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## Agents for Change and Changed Agents: The Micro-politics of Change and Feminism in the Academy

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# **Agents for Change and Changed Agents: The Micro-politics of Change and Feminism in the Academy**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores gender politics and processes in the academy and investigates change from the perspectives of feminist academics. In particular it explores the experiences of women academics attempting to effect change to the gendered status quo of their own institutions. Focusing on micro-politics, the feminist movement is empirically explored in localised spaces of resistance and in the small, but significant, individual efforts at making changes within academic institutions. The analysis is based on interviews with female academics working in business and management schools and focuses on the challenges for change and how change attempts affect their personal and professional identities. The paper explores the range of change strategies participants use as they try to progress in their academic career while staying true to their feminist values and priorities through both resisting and/or incorporating dominant discourses of academic work. The analysis highlights such tensions and focuses on a contextualised, bottom up perspective on change which, counter to more totalizing theorisation, takes into account mundane and lived experiences at the level of the individual.

*Keywords:* Feminism, change, gender, academia, identity, discourse.

## **Introduction**

Gender inequalities in the workplace have been studied from various disciplinary backgrounds and from several perspectives, however most scholars agree on the fact that gender inequalities persist due to culture, processes and practices that constitute the structural systems of contemporary organisations and therefore are taken for granted and mostly left unchallenged (Meyerson and Kolb, 2000; Gherardi and Poggio 2007; Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007). In addition, as Hearn (2000) observes, little is known about the gendered nature of organizational change and intervention processes. Therefore this paper focuses on the experiences of women academics attempting to effect change to the gendered status quo of their own institutions. Academia, as a highly institutionalised environment, is characterised by a traditional, hierarchical and selective culture which provides opportunities for differentiation at all levels (e.g. academic, student, administrative and support staff levels), thus exacerbating and reproducing institutional and social inequalities (Morley, 1999). In particular, its traditional culture based on bureaucratic hierarchical systems is founded on sets of values that define and maintain a specific configuration of gender roles and relations (Ferguson, 1984; Leathwood, 2005). Authors (e.g. Park, 1996; Thomas and Davies, 2002; Priola, 2007) have observed the tendency for these relations to disadvantage women in both their research and managerial careers. In such institutionalised workplaces initiating and sustaining change is particularly difficult and problematic because the persistence of gendered structures and processes is partly attributed to institutional configurations that legitimise and ascribe neutrality to these processes. Such gendered processes based on masculinities are rendered invisible to most institutional members because they represent the systems of knowledge and beliefs that justify and explain current practices and maintain the stability of

the institution; they are ‘the way things are’ (Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007; 308). Within such ‘institutional logic’ change is only possible when gendered processes become visible through experiences of discrimination (Katzenstein, 1998; Sinclair, 2000) or when individuals or groups are exposed to multiple and contradictory institutions (Clemens and Cook, 1999; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007).

This paper explores feminist academics’ experiences of instituting change. While the general focus is on gender and change in academia, the study aims are twofold: firstly, it examines the strategies feminist academics use to raise gender awareness and thus promote change from within their own institution; secondly it explores how these attempts at change can affect their identity work. In this respect the study explores how activism at the institutional level acts as a bridge between political intervention and professional and personal positioning. Similarly to Morley and Walsh who see activism as ‘both politics and self-care’ (1995: 1), our perspective views the participants as both *change agents* in their organisations, endeavouring to bring about change, but also as *changed agents*, who are professionally and personally affected by their institutional activism. Therefore, while the focus of the paper is on academics as change agents, we argue that the investigation of these change experiences has the potential to offer an understanding at the level of individuals’ identities. While we recognise that this distinction may lead to an artificial separation between the analysis of conscious practices of change and more unconscious changes at the level of the individual we feel that this dual level of analysis is useful for explanatory purposes. The discussion that follows will thus explore the consequences of the change strategies for both institutional changes and the identity work of the participants. The paper takes a position on identity that sees it contextual, contingent and formed through social action and discourse (Butler, 1990, 1997; Davies and Harre 1990;

Fairclough, 2004; Hall, 2004). Drawing on critical feminism (e.g. Irigaray, 1985; Kondo, 1990; Hekman, 1992; Oseen, 1997), the paper considers gender identities and subjectivities as socially constructed within the workplace and rejects the categorisation of women as homogeneous group and the view that femininity and femaleness are unitary conceptions.

The paper is organised as follows: firstly we seek to identify the micro-politics of change and resistance and explore their potential implications for feminist action and feminist identities. Then we explore the context of our empirical work and outline our methodology. Thirdly, in our analysis we explore feminist academics as ‘Agents for Change’ identifying the changes they want to see in their institutions and the methods they have used to achieve these changes. We then explore these women as ‘Changed Agents’, delving into the challenges and dilemmas posed to their identities by their change attempts. The conclusions will provide a further theorisation of the findings.

### **The Micro-politics of Change in the Academy**

Many theorists of gender and organisation studies have highlighted the multiple dimensions, practices and processes of gender inequalities. Such inequalities operate differently in different sectors, different organisations and hierarchical positions. We argue, therefore, that more specific analysis is needed at the micro-political level. Currently the politics of micro-practices in context is under-investigated (see also Swan and Fox, 2010) but, as several authors suggest (e.g. Thomas and Davies, 2005a and 2005b; Barry et al., 2007), the politics of daily practices of resistance has significant potential for change, at least at the institutional or organisational level. Conversely institutional or organisational values do affect these practices

of resistance, in fact, as Katzenstein (1998) realised through her empirical work in the US military and the Catholic Church, the power of institutions in shaping the differences in contemporary feminism is significant. Therefore further empirical analysis is needed to shed light on the dynamics of women's activism and resistance in organisations.

Thomas and Davies' (2005a) 'politics of reinscription', usefully connects politics of resistance to possibilities for change. They offer a broad-based conceptualisation of resistance arising from the micro-level negotiations taking place between an individual's subject positions. Such forms of resistance centre on the destabilising of truths, challenging subjectivities and normalising discourses. They see resistance as subtle, small-scale and located within specific contexts and aimed at specific social groups. It is in institutions that the meanings of this newer gender politics are being contested (Katzenstein, 1998). Citing Weedon (1999), Thomas and Davies (2005b) suggest that local struggles and attempts to institute change are not necessarily part of a deliberate and totalising emancipatory project; they can also be located within a conceptualisation of resistance that is multiple and cannot be characterised simply as either grass-roots mobilisation or total alignment with organisational arrangements. They acknowledge that:

'The emphasis is on the promotion of a multiple politics that recognises limits and differences, and on a form of feminist activism and struggle that may not result in radical rupture or apocalyptic change, but may, nevertheless, be effective'  
(Thomas and Davies, 2005b: 720)

As Meyerson and Tompkins (2007) suggest, it is often marginalization that creates the motivation to change, however being on the margins of organisations generally corresponds to a lack of power and resources to implement wide changes or to mobilise a broad base of support. For this reason the localised small-scale tactics used by dispersed actors, which have been described as “everyday feminism”, “small wins”, “covert conflict”, “piecemeal change” and “disorganised co-action” (in Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007: 311), have also been widely debated and criticised for their individualist, rather than collectivist, focus.

