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Neoliberal and Postfeminist Discourses: Constituting and Constraining Subjectivities within a Bank and a Network Marketing Organisation

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Supervisor: Professor Elisabeth Kelan
Associate Supervisor: Professor Patrick Reinmoeller
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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes towards an understanding of how neoliberalism and postfeminism have become entrenched within organisations as a gendered form of governance. The study contributes to current debates by adopting a poststructuralist approach to explore how discourses of neoliberalism constitute and constrain feminine subjectivities. It is argued that these discourses act as forms of governance to obscure inequalities by: calling on women to 'work within' and psychologise; individualising strategies, which divide women and negate collective action, and finally; obscuring inequalities through normalising discourses.

The study draws on material collected in two different organisations. First, twenty qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with women managers in a multinational bank with its headquarters in the UK. Second, using an ethnographical-inspired approach, observations and interviews were conducted with sixteen women distributors in a beauty based networking marketing organisation. The analysis of the interviews and field notes is organised into chapters presented in the format of peer-reviewed journal articles. First, I offer poststructuralist reflexivity as a way to consider research practice, research subjectivity, power and regimes of truth. The second article uses the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism to consider how neoliberal spirituality has been co-opted within the network marketing company as a gendered form of governance. Next, I turn to the bank to consider what happens when women collectively mobilise, a solution often offered in the literature to the individualising effects of postfeminism. The final article considers how discourses of competition differ across the two organisations, albeit framed in neoliberal terms which bind women in unique ways.

Through examining two different organisations, the thesis extends our understanding of the ways in which fluid and adaptable neoliberal discourses are enacted within organisations. Overall, the thesis seeks to make a contribution to debates about neoliberalism and postfeminism as forms of governance which silence critique and normalise women's experiences in organisations.

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This is for my children, Henry and Freddie, who light up my life and kept me going. You make the world a better place.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NMO	Network Marketing Organisation
LOA	Law of Attraction
FDA	Foucauldian Discourse Analysis
DA	Discourse Analysis

1 Introduction

In 1991, during the first year of my undergraduate degree, I took a module in gender studies. I learned about concepts that were new to me and fascinating; patriarchy, feminism, systemic oppression, and the gender binary as socially constructed. Collective action, protests and demonstrations were offered as solutions to challenging the social order. We have recently seen a revival of feminist movements online[1] however, within work and organisations the call for action, and arguably feminism, have taken a very different turn.

In illustration of this, I was recently invited to a 'Women in Business' Award Ceremony, where the founder gave a speech discussing her motivation to launch the awards. She spoke about her upbringing and her parents, who had encouraged her brother to pursue a career, while she had been encouraged to find herself a suitable husband. She talked about her career and the challenges she had faced running a business with four children. The speech ended with her concluding that the issues for women could therefore be reduced to *confidence* and, to support women with developing confidence, she had teamed up with a training consultant to deliver 'confidence-building' workshops for women. She then introduced the training consultant; a middle-aged white man, who would be running these events for women. As I listened, I was struck by the subtle misogynistic[2] assumptions in this speech, the ease with which women are held responsible for their success or failure, and the

[1] For example #metoo, Everyday Sexism Project, Slutwalk - mobilisation which is discussed further in chapter 5.
[2] I draw on Flood's (2007) definition of misogyny as ideology or belief system that exists within patriarchal societies which place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making.

solution to these systemic issues that are reduced to something women could fix within themselves (albeit in this situation, with the help of a man).

I see this incident, although I could have drawn on many others, as an illustration of neoliberalism; a dominant discourse which has pervaded all aspects of social life and had a particular impact on women through postfeminism as a gendered form of neoliberalism. These discourses are so customary that they are the 'common sense' on gender, recasting feminism in a very different form to the one I would have recognised as an undergraduate student in the early 1990s. My interest in these shifting discourses sparked the intellectual curiosity which motivates this thesis. This thesis explores how neoliberalism and postfeminism act as forms of governance, simultaneously constituting and constraining feminine subjectivities.

This chapter aims to briefly define the key concepts I draw upon, provide the rationale, aims and objectives, and link the chapters of my thesis. First, I briefly discuss gender as a construct which underpins this thesis. I then offer a brief overview of neoliberalism, postfeminism and neoliberal feminism which, while addressed in greater detail within the following chapters, provides the analytic tools of this thesis. My thesis is structured in a 'paper' format within which, the empirical findings are presented in the form of journal articles. The proceeding section therefore does not seek to provide a review of the literature; this is presented in the following chapters, but rather to conceptualise these key terms. Next, I seek to position myself within the research before outlining the aims and objectives of the research. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline of the substantive 'paper' chapters which form the thesis.

1.1 Gender as a social construct

Conceptualisations of sex and gender evolved significantly during the twentieth century, challenging traditional assumptions of the gender binary; mutually exclusive categories of man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine (Korabik, 1999). Whilst this challenged the normative and problematic conception of essential gender difference as biologically inherent, in everyday discussion, this binary still predominates. Feminist theorists have highlighted how these 'natural' categories are hierarchical, such that, men/masculine is valued above women/feminine (de Beauvoir, 1953; Baxter, 2003; Butler, 1990; Gherardi, 1995). In other words, gender is socially constructed and 'should be understood as a social category whose definition makes reference to a broad network of social relations, and it is not simply a matter of anatomical differences' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 86/87).

Within organisation studies, the social construction of gender as a practice is predominantly illustrated by the concept of 'doing gender'. There is little consensus about what 'doing gender' means (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014), however, within organisation studies, two traditions which consider how gender is done predominate; the ethnomethodological position (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and the discursive/poststructural approach (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004).

1.1.1 The ethnomethodological approach

The most widely cited ethnomethodological approach to gender as a practice was developed within West and Zimmerman's (1987) seminal article, '*Doing Gender*'[3]. This is located in an ethnomethodological tradition in which, the world is created through social interaction (West & Fenstermaker, 1995), therefore seeking to 'understand gender as a routine, methodological, and recurring accomplishment' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125).

West and Zimmerman's (1987) approach to doing gender is drawn from the work of Garfinkel (1967), and Kessler and McKenna (1978), whom argue that gender is socially constructed and, through the 'existence' of only two genders, biological sex becomes a fact, and Goffman (1976, 1979) whom considers 'gender displays' as performances of idealised masculinity and femininity. However, West and Zimmerman move away from Goffman's understanding of gender displays as something that can be entered into when appropriate, instead seeing gender as a more ritualised performance. Therefore, they see gender as unavoidable, on-going, and embedded in everyday interaction (Wickes & Emmison, 2007). To illustrate this, they revisit Garfinkel's (1967) well cited discussion of Agnes, who while biologically equipped with male genitalia, claimed membership of the female sex category. How Agnes accomplishes and claims gender categorisation through ritualised repetition of femininity, illustrates the on-going nature of doing gender such that gender is created through interaction rather than a priori (Kelan, 2010). Subsequently, the two genders appear to be constant and objective; perceived by

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[3] Wickes & Emmison (2007) looked at 226 papers in which West & Zimmerman's concept of 'doing gender' was cited within sociological journals alone; however, the paper had been cited 650 times by 2005. It remains Gender & Society's most downloaded article.

societal members to have existed prior to the interaction. For West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 125) however, doing gender involves a complexity of 'socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'.'

For ethnomethodological approaches such as West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is an interactional achievement expressed through elements such as gestures, body language and speech (Kelan, 2010). These interactions occur anew in every situation, thus individuals are continuously accountable to the audience to do gender in line with normative conceptions of one's sex category. West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 136, italics in original), discuss this in terms of individuals being '*at the risk of gender assessment'*. Therefore, whilst a common sense understanding of the gender binary exists, gender must always be 'done'.

West and Zimmerman's approach to understanding gender as something one *does* in recurring interactions with others, rather than something that one *is,* has made a significant impact on feminist research (Wickes & Emmison, 2007; Lorber & Farrell, 1991). However, writers such as Risman (2009, p. 82), highlight the 'conceptual confusion' brought about by the ubiquitous use of the term in sociological, and indeed organisational, research. This is supported by Wickes and Emmison (2007) who, in their review of 226 articles that drew on the concept of 'doing gender', found the majority used the term in a ceremonial way without remaining true to its ethnomethodological traditions. Others have critiqued West and Zimmerman (1987) for not considering agency and resistance (Vidal-Ortiz, 2009), or change and how gender can be 'undone' (Deutsch, 2007). Deutsch (2007) particularly highlights how West and Zimmerman fail to move beyond an interactional level of study to consider solutions to the problems of

gender inequality. Deutsch (2007, p. 114) suggests that research should move beyond 'documenting the persistence of inequality to examine (1) when and how social interactions become less gendered, not just differently gendered; (2) the conditions under which gender is irrelevant in social interactions; (3) whether all gendered interactions reinforce inequality; (4) how the structural (institutional) and interactional levels might work together to produce change; and (5) interaction as the site of change. West and Zimmerman (2009) have responded to some of these criticism arguing that gender can be 'redone' but never 'undone', as accountability structures may adapt but gender is always present. The question of 'undoing' gender is one that is advanced by Judith Butler (2004) within the discursive/poststructural approach.

1.1.2 The discursive/poststructural approach

The poststructural approach to gender as a social practice is drawn predominantly from the work of Judith Butler (1990, 2004). Conceptualising Butler's extensive work within a particular 'position' such as discursive or poststructural is problematic as Butler is a syncretic writer, drawing on many influences such as Hegel, Nietzsche, de Beauvoir, Foucault, Freud, Althusser, and Austin among others, however, I use this term in line with others (c.f. Kelan, 2009, 2010).

Butler's (1990) understanding of gender holds similarities to West and Zimmerman's (1987) approach in that the starting point is to consider why the gender binary is perceived to be natural and credible. However, a significant point of difference is that Butler considers gender to be a discursive effect, rather than the expression of given traits; ritualised through constant repetition making it appear natural (Tyler, 2012). For Butler (1990), gender is done through the central concept of *performativity.* Butler draws here on the language philosopher, Austin's, use of the term performative

utterances, Derrida's notion of citationality, and Foucault's subjection processes. Performativity for Butler is 'that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler, 1993, p. xxi). Discourses 'congeal' (Butler, 1990, p. 33) into a form that makes it appear that gender has been there all along, constructing certain subject positions as viable and available. Discourses therefore hold power to determine which subject positions are produced and individuals must be readable within the norm to exist as human beings (Butler, 2004). Butler (1990) describes the heterosexual matrix and one such discursive regime, which organises gender and desire in a way which privileges hegemonic masculinity. An individual's gender identity is thus a discursive effect of the regulatory framework and we must remain recognisable within socially intelligible norms. This concept of intelligibility is developed in *Undoing Gender* (2004), where Butler suggests that we must remain readable within a regulative framework or we become 'undone' and our existence is denied (Butler, 2004). The construction of a natural binary sex produced through discourse consequently produces both gender and heterosexuality to be construed as natural; a concept that has been taken up within feminist and queer theory.

Butler's work has received acclaim but also much criticism from academics and beyond[4]. Within the academic sphere, Butler has been criticised for reducing gender to language therefore devaluing the role of the body in gender (Bordo, 2003), for misinterpreting Austin's idea of performative utterances, and dismissing agency and resistance within discourse (Nussbaum, 1999). How people navigate discourses and decide which to adopt, and therefore negotiate subject positions, is left unanswered.

[4] Pope Benedict XVI has challenged Butler's argument on gender (McRobbie, 2009) and Butler has been criticised for her elitist and inaccessible writing.

Perhaps most significantly for organisation studies, Butler's work is predominantly philosophical, her theories are particularly abstract with little guidance on how they can be empirically studied or applied.

1.1.3 Combining the ethnomethodological and poststructural approaches

The ethnomethodological tradition exemplified by West and Zimmerman, and the poststructural discursive approach of Butler, hold similarities in that both approaches consider gender as a practice; a social construction based on a gender binary that appears natural. However, the ethnomethodological approach considers gender as done in interactions, and the poststructural approach to gender focuses on the formation of subjects through discourse such that gender is an effect.

The two approaches hold some significant points of difference and it has been argued that they should not be used inter-changeably (Moloney & Fenstermaker, 2002). Alternatively, Kelan (2009), suggests that there are advantaged in carefully combining the two to give a full description and understanding of what gender as a performance means. Kelan (2009, p. 52) argues that 'whereas the ethnomethodological approach focuses on the production side (subject as producing norms), the discursive/poststructural approach explores the produced side (subject as produced by Discourses). Both sides are needed to understand which resources people are able to draw on in a situation to constitute their subjectivities…If we study only one side, our analysis of how gender is done in a situation may be incomplete'.

Within organisation studies, Nentwich and Kelan (2014), highlight how many articles discuss both West and Zimmerman and Butler in relation to how gender is done (c.f. Mavin & Grandy, 2013), suggesting the predominance of both theories. McDonald

(2013, p. 566), in her study of male nurses, for example, argues that while epistemological differences between the two approaches remain, they complement each other in important ways. Therefore, West and Zimmerman and Butler both provide an alternative and potentially complementary lens to consider the social construction of gender. The ethnomethodological approach of West and Zimmerman considers micro-interactions, while Butler looks at broader discourses. Combining the two thus has potential to provide a fuller picture of how gender is done within organisations. These debates are revisited within chapter two and the discussion chapter. I next turn to consider neoliberalism, postfeminism and neoliberal feminism, which provide the analytic tools of this thesis.

1.2 Neoliberalism, postfeminism and neoliberal feminism

Neoliberalism is a much used, but ill-defined and often contested, term (Elias & Gill, 2017; Harvey, 2007; Rose, 1999). Prügl (2015) highlights that the term is often used in three different ways within academic discourse; first, as a post-Cold War global political agenda associated with Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and the Bretton Woods institutions that emphasised deregulation and privatisation. Second, as an economic ideology associated with Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and the Chicago School, which argued for free market enterprise and a distrust of the state. Finally, as a Foucauldian rationality or cultural formation in which mechanisms of government creep into the most 'intimate realms of privacy by creating responsible subjectivities' (Prügl, 2015, p. 617). Within this thesis, I draw on the Foucauldian perspective, which positions neoliberalism as a political rationality that constructs individuals as entrepreneurial subjects, through propagating market values to social domains and actions (Adamson, 2017; Brown, 2003; Rose, 1999). This Foucauldian understanding

has been developed by feminist scholars to develop a poststructuralist understanding of the particular impact that neoliberalism has had on feminism and subjectivities (Colley & White, 2018; De La Fabián & Stecher, 2017; Elias & Gill, 2017; Gill & Scharff, 2011).

Understanding how neoliberalism acts as a form of governance often starts with Foucault's (1979) early work, which drew on the notion of the panopticon where individuals are never sure if they are the target of surveillance and therefore make the assumption that they are being watched. Therefore, surveillance acts as a powerful form of social control, influencing how individuals construct themselves. This metaphor has, however, been much criticised for its unidirectional view of surveillance, agency, power and 'surveillance pleasure' which is overlooked in the panoptic logic (Brivot & Gendron, 2011; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Van der Meulen & Heynen, 2016). Foucault's (2008) later theory of governmentality has been more recently taken up, particularly by feminist scholars. For Foucault (2008), government moves beyond a macro-level understanding of official institutions and practices to a micro-level concern for the private conduct of individuals. Thus, it includes the bureaucratic and administrative affairs privileged to the state, as well as the execution of political power through employing a multitude of rationalities and techniques to deal with issues within society (Gurkan, 2018). Governmentality involves subtle practices, which bring conduct in line with broader rationalities. For Foucault (2008, p. 121), neoliberalism is an 'active governmentality'; an ensemble of governmental techniques through which 'technologies of self' (Foucault, 1988) and the 'conduct of conducts' (Foucault, 1984) are employed to produce subjects within a market rationality. Technologies of self 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain

number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Thus, the link between wider discourses, regimes of truth and individual agency is fashioned (Gill & Orgad, 2015). This notion has been developed by others, including Butler (1997), who conceptualised the 'psychic life of power' using a poststructural perspective to examine how a subject proceeds from discourse, in this case neoliberalism, thus fashioning subjects at work (Baker & Kelan, 2019).

Much of the recent literature which seeks to consider the current common sense on gender draws on postfeminism (Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017; Lewis, Benschop, & Simpson, 2017). Second wave feminism's goals of emancipation from patriarchy and collective mobilisation faced a backlash in the 1980s and '90s (Gill, 2007; Riley, Evans, Elliott, Rice, & Marecek, 2017; Ronen, 2018), conceptualised for *some* as postfeminism. While a limited number of authors have sought to understand postfeminism as a poststructural theoretical perspective (Gill et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2017), seeing it as the 'intersection of feminism with other anti-foundationalist movements, including postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism' (Brooks, 1997, p. 1). The majority of writers reject this interpretation, instead seeing postfeminism as a discursive formation or sensibility, rather than a movement, as with other forms of feminism.

Those who see postfeminism as a sensibility argue that it extends beyond a backlash, to encompass a complex relationship with feminism, in which there is a 'double entanglement', where postfeminism simultaneously incorporates and repudiates issues advanced by second wave feminism (McRobbie, 2004, 2009). Gill (2016) for example

highlights the discursive formations of postfeminism which impact on organisations and subjectivities, including individualism and empowerment discourses, a reconfiguration of femininity and emphasis on 'natural' sexual differences, self-surveillance and monitoring women's bodies, the make-over paradigm, and femininity as a bodily property, and a return to traditional values with women in the home as 'choice', rather than necessity. However, as Lewis et al. (2017) argue, there is value in underpinning postfeminism as a sensibility with poststructuralist theoretical principles, as it recognises its governance dimension. Thus postfeminism acts as a form of governmentality as 'individualism, agency and femininities of contemporary women (and men) are approached as constituted effects connected to postfeminist discourse as opposed to emerging from the 'inside' of a sovereign individual with an essentialist, agentic sense of self' (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 215). Within this thesis, I draw on postfeminism as a sensibility framed within a poststructuralist perspective, which recognises its governance element.

In recognising the constitutive effects of postfeminism as a form of governance, we can move to consider the relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism. Both hold similarities, such as a focus on individualism, a call for women to self-transform and reinvent, and similar discourses around choice, empowerment, autonomy and self-regulation (Gill et al., 2017). Gill and Scharff (2011) highlight, for example, how the independent, entrepreneurial, self-managing, subject of neoliberalism holds similarities to the agentic, responsible, choosing, self-fashioning subject of postfeminism. The link between neoliberalism and postfeminism seems to be situated in the notion of 'choice' biography, where women are called upon to work on themselves more than men, and

then present these actions as freely chosen (Gill, 2007). Yet the relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism is not theoretically clear.

Feminist scholars have argued that postfeminism is a discursive formation that has become dominant in our neoliberal era, recasting gender equality in neoliberal terms (for example: Lewis, 2014; Liu, 2019; Sullivan & Delaney, 2017). However, Catherine Rottenberg (2018) has added much to this argument, recently positioning the relationship between neoliberalism and postfeminism differently. Highlighting examples such as Facebook's Chief Operating Officer, Sheryl Sandberg (2013), whose popular and highly successful book called for women to 'lean in' to organisations, Rottenberg (2018) argues that since 2012, a range of high profile women from business and popular culture; Anne-Marie Slaughter, Karen Brady, Beyoncé and Emma Watson[5], among others, have declared themselves as feminists, albeit in neoliberal terms. Yet this form of neoliberal feminism is based on a notion of equality, where women move unilaterally through hierarchies, creating an isolated feminist consciousness with no call for collective action (Mavin & Grandy, 2018). For Rottenberg (2018) liberal feminism gave rise to postfeminism, which has now been ascended by the resurrection of feminism in neoliberal terms, uncoupled from calls for collective action, equality and emancipation (Gill & Orgad, 2017). Neoliberal feminism still relies heavily on the 'choice' discourse that is seen with postfeminism. However, it is differentiated not by the 'overing' of feminism which characterises postfeminism, but rather by the way in

[5] Rottenberg (2018) references Sheryl Sandberg, CEO of Facebook and author of 'Lean In: Women, Work and The Will to Lead', Anne-Marie Slaughter's 'Why women can't have it all' article, Emma Watson's 2014 UN speech at the #HeforShe campaign launch and Beyoncé's 2014 MTV music award's performance to a 'Feminist' backdrop. Maria Adamson (2107) has argued Sandberg's, Brady's and other's celebrity CEO autobiographies are shaped by a neoliberal and postfeminist context.

which high-powered women have embraced and 'mainstreamed' this form of feminism within organisational life. Rosalind Gill (2016, p. 618) rejects the implication that we are 'post-postfeminism', instead positioning neoliberal feminism as a form of corporate feminism that staves off feminist movements or feminist anti-capitalism, while appearing to take feminism 'into account'. Thus, postfeminism is a sensibility 'deeply enmeshed with neoliberalism' (Gill, 2016, p. 613).

In sum, postfeminism and neoliberal feminism share a complicated and inter-twined relationship and the difference is not theoretically clear. Subsequently, within this thesis, I use the terms somewhat interchangeably seeing postfeminism as a gendered form of neoliberal governance and neoliberal feminism as the co-opting of feminism within neoliberal terms. Arguably, the difficulty in clearly differentiating these terms may be because they are shifting discourses that are far from static; instead they are able to adapt and shift to context meaning that they remain somewhat hard to fully conceptualise. If we are to interrogate discourses of neoliberal feminism and postfeminism, then first we must empirically consider how these discourses are played out in organisations, how subjectivities are performatively constructed through these discourses, and the mechanisms through which they silence critique and normalise women's experiences. In illustration, I turn to briefly present my PhD journey as a tale of neoliberalism which, in part, prompted some of the academic curiosity that motivated me to conduct this research.

1.3 My PhD journey: the neoliberal myth of 'having it all'

'Phase 1' of my PhD journey started in 2006, when I was working at Ashridge Business School as a Programme Director, running leadership development programmes. My motivation to do a PhD initially arose from my experiences of working with senior managers and observing the lack of women at senior levels in organisations, and indeed, attending executive education programmes. When I reflect back on myself at that time, I see myself as a neoliberal subject *par excellence* (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Scharff, 2016). I recognised that structural inequalities created gendered divisions in organisations, I had experienced subtle forms of sexism in my career, and my mother is a second wave feminist, who wanted her daughters to gain a good education, so they could be emancipated from the lack of opportunities she had experienced as a working-class woman leaving school in the 1960's. However, on one level, I believed that, if I invested in myself as an entrepreneur of self, and developed the right forms of human capital, I could reach the senior echelons. This was before Sheryl Sandberg had urged women to 'lean in' to organisations, but as I sat in the first doctoral programme classes, I felt like I had a successful career, my career trajectory was planned out, I was planning my wedding and starting a PhD. I felt like I could 'have it all' (Farris & Rottenberg, 2017).

In 2009, I was on maternity leave, when the UK economy took a downturn, and the financial crisis of 2008/9 meant my job was uncertain and voluntary redundancy looked like a good option, given that I had a baby and a husband, who travelled extensively and had prioritised his career. By mid-2009, I had become a full-time, stay at home mother, but I framed this within a postfeminist choice discourse. As Sørensen (2017) suggests, 'choice' constitutes individual agency, constructing individuals as being in charge of

their own destinies. Thus, ‘choice’ is a neoliberal rationality, which directs attention towards self-governance and subjectivity. Maybe I couldn’t ‘have it all’, but I could be recast in a postfeminist ‘successful’ form of femininity, enacting feminine practices connected to motherhood (Lewis et al., 2017); what McRobbie (2009, p. 64) refers to as the postfeminist masquerade ‘re-orchestrating the heterosexual matrix’ in favour of masculine hegemony. I suspended my PhD for a period of what was meant to be 6 months, but it was almost 5 years before I returned to it.

Neoliberal feminism and postfeminist discourses obstruct the precarious reality of women’s lives, silencing inequalities and structural disadvantage (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017; Gill, 2014, 2017; Rottenberg, 2014). In 2012, I separated from my husband, leaving me with two small children. He has since become a partner at a global consultancy firm; he is an entrepreneur of self, free to travel and work the hours that the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990, 2006; Kokot, 2015) is required to do. I was left as a single mother, trying to get back into the job market after having had a five year career break. I could not return to my old job, as this required extensive travel, which was not possible as a single parent. Choice discourse hides the politics of choice (Lewis et al., 2017); as a single parent unable to freely travel and do the extensive hours my previous role demanded, I had no place. This was not the neoliberal feminist dream I had been sold.

‘Phase 2’ of my PhD started in 2013, when I was fortunate enough to gain a position as a lecturer at a local university, restart my PhD, and with the guidance and support of my supervisor, submit this thesis. In the time between starting my ‘phase 1’ PhD and submitting this ‘phase 2’ thesis, scholarly work recognising the hegemonic nature of

neoliberalism, and the dominance of postfeminism as a discourse representing a common sense on gender in organisations and society, has blossomed.

As a lecturer in higher education, I find myself again subject to a neoliberal agenda. My contract at the university is contingent upon me completing a PhD and without publications, my role, like many others is precarious. Neoliberalism has invaded the higher education sector, casting academics within this framework as entrepreneurial subjects, while obscuring inequalities (De Coster & Zanoni, 2018; Huppatz, Sang, & Napier, 2018). My university has, for example, a gender pay gap of 23%, yet the solution offered by the university is mentoring and training courses for women. This demonstrates a neoliberal, 'fix-the-woman' approach, which calls on women to internalise their failure, rather than recognise the structural conditions that create this inequality (Gill & Orgad, 2015, 2017). As De Coster and Zanoni (2018) argue, the neoliberal ideology of meritocracy assumes women simply make the wrong decisions, thus obscuring the reproduction of gender inequality. Neoliberalism is pervasive; it gets into the 'nooks and crannies of everyday life' (Littler, 2017, p. 608), as a form of governance constraining individuals.

I do not wish in this account of my PhD journey to construct myself as a victim of neoliberalism; indeed I am very conscious that as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, cis-gender woman, I embody a form of privileged femininity (Genz, 2009; Lewis, 2014), and that 'the privilege of certain voices, that is white, middle-class, women leaders or women scholars, may render others voiceless' (Mavin & Grandy, 2018, p. 5). My experiences have however begotten an interest in understanding the toll of neoliberalism, the ways in which it pervades and stifles critique, particularly its impact on women and subjectivities. Through understanding the normalising effects of

neoliberalism, we are able to start to consider ways in which to challenge the silencing effects of neoliberal feminism and postfeminism.

1.4 Aims, Objectives and Structure

The aim of this thesis is to explore ways in which neoliberalism and postfeminism have become ingrained in organisational life as a form of governance, contributing to an enhanced understanding of how these discourses constitute and subsequently constrain feminine subjectivities. In considering how neoliberalism and postfeminism are entrenched within organisations, we can start to consider strategies to overcome the normalising effects of neoliberalism.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the substantive chapters of this thesis, which are presented in the format of three empirical, and one methodological, peer-reviewed articles. These articles explore how neoliberalism constitutes and constrains feminine subjectivities, how it acts to silence and obscure critique, and thus, how we can start to challenge the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism, neoliberal feminism and postfeminism in organisations.

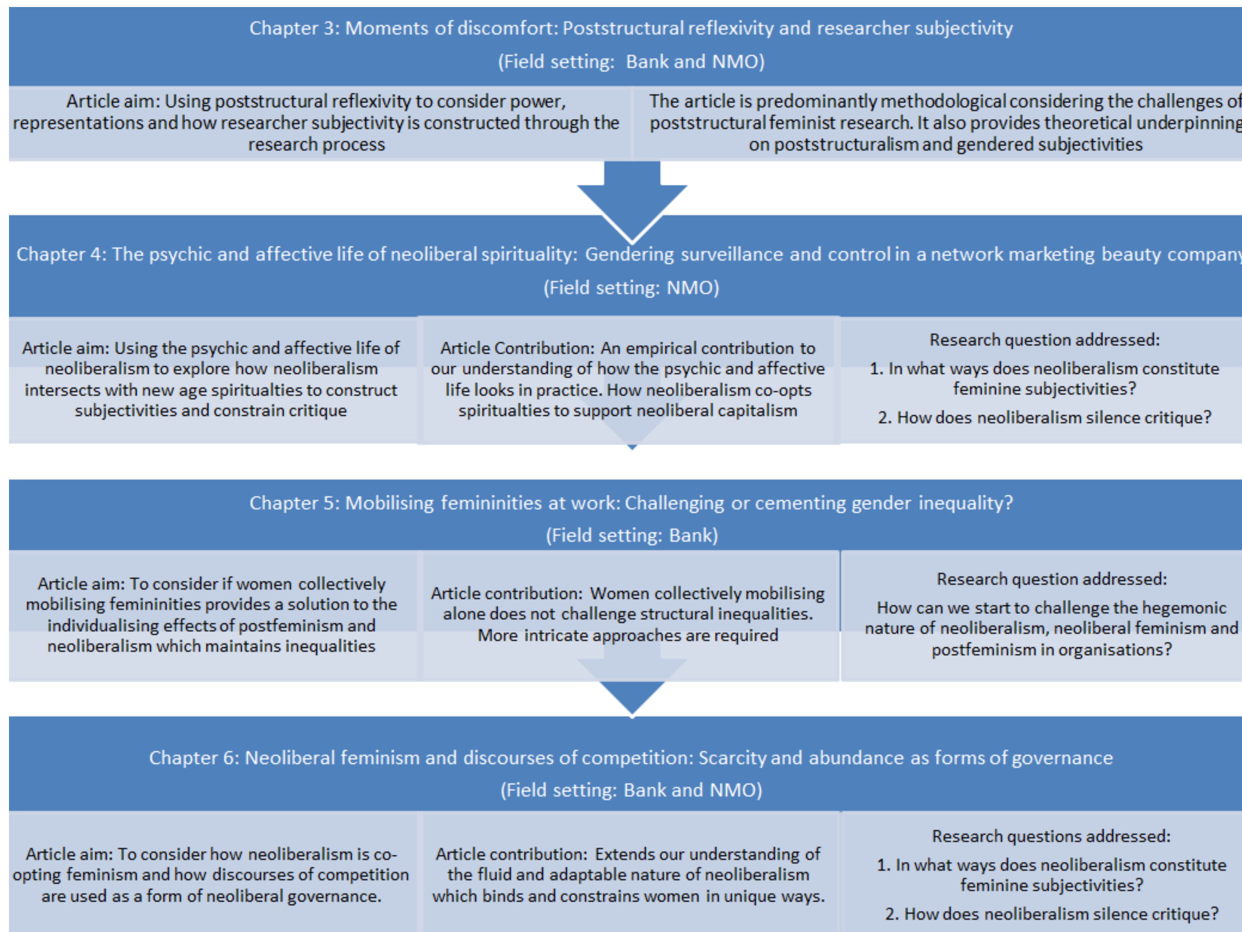

Figure 1: Thesis chapter structure

The thesis proceeds as follows. While chapters three to chapter six present the empirical findings of my research, in chapter two, I offer a more in-depth overview of the two organisations that provided the field settings for my research; a multinational bank, and a network marketing organisation (NMO). In chapter two, I also provide further information about the methodological decisions I made during the course of my research, and the analytic approach adopted.

The poststructuralist theoretical framework I adopted is discussed further in chapter three. Here, I start to consider the methodological challenges of conducting poststructural feminist research in an article entitled *'Moments of discomfort: poststructural reflexivity and researcher subjectivity'*. My thesis interrogates neoliberalism and postfeminism with a poststructuralist understanding of the role that these discourses play in governance and constituting subjectivities. Within this article, which is predominantly methodological, I present poststructural reflexivity as a way to consider my own research practice, and how my subjectivity is constructed through the research process. I present two vignettes drawn from my research, which were moments of discomfort. I argue that moments of discomfort provide a space where subjectivities become visible and are constituted through discursive regimes where the performativity of gender renders us viable (Butler, 1990). Thus, I use poststructural reflexivity as a means to recognise regimes of truth, power, and the discursive regimes, through which we become gendered subjects, as a way to frame our seeing. Within this article, I make a contribution to our understanding of the methodological challenges of reflexivity through offering poststructural reflexivity as a way of reflecting on our ways of seeing and ways of being as feminist researchers.

Next, I move from a predominantly methodological focus, to present the empirical findings of my research. In chapter four, I consider the silencing processes of neoliberalism and particularly the psychic and affective toll that this has on individuals, in my second article entitled '*The psychic and affective life of neoliberal spirituality: gendering surveillance and control in a network marketing beauty company'.* The article focuses specifically on the NMO, which employs a form of New Age spirituality called the 'Law of Attraction' (LOA) as part of its induction and training, which has become ingrained into the cultural discourses of the NMO. Whilst the LOA is not new, it has been made popular through Rhonda Byrnes bestselling book '*The Secret'* (2006). The LOA works as a form of 'karma', so that those who develop the right attitudes, such as gratitude and positivity, will be successful and reap financial rewards. Using a form of pseudo-science (Hashimoto, 2018), the LOA suggests that thoughts have a frequency. Consequently, individuals who are positive will reap the rewards of abundance, whilst those who are negative will attract negativity and disappointment back. This favours a form of 'self-creation' where the LOA enables individuals to instantly benefit in all aspects of their lives from health, to wealth and relationships. Within the article, I draw on Christina Scharff (2016) and Rosalind Gill's (2017) notion of the psychic life of neoliberalism, where individuals are called upon to develop the 'right' dispositions, and the affective life, where 'feeling rules' constrain what emotional states are allowed. The aim of the article is thus to examine how neoliberalism intersects with New Age spirituality's to constitute feminine subjectivities and act as a form of surveillance and control. The article demonstrates the pervasive and adaptable nature of neoliberalism, which, in this context, appropriates Eastern philosophies, recasting them in neoliberal terms as a form of 'spiritual neoliberalism'.

However, I extend this to show how neoliberalism is increasingly becoming a psychological project, calling on women to practise gratitude, self-belief, and positivity, and disallow negativity. This acts as a form of self-surveillance, which constrains women and negates any criticism of structural issues, blaming women for their failure. In the article, I make a further empirical contribution to our understanding of how the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism looks in practice, how it constitutes subjectivities with the 'right' dispositions, and how it silences critique by individualising failure.

In chapter five, I turn to consider neoliberal discourses within the bank in an article entitled; '*Mobilising femininities at work: challenging or cementing gender inequalities?*' The previous article considers the constitutive effects of neoliberalism and postfeminism and the ways in which this obscures inequalities. The extant literature suggests that collective action would provide a solution to the inequalities maintained and obscured by postfeminism, and neoliberalism's emphasis on individualising and responsibilising subjects. Turning to the bank, I consider what happens when women do mobilise collectively within this organisation and if it can offer a challenge to gender inequalities. I build upon the work of van den Brink and Benschop (2014) who develop the concept of mobilising femininities; defined as occurring when two or more women concertedly bring to bear, or bring into play, femininities. In my research, women collectively mobilising femininities was presented in two ways. First, through nurturing; this was presented as a traditional and essentialised acceptable organisational femininity linked to women's journey of self-improvement. Second, women mobilising femininities is seen as a form of protection from men mobilising masculinities, which, while it offered support, presented no challenge to the *status quo*. However, this form of

mobilising femininities presented a risk, as it made women's behaviour visible and subject to scrutiny. In this article, I argue that women mobilising femininities as a form of collective action *alone* does not offer an explicit challenge to gender inequalities or the *status quo*. Thus, more intricate and multifaceted means are required to tackle inequalities and the silencing effect of neoliberalism and postfeminism.

In chapter six, I present my final empirical article entitled '*Neoliberal feminism and discourses of competition: Scarcity and abundance as forms of governance'*. In this article, I look at discourses of competition for women in the two organisational settings that I draw upon for my research; a corporate bank and a network marketing organisation (NMO) focused on beauty products. An element of the overall aim of this thesis is to consider how neoliberalism has become ingrained in organisational life as a form of governance. Thus, we first need to understand how neoliberal discourses are enacted and able to shift and adapt to context. Within this article, I therefore consider how discourses of competition are contextual and framed within a neoliberal feminist discourse. I draw on competition as a form of governance based on Foucault's (2008) concept of governmentality, where individuals are expected to become economically self-sufficient within a free market rationality. In my interviews, the bank was presented as having a pyramid structure where there are fewer positions at the top, and crucially, a perception that there are fewer positions for women. Discourses of competition drew on a 'scarcity logic', which meant women felt they were competing with each other for these limited opportunities; this spoke more to Foucault's enterprise as self, where neoliberal capitalism creates inequalities to maintain a sense of scarcity. Alternatively, the NMO beauty company was presented as having a model of 'abundance'; anyone who could develop the right skills and belief systems could achieve and be successful.

Discourses of competition suggested women felt the need to 'work on themselves', therefore competition became a psychological project calling on women to self-improve; a neoliberal feminist empowerment and self-improvement discourse. I thus show how, in two very different organisational settings, neoliberal feminism adapts and transforms. Yet, in both settings, it sustains and supports neoliberal capitalism. I argue that neoliberal feminism damages women, albeit in different ways; in the bank discourses of competition call upon women to individualise, and in the beauty company to internalise failure; both are forms of governance which obscure inequalities.

1.5 Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have provided an outline of the main aims and objectives of this thesis, as well as an overview of the articles which form the empirical and methodological chapters. Central to this thesis is the aim of exploring how neoliberalism and postfeminism work as a form of governance, constraining feminine subjectivities within organisations. In chapter two, I describe in further detail the methodological decisions and field settings for my research, before turning to present the four chapters which constitute the central element to this thesis. The thesis concludes with an overall discussion of the contribution of this research and recommendations for further research.

