

Research Article

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The Lean In Collection: Women, Work, and the Will to Represent

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Abstract: In February 2014, Getty Images, the largest international stock photography agency, and LeanIn. org, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's women's empowerment foundation, announced a new partnership that aimed to change the way women are portrayed in stock photography. The "Lean In Collection" with Getty seeks to challenge visual gendered stereotypes ascribed to both sexes in the daily life of work, home, and family life in advertising imagery. While the overarching ambition of gender empowerment implicit in the mission of Lean In is a worthwhile goal, I look to the problematic relationship rooted in the partnership between Lean In's gender empowerment initiative and the role of Getty Images in trafficking aesthetic stereotypes for profit. Using methods of visual analysis and feminist critique, I argue that the photographs idealise a concept of female empowerment that is steeped in the rationale of neoliberal economics, which narrowly circumscribes gender citizenship according to the mandates of market logic. The Lean In Collection describes gender equality not as a right of citizenship procured by the state, but as a depoliticised and individualised negotiation.

Keywords: gender studies, photography, visual culture, media studies

Introduction

In early 2013, chief operating officer for Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, published the bestselling book, Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead: an examination of gender inequalities in the workforce that aims to empower women to narrow the "leadership ambition gap" by actively seeking out professional leadership positions in the workplace (15). Alongside recounting her own experiences, Sandberg provides anecdotal stories from women in high-powered positions moving up the "corporate ladder" in a workplace culture that demeans, discriminates, and underestimates the ability of women to perform on equal ground with men. Threading through her narrative, she acknowledges the challenge of balancing career ambition with the responsibilities of marriage and family, a particularly fraught social and economic negotiation primarily levelled at women workers. As a number of feminist critics have noted (Cottom "The Atlantic Article, Trickle Down Feminism, and My Twitter Mentions. God Help Us All," Losse "Feminism's Tipping Point: Who Wins from Leaning In?" Rottenberg "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," Gill "Post-Postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," Gill and Orgad "The Confidence Cult(ure)"), Sandberg's personal manifesto gives cursory attention to the external systemic barriers that exclude women from advancing in the workplace; rather, she chooses to focus on how gender biases manifest through internal barriers: the fears and insecurities that women place on themselves. As such, Sandberg and her contributors provide advice to their readers on foraging career advancement opportunities by advocating for them, as the book title suggests, to "lean in" to leadership roles. She addresses the double standard uniquely placed on women

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to balance career and family life by encouraging women to seek out more equal and supportive marriage partnerships. For Sandberg, the power for change lies in the individual actions of her female readers.

To employ Lean In as a movement, Sandberg founded LeanIn.org, a non-profit foundation that has partnered with corporations to offer educational materials, developed by LeanIn.org, that provide advice and support strategies that empower female employees to seek out professional advancement, including how to start the organization's signature peer-to-peer "Lean In Circle" groups. Expanding on its corporate collaboration efforts, in February 2014 LeanIn.org announced a new partnership with Getty Images, which is the largest international stock photography agency. Together they have curated the continually evolving "Lean In Collection," which Getty describes as "a library of images devoted to the powerful depiction of women, girls and the people who support them" ("Lean In Collection—Getty Images"). By intervening in the distribution division of advertising imagery, the Collection aims to address the advertising and the mass media industry's "image gender gap;" the proliferation of stereotypical and clichéd visual representations of women and men in various social and professional gender roles ("Getty Image Collection"). The Lean In Collection consists of a variety of portraits of women engaged in work, leisure, and caretaking activities: women at work alone and in groups, women working while pregnant, women exercising, as well as women performing leisure activities with children. In addition to women featured in modern corporate offices, they are also represented working in job settings typically ascribed to men, such as scientific laboratories, industrial sites, and trade workshops. Situating itself in opposition to visual media that have historically functioned to establish and reiterate gender stereotypes, the Collection claims to provide a selection of images that visually describe female empowerment at work, in play, and at home.

