

Feminisms in Social Work and Social Care: Backwards, Forwards or Something in Between

Short Title: 'Feminisms in Social Work and Social Care'

The various feminisms create a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. Within social work and social care there has been a mixed reception. However, it is maintained that a gendered analysis in a profession where women remain in the majority remains highly relevant. In particular, the continuing and increasing pay gap and the relatively low numbers of women in senior positions are used as markers. Similarly, comparisons between 'choice' feminism and current practices are appraised. It is argued that critical deconstructive analyses drawn from postmodern feminism remain significant in both naming and addressing pervasive gender inequalities in national and International arenas.

Key words Feminisms, Social Work, Social Care, Deconstructive Analysis

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Introduction

There are clearly many feminisms, with these including #MeToo campaigns, profeminism, postfeminism and postmodern feminism. Forms of feminism have also continued to be described in waves with a 'third' and 'fourth' wave following the iconic second wave. It also needs to be acknowledged that within the different forms there are a range of variations. Different analyses direct attention toward different areas. Some focus on progress, others concentrate on the implications of the feminist backlash together with recidivism and fatigue about feminist issues, some reformulate the many feminisms into a range of tailored narratives and others both critique and reframe debates in ways which are relevant for contemporary situations. As a result, it is not surprising that feminisms generally have a very mixed place within social work and social care. Theoretical complexities can cause many to regard these perspectives as lacking meaningful practical connections. In this article, however, it is argued that theoretical perspectives, particularly critical deconstructive analyses drawn from postmodern feminism, remain important and retain a practical relevance in both naming and addressing pervasive gender inequalities. In order to demonstrate this continued significance, the gender pay gap and promotion prospects for women have been chosen as useful markers to both assess progress towards parity and to draw attention to key areas which particularly affect the large numbers of women working in these fields.

Although, there is an emphasis on the United Kingdom International comparisons are made and the analysis is highly relevant for an International audience.

A statistical portrait

Cree (2018) and Cree and Phillips (2019) argue that real and persistent inequalities are increasingly being obscured by a policy and practice agenda that apparently embraces feminism, whilst at the same time, particularly in western contexts, commodifies, co-opts and nullifies it. In this light it is notable that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures for 2018 for the United Kingdom show that women comprise 82% of all social workers, with men accounting for only 18% of the total. Of the 82%, 22% of women work part time, although all 18% of men work full time (ONS, EMPO4, 2018). Skills for Care estimated in 2017 that there were 1.45 million people working in adult social care in the United Kingdom. The gender breakdown mirrors that of social work, with over 80% being women and under 20%, men. Despite there only being a relatively small numbers of men working in Social Care, 33% are more likely to work in senior management positions (www.skillsforcare.org.uk, 2017). Carter (2019), using ONS data, illustrates that rather than diminishing, the gender pay gap in social work is increasing, with in April 2019, the average female social worker in the United Kingdom being paid 3.4% less than her male counterpart. In social care the gap is greater with women's mean hourly wage being 12.3% lower than that of men (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019). This largely corresponds to gender pay gaps in other female dominated areas such as nursing. Ward (2018) points out that not only are jobs undertaken primarily by women generally undervalued, but if over time the proportion of women in a specific sector increases, then the average rate of pay tends to decrease still further. In terms of women in senior positions, the data is mixed. The most recently available

information for the health and social care workforce shows that although women are represented in the highest paid positions, two thirds of the lowest paid posts are occupied by women (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019). The average gender pay gap for health and social services managers and directors also remains at 16.9% (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019).

