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BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVES' WIVES

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BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVES' WIVES

ABSTRACT

This article shows how historical studies enrich our understanding of imprinting theory and can further our knowledge about gender in business schools. In the founding period of executive education following World War II, rather than excluding women from participation, U.S. business schools included women as wives in the socialization process as their husbands trained for top corporate manager positions. We contend that the imprint of the separate spheres ideology, whereby men and women engaged in different aspects of social and economic life, persisted in subsequent decades despite business schools' efforts to more fully integrate women into the classroom. The article makes two contributions to imprinting theory. First, it shows how a historical approach to studying ideological imprints from a founding period develops our knowledge as to why some imprints persist over time. Second, it extends our understanding on how to study imprints in a multilevel context. Our empirical data draws from the archives of leading business schools, as well as from academic literature, popular business articles, media reports, and a literary novel.

Keywords

Business schools; Executive education; Gender; History; Management education: Imprinting theory

BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVES' WIVES

In her novel, *The Week of the Wives,* Sarah-Elisabeth Rodger (1958) described the last week of the thirteen-week Advanced Management Program (AMP) at Harvard Business School (HBS). The AMP was a non-degree program established in 1945 for men—and until 1962, only for men—who were chosen by their companies to attend the program as a step on their way to top executive positions. Having studied hard and lived close together with other men for twelve weeks on campus, the AMP participants were allowed to invite their wives to live with them in a Boston hotel for the last week of the program (Wingo, 1967). During this week, the wives were socialized into the norms and culture of executive life through special lectures such as on "The Care and Feeding of your Executive Husband", case discussions on "The Wives of Management", museum visits, and cocktail parties. In the novel, one of the key persons, Harry, explained to his wife that he hoped she would get some idea of what he and other men had gone through during the twelve weeks. Harry encouraged his wife to join him on his journey into the new elite of professional managers in U.S. business:

> He had hoped, with all the other women doing the same things, here for the same purpose, that Louise might achieve a sort of identification, if not a companionship, with them (Rodger, 1958: 72).

Executive education, defined as short non-degree programs for managers who aimed at top executive positions, emerged as a new sector within U.S. post-war business schools with HBS' AMP program from 1945 as the first one (Amdam, 2020). During the 1950s, the executive programs students were all male. The programs approached women as a group of outsiders who should be socialized into the norms and values necessary to support their coming executive husbands, and should share his new role. Since then, more women have enrolled in business schools, joining the students ranks of MBA and executive education programs, business schools have created degree programs to serve the needs of a broader student population including women (Friga, Bettis, & Sulliva, 2003; Ibeh, Carter, Poff, & Hamill, 2008), and they have designed non-degree programs for emerging female executives (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Despite these efforts, women remain more underrepresented as students in MBA programs than, for example, in law and medical schools (Kelan & Jones, 2010). And women are especially few in programs aimed at preparing managers for top executive positions. In 2019, only one of the top-10 programs in the *Financial Times* ranking of Executive MBA (EMBA), and two of the top-ten in the executive education open programming ranking had more than 35% women in the class (FT Ranking, 2020).

These observations illustrate a major challenge facing today's business schools: what constrains the business school from becoming an institution that promotes greater gender equality not just for its students but also in the executive ranks of the broader corporate environment? Our approach to this overall question is to search for historical explanations that are grounded in organizational theory. Our findings enhance our understandings of imprinting theory, a prime example of historical theories of organization (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Zald, 1990). Imprinting theory holds that during a sensitive moment when an organization was founded, contextual elements make an imprint on the characteristics of that organization (Erçek & Günçavdı, 2016; Johnson, 2007; Simsek, Fox, & Heavey, 2015; Sinha, Jaskiewicz, Gibb, & Combs, 2020; Stinchcombe, 1965). These imprints are strongly resistant to future alterations, except during a new sensitive period, which is characterized by "high susceptibility to environmental influence" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 199). This article explores how strong prescriptive roles for men and women in the post World War II period made lasting imprints on executive education programs during their founding period. Gender historians have shown that the separate spheres ideology (Cott, 1997; Kerber, 1988; Welter, 1966) became especially prominent during the postwar period, upholding stringent behavioral expectations for men and women (Coontz, 1992; May, 1988). We argue that these gender roles from the founding period of executive education became entrenched in the business school's structure and culture, even in the face of new contextual changes.

Given the existing literature, we posit the following research question: to what extent can imprints from the founding period of executive education explain the current underrepresentation of women in business schools' executive education programs? Based on Sinha et al. (2020: 558) and Marquis & Tilcsik (2013: 199), we define an imprint as a characteristic that is embedded in a focal entity during a sensitive period and persists despite subsequent environment change. We will explore this question by presenting historical evidence of how three university business schools—Harvard Business School (HBS), the Alfred P. Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Stanford Graduate School of Business (Stanford)—actively socialized the wives of their executive student husbands in the founding period of executive education. To make our observations more robust, we add two other dimensions to our study. First, we discuss the nature of university life before and during the founding of executive education, using evidence from the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and its business school, Wharton. Second, we analyze the reaction of business schools to contextual changes in the late 1960s and 1970s, when an impetus to advance gender equality offered a new, additional imprint that challenged the founding imprint made by separate spheres.

Our historical account shows that there were no female participants in executive education during its founding period. Yet instead of perceiving women as excluded from the executive ranks, we demonstrate their engagement—as wives of their participant husbands—in the broader process of socializing men into the values and norms of the business elite. Based on this evidence and analysis, we make two contributions to imprinting theory. First, we contribute to the understanding of what makes an imprint persist or decay over time by exploring how an imprint changes or remains over several decades from a founding period to another period of changing ideological influence. Based on this, we address the need for further research on what creates or constitutes a sensitive period.

Second, we respond to the call for more multilevel research on imprints (Marquis & Tilcsik 2013). Bringing together two imprinting dimensions—the imprint on executive education as a building block of an organization (business schools) and on the organizational collective of several business schools—allows us to better understand the current gender climate of the business school. We hold that business schools were active players in cultivating and reinforcing separate spheres ideology, bringing the traditional gender roles of the external environment (including the home) into the social and cultural life of the business school. Because business school educators and administrators perceived the corporate wife to be a crucial element in the career success of the organization man, gender role expectations became embedded into the institutional structure of management education. And while business schools helped to prescribe the comportment of future executives' wives, we will show that the wives too reproduced separate spheres ideology, pursuing opportunities to hone distinctive skills that could contribute to their husband's careers.

We suggest that in our case, the strength of the original imprint from the separate spheres ideology persisted to a large extent even in the face of new external changes. This lasting imprint may explain why women remain underrepresented in management education, and why, even as they have increased their proportion among student ranks, they nevertheless face disadvantages within the business school climate (e.g. Bryans & Mavin, 2003; McTiernan & Flynn, 2011; Simpson, 2006; Simpson & Ituma, 2009). In this way, we use imprinting theory to show how traditional gender roles, embedded during executive education's founding period, have persisted, and we suggest that even today as university adminstrators and corporate actors actively commit to gender equality, the institution itself remains constrained by the separate spheres imprint.

