Postfeminism, Gender and Organization

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Postfeminism in Organization Studies

This special issue seeks to insert postfeminism as a critical concept into understandings of gender, work and organization. It is motivated by a desire to highlight the wider applicability of postfeminism and its associated themes and archetypes beyond its original disciplinary position of cultural and media studies, demonstrating its importance to the field of gender and organization studies (Lewis, 2014a; Tasker & Negra, 2005). In doing this, the special issue will reveal how notions of choice, individualism, opt-out, opt-in, merit, make-over - frequently used in relation to contemporary gender issues in organisations and presented as reasons for the persistent inequalities that women experience in the world of work – share common (unacknowledged) postfeminist roots. A key aim is to move beyond superficial understandings of women's contemporary agency to investigate how the reconfiguration of femininities, the disavowal of structure, the promotion of choice and the valorisation of a moderate feminism associated with postfeminism, impact on organizations and the women and men who work within them.

As postfeminism has only recently been drawn upon within organization studies, to investigate persistent structures of discrimination and systems of inequality (e.g. Kelan, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010; Lewis, 2010, 2012, 2014a, 2014b), it is important to clarify how it has been understood and taken up in the field. Explorations of gender within the organization studies field are normally informed by one or more feminist perspectives which have shaped '…the conceptual contours of the gender and organization literature over the

past forty years.' (Calas et al, 2014: 17). A number of authors have sought to outline the variety of feminist theories which are drawn upon in research which considers the relationship between gender and organizations, gender and organizational practices and gender and organization theory in terms of how they are mutually constitutive of each other (e.g. Alvesson & due Billing, 1997; Benschop & Verloo, 2016; Brewis & Linstead, 1999; Calas & Smircich, 1996, 2006; Calas et al, 2014; Gherardi, 2003; Halford et al, 1997; Halford & Leonard, 2001; Simpson & Lewis, 2005; Savage & Witz, 1992). Space does not permit the delineation of the feminist theoretical perspectives which have informed the study of gender in organizations or the gendering of organizations (Calas et al, 2014). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the versions of postfeminism which fit with the existing shape and ongoing concerns of the field are postfeminism as a theoretical perspective and postfeminism as a cultural discursive strategy (Lewis, 2014a). While we consider these accounts of postfeminism below we should acknowledge that these are only two of a range of interpretations, with a definitive conceptualisation of the postfeminist cultural phenomenon being somewhat elusive (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Indeed, the many versions of postfeminism contribute to its pervasiveness, power and versatility and this malleability means that it can be drawn on in many contradictory ways (Projansky, 2001; Negra, 2004).

Understanding postfeminism as a theoretical perspective

Understood as a theoretical perspective, postfeminism is depicted as feminism within poststructuralist theory (Gillis & Munford, 2004; Lewis, 2014a; Robinson, 2011). This version of postfeminism is present in the work of authors who define it as 'the postmodern offspring of feminism' (Mann, 1994: 239); as a 'pluralistic epistemology dedicated to disrupting universalising patterns of thoughts' (Gamble, 2001: 50); and as marking '…the intersection of

feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism' (Brooks, 1997: 1). Approaching postfeminism in these terms is said to signal three significant moves within feminism: first a shift away from a concentration on equality to a consideration of difference manifest in an active engagement with multiplicity, heterogeneity and variety. Second, there is a change in how 'woman' as the subject of feminism is conceptualised and third, there is an ability to contemplate feminism's location in relation to other political and philosophical movements focused on change. In 'post-ing' postfeminism by aligning it with other 'posts', this version of postfeminism presents itself as a type of feminist perspective which connects with existing feminist approaches (Gill, 2007; Genz & Brabon, 2009; Lewis, 2014a). Understanding postfeminism as a theoretical stance '…signals that the breadth of feminist issues is more extensive than in previous times and as such is not *against* (or after) feminism but about a feminism which reconsiders and makes a clear shift in its categories and questions' (Lewis, 2014a: 1849).

Despite the positive evolution of feminism that this version of postfeminism presents, most commentators *do not* adopt this interpretation when investigating postfeminism itself or when mobilising the notion of postfeminism to interrogate contemporary gender relations. Indeed, a number of commentators (e.g. Blue, 2013; Genz & Brabon, 2009; Gill, 2007, 2016; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Lewis, 2014a) explicitly state that postfeminism should not be treated as a theoretical perspective and that:

> *'…it is necessary to distinguish postfeminist discourse from forms of feminism – there is no postfeminism in terms of feminist movements, and it is likewise difficult and unproductive to categorize persons as 'postfeminists'* (Blue, 2013: 664).