Although direct social work and social care appraisals are not available, general International comparisons show that the global labour force participation rate is 49% for women and 75% for men (ILO, 2018). This shows a 25% difference on average, although in some regions this rises to 50%. Accordingly, 46% of working age women are employed globally, with 3% being unemployed and 51% remaining outside the labour force (ILO, 2018). The World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2020 (TWEFGGR, 2020) shows that the top country in terms of gender pay parity remains Iceland for the 11th year running, with the United Kingdom not even featuring in the top ten. Those countries which do appear in the table after Iceland, in order of ranking are: Norway, Finland, Sweden, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Ireland, Spain, Rwanda and Germany. However, the situation remains mixed. Overall there have been gains, particularly in terms of an increase in the number of women in senior positions in the labour market. France is top of the scale with women on average comprising at least one third of boards of directors. The TWEFGGR 2020 Report regards a 'role model' effect as producing results in relation to an increase in the number of senior positions occupied, although the Report acknowledges that wage parity is still very far from being achieved. However, at senior political levels women remain seriously under represented. In 2019, Internationally, women accounted for 25.2% of parliamentary (lower-house) seats and just 21.2% of ministerial positions.

The picture is very different lower down the scale in the wider labour market. With regard to economic participation and opportunity, gender parity has declined to 57.8%, and it has been estimated that it will take at least 257 years before gender parity can theoretically be achieved (TWEFGGR, 2020). Three key reasons are outlined in the Report as contributing to this.

These are: that women tend to have a greater representation in roles that are being automated; that not enough women are entering professions where wage growth is the most pronounced (for example, technology), and that women continue to be beset by insufficient care infrastructures and restricted access to capital. Allied to these are enduring macro topographies such as structural inequalities, pervasive gendered ideologies and historical religious hegemony as well as meso factors associated with caring responsibilities, role load and part time as opposed to full time work patterns. Women are also overrepresented in vulnerable jobs such as those with zero hours contracts or where they are ‘helping out’ in relatives’ businesses (ILO, 2018).

Clearly there are many differences between women in different countries. Culture, politics and context are very important and women’s movements in different countries have drawn from a range of strands within the many feminisms and there have been successes. However, there is still a long way to go, particularly in the fields of social work and social care.

International practices vary but there are similarities between areas – such as pay and promotion in particular - where the lack of parity remains significant (Domingues-Amoros, 2021; Rubery, 2015).

With regard to the gendered implications of Covid 19, across countries and cultures, it is notable that gender has featured significantly. Although women have been less likely to die from Covid-19 than men (ONS, 6.10. 2020; Lawton, 16.4. 2020), the measures introduced to

prevent the spread of the virus disproportionately affected women. An online survey produced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the UCL Institute of Education (Andrew et al, 27.5. 2020) which took place between 29.4.2020 and 15. 5.2020 showed that in relation to mothers, they were 47% more likely to have permanently lost their job or quit and were 14% more likely to have been furloughed. In relation to those carrying out paid work at home, mothers were more likely than fathers to be spending their working hours simultaneously trying to care for children. (Andrew et al, IFS, 27.5. 2020; Anderson and Parker, 18.8. 2020; Adam-Prassl et al., 17. 8. 2020). In relation to social work, this draws attention to the pressures placed on social workers who are mothers. It also has clear implications for the work undertaken by social workers with families.

Acknowledged Reasons for Gender Disparity in terms of Pay and Representation Within Social Work and Social Care

Wendt and Moulding (2017) emphasise that engagement with feminisms has become more nuanced over time and not only includes recognition of oppressive structural gender power inequalities but also social constructions of gender, the intersection of gender with other social inequalities and the ways in which this affects women's agency. In this light, gender disparity in terms of pay and promotion within social work and social care should be clearly and firmly on the agenda. However, in the United Kingdom as well as internationally, the reasons given for gender differences in terms of pay and representation have remained largely consistent, individualised and not subjected to the sustained scrutiny one would expect.