1.6 Current and planned dissemination

Chapter 3 Moments of discomfort: Poststructural reflexivity and researcher subjectivity

- Target Journal : Organization (ABS 3*)

Chapter 4 The psychic and affective life of neoliberal spirituality: Gendering surveillance and control in a network marketing company

- Target Journal : Organization Studies (ABS 4*)
- Submitted to a special issue in Organization Studies (ABS 4*) in August 2018 on organisational control and surveillance. The paper went for review and in late December 2018 it was rejected for the special issue however it received supportive feedback from the reviewers and the editor has suggested it be resubmitted to the regular journal.

Chapter 5 Mobilising femininities at work: Challenging or cementing gender inequality?

- Target Journal : Gender, Work & Organization (ABS 3*)
- The article was submitted to Organization (ABS 3*) in 2017 and I was asked to revise and resubmit. The paper was rejected after the revise and resubmit. The paper will be edited post PhD submission and submitted to Gender, Work & Organization (ABS 3*).

Chapter 6 Neoliberal feminism and discourses of competition: Scarcity and abundance as forms of governance.

- Target Journal: Gender, Work & Organization (ABS 3*)

Conference presentations

- Carr, M., & Kelan, E.K. (2016). *Femininities at work: How women support other women in the workplace*. Paper presented at the British Academy of Management, Newcastle, UK.
- Carr, M., & Kelan, E.K. (2016). *Mobilising femininities in the workplace: offering intra-gender support as a way to make work 'work'*. Paper presented at the Gender, Work & Organization, Keele, UK.
- Carr, M., & Kelan, E.K. (2017). *Discord in the gender harmony: Mobilising femininities at work*. Paper presented at the 10th International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference, Liverpool, UK.

Figure 2: Current and planned dissemination

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2 Methodology and Methods

In the previous chapter, I discussed my research aims and objectives and positioned the articles, which form the empirical chapters of my thesis. Although methodology is addressed within each empirical article which forms the substantive element of this thesis, within this section I provide some further details about the organisations I selected for my research, the material collection process, the research design as it evolved over the course of my research, the methodological decisions I made, and an overview of how I analysed the material.

2.1 The material collection process

During the course of my field research, as is typical for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Flick, 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), my research questions changed and adapted. Within the following section, I chronologically outline the research journey and subsequent evolving research focus.

During the research process, data analysis, and subsequent selection and presentation of the research findings, I made certain ontological, epistemological and methodological decisions. This thesis is in many way ‘constructed’ through ‘actively select[ing]’ which resources to include, and which to omit, and through building it ‘out of a variety of pre-existing linguistic resources’ such as existing literature and notions about how to conduct research (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 33-34). As Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest, this is not always a deliberate or conscious process, rather, it is evolving and opportune. This is particularly so when completing a PhD on a part-time basis. Between 2008 and 2018, the literature developed significantly and subsequently my research question adapted in line with the emerging literature. This evolving research process is

shown in Figure 3, which provides an overview of the research process, design, and how the research question was influenced by developments in the literature. This is outlined in more detail in the following sections.

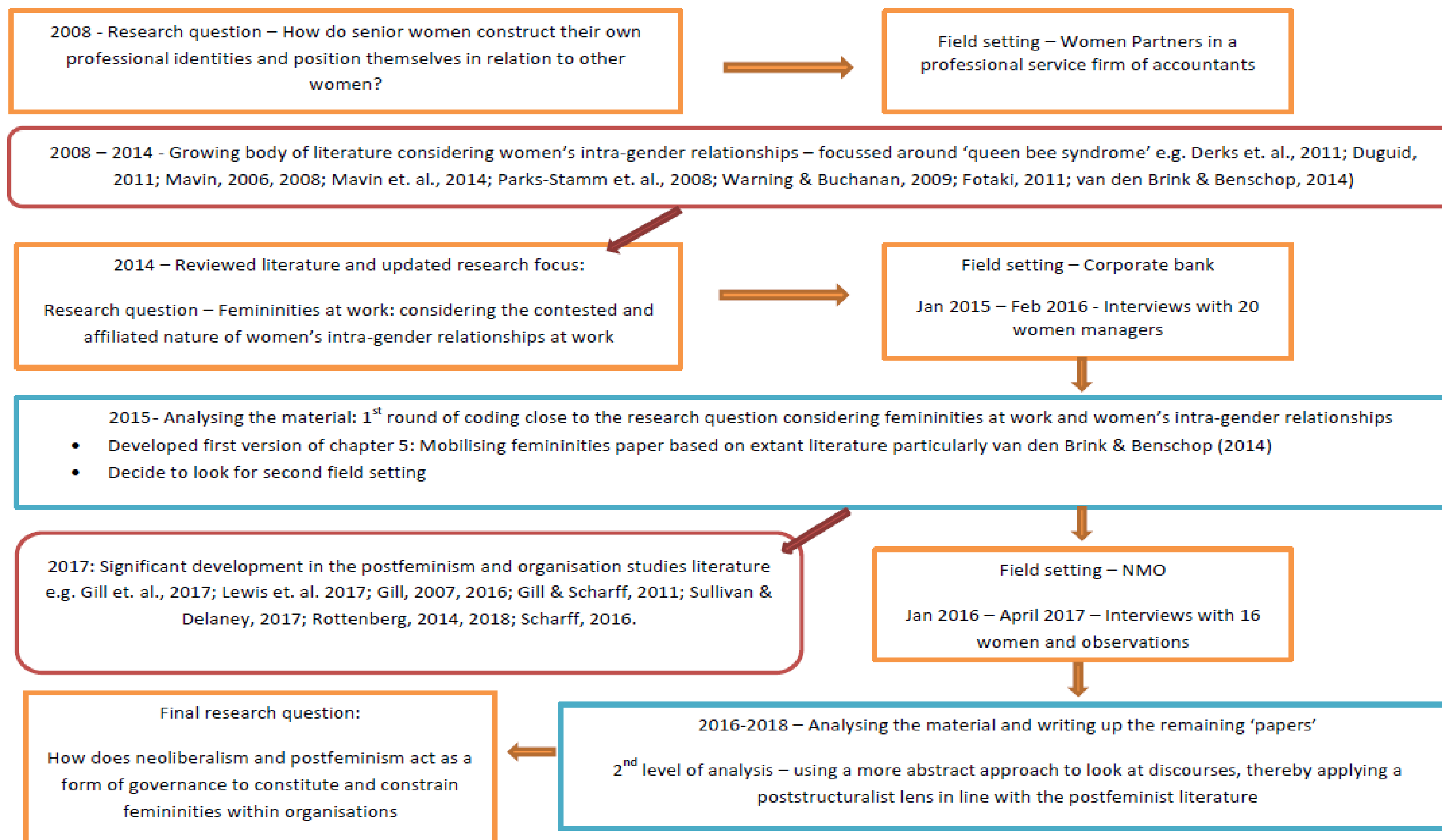

Figure 3: Evolution of the research process

During ‘phase 1’ of my PhD, I had started fieldwork, interviewing women partners at one of my clients, a professional service firm of accountants. My overall research question at this time was; how do senior corporate women construct their own professional identities at work and position themselves in relation to other women? I was particularly interested in considering women’s intra-gender relationships at work drawing on positioning theory (Davis & Harre, 1990). This is a discursive practice, whereby people actively produce social and psychological realities, which suggests that people see the world from their ‘position’ and thereby interpret it to produce a multiplicity of selves. Several researchers had used the concept of positioning to understand how women position themselves within gendered cultures (Gherardi, 1996; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001; Jorgenson, 2002), however, proceeding 2008, there was limited research looking at how women position themselves and construct their identity in relation to other women.

On returning to my PhD in 2014, the literature on women’s intra-gender relationships had advanced. Much of this was focussed on women in senior leadership roles, and framed in terms of the ‘queen bee syndrome’; a term used to describe senior women who make it to the top in an organisation and then act in a way which is unhelpful or negative towards other women (Staines, Tavris, & Hayagrante, 1973). The extant literature at the time proposed that these behaviours are driven by senior women’s need to remain unique in the organisation and to stave off competition, although it was suggested that factors such as gender identification (Derks et. al., 2011), career experiences (Ellemars et. al., 2004), competition and collective threat (Duguid, 2011), and the perceived risk of promoting other women (Klenke, 2003), could influence its occurrence. The queen bee syndrome can be conceptualised as a sexist concept as it

blames women for their behaviour which occurs within a gendered organisational context where women are positioned as being competitive with each other (Mavin, 2008). However, the existing research was still seeking to conceptualise this behaviour and examine whether its occurrence within organisations acts as a barrier to other women (Ellemars et. al., 2012). Research had for instance looked at aspects of women's relationships such as female misogyny (Mavin, 2008), micro-violence (Mavin et. al., 2014), competition among women (Parks-Stamm et. al., 2008), and distancing from other women (Warning & Buchanan, 2009; Cooper, 1997; Fotaki, 2011), focussed again on the more negative aspects of women's relationships.

My research aim therefore was refocused on extending the literature in two ways. Firstly, while much of the research was concerned with the negative aspects of women's intra-gender relationships, this ignored the complexity of women's relationships and therefore, more constructive aspects of women's relationships with other women at work. Secondly, the literature was predominantly focussed on more senior women leaders in relation to 'queen bee' behaviour. For example, Sharon Mavin and Gina Grandy, key researchers within this area, focus on 'elite leaders' which they define as 'women who hold significant positions of power and influence at the top of organizational hierarchies; participants hold, for example, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Managing Director (MD), Director/Non-Executive Director positions' (Mavin & Grandy, 2016, p. 3). Therefore I was interested in extending this to look at women in middle and junior management positions too. This research aim is reflected in the interview guide presented in appendix B which was designed in relation to this body of literature and research focussed on women's intra-gender relationships.

In 2014, on returning to my PhD, the financial crisis had impacted on the accountancy firm in significant ways, including a change of leadership at the firm, and the loss of a significant amount of women partners. In fact, my client within the firm had remarked that; as the women partners were engaged with much of the people management and administrative roles, their billing tended to be lower, consequently they were disproportionately affected by redundancies. This echoes previous work, which discusses the 'career choices' of women in professional service firms, who are judged in relation to a masculine norm (Lewis & Kumra, 2010; Kokot, 2014; van den Brink, Holgersson, Linghag, Dee, 2016). The new senior leadership at the firm were unsupportive of allowing me access to the women partner group; therefore I made the decision to look for an alternative organisation and to restart my fieldwork. This provided an opportunity to look for an organisation which could be construed as gendered (Acker, 1990, 1992), and hierarchical; where women are under-represented at senior levels in the organisation (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008; Anderson, Vinnicombe & Singh, 2010). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, one where women are represented at middle and junior management levels, therefore extending our understanding of both the contested and affiliated nature of women's intra-gender relationships when working in gendered organisational cultures.

There was also an element of personal motivation in selecting this as the field of analysis. As I previously mentioned in chapter 1, when I worked in executive education, my client basis had been mainly focused on professional service firms and the financial service sector. I had observed the lack of senior women within these organisations, and I was interested in considering some of the gendered processes influencing this.

Therefore, there was an element of research rationale based on the existing literature, personal interest, and familiarity with choosing such a setting.

2.1.1 The bank

A chance conversation at work led to the bank being selected as my first field of study. One of my colleagues had previously worked as a human resources business partner at the bank and still did some consultancy work for them. She mentioned that a Director in the corporate banking division was trying to increase the proportion of women within his team and that he would be interested in meeting with me. I established contact with him via email and arranged a first meeting. In chapter three, I provide more detail of this initial meeting, which forms one of the vignettes I have selected as an illustration of poststructural reflexivity and subjectivity.

The bank provided a good fit with my aim of looking for an organisation which, like many others, is hierarchical, with women under-represented at senior levels. The bank is a FTSE 100 listed multinational investment bank and financial service company. The bank has a long history and maintains its headquarters in the UK. In 2018 the bank, under the new UK legislation, was required to publish their gender pay gap data, which revealed a basic pay gap of over 40% including bonuses. The report provoked challenge from members of Parliament, however in response, the bank stated that they were confident that women were paid the same as men for doing the same job, and that the gap was due to men occupying more senior roles. This illustrates the inequality regimes at the bank, which are ingrained within its culture and organisational logic (Acker, 2006).

Banking is a highly regulated industry, which deals with confidential and sensitive information; therefore access to the bank potentially could have been problematic. However, my meeting with the Director, 'Simon', provided a sponsor to move the research forward, initially at speed. After attending a first meeting with Simon, he provided a list of twelve women within his division who had indicated they would be receptive to being interviewed. I made initial contact with the women on this list via email to provide further details of the study and to arrange a meeting to conduct the interviews. However, it quickly transpired that although the list was meant to be 'warm' leads, several seemed reluctant to actually be interviewed or had little knowledge of the research. Simon provided an additional list of names and eventually, I managed to interview fourteen women using Simon as a point of contact.

During my interview phase at the bank, Simon rather abruptly left the organisation and I was left without a sponsor, subsequently leaving the project in a precarious position. There ensued a period of stasis, where the project sponsorship was allocated to the Human Resources department, who became quite nervous about the goals and dissemination of the research. The bank suddenly felt monolithic to me, and I struggled for a while to find someone with the authority to support my interviews and allow access. Eventually I made contact and arranged a meeting with a woman within HR who was able to confirm permission to continue, however, her involvement was very remote. I then adopted a snowballing technique, returning to some of my previous interviewees to ask them for contacts and names of women I could approach within the bank.

In using Simon and then HR to access the bank I was, in effect, using a gatekeeper to access participants. My decision to use a gatekeeper was a pragmatic one to gain access

to an organisation which is somewhat risk adverse given it deals with confidential information, is highly regulated and, along with other banks, had faced press scrutiny in the post-financial crisis era. Corporate gatekeepers are a powerful and sometime singular tool for access (Nir, 2016). Alternative methods could have included cold-calling or emailing potential participants directly; however, I was cautious about reputation issues and repercussions if I did not have a senior 'sponsor' to grant access. However, I recognise this created certain tensions particularly in relation to the relationship and dynamic with Simon. As Nir (2016, p. 79) states, 'navigating these gatekeeper relationships is a delicate balance with dynamic power struggles that must be carefully managed at each stage of the process (*ibid*. p. 79). Gatekeepers can also present ethical challenges. While gatekeepers are key individuals who grant access and permission, they may sometimes do this on behalf of other participants who are not aware of the research (Brewer, 2000). Yet, gaining permission from senior people can be crucial to pre-empt difficulties later on (Lareau, 1996).

Once a participant had agreed to take part in the research, we either met at the bank office, although one participant requested to be interviewed at home, or arranged a time for a telephone interview. The decision to conduct a face-to-face or telephone interviews was based on geographical location. I recognise that there are disadvantages and advantages to both approaches. Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury (2012), for example, highlight that telephone interviewing has traditionally been seen as unsuitable for qualitative interviews, as it loses opportunities for rapport building and observation. However, their study demonstrates that the differences in the two approaches offer more nuanced variations such as; interviewees asking for more clarification in telephone interviews and checking the adequacy of their responses more (Irvine et. al., 2012). I

noted little perceivable difference in either method, apart from length of time, as there tended to be less general conversation at the beginning of telephone interviews. Arguably, there are advantages that occur through the elimination of bias arising from the researcher's appearance, for example, when I initially interviewed the women partners at the accountancy firm, one respondent on the telephone remarked to me that she would never hire a woman in her thirties as they leave to have children. As I was around eight months pregnant at the time, it is doubtful whether she would have made that comment in a face-to-face interview.

As previously discussed, I had made a decision early on in the research process that I wished to interview women who were in a management role within the bank, thus extending previous work which considered women's intra-gender relationships in senior management positions. Although the bank has a good gender balance at the lower levels of the organisation, particularly in the retail banking sector, women are increasingly under-represented throughout the middle and senior management levels. I wanted to gain a greater understanding of women's experiences when they are in a minority position. Therefore, I decided to interview women manager ranging from Associate-Vice President level, a junior management position, through to Managing Director, a senior strategic role. The bank has four tiers, entry to intermediate and then 'management roles' which are banded AVP to VP, Director and Managing Director. Therefore, I chose to interview women from AVP to MD as these represented management positions as defined by the company and extended the current focus in the literature on more senior positions.

Ultimately, I interviewed twenty women from the bank between the end of January 2015 and the beginning of February 2016 (details of the women interviewed are

provided in Appendix A:1). The interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes with an average of 56 minutes. The shorter interviews were with more senior women who were constrained for time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (I discuss transcription in the proceeding section). I also kept a research journal with observation notes and reflections on the interviews and my own personal feelings during the process.

During my initial email exchange, I provided details of the research aim, however, at the start of each interview I reiterated this, provided a participant information sheet and asked participants to sign a consent form (see Appendix C for an example). For feminist research, the concept of consent is somewhat problematic as it is difficult for interviewees to fully consent at the beginning of an interview if they are not sure in what direction it will turn (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). Furthermore, informed consent makes an assumption of a stable and independent subject, which is in contrast to a feminist ideology which considers the multitude of power relationships which constitute the subject (Halse & Honey, 2005). This is something which I discuss further in chapter three in presenting my research within a feminist poststructuralist lens. However, I found seeking informed consent provided a good opportunity to establish rapport and allow the participants to ask questions and clarify the research aims.

During my interviews at the bank, I started to consider the value that would be gained in extending my research to a second field setting. Hammersely and Atkinson (2007) suggest that adding another setting adds breadth and reduces depth. Once I had started to analyse the interviews conducted at the bank, a recurring question I kept considering was the extent to which my findings were influenced by women's *minority* position within management at the bank. As Mavin & Grandy (2008, p. S76) highlight, women's

behaviour within organisations is assessed in terms of a masculine norm and 'as such women cannot win and face contradictory demands of being feminine and business like' and the 'gendered context of senior management and sex-role stereotypes provide a backdrop for relationships *between* women' (ibid, p. S77). Whilst the goal of this qualitative research was never to claim any form of representation, I decided that another organisation could provide a different context in which women were not in a minority position, and sex-roles stereotypes were perhaps less influenced by the masculine norm, therefore allowing some consideration of the contextual nature of the research.

2.1.2 The Network Marking Organisation (NMO)

Having concluded that I wanted to look for a second organisation to extend my field research, I decided to look for one that had a greater representation of women at senior levels than in the bank. This presented a challenge; industries that are dominated by women, for example healthcare and education, still tend to have a gender balance in senior positions which favours men (Williams, 1992, 2013). Indeed, while some exceptions exist, notably Britton's (1997) study of policies and practices comparing a men and women's prison, there is less research considering the gendered processes and substructures within alternative forms of organising. Sayce and Boone Parsons's (2012) study of the all-female feminist organisation Stewardesses for Women's Rights (SFWR), for example, recognised that this alternative form of organising still adopted a rather traditional hierarchical structure. Thus, without 'a critical mass of feminist organizations, institutional logic was likely anchored to masculine forms of isomorphism' (Sayce & Boone Parsons, 2012, p. 272). Hence, there presented both a

rationale, and an opportunity, to consider an alternative form of organisation less bound by traditional, hierarchical forms of organising.

I started attending a local 'Women in Business' networking event, however, the women who attended tended to be sole-practitioners working within a disparate range of roles, which did not fulfil my criteria for an alternative form of organising. The organiser of the networking event, 'Heather', is a distributor for the NMO and suggested I conduct the research there. Having had no previous experience of NMOs, I was unsure what to expect, so I attended a local event with Heather to scope the organisation and get a feel for how it worked. In chapter three, I again draw on a reflective vignette which describes my attendance at this first meeting.

The NMO is a North American based organisation which supplies personal care beauty products and dietary supplements. It has been operating for over 30 years, trades globally and generates several billion dollars in revenue, therefore is of significant size and global reach. NMOs are sometimes referred to as direct sales organisations or multilevel marketing organisations. They are based on a business model where independent distributors are encouraged to both sell products, and build up their own teams of distributors. Distributors earn commission on their own sales, and those of their distributors; their 'down-line'. The 'tiers' within which distributors earn commission on their down-line sales varies between NMOs, however within the organisation I studied, this extends six-tiers deep so that each distributor 'kicks back' a portion of commission to their up-line up to six tiers above. In Appendix A2.1, I provide examples of the distributor commissions which grow exponentially at each tier

due to this deep kick-back from the down-line. Multi-tier NMOs such as the one I studied have been criticised for showing similar characteristics to pyramid schemes[6] . Indeed, the NMO I studied has faced several court cases and fines, most recently a multi-million dollar class action suit in China where the NMO was found to have broken local regulations against pyramid schemes. However, the image presented at the NMO events is very different; one of an ethical business which emancipates women and even has a not-for-profit foundation which provides aid to children in developing nations.

The distributor and team meetings I attended with Heather, were all held on the South Coast of the UK, therefore my research is concentrated within the UK operation. Sales in the UK have grown rapidly in the previous 15 years, driven by a husband and wife team who had brought the product to the UK and settled on the South Coast. The distributor network has subsequently developed from here, and has the highest concentration of distributors, and most active network in the UK.

Unlike banking, the NMO structure was a new concept to me, and I had no previous experience within this, or the beauty industry. The bank was highly constrained by issues of confidentiality; for example, when I attended a meeting at the bank I would have to go through security, and I was restricted from areas where confidential information could be accessed. No such constraints existed within the NMO, in fact, I was actively encouraged to attend meetings and events, therefore an opportunity arose to take a more ethnographical-inspired approach to the fieldwork.

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[6] A pyramid scheme is an unsustainable business model where members have to make a payment to join and are promised a share of money from every member they recruit. Thus recruiting members is more lucrative than selling their products

There is little agreement or consensus about what ‘ethnography’ means and it is often used to describe an overlap in qualitative methods (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007). Indeed, Gobo (2008) argues that ethnography has become a buzz-word; much qualitative research, presented as ethnography, diverges from its original anthropological origins based on in-depth and often longitudinal participant observation. In the 1980s, ethnography came under criticism for assuming that the world could be studied in its ‘natural state’ (Lofland, 1967; Blumer, 1969: Matza, 1969). This assumes a realist approach; that the social world can be studied and documented, without recognition of the role the researcher plays in this. Poststructural approaches have influenced a revived interest in ethnography as a means to consider the changing role of language and rhetorical strategies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, the belief that value-free ethnographers represent social reality has been rejected, replaced by research carried out from a particular viewpoint. In Bev Skeggs’ (2001) classic feminist ethnographic study of working-class women, for example; Skeggs argues that ‘feminist ethnomethodology is about understanding process’ (Skeggs, 2001, p. 427). Feminist ethnography provides an interest in both the ‘lived experiences’, and a politicisation of researching these experiences (van Loon, 2011), in other words, to connect personal experiences to larger social and political structures.

Combining different data collection techniques allows the findings to be compared to examine the researcher’s effect on the social action. Hammersely & Atkins (2007) explain that the researcher accordingly becomes central to the analysis by influencing the context as an active participant; subsequently reflexivity is crucial (this is explored further in chapter three). While ethnographers generally draw on a range of sources of data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3), I position my research approach as more

ethnographical-inspired than a purer form of ethnography. Predominantly, the goal of observation within my research was to contextualise the material and provide richer data. Thus, enabling an enhanced understanding of the experiences of distributors and dominate discourses within the NMO, rather than using observations as data to drawn inferences. This again reflects the evolving nature of research as this moved away from my original research aims but allowed a deeper level of understanding about this form of organising.

After attending the first meeting with Heather, I decided to become a NMO distributor and use observation as a way to support my interviews and provide a contextual understanding of the NMO. This presented a challenge in managing the balance in being sufficiently close to organisational members and maintaining some distance to be able to observe and produce an organisational analysis (Neyland, 2008). Going through the process of training that other distributors went through allowed me to develop an in depth understanding of the initiation processes into the NMO while seeking to 'manage positioning' in terms of moving in and out of group membership (Neyland, 2008). Over a one year period I conducted around 40 hours of observations, which involved attending a range of events. My attendance at events finished once I had a sufficient understanding of how they ran, and as the events were stuck to a company defined format, they tended to be quite repetitive. I attended several 'new distributor' events, such as the one described in chapter three, which are predominantly a sales pitch, designed to recruit new distributors into the business. These are high energy, evangelical style events, with loud music, applause, congratulatory messages, and passionate and emotional testimonials. The purpose is to present the NMO as 'freeing' women so that, through hard work, and developing the rights skills and attitudes, great

rewards can be reaped, while working flexibly and spending time with their families. In chapter four, I discuss the evangelical, neoliberal and gendered culture at the NMO in further detail (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017; Biggart, 1989; Bromley, 1999; Pratt, 2000).

In addition to new distributor events, I attended team meetings where active distributors would gather to network and share ideas. Often a 'Team Elite'[7] distributor, from Europe or the US, would join the meeting to offer support and advice. I was struck by the collaborative nature of the NMO, where individuals were encouraged to support each other and act collegiately. In conversations, the distributors talked about this as something unique to the NMO that does not exist in competitor organisations. However, other organisations have fewer tiers; Avon, for example, only has one-tier, therefore potentially there is less motivation to support an extended down-line. Criticism of the NMO was highly frowned upon and those who were perceived to be negative were portrayed as having low self-belief and responsibilised for their failure (Budgeon, 2015; Elias & Gill, 2017). I consider this further in chapter four in relation to neoliberal spirituality and governance, and in chapter six in relation to discourses of competition.

During these meetings and events, I took notes in the form of a reflective journal. Sometimes I was able to capture these 'in the moment' as they were happening, but more typically, immediately after the event I would record conversations and encounters in a notebook. I took a comprehensive approach to capturing field notes through charting the sequence of events (Wolfinger, 2002), yet I acknowledge these field notes are themselves constructed through what is captured and what is ignored or overlooked.

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[7] Team Elites are sometimes referred to as the 'Million Dollar Club' as they have accrued over a million dollars in commission.

The primary source of material for my analysis was drawn from interviews with sixteen NMO distributors. Heather and Scarlett; a 'blue diamond' distributor (see Appendix A.2.1 for an explanation of pin titles), were hugely supportive and provided a list of contacts that I could interview. In addition, I would often see some of the women I interviewed at meetings I was attending where I would chat with them, and occasionally, the women would make recommendations about people I should speak to or other events I should attend. This helped build a sense of rapport and facilitate my understanding of the interview discussions and what was happening in the field. The NMO distributors were supportive and keen to meet to tell me their stories. All had come to the NMO from other organisations and they had wide ranging backgrounds. In Appendix A:2 I provide a list of the distributors interviewed and their previous occupations. Twelve of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, at coffee shops or people's homes, while the rest were conducted over the telephone, again due to geographical constraints. One distributor, for example, was running her beauty business from her small-holding in the Scottish Highlands, so they were based all across the UK.

By the end of the material collection process, I had conducted interviews with twenty women managers at the bank, and sixteen interviews with women at the NMO, supported with forty hours of observation at the NMO. In each context, I felt that at this point of material collection, no new significant insights were being added to the analysis. Often referred to as saturation point to describe this experience, the term has its origins in grounded theory and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2014, p. 213) provides a more detailed definition of saturation as the point in which 'your categories are robust because you have found no new properties of these categories and your established properties account for patterns in your data'. However,

as Nelson (2017, p. 557) highlights, 'conceptual density' is perhaps a more appropriate term as this suggests, not that the analysis has reached the final limit beyond which it is impossible to find new insights, rather that it has reached 'a sufficient depth of understanding that can allow the researcher to theorise'. At twenty bank interviews and sixteen NMO interviews, I felt this point of conceptual density had been reached. Within the NMO, this point was reached sooner, which I argue is possibly a reflection of the strength of the NMO culture, and that I interviewed distributors who were successful and ingrained within the local NMO 'leadership'. With no barriers to entry or exit within the NMO, distributors who do not 'fit' quickly leave the organisation. This situation does not exist within the bank, where a different business model potentially means greater diversity of thought and experiences. Whilst the NMO analysis was supported by observations, my predominant material collection method was qualitative interviews, which I consider next.

2.1.3 Qualitative in-depth interviews

Feminist research draws on a range of methodologies; defined as 'a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed' (Harding, 1987, p. 2-3), and methods; which are 'a technique for (a way of proceeding into) gathering evidence' (ibid.). It is well argued that there is no single correct method for conducting feminist research (Letherby, 2003; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). However, feminist research seeks to focus on women's experiences and to develop non-exploitative relationships (Letherby, 2003, p. 73) that considers gender as of significance within social and organisational life (McNay, 2009; Weedon, 1997, Butler, 1990). Interviews arguably are the research method most often associated with feminist research (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Maynard, 1995, Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1995).

As the aim of my research is to explore discourses of neoliberalism, postfeminism and subjectivities, in-depth qualitative interviews were chosen for being well suited to providing an insight into ‘finding out what others feel and think about their worlds’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.1). By interviewing twenty women managers at the bank, and sixteen women at the NMO, supported with forty hours of observation at the NMO, my predominant material collection method was qualitative interviews. A semi-structured interview guide allowed both flexibility and opportunities to seek clarity and ask for illustrative narratives (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Furthermore, the use of interviews allows exploration of ‘the ways in which the social worlds we inhabit, and the possibilities for existence within them are actively spoken into existence by individuals and collectives’ (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 74).

Interviews as a feminist method are not without critique; feminist researchers have highlighted the problem of over-generalisation (Kelly et. al., 1992), power relationships which disadvantage oppressed groups (Tang, 2002; Kvale, 2006), representation so interviewees are seen as ‘subjects in their own right’ (Lazreg, 1988, p. 94), and seeing women’s experiences as unified and thus, ignoring women’s differences (DeVault & Gross, 2014). This raises questions of positionality, power and voice which I turn to consider next.

2.2 Positionality, power and voice

In chapter one, I presented a brief overview of my PhD journey as a way present my motivations and interests to conduct this research, and therefore offer a degree of ‘positional reflexivity’ (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). Positional reflexivity is a form of self-reflexivity in which we recognise ourselves to be integral to the research process (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). In other words, is important to acknowledge that research is

‘as much the researcher’s story as it is the story of organizational participants’ (Cuncliffe, 2011, p. 415).

Day (2012) extends this argument, suggesting that ‘the self’ occurs as a ‘research tool’ in three ways; as enacting multiple and conflicting roles, as co-constructed multiple identities where power relationships and race/ class/ and gender become meaningful, and finally in relation to the researcher’s positionality with regards to methodological and theoretical perspectives.

2.2.1 Power and identities

Conceptualisations of power have implications for the form of reflexive practice adopted (Day, 2012). For Wolf (1996), power intersects in three connected ways; firstly, in power differentials and positionality of the researcher and researched, secondly, during the research collection stage itself, for example, through exploitation of research participants, and finally, in writing up the research where power of representation comes to the fore.

Poststructuralist approaches critique the assumption of power to be something which is passed between the researcher and researched at any given moment, and subsequently are critical of reflexive practices considering who is holding more or less power (Day, 2012). Instead, a Foucauldian approach positions power as ‘the effect of discursive struggles over the realm of meaning and production of knowledge…distributed throughout social relationships’ (Day, 2012, p. 67). Others would suggest that searching for transparent positionality is impossible (Rose, 1997), instead arguing for seeing difference or distance between the researcher and researched in terms of a ‘landscape of

power' (Rose, 1997, p.312). This shifting landscape of power forms one of the key elements of poststructural reflexivity discussed within chapter 3.

Reflecting on positionality and power within my own research; during the interviews conducted at the bank, I experienced a sense of shifting power distance. Social class cannot be understood in terms of economic capital alone, rather, symbolic capital (status, reputation, being listened to), and cultural capital (education, competencies, skills, taste), maintain and define social class (Tyler & Bennett, 2010). In terms of my own class status, it is conceivable that my interviewees perceived me to be middle class; as a university lecturer I hold cultural capital and some elements of symbolic capital. However, such conceptualisations of class are somewhat over simplistic; for example, I would see myself to be 'first generation middle-class' (Yee, 2016), being the first person in my family to attend university. My parents are both from a Northern mining community and my mother, for example, left school at fifteen without any formal qualifications.

With many of the interviews I conducted at the bank, I found an easy sense of rapport that came through holding similar backgrounds and defining characteristics. While feminists have pointed out the dangers of exploitation within interviewing (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Watts, 2006), others have suggested that interviewees can experience the interview in a positive, empowering way (Opie, 1992; Phoenix, 1995). For example, Olsen and Shopes (1991, p. 197) argued that interviewees benefitted from 'being heard, to air grievances, to work over and perhaps seek reassurances for certain decisions, and, yes, to complain'. This is something that I reflected on within many of the interviews which were, on the whole, relaxed, chatty and informal. However, at times, I felt the process to be uncomfortable, particularly when interviewees had opinions which I

struggled to accept without challenge. As illustration, one interview with Evelyn, a VP at the bank, felt very defensive and taxing. Evelyn spoke at length about her irritation with women who 'winged' about their gender. This is illustrated in the extract below:

Evelyn	…and I think that some of the females that maybe I admire least, I think for some reason that women can't have a voice in a meeting room…and are almost then it hinders other females and then maybe other females think that they can't because other females maybe behave like that and again, just my personal view, right, so…
Interviewer	Yeah
Evelyn	…but I find that frustrating!
Interviewer	Yeah
Evelyn	And again mainly because of my own personal situation, you know, I didn't get any 'A' levels, I didn't go to University…I started at, you know, the bottom of the food-chain in [bank name], it's taken me 13 years to work my way up…
Interviewer	Yeah
Evelyn	…and I haven't had any support from anyone, right, so…I've done it by myself and I do have a voice around the table, I am part of two leadership teams…
Interviewer	Yeah, yes … so, that hasn't been an experience for you and as you said, sometimes you…there maybe women are attributing things to

	gender that maybe are not gender related perhaps – yeah?
Evelyn	Yeah, potentially. However, I do recognise that, you know, there are less females in senior positions and, you know, generally there are less females and I think from my perspective there's a couple of reasons why I think that is. One is again banking is traditionally a male profession…
Interviewer	Yeah
Evelyn	…females have been in work for a shorter period of time than males…and, you know, women go off to have babies, right.
Interviewer	Yeah
Evelyn	You know, because you're going to have a child doesn't mean that you're disadvantaged. I mean one of [name of male Director]'s leadership team is a female, she's a Managing Director, she's very successful and she's just gone off to have her second child.
Interviewer	Yeah
Evelyn	…do you know what I mean?
Interviewer	Yeah
	I don't think because you have a child means that you should be disadvantaged but I appreciate, you know, maybe some people feel they are. I certainly don't see that at all…

Evelyn positions herself as having achieved from a disadvantaged position; ‘I didn’t get any ‘A’ levels, I didn’t go to University…I started at, you know, the bottom of the food-chain’. She constructs herself as working-class, in terms of cultural capital, and the implication is that, if she can achieve from a position of disadvantage, others can. For Evelyn, success comes to those who have enough resilience and perseverance. However, there are contradictions within Evelyn’s comments, for example, Evelyn talks about banking being a ‘male profession’ and women ‘go off to have babies, right’ as an explanation for ‘less women in senior positions’. This offers no analysis of why childbirth should be a disadvantage for women and why banking is a ‘male’ profession, instead she blames other women ‘who have no voice in the room’.

I found the interview emotionally tiring and disconcerting. Having just gone through a difficult divorce and feeling my career had stalled by the constraints of being a single parent; I struggled to remain neutral to Evelyn’s comments. Evelyn is in her thirties and has no children. In my reflective diary I wrote afterwards that Evelyn was ‘naïve’ and I was angered by her comments which I felt to be unsupportive of other women. However, I also reflected on the impact of the interview on Evelyn and how she had felt afterwards. Evelyn obviously had a sense of frustration from her experiences at the bank and perhaps feeling ‘othered’ by her class status and having not attended higher education. I also reflected on how Evelyn saw me. I had introduced myself as a lecturer doing a part-time PhD. If I had declared myself as a feminist, or that I was conducting a feminist piece of research, would she have offered the same opinions? Perhaps, as Olsen and Shopes (1991) suggest, the interview is also an opportunity to air grievances and complain.

On the whole, while the 'landscape of power' presented less of a sense of difference in the bank, the NMO was more complex. The NMO distributors come from a range of class and occupational backgrounds (see Appendix A2). Within the NMO, 'success' was encapsulated in the new type of distributors, whom were attuned to a 'celebrity culture'. Here, their success came through Instagram followers and presenting a form of 'ideal life', which the women talked about in terms of attraction marketing. As Tyler and Bennett (2010) argue, the celebrity culture ties these celebrities to a form of class relations despite the transformation of their material wealth. I would argue that status within the NMO came from adopting a form of 'glamour labour'. For Wissinger (2016, p. 145), glamour labour is a 'phenomenon of the Internet age. It is the work of investing time and effort into editing the body and self to appear as fascinating and polished in person as one does in one's highly scripted, filtered and manipulated online life. Melding the body and image into one means shaping the body (by going to the gym or the salon), styling the self – by swiping, clicking and shopping to chase fashion or trends – and crafting one's online image to appear to have achieved an elusive ideal of trendy attractiveness'.

At the NMO, glamour labour is combined with a neoliberal work ethic, where individuals are called upon to work on their bodies, transform themselves inside and out, commodify themselves and achieve financial success. However, this is only available to a few who physically embody characteristics of this ideal form of femininity. Within chapter 3, I discuss aspects of this in relation to idealised femininity within the NMO and the symbols of status achieved through consumerism and dress. Within the NMO, power relations therefore felt more complex, as status within this context was accomplished through a combination of symbolic status, achieved through

social media followership, achievement of beauty standards, and cultural capital by developing the right skills and dispositions (which is discuss in chapter 4 in relation to the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism).

