Individualized Entrepreneurial Power Women

Examining gender inequality in the business world through the lens of postfeminism's emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment

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Introduction

Today it is widely believed that equality between men and women in the Western world is achieved. Now that the political demands of first and second wave feminism have been met (enfranchisement, equal pay, sexual liberation etc.), it is no longer necessary for women or anyone else to be actively involved in feminism (Genz & Brabon 14). Feminism seems to have achieved the status of 'common sense' and some of its elements have been fully incorporated into political and institutional life (McRobbie 1).

Angela McRobbie describes how the feminism which is deemed to be no longer necessary is increasingly replaced by a new kind of feminism. "Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice', elements of feminism are converted into a much more individualistic discourse" (1). McRobbie calls this discourse 'postfeminist'. Postfeminism could be seen as a new, fresh version of feminism in which women are free to choose anything they want, "presenting them as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever" (Gill 153).

This individualistic discourse of postfeminism comes with positive advantages for (mainly white) women in the Western world, like the ability to celebrate their femininity and the freedom to make their own choices. However this thesis project argues that there is also another less favorable side to it that needs to be analyzed critically. The emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment is considered as central to the postfeminist discourse according to Rosalind Gill, and makes that postfeminism is very strongly connected to neoliberalism with its emphasis on agency and free choice. The danger of both these discourses is that important notions of political and cultural influence in the lives of women are lost out of sight. They facilitate a shift in focus toward the agency and responsibility of women, and away from the underlying power structures that partly constitute their position in society.

During my internship at Rabobank Nederland, I conducted a research project in which I have investigated the chances and possibilities for women working in local banks of the Rabobank in pay level eight and nine to move higher up in the organization, by interviewing them in focus groups. I was shocked to discover a striking reluctance and awkwardness among these Dutch, white, well-educated women between thirty and forty years old to talk and think about gender equality, the position of women in the Rabobank and the diversity policy of the organization. Generally, the women did not feel the need to discuss these issues for they were convinced that if

they would work hard, they would be able to achieve the same career successes as their male colleagues. I suspect that the postfeminist discourse with its emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment has a lot to do with this uneasiness of the participants to talk about their position as a woman in the organization in relation to larger social and political power structures. I expect the concept of postfeminism to be helpful when exploring the way these women relate toward issues of gender equality and women's rights.

In this research project I will take up postfeminism as a sensibility to critically analyze the conversations with the participants in the focus group interviews. Rosalind Gill defines the postfeminist sensibility as a concept that is comprised and constituted through several themes. In this research project I focus on the aspect of individualism, choice and empowerment in particular, for I believe that it is these concepts in particular that influence the reluctance of women to talk about their position as women in the organization. The following research question will be central to this research project:

> *How might postfeminism's emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment help to understand the reluctance of women working for the local banks of the Rabobank in pay levels eight and nine to talk about gender inequality?*

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will map out the theoretical framework that supports this research project. My thesis will be drawing mostly on the works of Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill. They both argue that the individualistic nature of postfeminism comes at a certain cost. (Mainly White, western) women are included into the business world on the condition that they withhold their critique toward political or social power structures that keep gender inequality in place. I will lay sufficient groundwork for discussing these theories by first accounting for the definitional complexity of postfeminism. I will differentiate between postfeminism understood as an academic discussion and postfeminism as a phenomenon in mainstream culture. I will then elaborate on reasons for choosing to work with the postfeminist sensibility, and I will explain how McRobbie's work relates to this definition of postfeminism.

In the methodological chapter, I will reflect on the methods for assembling the data, with a thorough description of the research I conducted at the Rabobank. I will here elaborate on the advantages and limitations of the method of focus group interviews. In the second part of the chapter I will account for the methodology of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis that was used in the analysis of the data. In the analytical chapter, I will use a postfeminist sensibility to critically

examine the way women in the Rabobank experience their position in the organization as a woman, and the reasons for their hesitance to talk about gender inequality in their workplace.

The analytical chapter is divided into two parts. In the first section, I will elaborate on the paradoxical way the women reify a stereotypical definition of masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and believe in the possibility for women to overcome these stereotypes on the other. In the next part, I will connect that paradox to the language of individualism, choice and empowerment that is central to the postfeminist sensibility. By doing this, I hope to be able to come to a conclusion on how the individualistic discourse of postfeminism influences the reluctance of the women in pay grade eight and nine of several local banks of the Rabobank to talk about gender inequality in the organization.

Theoretical Framework

This research project makes use of the definition of postfeminism as a sensibility (Gill 2007), because it allows for postfeminism to be understood as a contradictory and complex reworking of feminism, as well as a concept that can be used analytically to examine the influence of postfeminism in mainstream culture. While Gill mainly focuses on how the postfeminist sensibility works in popular media culture, I argue that this postfeminist sensibility can be useful in examining other case studies too. I use the articles of Catherine Rottenberg and Patricia Lewis to deploy the postfeminist sensibility to examine what is distinctive about contemporary articulations of gender in the business world.

This thesis focuses on the aspect of individualism, choice and empowerment, that Gill mentions as central to the postfeminist sensibility. According to Gill, these concepts are closely related to each other and reinforce each other. She therefore phrases them into one sentence so that together they form one of the central aspects of postfeminism as a sensibility. As Gill argues, "These characteristics are also central to neoliberalism and suggest a profound relationship between neoliberal ideologies and postfeminism" (163). I would argue that this parallel is important because it shows how feminism is increasingly integrated into mainstream culture for it to become in line with the current neoliberal society.

Before going into depth about the postfeminist sensibility, I will start with an examination of the definitional complexity of postfeminism by differentiating between postfeminism understood as an academic discussion and postfeminism as a phenomenon in mainstream culture. Several feminist scholars have attempted to structure postfeminism's multiple definitions and manifestations, of which the most prominent distinction is made between postfeminism in academia and postfeminism in mainstream culture (for example by Genz & Brabon, Patricia Lewis and Gill & Scharff). These distinctions are an easy way of coming to a better understanding of the complex notion of postfeminism, for it creates clarity and structure in the complex and extensive body of literature on postfeminism. However postfeminism in academia or as a cultural phenomenon should not be treated as strictly separate categories. Instead, I will show how these definitions often overlap and operate simultaneously. I will then elaborate on backlash theory, which forms the basis to the definition of postfeminism as a sensibility. McRobbie offers a complexification of this backlash theory, which I will discuss subsequently. I will then also explain the way Gill uses McRobbie's complexification of the backlash theory in her definition of postfeminism as a sensibility. In this

definition, the focus on individualism, choice and empowerment is one of the central aspects. Discussing this aspect will subsequently lead to a discussion about the parallels between neoliberalism and postfeminism. Lastly, I will discuss how the postfeminism according to McRobbie seems to entail a certain exchange process.

Postfeminism in the Academic Discussion

Postfeminism in the academic world refers to the theoretical discussion about other ways of thinking about feminism and defining it. An often-cited example of this definition of postfeminism is offered by Ann Brooks: "Postfeminism refers to the current state of feminist thinking - the culmination of a number of debates within and outside feminism" (7). While according to Brooks the discussion about the changes in feminism can also happen outside of feminism, the discussion about postfeminism in the feminist academic realm does have a more abstract theoretical context than postfeminism in the field of media or cultural studies. It is often understood as being intrinsically connected to postmodernism and poststructuralism, in which feminism is fundamentally challenged and redefined. Ann Brooks agrees with De Lauretis that postfeminism is about understanding feminism as a *process,* "resisting closure of definition" (De Lauretis in Brooks 4). Postfeminism in this sense is about critically reworking feminism's own assumptions (Lewis 1849). More specifically, the unity of the feminist movement is questioned through the concept of postfeminism. One overall definition of feminism is unable to account for the complexity of the feminist movement. Besides, one single definition would inevitably be based on the inclusion of certain minority groups and the exclusion of others. Instead, as Genz and Brabon assert, postfeminism "can be considered as a movement of feminist pluralization and diversification" (28).

This fragmentation offers the possibility to see the feminist movement as an ever-changing process, and makes it possible to define feminism in non-essentialist terms. This plural notion of feminism addresses the complexities of the intersection between sex and other forms of oppression such as race, class, ethnicity and age. But Genz and Brabon criticize this increasingly "fragmenting feminism" (Brooks 9): "The understanding of postfeminism as feminist pluralism also highlights the fact that, with the advent of the postmodern era, any illusions of feminist unity have to be interrogated and ultimately discarded" (29).

I would agree with them that this non-essentialist definition of feminism makes it difficult to pursue political action. When feminism has no essence, it takes away the possibility of collectivity. It removes the identity that serves as the basis for a political agenda. Therefore, "the central questions raised by feminist critics resolve around issues of agency and the specific nature of political action that feminists can pursue in the absence of a single feminist agenda and identity" (Genz & Brabon 29). Genz and Brabon emphasize that these issues raised by feminist critics in the academic world drift away too much from discussions about transformations of feminism in the public sphere. They state that "a purely theoretical conception of postfeminism is inadequate" (17), and argue for an understanding in which its other manifestations of postfeminism, especially in the context of the public debate on feminism and the modern woman (17), are also taken into account. Like Genz and Brabon, I contend that it is unnecessary and ultimately problematic to maintain a strict boundary between the different contexts in which postfeminism is discussed.

As mentioned above, postfeminist academics are attracted to postmodern accounts of subjectivity, in which there is "an increased freedom for women and a free play of a plurality of differences unhampered by any predetermined gender-identity" (Genz & Brabon 29). But these accounts of subjectivity are not only noticeable in the academic world. They seem to have found their way into the mainstream accounts on gender and gender equality as well. A common thought on issues regarding gender inequality in the business world that circulates in gender and entrepreneurship literature is the idea that men and women can both possess 'masculine and feminine energy'[1]. In the focus group research that I conducted I spoke with women in pay level eight and nine of the Rabobank organization about how they experience their position in the Rabobank as a woman and what problems or issues they faced in their work. It became clear that the women were not that eager to talk about gender differences. Instead, they assured me that men could just as much show behavior that was supposedly feminine, and the other way around. Men and women could even learn to develop more of their 'feminine' or 'masculine' traits. Here, the postmodern 'free play of differences' takes on a slightly different form, but the discussion shows similarities: the consequence of this free play of identities is that there is nothing that unites women anymore, and so, the notion of a form of 'sisterhood' among women is discarded. Thus, discussions about the reworking of feminism within the academic realm overlap with discussions about feminism in the public sphere. The concept of postfeminism takes up a different form in these various contexts, but it raises similar questions and issues. Although in this thesis I will not

[1] See for example Michele Mees, *The Balanced Leader,* 2011.

thoroughly elaborate on the academic discussion about how to avoid essentialism in defining feminism, I do want to keep the pluralistic notion of feminism and postfeminism in mind while moving to the next part of the chapter in which I account for the deployment of postfeminism as a sensibility.

Postfeminism as a Backlash

Although the themes and discussions between postfeminism in the academic realm and postfeminism in the context of mainstream culture overlap, the way these discussions take shape are still different from each other. The term 'postfeminism' was initially used in popular media, referring generally to the new and modern successor of second-wave feminism (Genz & Brabon 25). In this form, it has often been described by feminist scholars as a 'backlash against feminism'. Susan Faludi, who won a Pulitzer Prize for her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), is one of the first and most well-known feminist scholars to write about the negative publicity toward feminism in popular media. To illustrate her point, Faludi confronts her reader with the enormous amount of messages in the media about the negative effects of feminism on women. Faludi shows how the media uses an over-simplified account of feminism and promotes anti-feminist sentiments as sophisticated and taboo-breaking for daring to represent women in demeaning ways again (McRobbie 35). Ultimately, Faludi interprets these representations of feminism in the media as part of a "powerful counterassault on women's rights, a backlash" (Faludi 9). Faludi directly links this backlash to what she calls 'post-feminism' (Genz & Brabon 16). Faludi uses the hyphen to emphasize that 'post-feminism' is a movement coming *after* feminism, the prefix suggesting invasion and appropriation (Genz & Brabon 16). Faludi asserts that "post-feminism *is* the backlash" and defines it as something that "redefines women's rights in terms of a liberal individualist politics that centers on lifestyle choices and personal consumer pleasures" (Genz & Brabon 16).

