

# Feminism in management research: A route to justly optimise talent

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‘Convictions are more dangerous foes to truth than lies.’ - Nietzsche

## ■ Introduction

The words ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ are controversial, arousing visceral responses from many people (Offen 1988). These responses include some from within the academic fraternity where bell hooks

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(2000) has noted that second-hand accounts and misinterpretations contribute to the inaccuracy and fear associated with feminism. This situation is fuelled by the fact that feminism defies easy definition because it is under continual dispute and negotiation with researchers adopting a range of approaches to its definition and description (bell hooks 2000; Griffin 2015; Hekman 2015; Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby 2003; Lorber n.d.; Thomas & Davies 2005), hence feminists should be open to critical scrutiny by others (Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby 2003). In brief, feminism concerns itself with the identity of women, both philosophically and socially (Hekman 2015; Letherby 2003), and with equal rights (bell hooks 2000), politically, legally and economically (Lorber n.d. Offen 1988); not only for women but for all minority and marginalised groups (see Lorber n.d.). Identity encompasses an understanding of empowerment at a personal level, having a voice, knowing how they (women and marginalised groups) are different, knowing what cultural and social expectations they carry, and how they carry them, in both a personal and professional way (see Calvert & Ramsey 1992), which inevitably challenges knowledge claims (see bell hooks 2000; Calvert & Ramsey 1992; Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby 2003; Thomas & Davies 2005). Equal rights aim to end sexism, sexist exploitation, oppression, domination, racism, class elitism, imperialism and patriarchy (bell hooks 2000). Without a clear sense of identity, women cannot fruitfully participate in discourses on equality, which aims at changing women's and minority or marginalised groups' lives for the better by ensuring inclusiveness. In essence, feminists seek to challenge the existing social systems that they regard as responsible for the oppression and

exploitation of women and other marginalised groups. Fundamentally, feminism concerns itself with autonomy, which refers to that which allows all persons regardless of gender, class, race, religion and sexual orientation to become fully self-actualised beings and to create a cherished community in which they can live together, realising their dreams, especially those of freedom and justice, giving effect to the truth that all humans were created equal (bell hooks 2000; Hekman 2015). At the same time, bell hooks (2000) points out that equality does not mean equity and thus acknowledges differences between people, whether from the same gender, sexual orientation, social class, race and religion, which differences feminism embraces.

Freedom is the source from which all meaning and value springs (Hekman 2015; Offen 1988). Consequently, all human beings are placed on a moral plane, seeking freedom to will the self as well as others towards it (Hekman 2015). Freedom and feminism are social constructions, which are subjective in nature and depend on context for their meaning, as well as relationships with others (Calvert & Ramsey 1992; Hekman 2015; Hesse-Biber 2012; Letberby 2003). A lack of an understanding of freedom results in people, especially women to consent to servitude, perpetuating inequality (bell hooks 2000; Hekman 2015). Ignorance leads inter alia to flawed scholarship, which further exacerbates, or worse, creates hierarchies of inequality in labour, class, gender, sexual orientation (Griffen 2015) as well as race, disability and children's rights. In the labour market, findings show that women are underpaid or unduly overlooked for promotion. This undermines moral justice, and many countries regard such practices as unlawful (Gregory-Smith, Main & O'Reilly III 2013).

Furthermore, discrimination in the labour market perpetuates economic inefficiency (Becker 1957). In contemporary times, particularly in South Africa, equality, freedom and social justice have been receiving increased attention so as to prevent the continuation of the injustices of the past. In addition, globally, organisations are on a quest to manage talent by including minorities and marginalised groups (for diversity reasons) so as to ensure optimal organisational performance (Buckingham 2014). Hence, it is an opportune time to explore management research from a feminist perspective. The feminist perspective, or the perspective of women's voice, holds that people are equal but different regardless of gender, sexual orientation, social class, race or religion, and it calls for new assumptions and possibilities (Calvert & Ramsey 1992), including in knowledge creation. Knowledge creation warrants consistent reflecting as a process based inter alia on assumptions and methods that signal what knowledge is valid and valuable (Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby 2003).