When conducting the interviews at the NMO, I found the women to be warm, open and enthusiastic to tell their stories but I recognise what Hoskins (2015) describes as the lack of fit between the habitus of the researcher and the field in which they are operating. At times I felt such a degree of difference between the women at the NMO, and my background and experiences, that I felt uncomfortable. One such incident occurred when going through the training to become an NMO distributor. I decided to take part in the training to gain a better understanding of how the NMO works and its complex compensation structure. Once you have signed up for an account at the NMO, the first step to selling and recruiting distributors is to contact everyone you know and ask to meet with them to discuss a 'fantastic opportunity' you wanted to share with them. This felt incredibly uncomfortable for me. To directly 'sell' to people I was friends with felt like crossing a boundary in terms of friendship, probably enhanced by a feeling I had about the NMO being a form of pyramid scheme and my own cynicism about the beauty industries claims over the benefits of their products. I also recognise that this feeling of abjection from selling could stem from my own class position and feminist values where, to sell beauty products, would have felt like I was aligning with discourses where women are subjugated by being defined in terms of beauty. However, my reluctance to embody the characteristics required to become a NMO distributor are captured in the following quote from Scarlett. Scarlett is a blue diamond within the business and therefore one of the highest earners. Having come through a more traditional route, she describes how the business has shifted with the new type of

distributor she describes below. Within her team, Scarlett has a number of highly successful women who embody glamour labour, she describes this in terms of the 'millennials':

Scarlett It has shifted because with the arrival of the millennials - the 18 to 30 year old women - they don't have that limited self-belief; they don't have that cultural thing. It's absolutely okay for women to be young and wealthy and to be ambitions and driven, whereas for somebody, me at my age, I'm 53, even though I was … we were channelled yeah, you've got to go down the academic route and become a doctor, a lawyer, or whatever it might be, ultimately, if you went out there and said I want to be really, really wealthy and financially free and build a huge organisation and you declared your ambition, it wasn't seen as a very feminine thing and it almost like took away from your qualities maybe as a mother or as a woman in itself. Whereas today we have that boss babe culture and women really, really shout from the rooftops. The girls in their 20s; I want to have fun, I want to be wealthy, I want to have the big car, big house, the amazing jewellery, shoes, wardrobe, holidays, you name it and there is no shame attached to it whatsoever.

This comment reflects many of my own reservations with selling NMO products, which could be related to class and status. I was encouraged by my parents to work hard at school, go to university, as Scarlett says; 'go down the academic route'. For many of the distributors at the NMO, these are outdated success models. Arguably, what may have been seen as an imbalance of power, for a middle class academic interviewing these

women, is more complex as power and status are defined by the glamour labour Scarlett describes above.

Within the NMO, power and success were thus particularly complex, nuanced and contextual (Hoskins, 2015). The question therefore arises as to how race/gender and class are made meaningful in this relationship (Day, 2012, p. 72). Class is a pertinent and particularly relevant consideration given different class differences and expectations about what cultural capital and symbolic capital entail. As a middle-class, educated woman, with feminist values about beauty and objectification, my expectations around what constitutes cultural and symbolic capital may have differed significantly from the women in the NMO.

The dynamics of power were therefore more complex than a one-dimensional relationship between the researcher and the researched; however, issues of power extend beyond power and identities to consideration of voice and representation. This is particularly pertinent when considering how the material is ultimately presented. As Cousin states, we are always *re-presenting*' (Cousin, 2010, p10, emphasis in original) our interviewees experiences and interpreting these 'from a particular stance and an available language' (Cousin, 2010, p10). The social knowledge we create is constructed, and shaped by the interests, ways of seeing the world, and circumstances in which we carried out the research (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). This is discussed further in the following section where I discuss the evolving nature of this research and how the material was analysed.

2.3 Analysing the material

At the beginning of this chapter, I highlighted the evolving nature of my research which developed in response to advances within the extant literature, how my research question adapted over time and, how this thesis was 'constructed' in a way which is, in part, evolving and opportune (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This process was summarised in Figure 3. Linking to this; my analysis of the material was not a linear process, rather I collected new material while analysing material I had already collected, reading and returning to the literature throughout. Therefore, I followed a process which was, to some degree, iterative; moving between analysis and theory (Mavin & Grandy, 2016).

When I started material collection within the bank, my research question at the time was focussed on 'doing' femininities at work through considering the affiliated and contested nature of women's intra-gender relationships. Therefore, on the first round of coding the bank material, I remained fairly close to the research question and interview schedule (Appendix B). Subsequently, my first reading of the data looked more closely at interactions. This approach would be more typical of an ethnomethodological practice, such as West and Zimmerman (1987), as the emphasis is on how femininities are done in the bank. This first reading of the bank material is presented in chapter five where I look at mobilising femininities within the bank.

Postfeminism as a sensibility has a long history within cultural studies; first used in the 1980's to describe a backlash against feminism, it was much advanced by Angela McRobbie (1994; 2009) and Rosalind Gill (2007; 2009; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Both writers work within cultural studies focussing particularly on media and popular culture. There was a degree of latency between discussions of postfeminism in cultural studies

and then moving this into gender and organisation studies, with an explosion of work looking at postfeminism and organisations post Patricia Lewis's (2014) article (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017; Adamson, 2017; Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017; Duffy, Hancock & Tyler, 2017; Sullivan & Delaney, 2017; Sørensen, 2017). Reading and engaging with this literature provided an opportunity to engage with the material at a second level of analysis in a more abstract and creative way by taking a step back from interactions and how gender is done, to look discursively at how subjectivities are constituted. This discursive approach adopts a poststructural position in line with Butler's approach to gender. This analysis is presented in chapters three, four and six where a discursive approach to gender denominates. In the introduction chapter, I discussed how applying both the ethnomethodological approach and poststructural approach, as a lens to understand gender, provides potential to gain a fuller picture of how gender is done within organisations. In conducting a first level of analysis looking at doing femininities, and then a broader more conceptual analysis looking at discourses, a richer picture is gained. The contribution this approach made to my thesis overall is considered further in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

In figure 4 below, I summarise the material analysis phase discussed above. I then move to discuss Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as this provided the method of this second level of analysis across the material.

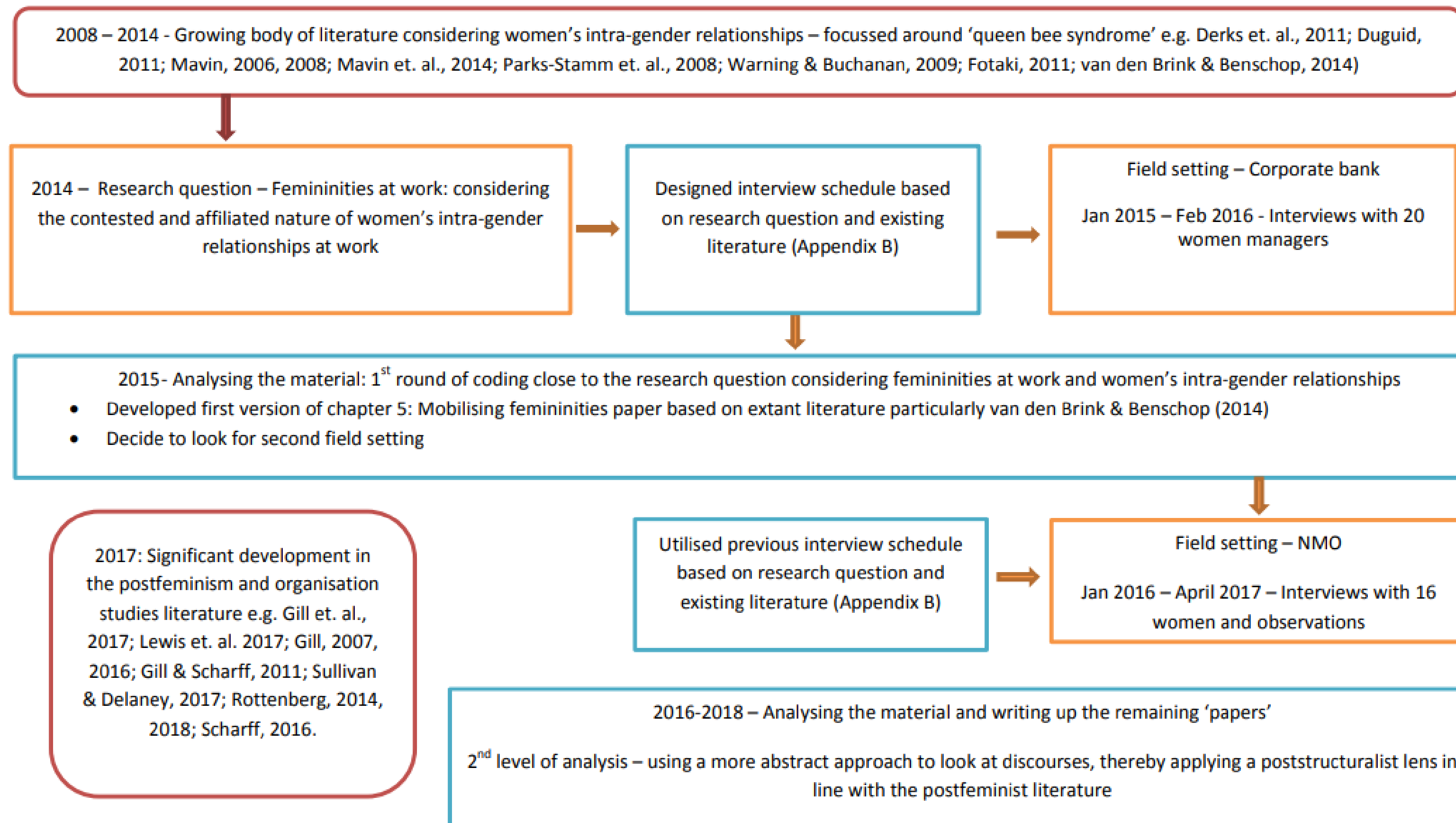

Figure 4: Stages of material analysis

2.3.1 Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Poststructuralism traditionally positions the analysis of language and discourse as epistemologically central. Feminist poststructural approaches have been particularly useful for challenging the categories of 'women' and 'men' (McNay, 2009). It is argued that, by challenging this categorisation and essentialisation of gender differences, we can consider how these categories maintain the *status quo* while benefiting the powerful. These are questions which are central to this thesis. Postfeminism as a sensibility, for example, considers discourses which normalise women's experiences within power relations. Therefore, if we are to understand the (re)production of power relations and subjectivities, language provides a key site for analysis (Davies et al., 2006; Foucault, 1972; Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006; Weedon, 1997), and discourse analysis (for example Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) becomes particularly appropriate here. However, discourse analysis takes on different forms due to the wide range of traditions it draws upon.

Burman and Parker (1993) identify broad approaches to discourse analytic research, although these should not be considered as discrete types of method. Within my research, two of these types could have been considered as appropriate given my research aims. The first approach includes those discourse analysts that focus on linguistic repertoires and ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). While the focus here tends to be on how accounts are constructed in ways which achieve particular goals, theorists within this vein draw on the term 'repertoire' rather than discourse. Here, interpretative repertoires are defined as

resources, or linguistic devices, that individuals use to make sense of what is happening; subsequently constructing the world through language, rather than simply representing them (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). How discourse and repertoires are differentiated is rather unclear, however, Parker (1992) suggests a discourse often refers to more abstract meanings through which objects are constructed, (e.g. femininity), whereas interpretative repertoires tend to be more strategic or action orientated aspects of talk.

The second approach includes discourse analysts who are principally concerned with subjectivity, such as poststructuralist or Foucauldian theorists (Davies et al., 2006; Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006; Weedon, 1997). Theorists here draw on the term 'discourse' rather than 'interpretive repertoire', in contrast to the type of discourse analysis discussed above. While some forms of discourse analysis focus on the more micro details of talk and text, and what the speaker is trying to achieve, poststructuralist forms of discourse analysis tend to be orientated more towards constructing patterns of discourse within the historical and socio-cultural context within which the research is located (Willott & Griffin, 1997). Furthermore, poststructural approaches to DA are more concerned with power and subjectivity. Therefore, I selected a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis as one which is particularly appropriate, given the aims of my thesis, which is concerned with subjectivity, discourse and governance.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) is not without criticism and has a number of issues. The 'bottom-up' approaches of conversation analysis and discursive psychology (see Edwards & Potter, 1992 for example), means that a focus on micro-level discourse allows for analysis of what happens at an interactional level, and the subtle strategies people use when speaking (Parker, 1994). 'Top-down' approaches, such as FDA and Critical Discourse Analysis, tend to be less focused on nuances, and more concerned

with macro-level discourse. Budds, Locke, and Burr (2014) argue, that this positions individuals as passive-users of discourse without allowing for agency. One possible solution offered has been to remove conceived barriers between different forms of discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1998). However, the compatibility of different discourse approaches presents a challenge, and the choice of DA method seems better suited to consideration of the research aims and objectives.

Another key issue with FDA is the lack of clarity over the procedural steps, and the absence of methodological process, which leaves readers guessing how the material was produced. However, Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue, discourse analysis should be viewed as an approach to research, rather than a particular method or technique, with no one common or correct way to conduct this (a case I argue below in my adaption of Willig's (2013) approach to FDA).Theorists have provided examples of procedural guides to conducting FDA. Parker (1992) provides a 20-step guide to analysis, which focuses on; selecting the text for analysis, identifying how subjects are constructed through discourses, and considering how this reproduces power relations. Others have presented an abridged version of this (see for example Kendall & Wickham, 1999), yet recent empirical work has primarily employed Carla Willig's (2013) six stages of FDA (Johnson, Boutain, Tsai, Beaton, & Castro, 2015; Sae-Mi, Bernstein, Etzel, Gearity, & Kuklick, 2018; Zitz, Burns, & Tacconelli, 2014). This allows the researcher to map discursive resources and subjectivities, albeit not providing a full Foucauldian analysis, as discourses are not historically located, in other words, their genealogy is not addressed. However, I found Willig's (2013) approach still somewhat difficult to implement in practice, as it presented a challenge in terms of dealing with the large volumes of data I had collected during my PhD research.

Below, I present an overview of the analytic procedure I conducted, which I see as drawing on some of the principles of FDA proposed by Willig (2013), but pragmatically managed for dealing with large quantities of data, and the intertwined and interrelated aspects of subject positions and subjectivities. I have outlined the main steps below, with a critical appraisal of some of the issues faced at each stage.

2.3.2 FDA: Stages of analysis

2.3.2.1 Transcription

I used an external provider to transcribe the interviews due to practicalities of time. I recognise that this presents some challenges, for example, Tilley and Powick (2002) note issues related to hiring transcribers such as; researchers relying on transcripts rather than returning to the data, omissions of words, and ethical issues of confidentiality. However, it can be argued that 'outsourcing' allows the chance to add an alternative interpretation as the transcriber hears different things, as well as saving time and money (Wood & Kroger, 2000). As the transcripts were returned, I would proof read them once while listening to my recording of the interview, and secondly, for sense-making, while considering how I remembered the interview and cross checking with my reflective notes that were jotted down immediately after I had conducted the interview. I recognise here the selective nature of transcription, which inevitably excludes some events and information (Davidson, 2009). I used a very simplified form of transcription which did not focus heavily on silences, intonation etc. Discourse analysis approaches tend to use a more detailed transcription system, however, Duranti (2006) argues most researchers use a hybrid system of transcription so, for example, I noted long pauses with […] and

only significant ‘umms’ rather than those that were part of everyday speech. As I was considering more macro discourses and subjectivities, this allowed transcripts to be easier to read (Hollway, 1989, p. 21).

Finally, to maintain anonymity, I have sought to provide sufficient background information on the organisations I studied, without disclosing which companies they are. Similarly, all the people within my research have been given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. This was done at the transcription stage to ensure identifying material was removed from the research process.

2.3.2.2 Coding the material

At this next stage, I coded the text into chunks which tended to be a block of text ending with an interjection from myself, or a topic shift introduced by myself or the interviewee (Willott & Griffin, 1997). This coding or chunking process was inclusive and overlapping, so chunks of data appeared in different codes. To manage this process, I worked with the qualitative software programme NVivo, to help deal with the volume of data. I free-coded data at this stage, working with broad themes that arose from the data and, in part, linked back to my interview schedule. The process of coding was iterative, so that when new themes arose, I would return to earlier transcripts and recode them considering these themes. This initial coding strategy was more similar to those employed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), which unlike other qualitative approaches, does not arise from a specific epistemological position, and so provides a high degree of flexibility. This was a pragmatic approach, which I found to be a valuable way to manage the data. At the end of this process I was left with thirteen codes for the bank, and fifteen for the beauty company. Typically for FDA, these would

not be conceptualised as codes but as discourses, which at this stage were large chunks of data, which provided a way to manage the next step of analysis. If we take chapter six as illustration for example, competition was a theme that came from the interviews and related to the interview schedule. Willig (2013) would see this as the first stage of analysis, which draws on discursive constructions, and therefore 'competition' is the discursive object. Therefore, in this first stage, I used a hybrid approach coding the data to manage the volume of data, and then considering these codes as potential discursive objects for further interpretation.

2.3.2.3 Discourses and action orientation

Having gathered large chunks of text into themes or discursive constructions, I then focused on re-reading these to look for differences in construction. These discursive constructions can be presented in various different ways. I considered how the discourse varied not just between individuals, but for the subject themselves, and thus the contradictory and differing way in which the discourse was described. To help with this, I found it useful to refer back to the original transcripts, otherwise the chunks of data seemed somewhat disassociated from context. Willig (2013) talks about 'discourses' and 'action orientation' being two separate stages, however I struggled to separate this into two distinct steps. Action orientation involves returning to the context to see what is being gained, and how it relates to other constructions. I found considering this as separate from focussing on the difference in construction, as a difficult distinction to make in practice. Therefore, I worked with these two steps together considering; what discourses are drawn upon, what their relationship to one another is, what the constructions achieve, and what is gained from deploying them here (Willig, 2013)?

2.3.2.4 Positioning, practice and subjectivity

Next, I looked again at the text and my discursive constructions to consider what subject positions this offers. As Willig (2013) highlights, discourses construct subjects as well as objects, which I saw as intertwined with subjectivity; the ways of seeing and being in the world (Willig, 2013, p. 133). This is by its nature the most speculative part of the interpretation and therefore, it is important to see these as positions from which subjects have limits on what *can* be felt, said, or done, not necessarily that they *do* feel or experience these things (Willig, 2013). Thus, if we take discourses of competition (chapter six) as the illustration again, a discursive construction of competition as abundance suggested women responsibilise and subsequently internalise failure; the subject position and subjectivity is constructed within the possibilities of this discourse. Whether they *do* internalise failure is beyond the scope of interpretation. Within step 4, I therefore considered; what subject positions are made available from these constructions; what can be said and done from within these subject positions, and what can be felt through, and experienced from, the available subject positions (Willig, 2013)?

The steps of analysis I used, therefore, do not conduct a full Foucauldian analysis to consider the relationship between history, governmentality and discourse, however, it stays close to Willig's (2013) principles, albeit in a more fluid form. This allowed me to ask questions of my material, which would specifically address my research aims and objectivities. The advantage of FDA over other forms of DA, is that it draws attention to

the power of discourse to construct objects and subjects, what can be said or done; this has implications for agency. This is critical for my thesis aims and objectives.

2.4 Conclusion

Within this chapter, I presented a richer description of the field settings and methodological decisions, than can be provided within the scope and constraints of a journal article. I also provided details of FDA as my main analytic procedure. The chapter therefore provides supplementary information to the methodology sections presented in the following empirical chapters.

One methodological issue, that has not been addressed within this chapter, is with regards to reflexivity; a consideration that is given prominence within feminist research in terms of considering representation, intersubjective dynamics (Finlay, 2002), and power (Skeggs, 2004). Within the following chapter, I address this through presentation of a methodological paper, which explores poststructural reflexivity and researcher subjectivity. I then turn to the three empirical papers, which present my research findings, before providing a discussion of the empirical and theoretical contribution of this research.

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3 Moments of discomfort: poststructuralist reflexivity and researcher subjectivity

3.1 Abstract

This article presents poststructural reflexivity as a way to both deconstruct the performativity of one's own research practice, and consider how researcher subjectivity is constituted within the research process. I present two vignettes as moments of discomfort conducting research 'in the field', which I argue create a sense of unease, when shifting subjectivities and regimes of power become more visible. I draw upon Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, as a tool of poststructural reflexivity, to illustrate discursive regimes through which we become gendered subjects. The article illustrates the usefulness of poststructural reflexivity as a way to consider the performative effect of research and regimes of power, which impact our ways of seeing and being in the world.

Keywords: Poststructuralism, reflexivity, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, subjectivity, performativity

3.2 Introduction

Reflexivity is well established as a core practice within qualitative and particularly feminist research (Finlay, 2002; Bott, 2010), where the researcher seeks to situate themselves within the research as a way to 'explore and expose the politics of representation' (Pillow, 2003, p. 176). Feminist versions of reflexivity (see for example Reinharz & Davidman, 1992), have sought to address power balances between researchers and participants. Indeed, Wolf (1990, p. 132) argues that, 'before reflexivity was a trendy term, feminists were examining 'process' in our dealings with one another – questioning the use of power and powerlessness […] evaluating the responsibilities we bore towards one another, and so on'. As Finlay (2002) highlights, the question is not so much whether there is a need for reflexivity, more how should it be done, with a danger that the researcher falls into a 'swamp of interminable self-analysis and self-disclosure' (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). Furthermore, critics highlight how reflexivity is often presented as a solution to representation whereby, the researcher engages in a process of self-reflection, therefore validating the knowledge through reflexivity as a 'tool of methodological power' (Pillow, 2003, p. 192; see also; Lynch, 2000). Following Pillow (2003), and Dosekun (2015), within this article I offer a poststructuralist approach to reflexivity, which is a form of 'uncomfortable reflexivity', where the goals are not to validate or provide neat solutions, rather to 'confound and interrupt […] to resist regimes of truth' (Dosekun, 2015, p. 436).

The poststructuralist turn recognised that research, in itself, constitutes its subjects and objects performatively (Davies et al., 2004; Youdell, 2006; Dosekun, 2015). If performativity is the 'reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it name' (Butler, 2011, p. xii), the discursive practice of research through

naming and counting performatively brings objects or subjects into being, so that they appear to have existed prior, rather than being a performative effect of the research (Dosekun, 2015). Poststructuralist reflexivity focuses therefore, on ‘not who the researcher and research are, but how they are reproduced in these terms’ (Youdell, 2006, p. 63). Hence, poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity that is continually being reconstituted in discourse every time we speak (Weedon, 1997, p. 32), and poststructural research a matter of deconstructing the performativity of one’s research practice. Yet as Dosekun (2015, p. 436) highlights, ‘complex questions remain about how one is to actually ‘do reflexivity’ or ‘be reflexive’, especially in line with poststructural theoretical principles’.

The aim of this paper is predominantly methodological. I draw on poststructuralist practices applied to the ‘messy’ work of reflexivity, to bring to the fore power within the research, and subsequent representations (Pillow, 2003). To do this, I present two vignettes from my doctoral research experience which created a sense of discomfort. I argue that, it is in this space of discomfort that subjectivities become more visible and are played out through discursive regimes, where the performativity of gender renders subjects as viable (Butler, 1990). Drawing upon Foucauldian Discourse Analysis; which considers discourses which legitimate power relations, makes sense of ways of being which are so entrenched, that they appear to have become ‘common sense’ (Willig, 2013). I argue that, turning poststructuralist analysis back in on the researcher as a form poststructural reflexivity, illuminates the dominant discourses or regimes of truth which obscure and maintain power relations. It is through these discourses that certain positions are made possible and taken up within a particular discourse; therefore

poststructural reflexivity also allows the researcher to consider how their subjectivity is constituted within the research process.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I present an understanding of feminist poststructuralism, particularly in relation to the performativity of gender. I then present my methodological approach, drawing on principles of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis applied as a tool of reflexivity, before discussing two vignettes as examples of uncomfortable reflexivity in my research of a bank and beauty company. Finally, I offer a discussion of poststructural reflexivity as a way to consider researcher subjectivities and positionality within the research process itself. This paper therefore makes a contribution to our methodological understanding of the challenges of doing poststructural reflexivity, and to the opportunities for considering power and performativity within feminist research practice.

3.3 Poststructuralism and gendered subjectivities

The poststructural approach considers gender as a social practice; as something we 'do' rather than something we 'are' (Martin, 2003; Bruni et al., 2005; Poggio, 2006; Pullen, 2006). While this is also true of ethnomethodological approaches, such as West and Zimmerman's (1987) conceptualisation of 'doing gender', poststructuralists hold a more radical position, suggesting that gender is not just something that we do or perform, but that the performance of gender brings us into being (Tyler, 2012).

West and Zimmerman's (1987) model of doing gender suggests that, individuals perceive the essential characteristics of feminine and masculine as existing separately to context or situation. Thus, societal members view the existence of two genders;

however, these are created through interaction rather than a priori (Kelan, 2010). This shifts the focus from an essentialist view of gender, as a binary biological concept, to seeing gender as socially constructed, an accomplishment which is conducted within social and cultural contexts. However, it is a 'situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126); therefore, gender is created and recreated through interactions with others (Gherardi, 1994). Gender thus becomes 'the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate from one's sex category' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). When individuals are 'doing gender', they are accountable to the audience to do gender in line with normative beliefs; in other words they are at 'risk of gender assessment' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136).

In contrast, the poststructural approach to gender is drawn predominantly from the work of Judith Butler (2004; 1990). Butler (1990) sees gender not to be the expression of pre-given natural traits, but rather as becoming ritualised through constant repetition, therefore, making it appear natural (Tyler, 2012). For Butler (1990, p. 25), gender and the gender binary is constructed discursively, and 'gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes...gender is always a doing'.

Butler (1990) developed the notion of the performativity of gender which is much contested and difficult to define with certainty as it is evolves and shifts as a concept over the course of her writing (Salih, 2002). Butler (1990) argues that gender is performatively accomplished through 'a repeated stylization of the body' and a multitude of micro-acts that occur within a regulatory framework which 'congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990,

p. 33). Our gender subjectivities are therefore not something we are born with or socialised into, rather we are performatively constituted as women or men through discourse (Gond et al., 2016). Performativity does not suggest that gender is a performance as this presupposes a subject who is doing that performance, rather Butler suggests that subjectivities are thus the effect of discourse, through the 'reiterative and citational practice by which the discourse effects what it names… [and] the recitative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler, 2011, p. 3). This is counter-intuitive and much challenged, with scholars arguing that the notion of performativity is somewhat vague, abstract and difficult to apply empirically (McNay, 1999; Tyler, 2012; Kelan, 2010). Furthermore, it does not address questions of agency in terms of what capacity individuals have to reject or adopt particular discourses and to 'engender change within a particular socio-cultural order' (McNay, 1999, p. 178).

Butler (1990) draws heavily on Michel Foucault's (1972) formation of discourses as groups of statements governing the way we understand and perceive historical moments, accordingly, gender is constructed discursively within these historical contexts, and discourses provide positions which subjects can adopt. One of these discursive regimes Butler (1990) describes is the heterosexual matrix, where gender, sex and desire are organised schematically in a way that privileges hegemonic masculinity. Enacting gender in line with the heterosexual matrix involves 'undoing' gender (Butler, 2004), where for individuals to be recognised as 'viable' subjects, they must operate within and maintain socially intelligible norms (Butler, 1990). In other words, we have to be readable within the norm to exist as human beings (Butler, 2004). Those that are unable to live within these norms risk being forced to live a life not worth living (Pullen

and Knights, 2007); they are ‘undone’, thus losing their sense of self and excluded socially.

This un/doing has implications for the performative production of gender within organisations, with Butler (1990) arguing that we should be looking at how the category ‘woman’ is produced performatively and constituted within power structures. While a critical feminist approach would seek social change through considering how to overthrow power structures; for example, patriarchy, poststructural feminists argue that ‘emancipation’ is problematic as individuals cannot stand outside of discourse (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Drawing on a Foucauldian notion of discourse, Butler suggests the need to consider how discourses function, the political aim they fulfil, and how the subject is constructed as an ‘effect’ of institutions, practices and discourses (Butler, 1990). Simpson and Lewis (2007, p. 16), summarise the poststructural feminist approach to ‘doing gender’ suggesting that for poststructuralists, ‘gender is performative in that feminine and masculine are not what we are, or traits we have, but effects we produce by way of what we do’. As Tyler (2012, p. 13) argues, ‘for those influenced by a postmodern understanding of the self, gender is an on-going process, one that has to be continually re-enacted and re-inscribed in accordance with the cultural norms defining masculinity and femininity at any given time, and in any given context’.

In summary, while the ethnomethodological approach to doing gender focuses on how gender is done in interactions, the poststructuralist approach to doing gender focuses on the formation of subjects through discourse such that gender is an effect. I next turn to consider poststructural methodologies, particularly Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, as a way to make sense of poststructural reflexivity, discourse and power.

3.4 Poststructural methodologies and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Poststructuralists are critical of realist social science approaches, that claim an existence beyond the researcher's observations and their subjects, rather seeing individual subjectivities as created through social and discursive practices (Davies & Gannon, 2011). Post-structuralism typically does not draw on a set of practices that can be considered a 'method' (Gannon & Davies, 2012), rather poststructural theory, particularly through the work of Michel Foucault, turns to discourse as the primary site for analysis. For Foucault (1972), discourses are complex intertwined connections of being, thinking, and acting. They are constantly changing; historically, culturally, temporally, and spatially located. Individuals are constituted within this multitude of discursive practices; there is 'no pre-discursive rational self, existing outside of or apart from discourse' (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 74).

Discourse extends beyond language to other forms of textual analysis, which can be on a macro-level, for example, capitalism, feminism, Marxism etc., or at a more micro-level incorporating interviews, or indeed, bodies and space. Butler (1997), for example, argues that the body is a site of discourse stating, 'one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body" (Butler, 1997, p. 404). 'Deconstructing' these texts by taking them apart and showing how they present us, provides insight into the way discourse constructs our experience, and thus enable us to challenge it (Burr, 2015). As Burr (2015) highlights, while this has typically been associated with discursive psychology (see for example Potter, 1996), much research application today falls under Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) focuses on the availability of discursive resources within a particular context, which

make available certain ways of being and seeing in the world (Willig, 2013). Discourses are ‘sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions’ (Parker, 1994, p. 245) which, when taken up, have consequences for subjectivity and experience. Dominant discourses privilege those with power and create social realities that become ‘common sense’; difficult to see as they are so ingrained.

There are no agreed upon conceptual tools to guide FDA (Burr, 2015), although Parker (1992) provides 20 steps of discourse analysis, others such as Kendall and Wickham (1999) have fewer steps but, as Willig (2013) argues, require more of a conceptual understanding of Foucault’s methods. We draw on Willig’s (2013) 6-step process of FDA. Whilst this does not provide a full analysis in the Foucauldian sense, by not reflecting the history and genealogy of discourses over time, it does provide insight into the availability of subject positions and subsequent subjectivities and experience. Willig’s (2013) six steps include: identifying discursive constructions (highlighting instances where the discursive object is referenced); locating discourses (how do the different constructions differ and how does this fit within wider discourses); action orientation (what do these constructions achieve and what is their effect); positionings (what subject positions are made available by the discourse); practice (what can be said and done from within these subject positions), and subjectivity (what can be thought or felt from these subject positions).

FDA selects any site of meaning as a form of text for analysis, thus a multitude of sources beyond speech can be used as a textual analysis, for example, adverts, bodies, architecture. As Gannon and Davies (2012, p. 74) highlight, ‘there are no “right” research methods that will produce a reality that lies outside of the texts produced in the research process because reality does not pre-exist the discursive and constitutive work

that is of interest to post-structural writers'. I have selected vignettes taken from my doctoral research, which I recognise to be discourses in themselves, and therefore possible to apply a poststructuralist analysis to these discourses as a means of researcher reflexivity. Before presenting my vignettes, I first position these within the research context and background.

3.5 Research context and background

The vignettes draw upon research conducted at two organisations as part of my doctoral research into neoliberal discourses and feminine subjectivities within organisations. The first organisation I studied is a multi-national bank with its head office in the UK. Twenty interviews were conducted with women, who ranged from Associate Vice President, a junior middle management position, through to Managing Director; a senior position within the bank. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face, although some took place over the phone due to geographical constraints. The interviews typically lasted an average of 56 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Alongside the interviews, I kept a detailed research diary where observations, feeling and reflections were captured after each interview and during the research process as a whole.

The second organisation I draw upon is a beauty network marketing company. Network marketing is a business structure where distributors are recruited to work as freelancers, selling the products to clients, whilst also seeking to grow their own teams of distributors (Biggart, 1989). Network marketing is precarious work, with many distributors failing to make a living wage (Shade, 2018). The sixteen women I

interviewed had all reached higher ‘pin titles’, the name given to ranks based on income generated, and as such, were successful within network marketing terms. In addition to the interviews, I also conducted around 40 hours of participant observation by becoming a distributor and attending sales meetings, team meetings, and networking events. Again, a detailed research diary and observation notes were taken, which captured observations, conversations, and reflexive thoughts during the research process. Following Wolfinger (2002), a comprehensive approach to taking field notes was adopted through capturing the sequence of events. Yet, I acknowledge that these notes inevitably reflect ‘background knowledge or tacit beliefs’ (Wolfinger, 2002, p. 93), as data is constructed through those events and conversations which are captured, and those which are not.

The two vignettes I have selected are adapted from my research diary and notes taken as the events happen and are used as a way to place the researcher as an actor in the ‘play’ (Butler, 1997; Humphreys, 2005; Liu, 2019). Thus, the vignettes are used as a way to provide a ‘vivid portrayal of the conduct of everyday life’ (Erickson, 1986, p. 149). The vignettes are selected as examples of ‘uncomfortable reflexivity’ (Pillow, 2003, p. 193), as their purpose is not to claim better representation of the research participants, or indeed myself as a researcher, but rather because they left me with a sense of unease. Therefore, these vignettes are not selected to represent reflexivity as a ‘tool of methodological power’ (Pillow, 2003, p. 192), but rather as examples of the ‘messy’ realities of organisational research where subjectivity is reconstituted in discourse (Weedon, 1997; Dosekun, 2015). Subsequently, these vignettes are not presented as the ‘truth’ of the events, as the goal is not to presume the discovery of truth (Cunliffe & Haynes, 2011; Liu, 2019), but instead have an element of what Liu (2019) refers to as

fictualisation; told in a way that captures the feelings and emotional experiences. Names in the vignettes have been altered to maintain anonymity.

3.6 Moments of discomfort and shifting subjectivities

I turn to present two vignettes, which have been adapted from my research notes and are therefore presented in the first person. Therefore, the 'text' is the reflexive notes of these research experiences, the feelings and shifting subjectivities. Both these instances are chosen as they personally resonated as something uncomfortable, they had a certain significance and sense of heightened awareness. I first present these reflexive vignettes, and then parse these vignettes through a FDA lens, to consider questions of power and subjectivities.

3.6.1 First meeting with the Bank project sponsor 'Simon'

Access to the bank and the women managers comes through a colleague who puts me in contact with 'Simon', a Director at the bank, whom she describes as 'supportive of promoting more women within his team'. After an email exchange we arrange to meet at his office. The emails are brief and formal without niceties: just 'Melissa' in the initial line, no 'Dear' or 'Hi', 'kind regards' etc. I copy this approach in my email exchange back but it feels odd for me and I imagine Simon to be austere and perfunctory.

On the agreed meeting day, I'm met at reception by the Director's personal assistant who leads me up to one of the higher floors in the building. We make small talk in the lift about the traffic. The Director's office is situated at the far end of an open plan floor

in a glass box along one of the far walls. Why do all offices look the same and why do managers sit in glass boxes as if they are on display? As I walk across the open plan area I notice firstly that there is a balance of men and women. I'm surprised as, based on my previous experience with investment banking, I was envisaging more men, and secondly that people are casually dressed. It is 'dress down Friday' and I'm wearing a suit which I dragged from the back of my wardrobe earlier. I feel conspicuously overdressed and hence very visible as I walk through this area. In my heels (which I never normally wear, why today?) I'm 5ft 10 which increases my sense of visibility. I feel like I am play-acting at this role, like a caricature corporate women, a costume I used to blend in but then I got caught out.

I'm shown into the office by the PA and Simon comes round the desk to shake my hand. I see him look slightly surprised for a minute and I wonder if I'm not what he expected. So what did he expect? He's about the same age as me but shorter than me and everything about him is precise and pristine. The conversation somehow quickly turns to his career and he is surprisingly open and unguarded. He tells me that the bank 'isn't for him'; he's been told he needs to be more 'cut-throat' to get ahead. Simon is ex-military, white, married and personifies a form of hegemonic masculinity which makes me wonder what 'more cut-throat' looks like in this environment if he doesn't fit the mould. I wasn't expecting the Director to start telling me how unhappy he is at the bank and I feel like part coach, part sympathetic wife. On one level I feel flattered as if this validates my credibility to be there, on the other I feel a degree of intimacy which makes me feel uncomfortable. As I smile and nod sympathetically I feel very uncomfortable, there is something within the exchange that creates a sense of unease. I mention the

term 'gender champions' and he picks this up, self-identifying as one and reiterating a couple of times that is how he sees himself.

After discussing my research, he opens his office door and beckons three women from his team into the office and introduces them. They are all at AVP and VP level so report directly into him. He explains the project to them and that I will be in contact. I am mute as he explains it and they are too. We all look at him, smiling and passive. I note that he claims authority in this situation. He asserts himself as the facilitator and enabler of this conversation and my access to the women. The meeting is closed with him saying he will forward the emails of the women to me. It's clear he will be the point of contact and enabler of this research and I feel powerless without his support.

