

Woman, manage your life! The Life-Work Balance Discourse in Popular Management Literature Aimed at Women*

Maria Medina-Vicent

UNIVERSITAT JAUME I

medinam@uji.es

ORCID: 0000-0002-2716-6786

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ABSTRACT

Management posts have traditionally been held by men. Consequently, the business management normative model has dictated the rules women should follow. Among other reasons, this is why the issue of work-life balance has been sidelined in popular management literature. In keeping with these male-dictated rules, it was always blithely assumed that the manager's role was exclusively linked with his public presence — in other words, family and care issues were left out of the equation. However, as more and more women have become managers, new issues have shaped the management agenda.

In this paper, we study how the issue of work-life balance has been incorporated in popular management literature for women. We are particularly interested in identifying whether the discourse on women's presence in management enshrines: (1) a transformative, egalitarian vision (requiring policies fostering work-life balance), or (2) a view that sees women's traditional household roles as something belonging to the private sphere, leaving them disadvantaged and bereft of support as they pursue their management careers.

Keywords: management literature, gender perspective, work-life balance.

Corresponding author: Maria Medina-Vicent, Departamento de Filosofía y Sociología. Universitat Jaume I. Av. Sos Baynat, s/n. 12071 Castelló de la Plana (Spain).

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INTRODUCTION

Analysing popular Management literature is one of the best ways to familiarise oneself with the business management discourse in today's Neo-Liberal society. The main reason this is so is because such works reflect

and spread the most popular management fashions (Collins, 2000; Clark, 2004). To the extent that corporate managers consume industrial quantities of such literature, one way or another the discourses in these works end up shaping business management and imbuing it with certain values, principles of action, and rationales.

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We should also bear in mind that business management's ideology forms part of the discourses in the economic, political, technological, social, and cultural spheres (Fernández Rodríguez and Gantman, 2011, p. 161; Fernández Rodríguez and Medina-Vicent, 2017). That is why it is worth seeking the keys to today's discourse on work-life balance, and to identify what companies have to say on the issue. Managers are the people charged with interpreting and applying management principles (Gowler and Legge, 1986) to matters such as the ones covered in this paper. Hence the importance of uncovering the kinds of discourses on life-work balance found in management literature aimed at women. Here, one needs to consider that the underlying premises found in the sub-genre influence management practice and thus condition the presence of women in companies — especially in senior posts.

We therefore look at the management literature focusing specifically on women when dealing with the issue of work-life balance. One should bear in mind that while most management literature is theoretically neutral, it nevertheless caters to an overwhelmingly male audience and therefore does not broach the matter. That is to say, the segment of management literature aimed at women has only begun to tackle the life-work balance issue. That in itself is a clear sign of the highly masculine bias in the management world.¹ In this context, before embarking on our analysis we need to briefly cover the phenomenon of management literature aimed at women. To begin with, one should recall that the business sphere has traditionally been a man's world and thus many of its structures and leadership models are male ones (Baxter, 2010; Hearn and Collinson, 1996). This trait is reflected in the popular management literature aimed at women (Kelan, 2008).

¹ According to data from Spain's *Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades* [Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities], specifically data from *Mujeres en Cifras-Poder y Toma de Decisiones-Poder Económico* [Women in Figures: Power, Decision-making, Economic Power] in 2018, women made up just 2.90 % of CEOs in Spain's IBEX-35 index of the biggest publicly-quoted companies, and a meagre 14.30 % of management posts. These figures have remained static since 2014.

From our point of view, the gradual incorporation of women in management posts is a prerequisite for the appearance of women's management literature (Orser and Elliott, 2015). If the target audience for managerial literature mainly comprises managers — as Pagel and Westerfelhaus (2005: 421) findings bear out — the logical deduction is that incorporating the gender variable leads to segmentation of the reader base precisely because it now includes women managers. Given this situation, the target audience of popular management literature over the last few decades has shifted to make managers identify with corporate story-telling.

In a nutshell, business is still mainly a man's world, especially when it comes to senior management. It is therefore little wonder that popular management literature reflects this. This bias is self-evident in the way men make up the ranks of management gurus (Clark and Salaman, 1996), and the scant attention paid to gender issues in the management field (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Nevertheless, in books targeting career women, we find the emergence of issues that were hitherto seen as matters solely for women — including caring for home and family. That is why we must look at management literature specifically catering to career women if we are to tackle the discourse on life-work balance. By contrast, general management literature gives no clues on this score given that it basically caters to men.