Ann Braithewaite explains how this backlash theory has been widely taken up in many feminist analyses "to critique - and then usually dismiss - representations of both women and feminism throughout media and popular culture" (18). She perhaps correctly argues that this backlash theory is ultimately problematic, for it might uphold the illusion that there was ever something easily identifiable as 'feminism' to begin with (25). This definition glosses over the fact that second-wave feminism was just as scattered and unidentifiable as postfeminism is now. Moreover, as Genz and Brabon assert, this backlash theory leads to the idea that the popular

postfeminist position presumably stands outside of the academic discussion, it is therefore by definition useless, according to feminists such as Tasker and Negra (Genz & Brabon 18). Genz and Brabon note that this notion of a backlash has lead to a "skeptical and sometimes even hostile approach" toward postfeminism as a cultural phenomenon (19).

Complexification of the Backlash

Genz and Brabon's and Braithwaite's critical take on the backlash theory are more than justified. However Genz and Brabon perhaps overgeneralize when they argue that nearly all feminist scholars are 'hostile' toward postfeminism in popular culture and see it merely as a backlash against feminism. For example, in discarding Angela McRobbie's depiction of postfeminism "as an unfaithful reproduction of feminism – or worse, 'a ritualistic denunciation' that renders feminism 'out of date'" (6), Genz and Brabon gloss over the possibilities that McRobbie's writing on postfeminism provides. In *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change,* McRobbie argues like Faludi that postfeminism is making feminism seem redundant and unnecessary and defines postfeminism as "the active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s come to be undermined" (15). However unlike Faludi, McRobbie manages to account for the complexity of postfeminism's workings, by showing that postfeminism does not directly reject feminism, but that it takes feminism into account, by then showing it to be a thing of the past (6). At the same time, while feminism is taken into account, it seems to be substituted for something else. This is what McRobbie calls a "double entanglement". (Young) women are offered particular kinds of freedom, empowerment and choice 'in exchange for' or 'as a kind of substitute for' feminist politics and transformation (Gill & Scharff 4):

> Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice' these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise (…) as a kind of substitute for feminism. (McRobbie 1)

McRobbie shows how feminism is displaced by this new, 'modern' postfeminism which emphasizes the agency of the white women of the West through an individualistic choice discourse.

McRobbie is able to provide insight into how postfeminism seems to play with agency and how it creates the idea that everything (Western, white) women do is their own choice and responsibility. This approach to postfeminism makes one able to be attentive of "the underlying regulative dimensions of popular discourses of personal choice and self-empowerment" (McRobbie 19).

McRobbie's analysis is important and useful because she is able to shift the attention to these underlying power structures that partly constitute this postfeminist discourse. In this research project, I will argue that through the discourse of personal choice and self-empowerment, these power structures that are obscured and ignored. When Genz and Brabon argue for a different understanding of postfeminism than backlash theory, they do this because according to them, "it makes more sense to examine how power functions in contradictory ways in postfeminist discourses and how engaged individuals rework notions of agency in the context of postfeminist politics" (41). I agree with them that in discussions about postfeminism in popular media culture it is important to take women's agency into account. However, I also contend that it is important to problematize the term 'agency' in the context of postfeminism.

In this research project I will argue that the focus on agency is emblematic of a postfeminist and neoliberal discourse, and that this discourse is influencing the position of the women in the Rabobank in a profoundly negative way. My argument is partly based upon Gill's skeptical approach to 'agency' and 'choice'. She observes a certain trend in social theory and humanities to focus on these concepts, causing the influence of, for instance, popular media culture on girl's clothing preferences to remain unquestioned. Agency, in this respect, becomes something that puts emphasis on the responsibility of the subject itself, and shifts attention away from social power structures that also have a great influence in the chances and possibilities that every subject posses. She asserts that "One of the problems with this focus on autonomous choices is that it remains complicit with, rather than critical of, postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that see individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating" (436).

As I will address later, Gill sees a profound relationship between neoliberal discourses and postfeminist ones, asserting that academics have to be careful not to gloss over the inevitable entanglement between academic research and neoliberalism. While this connection between postfeminism and neoliberalism seems an obvious one, it is largely left unnoticed or under-explored by feminist scholars, as Rosalind Gill points out in her article "Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times". Neoliberalism was initially an economic policy or a policy framework adopted by several rich Western countries such as Britain and the USA. Market

competition played a central role in this policy framework or economic system. Nowadays, neoliberalism is not only seen as merely a concept in the economic realm. Instead, it is deemed to be completely embedded within our culture (Couldry 2010). As Gill points out, it is increasingly recognized in social theory that "neoliberalism is constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating" (443). One of the central consequences of neoliberalism is that "the neoliberal subject is required to bear full responsibility for their life biography no matter how severe the constraints of their actions" (Walkerdine *et al* quoted by Gill, 443). But these observations in social theory do not yet make an explicit connection between postfeminism and neoliberalism. According to Gill however, it is very important to further analyze the effect of neoliberalism on gender relations and more specifically on postfeminism (443).

Postfeminism as a Sensibility

I will elaborate further on the connection between neoliberalism and postfeminism later in this chapter, but for now I want to point out that McRobbie provides a complexification of the backlash theory, which, contrary to Genz and Brabon's and Braithwaite's suggestions, can in fact be very useful. Her analysis provides a possibility to critically examine the way feminism is represented in mainstream culture, and how postfeminism as a substitute for this particular image of feminism works. Postfeminism is deployed by McRobbie as a critical concept to understand the underlying power structures in popular media culture (Gill & Scharff 10). Gill and Scharff agree with Genz and Brabon and with Braithwaite that Faludi's understanding of postfeminism as a backlash is "not telling the whole story" and that this "linear model" of postfeminism as something that makes feminist achievements undone, cannot account for the complexities and struggles that characterize feminism itself. McRobbie, however, is able to offer a more complex notion of feminism, according to Gill and Scharff. Her analysis accurately shows that what is distinctive about postfeminist culture is the way in which a selectively defined feminism is both taken into account and repudiated.

Inspired by this approach to postfeminism, Gill and Scharff propose a notion of postfeminism as a sensibility, which offers the opportunity to see it as a critical concept, as a term that can be used analytically (8). Indeed, postfeminism deployed in this way can shift the focus onto the power structures that play a role in expressions of feminism in the public debate. I would argue that the idea of the postfeminist sensibility is more than a simplistic dismissal of representations of feminism in mainstream (media) culture. Instead, postfeminism in this sense "can be understood as

a cultural response to feminism and the changes it has brought, which does not seek to supersede feminism, but rather to rework and co-opt it" (Lewis 1850). Gill's definition of postfeminism as a sensibility is more focused upon the manifestation of postfeminism in popular media culture, but Patricia Lewis' article "Postfeminism, Femininities and Organization Studies: Exploring a New Agenda" is helpful in emphasizing that this definition of postfeminism as a sensibility is also "something that can be deployed as a critical tool for analyzing the feminine organizational subjectivities which form the basis of women's inclusion in contemporary organizations" (1846). Lewis makes a case for the relevance of exploring the business world through the lens of the postfeminist sensibility, and adequately explains how deploying postfeminism as a critical concept "can direct critical attention to the kinds of organizational subjects women (and men) are being asked to become" (Lewis 1846). By using postfeminism as a sensibility, I can call critical attention to the language of individualism, choice and empowerment that the women in the focus groups deploy, and critically address the consequences of this language to the way the women experience their position within the Rabobank as women.

Prominence to Individualism, Choice and Empowerment

Postfeminism as a sensibility consists of several coexisting themes (Gill 148). While all the themes are addressed in the analysis in one way or another, the focus of individualism, choice and empowerment takes up the most prominent role in this research project. Because these three concepts of individualism, choice and empowerment coexist with each other and reinforce each other, Gill has drawn them together and treats them as one overarching theme. According to Gill, "notions of choice (…) resonate powerfully with the emphasis upon empowerment and taking control (…) and a grammar of individualism underpins all these notions" (153). The emphasis on personal choice, Gill writes, "presents women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power balances whatsoever" (153). Gill shows how the postfeminist discourse manifests itself in popular media culture. Her most important finding is that nowadays it seems 'uncool' to state that people are strongly influenced by popular media culture and that issues concerning the relationship between representations and subjectivity are avoided (154). Individualism, choice and empowerment together lead to an "almost total evacuation of notions of cultural or political influence" (153). As I mentioned earlier, she connects this observation to the neoliberal focus on agency as well. The following quote illustrates her point:

> In postfeminist and neoliberal contexts in which women (particularly young women) are often presented as autonomous, agentic and empowered subjects, and in which, even in feminist scholarship, an older vocabulary that spoke of structures, domination, inequality and oppression sometimes seems to be giving way to something more celebratory, as though the feminist theorizing were itself inflected by a post-feminist sensibility– had come to believe the hype. (9)

Gill accurately shows how 'an older vocabulary' of feminism focused on underlying power structures that have now disappeared in the postfeminist discourse of agency and choice. This shift in focus not only characterizes the changes in feminism in mainstream culture, but also seems to have incorporated academic discussions about feminism. The consequences of this pervasiveness of a neoliberal and postfeminist focus on individualism, choice and empowerment is that instead of finding answers to the way power structures in popular culture influence subjectivities, social inequalities are increasingly seen as personal problems that have to be solved individually. Inequality issues are not seen in a larger context of power structures in society, but instead, through the discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment, the individual is impelled to take full responsibility for his or her own social position. Moreover, McRobbie shows how this postfeminist discourse of individual freedom goes together with anti-feminist sentiments (feminism in this case, meaning the particularly negative way in which feminism is represented in the media as a movement for uncool, bra-burning and embittered women). This kind of feminism is deemed to be no longer necessary, for female subjectivity is presented as unhampered by inequality structures whatsoever. Postfeminism is depicted as liberating women from the constraints of feminism, making it possible for women to finally make choices for themselves again without having to deal with feminism's interference. These postfeminist depictions of women that are liberated from feminism's intervention in the personal realm must be approached through a critical lens, for the underlying power relations that are active in these discourses of freedom are far from innocent, neutral, or even liberating.

Neoliberalism and Postfeminism

As mentioned before, the discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment means that postfeminism is strongly connected to neoliberalism. The powerful resonance between these concepts is operating on three levels, according to Gill. First, and this has been addressed in the previous section, postfeminism, just like neoliberalism, is structured through individualism, replacing notions of the political or the social (443). Secondly, there is a similarity between the neoliberal autonomous, self-regulating independent subjectivity and the inventive, self-choosing postfeminist subjectivity. These similarities lead Gill to perhaps correctly conclude that postfeminism might even partly be constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas (164). The first two levels are inherently connected: the individual is encouraged to take responsibility for his or her own actions instead of ascribing its position to social structures, and is therefore addressed as a self-choosing subjectivity who can act independently of these social structures. The third connection between neoliberalism and postfeminism that Gill proposes is that it is always *women* who seem to be addressed in the trend of self-disciplining and self-managing. Therefore, Gill poses the question "if neoliberalism could be always already gendered, with women constructed as its ideal subjects?" (443). Gill's point might indeed be justified: based on the focus group participants at the Rabobank, I would say that indeed in the business world it is mostly women, especially in the higher pay grades, who are extremely focused on individually adapting their behavior and communicational strategies to a masculine work environment. It seems to me that it is especially women who, through the new concept of feminism that is intertwined with individualism, choice and empowerment, are prompted to enact a certain kind of femininity that fits perfectly in the neoliberal business environment.

Catherine Rottenberg is one of the few feminist scholars to make a similar connection to that of Gill, by arguing that the intimate relation between neoliberalism and feminism gives rise to the gendered "neoliberal feminist subjectivity". This new subjectivity primarily emerges from Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In.* In this bestseller the COO of Facebook stimulates women to climb the corporate ladder by laying out various strategies for facilitating women's ability to foster their professional ambition (Rottenberg 425). The new neoliberal feminist subjectivity that emerges from this book is, according to Sandberg, an "entrepreneurial subject who is encouraged to take her own personal initiative in order to improve her career prospects, particularly in the corporate world" (Rottenberg 427). Thus, this subjectivity is constituted through neoliberal notions of individualism, choice and empowerment, concepts that are also central to postfeminism. Rottenberg

does not mention the word postfeminism in her article so it is unclear how neoliberal feminism is in this context related to postfeminism, but it seems to me that Rottenberg's account of neoliberal feminism corresponds well with Gill's understanding of postfeminism because of the focus on individualism.

