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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen vast sums of money invested in health, education and economic empowerment Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs for women and girls, particularly in the Global South. Feminist scholars of IPE have charted how transnational corporations (TNCs) have partnered with international institutions, donor governments and non-governmental organizations to position themselves as champions of gender equality. There is some debate in the literature over whether this phenomenon constitutes a co-optation or an appropriation of feminism. In this article, I focus on the behavior of TNCs, arguing that it can be conceptualized as 'gender wash.' Drawing on the extensive environmental literature on the 'greenwashing' of corporations' public images, I outline a framework for analyzing CSR as 'gender washing.' Adapting Lyon and Montgomery's summary of the greenwashing literature, I present seven varieties of gender wash – selective disclosure, empty gender claims and policies, dubious certifications and labels, co-opted NGO endorsements and partnerships, ineffective public voluntary programs, misleading narrative and discourse, and misleading branding – giving illustrative examples for each. In doing so, I aim to put forward a useful tool for critiquing contradictory claims made by corporations whose products, business model or employment practices are inherently damaging to women and girls.

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is serious business. In recent years, it has burgeoned into a profession in its own right and is now the subject of academic journals and conferences, of business school programs, and of entire organizations and consultancies (Kallio, 2007, p. 173). In a climate of disappointment with corporate governance, where publics have been disillusioned by high profile cases of corruption and dishonesty (Erturk et al., 2004, p. 678), public demand for corporations to behave responsibly both to their shareholders, and to the many different

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stakeholders their operations affect, have become widespread. Companies must be seen to be good corporate citizens. A survey in 2017 by KPMG International found that of the largest companies in the world, some three-quarters issue annual reports on corporate responsibility (KPMG International, 2017, p. 5). However, scholars disagree on whether such activities are driven by a genuine motivation to do good, by knock-on improvements in efficiency and profitability, or simply by a desire to improve the company's brand and public approval ratings. For some economists, CSR is an attempt to clean up corporations and to use their immense power and financial reserves to do good, while for others it is 'the tribute that capitalism everywhere pays to virtue' (Crook, 2005).

Feminist scholars in International Political Economy have also documented how corporations have turned their attention, and their CSR programs, towards women and girls. High profile cases such as the Nike Foundation's Girl Effect program and Dove's Generation Girl and Real Beauty projects (discussed below), are just two such examples. One 2013 mapping exercise of 170 different corporate sector initiatives in this area found evidence of some USD 14.6 billion committed to programs targeted at women and girls specifically (Miller et al., 2013, p. 14), with high profile names such as Anglo-American Platinum, Coca Cola, Gap Inc., Unilever, Walmart and Goldman Sachs, to name a few, among those investing in women and girls (Oddsdóttir et al., 2013). Feminists have noted with irony that in a climate of growing backlash against feminism in many contexts, corporations 'have now become some of the most vocal champions of gender equality and women's empowerment' (Gregoratti, 2016, p. 922).

There is a lively debate within feminist IPE about how to conceptualize this phenomenon. For scholars working in the feminist materialist tradition, gender CSR programs are part of a wider co-optation of feminism into neoliberal governance (e.g. Roberts, 2015). Adrienne Roberts, in particular, has put forward the term 'Transnational Business Feminism,' by which is meant:

> an increasingly large coalition of feminist organizations, capitalist states, regional and international funding institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) that converge on the need to promote women's equality, particularly in the Global South. (Roberts, 2012, p. 87)

According to this school of thought, corporations are 'using a form of pseudo-feminism to bolster profitability and to further legitimize the increasingly perilous form of globalized capitalism that we are living under' (Eisenstein, 2017, p. 42). Some scholars, however, adopt a more optimistic view, arguing that while we may be witnessing the 'neoliberalization of feminism,' we should be wary of narratives that suggest there was ever a supposedly pure and unco-opted feminism (Prügl, 2015, p. 615; Prügl, 2016, p. 48; Roy, 2017). These scholars argue that we should focus on exploring what feminism might gain, and lose, from its neoliberal manifestations; how girls, women, activists and NGOs everywhere might exploit this phenomenon for emancipatory aims (e.g. Gregoratti et al., 2018, p. 103; Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Grosser & Moon, 2019; McCarthy, 2017; Scott et al., 2012). Indeed, my own previous research has contributed to this project by highlighting the agency that girls show in adapting neoliberalized empowerment programs to fit their own emancipatory aims (Walters, 2018).

Yet, it is important also to move beyond a simplistic dichotomy of feminism under neoliberalism as either co-opted or resistant (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2018).

To do so, we need concepts that avoid totalizing claims (Gregoratti, 2018, p. 212) and distinguish between the actions, and intents, of actors at different levels of political and economic hierarchies. By focusing on the behavior of corporations in this article, I aim to move away from 'trying to assess the extent to which feminism has been co-opted by neoliberalism, [and instead] ask why and how neoliberalism expresses a concern with feminism' (Calkin, 2017, p. 70). The framework I put forward for analyzing CSR programs as gender washing begins to answer both the why – to boost profitability and corporate legitimacy – and the how – through misleading communications.

There is no one clear definition of the term gender washing. [1] It has been variously used to describe rescue discourses about Afghan women and the War on Terror (Mason, 2013, p. 65); the impact of the presence of gender experts within an institution on its reputation and policies (Kunz & Prügl, 2019, p. 6); the business case logic put forward by the World Bank for investing in women's empowerment (Gerard, 2019); a 'discourse of false state feminism,' whereby authoritarian regimes make 'claims to promote gender equality while simultaneously undermining it' in order to appease international institutions or investors (Allan, 2020, p. 106); and 'a particular organizational process that perpetuates the myth that an organization is practicing equity and fairness' (Fox-Kirk et al., 2020, p. 587). As a term, then, it appears across different fields and literatures and seems difficult to pin down. It encompasses many phenomena and is conceptualized in different ways.

