

Exploring the Emergence of Moderate Feminism(s) in Contemporary Organizations

Special Issue

Call for Papers

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This special issue seeks to investigate the complexities and complications attached to the public embracing of (some) feminist norms. While the apparent revival of feminism in the public sphere has been viewed optimistically, there has also been consternation at the selective take-up and restrained (or exploitative) implementation of feminist principles such as empowerment, choice and agency (Eisenstein, 2009). The selective take-up of feminist principles has been referred to by commentators such as Dean (2010) as the domestication of feminism. This process of domestication is defined as ‘...the explicit or implicit affirmation of a safe unthreatening form of feminism....whilst at the same time curtailing its more radical, political dimensions’ (Dean, 2010: 391). A good example of such domestication is the replacement of liberal feminism with neoliberal feminism. While both of these forms of feminism place an emphasis on individual empowerment, the former also includes a critique of systemic male dominance manifest in the culture of business, while the latter is devoid of such analysis. Thus within a context of domestication, feminist perspectives which are characterised by a critical collective ethos with an emphasis on shared rights as emblematic of feminist activity, are at best less favoured at worst cast aside in favour of a more moderate feminism, characterised by an emphasis on the empowerment of individual women (Dean, 2010). Here, the onus for the achievement 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). Different labels have been attached to the phenomenon of moderate feminism(s), including neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2014), referred to above; choice feminism (Kirkpatrick, 2010); market feminism (Kantola & Squires, 2012); transnational business feminism (Roberts, 2015) and empowerment feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2015). Despite the variation in labels, central to all versions of moderate feminism is the individuated female subject who recognises the persistence of gender inequalities but perceives the solution to inequality as dependent on individual action ‘...transforming collective liberation based upon a commitment to the common good into a limited form of individuated self-care’ (Rottenberg, 2014: 433). Thus moderate feminism(s) are characterised by an implicit or explicit distancing from a broader critique of gendered inequalities. In doing this, the onus for the achievement of equality is placed on each individual woman with female success understood as being dependent on women’s own personal initiative and therefore interpreting the securing of gender parity as something which is internally referential as opposed to externally structured (Baker, 2010). While other disciplinary fields such as Cultural Studies and International Relations and Political Science have interrogated this emerging form of feminism in all its variations, less attention has been given to the notion of moderate feminism(s) within Gender and Organization Studies (GOS) and as such this special issue represents a first in the field.

The need for this special issue on moderate feminism(s) is two-fold: *first*, organizations and the world of work in general are key sites for the operationalisation and implementation of moderate feminism based around an emphasis on the “business case” for gender equality. This “business case” instrumentalizes and deploys gender equality through

the championing of women as crucial to the delivery of economic competitiveness and growth while little attention is directed at the persistence of gendered structures and practices which perpetuate inequality among women and between women and men. Instead, women are encouraged to look to themselves and to devise individual “solutions” to facilitate the carrying of an increasingly complex burden of work and home. *Second*, of particular concern and an issue which demands attention in the field of GOS, is whether the successful rise of moderate form(s) of feminism aided by national states, international organizations such as the UN and business corporations, has subsumed and silenced all other forms of feminist expression. What are the implications for our understanding of gender issues in organizations, particularly the persistence of inequalities, when moderate feminism(s) which conceptualise ‘true equality’ as ‘...predicated upon individuals moving up the professional ladder, *one woman at a time*’ (emphasis in original) (Rottenberg, 2014: 426), dominate organizational and policy agendas? Can more critical feminist perspectives co-exist alongside moderate feminism(s) within organization studies? Indeed, is such a co-existence desirable given moderate feminism(s)’ repudiation of the 1970s feminist emphasis on shared struggle, common connection with other women and the pursuit and implementation of collective solutions to communal problems? What issues come into focus when we investigate gender in contemporary organizations against the backdrop of these developments? Are these so-called moderate feminism(s) really feminist?

Recognising this complexity raises many key issues which we, as editors, seek to address in this special issue. In particular, we aim to investigate the following: the deliberate advancement of a market oriented gender equality discourse and the consequences of this for women’s experience of organizations; the trends within feminist thinking which may have contributed to the emergence of moderate feminism(s); how critical feminist perspectives appear to have been eclipsed by moderate feminism(s) and how this occurred; the question of how GOS scholars should respond to the rise of moderate feminism(s) within the contemporary postfeminist and neoliberal context. Finally, the cultural significance of the entrenched individualism which is a central element of moderate feminism(s) and manifests strongly in contemporary organizations through the lean-in philosophy of merit, enterprise, ambition and confidence, will be addressed. While Sheryl Sandberg has admitted that her lean-in philosophy is incomplete due to its neglect of the need for systemic change, continued investigation of how systemic transformation can be achieved within a context which privileges individualism and individual effort, is necessary.