The notion of the neoliberal subjectivity lies close to the notion of the "individualized entrepreneurial subjectivity" that Lewis describes. Through an analysis of research on gender and entrepreneurship, Lewis shows that "a hierarchic ordering is achieved among white femininities through judgements made about the extent to which they are feminized" (1859). She shows how in the entrepreneurial literature, women are encouraged to enact a certain amount of masculine behavior, to compensate for their feminine behavior and to make sure that they reach the right balance between masculinity and femininity. Here, a stereotypical opposition is reified between a definition of masculinity as rational, autonomous, assertive and femininity as nurturing, emotional, passive and attractive (1852). Lewis makes a distinction between four different kinds of entrepreneurial femininities that emerge from the entrepreneurship literature, of which the 'individualized entrepreneurial femininity' is highly valued and more widely promoted than other entrepreneurial femininities (1860). This embodiment of femininity is an "autonomous, freely choosing subject", an entrepreneur who is active, dynamic, who can "choose" the nature of her entrepreneurial activities and can overcome any restrictions she may encounter" (1854). This subjectivity is thus very similar to neoliberal feminism. It is also noteworthy that Lewis shows how the character traits of this idealized individualized entrepreneurial femininity are associated with masculinity. Connecting back to Gill's argument that it seems to be especially *women* who are called upon to adapt and self-manage, Lewis shows how in this adaptive behavior, women are considered as powerful and even feminist when they are able to enact the individualized entrepreneurial femininity and adapt to the masculine business environment. Lewis' analysis very accurately shows that women in the entrepreneurial field are expected to enact a specific kind of femininity, in which individualism, choice and empowerment are central.

Postfeminist Exchange

McRobbie demonstrates how the emergence of postfeminism has brought a new definition of feminism that can be seen as "female individualism" (16), a kind of feminism that prompts women to celebrate their individual successes. Catherine Rottenberg remarks that the neoliberal feminist subjectivity is feminist in the sense that she is aware of gender inequalities. However, what makes

the neoliberal feminist different from older definitions of feminism is that she has to be prepared to convert gender inequalities from a structural problem into an individual affair (420). The neoliberal feminist subjectivity is required not to be critical of the social system, but instead to be very critical of herself. Rottenberg's argument is closely related to that of McRobbie's, who shows that women or girls in the West are involved in a kind of 'exchange' in which society allows them to occupy a 'feminist' or agentic position on the condition that no critique must be uttered toward social structures that preserve the marginalized position of these girls and women in for example the business world. The discourse of freedom is central to neoliberal subjectivity as well as to postfeminism, but while its discourse presents women as 'free agents', this freedom is tied to various conditions which simultaneously narrow this freedom down. The exchange "is based on the invitation of young women by various governments that they might now consider themselves free to compete in education and work as privileged subjects of the new meritocracy" (McRobbie 16). Feminist politics are substituted for female individualization in order for women to be able to participate in the new meritocracy and receive certain privileges. In the feminism that Rottenberg depicts, women are required to be critical only on themselves, and never on the social system that keeps gender inequalities in place. McRobbie argues that even worse,

> The new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold her critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl. Indeed, this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom. (18)

This exchange is part of the 'sexual contract' that women are required to sign, according to McRobbie. This sexual contract makes clear that the discourse of freedom through which postfeminism is presented, is placed within firm limits, and McRobbie justly calls into question whether the idea of the liberation from feminism's restriction has really made women able to make their own personal decisions.

I would argue that there is an urgent need to critically address the conditions that shape this so-called freedom on which postfeminism is based, and to call into question whether that freedom is really liberating and empowering *all* women. Many feminist scholars have argued that Sheryl Sandberg is promoting a feminism that is only available to a limited group of white, western heterosexual women. Gary Gutting manages to accurately pinpoint one of the biggest problematics of the *Lean In* movement (which she calls 'mainstream feminism'):

> The trouble is, mainstream feminism is focused on encouraging educated middle-class women to "lean in" and "crack the glass ceiling" – in other words, to climb the corporate ladder. By definition, then, its beneficiaries can only be women of the professional-managerial class. And without structural changes in capitalist society, those women can only benefit by leaning on others — by offloading their own care work and housework onto low-waged, precarious workers, typically racialized and/or immigrant women. So this is not, and cannot be, a feminism for all women!

Gutting's point is very similar to what Audre Lorde argued much earlier in her essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House". In this essay from 1979, Lorde argues that as long as the feminist movement keeps ignoring differences among women, and keeps silencing those women "who stand outside of the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women" (99), it will never be able to bring about genuine and structural change. Lorde asks a question that is very similar to Gutting's point: "What do you do with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor and third world women?" (100). Sheryl Sandberg, who creates a feminism that coexists with the rules of capitalism and neoliberalism, could be considered as one of "those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (Lorde 99). By encouraging women to climb the corporate ladder, Sandberg sticks to the rules of the master's house instead of breaking it down. That *Lean In* is problematic because it does not include all women but only a small group of women, and that therefore it does not envision genuine change, is recognized by other feminist scholars as well (hooks, Bruenig, Garcia). But in this research project, I question whether this 'mainstream feminism', which can be seen as a result of the postfeminist sensibility, is even beneficiary and empowering for all women in the professional-managerial class. I agree with bell hooks and with Rottenberg that this *Lean In* movement has to be placed into a broader context and that the way this feminism has been "chosen and lifted up in the neoliberal marketplace" (hooks 2015) needs to be analyzed critically.

In this chapter I have shown how I understand postfeminism as a sensibility that offers the possibility to use postfeminism as a critical concept. The postfeminist sensibility is characterized by a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment, which makes postfeminism closely connected to neoliberalism. The focus on individualism, choice and empowerment gives rise to new

femininities like the individualized entrepreneurial femininity and the neoliberal feminist subjectivity. These correspond to the neoliberal system of self-regulation and offer women the possibility to be included in the current neoliberal society. I have argued that the enactment of these femininities comes with a certain exchange which according to McRobbie is characterizing postfeminism in general. In this exchange, women are included into the world of work but on the condition that they are prepared to convert gender inequalities from a structural into an individual affair. In the analysis, I will use the postfeminist sensibility to analyze how the women in the focus groups relate these issues. In the next chapter, I will first address the methods that were used to assemble the data for this research project and the methodology behind the analysis of these data.

Methodological framework

This thesis is based on research conducted during my internship,[2] together with my colleague Annemieke van der Poel, at the Rabobank. The research was about women who worked at local banks of the Rabobank in pay levels eight and nine.[3] This research project focused on the needs of the diversity manager of the Rabobank at the time, and thus was concerned with gaining practical information on the issues that women face when trying to move up in the organization. But the discussions that came up during the focus groups were very rich and inspiring, providing valuable insight into the way women experience their position within the business culture of the Rabobank. Therefore I decided to use the data for this thesis project as well.

In the first part of the chapter, I will elaborate on the methods or "the technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence" (Harding 2) that were used to assemble the data in the research for the Rabobank. The data consists of recordings of the discussions that were held in the focus groups. These were assembled through interviewing the women in small focus groups of four to ten participants. The second part of the chapter concerns the methodological framework. McGregor and Murname adequately explain what distinguishes methodology from method:

> The word methodology comprises two nouns: method and ology, which means a branch of knowledge; hence, methodology is a branch of knowledge that deals with the general principles or axioms of the generation of new knowledge. (…) Simply put, methodology refers to how each of logic, reality, values and what counts as knowledge inform research. (2)

This methodological part of the chapter will thus elaborate on what I believe is important in the practice of creating or generating knowledge, and how I interpret my role as a researcher. I will do this by detailing the reasons for using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to analyze the data. Also, I will discuss the issues and problems I faced when reporting and structuring the data.

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[2] I was an intern at Rabobank Nederland from February until August. My internship supervisor was Roeli Pot.

[3] The pay grades of the Rabobank go from level 1 until 11, followed by the Senior level and Executive level, which is the top level of the organization. Pay level eight and nine are the levels just below the sub-top. Level ten until eleven is considered sub-top, and SK and EK are considered as the top level. The income of scale eight is between € 3.101,64 and € 4.429,47 and in scale nine between € 3.587,04 and € 5.123,20 according to the rapport about Rabobank's collective agreements from 2011 until 2015.

Part One: Methods

Contextualizing the Research

Before explaining how the data was assembled, I believe it is important to give an impression of what kind of organization the Rabobank is and what the diversity policy within this company looks like. The Rabobank is very influential in Dutch society. It is one of the biggest financial organizations in the Netherlands with a leading role in the business world, and it is the third largest employer in Holland. Unlike most other banks, Rabobank is a cooperation, which means that it consists of a network of 110 local banks. The role of Rabobank Nederland (where I did my internship) is to serve these local banks, instead of the other way around.[4] What is so special about this system is that the local banks are relatively independent, and have a lot of freedom to structure their own way of working. Every local bank therefore creates its own distinct culture. In the research I conducted with my colleague Annemieke van der Poel, we looked at women who worked in four of these local banks.

For many years, the theme of diversity has been taken up several times in the Human Resources department, but the diversity policy always remained vague and it never gained a firm foothold. It is only since this year that the diversity policy has taken shape and became a little bit more well-known within the organization. This is partly thanks to Wiebe Draijer, the new CEO of the Rabobank who started in 2014 and who had to regain the public's trust in the Dutch financial organization. He is considered to be very supportive of the theme of diversity. The diversity policy consists of three separate themes: gender diversity, ethnic diversity, and disability. Gender diversity, which refers to equal treatment for women in the organization, is the main focus of the diversity officer. The Rabobank does not work with quotas for women, but there are certain target figures for the amount of women that have to be appointed in the top and sub top of the organization, set by the diversity manager and approved by the board of directors. The focus in the diversity policy is on stimulating the number of women in the top level of the organization. There are also target figures for people with disabilities, which are taken up by a different diversity manager who is specialized in disability. The diversity manager also tried to set up a policy to stimulate 'ethnic diversity' within the Rabobank, which was focused on people with a 'non-western background', but this was still in the start-up phase during my internship. The diversity policy is problematic in a number of ways. In

[4] This system of local banks changed drastically soon after I left the Rabobank. However, during my internship the Rabobank was still a cooperation. How did it change? It might be interesting to briefly state what these changes were.

short, the way different minorities in the organization that the diversity policy focuses on are neatly separated into different categories, makes an intersectional approach impossible. The term 'gender diversity' only refers to the balance between men and women in the organization: other gender identities are left out of this definition. Moreover, it obscures the fact that the policy on gender diversity mainly centers on the needs of white, Western women. Given the scope of this research I cannot elaborate further on these problematics; however, it is important to include this background information because the nature of the diversity policy also defines the context in which the data that this thesis project uses are assembled.

Research Aims

During my internship, my supervisor asked me and my colleague Annemieke van der Poel to conduct a study of the chances and possibilities of women in pay level eight and nine to move up to a higher pay level in the organization. She wanted us to make an inventory of the difficulties that the women in this level face when trying to move up in the organization and what is needed to help them improve their career chances. The diversity policy of the Rabobank offers several programs and activities for women in higher pay grades, such as the sponsoring program in which women are sponsored by a colleague from the top level of the organization, and workshops for women in management positions. But for women under pay grade ten, these programs are not available because the diversity policy initially focuses on the stimulation of women in the sub-top to move to the top. To gain a higher number of women in the top level of the organization is one of the main tasks of the diversity manager, because the top level of the organization is the most visible part of the organization. Having a large number of women at the top can give the Rabobank a better ranking in the Female Board Index. Showing up high in the list of this Female Board Index increases the organization's reputation in the field of diversity. Another reason for this to be a main goal of the diversity manager is that the sub top and top level of the organization is where there are the fewest women (20 percent in 2015). However the diversity manager saw some importance in improving the number of women in the 'talent pool', women in the lower scales who might later be able to move toward the top levels of the organization. Moreover, from pay level eight and nine onwards, the number of women starts to lower drastically. In the lower pay levels until pay level six, consisting mostly of functions such as secretarial and administrative work, the positions are generally occupied by women (which is of course equally problematic, although I cannot elaborate

on that here). Scale seven consists of approximately fifty percent men and fifty percent women, but the relatively small number of women in scale eight shows that men are much more likely to move up to the higher pay levels than women. To be able to gain more insight into the reasons why the number of women lowers in these pay levels, research into the experiences of these women in their work environment was useful.

