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## Rationalizing pay inequity: women engineers, pervasive patriarchy and the neoliberal chimera

Sharyn Graham Davies<sup>a</sup>, Judy McGregor<sup>a</sup>, Judith Pringle<sup>b</sup> and Lynne Giddings<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Social Sciences and Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand; <sup>b</sup>School of Business, Economics and Law, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand; <sup>c</sup>Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences, School of Health, AUT, Auckland, New Zealand

### ABSTRACT

This article argues that neoliberalism with its pervasive patriarchy and co-option of feminism, renders women tacitly complicit in gendered pay inequalities. We show that in New Zealand, one of the world's most neoliberal nations, women who might precisely be best equipped to argue for equal pay – engineers – do not do so because neoliberalism makes many feel responsible for, and accepting of, their lower salaries. In interviews and focus groups, many women engineers talk of deserving less pay than men because of their 'choices', their 'personality' and their lack of 'responsibility'. In a disempowering environment, some women show agency by disavowing gender as a reason for the pay gap. Such narratives of individualized shortcomings reduce hope of collective action that might uncover and dismantle the systemic causes of pay inequity, which are not due to a woman's choice or personality but rather what we frame as the neoliberal chimera.

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## Introduction

After a number of swift political moves in the early 1980s, New Zealand became one of the most neoliberal nations on earth. With little opposition, New Zealand underwent significant restructuring that saw the mass privatization of public assets, withdrawal of government responsibilities and the emergence of what Jane Kelsey (2015) calls the FIRE economy (finance, insurance and real estate). Indeed Kelsey (1995) argues that the wholesale adoption of neoliberalism, in what has been dubbed the 'New Zealand experiment', has been a widespread failure resulting in rising inequalities. That New Zealand's neoliberal reforms passed with barely a whimper was in part due to the promises heralded, including the promise of full employment. What the reforms offered was the chance for women to not only work in the same jobs as men in a free market economy driven by individual excellence, but the chance to earn the same amount of money as men. Alas, the promise of equal pay has not become a reality.

On average the world's women earn 24% less than men (UN Women, 2015, p. 12); in some countries this gap has closed slightly but only because men's real wages have decreased (UN Women, 2015). This wage gap is exacerbated when looking at career earnings and even in a country like Germany, with policies supportive of women's employment, women on average earn half the income of men over their lifetime (Cichon, 2014). Many overlapping reasons are given to explain the gender pay gap: women take time out to have children (Dechter, 2014; Nowak, Naude, & Thomas, 2013; Waldfogel, 1998); they assume the primary burden of domestic duties (O'Connor & Wright, 2013); they work part-time and

flexible hours (Evers & Sieverding, 2014); they are over-represented in clerical and support positions (63%) compared to managerial occupations (33%) (UN Women, 2015, p. 12); they do low paid jobs (Palmer & Eveline, 2010); they have a self-imposed glass ceiling (Cabeza, Johnson, & Tyner, 2011; Cross & Linehan, 2009; Prokos & Padavic, 2005); they are less ambitious, less competitive and less motivated by money (Castagnetti & Rosti, 2013; Manning & Saidi, 2010; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007; Uri Gneezy & Rustichini, 2003); they do not network effectively (Ho, 2009); they do not negotiate salary (Leibbrandt & List, 2014; O'Reilly, Smith, Deakin, & Burchell, 2015); they work fewer hours (Goldin, 2014); they are given inferior assignments (Madden, 2012); and they face multifaceted discrimination (Fredman, 2008; Prue, 2015). Yet are these reasons giving us the whole story of the gender pay gap? Is something more fundamental going on? Indeed, what is it that makes women more likely than men to work part time at poorly paid jobs and be less able to negotiate salary? In addressing these questions, this article goes beyond the oft cited reasons for why women earn less than men to analyse the structural basis of the gender pay gap.

We argue that these complex and interrelated reasons are significant contributors to the gender pay gap, but that these reasons are the effects of the underlying structure of neoliberalism, including neoliberalism's patriarchal foundations. The article does more than theorize these structures, it shows the tangible ways that rhetorics of patriarchy and neoliberalism are embodied and reproduced in the narratives of women. While an article on the patriarchal basis of gender inequality is far from new (Eisenstein, 1979; Kandiyoti, 1988), and indeed feminist critiques of neoliberalism have become something of a cottage industry within feminist theory (Dietz, 2002, p. 28; see also Oksala, 2011), this article brings these long standing debates into a contemporary setting by reflecting on current conditions and discourses, including those framed by neoliberal feminism.