Explanations relate to continuing disparities in terms of differential performance scores and promotion rates, variations in starting salaries and bonuses, more women being recruited into

lower paying positions and women and men leaving organisations at different rates (ILO, 2018; Department of Health and Social Care, 2019). Gendered life course patterns associated with child care also often result in women taking time out during periods often regarded as critical in the working life span, resulting in missed or late promotions. Parental leave has altered the picture to a small degree, but in the United Kingdom one to two weeks paternity leave with 90% paternity pay is unlikely to make a significant difference. Shared Parental Leave, whereby new parents or adopters can share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay, could prove to be more productive, although a survey carried out by US based DoveMen+Care in association with Promundo in 2018 indicated that many men see shared leave as taking a leave entitlement away from the mother. They surveyed seven countries and found that although 85% of fathers wanted to take parental leave only 33% actually did, largely for financial reasons (58%) (DoveMen+Care/Promundo, 2018). However, it is notable that Germany introduced two months parental leave specifically for fathers in 2007 and saw the take up rate increase from 3.3% to 29.3% by 2012 (Edwards, 2019).

With regard to gendered perceptions of child rearing, it is also notable that the Dove Men+Care/Promundo survey showed that 84% of fathers regarded themselves as being the main financial provider for the family, with this being echoed by 82% of mothers (DoveMen+Care/Promundo, 2018). This needs to be looked at alongside the ILO/Gallop survey carried out in 2016 which was based on interviews with nearly 149,000 adults in 142 countries and territories. They found that a total of 70% of women and 66% of men said that they would prefer that women work at paid jobs as opposed to caring for families full time. It is notable that each of these figures is more than double the percentage of those who said they would prefer women to stay at home, although there was an implicit assumption that women in paid employment would also predominantly maintain caring roles, significantly increasing

the pressure on women overall. Gallup/ILO (2016) make it clear that this total includes a majority of women who are not currently in the workforce, but that it also applies to regions such as the Arab states where women's labour force participation is traditionally low.

Although the Gallup/ILO (2016) survey found that families continue to play a significant role in determining attitudes, with 61% of women in households where it is not acceptable for women to work outside the home concurring with the family view, there were also 36% of women in such households stating that they would like to work in paid jobs. In terms of turning aspirations into reality, it was highlighted that women continue to face very different challenges in different parts of the world. However, in both developed and emerging economies, the lack of affordable childcare facilities and the gender pay disparity were highlighted as enduring features (Gallup/ILO, 2016).

Disparities between younger and older workers are often ignored, but an ONS survey in 2019 carried out in the UK looked at differences between male and female workers in the 52 – 69 year age range who had taken on 'caring'¹ responsibilities for a parent, spouse, grandchild or for others. These figures showed that for older women in particular 'caring' responsibilities remain significant and wide ranging. Accordingly, one in four older working women take on caring responsibilities compared to one in eight older working men. Men tend to provide care for a spouse which accounts for at least a quarter of all 'care' provided by men, whilst older women take on 'caring' responsibilities for both relatives and non-relatives. Two thirds of men 'caring' for a spouse are likely to remain in full time work, whilst men undertaking more wide ranging 'caring' responsibilities, are less likely to remain in work. Of those older women in work undertaking 'caring' responsibilities, two thirds work part time compared to 24% of men (ONS, 2019).

¹ It is fully acknowledged that 'caring' is a multifaceted activity with strong reciprocal aspects. The ONS survey mainly, but not exclusively refers to 'caring' as the provision of assistance.

These figures do not take account of the multifaceted nature of caring, nor differences and disparities between women as well as amongst men both within and outside the work force. However, they do present an indicative picture which shows that trends are at best mixed and that gender equality, even in terms of straightforward markers such as pay and promotional opportunities, still, perhaps remarkably in the third decade of the twenty first century have a considerable way to go.

There are surprisingly few studies of the gender pay gap and promotional prospects which look specifically at social work and social care. Davey back in 2002 looked specifically at the social work and social care workforce and highlighted the disproportionality of women in relation to men and their significant under representation in middle and senior management positions. She also reported that whilst it was unusual to find a male fieldworker not committed to an upward managerial trajectory irrespective of age and family commitments, women's interests remained largely offset by career breaks, part time working and an emphasis on practice, with, as highlighted in the ONS 2019 survey, family responsibilities disproportionately affecting the working patterns of older women.