In this article, I draw on the vast literature in business and management studies critiquing so-called 'greenwashing,' in which corporations use CSR programs and related marketing strategies to present themselves as environmentally friendly and to deflect criticism from harmful environmental practices, in order to put forward a framework for a critique of gender wash in feminist IPE. Scholarly critiques of greenwashing both predate, and far outnumber, critiques of gender washing. One particular review of greenwashing analyses in trade journals, the media and scholarly outputs identified nearly five and a half thousand articles on the topic, spanning a 34-year period (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). Based on their analysis of those articles, the authors identified seven different varieties of greenwashing communications. Similarly adopting a conceptualization of gender washing as a form of misleading communication, I argue that this framework offers useful insights for scholars of gender and CSR, an eclectic and disparate group that span feminist IPE, business ethics and organization studies. I make three principle contributions: setting out a definition of gender washing as a range of communications with the intent to mislead publics into adopting overly positive beliefs about the impact of an organization's practices, policies or products on girls and women; offering a useful framework to help structure critiques of the deeply contradictory, and deliberately misleading, claims of corporations (Prügl & True, 2014, p. 1156); drawing insights from, and speaking back to, the literature on greenwashing by expanding on the often-overlooked issue of the intent to green/gender wash.

In the following section, I give a brief overview of the literature on CSR, before considering the different feminist critiques that have emerged as part of that. Of critical importance here is also a consideration of the work of postcolonial scholars in analyzing the actions of transnational corporations (TNCs) operating in the Global South, but marketing their CSR activities to publics and shareholders in the

Global North. I also situate this article within wider debates in feminist IPE about neoliberalism, co-optation and resistance. In the following section, I focus on the extensive literature on greenwashing, discussing the seven varieties of greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015): selective disclosure, empty green claims and policies, dubious certifications and labels, co-opted NGO endorsements and partnerships, ineffective voluntary programs, misleading narrative and discourse, and misleading visual imagery. I also discuss my divergence from the greenwashing literature, in addressing the issue of intent to green/gender wash, arguing that a case can be made for labelling these communicative practices as deliberately misleading. In the sections that follow, I illustrate each of the seven varieties with an example from the various literatures on gender and CSR, to show how they can be categorized as gender wash under this framework. Finally, I argue that such a framework can help to bring together a disparate body of scholars working across different fields in highlighting corporate hypocrisy towards women and girls.

Gender and CSR

Corporate social responsibility comes under attack from both left and right. It is simultaneously criticized for placing unnecessary restraints on market forces, and for not doing enough to restrain those very same market forces (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 3). One of the most frequently cited criticisms of CSR came from Friedman in 1962, who declared that 'there is one and only one social responsibility to business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits' (cited in Kallio, 2007, p. 167). Indeed, debates about the responsibility of transnational corporations have existed since the very first transnational corporations. The First Baron Thurlow, for example, made the following comments when referring to the activities of the East India Company: 'Did you ever expect a corporation to have a conscience, when it has no soul to be damned and no body to be kicked? (And by God, it ought to have both!)' (cited by Banerjee, 2008, p. 51). Such opposition to the very concept of corporate responsibility is supported by high profile cases in which shareholders have successfully sued corporations for spending money on charitable causes that could have been distributed to them in dividends (Banerjee, 2008, pp. 58–59). CSR claims and commitments are almost always voluntary and self-regulating, with no apparent downside to a corporation making claims to be ethical (Evans, 2020, pp. 3–4; Pearson et al., 2019, p. 881; Ramus & Montiel, 2005, p. 378). For some, this shows the need to strengthen responsibility in its 'purist form – as an ethical position,' because the alternative is to 'allow corporate behavior to drop to the lowest common denominator, propped up only by external controls, by regulations, pressures and the like' (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 5, p. 13). For others – especially civil society groups and more critical scholars – this shows the need to dismiss with CSR altogether, in favor of stronger regulatory frameworks and corporate 'accountability' (Fig, 2005, p. 605).

The critical literature on CSR lists a wealth of examples of contradictory claims to good corporate citizenship, perhaps the most obvious of which come from the so-called 'sin' industries, including oil, tobacco and defense (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009, p. 111). These include the United Nations giving an award for environmental leadership in 1999 to the head of the petroleum company BP (Munshi & Kurian, 2005, p. 516), and KPMG awarding a prize for the 'best annual sustainability

report' to British American Tobacco South Africa in 2003 (Fig, 2005, p. 612). Critics frequently question what corporations stand to gain from engaging in CSR activities. A 2002 study by KPMG found that companies adopted sustainable practices because of the improvements they believed it would make to business performance through increased efficiency, accessing new markets and risk management (Ramus & Montiel, 2005, p. 387). Similarly, studies have also found that CSR activities improve price-earning ratios (Arendt & Brettel, 2010, p. 1483), increase retention of employees and facilitate access to capital (Mahoney et al., 2013, p. 350). For its critics, CSR has taken activists' calls for greater regulation of supply chains, environmental impact and employment practices, and absorbed them into voluntary schemes in which there is seemingly 'no distinction between ethical practice and the self-interested pursuit of profit' (Cross & Street, 2009, p. 5).

In order to reap the benefits of this 'investment,' corporations must publicize their CSR activities. Indeed, corporations are seen as engaging far more readily in so-called 'promotional CSR,' aimed at communicating ethical values, than they do in 'institutionalised CSR,' which is 'a comprehensive program that integrates socially responsible actions into the operations across a company' (Sternbank et al., 2021, pp. 2–3). Once again, the critical literature provides examples of where such communication seems contradictory to the claims being made. For example, tobacco company Phillip Morris International purportedly spent USD 25 million more in one year communicating about its CSR activities than on the activities themselves (Rahbek Pedersen & Neergaard, 2009, p. 1264). Other companies' attempts to combine CSR activities and communicating about them have led to the rise of so-called 'cause-related marketing,' which aims to raise awareness about a cause whilst simultaneously improving corporate performance (Arendt & Brettel, 2010, p. 1471). CSR activities, and more importantly, communications about them, not only help to bolster profits and give corporations the legitimacy they need amongst governments, shareholders and publics, but they also position the current global economic system as capable of resolving all of the world's social and environmental ills (Cho et al., 2015, p. 80). This is perhaps CSR's proponents' biggest success: 'In public-relations terms, their victory is total. In fact, their opponents never turned up. Unopposed, the CSR movement has distilled a widespread suspicion of capitalism into a set of demands for action' (Crook, 2005).