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According to these authors, an understanding of postfeminism which is purely theoretical is inadequate and represses the potential of the concept to expand our understanding of contemporary experiences and manifestations of gender in social and organizational contexts.

Understanding postfeminism as a discursive formation

Setting aside an approach to postfeminism which treats it as a theoretical perspective per se, Lewis (2014a) argues that within the field of Gender and Organization Studies, an understanding of postfeminism which approaches it as a discursive formation facilitates critical use of this complex concept. Here, this interpretation of postfeminism follows Foucault's (2002) explanation of a discursive formation as a constellation of authoritative speech acts that relate to one another in some coherent way such that it is possible to define regularities between statements. Gill (2016: 621) describes herself as '…an analyst of postfeminism…' developing the notion of a postfeminist sensibility which she defines as: '…an analytical category designed to capture empirical regularities in the world'. Understood in this way, postfeminism can be used to identify a range of predictable cultural uniformities which impact on organizations, gendering them in very particular ways and constituting the subjectivities of those who work within them. These include an emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment; the revival and reappearance of 'natural' sexual difference; the shift from objectification to 'voluntary' subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance with constant monitoring and disciplining of women's bodies; the ascendancy of a make-over paradigm that not only acts on the body but also constitutes a remaking of subjectivity; the resexualization of women's bodies and the retreat to home as a matter of choice not obligation (Gill, 2007; Negra, 2009).

Taken together these modalities signal a complicated co-existence of feminist values such as choice, equality of opportunity and agentic self-determination alongside the re-articulation of traditional expectations and traditional gender stereotypes around motherhood, beauty and female sexuality. In her account of a postfeminist gender regime which aligns with Gill's (2007) analytical category of a postfeminist sensibility, McRobbie (2009) draws on the notion of double entanglement to explain the take-up of feminism as part of our routine common sense. She argues that the contemporary "ordinariness" of feminist principles is accompanied by a repudiation of feminist action alongside a process of retraditionalization. Here, feminism has to be understood as no longer with us before it can be acknowledged (Scharff, 2012). Nevertheless, while postfeminism is often associated with a renunciation or the "leaving behind" of feminism, the suggestion that feminism is completely rejected has been contested. Instead, what is noted is the selective take-up of feminist principles such as choice, empowerment and agency referred to as a domestication of feminism (Dean, 2010), an issue we will come back to below.

In considering how postfeminism can be utilized to investigate ongoing often unseen discrimination, which contributes to persistent inequalities in organizational contexts, we have differentiated between two versions of this entity. First, a theoretical account which portrays postfeminism as feminism within poststructuralist theory but has not been taken up in any extensive way by writers seeking to understand this complex phenomenon. Second, an interpretation which approaches postfeminism as something which is discursively produced at the junctures of a complex set of discourses around gender, feminism and femininity. Here, postfeminism is treated as a discursive formation that shapes how we relate to, think about and react towards feminism and the transformation of women's place in contemporary society. We have privileged the latter as the most important and useful

interpretation of the postfeminist phenomenon for organization studies and rejected an approach which treats postfeminism as a type of "post" theoretical perspective in and of itself. However, we suggest that use of postfeminism as a critical concept in organization studies should be underpinned by poststructuralist theoretical principles whereby this cultural phenomenon is understood as having a governance dimension. Characterising postfeminism as a governmentality means that this phenomenon is not approached as a historical event, a backlash or an ideology but rather as a means of governing everyday life, influencing how subjects are produced through the active shaping and regulating of bodies and subjectivities, contributing to a new organization of the social (Repo & Yrjola, 2015). As such the individualism, agency and femininities of contemporary women (and men) are approached as constituted effects connected to postfeminist discourses as opposed to emerging from the "inside" of a sovereign individual with an essentialist, agentic sense of self.

