

Feminist perspectives in research and practice: characterizing neoliberal feminism

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Full paper

Abstract

1. Purpose

In this article, we propose to define and discuss the rise, in both theory and practice, of what we come to call neoliberal feminism. We seek to contribute to the scholarship on gender and diversity in organizations, and to feminist scholarship in organization studies. While the submitted article focuses on gender diversity, it intends to address the larger community of diversity research scholars.

2. Design/methodology/approach

- Analytical deconstruction of the 'business case' discourse and scholarship, with a focus on how it addresses gender diversity
- Linguistics-based discourse analysis of the websites of the 14 corporate sponsors of a Swiss women's business network

3. Findings

Theoretically, we show how the neoliberal feminist perspective can be distinguished from the liberal one, and propose a definition of it. Practically, we show that neoliberal feminism can be traced in corporate discourses on gender and that it can be found in co-presence with other feminist perspectives in a single discourse.

4. Research limitations/implications

The theoretical implications are limited by the fact that, as any tentative to propose a typology of streams of thought, we resort to a simplification of complex ideas and sets artificial boundaries between categories. The empirical implications are limited by the fact that we consider only a limited number of companies in a particular local context.

5. Originality/value of the paper

The paper addresses an issue in which scholars and practitioners are interrelated: the relative invisibility of neoliberal feminism as a research lens and as a rationale for corporate discourses on gender diversity in organizations. We show this through the magnifying lens of feminism and gender and with the use of seldom-used linguistics-based tools for discourse analysis.

Keywords: gender in organizations, feminism, corporate discourse, business case, neoliberalism

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In organization studies, there is a slowly but steadily developing interest in gender diversity in organizations. Although the larger part of this research consists in cross-sectional studies where sex/gender is a variable (Ely and Padavic, 2007), such scholarship has helped to raise awareness of such questions in organization studies and management research. A still small number of researchers has taken gender not only as its research topic, but has applied a feminist lens to its inquiry. Such a lens does not entail that the findings are only about or for women, but can help to highlight new theoretical and practical aspects about organizations that may not be visible from supposedly “neutral” perspectives (Calás and Smircich, 2006), i.e. there is a heuristic value to the feminist lens, in particular to power relations and inequality in organizations. This feminist lens has itself been the topic of research, in which typologies feminist theories are proposed (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2003; Alvesson, 2009). Indeed, feminist theory is not a united body of thought, and applying a feminist lens can thus take a number of forms, which are explored in great details in such contributions.

These different feminist lenses adopted by organizational scholars are closely tied to typologies of streams of feminism that together have made the history of feminist activism. In a number of empirical articles, researchers have thus also tried to trace the presence, or the acceptance of different feminist perspectives in an organizational setting (Meyerson and Kolb, 2000). Also, it has been claimed the liberal feminism is the perspective most commonly found in practice¹ (Holvino, 2008). Legal dispositions concerned not only with women, but also with “diversity” at large, and policies such as Equal opportunities are the better-known practical outcomes of such a perspective. Such policies have indeed been largely

¹ It is to be noted that most research on gender in organizations is produced by western scholars, about western organizations ; this contribution is no exception to this.

implemented in practice, in particular when required by law, and they have been the topic of a large literature (Tatli, 2011; Luring and Thomsen, 2008; Jewson and Mason, 1986).

Liberal-inspired policies have however suffered from a “backlash”, in the form of resentment from both the people that are meant to benefit from such policies, and more expectedly by the ones excluded from it, in particular males from the dominant ethnic group. Another discourse that has emerged, then, is the ‘business case’ discourse for (gender) diversity. This discourse proposes that there is an economical gain to be made from gender/diversity, and has been both praised and criticized in the gender literature as well as in the larger diversity literature, as such a discourse is also often applied to diversity “in general” (Terjesen et al., 2009; Perriton, 2009; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Jonsen et al., 2013); it has also received coverage and been relayed practitioners, such as consulting firms (Desvaux et al., 2008). However, in the existing typologies of feminist streams cited above, the business case discourse is considered to be part of the liberal feminist perspective. In light of discussions present in the existing literature, in this article we propose that there is a theoretical and practical interest to show how this discourse is actually in parts inspired by a distinct stream of feminism, that we will call neoliberal feminism. We will highlight how the lines of thought behind the liberal and neoliberal perspective differ regarding ontological assumptions (what differentiates men and women?), the definition of the issue (why is inequality between men and women an important issue?), and solutions to the issue and ways to implement them (how to solve the issue in practice?).

