Gendered Identification:

Between Idealization and Admiration[*]

Abstract

While much of the literature on gender focuses on role models, this article extends the understanding of gendered professional identification processes by exploring these processes through the lenses of idealization and admiration. Using the method of discourse analysis to analyse MBA students' accounts of people who they identify with, this article explores discourses of idealization, defined as aggrandising a person, and of admiration, which means to discuss positive as well as negative and neutral characteristics of a person. We show firstly that most male and female MBA students idealised the self-made 'authentic' CEO or founder of an organization. Secondly, we found that women mainly admired other women through naming their positive, neutral and negative attributes. The article thereby adds to our understanding of how gendered identification processes are structured by idealization and admiration.

Keywords: Admiration, Discourse Analysis, Gender, Idealization, Identification

Introduction

Professional identification is said to be central for women in business because it allows women to find role models they can emulate (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008; Gibson and Cordova, 1999; Sealy and Singh, 2006; Dryler, 1998; Sealy and Singh, 2010; Mavin, 2008). Role modelling is however only one form of gendered identification that happens in the work context. Identification can be seen as the processes through which individuals construct their identities, often through comparing and contrasting themselves to others (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). This is a dynamic process (Ibarra, 1999) that can be explored by researchers through analysing how the self is narrated (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). While there is ample research on gender and role models, a fine-grained analysis of various gendered identification patterns is still missing from the literature. Such an analysis would enable researchers to show the complexities that gendered identification patterns can take in organizations and could help to highlight potential conflicts in identification patterns that can arise.

In this article we explore gendered identification processes by drawing on the social psychological differentiation between admiration and idealization: admiration means that identification with the subject is split into different aspects, some admired and others not; idealization in turn goes hand in hand with an unrealistic aggrandisement of the person one identifies with (Sandell, 1993). We examine gendered dynamics of gendered identification processes through a discourse analysis of twenty MBA students' accounts of who they identify with. The article is structured as follows: firstly, we situate our argument in relation to the literature on role models and gendered identification processes; secondly, we outline the methodology of discourse analysis used in this research; then in the empirical section, we

analyse how identification is achieved through either admiration or idealization and finally, we offer a discussion and conclusion by stressing that gendered identification processes are structured by admiration and idealization.

Gendered Identification: Broadening the Concept of Role Models

In this section we highlight what the research on gender and role models has contributed to our understanding of gendered identification patterns and show how understanding about gendered identification might be broadened by considering a wider array of gendered identification patterns.

Much of the literature on identification has focused on how individuals identify with organizations. Identification relates to how individuals construct their own identities in relation to specific groups such as organizations (Dutton et al., 1994; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). For organizational scholars, organizational identification has been used as a way to assess the extent to which an individual feels at one with the organization. It has been shown in research on physicians that a strong organizational identification relates positively to performance (Hekman, Bigley, Steensma and Hereford, 2009). This literature has explored how individuals identify with organizations, teams and professions.

Research that explores identification patterns between people has often talked about the concept of role models (Chung, 2000; Allen, 1995; Gibson, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008). The term 'role model' was first coined by sociologist Robert Merton in a study of the socialization of medical students at Columbia University (Holton, 2004). Merton defined role models as the 'emulation of a peer, parent or a public figure… restricted to limited segments of their behaviour and values' (Merton, 1949: 357). He argued that people

do not assume a single role or status, but that they have a 'status set' within the social structure which is based on expected behaviours (Holton, 2004: 514). Gibson (2003) addressed the question of the construal of role models, or how individuals choose them and who they are. Others focus more on the question of identity in role models, or how role models relate to self-conceptions and possibilities or constraints for career development (Gibson, 2004; Ibarra, 1999; Sealy and Singh, 2006; Quimby and DeSantis, 2006).

Whilst much of the research approaches identification and role models as static, recent approaches have stressed that identification is a dynamic process (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Pratt, 2000; Ibarra, 2005, 1999; Pringle, 2008). Ibarra (1999) for instance explores how junior professionals in investment banking and consulting navigate career transitions. She shows that individuals move through three stages when adapting to more senior roles. They first observe role models to explore possible identities. They then play with these provisional identities and evaluate these identities against the feedback they receive. In order to capture those fluid elements of identification, research has often focused on narrative approaches (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Barley and Kunda, 2004). Approaches that see identification as dynamic process have the advantage that they allow seeing how identification happens.