The emphasis on such everyday practices and small-scale actions has not only implications for meanings of feminism but also for a theoretical understanding of change, which needs to be viewed at the micro level, as contingent and fluid. As feminist ideology does not correspond to one single political stance or a unitary perspective, so the varieties of activism and strategies for change are multiple and varied, ranging from radical activism to subtle resistance. Consequently, change is viewed as processual, emergent, contextualised and contingent. Micro-changes initiated endogenously by organisational members are important in affecting organisational practices and can contribute to create a wider critical awareness, antecedent to any transformation project. We seek to contribute to this under-researched debate by focusing on the daily practices of change and resistance to gendered processes as enacted by individuals within the academy.

### **Feminist Activism and Identity**

The growth of change attempts within institutions in recent decades has been determined by the increasing representation of diverse groups in organisations and the legal recognition of

discrimination (Katzenstein, 1998). Micro-processes of change are thus generally interest-driven by individuals who are either discriminated against or marginalized by the practices they want to change. Such individuals are often exposed to other institutions or ideological commitment such as feminism and possess available discursive positions that allow them to question the dominant logic. As Meyerson and Tompkins (2007) argue those who can expose the contradictions between their identities, ideology and interests and the dominant logic of their own organisations are able to maintain a critical consciousness and thus act as 'institutional entrepreneur' (using DiMaggio's 1988 terminology) or 'tempered radicals'. Meyerson and Scully's (1995) refer to 'tempered radicalism' to describe the struggles often emerging between the professional appropriateness required by the dominant culture and individual personal authenticity. Tempered radicals are 'individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds, with the dominant culture of their organization' (1995: 586). As Warwick and Auchmuty (1995) point out women activists' position in the academy is bound up with tensions and paradoxes between political commitment and organisational structure, it is these tensions that form the basis of the conflictual identity work resulting from the wish to change the current gender order of their own institution while maintaining commitment to the same institution.

Several researchers observe both the temptation and the dangers of incorporation (Deem and Ozga 2000), compliance (Thomas and Davies 2005a) and co-optation (Meyerson and Scully 1995) of inside activists. The temptation to abandon, or at least significantly dumb down, one's personal values and beliefs and embrace more fully those of the dominant organisational culture is always present. Meyerson and Scully (1995) observe that, ironically



as individuals move up through the hierarchy of their organisation and therefore have greater potential to effect change, the greater the pressures to incorporate the dominant cultures' values (see also Eisenstein, 1996; Spurling, 1997 and Hearn, 2001). This incorporation may extend to include language, communication and management and leadership styles. Feminist researchers then continually make decisions which are bound up in the identity conflict of remaining 'on the outside' and distinct from the dominant culture, or acquiescing and following suit. Such conflictual positioning has been also documented by femocrats who admit that the experience of been caught between two roles is a very difficult one. The inevitability of such a position has been investigated by Eisenstein (1996), whose study of Australian femocrats between the 1970s and 1990s explores the complicated and conflictual position of those who are wedged between the role of the 'mandarin' and that of the 'missionary'. Femocrats enter government bureaucracy at senior levels to influence policies that advance women's status in society. However this role brings with it a series of tensions between their aims and practices (Eisenstein, 1996). If femocrats acted like 'mandarins' (e.g. bureaucrats: elite, inaccessible guardians of government secrets) they would gain the trust of their colleagues but lose the trust of the women's movement. If they behaved like 'missionaries', as uncompromising promoters of women's issues, they would be perceived as 'having an agenda', thus been discredited by colleagues and become ineffective within the bureaucracy (Eisenstein, 1996: 87). The experience of many feminist academic can thus be an uncomfortable one, where feelings of being on the margins and isolated from the dominant organisational culture (Acker and Feuerwerker, 1996; Katila and Meriläinen, 2002; Leathwood, 2005; Haynes and Fearfull, 2008) co-exist with feelings of frustration, loneliness and self-doubt.

Women academics who actively challenge masculine hegemonic discourses find themselves resisting stereotypical articulations of femininity, for example in relation to teaching and caring, while, at the same time need to demonstrate high commitment to their profession and their institution. At the level of identity, the continuous negotiation between selves, both those sanctioned and those encouraged by the organisational culture, can be a significant source of stress. In their study of women academics in Canada, Acker and Feuerverger (1996) locate contradictions in tensions between prescriptions for ‘caring women’ and ‘productive academics’ (see also Park, 1996; Raddon 2002). Similarly Haynes and Fearfull (2008) observe that women academics are often forced to grapple with complex and conflicting priorities which, on the organisational level, see women’s identities subject to stereotypical notions of femininity and, on the professional level, see them torn between intellectual scholarship, research and inquiry and the nurturing and teaching components of the academic role.

As researchers (e.g. Sinclair, 1995, 2000; Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007) have argued, while this state of ambivalence is often disabling, it can, conversely, also be seen as enabling in that those on the margins are often less visible within their institution and this can have its benefits. As Barry et al. (2007: 359) observe, there are a number of ‘concealed adherents who bide their time, remain silent and can move unnoticed within organizations’. Such mobilization from inside institutions is an important development in feminist political activism since the 1980s when women’s protest left the streets (Katzenstein, 1990). As more women have entered traditionally male-dominated organisations, such as higher education, the military, the church, the legal, medical and media professions, they have been demanding a co-equal place through various forms of everyday resistance and mobilization. Feminist-led

resistance on the inside of institutions is currently one of the dominant modes through which women insist on their recognition as equal members of mainstream institutions (Katzenstein, 1998). In this regard this study documents women's resistance as a means to promote change inside higher education institutions.

### **The Research Context**

It has been widely reported (e.g. Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Priola, 2007; Van Den Brink and Stobbe, 2009) that the structure, culture and hierarchical arrangements of academia reproduces a particular system of gender relations that reflect a hegemonic position which privileges masculinity. As Benschop and Brouns (2003: 195) argue, despite 'the growing body of theoretical and empirical studies on gender, work and organisations', universities 'turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the developed insight when it comes to their organising processes and principles'. This is not only evident in the practices which determine the existing vertical and horizontal segregation, but also in the ways in which work is organised and in the systems of knowledge production. They also (2003: 209) contend that the 'integration and mainstreaming of gender issues within the academy will serve as a strong impetus to the necessary modernisation of the universities'. In fact, during the last two decades the significant changes experienced to the organisation of the academy have not necessarily transformed its traditional and masculine culture (Monroe et al., 2008; Bird, 2010). Some argue (e.g. Haynes and Fearfull, 2008), that they have actually created a more divisive, elitist and masculine environment where competition, individualism and target orientation have become more than ever before associated with discourses of the successful academic.

Over the last ten to fifteen years the key influences on the organisation of work processes in academia include an emphasis on management and private-sector practices (Leonard, 1998; Brooks and Mackinnon, 2001; Deem, 2003) coupled with a shifting and reduction of state funding. The market driven culture of corporate managerialism has progressively filtered to the university sector since the early 1990s subsequently informing their managerial processes (Willmott, 1995) and resulting in what has been defined as new managerialism or new public management (Thomas and Davis, 2002; Leathwood, 2005). These shifts bring with them a focus on increased marketisation (Ball, 1990; Kenway, 1995) and accountability (Brooks, 2001; Barry et al., 2001). The emphasis has shifted from ‘intrinsic reward’ to measurable outcomes in terms of income generation, research grants and highly rated publications (Macdonald and Kam, 2007), teaching quality and community engagement. The audit culture, influenced by the government’s policies aimed at maintaining high competition in a globalised education and labour market,<sup>1</sup> is evident in various mechanisms of control. Examples of these are the systems of measurement of research and teaching, such as REF (Research Excellence Framework) and QAA (Quality Assurance Assessment) in the UK, but also the language and the systems of control, accountability and monitoring performance of academic work such as appraisal systems and performance indicators.

While our discussion focuses on the context of academia in general, the participants in this study all work in business or management schools. Whilst we note the variety of the interviewees’ background in history, sociology, psychology, agricultural studies and geography, we are cautious in generalising from the business/management context to Higher Education institutions in general, recognising the different experiences of women in different

fields and in different institutions. Despite the strong masculine culture and the numerical dominance of men in business and management schools (see Priola, 2007; Haynes and Fearfull, 2008), statistics on the gender gap rank business and management schools in-between the men-dominated 'hard' sciences such as physics, engineering and mathematics and the women-dominated areas of health, nursing and paramedical studies, women's studies and education (AUT, 2004)<sup>ii</sup>. In numerical terms, at least, the gender balance of men and women in business schools reflects the higher education sector more generally in the UK where in 2007/2008 women represented 42.6% of the total of academic staff (HESA, 2009).

## **Research Methodology**

This paper explores the experiences and practices of feminist academics who have an agenda for change within their own organisations. The approach taken follows the feminist tradition of prioritising women's own voice in constructing the narrative of their own experiences. The study is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with nine academics working in Business and Management schools (see table I). A call for participants was posted via various academic networks and mailing lists asking for individuals to self identify as having an agenda to change the gendered status quo of their institutions. Interviews were conducted over the telephone where it was difficult (due to distances) to conduct the interview face to face. In three cases interviews were conducted over the telephone, the other six interviews were conducted face to face. Interviews were all recorded and lasted between 60 and 100 minutes. The women included in the study work at different levels within their own institutions and are at different stages in their academic careers. Four are professors and five are senior lecturers (two of whom were lecturers at the time of the interview)<sup>iii</sup>. Seven work at British universities

and two work at two different northern-European Universities. Having contacts within the international academic community all participants are exposed to gender issues beyond their institutions. We should add a note here that the women in this study have had differential exposure to feminist ideology due to background, age and experiences of work within differing organisational cultures; some of them trace their change project back to the radical politics of the 1970s, while others have more recently identified with feminists agendas<sup>iv</sup>.

INSERT TABLE I HERE

During the interviews we asked participants to consider how they interpreted gender change in academia and to reflect on their role as academics wanting to change institutional practices. We also asked them about the wider impacts of their work on their organisations' gendered processes and to reflect on how the process of undertaking feminist action and research has affected them as individuals and as professionals. Given that we are also academics working within the same subject area of the interviewees, this certainly has influenced the talk and type of interaction as well as the content of the interview. There was certainly a high level of mutual understanding between us and the interviewees and we felt that we shared similar experiences, language, vocabulary and ideology leading to a level of openness and complicity that otherwise might not have been possible.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were subsequently examined by both authors independently, for emerging themes. The preliminary coding stage consisted of identifying categories comprising issues, events and key concepts emerging in each interview. These were then grouped into themes where commonalities among them were evident.

Between five and eight themes were identified within each interview (e.g. strategies for change; difficulties in instituting change; feminine and masculine work, work and family, leadership issues) and key quotes were also highlighted for each theme. In the second stage all interviews were compared together to identify common themes. In a separate document a list of themes was compiled along with the frequency with which each emerged across all interviews. Following this stage the researchers met to compare and discuss their preliminary individual analysis and attribute a common label to each theme. Quotes that were included in each theme were also discussed between the authors and patterns in consistencies and differences in the content of accounts were searched for across the transcripts. Eleven themes were generated from the interviews, we merged these into six groupings based on a general classification of the theme substance. These are explored below in each subsection and consisted of: making gender inequalities visible through discussion; the value of feminist research; teaching gender; resisting stereotyping; playing the game; opting out of the game. The analysis followed an interpretive perspective (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2006) involving the iteration between the data and the theory we used to interpret the data. Participants' narratives were thus interpreted in relation to the theory but they were also related to the wider institutional context of the business school.

### **Agents for Change: Everyday Change Practices**

In this section we explore the changes participants wanted to see in their institutions and the strategies they have used to achieve these changes. During the interviews frustrations were frequently expressed in actually achieving change and identifying the specific modalities for change, therefore, rather than talking about concrete changes, often participants tended to

identify a series of problems as targets for change. Overall they wanted to see: increased transparency in a range of procedures including systems of recruitment and promotion, internal funding structures and mechanisms for distributing roles; a more equal recognition of different types of work (in particular a greater valuing of teaching, administrative and pastoral work); and an increased recognition and valuing of feminist research. These problems are seen as underpinning the under-representation of women in the academic hierarchy and as something that, as one of the interviewees observed, needs tackling ‘ultimately to improve the position of women in the academy’. In trying to address gender inequalities in their institutions participants relied on strategies which have focused on a range of methods, these include having formal and informal discussions with both their peers and their superiors, conducting and disseminating research on gender and including gender in their teaching.

### *Making Gender Visible: Challenging Normalising Discourses through Everyday Talk*

Language is entirely bound up in power structures (Foucault, 1972) and the interaction between language and power determines ‘which words achieve the status of knowledge’ (Sinclair 2000: 92). It is perhaps not surprising then that one of the most talked about methods for trying to effect change was through everyday talk in university departments. Talk was seen as vital for raising awareness of gender issues in both formal and informal settings. As Becky observes: “*I’ve tried to talk to my head of department about this before, but I don’t think he gets it or sees it that the department is gendered.*” Becky’s observation that her head of department doesn’t ‘see it’ or ‘get it’ betrays her double frustration at neither being able to encourage him to acknowledge, thus ‘see’ the gender inequality, nor being able to make him understand the situation (‘get it’) and do something about it. By ‘ignoring’ the problem her



head of department is not giving her any grounds on which to engage in discussion, thus closing the debate down before it can even start.

“I have instigated discussions with other colleagues in the School about these gendered structures because it only began to dawn on me, maybe about three years ago, that this appeared to be happening. We did have some discussions with, not just other women but some male colleagues as well, where I said: “look, I actually think this is a gender issue” and it did spark a slightly wider debate. But it was a kind of off the record debate rather than embedded in any constitutional committees or anything like that. As a result I think other people did begin to see that this was an issue too, although nothing really has changed. Nothing’s really been done about it.” (Becky, Lecturer)

Becky clearly takes the opportunity to raise issues as and when they arise in her everyday working life encouraging colleagues to interpret shared experiences using a gender lens. She observes that these discussions have raised a wider awareness, however she is also rather pessimistic about the concrete changes that have resulted from them. Layla similarly observes the importance of acknowledging gendered inequalities through talk highlighting the need for a more collective action.

‘I still think it’s too dependant on the individual in a way...if there are enough people who practice, for example filling appointments differently, they influence the newcomers and novices to think differently. For example even though the processes are still gendered, gender is discussed... they realize this is one of the issues that needs to be discussed and taken into consideration, even though the end result might be the same. But at least it’s on the agenda, they recognize it, they acknowledge it as a relevant factor’ (Layla, Professor).

While neither of the above excerpts are very optimistic about the outcomes of informal talk as a method for effecting change they both underline the importance of the overall strategy of keeping gender issues in sight and on the agenda, even if no immediate change is apparent in the short term.. It is in response to feelings of frustration and marginalization that our interviewees produce a variety of forms of resistance and action and while these can be seen as part of a short agenda and as disorganized action (Cockburn, 1989) they are still influential and thus carry a political weight. Sally's comment below is evidence of the potential for formal and informal talk to slowly change a gendered organizational culture:

'Just raising that whole argument I think was quite emancipatory and got a lot of the staff talking about it ...they were talking about how far we'd come from two women principle lectures, to I think, probably about 13 now, 13 or 14. From gender neutrality or defensiveness on our programmes to incorporating gendered aspects into the curricula, from fight the quant. guys quoting football stats., to giving examples that impact on both men and women. Making sure that in each publication, each corporate do we're looking at gender balances, looking at symbols, people are actually talking about that and not being ridiculed as some kind of backlash but just becoming much more of an accepted way now. That's not to say that inequalities don't still exist' (Sally, Professor)

Sally is a senior manager at her school and here she observes the gradual impact that her actions (as well as that of other colleagues) had not only on increasing the number of senior women but also on the symbolic discourse and therefore culture and practices of her organisation. In particular influencing the use of language and the valuing and acceptance of particular content, terms and modes of speaking are seen by Sally as a central aspect of her emancipatory project. Sally's action demonstrates how the notion of power and the

possibilities of resistance are intertwined within context-specific settings (see Jermier et al., 1994; Collinson, 2003; Fleming, 2005) that need to be exploited to achieve change.

### *Making Feminist Research Matter*

Calás and Smircich's (1997: 54) emphasise the feminist epistemological activities of 'revising, reflecting and rewriting' as central to achieving change. For our participants these activities emerged strongly when talking about research. As Becky commented: '*what's the point of research if it doesn't make a difference*'. Similarly to raising awareness through discussions, there was a strong sense that gender research was important in keeping the feminist agenda alive and, at least, sustaining the possibility for change; as Emma observes: '*I don't know about how much possibility there is of change, but I think if people don't do research then there is no possibility of change*'. Therefore to stop researching and writing about gender inequalities was seen as giving up on the whole feminist project. Research was important in participants' change agendas in a range of ways: in the conduct of fieldwork by prompting a process of reflection amongst research participants, in the actual conduct of research for the individual academic in helping her to make sense of her own experience and offering her a position from which to question dominant logics, and in the dissemination of findings revealing inequalities to others. Emancipatory research is also about changing your participants, Emma hopes that her research fieldwork has prompted a process of reflection amongst her interviewees: '*maybe by interviewing 10 male colleagues for three hours each and asking them how being a man has influenced their working lives, maybe that's had some impact on them*'.

While research was seen by most interviewees as a tool for changing their wider social and working contexts, Sally mobilises the Business School discourse of ‘industry applicability’ to legitimise her gender research within an otherwise hostile environment.

“There have been challenges to whether my research was suitable for the Business School or suitable for the RAE in my career history. I think for me it was about how to persuade people that the research was meaningful and valuable to the practicing managers who come to be a part of the business school’ (Sally, Professor)

When her feminist research was questioned as possibly unsuitable for the Business school and the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) submission, Sally managed to highlight and persuade her superiors that gender research is actually ‘meaningful and valuable to the practicing managers’. She uses this discourse to support the increasing marketization of academia (in particular business schools) and legitimises her position as feminist by drawing directly on Business School discourses of valued research ‘as applicable to industry’ as well as locating her own gender research within this discourse. In line with Sinclair’s 1995 study of MBA (Master in Business Administration) culture, all our interviewees reported that the values of competition and individualism, instrumentalism and effectiveness dominate the culture of business and management schools. Here Sally shows how she (re)positioned her feminist research within these discourses to avoid being seen as ‘other’ and to reframe gender research within the dominant language of the business school and therefore legitimise it. Similarly Kirsty (who is also a senior professor) during the interview routinely incorporated dominant business school discourses in her narrative. She frequently referred to financial measures of research work and her narrative was replete with entrepreneurial discourses surrounding the bottom line and creating value for the organisation. Such incorporation of

institutional discourses to the benefits of one's strategy is deemed effective, however it can be seen as problematic in that it legitimises and reinforces the same dominant discourses.

### *Growing the Next Generation: Teaching Gender in Business Schools*

A third key way in which the women we interviewed attempted to effect change was through their teaching. Including gender in teaching was seen as impacting on the next generation and therefore considered as central to change in the longer term:

'if we're going to change a profession like XXX it's got to probably be from the bottom up, because you've got a sort of old guard, a very masculine dominated, older leaders in the profession. And as younger people come through with slightly different views and more women are pushing for a different agenda then I think it will slowly hopefully change for the better.'

(Becky, Lecturer)

Participants observed the difficulties in trying to set up gender focused teaching modules in their business schools, so instead many opt to 'sneak gender issues in' everything they teach (Ella). In reflecting on her own experiences of teaching gender to managers and those on MBA courses, Sinclair (1995, 2000) identifies some of the problems inherent in this strategy for change. She observes the need to go beyond merely teaching gender while focusing on the short term issues of diversity and employment opportunities, and instead to examine the forms and nature of masculinities with concrete examples of how male gender identities impact on the experiences of working life which most MBA students could relate to. Our participants held similar views seeing teaching as central in starting a process of reflection in the next generation of managers.

‘I feel most influential when I can put gender into my teaching...they (the students) are forced to reflect on their own assumptions, it’s a very powerful position’ (Layla, Professor)

While Layla observes that encouraging students to reflect on their own assumptions can be powerful, her comment that the students ‘are forced to reflect’ also reveals some of the underlying obstacles highlighted by Sinclair (2000). The sharing of experiences on business courses does not always come naturally to students, especially in a climate where common-sense concepts remain unquestioned and a more didactic mode of learning still often dominates. A second challenge comes from the hierarchy of disciplines within the business school wherein subjects such as business ethics and gender studies are feminized and therefore occupy a secondary position (Calás and Smircich, 1997).

### **Changed Agents? Strategies of Incorporation and Resistance**

In this section we place our focus on the contradictions and challenges that the change actions have posed to participants’ identities. Our specific focus is on practices of resistance and accommodation of dominant institutional discourses (e.g. Thomas and Davies, 2005a and 2005b; Barry et al., 2007) and how individuals deliberately position themselves as insiders by drawing on dominant institutional discourses or as outsiders by rejecting institutional pressures. Conversely we also explore the way in which participants are positioned by others in their organizations and are often rendered powerless. We have chosen two overlapping themes to explore these issues: resisting gendered stereotypes and playing and rejecting the rules of the game by utilizing dominant discourses. We see each of these themes as a strategy

for achieving change and we explore the victories and frustrations that our participants experience.

### *Challenging Subjectivities: Resisting Gendered Stereotypes*

While the links between individual resistance and change may not be instantly obvious, we agree with Weedon (1987) who sees individual resistances as vital in producing alternative forms of knowledge. In addition, because gendered inequalities are so invisibly woven into the institutional logic of business schools, it is only through experiences of discrimination and resistance that gendered processes become apparent (Sinclair, 2000; Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007). Resistance to the dominant stereotype of the female academic as ‘caring teacher’ and ‘efficient administrator’ (Leathwood, 2005; Haynes and Fearfull, 2008), was overwhelmingly represented as a crucial element of participants’ change effort. Participants complained about being pigeonholed or stereotyped, for example Becky observes *‘I don’t know how we can resist ... on a more personal level you know, how can we resist this (gender) stereotype? How can we change these gendered structures?’* While interviewees often reflected on whether their resistance was effective we found a number of ways in which participants attempted to defy these stereotypes, which were often in tension with their subject positions of feminist and researcher. As we can see in the excerpts below, such identity work is complex and often contradictory and has a significant effect on women’s career paths. In the following excerpt Ella describes a situation where she complained about her over involvement in recruitment boards:

“When I made this comment and said ‘I think it’s great that you’ve involved women more in this way, but I think it’s worth thinking about this. There are so fewer women and they have to do it more often’. I was horrified by his kind of look, of absolute blank horror and then he replied ‘my God, you feminists are all the same; you’re never satisfied’ to which I said ‘well, if this is your solution then no, we’re never going to be satisfied because that’s the kind of job which gets us no credibility whatsoever’. It’s an admin job, people regard it as a displacement activity.” (Ella, Lecturer)

Ella, as Becky below, has a significant role as director of studies at her institution. She admitted that after she had her son (who is now a teenager) she could not bear the idea of leaving him in order to attend conferences and seminars. More or less deliberately she drifted towards programme management because in this way she could fit her work around the standard working day. While the dominance of masculinity and male working patterns in the culture and structure of academic work has been highlighted by several authors (e.g. Knights and Richards, 2003; Deem, 2003), Ella raises the issue of choice versus exploitation of women’s work. The interplay of her identities as a mother (who shies away from travelling and networking to spend time with her son), as an academic and as a feminist is complex. While, by prioritising her caring responsibilities, Ella might have made a choice which limited her career opportunities, in her work practices she also resists the position which equates academic success with high research ‘output’. Although pastoral work is fundamental and indispensable in education institutions (Knights and Richards, 2003) she suggests that it is deemed as valueless (in terms of academic recognition and career progression) and therefore deliberately ‘allocated’ to women. She challenged this by raising the issue with the head of school, therefore shifting the focus onto exploitation. Becky, below, also emphasises the



administrative burden on women academics, observing the distribution of roles within her own and another colleague's institutions.

“We see women acting as the kind of handmaidens of the institution in that we have significantly responsible administrative roles. I have been Head of the Undergraduate programmes for six years, it's a major admin role. ... You know the quality assurance, the programme management roles tend to be done by women and the glamorous sexy research jobs are done by men. ... That's what we perceive in our own institutions and we feel that our research has suffered because we happen to be on call to students all the time, ... which takes time and energy. We've got quite significant pastoral roles.” (Becky, Lecturer)

Ella and Becky attempt to resist being positioned as a 'good pair of hands', or the 'handmaiden' of the organisation, but seemingly to little effect. Authors such as Raddon (2002) and Haynes and Fearfull (2008), among others, have empirically explored the institutional allocation of administrative and research activities in order to highlight the production and reproduction of gendered roles and identities within the academy. They have reported, similarly to our interviewees, that many academic women are under pressure to accept a heavier teaching load and more pastoral care than their male colleagues who can focus more on research and external networking (see also Thomas and Davies, 2002 and Acker and Feuerwerker, 1996). This results in a reduction of research time and therefore of research publications (Brooks, 2001).

“A thing that we've noticed is this idea that as a woman anyway, but certainly as a woman who is a mother, you automatically have a certain set of traits. I wouldn't call it skill because I don't think they would call it skill, apart from in quite a patronising way, but certainly an ability to

nurture and look after other people. That, in the first line, is with the students but in fact it's also with them, nurturing other colleagues, helping them to do things and not always male colleagues, but more often than not. So you end up with kind of pastorally-oriented jobs: student director or degree programme director or personal tutor, or you are the one that people come to for references because you've smiled at them once, you've spoken to them pleasantly rather than just dismiss them, you've treated them as a person rather than just part of the sausage machine. And if you are a woman and you haven't done that then there's something very wrong with you" (Ella, Lecturer)

Ella's words resonate with Hochschild's (2003) work on the commercialisation of human feelings. Her subject position as a mother is abused and exploited by the arrangement of roles within academia. While during the interview Ella suggested that she did not want to confine her identity as a mother to her life outside of work, she also strongly resisted the view that because she is a mother she has to nurture students as well as colleagues. This places her in a double bind. Such professional/mother/nurturer discourses are constructed as emotional labour and highly contested by many women who find themselves in similar roles and positions. Gender stereotyping is generally based on what are often considered 'natural' differences between men and women in the workplace. In order to resist this stereotyping and the discrimination attached to it, the women chefs in Harris and Giuffre's (2010: 59) study reframe these discourses by redefining feminine skills as assets pointing out, for example, that the feminine traits of care and nurture made them better cooks and managers. Parallels might be drawn between this attempt at redefinition and the 'politics of reinscription' identified by Thomas and Davies (2005a). It seems that in the academic workplace many female academics still feel subjected to these discourses, which act as a form of discipline placing female

academics in the role of ‘nurturer’ which, while important in higher education, is also devalued by colleagues and the general academic community.

*Playing the Rules of the Game: Incorporating and Co-opting Dominant Discourses*

The concept of playing the game came up time and again during the interviews. Participants routinely observed that a way to achieve change was to conform to the rules of the game. The game might be seen as the operation of dominant systems of knowledge and beliefs that promote and ascribe value to one set of practices and ignore and devalue another. Participants typically opted in or out of the game depending on the perceived costs and benefits of doing so. However, as we explore below, decisions to opt in or out are never simple. We found plenty of evidence of the tensions our participants routinely felt between opting in and complying with (Thomas and Davies 2005a), or incorporating (Deem and Ozga, 2000) the rules of the game, or rejecting them and remaining on the outside. In addition, the rules of the game are neither fixed, transparent or gender neutral, although they are routinely presented as such by dominant discourses. This means that they are neither accessible to all nor can everyone participate on equal terms. As Gersick et al (2000: 1039) observe in their study of the role of relationships in academia, the world of women is on the periphery of the profession while the world of men is more inside the centre. Therefore to participate in the dialogue and achieve some form of change female academics often have to co-opt or assimilate the institutional rules which are not of their making. Participants referred to the often uncomfortable and alien experiences of conforming to institutional norms and behaviours and been torn between contradictory organisational and ideological pressures (see for example Eisenstein, 1996).

“We had to conform to make a change and I think that is what I have kind of been doing myself. If I understand what conformity means, it means that you have learnt the rules of the game and how you should play the game to make the difference. So it’s essential to first learn the rules of the game and the practices and then after that, somewhat, you have to play by these rules and then you can also try to make some changes at the same time. ... When I wanted to recruit a female candidate to senior lecturer position at the University of X, I knew how to play the game and how to make her look like the best candidate, which is like playing the same game that we have been very critical of, it is very tricky, it is very tricky” (Layla, Professor)

Layla constructs her position as someone willing to play by the rules of the game, even though these are not her rules. Using ‘the master’s tools to dismantle his house’, she retains an amount of control for herself in order to progress within the career structure of academia. This is certainly problematic but there appear to be a tacit consent, among the interviewees, that in an environment which still appears to be dominated by masculine norms and values, this might be one of the only potential avenues female academics have to progress in academia and make changes to a heavily gendered system. In fact, as shown by Layla, such position can also be used to women’s advantage, albeit with some dilemmas (see also Eisenstein, 1996). Still some of the participants wanted to believe that the rules were relatively flexible and equitable and that it was just a matter of adjusting them to specific situations to suit one’s objectives.

‘I think what we are talking about is a very important point, understanding the flexibility of the rules, when you understand this you can play the game, and you can flex them as much as you want.’ (Thelma, Professor)

We question the extent to which rules can be fully flexible and argue that a belief in a fully flexible system can be seen as a form of denial stemming from the inability of women working in male dominated environments to fully accept the patriarchal system. The reasons for this are the deep entrenchment of taken for granted (largely masculine) language and belief systems which make it difficult to move beyond such structures. As suggested by various authors (e.g. Marshall, 1988; Sinclair, 2000) the emotional turmoil involved in developing a feminist consciousness and accepting the full implications of such ingrained inequality is often a barrier to confronting patriarchy.

“I’m after a revolution. ... I’ve always gone big. ... I focus on big questions like where are we going and how do we get there, ... I want to crack this and I want to cause a revolution.... But actually, I’m a corporate woman after all. Very early on somebody said to me ‘it’s easier to cause a revolution in a pin-stripe suit’ and I am standing here in a suit. I have always dressed conventionally; I have always thought of turn up and it’s like ‘you’ve got to get in the door to see the bank manager’. ... So I think all of this stuff about causing revolutions is about conforming. ... You have to be part of the dialogue and that I find very difficult sometimes. So I’m sitting in utterly, for me, ghastly environment, but I’m willing to be there because I think if I’m not part of the dialogue I can’t change this’ (Kirsty, Professor)

Kirsty is clear that she wants to change the structures and culture of the academy, she is ‘after a revolution’ although interestingly, as Layla, she emphasises change through conformity. The pin stripe suit, as stereotypical male business attire, suggests conformity to male norms. She is reflective about working from the inside, willingly and knowingly subjecting herself and her body to discomfort, ‘sitting in utterly ghastly environments’ and wearing a pin stripe

suit. Kirsty is reflective about her 'performance', as an academic she feels she has to be inauthentic in order to be 'part of the dialogue' and thus pursue her political objective.

“As a lecturer I didn't have anything to lose, I wasn't involved in the politics, I thought I was a good teacher, I was going to be a good researcher. I wasn't worried and therefore I had nothing to lose by challenging openly and explicitly what I felt were gender processes and what I felt was discrimination. Everyone in the school knew that if there was going to be a challenge then it was going to come from me and I wasn't the only one, I think there were two or three more who would challenge openly. I think even as a principle lecturer I was very open about feminism and the fact that I researched and practiced what I preached so to speak. I was very much part of it, then I think it gets you into hot water, the higher you go up the more you have to lose and the more adept you have to become at the politics, and choosing your battles, and making sure that the people you work with aren't intimidated by your politics, but at the same time understand your politics” (Sally, Professor)

Sally models her activism (within her institution) to fit in with her career development. Her current managerial role places some pressure on her political activism. As a senior manager at executive level she has to demonstrate her commitment and loyalty to the organisation and gain the trust of her colleagues (including subordinates and superiors) and this has forced her to soften her political allegiance by making her choose her battles. However, such a strategy might not be seen as completely forsaking one's ideological commitment, rather it results in what Meyerson and Scully (1995) call a 'small wins' approach to change. As suggested by Kerman (1995), in fact, in order to progress, women in senior management positions in universities must not be seen as a threat in terms of management style and subject identity. Such struggles to handle the tensions between the feminist subject position and that of the

'manager' have been highlighted by several other authors (e.g. Meyerson and Scully 1995; Eisenstein, 1996; El-Khawas, 1997; Whitehead, 2001; Deem, 2003; Priola, 2007). Sally has developed within her organisation and has sought the opportunity to assert her influence. She has never concealed her activism and constructs her feminist identity as fundamental to her 'self' at work as well as outside. With increased seniority the modality of her resistance shifted from radical in tone to both subtle and confined to the battles that matter the most to her. Being a feminist in a position of seniority makes her highly visible in the organisation. This high level of visibility makes it harder to 'move unnoticed' (Barry et al 2007) in her attempts to affect change and therefore instils a level of cautiousness in her actions. As one moves up the organisational hierarchy and becomes increasingly exposed one also has to demonstrate one's loyalty and be seen as a legitimate representative of the institution. This balancing act will result in an array of stances which, as Eisenstein (1996) reports, can range from 'temporary missionaries', whose only scope is their cause, to 'permanent mandarins', whose feminist beliefs are only one of several concerns.

### *Rejecting the Rules of the Game: Opting Out*

In exploring relationships in academia Gersick et al. observe that those rendered outside the dominant group 'struggle to prove their fitness to "play the game" at all'. (2000: 1040). We found evidence of this amongst our more junior participants. In these instances participants felt so disenfranchised they developed coping strategies which typically involved a refutation and dismissal of the game entirely. In their narratives they render the game unimportant, or even 'sick' or 'objectionable', while simultaneously empowering themselves by stating that they could leave the game at any time.

“Colleagues say: ‘you should be a reader’, why are you doing this?’ But I just decided I wasn’t playing the game. In a very sort of perverse way it kind of appeals to me the fact that I can get the CV out with all this information on it and still say, you know, I’m a lecturer, yeah. It’s horrible this kind of perverse thinking [laughs] .... I look at myself and think I’ve got a good salary, I think, a nice lifestyle, I live in a beautiful place, why the hell do I want anything more? Why do I want to put myself in a position where I’m going to be working more? Having to spend more time with people I really don’t like, who I find morally objectionable as well as personally objectionable, so I’ve just kind of let lot of things go. It’s been really liberating, like coming at the end of a conference, it’s almost what can they do?” (Ella, Lecturer)

Ella draws attention to the issue of ‘playing the game’ from a different perspective to that of the professors. She constructs career progression (e.g. promotion) in academia as very complicated and embedded in a type of politics she refuses to be part of. While undoubtedly female academics feel the pressure to ‘play the game’ and incorporate the dominant organisational values in order to progress (see also Meyerson and Scully, 1995), Ella presents herself as a victim and draws on the rules of promotion to resist the demands of competitiveness. Ella applied for promotion a few years ago and this was refused. Despite her increased publications she has since refused to re-apply. Such personal disappointment acted as a motivation for ‘pulling out of the game’, resisting a competitive masculine subject position resulting in a total rejection of such discourses of promotion. At the same time her behaviour protects her academic identity, contributing to construct it, also in the eyes of her colleagues within the wider academic community, as highly successful in relation to her job title. Thelma similarly observes:



'being an academic was never a dream of mine, it wasn't an identity or a goal that I will really be striving for, so I thought: ... I don't give a shit if you kick me out of this institution, my life is not dependant on this, my identity is not tied to this, I am something without this, so if I get crushed, so what?' (Thelma, Professor)

In emphasising their identity outside of academia both Ella ('I've got a good salary, a nice lifestyle, I live in a beautiful place') and Thelma ('I am something without this') legitimise their ability to reject the game of academia. For these women reminding themselves that their academic identity, and the subjectification associated with it, is optional serves to both empower them and protect them from hurt. While most women academic may possess the resources to re-articulate their positioning and in many cases use feminist theory and their feminist research to make sense of their own experience and feel empowered, this is not the case for many women in other workplaces who may feel disconnected, disempowered and ultimately lose their self-esteem (Sinclair, 1995).

## **Conclusions**

In concluding we return to the initial aims of this study to explore strategies and challenges for change and the impact of these on the personal and professional identities of feminist academics; and thus to highlight how activism at the institutional level acts as a bridge between political intervention and professional and personal positioning. In examining women's daily practices of change the paper highlighted how attempts to render gendered inequalities visible, and thus affect them, often took different and sometime contradictory routes, particularly at the strategic level. Targeting normalising discourses both formally (in meetings with superiors) and informally, though talk with colleagues, was widely used as an attempt to make interventions into accepted gender norms and their associated power

structures. A second practice engaged in by participants was ‘making research matter’, seeing their feminist research practices and dissemination strategies as a central strand of their change project. A final key approach to affecting change was through teaching, with a clear long term agenda to grow the next generation of managers and practitioners more attuned to gender issues.

The women we interviewed had a series of wider strategies for change within which these practices were couched. We have termed these ‘strategies of incorporation and resistance’, exploring the ways in which women resisted, incorporated or entirely rejected wider processes of subjectification and their attendant discourses in order to harmonise their identity work with their priorities and desires. Attempts to resist a series of gendered stereotypes in the workplace were aimed at producing alternative modes of subjectivity (Weedon, 1987) to the figures of the ‘caring teacher’ and ‘efficient administrator’ (Leathwood, 2005; Haynes and Fearfull, 2008) which were often placed upon them by others. Overall participants resented institutional attempts to harness and exploit their emotional labour, however their resistance resulted in very different responses. These different strategies involved the incorporation and co-optation of dominant discourses (Thomas and Davies, 2005a; Deem and Ozga, 2000) in order to ‘get on’ in the workplace, this was often expressed as an uncomfortable position by participants. On the other hand, such responses for some women also involved opting out entirely and rejecting dominant discourses and subjectivities in favour of those developed outside the workplace. This seemed to be a particularly painful position and often one that had been reached after experiencing a series of disappointments at work (Sinclair, 1995). Participants taking this position described themselves as marginal to the institution (Gersick et al., 2000), citing instead sources of identification outside the workplace, in their private lives.

Overall the study has explored the personal experiences of academics in their attempts to challenge and change gendered work. Despite the external appearance of university life as organised around a shared and largely uniform set of practices, it has highlighted the diversity of experiences but also the diversity of practices and transformative actions taken by feminists in the higher education sector. Despite the enduring image of the university as ivory tower disassociated from society (Gherardi, 2010), the plurality of practices undertaken by participants in this study typically straddled the boundaries between university and wider society, locating academic processes within wider political discourses of inclusion. As Gherardi (2010) suggests an analysis of academic practices of inclusion externalises the ethical problems concerning the profession's practices and thus establishes a relationship between university and the wider society. This study finds academia to be a heavily 'contested arena of covert organizational politics and exclusionary power relations' (Henttonen and LaPointe, 2010: 175) which are shown to privilege specific (largely masculinised) voices and identities over others.

The plurality of change actions discussed in the analysis also reveals the importance of localised actions beyond the confines of the specific institution within which they take place. An agenda for change relies on both a critical mass of women and men with an understanding of the political, cultural and gendered organisational context, along with the development of alliances beyond one's own institution. It is the building of alliances within the sector that support wider change (Colgan and Ledwith, 1996) and is considered fundamental for generally reducing gender biases. However, considering the difficulties in engaging in deliberate and radical shifts both from inside and outside organisations, it is evident that a

wider collectivist strategy needs to be supported by smaller, isolated, incremental, localised and subversive changes which act as springboards to the development of a long-term agenda (Cockburn, 1989). In hostile institutional climates (such as the one studied here) there is often little room for highly visible collectivist strategies which are generally seen by individuals as compromising and ineffective. As evident in this study, but also in other researchers' work (e.g. Palmer, 1996), women working in masculine environments tend to adopt more individualist strategies to career progression, even though organizations promote a series of more visible and formalised channels to denounce discrimination and exclusion (such as equal opportunities measures).