It is particularly interesting to look at pay equity in New Zealand for three specific reasons. First, New Zealand is often lauded on the international stage as a leader in women's rights, yet closer examination reveals its self-image as a gender leader is fractured (McGregor, 2014; McGregor, Wilson, & Bell, 2015). Amnesty International has asserted that New Zealand is failing to champion women's rights and is neglecting issues of gender inequality in a wider Pacific context (Amnesty International, 2015). This article shows that New Zealand must do more to close the gender pay gap. Second, New Zealand has actively dismantled pay equity machinery. The Equal Pay Act 1972 fails to promote significant attitudinal change or enforce legal compliance and these shortcomings, combined with the 1990 repeal of the Employment Equity Act, the closure of the Department of Labour's Pay and Employment Equity Unit, and the 2009 discontinuation of two equal pay investigations involving predominantly women workers, highlight how poorly New Zealand is doing in the area of equal pay (McGregor, Davies, Giddings, & Pringle, 2016). This article drives home the need for greater efforts to be made to close the New Zealand gender pay gap. Finally, and a key factor underpinning the former two reasons, is the position of New Zealand as one of the most neoliberal countries in the OECD (Kelsey, 2015, p. 122). Neoliberalism has become hegemonic precisely in Gramsci's (1971) sense, bundling together patriarchy and feminism and in turn presenting them in the image of neoliberalism itself. The resulting benign facade appears as a chimera, an unrealisable dream, erroneously convincing women they have the power to obtain equal pay if they so choose, but offering no realistic path for women to follow. The article develops the heuristic of the neoliberal chimera to understand why and how professional women rationalize unequal pay.

## Women in engineering

A focus on women in engineering is a fascinating way to analyse the gender pay gap, in part because of the ubiquity of the argument that women will earn the same as men once they enter the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Indeed, a 2015 UN Women report argues that a key way of reducing the gender pay gap is 'Providing careers advice for young women and encouragement to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and other male-dominated subjects' (UN Women, 2015, p. 13). So are women in engineering currently receiving equal pay? In a word, no.

Men earn more than women at all levels of engineering in New Zealand (Institute of Professional Engineers New Zealand [IPENZ], 2014, p. 15). Women are offered lower starting salaries and the gap continues throughout their life course, reaching a peak for women between the ages of 45 and 49 when there is a NZ\$32,000 pay difference (IPENZ, 2014, item 15). The wage gap is showing no signs of narrowing and indeed grew from 2013 when women engineers were earning 96% of men's salary to 2014 when they were earning 95% (IPENZ, 2014). Top women earners make a median NZ\$90,000 compared with NZ\$123,000 for men. Twice as many men as women earn between NZ\$90,000 and NZ\$120,000 a year while three times as many women as men earn between NZ\$30,000 and NZ\$60,000 (IPENZ, 2014).

Currently, 23% of graduating engineers in New Zealand are women and combined with low retention rates only 13% of all professional engineers in the country in 2014 were women (IPENZ, 2014, item 5). Many reasons have been put forward for why the recruitment, retention and progression of women engineers continues to lag behind men, including: the masculine culture of the working environment, gender discrimination, difficulty maintaining family life, lack of flexible hours, little upper level support or mentoring, networking difficulties, limited pay rises and isolation (Ayre, 2011; Faulkner, 2009; Fox, 2006; Hatmaker, 2013; IPENZ, 2013; Kanga, 2010; Silim & Crosse, 2014; Watts, 2009). Acknowledging these difficulties, the Institute of Professional Engineers New Zealand (IPENZ) has stated that it is committed to increasing participation and representation by women (IPENZ, 2011). However, the stated overall aim of IPENZ – to make the profession 'gender neutral' (IPENZ, 2013) – is concerning given that 'gender neutral' frequently renders an organization gender blind (Brown, 2005).

Women who are accepted into engineering degrees, graduate and get employed in the industry are smart, dedicated and motivated to succeed – in other words, women engineers have all the qualities that should ensure they are paid the same as men. Yet they are not. A number of women in our study knew they were paid less than their peers, but many others, initially convinced they were earning the same as their male colleagues, subsequently found upon asking that they were earning up to \$10,000 less per annum. Certainly reasons mentioned in the introduction are key contributors to wage differentials, but they do not explain the whole picture. Something else is happening to perpetuate the gender pay gap.

## Patriarchy's persistence

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990, 2) states

It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'woman', the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.

A key structure of power is patriarchy, yet it has receded as a tool of analysis in examining the positioning of women; indeed, since the 1980s the world has been increasingly framed as post-feminist (e.g. Rosenfelt & Stacey, 1987; see also Tasker & Negra, 2007) and thus post-patriarchy. But as Ortner (2014) reveals, we are by no means beyond patriarchy and in showing its legacy she develops a three-fold model. While Ortner's work warrants more attention than word space permits, we can take her broad arguments to show how patriarchy structures women's lower pay and its subsequent rationalization.

Patriarchy is a system of social power, shaping cultural categories and personal identities extending through male dominance enveloped in an ideology of control, protection and benevolence, not just vis-à-vis women but also other men (Ortner, 2014). Patriarchy combines with other structures of power such as colonialism, capitalism and racism and Ortner argues that global macro-structures and the overarching system of states, corporations and the military remain massive patriarchal systems (Ortner, 2014). The impacts of patriarchy are experienced differently according to intersections of race, class, sexuality, dis/ability and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). As a result of these different experiences some feel that patriarchal oppression has a limited impact on their lives, or indeed that it brings benefits. For those feeling this way it is possible to conclude that the important political struggles are elsewhere. Yet as Ortner shows, this 'elsewhere' is itself organized on complex patriarchal principles (Ortner, 2014, p. 534). Heeding Ortner's call to make patriarchy visible (again), this article reveals, in part, how

patriarchy is 'inextricably and aggressively intertwined with so much that is bad in the contemporary world' (Ortner, 2014, p. 546). We draw on Ortner's three-fold model where patriarchy is constructed through: (1) a patriarchal authority figure or patron, (2) homosocial reproductions that occur primarily in groups at after-hour activities and (3) delimiting what is meant by 'woman'. Each aspect is illustrated in our empirical study below. We extend Ortner's analysis, though, by arguing that patriarchy has been so fully subsumed within the neoliberal chimera that without a separate analysis its influence is often overlooked. We thus draw specific attention also to neoliberalism.

## **Patriarchy's Trojan horse**

Neoliberalism has largely come to dominate understandings of how the world is structured, with other theories, such as globalization, Marxism, modernization and patriarchy taking a back seat. Indeed, one could argue that neoliberalism has become patriarchy's Trojan horse. Neoliberalism it seems is blamed for everything and used to explain everything. Yet as Prügl (2015, p. 616) argues, the capacious character of neoliberalism is an opportunity 'providing room for interpreting in a new way the transformations of feminism observed by critics'. So to what does neoliberalism refer? For Larner (2000) and Ferguson (2009), neoliberalism has at least three aspects: it is a political project associated with deregulation, privatization and structural adjustment; it is an economic doctrine or ideology that values private enterprise and the market and is suspicious of the state; and it is a cultural formation, a Foucauldian rationality linked to certain mechanisms of government (see also Prügl, 2015, p. 619). All three aspects – economic, ideological, governmental – apply private market forces to public governance while simultaneously and conversely inserting those forces 'into the most intimate realms of privacy by creating responsible subjectivities' (Prügl, 2015, p. 617, cf. Trnka & Trundle, 2014). Of particular interest to this article is the way in which neoliberal rhetoric has colonized feminism and arguably made feminism its handmaiden.

Rottenberg (2013, p. 1) contends that the husk of liberalism is being 'mobilized to spawn a neoliberal feminism as well as a neoliberal subject'. This feminist subject accepts that she alone is responsible for her well-being, health and career. According to Rottenburg, this new form of feminism hollows out the potential of liberal feminism and rather than engender discontent with forces of inequality, turns the critique inward, to women's own imagined shortcomings and failings. This discontent is often directed at a woman's inability to establish a felicitous work-life balance. For Prügl (2015, p. 617), this neoliberalisation of feminism draws on three key forms: '(a) the co-optation of feminism into neoliberal economic projects; (b) the integration of feminism into neoliberal ideology; and (c) the interweaving of feminist ideas into rationalities and technologies of neoliberal governmentality'.

## **Economic neoliberalism**

Second-wave feminism emerged with state organized capitalism to provide substantial critique, although this critique was primarily culture-based focusing on issues of identity politics and violence against women rather than on, for instance, fighting systemic causes of poverty. Given this basis, Western feminism was open to co-option by the neoliberal economic initiatives of deregulation, privatization and marketization. In some ways, this co-option appeared liberating; feminism's distrust of traditional authority shared an anti-state sentiment with capitalism. By the late 1990s, dominant Western feminism – and of course there was not just one form of feminism – was seen as pursuing personal freedom, economic independence and professional success. Rather than challenge neoliberal conceptions of the subject, it largely mirrored it by exhorting women to pursue their own rational and economic self-interests.

## **Ideological neoliberalism**

In addition to providing a 'business case' for gender equality that materializes in rhetoric only and precludes collective action to challenge it, ideological neoliberalism works to keep women earning

less than men. Neoliberal feminism abstracts from embodied individuals to fit women into a mould of economic man. Gender empowerment is reformulated to the micro-level giving women access to assets and opportunities, but in rhetoric only. Women should perform like economically rational men. We see this model explicitly in Sandberg's (2013) *NY Times* bestselling book *Lean In*, which exhorts women to fully engage with their work environment if they ever want to achieve equality with men. However, this discourse is inherently paradoxical. On the one hand women are to become just like men, but on the other hand women are essentialized as different from men. A key example of this paradox is found in the Grameen Bank, which was set up to offer women small business loans. Women are given money to enable them to become economically rational and independent just like men, but the money is given to women precisely because they are seen as fundamentally different to men – that is, more fiscally responsible.

### Governmental neoliberalism

At the close of the 1970s, Foucault presciently foresaw a future where governments would stop overtly surveilling bodies and offload the burden onto individuals themselves. We would become self-disciplining subjects. The relationship changed between the feminist movement and the state, and gender equality arguments were recruited into technologies for the governance of the self (Prügl, 2015, p. 619). Feminist appropriations of Foucault have shown how feminine subjects are shaped through patriarchal, disciplinary practices and women are 'constructed as subjects who are dependent on others, who must suppress their aggression, egotistical interests and ambitions and demonstrate caring and nurturing qualities' (Oksala, 2011, p. 105). Oksala (2011, p. 105) further argues that in recent decades 'new and fundamentally different mechanisms and rationalities of power have come to shape our technologies of gender'. She looks at Foucault's idea of neoliberal governmentality as the mechanism producing feminine subjects, arguing 'that liberalism's allegedly masculinist conception of the subject as an independent, self-interested, economic being, has come to characterize also the feminine subject', which she states is not a triumph of feminism but a triumph of neoliberalism.

If people are innately self-interested, they are, as Foucault showed, eminently governable. Indeed Oksala (2011, p. 107) comments, 'a generalized male witness structures woman's consciousness of herself as a bodily being, and women become self-policing subjects committed to a relentless self-surveillance'. And this is the case not just in the Western world. For instance, Jones (2010) shows how women in self-help groups in Indonesia employ rhetorics of discipline, authenticity and self-surveillance to make themselves better (see also Davies, 2015a, 2015b). We enhance our capabilities as producers and consumers by investing in ourselves and increasing our human capital (Becker, 1962). If we do not invest in ourselves we are seen as irresponsible and thus deserve to fail.

### Methods

To flesh out the theoretical analysis of the gender pay gap, this article draws on the results of a research project started in 2014, exploring new directions in benchmarking sex and equality. The project uses a post-positivist, qualitative descriptive methodology (Giddings & Grant, 2007), which is useful for capturing and representing shared and individual meanings of particular experiences with minimal interpretation from researchers (Sandelowski, 2000). A series of focus groups and interviews were conducted with two groups of New Zealand-based women: highly paid engineers and minimum-wage care workers.

The data for this article specifically come from a focus group attended by nine women currently working as engineers and from 22 semi-structured interviews with women engineers (five of whom participated in the focus group). Participants were recruited from various cities and towns in New Zealand through an open invitation in the Institute of Professional Engineers of New Zealand newsletter. All participants were informed in writing about the study before signing consent forms and participating in the focus group/interview. Ethical approval was received from the university ethics committee. Both the



focus group and interviews were digitally recorded and were started by asking participants specifically about equal pay: 'Do you receive equal pay?'; 'Have you received equal pay throughout your career?' The sessions then followed a flexible format to take account of the narratives women wanted to share and to enable women to share their stories in an organic manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Brief field notes were taken during the focus group to assist in delineating speakers and main discussion points.

Once the focus group and interviews had been conducted, the interview recordings were transcribed, checked for errors and corrected, then sent to participants for member checking; few changes were made. Data were then analysed inductively following a conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After transcripts were read through, initial manual coding of sentences or phrases enabled the organization of data into clusters based on similarities and differences. Emergent themes were reviewed to remove repetitious categories before final themes were generated. Analysis was an iterative process and continued re-reading and ongoing discussions took place amongst the research team to further develop themes and subthemes that reflected content. Quotes that captured the designated themes were identified and have been used illustratively in the findings. All participant names in the article are pseudonyms. The inspiration for this specific article arose from the surprise we felt, as academic feminist women, at the responses given by our well-educated aspirational participants justifying their lower rates of pay and their disavowal of gender as a factor in this disparity; a disavowal often given in the same breath as recounting examples of overt gender discrimination.

## Patriarchy's ruse

Adapting Ortner's three-fold model, the *first* way in which patriarchy structures everyday life is through power exerted by patriarchal figures. This patriarchal figure emerges clearly in the narratives of women engineers and while often benevolent, he limits women's chances of promotion and commensurate salary increase. Kelley graduated in 1997 as a civil engineer and when asked if she felt at any time disadvantaged in her career because she was a woman she replied:

I worked on an engineering project once and my boss was ... I don't know, older than my dad and he liked me so he and his wife used to have me over for dinner. I think he saw me a little bit as a daughter and that can be positive. But at the same time he would not let me stay at the hostel because the [men] doing the tunnelling were staying there. He said 'No way on my watch are you sleeping the night over there'. So each day I had to commute an hour each way. But I respected it because I knew he had my best interests at heart.

In Kelley's narrative we see precisely how patriarchy, and indeed paternalism (Dworkin, 1972), drive gendered relationships. Kelley takes ownership of her decision to spend two hours a day commuting by framing her response as acceptable because her boss was looking after her. The fact that Kelley would undertake this commute rather than offend her boss, signals the pervasiveness of patriarchy. While expressed as agentic, Kelley had no viable option other than accepting her boss' imperative. It is taken as fact that men are volatile creatures who cannot be held responsible for their own actions, especially in a homosocial, heterosexual context interrupted by a lone woman; her boss felt he could not guarantee her safety. Kelley provided a further instance of a patriarchal figure dictating what women can and cannot do in their job, which in turn limits women's workplace experience and hence opportunities for promotion:

We look after dams overseas, so Fiji and the Philippines being two of the common places. I have never been to either of those sites, largely because the guys decided it just wasn't going to be safe. And I said to them, I will never ask to do something if it genuinely isn't safe, but I want to make sure that that is the reason. So this year one of my female staff is going to the dam in this really remote part of Fiji ... And I said to the guys, if that means a guy has to go with her, so be it, but she's going because she's been looking after that dam.

Kelley expresses here an internalized acceptance of the patriarchal notion that men are needed to safeguard and protect women, reflecting Bourdieu's (2001) notion of masculine symbolic domination. For Kelley, a protector needs to be appointed, a move that simultaneously normalizes gender discrimination and blames the victim.

The *second* way in which patriarchy structures everyday life is precisely through men's homosocial, yet heterosexual groupings, alluded to above. Ho's (2009) ethnography of Wall Street, showing men's drinking sessions and golf outings as sites for career progression, is an exemplar of this process, but we also see it in the narratives of women engineers. Sam, a civil engineer who has been in her current job three years, believes that her lack of promotion is due primarily to her exclusion from those very sites at which promotion takes place:

And also, this is on a social level ... they have an annual golf competition and I play golf. I always have done. I'm not bad at it either. And I asked if I could go in it and they said 'Oh, I'm really sorry, you're not, well, you're basically not important enough to go'. And I found out they sent a recent graduate, who was a guy who never plays golf. But I felt like I couldn't say anything because you don't want to stir the pot.

Sam is keenly aware that her seniority and golf prowess do not trump gender. We see that competition and the relentless pursuit of power and status driven by patriarchy ensure women are excluded from the solidarity of homosocial, heterosexual male groupings, even when women can literally play the game (cf. Ortner, 2014, p. 541). Interestingly, the first part of Sam's interview was replete with categorical statements that there is no gender discrimination in engineering. For instance in response to the question 'have you ever felt disadvantaged or not treated equally because you're a woman in engineering' she responded, 'Well, not really overtly, not discriminated ...'. As Sam's interview progressed, numerous examples were given of discrimination, pointing not to Sam's naivety, but to tactics women must deploy to feel themselves agentic and perhaps even optimistic. Sam's last statement, that she does not want to stir the pot, shows a woman taking ownership of gender discrimination while simultaneously illustrating the pervasive nature of patriarchy; I will be a good woman and accept my lot.

Sam is not alone in experiencing the exclusionary tactics of men's homosocial, heterosexual groupings. Gretchen Kivell, a New Zealand-based engineer, has written about the laddish behaviour of men engineering students, noting that women who do not participate in loutish behaviour and become 'one of the boys', are outcast and may fail to get promoted, or to even get employment (Kivell, 1999, p. 4). Men's bonding is thus reinforced by excluding women from social and sporting activities, but it also operates through everyday mundane actions. One engineer, who has been in the field for over a decade, reveals:

My section manager used to make jokes. Like he'd say 'If you wear trousers you can be part of our club, but if you wear a skirt you can't'. I was thinking I could actually speak to HR about that because it's kind of sexual harassment. But you can't because it's a bad mark.

This woman's section manager defines who is an acceptable engineer and it is not women unless they take on the guise of men. Said in a jocular way, the boss invalidates formal sanction. The reality of being labelled as troublesome, and consequently penalized socially and financially, works to disempower women from speaking up, and shows the very real ways in which patriarchy works to ensure the continuation of the gender pay gap.

The *third* way in which patriarchy structures everyday life is by delimiting 'woman'. Perhaps the clearest way to illustrate this process is by examining the popular notion that women could reduce the gender pay gap by negotiating more effectively for higher remuneration. Indeed, many of the women engineers we interviewed suggested that women were paid less because they did not put themselves forward, they lacked ambition, or they preferred to work in the country:

You can't wait for someone else to come and push you along. I think there's a perception that maybe men do get pushed along more than women. Nobody's going to notice you if you just sit down and wait for somebody to go 'Why don't you do blah'. You actually have to be in their faces.

It's about your level of ambition and your suitability.

And we've been talking about pay. Well I think the divide in pay is more about where you work, like regional or in a city. So pay is not based on a gender thing.

Women just don't like to ask for a pay rise.

Patriarchy works to render salary negotiation inappropriate for women. Yet while women have difficulty discussing salary, many in our interviews felt empowered to discuss flexible hours. The right to



request flexible hours is mandated in New Zealand, but we argue that this is not the primary reason women successfully negotiate hours. Requesting flexible hours to care for dependents is a socially sanctioned practice for women; patriarchy permits it and is indeed built on this premise. We find further evidence of the advantages accrued to women who conform to gendered expectations below.

Negotiating higher compensation is 'consistent with the masculine stereotype of the agentic, bread-winning man' but it contradicts 'normative expectations of women as other-oriented and caring, as giving rather than taking in character' (Babcock, 2013, p. 81). As such, negotiating for a salary increase is socially costly for women – especially when the cost outweighs any benefit brought by higher remuneration – and women are understandably reticent to self-advocate (Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). Interestingly, Bowles and Babcock found that it made no difference whether women or men were on the promotion committee, as both were likely to penalize women who were too assertive and reward those who sought increased remuneration in stereotypical ways (on neoliberal maternalism see Cummins & Blum, 2015). Given this gendered context, Bowles & Babcock (2013) sought a way for women to negotiate without necessarily threatening their social and financial position. They found that potentially, the most successful approach is for women to frame salary negotiations in essentialized gendered ways. For instance, women should emphasize that while they are contravening gendered norms by asking for more money, they are conforming to the norm of submission ('My line manager encouraged me to talk to you about salary progression') and the norm of caring about relationships ('I hope I don't offend you by raising this issue because my relationship with people in this organization is very important to me').

That Babcock (2013) found that women should negotiate in gender stereotypical ways makes many, including them, bristle at the possible implications. Bowles and Babcock acknowledge that women may feel inauthentic in framing their negotiations according to such a script and angry at being made to conform to unjust gendered standards. However, they believe that individual agency will overcome entrapment and enable women to put their insights into practice and eventually close the gender gap in pay and authority through reform of discriminatory social structures. We argue here that patriarchy is so pervasive that rather than provide a path for change, such an approach will merely reinforce existing structures and further penalize women who do not conform to gendered expectations. While we celebrate any approach that gives women immediate tools to increase remuneration, suggesting women must become astute analysts of social context and the economic structures of negotiation, puts the onus solely on women to effect change, when what is needed is a wider demolition of patriarchy – something that is extremely difficult given its usurpation by neoliberalism as we explore below.

## The neoliberal chimera

Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on liberalization policies of privatization, austerity and deregulation, works through economic, ideological and governmental mechanisms to perpetuate and rationalize gender pay disparities. Given New Zealand's early and wholesale adoption of neoliberalism, women's ability to access equal pay has been severely compromised. To be clear, we are not suggesting that pay parity existed before neoliberalism (it did not), nor are we suggesting that if neoliberalism suddenly disappeared, women would earn the same as men (they would not). What we are arguing is that neoliberalism provides a particular means of keeping women from earning the same as men. Here we draw on Prügl's three aspects of the neoliberalisation of feminism to show how and why the gender pay gap persists.

Prügl's first aspect is *economic neoliberalism*. Enmeshing of feminist ideas with neoliberal agendas meant that feminism provided 'legitimacy to the neoliberal transformation of capitalism'. In this consideration, 'Feminism thus did not need neoliberalism to flourish though neoliberalism may have needed feminism' (Prügl, 2015, p. 618). We see one example of the neoliberal co-option of feminism in the business case for gender equality. The World Bank now espouses the motto: 'gender equality is smart economics' (cited in Prügl, 2015, p. 618). Such rhetoric can also be found in statements by IPENZ. IPENZ promotes the importance of increasing the numbers of, and contributions by, women but it

does so in a tokenistic way. Many of the women engineers we interviewed were aware of the lack of substance behind IPENZ claims of valuing women. For instance, one engineer named Liz noted that gender equality for IPENZ was largely a symbolic public relations exercise:

I think a lot of actually what [IPENZ] do now is still just lip service. I don't think they actually are making changes that are substantial. The changes are still in policy and talking about inclusiveness, but I don't see a lot of action or suggestions or physical actions taking place.

The adoption of feminist ideals by neoliberal discourse has made it essential for companies and professional bodies to espouse the notion that they see women as key contributors and that they want more representation by women. But the shallow nature of the feminist discourse they appropriate means there is little if any substantial critique of the substance of claims to be working towards equal participation and representation. As Prügl (2015, p. 619) concludes, 'Neoliberalised feminism may provide arguments for gender equality and the empowerment of women, but it retains ideological commitments to rationalism, heteronormativity and genderless economic structures'. The rhetoric is there in IPENZ statements, but there is no substance and no collective action to challenge women's continued lower pay. Economic neoliberalism with its patriarchal basis thus works to keep women earning less than men and forces women to rationalize this situation.

Prügl's second aspect is *ideological neoliberalism*, which puts forth the idea that women can have it all. But of course women cannot have it all; men have not stepped up, for example, to do half the child-raising and care for ageing family so women are in effect triple burdened. Ideological neoliberalism works not to make men share women's burdens, but to reinforce that good women can handle it all and if they cannot, they should feel guilty. Liz commented:

[A colleague] did take a little time off a couple of years ago to have children, and she perceives she owes the company something for them giving her a job and allowing her flexible hours to pick up the kids from childcare and things. I've told her before that she doesn't owe them anything ... They're just a company, they just make money off us ... when she talks about flexible hours for childcare ... she's asking basically to work the eight hour day that she's paid for.

Neoliberalism operates to make Liz's colleague feel guilty for working just the 8 hours a day that she is paid for, and to feel that she literally owes the company because the latter fulfilled its statutory duties on flexible work. As Oksala (2011, p. 17) notes,

The idea of personal choice effectively masks the systemic aspects of power – domination, social hierarchies, economic exploitation – by relegating to subjects the freedom to choose between different options whilst denying them any real possibility for defining or shaping those options.

In this way, women continue to earn less than men because responsibility for caring for dependants falls on them, but simultaneously they are expected to prioritise a commitment to paid employment. As Faith, an engineer at the start of her career noted: 'I don't know any other female engineers at my stage of life, so I am kind of petrified. I am petrified of everything. I am petrified of not seeing my kids and I am petrified of not going to work'. Neoliberalism works to silence women into not openly questioning pay inequities but un/consciously feeling grateful and indebted if they manage to juggle work and family life.

Prügl's third aspect is *governance neoliberalism*, which draws on the notion that the subject is independent, autonomous, self-interested and economically motivated. Indeed, Oksala (2011) suggests that a triumph of neoliberalism has been the co-option of the feminine subject into this frame and she asks the intriguing question: 'If a docile feminine body is the correlate of disciplinary practices, what kind of feminine subject is the correlate of neoliberal practices of governing?' (p. 112). We see this new feminine subject, we argue, precisely in women engineers. Here is a liberal subject in the full sense of the term: an egotistical, autonomous subject of interest, competing freely for economic opportunities (cf. Oksala, 2011, p. 115). But she is rendered (consciously acquiescing or not) complicit in the neoliberal chimera that ensures she is never able to earn the same as men. Caught up in the rhetoric of choice, she is nevertheless bound by neoliberalism's patriarchal frame dictating where she can sleep, what job she can do, and what activities she can engage in. Women must internalize these structural hierarchies through mundane habits of the gendered self and these techniques, as well as the power they reflect, are portrayed precisely as a consequence of individual choice.

We see this neoliberal chimera in statements made by women engineers. For instance, one senior engineer who recounted decades of sexism in the industry, announced at the end of her interview: 'I don't think there's any difference now in promotion by gender'. Other women noted that they could have reached the top of their profession if they wanted to, but 'I've never been overly-ambitious. I'm just happy to get on and do what I do'. A particularly crystalizing moment came when one engineer said:

The thing with having children was just a minor blip for me. A lot of people say 'Oh well, the problem is that women go and have children and then they get left behind.' But to me that's just rubbish. You don't get left behind at all. It's just another sort of excuse for saying 'Oh well, that's why women never get to the top'. It's basically around the person, not gender, because you get that with men as well. There are men who don't want to become managers.

The notion that individuals are to blame if they do not make it professionally percolated through numerous interviews with women providing the following responses to questions about whether women can make it to the top of their profession:

I think it's about the individual's choice.

It's about your own aspirations.

It comes down to personalities and a sort of strength or drive or whatever.

If you're one of those people who's not naturally in people's faces, then I don't think you can claim to be somehow disadvantaged by not getting up the corporate ladder or whatever, because you've actually brought it on yourself.

In these interviews, choice operates as a driving technique of power. Raising children is merely an excuse for failing in the market; if you lack confidence and drive, you have no one but yourself to blame for failing to climb the corporate ladder; pay inequities are due to choices and personal shortcomings, not gender.

What the dominance of neoliberal discourse, especially when infiltrating feminism, misses is the larger structural framework that presents itself as giving women choice and agency but is predicated precisely on their absence. Indeed, as Oksala (2011, p. 116) notes:

As long as our life form is fundamentally centred on families and on a gendered division of the sensibilities and activities of the subjects, the neoliberal, purely self-interested feminine subject would signal the collapse of our social order, a collapse that is in no way evident.

As such, a woman's ability to choose children and to choose to reach the top of her profession is regulated by gender; that women acquiesce to regulation with various degrees of cognisance reflects the neoliberal chimera.<sup>1</sup> Women have to make choices within an environment of highly unequal power structures that restrict possibilities and options and 'crucially constructs their very subjectivities' (Oksala, 2011, p. 117). Choices take place through highly normative disciplinary practices (Bartky, 1988) that are constituted by human agency and simultaneously are the medium of this constitution (Giddens, 1984). The idea that 'feminine subjects have static interests and identities that precede their choices as well as the power relations they are embedded in obfuscates the systematic and constitutive aspects of male power' and this obfuscations means that paradoxically, women's 'belief in unlimited possibilities and freedom of choice makes women more not less vulnerable to sexism' (Oksala, 2011, p. 117).

## Conclusion

In her presidential address to the 126th meeting of the American Economic Association, Goldin (2014, p. 1106) argued that 'Differences in pay arise because of productivity differences in the workplace, not because of inherent differences in human capital across workers'. In short, Goldin asserted that in highly-skilled occupations, hours worked, not gender, explain the persistence in the pay gap. To close the gap, Goldin states, we need men to work fewer hours and we need to increase the ability of workers to substitute seamlessly for each other. While prevailing political and economic rhetoric concerning the gender pay gap frequently follows such predictable arguments based on productivity differences, we show that the reasons for, and solutions to reducing, the gender pay gap are far more complex and complicated.

Our article analysed three ways patriarchy keeps women earning less than men: a paternalistic father figure defines what women can do at work; men's homosocial heterosexual groupings exclude women from key areas, especially promotion accruing activities; and by presenting a limited framing of 'woman' and endorsing the subsequent banishment of those considered non-normative. We also analysed the ways patriarchy subsumes neoliberalism and concomitantly deploys feminism to further entrench pay inequities. The feminine subject developed in this environment feels responsibility for her lower rate of pay: women are considered autonomous, rational beings who could choose to make the same amount of money as men if only they made the right choices and became the right type of person.

Many steps are needed to bring about pay equity and indeed, crucial moves are underway: equalising hours worked (Goldin, 2014); legislating paternity leave (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Russell and Banks, 2011); implementing the right to ask about pay levels (McGregor et al., 2016); raising awareness (Devere & Davies, 2006); collectivizing action (O'Reilly et al., 2015); and indeed finding 'conditions under which neoliberal feminism provide openings to challenge oppressive power relations' (Prügl, 2015, p. 627). Given that women in engineering are among the most privileged in society, that they are still paid less than men does not inspire optimism. Multiple interventions at various levels are needed and indeed, perhaps a complete paradigm change (Kelsey, 2015) that fundamentally disrupts the patriarchal/neoliberal basis of gender pay disparity. The gender pay gap is experienced by all women across all sectors of economic, social and political life and as no country has yet achieved pay parity, it is likely that as of yet unanticipated interventions are needed. What we can anticipate, though, is that the fight for equal pay is far from over.<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

1. Thank you to the anonymous reviewer who pushed us to interrogate further the subtleties surrounding women's negotiation of the neoliberal chimera. While women may indeed acquiesce in practical ways to gender expectations, they may do this fully realizing that they are operating within a framework stacked against them. Women thus rationalize a situation they cannot individually change.
2. We recognize that this article concludes on a rather pessimistic note. We also recognize that while there are many flaws in Sandberg's argument, she at least provides women with a sense of optimism and agency – 'you can make as much money as men if you learn to lean in and demand a pay raise'. Our article provides no clear direction for women in this regard. We thus encourage future articles that specifically address ways that the neoliberal chimera can be dismantled and thus give women concrete tools to achieve pay parity as well and gender equity across all spectrums of society. Thank you again to the anonymous reviewer for challenging us on this point and pushing our article forward.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

**Sharyn Graham Davies** is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. Sharyn is an anthropologist focusing on gender and sexuality in Indonesia and author of two monographs and co-editor of *Sex and Sexualities in Contemporary Indonesia*, winner of the 2015 Ruth Benedict Prize for best edited collection. Sharyn has previously been Leverhulme Visiting Professor at Cambridge University and received a Fulbright award to present her work at Yale in the US.

**Professor Judy McGregor** is the head of the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy at Auckland University of Technology. She was Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner with the New Zealand Human Rights Commission between 2002 and 2012, and her national inquiry into aged care was the catalyst for trade union litigation and significant public policy change on equal pay. She is the Australasian editor of *Gender in Management: an International Journal* and has published extensively on human rights and gender equality issues including equal pay, women's economic empowerment, and women's participation and representation. Her latest co-authored book is *Human Rights in New Zealand: Emerging Fault lines*. In 2016 she was the NZ-UK Link Foundation Visiting Professor in London.

**Judith Pringle** is a Professor of Organisation Studies, School of Business, Economics and Law. Her specialist research interests lie in the areas of women, gender, diversity and careers. She has published chapters in edited books and wide ranging articles in journals such as *Gender Work and Organization*, *British Journal of Management*, *International Journal of HRM*, *Journal of World Business*, *Personnel Review*, *Organization*, *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, *Women and Management Review*, *Women Studies Journal (NZ)* and consistently contributes to international conferences.

**Lynne Giddings** is an associate professor in the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at Auckland University of Technology. Her research focuses on: methodological issues in research, women's health issues, and social justice issues in healthcare and education. She has authored and co-authored book chapters and journal articles on these topics and is especially recognised for her contribution to the methodological debates on mixed methods.

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