The lack of role models is often cited as a reason for the scarcity of women in leadership positions in business. The literature suggests that part of the problem lies in the fact that women struggle to find other women in management whom they can identify with (Ely, 1994; Ibarra, 1999; Kanter, 1977; Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008; Singh, Vinnicombe and James, 2006; Larwood, Wood and Inderlied, 1978; Mavin, 2008). The underlying rationale is that people look for role models who are like them or '(i)ndividuals tend to seek role models who are

similar to them in some easily identifiable way, such as gender or race' (Quimby & DeSantis 2006: 297). It is therefore not surprising that men tend to choose men as their role models and women tend to choose women as their role models (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008; Gibson and Cordova, 1999; Sealy and Singh, 2006; Dryler, 1998; Sealy and Singh, 2010). With few women working in senior positions, this might explain why women find it difficult to identify with other women (Ely, 1994, 1995; Gibson and Cordova, 1999; Sealy and Singh, 2010). Therefore women often have to look for role models elsewhere such as outside of the organization (Singh et al., 2006).

While research on role models and gender has highlighted the importance of demography and same-sex role models, it appears that focusing on role models leaves other processes of identification that might play a key role for gender unconsidered. Identification can take various different shapes and it is for instance useful to turn to social psychology to explore the concept of identification further. Sandell (1993) distinguishes two forms of identification: admiration and idealization. Admiration involves a splitting through which the object of identification is split into different aspects of a person; some of which one admires, others one feels indifferent about. While idealisation involves an exaggeration beyond realistic merits, admiration does not mean an unrealistic aggrandisement. Instead it means to single out specific traits for particular admiration. The social psychological definition of admiration thereby describes admiration as the processes of selecting specific traits of a person one admires without an unrealistic aggrandisement whereas idealisation contains an unrealistic aggrandisement. Idealization and admiration are thereby subcategories of identification. While role models are often described in the literature as persons worth emulating, other processes of identification seem neglected. It is for instance possible that processes of admiration and identification play a key role when it comes to gendered identification

patterns. However such gendered identification patterns have so far not been explored. This research seeks to address this issue by showing gendered identification patterns through a focus on idealization and admiration. In the next section we will outline the site we have selected to study identification and which methodologies we have used for doing so.

Methodology, Methods and Research Design

The aim of the study is to explore gendered identification processes of MBA students. In order to fulfil this aim a discourse analysis was conducted. Developed on the qualitative and constructivist margins of social psychology (Potter, 1996), the version of discourse analysis proposed by Potter and Wetherell (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988) sees discourse as all forms of talk and texts and assumes that this discourse is a social practice that is constructed and constructive of social reality. Discourse is also functional, occasioned and rhetorically organized. A central term for discourse analysis is the interpretative repertoire which is a repeatedly encountered construction employed in sense-making. It is a repertoire because only a limited number of terms is used. The interpretative repertoire has also been described as a register or lexicon where certain commonly accepted notions are pulled out. These are common-sense understandings of how the world is which have 'off-the-shelf' character and can be used flexibly to make a point in any given situation. In our research, we were interested in which interpretative repertoires MBA students use in gendered identification processes.

There are many different types of discourse analysis (Gill, 2000), some focusing more on the macro perspective as suggested by Foucault which is particularly popular in much of management and organization studies. Other versions are more conversation-analytic and micro in outlook and explore to a greater extent how meaning is created through interaction.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) draw on both perspectives in their original formulation but have since taken slightly different approaches, with Potter (Speer and Potter, 2002) focusing more on the micro aspect and Wetherell (Wetherell and Edley, 1999, 1998) more on the macro aspect. In this study we have decided to focus more on the bigger picture to explore the role of admiration in the gendered identification patterns of MBA students.

