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**Citation:** Favaro, L. (2017). 'Just be confident girls!': Confidence Chic as Neoliberal Governmentality. In: Elias, A. S., Gill, R. and Scharff, C. M. (Eds.), *Aesthetic Labour : Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. (pp. 283-299). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 9781137477644

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## DRAFT CHAPTER

Favaro, L. 2017. 'Just be confident girls!': Confidence Chic as Neoliberal Governmentality. In *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking beauty politics in neoliberalism*, edited by A. S. Elias, R. Gill and C. Scharff. 283-300. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

### Introduction

Confidence is the new sexy  
(Bobbi Brown Cosmetics, 2014)

In our injurious patriarchal cultures, unconfidence is almost inescapable when inhabiting womanhood. However, recently the promotion of self-confidence has surfaced as the site for expanded, heightened and more insidious modes of regulation, often spearheaded by those very institutions invested in women's insecurities. This notably includes consumer women's magazines. Contemporary publications are marked by an intensified preoccupation with taking readers 'from crisis to confidence', offering even dedicated sections (for example, 'confidence revolution' and 'Bye-bye body hang-ups' in *Cosmopolitan* UK) and issues – see for example *Elle* UK's January 2015 'Confidence Issue: A Smart Woman's Guide to Self-Belief'. Clearly, this sector is a fundamental player in the confidence movement-market, bringing together a range of interested parties, not least 'love your body' (LYB) advertisers like Dove (see Gill and Elias, 2014), and enjoying an extensive audience reach, both in terms of numbers and geography – a reach increased to unprecedented degrees by online versions.

This chapter asks: how is (the turn to) confidence articulated in magazines for – and mostly by – young women? What does the rise of self-confidence as primary imperative for the production of successful femininity suggest about the operation of power at the current conjuncture? I focus on five popular websites/online magazines produced in the UK but globally accessed: *cosmopolitan.co.uk*, *elleuk.com*, *femalefirst.co.uk*, *glamourmagazine.co.uk* and *sofemenine.co.uk*. The analysis is divided into two main sections, each exploring a different data type: first, 80 editorial features applying a 'love your self' (LYS) approach; and second, 30 interviews conducted between December 2014 and July 2015 with writers and editors of these publications.<sup>1</sup> Uniquely, then, the paper throws light both on confidence texts and on those producing them in widely-read media spaces. Participants were all female, white, mainly in their mid-twenties to early thirties (coinciding with the target readership), middle-class and London-based.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis interrogates what I have labelled 'confidence chic' – pointing to the gendered, classed and commercial nature of the phenomenon under study, as well as its entrenchment within economies of visibility (in new media, neoliberal times; see Banet-Weiser, 2013). I apply a feminist discursive Foucauldian-influenced approach, a key concept being that of 'governmentality', namely the contact between the (objectifying) technologies of domination of others and the (subjectifying) technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988). Ultimately, this paper argues that confidence chic is an emergent gendered technology of neoliberal governmentality variously related to proliferating feminisms.

## **Confidence chic: Notes from the web** **Psycommerce as confidence expertise**

Feel Like the Queen of Confidence with these Expert Tips  
(*cosmopolitan.co.uk*, 2014)

In women's magazines, 'lack of self-confidence' is normalised as a universal peculiarly female malady. However, this malady has solutions – individualised ones. The confidence chic regime exhorts women to undergo intense, constant self-scrutiny and self-work according to knowledges and procedures specified by experts. This notably involves the 'psy' professions (Rose, 1998) and the newer authorities associated with the 'self-esteem industry' (Banet-Weiser, 2013). Indeed, the power/knowledge apparatus of confidence chic seems gendered psychotherapies with commodity logic, as illustrated by hybrid 'psycommercial' positions such as: 'dating guru and head and shoulders Date Night Confidence Coach'.

