

# **“Bossyboots”: Postfeminism and the construction of Australia’s ‘Corporate Woman’**

## Abstract

Improving the representation of women in corporate leadership is a key postfeminist project. Postfeminism – or the integration of women’s empowerment and neoliberalism in the decades following the Women’s Movement – has shaped the experience of Australian women in corporate leadership roles since the 1990s. As such, while efforts to improve the number of women in leadership have yielded admirable progress, achieving sustainable, intersectional improvements in corporate diversity requires attending to collective postfeminist scripts. In order to better understand the global and local features of Australian postfeminism, this article analyses ‘Corporate Woman’, a mainstream newspaper column published regularly by the *Australian Financial Review* between 1988 and 1998. It finds that similar political and economic systems, and feminist histories, encouraged Australian postfeminism to adopt many core transnational tenets. At the same time, aspects of Australia’s national history and identity, including the myth of egalitarianism, emphasis on nuclear families, and context of major economic change, contributed to localism in postfeminism’s expression. This expands our understanding of postfeminism, and can help empower corporate women by uncovering the collective cognitive maps that have guided policy interventions, and women’s lived experiences in corporate leadership roles.

## Keywords

Postfeminism; Australian corporate history; women in corporate leadership; media representations

## 1. Introduction

Improving the representation of women in corporate leadership is a key postfeminist project (Adamson and Kelan 2019; McRobbie 2004; Tasker and Negra 2007; Summers 2013). Global efforts to improve women's representation in board and executive roles first emerged in the 1980s, alongside the split of the Women's Movement between those interested in labour politics and union organising, and those that integrated female empowerment with neoliberalism (Adamson 2017; Berglund et al. 2018; Baker and Kelan 2019; Gill et al. 2017; Mastrangelo, 2021; Meyers 2013). Focussing on individualism, autonomy, choice and personal achievement, alongside an interest in 'natural' sex-based differences and the presumption that gender equality has been achieved, organisations and governments in various countries have supported postfeminist efforts to improve the number of women in leadership (Adamson 2017; Gill 2017; Tasker and Negra 2007). These diversity policies have yielded admirable progress, with the proportion of women in executive and board roles increasing 50-fold from the 1980s to now (Ginalski et al., 2023). More recently, attention has been paid to sustainable, intersectional improvements in corporate diversity, with a broader range of women occupying positions of similar influence and pay across the suite of leadership roles (Cermak et al. 2019; Cook et al. 2019; Guest 2019; Hutchinson et al. 2017; Yanadori et al. 2018).

Although responsible for progress to date, existing postfeminist policies are unsuited for the movement's current challenges. Regulatory interventions have focussed on the overall number of corporate women, contributing to a narrow demographic profile, a lack of women in key portfolios, and a gender pay gap that exceeds the general workforce (Cermak et al. 2019; Wright et al., 2023). Individualism has presented interventions that aim to 'fix' women rather than organisations, and anoint certain (white, wealthy, straight) women with insider knowledge rather than addressing intersectional concerns (Du Plessis 2014; Ehrich and Kimber 2016; Huse 2012; Wright 2021). Integration with corporate norms and structures – while certainly pragmatic – has rendered women's equality contingent on their contribution to governance, innovation and stakeholder relationships, rather than dismantling broader systems of oppression (AICD 2021; Corkery et al. 2018; Du Plessis et a. 2014; Groutsis et al. 2018).

These interventions, based on postfeminist logics, have been transnational in their core characteristics but adjustable to local conditions. Rather than imitations of an 'authentic' Western iteration, postfeminism has adapted to class, age, location, race, sexuality and so on (Gill 2016, pp.619-20; Butler 2013). Similarly, policies to address women in corporate leadership have been both global and local, with institutionalisation of postfeminist ideas through global academic research, international organisations, multinational companies, local government regulations, industry lobbying groups and individual company initiatives resulting

in broadly consistent approaches, but with some localism in specific strategies (Chen et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2022; De Vos and Culliford, 2014; Seierstad and Opsahl, 2011; Wright et al. 2023).

Australian postfeminism demonstrates the nexus of global and local forces, lagging behind other countries and with, potentially, a more positive relationship with other parts of the Women's Movement (Henderson and Taylor 2019). Postfeminist efforts to increase the number of women in leadership also had a local flavour, focussing on professional white women, and non-binding 'comply or explain' regimes rather than quotas (Du Plessis et al., 2014; Ross Smith and Bridge 2008; Sheridan 2021; Wright et al., 2023). However, research that contextualises Australian postfeminism is limited, with most identifying elements of metropole US or UK postfeminism in Australia (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Stevenson 2013). This article responds to calls internationally to historicise and contextualise postfeminism, as well as research that uses aspects of Australia's social, political and economic history to "complicate (or perhaps extend) [...] dominant understandings of postfeminism" (Henderson and Taylor, 2019: 6; Butler 2013; Chen 2012; De Simone and Priola 2022; Dosekun 2015; Gill 2016; Turner and Simpson 2017; Samuelsson 2024). It fills an important gap by contextualising media written about, and for, the quintessential postfeminist subject: women in corporate leadership.

In order to better understand the global and local features of Australian postfeminism, this article analyses 'Corporate Woman', a mainstream newspaper column published regularly by the *Australian Financial Review* between 1988 and 1998. Historical research provides an axis of contextualisation, with this decade marking the beginning of postfeminism "as a recognisable phenomenon" in Australia (Henderson and Taylor, 2019: 7). This column – intended to capitalise on the early excitement of the postfeminist 'women in corporate leadership' movement – is the only mainstream Australian periodical that consistently documented women's progress up the corporate ladder. As such, this column presents a unique opportunity to understand the quotidian character of Australian postfeminism, as it was sold to elite corporate women, at the moment it embarked on one of its key projects. This article thus provides a theoretical contribution, analysing the local and global features of Australian postfeminism. It also makes a practical contribution, illuminating the basis of contemporary policies to improve the number of women in corporate leadership, and providing insight into the movement's current challenges.

This paper will progress as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and theoretical framework. Section 3 outlines the content analysis methodology that has been used to understand the postfeminist features of the 'Corporate Woman' column. Section 4 presents the empirical results and section 5 analyses these results relative to the features of postfeminism

and Australian society in the 1990s. Section 6 concludes by arguing that although the column included many of the core features of postfeminism, it presented a postfeminist subject that was specific to the audience of elite corporate women operating in 1990s Australia. The reflected the contradictions of postfeminism, the entangling of feminist and anti-feminist ideals, and the specific expectations of Australia's elite corporate women at the end of the twentieth century.

## **2. Postfeminism and Australian corporate leadership**

Postfeminism has emerged as a key concept to understand the representation and experience of women in aftermath of the second wave feminist Women's Movement. Although the concept contains endless multitudes (as this article shows), research on postfeminism has established a "hegemonic version" of key assumptions (Henderson and Taylor, 2019: 5). Scholars have argued that, in the aftermath of the Women's Movement, feminism split between mainstream groups focussed on labour politics and union organising, and liberal groups focussing on issues important to middle class white women (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Gill 2007; Henderson and Taylor 2019). The latter, *postfeminism*, refers to the integration of women's empowerment and neoliberalism, focussing on individualism, autonomy, self-surveillance, choice, consumerism and personal achievement, alongside an interest in 'natural' sex-based differences and the presumption that gender equality has been achieved (Fitch and Third 2014; Gill 2017; McRobbie 2004; Tasker and Negra 2007). Entangling feminist and anti-feminist ideals, further radical action was deemed redundant, with any remaining inequalities the result of 'natural' differences and/or women's choices (Adamson 2017; Baker and Kelan 2019; Berglund et al. 2018; Gill et al. 2017; Mastrangelo, 2021; Meyers 2013). A class- and race-blind emphasis on 'girl power', or the idea that women can do *anything* now, sat uneasily against the realities of women's experiences at the end of the twentieth century: with intense scrutiny of women, a persistent gender-pay gap, and segregated labour market (Gill 2017).

Over time, the concept of postfeminism has taken on a hegemonic status through application to cases in law, psychology, management, media studies and politics (Gill 2017; Henderson and Taylor 2019). In a globalised world, major cultural forces – including postfeminism, as well as its constituents of feminism and neoliberalism – are undoubtedly transnational (Tasker and Negra 2007). However, a lack of original, secure, or possible authentic version of postfeminism has complicated matters, with scholars using the work of prominent theorists operating in the Global North to import a generalised Anglo-American model across national boundaries (Dosekun 2015; Henderson and Taylor 2019). Australian scholars, for the most part, have adopted this approach, identifying how elements of British or American postfeminism can be

found in Australia (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Stevenson 2013). Rosalind Gill (2016) has welcomed recent attempts to take account of postfeminism's historical and cultural specificities, with researchers considering the way postfeminism has been transnational in core characteristics, but adaptable to various local conditions (Butler 2013; Chen 2012; De Simone and Priola 2022; Dosekun 2015; Liu 2016; Turner and Simpson 2017). In Australia, Henderson and Taylor (2019) note that little attention has been paid to the antipodean context, but have considered the way Australia's social, political and economic history can "complicate (or perhaps extend) [...] dominant understandings of postfeminism" (Henderson and Taylor 2019: 6; see also Samuelsson 2024).