This experience in my research resonated as a moment of discomfort; it left a sense of unease which was carried beyond the meeting. Using the principles of FDA to examine this vignette as a text offers insight into the discourses that produce the effect that it names (Butler, 2011) thus to consider why this moment created such discomfort. Reading the vignette as a text allows an opportunity to turn one's reflective gaze back in on itself; to focus on discourse and its constitutive effect.

In reading the text as a poststructural performance, I see discourses of power and hegemonic masculinity, which speaks to Butler (2004) heterosexual matrix, where individuals must operate within socially intelligent norms to be recognised as viable (Butler, 1990). Hegemonic masculinity is a dominant discourse, which privileges a version of reality which legitimates power relations (Willig, 2013), for example; the architecture of the office, the long walk to the glass box, the desk behind which the

Director sits, the curt and perfunctory email exchange. These are discursive objects of power, which render a power dynamic through which I feel both subordinate and 'othered' as an embodied feminine researcher within the masculine corporate setting. I do not belong. This sense of otherness is expressed through my dress, which is selected as a means to blend into what I perceived to be appropriate from my previous experiences working as a management consultant. Davies et al. (2006, p. 99) suggest that, where subjection and mastery co-exist, 'co-existence is made starkly visible by the (un)expected interruption to the moment of mastery'. I recognise this here, where my sense of mastery as a professional woman drawing on discourses of acceptable corporate dress (Kelan, 2013) is interrupted. In my previous career as a management consultant, I wore a suit which fitted a 'template' for women to appear business like and make a statement about professionalism and 'how they position themselves in respect to ideal masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004)' (Kelan, 2013, p. 46). Arguably, such 'templates' are less defined within academia and therefore, I approach the bank perceiving it to be similar to the previous types of environments I worked in. However, I become undone (Butler, 2004) when 'dress-down Friday' leaves me with a sense that I am not readable within the norm of ideal femininity within the bank, thus losing my sense of self.

A feeling of discomfort occurs with shifting discourses, which create a sense of switching subjectivities. Kanter (1977) discusses how women are often positioned in stereotypical roles, such as mother or seductress, and I see similar discourses here. At points in the conversation, I feel like a sympathetic listening ear to the Director's problems; there is a sense of intimacy, which creates discomfort through the performativity of the gender binary, where my intelligibility as a woman is a result of

social norms and the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2004). While it has been argued that there is a pluralization of gender, which allows subjects to occupy multiple and shifting positions (Kelan, 2010), my discomfort comes exactly from the feeling that there is a lack of subject positions. The intimacy of hearing the Director's problems draws on discourses of femininity - sympathetic, listening, and supportive - which presents a subject position from which it appears that opportunities for action are closed down; what can be said and done becomes limited. Thus, the effect of this interaction is performative, and my feminine subjectivity is an uncomfortable effect of this discourse.

When the other women are brought into the room, I feel a shift in discourse from being positioned as a sympathetic listening ear, to a move in power where the Director positions himself as the enabler and facilitator of this fundamentally feminist piece of research. The women in the room are mute, I smile and nod agreeably, and this creates unease. My subjectivity shifts from a form of femininity within the heterosexual matrix of sympathetic woman, to mute subordinate, with the Director as enabler of the research. In the post-financial crisis era, the bank is cautious about my motivations and access has been agreed as long as I have an internal 'sponsor'. However, there is a tension; I feel that I need the Director's approval to gain access to women in a corporate bank, which feels insurmountable without the Director's help, yet here is a man governing this feminist research. Furthermore, in presenting himself as a 'gender champion', he draws on a patriarchal discourse and the gender binary where, on the one hand he is the paternalistic protector of the women who are in need of his help and support, but on the other he is the gatekeeper who can govern, monitor and control this. He is the gatekeeper, and thus discomfort comes from this sense of powerless. As a researcher, what can be said and done within these subject positions feels very limited,

and my reluctance to adopt a subject position within discourse, which identifies 'a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those that use that repertoire' (Davies & Harre, 1999, p. 35), creates the unease and discomfort this experience leaves.

3.6.2 Attending a Beauty Network Marketing distributor recruitment event

During the early stages of research at the beauty network marketing organisation (NMO) I was invited by my main contact at the NMO (Heather) to a Saturday meeting in a local hotel. These events serve the dual purpose of training and a sales pitch as distributors invite guests so they can learn and be recruited into the business. I note in my diary that I am nervous about attending as I don't know what to expect having had no interaction with NMOs or beauty companies before. I imagine a room full of well-made up glamorous women and I worry about what to wear. I want to blend in and write in my diary 'I want to look feminine but not corporate' but I'm not actually sure what this looks like.

I meet Heather in the café area of the hotel. There are lots of women there, all kissing each other like old friends. When Heather introduces me to people, they kiss me on the cheek and tell me how exited they are that I am there which surprises me and leaves me unsure how to respond. I feel like I want to believe them, but I wonder if they are just seeing me as a potential customer? We go up to the room where music is playing – high impact, high energy music and people are talking loudly. I'm struck that there are men there, I was expecting all women. I'm also struck by the clothes the men are wearing, in my diary I write 'snappy dressers and the shoes!' One man, for example, has bright

blue leather shoes with pony skin on the top part, while another man is dressed in a jacket of a vivid checked pattern. The women aren't the Instagram, Kim Kardashian-styled, glamorous women I expected; they are very diverse in terms of age and appearance, and Heather reverently whispers to me that these women are 'serial entrepreneurs, savvy women'.

The guest speakers for the day are a husband and wife team who are 'blue diamonds', the NMO elite. Their presentation feels carefully scripted like a double act so that 'Izzie' is the bossy wife running the event and her husband 'Jay' is her comedy fall guy. Izzie is a tiny, glamorous woman in her early 30's. She's wearing a white, tight dress quite similar to one a beautician would wear (strange on a cold November day) and towering Christian Louboutin heels. I feel dull and frumpy when I'm introduced to her.

Izzie leads the presentation and does 90% of the talking. Izzie describes her motivation to become involved in the NMO as giving her 'time with her kids' and Jay says it was 'the money' with a wink to the audience. Izzie gives an eye roll to the audience who laugh. Izzie appears to be the driving force and Jay is there to make the men feel comfortable. The presentation is laced with sexual innuendo and Jay shouts 'Yeah' at full volume whenever money is mentioned. There is a lot of pseudo-science with pictures of scientists flashed on the screen (all men) who invented these 'life changing' beauty products.

Izzie explains that when she was deciding whether to become a distributor she wanted to know more about the financial credibility of the company. She says 'I ask the one person I trusted most, I have real trust in my daddy'. She explains that her 'daddy' researched the business and explained it to her; 'my daddy knows what this is…I just

say 'oh that's nice' (said with high childlike voice and big eyes). I feel my eyes flicking between Izzie and Jay and the audience and I wonder what they are all thinking? Later she talks about her son and cries. Jay is mute throughout this and offers no comfort when she cries. I feel both intrigued and uncomfortable watching this. Do other people see what I am seeing? I feel uneasy as if I am judging these women, and who am I to judge? Am I judging? I feel judgemental even though I'm there as an observer, I am a researcher. In critiquing what I see, am I not being a good feminist, a supporter of women?

After the pitch Heather introduces me and Anya; another of her 'guests' (potential distributors), to a team elite leader at the NMO. Anya is German, early 30's, married with a young child. I hover awkwardly on the outside of the conversation. Anya keeps apologising for her appearance and her 'no makeup face'. The team elite says, 'I love this woman, I can feel her energy'. I feel voyeuristic and uncomfortable. The next day Heather calls me, hugely enthusiastic, and asks me what I think. I tell her I really enjoyed it. I feel disingenuous.

I have selected this experience in my doctoral research as a moment of discomfort, which left a legacy feeling of unease. Considering this discomfort through a FDA lens, there are dominant discourses which created tensions and disquiet. In line with other beauty NMOs (see for example Sullivan & Delaney, 2017), the NMO I researched positions itself as an emancipatory force, which frees women from '9-5' occupations to enable them to earn money while balancing home and family life. When Heather whispers to me in a reverential way that, the women are 'serial entrepreneurs, savvy

business women', they are constituted as 'competence machines'(Foucault, 2008, p. 312) through an enterprising self discourse, where individuals are free agents, working within the market to develop themselves as their own form of human capital. Yet, this obscures the precarious and gendered nature of NMO work (Shade, 2018; Williams et al., 2012), and part of my discomfort comes from my growing knowledge of the organisational realities of NMOs. When my eyes flick between Izzie, Jay and the audience, I have a sense of an illusion, where potential distributors are 'sold' an experience with high energy music, symbols of success in the expensive clothes and dazzling shoes, and talk of balancing family life while earning significant commission. This creates a tension where, on the one hand my silence and lack of challenge to this neoliberal illusion cast me as a co-conspirator, and on the other, my critical observations and judgements 'hovering on the edge of conversations' make me feel like a failed feminist, constructing power relations between myself as a researcher and the women. As Davies and Harre (1999, p. 35) suggest, 'once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned'. Yet, here I feel caught in the middle of two subject positions; limited by what I feel can be said and done in either position. Subsequently, I feel undone and unreadable within these subject positions (Butler, 2004).

When I reflect on this event, I see a form of emphasised femininity as evident within this experience, it pervades as a dominant discourse, which restricts the subject positions available, and essentialises gender differences (Lewis, 2013; Lewis et al., 2017). Much of this revolves around Izzie and how she is constructed through

discourse. When she talks about 'asking her daddy', and uses a child-like voice, she is infantilised and positioned as incapable of understanding the financial side of the NMO business. Gill and Orgad (2015) discuss how infantilising metaphors become a mode of self-regulation that gives women the illusion of being in control, while avoiding critiquing the structures which perpetuate gender inequalities. Here Izzie's 'daddy' references seem to go further than this; they validate her and make her acceptable as a viable subject within patriarchal discourse. Infantilising discourse constructs Izzie as a child-like woman, who likes beauty products (read femininity), and refers financial matters (read masculinity) to her father. Thus, infantilising becomes a form of protection which 'does not challenge patriarchal gaze and asymmetric power relations' (Gill & Orgad, 2017, p. 30).

Feminist Foucauldian writers (for a review see Elias et al., 2017), have theorised beauty as a disciplinary technology, where women become subject to profound surveillance and regulation. Izzie's tight white dress and Louboutin high heels represent a sexualised form of femininity, which speaks to the development of the idea of 'technologies of sexiness' (Radner, 1993; 1999; Gill, 2008; Gill & Orgad, 2015, Evans & Riley, 2015). This is a discursive regime in which women, who were previously expected to bring to marriage their virtue, must now 'embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of makeup, clothing, exercise, and cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and heterosexuality' (Radner, 1999, p. 15). Izzie's choice of tight dress and expensive designer high heels link sexualised femininity, consumerism and financial success; performativity constituting her as viable through a form of 'sexual entrepreneurialism' (Harvey & Gill, 2011, p. 56). Technologies of sexiness can also be linked to ways in which romantic scripts are changing (Radner, 1993); hence in having her husband on

stage with her, Izzie remains readable within the heterosexual matrix. Jay makes Izzie the comedy straight guy to his jokes and innuendo, and he is mute when she cries about their child, as if childcare is not part of his reality. Thus, within the heterosexual matrix, hegemonic masculinity is privileged, and Izzie must operate within socially intelligible norms of femininity (Butler, 1990).

The technology of sexiness discourse makes me feel frumpy and dull, which creates a tension; although as a feminist academic I am intellectually aware of this performativity of gender, I feel a sense of becoming undone by being unreadable within this discourse. As Winch (2015, p. 233) states, 'managing the body…is the means by which women acquire and display their cultural capital'. I feel that I am perpetuating an element of 'girlfriend gaze' (Winch, 2013), where women and girls police each other's looks and behaviours, through my judgement of the other women. This makes me feel uncomfortable, yet I want to blend in and to belong. I worry about my clothes; wanting to appear feminine, but not corporate. I feel voyeuristic and as if I am simultaneously one and other; identified as a woman, but failing in this form of femininity, so that avoiding feeling frumpy and dull becomes a form of glamour labour (Wissinger, 2015). It is in this space of discomfort that I argue subjectivities are more visible, and regimes of truth and power illuminate how I am constituted and constituting others within the research process.

3.7 Discussion

Within this article, I have used poststructural reflexivity as a form of 'uncomfortable reflexivity' (Pillow, 2003; Dosekun, 2015). The aim of this article was therefore, not to

provide a validation of knowledge, rather to consider the performativity of research which constructs objects and subjects through discourse. Through applying a poststructural approach to reflexivity, I have sought to focus on who the researcher is, emphasising how the researcher is produced through discourse (Youdell, 2006). This form of 'uncomfortable reflexivity' seeks to resist regimes of truth (Dosekun, 2015), rather than validate or provide solutions. I drew on the principles of Willig's (2013) Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, recognising that while these principles do not constitute a full analysis in the Foucauldian sense through tracing the genealogy of discursive formations, it provides a means of seeing how subject positions have implications for subjectivity and experience. Particularly, it provides insight into what can be said and done from within these subject positions.

Vignettes were selected from my doctoral studies, where moments of discomfort arose in the tension that lies where dominant discourse stood uncomfortably next to the way in which I am more commonly construed. Bott (2010) argues that, as women academics, our work lives are supposedly 'gender-free', in other words 'womanhood should not be a significant feature of our working identity' (Bott, 2010, p. 170), yet 'in the field' we are marked in terms of gender. While I would not argue that academia, or indeed any social interaction can be 'gender-free', in these vignettes, discourses of masculinity and femininity created a sense of personal discomfort which reconstituted my subjectivity in a way that created a sense of unease.

In the bank vignette, I drew upon Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to trace the shifting discourses from sympathetic women, to subordination, and powerlessness. In Helena Lui's (2018) autoethnographical account of working as a research fellow at a leadership research centre, she describes the centre director as the 'resident patriarch' instructing

women on the appropriateness of their gendered performance. As Lui (2018) argues, the Director represents a form of entrenched patriarchal system, which redraws and constrains boundaries of acceptable femininity (Adamson, 2017; Lewis et al., 2017). I see similarities here in the discomfort that arose when 'Simon' positions himself as the gatekeeper of this feminist research project, thus patriarchal privilege and power relations effect what can be said and done.

In the beauty company vignette, femininity, beauty and aesthetic labour create a disciplinary technology of self, where woman are caste as embodying heterosexuality. Combined with the neoliberalism of the NMO, this constructs a common sense on gender, where messages of individualism, choice and empowerment obscure the reality of the precarious NMO work (Shade, 2018). Within this context, I found discomfort through a sense of failing femininity (Gill, 2007; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008), through which I am brought into being (Tyler, 2011). In sensing that I am perpetuating the girlfriend gaze (Winch, 2013) as a judge, and critical eye on the women, limits what I feel can be said and done, leaving me feeling disingenuous. Butler (1990) argues that, to be viable, individuals must operate within and maintain socially intelligible norms; to exist as human beings we must be readable within the norms. Thus, I argue that these moments of discomfort relate to shifting subjectivities where I feel 'undone', losing my sense of self.

While feminist goals are often associated with challenging metanarratives such as patriarchy, this is rejected by poststructuralist approaches to power. Poststructuralist critique instead allows an interrogation of how power operates to construct our desires and thoughts, in other words, our subjectivities, which can normalise the oppression of some and domination of others (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Discourses are not abstract

but expressed in the very 'matter' of bodies, shaping desires and ways of being in the world (Butler, 2011). So for poststructuralists, the subject is constituted through discourse, and therefore at the heart of the operation of power. This raises questions of agency for some feminist writers who argue that, this therefore removes opportunities for agency and action. However within this article, I offer poststructural reflexivity, not as a means of agency through freedom from discursive constitution and regulation of subjects (Davies, 2000b; Davies, 2000a), but in the opportunity for change through recognising discursive constitution as regimes of truth historically and culturally situated (Gannon & Davies, 2012).

Poststructural reflexivity presents epistemological and praxis challenges for the researcher. When I reflect back, for example, to the experience of sitting in the Director's office in the bank, I visualise the women sitting quietly and neatly, with hands folded on laps, while the Director stands behind his desk, which represents a symbol of power and masculinity. This is possibly an adapted recollection; a tableau I have constructed within my memory, which represents how I 'read' the performativity of gender in this moment. This demonstrates a challenge for poststructural reflexivity, as Davies et al. (2004, p. 362) argue, if gaze is constitutive, then in being both the object gazed at and the conductor of the reflexive gaze becomes 'slippery'. Thus, the practice of reflexivity should be a site for innovation, where we catch ourselves using the old modes of meaning.

3.8 Conclusion

Within this article, I extend poststructuralist reflexivity as a way to recognise regimes of truth, power, and the discursive regimes, through which we become gendered subjects. As Dosekun (2015, p. 437) argues, 'poststructural reflexivity is a matter of deconstructing the performativity of one's research practice, the work of doing so 'is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing – spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge'. Within this article, I draw upon vignettes in which discursive regimes and shifting subjectivities created moments of discomfort in my doctoral research. I argue that, poststructural reflexivity offers a methodological window of insight into some of these discursive regimes, not of ways of looking harder, but to see what frames our seeing thus, providing opportunities to name 'how power intersects with our scholarly work and deconstructing the compelling enticements of accepting the *status quo*' (Liu, 2019, p. 14). Overall, the paper broadens our understanding of the methodological challenges of reflexivity, through offering poststructural reflexivity as a way to reflect on our ways of seeing, and ways of being, as feminist researchers.

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4 The psychic and affective life of neoliberal spirituality: gendering surveillance and control in a network marketing beauty company

4.1 Abstract

This article explores how New Age spiritualties are co-opted by neoliberalism as a form of surveillance and control to render gender inequalities unspeakable. We draw on the psychic life and affective life of neoliberalism, which compels individuals to develop the dispositions required to become ideal neoliberal subjects, while governing how individuals should feel and what emotions are allowed. Through an ethnographically-inspired study of a beauty network marketing company, we show how one particular form of New Age spirituality is co-opted as a means of control requiring women to work on positivity and gratitude. The psychic and affective life of neoliberalism combines to compel women to engage in self-surveillance, while controlling critique. This article thereby makes a contribution to research on control and surveillance through considering the psychic life and affective life of neoliberalism as a lens to understand the multitude of ways in which neoliberalism is becoming hegemonic.

Keywords: neoliberalism, spirituality, psychic life, affective life, surveillance.

4.2 Introduction

While work on surveillance and control has been conducted by feminists researchers for some time, feminist surveillance studies is a burgeoning area of research (Dubrofsky & Magnet, 2015; Van der Meulen & Heynen, 2016) recognising the need for a feminist invention into this area of study. Surveillance is central to contemporary forms of neoliberal governance (Foucault, 2008; Van der Meulen & Heynen, 2016). Neoliberalism is a dominant political rationality that constructs individuals as entrepreneurial subjects through propagating market values to social domains and actions (Adamson, 2017; Brown, 2003; Rose, 1999). Women particularly become the focus of adapting to become ideal neoliberal subjects expected to self-transform and self-reinvent more than men (Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017; Gill & Scharff, 2011). 'New femininities' are thus constructed around a modernised femininity with appropriated feminist ideals of autonomy, choice and self-determination (Budgeon, 2011; Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2007, 2009). This constructs subjectivities in terms of individual agency such that individuals act as entrepreneurs, able to adapt and navigate inequalities to become 'agents of their own success' (Baker & Kelan, 2019, p. 4) through turning to 'work within' and develop their own human-capital (Weidner, 2009). Thus self-surveillance becomes a focus of gendered neoliberal ideologies (Elias & Gill, 2017; Gill, 2007; Sanders, 2017).

A small but growing body of work has started to consider both the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Gill, 2017; Scharff, 2016). Scharff (2016, p. 111) appropriates the terms from Judith Butler's poststructural perspective in the 'Psychic Life of Power' (1997) to 'convey the formation of subjectivities in and through power'. This has been developed recently by Gill (2017) who identifies the psychic life

of postfeminism where individuals are called upon to work on the 'right' dispositions and the affective life of neoliberalism where 'feeling rules' constrain how emotional states should be presented. Hence we argue that extending our understanding of the psychic and affective elements of neoliberalism provides a lens within which to consider neoliberal mechanisms of control and surveillance thus exploring the constitution of feminine subjectivities and how this silences feminist critique (Adamson, 2017; Lewis, 2014). This critically speaks to Lewis's (2014, p. 1848) call for more 'sophisticated' ways to investigate how women and femininities are being included within organisations that moves beyond considering women in relation to the masculine norm.

One element of the affective life of postfeminism Gill (2017) highlights is the increasing entanglement of positivity and 'positive psychology' into postfeminist culture, which compels women to disavow negative feelings, anger or complaint (Scharff, 2016). In parallel with this, New Age spiritualties are becoming increasingly mainstream and, with the decline of traditional religions, have been co-opted into a neoliberal discourse (Martin, 2012; Nadesan, 1999; Williams, 2014). The New Age movement 'covers a variety of forms of religious and spiritual experimentation' (Bell & Taylor, 2003, p. 332), which exists in tension with science and religion combining spirituality with self-fulfilment and self-discovery. One such example is the Law of Attraction, popularised by Rhonda Byrne in '*The Secret*' (2006). '*The Secret*' draws on a long favoured belief that a force – the universe – responds to individual's thoughts so that those who can manifest enough self-belief can harness this universal force or law to create their own reality. We argue that New Age spiritualties such as the Law of Attraction can be viewed as neoliberal spiritualties; they are based on a neoliberal

rationality where self-actualisation occurs within the work context, individuals are entrepreneurs of their own (spiritual) self, and happiness and positivity become forms of human capital. Having sold over 30 million copies and been translated into 52 languages (The Secret website) it would be easy to dismiss The Secret as a self-help book, however, it has moved beyond popular culture into the practices of some alternative organisations (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014). As Sullivan and Delaney (2017) argue, these forms of spiritual and religious infiltrations into organisational life deserve more attention from organisational scholars than they currently gather. Our interest is mainly on how these forms of neoliberal spirituality intersect with control and surveillance. Thus within this article, we seek to explore how neoliberal spiritualties act as a form of surveillance to control feminine subjectivities and constrain feminist critique. To do this we draw on research conducted at a network marketing organisation which operates in the beauty industry.

Network marketing organisations (NMOs), sometimes referred to as multi-level marketing organisations, have been described as 'quasi-religious' (Bromley, 1998) as they use techniques such as evangelical style performances (Bell & Taylor, 2003). NMOs, particularly the beauty industry, is gendered work (Benoit, 1997; Biggart, 1989; Sullivan & Delaney, 2017) based on neoliberal and postfeminist ideals of beauty and self-regulation. Women are entrepreneurs of self, both as independent distributors and role models for maintaining feminine ideals and subjectivities. Thus it can be argued that the NMO beauty company is a neoliberal organisation *par excellence*.

The NMO we studied has changed significantly over recent years with a new group of highly successful distributors working predominantly through social media. These women are freelance distributors, sometimes with multiple 'jobs', working virtually

through social networks. Therefore the organisation holds more similarities to new forms of organising such as the gig economy; flexible, precarious work which positions women within neoliberal feminist discourses as micro-entrepreneurs (Shade, 2018). Distributors work remotely, often never physically meet their teams, thus a tension lies in the need for a ''deep' form of control that seeks to tap into […] individuals sense of self and experience of the world' (Dale, 2005, p. 650). This form of new work practice requires novel forms of control which moves beyond virtual and digital surveillance. We thus have two interrelated aims. First, we seek to explore how neoliberalism intersects with New Age spiritualties to construct feminine subjectivities. Second, we seek, through using the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism as a lens, to consider how neoliberal spiritualty acts as a form of surveillance and control.

The paper is structured as follows: first we address the literature on neoliberalism, wellbeing and neoliberal spirituality in relation to control and surveillance before discussing our organisational context, network marketing and the beauty industry. We then present our methodology and methods before looking at our findings considered through the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism. Finally we offer a discussion and conclusion. We make two contributions to the literature. Firstly we contribute to a growing body of work on the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism thus furthering our understanding of how neoliberalism constitutes subjects at work. Secondly, we show how New Age spiritualties are co-opted by neoliberal discourse as a form of surveillance and control complicit with neoliberal capitalism and obscuring inequalities.

4.3 Neoliberalism, postfeminism and gendering surveillance

Understanding the processes through which neoliberalism governs subjects often starts with a consideration of Foucault (1979) panoptical metaphor where individuals are never sure if they are the target of surveillance, therefore they assume they are constantly being watched (Brivot & Gendron, 2011). For Foucault (1979), a range of disciplinary and surveillance devices influence the way individuals construct themselves and the panopticon is the archetype of social control. Yet in a time of 'digital enclosure' (Andrejevic, 2007), the meaningfulness of the panopticism is a less obvious reflection of how surveillance is enacted. The panopticism ignores issues of individual's agency and active participation in their own visibility, and the unidirectional view of surveillance (Brivot & Gendron, 2011; Van der Meulen & Heynen, 2016). Haggerty and Ericson (2000) address this in conceptualising the 'surveillant assemblage' to argue that contemporary surveillance constitutes a range of continuously adapting assemblage of practices rather than a single focus of power. This recognises, to some degree, the vast range of forms of surveillance, however feminist theorists have argued this needs to go further to consider forms of agency, power, self-production and surveillance pleasure that are not captured within the panoptic logic (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Van der Meulen & Heynen, 2016). Haggerty (2006) argues Foucault's (2008) theory of governmentality is a more useful way to consider contemporary surveillance practices than the panopticon. For Foucault (2008) governmentality is the subtle practices that bring conduct in line with broader political rationalities, in other words, the processes through which behaviours are governed to produce subjects best suited to neoliberal rationalities. Indeed, Foucault's understanding of governmentality has been taken up by feminist writers, particularly to make sense of how neoliberalism and postfeminism

constitute feminine subjectivities (Adamson, 2017; Elias & Gill, 2017; Gill, 2011; Gill & Orgad, 2017; Tyler, 2012).

Neoliberalism constructs subjectivities in terms of individual agency such that individuals act as entrepreneurs, able to adapt and navigate inequalities to become 'agents of their own success' (Baker & Kelan, 2019, p. 4). Often constructed around a 'have it all' discourse, women are presented with a perception of freedom as long as they conform to neoliberal subjectivities and normative ideals (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017). The pervasive and hegemonic nature of neoliberalism can be seen in postfeminism', which Sullivan and Delaney (2017) describe as a 'symptom' of neoliberalism. Both neoliberalism and postfeminism's 'choice' narrative contributes to the silencing processes of othering (Sørensen, 2017), obscuring power structures and exclusionary practices with regards to 'race' and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, disability and gender (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017; Gill, 2007; Lewis, 2014). Indeed, the themes are so parallel that postfeminism can be considered a sensibility constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas (Gill, 2007, p. 164). Recent discussions have highlighted how neoliberalism is colonising feminism (Fraser, 2013; McRobbie, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014b), 'taming' femininity (Adamson, 2017) and giving feminism a makeover so the focus in organisations becomes changing women rather than inequalities (Gill & Orgad, 2015).

Building on Foucault (2008) and providing an alternative lens to consider neoliberalism and subjectivities, Scharff (2016) and recently Baker and Kelan (2019) use the concept of the psychic life of neoliberalism. Scharff (2016) draws upon Butler's (1997) notion of the psychic life in her seminal work looking at 'The Psychic Life of Power'. For Scharff (2016), Butler's poststructuralist rather than psychoanalytic perspective is

valuable in that it suggests that there is a subject that precedes the discourse. Therefore the psychic life of neoliberalism places emphasis on how neoliberalism fashions subjects at work (Baker & Kelan, 2019). Gill (2017) extends this to consider the psychic, affective and cultural life of postfeminism, arguing that these combine to operate as a form of gendered neoliberalism. Gill (2017) identifies the psychic life of postfeminism where individuals are increasingly called upon to not only individualise but also psychologise to remodel oneself, in other words, to engage in self-surveillance by turning inside to work on the right characteristics and dispositions required by neoliberal subjectivities. This is differentiated from the affective life of postfeminism where 'feeling rules' constrain how emotional states should be presented (Gill, 2017). These combine to create a powerful force where inequalities become unspeakable (Gill, 2014; Kelan, 2007) and certain negative feelings are disavowed through a form of 'affect policing' (Gill, 2017).

Within this paper, we draw upon the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism as a lens to deconstruct the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism which is becoming an increasingly common sense regulatory force (Gill, 2017). Furthermore, we argue that the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism provides a means to understand mechanisms of self-surveillance which are so pervasive within contemporary life. One illustration of this is the popularity of well-being discourses and spirituality, particularly as a form of gendered self-surveillance, which we turn to consider next.

4.4 Well-being and neoliberal spirituality

While parts of the Western world are arguably becoming more secular, religion continues in an 'invisible' form where consumers select aspects which fit within their personal lifestyle (Luckmann, 1967). We see this with the decline of traditional religions and the appropriation of 'Eastern spiritualties' which have been Westernised and privatised (Carrette, 2005; Martin, 2012). Martin (2012) refers to this as 'neoliberal mythmaking' where capitalist cultural traditions shape people's lives without church attendance or indeed being 'members' of religious organisations. These adapted, appropriated spiritualties are repackaged under a range of guises which touch on 'well-being', the 'happiness' industry and the 'psy-complex' (Gill & Orgad, 2017).

Drawing on the work of Foucault (2008), Miller and Rose (2008) argue that the psychological regulative discourses of 'well-being' demands individuals are free, autonomous and happy with the aim of becoming self-actualised individuals. However, underlying this is a consumerist ideology which links economic health to the choices of individuals (Miller & Rose, 2008). Individual's self-help journeys are thus linked to neoliberal economic ideals. For Martin (2012), neoliberal spiritual discourse structures capitalist practices in a contemporary version of the Protestant work ethic where individual's well-being enables happy and productive workers and happy and productive workers enables individual's well-being. Consequently, well-being links to the enterprising self with the goal of being a fully contributing economic citizen. This is gendered with non-Western religious and cultural practices appropriated and commodified for feminised and racialized Western middle-class consumers (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Through the purchase of goods and services, individuals can attain enlightenment thus consumerism, neoliberalism and spirituality intertwine and are

feminised into 'neoliberal spirituality' (Williams, 2014) where religion becomes a free choice with different elements selected like a 'pick and mix', uncoupled from their history or context.

Well-being and happiness homilies are built around New Age/self-help discourses that promote calm, serene, warm, positive and successful feminine subjectivities where women display and practice gratitude (Gill & Orgad, 2017). We see this in the growth of neoliberal mantras ('dance like no one is watching', 'breathe and appreciate the moment' etc.) which offer hope for those with the right type of self-belief. However these type of mantras focus on women as the main target audience and individualise and psychologise rather than focusing on social change and transformation (Gill & Orgad, 2017). Williams (2014) critique of Elizabeth Gilbert's (2006) spiritual self-help book '*Eat Pray Love*' highlights that 'messages of liberation and self-rescue seem to support a feminist vision of women's empowerment in which women resist patriarchal social norms - marriage, children, being selfless - by placing importance on their own spiritual development and happiness' (Williams, 2014, p. 615). Yet the spiritual enlightenment and empowerment advocated through world travel is available only to those who have the means to purchase it. Thus, for the few, neoliberal spirituality can be purchased, what Gill (2017) refers to as a 'spiritual materialism'.

Related to well-being and happiness, Gill (2017) highlights postfeminist messages which target not just the individual but the psychological, focusing on self-esteem, body confidence and positivity. Positivity and gratitude are key elements of neoliberal spirituality where, through self-help books and mantras, the importance of staying positive and setbacks are framed as a learning experience. As Gill (2017, p. 618) highlights, the importance of 'focussing on personal qualities like confidence or

resilience is that it is not disruptive: the small manageable, psychological tweaks – practicing gratitude, 'reprogramming' negative thoughts – are capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy-friendly' (emphasis in original). Thus practicing positivity diverts attention from engaging in negative thoughts which could challenge or question existing structures and rules. Positivity is depoliticized, anger or despair is negated, the drive to change unfair systems is diminished (Scharff, 2016) and feminism is reformulated as a tame form of neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2014b). One form of neoliberal spirituality framed by positivity and gratitude is the Law of Attraction which we briefly review next.

4.4.1 The Secret and the Law of Attraction

A belief about a force, the universal Law of Attraction (LOA), has been long-favoured by New Age philosophers (Hashimoto, 2018), however it has become mainstream with the popularity of Rhonda Byrne's 'The Secret' (2006). The book claims that 'thoughts are magnetic, and thoughts have a frequency. As you think, those thoughts are sent out into the Universe, and they magnetically attract all like things that are on the same frequency' (Byrne, 2006, p. 10). Thus it favours 'self-creation' rather than a literal interpretation of the 'word' of some higher spiritual being and harks to karma base spiritualties as well as science through the use of physics to offer a pseudo-scientific dimension (Hashimoto, 2018).

The book falls into a range of literature where spiritual enlightenment is linked to women's hard work, patience and commitment combined with consumerism and spending (Williams, 2014). The key themes of the LOA are positivity, belief,

abundance and gratitude and failure to manifest goals is internalised to lack of self-belief or correct implementation. Gratitude recurs as a theme within this form of literature. As Gill and Orgad (2015) argue, women must eradicate 'self-doubt, self-criticism and self-questioning, by erasing doubt, critique and anger altogether' (Gill & Orgad, 2015, p. 338).

The LOA has moved beyond popular culture, adopted into the practices of some alternative organisations. Lavrence and Lozanski (2014) looked at the Canadian yoga brand Lululemon where yoga is adapted and 'Westernised' under neoliberal ideals; wellness becomes an outcome of good choices made by good neoliberal subjects to mitigate the risk of economic precariousness and the infallibility of the body (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014). The focus of these neoliberal subjectivities being middle-class women, who can afford to consume Lululemon and reach spiritual fulfilment. Lululemon provides new employees with a copy of The Secret as well as other self-help discourse materials where individuals can design the future selves they desire. This is seen in their heavy use of New Age mantras of self-improvement used on their bags and merchandising. Thus employees within Lululemon have new agency to create the self they desire free from the realities of gender inequalities and the precarious nature of work in both retail and yoga (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014). As Hashimoto (2018) highlights, there is very little scholarship on the LOA despite millions of people utilising its philosophy. The LOA is also a form of surveillance and control. We illustrate this through a network marketing company that endorses and has a culture and working practice based on the LOA.

4.5 Networking marketing, beauty and neoliberal surveillance

Network marking is a business where independent distributors sell goods and services and 'recruit' other distributors to their teams (Biggart, 1989). The focus of our study is a global American networking marketing organisation (NMO) selling beauty products generating several billion dollars in revenue in 2017 and with over a million active distributors, which we refer to as BeautyCo for anonymity. Distributors operate within a structure where their 'downline' is made up of distributors they have recruited to their 'teams' and their 'upline' who is their mentor. In line with other NMOs (Pratt, 2000), individuals hold 'pin titles' given the names of precious stones which represent their sales volume accrued from their downline distributors and their own sales. Unlike many other NMOs, BeautyCo requires no initial investment meaning that entry and exit barriers are low (Pratt & Rosa, 2003), however individuals must operate as independent franchises bound by ethical guidelines.

Within the NMO we studied, sales within the UK had grown exponentially within the last couple of years due to a new breed of social media savvy distributors, predominantly young women, selling and recruiting distributors through social networks. Therefore the organisation holds similarities to new forms of organising such as the gig economy (Shade, 2018). BeautyCo positions distributors as independent entrepreneurs whereas, in reality, they are predominantly micro-earners often working multiple jobs (Shade, 2018). For example, only one third of distributors were counted as active (placing an order in the last 3 months), of which less than 20% earned a commission check which averaged less than $200 per month (BeautyCo's website data). Sullivan and Delaney (2017, p. 1) highlight the precarious nature of NMO work which is at odds with the 'grand messages of spiritual and material riches' promoted.

In many ways the beauty NMO represents the epitome of the neoliberal organisation. The majority of distributors are women with young women particularly finding great success selling through social media therefore becoming entrepreneurial subjects *par excellence* (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Scharff, 2016). Beauty is a form of governance to work upon ourselves, gendered to address women through feminist language (Elias & Gill, 2017). Normative expectations on beauty work has risen significantly but this is rationalised through discourses of autonomy, choice and pleasure appropriated from feminism (Gill, 2007, 2008; Riley & Scharff, 2012). The body becomes a site of continuous monitoring and self-surveillance, always at risk of failing in femininity (Gill, 2007; Trethewey, 1999). Elias and Gill (2017) support this in their study of beauty apps which present an unprecedented gaze upon women, whilst others (Gill, 2007, 2008; Riley & Scharff, 2012) critique the increasing association of femininity and appearance regulation requiring women to constantly engage in self-surveillance in line with neoliberal and postfeminist disciplinary regimes. These regimes hide contemporary beauty ideals where idealising white, slim, middle class, heterosexual femininity is hidden by choice and empowerment discourses (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Riley & Scharff, 2012; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Skeggs, 1997).

The beauty industry and NMO structure combines to form gendered work around neoliberal and postfeminist ideals of beauty and self-regulation where women are entrepreneurs of self in a dual sense: as independent distributors and roles models for maintaining feminine ideals and subjectivities. Thus we see a double entanglement of postfeminist beauty ideals and neoliberalism in the NMO structure which constructs BeautyCo as a neoliberal organisation *par excellence*. Exploring how New Age neoliberal spiritualties have been embraced by the NMO as a form of surveillance and

control can further our understanding about the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism and its influence on silencing feminist critique.

4.6 Methodology and methods

The aim of the article is to consider the psychic and affective life of neoliberal spiritualty as a form of surveillance and control. To do this we draw on data collected from an ethnographic inspired study of a network marketing company which we refer to by the pseudonym BeautyCo. Much research on surveillance and control relies on ethnographic research studies (Brivot & Gendron, 2011; Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley, & Marosszeky; de Vaujany & Vaast, 2014; Green & Zurawski, 2015; Iedema & Rhodes, 2010). Ethnographic methods tend to be associated with participant observation however Hammersley and Atkinson (2001) call for a move towards viewing ethnography as less associated with one method, rather as a style of research which aims to understand social meanings given to individuals in a particular social setting (Brewer, 2000). Following Simpson, Slutskaya, Hughes, Simpson, and Grandy (2014, p. 185) we see that the ‘ethnographic process is not the application of a single research method, but rather an understanding of representation and experience through both empirical and theoretical application’. Our research thus draws on a range of sources of data; predominantly interviews with 16 distributors at BeautyCo (see Appendix A:2), however to gain a rich picture of the cultural context, the first author conducted around 40 hours of participant observation over a 15 month period and joined various distributor’s Facebook groups, which acted as online shops for the beauty products, combined with personal posts about family and daily events.

Access to BeautyCo came through 'Heather', a personal contact of the first author who is a distributor at the NMO as well as having other business interests. After a discussion about the research aims, Heather invited the first author along to one of the recruitment events. Participant observation data was collected from attending a range of events and meetings such as this. These are full-day events where potential distributors were invited along and presented with a fast moving and high energy sales pitch. Field notes were taken during the event and supported by a reflexive journal written immediately afterwards. The events felt scripted and evangelical in style, the first author noted in her reflexive diary 'there is a lot of cheering, clapping and a lot of tears of redemption from being freed from their previous careers'. Redemption from the past and liberating to the new more enlightened way of working at the NMO was a recurrent theme within these events with new recruits pushed to answer 'what is your why?', meaning - what burning motivation do you have for entering this new life? This often focused around having more time with children, flexibility and a reoccurring mantra of 'sacking your boss'. However the 'why' was then juxtaposed by exhortations from the 'team elite' (senior leaders in the business) that success came through working long hours and (in the medium term) 'giving your all' to the business. Thus a neoliberal 'have it all' mantra prevailed (Lewis, 2014; Lewis, Benschop, & Simpson, 2017; Rottenberg, 2014a, 2014b).

As well as attending meetings, the first author also became a BeautyCo distributor to understand the process of 'becoming' (Bröckling, 2005; Scharff, 2016) a neoliberal subject within BeautyCo. Through 'going native' (Rossing & Scott, 2016) as an insider to the NMO we were studying, we were able to provide a richer understanding of the culture and practices at BeautyCo than would have been gained by interviews or

observation alone. Whilst we recognise that within this ethnographic participant observation approach, the researcher is both subject and author, the reflexive diary was used alongside our interview data to provide context thus creating separation between the writer and the self (Coffey, 2002). Reflexivity is important to challenge the notion that knowledge production is independent of the researcher producing it or objective (Berger, 2015).

Throughout the process we sought to be guided by ethical principles relating to participant observation (Flick, 2007; Simpson et. al. 2014). At these events the first author would make an introduction to the group and explain the purpose of the research, trying to explain clearly and accurately what the aims and objectives were, how the research data would be used and that the company and individual names would be anonymised. We supported this by providing a participant information sheet (see Appendix C). At coffee breaks and discussions the first author would remind people of her research role and seek their permission to make notes on conversations after the event. Initially concerned she would be viewed with apprehension, in reality she found that at coffee breaks she had people queueing to see her and tell their story. Whereas in traditional corporate organisations there may have been suspicion of her intent, she was struck by the opposite, as noted in her reflexive diary, one women said to her 'I'm so excited you are here, more people need to know about this great business'. We recognise here the tension between involvement and detachment (Berger, 2015). Over the 15 months the first author spent with BeautyCo, she developed feelings of warmth and sense of responsibility for representing the stories of the women interviewed who were so welcoming. To step into the data as a researcher with a critical and analytical perspective creates some level of unease. Positivity is a key feature of the NMO and

neoliberal spirituality we later discuss and thus critical evaluation, perhaps interpreted as negativity, feels like breaking a BeautyCo taboo. We recognise here the ethical dilemmas of feminist ethnographic style research where relationships are formed with a goal of giving voice to women yet the researcher maintains an inevitable hierarchical position of subsequently interpreting and critiquing the knowledge of others (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012; Stacey, 1988).

During the 15 months period, 16 BeautyCo women were interviewed who ranged in ‘pin-titles’ from having small teams of 3 or 4 distributors to the BeautyCo elite, ‘Million Dollar Club’. All were earning commission from the company thus these women were all successful within NMO terms where the majority of distributors fail to make a living wage. We acknowledge therefore that our interviewees represent a minority of NMO distributors however as the ‘successful’ ones, they are ingrained within the BeautyCo culture and therefore hold organisational knowledge. As BeautyCo team leaders, this group espoused the values of the business, for example, we noted the degree to which meetings felt ‘scripted’ with the same messages being repeated.

The majority of interviewees were approached at meetings after an initial conversation so that a relationship was already established and then a follow up meeting to interview them was arranged. A few women were interviewed via telephone as they were geographically based far away but our understanding of the NMO structure and culture helped establish a rapport quickly with those the first author had not met face-to-face. Interviews were recorded, transcribed *verbatim* and typically lasted between 40 to 90 minutes. For data analysis, interviews were carefully reread while listening again to the interview recordings and at this stage initial themes and patterns were noted. The transcripts were then coded using qualitative analysis software NVivo, whilst the first

author kept returning to the reflective observation notes to make sense of these themes and build a rich picture of some of the patterns and observations. The aim of the broader research project was to consider neoliberalism, postfeminist and subjectivities, 'the law of attraction' was a theme which arose in the first round of coding and reiterated in the observation notes about how success and failure were described and attributed in the meetings and discussion. This was something we were not considering within our original research design however as we were reading and rereading the data we were struck by the echoes of neoliberalism in the discursive construction of the LOA. Discourses which involved the LOA were reread considering; what subject positions were made available within these discourses, what can be said and done, thought and experienced from within these subject positions (Willig, 2013)? Returning to the literature, we drew on the psychic life literature as an analytic framework to consider the discursive construction of the LOA.

4.7 The psychic and affective life of neoliberal spirituality

Within this section we consider the ways in which neoliberal spirituality acts as a form of surveillance to render inequalities unspeakable, silencing women while constructing ostensibly empowered feminine subjectivities. First we consider the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality where successful femininities are constructed through individualising and psychologising certain subjectivities. We then look at the affective life of neoliberal spirituality where norms or rules of behaviour constrain the feelings and emotions that are permissible.

4.7.1 The psychic life of neoliberal spirituality

Within our interviews and observations, women referred to the Law of Attraction (LOA) as a governing force that determined who would be successful within BeautyCo. Success came to those who could manifest their reality through transcending the principles of the LOA based on gratitude, positivity and karma. Karma within BeautyCo was described in terms of 'giving out' to others or to the universe and subsequently receiving a gift from the universe in return. This required being a good, kind person, supporting others and helping people in their teams and wider BeautyCo network. We thus observed the LOA and these karmic principles constructing ideal subjectivities as feminised; the 'good girl' (Mattsson, 2015). Lexi for examples states;

Lexi	The more you help them (the team) the more success you get back yourself, so it actually teaches you to be a much nicer person, because in the traditional world if you found something that worked you'd keep that very much to yourself to own it, where with these girls you tell everyone in your team because if it'll work for you, it will work for them, we can pass it back to you

Lexi states that the LOA teaches people to 'be a much nicer person' contrasting this to the 'traditional world'. Many of the women we interviewed had come from more traditional corporate backgrounds and they contrasted the feminised and supportive environment at BeautyCo with their previous careers. Here Lexi attributes becoming a 'nicer person' to the LOA which dominated the culture and working practices at BeautyCo. We see this demonstrated again in the following quote from Charlotte:

Charlotte Certainly in BeautyCo, the whole thing is whatever energy you put out, you get back, if you help people they help you and that’s the whole kind of ethos that I've found […] then when you want to ask someone for help, then naturally it will happen […] people sign up and they don’t know anything about the law of attraction or about personal development or anything like that, positivity and you can just see how it starts to change them, it’s just really lovely.

Charlotte talks about the LOA as a form of karma where the ‘energy you put out’ by helping others will be repaid at a later date. She describes how people entering BeautyCo learn about the LOA, consequently changing and becoming positive which she describes as ‘lovely’. Part of the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality is cultivating the right type of dispositions (Gill, 2017) which within BeautyCo are helping, supporting, and traditional feminine subjectivities.

We observed that our interviewees constructed the LOA’s road to enlightenment as a continuous journey, a project of self-improvement, always ongoing, working on oneself to become a better person. We see this in the following example from Isabella:

Isabella We're all on a journey, and whatever that journey is, you know, some people are extremely successful right from the start, and that's brilliant, some people are not, and that's brilliant, you know, and I love that. It's very, an equal company, everybody's got, you know, everybody's got the same opportunity as anybody. It's all about

valuing people, working with them and there's no blame, no shame, you know, it is all positive, it is incredibly positive.

Isabella talks about entering BeautyCo as the 'journey' which is framed within neoliberal free market terms; 'an equal company…everybody's got the same opportunity' therefore any structural inequalities are negated and the NMO is positioned as free from advantaging certain individuals over others. Isabella refers to the journey as developing positivity and accepting an environment where there is 'no blame, no shame'. Thus the challenge within BeautyCo is to truly adopt neoliberal spirituality's gospel of positivity and the only barriers are internal. Individuals must become entrepreneurs of self, working on their own positivity as a form of human capital. This resonates with Bröckling (2005) who suggests that the entrepreneurial self is in a constant state of becoming and Gill and Orgad (2018) who discuss the journey metaphor for women who are expected to bounce back from adversity. For neoliberal spirituality, in gaining positivity and overcoming internal barriers, the rewards are both economic and spiritual by means of becoming ideal neoliberal subjects; manifesting their futures through the universal laws of attraction. The psychic life of neoliberal spirituality thus involves self-surveillance; turning the focus of attention inwards and building characteristics that are required both by the universe and neoliberalism. Francesca demonstrated this process of individualising and psychologising:

Francesca When you go down the route of networking marketing, you tend to do introversion and look at yourself and self-development and reading up on it, and trying to make yourself a stronger person, so I

am building confidence and what's come out of that is this awareness that what we put out there comes back to us, it's the law of attraction thing, […] It's fascinating, it's all to do with aligning our energy and getting rid of all the negatives, so we are back in the flow with ourselves, […] it seems a bit surreal and out there and other worldly.

Francesca again uses language which suggests a journey or process of turning the focus inwards to 'look at yourself' with the goal of making yourself a stronger more confident person. She then directly relates this to the LOA suggesting it is about 'aligning energy' to be in 'flow with ourselves'. Whilst it has been recognised that neoliberalism constructs individuals as entrepreneurs of self, tasked with constructing the right dispositions (Foucault, 2008; Gill, 2017), we see here that confidence and self-development through following the principles of the LOA also have a spiritual, 'other worldly' element. The LOA thus requires individuals to become empowered to reach higher goals; their divine universal being is achieved through self-development and belief. Neoliberal beliefs around individual responsibility are intertwined with self-belief as the means to spiritual and thus economic fulfilment. Individuals are bearers of their own (spiritual) human capital (Weidner, 2009). This is supported by Liz:

Liz It is very clever, network marketing. It is very difficult in a way as well because you think, as a success ... because like I was a successful business woman in my nail salon; it was fantastic I grew that in six months and it was brilliant, I was successful in [business

> name], […] then I come to BeautyCo and it is completely different. It is just like, why am I not being as successful as what I think I should be and it is all to do with the mind set and the personal growth. I haven't grown big enough yet, need to grow at least another foot before I get there. [Laughter]

Liz describes having been successful in previous businesses but struggling within the structure of the NMO. The solution to this struggle is mind-set and personal growth, suggesting that to do well, Liz needs to try harder and adjust her mind set. Liz is a firm believer in the LOA and practices gratitude; for example, she posts positivity mantras daily to Facebook where she has her online product shop. These messages typically make statements such as 'When the road seems long and nothing seems to be happening – trust the process', and 'I'm working on myself, for myself, by myself'. These Facebook posts are interspersed with beauty product reviews such that neoliberal spirituality intersects with beauty and mantras of trust and gratitude sit next to messages about self-improvement. Gratitude and positivity obscure the precarious and difficult nature of the NMO structure where inequalities are repudiated and mind set is offered as the solution to success.

Within our interviews and observations, some of the women recognised the challenges of the NMO structure where not all were able to gain financial success, however, this was attributed to lack of self-belief, positivity and gratitude. Those that left BeautyCo were positioned as being unable to develop these characteristics, look inside themselves and manifest their futures. For some of our interviewees, if positivity was the route to

redemption by harnessing the universal laws of attraction, negativity was the devil. Charlotte describes the difficulty for some women on the journey of self-development:

Charlotte A couple of girls who I've met, who I would have loved it to work for, absolutely loved, but for one reason or another they left… it can either be a massive journey in personal development and if someone is … if the glass is more half empty than half full … I've got a girl on my team who's a real sweetheart but she's really battling, she's quite negative, naturally. I've really tried to do lots of personal development and you can see the change in her that's happening gradually and she's becoming a lot happier, a lot more grateful, she's really, really working on positivity and law of attraction and all of that and it's a real journey for her but I've seen people that are maybe slightly more negative and more critical and they don't tend to stick around.

Charlotte describes distributors who have left because they could not achieve success within the NMO but relates this to losing the battle with negativity. She describes one of her 'girls' as starting to win this battle through working on the LOA to be more positive and grateful. Positivity and gratitude are tools the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality requires in the battle against oneself and, in vanquishing negativity, the universe will provide both happiness and financial rewards. Both success and spiritual enlightenment are thus individualised and failure is negated through accusation of lack of self-belief.

In this section we demonstrated the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality which individualises and psychologises success. The LOA requires individuals to practice gratitude and positivity and demonstrate feminine subjectivities to benefit from karma. Subsequently negativity becomes toxic, and failure is linked to an inability to harness the universal laws. This negates any criticism of the NMO structure as achievement is individualised to those who can make the journey to spiritual enlightenment by developing the characteristics required by the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality.

4.7.2 The affective life of neoliberal spirituality

Whereas in BeautyCo the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality calls upon individuals to practise characteristics of positivity and gratitude required by the universal laws of attraction, the affective life of neoliberal spirituality constructs 'feeling rules' and norms about what emotions and feelings are allowed (Gill, 2017). These feeling rules begin with some of our interviewees positioning the LOA as a form of karma based on a mixture of Eastern philosophies and 'science' and therefore irrefutable. Heather demonstrates this:

Heather — But it's a known factor that the law of attraction, call it what you want […] it's physics, you know, you can't argue. […] people call it karma […] it's got lots of different names but, you know, it's been around for thousands of years obviously ever since humans…you know, began.

Here Heather suggests the LOA is known by many names but fundamentally is a form of spirituality based on science; ‘it’s physics’ and irrefutable; ‘you can’t argue’. This form of assertion negates criticism by rationalising spirituality to a scientific universal law. The LOA therefore is protected from criticism from the onset.

Neoliberal spirituality of the law of attraction within BeautyCo constructed ideal subjectivities which required women to demonstrate positivity, gratitude and be ‘nice’. We observed that women who did not follow these requirements risked being positioned as abject or their behaviour was repudiated thus demonstrating the affective life of neoliberal spirituality through disassociation from those who do not follow the rules. Abjection can be viewed as a ‘theory of power, subjection and resistance’ (Tyler, 2013, p. 4), in which psychic anxiety is used as a form of self-surveillance to create neoliberal subjectivities via exclusionary dynamics (Scharff, 2018). This can be distinguished from repudiation, where individuals position themselves as distanced, or disassociated, from ‘others’ (Scharff, 2018). Yet both repudiation and abjection work in unison to constitute and constrain neoliberal subjectivities. Scarlett demonstrates this in the following example where she talks about successful and unsuccessful women within BeautyCo. She states:

Scarlett These people have such low levels of self-belief, as soon as somebody says no, or they make a criticism, they are just completely thrown off course and they lose their power and they lose their attraction, people are just not attracted to want to work with them.

Neoliberal subjectivities use abjection as a means of exclusion (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Tyler, 2013). Through using rejection of what they are not, ideal subjectivities are created (Scharff, 2016). Here we see Scarlett talk about 'these people' who have lost their power through lack of self-belief thus becoming unattractive. Subsequently people do not want to associate with them; their lack of self-belief is toxic and abject. In this way Scarlett is constructing herself as powerful through her self-belief and repudiating the failure of others to their deficit in this area.

We saw repudiation extended to 'othering' those who were external to BeautyCo. This occurred through simultaneously acknowledging and then rejecting criticism of the perception of network marketing organisations and their 'gospel' style meetings. Heather for example states:

Heather	We're very positive. Some people say they come to an event and - particularly the bigger events - and they're like, oh, it's too happy-clappy and things like that but that's because the higher your energy… because this is the law of attraction, we're all just balls of energy basically it's physics, pure physics.

Heather suggests some people do not like the large events which they see as 'happy-clappy', a term which recognises the perception of NMO events as having an evangelical feel. She immediately repudiates this perception by suggesting 'happy-clappy' relates to positivity, the LOA and energy; 'it's physics'. Through acknowledging and then subsequently repudiating this perception, Heather 'others' those that hold these views, negating any alternative, less positive perspectives on the

structure and culture at BeautyCo. Lexi supports this while discussing people who leave:

Lexi They try for a while but they always end up leaving, they do, very difficult business to be in unless you can work on yourself and be positive and we are not all happy-clappy nutters, it's difficult, but it's … I suppose believing that you'll get where you want.

Again Lexi acknowledges the perceived criticism of NMOs; 'we are not all happy-clappy nutters' and accepts that it can be 'difficult' while subsequently suggesting that the leavers were 'unable to work on themselves'. This process of acknowledging and subsequently repudiating the criticism negates evaluation while reinforcing the affective life of neoliberalism. We see similar supporting examples from Ava:

Ava It seems to be that if you are a negative person and you come into business, it's just too much positivity going on and you are like 'Oh, this is way too positive for me.'

Ava suggests that those who criticise positivity in BeautyCo are negative people. Ava's comment recognises that rules about positivity, being happy, and showing gratitude exist and are visible to others. The affective life of neoliberal spirituality enforces these rules and those who leave or decide not join BeautyCo are positioned as being internally flawed. The affective life of neoliberal spirituality renders negativity not permissible while repudiating critique.

Within our interviews and observations we noticed that 'feeling rules' required individuals to monitor their negativity. We previously described how women portrayed a continuous battle with their inner lack of self-belief to build characteristics and dispositions required by the neoliberal spirituality of the LOA, however, these developed an affective life and negativity was policed. Heather recognises this in the following comment:

Heather	We're told to keep the negative, keep the moaning out of your public life. We all have 'crap' going on in the background…don't let it out, don't let people know that you're having a bad day or, you know, moaning about this, that and the other and it's true. If you're a moaning Minnie, that's what you attract.

Heather acknowledges that they are 'told to keep the negative' out, resonating with the first author's observation of a team meeting. At this event Heather provided a testimonial to potential new distributors, telling them of her experience in BeautyCo – her 'journey'. Heather describes herself as 'nothing special' but is immediately publicly admonished by one of the 'Team Elites' for this negative self-portrayal. When Heather then cries, the leader hugs Heather and everyone is told to give Heather a standing ovation. She is abject through her lack of self-belief but redeemed through tears. Redemption is given by the others in the room through applauding her confessional in which Heather acknowledges her 'journey'. In this moment, I am reminded of evangelical redemption where testimonies and tears create spiritual purity (Frederick,

2015), however in this context, tears confirm Heather's commitment to becoming an ideal neo-liberal subject who seeks to conquer the battle of self-belief.

In the above quote, Heather frames negativity in terms of the LOA 'if you are a moaning Minnie, that's what you attract' such that not only are you abject through negativity, there is a consequence for this behaviour. In the neoliberal spirituality of the LAO, there is no afterlife: rewards and punishments occur in the present. This presents an inherent contradiction with traditional beliefs of karma which relies on re-incarnation through a continuous circle of birth and death. In the LOA, karma is 'in the moment' and becomes a powerful silencing force to negate negativity and the reality of the precarious nature of work in the NMO organisation. To do so risks retribution from the universe.

We saw further examples of the affective life of neoliberal spirituality in relation to what individuals felt allowed to feel and to express. We see this in the comment below from Darcey:

Darcey	If you're jealous then there's a reason that you're jealous and you should really look inside as to why. What's not happening, you're not happy within your universe that's making you feel it towards somebody else.… jealousy always comes from being bitter and it's not necessarily about exactly what's happened, it's other things that happened that's made you bitter and that's for both men and women and going back to keeping yourself in a good place and being positive and everything like that.

The LOA hold individuals accountable so that jealousy becomes an individualised issue, here explained by Darcey as not being happy 'within your universe'. The antidote to jealousy is to be positive, have gratitude and 'keep yourself in a good place'. We see here the affective element of the LOA as feeling rules are established. Jealousy is repudiated and abject; it makes people 'bitter', thus individuals must put these feelings aside and stop looking externally. Neoliberal spirituality constrains comparison with others as this may render inequalities visible, therefore the affective life of neoliberal spirituality restricts people to only look internally. To do otherwise would have negative consequences. Beatrice supports this in the following comment:

Beatrice — The majority of people that get brought in are good people, they're honest people […] they will support for the greater good and on the occasions that that doesn't happen, the truth will out and karma will find you and… I've seen it happen time and time again, people have tried to be clever, tried to be funny, tried to think, you know, that they know better than either the system or generally or universal law and they have come unstuck every single time.

Beatrice explains that the consequence of challenging the system or universal law is that people risk becoming 'unstuck' and that 'the truth will out'. We see here how the affective life of neoliberal spirituality polices behaviour with individuals required to follow the rules or face the consequences; 'karma will find you'. However, we also see here how it fashions feminine subjectivities, described here by Beatrice as 'good people' who will 'support for the greater good'.

In this section we explored how the affective life of neoliberal spirituality constitutes 'feeling rules', in this case around positivity, gratitude and self-belief. Individuals who do not adhere to the feeling rules are rendered abject or disassociated from and criticism of the LOA is repudiated. The affective life of neoliberal spirituality thus constrains criticism through repudiating critique and requiring a self-policing of feelings which challenge the LOA and subsequently neoliberal capitalism.

4.8 Discussion

The aim of the article was to explore how neoliberal spiritualties act as a form of surveillance and control to constitute feminine subjectivities while constraining feminist critique. To do this we used the psychic and affective life of neoliberalism (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Gill, 2017; Scharff, 2016) as a lens to frame our understanding of how neoliberalism co-opts spiritualties while masking inequalities. It was first shown that within BeautyCo the psychic life of neoliberal spiritualties - in this case the Law of Attraction - called upon individuals to internalise and psychologise the right characteristics and dispositions (cf. Gill, 2017). Whereas other have discussed these broader neoliberal dispositions as including confidence (Gill & Orgad, 2015, 2017), resilience (Gill & Orgad, 2018), and overcoming the 'tyranny of perfectionism' (McRobbie, 2015), the psychic life of neoliberal spirituality extends this to positivity, gratitude and supportive, communal feminine subjectivities in order to benefit from karma. This was often framed in terms of 'journey' discourses so that individuals were in a continual process of becoming (Bröckling, 2005; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Scharff, 2016), working on themselves to develop their own human capital. Neoliberalism produces 'a constantly failing subject who has to understand their position in essentially

personal and psychological terms' (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241) however this is intensified within neoliberal spirituality. For the LOA, failure to manifest the 'right' dispositions means individuals fail as ideal neoliberal subjects *and* spirituality through being unable to harness 'universal laws'. Whereas in traditional religions such as Christianity for example, transgression is punishable in the next life, in neoliberal spirituality, failure presents more immediate economic and spiritual punishment. Thus individuals are called upon to self-monitor and work within which constitutes a form of self-surveillance.

We then turned to consider the affective life of neoliberal spirituality where 'feeling rules' govern feelings and emotions that were permissible (Gill, 2017). Within BeautyCo we observed examples where individuals who did not adhere to the rules were positioned as abject or disassociated from, and external criticism of BeautyCo was acknowledged and then subsequently repudiated. Hence through negating criticism, the affective life of neoliberalism was reinforced. As Scharff (2016, p. 118-119) highlights 'the notion of abjection suggests that the entrepreneurial subject configures itself through the rejection of that which is not'. While Imogen Tyler (2013) and Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) have illustrated how racialized and classed subjects tend to be positioned as 'others', within our research those who did not buy into the LOA and positivity were 'othered'. Thus we see the exclusionary and constraining effects of neoliberal spirituality where critique is presented as negativity and subsequently becomes toxic, abhorrent and disavowed and anger is repressed (Scharff, 2016). Thus the affective life of neoliberal spirituality acts as a form of control.

Neoliberalism's hegemonic influence touches aspects of everyday life (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Harvey, 2007; Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2016). This is apparent in the

appropriation of Eastern spiritual philosophies where aspects of these religious beliefs are decoupled, appropriated and privatised (Carrette, 2005; Martin, 2012). In the LOA, for example, karma is adapted to a form of instant gratification based on a neoliberal ideology where, through developing oneself, individuals can gain spiritual and financial gratification in *this* life. We argue this presents an example of 'spiritual neoliberalism' (Williams, 2014) where neoliberalism encroaches into all aspects of daily life and is increasingly becoming a psychological project (Gill & Orgad, 2018). The LOA tasks individuals to turn inwards, becoming entrepreneurs of their spiritual self through the practice of positivity, gratitude and self-belief thus enlightenment lies within individuals rather than with a higher being. Monitoring negativity and practicing positivity and gratitude becomes a form of spiritual labour, a project of improvement where negativity is policed and made toxic. Accordingly inequalities at the NMO are obscured and critique is silenced.

Finally, within our research, women were on a continuous journey of self-belief, which can be described as an 'optimistic 'can do' trajectory and narrative of success and aspiration' (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017, p. 352) where advantage and disadvantage is hidden through neoliberal spirituality discourses of positivity and gratitude. We argue that the neoliberal spirituality of the LOA at BeautyCo acts as a form of self-surveillance where failure is internalised and inequalities become unspeakable (Gill, 2014). The affective and psychic life of neoliberal spirituality both constrains women and subsequently blames them for their failure. As Gill (2007) highlights, internalisation denotes a 'deeper' form of exploitation. We argue that neoliberal spirituality acts as a form of spiritual control and surveillance, exploiting women through discourses of positivity and gratitude.

4.9 Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how New Age spiritualties such as the LOA are being co-opted into a network marketing organisation to silence critique and constitute positive, feminine subjectivities thus acting as a form of surveillance and control. Firstly, we make an empirical contribution to the growing body of research considering the psychic life of neoliberalism (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Gill, 2017; Scharff, 2016). Where these previous studies have predominantly considered the psychic life of neoliberalism; where individuals are required to psychologise the right characteristics and dispositions (Gill, 2017), we extend our empirical understanding of the affective life; what Gill (2017) terms the 'feeling rules' neoliberalism reinforces. We demonstrate how these work in conjunction with the psychic life of neoliberalism to provide a powerful constraining force to obscure inequalities moving them beyond unspeakable (Gill, 2014; Kelan, 2007) to rendering them obscured. We therefore move our understanding of surveillance beyond the virtual and digital as new forms of work to conceptualising it as having an affective, psychological element which is darker and more pervasive. Secondly, Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis (2017) call for the need to mount a critique against the 'truth effect' of neoliberalism and consequently successful or unsuccessful femininities. We contribute to that. Our research demonstrates the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism which can be seen in the way it co-opts and adopts New Age spiritualties presenting them within a neoliberal discourse thus supporting neoliberal capitalism. This further obscures inequalities and makes any feminist critique difficult to articulate.

While this article has explored the LOA as a form of neoliberal spirituality, the themes of gratitude and positivity are echoed in other areas of postfeminist and neoliberal

organisational life where women are continuously called upon to 'work within' as a form of self-surveillance. Research into the pervasiveness and constraining nature of these dispositions on feminine subjectivities would further our understanding of the micro-processes which sustain inequalities. Further research is therefore called for to challenge and make visible the pervasive effect of neoliberalism on feminine subjectivities. In this article, we showed how the psychic and affective life of neoliberal spirituality both constrains women and subsequently blames them for their failure. It does this in two interconnected ways, firstly by acting as a form of self-surveillance and control to silence critique and secondly through constituting subjectivities with the 'right' dispositions required for neoliberal capitalism. The article thereby shows that control and surveillance are intertwined with gender and neoliberalism in intricate ways.

4.10 References

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5 Mobilising Femininities at Work: Challenging or Cementing Gender Inequality?

5.1 Abstract

The postfeminist sensibility entails a focus on individual choice, agency and empowerment with an associated negation of structural inequalities. In the literature on postfeminism, collective awareness and action is often suggested as a way to challenge structural inequalities. This article critically examines whether women collectively mobilising can challenge gender inequalities. Drawing on interviews with women managers in a bank, the article develops the concept of mobilising femininities as women collectively performing femininities. The article shows how women mobilise femininities either as a traditional form of nurturing femininity, or to protect women from men mobilising masculinities. Rather than challenging the *status quo*, this collective mobilising of femininities is largely an apolitical support mechanism that recurs to essentialised notions of femininity. The article thus extends the literature on a postfeminist sensibility by showing that collective action through mobilising femininities does not necessarily challenge structural gender inequalities.

Keywords: Mobilising Femininities, Postfeminism, Gender inequality, Resistance, Organisational feminism

5.2 Introduction

A growing body of literature has started to consider postfeminism as a sensibility (Gill, 2007; Adamson, 2017; Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017; Ronen, 2015; Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017) which frames the contemporary common sense on gender (Kelan, 2018). This postfeminist sensibility contains notions of individualism, choice and empowerment, femininity as a bodily property, and the repudiation of feminism as something 'taken into account' (McRobbie, 2009). Themes of individuality and choice have been closely linked to a neoliberalism, with the emphasis on individuals to transform themselves, and the persistence of gender inequalities explained by 'choice' rather than structural issues (Gill, 2007). The individualising discourses of neoliberalism responsibilise women; accordingly challenging gender inequality can be achieved by individual action with women reaching senior positions 'one-woman at a time' (Rottenberg, 2018). We see this epitomised within Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) hugely popular manifesto '*Lean In'* which encourages women to challenge their own internal obstacles so that they are better suited to succeed within the corporate world. As Rottenberg (2014, p. 427) states; encouraging women 'to '*lean in'* to their individual careers is antithetical to working together towards any common goal' (emphasis in original). Within 'new' configurations of femininities epitomised by postfeminism and neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017), collective solutions towards a common goal are refuted in favour of individualised action (Rottenberg, 2014).

Theorists, who consider postfeminism as a discursive strategy, regard postfeminism's move away from feminist collective activism as having a potential detrimental effect for organisational and gender equality change (Lewis, et. al., 2017). Whilst acknowledging

the complex and non-linear nature of organisational change, Lewis, Benschop and Simpson (2017) suggest that elements of postfeminism, such as a focus on individualism and the repudiation of feminism, can negate the call for collective action embodied, for instance, by second wave feminism. Indeed, much of the literature alludes that, as a 'solution' to the problem of postfeminism, moving from individual to collective action will create a body of resistance to challenge and change structures which maintain inequality (McRobbie, 2015; Riley et. al., 2017; Adamson, 2017). Therefore, collective action is offered as a potential solution, both to gender inequality, and to the focus on individualism that postfeminism fosters.

In media and cultural studies, it has been suggested that feminist activism is in resurgence. Dean (2012; Dean and Aune 2015) has argued that, far from being in abeyance, the resurgence of feminism is exampled through feminist mobilisation such as SlutWalk and Everyday Sexism Project. Yet, whilst this may be the case, much of this has been online (Dean, 2010) and we are yet to see if, and how, these mobilisations will change systemic gender inequalities. Within gender and organisations studies, postfeminism is deemed to have a 'taming' effect on feminism and indeed femininities (Adamson, 2017, p. 324), which weakens a call for collective action as resistance to the sustained nature of inequalities within work. Yet, we currently have no understanding of what form collective mobilisation could take in organisations, and if this would impact on gender inequalities. This article thus asks what a collective mobilisation of women looks like within organisations, and how far such a collective mobilisation can challenge gender inequalities.

To understand collective mobilisation within a system of gender relations, we draw upon the notion of *mobilising femininities*; originally proposed by Martin (2001), and

recently developed by van den Brink and Benschop (2014) in their study of networking and recruitment practices within Dutch academia. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014), build upon Martin's (2001) work considering masculinities, specifically differentiating between individual men's 'doing of masculinities', versus a group of men collectively 'mobilising masculinities', which occurs when men act collectively to do masculinities together; consequently excluding or devaluing women. Adapting Martin's (2001) definition of mobilising masculinities, van den Brink and Benschop (2014) apply it to position mobilising femininities as occurring when two or more women concertedly bring to bear, or bring into play femininities. For Martin (2001), mobilising masculinities can take two forms; 'contested' where men emphasis distance and separation from each other, and 'affiliated', where men align and support each other. We specifically draw on affiliated forms of mobilising femininities, as this practice of intra-gender support and alignment stands in contrast to the individualising discourses seen within neoliberalism. In addition, we purposely use the term *mobilising femininities* rather than *mobilising women* to describe collective action as we see gender as more than a bodily property; something that people 'do' rather than something that people 'have' (Tyler, 2012). Femininities are 'practices that are represented or interpreted by either actor and/or observer as feminine within a system of gender relations that gives them meaning as gendered 'feminine'' (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p. 484). This recognises that gender is a complex social practice that can address organisational routines and norms to produce or counteract inequalities (Acker, 1990).

This article thus aims to answer two interrelated questions. First, we seek to develop a better understanding of how mobilising femininities look in practice. Consequently, we extend the concept of mobilising femininities, positioned by van den Brink and

Benschop (2014), to see it as part of the everyday practices and struggles of women dealing with gender inequalities. Second, we consider how far mobilising femininities acts as a form of resistance to gender inequalities and therefore, a potential way to challenge the ignorance of structural disadvantage expressed through postfeminism as a sensibility. Therefore, we make a contribution to the postfeminist literature which offers collective action as a solution to the individualisation of strategies to reduce gender inequalities.

The article is structured as follows: first we address the literature on gender hegemony and gender practices, mobilising femininities, postfeminism and feminist activism. Secondly, we present the methodology and empirical data to show how mobilising femininities looks in practice. We end with a discussion about mobilising femininities as a potential site for challenging gender inequality and focus on the individual emphasised by postfeminism. The article thus offers an analysis of how mobilising femininities can take shape, and if mobilising femininities is an effective approach to challenge structural gender inequalities.

5.3 Mobilising femininities, postfeminism, and collective action

The literature on postfeminism as a sensibility has regularly pointed out that, individual agency is stressed in contemporary sense making on gender, while structural inequalities are side-lined. This, in turn, is often used to suggest collective action as beneficial to move the focus from the individual to structural inequalities (McRobbie, 2015: Riley et. al., 2017; Rottenberg, 2014; Adamson, 2017). Mobilising femininities, through supporting and aligning with other women, is potentially one way through

which collective action can be achieved. In this section, we first outline how mobilising femininities can be theorised, before moving to consider how far mobilising femininities can be understood as a form of collective action, which has the potential to reduce structural gender inequalities.

5.3.1 Femininities, masculinities and gender practices

Mobilising femininities takes place within gendered institutions where gender is present in the processes, practices, images and distribution of power (Acker, 1992). Consequently, gender practices are ingrained within the sub-structures of organisations reproducing gender divisions and inequalities (Acker, 1998). We view gender as socially constructed, occurring within gender practices, such that femininities and masculinities are constructed within a system of unequal gender relations. Connell's (1987) seminal work considering 'hegemonic masculinity' advanced our understanding of gender relations. Drawing on Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, which explains the ruling classes' maintenance of power through consent, hegemonic masculinity refers to 'the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is always positioned and constructed as superior to femininities and inferior masculinities and importantly, power is maintained by making unequal gender relations seem natural and legitimate.

Recognising that gender hegemony naturalises power relations is important to our understanding of femininities. Femininities are socially constructed, contextual, and subject to variations over time and on the basis of class, race and sexual orientation (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Femininities differ to masculinities as they do not hold

cultural power in the way that hegemonic masculinities do, in fact, Connell (1987) argues that there are no femininities that are hegemonic. Instead, she locates the concept of 'emphasised femininities' which supports men's dominance over women through compliance and 'accommodating the interests and desires of men' (Connell, 1987 p. 183). Messerschmidt (2011) extends the concept to see it as 'a form of femininity that is practiced in a complimentary, compliant, and accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity' (Messerschmidt, 2011, p. 206). Therefore, emphasised femininity only has meaning and occurs in relation to hegemonic masculinity. This is an important distinction. Recognising the relationship between masculinity and femininity helps us to understand how feminine characteristics which are not subordinate to hegemonic masculinity are stigmatised.