Approaching postfeminism as a cultural formation with constitutive effects which produce reconfigured feminine subjectivities also facilitates exploration of the connections between it and other rationalities of governance such as neoliberalism. Understood as discursive formations, both postfeminism and neoliberalism place a strong emphasis on individuals who '…cultivate and actualise autonomous and authentic selves through self-invention, transformation, management, enhancement and improvement' (Repo & Yrjola, 2015: 744). Gill & Scharff (2011) highlight the compelling similarity that exists between the independent, entrepreneurial, self-managing, calculating subject of neoliberalism and the agentic, responsible, choosing, self-fashioning subject of postfeminism. Indeed, they go further by arguing that as it is women who are required to self-transform and self-reinvent to a greater extent than men, and as this process of recurrent "make-over" must be

presented as freely chosen, women are therefore the ideal subjects of neoliberalism. While the discursive formations of neoliberalism and postfeminism seek to regulate the subjective capabilities of individuals as self-reliant and independent, commentators also suggest that women increasingly see themselves as freely choosing, self-transforming subjects. As Oksala (2013: 39) argues women not only want a happy home, '…they too want money, power and success. (Given this) they are atomic, autonomous subjects of interest competing for the economic opportunities available'. What this means is that while traditional femininity required that women sacrifice their own self-interest to ensure that their husbands and children could secure an autonomous subjectivity, postfeminist femininity compels women to be self-actualising choosing subjects who cultivate their professional ambitions while also having children and a fulfilling family life (Lewis & Simpson, 2016).

In conceptualising postfeminism as a form of governance of everyday life which influences the way in which individuals practice their freedom by acting on the actions of individuals, shaping and modifying the ways in which they conduct themselves (Burchell, 1996), a key question asked is whether postfeminism is for white/western girls only (Butler, 2013; Dosekun, 2015)? Critiques of postfeminism as a cultural formation have censured it for the presentation of a white, western, middle-class, heterosexual girl as the ideal postfeminist subject thereby excluding a range of people on grounds of race, age, class and sexuality (Genz & Brabon, 2009). The criticism of exclusion on grounds of race has been questioned by a range of authors who argue that postfeminism as a discursive formation interpellates women around the world and not just those who live in the West (Dosekun, 2015). Postfeminist representations of female subjectivity have been identified in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2010), China (Chang & Ren, 2016; Thornham & Pengpeng, 2010), Eastern Europe (Imre, 2009), Nigeria (Dosekun, 2016) and Singapore (Lazar, 2006). These

writers argue that postfeminism is a transnational circulating culture which is taken up by women in a range of locations not just as an imitation of how it is drawn upon and iterated in the West but rather is reshaped, rearticulated and integrated into local cultures in diverse and fundamentally altered ways (Dosekun, 2015; Gill, 2016; Imre, 2009).

Understanding postfeminism as an adaptable, multifaceted, discursive phenomenon which governs the everyday life of individuals in a range of settings allows us to draw on it as a critical concept within organization studies. By deploying postfeminism in these terms we can revisit how we use notions such as that of choice when we consider the persistence of inequalities within organizations. Thus instead of presenting "choice" as the answer to why there is still a minority of women in senior management positions – e.g. women "choose" motherhood – we can approach the notion of "choice" as a question, such as what are women seeking to achieve when they cite "choice" as the reason for opting-out? In the next section we consider how postfeminism, used as a critical concept, can assist in understanding the persistence of inequality within contemporary organizations where equality as a principle is valued and pursued.

Postfeminism: Hindering Organizational Change towards Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

One of the many issues that is hitherto unexplored when it comes to postfeminism in organizations is how the cultural discursive strategy of postfeminism contributes to or hinders organizational change towards gender equality, diversity and inclusion and it is to this that we now turn. Gender and change obviously do not go together well, as the continuation of the wage gap and occupational segregation patterns illustrate. The quest for

effective strategies and interventions that can bring about systemic change in organizations and societies is ongoing (Benschop, Mills, Mills, & Tienari, 2012). It may well be that the influence of postfeminism in organizations plays a role in the 'blinding lack of progress' (Ainsworth, Knox, & O'Flynn, 2010) in this area. While we certainly need more empirical research to examine how postfeminism fosters change and/or contributes to the (re)production of gender inequalities in different organizational settings, we want to provide some first reflections on the relation between postfeminism and (the lack of) organizational change here. To do so, we use postfeminism as a critical analytical term that is deeply enmeshed with neoliberal feminism, and examine how its patterns of individualism, agency, choice, self-improvement, and make-over impact on gender equality change (Gill, 2016; Lewis, 2014a).