Munshi and Kurian (2005) propose a postcolonial critique of the CSR agenda by arguing that concerns about the public image of corporations are addressed at an 'asymmetric hierarchy of publics':

> (1) the predominantly Western shareholders; (2) the Western consumer public/the global middle-class consumer; (3) the Western activist public; (4) the vast numbers of Third World workers who produce the goods for consumption by others; and (5) the even greater numbers of Third World citizens too poor to consume. (p. 514)

They argue that TNCs' CSR campaigns 'reflect neo-colonialism at work' (Munshi & Kurian, 2005, p. 517; see also Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Pearson et al., 2019), because their concern is primarily the approval of publics in the Global North, rather than the wellbeing of people in the Global South affected, or even harmed, by their operations. The profit-driven nature of CSR 'investments' means that they are targeted first and foremost at shareholders, then at the publics needed

to consume the goods. Concern for the welfare of publics and workers in the Global South is addressed only if it comes to the attention of the third public, activists in the North, whose activities may in turn affect the buying intentions of the second public, Northern consumers. This is reflected in the analyses below, where claims to be empowering women in developing countries are contradictory to exploitative and harmful employment practices of women in those very same countries.

Among the many critical reflections on CSR, there is the feminist critique of the recent upsurge in activities aimed at women and girls, many of them with a focus on economic empowerment. These initiatives are the product of, and reproduce, discourses in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash that see women as a safe investment and antidote to masculinist, risk-prone forms of financial management (Chant, 2016a; Roberts, 2012, p. 90; Roberts, 2015, p. 212). These discourses themselves resonate with earlier, 'smart economics' discourses (also labelled 'womenomics') promoted by institutions such as the World Bank, corporations and NGOs for decades, making an instrumentalist case for investing in women on the basis that doing so will minimize risk and increase corporate profits (Eisenstein, 2017). This so-called 'win-win' case for investing in women, and more recently girls too (Chant, 2016b), unproblematically links women's interests with economic outcomes and corporate profitability (Calkin, 2015b, p. 3; Chant, 2016b; Roberts, 2012, p. 92). In gender CSR programs, women are a target for investment not because it is the right thing to do, but because of the returns that they will produce on that investment. In short, many powerful interests are coming together to 'cheerlead the business case for gender equality' (Prügl & True, 2014, p. 1130).

As discussed in the introduction, there is some debate within feminist IPE about how to conceptualize this phenomenon. Adrienne Roberts (2015), who conceptualized the term Transnational Business Feminism (TBF), concedes that the use of the term 'feminist' to describe this phenomenon 'may be somewhat controversial, particularly to those who tend to equate feminism with more critical epistemological positions' (pp. 216-7). Indeed, as Sofie Tornhill argues, 'Corporate actors themselves are seldom inclined to label their undertakings as feminist' (2016, p. 540). However, Roberts argues that debating whether or not such projects are indeed feminist is not the most important question at stake, but rather identifying the ways in which 'struggles against gendered forms of inequality and oppression have been incorporated into a politico-economic project that supports the reproduction of neoliberal capitalist frameworks of accumulation, which are inherently inequitable and exploitative' (Roberts, 2015, p. 217; see also Kantola & Squires, 2012).

Yet, there is an important distinction to make between the actions of corporations in adopting feminist language to bolster profits, and the work of feminist organizations, NGOs, individuals and groups of women to empower women within and against the current global economic system. Ignoring the latter risks 'reifying the power(s) of TBF projects, concomitantly erasing from theory and empirical analysis forms of resistance and alternative political economic imaginaries that disrupt and displace the hegemony of the business case [for gender equality]' (Gregoratti, 2018, p. 221). Empirical studies with women participating in, or impacted by, some of the kinds of programs discussed below have found that they can and do experience emancipatory outcomes from this participation (e.g. Scott et al., 2012; Villesèche & Josserand, 2017), while in the broader literature in

feminist IPE, scholars have documented the successes of feminism in garnering attention, and funds, to gendered issues that have long been overlooked (Cornwall et al., 2008), as well as the resistance of women across contexts and continents to neoliberalism (e.g. Bassel & Emejulu, 2017; Dominguez Reyes, 2014; Evans, 2016; Korolczuk, 2016; Roy, 2015).

Whilst recognizing the value in critiquing the 'broader politico-economic project' of TBF (Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019, p. 412), I conceptualize gender CSR programs as less a form of 'co-optation' of feminism, and more an 'appropriation' (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2018, p. 232).[2] The concept of gender wash allows scholars to critique the appropriation of feminist language by corporations whose practices, policies and products are harmful to women and girls, while leaving open the possibility that feminists might exploit CSR discourse to their own ends. In the following section, I draw on the extensive literature critiquing greenwash in order to develop a definition of, and a framework for critiquing, gender wash in feminist IPE.

The means of greenwash

There are multiple possible definitions of the concept of greenwashing, and they differ in one key area: that of intent. Scholars disagree on whether it matters if a company intentionally distracts from its harmful practices with green CSR programs, or whether those programs may be genuinely well-intentioned, but contribute to a misleading perception of the company's environmental performance. Greenwashing can be defined as, 'concealing environmentally harmful actions with the rhetoric of environmental friendliness to entice and manipulate the consumer' (Plec & Pettenger, 2012, p. 464) or 'disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, cited in Ramus & Montiel, 2005, p. 377). Studies suggest that the public perceive there to be a key distinction between 'moral hypocrisy,' when a corporation intentionally deceives publics about its practices, and 'behavioral hypocrisy,' when certain practices within the organization contradict the ideals it espouses, but it is generally perceived to be acting in good faith (Wagner et al., 2020).

Key to ascertaining intent to greenwash, or indeed to gender wash, is the issue of whether a corporation is to be considered a single, unitary actor, or a conglomerate of multiple different teams and divisions, each with different, or even contradictory, aims. In practice, this is a very difficult distinction to make and many scholars avoid the issue altogether. One possible solution comes in a conceptualization of a corporation as a 'political entity,' with 'multiple, somewhat isolated, substructures to respond to specific stakeholder management requirements (e.g. an investor relations department, sustainability office, or charitable foundation),' yet which must still ensure that 'market participants believe that [it] is a unitary actor' (Cho et al., 2015, pp. 81 & 84). While it is almost always impossible to prove that an executive board adopt a conscious strategy of deception, or that a communications team producing positive news stories about CSR achievements are aware of bad practice elsewhere within a corporation, it should not be necessary in order to prove the intent to green/gender wash. Corporations have intentionally been structured into different divisions and teams in order to manage inherently

contradictory demands placed on them by the five publics identified by Munshi and Kurian. Yet they present themselves as unitary actors to those publics to avoid accusations of hypocrisy (Cho et al., 2015, p. 84). A critique of gender wash, then, needs to expose the hypocrisy in the contradictory actions and communications of different sub-structures beneath the façade of a unitary actor. Regardless of the motivations of individuals or individual teams, if a corporation is structured in such a way that contradictory claims can emerge in which 'the company is pretending to be something it is not' or 'the company tries to appear more virtuous than it actually is,' then the deceit can be said to be part of an intentional strategy to present the company in a favorable light to all of its many stakeholders (Wagner et al., 2020, p. 388). In practice, this makes little difference to the overall analysis of the forms of gender washing, or to their possible impacts on women and girls. However, my point here is to argue for a more critical stance towards the claims of TNCs; one which views any corporation whose structure is set up in such a way as to make hypocrisy possible, or which presents itself as a unitary actor despite contradictory divisions and practices, as intentionally deceiving publics, regardless of the motivations for individual CSR programs.

