

Public online lecture
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Feminism, 'Post-feminism' and Neoliberalism:
Figurations of Gender's Normativity in Pop Culture

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Drawing on the conjunctural methodologies of the late Stuart Hall this lecture reflects on a number of figurations of normative femininity which have functioned as forms of popular governmentality predicated first on the instituting of a moment (1997-2007) of post-feminism, where feminist campaigning and activism were repudiated as belonging in the past, to more recent times, (2008-2018) with 'feminism' now seemingly tolerated and even granted a place within the consumer culture of contemporary capitalism. The lecture considers the power and impact of these various 'figuration's as they resonate across the popular culture and social media. In this lecture I present 6 of these 'ideal types' as sociological aids to understanding and for discussion. Through a web of media articulations, a society of gender control moves from iterations of a 1) 'post-feminist masquerade' to 2) 'phallic girl' and then to the idea of the 3) 'global girl'. Then with the rise of the new acceptability of intersectional feminism from 2008 followed by Sheryl Sandberg's idea of 'lean in' (neoliberal) feminism, there is a new iteration of the 4) 'high achieving working mother' who is also a new 'angel in the house' marking a shoring up family life as human capital. For younger women within the reach of the new feminist consciousness that now pervades pop culture and the magazine industry there is the ideal type of the 5) 'resilient girl'. Finally, we will consider the more globalised ideal of the 6) 'development girl'. This is another favoured figuration from across the leading global brands who seek to be seen as 'championing' young women and human rights. This includes campaigns like 'Because I'm a Girl' by Plan International as well as so many Nike 'dream crazier' videos directed to young women. We will end the lecture by considering how post-colonial feminist theorists have developed critiques of these approaches to 'empower' girls in developing nations.