Producing fine-grained mapping of ideas and disentangling existing arguments are an important part of scholarship (Jewson and Mason, 1986). This distinction between liberal and neoliberal feminism allows us to enrich existing typologies by pointing out a distinct stream of feminism; moreover, it will also allow us to discuss how neoliberal feminism has been used as a lens in existing scholarship without having been identified as such. This theoretical contribution will in turn allow us to help enrich scholarship interested in identifying different

types of discourses on gender in organizational settings by adding a new type of discourse to look for. Firms do not explicitly invoke or use the words “feminist” or “feminism”. However, discourses always refer to, combine and translate existing discourses available at a given time and place (Bakhtin, 1981; Martin, 1999); feminist perspectives are part of these available discourses. We will illustrate how the neoliberal perspective can be distinguished from other streams of feminism in practice through a linguistics-based discourse analysis of the websites of the 14 corporate sponsors of a Swiss women’s business network, through which we are able to show the presence of the neoliberal feminist discourse, but also the co-presence of other feminist discourses. We will discuss our contribution in particular through a reflection of the overlap of discourses in practice, and the relative invisibility of neoliberal discourses in ‘mainstream’ organizational and management research scholarship on gender, diversity and beyond.

Gender in organizations: theoretical lenses and discourses in practice

Although the different streams of feminism all agree that there is inequality between men and women and that this situation has to change, they differ in their explanations for gender inequality, as well as on the means and reasons to change women’s positions in society and in organizations (Calás and Smircich, 1996; Gherardi, 2003). Previous typologies of feminist perspectives in organization studies can be found in works such as those by Alvesson (2009), Calás and Smircich (1996; 2006), and Gherardi (2003). More general typologies of feminist streams have been produced in the fields of gender studies or communication, notably by Beasley (1999), Bock and James (Bock and James, 1992), and Kroløkke and Sørensen (Kroløkke and Sørensen, 2006), which are the fields from which the feminist perspectives on organization and management were developed. The different types of feminism identified in those contributions largely overlap; we will thus not distinguish, in the remainder of our

argument, between typologies of feminist lenses on research and typologies of feminist discourses used in practice.

Typologies

As remarked by Gherardi (2003), it is to be noted that such typologies are largely based on Anglo-American appraisals of feminism(s), though they are the dominant ones in organization theory and beyond. Moreover, whatever the typology, it is bounded in a specific historical time, and “boundaries change over time and are permeable or fluid rather than concrete” (Beasley, 1999: : xiii). Such typologies, nevertheless, allow us to distinguish how different streams of feminism deal with the question on inequality, i.e. how each stream sees the issue(s) at stake and how they seek to solve them. Whether the typology is concerned with feminist lenses that researchers can apply, or with feminist postures that are/can be used in practice, such typologies also give us a frame of reference of what has been identified as constituting a distinct discourse. We thus believe that such typologies shall be expanded, shrunk or undergo other transformations in order to reflect the time’s evolution in thought and practice. We here propose to contribute to such change, by arguing for the importance of a missing perspective: neoliberal feminism.

In one of their contributions, Calás and Smircich (2006) propose to look at how “various approaches in feminist thought intersect with theories of organization and organizational practices, and how each feminist theoretical strand highlights particular organizational issues while ignoring others” (p.213). In the typology they propose, Calás and Smircich (2006) contrast a group of streams centered around similarity and difference between men and women composed of liberal, radical and psychoanalytic feminism to a group of streams centered around power relations and identity composed of socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern, and transnational/(post)colonial feminism². It is remarked a

² For a more detailed overview of the different streams of feminism we refer you to the cited works, and in particular Calas & Smircich 2006, as we mainly based our framework mainly on their discussion.

large part of the organizational literature, often referred to as the women-in-management literature, follows this perspective (p.217). From existing empirical studies, it appears that the most common feminist perspective that can be traced in practice is also the liberal one. In a nutshell, liberal feminism is a stream in which sees inequality as an unfair and irrational economic decision: missing out on potentially half of the available talent pool is a mistake, since “women are as good as men in fulfilling organizational needs” p.216 (Gherardi, 2003); the solution to this problem is notably seen as residing in the development of fair regulation.