The article is structured in the following way: in the next parts, we discuss relevant literature and then present our methodology approach. This is followed by two empirical sections. The first shows how the ideology of separate spheres defined gender relations in business and university life, elucidating contextual factors present during the founding period of executive education. Then, we discuss to what extent changing gender norms from the external environment, beginning in the 1960s, challenged separate spheres ideology and made a distinctive imprint on business schools' practices. In the discussion section we integrate our empirical findings with imprinting theory, demonstrating that dominant gender norms, and in particular those from the 1950s, have shaped the way that business schools educate and socialize students in preparation for the corporate world.

THE EXECUTIVES' WIVES AND THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

This great challenge for business schools—achieving greater gender equity—has not attracted much research in the management education discourse. However, there are some exceptions. According to Kelan and Jones (2010), women's historically lower participation in management education could be explained by the dominance of a masculine culture in MBA programs where, to fit in, women have to behave as "surrogate males" (Kilduff & Mehra, 1996: 118). Simpson (2006) argues that perhaps the masculine nature of business schools not only has deterred women from applying, but also has stifled their learning. Bryans and Mavin (2003) argue that perhaps men and women have different ways of learning, and business schools have accommodated the male experience; and Vinnicombe and Singh (2003) suggest that female-only management education could help more women succeed. Among historians, Larsen (2011) has demonstrated that masculinity and manhood influenced the formation of management education in France and Norway in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our approach here is to utilize imprinting theory to demonstrate how a traditional gender ideology became embedded in the business school through the practices of executive education.

Imprinting theory

According to imprinting theory, contextual factors such as the economy, technology, and institutions make imprints on an organization, especially during foundation. According to Marquis and Tilcsik (2013:199) imprinting is "a process whereby, during a brief period of susceptibility, a focal entity develops characteristics that reflect prominent features of the environment, and these characteristics continue to persist despite significant environmental changes in subsequent periods". Stinchcombe (1965) first drew attention to the importance of a founding period, demonstrating the lasting quality of an original imprint over time. These imprints tend to survive over time due to inertial forces such as lack of competition, vested interest or ideology, or tradition (Stinchcombe, 1965). However, imprints are not always stable: they may also change or decay (Simsek et al., 2015). Founding imprints might be reproduced at later points in time, as Johnson (2007) demonstrates in her study of the Paris Opera, where she makes a case for an analytical separation between the founding period and the reproduction of the founding characteristic. Or entirely new imprints may be added to the old ones as layers of history, with changes occurring during a new sensitive period, or a "period of transition during which the focal entity exhibits high susceptibility to external influences" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 195). The length and frequency of these sensitive periods may vary. For example, a historical study of a Turkish business group mentions three sensitive periods including the founding period from 1957-1959 over a period of

40 years (Erçek & Günçavdı, 2016). Between these sensitive periods, actors are "largely impotent with respect to existing imprints" (Sinha et al., 2020: 558).

Imprints can originate from a variety of sources at the individual level (i.e., Johnson 2007; Burton & Beckman, 2007), at the institutional level (i.e., Dobbin, 1994; Loundsbury, 2007), and from economic and technological conditions (i.e., Carroll & Hannan, 1989). Among these sources of imprints, ideological factors are mentioned (Johnson, 2007; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Simsek et al., 2015), but with a few important exceptions (e.g., socialism in Kriauciunas & Kale, 2006; self reliance idelology in Raynard, Loundsbury & Greenwood, 2013; and Marxist-Leninism in Wang, Du, & Marquis, 2019), have not been at the forefront of research. We add to the scant literature regarding ideological imprints by analyzing the imprint of separate spheres ideology on the social roles of men and women during the founding period of the executive education programs at HBS (executive education founded in 1945), Stanford (1952) and MIT (1956). In this founding period of executive education (Amdam, 2020), the separate spheres ideology was strong in society, with roots in 19th century family and economic life (Welter, 1966; Cott, 1997; Kerber, 1988). Our findings address two debates within the literature on imprinting theory: the question about changes over time, and the multilevel dimension of the theory.

Existing literature about imprinting theory acknowledges that it is a dynamic process; that is, new imprints may lead to changes in existing impressions, especially during new sensitive periods. Still we know little about how imprints develop and eventually change over time (Marquis & Qiao, 2020: 796). At the ideological level, we address to what extent a new imprint of gender equality, which emerged from social and legal change in the late 1960s, influenced the existing imprint in business schools for gender roles: separate spheres ideology. Studies of ideological imprints on individuals show that imprints formed at an early stage in the life cycle are especially strong and persistent (Wang et al., 2019), and thus, in our case, we cannot assume that a new ideology (gender equality) would result in changes to the existing imprint from the founding period (separate spheres ideology). Imprints from the founding period may persist, or, over time, new imprints may be added to organizations as layers upon one another (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). New imprints may actually alter original imprints in new sensivite periods characterized by "high susceptibility to environmental influence" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 199). However, the understanding of the notion of sensitive periods is cursory; the timing and duration of sensitive periods, and the relationship between environmental changes and organizational susceptibility is underexplored (Simsek et al. 2015: 307). This also includes if and how sensitive periods occur, or do not occur. In addition to exploring the separate sphere ideology as a contextual imprint on the norms and values of executive education, we are also aware that the new educational concept (executive education) may have been imprinted by existing gender policies and practices of the university. Therefore, to better understand the contextual factors that shaped executive education, we explore relevant gender roles in university life that existed prior to the founding period, including a section on how wives of the students in the oldest business school in the U.S., Wharton (established in 1881), reproduced the behavior of faculty wives.

As Marquis and Tilcsik (2013) describe, scholars have shown the workings of the imprinting process on various entities including organizational collectives, meaning groups of organizations such as an industry (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013) or a group of new ventures (Snihur & Zott, 2020); organizations (i.e., Baron, Hannan, & Burton, 1999); and organizational building blocks, meaning "elements from which organizations are constructed" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 214; see also Cohen, 2013), underlining the multiple organizational dimension of imprinting theory (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). According to Simsek et al. (2015: 289), "we lack a framework for generalizing theoretical constructs, statements, and relationships across level of analysis, contexts, and disciplinarian boundaries." Here, we follow Marquis and Tilcsik's

(2013) distinction among entities and bring together two levels of analysis: imprinting on organizational building blocks and imprinting on organizational collectives. The founding of executive education with its strong prescriptive gender roles represented a new building block within the organizational collective of the business school. After World War II, the non-degree executive education programs were introduced as innovative elements (i.e., additional layers of administration, new student enrollment principles, different exam systems) into well-established universities (Harvard founded in 1636, MIT 1861, and Stanford 1885) and their business schools (1908, 1914, and 1925, respectively). The role of Harvard, MIT, and Stanford as pioneers in establishing executive education in the U.S., and more broadly as leaders in the business school industry, allows us to use this sample as representative of an organizational collective.

Separate spheres ideology

To capture the gender ideology that made imprints on executive education programs we draw upon historical literature regarding the norms and behaviors of women as wives. Gender historians have studied the ways that wives contributed to the maintenance of the household and the development of the U.S. economy. In the early 19th century with the rise of industrialization, most wage work moved outside the home to more centralized sites of production. Whereas men earned wages for their work in factories, the domestic labor of wives, daughters and sisters became less visible in the new industrial economy. Housework, which was performed by women, was recast as an activity demonstrative of love and familial devotion (Boris, 1994; Boydston, 1990). In an influential 1966 article, Welter (1966) first described what would be known as separate spheres ideology, meaning that women had their own sphere or domain of influence over the domestic realm while men took charge in the more public arenas of politics and commerce. Because women were believed to have innate abilities different from those of men, they were to honor their roles as wives and mothers by cultivating four traits (piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity), which would contribute to the wellbeing of their families and to the larger society (also see Cott, 1997; Kerber, 1988). Distinct social roles for men and women constituted an important element of a new middle class in the United States, such that to be middle class meant that a man's wife did not have to earn wages (Ryan, 1981), though she still made less visible contributions to the family economy.