Research Population

The research project especially focused on women in local banks. Employees of local banks from the Rabobank, especially small local banks, presumably have fewer contacts with people from other local banks or from Rabobank Nederland, situated in Utrecht. Therefore they have more difficulties with extending their strategic network. We wanted to find out how this affected women's career chances within the Rabobank. Moreover, when an employee wants to move up to pay grade ten or higher, there are significantly more possibilities at Rabobank Nederland than at the local banks. This is because the local banks are smaller and consequently have less jobs available, and because Rabobank Nederland is where most of the staff and management positions are available from pay level ten and higher.

We conducted the research at four local banks in Utrecht, Kromme Rijnstreek (a region nearby Utrecht), Leiden-Katwijk and Amsterdam. The local banks in Amsterdam and Utrecht were relatively large organizations opposed to those in Kromme Rijnstreek and Leiden-Katwijk. We chose two small and two large banks because the size of the organization influences the career possibilities that are already available within the local bank itself. The number of participants differed, depending on the size of the bank. In the bigger banks of Amsterdam and Utrecht we had ten participants, and in the smaller ones in Kromme Rijnstreek and Leiden-Katwijk we had four to six participants, respectively.

The research focused on talented women in pay levels eight and nine who were selected on the basis of their pay level and also on their performance. This was because together with the diversity manager we decided that the women who have a 'talent indication'[5] would be likely to have more ambition than women with no such performance indication. The central aim of the research was to find out which obstacles women faced when wanting to move to a higher pay level.

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[5] The talent indication is an indication of how well the employee has performed their job. This performance indication is assigned by each employee's manager.

The women with excellent performance would be more likely to consider moving to a job in a higher scale because it would be more challenging for them. I am aware though, that such an assumption can be considered problematical. One can earn a high performance indication according to certain standards within the Talent Management System of the Rabobank. These standards imply a certain definition of 'talent' that might be limited and not inclusive. An extended report from 2009 about gender biases in Talent Management by Anika Warren, concludes that "A narrow image of what talent looks like in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation" is one of the biggest issues that causes companies to "lose talent" (Warren 2). When the definition of 'ambitious' and 'talented' are dependent on the granting of the 'talent indication', there might only be a few women who measure up to this definition of ambitious and talented, but this does not have mean that there are no ambitious or talented women in the organization. Moreover, assigning a talent indication is highly dependent on the opinion of the manager and thus very sensitive to unconscious or conscious discrimination. As Warren points out:

> Senior executives set the tone, determine who gets what, and demonstrate the behaviors embedded in leadership competency models. Therefore, organizations risk pro-male criteria creeping into strategies and perceptions, inevitably disadvantaging women and businesses as men and senior leaders reap more benefits from the cycle. (13)

The report by Warren was written in 2009, but the diversity policy of the Rabobank still does not intensively intervene into the Talent Management System of the Rabobank. Thus, it is very likely that a high performance indication is not necessarily a guarantee for ambition because the granting of a high performance indication is by far a gender neutral or objective instrument.

We did not select women on the basis of their position or on the department in which they worked. The women participating in the focus groups all held different positions in different departments of the bank, including team leaders of certain departments, account managers, communication advisors, and process controllers. However, most shared the same educational background, with training in economics, sociology, or mathematics. The participants were all white, Dutch-speaking women between thirty and forty years old. The participants thus hold a relatively privileged position in Dutch society, in the sense that they conform to what is considered as 'normal' in the organization. This position is seen as 'neutral', unaffected by racism or discrimination (McIntosh 1988). Because of their whiteness, these women are privileged in the

sense that they conform to the white norm of the Rabobank organization. As a result of their job at the Rabobank, they are also privileged in terms of income. There are numerous other axes on which these women can be called 'privileged'. Given the fact that most of the women talked about their husband or male partner, I can conclude that they were in a heterosexual relationship, so this also meant that they held a normative and therefore privileged position. Also, none of the women were visibly disabled. It is important to keep in mind that the research participants share a privileged social position that influences the way they experience their position and the way they experience gender inequality or discrimination in general. For example, the participants in these focus groups have higher salaries and thus if they have children, they have the option of taking them to day-care, which determined the character of the discussions about the choices regarding motherhood and career, for this is something that women with lower incomes would not have been able to afford. It causes women with high salaries to face different choices and issues than other women. Because of their skin color, women have the advantage of conforming to the white norm of the Rabobank organization, and thus they will likely not experience racial discrimination. This will also certainly influence the way they experience their position in the organization and therefore, it is important to keep in mind the position of the research participants in this thesis project.

Choosing Focus Groups

Feminist scholars have only recently acknowledged the advantages of the focus group method. Interviewing in focus groups had previously been used primarily within the field of marketing studies, which was mainly because of practical reasons: interviewing several people at the same time saves time and money (Hesse-Biber, Montell). According to Hesse-Biber, who writes about her own experience with doing focus groups, it is precisely because focus groups were mostly used in marketing that feminists became suspicious of this method (Hesse-Biber 241). It was assumed that by doing focus groups the participants were stripped from their natural contexts, and therefore the data that was created was artificial or unnatural (Wilkinson 224). Yet as Sue Wilkinson points out, it is precisely the group dynamics in the focus groups that can produce particularly interesting data: "The social context of the focus groups provides an opportunity to examine how people engage in generating meaning, how opinions are formed, expressed and (sometimes) modified within the context of discussion and debate with others" (227). Moreover, Montell argues that "because

knowledge and meaning are collective rather than individual, focus groups can be an effective method for getting at this socially produced knowledge" (54).

This is the reason why my colleague and I chose to do focus groups instead of separate interviews: we wanted to see how the women interacted with themes regarding the subject of gender inequality, and by bringing the women together to talk about these issues, we wanted to gain insight into the way they experienced their position in the business culture of the Rabobank. Moreover, we saw the focus groups as an opportunity to bring women from separate departments of the Rabobank into contact. By doing this and by letting them share experiences with each other, we hoped to bring about a sense of community and solidarity amongst them and other female colleagues. As Hesse-Biber states, one of the big advantages of focus groups can be the collective nature of the method: "They bring women together and through discussion can reach a point where they realize that their experiences were not just individual but collective" (242).

As will become clear in my analysis, the women were very focused upon gaining individual success in their jobs. Therefore, they had the tendency to repudiate other female colleagues who are less successful, and generally to distance themselves from other female colleagues. To share experiences with other female colleagues was completely new to many of them. On the one hand, as the analysis will show, the women felt uncomfortable being amongst other women and having to talk about their position specifically as a woman in the organization. But at the end of the conversations, most of the research participants also said that they really enjoyed talking and getting to know each other. Annemieke and I got the impression that it was a relief for them to find out that other female colleagues were sometimes struggling with the same issues, such as the fear of negotiating over salary, feeling lonely as the only woman in an all-male team, or the difficulties of combining work and children. We triggered some of the participants to share their experiences with each other more often, and we felt that this created, even if only temporarily, "connections and solidarities among the women that contributed to feminist consciousness and social action" (Montell 45).

In the focus group in Amsterdam, the discussion mainly centered around the idea that the business culture in the Rabobank Amsterdam was gender-neutral. Nearly all of the women stated in the beginning that they had never experienced gender discrimination. But there were also moments in which the focus group seemed to raise consciousness about gender differences in the organization. One of the women mentioned that talking in a group of other female colleagues made her feel comfortable and appreciated, and that this was very different from how she usually felt in a

group with only men. She became aware of the idea that her position and her role in a group was not only the result of her own decisions and individual issues, but that it was also strongly affected by her social position as a woman in an all-male team and in a masculine environment. This is an example of how a focus group can raise feminist consciousness. It also made her feel a connection and solidarity with her female colleagues. Another example of the way focus groups can raise consciousness was the discussion about the gender pay gap in this focus group in Amsterdam. One of the women remarked: "I think it is ridiculous that a man with a big mouth can get a pay raise more easily than someone who is modest and kind!" Another participant remarked: "It is not fair." One of the participants even got red in the face and called out: "I have worked so hard every day to get to the point where I am now, but my salary stays the same!" Someone else reacted; "That's right, it's making you angry because it is unfair that a man gets more money than you do, just because you're a woman. That's how you should start your negotiation!" It might have been specifically the gender pay gap that triggered this emotional reaction because it was one of the few examples in which gender discrimination is very clearly visible, and also because it was undeniably affecting the women in the focus groups as well. This discussion is one of the rare moments in the focus groups where the women really became aware of gender discrimination, and where they supported each other to do something about it.

Research Progression

Based on my conversations with women in pay grades eight and nine, and based on research about gender in the business world such as the research project "Regretted Losses" by Henderikse and Van Beek[6], Annemieke and I arrived at a number of themes that we thought were important to discuss in the focus groups. For each theme we came up with a statement that we projected on a screen in every focus group to incite a conversation. We purposely formulated blunt statements, because we wanted them to provoke discussion. The statements went from the possibilities inside the local bank to take next career steps, to the balance between career and children, and the differences between supposedly masculine and supposedly feminine behavior on the work floor. We asked the participants if they agreed with the idea that women are less confident about their readiness to move to a next step, and more shy than their male colleagues which makes them less

[6] This research project was conducted in 2000 by order of Opportunity, a consultancy company specialized in gender in organizations. The research was about how the early resignation of women in companies can be avoided.

‘visible’ in the organization. The last statement was about whether men move up to higher scales more easily than women. The statements, translated from Dutch to English, were formulated approximately as follows:

- Inside this bank, the opportunities for me to move to a higher scale are limited. Within five years, I am out of here.
- To make a career in this bank as a woman, I have to be a bitch.
- Career and kids are an impossible combination.
- In this bank, prominent behavior is rewarded. Women do not come to the fore and they therefore hamper their career perspectives.
- Women are less confident than men, and are doubtful of taking the next step.
- Male colleagues in this bank move up to higher scales more easily than women.

We did not stick to these statements very strictly, but we would begin with the first and then the discussion always started. During the discussion about the first statement, already a lot of themes came up that also related to other statements. The first statement is not directly related to gender issues. We did this on purpose, because we wanted to stimulate the women to start talking to each other by making them feel comfortable, and we knew already that if we would start with a statement about gender issues, it might scare them off. We noticed that the women would find it easy to talk about their career paths, and that the issue of gender would eventually come up in the discussion anyway. For example, the women would talk about the way their career options were limited because they had young children and this would bring us to a discussion about the combination of work and children.

We recorded the focus groups with a voice recorder, for which we asked permission. We discussed with the women that we would write out the discussions and that we would send our findings to them so that they could check if we had cited them correctly. We ensured the participants that their information would be treated anonymously in the final presentation of the research. Also, we asked the participants permission to use the data for our theses, which was granted.

Group Dynamics

During the discussions, Annemieke and I posed questions to guide the discussion. We also shared our own experiences with the participants. At first, the women would be a bit shy and hesitant to speak up, but Annemieke was very good at making them feel at ease by sharing her own experiences. Also, we brought chocolates or apple pie to the focus groups to make the setting somewhat less formal and business-like. Soon, we would be able to create an intimate, informal setting, which helped the women to feel more free to speak up.

The participants did not always know each other because they all came from different departments. Even in the small banks, this was the case. Among the participants, there were always one or two dominant women who talked most of the time. Annemieke and I tried to break up this dynamic by asking questions to participants who had not spoken up yet, and by interrupting the dominant participant from time to time, but we did not always succeed in making the group dynamics more equal. However, as I will show in my analysis, it was interesting to see that some women are more dominant than others and get more time to speak. This revealed some of the power dynamics among the women in the focus groups, which related back to Patricia Lewis' observation that among the white, western women that are working in the business world and the entrepreneurial field, there are multiple definitions of femininity with which these women can identify (1851). Some of these femininities are more appreciated than others, according to the extent to which they are mixed with qualities that are associated with masculinity. In the available femininities, a binary opposition is reified between a definition of masculinity as rational, autonomous, assertive and femininity as nurturing, emotional, passive and attractive (1852). Through an analysis of research on gender and entrepreneurship, Lewis shows that "a hierarchic ordering is achieved among white femininities through judgements made about the extent to which they are feminized" (1859). She shows how in the entrepreneurial literature, women are stimulated to enact a certain amount of rational, assertive behavior that is associated with masculinity to compensate for their emotional, passive behavior that is considered feminine, and to make sure that they reach the right balance between masculinity and femininity. I will get back to the problematics that this trend in the business world raises and how it affects the experiences of the women. For now, it is important to note that the group dynamics in the focus groups provided a lot of insights into the way certain participants received more respect than others, and this can be very useful information when trying to discover which behaviors are appreciated in the business world and which are not, and why.