I have therefore adapted Lyon and Montgomery's (2015) definition of the popular use of the term greenwashing, based on their review of thousands of articles on the phenomenon, as 'a range of communications that mislead people into adopting overly positive beliefs about an organization's environmental performance, practices or products' (p. 225). I propose a definition of gender wash as: a range of communications *with the intent* to mislead people into adopting overly positive beliefs about the impact of an organization's practices, policies or products on girls and women. In the sections that follow, I draw on Lyon and Montgomery's varieties of greenwash: selective disclosure, empty green claims and policies, dubious certifications and labels, co-opted NGO endorsements and partnerships, ineffective public voluntary programs, misleading narrative and discourse, and misleading visual imagery. The translation of this framework into the feminist literature is possible because its focus is on the communicative practices engaged in to deceive, as opposed to the subject of those communications. For each variety, I give an example inspired by the existing literature on gender and CSR in feminist IPE and business studies to illustrate how this framework can be used to analyze gender wash (see Table 1). These examples are not intended to be representative of all CSR activities aimed at women and girls and further forms of gender wash may well be identified as the literature develops in future. However, I argue that this constitutes a useful framework for feminist and postcolonial scholars of IPE to identify the different ways in which corporations' CSR programs targeted at women and girls in the Global North and South can frequently be contradictory to their products, employment practices and supply chains.

Varieties of gender wash

Selective disclosure

In environmental terms, selective disclosure incorporates communications by corporations that emphasize only the areas where they are improving environmental performance, and which do not disclose areas where there is no improvement or

Table 1. Varieties of gender wash (adapted from Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Varieties of Gender Wash	Definition	Illustrative Example
Selective Disclosure	Communications by corporations that emphasize only the areas where they are improving performance on gender issues, and which do not disclose areas where there is no improvement or even a worsening performance.	A corporation's communications team nominating the firm for a shortlist of best practice employers of women, even while the corporation faces lawsuits for alleged gender and maternity discrimination.
Empty Gender Claims and Policies	Claims by corporations to be implementing policies that will radically transform gender relations, when in reality there is little power to implement them or they do little to challenge the status quo.	The creation of 'women's networks,' which place the onus on women themselves to challenge sexism and discrimination in the workplace, and often go ignored.
Dubious Certifications and Labels	The use of third-party labels and certification to imply a product is beneficial to women and girls.	The placement of the pink Breast Cancer Awareness Month ribbon on products known to contain carcinogens, to indicate a donation to the campaign.
Co-opted NGO Endorsements and Partnerships	Association with girls' and women's rights organisations to lend credibility to corporate claims to be striving towards gender equality.	A corporation sponsoring a high-profile women's rights NGO, gaining publicity and brand recognition on NGO materials as a result, while doing nothing to address harmful practices towards women and girls in the corporation's own products, supply chains or employment practices.
Ineffective Public Voluntary Programs	The creation or signing of voluntary commitments, programs and codes of conduct on gender equality in the workplace, with weak enforcement mechanisms.	The voluntary adoption of a code of conduct on sexual harassment in the workplace, with internal reporting and investigation mechanisms, in order to help assuage activist, public and worker demands for greater legal regulation and accountability.
Misleading Narrative and Discourse	Marketing campaigns aimed at positioning a corporation as a leading actor or expert in girls' and women's empowerment, regardless of its track record in this area.	A corporation branding itself as having expertise in the empowerment of women in the Global South, despite accusations of sexual harassment and child labour in its supply chains.
Misleading Branding	The use of female logos, avatars and voices to imply that a brand is women- or girl-friendly.	The use of a woman's voice, image or avatar as the public face of a corporation whose employees, and senior management, are overwhelmingly male to make the corporation appear more 'feminine,' approachable or woman-friendly to consumers.

even a worsening performance. In the context of gender washing, selective disclosure could be applied to employment practices where corporations only disclose information about their improving performance in, for example, gender parity at the highest levels of an organization or in the gender pay gap, and do not disclose information that may contradict such claims.

One example is the *Working Mother* magazine annual list of the 100 'Best Companies to Work For.' Corporations nominate themselves for the list and

Working Mother suggests that 'a representative from the company's HR, Diversity, Work/Life, or *Communications* department' completes the forms (Working Mother Magazine, 2015, own emphasis). As well as choosing which information to disclose, companies need not fear negative consequences should they fail to make the list: '*Working Mother* lists are a celebration. We do not release the names of companies that apply but do not make the list' (Working Mother Magazine, 2015). Rather than any detailed scrutiny of a company's practices, the list serves as a communications exercise, by which companies promote themselves as women or parent-friendly places to work. Indeed, Still (2007) found that in the ten-year period of 1996–2005, nearly 30 companies that featured on the *Working Mother* list or a similar one by *Fortune*, had been sued by employees for discriminating against workers with family responsibilities (p. 30).

One such company is Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, which boasts of having featured on the *Working Mother* list 14 times (Novartis, n.d.). Yet, in 2010, Novartis lost the 'largest gender discrimination case to ever go to trial' (Sanford Heilser LLP, n.d.), with a further suit filed in 2015. In the 2010 suit, the court awarded 5,600 sales representatives over USD 250 million in damages on the grounds of gender pay and promotion and pregnancy discrimination (Sanford Heisler LLP, n.d.). The court heard claims of male managers openly discussing preferring not to hire young women and encouraging female employees to get an abortion or not to get pregnant (Velez v. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation). Despite this, Novartis still featured on the list of best employers of working mothers four years later. This illustrates how some corporations might use schemes such as the *Working Mother* list to gender wash their image and to make themselves appear gender equal or women-friendly, regardless of their actual policies and practices.