While this ideology of separate spheres arose in the 1820s and 1830s and subsequently persisted, it became especially strong as an ideology in the post World War II period. May (1988) contends that conservative familial ideals characterized the 1950s as a response to the political uncertainties arising from the Cold War. She holds that Americans emphasized the family unit as a haven from insecurity: "cold war ideology and the domestic revival [were] two sides of the same coin (May, 1988: xxi)." Coontz (1992) builds upon May's narrative, emphasizing that the ideological strength of separate spheres in the postward period. She contends that the idealized nuclear family of the 1950s represented an aberration relative to other familial forms that were more common and more acceptable, in earlier and later decades. In the 1950s, more American families were able to afford having a full-time wife and mother because of postwar prosperity: higher wages allowed for a single male breadwinner who could support dependents comfortably.

Thus, the dominance of separate spheres ideology in the 1950s allowed for the prominence of executive wives in social and cultural life of the university and the corporation. Though these women did not earn wages themselves, nonetheless they contributed to the careers of their husbands. We expect that management education, as an institution designed to prepare students for the realities of the corporate world, would be imbued with these gendered distinctions between home and work. And indeed, business schools did socialize women to assume the role of executive wife.

METHODOLOGY

In this article, we use historical methodology, investigating historical sources of different forms (e.g. legal documents, correspondence between actors, minutes from meetings, interviews), which often are located in archives. The search for information from these sources drives the research inquiry and process in history as opposed to in management studies, where the collection of data typically serves to test a preformulated hypothesis (Lipartito, 2014). We have followed Kipping, Wadhwani and Bucheli's (2014) advice for historical methodology in cross-disciplinarian history and organization studies, which draws upon three principles: source criticism, triangulation, and hermeneutic interpretation.

First, the principle of source criticism highlights an awareness of the origin and function of the historical sources, which were not created primarily for historical research, but by actors with other purposes. As historians discovering a source, we should have some skepticism of the author's intent (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946). Hence, the researchers need to establish the validity of a source by analyzing the motives for creating and storing the source. We also need to establish the credibility of the source, which means reflecting on how trustworthy and reliable the sources are. Historical research also needs to be verifiable, and historians practice source transparency, linking evidences back to specific sources (Kipping, et al., 2014).

The principle of triangulation refers to the fact that historians cross check information and analysis from different sources, or other published research works. A historical record is usually incomplete, and historians often remain unsure as to why certain sources have become part of the historical record while others have not. Because we lack access to materials which do not appear in the archives, the historical method relies on some speculation due to the incomplete record we have of the past (Megill, 2007). By hermeneutic interpretation, we mean that the sources are defined as texts, and should be interpreted in the social, cultural and political context in which they were produced (Kipping et al., 2014). We need to interpret language as emerging not just from a single actor but also from complex social, cultural, and political environments (Skinner, 1969).

To get a deeper understanding of our topic we examine four university business schools based on an extensive reading of historical literature (Conn, 2019; Engwall, Kipping, & Üsdiken, 2016; Khurana, 2007; Locke, 1989; Sass, 1982). Three of these, HBS, MIT, and Stanford, were chosen because we perceive them as highly influential both in management education in general and in the founding period of executive education. The fourth, Penn, was chosen because the university established the U.S.'s first business school (Wharton) and could illustrate relevant practices on gender issues within an organizational collective.

The socialization of the students' wives into the norms and values expected for spouses of top executives is an example of a topic that requires extensive archival work to find anything of relevance. Historians rely on primary source documents as their evidence, but we are beholden to what previous generations preserved as to what records still remain. Thus, the work of wives, relative to the activities of their husbands, is much less visible in our remaining records. For example, discussions relevant to the topic are not collected and organized in special series like, for example, minutes from committees meetings or records from a dean. Our topical area of socializing wives also defied keyword searches. Instead, information was found "here and there" and where a researcher might least expect it. This archival search unveiled several types of sources such as written letters and statements, but also printed documents such as brochures, alumni magazines, and clippings from newspapers. These printed sources also illustrate how archival research functions as a door-opener to sources that otherwise would have been overlooked.

We have chosen a strategy of combining different types of sources, and we regard both published and unpublished sources as primary sources as long as they express first-hand information about the studied topic. One type of source is university newspapers and alumni magazines that often report on current events. Another type is annual reports and detailed inventory lists of what is stored in the archives. A third type of sources is business magazines and journals that were interested in the development of education and training programs for managers. These sources have been combined in the case studies of HBS, MIT, Stanford, and Penn. A special source is the novel that we found in the HBS historical archives, *The Week of the Wives* (Rodger, 1958), which in a literary way reported the discussions and reflections of the wives. Quotes from the novel are used for illustrative purposes when the observations are supported by other sources. Finally, we draw upon popular understandings from the relevant historical period of the role of the corporate wife as outlined by sociologists, psychologists, management scholars, mainstream media, and prescriptive literature. The main sources are illustrated in Table 1.

<Table 1. in here>

THE MAKING OF THE EXECUTIVES' WIVES

The separate spheres ideology in business

We focus on full-time wives as pivotal in their husbands' management careers. Although managerial capitalism arose in the United States well before the 1950s (Chandler, 1984), the cultural conditions of the decade (Coontz, 1992; May, 1988) drew public attention to the role of the executive wife. In the 1950s, during the founding period of executive education, wives gained recognition as influential to the breadwinner's success, shaping the nature of managerial capitalism by augmenting—or possibly undermining—the social mobility of their husbands. Although historically men from the upper class have composed the majority of the American business elite, (Mills, 1945; also see Taussig & Joslyn, 1932), by the 1950s, greater social mobility became possible for those without existing capital or connections to industry leaders (Newcomer, 1955; Warner & Abegglen, 1955).

In their interviews with 8,300 executives and their families, social scientists Warner and Abegglen (1955) found evidence of greater social mobility, but noted that "the mobile man must leave behind the ways of behaving, the sets of manners" from his lower-class origin (p. 62). The type of marital partner at his side was one important element in his adoption of new behaviors and manners. The separate spheres ideology figured prominently into the making of a business leader. Warner and Abegglen found that many successful corporate men had married what they termed a "community-centered woman", meaning someone heavily engaged in the social life of the community (1955: 122). Her activities in a distinctive sphere would "help translate his economic achievement into social advancement for the entire family: husband, wife, and children" (p. 122). Therefore, the personalities, behaviors, and engagements of the corporate wife could aid or diminish the mobility of her husband. Warner and Abergglen (1956: 64) noted in the *Harvard Business Review* that increasing cultural attention that was being devoted to the corporate spouse due to her importance: "Judging from the content of recent magazine articles, books and movies, the only people more interesting to observers of American society than executives are the wives of executives".