We merged our personal collection of texts on the topics of feminism and feminism in business or management with texts retrieved from a literature search on these topics, which we do not claim to be comprehensive. We performed a literature search of feminism or feminist studies in management, in English, using the search terms 'feminist theory' and 'business or management'. This search was done on the database ProQuest, and it yielded 89 studies of which 11 were usable. Only three of these pertained to the enactment of feminist research in management. A number of the articles returned by the search draw on philosophical discourses about feminism in management, which fall outside the scope of this overview as the intention is to clarify feminism and how it is enacted

or applied in management research. Hence, only a few articles met the inclusion criteria regarding feminism, generally, and feminism in management research, specifically. The few studies pertaining to a feminist perspective in management research seem to support the view that feminist research in management is lacking (Limerick & O'Leary 2006) or limited (Harding, Ford & Fotaki 2013) and its impact minimal (Calvert & Ramsey 1992). Thus, an opportunity exists to provide a brief overview of feminist thought and, in particular, its application in management research, which is the aim of this essay. Management and management research play a vital role in creating a just society as they influence employment, economic independence, human resource development, career progression, remuneration, the well-being of employees, value creation for the enterprise as well as wealth creation for society as a whole, thus enabling people to become self-actualised beings. Hence, from a management perspective, inequality is detrimental to organisational performance as the best-suited person for a job may be overlooked, based on inappropriate considerations.

Misconceptions about feminism, in particular in management research and practice, can be corrected. Hence, the purpose of this essay is to offer an overview of 'feminism' and its application in management research. Its aim is to clarify feminism particularly in respect of the field of management and by so doing to assist organisations and their members to value all of their employees (talent), especially women and other marginalised groups. Research outlines the necessity of having a talent-development plan, which clearly describes how organisations will retain and develop their talent (especially women) at different organisational or hierarchical

levels (Garcea *et al.* 2011). This could lead to behaviour like investing more strategically in all employees (Berger & Berger 2004), which in turn will support individuals to realise their full potential and to become the persons they are destined to be. These types of behaviour will ultimately create more value for the organisation, which will be beneficial to the organisation and the society(ies) in which it operates, including its investors. The reason for the benefits is that employees will derive more meaning from their work, positively influencing their well-being. The purpose of Chapter 5 is achieved by elaborating on the variety of feminist perspectives and their contribution to equality in the next section. This is followed by an overview of research in management from a feminist perspective rather than participating in the philosophical debate about feminism in management. Chapter 5 ends with conclusions and implications for management research and practice.

## ■ The variety of feminist perspectives

This section is primarily based on the works of Lorber (n.d.), Offen (1988) and bell hooks (2000), which give an exposition of feminism and the variety of feminist perspectives. Each perspective has made important contributions to improve the position of women in society but is not without limitations and/or critique (Lorber n.d.). Many debates occurred at the same time and are on-going. Thus, advances are not necessarily chronological or final. Moreover, a feminist may incorporate ideas from a range of perspectives (Lorber n.d.), complicating the matter. Different feminist perspectives have been identified (bell hooks 2000; Hesse-Biber 2012; Lorber n.d.; Thomas & Davies 2005), and these are commonly classified into three broad

categories, namely, gender-reform feminism, gender-resistant feminism and gender-revolution feminism (Lorber n.d.). A broad overview of which is presented below.