This research paper has two goals. The first is to identify what the business management discourse on life-work balance is based upon. This is because we need to know whether the discourse takes a transformational, egalitarian vision fostering women's presence in senior management or, on the contrary, is based on stereotypes and excludes women by banishing such issues to the private realm.

Second, we take an ethical, feminist perspective on the work-life balance discourse found in said literature, seeking to discover whether it: (1) aims to doubly exploit women in both the productive and reproductive spheres, or; (2) liberates women from the imposition

of traditional gender roles. The ambivalence of the discourse on women managers' life-work balance and motherhood will reveal the dichotomies found in the employment world on both subjects.

The methodological approach taken in the discourse analysis of women' management literature focuses on the ideas and ideologies found in the works rather than on structural aspects. Here, the analysis follows the enunciative spoor in the texts and their behavioural advice for women in striking a work-life balance (and indirectly, in dealing with motherhood). Specifically, we seek to identify the values and behaviour patterns prescribed for mothers who are company managers, especially those holding senior posts.

Thus we must pay special attention to certain linguistic aspects of the prescriptive-imperative language used, and to the evaluative language. We use Appraisal Theory to analyse the aforementioned aspects in the works in our sample ² (Egins and Slade, 1997; Martin, 2000; Martin and White, 2005) because this offers a standard model for appraising the discourse and has been tried and proven in many academic contexts.

Using the indicators drawn up by Martin and White (2005), we make our selection based upon our research goals. First, we focus on the advice given to career women through mandates, imperative wordings, and/or prescriptions recommending behaviour, actions, or decisions, considering these in the light of our research goals. Here, we shall pay special attention to the modal verbs have to, must, ought to, should, can, could, do in both their positive and negative forms, given that they express need, obligation, and recommendations.

2 According to the author James R. Martin, *Appraisal Theory* refers to "the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations" (2000, p. 145). Thus said theory explores in what contexts and in what ways linguistic resources are used to express, negotiate, and naturalise given inter-subjective positions and, in the final analysis, the speakers' ideologies. This methodology is especially valuable because it leads us to negotiations on value judgements.

Second, we must identify the wordings that lead us to evaluative language — that is to say, those fragments that indicate actions and decisions that are deemed either 'good' or 'bad' for a woman's business career. Terms we label positive include: good, OK, right, value, nice, convenient, adequate, satisfying, possible. Terms labelled negative include: bad, wrong, mistake, error, failure, dissatisfying, impossible. Drawing on the methodological bases provided by Appraisal Theory, we shall discern which discourses run through the issue of life-work balance in this kind of literature. Here, we shall determine whether a transformational discourse is adopted or merely one that considers corporate women as mothers. Last but not least, to ensure our analysis is as broad as possible, we should also consider the following categories: work-life balance, personal life, care, children, family, motherhood.

IDENTIFYING PRO-BUSINESS LITERATURE

The burning question begged by this research is this: What values/behaviours/prescribed actions does popular management literature advocate for career women in relation to life-work balance and their roles as mothers? We therefore formulated the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis:

The values and behaviours prescribed for career women and mothers (especially those in senior management posts) reproduce traditional sexist, gender stereotypes, placing such women at a disadvantage compared with their male peers, thus fostering immoral companies in which there is no scope for gender equality.

Taking a corpus as "a finite collection of materials, previously selected by the analyst for further work, and in which the choice of items is necessarily arbitrary to a greater or lesser extent" (Barthes, 1997), we can see that it should mirror the complex system of oppositions and confluences found in the whole body of literature. Furthermore, it should also show

some homogeneity in terms of the research criteria chosen (a point that will be explained in the following paragraphs).

The first criterion covers chronology. In this case, we will focus our study on works published between 2010 and 2015 so as to analyse the most recent values bearing on women in companies. The second criterion covers geographical scope, which is important given that most works of this kind are written by English-speaking authors and are published in North America or in The United Kingdom (Fernández Rodríguez, 2007) — although they have been exported on a large scale elsewhere (Fernández Rodríguez, 2011; Gantman, 2017). The third criterion covers authors and their popularity. In the management world, reputation and fame are vital in spreading the ideas contained in such books. The fourth criterion covers book reviews by mass circulation newspapers and well-known authors. If it proved impossible to find a book's total sales when we were making the selection, we looked at the number of searches on the Amazon web site as a proxy (given that Amazon ranks titles in this literature field by popularity/number of sales to clients).

