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Sexism in Business Schools: Structural Inequalities, Systemic Failures and Individual Experiences of Sexism

'I am not a Gentleman academic': Telling our truths of micro-coercive control and gaslighting in Business Schools using 'Faction'

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Abstract

This paper draws from our own experiences of sexism within Business Schools to bring attention to the effects of the operation of a highly masculinized, white, cis-gendered, and patriarchal culture, whether enacted by men or women, and to how we come to be silenced within it. Our work reflects on intersectional issues of race, health (mental and physical), and care-work, using faction built from six paired interviews to tell a truth we feel unable to tell individually. This piece highlights the real fear of repercussions that still persist for female academics, and uses the acts of collecting data and writing differently to offer the authors a safe space in which to resist both overt and structural sexism in Business Schools. It highlights the need to take seriously those subtleties of sexism that we are often expected to put up with, those difficult-to-name aspects of our working lives that leave us feeling it would be "silly" to complain and act as a form of micro-coercive control over our lives. We operationalize our collective voice as a form of activism in the academy that is situated within our individual silences.

KEYWORDS
faction, gaslighting, sexism, silence, voice

1 | INTRODUCTION

Women's voices as sources of authority have been and continue to be silenced in both explicit and implicit acts within organizations (Aiston & Fo, 2021; Powell, 2020). Leadership texts advocating greater female empowerment frequently continue to chastise women for their complicity in such practices, proposing neoliberal justice narratives that claim simply working harder, speaking up, or "leaning in" (Sandberg & Scovell, 2016) offers the means by which women may claim a greater share of success and authority in the workplace.

Narratives proposing greater feminine success through the exercise of agency, as so many of our colleagues' research has emphatically established (Adamson & Kelan, 2019; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019) are false. Yet silence continues to be charged as a tacit and implicit acceptance of derogation. In this paper, "faction" (Bruce, 2019) is used to challenge this assumption and to write our collective truths. In exposing sexism in the Business Schools to which we belong and have been a part of in the past, we expose ourselves to risk. Nevertheless, our work seeks to resist, to write differently, and to challenge the system through an act of rebellious storytelling.

As individuals, we have often felt a need for silence, unable to speak for fear of repercussions. As women in academia, we want our silence itself to speak. Maybe some of you will think that it is important to speak individually; we do not disagree, but to do so is to enter into a game that is still set against us. To those who feel they can speak and those who do, you are owed our gratitude. Experiences of injustice and exploitation continue to expand, and in doing so, the weight of expectations, of isolated fruitlessness, and of an awareness of vulnerability presses down. To speak up comes with consequences that we should not have to bear. Consequences should fall to those people and institutions that proliferate the sexism that we have experienced, but rather in raising our voices individually, we would likely bear the brunt of any fallout. Our experiences have often been in relation to those in much more powerful positions, where a voice raised could end hopes of jobs, publications, opportunities etc. Even when this is not the case, experiences of sexism are often difficult to articulate and subtle in nature; it is likely we will be thought of as trouble-makers. It is a struggle to find the words. Therefore, we sit in silence in the hope that we will be allowed to pass through this unjust system with our careers untouched.

Are we complicit? This speaks to the power structure that silences women in every area of life and judges them for the violence done to them. It is a system of privilege in which the biases of the colonial patriarchal neoliberal university have highlighted the discreditable nature of vulnerable members, with few means of resistance. This paper is our small act of resistance.

Drawing from and building upon the work of Bourabain (2021) writing in this journal and Aiston and Fo (2021) on the silencing of academic women, our paper focuses on the subjective experience of individuals encountering both macro and micro factors of discrimination, with a specific focus on how this contributes to expressions of silence and voice. Broadly, work on discrimination within academia has focused on structures of exclusion, harassment, and discrimination (Powell, 2020). Research concerned with gender inequality in academia has then particularly considered structural barriers, the "glass ceiling", the "leaky pipeline", and recruitment (Bourabain, 2021; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). The various ways in which women disappear in high-ranking positions and are over-represented in low-ranking positions. The precarity of such positions has also been discussed in relation to insecure research roles (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020) and the "Glass Cliff" (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). We also draw on literature that explores the impact of management practice on the interior world of the individual; studies of new managerialism and regimes of public management within academic lives (Knights & Clarke, 2014); and how a caring academia (Askins & Blazek, 2017) is incumbered by the effects of control, audit, and accountability of staff. In addition, important work has highlighted the lower levels of work satisfaction among women and their feelings of isolation (Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Hult et al., 2005; Nielsen, 2017). There have also been vital contributions concerning the intersectional effects of gender and race or foreignness (Bourabain, 2021; King, 1988; Knights & Richards, 2003; Mirza, 2006; Strauβ & Boncori, 2020).

We are particularly inspired by those who "write differently" about their academic selves in brave and beautiful ways (Boncori & Smith, 2019; Johansson & Jones, 2019; Pullen et al., 2020). We seek to contribute by using faction

to support each other in our resistance and activism; highlighting (as many before us have done) the lack of care that pervades the academy. Ultimately, however, we resist and act against our experiences of sexism via raising our collective voice and supporting each other to name our experiences as a societal and institutional product of a form of coercive authoritarian control. We suggest that coercive control exists not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere, into which women are now admitted but not accepted. We name this micro-coercive control. We tell tales you will have heard before, but argue that it is necessary to continue retelling these tales in spaces women can feel comfortable within until real action is felt in Business Schools and beyond. This is perhaps particularly the case given the untold pressures women have faced during the COVID 19 pandemic (Boncori, 2020).

2 | INEQUALITY IN ACADEMIA

The academic workplace is not alone in promoting an image of meritocracy, which conceals systemic inequalities in rewards and participation. Specific studies have highlighted the ways in which systematic inequalities are embedded in the standards of excellence (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012) and other daily bureaucracy of academia (Krishen et al., 2020; Madera et al., 2019). They have also noted how these inequalities operate in conjunction with agent-centered explanations for discriminatory outcomes (Bird, 2011) and discursive practices of masculinity that normalize a single picture of meritocratic achievement (Knights & Richards, 2003). Women of diverse backgrounds often occupy a category of "interloper" in university spaces (Johansson & Jones, 2019), and perhaps doubly so in business and management schools where the image of the white, cis-male, single, childless, or care-free middle-class patriarch continues to hold sway. Bourabain (2021) makes the critical argument that subtle and everyday forms of discrimination, in which the micro and macro structures of discriminatory practice are combined in the experience of individual relations, act to produce disempowerment among early career scholars as part of the inequality regime (Acker, 2009) of academia. The features of academic careers, as with other forms of training that employ an historic apprenticeship model of advancement, are particularly susceptible to individual exercises of power/privilege. While such gatekeeping often occurs early in the career development of PhD candidates or postdoctoral researchers, studies also show challenges at every stage of career advancement of Management scholars, as well as in other faculties (Treviño et al., 2018; van Miegroet et al., 2019).