Femininities have traditionally been positioned as rather one dimensional; constructed in a complementary and compliant relationship to masculinities. Whilst Connell (1987) recognises that there are alternative forms of femininities characterised 'by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance' (p, 183), it is Messerschmidt (2011) who extends this to consider subordinate femininities. Subordination can arise through class, race, sexuality, or displaying behaviour which is unfeminine. This recognises that not all femininities have equal value and a hierarchical relationship exists between different modes of femininity (Lewis, 2014). In line with Mavin and Grandy (2014), we argue that the gender practices and cultural ideals associated with femininity are a powerful set of prescriptive feminine norms constraining women's behaviours. Women mobilising femininities must therefore be viewed as occurring within gender practices, where femininities are constrained by gender norms. Furthermore, the masculine and feminine ideal varies by context, economic, societal and power relations. As Schippers

(2007, p. 98) states, 'the importance of context cannot be overstated', so when considering mobilising femininities we recognise that this is contextual, and femininities and masculinities are ultimately an empirical question. Thus, we note that understanding gender inequalities and mobilising femininities as a form of resistance is highly contextual, influenced not just by gender hegemony but the nuances of power relations within each specific context.

5.3.2 Mobilising femininities and masculinities

Organisations are constructed within patriarchal values and principles which seek to uphold men's domination over women (Acker, 1992, 1998), and gender hegemony which ensures this is seen as legitimate (Connell 1995). It has been argued however, that agency and activism still operates despite gender hegemony (Mavin & Grandy, 2016; Benschop, 2009), and collective action is often suggested to reduce the focus on the individual. Yet, the question remains as to how collective mobilisation looks in practice, and to what extent could it be considered a potential source of activism or resistance to gender inequalities.

Martin's (2001) article exploring men collectively mobilising masculinities at work sought to provide insights into both the nature and production of masculinities. Martin (2001) draws a distinction between individual men's 'doings of masculinities', and men collectively 'mobilising masculinities'; the latter being 'practices wherein two or more men concertedly bring to bear, or bring into play, masculinity/ies' (p. 588). She argues that masculinities can be mobilised in two ways; first, as 'contested'; defined as emphasising distance and separation, and second, 'affiliated'; defined as aligning and

connecting. When men in her study were mobilising masculinities in a contested way, despite the focus of attention being other men, women were harmed by this behaviour. Martin (2001, p. 601) describes, for example, 'peacocking' behaviour, where men vied for attention, but this prolonged meetings leaving women feeling like 'exhausted' outsiders. Affiliated masculinities focused on men as the audience and subsequently benefitted other men. Therefore, unlike men, women were harmed by both forms of men mobilising masculinities.

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) revisit Martin's (2001) seminal work in their study of the gender practices that occur within networking and recruitment in Dutch academia. Men in academia identified with the similar in that they recommended other male colleagues. For women, however, it was harder to promote another female candidate for a professorial role, in other words, mobilise femininities, because their minority position made support more visible. Female candidates 'otherness' was seen as risky, and mobilising femininities is more problematic than mobilising masculinities as it incurs the risk of being associated with nepotism or radical feminism. This scrutiny or risk does not occur when men mobilise masculinities.

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) argue that women cannot mobilise masculinities in the same way that men do, as this is a collective practice of men connecting to each other. Women can, however, take part in it by aligning with masculine hegemony. The challenge for women is that, if they affiliate, their behaviour is scrutinised in a way that male colleagues are not. Furthermore, both Martin (2001) and van den Brink and Benschop (2014) found men were only liminally aware of mobilising masculinities and the impact they were having. Liminal awareness is the point where 'phenomenon is imperceptible or a state of consciousness that is supposed to exist but is not strong

enough to be recognised' (Martin, 2001, p. 606). Critically, women mobilising femininities by supporting each other, is a conscious activity that involves the risk of exclusion, the depletion of energy, and increased visibility, as it occurs within a system of unequal gender relations that privileges masculinity.

The system of unequal gender relations, which benefits masculinity, can be seen in the concepts of homophily and homosociality; used to explain the benefits men gain from each other (Holgersson, 2013; McPherson et. al., 2001). The term homophily is used to refer to people who are socially similar being more likely to have work relationships with each other, while homosociality refers to 'practices in which men orientate themselves towards other men within a patriarchal gender order' (Holgersson, 2013, p. 456; see also McPherson et. al., 2001). Homophily and homosociality have been used to explain women's exclusion within male-dominated organisations, thus demonstrating the degree to which gender is embedded within organisational hierarchies privileging hegemonic masculinity (Collinson & Hearn, 1995). However, van den Brink & Benschop (2014) argue that these studies tend to use essentialist conceptions of men and women; as they focus on the positions of men and women within organisations, without considering the *meanings* of masculinity and femininity within organisations. Therefore, in line with their study, we draw upon mobilising femininities to capture gender as a complex social practice, rather than concepts of homophily or homosociality, to consider forms of collective action which have the potential to reduce the focus on the individual emphasised within a postfeminist sensibility.

5.3.3 Postfeminism and collective action

Women mobilising femininities as a potential form of resistance to gender inequality, and the gender order, requires contextualising within contemporary forms of femininities. While there has been considerable focus on masculinities and the gendered nature of organisations (Acker, 1990, 1992; Connell, 1989, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), recent work has shifted attention away from masculinities, to consider the reconfiguration of femininities (Lewis, et. al., 2017), and the discursive construction of gender equality (Kelan, 2018). This has coincided with an increased interest within gender and organisation studies of postfeminism as a critical concept to provide insight into current manifestations of femininities in organisations (Lewis, 2014, Lewis et. al. 2017). Postfeminism remains a contested term, with several competing definitions of postfeminism (see Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017). However, within this article, we draw upon the notion of postfeminism as a sensibility or a discursive formation (Gill, 2007). Here, central focus is on understanding which discursive patterns are currently used to make sense of gender (Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017). Thus, postfeminism functions as an ideology that contains a set of ideas about gender which can be studied (Riley et. al., 2017).

The postfeminist sensibility is characterised by a focus on empowerment, choice and individualism. The similarity between postfeminism and neoliberalism's narratives of individualism and choice are so hard to differentiate, that some researcher regard postfeminism to be a gendered form of neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011, Gill, 2016). Postfeminism frames the ideal woman as a free, self-transforming subject, who balances home and family commitments while achieving in her professional career (Farris & Rottenberg, 2017). The emphasis is on individual accountability and responsibility,

presuming that women are unconstrained by inequality or imbalances in power. For example, women 'opting-out' of organisations are framed in terms of individual 'choice' (Lewis et. al., 2017), rather than a consideration of structural inequalities and the gendered sub-structure of organisations (Acker, 1990).

Postfeminism's focus on individual choice and empowerment can be linked to the make-over paradigm; which emphasises reinvention and self-improvement. However, self-improvement requires self-surveillance and self-monitoring, so that 'femininity is contingent' (Gill, 2007, p. 155), demanding continuous work and attention. While femininity has become a continuous project of self-improvement, the postfeminist sensibility also reasserts sexual difference, where men and women are presented as fundamentally different (Gill, 2007). Traditional femininities, once seen as a threat to women's empowerment, have been deconstructed so that they are being 'consciously and playfully performed' (Budgeon, 2014, p. 320). This leads to one of the most confounding aspects of postfeminism; the 'overing' of feminism where feminism is both taken into account and consequently repudiated (McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie (2004) discusses this in terms of a 'double entanglement', where postfeminism incorporates, revises, and depoliticises many of the fundamental issues related to second wave feminism (McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Ronen, 2015). Consequently, it has been argued that women reject second wave feminist action and identification, while simultaneously drawing on feminist ideals as part of their common sense. This makes gender inequalities 'unspeakable' (Gill, 2014: Kelan, 2007),while repudiating feminism as unfeminine and man-hating (Scharff, 2012).

The depoliticisation of feminism (McRobbie, 2004), and 'unspeakable' inequalities (Gill, 2014; Kelan, 2007), has a bearing on opportunities to challenge and resist gender

hegemony. Lewis, Benschop & Simpson (2017) contend that the discursive strategies of postfeminism hinder organisational change towards gender inequalities. Examining five issues - the rise of moderate feminisms, the reconfiguration of femininity, the emphasis on individualism, the notion of choice, and the aversion to radical interventions - they argue that a *moderate* feminism has been encouraged while 'excessive feminism characterised by a critical orientation and collectivist spirit based on mutual struggle, communal relations with other women and the search for collective solutions to shared problems' (Lewis et. al., 2017, p. 217) is refuted. Furthermore, postfeminism seeks to 'tame femininity' by constructing a restrained or moderate form of feminism, focused on working on self rather than others, to create social change (Adamson, 2017, p. 324).

Taylor (1987, p. 409) suggests feminist activism is an abeyance; 'a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in non-receptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilisation to another'. Arguably postfeminism's focus on individualising strategies, rather than consideration of structural issues, shows elements of a non-receptive environment counteracting the need for mobilisation. We can see this through the recent explosion of feminist discussion in the media and a wave of popular feminist manifestos (Farris & Rottenberg, 2017). However, these still show characteristics of postfeminism and neoliberalism, as key themes of individuality, choice and a successfully balance femininity are espoused (Adamson, 2017; Farris & Rottenberg, 2017; Riley et. al., 2017). In contrast, others would argue that far from feminist activism being in abeyance, a term which Bagguley (2002) suggests has a connotation with decline or demobilisation, women's everyday struggles and practices such as networking, micro-politics and oppositional routines, should be seen as a more subtle and less visible form of feminist activism (Barry et. al. 2007; Bleijenbergh, 2018;

van den Brink, 2015). Bendl, Danowitz and Schmidt (2014), for example, suggest that rather than going underground, feminist activism is operating in less visible forms through the domain of individual work, reshaping itself within agendas of managerialism. Dean (2012) argues that, there is a dominant narrative of loss associated with feminist activism of the 1970's, despite an increase in feminist mobilisations such as Reclaim the Night and UK Feminista. This narrative of loss dismisses new forms of feminist activism as being 'not appropriately feminist' (Dean 2012, p. 319), which suggests that some forms of contemporary feminist activism, particularly those online, are being dismissed when held against a model of earlier feminist movements (Dean & Aune, 2015). Therefore, alternative forms of feminist activism should be considered which may not conform to earlier models, and potentially, there is value in considering how mobilising femininities can be understood as a form of collective action to challenge gender inequality.

In sum, while research has developed an understanding of how men mobilise masculinities within organisation, there is limited research to date that would show how a mobilising of femininities might look. Contemporary postfeminist discourses of gender in organisations are framed by individual choice and agency. There is subsequently a move away from a call for collective action that could be instrumental in challenging structural gender inequalities. Thus, within this article we ask how far mobilising femininities could be considered a collective approach to challenging gender inequalities in organisations.

5.4 Researching Mobilising Femininities

Within this article, we draw upon twenty interviews conducted with women managers working at a British multinational bank with its headquarters in London (Appendix A:1). It has long been recognised that banking, along with many other professions such as law (McGinley, 2018) and accounting (Kokot, 2014; 2015), has a gendered culture which can be hostile to women, and where women are underrepresented in senior levels (Blomberg, 2009; Neck, 2015). Whilst the bank in question has been involved in some high profile campaigns to support and promote women within banking, at the time of writing, it has no women represented on the executive leadership team, which illustrates how rhetoric differs to reality and the slow pace of change.

The majority of women interviewed worked in the global payments and technology divisions, which are fairly representative of the banking sector in that, women are underrepresented at senior levels in the organisation. The women ranged from associate vice-president (AVP), classified as the first move into senior and team leadership roles, through to managing director (MD), which are strategic leadership posts. They had between 3 and 28 years tenure in the bank and ranged in age from late 20's to late 50's. To provide a balanced perspective, they were drawn from the London office and various offices around the country, as it was recognised by the women that the London office had a particularly different culture (an emphasis on long-hours culture), to some of the other offices (seen as more family friendly and inclusive of women). However, we saw no observable differences which could be attributed to location.

Using a personal acquaintance, the first author made contact with a male Director at the bank, who had a particular interest in developing more women within his division. During conversations, he self-identified as a 'gender champion', yet we noticed he used

phrases such as 'man-up' to his team; such expressions, we felt, were part of a pervasive masculine culture in the bank. The Director provided a list of names of women managers, which we subsequently contacted via email asking if they would volunteer to take part in research into women's careers at the bank. Most of the women on this list agreed to be interviewed for different motivations, ranging from a sense of dissatisfaction with inequality in the bank, to a sense of duty at being nominated by their line manager. We did not notice particular differences in terms of people's motivations for taking part in the interviews however, willingness to engage with the interview seemed more contingent on level in the bank than the method through which they were approached. In fact, we were surprised by the participant's willingness to speak openly and quite frankly given the confidential and cautious nature of the bank. While the interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes with an average of 56 minutes, there were only two interviews that were shorter than 35 minutes, and these were both with senior women in the organisation who presented themselves as pressed for time. During the data collection phase, the Director left the bank, consequently placing the project in a precarious position as we were without a sponsor. When our list of names was exhausted, we then used a snowballing technique to access the remaining women, which was a pragmatic way to access the women, but meant we were potentially accessing women more willing to discuss gender as the request was not via their line manager.

Our flexible interview guide (Appendix B), asked the women about a range of topics, which included their close and distant relationships with other women at work, how they experienced collaboration and competition between women, and how they perceived this as different to their male colleagues. Many of the women worked in

teams and on projects together and we found this incredibly helpful as sometimes the same events were retold by different participants, providing corroboration and significance to these events. Interviewees were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The interviews were all digitally recorded and then transcribed *verbatim* after the interviews. We acknowledge that the individual interviews were co-constructed by the respondent and the researcher and therefore the influence of the researcher on the process must be recognised (Lewis, 2013). We reflected, for example, on a sense of rapport that was often quickly established when the first author and some of the participants started discussing issues around being a working parent. We also recognise that feminist research is neither disinterested or objective knowledge (van den Brink, 2015); and that interviews provide insights into sense making processes, rather than studying workplace interactions as such, and that interview data is constructed (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Initially, the interview data was coded to allow the data to be collected into themes. In the first stage of analysis, we read through the interviews several times whilst simultaneously listening to the audio recordings. The first author had also written a reflective diary of observations during the data collection process, which helped us reengage with the interviews and become immersed in the data. As initial patterns and recurring themes started to arise, these were noted down. The first author then worked systematically through each transcript coding the data. The transcripts were coded using an iterative approach, returning to transcripts as new codes were added. The software package NVivo was used to support the process of coding and to organise and manage the volume of data. Initially this stage of coding was more akin to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which is not linked to any particular epistemological position,

therefore offering a degree of flexibility and a way to manage volume data. Initially, fifteen themes were drawn from the data, which we then used to consider how these represented discursive constructions (Willig, 2013). From this initial consideration of the material, broad themes which reflected doing femininities at work, working with men, and working with women were selected and re-read several times whilst the author returned to the literature, particularly around femininities and masculinities. Using mobilising femininities as an analytic tool enabled us to consider how this form of collective action is discursively constructed for the women in our interviews in the two ways which we describe below. This allows us to consider what subject positions are available, and what possibilities for action are available within these constructions (Willig, 2013).

5.5 Practices of Mobilising Femininities

In the following section, we present two ways in which women within our interviews constructed mobilising femininities. Adapting Martin's (2001) definition, we position mobilising femininities as practices where women act in unison to affiliate or align with other women. We consider women mobilising femininities first, as nurturing, and second, to protect women from men mobilising masculinities. However, a degree of fluidity exists between these two forms of mobilising femininities.

5.5.1 Mobilising femininities through nurturing

Within our interviews, we found examples of women mobilising femininities at work through aligning and supporting other women. For some women, this was discursively

constructed in terms of 'nurturing', which draws upon a traditional form of femininity related to motherhood and helping others grow. This traditional, nurturing femininity is highlighted by Cleo (VP), discussing her role in managing younger women in her team:

Cleo — I tend to take on the sort of like, not the mummy role but I do try and nurture them and I do and I think that's probably something I do naturally…and if I feel that they're not promoting themselves or doing what they need to do, I sit them down and go, have you done this, can you do that? I feel a lot better about promoting them and sort of ensuring they're okay than I do kind of doing it myself but then…that's just me I think.

Cleo states her role in supporting the younger women is 'nurturing' them and uses a disclaimer that she is not 'taking the mummy role'. She then describes providing advice to help the women in her team self-promote, despite not being comfortable to do that herself. Self-promotion is not in line with norms of femininity (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). Cleo concludes by saying 'that's just me I think', therefore any social constraints that are stopping Cleo self-promoting are overlooked. Instead Cleo take responsibility for this as 'just me', thus Cleo individualises and responsibilises her behaviour (Budgeon, 2015; Elias & Gill, 2017).

Whilst Cleo's disclaimer about the 'mummy role' aims to avert this interpretation, other interviewees went further, specifically relating their support of other women to mothering. Hilary (VP) for example, states 'I think I feel sorry for people too much, I always want to play the mothering role', and Bridget (Director), when describing a

colleague says, 'she very much operates, as if her team are her family'. Amy (AVP) describes an example, working with a woman colleague, to support each other through a difficult time:

Amy — Yeah, I think that that's probably the emotional side of a woman isn't it…and stuff like that that comes in and the mothering maybe as well, you know, when you're a mum and then you want to mother everybody.

In these examples, we saw women aligning with each other and framing this in terms of 'the mummy role'. One facet of a postfeminist sensibility is the reconfiguration of femininity, which fuses feminism with femininity (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017), therefore reasserting traditional femininities related to motherhood and sexual relations within a choice feminist discourse. In our research, women mobilising femininities by supporting other women appears to show elements of this postfeminist sensibility by relating aligning with other women to 'mothering'. This positions women collectively mobilising femininities as a natural occurrence: an enactment of traditional feminine behaviours. Furthermore, Gill (2007) discusses the reassertion of natural sexual differences as an element of the postfeminist sensibility. We see this reflected in the following quote from Hannah, a Director at the bank, who relates women's collaboration to something that is inherent to women:

Interviewer — Your experience is almost…that women are potentially more collaborative in their approach, almost a strategic choice to do it?

Hannah As a general rule, I think they are. Do I think it's a strategic choice? No – I think it's just what's built in us as the caregivers.

When Hannah is asked if collaboration is a strategy, a conscious decision that women are making, she disagrees and suggests this is something inherent to women. Again, a link is formed between essentialist views of communal feminine behaviours and reasserting sexual difference (Gill, 2007). In other words, Hannah's comments about care-giving being 'built-in', suggests a gender binary which attributes certain traits to women. As Lewis and Simpson (2017) argue, an excessive feminism which is characterised by a collective struggle, communal relations between women, and collective action, has been repudiated in favour of moderate feminism. Here, we see examples of women acting communally through mobilising femininities, yet this is linked back to a traditional femininity based on 'mothering'. This speaks to the prevalence of the postfeminist discourse, with the resurgence of traditional forms of femininity; previously argued to be a threat to women's empowerment, and the reappearance of 'natural' sexual differences (Lewis, 2014). While these communal, maternal characteristics are linked to 'feminized management' (Lewis, 2014, p. 1847); a form of idealised manager, women's doing of femininity does not translate into economic advantage, while conversely men benefit from displaying these feminised behaviours.

In these examples, we see women demonstrating communal relations however, it is constructed as nurturing, mothering and something natural to women. In this way, it could be argued that a behaviour which could become visible and therefore subject to

scrutiny (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014) is nullified as an 'acceptable' organisational femininity (Lewis, et. al, 2017, p. 217). We see this in the following example from Jane (VP) where being a 'strong woman' is discursively positioned as a maternal instinct:

Jane — If you're a strong woman and you're confident in who you are then I think you will try and help other women to feel the same and bring them up. So, it's just something that's kind of comes naturally, maybe it's that maternal kind of nurturing instinct.

We could also examine Jane's comment about 'bringing them (women) up' in terms of the postfeminist sensibility, which frames women as on a continual path of self-improvement and self-regulation (Gill, 2007). Gill and Orgad (2015) suggest that the confidence cult(ure) establishes women's lack of self-confidence as the source of women's lack of achievement, consequently continuous self-labour and self-improvement can overcome this. Within our interviews, we saw examples of women mobilising femininities through nurturing positioned in terms of helping each other develop and self-improve, providing feedback on how they were measuring up against a traditional form of organisational femininity. Ali (AVP), for example says:

Ali — She's always got that sort of open door approach, so if I'm stuck and I need to ask her a quick question, I can pop down and she helps you feel more confident as well, so you know she'll say, you could host this call and I'll be on the phone to support you…so she's there to support but then afterwards she'll always drop you an email or phone you to say, oh that was really well done… and she does it in the right

way, so she's supportive.

Ali describes the supportive relationship she has with a colleague linking this to helping her to build confidence. She describes this support as being provided 'in the right way', what we would suggest is a traditional form of femininity closely aligned with nurturing. Hilary also hints at this when describing the support and feedback she gets from her female peers; 'I find that with the female peers…the way in which they'll deliver the feedback is still giving you the point but in a way in which you can receive it quite softly'.

We found several examples of women mobilising femininities through nurturing by supporting each other and directly relating this to helping their confidence grow. For example, Cleo states:

Cleo	I supported her though sort of very difficult time for her but actually her confidence grew and grew and actually she then left the bank and she's gone and secured herself a really good job but I think some of her anxieties were based around the job she was doing and the fact that she didn't think she was matching up to the guys that were around her and it was just all in her own head.

Cleo here describes supporting her colleague so that her confidence grew and she was able to leave the bank to go to a 'good job'. She relates this confidence issue to anxiety about 'matching the guys' suggesting her colleague was comparing herself to a

masculine norm. A successfully balanced femininity requires a careful calibration of both feminine and masculine, managing individualism with caring, traditional femininity (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). It is a continuous project, and we saw mobilising femininities through nurturing as supporting each other on this self-improvement project, what Hannah describes as a journey:

Hannah I will talk about what I have been through…guidance and coaching to try and understand more about who I am, where my lack of confidence is coming from and understanding those emotions and how to cope with them and that's what helped me on my journey, I am still on that journey and it was a whole load of personal development.

In this extract, Hannah is describing her relationship with her mentees who are all women, sharing her own personal development journey to continuously strive towards confidence. Mia again talks about conversations with other women around confidence:

Mia Yes, I think that's really interesting…that thing about confidence… I think it's just that self-awareness thing isn't it? For a lot of women, just recognising that they are really tough on themselves. You know, sometimes tougher than other people would be and tougher than the men would be on themselves.

Here, Mia relates confidence to something pertinent for women suggesting that they are tougher on themselves than men. Gill and Orgad (2017, p.18) describe this as the 'gendered imperative to 'be confident'' which, whilst being articulated as a feminist intervention, is complicit with male domination and capitalism.

In this section we showed how women are mobilising femininities through nurturing; a traditional femininity based on mothering, supporting, or building each other's confidence in a continual process of self-improvement. We now turn to discuss how, within our interviews, mobilising femininities also occurred in relation to men mobilising masculinities.

5.5.2 Mobilising femininity to protect women from men mobilising masculinities

Within our interviews, we found examples of women describing the value of having female colleagues to support and defend each other against the pervasive masculinity that existed in the bank. We suggest this is a form of mobilising femininities which occurs to protect women from both men mobilising masculinities, and masculinity ingrained in the culture of the bank. We found examples of women describing groups of men as intimidating and the empathy they felt for women who were struggling with this contested masculinity. There appeared to be, for these women, a conscious recognition of men mobilising masculinities and the damaging impact this could have on women. Sarah (VP) describes this feeling in the following quote:

Sarah	I don't know, not that the men want you to fail, definitely not that, but they're kind of, they'd ask you a challenging question and put

you on the spot…Whereas I think women are really more sympathetic to the fact that you put yourself out there and…I don't know, I just think there's something there that as men they just want an answer, babe, just what was the answer?

Sarah's comment that, 'not that the men want you to fail', could be read as disassociating herself from any perception that she is blaming the men, or indeed 'man-hating', a position Scharff (2012) explored in relation to feminist dis-identification and the adverse reactions women find when using politicised language. Furthermore, Sarah's use of the word 'babe' to portray men addressing women hints at a hierarchical relationship where women are objectified. The term 'babe' also speaks to an element of the postfeminist sensibility that Gill (2007) describes as 'irony and knowingness' (p. 159), so that words from a bygone era, for example 'totty' and 'babe', are used ironically allowing sexism to be defended as irony. Likewise, Ali describes receiving support from another woman when dealing with the male Directors:

Ali When I've been challenged by sort of my Director on different questions, she … if she can see I'm getting a bit flustered, she'll step in and she'll kind of give you that support whereas, I'm not saying that men wouldn't, but they're less likely to jump in because they just want you to get on and kind of do it.

Both Sarah and Ali describe the empathy that women show for each other and attribute this to inherent gender differences, with women being more sympathetic to other's

needs (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). Sarah specifically relates this to the other woman in this meeting; her direct line manager, stepping in when she recognises Sarah is 'flustered' dealing with men; the Directors, mobilising masculinities in the bank. In this way, gender is done through the gendered interactions and relationships that occur in these meetings (Kelan, 2010).

For some of the women in the bank, men mobilising masculinities created an awareness of the need for women to support each other. However, as van den Brink and Benschop (2014) found, there was an inherent risk in supporting other women as their male colleagues, particularly the more senior men, were made uncomfortable by this support. It was suggested by some women that senior men even tried to purposely create dissent and conflict between some of the women. This is demonstrated in the quote below from Annie (VP):

Annie	So, I know that with 'Jane'… and we work so closely together, I can tell if (name of male Director 1) or (name of male Director 2) or any of the men are maybe being a bit too hard on her, I can just see it on her face and I'll quite quickly jump to her defence and she'll do the same for…so I think it's something that we've started doing, it drives (name of male Director 1) mad because we'll just be like at team against him sometimes.

Here, Annie states that the male Director is aware of women becoming a 'team against him' or in other words, women mobilising femininities in reaction to a perceive threat of men 'behaving like men' (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). This suggests a risk in

mobilising femininities as, by doing so, women's actions become visible and subject to scrutiny (van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). We see here the persistence of the 'gendered-substructure of organisation that operates to help reproduce gender divisions and inequalities' (Acker, 1998, p. 197). When women mobilise femininities, this can potentially challenge the gendered sub-structure and the gendered distribution of power (Acker, 1992). The gendered subculture was evident in the way some of the women described the male-dominated senior levels of the organisation as 'cut-throat' and undesirable for women. Several described the uncooperative and competitive nature of the relationships that existed between male Directors which created an individualistic culture which they chose not to conform to. This is described by Jane (VP):

Jane	So people have tried who we work for to play us off against each other and give something to one of us and not to the other and then … but we will always … because we sit right next to each other as well, so have you seen this, no. Can you come over? What do you think?

Jane describes the male Directors using the VP's to 'play us off', which Martin (2001) would describe as a 'dominating' contested masculinity, seeking to control or dominate by creating discord. Jane seems to suggest that the women are aware that this is happening so they support and protect each other, again mobilising femininities in response to the men's behaviour. Jane later continues by describing how she sees the men responding to this, reacting with unease at the strength of the women's relationships:

Jane: Obviously some of them might be a little threatened by our relationships because we take quite a collaborative approach to stuff, so we will often talk things through between us and then go an give an aligned approach, you don't see that often in this kind of environment.

Here, Jane describes the men as potentially being 'threatened' by the women's collaborative approach, pointing out that this behaviour is counter-cultural; 'you don't see that often'. In this way, Jane suggests that the collaborative nature of women mobilising femininities in support of each other is at odds in the pervasive masculinity in the organisation which is individualistic and competitive.

5.6 Discussion

The aim of the article was to highlight how mobilising femininities looks in practice, and if it could be seen as a form of collective action which challenges gender inequalities. It was first shown how mobilising femininities through nurturing was a positioned as a traditional form of organisational femininity. This form of mobilising femininities provided comfort and support to other women which they described as nurturing, taking the 'mummy role', and supporting each other on a journey of self-improvement. This mobilising of femininities thus empowers individual women and allows them to unfold their agency which is aligned with a postfeminist sensibility. Lewis (2014) argues that postfeminism is characterised by the fusing of femininity with feminism. This is evident in the feminisation of management, so that feminine

characteristics are linked to an ideal (feminised) manager who nurtures and cares. Yet women gain little advantage as these characteristics, when displayed by women, are subsequently 'naturalised and unrecognised' (Lewis, 2014, p. 1848). In our research, the women recognised the benefits of intra-gender support; however, as Lewis argues (2014), there is no economic advantage when women display feminine characteristics, while this is not true for men. Ronen (2017) supports this, suggesting that postfeminist ideology celebrates essentialist gender differences whilst simultaneously overlooking feminine devaluation therefore obscuring inequality. There are similarities here, as women's support for each other was naturalised as nurturing. This can be seen through a postfeminist lens as the reassertion of traditional femininities related to motherhood and sexual relations (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017). Whereas second wave feminism challenged the gender binary, here we see examples of women accentuating essential gendered differences (see McRobbie, 2004). Such reassertion of sexual difference disadvantages women when they work in gender-incongruent professions and job roles (Kelan, 2007). We extend this analysis to suggest that, in our findings, the reassertion of sexual difference neutralizes mobilising femininities so that, rather than being seen as a source of communal relations and collective action, it is presented as nurturing; a traditional, moderate organisational femininity.

We saw instances in our study of mobilising femininities through nurturing extended to examples of women describing helping others to build confidence on a journey of self-improvement. We see elements of a postfeminist sensibility where women are on a road to 'perfection' (McRobbie, 2015), through continuous self-transformation to reach a goal of performing ideal femininity (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017). Locating mobilising femininities in terms of helping women on this gendered imperative to be

self-confident (Gill & Orgad, 2017) demonstrates a 'choice' discourse where women are free, self-transforming subjects unconstrained by inequalities. This adheres to a construction of mobilising femininities through nurturing as an acceptable form of organisational femininity, but crucially suggests that a move from individual to collective support is not political and creates no change to the *status quo*. Ahmed (2014) use the term 'stickiness' to describe how affects become attached to objects through repetition, for example, the connotation of 'man-hating' attached to feminism through reiteration. We extend this to argue that postfeminism has a 'stickiness' to it so that, even when women are mobilising femininities in concert, a potential opportunity for collective action, the discourses of postfeminism are difficult to shake-off.

Finally, we turned to look at mobilising femininities to protect women from men mobilising masculinities and the pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) within the bank. Echoing Martin (2001), in our study some of the women discussed forms of dominating masculinities, which were harmful and created a cut-throat environment they wanted to disassociate from. Here, the intra-gender support element of mobilising femininities was particularly important but we suggest that, within our data, it operated as a form of protection and a coping mechanism. Our data supports van den Brink & Benschop's (2014) study as mobilising femininities to protect women from men mobilising masculinities was at times risky; supporting and aligning with each other was counter-cultural to the environment in the bank and attracted negative attention. However, we extend this to suggest that mobilising femininities offered support and empathy for other women dealing with masculinities in the bank but this was not a form of direct challenge to the *status quo* as such. Women colleagues might be protected from individual acts of mobilising

masculinities, but women mobilising femininities in such a way were rarely considering this as a challenge to gender inequalities more systematically. It was more an *ad hoc* reaction to mobilising masculinities, however, it was not associated with political action. While these small acts of resistance might be effective in challenging the effects of mobilising masculinities by protecting other women, it seems to lack a more systematic approach that could challenge gender inequalities more widely.

This has two important implications. Firstly, collective action is often suggested as the solution to the focus on the individual postfeminism emphasises, yet within our study, collectively performing femininities did not create challenge or resistance to gender hegemony and inequalities. Arguably, the 'overing' of feminism (McRobbie, 2009) encapsulated within postfeminism is such a dominant discourse that explicitly confronting the harmful effect of masculinities seems counter-intuitive when feminism has been repudiated (Lewis et. al., 2017). While mobilising femininities is a potential opportunity for feminist activism, we suggest that collective action alone is not a sufficient condition to challenge gender inequalities.

The second implication relates to feminist activism which, researchers have argued, is operating in a more subtle form within organisations (Barry et. al. 2007; Bleijenbergh, 2018; van den Brink, 2015; Bendl et. al., 2014). Mobilising femininities, to protect women from men mobilising masculinities, has the potential to operate as one of the moderate feminist practices that Barry, Chandler and Berg (2007) argue occurs in activities such as networking, micro-politics, and oppositional routines. However, within our study, collectively performing femininities provided support and comfort against hegemonic masculinities but with little evidence that it impacted on the *status quo*. At best, the support mobilising femininities provided some of the women in our

interviews can be viewed as sharing experiences, which potentially empower and help with the ‘hard work’ of resistance (van den Brink, 2015). At worst, it is simply a way for women to survive on a daily basis without seeing it even as resistance to gender inequality. Bleijenbergh (2018) recognises the energy that coping with resistance takes, however reflecting on personal experiences with resistance, storytelling, and sharing in groups can provide a source of empowerment for gender change agents (Bareil, 2013; van den Brink, 2015). Yet, it is worth stressing that mobilising femininities as protection from men mobilising masculinities treads carefully around the excesses of feminism (McRobbie, 2009) and is essentialising. Mobilising femininities is constructed by the women in our interviews as a support mechanism, rather than feminist activism. Mobilising femininities as a potential source of collective action is apolitical rather than a disruptive force for challenging inequalities.

5.7 Conclusion

While much of the extant literature considering postfeminism as a sensibility discusses collective action as a solution to the focus on the individual, we questioned if mobilising femininities could provide the collective action to challenge gender inequalities. The article discussed mobilising femininities first, through nurturing, and second, to protect women from men mobilising masculinities. We argue that these forms of collective mobilising, while acting as support and comfort to the women in our study, did not impact on the *status quo*, or as an explicit challenge to gender inequalities. Furthermore, we see postfeminist themes running through our examples of mobilising femininities, particularly in our first example, where collective support was positioned in terms of nurturing as a traditional form of femininity.

The article makes the following contributions. First, we extend our understanding of how mobilising femininities looks in practice. Van den Brink & Benschop (2014) suggest their study provides the first empirical consideration of women mobilising femininities. We extend this to provide two further examples of the gender practice of mobilising femininities. We suggest that these are one of several strategies women could adopt to mobilise femininities which are fluid, relational and contextual. In this way, we extend the literature away from doing gender as an individual practice to considering how women collectively are doing gender.

The second contribution is an empirical exploration in how far collective action can be used to overcome postfeminism's silencing of structural gender inequalities (Lewis et. al, 2017). In our study, women collectively mobilising femininities within the hostile environment of the bank did not show challenge or resistance as the *status quo* remained in place. Mobilising femininities offered support and comfort and can best be described as a coping mechanism. However, it was not political in the sense that it would be employed systematically to challenge gender inequalities. This suggests that it is not necessarily collective action alone that dismantles gender inequality and further ingredients are needed to make collective action political enough to challenge the *status quo*.

Further research to examine additional modes of mobilising femininities within alternative settings would extend our understanding of how this collective mobilisation varies contextually. Furthermore, considering whether alternative forms of mobilising femininities in different contexts shows opportunities for challenging systemic inequalities would extend our understanding of how gender inequalities can be tackled. In our study, it is not necessarily collective action that dismantles the system and it thus

needs to be explored what additional factors play a role to ensure that a collective mobilisation of femininities challenges gender inequalities in organizations. Overall, the paper broadens our understanding of what women's collective mobilisation looks like and its potential as a strategy for challenging gender inequalities. It also shows that mobilising femininities could be seen as a way to challenge gender inequalities at work, but the conditions under which mobilising femininities could be seen as a collective form of resistance that changes the *status quo* systematically are still unclear.

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6 Neoliberal feminism and discourses of competition: Scarcity and abundance as forms of governance

6.1 Abstract

This article explores discourses of competition for women working in two different organisational settings: a corporate bank and a network marketing beauty company. Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective to understand competition as a form of governance through encouraging individuals to see the self as an enterprise, we examine how neoliberal feminism works with neoliberal capitalism to constrain subjectivities. In the bank, we saw discourses of competition based on scarcity, where women felt they were competing with other women. In the beauty company, competition was based on an abundance logic, which called on women to internalise their focus, thus women were competing with themselves. This article shows how neoliberal feminism adapts to different contexts, while binding women in unique ways. The article thereby makes a contribution to research on the silencing processes of neoliberal feminism and the normalising effects this discourse has on regimes of truth.

Keywords: Neoliberal feminism, neoliberalism, competition, scarcity, abundance, capitalism.

6.2 Introduction

Neoliberalism is a much used, but often contested, term (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Grosser & McCarthy, 2018; Harvey, 2007). Within this article, we draw upon neoliberalism as a cultural rationality in the Foucauldian sense, linking to mechanisms of government and subsequently subjectivities. Michel Foucault's (1970, 1973, 1988a) early work considered how discourse forms and shapes realities and subjectivities (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006). Later, and particularly in '*The Birth of Biopolitics*' (2008), Foucault developed the concept of governmentality, where social relations become organised around a notion of enterprise. Subsequently, individuals are expected to frame their lives and identities as a type of self-enterprise, ultimately based on a belief in incontestable economic interest (McNay, 2009; Munro, 2012). For Foucault (1984, p. 241), neoliberalism employs technologies of government, in which individuals are controlled without the need for intervention through being encouraged to view their lives as a type of enterprise, working on the self as a form of human capital to become economically self-sufficient within a free market. Thus, governmentality controls individuals at both a large-scale regulatory level and an individualising level through normalising technologies of the self (McNay, 2009).