Empty gender claims and policies

The second form of gender wash is very closely related to the first. One suggested example in the literature on greenwashing is the creation of a 'sustainability' team within a corporation, whose role is related to improving the environmental performance across the organization, but who in reality are largely ignored (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015, p. 237). Here, 'women's networks' within corporations offer a clear equivalent. Women's networks are designed to 'help women build skills and create knowledge to succeed in organizational culture' (Bierema, 2005, p. 208). They promote networking events and mentoring schemes for female employees and are sometimes also given the remit of advising senior management on gender policies. They are not only commonplace in corporations, but are also widely perceived to be successful in generating change (Bierema, 2005, p. 211).

While some research has shown positive impacts of such initiatives in terms of boosting women's confidence, enabling them to share career advice and supporting one another emotionally (Villesèche & Josserand, 2017), critics argue that they do little to address underlying inequalities. The burden of challenging and resolving inequalities within a corporation falls on the shoulders of women, without addressing the many complex institutional and cultural factors that lead to discrimination against women, or indeed asking men to engage with these factors (Gerard, 2019, p. 1026).

Indeed, one study of an in-company women's network found that its effectiveness was limited by participants' fears that their involvement in the group could be damaging for their careers. These fears were fueled by male colleagues' jokes about the group 'male-bashing' and exchanging recipes during their meetings (Bierema, 2005, p. 214). Bierema (2005) concluded that the failure of the network, which eventually disbanded, may have been directly related to its labelling as a 'women's network,' and that many of its members could have achieved more on the issues raised within group meetings by raising them within the networks they were already party to (p. 217). Nevertheless, having such a network enables corporations to present themselves to prospective employees, shareholders and the general public as taking action to empower their female members of staff.

Dubious certifications and labels

Lyon and Montgomery (2015) define the third variety of greenwash as the use of dubious certifications and labels, with the aim of 'substituting the credibility of a third-party certifier for a firm's own claims' (p. 237). An example might be placing symbols on products which seem to imply that they are organic when they are in fact not. As described above, feminist scholars and campaigners have adopted the term 'pinkwashing' in a similar context to describe when companies whose products are known to contain carcinogens place the pink breast cancer awareness ribbon on their labelling to indicate a donation for every product sold.

Indeed, Breast Cancer Awareness Month was launched by global pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, who one campaign group, the Toxic Links Coalition, claim have a 'USD 300 million annual business in the carcinogenic herbicide acetochlor' (Pezzullo, 2003, p. 353). Similarly, Mart and Giesbrecht (2015) discuss the prevalence of the pink breast cancer ribbon on products containing alcohol, which accounts for approximately eight percent of the global breast cancer disease burden (p. 1541), and Sulik (2014) describes action by the Breast Cancer Fund against Revlon, who market beauty products such as lip gloss featuring the pink ribbon, despite their products having been found to contain 'formaldehyde-releasing chemicals, parabens, and carbon black (linked to cancer); endocrine disruptors (linked to breast cancer and thyroid disorders); and *p*-phenylenediamine (a respiratory toxicant)' (p. 672).

This critique could also be expanded to include corporations adopting the pink ribbon as a symbol when their very existence or business model perpetuates harmful discourses about women and girls. For example, the US bar and restaurant chain Hooters, whose female-only waiting staff are famed for their beauty, large breasts and skimpy clothing, has an annual campaign to 'give a hoot' for Breast Cancer Awareness Month (Hooters, n.d.-b). The site urges customers to 'add a donation to your bill,' 'buy a pink bracelet,' 'buy a pink drink' (presumably alcoholic) or 'purchase a calendar' featuring Hooters staff in bikinis, to support the cause. In the 'History' part of its website, Hooters claims to offer its customers 'All-American fun in 29 countries,' with an image of two smiling women in Hooters hot pants and vest tops, set against the exotic background of a beach and dazzling blue water (Hooters, n.d.-c). Meanwhile, the 'Careers' page boasts that:

> Being a Hooters Girl is an honor bestowed upon only the most entertaining, goal oriented, glamourous and charismatic women. Hooters Girls have that special gift for making every guest feel welcome. […] She is an American icon the world over. A waitress she is not. (Hooters, n.d.-a)

The brand that Hooters exports around the world produces, and reproduces, sexist and racist power relations, recruiting only young women who conform to US ideals of beauty and hospitality, to ensure that even when they find themselves overseas, US men 'feel welcome.'

Hooters – a corporation whose entire business model relies on the racialized objectification of women – uses pink ribbons and branding to present itself as concerned about women's health. Not women's health in general, but specifically the health of their breasts, which are so fundamental to the Hooters brand. The most blatant example of this comes on the 'Give a Hoot' page of the website, in which the two Os in Hoot have been replaced with pink ribbons (Hooters, n.d.-b). Where in the Hooters logo, they are usually made of the eyes of an owl – two disproportionately large circles on the owl's face to symbolize both the breasts that are to be stared at, and the act of staring wide-eyed – they have now been replaced with symbols of women's health. Staring has been rebranded as caring.

This second critique demonstrates the potential for the use of the concept of gender washing to critique corporations' practices in a way that goes far beyond simply questioning the content of products labelled in certain ways. It is a tool for critiquing wider social practices associated with corporations and their brands, highlighting how claims to be supporting, empowering or promoting the health of women must be situated within corporations' reproduction elsewhere in their practices of racialized misogyny.

Co-opted NGO endorsements and partnerships

A further means of greenwashing a corporation's image is in co-opting NGOs by sponsoring their programs, gaining their endorsement or partnering with them. In this way, corporations boost their environmental credentials by associating with organizations whose activities center on the issue of environmentalism. Parallels can be drawn with corporate sponsorship of NGO projects aimed at empowering girls and women. For example, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts claims to be the 'largest voluntary movement dedicated to girls and young women in the world' (WAGGGS, n.d.-c). The Association offers a range of activities, training and opportunities to girls around the world, often in contexts where these activities would not be available in other forms. It has recently partnered with Dove, the producer of beauty products for men and women, to create a teaching resource to boost girls' self-esteem, 'because we share the vision of a world free from appearance-related anxiety for girls' (WAGGGS, n.d.-b, p. 4). The resource describes Dove as a 'leading personal care brand with a long-standing commitment to improving the body confidence and self-esteem of women' (WAGGGS, n.d.-b, p. 4). Dove's long-running interventions in the body positivity movement – including the 'Campaign for Real Beauty' – have been critiqued by feminist political economists for 'seamlessly connecting Dove's politics to its products,' with statements on the Dove website such as 'Let's Dare to Love Our Hair' linked to opportunities to buy Dove hair care products (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 952; see also Taylor

et al., 2016). The campaign, which features adverts with everyday women as opposed to models, and promotes messages about body positivity, 'is part of a gender-specific marketing strategy that cultivates brand loyalty using models and imagery that women can identify with, while conveying an appearance of corporate philanthropy' (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 955).