Limitations of the Focus Group Method

During the focus groups the women shared information not only with us as researchers but also with each other. While this turned out to be a positive experience for some of the women, others might have been hesitant to openly speak about their experiences and feelings, for they were all colleagues who knew each other. Montell argues that "groups in which participants know each other may feel uncomfortable revealing certain information in front of people they know they will see again unless a high level of trust has been established" (62). Hesse-Biber agrees with Montell, and writes that participants might indeed be concerned about revealing information to people they know for "once information has been disclosed, no one can control how fellow participants treat this knowledge outside of the research setting" (240). The participants might have been afraid that their colleagues would share the information with other people. We once received a complaint from one of the participants after we sent the report of the focus groups to all the interviewees. This participant did not feel comfortable with the idea that other colleagues possessed proof of what she had said in the focus groups. Therefore in the next focus groups, we made the reports anonymous when sending them to the participants. But the complaint from this participant indicates that some of the interviewees must have feared that what they said in the focus groups would fall into the wrong hands. Consequently, the participants might not always have been completely honest during the group discussions to protect their reputation.

Although this might be seen as a limitation to the research, it can also be interesting to see what the women have to do or say in order to save their reputation, or to be included in the business environment they work in. For example, I analyze below a moment in the focus group where one of the participants said something to which no one dared to respond. The remark of this participant was followed by an awkward silence. This is what Kitzinger would call an example of a 'sensitive moment' which according to her has a specifically high analytical potential. Instead of regarding it as a problem, Kitzinger points out that it is indeed the "sensitive moments that can be a source of insight" (9). She therefore argues that:

> Whatever the topic of enquiry researchers can usefully ask: 'Why and when is an area sensitive or not?' 'Which aspects of the group process make people uneasy?''Which opinions or experiences are seen as "skating on thin ice" and what happens when such opinions/experiences are discussed?' (26)

An example of a sensitive moment in the focus group discussions is the moment when one of the research participant in the focus group in Utrecht acknowledges that she would feel uncomfortable in a masculine environment. None of the women responded to this remark and it was followed by quite a long and awkward silence. The silence shows that the participants felt uneasy. What are the reasons for that? In the analysis I will attempt to take advantage of this awkward silence by asking the questions that Kitzinger suggests.

Part Two: Methodology

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

I use feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) as a method for analyzing the data. According to Frost and Elichaoff, all critical discourse analysis, whether it be critical, feminist or not, observes cultural and societal influences on subjective experiences (46). This implies that subjects are never disconnected from their social environment, but are partly constituted through that environment and the power dynamics that have shaped it. Frost and Elichaoff give an accurate and hands-on description of discourse analysis, that, according to them:

> Pays attention to the selection of the words and phrases used by the narrator as well as to the way meaning is given to the concepts it constructs. It is assumed that descriptions of experiences and events are designed by the narrator to accomplish actions, such as to persuade or to argue. Language is regarded as performing a function, and the function is achieved by the words used to construct the description. (47)

In discourse analysis, according to Frost and Elichaoff, language is assumed to be performative, to 'do' something. Discourse analysis believes that knowledge can be gained from the language that is used in certain contexts. In my analysis I critically examine the language that the women in the focus groups use to find out how the women give meaning to concepts like masculinity and femininity. The aim is eventually to "gain insight to how experiences are constructed through language" (Frost and Elichaoff 46), in this case, the way the participants in the focus groups experience their position as a woman within the business world. Through the use of a critical

analysis of the discourse that the participants deploy, I hope to be able to uncover hidden oppressions (47) that help to define the position of women in the Rabobank organization.

Critical discourse analysis does not immediately need the label of 'feminist' because of its aim to unravel how realities are constructed through language, and discourse analysis can be seen as an underpinning influence for all the questions that feminists ask (Hesse-Biber 46). Why then do I make use of *feminist* CDA in particular? This methodology is defined by Michelle Lazar as "a critical perspective on unequal social arrangements sustained through language use, the aim of which is to show that social practices are gendered" (Lazar 1). FCDA is suitable for this research because of its specific emphasis on gender. In my analysis, too, I want to show how the postfeminist discourse in which individual freedom is central, obscures certain power structures that still negatively impact the position of women in the business culture of the Rabobank. Lazar points out that the central aim of FCDA is to show the power structures through which women's oppression is maintained:

> As feminist critical discourse analysts, our central concern is with critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group. (5)

The way Lazar opposes 'men' and 'women' in this quote might be problematic, for these concepts would have to be specified in order to account for the differences in class, race and sexuality amongst women and men. Therefore, I believe it is important to keep in mind that I am writing about white, Western, upper and middle-class highly educated women in the Rabobank (and even among these women there are differences, for some are more excluded than others depending on age, appearance, behavior and communication skills). As long as it is appropriately specified and contextualized, I argue that FCDA is a useful methodology. I hope to show in my analysis how the language of the research participants is reifying a binary definition of gender in which masculinity is hierarchically better than femininity. Here, the definition of gender that is deployed in FCDA is useful: "Gender functions as an interpretative category that enables participants in a community to structure their social practices" (5). Thus, I do not want to reconfirm this binary definition of gender in my analysis, but rather I want to discover how the women position themselves in relation to this binary, and how this binary definition of gender influences the way the women relate to the

diversity policy of the Rabobank. By doing this, I will eventually hope to critique the postfeminist discourse which sustains a patriarchal social order in which the white, higher-class highly educated male employers of the Rabobank have a privileged position. Another advantage of CDA is that it can be used not only to study language, but that it "is equally applicable to the study of texts as well as talk, which offers a corrective to approaches that primarily favour one linguistic mode over another" (Lazar 5). Through CDA, I will also be able to analyze laughter or other communication sounds that are important to understand the group dynamics in the focus groups.

Reporting the Data

I analyzed the data by first listening to the tape recordings of the focus groups and then fully transcribing the conversations. I have tried to write down the quotes as literally as possible, not adapting the quotes too much to 'properly' written language because it is particularly everyday speech that entails the many nuances that are important when doing discourse analysis. As Kitzinger argues in her article about feminist conversation analysis: "Indeed, it is precisely the fact that sexist, heterosexist and racist assumptions are routinely incorporated into everyday conversations without anyone noticing or responding to them that way which is of interest to me" (57). I have made the sentences grammatically correct in some cases, to improve readability. An important limitation to the discourse analysis is that I had to translate the quotes to English. I have tried to stay as close to the original quote as possible, but it is inevitable that meanings get lost in translation. The participants used a lot of business-world jargon and because I am not a native speaker in English and have limited knowledge of English business-jargon, I was not always able to find an appropriate English translation to the quotes. This means that some of the nuances in the language are lost. I was sometimes forced to translate the quotes freely to catch some of the implicit meanings in them.

Structuring the Data

In the analysis, I do not elaborate on the culture differences among the different focus groups. One, for example, had a more informal style than the other, but given the scope of this research project I have chosen not to elaborate on these nuances. The analysis mainly focuses on the general patterns and similarities of the discussions in the different focus groups. For clarity's sake, I always mention

from which focus group the participants come when I quote them. When the quote entails a conversation with more than one participant involved, I number the participants.

Analysis

This chapter consists of two sections. The first part contains an analysis of the way the research participants define femininity and masculinity and how they relate to these concepts. The analysis shows how on the one hand, the participants reaffirm a stereotypical understanding of masculinity as blunt, direct, straightforward and efficient, and feminine behavior as gossipy, indirect and inefficient. On the other hand, the women in the focus groups see the possibility of overcoming those stereotypes through the enactment of a new kind of femininity in which a balance between masculine and feminine traits is gained. I will connect this kind of femininity to the individualized entrepreneurial femininity as defined by Patricia Lewis. She shows how women are encouraged in gender and entrepreneurship literature to enact a certain kind of femininity in which individualism, choice and empowerment are central. In the second part of the chapter, I will link the paradox that emerges in the first part of the chapter to the language of choice and empowerment that is employed by the participants in the focus groups.

Part One: Definitions of Femininity and Masculinity

Defining Femininity and Masculinity

The focus group participants, especially in Kromme Rijnstreek and in Utrecht, defined masculinity as direct and straightforward and therefore as more effective business behavior, and feminine behavior as inefficient and indirect. Take for example the account of this participant from the focus group in Kromme Rijnstreek:

> I have always worked with men. I've always liked it, because men are more straightforward. And I too sometimes just blurt something and then I have not hurt any feelings, then everyone can handle it. But just the other day I had a lot of women around the office, and the gossip! I couldn't stand it. Just say what you think, and all those little things between them. Then I think dude, get some work done already! I like to work with men, I am very direct.

In her last sentence the participant explains that she prefers working with men because she is very direct, assuming that men are direct, too. She also suggests that men are straightforward, which is

marked as another reason to enjoy working with male colleagues. According to this participant, 'straightforward' and 'direct' are positive, masculine traits. She opposes these to the behavior of her female colleagues. With men, she will *not* hurt any feelings when she blurts out something, and *everyone* can handle this blunt communication. It is suggested that her female colleagues would have reacted in the opposite way than her male colleagues: their feelings would have been hurt and they would not have be able to handle her bluntness. Here, a dichotomy is created between women as hypersensitive and incapable of handling things, as inefficient and indirect (as her female colleagues are gossipy and unable to 'just say what they think'), and men as 'direct' and 'straightforward'.

By literally and implicitly confirming that she is more fond of working with men than with women, this interviewee veers to the masculine side of this dichotomy. She uses powerful, strong words. Her word choice is blunt and her accent becomes slightly more commonplace (which is not apparent from the text but it becomes clear from the audio tape). She straightforwardly states that you 'just have to say what you think' and she even addresses the female colleagues that she talks about with 'dude' or 'guys', as if it is an attempt to bring about masculine behavior in them as well. This utterance 'Dude, just get some work done already', also implies that because of their behavior women are not able to finish their work. 'Getting work done' (thus working efficient) is marked as masculine. Here, a paradox emerges: on the one hand, certain behaviors are ascribed to men specifically and others to women specifically, resulting in a very stereotypical depiction of masculinity and femininity. But on the other hand, this female interviewee defines herself in masculine terms.

The conversation continued and another participant remarked that she recognized the negative experiences of working with women:

> Of course I can see different types of women. When there are too many of those whining types it can really annoy me. And of course at a time like that (for I'm usually quite direct) I can say to them OK now, quit the whining. That can come across as harsh for them. Anyway, I have learned how to handle it off and to improve myself in it but I do notice that it still annoys me terribly when that (*the whining*) is too much present. Men have less of those things, they are easier.

Here too, a dichotomy is created between men, who are ‘easier’ and who do not ‘whine’ and women who do. The participant defines herself as ‘direct’ and ‘harsh’, and this is opposed to the ‘whining’ behavior of the other female colleagues, which this participant marks as annoying, something that she has to ‘learn how to handle’. However she slightly nuances the account of the other participant by stating that not all women are like that. There can be different ‘types of women’, and it especially annoys her when women have ‘too much’ of the whining aspect (the feminine aspect). Another participant acknowledges this: “I now have a female manager, and she is fantastic. But that’s not such a crybaby”. This quote was followed by laughter, and another participant remarks, “well, when we’re talking about typical feminine behavior… there you have it!”. The ‘whining’ is defined as a *typical* feminine characteristic. And apparently, women can have certain levels of typical feminine behavior. Having ‘too much’ of a certain ‘type of woman’ makes them ‘typical’. There seems to be a hierarchy that is dependent on the level of ‘typical femininity’ that a person has, and too much femininity can do damage to the reputation of that person, which becomes clear from the laughter and annoyance that the participants express when they talk of this kind of femininity, and from the fact that the female manager who is not a crybaby is ‘fantastic’.

