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Petersson McIntyre, Magdalena

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Commodifying feminism: Economic choice and agency in the context of lifestyle influencers and gender consultants

Magdalena Petersson McIntyre 

Centre for Consumer Research, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

Correspondence

Magdalena Petersson McIntyre, Centre for Consumer Research, University of Gothenburg, Box 606, Gothenburg 405 30, Sweden.

Email: Magdalena.petersson@cfk.gu.se

Abstract

Feminism has become a recurrent ingredient in many women's narratives of their selves and is regularly appearing as an important aspect of women's success, happiness and self-realization. The development has been criticized for upholding a view in which structural inequalities are explained in terms of individual choices; choice feminism. This article examines two professional groups, lifestyle influencers and gender equality consultants. The purpose is to examine how questions of feminism, choice and entrepreneurship are made sense of in these contexts. The article situates the interviewees' explanations in fourth, or even fifth wave feminism to examine whether the embrace of choice still relies on a critique of gender structures and inequalities. Both the consultants and the influencers felt that entrepreneurial success had changed the way society viewed them. The appeal of 'choice' was an outcome of a perceived lack of choice, a matter of performing resistance to the culturally defined choices these individuals felt were presented to them. The article contributes to an understanding of the shifting meanings and forms feminism takes in social media and commercial market settings and what it is that these individuals find appealing in addressing individual success as a feminist victory.

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KEYWORDS

choice feminism, gender equality consultants, influencers, neoliberalism, post-feminism

I want to encourage all women (and men) to be driven more by the will to succeed than by the fear of failure. Dare to say yes! Go for it! Don't [follow] what others think is right or [what gives] status! And! Don't forget the work life-balance. Don't be careless with your time to rest and time for your family. Ebba Busch Thor¹—for a new [Swedish, Christian right-wing] feminism. Instagram, EU campaign May 2019

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, feminism has increasingly become a recurrent ingredient in many women's narratives of their selves. Feminism is regularly appearing as an important aspect of women's success, happiness, and self-realization. Celebrities and politicians officially declare their feminist beliefs and feminism has become a visible element in commercial contexts, for instance in advertising and products with feminist content and iconography (Gill, 2016). In parallel, there has been a development where issues of gender equality are driven as an issue for the market, *market feminism* (Kantola & Squires, 2012). This increasing presence of feminist statements and announcements inevitably means that many people's views of feminism and what it is change (cf. Aune & Holyoak, 2018; Charles & Wadia, 2018). Individuals that would not previously call themselves feminists are now doing so to a greater extent, while the meaning of being a feminist is shifting. For example, a Christian right-wing politician, as in the quote above, can talk about feminism as a matter of finding a balance between work and family life. The popularity of feminism does, however, not necessarily mean neither that the redistribution of power based in gender is becoming more effective, nor that feminist perspectives are more widely tolerated. Rather, and as argued by many scholars, feminism is increasingly associated with individual empowerment, and to individual women's professional success, at the expense of collective struggle. Structural inequalities, gender segregation and gendered patterns of work and consumption are referred to in terms of individual choices; a development sometimes referred to as *choice feminism*. The development has caused many feminists to worry, point to de-politicization, and fear that feminism is becoming a commodified concept used to talk of women's right to be beautiful and their choice to be dependent on men.

This paper examines two relatively “new” professional groups of (mostly) women entrepreneurs, namely (i) lifestyle influencers and (ii) gender equality consultants that offered services that were entangled in a message of feminism, and/or feminine empowerment. The initial idea of comparing these two groups of entrepreneurs was inspired by my work on two different projects between 2014 and 2020 (Pettersson McIntyre, 2020; Pettersson McIntyre, 2021). Despite some obvious differences, I found that the professional activities that these two groups were engaged in were surprisingly similar. By relating their ways of making sense of feminism, agency and choice, the article will problematize and explore what feminism means to these individuals, put in relation to waves of feminism. Hence, the article critically examines whether feminism really is becoming a matter of individual success, for growing numbers of women, or whether the embrace of choice, individual empowerment and professional and financial success still relies on a critique of gender structures and inequalities.

The context of the present study is Sweden; a country that likes to pride itself for its gender equality, its entrepreneurial climate, and its far-reaching digitalization. Over the past few decades, Sweden has changed from a social-democratic welfare state, to embracing neoliberal, market-based forms of governance with high levels of privatization (Olivius & Rönnblom, 2019). The #MeToo movement has had a large impact in Sweden, and “the myth of Swedish gender equality” has increasingly been debunked (Martinsson et al., 2016). The new forms of feminist

activism that have emerged in conjunction with increased use of modern social media have been referred to as the fourth- (or even fifth-)wave of feminism (McLaran, 2015; Rivers, 2017).

Lifestyle influencers are micro-celebrities (Abidin, 2016) (or increasingly “macro” as they become superstars) who are celebrated in popular media for their beauty, their lines of cosmetics, their consumption, their opinions, their personal experiences, and their entrepreneurship. They write about indulgence of the self and the creation of a beautiful body as an expression of feminism and feminine empowerment. They embody an entrepreneurial self in which the boundaries between work, consumption, intimacy, and the marketplace are dissolved and where personal life experiences are conceived as assets that can be commodified (Pettersson McIntyre, 2020). Gender equality consultants, on the other hand, have an academic background, often in gender studies. They analyze gender structures in society and provide suggestions to organizations on how they might improve gender equality. The goal of these consultants is not to make money by attracting interest in the popular media, but, rather, to promote gender equality in the work place. That is the nature of their influence. In a manner similar to influencers, gender equality consultants use their personal experiences as a resource for entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the consultants also experienced difficulty in drawing boundaries between the personal and the professional; again illustrating how new occupations commodify gendered bodies, experiences, and emotions in specific ways (Hochschild, 1983; Illouz, 2007; Pettersson McIntyre, 2014; Scharff, 2016). These occupations are also part of a development where many women are pushed into entrepreneurship and have moved from low income jobs to low income entrepreneurship (Ahl et al., 2016).

While influencers talk of breast enlargement procedures being broadcast live on YouTube as empowering, gender consultants talk about being open to clients about how one's menstruation is important to them, as a way of occupying masculine spaces. These two ways of displaying the female body are thus quite different with respect to normative expectations; one approach celebrates the connection between femininity and beauty, whilst the other allows suppressed expressions of femininity to take part in public life. Nonetheless, when one examines how these strategies make sense to individuals, they are not necessarily perceived as being that different from each other. Furthermore, note that influencing others is a central goal for both groups, as made manifest by the name given to one of them. Gender consultants, nevertheless, also wish to influence people, by changing their minds about something.

My purpose is thus to analyze how influencers and gender consultants, respectively, make sense of the relation between feminism, choice and agency. I am not so much interested in determining *whether* these individuals can be considered feminist, as in examining *why* these individuals consider themselves feminists and what it means in terms of next wave of feminism. Even more, the article studies *when* these individuals see the activities that they do as feminist, and how they act upon these ideas. To this purpose, I discuss the ambiguous meanings that are ascribed to *choice feminism* in order to (i) explain *when* choice feminism is an attractive form of feminism for individuals, (ii) identify *why* subjects turn to this form of feminism, and (iii) examine *how* choice feminism makes sense to them. By that the article contributes to an understanding of the shifting meanings and forms feminism takes in social media and commercial market settings and what it is that these individuals find appealing in addressing individual success as a feminist victory. This perspective also bridges the divides that exist between the popular forms of feminism that are shared on social media and academically informed gender equality work. By examining how influencers and gender equality consultants relate to choice, the present study adds to knowledge of how contemporary Swedish entrepreneurs understand feminist agency in a time and place where “choice” has been somewhat enthusiastically promoted as an alternative to what Ebba Busch and her political party term “elite feminism” (*Aftonbladet*, 2019-08-27).

2 | FEMINISM, CHOICE, AND AGENCY

Women's right to choose and influence the events that affect their lives, desires, and bodies, continues to be a central component of feminist waves and feminist scholarship. Whilst assertive action characterizes the social construction of masculinity, the lack of choice has been identified by feminists as the foundation of gender oppression. As argued by Budgeon (2015), femininity has been formed around enabling the autonomous choices of

others, for example, one's family members. Choice implies an active participant. Therefore, to relate the act of choosing to women's agency explicitly questions the role of passivity that traditionally has been associated with femininity.

2.1 | Third- and fourth-wave feminism

With the rise of third-wave feminism in the early 1990s emphasis was placed on questions of inclusion, pluralism, difference, context, and being non-judgmental; issues that have continued to be central to later feminist waves. Third-wave feminism challenged "woman" as category, and included questions of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, arguing that feminism must abandon universal claims in favor of diverse and plural definitions. This development was in response to the realization that questions of power depend on the perspective one has adopted. Issues related to sex-positivity, intersectionality, and post-structuralism subsequently took center stage. Women's desires should be accepted as well as contextualized, be they desires related to consumption, sexuality, or their careers, whether they are stereotypically feminine or seemingly patriarchal, or not (Budgeon, 2015; Martinsson et al., 2000; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008).

However, while the lack of choice, as examined in first- and second-wave feminism, was previously understood as a collective disadvantage that women were subjected to (as a result of their ascribed gender), in third- and fourth-wave feminism, it has been increasingly claimed that the right to choice has motivated acts that benefit individual women, often in relation to their consumption, careers, or entrepreneurial efforts. For example, female empowerment has been linked to economic success and entrepreneurship (Berglund 2018; Budgeon, 2015; Oksala, 2013; Ringrose, 2007; Thwaites, 2016).

The term *choice feminism* was later coined to describe aspects of this development (Hirschmann, 2006). Choice feminism has been criticized for being individualistic, lacking in collectivity, overly consumerist, and for upholding patriarchal structures, all the while emphasizing women's rights to choose and play with these structures, as empowered subjects. Representations of femininity in terms of choice, or (rather) practices that are associated with femininity, are particularly developed in commercial contexts and cultures; including advertising campaigns that promote beauty, perfumes, and cosmetics (Lazar, 2009, 2017; Petersson McIntyre, 2019). In these contexts, success is related to making the right choices, and not to opportunities that fall out from gender, class, and racial structures (Budgeon, 2015; McRobbie, 2007; Thwaites, 2016). Even if "third-wave feminism" and "choice feminism" share some viewpoints, "third-wave feminism" is, as argued by Claire Snyder-Hall (2010) a better concept than "choice feminism." Third-wave feminism is not a thoughtless endorsement of "choice," she argues, but a deep respect for pluralism and self-determination.

Several different concepts have been invoked in deliberations on the rise of feminist content in popular and commercial cultures. "Commodity feminism" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Goldman et al., 1991), "post-feminism" (McRobbie, 2009; Negra & Tasker, 2007) and "choice feminism" (Thwaites, 2016) all adopt a critical approach to individualization, de-politicization, consumerism, and the celebration of individual economic success or entrepreneurialism. Gill (2016) describes "post-feminism" as reliant on a blurring between femininity and feminism—if it is feminine, it is feminist—thus draining feminism of its critical content. Post-feminism should not primarily be seen as a historical shift, but as an analytical category which can be used to examine how gender is produced in the media, she argues (Gill, 2007, 2016). Choice feminism shares with post-feminism the ideas that gender inequalities have been overcome and that women have gained freedom to make individual choices (Budgeon, 2015; Ferguson, 2010; Hirschman, 2006). While post-feminism addresses questions of empowerment and the image of women as empowered by consumption (McRobbie, 2009; Negra & Tasker, 2007), "choice feminism" is more directly concerned with the meaning and consequences of choice (Budgeon, 2015; Thwaites, 2016). Choice feminism argues that women are best suited to judge what is right for them in their lives, and that women's lives are the result of the choices they have made. According to this view, women who act in gender-stereotypical ways have chosen to do so

and are thus not subordinated by this behavior since they may choose something different if they so want to. To be a stay-at-home-mom is a choice, or to undergo cosmetic surgery is a choice. To criticize other women's life choices is, therefore, an act of disrespect or a showing of bias.

These concepts are also widely applied to contexts that extend the field of the media. In the context of organizational studies, "post-feminism" has been criticized for expressing a safe and unthreatening form of feminism, since it focuses on individual empowerment without criticizing the existing masculine power structures that permeate the business world (Dean, 2010, p. 391; Lewis et al., 2017). Lewis et al. (2017) present post-feminism as a Foucauldian discursive formation, identifying it as "a constellation of authoritative speech acts that relate to one another in some coherent way such that it is possible to define regularities between statements" (p. 4). They also refer to the "complicated co-existence of feminist values such as choice, equality of opportunity and agentic self-determination alongside the re-articulation of traditional expectations and traditional gender stereotypes around motherhood, beauty and female sexuality" (ibid., 2017, p. 5).

Choice feminism and post-feminism have been criticized for disregarding how the choices people make impact on others and for not paying enough attention to how choices that reinforce patriarchal structures should be understood. Perhaps more importantly, these approaches have been criticized for how choice is embedded in racial and ethnic class structures that limit, constrain, and give privilege to women, both in terms of what is structurally possible and in terms of what can be imagined as possible by women of different social and ethnic backgrounds (Budgeon, 2015; Thwaites, 2016). As Budgeon (2015) argues, "choice feminism" values the act of choice over the content of choice.

2.2 | Neoliberal governmentality and choice

Gill (2007, 2016) interprets post-feminism as a "sensibility"; a kind of emotional responsiveness that is enmeshed in a neoliberal message. *Neoliberalism* can be defined as the use of market principles to govern aspect of public life, including welfare institutions. Neoliberalism views private enterprise, deregulation, and competition as ideal models (Brown, 2003). Neoliberal discourse emphasizes individual choice as the guarantor of freedom and quality of services, including the provision of welfare to the sale of commercial goods. Consumption plays a key role in this worldview, because it is via the consumption choices that citizens are asked to assert their power over any particular market. Choice presupposes a choice maker that is untied to certain limiting structures. Thus, the whole idea of choice builds on the idea that structural inequalities have been overcome. Furthermore, when a person is considered to be free to make the choices that they make, then they are made responsible for those choices (Budgeon, 2015; Lewis et al., 2017; Rottenberg, 2014; Thwaites, 2016). Note, however, that the neoliberal valorization of private markets delivers distinct advantages to those who already hold economic power (Budgeon, 2015) and to those who are in a position to make free choices, based on the privileges they take for granted.

Neoliberalism does not only change the role of markets, it also changes the way people make sense of their lives (Brown, 2003; Du Gay, 2007; Lewis et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial subjects see themselves, and their bodies, as assets that can be exploited for purposes of entrepreneurship in different markets (Ahl et al., 2016; Berglund et al., 2018; Du Gay, 1996; McNay, 2009). Such subjects relate to themselves as if they were a company. They are active, embrace risk, deal with difficulties, and hide losses and damages. They can be characterized as rational, calculating subjects who employ economic thinking in all aspects of their lives (Scharff, 2016). Neoliberal discourse constructs citizens as "entrepreneurs of the self" who take responsibility for and manage their own lives (Brown, 2003; Foucault, 1982; Petersson McIntyre, 2014, 2016; Sharff et al., 2017). From this perspective, even the human body has become an economic project. The ideal neoliberal subject is a master of self-control, and is presented as free and independent, responsible, and rational; an individual who constantly strives to control their body and its movements (see Gill, 2007; Harjunen, 2017; Scharff et al., 2017).

As I will show, the individuals who were interviewed for this study approached their bodies, their selves and their experiences as resources for entrepreneurship. With the rhetoric of choice they were able to make sense of their lives and occupation as a struggle for independence, recognition, and a proper valuation of women's unpaid work. Individuals embrace both post-feminism and choice feminism when they identify the fact that these discursive regimes are empowering. As demonstrated below, the interviewees wanted a different work-life situation; one where their interests and convictions mattered. They expressed a desire to live in a world where their activities were judged as valuable and where the organizations that they operate in also endorse that which they consider to be important.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This study employs an ethnographic methodology where cultural patterns are identified with the use of thick descriptions (Ehn et al., 2016). Sense-making practices were traced across a variety of fields; including the spoken word, writing, and digital texts. This research method thus includes text analysis, in-depth-interviews, and observations. The ethnographic methodology was chosen based on my research interest in lived experiences, and my desire to interrogate what feminism signifies for contemporary Swedish entrepreneurs who “sell” feminism. A perspective on their narratives was obtained by relating them to the range of post-feminist sensibilities that has been described by Gill (2016) and others (O'Reilly, 2005; Pink et al., 2016).

By asking the participants about their views on feminism, femininity, and entrepreneurship, I was able to analyze their narratives as something that was ongoing, something that they enacted, and something which they actively created. I did not search for expression of the grand narratives of neoliberalism in their stories, but, instead, I addressed how everyday experiences can be sometimes contradictory, fragmentary, and inconsistent, whilst appreciating that they can be simultaneously intertwined with and profoundly informed by political and cultural processes at large (Stewart, 2007). My purpose was to gain insight into their everyday negotiations and renegotiations of gender, agency, and power. The interviews with the participants allowed me to recognize how a particular discourse that might empower a person's life (e.g., “choice feminism”) can be experienced as the opposite of another discourse (Saukko, 2004). Thus, I contrasted the two groups, thereby highlighting contradictions (instead of toning them down), so as to enable a multi-dimensional analysis of post-feminism and to facilitate the identification of the contradictions in this discourse. If women say that post-feminist sensibilities afford them agency, then it is necessary to come to an understanding of what it is that they think that agency consists of. Their experiences are taken seriously, whilst recognized that they exist as under the influence of prevailing cultural discourses.

Between 2014 and 2016, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 12 self-defined influencers or bloggers. I followed these individuals' Instagram or YouTube channels over a period of four years, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, and sometimes less frequently. I also followed 25 similar social media accounts that they had recommended or had been suggested to me by the algorithm in my Instagram feed. I also read two biographies that had been written by top bloggers. I “followed the people” and their networks, but also the phenomenon of blogger, or “bloggeress” [*modebloggerska*], as the feminized Swedish term is, in media representations (Marcus, 1998). These representations evolved from initial moral-panic condemnations of young women's superficiality, to later celebrations of their entrepreneurial spirit. I used Bloggtoppen to find the bloggers in terms of their number of followers and their geographical location. “Fashion and beauty” bloggers who were relatively close to my university were contacted and asked whether they would like to be interviewed. They all initially enthusiastically answered Yes!, but when I wanted to schedule meetings with these people, it was difficult to get response. I associated this discrepancy to their online presence and their habit of giving positive answers to all possible collaborators. It took some concerted effort on my part to successfully book a physical meeting. All of the individuals who eventually agreed to meet with me ran independent blogs. The interviewees could be categorized into three categories at the

time of the interviews: (1) They could live off the income that their blog generated ($n = 7$, between 25 and 33 years of age); (2) They used their online activities as a resource for a day-job in marketing or communications ($n = 3$, two were 25 years of age and one was aged 38); and (3) It was a free-time activity ($n = 2$, aged 40 and 45). These were, however, not clear-cut categories, and some of the interview participants moved between categories after the interview period or this had taken place before the interview period. All of the bloggers aspired to be able to live off the income that their accounts generated, but this was not always possible, and their income could vary on a monthly basis. They all had some form of safety net to fall back on, such as a partner, sick-pay, and/or unemployment benefits. Some of the interviewees employed their male partner in their company. In addition to their blogs, they published updates of their work on Instagram. Not all of the interviewees had children at the time that they were interviewed, but according to their media accounts they all have children now. All of the interviewees had a male partner, were white, and were second or third generation Swedish citizens. The vast majority of the accounts and individuals in the category fashion and beauty are women. Only female bloggers were selected for study because, I wished to investigate why so many women engage in sharing consumption issues through new digital media and to examine the (sometimes condescending) media representations of "fashion bloggers." The aim of this investigation is to deepen our understanding of why women choose these activities.

I conducted 20 in-depth interviews with gender equality consultants between 2016 and 2019. The interviewees were operative within the broad field of gender, equality, inclusion, and "norm-critique." The only selection criteria that I used was that a participant had to have some form of self-employment or employment by a private company in this field. I asked all of the interviewees to map out what they considered the field of gender consultancy in Sweden was. This was done in order to identify key persons or key firms in the area, and to garner recommendations concerning who I might contact next. Three different groups were identified during the course of the interviews: (i) The first group was business-oriented and interested in recruiting clients from private companies, to help them with ad campaigns, product design, or modifications to their work environment. (ii) The second group was more oriented toward promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in public administrations, such as universities, municipalities, and hospitals. (iii) A third group consisted of individuals who gave talks on their private experiences, including topics such as "sex on equal terms" and "non-binary experiences." Just under half of the interviewees belonged to either the first group or the second group, whilst two individuals fell under the third category. Some tensions existed between the two groups, although the differences between them were not clear-cut. Some of the participants moved between the first two groups, too. Most of the consultants who participated in the interviews employed only themselves, but a few firms employed up to five consultants. Some of these firms had provided consultancy services for 30 years (typically Group 2), while others were new to the field (typically Group 1). Two of the interviewees identified as "male" (one from a transgender perspective), the rest identified as "women" (although many of the interviewees were critical of binary gender definitions and heteronormativity). Most of them had a Swedish, or Nordic, background.

For the purposes of this study, I also conducted participant observations during the training of new consultants. I participated in activities with clients, took part in meetings, attended workshops, and listened to a number of lectures. I also followed a closed Facebook-group which approximately half the interviewees regularly participated in, read webpages where their services and products were presented to clients, and other materials such as books written and used by the consultants, some of which they had written themselves, or books that they recommended to clients. I also examined a number of tools that were used by the consultants, including card games that were used during assignments to expose hidden gender norms. These materials provided me with insights into the work that consultants perform, and allowed me to examine how they put their ideas to practical use.

The interviewees have all been anonymized. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 h, the majority of which took place at the interviewees' offices. The interview recordings were transcribed in full and coded in terms of re-occurring themes.

Contrasting and comparing these two groups of entrepreneurs enables a certain perspective on choice feminism as insofar as it is concerned with middle-class, Swedish lifestyle influencers' and gender consultants'

desire for independence, whilst recognizing the (feminized) interests that they have. While most of the interviewees were middle-class, some of them had a less privileged back-ground. It was however clear that self-employment often relied some form of class-based financial security, but, as I will show, physical capital also played a part.

The two sets of interviews occurred after one another. Interviewing the gender consultants after the influencers meant that I was able to see the similarities between the two, an observation that I would not have been able to detect otherwise, and which led me to think of similarities between the two groups. The influencer study formally ended in 2016, but I have continued to follow the interviewees' accounts up to date, although on a less regular basis. The relatively long time span of the study has enabled me to situate the formation of choice and agency within feminism as an ingredient in a larger wave that is both typical and historically and contextually specific.

4 | LIFESTYLE INFLUENCERS

The influencers who were interviewed had starting blogging so as to create “a room-of-their own,” and to share their personal thoughts and passions with others (see also Dmitrow-Devold, 2017; Lövheim, 2011; Palmgren, 2015). The connections that they developed through their online activities quickly allowed them to use their private homes and families as a backdrop for product placement. Unlike any previous professional group, bloggers had turned their whole lives into commodifiable products and services (Pedroni, 2015; Tilton, 2015). With sponsorship deals they are able to get paid to consume, thus dissolving the distinction between production and consumption (Pettinger, 2005). More specifically, their blogs relied on the relationship between consumption and their selves—on enabling the construction of a consuming self (Petersson McIntyre, 2020; Williams & Connell, 2012). Neoliberal and post-feminist techniques of self-surveillance and self-improvement (Lewis et al., 2017) are intensified, but, as I will show, also diversified, with the use of social media.

The word *freedom* was frequently used to describe their situation and “choice” was a recurring theme. The ability to choose to not accept low-wage menial work in the public sector was considered to be empowering. They had chosen their occupation because they were interested in something, often particular consumer goods, or brands, or they wanted to share information about the consumption of goods and services, and also about family life, mental health or illness, cosmetic surgery procedures, and personal thoughts about life in general. Ellinor, stated the following:

I am a very social person and this form of occupation really lifts me up, being able to expose things, to write posts that are touching and about things in my life that others can relate to and feel for. I can make a difference. I think it is really cool, you can form a site and help others from your own experiences. In the past, I suffered a lot from anxiety.

Helene, on the other hand, took inspiration from the prevailing “celebrity culture” to create content for her blog account (cf. Abidin, 2016; Church Gibson, 2012). To this aim, she used herself as a resource:

I started to blog in 2001 because I was interested in graphic design and web design. I had to fill the sites with something and I thought “then I will make a site about myself.” I had seen sites about celebrities before and that is what inspired me to make one about myself.

Notwithstanding the sentiment above, many of the interviewees emphasized the importance of keeping a distance between one's actual self and one's blog self. These two identities, I was informed, should not be confused with each other because doing so could lead to problems, such as hateful messages from online readers who don't understand that the blog self is not real. Cultural ideas of how “real life” works, outside the

sphere of the blog, constantly provided the participants boundaries for what could be said and done online (Lewis, 2015). Thus, becoming successful within Internet culture required negotiations with respect to privacy boundaries, such as giving personal information about one's family, and being open with oneself in relation to perceived "failures," including mental illness, weight gain, stretch marks, or pictures of one's face without make-up. Many of them subscribed to the logic of "mumpreneurship" in which home and work are not in tension with each other and the notion of balance between the two is not an issue (Lewis, 2014; see also De Wit Sandström, 2018; Ekinsmyth, 2011).

4.1 | Entrepreneurship of the consuming self

Themes such as "fashion," "beauty," beauty products," and "beauty treatments" were common topics that were addressed during the interviews. Participation in the beauty and consumer culture was regularly referred to as a *choice* (cf. Davis, 2002). To become successful as an influencer, they were required to put considerable effort into making their bodies, homes, and families look glamorous. As put by Rebecca: "I have always been very interested in fashion. When I was a little girl my mom would let me buy a new dress instead of sweets on Saturdays. I think that interest stayed with me." Blogging did not only give them the opportunity to work with their interests, but it also enabled them to cultivate those interests more deeply.

Becoming successful as an online influencer was connected with creating a product of the self and simultaneously deleting any boundaries between the product (the online persona) and the self. As Matilda reported: "I started to blog because I am interested in marketing and I live an exciting life (i.e., that people would be interested in).

This self (as described by the interviewees) was intensely empowered by consumption. Their personal stories were layered and illustrated with pictures and links to goods, and goods were used to narrate the self with frequently occurring stories such as "Me and baby on morning walk in pram from [brand name] and outfits from [brand name]. The fresh air does both of us good...." These stories were always completed with links to where the products could easily be bought.

Being true to oneself, to one's interests and convictions was important to all of the interviewees. Susanne said that she did not want to write about things that she did not enjoy. She would have liked to have had the blog as her main job, "but it is a rare luxury." Similarly, Catherine spoke about how important it is that blogging should be fun, driven by her interests, and that she was able to decide to not cooperate with companies that she did not want to represent. There were a number of techniques that were exploited by the bloggers to achieve success by leveraging their corporate partnerships to their advantage. However, there were more choices available to those who were had many followers. Success also required collaboration with sponsors and companies one perhaps did not like, or prefer to use. There was thus a price to pay when boundaries of privacy were kept too high in the form of less attention by followers. Sharing intimate matters is, of course, a gender issue, since it is mostly women who feel compelled, and are required in the current blog economy, to share what is most private to them. Such sharing is also related to acquiring capital in the form of beauty and success.

4.1.1 | Empowerment of the body

The opportunity, or choice, to indulge in one's (consumer) interests was raised by several of the interviewees as a feature of empowerment, or as a feature of being a feminist. Choices were rarely related to structural, or collective aspects, but, if anything, understood as a reward coming from success. A great deal of significance was given to the body, and not in terms of its collective aspects, but in relation to one's *own body* (Gill, 2007, 2016). The themes of "beauty" and "beautification" were often raised in this context. Empowerment could involve the production of one's

own body image so that one looked like a fashion model, but it could also be a matter of showing body types that one might think were excluded by mainstream fashion media (Mora & Rocamora, 2015; Rocamora, 2012), thereby daring to occupy visual space even though one's body does not conform to certain beauty ideals (Murray, 2015; Pham, 2015). Similarly, certain fashion vintage styles were thought of as empowering, since they were seen as questioning or challenging mainstream ideals:

Susanne: I want to be able to go in a tip skirt and wear high heels and look coquettish and still be CEO of a male-dominated business. Why should I adapt my clothing to men? Why should I look like other men to be respected like a man? [...] They [critical followers] think my husband is a dominant type just because I (laughs) look like a 50s-housewife. Which does not have the slightest thing to do with anything. He really does not care what I wear, and would never interfere. [...] I like my body and I like pretty dresses and it does not matter if I [don't] have a wasp's waist. I love these dresses anyway. [...] But if I ever do get rude comments, it's about my weight. The fact that they think I'm too fat to appear on images. I should not do it. Or they think that I do not support feminism, just because I look feminine.

This form of femininity was individualized—and proclaimed that the person in question wants to be admired and respected. More importantly, however, even if Susanne claimed that her body does not conform to beauty ideals, it was presented as aestheticized and beautiful on her blog account. It is the ability to present a body that does not conform as something beautiful that is desired, not to present it as “ugly,” or whatever that may be. At the same time, the core of Susanne's argument lies in the claim that her performance of femininity should have the same value as conventional business-masculinity. Undoubtedly, Susanne thinks that other women should be also respected for their performance of gender too. Her story can be interpreted as, what Claire Snyder-Hall (2010) calls, “a conscious struggle with life's competing demands.”

Matilda shared, in detail, all the events and procedures surrounding about her “boob job” live on YouTube (Jones, 2015). She said it was important for her to “be allowed to be beautiful” without being judged as superficial or ignorant:

I'm trying to portray a world, because I'm very focused on appearances ... my blog is made up from a lot of beauty, but [I want to show] that there is a something behind it all. That although you may be, perhaps working as a model, and look very styled, there's actually a brain behind it all. And that's what has made my blog grow so large. I'm not just a makeup blogger who is an expert on makeup.

The ability to create an almost perfect feminine body is understood (above) as a feminist victory and not as a concession to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975; Rocamora, 2011). But Matilda's choice to be beautiful was closely linked to the fact that she had a body that could be judged as beautiful, by her followers and sponsors. She was slim, fit, and conformed to several ideals about female beauty. She did sometimes show older pictures of herself when she perceived herself overweight, but such showings were always in relation to how she had overcome that phase of her life, and how she had now achieved her “dream body,” in collaboration with products, services, and her own hard work and determination.

In Matilda's case, empowerment is clearly featured as a *project of the body*, particularly a body that conforms with certain beauty ideals. At times, this project was made manifest in the form of a body that was surgically cut open and sewn up again for the world to see. It is difficult to imagine that most men would describe empowerment in this way. Women are constructed as “malleable subjects” (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 14), and thus the feminine body is considered to be an object of constant improvement. These “improvements” are celebrated, particularly online, as courageous, admirable, and a sign of success. Many people are fascinated by gazing at the things that are done to the female body, and to observe see the subject/person who passes through these (sometimes painful) transformations.

4.1.2 | Feminism—feminine empowerment

Although none of the interviewees described her blog as being explicitly feminist, many felt that their blog was feminist to some degree with respect to certain specific issues. In these formulations, *femininity* and *feminism* were often related to each other. Just as *feminism* was seen as a feature of an individualistic *feminine* body, as an expression of being allowed to or daring to look beautiful, the term *feminism* and its associated collective and political connotations was met with some degree of suspicion. Ellinor, for example, was reluctant to come to grips with deeper significance of the concept of “feminism.” On the one hand, she claimed that it is obvious that she should have the same rights as a man, but on the other hand, she did not think that one should talk about gender:

Ellinor: I think it is so very tricky with feminism. [...] What I feel is that all people are equal. It should not be either or. I think that sometimes with feminism it can be [i.e., go too far]. Instead of finding equality, it becomes stereotyped the other way. [...] I do not want to put labels on myself.

Ellinor expresses her desire for equal rights, but she is not sure whether this constitutes feminism. She does not want her gender to set limits for her and she does not want to be limited by being called a “feminist.” Again, this seeming conundrum is reduced to exercising her ability to choose; for Ellinor, this matter of choice is seen as empowering, interestingly, feminine empowerment becomes, for her, the opposite of feminism.

A post-feminist sensibility in which the right to consume is combined with a sense of empowerment, the freedom to follow one's interests, the license to show what “real” women look like, and the ability to make money based on sharing one's skills and interests informed many of the narratives that were produced during the interviews. The interviewees articulated a desire to realize themselves through consumption, but maintaining traditionally female-defined values such as family life, beauty, and fashion. They wanted to be beautiful, to be mothers, to engage in consumption and fashion, but also to gain respect as entrepreneurs. They wanted to share images of their aestheticized homes and family lives by producing elaborate photographs of meals that they had prepared and celebrations that they had arranged.

However, they wanted to do these things in a way which they had control over their time and where these activities also generated money for themselves and their households. They all took the gains that feminism has made in society for granted, and thus didn't see the need to explicitly identify themselves as feminists. They admired entrepreneurship, but preferred companies that they could run from home and could be combined with family life. The interviewees who enjoyed financial freedom, physical capital in the form of possessing ideal beauty, and/or the necessary connections and skills to make use of available resources felt like their achievements were a result their choices.

5 | GENDER CONSULTANTS

The last decade has witnessed substantial growth in the gender consultancy field, especially in Sweden. In part, this growth can be seen as a result of the spread of feminism, and in part in response to the implementation of neoliberal forms of management where issues of gender equality have been outsourced to a private market (Kantola & Squires, 2012; Kunz & Prügl, 2019; Olivius & Rönnblom, 2019). The gender consultants who were interviewed for this study reported that they accepted different assignments of varying budgets and lengths. An assignment could range from a 1-h lecture to a 4-month project. Their work could consist of, for example, lectures, workshops, evaluations, a survey, and/or a written report. The gender consultants were also commissioned to give feedback on recruitment and communication strategies, provide input on visual campaigns, advertisement campaigns, and information campaigns. Occasionally, a job might consist of a more general analysis of the norms within

an organization, including the lunch-room culture, the jargon that is used by employees, and attitudes amongst management.

Similar to the influencers, the consultants talked about entrepreneurship in terms of “independence” and “freedom,” and as an alternative to typical women's work in the public sector. *Gender* (or *gender equality*) was described as “an interest” and self-employment had offered these consultants the opportunity to work with their passion by using their personal interests and competencies as resources for entrepreneurship. Work was described as “fun” and many of them reported that students and others contact them regularly for advice on how to get in to the business:

In the beginning it was like that. I want to work with something that is fun and what I want to do. With time it has become more... not that I want to make money, but I like being self-employed. I like having my own office. I like not having any employer. I enjoy the freedom. I enjoy the entrepreneurial life. But it wasn't, I didn't want to be an entrepreneur from the beginning. Now I wouldn't want to leave entrepreneurial life. (Eva-Marie)

Similar to the influencers, the gender equality consultants wanted to share information about something they felt they had “exclusive” knowledge of, and believed that others may find interesting and that there was a market for such knowledge. Going into business had given them the opportunity to work on their self, thereby creating a knowledgeable or competent self. The knowledge that they wanted to share was not about consumption and beauty however. The consultants informed others about gender structures, gender equality, methods such as gender mainstreaming, and how gender norms work. The consultants also addressed norms such as heteronormativity, cis-normativity, and masculinity.

Surprisingly often, the influencers and the gender consultants had similar background stories. Many individuals from either group had felt uncertain about their careers, in the sense that they didn't quite know what they wanted to work with. Many had tried different forms of artistic work. Both groups contained a relatively large number of individuals who had been on sick-leave for exhaustion syndromes, felt out of place in the regular work market, and had searched for alternative occupations. After pursuing a degree in gender studies, some of the consultants had found themselves unemployed and unwanted on the labor market. Consultancy work had slowly manifested itself as a workable career pathway. For example, Ellen said that she grew tired of being “the poor artist,” and so proceeded into adult education. Being a “single mom with four kids,” she “had to dare.” Thus, even if many of the interviewees felt that they did not fit in with the mainstream work market, self-improvement and a constant molding of the self, along with taking responsibility for one's own life-situation, worked as driving forces in this respect (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 14).

The sense of vulnerability and the dependency that one has on others which is often associated with women's entrepreneurship and the exposure to change that one has no control over characterized the work conditions for both groups (if not for every individual). Among the gender consultants, there were some individuals who had worked for many years in private industry, dealing with issues related to management and HR.

Whilst it is uncontroversial to observe that influencers are a product of social media, it is noteworthy that the consultants also felt pressure to be constantly visible on Facebook and Twitter. They felt they had to regularly update profiles and write positive and encouraging comments to both present, former, and future clients. Many posted comments on Instagram about how wonderful their latest assignment was, how privileged they are to work with their passions, or how rewarding work was for them personally. These are posts that clients would often “like,” comment, or share, too. Thus, whilst social media may increase the pressures of precarious working conditions, the consultants also felt that it gave them important feed-back that encouraged them to keep doing important work.

As with the influencers, the consultants had also decided to follow their chosen career pathway as the result of a combination of different reasons. They reported that were interested and engaged in the topics that they dealt with, they did not want to have an 8-5 office job, they liked doing different things, and they wanted to combine

work with the time they spent for home and their family. However, the consultants more clearly articulated the claim that they thought of their decision to be a consultant was a matter of actively pursuing an explicit feminist agenda, not merely the working out of a personal matter, or a choice, as in the case of the bloggers. The consultants were critical of how Swedish society had organized life for its (female) citizens, and wanted domestic work and time spent with children to be valued, without falling into the traps inherent to the traditional division of labor, such as financial dependency. They expressed “choice” in terms of *independence* and *equality* in ways that the influencers did not. Importantly, many of the consultants held university degrees in law, social sciences, and humanities, and were used to expressing themselves in political terms. Even though some of the influencers also held university degrees, their (public) communication was more focused on matters related to consumption, and they were not used to talking politics in the same way as the consultants were. Both groups had a strong ambition to impact on ways of making sense of the world—of influencing people’s thoughts on what is right and how one might live life in ways that matter. In order to make a living, the consultants entered into business partnerships and accepted assignments from clients. The influencers were allocated sponsors who required them to perform “a consuming self.”

5.1 | The entrepreneurship of the activist self

The influencers and the consultants had both fused their professional roles with their self. However, while many influencers had dreamed of entrepreneurial life, and strove after this life as the ultimate proof of the importance of their activities, the consultants were often “unwilling entrepreneurs.” They had become entrepreneurs because it had been the only way for them to work with the questions that they “burnt for.” Ellen, like many other consultants, had to develop herself in order to see herself as a business owner. During her interview, she explained how she negotiated with her feelings: “If you see that people need to learn about [gender structures] you have to realize that you have something to [that will help], instead of thinking that you are selling something they don’t need.” Ellen, and many other consultants talked of “selling” as something negative -- something that entailed pushing something that might be unnecessary for the client – merely for one’s own personal gain. Selling was habitually associated with masculinity, of promoting oneself, thus deemed unfeminine. Selling is closely entwined with ideas of entrepreneurship, thus repeating the logic of the norm of entrepreneurship as being “male” (Ahl et al., 2016; Lewis, 2006; Petersson McIntyre, 2015). However, this view also created requirements to invest more of the self in work.

Find your passion. Try to affect. Embrace resistance. Use the force. The more resistance you meet, the more you become engaged in trying to turn someone. Use your passion. (Fia, gender consultant).

During my fieldwork practice, I often encountered exercises which were intended to teach one how to use one’s unique strengths and talents, so as to make a difference. These exercises exemplified how a person’s personality, experiences, and dispositions can be employed as assets for building an entrepreneurial self. The interviewees spoke of the importance of self-knowledge and the significance of knowing one’s unique strengths and weaknesses. Anna made the following remarks with respect to consultancy work: “Dare to be honest with your strengths. Think about what you do to cover up for your weaknesses. How do you put your strengths to use? Can you tweak anything so as to make more room for your strengths?”

5.1.1 | Creating trust by using the self as a resource

When I interviewed Camilla she explained to me that her enterprise involves “being authentic.” Her aim is not to “create a brand,” but, instead, she “wants to be useful.” She calls her approach a new form of entrepreneurship: “I

am my competence and I am my network." There is no filter between the three points of reference, she said; that is to say, between herself, her competence, and her connections.

For the influencers, authenticity entailed creating trust in products and brands, but the consultants had similar goals — they also wanted to appear authentic and trustworthy so that they could be persuasive with respect to their message. Camilla stated: "I don't want to sell. I want to convey knowledge. I don't want to sell myself, "I am so brilliant at this." Didn't want to be like a car salesman." In a manner similar to how the influencers spoke about the early days of their social media work when they had to promote products they didn't really like, many consultants reported on the early days of their work, when they would be forced to accept assignments they didn't really want to do. Both groups had a common goal of avoiding such situations in the future. The consultants often expressed their fear over "selling their soul" and expressed concern over where to draw the line between their ideals and the practical work that they were commissioned to perform.

5.2 | Empowerment of the body

To actively involve one's self and one's passions was thus an unofficial requirement for both the bloggers and the consultants. However, the consultants explained this requirement as a way of resisting (what they saw as) norms that govern work-life and the norms of gendered labor. They did not see this as a concession to a de-politized post-feminist or neoliberal order. However, performing a different entrepreneurial subjectivity was not seen so much as a question of creating alternatives, as of involving matters that the consultants perceived were excluded in mainstream markets; for instance, a refusal of accepting established boundaries between femininity, bodies, and markets. As Camilla argued:

By simply existing, we change policy. With our bodies, we move through private industry. Sometimes, we feel that we only create circles in the water. But if we were outside it, then we wouldn't even do that. Then we would have to go and talk to them. Now, we are in the middle of it. And then we can say: "We would like to change it like this."

Even if the consultant's interest was not directed towards their physical bodies (in contrast to the way that bloggers perform a feminism of the body), one would be hard pressed to say that their bodies are not a part of the work that they perform. Making the feminine body visible, in order for their work to matter, was important to them. Camilla continued:

Private industry is so very male coded. Sometimes it clashes. Being authentic means that sometimes I want to say: "Today I have my period." Maybe I don't always say it, but I want the feeling of knowing that the client knows why I am feeling down today. So it can clash and they think: "Oh my god how private, messy, and feminine." We understand that it clashes, but sometimes it is good to be completely honest. The value that I add to private industry is that I understand how the gender system works, I understand how norms work, and I want to be an actor who, through my sheer presence, my way of running an enterprise, actually makes a difference, makes a change. That involves me being myself, even if, of course, I understand that it can clash.

Camilla talks about being authentic, in ways similar to the influencers, but, for her, authenticity does not involve the relationship between a digital avatar and a human of flesh and blood. Instead, the relationship exists between her as an entrepreneur of flesh and blood and her movements and physical actions in a corporate world.

5.3 | Femininity as choice

The consultants who were interviewed saw themselves as critics of the “gender system.” In doing so, they connected women with the public sector and men with the private sector. Consequently, they were under the impression that working for the private sector challenged that system. “I have developed the kind of confidence that I observe among men in private industry, that I can do anything. Otherwise that way of thinking is not allowed [among women in the public sector?]. I don’t know what to say...” (Camilla). As argued by Lewis et al. (2017), post-feminism fuses together matters that are conventionally perceived as masculinity, such as *individualism* and *choice*, with matters that are conventionally perceived as feminine, such as *beauty*, *motherhood*, and *sexual relations*. Such positionings result in “feminism” and “femininity” becoming interdependent concepts, instead of being concepts that are in an oppositional relationship to one another.

Whilst the influencers talked about being allowed to be “feminine,” that is, being beautiful and focused on their appearance, the consultants spoke of being allowed to get respect, and not having to conform to norms of masculinity and gendered bodies. Unlike the influencers, the consultants had no problem with feminism seen as a collective struggle, as revealed by their frequent reference to gender structures. Notwithstanding this, many aspects were individual to them; their existence as feminist subjects and their efforts to cultivate their selves.

5.3.1 | The individualization of class

Unlike the influencers, the consultants sometimes spoke of “class” as an issue that had previously disappeared from contemporary feminism, but was becoming a fresh concern once again. Clients often appreciated it when the consultants brought up class issues, but this was considered to be a “difficult” area to properly address. As shown by Skeggs (1997) and many others, the collective idea of “class” fits in quite poorly with the prevailing cult of individualism that are common to present-day identity projects. In some of the interviews, the notion of “class” was individualized and merely appeared to be a personal question, in the sense that “class” was seen to be an individual problem that prevents a person from performing according to their fullest potential. Viola, for instance, argued that “class” is a particularly relevant concept in the context of discussing stress:

Me, coming from a background of upper middle-class, I have certain values when it comes to performance. Someone with a background in the working-class would have completely different [baggage]. But we have both been given flawed information that leads to stress. From one way or another. When you start dissecting it, you understand it.

Viola relates class to expectations regarding performance. Her class background has meant that she has internalized demands on herself to perform, and which leads to stress, while someone with a different class background may feel stress for other reasons. By making these patterns visible, it becomes possible to understand, and perhaps change, she argues. The arguments are similar to choice- and post-feminism. Class is not approached as a structural position, but individual and flawed which is why consciousness-raising can help you understand why you feel (stressed) the way you do. Importantly, these ways of dealing with “class” can be fitted into the work that consultants offer. It shows a method of solving class inequalities with services on a market. Similarly, to the influencers, the consultants developed a relation between their view on feminism and categories of identity, and their product.

The power that comes with many followers was often brought up by the influencers. Power to influence was also a driving force for the consultants and the choice to be self-employed had led to positions of power for some of them. The possession of political influence was something that several of the gender consultants referred to as a motivational force. In the context of working as a gender expert for a public administration, Rigmor stated: “You

have a lot of power. You are part of something and you can use it to influence, there is a lot of opportunity for influence, I really like it [...] I can make suggestions, say we should go for this, most of my suggestions are accepted and realized, 'this sounds fun, we should be part of it' I really like it."

Many of the consultants emphasized that they actually had significant leeway to induce policy change. The willingness to work with what is interesting and important in life, to share one's views with others, to exert influence, and to make things happen was common to both groups.

6 | CONCLUSION

Choice and post-feminist sensibilities ran as common theme through the interviews, illustrating how choice feminism has become part of what many middle class Swedish women see as a part of living the good life. In comparison, when I interviewed Swedish flight attendants in the late 1990s for my PhD thesis, surprisingly many of the women said they had (metaphorically) "slipped on a banana skin" and fallen into their occupation, meaning that becoming a flight attendant had been a random coincidence that was not dependent upon their own choice or agency (Pettersson 2003). I took no particular notice of this at the time. However, the strong emphasis on "choice" that has emerged in my more recent interviews has prompted me to think that the banana skin metaphor held some deeper meaning. In the light of post-feminism and choice feminism it is difficult not to think that this banana skin metaphor signaled a gendered way of talking (at the time) and that, in recent years, it has become more acceptable and expected of women to make active choices, to be assertive and even aggressive in pursuing their career pathways. The women that were interviewed for this article never talked of chance as playing a significant role in their choice of occupation. Thus, even if it is the case that choice feminism can certainly create false ideas of agency, it simultaneously points to changing discourses with respect to the ways in which women can now stake out their own pathways.

Entrepreneurial subjects see themselves, not just as assets, but as motors for entrepreneurship. Through self-mastery and self-control, they make choices and decisions that improve their opportunities in life. Having "chosen" feminine occupations, rather than being allotted by tradition made the interviewees feel "empowered" and in control. However, the choice to be self-employed had often been conditioned by facts that the interviewees couldn't control themselves, and thus these were circumstances which they had not chosen. These included being burnt out, the effects of becoming a mother, or living far from economic centers and job markets. Thus, the choices they were forced to make became meaningful when justified as the outcome of free personal choices, rather than the result of class and gender structures they were not in control over.

Consequently, "choice," as a discursive formation, or an expression of neoliberal governmentality must be related to human experiences of agency or the ways of feeling in control over matters that really are not within control. The appeal of "choice" is an outcome of a perceived lack of choice, and a way of dealing with the same perceived lack. Personal choice is thus elevated to way of performing resistance to the culturally defined choices these women felt were presented to them; a way of showing that they were not merely subject to the choices made by others. It indicates that choice feminism is experienced as meaningful when it is experienced as agentic.

However, choice was not equally distributed across the interviewees, but worked to deliver advantages to those who already hold power. For the influencers, their ability to correspond to or portray ideals of beauty also played a role in their activities and ultimate success. Women who possess bodies that corresponded with these ideals found it relatively easier to find and pick the sponsors that they wished to work with. Consultants who embodied expertise and knowledge in a charismatic manner also found it easier to engage clients. For both groups, a background with financial stability played a part. "Choice" remains embedded in structures where some individuals have more opportunities to choose than others. Too much emphasis on choice thus risks confusing it with privilege which strengthens the view that choice relates to privilege, and that it makes sense to individuals who feel they are able to make choices. Feminism, when defined as the result of individual choices, becomes an exclusive

privilege to certain advantaged classes. Thus, choice made sense *when* it was experienced as meaningful, but also *when* it was structurally possible.

The influencers used feminism to motivate the choice to be beautiful. From their own descriptions, feminism was a matter of being respected for one's life choices, as individuals as well as entrepreneurs. Depending on how we chose to define feminism, it is not enough to say that one is a feminist, when the actions one does affects other women's lives in negative ways. The feminism represented on blog accounts may be criticized for being drained of critical content, and for presenting a feminism of the body that is individualistic. At the same time, during interviews the influencers claimed that helping others was fundamental to them. Inspiring and empowering followers by sharing information about one's own failures and transformations, and about matters previously excluded from public domains, was one of the main reasons they gave behind their activities. Their explanations iterate many of the arguments put forward by third-wave feminism concerning pluralism and self-determination and were power and (in)equalities are always contextual and non-universal, and depending on the angle one is looking from. They felt it was a feminism that they were included in.

Thus, listening to their narratives can work as a way of finding cracks in the individualistic approach. Feminism was for many of the interviewees something that they *used* in their professional activities, rather than something they *were*, that is, feminists, even if the processes are related. Both the consultants and the influencers felt that entrepreneurial success had changed the way society viewed them. A deeper understanding of why they think of this as feminism can help to understand where feminism is going, and the many different representations of feminism that circulate, particularly in new media landscapes.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

ORCID

Magdalena Pettersson McIntyre  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4966-5313>

ENDNOTE

¹ Ebba Busch Thor (since her divorce known as Ebba Busch) is leader of the political party "The Christian Democrats" in Sweden. Quote translated from Swedish by the author.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Magdalena Petersson McIntyre is Associate Professor and PhD in European Ethnology at Centre for Consumer Research, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research interests are within work, consumption, and gender. She has published on influencers (*Journal of Cultural Economy* 2020), on gender fluidity and consumption (*Design and Culture* 2018; *Fashion, Style and Popular Culture* 2019), and on aesthetic labor processes and work clothes (*Fashion Practice* 2016, *Journal of Cultural Economy* 2014). Her ongoing research concerns the consumption of beauty treatments.

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