The business case discourse: from liberal feminism to neoliberal feminism

Following this description, one can easily connect policies such as equal opportunities or gender mainstreaming efforts the liberal feminist perspective. Indeed, such policies notably try to set up fairer selection processes, which should decrease the number of women and other ‘diverse’ people that are rejected unfairly from the job market, in particular when aiming for higher-level corporate positions. Its large presence in practice, in turn, is rather expected as an effect on the mandatory implementation of such solutions to inequality, either because of national laws under which companies operate or because of stakeholder pressure (Klarsfeld, 2010).

We believe, however, that parts of the “business case” discourse present in practice and in the women in management literature does not fit with the definition of liberal feminism; we thus wish to introduce a theoretical distinction with neoliberal feminism. By doing this distinction we want to clearly highlight how neoliberal feminism differs in its the ontological assumptions, the way it define the issues at stake, and the solutions it propose to overcome them.

The business case discourse for gender diversity, in substance, argues that hiring women can have an effect on the performance of the firm. This statement clearly fits with the liberal perspective, in that the justification for change is the fact that not hiring women is a sub-

optimal economic decision. However, if we go deeper than the surface of this discourse, we can trace how it can be attached to two distinct streams of feminism: liberal feminism, and the stream we propose to call neoliberal feminism. If we refer to the proposed typologies, the liberal perspective promotes a just society, that treats individuals fairly, so that they can fully exploit their potential and contribute to economical progress (Gherardi, 2003; Calás and Smircich, 2006; Olsen and Martins, 2012). We thus can say that the business justification is in line with liberal feminism, and policies such as equal opportunities: the business outcome is, in a liberal perspective, attained through the development of fair policies. This aspect is often overlooked in contributions that address the business case, as it is often assumed that it is distinct from the spirit behind equal opportunity frameworks (see for example Cassell 1996, or Olsen and Martins 2012)(Cassell, 1996; Olsen and Martins, 2012).

Nevertheless, what is clearly identified in the diversity literature is that the business case discourse, as taken up in what has come to be called diversity management tends to present the hiring of 'diverse' individuals as an added-value because they it is assumed they will perform 'differently' (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Jonsen et al., 2013; Ahonen and Tienari, 2009; Thomas and Ely, 1996). This is clearly different from the liberal perspective: in that perspective, business value comes from the fact that fair hiring policies prevent firms from neglecting talented individuals (for example women) who can perform the same task in the same way as others (men). In what we call the neoliberal perspective, business value comes from the fact that new management techniques allow firm to leverage the value coming from individuals who perform in different ways. If we keep our focus on gender, this means that the liberal perspective emphasizes similarity between men and women's abilities, while the neoliberal perspective emphasizes difference.

We thus have an ontological difference between liberal and neoliberal feminism in the way they see men and women as similar or different; this entails a different formulation of the issue at stake, and of the solutions that can be devised to solve them. Starting from the

similarity of abilities between men and women, liberal feminism takes it that stereotyping (resulting in discrimination) is the source of the problem (Jonsen et al., 2010), and that it can be solved through implementing fair recruitment processes. Starting from the dissimilarity between men and women in the performance of their abilities, neoliberal feminism takes it that the source of the problem is the fact that firms do not dare to give up uniformity and tap into different ways to conceive of business problems; as, however, diversity could be disruptive of the existing equilibrium, it has to be managed in order that the firm can continue to exist without crisis and reap the benefits of diversity.

This leads us to define feminism as a stream of feminism that considers women as different from men in the way they will carry out their work; this difference can be an added value to business if it is properly managed. This definition of neoliberal feminism has been included and split in different entries in Table 1 (derived and adapted from previous typologies for the other feminist streams), showing the variety of feminist perspectives available today. As mentioned earlier, such perspectives can be used both as research lenses and as discourses of reference for corporate discourses. We thus propose to illustrate the significance of adding neoliberal feminism to existing typologies by showing that it allows for a finer analysis of corporate discourses and underlying streams of thought and ideologies present. To this end, we present a linguistics-based discourse analysis of the websites of the 14 corporate partners of a Swiss women's business network.