While the overarching ambition to challenge normative gender stereotypes that is implicit in the mission of partnership is a worthwhile goal, what is particularly interesting about this project is the problematic collaboration between Lean In as a gender empowerment initiative and Getty Images as a mechanism for trafficking aesthetic stereotypes for profit. Through visual analysis of the Lean In Collection and a theoretical commitment to political economic and feminist critique, I argue that the photographs idealise a concept of female empowerment that is steeped in the rationale of neoliberal economics, which narrowly circumscribes gender citizenship according to the mandates of market logic. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's concept of the "intimate public sphere," I posit that the representation of the "Lean In woman" in the Collection idealizes a female empowerment predicated on a collapse of the public and economic life of work and private family life in the home and portrays women as simultaneously worker and mother in a way that mitigates the collective politics of gendered labour and social reproduction. Illuminated by Wendy Brown's theory of neoliberal rationality, the effect of the intimate public sphere on contemporary feminism has been to direct women, as individual actors, to engage in an economic negotiation of both work and family life directly with corporate power. As such, I propose the Lean In Collection describes gender equality not as a right of citizenship procured by the state, but as a depoliticised and individualised negotiation. I contend the photographs in the Lean In Collection represent an iteration of how seamlessly capital appropriates the politics of identity and marginal representation into commodity form; thereby, women's individual empowerment practices remain embedded within the existing culture that will continue to maintain and nurture structural inequalities.

Feminism and its Visualization in the Neoliberal Era

Sandberg's book, and the creation of the Lean In Collection, are part of a broader resurgence in Western media attention to the particular barriers and challenges women face in the workplace and the home. While Sandberg's Lean In movement has garnered significant attention in the media and by feminist scholars, little attention has been paid to the critical examination of the Lean In Collection's visual communication of Sandberg's brand of women empowerment. In order to develop a critique of the visual rhetoric of the Lean In Collection, it is important to contextualise LeanIn.org and The Lean In Collection within a critical contemporary narrative of feminism and engagement with the unsettled concept of "having it all."

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Sandberg's success with the Lean In movement has been closely aligned with a 2012 piece published in The Atlantic, "Why Women Can't Have It All," written by former U.S. State Department foreign policy expert, Anne-Marie Slaughter. Both Sandberg and Slaughter's arguments had immense popular uptake, and in the process have set in motion robust debates about how the balance of work and family had been framed within the feminist movement. Similar to Sandberg's professional and personal life, Slaughter wrote from the perspective of working in a high-powered job, being wife to a husband with a professional career, and mother to two children. Coming of age during the women's movement in the 1960s, Slaughter wrote that she felt feminism had sold her a bill of goods by convincing her that she could seamlessly cultivate a professional career and raise a family in an equal partnership. In other words, she was told she could "have it all." While Slaughter does address systemic problems with the expectations of women and men in work and family in her challenge to "having it all" as myth, Sandberg, on the other hand, chooses to pinpoint individual actions women can advance to advocate for themselves. Angela McRobbie aligns Sandberg's understanding of the trope of "having it all" with that of "the perfect" and the desire for "the good life," which involves the pursuit of personal control, discipline, and regulation, which is mobilized as "a kind of solidaristic competition" ("Notes of the Perfect" 7-9). McRobbie points to Sandberg as the shining example of the way individuated competition, both internal expectations and its social presentation, are funnelled into traditional practices of femininity to define success.

The irony of mainstream media pitting Sandberg and Slaughter, two wealthy, white, powerful and professionally accomplished women, as the yin and yang of contemporary feminism has not been lost. Reactions from authors such as Tressie McMillian Cottom, Melissa Gira Grant, and Sarah Jaffe centralised their critiques in the profound subjectivity in how "success" is measured by women with and without social and economic power. According to Grant, the marriage of business and feminism that Sandberg and Slaughter advocate is "a trickle-down feminism that centres the concerns of an elite minority of women, and it repeats losing tactics in the history of feminist movements" ("Like' Feminism"). She refutes the premise that addressing the challenges of maintaining careers and families for women in powerful positions would naturally instigate progressive policies that would have a positive effect on all women. Catherine Rottenberg writes that Sandberg and Slaughter are indicative of neoliberal feminism, a distinctly new practice of feminism. She posits neoliberal feminism conditions a particular kind of feminist subject who "accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care" (Rottenberg 420). In The Aftermath of Feminism, McRobbie describes the emergence of post-feminism as the abandonment of liberal feminism's historical discourses and the depoliticisation of its activism. This shift in action and accountability only serves to strengthen the neoliberal order as ideologically superior on political and economic grounds. As the Lean In movement and its visualisation demonstrates, it places the responsibility for creating the conditions for "having it all" primarily in the hands of individual women workers.