To better understand the global and local features of Australian postfeminism, this article analyses 'Corporate Woman', a mainstream newspaper column published regularly by the *Australian Financial Review* between 1988 and 1998. Time has, of course, influenced postfeminism, with the 1990s distinctive from 'later' postfeminism of the *Lean In* era (Dejmanee 2015; Gill 2017; Sandberg 2013). History thus provides a further axis along which postfeminism's specificities can be illuminated. The 1990s were chosen as a time of significant social, political and economic change, while also marking the beginning of postfeminism "as a recognisable phenomenon" in Australia (Henderson and Taylor 2019: 7; Black 2022; Hatton and Withers 2015; Humphries 2019; Hutchinson 2015). However, the literature has not adequately *historicised* Australian postfeminism, with research spanning several decades, but little analysis of change over time (Henderson and Taylor 2019; Samuelsson 2024). This article thus makes a theoretical contribution by contextualising and historicising media written about, and for, the quintessential postfeminist subject – women in corporate leadership – at the moment it embarked on one of its key projects.

Understanding Australian postfeminism is crucial for uncovering the "adaptable, multifaceted, discursive phenomenon" that governs the lives of folks in a range of settings, including in corporate leadership (Lewis et al. 2017: 216). Gendered cultural assumptions – operating at various levels from legislation, to media, to families and organisations – have material impact through the direction of women's aspiration and the actions of those with whom they interact (Bjursell and Bäckvall, 2011; Eikhof et al., 2013; Kanter 1977; Lake 1986; Nadin et al., 2020; Summers 1975). Postfeminism has been entangled with women in corporate leadership, with their success in traditionally capitalist and masculine domains seen as a key postfeminist objective (McRobbie 2004; Negra and Tasker 2007). Interventions to improve the number of women in leadership have adopted postfeminist logics, with most regulatory interventions focussing on improving the overall number of women rather than attending to intersectional concerns (Cermak et al. 2019; Summers 2013; Wright et al., 2023). Individualist training and

mentorship programs have aimed to 'fix' women rather than organisations, and anoint certain (white, wealthy, straight) women with insider knowledge rather than making organisations more equal for all (Du Plessis 2014; Ehrich and Kimber 2016; Wright 2021). Integration with corporate norms and structures – including industry advocacy and diversity policies that focus on the 'business case' for women's appointments – have been pragmatic but have rendered women's equality contingent on their contribution to corporate profit (AICD 2021; Corkery et al. 2018; Du Plessis et al. 2014; Fitch and Third 2014; Groutsis et al. 2018; Reichel et al. 2010). Although there has been recent attention to intersectional issues, pay inequality, and imbalances of power, interventions have been largely unchanged since the institutionalisation of postfeminism in the 1990s (Wright et al. 2023).

Women's experiences in leadership roles have also been shaped by postfeminism. The interest in natural sex-based differences means women have been required to calibrate between stereotypically 'male' leadership characteristics, as well as their inherent 'feminine' nature (Bjursell and Bäckvall, 2011; Eikhof et al., 2013; Fitch and Third 2014; French and Webster, 2016; Kangas et al., 2019; Meyers 2013; Pillay et al., 2019; Pullen and Vachani, 2021; Reichel et al., 2010; Vroman and Danko, 2020). Individualism, and the accompanying choice architecture, has encouraged women to optimise themselves rather than interrogate the structural inequalities of the organisation (Baker and Kelan 2019; Bryan 2022; Gill et al. 2017; Lewis et al. 2017). An emphasis on choice has obscured the *politics of choice* or structures that govern the choices available to women (Baker and Kelan 2019; Gill et al. 2017; Lewis et al. 2017). Finally, the 'business case' – which aligns femininity and an interest in natural sex-based differences with economic progress – has commodified women and positioned remaining marginalisation as an individual lack of value (Ginalska et al. 2023).

Just as postfeminism operates at the junction of global and local forces, so too does the experience of Australian women in corporate leadership. Institutionalisation of postfeminist ideas through global academic research, international organisations, multinational companies, local government regulations, industry lobbying groups and individual company initiatives have resulted in broadly consistent approaches, but with some localism in specific strategies (Chen et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2022; Gill 2017; Wright et al. 2023). For example, most countries agree that external pressure is necessary to improve the number of women in leadership, but differ in the extent of regulatory control (Clark et al., 2022). Activist movements, operating unevenly across countries and over time, have also influenced the appointment of women to leadership roles (Chen et al., 2022). Other societal drivers such as women's education, labour market segregation, gender pay gap, political representation, and legislative changes have been found to influence the experience of women in corporate leadership roles (Brieger et al., 2019; Grosvold

et al., 2016). In Australia, efforts to increase the number of women in corporate leadership have aligned with most of the global postfeminist logics above, but have had a local flavour through the emphasis on professional white women, and non-binding 'comply or explain' regimes (Du Plessis et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2023).

Although postfeminism is responsible for much of the success of women in corporate leadership to date, recent research has argued that the challenge now lies with sustainable, intersectional improvements in corporate diversity. Wealthy, white, straight, professional women have been appointed to corporate leadership roles, alongside intensifying 'sameness' amongst most other social and demographic categories (Guest 2019; Huse 2012; Wright et al., 2023). At the same time, women are less likely to hold influential leadership positions such as CEO, and face a gender pay gap that exceeds the general workforce (Cook et al. 2019; Hutchinson et al. 2017; Yanadori et al. 2018). Women in leadership face intense scrutiny, with their perceived competence underpinned by an unspoken 'right' way to conduct oneself (). Although research has identified the political inertia of interventions, little is offered in the way of practical solutions (Berglund et al. 2018; Gill et al. 2017; Lewis et al. 2017; Wright et al., 2023). Postfeminist ideas underpin much of the mainstream research on women in corporate leadership, with most adopting a pragmatic lens of integrating with existing norms and structures (Glass and Cook 2016; Murray and Syed 2010; Pillay et al. 2019; Post and Byron 2015; Wright 2021). A more fulsome understanding of Australian postfeminism, as it was sold to elite corporate women in the 1990s, thus makes a practical contribution to corporate diversity policies. It reveals the postfeminist ideas that have shaped research, interventions, and women's experiences in leadership roles, and provides insight into the movements current challenges.

### **3. Materials and methods**

This article analyses 'Corporate Woman', a mainstream newspaper column published regularly by the *Australian Financial Review* between 1988 and 1998. Media plays a critical role in society and has the power to reproduce the shared myths, norms, stories, values and customs that allow folks to make sense of themselves and their place in the world. Media outlets are able to "privilege certain information, omit other information, and construe and constrain meaning", making them powerful agents in the social construction of leadership (Liu 2016: 51). Mainstream media is a fruitful, if under-researched, resource for analysing gender and leadership, and presents a useful case for understanding the features of Australian postfeminism (Heizmann and Liu 2022; Liu 2016; Liu et al. 2015). This was a crucial decade,

marking the beginning of postfeminism “as a recognisable phenomenon” in Australia and the moment where the contradictions of living as a woman in the era after second wave feminism became inescapable (Henderson and Taylor 2019: 7). This column – reflecting the mainstreaming of second wave feminism and intending to capitalise on the growing number of professional and managerial women – is the only mainstream Australian periodical that consistently documented women’s progress up the corporate ladder. It thus presents a unique opportunity to understand the quotidian character of Australian postfeminism, as it was sold to elite corporate women in the 1990s.

‘Corporate Woman’ was published regularly, with 425 columns of roughly equal length (1000 words) included in the analysis. Columns were published with uneven frequency across the decade, with 46-50 columns per year between 1989 and 1994, to 33 in 1995, 29 in 1996, before returning to 46 in 1997 (table 1). Columnists were relatively autonomous in deciding the content of ‘Corporate Woman’, but were ultimately answerable to the editor, with content representing conscious journalistic and editorial decisions that included and omitted certain stories, and presented information in a particular way. As such, texts both presented factual information, and were a set of discursive practices that created and legitimated particular subject positions and reproduced dominant power relations (Adamson 2017; Eikhof et al., 2013).

The ‘Corporate Woman’ archive was accessed via the *Factiva* database. Focussing on text rather than aesthetic features, the analysis followed the iterative inductive and deductive coding process used by Eikhof et al. (2013). In their analysis of mainstream magazine reporting on women entrepreneurs, Eikhof et al. (2013) first analysed half the articles inductively, coding for emerging themes and grouping themes into a preliminary coding system. In two subsequent rounds of coding, this scheme was revised and reapplied, with themes and perspectives determined inductively. Finally, the authors introduced a deductive component, combining their original coding with aspects typically recorded in the relevant research. This study followed this procedure, coding each column inductively for the theme or issue discussed (table 1). Women in corporate leadership was one of the major themes, with 19% of columns overall addressing women in executive and board roles of major companies (table 1). Similar to Liu’s (2016) analysis of Australian print media, the focus then turned to columns on leadership specifically. Leadership columns – discussing women in executive or board roles in large corporations – were coded for their framing or perspective, which were initially determined inductively from the researcher’s initial read of the column, and then revised through the postfeminist theoretical framework (table 2). Following refinement of the framing/perspective categories, all leadership columns were then re-coded.