Feminist perspective	Radical	Woman as same or different			Gender, power, identities, discourses		
		Psychoanalytic	Liberal	Neoliberal *	Socialist	Poststructuralist/ Postmodern	Transnational/ (Post)colonial
Intellectual roots	Women's liberation movement (late 1960s)	Freudian and other psychoanalytic theories	18th-19th century political theory	18th-19th century political theory	1970s - synthesis of radical, marxist & psychoanalytic feminisms	1990s - synthesis of post-feminisms	Gendered and postcolonial critiques of Western feminisms and epistemologies
Conception of sex/gender	Women as an oppressed sex class	Gender plays a role in the psychosexual development	Binary variable	Binary variable	Gender/sex class oppressed under patriarchy and capitalism	Gender constructed in local discursive practices	Complex subjectivities beyond Western conceptions
Conception of the 'good society'	Gender free, or matriarchy	No gendering structure	Equality is a matter of fairness	Gender diversity brings added value	Disappearance of patriarchy and/or capitalism	Discourses and practices are local and changing	A society defined with/including non-Western discourses
What are organizations missing? *	Oppression through patriarchal organizations creates discrimination	The sexuality of organizations ignores feminine values	Missed opportunities to find more talent	Missed opportunities for growth / higher performance	Missed opportunities for in depth CSR reflection	Missed opportunities to address the local meaning of gender	Fail to fully address globalisation/ transnational processes
Some favored interventions	Create separate organizations for women; matriarchy	Create more balanced organizations	Proving that equality will not disturb business	Proving the business case	Proving that structural changes are required	Proving that there cannot be acontextual assumptions	Address intersections that include non-Western identities
Core belief *	Matriarchy	Feminine psyche	Fairness	Growth	Emancipation	Contextualisation	Intersectionality

* Added to the typology of Calas and Smircich (2006). All other content is borrowed/adapted from their typology.

Table 1. Feminist perspectives

Methods

Case selection and presentation

To trace the presence of different streams of feminism in the discourse of corporations, and in particular to distinguish the liberal and neoliberal streams, we needed a limited corpus in order to be able to perform an in-depth and detailed discourse analysis. We decided to restrict our study to a limited number of corporations; to make the selection process more efficient, we focused on the corporate partners of a Swiss women's business network, as their formal support of such a group hints at an interest (of whatever nature) in the issue of gender in organizations, and that such an interest would be expressed in their corporate communication. The choice was set on the 14 corporate partners³ of the Career Women's Forum (CWF). The CWF is a Swiss EWB created in 1982 and open only to women who are (or have been) in managerial positions or are business owners. In addition, since 2005, the CWF has also had corporate members. This means that firms who sponsor the networks can send up to 10 of their female executives to participate in CWF events and activities. The CWF's mission is to promote the development of women's careers through networking, and

³ As of December 2011.

by being a forum for ideas exchange between its members and with public and private sector partners. The CWF organizes networking meetings such as lunches with a speaker, as well as a mentoring program, and workshops for specific interests (e.g. women over 50; women interested in board positions). Corporate members (i.e. members who work for one of the sponsor firms) can also participate in dedicated activities such as breakfast events during which participants' best practices are presented and discussed, and a cross-company mentoring program. In addition, they organize events that reach towards the larger community: the WAVE – Women's Added Value in the Economy – event is an annual event organized around a central theme, with several invited speakers and discussants; they also organize a mentoring program and workshops in association with the University of Geneva's equality bureau.

Websites as lines of inquiry

Websites have become a major means of corporate communication (Rouquette, 2008; Point and Singh, 2003) and have been considered as a source of main data in other studies in the field of management and corporate communications for that reason. For example, Sillince and Brown (2009) have explored the rhetoric of police websites; Kim and Rader (2010) have developed a typology of corporate strategies in CSR communication; and firms' relationship management in the form of blogging practices around CSR-themes has also been investigated (Cho and Huh, 2010). In the literature focusing on gender and diversity questions, Heres and Benschop (2010) have explored the translation of the diversity management discourse in the online corporate communication of the top ten Dutch companies; a similar study has been done in the Finnish context (Meriläinen et al., 2009). Singh and Point have explored the diversity statement from the websites of the top 500 European firms (Point and Singh, 2003; Singh and Point, 2006; Singh and Point, 2009).