In order to do this, we first have to say something about what constitutes organizational change toward gender equality, diversity and inclusion, as this is certainly a contested issue. Change is a moving target subject to heated debate, with our understanding of what is change adjusting over time, influenced by feminist, political and social theories and organizational practices (Verloo, 2005; Walby, 2005). There is no consensus about what *is it exactly* that should be achieved in gender equality change. Changing horizontal and vertical segregation patterns and unequal numerical representations in the workforce is but one part of the agenda. The ambition for change tends to stretch beyond the numbers to non-quantifiable goals such as visibility, access to power and full participation in decision making (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998). Feminist scholars generally consider transformative strategies and interventions, aimed at changing the ways that work is routinely divided, organized, and valued, as the most effective ways to counter gender inequalities and bring about the desired organizational

change (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Eveline, Bacchi, & Binns, 2009). However, transformative interventions that challenge core organizational values and processes are still rare in organizational practice (Benschop & Verloo, 2011). Many gender interventions tend to improve employment conditions (child care) and/or target women (education & development) rather than organizational processes (Benschop, 2007; Ely & Padavic, 2007). Taking this into account, we explore how postfeminism has contributed to limited change and/or maintenance of the status quo, by considering five issues as follows: the rise of moderate feminism, the reconfiguration of femininity, the emphasis on individualism, the notion of choice and the aversion to radical interventions.

The Rise of Moderate Feminism

Associated with the interpretation of postfeminism as a discursive formation is the suggestion that the selective take-up and restrained implementation of feminist principles is connected to the idea that '…feminism is taken into account but also forcefully repudiated' (Scharff, 2012: 7). This claimed repudiation of feminism has been questioned by those who argue that postfeminism cannot be associated with an absolute denunciation of feminist action, rather what has occurred is '…the explicit or implicit affirmation of a safe unthreatening form of feminism…while at the same time curtailing its more radical political dimensions (Dean, 2010: 391). From this perspective what has been discarded and spurned is an *excessive* feminism characterized by a critical orientation and a collectivist spirit based on mutual struggle, communal relations with other women and the search for collective solutions to shared problems (Lewis & Simpson, 2016). In its place what is valorised is a *moderate* form of feminism recognisable by the prominence given to the empowerment of individual women and dissociation from a broader critique of gendered inequalities and

systemic male dominance. The shift from liberal feminism to neoliberal feminism is an example of the surfacing of a moderate form of feminism whereby both give prominence to individual empowerment but only the liberal variant includes a critique of the masculine power manifest in the business world. As such while the individuated female subject may recognise the persistence of gender inequalities, the solution to inequality from a moderate feminist position is '…to work on the self rather than to work with others for social and political transformation' (Gill, 2016: 617). Thus, the onus for the realization of equality is put on each individual female subject such that the 'solution' for gender issues is sought internally and not understood in terms of the reformation of external structures (Baker, 2010; Rottenberg, 2014). We suggest that the reworking and constitution of feminism into an "acceptable" form through the discursive formation of postfeminism acts as a restraining force on the types of change that can be implemented within organizational contexts.

Reconfiguration of Femininity

A noteworthy feature of the postfeminist modification of (liberal) feminism is the fusion between feminism (individualism and choice conventionally perceived as masculine behaviours) and femininity (tradition around beauty, motherhood and sexual relations). Instead of being oppositional, feminism (take-up of masculine behaviours) and femininity (choosing feminine traditions) are now interdependent, exemplified by the combining of feminine and masculine aspirations and the mixing of feminine and masculine behaviours, an amalgamation which can now be found in the enactment of present-day management/leadership. As Carlson (2011) argues the successful "doing" of contemporary femininity necessarily engages norms as well as social realms marked by masculinity. Here, women are engaged in maintaining equilibrium between the two extremes of masculinity

and femininity, avoiding being located at one or other extremity. This required "balancing" should not be understood in terms of the adoption of an androgynous persona with women simply required to construct an integrated presentation of themselves as agentic (masculine) and communal (feminine). Rather, the simultaneous embrace of masculinity and femininity requires careful calibration (Cairns & Johnston, 2015) whereby women actively manage their relationship to the extremes of control/individualism and care/tradition as a means of performing acceptable organizational femininities