Since self-confidence is allegedly not innate in women, 'working on your confidence is a life-long task', magazines assure readers. This legitimises an editorial bombardment of advice features ranging from how to 'become confident', 'boost your confidence' to 'maximise your potential', with 'confidence commandments' for every minutia of women's lives – from the meeting at work to the 'bikini body' to fellatio. All this is informed by the general premise that becoming confident: 'it's all in the power of thought'. Influenced by the positive psychology movement, the confidence project is undertaken via the application of techniques imparted by experts – but in the arena of the intimate and quotidian. Readers are urged to engage in an enterprising subjectivity labour of confidence individually and at all times through the conscious direct manipulation of thought, taking 'mental shifts' toward a '#PMA' (positive mental attitude). The ultimate exhortation to women is, then, to 'Zap your negative thinking' and 'Think yourself confident!' 'Whether you're in the bedroom or boardroom'. Below I centre on the realms of the body and intimate relationships.

### **'Confidence is sexy': Enlisting labour**

In apparent opposition to the obsession with (highly sexualised) female bodies in contemporary hyper-visual culture, suffusing women's magazines is the claim 'confidence is sexy'. Moreover, some texts *equate* sexiness with confidence: 'Sex appeal *is all about* self-confidence', 'real sexiness *is* true confidence!' (my emphasis). Likewise, beauty magnates tell readers that 'beauty is all about confidence'. The relationships features accordingly assert that 'to attract love' 'what really works is looking at the *inner* you and doing the *inner* work necessary'. As an agony aunt further explains in response to 'My weight is making me nervous to register for online dating': 'The important thing is to feel confident, be confident as confidence is attractive regardless of your size'. Note in these two quotes the resort to 'overwording' (Fairclough, 1992), even italicisation for additional emphasis. This suggests ideological struggle, intense preoccupation with winning consent for a particular representation or (new) meaning – in this case complicated/challenged by adjacent weight loss content, and more broadly the centrality of the beauty sections in these magazines/sites, which are then further divided into dedicated subsections on skin, hair, make-up, nails, and even cosmetic surgery in *sofeminine.co.uk*.

Discursively mystifying this is the 'inside' dictate: 'love yourself on the inside', 'confidence is an inner issue', 'seductiveness comes from within', and so on; which also normalises the new realms of femininity labour.

Magazines promote the seemingly radically woman-friendly new precept 'love your body and he'll love it too'. This deceptively simple idea not only invisibilises likely conflicts with everyday experience, but it also effectively renders women responsible for body love *and* body hate in intimate relationships. Such state of affairs is discernible in this agony aunt response to 'My husband ogles at other women!':

Men are drawn to confidence and if you are feeling a little low about yourself atm [at the moment] then this may be why he is looking at the maid that is more forward and comfortable in her own skin. Remind him why he married you and bring out your best side again! (*femalefirst.co.uk*)

In this media female insecurity is the ultimate male-repellent, a total 'turn off'. 'He's not there to reassure you about yourself' *sofeminine.co.uk* adds. Even more worryingly, a piece titled '30 Things MEN Wish Women Knew' builds on the premise 'Insecurity isn't sexy!' as follows: 'A bit of self-dignity and self-confidence in who you are and what you want is HOT. If you can't respect yourself, he won't respect you'.

As a new requisite of the (hetero)sexiness imperative, 'confidence' adds *yet more levels of labour* to the project of successful femininity. Although becoming a 'queen of confidence' is allegedly 'all in the mind ladies', it is inseparable from 'keep[ing] up the self-maintenance' (for example, 'make sure you've waxed'), dressing for (hetero)'sex-cess' (for example, in 'killer heels'), wearing a 'full face of make-up', buying a 'push-up Super Egoboost bra', and performing a boudoir striptease for 'your man' Dita Von Teese-style – 'exuding confidence', of course. That is, confidence chic weaves the remodelling of the psyche with aesthetic and sexual labour, much of which is grounded in the heteronormative, pornified, body-fixated consumerist culture of postfeminism – the very culture seemingly being contested.