This developing interest is also explained by the fact that websites are very rich and complex sources of information. In addition to the presence of a large amount of potentially rich data on websites, Sillince and Brown highlight the fact that they contain considerable amounts of text and “constitute a distinctive genre of collective identity” (2009: : 1835). Furthermore, they contend that the analysis of official websites of organizations can give access to “projected identities”; to create them, organizations however need to “broker the need to author web-based identities that support and further their interests (as they define them), yet concomitantly offer versions that audiences will find compelling (Sillince and Brown, 2009: : 1835). Such comments encouraged us to collect website data for our study, as we seek to identify organizations’ discourses on gender and diversity, which form a part of such projected identities.

Website data collection

The websites of the CWF and its 14 corporate partners were searched manually for web pages or sections containing information about gender and diversity⁴. Where links pointed to downloadable documents (such as annual reports or case studies) we included them in our corpus. Where possible, we used the search engine of the website to find additional pages. All relevant pages and documents were saved as .pdf files, producing a total of 192 files: 153 web pages and 39 downloadable documents⁵ (see Table 2).

⁴ Due to the prevalence of a view of gender/sex as a category of diversity (Hannapi-Egger 2006), as commented on earlier.

⁵ Length of web pages and documents is not indicated as it is not correlated with the amount of analyzable information that was extracted from them.

	Number of webpages	Downloadable documents	Total
CWF	25	10	35
Alcoa	20	0	20
BCGE	1	1	2
Credit Suisse	9	3	12
Deloitte	18	8	26
DuPont	19	4	23
Firmenich	6	3	9
IBM	7	1	8
ICRC	3	1	4
Julius Bär	3	1	4
Lloyds	4	1	5
Mirabaud	3	0	3
Pictet	5	0	5
PwC	20	3	23
Richemont	10	3	13
	153	39	192

Table 2. Files collected for analysis

Data analysis

We then performed a discourse analysis on the data by using selected tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL is a branch of critical linguistics that developed in the seventies, particularly through the work of Halliday (Halliday, 1978; Halliday, 1977; Martin, 2002). SFL takes a particular interest in the network-quality of the ideas available for meaning construction (systemic) and the way language functions to transmit this meaning (functional). For Halliday “this is not the same thing as taking an isolated sentence and planting it out in some hothouse that we call a social context. It involves the difficult task of focusing simultaneously on the actual and the potential, interpreting both discourse and the linguistic system that lies behind it in terms of the infinitely complex network of meaning potential that is what we call culture” (Halliday, 1978: : 4). Here, Halliday clearly refers to the shortcomings of dominant, structuralist branches of linguistics where text is analyzed to understand abstract, context-free processes of cognition while he promotes a focus on text as a meaning production in context. Instead of distinguishing structural properties of linguistic elements (syntagmatic perspective), SFL proposes to look at how meaning is produced through paradigmatic choices at the ideational (what), interpersonal (from/to whom) and textual level (realization of the two) (Martin, 1999).

SFL has been used in research by scholars of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Coffin et al., 2010) as the work of Halliday was one of the inspirations for its development, particularly in the work of Fairclough (Threadgold, 2003). It has been only occasionally used explicitly in management and organizational research, for example in the work of Kuronen, Tienari and Vaara (2005) or Vaara and Tienari (2002). The use of such micro-linguistic tools complements the use of other approaches to qualitative data as they allow us to better understand how ideas are constructed; also, “the linguistic component in the analysis contributes to the tracing of the interpretation process of the reader (... and) make explicit assumptions of discourses embedded in the messages conveyed”, and thus constitutes evidence from which to interpret “the meaning potential of the textual totality” (Kuronen et al., 2005: : 253-254). Halliday’s perspective is thus aligned with our interest in contextualized discourses and our aim to deconstruct and reconstruct the discourses of the CWF and its corporate partners. In addition, such tools are adapted to the specificities of websites as they take into account linguistic and semantic relationships beyond the clause⁶, and take the wider context into account (Djonov, 2005). Indeed, websites cannot be analyzed without taking into account their multimodal and hypermodal characteristics (Lemke, 1999; Lemke, 2002), namely the fact that they combine different media and that websites do not have definite beginnings and ends: the reading of a page in isolation may not make it possible to understand the full meaning of its content.