Self as enterprise and discourses of competition are the bedrocks of neoliberal capitalism's dominant hegemonic discourse, heralding a break from the post-war consensus and Keynesian economics to a New Right (Eisenstein, 2017). As O'Neil (2015, p. 1628) argues, the value of capitalist firms products and services 'depends on scarcity, artificially maintained if need be, and the acquisition of financial rewards is the main motivation of participants'. Discourses of scarcity and competition are embodied in neoliberalism's focus on the self as enterprise thus impacting on the expression of

individual subjectivities in relation to competition (Foucault, 2008). Governance through enterprise constitutes individuals as entrepreneurs of their own life through developing forms of human capital, thus *others* become competitors. The notion of enterprise governs all behaviours so that 'the homo oeconomicus-entrepreneur… as entrepreneur of himself, has only competitors' (Donzelot, 2008, p. 129-130). As McNay (2009, p. 58) highlights, this creates a 'fragile dynamic of competition in what Foucault terms "a formal game between inequalities"'. Inequalities are required to stimulate market competition but, to capitalise on inequalities, everyone must be included in the race to become an entrepreneur of self, maximising their market value. Thus, competition is embedded within neoliberal capitalism as a form of governance, such that individuals are controlled through rational techniques; the 'conduct of conduct' (McNay, 2009, p. 60) rather than domination.

Much has been written about the pervasive and hegemonic nature of neoliberalism (De Coster & Zanoni, 2018; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Harvey, 2007), with critics of neoliberalism highlighting its ability to absorb and disarm critique, thus impacting on individual subjectivities and conceptualisation of agency (McNay, 2009). Furthermore, neoliberalism shows the ability to encroach and annex all aspects of our lives (Littler, 2017), casting individuals as individualised, entrepreneurial and self-investing human capital (Bröckling, 2005). Catherine Rottenberg (2014a, 2014b, 2017, 2018) particularly has argued that the pervasiveness of neoliberal rationality has corroded liberal feminism, allowing the ascension of neoliberal feminism. This is evidenced by a range of high profile women casting themselves as feminists in neoliberal terms. Yet the popularity of this new form of neoliberal feminism is linked with a neoliberal economic agenda, which is disassociated from second-wave feminisms' goals of emancipation and

equality (Fraser, 2013; Prügl, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014b). As Rottenberg (2018, p. 12) argues, while a body of research has recognised feminism's co-optation by neoliberal capitalism, co-optation as a concept 'fails to capture the intricate and complex interactions between neoliberalism and feminism'. Within this article we seek to address this by examining the adapting and morphing forms of neoliberalism, the intricate relationship between neoliberal capitalism, feminism and subjectivities. Drawing on discourses of competition in each context, which we see as central to the notion of self as enterprise and neoliberal capitalism (Foucault, 2008), this paper aims to examine how discourses of competition are assumed by neoliberal feminism as a form of governance.

To address this, we focus on interviews with women in two different organisational contexts. First, we look at women managers in a corporate bank, and second, at women working for a network marketing company focused on the beauty industry. Within the bank we found discourses of competition focused on scarcity, where women felt they were *competing with each other* for limited roles and resources. Within the beauty company discourses of competition were based on abundance, where notions of success were linked to individuals' ability to develop the skills required within the marketplace, therefore the women felt they were *competing with themselves* to overcome internal barriers. We argue that these varying discourses can be framed as differing permeations of neoliberal feminism, thus highlighting the pervasive and malleable nature of neoliberalism which is fluid and able to adapt to context. In this articles, we show how discourses of competition

The article is structured as follows. First, we consider the relationship between neoliberalism and feminism. We then present the two organisations: the bank and the

beauty company, before discussing our methods and methodology and findings. We end with a discussion and conclusion. This article makes two contributions: first, we extend our understanding of the fluid and adaptable nature of neoliberalism, which is widespread with local variations. Second, we examine how different discourses of neoliberal feminism bind women, but in unique ways. In addressing the complex and fluid nature of neoliberal feminism, we are able to start to consider approaches to counteract its normalising effects.

6.3 The ascent of neoliberal feminism

A number of scholars have started to discuss the emergence of a form of neoliberal feminism, which is rapidly displacing liberal feminism and constituting new feminine subjectivities configured in terms of balance, choice, and individualism (Adamson, 2017; Colley & White, 2018; Farris & Rottenberg, 2017; Rottenberg, 2014a, 2014b, 2017, 2018). Neoliberal feminism, sometimes referred to as corporate or moderate feminism, promotes an entrepreneurial ideology, which is complicit, rather than critical of capitalism, using psychologising discourses such as confidence and self-esteem as solutions to gender inequalities (Gill, 2016). Discourses such as ‘choice’ (Budgeon, 2015) and ‘balance’ (Adamson, 2017) encourage women to work on themselves, become entrepreneurs of self, while obscuring inequalities and the need for collective action.

Much of the work which considers the relationship between neoliberalism and gender does so under the guise of postfeminism (Baker & Kelan, 2019). While the term is itself contested and used in different ways, most scholarly work sees postfeminism as a

discursive formation (Foucault, 1972) characterised by individualism, choice and agency (Gill, 2014; Gill & Scharff, 2011), the disappearance of voice recognising structural inequalities (Kelan, 2009), surveillance and monitoring of women's bodies (Elias & Gill, 2017), and the 'overing' of feminism (McRobbie, 2009) whereby feminism is simultaneously taken into account and repudiated. The rise of postfeminism as a discourse coincided with the dominance of a neoliberal rationality, thus the two are often positioned as intertwined (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Gill, 2017). However, Rottenberg (2018, p. 10-11) draws a distinction highlighting that since 2012, a range of high profile women[8] have declared themselves as feminists, launching a revival of a feminist discourse, albeit 'mainstreamed' within a neoliberal political and economic agenda. Thus Rottenberg (2018) argues that we have moved from liberal feminism, through a postfeminist movement, to an era characterised by a neoliberal feminist discourse. Terms such as 'empowerment' for example, which were once linked to second-wave feminism's goals of emancipation from patriarchy, have been individualised into a pseudo-feminist ideology where the competitive individual is responsible for her own achievement and happiness (Budgeon, 2015, 2018; Eisenstein, 2017; Fraser, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014a).

Prügl (2015) suggests that instead of mourning the loss of feminism, we should consider the 'neoliberalisation of feminism' which is shifting and fluid, allowing opportunities for agency and action within these new forms of feminism. However. others see neoliberal feminism operating in a 'dangerous liaison' with capitalism (Eisenstein,

[8] Rottenberg (2018) references Sheryl Sandberg, CEO of Facebook and author of 'Lean-In: Women, Work and The Will to Lead', Anne-Marie Slaughter's 'Why women can't have it all' article, Emma Watson's 2014 UN speech at the #HeforShe campaign launch and Beyoncé's 2014 MTV music award's performance to a 'Feminist' backdrop.

2017), which, through casting women within an individualised neoliberal agenda, incorporates women within capitalist power structures and seeks to 'cure the ills of an ailing, slowing world capitalist economy' (Eisenstein, 2017, p. 44). Indeed the inclusion of feminism within organisational discourse has led to an accommodation of forms of feminism which maintain, rather than challenge, neoliberal norms (Budgeon, 2018). The 2008 financial crisis, for example, saw women's inclusion in organisations essentialised to a gentle feminine form of management to dilute the macho form of masculinity implicated in the financial crash (Eisenstein, 2017; see also Budgeon, 2018). Neoliberalism therefore negates any discussion of the deep structural issues within capitalism, focussing instead on human capital, injecting women into business as an antidote to masculinity.

If we reflect how neoliberal feminism constitutes subjectivities in relation to competition, McRobbie (2015, p. 7) references the impact that neoliberalism and postfeminism have had on the imperative for women to conform to 'the perfect', where 'female competition is inscribed within specific horizons of value relating to husbands, work, partners and boyfriends, family and home, motherhood and maternity'. Thus, the focus of competition becomes women themselves, assessed against a traditional form of femininity that overlooks structural inequalities. Scharff (2016) found similar issues around competing with self when looking at musicians as cultural workers impacted by neoliberalism. She argues that competition is not absent from neoliberalism, but rather is turned inwards, suggesting power dynamics work on a 'deeper level', where competition is directed at others and the self (Scharff, 2016). Women are neoliberal subjects *par excellence* as they become the focus of self-transforming and self-reinventing more than men (Gill et al., 2017; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Thus, neoliberalism

turns the focus in on the self, which we can see exemplified by high profile women such as Sheryl Sandberg (2013), who calls on women to simultaneously reject the systemic forces producing inequalities, whilst accepting full responsibility for her own well-being and care (Rottenberg, 2014b). Neoliberalism therefore individualises responsibility for success or failure, consequently competition is focused on the self and inequalities are disavowed.

Neoliberal feminism presents women with a raft of neoliberal mantras; a ‘have it all’ discourse (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017) encouraging them to ‘lean in’ (Sandberg, 2013) to organisations, become entrepreneurs of themselves, able to shape their own futures through choice discourses, as long as they conform to neoliberal subjectivities and ideals (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017). Woman are expected to achieve ‘balance’ in their lives which Budgeon (2018, p. 335) theorises as the further entrenchment of neoliberal rationality, a Foucauldian regulation of the ‘conduct of conduct’. Furthermore, the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007) acts to silence critique and forms of feminist activism, thus constraining feminine subjectivities (Adamson, 2017; Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2007, 2009). Neoliberalism shifts focus to individuals, rather than the structures or systems, consequently failure is internalised (Scharff, 2015) and inequalities are obscured.

In sum, neoliberalism has become hegemonic, showing the ability to infiltrate the ‘nooks and crannies of everyday life’ (Littler, 2017, p. 608), it has co-opted feminism, constituting feminine subjectivities and constructing them within a neoliberal capitalist agenda. Competition is central to neoliberalism and enterprise as self. Through examining discourses of competition as a window into the complex and shifting forms of neoliberalism, we can see how neoliberal feminism adapts to different contexts.

6.4 Methodology and Methods

The empirical aim of the study was to consider how neoliberal feminism manifests and evolves in different contexts through examining discourses of competition. In this study, we combine ethnomethodological inspired methodologies with a poststructuralist approach to consider the constitution of neoliberal subjectivities (McDonald, 2013; Rickett & Roman, 2013). To do this, we draw on data collected from interviews with 20 women managers in a multinational bank and 16 interviews and participant observation data with women who are part of a network marketing beauty company. Thus, in line with other research into neoliberal feminism and feminine subjectivities (Adamson, 2017; Colley & White, 2018; De Coster & Zanoni, 2018), we adopt a qualitative methodology.

The first organisational context we drew upon is a multinational corporate bank with its headquarters in the UK. Banking has long been recognised to have a gendered culture, which is hostile to women, and where women are under-represented at senior levels of the organisation (Blomberg, 2009; Neck, 2015; Tienari, Quack, & Theobald, 2002). The bank has, for example, no women represented on the executive leadership team, and a gender pay gap of between 30% and 73% depending on the division within the bank (data from bank website). We interviewed 20 women from the bank who ranged from associate vice-president (AVP), which is the first move into management, through to managing director which is a strategic leadership post (Appendix A:1). They ranged from late 20's to late 50's in age, had between 3 and 28 years tenure in the bank and came from both the head office and various other offices around the UK. Interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes, with an average of 56 minutes, although only 2

interviews lasted less than 35 minutes, and these were with senior women who were constrained for time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*. Alongside the interviews, the first author took notes and wrote a reflective diary of observations from the interviews.

The second organisation we drew upon is a network marketing organisation (NMO) operating in the beauty market. The NMO is a global American networking marketing organisation selling beauty products generating several billion dollars in revenue in 2017, and with over a million active distributors. Network marketing is a business where independent distributors sell goods and services, and 'recruit' other distributors to their teams (Biggart, 1989). People operate within a structure where their 'downline' is made up of their distributors and their 'upline' is their mentor. In line with other NMOs (Pratt, 2000), individuals hold 'pin titles', after the names of precious stones, for example 'ruby' and 'diamond', which represent their sales volume, accrued from their downline distributors and their own sales (Appendix A:2.1).

Network marketing is gendered work (Benoit, 1997; Biggart, 1989; Sullivan & Delaney, 2017). Within the NMO we studied, there had been a significant shift in the type of person attracted to the business, and in the means of selling and being 'successful'. Sales within the UK had grown exponentially within the last couple of years, due to a new breed of social media-savvy distributors, predominantly young women, selling and recruiting distributors through social networks. Therefore, the organisation holds more similarities to new forms of organising, such as in the gig economy (Shade, 2018); flexible, precarious work (Fleming, 2017; Wall, 2015), which positions women within neo-liberal feminist discourses as micro-entrepreneurs, where the reality is they are micro-earner often working multiple jobs (Shade, 2018).

Whereas full access to the bank was limited, due to issues of confidentiality and bank security, the more open nature of the NMO allowed us to adopt a more ethnographically-inspired approach to data collection. The first author became a distributor for the company, went through the induction and training to be a distributor, attended sales and team meetings over a one-year period, and conducted about 40 hours of observations at these events. This provided a rich source of data. In addition, 16 women were interviewed from the NMO (Appendix A:2). All of the interviewees ranged from executive to 'blue diamond', so they were all 'successful' by NMO terms. Interviews ranged from 21 to 65 minutes with an average of 49 minutes. The interview which lasted 21 minutes was atypical and the all the rest were more than 40 minutes long. These were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*. Both organisations, as well as the individuals interviewed, have been assigned pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

For interviews within both the bank and beauty company we used the same interview schedule (Appendix B), which focused on a range of topics including women's close and distant relationships at work, collaboration and competition, and admiration and distancing from others. The interviews were approached as a conversation, so that the interview schedule was used as a guide to shape the interviews, but allowing for flexibility to lead the conversation. We recognise that interview data is co-constructed (Potter & Hepburn, 2005) and that feminist research is neither disinterested nor objective knowledge (van den Brink, 2015) but rather providing insights into sense-making processes.

We draw upon poststructuralist analysis, particularly a form of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, which 'offers a way of understanding the constructed, historical and contingent nature of social relations through which the sense and meaning of freedom is

experienced' (O'Doherty & Willmott, 2001, p. 468). In this way, we were able to start to consider how subjectivities were constituted through discourse and what subject positions were made available. The data was initially coded into 'chunks' to allow for the data to be collected into themes (Rickett & Roman, 2013). Observation notes and diary entries were also re-read to add a richer picture to the interview data. The first author then worked systematically through each transcript, coding the data, and using an iterative process returning to old transcripts as new themes were added. The software package NVivo was used to code data and manage the volume of data which eventually comprised a total of 1779 minutes of interviews recordings and over 40 hours of observations and reflective journal notes. Both data sets were free coded therefore there were different themes attached to each data set. However, further examination showed similarities across the sets in terms of some of the overarching themes. We drew on a version of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Willig, 2013), which allowed us to consider competition as a discursive construction and, critically for the aims of this study; what was gained from positioning competition is such a way and subsequently what subject positions were made available. Finally we reflected on the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. This resulted in discourses of competition we present here which we saw as discursively constructed in terms of 'abundance' and 'scarcity'.

6.5 Neoliberal feminism and discourses of competition

Within the following section, we present discourses of competition which are framed around scarcity and abundance. First, we consider competition from scarcity where limited roles and opportunities meant women felt they were competing with each other. We then present discourses of competition framed through abundance, where women

felt they were competing with themselves. We see these as forms of neoliberal governance, which show how neoliberal feminism is able to adapt and shift for local variations.

6.5.1 Competition and scarcity: the ‘woman’s slot’

Discourses of scarcity and competition are central to neoliberal capitalism and the enterprising self. We saw discourses of scarcity arising for women in the bank related to a sense of competition for limited roles and opportunities. While neoliberal capitalist organisations, such as the bank, are by their very nature hierarchical and pyramid-shaped, with fewer positions as you rise through the ranks, some of the women we interviewed suggested that double-scarcity existed; not only were there fewer positions generally, there were fewer positions available for *women*.

These limited positions were perceived as intensifying competition so that women were not competing against men; they were competing against other women for these few slots earmarked for women. We see this below in the example from Anna, a Director in the bank, who linked quotas to increased competition between women:

Anna (Director)	I do think that there's probably more female competitiveness actually…I feel as though … they’re all introducing quotas and you have to x, y, z females at different positions…females obviously recognise that, oh, do you know what, potentially there are some senior roles to be had and we’ll compete with each other to see who gets it right, so I think that we’ve started to create that

competitiveness.

The bank had not actually introduced quotas, and Anna is potentially mis-referencing the UK Government's regulatory requirement for the FTSE100 to report board representation, yet the perception that the bank operates a quota system has become a discursive idea to which she has orientated. Consequently Anna suggests quotas are creating positions for women; 'senior roles to be had', implying roles that previously were not perceptibly open to women, or newly-created 'token' positions, for which women are competing against each other. This appears to reference the 'women's slot' (Kanter, 1977, p. 232), special roles for women often created by affirmative action policies. This is confirmed by Olivia (VP) who talks about the competition between women being more 'serious than it is between men'. When pushed as to what she means by 'serious', she replies:

Olivia (VP) In what way are they more serious? I think they're more determined because they want something whereas men I think are a bit more relaxed about it because there are probably more opportunities open for them and therefore, if you take the example of going for different roles, there's another role around the corner for them, whereas I think women don't feel that. The opportunities aren't as broad.

Olivia suggests 'opportunities aren't as broad' for women, directly linking this to creating a heightened state of competition between women that does not exist for men. In fact, she states for men, 'there is another role round the corner'. For Olivia, the

requirement to develop human capital and the self as enterprise, has a particular emphasis on other women as the focus of competition. Again this links to the perception of the 'women's slot'; roles available to women, whereas men dominate the hegemonic position and have free opportunities to go for all roles available.

Whereas Anna blamed quotas for increased competition between women, others in our interviews related it to other aspects of the structural processes within the bank. We see this in the example below from Heidi linking competition between women to the performance structures within the bank, where individual bonuses varied by performance rating:

Heidi (VP) I don't think it's the way we would naturally behave but I think sometimes there is competitiveness that is driven in organisation and anywhere you get performance development, you're instinctively bringing in competition because you've got ratings […] maybe it's a little stronger between women because of the competition is greater.

Performance ratings form part of the 'formal game of inequalities' (Foucault, 2008b, p. 120), in which neoliberal capitalism utilises competition as a form of governance. For Foucault (2008), competition is not 'given', rather it is formalised through an internal logic based on 'formal privilege' (ibid, p. 120). Thus, the bank's systems and processes appear gender-neutral, yet are based on a logic which benefits privilege and maintains inequalities (Acker, 2006; Eisenstein, 2017). Here, Heidi relates competition to 'natural' sex differences between men and women by suggesting that women would not 'naturally behave' in a competitive way, thereby gendering competition to a masculine

trait (Eisenstein, 2017). She then links performance ratings to competition, suggesting therefore that this disadvantages women who are not ‘naturally’ competitive, and who must therefore adapt to fit in. When probed by the interviewer as to why competition is ‘stronger between women’, she states:

Heidi (VP) I do think it’s harder for women, there's no doubt about it. It’s much harder to progress and maybe that natural difficulty has kind of got us instinctively slightly more wary of other women because it’s greater competition.

Here, Heidi states that it is harder for women to progress in the bank, and as a result they are more ‘wary’ of each other. Heidi thus suggests that the double-scarcity discourse creates competition *between* women, rather than men being the focus of this attention, thus women become the threat.

The perceived ‘threat’ of other women to accessing these limited roles or positions was evident in our bank interviews. Heidi, in the previous example, talks about competition between women generating a sense of wariness, whilst other interviewees provided examples of the difficult relationships that this competition created. Hilary, for example, describes her promotion to VP level and subsequent negative experiences with a female colleague:

Hilary (VP) We were supposed to be ‘a team’ but actually, I was very new into my role as VP and very much looking to that person to help me develop and build up, but a lot of the time what I felt was that I would get half

an answer to something, because it was almost like knowledge was power. There was almost this fear that you are coming up, you are rated really highly because you're the new … you've just been promoted all this sort of stuff and are you a threat to me? …I think there was almost this view from her of, well, I don't want to overly help you because are you a threat to my position and success.

Hilary suggests that her promotion to VP level threatened her colleague, who was concerned that she may consequently be displaced. She describes the colleague withholding information as a means of competition through the use of exclusionary tactics and suppression of opportunities. We see here competition embedded within neoliberal capitalism and a form of governance so the focus of attention becomes other women as a threat to the scarcity of positions that are available to women. The structural issues that create a sense of scarcity of roles for women are overlooked, and consideration of change through collective action is negated by neoliberal feminism. This 'threat' of other women is further illustrated by Lizzie:

Lizzie (VP) She actually started to belittle what I was doing to make herself look more important […] and I know that she really wants to be a Director […]. So, whereas I'd just become a VP and she'd been a VP for quite a long time before and is about 10 years older than me and was ready for that. So, probably saw me as a threat…that I was kind of new on the block.

Lizzie describes being 'new on the block' and therefore perceived as a threat to the older, more experienced woman colleague who reacts by 'belittling' Lizzie to 'make herself look more important'. There is perceived to be a double-scarcity logic for women: competition for fewer senior roles and competing for the 'woman's slot'. However, competition between women occurred at all levels of management, particularly focussing on opportunities for advancing through the bank. Within the interviews, we saw both perceptions held by junior women, and lived examples from senior women of this 'threat' of other women rising through the ranks. Sophia for example states that:

Sophia (VP) I think, you know, maybe at more senior levels within the organisation that there's some women that feel like, I don't know, potentially threatened by other women coming through.

The threat and obstruction that other women can cause at senior levels is further illustrated by Bridget who, as a Managing Director, is in a minority position; a 'token' (Kanter, 1977) within the bank. When telling the story of her promotion to MD level, Bridget explains that another senior woman on the promotion panel gave written feedback that 'she [Bridget] needs to think about her posture in meetings'. In explaining this interaction, Bridget says that:

Bridget (MD) I do think that sometimes, there is the element of threat, I think sometimes if you are of a certain, and this is, you know, shouldn't really say this, but of a certain age, or certain stage in their career, where they maybe, in the last 10/15 years of their career, and all of a

sudden, they've got someone in front of them that maybe has a bit longer runway ahead of them you know, younger, and sometimes I do believe that they do see that as, initially, a bit of a, oh, wow, okay, who is this person, you know, so I suppose a little bit of a threat to some extent.

As with the previous examples, Bridget describes the threat that women rising through the ranks presents to other senior women who have gained their 'women's slot'. Thus, within discourses of scarcity, women are focussed on each other as a source of competition, rather than the processes which maintain this competition.

One of the senior women, Hannah, a Director, talked about the positive impact she had on the women in her division, constructing herself as oppositional to the competition between women that prevailed in the bank. She states:

Hannah (Director) That's what my mentees like about me, I will talk about what I have been through […] guidance and coaching to try and understand more about who I am, where my lack of confidence is coming from and understanding those emotions and how to cope with them and that's what helped me on my journey, I am still on that journey and it was a whole load of personal development. I know that if I am going to go to MD in the next few years I need to continue to grow and continue to understand these things and I talk to them quite a lot about that and I think if female senior leaders are more open about it, I think people will go 'ah, right'.

Hannah talks about being on a journey of self-improvement, to manage her confidence and consequently 'grow' to become an MD. This speaks to neoliberal discourses of self-improvement, focus on the individual, and confidence (Gill & Orgad, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014b). However, Hannah suggests 'if female senior leaders are more open about it' thus constructing this as something which is counter-cultural within the bank. Our interviews supported this; while Hannah's quote was not typical of our bank interviews, it reflects elements of neoliberal feminism as a focus on the self that was more prevalent in the beauty company which we turn to next.

6.5.2 Competition as abundance: everything is up to you

Whilst the predominant discourse of competition in the bank related to inequalities created through neoliberal capitalism, which focussed competition between women fighting for limited roles and opportunities, we saw a different expression of competition in the beauty company. Within the beauty company, competition was presented as counter-cultural and repudiated through neoliberal discourses whereby success was attributed to individualistic entrepreneurial effort. We see this in the following example from Izzie who contrasts 'traditional' business with that of the beauty company:

Izzie I think traditional business…the way the women work together I think sometimes there is a lot of not necessarily bitchiness but talking, there is always some sort of negativity if there is a heavy female

environment that you know that it's going to be, falling out and what not, bitchiness and whatever, and here I don't know why it's so different, but it is. I think because everyone can have the same level of success, nobody is standing in anybody's way, you can't. We physically can't do it because if they are putting in the effort they will reach wherever they want to.

Izzie demonstrates here the discourses of abundance that we found recurring within the beauty company, where instead of a pyramid structure with limited senior positions, the beauty company was portrayed as a level playing field. Izzie contrasts the potential 'negativity' of a 'female-dominated environment' to that of the beauty company, attributing this more positive environment to individual effort, as 'nobody is standing in anybody's way'. The focus of competition thus becomes internalised through a form of neoliberal feminist discourse, where success is attributed to individual effort, autonomy and choice (Gill & Scharff, 2011). We see this further evidenced in the quote from Zara:

Zara With this business model it's … I don't know any other where you really want everybody to do well; there's no back-stabbing, you sing the praises of everybody […] so what is very lovely about this business model is that you get paid in accordance, it rewards you, with the effort that you put in.

Like Izzie, Zara links the positive environment at the NMO; 'no back-stabbing', to individual effort and reward. Zara suggests that externally focused competition is negated through a focus on individual effort. This is supported by Daisy who contrasts the NMO to her previous role as a loss adjuster:

Daisy — When there was an opportunity for one of the girls to go for something, there wasn't a lot of support because everyone wanted the same job, but there was only room for one, whereas here there is room for everyone. […] So it's there for the taking and if you put in the effort and you want it, it's there. But no one is sort of critical or jealous because it's there for you as well, so it's up to you if you have it or not. So there is no need to be envious or anything.

Daisy talks about competition experienced in her previous role framing this in similar terms to women at the bank; as limited roles available that women had to fight for. However, in the beauty company she contrasts this saying, 'there is room for everyone' and therefore no need for jealousy. We see the same view of abundance in the following quote from Lexi:

Lexi — Here you are not competing with anyone except yourself within [*name of NMO*], but sure in the corporate world, people going after bonuses or target driven incentives, things like that, yeah.

The internalised and individualised focus of competition we see from Lexi and others in our interviews rests on individual effort, autonomy and free-market choice, yet ignores the inherent biases that exist within the beauty company. The women proving most successful within the beauty company were maximising social media to promote an aspirational lifestyle, which they termed 'attraction marketing'. This drew upon a privileged mode of femininity (Lewis, 2014) as these women were young, physically attractive, white, able-bodied and cis-gender. It also draws on postfeminist ideals of femininity as beauty, glamour and fitness are the 'hallmarks of postfeminism' (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017, p. 4). Neoliberal discourses masked these inequalities. For example, Francesca talks about these social media-savvy women and their success:

Francesca	How are these women are doing this so quickly so well, so fast, these younger women, and what is it, and I sit down and I think well I know it's more natural to them, doing this and that, being girly, but I'm not girly-girly. So I'm thinking just leave them to it, it works really well for them. I've got to find my own way and not be envious. It will just take a little bit longer and I have to realise that.

Francesca acknowledges the younger women's success as they are 'girly', within this context an idealised, emphasised femininity. Thus, Francesca references that some modes of femininity are privileged over others (Lewis, 2014), but then states that she should not 'be envious', but 'find her own way'. In this way, neoliberal feminism acts as a form of self-governance, where the precarious nature of the NMO is ignored (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017) and inequalities are repudiated and become 'unspeakable'

(Gill, 2014). This neoliberal discourse is described by Adamson (2017, p. 317) as advocating the ideal neoliberal worker, who is ‘‘compelled never to rest’, stretching herself beyond limits in order to self-improve’. Thus, modes of competition in the beauty company rest with the individual and the solution to failure was self-belief. This is demonstrated by Scarlett; who holds the pin title of blue diamond, making her a senior figure within the business:

Scarlett — I say to people okay, look where you are in your business now, your business is a physical manifestation of the level of your belief. So if you’ve got a really, really strong business with a good income and it’s growing, it means that your self-belief is in the same position […] so basically we say to people if you want your business to grow, you need to grow yourself, and the business is a physical manifestation of your level of self-belief.

Here Scarlett directly equates running and growing a successful business to self-belief, thus disavowing any external factors which may impact on an individual’s ability to grow their business. We see here how neoliberalism constructs the ‘enterprising self’ (Gill, 2014); autonomous and self-reinventing (Gill, 2008) to maximise business performance. These mantras of self-belief and individual responsibility we saw in our interviews were linked to self-development and ‘journeys’ of self-improvement. While self-development focused on developing belief, it also involved self-regulating, so that negativity was controlled and suppressed. Here again we see the focus on competing

with yourself to be a 'better', more positive individual, thus echoing Gill and Orgad (2015) discussion of the gendered imperative to be confident. Megan states:

Megan It is more a personal thing, it is something that I'm working on […] it is the comparison and, you know, so it doesn't come from other people, it's just an issue with, really with me, that I'm working on, is that I tend to compare myself to other people, you know, […] and I beat myself up. But that is a negative trait that is coming from me, that is not coming from anyone else.

Megan suggests she must work to not compare herself to others and 'beat herself up', in other words, not to focus on competing with other women and comparing herself to them, but on the battle of competition with yourself. Megan talks about this as something that she is 'working on' directly referencing this internalised self-transforming as a form of human capital (Rottenberg, 2014a, 2018; Scharff, 2016).

Networking marketing companies are precarious (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017), but responsibility for failure fell to individuals, for example Isabella expresses:

Isabella I think network marketing, in general, teaches you to discover about yourself, being self-aware, so you realise who you are exactly in there […] for most people, they're not responsible if anything, you know. If they lose their job, it's because of the economy, it's because of other people, it's because of their manager, it's because of this, it's because of that. So there's a lot of blame… whereas, you know,

when you come into network marketing, the first thing that's said is that it's up to you. Everything is up to you. So there's no point in saying, my mentor was crap, because that won't wash with anybody.

As Isabella states, 'everything is up to you' and individuals are solely responsible for their success, thus repudiating external factors and placing the focus of competition with the individual self; your own weaknesses. As Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis (2017, p. 353) state, 'in a neoliberal discourse those who are not successful are portrayed as failures as a consequence of individual effort or choice'. Isabella confirms this in the proceeding quote, suggesting individuals must internalise their own success or failure as a consequence of self-awareness, thereby negating the influence of external factors. Scarlett supports this when discussing Daisy, who had been very successful very quickly rising to a high pin title:

Scarlett This is why Daisy is so successful because she has absolute belief in herself, in the business, in the products, no matter what anybody says to her, she never ever be shaken, but these people have such low levels of self-belief, as soon as somebody says no, or they make a criticism, they are just completely thrown off course and they lose their power and they lose their attraction, people are just not attracted to want to work with them.

Here, Scarlett talks about Daisy's success being due to her 'absolute self-belief', suggesting that Daisy has won the battle with herself and is no longer competing against

her own negativity. For Gill and Orgad (2015), self-belief is a symptom of the neoliberal imperative to be confident, and we see Daisy being praised as she can ‘never ever be shaken’; she has become an ideal neoliberal subject. Furthermore, Scarlett says that in losing self-belief, women lose their ‘power’ and ‘attraction’, thus displaying a form of devalued femininity, from which other women create distance. As Gill and Orgad (2017) argue, lack of confidence is rendered abject and abhorrent by neoliberalism; we see this demonstrated here in Scarlett’s assertion, relating lack of self-belief to women losing their attraction. This abundance neoliberal discourse is seen as a freedom from old gendered constraints, so that women can take up new empowered femininities (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017). This internalises and individualises success, consequently individuals are ‘responsiblised’ (Elias & Gill, 2017, p. 63), self-managing and autonomous, with self-belief being the barrier to overcome. Ideal neoliberal femininities are constructed as empowered and entrepreneurial individuals on a journey of self-improvement to battle the internal competition they feel with their own lack of self-belief. The focus of competition is thus the self.

6.6 Discussion

The purpose of the article was to consider how neoliberal feminism adapts and shifts to context through examining discourses of competition. We showed that discourses of competition are rendered into a neoliberal form of governance which constricts women in different ways. In doing so, we seek to contribute to a growing body of literature considering the hegemonic and pervasive nature of neoliberalism, its relationship with neoliberal feminism and subsequently how this constitutes subjectivities (De Coster & Zanoni, 2018; Elias & Gill, 2017; Gill, 2014; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Rottenberg, 2014a,

2014b, 2017, 2018). For Foucault (1984, 2008), neoliberalism employs technologies of government, such as competition, in which individuals are controlled through being encouraged to work on themselves and develop their own human capital to become economically self-sufficient. We saw this form of neoliberal governance in both contexts, albeit with a different focus.

First, we looked at discourses of competition in the bank, which were framed through scarcity, where women were competing for a limited number of senior positions available. Discourses of scarcity created a sense of *competition between women,* subsequently women were facing a double-scarcity; not only were they competing for limited opportunities, there was a perception that only certain roles, the ‘women’s slot’ (Kanter, 1977), were available for women. Thus the focus of competition became other women who were perceived as a threat (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Scharff, 2016). We saw this particularly around junior women rising through the ranks, challenging senior women for their ‘slot’. In the bank, neoliberal capitalism created a sense of scarcity (O'Neil, 2015), which was maintained through structural means and relating competition to a masculine characteristic better suited to the purportedly gender-neutral performance measures within the bank (Eisenstein, 2017). Competition through scarcity encouraged the women to individualise and see other women as the focus of competition, thus negating collective action as a response to women’s minority position or a consideration of the structural issues and barriers (Rottenberg, 2014b). This speaks to a neoliberal feminist discourse where, through including feminism within the organisational sphere, feminism accommodates rather than challenges neoliberal rationality. Women are encouraged to ‘lean in’ (Sandberg, 2013) to organisations,

negating challenge to the deeper structural issues that exist within capitalism (Rottenberg, 2014b).

Next, we looked at discourses of competition in the beauty company, which we conceptualised through an abundance discourse. Success in the beauty company was presented as obtainable for individuals who were able to cultivate the right skills and abilities such as confidence and self-belief. Thus women were called to work on developing themselves and the focus of competition became internal; women were *competing with themselves,* self-transforming and reinventing to overcome internal barriers and lack of self-belief (Gill & Orgad, 2017; Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2015). A prevailing neoliberalism of autonomy, independence and personal responsibility moulded the hegemonic discourses in the beauty company (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017). Sørensen (2017) argues that individual choice is a signifier of a neoliberal culture and, we saw 'choice' discourse in our interviews as individuals were positioned as free agents working on their own path to success and thus 'responsibilised' (Budgeon, 2015; Elias & Gill, 2017). The focus of competition became an individual battle against self-belief, where women embarked on a continuous project of self-improvement to become empowered individuals (Rottenberg, 2014a). Furthermore, neoliberalism within the beauty company obscured the privileged modes of some forms of femininity (Lewis, 2014) where, through social media, young, white, attractive women were presented as an idealised femininity; consequently gaining financial success and rewards. Yet neoliberalism meant that these inequalities could not be called out, as women were 'on their own individual journey', what Piketty (2014) has referred to as silencing around aspects of social difference, inequality and

disadvantage. Neoliberalism constrained femininities and made inequalities unspeakable (Gill, 2014; Kelan, 2014).

Our research has two important and interrelated implications. First, our research highlights the fluid and adaptable nature of neoliberalism and supports what other scholars have referred to as neoliberalism's ability to absorb and disarm criticism (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Littler, 2017). Rottenberg (2018) argues that while we recognise feminism's co-optation by neoliberal capitalism, we still need to investigate the intricate and complex interactions between neoliberalism and feminism. Within this article we sought to address this. In the bank, discourses of competition spoke more to Michel Foucault's form of enterprise as self, where neoliberal capitalism creates inequalities to artificially maintain a sense of scarcity and competition between the women. The beauty company drew on neoliberal feminism's discourses of self and empowerment, which were more internally focussed. We therefore show how neoliberal feminism is able to adapt and morph to context. However, in *both* settings, neoliberal feminism sustained rather than challenged the systematic structures which created inequalities. It shifted focus away from women's precarious position in the NMO and the structural inequalities that existed in the bank. Thus we make a contribution to our understanding of neoliberal feminism, which we suggest is adaptable, widespread with local variations, yet in both contexts operating in a 'dangerous liaison' with capitalism (Eisenstein, 2017).

Second, while neoliberal feminism is fluid and adaptable, in both our contexts it damaged women in unique ways. Within both the bank and the beauty company neoliberal feminism concealed structural inequalities by validating an individualist ideology (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017). As Sørensen (2017, p. 310) argues, the

neoliberal language of ‘choice’ contributes to the silencing process of othering such that power structures are hidden and produce ‘dichotomies and difference by the appearance of individual agency’. Our research supports this. However, we argue that in the beauty company, internalisation of competition can denote a ‘deeper’, more subversive form of exploitation (Gill, 2008) by turning the focus inwards, so women are continuously failing (Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006). Consequently, we argue that neoliberal feminism in the bank and the beauty company meant women suffered in *both* forms of organising as the differing discourses of competition in either organisation did not impact the gender order or the systemic inequalities in either context. However, in line with others (Elias & Gill, 2017; Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017; Gill & Orgad, 2017; McRobbie, 2015) we argue that neoliberalism in the beauty company is potentially more subversive through its internalisation and silencing processes. Therefore, we make a contribution to understanding how neoliberal feminism binds women, but in unique ways.