Many universities in the UK demonstrate commitments to gender inequality through Athena Swan awards (Bronze, Silver, or Gold). Nevertheless, as Tzanakou and Pearce (2019) note, "Numerous feminist scholars have criticized gender equality interventions for shying away from challenging assumptions and beliefs about the neutrality of organizational practices, and for emphasizing outcomes that focus more on 'fixing the women' than addressing structural barriers (Acker, 1990; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Liff & Cameron, 1997)" (p. 1192). These initiatives have been criticized for failing to recognize intersectional issues and for their "lack of engagement with the structural issues within which gender inequality is rooted" (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019, p. 1194). It has further been demonstrated that such initiatives frequently rely on the labor of women, adversely impacting their mental health and careers (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). Additional organizational interventions generally focus on problems such as inequities in recruitment practice and, to a lesser degree, in career advancement by means of promotion. Research into the experiences of marginalized groups in academia has often foregrounded how these scholars are subject to excessive "housekeeping" work (Bird et al., 2004; Heijstra et al., 2017) as well as exclusion that inhibits career progression.

Structural and cultural expectations around the role of women, even in societies that espouse a commitment to gender equality, act to pressure women into predictable/routine work or alternatively to conform to expectations to be an "honorary man", demanding the exclusion of non-heteromasculine attributes/activities (Holt & Lewis, 2011). Additionally, Boncori and Smith (2019) highlighted how papers are often rejected for being too personal, despite the need for these voices to be heard. Bourabain's (2021) data also highlights a range of exclusionary practices and the lack of effectiveness of diversity policies. It notes the myriad patronizing practices that devalue women's identities in

minority and majority ethnic groups. Racism and Sexism are subtle and ambiguous in their nature (Bourabain, 2021), making them difficult to speak confidently about. When combined, they compound and deepen experiences.

As Aiston and Fo (2021) noted, "The academy is positioned as a 'carefree workplace' that assumes academics have no other commitments than the devotion of their time to the profession (Morley, 2007, 2013). The concept of 'fairness' and a belief in the meritocratic academy fail to acknowledge the gendered nature of family life, thereby privileging male academics that may not be shouldering caring responsibilities (Nikunen, 2012)." (Aiston & Fo, 2021, p. 138). We also know, however, that the allocation of workload proves to be a key issue (Aiston & Fo, 2021; Aiston & Jung, 2015; Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Leberman et al., 2016). What Fitzgerald (2012) terms the "ivory basement" sees women allocated vast quantities of underappreciated work. Gender stereotyping affects the work assigned to academic women (Kjeldal et al., 2005; Morley, 2007; Ropers-Huilman, 2000; Schein, 2007; Turner, 2002). Gatekeeping in selection processes/resource allocation is known to hinder women's advancement (Husu, 2004; Van den Brink et al., 2010).

3 | VOICE AND SILENCE

As we intimated in our introduction, in popular literature on gender equality in organizations, silence is characterized as acquiescence to workplace problems/inequality. To refrain from speaking up, "leaning in", or using one's voice is to cede defeat and neglect to participate in organizations to bring about meaningful change. Such accounts prioritize the individual, and obscure the role of social practices in making certain work, and certain voices, invisible (Star & Strauss, 1999). Simpson and Lewis (Simpson & Lewis, 2005, 2007) argued that the frequent abstraction of ideas around women's voice (or silence), and indeed their visibility (or absence) within organizations often focused on "surface" conceptions of voice as being heard, and visibility as being seen, whether meaningfully or as a "token" representation. They argued for deeper conceptualizations of these, an argument that we feel needs greater acknowledgment.

Employee voice mechanisms are frequently promoted as necessities with benefits for organizational performance, contributing to a just and democratic civil society beyond the organization (Timming & Johnstone, 2015). An absence of employee voice or the promotion of practices or systems to inhibit employee voice is irrational; it is against organizational interests. Bourabain (2021) highlights that in academia, presentations of organizational diversity are a key marketing goal, contributing to the image of an inclusive learning environment. Voice practices that aim to enroll academic women in the production of a more equitable working environment seem to offer a win-win opportunity for staff. Yet in academia, as in other organizations (see Pinder & Harlos, 2001), employee silence or attempts to maintain a certain invisibility follow from the awareness that the benefits of such systems are unjustly distributed. The business case is prioritized over women, and many women react with silence and a lack of endorsement.

Pinder and Harlos (2001) extended the concept of employee silence beyond acquiescence to argue that a refusal to "speak up" could be linked to negative organizational experiences that were the product of fear, anger, futility, and resignation. Timming and Johnstone (2015) further present the challenging claim that such negative experiences might be promoted by leaders with anti-democratic tendencies/authoritarian personality traits. More recently, the work on employee attitudes has been further elaborated to highlight that employee motivations to remain silent may include disinterest, submissive, defensive, deviant, altruistic, and self-interested reasons (Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Subsequently, Harlos and Knoll (2021, p. 206) point out that silence is "anything but inactivity and [a] dormant response". Going beyond a focus on the subject, Donaghey et al. (2011) argue that management can (intentionally or otherwise) exploit power inequalities to "organize out" or displace a range of issues from the structures of voice within institutions. Such activities serve to highlight the role of the organization in employee voice mechanisms. This also foregrounds the need for academic institutions to revisit and revise their voice mechanisms.

Within academia, employee voice mechanisms include committees, panels, and participation in cross-institutional activities, such as external validation committees for professional bodies. Cross-institutional committees and

executive roles in learned societies also provide opportunities for commentary on institutional practice in the management of research. Access to such roles is limited according to seniority and experience. Fewer, though still significant, opportunities for employee voice on management practice operate at a local level; most institutions have formal mechanisms for complaint, and union recognition is high. However necessary such structural mechanisms are, their presence or absence does little to highlight the way in which interactional effects contribute toward employee silence.