The expanded cultural importance of the nuclear family in the postwar period (Coontz, 1992; May 1988) served as an external force that imprinted separate spheres ideology on the professional role of managers, as seen in reports from the business press. A two-part series in the October and November 1951 editions of *Fortune* magazine explored the significance of the corporate wife. Based on 230 in-depth interviews with corporate executives and their wives, the

Fortune editors, who were management consultants, organizational psychologists, and sociologists, co-authored the popular reports. One author, sociologist William H. Whyte, also utilized this material about corporate wives in two chapters of *Is Anybody Listening?* (Whyte, 1952), as well as in his famous critique of the homogenization of American society, *The Organization Man* (Whyte, 1956).

Whyte explained that "for generations business has been aware that executives' wives play a great if imponderable role" (Whyte,1951b: 109). What was new by the 1950s was that American corporations were realizing just how pivotal the corporate wife could be to the career of her husband. He wrote, "the corporation now concedes, one of the principal members of its community remains officially almost unnoticed; to wit, the Wife" (Whyte, 1951a: 86). The ideal wife elevated conformity and loyalty, much like the ideal organization man. Corporations were realizing that they wanted a wife who would prioritize her husband's work; she would create and maintain a stable home environment and thus "liberate her husband's total energies for the job" (Whyte, 1951a: 86). Adaptability also was required from wives because physical transfers were becoming more common as part of a career progression (Whyte, 1951b: 150). In addition, corporate wives should be gregarious, conversationalists, and "social operators" (Whyte, 1951a: 87). A wife who was not very sociable could hurt her husband's career because, "a lot of business is done on weekends" (Whyte, 1951b: 208).

Other media reflections on corporate wives emerged following the *Fortune* series, all with comparable messages. In *Newsweek* (1954:81), management consultant George Fry was quoted as valuing a corporate wife who could entertain and charm. In a *Life* magazine expose, "The Pirates of Personnel," corporate recruiters admitted that they considered the wives' sociability when assessing a possible executive poach: "the ability to mingle well socially can be very important to business success; the top man often invites all his executives to a weekly dinner or perhaps to a Sunday afternoon barbecue, which wives are expected to attend" (Young, 1961: 124).

To be sure, some companies claimed to have little interests in wives. According to an oil executive, "we are just as happy if we never see her at all"; a motor company executive echoed, "wives' activities are their own business" (Whyte, 1951b: 150). However, *Fortune*'s data on hiring showed that about half of the companies in its study had "wife screening" processes in place. In one company, about 20 percent of potential hires were rejected because of their wives' perceived shortcomings (Whyte, 1951b: 109). In fact, some companies believed so strongly in assessing wives that their practices bordered on surveillance. One life insurance company checked a wife's credit rating and also surveyed her acquaintances to "determine how popular or unpopular she has been in her community." Another organization did a background check on wives' finances to ensure that she did not have inherited wealth, which could "mitigate the man's economic drive" (Whyte,1951b: 109).

After the selection process, assessment of wives continued for promotion and advancement of husbands. At the Electrolux Corporation, a leading company in the direct-selling of vacuum cleaners, a promotion to the branch manager position relied on a positive appraisal of the salesman's wife. Candidates and their wives were invited to the executive offices in New York City to spend a day with vice president James F. Roach. "'If we sense that the relationships between the two people are not what we think they should be, we will not advance that man," Roach revealed to an international newspaper (Hoffman, 1958). The president of an insurance company admitted that he had decided to promote a less capable man over a more competent contender because the wife of the latter had "absolutely no sense of public relations" (Whyte, 1951b: 110). A wife who drank that "fourth martini" in front of the boss could only subvert her husband's chance of promotion, according to executives (Whyte, 1951b: 110).

Business schools and the making of the executives' wives

The separate sphere ideology imprinted not only the corporation and its managerial ranks but also the business school environment. Traditionally, the formal channels of management education had been for men only. Before World War II, business schools had engaged with women in two ways. The first way was to exclude them, or at least restrict them from full participation in the degree programs. The second was to allow them to enroll in separate women's colleges, some of which allowed female students to study business school subjects. At HBS women were excluded from the MBA program, but at Harvard's Radcliffe College for women, business school professors offered a one-year Training Course in Personnel Administration beginning from 1937 (Howells, 1978). The Wharton MBA program began admitting women as degree candidates in the late 1920s, but by 1951, still only 6 female students were enrolled in total. Until 1954 at the University of Pennsylvaia, undergraduate women could take business classes from Wharton faculty at a separate college for women called the College of Liberal Arts for Women (Lloyd, 2001).

Separate spheres for men and women (Cott, 1997; Kerber, 1988; Welter, 1966) became particularly strong as a cultural ideal in the postwar period (Coontz, 1992; May, 1988), and was embedded in university life. Although both men and women earned degrees, higher education was imprinted with separate spheres ideology, as men prepared to become breadwinners and women prepared to become wives and mothers. Many young women attended college primarily to find suitable husbands, not necessarily to develop their own career interests (Hamilton, 2014; Horowitz, 1984). In the 1950s, a large number of Radcliffe College graduates became housewives after college, but also were described by Howells (1978: 41) as "a vast reserve of professional, of administrative, and scholarly competence". Separate spheres ideology also underlied the reaction of some stakeholders to the integration of Radcliffe students into the HBS degree program. In 1959, HBS began to allow women who had graduated from the one-year Radcliffe business program to apply for the second year of the HBS MBA program. Yet one of Radcliffe's trustees, Margaret Earhardt Smith, was furious that women were applying, a transgression against the dominant imprint of separate spheres ideology. She argued that the graduate's – or the wives' – priority was, and should remain, to their domestic and material role. Smith contended that women should get some education at Radcliffe, work briefly until marriage, subsequently stay at home to prioritize motherhood, and then consider a return to work after some years (Horowitz, 2012).

In the rest of this section, we show how contextual factors shaped the separate spheres imprint on the founding of executive education, and thus on the business schools. We demonstrate that wives learned by observing and mimicking the role of faculty wives, and by participating in informal aspects of executive education programs.

The model of the faculty tea clubs

The imprint of traditional gender roles, whereby a wife's domestic acuity supported her husband's professional life, imbued the campus community. Professors' wives formed clubs to support their husbands and contribute to university life through the first part of the 20th century. After World War II, MBA students' wives, having observed these norms and behaviors, assumed similar traditions in preparation for their future role as executive wives. We contend that the role of the professor's wife was imprinted with expectations similar to those of the executive wife, whereby a woman's social graces could influence a man's career success. In fact, in its articles on executive wives, *Fortune* included academia, writing that one college president would invite himself and his own wife for a home visit to eat breakfast with a job candidate and his wife. "The wife who didn't fix her husband a good breakfast…wasn't a good risk," according to this college president (Whyte, 1951b: 109).

