, Shiu, & Shaw, 2016). Consumers who fail to “walk their talk” towards ethical consumption (Carrington et al., 2010) are influenced by a set of external (i.e., economic factors, availability) and internal (i.e., gender, educational level, neutralization techniques) determinants (e.g., Fukukawa, Zaharie, & Romonți-Maniu, 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

This study relates to the literature on the decision-making process in ethical consumption, especially focusing on the psychological and attitudinal strand (Caruana et al., 2016), by proposing a conceptual model that merges determinants of ethical consumption, both internal and external, with gender identity variables. Specifically, we argue that the intention of young ethically minded consumers to purchase ethical products is the result of a complex composition of internal (e.g., attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, moral obligation, self-identity) and external (e.g., impediments) factors, together with the gender related psychological traits of femininity and masculinity (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

### *2.1. Theory of Planned Behavior*

TPB explains consumption through consumer intention to perform one specific behavior. Consumer intention is split into the three internal elements of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. More specifically, attitude is the combination of the individual belief about a specific behavior with the estimation of the likelihood that this behavior would result in a certain outcome (e.g., Evans, Jamal, & Foxall, 2009); therefore, a positive attitude towards environmental concerns enhances the green consumers’ willingness to consume ethically and, eventually, to buy green products. For instance, an ethically concerned consumer will positively evaluate personal purchases of Fairtrade products. On the other hand, the individual belief (or subjective norm) about what relevant people (friends, relatives, etc.)

might say about ethical consumption practices also strongly influences the intention to purchase a product (e.g., Ravis, Sheeran, & Armitage, 2009). For example, when an ethical consumer perceives positive pressure from important others (e.g., friends, parents), he/she will likely buy ethical products (and vice versa). Similarly, according to the theory (Ajzen, 2001), human behavior is also guided by “beliefs about the presence of factors that may further or hinder performance of the behavior (control beliefs)” (Ajzen, 2002 p. 665). Such control beliefs give rise to perceived behavioral control (PBC), which describes “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior” (Ajzen, 2002 p. 665). More simply, perceived behavioral control is the consumer’s perception that the necessary mechanisms are there to help (or inhibit) him/her in finalizing a specific purchasing behavior. For example, an ethical consumer who feels able to actually purchase a Fairtrade product, will most probably perform the said behavior (i.e., buy the Fairtrade product). Therefore, consistent with Ajzen’s (1991) approach, we posit the positive influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on ethical intentions. Therefore, the testable hypotheses are:

H<sub>1</sub>: Attitude positively affects the Intention to buy ethical products.

H<sub>2</sub>: Subjective Norms positively affect the Intention to buy ethical products.

H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived Behavioral Control positively affects the Intention to buy ethical products.

## *2.2. The inclusion of additional constructs in the TPB*

Recent research in ethical consumption has added new constructs to the traditional TPB factors. Specifically, ethical decision-making is found to be determined by internal factors such as moral obligation and self-identity (Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2014; Chatzidakis et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2000). Moral obligation is the “internalized ethical rule which reflects personal beliefs about appropriate behavior” (Shaw & Shiu, 2002a, p. 287). More simply, moral obligation indicates the personal feelings of what is right or wrong. For instance, a responsible consumer might purchase ethical products simply because it is the right thing to do, whereas the violation of these principles would be intrinsically wrong. The extent of

consumers' belief that they should consume in an ethical manner (Cotte & Trudel, 2010) relates to their feeling of anticipated guilt when they fail to do so (e.g., Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005). The desire to avoid feelings of anticipated guilt leads consumers towards satisfying their internal standards, such that, in the end, moral obligation is associated with positive intention to purchase ethically (e.g., Pelozo, White, & Shang, 2013).

Research has suggested that the TPB can be further augmented with measures of self-identity (Shaw & Shiu, 2002b). Self-identity, on the other hand, defines that part of the individual self that relates to a particular behavior (Shaw & Shiu, 2002a). As such, it is more likely that a person adopts a certain behavior if that behavior is associated with his/her self-identity (e.g., Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2006). Self-identity has also been found to be a positive motivation for consumer ethical behaviors (e.g., Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2014). Ethical consumers may make ethical consumption choices because ethical issues have become an important part of their self-identity. For example, people who identify themselves as "recyclers" are more likely to recycle than those who do not identify as such (e.g., Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2004). Consistently, we posit that:

H<sub>4</sub>: Moral obligation positively affects the Intention to buy ethical products.

H<sub>5</sub>: Self-identity as an ethically concerned consumer positively affects the Intention to buy ethical products.