The content of the WAGGGS resource aims to help participants explore what it calls the 'Image Myth,' by which is meant unrealistic beauty standards placed on girls and women. By the end of the resource, participants should understand that 'beauty ideals change over time and vary between cultures and therefore are not worth pursuing' (WAGGGS, n.d.-a, p. 11). This is achieved through activities exploring topics ranging from the use of photoshop in advertising campaigns to discussing beauty standards in different contexts.

The resource silences a critique of the behavior of brands such as Dove in perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards in order to boost sales of their products. Indeed, the Real Beauty campaign has been hugely successful for Dove in terms of sales of some of its flagship products, including firming cream (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 124). This silencing can be seen in the accompanying resource for Guide and Scout group leaders and the suggested answers it provides to discussion questions. For example, when girls are asked 'Where do you learn, hear and see the Image Myth?' the suggested answers for leaders are: 'friends; family; media (television shows; films; magazines; internet; advertising); diet industry' (WAGGGS, n.d.-c, 12). Some of the beauty ideas explored in the resource include the following:

> In countries like Australia, the UK and the USA, many people want to look like they have been in the sun and have tanned skin […] In many places in Asia, such as India, China and Pakistan, lighter skin is often considered more attractive. Some people believe they will be more successful with whiter skin. (WAGGGS, n.d.-c, 49)

Yet Dove itself, and its parent company Unilever, are heavily invested in perpetuating these beauty ideals. Dove sells tanning or 'tinted' products in various countries, while Unilever owns two brands of skin lightening creams, 'Fair and Lovely' and 'White Beauty.' Fair and Lovely is specifically marketed at poor women in countries across the Global South with adverts to suggest that lightening their skin will help to improve their lives *via* better job prospects or a favorable marriage (Karnani, 2007, pp. 1353–1354).

Whilst the WAGGGS resource's claims that 'some people believe' that white skin brings greater success, implying that the issue is one of individuals and their (misplaced) beliefs, Fair and Lovely's advertising campaigns make this link explicitly. Dove may not sell skin lightening creams themselves, but their close links to products such as Fair and Lovely – through their parent company Unilever – render their claims at educating girls against 'myths' about skin color deeply problematic. Similarly, the suggested list of sources of the 'Image Myth' in the resource guide places blame for these discourses first and foremost on girls' friends and families, then the media in general, and only towards the end of the list does it mention 'advertising' and even then, not specifically the beauty industry.

According to the resource, girls need only to stop believing myths, or listening to their friends and family, in order to feel better about themselves. In this case, a beauty brand and its parent company, rather than targeting girls and women for 'gendered products, particularly those that promote the aspirational ideals of class

mobility, racialized beauty and professional status' (Moeller, 2018, p. 8), are rebranded as a 'personal care' brand, who care about young women and who are working alongside a globally-recognized NGO to challenge sexism and racism globally.

Ineffective public voluntary programs

Another means to greenwashing a corporation's image is through signing up to voluntary commitments, programs and codes of conduct, with weak enforcement mechanisms, which nevertheless help to silence calls for legal regulation and accountability (Elias, 2007, p. 55). Lyon and Montgomery (2015) argue that firms may sign up to voluntary sustainability commitments for a variety of different reasons, but their participation in them rarely leads to environmental improvements (p. 237). An interesting example of a 'gender washing' equivalent to this phenomenon is the creation of voluntary programs to address safety in supply chains, such as the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (henceforth, the Accord) and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (henceforth, the Alliance). Both programs were established in the wake of the Rana Plaza factory collapse, which killed over one thousand garment factory workers in 2013, an estimated 80 percent of whom were female (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019, p. 856).

The Accord and the Alliance are agreements between the many different transnational corporations that purchase garments from factories in Bangladesh, most of them based in the Global North. The main purpose of the agreements is to carry out inspections for fire, structural and electrical safety in thousands of factories, and to create 'Corrective Action Plans' to carry out remedial work. However, they differ significantly in legal status. While the Accord is a legally binding agreement – involving a mixture of European and North American fashion labels – that requires factories to be inspected by independent structural engineers, the Alliance – involving North American brands including Walmart and Gap – is an industry-led, voluntary initiative, which gave 'complete oversight and control of the inspection process to the companies themselves' (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019, p. 860). While both the Accord and the Alliance have been critiqued for not acting quickly enough to mitigate risks to predominantly female garment factory worker's lives (Kasperkevic, 2016; Butler, 2016), the voluntary nature of the Alliance has led to it being labelled a 'gendered CSR approach,' in which calls for respect of fundamental rights of female garment workers were translated into a voluntary, self-regulated program of remediation which, if anything, detracted from calls to address widespread discrimination and harassment (Alagmir & Alakavuklar, 2020).

A page on the Walmart website entitled 'Our Commitment to the Workers of Bangladesh' states that the corporation cares 'deeply about the *women and men* in our supply chain' (Walmart, n.d., own emphasis). Under the subheading, 'The Alliance's Impact,' it sets out the various measures taken to address worker safety and the 'sustainable, long-lasting improvement in the global supply chain' that Walmart undertook, including through its 'Women in Factories Training Program' (Walmart, n.d.). This training course aimed to provide women with 'the fundamental life and work skills necessary to be successful in the workplace, at home and in their communities' (ibid). While worker safety is framed as a gendered issue on the website, with the emphasis placed on women workers first, and specific training

programs aimed at them, the Alliance has been critiqued precisely because it misrepresented women workers as simply workers, ignoring the very specific, gendered issues that they faced. Doing so allows factory owners to continue paying women lower wages, forcing them to work long, unsafe hours despite their caring responsibilities, dismissing them when they become pregnant and harassing them in the workplace (Alagmir & Alakavuklar, 2020).