Typical feminine behavior is described as indirect, complicated, inefficient in the focus group in Kromme Rijnstreek. This inefficient communication was also marked as feminine in the focus group in Utrecht. One of the participants there noticed that she could talk more straightforwardly with her male manager than with her female manager. Another participant remarked that she liked working in a ‘men’s environment’, because she was now working in a department with a lot of women and she always had to think twice before she said something. This remark was followed by some huffs and laughter from other participants. Another participant noticed that her department was a ‘kippenhok’ sometimes because of all the chatting of her female colleagues. ‘Kippenhok’ is a Dutch expression literally meaning ‘that they were all talking at the same time like chickens in a chicken coop’. The expression is used when a group of (mostly) women excitedly talks to each other. The comparison with chicken suggests a very noisy and chaotic situation, with the chicken excitedly running all over the place. The participants of the focus group in Utrecht also defined departments as masculine or feminine.

Throughout the conversations, a dichotomy emerged between masculine, efficient and harsh departments on the one hand and feminine, friendly and soft departments on the other. The following conversation is an example of this:

Participant one: It depends on the department. When there is a masculine culture…

Participant two: Yes, for example in the private banking department, you have to show more guts. You have to be stronger.

Participant one: Yes, exactly.

Participant three: Yes, I came from the head office at the Croeselaan and I have noticed that since I am in this local bank, it has struck me that it is quite soft and friendly here. Even so that I think it could be a little bit less sometimes.

The private banking department is apparently an example of a masculine culture, which is described as a place where you have to 'show guts' and 'be strong'. The local bank of Utrecht, which was acknowledged by all the participants to be a less masculine environment than the head office, was defined as 'soft' and 'friendly'. On the contrary, strength and guts are connected to masculinity or a masculine culture. Clearly, participant three lets the others know that she does not appreciate the friendliness of the environment. Later in the conversation, the culture of the head office is described by other participants as 'business-like' 'distanced', 'you can be more harsh in the communication toward colleagues', 'in that department you don't show your weaknesses, you have to have everything under control'. These are apparently traits that are connected to a masculine environment, in opposition to the less masculine departments where the communication is more indirect. The woman also marked talking about private life as a form of indirect communication or indirectness. In the culture of the local bank it was apparently normal to often talk about private life with colleagues, but in the culture of Rabobank Nederland, this was not so common. One of the participants uttered: "I thought that was odd. I sometimes find it tiresome. It's not efficient, I really had to get used to that." Another participant added: "Yes, all that waffling". The Dutch word for waffling is 'neuzelen', which does not only mean to talk foolishly about irrelevant matters but also has a subtle meaning of whining in it.

As mentioned earlier in this analysis, whining was marked as a typical feminine trait. The women strongly emphasize that this style of communication is not something that they appreciate much, as they think it 'odd', 'tiresome', and it is marked as 'waffling' and 'inefficient'. The women thus distance themselves from this behavior, which is implicitly marked as less masculine in opposition to the masculine 'direct' and 'harsh' communication. In this dichotomy between the feminine and masculine departments, it becomes clear that the masculine culture is deemed to be more efficient and is a better environment to do business in. A binary opposition between

masculinity and femininity is deployed, resulting in an unequal power balance in which masculinity is preferred over femininity. At the same time, some participants seem to distance themselves from this stereotypical view of femininity by defining themselves in masculine terms.

Becoming a Nonpreneur

As has become clear from the analysis so far, the participants in the focus groups of Kromme Rijnstreek and Utrecht distanced themselves from typical femininity (which they define as indirect, whiny, sensitive and inefficient) and referred to themselves in masculine terms (masculinity meaning in this case direct, harsh, blunt, uncomplicated). This corresponds to Lewis' observation that "a hierarchic ordering is achieved among white femininities through judgements made about the extent to which they are feminized" (1859). Typical feminine behavior has to be compensated with masculine behavior in order to gain a good reputation in the business world. The feminine side must never become too dominant, as becomes clear from a conversation in the focus group in Leiden-Katwijk: a female manager used too much of her 'female charms' and therefore crossed the line of what is considered to be the appropriate extent of femininity. With her tendency to 'chirp and suck up, and being silly', she was an example of unwarranted feminine display. "When you want to reach the top, you cannot be kind and sweet all the time", added another participant in the focus group, suggesting that feminine qualities like kindness and sweetness have to be balanced with masculine qualities in order to reach the top.

When the research participants in Utrecht and Kromme Rijnstreek agitated against 'typical feminine behavior', they received respect and sympathy from the other women in the focus groups, who smiled and laughed or nodded their heads in recognition. But when one of the research participants in the focus group in Utrecht remarked that she would be intimidated at a department where there was a masculine culture, her comment was received somewhat coldly by the other research participants. There had just been a conversation about the experience of some women in the focus who had worked in a more 'masculine' environment. "I don't see the business-like environment as an obstacle, I don't have a problem with it," commented one of these research participants, upon which another reacted by stating that on the contrary, "I would experience such a department as an obstacle, rather than when I would know that it was a friendly, informal environment." Here, the participant showed herself to be vulnerable by admitting that she would feel uncomfortable in a masculine environment and to be passive for not having the guts to show

initiative and approach the work unit to ask if she could join them for a day to have a look around. From the reaction of the other women, it becomes clear that they try to distance themselves from this participant. All the while there had been a lively conversation, but her remark was followed by an awkward silence that Annemieke eventually tried to break. From the cold and awkward reaction from the other women in the focus group, it becomes clear that this remark is bad for her reputation.

Here, the participant is, as Lewis would formulate it, "occupying a pariah position due to the enactment of traditional femininity characterized by dependence, vulnerability, passivity and in need for male approval", of which the worst part is that "it prevents her from fulfilling her own ambitions and achieving entrepreneurial success" (1858). This behavior is what Lewis calls enacting the femininity of the 'nonpreneur'. By stating that she would be intimidated by a masculine culture, this participant veers too much to the feminine side of the binary. By admitting that she has made the decision not to go to that department because of its masculine culture, the participant admits to character traits that are marked as typically feminine: she is afraid to communicate directly, thinks too much, lets her choices be influenced by her feelings, and therefore shows irrational, weak and inefficient business behavior. Because of stereotypical feminine behavior, she is not able to make her decisions individually and independent of social surroundings. It is direct and straightforward behavior through which an independent, self-regulating position can be reached. These behaviors are connected to masculinity. Instead of presenting herself as an independent, self-choosing subject, this participant veers too much to the side of femininity by showing herself vulnerable and weak for letting her decisions be dependent on her social environment.

Doing Individualized Entrepreneurial Femininity

To become successful businesswomen and 'get some work done', women apparently have to enact masculine behavior. While this masculine behavior is initially ascribed to men, women seem to be able to enact this behavior as well. As I mentioned earlier, the women describe themselves in these masculine terms, and distance themselves from typical feminine behavior. In the focus group in Utrecht, it became clear that the participant was judged negatively by the other participants when veering too much to the feminine side or as the participant from Kromme Rijnstreek called it 'when being too much of the whining type'. Failing to compensate for feminine behavior leads to 'excessive entrepreneurial femininity' or becoming what Lewis calls a 'nonpreneur'. The

unsuccessful femininity of the nonpreneur is different from the individualized entrepreneurial femininity, which is independent and unfazed by social surroundings and therefore highly valued in the business culture. Through the enactment of the individualized entrepreneurial femininity, it becomes clear that some women in the focus groups present themselves as agentic individuals who just as well as men can reach effective and efficient business behavior. An example is the following conversation from research participants in the focus group in Rabobank Utrecht:

> *Participant 1*: It is also a sort of mirroring. You see what you have in front of you and you adapt your way of communicating.
> *Participant 2*: I recognize that. You act differently with a timid person than with a big mouthed one. Then you have to be stronger.
> *Participant 3*: Women assimilate more easily. They are flexible. Like a chameleon. That is positive because you often gain more. Men are more convinced, they hold on to their ways. Being flexible is much more effective. Being soft in a tough world will not make you be heard, and the other way around. I used to work in masculine environments, and I learned, for example, to think before you say anything in a feminine environment. To be less direct.

The three research participants assert that they can switch from masculine to feminine behavior, depending on the environment and the person they are talking with. This adaptability of the women should not be interpreted as passive or weak behavior. On the contrary, the women emphasize that they are in charge of the situation. As a participant of the focus group in Kromme Rijnstreek said, "I choose my approach carefully, I know exactly where I have to handle it differently. I talk differently to Peter *(the manager)* than to the ladies of the facility department." The women make it seem as if they are fully in control of choosing when they enact feminine and when they enact masculine behavior. Participant 1, for example, by giving her adaptive behavior a name (calling it 'mirroring') implies that she is fully aware of how she does it. Moreover, by naming it, the adaptive behavior is transformed into a strategy that she can use. Participant 2 mentions that you have to 'act' differently according to a situation: presenting masculine and feminine behavior not as something that is inherent to a woman or a man, but something that can be enacted and controlled. For example, the participant from Kromme Rijnstreek 'knows exactly' where she has to 'handle' it differently. The enactment of masculinity and femininity comes across as calculated and strategic, especially in the account of participant 3, who emphasizes that flexible behavior is something with which 'you gain

more' and which is 'more effective'. Besides, her use of the word 'flexible' twice, which implies an athletic and controlled manner of behavior.

As Patricia Lewis asserts: "Here, women who 'do' individualized entrepreneurial femininity are seeking to become agentic individuals. This agency is connected to a discourse of individualization within which masculine characteristics and behaviors are conflated with individuality" (1854). As mentioned earlier, individuality and agency is connected to masculinity, and Lewis makes a similar argument. However, what becomes clear from this individualized entrepreneurial femininity, is that women can overcome those stereotypes by enacting masculine behavior as well. Paradoxically, while masculinity is ascribed especially to men, at the same time the women present themselves as freely and actively choosing subjects who can perform masculine or feminine behavior strategically: "This particular entrepreneurial femininity offers a rational, unified and deliberate image of the women who perform it" (Lewis 1854). What can be concluded at this point, is that women reify a stereotypical definition of femininity and masculinity on the one hand, in which masculinity is defined as the positive and effective behavior to do business in. However, on the other hand, the women seem to be able to overcome those stereotypes through the enactment of the individualized entrepreneurial femininity, which combines femininity with many masculine qualities. Enacting masculine or feminine behavior becomes a strategic practice, and the right balance between masculine and feminine behavior can eventually be achieved by every woman if she works hard enough. In the next part of the chapter, I want to explore how these two seemingly opposing discourses coexist, by making a connection with the postfeminist and neoliberal discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment.

Part Two: The Influence of Individualism, Choice and Empowerment on the Experience of Gender Discrimination

Gender Fatigue

Elizabeth Kelan analyzed how information communication technology workers talk about gender discrimination. Kelan introduces the notion of 'gender fatigue' referring to "the moment in time where gender discrimination is still a feature of modern workplaces but is repudiated in such a way that workplaces appear to be gender neutral" (Kelan 28). This is what happened among the participants in her interviews. Another problem that Kelan addresses is that gender discrimination

was experienced by her interviewees as a problem that had to be dealt with individually, and not by means of a collective intervention. She therefore argues that this repudiation of gender discrimination is reinforced by - or at least fits well within - the postfeminist individualist paradigm. “Women construct themselves as active agents who can avoid confronting gender discrimination through making themselves responsible for overcoming it” (Kelan 21).

Earlier in this chapter, the paradoxical relationship was addressed between the way the women described men and women in stereotypical terms on the one hand, and the way they described themselves in masculine terms on the other. According to one of the research participants in Rabobank Utrecht, differences in behavior between men and women occurred “much more on a personal level”. She meant that men as well as women could enact masculine or feminine behavior. It is dependent on the person to what extent he or she balances these behaviors. In the focus group in Amsterdam, several participants pointed to the idea that every individual could possess a certain amount of masculinity or femininity. They called this ‘masculine and feminine energy’ of which every person could have more or less. Because men and women can both possess masculine and feminine qualities, men could experience the same problems as women, according to several research participants. Many of the women asked me why the focus group was organized especially for women, because for men it was just as difficult to move higher up in the organization. In the focus group in Amsterdam and in Utrecht, five of the research participants pointed out that they did not experience any difficulties on the work floor because they were women. According to them, men could in fact experience the same problems as women could have, and these problems were dependent on the extent of feminine or masculine energy that a person had. Thus one of the participants of Rabobank Utrecht mentioned:

> I think it really depends on the person. If I look at the men in my team that I need to kick them in the butt and I have to tell them (hits on the table) this is the name (hits on the table) this is the number, call them already, and that he is still beating around the bush for a week. I think it is really personal.