To start with, within the downloaded pages and documents, we searched for passages (sentences or groups of sentences) explicitly referring to gender and diversity for micro-analysis. These passages were then analyzed using SFL tools. We used the text-level tool of Theme and Rheme as well as the ideational-level tool of Given and New. The Theme is what a clause is about, the starting point, while the Rheme is what is said about the Theme. The

⁶ A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate (verb and other elements governed by the verb). A sentence is an independent clause (that does not depend on or need an additional clause)

Given in a sentence is the information we start from, the idea that is considered as a given; the New is, conversely, the idea that is combined with the Given and that brings a new element in the discourse. The use of such micro-analytical tools allows us to see how “information is packaged not just at the level of lexico-grammar, but also at the level of discourse” (Djonov, 2005: : 86). Indeed, the theme does not necessarily coincide with the grammatical subject of a clause, for example: “Everywhere in the firm (theme), inclusion is our top priority (rheme)”⁷. The terminology used in relation to gender and diversity at work was also given close attention, as lexical choices in the Theme/Rheme and Given/New are also choices made on a paradigmatic axis and that help produce a certain meaning.

We then sought to establish logico-semantic relations (LSR) across and within pages to reconstruct the EWBN’s and the firms’ discourses on gender in the workplace. LSR are relations established between clauses or text sections within a single text, or relations with external texts. For example, successive nodes or hyperlinks present on a given webpage indicate intended relationships between ideas presented from one page to the next. These relations help us reconstruct the discourse on the gender and diversity of a given organization across the different parts of the website that were downloaded. For example, speaking about gender and diversity in the innovation section of the website or including a link to the innovation section on the gender and diversity page creates an LSR with innovation even if this LSR is not made within a single clause. This also means that speaking about gender in the innovation section or in the human resource section of a firm’s website creates a different meaning. When relevant, images and videos were also included in this process, as their semantic content can act as a Rheme (i.e. comment on a Theme) and/or have a LSR with the text present on the same webpage.

⁷ Here the Theme coincides with the Given, and the Rheme with the New, which is not always the case, as we will see in excerpts presented in the results section.

The output consists of 71 pages of discourse analysis reports containing SFL analyzed excerpts and comments. For the CWF and for each corporate partner, the identified elements allowed us to reconstruct each actor's discourse on women in the workplace. After the reconstruction of discourses inductively, we linked the reconstructed discourses to the streams of feminism identified in Table 1, thus deductively replacing the discourses of the CWF and its 14 corporate sponsors in a wider discursive context. This step of analysis is consistent with the importance of layers of context in SFL and with discourse analysis theory, which advises iterations between theory and data (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). For example, in a recent study, after the inductive identification of themes in the online statements about diversity on the websites of Dutch companies, the reconstructed discourses were linked either to the diversity management discourse or to the Finnish discourse on equality (Meriläinen et al., 2009).

Results

The aim of our empirical enquiry was to explore the discourse on gender in the workplace proposed by the CWF and its corporate partners. The aim of the analysis was first to deconstruct and reconstruct the discourses, by using tools from SFL; we then matched the identified discourse(s) with more macro discourses, i.e. the streams of feminism identified in our typology (Table 1). The same analytical process was used on all the websites. A summary of the results is presented in Table 9: it features examples of excerpts that have been analyzed with SFL tools for each case, the section of the website most excerpts were located in (thus creating LSR between gender/diversity and another ideational element, for example CSR), and the stream(s) of feminism that were matched with the reconstructed discourses in the last phase of the process of the discourse analysis.

We see in the results in Table 3 that different discourses are present, but also that we were able to identify traces of the neoliberal discourse, which is found in a majority of the analyzed

websites. In sum, Table 3 shows a dominant presence of the neoliberal discourse, followed by the liberal discourse, and a more limited presence of the poststructuralist discourse. Regarding the CWF itself, our results indicate that their discourse is also centered on the neoliberal feminist perspective. This means that there is both similarity and difference in the discourses that are put forward: a majority of partners in the advocacy network present a neoliberal discourse; however, there is often a strong presence of a second discourse, leading to different combinations of discourses. Our research sample is limited to one EWB and its 14 corporate sponsors, and so we are cautious not to generalize from our results; however, these elements will be further discussed below.