Amazon's 'quality rankings' are based on the number of web sales (Noguera, 2015). In our case, we centred on the 'Business & Money' category and within that, on the sub-category 'Women & Business', which is where the works making up our theoretical corpus are to be found. For search purposes, we used the following key words: women's leadership, female leadership, business, entrepreneurship, success. Here, one should note that the list of books produced by the Amazon search engine is based on the popularity and relevance of titles.

The sample produced as a result is listed below:

1. Mistakes I Made at Work: 5 Influential Women Reflect on What They Got Out of Getting It Wrong, by Jessica Bacal (2014).
2. Work with me. How Gender Intelligence can help you succeed at work and in life, by Barbara Annis and John Gray (2013).
3. How Women Lead: The 8 Essential Strategies Successful Women Know, by Sharon Hadary and Laura Henderson (2013).
4. Who Says It's a Man's World: The Girls' Guide to Corporate Domination, by Emily Bennington (2013).
5. Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead, by Sheryl Sandberg (2013).

THE DISCOURSE ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN POPULAR MANAGEMENT LITERATURE AIMED AT WOMEN

This section focuses on identification of the main premises in the discourse on life-work balance in popular management literature targeting women (hereinafter, 'the sub-genre' for short).

To begin with, one should note that work-life balance is one of the main subjects appearing in all the books chosen. This makes it reasonable to conclude that the subject is a central one in the sub-genre, even if it is not acknowledged as such. Nevertheless, instead of taking a common stance on the issue, each work takes a different line and in some cases, contradictory ones. Various citations on the issue are given below and from which one can draw conclusions.

First, one of the issues that crops up most often is the social pressure women feel in having to meet a host of demands, namely: having a successful career; having children; being faithful wives and good homemakers as demanded by tradition. Thus women are required to meet traditional gender roles in both the public and private spheres, and are expected to meet not only the demands of the socio-economic system but also those of family.

The pressure on women caused by such demands is acknowledged in these books. Nevertheless, the way the issue is tackled gives one reason to think that for women, having a career does not mean relinquishing traditional roles in the private sphere. Rather, there are grounds for believing that working women now suffer double exploitation of their time (Carrasquer, 2009).

Thus while all of the cited works recognise the heavy burdens placed on women as a result, the message they give to their readers is often contradictory, as can be seen from the citations below.

YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL

[She'd been thinking about the pressure that women can feel "to do everything"] (Bacal, 2014, p. 65)

[She can have it all. She just doesn't need to do it all!] (Annis and Gray, 2013, p. 240)

[A woman can be as ambitious as she wants to be, build a successful career that she can be proud of, and have a personal life that brings her joy and satisfaction — regardless of whether she's single or married, and with or without children or others to care for] (Annis and Gray, 2013, p. 241)

[Without fear, women can pursue professional success and personal fulfilment — and freely choose one, or the other, or both] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 24)

[The good news is that not only can women have both families and careers; they can thrive while doing so] (Sandberg, 2013, pp. 23-24)

[We need more portrayals of women as competent professionals and happy mothers — or even happy professionals and competent mothers] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 24)

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL

[You can't have a life and a career. Read what that woman executive is saying on her article, "You can't have it all"] (Annis y Gray, 2013, p. 240)

[But, they (women) realize they cannot be everything to everybody at the same time, and that's okay] (Hadary y Henderson, 2013, p. 145)

[Due to the scarcity of this resource, therefore, none of us can „have it all“, and those who claim to are most likely lying] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 121)

[Having it all is best regarded as a myth. And like many myths, it can deliver a helpful cautionary

message] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 121-122)

[Trying to do it all and expecting that it all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 123)

[Over the years, I learned that you can have it all —just not at the same time] (Bennington, 2013, p. 31)

Comparing these citations from the sampled works, one can appreciate a certain 'strategic ambiguity' (Eisenberg, 2009) in the authors' arguments. This stems from the contradictory advice given on how women should square their professional and personal lives. The bits of advice/prescriptions tendered to women are so vague that one really cannot say whether the books encourage their readers 'to have everything'³ (that is to say, to be successful managers and mothers at the same time) or 'not to have everything' (that is, to choose between either a career or having a family). In other words, we cannot say one way or the other whether the books advocate a 'career-comes-first model', a 'family-comes-first model' or a 'go-for-both model'.

The books thus do not urge a given behaviour pattern but rather adopt a 'free choice' discourse strongly linked to what one might call "The New Spirit of Capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002), which we shall discuss further on. Such 'strategic ambiguity' is counter-productive for readers, bearing in mind that women mainly buy such books to guide their actions in the company. Yet from our standpoint, such ambiguity comes as no great surprise given that the point of departure is one in which women are pinned down in 'no-man's land', bombarded by demands from all sides, and face diverse perils. By refraining from saying whether they 'can have it all' or 'not have it all', women are made all the more vulnerable, putting them in a position where any decision they make can

³ The dilemma of 'having it all' is strongly present in current Feminist political theory (Genz, 2010). While this does not always refer to work-life balance, it does reflect on the contradictions that women are subject to in the Neo-Liberal setting.

draw fire from society (Hayden and O'Brien, 2010). This Kafkaesque situation also follows the Neo-Liberal script (De Miguel, 2015).

Second, while strategic ambiguity is a key feature of the sub-genre, the analysis lends weight to the argument that the books in question generally reject the notion of a work-life balance. The authors consider that the concept does not reflect the experience of women who have both a career and a family, given that from their standpoint, such a lifestyle would imply two different lives, not a melding of both. Accordingly, no true balance is to be struck because the authors create two lifestyles for their readers and leave a yawning gap between them instead of finding a way to bridge them. Neither do the authors put forward any other concepts that might meet the needs of career women. This is odd given that the writers claim to know those needs so well. These shortcomings are palpable in the following citations:

[The idea of work-life balance is not necessarily helpful. If you are immersed in your work and raising a family, you might feel a lot of good things—but it may not include 'balanced'] (Bacal, 2014, p. 71).

[The idea of 'work-life balance' with the concept of 'managed disequilibrium' (a phrase she first heard from Google's Eileen Naughton) because no ambitious woman is ever going to feel that things are „in balance“. Instead, we have to find what's meaningful to us and create conditions in which we can thrive] (Annis and Gray, 2013, p. 103)

[The phrase 'work-life-personal life balance' suggests a need to create time equality between two competing lives, as if the possibility of finding an optimal distribution of time between both lives can be found. This is a near-possible task, particularly for women] (Annis and Gray, 2013, p. 231)

These passages also reveal another key idea in the books, namely the basis for choice. While it is clear that readers are entitled to make up their own minds, there is a discourse surrounding choice that leads us to the idea that at the end of the day, each woman

must decide for herself what her life priorities are. The books are imbued with a wholly individualist logic, as if work-life balance were an individual problem (that is to say, merely a question of deciding what is most important to us as women).

This approach trivialises the issue and minimises a problem that affects women's lives in today's society. Nevertheless, this individualisation of collective problems responds to a Neo-Liberal logic that, when it comes to gender issues, places the burden of guilt and responsibility on the shoulders of individuals (Gill and Scharff, 2011; Kelan, 2010), as one can see from the citations below:

[You have to decide what you want to do and when. Some women have chosen to have a family early and a career later; others have focused on their career early and had a family later. Many have decided to do both simultaneously. You do not need to focus exclusively on one or the other] (Hadary and Henderson, 2013, p. 37)

[Based on your values, you have to decide what aspects of your life take precedence at different times] (Hadary and Henderson, 2013, p. 146)

[You have to make one thing a priority and achieve balance that way, rather than trying to everything all at once] (Bennington, 2013, p. 31)

[They are told over and over again that they have to choose, because if they try to do too much, they'll be harried and unhappy] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 23)

[She decided how she wanted to manage her career and family and never claimed that her choice should apply to anyone else] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 161)

By heaping the burden of choice onto individual women, corporations are shirking their duty to manage such issues, leaving it up to governments to act in this field (Sørensen, 2017). We shall see that the issue of life-work balance affects the vast majority of women working in the public sector and who have families (whether children, or the elderly for whom they care). Yet despite this, the problem is dealt with as if it were

one of ‘personal organisation’, thus depoliticising the feminist struggle and once again applying a Neo-Liberal approach that disarticulates feminism (Park, Wahab, and Bhuyan, 2017). In other words, from the standpoint of these ‘self-help’ books, work-life balance is one that each woman must face for herself in splitting her time between work and family commitments. We thus again witness how these works skate over gender equality issues, taking a stance that treats such matters as purely personal ones. Needless to say, this individualist approach does nothing to change the world for the better:

[Many women have learned that what is more important is establishing rituals and routines your children can count on] (Hadary y Henderson, 2013, p. 154)

[Ask your family members what is most important to them. (Hadary y Henderson, 2013, p. 146)

[There will be times when you have to leave work to deal with your kids and times when you have to leave kids to deal with your work] (Bennington, 2013, p. 23)

[Decide where you are choosing to spend time and what can be cut immediately, knowing your boundaries will shift as your kids grow] (Bennington, 2013, p. 41)

[I had to decide what mattered and what didn’t and I learned to be a perfectionist in only the things that mattered] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 123)

As can be seen, instead of demanding more work-life balance policies within the corporate structure and shared responsibility in couples, such books only contribute to building a Neo-Liberal individualist argument in which women must learn to organise themselves to overcome the barriers they face (Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy, 2016). The sub-genre skates over the structural issues faced by women who find it impossible to strike a balance in their lives (Carrasquer, 2009; Moreno, Moncada, Llorens, and Carrasquer, 2010). The upshot is that they face a double burden: work and family. On this score, Sheryl Sandberg’s book (2013) refers to hiring helpers to look after children.

She cheerily notes that when a woman has a career and is a mother, she can always get other people to take charge of her offspring:

Even though Dave and I are extraordinarily fortunate and can afford exceptional child care, there are still difficult and painful decisions about how much time our jobs require us to be away from our family and who will pick up the slack. (Sandberg, 2013, p. 111)

[We hired a nanny, but she couldn’t solve all our problems] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 106)

[He reasoned that we were the central figures in our son’s life, but forming an attachment to a caregiver was good for his development] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 137)

[The ‘nanny issue’ is interesting for it reveals that both a key aspect of the problem has been passed over, and the homogeneity of the audience addressed by these books. The point is that not all women have the wherewithal to hire such services, which are dear to say the least. In other words, the writer speaks from a highly specific (privileged) position and comes up with hiring a nanny as a universal panacea when very few women can afford them. Sandberg’s well-heeled circumstances are hardly typical of most women. At the same time, one wonders whether the gender roles fostered by these books are the old ones, which do nothing to build greater sex equality. The measures she recommends give no help in striking a real balance between one’s work and family commitments] ⁴

In this respect, we find these works resort to another common idea — that of ‘mommy guilt’ (sic), the term used by the authors to denote mothers’ pangs of conscience for not coming up to society’s (and their family’s) expectations. In these books, women

⁴ At the same time, these ideas lead us to a particular kind of feminism in these works, that is to say, an ‘institutional feminism’ that embraces specific demands. It is one that appeals mainly to Western women and ignores other feminist experiences and demands that spring from other roots (Reverter-Bañón, 2011)..

are urged to dump their guilt and to feel at ease with decisions that seem hard to take at the outset. Nevertheless, the idea of blaming oneself takes us into the psychological realm (Bort, Pflock, and Renner, 2005), recalling the rhetoric found in the traditional self-help genre⁵ (Papalini, 2006; Siurana, 2018). This is typical of the demands made by Neo-Liberalism, which makes individuals feel guilty for the system's failings and urges them to help themselves (Laval and Dardot, 2013).

At the same time, such discourses on ditching guilt give some scope for building a model of another kind of mother, though not one that is that transformative (Godrin, 1995), as one can see in proposals for alternative, subversive forms of motherhood (Llopis, 2015). We list give various citations covering the 'mommy guilt' pandemic below:

[Reining in the Mommy Guilt] (Bennington, 2013, pp. 23–32)

[Employed mothers and fathers both struggle with multiple responsibilities, but mothers also have to endure the rude questions and accusatory looks that remind us that we're short-changing both our jobs and our children] (Sandberg, 2013, pp. 122–123)

[So if you're giving your all to your job and to your kids while they're in diapers, maybe that means you have to say no to excessive travel, joining the industry association, applying to grad school, or fund-raising for the library gala] (Bennington, 2013, p. 25)

[Parenting isn't a day-by-day or week-by-week gig, so forgive yourself (and your boss) if you occasionally have to miss out on something cool because your job needs you] (Bennington, 2013, p. 29)

[Because of work obligations, I've missed doctor's appointments and parent-teacher conferences and have had to travel when my kids were sick] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 136)

As one can see from the citations, the issue is treated in pseudo-psychological terms. There is talk of renouncing certain things, of pardon, blame, and so forth but this discourse does not touch on the structural problems that lie at the root of working mothers' difficulties in managing their daily lives. While work-life balance is discussed, there is no mention of shared responsibility within a couple (Maganto, Etxeberria and Porcel, 2010). In other words, the burden falls wholly on the woman, not on the couple, the corporation, or the government. It thus seems odd that these books talk about the need to overcome exclusive roles and the work pressures parents feel when they want to put more into their private lives:

[If women want to succeed more at work and if men want to succeed more at home, these expectations have to be challenged] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 108)

[As women must be more empowered at work, men must be more empowered at home] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 108)

[Employees who use these benefits often face steep penalties ranging from substantial pay cuts to lost promotions to marginalization] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 114)

[When male employees take a leave of absence or just leave work early to care for a sick child, they can face negative consequences that range from being teased to receiving lower performance ratings to reducing their chance for a raise or promotion] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 114).

[Fathers who want to drop out of the workforce entirely and devote themselves to child care can

5 One of the key differences between management literature and traditional 'self-help' literature is that the former focuses on individual self-management within a corporate setting, whereas the latter covers self-management in a wide range of settings — family, love, money management, affective relationships, and so forth. Even so, they have certain points in common, such as stress on the notion that everyone should take the blame for his or her failures and take up the reins of his/her life. That said, the first genre centres on personal success in one's job whereas the second focuses on the path to individual happiness in a more basic and possibly more spiritual sense (Béjar, 2018).

face extremely negative social pressure] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 114)

[We all need to encourage men to lean in to their families] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 113)

[We need more men to sit at the table... the kitchen table] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 120)

[Women are surrounded by headlines and stories warning them that they cannot be committed to both their families and careers] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 23).

This pseudo-psychological discourse largely reflects the modern expansion of psychology, whose roots lie in a process of social individualisation and a powerful process of depoliticisation among subjects (Rodríguez López, 2016). Thus even though these books say gender roles need reconstructing, they do not supply any of the tools needed to do so, nor do they mention the feminist struggle or the need to politicise the issue. There is an interesting component in the approach taken to the issue by several authors, namely the stress on one's partner. I think two observations are worth making in this connection. The first is that the vision given of the 'partner' is fairly limited, leaving out any experiences that are not those of Western wealthy, middle-aged white heterosexual women. Second, it is odd that Sheryl Sandberg tackles this issue by urging business professionals to plan ahead — even before accepting promotion in a company, and to choose a partner (usually a man) who is willing to look after the children.

We can therefore say that the family models and love-life covered in these works have more to do with traditional heterosexual lifestyles (Leto De Francisco and O'Connor, 1995) than with a heterogeneous vision of the processes at work (Llopis, 2015). In other words, the books seldom consider the possibility that the readers are single mothers or have less conventional relationships (Goldfeder and Sheff, 2013). This gives us a clue to the specific group of women targeted by this sub-genre, namely well-educated, wealthy WASP women with the means to strike a better work-life balance.

[Nina McLemore says that one of the keys to success is to marry well (...) Today, it means marrying someone who supports your aspirations and is willing to be a full partner in managing your joint personal life] (Hadary and Henderson, 2013, p. 154)

[Anyone who wants her mate to be a true partner must treat him as an equal —and equally capable— partner] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 109)

[And contrary to the popular notion that only unmarried women can make it to the top, the majority of the most successful female business leaders have partners] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 110)

[Not surprisingly, a lack of spousal support can have the opposite effect on a career] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 110)

[The things that make the bad boys sexy do not make them good husbands] (Sandberg, 2013, p. 115)

To sum up, in analysing such books, we continually come across the individualisation of a social issue — work-life balance — that instead of being solved by career women through an 'optimal' choice of their future partners (the prescription made by the sub-genre) is one that should instead be dealt with through the public sphere. Here, the path to a solution lies in making it a matter of public debate, tackling it in the political sphere, and turning it into an ethical issue on the agenda of companies and trade unions. Yet at no point have we seen any reference to a corporate work-life balance policy, the need for ethical management of such a policy and to rekindle a feminist struggle within organisations. Instead, this literature tries to neuter the issue, refusing to broach gender inequality as the starting point for discussing motherhood and work-life balance in firms, among other matters (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). That is why we can conclude that the work-life balance discourse in the sub-genre is uncritical, individualist, conservative, and meets the needs of 'The New Spirit of Capitalism' rather than those of women. Consequently, the discourse in such books is wholly depoliticised and only serves to ingrain gender inequality even more deeply.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the sampled books led us to conclude that the sub-genre has two key features that: (a) condition the discourse on work-life balance and motherhood; (b) turn the issue into one that is wholly individualised, depoliticised, and psychological in nature. These two features are: (1) the psychological approach taken; (2) the depoliticised nature of such works. These two strands are tightly interwoven to form a conservative discourse on women in companies. While not overtly sexist, the sub-genre nevertheless enshrines a highly uncritical notion of gender inequality in firms, revealing a lack of feminist discourse in the business world.

A feature found in each and every one of the books is their psycho-analytic nature. Here, we refer to the advice that such books dispense on the need for women to search their souls, delve into their psyches and question their personalities in order to boost their self-esteem and do better at work (Hazleden, 2003). In other words, instead of encouraging women to band together, to be critical of their setting, and act for themselves and for other women, they are urged to individually solve their problems and tinker with 'The Inner Woman'. This kind of 'empowerment' can be seen as being of a spiritual, individually-centred nature rather than being group-based (Redden, 2002). Such an approach may well lead to personal changes but it does nothing to remedy society's structural inequalities.

The sampled literature does not solve women workers' difficulties in striking a work-life balance nor does it offer alternative models for tackling the issues. The psychological approach only serves to come up with an uncritical, depoliticised discourse on gender equality in companies, foregoing the chance of building policies that would really transform women's roles in firms. That is why it is little wonder that motherhood and work-life balance are treated as personal challenges, not as matters calling for collective interest and action. Here, there are many similarities between the sub-genre and the mainstream discourses found in the self-help literature in that they both treat women's discontent as a pathological condition (Ebben, 2015).

Both distance women from the feminist struggle for gender equality. Thus whichever theme or issue is tackled by the books (equal pay, sexual harassment, learning to be more assertive, and so on); the approach is always individualist and Neo-Liberal in nature. In this respect, it seems there is a translation of the women's corporate business spirit to their role as women. The sub-genre does not stint on the language of mock-heroism and self-sacrifice common in corporate leadership literature but in this case applies it to the field of 'family management'.

Examining the results of our analysis, we can conclude that our initial hypothesis is confirmed (restated below for the sake of convenience):

The values and behaviours prescribed for career women and mothers (especially those in senior management posts) reproduce traditional sexist, gender stereotypes, placing such women at a disadvantage compared with their male peers, thus fostering immoral companies in which there is no scope for gender equality.

While the advice tendered to women (who are both senior managers and mothers) is open-ended and leaves it to readers to decide whether they want to perform both roles, the books' prescriptions are contradictory. This muddled advice leaves women defenceless, thrusting the burden of choice on them in a way that is typical of Neo-Liberal societies. This burden is made all the harder to bear through its intersection with gender.

We can conclude by saying that the feminist struggle is wholly secondary in this literary sub-genre, which turns each woman into a kind of 'Lone Ranger' fighting single-handed in big business' badlands. This kind of struggle is always framed in individual terms, thus depoliticising women, distancing them from demands for equality, and making them even more vulnerable to exploitation. In a nutshell, books in this genre do women a great disservice by frivolously reducing grave social issues to an internal struggle that leads to small conquests for a few lucky (well-placed) individuals but that renounces a collective war waged on gender inequality that would benefit the many.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Maria Medina-Vicent is Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Sociology at Universitat Jaume I (UJI) (Castelló de la Plana, Spain). She was awarded an International PhD by UJI within the institution's Ethics and Democracy Programme, her thesis being *Género y management en el marco neoliberal. Un análisis crítico para la emergencia de liderazgos feministas* [Gender and Management in the Neo-Liberal Framework. Female Leadership]. This thesis won Spain's Royal Academy of Doctors Prize [*Premio de la Real Academia de Doctores de España*] in 2018 in the Humanities category. Her main research lines are Feminist Philosophy, Leadership, and Critical Management Studies.