Aiston and Fo (2021) have investigated the role of "micro-inequities" in silencing women in research-intensive universities, distinguishing between the impacts of social and organizational practices on the internal motivations of women to "speak up" and the external silencing actions that often accompany their attempts to do so. Micro-inequities "include small events, which are hard-to-prove, covert, and often unintentional." (Aiston & Fo, 2021, p. 1). Concerns about how women themselves come to perpetuate silencing or exclusionary practices against other women are generally characterized as tragic or deviant expressions of voice (Ellemers et al., 2004; Faniko et al., 2021), and the defense of silencing practices by majority groups frequently displays both disinterest in transformative change and displacement of the responsibility for social transformation outside of the capabilities of the organization. Ozkanli's work also discusses women being ignored or being asked not to speak (Özkanli et al., 2009). Interactive practices then reflect the claims of Donovan et al. (2016, p. 563) that employees, particularly when new or precariously employed, may be "socialized into understanding that employee voice is not a democratic right" and that its function is only in service of the organization's interests. The demands of productivity and performance in academia are indeed so extensive (Strauβ & Boncori, 2020) that these pressures may well have an effect on internal motivations, acting to legitimize everyday silencing and exclusion (Aiston & Fo, 2021).

In existing studies of inequality and discrimination in academia, there are many examples of motivations for silence, which are in alignment with those identified in the employee silence literature. Many focus on the need for a defensive attitude in the face of precarious employment (Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & van Dick, 2013) or other negative consequences (Brennan, 2013), while others demonstrate socialization into a view of complaint as anti-productive and futile (Ahmed, 2009). Indeed, Brennan noted that the person experiencing micro-inequities may be considered "over sensitive" (Brennan, 2013) reducing the likelihood that individuals will feel confident in speaking up. Importantly for us, authors have already commented on specifically coercive practices at work, with Czarniawska (2006) noting a number of damaging practices. Perhaps the clearest historical example of such subtle but nevertheless coercive control rests in Hochschild's (1983) discussion of flight attendants "suffering under the burden of required 'femininity'" (Czarniawska, 2006, p. 237). If this femininity is un-performed, it makes the job (as structured by the institution) impossible and renders the woman unemployable by the institution, a fate that would be deemed her responsibility or fault. In many cases, women's reports of sexism in the workplace are being disregarded or minimized; "interviews with victims of discrimination have little credibility, on the somewhat paradoxical grounds that they must be biased if they have been wronged" (Czarniawska, 2006, p. 238). This lack of credibility often leads to women feeling a need for silence to protect themselves and maintain their fragile positions. We do not wish to draw a direct comparison between those who suffer coercive control at the hands of a partner/parent or significant other and the suffering that women more generally become subject to within the Academy. For this reason, following the work of Ratle et al. (2020), when they discuss "micro-terror" in relation to Early Career Academics, the terms "micro-coercion" and "micro control" are used to more accurately describe the subtle and pervasive nature of the damage done to women, in particular, in the Academy.

As a mixed ethnic group, we draw inspiration from the work of those feminists who discuss translating rage into action and the tensions between silence and speaking up (Chen, 2018). Ahmed's work notes how Black women become re-entrenched as a "cause of tension" when speaking out about racism in academia (Ahmed, 2009, p. 49). This poses a further barrier and contributes to the additional micro-coercion that silences such groups. Nevertheless, Rodriguez (2011) notes both the attractions but also, crucially, the dangers of remaining silent. While silent rage may encourage us to be "critically conscious", it will not motivate change; this requires action (Lorde, 1984). Rage can then be translated into action and so forms an act of liberation that performs work to challenge white supremacy

(Lorde, 1984). The justifiable anger of Black women regarding what they have viewed as the conspicuous silence of white women in relation to the complex interaction between racism and sexism has been explored by Edmondson Bell et al. (2003). In addressing both the benefits and protections of silence alongside the need to take action, this paper attempts to weaponize our individual silences to give a collective voice of resistance and activism. We reflect on our individual silences to highlight how that silence arises out of intersectional issues and micro-coercive control, but simultaneously exists to protect our places in the academy and our relationships with fellow female academics with whom unspoken and spoken understandings are shared.

4 | METHODS

We offer a story compiled from our experiences as academics in Business Schools. Our story traces the life of a fictional academic, from her early PhD days through to her experiences mid/late career. In crafting our narratives we drew from six paired interviews, writing as a collective of African, Asian, Mixed Ethnic Heritage, Swedish, and White women. We take this opportunity to challenge academic convention that seeks to sanitize and silence women's experiences. Consideration is given to our own roles in the re-entrenching of silence and the performance of equality, through an attempt to write our silences into being in a safe space.

Following Gilmore and Kenny (2015), a paired interview technique was adopted to give voice to our experiences of silence and sexism in Business Schools. We interviewed each other (the paper authors) to reflect upon our experiences of sexism within academia, surfacing emotion and intersubjectivity with the aim of producing different insights than those which can be gained from individual reflection alone. We worked in pairs to conduct the interviews, and each of the transcripts was coded by two other researchers on the project who were not involved in the interview itself. A list of a priori codes was co-created by the researchers both through discussion with the authors concerning the most salient issues for them; and also in relation to the literature outlined above, which picks up on several key themes. Figure 1 outlines both the a priori and emergent codes. The interviews were "double coded" (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015) for analytical rigor to ensure that coding was consistent and that emergent codes were agreed upon. All of the data was coded on the criteria of its applicability to experiences of sexism. Where a comment alluded to experiences of sexism, whether these be structural, microaggressions, or experiences of inappropriate behavior, this was coded both for the circumstances in which it occurred, and any consequences/impact felt or experienced by the individual concerned. In total, 27 codes were generated/used and they were grouped under five themes with some codes falling under more than one theme. Most of our themes were constructed by drawing together key themes from the literature, represented by our a priori codes and our own data/emergent codes, the theme of "overt sexism" is emergent and based on the associated emergent codes. These themes formed the structure for the vignettes.

In progressing from the codes and themes to the narratives, we sought to focus on our key themes: microaggressions, structural failures, overt sexism, responses to sexism, and intersectional issues. We ensured that these key themes were drawn out throughout the narratives using evocative storytelling. Operationalizing Leicher and Mulder's (2018) two-phase approach to face validity, the first author began by drafting a narrative based on the key themes arising from the "double coding". This was shared with the other participants for comments, alterations, revisions, etc. to ensure that it represented the double coding carried out and the experiences of the participants.

Data processing was handled solely by the researchers. The paired technique also solidified our pre-existing relationships, providing a safe space in which to voice our experiences in the knowledge that they would be treated seriously.

We chose to create narratives based on "faction" for two reasons; to provide protection to the authors, and also because "academics have not only the right but the responsibility to represent research in multiple formats" (Bruce, 2019). Our aim was to build on this by drawing from interesting work concerning multi-vocal ethnographies (Deschner et al., 2020; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017) and autoethnography (Tsalach, 2013) to mark our experiences, politicize them, verbalize them, and resist them. In order to achieve the protection sought and to still speak, we have
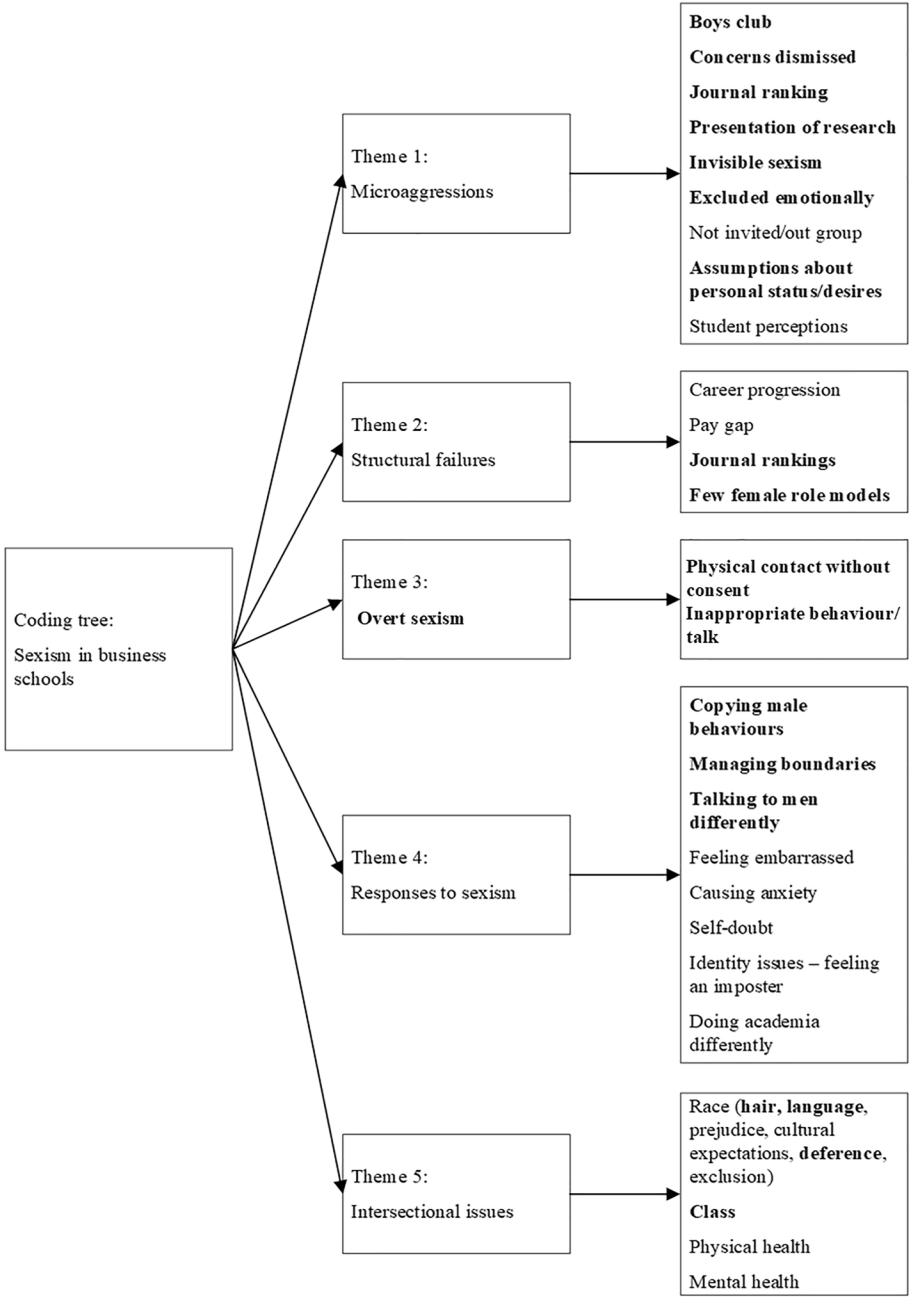
FIGURE 1 Outlines the codes that built each of our main themes. Sub codes are listed in brackets. Emergent codes are in bold

produced a multi-vocal faction. As regards protecting the authors, we are particularly aware that any repercussions of such a paper may be felt more strongly by the ethnic minority women in our group. As Anonymous (2021) notes concerning those writing about the negative experiences of minorities in academia, "The writer who wrote without anonymity has received surprising, potent and discomforting blowback from peers" (p. 1). Following several conversations, changes of heart, and considerable periods of reflection, it was collectively decided that anonymity with regard

to the specifics of our individual experiences is preferable for us. It should be noted by readers that each author made separate and individual decisions in this regard and that anyone who expressed a wish to write without anonymity would have been fully supported in this decision and knew that this would have been the case.

Having made the decision to all remain anonymous, we nevertheless recognize the danger of erasing the experiences of ethnic minority women in a paper that also relies on the voices of several white women. Some of our conversations have been uncomfortable, as we would expect them to be, but it is our hope they have been progressive and supportive of each other. Our paper is a compromise between seeking to offer each other the anonymity desired, particularly for those of us who would potentially suffer more through no fault of our own, and also the need to represent our diverse experiences of sexism in Business Schools and, crucially to avoid a "white-wash". Rodriguez (2011) notes the seduction of whiteness and emphasizes that

> We must overcome our own fears, and speak in order to make collective change. We also cannot deny our own rage, for doing so will only keep us from recognizing how we have been and continue to be marginalized in the academy. By denying our rage, we will silence ourselves, contributing to our own erasure, instead of demanding the full respect that we deserve. If we deny our rage, then we erase ourselves. We need to recognize the power of rage, whether it is silent or spoken, and the power it provides us, so that we can go beyond our own erasure by not only consciously engaging intimately with it, but also raising questions we may be fearful of asking. (p. 596).

In aiming to tackle this, we have presented two faction narratives. One is written by all of us and represents general depictions of sexism, italicized for those of us who are specifically affected by issues of class, health, caring responsibilities etc., and bolded for racialized emphasis. Our second narrative is written only by the ethnic minority women from this group and addresses, in more detail, the issues they face and discussed during the interview. In writing the second narrative, we realized the similarities and uniqueness in our racialized experience of sexism and aimed to deepen our stories (Chang et al., 2013). Our process of reflection also encompassed a challenging social and politicized issue of selecting a general label, "ethnic minority", through which we identify ourselves to maintain our anonymity.[1] In doing this, it is recognized that myriad issues pertinent only to our individual racial and ethnic identities will remain hidden in our text. The ways in which we have sought to retain our anonymity are imperfect, but we hope that our recognition of this helps to shed light on the problematic nature of collective and collaborative work among those who straddle mainstream and minority identities. Further, in not shying away from the difficulties here, we can show one imperfect way in which women from a variety of groups may support each other as colleagues through highlighting key issues, while also seeking to protect each other. It should be said that protection was something sought by all of us for a variety of reasons that will likely become obvious from reading our narratives.

Denison (2006) has further argued that "we must feel free to write in ways that combine and synthesize a range of voices" (p. 338). In order to be effective, "faction" must emerge from research gathered in "ethical and methodologically rigorous ways" (Bruce, 2019, p. 5). Moreover, it must be satisfying to read and artistically constructed (Denison & Rinehart, 2016). Our paper is based on known and accepted principles of data collection and analysis, but one's based on giving voice to women and othered groups. Hopefully, the narratives will also be a satisfying read. Nevertheless, in line with the work of Saoirse O'Shea (2019), we question the need for writing to be "artistically constructed" and rather reflect the trauma of our travels through academia, offering no easy answers. Faction (artistically beautiful or not) provides us with one way of articulating the "otherwise unsayable" (Bruce, 2019, p. 8). It is a welcome resource for those Othered by dominant norms and practices. Hooks (1993) has argued that when we are not permitted to speak, we become an "absent presence without voice" (p. 126). Our choice of "faction" is our way of giving ourselves that voice back.

4.1 | Solidarity in commonality and in difference: Two imperfect narratives

Key:

Normal text = shared experiences N.b we appreciate that these experiences are frequently enhanced, deepened, and made far worse by particular or specific characteristics including but not limited to ethnicity, class, health, caring responsibilities etc.

Bolded *= racialized emphasis* in incidences where the appropriate authors felt that their stories were particularly deepened.

Italics = Personal and/or class/mental and physical health/caring experiences shared by some but not all of the authors.

We are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, we identify as working class and middle class, as having physical and mental health problems and not having them, as having been sexually assaulted and as not having been. We are women who differ greatly but who also share much and seek to support each other—this is our story......

Narrative 1:

When I started my academic career, I had few female role models. **White** male professors abounded. I found paternalistic support from men who sometimes helped me immensely and sometimes offered unsolicited "pearls of wisdom", but I had few women I revered. Women were doing wonderful work, but they were usually of a lower rank than their male colleagues. I came to understand that academia was about stripping emotion and presence from my work. That my feelings were of little value and worse were inappropriate, unwelcome, uncomfortable. Women and men told me this, implicitly and explicitly. My work was not deemed scientific enough; my academic interests were thought of as less valuable. I wanted to write about emotion, to critique the neoliberal and managerial ideologies of our organizations. My identity needed to shift; I needed to conform.

Even my appearance was subjected to a **white** and masculine gaze, "You look nice today", "What's with the sexification of your look?". I was supposed to comply and submit to their emotional judgment or remarks as "compliments" or "humor". I was laughed at and made to feel both small and ignorant in seminars by **white** male professors displaying their dominance. I was excluded from the "Boys Club", I did not get invitations to the private events, to the after-work drinks in people's homes. I was not a part of the WhatsApp groups.

I am presented with a cafetiere (a contraption I didn't even know the name of) for the first time and asked to serve it to a room of professors, with no idea how to articulate that I didn't know what one was or how to use it. Coming from a working-class family serves to make me uncomfortable in the Academy, social situations are that much harder to navigate. I was excluded from their intellectual places, but my body was exposed to touch and privacy transgressions. I had an unwanted hand on my back walking down the stairs; I had to watch as a **white** *male colleague's belt was unbuckled as they tucked their shirt into their trousers, all I wanted was a conversation about my research paper, some advice. I was told I could have a job if I promised not to get pregnant... It was supposed to be a joke but it didn't feel like a joke. Three months after my viva, my examiner made sexually explicit remarks and advances to me. My confidence dipped; I doubted I deserved my position in these hallowed halls. I was there because somebody found me sexually appealing. I lost papers and networking opportunities because I couldn't work with a man who was supposed to be my mentor without fearing inappropriate sexual approaches. I had to cut him off completely despite the disadvantages that brought me. I stopped trying to publish papers in his area, aware that I would have no support.* I was advised to keep my voice small, to be unheard. When I had complained about things before, excuses were made that allowed unacceptable behavior to continue. I could not complain; he was senior, **he was white**, he would win, I would be ruined.

I picked myself up and got my first job. I found out I was being paid less than my equally qualified **white** male colleague. I felt lonely, isolated, worthless. *A thoughtful Professor tried to get me to challenge my salary, to seek equal pay. I was too frightened, I felt apologetic and stupid.* I was given my performance targets. *The ABS[2] list loomed large.* It reminded me that it is much easier to be mainstream and a **white** male to be an academic in a Business School. If I am a **white** mainstream, solid and resilient individual, I can publish multiple papers in highly ranked journals, my results will be statistically significant, and I will be significant. I author papers I do not want to write and submit them to journals I am not interested in to ensure I survive in this world. I say "no, I must be authentic!" so I write what I want to

write and find it challenging to publish. Gradually I became increasingly disenchanted. I was doing more than my fair share of the administrative load than my male colleagues and the older male professors who passed on invitations to take on some of the work. When I sought to benefit fellow female academics, this workload rested with those same female colleagues. We lost time for our research trying to put right a system we did not create that has never benefitted us. Our teaching evaluations were lower, it is known that students evaluate **ethnic minority women** more harshly, but still, our performance appraisals suffered. We were invited to compulsory meetings to listen, not speak; shouted down; we stopped talking. Finally, I was invited to an interview panel for a prospective colleague; I felt pleased that my opinion was valued. I discussed it with my boss; he told me he "needed a woman on the panel"; I was crushed.

I was born in an area with a very distinct regional accent. As I entered the world of work, I quickly learned that I had to neutralize my accent to gain acceptance. To make communicating easier with people from around the country and overseas. When I returned to my hometown, I used to slip easily back to speaking as though I had never left. But this is decreasing. I have embodied the mask of conforming to the middle-class academic standard.

When I became pregnant, my privacy was public, and my body was public property. People felt free to comment on my hair, clothing, and age. Women and men felt entitled to touch my stomach, to comment on my growing body, to say how well, bad, or tired I looked, to make articulated lorry reversing sounds when I left a room, to assume I was emotional when it was convenient for them. It allowed them to dismiss my thoughts in meetings. I did not speak, and it took a tremendous amount of emotional energy not to censure people; to tell them where to get off. I made them uncomfortable. But I was at work; I had to be professional even though they were not. I complained; it was mishandled and ignored; I needed to understand that they were going through a tough time and were only joking…. I had to police myself—yet again. I was seen as too sensitive, I wondered if I was. One male professor lost interest in co-authoring a paper as soon as he learned I was pregnant, he stopped responding to my emails. Then there was my well-meaning manager, the one who did not ask me to be involved with papers because I was going on maternity leave. The one trying to be kind and thoughtful, yet he still excluded me and my pregnant body from opportunities others had. Anxiety meant that I thought they didn't see me as a credible researcher anymore. I wish they had asked me. I wish they had put my interests above politeness or assumptions. Now I have fewer papers than I might have otherwise had, and his response to my pregnancy has rendered me more vulnerable than I needed to be.

I return to work after my maternity leave, and like all the women just like me, I am full of conflict. I am excited, eager, guilty, and frightened. I go back, and I work more efficiently than I have ever worked in my life; my time is precious, it is used wisely. I am disheartened by the students who show great displeasure at being taught by an **ethnic minority woman**. I feel disrespected, but I am used to it; it is normal. I am more excluded than ever from the "I scratch your back, you scratch mine" approach to academia; I have met so few senior people who genuinely attempt to collaborate with me though they are happy to make claims to my development as their achievement. *I am the younger woman expert in a room asking men who used to hold substantial power in their previous positions outside of academia, to change their approach as it was putting the University and the public at risk. Responses are defensive, passive-aggressive, eye-rolling, gaslighting me about my own training and understanding. I win this time, but I am made to feel small because of it.*

I am still subject to an approach that idealizes **white** male dominance and alleged efficiencies in the research excellence framework (REF) and the metrics by which I am measured. The journals I want to submit to, the ones that are enthusiastic about embodied work are often of a lower rank and those of a higher rank attract everyone and are fiercely competitive. I am at a disadvantage. This disadvantage runs not just through men but through the system and via senior women who enact it and those who stand by. The pressure is back on. *In the middle of a pandemic, I look after my little one(s) running around my ankles; I look after my Covid sick parents; I fall sick myself. I keep the house as clean and tidy as I have the energy for. I draft this paper as my children sleep;* I write and teach when I am sick. I am reminded we are all in this together, even if in different boats. I doubt whether my little boat, with its myriad holes in the bottom rotted out with structural and subtle sexism, will be considered in the REF. I still blame myself.

I consider submitting a solitary piece of paper with a smudged tiny child handprint as my contribution to this call, as this is all I have time for. For there is no work-loading of the time, it takes to excise the emotion and the life from my writing, build new networks, sanitize my difference, and intellectualize my contribution. Those who share my story will know from that almost-empty, almost-clean leaf of paper the work that had to be done. I depend upon my friends, sisters, and mothers'

… Those women who collectively hold me up when my strength begins to fail. We share a knowing glance and a sigh; chat in our WhatsApp groups, hold work calls at 10 PM with each other, exhausted but at peace in our mutual understandings.

The nurseries are closed, the childminder is isolating, the schools are shut, and it all falls to us. My husband is good; he cooks and cleans, but I manage and steer this ship, yet I suffer for it as no Captain does. So, I feel relief and hope when the deadline for this call is extended. And I think of all those for whom the deadline will not be extended. All those for whom a call on sexism, Covid or any combination of the two cannot be answered for the sheer force of the pressures they are under. As I write, my speed slows, my confidence ebbs and my eyes water. I feel the dread of the vengeful father and the headmaster's office. Images of blank and silent faces drown memories of solidarity and support from empathetic colleagues, the audience to battles I occasionally won in a war I lost to protect professional autonomy and integrity.

Narrative 2:

My experience is not that I am a woman alone. It is at the intersection of my race and my gender. As an ethnic minority woman, I am always thinking about how I carry myself, my physical presentation, my speech. Being a confident person with high self-esteem, I find myself combatting senses of vulnerability arising from being foreign that is imposed upon me.

I walk into a room and immediately stand out in academia, with the color of my skin and the texture of my hair. I am told "I preferred your hair last week" when it was styled in a way that met a Eurocentric ideal of beauty. I grin and bear it because I fear my true response would label me a stereotype of my culture.

Whereas there is a high level of tolerance of diversity in academia, the equivalence between foreignness and incompetence is commonly used to give rise to some and exclude others. I hold dual citizenship and find myself constantly navigating this in my professional life. I speak multiple languages and speak the national language in daily interactions with my colleagues, but I speak with an accent. I am told I "speak well" for someone who was born outside this country, yet speaking well is conforming. It's switching my tongue to the native language and accent so that I might "fit in". I add more "please", "kindly", "thank you" and "would you mind" because asserting myself in my tone can be passive aggressive. When I do speak up for myself, I am told to "take things in the spirit it was intended" by white male colleagues.

Male colleagues who share my cultural identity reinforce our patriarchy in the workplace: "You need to have more respect for me". I am supposed to accept it as banter, asked to apologize for hurt pride. The people I should be safe being my authentic self with, reinforce my place in our social hierarchy.

I strive to fit into a world where my white female colleagues battle gender inequality in academia. I strive for gender equality with them, too. I look to women in power to support and challenge the issues. They sympathize but they do not understand because the white woman's experience is not the same as mine.

There are collaborations of women in academia which I have been included in. That inclusion has given me the opportunity to be an independent researcher for the first time. I published a research report, an article, and eventually, I got a permanent position. I am still holding gratitude for that first opportunity of inclusion. But opportunities as such do not come along often. My fellow white female colleagues form their collaborations at different institutions where they promote and lift each other, where I find myself rarely being included. My solution is to work on creating collaborations of my own. I try to include others, who might experience exclusion. I believe the best resistance is to make changes.

I hope to create a benevolent circle of inclusive, collaborative culture in academia with my insignificant contribution and the symbolic identity of being foreign. Deep inside, my primary war is first to become equal to my fellow white female colleagues, then I can equal the men.

5 | DISCUSSION

In considering the relevance of our story to the literature surrounding sexism in Business Schools, three themes are drawn out. Firstly, our narratives speak to a silencing and pervasive self-doubt that occurs not just "in the moment" but

over many years. It is suggested that this arises from micro-coercive control, not complicity. Secondly, consideration is given to how our individual silences themselves are a form of resistance operationalized to keep our places in the academy and enacted to withdraw labor and verbalized support in order to avoid assisting the academy in performative equality work. Thirdly, we discuss how the writing of our experiences highlights the exclusions to which we have been/ are subject, and the value of "Faction" to Othered communities. Reflections are then offered on the value of women's informal support groups in the Business School and the activism arising from our raised collective voice.

Theme 1: A silencing born of "micro" coercion and "micro" control, not complicity.

Our silence is a product of prolonged institutional abuse and micro-coercive control enacted over individuals who have already been subject to society's abusive, coercive, and sexist practices and micro-practices. Coercive control/behavior can be a pattern of "threats, humiliation, and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim"; it is also intended "to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support" (Home Office, 2015). Crucially for us, it also seeks to exploit "their resources and capacities for personal gain" (Home Office, 2015). What we see in the micro coercions of the Academy is a continued effort to exploit the resources and capacities of women for the benefit of the Academy, while blaming any difficulties women may have on personal inadequacies or sensitivity (Brennan, 2013). This tendency to characterize women as sensitive serves to humiliate, to intimidate, and to frighten women into the often all-too-true belief that speaking up will cause us personal suffering.

From our first difficult steps into academia, we were at a disadvantage (some of us more than others), and yet this disadvantage is not to be spoken of. Academia is perceived as a neutral space, though it is formed in the fires of neoliberalism and white supremacism branded as "meritocracy" (Bourabain, 2021; Dar et al., 2021). This "smokescreen of equality" (Bourabain, 2021) and our negative experiences (Harlos & Knoll, 2021) make it hard to speak. If academia is presented as aware and equal, then how can we speak of our individual experiences of sexism, and expect to be believed? Our experiences amount to years of what would be termed abuse if thought of in the context of a domestic relationship. We have been humiliated for speaking up. It may seem shocking, but Timming and Johnstone's (2015) claims to the egoistic interests of authoritarianism creeping into management practice and personalities strongly resonate with such experiences. We have been gaslighted, made to mistrust our experiences and feelings, made to feel small. Our culture has been used to question our authority to speak, we have been ignored, touched, and spoken to inappropriately, and handicapped by demands for homogeneity and objectivity. Gender has been "done to us" (Czarniawska, 2006) and, vitally, used against us. The gender-blind and color-blind nature of policies has meant that, ultimately, we are judged by the same metrics as white cis-gendered men who do not suffer in the same ways. Is it a wonder that women cannot speak up alone when we have been taught to mistrust our voice and that others mistrust our voice? The smokescreen of equality to which Bourabain (2021) refers does more than convince those in power that there is little else to do. It also ensures that the less powerful question whether their unfavorable positions and fragility in the academy are of their own making. This gaslighting is commonly seen in micro-coercive behaviors in the Academy. For ethnic minority women, narrative two emphasizes the incompetence often unfairly ascribed to them. Speaking specifically on "Blackness", Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2017) note that "Given the burden of Blackness, {there is a} need to deal with the presumption of incompetence" (p. 402). This presumption of incompetence motivates a justifiable rage and highlights the particular dangers of silence for those for whom racism is a daily experience (Rodriguez, 2011). Caldwell (1991) tells us that "resistance can take the form of momentous acts of organized, planned, and disciplined protests, or it may consist of small, everyday actions of seeming insignificance that can nevertheless validate the actor's sense of dignity and worth" (p. 396). Our second narrative speaks to these everyday attempts to achieve equality with white women.

The accusation that women are complicit in the violence done to them fails to address how subtle, structural, intersectional, and pervasive acts of violence render the subject less able to confidently and publicly respond. When equality interventions are merely performative and organizational practices concentrate on "fixing the women" (Acker, 1990; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Liff & Cameron, 1997; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019), it reinforces that it is our personal failings that are the cause of our struggle in academia. Both narratives speak to a rational awareness of the

system, but at the same time, they are a reflection of this internalization of fault, "I still blame myself". It become the job of already discriminated against groups to work to fix the system (Parsons & Priola, 2013). As is known by those who have experienced coercive control in a domestic context, it is often the recognition that we are being discriminated against that is most difficult to arrive at, having been taught to believe that things are our fault. For those of us who identify as belonging to ethnic minority groups, this also speaks to the attractive nature of whiteness and the dangers inherent in this (Rodriguez, 2011).

As Tzanakou and Pearce (2019) note, equality is not a matter of metrics, optics, and a "business case", it is about addressing intersectional dynamics and the reproduction of gendered roles within academia. It is about noticing and taking seriously the micro-aggressions and transgressions that occur daily, and are so subtle in their nature that women are accused of sensitivity when they raise them (Brennan, 2013). To not ask a woman to be on a paper because she is going on Maternity Leave is not a kindness (though it may be intended as one), it is a micro-aggression born of gendered assumptions and paternalism in our workplaces. To tell any woman that "everyone is struggling at the moment" is not to sympathize but to disregard. Small acts matter, and the process of unearthing them must continue. Though, of course, this unearthing should not be our task, an additional burden of work (Heijstra et al., 2017). It should be the task of those in power to inform themselves. Moreover, where women do seek to raise their voices, it should not expose them to ridicule and penalty. Our act of camouflage in this paper still highlights the real and justified fear of repercussions that women face when seeking to speak up. Our narratives wreak of emotion, and that is a dangerous thing in the Business School.

Theme 2: Exclusion from the Business School and Silence as Resistance.

Our piece sheds light on our experiences of exclusion in Business Schools. We expand upon the literature by considering practices that contribute to the silencing of academic women (Aiston & Fo, 2021). There is perhaps something specific to say about Business Schools. In different ways, we have all been subject to the dominant ideal of the white cis-gendered businessman in a way that is not quite the same in other areas of the Academy. Certainly, our case is reflected across the Academy, and a recent paper highlights this in the case of ECRs within Geography (Hughes, 2021). Nevertheless, in Business Schools in particular, women become subject to a hyper-masculinity that pervades in the unspoken dress code, the attention to keeping particular working hours, the presenteeism, and, of course, in the UK, the CABS list. Business School Journal ranking systems are perhaps the clearest example of the infiltration of a neoliberal, meritocratic, business case approach to universities. This then filters down into the day-to-day management of Business Schools and Business School Academics. Our case highlights that to be successful, it was necessary to suppress emotion in our writing. As many of our colleagues have established, our Business School systems, though claiming to be neutral, reproduce traditional gender roles through their metrics and offer "limited consideration of intersectional dynamics" (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). Non-dominant groups are even less likely to have their voice heard (Travis et al., 2011). This could be attributed to their emotions, beliefs, and schemas as identified by Morrison (2014). A feature of this is the individual's assessment of the risk associated with giving voice (Liang et al., 2012). For those in minority groups, this risk may be undesirable social consequences like stereotyping or stigmatization (as identified by McNulty et al., 2018). Black women, however, were found to use their voice at work as an enactment of tempered radicalism, thereby using their difference to change organization systems (Edmondson Bell et al., 2003). We seek to produce a collective and yet intersectionally sensitive voice, to engage in protest and protection. Silence as wielded by a collective faction offers a means of collective defense.