### **Battle the negative self: Toxic women**

A notion of female toxicity informs confidence magazine content. Autocritique and negativity is presented as a natural tendency in women, which is profoundly toxic both for themselves *and* others. Here the familiar language of 'flaws' and 'battles' departs the corporeal as its (main) target to enter the arena of the psyche. A 'madeover' positive subjectivity is promoted as panacea for all ills: 'Stop looking in the mirror and bashing your body ... Battle the negative self talk ... Remember love your self and everything else will follow suit'. Confidence surfaces, then, as a depoliticised, straightforward self-governing venture of rational choice and active appropriation.

The ideological discourse of 'toxic insecurity' not only blames women for feeling unconfident, but also for putting their relationships at risk, and unjustly affecting their (male) partners (see Favaro, in press). Increasingly, magazines and advertisements also accuse mothers for 'passing' body insecurities onto their daughters, and stress peer judgement. These dynamics of culpability operate to turn the critical gaze away from socio-political and economic structures and institutions – not least sexual politics – and to constitute women as *pathological*, and so legitimate subject-objects of intervention.

Confidence chic is a sinister regime. Despite the apparent promotion of positivity, self-acceptance, and the insistence on insecurities as individual self-sabotage with no external basis (excepting possibly other toxic women), at the heart of LYS/B is a female body that is always already unruly, flawed, and difficult to love. The following extract from *cosmopolitan.co.uk* exemplifies this contradictory discursive landscape: 'Body confidence = great sex. It just takes a mental makeover ... The day of your big date is not the time you realise your legs resemble the Amazon jungle'. In addition to humour, the notion of producer-as-consumer that is key to women's magazines also facilitates a body shaming which would otherwise more readily risk criticism. By speaking from the position of 'us girls' and 'sisterly honesty', body hate – the prerequisite for the body love business – can be safely maintained. For example, among 'A woman's top 20 confidence boosters!' a *femalefirst.co.uk* feature consistently written in the first-person plural includes (emphasis added):

Looking good in a photograph - There is always an apprehension that you will be able to see *that awful spot, or your double chin* will appear, or *your arm will look fat* from the side - when one turns out well we are generally surprised!

Magazines therefore continue to endorse – indeed benefit from – the hostile fragmentation, micro-scrutiny and shaming of female bodies, the very body hate discourses purportedly under challenge. But in an ideological sleight of hand, it is women/readers who are figured as their toxic (re-)producers.

#### **'Accept responsibility': Managing injury**

In the spirit of neoliberalism, confidence chic interpellates women as autonomous, freely choosing, perpetually self-regulating, transformative and adaptive actors who are entirely self-reliant, responsible and accountable for their life, and whose value is largely measured by their capacity to self-care and self-improve. In particular, to be a 'confident chick' is to govern oneself taking an entrepreneurial approach informed by positive psychology. This involves incessant calculation – and 'appreciation' – of distinctive personal strengths ('assets'), along with advanced skills of self-management such as identifying and rationalising 'bad body triggers'. Women are equally expected to employ micro-techniques for the cultivation, enhancement and maintenance of positive outlooks and self-regard, through exercises like gratitude reflections and repeating affirmative mantras in front of a mirror.

Women's magazines are remarkably insistent on the idea that 'the greatest enemy of true self-confidence is *comparing yourself* (my italics), exhorting readers to instead 'just focus on being uniquely YOU!' This is informed by the values of authenticity and singularity of contemporary self-branding culture, inducing into being the entrepreneurial femininities of 'creative fashionistas' and 'trend setters'. The otherwise intensely promoted culture of comparison (certainly, it is a pillar of the industry) here hampers the competitive drive and work towards maximising unique personal qualities and developing differentiation (for example, in your 'fashion mojo'), hence hampering too the cycle of consumption.

The 'no comparison!' confidence commandment also fits within the program of sociocultural desensitisation that confidence chic entails. As exemplary neoliberal technology, it is structured by a violent ethos of self-determination that repudiates notions of social/external constraints, pressures or influences. Arguably due to the

current difficulty (see next section) of completely ignoring the cultural injuries inflicted upon women, some are at times acknowledged – but only to be disavowed a few lines later to again blame and responsabilise women, and to incite the labour of positive subjectivity, for example: ‘Fatphobia is everywhere in the media ... Negative thinking will damage you more than fashion mags’. Other editorial features interpellate the by now normative media literate consumer, with calls to ‘be critical of these kinds of images’, essentially exculpating the media industry.