## ■ Gender-reform feminism

All of the perspectives in this category are rooted in liberal political philosophy that developed the idea of individual rights, a critique of capitalism, class-consciousness, anti-colonial politics and nation development. This category of feminism includes liberal, Marxist and social as well as development feminism, and it positions women according to these perspectives (Lorber n.d.). *Liberal feminism* maintains that differences between women and men are not based in biology, which essentially represents procreative differences. Their common humanity supersedes their procreative differentiation. Consequently, women and men are not different and should thus not be treated differently under the law. Hence, women should have the same rights as men, including the same educational as well as employment opportunities. Liberal feminism focuses its attention on visible sources of gender discrimination like gendered job markets and inequitable wage scales whilst making it possible for women to attain positions of authority, the professions, government and cultural institutions, just like their male counterparts. Liberal feminism's main strategy to remedy the inequality between women and men, especially in the job market, is anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action. In this strategy, qualified people are sought out to redress imbalances in gender and ethnic representation. This remedial strategy includes encouraging the genders to train for occupations that are traditionally reserved for only one sex, for example women training as engineers

and males training as secretaries. Unfortunately, liberal feminism cannot overcome the prevailing belief that women and men are intrinsically different, but to a degree, it succeeds in showing that, although women are different from men, they are not inferior. Its contradiction, however, is that, if women and men were the same, it would not matter if a woman or a man fills a position.

## □ **Marxist and social feminism**

Marxist and social feminism holds that Marx's capitalist theory was thought to apply to people of any social characteristic where persons owning means of production are part of the capital class and those who sell their labour for a wage are part of the workers or working class. However, in the capitalist societies of the 19th century, women were not allowed to own property, and their profits and wages (and their bodies) belonged to their fathers or husbands. Further to this, Marxist theory did not take into account housewives who worked in the house and cared for children. Women in this circumstance were economically dependent on men and not free. This omission is addressed by Marxist and socialist feminists, who recognise the role of the housewife as vital to maintaining the status quo and at the same time recognise it is a source of oppression and exploitation. Because a woman works in the house, she is economically dependent on her husband, and if she is employed outside the home, she is still responsible for the housework (cleaning, cooking and taking care of the children), hence she works twice as much for less compensation. Marxist and social feminism's remedy is full-time employment for women (outside the house) with provision for maternity leave (in some instances, for both genders). However, in the case of socialist economies,



these provisions may change with changing economic and political conditions, leaving women still vulnerable as state policies protect the interest of the state and not women because these policies depend on the state's economic needs. In socialist economies, the solution to gender inequality is devising comparable worth rather than affirmative action so as to ensure more equitable remuneration for females, making them less dependent on marriage or state subsidies for survival.

### □ **Development feminism**

Development feminism addresses the economic exploitation of women in postcolonial countries as well as political issues of women's rights and oppressive cultural practices (such as child marriage, infanticide, female genital mutilation and honour executions) by stressing education for girls, maternity and child healthcare as well as economic resources for women, who contribute greatly to the support of their families. Generally, economically active women in postcolonial countries are paid less than men, which is a remnant of their colonial history. Historically, women supported the household by augmenting the meagre wage earned by the (migrant) husband by growing crops. However, under colonialism, women's traditional contribution to food production was undermined in favour of exportable crops, leaving them on less fertile land on which they could scarcely survive. Men were favoured in the production of exportable crops whilst remunerated with a slave's wage on which they could hardly survive themselves. Development feminism equated women's status with the control of economic resources, which they generally controlled as main producers of household food and distributors of surplus production. However, production is influenced by the technology

used as well as by kinship, the latter being important in society in determining the relative status of women and men. Some women may have a high status in their community, but in patriarchal societies, women and their production, including children, are still the property of men (father or husband). Hence, cultural values and practices still give men in these societies power over their wives and daughters when gender politics calls for marital rights and sexual autonomy.

## ■ Gender resistant feminism

This perspective emerged in response to the inequalities of everyday life such as a lack of acknowledgement for competently completing a job and being passed over for a job that involves taking charge. It includes radical, lesbian, psychoanalytical and standpoint feminism.