Within a postfeminist gender regime, the requirement that women draw on masculine discourses of individualism as much as their male colleagues, poses a dilemma as it puts women in a position to secure access to masculine power. As McRobbie (2009: 60-61) states: 'The Symbolic is faced with the problem of how to retain the dominance of phallocentrism when the logic of global capitalism is to loosen women from their prescribed roles and grant them degrees of economic independence'. However, the impact of this freedom is diminished by the cultural requirement to enact feminine practices such as those connected to motherhood and beauty. Drawing on the idea of a postfeminist masquerade to explore the demand made of women to engage in feminine behaviours, McRobbie (2009: 64) argues that the impact of *having* to enact the required rituals of femininity "tilts" the balance of power in favour of men and masculinity as the postfeminist woman cannot shed her gender. As she states: 'The postfeminist masquerade (is) a new form of gender power which re-orchestrates the heterosexual matrix in order to secure once again the existence of patriarchal law and masculine hegemony....The Symbolic permits the presence of a feminist gesture (e.g. choice) as it adjusts to ward off the threat of feminism' (McRobbie, 2009: 64).

By consistently bringing women back to those technologies of self that are constitutive of the *spectacularly feminine* (McRobbie, 2009), women's freedom of movement both physically and symbolically within organizations is restricted, while this constraint is constituted as freely chosen by women themselves. As McRobbie states (2009: 63) '…now that she is able to make her own choices, it seems as though the fearful terrain of male approval fades away and is replaced instead with a new horizon of self-imposed feminine cultural norms'. Thus the reconfiguration of femininity associated with the postfeminist discursive formation prevents women from fully securing the advantage that might accrue to them through developments such as the emergence of feminine management/leadership and campaigns to increase women's board membership.

Individualism

We argue that the preference in many organizations for interventions that are aimed at women, such as management development programs, training, mentoring, and networks (Benschop, Van den Brink, Holgersson, & Wahl, 2015), can be partly explained by the influence of postfeminism. These interventions have frequently met scholarly critique for their targeting (or 'fixing') of women instead of organizational processes, leaving the current system intact (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010) Yet, these are popular interventions in organizational practice, popular both with the staff members who decide upon what interventions to implement, and with the participating women themselves. The targeting of women in these programs that set out to bring women up to par with men can be understood as part of the postfeminist construction of women as subjects prone to self-surveillance, self-improvement and self-transformation(Kelan, 2009; Lewis, 2014a). It can be seen as the organizational extension of women's magazines

(Kauppinen, 2013) and self-help books for career women, that also specifically encourage middle-class, white women to adhere to a specific cultural project of subjectification and self-management (Kenny & Bell, 2011, 2014). Many women are keen to participate in these management development and training programs as they are used to broader cultural appeals of self-improvement and make-over (Gill, 2007).

Such interventions implicitly or explicitly build on postfeminist ideas of women as malleable subjects, urging them to mold their selves towards ideal career women in line with masculine norms. It is not hard to see how these postfeminist ideas are simultaneously a neoliberal feminist project: they emphasize how individualistic entrepreneurial women have to embrace autonomy and take full responsibility for their own lives and careers (Rottenberg, 2014). Many popular interventions do not problematize the 'rules of the game', the gendered systems of upward career mobility, or the masculine construction of leadership. Instead, organizational processes that sustain these notions of 'careers' and 'leaders' tend to be constructed as realities, and it is the women who have to self-improve, take control and 'lean in' (Sandberg, 2013), in order to avoid failure. The influence of postfeminism thus renders transformational organizational change an impossibility because changing the ways that work is divided, organized and valued is organized out of these interventions, while the active consent of women to the interventions that target them is manufactured in (Burawoy, 1979).