Following neoliberal logics, then, the injunction is to deny *external* injury. Low self-esteem, feelings of vulnerability, victimhood and dependence upon external factors are rearticulated as ‘self-pity, insufficient personal drive and a lack of personal responsibility for one’s own life’ (Baker, 2010, p. 190). One illustration is the following extract from an article on ‘How to be confident’: ‘Only you can help you. Want the truth? You have to stop blaming others for your low self-esteem and accept some responsibility’. This contrasts with the propagation of injury claims concerning society by heterosexual white men, as part of a rearticulated backlash against the upsurge of feminist ideas and activism in the 2010s (García-Favaro and Gill, 2015). Women’s magazines are also capitalising on the logics of victimisation or oppression, as discussed in the next section, which turns to the interviews I conducted with writers and editors of this media.

### **The confidence r/evolution: Notes from the office**

#### **‘A cultural backlash’: Claiming injury**

In the interviews, producers claimed that the sector is subjected to high levels of deeply unjust, ‘aggressive’, ‘focussed’ criticism: ‘Women’s magazine bashing is a thing ... which is unfair’. Furthermore, conjuring an idea of irrational attack, participants argued that this occurs ‘no matter what we do’. Critique was disavowed by describing publications a ‘best friend’, ‘loyal’, ‘honest’, ‘a source you can trust’. Evoking both the individualism and gender essentialism driving this media, many likewise drew on the notion of ‘a girl’s YOUiverse’ (*Cosmopolitan*), speaking about the magazine as a ‘women’s safe place’ that is ‘all about you’ and the things (all) ‘women really care about’. Moreover, for an editor-in-chief: ‘Our publication encourages young women to feel good about themselves, that they’re great as they are’. Swinging their dilemmatic (and problematic) relatability-aspiration pendulum, also repeatedly mobilised was an ideology of ‘best’: ‘It’s aimed at making you look and feel and do the best you can’, insisted a features editor. This was again used to counter claims that these publications are detrimental as misguided and unfair. ‘Me and my friends that write for magazines spend a lot of time actually trying to help people with their weak spots’, a freelance writer protested.

Others spoke of a distinctively contemporary backlash against these publications:

There’s been a cultural backlash against women’s magazines because we are perceived – I would argue incorrectly – as being out of touch, telling women that they’re not right, they need to be thinner, healthier, lalala. That we’re not funny, that we’re not intelligent, and that we’re out of touch with this growing new wave of feminism, etcetera.

Against this, magazine producers repeatedly asserted: ‘we have changed since the 90’s and the noughties’. In particular, in the words of a staff writer: ‘When we’re

talking about the shift in women's magazines, at the core of everything we do is [...] always trying to enforce positive messages'. In what follows I examine how magazine professionals explain the rise of LYS/B.

### **Creating confidence chic**

The writers and editors of women's magazines were keen to highlight that LYS/B – often described as shift in focus from 'looking' to 'feeling' good, from 'looks' to 'health' and 'wellbeing' – is 'such a subtle difference but it's huge'. This suggests how in this media: 'Working within tight restrictions of format and expectation, small changes become heavily symbolic' (Murphy, 2013, p. 178). Such recent editorial modification was variously explained. Some of the interviewed journalists pointed to a conscious response to critiques: 'I know in the past is like "there's models that are too thin and features that aren't very encouraging", but we're trying to address that'. Others similarly mentioned a personal motivation rooted in a concern about the role of magazines regarding the wellbeing of readers:

I remember reading a stat when I was first starting out about 'women read magazines and afterwards they feel worse about themselves' and I found that really sad and I've always had that at the back of my mind that I wanna go against that ... that's what my passion is.