Across the nation, many universities had faculty wives' clubs, which demonstrate the imprint of separate spheres ideology on the campus community even before the founding period of executive education in the 1950s. Since the turn of the 20th century, these clubs engaged in similar activities: there were social events like “a sherry party at Harvard, a square dance at Cornell” (Duncan, 1956: 2), as well as golf at North Carolina and craft shows at the University of Southern California. In addition, wives organized educational programming on topics as varied as reading Bible literature, practicing automobile driving, painting with watercolors, understanding health insurance, discussing child care best practices, learning about forestry, practicing flower arranging, or even surveying the history of clocks (Duncan, 1956). At Penn, a Faculty Tea Club, founded by women whose husbands, fathers, or brothers were on faculty, began meeting in 1906 at various faculty homes. The purpose of the club was to extend a welcome to new faculty and their families, as well as to encourage fellowship within the university community (Public Ledger, 1928). The wife of the Penn president served as an honorary club president, and as hostess to an annual event at the president’s house to welcome club newcomers. The Executive Board extended the courtesy of membership to the wives and mothers of university students during their residence in the city (*Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1914).

The Faculty Tea Club impressed a separate spheres imprint upon university life: the activities of faculty wives, daughers, and sisters complemented the work of male professors and bettered the Penn community. In addition to bi-monthly meetings, the Penn faculty club organized educational, philanthropic, and social events, hosting faculty lectures and discussions of current events for members. Tea Club wives helped other wives, particularly the wives of international students who were learning to navigate the Penn campus. In addition, some service reached beyond the campus, including volunteer work for the Philadelphia Orchestra and funding for medical research (in particular for heart disease and tuberculosis) (Hedges, 1982).

Reports from *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, a student newspaper, revealed that the Faculty Tea Club enriched student life in several ways. To promote faculty-student interaction, the Tea Club hosted an Annual University Tea Day to entertain more than three hundred faculty and students (*Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1914). Other receptions and dances had the additional purpose of raising money for the Faculty Tea Club's scholarship fund, which provided assistance to Penn students in financial need as well as to undergraduate women of exceptional academic character. Club members also helped to improve the decor in the women's dorm, Sergeant Hall (Hedges, 1982).

We have evidence that MBA student wives, as they prepared for their roles as executive wives, would come to adopt one particular routine of the faculty wives. In the 1930s, the Faculty Tea Club introduced a regular coffee hour, each afternoon from 4:30 until 5:30 p.m, for faculty and students (*Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1936). *The Daily Pennsylvanian* reported that coffee hours aimed to further the relationship between professor and student, and to "provide a place of social gathering on these dreary winter afternoons" (1941). The campus location of coffee hours began to rotate, and when held at the Wharton School, Mrs. C. Canby Balderston, wife of the dean, and Mrs. Thomas A. Budd, wife of the vice-dean, served as hostesses, pouring coffee and greeting attendees (*Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1950).

In the postwar period, students' wives became interested in mimicking the hostess role of faculty wives, keen to take part in faculty-student engagements. The managing editor of the *Daily Pennsylvanian* suggested that in addition to faculty wives, students' wives wanted to, and should, help to host coffee hours (*Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1947). This interest in assuming a hostess role demonstrated the reach of the separate spheres ideology imprint into university life. To better integrate students' wives, the MBA Club, which was the largest Wharton student club (in existence since at least 1940), began to organize events that included faculty, faculty wives, students, and students' wives (University of Pennsylvania, 1940), including dances each term (University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, 1959-1960, p. 20).

Through the MBA Club network, students' wives formed their own community to prepare for their future role as executive wives. The women initiated single-sex activities, like playing bridge, to stay occupied while their husbands remained busy (*Daily Pennsylvanian*, 1957). Much like the wives of the Faculty Tea Club, MBA wives also began to host twice weekly coffee hours in the MBA Lounge (University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, 1959-1960: 20). A picture in the 1960 Wharton bulletin showed MBA wives serving coffee to students and faculty during the MBA Coffee Hour (University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, 1959-1960: 13). MBA wives cultivated their own sphere of influence, complementing their husband's academic and professional efforts, and reinforcing the imprint of distinctive gender roles.

At Penn, likely the mission and activities of the Faculty Tea Club served as examples for student wives as they became more active in the 1950s through the MBA Wives' Club. Inspired by the engagements of faculty wives, student wives assumed role expectations from the separate spheres imprint. They kept themselves occupied with pursuits that ultimately would serve to support their husband's careers: they hosted social events, built networks with other wives, and served the university community. While on campus with their husbands, MBA wives looked to the activities of faculty wives in preparation for their future role as executive wives.

Faculty wives extended the separate spheres imprint beyond the United States to wherever their husbands were working. When U.S. professors travelled abroad to teach international executives, faculty wives often joined them, helping to socialize the executives. For example, in the Philippines, HBS professors taught a program for Southeast Asian executives for many years beginning in 1956. One of the participants in 1957, U Tin Htut from Burma, reported enthusiastically about the pivotal role of the professors' wives. He was happy with the academic program, but the extracurricular activities—golf, tennis, bowling, badminton, dinners, and cocktail parties—organized by faculty made an even stronger impression on him. As he learned to adopt the norms and lifestyle of modern American executives, what made the strongest impression was the dancing. Two of the HBS professors and their wives led instruction in modern ballroom dancing, and the wives especially opened his eyes to a new world:

> The professors' wives were very cooperative, and they were a great help to the participants in learning the latest steps in Cha Cha Cha, Calypso, Boogie Woogie, Tango, and the Waltz (Htut, 1957).

It was in this context that the wives of the men who participated in the executive programs at HBS, MIT, Stanford, and other business schools were offered to attend the weeks of the wives, and they did.

The week of the wives

In the U.S., separate spheres imprints were used in new residential executive education programs to teach participants and their wives new behaviors. For men, these executive education programs lasted typically from three to fifteen weeks; they were demanding—full days of courses (i.e., lectures, case discussions) and activities (i.e. professional networking), including preparation with other students during the evening. To remove distractions and allow for a more intensive learning experience, executive education students also lived together on-campus. Then, as a final event, wives were invited to campus to join their husbands for the end of the program, which at HBS, meant for the last six days (Amdam 2020), and at Stanford and MIT for the last three to four days (MIT, 1971; Stanford, 1968a). The core function of this final part of the program was similar across institutions: to socialize wives into the expected behavior of partners to top executives. The wives' programs provided instruction for women to help their husbands assume a new professional role and succeed in the ranks of the business elite. Based on narratives and pictures from the social events, almost all of the men had wives present for the end of the residential stay. In the novel *The Week of the Wives*, which follows seven husbands and their wives from morning to evening during the last week of the HBS program, one man did not have any wife. This is hardly mentioned, just understood, and treated almost as a taboo that leaves the reader to speculate on the reasons.

One element in the educational process for wives was to help them understand and appreciate the new position of their husband as a corporate leader. What could be more convincing to prove his importance to the company than to underline the fact that the men had been chosen to participate, chosen by their bosses – the top executives. Men had not applied to the program themselves. One evening, Harry, one of the seven husbands in the novel, told his wife that he had been chosen by his firm to participate in the program:

> He had explained slowly, carefully (that carefulness was the earliest indication of anger in Harry) that he hadn't asked to go, he'd been chosen (Rodger, 1958: 72).

The feeling of belonging to an exclusive group was supported by the program's efforts to foster shared roles for husbands and wives. While programs scheduled specific engagements (cocktail parties, concerts, or lectures) for only the wives in an effort to help them cultivate their own sphere of influence, there were also events that both husband and wife attended together since the role of the executive wife was to complement her husband's career. Through these joint activities, such as being invited to the men's presentation of their work and meeting the faculty, the wives became part of a community to "share … this important part of their husband's career" (MIT, 1971). Attending the program gave wives "an opportunity for socializing and forming new friendships" with each other (MIT, 1967) while also treating the husband-wife pair as a unit who, together, would make the journey upwards.