The research is based on 20 in-depth interviews with full-time MBA students at an elite British business school. The business school offers a two-year MBA programme and has a specific focus on finance. This means that the study took place in a business school setting, which has been seen as masculine numerically and culturally (Kelan and Dunkley Jones, 2010; Fotaki, 2011; Sinclair, 1995). The sample included ten men and ten women. The average age of the interviewees was just below 30 years with most interviewees belonging to Generation Y (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011). The interviewees were selected to be as diverse as possible, based on their country of origin, year of study, age and hobbies. We used students' CVs to select the sample. The MBA students were approached individually and asked if they were interested in contributing to a study on their experiences of doing an MBA. We received a very positive response from the students and most agreed to be interviewed. The MBA students were told that we were studying how future managers are educated and how the process of becoming a manager through an MBA course relates to aspirations, ambitions and career development. We told them that we would ask them questions about their past, current and future life. We also encouraged students to give detailed answers rather than yes/no answers. It was up to the interviewer to stimulate the conversation by listening and asking back.

The interviews lasted between 45 to 110 minutes. Whilst the interview questions touched on a range of issues relating to the MBA experience, we were particularly interested in identification processes in relation to gender. We asked a set of questions relating to a person they admired, posed in the following way: 'We 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?' We also asked students to bring photos of the people they admired. This was mainly to encourage them to think about a person they admired prior to the interview instead of being put on the spot in the interview. We used the term 'admire' to elicit open responses about gendered identification. Asking students to bring a picture meant that they thought about the question before the interview instead of giving *ad hoc* answers. About half of the students brought photos and we could not detect any differences in the types of replies we received depending on whether students brought a picture or not. Most had read the email and were aware that we are going to ask about a person they admired which prepared them for this question. After the interview we immediately selected a pseudonym for the interviewee to ensure that their identities would be protected.

The study is qualitative and does not claim to be representative of MBA students as a whole or even MBA students studying at the business school. Instead our aim was to find common ways through which these MBA students expressed gendered identification. The interview material was carefully transcribed using the Jefferson transcription system of which we used a simplified version[i]. The transcribed texts were then analysed in their completeness and segmented into different codes which speak to a certain topic or a certain language trope that deserves further attention. For the simple coding we used the qualitative software programme NVivo. We first coded the material based on interview segments, which means that material which generated an answer to a specific question was put into one category. We then used

further fine coding to explore how a certain question was answered which might relate to topics, tropes of talk and other emerging patterns. At this stage we also made sure that other parts of the interview that showed similar patterns were included in the relevant category. This means that the coding was inclusive and that sections would appear multiple times in different codes. We then printed the material and read and re-read the sub-codes until we were very familiar with the material. Finally, we read 'against the grain', which is recommended in discourse analysis to understand how common sense and the status quo is constructed as plausible (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This detailed analysis helped us to develop the pattern of interpretive repertoires that we present in the following analysis.

When we set out to analyse gendered identifications, we tried to find different interpretative repertoires that were used in talking about gendered identification. For this we first explored what common tropes of language were used when respondents talked about identification. The first stage was to explore how the sex of the interviewee mapped onto the sex of the person they admired. The result of this exercise can be found in table 1. The next stage involved exploring the content through which the admired person was described. We then included a gender angle in the analysis to analyse the extent to which there was a difference in the content of the admired person in regards to gender. The next step involved exploring particular tropes of talk. Again those tropes of talk were analysed in relation to gender. The result of this analysis led to two interpretative repertoires which are described in the following section.

[add table 1 about here]

Unpacking Gendered Identifications: Exploring Idealization and Admiration

Our analysis of gendered identification processes of MBA students, led to two ways through which identification with 'admired persons' was expressed. These two ways of expressing identification can be described as interpretative repertoires as they structure the way through which sense making happens. One interpretative repertoire related to idealization in which individuals were aggrandised, an exaggerated positive form of admiration. Another interpretative repertoire related to more social psychological and less common sense notion of admiration, the realization that some elements are great about a person while other elements are not admired. The first interpretative repertoire is an idealization of people who are self-made or are very senior in organizations. The second interpretative repertoire is admiration of certain people but with some reservations and ambivalence. All ten male students who were interviewed selected men as the person they identified with, and in general their accounts fit within the first interpretative repertoire, with relatively few contradictions. Five women selected other women as their main admired persons, three women selected both men and women, and the final two women selected men. On the most basic level, this indicates that women's identification processes appear more complex in comparison to men's identification processes. However more importantly we also found that the underlying dynamics varied between idealization and admiration. Through our analysis we also show that the second interpretative repertoire is used almost exclusively by women. We argue that women chose idealization over admiration when it comes to describing women they identify with because of the scarcity of women in senior positions (Gibson, 2004; Ibarra, 1999; Sealy and Singh, 2010) and because women do not seem to fit the template of the ideal professional (Acker, 1990).