The construct of "having it all" as a responsibility placed solely in the control of individual women is visually rendered in the cover image for Slaughter's article in *The Atlantic* issue. In the cover picture a young toddler with a head of long soft curls, a bare upper body, and ivory white skin, is peeking out the top of a brown leather attaché case. A woman's body, visible only from waist to feet is dressed in a conservative pencil skirt, hose, and sensible heels. In her right hand, she holds one handle of the case as the toddler inside the bag dangles precariously in midair. The woman has a tenuous grip on both her child and her work, bundled as one. The photograph is centred on the page with the boldly printed headline "Why Women Still Can't Have It All." Feminist author and journalist, Jessica Valenti, highlights *The Atlantic* cover in her online post, "Sad White Babies With Mean Feminist Mommies," writing that not only is "having it all" a "feminist-baiting" trope, but so are the mass media visual images that seem inevitably fused with this type of argument (*jessicavalenti.tumblr.com*). She provides nine more of her "favourite" stock photography images of women, in desperate exaggeration, struggling with the dual responsibilities of worker and mother. The white women all convey harried and fatigued expressions as they balance cell phones, laptops, cooking utensils, briefcases, and babies. The struggle is real, but the central message of the stock images is motherhood, and professional work are foundationally incompatible.

While these images are deeply problematic, they are also far from unusual, and in this sense, they provide insight into the norms regulating the production of stock images—norms that the Getty and

LeanIn.org partnership seek to disrupt. In press coverage of the partnership, representatives were quick to draw attention to the absurdity of stock photography's literal visualisations of stereotypical metaphors of gendered work, such as women in high heels climbing a ladder, women dressed in business suits and wearing boxing gloves, or multitasking represented by a woman with eight arms. Stock images are used widely in print publications from the pages of magazines and corporate pamphlets to the covers of greeting cards and novels. Stock images also proliferate digital media from commercial websites to television advertisements; therefore, they reach vast and broad audiences in every corner of visual life. As argued by graphic designer J. Abbott Miller, the overall effect of the standardised stylistic qualities of stock photographs has led to a "narrowing of the representational field for this commercially-driven practice" (133, emphasis in the original). Jonathan Klein, co-founder and chief executive at Getty, concedes that stock photography is "perceived as the armpit of the photo industry" (Clifford). Yet, despite the fact that stock photographs are not taken as "serious" photography, they reach broad audiences and actively participate in cultural meaning-making.

In the four years since the initial creation of the Lean In Collection it has grown from 2,500 to over 16,000 photographs. A TIME magazine article credits the Collection with working "to tackle the important issues" and follows this claim with a run-down of clichéd stock images juxtaposed with images from the Lean In Collection that show "real women doing real things" (Alter). In a BBC video story, Jessica Bennett, editor with LeanIn.org, describes the disparity between the lived experiences of women and how they are represented in media images. The goal of the Lean In Collection is an attempt "to close the gap" ("Getty's 'Lean In' Stock Photos Challenge Female Stereotypes"). LeanIn.org and Getty contend that the Collection is doing emancipatory work for the representation of gendered relations in work and family. By way of Sandberg's assertion that "you can't be what you can't see" (Miller), the curation of the Lean In Collection has set out to establish a new visual paradigm for women, work, and the family across mass media and advertising.

Lean In: Duality

The stated goal of the LeanIn.org and Getty partnership, then, is to counter the mass media depictions of women that have permeated the cultures of advanced Western societies since the post-war era and that delineate women's expected roles in the home and the workplace. But how effective is the partnership in doing so? According to Pam Grossman of Getty, central to the Collection's depiction of women in the workplace was to create the feeling that "the woman had agency, not like the image was happening to her, but she was the protagonist of her own story—they all should feel like the hero of their image" (Perez). The Collection actualizes this agency by presenting traditional scenarios of work and family activities, but feature women in the stereotypically masculine work roles such as, leading a meeting or inhabiting the corner office; and men doing traditionally feminine work such as, assisting colleagues in the office, teaching, or performing leisure and household activities with children.

As a whole, the visual depiction of balancing work and family life threads through the Collection's narrative. There are a small handful of photographs identifying men doing paid work while also caring for a child; however, all of them occur in a workplace situated in and around the home. In the vast majority of work and parenting images, it is women who are visually described in a dual role, simultaneously that of mother and career woman in home offices or in distinct business settings outside the home. A photograph from the Collection, "Businesswoman working at home office with baby" presents a woman sitting at a cluttered desk, laptop open, and holding a coffee cup. Smiling, she looks back at a swaddled infant lying in a playpen beside her desk. In another image from the Collection, the caption reads, "Businesswoman Showing Daughter Paperwork In Hotel" and portrays a woman sitting in a desk chair at the foot of the hotel

¹ Casagrande, Reggie. "Businesswoman Working At Home Office With Baby." Getty Images, www.gettyimages.com/detail/ photo/businesswoman-working-at-home-office-with-high-res-stock-photography/88308822.

² Barwick, Thomas. "Businesswoman Showing Daughter Paperwork In Hotel." Getty Images, www.gettyimages.com/detail/ photo/businesswoman-showing-daughter-paperwork-in-high-res-stock-photography/482307243.

bed. She is pointing to details in a stack of papers with her young daughter standing beside her, looking intently. These photographs communicate a message that it is perfectly reasonable to bring a toddler on an out-of-town business trip and that your home office should also function as a nursery.

In her book, Sandberg describes the idea of women "having it all" as a fiction, yet these images picture women seamlessly managing their roles in the home and at work. For Wendy Brown in *Undoing the Demos*, it is precisely the promise of economic success and social mobility that defines "the American dream," and she describes American governance as organised and practised by a neoliberal rationality where all political and social life is registered through a distinct market logic (26). As a result, the government functions to protect and encourage economic growth, not collective liberties. In The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship, Berlant registers a distinct shift in socio-political life and aspirations of "the American dream" during the conservative cultural wars of the 1980s under the Reagan Presidency, which transformed national understandings of citizenship for women, in particular. Rather than a political public sphere articulated by the actions of civic life, Berlant conceptualises the "intimate public sphere" as centring American citizenship on actions tied to conservative family values (5). Berlant contends that the pretence of the politics of the intimate public sphere is its neoliberal commitment to defining American citizenship through private and free market principles in all areas, except the intimacy of family life. For the Lean In Collection, it articulates a desire to reassert women's power and agency in its depictions of work life and home life. But instead, the imagery reinforces the ideology of the intimate public sphere by explicitly linking the expectation that being both a nurturing mother and productive worker are integral to womanhood. In the Collection, women do not visually compromise their motherhood duties despite their career ambitions. In fact, the simultaneous engagement is visually celebrated. Further, the images suggest that women are alone in this scenario, independently responsible for managing the dual role of motherhood and work. In this sense, the Lean In Collection underscores the internalisation of neoliberal rationality while tapping into what Berlant argues is a national fantasy of an ideal citizenship within the intimate public sphere. Within the remit of these images, there is no public sphere in the Habermasian sense, that is, a space where family values are practised separately from political discourse. Rather, family and political life are intertwined, and the stock agencies that supply the imagery feed off identifications couched not in civic life but in family life.

Harking back to Sandberg's message, "you can't be what you can't see," the images as metaphor are part and parcel of the explicit production of the fantasy. The businesswoman in the hotel with her daughter and the mother in the home office furnished with a playpen are depicted as calm, content, and happy in the scenario; therefore, the Collection's use of the images expresses a work/home life balance as authentic and, importantly, natural. The images seek to establish a cultural and national discourse, "a system of meaning in which allegory is the aesthetic of political realism" (Berlant 48, emphasis in original). Berlant describes the allegory as a way to experience, symbolically, an uncomplicated relationship between yourself as an individual and the society around you. While there is a larger systematic marginalisation of women as a collective force, this has been pushed aside to promote the individual accomplishments of women as mothers and workers (who in turn only symbolically profess collective representation). This is indicative of what McRobbie contends is the contradictory nature of gender politics in mass media more generally, where they create the illusion of "appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism" (The Aftermath of Feminism 11). The visual narrative of the Collection's presentation of women concurrently working and mothering envelopes a neoliberal rationality that reduces normative citizenship to an individual "undertaking the correct strategies for self-investment and entrepreneurship for thriving and surviving..." (Brown 133). The Lean In visual narrative situates a woman's individual empowerment over the politics of the collective. In doing so, the Collection abstracts the necessity of public services, which evident in the photographs described above would include access to services such as affordable childcare that could potentially level the playing field for all working parents.

Lean In: Recognition

Feminism is a word that is absent from all the narratives on LeanIn.org. It appears only once, as a headline, and it is directed at fathers: "How to be a Feminist Dad." The conversation LeanIn.org seeks to change is from "what women can't do to what we can do" and utilises words such as confidence, self-assurance, powerful, and trailblazing ("Lean In Book"). On LeanIn.org, women are presented with advice on how to be a "workplace ally," "role model," and "mentor." Men are advised on how to be a "workplace MVP," an "all-star dad," and a "50/50 partner." In 2015, LeanIn.org launched the #LeanInTogether awareness campaign that put the spotlight on the responsibilities of men to challenge gender biases in work and in the home. The campaign expanded the Lean In Collection to include "realistic photos" of "fatherhood and masculinity" that pushed beyond the stereotypical "white men in suits" stock imagery (Vagianos). As previously mentioned, men are less likely to be portrayed as parent and worker outside the confines of home in the curated Collection. Rather, the images selected focus on men as the primary caregivers. The images feature men happily performing household tasks such as laundry and grocery shopping, dressing children to getting them ready for school, helping with homework and reading bedtime stories, pushing strollers and wearing baby carriers, and engaging in play and outdoor activities with their children. The central message of the #LeanInTogether awareness campaign is how women and men can change their individual behaviours and foster the right attitude as encouraging colleagues, partners, and parents.

Of the 16,000 photographs in the Collection, I found only one series (of three images) that visually depicts the struggle to balance work and family. Notably, the protagonist of the image is a white father. In the series, the father is just coming into the foyer of a home. In one of the images, he is holding a phone to his ear with one hand, a toddler precariously balanced in the other arm, and a diaper bag slumping from his shoulder. The man's knees buckle in as he tries to balance himself against the various objects weighing him down. His face expresses quiet exasperation. He is not smiling or visibly conveying a sense of ease or aptitude at the task at hand. The photograph is understated and refreshingly real. I understand its inclusion in the Collection as the Lean In movement seeks to put pressure on men to share the weight of family responsibilities; and further, to represent this work of balancing career and parenthood in all its difficulty. However, in consideration of the breadth of the Collection, why does this important representation exclude mothers? The Collection depoliticises feminist struggles for gender equality by simply reversing the narrative and visually placing men in the role of struggling caregiver. In the Collection women are not portrayed as challenged in their roles as a career woman and mother; rather, the photographs portray a naturalness and ease of mothers changing a baby's diaper on their office desk, cradling a toddler while typing on a laptop, or practising yoga while holding a baby. If a central message of LeanIn.org is to expose "having it all" as myth for women, then its representation should be indicative of this message. Instead, the Collection visually reiterates and idealises the myth.

The idea that simply swapping caregiving duties from women to men will solve the problems of work/ life balance is as dubious as insisting that replacing male corporate leaders with female corporate leaders will solve inequalities of gender and work. These types of arguments dismiss all historical knowledge about how power functions under capitalism. Cottom takes to task the assumption that powerful women will make the best decision for all women. Speaking to her experiences as a black woman from the rural south, she argues that "powerful people, be they men or women, will act in the interest of power, not in the interest of gender (or, race for that matter). It is also important to note that social and political history tends to be congruent with my experiences" (Cottom tressiemc.com). In a round-table conversation published in The Nation, economist Nancy Folbre points to the lack of intersectionality within the Lean In narrative. Folbre argues that the sharp focus on Sandberg (even more powerfully, Hillary Clinton) as a torchbearer of contemporary feminism exposes the need for intersectional analysis because "the most photogenic women challenging gender inequality are those unencumbered by other forms of disadvantage" (Geier et al.). The

³ Zing Images. "Father Carrying Toddler (18-24 months) whilst using mobile phone." Getty Images, www.gettyimages.com/ license/519692985.

interpersonal dynamics of not only gender but class, race, and citizenship add layers of complexity to the maintenance of social and economic hierarchies.