At Stanford, the executive program was "designed for men between the age of 35 and 50 with successful records of management responsibility" (Stanford, 1962). The wives were invited to the last week, and the program's 1968 yearbook showed "The girls we left behind": a picture of all the wives, dressed for a husband-wife social event during the last days of the program. In addition to attending parties with their spouses, the wives had their own programming such as educational lectures and off-site company visits (Stanford, 1968a).

At MIT, the wives of men in executive programs and graduate degree program were strongly encouraged to participate actively in "The Graduate Management Society Wives", the female counterpart to the men's "Graduate Management Society" (GMS). The associate dean of the executive program, Peter B. Gill, appealed "To All Sloan Fellows and their Lovely Ladies" to participate on committees in preparation for a three-day alumni meeting (Gill, 1968). The Graduate Management Society Wives organized banquets, lectures (by MIT professors and Boston businessmen), bridge evenings, coffee evenings, holiday events, and dances. While cultivating friendships among the wives, the association aimed to support the husbands' activities. Therefore, the president of the wives association said, "we will make decorations for the dances and for other husband-wife parties planned by the men's GMS group" (MIT, 1964).

In this way, the separate spheres imprint imbued the training to become part of the business elite, as executives and their wives contributed actively to the executive program. Both husband and wife took part in the new professional role. At MIT, this important role of spouses was overtly communicated to firms considering the executive program. "They [the wives] contribute a great deal to the Program," the brochure said (MIT, 1971). While integral to their husband's professional development, sometimes wives offered unwelcomed opinions, perspectives, and assertions that reached beyond appropriate boundaries for their sphere. Rich, from the novel *The Week of Wives*, told his wife, on the last day of the week, that she had been of great help to him in many decisions he had made for the company. In fact, she had been a very good "management counselor". But his tone triggered concern in his wife, Camilla: "What you're trying to tell me by the oblique approach is that you don't want a management counselor any more—that's it, isn't it, Rick?" Rich admitted: "No man does, as a substitute for a wife" (Rodger, 1958: 317). We discern from this passage that an overly active corporate wife—and one with pointed opinions—could become too intrusive for her husband's liking.

THE EXECUTIVE WIFE IDEOLOGY UNDER FIRE

Discontentment among wives

In the mid-1960s, the separate spheres ideology, which had been bolstering the role and development of executive wives, faced challenges from social movements and legal change. The 1960s feminist movement disrupted longstanding norms about the appropriate roles for women (Rosen, 2000), which in turn destabilized separate spheres ideology and public regard for the executive wife. And with the passage of nondiscrimination laws like Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States, overt questions to job candidates about their marital status would become impermissible as part of the legal ban against gender discrimination (Bender, 1971; Edelman, 1983).

Although the business school instituted some operational changes, the entrenchment of separate spheres ideology persisted (Bryans & Mavin, 2003; McTiernan & Flynn, 2011; Simpson & Ituma, 2009). Arguably, the business school continued to reinforce masculine values (Simpson, 2006) given organizational expectations that executives should be fully and completely committed to their professional lives (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000). According to Burton & Beckman (2007: 242), "as positions are enacted in organizations, they generate position-specific expectations" such that future female students had to contend with the constraints of the original role for women in the business school: future executive wife. The position imprint of women as wives continued to constitute an important organizational building block of the business school, as "the traces of old layers" regarding separate spheres interacted with new ideas about gender equality (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 197; also see Cooper, Rose, Greenwood, & Hinings, 2000).

Thus, even amid the transformative social and legal environment of the 1960s and 1970s, some corporate actors remained committed to evaluating wives as part of the selection process given the endurance of the separate spheres imprint. In a 1965 survey of the 300 top-ranking executives who made up the Dun's Review President's Panel, still two-thirds thought it highly desirable or necessary to meet a man's wife before he was appointed to an executive position (Roberts, 1965). Management scholar Alfred Stoess's (1973) research on "wife-oriented companies," published in the early 1970s, reported ample evidence of firms interviewing the wives of potential managers.

Yet the enduring separate spheres ideology was challenged by new currents that were exposing a gloomier side of the executive wife role. Psychiatrist Robert Seidenberg pointed to the feminist movement as facilitating dissatisfaction among wives in his book *Corporate Wives or Corporate Causalities* (1973). Detrimental mental health effects accompanied the executive wife role given that physical transfers were common. Although women had always acted supportive, relocation triggered depression since women were uprooted from their social circle and had to rebuild a new sphere of influence for themselves, their husbands, and their children in a different community (Seidenberg, 1973). Executive wives were highly educated but reported being lonely, according to *Mrs. Success*, a book based on interviews with such women, written by advertising executive Lois Wyse (1970). A *Town & Country* article, "Liberated Executive Wives" reported that women "destined for the pedestal…as the wife of a successful man" seemed to be some of the loudest voices in the revolt. Journalist Marylin Bender profiled the eight members of the Women's Liberation Collective of the Wives' Club at Harvard Business School. Although "not a very militant group by the standards of radical feminism," according to Bender, they told her: "'we want something more out of life than our husbands can provide. We don't want to be just reflections of them'" (Bender, 1971: 111).

Executive education's reaction

Business schools began to open their doors more widely for women in management education, and very slowly women's enrollment increased. By 1970, women comprised about 9 percent of the students receiving undergraduate degrees from U.S. business schools, but only about 4 percent of the MBA degrees awarded (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Regarding executive education, according to a global survey of executive programs from 1969, only Northwestern's program did not accept women as participants among five U.S. programs for top executives. Among the providers of 37 U.S. executive programs for middle managers, 31 accepted women formally, two did not, and four did not answer (McNulty, 1969).

In 1962, the acceptance of Grace M. Willis as the first women in the executive class at Stanford (alongside 57 men) generated some debate. Miss Willis, as she was called, graduated from law school in 1949, first working for a firm and then establishing her own practice. One of her clients, a manufacturer of neon lights, sponsored her application. Stanford administrators admitted some hesitation to let her into the program, which was "designed for men between 35 and 55 with successful management responsibility". Yet once there, Miss Willis reported that the men in the class were "friendly and causal", perhaps because she emphasized that she was not trying to uproot longstanding gender norms. Stanford's newsletter for students and alumni stressed that she was not a radical, writing that besides practicing law, Miss Willis, "also like[d] to cook and to have her clothes to individual feminine taste. She is [was] no crusader for women's rights" (Stanford, 1962).

On the whole, executive education's incorporation of women was slow as the separate spheres imprint remained, albeit in tension with the new ideology of gender equality. At HBS the first woman was accepted in 1963, one year after Stanford (Stanford, 1963); MIT opened its executive programs to women in 1969 (MIT, 1969) although for most of the 1970s, no women attended MIT's executive education. In 1973, one woman was enrolled in the four-week program for Urban Executives (MIT, 1973). But as late as 1982, MIT executive education records showed no women in attendance (MIT, 1982). At Stanford, after Grace Willis attended in 1962, there were only a few women registered in the executive program until the 1980s. In 1975, there were only two among 185 participants. And one of them, Carol F. Marchick, was a member of Stanford's faculty and assistant dean at the business school. The other, Verica Milicevic, was an export director of a firm in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia (Stanford, 1975).