The participant wants to make clear that men are not always direct or efficient, and she clearly agitates against stereotypical views on femininity and masculinity. The colleague she talks about is ‘beating around the bush’. As was shown earlier in the analysis, this indirect behavior is associated with femininity more than with masculinity. Thus, this male colleague possesses a lot of feminine

energy. What this participant also wants to show is that women are not always indirect or weak. She hit the table twice to emphasize her opinion, enacting aggressive behavior generally associated with masculinity. By doing this she makes herself an example of how women can also possess masculine energy, thus making the amount of masculinity or femininity is 'dependent on the person'. What also becomes clear from this quote, is that because of this 'personal' amount of masculine or feminine energy, men can experience exactly the same problems as women, in this case not having the guts to make a direct phone call. Through gender fatigue women and men are presented as neutral and equal entities who can both possess feminine and masculine qualities. In this line of thought, the reason for women not to reach the top level of the organization is not because of gender inequality but just because they have not been able to reach a balance yet between masculine and feminine behavior. It is the women's own responsibility to find a way to gain that balance.

An example of the way gender fatigue leads to the idea that gender inequality is experienced as an individual problem occurred during the conversation that we had in the focus group in Amsterdam. One of the research participants spoke about a situation in which she had the feeling that her position as a woman was an obstacle for her to do her job properly:

> *Participant 1:* When I was a credit assessor, all at once I had to tell the account managers I had previously worked together with what they should do. I was really put to the test. You as a 24 old girl are you going to tell me this? I really had to give as good as I got and to show that I have earned my place.
> *Participant 2:* But it is exactly the same for women as for men. Men have to go through the same period in which they have to prove themselves. It is just that men are not taking it seriously, they can handle the comments better than women. If you'd been a man it wouldn't have bothered you as much, would it, just generalizing, as now when you are a woman.
> *Participant 3:* Girls are unsure about the tiniest things. I think that's typically feminine. That you can go on and on about some silly detail.

Participant 1 tries to bring up a discussion about gender discrimination, but the other participants do not acknowledge that her problem stems from inequality between men and women. According to participant 2, men and women face the exact same obstacles on their way to success. This might be interpreted as a matter of gender fatigue: the participant seems to be uncomfortable talking about

gender discrimination and therefore tries to soothe the account of participant 1 by presenting the business environment where she works as gender neutral, stating that men and women face exactly the same problems in the organization. The only difference that she acknowledges is the way men and women handle these problems. Here, participant 1 is stimulated by participant 2 and 3 to 'come to terms with her internal obstacle', her inability to 'handle the comments'. She has to overcome the uncertainty that participant 3 describes to be a problem that women in particular face. Participant 1 carefully suggests that as a woman she is treated differently than her male colleague, and that therefore, she has to work harder than him to prove herself. But this inequality is not acknowledged by the other research participants. By stating that the reason for her being treated differently is not because of her gender, but because of her age, her suggestion of gender discrimination is nuanced, or even soothed. Participant 3 asserts that it is actually the problem of participant 1 herself: her problem is that she is taking critique too personally. The anecdote of participant 1 becomes not an example of gender discrimination, but of this woman's inability to deal with critique. Women, according to the the focus group in Amsterdam, are too critical toward themselves and each other. Their insecurity and perfectionism will eventually make them less suitable to work in a business world environment. Thus, they seem to encourage each other to work hard and hope that eventually, they will be strong enough to overcome that insecurity. Gender inequality in the workplace is not something that is criticized, rather, it is a reason for women to become aware of their stereotypical feminine behavior and their own responsibility to overcome that behavior.

Neoliberalism and Postfeminism

At this point it might be concluded that women are stimulated to translate gender inequality from a social matter into an individual responsibility. The postfeminist focus on individualism, choice and empowerment shows striking similarities with the emphasis on the power of the individual to influence their own life course, which is central tenet to neoliberalism. Postfeminism is "at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas" (Gill 443). The first parallel is the replacement of the social and the political for the individual. The way the women in the focus groups experience gender discrimination as a personal matter that has to be solved individually is an example of this. The second level is the similarity between the neoliberal subject as independent and self-regulative, and the postfeminist subject as inventive and self-choosing. As I have shown, the participants of the focus groups highly valued and respected female colleagues who are able to

have perfect control over the enactment of masculine and feminine 'energy' (behavior or qualities). The individualized entrepreneurial femininity, which they generally strive to become, could be seen as a manifestation of this neoliberal or postfeminist self-regulative and inventive subjectivity. These first two parallels coexist with each other, for the idea that any woman can make independent choices means that she is not tied down to her social surroundings, and that her decisions are uninfluenced by anything but herself.

According to Gill, feminism and neoliberalism have become so intrinsically connected, that it seems to be "always *women* who seem to be addressed in the trend of self-disciplining and self-managing" and that it might be possible to interpret neoliberalism as "always already gendered" (443). Indeed, when the women in the focus group in Amsterdam say that it is typical for women to take critique too personally and be insecure about the tiniest things, this implies that it is especially women who need to work on themselves in order to handle critique better. Thus, "to a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (Gill 433). It is interesting though, that instead of seeing this as problematic, it is for example participant 3 of the focus group in Utrecht who marks this adaptability as an empowering quality for women, suggesting that women are especially good at adapting themselves to every possible situation. She utters that "Men are more convinced, they hold on to their ways. Being flexible is much more effective." It is thus especially *women* who are like 'chameleons', able to adapt their communication strategically to a masculine or feminine business culture. This idea of the female chameleon is highly paradoxical. Women are supposedly unconvinced in opposition to their male colleagues, but this insecurity somehow becomes a positive trait. Instead of criticizing the fact that women have to adapt to a masculine business culture, this adapting becomes something that is empowering women.

Like Rosalind Gill, Catharine Rottenberg sees how the intertwinement of feminism with neoliberalism results in the gendered subjectivity of the 'neoliberal feminist subjectivity'. Rottenberg analyzes Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* as exemplary to the rise of a new feminist subjectivity shaped through neoliberalism. One of the most important elements of this neoliberal feminism is that the subject is 'individuated to the extreme'. *Lean In* is the ultimate example of how this individualized subjectivity is constituted. Here, women are stimulated to 'internalize the revolution', thus "by coming to terms with and working through their internal obstacles, women will then be able to muster the self-confidence necessary to push themselves forward toward their

professional goals" (424). The neoliberal feminist subject is thus "mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural into an individual affair" (420). I see a remarkable parallel between the neoliberal feminist subjectivity that Rottenberg describes and the women in the focus groups in the Rabobank, who are so reluctant to talk about gender oppression in themselves and in other women, and do not want to acknowledge the small percentage of female employees in the scales from 8 to eleven as a social problem. Instead, the women stimulate each other to see gender discrimination as an individual affair. The participant in Amsterdam who noticed that she had to work harder than her male colleague, was instead convinced that she had 'internal obstacles' like her inability to deal with critique, and according to her other colleagues she had to work through these obstacles to obtain more confidence and be able to reach her professional goals. Through the enactment of neoliberal feminism, which is similar to the individualized entrepreneurial femininity because of its emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment, women working in the Rabobank embody a kind of subjectivity that corresponds to the neoliberal system that is inherent to the business world environment. Thus it is through the enactment of these kinds of subjectivity that certain women get the change to be included in the business world. But this inclusion is dependent on a set of terms and conditions. Instead of criticizing the fact that masculinity is deemed to be superior business behavior, the women enacting this kind of femininity have to acknowledge this and be prepared to interpret structural inequality between femininity and masculinity as an individual internal obstacle that they have to overcome.

The paradox between the stereotypes about men and women in the focus group discussions on the one hand, and the overcoming of those stereotypes by women on the other, is the result of this discourse on individualism, choice and empowerment. This discourse stimulates women to feel fully responsible for the overcoming of negative stereotypes about women in the business world, instead of offering the possibility to criticize these stereotypes collectively.

Individualism, Choice and Empowerment in the Discussions About Motherhood

The postfeminist and neoliberal tendency of many women in the focus groups to see their position within the Rabobank as a personal or individual responsibility that is disconnected from social structures also resounds in the argument that women are scarce in the top level of the organization because of their lack of ambition. Many women choose to work part-time and stay home to look after their children, especially in Holland. As became clear from the focus groups, the research

participants think that women lack the ambition to pursue a career, particularly because of their maternal ambitions. “There are few women who work full-time. A lot of women choose to work less. With this they limit the possibilities for themselves,” according to a participant from the focus group in Leiden-Katwijk. A conversation in Utrecht shows a similar point:

> *Participant 1:* A lot of women choose to work part-time and spend more time with their kids. The level of ambition is different. An executive position is not appealing to me, I wouldn’t want to work 80 hours a week. For certain steps in your career you have to make the choice to do less at home. But if I only look at the vacancies, it’s not that the man makes a better chance than the woman, that’s not it.
> *Participant 2*: Yes, I think it really depends on the level of ambition.

This conversation shows that the lack of women in top level of business organizations is not interpreted as a matter of gender discrimination, but as a matter of choice. The participant mentions that the man does not necessarily have a better chance than a woman in the application procedure. The reason why women are not likely to reach the top level of the Rabobank is not because they have a disadvantaged position, but because they have a different ‘level of ambition’. Women are presented as self-regulating individuals, who actively *choose* to work part-time, they make the *choice* to do less at home.

In her recent article “Feminism and the New Mediated Maternalism” McRobbie, drawing from Foucault, argues that the family is increasingly associated with a business context, with the idea of enterprise, in the new political economy of neoliberalism. Moreover, McRobbie shows how this connection is mobilized to “re-traditionalize gender as though by the back door” (141). This movement is closely connected to postfeminism and its workings of taking feminism into account while replacing it with a new, individualistic substitute for feminism. McRobbie's observations in her article about maternalism shows that this postfeminist substitute is closely connected to a neoliberal, corporate discourse:

> The family becomes a kind of unit or team, a partnership of equals, and new visibilities show ›stay home Mums‹ and full-time working fathers, but in contemporary times this is a team decision, one which could be easily reversed, and so by emphasizing personal choice

> it evades the criticism of merely being a return to the past, indeed it is a very modern solution. (141)

This business-like way of talking about the work-life balance shows how closely connected this is to a neoliberal discourse which is partly shaped through the business world of large corporate organizations. This discourse makes it possible to neutralize the decision of working part-time and disconnect it from political ideas about traditional gender roles in society. The way these participants from Kromme Rijnstreek talk about motherhood as a business negotiation or as something that has to be managed corresponds with this idea of the family as enterprise:

> *Participant 1:* My feeling is that when you choose for children, you have to invest time in them. I know families where the man is at home more often than the woman, so that's also a possibility. It's a choice that you make. I wouldn't want to see my children less than I do now. I don't make time for a career, but that's the choice that I have made. I know how to mix it, it's my choice: when I'm home, I'm home.
> *Participant 2:* How you want to do it is in agreement with your partner. If I speak for myself I'd say we're perfectly able to come to an agreement. But at the moment when it becomes fully dependent on the traditional role division, I think it's going to be tricky.

These quotes show how these participants strongly emphasize their agency in the decision to become part-time working mothers. By mentioning that a working woman and a man at home also exist in her circle of friends, participant 1 presents this as just another option that she could also have chosen. She neutralizes her environment, making it seem as if the pressure of pursuing traditional gender roles is not present in her circle of friends. The participant emphasizes the idea that her decision to work part-time was her own decision, and that this decision was uninfluenced by traditional gender roles. Moreover, she presents the decision as one that could be easily reversed. By saying that "I know how to mix it, it's my choice" she puts stress on the words "I" and "my", emphasizing the personal nature of this choice to stay home. Besides, by saying that she knows how to mix it, she presents her choice as something that she manages, as if she is the manager of her family. Her last sentence 'when I'm home, I'm home' shows that she is in control of the situation as a manager of this mix between home and work: she decides when she is home and when she is not. This managerial discourse also comes to the fore in the quote of participant 2, who speaks about

making choices between family and work as a business negotiation, something she has to 'come to an agreement about' with her 'partner'. The word 'partner' is a seemingly neutral, ungendered term, and using this word instead of 'husband' or 'partner' makes it sound even more business-like. By stating that she is perfectly able to come to an agreement with her husband, she presents her relationship with him as a good working team. This entrepreneurial discourse surrounding the discussion of work-life balance makes it possible to present the family as a team or a 'partnership of equals' (participant 2 literally using the word 'partner'). This entrepreneurial discourse emphasizes the agency of the women in the decisions about working part-time and suggests that the environment in which this decision is made was a neutral and modern one. The women seem to shield the choice regarding work-life balance off is from underlying political and social structures that may have had influence in these decisions. Participant 2 says that she would not accept it if decisions about the work-life balance become 'dependent upon traditional role division'. She presents the coming to an agreement with her husband as the opposite of 'traditional role division'. Thus, she seems to suggest that whatever the decision is that comes out of the agreement, it is alright as long as it was made through a modern agreement. And so by emphasizing personal choice through the entrepreneurial discourse, the decision to become a stay-at-home mum "evades the criticism of merely being a return to the past, indeed it is a very modern solution" (McRobbie 141).