## □ Radical feminism's theory

Radical feminism's theory of gender inequality goes beyond discrimination to deal with oppression and devise a gender politics of resistance to the dominant gender order (patriarchy). Patriarchy can be found wherever women and men are in contact with each other, whether in private or public. Patriarchy holds that women are not only different from men but also inferior (Jaffe 2010). It is deeply rooted in the consciousness of most men and hence difficult to eradicate. This oppression can best be resisted by forming women-only support groups to counter oppression and exploitation. Radical feminism blames values that are upholding male domination for the ills of the world and praises female values, which can be acquired by men, to foster harmony and equality. They also generally condemn

heterosexual relationships as coercive. This perspective does not attend to ethnic minorities and class differences. Consequently, radical feminism upsets women who are in heterosexual relationships and who are from the working class as well as from ethnic minority groups.

### □ **Lesbian feminism**

Lesbian feminism takes this radical view further. Heterosexual relationships, which are oppressive and exploitive, are taken to their logical conclusion by turning to women for sexual love as well as intellectual companionship and emotional support. Women are more than just sexual and emotional relationships but a cultural community of women. Bisexual women are resisted by lesbian feminism.

### □ **Psychoanalytical feminism**

Psychoanalytical feminism responds inter alia to Freud's theory of personality development. Men dominate women because of their unconscious contradictory needs, on the one hand, for women's emotionality and, on the other, for rejecting women as potential castrators. Women submit to men because of their 'unconscious' desire for emotional connectedness. This theory of feminism holds that gendered personalities are the outcome of the Oedipus complex where separation from the mother presents a crisis. This stems from the mother being the primary or dominant parent. It can be prevented by men taking up their role in the parental unit.

The former three perspectives converge in *standpoint feminism*, which confronts the dominant sources of knowledge and values, critiquing the thoughtless acceptance of scientific facts and the assumptions on which they are based, which produce gender

inequality. Standpoint feminism holds that women's voices are different from men's voices and that they must be heard if women want to challenge hegemonic values. Western society is divided on the basis of gender, and men do not realise or recognise that the knowledge they produce and the concepts they use come from their own experiences. Hence, they claim it (knowledge) as universal, general, neutral and objective. However, for women, this knowledge is partial, particular, masculine and subjective because they see the world from a different perspective where women have been excluded from much of science. If women produced knowledge, standpoint feminism holds that it is likely that it would have been much more in touch with the everyday material world and with the connectedness of people. It also contends that adding women to research teams is not enough but that they must have a feminist viewpoint, benefitting women's experience in the particular situation, which is critical of mainstream concepts that justify established lines of power and recognise that facts reflect current values and past history.

## ■ Gender revolution feminism

Feminist theories that confront the dominant social order by questioning the clarity of the categories comprising its hierarchies emerged. This feminist perspective disentangles the interconnecting structures of power and privileges that make one group of men (and women) dominant and ranges everyone else in a complex hierarchy of increasing disadvantage. They also examine the way in which cultural constructions, in particular in the mass media, justify and normalise inequality and subordinating practices. Multi-ethnic

feminism, men's feminism, social-construction feminism, post-modern feminism and queer theory are classified as part of this perspective of feminism and will be discussed below.

### □ **Multi-ethnic feminism**

Multi-ethnic feminism argues that no single aspect of inequality is more important than any other. This perspective holds that ethnicity, social class, religion and gender, which are structurally interconnected relationships, involve complex social structures in which upper-class, heterosexual white men and women dominate 'lower-class' women and men as well as women and men of disadvantaged ethnicities and religions. Hence, a 'lesser' group is a social position in multiple systems of domination whilst oppression is expressed in different formats for the different groups. This perspective argues that not only ought the views and experiences of women be included, but women and men of different ethnic groups, religions, social classes and economic conditions ought to be represented because the values, identity and consciousness of the self are ingrained in all its statuses, which structure what people experience, do, feel and believe about the self and others.