In-depth qualitative discussion supports the quantitative content analysis (similar to Eikhof et al. 2013; Henderson and Taylor 2019; Liu 2016; Samuelsson 2024). Qualitative evidence has been used to demonstrate the main features of Australian postfeminism, as they appear in this column, providing a rich discussion of postfeminism in action. The qualitative and quantitative analysis is then contextualised using secondary literature on Australia's social, political and economic history, illuminating the main features of Australian postfeminism, for elite corporate women, at the end of the twentieth century (similar to Liu et al. 2015).

#### **4. Results**

Utilising the quantitative content analysis, and in-depth qualitative material, section 4 examines the main features of Australian postfeminism, as it was sold to elite corporate women at the end of the twentieth century. In the late-1980s, reflecting the mainstreaming of second wave feminism, the *Australian Financial Review* began to systematically cover the advancement of women in the corporate world. The column covered a variety of issues relevant to women working in corporations, including women in work (28%), managing work and caring responsibilities (21%), women in the professions (10%), and discrimination legislation and affirmative action (16%) (table 1, figure 1). Minor themes included cultural representations of women (8%), women's financial literacy (7%), pay equity (4%) and education (4%). The 'other' category (37%) included a range of minor related issues, including women's entrepreneurship, admittance to social spaces, industry associations, political leadership or women in sport. Figure 1 indicates changes across the decade with, for example, columns addressing caring responsibilities attracting above-average space in 1989, 1990 and 1991, and leadership columns more common in 1993, 1994 and 1995.

'Corporate Woman' published 80 columns (19%) that reported on, and advocated for, women in corporate leadership (table 1). Columns reported on the number of women in board and executive roles, with Neales' arguing in April 1992 that four women on the boards of five of Australia's top 100 companies represented a "quiet revolution" in corporate Australia (14/04/1992). By mid-1997, the proportion of women on boards had jumped to 7.3%, though women in management remained stubbornly low. Different trends were identified across industries, with mining and media seen as particularly conservative, and banking and finance relatively more progressive (10/03/1993; 07/07/1993; 30/04/1997; 26/02/1997; 13/08/1997; 11/02/1998; 08/04/1998). The column was integrated with transnational postfeminism, with a third of leadership articles (26 of 80) comparing the Australian case to overseas jurisdictions, looking to the US for inspiration, or as a critique of the backwardness of

antipodean policies (see, for example, 13/11/1990; 23/03/1994; 11/10/1995). In 1990, for example, Neales reported on the barriers to women entering senior management, and argued that US workplace issues “tend to be about three years ahead of Australia” (13/11/1990).

#### *4.1 Work*

‘Corporate Woman’ reflected the integration of feminist empowerment and neoliberalism in the decades following the Women’s Movement. Most columns (83%) argued that women should be appointed to leadership positions as part of a fair and just society (table 2). Identifying gendered inequalities in the labour market, 63% of columns saw women’s leadership appointments as an issue that required collective action, while 59% addressed structural barriers such as the gender pay gap, gender segregation in work, unequal parenting demands, and the “glass ceiling” for promotion (table 2; see 13/07/1994; 08/05/1990; 05/11/1991; 30/06/1993; 03/11/1993). At the same time, the column reflected the postfeminist belief that, by the 1990s, feminists had ‘won’, that barriers to women’s promotion had been removed and that further agitation from second wave feminists was unnecessary (21/12/1994; 05/11/1991; 27/05/1998; 22/12/1993; 19/02/1997; 30/04/1997). Women in corporate leadership, it was argued, were evidence that the situation was “not really so bad” (21/12/1994; 05/11/1991), obscuring the complicated progress of feminism in Australian society by pointing to “welcome advances” despite “numerous and continuing incidents of women being discriminated against in the community” (14/04/1992). In attempting to reconcile these two positions, columnists were perplexed: banking executive Helen Lynch, for example, argued that although barriers to women’s promotion had been removed, “surely [women] would be [in leadership] in numbers better than the current paltry percentages” (26/10/1994; see also 06/11/1996; 16/02/1994).

Women’s conduct in corporate work was intensely scrutinised. Invoking the postfeminist revival in ‘natural’ sex-based differences, ‘Corporate Woman’ advised working and middle class women to work in areas that aligned with their ‘natural’ femininity. The column argued that women, for the most part, were “too emotional too illogical, and too irrational” for corporate leadership, and were “faithful observers or seductive diverters” for the “successful executive [...] as a solitary hero engaged on a journey of relentless trials” (28/06/1995). Women generally “lack[ed] experience in the exercise of power”, were “not commercial enough”, “trade[d] on their femininity”, and “impose[d] their own glass ceilings” by lacking ambition and aggression (12/01/1994; 13/12/1995; 24/07/1996). The so-called ‘natural’ differences between women and men’s corporate conduct was seen as one of primary barriers to women’s career progression, with women facing difficulties conforming to “macho” corporate culture (14/06/1995; 13/08/1997; 02/11/1994; 11/01/1995; 25/01/1995; 28/06/1995).

Those in corporate leadership, on the other hand, were advised to overcome their feminine disposition to succeed. Although 63% of columns saw women's leadership appointments as a collective issue – either as the barometer of success for women's empowerment, or through women's collective 'natural' managerial style – most also advised women on the way they could self-optimize to succeed (table 2). Table 2 indicates that 54% of columns adopted an individualist frame, instructing women to conform with masculine workplaces through human capital investment, mentorship schemes, career counselling, and confidence-building workshops (31/01/1989; 21/03/1989; 05/11/1991; 25/02/1992; 08/09/1993; 13/11/1990; 18/01/1995; 19/02/1997). Women were also advised to adhere to masculine social dynamics, instructed not to “rock the boat”, and to don an “elaborate camouflage” to conceal their “personal lives, their emotions and their femininity” to be deemed to “have what it takes” at the top (29/10/1991; 30/11/1994). Individualised advice sat uneasily against collective generalisations regarding 'natural' sex-based differences, with women seen to be inevitably unsuited to leadership, yet told to enrol in MBA degrees (08/09/1993), find a male mentor (13/11/1990; 18/01/1995), make better pay demands (19/02/1997), and be funnier (05/07/1995). In September 1996, the column acknowledged the corporate toxic masculinity of “boys being boys” and “mateship-gone-wrong”, but rather than addressing the conduct of men, recommended women correct their behaviour by being more confident and assertive (25/09/1996; 11/01/1995).

This individualist perspective was integrated with Australian egalitarianism, or the ideal of the 'fair go', where anyone could succeed if they worked hard enough. Collective initiatives such as quotas were opposed on principles of fairness, with columnists critical of the “regulatory-minded” in the Women's Movement who did disservice to women's talent, commitment and self-confidence (08/05/1990; 30/06/1993; 07/01/1992; 19/01/1994; 26/10/1994). Bagwell argued that “women I talk to in senior positions abhor being singled out for their gender” (30/06/1993), “squirm[ing] at terms like 'glass ceilings' and 'sticky floors'” (26/10/1994). The column repeatedly focussed on the appointment of “suitably qualified” female candidates, with a concern that affirmative action gave “jobs to incompetent women [...] at the expense of highly experienced men” (31/08/1994; see also 08/03/1995; 19/10/1991; 14/07/1992; 05/01/1993; 28/04/1993; 17/05/1995). Radical feminists were criticised for being “humourless”, “dogmatic” or a “bossyboots” (16/06/1993; 27/08/1997; 05/07/1995), with women's individual achievement was seen as the “triumph of the talented and tenacious over the mediocre and comfortable” (04/01/1995).

## 4.2 Family

Women's mass entry to the formal workforce prompted new performances of gender and family at the end of the twentieth century. Columns that preferenced women's 'choice' (20%) invoked postfeminist individualism and a focus on self-optimisation, arguing that women were free to choose "part time and casual work to accommodate family responsibilities" (05/05/1992; 16/06/1993), and were valuable workers for their "willingness to accept lower pay and little advancement in return for a flexible schedule" (21/03/1989) (table 2). Women opting for lower paid company directorships, rather than executive roles, was similarly positioned as a choice for corporate women with children, with Carolyn Hewson reportedly choosing to leave investment bank Schrodgers Australia to pursue a board career following the birth of her daughter (06/05/1998; see also 20/04/1994). Accepting the traditional division of labour, where women were responsible for the majority of parenting and domestic responsibilities, the so-called 'career and family' path was simultaneously positioned as a woman's choice, as well as a structural barrier to their career progression (28/06/1995; 07/12/1994; 25/01/1995; 05/05/1992). As such, few solutions were offered for mothers, with columnists arguing that women should individually counter the expectation that they will "only work for 10 to 15 years and will eventually stay at home with their family" (18/01/1995; see also 05/11/1991; 16/06/1993; 02/11/1994).

As with women's work behaviours, those at the top of the corporate hierarchy were advised to adopt a masculine persona in their family planning. Juxtaposed with the "career and family" path were those women choosing the "career primary" path, where they could be "worked long hours, promoted, relocated and generally treated like a man" (21/03/1989). If they were to succeed in the corporate world, women leaders were advised to put their "professional life before their professional life", sacrificing home and social life for the benefit of the company (07/12/1994). The demands of leadership roles, for women at least, presented an inevitable dilemma, with many choosing to remain "unencumbered" due to long hours, hypermobility, and the attitude that it would be "unfair to inflict the demands of their job on children" (16/06/1993; 07/12/1994; 22/06/1994). Although "spinsterhood and childlessness" was presented as undesirable, the column accepted that women were free to choose this if they were serious about corporate leadership (07/12/1994).