Finally, further research highlights that external factors, such as significant negative impediments against the decision to buy ethically, are also in play (e.g., Gupta & Ogden, 2009). For instance, a perceived personal inconvenience towards ethical products, since ethical products are perceived as time consuming or economically disadvantageous, may prevent consumers from buying them (e.g., Bray et al., 2011). Time, quality, effort, price, availability, stress, inertia, are all examples of perceived situational impediments that could negatively influence the positive outcome of ethical decision-making. More formally,

H<sub>6</sub>: Impediments negatively affect the Intention to buy ethical products.

### *2.3. Ethical Consumption, Gender and Gender Identity*

The literature clearly points out that specific demographic factors affect consumers' ethical sensitivity and are able to trigger ethical consumption. For instance, ethical sensitivity has been found to increase with age (e.g., Hines & Anes, 2000) and income (e.g., Barnett et al., 2005). Further, ethical sensitivity is more often observed in females rather than males (e.g., Bray et al., 2011). Theoretical explanations for gender differences in, for instance, environmental concerns were found in relation to safety concerns, risk perceptions, and institutional trust (McCright & Xiao, 2014). Recently, small but significant differences in men's and women's pro-environmental behavior have been associated with prenatal testosterone exposure (Hand, 2019). Nonetheless, research dealing with gender as a predictor of ethical consumption has produced a variety of conflicting evidence (e.g., Cherrier, 2005). While some contributions report significant differences in the ethical reasoning by males and females (e.g., Valentine & Rittenburg, 2007), other studies report modest dissimilarities or no differences at all (e.g., Roxas & Stoneback, 2004). Rather than originating in the biological sex identity (male or female), ethical behaviors might be rooted in the psychological gender identity (masculinity and femininity). Consistent with the "female/feminine stereotype" in the sustainable consumption literature (Brough et al., 2016), gender differences in ethical consumption could be intrinsic to the specific approach males and females use in ethical reasoning (Kennedy, Kray, & Ku, 2017): while women tend to solve ethical issues by relying on their sense of care, men trust their sense of justice (e.g., Gilligan, 1993). The construct of gender identity thus appears to be consistent with these purposes.

Traditionally, differences in the behavior of males and females were conceptualized as mere biological sex distinctions; additionally, individuals were expected to conform to socially accepted gender traits and roles in order to be considered "healthy individuals" (Stern, 1988). Consistently, gender identity was considered a unidimensional continuum composed of two opposing poles of femininity and masculinity

which were strongly correlated to sex differences (i.e., females being feminine, and males being masculine). Lately, relevant changes in Western societies (i.e., women working outside the home, and men more actively participating in family life) have challenged this commonly accepted “sex-role dichotomy” (Bem, 1974 p. 155). Bem’s seminal work called these assumptions into question and conceptualized femininity and masculinity as separate, orthogonal constructs, not biologically based, and able to healthily coexist in varying degrees within the same individual (K. Palan et al., 2011). As a consequence, “androgynous” individuals might be both masculine and feminine, thus specific traits related to masculinity and femininity can be simultaneously observed in males and females. For instance, an individual (male or female) can be both assertive and dominant (i.e., masculine gender identity traits), and tender and loyal (feminine gender identity traits) (e.g., Barak & Stern, 1986), depending on the “situational appropriateness of these various behaviors” (Bem, 1974 p. 155). Therefore, while a simple gender biological approach is very likely to fail in capturing the psychological differences that truly exist between men and women (e.g., Feiereisen, Broderick, & Douglas, 2009), gender identity is expected to provide a much more powerful explanatory framework.

Gender identity, as the extent to which an individual identifies him/herself with masculine or feminine personality traits (Deaux, 1985), is linked with consumer behavior (Ye, Bose, & Pelton, 2019). Indeed, gender identity has been found to be a good predictor of several consumer behaviors such as, for instance, shopping (Fischer & Arnold, 1994) and gift giving (Weisfeld-Spolter, Rippé, & Gould, 2015). Despite previous research efforts, gender identity and its related consumer behavior is still an understudied area (Ye, Bose, & Pelton, 2019), which deserves further investigation. Only a handful of papers have addressed the gender identity issue in ethical consumption (e.g., Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016; Dzialo, 2017).

We posit that gender identity, in addition to other constructs (e.g., TPB measures, internal ethics, self-identity), has the potential to shed light on our understanding of the decision-making process of ethically minded young consumers. The rationale of our assumption is linked to the fact that femininity

traits are often associated with a stronger ethic of care (Zelezny et al., 2000), higher sensitivity towards environmental risk (Brent, 2004) and greater concern for health and safety issues, especially when having children (Davidson & Freudenburg, 1996). In other words, we postulate that to the extent femininity traits are “other oriented” (i.e., oriented towards the environment, human beings, animals) they have the potential to predict ethical intentions, if compared to gender (at least nowadays in Western countries). In sum, whenever the hypothesis that gender identity plays a key role in determining ethical intentions is verified, feminine and masculine individuals would be more (less) prone to purchasing ethically. Therefore, we hypothesize that femininity traits might be one crucial predictor of ethical intentions; conversely, masculinity would be negatively related to ethical intentions. As such, we posit the following hypotheses:

H<sub>7</sub>: Femininity positively affects the Intention to buy ethical products.