In *The Aftermath of Feminism,* McRobbie shows how postfeminism presents itself as a liberation from feminism's boring and serious inflexibility, "accusing feminism to have robbed women of their most reassured pleasures" (21). "The repudiation of feminist experimentalism in regard to alternative family structures (…) resulted in a kind of defensively sentimental celebration of femininity, especially when it comes to maternity" (32). In this line of thought, I would argue that the women in the focus group might experience themselves as liberated from feminism's interference in the personal realm, especially in the realm of motherhood. This defensiveness that McRobbie mentions regarding maternity is evident in the extreme emphasis on the personal nature of the choices regarding motherhood and career. Every opinion regarding motherhood in the focus groups is empathically presented as 'personal' and in first person. 'To me personally….' 'If I speak for myself, I say that…' 'My feeling is that…'. It can be interpreted as a defensive reaction, as if it were a taboo to present an opinion in a more general or political context. The choice to retreat to the home is now an entirely personal choice, bringing a sense of self-determination, agency and control. Women do not have to 'justify' their decisions on a political level. Instead, by stressing the personal

nature of their choices and those of others, they seem to shield the maternal realm from feminist interference.

The Political Becomes Personal

When women are stimulated to present everything they do as a conscious and personal choice, it becomes very difficult to discuss social factors that play a role in the disadvantaged position of women in the business world. Through the discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment, inequality is even denied. In my opinion, Elisabeth Kelan is right in saying that "if gender inequalities cannot be voiced the status quo is enforced and strengthened rather than challenged and subverted" (31). I would argue that the idea that women enter the business world so slowly because of personal choices instead of social structures, puts 'the personal is political' as one of feminism's core values on a razor's edge. The personal is political was a slogan used in second-wave feminism to argue that everything that happens in the private sphere of the household is shaped through institutionalized power (Genz & Brabon 44). However, in the focus groups it becomes clear that private matters such as the realm of motherhood, are somehow shielded from the idea that institutionalized power has anything to do with it. The decision of women to stay home and look after the children is no longer connected to stereotypical gender roles. Instead, this decision is marked as a personal choice that women make independently. Postfeminism's focus on the empowerment of women as independent active agents gives rise to the idea that personal matters are not connected to social structures anymore.

The arrangement that women make regarding the combination of work and children was marked in each focus group as a 'personal choice'. There was a very strong emphasis on the individual nature of this 'personal choice', that every woman was expected to make for herself. However, there is an interesting paradox between the emphasis on the freedom to choose for oneself on the one hand, and the disapproval of certain choices on the other. The postfeminist focus on choice and empowerment seemingly liberates women from having to justify their personal choices in the political realm, and makes it possible for them to make personal decisions individually. There was a tendency in nearly all the focus groups to mark the choice of working part-time as the best and wisest decision. In some cases in the focus groups, maternal ambition was even marked as 'natural' for women. As one of the research participants in Utrecht remarked, "Men need to pursue a career, women are more easily satisfied. They have their kids they want to enjoy." According to a

research participant in Leiden-Katwijk, the will of women to take care of the children "is in the genes. Men don't have any trouble leaving their kids behind. I do. My husband takes the children to day care because he doesn't mind. I think it's just a male/female difference." By suggesting that it is unnatural for women to combine a career with having children, this participant implicitly states that choosing for career is not a respectable decision, what is more, presenting it as if it were not even an option at all. This is quite an 'extreme' example which has not occurred in all the focus groups, but most of the research participants did say that the choice for a career was difficult for them, because they felt 'guilty' about leaving their kids at day care, and they felt 'more involved' with the children than their (male) partner. In the suggestion that women are more natural care takers than men resounds a negative judgment of women who choose to take their children to day-care or leave them with their partner. It seems as if women who do that have taken negative advantage of their freedom to make their own choices. On the one hand the personal freedom that everyone has in this decision is emphasized, but on the other hand, some decisions seem to be more respectable than others. This freedom the women are emphasizing is, then, not so unlimited after all.

Is the Personal Always Personal?

An example of a more indirect way in which the choice of pursuing a career is disapproved of is the way the research participants in the focus group in Utrecht talked about their female director. The conversation was about the decision of the bank to forbid employees to work from home one day in the week:

> *Participant 1*: To me personally, when talking about stimulating career and children, it has surprised me that Annemarie, as a female director, was rather eager to go along with it.
> *Participant 2:* Yes, but she has always worked five days a week, she's just a real career woman. She has children, but… She just sees it in a different way. It's would not occur to her once to take a day off for the children. (others huff and laugh) She might have a nice time with her kids in the weekend, but… She just sees it in a different way. That's her choice…

Both participants are disappointed in Annemarie as a female director because she has different opinions about work and children. They feel that she should have defended female employees who

work part-time. Participant 2 however, notes that they should not have expected her support anyway, because Annemarie 'sees things differently'. By emphasizing the individual nature of the director's decision, ('It's her choice, she just has a different opinion') participant 2 puts emphasis on the fact that everyone is free to make their own choices and that others are not to intervene with such a personal decision. However, she implies her disapproval in the word 'but' after she mentions that Annemarie has children, as if to suggest that the children are not really meaningful to her. Also, while putting emphasis on the personal nature of Annemarie's choice to work full-time, with the exaggerated sentence that 'it has not occurred to her *once'* she seems to imply that the director has not thought about the decision to put her kids into daycare at all. Such an easy decision cannot be taken seriously, she seems to suggest. By playfully adding that the director might have a nice time with her kids on the weekends, she emphasizes again that the children of the director do not have to be taken all that seriously. While it is emphasized that no one should hold Annemarie back from making that decision in her personal realm, her choice has a negative influence on her reputation in the public sphere.

When in nearly all the focus groups there is a tendency to negatively judge women who choose to pursue a career and leave the care for their children over to others, one could call into question whether women are really all that free to make any choice they want. I do not mean to say that women have no agency at all, and I do not judge women who choose to work part-time for making the wrong, conservative choices. And I agree with the women in the focus groups that every person should be able to make that decision for him- or herself. But I do want to critically address the extreme emphasis that the women in the focus groups place on the personal and individual nature of these decisions, and to the idea that these decisions are entirely disconnected from traditional gender roles that persist in society. As long as the choice of motherhood is deemed to be a personal choice and the political or social aspect of this choice remains unacknowledged, it will never be possible to challenge the social structures that still determine the role of women as care-takers and men as working fathers.

Conclusion

This thesis was spurred by my own shock and disappointment of finding out that the women that I interviewed for this research project, women working for the local banks of the Rabobank in pay level eight and nine, were reluctant to speak about gender differences or gender discrimination, that they were skeptical toward diversity policy and often very negative about other female colleagues. I wanted to come to a better understanding of the way the participants of the focus groups experienced their position as women in the organization, not by locating problems in the behavior and choices of the women themselves, but by putting their experiences into a broader context by analyzing it through the concept of postfeminism. Thus, in this research I have investigated how postfeminism's emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment might influence the reluctance of the participants in the focus groups to talk about gender inequality.

Given that my analysis is based upon four small groups of women, it cannot be fully representative of the entire population of women in pay grades eight and nine in the Rabobank. But the small size of the research population made it possible to conduct an in-depth discourse analysis, producing valuable insights that possibly also count for many other women working in the corporate sector.

One of the characteristics of the postfeminist sensibility according to Gill is a focus on choice, individualism and empowerment. She argues that this is what makes postfeminism closely connected to neoliberalism, as neoliberalism is also characterized by a strong emphasis on agency and choice. Postfeminism in this sense gives rise to new femininities, like Lewis's individualized entrepreneurial femininity and Rottenberg's neoliberal feminist subjectivity. These femininities are in line with the neoliberal discourse of self-regulation and offer women the possibility to be included in the current neoliberal society. Drawing from McRobbie, I have argued that the enactment of these femininities comes at a certain cost, in which (mainly White, western) women are included into the business world but on the condition that they are prepared to convert gender inequalities from structural into individual affairs.

In the analysis I started off with an examination of the participant's stereotypical view of masculinity and femininity. Direct, blunt and assertive behavior is ascribed to male colleagues and is considered as efficient and effective business behavior, while feminine behavior is repudiated as gossipy, oversensitive, inefficient and tiresome. Paradoxically, the women did not criticize these stereotypes but instead believed that women were able to overcome these stereotypes through the

enactment of individualized entrepreneurial femininity, which mixes feminine behavior with masculine behavior. Thus, the women believed that they could 'manage' these behaviors strategically.

The second part of the analysis shows how this paradox emerges from postfeminism's focus on individualism, choice and empowerment. Through the notion of gender fatigue developed by Kelan, it became clear that many women in the focus groups did not acknowledge any gender inequality in their department, because they argued that every person (man or woman) eventually had an equal chance in reaching the perfect balance between masculine or feminine behavior. Thus, when a woman experiences problems in improving her career, they were believed to result from the woman's personal inability to reach a balance between masculine and feminine behavior. In this line of thought, it is the personal responsibility of each woman to overcome the stereotypical idea that only men can be suitable business people.

As a result, gender stereotypes remained uncriticized and were even reinforced. The participants often encourage each other to experience any problems on the way to success in the business world as individual obstacles that they had to learn how to overcome. This focus on individualism and personal choice turns the second-wave feminist slogan "the personal is political" on its head: instead, the political is converted into a personal matter.

The analysis of the discussions about motherhood in the focus groups pointed out that often, the choice to become a part-time working mother is almost defensively shielded by the participants from the idea that political and social structures in society might be part of that decision. Instead, these choices were discussed through a neoliberal and postfeminist discourse in which the interviewees emphasized their own agency and that of other women, and in which the family was presented as a modern "unit or a team, a partnership of equals" (McRobbie 141). I do not claim that working part-time is by definition a conservative and therefore 'wrong' decision. What I do want to address critically is a certain shift away from political and social inequality and toward personal agency and individualism. The possible danger of the emphasis on the personal and individual nature of decisions regarding motherhood and career, is that the political or social aspect of this decision is muted, making it much more difficult to criticize or challenge these political or social aspects.

The emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment in the postfeminist discourse that the women in the focus groups generally employ, made it difficult to talk about gender discrimination with them. Because many of the women in the focus groups are impelled to

experience their position as their own responsibility, the power structures that still negatively impact the position of women in the business culture of the Rabobank are ignored and obscured.

While postfeminism is characterized by a discourse of liberation and freedom of personal choice, this research project raises the question whether women are really all that free to make any choices they want. Although many women in the focus groups emphasized the idea that everyone can make their own decisions in life, they judged women who made decisions that are not in line with conventional expectations and ideas about motherhood. Is it possible to make a personal decision freely when these judgments still exist? The focus on personal choice and empowerment in these discussions makes it difficult to discuss the underlying nature from which these judgments emerge. Moreover, it glosses over the fact that choices are always in correspondence to people's social surroundings. White, western women are expected to make certain choices that are in line with what society considers 'normal'. Besides, they face different choices than women from other social classes. The postfeminist discourse potentially leads the focus away from these issues.

While the postfeminist discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment might offer possibilities to empower women to draw their own plans and to take hold of their own lives, I urgently suggest that it is critical not to lose sight of the forces of social power structures that constitute and preserve gender stereotypes and male dominance in the business world. When the women in the focus groups are stimulated to experience their position in the business world only as a result of their own individual choices and behaviors, it will become more difficult to join forces and criticize or challenge the masculine norm that still dominates the business world. Consciousness and awareness of the social structures that uphold inequality in our society and in the business world must be raised amongst everyone in order to be able to truly challenge these structural inequalities and really make a change.

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