In this context, the week of the wives not only continued, as evidence of the strength of the founding imprint. In promotional materials to potential clients, MIT described the executive programs as designed for men. That is, the purpose was "to assist young men to prepare themselves for future positions of leadership," according to one brochure (MIT, 1970). Under the assumption that students would be married men, another MIT brochure claimed that the objective of the wives' week was to allow them to "share […] this important part of their husband's career", and to "contribute […] to the Program" (MIT 1971). In 1975, MIT changed the language to be gender neutral, substituting "spouses" for the words "wives" and "husband", but the rest of the text about this week remained (MIT 1975). These archival materials demonstrate the layer of a newer imprint upon an older one. Despite the changing language towards gender equality, the structure and culture of the programs—as designed for men and their wives—remained intact.

Resistance to integrating women, both within universities and throughout the business world, allowed for the maintainence of the founding imprint amid educational and corporate transformation. At Harvard, the Radcliffe program in business administration was closed down in 1963 when HBS accepted women into the first year of the two-year MBA program. At that time, 1200 women had received a certificate for one-year graduate studies in business, which averaged around 50 per year (Horowitz, 2012: 141). During the first ten years after 1963, the number of women in HBS's MBA program was much less than 50 per year, meaning that the number of female graduate students studying business at Harvard de facto declined (Howells, 1978), In fact, a photograph preserved at Harvard of the 96 MBA graduates in the class of 1975 appears to show just three women (library.hbs.edu). This low proportion caused some unrest within the university, as did the 4:1 rule, whereby Harvard University practiced a 4-to-1 ratio of men to women in student enrollment. This 4:1 ratio finally ended in 1977 after some years of intense debate among faculty and students (Hicks, 2004; Horowitz, 2012).

At Stanford, many men expressed reservations about the presence of women in the MBA and executive program classes. In 1968, Stanford's alumni magazine featured a six-page article about female students in the MBA classes (Stanford, 1968b), when the MBA program contained eight women out of almost 300 men. Like Miss Grace Willis, these women distanced themselves from appearing too ambitious and unfeminine when interviewed for the magazine. One female student proclaimed: "I don't want to be a career woman, just a woman with a career". And in the article, some male students voiced negative reactions to the presence of female students with statements such as "Women's place is in the kitchen", an explicit reference to separate spheres. Even seemingly positive comments about the increasing numbers of female students reinforced traditional gender norms, with one male student observing, "Have you seen these girls—
they are quite attractive".

The journalist for the alumni magazine made a general observation that "old stereotypes are breaking down", but which stereotypes were breaking down and which new ones were emerging? According to the author, most male students complimented the women for "their 'social sophistication,'" suggesting the perseverance of the executive wife role. Perhaps female MBA students brought learnings once relegated to the week of the wives into the classroom. Women offered contributions regarding their own sphere of influence: "During class she may be asked to explain the housewife's consumer behavior. After class she may be asked for a date". Women were viewed as valuable because their feminine perspectives enriched the men's learning. For example, Professor Gerald C. Leader, who taught a class in sensitivity training, said that women made great contributions to the classroom. He remarked: "They can be catalysts in orienting the discussion to another point of view", referring to women as adding "intuition, imagination and human sensitivity." Therefore, when organizing the students of his MBA class into small groups, he made sure that each group included at least one woman. The aim of this approach was to supplement the men's learning and help them improve: "men need to be 'unfrozen' and 'opened up' a bit," according to Professor Leader. Former Dean Ernest C. Arbuckle supported this view. He argued that for the benefit of the men, more women should be added to the classes "because they raise the competitive spirit of the men. The men work harder […] to prove that it is a man's world after all" (Stanford, 1968b).

Although the societal prominence of the executive wife was declined by the 1970s, still business school students saw their own careers as intertwined with the character of their partners. Dr. Barrie S. Greiff began teaching "The Executive Family" at HBS in 1970 to try to combat the idea that career success should be prioritized without much attention or regard for the health of the marriage. A 1974 profile of his course in *The Christian Science Monitor* unveiled the tension between corporate promotion and successful family life. Two versions of the course were offered: one to second-year MBA students (Greiff chose 25 students and their spouses to participate); and another in HBS's executive education program for management development, where the course was positioned during the last week so that wives, who were present for their husband's graduation, also could participate (Rubin, 1974). Another HBS elective class for both students and their partners, "The Social Psychology of Management," was profiled in the *Chicago Tribune*. The instructor, psychologist Dr. Abraham Zaleznik, told the newspaper that his course tried to address the potential conflicts between work and family life that managers faced. For instance, the course recognized that for MBA students' spouses, "isolation can be a problem," according to Zaleznik, especially if women were at home with kids, and living off of the HBS campus (Collins, 1985). As late as in 1979, at a career day organized by the HBS Women Students Association, keynote speaker Barbara Quint advised women to carefully consider their spouse selection in light of their own careers: "But you need the right man – an emotionally supportive one" (HBS, 1979: 30).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has drawn upon imprinting theory to better understand the underrepresentation of women in business schools' executive education programs. According to this theory, multiple contextual factors may make imprints on organizational collectives, organizations, and organizational building blocks during the founding period and in subsequent "brief sensitive periods of transition during which the focal entity exhibits high susceptibility to external influences" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 197). Based on a historical study of the the imprints of the separate sphere ideology, we offer a reinterpretation of the history of women in management education, accounting for the role of women as wives. Instead of perceiving women as absent from executive education in the postwar founding period (since they were not enrolled as students), we focus on the cultural and ideological arena to offer a new understanding of gender relations in the business school. And this reintepration, in turn, has implications for our understanding of imprinting theory as a useful construct to historians as well as to management and organization scholars.

Business schools' efforts to prepare men for executive positions included initiatives to foster the social skills of their wives. We demonstrate that the business school actively shaped the role of executive wives who built social capital for their husband's careers. A strong separate spheres ideology (Cott, 1997; Kerber, 1988; Welter, 1966) upheld a strict division between matters relating to home and work during this founding period (Coontz, 1992; May, 1988). Given the importance of the domestic sphere during the 1950s, management programs included special events for wives in order to acculturate them to the norms, values and practices that would be expected of them. The activities and engagements of faculty wives provided a model that helped to socialize MBA students' wives (Wharton). Formal programming for wives during the last days of executive education (HBS, Stanford and MIT) also imprinted the separate spheres ideology upon the business school.

We also account for social and legal transformation in the external environment, showing that in the 1960s and 1970s, ideological changes deposited imprints of gender equality on the business school's operations. However, both change and continuity characterized the status of separate spheres ideology in the face of this new ideological influence. The dissatisfaction of executive wives became more visible and future executive wives questioned traditional gender role expectations. Futhermore, an increasing number of female students, though met with mixed reception, began to participate in the business school classroom and pursue opportunities to work as executives themselves. Formally, by the end of the 1960s most executive education programs had begun to accept women as participants although our records suggest that only a few enrolled. Some faculty, students, and administrators declared that women's presence in the classroom served to enrich the educational journey of men, as women brought learnings from their distinctive domestic sphere of influence. Women's unique perspectives enhanced classrom discussions and motivated the men to work hard. In this way, the separate spheres ideology moved into the classroom, surviving alongside notions of gender equality.

