

Self-financed project: Affects of Postfeminism

Affects of Postfeminism: A look into the everyday-worlds of post-feminist self-concepts

Ass.-Prof. Dr. Katharina Hametner & Natalie Rodax, MSc.

A central dichotomy dominates contemporary media representations of femininity: On the one hand discourses depict the ‘other’, ‘non-Western’ as living under patriarchal conditions, as being concerned with ‘traditional’ gender roles, and thus position ‘other’ women within ‘conservative’ relationships. On the other hand, discourses construct the ‘Western’ woman as ‘modern’ counterpart who freely and emancipated lives romantic relationship in which anything goes.

This second picture media-politically grounds on the discursive rhetoric that depicts both ‘Western’ genders as having an equal and free choice to decide which life s/he wants to live. The fact that ‘Western’ women are able to realise their full potential, not only within the domestic sphere but also in the world of (gainful) work is frequently seen as proof for this argument. However, postfeminist, neoliberalism-critical theories identify this as pseudo freedom of choice, as – especially during the last years – economic destabilisation (uncertain – e.g. temporal – employment, prolonged period of education, changes to welfare regime, etc.) gave rise to traditional relationship models that provide an economically stable living.

From a postfeminist point of view, the ideal of free choice – that continues to be central in discourses – thus masks patriarchal entanglements transferring them to ‘non-Western’ areas and maintaining gender-hierarchies. By applying a qualitative research design, we deploy a psychological analysis on how this postfeminist imperatives and ambivalences of free choice find entrance in the everyday worlds of women. We ask how women negotiate their womanhood against the backdrop of postfeminist discursive interpellations and based on this, how they develop their own gendered self-concepts. By adopting an explicit psychological analysis, we aim to explore how women experience and live their ‘modern’ womanhood and especially the various entanglements with different affects that are attributed to the freedom of choice narrative.

Thus, the project contributes to researching the concrete life worlds and affects beyond the already well-investigated media-cultural and –political postfeminist constructions of womanhood and provides insights on the „affective and psychic life of post-feminism“ (Gill, 2017) that is yet to be further explored.

→ SFU Research Project Database