Organization	Illustrative website excerpts that were analyzed with SFL tools	Main website sections with relevant information / LSR	Identified feminist approaches
CWF	The CWF had created an annual event named WAVE (Women's Added Value in the Economy) in order to promote exchanges and "best Practices" amongst Swiss and international companies who seek the complementarity of men-women in their talent pools.	Full website considered	1. Neoliberal
Alcoa	We also have a diversity goal in our annual cash incentive compensation plan for increasing global female employment	Sustainability Vision & Values	Liberal
Lloyds	1. We will create an environment in which all existing and prospective employees can access all appropriate employment opportunities. 2. A diverse workforce helps us perform better as a business.	Corporate Social Responsibility Employee Care	1. Liberal 2. Neoliberal
Richemont	1. We also monitor the gender balance in the workforce to promote diversity amongst staff. 2. Diversity is viewed as part of Richemont's competitive advantage.	Corporate Social Responsibility Employees	1. Liberal 2. Neoliberal
IBM	IBM has a long history of commitment to Diversity [...]. This strong foundation brings us to where we are today - Diversity 3.0. [...] Our diversity is a competitive advantage.	Employment	Neoliberal
Credit Suisse	A diverse workforce with wide-ranging expertise and a broad network of contacts helps us build a distinctive culture, which ultimately represents a competitive advantage.	Corporate citizenship	Neoliberal
DuPont	Our goal is to have an employee population that meets the business needs of our company and is reflective of our global customer base.	Diversity and Inclusion Sustainability Meet the Executives	Neoliberal
Firmenich	1. The diversity of our talent is also a key concern for our growth. Today, we employ 82 nationalities across the company; 60% of our employees are male and 40% are female. 2. Our Diversity Ethic helps us to attract the best people and allows us to reflect the diversity of the global community.	Careers	1. Neoliberal 2. Liberal
ICRC (Red Cross)	1. The ICRC's employment policy promotes equitable conditions for male and female staff through gender mainstreaming and affirmative action. 2. Different groups face different factors of vulnerability and it is an oversimplification to see one gender as active and the other as passive. 3. The ICRC believes there is a strong link between the improvement of women's status inside the organization and progress in the protection of and delivery of assistance to women in situations of armed conflict or internal violence.	Downloadable Annual Report: Operations and Human Resources sections	1. Liberal 2. Poststructuralist 3. Neoliberal
Deloitte	1. An organization-wide culture shift is required to nurture an environment that is friendly to women and encourages their advancement. Those organisations that have taken a systemic approach to the issue have reaped the rewards in greater growth and higher returns. 2. Deloitte is diversity. We are all unique. Each one of us is different from anyone and everyone else - including those people with whom we share the most in common.	Diversity and Inclusion Corporate Responsibility	1. Neoliberal 2. Poststructuralist
PwC	1. I am confident that the result of empowering women is that men, like my son, are empowered to explore all aspects of who they are and manifest the mixture of what would, traditionally, have been known as masculine or feminine traits that feels right to them. 2. At PwC, we are committed to ensuring women have the opportunity to build a rewarding career. Not only because it's the right thing to do, but because it's a business issue that affects our bottom line.	Women at PwC Careers	1. Poststructuralist 2. Neoliberal
BCGE, Mirabaud, Pictet, Julius Bär (private banks)	Males and females are offered equal opportunities. Yet, despite this principle, the financial industry continues to be particularly attractive for males	Corporate responsibility (Julius Bär)	The remaining websites provided insufficient analyzable content. Pictures and the presented excerpt from Julius Bär hint at Liberal.

Table 3. Results of the discourse analysis of websites

Discussion and concluding comments

Throughout this paper, we have pleaded for the theoretical and practical relevance of distinguishing neoliberal feminism as a stream of feminist thought, and in particular to differentiate it from the liberal feminist perspective. Through a review of existing typologies and of the literature addressing the “business case” argument for (gender) diversity, we have shown that the business case discourse cannot be attached entirely to the liberal feminist perspective. This led us to propose a definition of neoliberal feminism, and to integrate it into a typology of feminist perspectives (Table 1). We then proposed to show that the presence of this neoliberal feminist perspective could be traced in the corporate discourse in practice. We will here discuss the importance and implications of distinguishing neoliberal feminism from other streams of feminism for both theory and practice.

Neoliberal feminism in research

Theoretically, because the liberal and neoliberal streams have different ways of justifying and carrying out the business case discourse, we have shown that the business case discourse relates to two distinct streams of thought. This leads us to discuss two points: first, we will comment on the importance of continuing, as scholars, to “formulating analytical distinctions and disentangling disparate arguments” (Jewson & Mason, 1986, p.307); second, the fact that part of the existing literature can be considered to implicitly adopts a neoliberal feminist lens.