### □ **Men's feminism**

Men's feminism is a combination of a range of feminist perspectives, including social construction, multi-ethnic, psychoanalytic and development feminism as well as gay studies. It applies feminist theories to the study of men and masculinity, treating men as well as women as a gender and scrutinising masculinity as carefully as femininity in order to

arrive at a theory of masculinities, which takes into account the differences between men. There are neither universal masculine characteristics throughout all societies nor, it might be added, in any individual organisational setting. Considering that gender is relational and as such implanted in the structure of society, the analysis of men's feminism takes place according to the masculine-feminine oppositional relationship, including that of privilege, dominance, subordination, advantage and disadvantage. It disapproves of the pressure on men to only identify with their fathers without a close emotional bond and to be distant towards the women in their lives and their own children. Many men's feminists have also been critical of men's movements that promote patriarchal concepts of manhood as these movements seek to change individual attitudes rather than society's concept of gender inequality or the power differences amongst men.

### **Social-construction feminism**

Social-construction feminism examines the structure of a gendered society as a whole because gender is deemed to be a society-wide institution that is ingrained in all major social organisations. Consequently, gender, as a social institution, determines the distribution of power, privilege and economic resources. Gendered norms and expectations are entrenched in both women's and men's sense of individual human identity, justifying the patriarchal approach to life that asserts unequal treatment. The pervasiveness of gendering results in the belief that gendering is biological and thus natural. This perspective focuses on the processes that create gender differences and that render the construction of gender invisible. Society sees gender difference owing to social processes like the

gendered division of chores in the home, gender segregation – including in sports – and gender typing of occupations. In the latter case, women and men do not do the same kind of work, and there is control, suppression and the elimination of gender-inappropriate behaviour and appearances such as aggressiveness in women and nurturing in men. These processes perpetuate inequalities through moral censure and stigmatisation whilst most people willingly follow their society's prescription for their status as these norms and expectations are ingrained in their individual sense of identity and worth. Enduring change is unlikely, except in cases where the pervasiveness of gender and its social construction are openly challenged at every level of society, a task that will not be easy.

### □ **Post-modern feminism and queer theory**

Post-modern feminism and queer theory go the furthest in challenging gender categories as dual, oppositional and fixed whilst arguing that sexuality and gender are shifting, fluid, multifarious categories. This perspective explores the ways in which societies justify their beliefs about gender with ideological discourses (message), which are embedded in cultural representations or texts, including but not limited to art, fashion, literature, the mass media and religious liturgy. Like the analysis of any communication, attention is given to what is said, not said and implied as well as every aspect relating to the production of a message, including financing. As for any form of communication, the audience, by virtue of its interpretation of the message, which can be both open and direct as well as subliminal, conveys ideas about our identity and relationships with one another. These relationships are deemed

normal and acceptable whilst normality is rewarded and deviance is punished. As such, the focus is on individual actions.

From the above summary, it is clear that scholars hold many perspectives on feminism, and they have a diverse response to bringing about equality. Furthermore, one might reach a different analysis or interpretation if one consults different sources. Moreover, many feminists do not fit into a single category or perspective but draw on ideas from a number of categories and perspectives. What stands out as we summarise the perspectives of feminism presented above is that feminists search for explanations by means of which to describe the reasons why masculinity continues its hegemony over femininity and 'to explore political and social practices in order to bring about reform' (Grogan 1996:33). In this sense, feminists contend for the right to know, the nature and value of knowledge (and feminist knowledge within this), the relationship between the methods (epistemology or methodology) chosen, how they are used, and the knowledge that is produced as a result of them (Calvert & Ramsey 1992; Hesse-Biber 2012; Letherby 2003), which should be based on a careful analysis of the experience of everyone and not just a few.