Munshi and Kurian's (2005) postcolonial analysis of the hierarchy of publics targeted by CSR campaigns is useful here. On the Walmart website, the Alliance is sold to shareholders and concerned Northern consumers and activists as an initiative aimed at empowering Bangladeshi women. The voluntariness of the scheme is presented as a willingness to do good. Yet the literature on voluntary codes has shown repeatedly that they rarely have a significant impact on workers' rights. Indeed, the Rana Plaza collapse itself happened just weeks after the factory had undergone a social audit as part of one such voluntary program (Barrientos et al., 2019, p. 737). Yet, at the bottom of the hierarchy of global supply chains are female workers in the Global South who are recruited specifically because they represent cheap labor (Pearson, 2007, p. 738). They are treated as workers – as opposed to women workers – precisely because of the costs that recognizing and addressing the many gendered abuses they face would entail. And the voluntariness of the codes masks a refusal by some transnational corporations to take responsibility for the almost impossibility of maintaining decent working conditions under the prices offered to factories for their orders (Alagmir & Alakavuklar, 2020, p. 304). The marketing of the Alliance is a form of gender wash that aims to reassure Northern shareholders, activists and consumers that the garment industry is having a positive impact on women in Bangladesh, even as the many structural, gendered and racialized inequalities that led to the Rana Plaza collapse go unaddressed.

Misleading narrative and discourse

Misleading narrative and discourse describes the ways in which companies launch marketing campaigns on social issues that are deceptive when taken in the context of their overall record. The greenwashing example given by Lyon and Montgomery (2015) is British Petroleum's 'beyond petroleum' campaign, which gave the impression that the corporation was leading the search for more sustainable fuel sources even while it continued to make vast amounts of profit from the inherently polluting nature of its business (p. 238).

A gender washing equivalent might be that of Nike, whose high-profile initiative the Girl Effect, aimed at encouraging global leaders to invest in girls in the Global South, emerged from the corporation's long-running battle with scandals surrounding the use of child labor in its supply chains (Moeller, 2018, p. xii). The campaign to scrutinize Nike's labor practices started with the launch of two reports sponsored by unions, followed by televised documentaries in the UK and the US, and the establishment of various websites to document the abuses (Waller & Conaway, 2011, pp. 91–93). An article in *Life* magazine in 2002 gave the campaign momentum with its famous image of Pakistani children sitting on the dusty ground, stitching footballs (Waller & Conaway, 2011, p. 95). Much of the media attention honed in on how Nike's Asian contract factory workers — 90 percent of whom were female – were exploited, paid below-subsistence wages, exposed to dangerous

machinery and chemicals, vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse by managers and denied freedom of speech and association (Waller & Conaway, 2011, pp. 99–100).

In response, the corporation created its first Division of Corporate Responsibility and appointed Maria Eitel, former member of the George H. W. Bush administration's communications team (Fitterman, 2012), as the vice president in charge, under whose guidance, 'the company adroitly counterattacked' (Waller & Conaway, 2011, p. 103). Nike went from a 'PR nightmare' to 'an international role model' (Fitterman, 2012). Eitel was keen to take this role further:

> [Nike CEO Phil Knight] asked what her dream job would be. After some thought, she told him that solving problems like workplace sexual harassment was largely meaningless if women were still mistreated when they came home at the end of the day. Why not use the Nike Foundation, which at the time was just a name on a piece of paper, to promote the empowerment of women more actively? (Fitterman, 2012)

The Nike Foundation subsequently launched the Girl Effect, which started as a series of videos and an accompanying website, created by Nike marketing staff and branded in Nike colors.

Numerous scholars have analyzed how the Girl Effect's many videos and campaign materials posit girls as the solution to global poverty (e.g. Calkin, 2015a; Chant, 2016b; Grosser & van der Gaag, 2013; Moeller, 2018; Shain, 2013; Switzer et al., 2016). In the Girl Effect videos, in which girls in the Global South who are given a loan to buy a cow or school uniform lift entire communities out of poverty, saving themselves from early marriage and motherhood, HIV and prostitution (Girl Effect n.d.-a; Girl Effect n.d.-b), the only barrier to unlocking a girl's entrepreneurial zeal is a lack of access to capital and financial services, and training for workplace skills (Calkin, 2015b, p. 12). The videos focus on an individualized solution to gender inequality that is blind to the many structural reasons why girls are disadvantaged, in which transnational corporations are implicated.

For example, in one of the Girl Effect's first videos, images of girls in the Global South stare into the camera as a voiceover dares the viewer to see them as the solution to global poverty. The video proclaims that, 'When an educated girl earns income, she reinvests 90% of it in her family, compared to 35% for a boy' (Girl Effect, 2008). Typical of the Girl Effect discourse, this statistic does nothing to challenge the structural inequalities that mean that girls may be forced to relinquish a greater proportion of their income, or are raised to think of others before themselves. Furthermore, it does nothing to question the fact that a 'girl' is working rather than going to school. In this construction, employment is 'inherently empowering' (Prügl & True, 2014, p. 1152) not just for girls, but also for entire communities. Rather than a transnational corporation whose supply chain relies on the gendered exploitation of marginalized communities, where children must work in harsh conditions and girls are expected to devote themselves and their wages to their families, in this narrative Nike becomes a caring corporation offering empowerment and financial betterment through its commitment to changing perceptions of girls. Indeed, a 2012 action plan on empowering adolescent girls by the UK Government's Department for International Development stated that it planned to 'work in partnership with the Nike Foundation to bring private sector expertise into DFID's strategy on gender inequality' (cited in Roberts, 2015, 224). Accusations of child exploitation had been gender washed, positioning Nike as a leading expert in the empowerment of girls in the Global South.

Misleading branding

In the greenwashing literature, Lyon and Montgomery (2015) label this as 'misleading visual imagery,' which is exemplified by the many different brands that use biodiversity symbols such as animals, trees and plants in their logos, regardless of the actual link, or lack thereof, to nature of the product or enterprise (p. 238).

An example emerging from feminist IPE scholarship might be that of Chiquita Banana. Cynthia Enloe (2014) charts how the history of Chiquita Brands Corporation – formerly the United Fruit Company – is closely tied to the history of US intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean, and its supply chains are deeply gendered and racialized. She argues:

> Notions of masculinity and femininity have been used to shape the international political economy of the banana. Banana plantations were developed in Central America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Philippines as a result of alliances between men of different but complimentary interests: businessmen and male officials of the importing countries, on the one hand, and male large-landowners and government officials of the exporting countries, on the other. To clear the land and harvest the bananas, these male banana industrializers decided they needed a male workforce, one sustained at a distance by women as prostitutes, mothers and wives. (Enloe, 2014, p. 215)

Feminist research in the early twentieth-century documented how issues such as 'widespread sexual harassment, discrimination and violations of labor rights in areas such as health and safety, wages and overtime' (Prieto-Carrón & Larner, 2010, p. 44) and 'low remuneration, short contracts, long hours, health consequences of the use of agrochemicals and obstacles to freedom of expression […] violation of childcare and maternity rights and lack of safe transportation home' (Prieto-Carrón, 2006, pp. 87–88) were all still very much an issue for women workers in Chiquita plantations in Latin America.