It is within such political logic that the concept of 'playing the game' emerges among the participants' narratives. While the power of collective action has been weakened in recent years, feminists' 'unobtrusive mobilization from the inside' (Katzenstein, 1990) is experienced on the ground as a balancing act between political action and individual career progression. Effecting change, whether through a continued commitment to undertaking feminist research which exposes organisational discriminatory processes, or equally, a more general commitment to altering institutional practices, involves a degree of conformity to a set of rules that generally are not of women's making. Conformity and incorporation played a significant role in participants' reflexive accounts as well as in their positioning and identity politics. Such dynamics are hugely problematic not only in relation to the stress and exhaustion that they produce at the individual level, but also in the way in which they serve to further reify and legitimise dominant masculine discourses and practices.

While the study identified similar strategies used to effect change, participants differed in how

they responded to the positions offered by institutional discourses, choosing to locate themselves along the continuum between incorporation, adaptation and rejection. Generally all were reflective of their positioning within the business school dominant cultures, observing that they deliberately took on positions that fitted in with the wider strategic and entrepreneurial discourses when these allow them to continue to pursue their gender research and feminist agenda. Women further up the hierarchy were clear that they used these positions to 'get on' within their institutions with the expressed aim of effecting change when they had 'arrived' at a suitable level of influence. Martin and Knopoff (1997: 47) analyse the capacity of women to effect change the higher up they are positioned within bureaucratic structures, observing that they might become 'walking reminders of the inadequacy of gender stereotypes.' These women work to change gender norms in their interactions with others, eventually moving slowly to a position where emotional, nurturing and egalitarian relationships are valued.

Participants who occupied roles lower in the hierarchy did not seem to have the luxury of radical behaviours, their strategy was one of raising gender issues (with both colleagues and students) and (often covertly) continuing to undertake research that was true to their feminist positioning and political views. For some their deep seated positions as feminists made it almost impossible to incorporate dominant business school discourses, they often found themselves marginal to the institution, lacking in influence as well as feeling that their research was undervalued.

Furthermore we observed that the ability to effect change is not only associated with position on the academic hierarchy but also with the academics' position as insider or outsider within

their working environment. As Gersick et al. (2000) observe, the configuration of relationships within one's workplace are significant in structuring career progression in academia. Their study of male and female business school faculty members identifies the centrality of groups in constituting the working environment and in shaping career expectations and one's influence. The role of structural power in positioning women within the workplace should not be underestimated. While women are not passive recipients of such processes some of the participants reported feelings of being unable to control the way in which they are positioned by other members of staff. Several of the women we interviewed reported powerlessness at being cast as good teachers, 'a good pair of hands', or as 'the hand maidens' of the institution. This position is self reinforcing as it involves being given (and sometimes taking on) a greater share than male colleagues of the pastoral and administrative duties within the institution. Such activities are not valued or rewarded and are poorly recognised in structures for promotion. Neither do these activities figure as part of the dominant and valued discourses of the business school. Undertaking these time-consuming and emotionally demanding tasks result in less time spent on research and enterprise work, which are highly valued and recognised. Overall, in university the ability to negotiate the hierarchy and to demonstrate micro-political capability appear to be as important as any demonstration of intellectual capital (Morley, 1999). The current drive in business schools to engage with enterprise more intensively than before may make these micro-political capabilities even more central to future survival and change in this context.

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*Table 1: Brief Background of Participants (age reported refer to the time of the interview)*

<p><b><u>Becky</u></b> is in her mid forties. She started her career as a school teacher, followed by a few years as a practising professional before accepting a job as a lecturer. She completed her PhD on gender in the professions while working full-time as a lecturer. She was a lecturer at the time of the interview but has since been promoted.</p>
<p><b><u>Ella</u></b> is fifty. She returned to education in her mid twenties when she completed a degree and a PhD on a full time basis. She observed that once completed her PhD she found herself working in academia without having necessarily made the decision to be an academic. After the interview she accepted a job as a senior lecturer at a different institution.</p>
<p><b><u>Emma</u></b> is in her late forties. After completing her Master's degree she worked in local government for 10 years before joining a new university. While working as a lecturer she started a PhD on gender studies. She is a senior lecturer and has recently completed her PhD.</p>
<p><b><u>Hannah</u></b> is 41 and has been in her current role as senior lecturer for two years. She has often moved between jobs and countries over the last ten years largely to follow her husband's career. However, after moving around she now feels that it is her career that should take precedence as she observes that it 'holds the family together'.</p>
<p><b><u>Kirsty</u></b> is 52 and was recently promoted to professor. She began her career as a professional and made the crossover into a business school via a MBA and then into teaching. She completed her PhD while working as a lecturer.</p>
<p><b><u>Layla</u></b> is in her mid forties. She is a professor who made the move from her previous institution for this promotion but also to work within an environment where there was significant feminist research activity.</p>
<p><b><u>Louise</u></b> is in her late fifties. Her background is in management consultancy and training and this facilitated her move to a business school. She is doing her PhD on the gendered processes</p>



of academia, focusing on her own institution.

**Sally** is in her late forties, she is a professor and holds an executive position within her school. She came back into higher education when she was in her late twenties to do a master degree, after which she went into teaching. She completed her PhD while working as a lecturer. She based her thesis on the gendered practices at her own institution.

**Thelma** is in her mid forties, she is a professor and has degrees in various disciplines. She still wonders whether academia will be her career for life.

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<sup>i</sup> In the UK the 1987 White Paper *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* followed by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act are seen as crucial in the move toward marketisation and tight management practices. However, such shift towards corporate managerialism has been observed in most Western countries, including the US and Australia (see also Slaughter and Leslie, 1997) and more lately the rest of Europe.

<sup>ii</sup> The AUT (2004) reports that in 2002/2003 women represented approximately 35% of business and management academic staff, between 12% and 20% of academic staff in engineering (the variation in percentages depends on the engineering fields), 73% of academic staff in nursing and paramedical studies, and 54% of staff in education.

<sup>iii</sup> These grades are equivalent to full professor and associate professor.

<sup>iv</sup> See also Derry's study of corporate women where she found a wide range of both definitions of feminism and identifications with the term 'feminist' amongst her participants, who nonetheless all identified with 'women's issues in the workplace' (1997: 18-27).

<sup>v</sup> Reader is a transitional position between senior lecturer or associate professor and full professor.