## ■ **Feminism in management research**

According to Letherby (2003, 2013), a focus on the relationship between the self and other (the auto/biographical) necessarily encourages reflection on power relationships within research. In addition, the status of the claims that researchers can and cannot make from research and their relationship with and responsibility to respondents and the academic community should also be considered (see Letherby 2003, 2013) and, as such, accounted for



in research, including management research. Management is generally not considered a feminised occupation as men still outnumber women, particularly in the ranks of senior management, although women have progressively increased their representation in the ranks of senior management (Ross-Smith & Huppertz 2010). Consequently the (popular) assumption is that management texts are written by males, about males and for males whilst women are excluded as role-players (Crainer 2003 in Kelan 2008). It is contended that management texts with a masculine bias may be failing to keep pace with changes in the world of work such as flexible forms of employment (Kelan 2008). Moreover, the new worker is expected to benefit from flexibility, freedom and accountability. However, these very concepts are gendered, that is, taken as masculine, which need careful consideration if gender in management is to be taken seriously as a practice involving concern for equality (Kelan 2008). Hence, Kelan (2008) explores how far management texts have changed to reflect the new reality of work. Paying close attention to gender construction in management provides insight into the way in which a particular reality is constructed, thus shaping perceptions of reality (Kelan 2008). Moreover, gendered language is a powerful transmitter of who is seen as appropriate or suitable for a job, irrespective of whether the term is explicit or subtle, due to its underlying meaning that influences the way in which people interact (Kelan 2008). Kelan (2008) states that she uses discourse analysis (language and the ideology that the language in use supports and makes possible) as per Potter and Whetteral (1987) as it is a useful tool by means of which to identify which gender

representations are mobilised in the newer management literature and how it creates and validates knowledge. Mainstream management texts authored by management gurus (men and women) spanning a wide audience were analysed as part of Kelan's study. The authors of the texts ranged from MBA students to practicing managers, to newcomers in the workplace. The texts were coded according to the qualities that new workers are required to have and according to new career structures where the general use of gender was also examined for what was left out and/or glossed over. The discourse analysis resulted in three seeming progressive ways in which people talk about gender, namely: (1) an awareness of gender issues, showing that women are no longer absent from management, (2) the individualisation of discourse, showing that the factors that previously hampered equality are losing their importance and (3) the ideal discourse, representing women as the new ideal worker. Kelan (2008) contends that these representations of women are at best superficial and perpetuate inequality in masked ways. For example, women are the workers of the future because they have the right skills, but they are paid less for the same work and are unable to advance beyond the so-called 'glass ceiling'. These differences are accounted for by typical stereotypical roles within the private lives of individuals where men primarily take on the role of breadwinner with women taking primarily caregiving roles and secondarily breadwinner roles (which is supported by unequal pay and opportunity in the workplace and social-policy provision). If gender disappears from the agenda, power lines continue to operate along gendered lines, although in an obscured

fashion. Thus, the focus ought to move to the way in which gender is used and to the way in which writing needs to be done differently from the masculine agenda. It ought to be pointed out that, although this study was published in 2008, the books of most so-called 'gurus' generally dated back to 2001, which are outdated, considering the changing environment in which we find ourselves.

Limerick and O'Leary (2006) provide examples of qualitative research based on feminist epistemological assumptions. They contend that this research reinvents management theory by providing new understandings. These understandings address the demands of managing contemporary workplaces, which are characterised by increasing diversity and discontinuous change. They used three research projects in Australia, describing research processes and outcomes which aim to reflexively attend to a range of voices as well as researcher and researched subjectivities. In the research projects, they demonstrate the way in which feminist epistemologies are enacted and thus provide tangible examples of feminist (qualitative) research in management. They outline the feminist epistemological assumptions that they sought to enact because such a practice is in keeping with the principle of being visible and transparent about the subjectivities that researchers bring to their research whilst assisting reflexive endeavours to identify the tensions and contradictions that this perspective may involve. The intention of reflexivity is to gain insight into assumptions involving gender bias that underlies the inquiry. Like Kelan (2008), Limerick and O'Leary (2006) argue that overlooking gender in management research perpetuates the status quo, which both excludes women and fails to understand the practical