H<sub>8</sub>: Masculinity negatively affects the Intention to buy ethical products.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### *3.1. Survey Design*

A self-administered survey instrument was developed for the purposes of the study. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were qualified by means of a screening question that ensured they have purchased ethical products in the past. Then, respondents were provided of a definition of “ethical products” to stimulate memory and help them complete the questionnaire in a more focused frame of mind (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, respondents were informed their anonymity would be guaranteed and that no right or wrong answers were expected, to reduce potential evaluation apprehension, (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, respondents filled in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is built upon the literature investigating the determinants of intent to purchase ethical products. Specifically, respondents were asked to assess their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 7=strongly agree) for several measures. First, we moved from traditional TPB measures (e.g., Ajzen, 1985, 1991), then we adapted items to measure moral

obligation (e.g., Sparks & Shepherd, 2002; Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Pelozo, White, & Shang, 2013), self-identity (e.g., Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992) and impediments (Bray et al., 2011). Measures of gender identity were retrieved from the Gender Traits Index (GTI), the shortened version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (e.g., Barak and Stern, 1986). Barak and Stern's (1986) GTI scale was selected because it has been widely and successfully used, over the past 30 years in Western societies, to assess gender identity in several marketing-related and consumer behaviors studies (Palan et al., 2011; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2012; Weisfeld-Spolter, Rippé, & Gould, 2015). This parsimonious version of Bem's original BSRI scale has shown good reliability and validity even when applied to cross-cultural research (e.g., Schertzer, Laufer, Silvera, & Brad McBride, 2008). The GTI consists of 20 items describing 10 masculine and 10 feminine traits. Respondents rate the self-descriptiveness of each of these gender-related traits using 7-point Likert scales with "never or almost never true" at the low end of the scale and "always or almost always true" at the high end of the scale. Finally, the questionnaire includes a set of questions regarding socio-demographic characteristics. A comprehensive description of the measures and items in the questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

### *3.2 Data Collection*

Data was collected from a convenience sample of 626 individuals between 18 and 35 years old, mostly university students, residing in different regions in Italy. Although findings from a convenience sampling approach may limit the generalizability of the study, previous evidence has acknowledged the reliability of students and young samples in similar research settings (e.g., Phau & Cheah, 2011).

A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed online to reach the largest number of respondents. In total, 626 usable surveys were returned (78 % response rate) where 419 individuals answered they have purchased ethical products in the past. The final sample consists of 419 complete answers. The make-up of the final sample is as follows: 66.2% women and 33.8% men all between the ages of 18 and 35; 48.2% have

a bachelor's degree; 75.6% were unmarried and 10.9% had children. Table 1 provides the sample description.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

#### 4. Data Analysis<sup>1</sup> and Results

##### 4.1. Validity and Reliability of Measures

To ensure unidimensionality and internal consistency, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for each construct including more than three items (e.g., Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). After dropping several items that displayed low loadings or substantial cross loadings, most variables exhibit desirable psychometric properties (e.g., attitude, subjective norm, PBC) apart from self-identity and moral obligation, which led us to aggregate self-identity and moral obligation into one construct named internal ethics (Chatzidakis et al., 2016). In fact, from a conceptual standpoint, identifying oneself as an ethical consumer implies possessing an ethical orientation (Chatzidakis et al., 2016; Sparks & Shepherd, 2002). In addition, to ensure discriminant validity, we employed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA, maximum likelihood with Varimax rotation and latent root criterion – eigenvalue > 1). As recommended by (Hair et al., 2009), factor loadings greater than 0.50 were considered necessary for practical significance, and factors with high cross loadings (> 0.40) or low communalities (< 0.30) were candidates for elimination. The suitability of the data for factor analysis (EFA) was determined by the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index and

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<sup>1</sup> Given that several measures in the survey share common methods (i.e., consistency motif, common scale format and common scale anchors) - and that such shared methods may exert a systematic effect on the observed correlation between the measures, thus, threatening the validity of the conclusions about the relationships between the measures - one could argue that a common method bias might be an issue here.