Theoretical Constructs Drawn from the Various Feminisms

It would be impossible to do justice to the range of feminisms in this article and the discussion focuses on recent debates as these are seen to be particularly pertinent to ongoing gender disparities in the workplace. Clearly, the term 'feminism' means different things to different people. Supporters of 'second wave' feminism, as well as socialist feminism,

standpoint feminism and black feminism, can still be wary of the apparent relativity contained in some manifestations of postmodern feminism. There are also similarities between ‘postfeminism,’ ‘third wave’ and ‘choice’ feminisms in the emphasis on moving away from second wave identities and structural inequalities and on foregrounding individualism and personal choice (Matos, 2015). ‘Choice’ feminisms in particular have been described as incorporating ‘we have it all perspectives’ (Hirshman, 2006; Rottenberg, 2014 and Budgeon, 2015). Budgeon (2015) views ‘choice’ feminism as generally being clustered around a range of related aspects. These emphasise individualism and regard every woman as being able to best make the choices that suit her, regardless of what these choices might be. Structural underpinnings for gender inequality are largely disregarded with those espousing forms of ‘choice’ feminism claiming that it is their right and their decision to, for example, participate in pornography or take on roles labelled as exploitative and degrading by those who view feminism(s) as a means of critically analysing and calling out pervasive inequalities and divisions. ‘Choice’ feminists recognise other forms of feminisms, but regard any criticism as judgemental and as non supportive of the personal choices made.

These ‘choice’ parameters serve to change the old second wave feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ into one where personal is about individual specificity with choice becoming politicized as a ‘right’. Rather than emphasis being placed on challenging covert and overt social, cultural and economic practices and a disproportionately weighted infrastructure, it becomes individualised with the woman herself taking on responsibility for the turn her life takes. Accordingly, she assumes personal responsibility for making things happen by the pursuit of ambition and personal transformation (McRobbie, 2009; Genz, 2009; Budgeon, 2015).

At this point, it is also useful to consider the #MeToo movement. This movement has proved groundbreaking in terms of women speaking out, but it also contains within it contradictions and disparities (Boyle 2019). Accordingly, on the one hand overt sexism is highlighted and is named as exploitation, discrimination and abusive manipulation, however, on the other, there is a tendency to emphasise ongoing vulnerability and selectivity with persistent inequalities and power differentials being downplayed. As a result, covert forms of discrimination can be seen to continue to weave an even greater array of insidious gossamer like threads, arguably making it harder to address glass ceiling issues such as, promotion, pay and the constructive tackling of career breaks.

Within social work and social care, as in other workforces, pervasive inequalities are increasingly being related to ‘choice’ and individual issues prioritised over shared commonalities. Accordingly, career breaks, working part time and prioritising practitioner over managerial roles, all of which in the current system have a negative promotional effect, are being framed as personal choices. This is serving to gloss over enduring barriers and systemic inequities. A study which highlights these aspects was carried out by Gill et al (2017). As a means of further exploring how contemporary women view the various feminisms, they subjected previous research they had undertaken to a form of discourse analysis. Their research focused on the negotiation of gendered inequalities in the workplace and spanned a ten-year period from 2003 to 2013. It included a number of countries including the UK, Germany and Switzerland.

The overarching theme they found was how the women who had participated in the various studies downplayed gender and generally minimized sexism in the workplace. An example is that the women who took part frequently referred to how they had not personally experienced