and theoretical consequences of such an omission. In a study of women who achieved success in leadership positions in the educational sector, they conclude that women lead differently. In particular, collaborative work, which differs from the style of men as the dominant group in positions of leadership, is part of their success. In the study about mentoring, they find that sponsorship from higher-ranking colleagues is helpful. However, mentoring is ill-defined, and the women (participants) seem to prefer more reciprocal relationships. Networking, at all levels, which are easily accessible, also contributes to success. The difference between networking and mentoring is the intensity of the relationship, hierarchical positions and a lack of reciprocity. Mentoring is associated with a 'male-gendered' concept, which needs to be redefined in neutral words. In the final study about ethics in the public service, it is again pointed out that dominant ethical understandings are a male construction, which may not necessarily fit women's views and experience. The study also points out that each of the women studied had multiple voices regarding the different aspects of ethics. New ways of working necessitate a different understanding of ethics. This requires a re-conceptualisation of ethics, reflecting a relational conceptualisation. Once again, it needs to be noted that these studies draw on outdated literature from the 1990s, which may have changed with developments in recent times.

The study of Griffen (2015) attends to the global financial crisis from a feminist perspective, using a feminist discourse analysis to study issues of gender and governance. She (Griffen 2015) argues that the global financial crisis had the following effect:

[T]he emergence of crisis governance feminism has enabled existing structures and mechanisms of gendered privilege, to suppress calls for the

overhaul of the financial industry and re-entrenched their power in the political economy. (p. 50)

In her analysis, she examines the ways in which financial crises became an everyday technique of gendered governance. She does this by asking questions, including how feminist critique and knowledge have contributed towards and promoted the status quo. Taking gender seriously in the financial crisis, she contends, requires thinking carefully about how narratives about crisis have emerged and unfolded to effect women and men in specific – and malevolent – ways. The focus of the study is on governance that appeared after the crisis, and she maintains that the discourse involves an ongoing failure to reform the foundations of global financial systems, and the perpetuation of a ‘business as usual’ ethic that serves to promote global finance as the domain (preserve) of a privileged, neo-classical, male elite. In this regard, the UK Labour Party’s deputy leader, Harriet Harman, goes a step further when she submits that the liability for the financial crisis lies resolutely in the hands of men by saying the following: ‘[S]omebody did say... that if it had been Lehman Sisters, rather than Lehman Brothers, then there may not have been as much turmoil’ (Morris 2009). Griffen (2015) highlights the point that financial crises have an impact on labour markets, household income, social services, work burden and human development in deep and lasting ways, especially in the case of the Asian financial crisis. In addition, women in South Korea lost their jobs at a rate of seven times that of men. In developing countries, industries like textiles and apparel that employ mainly female workers were also hit hard. Women are not well presented in senior management (less than 20%) whilst their male counterparts earn up to 24% more.

According to social institutions like the IMF, the financial crisis is generally attributed to external variables like reckless lending and

insufficient oversight whilst internal weaknesses are ignored. There seems to be no solution to the crisis even years after its commencement. Attention is drawn to how feminists supporting neo-liberal economics eschew social change, thus supporting inequalities, probably because they see themselves as economists favouring technical measurements. The article draws on recent literature, and it seems that the financial crises are well documented from a feminist perspective. This analysis of gender inequality supports the conclusions of the study by Kelan (2008). Also, in line with the reasoning that the negative effects of the global financial crisis would not have happened if there had been a higher representation of women on boards (Koch 2015), the issue of promoting women on corporate boards has also gained significant attention.

In all the feminist studies cited here, it is clear that the use of language plays an important role in reinforcing gender inequality. On the one hand, scripts written by elite actors and institutions are passively absorbed by people at grassroots level (the masses) and fail entirely to consider the many ways in which everyday actions facilitate the status quo. On the other hand, because of their training which they do not question from a feminist perspective, women who are trained in a specific field may be oblivious to the way in which the standard texts and practices foster inequality.