In presenting women's leadership and family life as incompatible, the column accepted the traditional gendered division of labour in households (07/12/1994; 25/01/1995; 05/05/1992). There was little suggestion that men in leadership positions faced a similar dilemma, with Fox reporting that corporate men were far more likely to choose marriage and children compared to corporate women (30/06/1992). Wives were identified as central to the

careers of corporate men, indeed wives were the 'business accessory of the 90s', with one CEO arguing that "just as property is location, location, location, important in your career is your wife, your wife, your wife" (23/06/1994; 24/12/1997). Working women, specifically "dual-career couples", were blamed for difficulties moving executive men interstate or abroad (22/06/1994), with men unlikely to "take on the same supporting role" for their spouse. Rather than transformational change in the terms under which work was divided and valued, or expecting career support from their husbands, "upwardly mobile career women" were instead advised to rely on male friends and colleagues to accompany them to corporate functions (23/06/1993).

Investment in childcare was seen as the solution to women's career-family juggle. 21% of columns addressed managing work and caring responsibilities, with the majority focussed on changes to childcare legislation in the 1990s (table 1). The column praised companies who promoted market-leading childcare policies, or established an in-house crèche, as being progressive in their treatment of female employees (13/12/1988; 23/05/1989; 14/01/1992). At the same time, men were exonerated from childcare responsibilities, with columns reporting concern from male industry leaders with the cost to corporations of a so-called woman's 'choice' (14/11/1989). Neales reported that male partners of law and accounting firms "don't want to pay for female partners to take time off to have other men's children" (13/02/1990), with childcare and maternity provisions seen as a 'benefit' for women at the expense of men in the company (10/04/1990; see also 20/12/1988; 01/12/1992). Indeed, paid childcare was seen as a reason to not employ women of a certain age, with a (male) board member commenting:

"I don't know. All these extra costs of employing women – maternity leave, child care, affirmative action and all that – it's almost getting to the point where it is becoming too expensive to employ women anymore" (14/11/1989).

#### *4.3 Prosperity*

Reflecting the excitement for women in corporate leadership in the 1990s, 'Corporate Woman' integrated women's empowerment and economic progress. Although women were, as above, criticised for their 'natural' feminine predispositions, 54% of leadership columns adopted the 'business case' or the market-based motivation for women in corporate leadership (table 2). Reporting reflected, and often directly reported on, a flurry of books published in the decade on a new 'feminine' style of leadership. It was argued that women were "more logical, more intelligent, more conscientious and all round just brighter and smarter" (25/01/1992), and that they "manage in an interactive and circular way, encouraging participation, sharing power,

delegating and relying on team-work more than male managers” (18/02/1992). Moving on from the ‘Thatcher model’ (02/06/1993), women were seen as “adaptable”, “collegial”, “democratic”, “consultative”, and “gentle”, all of which were considered valuable assets in modern corporations. There was a “gradual recognition of the value of women’s contribution to corporate management” (26/01/1994), and “smart companies [...] recognise that if they want to stay competitive, they have to hire, train and reward women at the managerial level” (26/01/1994). The appointment of women was seen as beneficial for staff morale (31/01/1989; 14/04/1992; 30/06/1993; 19/01/1994), customer retention (13/10/1992; 17/05/1995; 14/07/1992; 22/12/1993), and corporate public relations (31/01/1989; 07/01/1992) with “forward-looking” companies that appointed women performing better than their competitors (28/04/1994; 11/10/1995; 14/04/1992).

Aligning women’s equality and market value, columnists argued that the 1990s economy necessitated the appointment of women managers (18/02/1992). Women in leadership were deemed necessary for the nation’s progress, with the “talents of our women [...] used to the country’s advantage” in the face of an ageing population and falling birth rates (19/01/1994; 26/10/1994). Structural adjustment away from manufacturing and towards more ‘feminized’ service industries prompted the appointment of women, as it was “symbolically and strategically essential for women to take their seats in the boardrooms of companies that are increasingly relying on women for their financial well-being, as their customers and shareholders” (22/12/1993; see also 07/01/1992). Women were also seen as necessary for the success of companies in “ferociously competitive” global markets (26/01/1994; 02/07/1997). Women’s “consultative and consensus approach” was seen as the antidote to the hyper-masculinity and “power-obsessed corporate scene” of the 1980s (25/02/1992), with women able to ‘save’ corporations from corruption and greed. Eva Cox, interviewed by Bagwell following Westpac’s 1992 board independence scandal, argued that “maybe Westpac wouldn’t have stuffed up so badly if they had a woman on their board” (06/10/1992). If business was to “move forward”, guest columnist Joan Kirner argued, Australian women had to be “more than workers and supporters – they have to be decision-makers” (21/12/1994).

## **5. Discussion: Postfeminism and the construction of Australia’s ‘Corporate Woman’**

Through their reporting on work, family and prosperity, the *Australian Financial Review’s* ‘Corporate Woman’ column reproduced an Australian brand of postfeminism. Contributing to recent calls to contextualise and historicise postfeminism (Butler 2013; Chen 2012; De Simone

and Priola 2022; Dosekun 2015; Gill 2016; Henderson and Taylor 2019; Turner and Simpson 2017), the following section analyses these results relative to the features of transnational postfeminism, and Australia's social, political and economic history. This reveals the theoretical contribution, specifically the factors that may have influenced the quotidian production of postfeminist media, as it was sold to elite white women in 1990s Australia. It also illuminates the practical contribution, namely the postfeminist foundation of contemporary policies for increasing the number of women in corporate leadership, and implications for future research.

Australia was an early pioneer of feminism, or the range of social movements that have fought to establish the political, economic, personal and social equality between men and women (Arrow, 2019; Wright et al., 2023). Feminism's 'first wave' comprised suffrage movements in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, while the 'second wave', also called the Women's Movement or Women's Liberation Movement, began in the 1960s and focussed on women's legal and social equality, and equal opportunities in work and pay. In terms of work, second wave feminists fought to allow women to remain in the workforce after marriage, expanded their access to traditionally male-dominated workplaces, and established equal pay for equal work. As a result, Australian women in the 1960s and 1970s, much like their sisters in other Western societies, increasingly completed tertiary education, and their professional career choices diversified beyond teaching, nursing and social work to include 'corporate' professions such as accounting, law, engineering and business (Du Plessis et al., 2014; Wright, 2021). Women increased from 27% of the Australian labour force in 1971, to 42% in 1991, with a "conspicuous" number of new female professionals (Bongiorno, 2015; Forsyth, 2019; Hatton and Withers, 2015).

The 1980s and 1990s were "best of times and the worst of times" for Australian women (Dixson 1999 [1976]: 5). Postfeminism split the feminist movement between mainstream groups focussed on labour politics and union organising, and those who emphasised women's participation in capitalist structures such as the corporate ladder (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Gill 2007; Henderson and Taylor 2019). As with their participation in the Women's Movement, Australia also actively participated in the reproduction of neoliberalism in the 1980s, with the Labor Hawke-Keating government (1983-1996) mirroring the US Reagan and UK Thatcher administrations in their emphasis on deregulation and government austerity (Bongiorno 2015; Humphries 2019). Buoyed by the narrowing of the gender pay gap, the career advancement of professional women, and the mainstreaming of feminist issues through government legislation and corporate diversity management initiatives, many postfeminists thought the job was done. However, the gender pay gap remained persistent, and the labour market heavily segregated, with the 1992 Australian parliamentary report *Half Way to Equal* finding that 85% of women

worked in community or business services, retail, or clerical roles. Despite advances in paid employment, women's behaviour was also heavily scrutinised, and they remained bound by traditional expectations regarding household labour (Black 2022; Dixson 1999 [1976]; Liu 2016; Samuelsson 2024; Summers 2013).

Australia's participation in both feminism and neoliberalism meant that 'Corporate Woman' shared many of the features of transnational postfeminism. The column frequently compared developments in Australia with 'best practice' policies in the US. Columnists reflected the postfeminist belief that, by the 1990s, feminists in the Western World had 'won', with women in leadership seen as the barometer of success for the women's movement, and their appointments, even in small numbers, seen as evidence that barriers to women's promotion had been removed (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Gill 2007; Henderson and Taylor 2019). At the same time, the postfeminist revival in interest in 'natural' sex-based differences portrayed women as ill-suited to management roles. Women were advised to work in areas that aligned with their natural femininity, which was used to justify the sex segregation of the workforce, and the inevitable lower pay and conditions of work in these 'feminised' industries (Fitch and Third 2014; Forsyth 2019; Ronen 2018). Although the column identified structural barriers to women's career progression – including the gender pay gap, segregated workforce, unequal parenting demands, and masculine corporate culture – solutions were found through individual achievement and personal optimisation such as education, mentorship schemes, and confidence building workshops (Adamson 2017; Baker and Kelan 2019; Fitch and Third 2014; Gill 2017; McRobbie 2004; Tasker and Negra 2007;). The column thus aligned with transnational postfeminism through the uneasy reporting on structural challenges and women's collective characteristics, alongside the assumption that gender equality had been achieved, and that any remaining inequalities were the result of women's natural differences and/or autonomous choices (Adamson 2017; Baker and Kelan 2019; Berglund et al. 2018; Gill et al. 2017; Mastrangelo, 2021; Meyers 2013).

Postfeminist individualism was integrated with Australian egalitarianism. Influencing everything from government, clothing and language, Australia has long seen itself as the land of the 'fair go' (Ward 1958). Egalitarianism was the foundation of the 'larrikin', or the cultural image of an unconventional, anti-authoritarian and likeable male figure, as well as the 'digger' who persevered in the face of adversity and looked after his mates on the battlefields of WWI (Turner 1994). Nationalist figures such as Ned Kelly invoked the perseverance of the working class, anti-authoritarian hero, and the Great Australian Dream sold the idea of land ownership for everyone, not just the rich (Clark 2022; Foster 2022). Alongside the long-term hollowing out of the middle class in the second half of the twentieth century – an experience common to many



other industrialised economies – Australian egalitarianism was revived in the 1980s and 1990s through the neoliberal politics of the Hawke-Keating Labor governments (1983-1996). Minimising structural inequalities and focussing on deregulation, freedom and personal achievement, the election of the conservative Howard government in 1996 symbolised the zenith of Australian neoliberalism and resurgence of egalitarianism (Humphries 2019). Women in corporate leadership were susceptible to expectations of Australian egalitarianism, with ‘Corporate Woman’ preferencing individual achievement, opposing collective interventions on principles of fairness, and criticising radical feminists for compromising women’s positions won on merit. The columns positioning of work thus conformed with global postfeminist discourse by focussing on individual achievement, self-optimisation, and natural sex-based differences, while also encouraging women to conform to exclusionary Australian national identities (Henderson and Taylor 2019; Holland and Wright 2017).

Reflecting the preference, particularly amongst Western countries in the twentieth century, for atomised ‘nuclear family’ units, ‘Corporate Woman’ focussed on childcare as the solution to women’s career progression (Phillips 2009). The ‘nuclear family’ has been a widespread means of organising Australian society, with the Australian trade union movement fighting for a ‘family wage’ that enabled breadwinning men to free their wives for childcare and domestic duties (Black 2022; Nolan 2003). In the first half of the twentieth century, although married women made up approximately 20% of the workforce, Australia’s working mothers was treated as culturally unacceptable in opposition to the ‘citizen mother’ who fulfilled women’s mission to “nurture and civilise” (Black 2022; Hatton and Withers, 2015; McCalman, 1993; Summers, 1975). Women were subject to abysmal pay, many were forced to give up work upon marriage, and all were subject to the societal expectation that stay-at-home marriage and childrearing was the key to maintaining a secure and a comfortable life (Forsyth, 2019; Mackinnon, 1997; McCalman, 1993; Summers, 2013; Wright, 2021).

In the wake of second wave feminism, women’s mass entry to the formal workforce did not absolve them of domestic responsibilities; nor were men free from breadwinning (Black 2022). Instead, postfeminism saw the binaries of the feminist and the housewife, the career woman and the homemaker, and the public and private spheres, destabilise (Henderson and Taylor, 2019: 109; Bjursell and Bäckvall, 2011; Bongiorno 2015; De Simone and Priola 2022). Some women embraced ‘new traditionalism’, recoding traditional gender roles as an individualised choice won by the Women’s Movement. Working women, on the other hand, were positioned as postfeminist subjects in ‘Corporate Woman’ through their ‘choice’ of the career-family juggle. Reflecting the postfeminist focus on individual achievement, market success and choice, women were expected to balance their newfound career opportunities with their traditionally feminine

roles of wife and mother. Obscuring the politics of choice that govern the choices available to women, working women were encouraged to 'have it all', juggling the competing demands of work and home and utilising market substitutes for their domestic work rather than adaptations from male partners or colleagues (Baker and Kelan 2019; Bittman 1999; Gill et al. 2017; Heizmann and Liu 2022; Lewis et al. 2017). Emphasis on the career-family 'juggle' was consistent with postfeminist expectations in other Western societies such as the US and UK of the time, though differed from the reliance on kinship networks in societies such as Italy (De Simone and Priola 2022; Press et al. 2018), or the expansion in the types of family formation that can be seen in Western postfeminism in later years (Henderson and Taylor 2019).

Differing from the career-family juggle of working women, or the 'successfully balanced' femininity found amongst corporate women in later years, corporate women in the 1990s were advised to adopt a masculine persona in their family planning (Adamson 2017; Liu 2016, 2022). The work demands of elite corporate women, it was argued, required them to choose the 'career primary' path where they would sacrifice their home and social life for the benefit of the company. The expectation that women in corporate leadership behave 'like a man' at work was seen as incompatible with family life, with it 'unfair' for mothers to inflict the demands of a corporate career on their children. At the same time, men were also exonerated from reproductive work, with little suggestion that corporate men faced a similar dilemma, or that fathers could successfully perform the bulk of domestic and caring labour. As such, the postfeminist portrayal of working women and women in corporate leadership was united by the emphasis on choice, while at the same time accepting the patriarchal organisation of families and the positioning of transformational change regarding domestic labour as impossible (Adamson 2017; Berglund et al. 2018; Gill 2017; Gill et al. 2017; Henderson and Taylor 2019).

Finally, the column integrated global postfeminist ideals with the needs of the 1990s Australian economy. Structural adjustment, which began in the 1960s, halved the share of GDP in manufacturing, with a corresponding increase in the share of GDP in services (Madsen 2015). Neoliberalism, found in Australia and across the Western world in the 1980s, emphasised financial deregulation and the removal of trade protections, exposing Australia to new global markets. Combined with concerns over skills shortages and falling birth rates, increased concentration of Australians' work in tertiary service industries precipitated targeted immigration with stringent skills and education criteria (Hatton and Withers, 2015). The decade also began with a deep recession, with the outrageous antics of the greedy, risky and corrupt 'corporate raiders' catalysed by the October 1987 global stock market crash (Bongiorno 2015; Humphries 2019). The resulting inflation spiral required the Reserve Bank to raise the cash rate

to just under 18% in late-1989 (Keating, 2015). In November 1990, Treasurer Paul Keating announced the ‘recession that Australia had to have’ (Black, 2022). Unemployment exceeded 11% in 1992, falling disproportionately on unskilled working men in industries such as steel and car manufacturing affected by the removal of tariff protections (Hutchinson, 2015).

‘Corporate Woman’ utilised the ‘business case’ to advocate for the appointment of women to corporate leadership positions based on the opportunities and challenges of the 1990s economy. In the 1990s, the growth of the HR profession, alongside the widespread entry of women to the workforce, and interest in ‘natural’ sex-based differences, contributed to new ‘diversity management’ principles for the co-ordination of human capital (Johnston, 1987; Ginalski et al. 2023). Rather than simply the ‘right’ thing to do, the business case argued that appointing women to leadership roles was necessary for companies to thrive, via women’s assumed capabilities in negotiation, stakeholder management, fairness, and collaboration. The column also positioned corporate leadership as women’s responsibility, with their natural aptitude seen as necessary for the Australia’s prosperity in the face of falling birth rates, skills shortages and corporate greed (Nadin et al. 2020). Although postfeminist women were told they could – and indeed *should* – be everywhere, they were also confined by expectations of their femininity, with the business case assigning them to emotional or ‘communal’ labour rather than ‘masculine’ management roles (Fitch and Third 2014; Reichel et al. 2010). In defining women’s contribution to corporate management, the ‘business case’ also defined women as ‘other’ to the prevailing leadership culture. Women were thus simultaneously applauded and disparaged for their immutable femininity, and were forced to walk a fine line between assumptions of their natural abilities alongside meeting masculine standards of success (Eikhof et al., 2013; Kangas et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2019; Pullen and Vachani, 2021; Ginalski et al. 2023).

In addition to illuminating the socio-political factors that have influenced the reproduction of Australian postfeminism, this study makes a practical contribution by uncovering the collective cognitive maps that have guided research, policy interventions, and women’s lived experiences in corporate leadership roles. Australian postfeminism, in this early phase, had a long “afterlife” (Black 2022: 426), with much of the contemporary action towards improving women in corporate leadership reflecting individualism, choice, personal optimisation, market success, and an interest in sex-based differences. Rather than only a matter for the past, the institutionalisation of postfeminist ideas in the 1990s has influenced women entering corporate leadership over subsequent decades. Australian company, industry and government initiatives have largely presented individualised, choice- and market-based solutions to structural problems, resisting regulatory initiatives such as quotas, and focussing on personal optimisation

and the 'business case' for appointing privileged women already working at the top of the corporate-professional hierarchy (Corkery et al. 2018; Du Plessis et al., 2014; Ross Smith and Bridge 2008; Sheridan 2021; Wright et al., 2023). This has subsequently influenced women's experiences in leadership roles, contributing to intersectional issues, pay inequality, and barriers to comparable levels of influence across the leadership suite (Baker and Kelan 2019; Lewis et al. 2017; Gill et al. 2017; Wright et al. 2023).

This study has several limitations that could provide the basis for future research. First, although the analysis of the quotidian character of Australian postfeminism is unique, 'Corporate Woman' represented a limited number of voices – chiefly the columnists and their editor – with very little insight into how it was received by the public. The method, additionally, has elements of subjectivity, with meanings suggested by the producer but essentially dependent on the responder (Adamson 2017; Eikhof et al., 2013; Liu 2016). Although not unusual in feminist research, analysis of a single outlet is restricted in its ability to compare to other newspapers, or to other forms of media at the time (Adamson 2017; Liu 2016). Future research could compare these findings to other newspaper columns in Australia or internationally, to reveal the influence of publishers, editors, columnists, or the intended audience, on the reproduction of postfeminism. Second, while the *Australian Financial Review* is a popular mainstream outlet, the column spoke to a white, middle or upper-middle class, urban demographic that was not representative of Australian society of the time (Heizmann and Liu 2022). The column's focus on a limited demographic of women, both as subjects and as the audience, restricts the capacity of this study to contextualise 1990s postfeminism for non-white, working-class, rural, or queer women. Future research could consider intersectional dimensions, particularly the way corporate leadership – in this and other publications – was sold to a broader range of women.

## **6. Conclusions**

By historicising the *Australian Financial Review's* 'Corporate Woman' column, this article reveals that Australian postfeminism has existed at the nexus of global and local forces (Henderson and Taylor 2019; Gill 2016; De Simone and Priola 2022; Samuelsson 2024). Making a theoretical contribution, the quotidian production of postfeminist media, as it was sold to elite Australian women, suggests that comparable political and economic systems – including Western democratic governments, and the introduction of neoliberalism since the 1980s – contributed to similarity between Australian postfeminism and those in comparable jurisdictions. Changes to women's work – experienced through the feminist Women's Movement in Australia and

elsewhere from the 1970s – contributed to the assumption that barriers to women’s leadership appointments had been removed, while also creating distinct work expectations for women at the top of the corporate hierarchy. As such, ‘Corporate Woman’ included many of the core features of transnational postfeminism, such as individualism, choice, personal optimisation, an interest in ‘natural’ sex-based differences, and the assumption that gender equality had been achieved.

At the same time, the column reproduced an Australian brand of postfeminism throughout the 1990s. The resurgence of Australian egalitarianism, Western atomisation of nuclear families, and the perceived contribution of women leaders to recession and structural adjustment in the Australian economy contributing to distinctive expectations of Australian women in corporate leadership. As such, the ideal postfeminist corporate woman in 1990s Australia, according to the column, chose to sacrifice marriage and family for her job; conformed with masculine workplace cultures yet was useful for her feminine managerial style; and advocated for women in leadership yet resisted collective interventions. The reflected the contradictions of postfeminism, the entangling of feminist and anti-feminist ideals, and the specific expectations of Australia’s elite corporate women at the end of the twentieth century. This fulsome understanding of the everyday production of postfeminist media, as it was sold to elite corporate women, illuminates the basis of contemporary diversity policies, and can help reshape them with a focus on justice and equality for all.

## References

- Adamson, Maria. 2017. "Postfeminism, neoliberalism and a 'successfully' balanced femininity in celebrity CEO autobiographies." *Gender, Work & Organization* 24 (3): 314-327.
- Arrow, Michelle. 2019. *The Seventies: The personal, the political and the making of modern Australia*. NewSouth Publishing.
- Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD). 2021. *Gender Diversity Progress Report*. AICD.
- Baker, Darren T, and Elisabeth K Kelan. 2019. "Splitting and blaming: The psychic life of neoliberal executive women." *Human Relations* 72 (1): 69-97.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg. 2020. "Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation." *Feminist theory* 21 (1): 3-24.
- Berglund, Karin, Helene Ahl, Katarina Pettersson, and Malin Tillmar. 2018. "Women's entrepreneurship, neoliberalism and economic justice in the postfeminist era: A discourse analysis of policy change in Sweden." *Gender, Work & Organization* 25 (5): 531-556.
- Bittman, Michael. 1999. "Parenthood without penalty: Time use and public policy in Australia and Finland." *Feminist economics* 5 (3): 27-42.
- Bjursell, Cecilia, and Lisa Bäckvall. 2011. "Family business women in media discourse: the business role and the mother role." *Journal of Family Business Management* 1 (2): 154-173.
- Black, Joshua. 2022. "'Unemployed Breadwinners' and 'Working Mothers': Male Breadwinner Nostalgia and the 1990s Recession in Australia." *Australian Historical Studies*: 1-19.
- Bongiorno, Frank. 2015. *The eighties: The decade that transformed Australia*. Black Inc.
- Brieger, Steven A, Claude Francoeur, Christian Welzel, and Walid Ben-Amar. 2019. "Empowering women: The role of emancipative forces in board gender diversity." *Journal of Business Ethics* 155: 495-511.
- Bryan, Amée. 2022. "A view from the top: An examination of postfeminist sensibilities in women leaders' constructions of success and responses to gender inequality in English football." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 20 (1): 373-397.
- Burkett, Melissa, and Karine Hamilton. 2012. "Postfeminist sexual agency: Young women's negotiations of sexual consent." *Sexualities* 15 (7): 815-833.

- Cermak, Jenny, Rachel Howard, Jessica Jeeves, and Nina Ubaldi. 2018. *Women in leadership: Lessons from Australian companies leading the way*. The Business Council of Australia, McKinsey & Company and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.
- Chen, Eva. 2012. "Shanghai (ed) Babies: Geopolitics, biopolitics and the global chick lit." *Feminist Media Studies* 12 (2): 214-228.
- Chen, Vivien, Michelle Welsh, and May Fong Cheong. 2022. "Gender diversity on Malaysian corporate boards: a law and social movements perspective." *Journal of law and society* 49 (1): 23-47.
- Clark, Anna. 2022. *Making Australian History*. Random House Australia.
- Clark, Cynthia E., Punit Arora, and Patricia Gabaldon. 2022. "Female Representation on Corporate Boards in Europe: The Interplay of Organizational Social Consciousness and Institutions." *Journal of business ethics* 180 (1): 165-186.
- Cook, Alison, Alicia R Ingersoll, and Christy Glass. 2019. "Gender gaps at the top: Does board composition affect executive compensation?" *Human Relations* 72 (8): 1292-1314.
- Corkery, JF, Madeline Elizabeth Taylor, and Melanie Hayden. 2018. "Gender balance in Australian boardrooms: the business case for quotas." In *Women on Corporate Boards*, 69-89. Routledge.
- De Simone, Silvia, and Vincenza Priola. 2022. "'Who's that girl?' The entrepreneur as a super(wo)man." *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences / Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration* 39 (1): 97-111.
- Dejmanee, Tisha. 2016. "Consumption in the city: The turn to interiority in contemporary postfeminist television." *European journal of cultural studies* 19 (2): 119-133.
- Dixson, Miriam. 1999 [1976]. *The real Matilda: Woman and identity in Australia, 1788 to the present*. 4th edition ed.: UNSW Press.
- Dosekun, Simidele. 2015. "For Western Girls Only?: Post-feminism as transnational culture." *Feminist media studies* 15 (6): 960-975.
- Du Plessis, Jean, James O'Sullivan, and Ruth Rentschler. 2014. "Multiple layers of gender diversity on corporate boards: To force or not to force." *Deakin L. Rev.* 19: 1.
- Ehrich, Lisa Catherine, and Megan Kimber. 2016. "The purpose and place of mentoring for women managers in organisations: an Australian perspective." *Handbook on well-being of working women*: 225-241.

Eikhof, Ruth, Doris Summers, and Juliette Carter. 2013. "'Women doing their own thing': media representations of female entrepreneurship." *International journal of entrepreneurial behaviour & research* 19 (5): 547-564.

Fitch, Kate, and Amanda Third. 2014. "Ex-journos and promo girls: feminization and professionalization in the Australian public relations industry." In *Gender and Public Relations*, edited by Christine Demetrious Daymon, Kristin, 263-284. United Kingdom: Routledge.

Forsyth, Hannah. 2019. "Reconsidering Women's Role in the Professionalisation of the Economy: Evidence from the Australian Census 1881–1947." *Australian Economic History Review* 59 (1): 55-79.

Foster, Meg. 2022. *Boundary crossers: The hidden history of Australia's other bushrangers*. Sydney NSW: NewSouth Publishing.

French, Sandra L., and Lisa Baker Webster. 2016. "Who's that girl? The (Mis)Representation of Female corporate leaders in *Time*." In *Gender, Media, and Organization : Challenging Mis(s)Representations of Women Leaders and Managers*, edited by Carole Elliott, Valerie Stead and Sharon Mavin. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Incorporated.

Gaunt, Ruth. 2013. "Ambivalent sexism and perceptions of men and women who violate gendered family roles." *Community, Work & Family* 16 (4): 401-416.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility." *European journal of cultural studies* 10 (2): 147-166.

---. 2016. "Post-postfeminism?: new feminist visibilities in postfeminist times." *Feminist media studies* 16 (4): 610-630.

---. 2017. "The affective, cultural and psychic life of postfeminism: A postfeminist sensibility 10 years on." *European journal of cultural studies* 20 (6): 606-626.

Gill, Rosalind, Elisabeth K. Kelan, and Christina M. Scharff. 2017. "A Postfeminist Sensibility at Work." *Gender, work, and organization* 24 (3): 226-244.

Glass, Christy, and Alison Cook. 2016. "Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling." *The Leadership Quarterly* 27 (1): 51-63.

Griffin, D, K Li, and T Xu. 2019. "Board gender diversity and corporate innovation: International evidence." *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis* 56 (1): 123-154.

Grosvold, Johanne, Bruce Rayton, and Stephen Brammer. 2016. "Women on corporate boards: A comparative institutional analysis." *Business & Society* 55 (8): 1157-1196.



- Groutsis, Dimitria, Rae Cooper, and Greg Whitwell. 2018. *Beyond the pale: Cultural diversity on ASX100 Boards*. University of Sydney.
- Guest, Paul M. 2019. "Does board ethnic diversity impact board monitoring outcomes?" *British Journal of Management* 30 (1): 53-74.
- Hatton, Tim, and Glenn Withers. 2015. "The labour market." In *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, edited by S Ville and G Withers. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Heizmann, Helena, and Helena Liu. 2022. "'Bloody Wonder Woman!': Identity performances of elite women entrepreneurs on Instagram." *Human Relations* 75 (3): 411-440.
- Henderson, Margaret, and Anthea Taylor. 2019. *Postfeminism in Context: Women, Australian Popular Culture, and the Unsettling of Postfeminism*. 1 ed. Vol. 1. *Feminism and Female Sexuality*. Milton: Routledge.
- Holland, Jack, and Katharine A. M. Wright. 2017. "The Double Delegitimation of Julia Gillard: Gender, the Media, and Australian Political Culture." *The Australian journal of politics and history* 63 (4): 588-602.
- Humphries, Elizabeth. 2019. *How Labour Built Neoliberalism: Australia's Accord, the Labour Movement and the Neoliberal Project*. Brill.
- Huse, Morten. 2012. "The 'golden skirts': lessons from Norway about women on corporate boards of directors." In *Diversity quotas, diverse perspectives: The case of gender*, edited by Stefan Groschl and Junko Takagi, 11-24.
- Hutchinson, D. 2015. "Manufacturing." In *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, edited by S Ville and G Withers. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson, Marion, Janet Mack, and Peter Verhoeven. 2017. "Women in leadership: an analysis of the gender pay gap in ASX-listed firms." *Accounting & Finance* 57 (3): 789-813.
- Johnston, William B. 1987. *Workforce 2000: Work and workers for the 21st century*. Government Printing Office.
- Kangas, Emilia, Anna-Maija Lämsä, and Marjut Jyrkinen. 2019. "Is fatherhood allowed? Media discourses of fatherhood in organizational life." *Gender, Work & Organization* 26 (10): 1433-1450.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1977. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

- Keating, M. 2015. "The evolution of Australian macroeconomic strategy since World War 2." In *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, edited by S Ville and G Withers. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, Patricia, Yvonne Benschop, and Ruth Simpson. 2017. "Postfeminism, Gender and Organization: Postfeminism and Organization." *Gender, work, and organization* 24 (3): 213-225.
- Liu, Helena. 2016. "A Fairytale Career: Media Representations of Australia's First Female Banking CEO." In *Gender, Media, and Organization : Challenging Mis(s)Representations of Women Leaders and Managers*, edited by Carole Elliott, Valerie Stead and Sharon Mavin. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Incorporated.
- Liu, Helena, Leanne Cutcher, and David Grant. 2015. "Doing Authenticity: The Gendered Construction of Authentic Leadership." *Gender, Work & Organization* 22 (3): 237-255.
- Mackinnon, Alison. 1997. *Love and freedom: Professional women and the reshaping of personal life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Madsen, Jakob B. 2015. "Australian economic growth and its drivers since European settlement." In *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, edited by S Ville and G Withers. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Mastrangelo, Frankie. 2021. "Theorizing #Girlboss Culture: Mediated Neoliberal Feminisms from Influencers to Multi-level Marketing Schemes from Influencers to Multi-level Marketing Schemes " Ph.D, Department of English, Virginia Commonwealth University.
- McCalman, Janet. 1993. *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920–1990*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2004. "Post-feminism and popular culture." *Feminist media studies* 4 (3): 255-264.
- Meyers, Marian. 2013. "The War on Academic Women: Reflections on Postfeminism in the Neoliberal Academy." *The Journal of communication inquiry* 37 (4): 274-283.
- Murray, Peter A, and Jawad Syed. 2010. "Gendered observations and experiences in executive women's work." *Human Resource Management Journal* 20 (3): 277-293.
- Nadin, Sara, Robert Smith, and Sally Jones. 2020. "Heroines of enterprise: Post-recession media representations of women and entrepreneurship in a UK newspaper 2008–2016." *International small business journal* 38 (6): 557-577.

- Nolan, Melanie. 2003. "The High Tide of a Labour Market System: The Australasian Male Breadwinner Model." *Labour & industry (Brisbane, Qld.)* 13 (3): 73-92.
- Phillips, Richard. 2009. "Settler colonialism and the nuclear family." *The Canadian geographer* 53 (2): 239-253.
- Pillay, Reevasa, Aden-Paul Flotman, and Jeremy Mitonga-Monga. 2019. "Emotional labour among women leaders within the South African consulting industry : a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry." *Southern African business review* 23 (1): 1-23.
- Post, Corinne, and Kris Byron. 2015. "Women on boards and firm financial performance." *Academy of Management Journal* 58 (5): 1546-1571.
- Press, Frances, Christine Woodrow, Helen Logan, and Linda Mitchell. 2018. "Can we belong in a neo-liberal world? Neo-liberalism in early childhood education and care policy in Australia and New Zealand." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 19 (4): 328-339.
- Pullen, Alison, and Sheena J. Vachhani. 2021. "Feminist Ethics and Women Leaders: From Difference to Intercorporeality." *Journal of Business Ethics* 173 (2): 233-243.
- Reichel, Astrid, Julia Brandl, and Wolfgang Mayrhofer. 2010. "The Strongest Link: Legitimacy of Top Management Diversity, Sex Stereotypes and the Rise of Women in Human Resource Management 1995 - 2004." *Management Revue* 21 (3): 332.
- Robinson, Penelope. 2011. "Mobilizing postfeminism: Young Australian women discuss Sex and the City and Desperate Housewives." *Continuum* 25 (1): 111-124.
- Ronen, Shelly. 2018. "The postfeminist ideology at work: Endorsing gender essentialism and denying feminine devaluation in the case of design work." *Gender, Work & Organization* 25 (5): 514-530.
- Samuelsson, Lauren. 2024. "Ita Buttrose, Dulcie Boling, and Nene King: The Construction of 'Idealised Feminine Leadership' in the Australian Media, 1972–1999." *Australian Feminist Studies*: 1-18.
- Sandberg, Sheryl. 2013. *Lean in: Women, work and the will to lead*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Stevenson, Ana. 2013. "Making gender divisive: 'Post-Feminism', sexism and media representations of Julia Gillard." *Burgmann Journal* 1 (2): 53-63.
- Summers, Anne. 1975. *Damned whores and God's police*. Sydney: New South.
- . 2013. *The Misogyny Factor*. Sydney: NewSouth.

Tasker, Yvonne, and Diane Negra. 2007. "Introduction: Feminist politics and postfeminist culture." 1. United States: Duke University Press.

Turner, Graeme. 1994. *Making it national: Nationalism and Australian popular culture*. Routledge.

Turner, Itari, and Ruth Simpson. 2017. "Doing-It-All: Exploring Work-Life Balance in Nigeria Through a Postfeminist Lens." In *Postfeminism and organization*, 43-56. Routledge.

Vroman, Susan R., and Tiffany Danko. 2020. "Against what model? Evaluating women as leaders in the pandemic era." *Gender, Work & Organization* 27 (5): 860-867.

Ward, Russel. 1958. *The Australian legend*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Wright, Claire, Corinne Cortese, Abdullah Al-Mamun, and Searat Ali. 2023. "Interrogating diversity: Feminism and the deconstruction of Australian board appointment practices." *Corporate governance : an international review*.

Wright, Claire EF, Corinne Cortese, Abdullah Al-Mamun, and Searat Ali. 2023. "The Whiteboard: Decoupling of ethnic and gender diversity reporting and practice in corporate Australia." *Australian Journal of Management*.

Wright, Claire E. F. 2021. "Good wives and corporate leaders: Duality in women's access to Australia's top company boards, 1910–2018." *Business History*: 1-23.

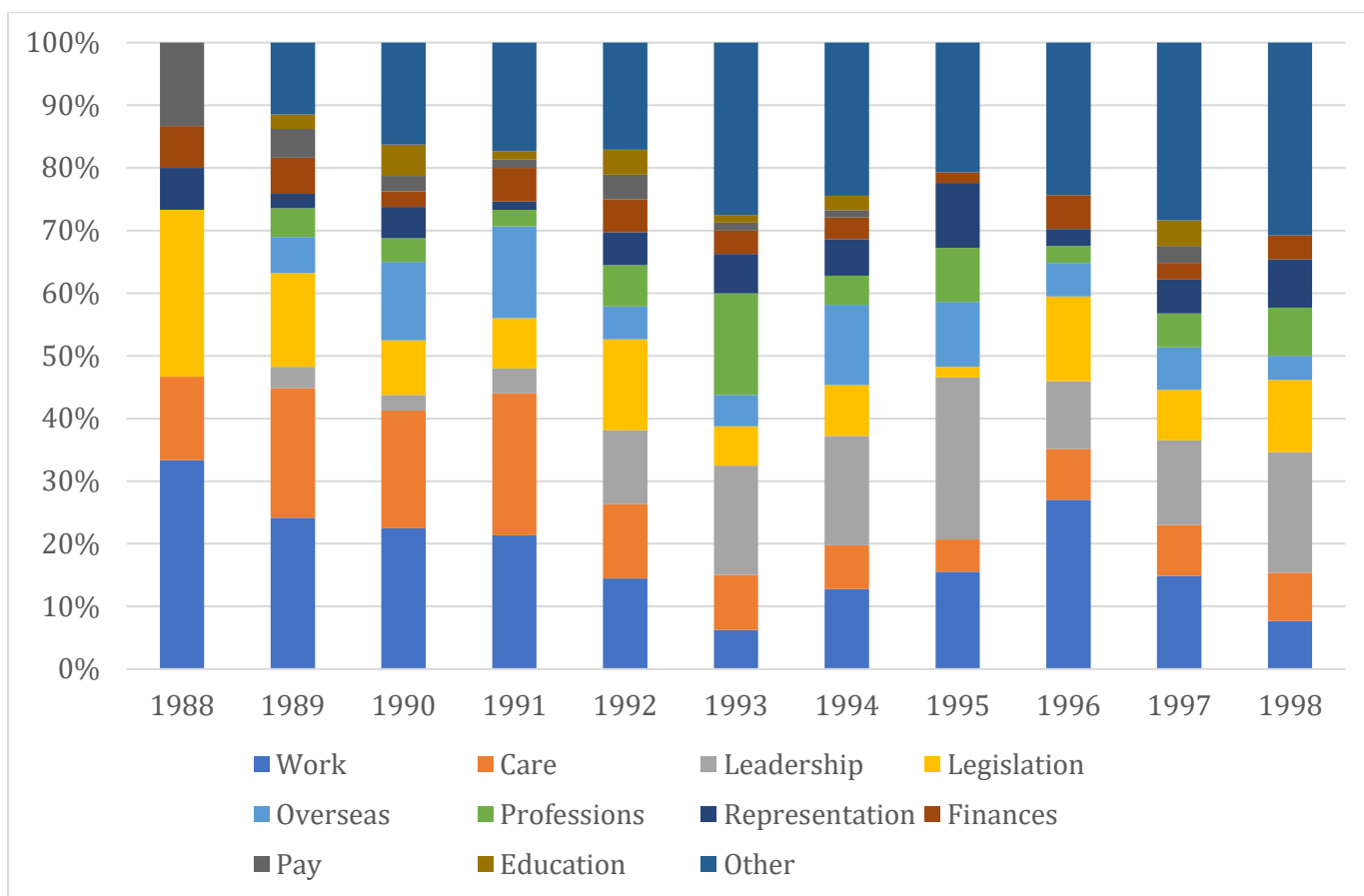
Yanadori, Yoshio, Jill A. Gould, and Carol T. Kulik. 2018. "A fair go? The gender pay gap among corporate executives in Australian firms." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 29 (9): 1636-1660.

Table 1: Content of 'Corporate Woman' column, 1988-1998

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Work (%)</b>	<b>Care (%)</b>	<b>Leadership (%)</b>	<b>Legislation (%)</b>	<b>Overseas (%)</b>	<b>Professions (%)</b>	<b>Representation (%)</b>	<b>Finances (%)</b>	<b>Pay (%)</b>	<b>Education (%)</b>	<b>Other (%)</b>
1988	8	5 (63)	2 (25)	0 (0)	4 (50)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (13)	1 (13)	2 (25)	0 (0)	0 (0)
1989	46	21 (46)	18 (39)	3 (7)	13 (28)	5 (11)	4 (9)	2 (4)	5 (11)	4 (9)	2 (4)	10 (22)
1990	48	18 (38)	15 (31)	2 (4)	7 (15)	10 (21)	3 (6)	4 (8)	2 (4)	2 (4)	4 (8)	13 (27)
1991	49	16 (33)	17 (35)	3 (6)	6 (12)	11 (22)	2 (4)	1 (2)	4 (8)	1 (2)	1 (2)	13 (27)
1992	48	11 (23)	9 (19)	9 (19)	11 (23)	4 (8)	5 (10)	4 (8)	4 (8)	3 (6)	3 (6)	13 (27)
1993	49	5 (10)	7 (14)	14 (29)	5 (10)	4 (8)	13 (27)	5 (10)	3 (6)	1 (2)	1 (2)	22 (45)
1994	50	11 (22)	6 (12)	15 (30)	7 (14)	11 (22)	4 (8)	5 (10)	3 (6)	1 (2)	2 (4)	21 (42)
1995	33	9 (27)	3 (9)	15 (45)	1 (3)	6 (18)	5 (15)	6 (18)	1 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	12 (36)
1996	29	10 (34)	3 (10)	4 (14)	5 (17)	2 (7)	1 (3)	1 (3)	2 (7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (31)
1997	46	11 (24)	6 (13)	10 (22)	6 (13)	5 (11)	4 (9)	4 (9)	2 (4)	2 (4)	3 (7)	21 (46)
1998	19	2 (11)	2 (11)	5 (26)	3 (16)	1 (5)	2 (11)	2 (11)	1 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (42)
<i>total</i>	425	119 (28)	88 (21)	80 (19)	68 (16)	59 (14)	43 (10)	35 (8)	28 (7)	16 (4)	16 (4)	157 (37)

Note: Based on content analysis of the *Australian Financial Review's* 'Corporate Woman' column, between 18<sup>th</sup> October 1988 and 10<sup>th</sup> June 1998. Archived full-text articles accessed via Factiva. Columns denote the main topic(s) covered in each column. *Work*: women in work in general. *Care*: childcare, family responsibilities, elder care. *Leadership* women in corporate leadership. *Legislation*: affirmative action, the Sex Discrimination Act, other legal issues. *Overseas*: trends in women's corporate work elsewhere. *Professions*: women's work in professions, primarily accounting, law, and banking. *Representation*: women's appearance in media and culture. *Finances*: women's financial independence and the superannuation gap. *Pay*: gender pay gap. *Education*: women's participation in secondary and tertiary education. *Other*: related issues, including women's entrepreneurship, admittance to social spaces, industry associations, political leadership or women in sport.

Figure 1: Content analysis of 'Corporate Woman' column, 1988-1998



Note: Based on percentage data in table 1.

Table 2: Framing of leadership columns, 1988-1998.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Equality (%)</b>	<b>Business case (%)</b>	<b>Individual (%)</b>	<b>Collective (%)</b>	<b>Choice (%)</b>	<b>Structural barriers (%)</b>
1988	0	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
1989	3	3 (100)	2 (67)	2 (100)	3 (100)	1 (33)	1 (33)
1990	2	2 (100)	2 (100)	2 (67)	2 (100)	0 (0)	2 (100)
1991	3	3 (100)	2 (67)	2 (56)	1 (33)	0 (0)	2 (67)
1992	9	8 (89)	6 (67)	5 (64)	6 (67)	2 (22)	5 (56)
1993	14	10 (71)	7 (50)	9 (67)	5 (36)	2 (14)	5 (36)
1994	15	14 (93)	9 (60)	10 (60)	9 (60)	4 (27)	14 (93)
1995	15	12 (80)	7 (47)	9 (60)	10 (67)	4 (27)	9 (60)
1996	4	3 (75)	1 (25)	2 (50)	4 (100)	0 (0)	1 (25)
1997	10	6 (60)	4 (40)	1 (10)	7 (70)	1 (10)	5 (50)
1998	5	5 (100)	3 (60)	1 (20)	3 (60)	2 (40)	3 (60)
total	80	66 (83)	43 (54)	43 (54)	50 (63)	16 (20)	47 (59)

Note: Based on content analysis of columns on women in corporate leadership in the *Australian Financial Review's* 'Corporate Woman' column, between 18<sup>th</sup> October 1988 and 10<sup>th</sup> June 1998. Archived full-text articles accessed via Factiva. Sample size based on the number of 'leadership' columns, from table 1. Remaining columns denote the main framing or perspective offered in each leadership column, as a percentage of total leadership columns. *Equality*: advocated for women in corporate leadership based on a fair and just society. *Business case*: advocated for women in corporate leadership based on the economic benefits to corporations and the economy. *Individual*: advised women reach career milestones through individual achievement and adjustments to their own behaviour. *Collectivism*: discussion of feminism, need for affirmative action, and women's 'natural' managerial 'style'. *Choice*: argued women were free to choose whatever life and career path they desired. *Structural barriers*: acknowledgment of societal barriers to women's advancement, including gender roles, childcare provision, the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling.