

Gender and the MBA

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We argue that while the male to female ratio in business school has not changed drastically, the mind-set in relation to gender has shifted in significant ways. Our study examines how MBA students talk about gender. We identify two main discursive repertoires that students use to make sense of gender. The first centers on accepting the status quo as "the way the world is," and the second insists that gender does not matter. We argue that a postfeminist climate is operating in management education, so that gender is no longer seen as salient, even while it continues to shape the culture in significant ways. In this context, the gender culture in business schools can only be changed by adopting more subtle strategies for challenging the masculine norms that persist in spite of gender's "disappearance."

The master's of business administration (MBA) has often been heralded as a ticket to the executive suite. Like the executive suite, however, the MBA seems to be largely dominated by men. Despite the continuous efforts of most business schools to improve recruitment ratios, the number of women in elite MBA programs seems to be stuck at around 30% (AACSB, 2007; Di Meglio, 2004; Ibeh, Carter, Poff, & Hamill, 2008). Sinclair (1995) provided an in-depth analysis of the gender dimension of management education. Her central argument was that it is strongly gendered masculine, making it difficult for women to fit into the prevailing culture. Simpson (2006) argued that MBA education is still fundamentally masculine but could be reshaped and feminized. This interrogation of business schools comes at a time where the effectiveness of business education is increasingly under scrutiny (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; McCabe,

Butterfield, & Treviño, 2006; Starkey & Tempest, 2005). Given the limited scholarship on gender and the MBA, it seems vital to include a perspective on gender when reconfiguring management education (Offermann, 2007).

Our work here looks at how MBA students talk about gender. It is structured beginning with a description of how business schools have evolved in terms of gender diversity in recent years. We then describe the methodology and present an empirical section highlighting two ways in which the MBA students in the study make sense of gender. Finally, implications for how gender can be brought to the fore in business and management education are discussed, and a brief conclusion is drawn.

WOMEN, MEN, AND THE MBA

Having an MBA is increasingly a requirement for those aspiring to progress within organizations. The great majority of MBA students are between 25 and 35 years old, and it is usual to have gained some years of work experience before honing one's management credentials. MBA graduates, generally considered to have acquired high levels of proficiency in technology, finance, and communication, possess skills which are much sought-after in organizations (Catalyst, 2000), and therefore, regularly command relatively high salaries. Doing an MBA, particularly at an elite institution, also means that one can build relationships with a peer

This article is based on material collected while at the Lehman Brothers Centre for Women in Business at London Business School. The research was financially supported by the research consortium on Generation Y, which includes the following partner companies: Accenture (Founding Partner), Allen & Overy, Barclaycard Business, Baxter International, Cargill, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, and KPMG. We would like to thank those who are commented on the paper, particularly, Lynda Gratton, Judy Wajcman, Alice Mah, Julia Nentwich, Mustafa Özbilgin, Myrtle Bell, Alison Maitland, and Matthias Kipping. We would also like to thank the various anonymous reviewers and the associate editor for their comments and suggestions to improve this article.

group of those most likely to rise to the top of other companies, and thus develop networks that aid in one's future career. Management education has thus a vital role in shaping new leaders of organizations, training them in the modes of behavior and self-presentation that are expected in business (Ehrensals, 2001).

The underrepresentation of women in MBA programs is striking, particularly in comparison with medical and law schools in the United States, where numbers are much more balanced, (Catalyst, 2000). During 2005–2006, only 39% of applicants taking a graduate management admission test (GMAT), were women (GMAC, 2006). A report by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2007) states that 36.1% of students enrolled in full-time MBAs internationally are women. The number is even smaller in highly ranked business schools, where the number of women is around 30% (Di Meglio, 2004). The number of women on the faculty is also low; figures from AACSB-accredited schools show that 26% of faculty are female (AACSB, 2007). Reasons for why women are said not to enter MBA programs are varied and range from women's lack of mathematical skills to the shortened time they can recoup the investment if they want to have children (Shellenbarger, 2008; Sinclair, 1995).

Given that gender diversity is a factor in the all-important rankings (*Financial Times*, 2006) and given that female students constitute a potential growth market for schools themselves, many institutions are attempting to improve recruitment through initiatives such as women-only information sessions, women's scholarships, and even women-only courses, such as those at Simmons College. Others have started to attract mothers by offering part-time "morning" MBAs (Shellenbarger, 2008). Research on best practice for women in leading business schools has shown that many offer scholarships for women, but only 10% offer centers for developing women leaders, and one third offer women-centered programs (Ibeh et al., 2008). In spite of these initiatives, women's participation in MBA programs remains low.

The masculine culture of business schools combined with the enduring paradigm of "Think Manager—Think Male" (Schein, 1976, 2001; Schein & Davidson, 1993) is one of the main factors that deter women from entering MBA programs. Women in business school find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to act like "surrogate males" (Kilduff & Mehra, 1996: 118) in order to fit in. Courses are mainly delivered by male professors by way of case studies that focus on men and men's interests; the absence of women from sam-

ples in research cited in the classroom is simply ignored. Much learning in MBA programs is done in teams. Sinclair argues that in some of these teams women confront a "sustained exposure to systematic discrimination—their ideas are dismissed, their comments overruled, their contributions relegated to clerical and secretarial tasks" (Sinclair, 1995: 305). Other studies have confirmed this (Catalyst, 2000; MacLellan & Dobson, 1997; Simpson, 1996; Simpson, Sturges, Woods, & Altman, 2005; Smith, 1997). If values commonly seen as more masculine than feminine, such as competitiveness, individualism, and instrumentalism, predominate inside the classroom, the gendering process is reinforced by social rituals outside it, including heavy drinking and extreme sports (Sinclair, 1995).

Given this picture of MBA education as profoundly masculine in its values and practices, recent studies have reported surprising findings, indicating that the culture may be less estranging for women than had previously been suggested. A recent U.S. study, for example, found that most women in MBA programs did not think that the gender imbalance affected their own performance, even though they acknowledged sexist undertones in class (JWT, 2005). The study also suggests that women do not like to be singled out for special treatment, as this raises questions about whether they are as well qualified as their male counterparts (JWT, 2005).

Any shift in perceptions of gender needs to be understood in the context of postfeminism, in which it is assumed that gender inequality has either been eradicated or remains only marginally relevant for the experiences of women (Bolotin, 1982). While it is commonly asserted that feminism refers to the movement that seeks to eliminate political, social, and economic inequities between men and women, there are various competing definitions (Kemp & Squires, 1998). However, for our purposes here it suffices to say that feminism can be understood as aiming at gender equality. Postfeminism takes as its starting assumption that feminism was so successful as a social movement that discourses about gender equality are no longer needed (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995). Having become a mainstream discourse, feminism has been assimilated by the media and by advertising, with the paradoxical result is that it is simultaneously taken for granted and repudiated (Gill, 2007; Goldman, 1992). Postfeminism thus describes a historical move for something that comes after feminism but also an antithesis to and backlash against feminism (Gill, 2006). While women take advantages of many of feminism's achieve-

ments, they often do not want to be seen as feminists themselves. Younger women, who have grown up with feminist ideas as part of the social and cultural fabric, assume that they can have everything, and some have suggested that they adopt a different form of feminism as a result.

Linked to this postfeminist moment is the growing evidence of what has been called "gender fatigue," one aspect of which is a reluctance to acknowledge the persistence of gender inequities (Kelan, 2009). Recent studies across a range of organizational settings seem to indicate that this phenomenon is widespread (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Eisenhart & Finkel, 1998; Gill, 2002; Jorgensen, 2002). They show that women and men do not like to talk about gender, as it seems *passé*. Gender is here seen as an individual rather than a systematic problem and often disappears from the radar (Henwood, 1996; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Academic workplaces are not exempt from this trend, and the progress of female academics is often constrained in ways which can only be challenged if women talk about their experiences and act as organizational catalysts for change (Bailyn, 2003; Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007). Overall, however, the majority of these studies suggest that individuals are unwilling or unable to deploy an overtly gendered discourse for making sense of or challenging the issues they confront in the course of their professional lives.

This resonates strongly with wider debates about diversity in organizations (Bell & Berry, 2007; Cox, 1994; Konrad, Prasad, & Pringle, 2006; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Page, 2007). Diversity is seen by many organizations as ever more central, and research has indicated that the diversity climate is particularly important for those who are often seen as different, such as women and minorities (Kossek & Zonia, 1993). It is thus not surprising that diversity is increasingly a topic taught in business schools (Hazen & Higby, 2005). Nevertheless, discussions about diversity are often driven by the fear of saying something wrong and offensive (Ely, Meyerson, & Davidson, 2006). At the same time, there is also a tendency for organizations to move from a focus on diversity to a focus on inclusion in organizational practice (e.g., Hyter & Turnock, 2006; Miller & Katz, 2002). A focus on fostering inclusion can lead to an identity-blind approach, which assumes that individual differences no longer matter, however, making it more difficult to identify and redress the continued disadvantages faced by those whose race, sexuality, class, culture, or age sets them apart from the norm (Roberson, 2006). There is a parallel with gender here, in that post-feminism also assumes that individual differences

are no longer important. This context, in which the salience of gender and other differences is both downplayed and difficult to articulate, needs to be acknowledged if the ongoing issues around the gendering of management are to be appropriately addressed.

METHODOLOGY

We chose a fairly typical top-ranking MBA institution that offers a 2-year program. Its MBA graduates are mainly recruited by management consultancies and investment banks. The business school is also typical in that more than 70% of the students are men, and 80% of the faculty is male. The study is based on 20 in-depth interviews with full-time MBA students. Given that all students were studying for an MBA full-time, this is the "classic-elite" MBA education, which attracts different students from part-time or executive programs and is probably more masculinized than that in part-time MBA programs. Interviewees were selected based on their country of origin, year of study, age, and other elements that emerged as important in course of the study, such as hobbies (driving race cars or doing yoga). The interviews lasted 45–110 minutes, with most just over an hour, and were conducted by two female interviewers. They covered four main areas: what people had done before joining an MBA program, their role models and attitudes to work and life, how they were experiencing the MBA program, and what they wanted to do after finishing their degrees. The interviews covered a set of fixed questions (see Table 1), but each interviewer also had the liberty to explore interesting elements in more detail. The interviews were transcribed using an accepted notation system¹ and were coded with the qualitative software program NVivo, first based on interview topics and then using much finer codes about top-

¹ The transcription system is an adapted and simplified version of the Jefferson system. (.) = a short notable pause; (0.9) = an exactly timed longer pause (more than 5 seconds, here 9 seconds); (inaud) = inaudible; (text) = transcriber clarification on unclear parts of tape; ((text)) = annotation of nonverbal activity or supplemental information; (. . .) = material deliberately omitted, ' . . . ' = direct speech reported by interviewee; wor- = sharp cut off, abrupt halt, or interruption of utterance; wo:rd = extreme stretching of preceding sound, prolongation of a sound; HAHA = loud laughter; = HEHE laughter; = strong emphasis or loud volume of speech; ~Text~ = quieter than usual; [. . .] = start and end point of overlapping talk; (=) = break and subsequent continuation of a single utterance; <text> indicates that the speech was delivered much slower than usual for the speaker; >text< indicates that the speech was delivered much faster than usual for the speaker; (hhh) = audible exhalation; (.hhh) = audible inhalation.

TABLE 1
Interview Guide

Prior to Joining the MBA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Could you tell me a bit about your previous education and employment before you started the MBA? ● So when and why did you decide to do an MBA, and how did you select [name of business school]?
Role Models and Attitudes to Work and Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I asked you to bring along a picture of a person in business you admire. Who have you chosen? What do you admire in this person? ● I have got some photographs from a business magazine and from websites. These are images of professional people. I wonder if you could comment on whether you think these people are successful and ambitious in their careers and what makes you think that? ● How would you define what being successful means to you? ● Would you describe yourself as ambitious? ● Some of these people [reference to photos] look like they are working more than 60 hours a week. What do you think about that? How do you see your own work as fitting in with the rest of your life?
Experiences in Business School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I'd like now to turn to how you would describe your experiences in the school. What aspects do you enjoy most? Are there things you enjoy less? ● How are you experiencing the MBA program and what do you want to do after finishing your degree? ● Could you tell me a bit about which options you have selected and why you specialize in this area? ● In what ways is your time here changing your outlook on business and in general? ● In this school around three quarters of students are men. Does this matter for you? ● What do you think the ideal manager has to be good at? ● Can you give me examples of people you have encountered who possess these skills? ● Why do you think that there are so few women doing an MBA? ● Do you think it would impact the educational experience if more women would be here?
Future Plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Where would you like to be in 5 or 10 years time, careerwise? ● How would you imagine your private life to be in 5–10 years time? ● Are you currently thinking about your next career move? Or, What attracted you to take the offer of [company name]? ● When searching for a job, which companies do you find particularly appealing and why? Does work–life balance, social reputation of the company, money, etc., play a role?

ics, tropes of talk, and other re-emerging patterns. All names are pseudonyms.

The interviewees were selected to ensure diversity according to a number of criteria. Ten men and ten women were interviewed. Half were in their first and half in their second year of the MBA. Five were of British nationality, five of other European

nationalities, five of North American origin (U.S. or Canadian nationality), and five were from all other nationalities. Most people had lived in various countries. No one indicated having lived in only one country, six indicated having lived in two countries, while one person had lived in eight countries. Interviewees had on average worked for just over 6 years before entering the MBA program, with a range between 3 to 11 years; they had worked for 2.7 companies on average, with one company as the minimum and six the maximum (see Table 2). The sample included two people who self-identified as homosexual. The ages of interviewees ranged from 26 to 35, with the average age at just under 30 years. Ten were single or divorced, six had partners, four were married, and one person had children.

These figures do not reflect the gender balance or nationality balance in the school as a whole, where, for instance, in the current first year just under 30% of students are women and around 20% are from the United States. However, we felt that little could be gained from selecting interviewees to reflect these statistics exactly. Instead, we aimed at exploring gender and other axes of difference from different perspectives. Rather than reflecting the existing ratios, the sampling strategy was intended to explore how those with potentially different perspectives think about gender. This follows a grounded theory approach in which one samples for diversity to ensure a variety of answers and perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and reflects a commitment to exploring how both men and women think about gender (Whitehead, 2001).

In terms of methodology the interviews are biographical narrative in form, drawing on discourse analytic principles (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This version of discourse analysis assumes that discourse is a social practice and a means by which gendered identities are negotiated and lived. The aim of our analysis is to identify the main discursive repertoires used to make sense of gender within the business school environment and to carry out a more fine-grained analysis of the resources interviewees deploy in constructing an account of the MBA experience. This approach allows us to focus on relatively lengthy interview extracts in order to draw out the subtleties and contradictions inherent in these discourses.

Although the study was conducted by two researchers associated with an institute focused on women in business, it was not explicitly framed as a study of gender themes but rather as examining the experiences and aspirations of MBA students, male and female. The role of academic researchers

TABLE 2
The Sample

Name	Age Bracket	Nationality	Years of Work Experience	Companies Worked for
Andrew	25–30	North American	4	1
Benjamin	30–35	British	8	2
Caroline	25–30	Other European	5	2
Dawn	30–35	British	7	4
Emma	25–30	North American	4	5
Frances	30–35	Other	8	4
Ganesh	25–30	Other	4	2
Helen	25–30	British	8	3
Kimi	25–30	Other	5	2
Luke	25–30	British	4	3
Mathieu	30–35	Other European	7	1
Nadia	30–35	Other European	11	2
Peggy	30–35	North American	8	2
Rafiq	25–30	Other	5	6
Stewart	30–35	British	9	4
Tanya	25–30	North American	5	1
Ulrike	25–30	Other European	3	1
Vicente	30–35	Other European	7	4
Wole	25–30	Other	5	2
Yatin	30–35	North American	8	3

Note. North American denotes American or Canadian; Other European denotes nationalities other than British; Other denotes nationalities other than European or North American. These categories have been adopted in order to protect the anonymity of interviewees.

provided the interviewers with a ready-made credibility and a recognizable status. These, combined with professional dress and the fact that the researchers were of a similar age to most of the interviewees, meant that the interviews were non-threatening but nonetheless recognizably part of the environment of the business school. The age and sex of the interviewers evidently influenced the interview interaction, as other researchers have outlined eloquently (Bruni, 2006; Cassell, 2005). In the interview process the interviewer and the interviewee make different assumptions about each other, which influences the interaction. For instance Cassell (2005) describes how interviewees assumed that she was “just jobbing” when conducting interviews while heavily pregnant. This is based on the assumption that pregnant women are unlikely to have a long-term interest in a career. Bruni (2006) talks about how his interviewees assumed that doing research on gender and sexuality meant he must be gay. Reflexivity provides a means of addressing this issue in qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000), allowing the researcher to critically reflect upon how their own presence and the assumptions that provokes impact upon what is voiced within the interview. This kind of reflexive approach guided a process of critical reflection about how our own presence has

shaped the material during the interview and the analysis stage.

The interviews approached the issue of gender from a number of angles, direct and indirect. As well as being invited to talk about their careers to date, their experiences of the MBA, and their plans and aspirations for the future, interviewees were asked about who they admired, how they defined success, and how they approached the issue of work–life balance. The only questions focused explicitly on gender were related to the relative gender imbalance at the business school. Interviewees were asked whether this mattered to them, why they thought that there were more men than women doing an MBA, and what difference it would make to the educational experience if the ratio were more evenly balanced. They were also asked for their views on women’s clubs and scholarships. Most of the extracts we analyze here originated from this question block about women and gender.

While it is not possible, based on a relatively small sample in one business school—and if one sees interviews as interactional encounters—to make wide-ranging claims of generalizability across all such institutions, the discourse analytic approach does allow us to identify discursive trends, which we would expect to find in other

top-ranking international schools. The context is a European one, but strongly modelled on U.S. business schools. Although the business school is more international than U.S. business schools, it is also less diverse than lower ranking business schools. This context shapes the responses, but we would expect MBA students at other top-ranking business schools to produce similar discourses.²

In the following we are presenting two interpretative repertoires, which were drawn on by the MBA students. The analysis of the material involved a reading and re-reading of the interviews and was not a reading for gist but rather a "suspension of belief" of that usually taken for granted (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 168). Discourse analysts look for certain rules that people apply in specific situations. These rules influence how everyday knowledge is constructed. In analyzing the material, one of the paradoxes we uncovered was that gender seemed to matter at some times and at others did not. We therefore started to explore these rules, which were applied to this relative importance of gender. The results of this analysis are the two interpretative repertoires discussed here.

ACCEPTING THE STATUS QUO: JUST THE WAY BUSINESS IS

When asked about whether the gender imbalance in business school matters to them, most interviewees played down its importance and asserted that gender had little relevance in the MBA context. This was true of both men and women. When asked to suggest reasons for the relative lack of women, many suggested that it merely mirrored the male-dominated areas of business, investment banking, or consulting. This theme comes through in Benjamin's response:

Interviewer 1: If you look around at school, you will notice that three quarters of the student population are men. What do you think about that?

Benjamin: I think it's a function of, of, the workplace, I think. (. . .) I think business school is actually quite representative of the workplace per se that I know, which is banking. There are very few females in banking,

and especially few senior females in banking because of course the natural thing is for people to just to go, okay, you are a female, you gonna get married and have babies and you gonna leave. Which is not, obviously, the case, but that's the natural precondition that we have growing up whereas, actually, in reality, this is not the case at all. So I think it's, yeah, I mean, there are females here, but not as many as maybe anybody would like to get the diversity aspect home.

Benjamin was one of a number of interviewees, male and female, who expressed the view that the gender ratios at business school either reflected or even compared favorably than what they had experienced in their working environments prior to the MBA. One possible reading Benjamin suggests is that the notion that women will leave to have children is a "natural precondition" people grow up with, preventing employers from employing women, particularly in senior roles. The unusual usage "precondition" suggests a combination of default condition and preconception. While the meaning of this word is not entirely clear, Benjamin's statement thus achieves a dual purpose, in that it presents stereotypes about women as inaccurate even while using those same stereotypes to explain why there are so few women in business (specifically banking), and consequently, in business school. His comment that the current representation of women in business school is not enough to "get the diversity aspect home" seems to suggest that diversity needs to be achieved for the sake of political correctness rather than involving a more fundamental challenge to the ways in which the business world is constituted, for example by examining how the working world might need to accommodate the needs of women who wish to combine childcare and professional responsibilities (Ely et al., 2006).

Vicente echoed the view that business schools merely reflected the world outside:

Vicente: I mean I I'm I'm aware that (.) the the business world is still more men, a man world ((sic)) (. . .) than, uh, a female world right now, I I think things are are changing right, there are more women interested in business than there were, there was a few years ago but still, men are a majority and what you see here I think it's a good sample of what's happening out there.

While Vicente argues that the business school is representative of the business world in general,

² One could of course design a comparative study using business schools in different locations both geographically and by ranking, but we would suggest that the emerging categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) would reveal similar discursive patterns to those discussed here.

he also seems to suggest that business is changing.

While the gender imbalance might be downplayed or explained away in some accounts, however, other interviews provide evidence that a masculine paradigm continues to shape the institutional culture in significant ways and that business education involves the mastery of a distinctly gendered performance of professional competence. Frances, for example, stated:

Frances: I'm not part of the women-in-business club either.

Interviewer 1: Why not?

Frances: (0.6) 'Cause women don't do business, men do. So if you don't, if you want to do business, you have to learn to play business like a man. In a way.

Since membership of the women-in-business club was the norm for female interviewees, and women MBA students more generally (see below for a detailed discussion), Frances' decision not to be a member was significant. One possible reading suggests that since her task is to master the male game of business, spending time cultivating networks with other women is counterproductive. Her assertion that business is a men's world, albeit qualified by "in a way," resonates strongly with classical self-help books for women in management, such as *Games Mother Never Taught You—Corporate Gamesmanship for Women* (Harragan, 1989), the language of which seems to have permeated her thinking about gender dynamics.

Yatin also drew on the notion of business as being a game. Having said that the business school was very masculine, marked by a lot of machismo and aggression, he was asked about his own role in this masculine culture.

Yatin: Yeh, I mean, it's it's it is what it is. I mean, you sort of, you know, I'm a man so you can play the game if you need to, but it isn't necessarily something that I identify with all the time. But you know, this is kind of life too, right? And there's a lot of business environments that I think there'd be a lot more of that sort of macho camaraderie than other environments which I don't necessarily like very much, but that's kind of how it works. And there've been situations where I've told people that I don't particularly like the environment or what they've said or comments or this

and that, and you've backed down, but you know, this sort of happens unfortunately.

Asked how he deals with the machismo, Yatin proffers the set phrase "it is what it is": This is just what the environment is like and he can do little about it. However, he acknowledges that he has the advantage of being able to play the game because he is a man, although he suggests that he does not like doing so. He refers to instances when he has opposed this behavior and later offers an example of an occasion when he told colleagues over dinner that they should stop talking about women in a sexist way. That changed the atmosphere and the group was no longer relaxed, which Yatin attributed to the fact that his intervention had disturbed the ritualistic male bonding. Yatin self-identified as being gay, which made him in his own view an outside insider. He can play the male games if he has to but can also resist them.

Another interviewee, Helen, who was in her first year of the MBA, talked about how difficult she found it to settle into the masculine culture of the business school after working in the more feminine culture of the media. She here talks about her experience of her study group:

Helen: I'm just think, um, I don't know if it's certain industries or certain cultures but, you know, someone (.) I work with kind of seems to have an attitude towards women of what I'd think of as a sort of a fourteen year old boy and he's constantly making references to body parts and, you know, if ever we, you know, have to do anything he's always talking about naked [women he downloaded porn.

Interviewer 2: HEHE.]

Helen: During one exercise, he, and I think, um, you know, while I find that vaguely annoying I can kind of deal with that, it's more I think that sometimes he, um, (.) I've noticed that if I say something he will almost disagree with me instantly but if then someone who's male in the group says the same thing as me he'll happily adopt the views as long as it comes from him, so, um, trying to get my head around that, it's still early days.

In this account, Helen seems to underplay the downloading of porn, characterizing it as childish and only "vaguely annoying," and she is more hurt by the subtle gender discriminations (cf. Beno-

kraitis, 1997) she is confronted with, such as realizing that her comments are not taken seriously or not attributed to her. She qualifies her unease by saying that it is "early days," as if these problems will fade away with time. While she clearly feels aggrieved about the situation, however, her attitude is marked by an unwillingness to address the issues directly or to take any formal action. Later in the interview she returns to the theme of her study group, stating that she has had to learn to become much more aggressive and assertive in order to participate in discussions, a shift that she initially describes as exhausting. Rather than complaining about the sexist behavior, it appears that her strategy has been one of adaptation and that by taking on more characteristically "masculine" traits, she has found a way to work more effectively with her male colleagues.

Another interview where sexism was addressed openly was with Dawn:

Interviewer 1: Three quarters of the students are men. What do you think about that?

Dawn: Um (.) well (.) they're sort of, that structure has really not uh ever felt uh like it's uncomfortable or 'Oh wish there were more women here'. It's, I mean, there are certain individuals at this school who um, ^oh dear^, I don't want to start getting upset on camera, who can say things that are quite unpleasant and pretty sexist and um (sounds tearful) yeh, that's quite frustrating. But um, (.) I, I mean, how I feel about that is that it's, unfortunately, it's one of those things that um you just have to get on and deal with the best, almost not wanting to give those people ammunition, you know?

Within the business school context, where interviewees were almost without exception highly confident and articulate, this moment of vulnerability was both unexpected and revealing of the discursive and emotional work that has to be performed around gender. Dawn's involuntary response is an emotional one, but this brief expression of frustration and what might be viewed as a stereotypically feminine response—"getting upset"—is quickly replaced by the insistence that "it's just one of those things" and that she has to control her emotions so as not to provide her male colleagues with "ammunition." Another and possibly related reading of her downplaying her experience might also be that it is hurtful and that she wants to be seen as professional rather than tearful. Showing emotions is seen as inappropriate in

business and indeed in a research interview. Asked to expand on this theme, she referred to an example where the class discussed what caused the gender wage gap. A male student entertained the class by commenting that a woman could not be at work because she had to be at home making his coffee. Another instance she recalled was of a spreadsheet created by certain of her classmates ranking the women at business school based on how attractive they were. These incidents seem relatively trivial, but Dawn may have given innocuous examples to avoid getting more upset. Nevertheless, what she describes certainly has a sexist function in that such comments sexualize women and put them in their place (Connell, 1995).

Although rare, a few responses that could be characterized as sexist emerged within the interviews themselves. This demonstrated the breadth of possible responses and represented only a very small minority of interviewees. Stewart, for example, was asked how he thought the educational experience would be affected if there were more women on the MBA course:

Stewart: I think (. . .) if I'm brutally honest you know, I think, if there were too many wom- if alright if it was the other way around, if there was 70 percent women and 30 percent men, I think it'd be a fundamentally different school. Um, (.) you know, I I I think we'd be in danger of (.) HEHE I I had this class last term and I went to this study group meeting and there's basically me, five five women and another chap, and it and it almost turned into a sort of a bit of a mother's meeting, you know, about cooing about children and all the rest of it and, you know, and and there's nothing wrong with that, I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with it, but I just wa- I suppose that's what I mean if there was 70 percent men and 30 percent women, there's a danger depending on the type of women obviously, but that there's there's a danger that it would, um, I'm going to get myself into all sorts of trouble here, but, yeah I I I don't know, I I put it put it this way I wouldn't come to a school which was 70 percent women.

This extract was a rare example of a male interviewee articulating what can be read as sexist views while trying to negotiate the delicate issues around what it is acceptable to say to a female interviewer enquiring about gender. His awareness of playing with the limits of acceptable speech is signified by the jocular aside about getting himself into trouble and by the repeated as-

sersion (contrary to what he has strongly implied) that he is not being critical of his female colleagues. A rare occasion when he found himself in a study group dominated by women is constructed as an example of the (otherwise unspecified) "danger" that would follow if women were ever to outnumber men overall. The caricature of this group as turning into "a bit of a mother's meeting" summons up images of groups of women as garrulous and not to be taken seriously, implicitly setting the world of motherhood and children against the world of business. For others, the articulation of a dominant male perspective was framed in a more benevolent paternalistic discourse of praise for the women at the school. Ganesh, for instance, stated:

Ganesh: I've been very impressed by the women, most of them, that I've met (in business school) especially in terms of their business acumen, and uh their capability, I think some of them will make great business leaders. So yeah, it's a shame there aren't that many.

The theme of sexuality arose a number of times within the interviews, with many men answering the question about gender in a joking manner, saying things like "I am single" (Vicente), "I'm married, so I never really gave that too much of a thought" (Ganesh), or "I love the women" (Stewart). These comments refer clearly to women in business school as potential sexual partners. Frances, in contrast, constructs women's sexuality as a bar to their success:

Frances: I think women are as much to blame because they don't, you know, go out and grab opportunities and do things and, you know, they're more interested in trying to find a husband and living off some guy, you know. So I don't, I don't think it's, it's just the way it IS. But it doesn't mean I have to like it. Or like being in that environment, I don't. So (.) so yeh, I'd prefer it if the business school was half women, half men.

One reading of this quote is that Frances almost blames women for not making the most of the opportunities they have, implying that they could enter business school but lack the desire or motivation because they prefer to get married. Other interviewees suggested that the business school itself functions as a marriage market, a construction which sexualizes the relationship between women and men in the MBA program according to heterosexual norms. Tanya, for example, stated

that some of her female colleagues were "dead set on 'I want to find my husband while I'm in the MBA programme.'" This subtly defines women as stereotypically sexualized objects of men's desire or as aspiring primarily to marriage rather than professional success.

Other elements of the gendered nature of business school were usually swept under the carpet. The fact that case studies are predominantly based on masculine experience usually was rarely mentioned, for example, and when an interviewer suggested that this might be the case, its importance was usually denied.

Interviewer 1: And what about in terms of the few female professors that are here that are teaching you, and things like the case studies that are more dominated by male experiences of the world or is that something that you do not experience as much?

Emma: Um (.) Um yeh, I mean, yeh, most of the case studies are about men, but that's just the way the world IS.

Like Yatin, Dawn, and Frances, Emma portrays the prevailing gender order as something that just has to be accepted. Challenging that order and the male dominance that characterizes it would, it is implied, be pointless. This discourse assumes that to be inculcated into the business culture one has to learn to do business according to the dominant norms, which frequently involve the performance of a distinctly masculine repertoire of behavior. This means learning to "play business like a man," but it also means (particularly for women and gay men) learning to deal with sexism, macho camaraderie, and the casual sexualization of women. This clearly reflects the fact that a masculine ideal has shaped the design of the business world and its associated expectations (Acker, 1990; Bailyn, 2006; Wajcman, 1998). The gendered nature of the status quo was largely unchallenged, however, and generally students did not make the link between the scarcity of women and the perpetuation of a masculine culture. Our analysis has shown that any systemic gender inequality tended to be downplayed, putting the onus on women to accept "the way the world IS" and play the game according to male rules. This includes learning to play the game like a man.

GENDER DOESN'T MATTER: WE ARE ALL JUST STUDENTS HERE

Evidence of such clearly gendered repertoires of interaction notwithstanding, most MBA students

interviewed asserted that gender does not matter in business school. Caroline's comments are particularly striking in this respect:

Interviewer 2: Does it matter to you that roughly three quarters of your fellow students are male?

Caroline: No. No, I don't, I don't register.

Interviewer 2: Ok.

Caroline: So I (.) I think a lot of things for me here fall away. Like I don't register nationalities anymore, because it just doesn't seem to matter. I don't register gender anymore, because it just doesn't seem to matter that much. What matters is, "Do I like you? Can I work with you? Or are you sort of useless, basically?" Well, it's not quite true (. . .)

Interviewer 2: HEHE.

Caroline: But you start making, everything else seemed to sort of fall away.

One can read this account as Caroline making use of a discourse of gender neutrality to position herself as the judge of her colleagues' competence, implicitly inverting the normative hierarchy in which women and other minorities are judged to be lacking in certain types of competence, as defined by male managers. Another female student, Peggy, also minimized the impact of gender in everyday interactions:

Peggy: But in general, no it's not, it's, it's a noticeable distinction in study groups, just numerically, there's seven people in my study group, two of us are women. Um, but on a sort of personal interaction level, it's not an issue at all.

Interviewer 2: So you don't feel it matters?

Peggy: No. I think it's disappointing that there's no more women here, um, and I would like to think that in time, that's gonna change (. . .) but the fact that there is three quarters of the campus are men isn't really (.) I don't know, it doesn't really make much of a difference on a, on a daily basis.

Peggy states that while the current situation is "disappointing," the imbalance makes itself felt only "numerically." In deploying this gender-

neutral language, she seems to discount the possibility that the institutional culture might itself be gendered. An extract from an interview with Andrew draws on a similar discourse, emphasizing talent and intelligence rather than gender:

Andrew: Um, (.) it doesn't mat- it it it, honestly doesn't matter to me, um, it wouldn't, I wouldn't, it wouldn't bother me if there was fifty percent women or sixty percent women and, you know, less men or more men, um, (.) uh as long as, you know, as long as the school makes an effort to pick the smartest people or the best people, whether they're whether they're men or women, you know, I certainly would be against accepting more women just because of their, just because of they're women, or just because they are women, um, but um, but no I think it's it's it's good, I think that, the, you know, the mix is good.

Andrew's response was typical of the men interviewed, almost all of whom demonstrated their egalitarian credentials by emphasizing their appreciation of or willingness to support their female colleagues. The only objection Andrew has is to the business school selecting women based on their sex rather than on merit, alluding to the hotly debated issues around affirmative action and positive discrimination. This theme of quotas for women came up regularly in the interviews:

Rafiq: Well, generally, it seems like my guess is that if more women applied, more women would get in. And you know it would change the ratios a little bit. I doubt, I don't know, my guess is that they don't have a quota on you know male versus female, like it's not in their interests to do that AT ALL.

Rafiq presents the gender ratio as caused by women not applying to business school and his account can be understood as strongly rejecting the idea of having quotas for women. This is typical of a generally negative stance toward positive discrimination among the students we interviewed. Attributing the gender imbalance to extrinsic factors over which the business school has no control can be seen in part as a defense of the elite reputation of the institution to which these students belong.

One place where positive discrimination did seem to be tolerated, albeit with some ambivalence, was in the role played by the women-in-business club in promoting female recruitment. The club provides what one interviewee, Peggy,

called "preferential access" to recruiters from consultancies and investment banks by way of such events as women-only breakfasts. Male interviewees tended to adopt a benevolent stance toward this practice, saying that they did not mind that the women received special attention; joking about wanting to set up a men-in-business club was as far as they went toward any kind of challenge.