## ■ Conclusion

Feminism is often misunderstood, and this misunderstanding is exacerbated by the fact that there is no common definition or perspective describing feminism. The different views also usher in tensions between competing perspectives. Nevertheless, feminism is essentially about the identity of women, philosophically and

socially. This identity transcends gender, sex and sexuality as women are more than a body because they are defined by a convergence of factors that consider their place in society. Feminism is also about equality, not only for women but for all marginalised groups regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, social class or religion. Gender, sex and sexuality are socially constructed concepts. These are based in some form of knowledge (philosophy), grounded in belief rather than scientific evidence. Hence, the questions of what is to know, how we come to know and who is to know are central concepts in feminism as inequality is a societal rather than an individual matter. Inequality is deeply ingrained in society and is affecting all social institutions like marriage, family, work and the economy, politics, arts, culture and language. Knowledge and meaning are conveyed by these social structures and can thus be more broadly viewed in social institutions like art, fashion, mass media, religious liturgy, business organisation, schools and universities where quality can only be achieved if society counters *inequality*. When women are aware of their true identity, they will be able to participate fruitfully in equality debates to bring about change by questioning the time-honoured secular knowledge or beliefs about women and equality. This requires a deep understanding of empowerment at the individual level, having a voice, knowing how they are different, knowing what cultural and social expectations they carry and how they carry them in a personal and professional way. As such, women should not thoughtlessly accept the subliminal messages of the norm in relating to the other as a consequence of the socially ingrained norms. Rather they should make visible the implications of what is said, not said and

glossed over, especially in their professional field, which may result in surprising outcomes as revealed by especially the studies by Kelan (2008) and Griffin (2015). It is useful to take on a feminist perspective in addition to the professional perspective in order to expose seemingly innocent differences (which manifest themselves in inequality). Although one can acknowledge that gender 'is a difference that makes a difference' (Di Stephano 1990:78), gender is not the only signifier of difference and does not always work in isolation of other differences in determining inequality of opportunity and experience (Brown & Misra 2003; Holvino 2010; Marchbank & Letherby 2014). Furthermore, it is important to understand why women who 'make it' do not always work collaboratively with those that hope to follow them (Mavin 2008) and to acknowledge that men too may be disadvantaged by gendered expectations which are often exacerbated by workplace and social policy (Connell 2005; Marchbank & Letherby 2014).

Following this overview, it is recommended that the academic or scholarly management literature authored by women, like Mary Parker-Follett, Lilian Gilbreth, Kathleen Eisenhardt, Margaret Peteraf and Dorothy Marcic, be analysed from a feminist perspective to see how they used language as well as addressed gender difference and inequality. This would add to a consideration of the measurable change we have been looking for since the early days of the female pioneer.

## ■ Chapter 5: Summary

Chapter 5 gives a brief overview of the application of feminism in management research. It is achieved through a summary of selected feminist theory and a survey of literature pertaining to feminist



research in management. The findings show feminism to be concerned with the identity of women, which transcends gender, sex and sexuality, promoting equality on economic, legal, political and social terms. Gender, sex and sexuality are social constructs, which are deeply ingrained in societies. These constructs are maintained by social institutions advocating for what is popularly defined as 'normal' and acceptable as well as unacceptable and potentially punishable. Generally, people, including women, consume these normative messages uncritically with the result that a patriarchal system in which women, children and other minorities are made subservient becomes subliminally reinforced. Language is a powerful mechanism in propagating this social paradigm, observed in the available research on management from a feminist perspective. Seemingly innocent words preserve the status quo, a situation necessitating critical reflection in order to bring about equality. It is recommended that scholarly management texts written by women be discursively analysed so as to identify which gender representations are mobilised and whether anything can be found to have changed since the pioneering works of Mary Parker-Follett and Lilian Gilbreth.

## Chapter 5

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