sexism or other forms of gender discrimination. This was in the context of ongoing and pervasive structural inequalities within a number of different workplaces which included disparities in pay, tenure and the number of women in senior positions. They also found that the women generally saw themselves as unlikely to experience a 'glass ceiling'. Of those who did present personal experiences of gender discrimination, these tended to be viewed as 'one off' events and something they personally had to deal with, clearly positioning the experience as an individual rather than a structural or socio political or economic issue. Overall, Gill et al (2017) reported that patterns of accounting were underwritten by four distinctive repertoires. The first of these was that gender inequalities were routinely allocated to the past. The second was associated with gender inequalities being acknowledged but regarded as occurring in other countries or contexts or in a previous era. An example is that 'I did not get the job not because of my gender but because of my age or, as there are fewer women working in this field in this country, there are fewer women working in this area in the company'. In this context it was notable that the women rarely referred to gender pay gaps and to promotional opportunities or the lack of them. Thirdly there was a tendency to support claims that gender equality exists by repeating media comments about women being the advantaged sex. There was a belief that there was a political will to increase the number of women in key positions in the workforce generally and that women occupying minority positions were advantaged as they stood out. Finally, they identified a repertoire where the women generally accepted the status quo as 'just how things are' (Gill et al, 2017:5). As a result, there was an unquestioning acceptance of men's entitlement to inhabit particular roles in the workplace and a belief that rather than doing things differently, for example, forming or joining a women's business network, it was more advantageous to operate 'like a man'. Similarly, women leaving the workforce after the birth of a baby or taking a career break was simply seen as a personal choice, rendering an historical, contemporary and masculinist shaping of

the business world, invisible and hidden. Additionally, they noted a general sense of complacency and a general acceptance that women from a younger generation could enjoy the equality fought for and won by a previous generation of women. Underpinning this position, Gill et al (2017) point to a pervasive belief in linear forward progress, in an assumption that things can only get better and an acceptance that this would happen automatically and would not need to be fought for and maintained.

These findings are interesting. They are qualitatively orientated, but they have a distinctive resonance particularly in terms of an acceptance that the prioritization of child care responsibilities and career breaks are personal choices and that the consequences are also personal and not related to entrenched and, as far as women are concerned, discriminatory working practices. There is an emphasis on battles being won and individual choice being the driving force for what happens in a woman's life. However, the evidence continues to undermine such perspectives. For example, although some companies and public organisations do take positive note of career breaks, the prevailing emphasis tends to be on job retention, rather than on ensuring that such breaks do not affect future promotional opportunities. These policies indicate constructive movement, but, overall, appear to be making little difference to the number of women in key positions and to the gender pay gap.

As highlighted in this article, there are considerable differences between women in the workplace and not all those who have achieved senior positions support other women in their organisations. Dabrowski (2021) carried out a qualitative study which looked at feminism in the context of austerity. She concentrated on how 'middle class' women who espouse feminism view other women affected by austerity in the workplace and in other spheres of life. She found that for these women, austerity promoted a neoliberal form of feminism where

distance, class and racialised distinctions, and it is possible to say personal position and choices made, were used to highlight lack of resilience, poor lifestyle choices and lack of a positive mental attitude. She concludes that this form of distancing appeared to form an essential element of the austerity project. Rather than addressing gender inequality and structural divisions, almost the opposite occurred with hierarchical relationships and gendered socio-economic inequalities being foregrounded. This study has an unfortunate resonance with critiques of second wave feminism by Black women and women in low socio-economic positions. It also highlights how 'choice' attributes can affect views held.

It is also useful to look at the attitudes of students, particularly social work students, towards 'feminism'. Cree and Dean (2015) undertook a study of UK social work students' attitudes towards feminism and the perceived relevance of feminist theory to social work practice. Their survey involved social media, specifically twitter and encompassed seven universities with 332 students from undergraduate and postgraduate courses taking part. Of these, 85.5% identified as female and 14.5%, as male. The students generally saw feminism as being about rights and a belief in equality between the sexes. A number pointed to men as well as women experiencing negative outcomes as a result of patriarchy. In terms of current issues, equality, particularly with regard to pay and equal opportunities in employment, rights and resisting gender stereotyping, came to the fore. However, within the responses there were contradictions. Cree and Dean (2015) remarked that although many broadly agreed with feminist concepts, there was a tendency to see feminism as perhaps having acquired a bad name and accordingly there was a reluctance to identify as a feminist or pro feminist. As with 'choice' feminism, there was a clear emphasis on individual views and personal choices taking precedence over perceived feminist ideas.