Idealization

Out of the twenty MBA students who we interviewed, eight of the interviewees picked CEOs as their main admired person and six picked founders of businesses. These findings suggest that many MBA students in our sample seem to subscribe to the ideal of the self-made founder or CEO. MBA students selected a wide array of people they identified with ranging from their fathers to Oprah Winfrey. The first interpretative repertoire focuses a lot on characters. The character that embodies the idealization in the interviews was that of the authentic and self-made CEO/founder.

Two of the most common characteristics that MBA students admired fall into two overlapping categories: 'being self made' and 'being authentic'. Being self-made is a classic notion in business and management discourse, linked to the American rags-to-riches dream that anyone can succeed in a capitalist society through hard work and perseverance. Being self-made was an idea that was regularly alluded to in the interviews. A typical expression of this was evident in Matthieu's account of the person he identified with, a former colleague, who 'started from zero and definitely became, uh, somebody'. Ganesh echoes this:

> Ganesh: It might sound a bit clichéd but uh uh my father. He started, our family is a migrant family, (...) so they started from absolutely nothing and grew to a very small but respectable size local business (...) it was my father who came along and he took that business and he grew it into a regional leader and then a national leader and now it's growing into an international business. So he was really a very, very successful first generation entrepreneur, in his own right.

Ganesh recognises that his account is somewhat typical or conventional, through his acknowledgement that 'it might sound a bit clichéd'. He is referring to the fact that he has

chosen his father, but implicitly the cliché extends to the story itself, of a rags-to-riches migrant, a self-made man.

'Authenticity' and 'being yourself' are current buzz words in management (Goffee and Jones, 2006; Fleming, 2008). The notion of authenticity is implied in the idea of being self-made, or of a commitment to self-values (Erickson, 1995), however these might be defined. Other accounts more explicitly stressed the connections between being self-made and authentic, such as Luke's story of the person he identified with:

> Luke: But he's, he got a football scholarship to school (...) and started up a load of car dealerships. And made kind of five or six hundred million dollars by the time he was fifty, and then decided to start an [racing] team (...) it's that sort of completely self-made, incredibly sharp, but rather, you don't know, you don't realise it when you first meet him, but actually when you start interacting with him, it's just that ferocious, he's got very high levels of integrity, you know, what you see is what you get.

Luke's admired person apparently did not come from a privileged background, and this serves as a good starting point for a 'nothing to something' narrative. He highlights the apparent contradiction between a first impression of his admired person and the more positive, characteristic behind the person as possessing 'high levels of integrity', which relates to Erickson's notion of authenticity as commitment to self-values. The use of the word 'ferocious' here is revealing, as an aggressive masculine trait with connotations of the jungle, alongside the stereotypically male interest in cars and racing.

Another 'from zero to hero' combined with an 'authentic' perspective was offered by a female interviewee, Peggy:

Peggy: I have a tremendous respect actually for Oprah Winfrey. Um, who is someone who came from, um, a very unusual background to become, to come into the position she's in. And that's the kind of thing that in my mind can only happen in America. Um, it would be almost impossible to do in Canada or in Europe. Um, but I have a tremendous amount of respect for someone who came from a very poor background where education was not necessarily valued and who as able to basically make herself into something quite different and be quite successful at it.

Although this has parallels with the other account in terms of being self-made, Peggy's account constructs authenticity in a different way. Peggy emphasizes the personal quality of 'becoming something different' which by implication had gained 'value', as contrasted with a past which lacked 'values' such as education.