Yet, to the millions of consumers of Chiquita bananas worldwide, the face of the corporation – the logo on the sticker on each banana – is the 'friendly face of a bouncy Latin American market woman' (Enloe, 2014, p. 217-8). Originally half-woman, half-banana, singing a calypso song advising US consumers on how best to store and eat their fruit, but now full-woman, Chiquita Banana represents racialized, exoticized perceptions of Latin American beauty. The beautiful, curvaceous, smiling Chiquita wears a dress with ruffled sleeves, reminiscent of a flamenco dress, large gold hoop earrings and a basket of tropical fruit on her head. She holds one hand on her hip and one in the air, as though she is about to start dancing. She is happy and beautiful.

Enloe argues that this branding is targeted at the predominantly female purchasers of bananas in the Global North and that it achieves two things. Firstly, it establishes brand affinity for a product that would otherwise seem identical to its rivals, with Northern mothers inspired to 'think "Chiquita" when they [go] to the grocery store to buy bananas' (Enloe, 2014, p. 217). Secondly, it presents the face of the brand to Northern publics as a happy, Latin American market woman. It masks the exploitation of women in global banana supply chains, and instead presents Northern consumers with an 'exotic and yet mildly amusing' character (Enloe, 2014, p. 214). The face of the international banana trade is both gendered and misleading.

Discussion and conclusions

This article has made three contributions. Firstly, it has set out a definition of gender wash in relation to CSR programs. This definition revolves around three key points: that gender wash is a communicative practice, that it is intentional, and that it presents a deceptively favorable view of an organizations' policies, practices and products. In the context of calls to move beyond a co-optation/resistance dichotomy in analyzing feminism in and against neoliberalism, I argue that the concept of gender wash gives scope to critique TNCs' appropriation of feminist language and struggles, while leaving open the possibility that feminists and feminist organizations might still find space to resist that appropriation.

A second contribution is in illustrating how the extensive literature on greenwashing – and one framework in particular, developed from a comprehensive analysis of over thirty years of discussion of the topic – might inform feminist critiques of CSR. Drawing on examples from feminist IPE and business studies, I have demonstrated how the seven varieties of greenwash might translate into a framework for critiquing gender wash. These seven categories can help scholars to sharpen their critique of corporate hypocrisy and raise the potential for new bodies of work within each strand.

The third contribution of this article is in drawing on, and speaking back to, the literature on greenwashing in making the case for identifying the intent to green/gender wash. This need not be attributed to individuals, executive boards or communications teams but rather can, I argue, be attributed to the corporation as a whole, which is structured in such a way that contradictory and misleading claims can emerge. This matters because greenwashing and gender washing suggest a willful neglect by corporations of important social and environmental issues, motivated by an attempt to increase profits, reach new markets and expand their production, all of which risk exacerbating the harmful practices their communications practices conceal. While CSR activities may lead to some positive outcomes for women, if they come from a corporation that is failing to address institutionalized sexism, and they succeed in presenting a woman-friendly image to publics, they may also serve to perpetuate gendered harms.

As the literature on gender and CSR develops further, there is scope to explore the possible limitations of this framework – does it capture every form of gender washing? Are there varieties specific to gender that have yet to be identified in the environmental literature, for example? There is also scope to explore how this framework might apply to other forms of 'washing.' For example, corporations' recent public support for Black Lives Matter protests in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd might be analyzed in many cases as a form of 'blackwashing' (Kelly & Gochanour, 2018) – that is a superficial or tokenistic public engagement with racism that does not engage with, or even masks, structural racism within the corporation itself. Or, for example, the sponsorship of the United Nations Foundation's Girl Up campaign by Caterpillar Inc. might be conceptualized both as a form of gender washing and 'blue washing,' that is an attempt to be affiliated with the UN brand and the humanitarian principles associated with it, despite criticisms from UN special rapporteurs of the corporations' ongoing role in the occupation of Palestinian territories (Besada et al., 2015, p. 6; Fig, 2005, p. 605;

United Nations, n.d.). How do these forms of 'washing' intersect? What insights might feminist conceptualizations offer to other disciplines?

There is scope to explore these and many other questions in examining the role of corporations in promoting gender equality initiatives. Indeed, rather than providing a series of answers, this article's aim has been to set out a possible research agenda for feminist scholars of IPE. The framework above provides a useful tool to those who wish to critique the actions of corporations that engage in marketing and communications that make them appear gender equal or women-friendly to the public, while their products, supply chains and employment practices are inherently harmful towards women and girls.

Notes

1. Some campaigners have adopted the term 'pinkwashing' in critiquing CSR initiatives, particularly in relation to the placement of the pink Breast Cancer Awareness ribbon – to signify a donation to the relevant charity – on product labels and marketing, despite those very same products containing known carcinogens (Tiefer, 2013, p. 274). However, the term 'pinkwashing' is probably most familiar to scholars of International Relations in the context of the queer theory critique of Israel's attempts to present itself as the only 'gay-friendly' state in the Middle East (Schulman, 2011). In the interests of avoiding confusion, I have therefore chosen to use 'gender washing' in this article, although the two meanings of 'pinkwashing' clearly have similar roots, in their exposure of the way in which powerful entities that are heavily implicated in the reproduction of masculinist and heteronormative power relations attempt to present themselves as promoters of human rights and equality.
2. In this article, I focus on the actions, and frequent hypocrisy, of corporations because, as Kate Grosser and Lauren McCarthy (2019, p. 1101) argue, they are powerful: 'influencing regulation, business practices and popular culture globally, including gender relations.' They have been shown to exploit women's paid and unpaid labor across the globe. Of course, the label of gender wash could equally be applied to other forms of organizations too – governments, NGOs, universities and so on – and the framework I propose may prove useful in doing so. But the power of corporations to produce, and reproduce, gendered inequalities makes the analysis of hypocrisy in this article particularly pertinent to them.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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