McRobbie argues that the vocabulary of "choice" and "empowerment," which is woven through Lean In's message, celebrates individual achievements and serves as a "substitute for feminism" in place of genuine movements for feminist solidarity (*The Aftermath of Feminism* 1). The feminist movement was based on the importance of the collective voices of women asserting that there was a struggle to be had for equality, and that gender inequalities are predicated on structural inequalities. While the rise of identity politics has rightly raised the question of who has been included and excluded under the banner of the feminist movement, Folbre, Cottom, and McRobbie are a few scholars who advocate for feminist activism to be grounded on the social and political power of collective voices in an intersectional capacity, reaching beyond gender to the social and political dynamics of race, nationality, and class. If social and political change can be achieved through the management of individual behaviours, as promoted by Lean In, then what is the point of feminism as a social and political movement? As McRobbie has argued, if "feminism is no longer needed, it is now common sense, and as such, it is something young women can do without" then the collective struggle for gender equality has achieved its goals (*The Aftermath of Feminism* 8). LeanIn. org aspires to present a positive spin to gender inequality issues through an effort to destabilise visual depictions of traditional gender roles in work and family settings and encourage individual agency, but in doing so, it erases value from the collective historical struggles and successes of feminism.

In general, the Lean In Collection's brand of resistance is largely symbolic. Framing the physical and mental balance of managing work and family primarily through the lens of gender, the Collection depoliticises feminist struggles for gender equality by simply reversing the narrative, placing women in the workplace and situating men in the home as family caretaker. In effect, if the struggle for recognition leads to the establishment of a neoliberal norm in which individual success is the key to social change, it will lead to the exclusion of everyone outside the confines of that norm (especially those who are classed out of it).

Lean In: Capital

In general, much of the criticism directed at LeanIn.org involves the claim that their advice is centred on primarily white, middle and upper-class women in corporate America. LeanIn.org saw the partnership with Getty as a way for them to diversify their message and expand their reach beyond the boardroom. There does look to be an effort to represent different races and ethnicities, a diversity in the visualisation of age, and portrayals of non-traditionally feminine workspaces. However, Getty is an exclusive, high-cost stock agency where licensing fees for a single photograph can run into the hundreds of dollars. Since access to the Lean In Collection at Getty remains restricted to companies with robust marketing budgets, the consumers targeted by those advertisers mainly reside in the worlds of middle and upper-class women.

As such, many photographs in the Collection look similar to the captioned image "Group of Coworkers in Discussion in Office." The four co-workers, three women and one man, are at work in an upscale and modern office with one woman standing over the others directing the meeting. All the workers are quite literally leaning in. This image is representative of the majority of workplace imagery in the Collection. There are far fewer workplace images in non-corporate settings, which typically include captions of women in non-traditional careers such as mechanics, engineers, and architects. In "Coworkers Portrait inside a Production Line Facility," two men and two women stand in a warehouse space with large vats, scaffolding, and forklifts in the background. The four smiling co-workers are lined up arm-in-arm with the two women flanking the men. They are dressed in overalls and casual t-shirts. Three of the workers are wearing crisp, white, paper air filter masks around their necks and one of the women is holding a pair of work gloves. The casual attire, alongside the objects surrounding them, reflects the work that they do would involve dirt

⁴ Barwick, Thomas. "Group Of Coworkers In Discussion In Office." *Getty Images*, www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/group-of-coworkers-in-discussion-in-office-high-res-stock-photography/114579255.

⁵ Casarsa, Valentin. "Coworkers Portrait inside a Production Line Facility." *Getty Images*, www.gettyimages.com/license/820437780.

and sweat. The images are a nod to the blue-collar workforce, but they are presented within the confines of a corporate logic. The workers are posed, clean, and relaxed, which counteracts any potential for deeper analysis of the current or historical work of women in industrial factories.