In their 1986 article, Jewson and Mason disentangle the discourse of equal opportunities, pointing out that in practice it is justified by arguments coming from both the radical and liberal perspective on diversity. We thus believe that we have contributed in a similar way by disentangling the business case discourse. Moreover, this had led us to define a distinct perspective: the neoliberal feminist ones. If we closely read the literature on women in

management, it then becomes visible that a number of scholars actually adopt such a perspective without naming it.

In this part of the literature, it is assumed that women are different; then, for example, to avoid the pitfall of trying to behave “like men”, it has been suggested that these differences should be put forward and leveraged (Vanderbroeck, 2010). The neoliberal feminist perspective can also be found in recent research that emphasizes, for example, the way in which women in top management and on boards exert a positive or negative impact on firms’ performance (Francoeur et al., 2008) or innovation if there are at least three women on a board (Torchia et al., 2011); indeed, if the presence or absence of women is the main independent variable, the results of such research suppose that the results would be different if there were no women in the sample, i.e. that women and men are different in the way they perform their tasks as directors. This implicitness, we believe, is characteristic of the general invisibility of neoliberal ideology in organizational and management research.

Neoliberal feminism in practice

Empirically, through the analysis of the discourses of a formal women’s business network and its 14 corporate partners, we have shown how both the liberal and neoliberal discourses are simultaneously present, and how further discourses are also found in a single discursive space. This leads us to comment on two further points: first, the presence of multiple discourses in corporate views on gender in organizations; second, the importance for practitioners to take interest into the underlying assumptions and consequences of their discursive choices.

Our analysis shows that, as discussed in theory, the liberal and neoliberal perspectives on gender in organizations are entangled in the discourses of companies. In their disentanglement of the equal opportunity discourse, Jewson and Mason (1986) also notice a similar situation. Through two case studies, they are able to show that this co-presence of

different discourses is both conscious and unconscious: while it is not always clear for all stakeholders which are the boundaries between the radical and the liberal perspective on equal opportunity policies, there appears however to be an instrumental and conscious choice made to use elements of another discourse in order to justify their position. For example, the liberal perspective takes it, as we have seen, that fair treatment will reduce discrimination; however, this does not automatically mean that higher numbers of previously discriminated social groups will access higher positions, as it is the best candidate that should be chosen. However, to push for such policies (vs. quotas for example), liberals are tempted to present this access to higher positions as an outcome. We believe that further research should elaborate on the liberal vs. neoliberal feminist perspective in a similar way, to understand the conscious and unconscious discursive choices made in corporate communication. Also, the possible presence of other discourses (the poststructuralist perspective in our results) in addition to the liberal and neoliberal one should also be further discussed and investigated.

In turn, we believe that the refinement of theoretical typologies and the deconstruction of discourses that are diffusing in practice can also benefit practitioners. Indeed, such typologies can provide them with a clear view on the assumptions and consequences of the way they conceive of their corporate communication on gender and diversity, but also of the related content of the human resource strategy they are implementing. Again, the divide between conscious and unconscious discursive choices should be explored, also with regards to imposed discourses (to comply with legislation for example, or to comply with stakeholder expectations) or desired discourses (discourses that can attract new talent, or present the firm in a positive light).

Implications, limitations and research avenues

Throughout this paper, we have thus addressed an issue in which scholars and practitioners are interrelated: the relative invisibility of neoliberal feminism as a research lens and as a rationale for corporate discourses on gender diversity in organizations. We showed this through the magnifying lens of feminism and gender and with the use of seldom-used linguistics-based tools for discourse analysis. Theoretically, we show how the neoliberal feminist perspective can be distinguished from the liberal one, and propose a definition of it. Practically, we show that neoliberal feminism can be traced in corporate discourses on gender and that it can be found in co-presence with other feminist perspectives in a single discourse.

The theoretical implications are limited by the fact that, as any tentative to propose a typology of streams of thought, we resort to a simplification of complex ideas and sets artificial boundaries between categories. The empirical implications are limited by the fact that we consider only a limited number of companies in a particular local context. We nevertheless hope that our contribution will have opened a rich discussion and further exploration of the heuristic value of feminist perspectives, of the importance of disentangling discourses whether produced by scholars or practitioners, and that future empirical studies will look at the consequences of the use of multiple discourses to justify gender diversity policies, and in particular the consequences of the neoliberal perspective.

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