Choice

To better understand the consent of women to the status quo of gender inequalities at work, we have to further unpack the postfeminist notion of choice. Choice is another key element to the understanding of how neoliberal feminism and postfeminism get in the way

of organizational change. Some say that the most important achievement of feminism is the realization of the classic liberal ideal of free choice, to the point that everyone, regardless of gender, race, age or sexuality, is free to make whatever choice they want. The notion of 'choice feminism' (Hirshman, 2006) presents free choice as the ideal - everything is permitted as long as it is presented as an authentic free choice. Crop tops and pole dancing (McRobbie, 2004), stitch 'n bitch (Minahan & Cox, 2007), opting out of work for intensive stay-at-home mothering (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015) and the career woman with her long working hours (Correll, 2001) are expressions of freedom and therefore the content of these life choices cannot be condemned. All of these divergent choices can be and are legitimated under the label of feminism. While the idea of 'anything goes' contributes to the current revival of feminism (Benschop, Van den Brink, & Verloo, 2015; Gill, 2016), certainly not all free choices contribute to changing organizations. In her analysis of choice feminism, Ferguson (2010) states that this feminism has such wide appeal largely because it abstains from radicalism, exclusion and judgment. Without value judgments of different choices, contemporary choice feminism is devoid of political power, losing the potential for political change. She problematizes the absence of women in positions of power not as a lack of individual choices, but as a systematic exclusion of women from involvement in shaping the world in which they live (Ferguson 2010, p.251).

Her analysis has profound implications for organizations as well. The postfeminist emphasis on women's choices that we observe in the workplace justifies persistent power inequalities as the result of women's individual choices. Opting out of a professional career exemplifies a type of choice that hinders organizational change. Yet, there is more to opting out, to part-time work, to better work-life balance, to career interruptions, to foregoing leadership positions. The glorification of choice obscures the politics of choice. Feminist

scholars have long stressed how social structures enable some choices and obstruct others: structural work arrangements presume an unencumbered worker (Acker, 1992), professional time/commitment norms obscure flexibility stigmas (Stone & Hernandez, 2013), women's qualities are systematically underestimated (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), and women leaders face a double bind dilemma (Catalyst, 2007). Using postfeminism as a critical concept, helps us to understand how many women consent to the status quo, by underplaying and silencing structural inequalities and emphasizing their own choices in their organization of work and life. Recognizing that structural inequalities and systematic discrimination in organizations breaches norms of equality (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998) is far less attractive than the appeal to agency and self-determination that make individual choice such a powerful rhetoric.

Aversion to Radical Interventions

Another way that postfeminism may stand in the way of organizational change is in the aversion to radical interventions such as preferential selection and, in particular, quotas. Quotas for women are interventions that aim for 'equality by result' (Dahlerup, 2006), enforcing a specific numerical representation of women among the members of a body, whether it is a parliamentary assembly, a committee, or a board of directors. Quota systems shift the burden of recruitment from the individual woman to those who control the recruitment process. Within the context of organizations, quotas are often hotly debated but seldom put in practice (Tienari, Holgersson, Merilainen, & Hook, 2009). Postfeminism can inspire a climate in which women actively distance themselves from such quotas. We analyze the repudiation of quotas as a postfeminist reaction, because it is a typical example of a response to what is seen as the excesses of feminism. The emergence of moderate

feminism as noted above indicates how feminist principles of equality, empowerment and agency have become taken-for-granted in all facets of life. In the context of work and organizations, this "taken-for-grantedness" manifests when women state that they never want to be selected for a position under quota rules, and that they want to be judged on their qualities, not on their gender. Quotas are either seen as help for women lacking the strength and talent to make it on their own or as reverse discrimination and the faulty preference of women over better qualified men. The postfeminism in the first argument is obvious; the prominence of the empowered corporate woman making it on her own is tangible. The second argument is exactly why feminists advocate quotas - the problematic equation of men to quality and of women to inferiority. Yet, under postfeminism, the need to correct recruitment and selection processes is denied, even when such processes systematically underestimate women's qualities to the point that John gets a much better job offer than Jennifer with the exact same CV (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012). The stigma of quotas is considered more harmful than the corrective effects they might have.

These first reflections all point to the detrimental effects of postfeminism for organizational change. But gender equality change in organizations is too complex for singular narratives (Gill, 2016), and linear stories of continuous inequalities miss the complexities of partial progress. There may be more and different relations between postfeminism as a critical concept, gender equality change and various interventions to change organizations. For instance, interventions such as mentoring can target individual women, teaching them to play the rules of the game, but can also contribute to transformational change when structural barriers and gender dynamics in the rules and the games can be questioned (Vries, Webb, & Eveline, 2006). How does postfeminism influence

the design, implementation and reception of different interventions for change? What are

the implications for contemporary men and masculinities, for women from different classes

and ethnicities, how does intersectionality come into the postfeminist organizational play?