Our historical findings have two implications for imprinting theory. First, we answer the call for more research on how imprints change or persist over time (Marquis & Qiao, 2020). Historical studies, based on archival research, uncover that determining whether original imprints persist, change, or are replaced by new imprints is a complex issue. The strength of separate spheres ideology in the postwar U.S., in tandem with corporate attention to the role of the executive wife, constituted a sensitive period for business schools' socialization function. During this period, business schools' executive programs helped women to learn to fulfill the role of executive wife. Business schools engaged women as future executive wives, with an aim of socializing them to the values and norms of the business elite. In one way, this represented a change in direction from how business schools previously had excluded women completely from their educational communities. In another way, it represented a continuation of a practice of university life: the established institution of faculty wives' clubs.

Our study replies to the call for more research on multiple sensitive periods (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 220). However, we do not find that a new sensitive period, defined as a period where focal entities are susceptical to environmental influence (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 199), arose and erased the founding period's imprint of separate sheres. In the 1970s, significant change in the external environment pushed against internal "traditionalizing forces" (Stinchcombe, 1965: 169; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 225), but the voices representing a possible new sensitive period of translation (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013) were primarily interpreted through older ideological lenses. In this case, the focal entity of the business school came to reflect a "superposition of imprints—a process whereby layers of history are deposited in organizations at a few specific points in time" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 223). As the social and legal transformation of gender roles challenged the status of the executive wife and the exclusion of women from the classroom, business schools grappled with the tension between "imprint decay and persistence over time" (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013: 222).

Existing research has shown that contextual imprints from the founding period may persist, even if societal changes take place (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013); that managers can modify imprints to serve new purposes (Sinha et al., 2020); and that there may be examples of retained, amplified and decayed imprints operating simulteanously within clearly-defined business activities (Erçek & Günçavdi, 2016). Our article illustrates how stable imprints may persist even when external forces change and push strongly against the founding imprint. Following Simsek et al.'s (2015) discussion that the form in which imprints are embedded may matter, but is hardly studied, we propose that ideological imprints have a deep societal impact, and may be among the most difficult to change even in the face of external challenges and new sensitive periods. This may explain why the the environmental changes (i.e., social and legal changes towards gender equality) in the 1960s and 1970s did not trigger a new sensitive period.

Second, and in addition to using history to show how an imprint develops over time, we explore the complexity of imprinting theory and contribute to the development of a framework for studying imprints over time, which according to Simsek et al. (2015) is missing. Not only do we combine the development of a building block (i.e., executive education) with a macro organizational collective level (i.e., group of business schools), but also we focus on the imprint of an ideology (i.e., separate spheres). The ideological imprint, which originated from external factors, shapes the nature of the internal imprints, in terms of the norms and practices of both the building blocks and the organizational collective. In this way we develop a greater understanding of the legacy left by initial ideological imprints, as integral to the nature of an organization and organizational collective. Executive wives in training, as the first women to engage in the business school environment, left a legacy that influenced the status and experience of subsequent generations of women who entered the business school as students.

We are aware of an important limitation of our current study. Our article has focused on the socialization of students' wives in a period when the separate spheres ideology made a strong imprint on business schools. Then also we have addressed the question of organizational reactions when the ideology was challenged. Our empirical data only reflects the initial stage of this changing environmental context towards gender equality. Thus, the limited period of our study means that future scholars should examine both the perseverance and the decaying of separate spheres ideology in the 1970s and beyond. Our empirical data shows how a shift in the ideological climate, towards incorporating women as business school students, failed to dismantle previously-imprinted norms. In this way, we contend that the founding imprint of the 1950s persisted as a mechanism to reinterpret and defend itself against radical, new potential imprints from the external environment. This persistence may explain why women are still lagging behind in many business school educational programs as well as in the ranks of top executives.

Despite its limitation, our study enriches imprinting theory by showing the theory's relevance in understanding the current status of women and gender in management education. Theoretically, we show the relevance of imprinting theory to the debate on history's contribution to organizational and management theory (Kipping & Üsidken, 2014). While Marquis and Tilcsik (2013) acknowledge the importance of historical contingencies in understanding organizational and institutional forms, Kipping & Üsdiken (2014: 536) point to a dearth of "historically cognizant studies" in the imprinting literature written by management scholars despite Stinchcombe's (1965) significant interest in historical methods.

Furthermore, as management scholars discuss why there is an underrepresentation of women in business schools and among the executive ranks, as well as what to do about it, we believe that historical analysis (which is integral to imprinting theory) contributes to the search for practical solutions. Our research helps to explain how business schools, like other institutions, have constructed and reinforced the image of an ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2010), meaning one who is completely and fully commited to professional pursuits without nonwork committments. While traditionally men have conformed to this ideal worker image (Acker, 1990), we argue that the executive wife role was embedded into the formation of the business elite. Moving forward, business schools, like other organizations, must recognize that many men and women want to prioritize nonwork commitments in addition to career advancement, according to a survey of 1,500 male and female MBA students. Business schools should consider offering more programs to address work-life challenges, which would be of interest to students of both genders (Coffman, Schenck, & Artaban, 2015). Today's ideal worker norms depend heavily on the historical construction and lasting imprint of separate spheres ideology.

Topic	Main types of source consulted	Example of source that is referred to	Example of information
Separate spheres ideology in business	Business magazines and reports	Warner & Abegglen, 1956	"the only people more interesting to observers of American society than executives are the wives of executives" (p.64)
University practice	Business magazines and reports	Daily Pennsylvanian 1910-1945	Faculty Tea Club: membership offered to students' wives and mothers (1914, February 14)
	Univ Penn's archive -Wharton executive education offerings and brochures -Wharton Graduate Division bulletins and announcements -Wharton School Office of the Dean correspondence - U of Penn Women's Club records of activities, events, membership, meeting notes	Penn University Archives & Records Center, UPQ, 1210, Box 1, folder 1	"Ohio University has a Dames Club for students' wives and mothers who are not townspeople" Letter from Mrs. Jim Duncan to Mrs. L.W. Burket, December 30. 1956
HBS	HBS archives -Brochures -Course catalogues -HBS Bulletin -Executive education archive -Several professors' archives	Harvard Business School Bulletin	"But you need the right man - an emotionally supportive one" 1979, no. 1: 29-30.
	Novel	Roger, 1958	"He had hoped, with all the other women doing the same things, here for the same purpose, that Louise might achieve a sort of identification, if not a companionship, with them." p. 72
MIT	MIT archives -Brochures -Course catalogues -Papers on Program for Senior Executives, Executive Development Program, Staff Memoranda, General correspondence	MIT Archives, AC 412/13 Brochures	"They [the wives] contribute a great deal to the Program," MIT Program for Senior Executives 1971, Brochure,
Stanford	Stanford archives -Brochures -Course catalogues -Bulletin and news releases -Yearbooks -Papers on Executive programs, Speeches, Ford Foundation	Stanford University Archives SC112, box 70, Graduate School of Business, Executive Programs 1952-69	"She is no crusader for women's rights" - About the first women in the executive education program (Stanford University News Service, June 27, 1962)

Table 1. Sources to executives' wives in business schools

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