These studies highlight that for many the critical edge of the various feminisms has become muted. They have an historical place and some ongoing relevance, but identifying as a 'feminist' is often not seen to be appropriate. As a result, there is an emphasis on the exercise of individual choice taking precedence over an ongoing critical examination of gendered power disparities and structural inequalities.

Social Work, Social Care and Feminisms

As highlighted, the various feminisms currently occupy a contested, ambivalent and paradoxical place within the very broad social work and social care fields. Just as there are differences and contradictions within feminism, there are differences and contradictions within the arena of social work and social care. The latter arena is premised on the principles of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice and on promoting social justice and equity. Nevertheless, there are tensions. Within social work and social care, the operation of these principles has often operated in parallel with practices based on neo liberal constructs which contain inbuilt gendered assumptions and which do not routinely encourage analysis or constructive change (Cree, 2018; Wendt and Moulding, 2016). As a result, there can be seen to be areas of overlap with 'choice' feminism, with some social work and social care practices remaining predicated on a range of interrelated, underlying and rarely interrogated operational and structural aspects. An example is how the demands of set procedures and operating systems which, once established, become difficult to challenge, work flexibly with and change, can work against situation specific, relationship-based practices. Similarly, as many authors have highlighted, within social work and social care, like in many other areas of public service, professional skills, autonomy and judgement have largely given way to standardised ways of operating and systematic reporting systems where IT configurations

dictate responses (Spolander, 2014; Strier, 2019). The emphasis on micromanagement can devalue working relationships between social workers and social care workers and those they serve with the danger that the latter can be responded to in homogenised and limited ways. As part of this process of particular working practices becoming ingrained, so employment policies can be taken for granted and unquestioningly accepted. The key example is that women rarely question employment procedures that position career breaks as personal individualized choices, even though this is one of the key reasons cited as to why there remain gendered pay gaps and there are fewer women in key management positions than men (Davey, 2002; ILO, 2018).

There are also further overlaps with ‘choice’ feminism in relation to the growth of ‘resilience’ and even ‘mindfulness’ within the fields of social work and social care and the concomitant emphasis on individual responsibility (Purser, 2019). Galpin et al (2019; 2020) argue that ‘stress’ has become individualised and that both government and local authority regulations expect those working in this arena to take on the weight of responsibility and to work on themselves to reduce stress. They point to 35% of social workers leaving local authorities within two years of qualifying, with 33% leaving within 5 years (Department of Education, 2019). They maintain that this workforce instability has been labelled a personnel orientated recruitment and retention issue with systemic issues, such as fewer resources, greater restrictive bureaucracy and higher caseloads, being downplayed. They express concern that responsibility continues to be placed on individuals, rather than on organisations and government policies.

Internationally, although there is considerable variation within and between societies and cultures, there are also clear parallels which can be drawn between current working practices

in the arena of social work and social care and pervasive ways of thinking such as ‘choice’ feminism. The fields of social work and social care, as with other areas of work, are subject to embedded working practices which can further entrench historical and intersectoral disadvantage and present gender pay gaps and promotional opportunities as reflecting individual judgements and ‘how things are’ generally. As a result, it can be argued that it is time to take stock and to re-emphasise in a contemporary form, deconstructive analyses which peel away the layers of taken for granted working practices to present different scenarios which have the potential to result in different understandings and outcomes.