However, paralleling the discursive moves in the editorial content, any critical allusion to the media was quickly followed by a statement that would redirect the gaze toward women(-as-problem), such as: 'women have a natural tendency to feel insecure'.

Consumer demand was also emphasised: 'We are setting the agenda but we are also just *reporting* on the agenda, we are giving people what they want' a digital health editor stated. This discourse was used to support both 'body love' and 'look good' content. The former would be depicted as a response to an 'awakening' or 'backlash' by women against beauty standards that were unachievable and thus 'alienating them', with many stressing a producer-as-consumer identity: 'we're all just women ... feeling the same things everybody else is feeling'. Mirroring contradictions in the magazine texts, this was often followed by claims like: 'Women still want to know how to be thin. They always will'. In this regard, I was repeatedly 'reminded' of the following: 'We have an editorial and journalistic responsibility to make sure that what we are giving people is going to be ethical and good and positive, but also we are business not charities, we have to sell'. In addition to blaming consumers' disinterest ('women like reading about diets'), magazine professionals argued that the potential expansion of LYS/B is restricted by the nature of the genre. Significantly, advertisers must not be 'alienated' by editorial, and veto the critique of some issues (for example, plastic surgery or photoshopping). 'All the content that is produced in the magazine is assessed through the filter of "what will our advertisers think about this"', explained a content director.

Generally leaving as quickly as possible the topic of editorial-advertising relationships, writers and editors would also highlight that 'at the end of the day women's magazines are creating an aspirational world'. Any potential critique of this was hastily pre-empted. Notably, these content producers would validate the pleasures of the aspirational, for example, as indulgent escapism or inspiring 'blueprint for how you ought to be living'; and evoke the figure of the media-savvy,

freely choosing consumer, for example, women are not 'stupid', understand how marketing works, and can 'make their own choices' and 'informed decisions'.

More cynically, LYS/B was also sometimes described as the result of wanting to promote aspirational elements like being 'skinny', 'but in a way that is less dangerous and means we won't get into trouble'. Indeed, participants spoke of women's magazine producers 'checking themselves in fear of being scrutinized or told off'. Interestingly, this never involved, say, higher-level journalists or media watchdogs. It was instead attributed to social media call-outs for 'realism' and 'honesty' by 'literate' and 'discerning' readers – and to feminists: 'People do self-censor and check themselves because they're so over-analysed by feminists, popular mainstream feminists who have a massive following, the bloody *Vagenda*'.

Launched in 2012 as an online magazine and adapted into a book in 2014, *The Vagenda* self-describes as 'a big "we call bullshit" on the mainstream women's press' ([vagendamagazine.com](http://vagendamagazine.com)). Interestingly, this feminist media was frequently cited as a key catalyst of the shift to LYS/B. As one staff writer put it:

[Women's magazines] were basically making women feel bad about themselves, and perpetuating this thing that women should be ashamed, women should try and be better. 'You're fat, that's not good enough. You need to be thin, and pretty and perfect in every single way, and be able to afford everything'. *The Vagenda* said: 'Hang on. This is not okay.' Then, suddenly, all the women's magazines, because they're in decline anyway, because print is in decline, it was the perfect opportunity to come out and be like: 'Hey, here's the new way'.

Whilst there were a handful of critiques (Favaro 2016), in general women's magazine producers enthusiastically endorsed this 'new way'. Such 'trend that is happening everywhere' was explained as 'an amalgamation of everything', 'a shift in mentality, a shift in historical context, a shift in so many things that is informing us ... working together'. Next I further explore a crucial underpinning factor: Feminism.

### **F-ing up the glossies**

Dramatically reversing a well-documented feature of postfeminism – namely the disarticulation of a feminist identity (Scharff, 2012) – most research participants eagerly defined themselves, the *glossierati* and women's magazines as 'utterly 100% feminists'. As explained by a features writer:

So one, we have a lot of feminist voices who write in women's magazines [gives examples]. We tackle a lot of feminist issues [gives examples]. And also a women's magazine office is one of the most feminist places you could possibly work: I'm surrounded by women, I have creative control or financial control, business control ... which is why it's frustrating when people always hold us up as prime examples of people who are failing feminism. It's upsetting, because actually the work we do, how we work *is* feminist.