6.7 Conclusion

This paper explored how differing discourses of competition are framed with neoliberal feminism as a form of governance. In the bank, the focus of competition was between women, and in the NMO, women competed with themselves. Yet, in both contexts, competition acted as a form of governance, regulating behaviour through an unwritten ‘conduct of conduct’ so that individuals are controlled through rational techniques. Thus, it extends our understanding of the fluid and adaptable nature of neoliberalism, which is wide-ranging, but shifts and adapts to context to covertly constrain women. Billing (2011, p. 314; see also Lewis, 2014) argued that instead of focusing on women’s

exclusion from organisations, we need to developing ‘more sophisticated ways of interpreting women’s experiences in management (and other organization) positions’. Considering how neoliberal feminism works hand-in-hand, its ‘dangerous liaison’ (Eisenstein, 2017) with neoliberal capitalism to enact forms of governance, which constrain subjectivities and silence critique is one way in which we can understand the complexity of organisational processes. Further research is required to consider how women can resist regimes of truth and develop strategies to overcome the normalising effects of this discourse. We also call for further research to consider the affective labour that the focus on internalisation has, as we see this as a deeper, more corrosive form of governance. Overall, the paper broadens our understanding of the shifting nature of neoliberal feminism, which is complicit, rather than critical of neoliberal capitalism, constraining and constituting subjectivities through normalising discourses which (re)create inequalities.

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7 Discussion

Within this concluding chapter, I summarise the main findings of the research, before moving to consider the contribution made within the thesis as a whole. I then turn to examine how these findings can be addressed and implemented within organisations, before concluding with a discussion of the limitations of my research, and future directions of research.

7.1 Key findings

The aim of this thesis was to consider how neoliberalism and postfeminism have become ingrained within organisational life as a gendered form of governance. Within this thesis, I drew on a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberalism as a political rationality that constructs individuals as entrepreneurial subjects within market values and domains (Harvey, 2007; Brown, 2003; Rose, 1999). Postfeminism was positioned as a sensibility or discursive construction, which frames our contemporary common sense on gender and has a governance element (Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017; Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017). The divergence between the two concepts is somewhat contested and, within this thesis, I have used them somewhat interchangeably. However, following Gill (2016, 2017), I would argue that postfeminism can be conceived as a gendered form of neoliberalism.

Within the empirical articles of this thesis, I started to explore ways in which neoliberalism constitutes subjectivities and stifles criticism by obscuring structural inequalities. Much of the extant literature explores how neoliberalism and postfeminism intertwine and work together to fashion both femininities and feminism (Butler, 2013; Fraser, 2009; Gill, 2008; Prugl, 2015; Lewis, 2014). The ideal neoliberal subject is

constituted within a range of discourses, for example; ‘balance’ where a happy work-life balance is a feminist ideal (Adamson, 2017; Rottenberg, 2018, 2014; Sørensen, 2017), ‘choice’ where women’s career choices are individualised to a choice discourse (Budgeon, 2015; Gill & Scharff, 2011), and freedom, autonomy and empowerment (Sullivan & Delaney, 2016; Gill & Orgad, 2011; 2015). I would argue that these discourses can be conceived as Foucauldian technologies of government which regulate the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault, 1984). Thus, these mechanisms of government obscure inequalities. For example: choice biography obscures those structural issues which hide women’s lack of choice; empowerment discourses individualises women as being responsible for their own success; mantras of confidence and self-belief internalise and psychologise women’s success (or failure). Furthermore, these discourses ignore social and economic inequalities around class, race and gender (Sullivan & Delaney, 2016); resulting in a neoliberal feminism that splits and divides women, so they are continuously upheld against a neoliberal ideal femininity (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017, Baker & Kelan, 2018; Elias & Gill, 2018).

The individualising and responsibilising discourses of neoliberalism are a theme that runs throughout my research and one which, I would argue, is core to understanding neoliberalism and postfeminism as forms of governance, which fashions femininities and feminism. Others have argued that neoliberalism and postfeminism are increasingly becoming a psychological project, calling on women to ‘turn within’ (Gill & Orgad, 2017; Gill, 2017; Scharff, 2016). In chapter four, I empirically developed our understanding of the psychological project of neoliberalism through exploring how New Age spiritualties had been co-opted within the NMO as a form of spiritual neoliberal governance. Using Christina Scharff’s (2016) and Rosalind Gill’s (2017) notion of the

psychic and affective life of neoliberalism, I argued that the psychic life of neoliberalism in the NMO called upon women to develop the ‘right dispositions’, which were based around positivity and gratitude, and the affective life presented ‘feeling rules’, which constrained which emotional states were allowed, and made abject those who did not conform to these feeling rules. New Age spirituality was co-opted within neoliberal discourses to hold individuals accountable; failure within the NMO was linked to women who were unable to become ideal neoliberal subjects with the ‘right’ dispositions.

In chapter six, I examined discourses of competition, which varied in relation to my two organisational settings. In the bank, discourses of competition could be framed within a Foucauldian interpretation of individuals as ‘entrepreneurs of self’. Thus, competition arose out of a sense of scarcity. Yet this was gendered; women faced a double-scarcity of limited senior positions within the hierarchical structure of the bank, *combined* with a perception that there were fewer positions open and available to women. In the NMO, the dominant discourses were one of abundance, suggesting that everybody could succeed, as long as they were able to develop the ‘right’ skills and abilities. Subsequently, competition became an individual project to self-improve and ‘work within’, to become the ideal neoliberal subject (Bröckling, 2005). In considering discourses of competition in the bank and the NMO, I was able to illustrate the fluid nature of neoliberalism, which is able to shift and adapt to context. However, one clear similarity exists; in each case, women were held responsible and accountable. In the bank, women were expected to be economically self-sufficient within free market rationality, where they were competing with each other for limited roles and resources. Within the abundance logic of the NMO however, women were still responsibilised,

albeit in different ways, through being called upon to develop the right skills and characteristics. Through considering two organisational settings, my research therefore extends our understanding of how women are increasingly seen as generic human capital, who must conduct cost-benefit analysis to remain viable (Rottenberg, 2018, Brown, 2003). Although the mechanisms of governance and discourses may change, the outcome is the same. Neoliberalism is hegemonic and pervasive; the discourses are so ingrained within organisational life that they become obscured. Neoliberalism has a particularly toxic impact on women, turning the focus inwards so that, within different contexts, women compete with each other, compete with themselves, and individualise and responsibilise failure. Through these mechanisms, neoliberalism silences critique and works hand-in-hand with neoliberal capitalism.

Neoliberalism and postfeminism have shaped feminine subjectivities, but it has also impacted on organisational feminism. I started this thesis with a recent personal example of attending a 'Women in Business' event, where confidence was hailed as the solution to inequalities and women's achievement. This epitomises the individualising and responsibilising discourses that I suggest are a key theme within my thesis. However, it also demonstrates neoliberal feminism in action. 'Women in Business' events, such as these, appear to work on a collective level, but they aim to 'fix' women's social and human capital deficits, while individualising career experiences (Mickey, 2019; Kalev, Kelly & Dobbin, 2006). Neoliberalism has displaced liberal feminism with a form of neoliberal feminism that offers no critique of neoliberalism (Rottenberg, 2014, 2018). Furthermore, neoliberal feminism works on market rationality, which benefits and supports neoliberal capitalism (Fraser, 2013; Prugl, 2015; Eisenstein, 2017; Rottenberg, 2014, 2018), by constituting feminine subjectivities

within neoliberal terms. While we have seen a rise of feminist activism 'on the ground' (Rottenberg, 2018, p. 12), and even more so online, the question remains as to how far these activist movements can create real systemic change, and if this will cross into organisational discourses?

Much of the extant literature suggests collective action would provide a solution to the inequalities obscured by neoliberalism and postfeminism's relationship with neoliberal capitalism, which calls upon women to individualise and responsibilise their own success or failure. In chapter five, I turned to the bank to consider what happens when women collectively perform or mobilise femininities. Within my research, mobilising femininities was presented as either a traditional form of nurturing femininity or, to protect women from men mobilising masculinities. Thus, rather than provide a challenge to the *status quo*, within my interviews with women in the bank, mobilising femininities became an apolitical support mechanism recurring to essentialised notions of femininity. Therefore, this form of collective action was not enough, in isolation, to challenge the inequalities that existed. I suggest that this further demonstrates the 'stickiness' (Ahmed, 2014) of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, which are so entrenched within organisational life that they are difficult to shake off. The question therefore remains as to how we can start to challenge the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism, neoliberal feminism and postfeminism in organisations.

7.2 Contribution

The aim of this thesis was to explore ways in which neoliberalism and postfeminism have become entrenched in organisations as a form of governance, contributing to an

enhanced understanding of how these discourses constitute and subsequently regulate feminine subjectivities. In addressing this, I make a number of original contributions through the research articles presented in chapters three through to chapter six. A summary of the contribution within each article is presented in Figure 5 below.

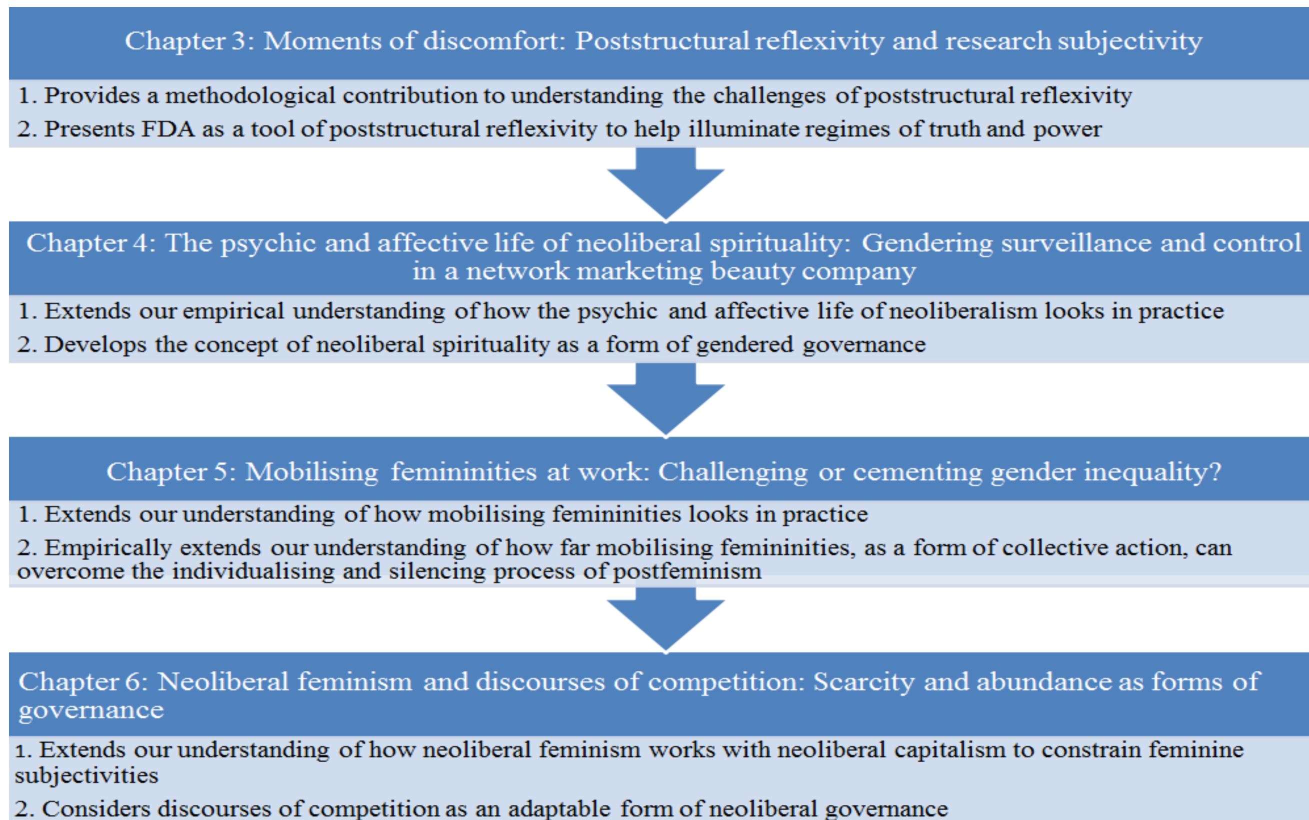

Figure 5: Summary of contribution made in each article

In addition to the contributions made within each paper, I make a number of broader contributions throughout this thesis. The principle contribution of this research is in extending our understanding of how discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism are enacted *within organisations*. A significant amount of theorising on postfeminism, neoliberalism and neoliberal feminism draws on cultural studies and textual analysis. For example, if we looks at the postfeminist literature, Rosalind Gill's seminal work in this area draws on contemporary Anglo-American media (Gill, 2007; 2008a, 2016), the representation of women within advertising (2008b), textual analysis from an online Women in Business community group (Litossliti, Gill & Garvia Favaro, 2019), analysis of neoliberal feminist books such as Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* and Katty Kay and Claire Shipman's *The Confidence Code* (Gill & Orgad, 2015; 2017; 2018), women's magazines (Gill & Orgad, 2018) and smart-phone apps (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Catherine Rottenberg, who advanced the concept of neoliberal feminism, also works predominantly in cultural studies, examining texts such as Ivanka Trump's *Women who Work* (2018), *Lean in* and Anne-Marie Slaughter's article in *The Atlantic* titled *Why Women Still Can't Have It All* (2014, 2017), as well as examples from popular culture and the mainstream media (2018). While exceptions do exist; Gill (2014) considered academics and the neoliberalisation of universities, Gill, Kelan, and Scharff (2017) looked at various research projects on cultural workers, ICT workers, professional service firms, and a business school to theorise a postfeminist sensibility at work, and Lewis (2014) considered entrepreneurship and postfeminism, studies applying a critique of postfeminism or neoliberal feminism to organisations are limited. I therefore make a contribution to advancing our understanding of how neoliberalism and postfeminism is enacted within organisational life in two ways.

First, while a limited number of studies have started to empirically consider postfeminism and organisation studies, this study makes an original contribution by comparing discourses across *two* alternative organisations. In examining two quite different forms of organisation, I demonstrate the pervasiveness of neoliberalism which, I suggest, shifts, adapts to context, and is able to co-opt and transmute in a multitude of areas. While others (c.f. Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017), have recognised postfeminism to be adaptable and multifaceted, this thesis provides empirical examples of how postfeminism and neoliberalism is able to adapt and co-opt different discourses; be it neoliberal spirituality or competition. However, core to neoliberal discourse is a call on women to individualise and be responsible for developing their own human capital. Individualising discourses normalise women's experiences and obscure inequalities which, through neoliberal feminism, work as a gendered form of governance to support neoliberal capitalism. Therefore, this thesis contributes to furthering our understanding of the intricate relationship between neoliberalism, neoliberal feminism and capitalism, and the importance of considering the contextual delineation of neoliberalism.

Second, in studying the NMO beauty company, I contribute to an understanding of how neoliberalism works as a form of governance in alternative forms of organising and, in contrast to the extant literature; one which is dominated by women at all levels of the organisation. Sullivan and Delaney's (2016, p. 9) study of a competitor network marketing organisation to the one I researched, focused on a narrative analysis of 'success stories' posted on the company's website, which they recognise are marketing materials 'produced for particular organisational purposes'. Thus, my empirical study speaks to the 'further qualitative fieldwork', that Sullivan and Delaney (2016, p.20)

suggest can illuminate the practices which sustain subjectivities within these forms of organising. Furthermore, empirical organisational research into neoliberalism has predominantly looked at women within more traditional forms of organising, for example, accounting and finance (Baker & Kelan, 2018), or ICT, Business School, and professional services work (Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017). Those studies which look at cultural workers or flexible workers, again tend to be focussed on male-dominated industries, for example, product designers (Ronen, 2017), classically trained musicians (Scharff, 2015; Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017), or the gig economy of *Uber* and *TaskRabbit* (Shade, 2018).

The NMO I studied sits in contrast to these as it is dominated by women at all levels of the organisation, women are the highest income earners within the business, and yet it holds characteristics of organisations more attuned to those within the gig economy; precarious, flexible work (Shade, 2018). It is worth reiterating that the women I interviewed only represented those who are 'successful' within the NMO; the vast majority of women who become distributors fail to make a living wage and many may exit the business quickly. However, this research focus thus provides insight into idealised subjectivities within these new forms of organising. Furthermore, while research has traditionally considered the 'ideal worker' in relation to a masculine norm (Acker, 1990; 1992), this thesis therefore makes a contribution to an understanding of how feminine subjectivities are constituted without the 'phantom male norm' (Billing, 2011), albeit in neoliberal terms.

As illustration, in Catherine Rottenberg's most recent work (2018, p. 94), she argues the 'mobilization of futurity as key to producing this neoliberal subject', referencing increasing calls for women to postpone motherhood, in a planned and strategic way,

which makes the most of their entrepreneurial self-investment as a generic form of human capital. Rottenberg (2018, p. 94, emphasis in original) describes futurity 'as a technology of self is arguably *most evident* in neoliberalism's hailing of young upwardly mobile women who are still constantly told that they must worry about their "biological clock" if they want to "have it all"'. In this way, Rottenberg (2018) argues that women are becoming generic human capital who will outsource care work and reproduction to remain as aspirational subjects with human capital. Again, this thesis demonstrates how contextual this is, with most theorising framed within organisations which are based in an 'institutional logic [...] anchored to masculine forms of isomorphism'[9] (Sayce & Boone Parson, 2012, p. 272). Within the NMO however, women talked of becoming financially successful to 'retire their husbands' and become the sole income earner, and family life and flexibility were used as tools of attraction marketing. Thus, subjectivities move beyond generic human capital; instead they recurred to postfeminist essentialist notions of femininity based around beauty, motherhood and sexual relations (Lewis et. al. 2014), *combined* with entrepreneurialism. This combined feminine, entrepreneurial subjectivity was sometimes referenced by my interviewees as becoming a 'boss-mummy'.

In summary, this thesis therefore makes a contribution to furthering our understanding of how feminine neoliberal subjectivities are constituted within alternative forms of organising. This is particularly pertinent given the changing nature of work which is shaped by precarious, flexible, gig economy type roles and the need to consider

[9] Rottenberg (2018), for example, references Apple and Facebook who controversially offered to pay for employee's egg freezing.

digitisation and gender relations. These are areas of research that call for further theorising through applying an intersectional consideration of the particular impact of new forms of organising on women.

The final contribution of this thesis is in adding to a growing body of work (c.f. Kelan, 2009; Mavin & Grandy, 2013; McDonald, 2013) which argues the advantages of carefully combining the ethnomethodological and poststructural approaches to gender as a practice. In the Introduction chapter, I briefly conceptualised the social constructionist approach to gender which sees gender as a practice. I described the two most often used approaches to the 'doing' of gender; the ethnomethodological approach of West & Zimmerman (1987), which sees gender as something one does in recurring interactions with others, and the poststructuralist approach of Butler (1990, 2004), which sees gender as a discursive effect that appears natural through being ritualised through constant competition. I discussed how the two approaches hold similarities however, others have suggested that their epistemological starting point is so different, they should not be used inter-changeably (Moloney & Fenstermaker, 2002).

In chapter two, I discussed how the changing and evolving nature of research which is conducted over a long period of time; such as when completing a part-time PhD, meant that my original research questions shifted. Originally I started the research process looking at femininities at work, hence taking a more ethnomethodological approach to gender. My first reading of the bank material used this approach and stuck closely to my original research question. However, an explosion of literature on postfeminism and neoliberalism influenced this research question so that, ultimately, this thesis considered subjectivities and discourse; a position more attuned to Butler's approach to gender.

This enabled a second reading of the material which took a more abstract approach and looked at discourse.

Whilst this approach was not a deliberate strategy adopted at the beginning of my PhD research, it provided a number of benefits. Firstly, taking a different gender 'lens' to apply to the material allowed the material to be repurposed and reframed in different contexts depending on which lens is being applied. As illustration, in chapter 5 and chapter 6, I reuse the quote from Hannah, a Director at the bank:

'That's what my mentees like about me, I will talk about what I have been through [...] guidance and coaching to try and understand more about who I am, where my lack of confidence is coming from and understanding those emotions and how to cope with them and that's what helped me on my journey, I am still on that journey and it was a whole load of personal development. I know that if I am going to go to MD in the next few years I need to continue to grow and continue to understand these things and I talk to them quite a lot about that and I think if female senior leaders are more open about it, I think people will go 'ah, right'.

In chapter five, which focussed on femininities, I use the example to illustrate mobilising femininities as a form of nurturing, therefore considering how supporting each other is a form of doing gender in these interactions. In chapter 6, which looks at discourses of competition, I use the example as part of the journey of self-improvement, psychologising discourses prevalent within neoliberal feminism, which were more akin to those found in the NMO than the bank. Thus applying a different lens presented an opportunity to frame the material in different ways.

My research therefore makes a methodological contribution which supports Kelan's (2009, p. 52) argument about the advantages of a careful combination of the two approaches. The ethnomethodological approach focused on the production side; the subject producing norms, for example in the case above, femininity as nurturing. The poststructural approach can illuminate the produced side, the subject as produced through discourse; for example, Hannah as a neoliberal subject atypical of discourses of competition between women within the bank. Careful combination potentially allows a fuller understanding of gender as a practice in both the micro-interactions and at a broader level of discourse. Identifying micro-interactions in which gender is done and recognising discourses which continue to constrain feminine subjectivities, has the potential to offer a fuller challenge to destabilising gender inequalities.

7.3 Applying of the findings to practice: Challenging neoliberal and postfeminist discourses

Within this thesis, I have adopted a poststructuralist approach to understand neoliberalism and postfeminism as forms of governance. In applying my findings to consider ways in which to challenge the normalising effects of neoliberalism, I first wish to return to poststructuralism to consider dominant discourses, agency and social change. Poststructuralism suggests that by making visible discourse and discursive practices, dominant discourses can be undermined and their normalising effect diminished. Foucault (1981) suggests that normative discourses are continuously under threat of subversion from the mobilisation of alternative discourses. Subject positions can therefore be negotiated and power relations challenged, which opens up possibilities for action, agency, and subsequently social change (Butler, 1992).

For poststructuralists, language becomes the site of negotiation, and resistance to inequalities and discourse is the focus of attention (Burman & Parker, 1993). If we consider discourses as transient and fragile, we can start to consider this as a focus for change. Feminists such as Walby (1990), for example, looked at how patriarchy was able to shift and mutate from the private, with women being controlled by husbands and fathers, to the public, whereby women are included, yet segregated within public life. If we consider this in relation to neoliberalism, within this thesis I presented shifting discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism, suggesting its adaptable and flexible nature. Understanding these shifting and mutating discourses is one step towards challenging the pervasiveness of gender inequalities obscured by neoliberalism. A focus upon attempting to deconstruct and challenge dominant discourses and power relations within specific sites provides an opportunity to open up debate, rather than offering grand solutions to meta-discourses, such as neoliberalism and patriarchy. Thus, adopting a poststructuralist approach, by bringing attention to the neoliberal discourses which create and sustain inequalities, is one possible strategy to affect change.

In practice, bringing attention to, and challenging, dominant discourses remains problematic. One illustration of the difficulty of shifting discourses can be seen in recent events which have occurred since conducting the interviews for my research. In 2018, we observed a shift in relation to feminist activism highlighting women's oppression, which received much attention in the mainstream media and online. The New York Times (2018), for example, declared 2018 an 'era of #MeToo and Time's Up', highlighting the global shift towards collective action through providing examples of women in Spain going on 'domestic strike', women in Manila taking to the streets to protest at the violation of women's rights, and women in South Korea handing out white

roses vowing to keep up the #MeToo campaign. Yet, for each step forward in highlighting women's oppression, there has arguably been a backlash and further entrenching of power structures. The focus of #MeToo in some of the media has for example, been presented as a site of feminist conflict; reporting on the generational divide among feminists, pitching women against each other (see for example The Guardian, May 2018). In 2018, Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed to the US Supreme Court despite testimony from Professor Christine Blasey Ford that he tried to rape her; she is now in hiding, having been branded a liar. A #HimToo backlash has positioned men as victims of radical feminists, with Donald Trump – whose election in itself presents a monumental step backwards for women's rights - calling it 'a scary time for young men in America'. Women's bodies are still a site of continual monitoring and patriarchal gaze, from Teresa May's dancing, to a row about Serena William's catsuit, to a discussion around Meghan Markel shutting her own car door. More disturbing, 2018 saw a rise in the 'incel' community, with two women killed in a yoga studio in Florida and in a separate incident 10 people killed in Toronto in an incel-inspired attack. 'Incel' is an online group of men, short for 'involuntarily celebate', who promote misogyny and are increasingly advocating violence towards women. In the business world, in December 2018, Bloomberg ran an article with the headline; 'Wall Street Rule for the #MeToo Era: avoid women at all costs'. In it, a former Morgan Stanley managing director was quoted as saying that women raising awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace was 'creating a sense of walking on eggshells'.

These examples show the pervasiveness of patriarchy and women's oppression. As Rosalind Gill (2016, p. 261) states, 'just as increasing anti-capitalist activism does not lead us to the false assumption that capitalism no longer exists, so too does increased

feminist activism not mean that pre-feminist, anti-feminist, and post-feminist ideas are not still in circulation with powerful force'. Gill (2016) further suggests that the idea of displacement; that new assumptions or discourses can replace old ones is misguided, and that multiple and contradictory ideas can co-exist at the same time. Thus, if we take women's sexual harassment as something which is undeniably overtly damaging and morally abhorrent, yet faces a backlash, what does that say therefore for challenging neoliberal and postfeminist discourses? Discourses of choice, empowerment, and confidence seem on the surface benign and yet, as I have argued within this thesis, are subversive, as they are tied to the psychological and internalising project of neoliberalism and maintaining patriarchal privilege within organisations. If sexual harassment proves a point of contention, how challenging will it be to bring attention to the covertly damaging impact of these discourses? In sum, complex, novel and multifaceted strategies are needed to challenge and destabilise these dominant discourses, a feat which cannot be easily reduced to simple solutions and action plans.

To illustrate the challenging 'stickiness' of neoliberal discourse, I return to my current situation as a lecturer in a UK University, which I described in chapter one in neoliberal terms. I previously explained that I am currently employed in an organisation with a gender pay gap of 23% and the continuation of neoliberal discourses which position women as making the wrong decisions (De Coster & Zanoni, 2018). In 2017, the University's gender pay gap report (the report was not updated for 2018, despite a commitment to this) offered the follow solutions that would be introduced by the University in response to addressing the pay gap; mentoring and coaching; professional development opportunities (in other words training); senior 'champions' and mentors; and flexible working and family-friendly policies. These 'solutions' can be viewed in

neoliberal terms with the predominant focus on women developing the ‘right’ skills and abilities, the ‘right’ form of human capital and essentialising inequality issue to that of childcare. Yet structural barriers are ignored, for example, in my department, women’s teaching and student contact time is higher than men’s, women are continuously pressurised into administrative roles, and pay and progression panels look at student feedback, despite evidence that this is biased in favour of men (MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt, 2014; Sinclair & Kunda, 2000). The neoliberal solutions offered to address the gender pay gap at my university internalise and psychologise women’s failure but do not address the reality of women academic’s lives and structural disadvantage. For poststructuralists, agency lies first in the ability to recognise regimes of truth as historically and socially regulated and therefore does not presume from freedom from discursive constitution (Davies, 2000a, 2000b). Second, agency does not imply imagining an external world as a possibility and then bringing that into being. Rather, it suggests that evolutionary thought is already happening, which can be mobilised or pushed further into discourse, thus becoming part of the ways of being (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Challenging these discursive constructions, raising awareness of the damaging impact they have, and offering counter-discourse, is one strategy to mobilise change.

7.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The first limitation with the study is that the research was conducted within the UK with a relatively small group of women. More specifically, the research was conducted with white women who were all either, managers in the bank, or women who were relatively successful within the NMO. The research therefore considers gender as the predominant

way in which the material was analysed and does not consider intersectionality within the data. This therefore provides an area for further research, particularly within the NMO, where an analysis of how gender and class intersect would offer additional insights to this research.

Secondly, I have discussed within the research the affective and psychic toll of neoliberalism, the psychologising project of neoliberalism, and the call to 'turn within' to develop the right disposition. One of the issues with looking at how women discursively construct this relates to agency and subjectivity. Women may discuss the psychic toll of neoliberalism, for example, but *how* they thus see themselves as having agency within this, and how they truly see this as constituting their subjectivities, is somewhat speculative. Subjectivities and positioning may present limits on what *can* be said, felt, and done, but it does not necessarily tell us if they *do* feel or experience these things (Willig, 2013). Thus, further research could seek to move beyond positioning and practice to see if and how people do take up these subject positions

A third limitation of this study is in acknowledging that within this research I have used the terms postfeminism and neoliberalism interchangeably. I argued in the beginning of this thesis about the complicated and intertwined relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism, and the lack of clarity among scholars about the conceptualisation of these terms. Catherine Rottenberg (2018) for example, sees neoliberal feminism as a form of feminism that has been co-opted by neoliberalism, subsequently replacing postfeminism, while Rosalind Gill (2016) argues instead that postfeminism is far from over, but actually a gendered form of neoliberalism. At the conclusion of this research process I would suggest that the key differentiator is in the 'over-ing' of feminism with postfeminism repudiating and simultaneously taking into account feminism and

neoliberal feminism, declaring itself a form of (albeit moderate and corporate) feminism. This raises the question as to whether postfeminism could indeed be framed as a technology of governmentality and that the 'over-ing' of feminism is perhaps part of an intricate conduct of conduct; another form of individualising strategy and therefore a gendered form of neoliberalism with a governance dimension. These are questions beyond the scope of this research, but further research could start to unpick this complicated relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism.

A final reflection and suggested area for further research lies in considering the pleasure that is gained from engaging in neoliberal and postfeminist discourses within organisation. I recognise that the outcomes of this research could be construed as somewhat disheartening and read that neoliberalism is like a silent and creeping dark shadow. I read Rhonda Byrne's '*The Secret*' (2006), enjoyed it and felt uplifted by it. Likewise, I read Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) book with interest, and if I find a copy of Psychologies[10] magazine, I read the quizzes and articles to find out how I could be a better, more confident, more resilient person. There is arguably a pleasure that comes from engaging in postfeminist and neoliberal feminist discourse, which I particularly observed when I conducted my observations of the NMO, which comes from mantras of positivity and gratitude. The pleasure of 'becoming' a neoliberal subject, self-production and surveillance pleasure, and what is gained from this, is something that is well discussed within cultural studies (for example, Elias & Gill, 2018; Elias, Gill &

[10] Psychologies is a magazine targeted at women which encourages them to 'create the life they want' through helping you to 'know more, grow more' (https://www.psychologies.co.uk/about-us), in other words, turn within.

Scharff, 2017). However, the pleasure of engaging in neoliberal discourses in organisational life is an area of further interest and study.

7.5 Concluding remarks

Throughout this thesis, I have presented illustrations of gendered neoliberal governmentalities that move the focus away from structural issues, subsequently maintaining and supporting neoliberal capitalism. Thus, I argue that these are permutations of the multitude of gendered technologies of government that neoliberalism is able to appropriate. Within this thesis, I have suggested that neoliberalism can shift, adapt and mutate, working as a form of gendered governance to constitute feminine subjectivities and silence critique in three broad ways. Firstly, through acting on women to work within and psychologise; secondly, by dividing women and negating collective action, through individualising strategies; and finally, obscuring inequalities through normalising discourses. The challenge for creating change to inequalities within organisations thus lies in the ability to make visible neoliberal and postfeminist discourses which are obscured and normalised through these gendered forms of governance.

7.6 References

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Participants

A.1 Bank Participants

	Pseudonyms	Level[11]	Length [12]	Age[13]	Children
1	Jane	AVP	64	29	Yes
2	Ali	AVP	90	30	No
3	Cleo	VP	70	49	Yes
4	Heidi	VP	48	42	Yes
5	Hilary	VP	66	35	Yes
6	Sarah	VP	40	42	No
7	Lizzie	VP	57	30	No
8	Annette	MD	23	50	Yes
9	Anna	Director	40	31	No
10	Hannah	Director	50	35	No
11	Bridget	MD	55	45	No
12	Annie	AVP	59	36	Yes
13	Amy	AVP	69	32	Yes
14	Kate	VP	50	41	No
15	Sophia	VP	36	44	Yes
16	Mia	Director	44	47	Yes
17	Chloe	VP	20	34	Yes
18	Olivia	VP	42	48	Yes
19	Evelyn	Director	54	55	No
20	Scarlett	AVP	56	28	No

[11] Level in the bank. AVP is Associate Vice President, VP is Vice President, Director and Managing Director. These are all management positions ranging from junior management (AVP), through to senior management levels (MD)
[12] Length of interview
[13] Age at time of interview

A.2 NMO Beauty company participants

	Pseudonym	Pin title[14]	Length[15]	Age[16]	Children	Previous role[17]
1	Wendy	Ruby	57	59	Yes	Office manager
2	Heather	Lapis	53	47	Yes	Personal Assistant
3	Isabella	Gold Executive	57	49	Yes	Civil servant
4	Liz	Lapis	65	56	Yes	Beautician owner
5	Charlotte	Emerald	45	38	Yes	Beautician
6	Daisy	Diamond	64	46	Yes	Loss adjuster
7	Ava	Team elite	41	49	Yes	Fashion industry
8	Ruby	Diamond	21	54	Yes	Senior corporate roles
9	Scarlett	Blue diamond	59	53	Yes	Entrepreneur/restaurant owner
10	Lexi	Emerald	43	52	Yes	Financial advisor/business owner
11	Megan	Ruby	35	44	Yes	Beautician
12	Zara	Ruby	57	48	Yes	Sales manager
13	Bethany	Gold Executive	42	22	No	Fashion/retail
14	Francesca	Ruby	53	45	Yes	Marketing/ café owner
15	Darcey	Ruby	44	29	No	Beautician
16	Beatrice	Emerald	45	39	Yes	Teaching/farming

[14] Pin titles are given depending on revenue and team and range from Gold Executive – helped 1 team member reach executive level, to Blue Diamond who have 12 frontline members at executive level.
[15] Length of interview
[16] Age at time of interview
[17] Role prior to joining the NMO

A.2.1 Distributors compensation summary

Within the US, the NMO is required to publish average compensation payments for its distributors. The following information is taken from the 2016 compensation plan information made publicly available although I have removed the company name to maintain anonymity of interviewees.

In the US, in 2016, the average commission paid to active distributors (defined as having placed an order in the previous three months), was $185.41 or $2224.93 on an annualised basis. On a monthly basis, 20.32% of US active distributors earned a commission cheque.

Pin Title	**Monthly average commission 2016**	**Average % of active distributors**[18]
Executive	$420	5.18%
Gold	$767	1.30%
Lapis	$1358	0.94%
Ruby	$2314	0.44%
Emerald	$4254	0.19%
Diamond	$7839	0.18%
Blue Diamond	$38,217	0.27%

[18] These percentages are calculated by taking the average of the total monthly Distributor payee count at each level and dividing by the total number of active distributors

Appendix B Interview Guide

Opening questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your current role? (What position do you currently hold? How long have you been in that position? Do you manage a team, if so, what proportion are male/female? What is the gender balance of your department/organisation like?)[19]

2. Tell me about the interactions you have in your role that involve other women. (For example as a line manager, working on a project, or an informal relationship)

Area of interest: being associated with other women or trying to create distance from them.

3. Thinking of the women you work with that you have close working relationships with – what are they like? (How are they similar/ different to you?)

4. Thinking about the women that you have more distant working relationships with – what are they like? (How are they similar/ different to you?)

5. Can you think of women that you have worked with who you admire, identify, or get on with? (Can you describe them/her? Can you provide an example? What type of relationship did you have with them/her?)

6. Can you think of women that you have worked with who you didn't identify with, admire or get on with? (Can you describe them/her? Can you provide an example? What type of relationship did you have with them/her?)

[19] Questions in parenthesis are supplemental questions or prompts in case people were not sure about the question.

Area of interest: Collaborating and supporting

7. Can you think of a time where you have experienced women collaborating or supporting each other to help each other out at work? (What happened? In what ways did you experience support or collaboration? Was this support a conscious process at the time for you or others involved?)

8. Do women collaborate and support each other at work in different ways to men supporting each other at work?

Area of interest: Competing and contested relationships

9. Can you think of a time where you have experienced women competing with each or not supporting each other at work? (What happened? In what ways did you experience the competition or lack of support? Was this a competition or lack of support conscious process at the time for you or those involved?)

10. Do women compete with each other in different ways to men competing with each other?

Summary question

Considering all we have talked about, is there anything else you would say about the way women work together in this organisation?

Appendix C Participant consent form

Participant number: _____________

Date: _____________

I, ____ (please print your name in block capitals) confirm that I agreed to participate in the research into women's working relationships with other women. This has been explained to me as a project looking at women's peer relationships at work and as part of this, the researcher is observing meetings at my organisation. I understand that all personal information that I provide will be treated with the strictest confidence and that my name will be changed to ensure that all raw data remains anonymous.

I understand that although the information I provide will be used by Cranfield University for research purposes, it will not be possible to identify any specific individual from the data reported as a result of this research.

I understand that the data collected will only be used for research purposes as part of the women's relationships project. This data will involve notes taken during the meeting on observations of people's interactions. The results will be written up as a PhD thesis, journal articles. I further understand that my raw data will be accessible only to the researcher and the supervising faculty at Cranfield University. All data collected will be stored in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998).

I understand that I am free to withdraw from this project at any stage during the session simply by informing a member of the research team, for whom contact details have been provided. I also understand that I can also withdraw my data for a period of up to 7 days from today, as after this time it will not be possible to identify my individual data from the aggregated results.

I confirm I have read and completely and fully understand the information provided on this form and therefore give my consent to taking part in this research.

Signature: ______________________________ Date: __________________

Full name: ______________________________ Contact number: _______

Address: ______________________________ Email address:_____