There are more questions here than answers, so that the research agenda on the influence

of postfeminism on gender equality change in organizations can engage many scholars.

Overview of the Special Issue

An excellent collection of articles that demonstrate the value of using the notion of

postfeminism in organization studies are included in this special issue. The issue opens with

a paper by Rosalind Gill, Elisabeth Kelan and Christina Scharff who develop a critical

approach to postfeminism in their article: 'A Postfeminist Sensibility at Work', highlighting

the analytical value of postfeminism in helping to make sense of the uneven progress

towards gender equality in organizations and the often contradictory processes involved.

Based on some of their own research, they draw attention to the repudiation of gender and

to 'gender fatigue' in the ways in which personal experience of discrimination is routinely

denied by women - despite clear evident of gender based disadvantage in their

organizations. As the authors suggest, this overarching discourse is further substantiated by

four 'discursive moves' which form part of a wider postfeminist sensibility namely, the

assignment of gender inequality to the past through, as example, adherence to notions of

'gender progress' and generational change; the location of gender inequality in other

countries or contexts, thereby disavowing the relevance of inequality in women's own

working contexts or personal lives; the perception of women as advantaged through, as

example, special contribution, attractiveness and appearance; and the acceptance of the

status quo through 'c'est la vie accounting' whereby inequalities are presented as 'just how it is'. This article gives new, fascinating insights into the patterning of a postfeminist sensibility in the work context by articulating 'from the ground' a critical perspective that enables us to better understand the dynamics and fluidity of sexism and its practices of power.

In his thought provoking article, 'Postfeminism, Men, Masculinities and Work: A Research Agenda for Gender and Organization Scholars', Nick Rumens addresses the implications of postfeminism for men and how postfeminist masculinities are discursively constituted and performed within media culture and in the context of work. Here he highlights the complexities and contradictions within discursive constructions of postfeminist masculinities (e.g. 'new lad'; 'new father') as they intersect with economic discourses of work and employment. As he convincingly and provocatively suggests, these appear to take feminism into account through, as example, enactments and understandings of 'inclusive' masculinities while reinforcing gender inequalities via traditional, patriarchal discourses of masculinity. In so doing he proposes and develops a research agenda within this hitherto neglected terrain. This relates firstly to the problematisation of a gender binary in media culture which casts women as powerful 'winners' and men as 'losers' in work and organizational settings – where women are discursively constructed as the culprits for 'feminizing and thus disabling men'. Secondly, he highlights the need to interrogate the often contradictory and ambivalent understandings of new postfeminist masculinities in the workplace, based on the recoding of masculinity as caring and inclusive and which accord with feminist critiques of masculinity and men. Finally, he argues for the need to explore how men perform postfeminist masculinities at work through an examination of the

implications of other categories such as sexuality and class and how these performances

may signify the re-negotiation rather than the relinquishing of male power.

In their engaging paper, 'Still Red Hot? Postfeminism and Gender Subjectivity in the

Airline Industry' Katherine Duffy, Philip Hancock and Melissa Tyler draw insight from Butler's

work to examine a high profile advertising campaign by Virgin Atlantic. The authors explore

how the 'retro' advertisement, as a performative artefact that compels particular ways of

doing gender, parodies the sexual images historically associated with the airline industry,

playing with feminist critiques of women as 'objects of the male gaze'. As they compellingly

demonstrate, this appropriation of postfeminist ideas around gender, sexuality and

subjectivity forms part of a marketing strategy - achieved through the commodification of a

postfeminist 'knowing, ironic and playful' subjectivity that is incongruent with

acknowledgement of gender based discrimination. The paper provides fascinating insight

into how workers' bodies are encoded, how in the context of organizations, a retrogressive,

sexist past is evoked (playfully and ironically) as a marketing resource to frame a

postfeminist present that is positioned as 'knowing better'. Women are presented as

knowing subjects, free to choose for themselves and this, as the authors argue, serves to

reinforce hierarchies and lines of exclusion and inclusion within the airline industry and the

aesthetic economy more generally. Highly gendered ideals of aesthetics and embodiment

accordingly perpetuate a commercially shaped set of expectations governing interactive

service work that appear culturally and politically regressive – foreclosing, through the irony,

any opposition and critique.