Postmodern feminism, as with all feminisms, has many manifestations. Postmodernism has been seen to adopt a pluralism and relativism that has been subject to a range of feminist critiques (for example, Brodrib, 1992; Jackson, 1992). However, postmodern feminism can also be seen to fully acknowledge difference, diversity and intersectionality and to reject the rationalisation of inequalities on the basis of ‘this is how things are’. There is an analysis of power dynamics and imbalances and drawing from key postmodern feminist writers such as Nicholson, 1995; Williams, 1996; Fawcett, 2000, 2015; Matos, 2015), it is possible to present a version of postmodern feminism-in-context which analyses and challenges covert and overt inequalities and discrimination. As a result, feminism-in-context can be seen to have something to offer in terms of challenging gendered pervasive disparities, whilst at the same time constructively critiquing the prevailing emphasis on individualism and apparent unfettered choice. This form of postmodern feminism takes issue with ‘taken for granted’ ways of operating and subjects practices to critical and deconstructive interrogation so that systems, routines and procedures can be critically examined. It is not about simply identifying differences but exploring how these differences have been constructed and the ongoing implications of these. Similarly, it is not so much about finding causes for divisions,

but about the meanings attached, how these intersect and how these meanings are affected by different contexts. Deconstructive scrutiny drawn from postmodern feminist analyses can inform appraisal and action in a range of intersecting areas including racism, LGBTQIA+, ageism and disablism. Postmodern-feminism-in-context draws attention to the consequences of an emphasis on individualism and ‘choice’ without essentialising positions. At the same time, it brings to bear an ongoing deconstructive critique which can both critically examine and address continuing gendered inequalities and focus attention on practical, tangible aspects such as the pay gap and promotional opportunities.

Deconstructive analyses drawn from postmodern-feminism-in context are not prescriptive in form, but key questions can be posed which facilitate the untangling of what have often become rigid and intertwined positions or ways of operating. These include taking account of specific situations and looking beneath the surface of statements such as ‘this is the way things are’ or ‘the system does not allow it’; appraising prevailing assumptions; reviewing underlying drivers for policies and practices; assessing individualising expectations; considering the implications of particular ways of operating for involved participants; exploring different ways of understanding what appears to be going on and working out, with those concerned, strategies for action. This is not to imply that practice in social work and social care does not contain a critical edge or that intersecting power dynamics always operate in a particular way, rather it is to draw from postmodern-feminism-in context critiques and to argue that there is an ongoing relevance in these analyses for women, as well as men employed in the fields of social work and social care.

Concluding Remarks

Men, like women hail from all classes, ethnicities and backgrounds. Women are not victims, neither are men victors or perpetrators. Men and women are diverse and complicated.

However, there remain prevailing themes which are insidious and resistant to change. In social work and social care workplaces, as in other arenas, these continue to relate to the ongoing gender pay gap and the disproportionate number of men in senior positions given the overall composition of the workforce.

Current modern neoliberal governmentality ostensibly favours 'choice', with 'choice' being presented as a fundamental freedom. However, the promotion of 'choice' is very much at an individual level, carrying with it responsibility for the actions following from the choices made. As a result, entrenched, embedded, ingrained and divisive social, cultural, religious and economic imbalances can remain under the radar, subject to reduced critical scrutiny, with the ongoing relevance for women being gradually and consistently eroded. The shaping of the choices available is also becoming increasingly hidden. In this light it can be argued that postmodern-feminism-in-context brings to the fore strong, deconstructive critiques which seek to uncover and address pervasive, intersectional and interacting power discrepancies and imbalances. Feminisms generally are being presented as irrelevant, having historical, but not contemporary significance, with identification as a feminist who is concerned about pervasive gender imbalances not being fashionable or cutting edge. However, in the arena of social work and social care, very basic equalities, such as those relating to pay and the number of women in senior positions has not been met, nor is it likely to be in the near future. Postmodern-feminism-in-context is not a movement or entity, but rather promotes the unravelling of static threads. These relate to naming the issues, to promoting ongoing deconstructive analysis and to taking action in various places and in a range of ways. These are all areas of considerable importance to women and to men working in these fields across

the globe. There is not one single way forward, but postmodern-feminism-in -context analyses can be seen to have considerable contemporary relevance in the arena of social work and social care.

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