The theme of pursuing passion rather than money was a recurrent theme for many of the respondents, which is an interesting narrative in the context of professional success within the world of CEOs and enterprise. Arguably, the notion of 'passion over money' serves to counterbalance and to justify the pursuit of money, as it frames the materialistic pursuit within a more 'human' moral value. Frances gave an example of this:

Frances: I chose Anita Roddick. Um, I think I, I like her 'cause she's a woman who's basically lived her life according to her own values. (...) Um, and I think that's, that's why I admire her, the way she's been able to be very successful while sticking to her own, her own principles. She's never had to, I think because she started her own business and that, she's never had to be changed and forced into a different kind of mould.

Through invoking the contrast between 'success' and sticking to one's own principles with the transitional trope 'while', and through the reference to the external threat of having to be forced into a mould, there is an implicit suggestion of struggle in this account that is suggestive of gendered barriers to her professional path. We explore some of this later on.

Matthieu, Ganesh, Luke, Frances and Peggy all gave positive accounts of admired self-made authentic leaders, expressing the twin themes of being self-made as well as authentic, which on first glance might appear to be contradictory, but which in effect serve to justify and balance the two ideals of 1) wealth, status and power, and 2) integrity, passion and being true to the self. The image of the self-made, authentic leader is promoted in much of the management literature and likely reflects some of the teachings students have received already in their MBA programme. It is also likely that people who strive to be a CEO or founder of company invest time and money in an MBA as an MBA is seen as propelling people to the top of organizations – either their own or ones set up by other people. In those accounts there appears to be a lot of idealization in the sense that only positive aspects are discussed. This is in sharp contrast to the second interpretative repertoire which centres more on a social psychological form of admiration, which means discussing positive as well as neutral or negative aspects about a person.

Admiration

The second interpretative repertoire that we identified was used only by female MBA students and relates to their at times ambivalent perceptions of identifications with other women, particularly the Superwoman who appears to 'do it all', with success in all dimensions of her professional and private life (Llewelyn and Osbourne, 1990; Newell, 1993). Through a discourse analysis of tropes of talk, we discovered that women's relationship to other women

was often characterised by admiration which included ambivalence, marked by certain caveats in their overall narratives of appreciation rather than idealization. Here we do not see the emergence of an idealised authentic and self-made CEO/founder but instead a discussion of female leaders that are characterized by ambivalence.

It is important to note that similar ambivalences that we discuss in this section were also visible in some of the descriptions of men who female MBA students identified with. However whilst there was some ambivalence towards these male admired persons by female MBA students, this was not as evident as in the ambivalence towards female admired persons. Interestingly, we discovered a similar ambivalence by a self-identified gay MBA student towards the person he identified with, a gay senior leader. Whilst instances of ambivalences towards male persons were not very common, we will return to this phenomenon towards the end of this article.

Some women presented overtly ambivalent descriptions of female admired persons. An example is provided by Dawn:

> Dawn: She basically, I think she's quite rare in that she's, I don't know, mid-fifties, and she does back-end database programming and has done so pretty much the last twenty years of her career. So in that respect she's very unusual. She does let her emotions come into business discussions, which (.) sometimes, if I reflect on it, as I was doing before I came here, I don't necessarily think that's a good thing sometimes, because for example, she can be, she can obviously show agitation, or become frustrated in business meetings. But, I think that's because, you know, she's very involved and attached to what she does, it's

HER business and you know it has started small, grown slowly but has now

gained a lot of strength.

Dawn's narrative begins by describing positive aspects of her admired person, notably her rare position within a male-dominated technical industry, but as her story progresses, she reveals less positive features, evident in how emotions affect the woman's performance in business discussions, which she characterises as not necessarily good. However, she justifies her role model's behaviour with the assertion that the admired person is passionate about what she does. Passion is seen as positive thing that might soften the emotions that were seen as inappropriate by Dawn. This flip is consistent in discourse analysis with the tendency for people to attempt to smooth out inconsistencies and contradictions which emerge in the course of speech (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Another example of overt ambivalence is evident in Frances' account of the founded Anita Roddick, previously discussed in the context of the less contradictory CEO or founder interpretive repertoire.

Frances: I chose Anita Roddick. Um, I think I, I like her 'cause she's a woman who's basically lived her life according to her own values. I mean, I never really used to, I kind of always thought she would have, I was always a bit suspicious that she'd be a bit of a fraud. Until I actually saw her speak (...) And then I realized that she's just very, very open, you know, and what you see is what there is. Um, and I think that's, that's why I admire her, the way she's been able to be very successful while sticking to her own, her own principles.

It is notable that Frances uses a number of caveats before she elaborates on the reasons for her selection of her admired person. Frances frames her selection of Anita Roddick in relation to

her initial suspicions that she was 'a fraud', suggesting that this may be a commonly held assumption about this woman, and that there was some sense in which she was unreal, or too good to be true, like the mythical Superwoman (Newell, 1993). In order to confirm the authenticity of her admired person, Frances had to see her speak, and yet recall that she refers in the first interpretive repertoire to barriers on her pathway to stick to her own principles. Through combining the two interpretive repertoires, one begins to see how these tensions and suspicions are gendered, reflecting a sense that it is hard to believe that a woman such as this exists.

There were also instances when women were constructed as admirable with more subtle caveats. This in fact refers to the majority. For example, Caroline talked about her admired person in the following terms:

Caroline: Because she's, she's the type, she's very female in a sense, she's very much a woman. But she knows what she wants and she gets it. (...) She really knows what she's talking about. And she's got that whole sort of poise about her, that I really, I really admire her.

Interestingly, Caroline links the two admired attributes ('a woman' and 'knows what she wants') together is via a 'but'. In discourse analytic terms disclaimers use a 'but' function to disclaim a negative reading of a sentence (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Burridge, 2004). However here 'but' is used to combine two otherwise contradictory ideas such as being a woman/being feminine and knowing what one wants. This construction was used also in other instances, such as in Helen's account:

Helen: I like the fact the she's, um, she's got quite a reputation for anarchy in the industry in that she, um, (.) she founded the chocolate society and then left

under a cloud and for various reasons and I quite like that. But she also has a

family and children and so she seems to have a good balance, but, um, I'm not

sure if that's true, she might paint a very different picture in person.

Helen describes what some people might view as a negative characteristic in a person: bringing anarchy to an industry and then leaving 'under a cloud'. Helen argues that she likes this element of 'anarchy' about her admired person, which suggests that she embraces rather than rejects unconventional norms and behaviours. However, in the discourse analysis of Potter and Wetherell, it is important to pay attention to tropes of talk. The use of 'but' is a classic turning point in discourse which often functions as a disclaimer (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Here 'but' is used to combine contradictory elements. Helen uses 'but' twice, adding firstly following a 'but' that her admired person has a family and children which Helen suggests *seems* to give her a good balance, and then adding another 'but' to cast doubt on this possibility in real life. Here, the ambivalence of the account is present through Helen's doubt at whether the reality and the ideal of her admired Superwoman, who appears to balance a slightly unconventional but high-powered female business leader identity with a more traditional female identity as a mother, but there is reason to doubt whether this is possible.

If 'but' was not used, another way to combine the contradiction in terms was through using the following construction:

Ulrike: She was somebody I did admire her, she was, she was very, very

successful in her job, um, and at the same time she was a great mother,

she was, you know, she was always there for her children.

Ulrike admires her godmother who was both successful at work and a great mother. She links the two together through using 'at the same time' which shows that something that usually

does not go together is brought together. What becomes clear here is that being a business woman and having children is seen for many women as difficult. It is an issue that they see as relevant for their future life and they seem to recognise that 'having it all' could be an issue but could also be entirely possible in their view.

Overall, the female MBA students who were interviewed tended to refer to stereotypically feminine ideals such as being feminine, having people skills, being emotional, and having children, and they linked these feminine ideals with the masculine ideal of business such as knowing what you want or being successful. Through language constructions many women used it became apparent that women see these contradictions revealed within their ambivalent admiration of the Superwoman. It might be that the female MBA students in our sample discursively recognized that to be such an overachieving woman is unrealistic or difficult to sustain. In order to manage their expectations they might therefore choose to frame their admiration with a range of discursive caveats. It is also clear that here no idealization takes place but instead the person is admired for certain characteristics while others are less admired or problematic. In contrast to the clearly defined idealised person of the authentic and self-made CEO/founder, the second interpretative repertoire focuses more on the ambivalences associated with female leaders.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis has shown that gendered identification patterns can be distinguished at least by two interpretative repertoires: idealization and admiration. The first interpretative repertoire reflected the ideal of the self-made authentic CEO/found eulogised through case studies and examples in business schools. The self-made authentic CEO/founder embodies the hegemonic ideal masculinity that a businessperson is supposed to display, and most MBA students