Following the above, theoretical and theoretically grounded empirical papers will be invited on the following (not exclusive) areas:

- The emergence and manifestation of moderate feminism(s) in contemporary organizations
- The relationship between moderate feminism(s), postfeminism and neoliberalism in organizations
- Moderate feminism(s) as a technology of neoliberal governmentality
- The impact of moderate feminism(s) on theorising and understanding experiences of work-based gender relations
- The relationship between women’s ‘choices’, individualization and gender discrimination in the context of moderate feminism(s)
- The conceptualisation of work-life balance within moderate feminist thinking
- The contemporary dominance of (neo)liberal feminism and the rise of the corporate feminist
- The potential for progressive change and emancipation within a moderate feminist gender regime
- Moderate feminism(s) and emerging femininities within contemporary organizations

- Men's involvement in moderate feminism(s) and its potential for organizational change
- The impact of moderate feminism(s) on men and masculinities
- Can moderate feminism(s) be considered feminist?
- Is there a place/role for feminisms underpinned by notions of solidarity and the wider social good in contemporary organizations?
- Imagining new feminist futures in contemporary organizations

Articles should be submitted online at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gwo> and conform to the author guidelines of *Gender, Work and Organization*. The normal length of a submitted article should be around 9,000 words. The deadline for submission of papers is **30 June 2017**.

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Editor Biographies

Dr Maria Adamson is a Senior Lecturer in Organisation Studies and Human Resource Management at Middlesex University Business School, UK. Her research interests centre on understanding gender inequality in professional work, gendered workplace identities and the application of feminist theories within the field of organization studies. She is a principal investigator on the ESRC funded research seminar series 'Gendered Inclusion in Contemporary Organisations'. Her research has been published in journals such as *Sociology*, *Human Relations*, *Gender, Work and Organization*, *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. She is currently convenor of the Work, Employment and Economy group in the British Sociological Association.

Dr Ingrid Biese is an Academy of Finland Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Management and Organisation at the Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki Finland. Her primary area of research is opting out and in among women and men, as well as sustainable working cultures and career models. Other areas of interest are questions of identity, individualization and gender. Ingrid has published work on women's opt-out practices in *Gender, Work and Organization* and regularly gives talks and engages in public debates on sustainable careers and lifestyles, for example through her blog theoptingoutblog.com.

Professor Elisabeth Kelan is a Professor of Leadership and the Director of the Global Centre for Gender and Leadership at Cranfield School of Management, Cranfield University. Her research focuses on Gender and Leadership, Gender in Organizations, Inclusion and Diversity. She has written extensively on these issues in a range of journals including *British Journal of Management*, *Gender, Work and Organization*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Management Learning*. She has also authored two books – *Rising Stars: Developing Millennial Women as Leaders* and *Performing Gender at Work* both published by Palgrave. She is an Associate Editor of *Gender, Work and Organization* and the series editor of the book series 'Routledge Studies in Gender and Organization'. She sits on the editorial boards of the *British Journal of Management* and *Management Learning*.

Patricia Lewis is Reader in Management at the University of Kent. Her research is located in the field of Gender and Organization Studies and she mainly draws on a poststructuralist feminist perspective manifest in her research on female entrepreneurial identity which has explored issues including the masculine norm published in *Gender, Work and Organization*, authenticity and identity also published in *Gender, Work and Organization* and development of the notion of entrepreneurial femininity published in *Organization Studies*. In addition she enjoys re-reading influential texts through the lens of poststructuralist feminism including Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation* published in the *International Journal of Management Reviews* (with Ruth Simpson) and Hakim's much criticised text *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory* published in *Gender, Work and Organization* (with Ruth Simpson). She is currently editing (with Ruth Simpson & Yvonne Benschop) a special issue of *Gender, Work and Organization* on Postfeminism, Gender & Organization and an edited book with Routledge entitled *Postfeminism and Organization*, both of which will be published in 2017. She is an Associate Editor of *Gender, Work and Organization*.