Our academic sisterhood is staffed by individuals of intelligence and insight. Our participants and those beyond, are not expressing acquiescence to their exclusion in their individual silences—though they may be fearful or feel shame/guilt. Scheff (2000) describes shame as one of the few emotions connected directly with sociality and experienced commonly when we feel a threat to social bonds. The structures of contemporary academic life promote limited social connections for those without time or inclination to embed all of their life energies within the academy in imitation of the fully serviced Gentleman academic. In experiences of sexism, there is a need for self-defense as a mechanism for survival. To be silent is often an attempt to evade micro-aggressive interactions or performative attempts at equality interventions that are seen as insignificant or tokenistic. Our individual silences work to circum-

vent (to some extent) tangible material disadvantages resulting from exclusion. In our narratives, silence resides in the shadows of social media backchannels where the alternative plans for events are shared, the strategies of recruitment are laid bare, or the unguarded sexism and racism of colleagues are revealed.

Silence as a means of withholding consent, abstaining from votes or refusing to attend meetings may exploit the power of (non)presence to inhibit the progress of sexist or ineffectual practices or policies. This can be done altruistically to support our colleagues and can be a form of deviance that gets noticed. Concomitantly, the practices of silence-as-invisibility cannot be discussed without acknowledging that our voice is not the only thing that stands out; the otherness of our bodies is hard to conceal. Much academic work has been done to illuminate the embodied nature of work and the suffering of women's bodies (Gatrell et al., 2017). We do not seek to cover old ground, but simply to state that in our narratives we were exposed to unwanted touch, overt sexualization, inappropriate comment, and ridicule of our bodies, and this cannot go unnoticed. As our narratives demonstrate, our bodies are actively excluded from the academy. Our pregnant bodies and sexed bodies provoke reactions that lead to missed opportunities for collaboration. Our bodies are considered open for public comment and touch, but our ability to act as an academic, to network, to collaborate, to write, becomes impaired by the reactions of supposedly neutral others.

We also highlight that there are worrying similarities between the promotion of conventionalism, the evaluation or sexualization of female academics and students, the prevalence of "toughness", and the spectre of excellence in the narratives of business and management school academic life. These align with the traits of authoritarian personalities identified by Timming and Johnstone (2015). In this light, we acknowledge the motivations of some women in Business Schools of academia as "deviant" in being silent. In not speaking up, in failing to fix the sinking boat, they embrace what Brinsfield's (2013) research characterized as retaliation, to make management look bad, or cause harm to the organization. Such resistance can be self-destructive, but it also comprises a broader altruistic dimension aiming at protecting others or relationships. Our narrative shows how the additional demands of work-life conflict are absorbed in order to persist within the organization, and resist its slide toward homogeneity and our co-optation into performative practices. We are a vitally different but crucially supportive collective, and here we use the neoliberal meritocratic academy that determines the paternalistic and performative way in which academics are measured, to try to publish a paper that simultaneously resists this system in its topic of choice, maintains our individual silences, and will also be seen as a highly ranked contribution by our employers.

Theme 3: the value of "Faction" to Othered communities.

We try to write this section of the paper as our babies cry, sick. We try to write during and post serious medical interventions, in the midst of moving house. It is impossible to think what it is that we are supposed to write, and yet it is all here at our finger-tips, the mind fog, the pain, the exhaustion, the indefensible inequality of it all. We message our friends and our working mum's WhatsApp group, telling them of our woes and our unending, ever-growing workload, and they run to the rescue with kind words, offers of help, and acknowledgments of understanding or sympathy. It is in this space that we are safe. Clearly, it is not possible to fix all of each other's woes, and nor should that be necessary, but we are friends. Excluded from the boys' club, this is our club. This is not a perfect community, we falter, our lives take over, we are not as responsive or helpful on some days; too tired ourselves; there is a need to be carried for a bit or to drawback. Sometimes we forget ourselves and mistakenly assume that our struggles are the same as another's, but we come back together and try to make amends. These communities exist and persist within but despite the Business School. If we dare to take the time to recover from the various things that life is throwing at us and do not make it to the paper deadline, the system will judge us to have failed. We rely on each other and on our reserves of strength. As Toni Bruce (2019) notes "Faction" offers much to othered communities. It offered us the opportunity to say the unsayable and brought us closer together as a community. As Barone (2007) states "Faction" is not broadly accepted in academia because it is felt to threaten measurements of validity and reliability. In writing this piece, traditional conceptions of validity and reliability as determined by our patriarchal neoliberal academy are challenged. This contributes to a growing body of work that attempts to uncover the "unknowable and unimaginable" (Denison, 2006), using evocative forms of writing (Boncori, 2020;[3] Gilmore et al., 2019; O'Shea, 2019). In doing this, we raise our collective voice.

"Faction" has allowed us to resist, protecting each other through our individual silence and our collective voice Writing together has allowed us to share stories that we might otherwise feel the world and specifically the Business School would blame us for. We hope that the reader hears our voice, that the Business School hears our voice and begins to understand our silences, but most of all we are glad that we share this space together.

6 | CONCLUSION

Our findings in this article are not novel. They will not surprise many (or perhaps even any) of the readers of this journal. Moreover, we cannot speak for the vital contributions, thoughts, feelings, and insights of our LGBTQI+[4] /non-binary colleagues and the specific and horrific abuses they face. Instead, our contribution in submitting this article is a performative and methodological one. We acknowledge the missing contributors and context from business management research through our factional narratives. Using "Faction" as our method of choice highlights the role of active silencing and more subtle microaggressions, often drawing on intersectional issues, in limiting both the expert and employee voice of women scholars in business and management schools. We acknowledge the need for quiescence as part of women scholars' self-defense and survival strategies, and celebrate the ways in which this can support their power to influence or engage in resistance, motivated by opportunities of deviance or altruism. Most importantly, however, we aim to offer up one way of writing journal articles that does not reproduce the fiction of the Gentleman Academic in its search for expertise and knowledge.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Research data are not shared.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The terms "ethnic minority" and "African, Asian, Mixed Ethnic Heritage, Swedish, and White women" refer to various authors of this paper. References to other identifications refer to the identifications chosen by the authors of papers that we have quoted.

[2] The ABS list ranks journal outlets on the basis of their 'quality' according to the judgements of the expert panels that make up the Chartered Association of Business Schools.

[3] "A national assessment of research that takes place accross UK universities." "The framework is used by the four UK higher education funding bodies (Research England, the Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland) to assess the quality of research and to inform the distribution of research funding - around £2 billion per year, to UK universities. This funding is known as Mainstream Quality-Related (QR) funding. In addition to funding allocation, the REF also provides accountability for public investment, so that the benefits of the research being undertaken can be demonstrated, and is significant in benchmarking." Simple Guide to REF 2021. Exeter University. https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/ref2021/Simple_Guide_to_REF2021.pdf.

[4] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex. The plus sign highlights that this is not an exhaustive list.

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