Despite the visual inclusion of factory and workshop settings, the Collection takes no fundamental approach to acknowledge real questions of class. On the surface, this makes sense, since stock photography's business model is predicated not merely on the supply of images to the advertising industry, "but [on] speak[ing] the industry's language, accept[ing] its practices and norms, adher[ing] to its standards and anticipat[ing] its needs" (Frosh 630). Therefore, stock photography agencies exist to emulate, not necessarily direct, the advertising industry. Herein lies the contradiction: the Collection is curated from the already existing database of Getty agency photographs, so the Lean In Collection is selecting images that were photographed under the same presuppositions and conditions that are inherent in the language of current advertising. Therefore, the Collection does not deviate from the dominant ideologies of visual language that have produced images of the past. It in no way posits a challenge to the precarious positions that women are placed in by the rhetoric of work/life balance. Rather, it depends on a variation in naming and branding to project its difference.

The post-feminist gender equality movement embodied by the Lean In Collection has commodified and depoliticised feminism. In keeping with Robert Goldman's arguments about "commodity feminism," the Collection "presents feminism as a style—a semiotic abstraction—a set of visual signs that say who you are" (337). The Collection depends not only on mass advertising's appropriation of the Lean In brand of feminism but also its ability to profit from it. McRobbie views the fascination with consumer culture as an explicit component of "the undoing of feminism" (The Aftermath of Feminism 5). In this respect, Sarah Banet-Weiser's argument about the cultural significance of corporate branding in her book *Authentic* TM : *The* Politics and Ambivalence in a Brand Culture is relevant. Banet-Weiser links the shift from mass advertising to identity marketing in the neoliberal era, which historically coincides with Berlant's emergence of the intimate public sphere. Advertising co-opts political and social activism, in this case, individual female empowerment, and sells the ideals back to the consumer. In similar fashion, the Lean In Collection presents a resource through which a company or organization can gain access to activism for a fee, thus "transforming the politics of feminism into a product to be sold means to reify feminism (and, through feminism, women)—to make identity into a kind of thing" (Banet-Weiser 36). The outcome is a shallow and hypocritical feminist practice. The Lean In Collection appropriates women's emancipation, repackages it within the rubric of individual empowerment, and sells the final product as universal in application without providing the tools for women to engender real change. Therefore, the fusion of the Lean In empowerment movement and the business of advertising is an economic strategy disguised as a social politics.

Conclusion

The Lean In movement and its visual articulation with the Lean In Collection has been embraced by women across the globe. I contend the popularity and accessibility of Lean In resides in the safe space it provides for women to practice their empowerment without disrupting their middle-class social and economic standing. Lean In does not advocate for mass strikes or congressional action; rather, each woman is held responsible for addressing her own workplace or home life inequalities and looking to her "Lean In Circle" of peers for encouragement. Kate Losse has succinctly described the problem with Lean In's alignment of feminist activism with capitalist labour as "encourag[ing] women to maintain a commitment to the workplace without encouraging the workplace to maintain a commitment to them" (Losse dissent.org). Through this lens, the Lean In Collection presents a completed image of neoliberal rationality where women can visualise progressive values of citizen equality in work and home life as economically viable. The Lean In Collection can be understood as disarticulating and displacing the mission for female equality and replacing and substituting the struggle for political recognition with capitalist and consumer motivations. If feminism has been swallowed by neoliberal rationality by divorcing citizenship from politics, the Lean In message works to maintain the distance between the individual control of desires and the politics of making collective

demands. Women believe that they are asserting agency by participating in an individualised negotiation with their internal selves and their career ambitions, but in actuality, it is a limited horizon that reproduces the ideology of neoliberal capitalism. In visual form, the Lean In Collection reifies feminist agency in the rationale of advertising and privatised consumer relations.

This is not to say that all efforts to address gender inequality on the part of the Lean In Collection and its larger movement are rooted in dishonourable intentions, but if the drive for recognition and gender equality is to be truly transformative then it cannot be embedded in a capitalist structure maintained by social and economic competition. Further, it cannot resolve gender discrimination by simply switching gender roles, visually or rhetorically. As Grant declares in a *Washington Post* opinion piece on Lean In, "Women and our social movements do not need a better boss but a more powerful base, from which we can lead on our own terms" ("Sheryl Sandberg's 'Lean In' Campaign Holds Little for Most Women"). She is arguing for a return to the power of a collective voice. Demanding a change in mediated representations of gender is an issue to be addressed; however, the LeanIn.org/Getty Images partnership does not offer a way to dismantle the structures that support and rearticulate gender inequality. We simply can't look to market logic for social justice.

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