According to most editors and writers, there is a 'huge sense of feminism' as magazines 'champion other women' and work to 'empower', 'celebrate', 'inspire' and 'make women strong'. Speaking to previous critiques, these journalists also repeatedly asserted that 'we are very, very much *not* man pleasing' (anymore). An



'it's always about doing it for yourself' rationality was presented as key to the 'undercurrent of female empowerment' in these publications.

Women's magazines were claimed to additionally champion the ('new') principle that 'you can be feminist and love fashion with a passion and love beauty', 'waxing and high heels', want to know 'how to have good sex' and 'to put on make up right'. This was at times expounded in explicit alignment with 'modern feminists' such as *Grazia* columnist Polly Vernon. Certainly, the tenets of her 'hot feminism' pervade contemporary glossies. This includes battling 'feminist fatigue' through 'rebranding feminism', 'encouraging women – fat, thin, whatever – to self-identify as hot', and embracing the figure of a 'shavy-leggy, fashion-fixated, wrinkle-averse, weight-conscious kind of feminist' (Vernon, 2015, p. 13).

The magazines' identification with feminism was also associated with a 'new wave of women's journalism', now that 'it's not a dirty word anymore'. A features editor described such new landscape like this:

Lena Dunham and *Girls* and female empowerment is in. These were buzzwords that now are fashionable, and the advertisers find a turn on rather than a turn off. It legitimizes this stuff that probably we always wanted to write. That being said, I also think that Twitter ... mainly Twitter, but all social media, is very female focused and it's mostly female users. If you piss off a huge chunk of Twitter users, they will let you know. That's a PR disaster. That influences a lot of what people are producing as well.

Therefore, the editorial inclusion of feminism partly emerges as necessity, since otherwise magazines 'get called out on it thanks to social media'. This account by a freelance writer further elucidates the editorial approach to the current cultural climate:

Now there's a massive trend for it, to be really empowering for the reader because feminism is obviously finally coming to full force. That's a massive consideration for everyone ... especially because you've got all these groups like No More Page 3 and Everyday Sexism. It's not just magazines and online things. It's all the social media. It's almost like a complete package that all this is going on at the same time. It's all bouncing off each other.

The constitution of feminism as trend and commodity evident in the interviews is reflected in the magazine content, as in this *sofeminine.co.uk* article 'Monday To Friday Feminism: How To F Up Your Week':

In case you haven't noticed, the whole feminist movement is making a big comeback and that means it is time to clarify what being a feminist actually means, and how you can incorporate it into your daily routine ... spice up your week with some feminism.

A number of critical voices spoke of 'tokenism' and 'just lip service' to feminism, arguing that the 'big players ... cover it because it's news, because it's popular', and (hence) 'to keep up with their competitors and with online'. Whilst in agreement, others still saw potentialities in this. For instance, one freelance writer applauded the rise of LYS/B in the following manner:

It's a commercial reaction to a new voice that's coming through women like Caitlin [Moran] and Lena Dunham that says 'there is an alternative life available

here. It doesn't have to be a life of self-hatred and comparison to other women and silence in times of distress or marginalisation'.

Only certain feminisms have been upgraded from passé to cool, however. *The Vagenda* was repeatedly depicted as 'totally and utterly anti-women', unsupportive, despotic, and mean. It was claimed to be 'doing the movement a disservice' with their 'negativity' and 'huge ranty raging', and especially through 'alienating the idea of feminism for people who would otherwise just accept it'; a growing investment by large commercial entities operating, then, 'from within' to (re)de-radicalise imaginaries, among other things. Beyond feminism as 'a basic thing of equality' and 'do whatever the fuck you wanna do', in line with the postfeminist sensibility there was a general abhorrence of 'hardcore', 'intensely feminist women', their purported hairy armpits, man-hatred and disrespect for other women's choices. The glossy happy feminism of individualistic go-getters intensifies the abject state of the 'feminist killjoy', alongside other 'affect aliens' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 158). Negative affect is rapidly silenced, and with that goes the transformative force of collective anger at structural realms of injury and injustice. Under confidence chic anger only flows inward.

## **Conclusion**

Confidence chic is an assemblage of diverse – often contradictory – lines of thought and will, acts and counter-acts, interventions and developments ranging from marketing strategies in the fashion-beauty-complex to a call-out culture in the digital mediascape. This transnationally travelling technology of governmentality has roots in the 'state of esteem', a form of citizenship and self-government linking power and subjectivity in modern democracies (Cruikshank, 1993). It is also part of the more recent neoliberal turn to happiness, connected to the impact of positive psychology, and, relatedly, the popularity of therapeutic cultures and feel-good self-help industries (Davies, 2015). And it is deeply aligned with the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2009), evident, for instance, in the emphasis upon individual empowerment and choice, (hetero)sexiness as power, and a reasserted gender essentialism. But LYS/B in women's magazines is also partly a response to longstanding critiques, for example, for promoting unrealistic beauty standards, being stubbornly 'man-pleasy', judgemental, and, ultimately, harming women. It is often pushed by young female professionals who sympathise with these critiques, claim to feel 'passionate and strongly about women's confidence and their self-image', and identify as feminists.

Indeed, confidence chic is related to proliferating feminisms. Some contest dominant forms of power. Others are embedded within them. In this regard a vital influence is 'neoliberal feminism', palpable in the compliancy to corporate values, the interlacing of positive affect and intensified individuation, alongside the concern with (some) gender inequalities and simultaneous avoidance of confrontation and emphasis upon 'internal obstacles' (Rottenberg 2014). Confidence chic constructs an active subject wholly responsible for her self-care, enhancing her own well-being, rationally calculating her 'assets', 'maximising her potential' and 'achieving success' – a hyper-autonomous, deeply individuated woman who can thereby more effectively meet the demands emanating from patriarchal neoliberal capitalism. Such mode of subjectification involves a versatile equilibrium between self-scrutiny and self-appreciation, self-capitalisation and self-realisation, 'self-discipline and enthusing the

self run parallel' (Bröckling 2005, p. 21). These micro-practices of self-government interconnect with the biopolitical management of women via apparatuses of power/knowledge increasingly centred on inserting positive affect within infrastructures of measurement, discipline and exploitation.

When for many the injuries of postfeminist (and gendered 'austerity') culture were becoming insufferable and thus no longer silenceable, power relations are revitalised by translating feminist sentiments into an ethos of individual capacity, realisation, worth, and wellbeing – re-conducting the desire for change toward the self, replacing social emancipatory struggles for personal entrepreneurial ventures and 'interiorised affective spaces' (Rottenberg, 2013, p. 6); and rendering normative new forms of violence. The inner-directed quasi-feminism of confidence chic works to countervail the more radical energies within the heterogeneous field of reinvigorated feminisms (McRobbie, 2015) – some of which would underscore the necessity for collectivist projects. Others might offer intersectional insights into structural domination and privilege; while queer politics destabilise sex/gender boundaries. And others still kill joy with their anger at the socio-political forces responsible for women's discontents and insecurities. Sara Ahmed would usefully encourage us to consider whether this duty to confidence could be about leaving collective 'feelings of structure' (2010, p. 216) safely unexplored, and the 'narrowing of horizons, about giving up an interest in what lies beyond the familiar' (2010, p. 61). Maybe the way to 'give ourselves that well needed boost' (*femalefirst.co.uk*) begins with *refusing* the imperative to be confident.

## Notes

1 This chapter is part of a larger research project that additionally examines online magazines produced in Spain, and which includes a third data type: user discussions about sex and relationships on the sites' forums/boards. 'Confidence chic' is pervasive here too, with typical peer-to-peer advice being: 'just be confident girls!'

2 My utmost gratitude to all the research participants.

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