In 'Postfeminist Stylistics, Work Femininities and Coaching: A Multimodal Study of a

Website', Elaine Swan draws on critical whiteness studies to produce a deeply insightful

examination of representations of work femininities and of the ways in which postfeminist

meanings are produced multimodally on a coaching website. As an important medium for

circulating postfeminist femininities, these websites illustrate how postfeminist stylistics, as

a patterning of visual artefacts and verbal text, reproduce postfeminist tropes and depictions

of relational, maternal and individualised entrepreneurial femininities. Coaching for women

is an illuminating research site given the ways in which it draws on ideas of transformation,

self-improvement and white, middle class 'makeover' to promote a postfeminist, neo-liberal

gendered self. Through her textual analysis, she shows how popular psychology and

therapeutic culture reinforce a 'constantly failing' feminine subject; how the text supports

depictions of postfeminist achievement, optimism and energy as well as a sense of

'synthetic sisterhood' through a warm, relational entrepreneurial femininity; and how these

representations create 'Othered' femininities based on class, age and race. As she argues,

coaching websites draw on postfeminist stylistics and visual aesthetics to promote a middle

class, white, relational and individualised entrepreneurial feminine subject – whose cheerful,

intense hyperactivity not only erases the social, political and economic constraints women

face but also relates directly to the social impossibility of the postfeminist promise that

women can 'have it all'.

Siri Sorensen in the 'Performativity of Choice: Postfeminist Perspectives on Work-Life

Balance' focuses on choice as a central element in both neoliberal and postfeminist culture –

looking in particular at how choice operates through understandings of work-life balance.

Illustrated through a critical analysis of media texts in the Norwegian context, this engaging

piece explores the mechanisms through which neoliberal and postfeminist ideas have

become 'saturated' in bodies and minds and how the vocabulary of choice can enable and

uphold, in a performative sense, a particular reality and subject position. As she argues,

rather than being seen merely as a substitute for feminism, choice is a site for the 'double entanglement' of neoliberalism and postfeminism - calling up meanings of empowerment while blurring gender and class hierarchies. Through the subject positions identified in the texts, she shows how notions of choice and making the 'right' choice reproduce traditional gender roles; how 'having it all' helps to construct a desirable, neoliberal subject positon based on being an 'exceptional career mother', downplaying the infrastructure and privileges that enabled the choice to be made, and also how position can easily 'morph' into a 'failing' career mother through an emphasis on motherhood ideals. In drawing attention to the gender tensions in work-life balance discourse, she highlights how choice as a performative concept construes subject positions and structures social categories such as gender and class, producing dichotomies and difference in the guise of individual agency.

Maria Adamson's article: 'Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and a 'Successfully' Balanced Femininity in Celebrity CEO Biographies', explores the construction of a balanced femininity in the female celebrity CEO autobiography genre and how this 'doing' is shaped by the postfeminist and neoliberal context. The powerful inspirational stories contained in such biographies, upheld as exemplars of female achievement, offer insight into particular models of subjectivity and 'repertoires of cultural meaning' for women in making sense of their lives. As she argues, these texts may declare affinity to gender equality but at the same time they support a femininity that is 'tamed' in the interest of the market - posing little challenge to gender power. Bringing together postfeminist understandings of female empowerment and agency and neoliberalist notions of individualistic entrepreneurialism, she develops an understanding of how certain ways of doing gender and doing femininity in organizations come to be deemed valuable and desirable. Thus, as she convincingly demonstrates, a successful way of 'doing balance' involves being both a 'good' postfeminist and a

responsible, entrepreneurial neoliberal subject – doing femininity but in a market-oriented, economically efficient and calculated way. Her analysis helps to further our understanding of the hierarchical nature of different femininities in organizations; how women negotiate gender identity and balance femininity and masculinity at work; and how individual 'solutions' are offered to problems that are seen to lie beyond the systemic influences of gender, race or class.

Concluding Remarks

The six articles that make up this special issue represent a novel attempt to bring postfeminism into the organizational terrain. As such, they highlight in different ways the fluidity of work based sexism; the significance of the overlaps between understandings of postfeminism and neoliberalism for organizational subjectivities and for 'doing gender'; how postfeminism has become appropriated -incorporated into organizational practices and rhetoric; and also how solutions to problems have become individualised and seen as beyond the influence of structural constraints, thereby failing to disrupt established gendered organizational hierarchies.

Acknowledgements

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