The purpose of the women-in-business club is mainly to build networks rather than anything that could be construed as political; the group would certainly eschew any association with feminism. For women students, membership seemed almost compulsory but few described themselves as active. Even those who took leading roles in the club were not keen to talk about gender. Nadia expressed her hesitations in the following terms:

Nadia: I joined initially the women-in-business club here. (. . .) I even helped, volunteered to help with the women-in-business conference (. . .) There is a fine balance. Clearly you need to help women, but I don't understand (. . .) why, why are we different, you know, why is not there men-in-business club? I know, I mean, women have more challenges with jobs, especially family balances stuff, but it can be put in a very (.) different-, it, it's a very fine balance. (. . .) Every company realizes that they need to give room for women. They have people that make sure that women can balance their different responsibilities. But it should (.) probably (.) You don't need to take the step further to try to make the claim 'you're different' per se by man ((sic)). You see, I, it's very difficult to explain, but I sensed in some of the meetings at the club that it was going a bit further away. You know, it's just like, (.), we are not that different, we do have different responsibilities.

Nadia is visibly uncomfortable with statements about gender difference that go beyond acknowledging that women having "different responsibilities," and as a result, any specially targeted recruitment events border on dangerous territory. The account can be understood as a rejection of gender differences that go beyond "different responsibilities." Evidence that women try hard to be an invisible group and to be seen simply as ordinary students also emerged in the interview with Dawn:

Dawn: And in fact a discussion did sort of start in one of the classes that I took last term,

when we looked at a string of adverts, and then we were asked to comment on them. (They) had been sewn together by a woman giving a lecture about how women are portrayed in the media. And I said, "I don't actually feel like that when I see those ads, I think this woman has basically turned this how she wants." Because (the lecturer) was being quite extreme, like it was a Black model who'd had make-up to make her look like a tiger, and she was like, "Oh, you know, the black women shown you know as lower than an animal." So I felt it was very extreme, the way she portrayed certain things. And, then this almost, there were like five comments or so about you know, the women, the number of women in school, and (.) uh I can't remember what else was said. And one of the other girls in the class put up her hand and said, "Can we not turn this into a women-in-business-school thing, please? Because we do everything we can to, you know, just be one of the, like everyone else, and not be, oh, here's the women and here's the men." And she said, "Can we not have this conversation be like this? Can we have it about something else?" And basically when she said that, we all sort of went, like, "Yeah, that's right."

Dawn expresses her discomfort in relation to her lecturer's suggestion that a Black woman was being associated with the animal realm by being made up to look like a tiger was "extreme," probably a euphemism for feminist. She presents herself and a fellow female student as the voice of resistance, insisting that women try to be invisible as a group and do not want to talk about gender. Her phrasing "we do everything we can to, you know, just be one of the, like everyone else" suggests that she is on the verge of saying "one of the guys" but amends it to "like everyone else." This seems to involve the careful avoidance of any suggestion that women might have particular needs, traits, or experiences which could differentiate them from their male colleagues. Given this heightened sensitivity, explicit or unsubtle treatments of gender in the classroom context appear to be counterproductive, serving to make women uncomfortable rather than challenging all students to develop a more subtle awareness of how gender operates within everyday interactions and how it shapes organizational values and practices (Bailey, 2003; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000).

Why is it that such an emphasis is placed on ignoring gender in this business school context?

Part of it may have to do with the fact that students have an interest in presenting business school and the workplace in general as gender egalitarian. We join this extract when Caroline talks about an informal group of female students to which she belongs. They meet regularly to discuss work and life, including the challenges of combining relationships and careers:

Caroline: Well, you sort of talk about those kind of things. The sort of things we don't talk about, which sort of strikes me when I think about it, we don't talk about glass ceilings, we don't, (. . .) if there's a women-in-business club, there should be a men-in-business club. Once it starts to get big and organized I sort of go like, "Aaagh! ." And at the conference (the women-in-business club organizes) it bor-sometimes it borders on whining, what I feel is whining. In my, where I worked, I never saw a glass ceiling. There never was.

Caroline notes that issues such as the glass ceiling are not among the things she and the other members of her small group discuss. While she is comfortable in that group and appreciates being able to "touch base with them," as she put it in the section preceding this extract, she does not like the women-in-business club because it is "big and organized" and she worries that some of what they do "borders on whining." Carrying derogatory connotations of being childish, complaining, fault-finding and irritable, the accusation of "whining" is often leveled at feminist-oriented women's groups (Phipps, 2006). Caroline was previously working in relatively junior positions, and it is unlikely that she would have faced a glass ceiling at that stage. However as gender discrimination accumulates over the life course (Agars, 2004), she may be confronted with it later in life. Her skepticism about its existence is important rhetorically, however, since in other parts of the interview, she portrays herself as very aware of gender. That she here does not mention this allows her to present the world of work as gender egalitarian, and to claim that gender no longer matters.

Caroline's concern about making too much of any disadvantages women might face was echoed in another interview, with a woman who had worked in a very male-dominated industry:

Frances: And I also get nervous around women, because (.) I feel like women and minorities often cause a lot of their own problems in the workplace because (.) 'cause there is a lot of sexism. Ok, there isn't. There is

sexism, ok, so let's say there's 30 percent sexism. But also, working is hard, right? So if you're a woman or a man, you're still going to get (.) battered around and you're still gonna, you know, you've got competition and, you know, things aren't always going to go your own way. I think the danger is that (.) if you're a woman, if you're not careful, you start to think that every time that happens to you it's because you're a woman, not just because that's the way the odds went or, you know, that's the way it unfolded and it could quite easily have happened to your male colleague. And I kind of feel like, I mean, 'cause when I was working I felt like I actually got caught into that trap. And I mean, a third of what happens is because you're a woman, so, you know, it's not like it doesn't happen. But mentally, and I've watched minorities do this as well, I've watched women and minorities do it as well, and I've seen myself do it. You, the, you've actually got to just focus on (.) you know, you've just got to kind of step back and give women-in-business club, that like you're not really doing that reality check, you know? It's more about how we're being held back, or, I mean, I worked in a, I worked in the engineering construction industry with guys who build nuclear power stations and dams [sic] and I don't know, put out fires in Iraq. And I was not held back because of that.

Caroline and Frances use similar constructions based on their work experience to make the point that ultimately gender has little relevance in the workplace. One of the problems with the explanation Frances offers is that it is difficult to pinpoint the 30% of situations in which women are experiencing discrimination and to address that. Here sexism is individualized and de-politicized and becomes something that happens only in women's minds. Another aspect of this construction is that it assumes that the competitive and sometimes bruising interactions which take place in the workplace are not themselves gendered, thereby demanding that women (and other "minorities") "toughen up" rather than acknowledging that there might be systemic issues at stake here. For Frances, doing a "reality check" implies that she refocuses on her goals rather than getting caught in the "trap" of interpreting her experiences through the prism of gender. The realities of sexism are necessarily left unaddressed, because to challenge them would involve getting caught up in the complexities of distinguishing between the objective existence of discrimination and subjective

experiences of it. Although adopting the strategy of “disappearing” sexism might enable women to succeed, it seems likely that it will also shape the type of leaders they become. This approach reproduces the traits associated with a traditional model of heroic leadership, including toughness, individualism, assertiveness, detachment, and self-control (Fletcher, 2004), all of which are stereotypically masculine and not in line with popular assumptions about appropriate feminine behavior (Billing & Alvesson, 2000).

A number of women acknowledged that they belong to friendship groups made up of women, and that these groups offered some support and solidarity within a male-dominated environment, with friends reviewing each others’ resumés, for example (Peggy). Women interviewees described a friendship group as a refuge (Helen) or as a support network (Ulrike). While denying the relevance of gender, these women did talk about the positive aspects they gain from informal female friendship groups, which seem to be an acceptable way to get support without being classified as a women’s rights activist. These groups did not appear to provide a context for reflecting critically on collective experiences of negotiating the masculine culture of business school, however.

Playing the gender card might then be seen as at odds with what these young women are trained to be. They are supposed to be future leaders of organizations, and the MBA is tailored toward providing them with confidence to succeed in that endeavor. Acknowledging the salience of gender has no place in this world; to do so would suggest that individual ability is not the only thing that determines success. Emphasizing structures beyond the individual would risk depriving women of their agency, and part of being a business leader is being proactive and self-determining. Women, therefore, have to ignore the possibility that gender can function as a structuring mechanism in society, as it would endanger their self-perception. For men, in contrast, downplaying the importance of gender may be a way to show their tolerance, open-mindedness, and support for gender equality. For men, most of whom identified with being the hegemonic group in business school, it seemed also more important that there were no quotas for women, given the implications for the purportedly meritocratic structure of the business school. Women, in contrast, defend against being passive victims of gender discrimination. For men as well as women, the preferred strategy is to insist that gender does not matter.

DISCUSSION

Although the percentage of women in business school has not improved since Sinclair (1995) conducted her study, the mind-set around women seems to have shifted. It is still the case that an MBA involves learning to do business like a man (cf. Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Calás & Smircich, 1992; Kerfoot & Knights, 1993; Wajcman, 1998). In this study this took the form of insisting that it was necessary to accept the status quo—that it is men who do business—and construct oneself simply as a student rather than a male or female student. The study was marked by the absence of any explicit acknowledgment that this masculine culture makes it difficult for women to thrive, however. Instead, day-to-day experiences of forms of hegemonic masculinity in business school were mostly ignored or downplayed, and women and indeed men appeared for the most part to make sense of such experiences without reference to gender, asserting that they had to be accepted and dealt with. In other words, experience was individualized, and incidents where gender clearly did matter were treated as single events, unrelated to wider social forces (Gill, 2002; Henwood, 1996; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The systemic nature of gender inequality was thus made invisible, and there appeared to be little opportunity to reflect on unequal structures and processes.

While it is perhaps not surprising that men are less likely to reflect critically on gender discrimination, it was striking that most of the women did not appear to do so either. However, of the women interviewed for the study, most were at a relatively early stage in their careers, all were under 35, and none had children. Some said they had not experienced explicit gender discrimination, and if they had experienced it in more or less subtle forms, most appeared to be missing the tools or the will to identify it, since doing so might impede them in their ambitions.³ This reflects the neoliberal discourse of the entrepreneurial individual (Du Gay, 1996; Pongratz & Voß, 2003), who takes charge of his or her own destiny rather than allowing outmoded forces, such as race, class, and gender to determine their life chances (Beck, 2000). Such a dis-

³ It might be that a follow-up study with the same students in 5 or 10 years’ time would produce rather different kinds of reflections on the challenges of combining work and family life and of being a working woman (cf. Bailyn, 2003). At this stage, however, most interviewees, male and female, embraced a discourse of empowerment, which assumed that women could achieve anything they wished to and should be judged entirely on their own merits rather than being seen as a group subject to particular pressures and constraints.

course of empowerment is seductive, as it provides individuals with the illusion of being on an equal footing with men and assumes that there is a level playing field. As the individualized postfeminist discourse fails to acknowledge any systemic gender inequities, it carries the powerful and attractive message that the world is gender egalitarian.

This does not mean, however, that gender ceases to shape women's experiences. There is still a lot of evidence that the glass ceiling is a persistent barrier for women's advancement. The number of women in senior positions has been stagnating or even declining in recent years (Sealy, Singh, & Vinnicombe, 2007; Stewart, 2008; Treanor, 2007). Besides this vertical segregation, the workplace continues to be segregated horizontally, with men and women working in different areas (Charles, 2003). These "hard facts" and figures, which might be thought of as convincing evidence within the business school context, were largely ignored. Instead, there was a tendency to impute the problems some women still face to an oversensitivity on the part of the individual.

The denial of gender as a relevant category for social interaction in MBA education might also be explained by the fact that highly ambitious female students do not want to be perceived as part of a disadvantaged group. They are educated to be future leaders, and they invest a substantial amount of money in the MBA as a passport to a successful career. If this career is likely to be undermined by discriminatory practices at work, the danger is that the investment may appear as less worthwhile. One way of distancing themselves from this possibility is to deny that being a woman is relevant. Being a woman is of use for networking and getting a job, but placing any greater emphasis on gender may have negative consequences and is therefore avoided. To risk being seen as too feminine or even potentially as a feminist who is whining about the state of gender relations would not be appropriate behavior for a future business leader who expects to create opportunities wherever she goes. A training in business is also a formation in individualism and in becoming a rational *Homo economicus* (Ehrensals, 2001; Ghoshal, 2005). In this environment, there is little room for acknowledging the potentially collective experience of sexism as a factor that could hinder individual success. Denying or understating the importance of being a woman is, in this context, a safer bet. In general men and women prefer to construct their workplaces as gender neutral (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Korvajärvi, 2002), and one can expect that the same is true for business education. A requirement of gender neutrality is that

gender does not matter and that men and women are valued based on individual merit; this was a strong feature of the talk MBA students produced. Through accepting the idea that business is dominated by men and that gender does not matter, MBA students constructed business school as a gender-neutral environment.

IMPLICATIONS

The flip side of this strategy of "disappearing" gender and sexism, however, is that the MBA students have limited access to a critical discourse through which they might identify and challenge the systemic factors that are operating to maintain the normative masculine culture of the business school environment. While this impacts the women themselves in multiple ways, it also has significant ramifications for the wider project of management education. If business schools are to equip future business leaders to think creatively about the opportunities and challenges involved in managing an increasingly diverse workforce, it seems crucial to provide them with the skills they need to recognize the ways in which gender shapes the values and working practices of organizations at all levels (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). There is considerable evidence that more equitable organizations, which are less constrained by gendered roles and images, are also more effective at meeting their goals (Bailyn, Fletcher, & Kolb, 1997; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). If this is so, visionary leaders need to be able to think critically about how the values, norms, and practices of their organizations are gendered in order to identify effectively and solve the problems that arise due to the pervasive effects of inequality (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996). Such an approach would involve specifically teaching all MBA students to "register gender," rather than allowing it to disappear from view.

This kind of approach would have to stretch across the MBA curriculum. It would mean including specific sessions or courses on gender and diversity for all students, male and female. Instead of adopting the approach of the female lecturer who gave "extreme" examples that alienated her students, it might be better to adopt more subtle strategies. This would mean making every business school course a gender-aware course and weaving into the curriculum examples about women and men in less traditional circumstances. Business students would then not think about gender as a special issue and be tempted to disregard it, learning rather that working with gender diversity is part of what it means to do business. This

requires a fundamental rethinking of how future managers are educated, so that gender diversity and inclusion are not optional extras, but rather are seen as central to all business processes. We outline some ideas of how this can happen in the following.

Such a reinvented curriculum would teach students to identify the ways in which certain kinds of competence, including crucial skills in relating, negotiating, anticipating, and smoothing out problems, and carrying out the "invisible work" that can be crucial to the success of a project or a business, are systematically unrecognized and undervalued because of their association with femininity (Fletcher, 1999; Fletcher, 2004; Kelan, 2008; Woodfield, 2000). It would also include systematic reflection on how leadership is taught at business school, taking into account the ways in which traditional styles of heroic leadership premised on individual success have been challenged in favor of a postheroic leadership style based on greater mutuality and collaboration (Fletcher, 2004). The feminine dimensions of the new leadership and management practices, such as people skills, are all too easily made invisible (Fondas, 1997). While men and women can perform feminine leadership, research suggests that it is more rewarded in men than in women because the gender connotations are often made invisible (Fletcher, 1999; Kelan, 2008). Naming these skills can be an important way of recognizing and valuing them (Fletcher, 1999).

Moving gender into the mainstream of the curriculum can only happen if it is properly understood and not viewed simply as relating to women. Awareness training might be useful in that respect. If male students and faculty are to become agents of change within the business school and beyond it, it is first necessary to convince them that a transformation of the gendered order would not only benefit them but also make them more effective leaders.

Role models have been shown to have a positive impact on how people think about their own abilities and what is possible (Marx & Roman, 2002). Women-only recruitment events can be effective in providing such role models, reassuring potential applicants that there are successful alumnae. One could use such strategies in class too, by inviting successful businesswomen to give presentations, for instance. In addition it might be useful to foster the creation of more informal groups in which students can share their experiences. This study suggests that anything half-official is not inclusive enough for MBA students' liking. However, informal groups, open to both women and men, might provide spaces to reflect on certain experiences

and to raise awareness that gender inequality is not an individual but a systemic issue (Henwood, 1996; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Such groups might foster awareness and work toward "small wins" (Weick, 1984), aiming at incremental change which gradually overcomes the barriers to women's success without provoking a defensive and thus counterproductive response (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). That would mean that rather than having to accept "the way the world IS", future leaders were equipped to play the masculine game of business in ways that subtly change the rules. In fact, one student, Tanya, reflected in the interview about a person she admired in her former place of work, describing (although she did not identify it as such) exactly such a small-wins strategy in which the business woman did not change the workplace immediately but used "small baby steps" to transform the working practices of a very male-dominated organization. Such examples could be used within the classroom to illustrate gender change processes in organizations, demonstrating some of the ways in which "tempered radicals" (Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007) catalyze changes in gender relations and organizational effectiveness. The small-wins model assumes that the process of change will be a gradual one, and it allows for ongoing reflection and midcourse corrections where a particular approach seems not to be achieving the desired outcome.

We have focused here mainly on MBA students, but faculty and nonacademic staff could also be fruitfully employed in change processes. The creation of a more gender-diverse and inclusive environment would benefit those at all levels. In the current climate, female faculty particularly in junior ranks face the double challenge of navigating the masculine cultures of academia and business school (cf. Bailyn, 2003; Benschop & Brouns, 2003). There are some useful approaches from women faculty in science and technology that might be applied in the business school context as well. It has, for instance, been suggested that through interactive theater, faculty members could become aware of the culture operating in their business school (LaVaque-Manty, Stewart, & Malley, 2007).

While scholarships and women's brochures may be effective means to increase the percentage of women in business school, they only tackle the tip of the gender iceberg and are not sufficiently ambitious to achieve the kind of thoroughgoing change that is urgently needed. Reshaping the masculine culture of business is a complex matter, and we have suggested that all-too-obvious strategies such as women's brochures or scholarships

are more likely to lead to a backlash rather than to real changes in gender relations. If the gendered order is to be challenged effectively, business schools need to be fundamentally remodelled to reflect subtle forms of gender awareness, and this would involve staff and faculty at all levels in a process that would necessarily challenge existing power relations and unsettle entrenched interests. Such a process, if it is to be effective and sustainable, needs to gain the support of both men and women in the faculty and student bodies (see Table 3).

CONCLUSION

We have argued that while the numbers of women in management schools have not changed greatly in the last decade, what appears to have changed is the mind-set in relation to gender. Business schools still educate future business leaders based on a masculine model, but this model is rarely seen as problematic by MBA students. Yet it impacts who can be a successful business person. Indeed it has been shown that most MBA students ignored gender in business school and thought it did not matter despite evidence that to the contrary. The idea that it might be relevant was generally discounted. In further research we will explore the rich and nuanced material generated from this research further. For instance, we intend to analyze how future plans and students' responses to the picture prompts can be read as gendered.

This research poses new challenges for management education in general and for business schools in particular. Management education has to question how it is possible to train future busi-

ness leaders in respect to diversity in a climate where explicit reference to gender diversity is not an acceptable repertoire. More subtle strategies are needed if the culture is to be reshaped, given the hidden depths at which gender currently operates. The article outlined various of those strategies, such as teaching students that gender and diversity are at the core of the business and not optional extras, including male students and faculty in the change processes, making gender-diverse role models more visible and creating support for informal networks in which the systemic nature of gender inequality can be voiced and specific incremental strategies for change can be developed. The adoption of such strategies would mark a significant step forward, remodelling the gender culture of business schools so that subtle forms of gender awareness were incorporated into the mainstream of MBA life. Such a remodelling would bring in its wake a wider focus on inclusion, challenging the ways in which other forms of difference are also "disappeared" alongside gender and helping to create managers of the future who understand the value and the challenge of increasing diversity.

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TABLE 3

Obvious and Subtle Strategies for Changing the MBA

Obvious Strategies	Subtle Strategies
● Women's brochures depicting women	● Brochures depicting men and women in nontraditional positions
● Women's scholarships	● Rethink how competences and concepts such as leadership are gendered
● Women-only programs	● Showing women in leading roles in case studies and as guest speakers
● Women's centers	● Involving men in change
● Women-only recruitment events	● Diversity awareness training for students and faculty
● Women-in-business clubs	● Informal groups for women

- demic organizing and its gender effects. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 10(2): 194–212.
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Fonte: Academy of Management Learning & Education, v.9, n. 1, p. 26-43, March 2010. [Base de Dados]. Disponível em: <[http://: web.ebscohost.com](http://web.ebscohost.com)>. Acesso em: 14 maio 2010.

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