reacted in one way or the other to this ideal, with both men and women idealising business people. However, the second interpretative repertoire of a social psychological form of admiration was almost exclusively used by women talking about women they identified with. We did not find many instances of men showing admiration in the social psychological sense that they discussed positive as well as neutral characteristics of person. Women in contrast regularly showed this form of admiration when discussing other women. Following Sandell (1993), this can be described as admiration because admired as well as not-admired traits were discussed. Those non-admired traits were either seen as negative or neutral but they meant that the person described was not idealised.

Research on role models has often stressed that people look for same-sex role models and that this is difficult for women due to the scarcity of women in senior positions (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008; Gibson and Cordova, 1999; Sealy and Singh, 2006; Dryler, 1998; Sealy and Singh, 2010). However this research has shown that by looking at identification of admired persons instead of role models more complex patterns emerge in which it appears that men and women idealise the authentic self-made CEO/founder while, women admire senior women in a social psychological sense, which means dividing the person one identifies with in positive, neutral and negative elements. This in a sense is on the first sight in conflict with Ibarra's (Ibarra, 2005) research, which highlighted that men selected elements of their role models that they saw worth imitating while women wanted to completely emulate their role models. What we have shown in this study is that men and women uncritically idealise a certain type of person, whereas women in particular engage in social psychological admiration of other women, which includes a more critical evaluation of the person one identifies with. In our study we find that women use compartmentalised identification processes through admiration when identified with other women. However there were also

instances where women idealised other women and men. This shows the importance of exploring gendered identification processes beyond the narrower concept of role models to uncover the nuances and facets that gendered identification in the work context can take.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the article was to explore gendered identification patterns. We argued that the concept of role models only includes a range of gendered identification patterns and highlighting other patterns of gendered identification could yield to new conceptualisations of gender in the work context. We therefore explored gendered identification as admiration and idealisation. The research drew on interviews with MBA students that were analysed using a discourse analysis which focuses on interpretative repertoires as units of sense making. The first interpretative repertoire was an idealisation of a person that the interviewee identified with. The idealisation was commonly an authentic self-made CEO/founder the figure that was idealised by men and women as is also eulogized in much business school education. The second interpretative repertoire was almost exclusively used by women and reflected a social psychological form of admiration, or the splitting of the person one identifies with in positive, neutral and negative characteristics. This finding refines the literature on gender and role models by pointing to wider dynamics of gendered identification which happen around idealisation and admiration.

The study is based on 20 interviews with MBA students in a single British business school which leads to various limitations. This study is limited by exploring only the business school context, and further studies could highlight how this plays out in other contexts and in other countries. It would be important to broaden the research to more senior professionals to see if

different dynamics might be at work because most of the MBA students had limited work experience in junior ranks. It should be explored if similar patterns of identification are at play in relation to admiration and idealization when it comes to 'race' and sexuality. Finally, we draw on a small number of in-depth interviews and it would be fruitful to explore how far other methodologies such as more quantitative approaches lead to similar results. Overall, the article broadens our understanding of gender and role models by contribution towards understanding gendered identifications by exploring admiration and idealization.

Table 1 **Gendered Identifications**

Interviewee	Sex of Interviewee	Sex of Role Model
Andrew	Male	2 males
Benjamin	Male	Male
Ganesh	Male	Male
Luke	Male	3 males
Mathieu	Male	Male
Rafiq	Male	2 males
Stewart	Male	Male
Vicent	Male	Male
Wole	Male	Male
Yatin	Male	Male
Emma	Female	Female
Frances	Female	Female
Helen	Female	Female
Tanya	Female	Female
Ulrike	Female	2 females
Caroline	Female	Female and Male
Dawn	Female	Female and Male
Peggy	Female	Female and Male
Kimi	Female	Male
Nadia	Female	Male

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[i] The transcription system is an adapted and simplified version of the Jefferson system (.) is 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 non-verbal 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, TEXT 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.