Reviewer's report

Title: Medical students' perceptions in relation to ethnicity and gender: a qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 21 December 2005

Reviewer: Katarina Hamberg

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Introduction, on page 5, first paragraph: When referring to Nicholson “So you row do you?...”, as highlighting that male students get less access during obstetrics and gynaecology attachment is correct in a restricted sense – but this description does not grasp the message in Nicholson’s article. Nicholson illustrated (for example in the quotation in the title) that female students have hardships and are discriminated in medical school. She also showed that when male students complain about gender related difficulties –they report about difficulties in getting access to patients in Gyn-obst. The way the authors now comment on this gives a skewed picture and I think this is more than a difference in nuances.

Introduction p 5. second paragraph: All these 5 lines are one single sentence and it seems as if some words are missing.

Results page 7-8.
The authors try to make a point in saying that male students reported external’ (public) reasons for studying medicine while the female students reported internal (private) reasons. However, such a distinction does not seem to be grounded in the data as presented in the quotations. When the female student says that ‘I really love communicating with people....’ this might be seen as a private motive. But this holds true also for the male student who is quoted saying ‘It's always been an ambition of mine,...’ That the student’s parents felt that he deserved to become a doctor was a confirmation that his ambition was legitimate maybe, but still this male student definitely had an internal (private) motive.
As this is now presented it seems as if the authors are trapped in looking for gender differences thus seeing too much of differences.

On page 15 it is stated that four female students (of 21) were considering surgery as a career option. Why not report how many male students who considered surgery too? When reading one might believe that many more males were reflecting on becoming surgeons – but was this the case? In the study by Gerdsberg (in ref list) men and women were similarly interested in surgery.
The quotation on page 10 needs more interpretation. Could the authors say something more about why ‘non-white’ role models might be significant for this female student?

On page 18 in discussion, second paragraph, I request more explanation. I advise the authors to explain in more detail what they mean when saying that “Some degree of explanation for this may be deduced by noting interviewees’ considerable propensity towards gender stereotyping, confirming prior related findings in the literature.”

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions