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6

Feminist organization theories

Islands of treasure

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Introduction

Feminism is a success (Walby, 2011); however contested that assertion may be at a time when gender inequalities still persist. Projects and programmes for gender equality can be found in many domains and organizations. Feminist theory, the academic strand of successful feminism, has over the years developed into many different strands informing an impressive amount of multidisciplinary academic research. In this chapter, we examine how feminist theories have contributed to our understanding of organizations and organizing.

Overall, feminist theorists have called attention to the gendered limitations to knowledge production in the field of organization studies, taking issue with claims to the ‘gender neutrality’ or ‘objectivity’ of any knowledge (Martin, 1994). Though we can see that the production of knowledge on the reproduction of gender inequality has blossomed, much less attention is paid to the processes that are needed to change organizations into gender-equitable workplaces (Benschop and Verloo, 2011). The impact of different contexts and the variation these bring to organizations and organizing also remain understudied (Ahonen *et al.*, 2014), especially for non-Western contexts (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2012).

Despite the success of feminism, virtually all theories of organizations and management remain silent about gender (Hatch, 2012), and some assert that feminist thought and gender theory are marginalized or even ‘ghettoized’ in the field of organization studies (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). One indication of this may be that the separate chapter on gender issues in edited organization theory books is the only place where gender is addressed at all. The feminist ancestry of some insights on inequalities, justice, and equal opportunities that have now been mainstreamed into organization studies is also not addressed. This development is sometimes referred to as postfeminism, a critical response undermining the achievements of feminism and presenting it as out of date (McRobbie, 2004).

Between these assertions of feminist success and achievement on the one hand and the isolation and marginalization of feminist theory on the other is where we write this chapter. Here we find ourselves amidst various debates and controversies, both in- and outside the various strands of feminist thought. These strands have previously been analyzed by Calás and Smircich (1996, 2006), whose influential overview of the impact of feminist theorizing on organization studies

FIRST PROOFS NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Feminist organization theories

comprises liberal, radical, psychoanalytical, socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern, and transnational/postcolonial feminisms.

While we acknowledge that psychoanalytical feminism (Fotaki *et al.*, 2012; Harding *et al.*, 2013; Vachhani, 2012), feminist postcolonialism, and transnational feminism (Gill, 2006; Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2012; Calás and Smircich, 2011) have certainly impacted management and organization studies, given the restrictions of this chapter, we will here focus on the four major strands of feminist thought that arguably have been most influential in contemporary management and organization theory. Two of them, (neo)liberal feminism and socialist feminism, are grounded in prominent political ideologies and philosophies, and the other two, social construction feminism and poststructuralist feminism, are rooted in the domain of social theories. As an exhaustive discussion of the merits of each of those strands is clearly beyond the scope of a single chapter, we will highlight and discuss the key contributions each strand makes to our understanding of organizations and organizing.

First, we will analyze the impact of (neo)liberal feminism on the study of leadership, calling attention to numerical representation and to perceptions of leadership styles. Second, we will highlight the impact of socialist feminism on what we know about the production and reproduction of inequalities in the workplace, particularly the dual intersecting inequalities of class and gender. Third, we will emphasize how social constructionist feminism's insights into the genderedness of organizations and identities contribute to our understanding of the gendered social order in organizations. Fourth, we will discuss how poststructuralist feminist thought has had a major impact through its focus on discursive practices of gender and its emphasis on masculinity and femininity performances, and on subjectivities and sexualities at work. We will end our chapter with a section that goes beyond these four strands to discuss promising developments in the impact of feminist organization theories on the field of organization studies.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is one of the most influential strands of feminism in management and organization studies. Rooted in political philosophy, the notion of liberalism embraces the core idea of individual liberty as a political value. While for classic liberalism and liberal democracy (Jewson and Mason, 1986), individual freedom, choice, opportunity, and equality are core notions, philosophical debates continue on how individual freedom has to be balanced against equality and social justice. Feminist philosophers engaging with liberal political theory have pointed out that without social and political equality, justice in the sense of fairness is meaningless to women (Okin, 2005). Furthermore, these feminist philosophers challenge liberalism for separating and opposing the private and the public spheres (Pateman, 1989). The focus of liberal feminism is on individual women and men getting equal opportunities to develop themselves as they choose and to engage in free competition for social rewards (Jewson and Mason, 1986). Liberal feminism thus meshes well with the political ideals of the free labour market and the meritocratic workplace, and uses those ideals to critique existing gender inequalities like those in wages and positions of authority.

Recently, several authors have noted how neo-liberal feminism is quickly replacing liberal feminism (Eisenstein, 2009). The key difference with liberal feminism is the lack of critique in neo-liberal feminism, which seems all too well attuned to the neo-liberal dominance of capitalist market values and its emphasis on individualistic, entrepreneurial women embracing full responsibility for their own lives and careers (Rottenberg, 2014). In her influential article, Fraser (2009: 108) argues that we are dealing with a 'disturbing convergence' of neo-liberal capitalist and feminist ideas, in which the cultural recognition of identity and difference prevails over the

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Yvonne Benschop and Mieke Verloo

redistribution of economic resources. While liberal feminism traditionally called for legislation against the discrimination of women and fought for affirmative action to increase the number of women in management positions (Lorber, 1997), we now witness how neo-liberal feminism dresses up as corporate feminism, urging individual elite women 'to lean in' (Sandberg, 2013) and be ideal workers (Acker, 1992) without questioning the underlying masculine and capitalist norms of that ideal.

In both of its incarnations, liberal feminism has shaped some of the core questions on leadership by placing gender centre stage. First, the unequal distribution of positions of authority is a question of numerical representation that can be perfectly summarized as 'Why so few?' (Valian, 1999). Studies on the underrepresentation of women on corporate boards and the debate about quota systems in business (Storvik and Teigen, 2010) both address this issue. The popular, though contested, metaphor of the glass ceiling refers to the almost invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing to positions of leadership and authority. These barriers have been exposed by making it clear how both gender and leadership are linked to status. Agentic women leaders are perceived as breaching the status expectations for women when they take up high-status positions of authority primarily associated with men and masculinity in the gender hierarchy (Rudman *et al.*, 2012). Even in the twenty-first century, women leaders are not typical leaders, nor are they typical women (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Liberal feminists believe that these stereotypical expectations of women and men stand in the way of both the individual's freedom of choice and of the meritocratic free labour market and that they should be replaced by equal opportunities for equally qualified women and men.

This idea of equality as formal equal opportunities also features in the second issue pertaining to gender differences in styles of leadership (Eagly *et al.*, 2003). There are constant clashes between the 'no-difference' camp, which emphasizes how intra-group differences exceed differences between women and men, and the 'crucial difference' camp, which points at small but significant sex differences in leadership style congruent with the alleged communal qualities of women and agentic qualities of men. In either case, liberal feminists emphasize the equality of the sexes, and seek their explanations for perceptions of difference in the cultural masculinity of leader stereotypes (Koenig *et al.*, 2011).

Additionally, (neo)liberal feminism has a profound impact by placing the issue of work-life balance on the agenda of management and organization studies. For many, the public and the private are no longer the separate domains in which a gendered division of labour created order. With the intensification of work and the increasing number of dual-career households, work-life balance is becoming an increasingly prominent issue in organizations (Hoobler *et al.*; 2009 Mescher, 2011). Outsourcing household and care tasks to the market is the preferred neo-liberal solution to conflicting demands, making this another area of 'the dangerous liaison between feminism and marketization' (Fraser, 2009). Rottenberg points out how 'the [neo-liberal] feminist ideal is not a one-track professional woman, but a high-powered woman who manages to balance a spectacularly successful career with a satisfying home life' (Rottenberg, 2014: 11)

Neo-liberal feminism thus stresses how entrepreneurial subjects have to make individual choices for balance, drawing on a market rationality of efficiency and cost-benefit analysis (Rottenberg, 2014: 12). This portrayal of work-life balance as a personal problem hinders any systematic critique of the inequality regime (Acker, 2006) of organizations that demand a flexibility and availability from their employees that does not sit well with these employees' activities and responsibilities in other spheres of life. And as (neo)liberal feminism maintains that hiring (migrant) domestic care workers and nannies can be a solution for the 'personal problem' of work-life balance, the larger implications of this 'personal choice' are not problematized as contributing to societal gender inequalities (Dyer *et al.*, 2011).

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Feminist organization theories

Overall, (neo)liberal feminism has had a profound impact on management and organization studies by introducing gender as an issue in questions of leadership and work–life balance. Yet, it seems to be satisfied as soon as women are also included in the myth that ‘everyone can make it to the top’, resulting in a fetish for research that limits itself to managers and professionals. Perhaps its success in management and organization studies stems more from the unproblematic fit of its assumptions about individual agency and choice with the mainstream neo-liberal discourses that dominate current management and organization studies than from its innovative solutions for gender inequality.

Socialist feminism

Though both liberal feminism and socialist feminism were born from the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, socialist feminism is closely connected to Marxist political philosophy through key notions such as social reproduction, domination, exploitation and oppression. Dissatisfied with the Marxist prioritizing of workers’ oppression over women’s oppression (Calás and Smircich, 2006), socialist feminist philosophy stresses that the system of capitalism alone does not sufficiently explain the persistence of gender inequalities, and calls for critical attention to the relation between capitalism and patriarchy as related structures of domination (Hartmann, 1979; Holvino, 2010). The core issues for socialist feminism are thus the inseparable relations of power and privilege related to the intersections of class and gender (Brenner and Holmstrom, 2012). Contemporary socialist feminist scholars make a strong claim for intersectionality (Verloo, 2013), including other social categories such as race/ethnicity and sexuality in their analyses of working-class women and men (Zanoni, 2011). Acker’s (2006: 441) notion of inequality regimes – the interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing classed, gendered, and racial inequalities in work organizations – combines the classic system focus of socialist feminist theory with the newer recognition of the importance of intersectional inequalities.

In contrast to liberal feminist organization studies, with its fetish for managers and professionals, socialist feminism-inspired research has expanded its perspective to all layers of organizations, starting with comprehensive studies of blue-collar work. Systemic analyses of the gendered division of labour have thus been performed under the label of ‘industrial relations’. Prominent examples are studies of gender segregation that show how women are more likely to be employed in low-qualified, low-valued, labour-intensive, temporary, numerically flexible jobs. Such gender-stereotyped jobs are making women vulnerable to low wages and to low career/development opportunities, and they provide little job security (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). Under the label of organization studies, we find socialist feminism-inspired research on lower-class and migrant women working in call centres (Ng and Mitter, 2005), care work (Jonsson, 2011), cleaning (Soni-Sinha and Yates, 2013), nursing (Henttonen *et al.*, 2013), and hotel services (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Dyer *et al.*, 2010). This strand of research reveals the lived realities of disadvantaged workers at the intersection of class and gender in times of globalization and transnational exploitation.

Following the post-2008 financial crises, socialist feminist theories regained prominence as business scandals resonated with their critique on the excesses of the patriarchal capitalist system and its rising levels of inequality and insecurity. Linking macro developments in the globalized economy to both meso sectorial and organizational employment trends and micro work preferences and experiences, socialist feminism inspired new research on non-standard employment, the politics of austerity, and the growing precariousness (Armano and Murgia, 2013).

The most gendered form of non-standard employment is part-time work. Socialist feminism-inspired research on the exploitation of part-time workers suggests that, in the UK context,

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Yvonne Benschop and Mieke Verloo

men and women part-timers are both exploited but in different ways, with men working longer unpaid overtime and women missing out on promotion opportunities (Conway and Sturges, 2014). And deteriorating working conditions and job insecurities related to non-standard employment do no longer only characterize the lowest strata of organizations; they are rapidly expanding into the realm of professional work (Kelan, 2014; Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003). Furthermore, as a response to the financial crises, the politics of austerity often involve structural reductions of welfare-state provisions, which turn out to have specific gendered impacts (Karamessini and Rubery, 2013). Analyzing the different austerity measures of states, employers and unions, research shows that these measures are reshaping the household-workplace-community nexus, re-invoking outdated and conservative views of women's place, reconfiguring the positioning of women's rights (Briskin, 2014) although they are not leading to women's return to the household (Walby, 2015). Very recently, scholars have been developing new concepts to grasp the increasing insecurity and instability of employment relations. The term 'precariat', for instance, refers to 'an emergent class in the making' consisting of those who face multiple related work and income insecurities (Standing, 2011). These notions are currently inspiring new research on age, class, and gender, for instance in academic careers (see www.garciaproject.eu).

Overall, socialist feminist work has inspired organization studies to look at the detrimental effects of gendered and classed divisions of labour, emphasizing the systemic and structural dimensions of capitalist inequality regimes. Furthermore, the attention for the intersections of gender and class has opened opportunities to incorporate other axes of inequality, such as race/ethnicity, sexuality, and age, in the study of organizations' power dynamics. It unlocked new lines of research that are responsive to current economic dynamics and realities.

Social construction feminism

Unlike the previous strands of feminism, social construction feminism does not originate in political philosophy or political movements, but in social theories about knowledge. Though one could argue that it is inspired by poststructuralist philosophical debates on realism/relativism (Burr, 2003), social construction feminism is most often seen as rooted in sociology and ethnomethodology, emphasizing social interactions as constitutive elements of social processes (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005). In a landmark article, West and Zimmerman (1987) coined the notion of 'doing gender', introducing a new conceptualization of gender in which it is seen as a routine, ongoing methodological social accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction. Gender can thus be studied as something that is said and done dynamically, within the boundaries of the gender order – the relatively stable cultural prototypes of masculinity and femininity that are experienced as universal, natural truths (Connell, 1987; Gherardi, 1994). 'Gendering' here becomes a verb referring to processes and practices that are enacted in various locations and relations, and also, prominently, in work organizations. Examining the social construction of gender as the dynamic practice of distinguishing between women and men, or articulating the differences between masculinity and femininity, can thus provide insights in power processes and in the production of social inequalities.

These insights in the ongoing production of social inequalities in the workplace have had a profound impact on management and organization studies. Social construction feminism calls out the alleged gender neutrality of organization theory and organization processes, pointing to the persistent reproduction of gender inequalities in organizational realities (Acker, 1992). Social construction feminism shows how norms about gender equality at work that emphasize the gender neutrality of jobs, skills and qualifications co-exist with norms and rules about

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Feminist organization theories

appropriate gender behaviour that imply differential assessments of femininity and masculinity at work (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998b).

A key contribution of this strand is the notion of the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990, 1992); this disembodied, abstract conception is characterized by more than full-time availability, mobility, flexibility, high qualifications, high ambitions, high commitment, a strong work orientation, and no other obligations or responsibilities in life other than the ones required by the organization. Acker (1992: 257) notes how, since the rules and codes that prescribe workplace behaviour incorporate assumptions about a separation of the public and the private spheres, the assumptions about this ideal worker fit men much better than women, rendering women less than ideal organizational participants. Over the years, several authors have contextualized the ideal worker in different sectors, industries, organizations, or functions (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998a; Tienari *et al.*, 2002; Kelan, 2010; Styhre, 2012; Kelly *et al.*, 2010; Pas *et al.*, 2014), but all find an implicit masculinity in the norm that continuously constructs masculine work patterns as normal and legitimate.

The social construction of gender is also elaborated in studies on women and men in non-traditional occupations. This research explores the experiences and identity work of women in masculine (top) positions and of men in feminized occupations, documenting the doing of gender in occupations that are traditionally held by the other sex. Non-traditional occupations are a particularly interesting site to study doing gender, as for instance demonstrated by studies on men in nursing and women in engineering (Simpson, 2014; Joshi, 2014). As the men and women working those jobs have to assert their competence and suitability for these gender-typed jobs, doing so means they have to challenge norms about masculinity or femininity in the conventional gender order. They thus develop strategies to manage gender in their daily work practices, complying with some constructions of masculinity and femininity, and resisting others.

This body of research is connected to, and informed by, studies on masculinities in organizations. Social construction feminism is one of the key inspirations for this strand of research, named critical studies on men and masculinities, interested in the power-laden social constructions of men and masculinities in specific contexts, times, and places (Hearn, 2014). Taking issue with the taken-for-granted equation of men and masculinities with management, leadership, and authority, Connell (1995) and Collinson and Hearn (1994) were among the first scholars to think critically about the concepts of 'men', 'masculinity', 'multiple masculinities', and 'hegemonic masculinity' in the context of organizations. Though this strand could contribute substantially to management and organization studies, its impact has been relatively small so far.

The strength of social construction feminism has also become apparent in the efforts to understand the slow pace of organizational change towards gender equality. Following organization's special 'beyond armchair feminism' issue (2000), the debate about organizational change has lost its naiveté because simply 'fixing the women' or 'creating structural equal opportunities' or 'valuing difference' will be all too easily absorbed into the ongoing reproduction of gender inequality (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Benschop and Verloo, 2006; Van den Brink and Stobbe, 2014). Realizing the resilience of gender inequality in organizations has wider implications for management and organization studies, as a social construction perspective on initiatives for change has proven to fully grasp the complexities of organizational change. However, with the spotlight on the difficulty or near impossibility of organizational change towards gender equality, this perspective is currently more invested in analyses of failed change than in providing suggestions and conditions for successful change.

Overall, social construction feminism has contributed to management and organization studies through its insights in the dynamic interplay of organizational structures, cultural norms and identities, and their continuous reproduction of the symbolic gender order. The potential to

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Yvonne Benschop and Mieke Verloo

change and transcend the gender order, however, though theoretically possible within the scope of this perspective, has so far been de facto understudied.

Poststructuralist feminism

The origins of poststructuralist feminism can be traced back to poststructural/postmodern philosophy and social theory. In line with de Saussure's (1966) structural linguistics, Derrida's (1978) core ideas about the impossibility of a universal truth, the dominance of oppositional dichotomies in our thinking, and deconstruction as a method to unveil ambivalences, fluidities, and absences, and Foucault's (1980) notion of the power of discourses, poststructuralist feminism questions unitary notions of woman and femininity, demonstrating that everyday social relations are characterized by instabilities and differences. As Lorber (1997: 32) says, poststructuralist feminism goes the 'furthest in challenging gender categories as dual, oppositional and fixed, arguing instead that gender and sexuality are shifting fluid, multiple categories'.

By focusing on discursive practices of gender, poststructuralist feminism deconstructs the binary logic of gender hindering more sophisticated and subversive conceptualizations of gender as a performative social practice (Butler, 1990; Poggio, 2006; Pullen, 2006). Gender and sexualities are no longer essentialized, but seen as multiple and fluid, situated performances. With the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity, there no longer is a solid gender order. In this perspective, the emphasis is on 'subjectivity' as a discursive effect, which means that subject positions – necessary in order to enact agency – are the result of cultural representations. According to poststructuralist feminism, what constitutes the subject position of a 'man' or a 'woman' is the outcome of the whole complex of performances in specific spatial-temporal settings. Intertwined with the binary logic of gender as two oppositional categories of women and men is a logic of desire that sees sexual attraction as the result of this gendered opposition. Gender and heteronormativity are thus simultaneously produced in dominant discourses (Pringle, 2008). Queer theory is a poststructuralist mode of critique that challenges such assumptions about relations between gender and sexuality and about the management of desire (De Lauretis, 1991).

The influence of poststructuralist feminism has been particularly felt in like-minded strands of management and organization studies such as critical management studies. These also point to the political power of knowledge and science and to the illusion of scientific neutrality and objectivity. Poststructuralist feminist analyses of the performativity of gender have also found their way into management and organization studies in questioning how people perform gender in organizational life, or how people do and undo gender at work. Hancock and Tyler (2007), for instance, analyze images taken from corporate recruitment brochures as locations where idealized, embodied gendered subjectivities are represented, revealing the gendered organization of aesthetics and desire. Another example is Kelan (2010), who shows that the very act of being a female ICT worker discursively challenged multiple forms of masculinities and femininities in ICT. While discursive constructions of gender have been most prominent in poststructuralist feminist writings, this emphasis on discourse also triggered attention for the material dimensions of organizations. Focusing on the way gender is materialized in and through organizational space, Tyler and Cohen (2010) analyze how gendered subjectivities are performed and valued in organizations through the interplay of bodies with aesthetic and symbolic artifacts in workspaces.

Building on the notion of the multiplicity and fluidity of gender, poststructuralist feminist approaches have extended to integrating other dimensions of inequality in their analyses. A good example of integrating intersectionality in a poststructuralist perspective is Riach *et al.*'s (2014) analysis of how lived experiences of age, gender, and sexuality are negotiated and narrated within organizations. Taking issue with heteronormativity (the prescribed conditions that assume

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Feminist organization theories

heterosexual and gender-normative coupling) and chrononormativity (the life course corollary of the heterosexual matrix), they show how older, self-identified LGTB professionals experience a fundamental vulnerability in their attempts to narrate and live coherent selves in the organizations they are part of (Riach *et al.*, 2014).

An important contribution of poststructuralist feminism to management and organization studies is that it places reflections on knowledge production centre stage – in line with the poststructuralist questioning of universal truths. A prime example is Lewis and Simpson's (2012) revisiting of Kanter's famous book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*. Their poststructuralist reevaluation uses the so-called (In)visibility Vortex – the normative dynamics constituting visibility and invisibility in the maintenance of gendered power – to unearth Kanter's hidden contributions to understand the effects of numerical representation and number-based solutions in organizations on gendered power processes. Another manifestation of this poststructuralist feminist-induced reflexivity is a heightened awareness that the social location of researchers affects their production of knowledge (Pullen, 2006; Essers, 2009).

Overall, poststructuralist feminism has mainly contributed to management and organization studies through its focus on performativities and subjectivities. It has also inspired a higher degree of reflexivity among knowledge producers both in terms of their accountability as often privileged researchers and their potential complicity in gendered power relations.

Concluding thoughts and directions onwards

In this chapter we have shown that various strands of feminist thought have all made specific contributions to the field of management and organization studies. Yet the degree to which these contributions of feminist scholarship have been recognized varies, especially in the degree to which they have been integrated in mainstream research. The chapters on gender in handbooks of organization theory and the multiple articles on gender issues in general management and organization journals do testify to the successful agenda setting of feminist scholarship. And as a separate field of studies, gender-and-organization studies has certainly matured, as evidenced by their own conferences, journals, and handbooks (Kumra *et al.*, 2014; Jeanes *et al.*, 2012). Feminist theorists and researchers are rightly convinced that their sophisticated insights and results could inform and improve the understanding of organizational phenomena, even when their work is overlooked or ghettoized.

For the mainstream, however, it seems as if gender and especially sex differences are palatable concepts, whereas feminist theory is hard to swallow (Ely and Padavic, 2007). This has been analyzed as due to the inherent critical stance of feminist theory, which at times is perceived as mere troublemaking, rendering feminists killjoys who spoil illusions of happiness by pointing out practices of sexism and gender inequality (Ahmed, 2010). Although feminist theories thus meet resistance for their problematization and politics of changing organization theories, their contributions and thinking certainly have the potential to enrich and revitalize management and organization studies.

Feminist scholars have also taken this resistance against feminist knowledge on board as a research subject, inspiring research on the causes, dynamics and consequences of resistance against feminist interventions in organizations (Benschop and Verloo, 2006; Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013). These insights in the dynamics of resistance to feminism could be used to come to a better understanding of, and design better strategies for, the integration of feminist theories into organization theories, benefitting both. Ideally, the influence between feminist theory and organization theory is two-way, and the analysis of organizational phenomena can be improved

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Yvonne Benschop and Mieke Verloo

by organization scholars looking at feminisms and feminists looking at organization theories (Thomas and Davies, 2005).

Our overview of the impact of feminist theorizing on organization studies points to three potential future directions of feminist organization research: searching for cross-disciplinary inspiration, cross-epistemological collaboration, and transnational theorizations overcoming the current Western bias. We argue that the first two directions would help overcome two kinds of fragmentations or compartmentalizations: the disciplinary boundaries within the social sciences on the one hand and the epistemological boundaries between the different strands of feminist philosophy and feminist theory on the other.

First, to surmount disciplinary fragmentation, multidisciplinary dialogues between feminist organization studies and cultural studies could, for instance, help spark new understandings of the backlash against feminism and the postfeminist taming of feminism into an acceptable corporate feminism (Lewis, 2014). Another example of crossing disciplinary borders would be to seek inspiration in gender and politics scholarship (Waylen *et al.*, 2013), which would help foster contextualizations and explanations of the conditions of success and failure of feminist organizational change. This connection to gender and politics would tap into a body of knowledge that has developed a rich vocabulary to grasp the differential impact of political and societal contexts, an area that has received scarce attention in organization studies, as noted in our introduction.

Second, and even more challengingly, to surmount epistemological compartmentalization, crossing and merging the various strands of feminist thought might deliver surprising contributions. This can only start by recognizing the specific contributions of each strand (as identified in this chapter) and being willing to engage in respectful dialogue and transversal politics (Squires, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Transversal politics here refers to a dialogue between different positions that departs from a common commitment to a broad feminist equality project. This dialogue can be productive to interpret insights stemming from one strand in another strand of feminist theory. Obvious examples are to be found in poststructuralist deconstructions of the liberal feminist theme of leadership (Davis *et al.*, 2014) or the unbalanced numerical representation of women managers (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). Another example can be found in the crossing of the socialist feminist's classic system focus with the sophisticated analyses of performed identities in McDowell's (2012) study of the labour market exclusion of working-class youth in times of austerity.

While feminist theory has not been totally oblivious to its Western bias, non-Western, postcolonial studies and Voices from the South have primarily been developed as separate strands of feminist thought. Inspired by the pioneering works of Mohanty (1988), Spivak (1988) and others, there is a substantial body of scholarship questioning the globalized politics of knowledge production and the roots of organization theories in imperialist legacies (Calás and Smircich 2006, 2011; Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2012; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). This restores the agency of both scholars and workers from the non-West and provides learning opportunities for those from the West (Mir and Mir, 2013). Postcolonial scholarship offers various promising starting points for further feminist theorizing, for instance on leadership (Nkomo, 2011), entrepreneurship (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2014), immigration (Prasad, 2012), and expatriates (Berry and Bell, 2012). There is clearly a high potential for cross-fertilization of this work with intersectional approaches and the theorizing of inequality regimes.

In this chapter, we have outlined how many necessary ingredients for further progress are already in place to widen the scope of feminist organization studies' success, hoping to inspire future generations of scholars building on our insights or contesting them.

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Feminist organization theories

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