To investigate the presence of common method biases in the study, Harman's one-factor test is performed (Chatzidakis, Kastanakis, & Stathopoulou, 2016). Measurement items for intention, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, impediments, moral obligation, self-identity, and masculinity and femininity have been factor analyzed (principal axis factoring, unrotated). The first factor accounted for 17.9% of the variance, which is much lower than 50% critical threshold and consistent with the absence of common method bias in the data. Despite being one of the most widely used techniques, Harman's one factor test has some limitations (Fuller, Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, & Babin, 2016; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) which have to be acknowledged to ensure a cautious use.

by Bartlett's test of Sphericity. The KMO exceeded the lower acceptable value (.70), and Bartlett's test was statistically significant at the .001 level, demonstrating factorability of the considered constructs (e.g., Hair et al., 2009). The EFA resulted in a two-factor solution. Thus, we broke apart and then re-aggregated the initial constructs of self-identity and moral obligation into two new dimensions that were conceptually distinct – internal ethics and moral harm. As per Pelozo et al. (2013), subjective norms and a desire to conform to one's own internal self-standards can drive pro-ethical behaviors (i.e., behaviors they believe they should exhibit), by both preventing the guilt from less ethical decisions and creating incentives for moral choices in consumption. Finally, after these adjustments, to ensure goodness of fit for the measurement model, we validated both the basic and the extended models with a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). All values indicate that both models have a good fit (TPB model: CMIN/df = 1.818, GFI = .966, CFI = .983, NFI = .964, RMSEA = .042; extended TPB: CMIN/df = 1.639, GFI = .900, CFI = .963, NFI = .912, RMSEA = .037), as recommended for instance by Hair et al. (2009). Table 2 summarizes Cronbach's alphas, composite reliabilities and average variance extracted for the employed multi-item constructs. Table 3 provides the respective correlations.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

[Insert Table 3 about here]

#### *4.2. Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis*

A comprehensive approach is important in ethical settings to consider the direct effects of both traditional and new predictors of intention to buy ethical products (Chatzidakis et al., 2016). Therefore, hierarchical moderated regression analysis might help to test contingency hypotheses (e.g., Arnold, 1982; Cohen and Cohen, 1983,). First, traditional TPB antecedents of intention are included in the analysis. Then, the model was augmented with the additional explanatory variables found to be significant in the literature

explaining the intention to consume ethically. Finally, the constructs of femininity and masculinity were further added, resulting in the following equation forms:

$$y = a + bx$$

$$y = a + bx + cz$$

$$y = a + bx + cz + dw$$

where  $y$  is the dependent variable,  $a$  is the intercept term, and  $b$ ,  $c$ , and  $d$  are the regression coefficients;  $x$  indicates the set of explanatory variables of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control,  $z$  stands for internal ethics, moral harm and impediments, and  $w$  is for femininity and masculinity. Any changes in the Adjusted  $R^2$  of the equations considered, indicate an improvement of the overall fit of the model. Table 4 provides the results of the regression analysis.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Looking at Model 1, results show that traditional TPB antecedents (i.e., attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control) provide adequate explanatory power of the intention to consume ethically (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.244$ ), with significant influences of attitude<sup>2</sup> ( $\beta = 0.458^{***}$ ), followed by subjective norms ( $\beta = 0.172^{**}$ ) and PBC ( $\beta = 0.093^{***}$ ). When the additional constructs of internal ethics, moral harm, and impediments are included in the analysis in Model 2, the Adjusted  $R^2$  increases by 0.079 up to 0.323, thus showing a non trivial increase in the explanatory power of the model. Attitude ( $\beta = 0.326^{***}$ ), internal ethics ( $\beta = 0.264^{***}$ ), moral harm ( $\beta = 0.097^{***}$ ), PBC ( $\beta = 0.089^{***}$ ), and impediments ( $\beta = -0.080^{***}$ ) are newly confirmed and extremely important predictors of intention to consume ethical products. Finally,

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that betas for attitudes are always strongly significant, we acknowledge that this evidence is not surprising since attitudes were measured as *Act* (i.e., attitude toward the behavior) which is indeed very similar to intention.

Model 3 is further augmented with measures of gender identity of femininity and masculinity: as predicted, the effect of femininity on intention is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.049^{***}$ ), while masculinity significantly but inversely affects the intention to purchase ethically ( $\beta = -0.046^{**}$ ). In the other explanatory variables, the pattern remains essentially unchanged from previous evidence thus further supporting the robustness of the analysis. As a robustness check, Model 4 in Table 3 includes the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents as explanatory variables of intention, with results unchanged. In addition, female gender, having children, and a high income emerge as factors enhancing ethical intentions ( $\beta=0.244^{***}$ ;  $\beta=0.077^{*}$ ;  $\beta=0.194^{***}$ ). Overall, findings provide empirical evidence for hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> to H<sub>8</sub>, albeit through the construction of two composite measures of internal ethics and moral harm.

#### *4.3. Gender, Gender Identity, and Intention*

Some research shows that gender has a role in ethical consumption. More specifically, ethical consumption is found to better characterize females over males (e.g., Bray et al., 2011). Our findings from Model 4 in Table 4, that include the female variable as a predictor, support this evidence. One might still argue that the effects we find for gender identities simply reflect genders rather than the specific attributes of femininity and masculinity. If this were indeed the case, our results would neither be new nor an interesting contribution. To check for this, the roles of femininity and masculinity were investigated in the subsamples of men and women where significant evidence emerged. Thus, we can state femininity and masculinity are important in explaining ethical consumption. The results are provided in Table 5.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Model 1 in Table 5 deals with the ethical intentions of females. Remarkably, while the effect of femininity is not significant ( $\beta=0.007$ ), masculinity significantly and negatively affects intention ( $\beta=-0.040^{*}$ ). For the other explanatory variables, the pattern essentially mimics the evidence for the whole sample.

Specifically, attitude and internal ethics predict ethical intentions ( $\beta=0.278^{**}$ ;  $\beta=0.283^{**}$ ), followed by PBC ( $\beta=0.091^{***}$ ), subjective norm ( $\beta=0.058^*$ ), and finally impediments which exert a negative effect on ethical intentions ( $\beta= -0.057^*$ ). Model 2 in Table 5 is on men. The pattern of femininity and masculinity is reversed compared to women: masculinity is not significant ( $\beta=0.040$ ), while femininity significantly and positively affects the intention of males to buy ethical products ( $\beta=0.059^*$ ). As for the whole sample and the subsample of women, the males' ethical intentions are driven by attitude and internal ethics ( $\beta=0.329^{***}$ ;  $\beta=0.252^{***}$ ) and attenuated by impediments ( $\beta=-0.149^*$ ). Interestingly, the third main important predictor is moral harm which shows a positive and highly significant coefficient ( $\beta=0.246^{***}$ ). Remarkably, the intention of males is positively affected by femininity, whereas the intention of females is negatively influenced by masculinity traits. Therefore, the effects of gender identities that we documented are not simple synonyms of the gender effects. Finally, coefficients of subjective norm and PBC are both positive as expected and close to being significant ( $\beta=0.139$ ;  $\beta=0.055$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The results suggest that a young consumer's intention to consume ethically can be predicted by traditional TPB antecedents - attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. Specifically, the explanatory power of variables such as attitude, subjective norm, PBC (e.g., Ajzen, 1985, 1991) and impediments (e.g., Bray et al., 2011) are consistent with previous studies. Such results provide evidence to our initial hypotheses  $H_1$  to  $H_3$  and  $H_6$ .

The current findings also confirm the importance of additional variables proposed in previous research, such as internal ethics. In fact, in this study, internal ethics – a construct that comprises measures of self-identity and moral obligation, given the lack of discriminant validity for the two initial constructs - is the second most important predictor of intention to consume ethically. Accordingly, Hitlin (2011 p.525) noted that “personal identity is – at its core – a moral entity, framed by values providing cognitive-emotional horizons through which we understand and evaluate ourselves and others”. As suggested by

Conner and Armitage (1998), the relationship between personal norms and self-identity may vary depending on the behavior considered.

Finally, our results show that femininity is a relevant psychological antecedent of ethical intentions (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016), thus supporting H<sub>7</sub>; whereas masculinity has a negative and significant impact on ethical intention, as predicted in H<sub>8</sub>. Remarkably, the measures of femininity and masculinity confirm their power to predict ethical intentions both when the variable of female gender is included in the model and when the pattern is investigated in the subsamples of males and females. Not surprisingly, when measures of femininity – which describe, feelings such as tenderness, sensitivity to others, or eagerness to soothe hurt feelings – are added in the model, the impact of internal ethics on intention increases.

Overall, the findings support the applicability of the TPB model in the area of ethical consumption. The results also support the inclusion of additional predictive measures in the TPB model, especially femininity, as these improve the predictive power of the proposed model.

## **6. Conclusion and Future steps**

### *6.1. Theoretical and Practical Contribution*

Built on the extant research investigating the determinants of ethical consumption, this study provides insight into young people's decisions to consume ethically, responding to the calls for a more comprehensive assessment of the decision-making process in the domain of ethical consumption made by prior researchers (L. M. Hassan et al., 2016). This study also contributes to the literature on the female/feminine stereotype in ethical consumption by showing that, respondent gender notwithstanding, femininity significantly increases ethical intentions, whereas masculinity brings the opposite. Therefore, we suggest a conceptual framework wherein femininity traits significantly influence the intention to purchase responsibly regardless of gender. Contrary to the approach taken by Kennedy et al. (2017), our findings show it is femininity (in terms of sensitivity to others) that drives ethical intentions, not that females have a

stronger moral identity than males. This is the reason why males in this study showed stronger attitudes towards purchasing ethically, when compared to females. Further, results show that the construct of internal ethics changes consistently with femininity, which in turn contributes to the formation of the ethical self. Thus, we claim that in order to properly measure intentions and behaviors in ethical settings, measures of gender identity should be taken into account.

The findings presented here also offer potential insights for practitioners. Specifically, we found evidence for the influence of gender identity in shaping consumer intentions towards ethical products. While social psychologists have acknowledged the idea that even inanimate objects can be imbued with human characteristics, such as psychological or personality traits (Neale, Robbie, & Martin, 2016), “marketers support consumers’ need for self-expression by creating masculine or feminine brand associations” (Grohmann, 2009 p.106). For example, Jeep is associated with adventurous, independent and authentic characteristics which relate to traits of masculinity; whereas Johnson and Johnson’s embodies caring, maternal and nurturing qualities which are generally linked to femininity identities. Further, according to self-congruency theory, consumers prefer products and brands that “are congruent with their self-concept” (Sirgy, 1982 p.291). To the extent that gender identity is a relevant part of individuals’ self-concept and is also a prominent dimension of brand personality, favorable consumer responses (i.e., loyalty, purchase intentions) may be expected, as suggested by Neale, Robbie, & Martin (2016). Further, previous studies on impression management in ethical settings have revealed that when a consumer, especially in public contexts (i.e., at the supermarket), makes an ethical purchase, observers perceive him/her as more feminine (Shang & Pelozo, 2016). This evidence may dissuade masculine type male consumers from buying ethical products. However, Griskevicius et al. (2007) state that men are more helpful in contexts where they can display heroism or dominance. Therefore, market segmentation based on gender identity could furnish important suggestions to overcome masculinity issues in ethical settings, and in turn expand the market share of ethical products. To the extent that we have not investigated the congruence of ethical consumers’ gender identity and specific products or brands personalities, we cannot directly suggest that marketers should attach femininity traits to ethical products. However, there is

theoretical basis (Grohmann, 2009; Neale et al., 2016) to suggest that marketers should communicate ethical appeals in a tailored way such that consumers can simply identify femininity attributes when selecting a product on the aisle. For instance, femininity can inspire advertising campaigns of ethical products by conveying feelings of tenderness or eagerness to soothe hurt feelings.

Finally, despite ethical sensitivity, consumers still perceive ethical products in terms of time-consuming or expensive, thus they tend to minimize the effort related to purchasing them. Accordingly, marketers who wish to incentivize the purchase of ethical products should focus on identifying the most suitable positioning strategies and communication channels.

## *6.2. Limitations and Future Steps*

Along with the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study, there are some limitations. This paper treats “ethical consumption” as consumer behaviors both influenced by concerns for social issues and/or concerns for the environment (Barnett et al., 2005). Otherwise said, the “proxy” for ethical decision-making is the intention to purchase ethical products. However, the consumption, for instance, of green products is not one-to-one an ethical behavior. Future studies investigating ethical decision-making based on ethical consumption could beneficially consider running a pretest that confirms that their respondents do actually see/perceive/think “as ethical” products such as, for example, green ones or those from the Fairtrade circuit; in the end, future researches would benefit by a more convincing evidence.

This study relies on a relatively small size (419) convenience sample of young ethically minded consumers in Italy, thus findings are not easily generalizable. In particular, young and educated consumers might have answered the survey in a more socially desirable way (Kaiser, Schultz, Berenguer, Corral-Verdugo, & Tankha, 2008). Indeed, social desirability appears troublesome in ethical consumption settings where respondents perceive that they should provide socially acceptable answers instead of expressing their own views (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Carrington et al., 2010; Devinney et al., 2010; Shaw, McMaster, & Newholm, 2015). In this paper, assurance that a significant part of the results is not explained by social

desirability bias would have been beneficial. Further, some could argue that women and others with high feminine traits will recognize how they are “supposed” to answer and answer accordingly, given that feminine traits are associated with pleasing others and being sensitive to others. Future studies could take into account social desirability bias and account for its potential to influence the findings and inflate the attitude-behavior gap in ethical consumption (Larson & Kinsey, 2019). Specifically, it would be good to measure social desirability bias and, for instance, include it as a covariate in the model to control for its effects.

Further, future studies could include a sample from diverse socio-demographic populations that will help generalize the findings. Additional testing on the efficacy of our hypotheses in other countries would be required in order to provide more robust evidence to our model, deriving from cross-cultural comparisons. For instance, the feminization of environmental responsibility was found to diverge widely cross-nationally, therefore the national context should be taken into account when gender traits and ethical behaviors are investigated (Dzialo, 2017).

This study is limited to measuring intention, not actual behavior. So, future studies may investigate the actual behavior regarding ethical purchases in order to identify the relationship between purchase intention and actual behavior. The explanatory power of the proposed framework is 34.1% (i.e., Adj  $R^2$  0.341), therefore future studies can improve the predictive power of the framework by integrating additional constructs from prior literature. For instance, to keep the model simple and shed light on the positive influence of femininity towards ethical intentions, we have omitted the discussion on some factors that play an important role in shaping ethical decision-making. We did not point out the influence of past behavior, which has been found to mitigate the negative impact of perceived impediments (Chatzidakis et al., 2016). Future studies can explore whether correlations occur between measures of internal ethics, femininity and value types serving collective interests, and their influence on ethical intentions. Another promising area for future investigations would be testing the influence of internal ethics, femininity and value types serving collective interests on actual ethical behaviors.

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**Table 1 – The sample**

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed.

	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	66.2
Male	33.8
<b>Age</b>	
18-25	49.3
26-35	50.7
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	75.6
Married	20.6
Separated	1.9
Divorced	1.1
Widow	.9
<b>Education level</b>	
Intermediate	3.2
High school	35.1
Bachelor	48.2
Master	8.6
PhD	3.0
Other	1.9
<b>Children</b>	
No	89.1
Yes	10.9

**Table 2 – Reliability scores**

Cronbach's alpha values, composite reliabilities and average variance extracted values for the employed multi-item constructs are shown.

	Factor Loadings	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Attitude	0.730	8	0.894	0.879	0.511
	0.665				
	0.667				
	0.820				
	0.622				
	0.792				
	0.688				
	0.781				
Subjective Norm	0.812	3	0.814	0.830	0.623
	0.882				
	0.658				
PBC	0.762	2	0.788	0.791	0.655
	0.854				
Internal Ethics	0.720	5	0.892	0.889	0.619
	0.705				
	0.760				
	0.872				
Moral Harm	0.812	3	0.900	0.901	0.753
	0.893				
	0.895				
Intention	0.924	3	0.946	0.947	0.856
	0.894				
	0.957				
Impediments	0.568	3	0.752	0.770	0.537
	0.914				
	0.674				
Masculinity	0.737	5	0.836	0.835	0.504
	0.659				
	0.661				
	0.744				
Femininity	0.743	6	0.871	0.901	0.535
	0.785				
	0.769				
	0.619				
	0.549				
	0.812				
	0.724				

**Table 3 – Correlations**

The correlations for the multi-item constructs are presented. \*\*\*, \*\*, \* indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Attitude	1								
(2) Subjective Norm	0.1742***	1							
(3) PBC	0.2780***	0.1014**	1						
(4) Internal Ethics	0.5589***	0.3913***	0.2062***	1					
(5) Moral Harm	0.2993***	0.1895***	0.2361***	0.5236***	1				
(6) Impediments	0.1257**	-0.0879*	0,0168	0,0309	0.1304***	1			
(7) Femininity	0.2536***	0.1760***	0.2222***	0.1903***	0.1221**	0,0177	1		
(8) Masculinity	0.1027**	0.0855*	0.1479***	0.2582***	0.1958***	0.1068**	0.1202**	1	
(9) Intention	0.5550***	0.2405***	0.3242***	0.6133***	0.3630***	-0,0219	0.1782***	0.1823***	1

**Table 4 – Hierarchical Moderated Regression Results**

Standardized beta coefficients are presented. T-statistics are reported in parentheses. Robust to heteroskedasticity standard errors have been considered.

\*\*\*, \*\*, \* indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

	Intention			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Main Effects of Traditional TPB</i>				
Attitude	0.458*** (31.95)	0.326*** (9.50)	0.318*** (10.05)	0.310*** (11.09)
Subjective Norm	0.172** (4.81)	0.095* (2.80)	0.091* (2.58)	0.100** (3.56)
PBC	0.093*** (9.08)	0.089*** (7.16)	0.077*** (6.16)	0.073* (2.52)
<i>Main Effects of Extended TPB</i>				
Internal Ethics		0.264*** (5.65)	0.272*** (5.97)	0.254*** (6.17)
Moral Harm		0.097*** (8.05)	0.097*** (8.16)	0.120*** (9.58)
Impediments		-0.080*** (-10.64)	-0.075*** (-12.56)	-0.078*** (-9.43)
Femininity			0.049*** (6.74)	0.024* (2.37)
Masculinity			-0.046** (-5.05)	-0.016** (-5.47)
<i>Main Effects of Socio-demographic Variables</i>				
Have Children				0.244*** (6.55)
High Education				0.046 (1.28)
High Income				0.077* (2.86)
Female				0.194*** (10.15)
N. of Observations	419	419	419	419
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.244	0.323	0.327	0.341

**Table 5 – Hierarchical Moderated Regression Results**

Standardized beta coefficients are presented. T-statistics are reported in parentheses. Robust to heteroskedasticity standard errors have been considered.

\*\*\*, \*\*, \* indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

	Intention	
	Females	Males
	(1)	(2)
<i>Main Effects of Traditional TPB</i>		
Attitude	0.278** (5.61)	0.329*** (12.74)
Subjective Norm	0.058* (3.09)	0.139 (1.82)
PBC	0.091*** (33.05)	0.055 (1.97)
<i>Main Effects of Extended TPB</i>		
Internal Ethics	0.283** (4.43)	0.252*** (17.95)
Moral Harm	0.056 (1.82)	0.246*** (18.13)
Impediments	-0.057* (-3.17)	-0.149* (-3.73)
Femininity	0.007 (1.41)	0.059* (3.10)
Masculinity	-0.040* (-2.48)	0.040 (0.95)
N. of Observations	283	136
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.293	0.404

## Appendix

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### The Survey Instrument

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*Intention (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)*

**I expect to buy EP in the near future**

**I want to buy EP in the near future**

**I intend to buy EP in the near future**

*Attitude (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)*

**In general, my attitude towards buying Ethical products is favorable**

**In general, my attitude towards buying Ethical products is positive**

**Buying EP is beneficial**

**Buying EP is good**

**Buying EP is pleasant**

**Buying EP is worthless**

Buying EP is valuable

**Buying EP is enjoyable**

**Buying EP is rewarding**

Buying EP is the right thing to do

*Subjective Norm (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)*

**Most people who are important to me buy EP**

**Most people who are important to me think that I should buy EP**

The people in my life whose opinions I value would not approve my ethical purchases

The people in my life whose opinions I value support my ethical purchases

**It is expected of me that I buy EP in the near future**

For me to buy EP in the near future would be difficult

If I wanted to, I could buy EP in the near future

It is mostly up to me whether or not I buy EP

*Perceived Behavioral Control (no control/ complete control)*

For me to buy ethical products in the near future would be difficult

**If I wanted to, I could buy ethical products in the near future**

**it is mostly up to me whether or not I buy ethical products**

*Moral obligation (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)*

**I feel that I have a moral obligation to buy EP**

**I personally feel I should buy EP**

**Buying EP would be the right thing to do for me**

**I would feel guilty if I buy products that damaged the environment**

**Buying products that damage the environment would be morally wrong for me**

**Buying products that damage the environment would go against my principles**

*Self-identity (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)*

**I think of myself as someone who is concerned about ethical issues in consumption**

I think of myself as an ethical consumer

**To buy EP is an important part of who I am**

I am not the type of person oriented to buy ethical products

*Impediments (strongly disagree/ strongly agree)*

**Purchasing EP is time consuming**

Purchasing EP means spending extra time

**Purchasing EP means spending extra time to go to specialized stores**

**Purchasing EP means spending extra time to recognize them on the shelf**

EP are lower in quality

If a company is primarily focused on maintaining ethical standards, then the quality of its products its likely to be lower

Purchasing EP is difficult because of the proliferation of ambiguous green labels  
 Purchasing EP is confusing because of the proliferation of ambiguous green labels  
 The proliferation of ambiguous green labels undermines the credibility of Purchasing EP  
 Purchasing EP is economically disadvantageous  
 Purchasing EP means spending extra money  
 EP lack in availability  
 There's a narrow range of EP  
 Purchasing EP is a stressful activity  
 Purchasing EP means spending extra cognitive resources  
 I feel reluctant to change my shopping practices  
 My ethical actions can make a difference  
 A change in my consumption pattern would have no impact  
 Focus group participants suggested they did not have enough knowledge to make ethical decisions  
 Without prominent communication of ethical issues, lack of knowledge would continue to limit their ethical consumption

*Gender Identity (“never or almost never true”/ “always or almost always true”)*

*Masculinity*

**I describe myself as a person with leadership abilities**

**I describe myself as an assertive person**

I describe myself as a person willing to make a stand

I describe myself as an ambitious person

I describe myself as a competitive person

**I describe myself as a dominant person**

**I describe myself as a person with a strong personality**

I describe myself as a forceful person

**I describe myself as a person who acts like a leader**

I describe myself as an aggressive person

*Femininity*

**I describe myself as an affectionate person**

**I describe myself as a tender person**

**I describe myself as a person who is sensitive to others' needs**

**I describe myself as a sympathetic person**

**I describe myself as a warm person**

**I describe myself as a person who is eager to soothe hurt feelings**

I describe myself as an understanding person

I describe myself as a gentle person

I describe myself as a compassionate person

I describe myself as a loyal person

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**Items marked in bold made into the final analyses.**